modern dispatch ☼40

The Hellcrash Transmission
by Phil Reed

RONIN ARTS

In other news, the Dayar-Kolnaa Corporation reports that one of their mining teams encountered a Class V meteor shower on the spinward side of the Wixxa Nebula. One starship was lost in the accident. Dayar-Kolnaa officials have claimed a loss of seven billion credits – that's one expensive wreck!

The Hellcrash Transmission is a short adventure outline for futuristic **D20 Modern** campaigns. This is not a complete adventure but, rather, an outline and the tools necessary for the GM to expand the material herein into an adventure that suits his campaign. To use the material in this PDF you will need both the **D20 Modern** rules and the starship rules from the SRD or futuristic supplement. SkeletonKey Games' **e-Future Tiles** series will prove useful if you prefer to use miniatures during your game sessions.

This adventure outline, and the accompanying material, make some assumptions about your campaign and will be most useful in campaigns in which the following statements are true:

• The campaign is not a "hard" science setting. Campaigns that are more space opera/adventure movie are the intended target for this *Modern Dispatch* issue.
• Starships are not rare or unusual. This adventure assumes that space travel is a standard and common occurrence – individuals either fly their own ships or ride on passenger ships. Starships and space travel are as common for characters as a plane ride is for people of our reality.
• Space combat is not uncommon. It's just another exciting adventure when the player characters have to engage the enemy while fleeing from some world or other.
• The campaign is packed with action. If things aren't exploding, how much fun can the game really be?

This adventure outline is very rigid and linear in design. As a site-based adventure, consider this a dungeon crawl in space more than a work of epic storytelling. As the player characters are led into the situation they can do little more than react to their surroundings.

The Hellcrash Transmission does not feature combat and is intended for characters of all levels.

The remaining information in this PDF is for the GM's eyes only. Players please read no further.

Open Game Content
All of the text in this PDF, with the exception of the product identity, is presented as open game content. While this means absolutely nothing to your campaign it does give other publishers permission to use this material as long as they follow the open game license (see the end of this PDF).

About the Author
Philip Reed has been working professionally in the roleplaying game industry since 1995. In that time he has worked for such companies as Atlas Games, Privateer Press, and *Scrye* magazine. Today

Philip spends his days at home running Ronin Arts, writing and designing new games, and watching DVDs. To learn more about Philip Reed – and Ronin Arts – please visit www.roninarts.com and www.philipjreed.com.

Adventure Summary

The player characters, while traveling through a lighty-used merchants' lane, encounter a derelict starship. As they close to investigate their starship's systems automatically shutdown and they're drawn to the derelict where their computers – which they no longer control – initiates a docking procedure with the unidentified ship. Once onboard they encounter an alien artifact and must save themselves and their ship before the artifact destroys them all.

Adventure Setup

In order to run this adventure as written the player characters need to be in possession of their own

starship and enroute to a planet or system – this adventure is a side-story that should be completely unexpected by the players. If the player characters do not own their own starship you will need to construct an incident in your campaign in which they are temporarily loaned a ship. In the unlikely event that the player characters do not possess the skills necessary to pilot a starship they can be assigned one with a robotic pilot or crew.

At about the half-way point of their journey the starship's sensors beep a detection alert. The adventure has begun.

Detection and Malfunction

The unidentified starship is detected at the very edge of the ship's sensor range. A DC 20 *Computer Use* check indicates that the ship is an ultralight courier. A second DC 20 Computer Use check brings the unidentified ship into focus – hand the players the ship's illustration (see the end of this PDF).

Any transmissions directed at the starship are left unanswered and sensor sweeps indicate that all systems aboard the ship are shutdown.

At this point the player characters should move in closer to investigate. If they fail to investigate, or the moment they are within 10,000 ft. of the ship if they do move in closer, all of their sensor and computer systems red green and then display nothing but green-colored static. No matter the actions attempted the starship's controls and systems are no longer accessible to the player characters. They find themselves watching helplessly as their ship docks with the derelict.

