

Gift of the Makers

A Scenario for the Traveller Roleplaying Game



BEN LECRONE



Requires the use of the Traveller[™] Main Rulebook, available from Mongoose Publishing

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INTRODUCTION

GETTING STARTED

Gift of the Makers is an adventure for nearly any number of players. As it is based in the world of **Outpost Mars** and **Orbital**, it would be helpful to have either of those PDFs, but they are certainly not necessary. This adventure as written is intended to be an introduction and prequel to the **Orbital** setting which takes place three years before the official date of that setting (2100 AD). However, this needn't be the case and with minor modifications the **Gift of the Makers** could easily be integrated into an ongoing **Outpost Mars** campaign, the standard *Traveller* setting or even *2300AD*.

At the beginning of the adventure it is assumed that all of the Player Characters are already on Mars and at least a little familiar with that planet. PCs from other locations can be integrated into the party but remember that without reaction drives travel about the Solar System is rather slow so plan accordingly. Furthermore as per the **Outpost Mars** game the Players can be of almost any faction or career. It is highly recommended that all the players have hostile environment survival and vacc suit skills. Combat skills are helpful but not essential since guns are not permitted within any enclosed extraterrestrial habitat. Investigative skills will also come in handy.

You will need the *Traveller: Core Rulebook* by Mongoose Publishing, and Zozer Games' free pdf supplement **Vacc Suit** would be helpful as well. **Orbital**, even during the time of this adventure, is Traveller Tech Level 9 but without artificial gravity, psionics or jump drive.

Orbital is a science fiction role-playing setting that makes use of the popular Traveller rules. It is also a sequel to **Outpost Mars** and expands upon that setting by providing information regarding the entire Solar System, including some of what lies beyond, as well as moving the timeline forward to the year 2100. Even more importantly, the world of **Orbital** looks at what could have been. The enigmatic Face that Viking took pictures of in 1976 really is an ancient monument built by aliens as are the nearby Pyramids and City. There was a renewed push into space, including a return to the Moon and eventually humans on Mars. Humanity has spread throughout the Solar System, discovered life on several worlds, and confirmed the existence of intelligent life beyond our own little piece of real estate.

Yet even through all of these advances human kind remains largely unchanged. **Orbital** is a setting that is familiar, believable, and exotic. It focuses on exploration and adventure. Like light unable to escape from a black hole, the predicted computer intelligence 'singularity' goes unseen. Super intelligent computers exist but require extensive upkeep and handling while lacking that spark of imagination that would allow them to become truly self aware. Genetic engineering has wiped out many diseases and extended the average lifespan, but people still look and act like people. Science and technology has created a multitude of wonders, but humans remain humans.

MISFITS ON MARS

Madison Cornelius swore under her breath. Of all the damn days for my custom Aerodyne MES-XXII to be getting a damn hardware upgrade..she thought to herself while tugging on the sleeves in a vain attempt to relieve the itching.

"Is there a problem Maddy?" Edger's voice made Madison jump a bit inside her borrowed Mars suit.

Madison swore again as she heard Edger chuckle over the suit-to-suit link.

"Go to hell, Edger." she replied with a hiss.

A third voice joined the banter and cut off what would certainly been one of Edger's typical crude retorts. "Quiet down you two. We aren't supposed to be this close to the exclusion zone. If an ETM patrol finds us we lose a month's worth of salvage."

Dodger was right of course. The Martian government and Eckard Tactical Management took security around the Cydonia Ruins very seriously. All manner of alien artifacts had been discovered along the edge of the exclusion zone ranging from what most believed were extraterrestrial chew toys to massive egg shaped devices thought to be long dead fusion power plants. While Dodger and his crew had so far only found shards and pieces, a single intact artifact could make them all very rich.

Madison understood Dodger's concern. She glanced up from her scoop of Martian soil to look over at Dodger. His head was turned away, but she could clearly see the large yellow ball with a single calligraphy styled word across its center. The word...Artful, stood out in black against the yellow, adorning his vacc suit helmet with a design known to everyone within the local salvage community. Dodger was a legend. The only man to get a partial alien corpse out of the exclusion zone despite the best efforts of the Martian government, International Astronomical Union, and their ETM lapdogs. Madison smiled as she thought about the time they spent together the last few nights.

The back of Edger's helmet was nearly as simple. A dagger like knife between the numbers six and nine. Arching above the knife was the word Sharpe, and down at the knife's tip could be read, Edger. Edger wasn't as well known as Dodger, but he had a bit of a following none the less. Despite being a perpetual wise ass, he was a likable man whose loyalty to his friends had saved Madison's bacon on several occasions.

Further up ahead was Edger's girl, Indira. The newest member of their gang she had arrived just months ago directly from Earth. She didn't talk much, and Edger hinted that her time with the Snakeheads had left her traumatized. The back of her helmet held an intricate portrait of the Hindu goddess, Lakshmi. Lakshmi was the bringer of luck and a ward against misery. The group could certainly use all the luck they could get, especially after the deaths of Soumil and Monty. Edger, a man once unwilling to take any interest in helping others beyond his core group of friends, now had a personal vendetta against the people smuggling gangs collectively known as Snakeheads. It was a recent run in with a powerful Martian based gang that had forced them out of Reunion and cost them nearly all of the fortune that Dodger had made upon selling the alien corpse. Dodger had every reason to be furious, but

he had let it go. They took the last of their money completed repairs and upgrades on their two remaining rovers and headed back to the exclusion zone.

Everyone was a bit more subdued now. Monty had been a friend of Dodger's going all the way back to their childhood on the Yorkshire coast, and the two would often talk about going home to hike the Moors one last time before retiring to the seaside town of Whitby. Monty had always hoped to open a fish and chip shop to compete with the Magpie Cafe, which he and Dodger would laugh about for having excessively long queues. But now their two friends were dead. Dodger was more serious than ever, Edger's humor had grown bitter, and Indira hardly spoke.

Madison brought herself back to the present and began to reset the portable subsurface imager. A thermal detector beeped and Madison looked up hoping to catch a glimpse of the line of steam that would mark the sinkhole she was secretly looking for. She didn't like misleading her friends, but if she found the special artifact they would be extremely rich. Just as she readied the first seismic charge, Indira began to speak excitedly.

"Something just registered. Definitely not natural." She said quickly.

Madison unfolded the old style flexi-screen mounted on her left forearm and quickly brought up the image created by Indira's subsurface imager; two large coffin sized objects with a somewhat smaller cylinder in between them. She stared at the image in disbelief for several seconds. It wasn't a sinkhole vent at all! Only Indira's frantic yelling took her attention away from the image.

"It's active!" She hollered into the intercom. "There's a heat bloom, and, and my goodness...it's moving!"

Madison tried to move or scream, but the world seemed to freeze. She watched in horror as a short barreled weapon popped out of the red Martian dirt. It swiveled menacingly towards Indira and then opened fire. As the 15mm slugs tore into her friend Madison finally found her voice.

"Charlie-in-the-Box!! Everyone down!!" Madison screamed into her helmet's microphone.

Edger ignored her and ran to help Indira. The motion sensing array quickly turned the weapon towards this new target, and once again Madison could here the muffled noise despite her helmet. Brhuump...Brhuump...Brhuump.

Edger's helmet exploded into a cloud of glass and gore. Madison screamed again and ran towards Dodger. He stood there transfixed. Madison tackled him just as the auto-shotgun turned to fire. As the deadly machine let loose a hail of slugs she took him to the ground. Most of the slugs flew high, but one ripped into Dodger's suit tearing away a chunk of it, along with a bit of his shoulder. Madison covered the hole with her hand as she groped for her patch tape. Within a few seconds Dodger's suit no longer leaked air and was refilling with the proper mix of O2.

Now stuck behind a half buried boulder, Madison looked around for a way to get clear of the killing machine that continued to search for more targets. Just an arm's length away lay Dodger's subsurface imager. Like her's it was charged and ready to fire a steel piston into the ground. In normal use the rebounding sound waves would return a sonar echo that allowed subsurface images to be accurately mapped. An old fashioned but very effective tool for



anyone looking for something hidden underground, but with the proper tampering the piston mechanism could be loosened enough that it would fly off at tremendous speed. Madison checked her air supply...two hours left. That was more than enough. Unfortunately, Dodger's suit had lost a lot of air and a red warning light now shone on his wrist panel. She had to hurry.

The piston wouldn't come loose. Madison struggled a bit more but then glanced at Dodger. His face was pale, and he appeared to be going into shock. No more time, she thought. Quickly she grabbed two fist sized rocks. The first one she rammed into the opening right where the piston would poke out to bang the ground. Then she readied herself to stand up as quickly as possible.

She threw the second rock away from the boulder to the area where Edger's lifeless body now lay. The machine tracked the movement and once again opened fire. Madison jumped to her feet and fired the imager's piston. The rock plug exploded into a hail of fragments as the shotgun turned towards her movement. Pieces of rock peppered the automated gun system knocking its gyro out of alignment and shattering the motion tracker. Brhuump...Brhuump...Brhuump...

The first shot followed the imager as its' recoil carried it out of Madison's hands. By the second and third shot the gun's barrel pointed skyward and had no chance of hitting her. Madison grabbed Dodger's utility strap and dragged him towards their camouflaged rovers. As she walked backwards pulling the unconscious man she saw two coffin sized boxes erupt from the loose Martian soil. Both boxes opened to reveal two missiles, each one over a meter in length. She was half way back to the rover when the bright light of the rocket engines caused her suits visor to darken automatically. A moment later the roar of their engines was enough to awaken Dodger.

"What the hell was that?" Dodger asked weakly.

Madison watched as all four rockets streaked southward towards one of the many small settlement domes that dotted the newly opened regions around the Cydonia Ruins. At first she didn't know what to say to Dodger, but then as she reached the rover's airlock she remembered something her old professor had told her while they were out doing field research.

"It was a Charlie-in-the-Box. No child wants to play with a Charlie-in-the-Box." Madison replied in quiet sadness.

THE WORLD OF ORBITAL

In 1989 American President George H.W. Bush presented to Congress and the American people the Space Exploration Initiative. Initial skepticism gave way after a series of closed door briefings and funding was approved beginning in 1990. A brief war in Iraq threatened to derail the effort, but a quick victory followed by regime change ensured that space exploration remained a major focus in the national budget. Just ten years after the conflict Americans landed on the Moon once again and soon laid the groundwork for a permanent presence there. This was followed by a manned mission to Mars sixteen years later. Assistance from the ESA and Russia helped to alleviate growing financial concerns

The next few decades saw the expansion of America's settlements on Luna and Mars. On Luna they were joined by the Chinese and several European nations. Luna and Earth orbit soon became the home for hundreds of laboratories and processing plants that fed the vital solar power manufacturing plants. The face of Luna changed over time as mining and a gigantic band of solar collectors forever altered its surface. Further out from the Sun the settlement of Mars became an international effort. Terraforming of the red planet began in fits and starts despite the discovery of Martian life. Scientists flocked to Mars to partake in the terraforming or to study the long abandoned alien ruins. Thousands moved off of Earth by way of government programs, corporate projects, or privately funded space colonization efforts. By 2040 there were 22,000 people living on Luna and another 15,000 on Mars. Compared to the 8.5 billion on Earth this seemed minuscule, but computer technology and advanced robotics enabled those living in space to produce far more than a comparable population on Earth.

History followed a familiar course and by 2044 tensions had arisen between those living on Luna and their Earth based masters. A short war, highlighted by the dropping of three mass driver loads into sparsely populated desert regions as a warning, bought the newly proclaimed Luna Republic its independence. But the need for nitrogen and a few crucial vitamins ensured that Luna could not totally cut itself off. Luna struggled for a few years to form a stable government and replace crucial materials no longer available from Earth. During this time the nations of Earth turned their attention back towards home. Unfortunately, in eastern Asia this attention took the form of one of mankind's most destructive wars ever. The East Asian War pitted China, Pakistan and Indonesia against India, Russia, Vietnam and the Philippines. Nearly a dozen nuclear weapons were used and millions died. The bad years of 2044 to 2050 so frightened the people of Earth that support for a united Earth government reached a peak. The largely impotent Union of Inter-regional Organizations was soon replaced by the Earth Union.

While Earth recovered and worked towards unification, Luna took the time to build its defenses. After a few years of recovery both Earth and Luna once again turned their attention towards expansion. During the chaos of the time Mars saw extensive population growth and the process of mining and settlement of the asteroid belt begun by China continued unabated. When the two major powers, Earth and Luna, moved to assert their influence on the outer bodies of the Solar System they naturally came into conflict. Luna attempted to assert control over the Belters, now largely ignored by the new Chinese government. In response the Earth Union promoted the idea of a Belt centered nation called Cascadia. The newly formed Earth Union found itself ill prepared to intervene so far from Earth and had difficulties coordinating the many parts of its newly united military force. Emboldened by the Earth Union's bumbling, Luna intervened in force and precipitated a vicious war. The Belt War lasted from 2052 to 2055 and saw fighting throughout the Belt and

on Mars. At its end Earth conceded and rescinded its support for Cascadia while keeping its outpost on the asteroid 243 Ida. Luna attained nominal control of the Belt.

In the years following the Belt War the two powers yet again invested heavily in off world pursuits. The discovery of life in the atmosphere of Venus had caught the interest of many scientists and researchers, but it wasn't until an asteroid strike in 2041 that the mineral wealth that lay hidden there became exposed. Soon Luna came to dominate the second planet by building massive floating cities called aerostats as well as several subsurface cities along the rim of the newly created impact crater. Earth has but a minor presence on Venus. Mercury has become, by way of a failed Earth Union effort and the careful manipulation of the resulting fallout, the personal domain of a one very wealthy and powerful man. As a major producer of solar power its resemblance to the sultanates of old does not go unnoticed. Beyond the asteroid belt both sides jockeyed for position amongst the vast system of moons and rings that encircled Jupiter and Saturn.

Despite the ongoing Cold War mankind flourished amongst the other planets. The long mocked Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligences (SETI) made several miraculous discoveries. Life was discovered in the oceans of Europa, and powerful telescopes found signs of life bearing planets around several nearby stars. Scientists delved deeper than ever into the mysteries of the aliens that constructed the vast Martian monuments. They learned about the doomed Servants and found clues hinting towards another race, the enigmatic Makers. Nearly everywhere humankind looked life showed itself to be an irrepressible force, ubiquitous and abundant but always possessing new tricks and traits that allowed survival in almost any condition. Yet through all the discoveries humanity remained largely constant, and after forty years of tense standoffs, trade wars and diplomatic posturing the solar system slipped once more towards the brink of war.

Disagreements over Titan led the Earth Union to invade and occupy that distant moon. Earth troops landed in 2095 and quickly occupied the major settlements. Luna responded by stirring up trouble throughout the Earth Union colonies around Jupiter. Both sides accelerated construction of military Deep Space Vehicles and readied for war.

It is now late 2097 and the entire solar system once more appears ready to plunge into the abyss.

TECHNOLOGY

Basic

The overall Tech Level for **Orbital** is equivalent to **Traveller Tech Level 9** but with the notable absence of gravitics, jump drive and anything related to psionics. Any piece of equipment from either the *Traveller Core Book* or the *Central Supply Catalogue* that is Tech Level 9 or less and does not make use of one of the three forbidden advances can be incorporated into **Orbital**. Computer technology can be considered Tech Level 11. But while **Orbital** is a setting inspired by and drawing inspiration from the almost retro feeling technology envisioned in the 1970s and 80s, it is also hard tech; meaning it takes inspiration from real world technological advances.

Computers

The computers of **Orbital** are not bulky retro style machines. They are sleek multi-function devices where even the smallest wrist mounted computer has enough memory to store the entire some of knowledge within the British Museum and Smithsonian combined with ample room left over for mundane tasks like home videos. Most 'coms', or wrist PDAs, combine all the functions of a GPS, phone, entertainment device, video camera, translator, web browser, medical monitor, and occupational assistant into one device. All of this is managed by a Smart Operating System Fragment which can seamlessly link to the owner's larger and even more complex home based Smart Operating System. As no truly self-aware computers have been successfully maintained most Smart OSs integrate a Personality Imitation Program into their system to create the illusion of sapience. Interface is via voice, touchable flex-screen, or neural-scan for cutting edge computers.

True Artificial Intelligence remains elusive. In order to be considered self-aware a computer system must be able to not only learn but also create and imagine. Unfortunately, this requires that the device be able to integrate new code directly into its primary cognitive programing. While smart computers have done this to some degree since the 2020s, they have always had trouble creating original code that goes beyond trial and error learning. The most advanced computers today can create new code, but as it is placed within the original operating system problems occur. Over time the new code fragments the original programing and leads to memory loss, slower running times, and even complete changes in the AI's personality. Defragmenting the computer will fix the first two problems but always destroys any personality or self-awareness that had arisen. This personality fragmentation process occurs even more quickly to any AI linked directly to the wider internet. Until the problem of personality fragmentation is overcome computers will remain nothing more than extremely smart tools.

Materials

Material science has advanced greatly over the past 100 years. New ceramic-metal combinations have made suits and rovers capable of surviving on the harsh surface of Venus possible. Memory metals allow for tools that change shape or airplanes that alter themselves during flight. Transparent metals and one way glass have made all sorts of impressive domes and space structures possible. Advances in material sciences have made massive structures on Earth like the Pacific Gyre City possible.

On Earth and most colonies, rules dictate that nearly all durable goods be "universally recyclable", meaning every part of them can either be reused or repurposed using less than half the energy it took to create the object upon initial manufacturing. Also, manufacturers are obligated to collect and recycle every item that they sell. As such (discounting food items) fully 95% of all items manufactured on Earth can be reused with minimal effort. Luna too has similar regulations, but Mars lags far behind in this respect. Some critics complain that such levels of recycling have stymied innovation as nearly everything is reused, but since the 2080s there have been high levels of deflation on Earth as improved manufacturing processes have combined with the recyclable economy to drive the costs of goods down.

Weapons

Despite the formation of the Earth Union and a noticeable decrease in violent crime, weapons too have seen numerous advances over the intervening decades. All modern firearms are modular, caseless, and use a electric trigger to fire their ammunition. Military grade personal weapons make use of a bullet type known as SPEED rounds. Solid Plasma Explosive, Electric Detonation rounds use an electric ignition system to fire like normal rounds, but the propellant

is layered and when ignited behaves like a plasma providing the the round with more continuous acceleration within and sometimes beyond the barrel. SPEED rounds have the benefit of being programmable in that changes can be made to muzzle velocity, rate of fire and, by using memory metal, even the characteristics of the ammo being fired. With the exception of a few places on Earth and the wilds of Mars, gun control regulations are extremely harsh and firearms are almost universally forbidden. The advent of 3D printers and auto-machining has made most of these laws unenforceable, and many small communities in the Belt and on Mars keeps a stash of guns on hand "just in case".

Military weapons beyond personal arms make heavy use of robotics, powered armor, and armored vehicles. Luna prefers electro-magnetic weapons mounted on combat robots. These robots can perform autonomously but also have built in oversight systems that allow operators to take control using VR hardware or neural-scan linking. Usually one oversight officer controls two vehicle sized or four human sized bots, but for special operations the ratio is often one-to-one. The Earth Union, which has population to spare, has a large force of soldiers equipped with combat armor. Most heavy weapons are rapid firing and can use a wide variety of specialty rounds. What they lack in kinetic energy they make up for by being extremely versatile. Both sides make use of tracked and wheeled armored vehicles capable of being deployed on Luna, Mars and even Titan.

