The Metabarons™

With the participation of Alexandro Jodorowsky

ROLE PLAYING GAME

Featuring the D6™ system

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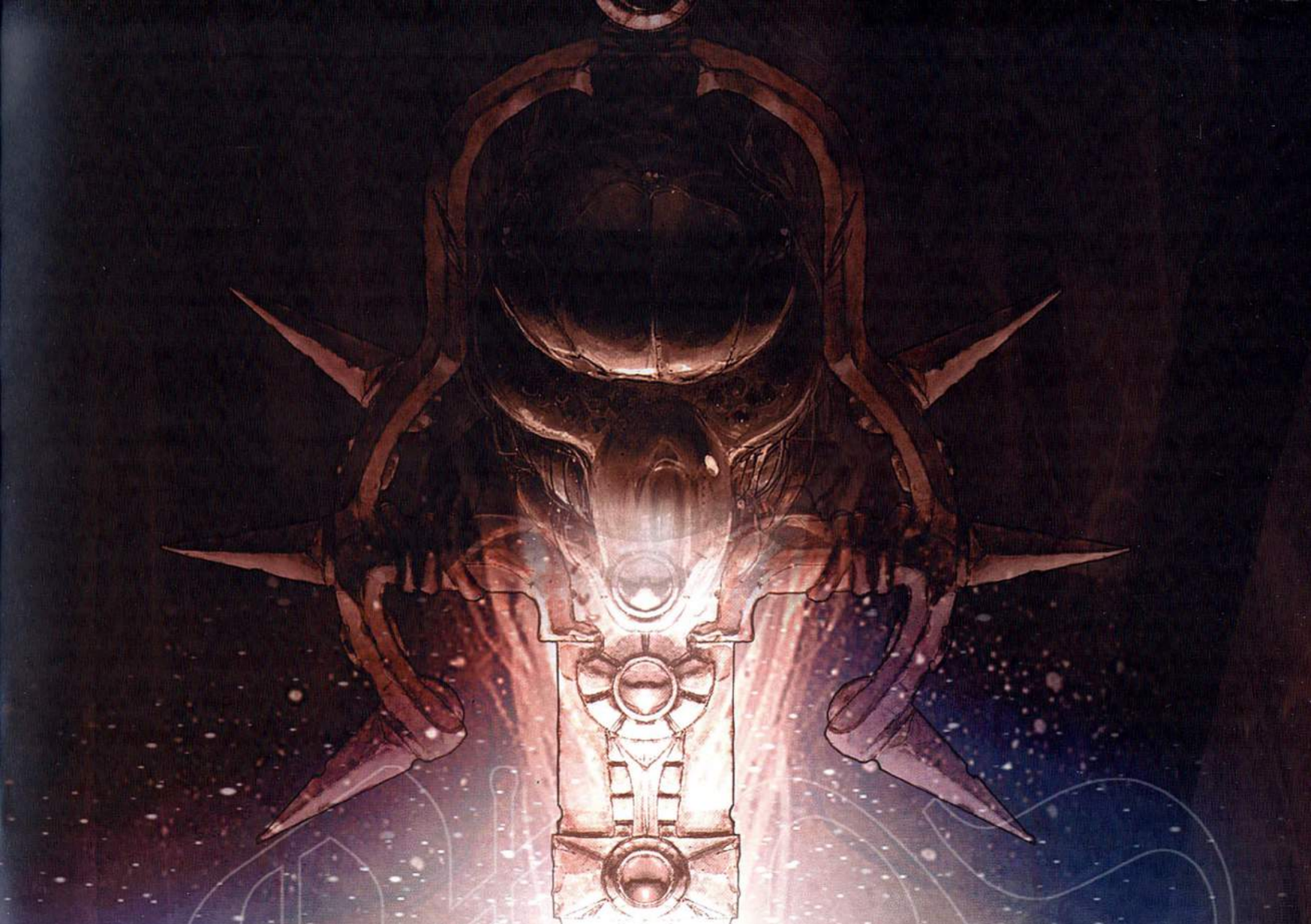
Rule Book



You cannot win without sacrifice. Resist the call of weakness. Emotions block the path to power. The honor of the warrior is victory. And your honor is your only truth.

-Ballad of Largon deer

Enter a universe where good and evil are a concept of a long forgotten past. Honor is found within, and it is your only protection from the forces that rule the universe... forces that would drown your soul in gratuitous pleasure, personal gain, and in the end, a blissful state of mental depression. Explore galaxies where even the word "love" has been erased from the memory of every living being, machine, and organic computer. In a decadent future where technology fulfills every person's desire, humanity has lost everything humane. You must fight to rediscover your own personal code of honor, your path to physical and mental mastery. Life has lost its meaning, but you will have to fight to stay alive in the harsh universe of...

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Developed & Published by
D6 Legend Inc. (US) & Yéti Entertainment S.A. (Europe)

First printing: January 2001. Printed in Spain. N° ISBN: 1-930753-50-0

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Metabarons™

Roleplaying Game

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The Bet

BY AARON ALLSTON

1: Taz-Trang

Taz-Trang had two good arms, but the left one was better than the right. Its skin was a silvery metal. It was packed with circuits and redundant circuits, with diagnostic gear and self-repair systems, with neural couplers and sensor leads. He could feel with it as though it were flesh but, as he liked to tell people, he could punch holes through reinforced metal doors.

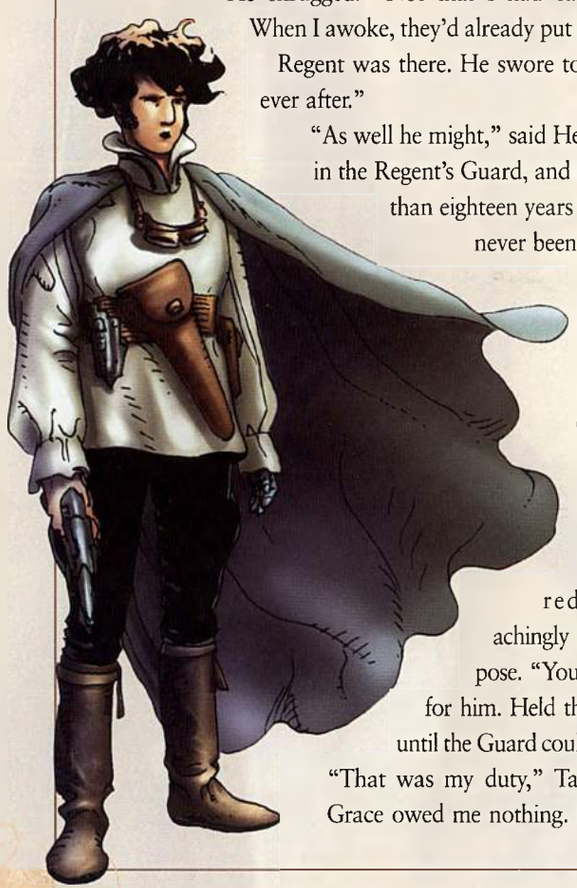
When it was first put on him, it had been as polished and reflective as the sort of dinnerware used only to serve a royal family, but now it was burnished and abraded through use to a pleasing but dull sheen.

"Did it hurt?" asked Vetter. He was a younger man, the same age Taz-Trang had been when he'd lost the arm, and of an age to ask personal questions without realizing that he was intruding.

Taz-Trang held his mechanical hand up before his face and studied his reflection. He kept his palm polished so he'd always have a mirror with him. This wasn't mere vanity at work, though he knew his dark hair, just wavy enough never to bow gracefully to styling, and strong features often made him a subject of interest to ladies. No, it was the ability this mirror accorded him, to see behind him, that had given him limitless opportunities to keep watch on others. It had also saved his life on two occasions.

"It hurt for a moment," he said. "The shot hit me just above the elbow, seared right though bone and muscle and everything in an instant. I was in shock almost immediately and unconscious a moment later. So it only began to hurt when I awoke in the Techno-hospital."

He shrugged. "Not that I had cause for complaint. When I awoke, they'd already put this arm on and the Regent was there. He swore to watch out for me ever after."



"As well he might," said Herran. She, too, was in the Regent's Guard, and like Vetter no more than eighteen years of age, but she had never been as young as Vetter. When she wanted to, she could relax her usual cynical expression into one of wide-eyed innocence, transforming magically into a red-haired urchin, achingly needy, but it was a pose. "You'd taken a rifle shot for him. Held the murderers at bay until the Guard could reach His Grace."

"That was my duty," Taz-Trang said. "His Grace owed me nothing. But waking to find my hurt repaired, to learn that His Grace was going to send me off-world for training —no, it was I who owed him."

"So how did you lose the leg?" Vetter asked.

Herran sighed and put her head down on the tabletop. Its rigid blue surface held for a moment. Then internal sensors calculated that the patron needed rest and the surface softened, became pillow-like. "Vetter…"

Taz-Trang smiled. "It's all right. I might as well tell all now so the story can circulate, so my Guardsmen won't wonder."

He looked around, automatically taking in details of the establishment. It was one of the favorite bars of the Regent's Guard in the capital city; half the clientele at any time would be Guardsmen and Guardswomen, and half the rest would be their civilian companions. Ordinary civilians had to be comfortable in the presence of Guardsmen to stay here.

The walls were hardwood, or at least veneered to appear so. The booth seats looked like padded plastic, but were smartseats, constantly adjusting themselves to accommodate restless patrons. The bartenders and waiters were appealing to look at, but schooled in unobtrusiveness. Even though it was night outside, most patrons seated along the walls chose to keep the windows switched to blackness—to keep the streets at bay.

Taz-Trang logged, in his brief glance around, what might have changed in the last few moments. The tall man at the bar, the one with the glowing facial tattoos and violet surcoat, had left after his one drink. The bartender had dialed the ceiling and floor to a lower albedo, making the atmosphere fractionally more cozy. The collection of city controlmen in the big corner booth, despite their advanced stage of drunkenness and legendary rivalry with the Regent's Guard, continued to show no interest in Taz-Trang's table or any other. And the man in the golden surcoat and hood, who sat leaning over his drink just behind Taz-Trang, had yet to stir.

Taz-Trang gestured at the waiter, a smooth-faced boy still three or four summers from being of age to join the Guard, and gestured for his drink to be refilled. Then he returned to Vetter's question.

"I was offworld when that happened. Already on the Golden Planet, undergoing officer training."

Herran lifted her head. Her green eyes were bright; her sudden interest looked genuine. "The Imperial capital," she said. "Tell us about it."

"That's another story."

"That whole planet is a ball of tabra droppings." The voice emerged as a whisper, and a drunken one, from directly behind Taz-Trang. Taz-Trang turned, but the speaker was still facing away, concealed by his hood, bent even farther over his drink.

Taz-Trang grimaced. An eavesdropping drunk. He charged the man one mental point for rudeness. At three points, Taz-Trang would be forced to go on duty and arrest the man. He turned back. "It's hard to describe how I loved the Golden Planet. Here on Privarr, sophistication consists of imitating what was yesterday's fashion there. On that world, everything we think of as new and interesting is just one layer on top of countless others.

"And that was just the atmosphere. Officer training was hard work, but it was an honor that no one in my family had ever been accorded —we're the most common of the common."

Vetter nodded. Then he realized he'd just agreed with his

commanding officer being described as common. He froze, confused as to how he might correct this social gaffe.

Taz-Trang grinned at the younger man's sudden discomfiture. "From my early days there, I was counted as something of a prodigy. I have a knack for motivating others." He shrugged, offering a "who could have guessed?" expression so they would know he wasn't bragging. "And I fought well, which is what got me into trouble.

"One of my classmates —I won't name him— was a son of a merchant prince of Oroway. He had the misfortune to agree to a duel against a retired officer whose mistress he fancied. The officer was known to be a superior shot. The little merchant boy asked me to be his second. But when the appointed hour arrived, he was still absent, and I was obliged to take his place."

He drank from his refilled glass and tried to keep at a distance the memory of overwhelming pain, of the smell of his own flesh burning away. "I lost the duel, and my leg…but, against any odds I might have calculated, I woke up with this one already on." He rapped his knuckles on his right thigh; under his pants leg, it gave off a muted bell-like noise. "Another prosthetic I could never have afforded. I was still fit for duty. And, to be truthful, people are no more put off by a man with two prosthetics than they are by one."

"Did the Regent pay for this one, too?" Vetter asked.

Taz-Trang shook his head. "No, it was a gift of the little merchant boy. He did have some honor in him. He resigned his commission, paid for my leg, broke things off with the officer's mistress, and went home to become a leech like his father. And good riddance."

"Good riddance," echoed the man behind him. Taz-Trang turned to look at him, but the man remained facing away, concealed by his hood. That's two, Taz-Trang told himself.

He turned back. "And here were other benefits. The man I'd dueled liked what he saw of me —what there was left of me, that is— and taught me the use of the pistol. I graduated first in my class in marksman's scores, as well as in a few other categories. The incident also gave me something of a reputation for honor."

Vetter cleared his throat. "If I may ask, sir—"

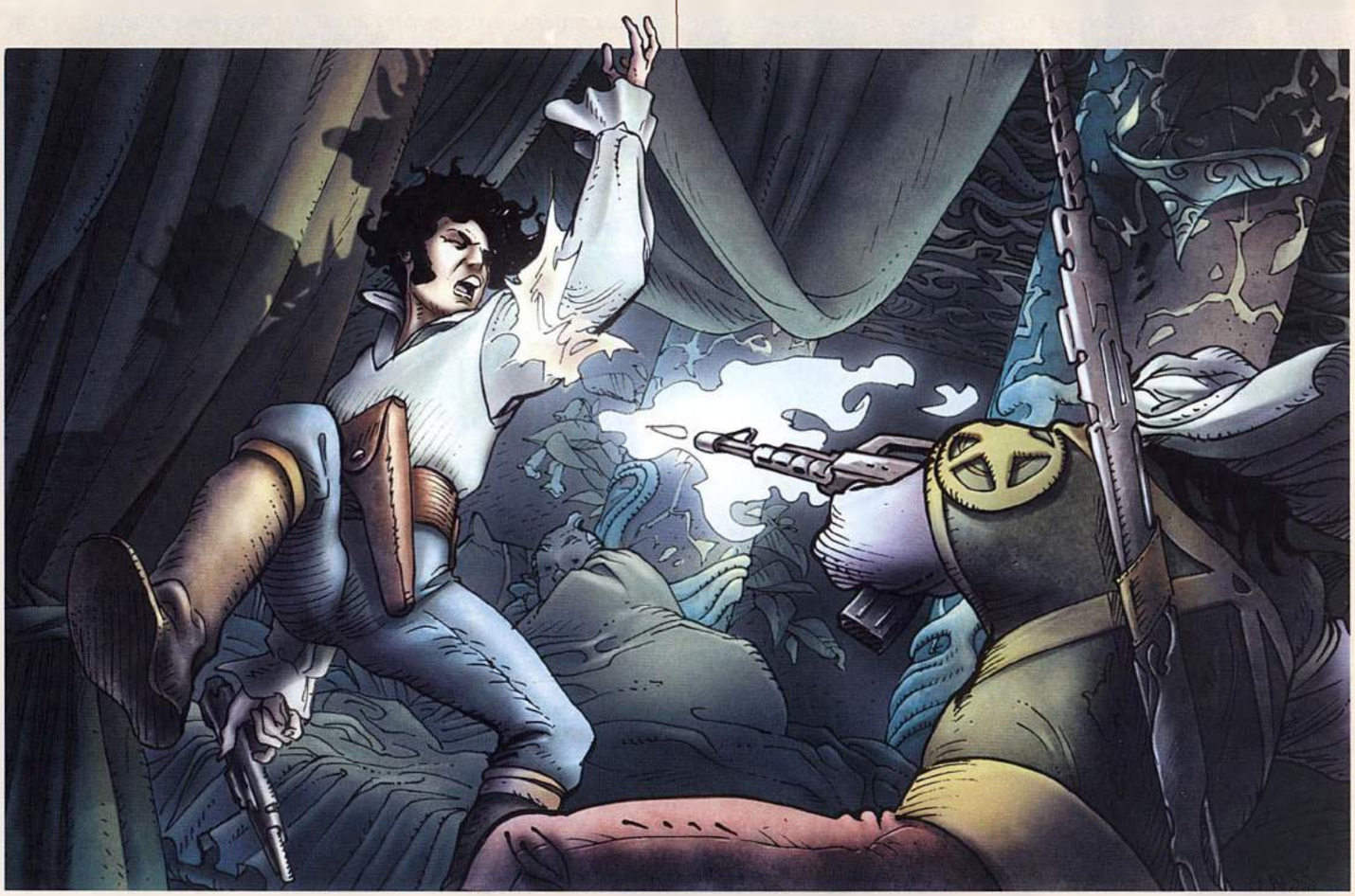
Taz-Trang grinned over at Herran. "See, he's not hopeless. He's already learning rudimentary courtesy."

Vetter smiled uncertainly. "When I'd just joined the Guard, I'd heard you had been deafened. That you would not be coming back to rejoin the Guard at all."

"That one doesn't show." Taz-Trang indicated his ears, which were ordinary in appearance. "In our final days of officer training, we sometimes accompanied peace officers of the capital city on their nightly duties. An Imperial minister reported that his estate had been broken into but nothing taken. When we got there, I found explosives. They had probably been set up to detonate at a party scheduled for that night. We cleared the estate out, but the planters of the bombs —there were more explosives than the one I'd found— apparently had the place under observation. They set off the bombs, too late to harm the minister or his family, but certainly in time to cost me my hearing. My natural hearing, that is. It's all mechanical now, but with augmented analytical programming, radio reception, many useful additions."

He gave the two of them his unconcerned expression. "So, yes, I've lost some pieces here and there. But I don't count myself as unlucky. I've been more than compensated. The Regent appointed me Captain of the Guard immediately on my return. Would he have done that if I couldn't kick the door off a vehicle, squeeze any offender's arm until he submits, and listen to the gossip of my subordinates two offices down?"

The two of them laughed, but Herran became serious again immediately. "Actually, sir, I suspect the answer is yes. Scuttlebutt has it



that the Regent had you in mind for Captain ever since you saved his life."

"I hope not," Taz-Trang said. "That would make old what's-his-name—"

"Ol-Korf," Herran said.

"That would make old Ol-Korf just a place-holder for me." Taz-Trang frowned. "Then again, it doesn't matter. He got caught skimming money. It wasn't my return that cost him his career—just his own greed."

Vetter and Herran looked at one another. Neither answered. Taz-Trang wondered about that. He probably shouldn't have offered an opinion about a man he'd not yet met, especially in front of the man's former subordinates. It naturally would make them uneasy.

The man behind Taz-Trang saved them from having to answer. "Poor old Ol-Korf," he said, and, incongruously, giggled.

"That's it." Taz-Trang stood and moved to the man's side. He heard Vetter and Herran scrambling out of the booth, moving to provide him backup. "Sir, stand up. You're going to sleep this off in the Guard's jail."

"A place I know well," the man said. He stood and faced Taz-Trang. With a shake of his head, he tossed his hood back.

He was a lean man, with weathering in his face and deep lines at the corners of his eyes; his hair, mustache and beard were a graying brown, well-trimmed. Taz-Trang judged him to be in his mid-40s.

The man's baggy surcoat concealed his upper body, but he held his hands in plain sight as though he knew the posture would keep Guardsmen more at ease. Still, the way he held his head, and the slightly off-center way he stood, told Taz-Trang he was very drunk.

Taz-Trang heard a hiss from Herran, then heard both his Guardsmen clap palms to their chests in standard Guard salute. He looked at them. Both were at full respectful attention.

He turned back to the man and added things up. "You are Ol-Korf?"

The man nodded, his movements a little too energetic. "At ease," he told the two Guardsmen.

They held position.

"As you were," Taz-Trang said. Vetter and Herran relaxed a bit, though Taz-Trang could see, in his peripheral vision, that they seemed ill at ease.

Ol-Korf laughed. It emerged as a short bark of amusement. "Very proper, Guardsmen. Respect for the old captain, but obedience to the new. Too bad I couldn't have had these two for a few years. I'd have trained them up right."

"I'll try to do that."

Ol-Korf's smile did not fade, but it changed, became cynical. He leaned forward, too close, conspiratorial. "You'll fail."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you're a fool." Weaving on his feet, Ol-Korf put a finger to his lips. "Shhh. I won't tell your Guardsmen."

Taz-Trang debated, for a moment, knocking Ol-Korf flat. It was certainly his right; Ol-Korf was an insulting drunk on the verge of becoming belligerent. Or perhaps he should just arrest the man as he'd promised to do. But curiosity won out. He repeated, "Why do you say that?"

"Have you not listened to yourself?" Ol-Korf's expression turned to a comical exaggeration of scorn. "It's your loyalty. Blind loyalty. Which accident cost you your eyes? You won your sparkling toys showing loyalty to the Regent. And yet you never realized that he doesn't deserve it. He'll show none to you, and everyone will hear your adolescent words of faith and adoration and will laugh at you."

"If you were as good at your job—at my job—as others have said, you'd know that you were speaking treason."

Ol-Korf nodded, too vigorously. "I'll even teach you how. You remember the Guard-Captain who trained you? Old Seare, wounded in the same battle that crippled you."

Expressionless, Taz-Trang nodded. He wondered how long he ought to let this man ramble on. Wondered whether to forget what he'd heard, doing this man a favor, or to let him rack up an ever-worsening list of treason charges.

Ol-Korf continued, "While you were off-planet thinking you were learning how to lead men, Seare retired and the Regent hired me. I straightened matters out. I set up an organization that could alert us to rebels like the ones that shot you long before they turn into an assault on the Regent's personal quarters."

"From what I've seen, you did a fine job—"

"Because I have a brain and use it." Ol-Korf swayed from the vehemence of his words. "But even with my experience, I did not suspect that I was merely a place-holder for you. That as soon as you returned, he would hand my job to you. And because I had done my job honestly, had not lined my pocket at his expense or bent our laws until they were all out of shape, he had no just cause to dismiss me. What did he do? He made money disappear and left a trail from the empty accounts to me, that I might be dismissed without pay, without honor. That's the man you serve, the man whose generosity you speak of."

"You're lying, and I'm losing patience with you."

"And you talk of your cybernetic enhancements as though they make you a better Guard, a better officer." Ol-Korf made a shooing gesture as if dismissing that thought; the motion unbalanced him and he had to lean back against his booth to stay upright. He tapped the side of his head. "This, the brain, is what you need to be Guard-Captain here. It's the most powerful weapon you have. No door-smashing metal arm or prisoner-kicking metal leg or snooping set of metal ears can better it."

"You have no idea of the range of technology I can bring to bear on the Regent's enemies," Taz-Trang said. "Techniques and devices you've never heard of."

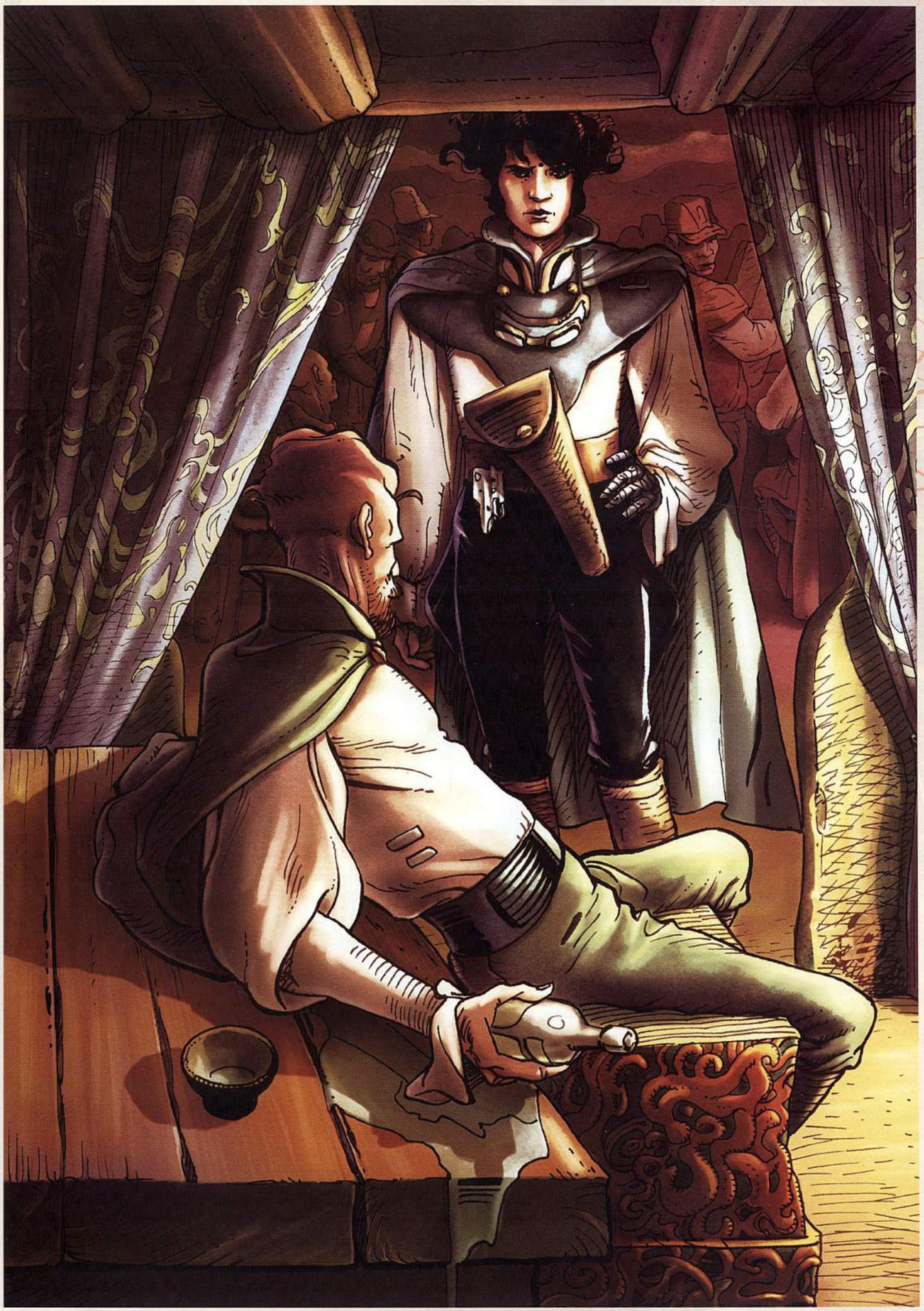
"If they don't start with the brain, they'll do you no good. Do tell us which disaster destroyed your brain, and what sort of appliance you found filling your head when you woke."

Taz-Trang gave him a mocking smile. "If you think primitive tools are so superior to the modern, let's take a test. We'll go out in a field. I'll take a modern suprapistol. You take as many rocks as you can carry, and can pick up as many more as you can find. You keep throwing and I keep shooting until one of us is dead."

"I accept."

Taz-Trang leaned back, surprised. "Ol-Korf, that was a chance for you to think over your words. To realize how foolish you sound."

"No, it was a formal challenge. A bet. Witnessed!" Ol-Korf pointed at the two Guardsmen, then swept his hand around to indicate the entire room; many of the patrons were watching, and others were pretending not to. "And I have accepted. Rocks against suprapistol. Or do you wish to surrender now, and lose no more than a bit of youthful pride and vanity?"



Taz-Trang took a look around. There were just too many witnesses to do the noble thing and pretend this wasn't happening. He returned his attention to the older man. "Very well. Choose a place and time."

"Tomorrow, sixth hour." Ol-Korf considered. "The shelling range at the army's practice fields. Like your head, it's full of rocks."

"Done." Taz-Trang felt sadness creep over him. This duel, like so many, was unnecessary.

Ol-Korf turned to Herran. "Guardswoman, will you be my second?"

Surprised, she leaned away from him. "I... I don't..."

"Come, now. You know I'm no little merchant prince. I won't abandon you to fight in my place."

She turned her attention to Taz-Trang. "I cannot accept without my superior's permission..."

"Granted, of course." Taz-Trang gave her a formal little nod. "Vetter, will you stand as my second?"

"I'd be honored, sir."

"Done, then," Ol-Korf said. He extended his hands to Taz-Trang, wrists together. "Will I be sleeping tonight at the Guardhouse?"

"Just go home."

2: Herran

By the appointed hour, word had spread of the duel. A crowd assembled at the shelling range, the broad field topped with blue ankle-high grasses and pockmarked with missile craters. Overhead, rain-bearing clouds drifted by, a turbulent upside-down sea. A kilometer or two beneath the clouds, an observation craft drifted along, in the same direction and at the same speed. Herran suspected its passengers included newsgatherers, and that long-distance recorders were trained on this field already.

Many in the audience at ground level wore the distinctive black-and-red uniform of the Regent's Guard; others, though they were in civilian dress, Herran recognized as off-duty Guardsmen.

Taz-Trang was there, an expression of disapproval on his face, and whenever asked about these events, he accepted his own fair share in allowing the duel challenge to develop as it had. Vetter stood beside him. They both wore their Guard uniforms.

Herran stood a few meters away, dressed in an anonymous jumpsuit in gold; as second to a man who was no longer in the Guard, she did not feel it was fitting for her to be uniformed.

She masked her dismay by going through the medical kit, checking and double-checking its contents. Bandages. Salves. Painkillers. Anti-shock medications. A radio fixed to the emergency frequency. Insulating wrap. Plastic muscle in sheets and cords; it would tighten or loosen with the turn of a dial.

Dammit, she'd liked Ol-Korf. He didn't just lead, he taught. He'd shown her no consideration he hadn't offered to the other new Guardsmen, but after just weeks in the Guard she'd learned more about watching people, about calculating their moods and predicting their actions, than she had in her lifetime before.

There was no sign of Ol-Korf, though the timepieces were counting up close to the sixth hour. Then Herran heard the crowd noise rise and Ol-Korf stepped through the near fringe of onlookers.

Today he looked much improved, with no sign of drunkenness or hangover. His clothes and hip-cloak were all in black, appropriately funereal. He carried a blue cloth bag over his shoulder, and as he neared Herran, she heard a low clattering from within, the sounds of rocks shifting with Ol-Korf's movements.

He offered her a tight smile. "Did you fear that I had abandoned the fight?"

"No, sir," she lied.

"Well, you should have." He shrugged. "How are you armed?"

"I've brought my issue pistol, fully loaded. But will I be able to use it if I have to act? Am I also limited to rocks?"

"No, of course not. Keep your pistol at hand. And if Vetter comes into things, stay beyond thirty meters and present him with a moving target. He's no good at that range, in case you hadn't noticed." He sighed. "Wish I could say the same about Taz-Trang."

To the side, Taz-Trang and Vetter were conferring. Taz-Trang glanced over, but offered Ol-Korf and Herran no expression to interpret.

Herran said, "If I may ask, Captain —I mean, sir—"

Ol-Korf gave her a humorless smile. "Neither honorific is appropriate now. I'm just a civilian under indictment for treasonous theft. Technically your enemy, or prey. So it's just Ol-Korf. What is it?"

"If I may ask, last night, what was your plan?"

"When I accepted that green fool's challenge?" His expression turned bleak. "I had none. In all my professional life, I have never been that drunk, because I know that drunks do stupid things. The day after my professional life ends, I get drunk and do the stupidest thing imaginable. If I do not live to offer you any further advice, Guardswoman, remember the mistake I have made."

"I will, Captain. Ah, sir. Ol-Korf."

A man well-known to Herran —short, lean nearly to the point of emaciation, with features that seemed better suited to pore over numbers and accounts than to face outdoor weather— now stood beside Taz-Trang and Vetter. He beckoned to Ol-Korf and Herran.

They joined him. "Good afternoon, Minister Motte," Ol-Korf said. "To what do we owe the pleasure of your company?"

"I am your referee," Motte said. He had a big voice for a small man.

Ol-Korf smiled, shook his head. "I don't believe so. I had no part in choosing you."

Motte drew himself up to and beyond his full height. "Do you question my honor?"

"Never!"

"My qualifications for this task?"

"Certainly not. But you're still not the referee. Not unless Taz-Trang and I both agree on you."

"As you wish." Motte did not bother to conceal that he had taken offense. "Who do you want for a judge?"

"Oh, you, of course," Ol-Korf said. "Is the Guard not under your ministry? I would have no other."

Motte gave him a close look. "You are more than usually argumentative today."

Ol-Korf leaned toward him. "Confidentially, sir, it's probably the last day of my life. I reserve the right to be argumentative. Besides, you should thank me for this. If Taz-Trang kills me, it will save the state the cost of my trial. And execution."

"Point taken."

G. BESS

"I still hope you'll spend freely for my burial."

Motte ignored the comment. "Are we all ready?"

Taz-Trang said, "Not quite." He gestured to some of his officers. "You, there. Set up a crowd shield on that hill. Move the audience behind it. We don't want any stray blasts hitting innocents."

"Or rocks hitting them, either," Ol-Korf said.

Taz-Trang shook his head. "Ol-Korf, do us all a favor. Resign the field. It certainly can't do your reputation any harm."

"It would smear the reputation I had only two days ago," Ol-Korf said. "Besides, what do I have to live for? What have you left me?"

Exasperated, Taz-Trang just raised his eyes to the sky.

The crowd shield leaped to life on the near crest of the hill—the height of a man, several dozen meters in length, it was a transparent yellow. Herran could feel the hum of its generators in her bones even at this range. The shield would absorb low-power energy shots and repel physical objects hitting it.

Minutes later, with the audience set up behind the crowd shield, Motte again asked, "Are we ready?"

"Certainly not." Ol-Korf pointed at Taz-Trang. "He is cheating. I insist that he stop it, or quit the field in failure."

"Cheating?" Taz-Trang drew himself upright. "I am a man of honor."

"Yes, you are. But you're a man of stupidity, too. You aren't even aware that you're cheating. What were the terms of our duel?"

"Rocks against pistol." Taz-Trang unholstered his sidearm. "Here's mine. I trust that your bag holds only rocks."

"By extension," Ol-Korf said, "the terms were flesh against technology, and technology was supposed to be represented only by your pistol. I see you have brought other weapons. An arm that can break the neck of a middle-aged man. A leg that can kick a ribcage in. Ears that can listen to the movements of an enemy creeping around out of sight…or receive radio instructions."

"I suppose you have a point. But these are part of me. I can't just leave them behind."

"Can you switch them off?"

Taz-Trang considered, then nodded.

Motte obviously felt the need to interfere. "I'd have to rule against that. If he switches all of them off, then he's at a greater disadvantage than a normal man. No."

"How about this?" Ol-Korf said. "He switches off the arm—it's not his shooting hand anyway—and the radio. And one ear, so he loses some of his audio pickup capabilities. He keeps his leg, and thus his mobility, and one ear, so he's not deaf."

"This is macabre," Motte said.

But Taz-Trang merely nodded. "I accept. It will bring us as close to equal as circumstances will allow."

Eyes closed, Taz-Trang concentrated, and his shining arm went limp. Vetter quickly tied him a sling from bandages in the medical kit and helped him into it. "There," Taz-Trang said. "All done."

"Now," Motte said, "are we ready?"

"Certainly not," said Ol-Korf.

Motte clapped a hand over his face in exasperation.

"You accuse me of cheating again?" asked Taz-Trang.

"No," Ol-Korf said. "But let me demonstrate something. Turn your prostheses back on."

Taz-Trang sighed and shut his eyes. A moment later, his arm stretched out straight to the side, snapping the improvised sling, and went through what looked like a brief set of calisthenic exercises.

Taz-Trang opened his eyes. "I apologize," he said. "It's a power-on test. It will end in just a moment."

"I've seen that sort of thing before," Ol-Korf said.

"Ah, there." His arm once again under control, Taz-Trang gestured with it to Motte, an appeal for the man to fix matters. Vetter moved in to retie the sling.

Motte said, "What was your problem, Ol-Korf?"

"Do you not see it? He can turn his systems on again at will! This is the same as me going out there with a fully loaded pistol with the safety on. Would I not then be in compliance with the terms of our bet?"

"Of course not." Motte shook his head. "Thank the powers that be that you were never this argumentative when you were in power. What do you recommend?"

"Slave his on-switch to a remote that he does not have access to. When the duel is done, he can use the remote to turn his systems on again."

Motte asked Taz-Trang, "Can this be done?"

"Yes.," Taz-Trang said. "And let it be soon, that I not be Ol-Korf's age when this duel is finished."

So they waited, with the crowd growing louder and the sun, a small glowing patch behind the clouds, descending toward the western hills, while a Guard technician was brought out to examine his captain's systems and slave certain of them to a remote control. When it was done, he handed the device to Motte, saluted, and made a quick retreat to the crowd shield.

Motte waved the little device under Ol-Korf's nose. "There. Are you happy? Can we start?"

"Of course not," Ol-Korf said.

"What now?"

"I want that remote in the hands of the one person on this field who can not be coerced, bribed, tricked or beaten into turning on those systems."

Motte indicated Herran.

"No," Ol-Korf said. "No disrespect to the Guardswoman, but I was referring to myself."

Motte glanced at Taz-Trang for permission. The captain offered it with a nod, and Motte gave the device to Ol-Korf. "Now?"

"Now."

"You mean it? You have no further objections?"

Ol-Korf gave him a smile. "None."

"Take your positions."

Ol-Korf walked eastward some twenty paces, to stand beside a deep blast crater. He turned back to face his opponent.

Taz-Trang remained where he was, staring at him in undisguised confusion. "Ol-Korf, as challenged party, you could choose to put the sun in my eyes."

Ol-Korf offered his humorless smile. "There clouds are letting through enough sun to cast shadows, but not enough to dazzle the eyes of a young man who already can't see what is before him. I'm content where I am. Ready."

Taz-Trang shrugged. "Ready."

Motte moved up the hill and joined the men behind the crowd shield.

Vetter and Herran lugged the medical kit to a crater at the foot of the hill.

Vetter jumped in. He was smiling. "This is going to be interesting," he said.

She scowled down at him. "Has it occurred to you to think what will happen if, say, Ol-Korf does something treacherous? Such as pull out a defense pistol and begin shooting?"

Vetter considered. "I'd have to get involved. To protect and support our captain."

"And what happens then, especially if I don't see the treachery?"

"You'd get involved. To defend Ol-Korf."

"Correct. Which results in me killing you or you killing me. How 'interesting' is that?"

He grimaced. "Too interesting, perhaps."

"That's your lesson for the day." She moved away and found her own blast crater not less than thirty meters from where Vetter waited.

3: Ol-Korf

Motte's voice, amplified by a Guard speaker system, rose from the near edge of the audience: "Begin."

Taz-Trang drew his pistol.

Ol-Korf jumped into the blast crater beside him and ducked below its rim. He heard the audience laugh. He reached into his bag and brought out a stone—smooth, rounded, a good size for throwing.

He heard Taz-Trang's shout: "Come on, Ol-Korf. I give you this last chance to quit the field. If you refuse, I'll accept no surrender later. I'll have to kill you."

For response, Ol-Korf raised up far enough to peek over the crater lip. Taz-Trang stood where he'd begun, twenty steps away. Ol-Korf heaved his rock. Taz-Trang took a step to the side and the rock thumped to the ground a few meters beyond him.

"I take that as refusal." Taz-Trang's voice was sad. He aimed.

Ol-Korf ducked. He heard the sizzling noise characteristic of suprapistols. A rock at the crater's lip radiated heat, then broke. A superheated shard from it fell on Ol-Korf's neck, burning him; he slapped it away and rooted around in his pack for another throwing stone.

"Before you kill me," Ol-Korf shouted, "perhaps you'd tell me if you did any thinking about what I said last night. About the possible guilt of a specific perpetrator."

"I did. I even looked into the case and the evidence." Taz-Trang's voice seemed a little closer. But the man was surely clever enough not to walk in a straight line from his starting position toward the crater's lip. He'd be moving in at an angle. Ol-Korf would have to hazard a look to do any good with his next throw.

"And your conclusions?" Ol-Korf set another rock on the crater slope, within easy reach. He brought out the jury-rigged remote control he'd been given. Pulling off bands of muscle plastic that had been used to hold it together, he opened it and examined the interior.

"You were correct. The evidence was faulty. The... convicted criminal appears to be innocent. I will investigate to find the true offender. Sadly, you will not be alive to observe my investigation."

Ol-Korf was unsurprised to find that the specialist who'd rigged the device had used a demolition expert's remote as its basis. The devices were capable of broadcasting pulses or data on a broad range of radio frequencies; they were normally used to detonate explosives that had been seized by the Guard.

This one was now set up with four operations in memory. A tiny screen and arrow buttons on the exterior allowed him to switch between operations.

The first operation was labeled ARMOFF. It was to transmit Taz-Trang's arm disabling code on a specific, little-used frequency. The second, ARMON, transmitted the arm enabling code, the third, EAROFF, transmitted the ear disabling code, and the fourth, EARON, the ear enabling code.

"With your manners," Taz-Trang said, "I thought you'd at least say 'Thank you.'"

"Thank you," Ol-Korf called. He made his voice loud, friendly. He heard the audience laugh. And he finished reprogramming the fourth button so that, once it was done transmitting its code, it would also transmit a loud, sustained burst of static on the Guard frequency.

Quickly, he set the first stone and three more like it in the crook of his left arm. He positioned the remote there as well, tucking it into his elbow and squeezing it to keep it secure. "Say, would you like to hear something funny?"

"Amuse me." Taz-Trang sounded closer still. Halfway now? Maybe only five steps away?

Ol-Korf hit the fourth button and grabbed a stone. As he began to rise, he heard Taz-Trang's cry of pain. There were also sounds of commotion from the audience, many of whom, he knew, constantly monitored the Guard frequency.

As Ol-Korf straightened, he saw Taz-Trang, eight or ten paces away, his flesh arm up, his wrist clamped over his ear, his pistol pointed off behind him. But no amount of external pressure would diminish the strength of the radio signal reaching an internal receiver. Taz-Trang didn't react immediately as Ol-Korf rose into view.

Ol-Korf threw the first stone. It took Taz-Trang in the face. The man staggered back, blood gouting from his nose.

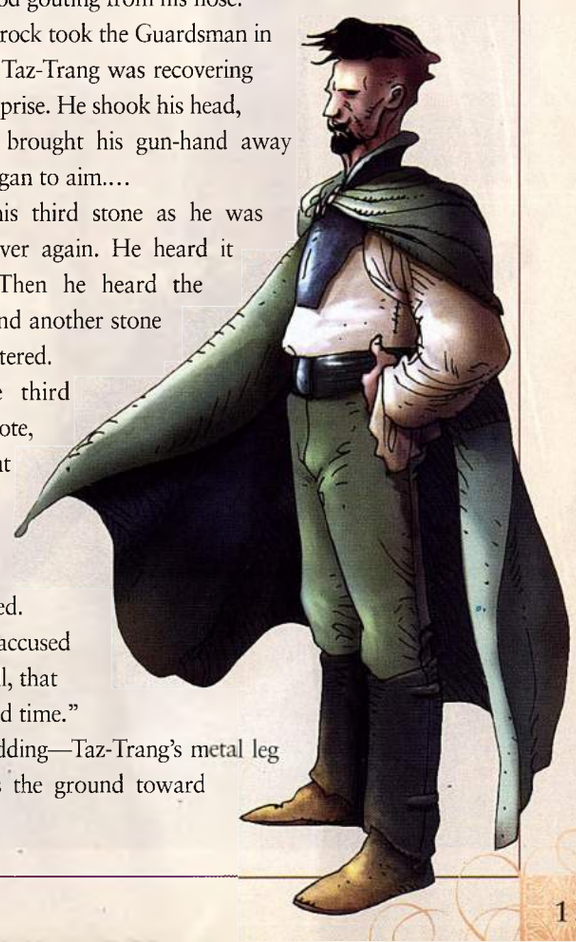
Ol-Korf's second rock took the Guardsman in the chest. But now Taz-Trang was recovering from his sudden surprise. He shook his head, took his bearings, brought his gun-hand away from his ear and began to aim....

Ol-Korf threw his third stone as he was ducking behind cover again. He heard it clank off metal. Then he heard the pistol's hiss again and another stone above his head shattered.

He pressed the third button on the remote, giving his opponent a moment of quiet.

"Very clever." Taz-Trang's voice sounded pained. "And to think you accused me of cheating. Well, that won't work a second time."

There was a thudding—Taz-Trang's metal leg bearing him across the ground toward the crater.



Ol-Korf put his back to the near lip of the crater. Now Taz-Trang would not be able to see him until he got to the very lip. Ol-Korf took the remote in his left hand.

He saw Taz-Trang's shadow begin to stretch over the crater. It got longer—there was Taz-Trang from the waist up, from the knees up, from the ankles up....

Ol-Korf hit the second button on the remote.

Taz-Trang's shadow jerked spasmodically as his mechanical arm began to go through its power-on procedure. Taz-Trang grunted in surprise.

Ol-Korf launched himself up. He grabbed at Taz-Trang's pistol hand, caught it, yanked. Taz-Trang, overbalanced, fell into the crater.

Ol-Korf kept his grip on the pistol hand. Taz-Trang inverted as he came down. He crashed back-first onto the slope of the crater, his mechanical arm still flailing. Ol-Korf drove Taz-Trang's flesh arm down hard on the dirt and rocks. Taz-Trang let go of the pistol. It tumbled down the side of the crater.

Ol-Korf dove for it, got his hand on it. His somersault carried him across sharp rocks. The slope of the crater was such that he was barely able to skid to a stop when he rolled to his feet. He spun and put Taz-Trang in his sights.

Taz-Trang, rising, froze. Then, with a bitter sigh, he leaned back against the crater wall.

"Tell young Vetter not to come," Ol-Korf said. "I'd hate to have to shoot him."

"Vetter, keep your position."

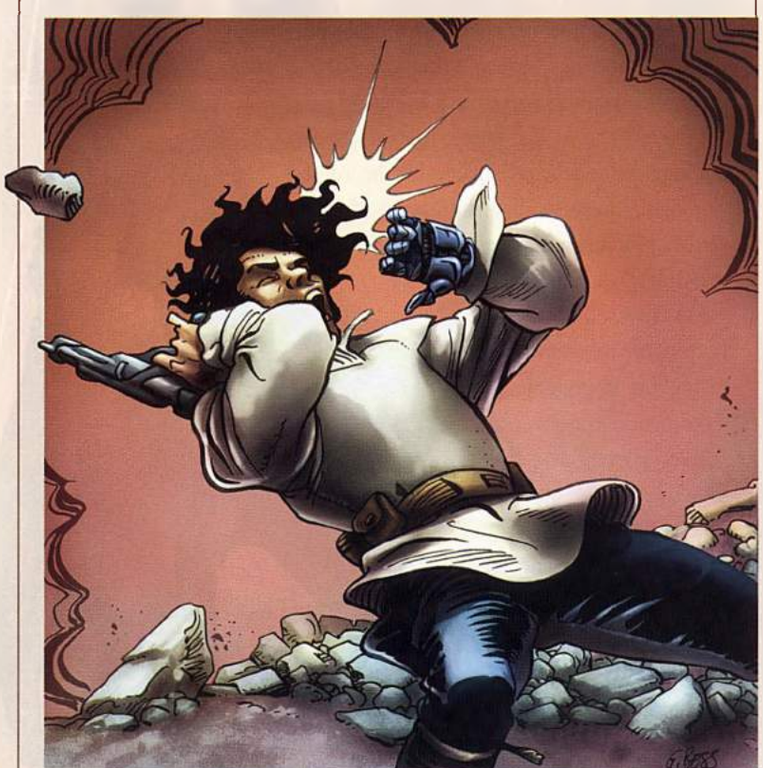
"You, too, Herran." Ol-Korf tossed Taz-Trang his remote.

The captain caught it with his metal arm. His human arm he used to press against his nose and slow the flow of blood from it. "I don't see much point in re-enabling my ear."

"Don't. It would hurt."

"I'm not going to beg for my life. But you understand that, by the terms of our bet, you have cheated."

"By taking your pistol?"



"No. By using this." Taz-Trang gestured with the remote.

Ol-Korf gave him an unfriendly smile. "Still not using your brain, are you, boy? Think about that. When, ever in human history, has it been cheating for one duelist to give the other a second weapon, or for the other duelist to use it? You gave me that weapon. Who would deny my right to use it?"

Taz-Trang looked chagrined. "That was your plan all along."

"No, only since this morning. Only since my own brain began to work again."

"Then you have won fairly."

"Perhaps you would do me a favor and inform the minister that there has been no dishonor here today. For the record, you know."

Taz-Trang considered, then raised his voice. "Minister Motte!"

"I hear you. Is it safe to come down?"

"I think not.... But I wish you to enter it in the logs that this duel has been honorably discharged on both sides."

"I will do so."

Taz-Trang dropped his voice to normal levels. "Will you be shooting me now, or prolonging my pain?"

"Prolonging your pain. Demonstrating how, once more, you are wrong."

Taz-Trang offered him a disgusted look. "How?"

"Isn't it obvious? I lost this duel, boy."

"I don't understand."

"You and I both made the same mistake, Taz-Trang. You gave me control over your prosthetics. I defeated you by pushing buttons. But, last night, I gave you control over my anger. I found it impossible to decline this duel because you had pushed my buttons. I lost when I accepted this duel in the first place. It was irresponsible and stupid. Perhaps that limits my right to accuse you of the same traits."

"A pity I won't survive to profit from that realization."

"Why shouldn't you?" Ol-Korf depressed the button to engage the pistol's safety. He tossed the pistol to his enemy.

Taz-Trang caught it, looked at it blankly for a moment. Then he slipped the safety off again and pointed the weapon at Ol-Korf. "The duel's not done until someone dies."

Ol-Korf shrugged. "Be my guest. My time is done. If you don't, I will be tried, convicted, and executed anyway. I will never lead again. I will never teach again. The new generation of Guardsmen will admire you and your shiny toys. The lessons I tried to impart will be lost forever. Your ways leave no room for mine."

"So this was just one last lesson. A bit of training for your replacement."

Ol-Korf nodded. "However else would I have been able to force you to attend class?"

"You have a point." Taz-Trang raised the pistol, sighting on Ol-Korf's forehead. Then he lowered the weapon. "Perhaps you could teach me more."

"I think not. To do so, I would have to live." Ol-Korf gestured toward the crowd, safely hidden from sight beyond the wall of the crater. "If I live, the Regent will know that you have acted in a fashion inconsistent with his interests. He will suspect that I have turned you against him. And he will get rid of you, as he has done with me. At his leisure, with perhaps no more than a pang of disappointment."

"True." Taz-Trang aimed again and fired.

4: Taz-Trang

Taz-Trang had two good arms, and it was his stronger arm, the left, that supported the weight of the man he'd just duelled. He emerged from the crater, Ol-Korf's body across his shoulder, Ol-Korf's limbs swaying with every step the Guard-Captain took.

Taz-Trang marched to the foot of the hill. His Guardsmen rose from their respective craters to join him. Despite the weight he carried, Taz-Trang managed a little bow while the audience at the hill crest applauded him. Then he shouted, "This man has fought honorably and died well. I will conduct his body to the hall of justice for proper dispensation."

"It is so noted," called Minister Motte.

Taz-Trang turned toward the portion of the field where the personal vehicles of the duellists and the noble witnesses waited. Vetter and Herran fell into step beside him. "We should help," Herran said.

"It's only a few steps," Taz-Trang said. "I'll have things for you to do soon enough. For now, thank you for serving us as seconds. Please go home now…and reflect, as I have had to do, on what happens when obligations of personal honor come into conflict with obligations to one's profession."

They saluted and dropped behind. Their expressions suggested that they did not look forward to such reflection.

When they were two dozen steps behind, Ol-Korf said, "Well?"

"Well, what?"

"I have convinced you that I was falsely accused. When we have the proof to convict my accuser, what will you do?"

Taz-Trang sighed, and put an extra bounce in his step, extra annoyance for his inconvenient talking cargo. "We will arrest him, and will resurrect you so that you can sing and dance at his trial."

"And if—as I maintain—my accuser is the Regent? We could never arrest him. We could never bring him to trial."

Taz-Trang was silent a long moment. Ol-Korf was right. The Regent could, and would, take any sort of step to keep a crime from being laid at his feet. Taz-Trang felt a stirring of regret. The naïve man he'd been, the man who'd gone to the Golden Planet and received training funded by a ruler he admired, breathed his last. "We'll have to kill him," Taz-Trang said.

"That's right."

"We may be obliged to flee Privarr afterwards."

"I'll teach you techniques of survival," Ol-Korf said. "Here's a lesson for free." Taz-Trang felt Ol-Korf flexing his back. "When you're forty-five, do not do somersaults across sharp rocks. Leave that sort of foolishness for the younger Guards."

"I'll remember."

INTRODUCTION

Take a seat, good friend, and listen as Largon Deer, troubadour extraordinaire, weaves another tale of treachery, honor, and adventure among the stars... What? You say you're tired of hearing me sing epic poems of past glories? Isn't it enough to see the glimmer of excitement in my eyes, listen to the melodic accompaniment of my sonicharm, and watch the broad sweep of my arm as I describe

incredible battles as armadas clash over ancient worlds?
You want to create stories of your own? Hmmm...

If you're so inclined to act out your own dramas of misfortune, adventure, and heroics, then perhaps you'll listen a while longer as I share with you some of my storyteller's secrets.

I'll assume you've heard me relate other tales—those woven in the graphic novels of such illustrious storytellers as Jodorowsky and Gimenez, or in the short parable by Aaron Allston you may have just read in this very volume. Then you know this epic spans the entire vast canvas of the universe, a place you'll soon explore on your own. It's dominated by the Human Empire, for those of us who realize its truly degenerated state from its past days of glory. The Empire encompasses many smaller yet equally powerful factions, from the Techno-Technos and their Supreme Technopope, the Ekonomat, and the insanely wealthy industrial Maganats, to the courageous Troglosocialiks and other peoples of the Union of Planets. Beyond the 22,000 major worlds controlled by members of the Empire one finds entire galaxies with alien civilizations of their own, like the Pthagures and other hideous, unscrupulous monstrosities.

This is a universe where vast battleship fleets clash, with the losers committing honorable suicide, their cruisers' burning hulls appearing as one tiny, bright splinter visible from every corner of the galaxy. It's a place where pirates prey on the weak to survive, where insanely rich aristocrats profit off the misery and base desires of the common people. Heroes rise from the slums, only to have their hopes cut down by their trusted companions. Villains topple beneath the weight of their corruption, yet destiny's mysterious hand spares them, often returning them to some semblance of their former power. Here the Metabarons forged their caste of warriors, influencing the outcome of wars, searching for liberty and companionship, and often hiding from the savage betrayal and bitterness which infects the universe. It doesn't matter whether you were born a noble or thief—here your beliefs and actions define how you face fortune and misfortune. Your honor gives you liberty.

Your adventures throughout these vast galaxies won't be real, of course, but may seem real because you immerse yourself in an exciting story. Remember escaping to imaginary places as children when you play-acted adventures of pirates, soldiers, outlaws, and frontier lawmen? When you read a good book, or watch a holovid or play, the characters, setting, and plot draw you into a fictional galaxy for a little while.

The Metabarons universe is just the backdrop for your story, like the magnificent scenery enhancing an epic, five-act drama performed on the stage. The Metabarons Roleplaying Game is similar to these storytelling experiences. When you play, you don't really have a stage, but you act out your roles for your friends sitting around a table or lounging around your quarters. Unlike a novel's plot or a play's script, the stories you play in the game have more flexibility. You choose your own character from among several kinds of people inhabiting the Metabarons galaxy: warriors, Merchants Guild toadies, defused mentreks, explorers, outcast nobles, mercenary soldiers, contract pilots, private investigators, headhunters, and many more. While playing your character, you can wander off and do your own thing, speak your own lines, explore new corners of the universe.

Like most people, your character possesses strengths and weaknesses. For instance, a merc-soldier can dominate the battlefield with his combat prowess, but isn't as good at negotiating a deal to buy new weapons as an Imperial Merchants Guild bureaucrat. The game simulates these limitations and successes with statistics on your character sheet and die rolls made during the game, adding an element of suspense to the story. The game rules limit what you can do based on your character, determining whether or not he succeeds at any given task: jumping from one catwalk to another, shooting an enemy with a Cogan rifle, piloting a heavy utility transport through a meteor storm. Whenever you want your character to do something, you see how skilled he is at that task and roll some dice. The higher you roll, the better your chance at accomplishing your intended goal.

Perhaps the best way to learn how all this works is to try it yourself—right now. In a moment I'll introduce you to a friend of mine, a rather quiet explorer named Martius. He's a character in a story called "Scout for Hire"... and you'll be playing his role in this tale, using the basic rules forming the foundation of this game. Find a pencil, some scrap paper, and a handful of six-sided dice (you can scavenge those from various board games).

Turn the page...
... and continue reading to begin your adventures in the Metabarons universe.

Scout For Hire

Once you've collected your dice, scrap paper, and pencil, briefly look over the information on Martius's character sheet. This template describes the skills at which he excels, shows what personal equipment he's carrying, and tells you a little about his background and honor code. It will help you prepare for playing the role of Martius in this particular story.

"Scout for Hire" is a solitaire adventure you can play by reading and following the directions at the end of each numbered section. In following the adventure text, you create a story involving Martius and his search for a mercenary captain. The directions at the end of each entry help you learn the rules for the Metabarons Roleplaying Game. Before you start, read the short summary below. It describes how you use your character template and the dice to determine when Martius succeeds and fails at various tasks. Several examples elaborate on these guidelines, but "Scout for Hire" really illustrates these rules in action.
If you're ready, let's introduce my friend Martius....

Your Character: Martius

For this adventure you'll play the role of Martius, a rather quiet explorer who prefers his technological gadgets to the company of other people. Unfortunately he must interact with other people to find new jobs using his explorer skills. Look at Martius's character template on the following page. The right side of this template explains his background, personality and honor code. Read these to gain some understanding of the character you're playing.

The left side of this template shows Martius's game statistics which help describe his strengths. He has seven **attributes** measuring his basic abilities: *Agility*, *Knowledge*, *Mechanical*, *Perception*, *Strength*, *Technical*, and *Psionics*.

Martius's **skills** are listed under each attribute —these are abilities you learn through training and experience, and include expertise like *dodge*, *astrography*, *persuasion*, and *exoskeleton repair*.

Every attribute and skill has a **die code**. This represents the number of six-sided dice you roll when using the attribute or skill —one die is 1D, two dice is 2D, three dice is 3D, and so on.

> **Example:** Martius has a *Perception* of 3D, so if he tries spotting something out of the ordinary in a crowd, you roll three dice and add the results together. If you rolled a 3, 4 and 6, Martius's *Perception* total would be 13.

If you look at Martius's *Agility*, you'll see it's only 2D+2. That die code means you roll two dice, add them together, and then add 2 to the total.

> **Example:** Martius has a *Strength* attribute of 2D+1. If he tried bashing down a stuck door with his shoulder, you'd roll two dice and add one point to the total. If Martius rolled a 2 and 5, and then added one for the "+1," his *Strength* total would be 8.

Die codes work the same way for skills. Each skill begins the game with the same die code as its associated attribute. Even though no die codes are listed on the character sheet for Martius's *bureaucracy*, *business*, *cultures*, *languages*, and *streetwise* skills, they still share the same die code as his *Knowledge* attribute: 4D.

Martius has improved those skills listed with die codes next to them. Notice that they're all higher than the related attribute by +1D or +2D. Martius increased his skill in *dodge*, *firearms*, *astrography*, *survival*, *computer interface/repair*, and *first aid*. For now you shouldn't worry about how he improved those skills —you'll learn about that in the next chapter.

> **Example:** Martius has a die code of 2D+2 for his *Agility* attribute. All his *Agility* skills begin at 2D+2 even though some don't have die codes next to them (like *archaic weapons*, *brawling*, *martial arts*, and *melee combat*). If Martius uses any of these skills, he just rolls 2D+2. Two skills have improved die codes —*dodge* and *firearms* have been boosted to 3D+2 (1D higher than the related attribute), showing that Martius is a little better in these than his other *Agility* skills.

You also shouldn't worry about the listings for **Amarax Points**, **Necro-Dream Points**, **Move**, or other categories. Although you'll use these later when you play the game with friends, you don't need them to play "Scout for Hire." They appear on the template in case you'd like to use Martius in other *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* adventures.

Martius in Action

Every action Martius might attempt in this adventure (and others) is described by a **difficulty** noted in the text —**Very Easy**, **Easy**, **Moderate**, **Difficult**, **Very Difficult** or **Heroic**. These difficulties describe in very general terms how hard it is to successfully complete an action. If spotting a strange creature on an open plain seems easy, then the difficulty to successfully do this would be Easy. If the creature was grazing among some rocks, this might make it slightly more difficult to notice, raising the difficulty to Moderate.

Every difficulty has a **difficulty number**. To succeed at an action, you must tie or beat this number with your die roll. In "Scout for Hire," the text tells you what difficulty numbers are associated with certain tasks. When you play this game with friends, one of you will be the **gamemaster** —the person who guides the story and describes the setting— and will choose difficulties based on the complexity of the actions players want their characters to take. To remind everyone about difficulty levels and numbers, they're often listed in adventure text with the uppermost difficulty number in parentheses, such as "Easy (10)," or "Difficult (20)" —a gamemaster might see it in an adventure like this: "Scanning the bar for anyone the characters know requires an Easy (10) *Perception* roll." (We'll talk more about the gamemaster later.) The chart below gives you some general guidelines about difficulty levels and their associated difficulty numbers.

Difficulty	Difficulty Number
Very Easy	1–5
Easy	6–10
Moderate	11–15
Difficult	16–20
Very Difficult	21–30
Heroic	31+

When you undertake an action, you roll the appropriate skill or attribute dice. If your roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, your character succeeds. If the roll is lower, your character fails.

> **Example:** While exploring a planet, Martius stumbles on the nest of a new creature. Unfortunately, this animal is somewhat annoyed by Martius stepping into its lair, and

Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
MARTIUS		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Quiet Explorer		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 2D+2

Brawling	
Dodge	3D+2
Firearms	3D+2
Riding	
O-G maneuver	

Knowledge 4D

Aliens	
Astrography	6D
Cultures	
Languages	
Security regulation	
Survival	5D

Perception 3D

Hide	
Persuasion	
Search	
Sneak	

Strength 2D+1

Climb/Jump	
Lift	
Stamina	
Swim	

Mechanical 3D

Astro-nav	
Comm	
Piloting	
Sensors	
Vehicle operation	

Technical 3D

Comp/interface repair	4D
First aid	4D
Flight systems repair	
Perso. equip. repair	
Vehicle repair	

Psionics

Special Abilities

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

At this stage, you have simply adopted a line of conduct: independence and respect for ecology.

A Quote

"Um, yeah, sure. By the way, did you notice that anti-intruder scanner back there? I think it's blinking at us."

Equipment

Defense pistol (5 shots, 3D damage), io board, jumpsuit, range goggles (+3D to long-range *Perception* and *search* rolls), 3 kublars

Character Description

Background

You've always been an oddball, shying away from other people and wandering off to do your own thing. It's not that you don't like people—they can be useful means to an end sometimes—but you feel more at home by yourself, surrounded by the little miracles of modern technology. You quickly realized there was no escape from others, so you tried using that to your advantage. Hiring out your skills as an explorer, you wandered the Exofringe seeking new planets to colonize and exploit. Others might go crazy sitting in a tiny survey ship crammed with scanners, atmosphere analyzers, survey computers, and other explorer's equipment. But you're right at home. Unfortunately, you don't own your survey ship, so you're constantly seeking new clients to hire you to explore new regions of space for them. Between jobs, you tinker with your gadgets, follow others who might help you earn enough to buy your own scout ship, and daydream of surveying vast new regions of the galaxy.

Personality

You don't talk much, feel awkward around others, and rely more on technology than people. Your inquisitive nature inspires you to wander off when you get bored, seeking something more exciting.

Connections

You've reluctantly forged a passing friendship with anyone interested in space travel, new worlds, or cool technological gizmos, anyone who might help you attain your goals.

Physical Description

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lashes out with a powerful barbed claw. Martius has just enough time to *dodge* this attack. His dodge skill is 3D+2. The gamemaster determines that avoiding the blow is a Moderate (15) task. The player running Martius rolls three dice (for the "3D") and adds two more points (for the "+2") for a total of 16. Since this total is higher than the difficulty number of 15, Martius barely manages to dodge the creature's attack.

If you make an especially low roll, or if you want to improve a roll you just made, you can use a **Character Point** to roll an additional die and add it to that skill roll. Using Character Points represents someone pushing themselves, drawing on their determination and inner strength to succeed. Character Points offer a chance to improve your character's rolls when your character needs it most. Martius starts "Scout for Hire" with five Character Points —just like most beginning characters in the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*.

Example: Let's say Martius only rolled a 12 to dodge the creature's attack. That barbed claw might rip the poor explorer to shreds if it hits him. Martius decides to spend one Character Point (now he has only four left). By spending that Character Point, he gets to roll an extra die and add the result to his low *dodge* roll of 12. He rolls a 3, raising his *dodge* total to 15. Since his roll equals the Moderate (15) difficulty needed to succeed, he manages to avoid that barbed claw.

For this adventure, you're only allowed to use one Character Point to boost a single skill roll. You'll want to use these Character Points carefully. If you spend them too quickly, you won't have enough when you really need them. You might save a few to help your character survive the adventure's climax.

You've now learned enough about the rules to start playing. But a roleplaying game is more than rules —it's about creating your own exciting story! Playing this solitaire adventure will give you a feel for the game. Simply read on and follow the directions.

You'll be directed to several numbered entries, sometimes determined by your own choices, and sometimes determined by how well you make your skill rolls. Don't read the entries straight through, and don't read entries you're not supposed to look at —that will spoil any surprises for you. Just follow the instructions and you'll be okay.

A Mercenary Meeting

Your travels have brought you to Arcol 271, one of hundreds of immense city constructs on the barren surface of Dreer. You've wandered the crowded passageways, open levels, and darker sub-levels seeking work—anything that can get you back in the cozy comfort of a tight scout ship cockpit, surrounded by scanners, computers, analyzers, and other gadgets, all helping you explore new regions of space and survey new worlds. Despite the presence of several large industrial maganats here on Dreer, nobody you talked to wants to give work to a down-and-out explorer.

While wandering through the dank corridors of one of the arcology's sub-levels one day, you hear a fellow spreading rumors that some mercenary company was looking for an explorer to find them a new base world. He wears a tattered overcoat, though you can spot some kind of uniform underneath. When you ask him about more details, he says some mercenary captain is hanging out at an infamous soldier bar, Regimental Colors, down on sub-level 26. "Look for someone wearing a patch like this," he says, pulling back his ragged overcoat to reveal a shoulder patch on his uniform. It shows a black, winged creature on a blue background. "Talk to them if you're looking for some survey work."

Since this is the first concrete lead on a job you've had since landing on Dreer, you decide to check it out.

Sub-level 26 isn't too far below your current level. The passageways are a bit dirtier, the air smells more foul, and the people you pass look rougher around the edges. Eventually you find the Regimental Colors: a dingy building facade with high, narrow windows (more for ventilation than anything else), and a blinking electric sign sporting the bar's name. Taking a deep breath to steady your nerves, you step through the door.

The interior is dark, smoky, and loud. Soldiers cluster around tables, gambling, drinking, and arguing among themselves. Some hide in the darker shadows of booths lining the walls, while others hunch over the bar along the far wall. Old battle flags hang from the walls like faded clouds. It seems like every soldier wears a different uniform, with varying insignia and a different assortment of gear.

To see if you notice anything out of the ordinary —or the person with the patch you're supposed to meet— you must make an Easy (10) Perception roll. Look on Martius's character sheet. His Perception has a die code of 3D, so roll three dice and add them up.

- *If you roll 10 or higher, go to 3.*
- *If you roll 9 or lower, go to 5.*

1 "No, thanks," you say, politely refusing the pipe. The soldier who offered it to you slips it back between his lips. "I've seen a patch like the one you describe," says another mercenary in the booth. "Try asking over there," he says, pointing toward the bar... or was he gesturing at those two bald mercenaries at the table near the bar?

"Um, thanks," you say.

- *You can walk over and ask the bartender if she's seen that blue-and-gold patch: go to 11.*
- *You can ask those two bald mercenaries at the table near the bar if they know anything: go to 14.*

2 You carefully make your way through the crowd toward the bar. At a nearby table, two mercenaries with shaved heads and tattoos glare menacingly at you, and you do your best to ignore them.

The bartender smiles at you, but goes back to her business when she realizes you're not here to order a drink. You tap the lanky guy with the mop of dirty blond hair on the shoulder and ask if he's seen anyone wearing a particular unit patch showing a winged beast in gold on a blue background.

"You mean like this one?" the fellow says, pointing at the

insignia on his shoulder. It's the exact same patch you saw earlier, a blue-and-gold one with a winged creature on it. He extends his hand to shake yours. "I'm Lancer Gudrig, at your service."

• Please go to 20.

3 You notice several people who stand out from the crowd of mercenaries. In a dark booth to your left you spot a few jovial soldiers smoking pipes, but their blue-and-gold shoulder patches don't look like the one the fellow showed you earlier. Near the bar two bald, angry-looking mercenaries hunch over a table —the tattoos on the sides of their shorn heads show jagged-edged knives.

The bar itself holds an assortment of loners, their backs turned to you, some speaking with the barkeeper now and then, probably boring her to death with old war stories. She looks up from filling someone's glass, catches your eye, and nods her head at you. Maybe she just means to welcome a new customer into her dive, but perhaps she would know where to find your mercenary contact.

• You can approach the fellows smoking pipes in the booth: go to 9.

• You can head for the bar and ask the bartender if she's seen that blue-and-gold patch: go to 11.

• You can ask those two bald mercenaries at the table if they know anything: go to 14.

4 You dodge the soldier's blow, swiftly moving to one side and out of the path of his fist. You anticipate another attack, but he just stands there, face fuming, fists ready to make another swing at you. It seems he's staring directly over your shoulder. You glance to your side and see another mercenary —one of the men who was leaning on the bar earlier— aiming a suprapistol at your adversary. Despite this obvious show of force, the newcomer seems rather polite. "Leave this good fellow alone, now, will you, Roskovich?" he tells the surly mercenary. Your opponent just grumbles to himself. "I know you Razorheads don't hang out in the Regimental Colors too often, but we don't pick fights with other people, particularly those

who don't share our soldierly profession." The gruff mercenary backs off muttering rudely to himself, then sits back down next to his equally annoyed companion.

The friendly soldier holsters his suprapistol and leads you back over to the bar. "Sorry that Razorhead bothered you. They don't care much for manners and good behavior. I'm Lancer Gudrig, at your service." He extends his hand to shake yours, and you notice a blue-and-gold patch on his shoulder... just the one your were seeking!

• *Please go to 20.*

5 You notice several people who stand out from the crowd of mercenaries. In a dark booth to your left, you spot a few jovial soldiers smoking pipes, but their blue-and-gold shoulder patches catch your eye. Near the bar two bald, angry-looking mercenaries hunch over a table. The bar itself holds an assortment of loners, their backs turned to you, some speaking with the barkeeper now and then, probably boring her to death with old war stories.

One of these people has to know something about the mercenary you're supposed to meet...

• *You can approach the fellows smoking pipes in the booth: go to 9.*

• *You can head for the bar and ask the bartender if she's seen that blue-and-gold patch: go to 11.*

• *You can ask those two bald mercenaries at the table if they know anything: go to 14.*

6 Ow. The mercenary's blow really hits you hard. Your face feels like someone just landed a spaceship on it. You're hurt so bad that you're wounded. Your injury's serious enough that it affects how you take actions. For the rest of this adventure, you suffer a –1D penalty to all skill and attribute rolls!

As you begin regaining your senses, you realize that someone at the bar is helping you up. When you turn to thank him, you notice he's pointing a suprapistol at your adversary and giving him a stern look. Despite this obvious show of force, the newcomer seems rather polite. "Leave this good fellow alone,

now, will you, Roskovich?" he tells the surly mercenary. Your opponent just grumbles to himself. "I know you Razorheads don't hang out in the Regimental Colors too often, but we don't pick fights with other people, particularly those who don't share our soldierly profession." The gruff mercenary backs off muttering rudely to himself, then sits back down next to his equally annoyed companion. The friendly soldier holsters his suprapistol and leads you back over to the bar. "Sorry that Razorhead bothered you. They don't care much for manners and good behavior. I'm Lancer Gudrig, at your service." He extends his hand to shake yours, and you notice a blue-and-gold patch on his shoulder...just the one your were seeking!

• *Please go to 20.*

7 You manage to exhale the greenish smoke with only a little coughing. Everyone in the booth chuckles, and a friendly soldier pats you on the back. "Sorry about that, boy. All part of some good-natured fun, wouldn't you say?" You smile back weakly.

"To make it up to you, we'll tell you where you can find that patch you're looking for. See that lanky fellow chatting with the bartender? The one with the mop of dirty blond hair? Go talk to him."

"Um, thanks," you reply.

• *You can walk over and talk to the lanky fellow at the bar: go to 2.*

• *You can ask those two bald mercenaries at the table near the bar if they know anything: go to 14.*

8 You notice a darkened doorway just past the bar. If you had to leave in a hurry, it might prove a swift escape route. Then you notice a woman hiding in the shadows just inside the doorway. Her luxuriously long black hair curls over the shoulders of her military fatigues. She notices you, too, makes eye contact, then puts her index finger over her lips, encouraging you to keep quiet. You notice her suprapistol is drawn, but realize she's a friend when she taps the barrel against her shoulder...and the blue-and-gold patch there. She must be a member of the Sable Brigade watching Lancer's back.

• *Please go to 17.*

9 The friendly-looking mercenaries smoking pipes see you approach. They're all crammed into a darkened booth, from which this sweet greenish haze flows. As you step up to them, you notice their shoulder patches show a black cross on a blue background...not the particular insignia you're looking for.

One soldier slips the pipe from his lips and smiles. "Can we help you, son? You look kind of lost."

You explain how you're seeking someone with a blue-and-gold shoulder patch—not theirs, of course—showing some kind of winged creature on it. You ask if they'd know anyone in this bar who might wear such insignia.

Another mercenary pats you on the back, ignoring your query. "Here, why don't you try drawing on one of these," he says, offering his pipe. That greenish smoke wafts up from the smoldering pipe bowl.

- *If you'd like to try smoking the pipe, go to 13.*
- *If you'd rather get on with finding out what these mercenaries know about the patch, go to 1.*

10 The rude mercenary is too quick for you. His meaty fist connects with your face and sends you sprawling backward over a nearby table and toward the bar.

When characters get hit in combat, they sustain damage. To find out how seriously this punch affects Martius, you roll his Strength. Martius has 2D+1 in *Strength*, so roll two dice and add one to the total.

- *If you roll 5 or higher, go to 15.*
- *If you roll 4 or less, go to 6.*

11 You carefully make your way through the crowd toward the bar. At a nearby table, two mercenaries with shaved heads and tattoos glare menacingly at you, and you do your best to ignore them.

The bartender greets you as you step up. "What can I get for you, stranger?" You explain how you're looking for a particular unit patch showing a winged beast in gold on a blue background. "We don't hand out insignia here, just drinks and bad advice," she says. "And the bad advice is free." You ask her for a glass of whatever the guy next to you is drinking, and reluctantly part with one of your kublars to pay for it. You ask again if she's seen anyone wearing that particular patch.

"You mean like this one?" the fellow next to you says, pointing at the insignia on his shoulder. It's the exact same patch you saw earlier, a blue-and-gold one with a winged creature on it. He extends his hand to shake yours. "I'm Lancer Gudrig, at your service."

- *Please go to 20.*

12 On Lancer's advice, you dive for the bar's back exit. To do this and avoid getting hit by the Razorheads' gunfire, you must roll your *dodge* skill of 3D+2. (Remember, if you've been wounded, you have a –1D penalty to this action, so you only roll 2D+2.)

- *If you roll 5 or more, go to 19.*
- *If you roll 4 or less, go to 22.*

13 You don't see any harm taking one puff from the pipe. You suck on the stem, inhaling the sweet, green smoke. Your head starts spinning a little as you hold the smoke inside, then exhale with a puff of greenish haze.

To see how the pipe smoke affects Martius, you must make an Easy (10) roll of his *stamina* skill. If you look on the character sheet, you'll notice that *stamina* has no die code next to it. This doesn't mean Martius has no *stamina*, it just means that skill has the same die code as its related attribute, *Strength*. Since Martius's *Strength* score is 2D+1, roll two dice and add one to the total.

- *If you roll 10 or higher, go to 7.*
- *If you roll 9 or less, go to 16.*

14 You make your way through the crowd and approach the two bald mercenaries at the table. They're hunched over their drinks, muttering to each other. As you get closer, you notice they've decorated the side of their shorn heads with a tattoo shaped like a jagged-edged combat knife. The tattoos match the insignia on their well-worn camouflage uniforms.

The two soldiers glare up at you as you approach. "What's your problem," the more savage-looking of the two mercenaries growls. He's grasping his drink so tightly it looks like the glass might break.

You explain rather politely how you're looking for a particular unit patch showing a winged beast in gold on a blue background. The surly mercenary abruptly rises from his chair and stares you in the face. "You mean a creature with a bird-head and the back half of a feline predator or something? With wings?"

"I guess so," you reply, nodding timidly.

The soldier seems to seriously consider this, then his lips snarl in a ragged smile. "Sure, I've seen a patch like that. It belongs to soldiers fighting with the Sable Brigade."

He hesitates a moment while his smile dissipates. "Razorheads don't get along with the Sable Brigade," he growls. "We hate those guys."

You're just about to apologize for inconveniencing the mercenary when you realize he's swinging his fist toward your face!

You have just enough time to try dodging the blow. Avoiding the mercenary's punch is a Moderate (15) task using your *dodge* skill of 3D+2. Roll three dice and add two points to the total to see how well you dodged. (This is one of those situations where you might want to spend a Character Point to add an extra die to your *dodge* roll.)

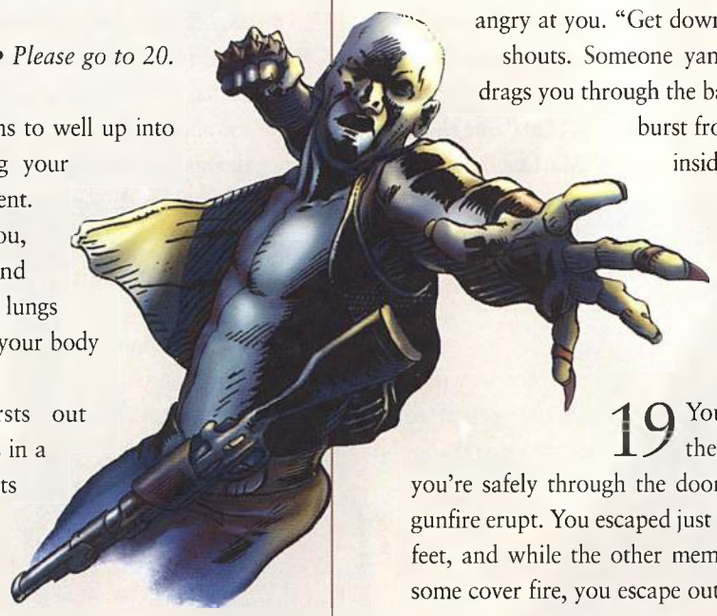
- *If you roll 15 or higher, go to 4.*
- *If you roll 14 or lower, go to 10.*

15 The angry mercenary's fist inflicts enough damage to stun you. You're not knocked out cold, just disoriented for a moment. You stumble to your feet, realizing that someone at the bar is helping you up. When you turn to thank him, you notice he's pointing a suprapistol at your adversary and giving him a stern look. Despite this obvious show of force, the newcomer seems rather polite. "Leave this good fellow alone, now, will you, Roskovich?" he tells the surly mercenary. Your opponent just grumbles to himself. "I know you Razorheads don't hang out in the Regimental Colors too often, but we don't pick fights with other people, particularly those who don't share our soldierly profession." The gruff mercenary backs off muttering rudely to himself, then sits back down next to his equally annoyed companion.

The friendly soldier holsters his suprapistol and leads you back over to the bar. "Sorry that Razorhead bothered you. They don't care much for manners and good behavior. I'm Lancer Gudrig, at your service." He extends his hand to shake yours, and you notice a blue-and-gold patch on his shoulder...just the one your were seeking!

• *Please go to 20.*

16 The greenish smoke seems to well up into your nasal cavity, filling your brain with the sweet, forgetful scent. The mercenaries all smile at you, then begin wobbling back and forth, blurring, spinning. Your lungs erupt in a spasm of coughing as your body tries to purge the green smoke.



Everyone in the booth bursts out laughing. They raise their glasses in a toast to you while one of them pats you gently on the back to make sure you hack up all the smoke. Someone passes you a glass and you tentatively take a sip to moisten your dry throat. When you regain your composure, the soldiers all smile at you like you've been buddies all your life. "Sorry about that, boy. All part of some good-natured fun, wouldn't you say?" You smile back weakly.

"To make it up to you, we'll tell you where you can find that patch you're looking for. See that lanky fellow chatting with the bartender? The one with the mop of dirty blond hair? Go talk to him."

"Um, thanks," you reply.

• *You can walk over and talk to the lanky fellow at the bar: go to 2.*

• *You can ask those two bald mercenaries at the table near the bar if they know anything: go to 14.*

17 As you look around the bar, you don't notice anything out of the ordinary...at least until the main doors burst open, allowing a flood of mercenaries to crowd inside. They're all dressed in camouflage fatigues, and every one of them—men and women—has a shaved head with a jagged-knife tattoo on the side. Everyone clears a path for them. The two surly soldiers seated near the bar stand up and hail their comrades, then point at you and Lancer. "Those guys work for Sable Brigade!" they shout. Lancer turns to you. "Now you see why we need a new secret base," he says. "Quick, out the back door."

As Lancer hustles you toward a darkened doorway to one side of the bar, you notice a woman wearing the Sable Brigade patch step out with her suprapistol raised—apparently she was waiting to guard the escape route and provide cover fire in case just this kind of situation developed. You peer over your shoulder at the angry gang of mercenaries near the front entrance. It looks like the Razorheads have drawn their weapons and are about to fire at you!

• *You can dodge toward the back door: go to 12.*

• *You can pull out your defense pistol and shoot at the Razorheads: go to 23.*

18 You get off one shot and hit a Razorhead in the arm. It only seems to make all of them more angry at you. "Get down!" the woman guarding the exit shouts. Someone yanks you down to the floor and drags you through the back door as several bright flashes burst from her suprapistol's barrel. Once inside the doorway, Lancer helps you to your feet. While the other member of Sable Brigade lays down some cover fire, you escape out the back to safety.

• *Please go to 24.*

19 You dive for the bar's back exit, hit the floor, and slide along until you're safely through the doorway. Behind you the sounds of gunfire erupt. You escaped just in time. Lancer helps you to your feet, and while the other member of Sable Brigade lays down some cover fire, you escape out the back to safety.

• *Please go to 24.*

20 Lancer seems a friendly enough fellow. "I'm an officer with the Sable Brigade, a mercenary company," he explains. "We're soldiers-for-hire, but we often make enemies among those we're paid to fight or other mercenary groups—like those Razorheads over there." He nods toward the two angry-looking mercenaries whose bald heads sport tattoos of jagged-edged knives. "We operate from several bases, some known to outsiders, and a few we keep secret, just in case. You might be the explorer we've been looking for. We're hoping someone like you can check out a few uninhabited systems for us." He asks about some of the worlds you've surveyed in the past, and the people who used to hire you. "You sound like the right person for the job. We can fix you up with a small scout vessel, and pay you about 50 kublars to make survey runs through three systems we have in mind." The two of you speak a few more moments, ironing out the deal's details. Working for mercenaries isn't bad, especially if they're willing to pay you.

While you're talking, you get the feeling that you're being

watched. You look around to see if you spot anything out of the ordinary, a Moderate (15) task. To determine whether you notice anything, you roll Martius's *Perception* attribute of 3D. (Remember, if you've been wounded, you have a –1D penalty to this action, so you only roll 2D.)

- *If you roll 15 or higher, go to 8.*
- *If you roll 14 or lower, go to 17.*

21 You get off one shot, which rips through the air and into several musty old banners hanging from the ceiling. Even though your shot went wild, it only seems to make all the Razorheads more angry at you. "Get down!" the woman guarding the exit shouts. Someone yanks you down to the floor and drags you through the back door as several bright flashes burst from her suprapistol's barrel. Once inside the doorway, Lancer helps you to your feet. While the other member of the Sable Brigade lays down some cover fire, you escape out the back to safety.

- *Please go to 24.*

22 You dive for the bar's back exit, trip over a nearby chair, and fall flat on your back. Gunfire erupts as the Razorheads open fire, and the woman with the Sable Brigade tries holding your escape passage open. Suddenly someone grabs your jumpsuit shoulders and yanks you from behind. Lancer drags you across the floor toward the exit! Once inside the doorway, Lancer helps you to your feet. While the other member of Sable Brigade lays down some cover fire, you escape out the back to safety.

- *Please go to 24.*

23 You're not going to stand for this. You whip out your defense pistol (a rather small gun compared to a suprapistol) and fire at the rude Razorheads. Actually hitting a Razorhead with a shot is a Moderate (15) task. To see if you succeed, you roll Martius's *firearms* skill of 3D+2. (Remember, if you've been wounded, you have a –1D penalty to this action, so you only roll 2D+2.)

- *If you roll 15 or higher, go to 18.*
- *If you roll 14 or lower, go to 21.*

24 You've successfully managed to escape from the Regimental Colors and the surly Razorhead mercenaries in one piece. While the three of you stumble through some back passages to lose anyone following you, Lancer introduces you to the woman who was guarding the back exit and covering your escape. She's Sable Griphynne, captain of the Sable Brigade, and apparently its namesake. Eventually she'll fix you up with a small scout ship to borrow while you survey a few worlds, hoping to find the brigade a new secret base... but that's another adventure.

Now you see how your character works in the game. Every time you want to do something, you roll the appropriate skill or attribute dice as listed on your character sheet. If your roll is equal to or higher than the task's difficulty, you succeed. If your roll is less, you fail.

To gain more practice doing things with your character, try running this solitaire adventure again, making different choices along the way. Did you try smoking the mercenary's pipe, or attempt to talk with those surly Razorheads sitting near the bar? Once you've learned how to create your own character, you might try playing this scenario again with a character you've made yourself.

Are you trying to get your friends interested in playing the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*? Let them borrow this book and run through "Scout for Hire" themselves. They'll learn something about the game and about the *Metabarons* universe, too.

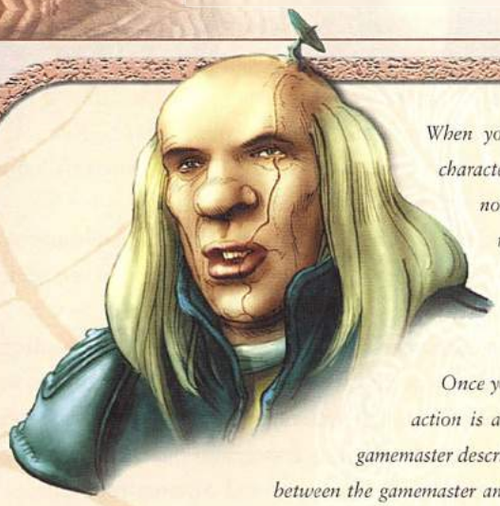
I trust Martius survived that little story, and that you got your first taste of roleplaying with all these dice and rules. This solitaire adventure helped teach you how to roll dice and simulate your character's skills and abilities during the game. Maybe it even gave you some idea what it's like to play a different role. But solitaire adventures are a very limited roleplaying game experience. When you play these games, you usually gather several people, including one called the "gamemaster." It's not too terribly different than what you just experienced in "Scout for Hire," except with a group.

Each person plays the role of a character in the story. You can use one that's already made, like Martius, or one based on a type of person. You'll find several templates for these characters at the end of this book. They represent the kinds of people you'd find inhabiting the Metabarons universe: explorers, nobles, mercenaries, headhunters, pirates, defused mentreks. When you play the game, your characters become the protagonists, the stars of the stage production, or the main characters in a comic book.

The gamemaster has several jobs. He sets the stage for the story, describing backgrounds, scenery, and your surroundings. He introduces complications to get the story rolling and propel it toward the climax. While you and your friends play one character each, the gamemaster plays the roles of all the other characters you meet, both adversaries and allies. Along the way, he helps the players interact in the story through the rules, reminding them what skills to roll, how difficult certain actions seem, and when it might be a good time to use Character Points.

In "Scout for Hire," the adventure text took the gamemaster's role, describing what you encountered, what other characters said to you, explaining which skills to roll, and reminding you of various rules about using Character Points or getting wounded. In a regular adventure, the gamemaster would do all that.

Before a game even starts, the gamemaster first creates the story your characters are going to play in. He makes notes on the setting, describes a few characters (enemies and allies) you might meet, creates a few encounters leading up to the climax. In the game, he presents these as your characters walk through the story's plot. Listen carefully—unlike a regular tale, where only one person tells it, roleplaying games allow everyone to tell a portion of the story. You might pick up on a detail the gamemaster provides and investigate it yourself. Maybe it's a major part of the main storyline, or perhaps it's just a momentary diversion.



When you've heard the gamemaster describe your situation and surroundings, you decide what your character's going to do. In "Scout for Hire," the text described the bar called the Regimental Colors. Martius noticed a few interesting people: the mercenaries smoking pipes in one booth, the bald soldiers sitting near the bar, and the bartender herself. You got to choose who you spoke to, and how you reacted to them. If you were playing a character other than Martius (a quiet explorer), you might have reacted differently. Instead of fleeing at the end, you might have put up a fight —though I'd hope you'd use a larger weapon than a puny defense pistol.

Once you know how your character will act in a certain situation, the gamemaster decides how difficult your action is and what happens if you succeed or fail. After rolling your skills to see whether you succeed, the gamemaster describes the scene that results from your character's actions... and it all starts over again. It's really a dialog between the gamemaster and players: the gamemaster describes a scene, the players react, the dice help determine who succeeds and who fails.

Rather than bore you with my epic metaphor of game simulating a story, why don't I give you a better example.

An Example of Play

Several friends meet to run a *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*. They've gathered around Jeff's kitchen table to play. Everyone's brought their character, a few six-sided dice, and pencils. Jeff's put out some popcorn and poured soda for everyone to snack on during the game.

The gamemaster, Pete, is running the scenario above —"Scout for Hire"— with a few modifications allowing for several characters instead of just the lone scout. Jeff is playing Martius, the quiet explorer. Chris is running the outcast noble Lucardo, and Beth is playing a private investigator named Larryn.

The characters just entered the Regimental Colors seeking the mercenaries with the blue-and-gold patches. They're hoping a job for Martius might also hold some opportunities for everyone.

Pete: *You step inside the Regimental Colors. It looks like a typical mercenary bar. The interior is dark, smoky, and loud. Soldiers cluster around tables, gambling, drinking, and arguing among themselves. Some hide in the darker shadows of booths lining the walls, while others hunch over the bar along the far wall. Old battle flags hang from the walls like faded clouds. It seems like every soldier wears a different uniform, with varying insignia and a different assortment of gear. (He quickly sketches a layout of the Regimental Colors on a piece of scrap paper.) "You've just entered here, booths line the walls, tables clutter the floor, and the bar stands along the far wall. What do you want to do?"*

Jeff: *(Talking in Martius's timid voice) "Uh, are you sure this is the right place? It looks kind of rough."*

Beth: *(Speaking as Larryn in a tough private investigator voice) "What a dump. I can barely see anything through all this smoke." (Beth waves her hand around as if she's waving the smoke from her face.)*

Chris: *(In a bold, posh voice like Lucardo would use) "I look over the crowd." (Now using his own voice and addressing Pete) "Do I notice anything unusual? Are any of these mercenaries wearing that blue-and-gold patch we saw earlier?"*

Pete: *(To Chris) "You can make a Perception roll to try noticing anything out of the ordinary, or that insignia."*

Beth: *(To Pete) "Can Larryn look, too?"*

Jeff: *(To Pete) "Martius is going to check things, out, too. Do my range goggles help any?"*

Pete: *"Everyone can roll their Perception to notice anything unusual." (To Jeff) "Sorry, Jeff, but those range goggles are only useful to spot things far away, like binoculars. You can notice something far off, but things close up are just big blurs."*

Chris: *(Looking on his character sheet) "Lucardo's Perception is 4D..." (He grabs four dice and rolls them.) "Hmmm, a 2, 3, 3, and 4, for a total of 12."*

Beth: *"Larryn has 4D Perception, too." (She rolls four dice.) "Larryn gets a 17 on her Perception roll!"*

Jeff: *(Rolling only 3D for Martius's Perception) "I got an 11 for my Perception."*

Pete: *(Checking his notes to see that everyone beat the Perception difficulty) "You all notice several people who stand out from the crowd of mercenaries. In a dark booth to your left you spot a few jovial soldiers smoking pipes, but their blue-and-gold shoulder patches don't look like the one the fellow showed you earlier. Near the bar two bald, angry-looking mercenaries hunch over a table —the tattoos on the sides of their shorn heads show jagged-edged knives. The bar itself holds an assortment of loners, their backs turned to you, some speaking with the barkeeper now and then, probably boring her to death with old war stories. She looks up from filling someone's glass, catches your eye, and nods her head at you. Maybe she just means to welcome a new customer into her dive, but perhaps she would know where to find your mercenary contact."*

Chris: *(As Lucardo) "I stride confidently to the bar."*

Jeff: *"Uh, maybe we should wait."*

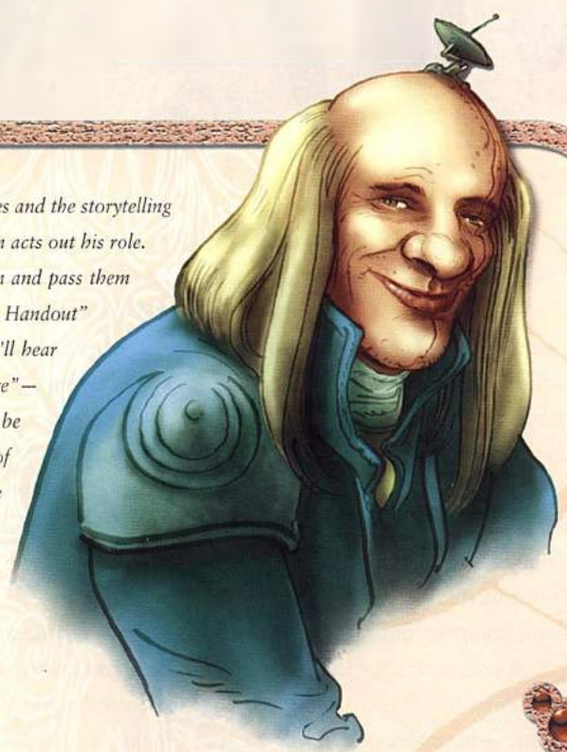
Beth: *"I don't like this. I'm following Lucardo to watch his back."*

Jeff: *"I'm not comfortable wading through that crowd of mercenaries. I hang back and wait near one of those booths, trying not to be noticed."*

Pete: *(To Jeff) "To blend into the crowd, you'll need to make a sneak roll... or if you haven't improved sneak, another Perception roll."*

Jeff: (Rolling dice) "I got a 14. Is that good?"
Pete: (To Jeff) "That's a pretty good roll. Anyone who's specifically looking for you needs to beat that 14 with a search or Perception roll of their own, so you should be okay for now. Just as long as you keep blending into the crowd, avoiding any actions to make you stand out." (Turning to Chris) "Lucardo strides up to the bar..."
Chris: "Ignoring anyone who might be staring at me or muttering nasty things about the nobility under their breaths."
Pete: "Before you reach the bar, a mercenary rises from his seat and blocks your path. His head's shaved, and you notice he's decorated the side of his head tattoo shaped like a jagged-edged combat knife. The tattoo matches the insignia on his well-worn camouflage uniform."
Beth: "Does he say anything? I put my hand on my Viper pistol, just in case."
Pete: "The mercenary glares into Lucardo's face." (In a gruff mercenary voice) "Where do you think you're going, fancy-boy?"
Chris: (Trying to look dignified and noble) "My friend and I are headed for the bar to get a drink. So if you don't mind stepping aside, we'll be on our way."
Pete: (In his gruff voice) "Actually, I do mind..." (To Chris) "The angry mercenary begins slowly drawing back one arm and balling his hand into a meaty fist."
Chris: "I don't think that would be advisable." (To Pete) "I put my hand on the hilt of my sword. My family sword."
Pete: (To Chris) "Why don't you make an intimidation roll..."
Chris: "I've been waiting to use that skill. I have intimidation of 4D. (He rolls four dice) "Wow, what a great roll: 20!"
Pete: (Rolling the mercenary's willpower skill and shaking his head) "Your subtle threat of violence makes an impression on the mercenary. He steps to one side and lets you pass."
Chris: "Thank you." (To Pete) "I stride up to the bar and say hello to the bartender."
Beth: "I cautiously slip past the mercenary."
Pete: "He glares at you, Larryn, but doesn't get in your way."
Jeff: "I'm keeping my eye on things from off in my own corner."
Pete: (To Jeff) "Why don't you make another Perception roll, Martius."
Jeff: (Rolling his 3D Perception dice) "Ew, a 7. I'm going to spend a Character Point and roll an extra die for that one." (He rolls 1D and adds the 4 that turns up to his total) "Hmmm, I hope an 11 is enough."
Pete: (To Jeff) We'll see in a moment. (To Chris and Beth) You reach the bar and say hello to the bartender. She asks what she can do for you."
Chris: "Hello, miss. We were wondering if you've seen any soldiers in here wearing a particular insignia—a patch showing a gold winged creature on a blue background."
Pete: (As bartender) "Maybe I've seen something like that. Can I get you two something to drink?"
Beth: "Looks like we're going to have to pay for some drinks here." (To Chris) "Do you have any kublars to spare?"
Pete: (To Jeff) "Remember that Perception roll you made? It was high enough that you notice that rude mercenary stepping up behind Larryn and Lucardo, and this time it looks like he means business. He's got a combat shock-knife clenched in one fist.
Larryn: "I turn around and punch him in the face..."
Pete: "Unfortunately, Lucardo and Larryn are too busy talking with the bartender to notice this, so you can't act on it until someone tells you or you notice it yourselves. Only Martius sees it from across the room."
Jeff: "Uh, I yell across the bar that Lucardo should watch out."
Pete: "Well, that definitely distracts the angry mercenary...and calls attention to yourself. The one near Lucardo and Larryn backs off when your shout alerts them. Several other mercenaries —all with their heads shaved and sporting jagged-dagger tattoos— rise from their tables. Some shuffle menacingly toward Lucardo and Larryn, but a few are heading in your direction, Martius. They all look like they're spoiling for a fight."
Jeff: "I knew this was going to happen..."

Now you've had a chance to see how the game works—in regards to both the game rules and the storytelling style. It's like a tale in which everyone contributes their part, or a play where each person acts out his role. The next few pages contain a few things to help you learn the rules. You can copy them and pass them around to your friends to help them learn the game rules. The "Metabarons Player Handout" summarizes the most important game information you've learned so far, and some you'll hear about in the next chapter, "Characters." Remember Sable Griphynne from "Scout for Hire"—the woman guarding the bar's back exit so Martius and Lancer could escape? She'll be guiding you through the next few chapters, talking about how you can create characters of your own using "character templates," and describing the various skills your characters use in the game.
I'll return later to talk more about enchanting your audience with amazing storytelling techniques.



Metabarons Player Handout

If you've never played the Metabarons Roleplaying Game, or any roleplaying game, for that matter, this handout will help prepare you to play and get you started quickly.

In roleplaying games, the action takes place in everyone's imagination. You don't use a board or move tokens around. Instead, a person called the "gamemaster" leads the story, describing each scene to the players, who visualize the situation themselves. You play the role of a character, someone living in the Metabarons universe. While playing, you pretend to be that character.

The players and gamemaster work together to create their own story, with the players' characters as the heroes. The players imagine what the scene looks like and how their characters would respond to the situations they encounter. Then the players tell the gamemaster how they want to react. When you describe what your character does, the gamemaster will tell you when to roll the dice, and tell you what happens as a result of how well (or poorly) you roll. The game rules help determine what your character is capable of doing, while the gamemaster's plot creates settings, adversaries, and incidents to propel you along toward the story's exciting climax.

Everyone's A Winner. Nobody wins or loses in a roleplaying game. You're not competing against the other players or the gamemaster. The characters must work together as a team to accomplish their goals, using their various strengths and expertise to everyone's benefit. The players work with the gamemaster to create an entertaining story.

Immerse Yourself in Your Character. You must rely on your imagination to fully enjoy the game. You might adopt your character's accent and mannerisms while speaking in the game. You should only act out scenes when they are non-threatening (for example, if your character tries conning someone, you could have fun fast-talking him while playing your part). Remember, this is just a game —never act out violent scenes or make any physical actions others might consider dangerous or threatening.

Use Your Imagination. In the game your character can do whatever you can imagine someone like him doing in that situation. If you can imagine it in the real world, or in the *Metabarons* universe, it can happen in the game. Don't worry about "going off the board," because there isn't one. Your gamemaster knows how to keep the game story focused toward your goal.

Keep Things Moving. A good story doesn't slow down, it just accelerates toward the exciting climax. Don't worry about the rules. Just tell the gamemaster what you'd like your character to do, and the gamemaster will tell you what skills you'll need and when to roll them.

Getting Started

Choose a **character template** that looks like you'd enjoy playing. Get a pencil and some normal, six-sided dice (you can borrow these from some old board games around the house).

Read over the character sheet. The right side describes your character's background, personality, and motivations. You can change some of these if you like, but make sure it's okay with the gamemaster first.

Look over the left side of your character sheet. It's covered with a list of attributes (in bold, big letters) and skills (the lists beneath each attribute). Each character has seven attributes:

Agility: A measure of how physically articulate your character is, including his eye-hand coordination and agility.

Knowledge: Measure of your character's overall intelligence.

Mechanical: Ability to operate mechanical equipment like vehicles, shields, spaceships, and sensors.

Perception: Your character's awareness of himself and things around him, including the ability to interact successfully with others.

Strength: Measure of a character's physical power and ability to resist damage.

Technical: A character's ability to manipulate, repair and modify complex mechanical systems.

Psionics: Measure of a character's psionic capabilities. Most characters begin with a score of 0D, since people with psionic powers are extremely rare.

Each die code represents the number of six-sided dice you roll when your character uses an attribute or skill (1D, 2D, 3D, 4D, 5D, and so on, pronounced "one dee," "two dee," etc.), and sometimes an added bonus of "+1" or "+2" you add to the entire roll.

Example: Jeff is playing a quiet explorer named Martius. He has a Knowledge score of 4D. When he tries to recall something he's learned about a region of space, the gamemaster tells Jeff to make a *Knowledge* roll. Jeff rolls four dice and gets a 1, 2, 5, and 6 —so his *Knowledge* roll total is 14.

Example: The scout Martius has an *Agility* die code of 2D+2, so if he wanted to juggle four balls at once, the gamemaster would ask Jeff to make an *Agility* roll. Jeff rolls two dice and gets a 2 and 4 (for the 2D), but he also adds +2 to the total (for the +2) and gets a grand total of 8.

A die code of 2D is average, 3D is above average, and 4D is professional level.

Skills

Skills are talents characters learn through training and experience. You can improve them over time. Skills are more specific uses of each attribute. For instance, the *astrography* skill is a more specific use of your character's *Knowledge* attribute. All skills beneath a given attribute begin at that attribute's die code.

Example: Martius's *Agility* is 2D+2. Since *brawling*, *dodge*, *firearms*, and *melee combat* are *Agility* skills, they all begin at 2D+2.

You can add more dice to skills to improve your talent at taking certain actions. If you add one die to a skill, the number in front of the "D" permanently increases by one.

Example: Jeff decides to add one die to Martius's *dodge* skill (an *Agility* skill). Martius's *dodge* skill is now 3D+2.

You can add one or two dice to a skill, but you only have seven dice to spend on improving your skills this way. You may not improve skills which start off at 0D (like any *Psionics* skills when your *Psionics* is also 0D). With only seven dice to add to skills, you must carefully choose which skills you think are important enough to your character to improve.

Example: Martius starts with the following attributes: *Agility* 2D+2, *Knowledge* 4D, *Mechanical* 3D, *Perception* 3D, *Strength* 2D+1, *Technical* 3D, and *Psionics* 0D. Jeff has 7D to spread among his skills.

Jeff decides Martius should be able to protect himself in the face of danger, so he adds 1D to *dodge* (an *Agility* skill) to make it 3D+2, and 1D to *firearms* to make that 3D+2 also.

Jeff decides to boost two *Knowledge* skills to reflect what Martius learned while exploring the galaxy. His *Knowledge* is already high at 4D. Jeff adds 2D to Martius's *astrography* skill to make it a whopping 6D, and 1D to his *survival* skill to improve it to 5D.

Jeff has 2D left to boost any other skills Martius might have improved. Martius has a *Technical* attribute of 3D. Jeff decides to put 1D in both *computer interface/repair* and *first aid*, bringing them both to 4D.

Important Skills

Each character sheet lists all the skills in the game. (Remember, if you haven't improved a skill and there's no die code written next to it, it still has the same die code as the attribute above). Here's a list of the most useful skills in the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* and what knowledge they represent and tasks they allow you to accomplish:

Agility Skills

brawling: Competence in unarmed combat.

dodge: Slipping out of danger's way, whether avoiding an attack or a sprung booby trap.

firearms: Shooting any gun one can carry, even if it requires a tripod set-up to fire. Covers everything from small Vipers to shoulder-launched rockets.

melee combat: Wielding modern hand-to-hand weapons (those using a power source).

Knowledge Skills

astrography: Familiarity with astrographic features (planets, star systems, nebulae), and general knowledge of any civilized elements present (settlements, industry, government, orbital installations).

bureaucracy: Knowledge of and ability to use a bureaucracy's intricate procedures to gain information, favors, or attain other goals.

languages: Familiarity with and ability to use various forms of communication, written, spoken, and non-verbal.

streetwise: Familiarity with criminal organizations, black markets, and other illicit operations.

survival: Knowledge of techniques for surviving in hostile, uncivilized environments.

Mechanical Skills

astro-nav: Plotting courses through space using a vessel's navigational computer interface.

gunnery: Accurately firing weapons mounted on vehicles, spaceships, or within fortresses.

piloting: Flying air- or space-borne craft, from aircars and fighters to transports and battleships.

vehicle operation: Operating non-flying vehicles traveling on or through the ground or a liquid medium.

Perception Skills

bargain: Haggling for prices for goods and services being bought or sold.

con: Bluffing, lying and deceiving others.

persuasion: Influencing others through honest discussion.

search: Spotting hidden objects or people.

sneak: Moving silently, avoiding detection and hiding oneself.

Strength Skills

climb/jump: Climbing or jumping over obstacles.

lift: Moving or lifting heavy objects.

stamina: Physical endurance and resistance to disease and poison.

Technical Skills

computer interface/repair: Programming, interfacing with, and fixing computer systems.

first aid: Using basic field medicine to treat injuries.

flight systems repair: Fixing damaged systems aboard flying vehicles and spaceships.

gunnery repair: Fixing weapons mounted on vehicles, spaceships, or within fortresses.

robot interface/repair: Programming, interfacing with, and fixing robots and their systems.

security: Installing, altering, and bypassing electronic security and surveillance systems.

vehicle repair: Fixing ground- and ocean-based vehicles that do not fly.

The gamemaster can answer any questions you have about how specific skills work in the game.

The Wild Die

One of the dice you roll should be a different color than the others. This is called your "Wild Die." When you roll skill or attribute dice, pay special attention to what you roll on the Wild Die.

If the Wild Die rolls a 2, 3, 4 or 5, just add it to the total normally.

If the Wild Die comes up as a 6, add the six to your score, but also tell the gamemaster. You get to roll that die again, adding the new roll to your score, too. If it comes up as a 6 again, add the six and roll the die again. You keep rolling as long as you get sixes.

If the Wild Die comes up as a 1, tell the gamemaster. He will ask you to do one of three things:

- Just add it to the total normally.
- Subtract that die and your other highest die from the total.
- Add it to the total normally, but the gamemaster will warn you that something bad resulted from your Wild Die roll, usually a complication that livens things up for your character.

How the Game Works

When your character tries doing something where there's a chance he might fail, the gamemaster determines how hard that task is and assigns a difficulty number. For instance, opening a door really has little chance of failure, but if you're trying to bash down a locked door by ramming it with your shoulder, there's a chance you might not succeed.

The gamemaster will ask you to roll the dice for the skill or attribute best suited for accomplishing the task at hand. If your character hasn't improved the skill, roll the attribute die code. If you roll equal to or greater than the difficulty number, your character succeeds. If you roll lower than this number, your character fails.

Example: Martius has an io board (like a mini-computer) and wants to search its computer database for facts about the planet he's exploring. His *computer interface/repair* skill is 4D. The gamemaster decides that searching the io board for this information is Easy, with a difficulty number of 10. Jeff rolls four dice for Martius's skill and gets a 17 —he finds the information he's looking for, and probably a lot more, since he rolled so much higher than the difficulty number. If he'd rolled an 8, he wouldn't have found the information on his io board —maybe it hasn't been updated lately, contains old data, or is lost somewhere among all the other files crammed into the io board's memory cards.

Example: Martius encounters some new aliens and wants to try communicating with them. The gamemaster asks Jeff to make a *languages* roll. Since Jeff didn't improve Martius's *languages* skill, he just rolls the attribute associated with that skill: *Knowledge*. Jeff rolls four dice and gets 12... probably not high enough to understand these aliens nobody's ever encountered before.

The chart below gives you some idea about difficulties and their associated difficulty numbers. The difficulties are a general way of describing how hard it would be to succeed at an action. If the gamemaster describes jumping a chasm as "pretty hard," it might have a difficulty of Very Difficult (30).

Metabarons Task Difficulties

Difficulty Level	Difficulty
Very Easy	1–5
Easy	6–10
Moderate	11–15
Difficult	16–20
Very Difficult	21–30
Heroic	31+

Opposed Rolls

If your character acts against another character —usually one controlled by the gamemaster— you make an opposed roll. You roll your skill dice, while the other character rolls his skill dice. Whoever rolls higher succeeds.

Example: While exploring a new planet, Martius encounters a strange and rather angry creature in its nest. The glossglok lashes out at Martius with a barbed claw. Although the creature's attack takes him almost by surprise, Martius has just enough time to try avoiding the blow. The glossglok makes a *brawling* roll of 11 to attack Martius: this is the difficulty number he must equal or beat to dodge the attack. Martius has a *dodge* skill of 3D+2, so Jeff rolls three dice and adds 2 to the total. He rolls a total of 16 and manages to avoid the blow. The glossglok's barbed claw narrowly misses crushing Martius into shredded pulp.

Actions in a Round

For most actions and roleplaying, it's not always important to keep track of how much time passes in the game ("game time," as opposed to "real time"). In certain situations like combat, however, game time is broken into several turns, or "rounds." One round represents about five seconds in game time.

Your character can perform one action in a round. Roll the skill or attribute die code for that action.

Characters can try doing more than one action in a round, but it becomes harder to do more than one thing at once.

If a character tries two actions, lose one die (–1D) from every skill roll.

If a character tries three actions, lose two dice (–2D) from every skill roll.

If a character tries four actions, they lose three dice (–3D) from every skill roll, and so forth.

Example: Martius just leaped back from the glossglok and wants to shoot back before it can attack him again. To make sure he hits with his defense pistol, he decides to take two shots. His *firearms* skill is 3D+2 —since he's taking two shots this round, he rolls 2D+2 for each shot (two actions, –1D per roll).

Example: Just to make sure he doesn't get hit with that barbed claw, Martius decides he's going to take only one shot at the glossglok and then dodge in the same round. His *firearms* skill is 3D+2, and his *dodge* is 3D+2. Since he's taking two actions in one round, he has a –1D penalty to both rolls —he rolls his firearms at 2D+2 and his *dodge* at 2D+2. If he decided to take two shots and dodge (three actions with a –2D penalty to all rolls), he'd make two *firearms* rolls at 1D+2 and his *dodge* roll at 1D+2.

Special Statistics

You'll notice each character sheet shows some other information besides background and skills. Each character begins the game with some equipment, including some basic notes in parentheses about what various items do. For instance, most weapons list their damage, while armor shows how many dice it adds to your Strength when resisting injuries. Remember, to use these items, you roll your skills, but when you successfully use them, you refer to the item's notes for the results.

> **Example:** Let's say Martius shoots that glossglok with his defense pistol. Jeff rolls Martius's *firearms* skill of 3D+2 to see if his shot hits the creature. If he succeeds, he looks under the "Equipment" heading of his character sheet and finds "defense pistol (3D damage)." He rolls the 3D to see how much his shot injures the glossglok.

Characters also start the game with at least one Amarax Point and five Character Points. You can spend these points to improve your character's chance of succeeding in especially difficult situations.

Character Points: When you spend a Character Point, you get to roll one extra die when your character tries doing something. You can spend Character Points after you've tried a skill roll, but you must do this before the gamemaster says whether your character succeeded or failed at the task.

When you roll an extra die for a Character Point, treat it as the Wild Die, rerolling and adding sixes. If you roll a 1, don't worry about it —just add it into your skill total. Using Character Points like this is a bonus, and can't hurt your skill roll.

You can spend a maximum of three Character Points to improve any one roll.

You can also use Character Points to improve your character's skills between adventures, so don't spend all of them during a scenario.

Amarax Points: When you spend an Amarax Point, your character draws on his inner vitality and spirit to try and succeed. He's tapping energy created from the harmonious balance between the physical and spiritual within himself —drawing on the very essence of life itself. This is best achieved when one's physical and spiritual being focus on an ideal, such as one's honor code.

If you decide to spend an Amarax Point, you must tell the gamemaster before making any die rolls. Using an Amarax Point doubles the number of dice you'd normally roll for one round only. You can only spend one Amarax Point in a round, and cannot spend any Character Points in the same round when you spend an Amarax Point. Players usually save their Amarax Points to accomplish particularly heroic feats that help others or advance their own code of honor.

Once used, you lose the Amarax Point —but you may earn it back at the end of the game if it was used for an especially brave or heroic deed that helped further your adherence to your code of honor.

Necro-Dream Points: Characters get Necro-Dream Points for succumbing to the apathetic forces of the universe: holovid, addictive mind-numbing drugs, homeosluts, and other mindless, technological conveniences of the Techno-Technos that encourage passivity. You can also receive Necro-Dream Points for surrendering to the universe's physical oppression: failing to stand up against unjust authority, allowing those in power to openly abuse the weak, or watching helplessly as governments herd their people along paths that also lead to the Necro-Dream. These points represent how close a character comes to slipping into the mindless stupor of the Necro-Dream.

The gamemaster penalizes characters with Necro-Dream Points awarded for shirking action for inaction, giving in to the temptations of the easy life, avoiding pursuit of their Honor Code, and otherwise lapsing into complicity when they should really be roused to action. The gamemaster should always warn players before their characters might receive Necro-Dream Points: "Okay, you can continue on your way and leave the robpolice alone while they assault that poor, innocent fellow, but you might get a Necro-Dream Point." For avoiding temptations, the gamemaster may ask players to roll their willpower skill against a difficulty representing the temptation's power.

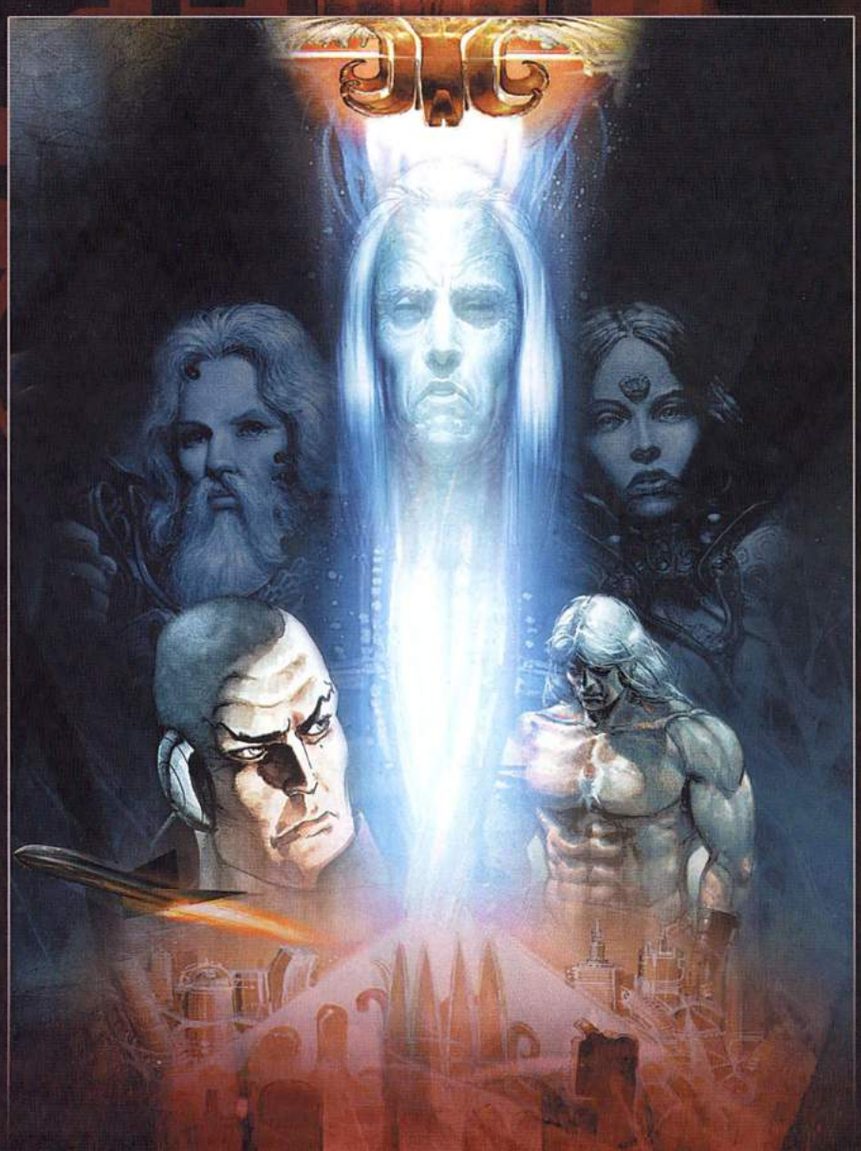
If at the end of an adventure a character has more Necro-Dream Points than Amarax Points, he lapses into the oblivious stupor of the Necro-Dream —losing his convictions, resolution, and spirit of self— and wanders off to satisfy his base pleasures with what comforts modern technological society has to offer. Life vanishes and the character becomes a creature of Tenebrai, a non-creature with a non-life. The player must create a new character.

You'll find more information on both Amarax and Necro-Dream Points in the chapter on "Honor, Amarax & the Necro-Dream."

Honor Code: Your character's Honor Code isn't a game statistic, but helps define your character like other background elements ("Personality," "A Quote," "Background," and "Connections"). It also helps illustrate what conduct and goals are most important to your character in terms of Amarax. The Honor Code serves as a general guideline on how to play your character. It may change as your character undergoes missions, trials, and challenges.

Move: This number (usually "10") represents how many meters your character moves in a round at maximum speed.

Player Section



CHARACTERS

Largon handed you off to me, so I guess that means he trusts me to give you all the nuts, bolts, and gears about creating your own game characters. I'm Sable Griphynne, captain of a mercenary company called the Sable Brigade. Mercenaries are one part soldier, one part entrepreneur, and one part outlaw. Rich folks and powerful groups pay us to do their fighting—we negotiate the deals, and then make

lifelong enemies out of those we're paid to war against. The wealthy people get what they want, and we get all the dirty work. Sounds much like the way the rest of the universe works.

You'll get to explore that galaxy pretty soon, though as I recall, Largon's already dragged you through that "Scout for Hire" scenario. Which means you've briefly met me, my second-in-command, Lancer Gudrig, and a few rowdy Razorhead mercenaries. (And yes, they really do hate our guts—this happens when you wipe someone's unit all over a battlefield.) Rough mercenaries are just a few of the general stereotypes of people you can meet in the Metabarons universe.

You can even play them as characters in the game. To play the Metabarons Roleplaying Game, you'll need a character of your own. Rather than wasting time trying to pull one out of thin air, you can turn to the back of this book and choose a template that catches your interest. This template represents a generic stereotype character from the universe at

large, focusing on the character's occupation, personality, and Honor Code. They're not punched from the same mold, but are slightly warped. For instance, you won't just find a standard "explorer," but you'll see the "quiet explorer." These slight personality quirks help guide you when running your character, and can assist you in making a choice of what kind of character you want to play. You might play the defused mentrek, outcast noble, private investigator, or even a hot-headed mercenary.

Once you've chosen a template, you can photocopy it, or copy the game information—the attribute die codes, Move and equipment—onto a sheet of note paper or a blank character sheet by hand. If none of these templates interest you, go to "Creating A New Template" at the end of this chapter for rules for making your own template —though if this is your first time wandering through the Metabarons universe, I'd stick to one of the existing templates for now.

Read over the template you picked. The right side lists background information —personality, background, objectives, and things like that— describing your character. There's even a quote your character might say during an adventure. These all help you understand the person you're playing, but they're only a starting point. You can make changes as long you check with the gamemaster first. (See "Selecting A Template" for a few suggestions.) As he stumbles through his own misadventures, your character will grow and change, challenging his own beliefs, his motivations, even whatever code of honor he follows.

Once you've gotten some sense what this character's all about from his background, give him a name. This is the first step in customizing the template into an individual. Many names in the Metabarons universe sound exotic. Look at those surrounding the great saga of the Metabarons themselves: Oda, Honorata, Bari, Doña Vicenta, Othon, Aghnar, Melmoth. Look at my name: "Sable" describes the color of my hair, while "Griphynne" refers to a mythological beast from paleo-earth.

Pick your character's height, weight, sex and age, and write down a brief description of his appearance: what he wears, any interesting features, the particular look about his face most of the time.

Check the "Special Abilities" category on your sheet. Only a few templates begin with any special abilities like cybernetic or natural enhancements.

If you see something on your character sheet you don't understand, just ask the gamemaster to explain it to you. As the main storyteller, he knows all the behind-the-scenes material, from subplots to all the game rules. You don't have to read this entire chapter to play, but skimming it would help.

Selecting A Template

If you've already chosen a template to play, jump ahead to "Finishing the Template." If you're still trying to decide on one, or need some ideas on making your character different, keep reading this section.

Think about what kind of person you want to play. Do you want to run a brooding mercenary like Aghnar? A sniveling mentrek like Champs-Gris the Intellectual? A bold diplomat like Doña Vicenta? A Troglosocialik soldier? Class-S private investigator? The *Metabarons* universe is filled with many different types of people, and you can play almost any type of person who might live there.

Before choosing a template, ask the gamemaster what kind of adventure he's running. He also might have some ideas for good templates to play for the game he has in mind. Perhaps he's planning to run a series of missions for a mercenary crew, or even a gang of pirates.

Don't be shy about asking other players what kinds of characters they're going to play. A diverse group of characters with strengths in various skills have a better chance of overcoming different obstacles and situations.

Detailing a Character

A character template is a good starting point, but it's only a generalized description of a type of character. There are thousands of mercenaries in the galaxy —how do you make yours unique?

Physical Description

What does your character look like? Your character's appearance helps define him, so spend a little time thinking about what others see in him.

Determine hair color and style, eye color, and other physical qualities. Is your character in shape or overweight? Attractive or plain? List anything unusual about your character's appearance, like a wild haircut, tattoo, scars, or anything else that comes to mind. Need some ideas? Look through some of the *Metabarons* comics, or magazines, to get a feel for what makes people stand out.

Think about your character's presence, body language, and mannerisms. Is he menacing? Shy? Outgoing and popular? Does he walk with a limp, or have a strange accent? Does he have a nervous twitch when he lies? What kind of impression does your character give people?

Write down what your character wears: a contract pilot dresses quite differently from a rough mercenary or a wealthy diplomat. In the *Metabarons* stories, Oda tends to wear flowing robes and gowns, while someone more daring like Doña Vicenta wears combat fatigues.

Background

Your template's background explains a little bit about what your character did before you started playing him or her. Only you and

the gamemaster really know about your character's background. You don't have to share any of this information with other players unless you want to. For instance, in *The Metabarons*, we learn that Othon von Salza used to be an intergalactic pirate before marrying into the noble Castaka family. The story begins once he's married, but he has this interesting past that we don't see, but is still part of his character.

Your character might conceal events from his past —maybe he's on the run from an old adversary, or is fleeing from authorities for some crime he may or may not have committed. If your character is bitter and cynical, there's probably a good reason he's that way — figure out what happened to him and make it part of his personality.

Don't hesitate to create a much more detailed background for your character. What kind of odd jobs did he take on? Where has he traveled and who does he know? What was his homeworld like? Who were his parents, siblings, relatives and friends —and how does he get along with them?

A well-developed background can give the gamemaster plenty of adventure ideas while allowing characters to grow during the game. The gamemaster might remind you of things your character knows or introduce other people that knew your character in the past. Perhaps you can even resolve one of your character's past conflicts during the present game.

Personality

Your character's personality reflects the general way in which he acts. He doesn't always act this way, but it gives you an overall feeling about his attitude toward himself, others, and his job. Spend a few moments developing an interesting personality you'll have fun playing.

Characters have both good points and bad points. For instance, Othon von Salza is an amazing warrior, capable of pushing himself to the limit and taking daring strategic risks in combat —but he's also easily insulted, moody, and haunted by his past.

Note some details about your character's personality. Does he worry all the time? Is he hot-tempered? Does he like bullying others? Is he always starting fights?

Think about what standards your character tries living up to; his sense of honor and morality. Some characters have very strong codes of behavior while others tend to "adapt" their ethics to fit the current situation. Other characters conform to the standards their peers, mentors, families, or organizations expect from them, and sometimes they rebel against these expectations. Does your character always follow the rules of his profession, or does he challenge authority? Is he unwaveringly loyal to his comrades, or would he betray them to further his own goals?

You should read the section on "Honor Code" below for more ideas on adhering to and breaking from standard expectations and codes.

Honor Code

Your character's Honor Code helps define your character like other background elements. Does your character follow a warrior code, or one seeking escape, or simply a code of conduct? The Honor Code also helps illustrate what conduct and goals are most important to your character in terms of gaining Amarax. Your character's Honor Code serves as a general guideline on how to play him.

The sample Honor Codes below may give you some idea of the simplicity of this system of behavior:

Bushitaka: Inspired from the way of the warrior of the Castaka clan, Bushitaka requires its followers to act as warriors in combat and in all aspects of life. For the warrior the highest virtue, his constant objective, is victory.

Fuga: The act of fleeing is the highest expression of the art of dodging. There is no more glory to face your enemy than to deceive him and to avoid aggression. The infamy lies in the objective of the action, never in the means you use.

Paleo-Noblis: A resurgence of the antique honor code of the paleo-knights, Paleo-Noblis is a harsh and constrained path which requires its followers to respect the rules and principles of loyalty, humility, and sacrifice.

Veritas: The followers of Veritas believe the world has a right to know. They must relate the facts as they are and unveil and tell the truth.

Skatawah: The Neo-Red Prophecy claims that the harmony of nature is a perfection that we must attain again. In everything the Skatawah followers look for the secret rhythm of life and do their best to find harmony with it.

Rayah: The survival of your designated group is your key motive, in spite of whether you belong to a family, pirate gang, mercenary

unit, or Maganat corporation. The individual must remember the group's interest, and is part of that group in everything he does.

Honor Codes represent short-term objectives that determine a character's general behavior in most situations; but they can also embody long-term goals. A defused mentrek following the Fuga Honor Code (seeking escape and camouflage at any price) might someday hope to find a comfortable home far away from the oppressive policies of those ruling the universe.

A character's Honor Code might also change during play as your character grows by undertaking missions, trials, and challenges—what's listed on your character template shows just what kind of honor drives and shapes your character when he starts the game.

You'll find more information on Honor Codes in the chapter on "Honor, Amarax & the Necro-Dream."

Connection With Other Characters

How did your character meet the other characters in the group? Why's he hanging out with them? Connections give the characters a reason to join up for a short while...long enough to stumble through an adventure together. These relationships help bond them to take risks for each other, cover each other's backs, and sometimes even help the story along. They also help the players determine how characters react to each other.

The connections listed on your character template are just sketchy ideas. You can develop some of these connections or use the ones listed below, discussing them with the other players and the gamemaster:

• ***Friends.*** Many people often overlook the most obvious connection with others. Friends are often willing do a lot to help each other even if they've been out of touch for years. If you need some ideas for how you made friends with other characters, think of how you met your own friends: on the job, through a hobby, at a meeting for an organization to which you both belong.

• ***Relatives.*** Nobody gets to choose their relatives, but most folks feel obligated to assist them, even if they don't like them too much. This can create some interesting minor tensions within the group if the two relatives would normally be at odds. What happens when you drop a tough mercenary in the same group as his nerdy mentrek brother? If you use this connection, you should spend some time with this player making sure your characters develop interesting and similar backgrounds, or explanations for why you're so different.

• ***Colleagues.*** Some characters might know each other from work, as comrades or in a supervisor-employee relationship. Maybe one hired the other for some reason: bodyguard, technical assistant, servant. Perhaps the characters worked together for a long time, even serving together in the same office, spaceship, or combat unit.

• ***Joint Ownership.*** Two or more characters might share an interest in owning something: a spaceship, stock in a colony, a bar, some portable treasure one of them carries. They must work together to protect their investment from those who want to steal it for themselves or destroy it to eliminate the competition.

• ***Traveling Companions.*** Various circumstances might bring two characters together to make a long journey before the game begins. Two wealthy characters might have become friends while seeing the universe in style. Less fortunate characters might have banded together to travel the stars, helping each other make a meager living along the way.

• ***Mentors.*** Any older character can take a younger character under his or her wing. The younger character gains a teacher or mentor while following him everywhere, coming to his aid, and absorbing his teachings on how the universe works.

• ***Rivals.*** A little friendly competition can add some interesting tension to a group of characters, as long as it doesn't sidetrack everyone from their mission or goals. Determine why two characters might be rivals. Did they both try winning the attention of the same love interest? Were they on opposite sides of a diplomatic debate or a brushfire war?

• ***Same Home Planet.*** People from the same homeworld often have a few things in common even if their personalities are different. They share a knowledge of the same places, world leaders, major industries, planetary problems, and entertainment districts. Given the vast size of the universe, folks from the same home planet may also know each other as friends, relatives, colleagues, or rivals.

• ***Admired Reputation.*** Sometimes a character's reputation precedes her. Others might know this character by reputation, even if they've never met before. Mercenaries would know others in their military profession, while aristocrats and diplomats might have heard of each other's prowess on the debating floor.

Making Changes

What happens if you want to play a cool-headed mercenary instead of a hot-headed one? Or a jolly explorer instead of a quiet one? Just remember that a character template is just a guide to creating a character, not some absolute regulation carved in stone.

Go ahead and change the background and personality to create the character you want to play—but make sure you clear any changes with the gamemaster.

Some information, like your character's Honor Code, provide challenges your character must overcome and ideas for the gamemaster to develop into entire adventures. If your character strives to regain his nobility, that might serve as the basis for an entire series of game stories!

Finishing the Template

Review the "Metabarons Player Handout" for quick explanations of attributes, die codes, and other basic rules.

Choose your character's name, and decide on his height, weight, sex, age, and physical description. Don't worry if your description doesn't match the sample illustration shown on the template—that's just a guide for you. You can always draw your own character portrait later.

All characters begin the game with five Character Points. Write that down on your character sheet, but be sure to use a pencil since this number changes during the game.

You only have to do two other things to finish a template:

1. **Pick skills.**
2. **Spend kublars on equipment.**

1. Pick Skills

Although attributes describe a character's natural ability in certain areas, you must be wondering, "How can my character get better at anything else?"

Skills help further define your character by representing how he's improved himself through school, experience, and training. Each attribute has several related skills listed below it on the template. The next chapter, "Attributes & Skills," provides more details on these skills and how you use them in the game.

A starting character has 7D to spend on skills.

You can add 1D or 2D to any of the skills shown on the template. All the skills listed beneath a given attribute begin with that attribute's die code.

You cannot improve skills for Psionics if you don't begin with dice in that attribute. You can only improve Psionics skills once you've boosted that attribute over time (see "Character Advancement" later in this chapter).

