modern dispatch ☼52

Starship Sensor Contacts
by Phil Reed

By far the most popular new addition to Ronin Arts' library of adventure material for sci-fi campaigns is the concept of sensor contacts. First introduced in the *Future: Datastream,* and then refined in *Future: 6 Free Sensor Contacts* (a free PDF available at RPGNow), starship sensor contacts are a special type of adventure seed designed specifically for use when the players' characters are onboard their starship and exploring the galaxy. I get more requests for new sensor contacts than anything else these days and, considering *Modern Dispatch* issues try to feature adventure material, I thought it appropriate to write a selection of new sensor contacts for my latest contribution to the *Dispatch.*

I hope that you can find a way to use some (or all!) of these sensor contacts in your campaign. As with the other starship-related releases that Ronin Arts has published this PDF makes some assumptions about your campaign; the sensor contacts in this PDF 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 PDF.

• Starships are not rare or unusual. Everything that I've written in this PDF 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 players' 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?

What's Required to Use this PDF?

In order to use this *Modern Dispatch* issue you will need the *D20 Modern* roleplaying game, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and the official future supplement, also published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.. You can find both at your favorite local game store or online at any number of roleplaying game vendors. Though some products are suggested in the text, no other products are required to use this PDF.

Future: Datastream

As of the time of publication, Ronin Arts' *Future: Datastream* subscription service is running, introducing new material for futuristic campaigns five times each week. For more information on the Future: Datastream, including subscription information, please visit the official forums at www.d20projects.com.

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Open Game Content

All of the text of this PDF 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 West End Games, Privateer Press, and Steve Jackson Games. Today Philip spends his days at home running Ronin Arts, writing and designing new games, and reading whatever books interest him at the time. To learn more about Philip Reed – and Ronin Arts – please visit **www.philipjreed.com/php** and www.roninarts. com**.**

The Sensor Contacts

Sensor Ghost (PL 6)

As the player characters' ship drops out of lightspeed (or whatever form of FTL travel is appropriate to your campaign) on the edge of a heavily-populated system their sensors sound contact. An unknown object just beyond their visual range is almost directly above them. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (give the players all of the information up to and including the highest result of the check):

10: Metallic object. High energy and lifeform readings, definitely an active contact.
15: The contact is a starship of the exact classification as the player characters' ship. If the player characters' ship is a custom job or heavily modified the contact still matches the exact specifications of their ship.

20: The starship is carrying exactly as many personnel as the player characters' ship and is in the exact same condition. It appears to be matching their speed and angle no matter what they do and remaining constantly 30,000-ft. away.
25: The contact fades in and out, appearing and disappearing from the sensor scan so quickly that it's barely noticeable.
30: The contact doesn't really exist and is a reflection of the player characters' ship.

How the player characters respond to this contact depends on their degree of success when making the Computer Use check. If they honestly believe that the contact is an actual ship they may agonize for several minutes before realizing what's happening. Once each minute secretly make a Knowledge (technology) check (DC 20) for each player character. Any character that makes a successful check suddenly realizes that the contact doesn't really exist and is merely a sensor ghost.

This contact could be used in conjunction with any other sensor contact. Imagine the players' response to any situation if they feel they've stumbled into two unidentified contacts at once.

Wreckage (PL 6)

Along any heavily traveled merchant lane the player characters come across a distant contact. The computer appears confused as it sounds multiple contact alerts and then revises its finding to display only one contact the size of a light starship and, surprisingly, growing larger with each passing moment. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (give the players all of the information up to and including the highest result of the check):

10: Multiple metallic contacts. Revision: one metallic contact. Revision: multiple metallic contacts.

Revision: one . . .
15: The contact is the remains of a starship. What type of ship it originally was, and what caused its destruction, cannot be determined.
20: The computer manages to locate and read the ship's transponder (that's still broadcasting even though it is floating in the wreckage). The ship was the escort *Jupiter's Hammer,* an older model design. According to information the sensors are collecting from the transponder signal the *Jupiter's Hammer* was assigned to a convoy seven weeks ago.
25: The wreckage is recent, the accident occurring no more than an hour before the player characters arrive. Ion trails head off in multiple directions from the wreckage.
30: The computer has detected a destroyer, identification unknown, hiding just beyond the wreckage of the *Jupiter's Hammer.* The destroyer's intentions are unknown though it is powering up its weapons.