Aboard the Derelict

Once docking is complete the player characters find themselves looking down an access tube into a dark, quiet starship. The air is breathable and smells stale, old, as if it has been left stagnant for centuries. Personal scanners detect an unusual power source deep within the derelict.

6. Engineering

The docking tube connects to the ship's engineering station. The characters can descend into the ship using ropes or whatever other means they may possess. None of the derelict's systems are active so the gravlift that would normally transport characters and cargo into this section is inoperable.

Within this room the characters will find several storage lockers filled with tools and equipment – all state-of-the-art but the circuits of computerized and electronic equipment has friend rendering them worthless – and terminals that display the same green static the player characters saw onboard their own ship.

Foreshadowing

If you wish, you can foreshadow this adventure with the following rumors, overhead when the player characters are onboard a starport, visiting a cantina, or are otherwise amongst feller star travelers. To use these rumors have the player characters make a *Gather Information* check and consult the following table. The characters overhear all of the rumors up to and including the result of their roll.

Rumor	Gather Information Roll
The Dayar-Kolnaa Corporation recently lost a starship on the spinward side of the Wixxa Nebula.	10
Survivors the Class V meteor shower that hit the Wixxa Nebula reported the Dayar-Kolnaa Corporation had picked up an alien artifact.	15
The alien artifact was lost when the Dayar-Kolnaa ship was lost.	20
The artifact was an unstable, alien power source thousands of years old.	25
The lost starship is still out there, intact and waiting to be salvaged.	30

A corpse is slumped against one of the terminals. Once an elderly human man, the corpse is now a charred pile of flesh and bone. Scanning the corpse registers high radiation and the same unusual power signature that radiates from deeper in the ship. There's nothing of value on the corpse.

A door in this room is jammed open and will not close.

5. Datacenter II

The *Hellcrash*-Class courier design features two datacenters, each of which is a massive electronic library and communications center. Whatever information the starship carries during a mission is hidden within the ship's datacenter – by burying information within information it's better hidden than it would be attempting to encrypt it and place it on its own system or disk. As a security measure the datacenter completely erases all stored information during any sort of power failure or information warfare attack.

Signs of a struggle, including laser fire marks and shattered computer systems, are all that can be found in this room.

The door opening into Area 3 is jammed shut. A DC 25 Strength check is required to break the door open. If attacked, the door has Hardness 15 and 20 hit points.

4. Fire Control

Connected to the ship's storage compartment (Area 3, see below), this is the gunnery station. A crew member in this station can fire the ship's single laser. In addition to gunnery duty this cramped chamber was also used as a secondary storage hold: assorted personal equipment is scattered throughout this area.

3. Storage

A large door in the ceiling is used to load and remove cargo from this chamber. At this time the door is frozen in place and welded. Whatever happened to the ship the crew thought it in their best interest to seal the large cargo bay door.

The Alien Artifact

The artifact was a large statue that an ancient, millions of years old god-like entity had possessed. The entity, immortal, incorporeal, and blessed with unfathomable power, has existed since the beginning of time and frequently moves between vessels. The entity exists only to collect knowledge and information even though doing so destroys whatever it has come into contact with.

After the crew of the Atlantis brought the statue onboard the entity broke free of its crate and quickly infiltrated the ship's computer system. Within seconds it had gathered all of the information the ship carried and then moved to the crew. All told, less than twenty seconds passed from the instant the entity left the statue until it finally settled in the corpse of a just-killed crew member. The ship has been floating out here for weeks during which time the entity grew lonely. It has tried many times to lure other ships within its sphere of influence but, unfortunately for the player characters, it was unlucky in its attempts – until now.

Once the player characters boarded the ship the entity grew scared. For the first time since its birth it was unable to leap free of a spent vessel to a new one. Something has changed within the entity and it now sees its death is close at hand.