With the gamemaster's permission, you can add other skills to the template. Talk with the gamemaster about which attribute a new skill might fall under. If you wanted to have some talent in cooking, that might be a *Knowledge* skill. Singing might be a *Perception* skill. If you want a more specific form of an existing skill, you can use "specializations" (see below).

How Good Am I?

When others ask how skilled your character is, don't just say, "Gee, I have 6D in *astrography*." Die codes just show how skilled your character is in game terms. But how do they measure up to everyone else in the universe in other descriptive terms?

The chart below gives you some idea how die codes translate into comparisons you can use to describe your character's skills.

Die Code	Description
1D	Below average for an attribute.
2D	Average for an attribute and many skills.
3D	Average level of training.
4D	Professional level of training.
5D	Above-average expertise.
6D	Considered about the best in a city or geographic area. About 1 in 100,000 people will have training to this skill level.
7D	Among the best on a continent. About 1 in 10,000,000 people will have training to this skill level.
8D	Among the best on a planet. About 1 in 100,000,000 people will have training to this skill level.
9D	One of the best for several systems in the area. About 1 in a billion people have a skill at this level.
10D	One of the best in a sector.
11D	One of the best in a galaxy.
12D+	Among the best in the universe.

Example: Jeff is just starting the game, and wants to play a quiet explorer named Martius. Jeff has 7D to spread among his skills. He decides Martius should be able to protect himself in the face of danger, so he adds 1D to *dodge* (an *Agility* skill) to make it 3D+2, and 1D to *firearms* to make that 3D+2 also.

Jeff chooses to boost two *Knowledge* skills to reflect what Martius learned while exploring the galaxy. His *Knowledge* is already high at 4D. Jeff adds 2D to Martius's *astrography* skill to make it a whopping 6D, and 1D to his *survival* skill to improve it to 5D.

Jeff has 2D left to boost any other skills Martius might have improved. Martius has a *Technical* attribute of 3D. Jeff decides to put 1D in both *computer interface/repair* and *first aid*, bringing them both to 4D.

Don't worry if you don't improve a skill. You can still use it by simply rolling the related attribute. Remember, skills that you don't improve still have the same die code as their attribute.

Example: Martius improved only two of his *Agility* skills: *dodge* and *firearms*. If he wanted to use one of the skills he didn't improve (like *melee combat*, *riding*, or *sleight of hand*), he just rolls his *Agility* of 2D+2.

Specializations

You can spend 1D of your character's beginning skill dice to get three "specializations"—more specific forms of existing skills. You get to add 1D to each of those three specializations.

Most skills in the "Attributes & Skills" chapter list several specializations; you may create new specializations with the gamemaster's permission. For instance, the piloting skill has specializations for general kinds of vehicles you fly —like aircars and moto-craft —and specific craft— like Endoguard lancet and Ostrov-class fighter.

Specializations reflect a greater familiarity in a particular area covered by a skill. You roll the specialization's die code only when you use the specific item or knowledge reflected by the specialization; otherwise, you roll the basic skill (or the attribute if you haven't improved the skill).

> **Example:** Let's say Jeff doesn't allocate 1D to *first aid* and instead decides to use it for a few specializations. He gets to improve three specializations by 1D.
> Jeff thinks Martius should specialize in *defense pistol* (a specialization of *firearms*), *mountains* (a specialization of *survival*), and *survey craft* (a specialization of *piloting*).
> He adds 1D to the skills for each specialization.
> Martius already has a *firearms* skill of 3D+2; Jeff notes that he now has a specialization, *firearms*: *defense pistol*, at 4D+2 on his character sheet. Whenever Martius uses a defense pistol, Jeff rolls 4D+2. If Martius is using any other firearm, he only rolls 3D+2.
> Jeff decides Martius should specialize in his ability to survive in a particular type of terrain, mountains. He adds the specialization's 1D to his *survival* skill dice, and notes that he now has *survival*: *mountains* at 6D.
> Since Martius hasn't improved his *piloting* skill, when he specializes in *piloting*: *survey craft*, he just adds the specialization's 1D to his *Mechanical* attribute of 3D.
> He notes on his character sheet that Martius now has 4D in *piloting*: *survey craft*.

Specializations become extremely helpful when a character plans on using the same item or knowledge often. For instance, Othon von Salza becomes extremely familiar with piloting his Meta-craft, so he'd have the skill specialization *piloting*: *Meta-craft*. He'd roll this whenever he tried flying his ship, which mean's he'd do so at a great advantage. If he tried flying some other craft, he'd only use his regular piloting skill. But since he rarely flies anything else, he'd be best off specializing in *piloting*: *Meta-craft*.

Advanced Skills

You'll notice some skills have an "(adv.)" listed after their names: these are "advanced skills." These skills require years of disciplined study and practice to master. The two advanced skills on the character sheet are engineering (adv.) and medicine (adv.).

These skills begin the game with a die code of 0D. Characters cannot attempt to use them unless a character has dice in the advanced skill—you cannot just roll the corresponding attribute to use them.

Your character must have at least 5D in the related prerequisite skill before you can put skill dice into an advanced skill. To put dice in *medicine (adv.)*, a character must have 5D in *first aid*. To put dice in *engineering (adv.)*, the character must have 5D in a *"repair"* skill, and must limit his engineering skill to that field. When a character purchases an advanced skill, it begins at 1D. Advanced skills do not begin at the same level as their corresponding attribute.

> **Example:** If you wanted to put some skill dice in *medicine (adv.)*, you'd first have to improve your character's *first aid* to 5D. Once a character's *first aid* reaches 5D, you can put 1D or 2D in *medicine (adv.)*, making that skill's die code 1D or 2D.

> **Example:** If you wanted to put some skill dice in *engineering (adv.)*, you first must improve one of your character's *repair* skills. If you wanted to get the *engineering*: *flight systems (adv.)* advanced skill, you'd first have to boost the *flight systems repair* skill to at least 5D. Then you could put 1D or 2D in *engineering*: *flight systems (adv.)*.

When a character uses one of the prerequisite skills, add the advanced skill to the prerequisite skill's roll.

> **Example:** A character has *flight systems repair* at 5D and *engineering*: *flight systems (adv.)* at 1D. When using his *engineering*: *flight systems (adv.)* skill to design a more efficient propulsion drive, he only rolls 1D. But if he must roll his *flight systems repair skill*, he rolls 6D—5D for flight systems repair plus the 1D for *engineering*: *flight systems (adv.)*.

If you don't place beginning skill dice in an advanced skill, cross it off the template.

If these specialization rules already have your head spinning in confusion, don't panic. If you're a newcomer to roleplaying, or this is your first time creating a character for the Metabarons Roleplaying Game, you might want to avoid the complexities of specializations your first time out. You can always use these specialization rules when creating a new character later, or when improving an existing character (see "Character Growth" later in this chapter).

2. Spend Kublars on Equipment

A character who starts the game with a few kublars (the standard currency in the Human Empire) can buy more equipment and weapons. Check out the chapter on "Weapons & Technology" for an idea of items your character might purchase.

It's best to check with your gamemaster before buying any extra weapons and equipment other than what's listed on your character template. He might have specific ideas for your group which extra gear might complicate. Some gamemasters just allow characters whatever equipment and weapons they find on their template. Sometimes they receive mission-specific items. Gamemasters might allow characters to purchase equipment during the course of the adventure. Finding, bargaining for, and buying a particular item might serve as the focus for an entire scenario.

Creating A New Template

When creating your own template, you must first decide what kind of person you want to play. You can use the "background" and "personality" sections on the template to help define this character. For instance, if you wanted to play a friendly explorer instead of a quiet one, you might indicate that the explorer enjoys exploring new worlds, but gets lonely in his small survey ship, so takes advantage of his time in port to befriend new people and talk about his exploits.

You can even create a quote to help define your character. Need some ideas? Look through the *Metabarons* comic books for a character you identify with, see how he talks, then paraphrase something he says as your own character's quote. Does your character's Honor Code inspire a quotation? Or you might look through the "Attributes & Skills" chapter, where quotes from various *Metabarons* personalities help illustrate some skills. Is there a skill that best represents who your character is or what he's best at? Find the appropriate skill and "borrow" any quote as your own.

You might find some ideas on developing these elements of the template back in the "Selecting A Template" section.

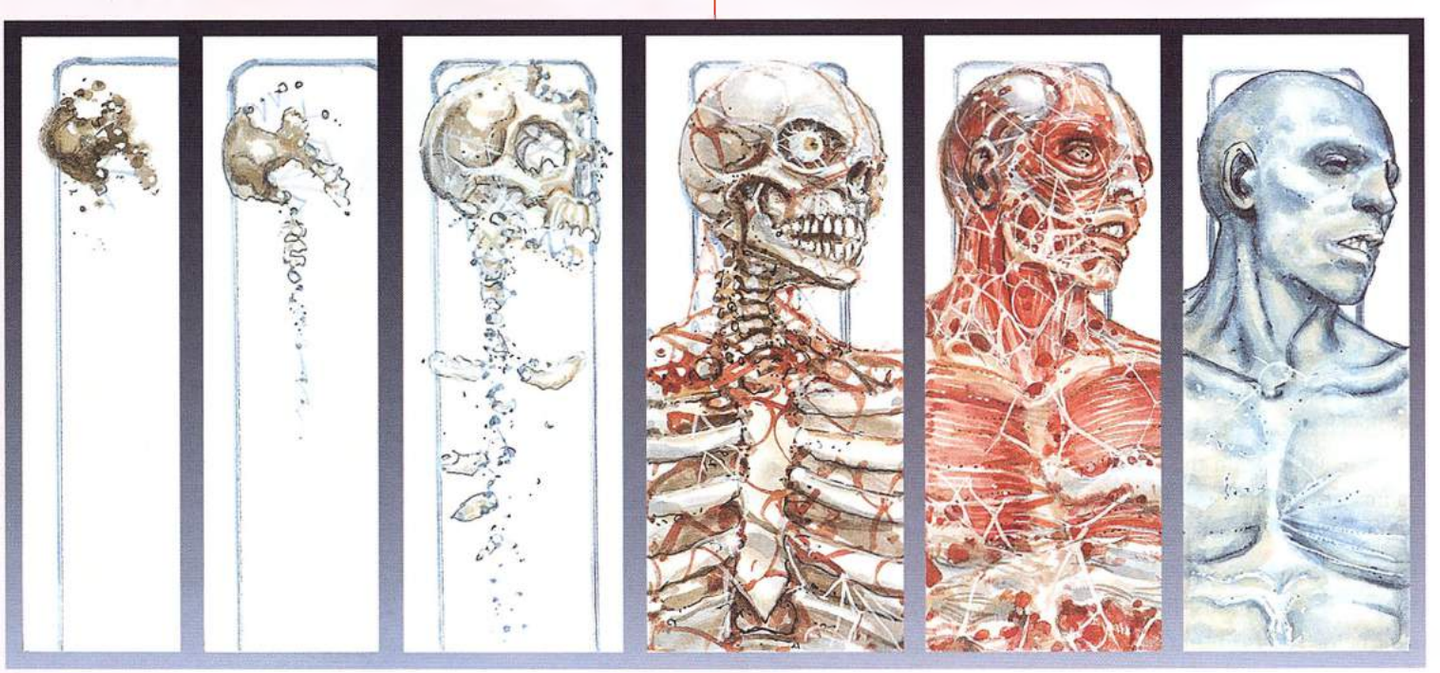
Type. Every character template lists a "type," a short title describing your character. These often follow the format of an adjective and a profession, such as "Quiet Explorer," "Hot-Headed Mercenary," or "Outcast Noble." Determine what job best describes what your character does (or did), then find a word best describing your character's personality ("quiet") or predicament ("outcast"). You can modify existing template types by changing the adjective, or use existing template adjectives as ideas for personalities of templates with new professions you develop.

> **Example:** You want to play an aristocratic kind of character, but not necessarily any of the ones listed among the templates at the back of this book. You think it might be interesting to create a template for a noble with lots of money to spend and an interest in wandering the galaxy. For "type" you write "Wanderlust Noble."

Playing Aliens. Don't worry about changing the template's species right now.

Playing Mutants. Like aliens, don't worry about playing mutants right now. They're not very tolerated in most public areas of the *Metabarons* universe, and inhabit the most inhospitable and secluded areas on planets (usually underground). Some governments actively persecute mutants as a threat to peace, order, and authority.

Allocating Attribute Dice. When you create your own template, you have no dice allocated to the seven attributes. Since you're developing this template on your own, you get to choose die codes for the various attributes. There are some guidelines you must follow, however, to make sure your character is somewhat balanced with other templates players are using.



Like skills, you get some dice to use to improve a new template's attributes. You may spend 18D to boost your attributes, making sure that each attribute is no less than the minimum and no more than the maximum die code as shown on the chart below:

Attribute	Min. Die Code/Max. Die Code
Agility	2D/4D
Knowledge	2D/4D
Mechanical	2D/4D
Perception	2D/4D
Strength	2D/4D
Technical	2D/4D
Psionics	0D/6D

You don't have to settle on full die values like 1D, 2D, and 3D. One "die" is equal to three "pips," so a +1 represents "one pip," and a +2 is "two pips." When you split a die to allocate to attributes, you either get three "+1"'s or one "+2" and one "+1." You won't see a "+3," since after three "pips" the die code increases to the next full die: 2D, 2D+1, 2D+2, then 3D, 3D+1, 3D+2, then 4D...

> **Example:** Your "Wanderlust Noble" begins with 18D for his attributes. Before spreading these dice over your character's attributes, you think a moment what he'd naturally be good at. You figure your noble should be particularly perceptive, with an ability to act quickly, and maybe an aptitude for learning.
>
> To represent these strengths, you decide to start by spending 4D on the noble's Perception, 4D on his Agility, and only 3D on his Knowledge. The 4D die code represents the highest your noble could go in these attributes. So far you've spent 11D out of your 18D. You have 7D left to spend on your remaining four attributes. You decide your wanderlust noble doesn't need Psionics (and doesn't have a good back-story to explain why he'd have such powers), so you leave that at 0D. You choose to spend two dice a piece on Mechanical, Strength, and Technical, making each attribute 2D.
>
> Now you have just 1D left to spend on attributes. Each attribute now has a die code within the set limits. You choose to split this last die into several pips: one "+1" and one "+2." You'd like to make the noble's Perception higher, even by "+2," but he's already reached his maximum. You could not boost the Perception to 4D+2, or even just 4D+1. You decide the noble needs a slight boost in some of his lower attributes. You add the "+2" to his Strength, making it 2D+2, and add the "+1" to his Knowledge, for a total of 3D+1.

Special Abilities. You'll notice some templates have special abilities often granted by using cybernetics. Unless your character is cybernetically enhanced, write "None" in this category. You should consult the "Weapons & Technology" chapter for information on using cybernetic enhancements on new characters.

Move. Templates for beginning characters start with a Move of 10, so write this number next to the "Move" category on the character sheet. This is the standard Move score for human-sized beings. The Move rate represents how many meters your character can move in a round —movement rules are discussed in the chapter on "Movement & Chases." Your character's Move score can improve over time (see "Character Growth" later in this chapter).

Amarax Points. Each character template usually begins with one Amarax Point. Write "1" next to the Amarax Points listing.

Necro-Dream Points. Characters usually begin with no Necro-Dream Points. You'll find more information on Necro-Dream Points in the chapter about "Honor, Amarax & the Necro-Dream."

Character Points. Each template begins with five Character Points. Write "5" next to the Character Points listing.

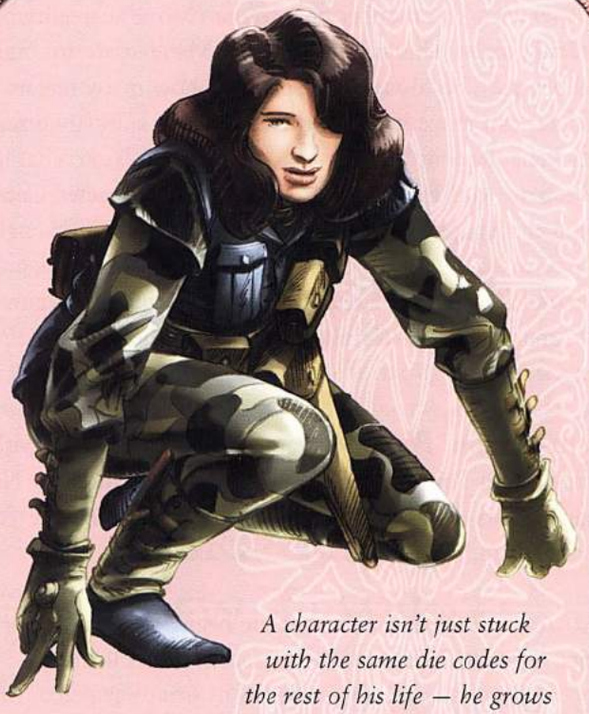
Starting Equipment. Choose some reasonable gear the character would have at the start of a game.

The gamemaster has the final decision about what's reasonable for a character. He might cross off gear that he doesn't feel is appropriate for the character or the game he'll be running.

The gamemaster might assign disadvantages attached to certain questionable equipment (such as owing allegiance to a group that let you borrow some heavy combat gear, or running from the authorities because you stole some expensive or restricted equipment). The gamemaster might not even tell you about disadvantages if the character wouldn't know about them.

When I can't find weapons and equipment to suit a particular combat mission, someone in my company makes that special gear for me. It takes a bit more work and effort, but it's worth it on the battlefield.

The same theory applies to these character templates. Don't become discouraged if you don't find any character templates you like. Remember, a template is just a suggestion for a character stereotype. With a little work, you can develop your own template representing the exact character type you want to play.



A character isn't just stuck with the same die codes for the rest of his life — he grows over the course of several games. Everybody has room for improvement. As your character tests his abilities, uses his skills, and survives new experiences, he gets better at what he does.

Even as the daughter of the unit commander, I had to put in my grunt work as a soldier before I could rise through the ranks to assume my mother's command. I learned what it was like to fight on the front lines, wait for an attack with my comrades, plan small-group actions, and even follow orders I didn't like. I learned a lot through both good and bad experiences. Game characters learn through experience, too, and improve their performance by using skills, listening to teachers, and actively training.

***Aghnar von Salza** serves as a good example of character growth. While secluded on Anasirma, the sacred mountain on Okhar, he grew under his mother's tutelage. **Honorata** taught her son the amazing psionic powers of the Shabda-Oud, and trained him in the warrior's way. Eventually he becomes skilled enough to pass his father's tests of combat and self-control. Through further experiences, he becomes powerful enough to challenge the very formidable psionic presence of the Shabda-Oud witches themselves, right in the heart of their stronghold.*

Your character might not advance that far, but you never know in this universe.

Example: Your noble needs some weapon to protect himself. A Cogan rifle's a bit overboard, so you opt for something a bit more subtle: a defense pistol. You figure a hand-held vid-comm unit might come in handy, plus enough kublars to spend as freely as your aristocratic status should allow... say about 350 kublars.

Now you ask the gamemaster if you can have something above and beyond what might be considered "reasonable": an aristocrat's space yacht. The gamemaster agrees, and devises a reason why you might have this space yacht —when you decided to wander the universe, you needed a ship, so you sold off all your estates and valuables to buy this yacht. That spaceship now represents your entire fortune. If you lose it, you lose your wealth and status. Of course, a fancy space yacht like that will attract everyone's attention, including that of pirates seeking lucrative targets and technicians looking for deluxe spare parts.

Customizing the Template. When you're done creating a new character template, show it to the gamemaster for approval. The gamemaster will discuss with you anything he changes because he feels it might unbalance the game.

To finish customizing the character just like it were an existing template, go back to "Finishing the Template."

Character Growth

When your characters complete adventures, they receive Character Points as rewards. The more goals you achieved, or the better your "performance," the more Character Points you get. You can always save these to spend to boost your die rolls in the next game, but you can also use them to improve your character's existing skills, learn new ones, and otherwise show your character is growing from his experiences.

Improving Skills

Skills. To improve a skill's die code by one pip, you must spend a number of Character Points equal to the number in front of that skill's "D." One pip is one "+1" level, from 2D+1 to 2D+2, or from 3D+2 to 4D, for instance.

You can only raise a particular skill one pip between each adventure. The number of skills you can improve by one pip is only limited by the number of Character Points you have to spend.

Example: Martius completes his latest mission and receives 10 Character Points as his reward.

Jeff, who's playing Martius, decides the explorer should improve his *dodge* and *firearms* skills. Both skills are currently 3D+2. To raise *dodge* to 4D, Jeff must spend three Character Points. He also spends three Character Points to improve *firearms* to 4D. After the next

adventure, Jeff would have to spend four Character Points to raise *dodge* to 4D+1 (since "4" precedes the die code for the new skill level).

Jeff could not spend three Character Points to raise *dodge* to 4D and another four points to raise it to 4D+1 all at once. He must wait until he's gone on another mission before improving that skill by one pip again.

After raising both *dodge* and *firearms* to 4D, Jeff has four Character Points left over. He decides to save these points for something later.

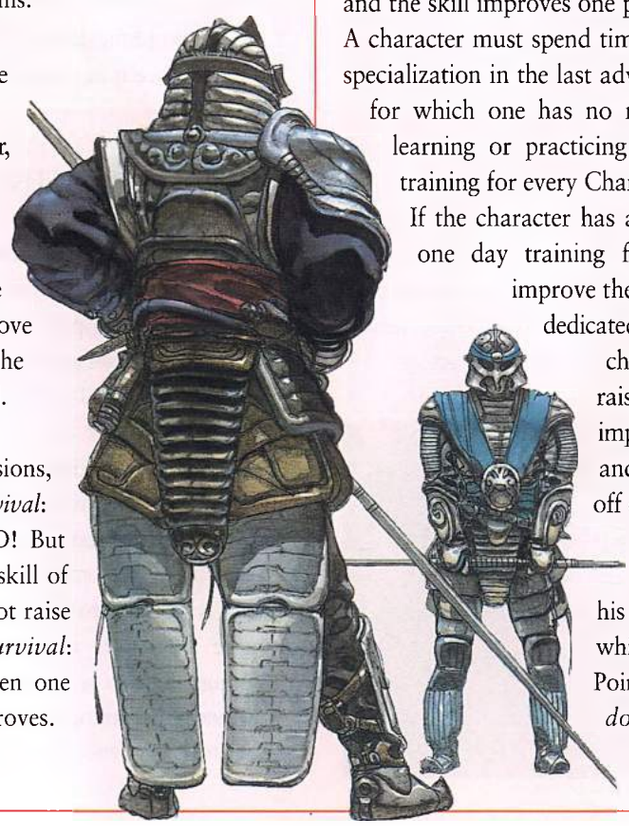
Players must usually wait until an adventure concludes before they can spend points to improve their characters' skills. If the gamemaster feels it's appropriate, he might allow players to improve their characters' skills during a point in an adventure where substantial time passes between scenes, such as when traveling for a few days through hyperspace.

Specializations. Improving skill specializations costs Character Points equal to one-half the number before the "D" (rounded up). Raising a specialized skill does not affect the base skill, and raising the base skill does not improve a specialized skill. Treat them as two separate skills for the purpose of character growth.

Example: Jeff wants to improve Martius's *survival: mountains* skill. As a specialization, it has a die code of 6D. If this were any unspecialized skill, Jeff would have to pay six Character Points to raise it to 6D+1. Since *survival: mountains* is a specialization, he only has to pay three Character Points to raise it to 6D+1. His normal *survival* of 5D does not go up just because he improved the specialization —Jeff must spend an additional 5 Character Points to raise his normal *survival* skill to 5D+1, assuming he wants to do this.

Specialized skills cannot go above 5D beyond the related skill. To improve such a specialization further, one must improve the base skill, then the specialization. If the base skill has never been improved (and you're using the associated attribute die code for all related rolls), you cannot improve a specialization more than 5D above the attribute until you boost the base skill.

Example: After quite a few missions, Martius has improved his *survival: mountains* specialization to 10D! But he hasn't improved his *survival* skill of 5D at all. At this point, he cannot raise the specialized skill of *survival: mountains* any higher —not even one pip— until his *survival* skill improves.



Advanced Skills. Improving an advanced skill costs Character Points equal to three times the number before the "D." Raising an advanced skill does not affect the prerequisite skill, and raising the prerequisite skill does not improve an advanced skill. Treat them as two separate skills for the purpose of character growth.

Gamemasters might also require characters to gain access to a teacher or learning institution focusing on certain advanced skills before raising their die codes (see "Optional Advancement Factors" below). At the gamemaster's discretion, this additional training might lower the Character Point cost to only twice the number before the "D" instead of three times the number.

Example: A character with *engineering: flight systems (adv.)* 2D must spend six Character Points to raise it to 2D+1. Since the character is on a major planet during the week of game time between adventures, the gamemaster decides the character can learn enough to boost this advanced skill by helping out at the offices of a spaceship design corporation based on this world.

Optional Advancement Factors

Your gamemaster might decide to work in a few more factors to your character's growth: training time and teachers. Both affect the way you advance your character's skills when spending Character Points. They add a little more realism to the game, but also require a bit more number-crunching. First-time players and gamemasters might want to wait until they've played the game a few times before using these optional advancement rules.

Training Time. If the character used a skill or specialization in the last adventure, they do not have to spend time "training" before boosting the skill. They can just spend the Character Points and the skill improves one pip.

A character must spend time training if he didn't use the skill or specialization in the last adventure. This reflects practicing a skill for which one has no recent experience using. A character learning or practicing on his own must spend two days training for every Character Point spent to improve the skill. If the character has a teacher (see below), he only spends one day training for every Character Point spent to improve the skill. Training to improve a skill takes dedicated study and practice. During training, a character concentrates all his efforts on raising his skill level. He cannot focus on improving more than one skill at a time, and he cannot focus on his training while off on an adventure.

Example: Martius is improving his *dodge* skill from 3D+2 to 4D, which will cost him three Character Points. Let's assume he didn't use *dodge* during his last mission. Without a teacher, he must spend

six days training (he's spending three Character Points and twice as many days practicing). If he found a teacher to help him improve his *dodge* technique, he'd still spend three Character Points to raise the skill, but only spend three days training instead of six.

A character's skill does not improve until training is completed. If for some reason the training is interrupted, the skill doesn't go up, but the training time and Character Points already spent still count toward raising the skill.

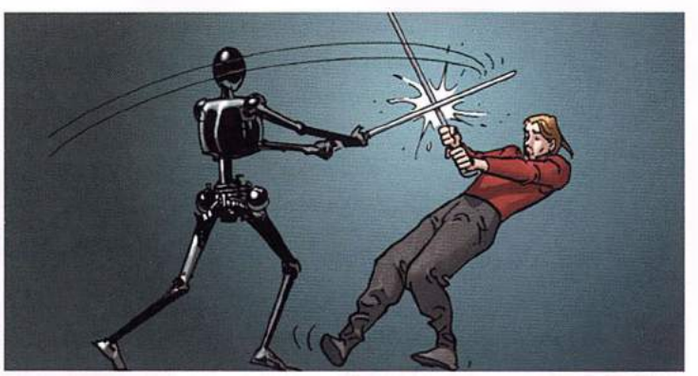
You can reduce training time by spending one additional Character Point per day cut from the training time. No matter how many Character Points you spend in this manner, the minimum time spent to train in a boosted skill is always one day.

Example: Martius is training on his own to raise his *dodge* skill from 3D+2 to 4D. He spends his three Character Points and starts the first of six days of training. But after practicing for four days, he's called out on a survey mission and must interrupt his training. When he completes that assignment, Martius returns to his training. He must practice for four more days to complete the six-day training regimen before his *dodge* skill improves. Martius gets impatient, so he spends three Character Points just to shave three days off his training. He only needs one more day of practice before his *dodge* skill improves.

Teachers. Characters learn much faster under the guidance of a more experienced teacher. Training time under a teacher's tutelage is only one day per Character Point spent to improve a skill. The teacher's skill or specialization must be higher than the character's die code in the skill before it's improved. A teacher is no longer qualified to instruct a character when the skill that character wants to improve equals the teacher's.

Some gamemasters might allow characters to teach others when improving skills. Other times teachers appear as gamemaster characters. A student must often search for a teacher —the gamemaster has no obligation to provide a teacher just because the player wants his character to learn under someone's guidance.

Gamemasters might make finding an appropriate or highly skilled teacher an adventure in itself, especially for rare skills, those known only on primitive worlds, very unusual specializations, or advanced skills. These prestigious teachers might demand services, special favors, missions, or payment in exchange for their instruction.



Example: Rather than train on his own, Martius finds a teacher to help him improve his *dodge* skill from 3D+2 to 4D. During his travels, he finds a wandering troupe of performers, including Goll the Acrobat. Goll has a *dodge* skill of 4D, and since this is higher than Martius's dodge of 3D+2, he can train the explorer. Once his training is complete, Martius gains the *dodge* skill at 4D. Since his score now equals his teacher's, Martius can learn nothing new from Goll. If he wants to improve his *dodge* skill more, he must find a new, more experienced teacher.

Advanced Training & Teachers. Improving advanced skills requires a greater degree of learning and training. If using the optional advancement rules, allow characters to spend twice the amount of Character Points to raise advanced skills instead of three times the amount, in this case, though, a character must spend time training.

A character without a teacher must spend two weeks training for every Character Point spent to improve the skill. If a character finds a teacher, he must only spend one week training for every Character Point spent to improve the advanced skill.

Characters can reduce this training time by spending one Character Point per day cut from the training time. No matter how many Character Points you spend in this manner, the minimum time spent to train to raise an advanced skill is always one week.

Example: A character wants to improve his *engineering: flight systems (adv.)* from 2D to 2D+1, and spends four Character Points to do so (instead of six, since he's using these optional rules). He must train on his own for four weeks to raise this skill. If he finds a teacher who has *engineering: flight systems (adv.)* of 2D+1 or higher, he only spends two weeks training. If the character spends an additional seven Character Points, he can cut this training time down to one week (or he might spend four to reduce it to one week and three days).

Learning New Skills

Skills & Specializations. Characters can learn a new skill or specialization by spending enough Character Points to advance it one pip above the attribute. Use the same procedures for raising existing skills and specializations outlined above.

Example: Martius has no skill dice in *brawling*, but wants to raise it. His related attribute, *Agility*, is 2D+2. He spends two Character Points to raise his *brawling* to 3D.

As with "Improving Skills" above, gamemasters might also require characters to gain access to a teacher or spend time training before raising their die codes (see "Optional Advancement Factors").

Advanced Skills. To learn an advanced skill, a character must have the prerequisite skill at 5D or higher, and must pay two Character Points to learn the skill at 1D. After that, it improves like any normal advanced skill, as detailed above. Gamemasters might require characters learning new advanced skills to find a teacher to initiate them with the basic knowledge of this skill.

> **Example:** A character wants to get the advanced skill *engineering: flight systems (adv.)*. The prerequisite for this skill is *flight systems repair* 5D. If the character has *flight systems repair* of at least 5D, he can learn *engineering: flight systems (adv.)* by spending two Character Points.

Other Game Scores

Improving Attributes. Raising one's innate abilities like attributes takes a lot more than improving skills. To boost an attribute by one pip costs ten times the number before the attribute's "D." You can only improve an attribute one pip at a time. (The gamemaster might use the optional rules for teachers and training—treat attributes as advanced skills to determine training times and effects of teachers).

When a character improves an attribute one pip, all skills under that attribute (except advanced skills) also increase by one pip.

> **Example:** Martius thinks he should improve his *Agility* attribute from 2D+2 to 3D. This will cost him 20 Character Points. Once his *Agility* reaches 3D, all related skills go up by one pip. All those he hasn't improved are now 3D, while those he's boosted go up +1: dodge and firearms are now 4D.

You cannot keep raising attributes forever, no matter how many Character Points you have to spend. Every time you boost an attribute, you roll its new die code; the gamemaster rolls 4D, the maximum human range for most attributes (see the chart under "Creating A New Template" above).

If the gamemaster's roll equals or exceeds the character's roll, the attribute improves. If the character's roll is higher than the gamemaster's roll, the attribute doesn't go up and the character gets half the Character Points he spent back.

> **Example:** Martius wants to improve his *Knowledge* attribute of 4D to 4D+1. After spending 40 Character Points, he rolls his new *Knowledge* of 4D+1 and gets a 16. The gamemaster knows that 4D is the attribute maximum. He rolls 4D and gets 14. Since Martius rolled higher than the gamemaster, his *Knowledge* does not improve, but he gets 20 Character Points back. If he rolled equal to or less than the gamemaster's roll, his *Knowledge* would have improved to 4D+1.

Improving Psionics. Since it represents such a powerful ability, *Psionics* is the only attribute that starts at 0D on many character templates. To gain 1D in *Psionics* costs 20 Character Points. All related skills for *Psionics —energy, self-control,* and *influence—* go up to 1D as well. After that, you raise Psionics like any other attribute, spending ten times the number before the "D" to improve it by one pip.

If your character suddenly gains *Psionics* (going from 0D to 1D or higher), you must create a believable background story to explain why the character now has these aweseome mental powers. Was he the victim of secret genetic mutation experiments? Is this some latent ability that manifested itself through a crisis or personal enlightenment?

You should check with your gamemaster before boosting your character's *Psionics* attribute. Characters with such abilities can sometimes imbalance the game. For more information on using *Psionics* and its related skills, read the chapter on "Psionics."

Move. Characters may spend a number of Character Points equal to their current Move rate to improve that by one meter. (If your gamemaster is using the optional rules for teachers and training, treat Move as advanced skills to determine training times and effects of teachers).

You may not improve a character's Move more than two meters beyond the rate listed on the character template.

> **Example:** To improve his Move of 10 to 11, Martius must spend 10 Character Points. He could later improve it from 11 to 12 (spending 11 Character Points), but could not raise it any higher, as that would boost it beyond two meters above his original starting Move score.

Well, that pretty much covers all the basics about creating and improving your characters. If you want to know more grueling details on how all those skills work you can check out the handy "Metabarons Skill List" in the next chapter, or, if you have time, read the entire "Attributes & Skills" chapter.

Assuming you played through "Scout for Hire" and read over the "Metabarons Player Handout," you're ready to find a gamemaster to run you through an adventure.

If you plan on becoming a gamemaster, you have a little more reading ahead of you. Definitely read the next chapter, but also pay attention to the other sections in this book. It's nothing like reading all 1,647 pages on the official Cogan 45 rifle instruction manual (like any Endoguard's ever read it all, anyway). And it's not like this book will blow up if you don't read the entire manual, unlike that Cogan 45 rifle. Sifting through all these rules might seem like a lot of work, but it's worth the read. Once you figure everything out, you'll realize how easily it all fits together so you can run an exciting Metabarons game.

Attributes & Skills

Creating a new character is just the beginning. So far you've described your character's basic personality and background, as well as his capabilities. You have a good idea who this character is, but might not be quite sure how all those skills allow him to face challenges in the game. You have the tools to create an interesting character, but he's not really battle-tested yet. It's

like training for combat —it can prepare you for battle, but nothing replaces the actual experience of working under fire.

Attributes and skills are what really bring your character to life, and you'll learn how they do that in this chapter. Here you'll find explanations describing how each skill works, plus some general guidelines and some specific examples to set difficulty numbers when you try using the skill. Thanks to your basic training in the previous pages, you've learned that characters in the Metabarons Roleplaying Game are defined by seven attributes: Agility, Knowledge, Mechanical, Perception, Strength, Technical, and Psionics. Each attribute has its own set of related skills drawing on that attribute's die code. Of all the various rules and charts in this book, you only need to remember one basic concept to play the game. Many game mechanics —and particularly those for using attributes and skills in the game— rely on this one central rule:

Pick a difficulty number. If the character's roll equals or beats that number, he succeeds.

When your character wants to do anything in the game where there's even the slightest chance of failure, the gamemaster determines the difficulty number representing that task's complexity, using the guidelines throughout this rulebook. If you roll equal to or higher than the difficulty number, your character succeeds at the task at hand.
That's it, the one essential rule you need to know to play this game.

Skill Descriptions

Time Taken: This represents about how long it takes to effectively use the skill. Many (especially combat skills) you can use in one round. More complicated skills, like computer interface/repair, may take a few minutes, hours, or even days depending on the task's complexity. The times listed here should serve as general guidelines; the gamemaster can always customize the time taken to suit the situation and story.

Specializations: Your character can focus on a particular aspect of a skill by choosing a specialization. Each skill explains the kinds of specializations available, and lists several sample specializations. Remember, if this is your first time playing the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*, you might want to wait until you get a better handle on the game before using specializations.

The skill description explains what your character can accomplish with that skill —often providing a few sample difficulties and modifiers— and any special considerations you should know about using the skill.

Agility Skills

Agility measures your character's physical dexterity: eye-hand coordination, speed, and balance. With a high *Agility*, your character can accurately shoot targets, dodge attacks, nimbly slip items out of other people's pockets, and competently maneuver in zero-gravity environments. Characters with a low *Agility* are clumsy. Among the *Agility* skills you'll find a few used mostly in combat that fall into three categories: ranged combat, melee, and reaction skills.

Ranged Combat Skills

Agility includes several "ranged combat" skills allowing characters to use certain weapons to attack from a distance. These skills all work the same way in the game.

When a character fires a ranged weapon, the gamemaster bases the difficulty number on the range to the target: the farther away a target, the higher the difficulty number. The "Range Chart" helps give gamemasters some idea on the range based on how far away the target seems. Individual weapons have different effective ranges, though, as described in the chapter on "Weapons & Technology."

Once the gamemaster determines the difficulty number for the shot, roll the appropriate *Agility* skill. If your skill roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, your attack hits.

It seems simple, but the target's actions and other factors can make the shot more difficult. The target might dodge (using a "reaction skill") or use some cover for protection. You'll find an explanation of these combat factors in the chapter on "Combat & Injuries."

The "ranged combat" skills include *archaic weapons*, *firearms*, and *throwing*. (*Gunnery* is also a "ranged combat" skill, but it's covered by the *Mechanical* attribute.)

Melee Combat Skills

Agility includes "melee combat" skills your character uses for hand-to-hand attacks: *archaic weapons*, *brawling*, *martial arts*, and *melee combat*.

Hitting a target with a "melee combat" skill requires you to roll equal to or higher than the difficulty number. When using *brawling* or *martial arts*, the difficulty to hit a target is Very Easy (5). Various melee and archaic weapons have different difficulties. (These weapons are described in the chapter on "Weapons & Technology.")

Just like "ranged combat" skills, the target might parry the attack using a "reaction skill" or might use the protection afforded by cover. The chapter on "Combat & Injuries" talks more about this.

Reaction Skills

Some *Agility* skills function as "reaction skills" used to avoid or block attacks. When your character is attacked and you roll a "reaction skill," your roll becomes the attacker's new difficulty number.

Dodge and *0-g maneuver* are the principle reaction skills, but *brawling*, *martial arts*, and *melee combat* can also serve to block similar attacks. (You can also use the *Mechanical* skills *piloting*, *power suit operation*, and *vehicle operation* to help maneuver vehicles to "dodge" enemy fire.)

Full Defense: Your character can use a "reaction skill" to mount a "full defense" against an attack. The character rolls the appropriate reaction skill and adds the roll to the attacker's difficulty number. Be careful, though; a character who makes a *full defense* can't do anything else during this round. The chapter on "Combat & Injuries" further explains how to use reaction skills.

Archaic Weapons

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Indicates proficiency in a specific archaic weapon —sword, bow, axe, musket, crossbow.

Use archaic weapons when attacking with any kind of out-dated firearm, bow, or melee weapon. Characters from primitive-

technology worlds often improve this skill. Training in archaic weapons is frequently a proud part of their culture and heritage practiced despite the rest of the universe's reliance on high-tech armaments. Expertise in these weapons is not simply a skill, but a way of life. Such characters prefer the obsolete weapons of their homeworld to more modern equivalents—for them, facing a technologically superior foe is honorable, even if it means risking death.

Archaic weapons also serves as a "reaction skill" to parry hits by melee combat attacks in hand-to-hand confrontations.

When using ranged archaic weapons (for instance, bows and crossbows), the difficulty to hit depends on the target's range from the attacker. See the "Range Chart." (Those versed in archaic weapons are often too proud to use thrown weapons, since it is much more honorable to engage the enemy with bows or in close combat.) In hand-to-hand combat, the difficulty to hit with an *archaic weapons* attack is Easy (10) unless the target uses a reaction skill to try blocking or dodging. One can parry such attacks using *melee combat* or *archaic weapons*. *Dodge* won't block an *archaic weapons* attack, but can help a character quickly avoid a strike.

A successful *archaic weapons* attack inflicts damage equal to a roll of the character's Strength attribute plus a bonus for the weapon.

Since wielding archaic weapons in hand-to-hand combat requires more discipline, characters employing this skill against an opponent defending with *melee combat* or *dodge* may roll two dice for each Character Point spent to improve their roll. They also receive this Character Point bonus when inflicting damage from hits made with the *archaic weapons* skill.

If you improve this skill, pick a specific weapon to use: not a weapon type, but the weapon you possess as your preferred archaic weapon. It might be your father's sword, your grandmother's longbow, a dagger your brother wielded in a famous battle (some character templates include these if that character should have proficiency in this skill). Since characters proficient in archaic weapons take pride in combat as an honorable artform, they should only use their preferred archaic weapon in combat. Gamemasters may choose to deny characters the use of the Character Point bonus if they do not use this preferred weapon.

Example: Lucardo is using his family's heirloom sword against a thug armed with a metal pipe. He rolls his *archaic weapons* skill of 5D+2 to strike the thug, who rolls his *melee combat* skill to block the blow with his pipe. Lucardo flubs his roll and only gets an 11. Lucardo spends a Character Point, but because he's using *archaic weapons* against someone using *melee combat*, he rolls two extra dice instead of one. The 8 he rolls makes his final result 19, enough to hit the thug. Lucardo could choose to use a Character Point to add two extra dice to his damage roll.

"Death is the warrior's only choice. We'd rather die fighting than live without honor."

—Lady Edna von Salza

Brawling

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Specific brawling style—boxing, wrestling.

This "melee combat" skill represents one's proficiency fighting hand-to-hand without any weapons. For creatures, *brawling* reflects their ability to attack with their natural weapons (claws, teeth, tail).

Brawling also serves as a "reaction skill" to block hits by *brawling* or *martial arts* attacks if you're unarmed.

The difficulty to hit with a *brawling* attack is Very Easy (5) unless the target uses a reaction skill to try *blocking* or *dodging*. One can block brawling attacks using *brawling* or *martial arts* (though if you're using a brawling attack against someone using *melee combat*, you might want to rethink your strategy). Dodge won't block a *brawling* attack, but can help a character quickly avoid a blow.

A successful *brawling* attack inflicts damage equal to a roll of the character's Strength attribute.

Characters can use *brawling* to grapple with their opponents instead of simply slugging them. A grappling character tries to subdue his opponent by wrestling him to the ground, pinning his arms so he cannot fight back, or stopping him in some other way. When a character attempts to grapple, increase the difficulty by +10: this makes the new chance to hit Difficult (20), or the defender's reaction skill roll +10. If the attacker beats the modified difficulty, he wrestles the defender into a difficult position: pinned, in a headlock, arm twisted behind the back, or a similar situation where the victim cannot strike back. If the attacker chooses, he can

Metabarons Skill List

AGILITY: A measure of how physically articulate your character is.

Archaic weapons: Wielding unpowered melee and ranged weapons no longer widely used in the universe. It's not just a skill, it's a way of life. It allows the user to roll 2 dice for every Character Point spent to boost an archaic weapons roll against those using melee or dodge to defend.

Brawling: Competence in unarmed combat.

Dodge: Slipping out of danger's way, whether avoiding an attack or a sprung booby trap.

Firearms: Shooting any gun one can carry, even if it requires a tripod set-up to fire. Covers everything from small Vipers to shoulder-launched rockets.

Martial arts: Proficiency in a more refined hand-to-hand combat technique than brawling, it allows the user to roll 2 dice for every Character Point spent to boost a martial arts roll against those using brawling or dodge to defend.

Melee combat: Wielding modern hand-to-hand weapons (those using a power source).

Riding: Controlling and riding domesticated mounts.

Running: Running quickly while avoiding obstacles and keeping from stumbling.

Sleight of hand: Nimbleness with the fingers, including picking pockets and palming items.

Throwing: Hitting a target accurately with a thrown item, including grenades, stones and knives. (Using or modifying grenades as explosives for special destructive effects requires the demolitions skill.)

O-G maneuver: Maneuvering on one's own in zero-gravity environments, including drifting through space in a vacuum suit, or flying under one's own power.

KNOWLEDGE: Measure of a character's intelligence.

Aliens: Understanding of aliens not of the character's own species and their physiology, customs, and history.

Astrography: Familiarity with astrographic features (planets, star systems, nebulae), and general knowledge of any civilized elements present (settlements, industry, government, orbital installations).

Bureaucracy: Knowledge of and ability to use a bureaucracy's intricate procedures to gain information, favors, or attain other goals.

Business: Comprehension of business practices and the monetary value of goods and opportunities.

Cultures: Understanding of the manners, customs, and social expectations of different cultures.

Intimidation: Using physical presence, verbal threats, and fear to influence others.

Languages: Familiarity with and ability to use various forms of communication, written, spoken, and non-verbal.

Scholar: Expert learning in a specific area of study, though not a practical proficiency in that subject (a scholar of archaic weapons would know details of them, but couldn't wield them effectively without that particular skill).

Security regulations: Understanding of how law enforcement organizations, regulations and personnel operate.

Streetwise: Familiarity with criminal organizations, black markets, and other illicit operations.

Survival: Knowledge of techniques for surviving in hostile, uncivilized environments.

Tactics: Familiarity with deploying military forces and maneuvering them to the best advantage.

Willpower: Personal ability to withstand stress and temptation.

MECHANICAL: Aptitude for operating mechanical equipment.

Astro-nav: Plotting courses through space using a vessel's navigational computer interface.

Comm: Effectively using communication devices and arrays.

Exoskeleton operation: Using personal exoskeletons which augment one's performance with mechanical aids.

Gunnery: Accurately firing weapons mounted on vehicles, space ships or within fortresses.

Piloting: Flying air or spaceborne craft, from aircars and fighters to transports and battleships.

Sensors: Operating scanner arrays to gather information about one's surroundings.

Shields: Deploying and redirecting shields aboard vehicles and vessels.

Vehicle operation: Operating non-flying vehicles traveling on or through the ground or a liquid medium.

PERCEPTION: A character's awareness of himself and things around him, including the ability to interact successfully with others.

Bargain: Haggling for prices for goods and services being bought or sold.

Command: Effectively ordering and coordinating others in team situations (such as commanding a battleship crew).

Con: Bluffing, lying and deceiving others.

Forgery: Creating and noticing false or altered documentation in various media (paper, electronic, plastic card).

Gaming: Winning and cheating at games of strategy and luck.

Hide: Concealing objects, both on oneself and using camouflage.

Investigation: Gathering evidence and drawing a conclusion from it.

Persuasion: Influencing others through honest discussion.

Search: Spotting hidden objects or people.

Sneak: Moving silently, avoiding detection and hiding oneself.

STRENGTH: Measure of a character's physical power.

Climb/jump: Climbing or jumping over obstacles.

Lift: Moving or lifting heavy objects.

Stamina: Physical endurance and resistance to disease and poison.

Swim: Moving and surviving in a liquid medium

TECHNICAL: Character's ability to manipulate, repair and modify complex mechanical systems.

Armor repair: Fixing damaged armor.

Computer interface/repair: Programming, interfacing with and fixing computer systems.

Demolitions: Setting explosives to achieve particular destructive effects.

Engineering (adv.): Practical and in-depth understanding of a particular technical field.

Exoskeleton repair: Repairing and modifying exoskeletons.

Firearms repair: Repairing and modifying firearms.

First aid: Using basic field medicine to treat injuries.

Flight systems repair: Fixing damaged systems aboard flying vehicles and spaceships.

Gunnery repair: Fixing weapons mounted on vehicles, space ships or within fortresses.

Medicine (adv.): Detailed understanding and application of medical procedures, including surgery and cybernetic implantation.

Personal equipment repair: Fixing small, electronic equipment, including damaged cybernetics.

Robot interface/repair: Programming, interfacing with and fixing robots and their systems.

Security: Installing, altering and bypassing electronic security and surveillance systems.

Vehicle repair: Fixing ground- and ocean-based vehicles that do not fly.

PSIONICS: Measure of a character's psionic ability. Can have a score of 0D.

Energy: Sensing and manipulating various forms of energy through psionics.

Influence: Using psionics to bend others to your will, including hypnotic control.

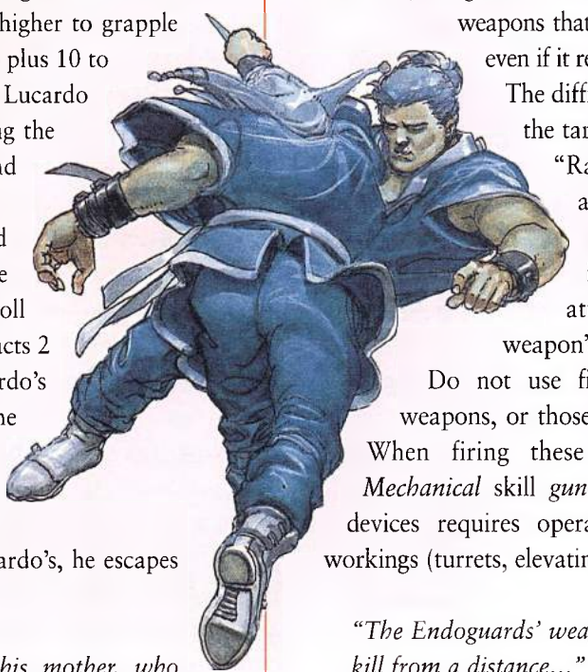
Self-control: Manipulating one's own body and mind from within.

automatically inflict damage for every round he holds the defender at bay.

For the victim to escape, both combatants must make opposed *Strength* rolls, with the victim suffering a –1 penalty for each point by which the attacker succeeded in his grapple attempt.

Example: Lucardo figures if he can crush Gauk in a headlock he can force the thug to reveal who killed his brother. Gauk rolls 13 for his *brawling* skill to avoid the attack. Lucardo must roll 23 or higher to grapple Gauk (the thug's *brawling* score of 13 plus 10 to the difficulty number to grapple). Lucardo rolls his *brawling* and gets 25, beating the difficulty number by 2 points and wrestling Gauk into a headlock.

But Gauk's a stubborn thug and refuses to talk. He struggles to free himself from Lucardo's hold. Both roll their *Strength* scores, but Gauk subtracts 2 from his final result because Lucardo's initial *brawling* roll to grapple beat the difficulty by 2. Lucardo rolls 13 for his *Strength*, while Gauk gets 17 (rolling 19, subtracting 2 for the penalty). Since Gauk's roll beats Lucardo's, he escapes from the headlock.



"And every day, he had to fight his mother, who possessed amazing strength. They fought for hours on end."

—Tonto

Dodge

Time Taken: One round.

Characters use this "reaction skill" to slip out of danger's way, whether avoiding an attack, booby trap, falling debris, or other hazards.

When avoiding most perils, the *dodge* roll must beat a difficulty to avoid the danger. For instance, dodging a falling rock might require a Moderate (15) roll. In combat, characters must decide if they're going to make a "full defense" or a normal dodge. In a full defense, the character spends the entire round doing nothing but dodging the attack —he adds his *dodge* roll to the difficulty for opponents to hit him. That character may not take any other actions that round. In a normal dodge, the character's *dodge* roll becomes the new difficulty number an attacker needs to hit the character. Sometimes this roll is lower than the normal difficulty to hit —this represents an ill-conceived dodge, a zig instead of a zag, or a misjudgment of the tactical situation, thus putting the character in harm's way instead of out of it. In a normal dodge, however, the character can take other actions in that round: he might dodge an attack while shooting back.

"By slipping away, a true hero asserts himself."

—Othon von Salza

Firearms

Time Taken: One round.

Specializations: A specific type or model of firearm—Cogan 45, defense pistol, sonic bazooka, Viper.

With this skill characters can accurately discharge any modern, ranged firearm, whether it shoots a high-density slug, a blast of energy, mini-missile, or grenade. Use this "ranged combat" skill to fire weapons that can be held and carried by a person, even if it requires a bi- or tripod mount to shoot.

The difficulty to hit with firearms depends on the target's range from the attacker. See the "Range Chart." The target may try avoiding a shot by taking cover or using the *dodge* skill. Damage inflicted by a successful firearms attack depends on the particular weapon's damage dice.

Do not use firearms to shoot fixed or crewed weapons, or those mounted on vehicles or spaceships. When firing these armaments, characters use the *Mechanical* skill *gunnery*, since aiming and firing these devices requires operation of the weapon's mechanical workings (turrets, elevating machinery, targeting computers).

"The Endoguards' weapons are powerful, but they can only kill from a distance..."

—Othon von Salza

Martial Arts

Time Taken: One round.

Specializations: Particular style of martial arts.

Characters trained in this skill are proficient in a more refined hand-to-hand combat technique than simple brawling. This unarmed combat style relies on carefully practiced moves and a disciplined mindset. Training in martial arts is frequently a proud part of one's heritage or combat style practiced despite the rest of the universe's reliance on high-tech armaments and clumsy brute force. Expertise in martial arts is more a way of life. Such characters prefer this elegant combat style to more modern equivalents.

Martial arts also serves as a "reaction skill" to block hits from a *brawling attack* if you're unarmed.

The difficulty to hit with a *martial arts* attack is Very Easy (5) unless the target uses a reaction skill to try blocking or dodging. One can block *martial arts* attacks with *brawling* or *martial arts*. *Dodge* won't block a *martial arts attack*, but can help a character quickly avoid a blow.

A successful *martial arts* attack inflicts damage equal to a roll of the character's *Strength* attribute.

Since training in martial arts requires more discipline, characters employing this skill against an opponent defending with *brawling* or *dodge* may roll two dice for each Character Point spent to improve their roll. They also receive this Character Point bonus

when inflicting damage from hits made with the *martial arts* skill; however, this practice goes against many of the universe's established principles of fairness and decency. Should a wound inflicted in this manner ultimately result in death, the character loses one Amarax Point (if he has no Amarax Points left, he loses three Character Points). Gamemasters should always warn players of this possibility if they use Character Points to boost their damage roll in this manner. Characters who have not improved their *martial arts* skill do not receive this Character Point bonus.

Since characters proficient in martial arts take pride in combat as an honorable artform, they should use martial arts over other forms of hand-to-hand combat (*brawling*, *archaic weapons*, *melee combat*). If characters fail to follow this code of behavior, the gamemaster may choose to deny them the use of the Character Point bonus for the duration of an adventure.

Example: While visiting a remote trading outpost on the Plains of Gargash, Angelian, a well-trained noblewoman traveling in disguise, gets into a brawl with a surly pirate. She uses her *martial arts* skill of 6D to defend herself against the pirate, who rolls his *brawling* skill to attack. Angelian rolls 16, but fears it isn't high enough to beat the pirate's *brawling* roll and successfully block his blow. Angelian spends a Character Point, but because she's using *martial arts* against someone using *brawling*, she rolls two extra dice instead of one. The 5 she rolls makes her final result 21, enough to block the pirate's swing.

Melee Combat

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Specific type of melee weapon—combat shock-knife, quiver-shiv.

Melee combat measures a character's prowess in wielding modern hand-to-hand weapons, especially those with power sources to supplement their operation. Characters can also use this skill to fight with impromptu weapons like chairs, bottles, and pipes. Although not as disciplined or elegant as archaic weapons, such things rarely matter to those bashing away with modern melee weapons. *Melee combat* also serves as a "reaction skill" to parry strikes by *archaic weapons* or *melee combat* attacks in hand-to-hand confrontations.

The difficulty to hit with a *melee combat* attack varies by weapon unless the target uses a reaction skill to try blocking or dodging. One can parry *melee combat* attacks using this skill or *archaic weapons* (assuming the defender has a hand-to-hand weapon). *Dodge* won't parry a melee combat attack, but can help a character quickly avoid a hit.

A successful *melee combat* attack inflicts damage equal to a roll of the character's *Strength* attribute plus a bonus for the weapon. Most weapons have an upper limit to the number of damage dice a character can roll for melee damage regardless of how high his *Strength* might be.

"Those battalions forgot the art of fighting man-to-man centuries ago... and as for us, we're trained for it!"
—Othon von Salza

Riding

Time Taken: One round or longer.
Specializations: Particular riding animal—eodactyl, guanodonte, koor beast.

This skill represents a character's proficiency at staying mounted on and using body motions to control riding animals.

Since creatures sometimes resist orders from their riders, each type of mount has an orneriness code reflecting their stubborn and rebellious nature. When mounting a riding animal, the character makes an opposed *riding* roll against the creature's orneriness code. The character must make another opposed roll whenever the animal faces danger or enters a situation which could scare it

—being startled by a low-flying spaceship, engaging in combat, evading a ferocious predator.

If the character rolls her *riding* higher than the animal's orneriness roll, the mount obeys the rider's commands. If the animal rolls higher, take the difference between the two rolls and compare it with the chart below.

Mount rolls higher than character by:

1–5 points: Mount abruptly stops moving and refuses to obey rider for the rest of the round.

6–10 points: Mount abruptly stops moving and refuses to follow rider's commands for the rest of this round and the next round.

11–15 points: Mount refuses to obey rider's commands and flees at top speed away from danger. The character may regain control by making another *riding* roll and beating the animal's original orneriness total by 5 or more points.

16–20 points: Mount bucks, dismounts rider and runs away from danger. The animal does not trample the rider.

21+ points: Mount bucks, dismounts and tramples rider while fleeing (if land-based animal only). Character suffers damage equal to the animal's *Strength* score.

Example: Angelian mounts a nearby koor beast to flee from a band of surly pirates chasing her on foot. Her *riding* skill is 4D, while the creature's orneriness code is 3D (koor beasts aren't very pleasant animals). Angelian rolls 21, while the koor beast rolls 6. She maintains control over her mount, urging it away from the pirates. In a bold move, Angelian decides she's going to turn the koor beast around and charge directly at the pirates. Since this situation might frighten her mount, she must make another opposed *riding* roll against the koor beast's orneriness. This time she only rolls a 10 and the creature rolls 15. Since the difference between her roll and the koor beast's is 5, the creature stops halfway through its turn toward the pirates. It might obey Angelian's commands next round... if the pirates don't catch up to her first.

"Dawn had hardly broken as Honorata and Aghnar, riding a trained eodactyl, reached the Castaka fortress."

—Tonto

Running

Time Taken: One round or more.
Specializations: Long distance, short sprint.

Running measures the character's ability to run quickly while avoiding obstacles and maintaining his balance, especially on uneven ground. Gamemasters should base *running* difficulties on the character's speed and the terrain the character is crossing.

Here are some sample difficulty guidelines for running over various kinds of ground:

Very Easy (5): Flat, open ground with no hazards.

Easy (10): Slightly uneven ground with natural obstacles (small rocks, low branches, bushes).

Moderate (15): Rough terrain or ground with many hazards (thickets, large rocks, fallen trees, foxholes).

Difficult (20): Extremely rough ground filled with hazards, or areas with many tightly packed obstacles (forests, crowds, garbage-strewn alleys).

Very Difficult (30): Deadly terrain (minefields, booby-trapped corridors).

Heroic (31+): Hazards that are nearly impossible to avoid (rockslides, collapsing tunnels).

The chapter "Movement & Chases" elaborates on this skill's use and the ramifications of failed running rolls.

Sleight of Hand

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Particular hand trick—mechanical lock picking, palming, pick pocket.

Characters proficient in this skill are nimble with their fingers and practiced in various sleight of hand tricks: manipulating and hiding items with one's hands, lifting items from an unsuspecting victim's pockets, and defeating simple mechanical locks.

When using *sleight of hand* to deceive others —as in picking pockets or making small objects seem to disappear or reappear in one's hand— a character makes an opposed roll against the victim's *Perception* or *search* roll. If the character fails, the victim notices the deception.

Example: Larryn must follow a Merchants Guild bureaucrat to uncover his involvement with a pirate gang. She decides to slip a tracking device into his robes so she can easily trail him. Larryn rolls her *sleight of hand* skill of 4D and gets a 16. The bureaucrat has a *Perception* of 3D, so the gamemaster rolls the dice and gets a 12. Since Larryn rolled her skill higher than the bureaucrat, she succeeds in slipping the tracking device into his robes unnoticed.

Although simple mechanical locks are rare in the *Metabarons* high-tech universe, characters can use the sleight of hand skill to try picking any they might encounter. Most electro-mechanical lock systems require characters to use the *security* skill to bypass.

Throwing

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Particular thrown weapon—knife, grenade, stones.

Use this "ranged combat" skill to hurl weapons accurately at targets. Such thrown weapons might include impromptu projectiles like stones, obsolete weapons like knives, or more modern grenades. (When characters place grenades to achieve particular destructive effects, use the *Technical* skill *demolitions*.)

The difficulty to hit with *thrown weapons* depends on the

target's range from the attacker. See the "Range Chart." The target may try avoiding a hit by taking cover or using the *dodge* skill. Damage inflicted by a successful *thrown weapons* attack depends on the particular weapon's damage dice.

0-G Maneuver

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Style of 0-G maneuver—flying, space suit.

When characters encounter null-gravity conditions, they use this skill to move around effectively. Since most species orient themselves to gravity environments, they're often confused and clumsy in weightless situations. Training in the *0-G maneuver* skill gives them a better ability to use body weight, counter balance, available hand- and footholds, and other advantages to traverse weightless conditions.

Here are some difficulty guidelines for using 0-G maneuver to move through various weightless situations:

Very Easy (5): Spaceship passageway designed to be traversed in null-gravity.
Easy (10): Enclosed space with readily available handholds.
Moderate (15): Enclosed area with widely-spaced handholds and bulkheads.
Difficult (20): Spaceship exterior.
Very Difficult (30): Open space between starships.
Heroic (31+): Open space with hazards (meteorites, hostile vessels, debris).

0-G maneuver also serves as a *flight* skill for characters, aliens, and creatures with the means to fly, such as wings, levitation, or gas bags. To them, flying is a weightless condition requiring careful maneuvering and bodily manipulation to defy gravity. For guidelines on flying through various obstacles and terrain, consult the sample difficulties provided for the running skill above.

Knowledge Skills

Knowledge reflects a character's academic learning and "common sense." It measures a character's general intelligence: related skills show how much he knows about a specific subject —from aliens to survival— or represent intelligence-oriented traits like *willpower*.

Characters with a high *Knowledge* learned a good deal during their life, and have a good memory, understand many academic areas, and possess solid judgment. Their past experiences taught them how to handle situations involving deduction, methodical thinking, and application of intelligence.

Players use *Knowledge* when they want to see how much their characters know about a particular subject. Gamemasters base the difficulty for such attempts on the information's obscurity and the character's knowledge of the general field. Most *Knowledge* skill descriptions include difficulty guidelines, but you should also read "The Rules" chapter for additional information. The following guidelines can help gamemasters quickly determine a difficulty for *Knowledge* tasks.

Very Easy (5): Broad, common knowledge almost anyone would know.
Easy (10): Most people would know this much.
Moderate (15): Amateur level of knowledge. The average person interested in the field would know this much.
Difficult (20): Professionals level of knowledge; the average person would not provide much information on this subject.
Very Difficult (30): Explicit, comprehensive knowledge of the specific field. Professionals and scholars might gain such knowledge through extensive research.
Heroic (31+): Very few people would know this information.

You can modify difficulties —and how much information *Knowledge* skill rolls produce— to suit a specific circumstance. Easily accessible information probably won't need a modifier, but fairly esoteric information might require an extra difficulty modifier of +10, +20, or more. A particularly stressful situation might also incur difficulty modifiers. Trying to recall the proper spaceport lift-off protocols (requiring a *bureaucracy* roll) is much easier when you have two hours to pre-flight your spacecraft. If you wait until those angry mercenaries show up and start firing on your vessel, recalling the proper procedures might prove more difficult.

Keep in mind that die codes are not set scores —they represent a potential for success. A *Knowledge* skill roll reveals what a character can recall about a subject when he makes that roll. A character isn't an expert in the field just because he rolls high once when using a skill. A good roll relates to the specific task or question at hand.

Similar Skills

You might have noticed some skills overlap in rather gray areas. When encountering an alien species, does a character use aliens, astrography, business, or cultures to determine specific details about the proper way to handle trade transactions? Benevolent gamemasters might allow players to choose the highest of the appropriate skills. In this case, the gamemaster might allow a character with aliens 4D, astrography 3D, business 3D+2, and cultures 5D to roll her cultures skill. Depending on the situation, the gamemaster might ask her to roll business instead.

A particularly high roll in one skill might also provide a bonus to someone rolling a related skill. For instance, a defused mentrek character making an exceptionally high astrography roll might give the group's pilot a +1D or +2D bonus to an astro-nav roll to or from a particular system. An advisor who makes a very high cultures roll might earn a bonus for his master's bargain skill roll when dealing with another merchant of that particular culture.

Gamemasters should make the final decision regarding which skills characters should use based on the situation and the effect characters want to achieve. If there's a question, resolve it quickly, discuss it during a break in play, or talk about it after the game is over. Don't spend too much time interrupting the game to search this rulebook or debate rules interpretations. Use these rules as a framework for telling an exciting interactive story in which everyone can participate.

Aliens

Time Taken: One round or longer.
Specializations: Familiarity with a specific alien species—Gords, Zerkits.

This skill represents familiarity with all aspects of aliens: their society, appearance, morals, etiquette, temperament, government, aesthetics, history, arts, sports, and entertainment.

Aliens pertains to knowledge about beings foreign to a particular character's own race. Alien characters naturally understand the intricacies of their own race. Humans use this skill to recall information about non-humans. Gords employ this skill to understand elements of non-Gord cultures.

The difficulties below give some examples of what a character might know with a given *aliens* roll:

Very Easy (5): Proper greetings, basic one-on-one interaction behavior.
Easy (10): Acceptable table manners, basic cultural information.
Moderate (15): What not to do on a date, business protocols.
Difficult (20): Religious practices, psychology.
Very Difficult (30): Close family customs, courtship rituals.
Heroic (30+): Intricacies of a wedding ceremony and related protocol.

"The Pthagures are a stubborn and cruel race without mercy."
— Imperial Mentrek

Astrography

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Specific system or planet—Marmola, Okhar, Golden Planet, Technogea.

Characters use *astrography* when they're trying to recall data about different star systems, nebulae, planets, and regions of space. A successful *astrography* roll might reveal specific information about indigenous life, surface conditions, inhabitants, local economy and government, established communities or cities, and spaceport data. Characters gain such knowledge by examining computer logs, hearing about planets from others who've been there, or recalling their personal experiences traveling the universe.

Characters can specialize in specific planets to gain a greater familiarity of more subtle details—more than the average off-worlder would know. Someone who improved their *astrography* skill would easily know that Marmola is a planet of solid marble. But a character with *astrography*: *Marmola* would have a better chance of knowing details about the planet's history in relation to the *Metabarons*.

Gamemasters set difficulties based on an astrographical feature's obscurity:

Very Easy (5): Everyone has heard of this system and knows something about it, like the Golden Planet.
Easy (10): Most people have heard of this system, but they only know one or two things about it. Nibal, planetary mega-city and home to the Zerkits. Baggdathi the Pearl.
Moderate (15): The average person might have heard of this planet, but probably knows nothing about it. Marmola, once ancestral homeworld to the original *Metabaron*.
Difficult (20): Most people never heard of this very obscure system, or heard about it but have no interest in learning more.
Very Difficult (30): Very few people ever heard of this planet, and even then only a small percentage know anything beyond its name.
Heroic (31+): No one has ever heard much of anything about this system. It may not even be on the astro-nav map logs. An unexplored system a lone interstellar freighter might have visited once... by accident.

Gamemasters can modify *astrography* difficulties based on whether the information a character needs is common or esoteric. More obscure data is more difficult to recall.

"The epyphite is the sacred blood of this marble planet."
—Othon von Salza

Bureaucracy

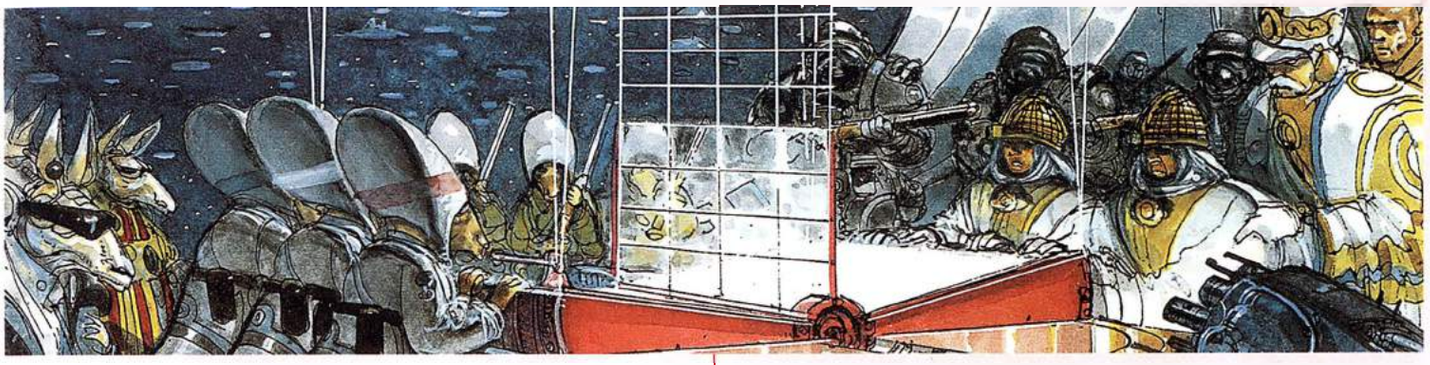
Time Taken: Anywhere from one round to several days.
Specializations: Specific administration or branch within it—Endocity Police, Imperial Merchants Guild, Techno-Techno hierarchy.

This skill measures a character's understanding of bureaucracies and their procedures, and her ability to navigate and manipulate these to gain information, favors, or achieve other goals. Characters succeeding at *bureaucracy* rolls attain their goals through the proper channels without any hassles —or arousing the suspicion of the officials involved. Characters who fail become mired in bureaucratic red tape. Their procedures take longer than usual, and come to the attention of the local officials involved. If characters roleplay the encounter with arrogant or hostile attitudes, they might be delayed further, turned away, or even detained on false charges of committing some crime.

You can use *bureaucracy* in two ways —to recall procedures and other details about how an administration functions, and to use that knowledge to pull useful data from those serving a bureaucracy.

Remembering or finding information on how a bureaucracy works helps characters know how to play by an administration's rules and procedures. For example, if Lucardo needs a permit to openly carry his family's heirloom sword on his belt, a successful *bureaucracy* roll helps him recall where to apply for the permit, what identification the government requires him to produce, how much processing fees cost, how long this might take. On a really good roll, Lucardo might know a few bureaucratic loopholes he can use to speed things up and save himself a few kublars.

Characters can also use this skill to extract information from a bureaucracy, usually by interacting with one of its servants.



Gamemasters determine the *bureaucracy* roll's difficulty by measuring the data's security priority:

Very Easy (5): Information is available to everyone. Finding out how much you owe in import tariffs for your cargo.

Easy (10): Available to most people. Discovering what other merchants owe in import tariffs for their cargo.

Moderate (15): Available to those with proper credentials or qualifications. Finding out who's under suspicion for not paying tariffs or importing questionable or illegal goods.

Difficult (20): Access to data is restricted. Discovering who's investigating corrupt import practices and details of those investigations.

Very Difficult (30): Information is very restricted. Finding the name of the official taking bribes to steer the investigation away from the real culprits.

Gamemasters can modify difficulties based on the bureaucracy in question and the character's reputation:

Condition of Bureaucracy:

+5–10 to the difficulty if the request for information is out of the ordinary.

+15 or more to the difficulty if the request is very unusual or suspicious.

–5 to the difficulty if the administration is well-funded, has good morale, or is really dedicated to meeting the needs of those who it serves.

+5 or more to the difficulty if the bureaucracy is poorly-funded or has low morale.

+10 or more to the difficulty if the administration is corrupt and doesn't care about services it provides.

Character's Reputation:

+5–10 or more to the difficulty if bureaucrats know the character as a criminal, rogue, or agitator. Use this modifier if the character belongs to (or is thought to belong to) an organization with such a reputation.

No modifier if officials don't know the character and have no reason to want to help her —but no reason to hinder her either.

–5 to the difficulty if the character has (or seems to have) official qualifications or credentials relating to the particular administration.

–10 to the difficulty if the character is well-known and well liked, and officials have good reason to help her.

Achieving good results with *bureaucracy* also depends on the official with whom the character interacts. A low-level Golden Palace administrator can't get the characters into the grand audience chamber, no matter how well they roll their *bureaucracy* dice. A high skill roll can only get the characters as far as a particular bureaucrat could normally go —although they might also make a better lasting impression on that official should they ever need his services in the future.

Business

Time Taken: One round to one day or longer.
Specializations: Product field (weapons, culinary delicacies, heavy machinery) or business organization (company, conglomerate, trade guild).

The character is familiar with companies and corporate procedures. A character skilled in *business* could run his own corporation, glean information from examining a company's accounts, convince corporate officials to cooperate with him, and determine how much it costs to manufacture various products. On a good *business* roll characters can find and successfully negotiate with business contacts, partners, suppliers, and related personnel. They can accurately judge the value of goods, services, and business opportunities.

You can also use the *business* skill to uncover information about companies. It's easy to figure out how the corner bar makes a profit and handles business affairs; understanding factories, service facilities, and public works is more difficult —Moderate (15) to Very Difficult (30), modified by whether the owners, workers, or management have something to hide. It's nearly impossible to uncover the inner workings and corporate secrets behind the Imperial Merchant's Guild.

> *"A single drop of that oil can raise tons... the news alone is worth millions of gold kublars, Your Eminence!"*
>
> *—Imperial Merchants Guild Magnate*

Cultures

Time Taken: One round to one day, sometimes longer.
Specializations: Social group, region, or planet—Ekonomat, Golden Planet court, pirate bands, Techno-Pontificate.

This skill represents knowledge and understanding of particular societies and common cultural tendencies (for instance, techno-capitalist cultures tend to focus more on the

accumulation of wealth through high-technology than anything else). You can use this skill to determine how a specific society expects a character to behave in a particular situation. Difficulties to use this skill become higher for more obscure cultures, or more in-depth information about them. Characters successfully rolling *cultures* can recall facts about a certain group's history, art, customs, social rituals, politics, and attitudes toward foreigners. Characters can use this skill to understand facets of one's own species or of those for other species.

> *"These savage warriors will fight to the death with their prehistoric swords to protect their secret."*
>
> *—Imperial Merchants Guild Magnate*

Intimidation

Time Taken: One round, several hours or longer.
Specializations: Blackmail, bullying, interrogation.

Characters use *intimidation* to influence others through application of physical presence, verbal threats, and fear. *Intimidation* can frighten others into revealing secret or personal information, obeying commands, or otherwise cooperating with the character under duress. Victims of *intimidation* use the *willpower* skill to resist; their *willpower* roll becomes the intimidator's difficulty number he must equal or exceed to successfully intimidate the victim.

Although *intimidation* relies on some factors other than those based on *Knowledge* —the character's physical presence and body language— the character must still know how to carefully apply these and her force of will to use this skill successfully.

Threatening victims with methodical pain, torture, or other unpleasantries can prove more successful than a simple display of muscle and tough talk.

Gamemasters can modify the intimidator's and the victim's rolls based on several factors:

+5 or more to intimidator's roll if threatening the victim with physical violence, brandishing weapons, or showing superior strength.

+10 or more to intimidator's roll if victim is totally at the mercy of intimidator.

+5 or more to victim's *willpower* roll if victim has an advantage over intimidator.

+10 or more to victim's *willpower* roll if victim cannot conceive of danger from intimidator.

Example: Larryn hasn't had much luck following that Merchants Guild bureaucrat to uncover his shady deals with a pirate gang. So she corners him in a dark alley, points her suprapistol at the bureaucrat, and pressures him to spill his guts about his illegal activities. Larryn rolls her *intimidation* of 3D+2; the gamemaster allows her a +5 bonus to her roll for brandishing a weapon. The cowardly bureaucrat has a *willpower* of 2D+2 and receives no modifiers to his roll. Larryn rolls a 14 and adds the +5 bonus for a total *intimidation* roll of 19. The bureaucrat rolls 8 for his *willpower*. With the suprapistol pointing directly at his quivering double chins, the bureaucrat reveals he meets his pirate contact every other afternoon at a particular bar.

Languages

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Specific language.

Most people throughout human space understand Universal, the basic language used to communicate in all forums throughout the Human Empire. It's as common among pirates, spacers, and mercenaries as it is among politicians, traders, and the nobility. Even aliens speak Universal, though often with accents or awkward grammatical formulations.

The *languages* skill represents a character's familiarity with and ability to use various forms of foreign communication, including written, spoken, and non-verbal. Like the aliens skill, assume a character knows her own language and other common tongues like Universal. Use this skill to understand a language or dialect unfamiliar to the character in a setting where a translator (living or computerized) is not available.

Characters must make *languages* skill rolls when they want to understand something in an unfamiliar tongue, or communicate with alien words and gestures.

Gamemasters base difficulties on the language's complexity and structure:

Very Easy (5): Extremely common language using many similar words or phrases.

Easy (10): Common language related to Universal, or regional and alien dialects.

Moderate (15): Common language, but not related to Universal.

Difficult (20): Obscure language not related to Universal.

Very Difficult (30): Extremely esoteric language; one unique to previously undiscovered cultures; a language considered "dead"; one that the character cannot pronounce using his inherent vocal abilities.

Heroic (31+): Language where many concepts are beyond the character's understanding or experience, such as musical languages or those dependent upon complex body gestures.

Gamemasters can modify *languages* difficulties based on the complexity of the idea the character wishes to express:

–5 to the difficulty if the idea is very basic: "Yes." "No." "Maybe."

No modifier to communicate slightly sophisticated concepts: "How much?" "Drink is five kublars." "I have no money."

+1–5 to the difficulty if the idea is sophisticated. "The Endoguard is coming and we don't have enough ammo." "I'm not giving you six crates of Cogans without at least the 500 kublar downpayment you promised me." "You go around the south ridge and outflank them while we draw them into the minefield."

+6–10 to the difficulty for complex concepts: "If we lure the pirates into the asteroids, we can wait in ambush there while Gorjo's commandos take out their mother-ship's scanner arrays and astro-nav computers. Once they start flying without all that extra data, they'll maneuver like wallowing koor beasts in the asteroids, and won't be able to escape into hyperspace."

+11–20 to the difficulty for extremely sophisticated ideas: "The Troglosocialik philosophy of harmonious existence with nature works from a rather colonial standpoint, but becomes totally irrelevant when it concerns the recovery of one's lost honor by whatever means necessary."

Characters can become fluent in a particular language through game experience or specializations. During the course of adventures, any character who makes 10 Difficult (20) *language* tests for a specific language is considered fluent in that language. These tests must occur during the normal scope of play, as the character uses this skill during encounters to communicate. In all future situations this character doesn't need to make skill rolls to see if she understands that particular language —assume she can understand all but the most complex concepts expressed in this language.

Characters can also specialize in particular languages. Once a character improves this specialized skill by 5D above his *Knowledge* attribute, consider him fluent in this particular language. He no longer has to make skills rolls to understand anything expressed in that language.

Scholar

Time Taken: One round to several days.
Specialization: Field of study—astrophysics, paleo-history, planetary geophysics.

Characters with this skill have expert learning in a specific area of study gained through formal academic training or personal research. *Scholar* represents the ability to recall specific details on a subject, and uncover more information in that field through research. Characters improving this skill should choose a specialization to reflect their particular area of study, often subjects taught at the universe's established universities and academies: archaeology, botany, chemistry, engineering concepts, geology, paleo-history, space propulsion theories, and physics. Players should choose their own scholar specializations, or create new ones with the gamemaster's permission. When creating a character's background, players should explain why and how they gained such academic training in a particular subject.

Like other *Knowledge* skills, *scholar* difficulties are based on the obscurity and detail of the information sought.

This skill represents knowledge gained in the classroom and library, and not a practical proficiency in the subject one can apply in other situations. For instance, someone with the skill of *scholar: archaic weapons* could identify paleo-weapons and rattle off several facts about them, but couldn't effectively fight with them without the *archaic weapons* skill. A character with *scholar: astrophysics* would know various theories about traveling through space, but couldn't fly a spaceship without the piloting skill.

Gamemasters may allow characters using *scholar* a small bonus under certain circumstances when applying scholarly theory to a practical situation. A character with *scholar: tactics* (the history of tactics) normally doesn't get a bonus to *tactics* rolls. But in some situations, an exceptional *scholar: tactics* roll might contribute a +1D bonus to a related *tactics* roll using the insight gained from the scholar's input.

Security Regulations

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Specific planet, government or association's legal codes and procedures—Drere Spaceport, Golden Planet, Imperial Merchants Guild, Union of Planets.

Characters who improve this skill have a greater understanding of how law enforcement organizations, regulations, and personnel operate. This skill represents a character's knowledge of laws and regulations, so she can recall what general statutes are enforced on various planets and regions of space. For instance, a character using *security regulations* successfully can remember whether it's legal to openly carry weapons in a particular spaceport. Characters also have a better idea whether it's best to cooperate, bribe, resist, or con in specific encounters with the authorities.

Using this knowledge, a character can also successfully deal with representatives of official security organizations; for instance, knowing how tariff inspectors inspect ships for cargo, or

convincing spaceport security forces that your minor offense is worth overlooking for a tip on someone else's more serious crime.

Streetwise

Time Taken: One round, one day, or longer.
Specializations: Specific planet, location, or underworld organization—Arcol Sublevels, Gamphris League.

Streetwise represents a character's familiarity with criminal organizations and their illicit operations: black marketeering, gambling, racketeering, trafficking illegal goods, blackmail, contract killing, fraud. Characters can use this skill to make contacts in the underworld, find illegal goods or services for sale, or engage in illicit activities with some knowledge of how they work. Proficiency in this skill also reflects knowledge of intergalactic criminals, outlawed organizations, crime lords, and their various schemes and operations.

Set *streetwise* difficulties based on how hard it is to find the kind of illegal good or criminal contact the character seeks:

Very Easy (5): Illegal items and services readily available in most situations and settings. A head hunter on lawless Exofringe world. Small arms in a spaceport where law enforcement is lax.

Easy (10): Readily available goods and services requiring a degree of discretion or careful investigation to find. Hiring a street thief to pull off a job for you. Contacting a representative of an infamous underworld organization.

Moderate (15): Any service involving considerable risk, or goods which are both illegal and carefully regulated by the authorities. Finding heavy weapons on a world where the authorities allow people to own only sidearms. Hiring a pilot to smuggle you out of a system where you're wanted for a crime.

Difficult (20): Hiring a criminal with a very unusual skill, or finding a very expensive, dangerous or well-controlled good or service. Finding weapons for sale on a planet where all firearms are outlawed except in the hands of the authorities.

Very Difficult (30): Tracking down a specific outlaw in hiding. Finding illegal goods on a world where their possession incurs an automatic death penalty. Arranging a personal meeting with a criminal godfather—without a hand-delivered invitation.

Heroic (31+): Finding extremely rare merchandise which normally wouldn't be available, even under the best of circumstances.

Gamemasters can always modify the difficulty based on many factors: the level and dedication of law enforcement in the area; the character's familiarity with the world and its criminal contacts; and the underworld's trust in the character. A high-ranking official of the Techno-Pontificate is obviously going to have a more difficult time making contacts in the criminal underworld than a low-life vagabond.

Survival

Time Taken: One round when recalling knowledge or reacting to danger; one hour or more when looking for necessities.
Specializations: Type of environment—jungle, desert, glacier, harmful atmosphere.

This skill reflects a character's knowledge of techniques for surviving in hostile environments —deserts, jungles, ocean, forests, asteroid belts, volcanoes, poisonous atmosphere worlds, mountains— anywhere the amenities of technologically advanced civilization are not readily available in abundance.

Characters can roll survival to recall general information what she knows about this environment and providing clues as to how best to deal with native hazards. In dangerous situations, the player may roll survival to see if the character knows how to react. A character may roll this skill to search for the necessities of life: shelter, food, water, medicinal herbs and roots, and other helpful materials.

When characters make survival rolls, use these difficulty guidelines:

Very Easy (5): Character is extremely familiar with terrain type, perhaps having grown up in a similar environment.

Easy (10): Character is familiar with the particular environment.

Moderate (15): Character is somewhat familiar with terrain, possibly having visited a similar environment before.

Difficult (20): Character is unfamiliar with terrain, possibly having only heard of such an environment from someone else.

Very Difficult (30): Character is completely unfamiliar with situation, this being their first time in this terrain.

Heroic (31+): Character is completely unfamiliar with situation and has no idea how to proceed, including any characters who don't know where they are.

"She and her son fed on the flesh of woolly toads which entered the cave during the bitter-cold nights, seeking human warmth..."
—Tonto

Tactics

Time Taken: One round to several minutes.
Specializations: Type of military unit involved in combat actions—fighter squadrons, battleship fleets, ground assault troops, commandos.

Characters use this skill when deploying military forces and maneuvering them to the best advantage. They can roll tactics to recall general knowledge of how best to conduct particular military operations: deploying a fleet to blockade a system; landing troops to invade an enemy installation; setting a trap using the available terrain and forces.

You can also use this skill to determine the best response to an opponent's move in battle: what to do if the enemy entraps your

forces in a pincer movement; how to proceed in the assault should reinforcements arrive; what to do with units trapped behind enemy lines.

When setting difficulties for characters using *tactics*, gamemasters should consider the many factors of complexity within a battle: the number of units involved; the terrain over which the action is fought; and the difference in training and armament between forces.

Characters using this skill often seek ways to triumph in military situations. The better the result, the more hints a gamemaster should give to help the character win the engagement. Hints can include reminders about different moves the enemy can make, suggestions on how to maneuver the units for particular advantages, or (for especially good rolls) risky and unanticipated moves which could throw the enemy off guard.

Tactics rolls only provide information or advice on how best to handle military situations. A battle's final outcome depends on other skill rolls —*command* for the opposing leaders, and the combat rolls of their forces engaged in an action's smaller skirmishes. See the chapter on "Running Battles" for more details on using *tactics* and *command* in large-scale engagements, and ideas on involving characters in such massive clashes.

"You, Hohenhole, will attack from the north with half our men. Engage them as closely as possible, and try to fight man-to-man... And you, Konrath, will do the same from the south. You must force the Endoguards to remain tightly packed together. Come out from the secret tunnels."

—Othon Von Salza

Willpower

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Specific duress to resist—persuasion, intimidation, psionic manipulation, torture.

Willpower represents a character's personal ability to withstand stress and temptation. It's a measure of one's strength of will and determination used to resist intimidation, persuasion, exposure to the Necro-Dream, and certain psionic attacks using influence.

Characters often roll their *willpower* against someone else's skill roll to intimidate or otherwise influence them. Resisting exposure to the passive temptations of the Necro-Dream is a Very Easy (5) *willpower* task; however, if an adversary actively tempts them with the mindless pleasures of the Necro-Dream, they must make a *willpower* roll opposed to their *persuasion*, *intimidation*, or other relevant skill.

Characters can call upon their *willpower* to push themselves under stressful situations. Sometimes a character must roll *stamina* to test his endurance. If he fails under these circumstances, the character can drive himself on through sheer force of will by making a successful *willpower* roll at one higher level of difficulty than the *stamina* test. The character must make a *willpower* check as often as he would normally have to make a *stamina* check, with all rolls at one difficulty level higher. Once the character fails a check or stops pushing himself, he collapses, completely exhausted, and must rest double the normal length of time. If in failing a *stamina* check the character would have suffered any damage, the character suffers one worse wound level as a result of pushing his body far beyond its limitations.

Example: Angelian has fallen from her koor beast. Although she's managed to escape the pirates pursuing her, she still hasn't recovered the koor beast, since it's tromped off across the Plains of Gargash at a good pace. Angelian begins jogging after the creature. After half an hour, the gamemaster asks her to make a Moderate (15) *stamina* roll to see if she's exhausted yet. She rolls an 8 —not high enough to keep running. Rather than give up, Angelian decides to use her *willpower* to push herself to her utmost physical limit. She must make a Difficult (20) roll (one difficulty level higher than the failed *stamina* roll) using her *willpower* of 3D. Angelian rolls a 12 —still not high enough— and collapses to the ground, exhausted (and with a –1D fatigue penalty to all her actions until she rests). Had she rolled high enough, Angelian could have continued running after the koor beast another half hour, and probably would have caught up with it.

"Your Majesties... My son and I are the only ones who know the secret of the epyphite. No amount of torture will make us reveal it..."

—Othon von Salza

Go Slow on Specializations

Don't worry too much about specializations if this is your first time creating a character for the Metabarons Roleplaying Game. Stick with the basic skill until you get a better feel for the game.

Specializations help break a broad skill into more specific categories. Some gamemasters ignore them altogether, preferring to focus on the adventure and character stories rather than game mechanics. Others like the flexibility to focus on particular aspects of a skill.

Remember, though, that specializing in one field means you're not as qualified to use that skill for other purposes. It's like a weapons specialist in a combat unit. He's really great at operating one kind of weapon —let's say a sonic bazooka— but when it comes to using other weapons like grenades or rifles, he's not as skilled. If you decide to use specializations, make sure they're ones you'll need frequently during the game.

Mechanical Skills

Mechanical stands for "mechanical aptitude" and measures a character's ability to operate large and often complex machinery: mounted guns, exoskeletons, spaceships, armored vehicles, and the sensor and comm systems serving them.

Those with high *Mechanical* attributes are naturals at piloting various craft effectively, whether maneuvering a floater through a crowded street or flying an Endoguard lancet into a heated space battle. Characters with low *Mechanical* scores often fumble over controls, press the wrong buttons, fire weapons when they're not supposed to, and inadvertently steer their craft into trouble... and the occasional minor accident.

When using *Mechanical* skills to pilot spaceships or drive ground vehicles (and even operate exoskeletons), you can negotiate clear terrain without too much trouble —such tasks are Very Easy (5) or Easy (10), if the gamemaster even requires a roll. Characters must make more difficult skill tests when they fly too fast for the terrain, attempt hazardous maneuvers, try shaking pursuers in a chase, or try anything risky. You'll find more details on movement, chase, and combat rules in the chapters on "Movement & Chases" and "Space Travel & Combat."

Astro-Nav

Time Taken: *One minute* if starting point and destination are known, and one takes a commonly-traveled route for which coordinates have already been calculated (this can be reduced to one round in emergencies, though with a higher difficulty). *A few hours* when the starting position is known, but the craft has never before visited the destination and the astro-nav computer must calculate coordinates. *One day* when you must gather sensor information to determine the vessel's current position and then compute astro-nav coordinates.

Spacecraft pilots use *astro-nav* to plot a course from one star system to another based on known navigational information, computer processing, sensor instrumentation, and a good dose of pilot's intuition. For more information on astro-nav difficulties, see the chapter on "Space Travel & Combat."

Techno-Technos using their network of intra-dimensional tunnels to instantaneously travel mega-distances do not require the *astro-nav* skill, as these intergalactic passages were firmly established long ago.

Comm

Time Taken: One round for quick checks, or several minutes, hours or days to cover long journeys.
Specializations: Specific kind of communications unit.

Characters use this skill when communicating with various electronic devices.

Although operating communication devices requires a Very Easy (5) roll (if any roll at all), the difficulty numbers become higher when using *comm* for complex purposes or in adverse conditions: descrambling secure transmission codes and frequencies, reversing communications components to listen in on conversations, and sending or receiving signals through natural hazards which disrupt communications (gas clouds, heavy magnetic fields, or regions with a high metal content).

Use the following difficulties for homing in on a particular kind of frequency:

Very Easy (5): Picking up a known, registered frequency. Public broadcasts, low-security corporate communications.

Easy (10): Listening in on specific private transmissions. Low-security government communications such as emergency services.

Moderate (15): Finding a somewhat sensitive communication frequency. Local governments, cautious businesses or security-conscious individuals.

Difficult (20): Tapping professionally secure channels. Low-level military communications, transmissions from the local government's upper echelons.

Very Difficult (30): Intercepting high-ranking government channels, command-level military communications.

Heroic (31+): Listening in on a top-secret galactic government or military frequencies.

Characters can use *comm* to break the codes encrypting secure communications. Base their difficulty on the original difficulty to intercept the transmission. For each difficulty level above the original one they roll, the character accurately deciphers more of the message. Some encrypted messages use code words to further hinder code-breaking attempts: for instance, Endoguards might refer to their impending target as "the prize" without giving away "the prize's" true identity. Characters intercepting and decoding such a message only know what was said about "the prize" and must figure out what "the prize" is from the transmission's context.

Example: Larryn hopes to intercept transmissions between the crooked Merchant's Guild bureaucrat and his pirate contact using the radio unit in her rented floater. She rolls her *comm* skill of 3D+2 and gets 15, beating the Easy (10) difficulty. Larryn finds the right frequency to intercept, but she didn't expect the bureaucrat to encode it. To break this code, she fiddles with the floater's radio unit (and makes another *comm* roll). To understand more than a few snippets of the conversation, Larryn must roll her *comm* at a Moderate (15) difficulty level (one level higher than the original difficulty to find the right frequency). This time she rolls a 14 for her *comm* —not enough to decipher the message.

"Put me through to the Ekonomat, the supreme Endoguard, the Technopontificate, and the representatives of the colonial planets! Right now!"

—Purple Endoguard Protecting the Golden Palace

Exoskeleton Operation

Time Taken: One round for chases and combat. For longer trips, several minutes, hours or days.
Specializations: Specific kind or model exoskeleton—battle suit, exploration exoskeleton, heavy load suit.

Characters use *exoskeleton operation* to drive any kind of powered suit which enhances one's natural abilities through servo-mechanisms and assisted movement. Unlike survival or space suits, exoskeletons fully enclose the wearer amidst the complex machinery which mechanically boosts their performance and protects them from hostile environments. People often use exoskeletons to move heavy loads, explore extremely lethal atmospheres, and enter battle with supreme personal protection and armament.

Since the exoskeleton replaces a character's abilities with its own mechanical attributes, you should use this skill when one would normally roll skills like *brawling*, *dodge*, *running*, *0-G maneuver*, *climb/jump*, or *lift*. To fire weapons mounted on or held by an exoskeleton, use the *gunnery* skill. Some exoskeletons provide bonuses for certain actions based on their operational profile and game statistics.

Example: Martius the explorer must leave his ship and explore a planet wracked by torrential acidic rain and high winds. He dons his exploration exoskeleton, which replaces many of his own abilities with its mechanical equivalent. Martius wanders the planet's surface until he finds an immense rock rising from the plains. If he could climb it, Martius would get a better view of the terrain and take more wide-ranging scanner readings. Since he's in the exoskeleton, Martius uses his *exoskeleton operation* of 3D to ascend instead of his *climb/jump* skill. He'll also use his *exoskeleton operation* skill instead of *dodge* to avoid an imminent attack from the angry creature nesting atop the rock.

Gunnery

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Specific mounted weapon—artillery emplacements, battleship lasers, missiles.

Gunnery serves as the "ranged combat" skill for operating weapons using any kind of mechanical assembly to aim and fire. These armaments use turrets, elevating machinery, targeting

computers, even a vessel's orientation to accurately attack the enemy. Such machinery must be mounted on spaceships, exoskeletons, vehicles, and defensive emplacements. Characters use *gunnery* to aim and fire armaments mounted on anything from battleships and lancets to trankars and planetary fortresses.

When using this skill, characters often add the weapon's "fire control" dice to their gunnery roll —this represents the gun's targeting computers and aiming assembly assisting the gunner in acquiring and attacking hostile forces. The chapter on "Space Travel & Combat" provides more details about using *gunnery*.

> *"When Othon launched all his weapons at its servo-brain, the Cetacyborg exploded like a supernova."*
>
> —*Tonto*

Piloting

Time Taken: One round for chases and combat. For journeys, several minutes, hours or days.
Specializations: Type or class of spaceship or flying vehicle—Endoguard lancet, floater, Imperial battleship, moto-craft, Ostrov-class fighter.

This skill reflects a character's proficiency at flying air- or spaceborne craft —from atmospheric anti-grav vehicles like aircars to immense battleships— using a basic understanding of control machinery and flight interface instrumentation. Those who improve this skill can pilot almost any flying craft, though some are more difficult to handle than others.

Characters can also use *piloting* to help fly battleship-sized craft. Such immense vessels require an entire crew (or its minimum crew) and a commander to coordinate the ship's numerous flight operations. When using *piloting*, characters often add the craft's "maneuverability" dice to their skill roll —this simulates the craft's propulsion and maneuvering machinery helping the character to successfully fly the ship. *Piloting* also serves as a "reaction skill" when trying to avoid enemy attacks while flying a vessel. See the chapter on "Space Travel & Combat" for more details on using *piloting* to fly vessels in various situations, and on using *command* to coordinate the efforts of a large crew.

Using Sensors as Bait

Gamemasters can use information from scanner readings as plot devices to draw characters into situations. When characters use sensors, they notice something interesting on their scanners, but don't always know exactly what it is or why it's there. They rarely discover enough data about their target, and must investigate the situation to reveal the whole story.

In the example above, Martius initially has no idea about the derelict ship's true identity. Maybe they're pirates waiting for him (as in the example), or perhaps it's a passenger transport marooned in this system, just waiting for Martius to explore. Does he find important survivors, valuable cargo, or even the cause of the transport's accident?

Sensors

Time Taken: One round for chases and combat. For trips, several minutes, hours or days.
Specializations: Specific scanner type or model—ship sensor arrays, medical diagnostic scanners, power sensors.

This skill represents a character's expertise at operating electronic detection equipment, including devices to identify life forms, detect approaching vessels, analyze energy readings, and enhance long-range visual readings. *Sensors* cover equipment from portable environment analyzers to huge scanner arrays used on battleships and planetary installations. Characters can take quick readings from round to round (often helpful in combat), or can make one roll to cover sensor readings for a longer period (during a long journey, while a patient recovers over several days, during one's late-shift patrol duty).

When using *sensors*, characters often roll their skill dice plus the "sensors" dice from the equipment or vessel's game statistics —this represents the sensor's enhanced power to detect and identify elements within scanner range. You'll find more information about *sensors* in the chapter on "Space Travel & Combat."

> **Example:** Martius flies his survey ship from one planet to another in the same system, a journey of several hours. He makes one *sensors* roll to see if he notices anything out of the ordinary during the trip. Martius rolls high enough that his scanners pick up a derelict vessel about halfway to his destination. Now he makes another *sensors* roll to identify the other ship... and quickly discovers the supposed derelict is really a powered-down pirate cruiser waiting to attack!

Scanning Space: Many vessels and planetary installations use *sensors* to monitor the surrounding space for authorized traffic, intruders, pirates, smugglers, and others wandering through the system. While scanning space, *sensors* serve two functions: detection and identification.

When a sensor detects something, it notices the object's presence but cannot identify exactly what it is. Martius realizing a ship's drifting out there falls into this category. He doesn't quite know what kind of a vessel it is, or if it's a derelict, pirate cruiser, or passenger transport.

When a sensor identifies something, it classifies it as corresponding to a known profile stored in its computers: an asteroid, specific vessel type, comet, probe, planetoid. Martius identifies his target when he focuses his sensors on the craft he encounters... and suddenly discovers it's a powered-down pirate cruiser waiting to pick off travelers like him!

Whatever you're scanning must be within a sensor's range to be detected. Ranges are listed as the first number under the "sensors" designation in spaceship stats —see the chapter on "Spaceships."

When scanning space for vessels, hazards, or other features, base the difficulty for *sensors* rolls on how the characters conduct their search:

Very Easy (5): Running a focused scan to find a known target.

Easy (10): Searching a general area to detect targets.

Moderate (15): Scanning in all directions using active sensor methods.

Difficult (20): Passively scanning the area based on information transmitted from potential targets and picked up by onboard instruments.

To discover a target's basic identity using a particular search method, increase the difficulty by one level (for instance, if Martius wants to find out what kind of vessel he's encountered: derelict, passenger transport, pirate cruiser). Increase the difficulty by two levels to gain more specific information about the target (if Martius wants to see if the vessel's engines are warm, if any survivors are aboard, or if the pirates are powering up their weapons and shields). Making a *sensors* roll two difficulty levels higher than normal also allows the scanner operator to pick up the target vessel's identification codes —assuming they haven't been altered or masked.

You can modify the *sensors* difficulty based on the target's disposition to the scanning vessel and any measures it might take to conceal its presence:

+1D or more to the difficulty if the target uses a sensor masking device.

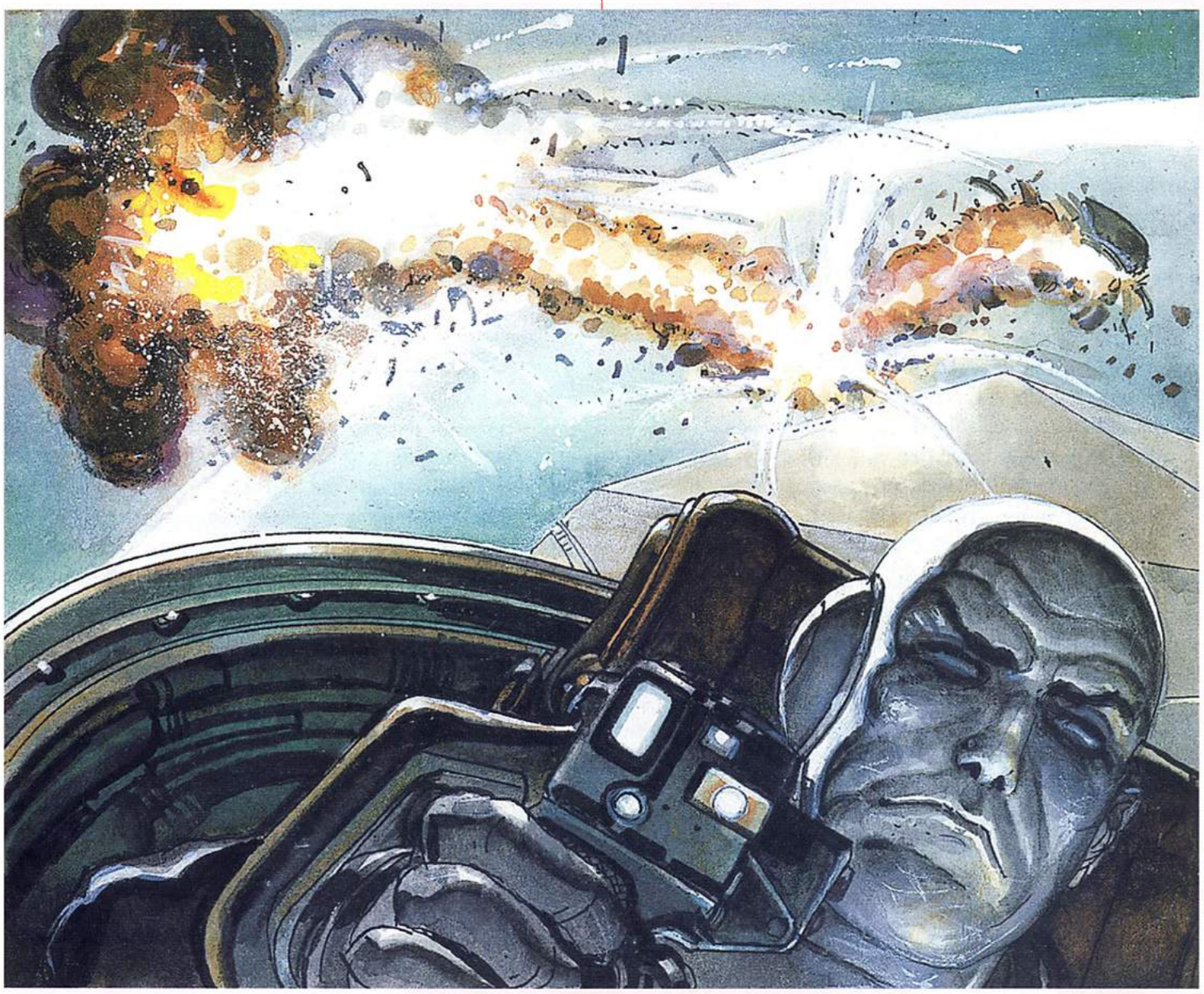
+5 to the difficulty to identify a target that's deployed a sensor decoy (scanners detect both ship and decoy as "real" unless characters beat the difficulty).

+5 to the difficulty if target's sensors are in passive mode. (See the chapter on "Space Travel & Combat.")

+15 to the difficulty if target is running silent, with all major systems powered down. (See the chapter on "Space Travel & Combat.")

+10 to the difficulty if vessel hides behind a planet or other massive body.

+20 to the difficulty if ship hides among other mass objects, such as asteroids.



You can also modify the character's *sensors* roll depending on the size of the object the scanners pick up. Larger objects are easier to notice than smaller ones:

+5 to the character's roll if targeting a small natural body (a small asteroid).

+10 to the character's roll if target is the size of a battleship or Cetacyborg.

+10 to the character's roll to detect whether the target ship is jamming sensor readings.

+10 to the character's roll if target is a moderate-size natural body (a decent-sized asteroid).

+20 to the character's roll to detect a planet-sized natural body.

+30 or more to the character's roll to notice a stellar object (a star, nebula, black hole).

Scanning Planets: Using *sensors* to more closely examine features on a planet's surface is difficult. Although scanners easily spot major features like continents, oceans, mountain ranges, and inland seas, many features on a world can interfere with *sensors*: natural geothermal activity, energy generated by immense urban sprawls, large concentrations of metal. These factors often distort sensor readings, particularly when searching a broad region for something small. Sensor operators frequently limit their scanning area —covering only a few square kilometers at a time— to detect military installations, secondary cities and other "minor" landmarks. Since only one hemisphere is visible at any given time, you can only scan a maximum of half the planet.

A general scan of the planet often reveals its general characteristics: atmosphere composition, major geographic features, energy readings typical of immense urban regions. Characters then conduct increasingly more focused scans on smaller areas to collect more detailed information about interesting landmarks.

You should base sensors difficulties on the area of a planet one intends to scan. Use these sample difficulties when scanning from orbit to spot something specific —a starport, small town, factory complex, military installation, or industrial compound— when searching an area of a certain size:

Very Easy (5): An area one square kilometer or less.

Easy (10): An area 100 square kilometers or less.

Moderate (15): An area 1,000 square kilometers or less.

Difficult (20): An area one million square kilometers or less. An average-sized nation.

Very Difficult (30): An area 100 million square kilometers or less. A small continent.

Heroic (31+): One hemisphere.

Feel free to modify the difficulty and character's rolls based on a variety of factors:

+5 or more to the difficulty to spot or identify a particular life-form among many different species in an area.

+5–15 or more to the difficulty if searching for trace energy emissions left by passing vehicles and spaceships.

+10 or more to the difficulty to locate a specific signal hidden among other similar emissions, or in a region where other factors could overwhelm that object's signature —a ship flying among volcanoes to disguise its trail, or one vessel out of the many docking at and flying around a major spaceport.

+5 or more to the character's roll to find known life-forms in massive concentrations, such as determining a certain species inhabits a planet.

+5–10 to the character's roll (based on size) if scanning for major landmarks —mountain ranges, deserts, forests, large lakes, cities.

+10 to the character's roll if seeking major sources of heat, light and other energy emissions; by default you can spot other, non-energy emitting areas, such as glaciers and deep ocean trenches.

+15 or more to the character's roll if looking for basic information —location of major continents, data on planet's atmosphere and gravity, general composition of land masses.

Don't worry about all these difficulty modifiers —they're here to help give you some idea how to create your own difficulties based on situations during the game. Keep things simple! Pick a difficulty number using your judgment. If the character beats the difficulty number, he detects something; if he rolls really well, he might find more detailed information.

"Othon von Salza, easily dodging the poly-radars, quantum sensors and photonic barriers, entered the pure oxygen atmosphere of the Golden Planet."

—Tonto

Shields

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Specific kind of shield system—fighter shields, photonic barriers, battleship deflectors.

Characters use this skill to operate shield systems, from those protecting small fighters and massive battleships to those defending entire fortresses and planets. You often use *shields* as a "reaction skill" to raise deflectors to block enemy fire.

The *shields* difficulty depends on how many "fire arcs" the character is trying defend using *shields* (fore, aft, starboard, port).

The chapter on "Space Travel & Combat" includes more information on using this skill, but here's a quick summary of difficulties for deploying shields:

Easy (10): One fire arc.

Moderate (15): Two fire arcs.

Difficult (20): Three fire arcs.

Very Difficult (30): All four fire arcs.

Vehicle Operation

Time Taken: One round for chases and combat. For trips, several minutes, hours or days.

Specializations: Specific type or model of vehicle—recon buggy, trankar.

Although most technologically advanced worlds use vehicles with anti-grav propulsion (utilizing a character's *piloting* skill), some still use vehicles traveling directly on the ground or water. *Vehicle operation* represents a character's expertise at driving any non-flying vehicle traveling on or through the ground or a liquid medium, including submersibles and tracked vehicles.

Characters can use this skill as a "reaction skill" to maneuver their vehicle to avoid enemy fire.

Perception Skills

Perception represents a character's awareness of himself, his surroundings, and other characters, including his ability to interact successfully with others.

People with high *Perception* easily notice concealed objects or enemies hiding around a corner. They convincingly persuade others to do them favors, confidently scam and fast-talk others, and bargain to get the best price possible for goods and services. Characters with a low *Perception* get lost a lot, miss things going on around them, and seem awkward with other people.

When characters want to see how much they notice about their surroundings, they make a *search* or *Perception* roll. The higher the roll, the more a character notices. Use these difficulties as guidelines for *search* or *Perception* rolls:

Very Easy (5): Noticing something very obvious (a character is walking down a crowded spaceport boulevard).

Easy (10): Making an obvious observation (the spaceport crowd consists of travelers, merchants, and various aliens).

Moderate (15): Observing something interesting (an Imperial Merchant's Guild official heads through the crowd with his entourage).

Difficult (20): Spotting something very specific (the official walks with a limp, while his chief advisor consults a personal data-reader).

Very Difficult (30): Noticing something requiring more than just a casual glance (The official seems engaged in a heated debate with his advisor; a minor Merchants Guild servant is discreetly tailing you).

Heroic (31+): You really have to look to notice this (the official's cybernetic eye is surreptitiously scanning the crowd; the servant tailing you conceals a suprapistol beneath his tunic).

Characters can use several *Perception* skills to interact with other people and try to influence them. Using these interactive skills often pits the character's skill against the other person's skill (often *Perception* or *willpower*) to resist giving in to whatever the character wants.

Example: Gauk the thug wants to convince the bar owner not to call security and have him arrested for fighting with Lucardo. Gauk rolls his *persuasion* of 3D. Instead of rolling against a set difficulty, Gauk must beat whatever the bar owner rolls for his *Perception* (4D) in an opposed roll. Gauk rolls a 10 —unfortunately this doesn't beat the bartender's roll of 18. Looks like Gauk is headed for more trouble...

Dice rolling shouldn't solely determine the outcome of interactions between players and gamemaster characters. If a character is conning a spaceport official, and the player rolls a high *con* score, he obviously succeeds —but how exactly does his character do it? What does he say to influence the official? What scheme does he weave to deceive him? This is up to the player. The better the player acts out the role of his character, the greater his chance of success becomes. A good player can get everyone laughing at his humorous attempts to fast-talk a gamemaster character —something you can't get with die rolling. Gamemasters might reward players who perform particularly well with a bonus of +1D to their roll, especially if everyone enjoyed the show.

In the example above, Gauk's player might have acted out exactly how he was trying to persuade the bar owner not to call security on him. He might have tried something like this: "Uh, gee, sir, I was only trying to test that guy's reflexes, especially since folks down here tend to be rough, and that guy looked kinda skinny to be wandering down here in such a rough neighborhood. Besides, there was no harm done to your fine establishment here." If Gauk's player made this a convincing and possibly comical or exciting performance, the gamemaster might allow him to roll an additional 1D to add to his *persuasion* total.

Players shouldn't use interactive skill rolls to influence other players' characters —instead, they should resolve differences by roleplaying and coming to some kind of mutual agreement. By reducing player interaction to a series of skill rolls, the game turns from a fun story to a die-rolling contest... and nobody likes getting stuck with the losing end of a die roll with a fellow player.

Bargain

Time Taken: One minute to an hour.
Specializations: Specific merchandise to purchase or sell—armaments, marble, robots, spaceships.

This skill measures a character's ability to haggle over prices for goods they want to buy or sell. To get a good deal, characters must make an opposed roll against the gamemaster character's *bargain* skill.

The gamemaster determines the fair market value of the goods or services in question. Use the prices listed with weapons, equipment, and the reference charts at the back of this rulebook as guidelines. Remember that some items could be very cheap or expensive depending on the location where it's offered for purchase. Water on a desert world would probably be just as expensive as weapons on a planet under martial law. Some merchants also charge extra fees for their services, particularly for illegal and hard-to-find goods.

Success at bargaining depends both on high die rolls and good

roleplaying. A gamemaster impressed with a player's bargaining performance might allow a bonus to the *bargain* skill die roll, or might simply base success or failure on the roleplaying. In these cases, gamemasters speak for the merchants, but shouldn't force characters to accept deals they wouldn't normally take —the players can always refuse a deal. If the gamemaster feels the character's roll represents an unfair deal, without the player embellishing by roleplaying the situation, he should allow the gamemaster character to refuse the deal as well.

To resolve an attempt at bargaining, make an opposed skill roll using any appropriate modifiers. Find the results on the "Bargaining Results" chart below.

BARGAINING RESULTS

If the opposed *bargaining* rolls are within two points of each other, the acceptable price remains at fair market value.

Seller's roll beats buyer's by:	
3–5	Price is 110% of fair market value.
6–10	Price is 125% market value.
11–15	Price is 150% market value.
16–20	Price is twice that of market value.
21+	Price is three times market value.
Buyer's roll beats seller's by:	
3–5	Price is about 90% acceptable market value.
6–10	Price is 85% market value.
11–15	Price is 75% market value.
16–20	Price is 65% market value.
21+	Price is 50% of fair market value.

Example: Angelian is stuck on the Plains of Gargash without a ride when she flags down a nice fellow in an aircar zooming past. She asks him to give her a lift to Shantoon, the nearest settlement. The fellow mentions that he's a little short of cash, and would be glad to fly her there for five kublars. Angelian decides to bargain and try bringing the price down, explaining that she's somewhat short of kublars herself, and might be able to pay more once she reaches Shantoon. Angelian rolls her *bargain* skill of 4D+2 against the driver's *Perception* of 3D (he hasn't improved his own *bargain* skill). Angelian rolls a 17 against the driver's 9, so he reluctantly agrees to give her a lift to Shantoon for only four kublars.

You can modify *bargaining* rolls depending on availability and condition of goods, the relationship between buyer and seller, and the presence of local trade associations.

Availability and Condition of Goods:

+5 or more to the buyer if the local market is flooded with this item and easy availability has driven prices down.

+5 or more to seller if item isn't readily available and generally in higher demand.

+5 or more to buyer if the item is damaged and doesn't notice; the seller might pretend to drive a hard bargain, but sells damaged goods at a lower price and hopes buyer doesn't realize this. If customers make appropriate Perception checks to notice that the item is damaged, this modifier should increase to +10.

Business Relationship:

No modifier if the parties have never dealt before.

+5 or more to the buyer if both parties maintain a good relationship, the buyer is a frequent customer, pays on time, and never has a serious complaint.

+5 or more to the seller if the buyer has been a "problem" customer, so buyer has a vested interest in getting as good a price as possible, or even risk losing the sale to get personal satisfaction.

+10 or more to seller if local businesses work together to artificially inflate prices.

You can also use the *bargain* skill to bribe others. While it helps to have a handful of kublars, bribery also requires some very slick roleplaying, more than usually expected for *bargain* attempts. Characters must seem trustworthy to their subject, assuring him they won't get him in trouble for accepting the bribe and letting them do what they'd like. They must quickly create a relationship based on favors: the characters intend to pay off the subject, while the subject does them the favor of bending the rules or looking the other way.

Most everyone accepts bribes, though some not as often as others. Characters must estimate what certain officials are willing to do for payoffs of various amounts. Someone with greater authority (and therefore power to give the characters what they want) would expect a much larger bribe than someone with less bureaucratic standing. A character might offer a petty city officials 10 or 15 kublars to look the other way on some code violation. They'd have to offer a considerably higher price to pull some favor from a more prominent person. You don't have to limit the "price" to cash, either: many people are willing to exchange one favor for another.

Keep in mind, however, that some people simply will not accept bribes no matter how high the amount —they have no use for bribes, or don't want to compromise their loyalty or honor. These individuals include people with high moral standards or important loyalties, such as Colonial guards.

When negotiating a bribe, characters make opposed *bargain* skill rolls —if the recipient of the bribe rolls higher, he often demands more money or favors in exchange for his cooperation.

Example: Larryn is following a pirate associated with the Merchants Guild bureaucrat she's been tailing. The pirate slips into a warehouse patrolled by several customs guards. Larryn figures she can offer them a few kublars and a slick story to get inside. She rolls her *bargain* skill of 4D+2 against the guards' *Perception* of 3D, but backs up her bribery attempt with an interesting story: "I'm sorry to bother you, but I left my gear bag on a crate in the loading bay, and the workers

there said it had been sent here for storage. I know it's not really convenient for you, but would you let me inside to look for the bag? The loaders said you'd let me inside for an inspection fee of two kublars each. Is that right?" This interesting approach impresses the gamemaster, who lets her roll an extra 1D for her *bargain* skill. She rolls a 21 against the guards' *Perception* roll of 13. They accept her four kublars and let her slip inside the warehouse.

Gamemasters can modify rolls based on the size of bribe offered:

+10 or more to bribing character's roll if bribe is much higher than expected.

+5 to bribing character's roll if amount offered is more than what is reasonable.

+5 to subject's roll if bribe is significantly less than what is expected.

+10 or more to subject's roll if bribe is insultingly small, less than half what is reasonable. If the attempt fails, the subject might report the character to local security forces.

"We are Your Majesties' most loyal servants... all we ask is a reasonable percentage of the sales..."

—Othon von Salza

Command

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Commander's unit—fighter squadron, mercenary troops, Maganat guards, spaceship crew.

Command reflects a character's ability to convince gamemaster characters and subordinates to follow orders, coordinating them in situations where teamwork is essential. Players shouldn't use *command* to force other players' characters to do something against their will —you should resolve these situations through roleplaying interaction or group discussion and planning.

Characters often use *command* in combat situations when trying to coordinate a unit toward a common goal, such as a mercenary leader issuing orders to her soldiers, or a battleship captain commanding his gunners to intensify their fire to destroy a particular target. Captains aboard battleship-scale spaceships use this skill to "fly" their vessel, directing the combined skills of the ship's pilots, navigators, gunners, and other crew members. You also use *command* when coordinating projects involving many workers, such as mining massive slabs of marble using stonecutter teams (such "combined actions" are discussed in the chapter on "The Rules").

Use the following guidelines for setting *command* difficulties:

Very Easy (5): Characters have every reason to obey. Purple Endoguards taking orders from the Emperoress.

Easy (10): Characters have some reason to obey. Mercenaries obeying their captain to accomplish a job.

Moderate (15): Characters have no reason to disobey. Civilians receiving orders to "move along" from robcops clearing a public crime scene.

Difficult (20): Characters are skeptical or suspicious. Ekonomat guards hearing orders from unauthorized officials.

Very Difficult (30): Characters have every reason to be suspicious. Pirates taking orders from security forces.

Heroic (31+): Characters have no reason at all to listen to you. A Techno-pope being ordered around by civilians.

"This is amazing, Baron! A fifteen by thirty foot block of marble, cut in less than an hour! The coordination of your team is just extraordinary."

—Imperial Merchants Guild Magnate

Con

Time Taken: One round to several minutes.
Specializations: Specific method of conning—disguise, fast-talk.

Characters use *con* to trick and deceive others, or convince them to do something that isn't in their best interest. Unlike *persuasion* or *command*, this skill relies on lying, bluffing, and twisting the facts so those to be deceived are more willing to believe the character and do what he'd like.

Since *con* is another interaction skill, you should resolve these situations through roleplaying, using the skill rolls as a general guideline.

You can base the difficulty to *con* someone based on the victim's relationship to the character:

Very Easy (5): A close friend or relative with no reason to suspect a scam.

Easy (10): Naive teenager, gullible person.

Moderate (15): Someone with nothing to gain or lose through the con, who isn't personally involved in it, or who happens to be a bystander to the situation.

Difficult (20): Someone whose job normally involves taking note of suspicious persons. A tariff collector, security officer, warehouse guard.

Very Difficult (30): Someone who really should know better. High-level bureaucrat, well-educated people, ranking military personnel.

Heroic (31+): Someone way out of your league. The Emperoress, Purple Endoguard, the Metabaron.

Gamemasters can modify *con* rolls based on the relationship of the character to his victim and the nature of the con:

No modifier if the con would convince victim to do something he might normally do anyway.

+5 or more to victim's roll if he knows the character is prone to pulling cons and has their guard up.

+10 or more to the victim's roll if the con would cause him to do something illegal or highly dangerous.

+5 or more to conning character's roll if the victim generally likes the character, even if he suspects something because of the character's unusual behavior.

+10 or more to conning character's roll if the victim has no reason to suspect dishonesty and trusts the character.

Characters (and gamemaster characters) suspecting they're the victim of a scam can resist this attempt to deceive them by rolling their *con* or *Perception* dice against the opponent's *con* total. The victim's *con* or *Perception* roll now becomes the new difficulty number, though you might modify it using the bonuses noted above. Use the victim's score as the new difficulty number even if it's lower than the actual difficulty number if he weren't suspecting the con —sometimes people outsmart themselves and fall for something even when they know better.

You can only resist a con if you suspect one —the gamemaster should never ask if you'd like to roll against a *con* attempt.

> **Example:** While searching for the pirate in the warehouse, Larryn stumbles into a patrol of customs guards. She immediately tries fast-talking to create a cover story explaining why she has business in a secured warehouse. Larryn rolls her *con* score of 5D, but since the guards are already suspicious of her, she rolls against their *Perception* score of 3D instead of a set difficulty number. Larryn rolls a 16 against the guards' 13, concocts some barely believable reason why she's wandering around a secured warehouse, and is ushered outside with no further consequences.

Forgery

Time Taken: One round to several days.
Specializations: Particular kind of documentation to forge—access codes, datareader docs, personal identification cards.

The character can create and notice false or altered documentation in various media, including paper, cards, and datareaders like io boards. You might forge authorization codes to access restricted areas, change information on personal documents to hide your true identity, or alter datareader orders to requisition parts for your spaceship.

You can modify a character's *forgery* roll based on several factors:

- **+3** to forger's roll if he has sample document to compare against forgery.
- **+3** to forger's roll if he has all necessary materials to create forgery.
- **+3–15** to forger's roll if he has special assistance (robots, computers) specifically designed to assist in forging documents.
- **+5** to forger's roll if he has some experience with the particular document type.
- **+10 or more** to forger's roll if he has extensive experience with the particular document type.

When forging a document, the *forgery* skill roll becomes the difficulty others must meet or beat to notice the fake or altered data. A person inspecting a forged document can make an opposed *forgery*, *search* or *Perception* roll to notice tampering, inconsistencies, or other signs the document's been forged.

Gamemasters can modify the inspector's roll to detect a forgery from their own experience detecting alterations and fakes:

- **+3** to inspector's roll if he has a sample document to compare against forged materials.
- **+3–15** to inspector's roll if has additional assistance (computers, robots, scanner analyzers) designed to help detect forgeries.
- **+5** to inspector's roll if he's had some experience with document type.
- **+10 or more** inspector's roll if he has extensive experience with document type.

Gaming

Time Taken: One round, several minutes, sometimes hours.
Specializations: Specific game.

Gaming reflects a character's skill at playing, winning and cheating at various games of strategy and luck. Characters are generally proficient at games involving strategy, using the rules to their advantage, beating the odds, and anticipating other players. When playing an honest game, all characters make opposed *gaming* rolls, and the highest one wins.

You can also use *gaming* to cheat or notice others who are cheating. When a character rolls this skill to cheat, others playing the game can make an opposed *gaming* skill roll to see if they detect the cheat. If the cheater rolls higher than everyone else, he gets away with the cheat and wins that round of the game, no matter what he initially rolled for his skill to play the game. If anyone else rolls higher than the cheater, they notice his deception. Characters may make detection rolls every time a player tries cheating.

The gamemaster should consider as many approaches as possible when characters cheat with the *gaming* skill. You might modify the cheater's roll if he has others helping him (or watching out for him), or if he's more familiar with the game than other players he's trying to dupe.

Like other interaction skills, those using *gaming* should describe how they're using this skill, especially when cheating. A player whose character makes a high *gaming* roll to cheat but doesn't have a viable plan for actually accomplishing the cheat should not be successful. Particularly ambitious cheaters might even try making sleight of hand rolls to deceive their fellow players and win a game.

Hide

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Camouflage, surveillance concealment.

Characters use *hide* to conceal objects from view, whether secreting a sidearm in the folds of their robe or coat, positioning surveillance devices out of view in someone's room, slipping documents into a hidden panel in some baggage, or piling brush on their aircar to camouflage it in a forest.

Characters describe how they're hiding a particular object, then roll their *hide* skill —the total reflects how well they've hidden the item. Gamemasters can modify the *hide* roll based on environmental

factors used for concealment: lighting, clutter, object size. To spot hidden items, characters can roll their *search* or *Perception* skills against the original *hide* roll used to conceal the object.

> **Example:** When those guards run into Larryn in the secured warehouse, she decides they'll become even more suspicious of her if they spot her Viper pistol. Larryn tries concealing it in the folds of her coat and rolls her *hide* skill of 4D. The gamemaster thinks the bulky coat is a good hiding place, so he allows Larryn a +5 bonus to her roll. She rolls an 18 and adds the +5 bonus for a total of 23. When the guards casually look her over, they roll their *Perception* of 3D. A result of 12 doesn't beat Larryn's *hide* roll, so they don't even suspect her coat might hide the weapon.

You can also use *hide* to camouflage large objects, like vehicles, entryways, and encampments.

To conceal a character's presence, you should use the *sneak* skill, even if the character is "hiding" around a corner.

Investigation

Time Taken: One round to several days.
Specializations: Locale or investigation specialty —Arcol 271, Crimson Circle, business fraud, black market.

Investigation represents a character's ability to gather evidence and draw conclusions from it. The skill is useful in following and uncovering the actions of others —particularly when they involve shady deals or corrupt activities— and filling in any gaps based on available evidence. Using *investigation* can help you determine where someone is headed based on related vid-comm calls, visits to certain businesses, and their overall behavior. Characters can piece together seemingly unrelated bits of evidence to uncover some greater plot. Like other *Perception* skills, *investigation* relies as much on roleplaying as it does good die rolls. Players should ask specific questions regarding evidence analysis before making *investigation* rolls; a good die roll could prompt the gamemasters to provide additional hints and clues instead of just revealing to the player the answer to the entire puzzle.

> **Example:** Larryn has several clues she wants to piece together —a nervous Merchants Guild bureaucrat, his surly pirate contact, and a secured warehouse whose guards allow the pirate contact to come and go as he pleases. Larryn asks the gamemaster if she can make an *investigation* roll to get some idea what all this means, especially about the relationship between the bureaucrat and the pirate. She rolls her *investigation* of 5D and gets a 17. The gamemaster determines Larryn can figure out a moderate amount of information from analyzing the evidence at hand. He tells her that the two are probably involved in some smuggling scheme, with the illegal goods stored at the secured warehouse. Since the guards allowed the pirate inside without any hassles, they're probably involved in the operation, too.

Persuasion

Time Taken: One round or longer.
Specializations: Particular form of persuasion—debate, flirtation, oration, storytelling.

Characters with improved *persuasion* are good at presenting their arguments and exhorting others to believe them and follow their ideas, plans, and motives. Like *con* and *bargain*, *persuasion* involves trying to convince someone to go along with you —but you're not deceiving the person (like *con*), and you're not paying them off (like *bargain*).

This doesn't mean a character can't offer the promise of rewards for following him. A good *persuasion* attempt involves solid roleplaying which appeals to the interests of those you're trying to influence. Perhaps they're swayed by appealing to their sense of honor, potential to gain glory, or loyalty to the character and his cause. Others might give in to their more base desires for money, power, and dominance over others.

The difficulties for *persuasion* depend on who the character's trying to bring over to his side:

Very Easy (5): A close friend or relative with a great sense of personal devotion to the character.

Easy (10): Someone who owes the character some loyalty.

Moderate (15): The average person who feels indifferent toward the character and her cause.

Difficult (20): Those mildly opposed to the character and her point of view.

Very Difficult (30): People considered the character's enemies and opponents.

Heroic (31+): The character's most dire enemy.

You can modify these difficulties based on the nature of the character's argument:

–5 to the difficulty if the character passionately believes in his cause.

+5 to the difficulty if the character is adjusting the facts to suit his own particular point of view.

Gamemasters can also reward characters with bonuses for good roleplaying. *Persuasion* die rolls are guidelines, while the character's spoken argument really helps make a difference when persuading others.

"We, Your Imperial Majesties, issue an urgent appeal for help, inviting all our subjects to participate in eliminating these contemptible pirates..."

—Imperial Couple

Search

Time Taken: One round or longer.
Specializations: Tracking.

Search measures a character's ability to spot specific items or people, hidden objects, or individuals using stealth to conceal their presence. Characters actively seeking something or someone roll their *search* dice against the *hide* roll of the person who concealed an item or the *sneak* roll of someone trying to stay out of sight.

Example: While Larryn looks through that secured warehouse, the pirate's noticed her and slipped behind several reinforced plastic crates. Knowing this, the gamemaster asks Larryn to roll her *search* skill of 4D while he secretly rolls the pirate's *sneak* skill of 3D+2. Larryn's *search* roll of 10 doesn't beat the pirate's *sneak* roll of 12, so she fails to find him (though with the rolls so close, she might have come very close to him before running into those warehouse guards...).

Characters can also use *search* to look for things that are not actively hidden, such as a particular kind of alien in a crowd, an item someone accidentally dropped on the sidewalk, or signs that someone passed in a particular direction. Use these difficulty guidelines for searching:

Very Easy (5): Character knows the item's exact location.

Easy (10): Character knows approximately where the item might be found.

Moderate (15): Character has only a general idea what he's looking for.

Difficult (20): Character searches for anything out of the ordinary, but doesn't know exactly what he's looking for; searching for very small objects.

Very Difficult (30): Fishing for clues, or searching for a very obscure or extremely small object.

Heroic (31+): Looking for an almost microscopic item.

"Four men... with SBR-17 spin-accelerator armor... unsure of their steps... they're getting lost in the fog... the tracks are fresh... only ten minutes ahead of us!"

—Othon von Salza

Sneak

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Terrain type —desert, jungle, urban.

Characters use the *sneak* skill to conceal themselves, move silently, and avoid detection using their own self-awareness in relation to their surroundings.

Characters always roll the *sneak* skill against someone else's *search* or *Perception* —whoever's actively patrolling for intruders, watching for anything out of the ordinary, or in a position to possibly spot the character. If sneaking characters roll higher, they slip by unnoticed. If opponents roll higher, they spot the characters and take appropriate action.

During a long journey you can also use *sneak* to conceal signs of your passage along a particular route, or leave behind false clues to throw off anyone following you. Anyone trying to follow the trail must make an opposed *search* roll to successfully track characters covering their tracks.

Characters can only mask their own presence using this skill —to conceal objects, use the *hide* skill.

Difficulty Notations

As you read this chapter, you might notice the difficulties are referred to by level followed by a difficulty number in parentheses —like "Very Easy (5)," or "Moderate (15)."

But the difficulty chart shows a range of difficulty numbers...

Don't worry. The difficulty numbers are just guidelines, and appear after difficulty levels as reminders. They represent the upper number in that difficulty range. So if a task is listed as "Easy (10)," the gamemaster can choose a number from six to ten as the difficulty number. Some gamemasters might just use this notation as a handy reference and always use the set difficulty number for tasks. (Then again, good gamemasters know that if you need a 15 and only roll a 14, they might let you just barely succeed.)

Strength Skills

Strength measures a character's physical power and health. Those with a high *Strength* can better withstand damage and disease, push themselves to greater limits, and back their physical performance in actions and combat with greater force. People with low *Strength* tend to avoid situations depending on their physique, especially when they might involve sustaining injury.