Genetics and Biotech

In 2097 humanity looks pretty much the same as it did 100 years prior. Lifespans have increased to over 140 years on Earth and Luna as nearly all babies are treated for possible genetic disorders while still in the womb. Furthermore most congenital defects can also be corrected prior to birth or very soon after. With the exception of fixing health defects and selecting gender, parents are forbidden from tampering with their child's genotype. Allowances are made for same sex couples and single parents who want to use their own modified DNA to create a child. Upon reaching the age of biological consent, set at 18 on Earth and 16 on Luna, a person can elect to alter his or her own DNA. Inserting non-human DNA is not permitted, but changing skin color, sex, or other aspects of one's phenotype is permissible within reason. Some people have made large sums of money by selling portions of their DNA to those wishing to acquire a certain look, talent, or physical trait. As one's genotype is immediately private and copy written upon birth others must pay or otherwise get permission to make use of another's DNA. D-Jacking has become a common crime on Earth as criminals attempt to acquire DNA from media stars and athletes for resale on the black market.

Regulations are much looser for non-human animals and especially plants. Earth has long made use of genetically modified plants and animals to provide increased food yields. By the middle of the 21st Century nearly all opposition to so called "frankenfoods" had ceased as nearly every fruit and vegetable had been genetically modified in some manner. Not only did this increase crop yields, reduce pesticide use, and make food more nutritional; it also increased the diversity of available foods by bringing back extinct varieties and creating new species. Meat production has benefitted by being able to grow isolated muscle and fat bundles without the need to raise a real animal. While this has reduced agricultural pollution and resource consumption; several species of cows, pigs and and goats have gone extinct. On Mars a wide variety of genetically modified plants have been released onto the planet. Lichen, moss and several variety of cacti are thriving. The release of modified animal species has been controversial, but modified arthropods, insects and martian deermice thrive around Hellas and Marineris.

THE ALIENS ON MARS

Humans have known about the alien ruins on Mars for at least 120 years. They have been exploring the ruins since shortly after landing on Mars. Yet even now not much is known about these alien visitors. Their time on Mars goes back at least 750,000 years and perhaps as far as a million years. Their home world is unknown for certain but some evidence points to it being less than 50 light years away. It is also not known whether or not the aliens had the ability to travel faster than the speed of light. Humans do know that the aliens were very adept at building robots and used them for numerous tasks including construction, exploration, and possibly warfare. The structures on Mars were built using local stone and then covered in an advanced ceramic-metal mix that could be shaped similar to concrete. This makes them very durable despite their ancient age. Furthermore structures on Saturn's moons of Mimas and Iapetus point to a level of technology far beyond humanity.

Even so inconsistencies abound. Much of the alien technology discovered on Mars seems no more advanced than pre-spaceflight Earth. Some pieces of hyper advanced technology exist amongst the ruins, but the vast majority of the finds are simple items resembling common household tools. The vast majority of these items do not appear technologically compatible with the numerous advanced, but long inactive, robots that have been discovered throughout the Ruins. This has led many scientists to speculate that there were at least two completely different alien races on Mars. Known simply as the Makers, the first race to arrive on Mars built much of the city and the artifacts around Saturn. Very little else is known about the Makers as they left no biological evidence. The second race were initially referred to as the Servants as some early explorers thought they were directly connected to the more advanced Makers. Currently no direct evidence exists that these two races interacted in any way. Most researchers refer to this second race as Hexapods, but they are still more commonly referred to as the Servants.

The Servants thrived on Mars for over a thousand years and within several of the chambers opened on Mars have been actual alien corpses. It is known that they were six limbed arboreal creatures that consisted on a diet mostly of meat. They were about the size of large dogs and appeared to live in large family groups based around a child bearing female and two or three related alpha males. Like humanity they evolved in an atmosphere composed primarily of oxygen and nitrogen but with a higher abundance of carbon dioxide. Their body stored cellular information by way of a protein based system similar in function to but far different in composition to Earth based DNA. Several species of Martian life have been proven to share biological similarities to these creatures. It is also known that the Servants built the Face and carved numerous sculptures depicting archaic hominids, but the reason for this is unknown. It is currently hypothesized that the Servants arrived at Mars thousands of years after the Makers. Given that the Makers were already gone, they occupied the City and even expanded it. They thrived for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, some sort of accident or war occurred, and all of the Servants either died or fled. Some scientists refute this hypothesis and still believe that the Makers and the Servants were directly connected. Further research is needed.

***** Referees Only Past This Point! *****

2 MARS

Mars draws adventurers and fortune seekers like moths to a flame. And nothing on Mars burns as bright and alluringly as the Cydonia Ruins. Fortunes are gained and lost everyday around those strange alien structures, but adventure can always be found for those who look. And so the player characters find themselves on Mars. The initial reason for their being there is largely unimportant, but it would be helpful for them have a contact within the local law enforcement agency, the Martian Rangers.

While going about some mundane and agonizingly boring task, the players each hear the attention chime of their personal PDA. Upon checking they find a text only message marked urgent sent directly from the regional Martian Rangers office.

+++++ Urgent. Please Read and Respond ASAP

SolNet News Feed (1st November, 2097): Sixteen are dead after a suspected act of terrorism occurred just north of the Cydonia Polis Regio. A small habitat dome was struck by two missiles just as dawn broke. Located just inside the exclusion zone, Redhorn was being constructed as part of the Open Housing Initiative championed by Mars' Homestead Party. Four missiles with high-explosive fragmentation warheads were fired from an automated launcher shortly after daybreak. Two of the four missiles struck the unfinished dome within its residential district causing thirteen of the deaths. A further three deaths occurred when a portion of the uncompleted dome collapsed. As the dome had not yet been sealed and pressurized all buildings were independently sealed, thus preventing complete catastrophe. Authorities believe that notable terrorist group Red Legion carried out the attack using one of their notorious Charlie-in-the-Box automated weapon systems. The Martian Rangers are heading the investigation with help from Eckard Tactical Management and freelance operators. (SolNet Services)

Could use your help here. Transportation to Cydonia has been pre-paid and along with a 250 MC consulting fee can be downloaded to your Mars Credit chip from account number CPR022 using the password 8Mincemeat4Zozar. Meet me at Drexels, NE corner of the Great Hall of Goeria, at 19:00 local time. Others have been notified. You may well recognize some of them. I'll owe you.

MR +++++

Each player receives the same message, and it doesn't take them long to realize the initials stand for Mariana Rupali. Rupali is a member of the Martian Rangers and once worked in the Mars capital of Reunion. As such she made friends with a wide variety of people both native and new to the Red Planet. Recently she received a promotion and was transferred to the growing Cydonia Polis Regio. Her main duties have largely consisted of keeping the peace in the newly opened Great Hall of Goeria and patrolling the borders of Cydonia Exclusion Zone. Rupali works closely with employees of the private security firm, Eckard Tactical Management, but there is some friction between the two groups.

The trip to Cydonia is largely uneventful, but upon reaching the city famous for its alien ruins the players find themselves in a very different world. After a journey of several hours the suspended monorail passes through the airlocks leading into the inner portion of the A-Frame shaped Cydonia Central Station. Because of the unbreathable Martian air the monorail pulls entirely into a large airlock, and passengers disembark into a second airlock waiting area. Once everyone has cleared the monorail the waiting area doors open up into a large well-lit hallway. Carved right through the Martian rock the hallway leads gently downwards with walls covered colorful murals depicting all sorts of scenes out of famous works of science fiction. After a 200 meter walk the hall ends and opens up into the Cydonia Round About.

SolNet

The Solar System Information Dispersion Network, better known as SolNet, was established in 2066 by the Earth Union as way to enhance communication between the inner planets. Initially, consisting of just a few large communication satellites SolNet has expanded over the years into a network of large multi spectrum communication arrays that disperse and relay radio, microwave, and laser broadcasts. Each satellite also acts a data fortress, travel beacon and emergency aide station. Entertainment and information services, both paid subscription services and free non-profit broadcasts, are also dispersed through SolNet. SolNet, and the entire solar system uses Greenwich Mean Universal Time as its official method of keeping time. As of 2097, SolNet reaches as far out as Jupiter and its many moons.



Aerial view of Cydonia

Gone is the business like attitude that pervades in Reunion. Also absent are the ruff and tumble miners and hard working but tight lipped immigrant families. Instead Cydonia bustles with an atmosphere that is part college campus and part science fiction convention, and as soon as the characters come fully into the Round About they are approached by numerous people trying to hand them religious pamphlets or sell them the latest New Age alien miracle device. The streets of Cydonia are paved with the non-stick resin common to roads throughout the solar system, but the center of the Round About is composed of red cobblestones laid out in an intricate design. At its centre is a large open-sided pyramid that doubles as a

central gazebo and much of the area around the pyramid is covered in food carts, portable mini-shops and information kiosks. The area is crowded but the people are friendly if a bit odd.

Cydonia like nearly every Martian city is a mix of clear domes and subterranean spaces. In this case it means that the Round About and most of the city proper is under ground, but high overhead stands a large clear dome that lets in natural light. Heading out of the Round About are four wide boulevards going north, south, east, and west. West heads back to the monorail station. North dead ends after four hundred meters and consists of the primary residential district. Heading southward is Grand Boulevard which leads directly to the alien ruins. Both sides of Grand Boulevard are lined with shops and restaurants for over a kilometer before hitting the Exclusion Zone. At the border of the Exclusion Zone EMT has an elaborate security station that includes anti-vehicle barriers and automated perimeter defenses. The eastern most street is called Fellowship Boulevard. It is lined with a mix of apartments and small shops for several hundred meters before these give way to bare rock and unfinished pavement.

From the Round About the players need to hail a taxi to take them from the center of Cydonia to the Great Hall, which lies at the far end of Fellowship Boulevard...15km away. This is a relatively difficult task as Cydonia's recent population growth combined with an onerous taxi cab registration and licensing system has led to a severe shortage in available taxis. After waiting for some time the players may notice a van-sized taxi approaching the Round About close to where they are standing. An Average awareness related task check followed by a Difficult athletics check will get them to the taxi quickly.

Mars B420585 N,S De Po NI

The first human to set foot on Mars was American Kyle Schaffer. The twelve person international mission that he led planted the groundwork for future colonisation. The first permanent population consisted of scientists and engineers and was in place by 2020. These early pioneers were soon followed by "average people" who sold nearly everything for a chance to move to the Red Planet. By settling around the automated MARVIN in situ resource processors these intrepid people made use of the resources provided by the non-profit Frontier Foundation. Mars is also the site of alien ruins thought to be nearly a million years old.

Mars gained its independence in 2068 but is still dominated by the pro-terraforming Greens. Conflict between the Red Legion, a group dedicated to removing humanity from Mars and ending terraforming, and the current government continues as a low level guerrilla war and occasional acts of terrorism. The people of Mars are still mostly scientists who partake in the terraforming effort or study the alien ruins, and miners who extract resources from the Martian rock. Mars is predominately Euro-American, but there are large Indian and Native American minorities which make up a combined 15% of the population. Despite the unrest and dysfunctional government, the population of Mars continues to grow at the highest rate in the solar system.

Even if one of the players sees and gets in the taxi very quickly the driver will wait for nearly twenty minutes or until all ten of the vehicle's seats are taken. He is required to by law, and the players are not late enough yet to make it worth bribing the drive to leave early. This is a chance for all the player characters to come together as a group. Nothing brings people together like being stuck on some manner of crowded public transportation.

As the entirety of Cydonia City, the Boulevards, and the Great Hall are pressurized the players have no need for bulky suits. Most people though, choose to wear an emergency skintight Mars undersuit, known locally as tighties [see Stuff, pg.53]. During the drive the Players will

see the local scenery, which inside the unfinished tunnels leading to the Great Hall is rather uninteresting. This is a time for the player characters to get acquainted and realize that they all got the exact same enigmatic message from Mariana Rupali.

The drive to the Great Hall takes just under half an hour and comes to an end just inside the hall. The cab stops at a large prefab building that the Players might notice is both cheaply made of local tin and bolted to the floor. Upon exiting they are hit by a powerful smell that combines the iron filled clay of Martian dirt with strong hints of curry from Indian cooking. The Hall is filled with tents and prefab buildings giving the place a distinctly temporary feel. Far away at the center of the Hall is the Central Pillar. Despite the distance the Players can see that it has been lavishly decorated for the upcoming Christmas Season with colorful lights.

After a short wait, during which they are pestered constantly by panhandlers, Church members and local salesmen, they see Mariana Rupali approaching. The Players might notice that she looks worried. Once the other people notice her approach those pestering the Players quickly disperse. Rupali will immediately approach and greet any Players who have chosen to have contacts within the Martian Rangers. After all introductions are made Rupali will pull the Players away from the Taxi building to find a quiet place near one of the lesser pillars. Once away from the crowds she immediately begins speaking quickly and with a strong Hindi accent. Some Players may find it difficult to follow what she's saying. A Task Check might be appropriate.

"Less than a day ago a small settlement dome was hit by a Charlie-in-the-Box. Four missiles fired, thankfully only two connected. Even so the damage was pretty bad. Fifteen people were killed. I think. Really, it could have been a lot worse but everyone there had their tighties on, because the dome wasn't fully completed and had yet to get it's habitation cert.

"I got called in right away. Even though we're kind of close to the edge of the Zone, not much happens around here. The Church of the Heavenly Stigmata, the Facers and ETM do a pretty good job of keeping the lid on things. Most of the crime is still down the tunnel in the city. So this incident has everyone all shook up. ETM claims it was the Red Legion. Ranger headquarters isn't ruling out anything, but some higher ups fear that the Lunatics might be stirring up trouble to distract the EU from Titan.

"So shortly after the strike I oversaw a drone walk through. Wasn't sure what had occurred and some reports claimed it was a static bombing. Just to be careful I sent in six Overseers, four Sniffers and four Rescuebots. The Sniffers confirmed by way of chemical analysis that the dome had been hit by missiles. Too much solid propellant mixed into the residue to be a static bomb. Plus they found bits of rocket shroud. Anyway, while the Rescuebots helped in search and rescue, the Overseers circle overhead.

"Fifteen dead. I have the images right on my PDA. Some were pretty messed up, but crime scene analysis software confirmed and reconfirmed that there were only enough body parts for fifteen people. Three of them kids no more than eight for Ares sake.

"I went in person to Redhorn just four hours after the attack. When I get there they have sixteen body bags out, and the local med-techies had already bagged most of the deceased. I can understand not wanting dead loved ones lying about like upended litter, but it's a bloody crime scene. The damage already done, I reviewed each DNA record and matched it to those on file with the Redhorn med-bank. After a bit of work and three warrants, I finally got all fifteen bodies tagged by the Overseers identified. But there was an extra.

"Med-techs and locals say they found her lying near an inner airlock. No tighties, just wearing some high end active wear. Died of asphyxiation. I guess she didn't make it to the airlock in time. I went back over the Overseer images. She's not there. Sure there are a lot

of shadows, and it was pretty early in the morning, but my dronies know their stuff. She came out of no where. No DNA on file. Not on Redhorn, not on Mars, not on Earth. Luna hasn't responded.

"The Med-techs had already cleared out her pockets. Some hard credits...untraceable, a pocket knife, a ring...real Venusian diamond, half of a business card, and an encrypted data chip...two terrabytes of data. But the damn chip has a double super-prime lock.

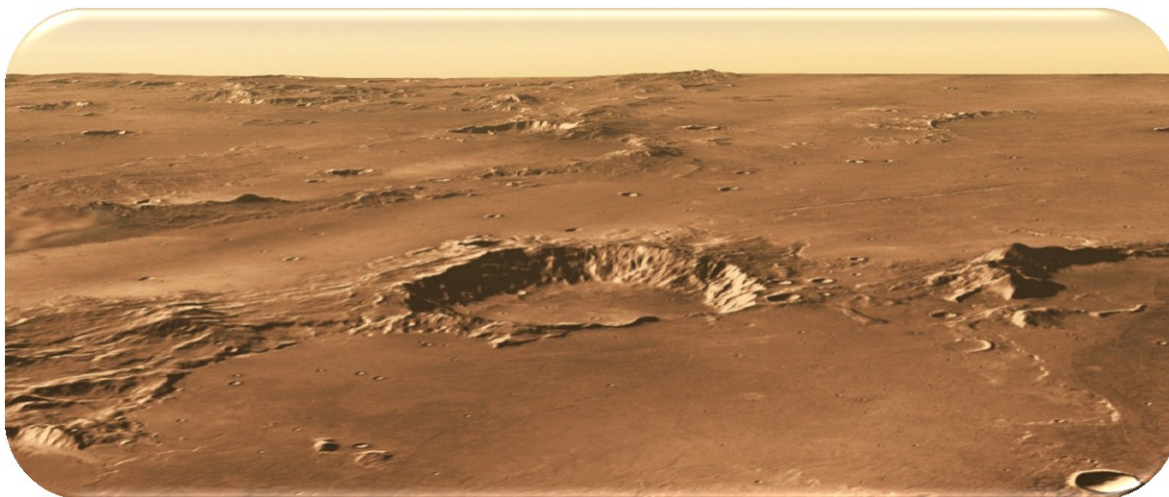
"But if she weren't dead she'd be a real beauty. I have her a klick and a half away near the lift. I can't pay much. Ranger's don't pay consultants much, but I have something I can give you. Help me out, please."

While it's possible for the Players to say no thanks and go grab a pint at the local prefab pub, there's no fun in that. Saying yes will make Rupali grateful and put a bright smile on her face. Given the lack of transportation within the Great Hall, besides the numerous llamas, yaks and peddle cars, the group will have to walk to the far end where Rupali has the women's body. The walk takes another half hour and reinforces the slow pace of things in the rural portions of Mars. For those used to the hectic cities of Earth or the crowded warrens of Luna, the Great Hall will test their patience, but they do have time to grab a bite to eat. Food stands abound and the Indian-influenced cuisine is excellent. As they walk Rupali informs them that the Green controlled government wants the incident to go away. They don't want to draw undue attention to Mars while Earth and Luna are on the brink of war. The Rangers are allowing Rupali to pursue the case further, so as to assert their independence from the dysfunctional central government, but does not have the resources to lend much direct assistance.

Upon getting to the north end of the Hall, Rupali will direct them to her small ground car. It is painted the bright red, yellow and white of the Martian Rangers with a bar of red and yellow lights across the top. Rupali activates a thumb print - voice recognition lock to get into the vehicle's rear cargo compartment. After a bit of rummaging she holds up a small data chip.

An Easy Task Check using the Computers skill or even basic Electronics will reveal that the data chip is a generic design that can be purchased nearly anywhere for just a few credits.

The data chip fits all standard computer inputs, but attempts to read it only reveal a popular children's audio book, Spacer Sam's Super Special Spacesuit. A difficult computers task check will confirm that the chip contains a lot of highly encrypted data. Protected behind a dual super-large prime key encryption matrix, the chip is unhackable given the players' current gear. They need help. Furthermore the players may want to examine the dead woman's body or the damaged dome. If so allow them to do as they please. As the woman's body is near by in a medical van it is the logical place to start the investigation, but just make sure they hack the chip last.



The Great Hall of Goeria

Despite having a length of nearly 2.0 kilometers, the Great Hall of Goeria was only recently discovered in 2093. Goeria is a vast open hall, 750 meters wide at the widest with an overall oval shape, held up by two rows of nine pillars. In the center is the Central Pillar, a huge column now covered in bolted on housing units often consisting of nothing more than modified cargo containers. At the north end of Goeria is a gigantic pit 250 meters across and estimated to be nearly 1km deep. It is filled to overflowing with junk and debris from the aliens. Thus far nearly everything discovered is either so badly weathered as to be unrecognizable, or it is nothing more than trinkets that are worthless to anyone except collectors and scholars. Just above the pit is a small opening to the Martian atmosphere as the Pit was once part of a natural sink hole. Now soil and debris cover so much of the opening that it went unnoticed until some explorers fell through to the cavern below. Just weeks ago Goeria was connected directly to the rest of Cydonia by way of a subterranean tunnel through which rovers can travel. The entire Hall is now pressurized as a dome was installed over the sinkhole entrance and air locks were placed at all surface entrances.