The stock destroyer (see the future SRD) is the *Arc Ring,* a pirate vessel rumored to have been responsible for the destruction of over one hundred starships in the last decade. If the player characters are carrying any sort of cargo, or are flying a freighter of any sort, the *Arc Ring* will attack, attempting to knock out their engines and capture them in grapplers. Any other sort of ship the *Arc Ring* will attempt to destroy on sight.

If the pirates are outgunned or outmaneuvered they'll call in support that's hiding behind a planetoid just below the system's elliptic plane. Within 6d6+5 rounds a corvette and four fighters will reach the battle.

While it is highly unlikely there is the possibility that the player characters will defeat the pirates. If this happens they may choose to salvage the wreckage

– the pirates will not surrender – but as soon as any pirate ship's hit points are reduced by 75% it will attempt to flee the battle.

Freighter in Distress (PL 7)

As the players' characters prepare to engage their FTL drive, the computer indicates a contact 5,000 ft. directly ahead, blocking their path. The computer identifies the contact as a starship, *The Targovlya Syem,* and the comm. system receives a broken transmission:

" . . . tems are failing and we're . . . ble to activate the . . . peat this is a call for help. This is the freighter *Targovlya Syem* experie . . . minutes remain."

The message continues to repeat, each time slightly differently, but the above is the most the characters will be able to decipher. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (give the players all of the information up to and including the highest result of the check):

10: *The Targovlya Syem* is a compact freighter (show the players the recognition sheet, the PDF page that displays the starship's top view and silhouette – this is what their computer monitor displays) that's breaking apart. There's very little time before the starship will explode, killing everyone onboard and destroying anything that the freighter is carrying.
15: The starship is currently at –18 hit points and losing 1 hit point each round. The computer alerts the player characters that the freighter has only a few moments before the ship will be destroyed.
20: *The Targovlya Syem* is equipped with damage stabilization equipment – unlike a standard starship of this size the ship has almost three minutes before it will be destroyed. Scans indicate that the ship still has functioning lifesupport systems.

25: The computer can identify three humanoid lifeforms aboard the ship, all of which are in the port cargo bay. The computer has also managed to scan the ship and construct a visual representation of the starship's layout (show the players the deckplan sheet – this is what their computer monitor displays).
30: The starship's port cargo ramp is disabled – sensor scans show that all power to the ship's cockpit, port cargo bay, and engineering is off-line – and only the starboard cargo ramp is still functional.

The player characters will need to decide what course of action to take. Will they close with the dying freighter and attempt to rescue the crew or will they hang back and wait for the ship to destroy itself? If the player characters elect to allow the ship to be destroyed this is an adventure opportunity missed (and why are you playing with such dull people?). If they're a heroic bunch and move in to save the crew of *The Targovlya Syem* continue reading.

Take three ten-sided dice and arrange them to read "162"; this is the number of rounds the freighter has before it explodes. Reduce the number by 1 at the beginning of each turn. When the counter reaches "0" the freighter explodes, inflicting 20d6 points of damage (no save) to anyone onboard the ship and 10d6 points of damage to any ship within the same square.

Though the freighter is wounded it is drifting through space, moving 500 ft. (1 tactical square) per round away from the PCs' starship. Whichever player character is piloting will need to close to within a square adjacent to the freighter (or the same square if the player characters' starship is also an ultralight) and match speed and angle – a successful Pilot check (DC 15) is required, each check taking three rounds; the player may retry as many times as necessary (as long as he succeeds before the freighter explodes).

Once the PCs' ship has matched speed and angle with the freighter a second successful Pilot check (DC 20) is required to dock with the ship. There are only two docking points on the freighter – the cargo ramps – and if the players do not know that the port ramp is nonfunctional there's a chance they'll initially dock at the wrong ramp. Each docking attempt requires five rounds.

Docking with the Port Ramp: Unfortunately, the ramp's controls are dead – there's no power. A manual control can be used to open the ramp's emergency hatch (a 5-foot square) – requiring 10 successful Strength checks (DC 15) to open. Each check requires one round and only one character may attempt to open the hatch each round. If the player characters can manage to communicate with the crew of the freighter there's a fast-release switch inside that will open that hatch in three rounds.