When using *archaic weapons*, *brawling*, and *melee combat*, one's *Strength* helps determine damage inflicted upon opponents. If you score a hit with *brawling*, you just roll your *Strength* dice to see how much damage you cause. For damage inflicted by *archaic* and *melee weapons*, you roll your *Strength* and add a bonus specified for the particular weapon's damage. For instance, a quiver-shiv causes STR+1D damage: a *Strength* roll made with an extra die added to the total. It's a good idea to write weapon damage down on your character sheet after the weapon name in the "Equipment" listing: "quiver-shiv (STR+1D damage)."

Since *Strength* represents a person's physical health, gamemasters often ask characters to roll it when an adversary hits them during combat. The higher you roll *Strength*, the better your character resists damage. Gamemasters sometimes allow you to add dice to this roll depending on any armor your character's wearing or protection he's hidden behind.

For more information on how to use *Strength* to determine and resist damage, see the chapter on "Combat & Injuries."

Climb/Jump

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Climbing, jumping.

Characters use this skill to climb or jump over obstacles. One might climb over fences, up ventilator shafts, or into high windows. Characters can try jumping over defensive ditches, rooftops, and narrow chasms.

Use these tips on setting *climb/jump* difficulties:

Very Easy (5): Leaping over a narrow ditch. Using sturdy ladders and well-secured ropes to climb walls.

Easy (10): Jumping from one rooftop to another when the roofs are only a few meters apart. Climbing a rocky slope with many handholds.

Moderate (15): Leaping a large gap without a running start. Climbing a wall with boxes to help get a solid beginning.

Difficult (20): Jumping for more stable ground while an earthquake fractures the terrain around you. Climbing a bare wall with few handholds.

Very Difficult (30): Jumping from one aircar to another in mid-flight.

Gamemasters might allow characters to roll their *Agility* while climbing or jumping if the situation depends on their sense of balance and speed, such as jumping to intercept a moving vehicle, or climbing a crumbling slope.

Lift

Time Taken: One round.

Lift represents a character's physical ability to pick up heavy objects and move them over distances. The difficulty to use this skill depends on the object's weight and the length of time a character tries carrying it (see tables).

When a character first lifts an object, she must make a *lift* check to see if she can physically raise the item. One roll is enough if she's just moving or manipulating it for a few rounds; however, the longer one carries a heavy object, the more difficult it becomes to lift over time.

Use the chart below to set difficulties for lifting heavy objects for more than a few rounds. When the character reaches each interval listed, she must make another *lift* check against the modified difficulty to prove she can continue carrying the object. If she fails this roll, she becomes exhausted and must immediately set the object down. If she matches the difficulty, she must concentrate on carrying the object for that time and may take no other actions. If she beats the difficulty by more than one level, she manages to carry the object and may take other actions, though lifting the item counts as an extra action when figuring multi-action penalties.

Approximate Weight	*Difficulty Level*
10 kg	Very Easy (5)
50 kg	Easy (10)
100 kg	Moderate (15)
200 kg	Difficult (20)
500 kg	Very Difficult (30)
750 kg	Heroic (31+)
1 metric ton	Heroic+10
1.5 metric tons	Heroic+20
2 metric tons	Heroic+30
2.5 metric tons	Heroic+40
3 metric tons	Heroic+50

Time	*Difficulty Modifier*
1–6 rounds	no increase
7 rounds–3 minutes	+5 to difficulty
Up to 10 minutes	+10 to difficulty
Up to 30 minutes	+15 to difficulty
Up to 1 hour	+20 to difficulty

After the first hour, characters must make new *lift* or *Strength* rolls every hour at the same difficulty modified by +20. At this point, those failing such a roll must set the object down and rest for twice as long as they carried the heavy weight.

Example: Martius the explorer discovers an interesting yet rather large rock sample. He intends to haul it back to his survey craft. It weighs around 20 kilograms, so the gamemaster decides that hefting it requires a Very

Easy (5) lift roll. Martius accomplishes this by rolling an 11 on his *lift* skill of 2D+1. After a few minutes, Martius must make another *lift* roll to see if he can carry the rock sample that long —but this time it's a Very Easy (5) task with a +5 modifier to the difficulty. Martius rolls a 10 on his *lift* skill... just enough to carry it for a few more minutes. After 10 minutes, he must make another *lift* roll, but with a +10 difficulty modifier. A roll of 6 fails to beat the difficulty of 15, and Martius must put down his rock sample and rest a moment before continuing back to his ship.

Stamina

Time Taken: Characters make *stamina* checks when they exert themselves over long stretches of time.

Stamina measures a character's resistance to prolonged physical stress, disease, psionic exposure, and poison. Gamemasters ask characters to make *stamina* rolls when their endurance is tested under extreme circumstances: a strange disease ravages their body, they must endure in a hostile environment for some time, they push their psionic powers to the limit, or they must resist the effects of a poison.

Those using *stamina* to resist poison shirk the effects if they make a successful roll against the poison's difficulty level —the more lethal or powerful the poison, the higher the difficulty. Characters resisting disease or the effects of prolonged strain become fatigued when they fail a *stamina* roll. Fatigued characters suffer a –1D penalty to all rolls. For each subsequent *stamina* roll they fail, they receive another –1D penalty on top of the first. This continues until they rest for the length of time they strained themselves. Should they fail a total of three *stamina* rolls while pushing themselves to their physical limit, characters fall completely exhausted —they must rest for twice as long as they exerted themselves to remove the –2D cumulative penalty.

Example: Before Angelian hitched a ride with that aircar driver, she wandered the Plains of Gargash for a while without adequate food or water. The gamemaster asks Angelian to roll her *stamina* of 2D after two hours of game time roaming the desolate area with no relief in sight. The gamemaster decides enduring this long under these conditions is a Moderate (15) task. Angelian only rolls a 10 for her *stamina*, so she continues with a –1D penalty to any skill or attribute rolls she might make. Unfortunately, this penalty would apply to any future *stamina* rolls the gamemaster might ask from her. Luckily she spots the aircar and flags down the driver before testing her endurance again.

"I am tougher than my fatigue."

—Steel Head

Swim

Time Taken: One round, several minutes, or a few hours.

Characters use their *swim* skill to move and survive in aquatic environments like rivers, rolling seas, and flooding passageways. It reflects their ability to effectively maneuver in such conditions and manage to find air and stay afloat when necessary. Gamemasters set difficulties based on the condition of the water. Swimming across a calm lake might require an Easy (10) *swim* roll, while struggling to stay afloat and find air in a rapidly flooding chamber might require a Very Difficult (30) roll.

Characters who fail a *swim* roll start drowning. To determine if the character drowns and dies, the gamemaster rolls 2D at the beginning of each round. If the result is less than the number of rounds the character has struggled against drowning, he finally exhausts himself and dies of drowning.

Drowning characters can try saving themselves by making a *swim* roll once per round. They must beat a difficulty one level higher than the initial swim roll they failed in the first place.

Since drowning characters often become confused from lack of oxygen and extreme water pressure, they make all actions with a –2D penalty... including the *swim* roll to escape drowning! (Don't forget that players can use Character Points to boost their rolls in dire situations such as this.)

Characters using breathing apparatus don't need to worry about drowning until their air supply runs out; however, they're still vulnerable to other hazards in the water, including sharp rocks, swift currents, and tangled branches.

Technical Skills

Technical represents a character's familiarity with manipulating, repairing, and modifying complex mechanical systems.

Characters with high *Technical* scores can modify robots for specialized tasks, boost the speed out of their aircar, defeat electronic security systems, and repair most damaged equipment. Those with low *Technical* attributes have major difficulties replenishing the ammunition for their defense pistol, programming robots to accomplish simple tasks, and bandaging light injuries.

Repairing Equipment and Vessels

The *Technical* attribute contains many "repair" skills used to fix various equipment and vehicles. These skills follow similar patterns for the amount of time taken to use them and the guidelines for setting difficulties. Although you'll find definitions of individual "repair" skills below, you can follow these general rules for using "repair" skills. Bear in mind that these repair times, costs, and difficulties are only generalized guidelines you should adjust to best fit a given situation during the game.

Time Taken

When rolling repair skills to fix damaged vehicles, weapons, spaceships, and equipment, the initial roll represents 15 minutes of work. If that roll fails, characters can make additional repair rolls after working for varied lengths of time. Gamemasters often allow additional repair rolls once for every extra hour of work done past the initial 15 minutes. Sometimes characters can make an initial repair roll to determine the extent of the damage and estimate the time required to fix it —in this way they can spot parts that need replacing and systems that must be shut down before work actually begins.

Complex machinery requires extra maintenance to ensure optimum operational performance. You don't have to consume valuable time during adventures to roleplay every minute you use repair skills. Fixing equipment happens off-stage, while other action occurs. Gamemasters might even jump over such time and skip to the next part of the story: "Okay, you've made your *spaceship repair* roll, so after two hours of work, you have the main propulsion drives up and running. Meanwhile, your Merchant's Guild contact has been waiting patiently for you to arrive at Amahdis to close an important deal."

Multiple System Damage

Characters must make a separate repair roll to fix each damaged system aboard a vehicle or spaceship: drives, shields, ordnance, maneuver jets, hull. No one repair roll can fix all the complex systems of a vessel if more than one component is damaged.

When trying to repair multiple systems, you might try assigning different characters to work on different systems, each making a separate repair roll to fix their component. Several characters can also pool their efforts to try repairing severely damaged systems, too —see the discussion of combined actions in the chapter on "The Rules."

Repair Difficulties

The amount of damage sustained by equipment, vehicles, and spaceships determines difficulty levels characters must meet or beat to fix them using *repair* skills. The chapters on "Movement & Chases" and "Space Travel & Combat" show how gamemasters determine vehicle and spaceship damage. Use terms from those chapters for figuring the severity of damage to systems and various difficulties associated with repairing them.

Difficulties for repairing different components are listed below by different stats and systems that can sustain damage —each lists the pertinent skills characters can use to repair them.

Hyperdrives: Damage to a spaceship's hyperdrive can prevent it from traveling long distances through hyperspace...and often escaping from adversaries engaging them in normal space. Characters must make a Moderate (15) *flight systems repair* roll to fix damaged hyperdrive components.

Maneuverability: Vehicles and spaceships lose directional control when their maneuvering systems sustain damage. The number of maneuverability dice lost determines difficulties for characters to repair such damage, and the cost of replacing destroyed parts as a percentage of the craft's original price (as if purchased brand new, not the price they paid for it on the used spaceship lot).

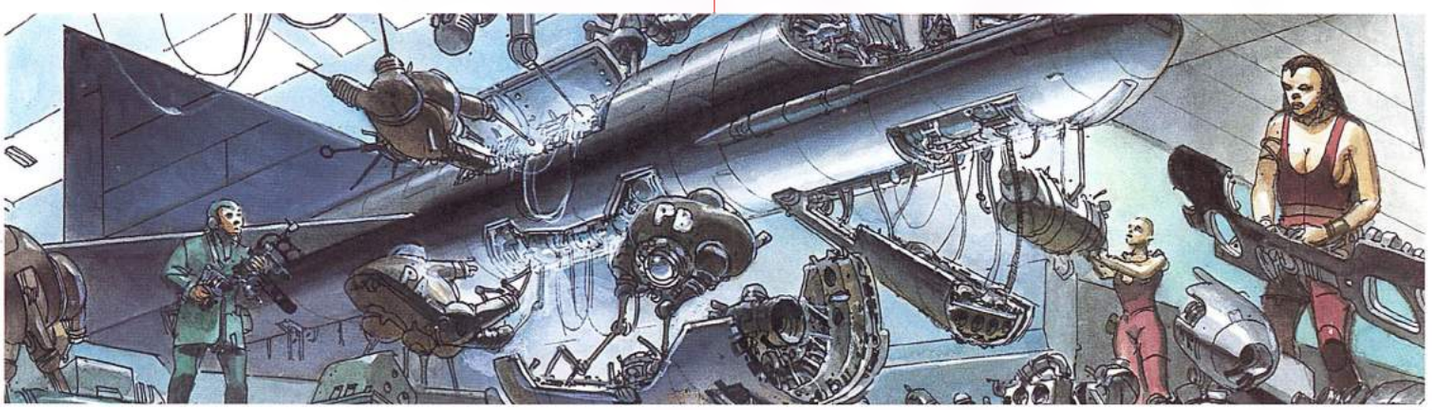
Characters should use a repair skill appropriate to the craft they're fixing: *flight systems repair* skill for spaceships and other flying vessels, and *vehicle repair* for non-flying vehicles traveling on or through the ground or a liquid medium.

Maneuver Dice Lost	*Repair Difficulty*	*Repair Cost*
–1D	Easy (10)	10%
–2D	Moderate (15)	15%
–3D or more	Difficult (20)	20%

Shields: Absorbing hits sometimes blows a craft's shields and the machinery that powers and effectively deploys them. Gamemasters base the difficulty and cost to repair shield damage on how many shield dice were lost.

Shield Dice Lost	*Repair Difficulty*	*Repair Cost*
1D	Easy (10)	5%
2D	Moderate (15)	5%
3D	Difficult (20)	5%
4D+	Very Difficult (30)	10%

Characters use their *flight systems repair* skill to fix damaged shield components on spaceships and other flying vessels, and use *vehicle repair* to fix shields on craft traveling over land or ocean.



Speed: Spaceships and vehicles receive power for propulsion from a variety of sources: anti-grav generators, engines, motors. When these components sustain damage, they fail to provide propulsion for movement at normal velocities, represented in game terms by a loss of a craft's Move or Space points. Repairing this damage depends on the number of points lost, and requires an appropriate skill roll and an expenditure of kublars (as a percentage of the vessel's original cost).

Points Lost	*Repair Difficulty*	*Repair Cost*
1	Easy (10)	10%
2	Moderate (15)	15%
3	Difficult (20)	20%
4	Very Difficult (30)	25%
5	Drive destroyed and must be replaced	-

Characters use their flight systems repair skill to fix damaged propulsion components on spaceships and other flying vessels, and use vehicle repair to fix drive machinery on craft traveling over land or ocean. Various specializations in both these skills can help boost the chance of repairing damaged systems.

When damage destroys a propulsion unit, characters can replace it with a Difficult (20) repair roll and kublars equal to 35% of the vessel's original value.

Weapons: Weapons can sustain damage in combat, too, whether they're small Viper pistols and Cogans or spaceship-mounted cannons and guns protecting planetary defense lines. For characters to fix ordnance, they must make an appropriate repair roll based on how much damage the weapon sustained, plus pay a price for replacement parts equal to the weapon's original cost.

Damage	*Repair Difficulty*	*Repair Cost*
Lightly	Easy (10)	15%
Heavily	Moderate (15)	25%
Severely	Very Difficult (30)	35%
Destroyed	May not be repaired	-

Characters should roll *firearms repair* to fix any weapons that can be held and carried by a person, even if it requires a bi- or tripod mount to shoot. Use *gunnery repair* to fix weapons using any kind of mechanical assembly to aim and fire, including ordnance mounted on spaceships, exoskeletons, vehicles, and defensive emplacements.

You should also use these difficulty and cost guidelines for repairing damaged armor using the *armor repair* skill.

Modifying Equipment and Vessels

Over a series of several adventures, characters might wish to make improvements and modifications on their favorite spaceships, weapons, robots, and other equipment. To do so, they must improve their own *repair* and *engineering* skills, save Character Points, and collect a good pile of kublars. With long hours of work, lots of dedication and perseverance, and money for new materials, they can improve speed, shields, weapons, damage, and other aspects of their adored technology.

Applying technology to modify equipment and vessels requires lots of time, personal devotion, resources, and money. Othon von Salza had at his command a vast fortune, the knowledge of spaceship engineers, and the labor of his servants to invest in the construction of his fantastic Meta-Craft and the customized metabaronic weapons. The biotechnicians of the Hospital-Planet labored more than 30 years to create the embryo of the perfect androgyne for the Emperor and Empress. Othon had the time, wealth, and material to construct his powerful ship and weapons, and the biotechnicians had the riches of the entire Human Empire at their disposal. Characters can only accumulate such resources over many adventures, and implement their improvements over time as their assets and skills allow.

Gamemasters should realize that the more players improve their characters' equipment and vehicles, the more powerful they become in the universe. But characters face several risks in successfully installing these modifications and using them —gamemasters can use these to their advantage in keeping such powerful technology in check.

Slipshod Workmanship: When working on sensitive machinery, making mistakes has serious consequences. If characters fail *repair* rolls while modifying technology, they might severely damage or even destroy the systems they're trying to improve —and that all costs even more time, money, and effort to replace.

More Things Can Go Wrong: Technology that someone's tinkered with isn't as reliable as an entirely new system right out of the factory. When characters use heavily modified technology, it sometimes doesn't work exactly as they'd like. Gamemasters can use systems that fail frequently as plot devices ("Your modified spaceship engines overheat and cut out —you're going to have to set down on that unexplored planet for repairs..."). You can even use malfunctions to balance out game play or provide comic relief.

Jealousy: Heavily modified technology attracts the attention of unscrupulous people hoping to profit from someone else's work. If the item is so powerfully improved, what's to stop someone else from trying to sabotage it, or actually stealing it? People have tried making a fortune stealing technology that others spent time and money to develop —such as a genetically bred horse whose species has been extinct for 20,000 years.

Limits of Technology: Every piece of technology has its limits, and modifying it pushes it to those limits. The game represents this by limiting how much you can improve technology in the statistics for a weapon, spaceship or piece of personal gear. Increases shown in the charts below reflect the modification above the original stat. Players can only increase stats by one "pip" or one speed level at a time. For example, a shields score of 2D must be improved to 2D+1 and 2D+2 before modifications finally boost it to 3D. Using the rules guidelines below, no system may be improved more than +1D+2 over its original stat, or more than 4 levels of speed.

You can use the general rules below as guidelines for modifying spacecraft, weapons, vehicles, and personal equipment. They provide a basic framework for you to use in your game. Feel free to change the difficulties or costs to reflect the kind of campaign you're running.

To represent the effort and dedication it takes to install these modifications, characters must also spend Character Points as listed on the charts below. In most cases, the character making the *repair* roll should pay these Character Points, though if others help him, they may contribute points to pay this cost.

Characters can make a new *repair* skill improvement roll once per month of game time. You might allow one roll for each adventure the characters undertake. The charts below show guidelines for *repair* skill difficulties as well as the price of new components. These costs are expressed as a percentage of the spaceship, vehicle, weapon, or equipment's original value.

Of course, if characters find someone capable of installing modifications for them, they don't need to roll the *repair* skill or pay the Character Point cost, but must pay at least triple the cost listed.

Maneuverability: Characters can increase their craft's maneuverability by adding new components like impeller vanes and vent thrusters.

Pip Increase	*Difficulty*	*Character Point Cost*	*Cost*
+1	Easy (10)	2	5%
+2	Moderate (15)	4	10%
+1D	Difficult (20)	6	15%
+1D+1	Very Difficult (30)	8	20%
+1D+2	Heroic (31+)	10	25%

Characters can roll a *repair* skill appropriate to the vessel whose maneuvering system they're improving: *exoskeleton repair*, *flight systems repair*, or *vehicle repair*. If characters fail a *repair* roll when installing a modification to this system, they might inadvertently cut off all or some of their craft's maneuverability, or even cross control wires and reverse flight controls (increasing all difficulties involving maneuverability by one level).

Shields: Characters can boost the protection provided by their spacecraft or vehicle's shield systems by adding extra generators, burst capacitors, and configuration projectors. Such improvements are represented by increasing a vessel's shields die code.

Pip Increase	*Difficulty*	*Character Point Cost*	*Cost*
+1	Easy (10)	2	15%
+2	Moderate (15)	4	25%
+1D	Difficult (20)	6	30%
+1D+1	Very Difficult (30)	8	35%
+1D+2	Heroic (31+)	10	50%

Appropriate skills for improving shields include *exoskeleton repair*, *flight systems repair*, or *vehicle repair*, depending on the craft. Anyone failing such a *repair* roll could damage the shields —causing random shield fluctuations, overloading the shield generator or capacitors, or fouling up shield controls (increasing all difficulties to deploy shields by one level).

Speed: To improve a vehicle or spacecraft's speed, characters often tinker with its engine or propulsion systems. The chart below includes information on improving the Move or Space stats for atmospheric and spaceborne vessels.

Move Increase	*Space Increase*	*Difficulty*	*Character Point Cost*	*Cost*
+5	+1	Moderate (15)	4	10%
+10	+2	Difficult (20)	6	15%
+15	+3	Very Difficult (30)	8	20%
+20	+4	Heroic (31+)	10	25%

Use the *repair* skill most appropriate for the *vehicle* or *spacecraft*: *exoskeleton repair*, *flight systems repair*, or *vehicle repair*. Failed *repair* rolls to increase speed could severely damage propulsion units, possibly reducing the Move or Space rating for their vessel, causing an unreliable engine start-up problem, or stalling the drives when least expected or pushed to their limit.

Weapons: By modifying various weapons, characters can improve the damage, and often the fire control for mounted ordnance. Gamemasters should base the cost percentages for improving weapons on the price of the ordnance itself, not the cost of the vessel to which it's mounted. You should also use these difficulty and cost guidelines for modifying armor using the *armor repair* skill.

Pip Increase	*Difficulty*	*Character Point Cost*	*Cost*
+1	Easy (10)	2	15%
+2	Moderate (15)	4	25%
+1D	Difficult (20)	6	30%
+1D+1	Very Difficult (30)	8	35%
+1D+2	Heroic (31+)	10	50%

Use the table below to determine the costs and difficulties for improving ranges on weapons:

Range Increase	*Difficulty*	*Character Point Cost*	*Cost*
+5%	Easy (10)	2	5%
+10%	Moderate (15)	4	10%
+15%	Difficult (20)	6	15%
+20%	Very Difficult (30)	8	20%
+25%	Heroic (31+)	10	25%

Use firearms repair to modify any weapons that can be held and carried by a person, even if it requires a bi- or tripod mount to

shoot. You should roll *gunnery repair* to improve ordnance using any kind of mechanical assembly to aim and fire, including weapons mounted on spaceships, exoskeletons, vehicles, and defensive emplacements.

Characters failing a *repair* roll to modify ordnance might destroy the weapon, or damage it in such a way that it fails to operate properly —it might consume more power than usual, react slowly to the user's commands, or lose power to damage or fire control.

Armor Repair

Time Taken: 15 minutes, then one hour, then two hours, possibly longer.
Specializations: Particular type of armor—Endoguard armor, scavenged armor.

Armor repair represents a character's knowledge and expertise at fixing damaged armor and modifying it. For game guidelines, difficulties and costs for repairing and improving armor, see "Weapons" in "Repairing Equipment and Vessels" and "Modifying Equipment and Vessels" above.

Computer Interface/Repair

Time Taken: One round to several minutes, hours or days.
Specializations: Specific kind of computer—data reader, facility computer, scientific analyzer.

This skill reflects a character's proficiency at interfacing with and repairing computers, including detecting and bypassing internal computer security protocols.

You can use the following difficulties to access restricted data, tamper with sensitive programming, defeat anti-intruder countermeasures, and mask your presence from those monitoring a system:

Very Easy (5): Public data. Your character's kublar balance. Local news stories.

Easy (10): Public information requiring more research to access. The owner of a particular city level, the location of a business, local laws and regulations.

Moderate (15): Private data. A personal electronic log, someone else's kublar balance, general reports entered by security personnel.

Difficult (20): Secret information. Secure data on local governments, personnel files, police records on active cases, a company's corporate plans.

Very Difficult (30): Classified data. The Empire's strategy for opposing alien attacks, top-secret information for corporations, security authorities, or governments.

Heroic (31+): Highly restricted information accessed by only a select few people. A Techno-pope's travel itinerary, the Metabaron's databanks, the Emperoress's personal agenda.

Characters beating the difficulty manage to find and retrieve the information they sought while avoiding programs designed to detect and stop unauthorized access. If characters roll less than half the required difficulty number, the computer recognizes their presence as a security breach and takes appropriate action: alerting a live computer security officer, sounding alarms, or even shutting down the system or remote access points.

You can also use *computer interface/repair* as an opposed skill to detect others trying to access data and avoid security protocols. In these cases, whoever rolls their skill higher attains their objective: the infiltrating character grabs the information without leaving traces of his presence if he succeeds, and the person monitoring the computer's security programs catches intruders if he succeeds.

Demolitions

Time Taken: One round to several minutes.
Specializations: Particular type of target—buildings, set defenses, vehicles.

Demolitions measures a character's expertise at setting explosives to achieve special effects for destructive objectives. This includes using everything from conventional explosives, jury-rigged bombs, and anti-personnel mines to tactical atomic weapons and OKO mini-bombs. Characters can even fabricate explosives from scavenged materials such as power packs, volatile chemicals, and vehicle motors. Such jury-rigged charges are not as powerful as regular explosives, and are frequently unstable.

Characters use *demolitions* to position and prime explosives with remote, timer, or fuse detonators. Setting them to simply explode with the proper trigger is a Very Easy (5) task; however, characters can plant explosives to try achieving special destructive effects against targets using the following difficulties:

Easy (10): Tampering with an aircar's ignition sequencer so the next time it's activated a bomb explodes and destroys the aircar.

Moderate (15): Blasting open armored hatches without damaging much of the surrounding bulkhead.

Difficult (20): Setting explosives to disable an armored vehicle, or a particular system aboard a spaceship.

Very Difficult (30): Positioning charges to disintegrate a hatch and send a blast of flame and shrapnel down a specific passageway.

Characters can also use demolitions to set explosives to inflict additional damage to targets. Most military explosive materials are shaped in small cubes. Each inflicts 1D vehicle-scale damage when detonated, with additional charges increasing the base damage by +1D. To set explosives in such a way to inflict extra damage, use the difficulty guidelines below based on the object targeted for destruction:

Easy (10): A heavy wooden door.

Moderate (15): A steel hatch.

Difficult (20): A lightly armored hatch.

Very Difficult (30): A heavily armored hatch, or a spaceship's hull.

Characters making successful rolls add extra damage beyond the explosives' normal 1D based on the difference between their *demolitions* roll and the difficulty number:

Points Above Difficulty	*Extra Damage*
1–5	+1D
6–10	+2D
11–15	+3D
16–20	+4D
21–30	+5D
31+	+6D

This bonus is added to the explosive's base damage rolled against the target's body strength (described in the chapter on "Combat & Injuries.")

Of course, if characters use enough explosives, determining exactly how much damage it inflicts isn't worth rolling all those dice... unless someone messes up. If characters using demolitions roll less than half the required difficulty number, they fumble explosives or the fuses, possibly fouling the triggers or even setting off charges.

Implanting explosives like OKO mini-bombs inside someone's body requires successful rolls on both *demolitions* and *medicine (adv.)*.

Engineering (adv.)

Time Taken: Minutes or hours.
Specializations: Specific engineering field based on repair skills —armor, exoskeletons, firearms, flight systems, gunnery, shields.
Advanced skill—requires at least 5D in a repair skill.

Characters who improve this skill spent years of advanced study, training, and experience in a specific engineering field. Characters are familiar with engineering principles, designs, and implementation methods.

As an advanced skill, *engineering (adv.)* does not begin with the same die code as its associated attribute, Technical. If they possess at least 5D in a repair skill, characters can spend one of their initial skill dice to raise *engineering (adv.)* to 1D, or later spend two Character Points to gain this skill at 1D. At this time, gamemasters might wish to limit the character's engineering expertise to the specific field covered by the prerequisite skill. For example, if a character with *flight systems repair* of 6D gained the *engineering (adv.)* skill, his engineering knowledge would be limited to various flight systems. If he later improved his *gunnery repair skill* to 5D or higher, he'd also be qualified to apply his *engineering (adv.)* skill to fixing, improving, and designing mounted ordnance.

Characters can always add their *engineering (adv.)* skill dice when using its prerequisite *repair* skill.

Characters can also use the *engineering (adv.)* skill to create new technology from scratch. For example, a person with *flight systems repair* could fix and modify her aircar, but wouldn't have the skills to build one entirely from the plans up. Those with *engineering (adv.)*: *flight systems* could draft blueprints for their customized aircar —making advancements over older designs —and build it given enough materials, effort, and kublars. As a general guideline, creating new technology costs 200% of its closest existing equivalent, with difficulties based on the complexity of the technology —usually at least Very Difficult (30).

Exoskeleton Repair

Time Taken: 15 minutes, then one hour, then two hours, possibly longer.
Specializations: Particular kind or model exoskeleton—battle suit, exploration exoskeleton, heavy load suit.

Characters use *exoskeleton repair* to fix and improve motivation, maneuvering, sensor, and shield systems aboard any kind of powered suit enhancing one's natural abilities through servo-mechanisms and assisted movement. If you want to repair or modify exoskeletons, consult the game rules listed under "Repairing Equipment and Vessels" and "Modifying Equipment and Vessels" above. To repair or modify weapons mounted on exoskeletons, use the *gunnery repair* skill.

Firearms Repair

Time Taken: 15 minutes, then one hour, then two hours, possibly longer.
Specializations: Specific kind of firearm —Cogan 45, defense pistol, sonic bazooka, Viper pistol.

When characters want to fix or improve any modern ranged weapons that a person can hold or carry, they use *firearms repair*. If you want to repair or modify firearms, consult the game rules listed under "Weapons" in "Repairing Equipment and Vessels" and "Modifying Equipment and Vessels" above.

First Aid

Time Taken: One round.
Specializations: Patient's species.

First aid represents a knowledge of and ability to perform emergency medical procedures in the field. For rules on using *first aid*, consult the chapter on "Combat & Injuries."

Characters who raise their *first aid* to 5D may spend their initial skill dice or Character Points to learn the advanced skill *medicine (adv.)*.

Flight Systems Repair

Time Taken: 15 minutes, then one hour, then two hours, possibly longer.
Specializations: Specific kind of craft or system —aircar, Endoguard lancer, Imperial Battleship, utility transport, maneuverability, propulsion, shields.

This skill measures a character's familiarity with and expertise at fixing systems on air- or spaceborne craft —from atmospheric anti-grav vehicles like aircars to immense battleships.

By making a successful roll of this skill, characters can repair one damaged flight system on a specific craft. The cost and difficulty to repair a system depend on which systems sustained damage and the extent of that damage. See "Repairing Equipment and Vessels" above for difficulties and costs associated with various damaged systems.

Characters can also use *flight systems repair* to modify various components on their flying vehicles —read the rules presented in "Modifying Equipment and Vessels" above for guidelines on improving flight systems. Use *gunnery repair* to fix any weapons mounted on flying craft.

Gunnery Repair

Time Taken: 15 minutes, then one hour, then two hours, possibly longer.
Specializations: Particular weapon—artillery emplacements, battleship lasers, missiles.

Characters use *gunnery repair* to fix and improve ordnance employing any kind of mechanical assembly to aim and fire, including weapons mounted on spaceships, exoskeletons, vehicles, and defensive emplacements. If you want to repair or modify such ordnance, consult the game rules listed under "Weapons" in "Repairing Equipment and Vessels" and "Modifying Equipment and Vessels" above.

Medicine (adv.)

Time Taken: Minutes or hours.
Specializations: Specific medical field practiced—cybernetics, research, surgery, transplants.
Advanced skill—requires at least 5D in first aid.

Improving this skill reflects years of advanced study, training, and experience in the medical field. Characters are familiar with a variety of medicines and their effects, and are knowledgeable about and can perform complex medical procedures such as surgery, transplants, and cybernetic grafts.

As an advanced skill, *medicine (adv.)* does not begin with the same die code as its associated attribute, Technical. If they possess at least 5D in *first aid*, characters can spend one of their initial skill dice to raise *medicine (adv.)* to 1D, or later spend two Character Points to gain this skill at 1D.

Characters can always add their *medicine (adv.)* dice when using its prerequisite skill, *first aid*.

"He proceeded to extract the OKO mini-bombs in order to graft them into his own body."

—Tonto

Personal Equipment Repair

Time Taken: 15 minutes, then one hour, then two hours, possibly longer.
Specializations: Particular type of equipment: hand vid-comms, range goggles.

Characters use this skill to repair personal equipment that is not a weapon, computer, or robot. They are also capable of repairing damaged cybernetics, as long as such damage does not require medical attention, too.

Use these difficulty and cost guidelines when repairing personal equipment:

Damage	*Repair Difficulty*	*Repair Cost*
Lightly	Easy (10)	15%
Heavily	Moderate (15)	25%
Severely	Very Difficult (30)	35%
Destroyed	May not be repaired	-

Unfortunately most personal equipment is too small or delicate to modify.

"Time to retrace our steps... The fog is thickening, and my paleo-compass is out of whack..."

—Horse-Thieving Pirate

Robot Interface/Repair

Time Taken: 15 minutes to several hours or days.
Specializations: Particular kind or model of robot—ant robots, combat robot, formicular units, heavy work unit.

This skill represents a character's ability to interface with and repair robots.

Robots operate on commands and protocols created by living controllers, though more sophisticated automata have the capability to learn on their own through observation and experience. You can program commands into robots using this skill and some form of interface —a computer, command console, io board with interface cable, remote control unit, or even an interface board within the robot's housing.

Characters roll this skill when programming robots to undertake specific duties or operations. The more sophisticated a task, the higher the *robot interface/repair* difficulty becomes. The time to use this skill also depends on the program's complexity —a Very Easy (5) task might take only 30 minutes to program, but a Very Difficult (30) program might take days or weeks to input. Even when complex programs are broken down and installed in a series of smaller elements, characters need more time and skill to correctly input and connect all these protocols.

When characters program a robot with a new skill, it gains that skill at one pip above the associated attribute. Additional pips may

be added by spending Character Points to improve the skill, or by spending kublars on memory chips with protocols for that skill.

Use these difficulty guidelines for programming robots for tasks of varying complexity:

Very Easy (5): Move cargo crates from one loading bay to another, one at a time, making neat stacks.

Easy (10): Patrol a perimeter in a particular pattern at regular intervals, reporting and detaining unauthorized intruders.

Moderate (15): Running a hotel's front desk, showing customers courtesy while handling arrangements and solving problems.

Difficult (20): Programming a robot with a basic skill (see above, and "Robots" in the "Weapons & Technology" chapter).

Very Difficult (30): Programming a robot to work on other complex machinery, making repairs and modifications based on observation and combined task protocols.

Heroic (31+): Tampering with a robot to override its core programming, such as changing a heavy work unit into a combat robot.

Gamemasters can modify these difficulties based on several variable factors —the character's familiarity with the specific robot or kind of robot; the difference between the robot's basic function and the one characters intend to give it; and the robot's initial level of intelligence (or lack thereof). Characters can also use *robot interface/repair* to fix and modify robots.

Gamemasters base the difficulty for repairing robots on the amount of damage they've sustained. Characters must make a *robot interface/repair* roll and pay an amount for spare parts equal to a percentage of the robot's original price.

Robot Damage	*Difficulty*	*Cost*
Lightly damaged	Easy (10)	15%
Heavily damaged	Difficult (20)	25%
Severely damaged	Very Difficult (30)	35%
Nearly obliterated	Heroic (31+)	65%

Like programming robots for complicated tasks, characters can effect complex repairs by fixing many smaller components over time. Given enough time, patience, and kublars, you can reconstruct nearly any robot, no matter how badly damaged it becomes.

If characters wish to modify their robots, gamemasters can use the guidelines above under "Modifying Equipment and Vessels." Just use whatever system guidelines seem appropriate for improving a robot. For instance, if a character wants to increase the speed on his lethargic heavy work unit, consult the rules and chart on modifying the Move score, using those difficulties, Character Point and kublar costs. If adding equipment the robot normally wouldn't have, you might also require additional *robot interface/repair* rolls to increase appropriate skills. For example, if players want to install enhanced surveillance scanners on a formicular unit, they must make rolls and payments for improving the components as well as rolling to reprogram the robot to undertake surveillance tasks.

> *"But the formicular units could rebuild you at once, you idiotic pile of scrap metal!"*
>
> *—Tonto, to Lothar*

Security

Time Taken: One round to several minutes.
Specializations: Particular security device—armored hatch, input pad, magnetic lock, retina scan lock.

This skill represents a character's knowledge of electronic security systems —locks, alarm systems, and other detection devices— and his ability to bypass them. It does not cover computer security procedures or the security monitoring capabilities of robots.

The lock or alarm's complexity determines the difficulty for defeating it:

Very Easy (5): Basic lock with no special electronic security precautions.

Easy (10): Civilian-quality security lock.

Moderate (15): Quality lock guarded by some security measures.

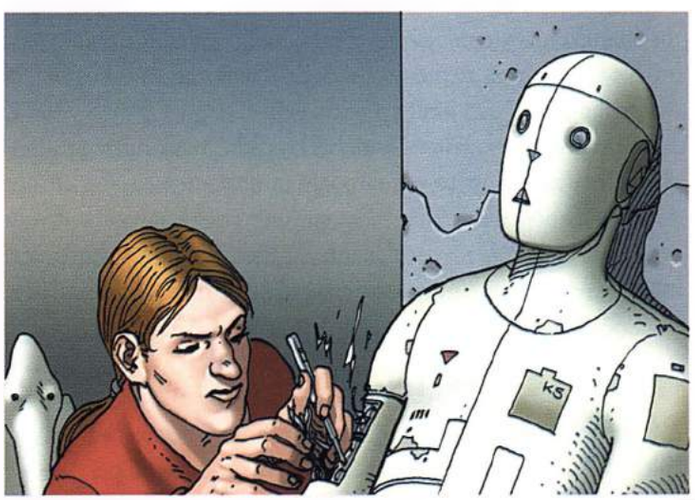
Difficult (20): Military-grade lock with substantial security precautions.

Very Difficult (30): Super-security lock with state-of-the-art security measures, including anti-intruder countermeasures.

Vehicle Repair

Time Taken: 15 minutes, then one hour, then two hours, possibly longer.
Specializations: Specific kind of vehicle or system—recon buggy, trankar, engines, maneuverability, shields.

This skill represents a character's familiarity with and expertise at fixing systems on vehicles traveling directly on the ground or water. With a successful *vehicle repair* roll, characters can fix one damaged



system on a specific vehicle. The cost and difficulty to repair a system depend on which systems sustained damage and the extent of that damage. See "Repairing Equipment and Vessels" above for difficulties and costs associated with various damaged systems.

Characters can also use *vehicle repair* to modify various components on their vehicles —read the rules presented in "Modifying Equipment and Vessels" above for guidelines on improving these systems. Use *gunnery repair* to fix any weapons mounted on vehicles.

Other Skills

The *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* uses the most practical skills one should have in such a space opera setting. You won't find the *singing* skill here because it's rarely used in the game. This skill section includes only those skills most useful to play the game.

When a character wants to do something outside an existing skill, the gamemaster determines which attribute would best suit that action. If players want their characters to excel at that action, and believe they'll use it often enough in the game, the gamemaster can create a new skill.

Take storytelling, for instance. There's no *storytelling* skill, even though it involves several different *Perception* and *Knowledge* skills: a little bit of *cultures*, *languages*, *con*, and *persuasion*. The gamemaster might ask characters attempting to tell stories to make a few rolls on some of these skills and attributes, depending on the kind of tale they intend to weave.

If a character spends much of his time telling stories, the gamemaster might create the *storytelling* skill. This character —and others interested in relating interesting tales— could now spend Character Points to improve this skill. It's up to the gamemaster to figure out which attribute *storytelling* would appear under.

Gamemaster Interpretation

You'll notice throughout these rules that many subjective decisions are left to the gamemaster and his judgment. The *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* rules are very flexible to allow you to simulate all kind of experiences within the *Metabarons* universe. The gamemaster must interpret these rules to make sure everyone has a good time telling an exciting story.

In the case of the *storytelling* skill, the gamemaster could allow the character to use this newly created skill, or make him rely only on his *Perception* attribute, or decide that the talents used in storytelling really fall under the *con* skill.

Gamemasters shouldn't be afraid to make snap rules decisions during the game just to get through an adventure. If you change your mind about a rule later, make sure everyone knows about your decision. Sometimes it's good before or after a game to spend a few moments discussing how the gamemaster interprets certain rules.

Controlling Skills

Gamemasters must learn to find a balance between the existing rules and interpretations, particularly when determining whether what a player wants is best for the game. Some players might want some terribly imbalanced skills or specializations, perhaps something like *security: Golden Palace*. While this skill specialization might exist, no player's character should have this skill without a substantially valid reason. If gamemasters allow this, they should require players to create some backstory explaining why they'd have such a rare skill. Besides asking for a special backstory, the gamemaster can give the character some unexpected complications from having this kind of skill. You can hand the players what they want... but remind them they might get it along with all the consequences, too.

In the case of *security: Golden Palace*, the gamemaster might ask that player to create a story detailing his job as a palace security coordinator who had to flee for her life when she was framed for involvement in an assassination plot. She might have this incredible skill, but now she's hunted by Imperial authorities intent on executing her on the spot.

The gamemaster has the final say when permitting characters to have new skills or specializations that might unbalance the game.

Well, that covers all the conventional information about creating and playing a character in the Metabarons Roleplaying Game. You're ready to begin.

If you want to add a little more depth to your character, you might want to read the next two chapters: "Psionics" and "Amarax & the Necro-Dream."

The first one describes the Psionics attribute and its three skills. Since psionic powers are so rare, you probably won't use them in your first Metabarons game. If you do plan on using them, or choose one of the extremely rare templates that start with 1D in Psionics, you might want to skim this chapter.The second chapter talks more about how Amarax and Necro-Dream Points affect the game rules and how they help mold your character's personality and actions.

If you're going to actually run an adventure as gamemaster, you still have a little work ahead of you. You'll be leading your players into an exciting story, much like a good commander leads her troops into combat. But a good commander knows more about the overall picture on the battlefield than the average soldier. To prepare for your storytelling role, you should familiarize yourself with the rest of the information in this rulebook.

PSIONICS

You've read a few chapters, played a little solitaire adventure, and learned something about your character's mundane skills. So, you think that makes you ready to venture out into this cold, harsh universe? I wouldn't bet on it.

My name is Seltis, and I'm a novice of the secret Neo-Shabda-Oud order. You can probably guess the universe doesn't treat me very well. That might have

something to do with my being trained in the forbidden ways of the Shabda-Oud priestesses, though some call us witches. Once we stood on the verge of conquering the galaxy with our incredible mental powers. We almost fulfilled the great prophecy and conceived the perfect androgyne to topple the Human Empire and bring us to power. Instead, our people were virtually destroyed.

I'm the granddaughter of a Shabda-Oud priestess. My mother raised me in hiding, fleeing from backwater world to undiscovered planet.

Along the way she initiated me in the awesome power of Shabda-Oud, though without all the trappings of doctrine and ceremony. We lived in fear that someone would discover we possessed such awesome psionic powers, hunt us down, and ultimately kill us.

If you develop your psionic potential, you too can roam the galaxy, persecuted as a threat to the all-powerful Human Empire.

Well, if you really want to know, I'll teach you everything you need to tap your inner mental potential, and use it against your enemies.

Psionic Powers

Everyone has an inner ability hiding just below their subconscious: the innate power of their mind. We're not talking about your mental capacity, because everyone can think, write down ideas, remember procedures, and otherwise use their brain to get through the day. You really only consciously use a small fraction of your brain's total capacity. *Psionics* represents the untapped potential of your mind, manifested in your self-control, influence on others, and ability to manipulate your mental energy. We only get in touch with this power very rarely in dreams, by using our imagination, or in delirious fever.

But in the game, aren't many of these aspects represented by existing attributes and skills? Yes, but *Psionics* goes one step further. A character's attributes and skills reflect learning, training, and experience accessed in the conscious portions of the brain. *Psionics* taps the unconscious portions, infinitely more powerful resources than the feeble percentage of gray matter used for everyday thought.

You'll notice that most character templates begin with 0D in *Psionics*. This doesn't mean that character has no psionic potential —it just means they haven't learned to tap into it. Those templates beginning with 1D in *Psionics* have some reason behind this incredible ability. Usually they inherited it from one of their parents, or spent time training with a group or individual who knows how to develop psionic potential in normal people. For instance, I was trained by my mother, who's own mother taught her the forbidden psionic ways of Shabda-Oud. That fiend Aghnar inherited his powers through his treacherous mother, Honorata, who betrayed the priestesses of Shabda-Oud. We all received our ability to tap these psionic powers through genetic succession and rigorous training. Characters like these begin the game with a mere 1D Psionics, which means their three related skills —*energy*, *self-control*, and *influence*— also begin at 1D. They can improve these skills using their 7D beginning skill dice. Later they can boost these skills and their *Psionics* attribute itself by spending Character Points.

Some people only develop their psionic potential later in life through different means: joining a religious sect which expands one's consciousness, training with someone else attuned to their psionic powers, or through some other personal transformation. The game represents this by allowing characters with 0D *Psionics* to invest Character Points to develop their mental potential. It costs 20 Character Points to raise *Psionics* from 0D to 1D. All related skills for *Psionics* go up to 1D as well. After that, you raise *Psionics* like any other attribute, spending ten times the number before the "D" to improve it by one pip.

Characters raising their *Psionics* from 0D to 1D must develop some roleplaying reason for this sudden change. This almost always involves finding someone with a higher *Psionics* attribute and skills to help attune them to their mental potential. This teacher might be a Neo-Shabda-Oud witch, a member of some religious cult which advocates expanding one's consciousness, or a wandering individual whose psionic powers are often mistaken for foul magic. The player and gamemaster should develop a plausible reason why a character suddenly acquired these psionic abilities. A player who wishes to invest Character Points to acquire 1D in *Psionics* might discuss this with his gamemaster, who could create an entire adventure where the character could meet someone to help him tap his powers, or undergo some other-worldly transformation giving him this energy.

The Burden of Psionics

Those with psionic powers possess an incredible energy, yet are also marked with a stigma that often forces them to keep their abilities secret. For every benefit mental powers grant, there's a greater sacrifice one must make. Like many things throughout the universe, supreme powers come only with supreme burdens.

The *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* isn't just about die rolls, but creating and playing a character role. When someone has dice in the *Psionics* attribute, it gives them great powers others don't possess, but also has a bearing on what kind of a person they are and might become.

Players who want characters with dice in *Psionics* should discuss with their gamemaster why they'd have this attribute and how it might affect the game. The character template often provides guidance for those starting with 1D *Psionics*. The background, personality, and Honor Code help illustrate the importance of mental abilities in relation to your character. If players buy their 1D *Psionics* once they've started running a character, they should integrate this into their existing personality and Honor Code with the gamemaster's help.

There's one essential question psionic characters must answer: now that you have psionic powers, how will you use them? Characters might just see *Psionics* as cool new skills to help them through adventures. Or they might see them as a means to achieve a greater goal, possibly in relation to their Honor Code.

No matter how one uses psionics in the game, they bring upon a character's head a variety of drawbacks. These often manifest themselves as challenges during the game. Players can work with their gamemasters to create appropriate roleplaying elements to hound their psionically powerful characters. A few ideas follow.

Attracting Attention

Psionic powers often seem like they go against the natural order of the universe —or at least what most people think of as the natural order. If people with such mental capacity use their abilities openly, they attract the attention of others nearby who don't understand these special powers. Some might look upon these works as wonderful miracles, while others more likely would see these as strange perversions of nature. Characters with *Psionics* must take care not to use their powers too openly lest others take note of them and their companions.

Great Expectations

People who see psionic force used to their advantage often assume such power can solve any problem. They hound those with extraordinary mental energy, begging them to work miracles, resolve disputes, right wrongs, and bring hope to otherwise hopeless situations. When these expectations aren't met, others misinterpret it as weakness, arrogance, and reason for suspicion.

Fear of Psionics

People fear what they cannot understand, and few people understand psionics. Such awesome powers pose a great threat to the stable governments and lifestyles people enjoy. In the past, groups like the Shabda-Oud witches relied on seemingly sorcerous mental capabilities to dominate the universe. Those with psionic powers who stand out often attract the attention of fearful authorities whose response is to persecute them, running them out of their territory or, in some cases, hunting them down for imprisonment, torture, and eventual execution.

Psionic Rivals

Rivalries often develop between those using their psionic abilities openly. Besides avoiding persecution from those who don't understand their powers, they must repel attacks by others with similar capabilities who view them as threats to their authority and very lives. The more powerful one's *Psionics*, the more likely a rival might challenge him out of fear. Only the strict moral codes of semi-religious groups promoting mental powers can gather so many without open competition erupting.

Using Psionics Skills

The three *Psionics* skills reflect a character's mastery over certain inner powers: *energy*, *influence*, and *self-control*. Skill rolls indicate whether a character's power succeeds or fails. Sometimes a character must then roll her *Psionics* attribute to gauge the effectiveness of her efforts, much like characters roll *Strength* to help determine damage for *brawling* and *melee combat* attacks.

Unlike regular skills, *Psionics* skills do not define very specific actions, and therefore have a variety of applications. Characters can use the same skill to implement several "powers," though these aren't rigidly defined. For instance, Seltis might use her *energy* skill to send a mental blast at an attacker, detect energy emissions in the upper atmosphere, or overload a robot's circuitry.

If gamemasters feel it's appropriate for the game, characters can adopt specializations for *Psionics* skills, often specific applications of their mental powers. You can use the specializations listed below for ideas on what kinds of powers each *Psionics* skill can tap. If this is your first *Metabarons* game —either as a player or gamemaster— you might want to avoid the complexities of specializations until you grow more comfortable with the game mechanics.

The flexibility in *Psionics* skills allows players to simulate a variety of psionic effects, limited only by a character's powers and any designs the gamemaster has for his style of campaign. Use the tables below as general guidelines to determine difficulty numbers based on what a character hopes to achieve using a particular skill. The tables represent different aspects of *Psionics* skill which contribute to the difficulty to effectively use it, including the effect's range, duration, and scope.

When using a *Psionics* skill, players should first describe how they want to use it to perform a certain action. Gamemasters should reference each table to determine the difficulty number based on the result the character hopes to achieve.

> **Example:** Heather is playing Seltis, the Neo-Shabda-Oud witch with psionic powers. She wants to hit an unsuspecting opponent with a quick mental blast to inflict damage equal to a roll of her *Psionics* dice. The gamemaster consults the tables for "range," "target size," and "effect duration." He figures the target is within long range, so he starts with a base difficulty of 10. Since the victim is only one person, the target size adds +5 to the difficulty, making it 15. Since her mental blast occurs instantly that round, Seltis has no difficulty modifiers for the duration of the blast. Seltis must roll at least a 15 with her energy dice to hit her opponent and inflict damage.

Opposed Rolls: When targets of *Psionics* skills resist or try dodging these effects, gamemasters should base the difficulty on their opposed skill rolls, modified by the appropriate charts below.

> **Example:** Let's say Seltis's target spots her and tries dodging her mental blast. He rolls a 13 for his *dodge*, which the gamemaster adds to the existing difficulty. Seltis must now equal or beat a 28 to hit her opponent with her mental blast.

Range: This factor represents the distance from the character using a psionic power to her intended target. Those using skills on themselves —for instance, *self-control*, or *energy* when creating a shield or absorbing radiation— have no increase in their difficulty number due to range. "Close range" represents a target within a few meters of the character, while "long range" includes targets

within the average long range for firearms (about 400 meters). Use the modifier for "kilometer" for opponents up to a kilometer away, and "atmosphere" for anyone farther, including targets in the lower atmosphere of a planet.

Range	Difficulty Modifier (Cumulative)
Close	+5
Long	+10
Kilometer	+15
Atmosphere	+20

Example: Seltis intends to use her *influence* skill to convince two soldiers that she and her companions can pass the hatch they guard, and that they'll forget ever seeing her. She could do this from around the corner (at long range), but decides to first approach the guards (and risk a hostile reaction from them). When she uses her *influence* skill, she'll be at close range. The gamemaster checks the range chart and gives her task an initial difficulty of 5.

Target Size: The difficulty to successfully use a *Psionics* skill also depends on the target's size. Anyone using powers on themselves use the "person" difficulty modifier of +5. The other categories below are general guidelines the gamemaster should interpret himself. Gamemasters might interpret a "few people" as two to four, with a "group" being five to fifteen people, and a "crowd" consisting of more than fifteen people.

Target Size	Difficulty Modifier (Cumulative)
Person	+5
Few People	+10
Group	+15
Crowd	+20
Horde	+30

Example: Since Seltis is using her *influence* skill on two guards, the gamemaster adds 10 to her difficulty, making the total difficulty 15. He decides two soldiers do not make up a "group," so he chooses the modifier for a "few people."

Effect Duration: The amount of time a character wants a psionic effect to last also determines the difficulty. The longer the effect lasts, the harder it is to achieve. Near-instantaneous effects lasting one combat round —like mental blasts— do not raise the difficulty. For a psionic power to last longer, the difficulty to succeed increases.

Effect Duration	Difficulty Modifier (Cumulative)
Few Minutes	+5
1 Hour	+10
Several Hours	+15
1 Day	+20

Example: Seltis needs to make sure the guards let her and her companions through the hatch (an instantaneous action), but also wants to leave the impression that the soldiers never saw her. Since Seltis needs about an hour to accomplish her goals beyond the hatch, the gamemaster checks the effect duration chart and adds 10 to her difficulty. Seltis must roll 25 or higher on her *influence* dice to succeed in forcing the guards to let her pass and masking her presence from their memories for one hour.

Psionics Difficulties Are High!

Those modifiers add up to some pretty high difficulty numbers to beat. These extreme difficulties for using Psionics skills help balance out their awesome capabilities.

Energy, influence, and self-control are very versatile skills with various applications in the game. They're more than skills, they're mental powers characters can wield in several different ways.

Beginning with only 1D in Psionics and maybe a few dice in the skills isn't much to start with. How can you overcome these great difficulties (other than rigging the dice...)? Remember, you can always use Character Points to boost your die rolls after you've made them. You can spend up to three Character Points on any given roll, as long as you have enough. Characters can also increase their skills and attributes over time, though this also requires an investment of Character Points.

Possessing and using psionic abilities isn't easy. Characters with such powers are tapping into their own inner forces, subconscious energy that still isn't fully understood. It's a great burden with the potential for great reward.

Modifying Psionics Rolls

Don't forget that gamemasters can always modify *Psionics* rolls depending on the situation and surroundings. The difficulty system is flexible —combining that with the open-ended *Psionics* skills leaves the gamemaster plenty of room to interpret difficulties for using these mental powers.

Gamemasters might wish to discuss these rules with players who want to run characters with dice in *Psionics*. While these abilities might at first seem weak, they'll soon become more powerful as characters grow. Gamemasters might decide to limit the use of *Psionics* in a game, or allow players to improve only one *Psionics* skill between adventures. To create a psionics-heavy game, a gamemaster might introduce a highly skilled person to help train others to tap and control their mental energies. In both cases, gamemasters can challenge the characters with equally powerful adversaries using the same amazing abilities they themselves possess.

Psionics Skills

The skill descriptions below contain similar information as those in the chapter on "Attributes & Skills," including "time taken" and sample "specializations."

The specializations provided include particular "powers" characters can use through that skill. These powers are described under each skill, though they serve only as general guidelines. Characters and gamemasters are not limited to these powers, and should feel free to use these basic *Psionics* rules to channel characters' inner forces into new forms.

Energy

Time Taken: One round or longer.

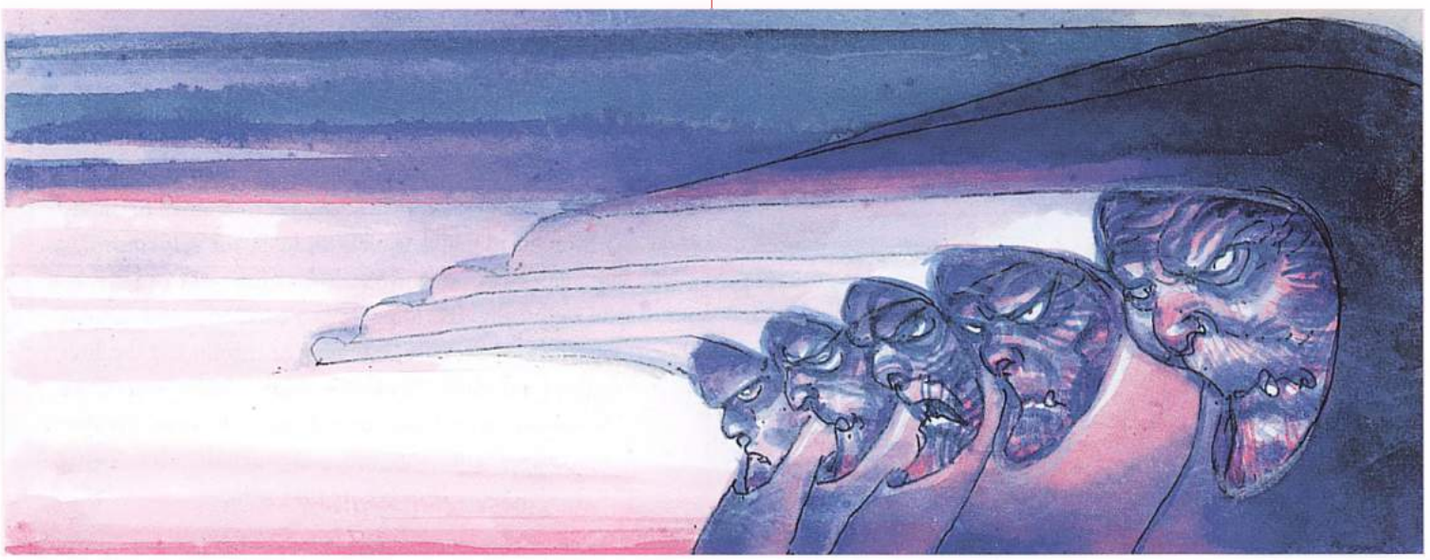
Specializations: Particular attunement to energy —detect energy, mind blast, shield.

This skill represents a character's ability to sense and manipulate various forms of energy through her mental powers. In essence, the character uses her body and mind as a huge, living capacitor, able to sense, absorb, and discharge power. She can project her personal energy as a weapon, detect various uses of energy (psionics, life forces, energy emissions), absorb harmful levels of radiation, and create a shell of energy around herself to repel harmful elements (explosions, gas, falling rocks, physical attacks).

Detect Energy: Characters can use this power to notice various forms of energy: spaceship exhaust paths, tiny electronic devices, invisible deflector shields, and life forces (including anyone else using psionic abilities nearby). Difficulties are based on the range they're searching and the amount of time they keep themselves attuned for variations caused by energy fluctuations. For instance, keeping their senses open for one scene to detect a vehicle passing through a one-kilometer perimeter might require an *energy* roll of at least 25.

Mental Blast: Characters can gather their mental energy and project it at a target to inflict damage. The blast could damage a living target by directly assaulting their mind, or could incinerate a non-living target (such as a weapon, hatch, vehicle controls, or other equipment) through sheer heat. Difficulties would depend on range and target size —duration modifiers would only apply if the character wanted to inflict this damage continuously for more than a round. A successful *energy* roll hits the target, with a *Psionics* roll determining exactly how much damage the target suffers.

Shield: Characters can use this power to protect themselves from physical and energy damage, from long-term radiation exposure to explosions and laser blasts. The difficulty depends on the amount of damage and the length of exposure. A character wandering a radiation-swept moon without proper protection might have to beat a difficulty of 20 to effectively deploy an energy shield for an hour. When creating such a shield to defend against attacks, characters roll their *energy* dice against their opponent's attack roll. If they roll higher, they successfully deploy their personal energy shield in time to block the attack, and can add their *Psionics* dice to their *Strength* roll for purposes of resisting damage.



Influence

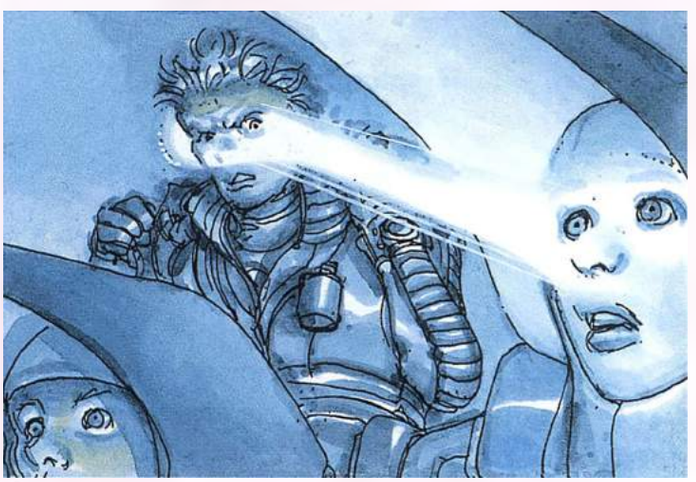
Time Taken: One round or longer.
Specializations: Specific attunement to influence—domination, group command, mass illusion.

Influence functions much like the *Perception* skills of *con* and *persuasion*, except on a more forceful level. Characters using it can hypnotically dominate others in various ways —breaking down their mental resistance, compelling them to cooperate, altering their perceptions, and imposing new memories or impressions. Although *influence* is not mind-reading or telepathy, it can serve as a means to extract information and force cooperation in unwilling subjects.

Difficulties to use influence depend on whether the victim knows he's under psionic attack and tries resisting. For those unaware of a character's attempt to influence them, gamemasters should base the difficulty on the factors noted in the tables above. Anyone who realizes they're the subject of such mental coercion can make an opposed *willpower* roll (or *self-control*, if they have any dice in it) which the character using *influence* must beat to attain success. Gamemasters may modify this roll taking into consideration the range, target size, and effect duration. Feel free to modify the difficulty number based on the complexity of commands or the ultimate effect.

> **Example:** Seltis wants to extract information from one of the guards about patrols in the area. The soldier is quite aware he's under some kind of mental attack, so he resists. He rolls his willpower of 2D+1 for a total of 9. To coerce the information from him, the gamemaster decides Seltis must beat his *willpower* roll plus 10... +5 for the range (close), and +5 for the target size (one person). He does not apply any modifier for the length of time she spends psionically influencing him, since he decides this occurs in one round. Seltis must roll 19 or higher on her *influence* to successfully extract information about nearby patrols from the reluctant guard.

Characters who improve their *influence* skill may specialize in achieving particular effects, such as completely dominating one person, coordinating groups of people, and creating "mass illusions" in the minds of others.



Self-Control

Time Taken: One round or longer.
Specializations: Aspect of self-control—ignore pain, physical enhancement.

Self-control represents a character's mental ability to manipulate his own body and mind from within. Character roll this skill when opposing others trying to use *influence* against them, and use it to channel their psionic energies to enhance their physical attributes, including the ability to ignore pain.

Gamemasters should use the suggested difficulty modifiers in the charts above when players devise new applications for characters using this skill.

Ignore Pain: By controlling their mind's response to pain, characters using *self-control* can ignore its effects on their body's ability to continue functioning. Injured characters must roll their *self-control* dice higher than the damage total inflicted upon them (the damage roll minus their *Strength* roll), modified by +5 for focusing their mental powers to control their own bodies (target size modifier). If characters fail this roll, they may make another attempt to ignore the pain the next round. Characters who succeed may ignore the penalties associated with their particular injury level beginning next round. They are still considered injured for purposes of subsequent damage —so if a "wounded" character using *self-control* to ignore pain is wounded again, his injury level rises to "wounded twice." A character ignoring pain who sustains more damage must roll his *self-control* to re-establish his ability to disregard injury penalties.

> **Example:** Seltis has *Strength* 2D+1, *Psionics* 3D, and *self-control* 5D. During an attack, she's hit by suprapistol fire and suffers that weapon's 5D damage. The gamemaster rolls 16 for the damage, while Seltis rolls 9 for her Strength. The difference between damage and Strength is 7, meaning that Seltis is "wounded." She suffers a –1D penalty to all her actions. The next round Seltis uses her mental powers to ignore the effects of this injury, and therefore the –1D penalty. She must roll 12 or higher on her *self-control* (7 for the damage which "wounded" her, and +5 for focusing her mental powers to control her body and mind). She'd normally roll 5D for *self-control*... but remember, she's wounded with a –1D penalty, so she only rolls 4D. Seltis rolls 12 exactly, and ignores the effects of the pain beginning next round. If she later sustains another "wound" result, Seltis would be "wounded twice" and would have to make another *self-control* roll (at the –2D penalty for being "wounded twice") to ignore that pain.

Physical Enhancement: Characters can use *self-control* to enhance their attributes other than *Psionics*. The difficulty is based on the attribute's die code... +5 for each die normally rolled for the attribute. For instance, enhancing an attribute of 3D would have a base difficulty of 15. This difficulty is modified by +5 for focusing the character's mental powers to control his own body (target size modifier). If successful, during the next round the character rolls the attribute and any associated skills adding his *Psionics* dice as a bonus. The attribute remains enhanced for only one round unless the character beats the difficulty modified for the extended length of time (see the "Effect Duration" table above). Gamemasters may choose to temporarily penalize those who fail this roll with a –1D penalty to the attribute the character intended to enhance.

Example: Seltis must jump from one catwalk to another high above a factory assembly floor. Her *climb/jump* skill is only 2D+2, and she knows this is a challenging task far above her skill level. Before making the jump, she focuses her psionic powers to enhance her *Strength* attribute for the next round only. The difficulty for the required *self-control* roll is 15: +5 for each die of her *Strength* score (2D+2), and +5 for concentrating her mental energy on herself. She rolls her *self-control* of 5D and gets 16, successfully beating the difficulty. Next round she jumps to the other catwalk. She rolls her 2D+2 *climb/jump* dice and her 3D *Psionics* dice... 5D+2 total! If she fails the *climb/jump* roll and sustains damage in the fall that same round, her *Psionics* dice would still enhance her *Strength* dice when determining damage.

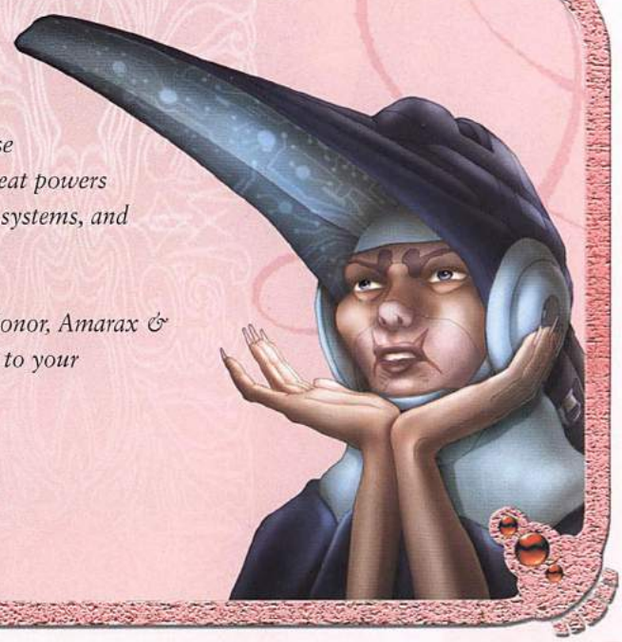
Creating New Powers

You probably noticed that the *Psionics* skills are more open-ended than other skills. This should allow you greater freedom when using these awesome mental powers in the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*. Don't limit yourself to the applications mentioned under each skill. Just as you use your imagination for certain skills, you should be creative when finding new uses for *Psionics* skills.

Always check with your gamemaster to make sure what you'd like your character to do with *Psionics* is in tune with the style and atmosphere of the game he's running. Perhaps he'd rather have characters use mental powers as slightly enhanced skills. Or maybe the gamemaster has mapped out an entire series of adventures emphasizing psionics.

Make sure you read the "Other Skills" section at the end of the chapter on "Attributes & Skills." All those tips on creating new skills and interpreting existing ones apply even more to *Psionics* skills. The *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* focuses on telling a fun and exciting story in which everyone participates. These rules help you tell that story, but not if you're arguing about rules during the game. Work with the gamemaster and other players to find a balance in the rules that's right for everyone.

Now you know all my secrets to the deeper powers of the mind.
Commanding such energy isn't for everyone. Only the strongest of you can master psionics without succumbing to its burdens. Don't waste these energies on fulfilling your paltry little schemes —aspire to wield these great powers for much grander motives, like bending others to your will, ruling entire systems, and taking revenge on your enemies.
What? You don't think those are honorable goals?
What do you know about honor? You'd better read the next chapter, "Honor, Amarax & the Necro-Dream," to discover how these concepts are just as important to your character as skills, attributes, and even the powers of the mind.



Honor, Amarax & the Necro-Dream

I hate to admit it, but that Shabda-Oud witch Seltis might be right. In a universe crumbling beneath the strain of corruption, greed, and selfish motives, a solid sense of honor is rare, and often depends on your particular point of view.
The universe sleepwalks through an endless dream:

my code of honor is my only protection against it. Honor plays a part in our actions and ultimate goals whether you belong to a mercenary unit, serve the Ekonomat, fly with a pirate gang, or follow Troglosocialik principles.
Honor is personal truth, a set of guidelines you establish to help you through all the crazy things that happen in life. What works as honor for you might not work for others, but what matters is that you stick to it. It's a defining principle of your life, a constant factor that helps others know where you're coming from.
I leave "truth" to the philosophers sitting in their comfortable towers looking down on the galaxy with idealistic vision. Your individual code of honor and its relation to the rest of the universe is up to you to decide.

Your Code of Honor

One's code of honor comes from your heart.

Your basic code of honor is dictated to you from those around you: your family, political groups, your profession. You've grown up with it all your life. Teachers, parents, community leaders, and peers constantly instill a sense of their group's honor in everything you do. Soldiers pledge their allegiance and loyalty to their commander. Pirates live by such codes as not revealing the locations of their secret supply bases and submitting to their leader's orders and decisions. Mercenaries are loyal to each other, and won't fight without pay unless in self-defense. The Techno-Technos are devoted to their Supreme Techno-Pope and the omnipotent power of high technology.

In many cases these guidelines for behavior benefit the institution rather than the individual. Following these codes you've been brought up with isn't true honor as much as it's just blind acceptance of a way of life or code of behavior. In some cases it's not even a heartfelt obedience to one's codes.

More often your code of honor is what you make of it —your personal motives, codes of behavior, perception of right and wrong, all molded by your background, personality, current situation, and your heart. Your honor is a code of personal preservation, meant to guide you toward actions benefiting you and helping you to survive in a universe filled with betrayal, apathy, and oppression.

Some people live by a mercenary code, taking whatever side offers the most money. Others revolt against the behaviors and morals imposed on them throughout their lives. Most base their code of honor on their philosophy for survival, a strategy to attain their goals, or their greater sense of personal loyalty toward their fellow humans. This comes from within, as an amalgam of your past experiences and emotions. What matters with honor is not good and evil, but that you consistently follow a code. It helps define your inner personality and how others perceive your actions.

The game simulates your sense of honor through Honor Codes. This isn't a game statistic, but it helps define your character like other backround elements. You'll notice there's no other category defining your Code of Honor. Players establish their characters' behavior by merging pieces of their backgrounds, personalities, and motivations, and acting according to these elements during the game. Codes of Honor can change with time and experience. Events during adventures affect your characters, helping them improve their skills, exercise their good (or bad) judgment, meet new contacts, make friends, and develop rivalries.

Following your Code of Honor requires a good measure of roleplaying, something that can't be governed by rules and die rolls. But adhering to a Code of Honor can help you earn Amarax Points, bringing your physical and spiritual hearts into synchronicity and strengthening your character. You can read more about this in the section on Honor Codes in the "Characters" chapter.

Amarax Points

When you spend an Amarax Point, your character draws on his inner strength and spirit to try and succeed. He's risking his code of conduct, part of his soul to do what he feels is correct.

All player characters begin the game with at least one Amarax Point. Only important gamemaster characters have Amarax Points they can use during the game —major adversaries, helpful allies, and others meant to challenge or assist the characters. If at the end of an adventure a character ever has zero Amarax Points or has more Necro-Dream Points than Amarax, he succumbs to the Necro-Dream and becomes a gamemaster character.

If a player decides to spend an Amarax Point, he must tell the gamemaster this before making any die rolls. A player may spend one Amarax Point to double all his character's skill, attribute, and any special ability die codes for the rest of that round. Do not double anything that's not part of the character, such as weapon damage die codes and spaceship stat die codes. If a character using an Amarax point inflicts damage while using *archaic weapons*, *brawling*, *martial arts*, or *melee combat*, he doubles only his character's *Strength* when determining damage, and does not double any weapon bonus to damage.

Players can only spend one Amarax Point in a round, and cannot spend any Character Points in the same round when they spend an Amarax Point. Characters usually save their Amarax Points to accomplish particularly heroic feats.

Example: Lucardo's in a fix... he needs to quickly fire his defense pistol at an adversary who very well might kill the nobleman if he doesn't dispatch his foe now. Lucardo has a *firearms* skill of 3D+2, and his defense pistol inflicts 3D damage. Chris, who's playing Lucardo, tells the gamemaster that he's spending an Amarax Point. Lucardo rolls 6D+4 to hit with his *firearms* skill. If he rolls high enough to hit his adversary, he only rolls the defense pistol's normal 3D damage dice.

Example: Lucardo decides that instead of attacking with his defense pistol he'll unsheathe the family sword and strike his foe with that. He has an *archaic weapons* skill of 5D+2, a *Strength* of 3D, and his sword inflicts *Strength* +2D+2 damage. Chris informs the gamemaster that he's using an Amarax Point this round. Lucardo rolls 10D+4 for his *archaic weapons* skill to see if he hits. Assuming he strikes his foe, he'd roll the sword's *Strength* +2D+2 damage. Since he's using an Amarax Point, Lucardo's *Strength* is effectively 6D. For his damage roll, he uses his doubled *Strength* but does not double the 2D+2 damage bonus for the sword.

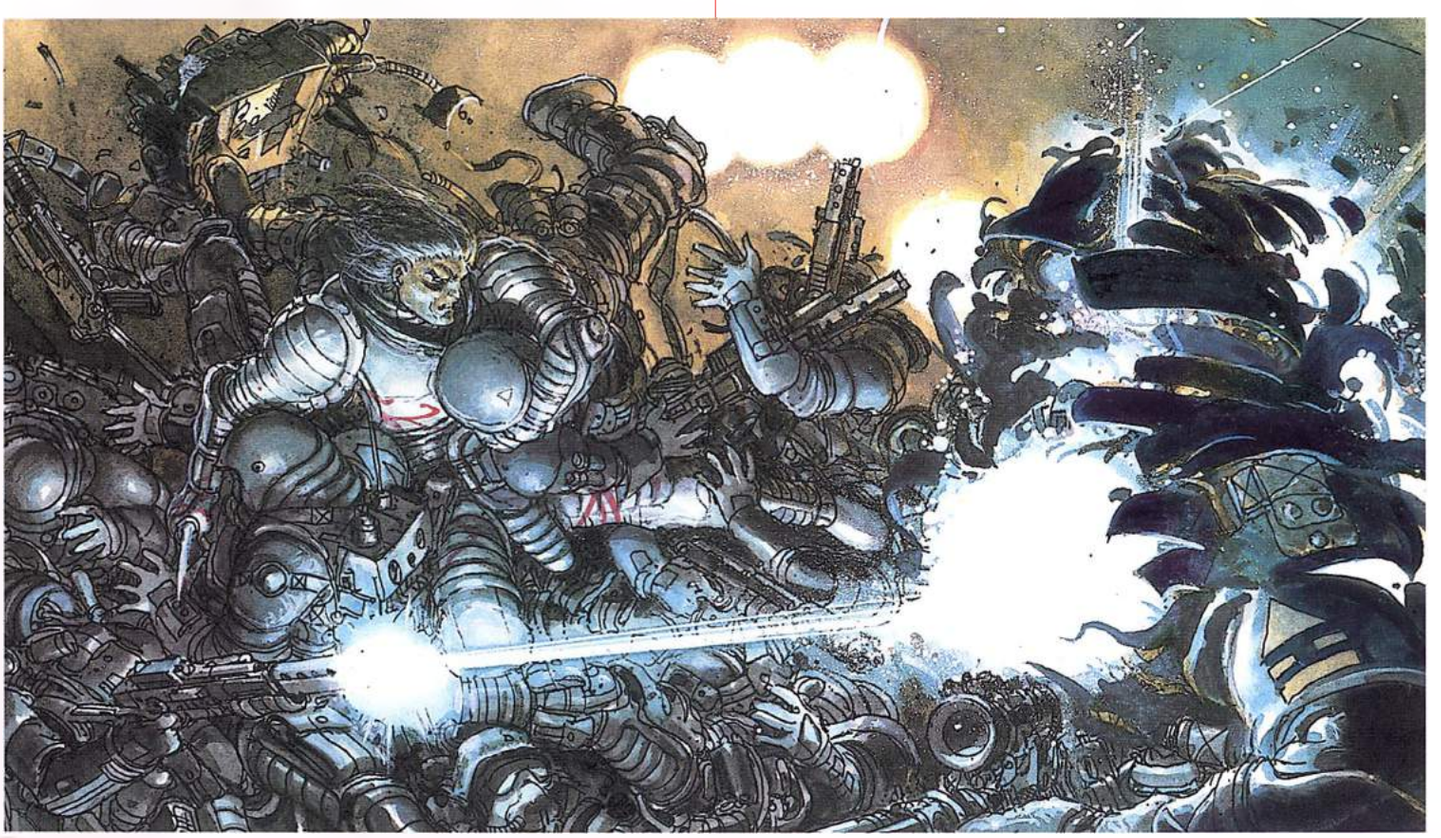
Characters can also use Amarax Points to boost their rolls for continuous actions taking an entire scene, such as repairing a damaged propulsion unit, flying through a meteor shower, or performing risky surgery. The Amarax Point bonus ends when the character stops the continuous action to do something else. The character cannot spend any Character Points in the same scene when he uses an Amarax Point.

Example: Larryn is tailing that crooked Merchants Guild official through a busy city and doesn't want to lose him in the crowds. The gamemaster figures Larryn will have to make one *search* roll to keep track of her target during the next scene. Beth, who's playing Larryn, tells the gamemaster she's spending an Amarax Point to double Larryn's *search* roll to 8D and make sure she doesn't lose the official. The bonus to her action ends if someone from the crowd suddenly picks a fight with Larryn several minutes after she starts tailing her target.

Regaining Amarax Points

How your character spends Amarax Points determines whether or not he gets more as a reward for completing the adventure.

Spending an Amarax Point during the game is like investing your kublars in a risky business proposition. If you invest it



against your heart or Honor Code, you lose some of your Amarax. If you spend it for a neutral action, you break even. If you invest Amarax for an action that deepens your commitment to your Honor Code or strengthens your heart's synchronicity, you reap the benefits.

Here are the four general situations in which characters often use Amarax Points, and their consequences in regaining any of these spent points:

Acting Against Your Honor Code.

If a character uses an Amarax Point to improve an action that blatantly goes against his Honor Code, he loses the Amarax Point and an additional Amarax Point if he has one. For instance, a character who follows Bushitaka cannot use an Amarax Point to flee an honorable combat. If he does, the Amarax Point invested to boost his skills used to flee is not regained, and he loses another one. Remember, if at the end of an adventure a character ever has zero Amarax Points or has more Necro-Dream Points than Amarax, he succumbs to the Necro-Dream

Acting Neutrally.

If an Amarax Point is spent to do something that is neither following or straying from his Honor Code, the character loses the Amarax Point. If the Bushitaka character uses an Amarax Point for pure personal convenience (such as boosting his gambling roll), he does not gain it back at the end of the adventure.

Following Your Code.

When a character uses an Amarax Point to act according to his Honor Code, he gets the point back at the end of the adventure. If a Bushitaka character uses an Amarax Point during the course of a battle to defeat his adversaries, he regains it at the end of the adventure.

Following Your Code at a Dramatic Moment.

Characters who wait until spending an Amarax Point at a dramatically appropriate moment get the Amarax Point back at the end of the adventure and gain another one as well. This represents following your Code of Honor under the most stressful circumstances where failure might destroy your character or those for whom he's responsible.

You should consider any time when success is vital to the story a dramatically appropriate moment. It's the climactic point of an adventure, where the characters confront the main villain or when they're in dire straits. The characters' success or failure will decide the outcome of the whole story.

Here are some ideas of what constitutes a dramatic moment for characters to put their Amarax on the line: sacrificing oneself to save others; conquering a more powerful and treacherous foe; saving a virgin planet from destruction; or preventing the deaths of millions of innocent people.

A character may encounter a dramatically appropriate moment during the climax of an adventure or, at most, one other time during an adventure. For instance, Aghnar and Oda confronting the witches of Shabda-Oud in a final showdown would be considered a dramatic moment. The battle between Aghnar and Steel Head to decide the fate of the Human and Pthagure empires could also be viewed as a dramatically appropriate climax.

Not every adventure has dramatic moments for every character. But when the character seizes the moment and acts heroically, the rewards can be great.

No Amarax Points.

Sometimes characters spend Amarax Points and don't regain them at the end of an adventure... bringing their Amarax Point total to zero. If at the end of an adventure a character ever has zero Amarax Points or has more Necro-Dream Points than Amarax, he succumbs to the Necro-Dream and becomes a character controlled by the gamemaster.

Necro-Dream Points

Characters get Necro-Dream Points for giving in to the temptation to immerse themselves in the apathetic forces in the universe, choosing inaction over action. They represent how close a character comes to drifting off into a life of passive pleasure in the oblivious stupor of the Necro-Dream.

Gamemasters should always warn characters when their actions risk earning them a Necro-Dream Point. Give the player the option to change his mind if he wishes. If he continues, he does so at his own informed risk.

Characters roll their *willpower* skill to resist the Necro-Dream's various temptations. They can boost this roll using Character Points or even an Amarax Point. If they beat the given difficulty to resist the Necro-Dream's influence, they do not gain any Necro-Dream Point. If they fail this *willpower* roll, they gain one Necro-Dream Point.

If at the end of an adventure a character has more Necro-Dream Points than Amarax Points, he wanders aimlessly off to the nearest comfortable diversion and falls into an apathetic stupor —the player must create a new character. For instance, a character with five Amarax Points and five Necro-Dream Points is very close to drifting off into the Necro-Dream. Should he ever have one more Necro-Dream Point than Amarax Point at the end of an adventure, he succumbs to the Necro-Dream.

Resisting Temptation

Use these general guidelines when setting difficulties for willpower rolls to resist various temptations of the Necro-Dream:

Very Easy (5): Resisting casual exposure to the Necro-Dream —strolling past a blaring holovid set; seeing an advertisement for a homeoslut establishment.

Easy (10): Avoiding general contact with temptation — resisting the advances of a beautiful prostitute; passing up an offer to drink some Cocoloco.

Moderate (15): Resisting basic exposure to the Necro-Dream —taking a drink of Cocoloco; spending the night with a homeoslut; participating in holovid gambling; sitting down to watch holovid for the afternoon.

Difficult (20): Prolonged exposure to the Necro-Dream— spending a week in an endo-city.

Characters with addictions —to homeosluts, drugs, holovid, and other technological comforts— resist the Necro-Dream's temptations at one difficulty level higher than normal.

Removing Necro-Dream Points.

A character with Necro-Dream Points who truly wishes to get rid of them can spend two Amarax Points to remove one Necro-Dream Point. This represents sacrificing part of your inner self to purge a small portion of the Necro-Dream's influence from your life. You lose Amarax, but you also distance yourself ever so slightly from ultimate destruction by the Necro-Dream.

Well, if you've read all that, then you're definitely ready to jump right into the Metabarons Roleplaying Game. You have all the information about creating and playing your character.

Now if you're going to actually run an adventure as gamemaster, you still have a little work ahead of you. You'll be leading your players into an exciting story, much like a good commander leads her troops into combat. But a good commander knows more about the overall picture on the battlefield than the average soldier. Gamemasters should move onto the next section to gain some additional training in running the game. Everything you've read up to now applies, but it forms the bases for more specific rules you should know.

Don't worry that we're dumping all this material on you at once. Keep the essential rule at heart —pick a difficulty number, have the players roll the appropriate skill equal to or higher than that to succeed.

Remember that and you'll be okay.

Gamemaster Section

BECOMING A GAMEMASTER

Only the most dedicated, battle-tested soldiers rise above the ranks to lead their peers. You've received your basic training in creating a character. Now I'll teach you how to run the Metabarons Roleplaying Game for your friends, with them playing the characters they've created, and you supervising the

game as the gamemaster. Like a good commander, you'll be working with the troops (or your players, in this case) toward a common goal: telling an exciting interactive story, and having fun at the same time.

Your Orders

Your objective is to make sure everyone has fun. If you and the players are having a good time, nothing else matters. Even the rules in this book.

Gamemasters have three essential jobs:

• Judge • Storyteller • Scene Setter

Judge

As the game's judge, you must know the rules and interpret them during play. The players will explain what actions they want their characters to try—the rules guide you in figuring whether they succeed or fail.

Judging is a three-step process:

1. Determine how challenging the action is and pick a difficulty number.

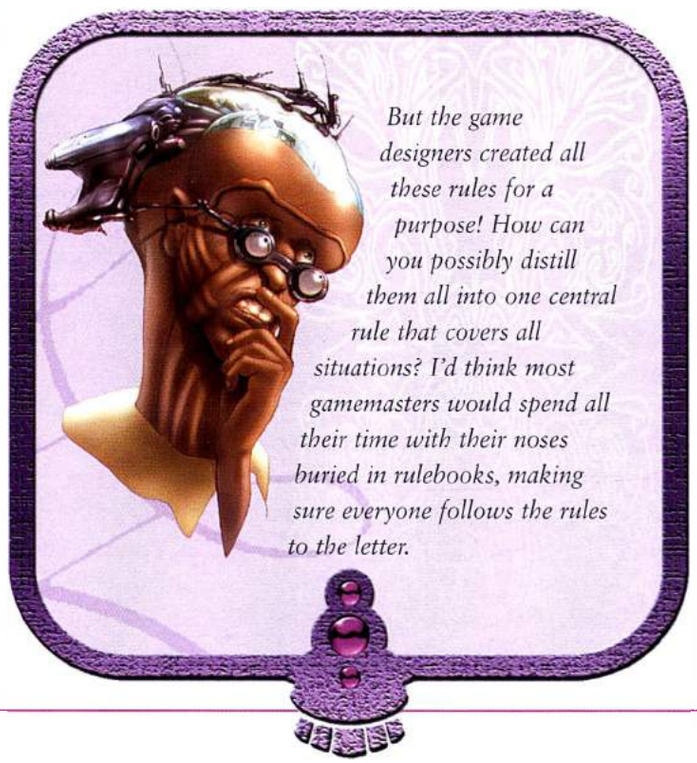
2. Determine which skill is best for the action and ask the character to roll his skill dice. (If the character doesn't have the skill, he rolls his attribute dice.)

3. If the character rolls higher than the difficulty number, he succeeds. If he doesn't, he fails. Ties go in favor of the character.

The rest of the rules build on the foundation of this idea, with guidance on how to determine difficulty numbers for various actions. There are also plenty of examples to help you out.

The next few chapters give you rules covering just about every situation you can simulate in the game: piloting spaceships through massive battles, blasting away at pirates, haggling with Merchants Guild bureaucrats, sneaking past guards. Don't let all the details and seemingly complex rules worry you. When in doubt, fall back on the central rule of the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*:

Pick a difficulty number. If the character's skill roll is equal or higher, he succeeds.



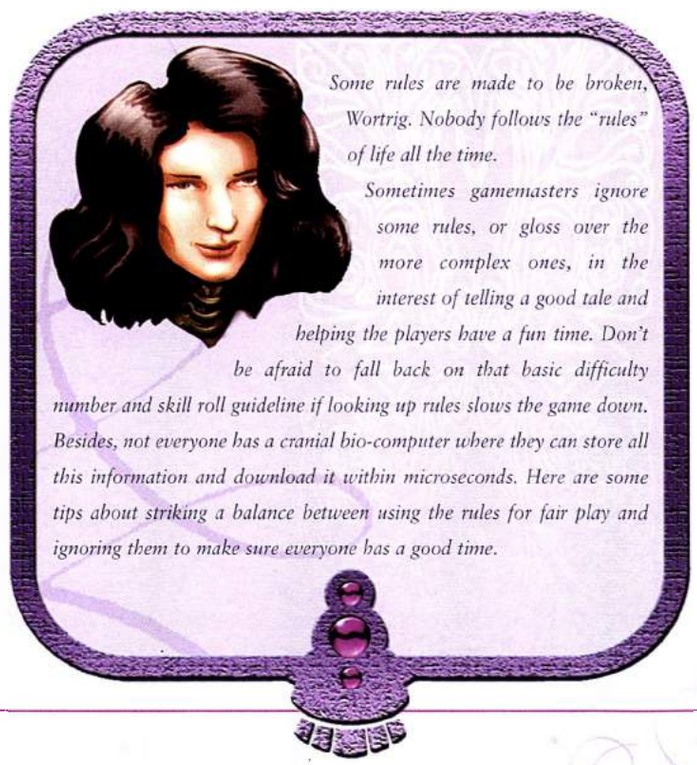
When you're not sure how to handle a situation in the middle of the game, fall back on this essential concept. Once you've finished the game, you can discuss rules with your players or consult the rulebook for future reference.

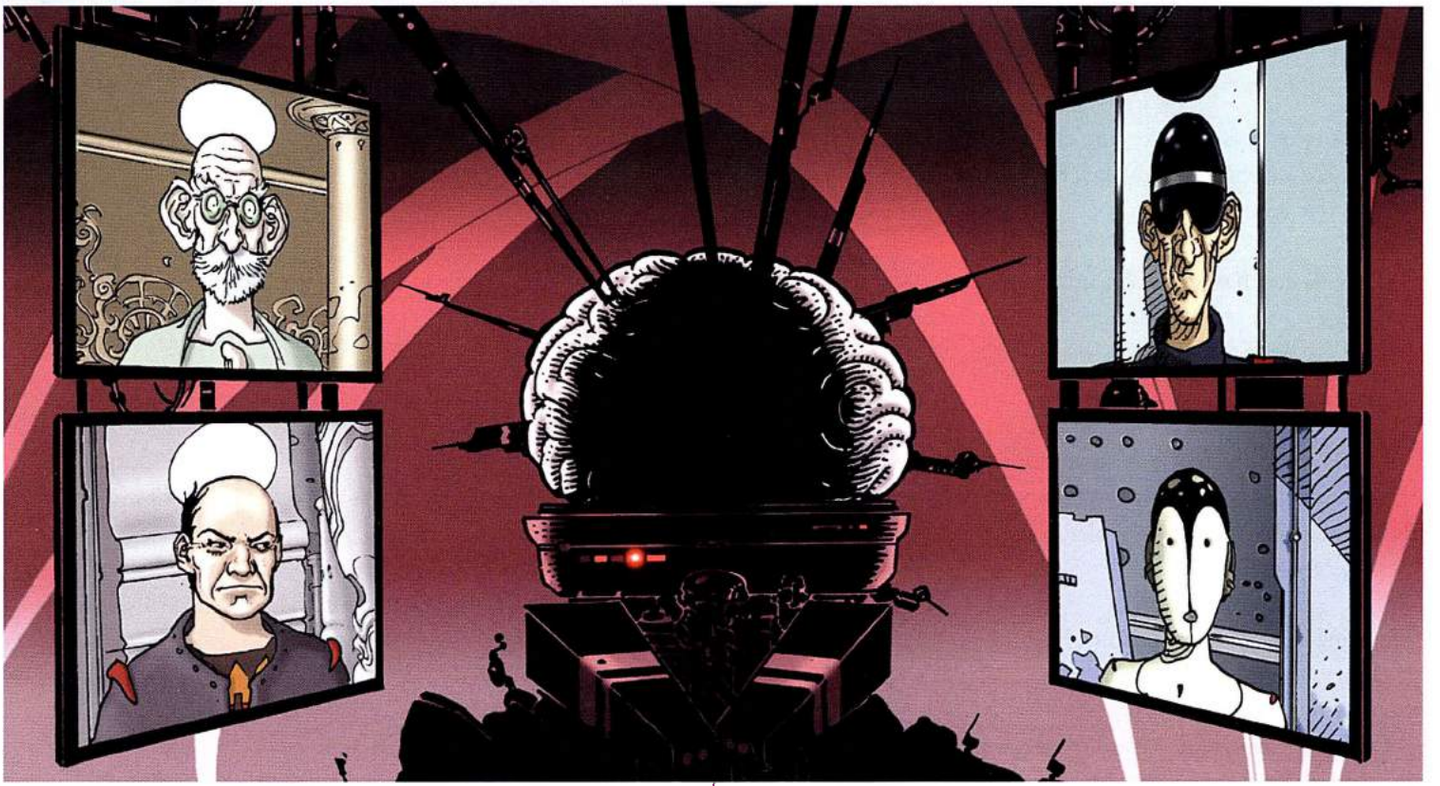
Don't Let the Rules Distract You from Telling A Good Story. Use only those rules you want to use. Ignore the ones that slow the game down. Instead, relax and trust that the players' interesting characters and the action you've planned for them will move the game along.

Run A Fast-Paced Game. The *Metabarons* universe is filled with action and excitement. Lone heroes spring into combat against all odds, and spaceships soar through asteroids blasting at each other. Look to the comics to see how the action rarely slows for more than a few panels before something new comes up.

Use Your Judgment. As gamemaster, you must use your own judgment to decide what is and isn't possible in the game. You must decide what's "reasonable" and true to the spirit of the *Metabarons* universe. You must ensure that no one abuses the game system to gain an unfair advantage, hog game time, or otherwise take over the action and dominate the game. Every game system has a few "loopholes" some players will try to exploit. It's your job to decide what's possible. It doesn't matter if the player argues that if she rolls well enough her character can con the Emperoress into abdicating and declaring herself the true Empress of the Human Empire. If you think that's taking advantage of the rules, your decision is what counts.

Interpret the Rules. No set of rules can simulate every situation. You may have to make up new rules to suit the needs of your game—create whatever rules you need to make your game fun and exciting for everyone. Sometimes you'll also have to "fudge" the game results to strike the right balance, make the game challenging, and push the storyline toward its climax. For example, it would make for a very short adventure if the characters kill off the main villain right away just because a player rolled exceptionally well. Instead of killing the villain, maybe he's injured but escapes—the players get a sense of accomplishment while you get to bring your villain back later for a dramatic conclusion. (And now he's going to have a grudge





against the characters!) Sometimes players devise a great plan, but roll poorly when their characters implement it. A character shouldn't die just because the player made a terrible roll—you can "fudge" the results, rewarding the player for his ingenuity and bravery at risking the character's life. Reward actions that propel the story forward, add to the excitement, and challenge both the character and his player. You may penalize characters for taking really stupid actions—every action has some consequence, good or bad—but don't let that disrupt the game. Use it to add some humor, or to increase challenges later in the game.

Be Fair and Impartial. In your role as judge, you're not trying to beat the players. You shouldn't fudge results just to frustrate them. Instead, interpret the rules to make the game more exciting. Play fair when you referee. If the players are defeated in an adventure, they want to at least feel like they had a fair shot. They shouldn't feel like they couldn't succeed no matter what choices they made. Treat the player characters and gamemaster characters equally, and keep the game fun. If you fudge a rule to benefit a gamemaster character, give a player character the same break in a similar situation.

Your Word is Final. If the players think you've made a bad decision, they'll certainly tell you. Listen to their arguments, but also use your own judgment. Once you've made a decision, it is final.

Game Options. Anything labeled as optional game rules are ones you can choose to use. They offer different ways of handling certain situations that you can use as you see fit. In some cases you as gamemaster should make the decision whether or not to use them; in other cases you might consult your players to make sure the optional rules you use are right for the tone of the game you're playing.

Recommended Reading. Assuming you've read over all the material in the "Player Section," you should read a few more chapters to complete your training in the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* rules. "The Rules," covers the basics—turns, how to roll actions, how to pick difficulty numbers, how characters can spend Character Points. "Combat & Injuries," explains how to run combat, such as when the characters decide to shoot it out against some surly mercenaries, savage pirates, or, worse yet, the Endoguard. Of course, sometimes characters get injured in battle—you'll find out how to handle that, too. "Movement & Chases," covers movement on foot, as well as chases and combat with various flying and land-based vehicles. "Space Travel & Combat," tells everything you'll need to know about ships, from how to acquire them to how to fly and fight with them. "Running Battles," explains how you can drop the characters into the middle of massive land and space battles—like the clash on Marmola between the Castakan stone-cutters and the traitorous Black Endoguard, or the space battle in which Othon von Salza led the Purple Endoguard against the pirates seeking to steal the Imperial embryo.

Storyteller

Each game you run is called an "adventure." Think of the players' characters as the stars of their own *Metabarons* comic book and you'll start to get the right idea. Adventures focus on the player characters and what happens to them: where they go, who they meet, and what they do.

Tell A Good Story. Every adventure is a story you perform with the players. Published adventures have all the details worked out —you just have to figure out what happens because of the player characters' actions. If you write your own adventures, you'll need an interesting plot and a good "hook" to get the characters involved. You have to figure out what kinds of obstacles the characters are going to face— do they have to infiltrate a pirate organization, fly important cargo through an asteroid field, or uncover the secret schemes of a crooked Merchants Guild official? Make sure your adventure is exciting. Your players want menacing villains, chases, puzzles, traps, and epic battles.

Make the Characters Important. Just as in "Scout for Hire," you must offer the players choices. Their decisions should matter. Present the players with situations, let them choose how their characters respond, and use the rules and the adventure to figure out

what happens as a result of their decisions. Because you're the gamemaster, you've read the entire adventure and you know what's really going on, so you get to decide how the adversaries and other characters respond to the player characters' actions (assuming the villains even know about them).

Create Perspective. The universe is a big place and there are always exciting and dramatic things going on there. Your games should suggest to the players that their characters are living in a civilization that spans the entire universe!

Constant Action. The game must maintain a fast pace with plenty of thrills to keep it interesting. While games shouldn't feature non-stop battles, you should always introduce something exciting to hold the players' attention.

Illusion of Free Will. People have many choices in their lives —you can visit different places, go over to a friend's house, open a business, change jobs, choose schools, whatever. The players must feel their characters have those same kinds of freedoms; they must feel that the *Metabarons* universe is as real as our own. If the players want their characters to go somewhere, you have to tell them what they find there— or come up with a good story reason why they can't get there.

> **Example:** The players decide they want to take off and head out to find the legendary fortress of Zaran Krleza at the edge of the universe. As gamemaster, you have no idea how to handle this sudden whim—and haven't had time to prepare a suitable adventure if you even wanted them to search for the fortress. Rather than just tell the players their characters can't go there, you try the following: "As you begin plotting a course to the universe's edge, your ship suddenly comes under attack by a mysterious and well-armed craft." After running some quick spaceship combat, the characters' vessel takes enough damage to force it down on an unexplored planet nearby, someplace where nearly anything can happen and you can run an impromptu adventure. This distracts the players in a credible way and gives them something interesting to do. Perhaps it will give you enough time before your next game to whip up an adventure to ultimately lead them to the fortress and accomplish their goals.

Improvisation. You've presented the situation and planned a great adventure —and then the players decide to do something completely unexpected. It's time to start making up new characters and scenes as you go. Maybe you can steer the players back into the main adventure —or maybe you'll end up creating an entirely new adventure off the top of your head. Don't panic; improvised games are often the most fun to play and run.

Recommended Reading. If you want more advice on this aspect of gamemastering, turn to "Running Adventures." You can also run the adventure in this book, "The Maganat's Daughter." "Designing Adventures" tells you how to create your own adventures.

Scene Setter

When running games, you should try making the players feel like they're in a *Metabarons* comic book story. Your games must capture the mood of a universe filled with brooding mercenaries, high technology, a corrupt Human Empire, numerous planets with strange creatures, competing factions, and other kinds of epic science fiction elements.

Use All Five Senses. Describe to the players what their characters see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Keep your descriptions interesting and animated so the players can picture what's happening to their characters and get excited about the game. Give the players plenty of details when it's important; when what's going on isn't essential, don't bog the game down with overly-detailed descriptions. Draw maps to help players get a sense of a location, especially where they stand in the greater scheme of things. Play exciting music during combat scenes. Show the players what their characters see by referring to illustrations in the *Metabarons* comic books and this game.

Be Consistent. Keep the universe consistent and rational. This is a very important part of getting the players to believe in any fictional world, including the *Metabarons* universe. If you tell the players that the pirate base consists of three buildings and a landing pad, those structures should still be there if they return. And if something does change, make sure there's a good explanation for it—maybe the pirates add a reinforced guard post while the characters are gone, or maybe a building disappears because it's been blown up in a mercenary attack.

Use Elements from the Comics. Fill your game adventures with elements like adversaries, creatures, spaceships, robots, vehicles, and locations from and inspired by the *Metabarons* comics. Let them bargain with crafty Merchants Guild representatives, foil the plans of surly pirates, and join the risky enterprises of mercenaries. Refer to familiar people and places from the *Metabarons* universe in your games. Your goal is to make the players feel like they're the heroes of their very

own *Metabarons* comic book. Don't be afraid to "borrow" plots and rework them to fit your game. Maybe the characters are hired to steal some powerful technology from a remote fortress, like the pirates try stealing Bari von Salza's genetically engineered horse. Or maybe the characters are hired to hunt down technology thieves. While this is generally a good technique for setting the atmosphere in *Metabarons*, be careful not to "overuse" elements from the comics. Don't always have the characters opposed by Endoguards, or working for the Troglosocialiks. Find a balance between familiar and new elements.

Exciting Settings. The exotic scenery helps make *Metabarons* special: deep endo-cities, wild-looking spacecraft, fanciful outfits and armor, unbelievable landscapes. Why set an adventure on a boring planet with terrain like earth's when you can drop the characters onto a geothermically unstable world filled with crumbling ground, geysers, boiling mud pits, and scalding pools? Go ahead and create new material for your *Metabarons* universe. Remember, the universe is a big place, and almost anything can happen. Create new robots, adversaries, planets, political factions, pirate and mercenary groups, and spaceships to liven up your game and help create new adventures. You still must make sure these newly created elements fit the tone of the *Metabarons* universe, but if you do your job well, your players will accept your creations as being just as real as the materials in the comics.

Memorable Characters. The players each play one character —you get to play everyone else, from the main villain and supporting cast to the extras and walk-on parts. This includes the adventure's primary adversary, his minions, thugs who happen to waylay the characters, pilots, business owners, people on the street, and creatures on strange planets. You play everyone who makes an appearance in your adventure. All of these other people are called "gamemaster characters" and it's up to you to act out their roles— speaking their lines in different voices, making them interesting, knowing their objectives and deciding what they do during the course of the adventure.

Recommended Reading. The chapters on "Running Adventures" and "Designing Adventures" give you plenty of advice on using these ideas in your game. The "Universe Section" has a lot more information on the setting elements from *Metabarons* that you can use in your games. "The Metabarons Universe" tells you about history and the state of the universe —and there are plenty of ideas for adventures hidden in there. "Gamemaster Characters" includes descriptions and game statistics for common adversaries, like Endoguards, as well as potential allies. There's also a lot of advice on how to create original characters for your own games. "Creatures" tells you how to use animals like eodactyls and koor beasts, with rules and hints on creating your own creatures as well. "Weapons & Technology" has descriptions of all kinds of weapons and some of the gear the player characters may want to use, plus a section on running robots in the game. "Vehicles" and "Spacecraft" cover various craft used to travel on land and through space. "Worlds" provides plenty of tips on how to create worlds and use them in your games.

Remember These Helpful Hints

Here are the some important things to remember when running a *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* adventure:

- **Make the players feel like they are in a *Metabarons* comic — use action, excitement, exotic settings, and fantastic technology to get the right "feel."**
- **This game is like an advanced version of "Let's Pretend." Play your villains. Describe the scenes. Ham it up and encourage the players to do the same.**
- ***Metabarons* is about exciting adventures, not rules. When the rules gets in the way, fall back on the central rule:**

"Pick a difficulty number. If the character's skill roll is higher or equal, he succeeds."

- **Roleplaying is cooperative.** You're not trying to beat the players. You're all working together to tell a fun story. Sometimes the heroes win —sometimes they lose— but having a great time matters most.
- **Be fair and impartial.** Treat both the player characters and gamemaster characters fairly. Sometimes that means the players will be outwitted by their opponents. The players won't mind if you fudge the rules, as long as you fudge fairly.
- **Your decision is final.** Be firm but fair. Just because the players want something, it doesn't mean they've earned it.
- **Think on your feet.** If the players go in an unexpected direction, improvise new situations to get the characters back on track without being unfairly manipulative!
- **You can't learn everything at once.** Concentrate on telling an exciting story and don't worry about the details.
- **Every gamemaster makes mistakes.** Admit it, and change your ruling or have a "do over" if you think it's necessary. Then get on with the game and have fun.

Being a gamemaster may seem like a lot of hard work, but it's really not that difficult. Once you've run a few adventures, you'll get used to it. Just like training for combat—no matter how hard you train, you're never quite battle-hardened until you have to dive into a real fight.

The most important thing is to have the right perspective on the game. Make sure the players feel like they're in their own Metabarons comic. Make sure they have fun. Everything else will fall into place. Stick to these basic ideas and you'll be okay.

For the next chapter, I'm sending you over to Wortrig, a worrisome mentrek who keeps the game rules stored on the microchips in his cranial bio-computer. Don't let him confuse you with all those rules. Remember, pay attention to those you feel work best for your game. If you're not having fun playing, then maybe you're spending too much time looking things up in this rulebook.

THE RULES

I'm here to provide you with all the rules you need to play the Metabarons Roleplaying Game. *As a defused mentrek, I keep all these various procedures and game mechanics stored in the memory chips of the cranial bio-computer implanted in my skull. I can access any rule at a moment's notice, including all its tables, options, and examples. You, on the other hand, just have this book, which, I'm afraid,*

will have to suffice as your main interface in referencing the game rules.

Knowing the rules is important in running a fair and consistent game. Nobody's right all the time, but it helps to have some general guidelines to tell you you're on the right track. The game rules do this for you. As a gamemaster, you're the final judge of how rules work, especially when determining whether characters succeed or fail at actions. You have a certain degree of discretion to interpret these rules… all with the greater goal of telling a fun story. First, you only have to use rules you feel like using. Why? Because it's your game. Run it the way you want to.

Next, if you don't like the rules here, go ahead and make up your own.

When you're running your game, you can choose which rules to follow strictly, which to overlook… and which to make up when you think they're needed. You can't instantly access the rules in a few micro-seconds like I can through my cranial bio-computer.

Referring back to the rulebook while you're playing can distract everyone from the story you're trying to tell. So read over this chapter carefully, but don't worry if you're not following the rules exactly when you play the game. As long as you're consistent in how you play the game, everyone will have a great time.
The rules are divided into three major sections. The first is "Rolling Actions." You already know that the players roll skill dice when they want their characters to try accomplishing a task... now you'll learn how to decide difficulty numbers so you know how well the players have to roll. You'll also find out how to decide what happens when a character succeeds or fails.
Section two covers "Scenes and Rounds." You use scenes when characters are doing "ordinary" things like meeting a potential employer in a bar and traveling by spaceship to a distant world. Use rounds when the action gets "intense," like when the characters get into a battle or go on a frantic chase through an asteroid belt.
The final section of this chapter covers "Character Points" and their use in the game.

Rolling Actions

Characters roll their skill dice (or their attribute dice if they haven't improved the skill) whenever they attempt an action and there's a risk of failure.

A player doesn't need to make a skill roll to open the average door, walk down the street, or say hello to a friend. A player makes a skill roll when his character tries shooting a pirate who's taken cover, flying a spaceship while evading fire from enemy craft, or cracking the security code sealing an entry hatch.

The Wild Die

Whenever a character makes a skill or attribute die roll, the player must choose one die of a different color to be the character's wild die. This die is not an extra one rolled, but one of the dice the character would normally roll for a skill. For instance, if Chris rolls the noble Lucardo's *archaic weapons* skill of 5D+2, he'd roll four dice of one color, and one die of a different color... his wild die.

Whenever the wild die rolls a 2, 3, 4, or 5, just add it to the die total normally.

> **Example:** Lucardo rolls his *archaic weapons* skill of 5D+2. His four normal dice roll a 1, 2, 5 and 6. His wild die (the different colored one) comes up as a 2. After adding the +2 from his die code, his total is 18.

When the wild die rolls a 6, add it to the die total. Roll it again and add the new number to the total, too.

If the new roll is a 6, add it to the total and roll the die again. You keep rolling as long as you get sixes. If you're lucky, it's possible to get really high totals if your wild die rolls several sixes in a row.

> **Example:** Lucardo rolls his *archaic weapons* skill again. His normal dice come up as a 2, 4, 5 and 2, while his wild die comes up as a 6. He gets to roll the wild die again —and gets another 6! He rolls the die again, and gets a 3. After adding his +2 from the die code, his total is 30!

For the first roll only, if the wild die rolls a 1, the player must tell the gamemaster. This is bad. The gamemaster can choose one of three options:

- Add up the dice normally.
- Subtract the one and also subtract the highest other die.
- Total the skill dice normally to see if the skill roll succeeded, but a "complication" occurs. (See "Complications" below.)

> **Example:** Once again Lucardo rolls his *archaic weapons* skill of 5D+2. He rolls a 3, 4, 2, 5, on his normal dice and a 1 on his wild die. The gamemaster decides to not count the 1 and the highest other die, which is a five. That leaves him with a 3, 4, and 2, which, with his die code's +2 gives him a skill total of 11.

The wild die rule counts for all die rolls in the game, including skill and attribute checks, weapon damage, and rolling *Perception* for initiative.

If the player is rolling two different types of dice at once —for example, rolling the character's *piloting* skill and the spaceship's maneuverability die code— only one die counts as the wild die.

Why the Wild Die? The wild die represents the often twisted nature of fate and luck. Sometimes characters are very, very lucky... and other times they just can't seem to do anything right!

For example, Othon von Salza is an incredible warrior, felling many Endoguards during the Battle of Marmola. But he later falls prey to a single pirate he fails to fully dispatch, one who gets a final shot and disintegrates Othon's groin.

Let's face it, sometimes the universe can be really kind or very unfair—the wild die helps simulate the chance for such injustice to infect every die roll.

Complications

Complications make things a bit more interesting, often by compiling the challenges characters must overcome. When a complication occurs, something directly related to the die roll has gone wrong —sometimes horribly so— and now the characters must deal with the situation.

You should use complications to help tell a more suspenseful and exciting story. Complications should only happen a few times during an adventure —most often at its dramatic conclusion— and should excite the players and draw them further in the game. When you use a complication, the players should be asking themselves, "What do we do now?"

Complications should be fair and balanced: they may put

characters in danger, but they should always offer the possibility of escape. They should challenge the characters, forcing them to be clever and courageous in dealing with the situation.

You can also use complications to balance powerful characters. If one character possesses an unusually lethal weapon that dominates the battlefield —perhaps something like a sonic bazooka— the weapon may malfunction if a complication is rolled.

Complications should directly relate to what the character was doing —if a character gets a complication while repairing a robot, perhaps the robot's components short out and start a fire, or a malfunction makes the robot more difficult to fix.

> **Example:** Othon and his family are cutting a massive block of marble on Marmola. Othon cuts away with his hyperlaser a little out of synch with everyone else —essentially rolling a 1 on the wild die for his skill at cutting the marble as part of a team— causing the immense stone to collapse on top of him. He barely survives, rescued only by revealing his family's secret of epyphite to outsiders.

Advancing the Story

Othon's mistake threatens his life... but by resolving it and saving his life, his family introduces a new challenge into their lives: the revelation of the family secret. Without this plot twist, the Castakan stonecutters would have continued living in peace, and the story of the *Metabarons* would be rather dull compared to what it became through one complication.

Use complications the same way in the game, challenging characters with greater risks and obstacles to overcome, forcing their characters to face new threats, and sending their lives on different paths than they expected.

Creating Complications

Gamemasters should take a few minutes to devise complications for key scenes in adventures. Here are a few possibilities:

- One of the characters kills a mercenary. Unfortunately, when the soldier hits the ground, it triggers a grenade on his belt. The characters have only a few seconds to act before the grenade explodes...
- A character is conducting a routine sensor scan of a planet and either picks up something completely erroneous or misses something absolutely vital. In the first instance, the character may believe that the planet harbors a small pirate supply base, while in the latter, the character may completely overlook the base and land on the planet, thinking nobody inhabits the surface.
- While sneaking up on an adversary, the character's hand vid-comm beeps with an incoming call, spoiling the surprise attack.
- A weapon malfunctions, jams, or runs out of ammunition.
- A character slips and falls while moving, perhaps spraining an ankle. The character cannot run until the sprain heals...this can be even worse if the character is caught out in the open during the middle of a battle.
- While haggling over the price of a product with a merchant, someone else interrupts and offers the merchant's original asking price. This is especially useful if the item is somehow necessary to continue the adventure, like parts to repair a damaged spacecraft, information containing a vital clue, or some gear the characters need for a particular mission.
- The characters are following someone tagged with a tracking beacon when the beacon is discovered, dropped, or stolen. Now the characters are off on a wild goose chase while the target escapes.
- The vehicle the character is piloting runs out of fuel, its controls freeze up, or perhaps a computer glitch locks the weapons on autofire.
- A computer system the characters are hacking suddenly freezes up for a second. Is it just a glitch or did they just trigger the computer's internal security protocols?

Difficulty Numbers and Opposed Rolls

When the characters make a roll, what are they rolling against? They're rolling against a set difficulty number or they're rolling

directly against another character to see who does better (an "opposed roll").

Use this central rule whenever you're not sure how to handle a situation:

Pick a difficulty number. If the character's skill roll is equal or higher, he succeeds.

Difficulty Numbers

You should choose a difficulty number when the characters are undertaking a task and not rolling directly against someone else. For example, you'd pick a difficulty number when a character tries to repair a vehicle, run across an unstable catwalk, or bash down a stuck door.

You first must decide how hard the task is: Very Easy, Easy, Moderate, Difficult, Very Difficult, or Heroic. Then pick a number from the difficulty's range. If the character's roll is equal to or higher than the difficulty number, the character succeeds; if the roll is lower, the character fails.

Difficulty	Difficulty Numbers
Very Easy	1–5
Easy	6–10
Moderate	11–15
Difficult	16–20
Very Difficult	21–30
Heroic	31+

Heroic difficulty numbers may be any number above 30. Some skills call for a difficulty of Heroic+10 (the difficulty number falls in the range of 40-49), Heroic+20 (50-59) or more. Difficulty numbers can go as high as 100... or even higher!

In rules and adventure text, suggested difficulty levels are listed with the highest difficulty number for that range, like "Easy (10)" or "Difficult (20)." This notation is simply meant to remind you of the difficulty number at a glance. Feel free to set the actual difficulty number within that difficulty's range if you want.

Use these general guidelines for choosing a difficulty:

Very Easy (5): Almost anyone should be able to accomplish this task most of the time. **Examples:** *Hitting a target with a defense pistol at point-blank range. Driving a recon buggy across clear terrain or a good road. Knowing that the Golden Planet is the capital of the Human Empire, and that the Emperoress is its ruler.*

Easy (10): Most characters should be able to do this most of the time. While these tasks aren't too difficult, there's still a chance of failure. **Examples:** *Hitting a target with a defense pistol at short range. Driving a recon buggy off the road over somewhat rough terrain. Knowing the population of the Golden Planet, and what proportion works for the Imperial government.*

Moderate (15): This kind of task requires skill, effort, and concentration. The average character has a good chance to fail at this type of task, but most highly-skilled characters can succeed at something this hard. **Examples:** *Hitting a target with a defense pistol at medium range. Keeping control when jumping a recon buggy over an infantry trench (or other obstacle). Knowing how to reach the most public accessible areas close to the Golden Palace.*

Difficult (20): Difficult tasks are hard and the average characters can only succeed at them once in a while. These tasks take lots of skill... and luck doesn't hurt either. **Examples:** *Hitting a target with a defense pistol at long-range. Driving a recon buggy at high speed around moving troopers and other obstacles. Knowing a safe place on the Golden Planet where your character can hide from authorities.*

Very Difficult (30): Even professionals must expend a lot of effort to succeed at Very Difficult tasks. Only the most talented individuals in the universe succeed at these tasks with any regularity. **Examples:** *Hitting someone with a defense pistol at long range who is mostly hidden behind cover. Safely driving a recon buggy at high speed through a traffic jam by taking to walkways and making "insane" maneuvers. Knowing which bureaucrats on the Golden Planet can get you into the most minor of Golden Palace back offices.*

Heroic (31+): Something that's almost impossible and calls for extraordinary effort and luck. Even the greatest of heroes have a tough time accomplishing Heroic tasks. **Examples:** *Defeating a Cetacyborg single-handedly with a good ship and a handful of triple-H missiles. Facing hordes of Shabda-Oud witches, destroying their hideous god, and living to tell about it.*

Gamemasters can choose any number in the difficulty's range. The higher the difficulty number, the harder the task.

> **Example:** Martius the explorer is stranded on an uninhabited planet. He wants to forage in the nearby woods for food. The gamemaster decides this requires a Moderate *survival* roll. A Moderate task can have a difficulty number ranging from 11 to 15 —since the forest is a natural haven for wildlife (and therefore food), the gamemaster chooses a difficulty number of 12.
>
> Somewhat later Martius sees a storm approaching and decides to build a shelter from materials he finds in the woods. The gamemaster decides that constructing such a shelter requires another Moderate *survival* roll, but since Martius is working to complete it before the storm hits, the gamemaster chooses a difficulty number of 15 to reflect the limited time Martius has before it starts raining.

When choosing difficulties and difficulty numbers, you can check the skill's description for guidelines in Chapter Two, "Attributes & Skills."

Opposed Rolls

When one character acts against another, both roll their skills: the higher roll succeeds. This is called an "opposed roll." If the two rolls tie, the first roller —the person who initiated the action— succeeds.

Here are some examples showing when you'd use opposed rolls to resolve an action:

- A character shooting an opponent rolls the *firearms* skill; the target may *dodge* out of the way. If the *firearms* roll is equal to or higher than the *dodge*, the attack hits; if the *firearms* roll is lower than the *dodge*, the attack misses. (See Chapter Seven, "Combat & Injuries," for more information.)
- Two characters are dueling with their ancestral melee weapons, making attacks while trying to defend against the other's attacks. Each rolls his *archaic weapons* skill to represent lunges and parries, with the higher roll successfully scoring a hit on the other.
- Two characters playing a game of chance make opposed *gaming* rolls; the higher roll wins.
- A supplier and a player character are haggling over the cost of a crate of lupium. While you could just pick a difficulty, you decide to use opposed rolls: both characters roll their *bargain* skill codes. If the supplier rolls higher, the asking price will be a lot higher.

Modifiers

Sometimes characters rely on advantages (or are subject to disadvantages) based on factors other than their skill level. If one character has a clear advantage over another, you may want to assign a modifier. Don't use modifiers when one character simply has a better skill; use them in unusual situations where skill is not the only determining factor.

Add the modifier to the character with the advantage.

Modifier	Guidelines
+1–5	Character has only a slight advantage.
+6–10	Character has a good advantage.
+11–15	Character has a decisive advantage.
+16+	Character has an overpowering advantage.

Here are some situations where gamemasters might use modifiers:

- The characters are in aircars racing each other through a narrow canyon. If one character knows the terrain and has any past experience racing (more than the other character), he might get a +5 bonus modifier to his *piloting* roll.
- The player characters are trying to sneak out of a prison while avoiding detection. The warden knows the facility layout and realizes the characters have somehow left their cell. The warden might receive a +10 bonus to his *search* roll to figure out what route the characters will use to escape.
- Two characters are dueling with their ancestral weapons. One has backed the other up against a cliff wall. Since his opponent has limited space in which to maneuver, one character gets a +5 bonus to his *archaic weapons* roll.

> ***Note:*** *You don't need to use modifiers with difficulty numbers... but you can apply them to justify making difficulty numbers as low or high is as needed to make the game challenging for the players. Think of modifiers as a way of tailoring your game to best suit your players.*

Should Players Know Difficulty Numbers?

Should the players know the difficulty number or opposed skill roll they're rolling against? Only if you want them to.

You can tell their players the difficulties they are rolling against, but sometimes it's a lot more exciting to describe the situation in general terms and keep the players guessing —"I don't know, this looks pretty hard," or "It'll take a few minutes, but it looks pretty simple."

If the situation is really tense or a player needs a little help, you may want to drop a hint. For example, if a player doesn't quite beat the difficulty, you may want to say something like, "Are you done... or do you want to spend a Character Point?"

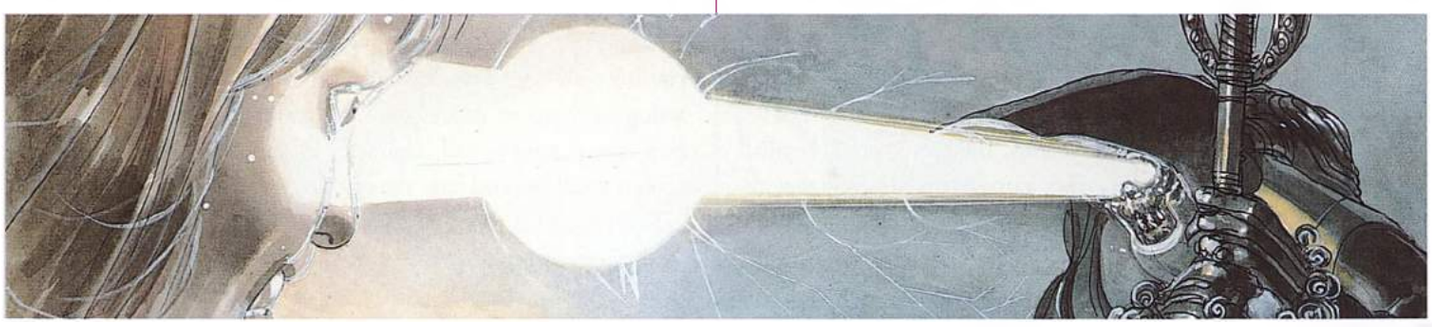
Scenes and Rounds

"Game time" represents how time passes for your characters while taking actions in the game adventure. "Real time" is the time you as the player spend while you're sitting around the table with your friends playing the game. For instance, if Jeff's explorer character Martius has a fight with some strange creature, that action takes only a few seconds of game time. In real time, however, it might take Jeff and the gamemaster three or four minutes to figure which skills to use, roll all the dice, and resolve the action.

The *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* keeps track of game time in two increments: scenes and rounds.

Scenes

Gamemasters use scenes whenever blow-by-blow action doesn't really matter, when players don't have to worry what their characters are doing from one second to the next. The gamemaster simply describes the situation and the setting, the players say what they want their characters to do (and make skill rolls if necessary),



and the gamemaster tells them what happens and how long it takes.

A scene can cover a couple of minutes, a few hours, or even days or weeks of time.

A scene could show a conversation between two characters. Another scene might cover an hour, such as the scenes showing the Emperor and Empress arriving on Marmola with their escort of Purple Endoguard lancets.

When describing scenes, you can just state how much time has passed, let the players tell you what their characters are doing and get on with the story.

Example: Jeff is playing his quiet explorer Martius in an adventure run by Pete, who's the gamemaster.

Pete: *"You've landed on planet AA-297, it's astrographical designation. From your survey ship, you spot a rocky outcrop looming above the plains on the horizon."*

Jeff: *"Well, I guess I'll check my gear, then set off toward the rocks. No use in wasting fuel by flying there."*

Pete: *"It takes you about half an hour to walk through the low grass and dust."*

Jeff: *"Do I notice anything out of the ordinary as I approach the rocks?"*

Pete: *"Make a Perception roll."*

Jeff: *(Rolling some dice) "I got a 10. Do I see anything?"*

Pete: *"As you walk toward the rocks, you notice there might be some kind of nest in one of the higher crags."*

Jeff: *"While I'm walking I watch the nest to see if I notice any movement."*

Pete: *"By the time you reach the outcropping, you haven't seen anything move."*

Jeff: *"I guess climbing up there might take a few minutes..."*

Rounds

Gamemasters slow time down to individual rounds when every second counts. Each round represents five seconds of game time —give or take a few seconds for dramatic license.

You usually use rounds in combat, but you can also use them any time there's an exciting conflict or contest where timing counts. You may use rounds for the climactic elements of an intense chase or when the characters are trying to beat a deadline, like attempting to defuse a bomb before it explodes.

Rounds are also used when it's important to know who acts first —such as when a character wants to grab for a dropped weapon before someone else can.

Each round has two phases:

1. Initiative
2. Roll Actions

When everyone finishes both phases, the next round begins. Rounds continue as long as the gamemaster thinks they're necessary —usually until the end of a battle. Once you finish the round-by-round action, go back to using scenes.

1. Initiative

Decide how many sides are participating in the action or skirmish —normally there are just two: the player characters and whoever they're fighting. Be aware, however, that sometimes there are three or more sides —for example, you may run a battle where the player characters, Endoguards, and a band of pirates are all shooting at each other.

The character with the highest *Perception* on each side rolls that attribute. The character who gets the highest roll decides whether his side acts first or last in that round. Sometimes it makes sense to act last —by letting the other side go first, you can react to their actions. If anyone rolls a tie, have them re-roll their *Perception*.

Rolling for initiative doesn't count as an action. (See "Multiple Actions" below.) A character may not spend Character Points or Amarax Points to improve the initiative roll, but penalties for being wounded count (the chapter on "Combat & Injuries" explains how wounds affect characters).

Example: The player characters leave the mercenary bar and head through the dingy streets of Arcol 271's sub-level 26. As gamemaster, Pete describes the scene. "You continue until you reach a small enclosed plaza when you notice some shadowy figures behind you. A moment later five angry Razorheads —those bald, tattooed mercenaries from the bar— emerge into the light, each pointing a suprapistol at you. 'We don't like fancy folks like you interfering in our business,' the leader says. 'We do nasty things to strangers poking their noses into our business.'"

Jeff's character Martius only has a 3D *Perception*. Both Chris's character Lucardo and Beth's private investigator Larryn have 4D *Perception*. They decide Beth should roll for initiative since she's been rolling lucky all night. She rolls for initiative and gets a 16.

The gamemaster character with the highest *Perception* is the Razorhead sergeant, with a *Perception* of 3D+2. Pete rolls the dice and gets an 11.

Since the players rolled higher, they decide amongst themselves whether they go first or last. In this case, they choose to act first.

2. Roll Actions

The first side acts now. The character with the highest *Perception* goes first. The player tells you how many actions he's making this round and you assign the multiple actions penalty. Then the player rolls his character's first action.

Acting in *Perception* order (highest to lowest), every player tells you how many actions his character is making and rolls his first action. (If the gamemaster characters go first, you just have to know how many actions each character is taking, assign the multiple actions penalties, and have the characters take their first actions.)

This process is repeated for each character on the second side. (If there are three or more sides, these characters now take their first actions.)

After every character has taken his/her first action, the characters on the first side take their second actions. (Again, go in *Perception* order, highest to lowest.) Characters without second actions are skipped. Then the characters on the second side roll their second actions... and so on, until everyone's completed all the actions they initially declared.

Each action occurs as it is rolled —a split-second after any actions that have already been rolled and a split-second before the next action that's rolled.

Characters can't "skip" actions and wait to go later in the round.

After everyone has completed all actions, the next round begins or you can switch back to "scenes."

Character Points and Amarax Points. Players can declare that they're using an Amarax Point or Character Points at any time, but they can't use both in the same round. Remember, someone using an Amarax Point must say so before making any rolls. Players can decide to use Character Points after they've made a roll they feel needs an extra boost.

Multiple Actions. Characters can try to do several things in a round —but if your character tries to do too many things, he's likely to fail at most of them...

- If a character is only making one action, roll the skill's full die code.
- If a character is taking two actions in a round, he loses –1D to all rolls that round.
- If a character is making three actions, he loses –2D to all rolls.
- If a character is attempting four actions, he loses –3D to all rolls... and so forth.

Example: Pete just described the scene to the players. Everyone's made their initiative roll, and the players, having won it, decide to go first.

Pete: *"The Razorheads have moved up the street a bit, suprapistols at the ready. What are you going to do? We'll start with either Chris or Beth, since your characters both have the highest Perception at 4D..."*

Beth: *"You can go first, Chris."*

Chris: *"Thanks. Lucardo draws his defense pistol and takes a shot, still holding his ground."*

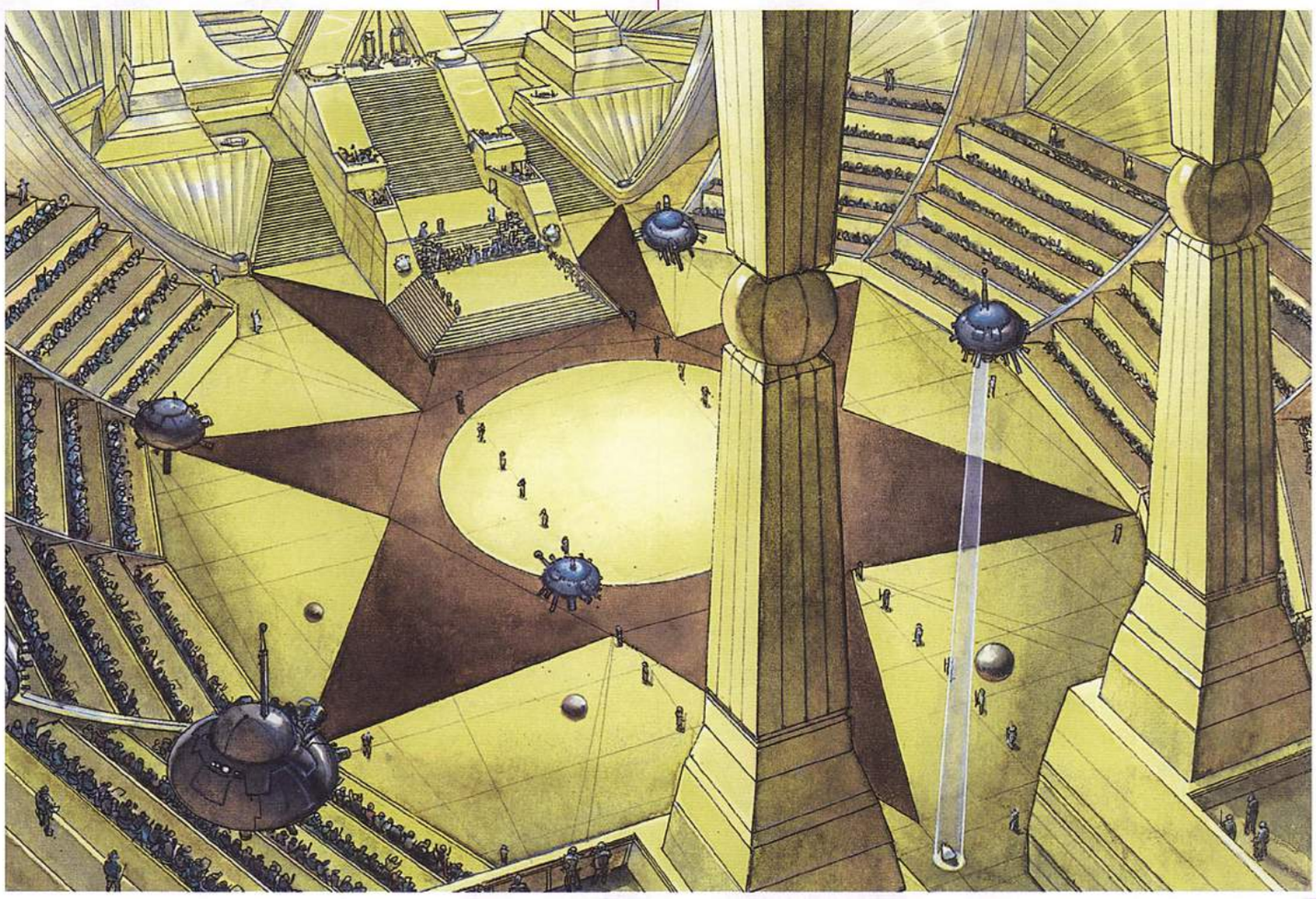
Pete: *"Okay, Chris, make your firearms roll."*

Chris: *"I've got no extra dice in firearms, so I roll my Agility of 3D+2." (Rolling dice) "I rolled 19."*

Pete: *"The Razorheads are about 8 meters away, so your shot is about a Moderate (15) difficulty. On a 19 you definitely hit one of the mercenaries. Roll your defense pistol's damage."*

Chris: *(Checking his character sheet) "I roll 3D for the pistol's damage... I got a 10."*

Pete: *(Rolling the Razorhead's Strength to resist damage and getting a 14.) "Well you hit one Razorhead, tearing out some of the flesh near his shoulder, but he doesn't look too badly hurt... in fact, he looks much angrier. Now, Beth, what's Larryn going to do?"*



Beth: "I'm going to whip out my Viper pistol, shoot one of the Razorheads, then try to dodge for some cover."