THE MECH-HARE

Despite having little in the way of an expense allowance, Rupali does have a way to compensate the Players. She offers them a cutting edge robot known as the Gregor Technologies Mech-Hare. Anyone with a knowledge of computers or robotics will have heard about the Mech-Hare. It is an advanced prototype smart robot with a learning neural net and personality imitation program. To many mechanics and engineers the Mech-Hare has become the robotic equivalent of the Holy Grail. Rupali got the Mech-Hare from a Gregor Technologies executive whose life she had saved while working in Reunion. It has received all the recent software updates.

Rupali is not mechanically inclined and has kept the robot in her car's trunk for over a month. She offers it to the Players in lieu of payment. The Mech-Hare would retail for Cr12,000, but due to shortages and the software improvements this Mech-Hare is worth about Cr20,000.

Any tech-minded people within the group will be ecstatic about getting their hands on a Mech-Hare. If the group is not yet, or does intend to remain, a team it would behoove the group to work out a way to compensate those who do not get the Mech-Hare by having the techies pay them their share based on the robot's worth.

Upon activation the robot rabbit will hop around playfully and immediately seek to assist the Players in some way. If some sort of mechanical device is within its reach (waist high or less) it will immediately grab the item and tinker with it. After about half an hour the Mech-Hare will return the device in top repair and any future uses will incur a +1 DM. The Mech-Hare is very helpful and for a robot very cute. Play it up, and make the Players fall in love with this little bot.

After agreeing to accept the robot as payment the group must then begin the investigation. Looking over the body of the deceased mystery woman would be a good place to start.

MEET JANE FROST

The broken and battered body of the mystery woman has been placed in a coroner's bag and is lying in the back of a medical van. Opening the bag will immediately alert the local medical examiner as well as the ETM officers on the scene. They will arrive within a few minutes as they are very near by. Either the Players or Rupali will need to confront and somehow convince the medical examiner that they have authority to examine the body. As the group confronts the medical examiner it takes an Average Task Check to notice that she is nervously fingering a silver necklace that has a pendant shaped like a mobius strip placed just below an oval aquamarine. If pressed by Rupali she will admit that she took the necklace off of the woman's body. The threat of reporting this to her superiors will make her quickly hand the necklace over.

ETM will need to be headed off as the Martian Rangers do not want the mercenary company expanding their authority beyond the Exclusion Zone.

Upon opening the bag the Players see that the mystery woman truly was beautiful. Her hair is a stark white color, but her features are those of a woman no older than her mid-twenties. Her eyes are pale blue and skin is very pale. Further examination will reveal numerous scars on her back and thighs that look like whip and claw marks. Her clothing, which has been removed, is stuffed at the bottom of the bag. Examination of the clothing reveals nothing except that it is very well made and of an expensive label. Looking at the body reveals two tattoos; one at the nape of the neck depicts a blue oval on which there is a black circle bisected by two perpendicular black lines, the other one her right ankle is that of a mobius strip. A difficult Task Check using an appropriate History, Archaeology or Philosophy skill will remind the Player that the circle and line symbol is the old astrological symbol for Earth. Any Player with a notable interest in science fiction or collectibles can with an Average Task Check recall that the symbol, especially when placed on a blue oval, also represents the fictional Solar Union from the old Commander Quantum videos.

If any Player thinks to take a picture of the corpse and run a internet based photo match, they will come up empty. This is a bit surprising. A more thorough search using special software to access portions of the Marsnet not open to the public will bring up more information. With a successful Computers Task Check the Players will discover that the woman is named Jadismarine. She was reported missing and surprisingly there was a

substantial reward posted for her return. A Very Difficult Advocate Task Check will reveal that the wording for the "reward" is very similar to the murder contracts organized crime issues to hit men.

THE BROKEN SNOW GLOBE

Redhorn appears to be a half buried snow globe that has been cracked open by a tremendous force. The dome is very near a newly opened portion of the city at Cydonia. As it is a small settlement nearly everyone living there knew everyone else. Despite their suspicious nature some of the residents will talk to the group and it will be rather easy to determine that no one knew the woman. If they assist the struggling community in some way and show sympathy it will be easy for the group to learn that the woman was not present during the attack and her body somehow mysteriously showed up very soon after. No one knows how this came about but they suspect government or church involvement.

As the group moves about the dome security cameras and locals with coms capture video and images of them. These soon find their way onto the Marsnet and so very quickly word spreads by way of informants, SIGINT and the notoriously leaky Martian government that this woman has been found and she had something very important. It also becomes common knowledge that the Player Characters are snooping around and asking a lot of questions.

PRIMES FOR A PRESENT

Cracking the data chip is no easy task. The chip uses a dual massive prime encryption key system which will take time to get past. It requires a very good computer capable of being used by two people working in tandem. If one of the Players is very good with computers they can give it a try while working alongside a smart Intrusion program provided by Rupali. This is Very Difficult and the Intrusion program only counts as skill level 0. Barring an exceptional failure they will notice that the chip makes no attempt to erase the encrypted data even after repeated attempts at hacking. What the group needs is a Data retrieval expert. After a bit of time and frustration the Players will be able to crack the chip's encryption. After doing so the group will uncover a large amount information concerning a pair of alien artifacts. It will take several hours to sift through the data, but those with Investigate skill can shorten this with an Average Task Check.

Besides the information about the alien artifacts there are several diary entries made by the enigmatic dead woman. An observant Player will quickly notice that it's a bit odd that these are written diary pages and not the far more common video entries. In fact beyond a few still images there is nothing on the chip that shows the woman. There is also nothing that gives her name or any other personal information. A Player with knowledge about undercover work will realize that this too is strange; normally a cover identity will be created, especially on Mars where the influx of immigrants makes it one of the few places besides Earth where human spies can be used effectively.

Also within the diary pages in a cryptic entry that reads..."While once Mars held possession of both gifts, it is said that he gave one to his lover. The second gift now resides with her. Only by possessing both gifts will one have great power."

She goes on to call one of the artifacts, the Red Box, and the other one is referred to as the Green Box. The dead woman has put further information on the chip. It refers to a group of rovers that discovered a similar alien box several years ago. Despite the extreme difficulty involved they were able to open the box. Unfortunately, the box held a decidedly deadly booby-trap. As soon as the artifact was opened an advanced swarm of nanobots erupted forth and proceeded to strip the flesh from their bones. For some death came quickly but for a few standing further away from the artifact death was slow and painful. The nanobots consumed their bodies from the inside out and they died writhing in pain over the course of several days.

Constructed of extremely advanced hardened carbon ceramets; the boxes are nearly impossible to open without industrial grade plasma cutters. If the Players insist on taking a peek led them go on a wild goose chase to find a plasma cutter, but harry them with angry rovers, tele-operated bots, government agents, corporate operatives or anyone else who might want to obtain the artifacts. Eventually they should get back on track, and the boxes will remain unopened

The final few files on the chip are in the form of an intelligence report detailing a Rover group called the Rosalindas. Rupali has heard of this Rover band but knows very little about them since she is new to Cydonia. She does know someone who is familiar with the local Rovers.

MEET MS. CHIN

Rupali reluctantly takes the team to a small tent bar at the northeast end of Goeria. There they meet Tessa Chin. Given the way Rupali and Chin behave towards each other an Average Carouse Task Check will reveal that the two know each other well but their relationship is strained. A Difficult Task Check gives them the impression that the two women once had a relationship. They are correct, Rupali and Chin dated for over a year before splitting. Because of that the two will be cold towards each other and over time begin to bicker. It's possible that some of the Players will begin to find the two women very annoying.

If the group did not have a computer expert along, don't worry, Ms. Chin can fill in. Chin is a computer wizard but does not make use of these skills in her current job. If the Players were unable to crack the chip's encryption then Chin will offer to help. The fact that she does not get to use her impressive computer skills frustrates her a lot and so she often takes side jobs. Many of them are not totally legal. This is what caused Rupali and Chin to split up, and while the two still have strong feeling for each other, Rupali has always been uncomfortable with Chin's border-line legal and often illegal activities. Chin feels Rupali needs to get off her high horse, especially since many of the activities she does are legal elsewhere and are only illegal on Mars because the Green Party fears political dissent.

Chin has numerous contacts within the Rover gangs of Mars due to her side jobs. One of her closest set of associates are the Rosalinda's, the very Rover group Rupali and the Players need to meet up with.

If allowed to look at Jadismarine's report concerning the Rosalindas, Chin will say that she knows of that rover group. She also knows that they usually camp a few kilometers outside of the Exclusion Zone. Chin also discovers, by way of code words in the report, that the woman had contact with the leader of the Rosalindas. Rupali insists that they find the Rosalinda's and make personal contact with them. To assist in this endeavor she radios the Ranger base in Cydonia City and has two Overseer drones tasked to look for the Rosalindas.

Furthermore since Rupali's auto cannot handle the Martian terrain, they will need to take vehicles made or modified to travel on Mars. So long as the Players and Rupali agree to take her along, she is desperately bored with her current job, Chin helps them purchase some old mono-track motorbikes and a used Mars rover.

OVER THE HILLS WE GO...

Rupali pays for the used vehicles, a beat up Mars rover and several new tracked motorcycles. Any Player with an appropriate Drive skill of 1 or more will be allowed to drive. They head out to find the Rover band known as the Rosalindas. The terrain on Mars is dusty and dangerous. Terraforming has made the geology and weather on the planet unpredictable. Referees should feel free to add some problems such as a sinkhole or a dust storm.

All players will be lent a standard Mars suit if they don't already have one. See Zozer Game's **Vacc Suit** PDF for details; it's free and will be very helpful. Anyone riding a track cycle will need to wear the full suit. Persons within the rover, which can hold eight in tight quarters, should have their suit on but can forgo the helmet and gloves.

The group heads out even before the Overseers can get a confirmation as to the location of the Rosalindas. The group must rely on Chin's informed guess and if anything goes wrong Rupali will badger her, thus sparking another round of annoying bickering.

Less than an hour after starting out an Average Task Check will reveal that they are being followed though only a small dust cloud gives their pursuer away. Shortly after that they are buzzed a small spy drone. Players with military or police backgrounds will identify the drone as an RPV and it's likely that it's being controlled by the vehicle that is following them. Chin recommends that they speed up to get away, but Rupali doubts that they can outrun the drone. The Player characters may think to split up and rendezvous once the Overseers report in. The Players may have other plans in mind to avoid the tail. The terrain is very rugged and they are now over 25km from their starting point.

Either way the small spy drone will be followed by three larger recon/patrol drones. Unlike the spy drone these drones are armed and have a little armor. Unfortunately, except for Rupali, none of the Players have lethal weapons. They may have short ranged stun weapons, melee weapons or non-lethal grenades. The larger armed drones, Aerodyne Sky-Wasp Security Drones, will strafe the Players with small caliber automatic weapons but they prove to be very bad shots. Harass the players, but allow them opportunities to think of ways to fool or even destroy the Sky-Wasps. With a Difficult Task Check allow Players with military knowledge to realize that the drones may be missing on purpose. The enemy Mars rover remains out of range and will retreat if the Players get at all close.

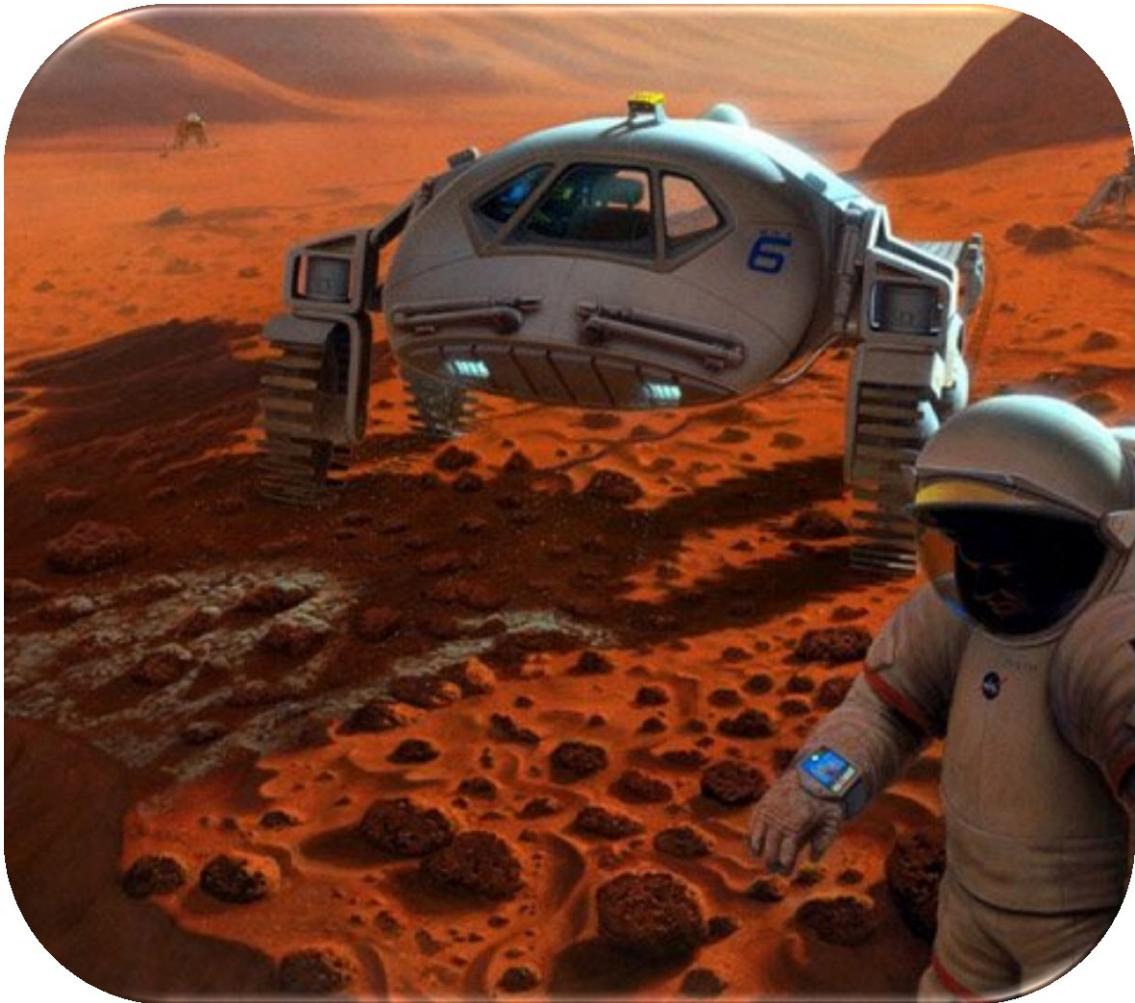
After a half an hour of cat and mouse chasing the Players will receive word from Rupali, and she will download the coordinates for the Rosalinda's current base camp. As the Players head there any surviving Sky-Wasps will follow. As they near the coordinates high power rifle fire will drive the drone off or bring it down.

CIRCLE THE ROVERS

As the Players come over a small ridge they will note that they've entered a large crater. At its center, positioned around a small central peak, are nearly a dozen Mars rovers and an equal number of trailers. Most of the rovers look as used and worn as the rover the Players have access to. As soon as they enter the crater they are flanked by six track-cycles. Each one holds a rider and a passenger, and the passengers all have very large rifles slung over their shoulders.

Very quickly they will notice that both Rupali's and Chin's track-cycles are already parked nearby. A Difficult awareness based Task Check will cause a Player to notice that the tracks made by Chin's track cycle are already filling a bit with the fine Martian sand that blows through the crater. A good estimate would be that they are at least 20 minutes old. Rupali's tracks could not have been made more than a few minutes ago. Obviously this only happens if the party split up.

The Players will be greeted politely but a bit coldly. The Rovers don't care much for strangers. They are only being civil because Chin vouched for them. If the players are reluctant to trust the Rovers; they really have little choice. Their air is running low and a dust storm is coming.



The group is cycled through the airlocks and enters a large modified Mars trailer. The RV sized enclosure can easily seat fifteen people. Besides Rupali, Chin (who seems to have been shot) and the Players; there are four Rosalindas. Momma Rosa is an elderly lady with a warm smile. She knows Chin well but is reluctant to have the Players stay longer than absolutely necessary. An Average medical or awareness Task Check informs the Player that Chin's wound does not look much like a drone-inflicted bullet wound as she claims.

After a bit of talking the leader of the Rosalindas hands over another data chip that tells how there are actually two artifacts, one of which is still on Mars. The second artifact, known as the Green Box, was stolen very recently and taken by persons unknown.

Chin knows that some of the enigmatic wording within the encoded files refer to an area on Venus where those known as Betabackers look for diamonds and other valuables.

With the information gained from the Rovers the team now has the evidence they need to recover the Red Box and look for the second artifact. The Rovers warn them that the people who stole the Green Box took it from the Grinch and now the Grinch is very mad. They are unsure if the Grinch has the Red Box, but it's the best place to start looking for it. The Grinch is some sort of large creature that lives under ground just inside the Exclusion Zone. Every few months it emerges from its lair to steal supplies and terrorize any Rovers it comes upon. The only two ways to get into the Grinch's lair are to find the primary entrance, which is well hidden and may be very well guarded, or to enter through a narrow sinkhole that links to the Grinch's hideout by way of a long set of natural caves.

Momma Rosa, Rupali and the other members of the Rosalindas all recommend taking the route through the sinkhole. If the Players insist on looking for the main entrance they will waste at least a day and still find nothing.

Also, as the group is getting ready to leave Rupali reveals that her Overseer drones spotted an abandoned martian rover not far from the sinkhole. Tire tracks, now a day or so old, reveal that there were originally two rovers in the area but now only one remains. There is also evidence of the remains of the Charlie-in-the-Box, which is common when those systems self destruct; and, most disturbing, two bodies lay on the ground near the Charlie-in-the-Box.

As Rupali reveals this information Momma Rosa looks a bit nervous. A Difficult Carousing check and some good role-playing will get her to reveal that the group recently gave aid to a beautiful blonde woman who drove through in a Mars rover. The blonde made a strong impression on Momma Rosa as she had one green eye and one blue eye and spoke with a strange accent. She had with her a man who had been injured by shotgun fire and suffered minor decompression injuries. She was reluctant to tell the Players this because she had taken a liking to the girl and did not want her to get in trouble with the Rangers. If the Players do a very good job earning Momma Rosa's trust she will also tell them that the blonde was looking for another woman whose picture matched the picture of the mystery woman the Players know as Jadismarine. But the blonde referred to this white haired woman as Zwei Blau.

A quick Marsnet search for the name Zwei Blau will turn up tens of thousands of hits. Zwei Blau, though, was the young blue-eyed, white-haired crack pilot of the Tomorrow Team. She was a close companion to the heroic fictional character, Commander Quantum. Zwei Blau's picture, while a different woman to the images from the long-running TV series found, do look a lot like the mystery woman.

It is relatively easy to find information concerning Commander Quantum and his intrepid Tomorrow Team, but information concerning a real life woman named Zwei Blau is non-existent on the Marsnet.

The Grinch

Said to be a large alien creature or robot, the Grinch has been terrorizing the local Rovers for several years. It emerges from a hidden underground layer every few days, usually during windstorms when the Rovers dare not go outside, and steals anything it can from the exterior of their vehicles or habitats. It has caused no deaths directly but several people have died or gone missing while attempting to track the beast. Over the past decade or so the Grinch has taken on near legendary status. Many Rover children warn that if they stay out too long or do not properly stow their belongings at night then the Grinch will come for them. The Grinch is said to be a sickly greenish grey color with a long neck and two glowing eyes. Its' back writhes like sea urchin and it growls and hisses as it moves about the surface of Mars. Some have suggested mounting a large hunt to destroy the creature but no Rover gang wants to expend the resources or kill off a legend.

DOWN THROUGH THE CHIMNEY

Now that the characters have learned where the Red artifact is they need to go and get it. Besides the Players, two others will be traveling towards the artifact site. They are Rupali and Martin Brant, a member of the Rosalinda's who is curious about the Aliens in general. The group can leave Brant behind if they wish, but if they take him along the Rovers will offer them use of one of their spare rovers as well as numerous supplies. After spending the night with the Rosalindas the team will head off to find the Grinch's layer.