Various crates are scattered across this area, all of which have been smashed open and are spilling their contents – circuit boards and storage devices – across the hold. One wooden five foot by five foot crate lies in splinters in one corner of the hold. Scanning the crate registers the highest levels yet of the unknown power.

2. Datacenter I

Other than a corpse this room is identical to the ship's second datacenter (Area 5). The corpse was once a human female roughly thirty years of age. Her body is fried much like the corpse found in Area 6; even the strange power signature radiates from her body.

The door connecting to the cockpit (Area 1) has been blown out by an explosive device – twisted metal fragments litter the floor in this area.

Sensor readings in this room indicate that the source of the unidentified power is directly ahead, through the twisted cockpit door.

1. Cockpit

Entering the cockpit the player characters discover four more corpses, one of which is glowing a dull green. Investigating the cockpit the player characters will find some personal weapons and equipment, an assorted number of credsticks, and other personal effects. Any character that moves within 5 ft. of the glowing corpse feels a strange sensation wash over him and must make a DC 20 Willpower save or drop, stunned for 2d4+2 rounds.

A character that succeeds this Willpower save finds himself in communication with the source of the ship's problems, an entity that had existed within the alien artifact (see box) that the *Atlantis* had picked up just days before the ship and crew went dead.

The entity is a god-like being that is dying. The player characters, in communicating with the being, prove to it that it is now no more powerful than a mortal. The entity communicates with one or more of the player characters for a few rounds, answering questions cryptically and asking several of its own, after which it realizes that its time is at an end. The entity begs them to remember it and its knowledge and then fades to nothing. Any player characters that were in communication with the entity will hear it speaking in their mind for weeks to come – any Knowledge checks for 2d6+4 days following the contact with the being are made with a +4 awakened bonus (see below).

Awakened: A character that comes into contact with a god-like entity may be blessed with insight into the universe. This is represented as an awakened bonus. Awakened bonuses are temporary though they frequently last for several days.

If the characters continue to fail their Willpower saves the entity talks to them directly. They do not gain the awakened bonus to Knowledge checks *but* they do have a few seconds of interaction with the being before it ceases to exist.

Concluding the Adventure

Once the player characters have dealt with the alien artifact – either by communicating with the artifact or through the help of the GM – the *Atlantis* and their own ship reset. The *Atlantis* is in terrible shape and in no condition to fly on its own but it could be towed to the nearest starbase or planet. If you do not want the players to keep the *Atlantis* members of the Dayar-Kolnaa Corporation will be awaiting at whichever destination the player characters chose – the corporation will pay handsomely for the return of the ship. Of course, there's a very good chance the player characters will do everything possible to retain ownership of the *Atlantis* – dealing with the aftereffects of this short adventure could be a series of adventures as they attempt to repair the ship and stay free of the "evil" corporation's clutches.

For more ideas on using derelict starships in your campaign, including a large number of possible disasters and complete statistics and a key for a multi-level starship, see Ronin Arts' ***Future: Starship 13*** available now at www.rpgnow.com, www.drivethrurpg.com, and e23.sjgames.com.

Hellcrash-Class Template (PL 7)

The *Hellcrash*-class template can be applied to any PL 6 courier or escort ultralight or light starship. The starship's design specs should be adjusted as follows.
Hit Dice: Increase by +1d20.
Engine Upgrade: Induction engine (tactical speed +1,000 ft.).
Sensors Upgrade: Class IV Sensor Array, Improved Targeting System.
Special System Upgrade: Atmospheric streamlining, nanite shielding.
Crew: +2.
Passenger Capacity: Reduce to 0.
Cargo Capacity: +2,000 lbs.