Pete: "There's an alley nearby that'll do nicely, I think. But first you take your shot. Since you're attempting two actions, both have a –1D penalty."

Beth: "Hmmm, that means I roll both my firearms and dodge at only 3D instead of 4D. Should I roll both now?"

Pete: "Just make the firearms roll now. We'll wait to resolve your dodge until the Razorheads attack."

Beth: (Rolling dice) "I got a 15 for my firearms skill."

Pete: "You hit one of the Razorheads, too. Let's see how badly you wound him."

Beth: (Rolling more dice) "I got an 11 for my Viper's 4D damage."

Pete: (Rolling the Razorhead's Strength to resist damage and getting a 13.) "You wing another Razorhead, but barely stun him. Sorry, but these mercenaries are tough. What's Martius going to do, Jeff?"

Jeff: "I'm diving for cover." (Rolling dice) "I got a 15 for my dodge roll."

Pete: "Since you're only dodging this round, the Razorheads need to roll really high to hit you. Now the mercenaries get their chance to take shots at you. There are five left, though two are stunned and have small penalties to their rolls."

Chris: "Um, maybe I should dodge..."

Pete: "Okay, we'll get to your dodge and Larryn's dodge in a moment..."

Reaction Skills. Characters can react to attacks by trying to get out of the way: the most common reaction skills are *dodge*, *melee combat*, and *brawling*, though you can also use *martial arts* and *archaic weapons*.

A character can wait until he's attacked to use a reaction skill, or he can announce it as part of his actions for the round. In the example above, Beth expects Larryn will *fire* and then *dodge*, while Chris only thinks of dodging once he realizes he's facing five angry, well-armed Razorheads. The character can use a reaction skill in place of any remaining actions he's declared for this round. The reaction can also count as an extra action, though this incurs a higher multiple action penalty for the rest of the round.

Once characters roll their reaction skill, the result becomes the new difficulty number opponents must beat to hit the character with an attack, even if the original difficulty number was higher —it's entirely possible in the confusion of combat to dive into danger's path. This new difficulty number applies for the rest of the current round.

Reaction skills are only used in combat. See the chapter on "Combat & Injuries" for complete details.

Example: The characters have all taken their initial actions —now it's the Razorheads' turn to attack. Before they do, Chris and Beth decided their characters are going to use their reaction skill of dodge. They must roll this skill first so Pete has a new difficulty number to see if the Razorheads shoot them.

Pete: (To Chris and Beth) "Since this dodge is both your characters' second action, you each roll it at –1D."

Beth: "Larryn makes her roll at 3D." (Rolling dice) "I got a 15!"

Chris: "Ew. At –1D, Lucardo's dodge becomes 2D+2." (Rolling dice) "How good is a 12?"

Pete: "We'll soon see. Two mercenaries shoot at Larryn, two at Lucardo, and one at Martius, just for good measure." (He rolls 5D for the Razorheads' firearms skill, keeping track who's shooting who, and which of the two mercs have a –1D penalty for firing while stunned. He rolls 14, 15, 26, 12, and 21.) "Okay, the one shooting at Martius rolls 21, but even that's not high enough to hit him when he's spending the entire round dodging. The two firing at Larryn fail to beat the 15 she rolled for her dodge, so they miss; although one comes awfully close. One Razorhead shooting Lucardo just misses with a 12, but the other one definitely hits, his 26 beating Lucardo's dodge roll of 12."

Chris: "Ow. What happens now?"

Pete: "We'll see how badly damaged you are..."

Gamemaster Tips

While the rules for rounds are fairly specific, they're intended to make the game more fun. You can use the following tips and game options to help make all this work more smoothly. You may want to use some of them all of the time; others you may want to use only once in a while; you may never want to use the rest —the choice is up to you.

Speeding Play

You'll probably want to seat players in their characters' *Perception* order so you can simply go around the table in order each round.

You may sometimes want to have characters act in reverse order (let the character with the lowest *Perception* go first) so the same players aren't going last all the time.

Don't let a player hesitate when it's time to decide what to do. If the player is dragging his heels, count out loud to three —if you get to three and the player hasn't decided what to do, the character hesitated and can't act that round. Go straight to the next character. Don't be too strict with new players: give them a chance to get used to the game. It's also bad form to allow a player's character to be killed after he or she was skipped...

Roleplay It Out

It's often a good idea to use a combination of roleplaying and die rolls to figure out what happens.

If a player comes up with a brilliant plan and explains it in character, that should count for a lot more than a bad die roll.

On the other hand, if a character has a high skill level but the player isn't very good at getting into character, the die rolls should play a larger part in determining whether the character succeeds (as long as the player is making an honest effort).

You might reward players' ingenuity and intelligent roleplaying with bonus modifiers. Conversely, if the players insist on doing something that isn't too smart, the gamemaster

characters should get a hefty bonus modifier to reflect the players' poor decisions.

Interpreting Rolls

You can use the die rolls as an indication of how well (or poorly) a character did. Don't get bogged down in detail; use these rough guidelines.

If a roll beats the difficulty by only a few points —less than five— the character may have only barely succeeded. If a roll beats the difficulty by 15 or more points, the character may have made a spectacular success. You might even consider adding an extra die or two to any damage they inflict.

Likewise, if a roll misses the difficulty number by 1–5 points, the character may have just barely failed. When a roll fails by 15 or more points, the character has failed spectacularly, possibly triggering a few other problems along the way, similar to a complication.

Free Actions

Free actions are anything a character can automatically perform except under the most extreme conditions. They're extremely simple actions that don't require a skill roll or much effort; if something requires significant concentration, it's not a free action.

Use these examples of free actions as guidelines:

- Rolling *Perception* to determine initiative.
- Shouting a sentence or two to someone across a corridor.
- Taking a quick look around a room —at the gamemaster's discretion, characters may be allowed to make search or *Perception* rolls to see if they spot something unusual or hidden.
- Grabbing a nearby item. You might consider this action as pretty difficult in the middle of a battle —in that case, don't count it as a free action.
- Walking very slowly in Moderate, Easy or Very Easy terrain. This is "cautious movement" and is explained in the chapter on "Movement & Chases."
- Making a *Strength* roll to resist damage in combat. A character always rolls his or her full *Strength* to resist damage (even if wounded), although diseases and other circumstances may reduce a character's *Strength* dice.

Non-Roll Actions

Characters often attempt actions that don't require a skill roll but are complicated enough to count as an action —reducing the character's die codes for all other skill and attribute rolls that round.

Here are some examples of non-roll actions:

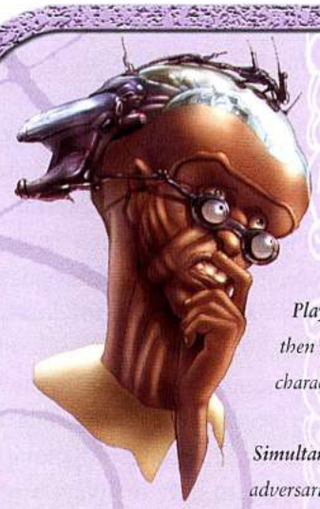
- Reloading a weapon.
- Getting very basic information out of a computer or io board.
- Piloting a vehicle very slowly in Moderate, Easy or Very Easy terrain. This is "cautious movement" and is explained in the chapter on "Movement & Chases."
- Anything requiring a lot of concentration but doesn't require a skill roll.

How Long Does it Take?

Firing a pistol takes only a split-second, but programming a robot or repairing spacecraft can take hours... sometimes days. So how do you determine how long it takes to do something?

Each skill description lists a "time taken" (in the "Attributes & Skills" chapter). Anything listed as "one round" can be completed in a round —you can use some skills, like *firearms*, several times in a round.

Some skills may only take a round, but require such concentration that the character can do nothing else in the round —*first aid*, *computer interface/repair* or *piloting* are good



Combat Initiative Options

What, are all these rules on rolling initiative, who goes first and when, and taking turns confusing you? I understand. I can figure all this out in 2.5 microseconds, but it can seem pretty complex if you don't have your own cranial bio-computer...

Here are two options you might find easier to use in your game. Remember to discuss them with your players first so they know how you're running combat.

Players Advantage: *Give the player characters the advantage. Allow them to roll and resolve all their actions first in the round, then you make all the rolls for the opposition. You can allow enemies to go first only if they somehow manage to surprise the characters. This is a good option to use if this is your first time as gamemaster, or if you're new to roleplaying games.*

Simultaneous Combat: *Allow the characters to declare their actions, while at the same time you figure in your head what the adversaries are going to do. Ask each character to make their skill rolls while you make all the rolls for the opposition. Resolve actions simultaneously—so if someone shoots and dodges, their target, even if hit, has a slim chance of snapping off a shot and hitting them. While this might seem more confusing (and you might feel you really do need a bio-computer implant to keep track of all this), it makes for a much more suspenseful game, and gives you a bit more freedom in fudging the rules to tell an exciting story.*

examples. A character could try to do more than just this action, but it would be extremely difficult and you should adjust the tasks' difficulty numbers accordingly.

Several skills list a range of times, such as "one round to five minutes" or "one round to two hours." You must estimate how long it takes to complete the task.

Rely on your "best guess." For example, it may only take a minute or two to fix a busted power feed assembly in a spaceship's propulsion unit, but it could take days to completely replace the engine. As a general rule, a simple, straightforward task probably won't take that long, but a really complicated repair job requires a lot of time. Just make sure that if the characters encounter a similar situation in the future, it takes a similar amount of time.

Multiple-Roll Tasks

Sometimes you may decide to resolve certain tasks with several die rolls. Each roll covers a different aspect of the task and may represent minutes, hours, or even days of work. Use your discretion in determining how long each task takes.

Sometimes a task is too difficult for the characters; you may want to break it down into several smaller, easier tasks. The players will have a better chance of succeeding, but the job takes a lot more time.

> **Example:** Jeff's character Martius is trying to repair a damaged engine his survey ship suffered during a rough landing. Pete the gamemaster decides this repair job requires several rolls:

- A Moderate (15) *flight systems repair* roll to realign the ignition chamber. This takes one hour.
- An Easy (10) *flight systems repair* roll to calibrate the fuel lines and command wiring to the ignition chamber. This takes about 15 minutes.
- Martius notices one of the fuel coupling gaskets is busted, and he doesn't have the exact part, so he rummages through his ship and finds a component that's close enough. He must make a Moderate (15) *flight systems repair* roll to modify, install, and properly test it. This takes two hours.

Preparing

A character willing to spend twice as much time to complete a task receives a +1D bonus for the die roll. The character can do nothing else during this time.

Use your judgment when deciding whether "preparing" can help a particular task; if in doubt, ask the player to justify the preparation bonus.

Characters spend an extra round aiming to improve their chances of hitting an unsuspecting target with their *firearms* skill. You can also apply this rule to many long-term technical tasks, such as repairing a robot or spaceship —the character could be taking extra care or "studying" technical manuals to make sure the task is done properly.

Of course, preparing doesn't make sense for many tasks. In most cases you should not allow characters to prepare for *dodges*, parries, or *piloting* rolls. Characters probably won't be able to prepare for skills like *survival*, *hide*, *stamina* or *swimming*, but there may be circumstances when they can justify the bonus.

> **Example:** Martius is fixing his survey craft's damaged propulsion system using his *flight systems repair* skill of 3D. The repair would normally take two hours. If Martius were willing to spend four hours working on the engines, doing nothing else, he gets a +1D bonus and rolls 4D.

Rushing

At your discretion, characters can try to "rush" an action that takes two rounds or longer. They cannot rush actions that take only one round.

A rushing character is trying to do the task in half the time, so the player rolls only half the character's skill (rounding up to the nearest full "D").

You make the final decision whether players can rush a task. With some tasks —like fixing spacecraft in a hurry— it's reasonable to say a character could rush, especially if the character is racing against a deadline. In other cases, rushing doesn't make much sense. If in doubt, ask the player to justify how the task could be rushed.

> **Example:** Martius is trying to rush those repairs on his survey ship's drive system. He has a *flight systems repair* skill of 3D. He's trying to accomplish a Moderate (15) task in one hour instead of two. Martius can try making the repairs in one hour, but he only rolls 2D for his flight systems repair skill instead of 3D (he can't really roll 1.5 dice, since pips represent "thirds" of a die, so he just rolls 2D).

Alternate Between Scenes and Rounds

You'll want to use a good mix of scenes and rounds to keep the game tense and challenging. For example, what if the characters have 10 minutes to race to a landing hangar before the space station's reactor explodes? While this could certainly make for a great conclusion to an adventure, it would take 120 rounds if you played out every round. That's a good way to deaden the excitement of your grand finale.

Instead, use a combination of scenes and rounds to move the action along. The scenes describe the characters racing down passageways and up stairwells. Tell the players how long these actions take —and you might want to have the players roll the relevant skill (in this case *running*) to see if something unusual happens. A character who rolls poorly may have tripped over something, slowing the entire group down. A character who rolls really poorly or gets a complication may have twisted his ankle in a fall or gotten separated from the group and is now lost. All

this takes time, increasing the suspense without breaking everything down into individual rounds.

After establishing the tension and the basic action, you can use "events" —run in a round-by-round situation— to highlight the most important moments. Here are a couple of examples:

- The characters must pass through a hatch leading to the main passage to their hangar. When they get there, the hatch is locked. Maybe the characters need to make a few *security* or *Technical* rolls to open it; if they fail, they're going to be cutting their rescue close... perhaps too close.
- Once through the hatch, the characters scamper down a narrow access tunnel. A sudden explosion sends a ball of fire racing up the tunnel! The characters must scramble to find a quick way out (a *running* skill roll), duck down a side passage, or bust through a ventilation grate (a *Strength* roll)... before the fireball consumes the lift and anything else in its way.
- After the characters have reached the relative safety of a hallway, maybe the fireball triggers the station's fire suppression system. Suffocating and slippery foam begin pouring into the halls. The characters' movement is slowed and they lose precious minutes getting to the hangar.
- The characters' foes —security robots, station guards, or whatever— may have an ambush planned at some point.
- The main villain can make a final appearance to waylay the characters. Maybe he's got an escape craft and waits until the characters reach the landing hangar... at which point he detonates the explosive charges he's rigged on the characters' only ship. Now a desperate character must make a running leap to jump through the closing hatch of the villain's ship, somehow wrest control of it as the villain flies off, and get back in time to pick up the rest of the characters!

Using scenes to set the stage and rounds centered around "events" can heighten the tension and keep the players very excited about the game.

This principle also applies to chases (as discussed in the chapter on "Movement & Chases") and the characters' involvement in epic battles (described in the "Running Battles" chapter).

Secret Checks

There are times when you'll need to know if a character notices something, but you don't want to alert the players that "something's up." This is especially handy if someone's preparing to ambush the characters, or following them discreetly to see where they're headed.

Before the game, make several rolls for each die code (1D, 2D, 3D, 4D, etc.).

Keep a record of each player character's attributes, skills and equipment. When you need to know if a character noticed something, find the character's search or Perception die code and choose one of the die rolls you made (add the +1 or +2 as necessary).

If the die roll is higher than the difficulty, the character "noticed something"; if not, the character remains unaware. Cross off each die roll as it's used. This is a good way to give the characters a fair chance while not arousing the players' suspicions.

Combined Actions

Two or more characters can work together to more effectively accomplish a single task. Combined actions can be used for combat (several Endoguards shooting at a single character) or a situation where several characters are working closely together (a group of mechanics overhauling a busted spaceship engine).

The characters must agree to combine actions. During this time, the character can only roll their skill to contribute to the action; however, if the need arises, they can roll reaction skills.

The character in the group with the highest *command* skill (or *Perception* attribute) functions as the leader. He can only command as many characters as he has *command* skill dice.

> **Example:** The mercenary Lancer Gudrig has a *command* skill of 6D. He can command a maximum of six characters when leading combined actions.

The leader rolls his *command* skill to see if the group can work effectively together. If the leader is just supervising (not working on the task), he rolls his full *command* skill. If he's commanding and working on the task, this counts as two actions, giving him a –1D penalty to his *command* roll.

You must use your best judgment in selecting a *command* difficulty. Here are some factors to consider:

- How hard or complex is the task? The easier the task, the lower the *command* difficulty.
- How much precision is needed? A task where the end result must be very precise —components must line up to the millimeter, for example— is a lot harder to work together on than something where "that's good enough" will suffice.
- How many characters are involved? Generally, the more people who have to work together, the harder it is to get them working together effectively.
- How much skill or experience do the characters have? Characters with a very high level of skill in the task or who have done this type of task in the past are better able to understand what's expected of them and do their part. Characters who've never done anything like this before are going to have a tough time figuring out what to do, especially if the task is complex.
- How well do the characters know each other? If the characters have been adventuring together for years, they're probably pretty good at working together —even if they're completely inexperienced at the task. People who barely know each other sometimes have trouble working together effectively. And people who can't stand each other probably aren't going to join forces very easily.
- How much time is taken to complete the task? If the task would normally take two hours to complete and the group is taking just two hours, the difficulty should be a little higher because it takes some time to coordinate a group of people. If the

characters are willing to take extra time —three or more hours in this example— the difficulty should be lower; perhaps significantly lower if they're willing to take much longer to finish the task. If the characters are rushing things —in this example trying to finish the task in an hour or less— the *command* difficulty should be higher to reflect the challenge of getting a group of people to work together under pressure.

Very Easy (5): The task isn't too complicated or is not at all precise. The characters are highly skilled or work together regularly.
Easy (10): The task is fairly simple or requires a minimal amount of precision. The characters are skilled or work together well.
Moderate (15): The task requires a good deal of effort or requires precision. The characters have a modest level of skill or have worked together before (although not all that often).
Difficult (20): The task is difficult or requires a high degree of precision. The characters don't have very much skill or have rarely worked together before (if at all).
Very Difficult (30): The task is very difficult or requires extreme precision. The characters are completely unskilled in the task or have never worked together (or even despise each other).
Heroic (31+): The task is incredibly difficult or requires an almost impossible level of precision. The characters are completely unskilled, despise each other or don't even speak the same language.

You can increase or decrease the difficulty based on other factors, such as bad weather, nearby confusion, deteriorating conditions, or anything else that affects the commander's ability to get the characters to work together as a unit. If a task is very easy and the characters are highly skilled or experienced, you may even allow a leader to combine actions for more characters than he has command skill dice.

Example: Lancer Gudrig is supervising a group of five mercenaries attempting to fix a trankar that hit a rock and blew one of its tracks. Since Lancer is overseeing the repair job and isn't working on the trankar himself, he rolls his full *command* skill of 6D.
Replacing the thrown track with the vehicle's spare normally requires an Easy (10) *vehicle repair* roll, and would take about an hour. But since Lancer is trying to coordinate the team to save time, the gamemaster raises the difficulty for his *command* roll to Moderate (15). Lancer rolls his 6D *command* for a total of 20 —he succeeds in combining the actions of his fellow mercenaries.

If the *command* roll succeeds, add a bonus to the skill roll toward which everyone is working: +1D for every three characters combining efforts, with a +1 for one "extra" character and a +2 for two "extra" characters.

Example: Lancer uses his *command* skill to coordinate five fellow mercenaries fixing the trankar, giving them a 1D+2 bonus to their *vehicle repair* roll (the first three mercs earning the +1D, while the extra two provide the +2 bonus).

If the commander fails the roll, the gamemaster may still award a smaller combined action bonus. Subtract –1D from the bonus for every point the roll failed by. A bonus total that falls below 0D offers no bonus at all.

Example: Lancer successfully commanded five mercs to get the combined action bonus of +1D+2. The *command* difficulty number was 15. If Lancer had rolled a 14, he would have missed the difficulty number by one: the bonus would have been +2. If he'd rolled a 13 or less, there would have been no bonus at all.

The combined action bonus is added to the character with the highest skill who's working on the task.

Example: Lancer has commanded the mercs to gain a +1D+2 bonus. Repairing the trankar's thrown track requires a *vehicle repair* roll. One mercenary possesses that skill at 5D. Rather than all the mercs rolling their *vehicle repair* skill, only the one with the highest skill die code (5D) makes the *vehicle repair* roll with a +1D+2 bonus.

If a group of characters combines actions on a combat task, the bonus can be split between the attack roll and the damage roll. If a task requires two or more skill rolls, the characters can split this bonus up among any of these rolls.

Example: Lancer's mercenaries complete the repairs to the trankar and continue toward their rendezvous. Along the way they come under fire from some enemy soldiers. Lancer makes his *command* roll to coordinate the actions of the trankar's crew, giving them that +1D+2 bonus. He orders the driver to veer around to the enemy's flank while the gunner opens up with the trankar's primary weapon. The characters decide to split their combined action bonus: they give +1D to the driver to maneuver into an advantageous position, and the +2 to the gunner to fire at the target.

Character Points

Spending **Character Points** represents someone pushing themselves, drawing on their determination and inner strength to succeed. Character Points offer a chance to improve your character's rolls when your character needs it most. They're more plentiful than Amarax Points, yet much less powerful. There is no limit to the number of Character Points a character may have.

You can spend Character Points during the game to improve a character's skill or attribute rolls. A player spending one Character Point rolls one extra die and adds it to the skill (or attribute) total.

If you roll a 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, simply add the roll to the character's total. If you roll a 6, add six to the total and roll the die again, adding the new roll as well —keep on rolling if you keep on getting sixes.

Example: Martius is attempting to fix a broken drive unit on his survey craft, but hasn't boosted his *flight systems repair* skill, so he uses his *Technical* attribute of 3D. Jeff rolls a 2, 3, and a 3 on his wild die, for a total of 8. Jeff knows he must do better than that to fix the engines, so he spends a Character Point, rolls an extra die, and gets a 6. He gets to roll the die again, getting a 3. That boosts his *Technical* total to 17. Jeff tells the gamemaster he's finished with his *Technical* roll. Unfortunately, he had to beat a 20 to fix the drive. Of course, the gamemaster doesn't reveal this until after Jeff's completed his roll.

A player can wait until after he makes a skill or attribute roll before deciding to spend Character Points, but they must be spent before anyone else takes an action.

A player cannot spend Character Points in the same round or scene that he spends an Amarax Point.

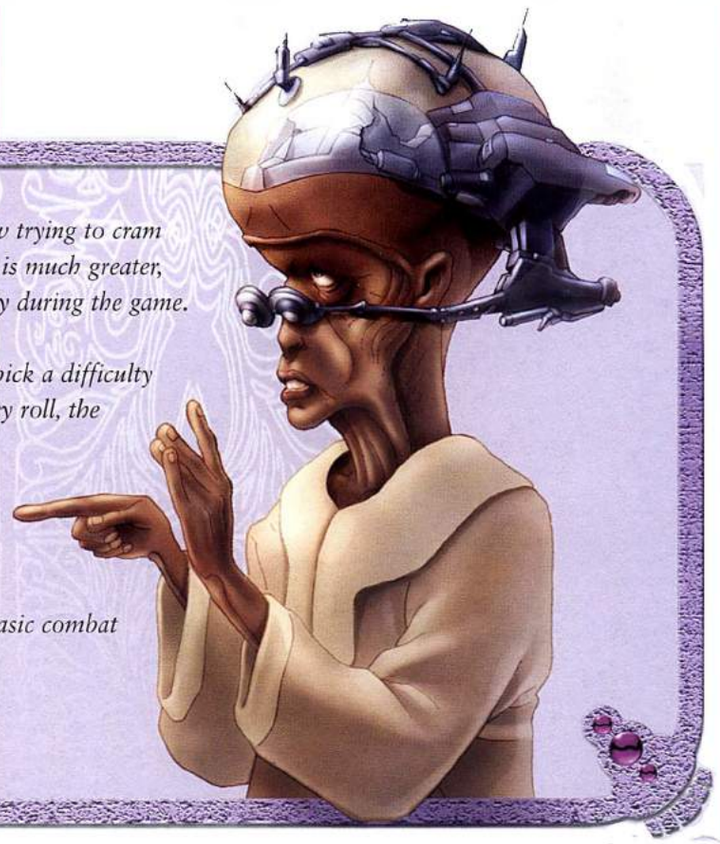
Two skills, *archaic weapons* and *martial arts*, allow characters to roll two dice for every Character Point spent.

Read the earlier chapter on "Characters" for an explanation on how Character Points may be spent to permanently improve skills and other aspects of a character's game stats.

You can spend a maximum of three Character Points on any one action: improving a skill or attribute roll, increasing the damage on an attack, or increasing one's *Strength* roll to resist damage. A character may not spend Character Points on another character's actions.

You can spend Character Points during scenes, but only for one continuous action. The bonus ends as soon as the character does something else.

Example: Repairing his survey craft's engines will take Martius two hours. When Jeff spends that Character Point to improve his *Technical* attribute roll, it lasts the entire two hours, as long as Martius does nothing else but work on his ship.



I know your fully organic brain is probably throbbing right now trying to cram all these rules into your head. Don't worry, my mental capacity is much greater, and I still have trouble keeping track all of this stuff... especially during the game.

Remember, if you're not sure about how to do something, just pick a difficulty number and have the characters roll their skills —the higher they roll, the more likely they'll succeed.

Now, if your brain's up to it, I'll send you over to Sergeant Tagus. He'll pound some more rules into your head, though these are more up his alley.
There's nothing like an elite Maganat guard to give you some basic combat training.

COMBAT & INJURIES

Listen up you miserable kamars! Stand up straight. If you keep slouching like the crowd of vagabonds you are, you'll never live through your first firefight. I am Sergeant Tagus, and I will train you in the art of combat like only a member of an elite Maganat guard can. You will obey my orders, follow my

instructions to the letter, and read this entire manual of combat rules and procedures. And if you don't, you'll end up looking like a piece of meat someone chewed up and spit out. Then I'll just ship you off to the field hospital where they'll patch you up before sending you back to the battle.
I have only two rules I expect you to obey.

1. Destroy the enemy before he destroys you.

2. In the event the enemy destroys you first, have the courage to suck it in and hold out until the combat medics can drag your sorry carcass out of the line of fire.

Those are the cold, hard facts of war, and if you don't like it, well... I don't care! Life isn't fair, kids. The best way to survive is to learn to fight back and protect yourself.

Combat

Great heroes are defined by their accomplishments, many of which are achieved in battle. Othon von Salza's defeat of the traitorous Black Endoguard at the Battle of Marmola is legendary. Aghnar's numerous mercenary campaigns earned him fame and great wealth. Steel Head's ruthlessness in combat brought him an infamous reputation he strove to overcome.

Conflict forms a central theme in the *Metabarons* universe, an element that most often manifests itself in armed combat. The rules in this chapter will help you infuse your *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* sessions with exciting fights where characters can prove their bravery and combat prowess.

Combat is normally fought in five second rounds (as outlined in "The Rules"). Each attack in an action uses the game's basic rules:

- Determine the difficulty number to hit the target.
- The attacking character rolls his attack skill.
- If the roll is higher than the difficulty number, the attack hits and causes damage (see "Damage" later in this chapter).

Gamemasters should run combat like the rest of the game: fast-paced and exciting. And while the rules allow you to measure every attack's range down to the nearest meter, don't be afraid to "fudge" a little to keep things going quickly.

Use your judgment to estimate ranges and difficulty numbers to hit targets. The "Range Chart" can help you visualize distances to opponents. If you're fair and consistent —and if the fights are exciting— your players will forgive minor errors and hesitations. If a player argues with one of your decisions, listen, but your say is final: that's why you're the gamemaster. Discuss the matter fully, and let players make their cases, after the game's done. You can implement any decisions you reach in the way you run the next game session.

Ranged Combat

Use the rules for ranged combat when fighting with any weapon that can be used at a distance, including pistols, grenades, sonic bazookas, and throwing knives.

You can use the following skills in ranged combat —unless otherwise noted, use the *Agility* attribute if the skill hasn't been improved:

- Use *firearms* to discharge any modern, ranged firearm, whether it shoots a high-density slug, a blast of energy, mini-missile, or grenade, including anything requiring a tripod set-up to fire accurately.
- Use *archaic weapons* to attack with any out-dated firearm, bow, crossbow, spear, or other ancient ranged weapon no longer widely used throughout the universe.
- Use *throwing* to hurl weapons accurately at targets, including impromptu projectiles like stones or more modern grenades.

If you're not sure which skill to use, check the weapon's description listing its skill and any relevant specializations.

Each ranged weapon's description lists the damage die code and several ranges (in meters). Each weapon's range differs, so check the stats when combat starts. Here's a typical listing for a Viper pistol:

Viper pistol. 4D, 3–10/30/120.

The "4D" refers to the damage the Viper inflicts, further explained under "Damage." The numbers listed represent short, medium and long ranges, in meters.

For this weapon, anything that's 3 to 10 meters away is at short range. (Any target that's closer than three meters is at point-blank range.) Any target 11 to 30 meters away is at medium range. Any target that's 31 to 120 meters away is at long range. The Viper can't hit anything more than 120 meters away.

Once you've estimated the range to target, you can determine the difficulty to hit an opponent at that distance:

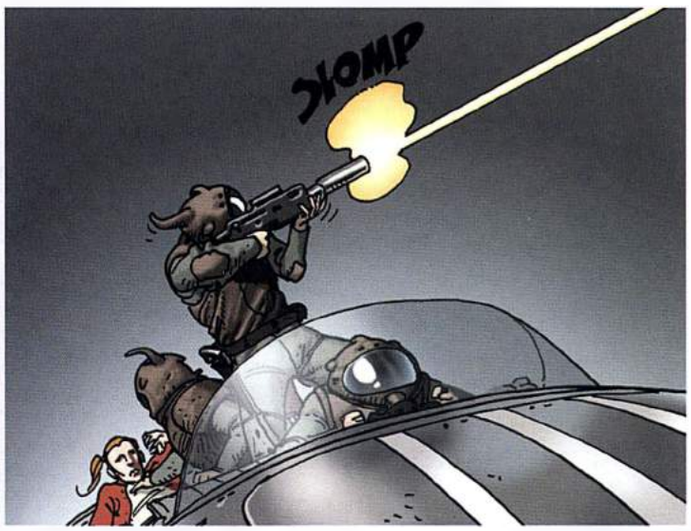
Range Chart

Range To Target	Difficulty
Point-Blank	Very Easy (5)
Short	Easy (10)
Medium	Moderate (15)
Long	Difficult (20)

If the attack roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, the shot hits and the attacker rolls the damage die code to see how much damage he inflicts (see "Damage" below).

Example: Sergeant Tagus is firing his Cogan rifle at a lawless pirate coward who's 100 meters away. The Cogan rifle inflicts 6D damage and has the following ranges: 3–50/120/300. Since the distance to the pirate falls in the rifle's medium range, Tagus must make a Moderate (15) *firearms* roll to blast him. Tagus rolls his 6D *firearms* skill and hits since his total of 22 exceeds the difficulty number. Tagus now gets to roll damage against the pirate.

Gamemasters should remember that reaction skills and various modifiers can also affect the difficulty number needed to hit a target (see "Combat Modifiers" later in this chapter).



Estimating Ranges. Rather than checking every weapon's ranges and measuring out ranges every round, you can generally estimate the range to a target. You can refer to the graphic range chart in this book for a visual idea how targets look at certain ranges. You can refer to the range chart and weapon ranges for ideas on distances to targets.

You can also make general estimates about ranges:

- Targets within three meters of each other fire at point-blank range: Very Easy (5).
- Most combat indoors occurs at short range: Easy (10). If combatants are at opposite ends of a fairly large chamber, rifles fire at short range —Easy (10)— while pistols fire at medium range —Moderate (15).
- Most outdoor ranged combat occurs at medium range with a Moderate (15) difficulty.
- Outdoor combat at great distances generally occurs at long range: Difficult (20).

Melee Combat

Use *melee combat* to attack with any modern hand-to-hand weapons, especially those with power sources to supplement their operation. Characters can also use this skill to fight with impromptu weapons like chairs, bottles, and pipes. You can also use *archaic weapons* to attack with obsolete hand-to-hand weapons like swords, spears, and axes.

Difficulty numbers to strike opponents with various melee weapons are listed with individual weapon descriptions. If the attack roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, the attack hits; roll damage.

> **Example:** Sergeant Tagus closes in to fight that lawless pirate in hand-to-hand combat. He unsheathes his combat shock knife and lunges at the pirate. The knife's stats show one must beat a Very Easy (5) difficulty to strike an opponent with it. Tagus rolls his *melee combat* skill of 5D and gets a 20, beating the difficulty and slashing the pirate.

Melee combat also includes any attack made with a character's bare hands (or claws or other natural weapons) using the *brawling* or *martial arts* skills. If a character hasn't improved his *brawling*, he rolls his *Agility* attribute.

Characters must beat a Very Easy (5) difficulty to strike with a *brawling* or *martial arts* attacks. If the attack roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, the attack hits and you should roll for damage.

> **Example:** Another pirate emerges to challenge Sergeant Tagus. To boast of his personal combat prowess, Tagus discards his combat shock knife and swings at the haughty pirate. The difficulty to hit with a *brawling* attack is Very Easy (5). Tagus rolls his *brawling* skill of 5D and gets a 16. His fist plows into the pirate's face and Tagus prepares to roll damage.

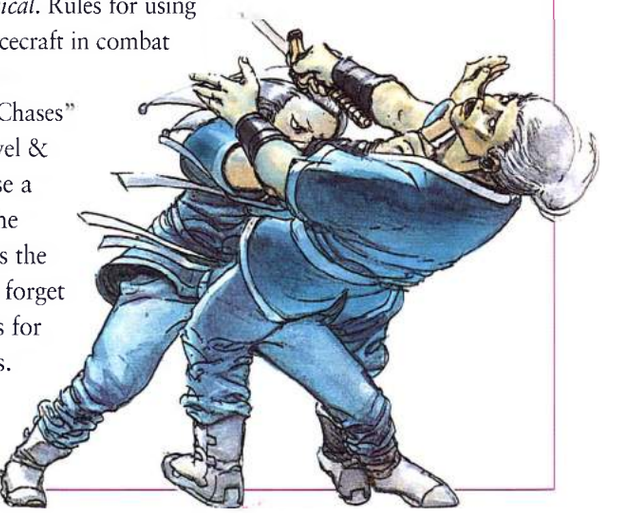
Gamemasters should remember that reaction skills and various modifiers can also affect the difficulty number needed to hit a target when using the various melee combat skills (see "Combat Modifiers" below).

In many cases where characters face off in hand-to-hand combat, you might choose to allow each to roll his melee combat skill both to attack and defend, since a five-second round gives characters time to execute several lunges, swings, and parries. The combatant who rolls the highest successfully fends off his opponent's attacks and scores a hit on his adversary.

Reaction Skills

Reaction skills help you get out of the way when someone takes a shot at you or swings at you with a weapon. You can use these skills as reaction skills at any time to avoid or parry an opponent's attack:

- ***Dodge.*** Your character can roll *dodge* to get out of the way of any ranged attack: a pistol shot, a missile, a grenade, and any similar attack. If your character doesn't have *dodge*, use his *Agility*.
- ***Melee combat or archaic weapons.*** If someone attacks your character in hand-to-hand combat (either with fists or a weapon) and your character has a melee weapon (club, chair, sword, quiver-shiv), you use *melee combat* or *archaic weapons* to avoid or block the attack. If your character hasn't improved one of these skills, use *Agility*. If your character is defending against an unarmed opponent with no sharp natural weapons, he gets a +10 bonus modifier to his roll.
- ***Brawling or martial arts.*** If someone attacks your character in hand-to-hand combat (either with fists or a weapon) and your character is unarmed, you use *brawling* or *martial arts* to avoid or block the attack. If your character hasn't improved one of these skills, use *Agility*. If your character is defending against someone who is attacking with a weapon or sharp natural tools, your opponent gets a +10 bonus modifier to his attack roll.
- ***Piloting, vehicle operation, or exoskeleton operation.*** If your character is piloting or driving a vehicle, spaceship, or exoskeleton, you can make a "vehicle dodge" to avoid enemy fire. Roll the appropriate skill used to operate the vehicle or vessel: *piloting* to fly air- or spaceborne craft, *vehicle operations* to drive non-flying vehicles traveling on or through the ground or a liquid medium, and *exoskeleton operation* for moving around in an exoskeleton. If your character doesn't have the appropriate skill, you use *Mechanical*. Rules for using vehicles and spacecraft in combat are explained in "Movement & Chases" and "Space Travel & Combat." To use a reaction skill, the character makes the skill roll. Don't forget to add penalties for multiple actions. This roll becomes the



new difficulty number the attacker must beat to hit the character. This difficulty number is in effect for all attacks of that type made against the character for the rest of the round.

> *Note: A low reaction skill roll can actually make it easier to hit a character —sometimes people accidentally leap in to the line of fire or move right into someone's attack, especially when hastily reacting in the confusion of battle!*

> **Example:** Trying to keep the guard from killing any more of his lawless friends, a pirate approaches the fight and shoots his suprapistol at Sergeant Tagus. Tagus wisely decides to dodge. The pirate is at short range, and would normally be required to beat an Easy (10) difficulty to hit the guard. But Tagus rolls his *dodge* skill of 5D and gets an 18. Now the pirate must roll an 18 or better to hit with the shot from his suprapistol. If another pirate jumped out and tried to make a *brawling* attack against Tagus, the difficulty still remains Very Easy (5). For Tagus to block this new attack, he'd also have to roll his *brawling* as a reaction skill.
>
> The next round two more pirates show up to fire suprapistols at Tagus. One shoots from short range at an Easy (10) difficulty, while the two newcomers fire using the difficulty for long range, Difficult (20). Sergeant Tagus *dodges* again, this time rolling 16. Despite their difference in ranges, all the pirates must roll a 16 or better to hit the guard.

Full Reaction. If a character announces that the only action he's taking in a round is rolling his reaction skill, he can make what's called a "full reaction." A full reaction —*dodge*, *melee combat*, *brawling*, *martial arts*, *archaic weapons*, or a *vehicle dodge*— must be the only action the character makes in the entire round. A character can't try and fend off an attack with a full reaction if he's already taken even one other action that round.

In a full reaction, the character rolls his reaction skill and adds it to the difficulties of all attacks made against him that round.

> **Example:** Three pirates are shooting at Sergeant Tagus, one from short range with an Easy (10) difficulty, and two from long range, a Difficult (20) shot. Tagus chooses to do nothing else this round but dodge... making a full reaction to their attacks. He rolls his *dodge* of 5D and gets a 13. Instead of replacing the difficulty numbers like a *dodge* made while taking other actions, the guard's *dodge* roll of 13 is added to the normal difficulties. Now the trooper at short range must roll 23 or higher to hit Tagus, while the two at long range must beat a difficulty of 33! But if someone else jumps out that round and tries stabbing Tagus with a quiver-shiv, the guard cannot use another reaction skill to prevent the attack because he's already made a full dodge. He hopes the thug's attack misses all on its own.

Combat Modifiers

Individual gamemasters can choose to use a number of optional rules to modify difficulty numbers, multiple action penalties, and other aspects of combat in their games.

Drawing Weapons. A character may draw a weapon from a holster or sheath, but it counts as an action, reducing all skill rolls in that round by –1D.

Fire Control. Some weapons mounted on fortresses, vehicles, and spacecraft use fire control programs, instruments, and aiming assemblies to help gunners track and shoot targets. When a character uses a weapon with a fire control die code, he rolls it and adds it to his attack skill roll.

> **Example:** Sergeant Tagus —serving as a starfighter's weapons officer— fires the fighter's main cannon using his *gunnery* skill of 4D. The cannon has a fire control die code of 2D, so Tagus gets to roll 6D to fire his weapon at the target!

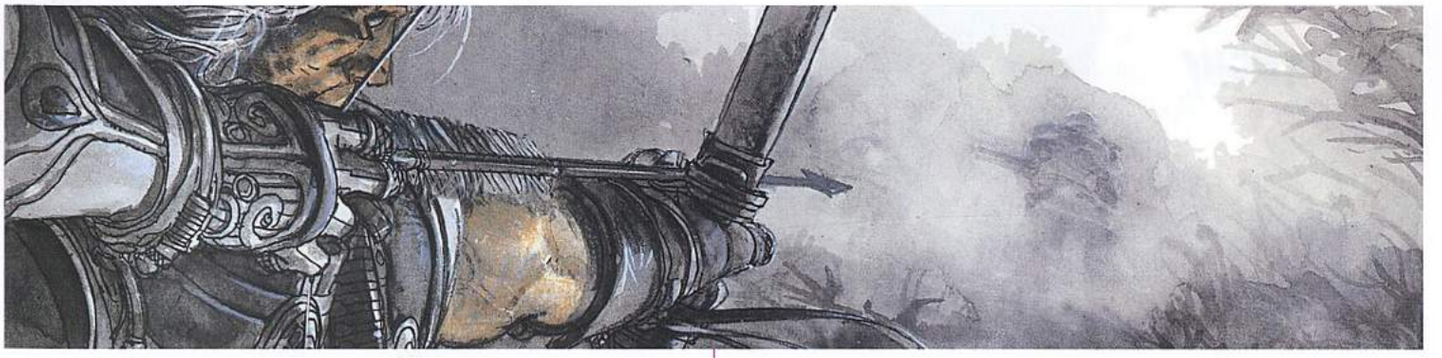
Ammunition. Most weapons list an ammunition rating. When the weapon has fired as many times as its ammo rating, it runs out of ammunition and must be reloaded. Unless specified otherwise, reloading takes one action.

Fire Rate. Some weapons descriptions show a fire rate. If no fire rate is listed, characters can fire the weapon as often in a round as they like. If the fire rate is a simple whole number (like 2 or 4), that represents the maximum number of times characters can discharge the weapon in a single round. If the fire rate shows a fraction, it means characters can only fire the weapon in some rounds.

> **Example:** A Cogan rifle with a fire rate of 3 can be fired three times per round. A defensive flak battery mounted in a fortress with a fire rate of 1/2 can be fired once every two rounds. A weapon with a fire rate of 1/5 can be fired once every five rounds.

Blast Radius. Some weapons have a blast radius. When a character successfully rolls to hit a target, everything within the blast radius suffers damage.

> **Example:** A character fires a sonic bazooka that causes 8D damage with a blast radius of five meters. Everything within five meters of where the blast hits suffers 8D damage.



Some weapons have several ranges for the blast radius —the farther away from the center of the blast, the less damage the weapon inflicts.

Example: The description of a standard grenade shows damage die codes as "5D/4D/3D/2D" and a blast radius of "0–2/4/6/10." When the grenade explodes, everyone within two meters takes 5D damage; everyone three to four meters away takes 4D damage; everyone five to six meters away takes 3D damage; and everyone seven to 10 meters away takes 2D damage.

Since blast radius weapons don't just affect one specific target, you may want to determine exactly where a stray shot goes using the "grenade deviation" rules below.

Called Shots. Attackers can declare a "called shot," aiming to hit a small target like a specific part of a target's body or shooting a weapon out of an opponent's hand.

Add +5 to the difficulty for a target 10 to 50 centimeters long.

Add +15 to the difficulty for a target one to 10 centimeters long.

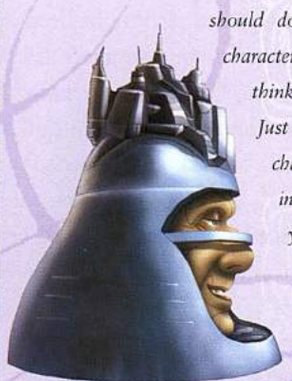
Add +30 to the difficulty for a target less than a centimeter long.

Example: Sergeant Tagus is firing his Cogan rifle at a pirate at medium range... a Moderate (15) shot. Tagus intends to shoot the suprapistol out of the pirate's hand. The gamemaster determines the pistol is about 35 centimeters long, so he adds +5 to the difficulty number of 15. Tagus must now beat a 20 with his *firearms* skill to blast the suprapistol from the pirate's hand.

Combat Is Deadly!

Anyone can tell you that combat in this universe is lethal. The key to survival is not getting hit. If someone shoots at your character, your automatic combat instincts should kick in and you should dodge. If someone comes after your character with a hand-to-hand weapon, don't think, just parry the attack.

Just like in the Metabarons comics, most characters who get shot are seriously injured or killed. Don't let it happen to your character. I'm not scraping your remains off the floor just because you were too busy being heroic to dodge.



Grenades

When throwing a grenade, the attacker picks a target point—the gamemaster determines the difficulty based on the range.

Add a +5 to +10 modifier to the difficulty if the thrower cannot see where he is tossing the grenade, for instance, if he's trying to flush an opponent out of a trench or from behind a low wall.

If the roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, the grenade hits its target point. If the roll is lower it misses; consult the rules for "Grenade Deviation" below.

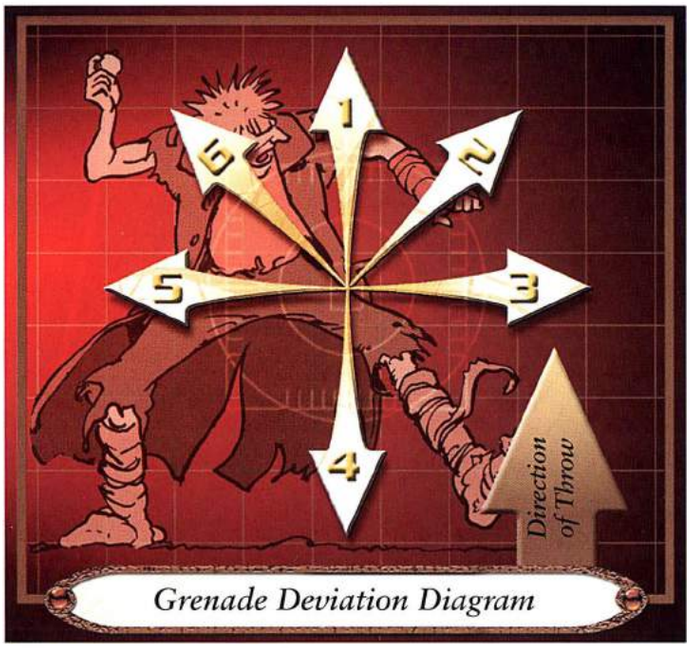
Different kinds of grenades use various detonators: some explode on impact, others after a short time depending on the length of their internal fuze. If the grenade is impact-fuzed, it explodes when it hits something. If it uses a timer fuze, it explodes after a set amount of time. If the fuze is set for less than five seconds, the grenade explodes at the end of the round in which it was thrown.

Grenade Deviation. If the character misses his throwing skill roll to toss the grenade, the weapon lands somewhere else. First, roll 1D to determine in which direction it deviates from the target point (check the "Grenade Deviation Diagram").

You must also determine how far the grenade goes. If the target was at point-blank or short range, the grenade deviates 1D meters. If the throw was at medium range, the grenade deviates 2D meters. If the target was at long range, it deviates 3D meters.

Example: A few pirates huddling behind a ruined wall have Sergeant Tagus pinned down with suprapistol fire. The guard decides a grenade will help clear this mess up quickly. The pirates are about 20 meters away, medium range for a grenade, with a Moderate (15) difficulty. Since he doesn't have the *throwing* skill, Tagus rolls his *Agility* attribute. He rolls 4D and gets 14... he just misses!

Now the gamemaster determines where that stray grenade goes. He first rolls 1D and checks the "Grenade Deviation Diagram" to see in which direction it goes. He rolls a 5 —the grenade lands somewhere to the left of where Tagus meant to toss it. Since the guard was throwing the grenade at medium range, the gamemaster rolls 2D and gets a 6 —the grenade lands



Grenade Deviation Diagram

six meters to the left of the intended target.

The grenade has a blast radius of 10 meters, so the pirates still get hit with some shrapnel. Since they're six meters from where the grenade finally lands, they each take 3D damage (as determined from the grenade's blast radius ranges and damage die codes).

Dodging Grenades. Characters can use their *dodge* skill to leap out of a grenade's blast radius before it goes off, or dive for better cover to avoid getting hit with a grenade's blast.

Example: Let's say Sergeant Tagus rolled a 17 for his *throwing* skill to toss the grenade amidst those pirates. The pirates decide to *dodge* —if they roll an 18 or higher, they leap from their position for better cover and manage to avoid taking any damage. If one of the pirates rolls 17 or lower, he fails to reach adequate cover and takes the grenade's full 5D damage.

Tossing Grenades Away. Assuming a grenade uses a timed fuze and not an impact fuze, brave characters can try to grab a grenade and throw it away. Most people set grenade fuzes for five seconds, causing the grenade to detonate immediately after it lands... so there's often very little time left to grab and throw it again.

The character may pick a specific spot to throw back the grenade, with the difficulty determined by range and a +5 modifier to the difficulty number for tossing it back hastily (unless characters really want to take their time about it, always a dangerous proposition). Characters can also opt to just grab the grenade and throw it as far away as possible —have the character roll his *throwing* or *Agility*. The higher the roll, the farther away the character throws the grenade. You can determine the approximate distance by comparing the roll to the difficulties for hurling grenades at opponents. If the roll exceeds the short range difficulty of Easy (10), characters toss it within the grenade's short range. If the roll exceeds the medium range difficulty of Moderate (15), they toss it as far as the grenade's medium range. Note that these are the ranges for throwing the grenade, not the ranges for the blast radius.

Example: One of the pirates notices the guard's grenade landing at his feet. Thinking quickly, the pirate grabs the grenade and throws it as far as he can. The pirate rolls a 13 for his *Agility* of 4D. Since this total beats the Easy (10) difficulty for throwing a grenade short range, he's tossed it away within a grenade's short range: between 8 and 20 meters. The gamemaster decides the grenade lands outside its 10-meter maximum blast radius. The pirate and his comrades avoid any damage when the grenade detonates.

Cover

It's more difficult to hit characters when they've got visual or hard cover —something that hides them from attackers.

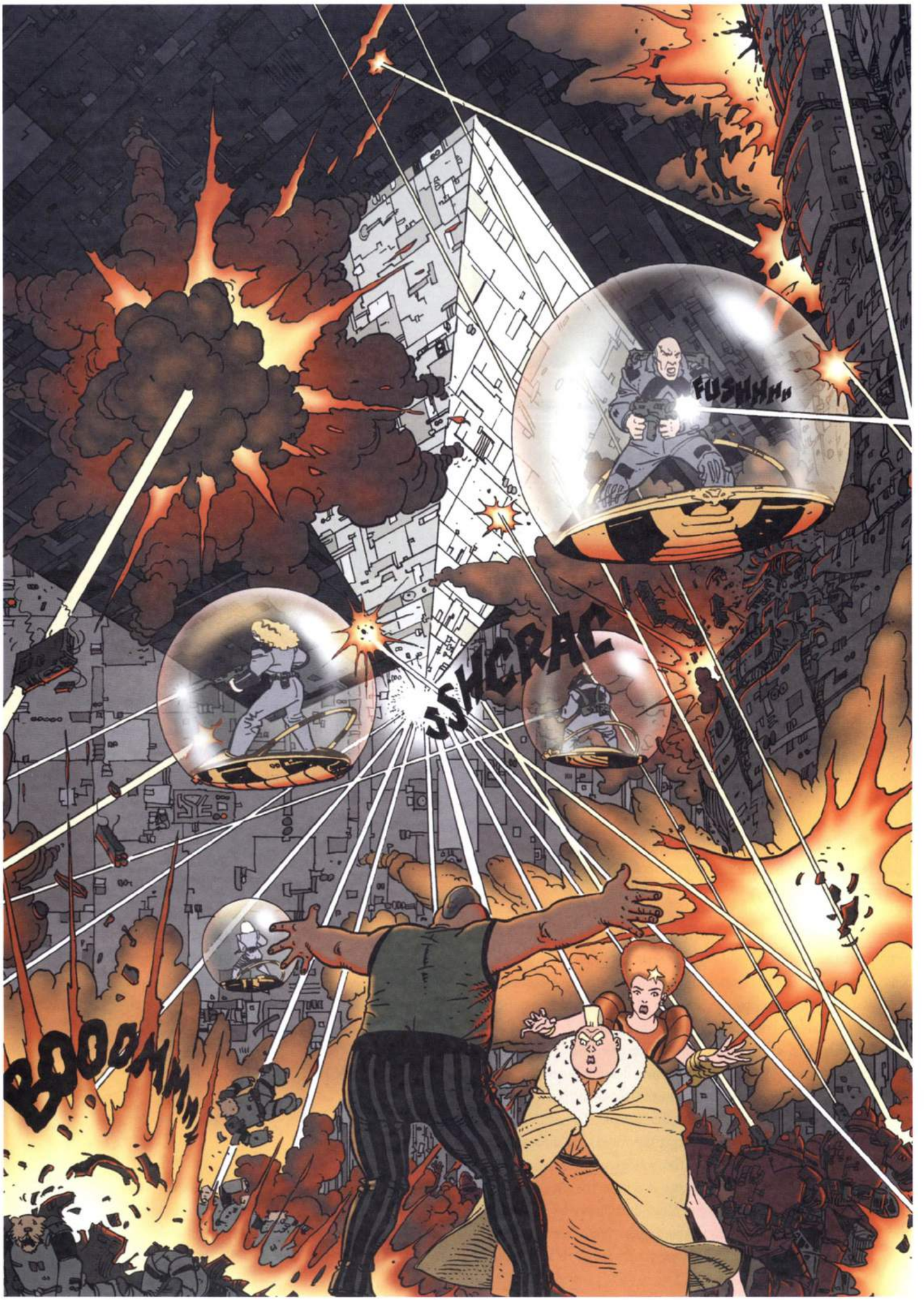
Under some conditions, such as thick smoke and fog, these modifiers may also be added to *search* or *Perception* difficulties to spot hidden characters. If poor visibility obscures a target from the enemy, add any applicable modifiers below to the difficulty to hit the target.

Cover	Modifier
Light smoke	+1D
Thick smoke	+2D
Very thick smoke	+4D
Poor light	+1D
Moonlit night	+2D
Complete darkness	+4D

Example: The fighting with the pirates has died down, and the battlefield is obscured by a light cloud of smoke. Sergeant Tagus spots movement near the pirates' last position and raises his Cogan rifle to fire. The target's at medium range —a Moderate (15) shot— but since the light smoke obscures his vision, his difficulty number increases by +1D. The gamemaster rolls 1D, gets a 5, and increases the difficulty by five. The guard's new difficulty to hit his target is 20.

Characters can also hide behind solid objects —such as walls, parked vehicles, crater rims, trenches— which provide cover and protection (see rules on "Protection" below). Add the cover modifier based on how much of the target character is covered.

Target is:	Cover Modifier
1/4 covered	+1D
1/2 covered	+2D
3/4 covered	+4D
Fully covered	If cover provides full protection, attacker cannot hit target directly; attacker must eliminate cover first.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Example: One of the pirates ducks through the light smoke into a blast crater whose rim covers about half his body. This adds an extra +2D to difficulties to hit him. The gamemaster rolls 2D and gets a 9. He adds this to any difficulty numbers for people shooting at him. Since the pirate's still at medium range from Sergeant Tagus, the guard must make a Moderate (15) *firearms* modified by the cover bonus of 9 —a total difficulty of 24— to hit the pirate.

Protection

Sturdy objects may provide protection in combat. If the attacker rolled well enough to beat the basic difficulty, but not high enough to beat the added cover modifier, the shot hits whatever the character was hiding behind.

Roll the weapon's damage against the body strength die code offered by the protection.

Sample Protection	Body Strength
Flimsy wooden door	1D
Standard wooden door	2D
Standard metal door	3D
Reinforced door	4D
Security hatch	6D

If the damage roll is lower than the body strength roll, the protection is not damaged at all and the target character suffers no damage. If the damage roll is equal to or greater than the protection's body strength roll, find the difference on the chart below to see how badly the protection is damaged.

Damage Roll Greater than Body Strength Roll by:	Protection is:
0–5	Not seriously damaged
6–10	Lightly damaged
11–15	Heavily damaged
16–20	Severely damaged
21+	Destroyed

A character behind protection may suffer damage depending upon how badly his protection is damaged. Subtract dice from the attack's damage based on the chart below.

Protection is:	Reduce weapon damage by:
Not seriously damaged	Character is completely protected
Lightly damaged	–4D
Heavily damaged	–2D
Severely damaged	–1D
Destroyed	Character suffers full damage

Example: Sergeant Tagus needs a 15 to shoot the pirate hiding in the crater at medium range, but a 24 to actually hit him and cause full damage. If Tagus rolls a 14 or less, his shot misses completely. If he rolls between 15 and 23, his shot hits the dirt rim of the crater protecting the pirate. Let's say the guard rolls a 20 and his shot hits the crater edge. The gamemaster decides the dirt and rocks in the crater wall provides a body strength of 2D. He rolls this die code and gets a 7. Tagus rolls his Cogan rifles damage dice of 6D and gets 17, for a difference of 10 between his damage and the crater's body strength. The crater wall is lightly damaged. This means the guard's shot hits his target, but has a –4D penalty when rolling damage for that hit. Tagus only rolls 2D against the pirate's Strength.

Armor

Armor protects soldiers from damage. In the game, characters wearing armor get to add an armor bonus to their *Strength* when rolling to resist damage. Don't apply this bonus to any other *Strength* rolls, just those to resist damage.

Example: Sergeant Tagus has a *Strength* of 3D+2, and wears guard armor that gives him a +2D bonus to his *Strength* to resist damage. If he's hit by suprapistol fire in combat, he rolls 5D+2 to resist damage. But if he were making a *Strength* roll to climb a steep rock face, he'd only roll his natural Strength of 3D+2.

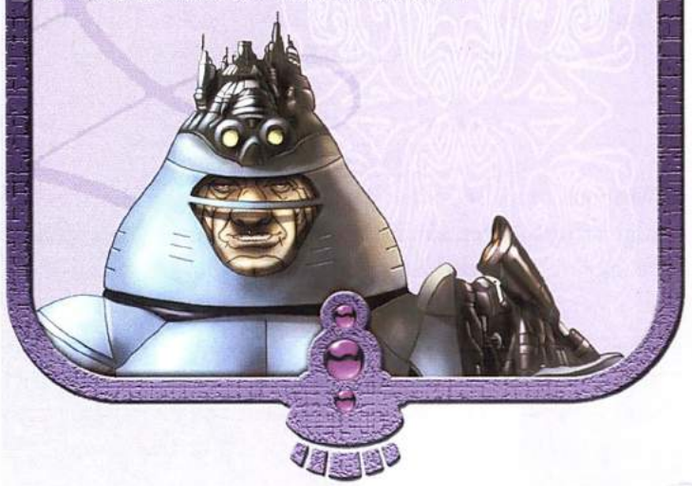
Too Many Modifiers!

Combat in the Metabarons Roleplaying Game should be fast and furious. But it will be tedious, methodical, and dull if you have your nose buried in this rulebook every round.

Remember that these rules are meant as guidelines to help you run the game. Don't be afraid to ignore some complex rules and use your intuition instead. It often serves many battlefield commanders better than following orders by-the-book.

Are the characters facing an opponent who has some form of cover? Just increase the difficulty a little if they're partially hidden behind some soft cover, or a lot if they're mostly concealed behind hard cover.

On the battlefield, you don't have time to pull out your field manual and read up on tactics. It's the same in the game —don't break up the action during the game to look things up in the rulebook. Know what material you really need before you start and fudge the rest.



Some armor provides different levels of protection against different types of attack. For example, some mercenary armor gives a +2D bonus against physical attacks (bullets, hand-to-hand weapons, rocks), but only +1D against energy weapons (lasers, sonic bazookas).

> **Example:** Lancer Gudrig is wearing mercenary armor which offers +2D against physical attacks and +1D against energy attacks. Lancer has a 3D *Strength*. If he's hit with a grenade (shrapnel), he rolls 5D to resist damage. If he's later in the blast radius of a sonic bazooka (an energy weapon), he rolls only 4D to resist damage.

The more protection armor offers, the more bulky it is to wear. Some armor reduces a character's *Agility* and all *Agility* skills. Endoguard armor provides +2D against all attacks, but inflicts a –1D penalty against the wearer's *Agility* and all related skills.

> **Example:** An Endoguard wearing his armor has a +2D *Strength* bonus against all types of damage, with a –1D penalty to his *Agility*. He likes having all that extra protection, but his important skills of *dodge* 5D and *firearms* 6D —in fact, his *Agility* and all his *Agility* skills—are reduced by –1D while he wears the armor. Unless he removes his armor, he avoids attacks by rolling his *dodge* of 4D and shoots back using his *firearms* of 5D.

Armor may not cover the wearer's entire body; if you use the optional hit location rules, this is important since armor can't protect an area it's not covering.

Damaged Armor. When someone wearing armor suffers damage through a protected area, the armor also sustains damage.

Injury suffered by wearer	Damage to armor
Wounded	Lightly damaged (–1 pip)
Incapacitated	Heavily damaged (–1D)
Mortally wounded	Severely damaged (Useless but may be repaired)
Killed	Destroyed

You'll find details on repairing armor under "Using Repair Skills" in the chapter on "Attributes & Skills."

Damaged Weapons

Weapons can also suffer damage in combat, when they fall against hard surfaces, survive nearby explosions, or as a result of a "complication" that leads to a serious malfunction.

If a weapon sustains damage, roll its body strength to resist damage. Most hand weapons —such as pistols and knives— have a body strength of 2D (regardless of how much damage they cause).

Damage Roll Greater Than Body Strength Roll by:	Weapon is:
0–5	Not seriously damaged
6–10	Lightly damaged
11–15	Heavily damaged
16–20	Severely damaged
21+	Destroyed

Lightly damaged weapons lose –1D of their damage die code.

Heavily damaged weapons lose –2D from their damage dice and add +10 to all difficulties to use them in combat.

Severely damaged weapons no longer function, but may be repaired.

Destroyed weapons may not be repaired.

Weapon repairs are discussed in the "Using Repair Skills" section in "Attributes & Skills."

> *Note: You can also use this rule to handle damage inflicted on ordinary objects. Determine the object's body strength and*

compare the roll to the damage roll. Find the result on the chart above.

Scale

You may notice that an aircar may have a body strength of 2D, while a character can have a *Strength* of 4D. Does that mean the character is tougher than the aircar? No!

In the game, "scales" show the differences between various sizes and types of objects. You add or subtract dice to *attack* rolls, *dodge* rolls, and damage rolls to show these differences.

The scales, from smallest to largest, are character (and creature), vehicle, fighter, battleship, and planetary.

The scale modifiers reflect the differences between small, fragile targets (like characters) and large, tough targets (like battleships).

Scale	Modifier
Character	—
Vehicle	2D
Fighter	6D
Battleship	12D
Planetary	24D

When targets of the same scale shoot at each other, ignore the modifiers; just roll *attack* dice, *dodges*, and damage die codes normally.

Use these scale rules when opponents of different scales engage in combat.

- Apply the difference between the two scales: this is now called the "adjusted modifier."

> **Example:** An Endoguard lancet (fighter scale) is firing at a pirate dreadnaught (battleship scale). The lancet has a 6D scale modifier, while the dreadnaught has a 12D modifier. The adjusted modifier is 6D (the difference between the two).

Smaller Against Larger. When a smaller scale character or vehicle is shooting at a larger scale character or vehicle:

- The smaller scale attacker gets to add the modifier to the attack roll. If the target makes a *dodge* (or vehicle dodge), it just rolls its maneuverability (and *dodge* skill).
- The larger scale target adds the modifier to its roll to resist damage; the smaller scale weapon rolls damage normally.

> **Example:** The lancet fires at the dreadnaught. The lancet's primary cannon has a fire control of 2D and a damage of 6D. The dreadnaught has no maneuverability (0D) and a body strength of 5D.
>
> The lancet adds the adjusted modifier of 6D to its roll to fire on the pirate vessel. If the lancet hits, it rolls its normal damage of 6D; however, since the dreadnaught is a larger scale, it adds the adjusted modifier of 6D to its body strength of 5D, rolling a total of 11D to resist damage.

Larger Against Smaller. When a larger scale character or vehicle is shooting at a smaller scale character or vehicle:

- The larger scale attacker rolls its normal attack roll; the smaller scale target adds the adjusted modifier to its *dodge* roll.
- The larger scale attacker adds the scale modifier to its damage roll.

> **Example:** The pirate dreadnaught survives the Endoguard lancet's attack and returns fire with one of its defensive gun emplacements. The dreadnaught fires normally. Since the lancet is a smaller scale vehicle, it adds the modifier of 6D to its maneuverability as its commander tries avoiding enemy fire.
>
> If the dreadnaught hits with its barrage, the pirates add the adjusted modifier of 6D to its normal weapon damage. The lancet only rolls its normal body strength to resist damage.

Surprise

When characters are surprised, their attackers automatically take their first action before the "surprised" side can act. The "surprised" side cannot roll defensive skills to *dodge* or parry this first action.

For characters to surprise another group, each character makes a *sneak* roll. When the targets of the ambush come within range (just a couple of seconds before the ambush is going to be sprung), roll *search* or *Perception* checks for each target character: if they roll equal to or higher than any of the ambusher's *sneak* rolls, they spot that attacker and are not taken by surprise in the ensuing attack. If none of the characters spot the attackers, the target characters are "surprised."

Ambushes are a good place to use "Secret Checks" as discussed in "The Rules."

Game Option: Hit Location

If you want to add some more dramatic tension to your fights, you can randomly determine which part of a character's body gets hit by a shot. Roll 1D:

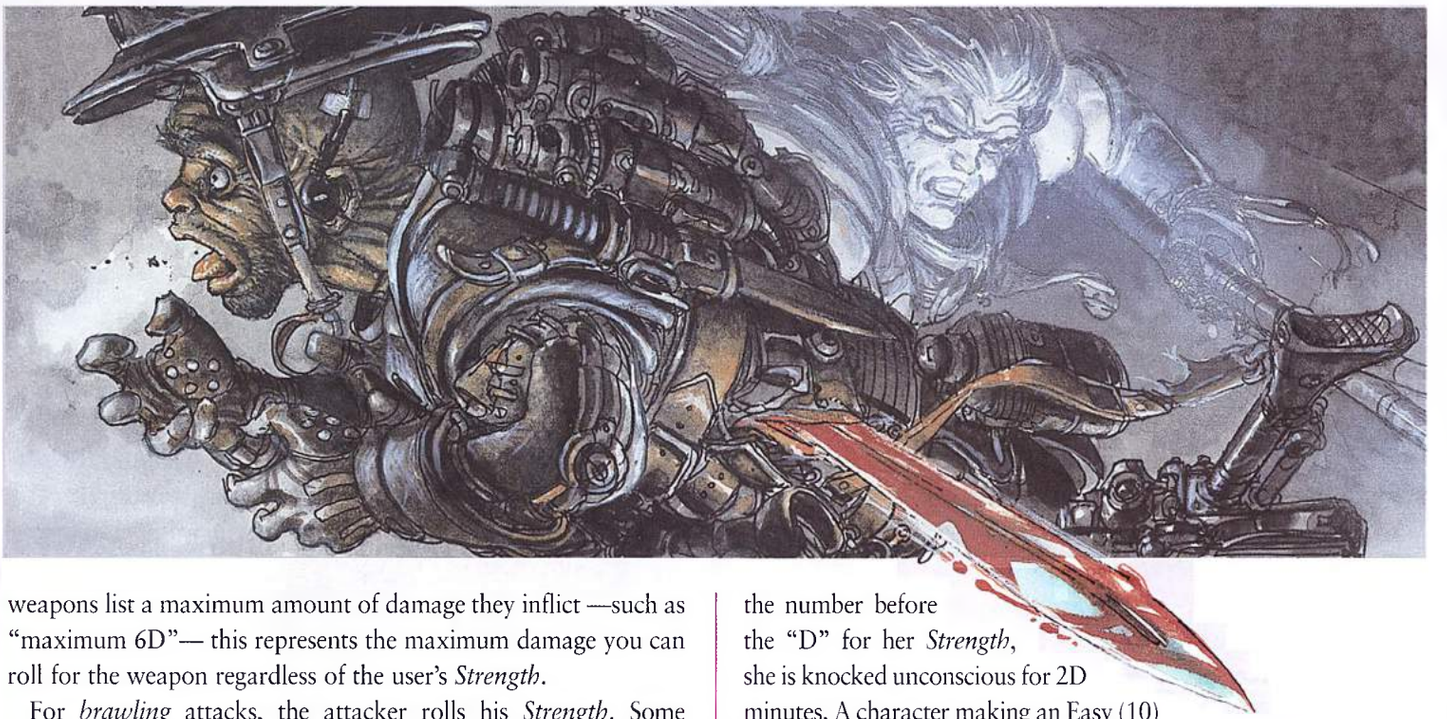
1	Head
2-3	Torso
4	Arms (roll again: 1–3 left arm; 4–6 right arm)
5	Left leg
6	Right leg

Damage

When a character gets hit by an enemy, the attacker rolls damage.

Ranged weapons normally inflict a set amount of damage: for example, a Viper pistol does 4D damage.

When inflicting damage with a melee weapon, characters roll their *Strength* plus a bonus for the weapon. A combat shock knife has a damage code of STR+1D+2 —that means the attacker rolls his *Strength* and adds one extra die plus one for damage. Some



weapons list a maximum amount of damage they inflict —such as "maximum 6D"— this represents the maximum damage you can roll for the weapon regardless of the user's *Strength*.

For *brawling* attacks, the attacker rolls his *Strength*. Some creatures using *brawling* to attack have natural weapons, like claws, which may cause "STR+1D" or "STR+1D+2" —roll the *Strength* and add the die code as indicated.

The target character rolls *Strength* to resist damage. If the character's *Strength* roll is higher than the damage roll, there's no effect. If the damage roll is higher, find the difference on the "Character Damage Chart" below:

Character Damage Chart

Damage Roll Greater than Strength Roll By:	Effect
0–5	Stunned
6–10	Wounded
11–15	Incapacitated
16–20	Mortally Wounded
21+	Killed

Example: Sergeant Tagus shoots a pirate with his Cogan rifle, which inflicts 6D damage. The pirate has a *Strength* of 3D. Tagus rolls 17 for damage, while the pirate rolls a 7 for his *Strength*, a difference of 10 points. The pirate is wounded. If the pirate had somehow rolled higher than the guard's damage roll of 17 (perhaps by using Character Points), the rifle shot would not have affected him.

Later Tagus engages a pirate in *melee combat* with his combat shock knife. If Tagus hits, he rolls his *Strength* of 3D+2 plus the knife's extra 1D+2, for a total of 3D+4 damage.

Stunned characters suffer a penalty of –1D to skill and attribute rolls for the rest of the round in which they're hit and for the next round. A stun no longer penalizes a character after the second round, but it is still "affecting" him for half an hour unless he rests for one minute.

If a character is suffering the affects of a number of stuns equal to the number before the "D" for her *Strength*, she is knocked unconscious for 2D minutes. A character making an Easy (10) *first aid* roll can revive an unconscious character.

Wounded characters fall prone and can take no actions for the rest of the round. The character suffers a penalty of –1D to skill and attribute rolls until he heals (through *first aid*, medkits, or natural rest). A character who is wounded a second time is wounded twice.

A character who is wounded twice falls prone and can take no actions for the rest of the round. The character suffers a penalty of –2D to all skill and attribute rolls until he is healed. A character in this state who is wounded again becomes incapacitated.

An incapacitated character falls prone and is knocked unconscious for 10D minutes. The character can't do anything until healed. An incapacitated character who is wounded or incapacitated again becomes mortally wounded.

Anyone making a Moderate (15) *first aid* roll can revive an incapacitated character. The character wakes, but is groggy, cannot use skills, and can only move at half his "cautious" rate (see "Movement & Chases").

A mortally wounded character falls prone and unconscious. The character can't do anything until healed. The character faces death —at the end of each round, roll 2D. If the roll is less than the number of rounds the character has been mortally wounded, the character dies. A mortally wounded character who is incapacitated or mortally wounded again is killed.

A character making a Moderate (15) *first aid* roll can "stabilize" a mortally wounded character. The character is still mortally wounded but will survive if someone brings the character to an auto-medic or makes a Moderate (15) *first aid* roll using a medkit; otherwise, he dies (this is different from healing a character with a medpac; see "Healing" below).

A killed character dies. Create a new character.

Example: Sergeant Tagus hits that pirate with a shot from his Cogan rifle. The pirate rolls his *Strength* of 3D and gets a 7, while Tagus rolls 17 for his weapon's damage. Since the difference between the two is 10, the pirate is

now wounded. The shot knocks him down, and he can't act for the rest of this round. Until he's healed, the pirate makes his skill and attribute rolls at –1D. If he's wounded again, he has a –2D penalty to all actions until he heals. If the pirate is wounded again, he becomes incapacitated.

One of the pirate's comrades takes a hit. He rolls a 9 for his *Strength* against the weapon damage of 24. The difference of 15 indicates that he's incapacitated and collapses unconscious.

Increasing Resistance. If you have enough, you can always use Character Points to boost a character's *Strength* to resist damage. If you use an Amarax Point during the round in which you took damage, don't forget to double your *Strength* when you roll it.

Stun Damage. Some weapons inflict stun damage. When these strike an opponent, roll damage normally, but treat any result more serious than "stunned" as "unconscious for 2D minutes."

Example: A security officer whacks a pirate with a stun baton. The officer rolls a 21 for the baton's damage, and the pirate rolls an 11 for his *Strength*. The pirate would normally be "wounded," but since the stun baton only delivers stun damage, the pirate is knocked unconscious for 2D minutes.

Game Option: **Merciful Injuries.** Gamemasters might want to allow characters with *archaic weapons* and *martial arts* to deliver less damage than the results of *Strength* and damage rolls indicate. This reflects those skills' higher degree of discipline and allows those using them to show mercy to opponents. For instance, damage and *Strength* rolls might determine that someone using *martial arts* incapacitates his opponent, but that character chooses only to wound him —possibly to intentionally show mercy, intimidate him, or save him for some other purpose.

Game Option: **Severe Injuries.** As an optional rule, a character who causes enough damage to kill another character has the option of causing a serious, permanent injury instead. For example, a limb could be severed or a body part injured so badly that it could never be used again.

In addition to the severe injury, the target character is wounded, wounded twice, or incapacitated, as determined by the gamemaster.

Healing

Characters can heal in a variety of ways, but the three most common methods of healing are natural healing, *first aid*, and auto-medics.

Natural Healing

A character can heal naturally, but this process is both slower and much riskier than auto-medics. The character must rest a specific length of time and then makes a *healing* roll: roll the character's full *Strength* to see if the character heals naturally.

Healing characters should spend all their time resting. A character who tries to work, exercise, or adventure must subtract –1D from his *Strength* when he makes his natural healing roll. Any character who opts to "take it easy" and do virtually nothing for twice the necessary time may add +1D to his *Strength* roll to heal.

A wounded character must rest for three days before rolling to heal.

Healing for Wounded Characters

Strength Roll	Result
2–4	Character *worsens to wounded twice.*
5–6	Character remains *wounded.*
7+	Character is fully healed.

A character who is wounded twice must rest for three days before rolling to heal.

Healing for Characters Wounded Twice

Strength Roll	Result
2–4	Character worsens to incapacitated.
5–6	Character remains wounded twice.
7+	Character improves to wounded.

Incapacitated characters must rest for two weeks before making a healing roll.

Healing for Incapacitated Characters

Strength Roll	Result
2–6	Character worsens to mortally wounded.
7–8	Character remains incapacitated.
9+	Character improves to wounded twice.

Mortally wounded characters must rest for one month (30 days) before making a natural healing roll.

Healing for Mortally Wounded Characters

Strength Roll	Result
2–6	Character dies.
7–8	Character remains mortally wounded.
9+	Character improves to incapacitated.

Example: Sergeant Tagus takes damage in a fight which incapacitates him and decides to heal naturally. After resting for two weeks, he makes his Strength roll and gets a 14 —his condition improves to wounded twice.

To heal from wounded twice to wounded, he must rest for another three days before making his healing roll.

First Aid and Medkits

Characters can use their *first aid* skill and whatever materials are available to stabilize injuries, dress wounds, and help patch up the wounded on the spot.

To treat injuries in the field, characters roll their *first aid* skill (or *Technical*). Anyone with *medicine (adv.)* can add those dice to their *first aid* roll as well. The difficulty depends upon the severity of the injury they're trying to treat:

Degree of Injury	Difficulty
Stunned, unconscious	Easy (10)
Wounded, wounded twice	Moderate (15)
Incapacitated	Difficult (20)
Mortally wounded	Very Difficult (30)

If the *first aid* roll is successful, the patient heals one level: stunned and wounded characters are fully healed; unconscious characters are revived; characters wounded twice improve to wounded; incapacitated characters improve to wounded twice; mortally wounded characters improve to incapacitated.

If the *first aid* roll is unsuccessful, the character's condition remains the same. If the *first aid* roll misses the difficulty by more than 10 points, the attempt to treat these injuries pushes the character's body to its limit —no more field procedures can be used on him for a full day.

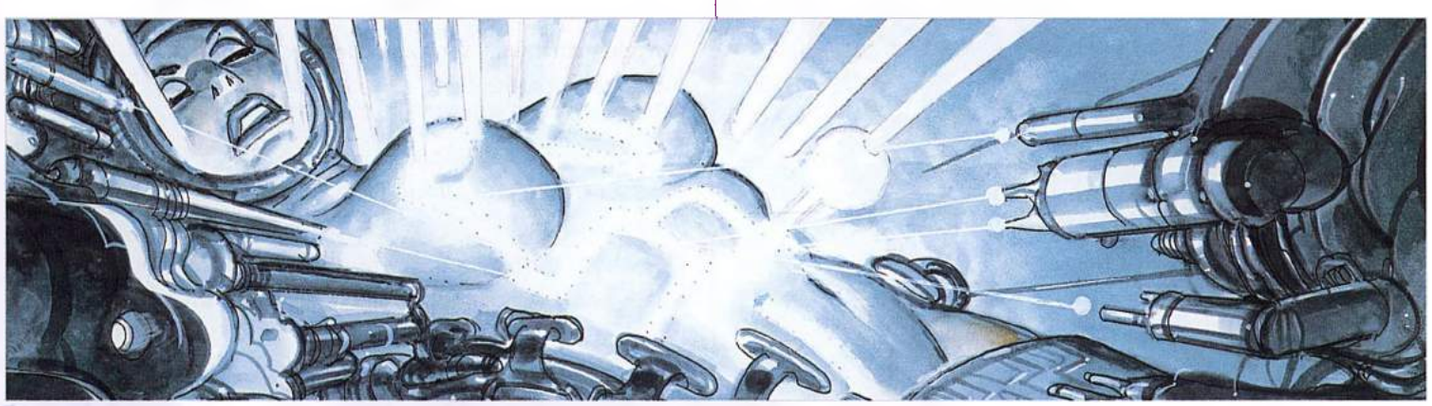
Medics can try using *first aid* on characters more than once in a single day. For each extra attempt to treat injuries increase the *first aid* difficulty one level.

Example: Sergeant Tagus is wounded. A field medic comes over and makes his initial *first aid* roll to treat his injuries. He must beat a Moderate (15) difficulty with his *first aid* roll. If he successfully makes this roll, he heals the guard's wounds. If he fails, Tagus remains wounded. The field medic can try making another *first aid* roll, but this time he must beat a difficulty of Difficult (20) to heal Tagus.

A character can attempt to use *first aid* to treat his own injuries, but he suffers an extra –1D penalty in addition to any other penalties, like those for being wounded or incapacitated.

Example: Sergeant Tagus is wounded (–1D to all actions) with no field medic in sight. He tries applying first aid to his wounds himself. This requires a Moderate (15) *first aid* roll. The guard's *first aid* is only 2D, so with that –1D penalty he only rolls 1D. This might be a good time for him to use some Character Points to boost that skill roll.

Medkits. Some characters carry medkits —sturdy little boxes filled with healing medicines, coagulants, bandages, body chemistry boosters, adrenaline drugs, and small diagnostic instruments— to better treat seriously injured individuals in the field. They're standard equipment aboard most spacecraft, and many characters, particularly medics, carry them in case of unexpected injury. Medkits provide a +2D bonus to any *first aid* rolls. The supplies inside can only take care of a few injuries before they run out —from three to five *first aid* rolls. Gamemasters should



inform players when a medkit runs out based on the number and severity of injuries they've already treated with it.

Example: That field medic is trying to take care of the guard's injuries. To heal a wounded person, he must make a Moderate (15) *first aid* roll. Using whatever materials he can find nearby for splints, bandages, and other medical supplies, he'd only roll his *first aid* of 5D. If he uses a medkit (which most field medics carry anyway), he'd add +2D to his *first aid*, rolling a total of 7D to heal Tagus!

Auto-Medics

Robotic medical units conduct surgery and emergency procedures under the supervision of doctors and researchers. These auto-medics, auto-docs, or "bot-docs" (the most derogatory term for them) consist of an intimidating array of medical instruments, control panels, monitors, and robotic machinery all hunched over a treatment bed. One usually only finds them in high-tech medical facilities, large spaceships, and military vessels.

Supervising characters must have the *medicine (adv.)* skill to operate, program, and oversee the activities of an auto-medic. On most worlds only licensed physicians and top-level scientists are authorized to operate auto-docs.

Doctors must make a Very Easy (5) *medicine (adv.)* skill roll to program and operate an auto-medic, regardless of the patient's wound level. On a successful roll, auto-medic treats the character, though over a length of time. This time includes procedures to help healing (surgery, suturing, chemical treatment, bandaging) as well as recovery time.

A character attempting to use an auto-doc without the *medicine (adv.)* skill must make a Heroic (31+) *first aid* or *Technical* roll. If the roll fails, the patient's injury worsens two levels —wounded patients worsen to incapacitated; wounded twice patients worsen to mortally wounded; and incapacitated or mortally wounded patients die.

Auto-medics aren't cheap. If you're working for a government or military and medical care is included in your contract, you don't need to worry about paying anything for an auto-doc's services. But many hospitals, clinics, even facilities catering to outcast individuals charge fees to use an auto-medic.

The healing time depends on the severity of the injuries.

Wound Level:	Treatment Time:	Fee:
Wounded	1D hours	2D+2 kublars
Incapacitated	4D hours	2D+10 kublars
Mortally wounded	1D days	2D+25 kublars

Example: Sergeant Tagus receives enough damage on the battlefield to incapacitate him. A corpsman drags the guard away from the action and evacs him to a mobile hospital unit. The field surgeon has the corpsman dump the guard's body onto the auto-doc. The surgeon must make a Very Easy (5) *medicine (adv.)* roll and succeeds. The gamemaster rolls 4D and gets a nine. Nine hours later Sergeant Tagus drags himself off the auto-medic, fully healed and ready for battle. If his guard medical contract didn't include such procedures, or if he were a mercenary, he'd have to pay someone 2D+10 kublars to let the auto-medic work on him.

Medicines

Many different medicines exist in the universe, including mass-produced pharmaceuticals, carefully controlled "wonder drugs," and local cures known only on remote planets.

Each medicine has different game effects. Some may add a bonus to a character's *first aid* or *medicine (adv.)* skill; others may allow a patient to heal faster; still others may only affect certain injuries or diseases and provide no help for others. You can create new medicines (and describe their game terms) as needed for your campaign.

I love a good fight. Hopefully you will, too, assuming you know how to handle yourself and keep your head about you... literally. But shooting at things and dodging from enemies is only part of the fun.
You need to run, jump, pilot vehicles, and other grunt work.
For that I'll hand you off to Captain Chanadyne, a contract pilot. She's no Maganat guard, but she'll tell you everything you need to know about how movement works.

Movement & Chases

There's nothing quite like sitting at the helm of a craft for the first time. It doesn't matter if you're driving an aircar above crowded streets, rumbling over the battlefield in a trankar, or darting through an asteroid field in a sleek spaceship —controlling any vehicle gives a thrill that's hard to beat.
I should know. I'm Captain Chanadyne, an old hand at flying all kinds of ships. As a contract pilot,

I hire out to folks who need someone to run transport jobs —mercenaries, Maganat corporations, petty nobles, pirates. Anyone with enough kublars to keep me in the latest flight gear and at the helm of something spaceborne.
Let's face it —there's a huge universe out there, and you're not going anywhere in it unless you get moving. So I'm here to show you how it's done.
We'll start small. You can't just jump into the helm post on a battleship and maneuver her through an armada-scale engagement.
First you need to understand how things at smaller levels work... how characters get around, maneuver, stumble over treacherous ground, stuff like that.
Then we'll move on to driving and flying vehicles. If you know about moving around under your own power, piloting vehicles should be a snap. Then we throw in the ever-complicating element of combat: evading enemy fire, maneuvering for a good shot, and getting your opponent before he gets you.

And if you just can't wait for it, jump ahead to the "Space Travel & Combat" chapter, though most of that material expands on what you learn here. Like I said, start small at first, move on to the intermediate vehicles, then worry about piloting that stolen Endoguard lancet and firing that impressive array of weapons all at once.

Character Movement

Every character and creature has a Move score: it's how many meters per five-second round the character moves while walking. Most characters have a Move of 10.

Moving is an action, just like firing a suprapistol or dodging an attack. A character can move once per round. A running character uses her *running* skill, and a walking character rolls her *Agility* attribute. A swimming character uses her *swimming* skill or *Strength*; a climbing character uses her *climb/jump* or *Strength*; someone moving in zero-gravity environment would use *0-G maneuver*. For unusual movements —such as *swimming* or *climbing*— the Move is normally one-third the character's Move; as gamemaster, you should adjust this rate at your discretion.

Movement works just like other actions. You describe the terrain and pick a difficulty level and a difficulty number: Very Easy (1–5), Easy (6–10), Moderate (11–15), Difficulty (16–20), Very Difficult (21–30) or Heroic (31+).

The player decides how fast she wants her character to move and makes her *running* roll. If the roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, the character moves without a problem; if the roll is lower than the difficulty number, the character has a problem.

Move Speeds

Although a character can only move once per round, she can do so at one of four speeds.

Cautious Movement

This is a slow walk for a character: she moves at half her Move. For instance, a character with a Move of 10 would move five meters.

In Very Easy (5), Easy (10), and Moderate (15) terrain, cautious movement is a "free action": it's not considered an action (incurring no multi-action penalty) and the character doesn't have to roll her *running* skill.

In Difficult (20), Very Difficult (30), and Heroic (31+) terrain, roll the character's *running* skill, but reduce the difficulty one level. Thus Very Difficult terrain becomes Difficult to cross; Moderate terrain becomes Easy to cross.

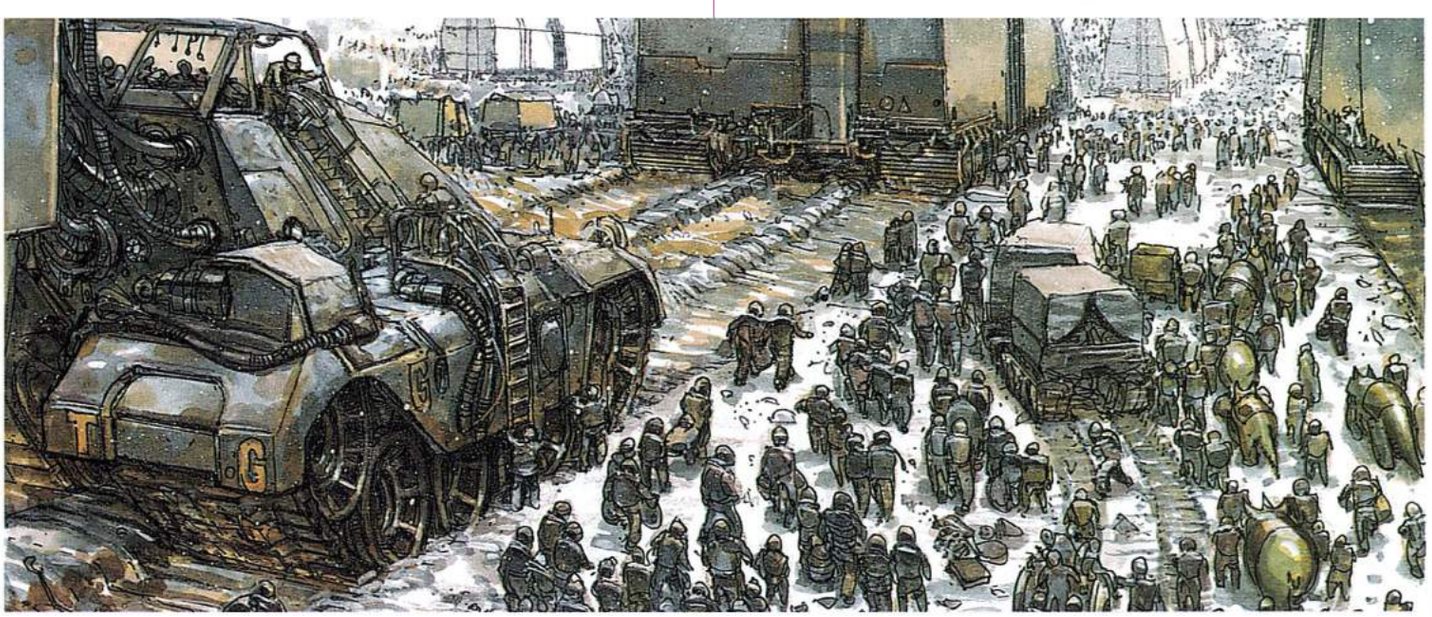
Example: Captain Chanadyne has an *Agility* of 3D+1, a *running* skill of 4D+1, a *firearms* skill of 5D+1, and a Move of 10. She's moving at cautious speed across a dried up stream bed...Easy (10) terrain. Because she's moving so carefully, she doesn't even have to roll —she automatically moves the five meters. If she were shooting her defense pistol, she'd get to roll her full *firearms* skill of 5D+1 because her movement is a "free action."
Later, Chanadyne comes upon a raging river. She wants to cross it by moving from rock to rock —it's Difficult (20) terrain. Since she decides to move at cautious speed, the terrain is considered one difficulty level easier: it's only Moderate (15). Chanadyne's *Agility* roll is a 17 — she carefully skirts across the rocks, moving five meters.

Cruising Movement

Cruising movement is walking speed for a character —a person with a Move of 10 would move up to 10 meters.

Moving at cruising speed counts as an action, but the character can automatically make the move to cross Very Easy, Easy, and Moderate terrain. A character must roll her *running* skill when covering Difficult, Very Difficult, and Heroic terrain.

Example: Chanadyne is walking (cruising speed) across Moderate (15) terrain while aiming her defense pistol at a guard intent on preventing her from passing. Her *Agility* is 3D+1 and her *firearms* is 5D+1. She can automatically walk 10 meters without making an



Agility roll, but it counts as one action. Firing her pistol is a second action (made with a –1D penalty), so she only rolls 4D+1 for her *firearms* skill to hit the guard.
Later, the pilot tries walking up a steep hill, Difficult (20) terrain. She rolls her *Agility* and only gets a 16 —Chanadyne only walks a few meters before losing her footing and slipping back down the slope.

High Speed

Running constitutes high speed movement for a character —she moves at twice her Move speed. A character with a Move of 10 would move up to 20 meters.

The character must roll her *running* to cross Very Easy, Easy, or Moderate terrain. When moving at high speed over Difficult, Very Difficult, and Heroic terrain, increase difficulty numbers by one level: Difficult terrain becomes Very Difficult to cross, Very Difficult terrain becomes Heroic, Heroic terrain becomes Heroic+10.

Example: Chanadyne is running across an open field: Easy (10) terrain. She rolls her *running* skill of 4D+1 and gets a 16 —she runs 20 meters across the field.
Later, the pilot tries running across a very rocky, uneven field pitted with craters: Difficult (20) terrain. Because she's running at high speed, the terrain is considered Very Difficult (30). Chanadyne rolls her *running* and gets a 12 —not enough. To find out what happens, see "Movement Failures" below.

All-Out

All-out movement is running at all-out speed for a character —she moves at four times her Move speed. A character with a Move of 10 would move 40 meters in one round!

Characters making "all-out" movement may not do anything else in the round, including dodging or parrying attacks!

Increase the difficulty one level for crossing Very Easy, Easy, and Moderate terrain. Increase the difficulty two levels for covering Difficult, Very Difficult, or Heroic terrain.

Example: Chanadyne wants to move across that open field —Easy (10) terrain— to reach her ship before that guard can take a shot at her. She decides to run all-out —the Easy terrain is now considered one difficulty level higher: Moderate (15). She also can't *dodge* to avoid the guard's shot. She rolls her *running* and gets a 16: Chanadyne sprints 40 meters to her ship.
Let's say Chanadyne must run through a dense forest tangled with thickets and overgrown bushes to reach her spacecraft. The gamemaster considers this Difficult (20) terrain, but since Chanadyne decides to move all-out, the difficulty increases two levels to Heroic (and the gamemaster sets the difficulty number at 35). She has her work cut out for her if she wants to make it to her ship through all that...

Partial Moves

You don't have to move the full amount for your particular speed. After picking a "move speed" (cautious, cruising, high speed, or all-out), a character can move anywhere between half and her full move speed.

Example: Chanadyne (with a Move of 10) decides to move at all-out speed: she can move anywhere between 20 and 40 meters.

Acceleration and Deceleration

Characters may increase or decrease their movement speed up to two levels per round.

Example: Chanadyne is moving cautiously in one round. The next round, she may stay at cautious speed, decrease one level to come to a complete stop, increase one level to cruising speed, or increase two levels to high speed movement. She cannot increase three levels to all-out movement.
Later, the pilot is at all-out movement to run across a corridor. The next round she can keep on going all-out, or she may reduce her movement to high speed (running) or cruising (walking). She couldn't slow down to cautious speed (slow walk) or no movement at all.

Movement & Stamina

All-out movement takes its toll after a long time. A character continuously going all-out must make a *stamina* roll every minute.

The first *stamina* difficulty is Very Easy (5); increase the difficulty one level for each additional roll. If the character fails the roll, she must rest for twice as long as she was moving all-out.

High speed ("running") movement also requires *stamina* rolls: roll once every 10 minutes. The first roll is Very Easy (5) and increases one difficulty level for each additional roll. If she fails the roll, she must rest for twice as long as she was moving at high speed.

Terrain Difficulties

When a character moves, you must determine the terrain's difficulty and then pick a difficulty number.

Very Easy (5): Flat, clear, even ground with no obstacles. Clear walkways or tracks. For swimming, calm water.
Easy (10): Flat but naturally uneven ground (fields, yards) that may have a few small obstacles such as rocks, holes, bushes, and low branches. For swimming, water with minor obstacles, occasional branches or reefs, or water with moderate currents.
Moderate (15): Rough ground or any area with many obstacles (large holes, rocks, thickets, and bushes). For swimming, an area with many obstacles or a very confined area, such as a small tunnel.
Difficult (20): Running through a densely packed area that's difficult to navigate: a panicked crowd or a thick forest, for

example. Very rough ground with drop outs, darkened tunnels, or an area that's being pelted by falling boulders. Swimming during a very rough storm or around attacking predators.

Very Difficult (30): Moving through any very dangerous terrain, such as a minefield, down a narrow crawl-way with whirling cooling fans, a spaceship as it breaks apart, or along the outside of a vehicle as it makes twisting maneuvers. Swimming in the middle of a dangerous storm with large waves.

Heroic (31+): Heroic terrain is virtually impassable: running through an avalanche, or running down a corridor filled with falling debris, smoke, and exploding control consoles. For swimming, in the middle of a tidal wave or hurricane.

Maneuvers

The movement difficulty number applies to basic maneuvers: straight-line movement, a couple of turns and other simple movements. If a character wants to make a more difficult maneuver —such as maneuvering between tightly-grouped building support beams, grabbing something out of mid-air while running, or grabbing something off a counter while all-out running— you may add modifiers as needed:

+1–5 *for a maneuver that takes a little effort and coordination.*

+6–10 *for a maneuver requiring a modest amount of effort and coordination.*

+11–15 *for a maneuver requiring a lot of concentration and appears very difficult to perform while moving quickly.*

+16 or more *for maneuvers that appears extremely difficult to perform while moving quickly.*

Characters often want to undertake some movement-related feat that crosses over into other skills: run and then jump over a ditch, or climb up a wall. The character rolls to move and then must make a separate climb/jump skill roll for the climb or jump.

Movement Failures

A character who fails a movement roll may have to slow down or may even fall and risk injury. Use the number of points by which the movement roll failed to determine any specific results:

*1–3: **Slight Slip.** The character loses her footing for a second. Although she completes the movement, she suffers a penalty of –1D to all actions for the rest of the round (in addition to normal multiple action penalties).*

*4–6: **Slip.** The character slips and nearly falls. The character only makes half of her intended movement. She suffers a penalty of –3D to all actions for the rest of the round, and –1D to all actions for the next round (in addition to normal multiple action penalties).*

*7–10: **Fall.** The character falls halfway through her movement, but manages to catch herself and is now kneeling. She may take no actions for the rest of the round and suffers a –2D penalty to all actions for the next round.*

*11–15: **Minor Tumble.** The character falls one-quarter of the way through her movement, suffering painful scrapes and bruises. She may take no actions for the rest of the round and the next round. She takes damage, but subtract –3D from normal collision damage. (In effect, the character takes 1D damage if she was moving all-out; if she was moving slower, she'd suffer no damage.) See "Collisions" below.*

*16–20: **Tumble.** The character falls, probably tumbling into a nearby object. She suffers painful scrapes and bruises (unlucky characters can suffer broken bones or worse): roll for collision damage normally.*

*21+: **Major Tumble.** The character takes a severe fall at a bad angle and may suffer a serious injury. Increase collision damage by +2D.*

Collisions

Collision damage depends on how fast the character was moving.

Move	Character Damage
Cautious	1D
Cruise	2D
High speed	3D
All-Out	4D

Roll damage against the character's *Strength*, just as described in the "Damage" section of the chapter on "Combat & Injuries."

Example: Chanadyne is moving at high speed and fails her running roll by 18 points. She suffers a "tumble" and trips and falls painfully. Since she was moving at high speed, she suffers 3D damage.

Vehicle Movement

Vehicle movement operates much the same way as character movement.

Every vehicle has a Move score, which is how many meters per round the vehicle moves at cruising speed. A vehicle's stats for Move also show the maximum speed in kilometers per hour, listed after the Move score. For instance, a recon buggy's Move stat would look something like this: "Move: 45; 130 kph."

Moving is an action, just like firing a weapon or dodging. A vehicle can move once per round.

When operating flying vehicles, use the *piloting* skill. This pertains to any vehicle that flies above the ground, even if it hovers only half a meter. To drive vehicles traveling directly on or through the ground or water, use the *vehicle operation* skill. *Exoskeleton operation* also functions as a vehicle skill when using it to make maneuvers while wearing an exoskeleton. If the driver doesn't have the appropriate skill, use their *Mechanical* attribute die code. Most vehicles list the appropriate skill in their statistics.

When a vehicle moves, you describe the terrain and then pick a difficulty level and a difficulty number, just like when characters move. The player decides how fast she wants her character to drive the vehicle and makes her *piloting* or *vehicle operation* (or other

skill) roll. If a vehicle has a "maneuverability code," add it to the driver's skill roll.

If the roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, the vehicle moves across the terrain without a problem; if the roll is lower, the vehicle has a "movement failure."

Move Speeds

Although a vehicle can only move once per round, the driver can pick one of four speeds.

Cautious Movement

This is a very slow movement —the vehicle goes at half its Move. For instance, a vehicle with a Move of 200 would move up to 100 meters.

When traveling over Very Easy, Easy, and Moderate terrain, cautious movement is a "free action" and the driver doesn't have to roll her *vehicle operation* or *piloting*.

In Difficult, Very Difficult, and Heroic terrain, roll the character's vehicle operation skill, but reduce the difficulty one level. For instance, Very Difficult (30) terrain becomes Difficult (20) to cross; Moderate (15) terrain becomes Easy (10) to cross.

Example: Lancer Gudrig is at the controls of a recon buggy, making a sortie to scout out enemy positions. He has a *vehicle operation* skill of 5D+2 and a *gunnery* of 5D. The recon buggy has a move of 45 (top speed: 130 kph) and a maneuverability of 1D+2. He's driving over rolling fields —Easy (10) terrain— at cautious speed. Lancer doesn't have to roll —the buggy automatically moves 23 meters. If he were also firing the buggy's tail cannon, he'd get to roll his full *gunnery* skill of 5D because this is a "free action."

Later, Lancer tries driving his buggy through a narrow, twisting canyon in the middle of a driving rainstorm —it's Very Difficult (30) terrain. Since he decides to move at cautious speed, the terrain is considered one difficulty level easier: it's only Difficult (20). Lancer gets to roll his *vehicle operation* of 5D and the buggy's maneuverability of 1D+2 —he gets a 21. Lancer maneuvers the recon buggy through the canyon without much difficulty, although he knows he'd better not go too much faster or he may bounce off an obstacle and flip the buggy.

Cruising Movement

Cruising movement is normal driving speed for a vehicle —it moves at its Move speed.

Moving at cruising speed counts as an action, but the pilot can automatically make the move for crossing Very Easy, Easy, and Moderate terrain. A pilot must roll the vehicle's operation skill for covering Difficult, Very Difficult, and Heroic terrain.

Example: Lancer is driving his recon buggy over open territory —Easy (10) terrain— but an enemy patrol vehicle is closing in fast. He can automatically drive his buggy at cruising speed (the vehicle goes at its Move of 45meters), but it counts as an action. Firing the tail cannon is a second action, so he rolls 4D (subtract the –1D penalty from his *gunnery* of 5D) to hit the enemy vehicle.

Later Lancer is maneuvering the buggy through a thick forest —Difficult (20) terrain— at cruising speed. He rolls his *vehicle operation* and the buggy's maneuverability and gets a 22 —he maneuvers through the tree branches without so much as scratching the paint.

High Speed

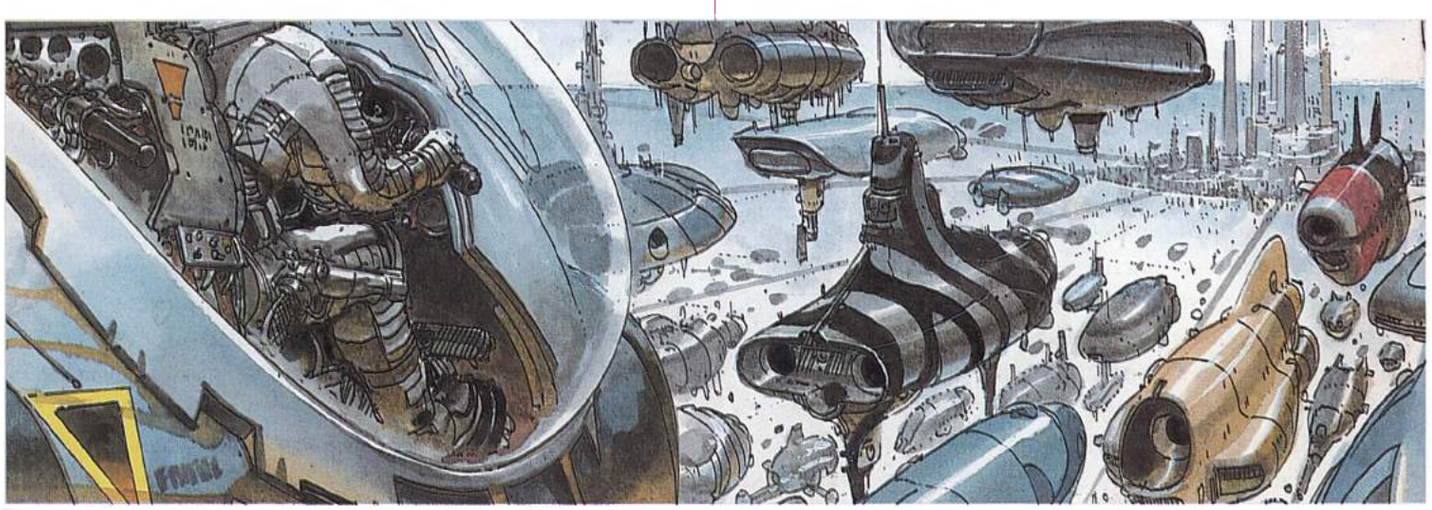
High speed movement is pushing a vehicle for added speed —the vehicle moves at twice its Move speed.

The pilot must roll to cross Very Easy, Easy, or Moderate terrain.

When moving at high speed, the difficulty for covering Difficult, Very Difficult, and Heroic terrain increases one level: Difficult terrain becomes Very Difficult to cross, Very Difficult terrain becomes Heroic, Heroic terrain becomes Heroic+10.

Example: Lancer is racing his buggy at high speed across a clear grassy plain: Easy (10) terrain. His *vehicle operation* and maneuverability rolls total 19 —his buggy races 90 meters over the plains.

Later Lancer tries racing his buggy at high speed through heavy traffic —it's Difficult (20) terrain. Because



he's moving at high speed, the terrain is considered Very Difficult (30). Lancer rolls his *vehicle operation* and maneuverability, getting a 27 —he fails. To find out what happens, see "Movement Failures" below.

All-Out

All-out movement is moving at a vehicle's top speed —it moves at four times its Move.

Characters driving a vehicle at "all-out" speed may not do anything else in the round, including vehicle dodges or firing the vehicle's weapons.

Increase the difficulty one level for driving over Very Easy, Easy, and Moderate terrain. Increase the difficulty two levels for Difficult, Very Difficult, or Heroic terrain.

Example: Lancer knows enemy vehicles are closing in on him, but he sees an open plain stretching for kilometers ahead. He decides to move all-out, hoping to out-race the enemy drivers. The open field is Easy (10) terrain; since Lancer is moving all-out, the difficulty increases to Moderate (15). Lancer rolls his *vehicle operation* and maneuverability, getting a 21 —Lancer's buggy (with a Move of 45) pulls away, crossing 180 meters!

Later, Lancer decides to move all-out through the heart of a dense forest. It's Difficult (20) terrain, but because he's moving all-out, the difficulty increases two levels to Heroic (35). Lancer rolls his *vehicle operation* of 5D+2 and his buggy's maneuverability of 1D+2 and gets a 27... even this task is a little above his considerable abilities. To see how bad Lancer may have wrecked, see "Movement Failures" below.

Acceleration and Deceleration

Vehicles may increase or decrease their movement one level per round.

Example: Lancer is driving his recon buggy at cruising speed in one round. The next round he may maintain cruising speed, decrease to cautious speed or increase to high speed; he may not increase his speeder to all-out speed.

Later, Lancer pushes his buggy at all-out speed while racing through a forest. He rounds a bend and faces a sudden dead-end. While he'd love to bring the buggy to a complete stop, the best he can do is slow down to high speed. Lancer holds on and hopes for the best!

Partial Moves

Characters can move anywhere between half their "move speed" and the full move speed.

Example: Lancer's recon buggy, with a Move of 45, is going at high speed (up to 90 meters). The buggy can move anywhere between 45 and 90 meters.

Long-Distance Movement

All-out movement takes its toll on vehicles —a vehicle continuously going all-out must make a **body strength** roll every 10 minutes.

The first body strength difficulty is Very Easy (5); increase the difficulty one level for each additional roll. If the vehicle fails the roll by 1–10 points, the vehicle suffers strain (such as overheating) and must "rest" for twice as long as it moved all-out. If the roll fails by 11 or more points, the vehicle suffers a mechanical failure and requires a Moderate (15) repair roll and at least one hour of work.

High speed movement also requires body strength rolls once every hour. The first roll is made at a Very Easy (5) difficulty and increases one difficulty level for each additional roll.

Terrain Difficulties

Very Easy (5): Driving over flat, artificial surfaces with no obstacles, such as roads. Driving in light traffic. Flying over any flat, stable surface.

Easy (10): Driving over smooth surfaces with minor obstacles. Driving in moderate traffic. Flying low over uneven terrain, or in moderate traffic, such as on a highway or on city streets.

Moderate (15): Driving in heavy traffic at high speed. Driving over rough terrain or through an intense storm with thunder and lightning. Flying over very uneven terrain, such as down a chasm, or in any situation that severely limits visibility (bad storm or thick fog).

Difficult (20): Driving a vehicle over very rough terrain, such as up a mountainside, through a crater field, or during a meteor storm. Conducting a chase in heavy traffic or with other major obstacles. Anti-grav flight through thick forests or a winding canyon.

Very Difficult (30): Driving through a city during an earthquake or fierce battle, as stray shots land all around your vehicle, buildings topple in front of you, or the highway you're driving on begins to collapse. Flying under similar circumstances.

Heroic (31+): Driving or flying in any situation that verges on the impossible. Trying to navigate through thick swamps with branches and vines blocking the way at every turn. Racing through the core of an immense drilling machine and avoiding its heavy machinery.

Maneuvers

The difficulty number covers basic maneuvers: straight-line movement, a couple of turns and other simple movements. If a character wants to make a more difficult maneuver, such as jumping an obstacle or making an extremely tight turn at high speed, add modifiers as needed:

+1–5	Maneuver is fairly easy.
+6–10	Maneuver is somewhat difficult and requires a certain amount of skill.
+11–15	Maneuver is very difficult and requires a very talented (or lucky) driver or pilot.
+16 or more	Maneuver appears to be almost impossible. Only the very best drivers can pull off a maneuver of this difficulty.

Here are some sample maneuvers and their difficulty modifiers. Gamemasters and players are not limited to this list —characters can attempt many other maneuvers, with difficulties for each determined by the gamemaster.

Bootlegger Turn. (Ground vehicles; +6–+15 depending upon situation.) The vehicle slams on its brakes, spinning around and sliding. It only moves half its normal Move, but ends up facing the opposite direction.

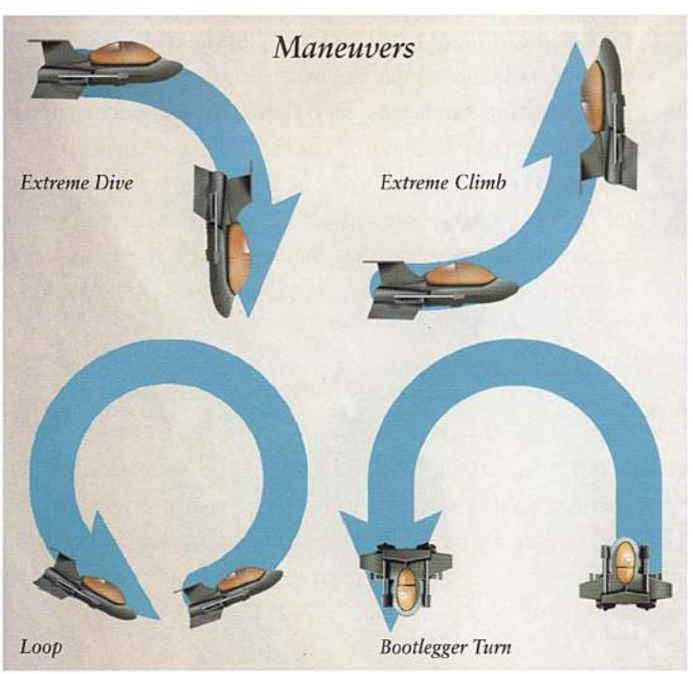
Extreme Climb or Extreme Dive. (Flying vehicles; +6–+20 or more depending upon situation.) The vehicle climbs or dives at an extreme angle (45° or more).

Extreme Turn. (Ground and flying vehicles; +6–+15 depending upon situation.) The vehicle is attempting a very tight turn (any turn over 45°) while maintaining a high speed. The specific modifier depends on how fast the vehicle is going and the difficulty of making the turn without losing control.

Jump. (Ground vehicles; +5–+20 depending upon situation.) The vehicle is jumping, either off a bridge, from a cliff or from some other obstacle or ramp. The difficulty depends on how far the vehicle is attempting to jump and the difficulty of maintaining control upon landing.

Loop. (Flying vehicles; +15–+25 or more depending upon situation.) The vehicle performs a loop over the course of its entire move.

Rotate. (+5–+15 or more depending upon situation) Some flying vehicles at cruising speed or less can rotate —change direction up to 360°— without changing their inertia.



Movement Failures

A vehicle that fails a movement roll may have to slow down or may even collide with an obstacle.

Find the number of points by which the movement roll failed:

1–3: Slight Slip. The vehicle experiences a slight "slip," skidding sideways or almost swerving out of control. While the vehicle completes the movement, the pilot suffers a penalty of –1D to all actions for the rest of the round (in addition to normal multiple action penalties).

4–6: Slip. The vehicle nearly slides out of control and only makes half its Move. The pilot suffers a penalty of –3D to all actions for the rest of the round, and –1D to all actions for the next round (in addition to normal multiple action penalties).

7–10: Spin. The vehicle completes one-quarter of its Move and then goes spinning out of control. It can make no movements for the rest of the round and the next round. If the vehicle hasn't been damaged by a collision, it may begin moving in two rounds.

11–15: Minor Collision. The vehicle glances off another vehicle or nearby obstacle. (Subtract –3D from normal collision damage; see "Vehicle Collisions" below.) If there's nothing to hit, the vehicle simply spins out of control and can make no movements for the rest of the round and the next round.

16–20: Collision. The vehicle smashes into another vehicle or nearby object, doing normal collision damage. (See "Vehicle Collisions.") If there's nothing to hit, the vehicle may spin out of control, or at the gamemaster's discretion, the vehicle may begin to tumble, flip over, or experience some other collision.

21+: Maior Collision. The vehicle crashes into an obstacle and at such a poor angle as to increase collision damage by +4D. (See "Vehicle Collisions.") If there's nothing to hit, the vehicle flips out of control or experiences some other serious collision.

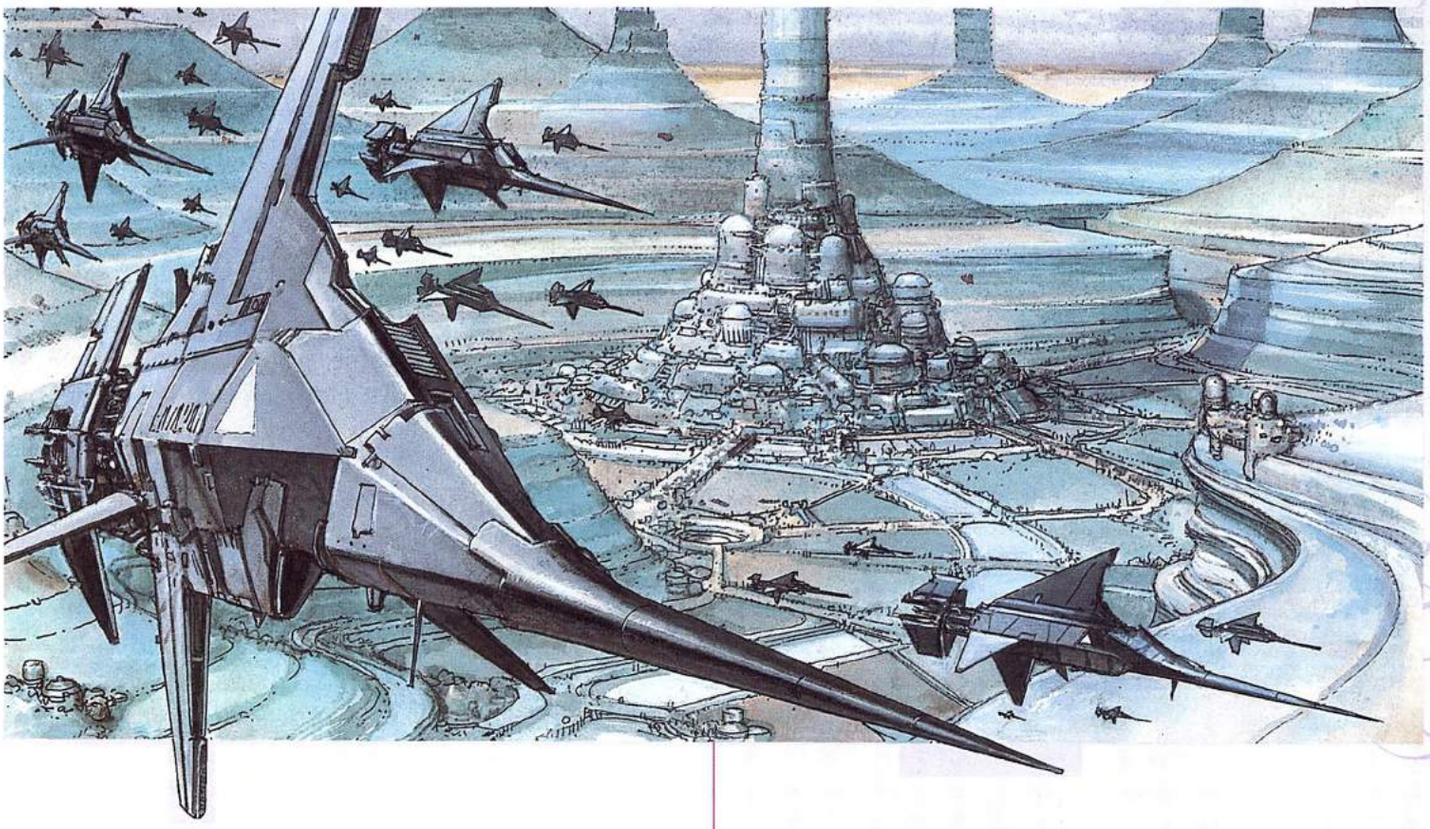
Vehicle Collisions

The amount of collision damage depends on how fast the vehicle was moving. (When resolving collision damage with ships or objects of different scales, don't forget to use appropriate damage die modifiers.)

Speed	Collision Damage
Cautious	2D
Cruise	4D
High Speed	6D
All-Out	10D

Roll the collision damage and compare it to the vehicle's body strength roll. The "Vehicle Damage" section in "Vehicle Combat" below explains what happens.

Head-on crash	+3D
Rear-ender/sideswipe	–3D
T-bone	0D



If the vehicle runs into another vehicle, the damage changes based on the angle of the collision.

You may want to adjust collision damage to reflect what a vehicle runs into. If a vehicle smashes into a reinforced wall, it suffers full damage. On the other hand, something with a little "give" —like a wire fence or thick bushes— may absorb some of the impact while slowing the vehicle down: you may want to reduce collision damage by –1D, –2D or more.

You should describe collisions in colorful detail since they're one of the "emotional payoffs" of chase scenes.

Example: Lancer is driving his recon buggy at high speed. The difficulty number is 20, but he only rolls a 6 —since he fails the roll by 14, he suffers a "minor collision." High speed movement normally causes 6D damage, but the minor collision's –3D to damage means that the recon buggy only suffers 3D damage. The gamemaster rolls the 3D, while Lancer rolls the buggy's body strength of 2D+2 to resist damage. Later Lancer fails another movement roll, this time by 24 points. He was driving the recon buggy at high speed and it experiences a "major collision": the high speed movement causes 6D damage and the major collision adds another +4D to damage. His recon buggy suffers 10D damage!

Vehicle Combat

You handle vehicle combat just like regular combat. The action is divided into five-second rounds. Attacking with a vehicle's mounted weapons requires three basic steps:

- Determine the difficulty number to hit the target (based on the range).
- The attacker rolls his attack skill (normally *gunnery* or *Mechanical*).
- If the roll is equal to or higher than the difficulty number, the attack hits. Roll damage. (See "Vehicle Damage" below.)

Example: Lancer is firing his recon buggy's tail cannon at an enemy trankar that's picked up his trail. The trankar is 75 meters away, within medium range for Lancer's tail cannon, and requiring a Moderate (15) *gunnery* roll to hit. Lancer's has the *gunnery* skill at 5D, and the tail cannon's fire control is 1D. If Lancer fires while his buggy's stopped, he gets to roll 6D to hit; if he rolls 15 or higher, Lancer's shot hits the enemy trankar.

Reaction Skills

The target can roll a reaction skill, considered a "vehicle dodge." Roll the driver's *vehicle operation* (or other skill) and the vehicle's maneuverability code. This becomes the new difficulty number to hit the vehicle.

Example: The enemy trankar driver decides to make a vehicle dodge to get out of the way of Lancer's attack. The driver's *vehicle operation* skill is 4D and the trankar's maneuverability code is 0D: his vehicle dodge roll is a 17 —Lancer's new difficulty number to hit the speeder is a 17!

Full Reaction. The driver can make a "full reaction." Roll the vehicle dodge; this can be the only action he takes in the entire round. The character rolls his *vehicle operation* (or other skill) and the vehicle's maneuverability code and adds it to the difficulties of all attacks made against the vehicle that round.

Example: Later on, Lancer fires again at the trankar: he's still at medium range, for a Moderate (15) shot. The enemy trankar driver decides to make a full vehicle dodge: he rolls his 4D (*vehicle operation* of 4D and the maneuverability of 0D) and gets a 10. Because this is a full vehicle dodge, Lancer's new difficulty number is a 25; however, the trankar driver can't do anything else in the round, not even move his vehicle in the intended direction.

Vehicle Combat Modifiers

All modifiers from the chapter on "Combat & Injuries" apply to vehicle combat. There are a few additional modifiers that may come into play.

Scale. Make sure you take into account scale modifiers for combat between vehicles of different scales.

Cover. Most vehicles provide some protection to the driver and any passengers —listed as None, 1/4, 1/2, 3/4 or Full. Add the cover and protection modifiers as described in the chapter on "Combat & Injuries."

Vehicle Weapons

Vehicle weapon descriptions list the skill required to use the weapon, its fire control and damage, as well as its fire rate and blast radius (if needed).

Ranges. If a weapon lists four ranges, the first range listing is for point-blank range, a Very Easy (5) difficulty. Anything less than point-blank range is too close for the weapon to be targeted accurately —the difficulty becomes Very Difficult (30). This often occurs because a weapon's mounting and elevating machinery won't allow it to lower far enough to shoot at targets up close.

Example: The trankar's primary cannon has ranges listed as 10–50/150/300. Anything between 10 and 50 meters away is at point-blank range. Anything closer to the weapon than 10 meters is at less than point-blank range: the difficulty to hit it is Very Difficult (30).

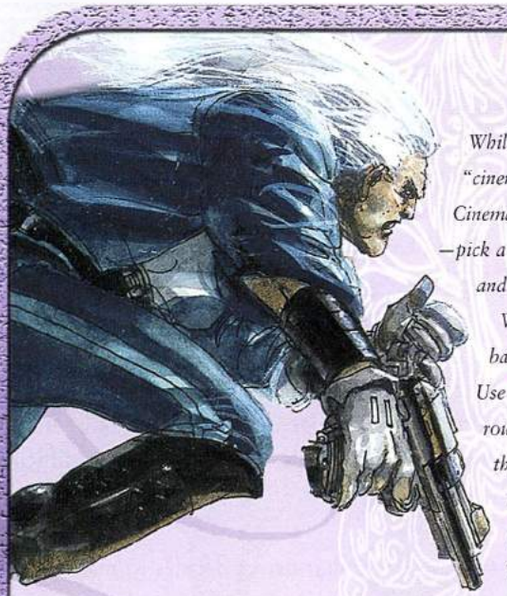
Crew. A weapon's "crew" listing shows the number of gunners necessary to fire the weapon in combat. A listing of "Crew: 1" means the weapon can be fired by one person. A listing of "Crew: 2" means that two people must work the weapon, but only one person rolls his *gunnery* skill to see if the attack hits. If a weapon doesn't have a crew listing, it means it can be fired by the pilot.

Fire Arc. Weapons also list **fire arcs** —the direction (or directions) the weapon can be fired. Weapon fire arcs are fore, aft, port, starboard, and turret. Turrets can fire in any direction.

Ramming

One vehicle can try to ram another, but only if it passes very close to the target vehicle during its move.

Add +10 to the movement difficulty for the ramming vehicle.



Running Cinematic Chases

While this set of rules allows you to measure every move of every round, you should consider using a "cinematic" approach when running chases and vehicle battles in your games.

Cinematic combat focuses on characters in aircars racing through the air, gunfire bursting wildly around them —pick a difficulty number, roll the character's skill, give a snappy description of what you think should happen, and keep the game moving.

Whether the vehicles are 140 meters apart or 150 meters apart isn't as important as making the chase or battle as exciting as the ones in the Metabarons comics.

Use a combination of rounds and scenes to maintain the flow of the game. Rather than rolling for every round, lump several minutes' travel into one scene: have the players decide how fast they're moving and roll their vehicle operation (or other skill) a few times. If the characters beat the terrain difficulty number, they have no problems; if they roll lower than the difficulty number, they may have had to slow down or may have even had a minor collision.

Then compare the vehicle operation rolls of their opponents —if their opponents started far behind but made several great rolls, they may be able to catch up to the player characters. If the gamemaster characters rolled poorly, the player characters may have pulled away.

Once you set the stage, you can run a round-by-round battle at the chase's climax. When you use round-by-round combat, don't be afraid to "bend" the rules in favor of telling a great story —approximate ranges and terrain difficulties, and estimate difficulty numbers quickly.

Focus on exciting narration —"the enemy trankar rumbles through the forest, crushing the underbrush beneath its massive multiple treads. It lowers its main gun at your fleeing recon buggy and opens fire! What are you going to do?"

This method might sacrifice a certain amount of "realism," but the game moves swiftly and you now have the freedom to adjust difficulty numbers to suit the needs of your story.

For more suggestions on running these types of scenes, see "Long-Distance Travel" later in this chapter and the chapter on "Running Battles."

Encounters

When setting up a cinematic chase, you should have a general idea of what the vehicles could run into. What's the terrain like and what obstacles will the combatants face? You have to determine who's involved in the battle. Some people sketch out a map of the chase area —but that's only necessary if you think you need one to keep track of what's going on. Other people are perfectly happy to make up details and terrain difficulty numbers on the fly: "You round the hill, gun the throttle... and right ahead is a thicket of trees! There's no time to turn. Make your vehicle operation roll as you dive into the thick branches!"
You can liven up the chase by creating several "encounters" —anything "extra" that happens to complicate the action, including freak weather, special terrain, people pulling out in front of the combatants, traps (such as vehicle mines set up to protect the mouth of a canyon), avalanches caused by the noise of the chase... anything that adds to the tension.

For example, if the characters are in a chase in the middle of a city, you might choose to include some of these encounters:
• Someone pulls out right in front of the characters' vehicle. The driver must make a Difficult (20) vehicle operation roll to avoid a high speed collision.
• The characters stumble into a traffic jam. The roadway in front of them is completely blocked. Now where are they going to go? Maybe they should take to the aqueducts running parallel to the highway... but first they have to jump the security fence: a Very Difficult (30) *vehicle operation* roll is needed to jump the craft over the fence and not crash.
• If the characters take a wrong turn, maybe they end up careening into the heart of an immense zoo or amusement park. They have to make several rolls to avoid obstacles (energy fences surrounding the animals, crowds of visiting tourists)... and find some way to avoid getting caught... and not get lost!
• If the characters weren't already being hounded by the local authorities, they are now! If they're already being chased, more security aircars close in from all sides... their capture looks a lot more certain. Whoever they're chasing is probably going to get away if the characters are pulled over.
• An aircar from a local news agency starts following the chase, broadcasting every second of the "pitched battle." Of course, that one aircar will soon be joined by others. Now the characters aren't going to be able to escape (unless they can lose the news agency vehicles) and they're most certainly going to be identified.

Props

You can use miniature science fiction toys, counters, and even board game pieces to represent all the vehicles in a chase. You can just move the vehicles around each turn to show their relative positions. Use stacks of coins or counters to show the altitude of each flying vehicle. Having terrain to set up around the vehicles is a nice touch, too, or you could just draw up a map on some scrap paper. Because vehicles move so fast, you can't really create terrain for the whole scene. You also don't really need to worry about the "scale" of the battle —just move the figures around to show "roughly" where everyone is.
Although setting up a battle scene like this takes some work, it certainly gets the players into the spirit of the chase: they'll soon start moving "their" vehicle around while describing their maneuvers... and everyone will enjoy the game that much more.
When staging major battles between characters, you may want to use maps and counters —or better yet, painted miniatures, mini-vehicle sets and scenery— to show the players what's happening. They're not necessary for the game, but they help all the players see exactly where their characters and their opponents are standing. The player can see the crates his character is going to dive behind and knows exactly where the enemy soldiers are standing. Just like vehicle miniatures, the players will soon get into the game and move "their" characters around on the table. Again, the visual representation gets everyone that much more interested in the game!

Three-Dimensional Combat

If you're running a battle with exact distances and the combatants are at different altitudes, here's a quick and easy way to measure approximate weapon ranges:
• Measure the horizontal and vertical distances between the vehicles.
• Divide the smaller of the two numbers in half and add it to the longer one: that's the range.

Example: Lancer is firing at a pursuing aircar in the distance. It's 150 meters away and 30 meters above him. Thirty meters is the smaller of the two, so add 15 to 150 to get a range of 165 meters.

Ramming also counts as a separate action: the driver suffers an additional –1D multi-action penalty.

If the driver's *vehicle operation* (or other skill roll) is higher than the difficulty, the attacking vehicle rams the target vehicle.

If the driver's *vehicle operation* (or other skill roll) is lower than the original movement difficulty number, the driver fails; see "Movement Failures."

If the driver's *vehicle operation* (or other skill roll) is equal to or higher than the original difficulty but lower than the new movement difficulty, the vehicle completes the move successfully, but the ram attack misses.

Target vehicles can make a vehicle dodge to avoid a ram attack. Ram attacks damage both vehicles: the attacker suffers damage as if involved in a sideswipe (–3D to normal damage), but the victim suffers damage as if involved in a T-bone (normal damage).

Example: The enemy trankar is trying to ram Lancer's recon buggy at high speed. The terrain is Moderate (15), and with the distance between the two vehicles closing, the trankar driver needs to roll his *vehicle operation* of 4D higher than 25. If the trankar driver rolls less than 15, he fails the *vehicle operation* roll and has a movement failure. If he rolls a 15–24, he succeeds at the *vehicle operation* roll and crosses the terrain, but his ramming attack misses. The driver rolls a 25 (using a few Character Points), and rams Lancer's buggy with the trankar. Since the trankar is moving at high speed, it inflicts 6D damage on the recon buggy, but only takes 3D damage itself.

Vehicle Damage

Rather than suffering injuries like characters, vehicles sustain damage to their systems, usually the engines and weapons systems.

When a vehicle has a collision, roll the collision damage and compare it to the vehicle's body strength roll (this is like a character's *Strength* roll to resist damage). If a vehicle is blasted in combat, compare the weapon's damage roll to the vehicle's body strength roll.

If the damage roll is lower than the body strength roll, the vehicle takes no damage. If the damage roll is equal to or higher than the body strength roll, find the result on the "Vehicle Damage Chart."

Vehicle Damage Chart

Damage Roll Greater Than Body Strength Roll By:	Effect
0–5	Shields blown/controls disabled
6–10	Lightly damaged
11–15	Heavily damaged
16–20	Severely damaged
21+	Destroyed

Shields Blown. A "shields blown" result means that the vehicle loses –1D from its shields total (if it has any). This loss lasts until the shields are repaired. If the vehicle has no dice remaining in shields (or had no shields to begin with), it suffers the controls disabled result.

Controls Disabled. A controls disabled result means that the vehicle's controls suffer a temporary power overload. The craft loses –1D from its maneuverability, fire control for weapons, damage from weapons, and shield dice for the rest of that round and the next round. The vehicle's body strength remains at its full die code.

If a vehicle suffers from as many controls disabled results as the vehicle has maneuverability dice, its controls are frozen for the next two rounds. The vehicle must maintain the same speed and direction for the next two rounds; it may not turn, fire weapons, make shield attempts or take any other action. A pilot must still make the vehicle operation rolls while the controls are frozen or the vehicle automatically crashes.

Example: Lancer is driving his recon buggy with a maneuverability of 1D+2. After coming under enemy fire, the buggy takes one controls disabled results, so its controls are now frozen. Lancer can't slow down, speed up or change course. The vehicle's speed and the terrain make the difficulty Moderate (15). If Lancer makes this roll on his *vehicle operation* skill for the next two rounds, he manages to keep the buggy from crashing.

Lightly Damaged. Vehicles can sustain light damage any number of times. Each time a vehicle is lightly damaged, roll 1D to see which system takes damage:

1–3: Vehicle loses –1D from its maneuverability. If the vehicle's maneuverability has already been reduced to 0D, the vehicle suffers –1 Move.

4: One on-board weapon is hit and destroyed; the gunners take damage (see "passenger damage" below). Randomly determine which weapon is hit.

5–6: Vehicle suffers –1 Move.

Heavily Damaged. Heavily damaged vehicles sustain a much more serious amount of damage. If a heavily damaged vehicle is lightly damaged or heavily damaged again, it becomes severely damaged. Roll 1D to see what system is affected:

1–3: Vehicle loses –2D from its maneuverability until repaired. If the vehicle's maneuverability has already been reduced to 0D, the vehicle suffers a –2 Move.