Docking with the Starboard Ramp: If the player characters' starship has a large enough cargo bay door (at least 20-ft. wide by 10-ft. tall) they can activate the freighter's underside ramp that opens into the player characters' ship (requiring six rounds). If they don't have a door large enough to accommodate the ramp they'll need to use the emergency hatch (see above). Fortunately, this side has power and the emergency hatch is powered and opens in one round.

Once the player characters have managed to gain access to the freighter there are several different ways in which the scenario could play out. The following are just a few of the possibilities:

• The PCs split up, some of them working to rescue the crew while the others hastily examine shipping containers in the hopes of finding something cool (see box) to take as "payment" for their time.
• The crew of the dying freighter attempt to overtake

the PCs and steal their ship.

• The PCs offer to save the crew for a fee. This is particularly mercenary behavior – but it could happen.

• Another starship appears just as the PCs are entering the freighter. How that ship changes the scenario could really make things interesting.

No matter what, remember that the clock is ticking. If the players begin spending time talking over the situation and deciding what their characters should do reduce the counter by one for every six seconds of real time. You want to constantly remind them that disaster is fast approaching.

What the players' characters elect to do with the crew after they've saved them could be an adventure all its own. Statistics for the crew can be taken from almost any source – the exact levels of the rescued crew will need to be determined to suit the level of your campaign. To rapidly create GMCs consider RPGObjects' *Modern Character Generator* at **www.rpgobjects.com.**

New Starship: The Targovlya Syem

A compact freighter, *The Targovlya Syem* is only slightly modified (a damage stabilization system was added) from its base design. The small size and light cargo carrying capabilities makes them popular with independent smugglers and freetraders.

The Targovlya Syem (PL 7)

Type: Ultralight
Subtype: Compact Freighter
Defense: 7
Flat-footed Defense: 5
Autopilot Defense: 5

What's the Freighter Carrying?

This is the perfect opportunity to provide your players with some new equipment. If they've been working hard, and the campaign has been a lot of fun, reward them with some equipment that they'll find useful (or be able to sell). If things aren't going as smoothly as they should you could always present them with a *really* good cargo – but one that's so large there isn't time (or equipment) to save it before the freighter explodes.

Future: 6 Free Sensor Contacts includes a few starship cargos that you could use here. For even more starship cargo take a look at *Future: 13 Starship Cargos.*

Hardness: 30
Hit Dice: 16d20 (320 hp) (currently -18 hp)
Initiative Modifier: +2
Pilot's Class Bonus: +3
Pilot's Dex Modifier: +2
Gunner's Attack Bonus: +2
Size: Colossal (–8 size)
Tactical Speed: 4,000 ft. (8 sq.)
Length: 75 feet
Weight: 200 tons.
Targeting System Bonus: +3
Crew: 3 (trained +4)
Passenger Capacity: 0
Cargo Capacity: 100 tons.
Grapple Modifier: +16
Base Purchase DC: 53
Restriction: Restricted (+2)

Attack: 2 fire-linked heavy lasers –3 ranged (12d8) and 2 fire-linked rail cannons –8 ranged (9d12)
Attack of Opportunity: None

Standard PL 7 Design Specs:

Engines: Induction engine, thrusters
Armor: Cerametal
Defense Systems: Autopilot system, damage control system (1d10), damage stabilization equipment,

magnetic field, radiation shielding, sensor jammer
Sensors: Class II sensor array, targeting system
Communications: Laser transceiver, radio transceiver
Weapons: 2 fire-linked heavy lasers (range incr. 4,000 ft.), 2 fire-linked rail cannons (range incr. 3,000 ft.)
Grappling Systems: Grapplers

New Starship Defense System: Damage Stabilization System (PL 7)

A starship equipped with a damage stabilization system takes longer to break apart, the ship working against the clock to delay the inevitable. The damage stabilization system cannot repair a ship that is breaking apart but it does extend the time the ship requires to completely break apart (see the future SRD) by 50%.

Example: An ultralight starship equipped with a damage stabilization system's destruction threshold is increased from –20 hit points to –30 hit points.

A damage stabilization system can only be installed on a starship that is equipped with a damage control system.

Purchase DC: Varies by starship type (see table below).
Restriction: Licensed (+1).

Ship Type	Purchase DC
Ultralight	20
Light	24
Mediumweight	29
Heavy	35
Superheavy	42

Starship Key

1. Cockpit – Designed for three crewmembers – a pilot, communications office, and navigator – the cockpit is quite large for a ship of this size. The navigation and communication stations include backup controls from which the ship may be piloted (-2 penalty to Pilot checks) in an emergency.