The drive over to the sink hole is uneventful, unless the Referee wishes to add a complication or two. It is highly recommended that one of the rovers experience critical mechanical trouble so that the Mech-Hare can prove its worth by quickly finding and fixing the problem. Make sure at least one of the Players develops an intense attachment to the little robot and takes it everywhere they go. It's small enough to fit in a modified back-pack, and with its little head and solar panel ears sticking out it looks pretty cute!

As the group gets ready to find the Grinch, Brant gives the team two Ball Guns (see chapter 5, Stuff), a TL9 motion sensor, two 100 meter lengths of smart rope, several dozen glow balls, and several high intensity flashlights.

The entrance to the sinkhole is very near to the location given to the group by Momma Rosa and it's location can be seen for nearly a kilometer due to the pillar of steam rising out of the ground. A third set of tracks, unseen a day ago while the Overseers flew overhead, is now visible around the area. The exterior of the stranded rover has been stripped of anything useful and the tracks lead up and then away from the edge of the sinkhole. The bodies are also missing.

Once up close to the hole it proves to be a small dark pit barely wide enough to fit a single person in a vacc suit. Rupali is nervous and reluctant to descend through the sinkhole, but

Martin Brant might offer to step into her place. After twenty meters of a dark cramped descent the sinkhole opens up into a wider cavern. If anyone thinks of it it might help to drop a glow ball or two down into the hole. An Average recon Task Check will reveal that the floor seems to be moving a bit.

Upon reaching the floor after a further fifteen meters of descent the Players will find themselves in a large circular chamber over twelve meters in diameter. They see a small passageway leading out of the chamber. And they are surrounded by Martian creatures known as Crawlies. This is not a scene for the queasy, especially since two corpses are also at the bottom of the sinkhole. The corpses are covered in Crawlies and the creatures are slowly consuming them. It doesn't take a genius to realize that these are the two bodies seen by the Overseers. Someone, or something, has dropped them down the sinkhole like pieces of garbage.

Players with medical or military experience will, after pushing the Crawlies out of the way, be able to determine that the people died less than three days ago due to gun shots at close range. Once chased off their food source the Crawlies will begin to leap onto the Players. They are not attacking or looking for food; they just want to benefit from the heat source that exists on the back of every Mars suit. Of course the Players do not know this and may react however they wish. Unless they have somehow smuggled a real firearm along with them, they have only non-lethal weapons. Electro shock weapons will stun the Crawlies, but their natural shell protects them from a lot of blunt damage and they can survive having up to five of their eight limbs cut off. Any loud noises will startle the Crawlies and cause them to whip about the sharp hooks at the end of their hunting arms.

Crawlies

These multi-limbed masters of camouflage are the largest alien creatures able to survive on the surface of Mars. Originally confined to the deep tunnels and caverns, Crawlies have begun to come to the surface as terraforming makes Mars warmer and wetter. Crawlies look a bit like a cross between an octopus and a turtle. A circular shell-covered body radiates eight flexible legs and the underside of each leg is covered in motion and heat sensing hairs. The legs are strong and have very good dexterity. This allows the creature to crawl over almost any surface; they are particularly fond of resting on anything warm such as a habitat's power unit or even a space suit's heat regulator. Crawlies are omnivores but prefer meat. As the amino acids used by the aliens and Earth life are very similar, Crawlies can eat Earth organics and be eaten by animals from Earth. Crawlies kill by hooking small animals with a poisonous barb located at the end of each limb. The animal dies very quickly and then the creature consumes it. Crawlies have never been known to attack humans, but they have been found in large numbers eating humans who have recently died through other means. Oddly, Crawlies cause a temporary increase in strength, dexterity, and awareness in primates as it affects the pituitary system and increases the production of adrenaline. After the boosts the character will crash and suffer several penalties for over an hour.

Referees are encouraged to make this as chaotic and scary as possible. Crawlies will launch themselves onto the Players' suits and drop from the ceiling. Geothermal heating will create false readings and steam will begin to cover their suits' visors. Motion sensors will be worthless in the tight space of the chamber, and the alarmed Crawlies will begin to chirp and trumpet in a manner sounding very much like the ill begotten offspring of a bullfrog and a barn owl.

Once the Players get free of or clear out the Crawlies they will notice that the floor of the chamber is littered with debris ranging from broken computers to emergency ration packets. If the Players take the time to look around the Referee may allow them to find a few useful items. Think of it as a high-tech treasure trove left behind by some sort of Martian monster.

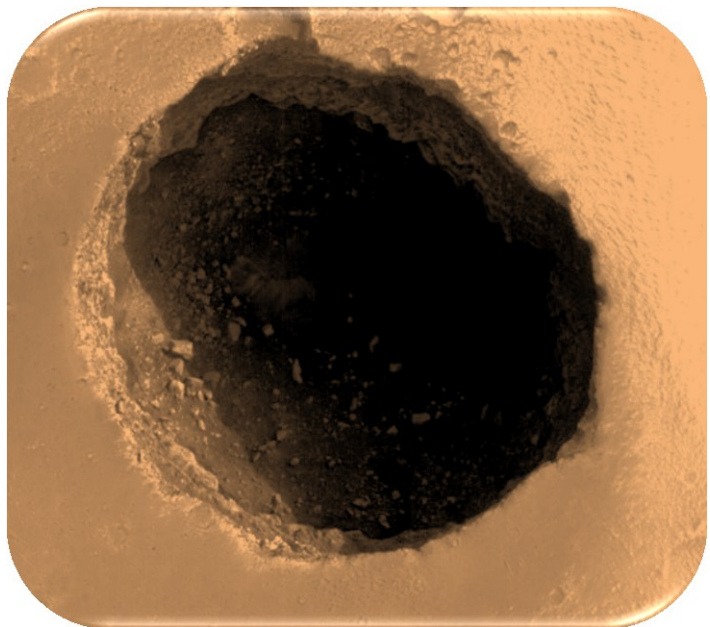
THE CAVES OF MARS

As there is but one exit from the sinkhole chamber the Players have little choice. That being said now is the time for them to make use of the Ball-Gun and some of their Mappers. This will give them a basic idea of the layout of what proves to be a rather expansive system of caves. Further exploration will show that the caves are largely natural, but after a few kilometers of winding labyrinth like passages they open into larger corridors and chambers. An Average geology Task Check determines that these portions are definitely man or even alien made.

Exploring the caverns could easily become a long term adventure itself. They hold quite a bit of life; some alien, in the form of the Crawlies and several smaller critters, and some brought from Earth and modified to suit the martian environment. This Earth life consists primarily of lichen, moss, cacti, insects and small arthropods. If the Players are observant they will perhaps catch a glimpse of a small rodent. This is the fabled martian marmot. Careful observation may also note that the Crawlies are more than capable of killing and eating said marmots. Video of such an event could be worth a lot to the scientific community and even more if sold to one of the many nature oriented channels on Earth or Luna. Skills in Biology and Xenology would be very helpful here.

It is recommended that while traveling through the caves that the Referee play up the tension. A few possibilities are hearing strange sounds like growling, flooded portions of the tunnel fed by melting subsurface water and obnoxiously persistent Crawlies that continuously attempt to hitch a ride on the back of the Players' Mars suits.

Eventually the Players will reach the portion of the caves that open up into wider passages ways. The walls will become smooth and it will be easy to see signs of excavation. Life persists in this region but in a much smaller amount; fewer places to hide make it more difficult to survive. After a further twenty meters or so the Players may notice wiring and pipes upon the ceilings and walls. An Average Engineering Task Check confirms that these are of human design. A Difficult check notices the small seismic sensors tucked into notches in the wall.



Continuing into the man made portion reveals an large underground bunker. Beyond an airlock there are numerous rooms with small metal bunks and lockers. One large room is obviously a mess hall and another looks to be an exercise room. There is also a room with an incredibly solid door and no visible lock. Any attempt at opening that door will fail since the Players have nothing more powerful than stun grenades or wrist mounted cutting torches. They can try for a while if they wish, but nothing will open the door. Let it irritate them.

Everything seems rather incomplete. Someone with a knowledge of history or military affairs can deduce by way of an Average Task Check that the facility was built during the later stages of the Belt War but while occupied for some time, it was never completed.

YOU'RE A MEAN ONE

As the Players are exploring the abandoned bunker they will hear a static filled crackle. It is not coming from their suits, and a Difficult Task Check reveals that the old ceiling mounted speakers are coming to life. After a second or two of white noise a loud voice will speak.

"Leave my caverns or suffer the consequences!" The voice says. Oddly, the voice changes in mid sentence as if it were spliced together using clips from multiple recordings.

Of course the Players should opt to continue onward. After a bit the lights will flicker, and they will begin to hear scary noises, including screaming and doors creaking. All of these sounds come from the afore mentioned speakers, and a Difficult hearing or perception check will reveal that they are most likely recordings not live broadcasts.

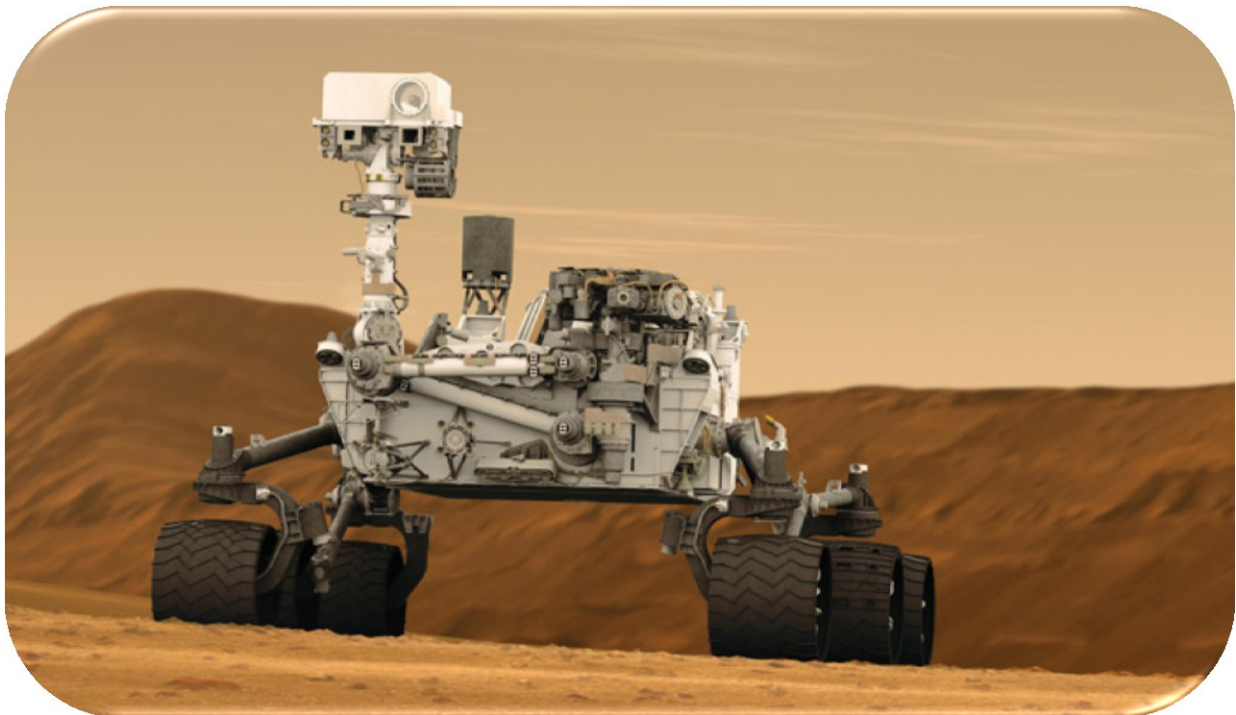
Just as the characters are reaching the end of the military bunker and can easily see a large airlock vehicle ramp a shape rumbles out of the darkness. The Grinch does indeed growl and hiss as it moves, due to its worn out gears. It is an ugly green-grey in color since moss and lichen are now covering most of its once white body. And the waving arms of the numerous crawlies that seek warmth on its back make it move and squirm in an unsettling fashion.

Check to see if the Players are surprised with a Difficult perception check. If they are surprised give them a free action to fire blindly, scream or cower. The Grinch is as large as Rupali's car but with an odd periscope like head. Anyone can with a knowledge of the history of space exploration, robotics or Martian history can make an Average to Difficult task check. If they succeed they will realize the following...

++++ Landed on Mars in 2016 the Mars Meteorology, Aerology and Biology Advanced Mobile Laboratory was a joint American-Canadian-British follow-on to the highly successful Curiosity mission. Better known as Ingenuity, the rover carried a plethora of sophisticated laboratory equipment as well as two smaller wheeled rovers known as Hawking and Sagan. Fitted with a long endurance radioisotope thermoelectric generator Ingenuity did much to pave the way for the 2017 manned landing on Mars. While astronauts did pay visits to Ingenuity in 2019 and 2027, mainly to retrieve sample collections and repair its solar collectors, the rover was all but forgotten once terraforming commenced and public attention turned elsewhere. Even so Ingenuity continued its mission for a further eighteen years before all communication with the rover was lost. The official reason for its loss was put as power loss but no attempt was made to confirm this assertion.++++

Of course the Players are now aware that Ingenuity was not lost. It's a bit kooky and very lonely but in surprisingly good repair. The Players should be able to ascertain from talking to the rover and by good role-playing that the rover was found and taken by elements of the pro-Earth Martian militia during the Belt War. Several grad students specializing in computers and robotics who were volunteering in the militia spent their free time fixing and upgrading Ingenuity. The rover is now able to tap directly into the base's geothermal power supply to recharge its batteries. It can also use its built-in wireless connection to access the base computer and control the few parts of the base that still work; this includes the vehicle airlock, lights, loud speakers and both internal and external sensors.

Unfortunately, all is not well for Ingenuity. Despite having access to power it is dying. Several of its subsystems are breaking down, it has dust and grime throughout its moving parts and it has lost Sagan while Hawking is stuck and unable to deploy. The rover is covered in moss and lichen as well as at least a half dozen crawlies. The poor thing while quirky, its voice consists only of pieced together clips of Carl Sagan, Stephen Hawking and Neil deGrasse-Tyson, is really very pathetic. If the Players don't think of it have Martin Brant suggest that they allow the Mech-Hare to work on the rover in exchange for information regarding the dead bodies and the Red Box.



The Mech-Hare will get to work right away and very quickly have several of Ingenuity's joints working much smoother. Ingenuity will admit that it knew about the Charlie-in-the-Box but as it lacked a long range radio it did not report it. Besides its dedicated orbital relay satellite is no longer in place. It also confesses that it dumped the two bodies in the pit and can even replay a recording of the attack made by the Charlie-in-the-Box. If the Players are paying close attention they will catch a glimpse of a woman wearing an ill fitting mars suit that matches the description of the woman Momma Rosa told them about. She and an injured man leave in the missing mars rover. It might be wise for the Players to get copies of this footage as it will move on Rupali's investigation and proves that the people in the missing rover were victims not the attackers.

Finally, if the Players broach the subject matter, Ingenuity will at first deny that it knows anything about the Red Box. Any Players with computer skills can make an Average check to notice that somehow the rover is lying. The Players can then try to trick the rover into revealing what it knows. Treat this as a Difficult task. Eventually, Ingenuity will let slip that it has the Red Box.

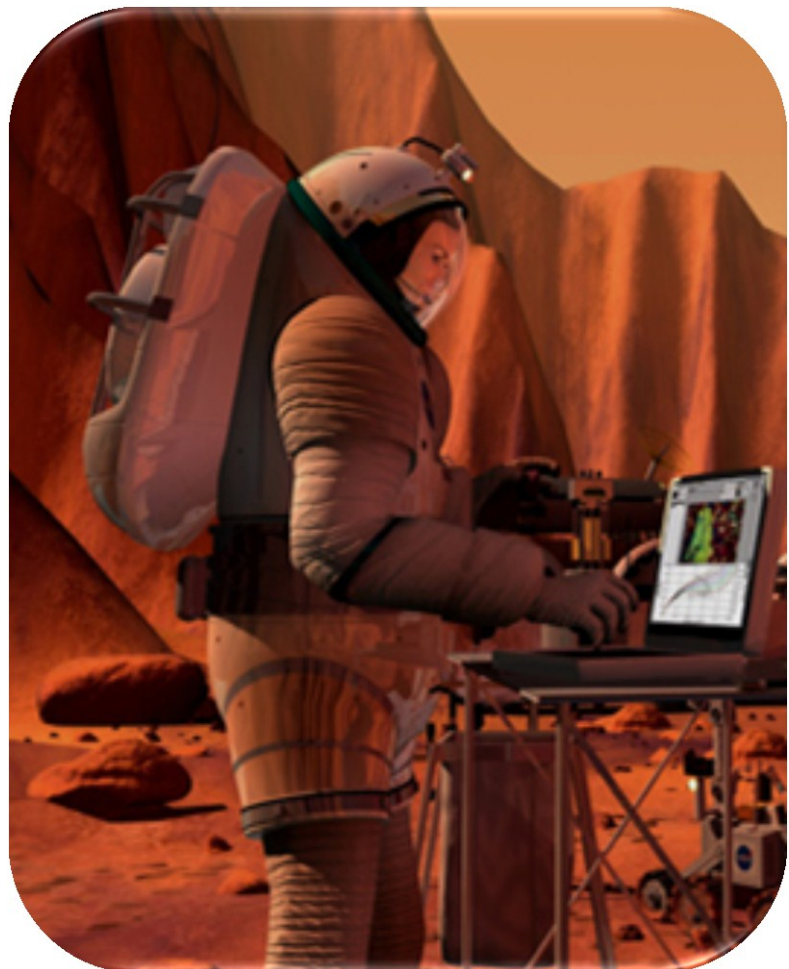
MECH-HARE, RED COFFIN

Ingenuity views the Red Box as its most precious possession. It will refuse nearly every offer. Every offer that is but one. If someone brings up the idea of trading the Mech-Hare for the Red Box Ingenuity will go very quiet. After a few moments it will finally say in Stephen Hawking's computerized voice ...*"We should seek the greatest value of our action."* After that it will extend its long sample arm as if to shake on the deal.

Of course not everyone will be happy with. Those who have grown to like the Mech-Hare will be reluctant to see it go, but the harsh reality is that without the Mech-Hare's help Ingenuity will soon die, and the Players will not get the Red Box. This should convince the hold outs. Of course the other Players may need to find a way to compensate them and smooth the transaction over for them.

Once the transaction is made Ingenuity will take the Players over to the un-openable door. Using an unnoticed pin hole in a hard to reach location the robot rover will unlock the door. Lights will come on automatically, and the Players will be able to see the interior of the what was once the base's armory.

The left wall is set up to hold about fifty assault rifles and their ammo. Only six remain. The right wall has twelve lockers. In side of them are a few random articles of clothing and a few personal items including combs, tooth paste and other toiletries. The far wall is lined with shelves. These shelves now have numerous biological and geological samples collected by Ingenuity. There is also a pile of older style computer wafers dating back to when the militia still occupied the base. On these wafers is



nearly twenty years worth of data collected by Ingenuity. The robot rover implores the Players to take these wafers, along with a full data dump of its internal computer, with them to hand over to NASA. Poor Ingenuity is unaware that NASA no longer exists.

Also on the disks are numerous research papers and diaries written by the grad students who were living in the base. Several of these papers would be of great interest to scientists and corporations alike. Two of them are especially important; Multi-Level Neural Net Buffering to Counter Smart Computer Fragmentation, has the possibility of revolutionizing the field of artificial intelligence, and Towards A Unified Ecosystem: Finding A Stable Mix of Native, Alien and Terran Life for Mars, which details why terraformers should use all types of life to create a habitable Mars. As the authors of these papers are now dead the Players could claim them and make a lot of money. Less morally grey would be for the players to reveal the truth so that the surviving family members of these militia members could have closure.