4–6. Vehicle suffers a –2 Move.

Severely Damaged. Severely damaged vehicles have absorbed major amounts of damage and are almost rendered useless. A severely damaged vehicle that is lightly damaged, heavily damaged, or severely damaged again is destroyed. Roll 1D to see what system is affected:

1–2: Destroyed engines. The vehicle's engines are destroyed. If a ground vehicle is moving at high speed or all-out speed, it crashes. If the ground vehicle is moving at cruising or cautious speed, it simply rolls or bounces to a stop. Flying vehicles plummet toward the ground —the character must make a *piloting* roll to land the vehicle— a minimum difficulty of Moderate (15) —or the craft crashes.

3. Overloaded generator. The engines begin overloading and will explode in 1D rounds, destroying the vehicle. The minimum difficulty to crash-land or stop the vehicle safely is Moderate (15).

4. Disabled weapons. All weapons systems completely shut down.

5. Structural damage. The vehicle begins breaking up, or a major system fails. The pilot has 1D rounds to eject or crash-land the vehicle; the minimum difficulty to crash-land or stop the vehicle safely is Moderate (15).

6. Destroyed. The vehicle is destroyed or crashes into another object due to complete loss of control.

Destroyed. The vehicle is immediately destroyed. All passengers take damage. (See "Passenger Damage.")

Lost Moves

Lost Moves are cumulative. For example, a vehicle that suffers a –1 Move result, then a –2 Move result is at "–3 Moves."

–1 Move: The vehicle can no longer move at all-out speed; it is limited to high speed.

–2 Moves: The vehicle is limited to its cruising speed.

–3 Moves: The vehicle can only move at its cautious speed.

–4 Moves: The vehicle's drive is disabled and it cannot move until repaired.

–5 Moves: The vehicle is destroyed.

Passenger Damage

Passengers may sustain injuries when a vehicle suffers damage or crashes. Use your judgment to decide whether a character takes damage. If a vehicle is destroyed, the resulting explosion almost certainly kills everyone. If characters are on the forward bridge of a large craft and the aft weapon emplacement explodes, it's very unlikely they'll be injured.

Determine damage to characters based on the severity of damage the vehicle sustains. Consider all damage below as character-scale:

Vehicle is:	Passenger suffers:
Lightly damaged	1D
Heavily damaged	3D
Severely damaged	6D
Destroyed	12D

Falling Damage

Whenever anything falls and slams into the ground, the damage depends on how far the character or object fell. The damage always matches the scale of the thing falling —characters suffer character-scale damage, and vehicles suffer vehicle-scale damage.

These values apply to standard gravity worlds. Increase the damage several levels for high-gravity worlds and decrease falling damage a few levels for low-gravity worlds.

Distance Fallen (In Meters)	Damage
3–6	2D
7–12	3D
13–18	4D
19–30	5D
31–50	7D
51+	9D

Speeds

You can use a vehicle's Move to find its all-out speed in kilometers per hour. (You can also use these numbers for characters' Move values.)

A vehicle's "high speed" ("running" speed for the character) is half the all-out kilometers per hour speed. A vehicle's cruising speed ("walking" speed for a character) is one-quarter of the "kilometers per hour" speed. A vehicle's cautious speed (a character's "slow walk") is one-eighth the "kilometers per hour" speed.

Move	Kilometers Per Hour (All-Out)	Move	Kilometers Per Hour (All-Out)
3	10	150	430
5	15	160	460
7	20	175	500
8	25	185	530
10	30	195	560
14	40	210	600
18	50	225	650
21	60	260	750
25	70	280	800
26	75	295	850
28	80	330	950
30	90	350	1,000
35	100	365	1,050
45	130	400	1,150
55	160	415	1,200
70	200	435	1,250
80	230	450	1,300
90	260	470	1,350
105	300	485	1,400
115	330	505	1,450
125	360	520	1,500
140	400	535	1,550

Example: Lancer is piloting an aircar with a Move of 350 (its all-out speed is 1,000 kilometers per hour). If he flies the aircar at high speed, he's going 500 kilometers per hour. If he's flying the aircar at cruising speed, he's flying at 250 kilometers per hour. If he decides to fly at cautious speed, he's going 125 kilometers per hour.

You can find a vehicle's all-out speed in kilometers per hour by multiplying the Move by 2.88.

Example: Lancer is driving a trankar with a Move of 23. Its all-out speed is 66 kilometers per hour.

Long-Distance Travel

Like playing out chases, you should use a combination of scenes and rounds to cover long trips. First, determine the "basic terrain difficulty" for each leg of the journey: clear plains might be Easy (10), while a thick forest might be Difficult (20). Then ask the driver to make his *vehicle operation* (or other skill) roll.

If the pilot rolls below the difficulty number, some kind of random incident occurs. The vehicle may break down. Maybe the characters have a minor accident. Perhaps the local terrain is populated by large and exceedingly stupid herbivores that have a knack for wandering in front of oncoming vehicles.

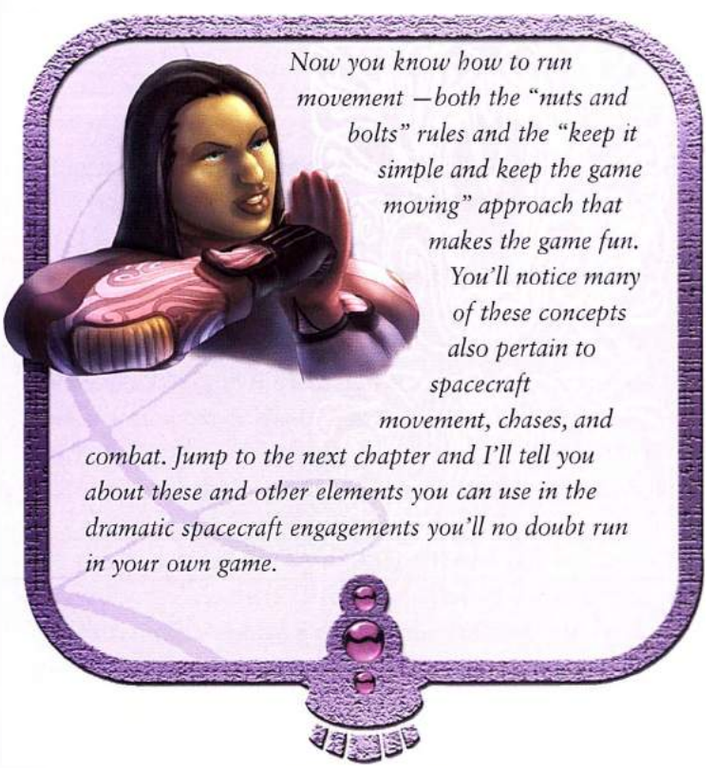
While the incident doesn't have to be directly related to the adventure, it can affect the game: if the characters get pulled over for violating local speed regulations —and the local law enforcement officials run an identity check and find that they're wanted for past offenses— the characters may spend several hours clearing up their problems. Of course, the people they're trying to catch now have a few extra hours to get away.

Encounters

Pre-planned encounters can help liven up an adventure with a long trip.

Maybe the characters must deal with a sudden, violent storm and seek shelter. What kind of vehicle operation difficulties do they face? What happens if they fail a roll? Where can they find a place to stay and who do they run into while they're there? Who can they get to repair their transport if it's damaged in the storm?

Any number of other encounters can liven up the game: maybe the characters get ambushed by pirates, have to avoid an ambush in a small town when they pull over for lunch, have to bluff their way through a security checkpoint —whatever you want to add to spice up your game.



Now you know how to run movement —both the "nuts and bolts" rules and the "keep it simple and keep the game moving" approach that makes the game fun. You'll notice many of these concepts also pertain to spacecraft movement, chases, and combat. Jump to the next chapter and I'll tell you about these and other elements you can use in the dramatic spacecraft engagements you'll no doubt run in your own game.

Space Travel & Combat

If you want to get from planet to planet, you need a spaceship. You can always book passage on a transport, or maybe even use one supplied by your patron. If you're ambitious and lucky enough, you might even buy your own spacecraft someday. But space travel is a lot more than just finding a ship and hopping from one world to another. Numerous dangers lurk along the way, both natural

and man-made. Pirates haunt the space lanes, waiting for unsuspecting cargo cruisers and passenger ships to ambush and rob. Government factions carry out raids against "enemy" shipping to further their own secretive agendas. Even mercenaries sometimes attack spaceships, either for their own greedy purposes or as part of some mission for their employer.

I'll tell you everything you need to know about spaceships and getting around this crazy universe. You probably have a lot of questions on your mind. What constitutes a spaceship? How do I get one? How do I get from one system to another? What can I run into once I get there? And finally, what happens when the shooting starts?

Sit back and listen to someone with way too much experience flying every craft imaginable. When we're through, you'll know everything it took me an entire career to figure out.

What's A Spaceship?

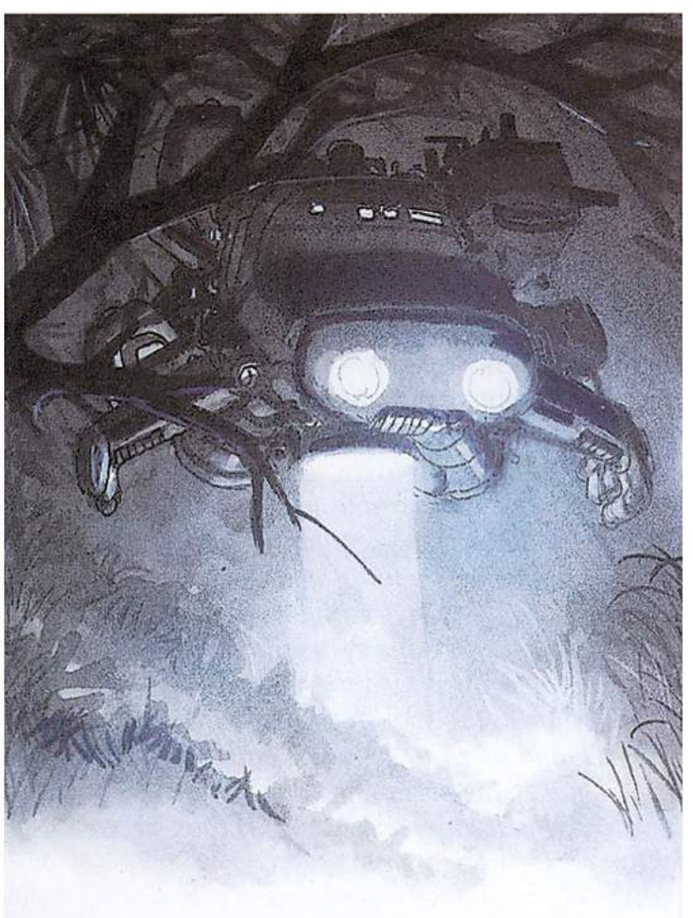
A "spaceship" is any vessel capable of traveling out of a planet's atmosphere, through a star system, and between stars.

Most "modern" spaceships use a stardrive to journey from one nearby star to another. Traveling long distances is best accomplished through the network of tunnels the Techno-Technos maintain. These miracles of technology allow people to travel to distant worlds, trade goods, and maintain a government that rules the universe. Those vessels without stardrive cannot jump through hyperspace to other systems; those without official clearance cannot pass through the Techno-Techno portals.

Space vessels come in many different classifications, but the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* groups them into three general categories.

Battleships

Also known as "capital ships," a battleship is any immense vessel designed for deep space combat or transport. They are typically more than 100 meters long, require large crews, and are armed with shields and numerous weapon emplacements. Many battleships carry fighters, drop ships, or cargo craft. Battleships include the Human Empire's massive military vessels, large, armed carriers used to transport smaller pirate vessels, and carrier-cruisers mercenary companies employ to move their flight and ground forces.



Ships of this size use the rules for battleship-scale vessels (see the section discussing "Scale" in the "Combat & Injuries" chapter).

Flying a battleship-sized vessel requires a crew proficient in various *Mechanical* skills (*astro-nav*, *comm*, *gunnery*, *piloting*, *sensors*, and *shields*), all coordinated and directed by a competent captain with the *command* skill.

Fighters

Fighters are designed for combat in space and often in planetary atmospheres. Starfighters typically have a crew of fewer than six, with almost no cargo space. Some are light, swift, and fragile, while others are larger, heavily armored, and much more durable. Most sport shields and an array of weapons. Many heavier fighters employ stardrives in addition to their standard engines, allowing them to jump to other systems through hyperspace. Those without stardrive must rely on carriers to ferry them from one star system to another.

Fighters include Endoguard lancets, armed mercenary drop-carriers, and the Ostrov-class ships often employed by mercenaries and pirates.

Ships of this size use the rules for fighter-scale vessels (see the section discussing "Scale" in the "Combat & Injuries" chapter).

Since fighter pilots and crews must often take on several duties aboard their craft, they must be proficient in numerous *Mechanical* skills.

Transports

This broad category covers any vessel not specifically designed for combat. These ships often serve to transport goods or people, gather astrographical information, explore new regions of space, and otherwise fulfill a variety of civilian tasks. This doesn't mean they're not armed. Many mount weapons emplacements and shields as a matter of protection, but their primary purpose is not combat.

Transports include exploration craft, utility ships, Imperial Merchants Guild cargo cruisers, passenger and cargo shuttles, Techno-Techno research transports, luxurious space yachts, freighter transports, and even immense passenger liners

You determine a transport's scale by its size and crew compliment. Anything larger than a heavily armed fighter (like the Ostrov vessels) requiring a crew of more than five people to fly is a battleship-scaled craft. Consider anything smaller as fighter-scale. Game information on individual ships indicates to which class it belongs. Use the *piloting* skills and scale classifications noted for fighters and battleships above.

How Do I Get A Ship?

Spaceships aren't cheap. I've worked on them my entire life and never had a vessel of my own. Although starship technology is state-of-the-art, it costs more kublars than many of us will ever see over our entire lifetimes. Entrepreneurs willing to mortgage their futures on the ability to make a profit hauling cargoes —legal or otherwise— may be able to purchase a beat-up, obsolete transport.

Small businesses and independent traders with more resources can purchase newer, more reliable vessels, but they often pour most of their profits into maintaining and upgrading these vessels.

Larger entities and wealthier individuals have better means to afford their own starships. Most mercenary companies pour their profits into cruisers, drop-carriers, and fighters to better tackle their military assignments. Pirates often use a good portion of their loot in maintaining and fixing space vessels they capture in combat or steal from unsuspecting citizens. The wealthy can afford luxurious, customized space yachts, and the equipment and ordnance to protect them (as long as it still looks stylish inside and out).

The powers that run the universe can really afford the big cruisers. Each Maganat has its own fleet of utility, transport, and defense ships. The Emperoress can summon an armada of battleships to protect citizens from the threats posed by aliens, insurgents, pirates, and other destructive political forces. The Endoguards enforce the Human Empire's will with their top-line lancets, bristling with armor and weaponry.

So you can see, spaceships aren't cheap. There's the basic cost of the ship itself, then any debt owed on the initial purchase, plus landing and fueling fees, then maintenance and repairs —it looks so romantic in the holovids; it's murder on your profit.

You'll find only a rare few templates that begin the game with any kind of spacecraft —and in these cases, they also inherit mountains of debt or other sticky conditions: allegiances, associations, and complicated obligations.

New vessels are beyond the reach of the average person; even used ships are expensive. Probably the best ship most characters can afford is an aging cargo transport with more than a few quirks hidden beneath the battered deck plates. Owners can upgrade their craft over time —see the rules for using *repair* skills to improve vessels in the "Attributes & Skills" chapter.

Military-grade vessels —such as fighters and battleships— are prohibitively expensive. Governmental regulations and the economy supposedly keep these craft out of the hands of questionable individuals and groups who might use them to cause trouble. Only planetary governments, corporate-sponsored mercenaries, and the largest companies have the opportunity to legally acquire such vessels. Those with enough kublars and connections can purchase such ships through the black market, though this is always a risky venture. There's always the "easy" way to acquire a vessel: borrow money from a criminal underlord. With the government's restrictive policies, even the most honest spacers are sometimes forced to turn to the underworld for a few kublars. Most criminal organizations are more than happy to help a freighter captain through a tough time in exchange for a few "favors" and a hefty profit. Since the obligations often outweigh the benefits, only the most desperate individuals take this route, but for some it's the only way to acquire their own ship.

Employer's Ship

If you don't have the kublars, you can work for someone who owns a ship.

Characters working for a particular group often receive transportation as part of their assignment, though this is often as temporary as employment with that specific organization.

Most mercenary units own their transports, cruisers, and fighters, allowing some pilots to grow attached to certain craft and giving them certain freedoms. A drop-carrier pilot, for instance, would fly his craft on unit missions, but would also have permission to use the ship for his own purposes between official assignments —as long as his job didn't undermine the unit's strength, reputation, or patrons.

Other groups —military militias, media companies, pirate bands— supply their members with ships, or access to transportation, but it doesn't approach the independence of flying your own ship.

Corporations often lease cargo freighters to their pilots, allowing them to take on small jobs on the side in addition to their formal company work. The more freedom the pilot has, the more he pays to repair and maintain his craft.

Contract pilots are the mercenaries of flight. They sell their talents to the highest bidder (or whoever's hiring), flying vessels provided by their employer for a period as specified in their usually temporary contract. Corporations hire contract pilots for special jobs —often entailing high risk or irregular cargo runs. Explorers find most of their work this way, though they usually don't collect most of their pay until they return, just to make sure they don't disappear into parts unknown with the company exploration vessel.

Characters may also be able to lease a ship from a wealthy or corporate sponsor. Often, they'll be under exclusive contract and have to take cargoes at the sponsor's convenience. They'll have to make regular payments and probably have to pay for all expenses and repairs out of their own pockets... but at least it's a way to buy a ship, especially for those people who can't get loans from financial institutions.

Booking Passage

Characters who must find a way to travel from one system to another, but who don't own a ship, still have a few options.

The most common choice is to book passage on a passenger liner or transport. Liners travel regular routes between worlds; most major systems are regularly served by one or more passenger cruisers. Accommodations range from spartan (a seat and perhaps a meal for short journeys) to staterooms with all the luxuries one could possibly imagine. Naturally, costs match the "style" one travels in, from a hundred kublars for a short trip on a cheap transport to many thousands of kublars for luxury cruises.

For such journeys, characters merely purchase their tickets and let the crew do its job. Of course, the trip doesn't always go smoothly. Pirate attacks are a frequent problem, and overzealous Endoguards and other Imperial officials have an annoying tendency to search liners, looking for insurgents, contraband, pirates, and others intent on disturbing the carefully enforced peace within the Human Empire.

Characters can save a few kublars by booking passage on an independent freighter that already has a cargo destined for the system they want to visit. Many freighters have a spare bunk or two —but not many other amenities— for just such an occasion. This is perhaps the most discreet way to travel between the stars, though not always the most comfortable or convenient.

Charter

Characters can also hire an independent freighter captain and charter his ship to take them to a planet. While more expensive than commercial liners —some chartered ships charge 8,000 kublars or more— they generally offer more privacy, and the characters can often determine the departure and arrival schedule. There are many reasons to charter a vessel —perhaps it's the only way to avoid the authorities, maybe the characters have a sensitive cargo that they want to keep hidden from prying eyes, or perhaps their destination is so remote that nobody else flies there.

How Do I Get From One System to Another?

Spaceships have two major drive systems: the main engines propel them through material space, and stardrives to jump them phenomenally long distances through hyperspace.

Main Engines

All spaceships have basic drives to propel them through space. These main engines use a variety of technologies and are called by numerous terms: sublight engines, fusion motors, ion drives, impeller motors, subspace engines.

Pilots use a vessel's main engines whenever a ship blasts off from a planet's surface to make a safe jump to hyperspace (away from the planet's gravity well) and for trips between worlds or moons within a system, or to nearby systems within a sector. All starship combat takes place in material space (as opposed to hyperspace). Ships also use their main drives for atmospheric flight. Most spacecraft capable of planetary landings also use anti-grav drives similar to those used on flying vehicles when maneuvering for take-off and landing.

Many battleship-scale craft are not capable of entering a planet's atmosphere to land. These often dock at orbital installations or shuttle passengers, troops, and cargo to the surface in smaller vessels.

Material Space Benchmarks

Although spaceships move at relatively slow speeds in atmospheres and orbit, they can achieve incredible velocities in open space. Here are some very rough guidelines for travel times in material space:

- Five minutes to fly from orbit to a safe point where one can engage the ship's stardrive and jump to hyperspace.
- Half an hour to fly from a planet to one of its moons.
- Two to six hours to fly from one planet to the nearest planet in the system.
- Anywhere from 10 to 48 hours to fly from a star to the outer limits of the system, depending on distance and the presence of any hazards such as asteroid belts or gas clouds.

Pilots frequently make a "micro jump" in hyperspace to travel quickly between planets within a system. Although very precise astro-navigation coordinates are necessary for this type of jump, such trips can be completed within an hour, compared to sublight "intersystem" trips taking many hours.

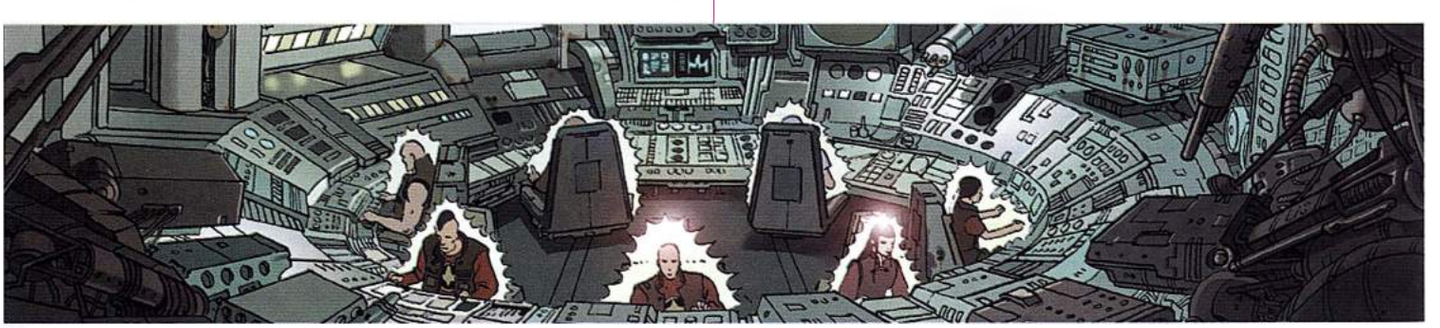
Stardrives

Stardrives propel starships into an alternate sub-dimension known at hyperspace, where it's possible to travel at many times the speed of light. This sub-dimension overlays the one in which one finds the universe at large (not the six parallel universes that bound the main universe). Ships in hyperspace can cross the incredible distances between stars in a few hours.

When a ship jumps to hyperspace, the stardrive rapidly propels the ship to and beyond the speed of light, sending the craft into hyperspace. The laws of physics operate differently in this overlay dimension, allowing the vessel to travel at supra-light speeds without the immense expenditure of power and extreme stresses normally caused by such velocities in material space. When the stardrive is deactivated, it drops the vessel back into material space. Most vessels with legal stardrives can keep a ship in hyperspace for five days at a time before they must drop out of hyperspace and refuel. It takes from one to five days in hyperspace to travel between a major world and a minor world. One must travel more than five days from a major world to reach obscure planets.

The hyperspatial sub-dimension is coterminous with material space —if you head toward the universe's center in hyperspace, you are also heading in that direction in material space. Objects in material space cast shadows of their mass and gravity in hyperspace at the same location. Small objects with minimal gravitational pull —small spacecraft, minute debris, comm satellites— cast small shadows that don't affect travel through hyperspace. Larger objects with greater gravitation influence and mass —gaseous nebula, battleship-sized craft, asteroid fields, even entire star systems— have greater shadows in hyperspace and are considered astrographical hazards to hyperspatial travel. Contact with an object's presence in hyperspace results in the vessel's instant destruction.

Spaceships use "gravimetric mass sensors" to detect hyperspace shadows and shut down the stardrive to avoid collision, although



these systems are not entirely reliable. While deep space collisions are very rare, they also tend to be quite deadly.

Astro-navigators must plot safe paths around interstellar astrographical features, making sure they emerge from hyperspace close to their destination without actually slamming into its mass shadow in the hyperspatial sub-dimension. Due to the incredible speeds achieved in hyperspace, the margin between safe passage and a collision is often only microseconds.

Astro-Nav Computers

To handle the overwhelming complexities of calculating hyperspace trips, most vessels employ astro-navigational computers (also called "astro-nav computers" or "astro-comps"). A ship's astro-navigator uses this computer to plot a safe trip along known routes through hyperspace.

Astro-comps hold a tremendous amount of data, storing the locations of stars, planets, debris, gravity wells, systems, asteroid fields, gas clouds and other hazards, plus the course coordinates for negotiating them in hyperspace.

Some vessels use expensive robot astro-navigators to calculate the coordinates for various jumps. Robots programmed to pilot ships on their own often store a preset number of hyperspace routes to particular systems within their memory chips, though this vies for processor space in their electronic brains with other skills necessary to fly their craft.

Human pilots with an acute understanding of astro-navigation can always try calculating jump coordinates using io boards and other mathematical aids, but this is always an incredibly risky alternative to a robot or computer.

Hyper-Lanes

"Hyper-lanes" are established routes through this sub-dimension linking certain systems, just like roads link settlements on planets relying on ground vehicles for transportation. Since these routes have been traveled countless times and are carefully charted, ships can traverse them much more safely than more indirect, untried courses.

As a route becomes well-known and its hazards are better understood, hyperspace journeys can be plotted with more precision; however, travel times might increase if obstacles drift (or are positioned) into the hyperspace route, forcing a vessel to drop out, refuel, and recalculate its course.

Easy as hyperspatial travel sounds, one must always exercise caution. Despite astrographical surveys, analyzed sensor logs, and innumerable successful journeys, the positions of more than 90 percent of the objects in material space are unknown. The hyperspace gravimetric mass shadow of anything larger than a single, medium-sized asteroid can destroy a ship, and material space is filled with countless such things drifting undiscovered. The extremely slim chance always exists that something has drifted into a hyperspace route.

Daring pilots may plot new routes through hyperspace, but this can be extremely dangerous. Explorers often use a series of very short jumps, scanning ahead prior to each jump, eventually reaching a system after engaging their stardrive dozens of times. This is a time-consuming, painstaking process, but it is much safer than "blind jumping" into unexplored space.

Due to the complexity of astro-nav coordinates, it's virtually suicidal to try to change course while in hyperspace. It's much safer for a ship to drop back to material space to calculate a new hyperspace course.

Since the laws of physics operate differently than in material space, all ships travel at the same relative speed in hyperspace. As long as a vessel has the stardrive and power enough to engage it, the craft can approach light speed and connect with hyperspace. Once there, the stardrive and the alternate laws of physics propel it at a constant supra-light speed. If two ships are racing to the same destination from a common jump point, all that matters is which vessel plots its coordinates and engages the stardrive first. Of course, reaching the destination first also depends on how close to the final location the pilot decides to disengage the stardrive, and whether the trip is interrupted by any unforeseen objects in the hyper-lanes.

Using Stardrives in the Game

You take three steps when a character wants to travel through hyperspace to a different system:

- Pick the *astro-nav* difficulty number.
- Make calculations for the jump.
- Determine the trip's duration.

Pick the Astro-Nav Difficulty Number

The *astro-nav* difficulty can range from Very Easy (5) to Heroic (31+). Most journeys have a base difficulty of Moderate (15), but difficulties can be much lower for easy trips —such as an Easy (10) difficulty for a jump from a major world to a minor world— or much higher for particularly perilous routes. For example, plotting a course to the planet at the Empire's border where Zaran Krleza built his fortress would require something like a Heroic (40) *astro-nav* roll since the system is beyond the reaches of charted space.

Here are some astrogation modifiers:

+30 to the difficulty if the pilot has no robot or astro-comp assistance in computing the course.

Double the difficulty if the pilot is making a hasty jump to hyperspace (see "Make Calculations for the Jump" below).

+5 to the difficulty if the ship is lightly damaged.

+10 to the difficulty if the vessel is heavily damaged.

+1–20 or more to the difficulty if the course comes dangerously close to astrographical hazards (novas, nebulae, nearby systems, asteroid fields, black holes).

Example: Chanadyne is plotting a course from Dreer to Velox, a mid-level industrial world. The trip will take 4 hours, and the gamemaster determines that, since this is a fairly routine course, the *astro-nav* difficulty is Moderate (15).

Techno-Techno Tunnels

For traveling continuous distances longer than five days, people frequently use a network of tunnels maintained by the Techno-Technos. With the correct codes and coordinates, a ship can enter a portal and emerge from another portal at any other major world hosting a portal.

As supreme technological wizards of the universe, the Techno-Technos established their own network for intergalactic travel. This consists of a series of intra-dimensional tunnels —controlled "wormholes" if you want to call them that— that allow them to travel mega-distances nearly instantaneously. The technology behind these gates is closely guarded, but made available to permit intergalactic travel. These tunnels allow ships to pass instantly from one "portal world" to another, within the same sector, within a galaxy, or even to other galaxies. To enter a portal, a ship must apply for and purchase an entry authorization code and destination coordinates from the Techno-Techno installation controlling the tunnel portal. Of course, these installations are well-guarded with some of the most powerful (and secret) technology available.

Only the Techno-Technos know how to properly operate and maintain this network of tunnels, and how to establish new ones. Without Techno-Techno supervision, the portals won't open and it would be impossible to travel through the tunnels. Fees vary for vessels using the tunnels based on the size of the ship and distance to the destination.

When sending a ship through these tunnels, pilots don't have to make any astro-nav skill rolls. They must trust the Techno-Technos to route them to the proper coordinates for the destination portal.

If you don't travel through a Techno-Techno tunnel, you have little choice but to journey between systems using conventional spaceship technology, jumping five days at a time with frequent stops for refuelling. Your characters in the game must resign themselves to long hyperspace journeys, pirate attacks, customs inspections, and crowded starports.

If the character's *astro-nav* roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, the jump proceeds smoothly. If the character misses the difficulty number by 10 or more points, the ship cannot enter hyperspace and a new *astro-nav* roll must be made. If the roll misses the difficulty number by 1–9 points, the ship suffers an "astro-nav mishap"; check out the rules for "Astro-Nav Mishaps" below.

Make Calculations for the Jump

A character making an *astro-nav* roll must make calculations for the jump to hyperspace.

Calculating a route takes one minute if the character uses a well-traveled hyperlane or uses pre-calculated coordinates.

In emergencies, a character can try to jump in one round instead of one minute. The *astro-nav* difficulty for calculating such jumps doubles, and the character rolls each round until he either beats the difficulty number or suffers an astro-nav mishap.

Calculating a less frequented routes between known systems takes about half an hour: Many freighter captains calculate coordinates while still at the spaceport so they can make a jump quickly if they're attacked in transit to the jump point.

These calculations take a few hours if the ship has never jumped to the destination system before. If the character doesn't know where he is (if the ship misjumps), it takes one day to determine his ship's current position and then compute astro-nav coordinates.

Determine the Trip's Duration

Trips between systems have "standard durations" representing the travel time in hyperspace to get from one system to the other. If the characters are visiting other systems, you must pick a standard duration.

Travel between major and minor worlds might take only a few hours, while travel between minor planets and obscure worlds, might take a few hours or days (consisting of several five-hour jumps with a day in between to refuel, effect any repairs, and calculate the next jump). To cross huge distances, it's often easier to plot a course to a major world with a Techno-Techno portal, use a tunnel to reach another major world, and journey through hyperspace to reach the final destination.

There is no publicly known route that travels straight across the universe. The Techno-Technos closely guard their tunnel technology. Only obscenely advanced craft like the Meta-craft can punch through entirely new dimensions to bridge the gap of material and hyperspace to jump across vast distances in virtually instant time.

Using Astro-Nav in the Game

The astro-nav rules can help spice up game play —the possibility of hazards drifting into routes allows you to set difficulties as high or low as you want. Acquiring astro-nav coordinates to a carefully guarded location can serve as an adventure's goal, or getting coordinates can be as simple as running down to the local freighter pilots' guild office and surrendering a few hard-earned kublars for the data.

You can even use astro-nav mishaps as a plot device —something yanks the ship back into material space mid-course, and the characters must deal with some new astrographical hazard, fend off pirates, or explore a strange planet that's drifted into the hyperlane. If you don't have anything special planned, it's normally enough to just cut to the arrival in the destination system and get on with the game.

Astro-Nav Mishaps

When a character fails her *astro-nav* roll and misses the difficulty number by 1–9 points, a mishap occurs. Roll 2D to determine the consequences:

2. ***Stardrive Cut-Out and Damage.*** *The vessel's stardrive cuts-out automatically, avoiding a collision with a stellar body. Unfortunately, the sudden cut-out damaged the stardrive itself. Characters must make a Moderate (15) flight systems repair roll to fix the stardrive; otherwise the ship must use its main engines to limp to the nearest system through material space (possibly taking several days or weeks). This can be a good excuse to introduce the characters to a new system, ship, alien species, or other adventure.*

3–4. ***Radiation Fluctuations.*** *Radiation surges affect the stardrive's performance, randomly increasing or decreasing the journey's duration. The trip takes an extra +1D hours for each point the roll by which the character missed the astro-nav roll difficulty —if the navigator missed the difficulty by 3, the journey might be increased by 3D hours.*

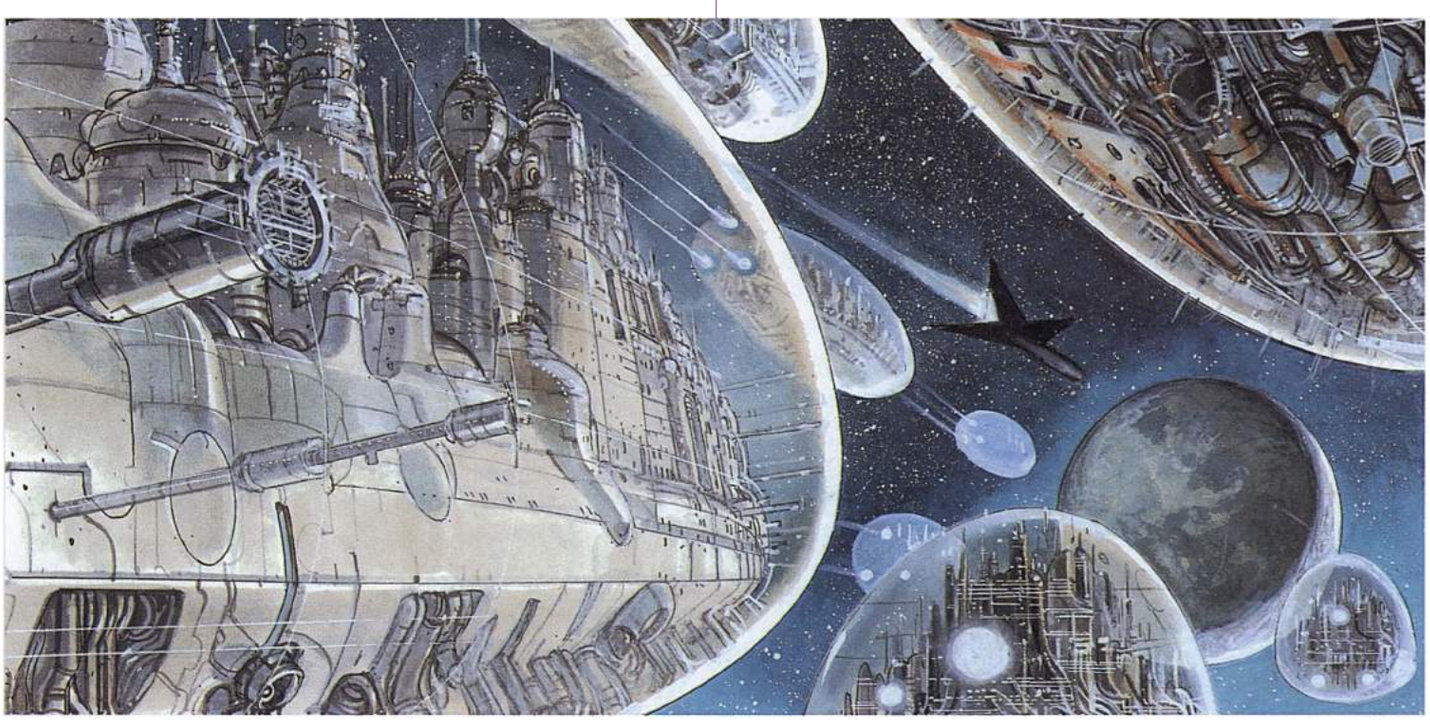
5–6. ***Stardrive Cut-Out.*** *The ship's astro-nav computers detect a gravimetric mass shadow (a rogue planet, for example), pulling the ship back into material space. The pilot must now figure out where exactly in material space they've emerged, and calculate a new jump to their original destination. This is also a good excuse to introduce an adventure or other story complications.*

7. ***Off Course.*** *The ship is completely off-course. The vessel emerges in the wrong system, or, worse yet, in deep space. Characters must determine where exactly in material space they've emerged and plot an entirely new course back to their original destination. The system they have arrived in may be settled or unsettled. Yet another good excuse to introduce an adventure.*

8–9. ***Space Parasites.*** *The universe is packed with nasty little critters who infest spacefaring vessels and nest in control conduits, chew on power cables, leave droppings on sensitive machinery, and otherwise foul up the delicate inner workings of a spacecraft. Some parasites enter a ship while it's docked on a planet or other atmosphere environment, while others that can better survive the cold vacuum might infest the vessel while it travels through material space. Parasites can cause all kinds of havoc while a ship travels the hyperlanes. They might infest the stardrive assembly, increasing the trip's duration by 1D days, and possibly causing damage to the stardrive and other vital systems.*

10. ***Close Call.*** *Some other ship's system, such as the sublight drives, astro-nav computer, maneuvering jets, or weapons sustains damage from any number of factors: faulty workmanship, bad parts, corrosion, or power surges. The ship completes its journey, but characters must repair the system upon arriving at their destination.*

11–12. ***Collision, Heavy Damage.*** *The ship actually collides with an object while traveling the hyperlane. The craft drops to material space, heavily damaged (see "Spaceship Damage" later in this chapter) and with a ruptured hull. The ship is no longer space-worthy and must be abandoned. All characters in a breached area of the vessel must make a Moderate (15) 0-G maneuver or survival roll to get into survival suits in one round. If the character doesn't, he must make a new stamina check each round to avoid passing out from lack of air —in the first round, the difficulty is Easy (10), then Moderate (15), then Difficult (20), then Very Difficult (30), then Heroic (35).*



What Can I Run Into Once I Get There?

Interstellar journeys can take hours, days... even weeks. Since the ship's computers handle everything, crew members and passengers have few responsibilities.

Luxury liners provide a wide variety of entertainment: gourmet meals, music, dancing, holovid shows, and even theatrical entertainment. Ship personnel often spend time studying up on *astro-nav* and other vital skills. Other people pursue hobbies, such as model building, playing games, reading and gambling.

Smaller ships present less enjoyable conditions. Being cooped up in a cramped utility transport for days at a time takes its toll even on the closest of friends. The food tanks may spew nutritious paste, but there's only so long people can take three square meals a day of white, flavorless glop. Ships' computers may carry holovids, games, and other pre-recorded entertainments, but these libraries are normally limited to what personally interests the captain and crew. During the game, you can often skip over the trip and cut to when the ship emerges into material space and closes in on its destination.

You can also use hyperspace trips to good effect. The characters might meet some interesting people aboard a passenger liner —"You run into this fellow who has an unique business proposition for some enterprising folks like you"; "One night you are invited to dine at the Captain's table and strike up a conversation with a kindly-looking old noblewoman." You can plant rumors or news the players might find useful— "Shipboard scuttlebutt says one of the suns near the hyperlane might go nova any time."

You can even stage a major encounter aboard the ship. Maybe there's a saboteur aboard. Perhaps pirates ambush the vessel. Or maybe the player characters accidentally stumble onto some conspiracy they never were meant to hear...

Arriving at Your Destination

When a ship arrives at its destination, it relies on two key systems: sensors and communications.

Sensors

Spaceships use a wide array of sensors to detect other vessels, planets, and any potential hazards. The sensor operator uses his *sensors* skill.

You should base sensors difficulty numbers on the kind of scan characters employ to detect and identify various targets. You can modify this difficulty depending on objects, situations, or conditions that might affect a sensor's readings. You can refresh your knowledge of the *sensors* skill, difficulties, and modifiers by reading over its description in the "Attributes & Skills" chapter.

A vessel's game stats list two numbers for its sensors score, such as "Sensors: 40/1D." The first number represents the sensor's maximum range in "space units" (often used to measure distances between vessels during spaceship combat). The second number shows the die code added to the operator's *sensors* skill when running a scan.

Difficulties for using sensors depend on several scanning techniques.

You can run a focused scan to find a known target in a specific area. Sensors running a focused scan gather lots of information about a very small area, but they get no information about the areas not being scanned.

Characters can program sensors to search for information in one specific fire arc (fore, aft, port, or starboard). This is easier than other methods, but it provides data only on the one fire arc under scan, and nothing about the remaining three fire arcs.

Using active sensor methods, characters can gather information about their general surroundings in space. The scanner array sends out pulses in all directions to actively detect and identify targets, but this technique also broadcasts the ship's presence to anyone else in the system.

Characters can also passively scan an area, picking up information transmitted from potential targets and detected by onboard instruments.

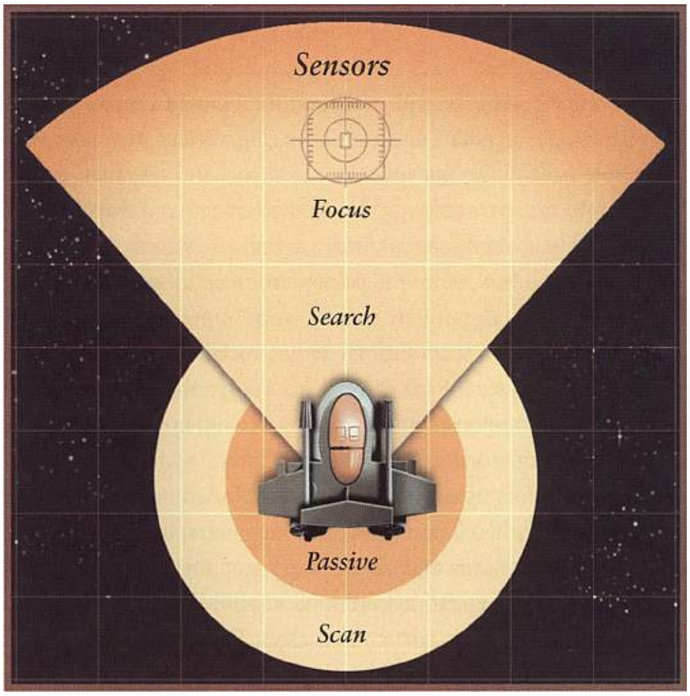
Sensor Countermeasures

Ships may employ a number of countermeasures to make themselves harder to detect.

- Since sensors operate on the principle of "line of sight," any ship can "hide" behind a planet or any other sufficiently large spatial body. By placing the obstacle between itself and the scanning ship, the target vessel can remain undetected. Of course, the sensors may detect a ship's energy emissions if they are too large.
- Any ship that uses its sensors passively is less likely to be detected than a ship using sensors to actively scan, search, or focus on targets.
- Craft can also run silent —the ship powers down all major systems, including engines, weapons, and shields. The ship drifts in space, with its life support systems running on minimal power. Vessels can seldom run silent for longer than five minutes before life support systems must be recharged from the ship's main power generators. A ship running silent has a much higher chance of remaining undetected at long distances.
- Any ship can use its sensors to jam scanner readings, flooding an area with "static noise."

Although any nearby vessels certainly detect this noise —they'll know a ship is causing the jamming— they'll have a tough time determining if the jamming is caused by a small freighter, or a battleship, or an entire armada. Spaceships may also employ devices specifically designed to hide from or confuse other ships' sensors. Such devices are normally listed with the ship's sensor statistics.

- Some vessels employ sensor decoys, small probes or miniature vessels that duplicate the "sensor image" of the launching ship. When a craft deploys a decoy, an enemy sensor operator now detects two identical ships where before there was only one.
- Particularly expensive sensor baffles can nullify the energy signatures of active scans. When activated, sensor baffles add a certain number of dice to the difficulty to detect the ship.



• Ships can alter or mask their true transponder identification codes, though this is highly illegal and actively prosecuted by Imperial authorities, usually with terminal force. Transponders broadcast information about a vessel —classification, captain, registry numbers— to others contacting it with transmitted requests for identification. All ships must log their transponder codes with the Human Empire's Ministry of Stellar Commerce Information Control Bureau. Some unscrupulous captains alter their ship's transponder code to identify it as another vessel —for example, with a false transponder code, a known pirate ship might pose as a legitimate utility transport, especially if it needed to visit a major planet for serious repairs. While false transponder codes are difficult to create —and expensive if you pay someone else to install the code— they make it much easier for a notorious ship to slip through a system's patrols. Others find ways to bribe officials, hack data records, or otherwise alter information on file with the registry. This usually requires hundreds of kublars in bribes, or some risky computer work to penetrate the Ministry's well-protected databanks.

Communications

Spaceships normally rely on several communications systems that function in material space only. Although some communication technologies employ some form of hyperspatial transmission, communications do not work between ships in hyperspace.

Hyperspatial Transceivers. High-level political vessels and military craft use hyperspatial transceivers to communicate instantly over vast distances. They're prohibitively expensive, extremely delicate, and consume a tremendous amount of power. And if you're not authorized to have one, government agencies have the authority to vaporize you immediately.

Material Space Transceivers. Most ships are equipped with a transceiver for real-time communication through material space. Most vessels have a short-range unit, usually good for clear communication up to a maximum range of 25 light years. With sufficient power, material space transceivers may boost signals to a range of 100 light years or more. You can also use these devices to send out distress signals if a ship is damaged in open space.

Comms. Most starships have speed-of-light radios (more frequently known as "comms") for ship-to-ship and ship-to-planet communications. Most comm chatter occurs when talking with other vessels and flight controllers when landing and taking off. Spaceports use a pre-set comm channel to broadcast Announcements to Travelers (AnnTrav, or "Annie" in spacer slang) providing landing protocols, weather, traffic patterns, conditions at the docking facility, and other general spaceport information incoming pilots must know.

Intercoms. Most vessels include internally wired comm systems —intercoms— to communicate between different sections of a spaceship. Sometimes these broadcast announcements over speakers, but they often require crew members to plug comm headsets into the system. Most intercom traffic cannot be overheard by other nearby vessels. Spies often employ electronic surveillance devices, piggyback transmitters, and other gadgets to listen in on internal intercom communications.

Comm Lasers. Only a rare number of vessels employ comm lasers, usually those engaged in espionage or otherwise needing to transmit data covertly. Comm lasers send their message in a micro-second flash pattern of laser light, a compressed digital-coded message like paleo-Morse code. Since it's not a true radio emission, most sensors and comm units won't detect the transmission. Both parties must have comm laser broadcast and receiving equipment to communicate, and must be in line of sight. This technology is ineffective for communicating over distances longer than the breadth of a star system. Comm laser arrays are extremely expensive. Their interface coding and linked encryption engines are complex and delicate. Government authorities track such technology. The Human Empire has declared comm lasers illegal unless you're working under the government's authority.

Comm Frequencies

It's very difficult to find a communication signal without knowing its frequency —there are literally billions of different frequencies for subspace communications. There are established military and government bands for the Human Empire and its member factions, as well as "secret" frequencies for secured messages, which are often electronically scrambled.

Local governments regulate the use of frequencies for civilian, business, emergency services, and military communications. Groups may also use unauthorized frequencies for covert communications.

Encounters in Space

Although every ship captain hopes for a smooth trip to his destination system, it's not always that simple. In these unsettled times, many hostile forces oppose those lawful travelers on the hyperlanes. Even most civilian vessels must mount at least a light cannon or two for protection. You might want to use some of these encounters while characters travel through material space,

either flying between jump point and destination, or if their craft suffers a hyperspace misjump that dumps them in an unexplored system.

Pirates

Despite the Human Empire's valiant efforts to stamp out this menace, pirates remain the number one threat to spacefarers. They often lurk in the remote regions of populated systems, waiting to pounce on ships in- or outbound from their jump points. More ambitious pirate bands operate in deep space by "blocking" hyperlanes with asteroids and other large masses —as soon as a ship cuts out into material space, the pirates swoop in to strip it of all valuables.

The Human Empire does its best to demonize pirates with stories of captives being vaporized or shunted out the airlock. Despite their ferocious reputation, pirates still subscribe to their own codes of honor. Granted, they are codes that best benefit their kind, but it often prevents excessive atrocities against innocent targets. Despite what's shown in the holovids, pirates are businesslike, in an overzealous, piratical sort of way —they prefer to keep things orderly as they transfer the loot into their cargo holds. Sometimes pirates kidnap well-known or important passengers and hold them for ransom. Of course, anyone violently resisting their acquisition of other people's wealth is fair game for a suprapistol shot in the belly.

The Empire treats piracy with the utmost severity. Pirate ships are destroyed whenever encountered and the penalty for piracy is death.

Alien Threats

If the Human Empire considers pirates the primary threat to galactic peace, prosperity, security, and control, powerful aliens rank a close second as the most feared potential menace to the Empire. Who knows when some uppity alien species will decide to venture from their homeworld to pillage, raid, and carry out their plans to dominate the universe that rightfully belongs to humans.

Most aliens exist peacefully on their homeworlds or in their own small domains of space. Those most likely to encounter the characters include aliens with recently developed spacefaring technology, civilizations exploring and colonizing their own reaches of space, and those with established armadas seeking to wreak havoc on every human they meet.

The Empire maintains a hold over alien worlds that might become threats to ensure such radical forces don't venture much farther than their own domain. When they do, the Endoguard is usually sent in to put the aliens back in their place —often by blasting them back to the stone age.

Most alien empires the Human Empire encounters are targeted as primary threats to the stability of the universe. This is often cause for much debate in the Golden Palace, frequently resulting in some universe-spanning genocidal war until the aliens are vaporized into extinction or commit a ritual racial suicide expected of the losing military force.

Insurgents, Anarchists, and Psychos

This motley category is also high on the Human Empire's threat list. It includes a broad and ever-changing variety of freaks who have some seemingly inexplicable need to band together, gather power, and cause trouble for the average citizen and therefore the Empire. They represent a wide array of insane ideologies: anarchists, nihilists, and radical environmentalists representing only a few. They oppose everything from oppressive government authorities, abusive corporations, entire social classes (usually the rich), and industrial exploitation, to more obtuse targets like particular entertainers, combat cyberware, full-color holoposters, and songs using words that don't make sense.

Such insurgents usually operate in established urban centers or on civilized worlds. They sometimes acquire spacecraft of their own, which they arm and use to carry out their crazy political, artistic, or ideological agendas. Sometimes they target the characters, often for no particular reason. The Empire often reacts to these insane groups and their annoying activities by hunting them down and suppressing them.

Mercenaries, Corsairs, and Privateers

Various powers employ and authorize mercenaries, corsairs, and privateers to act on their behalf in military matters. Maganat conglomerates field their own fleets of escorts to guard cargo cruisers, corporate, political, and social institutions hire forces to protect their systems, and small planetary governments authorize privateers to prey on enemy shipping and marauding pirate bands in their territory.

Characters can encounter mercenary ships, though these rarely pose threats unless the characters belong to, work for, or represent an opposing faction. These forces rarely engage random passers-by in combat unless it's part of their paid duty.

Customs and Military Patrols

Various government factions —from the Human Empire, Techno-Pontificate, Maganats, and Ekonomat all the way down to local planetary authorities— charge official military units with patrolling space within their control, maintaining order, and eliminating any hostile forces (pretty much anyone causing trouble). Most authorities claim the right to halt, board, and search any ship on demand...and usually demand to do so frequently.

The Emperoress uses the Endoguard to enforce its edicts on the universe. The Endoguard often works in tandem with other member factions, including the Colonial Planets and Maganat forces, to carry out policies beneficial to all parties. The Endoguard claims chief authority in establishing and keeping order in the space lanes. Encounters with Endoguard vessels usually entail a check on the ship's identity as broadcast by its transponder. Sometimes the Endoguards exercise their right to board any suspect craft without offering any explanation of their purposes. Any vessels the Endoguard encounters that are engaged in blatantly illegal activities are subject to immediate termination.

Under the Maganats' sponsorship, the Empire's Ministry of Stellar

Commerce (StellComm) operates the customs bureaus in most spaceports, inspecting cargoes both in dock and during boarding actions in orbit and in the space lanes. Although the agency maintains its own fleet of interdictor ships and inspection personnel, it also relies on the Endoguard in many situations. It's usually a good idea to comply with official customs inspection requests: there aren't many cargo transports that outgun or can outrun customs frigates, or the Endoguard ships frequently called in to assist. Especially tricky (or lucky) pirates sometimes try to dodge pursuit long enough to enter hyperspace. Once in hyperspace, the ship is safe from attack —although the Endoguard can sometimes make a good guess about its intended destination from its last known trajectory.

Search by the Endoguard or StellComm is never pleasant. There's no court to hear protests against the acts of these officials. The Endoguard and StellComm reserve the right —and often exercise it— to seize cargo and valuables without explanation, to terminate those who object, and to plant contraband to justify the seizure of a vessel.

Merchants and Smugglers

Trade vessels fill the space lanes, from owner-operated light transports to immense civilian and military cargo cruisers working for the Merchants Guild and Maganats. A small number of ships actually engage in smuggling activities on the side. An encounter with a freighter allows the characters to receive information —or misinformation, if the traders are unscrupulous— about hostile forces, potential cargo jobs, and even a good place to grab a meal at their destination.

Slave Merchants

Slavers are perhaps the cruelest, most despicable of criminals: they deal in sentient beings, selling their "wares" to the highest bidder for a variety of unsavory intentions. While slavers dare not practice their vile trade everywhere, there is still a profitable market in the galactic underworld and on some remote alien worlds. The Maganats and Techno-Technos even encourage slaving (what they call "indentured servitude") in some circumstances, particularly in entertainment and hazardous industrial professions. Some worlds and regional governments encourage slavery to help support the economy and give its citizens a sense of inflated importance.

Astrographical Hazards

The universe is filled with hazards to space flight: strange gas clouds, rogue planetoids, immense asteroid fields, and unusual "energy storms." There are also several life-forms that can survive in the vacuum of space, most of which are parasites that enjoy infesting spacecraft. All of these can hamper a ship's hyperspace journey, either forcing the ship to drop to material space, or possibly causing a stardrive mishap. A mishap revolving around one of these phenomena can quickly become an adventure hook leading into a larger story.

Uncharted Systems

Unexplored systems may offer much to a curious visitor: primitive alien civilizations, rich metal and mineral deposits, lost caches of technology and artifacts, and long-forgotten colonies.

What Happens When the Shooting Starts?

Running Space Combat

Your players expect exciting space battles with flak bursting everywhere, enemy fighters sweeping in on their tails, and blazing cannons. Give them what they want.

Your spaceship battles should follow the same guidelines as those for running vehicle combat. It's a lot more important to create an exciting battle scene with good storytelling than to measure out every movement round-by-round.

"As you dive into the asteroid belt, your sensors tell you the pirate Ostrov fighters are closing in fast. Make your piloting roll —a 22. Great! Your ship maneuvers around the asteroids just as the Ostrovs turn to follow you around an immense, spinning rock. Let me make their *piloting* rolls —one pirate slips around a massive corner, but the second pilot is a hair too late. He grazes the side of his Ostrov on the spinning asteroid, sparks flying and hull plates tearing, and goes spiraling out of control until his ship smashes into a large asteroid, exploding in a ball of flame. That lead Ostrov is still closing in and it looks like every gunner on that ship is trying to line you up in his sights! What are you going to do?"

That narration gives the players a good idea of what's going on and moves quickly; there's a minimum of number crunching. The gamemaster knows the Ostrov fighters are a lot more powerful and less maneuverable than the freighter. He estimated that as long as the pilots rolled well, they'd be able to close in on the freighter: of course, one pirate rolled poorly and ended up colliding with the asteroids.

The players can picture the scene in their minds and know that their characters have to do something or else their ship will get blasted to atoms.

When running space battles, use a combination of scenes, rounds, and encounters to maintain a lively pace and simulate the action shown in the comics. Fudge the rules when they slow things down: set a difficulty number, have the players roll their skills and use your judgment to determine what happens.

Sublight Speeds

Spaceships cover thousands of kilometers per second in open space. Although they move much more slowly when orbiting planets and maneuvering through asteroid fields, their speeds are still incredible.

Rather than using these huge numbers for movement, the game uses "Space units" to represent ship speeds and weapon ranges. Ships always move at the same proportional speeds relative to other spacecraft.

Starship Simulations

For most games, it's enough to describe the situation and let the players visualize what's going on in their minds.

If you want to provide something a little more visual, you can use counters, miniature spaceship toys, and model kits to show the relative location of each vessel so the players can better visualize the battle.

If you want to run a very detailed game, you can map out each movement. Place each ship miniature on the table, with a scale of "1 inch = 1 Space unit," using rulers to measure out exact movements and weapon ranges.

Spaceship Movement

Spaceship movement works just like vehicle movement. Every ship has a Space score representing how many "Space units" it moves at cruising speed.

A slow ship might have a Space of two or three, while an average freighter would have a Space of about five or six. The universe's fastest fighters have Space movements as high as 11 and 12.

Moving is an action, just like firing a weapon or dodging. A ship can move once per round.

When a ship moves, you describe the "terrain" and then pick a difficulty level and a difficulty number: Very Easy (5), Easy (10), Moderate (15), Difficulty (20), Very Difficult (30) or Heroic (31+).

The player decides how fast he wants to fly the ship and then rolls her *piloting* skill. If the ship has a "maneuverability" die code, add it to the pilot's skill roll.

If the roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty number, the ship moves through space with no problems; if the roll is lower, the ship experiences a "movement failure."

The pilot can fly her craft at one of four speeds, similar to those described for vehicle movement.

Cautious Movement

This is a very slow movement rate: the ship goes up to half its Space, rounded up (a vessel with a Space of nine would move up to five units).

In Very Easy, Easy, and Moderate space, cautious movement is a "free action" and the captain doesn't have to roll his *piloting* skill.

In Difficult, Very Difficult, and Heroic space, roll the character's *piloting* skill, but reduce the difficulty one level (Very Difficult space is Difficult to cross; Moderate space is Easy to cross).

> **Example:** Captain Chanadyne is at the controls of Jovar C-199, the light cargo transport she's contracted to fly on this shipping run. The ship has a Space of four and a maneuverability of 1D. Chanadyne's *piloting* skill is 7D. She's flying in open space at cautious speed. She doesn't have to roll —the transport automatically moves two Space units. If she were also firing one of the ship's defense cannons, she'd get to roll her full *gunnery* skill of 5D because piloting in Easy space is a "free action." Later Chanadyne is flying through the heart of a dense asteroid field —it's Very Difficult space. Since she decides to fly at cautious speed, the space is considered one difficulty level easier: it's only Difficult (20). Chanadyne rolls her *piloting* of 7D and the transport's maneuverability of 1D and gets a 30. Jovar C-199 maneuvers through the field with ease.

Cruising Movement

"Cruising movement" is the normal movement speed for a spaceship: it moves at its Space speed.

Moving at cruising speed counts as an action, but the pilot can automatically make the move for Very Easy, Easy, and Moderate space.

The captain must roll her *piloting* skill for Difficult, Very Difficult, and Heroic space.

Example: Chanadyne is flying Jovar C-199 through open space—Easy (10) space —with two pirate zip fighters closing in fast. She can automatically fly the ship at cruising speed (it goes its Space of four), but it counts as an action. Firing a defense cannon counts as a second action, so she rolls 4D (subtract the –1D penalty from her *gunnery* of 5D) to hit one of the pirate fighters.
Later, Chanadyne's racing through a thick asteroid belt —Difficult (20) space— at cruising speed. She rolls her *piloting* of 7D and ship's maneuverability of 1D and gets a 40 —she deftly swings the Jovar C-199 around a large asteroid as two smaller pieces of rock go tumbling by a little too close for comfort.

High Speed

Pilots flying at high speed movement push a spaceship for added speed: the ship moves at twice its Space speed.

The pilot must roll for Very Easy, Easy, or Moderate space. When moving at high speed, the difficulty for Difficult, Very Difficult, and Heroic space increases one level: Difficult space becomes Very Difficult to fly through, Very Difficult space becomes Heroic, Heroic space becomes Heroic+10.

Example: Chanadyne is flying the Jovar C-199 through open space —Easy (10) space— while trying to avoid those pirate zip fighters. She decides to go at high speed to outdistance them. Her *piloting* and maneuverability rolls total 29 —a success. The ship's Space is four, so it moves eight Space units.
Later, Chanadyne is still trying to avoid the pirates, this time by maneuvering through the girders of a partially completed space station —it's Difficult (20) terrain. Because she's moving at high speed, the space is considered Very Difficult (30). Chanadyne rolls her *piloting* and maneuverability, getting another 29: she just barely fails. To find out what happens, see "Spaceship Movement Failures."

All-Out

A ship going at all-out speed moves at four times its Space.

Characters piloting a ship at "all-out" speed may not do anything else in the round, including spaceship dodges or firing the craft's weapons.

Increase the difficulty one level for Very Easy, Easy, and Moderate space. Increase the difficulty two levels for Difficult, Very Difficult, or Heroic space.

Example: Chanadyne knows the pirate fighters are closing in on her, but if she's quick enough she may be able to engage her stardrive and escape into hyperspace. She decides to move Jovar C-199 all-out. The space is considered Easy (10) terrain; since Chanadyne is moving all-out, the difficulty increases to Moderate (15). Chanadyne rolls her *piloting* and maneuverability, getting a 24 —success! Jovar C-199 has a Space of four, so it pulls ahead 16 units!
Later, Chanadyne decides to fly all-out while moving through a thick formation of spaceships orbiting a planet. It's Difficult (20) space, but because she's moving all-out, the difficulty increases two levels to Heroic (35). Chanadyne rolls her piloting of 7D and her ship's maneuverability of 1D and gets a 27. Chanadyne realizes that she's pushed Jovar C-199 too hard and that the vessel is about to go spinning out of control! See "Spaceship Movement Failures."

Acceleration and Deceleration

Spaceships may increase or decrease their speed one level per round.

Example: Chanadyne is piloting Jovar C-199 at high speed one round. The next round, she may maintain high speed, decrease to cruising speed or increase to all-out speed. She may not slow down to cautious speed or come to a stop.

Partial Moves

Spaceships can move anywhere between half their "move speed" and the full move speed.

Example: A vessel with a Space of 6 is going at high speed (moving up to 12 units). The ship can move anywhere between 6 and 12 units.

Long-Distance Movement

All-out movement takes its toll on spacecraft: a vessel continuously going all-out must make a hull code roll every 10 minutes.

The first hull code difficulty is Very Easy (5); increase the difficulty one level for each additional roll. If the ship fails the roll by 1–10 points, it's suffering strain (experiences severe power fluctuations and so forth) and must "rest" for twice as long as it moved all-out. If the roll fails by 11 or more points, the ship suffers a mechanical failure and requires a Moderate (15) flight systems repair roll and at least one hour of work.

High speed movement also requires hull code rolls: roll once every hour. The first roll is at a Very Easy (5) difficulty and increases one difficulty level for each additional roll.

Spaceship "Terrain Difficulties"

Very Easy (5): Flying a vessel in clear space with no navigational hazards.

Easy (10): Flying a ship in the vicinity of other craft, such as

orbiting a space station. Flying around minor obstacles in space, such as a small, dispersed asteroid belt.

Moderate (15): Flying a ship in crowded space—like a busy spacedock staging area. Flying in an area littered with a moderate amount of debris.

Difficult (20): Fighter combat with many ships in the immediate area. Flying through an area clogged with debris or asteroids.

Very Difficult (30): Flying a vessel in an area of space densely packed with other ships or debris.

Heroic (31+): Flying through Heroic terrain is almost impossible. Flying through an ion storm in an asteroid field.

Maneuvers

The difficulty number applies to basic spaceship maneuvers: straight-line flight, a few turns, and other simple movements. If the pilot wants to make a more difficult maneuver —a series of spins that bring several enemy fighters into the ship's gun sights, for example— add modifiers as needed:

+1–5	*Maneuver is fairly easy.*
+6–10	*Maneuver is somewhat difficult and requires a certain amount of skill.*
+11–15	*Maneuver is very difficult and requires a very talented (or lucky) pilot.*
+16+	*Maneuver appears to be almost impossible. Only the very best pilots can pull off a maneuver of this difficulty.*

You can also use the modifiers for attempting certain maneuvers in flying vehicles —"Extreme Climb or Extreme Dive," "Loop," and "Rotate"— listed in the vehicle maneuvers section of the "Movement & Chases" chapter.

Spaceship Movement Failures

A spacecraft whose captain fails a *piloting* roll may slow down, go spinning out of control, or suffer a collision.

The severity of the mishap depends on the number of points by which the *piloting* roll failed:

1–3: Slight Slip. The ship "slips," nearly spinning out of control. Although the vessel completes its intended movement, the pilot suffers a penalty of –1D to all actions for the rest of the round (in addition to normal multiple action penalties).

4–6: Slip. The ship "wobbles," nearly spinning out of control. It only completes half of its Space move. The pilot suffers a penalty of –3D to all actions for the rest of the round, and –1D to all actions for the next round (in addition to normal multiple action penalties).

7–10: Spin. The craft completes one-quarter of its Space move and then goes spinning out of control. The pilot cannot control the ship for the rest of the round and the next round.

11–15: Minor Collision. If there's anything to hit, the ship has a minor collision (subtract –3D from normal collision damage; see "Spacecraft Collisions" below). Otherwise, the ship goes spinning wildly out of control. The pilot cannot control the ship for the rest of the round and the next round.

16–20: Collision. If there's anything to hit, the ship has a collision, suffering normal damage. Otherwise, the ship goes spinning wildly out of control. The pilot cannot control the ship for the rest of the round and the next round.

21+: Major Collision. If there's anything to hit, the ship smashes into an obstacle at such a poor angle as to increase collision damage by +4D (see "Spacecraft Collisions" below). Otherwise, the ship goes spinning out of control. The pilot cannot control the ship for the rest of the round and the next round.

Spacecraft Collisions

The amount of collision damage depends on how fast the craft was moving. (Don't forget to take into account scale differences where pertinent.)

Speed	Collision Damage
Cautious	2D
Cruise	4D
High Speed	6D
All-Out	10D

Roll the collision damage and compare it to the spacecraft's hull code roll. "Spaceship Damage" below explains what happens.

If the ship runs into another vessel, you may modify the damage based on the angle of the collision. (Most collisions will be "T-bone" crashes, but a very few qualify as "head-on," "rear-ender" or "sideswipe" crashes.)

Head-on crash	+3D
Rear-ender/sideswipe	–3D
T-bone	0D

You may want to adjust collision damage to reflect what the starship runs into. If a vessel hits something that's very light —for example, a primitive ship with a weak hull— you may want to reduce collision damage by –1D, –2D, or more.

Spaceship Combat

Spaceship combat works just like regular combat and is fought in five-second rounds.

To attack another spacecraft:

- Determine the difficulty number to hit the target (based on the weapon's range, listed in Space units).
- The attacker rolls his attack skill (normally *gunnery* or *Mechanical*).

• If the roll is equal to or higher than the difficulty number, the attack hits. Roll damage. (See "Spaceship Damage" below.)

Example: Chanadyne is firing the defense cannon aboard Jovar C-199 to fire at a pursuing pirate zip fighter. The enemy craft is eight Space units away — that's medium range for the defense cannon, and a Moderate (15) difficulty to hit. Chanadyne's *gunnery* skill is 5D and the cannon's fire control is 1D: she rolls and gets a 17. The cannon shot hits the pirate fighter!

Reaction Skills

Pilots can maneuver their craft to make "spaceship dodges" to avoid enemy fire, just as vehicles can perform "vehicle dodges." This is considered a "reaction skill."

The captain making the spaceship dodge rolls his *piloting* skill and adds his ship's maneuverability. This is the new difficulty number to hit the vessel.

Example: Chanadyne's shooting at another pirate zip fighter. It's at medium range for a Moderate (15) difficulty to hit. The pirate pilot decides to make a spaceship dodge, rolling his *piloting* skill of 4D and his fighter's maneuverability of 2D —he gets a 20. Chanadyne's new difficulty number to blast the fighter is a 20.

Full Reaction. A pilot can make a "full reaction," but it can be the only action in the entire round. The character rolls his *piloting* skill and the ship's maneuverability code and adds it to the difficulties of all attacks made against the ship that round.

Example: Later on, Chanadyne fires again at the pirate fighter: she's still at medium range, for a Moderate (15) difficulty. The pirate pilot decides to make a full spaceship dodge. He rolls and gets a 15. Because this is a full spaceship dodge, Chanadyne's new difficulty number is a 30! However, the pirate pilot can't do anything else in the round.

Shields

Spacecraft shields are electronic energy dampers which help absorb or deflect some of the damage from enemy attacks. Shields come in two main varieties: particle and energy shields.

Particle shields deflect all kinds of physical objects, including asteroids, missiles, and flak. They are used at all times, except when a carrier launches fighters, missiles, or torpedoes (the shields must be dropped to allow physical objects to pass through them). When a ship lowers its particle shields, reduce its hull code by –2D. (A ship which loses its main power generator also loses its particle shields.)

Energy shields are normally activated only in combat, and must cover specific fire arcs to be effective in combat.

Using shields is a "reaction skill." Each spaceship has a certain number of dice in shields. When a pilot uses shields, the shield dice must be split up among the four fire arcs: fore, aft, port (left), and starboard (right).

The difficulty to deploy shields depends upon how many fire arcs are being covered:

- One fire arc: Easy (10).
- Two fire arcs: Moderate (15).
- Three fire arcs: Difficult (20).
- Four fire arcs: Very Difficult (30).

If the ship takes any hits from that side in combat, the ship gets to add those shield dice to its hull code to resist damage.

Example: Chanadyne is flying the light cargo transport Jovar C-199, with a hull code of 4D and 2D in shields. Two pirate zip fighters are closing in from behind her. She decides to activate the ship's shields, placing all 2D to cover the back fire arc. She makes her Easy (10) shields roll`—if any shots come in from the back of the freighter and hit the ship, she rolls 6D to defend against damage.
A few rounds later, the pirate fighters have maneuvered around her. Chanadyne is under attack from both the fore and aft. She decides to split the shields, placing 1D in the front and 1D in the back. Because she is trying to cover two fire arcs, her shields difficulty is Moderate (15). If she makes the roll, any attack that hits the front or the back is resisted by 5D (4D for hull code and 1D for the shield covering that particular fire arc), but any attacks from the side are resisted by just the ship's hull code of 4D.

Spaceship Weapons

Most spaceships have at least one weapon system; some battleships have dozens of weapon emplacements.

Spacecraft weapons work just like normal character and vehicle weapons. They use the rules for fire control, ammo, fire rate, blast radius, and scale from the chapter on "Combat & Injuries." They also use the rules for ranges, crew, and fire arcs from "Movement & Chases." Since they're fully enclosed, all spaceships provide full cover; however, characters can still suffer injuries from a ship taking enough serious damage.

Fire-Linked Guns

Some weapons are fire-linked: several weapons are computer-linked in to fire as one group. The game statistics are for the weapons when fire-linked. For example, a pirate Zip fighter mounts two fire-linked laser cannons. When fired, both cannons discharge and inflict 4D should they hit the target.

Ranges

Most spacecraft weapons have "Range" and "Atmosphere Range" listings. "Range" is used for space combat and represents distances to targets in Space units. The "Atmosphere Range" listing is used whenever a vessel is flying in an atmosphere (see

"Ships in an Atmosphere" later in this chapter) or whenever a ship fires into an atmosphere from orbit.

Gauss Cannons

Besides the usual array of offensive weapons —lasers, railguns, missiles, flak cannons— many ships employ gauss cannons. These weapons fire a burst of magnetic flux energy that, when it hits the target, temporarily disables many electrical and computer control systems. Pirates, StellComm customs officials, and others seeking to disable and later board vessels frequently use gauss cannons. Shields cannot protect a vessel from gauss cannon damage.

> **Example:** Chanadyne has placed the 2D shields of her cargo transport (hull code 4D) to the aft fire arc. Any laser cannon attacks that hit the freighter roll against its combined 6D hull code and shields; however, gauss cannon blasts slice right through the shields. Chanadyne only rolls the transport's 4D hull code to resist damage from gauss cannons.

If the damage roll is lower than the vessel's hull code roll, it takes no damage. If the damage roll is equal to or higher than the hull code roll, find the results below.

Gauss Cannon Damage Greater Than Hull Code Roll By:	Effect:
0–5	controls disabled
6–10	2 controls disabled
11–15	3 controls disabled
16–20	4 controls disabled
21+	controls dead

Missiles and Bombs

Missiles and bombs are physical weapons which deliver awesome firepower; however, they're difficult to target. Their difficulty numbers are modified by how fast the target is moving:

Increase to Difficulty	Space	Move (Atmosphere)
+5	3	100–150
+10	4	151–200
+15	5	201–250
+20	6+	251+

Tractor Beams

Military-grade tractor beams manipulate gravitational fields to capture spaceships so they may be boarded and searched. Pirates and StellComm customs officials frequently use tractor beams in their work. (Many civilian vessels have small tractor beam generators for moving cargo around, but they have no combat applications.)

When a tractor beam attempts to "hit" a target ship, it's resolved as a normal attack: if the attack roll is higher than the difficulty number, the tractor beam locks onto the target ship.

Roll the tractor beam's "damage" against the ship's hull code. If the target ship's hull code roll is higher, the vessel breaks free. If the tractor beam damage roll is equal to or higher than the hull code roll, the target ship is captured. A captured ship that doesn't resist a tractor beam can automatically be reeled in toward the attacker, moving five Space units each round.

If the target ship resists, roll the tractor beam's damage against the target ship's hull code. If the target ship's hull code roll is higher, it breaks free of the tractor beam. If the tractor beam rolls equal to or higher than the target ship, the target ship is reeled in and its drives may be damaged. Find the results on the chart below.

Tractor Beam Damage

Roll Greater Than Damage Roll By:	Space Units Reeled In:	Target Ship's Damage:
0–5	No change	No damage
6–10	1	–1 Move
11–15	2	–2 Moves
16–20	3	–3 Moves
21+	4	–4 Moves

> **Example:** A pirate cruiser is holding Chanadyne's Jovar C-199 in the grip of a tractor beam. The transport is nine Space units away. Chanadyne decides not to resist and her ship is pulled in five Space units this round. It's only four Space units from the pirate cruiser. The next round Chanadyne decides to try breaking free. She rolls her transport's hull code of 4D and gets an 11. The pirate cruiser rolls its tractor beam damage of 6D and adds the scale's "adjusted modifier" of 6D, getting a 35. That's a difference of 24 points! Chanadyne groans as Jovar C-199 's engines blow out. The ship is now dead in space as the cruiser reels it in the final four Space units. Chanadyne begins wondering how she'll resist a pirate boarding party, if she can somehow repair the drives, and if she'll ever escape.

Spaceship Damage

Spaceships suffer damage in combat just like vehicles. Roll the attack or collision damage and compare it to the vessel's hull code roll.

If the damage roll is lower than the hull code roll, the ship takes no damage. If the damage roll is equal to or higher than the hull code roll, find the result on the "Spaceship Damage Chart."

Spaceship Damage Chart

Damage Roll Greater Than Hull Code Roll By:	Effect
0–5	Shields blown/controls disabled
6–10	Lightly damaged
11–15	Heavily damaged
16–20	Severely damaged
21+	Destroyed

Shields Blown. A shields blown result means that the ship loses –1D from its shields total. This loss lasts until the shields are repaired. If the ship has no dice remaining in shields (or had no shields to begin with), the ship suffers the controls disabled result.

Controls Disabled. A controls disabled result means that the ship's controls are temporarily overwhelmed by power surges. The ship loses –1D from its maneuverability, shields, and weapon fire control and damage for the rest of that round and the next round.

If a vessel suffers from as many controls disabled results as the ship has maneuverability dice, the ship's controls are frozen for the next two rounds. The ship must maintain the same speed and direction for the next two rounds; it may not turn, fire weapons, make attempts to deploy shields, or take any other actions, making the ship an easy target for enemy gunners.

The pilot must still make her *piloting* rolls or the ship automatically crashes (if there's anything to run into) or goes spinning out of control.

Lightly Damaged. Spaceships can be lightly damaged any number of times. Each time a ship is lightly damaged, roll 1D to see which system is damaged:

1: Ship loses –1D from its maneuverability. If the vessel's maneuverability has already been reduced to 0D, it suffers a –1 Move.

2: One on-board weapon emplacement is hit and destroyed; the gunners take damage (see "Passenger Damage" below). Randomly determine which weapon is hit

3: One on-board weapon emplacement in rendered inoperative by a major power surge or system failure; it's lightly damaged. Randomly determine which weapon is affected.

4: Stardrive damaged. Double the time to calculate any astro-nav courses; if the pilot wants to try to jump to hyperspace in one round, add an extra +10 to the *astro-nav* difficulty. The stardrive may be fixed with one hour of work and a Moderate (15) flight systems repair roll.

5: The craft loses –1D from its shield code. If the ship has no dice remaining in shields, it suffers the controls disabled result.

6: Ship suffers a –1 Move.

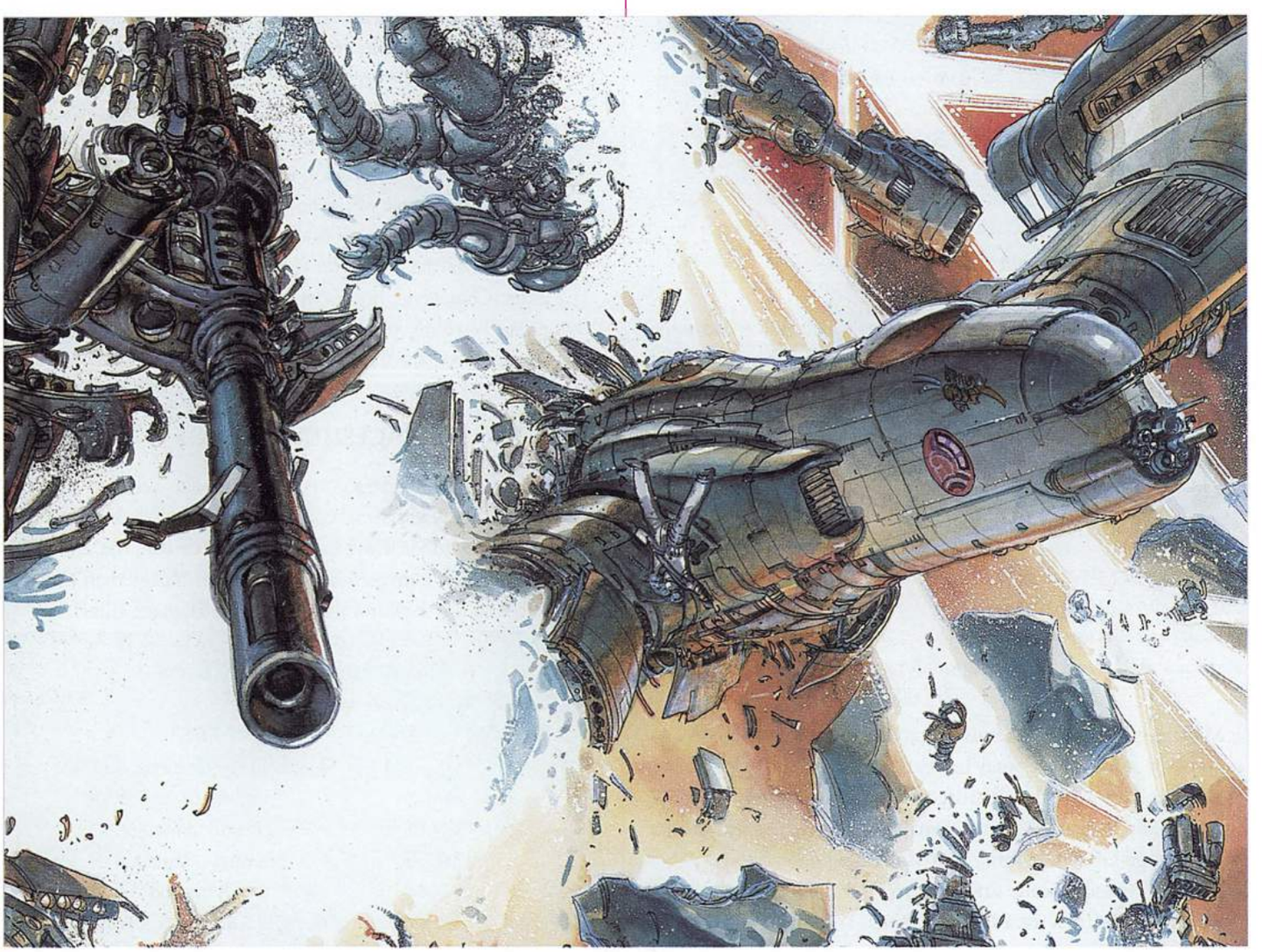
Heavily Damaged. Heavily damaged ships have taken a much more serious amount of damage. If a heavily damaged vessel is lightly damaged or heavily damaged again, it becomes severely damaged. Roll 1D to see which system is affected:

1: Ship loses –2D from its maneuverability. If the ship's maneuverability has already been reduced to 0D, the ship suffers a –2 Move.

2: Ship loses a weapon system in one fire arc. Randomly determine which one. All weapons of that type and in that fire arc are rendered inoperative due to a major power surge or system failure.

3: Weapons system destroyed. All of the weapons of one type in the same fire arc are destroyed by a series of power overloads. The gunners take damage (see "Passenger Damage" below).

4: Stardrive Damaged. Increase all *astro-nav* difficulties by +10



until the drive is fixed with a Moderate (15) *flight systems repair* roll and one hour of work.

5: Ship loses –2D from its shields. If the ship has no dice remaining in shields (or had no shields to begin with), the ship suffers 2 controls disabled.

6: Ship suffers a –2 Move.

Severely Damaged. Severely damaged ships have taken major amounts of damage and are rendered almost useless. A severely damaged craft which is lightly damaged, heavily damaged, or severely damaged again is destroyed. Roll 1D to determine which system is affected:

1: Dead in space. All drives and maneuvering systems are destroyed. The vessel is adrift in space.

2: Overloaded generator. The craft's generator is overloading; unless it's shut down, the generator will explode in 1D rounds and destroy the ship.

3: Disabled stardrives. The ship's stardrives are damaged. The vessel cannot jump to hyperspace until they are fixed with a Moderate (15) *flight systems repair* roll and one hour of work.

4: Disabled weapons. All weapons systems lose power. Roll 1D:

1–4: Weapons are severely damaged but may be repaired.

5–6: All weapons aboard the ship are destroyed.

5: Structural damage. The vessel is so badly damaged that it begins to disintegrate. The crew has 1D rounds to evacuate.

6: Destroyed. This ship disintegrates or explodes in a ball of flame.

Destroyed. The ship is instantly destroyed and explodes in a ball of flame. Everyone aboard is killed.

Lost Moves

Lost Moves add together. For example, a starship that suffers a –1 Move result, then a –2 Move result is at "–3 Moves."

–1 Move: The ship can no longer move at all-out speed; it's limited to high speed.

–2 Moves: The craft is limited to its cruising speed.

–3 Moves: The ship can only move at its cautious speed.

–4 Moves: The vessel's main engines are disabled; it's dead in space.

–5 Moves: The ship is destroyed.

Passenger Damage

Passengers may sustain injuries when their vessel suffers damage or crashes. Use your judgment to decide whether a character takes damage.

Determine character damage based on how badly the ship is damaged. Consider all damage below as character-scale:

Vehicle is:	Passenger suffers:
Lightly damaged	1D
Heavily damaged	3D
Severely damaged	6D
Destroyed	12D

Ships in an Atmosphere

The "Atmosphere" listing shows how fast the ship moves in an atmosphere. The first number is its Move, while the second number is its all-out speed in kilometers per hour.

A ship without an "Atmosphere" listing cannot enter planetary atmospheres.

Spacecraft in an atmosphere use the vehicle movement and combat rules, although they still use the "Spaceship Damage" rules.

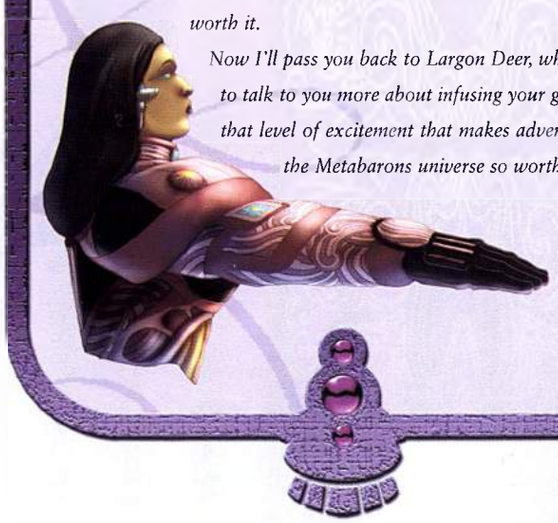
If you need to determine a ship's atmosphere speeds, use the chart below:

Space	Move (Atmosphere)	Kilometers per Hour (All-Out speed)
1	210	600
2	225	650
3	260	750
4	280	800
5	295	850
6	330	950
7	350	1,000
8	365	1,050
9	400	1,150
10	415	1,200
11	435	1,250
12	450	1,300

As you can see, flying your own spacecraft isn't the easiest thing in the universe. The space lanes are fraught will all kinds of man-made and astrographical hazards. Armed ships from various factions are intent on taking your hard-earned ship, cargo, and kublars. You even face threats from those established powers who supposedly maintain peace and prosperity among the stars. And as soon as you get into a fight, you quickly learn that combat can be deadly.

Despite all the dangers, though, I wouldn't give it up for the world. The travel, the excitement, the journey into the unknown. It's all worth it.

Now I'll pass you back to Largon Deer, who's going to talk to you more about infusing your game with that level of excitement that makes adventuring in the Metabarons universe so worthwhile.



Running Battles

Storytellers make battle seem like some carefully choreographed ballet of spacecraft, ground forces, and battleships. It all sounds exciting and well-planned, but when you set yourself down in the midst of combat as a participant, it's quite confusing. You're busy commanding your own unit, engaging a small portion of the enemy's forces, and covering your own position.

You're never quite sure in whose favor the overall battle is going. On the other hand, battlefield commanders can't concentrate on all the little details —they're worrying about the overall battle plans and strategies.

Gamemasters, as storytellers, must take care of both perspectives of battle. You must convey a general sense of how the battle's going on a greater scale, while still providing some detailed action scenes for individual characters. It's very easy for characters to start feeling lost in the midst of all the action and not be quite sure what to do.

It's your job to convey the chaos and at the same time keep the adventure moving forward and let the players feel their characters are contributing to the final outcome. You must maintain an overall impression of the course of the engagement and shift your attention to particular segments for a few moments at a time.

Running Battles

The combat rounds system is great for running the firefights that so often crop up in *Metabarons* adventures. But what if you want to tell a story with full-scale conflicts like the Battle of Marmola? Since the battle lasted several hours, does that mean you should run it round by round?

Of course not! That would take far too long...

Instead, use the battle as a backdrop. A battle shouldn't be the only thing in an adventure, but it can make for an exciting conclusion to one.

Look at the comics. Battles take only a few panels, at most two or three pages. The overall action is covered in a few panels, showing engagements between massive formations of troops and spaceships. When a battle lasts several pages, it focuses on a few key characters. You can run battles the same way: use brief scenes to describe how the overall battle strategy is going, then focus on the characters and their attempts to turn the tide in their favor.

Battles are ultimately storytelling devices. The best full-blown conflicts keep the game moving rather than getting you and the players bogged down in a round-by-round reenactment.

The Set-Up: First, decide what causes the battle scene. You could foreshadow the major conflict throughout the adventure —The Sable Brigade takes on a job and plans to hit a fortified encampment of Namarian pirates— or have an unexpected ambush —the characters are on a space station when pirates attack.

The Course of the Battle: As gamemaster, you should have a good idea of how the battle will proceed, but you should also include encounters that give the characters a chance to change the course and outcome of the conflict.

> **Example:** In the Battle of Marmola, it's clear the Castakans are outnumbered and outgunned by the traitorous Black Endoguard. Their defeat would cut short the saga of the *Metabarons*, so they must somehow triumph in the coming battle. For the story to continue, Othon's forces must eventually win against these incredible odds, but at a great price.

Scenes: Scenes occur during the battle independently of the characters' actions. The gamemaster should narrate these scenes to give the players a sense of what's going on.

> **Example:** Though we don't see it in the comics, we know squads of Castakan warriors work furiously drilling holes and pouring epyphite into their marble blocks to make them float. They all crowd on top, readying weapons, preparing themselves emotionally for the coming battle. We see the Castakans boldly engaging the Endoguard from their floating blocks of marble, firing bows into the enemy, and falling to their more superior firepower. This provides overall narration for the battle, showing the big picture. It sets the scene for the coming encounters where the action focuses on the characters and their part in the engagement.

Encounters: Since the players are taking part in the battle, present their characters with several major encounters. These scenes personally involve the characters, and give the players the sense that their characters can make a difference in the greater scheme of things.

When running a battle, you should give the players three or four encounters. The more fast-paced the action, the more encounters, but you shouldn't have more than a dozen. Encounters might consist of engagements with enemy forces, challenges of maneuvering over rough terrain to outflank opponents, or destroying an enemy installation, weapon, or vehicle dominating the battlefield. Sometimes the characters must accomplish a

mission that might affect the outcome of battle without actually diving into the heat of combat.

Give the players a map of the battlefield based on what they can see and what they learn from their fellow soldiers. Make sure they have clear orders on their objectives (hold a position, destroy a particular enemy unit), or, if they don't, that you provide opportunities for them to affect the course of the engagement.

> **Example:** After a few panels showing the Castakans' attack from their floating marble slabs—and establishing the overall sense of the battle—the *Metabarons* comic quickly focuses on Othon. He sneaks beneath enemy forces using secret passageways, then comes up right in the midst of an Endoguard formation, cutting a swath through their ranks using little more than his bravery, combat prowess, and a short dagger!

Choosing Critical Moments

Most of the encounters in which the characters have an opportunity to affect the battle should involve a critical moment: the enemy is about to break through the front lines; an essential piece of machinery or weaponry malfunctions; a powerful enemy vehicle puts itself into a particularly vulnerable situation for a brief second. This is especially true for engagements that have only one or two encounters. Make sure the outcome of the events occurring during the critical moment have dramatic consequences that change the tide of the conflict.

These encounters should involve one-in-a-million shots, strategic planning, and all-out bravado. If the characters can complete a task with little or no effort, the entire battle will seem less threatening, and therefore, less exciting.

In longer battles you may wish to include scenes and encounters that have an effect on only a particular segment of the combat, but don't alter the conflict as a whole. The characters could get the opportunity to save some vehicles, capture an enemy spaceship, rescue captives, steal military information, spy on the enemy's commanders, or even slip behind the opponent's lines and escape to rejoin their allies.

Cliffhangers

Sometimes the player characters split into a number of groups during a battle, either in squads, vehicle formations, or starfighters, or among various locations and objectives, or any combination of these elements. When Othon comes to the aid of the mother-coach carrying the Imperial embryo, the action follows the paths of various participants: the pirates' reacting to the newly arrived opposition; the Endoguard lancet's setting the FB3 bombs and waiting among the asteroids; Othon and the Meta-craft attacking Namar's artificial planet spacecraft-carrier.

Your goal in these cases is twofold. First, you must make sure you give all the players equal time. Don't spend an hour with one group while everyone else has nothing to do. Alternate between each group every few minutes so no one feels left out. Second, you should cut away from each segment of the battle on a cliffhanger. Let players make their rolls, but wait to reveal whether or not their strategies work until you've let the other group take some action. Allow each group of players to perform an action and then, after everyone has done something (and all of them are anxiously awaiting the outcome of their efforts), describe the results at the beginning of the next scene.

As you run these types of confrontations, think back to how the *Metabarons* comics depicted them: grand shots of the entire battle —focus on one section of the combat— focus even closer on a character —cut to another section, and so on. Weave all of the scenes into one exciting, fast-paced conflict that keeps the players on the edges of their seats.

Players Will Be Players

When players get involved in these types of situations, they will probably come up with plans and suggestions you never anticipated. That's where the art of improvisation comes in. Every good storyteller knows the overall plot, but is prepared to alter details here and there to make the story exciting. You should do the same thing: know the overall plot of the battle, but be ready to change things when the players steer the story along a different path.

If the players come up with a great battle plan, give them an opportunity to make it succeed. Improvise several new events and encounters, describe things with colorful narrative, and above all else, keep the game moving.

For more on improvising, see the chapter on "Running Adventures."

Skirmish on Rosev

Here's an example of how a ground battle might be set up and run in an adventure. If you're running a game in which the characters join a mercenary or pirate force, you could even adapt this into a battle within an adventure you run yourself.

The Set-Up

The characters are pirates resting at a supposedly hidden base on Rosev. The base is constructed on a low rise amidst one of Rosev's massive swamplands. Although the base itself is built on dry land, it's surrounded by unstable bog, low trees, and shallow, foul-smelling ponds. Only about 100 pirates operate from this base, which consists of a few temporary shelters, a technical tent for fixing machinery and small fighters, and some prefab units for higher-ranking pirates and operations equipment. A flat, clear area serves as a landing zone for the group's six armored transports and four Ostrov-class fighters.

A pirate monitoring the pile of sensor equipment heaped into one of the prefab units notices trouble —a mercenary carrier-cruiser emerges from behind one of Rosev's moons and heads directly for the pirate base. The pirate commander orders an immediate evacuation, but insists the sensitive equipment from the sensor shack and as much loot and supplies stored in the temporary shelters be loaded into the transports. This will take at least an hour, more than enough time for the mercenaries to arrive, attack, and possibly overwhelm the pirates.

If the mercenaries follow conventional strategies, they'll send some heavily armed drop carriers down, first to strafe the camp, then to disembark their troops in a safe zone they'll clear somewhere nearby.

The pirate leader orders the characters' group to take two aircars, pack them with supplies from a storage tent, maneuver them through the camp to the landing area, and unload them into one of the transports. Once they're done —and the mercenaries have completed their flyby— the characters receive orders to take one of the Ostrov fighters, destroy one or all of the enemy landing craft, and strafe the ground troops. Other pirates (or maybe a few of the characters) are assigned to create a temporary defensive position near the expected enemy landing zone to stall any troops disembarking there. Another group crews a small flak-gun emplacement to defend against strafing mercenary landing craft.

Draw a quick map of the pirate encampment —a few tents, the ships, two prefab units— and of the surrounding swamp. Show the nearest relatively dry area near the edge of the map where the drop-carriers will probably disembark their soldiers.

The Course of the Battle

The gamemaster decides that two of the five landing craft will strafe the camp. If the characters don't get both aircars loaded into a transport, the pirates won't have enough spare parts and supplies to successfully relocate elsewhere —and that means the characters will have to fork over some of their hard-earned kublars to keep the pirate outfit operational. If they don't manage to get their Ostrov fighter off the ground and shooting at the mercenaries, the enemy will overrun the camp and the characters will have no resources to fall back on should they flee the scene.

Scene One

From the pirate base, the characters see five mercenary drop-carriers descending through the atmosphere: three heading for a landing zone not far away, and two heading directly for the encampment. The pirates crewing the flak-gun emplacement open up, filling the air with deadly shrapnel bursts in the path of the incoming mercenary ships. Other pirates run around the camp in confusion, some loading supplies, others prepping spacecraft for take-off. Off in the distance the characters can hear the other three drop ships clearing their landing zone, and the pirates on the defensive providing a feeble resistance. The two incoming drop-carriers level off above the swamp, deftly weave through the flak bursts, and open fire on the base.

Encounter One

The characters' action begins as they pull the two aircars up to the storage tents and frantically load them with supply crates. Ask each character to make a *lifting* roll. The higher they roll, the more supplies they manage to load into the aircars. You can ask if they're trying to load any crates they can get their hands on, or if they're searching for particular supplies: weapons, food, spare parts, loot. The more picky they are, the fewer crates they can load.

To liven things up, have each character make a *Perception* roll. Anyone making an Easy (10) roll hears the whine of an incoming drop-carrier's engines, quickly followed by the sound of its guns opening up and targets exploding. The blasts are coming closer and closer, right for their supply tent!

Give everyone the chance to *dodge*: they need to make a Moderate (15) roll to dive out of the tent, hit the ground, or find cover before a cannon blast sends the tent into the air in a fiery ball. Anyone in the aircar's pilot seat can hit the accelerator and maneuver the vehicle for cover on a Moderate (15) *piloting* roll. Anyone failing their rolls takes 5D damage from the blast.

Assuming everyone survives, they then must pilot the two aircars through the camp, dodging fleeing pirates, burning prefab buildings, and fire from the second incoming mercenary drop-carrier. This requires a Difficult (20) *piloting* roll. If the drivers fail, they might lose a few supplies from sudden maneuvers, or take damage from a nearby blast.

Once they make it to the transport, they hand the aircars and their cargo off to the captain, then run for their Ostrov fighter to get into the air and engage the mercenaries.

Scene Two

The two strafing drop-carriers zoom overhead, head off toward the horizon, then begin turning toward their drop zone. The characters run through the burning camp toward their Ostrov fighter hoping to get into the fray and save some of their comrades

holding down the mercenaries disembarking in the landing zone.

If the players failed in Encounter One: The pirates are not able to save many supplies. This means there won't be many medkits to treat the wounded, or spare parts to effect spaceship repairs should any craft become damaged. It won't make much difference now, but after the battle, the characters may find themselves in dire straits. Without enough supplies and equipment to establish a new camp from which to operate, the pirate gang becomes little more than hunted outlaws.

If the players succeeded in Encounter One: The characters manage to save enough supplies so that the pirates can regroup after this battle and continue their raids, although on a much smaller scale than before. There will be plenty of medkits and spare parts to go around should anyone require them.

Encounter Two

The characters fire up their Ostrov fighter, crew the gunnery emplacements, and lift off. As they circle the nearly destroyed pirate camp, they notice explosions off in the distance: the feeble pirate resistance trying to hold off mercenaries from several drop carriers.

The characters have a few choices here. Let them carry through whichever challenge they decide to accept.

As they get airborne, the characters notice a ragged line of pirates desperately fleeing through the swamp, hoping to board one of the armored transports before they take off. The pirates are under heavy fire from the advancing mercenaries. To rescue some of their comrades, the characters must set down in the swamp —a Moderate (15) *piloting* task— while opening up on the advancing soldiers with their spaceship's guns. This works, as long as you don't decide to send one of the drop-carriers over to deal with the characters...

The characters might choose to go after one of the drop-carriers disembarking troops in the landing zone. While these ships are armed to defend a landing zone against ground forces, they only have minimal armament against other fighters. If the characters manage to destroy one of these craft (or their troops), they can buy more time for their pirate comrades on the ground.

The characters may also decide to swoop in and strafe the mercenaries closest to the retreating pirate forces. Hitting the soldiers requires a Moderate (15) *gunnery* roll, though you might increase this difficulty if the mercenaries see them coming and take cover, or if the characters suddenly come under fire from one of the drop-carriers intent on protecting its troops.

Final Scene

Assuming the characters accomplished the goals they set for themselves in the last encounter —and survived— they blast off in their Ostrov fighter to try and make it past that mercenary carrier-cruiser and chart a course for the emergency rendezvous system.

We'll get to that action in the next section.

With Some More Work...

You might stage this battle much more elaborately, with several more encounters that alter its course. The amount of work that goes into designing these scenes should depend on how much time you and players want to spend playing them. Most players, however, will be satisfied with a couple of exciting encounters and a vivid description of the overall conflict.

You could always vary the friendly or opposing forces, or assign the characters other duties (crewing the flak-gun emplacement, attacking disembarking troops on the ground, rescuing the pirate commander from a burning prefab building). Do whatever you want to create an exciting story in which everyone can play a heroic part.

Battleship Engagements

You can run battleship-scale skirmishes just as you would any other full-scale combat (as discussed above). Use scenes to set up the overall action and play out encounters to get the individual characters involved. Pick critical moments when the efforts of the characters may push the battle in either their allies' or their enemies' favor.

Battle Above Rosev

The Set-up

After ambushing the fortified encampment of a wanted pirate band on Rosev, hired mercenaries close in with their carrier-cruiser and drop-carriers to mop up pirates fleeing the system in several fighters and armored transports.

The pirates managed to stall mercenary forces on the planet's surface long enough to evacuate the base and pack the majority of their supplies, loot, and equipment into six armored transports. They've lifted off from their burning camp, accompanied by four of their Ostrov-class fighters.

The mercenaries have only one ship in orbit above the pirate base —a battleship-scale carrier cruiser. This vessel has moved into position to intercept its primary targets: the armored transports. The mercenary commander overseeing the operation expects the drop-carriers chasing the Ostrov fighters from the surface to keep them occupied until the larger ship can turn its guns on the remaining pirates.

The players are crewing one of the Ostrov fighters, having just fled the burning pirate base in the last confrontation (see "Skirmish on Rosev" above). To help everyone visualize the space battle, you can draw the planet, mercenary, and pirate forces on a map, or use a collection of miniature spaceship toys to show the positions of various craft. Now you're ready for the carnage to begin.

The Course of the Battle

The gamemaster decides that this skirmish is a fight for survival for the pirates. Their main objective is to get past the mercenary carrier-cruiser in orbit and engage their stardrive to head to their emergency rendezvous point. The mercenaries attempt to crush the pirates, focusing attacks on the armored transports first to try depleting the pirates' resources.

The characters have a chance to protect their future, however, by defending the transports against the carrier-cruiser and the pursuing drop-carriers. If they can protect all six transports, the pirate group can regroup and continue operations on a smaller scale. If they fail, the band will become little more than scattered outlaws.

Scene One

As the pirate armored transports rise through the atmosphere, two Ostrov fighters overtake them, moving into escort formation to run interference for them against the mercenary carrier-cruiser waiting for them in orbit. Two other Ostrovs race to catch up to the group and defend the transports. As the convoy enters the long range for the mercenary vessel's gun batteries, it comes under heavy fire.

The characters are in the second pair of Ostrov fighters rising from Rosev's surface. They watch as their six armored transports come under heavy fire from the mercenary carrier-cruiser. The two advance Ostrovs run interference, trying to divert the larger vessel's fire away from the transports, and even making a few attack runs against the immense battleship-scale craft.

Encounter One

On an Easy (10) *Perception* or sensors roll the characters realize the lead transport will not make it unless more fighters enter the fray. They can choose to put their own ship between the carrier-cruiser and the transport, or swoop in for a surprise attack against the gun batteries intensifying their firepower on the lead transport.

To place themselves as a physical shield to protect the lead transport, the characters must make several rolls: a Moderate (15) *piloting* roll to maneuver the ship into position; appropriate shields rolls to raise their deflectors and protect themselves; and any *gunnery* rolls if they're shooting back at the massive mercenary vessel. If they're successful in maneuvering into position, they take the brunt of the carrier-cruiser's attack. Their shields and hull must hold out two or three rounds until the damaged transport reaches a point where it can engage its stardrive.

If the characters charge in to attack one of the carrier-cruiser's gun batteries, they must make several rolls: a Moderate (15) *piloting* roll to swoop into firing position (and possibly evade enemy fire); a *shields* roll to best deploy their deflectors; and several Difficult (20) *gunnery* rolls to fire at the mercenary ship. Don't forget to use the scale rules for a fighter-sized craft firing on a battleship-scale target —add 6D to any rolls to fire on the carrier

cruiser. Remember, though, that when the mercenary ship fires on the Ostrov, it adds 6D to its damage should it hit! Characters must survive at least one round of this strategy to buy time for the damaged transport to escape.

Scene Two

While the characters are busy saving the lead transport, the mercenary drop-carriers rise from Rosev's surface and catch up with the slower transports. As the characters watch the lead transport engage its stardrive and blink off into hyperspace, they notice on their sensors that the slowest transports are now coming under fire from the mercenary drop-carriers and the huge carrier-cruiser.

To heighten the tension, you might allow one of the transports to explode in a fiery ball of flame and shrapnel, emphasizing the dire situation and fight for survival the pirates must endure.

Encounter Two

The characters must choose a target: the carrier-cruiser or the pursuing vessels.

If they choose to divert fire from the carrier-cruiser and attack some of its gunnery emplacements, repeat the steps outlined in the latter half of "Encounter One" above.

If they decide to rush back and engage the drop-carriers, ask for a few rolls from the crew: a Moderate (15) *piloting* roll to push the engines and race back to the fray; appropriate *shields* rolls; any *repair* rolls required from sustaining damage in the previous encounter; and, of course, Difficult (20) *gunnery* rolls to fire on the drop-ships at long range. Since the drop-carriers are fighter-scale vessels, there are no scale bonuses.

If the characters can cause any damage against the carrier-cruiser's guns or destroy even one pursuing drop-carrier, the remaining armored transports survive long enough to engage their stardrives. After fending off another round of enemy attacks, the characters can plot their course to the rendezvous point —a Difficult (20) *astro-nav* roll under these circumstances, so the navigator might want to use a Character Point— and jump to hyperspace.

Major Battles

These skirmishes last a relatively short amount of time and involve only a few troops and ships. You can create momentous battles that conclude major storylines in your campaigns, or you and your players could even spend an entire night replaying the incredible battles from the *Metabarons* saga.

Add more ships, more combatants, more scenes, and more encounters, and make the engagement seem epic, with devastating consequences for the loser. It usually makes the battle more exciting if the characters' allies look like they'll suffer defeat during at least one moment (if not most) of the conflict.

Just remember to let the characters' actions have some effect on the combat, especially near the end when the last few decisions can spell doom for one side or the other.

Other Long-Term Actions

This technique also works well for other long-term situations, such as travel between cities, long hyperspace journeys, extended chases, or other long-term events. When resolving these actions, decide the difficulties for the encounters, using just one roll or use a multi-roll task.

Through the use of scenes and encounters, the gamemaster can convey excitement and drama without having to play out every action round by round. Bargaining with traders, bribing diplomats, conning security personnel into (misinformed) actions—you can resolve all these scenes by using quick, dry, and uninteresting rolls of the dice, or by employing innovative and exciting roleplaying, where the dice are rolled only occasionally and rounds are used only at the appropriate times.

The point of the game is to tell an exciting story everyone can enjoy. Make sure no matter how grand or small the action, everyone has a chance to contribute to the mission's success.

Adventure Section

Running Adventures

Telling an entertaining story and planning a successful battle are very similar artforms. You might start out with a particular plot or plan, but this always changes along the way to suit your audience or battlefield developments. Some of my most popular stories —ones I've told countless times— never sound the same twice. Commanders are constantly altering their plans to accommodate their own troop strengths, enemy reactions, and the terrain.

Planning adventures is very similar. You can be prepared for some of the things your characters might do, but you'll never anticipate all of them. Surprises are a fact of life. So lay out your plans for an adventure, but be flexible enough to change them as the action changes the plot.

In an adventure, characters confront a series of obstacles as they attempt to reach an ultimate goal. Adventures, then, are the heart of roleplaying games. Here is where you'll find the story —the seemingly invincible adversaries, the exotic locales, and the fantastic technology, all threaded together to form an engaging plot for the main characters (the players). Every Metabarons comic book is a separate adventure. The very first episode introduces the isolated planet of Marmola, and focuses on the Castakan's attempts to save Othon's life. After the various galactic powers battle above the planet, the treacherous Black Endoguard prepares for a final showdown with the Castakas.

All this just to protect Marmola's secret from a universe just waiting to exploit its secret of epyphite. These goals entail epic struggles, but the adventures your players participate in will usually involve less universe-spanning conflicts.

This chapter discusses everything you need to know about preparing and running adventures. Right now it may seem like a lot to absorb, but don't worry, it will become second nature the more you run the Metabarons Roleplaying Game. There's only one rule you need to remember: make sure everyone has fun!

Some groups of players prefer a certain style of play, so not all of what follows applies in every situation. As you run adventures you'll develop a feel for what excites and enthralls your players, and then you'll be able to structure later scenarios to incorporate those elements.

The chapter is divided into three main sections: Preparing Adventures, Running Adventures, and Ending Adventures. You may want to reread these sections once in a while as you begin gamemastering, but there's nothing here to memorize or to reference during a game session. Instead you'll find tips and suggestions that will help you create hours of entertainment for you and your friends.

Preparing Adventures

You should start with an adventure. You can buy one from D6Legend, create one yourself, or make one up as you go along. This book contains an adventure you can use immediately. You may want to glance at this scenario as you read through this chapter to get a feel for what a finished adventure looks like. If you're a bit more daring, you can skip to the next chapter on "Designing Adventures" to develop your own scenario from scratch.

Reading the Adventure

Make sure you're thoroughly familiar with the adventure before you start playing. The players may not proceed through the encounters in the order they appear, so if you read only the first half of the scenario, you could find yourself flipping through pages trying to figure out what happens next.

You don't have to memorize every detail either, just know the basic plot, structure, and characters of the story. If the players do something unexpected, like killing a major villain who's supposed to participate in the finale of the adventure, you'll need to know what you can do to alter the remainder of the story so that it still comes to a satisfying conclusion.

The better prepared you are to run an adventure, the more comfortable you'll be improvising when the players wander off course.

Character Cards

One way to speed game play is to create gamemaster character cards for quick-reference. You can either photocopy the section detailing each character or you can write their game information on an index card. As the player characters encounter various gamemaster characters, you can pull out their character cards so you have all their important information at your fingertips. This way you can avoid flipping through pages of the adventure looking for a particular character's stats, especially if that character participates in more than one encounter.

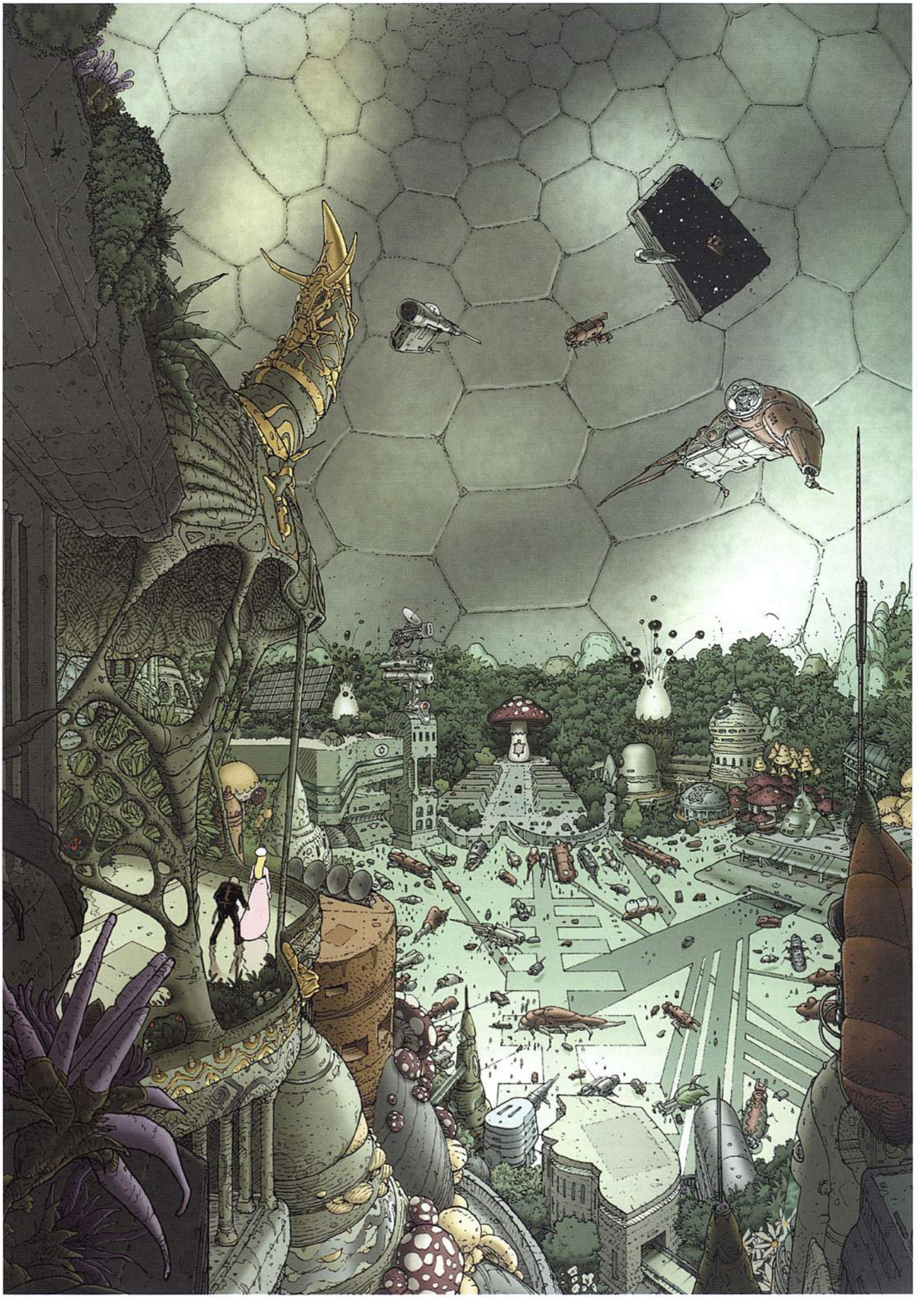
This technique works especially well for campaigns where many gamemaster characters play a recurring role. Also, if you create new characters on the fly (when the characters momentarily wander away from the scripted adventure), you can quickly jot down their information on an index card so you have it for later. You never know when the players may decide to return to speak with a particular character. If you haven't kept a record of his game information, you may have to guess —and you could be wrong, thereby shattering the players' suspension of disbelief ("Didn't this guy have a red uniform the last time we talked with him?").

Stock Encounters

Another way to save time during an adventure —and to save you from seeming ill-prepared— is to create several "stock" encounters. These short scenes could include anything from a bar brawl to a chance meeting with a security patrol checking IDs. When your players decide to go somewhere or do something you hadn't expected —and therefore hadn't written out beforehand— you can use one of your stock encounters to fill in the space while you figure out a way to get the characters back on track with the adventure.

For example, your mercenary characters are supposed to rendezvous with a possible business contact from an industrial Maganat. Although he's a high-level technocrat, he can't just have mercenary-types strolling into the corporate bureaus; so he plans to meet them in a bar in a low-class neighborhood. When the characters arrive at the city, however, they decide to first pay a visit to the spaceport district, hoping to purchase replacement parts for their recently damaged transport. When you designed your adventure, you hadn't counted on the characters going anywhere other than the bar where they are supposed to meet their contact. When the players state their intention, you quickly skim through your stock encounters and pull up a "business/shop" scene that you haven't used before with this group. In this encounter, you have the shop owner being harassed by a pair of tough-looking thugs. If the characters help the owner, they could get on the bad side of the crimelord who sent the toughs to collect the money the owner owes (which could provide a hook for the characters' next adventure).

It's a good idea to develop 10 or more stock encounters that cover everything from bar scenes to headhunters to security officers. The more you create, the less likely you'll be to get stuck in an adventure because the player characters did something or went somewhere unexpected.



Establishing the Mood

You can use the wide variety of science fiction multimedia elements on the market to quickly and easily get your players into the spirit of the adventure.

The Metabarons Comics

If you're running a scene that includes elements from the comics —people, skirmishes, weapons, spaceships— you can pull out a comic, turn to the appropriate page, show it to your players, and say "The person you encounter looks just like this," or "Here's some idea what the battle looks like."

Letting players read through the comics before you begin a *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* is a good way to get them excited about the game: potential character types they might want to play, ideas of Honor Codes they might follow, and the overall atmosphere of the universe they'll explore through roleplaying.

Music

To enhance your game, cue up some music from science fiction films that captures the feeling of various scenes for your adventure. Music from any space opera or dark future movie can help give your characters a better picture of their surroundings in the game. Play exciting tracks for furious space battles, or eerie, spooky tracks while sneaking around or exploring a strange planet.

Albums and CDs work well because you can cue them up to any point you'd like to hear, and with CDs in particular (depending upon your CD player) you can set a track to repeat indefinitely (allowing it to play over and over until you move on to the next episode).

Listen to albums a few times and select which tracks remind you of suspenseful scenes, or humorous incidents, or romantic interludes. You might even listen to science fiction soundtracks to help inspire you while designing your own scenarios. When you run an adventure you can turn on the appropriate track. Even if the music plays at a minimum volume, it greatly enhances the feeling that you're creating your own epic *Metabarons* story.

Toys

This is a game, after all, so you shouldn't neglect using toys to help illustrate the action. Browse through any toy department and you'll find an array of miniature space vehicles, models, play-sets, soldiers, and other goodies made for specific and generic science fiction themes. You can use these characters, vehicles, and ships to play out your adventures, giving you and your players a better idea of exact positioning (especially handy for combat encounters).

You can even buy some 1" square grid graph paper (available in large sheets) and count each square as two meters. If a character can move 10 meters during a combat round, you can move him five squares. This allows you to simulate battles more realistically ("You can't shoot him from there —that aircar's in your way."). You can do the same for vehicles and starships by altering the scale (200 meters rather than 2 meters, for example) and play out exciting dogfights just like the battle scenes in the comics.

Starting the Adventure

You have several options for starting an adventure. The most common is the "mission briefing" introduction. The characters, who may or may not know each other, have been assembled by their superior or a client for a meeting on their upcoming job. The superior gives them an objective, provides them with resources they'll need to accomplish that goal, and answers whatever questions he can.

While this standard opening works in most situations, it can also get boring, especially since not much happens during this encounter. The characters just sit around discussing the mission. Nothing really starts to happen until they get on their way.

Using A Script

One way to liven up the beginning of an adventure is to use a script, much like the scripts used to plot out comic books. You assign each player a part based on their individual characters or templates. As gamemaster, you play the role of the narrator and any gamemaster character part (like the player characters' client, for example).

The script usually brings the characters through an exciting or mysterious scene (or both) that launches them into the heart of the adventure. New players (especially those who have never played a roleplaying game before) immediately get a feel for how to play the *Metabarons* game.

The main problem with this technique comes from putting words into player characters' mouths, and assumes they take certain actions. Experienced players would rather retain complete control over their alternate personas, and so may shy away from adventure scripts. You'll have to see how your players react to know whether or not they prefer using a script (or you can just ask them before you start).

Handouts

Handouts, props, and other goodies help players dive into the scenario. Perhaps you hand the players a copy of a recent news broadcast about a situation in which they should become involved. Or maybe you show them an advertisement for someone seeking people just like them for some kind of job.

Along these same lines, you might use a tape recorder to record and play back a holo-TV news broadcast the characters overhear with some interesting adventure idea or employment opportunity.

While the handout option usually requires some preparation before the game, it's a fun way to draw players into the action by giving them something they can hold, read themselves, and hang onto during the adventure.

Start With A Bang

Another way to throw characters into the midst of the action is to start the game in media res (Latin for "into the midst of things"). The player characters literally begin play in the middle of an explosive or suspenseful event. Maybe their ship experiences a

technical problem and the characters must fix it before it careens into a planet. Such an adventure might start out like this:

Gamemaster: Okay, everyone ready to play?

The Group: Sure.

Gamemaster: All right. You make your last course correction to bring your transport into a landing vector—and then suddenly something explodes at the back of the ship. You begin to lose altitude control and start plummeting toward the surface! What are you going to do?

Such fast starts put the players immediately on their toes, thrusting them into the action before they even know it. Once they've dealt with their immediate problem, they're thoroughly enmeshed in the story.

You'll want to use caution with this technique. Some players may not like it, some may love it. Choose the one that works best for your group. And above all, vary your adventure beginnings. Nothing puts players to sleep more quickly than an introduction that exactly mirrors that last five.

Running Adventures

You've successfully brought the player characters into the adventure. Now you must keep them focused and enthralled with the plot. If you see their eyes start to wander, or they fall into a conversation about the last game, you know something's gone wrong.

This section should help you maintain an engaging story and a sense that the players are really into the action.

Setting the Scene

Your first job is to vividly depict the scene unfolding before the player characters. Where are they? Who else is there? What's happening? These are the questions you must answer immediately.

Description

Most published *Metabarons* adventures contain "read aloud sections" at the beginning of each episode. To set up the scene you can just read out loud or paraphrase the text. At that point the players usually either ask you questions about their surroundings ("How many pirate guards do we see?") or tell you their reaction to the situation ("I blast them!").

The key here is to engage the players' senses, just like a good movie, comic book, or television show. Try to use evocative words to give the players a clear and vivid view of their characters' environment. The best way to learn how to provide such lifelike descriptions is to picture the scene in your mind and do whatever you can to convey that same scene to your players. You may incorporate illustrations from the comics (as mentioned above), maps and diagrams, or even illustrations you've drawn yourself. Sound effects CDs can also help you set the stage for the characters.

Just remember that your players have five senses. Don't just rely on the sense of sight. Describe what your characters hear, smell, touch, and (sometimes) taste. The following example engages several senses.

Gamemaster: "The ship's landing ramp touches down on the soggy ground with a squish, and the thick, musty smell of the swamp-forest immediately sweeps up and into the access corridor you're standing in. From outside, you can hear the screech-chirps of local creatures as well as a strange, slow slurping sound. The humidity settles against your skin like a blanket of moisture as you head down the ramp. The gangly gray trees scattered in small stands about the ship reach upward into the mist, and you get the distinct feeling that something up there is looking down at you."

Believable Characters

The player characters will inevitably encounter other people who live in the *Metabarons* universe. Your job is to make sure that these gamemaster characters appear real to the players. Their words and

actions must seem appropriate in the context of their histories, personalities, and ambitions. If an Endoguard suddenly took off his helmet and started joking around, the players would probably just stare at your for a minute as the game came crashing to a halt.

Play each character to your best ability. Make sure he does everything in his power to achieve his goals, whether he's trying to thwart the player characters or earn a transport-load of contraband. This does not mean that every gamemaster character should act overtly. Part of his goal may be to achieve his objective undetected, or to make it look like someone else was responsible. Rather, the idea is that the gamemaster character should use all of his resources —his skills, allies, finances, etc.— to accomplish his immediate as well as his long-term goals.

For more on integrating interesting personalities in the game, read the chapter on "Gamemaster Characters."

Grabbing the Players' Interest

Once you get the adventure started, you spend the rest of your time trying to maintain the interest of the players —just like any other story in a novel, comic book, or movie. You have several options for moving the plot along and encouraging the players to focus on the situation at hand.

Exciting Locations

Use settings that evoke a sense of wonder. You could create an idyllic community situated amidst dozens of cascades and waterfalls, or a crime lord's fortress suspended above the ground by massive engines, or a spaceport built into the sides of the cliffs of an ancient series of canyons.

Try to make each place the player characters visit seem different from the others. By doing this, you can make these sights engaging and memorable for the players.

For more on creating exciting locales, read the chapter on "Designing Adventures."

Deadlines

You can help keep the players involved in the story by giving them a deadline. They have only four hours to rescue a Maganat's daughter before pirates transport her to the Exofringe. Or maybe the characters must warn an isolated mercenary company of an imminent threat despite the loss of communications. Or one of the player characters may have contracted a fatal disease that can only be cured by a certain doctor now enslaved by a greedy Ekonomat official.

Use Elements From the Comics

If you incorporate images, characters, settings, or plot threads from the comics, your players will immediately feel like their characters are really inside the *Metabarons* universe. Player characters could encounter character types from the comics, like Troglosocialiks, Endoguards, Techno-Technos, or Merchants Guild bureaucrats. They might visit locations from the comics like Endo-cities, Technogea, or even the Golden Planet itself!

Like everything else, however, use this technique in moderation. Players will get bored very quickly if they keep returning to the same location every adventure. While they do want to feel immersed in the *Metabarons* universe, they also want to create their own stories, to travel to planets not seen in the comics, and to meet gamemaster characters who have their own plans for the fate of the universe (or at least the fate of their sectors, worlds, or communities).

When the players know they have only a limited time to accomplish their objective, they don't waste time meandering about the universe, which is usually when they get bored with the adventure. You can even enforce a real-time deadline. You give the characters four hours of real time (as opposed to game time) to achieve their goal. Then, throughout the adventure, you keep reminding them about the time constraint. When you get down to the last hour, just watch them do everything in their power to help you move the story along!

Mysteries

If you present your players with a strange quandary that either cannot be explained by normal phenomena or lacks several key elements, they'll do whatever they can to uncover the truth.

Maybe a headhunter starts stalking the characters. They don't owe anyone any money and they're not wanted criminals, so who is after them and why? Or maybe a mercenary outpost suddenly

goes silent. When the characters arrive they find no one at the base and no signs that would indicate a sudden mass exodus. What happened?

Be careful when using mysteries. Continue to offer the players pieces of the puzzle throughout the adventure so they don't get too frustrated and give up. If halfway through the adventure they feel they're no closer to the truth than they were when they started, they'll figure that the mystery is unsolvable and forget about it —there goes the rest of your adventure.

Personal Stake

One of the best ways to motivate the players is by providing them with a personal stake in the adventure's outcome. Maybe one of their siblings is held hostage by pirates, or the Ekonomat has sent headhunters after them, or the Human Empire mistakenly believes they have become traitors. The characters must deal with these situations, although the whole adventure need not focus on that storyline. While the characters perform a supply run for some mercenaries, for example, they could receive word that the pilot's father has been abducted by masked thugs on his home world. Between accomplishing their mission and returning to their supply post, the characters could travel to the pilot's planet to find out who's abducted his father, and to extricate him from the clutches of an up-and-coming criminal overlord.

Every once in while you should ask to see the players' character sheets. Look for background information and personality traits that might lend themselves to a personal stake. If a player has written that his character is extremely competitive, for example, you could create a rival group of gamemaster characters who seek to outdo the player characters at every turn. This character will do everything in his power to make sure his group succeeds more often and more quickly than these newcomers.

Giving Options

Don't always force your players to follow the prescribed path of the adventure. They may have devised a different plan for success not covered by the scenario, and you shouldn't penalize them for their creativity. Instead you should use your judgment to run the remainder of the adventure.

If the players feel that they never have a choice, that you have already decided what their characters will do and say —and therefore, how the adventure will turn out— they're not going to have any interest in playing. Part of the fun of a roleplaying game is the almost unlimited possible reactions to any given situation. Take that away and you've lost much of the reason for participating in this type of game.

Sometimes the characters will have only a few choices —or at least, a few obvious choices— and that's fine if it makes logical sense in the context of the scenario and doesn't seem like an attempt by you as gamemaster to dictate their characters' paths.

Don't tell players their characters have no options outright —let them figure this out for themselves. Make the situation seem like they have alternatives, though only one seems most appealing in bringing them closer to success. Or you can provide options, but by using deadlines or introducing new complications and developments in a scene, some choices naturally dry up or are cut off.

Reward creativity. Give the players a reason to exercise their brains. The more freedom they think they have, the more they'll enjoy the adventure. When their characters make a mistake, they have no one else to blame it on; but when their characters succeed, they feel a genuine sense of accomplishment.

The Art of Misdirection

If the players can accurately determine the conclusion of an adventure while they're progressing through the first episode, the subsequent episodes won't provide as much excitement as they should.

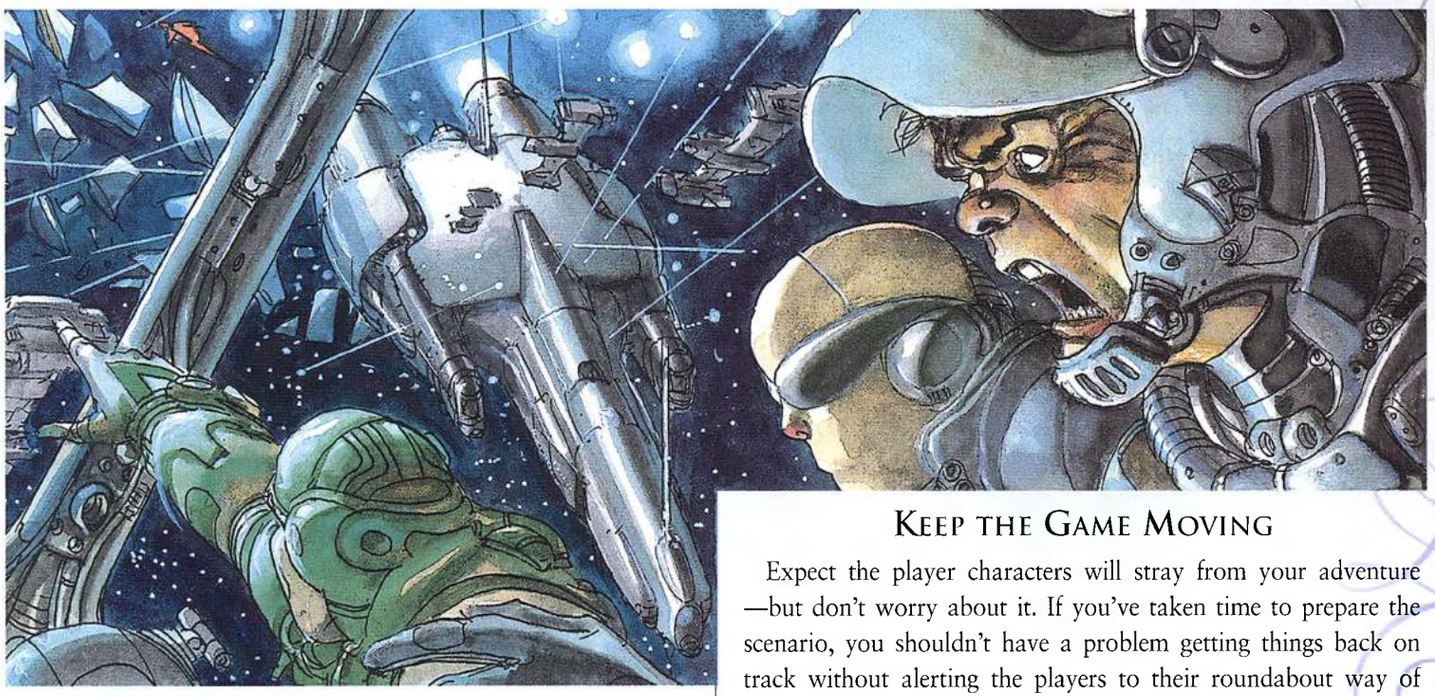
Here's where you use the subtle art of misdirection. You must strive to keep the players (and their characters) guessing and then revising those guesses through the whole adventure. You can do this in small ways: make die rolls, smile for a moment, and then don't say anything about it; have the characters make *Perception* rolls, ask for their totals, and then just continue with the episode; ask a player for detailed information on how her character is going to close a hatch ("Which hand are you using?" "Do you have a weapon in your hand"), but then nothing extraordinary happens.

You also have the option of throwing characters off the scent with unimportant or misleading clues. A gamemaster character starts tracking the characters. The players immediately attempt to determine how this new person fits into the rest of the adventure. In reality, however, he's just a common thief looking for an easy mark, or he thinks one of the characters looks familiar but doesn't want to say anything until he's sure he's not mistaking that character for someone else.

Fudging Die Rolls

The story is the most important part of a roleplaying game. Don't let the rules get in the way. If a flubbed die roll would normally indicate that the main villain dies a few minutes into the adventure, fudge the roll. Say he just barely escaped —or better yet, let him suffer injuries that scar him and increase his hatred for the characters. For this reason you should try to make all of your rolls behind a gamemaster screen or hidden from the players by some other object (like your hands). Keep in mind that some gamemaster characters also have Amarax and Character Points to spend to save their own hides in tough situations.

If the players make a roll that would derail the scenario, or would drain the excitement from it, you can fudge the difficulty number. For example, you've set up a situation where the characters must pursue a fleeing criminal informant out onto enormous struts suspended high above a factory assembly floor. One player decides her character will just turn off the lights and wait for their quarry to fall. You hadn't thought of that possibility when you designed your adventure (or it wasn't addressed in the adventure you bought), and there's no reason the character can't try such a strategy. You tell her to make a *security* roll to bypass the computer lockout on the lighting system. She rolls high, and even though it's enough to accomplish the task, you say that she



just missed it. Now the player character will have to risk their lives balancing on the struts to apprehend the informant.