2. Personal Storage Lockers – These lockers are used by the crew to store their personal goods. Each locker is equipped with an electronic lock – opening a lock requires the proper access code of a successful Disable Device check (DC 25). Each locker is roughly 2.5-feet wide and 6-feet tall.

3. Crew Quarters – This room was originally a passenger compartment but the current owners of *The Targovlya Syem* have retrofit the area to house three single bunks. Storage space under each bunk is kept locked (the locks are the same type as those found in area 2). Unfortunately for the crew, there isn't much room for privacy on a ship of this size.

SkeletonKey Games

The deckplan for *The Targovlya Syem* was created using SkeletonKey Games' *e-Future Tiles* series. In order to construct the starship for use with miniatures you will need the *e-Future Tiles: Star Freighter* and *e-Future Tiles: Star Hunter* tiles sets for the main body and cockpit; the cargo wings can be found in Ronin Arts' *Future: 13 Starship Cargos*. None of these products are necessary to use the material in this PDF, they just enable you to quickly put together the ship's deckplan for use with your miniatures. To learn all about SkeletonKey Games and their e-Future Tiles series please visit www.skeletonkeygames.com or www.starbaseprime.com.

4. Bathroom – Minimal facilities. There is no shower onboard since the original design was never intended for more than short cargo hops between systems – the crew is limited to sponge baths in the sink if they go on an extended flight.

5. Engineering Station – Actually two stations at the rear of the ship, these two areas are used to monitor and make any necessary repairs on *The Targovlya Syem's* engines and computer systems.

6. Cargo Bay – This small cargo bay is loaded from the ramp in the floor (see the sensor contact *Freighter in Distress* for information on the ramp). The largest width cargo container the ship can hold is 10-feet wide but the crew rarely accept such large loads. There was once a cargo mover – a mecha forklift – that the crew stored in one of the two cargo bay's but it was sold for fuel several years ago and they never got around to replacing it. Otherwise the cargo bays onboard the ship are identical to those found on almost any other freighter.