Hellcrash-Class Courier (PL 7)

This *Hellcrash*-class courier, identified only as *Atlantis*, was constructed three years ago by an unidentified corporation. The *Atlantis* is an experimental starship design used in exploring nearby systems. The *Atlantis* typically operates with an escort or corvette but was separated from its companion during a brutal meteor shower. The ship is now a derelict, floating in deep space, its unusual cargo constantly transmitting a bizarre alien signal.

Type: Ultralight
Subtype: Courier
Defense: 11
Flat-footed Defense: 9
Autopilot Defense: 8
Hardness: 20
Hit Dice: 9d20 (180 hp) (currently 50 hp)
Initiative Modifier: +2
Pilot's Class Bonus: +3
Pilot's Dex Modifier: +2
Gunner's Attack Bonus: +3
Size: Gargantuan (–4 size)
Tactical Speed: 4,000 ft. (8 sq.)
Length: 45 feet
Weight: 90,000 lb.
Targeting System Bonus: +2
Crew: 6 (trained +4)
Passenger Capacity: 0
Cargo Capacity: 11,000 lb.
Grapple Modifier: +12
Base Purchase DC: 55
Restriction: Licensed (+1)

Attack: Laser +0 ranged (6d8)
Attack of Opportunity: None

Standard PL 7 Design Specs:

Engines: Induction engine, thrusters
Armor: Polymeric
Defense Systems: Autopilot system, damage control system (1d10)
Sensors: Class IV sensor array, improved targeting system
Communications: Laser transceiver, radio transceiver
Weapons: 1 laser (range incr. 3,000 ft.)
Grappling Systems: Grapplers
Special Systems: Atmospheric streamlining, nanite shielding.

New Starship Special Systems

While defensive, weapon, armor, engine, and various other types of starship systems are easily classified there is a selection of items that do not fit neatly into an existing category. For simplicity, unusual systems that defy categorization in the existing areas are presented here, as special systems.

To build a special system from scratch, a character must succeed at a Craft (electronic) check (DC 30) and a Craft (mechanical) check after investing 60 hours in its assembly. A character without an electrical or mechanical tool kit takes a –4 penalty on the appropriate skill check. The character must also make a Wealth check against the system's purchase DC.

Installing a special system requires a successful Craft (mechanical) check (DC 30) after investing 30 hours. A character without a mechanical tool kit takes a –4 penalty on the skill check.

Different types of special systems are detailed below.

Minimum Ship Size: The minimum size the starship must be to use this type of special system.
Purchase DC: The purchase DC of the system.
Restriction: The level of license required to purchase the system legally.

Atmospheric Streamlining (PL 6)

Smaller starships can be constructed to operate efficiently in a planetary atmosphere. Such ships feature wings and maneuvering foils and are designed more like an aircraft than a starship. When flying a starship outfitted with atmospheric streamlining in a planetary atmosphere, the pilot of the starship gains a +2 equipment bonus to Pilot checks.
Maximum Ship Size: Only light and ultralight ships may use atmospheric streamlining.
Purchase DC: 10 + one-half the base purchase DC of the starship.
Restriction: –