Don't abuse this technique too regularly. If the players suspect you've been altering die rolls and difficulties, they'll start to lose interest because it will seem that their free will has been taken away. You should fudge rules only at critical moments and you should always be fair, giving the benefit sometimes to the gamemaster characters and sometimes to the player characters.

Judgment Calls

During an adventure you're in charge. You can always discuss rules questions or arguments with the players after the game (see the "Getting Feedback" section below).

While this general guideline provides you with a great deal of authority, it also gives you the responsibility of using that power wisely. You have to be fair. If a referee in a ball game started randomly penalizing one team, the other team would get extremely frustrated and eventually quit once it became obvious that there was no point in continuing.

While you take the role of the villains in the adventures you run, do not think of yourself as the players' opponent. You're job is to make sure the players have a good time, not to beat them. While you should try providing the players' characters with a challenge, you shouldn't try to crush them with an unbeatable adventure.

Then again, if the players do something stupid, you shouldn't baby them. The first time they make a particular mistake you may want to alert them and reduce the damage it would have caused, but the second time you should follow through with the action's true consequences.

Tread carefully on this aspect of gamemastering. It's easy to fall one way or the other. Just remember that you're all playing this game to have fun.

Keep the Game Moving

Expect the player characters will stray from your adventure —but don't worry about it. If you've taken time to prepare the scenario, you shouldn't have a problem getting things back on track without alerting the players to their roundabout way of proceeding through the adventure.

Some gamemasters actually enjoy the opportunity to run the game on the fly. You need a good imagination and a good understanding of the overall adventure ideas (plot, setting, and adversaries) to improvise encounters, but the more you do it, the better you'll get.

For the time being, follow the direction in which the players are heading. Start making up things off the top of your head, including as much color and flash as you can. If you need a couple of minutes to figure out how to get the players back into the story, call for a bathroom or snack break.

You can also throw complications at the players to stall for time while you figure out what to do next. If they have chosen to go in an unexpected direction, you can pull out a character card or a stock encounter (or make one up on the spur of the moment) and let them deal with that situation while you figure out how to bring them back into the plot.

The ability to improvise is extremely important because it allows you to maintain the players' illusion of free will. They must believe they can choose their own path, instead of being forced to do exactly what the gamemaster wants them to do —this is a game, and in games, players get to make choices about their strategies. Players hate being forced to do something against their will.

Sometimes, through no fault of the players or your own, the adventure grinds to a halt. The characters don't know how to proceed and the players completely lose interest. As soon as things start slowing down, make something exciting happen! A brawl breaks out, or a nearby gamemaster character gets unjustly dragged off by local security brutes, or the lights suddenly go out, or the characters' ship suddenly experiences a malfunction that will send it into the closest star, and so on. Get the players excited. Put their characters' lives in danger. Make them worry about how the encounter will turn out.

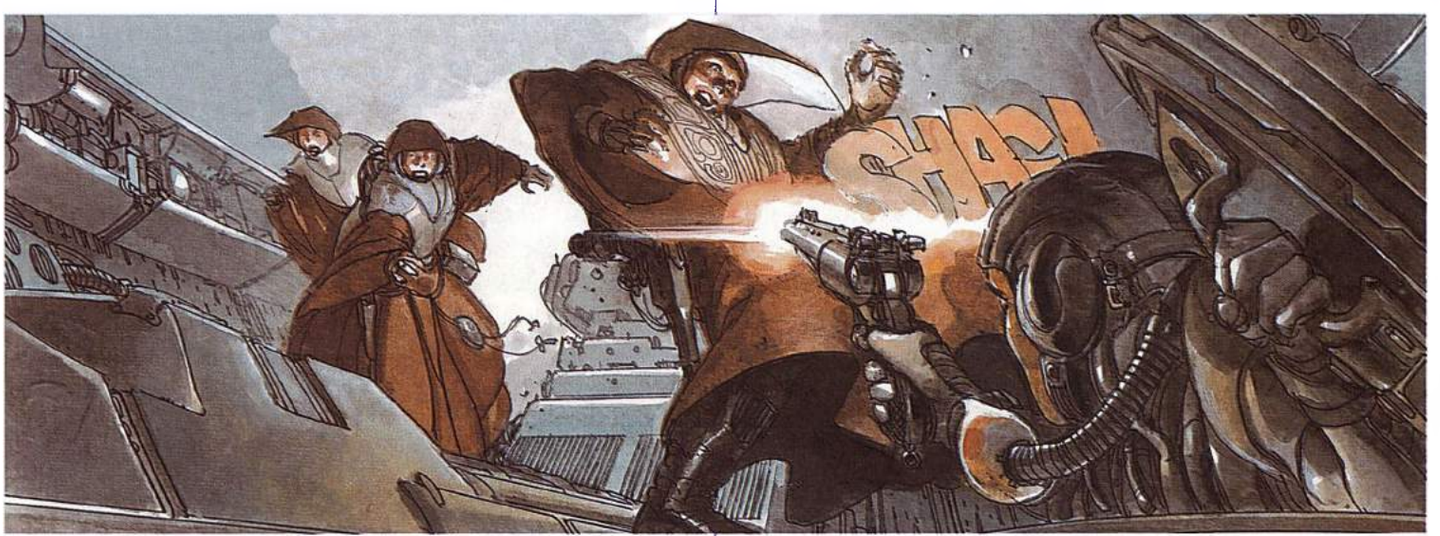
Above all, stay relaxed. This is a game, not a test of how well you can gamemaster. Everyone is playing to have fun, so just do your best and enjoy yourself.

Allow the Characters to Fail Once in a While

The characters are the heroes of their own *Metabarons* story, and even if they are pirates or mercenaries, they are heroic more often than not. That doesn't mean that they automatically get their way. The *Metabarons* saga is filled with main characters who are disappointed, cheated, and robbed of their expectations for greatness, respect, power, or a quiet, isolated life.

Sometimes characters need to fail. If they roll poorly, or are simply outclassed, or most importantly, if the players play poorly, their characters will lose.

On the other hand, with each defeat, the characters (and players) should learn something. They may learn a better way to approach a situation, or they may stumble upon a tool or gadget that will help them in the future. They might even learn about the overwhelming strengths and hidden weaknesses of their adversaries, to exploit in later confrontations.



Ending Adventures

Adventures can last a single night or can span several game sessions. At the end of a scenario (or the end of the game session), you may wish to distribute rewards. This helps encourage the players and gives them opportunities to develop and improve their characters.

Rewards

Make sure that what you give characters for their actions equitably matches the challenges they faced and goals they accomplished during the adventure.

You can award characters money, equipment, and weapons for their activities. They may also make contact with an important gamemaster character —someone who does them favors or saves their lives in a future adventure.

Characters also receive Amarax Points for their outstanding actions.

Characters also receive Character Points at the end of adventures, which their players can use to increase skills or save for later adventures.

As a general rule, a character should receive between 5 and 15 Character Points for each adventure. You should consider several factors when awarding Character Points:

• How Well the Characters (and Players) Performed. Reward everyone for the group's overall performance in getting through the adventure and accomplishing their goals. If the players solved puzzles, came up with great solutions, and made sure everyone had fun, give them four to six Character Points; if the players did very poorly, they should only receive three or four Character Points.

• How Well Individual Players Performed. If certain players were exceptional —very clever and went out of their way to make the game fun— give the player an extra two or three Character Points. Make sure everyone knows why these individuals get extra rewards: "Beth gets two more Character Points for Larryn's incredible performance scamming those two warehouse guards." You don't want to seem like you're playing favorites. If anything, you want to encourage others to put more effort into future games.

• Did They Cooperate? If the players worked well as a team they should get two to four extra Character Points. If they did nothing but argue (as players, not as characters; characters traditionally hassle each other during the game), they shouldn't receive points for working against each other.

• Did They Play In Character? If a player roleplayed his character well, give him two or three Character Points. If the player didn't play the character correctly —such as ignoring her Honor Code or acting against character— don't give her any points for roleplaying.

• Did Everyone Have Fun? If all of you (including you as the gamemaster) had a good time, give the players as many as three or four Character Points as a way of saying, "Good game." If players were difficult and never tried to get into the spirit of things, don't give them these bonus points.

Adventures can vary greatly in length. These award guidelines for an average adventure span two nights of gaming, or four or five fairly long episodes. If an adventure runs over several sessions, you may want to give partial awards during the adventure so the players don't go too long without getting anything to show for their efforts. Final Character Point awards should be correspondingly increased to reflect the length of the adventure. On the other hand, if playing one- or two-episode quick adventures, you should decrease the Character Point awards.

No adventure should award any character more than 15 Character Points at one time. If you think this may happen, then award some of the points during the adventure. You might even give them a way to spend them on skills or attributes during the scenario. If characters have time waiting or traveling where nothing happens, they might train or study to improve their skills.

You may offer other rewards —such as kublars, equipment, or other material objects— at your discretion. Again, try not to be too generous in giving out "stuff" —your characters need something to work for later. In the comics, rewards of respect, prestige, and reputation were more important than money or equipment.

Cliffhangers

If an adventure will continue over a few game sessions, you should consider ending each night's action on a cliffhanger so the players will look forward to the next part of the scenario. At first they may resist such a tactic, but after a few cliffhangers they'll come to enjoy and expect it. There's nothing like showing a "to be continued" line at the end of the night's episode to excite everyone to play the next episode.

For example, the player characters race across the universe to stop an industrial spy from selling trade secrets he stole from an important Maganat conglomerate. Just as they rush into the room where the spy is supposed to make the exchange, a dozen Endoguards appear from hidden alcoves and point their Cogan rifles at the characters. The industrial spy turns and says, "What took you so long?" and the session ends. Don't even let the players ask any questions about the scene. Just tell them they'll have to wait until next time to resolve this cliffhanger.

Setting up the Next Adventure

The end of one adventure could be the best time to introduce elements of the next episode to the characters. Throwing in a character who fits prominently in a subsequent scenario can make the universe seem more tied together, and therefore more real. Writers call this technique "foreshadowing." You incorporate images, characters, events, or settings of a future adventure into the current scenario to give the sense of concurrent and overlapping storylines.

You can even "end" an adventure by playing out the first scene of the next scenario. The players leave that night's game session with a hint of what's to come, and over the time between games their excitement about the next adventure gradually grows. You've given them something to think about, and they'll envision different ways to deal with the situation you've presented and left unfinished.

You may even offer a quick glimpse at the next adventure through a short preview: "Next week our heroes confront the Ekonomat traitor, unravel his web of deceit, and discover the true worth of the information he's stolen —data that could result in the painful incineration of millions of innocent people."

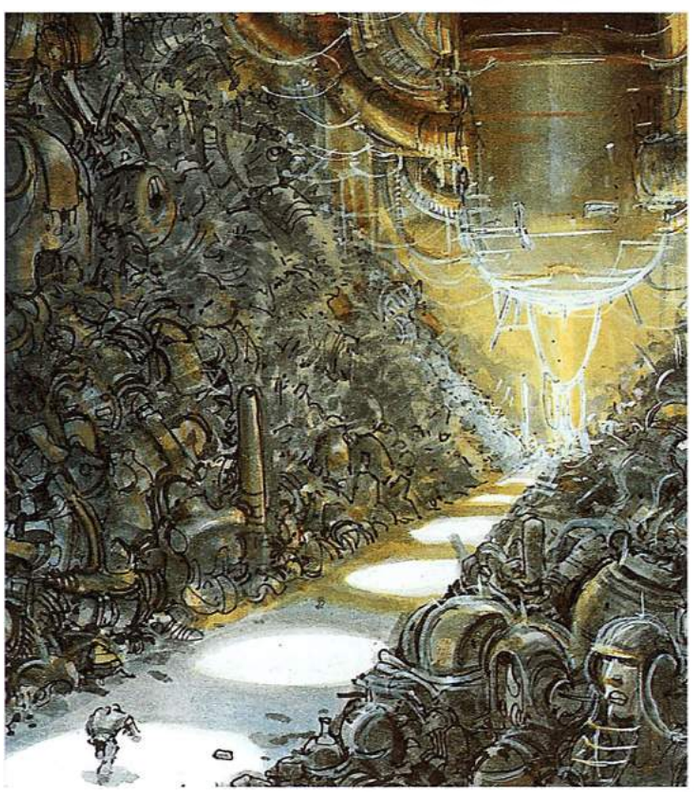
At the conclusion of any game session just remember to follow the age-old rule: always leave them wanting more!

Getting Feedback

Sometimes an adventure doesn't thrill the players like you expected it would when you were first reading or creating it. As you run a scenario, pay attention to the players' reactions to various scenes. Did they stand up and all try to talk at once during the chase? Did they fall into a coma when they reached the puzzle-solving encounter? The players words and actions can convey a great deal of information about which elements in the adventure they enjoyed and which parts put them to sleep.

You also have to gauge their reactions to your judgment calls and improvisation. Don't take any negative responses as criticism. It takes a lot of work to plan and run a game, and you can't always please everyone no matter what you do. Instead, view player reactions and comments as hints to help you improve the next adventure and keep them on the edge of their seats.

The best way to confront such a problem is to ask the players what they did and didn't like once you've finished the game. You could even have them write you an anonymous note with a list of their favorite and least favorite scenes, locations, and adversaries. Just don't forget to listen to what your players have to say. They may want to take the game in a different direction than you'd like. Compromise. Make sure you and your players have fun. If not, either you or your players will eventually give up and find something else to do during your precious spare time.



Designing Adventures

If writing an adventure is like preparing a story, then I'm the one to help you do it. Before telling a story, a good neo-troubadour must know his plot and characters, anticipate audience reactions, and prepare to embellish the telling so everyone enjoys the tale. A good storyteller, or gamemaster, knows how to cater to his audience, weaving exciting tales and drawing his listeners into the story.

Hopefully you'll find these storytelling tips useful in creating your own tales of honor, heroics, and adventure in the Metabarons universe. Don't worry that you're not properly trained, or aren't creative. Just look for ideas, and use what you find in this rulebook to guide you. Remember, people enjoy listening to stories and playing out their own adventures because it's fun —you should have fun, too.

No matter how many adventures you find for the Metabarons Roleplaying Game in officially published supplements, sooner or later you'll want to create adventures of your own. After all, who knows what your players want out of an adventure better than you? You are in the position to give them exactly what they want. No published adventure, no matter how good, can do that.

You'll quickly discover that designing your own adventures is one of the joys of gamemastering. Don't be intimidated —adventure design looks a lot more difficult than it really is. It still requires your

time and effort, plus a healthy dose of imagination. But if you follow some general storytelling guidelines, you'll be as famous for your adventures as the most renown troubadours. The basic steps of adventure design are simple:

1. ***Devise a good story idea.*** *The story idea is the spark that gets your creative juices flowing. In some cases it becomes the core of your adventure, and defines the central point of interest. In other cases it simply serves as a starting point —your final adventure might bear little resemblance to your original idea. Either way, you must start somewhere, and the story idea serves as that springboard.*
2. ***Develop a plot around the idea.*** *Flesh your initial idea out, toss in a few plot twists, and decide what gamemaster characters, technology, locations, and so on will figure in the plot. Be prepared to alter your original idea if more interesting and exciting possibilities come up in the creative process (and they will).*
3. ***Translate these episodes into game terms.*** *Put your adventure into "gamespeak." Create statistics for the gamemaster characters, spaceships, and new weapons, and decide on the difficulty levels for various tasks the characters may have to accomplish.*
4. ***Final preparation.*** *Assemble props, music, handouts, and other materials you might want to have handy when running the adventure.*

The Story Idea

The story idea is your adventure's foundation. Think of the story idea as a one-sentence plot summary. The easiest ones are snippets of a plot you can blow up into full-blown adventures with a bit of work —a nefarious pirate hijacks the characters' ship; a young child is looking for her mother; an old pilot buddy wants the characters' help; an old asteroid miner tells the characters a story about a mysterious ship he saw hiding in the local asteroid belt...

You can find other ideas in news stories, books you've read, movies you've seen, or from just about any other source, from conversations to something that happened to you on the way to work. Maybe you read an article about the effects an asteroid impact on Earth would have on the planet. Could this be spun into a *Metabarons* adventure? Sure. Toss in a colony of political refugees living on a doomed planet, and well-intentioned characters can become heroes in a hurry.

The idea doesn't have to be complicated, just a baseline from which you start working. It's like writing a story. You don't just sit down and type out the story all at once, you create ideas, take notes, sketch out a few scenes, write a first draft, polish it, then complete the final draft. You can build up a simple idea into a more complicated adventure one step at a time, just like a short story.

Brainstorming

It isn't always easy to come up with a good story. Sometimes, you might sit there, staring at that blank sheet of paper, knowing that your players are counting on you to get them up to their hips in danger in just a few days. What to do?

Time to jump-start the creative process by brainstorming. Clear your mind, and start jotting down every cool concept that enters your mind, no matter what it is. Write down everything you can think of. Then try using these phrases and ideas to create a few plot threads that you can build into a story. Here are a couple of ways you might get started:

Expand on an Element

Choose an element from the *Metabarons* universe: a character, location, piece of technology, legend, political faction. Anything will do. Scan the comics and other source material for ideas. Then think of a way that introducing that element into your game might create conflict and excitement. What can you add to the adventure to entertain everyone?

> **Example:** Beth is looking for a fresh idea for a new adventure. She reads *Metabarons* comic issue three and takes a liking to Namar's pirates. She starts asking herself what would have happened to any pirates who somehow managed to escape the ambush on the "Mother-Coach" alive. Would the Human Empire hunt them down and kill them like treacherous dogs? Would survivors go into hiding to plot their revenge? Would they ally with a sympathetic pirate band or mercenary unit? What if they had a scheme to pose a serious threat to the Human Empire? And what if the characters somehow stumbled upon that plan, or even an insignificant part of it? What would these pirate survivors be willing to do to keep their plans a secret? There's an adventure right there.

Create A Vista

Remember that first breath-taking glimpse of the Castaka fortress on Okhar? Or the Black Endoguard lancets cruising above the fortress on Marmola? Or the throne room in the Golden Palace? Sure you do. Those were illustrations designed to establish the character of those locations, and to create interest in what might happen there.

Writers often settle on locations and scene ideas by visualizing them, gradually adding detail to their mental images until the places are as real to them as their own backyards. You can use the same technique to inspire a story idea (it is also a useful exercise to try after you have the adventure planned out —your descriptions will be much more detailed and convincing).

Visualize a cool vista or visual scene. The more unusual, exotic, or spectacular it is, the easier it will be to use for story ideas. Once you have your vista fully-formed in your mind, start to ask yourself questions about it. Who lives there? What are they up to? What will happen to the characters if they go there? In answering these questions, you will begin to close in on a host of story ideas.

> **Example:** Beth creates an incredible visual scene in her imagination —a city built along the inside of a deep

canyon (perhaps she was inspired by an endo-city). She sets it on a remote planet covered with a dense and savage rain forest, with the canyon as the only safe place humans can live. Jungle vines and waterfalls burst from points in the canyon wall.

What kind of architecture dominates the city? Is it technologically modern or naturally rustic? Who lives here... Troglosocialik nature-lovers, political refugees hiding from persecution, an outlawed order that trains its members to expand their psionic potential? Beth likes the political refugees. She decides the city is home to a faction fleeing the oppressive policies of the Human Empire and the Techno-Technos; since they're outlaws, the architecture is natural and rustic, lacking many modern technological elements.

Now Beth thinks a little more about the grand scene she's created. Why would characters come here, and what conflicts would they find? Maybe one of the characters wants to find a long-lost relative, or the group has heard the canyon has a hidden treasure. Perhaps there's an internal conflict among the refugees —youngsters want to venture out into the universe and take revenge by conquering nearby planets, against the will of the colony elders, who wish to preserve their hidden canyon sanctuary. Maybe the youngsters need a spacecraft to leave the planet and carry out their schemes... something like the characters' ship!

As you can see, a single dramatic image can quickly grow into a multi-session adventure.

The Master Character

Creating an interesting gamemaster character can also help inspire story ideas. We'll talk in depth about developing gamemaster characters in a chapter in the "Universe Section" ahead, but for now, run with the idea of generating a mover-and-shaker —not a minion, but someone who will definitely alter the characters' world when he or she walks onto the stage.

This person can be either an ally or an adversary, but in a pinch, the adversary option is better. You instantly create conflict by making your master character an antagonist with strong motivations and goals opposing those held by the characters. And that leads right to story ideas.

> **Example:** Since she likes samurai films, Beth decides to create a gamemaster character for her *Metabarons* game who is among the best archaic weapons masters of the universe. She also knows one of her player's characters, an outcast noble, wants to develop his *archaic weapons* skill. She decides Varangian (her weapon master's name) made many friends while wandering the universe, teaching others the finer arts of combat. He keeps to himself and maintains a low profile, but often can't help getting involved in situations that offend his particular Code of Honor against those with power abusing the weak. This often exposes his combat specialty, fighting with two ancient swords at once.

Beth asks herself some questions to help her integrate Varangian into her campaign and possibly even become the focus of an adventure. What kinds of places does Varangian visit? How does he travel around the universe? How does he find students, and where do they go to train without interference? How might he become involved with the characters? Do they approach him for help or to train them? Do they come to his aid when his Code of Honor brings him more trouble than he bargained for? Does he know influential people who can help the characters accomplish their mission?

It is easy to see how Varangian could generate at least one adventure, then return later as a recurring character.

"Borrow" Other Stories

We've already mentioned that story ideas can be drawn from movies, books, plays, comics, news stories, and so on. "Borrow" ideas from these sources —altered a bit and repackaged as *Metabarons* adventures, they often take on new life. You can try science fiction or fantasy novels, movies and comics, but other genres yield good results too, and may not be as familiar to your players. Read other types of fiction, like detective stories, espionage, or adventures. Use plots from old movies —or from literature (the tragedies and comedies of Shakespeare might help).

The real world —history and current events— can provide a rich source of ideas.

If you are really stumped for a story idea, running through the headlines of the daily paper can yield some real gems. Scan the international news briefs, or watch the evening news for a summary of daily events across the globe.

> **Example:** Beth is looking through the newspaper for adventure ideas. She notices the following news stories that might provide good seeds for scenarios:

- One of the most popular internet providers seeks to merge with a major media company.
- A little Cuban boy whose mother died trying to get him to America is forcibly taken from his foster family by heavily armed government agents to be reunited with his biological father, who owes allegiance to Cuba.
- South Carolina insists on flying the Confederate flag over its capitol building despite protests from minority groups and the tourist bureau.

While any one of these might provide the inspiration for an adventure, Beth decides to combine elements from each one to create a more interesting scenario. She starts by setting the adventure on a world in turmoil, as inspired by the Confederate flag protests: a bankrupt planetary government seeks to sell it's natural resources to a Maganat conglomerate, against the wishes of much of the populace, which often turns out at the colony capital to protest this exploitative business strategy. She merges some syllables from "South Carolina" to get the planet name: Carouth. The news of two companies seeking to merge or buy each other out sparks the idea that two massive Maganat corporations are vying to buy and exploit the planet's resources. The planetary government is negotiating with each side to get the best deal. But the talks have ground to a tense stand-off when one conglomerate's mercenaries kidnaps the young child of the other company's business leader, the Pressex (the head of the company, a title Beth creates from "president" and "executive"). Of course, the rival company denies these allegations.

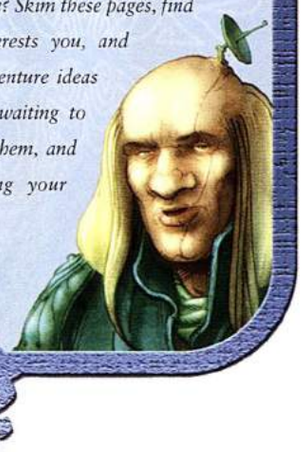
Now Beth has a good set-up, with some built-in conflict. Her next challenge is to somehow involve the characters in this mess. Maybe they're hired by the protesters to sabotage the negotiations any way they can. Or perhaps the mother of the kidnapped boy hires the characters to rescue her son —only the other company didn't abduct him, the protesters did to derail the corporate negotiations and save their planet from industrial exploitation.

By merging and tailoring elements from real-world news stories, Beth devises an adventure with believable plot twists and conflict.

Steal from the Best

Since we're talking about "borrowing" other people's stories as inspiration for your own Metabarons adventures, I should note that you're free to take any of the ideas in this chapter—or anywhere else in this rulebook —and modify them for your own scenarios.

Do your players want to get together in five minutes for you to run a Metabarons Roleplaying Game adventure? Skim these pages, find an outline for an adventure that interests you, and embellish it as you go along. These adventure ideas aren't just examples, they're scenarios waiting to happen. Read them, brainstorm about them, and give them a life of their own using your imagination.



Listen To Your Players

Your players are your best source for story ideas. When playing, take mental notes of what sort of adventures and plots interest them. Note what goals they establish for their characters. Ask them if they want to fight any particular type of villain or visit a specific place. What you learn by taking these actions may spark a story idea —one with the added bonus of being of great interest to your players!

> **Example:** During the course of the game, Jeff happens to mention that his character, Martius the quiet explorer, wants to buy his own survey craft, a ship the entire group can use to explore the Exofringe. Beth knows he'll be saving up his kublars, but thinks actually obtaining the ship would make a great adventure... one that will satisfy Jeff and the goals he's set for his character. Where would he find this ship? Who'd sell it to him? What condition would it be in? Beth decides Martius would receive a hasty offer from someone posing as an old nobleman selling his beloved spacecraft. Once he and the characters purchase it, though, they quickly discover the man was really the agent for a band of thieves who steal goods and quickly sell them off to unsuspecting customers. Now the characters are wanted by the ship's true owner, and possibly hunted as the criminals who stole the ship in the first place!

Fleshing Out the Plot

Now that you have a story idea for an adventure, what's next?

Continue working down from the general story idea to something a little more specific. Outline the adventure by breaking it into several episodes. Each episode must introduce a problem and give the players something interesting to do —investigate, fight someone, get involved in a chase, make a deal with other characters— gradually building up the tension and excitement, until the characters reach the adventure's climax and achieve their objectives. Save the resolution of the adventure's major challenge for the last episode.

Here's an example:

Story Idea: A high-level Merchants Guild official with a taste for ancient artwork hires the characters to rendezvous with some art dealers on Assyz, buy an old statue for him, and transport it back to his headquarters office.

Episode One: Arrive on Assyz and head for rendez-vous. Accosted by higher-class inhabitants.

Episode Two: Meet the art dealers in their conservatory sanctuary, negotiate the deal, and begin leaving to head back to their ship.

Episode Three: Art collector rivals appear, ones who aren't shy about influencing negotiations with superior firepower. The characters must fend off these adversaries and escape the conservatory for their waiting aircar.

Episode Four: Aircar chase through Assyz City. Lots of twists, turns, and gunfire exchanges.

Episode Five: The characters lift off and must hold out against their rival's transport cruiser before engaging the stardrive and delivering the ancient statue to their client.

Conclusion: The characters present the statue to the Merchants Guild official, only to find him waiting for them with their adversary! The operation was a test of their skills, proving themselves for an even more challenging, and more profitable job, for the Merchants Guild.

If you are having trouble developing an outline, start by writing down the basic story idea. Then ask yourself a few basic questions about the idea:

Who is the story about? Is it about a villain, or a character that has something happen to him?

What is the story about? Is it universal in scope, showing a civilization coming to grips with a star going nova? Is the story of a more personal nature, about a character coming to grips with anger at a friend or relative? Is the story told on a small scale, such as a simple cargo transport run from one system to another? Stories often have several elements to make them interesting.

When does the story happen? Are you setting it in the past, like much of the action in the Metabarons comics? Does it revolve around a famous historical event? Does the background leading into the story take into account thousands of years, such as the decline of an ancient civilization? Or, does this element of the adventure's background not really matter?

Where is the story taking place? Is it set on the Golden Planet or the remote Exofringe? Does the story move around a lot —are several things happening on several worlds at the same time? Because of the nature of the Metabarons universe, characters can move to and from several planets in the course of the adventure —that's half the fun!

Why is the story taking place? Why are the people doing what they are? What are the objectives of the adversaries? What's motivating the gamemaster characters the player characters interact with? In the real world, things happen for a reason, and in Metabarons, there should be an underlying reason for what's going on.

Be sure the adventure you prepare is appropriate to the characters —is the plot something that the characters will care about? How do you get the characters involved? Decide what is necessary to motivate them— duty to an organization to which they've pledged allegiance, belief in a Code of Honor, defeat of a personal obstacle or achievement of a goal.

Episodes

Metabarons adventures are divided into episodes, similar to scenes in a comic book. In each episode, something dramatic and exciting happens —the characters are acting upon what they have learned in earlier episodes, or they learn more information, or find themselves in conflict, or advance the plot in some other way.

In general, over the course of a *Metabarons* adventure, you should give the characters a chance to use all the major skill types. The following adventure format can help you vary the action in your scenarios. It is just an option, not a requirement, but it may be just what you need if you are a beginning gamemaster, or if you are stumped for plot ideas. Try including these in your adventure:

• *One episode solved with combat.* Roleplaying combat situations is fun, and your players will want to release their frustrations by shooting at adversaries at least once during the game... probably more than once.

• *One episode requiring interaction with gamemaster characters.* The players should have the opportunity for a little

roleplaying, and a chance to use the social skills of their characters —like *bargain*, *streetwise*, *interrogation*, or *command*.

• *One episode involving a chase.* Chases help speed up the action, literally! You can have chases through every conceivable environment with every conceivable vehicle.

• *One episode requiring problem-solving.* It's easy enough to set up a situation that requires a little skull-work to deal with, and players enjoy that, too, as a respite from all the other edge-of-their-seat action.

• *One episode featuring ship-to-ship combat.* Ship-to-ship combat is a major part of *Metabarons*, and should be a frequent occurrence in the game.

In the example above, episode one involves gamemaster character interaction; episode two requires some negotiating brainwork; episode three exposes the characters to combat; episode four features a chase through the city (and a running skirmish of sorts); and episode five is a straightforward spacecraft battle.

Twists

It's always a good idea to keep a surprise or two waiting to spring on the players. At the beginning of an adventure, you have to give the players enough information so they can plan intelligently —but the adventure will be a lot more interesting if you keep some information secret until later. In fact, if you can come up with a twist for every episode, you've got an adventure that will keep your players on their toes.

In general, twists depend on incomplete information. The unexpected happens —or the expected fails to happen.

Devising a good twist takes imagination and thought. You'll have to work at it, but here are a few suggestions that might help:

• In most adventures, the characters have a definite enemy —a pirate band, a corrupt government, a headhunter, some other villain. The enemy will, of course, have his own plans, which the characters won't know about until those plans mature. Using a villain to spring surprises on your players is an easy way to throw a twist or two their way.
Adventures in which the adversary reacts to the actions of the characters but never initiates plans of his own should be fairly rare. It's far more common for antagonists to actively pursue their own goals —whether the characters interfere or not.

• The "bait-and-switch" is a common twist; the characters are told that they're pursuing one objective, but, in the middle of the adventure, learn that they're really supposed to achieve a different one. They might have been misled by their employer, but more commonly, their patron has incomplete information and the characters learn more during the adventure.

> **Example:** In the adventure outlined in episodes above, the characters believe their mission is to buy and transport an ancient statue for their client. Their real objective is to keep it from the hands of the art collecting rival, all part of their patron's elaborate plan to test their abilities for an even greater challenge to come.

• The characters' assignment leads them into a trap, orchestrated by some known or yet unseen adversary: a rival, old enemy, third party, or other entity hoping the characters fail at their mission.

• The job is based on incomplete, sketchy, or out-of-date information.

• The characters' true antagonists are not who they think they are. By assembling clues and noticing things that just don't make sense in gamemaster character actions and adventure scenes, the characters eventually discover their real enemy's identity.

• Crucial information is unavailable. The characters' contact is dead or has disappeared. Their client may not tell them the reason for or the full background of the mission for security reasons. Alternatively, a gamemaster character, the only person who knows the whole story, may be assigned to lead or accompany the group —except that he dies early in the adventure, leaving the characters wondering what to do. If you chose to torture your players like this, you're obliged to drop hints and clues about what's really going on during the adventure.

You can adapt these plot twists to almost any adventure; however, because writers and adventure designers find them so handy, they are also highly prone to cliché —experienced players will certainly expect them. If you feel comfortable using them, go right ahead. Otherwise, you can use the above suggestions as a starting point and develop your own plot twists. Often, the best plot twists occur to you while you are outlining your adventure.

If your group is no longer surprised by your twists, it may be time to get more devious. Give out enough information to suggest a plot twist the players are expecting, and once they relax in the knowledge that they know what is coming, turn the tables on them again!

Settings

The stories told in the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* are the same as stories from any other genre; stories of human desire, greed, foolishness, love, and valor. You can often borrow entire plots and casts from heroic fantasy, pulp detective stories, or historical romances. But what makes your stories science fiction is their setting.

Metabarons stories are told against the starry skies of space, or the weird vistas of exotic worlds. The background is only background —but its presence makes the story feel complete. When designing your adventure, pay attention to the setting. Spend some time imagining an exotic world or an unexpected place (here we get back to the idea of mentally visualizing your locations and vistas). Ideally, each episode should have an unusual and distinct setting of its own.

Most adventures take place on planets, so developing interesting worlds is a good way of establishing setting. When designing planets, remember that the galactic civilization has used technology to master its environment. See the "Worlds" chapter for more ideas on detailing planets.

When describing scenes, be sure to highlight all the strange sights that the characters can see. The little details make a setting feel real. For example, suppose the characters encounter a derelict spaceship of an obviously alien design:

Poor Setting: *Uh, the ship is, uh, black. And the controls look weird. There are markings in some alien script on the controls.*
Good Setting: *The ship is like a black, streamlined ovoid, with several bulges in oddly organically appropriate places. As you approach, a hole appears, opening like an iris. The hull immediately around the opening flexes and bulges slightly, looking like muscles moving just under the skin. After exploring corridors glistening with gooey secretions, you find the control room. At least, you think it is the control room. The air crackles around you with an ethereal bass hum that remind you of a distant storm, or an electric power transformer. There are no controls in sight.*

While detailing your settings, try keeping your descriptions to the point and as succinct as possible —you don't want to bore your players. For example, imagine describing to your players the throne room in the Golden Palace. You would want to describe just enough to give the players the "feel" of the audience chamber, but you don't want to sit there and make a list of every individual representative sitting in the galleries and their costumes, every architectural element in this grand hall, and all the other details. Keep your descriptions colorful, but concise.

Motivation

Now that you've decided on an outline for the adventure, you've come up with a plot twist or two, and you've thought about setting, what's next?

You must decide why the characters are going to get involved in your adventure. What is their motivation?

If the characters belong to some institution or organization, establishing motivation is not too difficult. These groups tend to hand out orders like candy, and expect everyone to stomach them without question. If your superior tells you do to something —carry out a mission, achieve some goal, run an errand— you usually set about doing it. Obedience is part of your allegiance to any group.

The best motivations arise out of the personal goals, interests, backgrounds, and Honor Codes of the characters. Read over their character sheets now and then, looking for things they feel are important. You can use these later to draw them into adventures. Those motivated by money will risk their well-being for profit, but rarely for purely altruistic reasons (there are exceptions, of course). A headhunter is naturally motivated to apprehend his bounties, while psionic characters might be lured into adventure to flee persecution or prove themselves. Keep tabs on what the players are doing with their characters. Note expressed goals and desires. Since the players themselves came up with these motivations, they will be sure to follow them up if you introduce appropriate leads into your adventures.

Rewards

The last thing you must do when plotting your adventure is decide on the rewards for successfully surviving it. Generally each player should earn between 5 and 15 Character Points, depending on the contributions he or she made to the adventure. See "Running Adventures" for guidelines on Character Point awards.

You should also consider giving other potential awards. To some characters, money is important, and a profit on the adventure is one possibility. Hints and tidbits about where to find a master for skill training, or an exclusive hidden base where characters can hide and rest up for a while may be more important to others.

Once again, read the character sheets occasionally to see what matters most to individual characters. This might give you ideas on potential rewards. Is someone looking to acquire their own spaceship? Are they seeking a particularly powerful personal weapon? Do they hope to find information leading them to some resolution of personal conflicts? Your rewards can help satisfy the players' need to improve and develop their characters.

Translating Ideas into Game Terms

Run through your developed outline. Every time you encounter a gamemaster character, spaceship, planet, weapon, or other item or situation the characters must interact with, you should determine game statistics, pick difficulty numbers for tasks, and fill in other details which will allow you to run the encounter smoothly.

If the characters engage in combat, what are the skills of their adversaries? If the characters must break into a computer system or fix their spaceship, what is the difficulty to accomplish the action? What happens if they fail? Determine what other elements you must figure out in game terms.

Do the characters have access to the appropriate tools to help them solve the problems they face in the game? If you are designing an adventure where the characters must break into a prison facility, do they have access to explosives? Do they need them? Or do they have other tools —like guard uniforms and security passes? How are they able to accomplish their mission?

You must decide what skills are necessary for the characters to succeed at the adventure, and then figure out if they have the right skill levels, or how they can find someone to help them in those vital areas they are lacking. As gamemaster, you might also want to change your ideas so the characters stand a more reasonable chance of achieving success. If you want to run an adventure that includes a big starfighter battle, most of your characters should have the skills necessary to fly whatever fighter you provide them.

Make notes regarding the game value of any tools the characters will be using. If they are being given equipment by their employer, or are purchasing it, you should at least have a write-up of what the equipment does to give to the players so they know how to use it. If you invent new equipment, you should also write up a description of it and an explanation of its use.

Final Preparation

You're almost finished. The last thing you must do before calling your players together is create and assemble the scripts, maps, and other handouts you'll use during the game.

Scripts

Adventure scripts are useful tools for involving players in an adventure and imparting information in a painless way. You might consider writing your own script, making a copy for each of your players. Tailor the dialog to the characters you expect to be present for the adventure. If you don't know exactly who will be participating in your scenario, try to keep the parts generic, so just about any character can speak any line.

A script should explain how the characters got into the situation they find themselves in, and discuss any really important information pertaining to the adventure.

The script frequently begins with some action —where the characters are in danger already. Never write a script that marches the characters into actions blatantly contrary to their personalities or interests (at least not without good explanation), and never write scripts which require die rolls and skill checks within them. Save the die rolling for the adventure itself.

Handouts

Handouts are a great way of showing and telling players what they know about their surroundings, situation, or objectives without having to describe everything to them. Handouts often take the form of computer files on certain subjects, such as planets the characters are about to visit, information they might uncover in a computer network while hacking for secure data, or news on events occurring in their surroundings.

Maps

By giving the players maps, you help them visualize the environment in which the action's taking place. They love maps of the planets they visit, the cities they travel through, and the palaces and dusty cantinas they frequent.

It's always a good idea to sketch out potential combat zones —during the fight, the players will pelt you with questions regarding the tactical situation: "Where are we? Where are they? Where can we go to escape? What can we hide behind? How do we get back to our ship?" and other questions of this nature. Maps give the players a concrete idea of how things are set up; relying on verbal description often causes misunderstandings and arguments.

You'll sometimes find it helpful to prepare two copies of the same map —one for your reference, showing what's really going on, and one for the players, showing them what their characters know or believe.

Illustrations

If you are an artist, or if one of your players is an artist, you can make sketches and drawings of any starships, cities, gamemaster characters, technology, or other interesting elements the players will encounter —even rough sketches help considerably. If not, you can always show them art of something similar from any of the *Metabarons* comics. Look for helpful illustrations in science fiction books and magazines, especially if you used them to inspire the adventure you created.

Props

Players love to have physical things to touch and play with. Instead of describing a mystic artifact, if you can make one out of paper maché to give to them, they will be that much more interested in the device. Props take a lot of work sometimes, but they are always worthwhile.

You can also find many science fiction toys that might also make good props —or you could alter them yourself with a few glued-on attachments to better suit your adventure.

Getting Underway

You're just about ready to play. You've got all you really need: an extended collection of written and mental notes, some sketchy maps, and maybe a written script. If you want, you can prepare more thoroughly, plotting out each episode in detail, as we do in our published adventures. But this is sometimes more a hindrance rather than a help; the creativity of your players means no episode will go exactly as you planned, so too much preparation can be wasted.

Campaigns

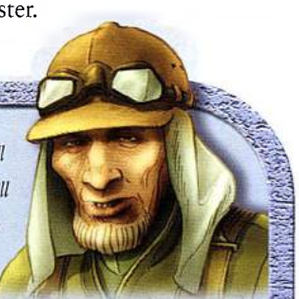
After playing a few adventures, you and your players may be ready to embark on a formal campaign. A campaign is a series of linked adventures involving the same characters, in an environment where their actions have far-reaching consequences. Each adventure forms part of an overall, ongoing story. So if your group has been gaming with the same characters for a few adventures, you are already in a campaign!

There are three basic types of campaign types to choose from, depending on the interests of you and your players:

Episodic. Episodic campaigns closely resemble most television action shows. They are linked by a common set of characters, possibly a common villain or two, and a small host of gamemaster characters who occasionally aid the characters. There's little else; each adventure is independent of the others. Episodic campaigns are great for a group that meets infrequently, or is likely to have players joining and leaving on a regular basis.

Series. Series campaigns are more like soap operas or continuing comic book stories. Stories are linked not only by the characters and gamemaster characters, but by numerous subplots and story arcs interwoven into the specific adventures. Series campaigns are very common, and a good choice for groups that want some continuity and a sense that the story of their characters is going somewhere.

Epic. Epic campaigns are quite structured. Each adventure is but one chapter in a long-detailed continuing saga, like the saga of the *Metabarons* in the comic books. Epic campaigns are quite involved, and require a lot of commitment from players and a great deal of preparation from the gamemaster.



Yes, designing adventures can be a lot of work... but like an entertaining story that draws your listeners into the action and emotions, it's all worth it in the end. When you see your players having fun—and you know that it's your story that is giving them thrills and excitement—you'll know a satisfaction like no other in the universe. Now move on to a beginning adventure you can use to get started. You'll see many of the points made in this chapter were used in writing this scenario, and it's a great way of getting your group started on a Metabarons campaign!

Making It Metabarons

Roleplaying adventures are stories the gamemaster and players tell together. So when you're trying to develop an idea for an adventure, think about the kinds of stories that make sense for Metabarons. You can incorporate many genres into a Metabarons adventure, from mystery to techno-thriller. Some work better than others in a Metabarons format, but the success of your efforts largely depend on the interests of your playing group.

The most important concept to grasp in giving your adventures an authentic Metabarons feel is this: more than anything else, Metabarons is space opera. Space opera, as a sub-genre of science fiction, has some specific conventions which you might want to keep in mind when developing adventures:

• Action. Space opera moves. Sure, there are quiet moments, but sooner or later (usually sooner), a threat appears and the characters spring back into action. The plot never stands still for long. Action includes combat, spaceship battles, chases, interesting character action, or any other kind of dramatic conflict—the point is that the conflict unfolds quickly, and the characters spend their time reacting to things, rather than carefully plotting every move.

• Struggle for Honor. Space opera often pits good against evil. The Metabarons universe doesn't care much about good or evil, but about honor, Amarax, and the insidious Necro-Dream. (You can read the "Amarax & the Necro-Dream" chapter for a quick discussion of this idea.) It's not whether a person does the right or wrong thing, but whether he follows his personal Code of Honor. What may be honorable for one character another might find despicable. It all depends on your point of view.

• Fight Against the Necro-Dream. Most people in the Metabarons universe have slipped into the languid apathy of the Techno-Technos' Necro-Dream, wallowing in the comforts of technology, easy living, drugs, alcohol, and other pleasures. The player characters belong to a small segment of people who've somehow managed to free themselves from the Necro-Dream, rising above others to pursue their goals and follow an Honor Code. They must constantly resist the Necro-Dream's temptations, consciously choosing action above inaction, resistance against passivity. To survive, they must stand up against this mental oppression instead of simply accepting it.

• Epic Storytelling. Space opera is about larger-than-life stories—giant armies and space armadas clashing, huge empires, dashing heroes, and fearsome villains. Desperate heroes faced with seemingly overwhelming odds are a hallmark of space opera. Metabarons is no exception. Though your characters will not be likely to play a huge part in the grand epic unfolding before them, their conflicts will seldom be small, mundane challenges. Even adventures which start small soon balloon into bigger affairs: if characters decide to save a small colony from destruction, they can be sure that they'll soon be called upon to save the whole star system; they may start out putting a few local criminals back into line, but wind up taking on criminal syndicates worth millions of kublars.

THE MAGANAT'S DAUGHTER

The Metabarons universe is filled with a variety of peoples, factions, and institutions who often serve as patrons or adversaries... and sometimes both. You're never quite sure who you can trust out there, other than your instincts, skills, and the pistol at your side.

Many times you trust the people with the kublars. In the case of "The Maganat's Daughter," your players start out working for an industrial Maganat who pays well and provides them with a ship to find his missing daughter. What happens along the way will give you and your players a better idea of the various forces, themes, and villains at work in the universe of the Metabarons.

A Metabarons Adventure

"The Maganat's Daughter" can be run as a stand-alone adventure, or be the springboard for a campaign. The following introduction can be used in both cases, or you can use the adventure script included in the next pages.

If you work this adventure into an existing campaign, you can substitute the corporate transport with whatever ship the characters are currently using.

Player Introduction

Read aloud: You've been wandering around some desolate industrial world, looking for work to earn enough kublars to buy passage out of here. One day you're hanging out down by the corporate docking hangars, hoping to find some loading work, when a dapper young corporate officer approaches you. Unlike the other company stooges who usually chase you away, this one seems friendly enough. He introduces himself as Second Adjunct Bartemus, secretary to the corporate Maganat Alsimus Cedro, who runs Cedro Flight Des-Eng. "It's just a small firm, really," Bartemus exclaims. "But Maganat Cedro has a rather large problem he's hoping you'll help him solve. For the right price, of course." He offers each character 50 kublars for accepting the job now, and another 75 kublars each when they accomplish the mission objective. At this point, if anyone asks about the job, Bartemus only admits that it involves retrieving some of the Maganat's lost property.

Allow the characters to debate the price or terms of the job, with you speaking the part of Bartemus. Once the characters accept, Bartemus begins leading them toward a Cedro Flight Des-Eng landing hangar while elaborating on the mission parameters.

Continue reading aloud: "The Maganat's daughter Estanza is apprenticing to a flight crew on one of our small cargo transports," Bartemus explains. "Her latest run was in a transport named Cedro T-144. Yesterday we picked up a brief emergency beacon transmission from the freighter, but it quickly cut off. The signal came from Delft B-31, a system that was close to their hyper-lane course. Our analysts assume they reverted back into material space because of some mishap, perhaps landing on the one habitable yet industrially worthless planet in the system, Delft V. The company has several hired mercenary units in that area, mopping up elements of Labbard's Legion, a pirate gang they confronted and successfully routed last week. None of those vessels heard anything past the cut-off emergency broadcast, and we cannot distract them from their continued operations to root out this pirate menace infecting in the area."

Bartemus stops at the entrance to the corporate landing bay. Inside you see a light cargo transport with the registry Cedro T-076 on the side. "We're letting you borrow this ship for the mission. It contains coordinates to the Delft B-31 system, computer files on the corporation and Estanza Cedro, and information on the missing freighter, Cedro T-144. To receive payment in full, you must return to this landing hangar with your borrowed freighter, the missing transport, its cargo, and Estanza Cedro."

Warning!

Only the gamemaster should be reading ahead.
If you intend to play a character in this scenario, you're going to spoil all the surprises.
Once you've run through this adventure as a player, you might want to read the entire scenario.
You'll find out what else could have happened —it might just encourage you to run this scenario for a different group of friends.

Gamemaster Information

Preparing to Play

If you're running this adventure as the gamemaster, you should read it thoroughly, especially if you haven't run many roleplaying game adventures before. Look it over a second time, taking any notes that will help you run it more smoothly — noting tasks and difficulties in the margins, highlighting important stats, and writing down any changes you want to make to throw off those players who didn't read the warning above.

When you're ready to play, help your players choose their character templates and start customizing them according to the character creation rules in earlier chapters. If players are running brand new characters, help them create connections. Each team member should know at least one other character before the adventure starts.

The characters start this adventure with whatever equipment they have on their character sheets. Since they begin on an industrial planet, they might wish to purchase additional equipment with your permission, though prices are high on such a technologically modernized world.

Adventure Materials

Dice and Paper. In addition to character templates (or experienced characters), you need several six-sided dice, pencils for everyone, and some scrap paper for writing notes, sketching what the characters see, and maybe even jotting down witty quotes the characters make.

Maps. You'll need the map of the transport crash site early on, and the map showing the pirate camp later in the adventure. Feel free to make other maps if you need them.

Script. You can use the script to start your adventure quickly and get your players into their characters. Photocopy and distribute it to the players, or simply crowd everyone around to read from the book when the time comes to use the script. If you don't want to use the script, you can just use the "Read Aloud" section above.

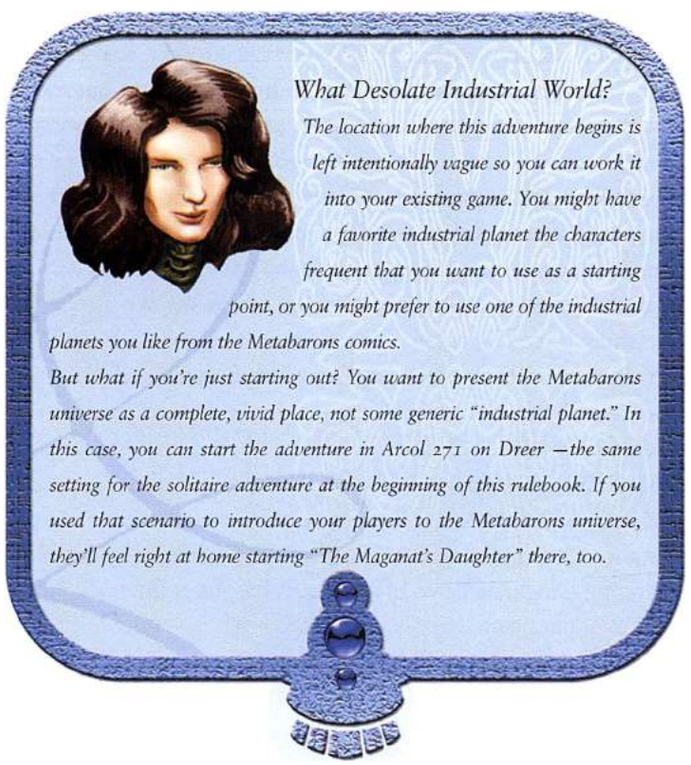
Munchies. Gaming is a social event, so having plenty of drinks and snacks around can help everyone relax and have a good time. It's a good idea for each player to bring along a bottle of soda or bag of chips to share with everyone.

Adventure Background

The characters have accepted a job for Cedro Flight Des-Eng: tracking down the Maganat's missing daughter, Estanza, and recovering her, her transport, and its cargo. It was supposedly yanked out of hyperspace back into material space, broadcasted a brief distress message, then went silent. Although mercenary groups loyal to the corporation picked up the signal, they could not interrupt their operations against pirate bands operating in this region of space.

The characters must survey Delft V, the only inhabitable planet in the system, find the downed transport, and retrieve the ship, cargo, and the Maganat's daughter. During the course of the adventure, they'll locate the transport, explore it, follow a path to a pirate hideout, plan an assault to rescue Estanza, and discover that the Maganat's daughter is a bit more loyal to her pirate lover than her estranged father.

Although you can start the adventure with the characters' transport arriving in the Delft B-31 system, you might ask the pilot for a few appropriate skill rolls (piloting, astro-nav) to get spaceborne and give everyone a quick refresher course in rolling skills.



What Desolate Industrial World?

The location where this adventure begins is left intentionally vague so you can work it into your existing game. You might have a favorite industrial planet the characters frequent that you want to use as a starting point, or you might prefer to use one of the industrial planets you like from the Metabarons comics.

But what if you're just starting out? You want to present the Metabarons universe as a complete, vivid place, not some generic "industrial planet." In this case, you can start the adventure in Arcol 271 on Dreer —the same setting for the solitaire adventure at the beginning of this rulebook. If you used that scenario to introduce your players to the Metabarons universe, they'll feel right at home starting "The Maganat's Daughter" there, too.

Episode One: Delft B-31 System

Summary

In this episode, you start the mission using either the "Read Aloud" section or the adventure script. This brief introduction sets the stage for the subsequent mission, and gives characters some basic information about their situation. In the first episode, they arrive in the Delft B-31 system, scan Delft V for signs of the missing transport, and might use the computers on their own ship to glean more information about Estanza, Cedro Flight Des-Eng, the conflict between the mercenaries and pirates nearby, and Delft V.

Start the Adventure

You can begin the scenario by reading the "Read Aloud" section to your players. This is a quick, no-nonsense way to brief them on the mission objectives, pay, and equipment (the transport) pertaining to the adventure.

You can also use the script to start your adventure, involving the players more directly right from the start. The script begins the game quickly and helps your players get into their characters. Feel free to make as many copies as you need to give each player their own script, or let everyone read from the script in the book.

Assign each player one part in the script (such as "1st Character," "2nd Character," and so on). If you have six players, each player reads one part. If you have fewer players, double up on several parts. You get to read the parts labeled "gamemaster." Your lines describe what situation the characters initially find themselves in. When you're ready, start reading the script, and your adventure will take off!

Computer Files

Once they've taken off from the industrial planet where they accepted this job, the characters jump to hyperspace and have a few hours before emerging back into material space in the Delft B-31 system. During their hyperspace journey, they might wish to use the computer aboard their transport, Cedro T-076, to uncover more information about a few elements of this mission they might not fully understand.

Below you'll find various subjects characters can search for in the transport's databanks, along with the skill difficulty required to discover the relevant information. Ask what information or files they're looking for, then let them roll their *computer interface/repair* skill. They can make one roll for each subject they're searching for. If they successfully make the roll, they uncover the pertinent data. If they fail, you can tell the characters they found nothing about that subject in the transport's databanks.

Cedro Flight Des-Eng: **Easy** (10) ***computer interface/repair.*** On a successful roll, the characters uncover a basic corporate profile on Cedro Flight Des-Eng. It's a relatively small Maganat conglomerate

Metabarons™

"The Maganat's Daughter" Adventure Script

Directions

Use the following script to start your adventure. Your gamemaster will tell you what part (or parts) to read. Read your lines out loud when your turn comes around. Try saying your lines the way you think your character would talk. Be sure to listen to what the other characters say so you get all the information you need to begin the adventure.

On Some Desolate Industrial World...

Gamemaster: You've been wandering around some desolate industrial world, looking for work to earn enough kublars to buy passage out of here. One day you're hanging out down by the corporate docking hangars, hoping to find some loading work, when a dapper young corporate officer approaches you.

1st Character: Uh, oh, here comes trouble.

2nd Character: Looks like we're getting kicked out of here... again.

Gamemaster: Excuse me, friends, but I am Second Adjunct Bartemus, secretary to the corporate Maganat Alsimus Cedro, who runs Cedro Flight Des-Eng. I believe I might have a job for you.

3rd Character: I hope it pays better than that last mission we took. What a fiasco.

4th Character: What's the deal, buddy? What are you offering, and what do you want us to do?

Gamemaster: My superior, Maganat Cedro, would like you to retrieve some property he's lost. He's willing to pay you each 50 kublars now, and another 75 when you return his missing property.

5th Character: I don't know —50 kublars now and 75 later? Doesn't sound like much of deal.

6th Character: Hey, I don't know about you, but I'm all for it. Kublars are kublars. And I need all the money I can get.

Gamemaster: And Cedro Flight Des-Eng will provide a transport you may borrow for the mission's duration.

2nd Character: Excellent. Free flight time. I'm all for it.

4th Character: Okay, okay, we accept. What's this Maganat fellow lost that's so valuable he has to hire down-and-out scum like us to find?

Gamemaster: The Maganat's daughter Estanza is apprenticing to a flight crew on one of our small cargo transports. Her latest run was in a transport named Cedro T-144. Yesterday we picked up a brief emergency beacon transmission from the freighter, but it quickly cut off. The signal came from Delft B-31, a system that was close to their hyper-lane course. Our analysts assume they reverted back into material space because of some mishap, perhaps landing on the one habitable yet industrially worthless planet in the system, Delft V. The company has several hired mercenary units in that area, mopping up elements of Labbard's Legion, a pirate gang they confronted and successfully routed last week. None of those vessels heard anything past the cut-off emergency broadcast, and we cannot distract them from their continued operations to root out this pirate menace infecting in the area.

5th Character: Just great. A missing daughter, pirates, mercenaries.

3rd Character: Hey, we're getting paid. Please, Second Adjunct Bartemus, continue.

Gamemaster: Thank you. We're letting you borrow this ship, Cedro T-076, for the mission. It contains coordinates to the Delft B-31 system, computer files on the corporation and Estanza Cedro, and information on the missing freighter, Cedro T-144. To receive payment in full, you must return to this landing hangar with your borrowed freighter, the missing transport, its cargo, and Estanza Cedro.

1st Character: Sounds just wonderful. When do we leave?

that develops new, more efficient components for spacecraft. Most of Cedro's recent designs have focused on better propulsion and weapon systems, though it's made small advances in life support, shields, and navigational systems. Cedro maintains design and engineering test facilities on several planets his noble family owns, and uses a small fleet of freighters to transport prototypes, assembly line equipment, and personnel between facilities. Since it's a relatively small corporation, it relies on mercenary units to protect its ships instead of a standing security force of its own.

Transport Cedro T-076: Easy (10) *computer interface/repair.* Characters seeking more information about the ship they've borrowed just find the basic data: allow the characters to read over the ship's game statistics to get a better sense of its performance. Overall it's a rather standard corporate transport, with minimal armament and other features.

Transport Cedro T-144: Moderate (15) *computer interface/repair.* The freighter Estanza Cedro served aboard is the same type as the one the characters are flying now. (You can show the characters the stats for their Cedro T-076 if you like.) The crew consisted of a pilot, co-pilot, and gunner, with Estanza serving as co-pilot. The ship's course brought it from one Cedro world to another, through an area of space known to be plagued by pirates... specifically a group known as Labbard's Legion. To access the freighter's cargo manifest requires a Difficult (20) *computer interface/repair* roll to circumvent security protocols on the file. If characters succeed, they discover the Cedro T-144 was hauling a load of engine parts from a test assembly facility to a quality control lab —a pretty routine shipment.

Delft B-31 System: Easy (10) *computer interface/repair.* The computer files state that this system is void of any official settlements. Only one planet of the system's seven worlds is hospitable to life: Delft V. A computer search reveals it's a grassy world pock-marked with eroded rocky regions whose mineral deposits interfere with orbital scans. The minerals themselves are worthless, so this planet has not been exploited by industrial concerns. The characters discover an interesting note: mercenaries working for Cedro Flight Des-Eng recently fought elements of Labbard's Legion in this system. The mercenaries have since dispersed, following pirate survivors who jumped to hyperspace during their hasty retreat.

Nearby Mercenary Units: Moderate (15) *computer interface/repair.* Characters following up on information about the mercenaries discover details of the recent action in the Delft B-31 system. Cedro Flight Des-Eng hired a mercenary unit, Magg's Marines, to rid this area of the pirate menace... and Labbard's Legion in particular. The Legion had been preying on shipping in this region, dealing several costly blows to Cedro Flight Des-Eng. Magg's Marines stepped in and tracked the bulk of Labbard's force to Delft B-31. During that engagement last week, mercenary cruisers blasted away at unprepared pirate craft. Those that survived hastily jumped to hyperspace, dispersing their forces to various nearby systems. After quickly searching Delft V for any pirate presence —and finding none— Magg's unit split up to hunt down the remnants of Labbard's Legion.

Labbard's Legion: Moderate (15) *computer interface/repair.* The transport's databanks on Labbard's Legion reveals much the same information as about the mercenary units above. Characters also learn that the commander of this band, Labbard, is quite the dashing pirate type, prone to shows of gentlemanly behavior now and then. Although his raids are quick and successful, he often frees the crews of commandeered ships after taking their cargo. The computer files do not specify whether he was killed in the recent confrontation with mercenary forces or somehow managed to escape.

Maganat Alsimus Cedro: Difficult (20) *computer interface/repair.* The top executive and owner of Cedro Flight Des-Eng is a busy man, overseeing operations at dozens of engineering labs, test facilities, and assembly factories throughout this sector. He inherited his corporation from his father. The society holovids focus mostly on his occasional marriages, only one of which produced a child: his daughter Estanza. He hopes his current wife will produce a male heir to inherit his corporate fortune.

Estanza Cedro: Difficult (20) *computer interface/repair.* Only child to Maganat Alsimus Cedro, she's proved a loyal daughter to both her father and his corporation. Only 20 years old, she's

Transport Cedro T-076

Class: Light Transport
Scale: Fighter
Length: 30 meters
Skill: Piloting: light transport
Crew: 2; 1 gunner
Passengers: 4
Cargo: 150 metric tons
Supplies: 1 month
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 5
Atmosphere: 295; 850 kph
Hull: 4D
Shields: 1D
Sensors: 25/1D
Ordnance:
Defense Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 1–2/10/20
Atmosphere Range: 100–200/1/2 km
Damage: 4D

Description: *The Cedro T-076 is typical of the corporate transports used by the Cedro Flight Des-Eng company. Although it has a light cargo capacity, it has some basic maneuverability, engine power, and defenses to protect itself. It's not a military grade craft, but it can hold its own long enough to engage its stardrive and escape to hyperspace.*

shown an interest in corporate and family political affairs at all levels. After completing a year apprenticing to the quality control division, she transferred to the transport corps to gain some experience flying cargo freighters. The society holovids focus more on her father than Estanza and her tomboy reputation. She has not expressed publicly any opinions on her father's struggle to sire a male heir to his noble-corporate fortune, instead immersing herself in learning and mastering the company's inner workings. If the characters make a Very Difficult (30) *computer interface/repair* roll, they discover and break into a secured file that reveals Estanza was aboard one of the corporate transports recently hit by pirate raids in this region.

Arriving in Delft B-31 System

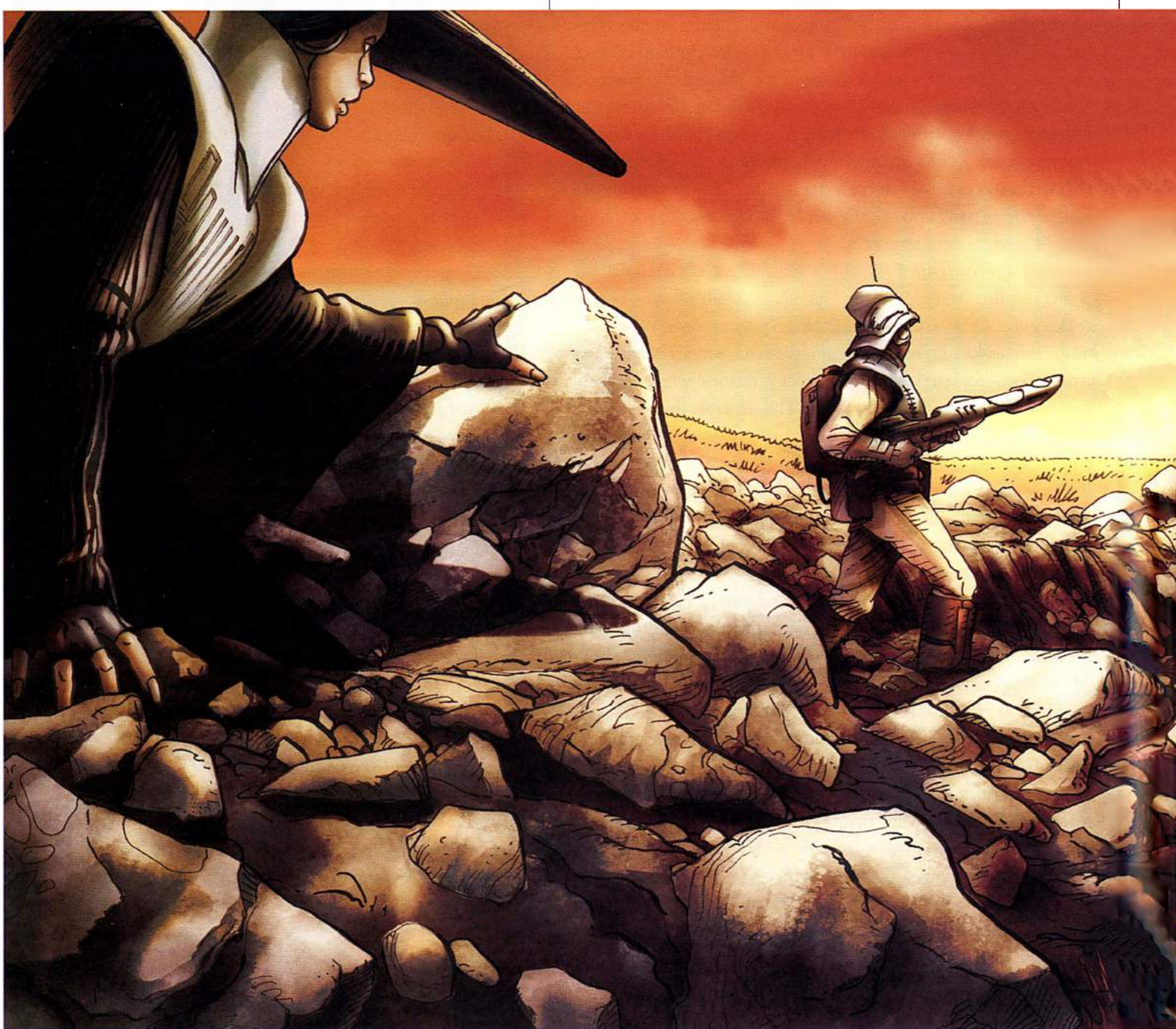
The characters emerge from hyperspace into material space in the Delft B-31 system. Delft V shows up clearly on their sensors, along with the system's other planets and the sun. They can scan the system using their ship's sensors, but must move into orbit around Delft V to more closely scan the planet.

The characters find no initial signs of the Cedro T-144 —so even if they fly straight to Delft V, they must make a sensor sweep to discover its crash site before moving on to the next episode.

Scanning the System

Using the Cedro T-076's sensors, the characters can scan the Delft system for anything unusual. This requires a Moderate (15) *sensors* roll —don't forget that the scanning character gets to add the ship's 1D sensors dice to her roll. No matter what the result, the characters receive basic information about the system: seven worlds orbiting a bright sun, one habitable planet (Delft V), no other spaceships flying in the system.

If the *sensors* roll is successful, the character detects a debris field orbiting the third planet in the system. The wreckage is all that remains of the confrontation a week ago between the mercenaries



and the pirate gang. Anyone making an Easy (10) *astrography* roll can determine the debris was pulled into the planet's orbit from its place in more open space where the confrontation undoubtedly occurred.

Approaching it requires no *piloting* roll, though if they decide to enter the debris field, the captain must make an Easy (10) *piloting* roll to avoid some particularly large pieces of wreckage. The scattered remains include the burned-out husks of three pirate frigates, several large pieces of Ostrov fighters (a pirate favorite), and the rare piece blasted off a mercenary cruiser.

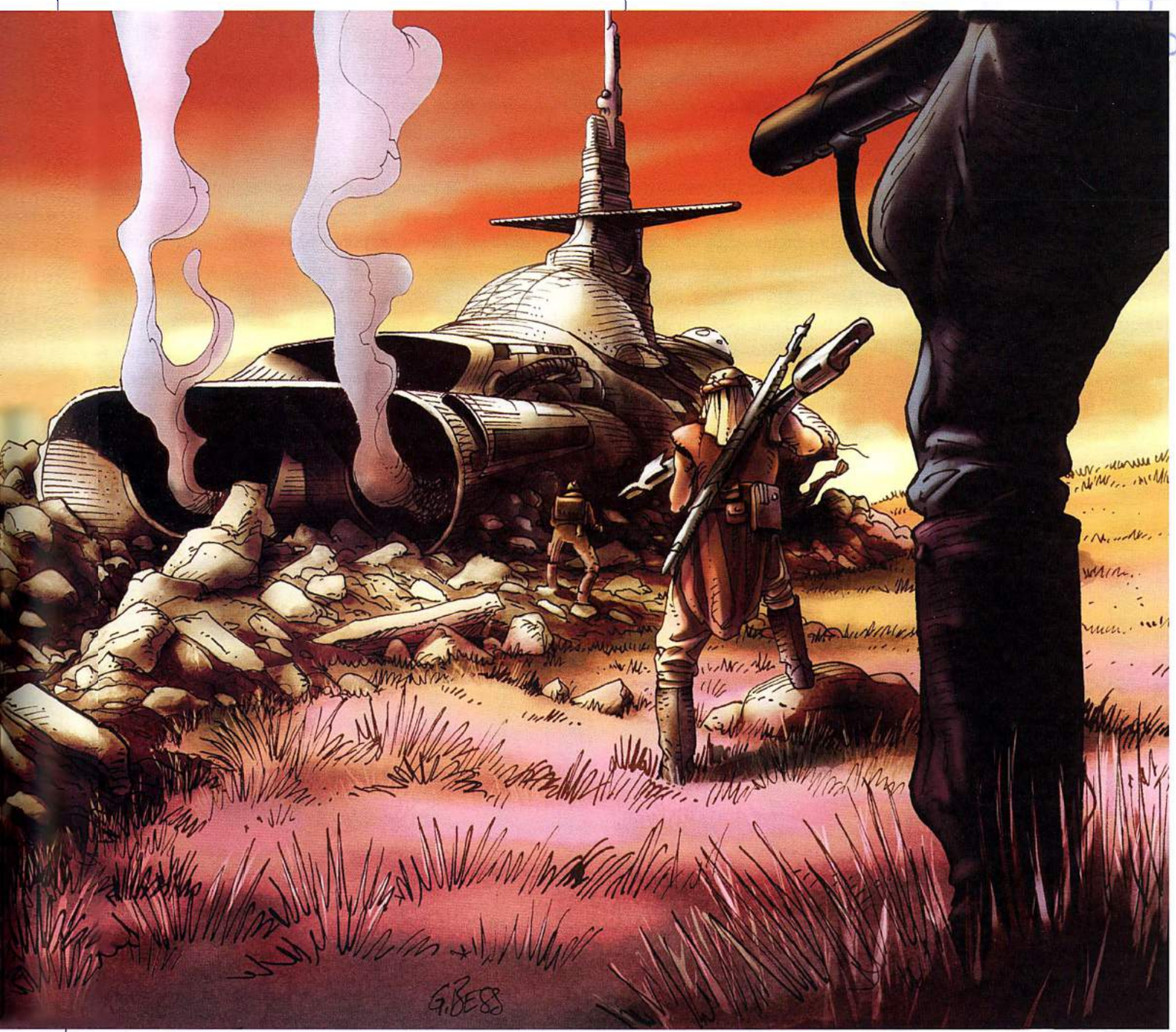
A detailed scan —on a Difficult (20) *sensors* roll— confirms that none of this debris belongs to Cedro T-144.

Scanning the Planet

Once the pilot brings their transport into orbit around Delft V, characters can scan the surface for signs of Cedro T-144. Anyone making an Easy (10) *Perception* roll immediately notices the distinct lack of an emergency beacon.

The characters must make a Moderate (15) *sensors* roll (adding the transport's 1D sensor dice) to locate the Cedro T-144. Scanner readings indicate it landed in the midst of a vast, grassy savanna. A trail of torn-up turf and scorched dirt behind it hints that the freighter didn't have a smooth landing. The scanners do not pick up any signs of life or energy readings from the downed transport.

Characters may broaden their scan to search for life-signs or other indications of activity on the surface. They find no signs of settlements, industry, or other spacecraft on the planet's surface. They also discover that their sensors are ineffective when scanning the rocky regions bordering the savanna, as varied mineral content there interferes with sensor readings. Only on a Very Difficult (30) *sensors* roll can they pick up faint readings of energy emissions, but these disappear before they can get an exact location lock on them.



Episode Two: Cedro T-144

Summary

During this episode, the characters have a chance to more closely examine Cedro T-144 and the vicinity. They quickly discover signs of foul play, and the presence of someone else on Delft V who was interested in the downed transport's cargo and crew.

Landing on Delft V

Once the characters locate Cedro T-144 on the surface of Delft V, they can land their own transport and investigate. Setting down on the planet isn't too difficult, but it depends how the pilot approaches.

Drop in and Land: **Easy (10) *piloting* plus transport's maneuverability.** With this approach, the pilot simply drops the characters' transport through the atmosphere on a direct course for the Cedro T-144's landing site. The players should be aware that this is the least stealthy option. If anyone's waiting for them at the downed transport, they'll be spotted. This is also the fastest option —if anyone's injured or otherwise in trouble at the crash site, the characters can get there quickly to offer help.

Circle the Site: **Moderate (15) *piloting* plus maneuverability.** The pilot can gradually enter Delft V's atmosphere and circle the downed transport's landing site to more thoroughly scout out the area before landing. Allow the characters to make *Perception* or *sensors* rolls as they approach to get information from the read-aloud portion of the "Cedro T-144" section below. If the pilot fails this roll, the landing is a bit bumpier than expected —giving any attempts at those *Perception* or *sensors* rolls a –1D penalty.

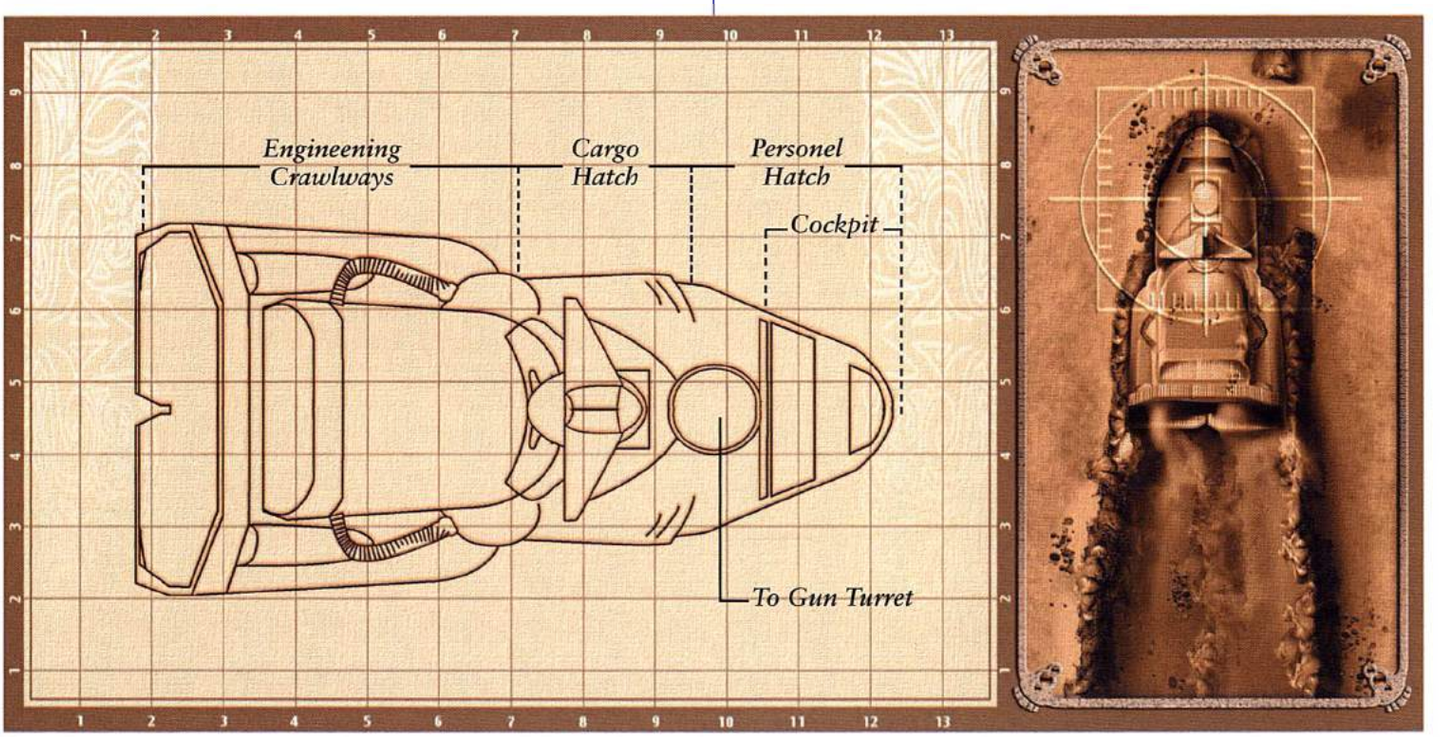
Low-Altitude Approach: **Difficult (20) *piloting* plus maneuverability.** Using this approach, the pilot brings the transport close to the ground before flying low over the grassy plains toward the downed freighter. Although speeding over the surface at this low altitude is risky, it lowers the chances of anyone at the Cedro T-144 noticing the incoming transport. The pilot can set down a short distance from the downed transport and the characters can sneak through the grass undetected. If the pilot fails her *piloting* roll, however, the characters could be in serious trouble —the transport grazes a grassy rise during its low approach, taking 2D damage.

Ask the character who's piloting the transport where she wants to set her craft down in relation to the Cedro T-144. She can land a short distance away, just in case something goes wrong, or she can set down right next to the other transport —though an Easy (10) *piloting* roll might be required to avoid actually bumping the other vessel. Although it's not too important exactly how far away the character's ship is from the downed transport, it's always good to ask and keep the players on their toes.

Cedro T-144

When the characters have the downed transport in sight, they can make *Perception* rolls —or *sensors* rolls if they're still aboard their ship— to survey the area.

Read aloud: As you approach, you notice that the Cedro T-144 is a light cargo transport like your own ship. Its hull sports the Cedro Flight Des-Eng corporate logo, and its registry number is prominently displayed. The hull shows no outward signs of attack: no laser scoring marks or burst patterns from flak cannons. The only indication of any damage is the blown defense gun turret and one engine, whose crushed underside was possibly caused by an unstable landing. The trail of charred grass and soil behind the transport lends further proof to this theory that the Cedro T-144 experienced a controlled crash



Errant Players

What if your players ignore the downed transport altogether and decide to fly over the rocky hills —discovering the hidden pirate encampment?

As gamemaster, you have to prepare for these deviations in the scenario plan. If you've read the adventure a few times, you have some idea what's waiting ahead, and how to alter that to fit the sometimes unexpected turns players often take.

In this case, maybe the characters fly over the makeshift pirate camp and discover it —but that also means the pirates are alerted to their presence on Delft V, and take suitable actions to prepare to repel them.

You might even work other elements the characters missed into this altered scenario. By jumping ahead, they avoid the encounter with the burrow-claw creature... but that doesn't mean it can't emerge from the ground in the middle of at battle at the pirate camp, just in time to add another layer of complexity to the fight.

Don't be afraid to let the story go where the players lead it. As long as you're familiar with the basic elements of the adventure, you'll be able to adapt quickly and improvise.

rather than a smooth landing. It's not clear what caused the defense gun turret to explode. Both the personnel hatch and the cargo door are sealed, and you notice no signs of life anywhere.

Characters who make Moderate (15) *Perception* or *sensors* rolls also notice a trail of matted grass leading from the Cedro T-144's main cargo hatch toward the rocky hills in the distance.

Anyone making an Easy (10) *flight systems repair* roll can determine that the engine was indeed damaged during a controlled crash landing, though it isn't serious. The characters can more closely examine the defense cannon turret. On a Moderate (15) *gunnery repair* roll, they realize the turret experienced explosive decompression. Since they find no signs indicating the turret was hit by weapons fire, they can only assume it suffered some kind of catastrophic seal or pressure valve leak.

The characters notice nothing else remarkable about the ship or the landing site.

Inside the Transport

Getting inside the transport presents a problem. The hull is intact, and both the personnel and cargo hatches are sealed. Characters cannot see through the polarized cockpit viewscreen or any portholes.

Examining the Hatch Locks: Easy (10) *security*. Characters making this security roll and closely examining the hatch locking electronics find no signs of forced entry or tampering.

Opening the Hatch Locks: Difficult (20) *security*. Actually opening the hatch locks isn't easy. Characters successfully making this roll manage to disengage the lock and seals for one hatch —make sure they specify whether they're working on the large cargo loading hatch or the smaller personnel hatch before rolling their security. Once they've opened the hatch, they can close and seal it again should they wish.

Blowing the Hatch: Moderate (15) *demolitions*. If all else fails —and someone has explosives or grenades— the characters can try blowing a hatch. This successfully allows the characters entry into the transport, but prevents them from closing the hatch again... they've just made the Cedro T-144 completely unspaceworthy. The explosion may also be heard in the distance.

Once inside, they discover the freighter's interior layout is similar to that of their own transport. They can explore these sections as a group or wander off individually. At the front of the ship lies the cockpit and minimal crew quarters, followed by the access hatch to the defense cannon turret, the large cargo hold, and finally the aft engineering crawlways with access to the engines and other mechanical systems.

Cockpit

The characters can reach the cockpit from the personnel hatch or through an inside corridor from the cargo hold. They pass a small supply station for food preparation and several duty bunks before reaching the actual cockpit.

Here they discover a grizzly sight: the pilot's body sitting lifeless in his command chair. He's been shot at close range by a small sidearm —probably a defense pistol— though he lived long enough to put up a struggle. The shot went right through his torso and into the pilot's command console, destroying several controls. Several other controls were damaged in a struggle. Anyone making an Easy (10) *piloting* roll can deduce that this damage to the controls contributed to the transport's crash.

Characters find no signs of Estanza Cedro, the co-pilot.

Anyone making an Easy (10) *Perception* roll notices that several instrumentation panels were completely removed from the control consoles. This was obviously done after the crash landing, since the ship couldn't fly without them.

The ship currently has no power. With a Moderate (15) *flight systems repair* roll, a character can fire up the emergency generators and get minimal power flowing into the cockpit... and particularly into the transport's computer.

Anyone with *computer interface/repair* can try pulling information out of the ship's logs. Let a character roll his skill while searching the computer, then consult the results below that best correspond to their roll. They uncover the information indicated for meeting or beating the particular difficulty and any data for easier difficulties:

Easy (10) ***computer interface/repair:*** The character pulls up basic information regarding the transport: it's name, registry number, points of departure and arrival, crew compliment, cargo manifest. Cedro T-144 had a crew of three: a pilot, co-pilot (Estanza Cedro), and a gunner. The cargo manifest lists 10 large crates of state-of-the-art engine parts bound for quality control testing at a Cedro lab.

Moderate (15) ***computer interface/repair:*** By accessing the technical logs, the characters discover the transport suffered from control interface damage and maneuverability jet control failure and misfire —all of which eventually led to a crash landing on Delft V. The technical log simply states these malfunctions were the results of gunfire in the cockpit and explosive decompression in the defense cannon turret.

Difficult (20) ***computer interface/repair:*** Digging down one layer deeper, the characters discover more in the technical logs. They note that the transport emerged from its course back into material space on manual orders issued from the cockpit controls (obviously before they were damaged). The electronic command to instantly depressurize the cannon turret was also manually issued from the cockpit.

Characters find little else in the cockpit. They glean no other useful information from the computer. All the crew's personal possessions are still in the lockers near the bunks, but tell the characters nothing about what happened here.

Cannon Turret

Characters can access the turret from a passageway just aft of the cockpit, where the personnel hatch opens to the outside, and a smaller interior hatch leads to the cargo hold. Although they can climb the ladder to the turret hatch, it remains firmly sealed. Apparently it shut when the turret above explosively depressurized. Characters can climb the transport's outside hull to reach the turret, or can open it from the damaged controls in the cockpit with a Moderate (15) *computer interface/repair* roll. There isn't much left to see. Much of the turret itself has blown outward, and the characters find no sign of the gunner.

Cargo Hold

The cargo hold is just aft of the cockpit, accessible through the large loading hatch on the transport's side. It contains hatches leading forward to the cockpit (and personnel hatch) and aft to the engineering spaces. The cargo hold is completely empty.

Characters notice scuff marks, pools of grease, and other signs of loading and unloading. Those making Moderate (15) *Perception* rolls spot small bits of grass and smears of soil most likely tracked in from the plains outside. If they entered by opening the loading hatch, they notice a trail of matted grass leading away from the downed transport and heading toward a low line of rocky hills in the distance.

Engineering Spaces

Characters can access the narrow engineering maintenance crawlways through a small hatch at the back of the cargo hold. Only one character can fit at a time, especially since the engineering spaces are a mess.

Spare parts rattle around on the floor, and others hang from wires and conduits snaking out from the engines, life support system, power generator, and other essential spaceship machinery. Anyone making an Easy (10) *flight systems repair* roll realizes the entire engineering area has been scavenged for parts. There aren't enough complete systems left to fly the ship at all.

Episode Three: Burrow-Claw

Summary

While the characters explore the downed transport, a creature native to Delft V is quietly approaching, preparing to investigate their presence —or more precisely, the presence of Cedro T-144. The underground burrow-claw begins digging away at the soil beneath

Burrow-Claw

Type: *Underground omnivore*
AGILITY 2D
PERCEPTION 2D
Search 4D
STRENGTH 7D
Special Abilities:
- *Claws: Inflict Strength+1D damage*
- *Tunneling: Bores through earth, leaving a packed-dirt tunnel behind.*

Move: *15*
Size: *7–10 meters long*
Description: *The burrow-claw is a subterranean mammal native to the vast grassy plains of Delft V. Its snout is black and covered with sensory buds which exude a gooey mucus. Several stalks extend from just behind the nose; each is about a meter long, and ends in a circular, toothy maw. It digs beneath the planet's surface using powerful forelegs with shovel-like digging paddles, with a longer, pointy claw on each side. The paddles dig into the soft ground and pull the creature forward, while two huge paddle-legs near the back push it through the packed-dirt tunnels it bores. Its bulky body is covered in hardened skin plates. The burrow-claw is normally a gentle creature that goes about its business digging for small animals to eat, water to drink, and nutrients to absorb from the soil. It's often attracted to investigate surface activity, although it is terribly uncoordinated and ungainly above ground.*

the ship, causing it to start sinking into the ground. The characters must evacuate the transport and confront the creature, an innocent beast just out exploring disturbances in its surroundings.

A Sudden Sinking

At some point while the characters investigate the transport —particularly if they're taking too long, or have reached a point where they don't seem to know what to do next— the ship begins shaking, then starts sinking into the ground!

Unless the characters left the transport before the tremors began, they each should make a Moderate (15) *dodge* roll to leap for safety. Those who fail fall with the ship into a 10-meter hole, taking 3D damage. Getting out requires a Moderate (15) *climb/jump* roll, unless one of the characters on the surface helps out with a magna-line. Ask anyone in the hole to make an Easy (10) *Perception* roll. If they succeed, they hear digging sounds underground, as if somebody... or something... is burrowing beneath the surface.

The characters don't have to wait long to find out. Once they've rescued any comrades from the hole, a low, grassy hill nearby erupts in a shower of dirt. A grotesque creature emerges from a tunnel beneath the savanna. Its snout is black and covered with sensory buds which exude a gooey mucus. Several stalks extend from just behind the nose; each is about a meter long, and ends in a circular, toothy maw. The bulk of the beast follows. Powerful forelegs end in shovel-like digging paddles, with a longer, pointy claw on each side. The paddles dig into the soft ground and pull the creature forward. The bulky body is covered in hardened skin plates. Two huge paddle-legs near the back push it farther out of its tunnel and toward the characters.

The burrow-claw is a native omnivore that digs underground in search of small animals, water, and nutrients in the soil. It's relatively harmless, though the characters don't know this. The burrow-claw is curious about the hard metal object which landed near its warren, and the odd little creatures running around inside it. Before the characters have a chance to do anything, it pulls itself forward, "sniffs" one of them with its sensory buds, and emits a low-pitched, nasal growl.

If the characters attack the burrow-claw, it naturally moves to defend itself. It's not very coordinated above-ground, but anyone getting hit by its claws is going to be seriously hurt. After a few rounds feebly trying to defend itself, the creature shuffles back into its tunnel and burrows deeper into the ground until the characters leave it alone.

If the characters try and befriend this ungainly beast, it seems to become docile and friendly. The burrow-claw is still a bit wary —feeding one of its maws some rations or allowing its sensory buds to sniff an open hand helps soothe it.

After a few moments of petting the creature, the burrow-claw lifts its snout into the air and sniffs around. The creature suddenly turns from the characters and begins burrowing into the soft rock. It quickly disappears into a tunnel, its foreclaws digging through the soil, while its massive body and rear paddles compact the burrow walls. Although the entrance seems in danger of collapsing with the weak surface dirt, the interior is a stable passage the characters might follow. And if their sense of direction is correct, the burrow-claw is headed toward the rocky hills in the distance.

If the characters choose not to follow the burrow-claw —or drove it away with their attacks— they all suddenly notice the path of matted grass heading toward the rocky hills on the horizon. The path is much more obvious after the downed transport sinks into the underground burrow-claw warren. If your players need any more incentive to move their characters toward the hills, allow everyone to roll their *Perception* attribute —the one with the highest roll thinks she sees faint smoke rising from that area, and if she listens carefully, believes she hears voices and the sound of machinery.

Episode Four: Pirate Camp

Summary

The characters head off toward the hills on foot, through the burrow-claw tunnel, or in their transport (which will most likely put the pirates on alert). They find a temporary pirate encampment nestled among the rocks where several survivors from the recently routed Labbard's Legion are busy trying to repair their remaining three Ostrov fighters with parts stolen and scavenged from the Cedro T-144. During their reconnaissance, the characters also spot Estanza Cedro, apparently held captive.

Approaching the Camp

Characters can approach the pirate encampment using one of several methods: on foot, through the burrow-claw tunnel, or flying there in their own transport. Each has its own benefits and drawbacks.

On Foot

The characters can follow the trail of matted grass on foot. It's only a few kilometers to the rocky hills. Along the way, anyone making a Moderate (15) *Perception* or *search* roll determines that two vehicles hauling heavy loads crushed the grass. In some places these characters notice bits of metal and synthetic canvas scraped on small rocks in the soil, indicating that the heavy load was dragged across the plains.

Once they near the hills, everyone notices faint smoke rising from a spot not too far into the rocks. They also hear the sound of work: men shouting, welders firing up, machinery clattering. Although the trail isn't as easy to follow through the rocky hills, the characters can find the pirate encampment simply by following the sounds.

Allow characters to make *sneak* rolls to avoid being spotted by any sentries who might be patrolling nearby. Of course, you don't have to tell them that the pirates are too busy repairing their damaged ships to actually deploy guards. Unless the characters make an unusually great amount of noise, they manage to sneak through the hills undetected, reaching a point that gives them a good overview of the pirate compound.

Burrow-Claw Tunnel

If the characters befriended the burrow-claw in the last episode, they can follow its compacted-dirt tunnel toward the rocky hills. If they try following it after attacking the poor creature, it uses its massive hind paws to collapse the tunnel behind it.

The characters can stumble through the tunnel —keeping a safe distance from the digging burrow-claw— for a few kilometers before the creature surfaces again. When they emerge into daylight, the characters find themselves at the edge of the rocky hills. Now everyone notices faint smoke rising from a spot not too far into the hills. They also hear the sound of work: men shouting, welders firing up, machinery clattering. Assuming they sneak quietly among the rocks, the characters eventually reach a spot with a good overview of a temporary pirate encampment.

Transport Flight

Instead of walking, the characters might decide to fly to the rocky hills in their transport. Although this alternative is easier, it makes everything more difficult later. Even if they only land the transport at the edge of the hills, the sound of its engines echo through the rocks and put the pirates on alert. When the characters creep up on the pirate camp, they'll have to make Moderate (15) *sneak* rolls to avoid detection by several patrols sent to guard against intruders.

If the characters fly directly over the encampment, they'll draw fire from the pirates and put the entire compound on high alert —nothing the characters try can take the pirates by surprise.

The characters might use the transport in a more subtle fashion. One or two characters might wait with the transport and fly in when the others attack the camp, providing a distraction and possibly cover fire with the freighter's defense cannon.

The Encampment

From their vantage point hidden among the rocks, the characters get a good view of the pirate camp. Show them the map and allow them to ask questions.

The camp is nestled among three rocky hills just high enough to conceal the Ostrov-class fighters from view. It consists of a makeshift camp built out of emergency survival shelters, two recon buggies on guard duty, and three Ostrov fighters undergoing repairs thanks to the pile of parts hauled from the Cedro T-144.

Characters count about 20 pirates in all (though you can modify

this to make things easier or more challenging for the group) —one crewing the tail cannon in each recon buggy, a few resting in the camp, and the rest scurrying over the Ostrovs, busily working on the engines and other systems damaged in the mercenary attack a week ago.

Makeshift Camp

The pirates' makeshift camp is set up in a small ravine in one of the hills. It consists of a few emergency survival shelters erected on the rocky ground. A campfire smolders amidst the shelters, with crates and other personal gear scattered around.

The characters notice five pirates lounging around the camp, a few resting beneath the shelters, with one or two preparing a meal over the fire's embers.

Characters making Moderate (15) *Perception* or *search* rolls spot Estanza Cedro napping beneath one of the survival shelters. One pirate sits on a nearby crate, looking rather bored as he cleans his suprapistol, and occasionally glances at Estanza.

Recon Buggies

The pirates have maneuvered their two beat-up recon buggies to guard approaches to the camp from the direction of the plains. Although the tail cannons only cover the buggies' aft fire arcs, the vehicles are parked in such a way that their field of fire covers the 180 degrees from the back of one Ostrov fighter to the camp area.

One pirate controls each tail cannon. They seem relatively alert to the activity in camp, but also scan the hills around them for trouble. If characters try sneaking closer, they'll have to make a *sneak* roll against the pirates' *search* of 4D.

Ostrov Fighters

The pirates landed three of their surviving Ostrov fighters in the hills, close enough that they can effect repairs. Behind the middle one stands a pile of spare parts and crates taken from the Cedro T-144. Fifteen pirates are working on the Ostrovs (about five on each fighter), using the scavenged spare parts to repair engines damaged in the mercenary attack last week. Most are scurrying around the outer hulls, jamming tools into exterior service panels, or welding hull plates back into place.

Unless the characters made their presence known by flying overhead in their transport, the Ostrovs remain powered down. Occasionally the pirates try starting the engines on one vessel to test their repairs, but it's quickly shut down even if the engines operate smoothly in an effort to conserve power and fuel.

Episode Five: Rescue!

Summary

Now that the characters have an idea of the camp layout and the pirates' numbers, they can make plans to rescue Estanza Cedro. Allow the players a set time limit to formulate their plans: anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes of real time. Then set it in motion. If they take too long, add some tension by having the pirates power up one of the Ostrov fighters and give it a brief test flight —if the characters don't take cover, the pirates will spot them and alert the camp.

Of course, this set-up assumes the characters took their time sneaking up to the pirate encampment undetected. You'll have to improvise the pirates' reactions if the characters decided to do a fly-by in their own transport or otherwise alerted them to their presence.

Formulating A Plan

Let the characters look over the map, noting the location from which they've been surveying the encampment. Note for them the emergency shelter where Estanza Cedro is sleeping (assuming they noticed her).

Here are a few sample strategies and other notes to help you determine what the characters can and cannot do in setting up their rescue attempt:

- Characters can *sneak* around the perimeter of the camp on a

A Players
B Camp
C Guards
Ostrov fighter
Recon buggy
Spare parts
Tank
A
B
C
C
C
W
N
S
E

Moderate (15) roll. Failure brings one or two pirates to investigate the disturbance, but won't put the entire camp on alert unless something really startling happens —like a sneaking character slips and slides down a rocky slope near the camp shelters.

• Characters can slip right up to the Ostrov fighters —even through the personnel access hatch to the inside— on a Difficult (20) *sneak* roll. If they fail the *sneak* roll, the pirates realize intruders are trying to enter the camp and raise the alarm. Once inside, they might sabotage various ship systems using an Easy (10) *flight systems repair* roll, or might try commandeering the vessel (in this case, use the stats for Labbard's Ostrov fighters below).

• Creating a diversion might distract the pirates. Assuming the characters make the diversion some distance from the camp, the pirates pack four men into a recon buggy and send it off to investigate. If the characters create a diversion closer to camp, the pirates react as if they were under attack. Ambitious characters who befriended the burrow-claw might somehow entice the large, ungainly creature to wander into the camp and wreak havoc while the characters rescue Estanza.

Pirate Reactions

Once the pirates notice the characters —either sneaking around or beginning their attack— the entire camp goes on alert.

Pirates

As soon as they notice trouble, every pirate scrambles for the Ostrov fighters. Those working on them slip down into the entry hatches. Pirates resting in the temporary camp grab what supplies and gear they can and run for the Ostrovs. If the characters are visible, the pirates begin shooting with small arms.

Labbard's Pirates. All stats are 2D except: *Agility 3D+1, brawling 4D+1, dodge 4D+1, firearms 4D+1, melee combat 4D, Mechanical 3D+2, gunnery 5D, piloting 4D+2, Perception 3D, con 4D, search 4D, Strength 3D, Technical 3D, flight systems repair 4D, Psionics 0D. Move 10. Character Points 2. Coveralls, heavy wrench (STR+1D damage), Viper pistol (4D damage).*

Estanza

When the characters begin their attack, the pirate watching Estanza sleep in the survival shelter wakes her up, helps her to her feet, and runs with her to the nearest Ostrov fighter. Estanza is not bound in any way, and puts up no resistance. If the characters try shooting at them, Estanza draws a defense pistol and shoots back!

Months ago, during a pirate raid on a transport she was piloting, Estanza met and fell in love with the pirate leader Labbard. Since then she secretly communicated with him, hoping to join him when the time was right. Unfortunately her father hired Magg's Marines to make an all-out assault to destroy Labbard's Legion. When she heard of the attack, Estanza got word to Labbard, who had hidden on Delft V and desperately needed spare parts for his damaged Ostrov fighters. She took control of Cedro T-144, forcing it out of hyperspace, killing the crew, and crash landing it on Delft V.

Estanza has no intention of ever returning to her father. She wants to spend her life with Labbard, whom she deeply loves. She resists any attempts the characters make to rescue her, shooting them if necessary.

Estanza Cedro. All stats are 2D except: *Agility 2D+2, dodge 3D, firearms 3D+2, 0-G maneuver 3D, Knowledge 3D, astrography 4D, survival 4D, willpower 4D, Mechanical 4D, astro-nav 4D+2, comm 5D, piloting 5D, sensors 5D, Perception 3D, bargain 3D+2, con 4D, sneak 4D, Strength 2D+1, first aid 3D, flight systems repair 3D+2, Psionics 0D.* Move 10. Amarax Points 1. Character Points 5. Defense pistol (3D damage, 5 shots), pilot jumpsuit.

Labbard loves Estanza as much as she loves him. Although he's a gruff, old pirate, he has a deep affection for this idealistic young woman who's willing to turn her back on her corporate lifestyle to be with him. During the attack on the pirate camp, Labbard stays by Estanza's side, making sure she boards one of the Ostrovs. Once on board, Labbard intends to take off and flee the system as soon as he knows his pirate comrades can escape, too. If the characters manage to capture them, Labbard and Estanza are willing to explain their circumstances and try cutting a deal for their freedom, playing on the characters' sympathies and their interest in material gain.

Labbard. All stats are 2D except: *Agility 3D, brawling 5D, dodge 5D, firearms 6D, melee combat 5D, running 4D, 0-G maneuver 4D, Knowledge 3D, astrography 5D, business 4D, intimidation 4D, security regulations 5D, streetwise 6D, survival 4D, Mechanical 3D, astro-nav 4D, comm 4D+2, gunnery 5D, piloting 6D, sensors 4D+2, shields 4D, vehicle operation 4D+2, Perception 4D, command 7D, con 5D, persuasion 6D, search 5D, sneak 5D, Strength 3D, computer interface/repair 3D+2, first aid 4D, flight systems repair 4D+2, security 5D, Psionics 0D. Move 10. Amarax Points 2. Necro-Dream Points 1 (a slight addiction to SPV).* Character Points 7. Boot knife (STR+1D damage), pirate coveralls, suprapistol (5D damage).

Recon Buggies

The pirates on guard in the recon buggies immediately fire at any intruders they spot. If nobody's in their field of fire, the pirates maneuver the buggies into a position where they can fire the aft tail gun at any enemies. Since the buggies are mobile, they move to any location that seems to be in trouble. Only when the very last Ostrov is set to take off do they abandon the vehicles and run for the remaining fighter.

Recon Buggy. Vehicle-scale, cover 1/2, maneuverability 1D+2, move 45; 130 kph, body strength 2D+2. Ordnance: light tail cannon (fire control 1D, damage 3D). Crew skills: *Mechanical* 3D+2, *gunnery* 5D. (You'll find more detailed stats on the recon buggy in the "Vehicles" chapter later in this book.)

Ostrov Fighters

When the alarm sounds, the first pirates into the Ostrov fighters fire up the power plants and bring the engines on line. They take a few more rounds to power up the fighters' weapons. At that point, the pirates in the heavy cannon turrets fire on any intruders inside or approaching the camp.

Once Labbard and Estanza reach one of the Ostrovs, that fighter takes off, possibly circling to provide fire support for other pirates on the ground. As soon as it seems all the pirates can escape, that Ostrov leads the others in blasting off the planet and flying to freedom.

Remember that the pirate fighters were heavily damaged during the mercenary attack a week ago. Despite new parts and lots of work, they're still not in top fighting condition. The stats below reflect this.

Labbard's Ostrovs. Fighter-scale, maneuverability 1D, space 4, atmosphere 280; 800 kph, hull 6D, shields 1D. Ordnance: 3 heavy cannon turrets (fire control 2D, damage 3D), 1 forward laser array (fire control 1D, damage 2D+2). Crew skills: *Mechanical 3D+2, gunnery 5D, piloting 4D+2.* (You'll find more detailed stats on standard and pirate-fitted Ostrov fighters in the "Spacecraft" chapter later in this book.)

Escape

The pirates' reaction betrays their main motivation: hold off any enemy until they can all escape. Once trouble starts—and the characters see Estanza fleeing with one of the pirates—the characters truly realize what's going on between her and Labbard (if they haven't already figured this out for themselves). She actively resists any attempt to rescue her, going so far as to struggle, and possibly even shooting back at anyone forcibly trying to "save" her.

The odds are stacked against the characters succeeding, even if they bring in their own transport for fire support. The situations below, however, sketch some of the circumstances under which the pirates might surrender, or at least cease fire long enough to hear anything the characters have to say.

Neutralize Ostrovs

If the characters can somehow neutralize two of the three Ostrov fighters, the pirates surrender and try brokering some kind of deal for their escape. Characters can do this by sneaking aboard the Ostrovs before any commotion begins, or fighting their way aboard in the heat of battle. Once inside, they can sabotage various flight systems, or commandeer the fighter, taking off, circling the area, and even using the ship's guns to fire on the remaining Ostrovs and pirates.

The characters could also damage the Ostrovs from the outside —they might capture a recon buggy and turn its tail cannon on the fighters, or they might use their own transport or other heavy weapons and explosives to damage an Ostrov enough to keep it grounded.

Showdown

Characters can also force a surrender by capturing Estanza and Labbard at gunpoint. This not only requires some good tactics and combat skill rolls, but some solid roleplaying as well. If the characters somehow capture both, Labbard orders his pirates to stand down. He and Estanza hope to convince the characters to let them go. They offer the remaining starship parts stolen or scavenged from the Cedro T-144. Labbard gives his personal word to leave this region of space to pursue his pirating activities elsewhere. He also pledges to owe the characters some favor in the future, once he and his pirate band have regrouped and found a new hunting ground.

If characters refuse to negotiate or accept any of Labbard's offerings, he, Estanza, and the other pirates surrender. They try to escape at every opportunity, giving the characters grief but never putting their lives in great harm. Although Estanza will likely face her father's wrath at her betrayal, Labbard and his fellow pirates face death sentences if they're ever turned over to the authorities.

Epilogue

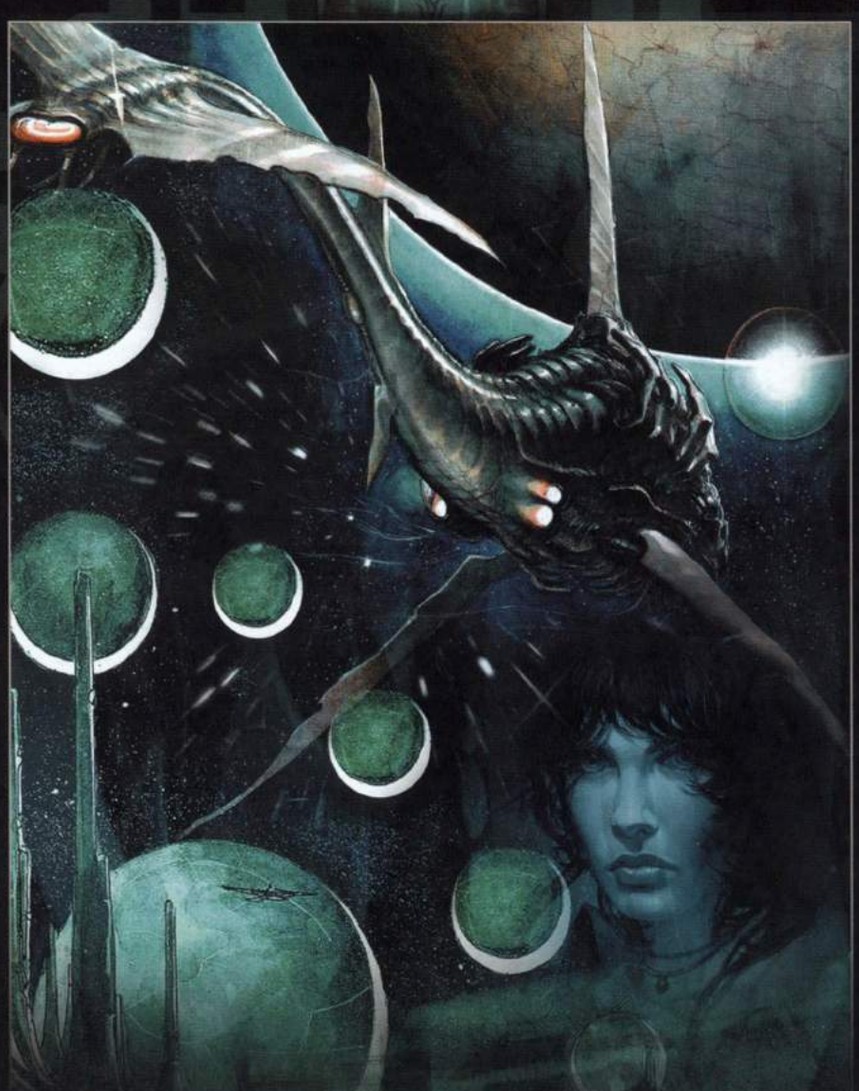
Let the characters play out their plans to rescue Estanza and attack the pirate camp. You can resolve the attack as you like given the options above, or create some other climax to the adventure. In the end, however, the characters either allow Estanza and Labbard to escape, or bring them back as prisoners to face her father.

Second Adjunct Bartemus meets them back at their landing hangar when they return. Their final payment from Bartemus depends on how they resolved the adventure. They get to keep the 50 kublars he gave each of them as an advance, no matter what happened during the scenario. If they bring back Estanza and Labbard, plus the Cedro T-144 and its cargo, Bartemus rewards them with another 75 kublars apiece. If they return without some or all of those, they are paid substantially less —to Bartemus, the transport, cargo, and people are each worth 25 kublars per character.

Characters also receive other awards once the adventure ends. Give each one five Character Points for surviving, with another three if they performed well during the final assault, and an extra point here and there for innovative ideas, heroic actions, or uncovering major breakthroughs in the adventure plot.

You should also determine whether characters who used Amarax Points regain them or gain additional points. One good way to do this is to ask those players whose characters used Amarax Points to remind you under what brave circumstances they used them, adding as much dramatic description as they like. This can help you gauge whether they lose the point, regain it, or gain another.

Universe Section



The Metabarons Universe

Before you go gallivanting off into the Metabarons universe, it might help if you knew something about the place into which you'll soon be traveling. I have all of this information stored in my cranial bio-computer, so it's easy for me to access at a moment's notice. But I'll explain most of it for you here, so you have a handy reference section you can access when required.

I've selected the most relevant data on various governmental factions running the universe, technology you'll encounter, and some other general information everyone should know. Read through it and familiarize yourself with it before you start playing the game, just in case your players want to know what "kublars" are, or how to communicate with each other over long distances, or want some idea whether the StellComm is a much nicer bureaucratic entity to deal with than the Ekonomat.

Universal Factions

Although the Human Empire nominally rules the universe, in truth various factions work together (and often against each other) to maintain some peace and order beneficial to their efforts to rule others, conduct profitable business, and stay in power.

Most factions have several things in common: they maintain or hire their own military forces, patrol their domains (whether planets, systems, or entire galaxies), and enforce their own laws on the populace while giving them some sense, however false, that the current authorities are duly representative and rule in the commoner's best interest.

The Human Empire

The Human Empire spans a universe of more than 22,000 politically major worlds inhabited primarily by humans. In the past it was nominally ruled by the Emperor and Empress, though today its supreme sovereign is Janus-Jana, the Emperoress, whom many believe to be the perfect androgynous autocrat, literally integrating the best values of both male and female perspectives. These monarchs hold authority over the Empire in a co-regency with the Senate, a confederation of factions that enacts laws, doctrines, and decrees through an assembly meeting on the Golden Planet. These factions include the Techno-Technos, Maganats, the Union of Planets (Colonials), and the Ekonomat. The Emperoress is protected by the Endoguard, and often employs a Council for information and recommendations on various situations.

The Emperoress has supreme power over the assembly of factions, particularly in times of great crisis. Most of the time the Emperoress acts in accordance with the Senate's suggested course of action to maintain unity and a firm stand on issues of authority.

The Senate includes representatives from the Techno-Pontificate, the Union of Planets, Ekonomat, Maganats, and several other less powerful groups who demand that their voice be heard in a universal forum. In many cases the policies of the Human Empire dominate the universe, though these are often backed by factions they benefit most. This shaky coalition governs in tandem with the political and military representatives authorized by factions to carry out their agendas and rule their territories.

The Endoguard

The Endoguard is perhaps the most efficient and feared military force in the universe —short of the *Metabaron* himself. A kind of praetorian guard, it functions as the direct hand of the Emperoress. The Endoguard serves as commando force, police unit, and bodyguard to the Emperoress, Imperial representatives, and those involved in executing Imperial policy throughout the universe.

Dressed in their heavy armor and carrying a formidable array of weapons, the Endoguards enforce official policy with power over and above the local planetary authorities, and quite often over the authority of other factions governing the area. The presence of their lancet fighters are sure signs of official Imperial interest in an area.

Every Endoguard swears an oath of allegiance to the Emperoress and the Human Empire, further ensured by a cranial operation. Although various levels of Endoguard exist for undertaking different assignments, they all fall under the command of the Supreme Endoguard, who reports directly to the Emperoress in all matters.

In times of great military crisis, the Emperoress can summon forces from among the four factions —the Colonial Army, the Maganat private armies, the Private Army of the Ekonomat, and Techno-Crusaders— into one mighty armada to oppose threats.

StellComm

The Empire's Ministry of Stellar Commerce—known to many as StellComm—regulates trade and commercial space travel throughout the universe thanks to the sponsorship (and control) of the noble-industrial Maganats. It serves as customs agency for most major ports, often in tandem with local law enforcement agencies whose governments can't afford to fund their own customs administration. StellComm inspects imports and exports, enforces safety regulations, charts astrographical features and hyperlane routes, and handles official documentation for spacecraft and spacefarers. Its duties often overlap with those of the Imperial Merchants Guild, local commerce bureaus, and parts of the Ekonomat. It's not unheard of for traders to pay tariffs to each agency, with little left over for their own profit.

StellComm maintains well-armed customs ships to carry out its duties, although it has no formal military organization capable of sustaining prolonged engagements with enemy forces. Should StellComm personnel encounter sizable resistance, they call in the Armada or Endoguard.

StellComm maintains an immense bureaucracy to handle the vast datawork that comes with monitoring interstellar trade. Personnel include customs inspectors, security officers, pilots, assessors, import/export clerks, warehouse guards, and several tiers of management bureaucrats.

Maganats

The universe's nobility falls under the faction of the Maganats. For thousands of years, these aristocratic houses evolved, expanded, and accumulated small realms in space. Each Maganat possesses a corporate conglomerate based on their domain worlds, and familial wealth. These business concerns exploit the resources and work forces of a Maganat's planets, often in massive industries that supply the universe with a good portion of its basic commodities. These noble holdings are run much like aristocracies, with noblemen running their domain's industries, courts, and bureaucracies.

Maganats generally field their own military forces and private guard with police powers within their realms. For larger actions against aliens, insurgents, or pirates, Maganats often hire mercenaries.

Techno-Pontificate

To the Church of Industrial Saints (CIS) and its followers, the Techno-Technos, technology is religion, and their primary means of dominating the universe. Many of today's modern scientific advancements are due to research programs at monastic Techno-Techno facilities, or aboard their traveling laboratory ships. The Supreme Techno-Pope leads the Techno-Technos as primary pontiff of science.

Legions of Techno-Technos labor in their secluded factories and assembly plants, working to develop and manufacture the latest technological gadgets, vehicles, and machinery. Representatives of the Techno-Pontificate travel across the universe overseeing implementation of new technology and intervening should any other parties make new scientific breakthroughs.

The Techno-Pontificate acts as a political entity to protect its interests and those of the universe's general technological advancement. It controls many planets, including the deep endo-cities, havens for their technological comforts and lures to draw common people into the languid apathy of the Necro-Dream. The secrets of the Techno-Technos are highly guarded. Each research facility is a small city unto itself, much like a fortified monastery. The uninitiated are forbidden entry.

Imperial Merchants Guild

The Techno-Pontificate runs the Imperial Merchants Guild, providing an association to protect the interests of traders, spacers, entrepreneurs, and businessmen with concerns ranging across the universe. The guild governs its own, assuming many similar duties as the Ekonomat, StellComm, and local customs bureaus.

Membership in the guild requires a certain loyalty to guild members, administrators, and policies, conformity to guild standards, and, of course, membership fees. Few independent traders manage to gain entry, the benefits of membership being reserved for the largest Maganats, shipping concerns with fleets of cargo-cruisers at their command, and official government-sponsored transport units.

The Imperial Merchants Guild often works with regional Maganats, and factions like the Ekonomat and the Union of Planets, in establishing prices, determining supply and demand, and scheduling shipments. In the end, all these agencies share the goal of higher profits and lower costs.

Ekonomat

As another member faction of the Human Empire, the Ekonomat serves as the bank to the corporate and industrial forces shaping the universe. It isn't as much a regional government as a coalition of mega-financial institutions pooling their resources with one goal in mind: protect and increase their profits. The Ekonomat lives and dies by the kublar —taking it from consumers, tearing it from the soil of unspoiled worlds, and working it from the tired hands of laborers. The Ekonomat draws much of its power from its monopoly on water.

Companies, colonies, and Maganats contribute tithes to support the Ekonomat's administrative bureaucracy, invite Ekonomat representatives and advisors into their offices, and send representatives to the Ekonomat assembly. Many corporations still maintain healthy rivalries with other companies, but these do not flare up into brushfire wars as often as they used to before the Ekonomat established universal financial authority.

The Ekonomat helps settle disputes between competing corporations, lobbies for commercial legislation in the Senate, regulates finances among worlds, and provides military protection for its interests in the form of mercenary corsairs.

The Union of Planets

A relatively new government faction in the overall scheme of universal politics, the Colonial Planets represent recently discovered and settled worlds, many along the Exofringe border, where many new systems and worlds await explorers. This government promotes small settlements, providing basic administration and some financial and military assistance. Individual colonies maintain their own system of government and other infrastructures, including its own militia for basic defense and law enforcement needs. The Colonial Planets struggle to help these newly discovered worlds develop along their own plans, protecting them from the exploitative policies of the Ekonomat, the CIS, and Maganats. Despite these efforts, some Colonial Planets member worlds have no choice but to sell out to Maganat mega-corporations to pay off their immense debts and survive as a developing colony.

Member worlds include planets with colonies harboring political and religious fugitives, those with quirky ideologies, peace-lovers, nature-lovers, and other benign dissidents. Although the Union of Planets does not condone the activities of pirates, quite a few of these bands arise from that sometimes lawless territory.

The Colonial Planets holds a contiguous territory bordering the Exofringe, though it has other offshoots in any region of the universe with unexplored and unsettled worlds.

Troglosocialiks

The paleo-Marxist nature-lover Troglosocialiks are just one example of the culturally fringe groups finding refuge among the new worlds in the domain of the Colonial Planets. They attract a steady stream of disaffected citizens who believe the universal possession doctrines of Marxism and the ideals of ecological preservation hold the key to happiness and prosperity.

With these goals in mind, the Troglosocialiks find pristine worlds to colonize, maintaining the planet's natural state wherever possible, keeping vast natural preserves in public trust for all to enjoy —much like property throughout the urban areas. They're one of the more fanatical political causes tolerated by the Human Empire.

Like any government, individual Troglosocialik enclaves are easily corrupted into new forms best serving those in power. Most play on the fundamentals of Marxism and ecology to manipulate the populace.

Pirates

Although pirates are not represented in the Human Empire, they play a role in universal politics as outlaws, thieves, and a military force to fear. Pirate bands abound throughout the universe, preying on weak worlds, greedy corporations, fledgling settlements, and anyone else with something worth taking.

Most pirate groups establish an internal code of conduct for its members that usually reflects the band's overall policies. They vary from savage raiders to privateers with noble causes and discriminating hearts. The Human Empire considers all pirates renegades —no matter what their personal codes are— and vigorously hunts them down when they pose a threat to the universe's economy or political stability.

Mercenaries

In the eyes of most citizens, mercenaries are just a step above pirates. Mercenary companies are ubiquitous in a universe where few can afford to protect themselves by raising their own military force. Mercenary units fill that gap by offering soldiers for hire to protect transport convoys, pursue petty nobles' wars for them, defend outlying settlements, patrol corporate facilities, and even serve as a law enforcement agency on some worlds.

Like pirates, mercenary companies vary greatly in composition and temperament. Those supported by wealthy patrons deploy a greater variety and power of soldier, vehicle, and warship. Others rely on what they can get, purchasing new equipment only after lucrative jobs and otherwise living hand-to-mouth. Some are infamous for their barbarous reputations, while others depend on high-tech weaponry to win their battles.

Mercenary companies attract an assortment of people to their ranks: ex-soldiers, security personnel, military exiles, young people looking for their fortune, outlaws, angry colonists, and even disaffected aristocrats seeking revenge.

As part of a long-standing martial tradition, if their clients fail to pay them, mercenary companies often extract payment by turning on their employers.

Terrorists

For every 10,000 contented citizens living the mindlessly comfortable life of the Necro-Dream you'll find at least one political nut-case bent on destroying the state, either single-handedly or with his anarchist buddies. The universe is filled with terrorists, psycho-insurgents, and political activists bent on violent government reform. Tired of supposed "representation" in the Human Empire or other authoritative entities, they labor secretly to undermine the infrastructure, sow discontent among the populace, and expose government scandal and abuse.

Terrorists pass the boundary of concerned citizens in their ultra-violent methods of public awareness and protests. Bombings, arson, riots, assassinations, and spacejackings, are typical activities for insurgents trying to spread their message of government corruption and injustice. Like with most renegades, the Emperoress and other governments do not publicly tolerate such activities, and hence persecute terrorist individuals and groups without mercy.

Aliens

The Human Empire considers aliens one of the main threats to peace, prosperity, security, and control. Any alien species with the capacity to develop spacefaring technology has the arrogance and aggressive nature to abandon their backwater homeworld and to try dominating the universe that rightfully belongs to humans.

Most aliens are relegated to their primitive and remote homeworlds. The Human Empire maintains a hold over alien worlds it discovers to ensure such radical forces don't venture much farther than their own system. Sometimes oppressed alien civilizations develop their own spacefaring technology and begin exploring and colonizing their own reaches of space. When aliens become major threats, the Emperoress deploys the Endoguard to put the aliens back in their place —often by blasting them back to the stone age.

Sometimes the Ekonomat, Techno-Technos or the Colonials encounter a powerful alien empire, usually on the fringes of the universe. The Human Empire targets these alien domains as primary threats to the stability of its domain. This is often cause for much debate in the Golden Palace, frequently resulting in some universe-spanning genocidal war until the vulnerable aliens are vaporized into extinction.

Mutants

Mutants are disaffected individuals who fled society to live underground and in remote areas. They're a rag-tag class of general outlaws, mutated by industrial pollution, drugs, biogenetic experiments, and other forces over which they have no control

themselves. They eke out a miserable existence in the technical bowels of the universe's cities and in isolated locations. Some cities have only a handful of mutants —"monsters" who inhabit those places into which nobody should venture— while other places boast entire tribes who rule garbage heaps and sewage swamps.

Mutants rarely venture into the open and into the polite company of good citizens. When they do so without permission, they're hunted down and killed, lest others of their kind get any idea that they're welcome.

Technology

Thanks to high technology, the universe enjoys a greater degree of comfort, prosperity, and security than ever before. The Human Empire, together with the Techno-Pontificate, advocate advances in science and research to develop even more sophisticated technology.

Technology improves nearly every aspect of life for the average citizen, making life more comfortable and carefree.

Spacecraft

In a universe spanning more than 22,000 major civilized worlds, space travel unites everyone. Commercial goods, government officials, cargo-cruisers, troops, battleships, and diplomatic envoys all travel the hyperlanes, maintaining peace and prosperity for all.

All spaceships have basic drives to propel them through space. These main engines use a variety of technologies and are called by numerous terms: sublight engines, fusion motors, ion drives, impeller motors, subspace engines. The main engines allow a ship to blast off from a planet's surface, and to make journeys between worlds or moons within a system or a sector. Ships also use their main drives for atmospheric flight. Most spacecraft capable of planetary landings also use anti-grav drives similar to those used on flying vehicles when maneuvering for take-off and landing. Many battleship-scale craft are not capable of entering a planet's atmosphere to land. These often dock at orbital installations or shuttle passengers, troops, and cargo to the surface in smaller vessels.

Most spaceships employ a stardrive to journey from one system to another. Stardrives propel starships into an alternate, overlay dimension known as hyperspace, where the alternate laws of physics allow a craft to travel many times the speed of light. In hyperspace, a ship can travel the incredible distances between stars in a few weeks, days, or even hours. Those vessels without stardrive cannot jump through hyperspace to other systems. Instead, they must dock in a larger carrier ship that transports smaller craft between systems.

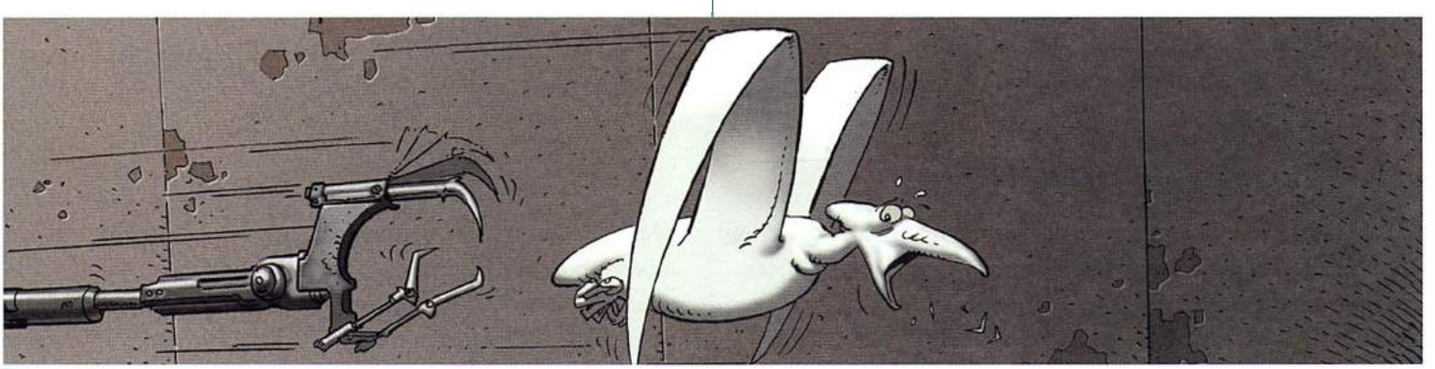
When a ship jumps to hyperspace, the stardrive rapidly accelerates the craft to and beyond the speed of light and into hyperspace. Since the laws of physics operate differently in this overlay dimension, the vessel actually travels at supra-light speeds without the immense expenditure of power and extreme stresses normally caused by such velocities in material space. When the stardrive is deactivated, it drops the vessel back into material space.

Objects in material space also have a presence in hyperspace. To make sure ships emerge from hyperspace close to their destination without actually slamming into obstacles in the hyperspatial dimension, pilots must plot safe hyperspace courses around interstellar astrographical features. To handle the overwhelming complexities of calculating hyperspace trips, most vessels use astro-navigational computers (also called "astro-nav computers" or "astro-comps"). A ship's astro-navigator uses this computer to plot a safe trip along known routes through hyperspace. Astro-comps hold a tremendous amount of data, storing the locations of stars, planets, debris, gravity wells, systems, asteroid fields, gas clouds and other hazards, plus the course coordinates for negotiating them in hyperspace. Most pilots stick to established hyperlanes, previously charted routes through this parallel dimension linking major systems. Since these routes have been traveled countless times and are carefully charted, ships can traverse them much faster than more indirect, untried courses.

Most spacefaring vessels fall into three categories: battleships, fighters, and transports.

Any immense vessel designed for deep space combat or transport is considered a battleship. They are typically more than 100 meters long, require large crews, and are armed with shields and numerous weapon emplacements. Many battleships carry fighters, drop ships, cargo craft, or other support vessels. Battleships include the Human Empire's massive military vessels, large, armed carriers used to transport smaller pirate vessels, and carrier-cruisers mercenary companies employ to move their flight and ground forces.

Fighters are designed for combat in space and often in planetary atmospheres. Some are light, swift, and fragile, while others are larger, heavily armored, and much more durable. Most sport shields and an array of weapons. Many heavier fighters employ stardrives in addition to their standard engines, allowing them to jump to other systems through hyperspace. Those without



stardrive must rely on carriers to ferry them from one star system to another.

Transports include any vessel not specifically designed for combat. These ships often serve to ferry goods or people, gather astrographical information, explore new regions of space, and otherwise fulfill a variety of civilian tasks. This doesn't mean they're not armed. Many mount weapons emplacements and shields as a matter of protection, but their primary purpose is not combat.

For more information on the complexities of space travel and hazards, plus information on spacecraft in the game, consult the "Space Travel & Combat" chapter.

Communications

Maintaining communications is as important to holding the universe together as space travel. Most communication carrier waves operate in material space, but a few allow near-instantaneous connections through hyperspace between people separated by great distances.

Hyperspatial Transceivers allow high-level political vessels and military craft to communicate instantly over vast distances. They're prohibitively expensive, extremely delicate, and consume a tremendous amount of power. Only government agencies possess the authority to use them, denying them to most private concerns on the basis of insuring security.

Material Space Transceivers serve most spacefaring vessels for real-time communication through material space. Many commercial and private ships have a short-range communications unit that can transmit and receive up to a maximum range of 25 light years. These transceivers also broadcast distress signals on established channels for those vessels encountering trouble. The technology for most personal communication devices (hand vid-comms, headset comms) is similar to that used in material space transmissions.

Comms serve many starships as speed-of-light radios for ship-to-ship and ship-to-planet communications, most often when hailing other vessels and flight controllers to land and take off. Spaceports use a pre-set comm channel to broadcast Announcements to Travelers (or "AnnTrav" in spacer slang) providing landing protocols, weather, traffic patterns, conditions at the docking facility, and other general spaceport information incoming pilots must know.

Intercoms allow internal communication between different sections of a spaceship through an internally wired comm systems. Sometimes these broadcast announcements over speakers, but they often require crew members to plug comm headsets into the system.

Comm Frequencies allow many different parties to communicate in an area using the same technology. Billions of different frequencies exist for subspace communications, so one must know the frequencies to find a particular communication signal. There are established military and government bands for the Human Empire and its member factions, as well as "secret" frequencies for secured messages, which are often electronically scrambled. Local governments regulate the use of frequencies for civilian, business, emergency services, and military communications. Groups may also use unauthorized frequencies for covert communications.

Anti-Grav Vehicles

Most airborne vehicles use anti-gravity technology for lift and propulsion —everything from aircars to the atmospheric engines of many spaceships. Before the discovery of epyphite on Marmola, such technology centered around manipulation of gravity waves and fields. The infusion of anti-grav vehicle assemblies with epyphite made such technology much cheaper and more widely available to common citizens.

Anti-grav technology only works in environments with at least some trace gravity: planets, spinning asteroids, moons, and space stations with artificial gravity. Without a gravity base off which it can push, anti-grav engines are useless.

For more information on specific vehicles employing anti-grav engines, check out the "Vehicles" chapter later in this section.

Robots

These intelligent, mobile automatons are employed as servants and workers throughout the universe. Like humans employed in similar functions, robots are often ignored by their owners and others who assume they're simply ambling about carrying out their programmed assignments. From the legal and social perspectives, robots are considered one's property.

Robot designs vary widely depending on the intended operational profile, from the more common heavy work units, servant robots, and labor units, to more specialized combat robots and those engineered for duties in deep space.

You'll find more information and a few sample robots you can use in the game in the "Weapons & Technology" chapter.

Medical Technology

Medical practices in the *Metabarons* universe are incredibly advanced —at least for those who can afford it. Auto-docs perform most routine and even some delicate surgery under the supervision of highly skilled physicians. Advanced medicines help heal most diseases and infections.

Those who lose the use of limbs or organs often replace them with cybernetic prostheses, though this is an expensive procedure affordable only by the rich, or those to whom a wealthy patron owes a debt. Soldiers disfigured in combat are often repaired at the expense of their client, who pays for these medical procedures and replacements as a reward for brave and loyal service.

Society

Political and economic forces divide the populace into five main social classes: ruling aristocracy, corporate elite, commoners, poor, and wanderers. The ruling aristocratic class —including their fat bureaucracies— inherited their power, domain, and wealth from their ancestors, who often accumulated it through wars, political scheming, betrayal, and other methods of sheer force and oppression in the name of establishing peace and prosperity. This class naturally assumes leadership roles for planets, systems, and entire regions of the universe. Those who don't follow such pursuits still have influence wherever they go and whatever they do. They were born into the aristocracy —and all its power, wealth, and authority— and expect others to recognize, respect, and obey them.

The corporate elite earned their power, domain, and wealth through their economic endeavors—and invariably their underhanded schemes to accumulate and protect their riches. They include the industrial Maganats, high Ekonomat officials, and the upper classes of the rich who weren't born in to aristocratic families. They're extremely protective of their recently gained wealth, often taking extreme measures to safeguard and expand their economic domains.

Commoners covers a middling class of consumers that includes factory laborers, spaceship crews, average citizens, lower officials serving other classes, and the average worker. They exist to serve the upper classes, providing the massive work force required for the industrial concerns molding the shape of the universe. With what little pay they earn, commoners also comprise the single largest consumer base in the universe. They spend their lives working hard to create the very goods they spend their hard-earned pay to purchase.

The poor consist of society's disaffected commoners, those who can no longer earn their keep and are tossed out on the street to fend for themselves. They exist outside the normal and polite bounds of society, and universally receive the disrespect of most people. The poor take the blame for most crimes in the areas they inhabit.

Wanderers are those transients who roam the universe with no steady job, yet enough means to support themselves. Pirates and mercenaries fall into this category. Wanderers take jobs wherever they go, carve a living out of the regions they inhabit, working for others who require such services or are willing to pay for someone's loyalty (however temporary). Their roaming nature gives them a suspicious and untrustworthy reputation throughout the universe.

Economy

The economy revolves around overlapping industrial and commercial concerns at the planetary, regional, and political level —all under the Ekonomat's watchful eye. A world producing trillions of kublars in exports is little more than a splinter of the entire universal economic picture.

Many worlds develop a self-sustaining economy or have a few key industries —they manage to conduct trade with only a handful of nearby planets. Other worlds are extremely specialized, producing only certain exports and entirely dependent upon others for essential goods. Huge spaceports and fleets of cargo-cruisers make such limited planetary economies possible.

The Ekonomat oversees the financial dealings of the universe's innumerable mega-corporations, Colonials and Maganats operating in dozens of fields and with facilities in several regions. Industries follow Ekonomat commercial policies, abide by rules intended to stimulate the economy, and otherwise work together to increase and protect their profits.