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TARGOVLYA SYEM

GRAVITY AGE ULTRALIGHT
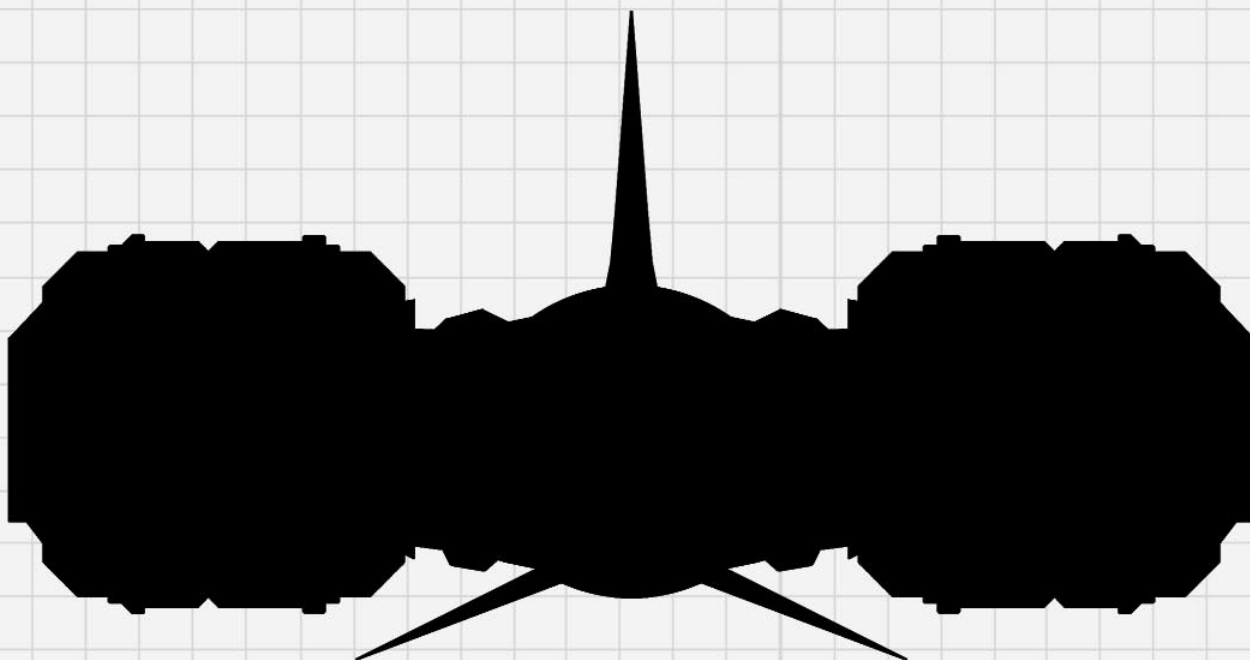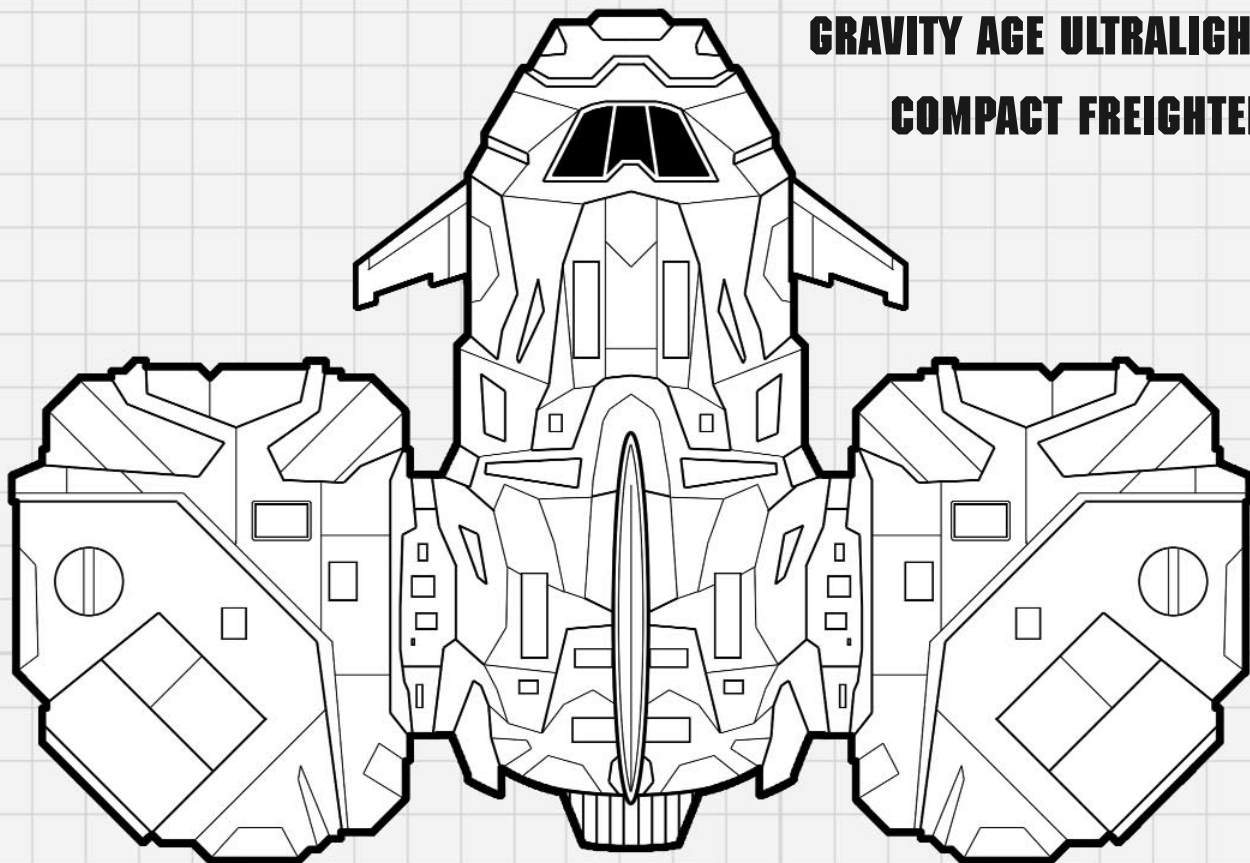
COMPACT FREIGHTER

TARGOVLYA SYEM
GRAVITY AGE ULTRALIGHT
COMPACT FREIGHTER

1. Cockpit
2. Personal Storage Lockers
3. Crew Quarters
4. Bathroom
5. Engineering Station
6. Cargo Bay