Nanite Shielding

As nanocolonies and nanoviruses become more common, starship designers strive to protect their creations from nanite attacks. Nanite shielding is a special system of nanocolonies that operate together to protect their host starship from nanovirus attack and infection. A starship outfitted with a nanite shield resists all nanite attacks 50% of the time. This is a highly experimental system limited to military use. Few starships have been outfitted with nanite shielding and most citizens of the galaxy don't even know that the equipment exists.
Maximum Ship Size: No maximum.
Purchase DC: 25 + one-half the base purchase DC of the starship.
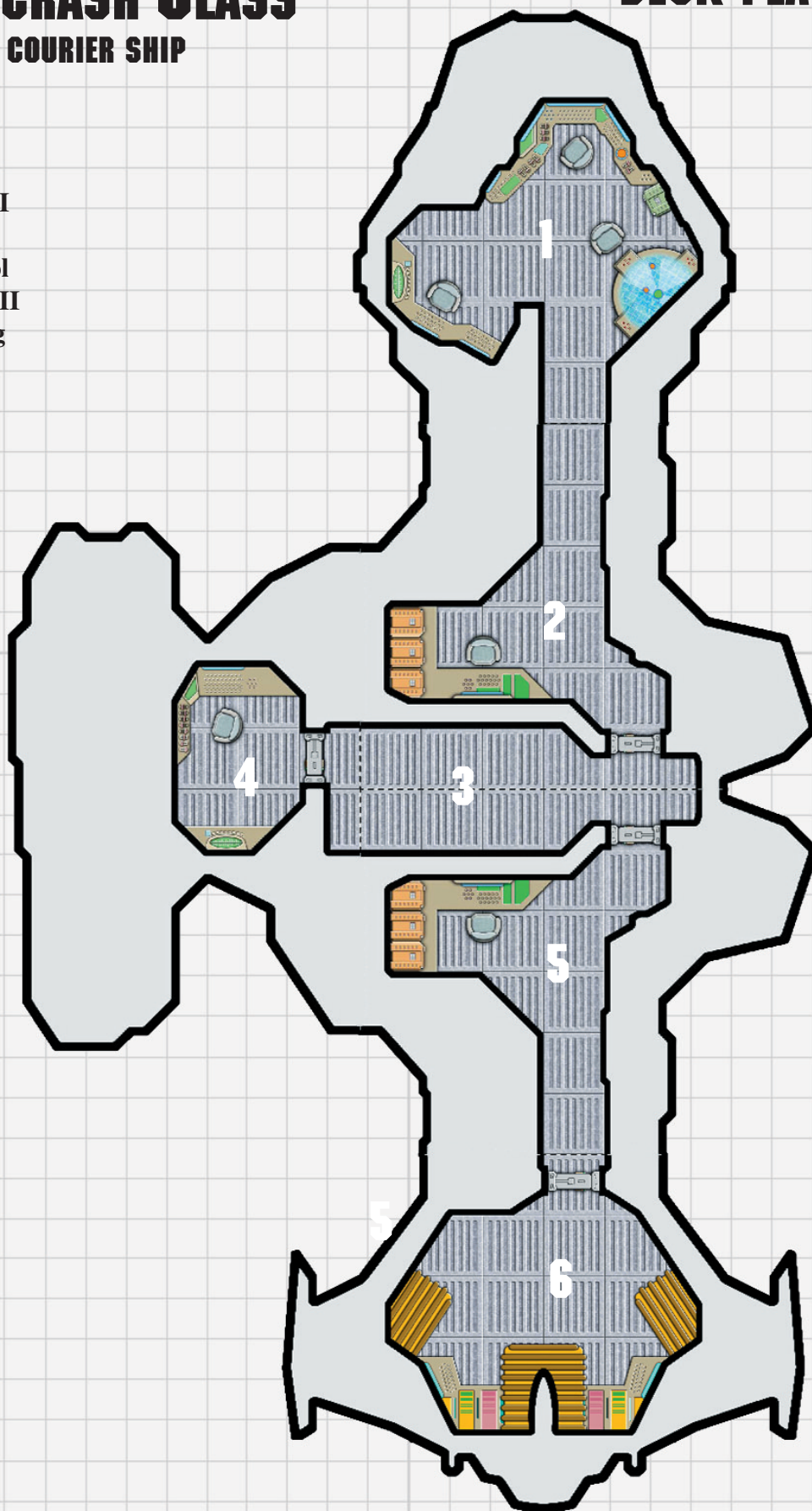**Restriction:** Military (+3).