At the very bottom of the shelf is a large coffin-sized Red Box. Despite the lack of handles two Players should be able to carry the box with a little difficulty. Getting the Red Box back through the caves and up the sinkhole would be near impossible so Ingenuity agrees to open the vehicle airlock to let them out.

Finally, if Ingenuity is asked how it got the Red Box it will say...*"The gifts have always been with Mars."* If it is asked about the rumored second gift, it will say...*"Mars chose to give the Green Box to his lover [Venus] long ago."* If asked how it knew that the robot will go into a detailed account about finding evidence of this occurrence long ago while traveling about the martian wilderness. Given the scientific nature of Ingenuity's programming this rambling, and rather unrevealing, story will seem strangely out of place. It further pressed Ingenuity will become sullen and reply with an angry...*"I just know! That's how I know!"*...in a strange voice. A Very Difficult task check might clue the Players into the fact that this fourth voice is none other than Tessa Chin.

GET YOUR ASS TO VENUS

The long hike back to the sinkhole opening will take over an hour. An observant Player might catch a glimpse of a Crawlie basking on some martian rocks. This is difficult to do since the crawlies can change color to blend into their surroundings. (See the cover for how this encounter might look.)

Upon meeting back up with Rupali, who is anxiously waiting at the sinkhole, she will give several of them hugs and tell them that Tessa Chin is in better shape. If the Players are suspicious of Ms. Chin they may want to reveal this to Rupali at this point. Rupali will react very angrily but since they need to return to the Rosalinda's for assistance she won't do anything about it in the short term; besides Chin has not really done anything wrong as there is no evidence that she was in any way involved in the attack on the dome.

At this point the Players should realize that they are part of something bigger than finding out who Zwei Blau / Jadismarine / Jane Frost is. They should also know that their next step is to get to Venus to find the second Gift. Rupali refuses to leave Mars as she can not do so as a Martian Ranger, but she does offer to hold the Red Box for them. This is a sincere offer, but the Players should say, no thank you. Tessa Chin, mostly healed from her injury, will go along if the Players need computer assistance but would rather stay on Mars as well. Martin

Brant, who hasn't really done anything yet, would love to go along and could act as a good love interest for any one of the Players if the Referee saw fit to add that to the adventure.

If Tessa Chin is confronted about her voice being used by the Grinch she will initially insist that the Players misheard the robot. If further pressed will offer up the explanation that perhaps the Grinch / Ingenuity recorded her radio transmissions during the track-cycle chase. If they continue to press her she will refuse to assist them any further.

Once it is decided who is going to Venus, Momma Rosa, Chin and Rupali will get together to find transportation for the Players. The Players are forced to hand over their track-cycles and Mars rover as payment for the trip into orbit. After two days of waiting they reluctantly announce that the Players will be traveling to Venus aboard the S.U.S.V. Prometheus.

The Players will then get to meet Commander Quantum.

AND EVERYONE YOU MEET...

Mariana Rupali - Rupali, she is almost never called by her first name, is a decorated Martian Ranger. She spent five years in Reunion where she gained a reputation as a friend to the Rover and mining communities. This was not because she had any close connection to these groups; instead it was because she wasn't willing to use them as scapegoats for the ills caused by the ruling political elite. This garnered her friends in all the wrong places and a year ago she was forced to transfer out of the capital. She resents this but is getting along well in the Cydonia Polis Regio. The laid back attitude of the local Ranger office bothers her at times as does the condescending attitude of the ETM agents she is often forced to work alongside. Rupali lacks a good sense of humor but is slow to anger. She is of Indian descent but is a true Martian native. Due to a manpower shortage, and the reluctance to bring in ETM, she is the only agent involved in investigating the mystery woman known temporarily as Jane Frost. She can call on other Ranger assets if her work coincides with the larger investigation into the terrorist attack on Redhorn dome.

Use the Detective NPC given on page 84 of the *Traveller: Core Rulebook*.

Tessa Chin - Chin is a contractor for Cyrethean Benthic, a subsidiary of Benthic Deep. Benthic Deep is a large Earth based corporation that builds deep ocean facilities and habitats and Cyrethean Benthic is their foray into building habitats for use on the surface of Venus. She knows a lot of people on Venus but is now working a job on Mars to examine whether deep ocean remotes could be used to explore one of the major Martian aquifers that is rumored to have significant macroscopic life. Chin is also a very experienced computer operator. She uses these skills to pursue secondary employment; not all of which is technically legal. Chin dated Mariana Rupali for over a year, but the two had a falling out due to Chin's criminal connections. The two still have feelings for each other but often fight. Chin is a petite woman of Hispanic and Asian descent. She is quite pretty but is very subconscious about an occasional stutter and the large scar across her left shoulder. Unknown to the PCs she is also a member of the Infinite Circle.

Use the Experienced Tech NPC given on page 84 of the *Traveller: Core Rulebook*, but increase her Computers skill to 4.

Momma Rosa - The Rosalindas are a Rover gang that is over fifty years old. They are well known in the Rover community and with the long haul road train drivers, but less known in the cities of Mars. That is because they have largely kept out of trouble. The Rosalindas make their money doing seasonal work, providing transportation to out of the way places or providing security for research teams. They have made numerous enemies within the Red Legion faction because they have foiled numerous terrorist attacks against terraformers.

Momma Rosa is one of their current matriarchs. She is an tall woman with dark brown skin that makes her bright white smile stand out like a beacon. She is quick to smile and provide encouragement, but if one of her fellow Rovers is hurt she is known to become uncompromisingly vindictive. Like most members of the Rosalindas she has no love for the Reds, but she harbors a special hate for them since they killed her son four years ago. Thus she will give aide and assistance to anyone working against that group.

Use the Diplomat NPC given on page 85 of the *Traveller: Core Rulebook*.

Martin Brant - If one thing can be said of Martin Brant it's that he's enthusiastic. Brant was born to a rich family and raised by an overbearing nanny. When he was nineteen he left college and travelled around the world. Two years later he got bored with Earth and moved to Mars. His intent was to join the Red Legion in order to fight for a "Free and Pristine Mars" but grew disillusioned after witnessing one of their terror attacks kill seven young children. He turned in the rest of his Red Legion colLegions and then fled for his life. His dislike of the Reds made him a natural fit with the Rosalindas. Brant is a very handsome young man of Mohawk descent and has a deep dislike of the Reds. Unfortunately, his enthusiasm is not complemented by a solid set of skills, but he is extremely loyal and has the secret backing of a very large trust fund.

Use the Young Noble NPC given on page 85 of the *Traveller: Core Rulebook*, but remove the servitor robot and replace it with Cr5,000 immediately available and ten times that available within 72 hours.

3 INTERLUDE

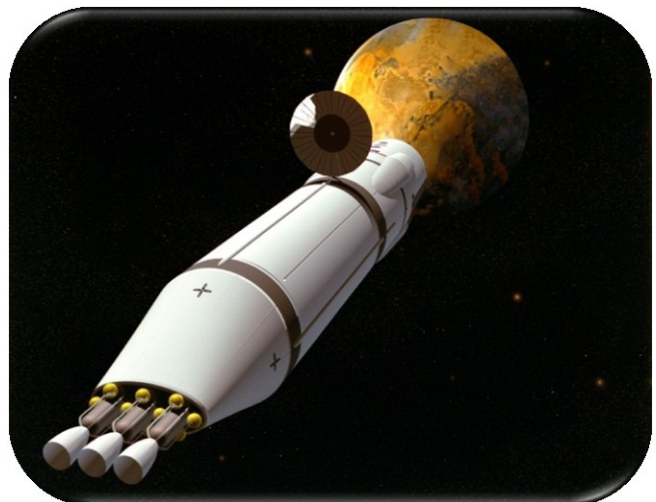
The trip to the Mars spaceport at Reunion is uneventful, despite the large Red Box they have to tote along. So too is the spaceplane they take into orbit. However, on the small Orbital Transfer Vehicle they are forced to take from the Mars space station to the S.U.S.V. Prometheus, they do have problems. These problems stem from their large package that barely fits in the cargo hold. They are instead forced to pay a bit extra, thus using some of the allowance given to them by Rupali.

Commander Quantum is a large man who looks very much like the television hero he has become. Quantum is outspoken, bombastic, and extremely charismatic. He will take the time to meet and speak with every Player who boards his space vehicle. A noticeable aspect of the Commander is that he speaks with an unidentifiable European accent. A Player with language skills will be able to tell with a Difficult Task Check that the accent is a fake 'Mediterranean' accent with a touch of Italian, Greek and French. This may make the Commander seem a bit goofy, but to women he is charming and a bit flirtatious and when dealing with men he quickly acts like a fellow team-mate who shares common interests. Some might find it disturbing, but he truly seems to believe that he is in fact Commander Quantum. Only three things will make Quantum outwardly angry; endangering his crew, showing sympathy towards causes that would hurt mankind, and expressing doubt that he is truly the Commander Quantum. One mildly irritating personality quirk is that Commander Quantum is prone to tirades that proclaim the innate greatness of humankind and dramatic pauses before making important decisions.

THE S.U.S.V. PROMETHEUS

Commander Quantum's space vehicle is one of a kind. Anyone with more than passing knowledge of space vehicle technology will realize on an Average Task Check that the Commander either has close connections in the one of the major space military organizations or within a major government, most likely both. The Solar Union Space Vehicle Prometheus began life as a used deep space vehicle and has been extensively modified. The exterior makes use of the white and blue color scheme common to the Solar Union space vehicles of the Commander Quantum shows and movies.

The interior has been redone to resemble that of the movie version of the Prometheus. It is clean and high tech with handsome wood trim and tasteful blue highlights.



The general layout of the vehicle consists of twelve circular floors stacked along the long axis. Each floor is three meters high with a meter more of storage and crawl space between the floors. This makes the overall length of the inhabited portion of the craft about 48 meters. The craft is 18 meters wide with the inner 2.5 meters taken up by the central elevator shaft.

Since the floors are perpendicular to the direction of thrust passengers and crew gain the illusion of gravity whenever the vehicle is accelerating. The primary personnel elevator runs through the center of the vehicle while two secondary access tubes run its length along the outer hull. These secondary tubes consist of ladders and pull ropes. The Prometheus has no spin gravity so the crew wears smart stick shoes and resistive clothing that provides low level exercise as the crew members move about the craft. The Players are given their own sets of this special clothing soon after they board the vehicle.

The forward-most deck consists primarily of avionics, communications and sensors. Access is by way of a small hatch leading to a three by three metre maintenance room. There is also a small lounge known as First Forward that can seat eight people around two small tables. A large window constructed of transparent metal dominates one wall and the ceiling, and there is a small drinks and snack dispenser recessed into another wall. For some reason this is the only place on the entire craft to get good coffee.

Deck Two, they count going from the nose to the rear of the vehicle, consists of two halves. One half is the primary flight deck and has stations for six crew members; commander, primary weapons controller, pilot, secondary pilot, sensors operator, and mission specialist. The names assigned to these positions do not necessarily match what these positions would be called on board other space vehicles since they are meant only to match the old movies. The mission specialist is a unique crew position that acts as a science advisor and jack of all trades. There is large view screen at the "front" of the flight deck as well as touch screen displays at every work station. Players with any knowledge concerning space travel will notice the differences within the Prometheus and anyone making an Easy Carouse check will soon realize that the man acting as the craft's pilot is very new to the job.

The other half of Deck Two consists of a flare shelter capable of holding twenty-four people for five days and a briefing room. The briefing room can comfortably seat sixteen people and is dominated by the large holo-display tank that sits off to one side.

Deck Three is divided into three parts. One half is the crew lounge and mess, while a quarter of it consists of a small kitchen and food prep area. The other quarter consists of the infirmary and is home to the craft's doctor. The infirmary has room for four reclining patients along with two top of the line auto-medical emergency stabilization booths. The crew refers to these booths as rent-a-coffins.

Deck Four is devoted almost exclusively to the Commander. Half of it is his personal bedroom and lounge. A quarter of it is a well appointed office from which the Commander conducts daily business, and the remaining quarter is the arms locker.

Decks Five through Nine consist almost exclusively of crew and passenger quarters. Each floor is divided into eight small rooms; six of which are crew rooms. Each crew member gets his or her own room, a rarity on board a space craft. The other two rooms consist of a maintenance room, which double as flare rooms, and a storage locker. Personal facilities consist of a fold away toilet and sink which are in every room. Deck Five is slightly different in that the two non-crew rooms are actually airlocks that lead to the vehicle's two space plane

landers. Deck Nine also replaces the two non-crew rooms with airlocks, but these lead only to the exterior of the craft and the outer service tubes.

Deck Ten is the only “open space” floor on the vehicle. It consists of a large torus shaped room that is used for training, exercise, and crew gatherings. Folding tables and chairs can pop up from the floor and there is even a large movie screen on the wall. A large portion of the wall consists of smart glass and can become transparent at the push of a button. Furthermore the ceiling can also project displays ranging from stars to a blue cloudless sky. With drop down walls in place, an entire portion of the room can act as an interactive VR room and another portion can actually fill part way with water to form a swimming area. (When coasting the water forms into a large ball that floats about the room. People can then push off from the wall to dive into or through the ball of water.) This is only done if there is an ample reserve of reaction mass, which for the Prometheus consists of...water. The crew refers to this floor as the Romper Room.

Deck Eleven consists of a green house that takes up half of the space and an equal sized portion that is off limits to the Players. The off limit portion is the craft’s primary weapons’ bay. Despite regulations limiting the armaments available to non-military craft, the Prometheus carries six large Combat Drones and twenty hypervelocity ASATs under a triple missile launcher. There is also a pop-up double laser turret and a chaff/flare dispenser. Within this area are the work stations for a further three crew members.

Deck Twelve houses the engineering facilities as well as a machining shop and several 3D printers. Raw materials are carried on the outside of the craft and can be moved into the craft using a dedicated airlock and one of two robotic arms. Work stations exist for six crew members.

IN SPACE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The voyage to Venus from Mars will take about fifty days. Quantum is burning a lot of reaction mass to get to Venus as quickly as possible. During this time the Players will be stuck on board a rather small vehicle in the middle of deep space. Most professional spacers have a second job that they do during the long down times while drifting between active thrusting. The Players can try to earn money by writing or programing. This can then be sent off to Earth or Luna, and they might even get paid before they reach Venus.

There are also a few mini adventures the Players can have while stuck on board the Prometheus.

The Video Room: On a vehicle the size of the Prometheus it is often difficult to sneak around without being seeing, but it is not impossible. If the Players wait for the crew to hold one of their regular hand ball tournaments in the Romper Room a few of the Players may be able to sneak away without being seen. Or one or more of the Players could create a distraction, but if it causes too much trouble it will not be appreciated by the Commander or his crew.

If the Players are able to sneak into Commander Quantum’s quarters they will find a well appointed but sparse bedroom. Next to the bedroom is a comfortable lounge. Normally nothing separates the two areas but an emergency door can be lowered into place if there is a hull breach. The lounge has a large comfortable chair and ottoman. Like all the furniture

on the Prometheus they are bolted to the floor. The chair faces a wall which is dominated by a large 3D video screen. To either side of the screen is a set of shelves. The left-hand shelves are a deep green color but are completely empty. There is an oval plaque above the shelving which has a circle broken by an equatorial line and a meridian line. A Player with knowledge of the old Commander Quantum show will recognize this as the symbol for the Solar Union. The right hand shelving is red in color and empty as well. An Easy Intelligence based Task Check will allow the Player to notice that the red color of the shelves matches the color of the Red Box. This may bring up even more questions, but ransacking the Commanders's quarters is not a good idea.

There is a good chance that the Players will be invited into the Commander's office for a personal conference. As the office is adjacent to the lounge the Players could catch a glimpse into the lounge and see the shelves that way. Whether they sneak in or just look while in Quantum's office, the personal conference would be a good time to ask Quantum about the shelves. Quantum will be evasive and it will take a Very Difficult Carouse task check to tell that he is lying. Either way he will not tell them the truth regarding the Two Gifts. As the Referee feel free to have Quantum make up some excuse regarding the color of the shelves and the Red Box.

A Tale of Two Daughters: If the Players still have the necklace taken off the mystery woman then at some point someone may notice that they have it. If a Player is openly wearing the necklace or worse yet trying to sell it; there will be a confrontation. Every crew member recognizes the necklace as having belonged to their old pilot, Zwei Blau. There is a very good chance that a fight will occur if the Players don't immediately hand the necklace over. If need be let a fight break out. Eventually, the Players will be subdued, but tension will remain for much of the trip. If the Players hand the necklace over without a fight the crew members will quickly accept them as part of the crew.

Once the necklace is handed over or taken it will be given to Commander Quantum. If the Players are there when this occurs, a likely event, then they are likely to notice a few tears run down the Commander's face. If the hand-over happened peacefully, then Commander Quantum will tell them personally why it is important. If a fight broke out the Players will have to talk to the crew members to get the story. In that case the story may be a bit inaccurate. The Referee should decide what the Players learn in that case.

After getting the necklace Quantum will personally thank the Players. With his eyes still full of tears he tells them that the necklace belonged to his adopted daughter, Zwei Blau. He will not go into Zwei's background, saying only that...*"No child sure endure such horrid times. She was a strong and loving girl despite what they did to her."* He will say that Zwei was on Mars visiting a friend who was moving into the Redhorn Dome when she received information concerning the existence of a powerful Maker artifact. Somehow the artifact was still in working condition and possibly had the power to destroy an entire planet. Rumors ranged from a immensely powerful anti-matter bomb to a device capable of creating artificial black holes. Realizing that as a member of the Tomorrow Team it was her duty to track down the device and make sure it was secure, she began to gather information concerning the artifacts. Unfortunately, she was killed in a Red Legion attack, and Quantum now believes that the Red Legion is after the artifacts as well.

If asked further questions, the Commander will admit that he also has a biological daughter named Madison. Madison left the Prometheus years ago and Quantum fears for her safety. When shown a picture of Madison by the Commander an Average memory check allows them to realize that the beautiful blonde mentioned by Momma Rosa sounds a lot like Quantum's

daughter and matches the picture taken from Ingenuity's recording. If they reveal this to Quantum he will be both relieved and worried. He is happy to hear that Madison may have been in the area near her adopted sister. He even goes so far as to convince himself that Madison was either looking for her sister or perhaps even working with her to find the artifacts. There is no evidence to support these conjectures, but Quantum wants very much to believe that his two daughters departed as friends and not the rivals they had been.

Meet Thy Makers: As the Players spend time on the Prometheus they will notice that besides the ever present symbol of the Solar Union, many crew members have jewelry or tattoos depicting mobius strips. Early on if they ask about this they will be ignored, but eventually someone will mention that the mobius strip is an infinite circle. After the Players pester a lot of crew members, Commander Quantum will intervene and reveal that the Infinite Circle is a group dedicated to investigating the Makers and determining where they came from and why they came to Mars. He depicts the organization as a concerned group of scientists and researchers who wish to educate the public about the aliens. Their reasoning is that educating the public will prevent the rise of conspiracy theories and increase the open flow of knowledge regarding the aliens. He says he fears that some nations or corporations are hiding information from the public and hoarding artifacts. The Infinite Circle believes that all alien technology and artifacts should be shared with all human kind. Of course the Players may, at the Referee's discretion, learn the truth about the Infinite Circle. If they do they may find themselves invited to join the secretive organization.

A Friendly Game or Two: Games and sports are common on board the Prometheus. Anyone with a skill level in gambling may wish to join the games played in First Forward. It is possible that the players might even win a bit of money, but any attempt at cheating will not be taken well. Zero-g hand ball and football (i.e. soccer) are popular in the Romper Room. Every month the crew holds a talent show which the Players are encouraged to a part of. On line VR gaming is popular as well and several members of the crew have created their own VR world known as "Stealing Fire" which is set in classical Greece and pits mortals and demigods against monsters and angry gods.