Despite the Ekonomat's seemingly iron grip on universal finances and the Maganats' noble-industrial power, many small corporations still manage to remain independent of such administration, operating on their own with their self-sufficient transport fleets and security forces, especially the Colonials. These companies just barely manage to resist the Ekonomat's influence in assimilating them into their immense commercial structure.

Smaller independent companies may "only" have operations in a few key systems. The corporations that are barely noticed by the Ekonomat and Maganats operate in only a handful of systems.

Most planets also support a large number of "local" companies, rarely known outside of their home systems, but somehow managing to compete against the major conglomerates through a combination of "home system pride," excellent product quality, and shrewd marketing.

Everyone engaging in commerce between planets must also obey economic and spacefaring guidelines set forth by the Human Empire's Ministry of Stellar Commerce (StellComm) and the Imperial Merchants Guild. StellComm handles most regulatory functions, while the Merchants Guild forms the single most powerful and efficient transport and import/export entity.

Other powerful guilds, professional groups, and trade associations figure less prominently in universal affairs, but may hold sway in certain systems or regions of space.

Other unofficial organizations also affect the economy. Pirates pose the primary threat to smooth commerce and transport. The presence of a pirate gang, or even the rumor of one operating in an area can often cause panic among transport companies. Once hyperlane courses and transport schedules are established, prices fluctuate and planetary markets panic. The criminal underworld also plays a role in the universe's economy. Wherever you find high tariffs or government product restrictions, you'll find some organized force of criminals finding ways to circumvent official regulations. Although this denies much-needed revenues to the authorities and opens the door to security risks, it satisfies the economic necessity of supply and demand, giving the consumers what they want while the criminal underworld makes a profit.

The Human Empire and other official political factions do not tolerate pirates, the criminal underworld, or other renegade forces that operate with flagrant disregard for authority.

Universal Standard Time

"Universal standard" time emanates from the most ancient of paleo-earth timekeeping traditions. The Golden Planet even maintains an entire ministry to monitor timekeeping and time zones across the universe. Many planets maintain traditional local timekeeping measurements, but all official communications and records use universal standard measures.

A standard hour contains 60 standard minutes, and a standard day consists of 24 standard hours. A universal standard week contains seven standard days, with four standard weeks and two "holidays" comprising a standard 30-day month. The standard 365-day year is rounded out by a five-day holiday honoring the Emperoress's birthday.

Money

The "kublar" serves as the universe's standard currency.

Kublars are squarish currency used for centuries throughout the universe. Although many people keep a few kublars on hand for small purchases, the majority of kublars are exchanged electronically on kublar chits, ident cards, memory crystals, and other data recording media.

The most common person requires about five kublars a day to live. More affluent citizens earn quite a bit more per day.

Personal Wealth Class	Daily Cost of Living
General Populace	5 – 25 kublars
Middle Classes	30 – 50 kublars
Rich Classes	50 – 100
Aristos	500 – 1,000

Language

Most people throughout human space understand Universal, the basic language used to communicate in all forums throughout the Human Empire. It's as common among pirates, spacers, and mercenaries as it is among politicians, traders, and the nobility. Even the rarely encountered alien speaks Universal, though often with an accent or awkward grammatical formulations.

One still encounters other languages throughout the universe, though most commoners are suspicious of people speaking in a tongue everyone can't understand. Some secluded religious sects, isolated colonies, or secret societies have their own languages intended for covert communication. Many recently settled planets or isolated worlds foster their own dialects of Universal which can be as difficult for commoners to understand as an entirely different language.

Campaign Themes

Now that you know the basics of how the universe works, you can start deciding what type of game you want to create. Your options for *Metabarons* adventures are virtually unlimited, but here are a few ideas and suggestions you might use. Remember, there's no "right" or "wrong" way to do things —if you and the players are enjoying the way the game is run, you've done your job.

Locations

The universe is an immense place—your adventures can happen anywhere in it. When it comes to creating new worlds, you can use almost anything as long as you "limit" it properly. If something is really powerful, you have to explain why it didn't show up in the comics or otherwise affected the universe as a whole. By making something just "dangerous" instead of "the most dangerous," or "the best in the sector" rather than "the best in the universe," you can throw some really great settings and ideas into your game.

Some gamemasters choose the "universe-spanning" approach, where characters go gallivanting all over the place. In one adventure, they may visit the Golden Planet, only to go racing out to the remote Exofringe worlds in the next. The characters get to visit many exciting places, giving them a good sense of the scope that makes *Metabarons* a fun gaming environment.

Other gamemasters may set their games in an established location (like an Endo-City, or Dreer's arcologies). You may even

limit your game setting to a single sector or a handful of worlds, allowing the characters to explore these places in greater depth —and requiring you to flesh them out with more detail.

By only using a few worlds in your setting (at least to start with), you can concentrate on creating really interesting planets, characters and settings. Even a "limited" setting (with only a few worlds) can still evoke the sense of wonder that's essential to a great *Metabarons* game. Of course, the characters need a reason to stay put in your meticulously-designed setting. A base of operations or an arch-villain who hounds them every step of the way can provide that motivation. By limiting the scope of the game to a small region of space, it makes it much easier for the player characters to play a major role there.

Character Themes

You can create a campaign based on the character types players are running. The suggestions below frequently depend on what kinds of character templates players choose. If you plan on running some of these campaigns, you might wish to discuss it with your players first —make sure they want to play in such a campaign, and encourage them to create appropriate characters.

Wanderers for Hire

Most beginning *Metabarons* campaigns start this way...and they're the easiest to assemble with a wide variety of character types. In these adventures, the characters are a rag-tag band of friends with different connections to people in the group (use the "Connections" portion of the character template to help determine how everyone knows each other). They have an assortment of talents and work well together as a team. And inevitably they all need money.

Adventures often consist of the characters finding work... or work finding the characters. They're approached by a patron who has a job for them: retrieve an item, track down an outlaw, deliver some goods, uncover a pirate base. Sometimes the characters stumble upon a situation that might prove profitable to them should they make the right choices. In most cases, the characters' actions are part of the patron's grander scheme that might further involve the characters.

Explorers

The characters serve as explorers for some faction: the Ekonomat, a Maganat, a Colonial Planet government seeking new worlds on which to expand. This campaign can involve a variety of character types —explorers, soldiers, scientists, pilots, gunners— anyone whose skills might prove useful on an expedition. The characters get a survey ship suitable for their numbers and purposes, and head off into the Exofringe.

The adventures consist of exploring new worlds, encountering strange creatures and exotic alien species to oppress, and possibly even fending off competing explorers or corporate interests intent on jumping the characters' claim. Each adventure poses new challenges. You can focus the campaign on surveying all the intricate details of one world, or allow it to span several nearby systems with planets worth exploring.

Mercenary Company

If all the players decide to run soldier-type characters, you might run a mercenary campaign. Character templates don't necessarily have to have "mercenary" in their "type" category —they might be other kinds of soldiers, nobility with military expertise, ex-pirates looking for legitimate work, or support personnel (like medics and technicians).

Mercenaries spend much of their time fighting heavy military engagements for their patrons. Depending on the client, these might include ground and space action against pirates, combat against rival mercenaries or security forces to attain a specific objective, or patrol and convoy duties. If you're planning on running several mass combat encounters, you should read the "Running Battles" chapter for some tips on making such large-scale engagements exciting at the individual character level.

Mercenaries also spend their time in other, non-combat pursuits: maintaining their equipment, seeking new clients, finding replacement parts, recruiting new members, and otherwise trying to stay afloat economically.

For a mercenary campaign, create one unit the characters all join, complete with a few gamemaster characters for the commanding officer, a few support personnel, and a few rivals. You should also create long- and short-term military objectives for them to accomplish —these are most often tied to the goals of their patron. To attain this objective, the characters must defeat some adversaries, so you'll have to create them, too.

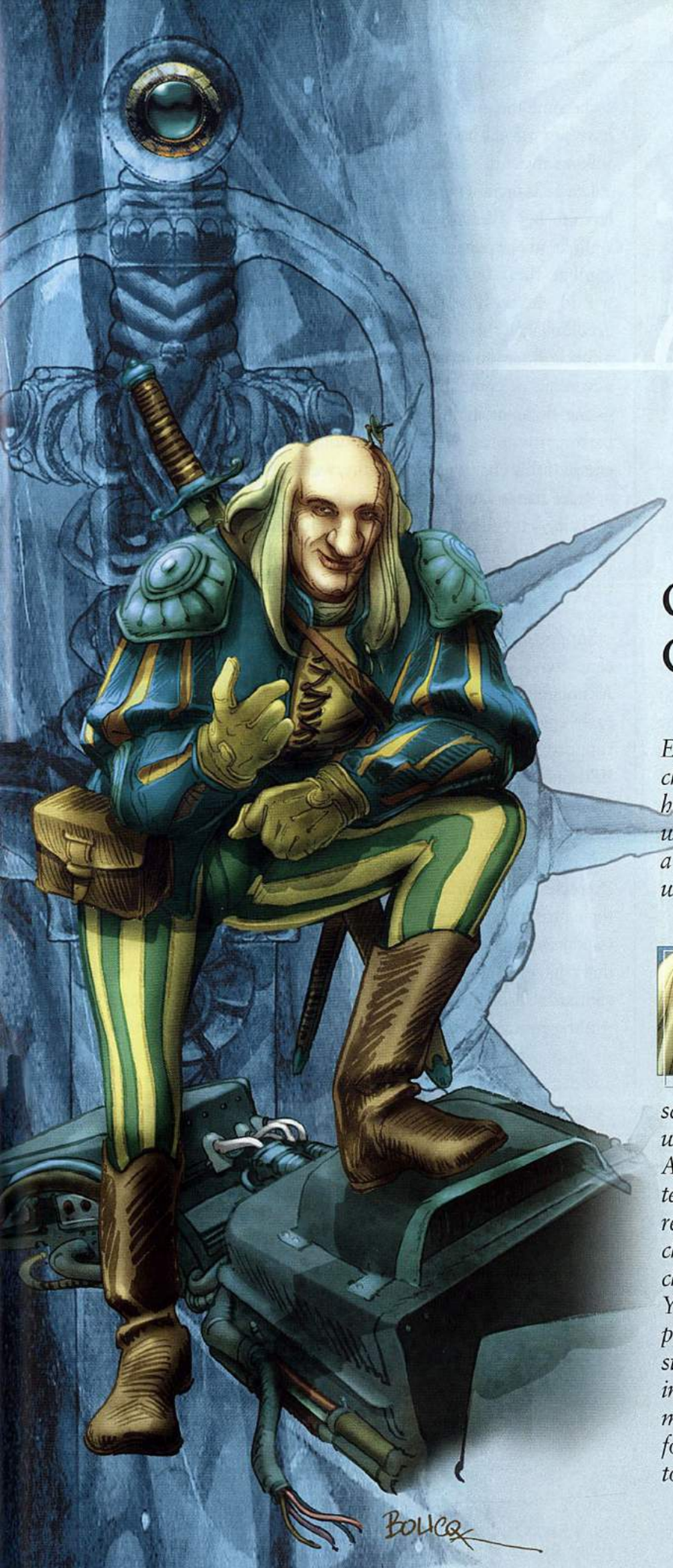
For some ideas on rival mercenary companies, check out the scene in the Regimental Colors bar in the "Scout for Hire" solitaire adventure.

Pirate Raiders

If all the players want to play renegade pirates, you can run an entire campaign centered on their pirate gang, their secret base of operations, and the targets they intercept and plunder.

This campaign is much like the mercenary campaign, except the characters are outlaws instead of a legitimate military force. Instead of working for clients, pirates work for themselves. They scout out potential targets, ambush them, then drag the spoils back to their hidden base. Their major adversaries include Maganat guards, Colonials Planet militias, convoy escorts, and the Endoguard, all of whom consider pirates the primary threat to the universe's economic stability and prosperity.

Any character template with talents to help a pirate band are acceptable. Ask each player to find reasons why their characters joined the pirates. Give each one some purpose in the pirate organization: a position on a pirate cruiser, snub-fighter, or boarding party.



GAMEMASTER CHARACTERS

Every story has heroes, and then it has all the other characters the heroes meet: the master villain, his henchmen, fellow travelers, shopkeepers, old women who interpret omens. They're all important to telling a good tale. Each contributes something to the story, whether it's major opposition, comic relief,

scene-setting, a little bit of romance, or guidance when everything seems lost.

As you journey through the Metabarons universe, telling stories through the game, you'll need to create realistic characters you control —called "gamemaster characters"— to help move the game along, point the characters in the right direction, and challenge them. You run every character who isn't run by a player… practically everyone else the characters meet in the story! That's a big responsibility, but don't let it intimidate you. Keep reading and I'll share with you all my little secrets about creating interesting characters for your stories, ones your players will enjoy and come to love time and time again.

What's A Gamemaster Character?

In the *Metabarons* comics, the main characters —Othon, Aghnar, Honorata, Steel Head, Oda— encounter allies, neutrals, and adversaries throughout their adventures. All of these other characters —Endoguards, Shabda-Oud witches, pirates, agents of the Techno-Pontificate, and many more— serve to shape the story, establishing the setting and helping or hindering the main characters at critical moments. Without these characters, nothing much would happen.

As the gamemaster, you create the universe's population, designing friends, foes, and casual acquaintances for the player characters to meet. Gamemaster characters include everyone from major villains to annoying robots, from loyal companions to reclusive mystics. And don't forget the less-spectacular characters —the shop owners, bartenders, wealthy patrons, spaceport citizens, security troopers. They're just as important to the story as everyone else.

Don't panic —we're not asking you to create enough characters to fill the entire universe. You should carefully choose which gamemaster characters play the most pivotal role in your adventure and design them in detail. Then select the less important characters and determine most of their background and personality, continuing until you reach the nameless characters who need nothing more than a brief mention. You can categorize these characters into lead, supporting, and extra characters.

Lead Characters

Without lead characters, an adventure would meander across the universe with no real focus. If Aghnar hadn't pursued the priestesses of Shabda-Oud, he would never have defeated them, married Oda, or become the great mercenary *Metabaron* that he did. He would have just stayed home, training in his family's ancient battle rites, sulking about the death of his parents and his life in hiding.

Lead characters make things happen, but they don't necessarily have to be adversaries of the player characters. Honorata trains Aghnar in the ways of Shabda-Oud as well as the traditions of combat the *Metabarons* honor. Without his mother, Aghnar would never have been capable of the amazing feats he accomplished throughout his life.

Since these characters play such an important role in your adventure or campaign, you should fill out a character template, listing skills, assigning die codes, and recording background and personality notes. When you're done you should have a definite grasp of this character's strengths, weaknesses, and ambitions.

Refer to the chapter on "Designing Adventures" for more tips on using lead characters to build an adventure or campaign.

Supporting Characters

Supporting characters usually play a role as seconds to lead characters, assisting them in their efforts to achieve their goal. Although the Emperor and Empress are lead characters in the early episodes of the *Metabarons* saga, they are helped by such supporting characters as General Thato and Imperial mentreks. Without these secondary characters, the lead characters would have to operate on their own, or with the help of sometimes incompetent extras.

You don't have to spend as much time creating supporting characters as you do with lead characters. You may want to record their attributes and skills in paragraph stats and append a few sentences about their backgrounds and personalities, but you don't have to go into as much detail as you would on a whole character sheet. Just make sure you have enough information to run the character during the adventure.

Extras

Extras are the nameless —and sometimes faceless— characters who captain battleships, serve your drink at the local mercenary hang-out, or guard the warehouse you're supposed to quietly enter. The motives, backgrounds, and personalities of these characters matter little (if at all) in the context of the adventure. They have a specific role, and may serve to help or hinder the player characters, but otherwise they have no bearing on the overall conflict.

You can easily sum up these characters in paragraph stats like this: *5 Pirates.* All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 3D, *dodge* 3D+2, *firearms* 4D+1, *Strength* 3D+1, *Perception* 3D. Move 10. Heavy service pistol (5D damage).

Sometimes, however, you may wish to give these otherwise nondescript characters some particular quirk or unique ability to set them apart from the billions of other people wandering the universe. Such flourishes make extras memorable, even if the player characters didn't get his name. Refer to the sections below for tips on fleshing out gamemaster characters.

Building Gamemaster Characters

There are many areas to consider when creating a gamemaster character. You may choose to skip some and elaborate on others depending on the role you expect a particular gamemaster character to play in an adventure. For example, it may not matter that a weapons shop owner has a wife, two children, a pet moog, and a luxury aircar, when his only purpose in the adventure is to sell the player characters information about recent arms shipments in the area.

On the other hand, major villains and recurring characters may require more substantial information. You may need to know what kind of allies and enemies a character has, or what skills he possesses, or how many kublars he has at his disposal, since you can't predict exactly what types of situations the character might become involved in.

When you design a gamemaster character, run through the following sections and decide whether or not you need to record information about that subject. Of course, you can always write out every character in vivid detail, but you'll soon find that it's a lot of effort for such a short appearance in the game. You can also develop a character with a brief walk-on part later. That weapons shop owner might only show up for five minutes in one adventure (for which you'll only need a few basic stats, like *bargain*), but if you want to develop him more and he has a larger role in the next adventure, you can always add more detail to his character.

The Character's Role

What's the character's role in the adventure? Do you want him to become a constant companion for the player characters, providing helpful information? Will he provide comic relief? Is he the main villain or an obstacle to the characters' accomplishment of their objectives? Is he there to set the tone and mood?

Speedy Gamemaster Character Generation

Are you strapped for time, and have to create a few gamemaster characters on the spur of the moment? Just flip to the back of this rulebook and scan through the character templates there. Need a contract pilot? Check out that template, read over the background and Honor Code, note the equipment, and examine the stats. Put 2D or 3D in a few important skills, and you're ready to go. The templates were designed so everyone could create realistic character types to fit into the Metabarons universe —both player and gamemaster characters.

Some characters can serve many roles —they can be both humorous and helpful (like the robots Lothar and Tonto), or deadly and threatening (like the Shabda-Oud witches), or they may even act without the players' knowledge (like Honorata with her various schemes to help perpetuate the *Metabaron* line).

Objectives

What does this gamemaster character want? What desires does she have? What goals does she hope to accomplish? The answers to these questions will help you decide how a gamemaster character will interact with the player characters. She may be interested in selling them information, or she may be hunting them down for the bounty placed on their heads.

Of course, she could have objectives that have no bearing on the player characters at all. Perhaps she wants to purchase her own transport and become a traveling arms dealer. Or maybe she hopes to win a place of honor serving the Human Empire, or even has no goal other than to earn a case-load of kublars.

As gamemaster, creating interesting objectives for characters can help make him or her unusual —for example, what if a gamemaster character simply says, "You owe me one," for a favor rather than asking for money? This character can then be used to provide an adventure complication at a later time. For example, just as the characters get ready to infiltrate a pirate base to steal time-sensitive plans for a massive raid, the gamemaster character appears asking for a return favor —maybe his daughter has been enslaved and is about to be transported to who-knows-where. If the player characters don't help him immediately, he may never see his daughter again. (And what if the massive pirate raid and the missing daughter are somehow related?) This choice creates a dilemma for the players, making for a memorable and suspenseful storyline.

Appearance

The easiest way to distinguish one gamemaster character from another is by appearance. Is the character attractive or homely? In good physical shape or sickly? Does she have any tattoos or scars? Is her clothing futuristic, or some combination of medieval and modern?

Appearance also covers areas such as dress (flashy or poverty-stricken), presence (menacing or friendly), physical quirks and mannerisms (twitches, stuttering, pacing, and so forth —see "Behavior" below for more), and any other distinguishing characteristics.

A character's appearance can serve you in many ways other than just identification. A white-haired man quivering uncontrollably and struggling to stay standing has a very different effect on player characters than a tall, slim, smuggler pointing a suprapistol at the nearest innocent bystander.

You can also use a gamemaster character's appearance to throw off the players. If they're looking for a pirate informer, for example, you could make that character a 12-year-old kid dressed in greasy coveralls. When the kid approaches the player characters, they'll most likely tell her to get lost because they have important business to take care of. Or, the player characters could encounter a beautiful, raven-haired woman in need of assistance, but in reality she's working for a rival mercenary unit keeping track of the player characters, hoping her good looks will encourage them to befriend her and let down their guard.

Again, give important characters a unique feature that allows player characters to immediately recognize them. For example, your criminal underlord might wear an enormous silvery medallion around his neck on a chain. If he constantly fiddles with it while he speaks with the player characters, it will draw their attention and they'll remember it next time when you say, "There's a person approaching, and the surrounding light reflects off a large disk hung on a chain from his neck." The players will immediately realize who this person is and start scrambling before he gets any closer (especially if the characters owe the underlord kublars).

Throwing the Players Off the Scent

Don't be afraid to "disguise" your villains every once in a while —when your players are experienced, this is especially important. Instead of putting your major villain right out where everyone can see (and perhaps shoot at) him, make him more mysterious. For example, through an entire series of adventures the player characters might think that the villain causing all their problems is a criminal underlord named Saasaay, but, when they finally confront him, they discovered he was actually being manipulated by someone else even more powerful —like another crimelord, an Imperial comptroller, or Merchant's Guild someone else!

Behavior

Behavior is another area that can help distinguish characters from each other. Does this character always seem nervous? Must he constantly be the center of attention? Is he helpful, or does he get his way by threatening others? Does he inspire confidence in those around him? Is he feared, despised, ridiculed?

Behavior is a good way to summarize the character's personality in both normal and exceptional situations. For supporting characters or extras you may want to jot down one or two behavioral characteristics, but for lead characters you should explore behavior in detail, perhaps even fleshing out the reasons for particular tendencies (for instance, a character never sits down because as a child he attended a military school where sitting was considered a sign of laziness).

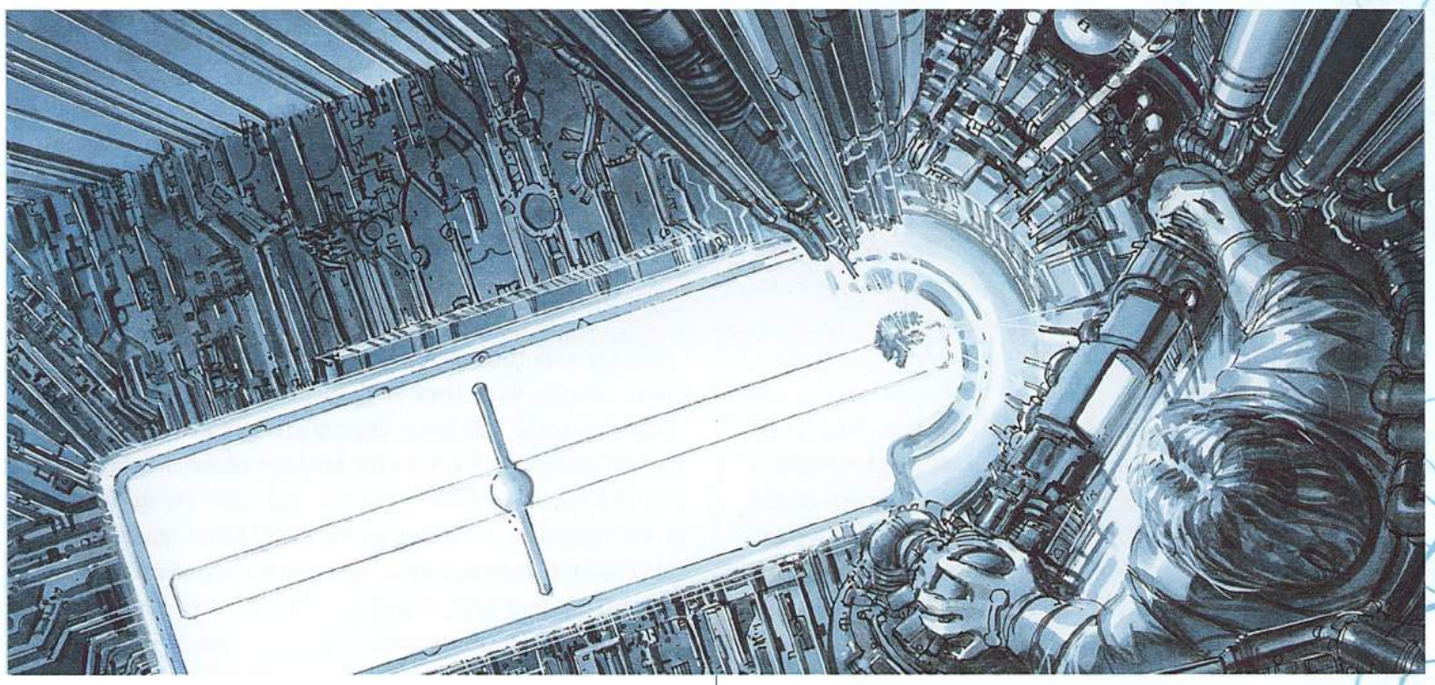
Behavior also serves a secondary purpose: it gives you some direction on how a character would react in a certain situation. If a spaceport mechanic has a habit of talking too much, he may "accidentally" tell the local security officers who arrived after the player characters that a surly looking group of travelers were just asking him a bunch of questions about a particular guarded warehouse. If the players thought they had landed undetected (which they very well may have), they're going to be surprised when a squad of heavily armed security troopers shows up at the warehouse to arrest them.

Try to determine at least one unique behavioral element for each major character you create. It allows the players to recognize him and it helps you more easily slip back into his character when you play his role during an adventure.

Background

Most major gamemaster characters should have complicated and colorful backgrounds. Providing such information accomplishes several purposes. First, it helps you get a better feel for a particular character's personality, since background plays such an important role in psychological development. Second, it prevents the player characters from immediately guessing at a gamemaster character's aims, and perhaps even his true identity. Such a character may seem shallow at first, but as the players continue to deal with her, they find that her history runs deep. For example, when Aghnar bids for Oda's hand in marriage, he conceals his identity as *Metabaron* because he knows if the witches of Shabda-Oud hear of him, they'll hunt him down. So he approaches Oda as a normal suitor. When he reveals his amazing gift through his psionic powers, he seems all that more enchanting to Oda, who has no idea of his secret past.

A character's background can include everything from his family ties and childhood friendships to his educational and professional pursuits. Depending on the character, you may touch on traumatic episodes, political affiliations, past relationships, failures, successes, and religious beliefs. Try to make each character you develop different from every other one so the players don't say,



"Oh, another ruthless head hunter trying to settle a childhood score." Remember, variation is the key to grabbing and maintaining the players' complete absorption in your storyline.

Assigning Game Statistics

Once you've created the character's concept, you should decide on her game statistics. Most of the time, you need only determine a character's attributes and major skills, although major characters often require additional work.

When it comes to assigning skills and attributes, use these guidelines below:

Die Code	Description
1D	Below average for an attribute.
2D	Average for an attribute and many skills.
3D	Average level of training.
4D	Professional level of training.
5D	Above-average expertise.
6D	Considered about the best in a city or geographic area. About 1 in 100,000 people will have training to this skill level.
7D	Among the best on a continent. About 1 in 10,000,000 people will have training to this skill level.
8D	Among the best on a planet. About 1 in 100,000,000 people will have training to this skill level.
9D	One of the best for several systems in the area. About 1 in a billion people have a skill at this level.
10D	One of the best in a sector.
11D	One of the best in a galaxy.
12D+	Among the best in the universe.

Character Points and Amarax Points

Cannon-fodder villains, such as security troopers, henchmen, and pirates typically have no Character Points or Amarax Points. Minor villains whose survival isn't dependent upon the adventure's plot may have 1–3 Character Points and (usually) no Amarax Points. Continuing villains, such as those who may be used for several adventures or who are subordinate to the main villain may have 4–10 Character Points, and at the gamemaster's discretion, one or two Amarax Points.

Major villains who might be used over the course of a campaign and are integral to an adventure should have at least 11 Character Points (some characters may have well over 50 Character Points) and many will have at least three Amarax Points, and perhaps a Necro-Dream Point.

There's no limit to the number of Character or Amarax Points.

The Quick Write-Up

For major villains, you might want to use a normal character sheet to write up the character. For less important characters, you may want to summarize them by using the quick method and form shown earlier.

Typical Characters

You can use the following characters as representative gamemaster characters that players may encounter. Some individuals should have higher or lower scores scaled to meet the demands of the players' characters and the situation. Use these as guidelines, and feel free to alter the numbers to suit the player characters' abilities and the scenario difficulty.

If you need another type of character, whether a head hunter, an explorer, a trader, or one of thousands of other character types, you may want to model the character after one of the character templates. When you do create a new character type, keep the stats handy

—you may want to reuse the character's stats for a new character even if the "personalities" of the characters are completely different.

Typical Endoguard

The Endoguards serve the Emperoress as personal bodyguard, special operations force, and military agents of policy. Their presence often indicates official Human Empire business in the area. They are the front-line troopers when the security of the Empire is involved —as defined by the sometimes subjective Imperial policies.

Typical Endoguard. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 4D, *brawling* 5D, *dodge* 5D, *firearms* 6D, *melee combat* 5D, *Knowledge* 2D, *intimidation* 4D, *tactics* 4D, *Mechanical* 3D, *gunnery* 4D, *piloting* 4D, *vehicle operation* 4D, *Perception* 3D+1, *command* 5D+1, *search* 4D+1, *Strength* 3D+2, *Technical* 2D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 7. Multi-Cogan rifle (6D damage), combat shock knife (STR+1D+2 damage), Endoguard armor (+2D STR to resist damage, –1D Agility), helmet with range goggles (+3D to long-range *Perception* and *search* rolls) and comm headset.

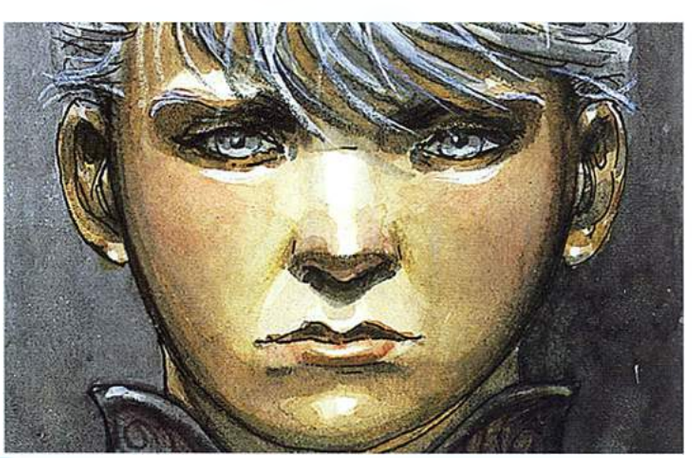
Common Pirate

Pirates come in all shapes, sizes, and skill levels. Most are equally effective flying a spaceship and fighting on the ground. Depending on the size of their pirate organization, they may take on specialized roles —gunner, pilot, mechanic, boarding party— or they may be required to fill numerous positions at a moment's notice.

Common Pirate. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 3D+1, *brawling* 4D+1, *dodge* 4D+1, *firearms* 4D+1, *melee combat* 4D, *Mechanical* 3D+2, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 4D+2, *Perception* 3D, *con* 4D, *search* 4D, *Strength* 3D, *Technical* 3D, *flight systems repair* 4D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 2. Armored vest (+1D STR to resist damage, torso only), heavy service pistol (5D damage), jumpsuit.

Typical Mercenary

Like pirates, mercenaries are typically trained to assume a variety of military duties: patrol, gunner, pilot, sensors specialist, commander. They often have a greater degree of training than the average pilot, though this varies on the professionalism and combat experience of the company on the whole. Mercenaries also have a wider array of equipment based on their resources and patrons.



Typical Mercenary. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 4D, *brawling* 5D, *dodge* 5D, *firearms* 6D, *melee combat* 5D, *Mechanical* 3D, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 5D, *Perception* 3D, *search* 4D, *sneak* 4D, *Strength* 4D, *climb/jump* 5D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 5. Armor pieces (+1D STR to resist damage), combat shock-knife (STR+1D+2 damage), laser rifle (5D damage), suprapistol (5D damage).

Typical Spaceport Security Trooper

Most spaceports maintain a force of security troopers to keep the peace, enforce local laws, and support StellComm or Imperial Merchants Guild authorities inspecting cargoes and levying tariffs. These troopers aren't always the brightest of the bunch, are often recruited from the local populace, and have no qualms about expressing and acting on their own personal biases against outsiders, independent traders, and others who arouse their suspicion.

Typical Spaceport Security Officer. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 3D+2, *dodge* 4D, *firearms* 4D, *melee combat* 4D, *bureaucracy* 3D, *security regulations* 3D, *Mechanical* 2D+2, *piloting* 3D, *Perception* 3D, *search* 3D+2, *Strength* 3D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Comm headset, stun baton (5D stun damage), uniform, Viper pistol (4D damage).

Average StellComm Inspector

StellComm inspectors board vessels, inspect cargoes, uncover contraband, cite flagrant violations of spacecraft safety and commerce codes, and levy tariffs and fines. They're often nosy busy-bodies with nothing better to do than make a pilot's day miserable. These inspectors also control entry and exit of goods and passengers through most major spaceport terminals. (If you like, you can also use these stats for a typical Imperial Merchants Guild inspector, who performs many similar duties.)

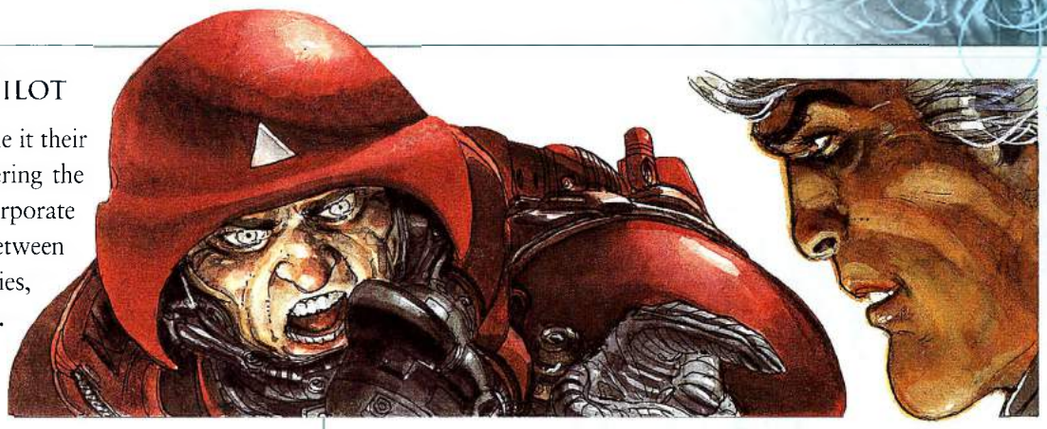
Average StellComm Inspector. All stats are 2D except: *dodge* 3D, *firearms* 3D, *Knowledge* 3D, *bureaucracy* 4D, *business* 4D, *intimidation* 4D, *security regulations* 3D+2, *Perception* 3D+2, *bargain* 4D, *investigation* 4D+2, *search* 4D+2, *Technical* 3D, *computer interface/repair* 3D+2, *security* 3D+2, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 1. Defense pistol (5 shots, 3D damage), fine uniform, hand vid-comm, io board.

Typical Explorer

Explorers work for everybody —the Ekonomat, pirates, the Empire, mercenaries, the Union of Planets, industrial Maganats— but they share many of the same abilities and expertise. Most are solitary folks trained in the technical aspects of surveying and exploring planets, and in the more physical aspects of surviving in harsh environments. They're often useful sources of information on astrographical regions as yet unexplored or colonized.

Typical Explorer. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 2D+2, *dodge* 3D+2, *firearms* 3D+2, *Knowledge* 4D, *astrography* 5D, *survival* 5D, *Mechanical* 3D, *piloting* 4D, *sensors* 4D, *Perception* 3D, *search* 3D+2, *sneak* 3D+2, *Technical* 3D, *computer interface/repair* 4D, *first aid* 4D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 2. Defense pistol (5 shots, 3D damage), io board, jumpsuit, range goggles (+3D to long-range *Perception* and *search* rolls).

Common Contract Pilot



Like explorers, contract pilots make it their business to work for whoever's offering the most money. Some keep the same corporate job for years, while others bounce between serving mercenaries, small companies, planetary forces, and even pirates. Contract pilots specialize in flying anything anywhere, as long as you have the kublars to pay them.

Common Contract Pilot. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 3D+1, *firearms* 4D, *0-G maneuver* 4D+1, *Knowledge* 3D, *astrography* 4D, *bureaucracy* 4D, *business* 4D, *security regulations* 4D, *Mechanical* 4D, *astro-nav* 5D, *comm* 5D, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 6D, *sensors* 5D, *shields* 5D, *vehicle operation* 5D, *Perception* 3D+1, *bargain* 4D, *Technical* 3D+1, *computer interface/repair* 4D+1, *flight systems repair* 5D+1, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 2. Defense pistol (3D damage), flight suit, io board, pilot's helmet.

Average Head Hunter

Various organizations or corporations hire head hunters to track down and return individuals wanted for everything from petty crimes to serious treason. Head hunters are expected to bring them back despite any opposition. They're the consummate predators, able to pursue their prey no matter where they flee, and capture them for return —though the prisoner's state (alive, slightly damaged, incapacitated, dead) often doesn't matter.

Average Head Hunter. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 4D, *brawling* 5D, *dodge* 5D, *firearms* 6D, *Knowledge* 3D, *bureaucracy* 3D+2, *intimidation* 4D, *streetwise* 4D, *Perception* 4D, *con* 4D+2, *investigation* 5D, *search* 5D, *sneak* 4D+2, *Strength* 3D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 2. Armored vest (+1D STR to resist damage, torso only), heavy service pistol (5D damage), long coat, stun baton (5D stun damage).

Typical Store/Bar Owner

The typical store or bar owner is mostly concerned with staying in business and serving his customers (as a means of achieving the former). They usually don't seek trouble, unless, of course, there's some profit gained at a low risk. Otherwise they just go about their business, doing their best to protect their economic investment.

Typical Store/Bar Owner. All stats are 2D except: *Knowledge* 3D, *business* 4D, *police regulations* 3D+2, *streetwise* 3D+1, *Perception* 3D, *bargain* 4D, *con* 3D+2, *Technical* 3D, *computer interface/repair* 3D+2, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 1. Average clothes, defense pistol (5 shots, 3D damage) or stun baton (5D stun damage).

Average Private Investigator

Private investigators provide a variety of services for their clients —discreet surveillance, information gathering, subtle protection— all for a price. They're street-smart, savvy, and professional. Their licenses sometimes offer them a sense of legitimacy that can help them access information normally unavailable to common people. They usually maintain some kind of rapport (good or bad) with local law enforcement agencies that also helps accomplish their various assignments.

Average Private Investigator. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 3D, *dodge* 4D, *firearms* 4D, *sleight of hand* 4D, *Knowledge* 3D, *intimidation* 3D+2, *security regulations* 4D, *Perception* 4D, *bargain* 4D+2, *con* 5D, *investigation* 5D, *search* 4D+2, *sneak* 4D+2, *Technical* 2D+2, *computer interface/repair* 3D+1, *security* 3D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 2. Hand vid-comm, long coat, nondescript hat, Viper pistol (4D damage).

Typical Street Vagabond

Every planet's urban centers abound with vagabonds with no life other than that lived on the street. These youngsters beg, borrow, and steal for their livelihood, barely surviving on the crumbs that society tosses them. Their experiences often prove helpful —they know their home city like nobody else, can slip in and out of otherwise inaccessible areas, and are swift of foot and sleight of hand. The lucky ones make a few handfuls of kublars aiding those willing to hire such an unreliable workforce for jobs of questionable natures.

Typical Street Vagabond. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 4D, *dodge* 6D, *sleight of hand* 5D, *throwing* 4D+2, *Knowledge* 3D, *security regulations* 3D+2, *streetwise* 4D+2, *willpower* 4D, *Perception* 4D, *con* 5D, *search* 5D, *sneak* 5D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Character Points 2. Grubby clothes.

Common Thug

Every city also has crowds of unruly bullies, whom others often hire for various illicit jobs requiring brute force and little thought. These thugs hang out in dark alleys, seedy bars, and ruined buildings, waiting for some unwitting person to wander by and provide them with a few kublars... and maybe something more. They have no qualms about taking what they want by force, unless they misjudge their prey and get more than they bargained for. Thugs like starting fights, arguing, and picking on weaker people all for the sake of something to keep them busy.

Common Thug. All stats are 2D except: *Agility* 3D, *brawling* 4D+2, *dodge* 3D+2, *melee combat* 4D+2, *intimidation* 3D+2, *streetwise* 3D, *Perception* 3D, *con* 4D, *Strength* 4D, *Psionics* 0D. Move 10. Grubby clothes, quiver-shiv (STR+1D damage).

CREATURES

You travel enough around the universe and you'll meet all kinds of people. If you wander off into the less urban areas, you might actually run into a few interesting creatures, too.

As an explorer, I'm often investigating new planets where almost anything can happen —atmospheric anomalies interfering with sensors, unstable geothermal strata crumbling beneath your feet,

hurricanes buffeting you with acid rain. But by far the most unpredictable challenges are those posed by a world's wildlife.

Most folks think creatures are good pets or practical mounts… and in many cases they are. But out in the wild, on untamed planets or in the remote regions of settled worlds you'll find beasts that must fight to survive in their habitats. Sometimes humans can tame or control them; other times they must accept that they should just steer clear of such creatures.

The universe is filled with just as huge a variety of beasts as interesting planets. You'll discover that as you explore the Metabarons universe on your own. Keep reading and you'll learn more about using creatures in the game, as well as a handful of sample beasts you can use in your adventures or as models to create your own creatures.

What Are Creatures?

Creatures in game terms are non-sentient living beings that do not use rational thought processes to interpret their environment. Creatures rely only on instinct.

This doesn't mean all creatures are stupid. Many are quite clever, and can even learn commands and simple tricks, but they are not considered truly intelligent: they are essentially animals.

Creatures do not possess the same number of attributes as sentient species; creatures are limited to *Agility*, *Perception* and *Strength*.

Role of Creatures in the Game

You can integrate creatures in a *Metabarons* roleplaying scenario in a number of ways. Creatures are often overlooked and viewed simply as opponents in a combat situation. While this view is not without precedent, these exotic animals can be useful in a variety of ways. At the end of this chapter are a number of creatures you can use to spice up a roleplaying session, or use as models to expand your own creature ideas.

Transport and Pack Animals

Humans frequently domesticate and train creatures to serve them, often as a simple means of transporting goods or people across the native terrain. You can use animals of this type to give a setting a more primitive feel; the players will know their characters are in a wild, untamed region if they must rely on pack animals to get from place to place, instead of using more high-tech transportation like aircars. While raising her son in the cold wilds of Anasirma, Honorata managed to train at least one savage eodactyl as her flying mount.

Pets

Some animals are kept as pets, and even trained to perform useful or entertaining tasks. Perhaps a player character can train an agile creature to fetch small items that have been dropped, or to sound a warning when an unfamiliar person approaches. While the training of such a creature should not dominate a roleplaying session, a pet can add color and humor to a *Metabarons* game. As a young boy, Aghnar von Salza befriended a woolly toad and kept it as a pet —only to slay it later as an exercise in controlling his emotions.

Food

One often-overlooked and very simple use for creatures in the roleplaying game is as a food source. When stranded on an alien planet, characters may be forced to hunt to replenish dwindling food stores. These scenes can be roleplayed to great effect, and can often lead to some exciting chases and plot twists. Animal hides and bones can also be useful in emergencies, particularly if the player characters need to fashion simple tools.

Predators

Predatory animals can add some surprise and excitement to a roleplaying session. Shrewd gamemasters can use these encounters to complicate matters for the players. For example, as the player characters sneak through an alien forest to ambush a pirate base, they are suddenly attacked by a cluster of ferociously large bark-chiggers. The characters must deal with the situation quietly or risk alerting the pirates to the impending attack.

Chance Encounters

Creatures are ideal for creating chance encounters, particularly in surroundings that are unfamiliar to the player characters. You can use creatures that steal "shiny objects" the characters may be carrying, packs of running animals that storm through the characters' camp, or anything else that may surprise the player characters.

Designing Creatures

At some point you'll want to create your own animals for use in a *Metabarons* game. Given the vast number of habitable planets in the universe, you should feel free to populate your campaign environment with as many colorful, exotic animals as you wish.

Much like gamemaster characters, the amount of detail depends on how much you intend to use the creatures —you'll really want to detail a creature that will play a central role throughout a roleplaying session or campaign. If the creature is designed to appear in a brief scene, you don't have to fully flesh it out. Simply assign the die codes that will make the animal an even match for the player characters.

When designing a creature, you may want to add information on the creature's habitat, behavior, attack forms, and other elements. Did the creature evolve naturally, or was it a Techno-Techno experiment gone awry? Is the creature friendly or predatory? How does it hunt? Does it have particularly sharp instincts, or is it easy to capture? Does the creature possess any special abilities that can make it valuable (or even dangerous) to catch? Answering these questions can help you create a more interesting and unusual addition to your game.

Creature Statistics

All creatures in the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* have some game statistics. These are "average" stats —individual creatures can vary considerably. Creatures are described with the following stats:

Type: A quick summary and classification of the creature.

Attributes and Skills: Non-intelligent creatures have only *Agility*, *Perception* and *Strength* attributes. Some creatures have skills, such as *brawling*, *climb/jump*, *0-G maneuver*, or *swimming* to represent their natural abilities.

Creatures use their *Strength* or *brawling* skill to hit in combat, as well as their *Strength* to determine damage. Some creatures have claws or teeth which can do extra damage; they're listed under "Special Abilities."

Special Abilities: This notes any special abilities or natural tools that help the creature. Special abilities may include claws, armor, the ability to breathe water, or any number of other tools or abilities.
Move: The average Move for the creature. If the creature has two or more prime modes of movement, all are listed.
Size: A common size range for adult specimens of the creature.
Scale: Normally creatures will be character scale, though some incredibly immense creatures are considered vehicle scale.
Orneriness: If the creature can be ridden, an orneriness code is listed. This die code is rolled against the character's *riding* skill to see if he can maintain control of the creature in dangerous situations. See the description for *riding* in the "Attributes & Skills" chapter for more details.

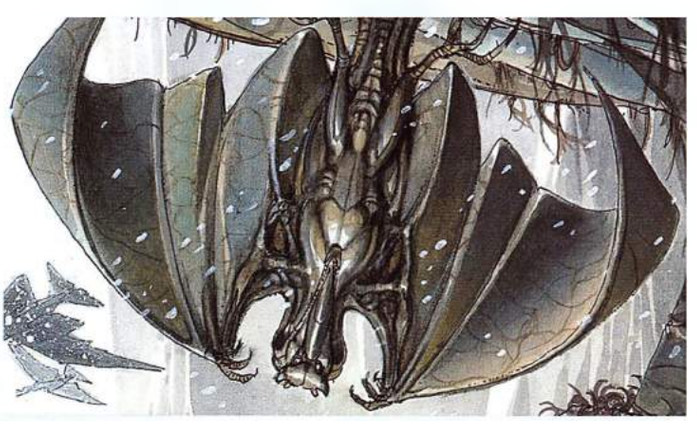
Creatures of the Metabarons Universe

Eodactyl

These immense pterosaurs are native to the icy region surrounding Anasirma, the Sacred Mountain on Okhar. They nest in the high-altitude mountain crags, hanging dormant until their passive senses detect food animals in the area. They attack with swift swooping strikes, using their toothy beaks and long talons to disable and carry off their prey. Only with great patience and incredible powers (often psionic) can one train these beasts to serve as flying mounts.

Eodactyl

Type: Winged predator
AGILITY 3D+2
Brawling 4D+2
0-G maneuver 5D+2
PERCEPTION 4D
Search 4D+2
STRENGTH 4D
Special Abilities:
Toothy Beak: Inflicts STR+2 damage
Talons: Inflict STR+2D damage
Move: 35 (flying)
Size: 6–9 meters long, 20–30 meter wingspan
Orneriness: 4D



Frazzhornet

The frazzhornet is a swarm insect that strays from its hive-nest to hunt food and bring it back to the queen. The creature is three times the size of a man, with a body segmented into three articulated parts. The head has large, rounded eyes empty of any expression, but giving it a full field of vision. The head tapers into a short probiscus that contains a needle tongue and sharp teeth. The middle torso packs powerful muscles that strengthen a pair of long arms ending in three claws, and two powerful legs. The smooth black skin resembles hardened ceramic plastic. Two pairs of veined, transparent wings allow it to fly through its environment and the nest-hive. The long tail ends in a soft segment tipped with a poisonous barb. The creature's varied coloration helps conceal it when ambushing prey. Only the bravest and most insane riders can liberate a frazzhornet from its queen and tame it as a mount.

Frazzhornet

Type: Hive predator
AGILITY 4D
Brawling 6D
0-G Maneuver 5D
PERCEPTION 3D
Sneak 4D
STRENGTH 5D
Special Abilities:
Bite: Inflicts STR+2 damage
Claws: Inflict STR+2D damage
Tail Sting: Inflicts STR+1D damage, plus poison that incapacitates victim if he fails a Moderate (15) *stamina* roll.
Move: 10 (walking), 30 (flying)
Size: 5–7 meters long
Orneriness: 7D

Glossglok

The glossglok is typical of many creatures living in the harsh environments of strange planets that have adapted to living under such severe conditions. This beast resembles a giant insectoid lobster, with two massive, barbed claws extending forward to protect its multiple eyes, sensory feelers, and mandibles near its face. The rest of the body tapers to a slim tail, all protected by broad sections of chitin that serve as armor against attacks and the elements. The glossglok backs itself into its lair tail first, keeping its claws near the entrance to defend against intruders and snatch unwary food animals wandering nearby. When seriously threatened, the glossglok spits a wad of mucus at opponents, though this does little more than stun them for several rounds. Since it's terribly slow on its puny legs, the creature only wanders outside to find a new lair or search for food when it hasn't been plentiful—and only when conditions best hide its presence during storms or at night.

Glossglok

Type: Nesting predator
AGILITY 2D
Brawling 4D
PERCEPTION 3D
STRENGTH 4D
Special Abilities:
Claws: Inflict STR+2D damage
Spit: Determine if it hits using the glossglok's Agility of 2D; stuns opponents for 1D rounds.
Move: 3
Size: 3–5 meters long

Kamamba

The kamamba's long, serpentine body consists of a furry torso and a scaled tail. It can retract its stubby yet powerful legs into its body, allowing it to quickly slither along the ground or even swim underwater; however, it cannot attack with its legs when they are retracted. The kamamba prefers to attack with its spiked tail and fang-filled mouth. It can unhinge its jaws to swallow prey several times its own size.

The kamamba's single green horn is valued as an aphrodisiac for potions, incense, and salves. Hunting the creature for its horn is a profitable sport for only the best warriors, as the kamamba's highly developed senses make it difficult prey and a dangerous predator.

Kamamba

Type: Saurian predator
AGILITY 4D
Brawling 5D
PERCEPTION 3D
Search 5D
Sneak 4D
STRENGTH 4D
Special Abilities:
Claws: Inflict STR+1D damage
Spiked Tail: Inflicts STR+3D damage
Teeth: Inflict STR+2D damage
Move: 20
Size: 2–4 meters long

Koor Beast

Koor beasts serve as cheap, easily imported beasts of burden, capable of hauling heavy loads or passengers. The creatures are ugly brutes with hairy underbellies (which undoubtedly smell as they drag them along the ground), big flared nostrils, small, savage-looking eyes, and blunt teeth seen between crusty lips. Their foul temperaments don't help their reputation for grumpiness, either. They have a tendency to bash their heads into anything that annoys them, including their trainers.

Koor Beast

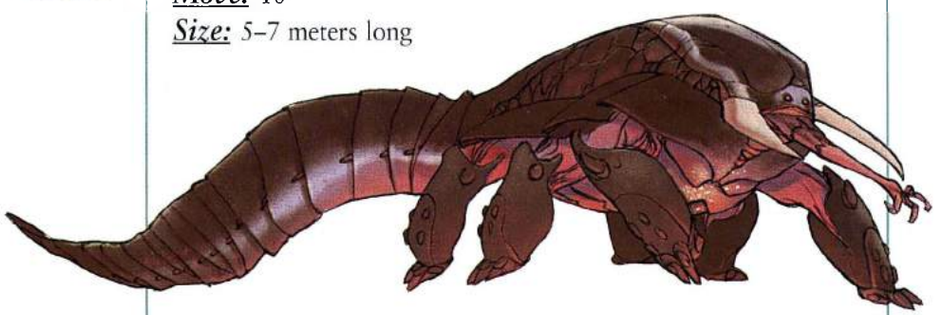
Type: Domesticated pack animal
AGILITY 2D
Brawling 3D
PERCEPTION 2D
STRENGTH 4D
Special Abilities:
Head Bash: Inflicts STR+1D damage
Move: 18
Size: 4–7 meters long
Orneriness: 3D

Xarmadillo

The tank-like xarmadillo has a flat face bristling with two tusks, beady eyes, and a trunk ending in fleshy manipulator. Its massive body is supported by six legs, all protected by armored plates. The legs and tusked face help it burrow underground, creating vast warrens as it forages for insects and smaller subterranean creatures. Xarmadillos lay eggs in various secret places within their territory, often forgetting exactly where they've left them until the eggs actually hatch. When it surfaces, the xarmadillo uses its long, segmented tail to stand upright to reach the tasty lirren-berries that supplement its diet. A xarmadillo is relatively harmless until someone violates its burrow, threatens its young, or attacks it.

Xarmadillo

Type: Solitary burrower
AGILITY 2D
Brawling 3D
PERCEPTION 2D
STRENGTH 6D
Special Abilities:
Tail: Inflicts STR+2D damage
Tusks: Inflict STR+1D damage
Move: 10
Size: 5–7 meters long

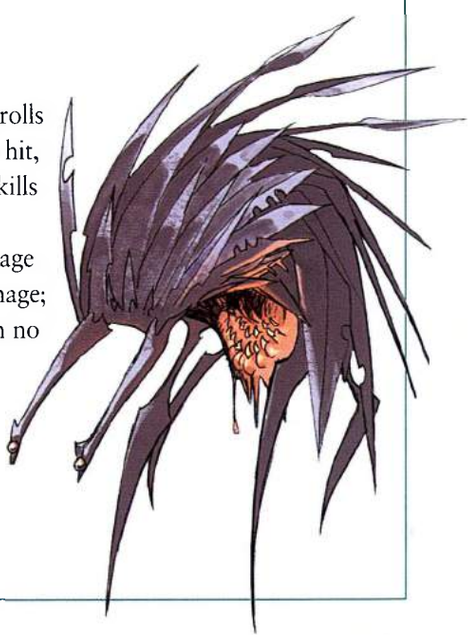


Zzurchinozz

The zzurchinozz looks like a ball with many long spines. Each spine functions like an independent, multi-form organism that can take the shape of a claw, blade, or other natural weapon, giving it multiple attacks and making it a formidable adversary. Two of these spines are tipped with eyes. One spine contains the creature's brain, though this spine looks no different than all the others. The creature moves by folding the spines, turning itself into a massive ball with a smooth, rounded surface that allows it to roll along. At the creature's heart sits an immense maw through which it can consume several people at once. The zzurchinozz inhabits swamps, coastlines, and other aquatic terrain, often nesting just below the water's surface waiting for unsuspecting prey to pass by.

Zzurchinozz

Type: Aquatic predator
AGILITY 2D
Brawling 5D
PERCEPTION 3D
STRENGTH 4D
Special Abilities:
Brain Spine: If an attacker rolls double the difficulty needed to hit, he strikes the brain spine and kills the zzurchinozz instantly.
Maw: Inflicts STR+3D damage
Spines: Inflict STR+2D damage; can make up to 4 attacks with no multi-action penalties
Move: 5
Size: 3–5 meters long



Weapons & Technology

Welcome, welcome, come right in. I'm glad you found my little "establishment" at the back of this Imperial Merchants Guild warehouse. The guards didn't give you any trouble, I trust? Good. A few kublars goes far in convincing them to let visitors inside.

As your informant told you, I am Assistant Controller Yrban, a petty Merchants Guild functionary who's managed to make a modest profit rerouting certain Guild shipments that won't be missed, and selling them to fine folks like you at bargain prices.

Yes, please, look around. The presentation is nothing special, but I assure you all this equipment is brand new and of the highest quality. We have some basic gear stacked on those shipping crates over there. The weapons you'll find farther back. I've powered down most of the robots; please ask if you'd like a demonstration. And if you don't see something you'd like, let me know —I can "special order" items depending on what shipments are due into port in the coming weeks. A small fee would be greatly appreciated to help expedite your request.

General Equipment

Breather Units

These portable filtration and respirator units provide wearers with breathable atmosphere for short trips into areas where existing conditions present inhospitable breathing environments. Breather units, or "breathers," consist of a small box with filtration and atmosphere enhancing filters, a connector tube, and a breathing mask. The mask fits over the wearer's mouth and nose, secured around the head with a strap (or clips into a helmet). The filtration unit clips to most clothing.

Breathers operate only in environments with pressurized atmospheres. They will not protect the wearer in pressure variant environments, where the pressure of the user's body is not equal to that of her surroundings. Therefore breathers do not help people in the vacuum of space; you'll need some kind of vacuum suit for that. Breathers also only aid a person's respiratory system, offering no other protection from harsh environmental conditions.

One unit provides enough breathable air for about one hour of vigorous use —users operating at lower levels of activity might be able to eke another 30 minutes out of the filter unit. Once the unit runs out, you can recharge it and replace filters for a minimal fee.

Type: Breather unit
Cost: 40 kublars
Availability: Common
Game Notes: Provides air in non-pressure variant environments for one hour.

Comm Headset

Comm headsets are often used by military personnel when they require full use of their hands, and can't spare a moment to fiddle with communications gear. The headset consists of a head-strap securing a small speaker near one ear, with a microphone boom extending to pick up the wearer's voice. Some models clip directly to the ear, with the microphone attached with an adhesive strip to the throat. The microphone is tuned to focus on sounds within only a few centimeters, filtering out other background noise that might interfere with clear communication. The earpiece has variable volume controls, and an option to gently buzz when receiving an incoming message instead of broadcasting.

Comm headsets operate on one frequency at a time. Adjusting the receiver is delicate work, so it cannot be accomplished with the speed and accuracy required on the battlefield. Units often determine what frequency they'll use before entering an engagement, setting and testing their receivers during their pre-combat prep time. The units broadcast clearly up to three kilometers, though this may be boosted by using a mobile communications station or squad radio backpack. The headset's power supply sustains continuous operation for 30 hours.

Type: Communications device
Skill: Comm
Cost: 70 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (requires permit)
Game Notes: Power cell provides 30 hours of continuous operation at a range of three kilometers.

Equipment Stats

The gear listed in this chapter displays its game information in short stats after each descriptive entry. Weapons have several more additional stats than most general equipment, reflecting the complexities of ammunition, damage, and other aspects of ordnance. Categories irrelevant to a particular piece of gear are omitted from the stat list.

Type: Common designation for the item, such as "communications device," "survival suit," "firearm," or "melee weapon."
Skill: The skill characters use to operate the item.
Cost: Cost in kublars to purchase the item. Assume the average worker drone makes 5 kublars a day. Fifty kublars is a big deal. Some cyberware also has a Character Point cost.
Availability: Common, uncommon, rare, with notations for R "restricted" (including most gear requiring a permit to carry and use) and X "illegal." For instance, "Uncommon R."
Ammo: Number of shots a weapon can fire before it requires recharging or reloading.
Fire Rate: Number of shots per round the weapon may fire.
Range: Weapon range in meters, listed for short/medium/long ranges.
Damage: Number of dice of damage a weapon inflicts if it hits the target.
Game Notes: Description of the item's use in the game, including bonuses, penalties, or interesting roleplaying tips.

Hand Vid-Comm

People commonly use this hand-held video communications unit to talk face-to-face with others connected through the same network. The device consists of a keypad for punching up other interface numbers, a small screen for viewing the other party, a fiber-optic receiver camera and speakers, several control buttons, and slots to insert promotional chits containing preprogrammed numbers to area businesses.

Users punch up the intended number and talk to the other party using the tiny receiver camera and microphones imbedded in the unit's assembly. The screen shows the other party only if they have access to their own hand vid-comm or other visual communications device. If not, only audio transmits, and the screen indicates "Video Transmission Unavailable." Most cities offer comm directories to help you find the parties you wish to call (for a fee), though you can also access data directories at vid-phone booths for free.

These small units operate only within the confines of vast cities, where communications networks pick up, relay, and boost signals. (This also means such calls can be monitored by the authorities and other interested groups.) Out in the wilderness, hand vid-comms have a limited range of about 10 kilometers. The power cells last for about five hours of calling time before they require recharging. The receiver system can also pick up hyper-television broadcasts in the area, though with the limited power supply, it's just as economical to find a holovid unit to watch.

Type: Communications device
Skill: *Comm*
Cost: 45 kublars
Availability: Common
Game Notes: Power supply lasts for five hours continuous use, with a receiver range of 10 kilometers.

Io Board

The input/output board was designed to serve as a portable mini-computer for basic note-taking, document scanning, remote mainframe access, and data entry, recording, and retrieval. It consists of a small view screen, numerous keyboard functions, jacks for accepting data storage media, a small speaker, and a remote mainframe interface to communicate with larger computer databases. The light-weight casing is designed so the user can cradle it in one arm and type with his free hand.

Bureaucrats, administrators, and other data-pushers use io boards to track information while away from their desk monitors. StellComm inspectors use them for reviewing a vessel's documentation and shipping manifest. Local security force captains refer to programmed profiles of wanted criminals. Imperial Merchants Guild officials use them to track shipments, transports, and warehoused goods.

The io board's integrated functions include data and word processing, document verification and transfer, and remote communication with established mainframes. Slots can handle a variety of data transfer media (disks, rods, cards), and plugs allow for direct interface with robots, computers, and other io boards. The screen viewer also functions as a hand vid-comm (see above), and, of course, the io board's receivers can pick up local hyper-television broadcasts to entertain the user during slow periods in his work. Since these devices are designed for long-term remote use, they can function continuously for 20 hours before their power source requires recharging.

Type: Interface board
Skill: *Computer interface/repair*
Cost: 150 kublars
Availability: Common
Game Notes: Power cell supplies energy for 20 hours of continuous use.

Luma

"Lumas" include a variety of illumination devices, from hand-held lumas to those mounted on swivel assemblies as spotlights. The most common personal lumas are units no larger than your fist. They often consist of a cylindrical or rectangular housing with an activation/deactivation button, a plug for recharging, and a focusing lens covering the broad reflective area containing the ignition bulb.

Lumas provide continuous light to an area, often with a variable beam depending on whether broad illumination or tight, brighter light is required. Most personal lumas last for 10 hours before requiring recharging, and can easily be clipped onto clothing or other gear to keep the user's hands free.

Most urban areas are well-lit, so authorities often suspect those carrying lumas as engaging in illegal activity —unless you're a mechanic or other worker who does his job in dark places. If you're caught carrying or using a luma, you'd better have a good excuse prepared in case someone asks what an ordinary citizen needs with portable illumination.

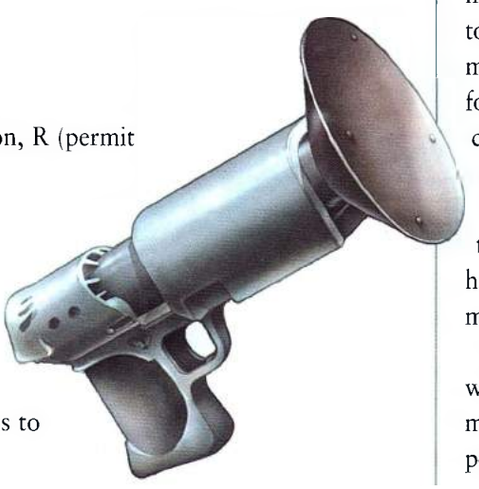
Type: Illumination device
Cost: 20 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Game Notes: Power cell provides 10 hours continuous use.

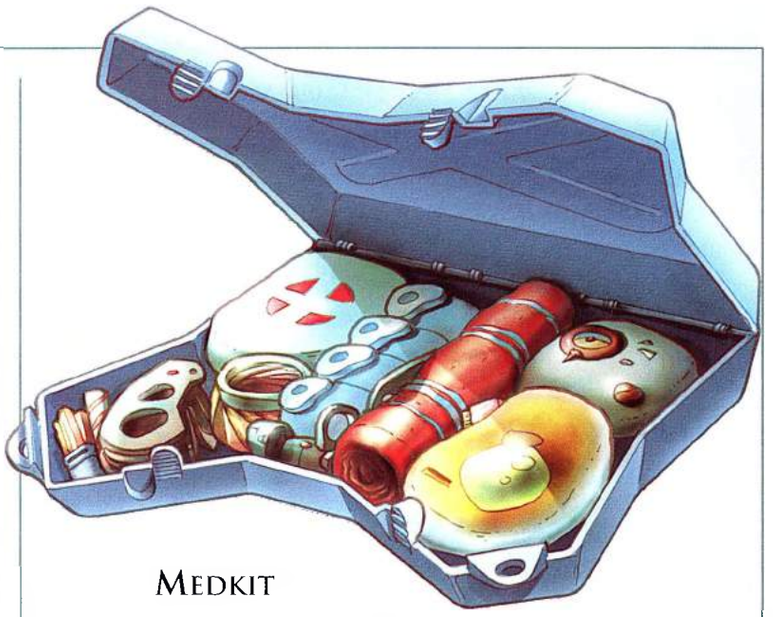
Magna Line

The magna line is typical of various grappling and climbing devices. Using the *firearms* skill, a user aims and fires the magnetic head attached to a rod threaded with cord. A power source ensures the electromagnetic head adheres to most relatively flat, metallic surfaces. The cord only reaches 100 meters, but is strong enough to hold two human-sized beings. A small motor in the gun assembly reels in the cord, aiding any efforts at climbing (allow those using magna line to climb a +2D bonus to their *climb/jump* roll). The gun clips to most apparel or gear so the magna line can serve as a safety cord. Similar devices use a simple hooked grappling head or fusion disk for snagging or fusing with other non-metallic elements.

Magna lines are also suspected by authorities as equipment used by suspicious people engaged in illegal activities. Thieves often use them to scale buildings and enter the ventilation works to get closer to their prizes. Pirates also employ magna grapples in space during boarding actions and salvage operations.

Type: Grapple device
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 200 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Ammo: 1
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–10/50/75
Game Notes: 100-meter cord and climbing motor in gun assembly offer +2D bonus to user's *climb/jump* roll.





Medkit

Medkits are standard equipment in most vehicles and spacecraft, and as part of any military force. The kit consists of a green plastic box with ribbed ridges for reinforced strength. A red cross in a white circle on the side clearly identifies it as a medkit. Inside it contains an assortment of bandages, vials of medicine, antiseptic, dressings, tweezers, and a small knife suitable for effecting first aid efforts in the field. It's small enough to fill the better portion of a backpack or duffel, or the user can carry it over her shoulder by clipping a strap to fixtures on the box.

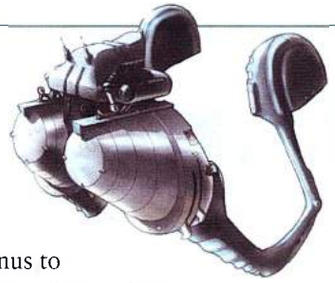
Medkits provide a +2D bonus to any *first aid* rolls. The supplies inside can only take care of a few injuries before they run out —from three to five *first aid* rolls. Gamemasters should inform players when a medkit runs out based on the number and severity of injuries they've already treated with it. For more information on medkits, read the end of the "Combat & Injuries" chapter.

Type: Medical kit
Skill: *first aid or medicine (adv.)*
Cost: 450 kublars
Availability: Common
Game Notes: Adds +2D to *first aid* rolls.

Range Goggles

This binocular assembly hooks around the wearer's ears and cheekbone, providing clear, hands-free use of the ocular magnification lenses. A mini-computer controls a series of lenses to enhance the user's visual range. The wearer controls the magnification level through verbal commands, though he can also focus the goggles manually if silence is essential. The mini-computer provides targeting information, including actual range to target in meters, compass bearings, and size information for the target. Characters using range goggles gain a +3D bonus to their *search* skill and other visually based *Perception* rolls; however, the range goggles cannot focus on targets closer than 100 meters.

Certain highly illegal range goggle rigs allow the user to interface with a sniper rifle, providing the +3D bonus to hit targets at medium range or farther. Such devices are outlawed, and possession is grounds for instant arrest.



Type: Range goggles
Skill: *Search or Perception*
Cost: 80 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Game Notes: Provides a +3D bonus to *search* and visually based *Perception* rolls for objects farther than 100 meters.

Tool Bag

Many mechanics carry their repair tools in bags or boxes easily slung over their shoulder and taken to the job site (though some prefer to leave them scattered about the repair hangar or spaceship engineering ducts). These kits easily open up and spread out to present the tools in an easily accessible fashion. Mechanics pack their bags with a few standard tools to take care of a broad range of repairs: magna-wrenches, spot-welders, laser drills, and beam cutters. Having just one tool is never enough for a good mechanic. When a character has this array of tools at hand, he gains a +1D bonus to his *repair* rolls. Those requiring power such as spot welders and beam cutters have energy cells that provide for several hours' operation —and can be recharged from readily available power sources.

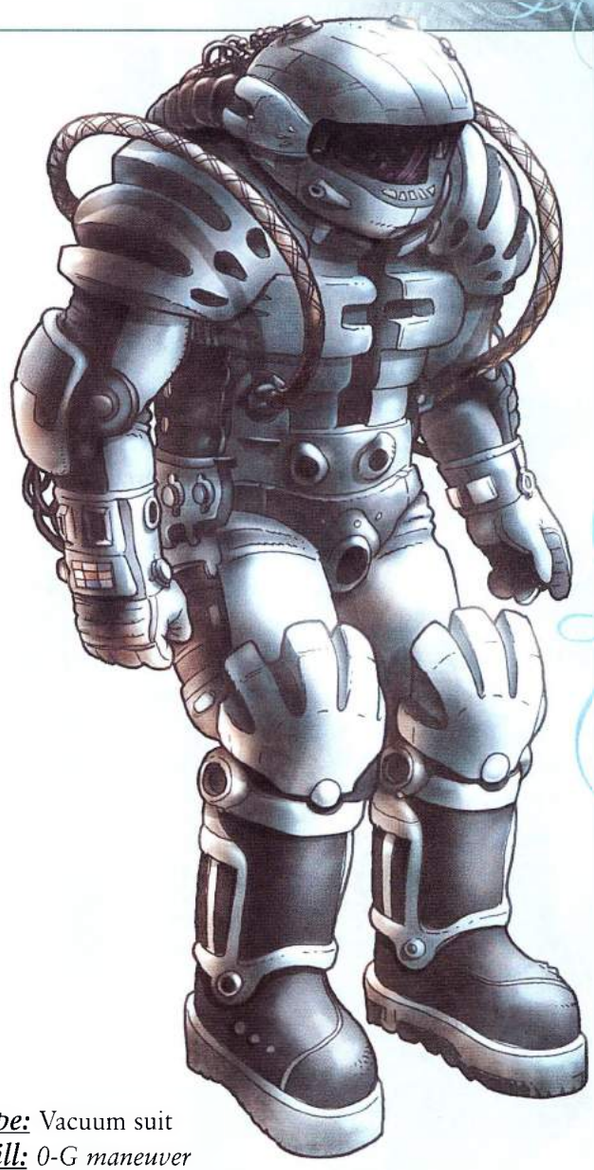
Type: Tool kit
Skill: Relevant *repair* skill
Cost: 250 kublars
Availability: Common
Game Notes: Provides a +1D bonus to *repair* rolls.

Vacuum Suit

The pressurized vacuum suits allow the wearer to operate in hostile pressure-variant atmospheres as well as the vacuum of space. The form-fitting suit provides pressurized, heated environment, breathable atmosphere, nutrients (via a nutrient dispenser tube), and personal waste systems. The suit's outer skin offers basic protection from light hazards (slightly inhospitable environments, micro-meteorites) and plenty of straps, grips, and clips for securing gear. The air and nutrient mask clips into a helmet with a headset comm system and a visor that fully encloses any remaining uncovered portions of the face.

The suit's independent power and air supplies can keep a human alive in space or hostile environments for up to five standard days. Many spaceships and stations keep stocks of these suits available in lockers for quick access in case of emergencies. The suits also hang in airlock prep chambers for mechanics and others going out to effect repairs on the exterior hulls and engines of spacecraft.

Characters use the *0-G maneuver* skill when using vacuum suits in non-gravity environments. Those wearing such suits under standard gravity conditions suffer a –2D penalty to their *Agility* and all related skills. It takes anywhere from three to five minutes to fully don a vacuum suit, depending on the character's natural *Agility*.



Type: Vacuum suit
Skill: *0-G maneuver*
Cost: 700 kublars
Availability: Common
Game Notes: Power and air supplies last five standard days before requiring recharge. If used in gravity environments, wearer suffers suffer a –2D penalty to their *Agility* and all related skills.

Melee Weapons

Combat Shock-Knife

A favorite with mercenary units, the combat shock-knife is an oversized steel knife, often serrated along one edge and with a decorative handguard. A burst battery in the handle delivers an electrical shock when the blade comes in contact with a target. (It's also good for short-circuiting security and other electrical systems.) An insulated sheath and hand-grip keeps the user from shocking himself accidentally. The boost battery is good for only five hits, after which the user must recharge it from any readily available power source.

The knife usually delivers STR+1D+2 damage, though this becomes STR+2 damage if used after the burst battery runs out.

Type: Melee weapon
Skill: *Melee combat*
Cost: 30 kublars
Availability: Common
Ammo: 5
Difficulty: Very Easy (5)
Damage: STR+1D+2 (STR+2 without power)

Quiver-Shiv

Although smaller than the combat shock-knife, the quiver-shiv is still an effective small weapon. A power cell in the handle generates minute vibrations through the microscopically serrated knife blade, making it a more efficient cutting and stabbing weapon. The energy supply lasts far longer than a shock-knife's burst battery, so it can function continuously for many days before it requires recharging. Its smaller size and lower energy profile make it easier to conceal—some quiver-shivs are even constructed of plastic with monomolecular edges instead of sharpened steel blades (though these are very illegal and a sure indication that the bearer engages in illicit activities).

Type: Melee weapon
Skill: *Melee combat*
Cost: 25 kublars
Availability: Common
Difficulty: Very Easy (5)
Damage: STR+1D

Stun Baton

Security officers frequently carry stun weapons to subdue offenders before apprehending them. The stun baton is the preferred melee stun weapon of many law enforcement organizations. The baton has served as a symbol of authority that has survived throughout most civilizations since the earliest days of paleo-earth's history. The sight of a security trooper menacingly brandishing a stun baton is often enough to encourage unruly mobs to disperse and trouble-makers to flee.

The stun baton delivers a severe charge of gauss energy through a conductive tip, inflicting 5D stun damage as it disrupts the victim's neuro-electric system. The baton's charge also wreaks havoc on electronic devices it hits. The handle —usually half a meter long— helps reach victims, provides good weight to deliver the blow, and contains the power source. The energy cell offers enough power for at least 10 hours of continuous operation, so it rarely requires recharging.

Type: Melee weapon
Skill: *Melee combat*
Cost: 100 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Difficulty: Easy (10)
Damage: 5D stun damage

Sword

For those preferring to focus their attention on the art of wielding archaic weapons, the sword (or some variant blade) is often the weapon of choice. The strong steel blade often includes a functional hand-guard, well-wound grip, and a great deal of decorative craftsmanship. Swords rely on the user's strength and agility with a blade to inflict damage. The weapon is also good at parrying other melee weapons.

Learning to use non-powered blades requires long and often difficult training, martial discipline, and a respect for the relationship between weapon, opponent, and one's own body. The doctrines of archaic weapons prepare one well for using swords, sabers, and other blades, but these beliefs also command a great deal of discipline in one's life. Such blades cannot easily be concealed, and others often view them and their bearers with an attitude of ancient authority...and often arrogance. To wear a blade at one's side requires not only martial but civil discipline.

Type: Melee weapon
Skill: *Archaic weapons*
Cost: 1 to 1,000 kublars
Availability: Rare
Difficulty: Easy (10)
Damage: STR+2D

Ranged Weapons

Bow

Like the sword, the bow is an archaic weapon that cannot easily be concealed and often arouses the attention and suspicion of others who distrust ancient and primitive ways. Consisting of an arc of flexible wood strung with a reinforced cord, the bow fires arrow shafts tipped with metal heads and balanced by feather or plastic fletchings at the opposite end. Arrows are usually carried in a quiver slung over one's back or hung at one's side.

The bow requires a good deal of strength to draw and fire, plus a large measure of discipline to use under the pressure of combat. Like others who prefer archaic weapons to more modern ordnance, those using bows often subscribe to a stern doctrine of personal discipline in all matters of their life, from their comportment in social situations to their performance in battle.

Type: Ranged weapon
Skill: *Archaic weapons*
Cost: 1 to 1,000 kublars
Availability: Rare
Ammo: 20 arrows
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–10/30/50
Damage: STR+2D

Cogan Rifle

The forerunner of the ubiquitous multi-cogan, the cogan rifle still serves as a mainstay among those military units that cannot afford or access the more state-of-the-art weapon. The cogan rifle fires a lazed bolt of plasma at its target that sears through fabric, flesh, and other soft materials. The magazine contains both a power supply and a thermo-tank charged with plasma —when the ammunition runs out, simply swap out the clip and you've just renewed the weapon's main components. The cogan also has a fixture on the barrel for a dual-powered quiver-bayonet (inflicting STR+1D damage in combat).

Although the cogan doesn't have the other added features of the dreaded multi-cogan, it's much more readily available to groups looking for heavy firepower: lower-class mercenary companies, psycho-anarchists, underworld organizations, and pirate gangs. Many planetary militias also arm themselves with the cogan —it's much less expensive than the multi-cogan, doesn't require the same kind of military screening to purchase, and is much easier to maintain. Individuals carrying cogans still require permits, and many urban areas restrict open display of such heavy ordnance.

Type: Energy rifle
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 1,200 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Ammo: 100
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–50/100/300
Damage: 5D laser; STR+1D quiver-bayonet

Defense Pistol

"Defense pistol" covers a wide array of small guns used for personal defense. Most pack enough power for only five shots, deliver minimal damage, but are also easily concealed on one's person. They're well-suited for personal protection against the average street thug intent on parting you from your kublars. The defense pistol's small profile allows people to carry it without falling under suspicion of the authorities (who usually arm themselves with much larger ordnance). It's also a favorite firearm of insurgents, spies, and others requiring enough firepower to incapacitate an enemy and steal something better.

As a laser weapon, it requires a tremendous amount of power to discharge an energy burst. The power cell built into the weapon's handle only holds enough energy for five shots at a very low damage level. Most of the time that's just enough to ward off an attacker and save your life long enough to run away.

Type: Energy pistol
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 300 kublars
Availability: Common
Ammo: 5
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–5/9/15
Damage: 3D

Gauss Rifle

The gauss rifle works on the same basic principles as the spacecraft-mounted gauss cannon. It fires a gauss energy burst that disables the target's neuro-electrical system for a time, effectively stunning them (and making them twitch nervously for a short period thereafter). Local security forces favor this weapon when apprehending those they expect might put up violent resistance to their authority.

Law enforcement agencies also employ gauss rifles as the "heavy ordnance" to bring in and handle large mobs. The weapon's discharge also has an unhealthy effect on electronic devices, rendering them at least temporarily out of service, if not permanently useless.

Because gauss energy takes a lot of power to generate a discharge, the gauss rifle only has the capacity to fire about 25 bursts before its magazine needs recharging. Its specialized role with law enforcement agencies limits its use to such authorities —possession of such a weapon by civilians or outlawed groups is illegal, though some mercenary units operating under license from various governments may use them for particular missions.

Type: Energy rifle
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 750 kublars
Availability: Rare, X (illegal)
Ammo: 25
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–10/30/120
Damage: 5D stun damage

Heavy Service Pistol

This is the standard service sidearm issued to military personnel stationed aboard spacecraft. It possesses a shorter range and smaller energy capacity than the suprapistol —but then again, who wants superior firepower when discharging huge blasts of laser energy aboard a pressurized spacecraft?

The heavy service pistol often finds its way into the hands of paramilitary groups like mercenary companies, underworld organizations, and pirate bands.

Most folks can carry one with the proper official documentation, though the pistol is a bit too bulky to easily conceal on one's person.

Type: Energy pistol
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 300 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Ammo: 75
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–10/50/75
Damage: 5D

Laser Rifle

This lighter version of the cogan rifle is frequently used for hunting and personal defense on fringe colony worlds where the local constabulary maintains a weak presence and settlers are expected to fend for themselves. Many law enforcement units also use laser rifles when even average cogan's aren't available —or when the planetary monarchs live in fear of civilian security agencies rising up against their rule. It's a much more acceptable firearm for those with good cause to carry a rifle without giving them something of military quality.

Of course, psycho-insurgents, pirates, criminals, and others seeking greater firepower often modify their laser rifles with boosted power packs, improved infusion systems, and ranged sights, though these modifications make the weapon unreliable and prone to overload —unless modified by a professional arms engineer.

Type: Energy Rifle
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 1,100 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Ammo: 75
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–50/100/300
Damage: 4D

Multi-Cogan Rifle

The modern series of cogan rifles are commonly referred to as "multi-cogans" because their arms load-out profile contains numerous weapons. Like its predecessor, the multi-cogan discharges a bright, lazed bolt of plasma. The multi-cogan further focuses this beam, infusing more plasma into each laser blast. The user can also fire the mini-grenade launcher mounted beneath the weapon's main barrel, or engage in melee combat with a pop-out quiver-bayonet.

Despite its design for inflicting a greater variety of destruction, the multi-cogan is seldom seen in the hands of non-military personnel. Only very elite, officially authorized military units may arm themselves with multi-cogans: the Endoguard, authorized Maganat guard units, and high-level mercenary companies with special concessions to carry heavy weaponry. If you don't have proper and very official authorization to carry that multi-cogan and someone in authority catches you, be prepared for a swift execution with no chance of trial or appeal.

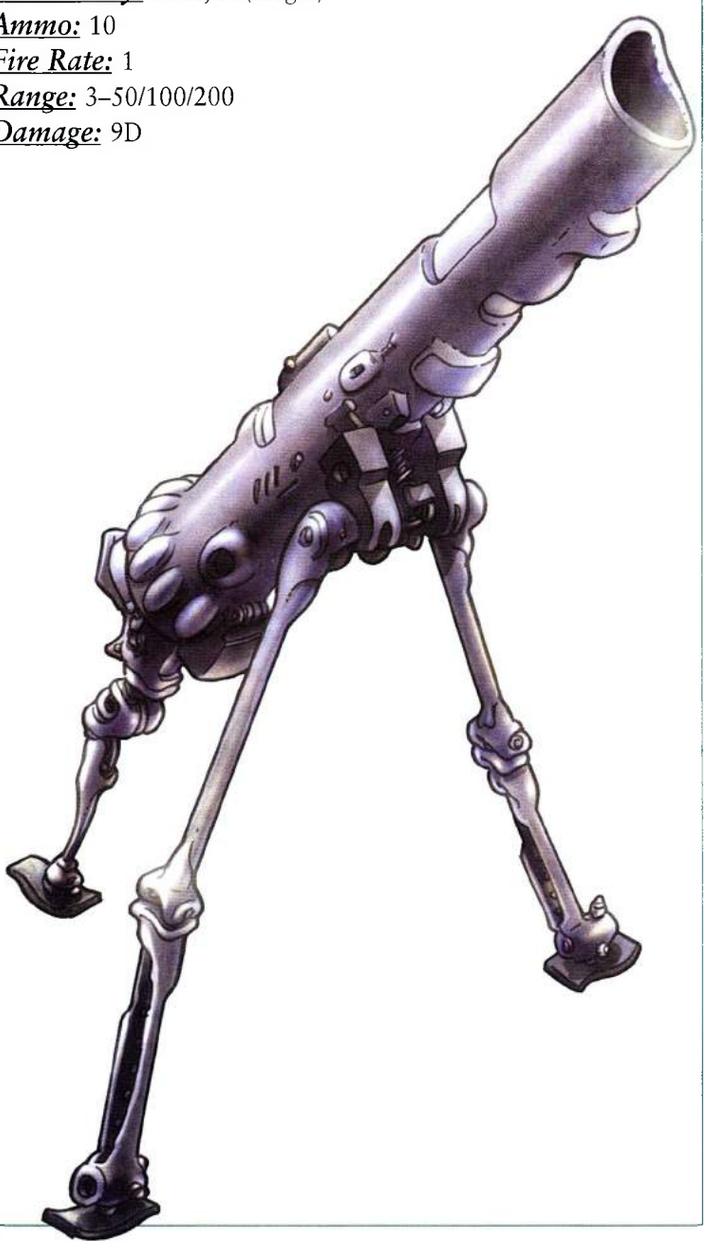
Type: Energy rifle
Skill: *Firearms, melee combat*
Cost: 3,400 kublars
Availability: Rare, X (illegal to possess)
Ammo: 150 laser; 10 mini-grenades
Fire Rate: 3 laser; 1 mini-grenade
Range: 3–75/150/300 laser; 5–25/100/200 mini-grenade
Damage: 6D laser; 4D+2 mini-grenade; STR+1D+2 quiver-bayonet

Sonic Bazooka

The sonic bazooka serves as a heavy anti-personnel weapon capable of inflicting damage against armored vehicles and structures. Military organizations employ this weapon as portable heavy fire support for infantry units, particularly those facing more formidable obstacles. It can be fired from one's shoulder like many standard mini-missile launchers, or from the tripod mount assembly for added stability.

The sonic bazooka fires an intense blast of variable-band sonic waves that tends to rip apart molecular bonds in the target. Such a discharge requires a massive amount of energy, so the bazooka's power slug is good for only 10 shots before it must be changed out for a fresh energy source. Carrying such a formidable weapon is highly illegal unless you can produce proper authorization. The bazooka's size and awkward shape keep people from concealing it on their persons —those transporting one covertly usually keep it in an oblong crate, covered by a tarpaulin, or hidden among pipes and other similar machinery.

Type: Energy rifle
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 2,600 kublars
Availability: Rare, X (illegal)
Ammo: 10
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–50/100/200
Damage: 9D



Pell-Stun Gun

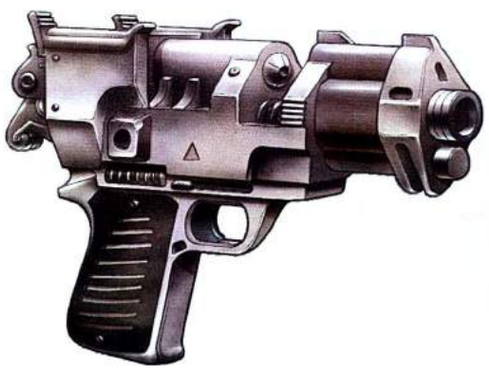
A cheaper and more acceptable alternative to crowd control than the gauss rifle, the pell-stun gun fires bullet-sized pellets that break on impact, spreading an ooze that dissolves clothing and acts as contact poison that stuns the target soon after its hit. The pell-stun gun has a greater ammunition capacity than the gauss rifle, and does not harm nearby electronic components —though organic materials hit with the pellets are at least discolored by the stun ooze. The gun is ineffective against targets wearing armor, and only works if the chemical ooze can eat through clothing and make contact with the target's natural skin.

Type: Stun gun
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 500 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Ammo: 50
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–10/30/60
Damage: 3D stun damage, effective on first round after target hit

Suprapistol

The suprapistol serves as the standard sidearm for many military units since it is a more powerful weapon than the heavy service pistol. With its greater range and ammunition capacity, the suprapistol has become the preferred firearm for most ground units, security forces, and elite guard corps. As such, most governments limit its distribution by requiring official permits to openly carry and use them. In many mercenary companies where the average infantry soldier carries a rifle or at best a service pistol, holstering a suprapistol at your side is a sign of authority. Many units allow only officers to carry suprapistols, though in more casual military organizations this protocol is lax.

Type: Energy pistol
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 350 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Ammo: 100
Fire Rate: 2
Range: 3–15/75/120
Damage: 5D



Viper Pistol

The Viper pistol serves as perhaps the most common civilian sidearm after defense pistols, no doubt thanks to the Viper Arms Corporation's vigorous advertising campaigns on holovids throughout the universe: "Protect yourself with the power of a Viper." The company produces several models of pistol (most with stats similar to those below) to better serve the various needs of its customers. Most models possess the capacity to fire a stunning burst of energy instead of one that wounds (inflicting the same amount of damage, only as "stun" damage).

Although slightly larger than a defense pistol, the Viper's profile still allows the bearer to conceal it on her person in a shoulder or pocket holster, or in the folds of a long coat or voluminous robe. Most authorities accept the Viper as the only allowable firearm in the hands of civilian professionals who need some degree of protection and offense in the natural course of their jobs. Those carrying a Viper still require a permit stating that local or galactic authorities officially allow them to bear such a sidearm.

Type: Energy pistol
Skill: *Firearms*
Cost: 300 kublars
Availability: Common, R (permit required)
Ammo: 50
Fire Rate: 1
Range: 3–10/30/60
Damage: 4D

Explosive Devices

Since governments consider explosives heavy weaponry, they frequently limit their distribution and use to official military groups: licensed mercenary companies, the Endoguard, planetary militias, Maganat forces, and anyone representing an official member of government, or of the Union of Planets militia. If you don't belong to one of these organizations and you're caught carrying, deploying, or using explosives without proper documentation, consider yourself dead. Most of these explosive devices have applications in the heat of combat, though many are intended for use (or can be modified for use) for structural obliteration. For more details, read over the description of the *demolitions* skill in the "Attributes & Skills" chapter.

Anti-Personnel Mine

Mines effectively guard against intrusion —often simply the posting of a "Minefield" sign is enough to deter the average intruder. Anti-personnel mines consist of an explosive charge, shrapnel plate, and a pressure-sensitive trigger in a casing that

focuses the blast upward (or in the direction of the target). Some mines use wire-triggers or small motion detectors instead of pressure sensors. Security forces deploy mines to guard areas normal patrols can't afford to watch frequently, or to deny enemy forces movement through a region (forcing them toward other established defenses or units).

Setting a mine requires a *demolitions* roll —the total becomes the difficulty number for intruders to spot mines, and evade their blast if triggered. The target may make a *dodge* roll to avoid the effects of the blast. If the *dodge* roll exceeds the *demolitions* roll made to set the charge, the target manages to leap to the next highest range of the blast radius from where he stands. Targets take damage depending on their distance from the actual mine (see the "blast radius" rating below).

Type: Explosive
Skill: *Demolitions*
Cost: 1,000 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Blast Radius: 0–2/4/6/10
Damage: 5D/4D/3D/2D

Grenade

Grenades are fragmentation explosives consisting of a metal casing surrounding a fuse and detonation packet. Once the grenade is armed, the user tosses it at the target (using the *throwing* skill). Most grenades employ a timed burn fuse giving the user about five seconds to throw the explosive after arming. Specialized grenades allow for setting an electronic or mechanical fuse for anywhere from five to 60 seconds, while others have impact fuses that detonate when the grenade hits a hard surface.

The inner explosive charge detonates, fracturing the outer metal casing and sending thousands of sharp splinters of shrapnel throughout the blast radius. Grenades are ideal for clearing close quarters, as long as the user is out of the blast radius, or better yet, shielded by cover. Soldiers commonly toss grenades around corners, into trenches, through windows, and into any enclosed spaces where hard walls will stop shrapnel from injuring the user and his comrades.

Type: Explosive
Skill: *Throwing*
Cost: 50 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Blast Radius: 0–2/4/6/10
Damage: 5D/4D/3D/2D

Military Explosive Charge

The standard military explosive charge serves to blow bridges, buildings, hatches, and other structures impeding a unit's progress. It consists of a fist-sized block of plastic composite easily molded to fit into cracks or to form a shaped charge. Although fire won't set it off, electrical discharges will, whether they come from an electronic timer, sensor detonator, stun baton, or gauss rifle.

Military explosives ignite hot and fast, inflicting much of their damage within a one-meter radius of detonation. Experts frequently set several charges together to achieve the desired effect. In most cases, they intend to destroy or damage some structural target. Damage from these blasts to personnel farther than a few meters usually comes from the destroyed structure itself and not from the explosives. Clever demolitions experts, however, can set these charges to tear through certain substances (sheet metal, bolts, rocks) and create a shower of shrapnel that conveys the explosive's full force on nearby personnel.

Type: Explosive
Scale: Vehicle scale
Skill: *Demolitions*
Cost: 200 kublars per block
Availability: Rare, X (illegal)
Damage: 1D per block

OKO Mini-Bomb

Governments throughout the universe horde these powerful explosives, hoping to keep them out of the hands of pirates, insurgents, and other enemies bent on destroying galactic peace, order, and prosperity. Official military units resort to mini-bombs in the most dire of tactical situations to dispatch opposing forces or destroy major targets on the battlefield. Most authorities don't even let trusted mercenary companies play with these things.

OKO mini-bombs are miniature thermonuclear fission devices packing an incredible punch. Instead of dispersing clouds of shrapnel amidst the enemy, the bombs incinerate the target at the molecular level. Their damage and blast radius is greater than any other explosive device deployed at the personnel level.

No larger than a child's fist, the bomb's inner workings are protected by a silvered exterior. A small interface node allows basic detonation programming, usually triggered by an electrical impulse from a timer, impact, or radio signal fuse. With the help of a demolitions expert, a skilled surgeon can even implant OKO mini-bombs inside a person's body for remote detonation. This expensive and risky practice sometimes helps keep captured criminals or state hostages under control.

Psycho-anarchists love these devices because they're small, difficult to detect, and deliver a nasty blast. Since the authorities maintain strict control of OKO mini-bombs, they're rarely found even on the black market. Anyone unauthorized personnel caught with them may be summarily executed by security forces at any level of government.

Type: Explosive
Scale: Vehicle scale
Skill: *Demolitions*
Cost: 3,000 kublars
Availability: Rare, X (illegal)
Blast Radius: 3–5/10/20
Damage: 10D

Stun Grenade

Some explosives are designed to stun opponents rather than slice them apart with shrapnel or incinerate them with miniature nuclear blasts. Stun grenades contain a small explosive core that blows a plastic casing specially designed to stun targets. When it detonates, the grenade's sonic blast and sudden shift in atmospheric pressure (especially in enclosed spaces) disorients targets for several rounds, effectively stunning them. Those unfortunate to touch the grenade when it detonates only sustain 1D of lethal damage, but everyone within a 3-meter radius takes 4D stun damage. Local militias frequently use stun grenades to clear holes in unruly mobs and encourage their dispersal. Military units also find stun grenades helpful in capturing enemy personnel, creating diversions, or disorienting the enemy before an offensive.

Type: Explosive
Skill: *Throwing*
Cost: 50 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Blast Radius: 3 meters
Damage: 4D stun damage

Armor

Armor offers only minimum protection against most modern weapons, and weighs the wearer down with bulky clothing that often limits his agility and speed. Many military forces still rely on armor, sometimes as a uniform tradition and other times to remain prepared and protected from a variety of threats. Armor provides the user with a bonus to her *Strength* roll when resisting damage.

Sometimes this bonus depends on the nature of the weapon, particularly if it is an energy weapon or one with more solid, physical components (like bullets or shrapnel). Some armor only covers a portion of the body, while other suits enclose much of the wearer behind padding, hardened plastic sheets, and ablative armor pieces. Armor is not effective against electrical or explosive stun devices (like the gauss rifle or stun grenade).

Armor Pieces

Those who cannot afford armored suits or new armor frequently take what they can get. They purchase bits and pieces of armor, or they scavenge undamaged armor from the battlefield or fallen opponents. Many pirate gangs, insurgent factions, and some lower-class mercenary units acquire their armor in this manner. Armor pieces represent bits of entire protective suits, helmets worn with no other protection, and improvised armor: a breastplate here, pauldron there, greave or armored gauntlet. They don't provide as much protection as a fully integrated armor suit, and they're often rendered useless after one or two hits.

Type: Personal armor
Cost: Variable; often 500 to 8,000 kublars
Availability: Uncommon
Game Notes: Armor pieces provide no more than +1D STR protection, more often only +1 or +2 STR.

Half This Equipment Is Illegal!

Yep, you're right —if any authorities at the local, planetary, or galactic level catch you with some of this stuff, you've just won yourself a one-way ticket to a prison planet like Aquaend... or worse, summary execution at the hands of some trigger-happy Endoguard.

So how do you get some of this gear and the permits to authorize you to carry them?

That's where someone like me enters the scene. The universe is full of people holding down legitimate jobs who use their minimal power and authority to make a few kublars on the side bending the law for kindly folks like you. Go to the right places, bribe the right people, and you can get your hands on anything —including heavy weaponry and the licenses to back you.

Looking for illegal ordnance? Bribe the guy shipping it to the local constabulary, authorized mercenary company, or planetary armory. Slip the armory quartermaster a crate-load of kublars to accidentally "misplace" a case of multi-cogans... misplacing it right into the back of your waiting aircar. Need a permit for those? Half these enterprising administrators can forge one for you (and those look really official, too). If not, you can find forgers of high quality in the more seedy sections of town. Sure, they'll charge you more than you can afford, but it's all worth it when the Endoguard wants to see your data authorization to carry that multi-cogan.

Armored Vest

Members of local security forces, planetary militias, and middle-grade military units frequently protect themselves with vests padded and plated to resist various attacks. Most consist of polyfiber weave, hardened flexi-alloys, and ablative plates in pockets for easy replacement. They offer basic protection from most attacks, but only those aimed at the torso and shoulders. Some drape down over the upper legs like a tunic, increasing the defense profile only slightly. Some vests are custom-made vests to be worn beneath one's clothing undetected, though these cost more than your average armored vest.

Type: Personal armor
Cost: 2,000 kublars
Availability: Common
Game Notes: Provides +1D STR for resisting damage inflicted against the torso only.

Endoguard Armor

The armor the elite Endoguards wear consists of an entire suit of protective clothing and armored plates, plus a helmet packed with various electronic battle aids. The suit is extremely bulky, cumbersome in tight spaces, and a handicap to the untrained soldier. It still offers an incredible amount of coverage equally effective against most weapons short of those using electronic bursts, or sonic stun technologies.

The base body suit provides temperature control for maximum comfort in most climates and varying heat conditions. Various ceramic armor plates, heavy ablative fabrics, and flexi-alloy joiners cover the base suit in an assembly that often takes upwards of 30 minutes to don.

Non-Endoguard personnel caught wearing Endoguard armor are immediately executed without trial or appeal. After combat action, the Endoguard or their support personnel often scour the battlefield to retrieve fallen comrades... and their valuable armor.

Type: Personal armor
Cost: Not available for sale
Availability: Rare, X (illegal)
Game Notes: +2D against all attacks, –1D to Agility and related skills. Helmet includes headset comm, breather unit, and visor with ambient light scanning system (+1D to Perception and related visual skills in low-light conditions) and rangefinder magnifier (+2D to Perception and related visual skills to notice targets more than 100 meters away).

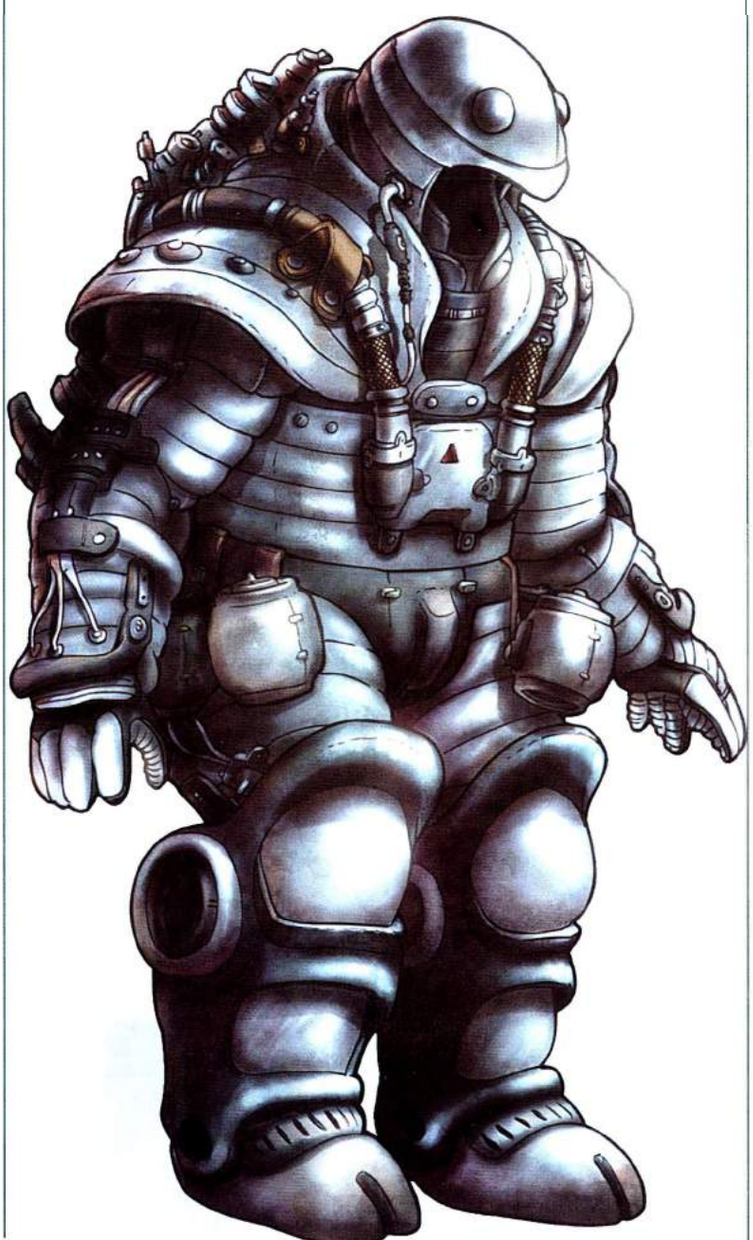
Mercenary Armor

Very elite or well-funded mercenary companies often equip their infantry soldiers with bulky armor specially fitted for the unexpected rigors of the battlefield. While not as effective as Endoguard armor, it still uses many of the basic principles of protection. Commanders reserve armor for those soldiers expected to face the heavy fire, charge a well-fortified position, or otherwise require as much protection as possible.

Mercenary armor offers the best defense for infantry in the field, though it's sometimes cumbersome and makes boarding or debarking through tight hatches of some transports nearly impossible. Besides the usual helmet, ablative plates, reinforced materials, and temperature-controlled body suit, the armor offers plenty of clips, straps, and closures for securing gear, grenades, and weapons right onto the suit.

Most mercenary companies adorn their armor with unit insignia for easy identification in the confusion of combat. This practice also makes it difficult for others to steal and use these suits, as removing the decorative insignia often visibly damages parts of the armor.

Type: Personal armor
Cost: 6,000 kublars
Availability: Uncommon, R (permit required)
Game Notes: +2D physical, +1D energy, –1D *Agility* and related skills. Helmet includes headset comm, breather unit, and visor with ambient light scanning system (+1D to *Perception* and related visual skills in low-light conditions).



Cybernetics

Battlefield injuries sometimes lead to amputation of a limb or loss of a sensory organ. Modern Techno-Techno science can replace these losses with cybernetic prosthetics that perform the same function as the lost member using biotechnology, surgery, and bioelectric interfaces.

For many civilians, cybernetics are unnatural and unfortunate replacements for one's lost flesh and humanity. Most military personnel, however, accept cybernetic prosthetics as a way of life, and some even come to view them as trophies of past achievements and survival in combat.

Cybernetic surgery is always a risky procedure, and is rarely undertaken voluntarily because of the mild cultural stigma and the extremely prohibitive expense. Many soldiers with cybernetics received these prosthetics as gifts from wealthy patrons, generous benefactor corporations, considerate commanders, or the aristocrats they served. Many whom cybernetics might save are left on the battlefield or in the field hospital to die of their wounds, or somehow survive with their physical loss.

Most cybernetic prosthetics simply replace the function of the lost limb or sense, allowing the character to retain his natural attributes of *Agility*, *Perception*, and *Strength*. Scientists can enhance existing cybernetics with various modifications offering game bonuses to skills and attributes, though these are extremely expensive in both kublars and humanity (represented by a Character Point cost), and often earn the character some small degree of suspicion from average people aware of the modification.

Below you'll find game information on several of the most common cybernetic replacements, along with suggestions for enhancements. Costs include prices for the material replacement as well as required surgery and medical rehabilitation. Remember, though, that most civilians generally distrust (if not fear) people who openly flaunt their cybernetics, whether replacements or modifications.

Audio

Blasts, shocks, shrapnel, and other battlefield dangers can easily destroy a soldier's hearing. Cybernetic audio replacements restore hearing through minute implants in the ear region that provide aural reception through artificial tympanic membranes, resonator canals, and a delicate neuro-electric interface. The minute assembly functions quite like a miniature bio-electrical microphone able to differentiate between soft and loud sounds, various pitches, and all the complexities of modern spoken language. The audio cybernetic replacement restores a character's natural *Perception* for all audio-related skill checks so he may function as if he never lost his hearing.

Type: Cybernetic replacement
Cost: 8,000 kublars
Availability: Rare
Game Notes: Character's *Perception* returns to the die code before the injury.

Audio Modifications

Characters whose ear structure is replaced by cybernetics may opt to add one of the following modifications to the electronic prosthesis.

Boosted Hearing: Using enhanced electronics, the character gains the ability to hear more clearly over longer distances. He gets a +1D bonus to all audio-based *Perception* and *search* rolls. Cost: 750 kublars, 10 Character Points.

Comm Receiver: A miniature transceiver is imbedded in the cybernetic prosthetic, with a pick-up fiber-optic wire directed at the vocal chords, giving the character a device similar to an implanted headset comm (see above). It may be activated by voice, incoming transmissions, or by pressing a control node near the ear. Cost: 1,200 kublars, 12 Character Points.

Translator Chip: A micro-processor linked to the cybernetic aural replacement can help the character understand unfamiliar languages and dialects. It provides +1D to all *languages* rolls related to hearing and understanding a new tongue, though it offers no bonuses to actually speaking it. Cost: 1,200 kublars, 15 Character Points.

Arm

Losing one's arm at any joint is a traumatic shock to people, even the most battle-hardened warrior. Using an assembly of metal rods, hydraulic muscle pumps, and flex-joiners, a cybernetic arm can fully restore the natural arm's strength and manual dexterity.

Type: Cybernetic replacement
Cost: 19,000 kublars
Availability: Rare
Game Notes: Character regains the use of his arm at the same attribute die codes as before the injury.

Arm Modifications

Much of the cybernetic prosthesis replacing the lost arm is filled with the inner workings that replicate a natural arm's function. Scientists still manage to find room for various modifications concealed within the cyber-arm housing that are rarely noticed by all but the most careful observers. Characters may purchase one of the modifications below for their cybernetic arm. They may also purchase a modification to the hand portion of the arm assembly, as detailed for "Hand" below.

Device: Surgeons can implant and interface a small device into the arm assembly. Such devices function as normal, but either pop out or have other external access when used. Devices commonly integrated into cybernetic arms include pop-out lumas, comm transceivers, and secret compartments. Cost: 2,000 kublars, 7 Character Points.

Concealed Blade: A small blade can pop out of the cybernetic arm housing at the user's command or touch, providing a melee weapon equivalent to a combat knife and inflicting STR+1D damage on opponents. Cost: 3,000 kublars, 10 Character Points.

Enhanced Strength: Reinforced housing and joiners, plus sturdier construction and materials provide the user with +1D *Strength* when the arm is used for inflicting *brawling* or *melee combat* damage, when lifting objects, or for *Strength*-essential *climb/jump* rolls. Cost: 3,000 kublars, 10 Character Points.
Pop-Up Pistol: A miniature defense pistol discharge assembly is installed parallel to the forearm for ease of aiming. Use the stats for the defense pistol above, except this weapon's capacitors only have enough power for three discharges that inflict 3D damage. Cost: 5,000 kublars, 19 Character Points.

Hand

Some combatants are fortunate enough only to lose a hand. These are more easily replaced than entire arms and legs, but require no less attention to detail than any risky cybernetic replacement surgery. The cybernetic prosthetic restores all the hand's natural manual dexterity and strength, allowing the character to function normally again.

Type: Cybernetic replacement
Cost: 10,000 kublars
Availability: Rare
Game Notes: Character regains the use of his hand at the same attribute die codes as before the injury.

Hand Modifications

The cybernetic assembly replacing the hand requires many more internal workings to simulate a natural hand's dexterity and flexibility, leaving little room for modifications. Engineers still manage to fit useful, miniaturized equipment among the rods and control joiners, or along the hand's outer casing. Characters who can afford them may opt for one of the modifications below for their cybernetic hand. Characters with cybernetic arms may also have one enhancement in their arm housing as well.
Mini-Blade: A small blade is concealed somewhere within the hand, often along the outer edge or within the tip of one of the fingers. The blade inflicts STR+2 damage in combat, and may be used for other applications where a sharp blade might prove effective. Cost: 1,500 kublars, 7 Characters Points.
Stun Tips: Cybernetic finger tips can be linked to a burst capacitor, making the hand a small stun baton (see above) that inflicts 2D stun damage on opponents when hit. The burst capacitor can deliver three such shocks before requiring recharge. Cost: 1,700 kublars, 15 Character Points.
Reinforced Casing: +2 to Strength when inflicting brawling damage or crushing small objects in their hand. Cost: 1,200 kublars, 7 Character Points.

Leg

Cybernetic leg prostheses replace the lost limb and restore all balance and dexterity a leg possesses. A character regains any *Agility* or Move lost because of leg amputation. The cybernetic housing and components are strong enough to support the person's natural body weight and perform all the regular functions of one's leg.

Type: Cybernetic replacement
Cost: 25,000 kublars
Availability: Rare
Game Notes: Character's *Agility* returns to the die code before the injury.

Leg Modifications

Although it's the largest cybernetic prosthesis, legs contain little room for additions because their workings must support body weight and enable locomotion. Engineers modifying the hydraulic assemblies and outer housings can still achieve one of the enhanced effects noted below.
Enhanced Strength: The artificial leg's inner workings and outer casing are reinforced, providing a +1D bonus to *Strength* rolls when using the leg for bashing or kicking. Cost: 3,500 kublars, 10 Character Points.
Spring Weight: Boosted high-speed hydraulic pistons and light-weight yet sturdy components help increase the character's ability to jump, providing a +1D bonus to *climb/jump* skill rolls for jumping. Cost: 4,000 kublars, 10 Character Points.

Ocular

Replacing one's eyes is a delicate surgical and cybernetic procedure, but they restore vision and negate any *Perception* penalties for vision-based skills. Visual prosthetics are perhaps the most disconcerting to others, as they don't even come close to simulating the appearance of one's lost eye. The bulging metal cyber-eye makes others uneasy —characters with this modification suffer a –2D penalty to all *Perception* rolls for social interaction skills like *bargain*, *con*, and *persuasion*.

Type: Cybernetic replacement
Cost: 10,000 kublars
Availability: Rare
Game Notes: Character's vision (and therefore *Perception*) returns to normal before the injury, but he also suffers a –2D penalty to all *Perception* rolls for social interaction skills like bargain, con, and persuasion.

Ocular Modifications

Visual cybernetics remain tricky, not as much to the amount of physical machinery in an artificial eye, but because of innumerable complexities of a neuro-electrical interface between the ocular processor and the optic nerve. But with enough surgery, additional processors, and a few fiber-optic implants, those with ocular prosthesis can opt for one of the modifications below.
Night Vision: Low-light processors focus ambient light, effectively allowing the character to see in the dark. The character receives a +1D bonus to his *Perception* for vision-

based skill rolls in darkened conditions. Cost: 1,500 kublars, 10 Character Points.

Ranged Sight: A series of telescoping lenses implanted in the cybernetic eye boost vision range, much like range goggles. The character gains a +2D bonus to *Perception* and related visual skills to notice objects more than 100 meters away. Cost: 1,700 kublars, 19 Character Points.

Target Vision: The character gains the ability to use the eye to sight targets, giving him a +1D bonus to her *firearms* skill when using the prosthetic eye. This requires risky surgery to implant a micro-processor for the targeting programming, plus a fiber-optic command and control link to one's arm. For this option to become effective, the character's gun arm must be a cybernetic prosthesis that can be wired into the target vision programming with minimal modification. Cost: 2,500 kublars, 25 Character Points.

Robots

Robots slave away as the universe's ubiquitous servants. They're always underfoot, no matter how hard they try to stay out of your way. They perform an astounding variety of menial tasks, heavy work, and dangerous assignments, and are subjected to abuse and scorn from their owners and others who don't fully appreciate the subtle nuances of their form and programming.

Commoners and other members of the middling classes can rarely afford robots, though some, like tele-broadcasters, rely on simple robots for their jobs. Maganats and corporations frequently employ robots, partly because they represent "cheap" labor that doesn't belong to a lower social class, but also because they're a fashionable sign of one's wealth.

You'll notice that the robots described below include stats similar to those of characters. While the attributes are often much lower than human norms, they balance with the skills and specialized components robots use to accomplish their tasks.

Ant Robots

These small, four-legged robots resemble armored ants, with miniature tools at their head where you'd normally find an ant's mandibles. Like their namesake, they're most effective in swarms. One ant robot can perform minor technical tasks: repairs, modifications, even monitoring machinery. Several ant robots can pool their abilities and accomplish greater technical tasks. A swarm of ant robots can undertake the most daunting repairs, crawling where no human could manage to fit to access vital technical components.

Although ant robots operate independently of humans —they will not combine actions with humans or even work in conjunction with them— they're relatively cheap (as robots go), don't take up much space, and hide in their "nest" (a modular tech-hive) when inactive so they don't get underfoot all the time.

Ant robots respond to commands for repair and maintenance jobs from the computer controlling the machinery they're assigned to. Humans can provide orders to them through the machinery's computer interface. This computer link and their internal remote interface units allow swarms of ant robots to automatically combine actions for *Technical* skills (see the section on "Combined Actions" in the chapter on "The Rules" for more details and examples on how combined actions work). For instance, six ant robots working together on a spacecraft engine would roll 5D (3D for the skill, with a +2D bonus for six robots combining actions) for their *flight systems repair* skill.

Type: Repair robot
AGILITY 2D
KNOWLEDGE 1D
MECHANICAL 1D
PERCEPTION 1D
STRENGTH 1D
TECHNICAL 1D
Flight systems repair 3D, *gunnery repair* 3D, *vehicle repair* 3D
Specialized Components:
Tool Node: Contains miniature versions of common tools, enabling ant robots to accomplish various repair and maintenance tasks.
Gripper Feet: Magneto-suction nodules on the robot's conical feet allow it to grip to most relatively smooth surfaces for firm stability during repair work.
Move: 7
Size: 0.4 meters long
Cost: 340 kublars each

Floater Cam

Tele-broadcasters use floater cams when reporting stories in the field and filming footage to edit later into their news stories. Like many similar robots who float nearby to provide lighting, surveillance, or security, floater cams employ simple programming allowing them to follow instructions from their master and carry out the jobs for which they were designed. Floater cams are essentially very dumb robots who obey simple commands to focus on objects, zoom in, pan the scene, record, hover, and follow their masters.

Although many models are available, most floater cams are spherical or semi-circular in design, with anti-grav impellers on their underside, and a camera lens, spotlight, and pick-up microphone assembly on one face (though sometimes the microphone and spotlight are mounted on a little mechanical armature extending from one side). Recording equipment is safely housed inside the robot's casing near its central processing and navigation unit. Floater cams record material onto a variety of storage media —disks, rods, crystals, chips— one can view and even edit on devices such as io boards.

Masters direct their floater cams with simple voice commands. Identification software helps the robot tell the difference between its master's voice and other sounds, making it stupidly loyal to its owner. These protocols can be overridden with a good amount of tampering. More sophisticated (and expensive) models use a remote unit to transmit commands.

Type: Media robot
AGILITY 2D
0-G maneuver 3D

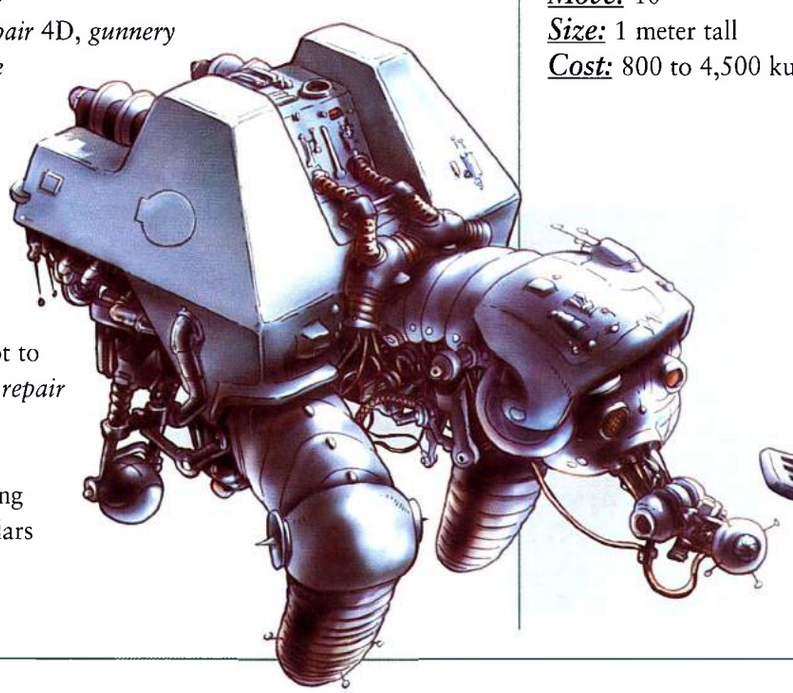
KNOWLEDGE 1D
MECHANICAL 1D
PERCEPTION 2D
STRENGTH 1D
TECHNICAL 1D
Specialized Components:
Anti-Grav Impeller: Allows movement above the ground with a flight ceiling of 50 meters.
Recording Assembly: Permits the floater cam to record images and sound onto various data media.
Spotlight: A small spotlight provides enough illumination for a human standing up to 5 meters away.
Move: 10
Size: 0.4 meters diameter
Cost: 3,500 kublars

Heavy Service Unit

These large technical robots undertake jobs that are too difficult for even swarms of ant robots: lifting heavy machinery, overhauling large pieces of equipment, flushing ventilation systems. Although they can accomplish different tasks than ant robots, they're limited by their greater size and clunkiness. Since heavy mechanical components fill much of their housing, there's only room enough for a small processor. Heavy service robots have an infamous reputation for clumsiness and idiocy.

These robots respond to simple verbal commands from their masters. Tools for performing repair duties extend from the robot's head on a manipulator armature, though larger tools are housed in the robot's hulking body.

Type: Repair robot
AGILITY 1D
KNOWLEDGE 1D
MECHANICAL 1D
PERCEPTION 1D
STRENGTH 4D
Lift 6D
TECHNICAL 2D
Flight systems repair 4D, *gunnery repair* 3D, *vehicle repair* 4D
Specialized Components:
Tool Armature: Includes tools useful in most repair situations, enabling the robot to effectively use its *repair* skills.
Move: 7
Size: 2 meters long
Cost: 2,400 kublars

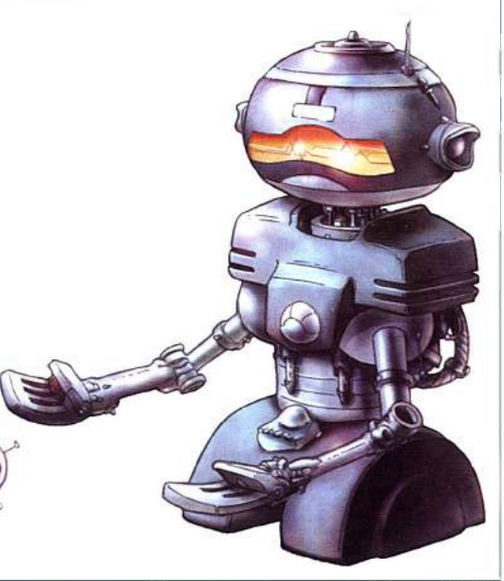


Servant Robot

Aristocratic households, wealthy space yachts, and nobles' country estates teem with servant robots of all shapes and sizes. Some hover, others waddle on legs, and a few still use old-fashioned treads for mobility. They wait in the wings for their master's every command, often anticipating his behavior and desires before he even voices an order.

Engineers designed these robots to operate as the perfect servants. As robots, they lack the freedom of will possessed by human servants. They undertake their duties without complaint. When their services are not needed, they wander off to some dark corner and shut down for a while. They're even designed smaller than the average human so their head is usually below the level of their master's. Many have an anthropomorphic shape (at least from the waist up) to better facilitate interaction with humans. The head contains a visual interface for better communication and information gathering, plus a comm antenna to receive radio commands from their masters if needed. Two fine manipulators mounted on extended armatures serve the purpose of hands and arms. Servant robot programming stresses obedience, respect, quiet operation, and prompt execution of commands.

Type: Servant robot
AGILITY 2D
KNOWLEDGE 2D
Cultures 3D, languages 3D
MECHANICAL 1D
PERCEPTION 2D
STRENGTH 1D
Lifting 2D
TECHNICAL 1D
Specialized Components:
2 Fine Manipulators: Assume the role of arms and hands the robot can apply to a variety of tasks.
Remote Comm Antenna: Allows the robot to receive orders transmitted from its master.
Visual Interface: Helps the robot communicate by absorbing and displaying visual information.
Move: 10
Size: 1 meter tall
Cost: 800 to 4,500 kublars



VEHICLES

Spaceships help you move around the universe from system to system, and from orbit to a planet's surface. We'll talk about those in the next chapter. But assuming you start on a planet somewhere, you'll need some transportation to get from place to place. Vehicles help you do that. Most fly through the atmosphere like spaceships, though some still travel along the ground, and

fewer still skim the waves of oceans.
I only have time to tell you about the most popular and prevalent vehicles in this chapter —those classified as aircars and military vehicles— but don't let that limit you. The Metabarons universe is huge, with all manner of conveyances getting folks from here to there on planets. Like everything else in this game, this information serves as a guideline for your own game.
You can use these vehicle stats for "standard" transportation, or customize them to suit your game's own needs.

Vehicle Statistics

Each vehicle in this section uses a variety of statistics to represent its capabilities in the game. Most of these vehicle codes are not necessary all the time, but they provide valuable background data on the vehicle. Most of the time you just need to know the vehicle's scale, skill, move, maneuverability, body strength, and relevant weapon codes. The stats are presented in the following order:

Class: The vehicle's general classification (aircar, trankar, submersible), sometimes including the vehicle's manufacturer and model number.
Scale: The vehicle's scale —usually vehicle scale— used for the "scale" rules detailed in the "Combat and Injuries" chapter.
Length: The vehicle's length in meters.
Skill: The skill used to operate the vehicle, usually *vehicle operation*, *piloting*, or *exoskeleton operation*.
Crew: The standard crew complement of the vehicle, followed by the gunners (in addition to the crew). The "minimum" lists the minimum number needed to operate the vehicle, as well as the penalty added to all operation difficulty numbers because of the smaller crew.
Passengers: The number of passengers the vehicle can carry.
Cargo Capacity: The maximum mass of cargo a vehicle can carry.
Cover: The amount of cover the vehicle provides for passengers. This is listed as Full, 3/4, 1/2, 1/4 or none—relevant modifiers are discussed in the chapter on "Combat & Injuries."
Altitude Range: For anti-grav and flying vehicles only. The minimum and maximum operating altitude for the vehicle assuming standard gravity and standard atmosphere density.
Maneuverability: This die code represents the craft's maneuvering capabilities, and is added to the driver's roll whenever he makes an *operation* total, including for movement and vehicle dodges.
Move: The distance, in meters, covered by each move; the vehicle's maximum speed in kilometers per standard hour.
Body Strength: The vehicle rolls this die code to resist damage in combat.
Shields: Some vehicles have shields. See the rules for shields in the chapter on "Space Travel & Combat."
Sensors: A few vehicles have sophisticated sensors packages boosting scanning capabilities. The first number represents the maximum effective range in meters or kilometers, the second die code shows the bonus to all *sensors* rolls using these instruments.
Ordnance: The number and type of weapon on the vehicle. Fire-linked means the weapons are linked and fire as one group. Otherwise, each weapon may be fired separately.

Fire Arc: Fore, aft, port, starboard, or turret. Turret weapons may fire in all four arcs.
Crew: The crew necessary to operate the weapon. If there is no gunner listing, the weapon may be fired by the driver.
Scale: The weapon's scale is listed only if different than the vehicle's scale.
Skill: The skill used to fire the weapon, usually *gunnery*.
Fire Control: Add these dice whenever the gunner shoots at a target, since they represent computer-assisted target acquisition and sighting.
Range: The weapon's short, medium, and long ranges in meters. If a weapon has four listings, they represent point-blank, short, medium and long ranges; for these weapons, anything shorter than point-blank range requires a Very Difficult weapon total to hit in combat.
Damage: This is the weapon's damage.

Crew Skill: Typical skill codes for crewmembers trained for particular duties aboard vehicles. Use these stats when characters meet vehicles of this type and you need gamemaster character skills to run encounters and combat.

Aircars

Aircars are the most prevalent personal vehicles in the universe. They include craft of various classifications: flitters, powered gliders, floaters, air taxis. If you can afford one —or your employer can, and lets you borrow it— it provides speedy, anti-grav transportation through city streets, above crowds, and in some cases, high above the atmosphere. Some companies operate aircar taxi services, while others run larger aircar omnibuses. Local and planetary security forces use armed aircars to maintain peace and order, and companies use larger aircar transports to ferry goods among corporate installations on a world's surface.

Open Aircar

Aircars with open tops are the standard mode of private transportation in urban areas with weather control or vast enclosed spaces. They're much easier to hop in and out of, and provide much better visibility for the driver, passengers, and paying tourists. As civilian craft, they mount no weapons, but still provide decent cover. Open aircars are relatively affordable for the naturally wealthier classes.

Class: Aircar
Scale: Vehicle
Length: Varies; 2–4 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 1
Passengers: Varies; 2–6
Cargo Capacity: 25 kilograms
Cover: 1/2
Altitude Range: Ground level–300 meters
Maneuverability: 2D
Move: 90; 260 kph
Body Strength: 2D+2
Shields: None
Sensors: None
Ordnance: None
Crew Skill: *piloting 4D*

Security Aircar

Some security and militia forces deploy armed aircars to provide air support to ground forces, patrol vast regions of a planet's surface, and otherwise maintain peace and order. They often escort spaceships in- and outbound to docking areas, respond to and provide cover for civilian emergencies, and monitor other atmospheric traffic. Security aircars mount light weaponry and fully enclose the cockpit with minimal armor. Although these craft are no match to real space fighters, they still pose a threat to the average ground force, and keep even armed civilian mobs in line.

Class: Aircar
Scale: Vehicle
Length: 5 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 1
Passengers: None
Cargo Capacity: 50 kilograms
Cover: Full
Altitude Range: Ground level–25 km
Maneuverability: 3D
Move: 520; 1,500 kph
Body Strength: 3D+2
Shields: None
Sensors: 1 km/1D
Ordnance:

1 Auto Cannon

Fire Arc: Fore
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Range: 300/1/2 km
Damage: 4D

Crew Skill: *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 4D, *piloting* 4D+2, *sensors* 3D

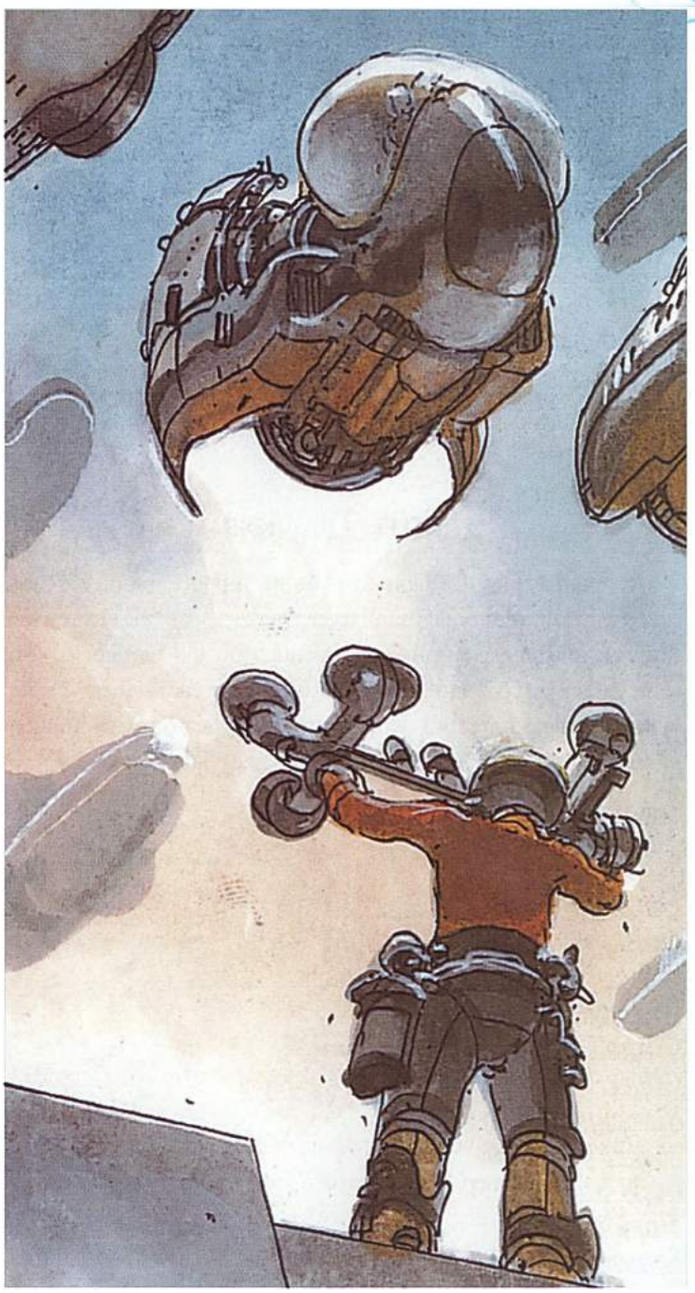
Aircar Transport

Transport aircars are designed especially for hauling cargo from one location to another —between cities on a planet, or from one docking hangar to a corporate warehouse in another neighborhood. Some use an open payload area for easier access, while some fully enclose the payload for security concerns, privacy, or to provide more space for advertising. In most cases the operator's cockpit is fully enclosed. Because they haul large loads, aircar transports have low altitude ranges and minimal maneuverability.

Class: Aircar
Scale: Vehicle
Length: Varies: 7–10 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 1
Passengers: 1
Cargo Capacity: 1 metric ton
Cover: Full
Altitude Range: Ground level
Maneuverability: 1D
Move: 35; 100 kph
Body Strength: 3D
Shields: None
Sensors: None
Ordnance: None
Crew Skill: *piloting 4D*

Mercenary Vehicles

Mercenaries —and other military organizations— employ various ground vehicles capable of handling greater armor and weaponry than lighter anti-grav craft. Although they don't have the advantages of rapid movement and variable altitude that aircars possess, military ground vehicles are more durable and capable in the combat zone. One rarely finds them outside the possession of mercenary, security, and militia forces that can afford to sink their hard-earned profits or government subsidies into maintaining and repairing such combat vehicles.



Recon Buggy

Military forces without the advantage of air reconnaissance —or who don't want to give away their presence by using aircars for intelligence gathering— use ground vehicles with minimal armament and weaponry that still retain some degree of speed and maneuverability. Recon buggies provide mobility and protection for one driver (who also serves as an observer) and a gunner crewing a weapon to cover the buggy's retreat if discovered by enemy forces. The vehicles are driven by tracks similar to trankars, or sometimes use wheels with oversized all-terrain tires.

Class: Fast recon vehicle
Scale: Vehicle
Length: 4 meters
Skill: *Vehicle operation*
Crew: 1, gunners: 1
Passengers: None
Cargo Capacity: 30 kilograms
Cover: 1/2
Maneuverability: 2D
Move: 45; 130 kph
Body Strength: 2D+2
Shields: None
Sensors: 1.5 km/1D
Ordnance:

Light Tail Cannon
Fire Arc: Aft
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Range: 3–75/200/500
Damage: 3D

Crew Skill: *gunnery* 4D, *sensors* 3D, *vehicle operation* 5D

Light Trankar

Mercenaries like the light trankar to support infantry action because it's more mobile than larger trankars, provides heavy fire support, and doesn't stand out as much on the battlefield. The vehicle can just fit into the hold of a mercenary drop-carrier, making it ideal for rapid deployment or extraction with infantry forces supported by recon buggies and other light trankars.