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Hellcrash-Class
COURIER SHIP

DECK PLAN

1. Cockpit
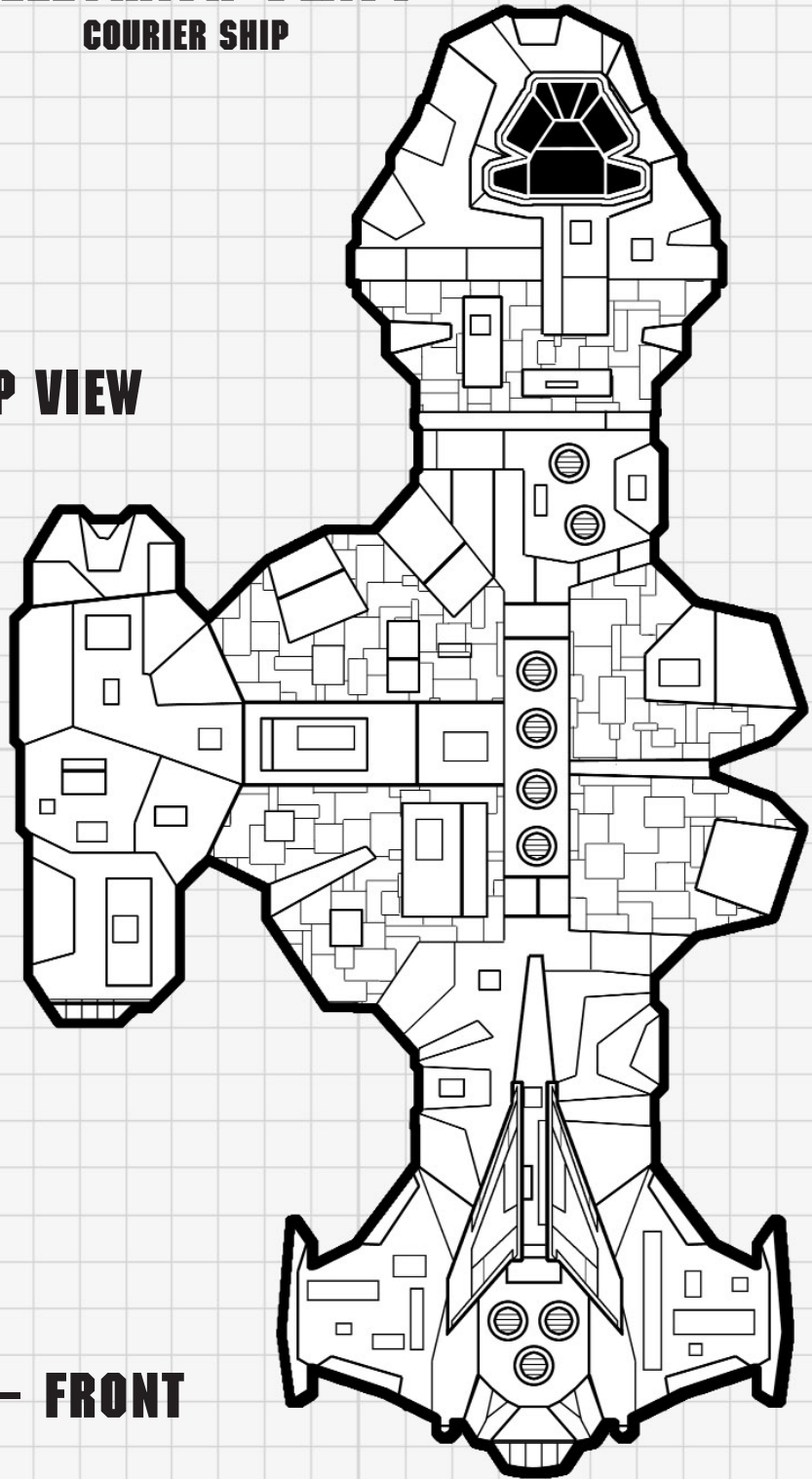2. Datacenter I
3. Storage
4. Fire Control
5. Datacenter II
6. Engineering

Hellcrash-Class
COURIER SHIP

TOP VIEW

SILHOUETTE VIEW – FRONT