THE CREW OF THE CRAFT

Commander Quantum is an enigma. He is a good leader both in the personal sense and in the military sense, but he may be a bit crazy. He either truly believes that he is Commander Quantum, or he is a very good actor. Use the Naval Officer NPC given on page 85 of *the Traveller: Core Rulebook* but add Advocate 2, Diplomat 3, and Persuade 3.

The rest of the crew can be formed by using the following NPCs. These are all found on either page 84 or 85 of the *Traveller: Core Rulebook*.

- 1 x Scientist (the above mentioned Mission Specialist)
- 1 x Belter (the new Pilot)
- 1 x Old Spacehand (the Co-pilot)

Other positions can be filled using the Technician, Experienced Technician, and Crewman NPCs. There are also four security specialists on board who can be represented by the Experienced Guard NPC. To add flavor to the NPCs role on the Random Traits table found on page 76 to customize them.

Humans have only been a space faring society for about 90 years. So while there are several million people living off of Earth they have had little time to develop distinct cultures and societies. Some may argue that the warren dwelling Lunars or those living high in the clouds of Venus are no longer real Earthlings, but they don't really differ too much yet.

Most of the planets, even the Luna Republic which boasts of its non-Earth culture, mimic the home planet in regards to holidays and traditions. Once exclusively national holidays, such as Boxing Day or Thanksgiving, have become internationalized within the Earth Union. These holidays have carried over to the other planets to such an extent that it is said that on Mars, "Every day is someone's holiday." Each planet, besides Earth, which now has Union Day as a global holiday, has First Landing Day as a world holiday; though it is usually nothing more than an excuse to take the day off from work. The one holiday that has become truly system wide in its' celebration is Solstice Mass. This holiday borrows heavily from Christmas, Boxing Day, Saturnalia and various New Year's Festivities. For most holidays throughout the solar system, especially religious ones, the standard Earth dating system is used to determine when they are to be celebrated.

On Mars Solstice Mass occurs twice a year as the Martian year is nearly two standard years long. First Mass is celebrated in a manner similar to traditional Christmas. Gifts are exchanged and families get together to celebrate the holiday. For children Red Claus travels around the planet handing out presents to those who have been good. His sleigh is pulled by four large yaks, and he lives deep in a cave under the north pole. On Mars Santa's toys are built by little green martians. First Mass is generally a three day affair and accompanied by numerous festivities. Later in the martian year is Second Mass. Second Mass is a far more sombre affair and is closely tied to the Church of the Heavenly Stigmata. Church members are expected to repaint the helmet of their Mars suit black and offer their assistance to those in need. A handful of young women are selected to be Red Hoods and as such paint their helmets red and travel about the planet telling stories and spreading encouragement in order to counter the Devil's temptations.

Venus initially followed Earth's lead concerning holidays despite pressure from Luna. Several holidays on Venus carried over from Australia due to the large number of Australian immigrants such as Boxing Day and Anzac Day. Recently Venus has begun to develop its own holiday traditions. One of the most popular of its indigenous holidays comes around the same time as Solstice Mass, but is referred to as Gifting. Gifting started when Mother Pandora began her rounds in late 2082. This was a decade after a vicious undeclared war known as the Crater Conflict drove hundreds of independent miners out of the 2041 impact crater and into the region known as the Betaback. Initially consisting of one very generous woman who drove about in a beat up Venus rover giving odd gifts to other miners, it has grown to become an important tradition in the Betaback. During the twelve days of Christmas all Betabackers turn on their long range communicators, broadcast Christmas Carols and allow themselves to be found so that the selected Elves of Pandora can deliver presents to them. In exchange they give presents to the Elves who then deliver those presents to yet more people. The original Mother Pandora continues to participate, but during the off season she disappears. This idea of chain gift giving has caught on in the aerostats of Venus as well, and even some rover groups on Mars have begun to celebrate Gifting.

4

VENUS

Venus C8B0525

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The second planet out from the sun, Venus is a hellish world, but despite high temperatures and pressures the planet is home to nearly 125,000 people. The settlement of Venus is due almost exclusively to two separate factors. Firstly, life was discovered within the planet's atmosphere and researchers were followed by corporations as ways were found to use these lifeforms in numerous industrial processes. Today much of Venus' population resides in large floating aerostat cities which oversee the nearby atmospheric industrial processors. The second factor leading to the settlement of Venus was the 2041 asteroid impact that exposed huge veins of precious metals and massive diamonds. Fully one fifth of the planet's population lives within the large underground warrens that make up the mining towns.

Venus is dominated by Luna, but there is one Earth held aerostat. Many of the settlers from Luna are actually immigrants from Australia who have left their homeland due to ruinous economic sanctions. There are also a large number of people from southeast Asia and North America, especially within the Earth held Eagle City. Despite the presence of native life there have been no alien artifacts discovered on Venus. Of note, Venus now has a moon as the large Near Earth Asteroid, 433 Eros, was moved into its orbit several years ago. Eros is now a major space manufacturing center for the Luna Republic.

The Prometheus reaches Venus slightly ahead of schedule after only forty-five days. The craft docks directly at Cyprus Station and the Players disembark a few hours later. The Players are to catch a space plane flight to Morning Star Aerostat, but first they must wait in the holding and transfer area of Cyprus Station which is a cramped but bustling place. Video screens dot the wall and spout out a continuous loop of information regarding Venus and emergency safety procedures. Unfortunately, the place is too noisy for any of this to be heard and the wireless headphone connection requires a prepaid fee that they were unaware of. The Players, along with Martin Brant and Tessa Chin (if they didn't piss her off previously), will sit for several hours in this holding area. After nearly three hours of boredom, broken only by the nearly deafening announcements regarding Venus spaceplane flights to various Venus locales or up to Eros, they will finally hear the announcement concerning their flight to Morning Star Aerostat.

They are going to Morning Star Aerostat based upon information given to them by Tessa Chin. She claims that some of the encrypted data on Zwei Blau / Jane Frost's data chip pointed to Morning Star as the place where the thieves initially took the Green Box. As this is the group's only lead they proceed to Morning Star. Unfortunately, Morning Star Aerostat has had a few problems recently.

SWAGGIE CLIMBS ABOARD

If the Players ticked off Tessa Chin enough so that she refuses to accompany them to Venus use this section.

As the Players are departing the waiting room to head for the space plane boarding area they are flagged down by a young man they recognize from the Prometheus. The man is Paul Irwin. He serves as an engineer on the Prometheus but decided at the last minute to take some time off to visit his brother who recently moved to Venus. Some of the Players may recognize him from the poker games in First Forward or as a frantic handball player from the Romper Room tournaments.

Paul is a nice guy but really twitchy. He can get overly excited and it shows as he tries to convince the Players to take him along on their adventure. He's pretty good with computers and in a fight. His outgoing personality will quickly clash with Martin Brant's similar demeanor and the two will not get along well at all. Use the Technician NPC given on page 84 of the *Traveller: Core Rulebook*, but add Computers 3 and Melee (blade) 3.

INSIDE THE BOUNCY HOUSE

The Players' spaceplane is barely half full and the entire crew seems a bit on edge. Just after boarding the large spaceplane they will be informed that a successful docking at Morning Star Aerostat, AKA the Bouncy House, depends entirely upon local weather conditions. Despite the ability of the Venus spaceplanes, known as Darts, to transform into an airship, docking at the Bouncy House during high winds is too dangerous. Luckily, the weather is calm. The crew is visibly irritated by this as they begin docking procedures. Anyone near a window will notice a large robotic arm slide out of the upper portion of the hanger to catch the Dart as it comes to a halt relative to the aerostat. As soon as the hanger door closes and the green safety light comes on, the crew opens the spaceplane exits and begins disembarking passengers.

The Players may notice that there is almost no interaction between the crew of the Dart and the people working the aerostat hanger. Luggage is unloaded very quickly if a bit roughly, and the Players are rushed out of the vehicle as soon as they have any personal items in hand. Once inside the hanger proper a small quiet woman wearing blue coveralls with the words Luxor Resorts above her breast pocket will hurry them into a separate room. The instant the door leading back into the hanger closes the main hanger door begins to open. The Players will need to show some photo ID but it is barely looked at. Anyone with police experience will notice that security is very lax and most of the security cameras don't appear to be active.

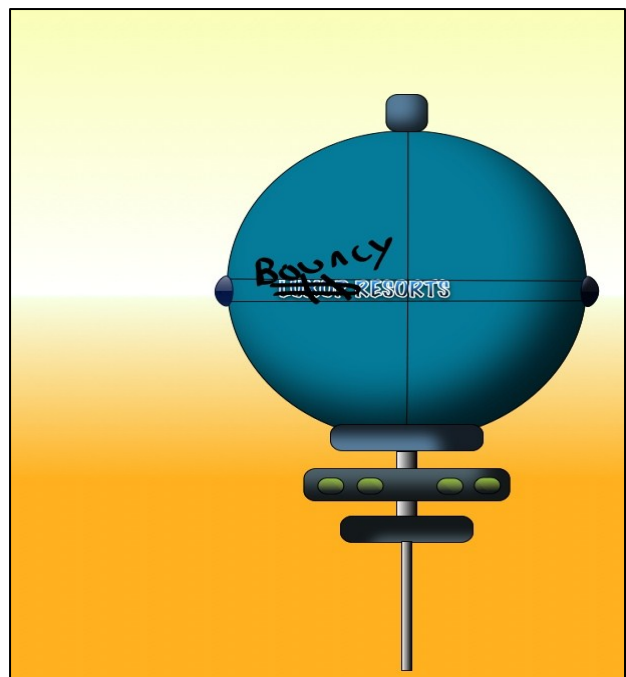
The Players will need to store the Red Box somewhere safe while they look for the Green Box. Luckily, there are storage lockers located at the lowest floor of the Bouncy House just beneath the old Hotel. They cost 50 credits per day for one large enough to hold the artifact, but Quantum has vouched for their safety. If the Players are reluctant to leave the box they can lug it around but it's heavy and draws a lot of attention. Martin Brant offers to stay with the locker, and if he's present Paul Irwin offers to pay for the locker. The lockers look pretty secure and only open using a combined thumb print, voice code, key card locking system. Leaving the Red Box there is the best idea but the Players can do as they please.

The instructions from Quantum were to proceed to the main promenade that cuts through the center of the entire aerostat. Once there they are to find the little ice cream shop called Scoops of Fun. They will need to take a large elevator up to the center of the main sphere and then walk several hundred meters to the ice cream shop. The elevator looks as though it was once nice but is now worn and smelly. It stops a few times before reaching the place where the Players are to exit. None of the handful of people on the elevator speak to the Players. Upon reaching the central atrium the Players find themselves on a large wrought iron bridge with a floor made of grating that gives them a view of the pond many meters below. They are in a large spherical garden, and despite its wild overgrown appearance the plants are thriving and it is filled with beautiful flowers, butterflies and small birds.

Unless the Players take their time to look around and explore a bit, the walk to the ice cream shop will only take a few minutes. They will see a lot of people walking around on the promenade, but no one pays them any attention. Attempts to speak to people will get results ranging from a curt "*Get lost!*" to the blank stare of a tripping drug user. It is possible someone, probably one of the young Erie Chemtech employees, might point them to Scoops of Fun, but no one will offer any further help or information. An Average awareness check will bring to their attention the fact that nearly everyone is armed. It's too bad they were not allowed to take any weapons with them on the spaceplane. They might be feeling a bit vulnerable at this point.

The Bouncy House

Built initially to be a family friendly amusement park floating within the picturesque clouds of Venus; the Luxor Morning Star Amusement Aerostat proved a very costly failure. Very few families could afford or wanted to travel to Venus for vacation, and except for the view the Morning Star offered very little that could not be found much closer to home at far lower prices. Those living on Venus, mostly miners and corporate executives, were totally uninterested in family entertainment. So while the Morning Star was completed out of sheer stubbornness; it immediately bled money. The entertainment giant Luxor spent several years trying to make a profit, but in 2090 they finally gave up and sold the aerostat to Erie Chemtech, a mid-sized chemical company based on Earth.



Pressure from Luna made the transfer expensive for both parties, and by 2092 the Morning Star had begun to suffer mechanical and electric failures. Added to that, squatters began to make use of the facility as a stop-over for long haul dirigible runs between the other aerostats.

In 2097 the aerostat is more commonly known as the Bouncy House because in 2095 it's primary vertical stabilizer failed. The aerostat now bounces up and down uncontrollably during heavy winds. A modified cargo crane allows dirigibles and other VTOL aircraft to dock during windy weather, but it requires a skilled pilot and skilled crane operator working together. Space planes can only dock during calm weather. The current population is about

2,500 but no accurate count exists. Corporate technicians mix with squatters, criminals and other colorful people and security is surprisingly light. The major industry on the Bouncy House is currently software programming, consulting services, cargo warehousing, and Venus mapping. Rumors have it that Erie Chemtech plans on forming a new division called Morning Star Service Tech based around the local industries that have arisen in the Bouncy House. If so it's likely that they will hire many of the people already living there. This is way relations between the disparate groups are so good.

The Bouncy House is a giant sphere just over 750 meters in diameter. On the outside in large letters are the words, Luxor Resort. The word, Luxor, is crudely painted over and replaced with the word, Bouncy. Dangling below the sphere is a large blimp dock with several hangers. There is also an observation deck with an expensive restaurant hanging below the hangers. Below these structures are the remains of the broken vertical stabilizers.

Unlike most aerostats the Bouncy House is built with a layer of four nesting spheres instead of separated pie shaped sectors. The inner sphere is 100 metres in diameter and holds an extensive botanical garden and atrium. The the bottom of the sphere holds a large fish pond. It is said a 65kg catfish named Goliath lives within its murky waters. The next sphere provides the largest amount of floor space and is 650 metres in diameter. The bottom portion contains the Water View Hotel which has many rooms that look right into the central pond. Due to a lack of maintenance most of these windows are covered with a thick coat of algae. Above the hotel is the amusement park, a cinema and the remains of a small zoo. The zoo has been emptied of animals but several species of birds, small primates and snakes have escaped into the inner and outer spheres. The next sphere holds very little except for the small dormitories meant to house the staff. The final circle is the outer hull and holds numerous high-end condos that look out into the skies of Venus.

A large central promenade runs through the sphere along its center. It is lined with small shops and restaurants. At either end of the promenade are large observation bubbles. Many of the areas have been extensively modified since Luxor sold the aerostat. The Water View Hotel is occupied by most of the non-criminal squatters, while the staff dormitories are filled with the criminal elements. Erie Chemtech has plans to hire a mercenary outfit to clean up this area. The luxury condos in the outer shell are only partly occupied because of their high level of security. A few have been filled by Erie Chemtech executives, but most are empty. Rumors persist that several of these condos are occupied by reclusive billionaires.

ICE CREAM AND THE MAN

Scoops of Fun is an anomaly among the shops that line the central corridor; it is clean and well kept. The old fashioned ice cream shop motif has been lovingly maintained, and its soda machine is still in working order. That being said its customers look completely out of place. Scoops of Fun is filled with all sorts of unsavory characters.

In order to find their contact, an unspecified person who knows Commander Quantum, the Players will need to talk to some of these people. Don't make it easy on them. Most of the people there want very much to be left alone, and some of them are in the middle of working out some sort of agreement pertaining to illegal activities.

Eventually, the Players will either make their way to the bar or if trouble brews; they will be approached by one of the shop's employees. A man wearing a white apron and a small white

hat will approach the Players. He is a giant of a man with huge arms and a very serious look about him. The only thing he says is...*"Come with me."* He then leads the players down a hall past the restrooms to a small office. After opening the door and allowing the Players to file into the office he quickly pulls it shut. There are not enough chairs and most of the group will be forced to stand. Behind the large desk that fills up most of the office sits a very small dark skinned man. His hair is tight curls and bright blond, but his teeth are darkened a wine red color very similar to the drink that fills the glass in front of him.

After signing a few papers he looks up at the Players and shakes his head. He goes on to explain that he owes Commander Quantum a favor which is the only reason he's helping the Players. The man, who never takes the time to give his name, explains that the item they are looking for was briefly in the Bouncy House. It was moved several years ago to parts unknown, but he's sure that a friend of his named William Martin will know who took it and where they went. Any Players with Investigation or Carouse skills can make a Difficult Task Check to determine that the man is being less than truthful. If the Players try to pressure the man in any way two men armed with shock batons will rush in and beat up the Players. Treat them as Dangerous Thugs from page 84 of the Traveller: Core Rulebook.

The Players are forced to leave either because they're kicked out or to go find William Martin. Martin lives in the lower level of the Water View Hotel. They are told that he works out of his room so there is a very good chance that he will be home no matter what time they go and look for him. His room number is 333.

At this point the Players may also want to try to get hold of some weapons. This requires a few Difficult Task Checks using Streetwise as well as some very good role-playing. Non-lethal and melee weapons will cost 1.5 x the price listed in the Core Rulebook and lethal firearms will cost 3x the price and require a Very Difficult Task Check.

The Water View Hotel is like most other hotels except that with the atrium pond taking up most of its centre, it is shaped like a donut. The halls are still in good shape but many of the doors now have improved security or have been strongly reinforced. Many of the doors also have small business signs on them as they now serve as home offices. Once again talking to the locals will be unproductive.

WE THREE MOOKS

As soon as the group gets to the third floor of the hotel they should make a Difficult Task Check to see if they become aware of a wiry man trailing them. Once they notice the man or make any attempt to approach him he will speak into a wrist mounted com and then run. He's not very fast so it is likely that they can catch him. After he uses his com the players only have ten turns before the Three Mooks show up. This should give the Players just enough time to realize that the last room on the third floor is number 332.

The men known as the Three Mooks are triplets. All three of them saw time in the Earth Union military but never made NCO because of their sadistic natures and constant fighting. Their real names are Tim, Tam and Tom. If any one of them is killed the survivors will become enraged and stop at nothing to kill the Players. The Three Mooks are armed with autopistols and have combat armor. Use the Experienced Guards NPC from page 84 of the Traveller: Core Rulebook.

The Mooks are tough and will be accompanied by a number of Petty Thugs. The Thugs should number about 2 times the number of PCs depending upon how combat oriented the Players are.

An added problem is that the wind picks up just as the chase through the hotel gets started. This means the Bouncy House begins to live up to its name. Once every D6 turns the aerostat either jumps up or drops down 1D6 x 20 centimetres. This will impose a -3 DM on all task checks and any movement over one meter has the added chance of causing a light injury such as a sprain or bruising. Make the Players really enjoy their time on the Bouncy House.

Very quickly the Players will realize that they are out numbered and out gunned. If they made any friends while looking for guns or information one of these people may hear through the grapevine that the Players are in trouble. If so the Players will receive an anonymous tip via their com that directs them to the emergency evac pods. Otherwise a series of Difficult awareness checks will allow them to notice the small emergency procedure signs that still hang on a few of the hotel walls.

Unlike the drones that attacked them on Mars, these men are serious. To drive this home have one of the NPCs like Martin Brant get killed; even the PCs could end up wounded or dead. These people are playing for keeps and will do anything to prevent the Players from finding the second gift.

Eventually the Players will have to work their way down to the lowest level of the hotel. Once there they will discover numerous evacuation pods. Each pod can hold twenty people in a circular set of seats and then float away from the aerostat by way of a self deploying balloon. If the balloon fails a parachute will allow the pod to land safely on Venus' surface.

The gun fight continues as the Players attempt to board the pod. Once they get on board the Mooks shoot at the pod. Their small caliber guns do little more than scuff its bright white surface. As soon as they are seated and strapped in they can pull the yellow and black release lever and the pod will drop away from the aerostat. Damage has prevented the inner door from shutting, thus leaving the aerostat open to the Venus air. This does not bring an end to the gun fire though. The Bouncy House floats a full 50km above the surface of Venus. At this altitude atmospheric pressure is just about 1.0 atmospheres, the same as sea level on Earth, and temperatures range from 0 to 50 degrees Celsius. Given that the air from Venus and the air within the aerostat will mix at slow standard rate, the Mooks have more than enough time to get off several more shots as the pod moves away from the aerostat.