Class: Trankar
Scale: Vehicle
Length: 8 meters
Skill: *Vehicle operation*
Crew: 2, gunners: 1
Passengers: None
Cargo Capacity: 100 kilograms
Cover: Full
Maneuverability: 1D
Move: 30; 90 kph
Body Strength: 5D
Shields: None
Sensors: 1 km/1D
Ordnance:

1 Pulse Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Range: 50–200/1/2 km
Damage: 4D

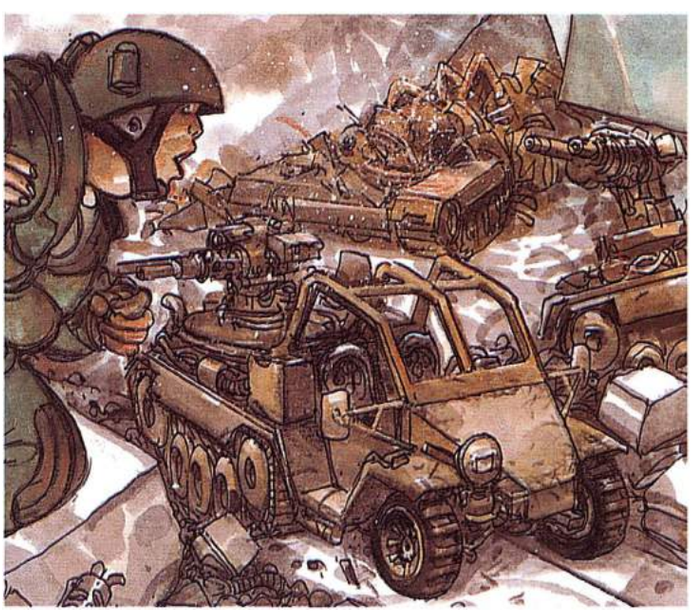
1 Anti-Personnel Gun
Fire Arc: Fore
Scale: Character
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Range: 3–50/100/250
Damage: 6D

Crew Skill: *gunnery* 4D+2, *sensors* 3D+2, *vehicle operation* 5D

Behemoth Trankar

Mercenaries use the behemoth trankar for those occasions when they must dominate the field with an armed and armored mobile command base capable of holding its own. The behemoth trankar consists of two independently powered sections linked by armored flexjoinders. Each section consists of a boxy armored fuselage mounted atop four massive track assemblies. In addition to the usual command cabins and weaponry emplacements, the behemoth contains a passenger and cargo area, plus enhanced sensors and communications equipment for coordinating battlefield actions. The behemoth is so large it requires its own oversized drop-carrier to deploy on a planet's surface.

Class: Trankar
Scale: Vehicle
Length: 20 meters
Skill: *Vehicle operation*
Crew: 5, gunners: 12, minimum 3/+10
Passengers: 50 soldiers
Cargo Capacity: 2 metric tons
Cover: Full



Maneuverability: None
Move: 18; 50 kph
Body Strength: 8D
Shields: None
Sensors: 1.5 km/2D
Ordnance:

6 Pulse Cannons
Fire Arc: 1 fore, 1 aft, 2 port, 2 starboard
Crew: 1 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Range: 50–200/1/2 km
Damage: 4D

4 Anti-Personnel Guns
Fire Arc: 1 fore, 1 aft, 1 port, 1 starboard
Crew: 1 each
Scale: Character
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Range: 3–50/100/250
Damage: 6D

1 Flame Thrower
Fire Arc: Fore
Crew: 2
Scale: Character
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Range: 3–10/25/40
Damage: 5D

Crew Skill: *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 5D, *sensors* 4D, *vehicle operation* 5D, *command* 7D

Exoskeletons

Unlike ordinary space suits or other protective clothing, exoskeletons fully enclose the wearer in a powered fuselage that greatly augments the user's abilities. Exoskeletons are self-sufficient "mini-vehicles" for one person. The hermetically sealed suits provide enough air for the wearer to survive for 10 hours before recharging. They offer protection from high pressures, cold vacuum, and harsh elements. Exoskeletons enable humans to operate in particularly harsh environments, exploring new worlds, constructing bases under difficult conditions, and boosting the wearer's capabilities.

Heavy Work Exoskeleton

Workers building new facilities in inhospitable climates often employ heavy work exoskeletons —they're also used in heavy industry and for loading and unloading large cargoes. Hydraulic pumps and oversized grasping claws on the armatures help augment the wearer's strength, giving a +2D bonus to all *lifting* rolls. The exoskeleton assembly also protects workers against accidents and harsh atmospheres: since the wearer is snugly nestled in the suit, use the body strength as a bonus to the character's own *Strength* for purposes of resisting damage.

Class: Exoskeleton
Scale: Vehicle
Length: 3 meters
Skill: *Exoskeleton operation*
Crew: 1
Passengers: None
Cargo Capacity: None
Cover: Full
Maneuverability: 2D
Move: 7; 20 kph
Body Strength: 2D (vehicle scale)
Shields: None
Sensors: None
Ordnance: None
Crew Skill: *exoskeleton operation* 4D, *lifting* 3D
Game Notes: The heavy work exoskeleton gives a +2D bonus to all *lifting* rolls. The suit's body strength (in vehicle scale) is added to a character's own *Strength* roll when resisting damage.

Exploration Exoskeleton

For explorers surveying the surface of inhospitable planets, the exploration exoskeleton provides a good deal of protection from both the environment and the local wildlife. Besides the 10-hour supply of air, the suit offers enhanced sensors and light shielding. An exterior harness provides pouches for small samples. The helmet casing includes a verbal-interface io board with heads-up display on the visor.

Class: Exoskeleton
Scale: Vehicle
Length: 3 meters
Skill : *Exoskeleton operation*
Crew: 1
Passengers: None
Cargo Capacity: 25 kilograms
Cover: Full
Maneuverability: 1D
Move: 8; 25 kph
Body Strength: 1D (vehicle scale)
Shields: 1D
Sensors: 1.5 km/2D
Ordnance:

Mini Auto Cannon
Fire Arc: Fore, port, starboard
Scale: Character
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Range: 3–75/150/300
Damage: 7D

Crew Skill: *astrography* 5D, *exoskeleton operation* 4D, *gunnery* 3D, *sensors* 3D+2
Game Notes: The suit's body strength (in vehicle scale) is added to a character's own *Strength* roll when resisting damage.

SPACECRAFT

An intergalactic society depends on spacecraft for everything —commerce, entertainment, exploration, diplomacy, and especially defense. You can't even travel through a Techo-Techno tunnel without a starship. To those of us who pilot them, spaceships are our life blood, our second homes, our way of life. Without them, much of the universe would become immobile, entire planetary governments would

crumble, and we'd be at the mercy of alien armadas bent on destroying what precious little we have. Spend enough time in a spaceship and it'll become a part of you. Flying is second nature to pilots. The ship's hull becomes your body, its control systems your central nervous system, its weapons your fists to strike at enemies, and its engines your swift feet. Protect it and treat it gently, just like you would your own body. The universe is huge, and people use a variety of vessels to get around and accomplish their particular goals. Spaceships often fit a customized role for those who employ them, so they vary widely in configuration, size, and armament. I've provided you a technical overview of some of the more common varieties here —those you're most likely to encounter— but what you see here doesn't even scratch the surface. There are plenty of other vessels, and new ones come on the market almost every day. This chapter will give you a feel for what's out there, but isn't anywhere near a complete list.

Spacecraft Statistics

In the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*, spaceships have a number of important game statistics. You should always keep in mind that all spacecraft provide full cover for their occupants.

In addition, each ship's statistics includes the following information:

Class: The vessel's general classification (light freighter, battleship, transport, fighter), sometimes including the ship's manufacturer and model number.

Scale: The ship's scale —fighter or battleship. Only the rarest vessel reaches planetary scale.

Length: How long the craft is.

Skill: The skill used to operate the ship. Most spacecraft require the *piloting* skill to fly.

Crew: The first listing is the total crew for the ship under normal conditions. Each ship has one prime person responsible for keeping control, running sensors, calculating astro-nav coordinates, and other duties. On smaller ships, one person may be responsible for all of these duties, while on larger ships, one person may be in charge of each of these functions. While there might be hundreds of support crew manning the machinery, whether the action succeeds comes down to one character's skill roll—hence the crew skill listing. The second number shows the number of gunners; gunners are listed in addition to the normal crew complement.

The final number is the "minimum crew" listing: the first part of the listing is the absolute minimum number of crewmembers necessary to fly the ship, while the number after the slash is the increase in difficulty for any actions with a minimum crew. For example, if a listing is "minimum: 130/+10," that indicates that there must be at least 130 crew aboard to operate the vessel, and all crew must add +10 to the difficulty number for all maneuvering, movement, and shielding actions. This modifier does not apply to *gunnery* difficulties.

Passengers: The number of passengers and troops a ship may carry beyond the crew complement.

Cargo: This indicates —in metric tons or kilograms (for smaller ships)— the amount of cargo a vessel can carry. This refers to the cargo's mass only, not volume.

Supplies: This stat shows how long the ship can travel before having to stop for refueling and resupply of the life-support systems (atmosphere, food, water).

Stardrive: Indicates whether the vessel is equipped with a stardive enabling it to jump to hyperspace. Such ships have astro-nav computers as part of their stardrive assembly packages.

Maneuverability: The ship's maneuverability die code.

Space: How fast the vessel travels at sublight speeds in space. This speed is used in ship-to-ship combat.

Atmosphere: How fast the craft travels in an atmosphere. The first number is its Move, the second number is its all-out speed in kilometers per hour. If there is no "atmosphere" listing, the ship cannot enter an atmosphere.

Hull: This represents the hull's toughness and how well the ship can withstand damage in combat.

Shields: The ship's combat shields.

Sensors: The maximum sensors range and the sensor die code (see the *sensors* skill for more details).

Ordnance: The number and type of weapon on the ship. Fire-linked means the weapons are linked and fire as one group. Otherwise, each weapon may be fired separately.

- **Fire Arc:** Fore, aft, port, starboard, or turret. Turret weapons may fire in all four arcs.
- **Crew:** The crew necessary to operate the weapon. If there is no crew listing, the weapon may be fired by the pilot.
- **Scale:** The weapon's scale is listed only if different than the ship's scale.
- **Skill:** The skill used to fire the weapon, usually *gunnery*.
- **Fire Control:** Add these dice whenever the gunner shoots at a target, since they represent computer-assisted target acquisition and sighting.
- **Space Range:** The weapon's short, medium, and long ranges in units.
- **Atmosphere Range:** Short, medium, and long ranges in an atmosphere or firing into an atmosphere from orbit.
- **Damage:** This is the weapon's damage.

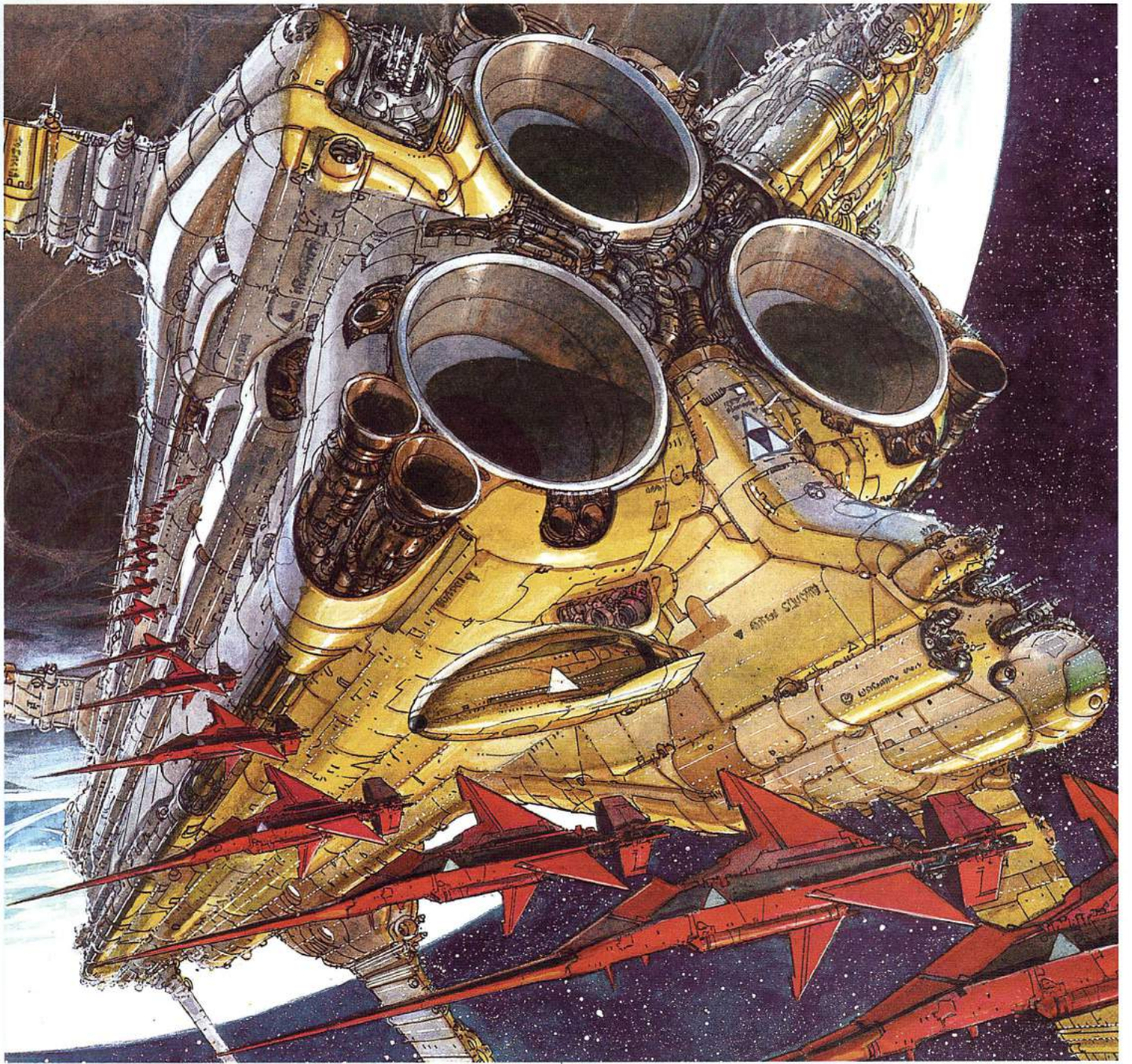
Crew Skill: Typical skill codes for crewmembers trained for that job: fighter pilots have all the skills; capital ship crewmen just have the skill for the duty they have been trained for. Co-pilots and assistants typically have –1D to each skill code. Use these stats when characters meet ships of this type and you need gamemaster character skills to run spaceship encounters and combat.

> ***Note:*** *Not all of these stats are always necessary in the course of the game. In combat, only the ship's scale, speed, maneuverability, hull code, weapons, and shields are of immediate value. Other stats (such as cargo capacity) are provided to help the gamemaster maintain consistency in the course of an ongoing Metabarons campaign.*

Imperial Ships

The Human Empire can summon vast armadas to protect its interests throughout the universe and keep order. With so many ships at its command, the Empire often uses superior numbers to overwhelm opponents. It's not uncommon to encounter entire fleets of Maganat guard craft, or even huge formation of Endoguard lancets on patrol. To those in the Empire, might makes right, and it certainly isn't shy about displaying that might to keep potential insurgents in line.

Military vessels often engage in a standard protocol when encountering other craft in regions not heavily patrolled. This procedure includes identifying one's ship, passengers, cargo, and purpose. Those who don't cooperate are considered threats that must be eliminated swiftly. It's always a good strategy to cooperate with any official government vessels you encounter.



Battleship

The Human Empire can summon armadas of immense battleships from the four factions: the Ekonomat, Maganats, Techno-Pontificate, and the Colonials. These massive ships are cities unto themselves, packed with ground troops, gunners, and a myriad of support personnel. They bristle with sensor masts, communications arrays, and a lethal assortment of weapons. Battleships are the primary means of enforcing government edicts. They patrol the space lanes, keep errant systems in line, and wage merciless war against those forces intent on interfering with the Empire.

Class: Front-line warship
Scale: Battleship
Length: 2 kilometers
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 50,000, gunners: 590, minimum 6,250/+20
Passengers: 15,000 troops
Cargo: 40,000 metric tons
Supplies: 10 years
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 4
Hull: 9D
Shields: 4D
Sensors: 100/3D
Ordnance:

80 Main Gun Batteries
Fire Arc: 20 fore, 20 aft, 20 port, 20 starboard
Crew: 5 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 3–20/40/80
Atmosphere: 6–40/80/160 km
Damage: 6D

40 Flak Cannons
Fire Arc: 10 fore, 10 aft, 10 port, 10 starboard
Crew: 3 each
Scale: Fighter
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–10/15/30
Damage: 7D

20 Gauss Cannons
Fire Arc: 5 fore, 5 aft, 5 port, 5 starboard
Crew: 2 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–5/15/30
Atmosphere: 2–10/30/60 km
Damage: 4D

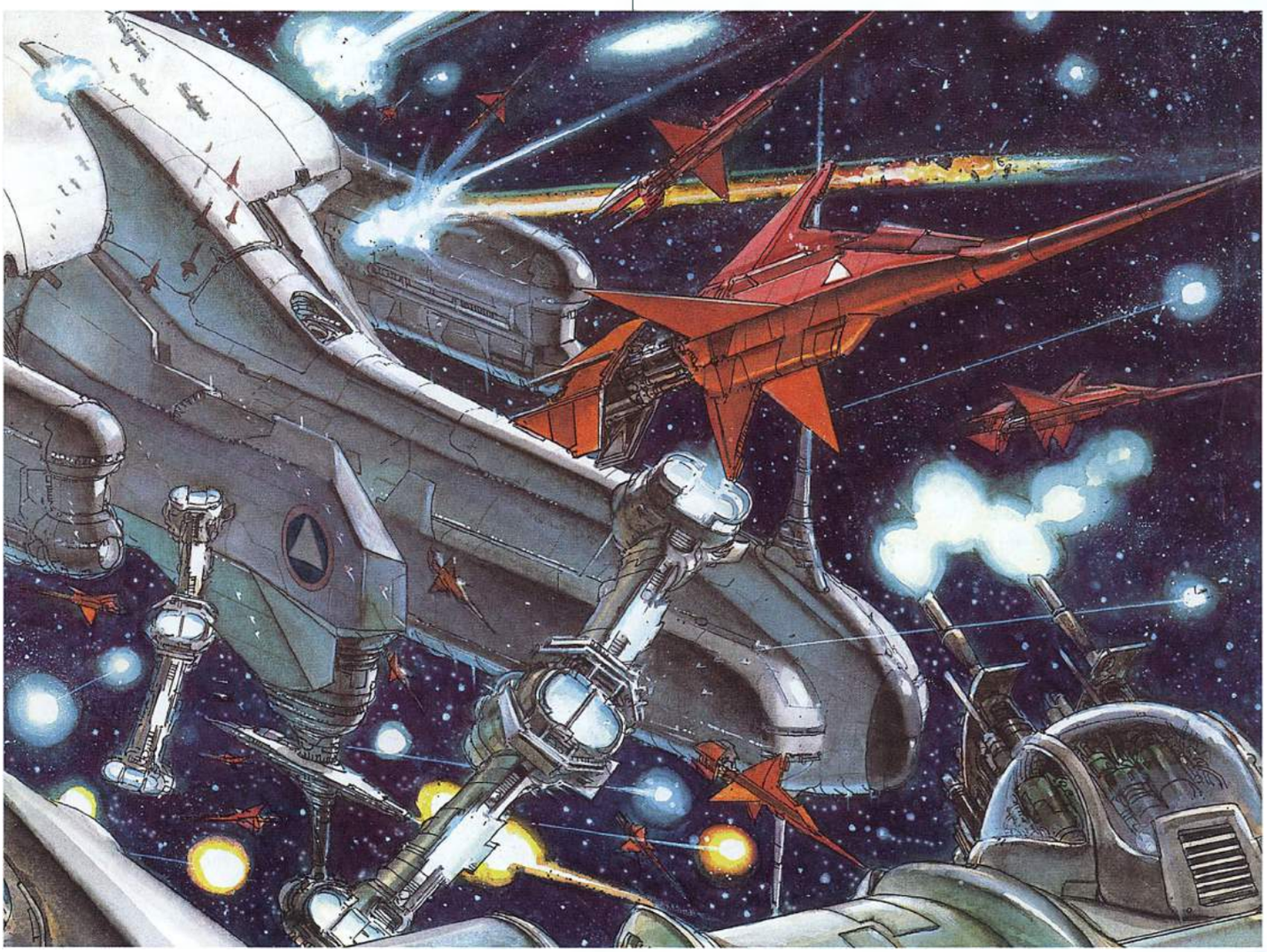
10 Tractor Beam Emitters
Fire Arc: 2 fore, 2 aft, 3 port, 3 starboard
Crew: 3 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 3D
Space Range: 1–5/15/30
Atmosphere: 2–10/30/60 km
Damage: 6D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 5D+2, *comm* 5D, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 6D, *sensors* 5D, *shields* 5D, *command* 7D+2

Endoguard Lancet

The Endoguards employ a three-man multi-purpose attack craft during space- and airborne military operations. These jagged vessels are known as lancets, mostly from their needle-like, protruding bow. The Endoguard craft are infamous for their speed, durability, heavy weapons load, and overall lethal nature in combat. Although encountering one in a fight is a challenge, the Human Empire and Supreme Endoguard commonly deploy them in great numbers to overwhelm opponents. Lancets are rarely used for common duties —patrolling secured space, intercepting petty pirate bands, or protecting the average merchant convoy— and are instead reserved for those missions of utmost importance to the Empire. Given the rough and often arrogant attitude of the Endoguard, messing with a formation of lancets is never a good idea.

Class: Multi-purpose attack and patrol craft
Scale: Fighter
Length: 42 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 1, gunners: 2
Cargo: 50 kilograms
Supplies: 1 week
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 2D+2
Space: 8
Atmosphere: 365; 1,050 kph



Hull: 5D
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 75/1D+2
Ordnance:

Primary Cannon
Fire Arc: Fore
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 6D

Missile Launcher
Fire Arc: Fore
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1/3/7
Atmosphere: 3–100/300/700
Damage: 8D

Gauss Cannon
Fire Arc: Fore
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/7/36
Atmosphere: 100–300/700/3.6 km
Damage: 5D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 5D, *comm* 4D, *gunnery* 5D+2, *piloting* 6D, *sensors* 4D, *shields* 5D, *command* 7D

StellComm Sentinel

The Empire's Ministry of Stellar Commerce —working in cooperation with the Imperial Merchants Guild and the Ekonomat—uses a small yet effective craft to patrol regions near busy spaceports and enforce customs regulations. As StellComm's standard customs inspection vessel, the Sentinel fulfills its main mission profile of interdiction and boarding craft suspected of violating commerce laws and smuggling illegal or taxable goods past local and Imperial authorities. It is not a front-line combat vessel, since the Ministry of Stellar Commerce defers to the Endoguard in military matters, but it can hold its own against unruly space traders and smugglers.

The Sentinel resembles an egg on its side with a slice off the bottom, engines strapped to the back, and weapons bristling from its sides. The underside contains docking apparatus to mate with most ships and allow customs inspectors to board suspect vessels.

Class: Customs interdictor frigate
Scale: Fighter
Length: 51 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 10, gunners: 10, minimum 5/+10
Passengers: 10 security troopers, 10 prisoners in brig
Cargo: 300 metric tons
Supplies: 4 months
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 8
Atmosphere: 365; 1,050 kph
Hull: 6D
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 75/2D
Ordnance:

5 Gauss Cannons
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/7/36
Atmosphere: 100–300/700/3.6 km
Damage: 5D

3 Flak Cannons
Fire Arc: 1 aft, 1 port, 1 starboard
Crew: 1 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 3–5/10/20
Atmosphere: 300–500/1/2 km
Damage: 5D+2

2 Auto Cannons
Fire Arc: Fore
Crew: 1 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D+2
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 4D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 3D+1, *comm* 4D, *gunnery* 3D+1, *piloting* 4D, *sensors* 4D, *shields* 3D+2, *command* 5D

Executive Shuttle

When transporting top officials, high administrators, and other people of exalted status, the Human Empire uses an executive shuttle. Outfitted with every possible luxury and state-of-the-art spaceship technology, these craft travel swiftly between planets. They're also used to ferry high-level personnel to and from vessels waiting in orbit. Passengers are protected by the ship's carefully concealed armaments, boosted sensors, and stylishly armored hull.

Class: Passenger transport
Scale: Fighter
Length: 30 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 3
Passengers: 4
Cargo: 50 metric tons
Supplies: 1 month
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 3D
Space: 10
Atmosphere: 415; 1,200 kph
Hull: 5D

Shields: 4D
Sensors: 75/3D
Ordnance:
1 Mag-Drive Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 3D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 6D
1 Flak Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 3–5/10/20
Atmosphere: 300–500/1/2 km
Damage: 5D+2
Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 5D, *comm* 4D+1, *gunnery* 6D, *piloting* 7D, *sensors* 5D, *shields* 5D+1, *command* 7D

Yacht

The more important members of the Empire don't travel like the rest of the commoners infesting the universe —for their personal transport, they often rely on luxurious space yachts outfitted with every ammenity and entertainment imaginable. The vessel's sleek and stylish exterior also conceals hidden weapons emplacements for protecting important passengers from the attentions of less savory types: pirates, rival mercenaries, and smugglers.

Class: Luxury space yacht
Scale: Fighter
Length: 50 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 10, gunners 5; minimum 5/+5
Passengers: 10
Cargo: 20 metric tons
Supplies: 1 year
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 2D
Space: 6
Atmosphere: 330; 950 kph
Hull: 4D
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 75/1D
Ordnance:
1 Auto Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D+2
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 4D
4 Flak Cannons
Fire Arc: 1 fore, 1 aft, 1 port, 1 starboard
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 3–5/10/20
Atmosphere: 300–500/1/2 km
Damage: 5D+2
Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 4D, *comm* 4D, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 6D, *sensors* 4D, *shields* 4D, *command* 6D+2

Techno-Techno Vessels

Although the Techno-Technos can travel nearly anywhere through their network of tunnels, they still require starships to journey through space. Few outside the Techno-Pontificate truly know the power of Techno-Techno spacecraft, or even what kind of warships they deploy in battle. Like most of their technology, the Techno-Technos prefer to keep their greatest and most powerful advancements to themselves.

Imperial Merchants Guild Cargo Dreadnaught

As an associated institution to the Techo-Pontificate, the Imperial Merchants Guild accepts transport contracts from Maganat corporations, other industrial concerns that require massive shipping, and political factions that don't possess transport fleets of their own. It's also the primary organization responsible for shipping official government cargoes throughout the Human Empire. The Guild's immense cargo dreadnaughts ply the hyperlanes, hauling massive cargoes through their own network of warehouses, guild halls, and even starports. The ships are capable of entering a planet's atmosphere to load goods in bulk from the surface. Although they're also very capable of protecting themselves, they're not shy about accepting the protection of mercenary units or even Imperial craft.

Class: Cargo dreadnaught
Scale: Battleship
Length: 1.5 kilometers
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 5,000, gunners: 100, minimum 1,000/+10
Passengers: 1,000 security troopers
Cargo: 45,000 metric tons
Supplies: 5 years
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 3
Atmosphere: 260; 750 kph
Hull: 6D
Shields: 4D
Sensors: 75/2D
Ordnance:
20 Flak Cannons
Fire Arc: 5 fore, 5 aft, 5 port, 5 starboard
Crew: 3 each
Scale: Fighter
Skill: Gunnery

Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 1–10/15/30
Atmosphere: 10–100/1.5/3 km
Damage: 6D

10 Laser Cannons
Fire Arc: 1 fore, 3 aft, 3 port, 3 starboard
Crew: 4 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 3–20/40/80
Atmosphere: 6–40/80/160 km
Damage: 4D

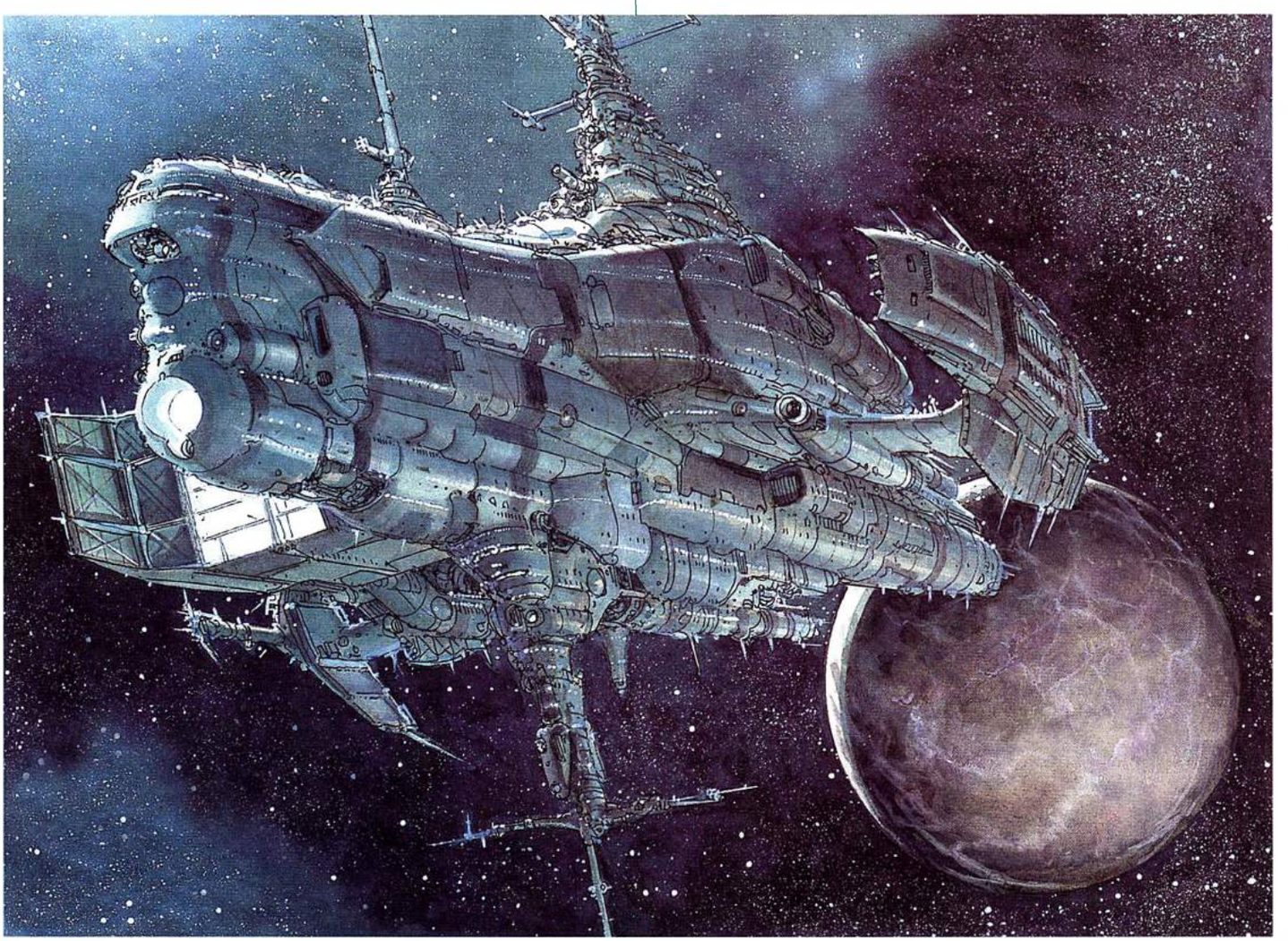
Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 4D+2, *comm* 4D, *gunnery* 3D+2, *piloting* 5D, *sensors* 4D, *shields* 4D+1, *command* 6D

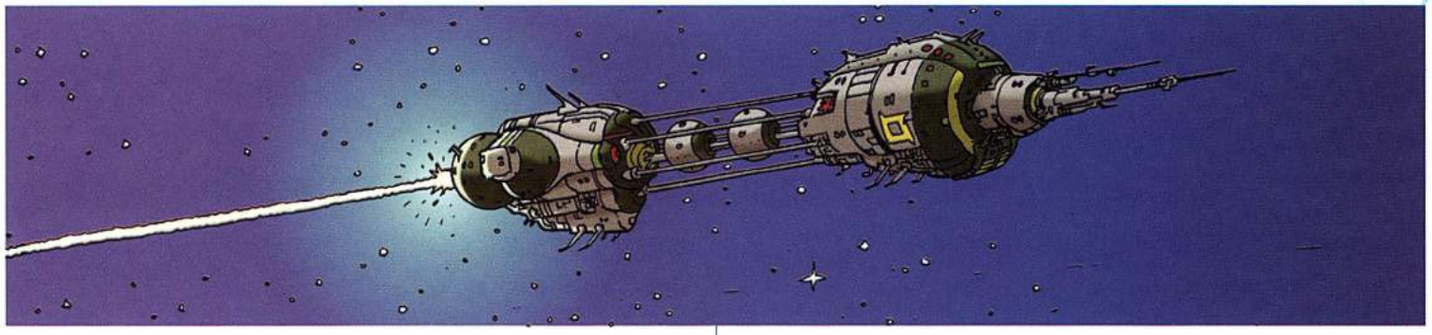
Techno-Techno Research Transport

Representatives of the Techno-Pontificate range far and wide cataloging and regulating new technologies, collecting data on their numerous experiments, scouting for new planets for endo-cities, and transporting their technological marvels throughout the universe in their massive lab-factory vessels. Their large research transports help them maintain their influence over technology throughout the Human Empire. Part exploration craft, part mobile research laboratory, part transport, these vessels go wherever the Techno-Pontificate has business. The transport has living quarters, cargo holds, and engineering laboratories allowing the crew to pursue their personal research while fulfilling whatever mysterious mission they might undertake.

Class: Research transport
Scale: Fighter
Length: 40 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 5
Passengers: 10 scientists
Cargo: 200 metric tons
Supplies: 6 months
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 5
Atmosphere: 295; 850 kph
Hull: 4D
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 75/2D
Ordnance:

2 Auto Cannons
Fire Arc: Turret
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D+2
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km





Damage: 5D

1 Gauss Cannon

Fire Arc: Fore
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/7/36
Atmosphere: 100–300/700/3.6 km
Damage: 5D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 5D, *comm* 4D, *gunnery* 3D+2, *piloting* 4D, *sensors* 5D, *shields* 4D, *command* 6D

Ekonomat Vessels

The Ekonomat maintains its own fleets of cargo and military vessels —though nothing so large as to rival the immense ships of the Human Empire. Commercial ships fill the hyper-lanes connecting worlds where the Ekonomat has business, out to the Colonial Planets, and between the prominent worlds in the Human Empire. They help form the backbone of the galactic economy.

The vessels below represent generic ship types similar to those used by various branches within the Ekonomat. Each branch customizes their craft with crew of differing experience levels, varied armament, and other specs changed to suit their purposes or budgets. Use these ships as general classes of craft, and feel free to customize them depending on your game and their role in the story.

Cargo Cruiser

These vast transports ferry huge cargoes from one system to another. Although they're not as heavily armed as the ships of the Merchants Guild fleet, they can hold their own against raiders through their own defenses and Ekonomat or mercenary corsairs accompanying convoys. Most cruisers have a squadron of 12 Ekonomat Midge fighters they deploy against belligerent forces intent on forcibly taking the cargo. They also have one or two utility transports for maintenance and loading duties.

Class: Cargo carrier
Scale: Battleship
Length: 1 kilometer
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 3000, gunners: 68, minimum 750/+10
Passengers: 500 security troopers, 100 passengers
Cargo: 35,000 metric tons
Supplies: 1 year
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 2
Atmosphere: 225; 650 kph
Hull: 4D
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 50/1D
Ordnance:

12 Flak Cannons

Fire Arc: 2 fore, 4 aft, 3 port, 3 starboard
Crew: 3 each
Scale: Fighter
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 1–10/15/30
Atmosphere: 10–100/1.5/3 km
Damage: 6D

8 Laser Cannons

Fire Arc: 2 fore, 2 aft, 2 port, 2 starboard
Crew: 4 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 3–20/40/80
Atmosphere: 6–40/80/160 km
Damage: 4D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 4D+1, *comm* 4D, *gunnery* 4D, *piloting* 4D+2, *sensors* 4D, *shields* 4D, *command* 5D

Ekonomat Midge

This bug-shaped snub fighter serves as a light patrol and defense craft for the Ekonomat. Its multiple wings tipped with maneuver jets give it high maneuverability, and its single engine (taking up most of the fuselage) provides thrust for competitive speed. These advantages compensate for its small size, fragile hull, and light armament. Since most are not equipped with a stardrive, they're incapable of jumping to hyperspace, and must be ferried to new systems aboard larger carriers. They're most often deployed in swarms to confuse and outnumber opponents. The Ekonomat also employs Midges as patrol craft to protect facilities and worlds under its control.

Class: Snub fighter
Scale: Fighter
Length: 6 meters
Skill: *Piloting*

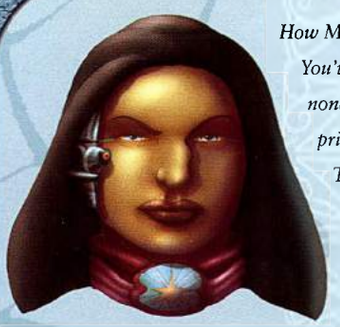
Crew: 1
Passengers: 0
Cargo: 50 kilograms
Supplies: 1 day
Stardrive: No
Maneuverability: 4D
Space: 12
Atmosphere: 450; 1,300 kph
Hull: 2D
Shields: None
Sensors: 50/1D
Ordnance:

2 Auto-Cannons (fire-linked)
Fire Arc: Fore
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 5D

Crew Skill: *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 4D, *piloting* 4D+2, *sensors* 3D

Light Transport

The Ekonomat corporations often use light transports for hauling small cargoes and routing them quickly to their destinations. These smaller freighters require smaller crews and fewer resources to keep them spaceborne. They're ideal for shipping specialty cargoes, or loads bound for more insignificant worlds off the main hyper-lanes from prominent planets. Light transports are also a favorite of Colonial companies who can't afford the immense cost of cargo cruisers.



How Much Does That Ship Cost?

You've probably noticed by now that none of these ship stats indicate a price. As discussed in the "Space Travel & Combat" chapter, you can go about acquiring a ship in several ways, most of which are risky and expensive. To purchase even the smallest vessel for your personal use —even a heavily used light transport or a beat-up snub fighter— is beyond the means of most common people in the universe. Only prominent corporate or government powers can really afford to purchase, operate, and maintain space-going vessels. Most middling folks like you just settle for borrowing other people's ships, working for those who have them, or outright stealing them ("borrowing" them permanently). But when looking to buy a ship, new or used, I fall back on the old adage: "If you have to ask, you can't afford it."

Class: Light Transport
Scale: Fighter
Length: 30 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 2, gunners: 1
Passengers: 4
Cargo: 150 metric tons
Supplies: 1 month
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 5
Atmosphere: 295; 850 kph
Hull: 4D
Shields: 1D
Sensors: 25/1D
Ordnance:

Defense Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 1–2/10/20
Atmosphere Range: 100–200/1/2 km
Damage: 4D

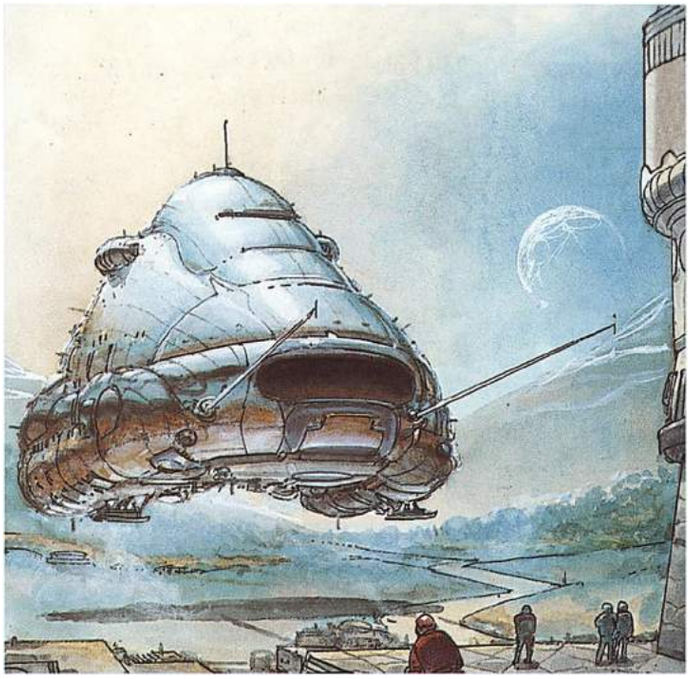
Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 3D+1, *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 3D+2, *piloting* 4D, *sensors* 3D, *shields* 3D+2

Utility Transport

Somewhat smaller than light freighters, these vessels ferry supplies, small cargoes, and personnel between a planet's surface and a ship in orbit. They're also capable of taking on repair duties, including work in the vast spacedocks where huge battleship-scale vessels are constructed. The ship contains airlocks and technical areas for mechanics to prepare for extravehicular activity during repair jobs, and is equipped with a fighter-scale tractor beam emitter for manipulating large cargoes and construction materials in space.

Class: Utility ship
Scale: Fighter
Length: 20 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 3
Passengers: 10
Cargo: 75 metric tons
Supplies: 1 week
Stardrive: No
Maneuverability: 1D+2
Space: 5
Atmosphere: 295; 850 kph
Hull: 3D
Shields: None
Sensors: 50/1D
Ordnance:

1 Tractor Beam Emitter
Fire Arc: Turret



Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–5/15/30
Atmosphere: 100–500/1.5/3 km
Damage: 4D

Defense Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 1–2/10/20
Atmosphere Range: 100–200/1/2 km
Damage: 4D

Crew Skill: *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 4D, *piloting* 3D+2, *sensors* 3D

Survey Craft

The Ekonomat continually searches for new worlds to explore and exploit in the pursuit of greater profit. Survey craft are designed to pack as many information-gathering instruments as possible into a small hull, putting fewer capital resources at risk in the further exploration of the universe. These vessels come equipped with powerful sensors, mapping programs, and sample collection and analysis machinery. Survey craft are usually piloted by a single explorer to allow for more sensor and computer equipment for acquiring and analyzing information.

Class: Exploration vessel
Scale: Fighter
Length: 12 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 1
Passengers: None
Cargo: 200 kilograms
Supplies: 6 months
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 5
Atmosphere: 295; 850 kph
Hull: 4D
Shields: 1D
Sensors: 100/3D
Ordnance:

Defense Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 1–2/10/20
Atmosphere Range: 100–200/1/2 km
Damage: 4D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 6D, *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 3D, *piloting* 5D, *sensors* 6D, *shields* 3D+2

Mercenary Craft

The universe's innumerable mercenary units employ a variety of spacecraft to transport ground forces and engage in spaceborne actions. These ships must fit many mission profiles, since a mercenary company is often required to take on various jobs with wide-ranging duties. Most are well-armed and armored, as these serve as the hired front-line forces for local planetary governments, corporations, and other factions not powerful enough to field their own fleets.

The vessels listed below represent typical spaceship classes mercenary companies use. Individual units frequently customize their craft for particular duty profiles or to suit their own specifications. Mercenary units constantly shunt their profits into maintaining and upgrading existing equipment, so a unit's spaceship of one particular class might even vary.

Carrier-Cruiser

Mercenaries commonly use vessels combining the offensive power of a military cruiser with the transport capabilities of a fighter carrier. This versatile craft allows companies to swiftly deploy in systems, providing a well-defended base of operations commanding satellite units of fighters or drop-carriers. A typical carrier-cruiser contains landing bays for one squadron of snub fighters or three drop-carriers. Many varieties exist, some with greater emphasis on offensive armaments, and others with a greater capacity to ferry troops and support craft.

Class: Carrier-cruiser
Scale: Battleship
Length: 500 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 650, gunners: 155, minimum 250/+10
Passengers: 125 soldiers
Cargo: 3,000 metric tons
Supplies: 2 years
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D+2
Space: 5

Atmosphere: 295; 850 kph
Hull: 5D
Shields: 3D
Sensors: 75/1D
Ordnance:

20 Laser Batteries
Fire Arc: 5 fore, 5 aft, 5 port, 5 starboard
Crew: 5 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 3–20/40/80
Atmosphere: 6–40/80/160 km
Damage: 4D

10 Flak Cannons
Fire Arc: 2 fore, 2 aft, 3 port, 3 starboard
Crew: 3 each
Scale: Fighter
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–10/15/30
Atmosphere: 2–20/3/6 km
Damage: 6D

5 Missile Launchers
Fire Arc: Fore
Crew: 5 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 1/3/7
Atmosphere: 3–20/6/14 km
Damage: 7D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 4D, *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 4D+2, *piloting* 5D, *sensors* 3D+2, *shields* 4D, *command* 6D

Drop-Carrier

These small craft carry troops and vehicles into the field, providing transport and fire support in the landing zone. These glorified light freighters are specially shielded for rapid atmospheric deployment. Light armament protects them from enemy forces while air- and spaceborne, and offers cover fire to clear potential landing areas and safely disembark soldiers in hot zones. The ship's cargo area typically has room for two squads of troops, two recon buggies, or one trankar. Since they rarely come equipped with stardrives, they rely on other ships like carrier-cruisers to ferry them to different systems.

Class: Drop ship
Scale: Fighter
Length: 32 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 2, gunners: 2
Passengers: 30
Cargo: 50 metric tons
Supplies: 1 week
Stardrive: No
Maneuverability: 2D
Space: 6
Atmosphere: 330; 950 kph
Hull: 4D+2
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 50/1D
Ordnance:

1 Auto Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D+2
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 4D

2 Anti-Personnel Guns (fire-linked)
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Scale: Character
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 3D
Atmosphere: 3–75/200/500
Damage: 7D

Crew Skill: *tactics* 3D, *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 4D, *piloting* 5D, *sensors* 3D+2, *shields* 4D

Snub Fighter

Snub fighters belong to a class of small, lightly armed, very maneuverable combat craft used for many duties: patrol, assault, interception, escort. Those employed by mercenary units are cheap, easily repaired, and compact enough to ferry in great numbers to combat zones. They participate in engagements in space, provide air support to soldiers fighting on planetary surfaces, and help patrol secured zones.

The stats below represent the most common snub fighters. Remember that individual mercenary companies often customize or commission fighters that best suit their combat requirements.

Class: Snub fighter
Scale: Fighter
Length: 10 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 1
Passengers: None
Cargo: 75 kilograms
Supplies: 1 day
Stardrive: No
Maneuverability: 4D
Space: 8
Atmosphere: 365; 1,050 kph
Hull: 3D+2
Shields: 1D
Sensors: 75/1D
Ordnance:

2 Auto-Cannons (fire-linked)
Fire Arc: Fore

Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 5D

Missile Launcher
Fire Arc: Fore
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1/3/7
Atmosphere: 3–100/300/700
Damage: 7D

Crew Skill: *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 5D, *sensors* 3D, *shields* 4D

Mercenary Ostrov

The Ostrov-class mini-fighter is anything but small. It was produced specifically for planetary defense militias and mercenary companies as a heavy fighter for escort and patrol duties, able to hold its own against numerous fighter-scale opponents (this also might explain why pirates quickly acquired and modified the craft). The versatile Ostrov is heavily armed and armored, with a good speed and adequate shielding. Mercenaries deploy it in spaceborne engagements, to provide heavy fire support for planetary units, and for attacks on well-defended targets. Like most other vessels these companies employ, Ostrovs can accept many modifications to suit particular mission specifications.

Class: Ostrov fighter
Scale: Fighter
Length: 20 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 3, gunners: 4
Passengers: None
Cargo: 1 metric ton
Supplies: 1 week
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 2D
Space: 6
Atmosphere: 330; 950 kph
Hull: 5D
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 75/1D
Ordnance:

1 Forward Laser Array
Fire Arc: Fore
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 4D

3 Heavy Cannon Turrets
Fire Arc: Fore
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 5D+2

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 3D, *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 4D, *piloting* 5D, *sensors* 3D, *shields* 4D, *command* 5D

Pirate Ships

The universe is rife with savage pirate bands preying on innocent freighters and colonists, and impeding the accumulation of wealth through commerce. They use a variety of spacecraft to accomplish their thievery, most stolen from spaceports or captured in raids. It's possible a pirate group might have commandeered versions of many ships presented in this chapter, with the exceptions of Endoguard vessels. Pirate fleets are anything but organized and uniform, but they get the job done. Like mercenary units, pirate groups frequently customize their ships according to available and stolen resources. The ships below represent the baseline for vessels pirates most often use —those encountered are modified as much as their owners can afford.

Pirate Frigate

The frigate classification of pirate vessels refers to light cruisers most commonly deployed by planetary defense militias... and eventually captured by pirates for their own use. They offer adequate offensive capabilities and serve as stable platforms from which to coordinate raids. The arms load-out and cargo capacity provide enough offensive capabilities to capture mercantile craft and carry off their cargo. Some frigates have their cargo holds refitted to ferry a small compliment of snub fighters to further harry merchant vessels.

Class: Light cruiser
Scale: Battleship
Length: 300 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 350, gunners: 57, minimum 100/+5
Passengers: 50 pirates
Cargo: 1,500 metric tons
Supplies: 1 year
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 6
Atmosphere: 330; 950 kph
Hull: 4D
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 50/1D
Ordnance:

10 Laser Batteries
Fire Arc: 2 fore, 2 aft, 3 port, 3 starboard
Crew: 5 each
Skill: Gunnery

Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 3–20/40/80
Atmosphere: 6–40/80/160 km
Damage: 4D

2 Gauss Cannons
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 2 each
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–5/15/30
Atmosphere: 2–10/30/60 km
Damage: 4D

1 Tractor Beam Emitter
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 3
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 3D
Space Range: 1–5/15/30
Atmosphere: 2–10/30/60 km
Damage: 4D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 4D, *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 4D+2, *sensors* 4D, *shields* 4D, *command* 6D

Pirate Ostrov

Pirates also realize the tactical advantages of the popular Ostrov fighters, and lost no time capitalizing on them. By capturing and stealing them from planetary militias, defeated mercenary units, and other factions deploying them, they integrated these versatile heavy fighters into their rag-tag fleets. Since pirates don't have the same resources as other factions with which to purchase and repair their vessels, they tend to use more armor and shielding to protect these valuable ships. Ostrovs serving in pirate fleets serve primarily as assault craft, patrolling a battle's outer perimeter when larger ships move in for boarding and looting actions.

Class: Ostrov fighter
Scale: Fighter
Length: 20 meters
Skill: *Piloting*
Crew: 3, gunners: 4
Passengers: 2
Cargo: 1 metric ton
Supplies: 1 week
Stardrive: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D+2
Space: 5
Atmosphere: 295; 850 kph
Hull: 6D
Shields: 2D
Sensors: 50/1D
Ordnance:

1 Forward Laser Array
Fire Arc: Fore
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 4D

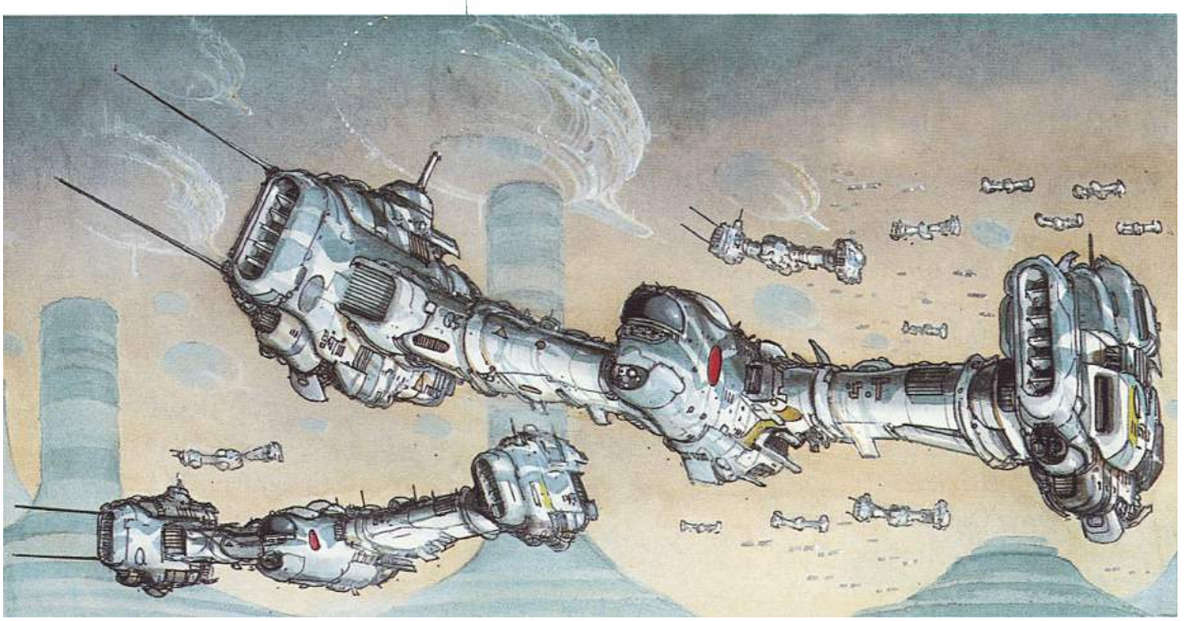
3 Heavy Cannon Turrets
Fire Arc: Fore
Crew: 1
Skill: Gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 5D

Crew Skill: *astro-nav* 4D, *comm* 3D, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 4D+2, *sensors* 4D, *shields* 4D, *command* 6D

Other Vessels

You'll only find a brief representation of spaceships from around the universe here. This is in no way a comprehensive review of spacecraft in the *Metabarons* universe. There are far more vessels for each of the groups listed here, and many other factions out there flying their own ships. Alien craft, vessels of the Troglosocialiks, spaceships commandeered by insane political psychos, and ships of the Maganats are among the innumerable kinds of ships characters can encounter in their travels.

You can use these stats as guidelines for creating your own craft or introducing similar ships in your game. Need a frigate for a planetary defense militia? Borrow the stats for the pirate frigate. Looking for a fast snub fighter? Use the stats for the Ekonomat Midge fighter. Do you want something a little different? Add another weapon, boost the shields, or cut down the speed. You're the gamemaster —do whatever you must to tell a good story.



WORLDS

The Metabarons universe is filled with innumerable worlds. The Human Empire alone includes 22,000 major worlds —that doesn't include innumerable minor and obscure planets. Later I'll tell you about a few planets in detail, but first we'll explore how you can create your own worlds filled with exotic locales, interesting people, strange creatures, and plenty of potential for adventure.
An exciting place to struggle for existence.

Sure, there are places where nothing much happens, but your players aren't going there! Everyone's looking for adventure and excitement, and the worlds you'll want to introduce into your game campaign are the vibrant, exotic ones where something interesting and dangerous is bound to happen.
World design is an important part of establishing setting, because most adventures take place on planetary locations —from sprawling urban arcologies and wild badlands to deep underwater canyons. Taking some time to make your worlds interesting and unique can yield great rewards when you sit down to play the game.
Don't worry too much about getting all the exact scientific details down when you design your worlds. You want to make sure water flows downhill, and that gravity works, but it's not absolutely necessary to get the geology, biology, and astronomy perfect in every detail. Under the right circumstances, almost anything can conceivably exist.

Metabarons Planets

You should focus on creating the overall concept for the world and a few key and exciting locations —and let someone else worry about exactly how everything works.

Making Your Worlds Memorable

In creating worlds, remember to give your planets individuality and a character all their own. Give players a unique "handle" on each world, a way for them to categorize a world in their minds —the place where people and insects live in harmony in vast hive-cities, or the planet with the spaceport built into a canyon wall. If you don't provide this "handle," the worlds gradually blend together into a foggy blob of basic types: the desert world, the city world, the polluted industrial world.

Worlds are like gamemaster characters that way. Just as you give your supporting characters some distinguishing characteristics that separate them from the other gamemaster characters, try making each planet a distinct place with its own feel and flavor.

A simple way you can give each world a unique character is to give it some exotic attributes. Exotic planets appeal to the players' sense of escapism and curiosity —and remind them that the *Metabarons* universe isn't like the one they know.

Look to the comics for your models. Okhar is meant to be a primitive planet where the *Metabaron* and his kind can flourish. Besides the *Metabaron's* fortress rising from the jungle vegetation, you also find a simple race of people who become (for a short while) the *Metabaron's* servants. The Golden Planet is a good example of an aristocratic world run by a complex military and political bureaucracy.

Exotic Elements

Making a planet exotic can be as simple as focusing on some geological features. Place a world in a binary or trinary star system, or give it an atmosphere so dangerous that humans must wear exoskeletons to walk outside. You might set an adventure on a young world subject to constant earthquakes and volcanic activity, or on an ancient, arid planet orbiting a huge red star. But you can get more fancy than that if you like.

You can often establish a single interesting focus to a world, and spin everything else off from that. There isn't anything particularly special about the jungles of Okhar, after all. But the dramatic focal point—the *Metabaron's* mighty fortress rising from the tropical vegetation—effectively establishes Okhar as a unique location.

You can focus on culture, society, and people to establish character. Maybe the locals paint their bodies with ritual patterns, or wear intricate masks to represent their profession or government position. Or perhaps the citizens are language purists, and treat those who don't use their peculiar inverted word order like uneducated idiots, or even kill them.

Here are several more examples to help fuel your imagination when creating exotic elements for your own worlds:

- Those who don't cover their faces are shunned and regarded with disgust.
- All non-citizens must wear arm bands to distinguish themselves from the privileged locals, who are accorded more rights and are treated more justly.
- Visitors must be accompanied by a guide-translator who often forbids them from entering certain locales or establishments.
- Only females can speak in public.
- Wearing the color red is reserved for the exalted class.
- Those who don't make offerings to the local temples are forbidden from conducting business.
- No one may openly carry or display a weapon.

Obviously these examples impact the characters' lives in some major or minor way. This isn't all bad. The players will remember the world where only females can speak in public if their characters landed there for badly needed repairs and the group has no female crew members! Making each world memorable and distinct is, after all, the whole point.

Take care to strike a balance between creating an exotic world and annoying the characters. Avoid harassing the characters just to establish world character. Societal and cultural examples tend to do that, but you can get more into physical aspects of places and things that provide atmosphere without overly impacting the characters' lives. Use some of these examples to establish a unique sense of place:

- Structures that are out of the ordinary —maybe people live and work in the discarded shells of giant insects, or in great industrial arcologies, or in living hive buildings.
- Settings unique to the world, like the immense halerce —oldest tree in the universe— in the Troglosocialik capital of Filodendra.
- Forbidden areas renown for mysteries, curses, or the deadly nature of their inhabitants, like the icy regions around Anasirma, the Sacred Mountain on Okhar.
- Military elements that help define worlds, like the *Metabaron's* maxi-protonic tower on Okhar, or the Troglosocialik defense lines.

Certain other elements of a setting can help establish a world's unique character:

- Doors dilate open and shut.
- Robots plated with strong ceramics instead of metals and plastics.
- Organic technology and transportation.
- Flowers prominently displayed everywhere imaginable.
- People preserve their dead relatives in a clear resin and place them in the yard to ward off evil.

As you can see, some examples are more exotic than others. But all help establish the character and uniqueness of the world.

Speedy World Creation

You won't always need a fully fleshed out world for the characters to visit. Sometimes you only need a planet to serve as a

backdrop for a scene or two, and then the characters are off on other adventures. Maybe you need a setting where the characters can meet their contact, or maybe the characters need a place to get their spacecraft repaired. In cases like these, you can follow this "quick and dirty" method of creating planets —use it when you won't be spending a lot of time on a world.

There aren't any particular stats or rules associated with this method. Your basic goal is to develop the world just enough to serve the demands of your adventure, and flesh it out just enough to give the characters a taste of the planet's character. This method is more an extension of adventure design than campaign design, since you use it to serve the needs of a specific adventure rather than the needs of the overall campaign.

You only have to follow a few steps in speedy world creation:

• *Determine the world's function.* This is not necessarily what role the planet has in intergalactic trade, but what role it plays in your plot. Is it where the characters are to meet someone? Witness something? Get into a fight? Pick up a hard-to-find spacecraft part? Analyzing what the planet needs to provide to advance the plot gives you the information you need to move to the next step.

• *Develop adventure locations.* You don't need to map out an entire global economy and political system if the characters are only going to land in a provincial border town, spend the night, and leave the next morning. Create the areas you know the characters will visit, and focus on developing a unique feel for those locations. Good visual images are important here.

• *Establish first impressions.* What will characters notice right away? That the spaceport is on a giant seashell; that the air smells of sulfur (or can't be breathed without a mask); that the star bathes the entire landscape in a blue light; that there are lots of palm trees and servant robots about. These aspects of the world will likely be local to the specific area the characters are visiting; the servant robots, for example, might not be found in abundance in other areas of this world.

• *Develop global elements.* Summarize a few exotic elements which apply to the world in general. You can use this step to include interesting ideas you haven't yet developed, such as cultural ideas and traditions, and unique geological features.

Detailed World Creation

You won't always just want a world for a walk-on appearance. Often the characters will visit the world you intend to create many times, or use it as a base of operations. If you are running a campaign, you will likely want to develop a number of detailed planets the characters will frequent.

This world creation method is more structured and formal than the speedy method, and focuses more on the planet's statistics. You are, essentially, starting with the speedy method, and taking it a few steps further.

You should think about some of the things that make your world unique. We've already discussed some of the general aspects of planet creation, and you can use all of these ideas to give your world a distinct character. The following method will help you to further develop and define your planet. As you go through each step, review your progress and see how each new detail affects what you have developed thus far. You may need to go back and change a few things as you learn more about your world, or backtrack a bit if you discover that you are getting a bit too far off from your original idea.

• *Name.* Pick a name for your world. If the world will play a major part in future adventures, make sure you really like the name, because you will be hearing it a lot. Getting stuck with a planet name you gradually come to regard as vaguely silly or annoying is a situation you probably want to avoid.

• *Type.* World type categorizes the astrographical role the planet plays. It may be a proper planet, a satellite like a moon, or even an artificial space station. The basic types of worlds in the planet generation system are Terrestrial (earth-like), Satellite, Asteroid belt, and Artificial (such as space stations). You can be more elaborate in your description if you want to give a quick feel for the world in the stats.

• *Climate.* Some worlds are hotter than others. Temperatures naturally vary depending on where you are on the planet (and most worlds will have variable climates —from icy tundras at the poles to hot and humid bands around the equator). Here you must determine the average temperature level for the entire world, or for the area where the characters will spend most of their time.

The temperature categories are Searing, Hot, Temperate, Cool, and Frigid. Most searing or frigid worlds are too harsh for humans to inhabit without extensive life-support provisions like exoskeletons.

• *Atmosphere.* Can the atmosphere support human life? Do humans need breather units or survival suits? Is it poisonous? There are five basic atmosphere types: Type I (breathable), Type II (breather suggested), Type III (breather required), Type IV (exoskeleton required), and None.

Most habitable worlds are Type I, while most gas giants are Type IV. The types are not necessarily exclusive; some worlds may have trace elements that are harmful or fatal, and if they aren't known, a ship's sensors may read an atmosphere as Type I when it should be Type III.

• *Hydrosphere.* How much moisture is in the air? The categories are Arid, Moderate, Moist, and Saturated (usually depending on the percentage of the planet's surface covered in water). Note that hydrosphere doesn't have to be water; methane glaciers, ammonia seas, and other exotic phenomenon are possible.

• *Gravity.* How heavy are objects on the world? The categories are Zero (as in zero-gravity), Light, Standard, and Heavy. Characters moving on worlds with light or heavy gravity might incur special penalties if they are not accustomed to such environments.

• *Terrain.* This category focuses on typical terrains for land areas —most planets are covered in oceans of some kind, so you don't need to list "ocean" unless it plays a major role in your adventures. Most planets have a variety of land types; very few are entirely made up of deserts or jungles. Again, list the land types that predominate in your world, or the areas where the characters will likely visit.

The common terrain types are Barren, Cave, Crater Field, Desert, Forest, Glacier, Jungle, Mountain, Ocean, Plain, Plateau, Urban, Wetlands, and Volcanic. You can modify known terrain types or come up with new ones if you like.

• *Length of Day.* The number of standard hours a local day lasts.

• *Length of Year.* Expressed in number of local days. A world's length of year won't necessarily match a standard year.

• *Aliens.* List any intelligent species that make up a significant portion of the planet's population (assuming they haven't been exterminated yet). Species native to the planet are indicated by an (N) next to their name.

• *Spaceport.* Most systems only have a few areas suitable for landing and servicing spacecraft (small population systems may only have one). List the most advanced spaceport in the system, or if there are multiple starports, you may list the number and classifications. You may also want to indicate if certain ports are restricted.

There are several types of starports: Minimal service, Standard class, Stellar class, and Golden class. A minimal service spaceport is a simple landing field, maybe paved or surfaced. There is usually a simple control tower, and a few hangars and maintenance sheds. Fuel and vital supplies may be available. Exotic spacecraft parts are rarely found in the vicinity of minimal service facilities.

The standard class starport is a fully staffed facility. It has restocking services, and at least a small shipyard for repairs. Common spacecraft parts are readily available.

A stellar class starport is a major commerce hub. It can dock and service almost any type of vessel, and there are often satellite shipyards in the area that can effect repairs and make major modifications.

Golden class starports are mostly found on the most advanced and commercial worlds. They often sprawl for hundreds of kilometers, and service thousands of vessels a day. They are modern and luxurious, with complete storage and maintenance facilities, and a large number of landing fields and docks.

• *Population.* How many people live on the world? Make a good estimate. A population in the millions is small on the galactic scale, while most settled planets average one to ten billion inhabitants. Anything upwards of 50 billion is a huge and densely populated world.

• *Planet Role.* What are the main industries of the planet? What does the planet "do" to generate income? Planet function categories include Abandoned Colony, Academic, Administrative/Government, Colony, Disaster, Entertainment, Exploration, Hidden Base, Homeworld, Luxury Agriculture, Luxury Goods, Manufacturing/ Processing, Military, Mining, Natural Resources, Research, Service, Subsistence, and Trade. You may create new classifications, use the ones above, or more precisely define one of the listed categories (e.g., substitute "spaceship manufacturing" for the more generic "manufacturing /processing"). You can also list more than one if necessary.

• *Government.* Who runs the world? A president for the Union of Planets? The Ekonomat? A powerful Maganat? Pick a government type from the list below, or invent your own.

The possibilities are Anarchy, Competing States, Colonial Council, Dictatorship, Ekonomat, Family, Feudalism, Guild/Professional Organization, Human Empire Governor, Industrial Maganat, Military, Monarchy, Organized Crime, Participatory Democracy, Pirate Band, Ruler by Selection/Rite, Theocracy, and Tribal.

You can always define a category more specifically, like noting the Baggdathi Royal Family instead of listing a generic Monarchy.

• *Technology.* Not all of the worlds in the universe are at an equal technology level. Some are on par with super-advanced worlds like the Golden Planet, while others are backward primitive worlds with few amenities. Where does your world fall?

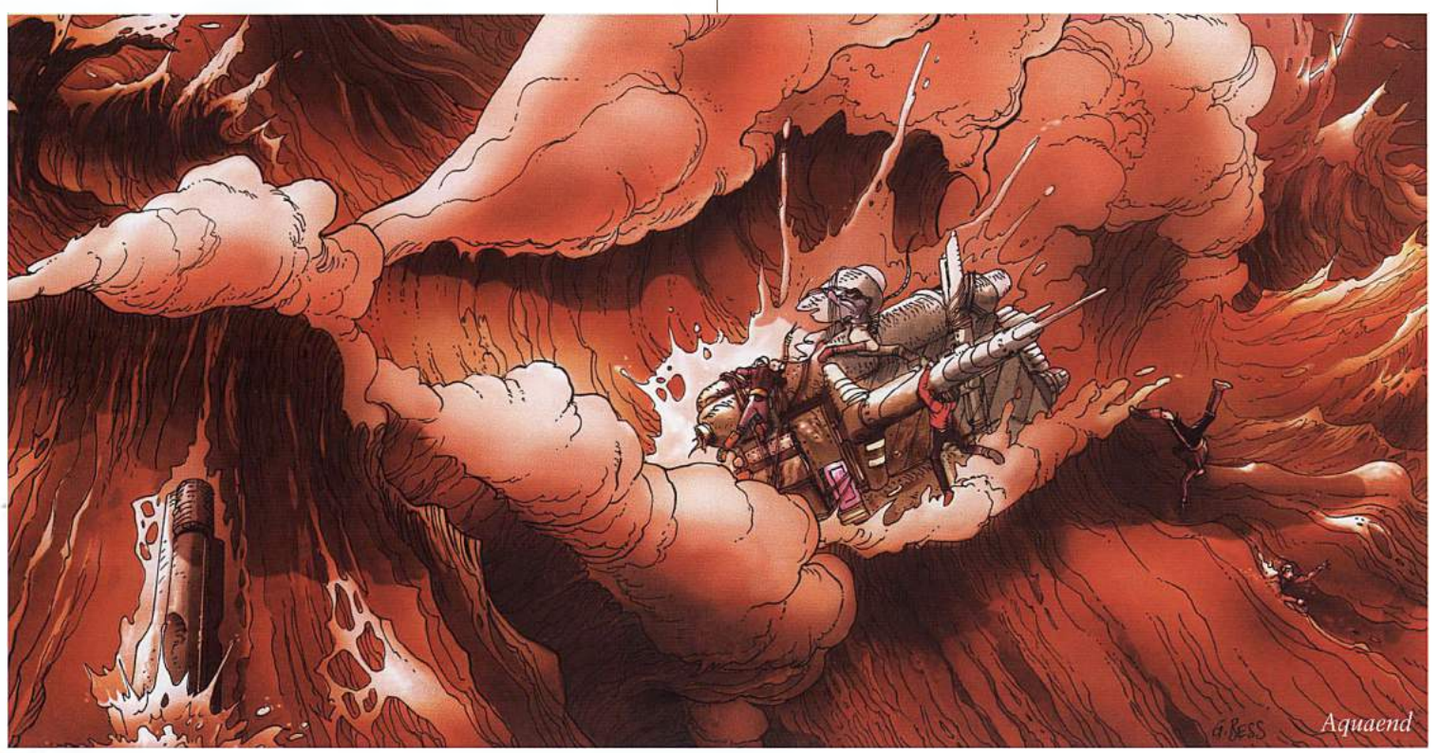
There are five technology levels: Stone, Feudal, Industrial, Information, and Space.

Stone age worlds are those characterized by loosely-knit cultures, primitive stone tools and such. These are usually quickly exploited or exterminated by the Ekonomat or the Human Empire.

Feudal age worlds are those that produce primitive manufactured goods, and have mastered basic mining and ore-processing techniques. In paleo-earth terms, this tech level covers everything from classical Greece to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

Industrial age worlds are those which have begun using mass production, and have adopted more complex social and political structures. Windmills, waterwheels, wood, and coal are typical energy sources. Motorized transport, projectile weapon and mass communication industries are in their infancy.

Information age worlds have sophisticated communications systems and efficient production centers. Energy weapons, inter-system space



flight, and anti-grav vehicles may or may not be in use. This is the period in which many worlds begin colonizing other planets.

Space age worlds are the standard in the *Metabarons* universe. Advanced technologies are common —like robots, spacecraft, and hyper-dimensional travel. Most planets at this level are integrated into the galactic economy, and thus are dependent upon and service other worlds.

Some planets have odd mixtures of tech levels. You can indicate this in the entry by listing each type, with a note specifying where it applies: "Space (only around cities), feudal."

• *Major Exports.* Most worlds manufacture a variety of goods and services for domestic consumption. But what does your world make for export? List the most important commodities.

There are several standard trade categories: Low Technology, Mid Technology, High Technology, Metals, Minerals, Luxury Goods, Foodstuffs, and Medicinal Goods. Feel free to add any more you feel best characterize your planet. You can also more precisely define one of the existing categories; "spacecraft" instead of "high technology," for example.

• *Major Imports.* Not all worlds are self-sufficient. Many must import certain commodities. Use the export categories presented above, or make up your own.

• *Description.* Here's where you can write a short essay better describing the world, covering all the areas not developed above. In the essay you can discuss the terrain, the economy, what the world is like, history, what other planets in the system are like, and any other data you feel would interest those visiting the world.

You can also touch on points of interest (like lost historical sites or huge cities), famous personalities (notable gamemaster characters), new alien species, items, places, people, or things the characters are likely to encounter.

The following stat items are not always listed in the planet stats, but you can use them if you want to provide more information on the solar system surrounding the planet:

• *System.* The name of the system. Systems are normally named after the main planet in that system.

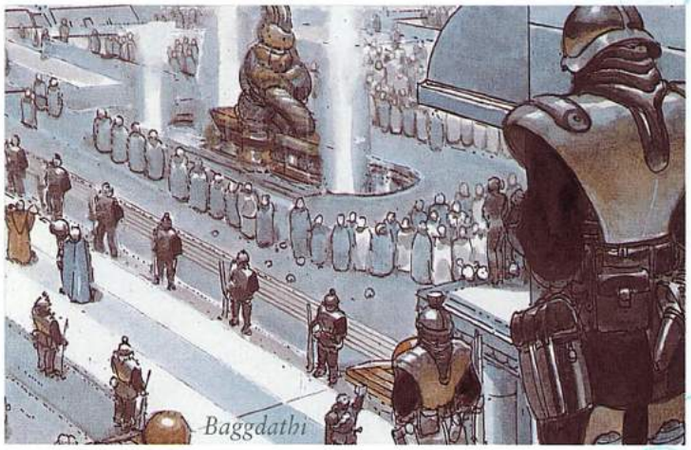
• *Star.* The name of the system's star, which is often the same as the system name, or a variant thereof. List the star color in parentheses after the name. Common colors are orange and yellow, while red, blue, and white are less likely to support habitable worlds.

• *System Bodies.* This is a charted listing of all the celestial bodies in the system, the basic planet type, and the number of moons for each world. The chart has the name of the world, a quick summary of the type of world, and the number of moons it boasts, if any.

If any moons are of particular interest, you may indicate that by listing the moon underneath the planet in italics with a brief summary. Asteroid belts and prominent space stations are listed in orbital order.

Sample Planets

Here are some sample worlds to get you started. These planets represent a variety of world types. Note that the description portion is placed before the stats. You can use this format if you prefer, or stick to placing the short essay last.



Aquaend

The Human Empire maintains several prison worlds on which it incarcerates criminals of various natures: anarchist insurgents, petty thieves, murderers, pirates, smugglers, corrupt officials. The Human Empire views anyone breaking the law as a criminal of the highest magnitude. This attitude of intolerance to any crime created a huge need for prisons. Rather than construct elaborate facilities in which to hold and reform criminals, the Empire found several worlds it designated as prison planets. Convicted criminals are simply deposited on these planets to fend for themselves, while Endoguard vessels post a patrol in orbit above (if even that) to prevent any escape attempts. Most of these worlds are not ideal for survival.

Aquaend is perhaps the most notorious prison planet. The water world is extremely inhospitable to human life. Convicts are dropped onto the planet from orbit in small drop-pods. They must survive on the minimal supplies given them: a few days of food and water, a poly-raft, the clothes on their backs. Most die of hunger and thirst while floating on the waves, while others drown, fall prey to hungry aquatic life, or are killed by their fellow convicts. Rumors abound of colonies of criminals formed by handfuls of survivors who managed to find shallow atolls on which to settle. These stories are hard to verify, as nobody's ever allowed off the planet, and only criminals are sent to the surface. Aquaend remains an infamous prison planet, frequently used to frighten others —"Disobey the authorities and they'll haul you off to Aquaend."

Type: Terrestrial
Climate: Hot
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Hydrosphere: Saturated
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Ocean, Atolls
Length of Day: 29 standard hours
Length of Year: 327 local days
Aliens: None
Spaceport: None
Population: Unknown
Planet Role: Prison world
Government: Anarchy
Technology: Feudal
Major Exports: None
Maior Imports: Criminals

Baggdathi

Spacers commonly call the wealthiest planet in the Septennial system Baggdathi the Pearl, though "Baggdathi" is the designation used on most astrographical charts. Centuries ago the planet's nobility exploited the natural resources of the other worlds in the system, using the riches they gained to protect and embellish the natural beauty of Baggdathi. They established vast natural preserves of virgin rain forest, built fabulous palaces at the base of mountain ranges, and concentrated development around their capital city of Amahdis. Only a small amount of the natural wealth is carefully harvested and exported. By raping the other planets in the system for their resources and constructing immense industrial facilities there, the Baggdathi nobles preserved the splendor of their homeworld.

Baggdathi is also known for its royal Maganat house. Although it shares command of the Septennial system with other aristocratic families, it serves as the ceremonial ruler. The family is particularly known for breeding heirs of stunning beauty, many of whom are married off to seal alliances with aristocracies in neighboring systems of equal wealth and influence. Baggdathi's most famous royal heir was the princess Oda the Capricious, rumored to be the most beautiful princess in the universe.

The capital city Amahdis displays the planet's wealth in every edifice. Even the spaceport district sports ornate architecture and high-class establishments. Travel into the more natural areas is restricted to the aristocracy and their honored guests, but most visitors are satisfied with enjoying the city's innumerable pleasures: parks, restaurants, market forums, and public museums.

Type: Terrestrial
Climate: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Rain forests, mountain ranges, plains
Length of Day: 19 standard hours
Length of Year: 225 local days
Aliens: None
Spaceport: Golden class
Population: 1.6 billion
Planet Role: System capital
Government: Monarchy
Technology: Space
Major Exports: Tourism, rare natural resources
Major Imports: Luxury goods

Dreer

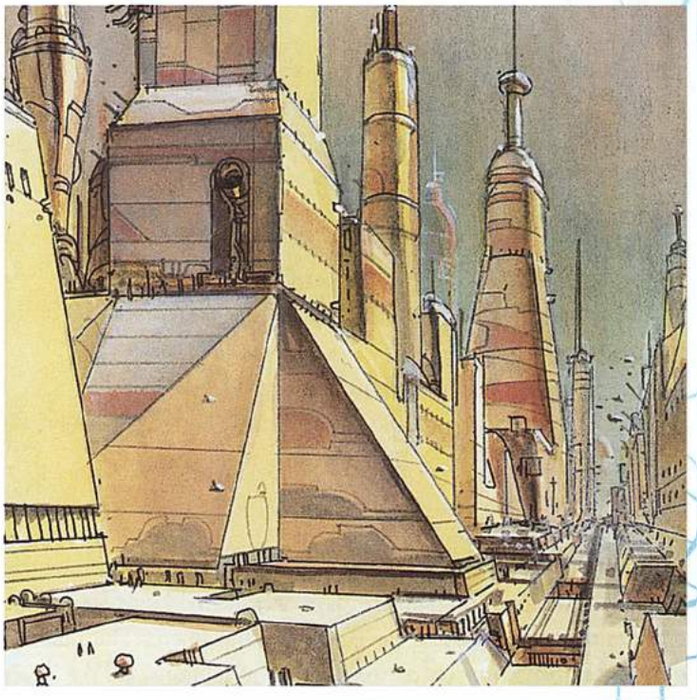
Dreer is typical of many worlds owned by Maganats and raped by a policy of industrial exploitation. The planet's surface is a vast, flat rocky wasteland covered in piles of tailings from mining, slag heaps from furnaces, and murky sludge seas filled with industrial and human waste. Huge arcology towers rise from the shores of these putrid oceans. These immense constructs rise on massive concrete pilings and pylons, including innumerable pipes and

Dreer

power conduits to support various industries. Atop all this are an assemblage of polygonal habitation and work modules into which the populace is herded to live and work. Each arcology is different, but they look like massive trees, the pipes and pylons being the trunks, and the polygonal portions the leaves. From rooftop smokestacks rise black fumes that turn the sky smoky and gray.

The arcologies house billions of inhabitants, massive factory facilities, entire spaceports, and corporate offices. Some arcol units serve mixed functions, but most concentrate on one purpose: industry, offices, or habitation. Physical plants filter and purify the air and provide other utilities, all at exorbitant prices. The upper levels of each arcol are naturally the most expensive, reserved for the corporate elite, aristocracy, and Maganat bureaucracy. Middle levels contain most businesses, industry, and civilian areas. The sub-levels house support machinery, but also foster underground elements of society who wish to remain out of sight from the regular workings of Dreer.

Type: Terrestrial
Climate: Hot
Atmosphere: Type II (breather suggested)
Hydrosphere: Arid
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Waste oceans, slag heaps, arcologies
Length of Day: 19 standard hours
Length of Year: 297 local days
Aliens: None
Spaceport: Stellar class



Population: 36 billion
Planet Role: Maganat industrial world
Government: Maganat
Technology: Space
Major Exports: Mid technology, high technology, minerals, metals
Major Imports: Luxury goods, medicinal goods, foodstuffs

Golden Planet

The capital world of the Human Empire sits at the universe's center, a shimmering orb of gold sending its light to every corner of the universe. The entire surface is covered in shining buildings reaching high into the sky, a testament to the might, authority, and myriad accomplishments of the Empire. Here politicians establish government and law, artists create the latest styles and cultural trends, and bureaucrats manage information for the more than 22,000 major worlds in the Human Empire.

The capital is well defended by Endoguard units, plus a dizzying array of photonic barriers, quantum sensors, and poly-radar. If travelers don't have the proper permits, they might be denied permission to land. Its pleasure districts cater to the widest variety of entertainments in the universe. Its public museums proclaim the glory of the Human Empire through inspiring displays of culture and technology from member worlds throughout the planets of the Emperoress. The hotels and restaurants are all top-line. Visitors are, of course, restricted to those locales under tight security and far from the Golden Palace itself. The palace is surrounded by an entire continent of offices, bureaus, ministries, and other edifices supporting the vast administrative bureaucracy that keeps the Human Empire running smoothly.

Type: Terrestrial
Climate: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Hydrosphere: Arid

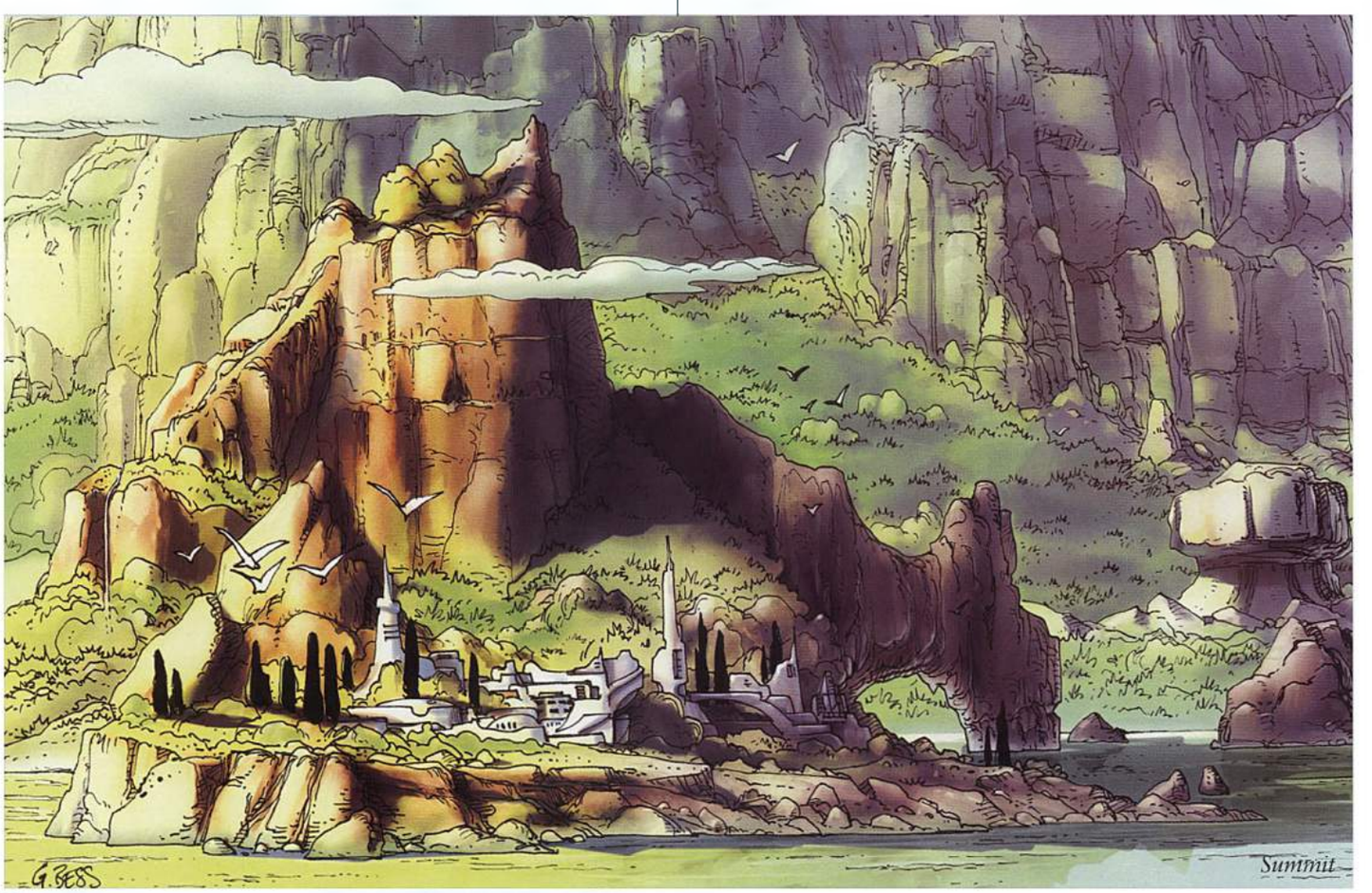
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Urban
Length of Day: 25 standard hours
Length of Year: 213 local days
Aliens: None
Spaceport: Golden class
Population: 88 billion
Planet Role: Capital of the Human Empire
Government: Human Empire governor
Technology: Space
Major Exports: Galactic bureaucracy
Major Imports: Luxury goods, foodstuffs, high technology

Summit

Summit is a world far out in one of the regions controlled by the Colonial Planets. Its surface is covered in kilometers-high mountain ranges reaching up past the atmosphere. The planet's only habitable areas lie between these mountains, in the deep valleys lush with forests, lakes, streams, and mossy fields. Since the mountains separate the valleys, Summit is home to many isolated settlements from many factions. Although the planet holds immense natural resources in its mountains, the Union of Planets passed an edict protecting Summit from exploitation by industrial concerns, including the ever-ambitious Maganats and their conglomerates. Instead, Summit serves as a haven for several groups who settle around the lakes in each valley. The Troglosocialiks have several enclaves, while travel companies developed other regions for low-impact eco-tourism resorts.

The planet's colonial council keeps several valleys in trust, harvesting wood and bottling the cool water from mountain glaciers for export to pay for maintaining a planetary administrator and basic system infrastructure. The capital city, Talline, serves as the trade and transportation hub for the planet. From here one can travel by pressurized aircar to nearly any valley. Talline is also the gateway for various factions seeking asylum to settle one of the valleys. The city's simple architecture reflects Summit's natural beauty and concern with conservation. The planetary government hopes to maintain the world's role as a natural haven against growing demands from the Maganats who are becoming increasingly greedy to exploit worlds rich with resources.

Type: Terrestrial
Climate: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Mountains, forested valleys
Length of Day: 29 standard hours
Length of Year: 327 local days
Aliens: None
Spaceport: Standard class
Population: 24 million
Planet Role: Natural haven
Government: Colonial Council
Technology: Space
Major Exports: Luxury goods, natural resources, tourism
Major Imports: High technology



Summit

CHARACTER TEMPLATES

Now it is time for you to create your own heroes. The following templates are here as a reference. Feel free to photocopy them and modify them as best befits your vision of your character.
Remember that you are one in a million to have found a way to fight the Necro-Dream.

You have chosen a code of honor that has allowed you to develop your spiritual heart. Your code has given you your first point of Amarax. Follow it, and it will allow you to increase your Amarax, making you a hero in deed and in spirit.
Avoid the Necro-Dream. It is ever present in the universe in many forms. Only the beliefs that come from within your own heart should be trusted. Others may try and convince you to follow their "truth". Their truth is not necessarily yours. This is one of the most insidious ways to fall under the power of the Necro-Dream. The Necro-Dream was created to take away your free will. There is nothing worse than giving away your freedom before you truly understand yourself what it is.
Trust your heart and you will grow stronger. Develop your code and follow its path.

Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Political Insurgent		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 3D

Dodge .....
Firearms .....
Melee combat .....

Knowledge 4D

Bureaucracy .....
Business .....
Cultures .....
Languages .....
Scholar .....
Security regulation .....
Streetwise .....
Willpower .....

Perception 3D

Con .....
Hide .....
Persuasion .....
Search .....
Sneak .....

Strength 3D

Climb/Jump.....
Stamina .....

Mechanical 2D

Comm .....
Piloting .....
Vehicle operation .....

Technical 3D

Demolitions .....
First aid .....
Medicine (adv.) .....
Security .....

Psionics

Special Abilities

Wound Status

Stunned
Wounded
Incapacitated
Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

Veritas. The followers of Veritas believe the world has a right to know. They must relate the facts as they are and unveil and tell the truth.

A Quote

"If the flards can't dance, you can keep your revolution."

Equipment

Long coat, Viper pistol (4D damage), wide-brimmed hat, 3 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You grew up on a large Colonial planet. Pure Troglosocialik doctrine was fed to you from your earliest years, and your diplomatic talents were noted by your Kamar. It was on one of your first diplomatic missions that you realized your heart was screaming at you to question what you had been taught. In fact, your Kamar had agreed in council to the genocide of a newly discovered alien species in order to bring their world into the Union of Planets. Kublars were flowing, and your clan's Kamar wasn't on the short end of the distribution list. The flards were exterminated in short order. "Viva la revolucion!" Outraged, on your return, you brought the "scandal" public. To your great distress, the public didn't seem to care. With a lot fewer friends and some new enemies, you gained the reputation of a political troublemaker.

Personality

You are obsessed by the inner workings of politics and the injustices that they often bring. You still believe that you can change the universe by making people see what is happening. You are anxious, and often disappointed by your fellow human beings. Still, Veritas gives you hope.

Connections

Though few people even care about your causes, you make friends easily with anyone who will listen. You have come to recognize curiosity in others as a positive sign of their trustworthiness.

Physical Description

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Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Corsair		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 4D

- Brawling
- Dodge
- Firearms
- Melee combat
- Running
- Throwing

Knowledge 2D

- Aliens
- Astrography
- Intimidation
- Survival
- Tactics

Perception 3D

- Command
- Con
- Hide
- Search
- Sneak

Strength 3D

- Climb/Jump
- Lift
- Stamina
- Swim

Mechanical 4D

- Astro-nav
- Comm
- Gunnery
- Piloting
- Vehicle operation

Technical 2D

- Armor repair
- Demolitions
- Firearm repair
- First aid
- Gunnery repair
- Perso. equip. repair

Psionics

Honor Code

Rayah. The survival of your designated group is your key motive, in spite of whether you belong to a family, pirate gang, mercenary unit, or Maganat corporation. The individual must remember the group's interest, and is part of that group in everything he does.

A Quote

"I'll watch your back, just watch out for yourself."

Equipment

Armored vest (+1D STR to resist damage, torso only), combat shock-knife (STR+1D+2 damage), comm headset, jumpsuit, suprapistol (5D damage).

Character Description

Background

You grew up to be an elite Maganat marine. One of your fondest memories is that of your father beaming with pride as you graduated with honors from the prestigious school of Winds'Or. You became an expert in small unit tactics and deep space boarding. It was on your thirteenth mission that your life changed. Six members of your team were slowly burned to death before your eyes. You were the only survivor, and you were never allowed to learn the dead men and women's names. Since that day the scene haunts you. The Guard had taught you to expect casualties and to block out your emotions. You resigned from the guard. Neither your family nor friends understood your decision. Since then, you have only ever felt comfortable in small mercenary groups where your partners value each others' lives.

Personality

You like to know where anyone in your group is at all times. Like a paleo-sheepdog, you tend to round everyone up for regular head counts. You are friendly and slightly sentimental.

Connections

You take to people who live in the present, but not only for themselves. You are constantly looking for a group that can make the best use of your talents.

Physical Description

Special Abilities

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

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Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Hot-Headed Mercenary		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 4D

- Brawling
- Dodge
- Firearms
- Melee combat
- Running
- Throwing
- O-G maneuver

Knowledge 2D

- Aliens
- Intimidation
- Security regulation
- Survival
- Tactics

Perception 3D

- Bargain
- Gaming
- Search
- Sneak

Strength 4D

- Climb/Jump
- Lift
- Stamina
- Swim

Mechanical 3D

- Comm
- Exoskeleton opr.
- Gunnery

Technical 2D

- Demolitions
- Exoskeleton repair
- Firearm repair
- First aid
- Perso. equip. repair

Psionics

Honor Code

Bushitaka. Inspired from the way of the warrior of the Castaka clan, Bushitaka requires its followers to act as warriors in combat and in all aspects of life. For the warrior the highest virtue, his constant objective, is victory.

A Quote

"My fist, your face, let's cut to the chase."

Equipment

Armor pieces (+1D STR to resist damage), combat shock-knife (STR+1D+2 damage), old Cogan rifle (5D+2 damage), suprapistol (5D damage), 2 kublars.

Character Description

Background

Fighting's always been a second nature for you. From your early youth to your recruitment in a mercenary unit, when things didn't seem right you punched your way through the dilemma. That annoying tendency has left you stranded on several planets as your units seemed to "forget" you when taking off for their next missions. Fighting has kept you alive, not only physically, but spiritually.

Personality

You persevere. You use your short temper to thwart off the ever present Necro-Dream.

Connections

You easily take to groups that appreciate your thirst for battle. You feel that you still have a lot to learn. Those with something to teach interest you.

Physical Description

Special Abilities

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

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Metabarons™

Character Name	Gender		Move	10
	Age		Amarax Points	1
Type / Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Defused Mentrek	Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 2D+2

Dodge .....
Firearms .....
Running .....

Knowledge 4D

Astrography .....
Bureaucracy .....
Cultures .....
Languages .....
Security regulation .....

Perception 4D

Con .....
Hide .....
Investigation .....
Search .....

Strength 2D+1

Climb/Jump .....
Stamina .....

Mechanical 2D

Astro-nav .....
Comm .....
Sensors .....
Shields .....

Technical 3D

Comp/interface repair
Flight systems repair ..
Perso. equip. repair ....
Robot repair .....
Security .....

Psionics

Special Abilities

Cranial Bio-Computer (Allows you to add +1D to either Knowledge or Technical and their related skills each round, but only one attribute per given round.)

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

Fuga. The act of fleeing is the highest expression of the art of dodging. There is no more glory in facing your enemy than to deceive him and to avoid aggression. The infamy lies in the objective of the action, never in the means you use.

A Quote
"We only have an 84.720% chance of survival."

Equipment

Defense pistol (5 shots, 3D damage), hand vid-comm, 3 kublars.

Character Description

Background
Transformed during your adolescence into a human thinking machine, you served the Human Empire flawlessly until your first face-to-face encounter with a Techno-Pope. The calculations that were asked of you were appalling. What crime rate percentage should be maintained in Endo-City 1455 to insure a 4% per annum death toll among the poor? After that task, you searched out a means to defuse yourself from the Imperial network. Your travels led you to Dreer where an underground and highly illegal "doctor" performed the painful surgery necessary to give you freedom from constant surveillance. Your choice put you on a black list that spans the universe.

Personality
You want to survive. Highly suspicious by nature, you have "thought" things that make your skin crawl. You take no shame in disappearing in front of confrontation.

Connections
You cautiously take to those who seem to have subversive intentions. You seek safety in groups that value discretion.

Physical Description

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Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Unscrupulous Trader		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 3D+2

Dodge .....
Firearms .....
Running .....
Sleight of hand .....
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Knowledge 3D

Aliens .....
Bureaucracy .....
Business .....
Languages .....
Security regulation .....
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Perception 3D

Bargain .....
Con .....
Gaming .....
Search .....
Sneak .....
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Strength 2D+1

Lift .....
Stamina .....
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Mechanical 3D+2

Comm .....
Piloting .....
Vehicle operation .....
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Technical 2D+1

Comp/interface repair
Perso. equip. repair ....
Vehicle repair .....
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Psionics

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Special Abilities

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

Rayah. Loyalty to your group is most important in your life, whether you belong to a family, pirate gang, mercenary unit, or Maganat corporation. The individual must remember the group's interest, and is part of that group in everything he does.

A Quote

"Caveat Emptor." (Buyer beware).

Equipment

Io board, defense Pistol (5 shots, 3D damage), hand vid-comm 20 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You grew up in poverty. You saw your entire family die of hunger even though they ate three square meals per day... of paleo-sawdust. The Maganat forest world where your family once thrived was transformed into a wasteland in a simple rush for greater profits. The value of the Kublar was something you learned to understand at an all too early age. That understanding allowed you to survive. Through years of struggle you learned to fly a transport ship, and even managed to set up your own firm as a transporter, leasing your ship from the very Maganat that cut your family tree down to a single branch. You came to understand that the only people worth living for were those you could care for directly with your own means. The members of your firm became your neo-family and you took care of them. Unfortunately, while you were on a delivery, someone else took care of them for you in a definitive matter. Bitter and alone, you left the system with a "borrowed" ship.

Personality

Bitter and Unscrupulous. You only believe in a world made up of those that can look you directly in the eye. For those you trust, you would sell your mother's bones.

Connections

You are cautious when making friends. Once made, you would do anything for them, especially if it keeps you moving and trading.

Physical Description

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Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
3D Reporter		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 3D

Dodge .....
Melee combat .....
Running .....
Sleight of hand .....

Knowledge 3D+2

Bureaucracy .....
Business .....
Languages .....
Security regulation .....
Streetwise .....

Perception 4D

Bargain .....
Con .....
Gaming .....
Hide .....
Investigation .....

Strength 2D

Climb/Jump .....
Stamina .....

Mechanical 3D

Comm .....
Piloting .....
Vehicle operation .....

Technical 2D+1

Comp/interface repair
Perso. equip. repair ....
Security .....

Psionics

Honor Code

Veritas. The followers of Veritas believe the world has a right to know. They must relate the facts as they are and unveil and tell the truth.

A Quote

"Let the truth be seen in living hologram."

Equipment

Hand vid-comm, io board, add cybernetic eye, 35 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You were equipped with a televised eye at your graduation from Journalism Central. You were good at finding scoops, and though the public never saw you, your channel superiors knew who you by name. It was a routine fire that changed your vision of the universe. Strolling through the red-ring of your Endo-City you saw smoke coming from the window of a boutique. Reporting it in a micro-second, you saw the first 3DTV crews arrive on site within minutes. Their first action before live coverage was to spew a thousand liters of liquid paleo-fuel through the same window. 245 spectacular deaths later and after a fantastic riot that killed even more, you were left questioning your journalistic principles over a pool of your own vomit. You became an independent the next day. Though a few, unwatched channels carry your discoveries, you barely manage to pay your rent and eek out a living.

Personality

You are tenacious and conscientious. You weigh your thoughts carefully before acting. You seek the purest way to convey reality to the public eye.

Connections

You take to those with capacity to differentiate information and propaganda. You've never left your Endo-City, but are open to getting out of the Techno-Techno machine.

Physical Description

Special Abilities

Wound Status

Stunned
Wounded
Incapacitated
Mortally Wounded

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Metabarons™

Character Name	Gender		Move	10
	Age		Amarax Points	1
Type / Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Bored Aristo	Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 3D+1

Archaic weapon .....
Brawling .....
Dodge .....
Melee combat .....

Knowledge 4D

Astrography .....
Intimidation .....
Languages .....
Scholar .....
Willpower .....

Perception 4D

Command .....
Con .....
Gaming .....
Investigation .....
Persuasion .....

Strength 2D+2

Climb/Jump .....
Stamina .....
Swim .....

Mechanical 2D

Comm .....
Piloting .....
Vehicle operation .....

Technical 2D

Demolitions .....
Security .....

Psionics

Honor Code

Paleo-Nobilis. A resurgence of the antique honor code of the paleo-knights, Paleo-Noblis is a harsh and constrained path which requires its followers to respect the rules and principles of loyalty, humility, and sacrifice.

A Quote

"How 'noble' of you... Ivanhoe!"

Equipment

Fine clothes, hand vid-comm, 100 kublars.

Character Description

Background

Boredom saved your soul. Other aristos seemed to thrive in the decadent lifestyle of your Endo-City; but gallivanting elegantly from one orgy to the next, discovering new dimensions through one drug or another, bored you to death. As you distanced yourself, and withdrew from the babbling, meaningless social talk, your sense of observation developed in your quest to find something significant in your elite universe. Your boredom brought you to the Endo-City data-libraries. Here things were even more boring. Paleo-Eureka! A chance discovery led you to an ancient paleo-scan of a paleo-earthen book. You've read Ivanhoe at least fifty times. For the first time in your existence there seemed to be a different way of looking at the universe immersed in its pages. This led you too sneak out of the Endo-City at the first opportunity and seek out what being "noble" might really mean.

Personality

You are suave and elegant, though extremely withdrawn. You are easily bored by meaningless conversation.

Connections

You take to anyone who expresses a desire to discover true meaning and purpose. Anyone who has ever read Ivanhoe will peak your immediate interest.

Physical Description

Special Abilities

Halo

Wound Status

Stunned
Wounded
Incapacitated
Mortally Wounded

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Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Reclusive Mystic		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 3D

Dodge .....
Running .....
Throwing .....

Knowledge 4D

Aliens .....
Cultures .....
Intimidation .....
Languages .....
Scholar .....
Survival .....
Willpower .....

Perception 4D

Hide .....
Persuasion .....
Search .....
Sneak .....

Strength 2D

Climb/Jump .....
Stamina .....
Swim .....

Mechanical 2D

Vehicle operation .....

Technical 2D

First aid .....
Medicine (adv.) .....

Psionics 1D

Energy .....
Influence .....
Self-control .....

Honor Code

Paleo-Nobilis. A resurgence of the antique honor code of the paleo-knights, Paleo-Noblis is a harsh and constrained path which requires its followers to respect the rules and principles of loyalty, humility, and sacrifice.

A Quote

"Time is our ally; vision comes to those who wait."

Equipment

Simple robes, walking staff (STR+1D damage).

Character Description

Background

Your home planet was forgotten. Neither the Colonials nor the Maganat seemed to remember who had discovered it. It was only ever important to the Ekonomat, and that was when it still had water. Your planet had lost its soul, but from somewhere else in the universe, waves of pain called to you, driving you nearly mad in your sleep, begging you not to accept its destiny as your own. You discovered quite rapidly that you had powers that very few others could even fathom. The fear of them drove you to a distant part of the barren planet that even your own family ignored. The waves were still there, and the nightmares, and the power. In a dire effort to avoid complete depression, you smuggled yourself off-planet on one of the last Ekonomat ships to have visited. A vision of a Paleo-Cup gave you the courage.

Personality

Patient and determined, you seek meaning on a large scale. You talk little, but when you do, others tend to listen.

Connections

You are attracted to those who search their individual significance in life. Those who seek higher causes especially interest you.

Physical Description

Special Abilities

Wound Status

Stunned
Wounded
Incapacitated
Mortally Wounded

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Metabarons™

Character Name	Gender		Move	10
	Age		Amarax Points	1
Type / Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Contract Pilot	Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 2D+2

- Brawling
- Dodge
- Firearms
- O-G maneuver

Knowledge 3D

- Aliens
- Astrography
- Cultures
- Security regulation

Perception 3D

- Bargain
- Gaming
- Search

Strength 2D+1

- Climb/Jump
- Lift
- Stamina

Mechanical 4D

- Astro-nav
- Comm
- Gunnery
- Piloting
- Sensors
- Shields
- Vehicle operation

Technical 3D

- Comp/interface repair
- Flight systems repair
- Perso. equip. repair
- Robot repair
- Vehicle repair

Psionics

Special Abilities

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

Skatawah. The Neo-Red Prophecy claims that the harmony of nature is a perfection that we must attain again. In everything the Skatawah followers look for the secret rhythm of life and do their best to find harmony with it.

A Quote

"Look at these little insects... they understand something."

Equipment

Comm headset, defense pistol (5 shots, 3D damage), flight suit, io board, pilot's helmet, 3 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You were born in space, where bio-life was limited to the 40,000 other humans living on your Techno-Techno cargo factory ship. You would certainly have finished your life on the same ship if not for a pirate raid. Along with a few hundred survivors, none of whom you previously knew, you found yourself stranded on one of the most beautiful planets in the universe. Here bio-life took on new meaning. Rivers of crystal green purity, lakes of organic red, and herds of soft blue animals brightened your childhood to the soul. As you grew up, you were trained as one of the ten pilots honored to care for the remaining five drop ships. When the Techno-Technos returned ten long and wondrous years later to reclaim their work force, and with the project to transform the new planet into an Endo-City, you were heartbroken. Stealing the best ship you could find, you left the system with a dozen bluish goats.

Personality

You are awed by the beauty of nature. Childish but certainly not naïve, you strive to make others appreciate the ecosystems around them.

Connections

You will band with any group interested in protecting a natural ecosystem. Those who respect life in all of its forms you consider trustworthy.

Physical Description

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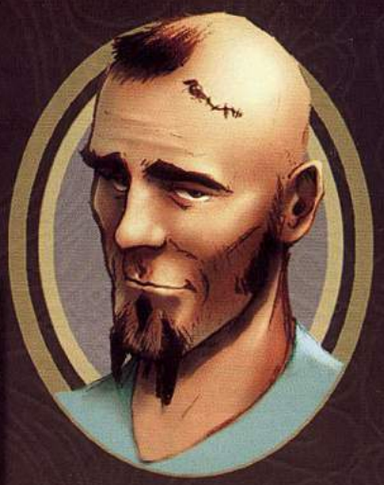

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Class-S Investigator		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 3D

- Brawling .....
- Dodge .....
- Firearms .....
- Melee combat .....
- Running .....
- Sleight of hand .....

Knowledge 3D

- Bureaucracy .....
- Intimidation .....
- Security regulation .....
- Streetwise .....

Perception 4D

- Bargain .....
- Con .....
- Forgery .....
- Hide .....
- Investigation .....
- Search .....
- Sneak .....

Strength 2D+1

- Climb/Jump .....
- Stamina .....
- Swim .....

Mechanical 3D

- Comm .....
- Sensors .....
- Vehicle operation .....

Technical 2D+2

- Firearm repair .....
- First aid .....
- Perso. equip. repair ..
- Robot repair .....
- Security .....
- Vehicle repair .....

Psionics

Special Abilities

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

Veritas. The followers of Veritas believe the world has a right to know. They must relate the facts as they are and unveil and tell the truth.

A Quote

"Being aware of the problem is already half of the solution."

Equipment

Hand vid-comm, long coat, nondescript hat, Viper pistol (4D damage), 4 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You were "rescued" as a child from a Pirate band during an Endoguard raid on an asteroid hideaway. Those memories were buried by your adoption into a Stellcomm orphanage. Here your curious nature led you to become a Stellcomm security specialist, and eventually a Class-S Investigator. A random event changed your life. Sent undercover to discover the origins of a shipment of illegal SPV you found yourself in a slum on the Maganat planet Dreer. Obliged to "test" the merchandise during the course of your investigation you realized that the drug possessed none of the qualities of standard SPV. Rather than send you off into a hallucinogenic stupor, it had the opposite effect. You were able to think clearly for the first time in your life. You then understood why it was illegal. It wasn't a drug at all. It was a direct threat to the Necro-Dream, a concept that you were suddenly able to visualize. You never returned from the mission, and you now hope your previous employers think you're dead. A Techno-Techno raid eventually eradicated the "illegal drug" dealers, but you escaped unseen and wandered the galaxy in search of new truths.

Personality

You fight to keep your sense of awareness. Clear thoughts are pure ones. You avoid all drugs and encourage others to do the same.

Connections

Any group desiring to stop the destruction of wildlife interests you. Though most Colonials profess this objective, very few actually do anything about it.

Physical Description

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Metabarons™

Character Name	Gender		Move	10
	Age		Amarax Points	1
Type / Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Wayward Mechanic	Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 2D+2

Brawling .....
Dodge .....
Firearms .....
Throwing .....
O-G maneuver .....

Knowledge 2D+1

Aliens .....
Streetwise .....
Survival .....

Perception 3D+2

Bargain .....
Gaming .....
Search .....

Strength 3D

Climb/Jump .....
Lift .....
Stamina .....

Mechanical 2D+1

Comm .....
Sensors .....
Shields .....
Vehicle operation .....

Technical 4D

Comp/interface repair
Engineering (adv.) .....
Flight systems repair ..
Gunnery repair .....
Perso. equip. repair ....
Robot repair .....
Vehicle repair .....

Psionics

Special Abilities

Wound Status

Stunned
Wounded
Incapacitated
Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

Skatawah. The Neo-Red Prophecy claims that the harmony of nature is a perfection that we must attain again. In everything the Skatawah followers look for the secret rhythm of life and do their best to find harmony with it.

A Quote

"Now you are thinking like the 'thumb-less'!"

Equipment

Comm headset, defense pistol (5 shots, 3D damage), greasy coveralls, mechanic's tool bag (+1D to repair skill rolls), 4 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You were born in a zoo. In fact, your whole planet was a zoo, one of the most beautiful resorts in the Union of Planets. It held a million different species of animals. Having a gift for tinkering with all things mechanical, you grew to hate any creature that didn't have a thumb. The beauty of the planet seemed false. As a gifted mechanic, you got a job to repair a broken down aircar that was stranded in a swamp. Wanting to save all the profits for yourself, you decided to strike out on foot with only your tool kit, and drive the aircar back once you had fixed it. Your thriftiness defied caution. You nearly drowned, ten minutes into your trip. A large green "thumb-less" otter saved your life. You muttered a "thank you" out of pure reflex, and were surprised to hear her say "You're welcome." Over the following years you learned from her the truth behind your home planet. It was indeed a zoo, made up of the last surviving creatures of hundreds of destroyed worlds. Your rage at the injustice grew as much as your love for all living things. You took to the stars with the quest to save other species from similar destinies.

Personality

You like solving problems with your hands. Talking is not your forte. You have a great deal of patience with animals, much less with humans.

Connections

Any group desiring to stop the destruction of wildlife interests you. Though most Colonials profess this objective, very few actually do anything about it.

Physical Description

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Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Merchant Functionary		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 2D+2

Dodge .....
Sleight of hand .....

Knowledge 4D

Aliens .....
Bureaucracy .....
Business .....
Cultures .....
Languages .....
Security regulation .....

Perception 4D

Bargain .....
Con .....
Gaming .....
Persuasion .....
Search .....
Sneak .....

Strength 3D

Stamina .....
Swim .....

Mechanical 2D+1

Piloting .....
Vehicle operation .....

Technical 2D

First aid .....
Security .....

Psionics

Honor Code

Fuga. The act of fleeing is the highest expression of the art of dodging. There is no more glory in facing your enemy than to deceive him and to avoid aggression. The infamy lies in the objective of the action, never in the means you use.

A Quote

"Live long, but not foolishly."

Equipment

Fine clothes, io board, 25 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You landed the job of a lifetime at a young age - an Imperial Merchants guild post that paid extremely well. You had little to do, next to nothing, and the drugs and women were free. Your account balance of "favors-owed" was always positive. You were a favorite among the traders, and helped them efficiently for a small fee. You left no trails. You had never counted on falling in love, but it happened in spite of yourself. Marlina was bright, funny, and talented. And she was beautiful. Her only fault: she was an Ekonomat spy. Your "love" affair ruined you. Within a year you had betrayed every secret you possessed. This time there were trails, and eventually trails of blood. Not only was Marlina killed by a Techno-Assassin, but so was half of your bureau. You took to the stars, for it was only a matter of time. The disgust with yourself over that chapter of your life lighted a spark. Adopting Fuga as way of life, you vowed never again to enter into the vicious circles of corruption.

Personality

You are a sad type. Some great, unforgivable pain shadows your existence. You seek freedom from your past. Though good with words, you weigh them heavily.

Connections

You are cautious when choosing a group. Though you easily make contacts, you are slow to commit to them. A cause targeting the downfall of corruption in any form would interest you.

Physical Description

Special Abilities

Wound Status

Stunned
Wounded
Incapacitated
Mortally Wounded

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Metabarons™

Character Name	Gender		Move	10
	Age		Amarax Points	2
Type / Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Proud Native	Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 4D

- Archaic weapon .....
- Brawling .....
- Dodge .....
- Firearms .....
- Melee combat .....
- Riding .....

Knowledge 2D

- Intimidation .....
- Languages .....
- Survival .....
- Willpower .....

Perception 3D

- Command .....
- Hide .....
- Persuasion .....
- Sneak .....

Strength 3D

- Climb/Jump .....
- Lift .....
- Stamina .....
- Swim .....

Mechanical 2D

- Gunnery .....
- Vehicle opporation ...

Technical 4D

- Armor repair .....
- Firearm repair .....
- Gunnery repair .....
- Vehicle repair .....

Psionics

Special Abilities

Willpower + 1D

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

Bushitaka. Inspired from the way of the warrior of the Castaka clan, Bushitaka requires its followers to act as warriors in combat and in all aspects of life. For the warrior the highest virtue, his constant objective, is victory.

A Quote

"I think you are repulsive, ugly and extremely limited intellectually, but I trust you all the same."

Equipment

Breather units, luma, magna line, range goggles, shock-knuckles (damage STR + 1D), viper pistol (damage 4D).

Character Description

Background

Your planet was a great prize for the Colonials. Not only were your race respectable and intelligent warriors, but they possessed certain bio-nano-technology that was unknown to the Human Empire. A micro-organism in your blood made deceit impossible. Through a quirk of politics with the Emperoress and the Union of Planets in coalition against the Techno-Technos, your race was not only spared, but accepted as a protectorate planet. Of course, the protection became slavery once the secrets of your blood were incorporated into the Empire's data banks. Still, the traditions of your race persisted, and your kind was often called upon for mercenary missions where numbers and courage were important. You are one of the last survivors of your generation's warrior class. You trust a code that you managed to advance a step farther from its traditional base. Following the code, you learned a way to lie.

Personality

You seek vengeance. You learned through following Bushitaka the power to hide this personality trait. Though you master the Human Empire's universal language, you consider it disgusting and designed for deceit. In your native tongue you can never lie, but by spending an Amarax point you may tell a lie in Universal.

Connections

You will team up with those who show no allegiance to the major factions of the Human Empire. Any group seeking to wreak havoc will attract you.

Physical Description

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Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	10
		Age		Amarax Points	1
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Neo Shabda-Oud		Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 2D+1

Dodge .....
Firearms .....
Martial arts .....
Melee combat .....

Knowledge 3D

Aliens .....
Business .....
Cultures .....
Intimidation .....
Languages .....
Scholar .....

Perception 3D

Con .....
Hide .....
Search .....
Sneak .....

Strength 2D+2

Climb/Jump .....
Lift .....
Stamina .....

Mechanical 2D

Comm .....
Piloting .....
Sensors .....

Technical 2D

First aid .....
Medicine (adv.) .....
Security .....

Psionics 3D

Energy .....
Influence .....
Self-control .....

Honor Code

Fuga. The act of fleeing is the highest expression of the art of dodging. There is no more glory in facing your enemy than to deceive him and to avoid aggression. The infamy lies in the objective of the action, never in the means you use.

A Quote

"No thank you, I am comfortable... I feel naked without my hat."

Equipment

Cloak and tunic, quiver-shiv (STR+1D damage), 10 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You were discovered on your backwater planet by an extremely ugly and old mid-wife. As she helped your mother bring your fourth brother into existence, her eyes caught yours for a fleeting moment. The next day she proposed to your family to take you on as an assistant in her mid-wiving profession. To this day you have never truly helped deliver a child. The following years of your life were spent developing your Psionic powers under the tutelage of a witch. It was during your initiation that you met for the first time others of the secret order. They were ten in all, but you only remembered one other face, that of the middle aged woman that drove the roots of Psionic enhancement into your skull. Though you felt your powers grow immediately, the pain took several months to disappear. Your tutor continued to train you until the day she left on a long trip, saying that she would return within the month. She never returned. You were forced to take to the stars, because gossip was causing you strife, and you never left your home with your head uncovered. You adopted Fuga in order to survive.

Personality

You are extremely discreet. You must wear something on your head at all times to hide the small roots sprouting from amidst your locks of hair. You have come to nearly hate your powers, and especially the roots growing inside your brain.

Connections

You will join any group that can help insure your survival, especially those that don't ask too many indiscreet questions.

Physical Description

Special Abilities

Wound Status

Stunned
Wounded
Incapacitated
Mortally Wounded

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Metabarons™

Character Name	Gender		Move	10
	Age		Amarax Points	1
Type / Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
Mercenary driver	Weight		Character Points	5

Agility 3D

Brawling .....
Dodge .....
Firearms .....
Melee combat .....
Riding .....
O-G maneuver .....
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Knowledge 2D

Astrography .....
Languages .....
Security regulation .....
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Perception 3D

Bargain .....
Persuasion .....
Search .....
Sneak .....
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Strength 3D

Climb/Jump .....
Lift .....
Stamina .....
Swim .....
.....

Mechanical 4D

Astro-nav .....
Comm .....
Gunnery .....
Piloting .....
Shields .....
Vehicle operation .....
.....
.....

Technical 3D

Comp/interface repair
Demolitions .....
Firearm repair .....
Flight systems repair ..
Gunnery repair .....
Perso. equip. repair ....
Vehicle repair .....
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Psionics

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Special Abilities

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

Honor Code

Bushitaka. Inspired from the way of the warrior of the Castaka clan, Bushitaka requires its followers to act as warriors in combat and in all aspects of life. For the warrior the highest virtue, his constant objective, is victory.

A Quote

"Freedom comes from within, and is even better at 500 km per hour."w

Equipment

Armored vest (+1D STR to resist damage, torso only), comm headset, flight suit, heavy service pistol (5D damage), medkit (+2D to first aid rolls), 5 kublars.

Character Description

Background

You were first noticed on a Maganat agricultural planet, driving farm equipment through the fields. You had never enjoyed sticking to the road. You were so impressive, pushing a common tractor to speeds of nearly 200km per hour, that you were awarded a three year prison sentence on an off-planet prison. In dire, brutal surroundings, you learned to fight, because every other prisoner seemed intent on killing you. It was at the end of your sentence that you learned that you had been subjected to a rudimentary, but planned initiation. A month before leaving, though not for good behavior, one of your most feared antagonists approached you and bowed. Your last month was the most memorable; you were taught the words and precepts of Bushitaka. You never returned to your home planet. A mercenary group leader was waiting for you outside the main entrance of your "school". He bowed and offered you a job.

Personality

You are patient... to a point. Fear is a concept of your past. You like high speeds and love to drive, especially if there is danger in the air. You have a good sense of humor.

Connections

You will team up with those who seem to show purpose. You do not hide your past, and are in fact proud to be an ex-con.

Physical Description

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Equipment Reference Tables

These tables show all the relevant stats for various equipment characters might access and use during the game. The "Availability" represents how easy an item is to find and purchase. Common items are readily available throughout the galaxy. Uncommon items are more difficult to find, perhaps only in urban areas or from particular merchants or organizations. Rare items are extremely difficult to find for legitimate purchase and use. These categories are sometimes accompanied by notations for restricted items requiring a permit to carry and use ("R"), or items that are illegal for average characters to possess ("X"). These designations are general guidelines for finding and purchasing equipment. Local factors may affect an item's availability.

Costs listed reflect the average price one might pay for such an item. This does not take into account extra costs for fine craftsmanship or quality, any charges for required permits, or "handling fees" for obtaining black market or illegal items. Prices may also vary depending on the merchant and what quality clientele his business attracts.

Ranged Weapons

	Ranges	Fire Rate	Damage	Ammo	Availability	Cost
Bow	3–10/30/50	1	STR+1D	20	Rare	1 to 1,000
Defense Pistol	3–5/9/15	1	3D	5	Common	300
Pell-Stun Gun	3–10/30/60	1	3D stun	50	Uncommon, R	500
Viper Pistol	3–10/30/60	1	4D	50	Common, R	500
Heavy Service Pistol	3–10/50/75	1	5D	75	Uncommon, R	300
Suprapistol	3–15/75/120	2	5D	100	Uncommon, R	350
Laser Rifle	3–50/100/300	1	4D	75	Uncommon, R	1,100
Cogan Rifle	3–50/100/300	1	5D	100	Uncommon, R	1,200
Gauss Rifle	3–10/30/120	1	5D stun	25	Rare, X	750
Multi-Cogan Rifle (Laser)	3–75/150/300	3	6D	150	Rare, X	3,400
(Mini-Grenade)	5–25/100/200	1	4D+2	10	-	-
Sonic Bazooka	3–50/100/200	1	9D	10	Rare, X	2,600

Armor

Item	Protection	Availability	Cost
Armor Pieces	+1 to +1D	Uncommon	500 to 8,000
Armored Vest	+1D, torso only	Common	2,000
Mercenary	+2D physical	Uncommon, R	6,000
Armor	+1D energy / –1D Agility	-	-
Endoguard	+2D	Rare, X	Not for sale
Armor	–1D Agility	-	-

Melee Weapons

Item	Difficulty	Damage	Availability	Cost
Quiver-Shiv	Very Easy (5)	STR+1D	Common	25
Combat Shock-Knife	Very Easy (5)	STR+1D+1	Common	30
Stun Baton	Easy (10)	5D stun	Uncommon, R	100
Sword	Easy (10)	STR+2D	Rare	1 to 1,000

General Equipment

	Availability	Cost
Breather Unit	Common	40
Comm Headset	Uncommon, R	70
Comlink (military)	2, R	150
Hand Vid-Comm	Common	45
Io Board	Common	150
Luma	Uncommon, R	20
Magna-Line	Uncommon, R	200
Medkit	Common	450
Range Goggles	Uncommon, R	80
Tool Bag	Common	250
Vacuum Suit	Common	700

Metabarons Task Difficulties

Difficulty Level	Difficulty #	Firearms Range
Very Easy	1–5	Point Blank
Easy	6–10	Close
Moderate	11–15	Medium
Difficult	16–20	Long
Very Difficult	21–30	-
Heroic	31+	-

Character Damage Chart

Damage Roll Greater Than Strength Roll By = Effect

0–5 = Stunned ; 6–10 = Wounded ; 11–15 = Incapacitated ; 16–20 = Mortally Wounded ; 21+ = Killed

First Aid Chart

A successful *first aid* roll to treat an injury level heals the character up one level: for instance, a successful *first aid* roll on someone who's wounded would bring them back to stunned. A character using up a medbox adds +2D to her *first aid* roll. Characters with any dice in *medicine (adv)* may also add those dice to their *first aid* roll.

Injury Level	Difficulty
Stunned, unconscious	Easy (10)
Wounded, wounded twice	Moderate (15)
Incapacitated	Difficult (20)
Mortally Wounded	Very Difficult (30)

Character Template Stat Chart

This chart summarizes the attribute die codes for the character templates in this book, and a few extras. You can use them to help players get started, or to quickly create gamemaster characters based on these templates. Need a hot-headed mercenary? Check out his stats, and add a few dice —probably 2D or 3D— to those skills you think he might need. Now you have an instant gamemaster character!

Template	Agililty	Knowledge	Perception	Strength	Mechanical	Technical	Psionics
3D Reporter*	3D	3D+2	4D	2D	3D	2D+1	0D
Bold Diplomat	3D	4D	4D	2D	3D	2D	0D
Bored Aristo*	3D+1	4D	4D	2D+2	2D	2D	0D
Class-S Investigator*	3D	3D	4D	2D+1	3D	2D+2	0D
Combat Medic	3D	3D	3D	3D	2D	4D	0D
Contract Pilot*	2D+2	3D	3D	2D+1	4D	3D	0D
Corsair*	4D	2D	3D	3D	4D	2D	0D
Defused Mentrek*	2D+2	4D	4D	2D+1	2D	3D	0D
Head Hunter	4D	3D	4D	3D	2D	2D	0D
Hot-Headed Mercenary*	4D	2D	3D	4D	3D	2D	0D
Mercenary Driver*	3D	2D	3D	3D	4D	3D	0D
Merchant Functionary*	2D+2	4D	4D	3D	2D+1	2D	0D
Neo Shabda-Oud*	2D+1	3D	3D	2D+2	2D	2D	3D
Outcast Noble	3D+2	3D	4D	3D	2D+1	2D	0D
Petty Warlord	4D	3D	3D	3D	3D	2D	0D
Pirate Jobber	3D	3D	4D	3D	3D	2D	0D
Political Insurgent*	3D	4D	3D	3D	2D	3D	0D
Protohistorian	2D+2	4D	3D+2	3D+2	2D	2D	0D
Proud Native*	4D	2D	3D	3D	2D	4D	0D
Pusher	4D	3D+1	3D+1	3D+1	2D	2D	0D
Quiet Scout	2D+2	4D	3D	2D+1	3D	3D	0D
Reclusive Mystic*	3D	4D	4D	2D	2D	2D	1D
Unscrupulous Trader*	3D+2	3D	3D	2D+1	3D+2	2D+1	0D
Wayward Mechanic*	2D+2	2D+1	3D+2	3D	2D+1	4D	0D
Zealous Gunner	4D	2D	2D	3D	4D	3D	0D

*Template included. For others use the blank template at the end of this book.

Vehicle Stat Chart

	Crew	Pass	Cargo Capacity	Cover	Maneuv.	Move	Altitude Range	Body Strength	Weapons	Control	Fire Range	Damage
Open Aircar												
	1	2–6	25 kg	1/2	2D	90; 260 kph	Ground level 300 meters	2D+2	-	-	-	-
Security Aircar												
	1	-	50 kg	Full	3D	520; 1,500 kph	Ground level 25 km	3D+2	1 Auto Cannon	2D	300/1/2 km	4D
Aircar Transport												
	1	1	1 metric ton	Full	1D	35; 100 kph	Ground level	3D	-	-	-	-
Recon Buggy												
	2	-	30 kg	1/2	2D	45; 130 kph	-	2D+2	Light Tail Cannon	1D	3–75/200/500	3D
Light Trankar												
	3	-	100 kg	Full	1D	30; 90 kph	-	5D	Pulse Cannon Anti-Personnel Gun	1D 2D	50–200/1/2 km 3–50/100/250	4D 6D*
Behemoth Trankar												*(character scale)
	17	50	2 metric tons	Full	-	18; 50 kph	-	8D	6 Pulse Cannons	1D	50–200/1/2 km	4D
Heavy Work Exoskeleton												
	1	-	-	Full	2D	7; 20 kph	-	2D	-	-	-	-
Exploration Exoskeleton												
	1	-	25 kg	Full	2D	8; 25 kph	-	1D (1D shields)	Mini Auto Cannon	1D	3–75/150/300	7D

Spacecraft Stat Chart

Scale	Stardrive	Man.	Space	Atmosphere	Hull	Shields	Sensors	Weapons	Fire Control	Space Range	Atmosphere Range	Damage
Battleship												
Battleship	Yes	1D	4	-	9D	4D	100/3D	80 Main Gun Batteries	2D	3–20/40/80	6–40/80/160 km	6D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40 Flak Cannons	2D	1–10/15/30	-	7D*
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20 Gauss Cannons	2D	1–5/15/30	2–10/30/60 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10 Tractor Beam Emitters	3D	1–5/15/30	2–10/30/60 km	6D
Endoguard Lancet												*(fighter scale)
Fighter	Yes	2D+2	8	365; 1,050 kph	5D	2D	75/1D+2	Primary Cannon	2D	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	6D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Missile Launcher	2D	1/3/7	3–100/300/700	8D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Gauss Cannon	2D	1–3/7/36	100–300/700/3.6 km	5D
StellComm Sentinel												
Fighter	Yes	1D	8	365; 1,050 kph	6D	2D	75/2D	5 Gauss Cannons	2D	1–3/7/36	100–300/700/3.6 km	5D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 Flack Cannons	1D	3–5/10/20	300–500/1/2 km	5D+2
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 Auto Cannons	2D+2	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	4D
Imperial Merchants Guild Cargo Dreadnaught												
Battleship	Yes	1D	3	260; 750 kph	6D	4D	75/2D	20 Flak Cannons	1D	1–10/15/30	10–100/1.5/3 km	6D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10 Laser Cannons	2D	3–20/40/80	6–40/80/160 km	4D
Executive Shuttle												
Fighter	Yes	3D	10	415; 1,200 kph	5D	4D	75/3D	Mag-Drive Cannon	3D	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	6D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Flak Cannon	1D	3–5/10/20	300–500/1/2 km	5D+2
Techno-Techno Research Transport												
Fighter	Yes	1D	5	295; 850 kph	4D	2D	75/2D	2 Auto Cannons	2D+2	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	5D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Gauss Cannon	2D	1–3/7/36	100–300/700/3.6 km	5D
Ekonomat Cargo Cruiser												
Battleship	Yes	1D	2	225; 650 kph	4D	2D	50/1D	12 Flak Cannons	1D	1–10/15/30	10–100/1.5/3 km	6D*
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8 Laser Cannons	2D	3–20/40/80	6–40/80/160 km	4D
Ekonomat Midge												*(fighter scale)
Fighter	No	4D	12	450; 1,300 kph	2D	-	50/1D	2 Auto Cannons (linked)	2D	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	5D
Light Transport												
Fighter	Yes	1D	5	295; 850 kph	4D	1D	25/1D	Defense Cannon	1D	1–2/10/20	100–200/1/2 km	4D
Utility Transport												
Fighter	No	1D+2	5	295; 850 kph	3D	-	50/1D	Tractor Beam Emitter	2D	1–5/15/30	100–500/1.5/3 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Defense Cannon	1D	1–2/10/20	100–200/1/2 km	4D
Yacht												
Fighter	Yes	2D	6	330; 950 kph	4D	2D	75/1D	Auto Cannon	2D+2	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4 Flak Cannons	1D	3–5/10/20	300–500/1/2 km	5D+2
Survey Craft												
Fighter	Yes	1D	5	295; 850 kph	4D	1D	100/3D	Defense Cannon	1D	1–2/10/20	100–200/1/2 km	4D
Mercenary Carrier-Cruiser												
Battleship	Yes	1D+2	5	295; 850 kph	5D	3D	75/1D	20 Laser Batteries	2D	3–20/40/80	6–40/80/160 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10 Flak Cannons	2D	1–10/15/30	2–20/3/6 km	6D*
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5 Missile Launchers	1D	1/3/7	3–20/6/14 km	7D
Mercenary Drop-Carrier												
Fighter	No	2D	6	330; 950 kph	4D+2	2D	50/1D	Auto Cannon	2D+2	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 Anti-Personnel Guns (linked)	3D	-	3–75/200/500	7D*
Mercenary Snub Fighter												*(character scale)
Fighter	No	4D	8	365; 1,050 kph	3D+2	1D	75/1D	2 Auto Cannons (linked)	2D	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	5D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Missile Launcher	2D	1/3/7	3–100/300/700	7D
Mercenary Ostrov Fighter												
Fighter	Yes	2D	6	330; 950 kph	5D	2D	75/1D	1 Laser Array	2D	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 Heavy Cannon Turrets	2D	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	5D+2
Pirate Frigate												
Battleship	Yes	1D	6	330; 950 kph	4D	2D	50/1D	10 Laser Batteries	2D	3–20/40/80	6–40/80/160 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 Gauss Cannons	2D	1–5/15/30	2–10/30/60 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Tractor Beam Emitter	3D	1–5/15/30	2–10/30/60 km	4D
Pirate Ostrov Fighter												
Fighter	Yes	1D+2	5	295; 850 kph	6D	2D	50/1D	Laser Array	2D	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	4D
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 Heavy Cannon Turrets	2D	1–3/12/25	100–300/1.2/2.5 km	5D

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Metabarons™

Character Name		Gender		Move	
		Age		Amarax Points	
Type	Species	Height		Necro-Dream Points	
		Weight		Character Points	

Agility

Knowledge

Perception

Strength

Mechanical

Technical

Psionics

Honor Code

A Quote

Equipment

Character Description

Background

Personality

Connections

Physical Description

Special Abilities

Wound Status

- Stunned
- Wounded
- Incapacitated
- Mortally Wounded

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