The Players should remember to contact Martin Brant if he was left behind to watch over the storage locker. Once contacted he will make an all out effort to drag the Red Box out of the storage locker and meet them at a predetermined location. As he is already in the lowest level this location should be near a suitable evacuation pod. If the Players took the Red Box along with them then let them suffer as the Bouncy House begins to bounce. Those carrying the artifact will have their movement speed halved and have an increased risk of injury. They should soon regret dragging that big box around.

A SNOWBALL'S CHANCE IN HELL

Just as the rescue balloon deploys from the top of the pod the Players will hear a loud ripping noise followed by a loud metallic SNAP. The Players very quickly realize that they are falling down to the surface of the planet. After several agonizing seconds of terror the pod jolts upward as the emergency parachute deploys. Barring some unforeseen problem, like damage from being shot or hitting a particularly jagged outcropping of rocks, they should survive the descent and land in one piece.

Allow the Players to sit and stew for several nerve wracking minutes as their pod gently floats down into the bone crushing, lead boiling recesses of Venus' lower atmosphere. The pod lands safely, and unknown to them an emergency beacon has been transmitting since the moment they pulled the lever that released the pod. Of course given that none of the Players had time to get into a Venus suit they are effectively stuck in the ball until some sort of rescue arrives.

Also unknown to the Players there is an angel upon high looking out for them. Commander Quantum, having been informed of the Scoops of Fun owner's betrayal has contacted an associate of his. They are relatively near to the pod's landing site and have access to an air-locked structure large enough to hold the pod while the Players are off loaded. Of course the Players do not know this, and unless they are dumb enough to open the pod, something that means instant death for everyone inside; they will have to wait for rescue. The pod has 200 man days worth of water and foul tasting rations. There is also a very unpleasant fresher facility that makes the entire pod smell, and they should enjoy knowing that most of the water they drink is their own filtered urine.

While the group waits for death any number of things could happen. Allow it to play out however the Players wish. If they can keep their wits the six day wait won't be too bad. On the other hand this situation could become a mini-horror adventure as one of the PCs or NPCs goes all *The Shining* on the group. Add to that the fact that who ever sent the Mooks also had the ability to track the pod's descent.

MEETING MOTHER PANDORA

After six days of fun in the pod the Players will hear noise outside. A tap, tap occurs on the hatchway and then quickly stops. A few minutes later the pod will begin moving as it is dragged along the ground. This is not a pleasant experience, and the Players will need to buckle back up in order to avoid getting hurt. Over forty minutes later the pod will stop moving and they will hear the sound of a large metal door closing. A little while after that someone will finally open the hatch.

Looking into the pod is a kindly looking middle aged woman. She is very attractive with long dark hair that is only just beginning to show wisps of gray.

"*Well get out of that stink hole.*" She says as she climbs down from the hatch way to give them room to exit.

She is patient as the Players exit the pod. The Players quickly notice her long green robe made of brushed leather with white fur along the hood and at the end of the sleeves. An Average Task Check for anyone with any skills regarding off Earth society will allow them to recognize Mother Pandora. Anyone with connections to Mars or a fondness for the holiday season will find it difficult to stifle an excited squeal...*"Mother Pandora! Oh my goodness, it's really you!"*

Mother Pandora will smile and nod. She will then tell the Players that she received information from a mutual friend regarding their predicament. After giving the Players time to clean up and eat some real food she will recommend that they get moving. She has recently heard of an old prospector friend who received a very strange gift during Gifting last year. He is willing to give Mother Pandora the item in return for vintage DVD copies of *Ghostbusters*, *Die Hard* and *The Princess Bride*. Luckily, Mother Pandora has just been gifted the last of the needed movies, *Ghostbusters*. Now they just need to find Mr. Fletcher, the man with the Green Box.

FINDING THE SECOND GIFT

During Gifting all of the independent prospectors, researchers, explorers, and miners turn on their long range radios and broadcast Christmas-themed music, readings or comedy. This fills the airwaves with a cacophony of holiday noise. Using advanced filter programs the Elves of Pandora are able to separate out distinct radio signals and use triangulation to find every participating broadcaster.

Mother Pandora knows the playlist that Mr. Fletcher uses each year and has her computer set to find his broadcast. Mother Pandora's rover is an overly large affair as large as the largest Earth based RV. It has room for a dozen people and all the amenities of home. In fact it is home to Mother Pandora, and she much prefers it over the dimly lit bunker that they are leaving. Looking around the rover's interior they will see all the signs of home. Pictures, holiday decorations, knick-knacks and an extensive snow globe collection. An observant Player will notice that one very old looking snow globe has place of pride on her rover's dashboard. If asked why that is so she will show the Players the snow globe. It shows Earth's Grand Canyon, but sunlight induced fading and a strange discoloration in the water makes the entire scene look like something from the yellowish landscape of Venus. Even the "snowflakes" have turned yellow, thus making them look a lot like the burning acid that falls as rain on this planet. She shakes the globe a few times and then watches it quietly. *"It reminds me of someone I once loved, as well as the planet that I now call home."*

After getting settled in her well furnished rover the group leaves the small underground bunker and sets out to find Mr. Fletcher. It takes only a few hours of driving to pinpoint his broadcast. As the computer automatically triangulates its location Mother Pandora puts it over the rover's internal speakers.

"...heard of people under extreme duress speaking in strange tongues. I became conscious that a steady torrent of obscenities and swearing of all kinds was pouring out of me as I..."

It is very likely that there is no way the PCs will know where this line comes from or what it means even if the Players recognize it. If asked even Mother Pandora will just shrug and say that Mr. Fletcher has a fondness for old 2D cinema. Despite this everyone in the rover quiets down to listen to the broadcast as it details the Christmas adventures of one young boy

obsessed with obtaining the present of his dreams. More than likely the Players can relate. Soon the rover begins to smell like hot chocolate and spiced cider. Mother Pandora instructs the Player sitting furthest to the rear of the rover to serve the drinks that she had the computer auto heat. Several other Players are asked to get cookies and biscuits out of the under seat storage bins. As they continue to drive Mother Pandora begins to hum a carol; if they are so inclined the Players may join in to start a festive round of caroling.

It takes nearly ten hours of driving before the rover's computer announces that they are approaching the location of Mr. Fletcher's rover. During that time they will hear the same 94 minute long story almost seven times. By the time they reach Fletcher's rover they will be quoting the show and may even have used the spotty quality Venusnet to download it in full video form. As they get close Mother Pandora will hail Fletcher using a short range comm channel. He will immediately respond and switch to video. Mr. Fletcher does not look at all like a grizzled old prospector. He is young man in his early thirties with an impeccable American english and exceedingly good grooming. He greets Mother Pandora with a dour attitude despite being told that they have the movies he requested. Mother Pandora is puzzled but backs the rover's air lock up to the air lock on Fletcher's rover. The two doors automatically latch together and a strong chemical sealant oozes out to make sure the connection is air tight.

RUN, RUN, ROVER

Just as the airlock opens Fletcher screams a warning. He is cut off by the sharp crack of a strong electro-shock weapon. If the Players win initiative they are able to close their airlock before two men in Venus suits force their way into Mother Pandora's rover. If they loose the men get into the inner part of the airlock but are stopped at the second door. Realizing the problem Mother Pandora tries to pull away, but her rover is held tight by the connected air locks.

If Tessa Chin or Paul Irwin are with the group they will suggest an audacious plan. Using the still synched video conferencing links they will hack into Fletcher's rover and put the vehicle in neutral. Once that is done they will be able to drive off pulling that rover along with them. From there they should be able to find someone sympathetic who can help them get rid of their attackers. While this is a decent plan there is no one around for over a hundred kilometers. By that time the men will have broken into Mother Pandora's rover and killed everyone.

There are six full Venus suits stored in Mother Pandora's rover. Furthermore she has several Cobras and some plastic-explosives. The Cobras are close range weapons that shoot out a metal piston with such force that they can easily crack a hard suit, but they won't puncture a rover's hull unless repeatedly fired at the same spot at very close range. Either the Players or Mother Pandora will suggest that the Players suit up and disembark using the secondary roof mounted airlock. From there they will be able to assault the other rover, retrieve the Green Box and separate the two vehicles.

This should be played as a desperate fight in a very hostile atmosphere while atop moving a moving vehicle. If the Players can confirm that Fletcher is already dead and no other innocent people are in his rover they are able to breach his rover's hull with impunity. Doing so will startle the attackers and give the Players the edge for several crucial moments. Other tactics may work as well. Let the Players be creative. Regardless of the tactics used the

battle should be a hectic brutal affair fought in close quarters as the vehicles bounce along Venus' rocky terrain.

During the fight the Players will realize that the attackers are none other than the three Mooks who nearly killed them on The Bouncy House. In the end the Players should be victorious. The Mooks are killed, though leaving one unknowingly alive may be a good way to give the Players a recurring enemy. Both rovers are badly damaged. Mother Pandora's rover is especially damaged since its engine may have burned itself out pulling the extra weight of the other rover. Fletcher's rover is also trashed, but thanks to an ingenious central blast door the breached portion can be sealed off from the rest of the rover. Even if the front is damaged the rover can be driven remotely from a computer station towards the rear of the vehicle. With the proper gear from both rovers' tool kits and by stripping parts they should be able to get Fletcher's rover in good enough condition to drive back to Mother Pandora's bunker. This will take a few hours and all the while they'll wish they still had the Mech-Hare.

While fixing Fletcher's rover they will find evidence that Fletcher had bragged on the Venusnet about having received a strange green box. This alerted the Mooks and they hoped to obtain both the Red and Green Boxes all at once.

After fixing Fletcher's rover Mother Pandora will tell the Players that she needs their help. In exchange for a way off of Venus and the right to keep the Green Box, they must help her retire. To do so the entire group gets in Venus suits and transfers to Fletcher's fixed up rover. They then drive Mother Pandora's rover into a nearby ravine. Inside her rover are the bodies of anyone killed in the recent fight.

The Players might notice that besides some computer wafers, credits and clean clothes; they only thing she keeps from her rover is the old Grand Canyon snow globe.

GIVING THE GIFT OF PEACE

With the Green Box retrieved from Fletcher's rover, the Players now have both Gifts of the Makers. Shortly after returning to Mother Pandora's bunker a blimp arrives with agents from the Earth Union government (or the Luna Republic if that's where the Player's loyalties lie). These agents were told by Rupali that they had gotten hold of a very valuable set of alien artifacts. The agents ask nicely for them to hand both boxes over. The agents also inform them that the Mooks were sent to kill them by the rival government which wanted the artifacts no matter the cost. If the Players refuse the agents threaten to use missiles to destroy the bunker and then retrieve the artifacts after everyone was dead. They are not immune to ironic hypocrisy.

An Average perception check is required to notice that all the government agents, even the ones who descend to collect the Boxes, are female. Also, the blimp is highly customized and bears a strange mark that a Difficult knowledge check reveals to be the astrological symbol for Venus or Aphrodite.

Despite the odd nature of the Blimp and its' operators, the Players have no real choice. To them it seems as though the government gets the Gifts of the Makers. Perhaps emboldened by their acquisition but realizing it may be years till the artifacts can be of any real use, the

government decides to concede a few points concerning the Titan Crisis. No point starting a war now with an uncertain outcome when in a few years it might be possible to ensure victory. Of course this won't be known for several days as it takes a little time to change the course of governmental affairs.

On the surface it seems as though the Players end up with nothing, but what they may or may not realize is that they have helped to prevent a major war. Their trip across the inner solar system proved a distraction to the intelligence services of both Earth and Luna. The fate of the Red and Green Boxes became more important than a few square kilometers of frozen methane on some distant moon. Their adventure ensured that there would be a happy New Year.

HALF WAY TO ANYWHERE

With the return of Zwei Blau's necklace and the rescue of Mother Pandora, Commander Quantum will happily pay for the Players to travel to Venus orbit from any local spaceport. This will involve a rather uneventful trip via a Venus space plane. The space plane docks at the Venus transfer station and then moves on to Quantum's deep space vehicle by way of a rickety old Orbital Transfer Vehicle. Mother Pandora, having lost her home, accompanies the Players.

To tie things up the characters may want to know a bit more about Zwei Blau, despite a curtly worded video message from Rupali complaining about the case being closed by the Martian Rangers. Quantum will refuse to talk about it, but Mother Pandora will take the Players aside. She explains that Zwei Blau was indeed on an extended vacation on Mars visiting a friend, but her friend was in Cydonia Polis proper and did not have anything to do with Redhorn. During the trip she received two anonymous messages. The first one told of a powerful pair of alien artifacts that could not be allowed to fall into the hands of the Red Legion, and the second message warned Zwei that she had been marked for death by a local Red Legion cell. Sure enough several days later Zwei was killed by mysterious double suit and airlock malfunctions. Her body showed up a few days later at the site of the Redhorn attack.

Quantum blames himself for her death and is having difficulty coping with the loss.

Quantum himself will meet the Players after they cycle through the airlocks. He gives each one a hardy handshake and presides over an impromptu medal ceremony. After a short speech the Players are rewarded with Cr5,000 Credits each and offered a trip via the S.U.S.V. Prometheus to anywhere in the solar system.

MORE PEOPLE THAT YOU MEET

Mother Pandora - Born on Earth during the Belt War, the woman known only as Mother Pandora has done a good job of hiding her past. It is known that she moved to Venus in 2080 following the death of her fiancée. He was a geologist working on the Grand Canyon Restoration Project when he was murdered. His side job was designing systems to dam the Valles Marineris once terraforming progressed to where there was running water in the old river beds. Pandora believes he was killed by elements of the Red Legion. After he moved to Venus she severed all ties to her past life and made a living prospecting for diamonds. It is rumored that she found a tremendously large diamond just months after arriving on Venus and has been set for life. In 2082 she added the honorary, Mother, to the front of her name and developed the persona of Mother Pandora. She has become a beloved figure on Venus, and although thought dead by the people of Venus, the tradition of Gifting will continue.

If the Players think to do some research they can cross reference geologists who were murdered in the late 2070s with engagement announcements. From there they will find that Mother Pandora was actually Liraz Shahaf, a young Jewish woman from a wealthy New York family. She held no job beyond volunteer positions within local charities and the anti-Earth Union, the American-Liberty Party. The investigation into her husband's death was halted prematurely by the pro-EU federal government, and she left Earth shortly thereafter.

EPILOGUE

SolaNet News Feed (31st December, 2097): A spokesperson for the Luna Republic has confirmed the recent announcement by the Prime Minister's office that an agreement has been reached regarding the status of Titan and the Maker artifacts orbiting Saturn. Earth Union forces currently on Titan will remain, and Luna has agreed to suspend its military support of the group calling itself the White Tigers. In return Earth has opened access to Mimas and Iapetus to a joint research team headed by the IAU. An IAU spokesman has confirmed that once again ETM will take the lead in providing security for the two alien facilities. Both Earth and Luna have agreed to post only minimal space assets in the region of Saturn while providing ETM with, "...any and all assistance required for them to protect and preserve the alien artifacts." Furthermore in exchange for exclusive access to Saturn's helium-3, the Earth Union has agreed to allow increased trade with Luna, end the IP tariffs, and drop all sanctions against Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Fiji. The EU government has already announced a timetable for returning control of the Woomera and Port Moresby space ports to their respective governments.

British Prime Minister Philip York, who worked doggedly to get American and Chinese support for this deal, praised today's announcement and said he felt confident that it would pass both the Luna Republic Demos and the EU World Council. York added, "I can think of no better way to begin the New Year than throwing off the dark spectre of war that has for too long cast a pall over the entire solar system."

On a sadder note, beloved Venusian folk hero, Mother Pandora, has been pronounced dead after being missing for several days. Her heavily damaged rover was discovered just days ago at the bottom of a deep ravine. Several, as yet unidentified, bodies were in or near the..."

"Video off." A man's voice said abruptly.

The video screen went dark and the words ended mid-sentence. Without the glow of the video the entire room was as night. The only light was the twinkle of artificial stars that seemed to dance across the ceiling.

As the door opposite the video screen opened a cascade of light flooded the room, temporarily blinding the man. The door shut and as his eyes adjusted once again to the darkness, he could hear the soft shuffle of a person unaccustomed to stick shoes walking across the room.

"You sound like a cat on ice, my dear." The man said kindly.

"I'm used to gravity and pressure. Lots of pressure." The woman said as she reached the large chair the man still sat in. She let out a soft laugh as she plopped herself down into the man's lap.

"Not much gravity and not much air. I can't crush you." She said jokingly as she hugged the well muscled man and gave him several soft kisses. "I'll miss my home. But at least this vehicle has a bit more room."

"I'm sorry." He replied. The true sound of regret was in his voice. "We both gave up something we loved."

The woman could see a look of deep sadness in the man's eyes, but in a flash it was gone. Reluctant to break the mood as the two held each other, they remained quiet for several minutes. Finally the man called for the lights to come on.

Immediately the woman turned her eyes towards the sets of empty shelves that flanked the large video screen. One set was dark green, and above them was mounted a circle bisected by meridian lines set against a lighter green oval. The other shelves were dark blood red above which there was a bright red polygon adorned with a set of sharp triangle like symbols. Only a closer look revealed that a small silver necklace with an aquamarine gemstone sat on the top red shelf, while a small extremely discolored snow globe graced the uppermost green shelf.

"It is New Year's Eve my dear." The man said after the moment of silence. He gave her a quick hug and another kiss. "Perhaps the Solar System will find peace in the coming year. If we are lucky that will be the true gift of the Makers."

Pandora smiled. "Yes, my love. We may yet find reason for joy this holiday season."

5 STUFF

GEAR

Programmeable Daily Assistant - PDAs are the Martian name for coms, or Configurable Operations and Messaging devices, or Coms. They are small devices usually measuring 140mm x 65mm x 5mm and weigh 100 grams. Because of their small size they are equipped with a fold-out touch screen that can expand to 250mm x 190mm. They are TL9 devices with Computer/2. Improvements in storage and programing allow for incredible amounts of data to be held on one's PDA. So while a Computer/2 may only be able to run one rating 2 program this is often its core operating system. On top of the OS the computer can still run numerous rating 0 programs which can be nearly anything. Some examples include; encyclopedia database, global navigation, telecommunications and messaging, communicator, and gaming. They have full wireless capabilities but it is short range (2 km).

Emergency Undersuit - Known as "tighties" these form-fitting suits are worn by nearly everyone on Mars. On Venus they are worthless. Treat as an Emergency Softsuit as per the *Supplement 4: Central Supply Catalogue*, page 140. As they are generally TL 9 there have been a few improvements. They provide Protection 1 against damage and 2 against radiation. They have a five hour supply of air, a small battery (recharged by kinetic movements), a mini radio with a 2.5 km range and integral heating and cooling. They can be plugged directly into one's PDA which increases its usefulness by granting a +2 on all Survival checks. Tighties come in all sorts of colors and are custom fitted to the wearer. The cost is Cr1,100.

Stick Shoes - Developed using smart glues and by studying the feet of geckos, stick shoes are very common in space vehicles and space stations. They allow the wearer to stay planted to the floor even in zero-g. A penalty of -1 DM is imposed on all athletics and melee roles involving running and kicking. They cost Cr100.

Smart Rope - This is an advanced rope made from high-grade carbon fibers with a memory plastic inner core. It can hold up to 1,000 kg and can be controlled by way of a downloadable PDA mini-program. It can untie itself, change its length by 25%, and even crawl back to its owner. It costs Cr1,000 for a 200 meter length.

Glow Balls - These items are small 60mm diameters balls that, when tapped, light up. Their soft white light fills an area as large as 5x5x5 meters and if left will last 30 days. Further taps turn them off and on. They can also serve as wireless repeaters to enhance the PDA messaging range. A small flat area on one side is covered in smart glue so that the glow ball can be hung on a wall or ceiling. Their weight is less than 20 grams, and they cost Cr10. An infrared version exists that provides heat instead of visible light. They last only 20 days and cost the same amount.

ROBOTS AND DRONES

Aerodyne Sky-Wasp Security Drone - Designed as a low cost surveillance and military drone, the Sky-Wasp is a common sight in police agencies around the solar system. It is capable of limited independent operations but only as Computer/0. The drone has a wingspan of 1.25 meters and masses 32kg fully loaded. It can be launched by hand but more often a purpose built catapult is used. The Sky-Wasp is armed with dual autopistols each with 150 rounds of ammunition. It has a top speed of 200km/hr and a range of 450km. Hull 1, Structure 1 and Armor 4.

Gregor Technologies Mech-Hare Repair Bot - The Mech-Hare is a cutting edge prototech robot. It has an advanced Computer/2 loaded with several skills; Engineer 3, Computers 1, Mechanic 4, Electronics 2 and Medic 2. The Mech-Hare moves in a rabbit like gate but can stand up to 1.2 meters high. It has a top speed of 30km/hr but rarely goes this fast. Its ears double as communication arrays and solar panels. The front paws have numerous built in tools and can even work with near microscopic items. Every Mech-Hare develops its own personality over time and becomes very loyal to its owners. The Mech-Hare can curl up into a ball no longer larger than .4 meters in diameter and weighs only 10kg. Count it as having Hull 1, Structure 2 and Armor 2.

The Grinch - Properly known as Ingenuity, the Grinch is a large but very old robotic rover. It is 2.9m long x 2.7m wide x 2.2m high. Its advanced RTG has a life span of about 84 years but has lost power substantially over the years. This is supplemented by solar panels and rechargeable batteries that can draw power from other sources. The Grinch has top speed of 25km/hr and can carry 50kg of cargo. It has a camera system fitted with lowlight, infrared, x100 magnification and video recording. It is also fitted with a long robotic arm capable of lifting 20kg and had two small wheeled drones that are fitted with cameras and a radio link. The Grinch is capable of orbital communications and short ranged wireless with a TL8 Computer/2. It has Hull 2, Structure 3 and Armor 2.

VEHICLES

Matsuyama Basilisk Trakcycle (Tracked Motorcycle, TL9)

Vehicle	TL	Skill	Agility	Speed	Range	Crew/Pass	Cargo	Open?	Hull	Structure	Cost	Ship Size
M/Cycle	9	Drive	+2	150	500	1/1	50	-	10	10	607,000	10 t
Armour	4	Equipment/Modifications: Basic Navigation, Very Distant communications (satellite uplink), Increased Hull, Increased Agility (due to advanced flexible tracks)										

Mars Rovers (Wheeled ATV, TL9)

The Mars rover is essentially a Tech Level 9 version of the ATV depicted in the *Traveller: Core Rulebook*, page 103. Being wheeled it has a top speed of 150km/hr. It has accommodations for eight, has 240 man days worth of supplies, and uses a combination Stirling engine and RTG for power. Tracked versions do exist that are slower but with better off-road capabilities. All TL9 rovers have two airlocks and self repair abilities. Armor rating is 4. They cost about Cr500,000 new and as low as half that for used models. Beware, you get what you pay for.

Many TL8 versions still exist with a top speed of 125km/hr and has only 160 man days worth of supplies. TL 8 rovers have only one airlock and cannot self repair. These rovers cost as little as 50,000 credits. Armor rating is 3.

Venus Rovers (Wheeled ATV, TL 9)

Venus rovers are almost exclusively wheeled vehicles, giving them a top speed of 150km/hr. This is because wheels are easier to replace or repair and need far fewer holes in the hull in order for them to be mounted on the rover. Venus rovers have two airlocks, redundant emergency beacons, self repair abilities and 320 man days worth of supplies. For power the rover uses a combination stirling engine, RTG and high capacity batteries. New models can cost as much as 800,000 credits and even the rarely-used rover will sell for as high as 650,000 credits. Armor rating is 6.

Mother Pandora's Rover (Wheeled ATV, TL9)

Mother Pandora's rover is an enlarged Venus rover with numerous extras. It has a top speed of 175km/hr and 400 man days worth of supplies. Her rover has also been fitted with an advanced computer control system that can drive the vehicle, use the appliances and play chess. This custom rover would easily fetch 2.0 million credits. It has an Armor rating of 7.

Notes on Rovers

Except for a few short range rovers and bare bones bottom-of-the-line models, all rovers have numerous extras. Bunks, Navigation, Sensors, Freshers, extra storage, vacc suit racks, kitchenettes, entertainment centers and even small holo-viewers are common features in these vehicles. Most Rover gangs live in their vehicles and as such they have become the mobile homes of Mars and Venus. Custom paint jobs are common as well. On Mars a smaller vehicle such as a track-cycle is often mounted on an external rack for short range travel. Also, every rover can pull an auxiliary trailer. These trailers can have their own power plants, storage and living space. They can be connected by a pressurized walkway but this is rarely used on Venus. Trailers cost 50% of a comparable rover and have the same armor rating.

WEAPONS

T-Stormer (Gyrojet Revolver, TL9) Skill: Gun Combat (Zero-G Weapons)

Constructed like an oversized revolver, the T-Stormer fires 12mm gyrojet rounds. It is a semi-automatic pistol capable of firing several different types of ammunition. All T-Stormer ammunition is essentially recoilless and can independently track targets thus providing a +2 DM to the users weapons skill.

Range	Damage	Magazine	Auto	Recoil	Cost	Mass	Ammo Cost
Shotgun	3d3 flechettes	6	no	-	350	3kg	85

Numerous special rounds exist with the Blitzer and Tracker being the most common.

Type	Damage	Ammo Cost	Notes
Blitzer	2d6+3 Stun	110	gives strong electric shock, heavy armor halves effect
Tracker	1d6-2 Stun	110	leaves behind a tracker disc (v. difficult task to remove) with a range of 20km

Ball-Gun (Grenade Launcher, TL8) Skill: Heavy Weapons (Launchers)

The Ball-Gun began as an improvised non-lethal weapon but proved so useful that manufacturers on Mars began to produce them for law enforcement and the militia. It fires a variety of 60mm balls at varying speed using a spring and compressed gas. The range can be set using an integral laser range finder. It is semi-automatic and uses a pump very much like those seen on some shotguns.

Range	Damage	Magazine	Auto	Recoil	Cost	Mass	Ammo Cost
varies	varies	6	no	-1	300	2kg	varies

Numerous special rounds exist for the Ball-Gun. Any type of grenade listed in the core Rulebook can be found as Ball-Gun ammo and even Glow Balls can be fired from the weapon.

Type	Damage	Ammo Cost	Notes
Mapper	none	150	range of 500 meters, uses LIDAR to map an area as it travels, gives a +3 DM to Navigation Task Checks.
Hard Ball	2D6+2 Stun	20	pistol range, can bounce into a target
Storm Cloud	2D6 Stun	110	shotgun range, erupts into numerous capacitors that create a floating cloud of electro-stunners that last for 15 turns.

Cobra (Staff, TL8) Skill: Melee (Bludgeon)

The Cobra is a strange weapon that consists of a 1.5 meter long staff, but out of one end it can project a .5 meter shaft at incredibly high speeds. This shaft strikes with enormous force and can shatter rocks or bone. An integral rechargeable battery can launch the shaft over fifty times before it needs to recharge. It needs only to be pushed back in to reset and be ready to fire again. It can also be used as a standard staff weapon or even a walking stick. Some fancy cobras are even covered with a wood veneer and ornately decorated (x3 cost).

Range	Damage	Heft	Mass	Cost
Melee (bludgeon)	4D6	-	3kg	250

6 GM's INFO

This adventure is intended to be an introduction to the world of **Orbital**, but it also a Christmas-themed adventure and as such should probably have a happy, heart-warming ending. As this may not be suitable for some gaming groups the Referee should feel free to modify the deadliness and tone of the adventure....

During the course of the adventure the Players may begin to suspect or question the motives of many of the people working with or against them. It is true that while many of the supporting cast have secret agents and hidden motives most of them are not working directly against the Players. Tessa Chin, Commander Quantum and Mother Pandora are members of the group known as the Infinite Circle, and as such they act in a way to further that group's agenda.

INFINITE CIRCLE

Even before it became publicly known that Mars really was the home of ancient alien ruins there were numerous conspiracy theories regarding the activities of visiting aliens. Once it was revealed that real alien ruins existed on the Red Planet, these theories became more focused and formed the basis for new religions and ideologies. Within the scientific community these new memes were met with scorn, but some scientists began to fear the long term repercussion of alien contact. Some remembered the words of the late Nobel Laureate, Stephen Hawking, regarding alien contact... *"I think it would be a disaster. The extraterrestrials would probably be far in advance of us. The history of advanced races meeting more primitive people on this planet is not very happy, and they were the same species. I think we should keep our heads low."*

With this in mind they got to together to discuss ways to protect humanity. Despite the solar system wide Cold War, scientists, scholars, journalists and politicians from nearly every planet joined this secret network of concerned persons. At first they merely exchanged notes and ideas, but soon they were sharing all information regarding the aliens including government secrets. Over time the group grew more structured and powerful. The current organization was formed just a decade ago, and the group took the name the Infinite Circle. It already has contacts within the governments of Venus, Earth and Mars.

The location of its home base is unknown and its membership remains secret. Some rumors have begun to emerge concerning the group. It is said that they have a living alien or have resurrected one using cloning. This is almost certainly untrue. More likely to be on target is the rumor that the Infinite Circle has the largest database of knowledge concerning the Makers and Servants anywhere in the entire solar system. The group's symbol consists of a simple silver mobius strip.

THE OVERALL PLOT

The Infinite Circle did not plan or launch the attack on Redhorn. Instead they used contacts within the Martian Rangers to deduce where the next attack would come from based upon threats made by factions within the Red Legion. Upon learning that an attack was imminent in the Goeria region they set their plan in motion. The untimely death of Zwei Blau gave them the bait, and Commander Quantum helped to have her body moved there after her death. As planned Rupali and the Players took the bait.

The goal was to get the two gifts into the hands of either the Earth or Luna government. Fear of the weapon that these gifts contained would be enough to drive both governments to the negotiating table and thus resolve the Titan Crisis peacefully. Very likely this will work as both sides were already looking for a way to resolve the crisis in a way that saved face. Fear of the alien weapon became a primary motivator to push for peace, albeit one unknown to the public.

Again the Referee should feel free to tweak the adventure. Perhaps the Infinite Circle is a bit more ruthless and launched the attack themselves in order to put their plan in action. Or maybe not warning the innocent people living in the dome about the attack has caused a split in the organization.

Overtime the Players may learn that neither government got ahold of the Boxes. Instead they were taken by an independent group known as the Legion of Aphrodite. Unaffiliated with the Red Legion, they are nonetheless portrayed by some corporations and the Luna Republic as a terrorist organization. Their taking the Boxes was not part of the plan, but it worked to make the governments of Earth and Luna even more paranoid about the Makers.

So no matter how the Infinite Circle is portrayed the plan has worked, though how much the presence of the aliens actually ended the crisis is open to debate. Either way the Titan Crisis is resolved by the beginning of the New Year, and the Earth Union will soon see a change in government. Fighting will continue on Titan, but there will be no system wide war nor the massive casualties such an affair would have caused.

For the Infinite Circle this is a start. Someday they hope to see a united humanity ready to stand against any alien threat that may emerge.

SO WHAT'S IN THE BOXES?

The adventure ends with the two gifts going missing and the governments being worried about what they hold inside. So what's really in them?

Obviously, they are fakes. The boxes were built over many years to match as closely as possible the construction style and techniques of the Makers. Upon completion they were filled and then sealed using advanced technology to make them seem as though they were solid blocks. Inside there are no alien weapons... sort of. The Green Box contains the entire collection of Commander Quantum action figures. The Red Box holds the entire collection of Alien Adversary, Quantum's unyielding foes, action figures. They are mint in box, and to the right collector would be worth over Cr50,000 per set.

They had been collected over the course of many years by Quantum's daughter, Madison, and Zwei Blau. Upon Zwei's death Quantum gave them up right before the boxes were sealed. In a way they are the ultimate inside joke.

TRAVELLER & 2300AD

Gift of the Makers was written as an extended scenario for **Orbital**, but it is a simple task to modify it for use in the Traveller Universe or even in *2300AD*.

Gift of the Ancients - In the Imperium the first day of every year is designated an Imperial Holiday. This very nicely coincides with the Terran concept of New Years Day even though the two calendars make use of differing starting dates. Have the adventure start just as the Imperium approaches the Imperial Holiday. This will retain the Holiday feel, or if you wish jettison the holidays and just set the adventure whenever you want it to occur. Instead of the Makers the two Boxes are obviously Ancient artifacts of great importance. In that case the scenario can be set either Behind the Claw, where the Players struggle to bring yet another Frontier War to an end, or deep within the Solomani Rim, where they rush to prevent a disastrous Second Rim War. Instead of the Infinite Circle it is like that either Norris or Adair are behind the scenes as unseen patrons. Perhaps even the Emperor himself knows a bit more about these Gifts than anyone could ever imagine. The slow travel time experienced by nuclear-thermal rockets is easily substituted for week long jumps between Imperial worlds. Maybe the enigmatic Commander Quantum has a strange tattoo normally only seen on the vaunted Sylean Rangers. Just pick your favorite world with a hostile super dense atmosphere and a low gravity world with a very thin atmosphere and plug them in. Change a name or two and you're good to go.

Gift of the Medusa - Like **Orbital**, *2300AD* has mysterious alien ruins and rival nations on the brink of war. The major difference is that the setting is interstellar instead of interplanetary. This is not a major concern. Days spent in stutterwarp transit between worlds is similar to the time spent by nuclear rockets as they cruise between planets. The major difference is that while stutterwarping the vessels of *2300AD* are incommunicado but this is not a major issue for this scenario. Gift of the Makers can be set nearly anywhere in the *2300AD* setting, but I strongly recommend the French Arm for several reasons. Colin Dunn's excellent update of the old *2300AD* adventures has recently come out on PDF as the French Arm Adventures. This gives a good overview of the French Arm and illustrates how an adventure set in that region can be played. Also, the French Arm is the most tense and militarized arm of human space. This makes it ripe for adventure. From there it is easy to make a few adjustments.

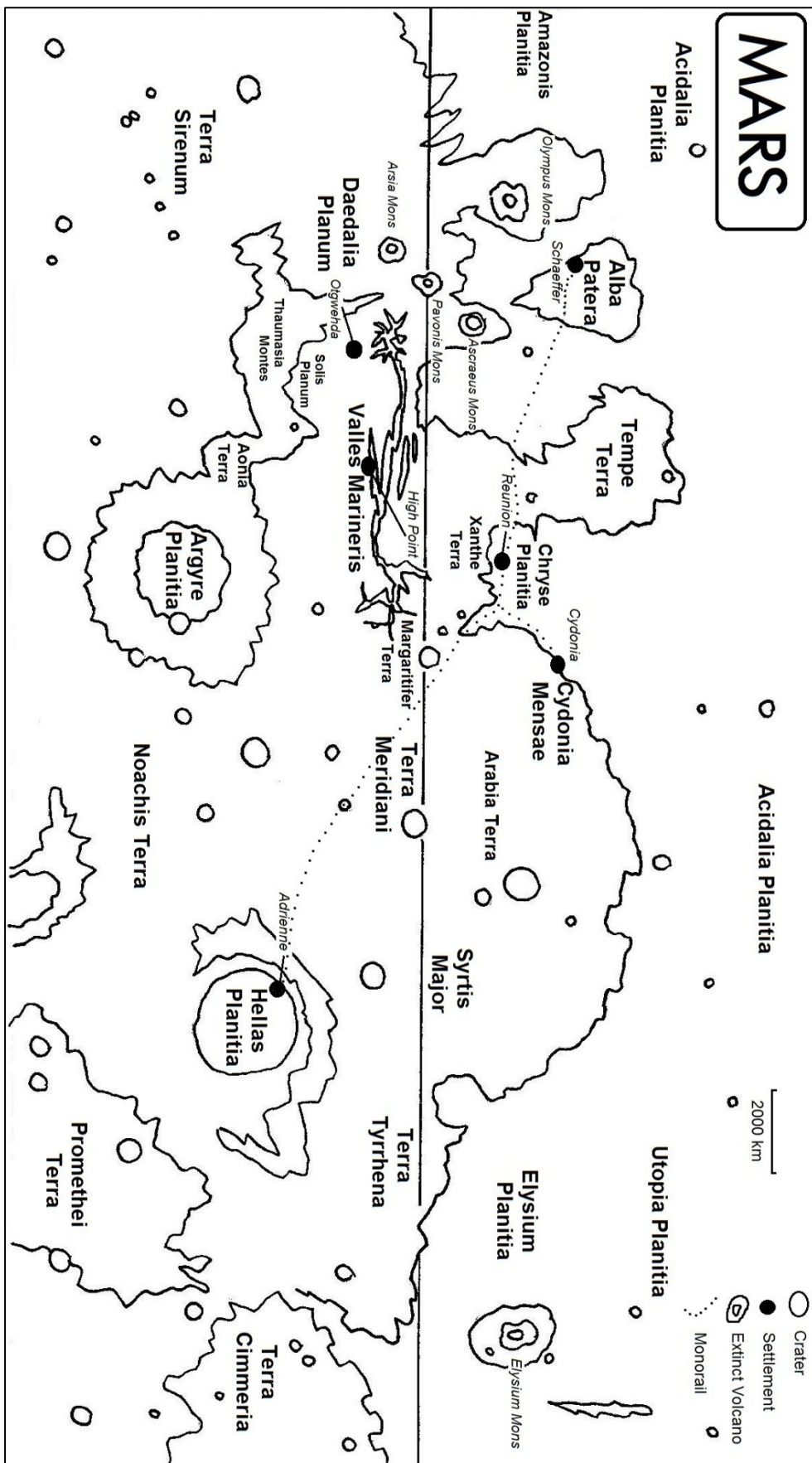
Instead of Mars perhaps the adventure starts on a Mars-like world. Hochbaden would work well, but I recommend Beowulf's moon, Hrunting. Hrunting is not mentioned in Mongoose's *2300AD*, but in the original setting it is a moon orbiting 342,400 km from Beowulf. Hrunting's gravity is about .37, and it has an atmospheric surface pressure of .36 atmospheres. This is similar enough to Mars that domes are needed and environmental conditions will be similar between the two planets. To make it fit within the scenario either rename some of the locales and locals to fit the fact that the colony was founded by Europeans, or perhaps more interestingly plop Cydonia City (now New Cydonia of course) and the Great Hall of Goeria right onto Hrunting as is. Who says there isn't a Native American / Indian enclave there that happens to use a mish-mash of Martian and mangled Sindarin to name some their towns? It's

also nice that Hrunting is said to have an ancient alien outpost on its surface. What a great place to begin an adventure!

Commander Quantum can be from any major foundation, though the North American Research League makes the most sense. Of course things could get interesting if it turns out that the Royal Society or the Transhuman League is somehow involved. The Brits have a very strong interest in ensuring that the French Arm remains peaceful and the Transhumanist want to further the cause of all mankind and not watch humanity plunge itself into violence. After spending some time on a Mars-like world, the Players need to head for a dense atmosphere world. There are several in human space and even a few along the French Arm. Pick your favorite, Limbes in the Alpha Centauri system would work, and its possible that the aerial life are remnant species from a time when Limbes had far more life. It's not hard to imagine that a world within the Core that has strange aerial life would attract an eclectic population of miners (tantalum anyone?) and researchers. Even more probable is that the Australian and American influences remain even if it irks the majority population of Europeans who live there.

So why the ruse in the first place? Perhaps something has occurred to bring France and Germany once again to the brink of war. Maybe Manchuria is supplying the Elysians with advanced space weaponry and France is mobilizing. Either way a major international conflict could so weaken the nations of the French Arm that Earth its self would be threatened by any Kaefer advance. No matter how or where you run the scenario remember the final goal...Peace on Earth and Good will to Men.

E N D



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