

COLONIAL TIMES

THE JOURNAL FOR THE 2300AD SCI-FI ROLE-PLAYING GAME

GRAPHIC LANGUAGE

COMIC BOOKS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS IN 2300

'OPERATION BACK DOOR' PART THREE

THIN SKIN: SPACESUITS IN 2300AD

PATRONS: SILAS CANTRELL

THE RAMTHA CULT

ON DECK: THE STORM PETREL

YOUR WORLD: NEWS FROM THE CORE & THE COLONIES



SPRING 2014


STYGIAN FOX



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Writers

Steff. J Worthington, Gavin Dady,
Chuck Gannon, Randy McDonald,
R.M.Rhodes

Artists

Steff. J Worthington, Damseldams,
Ashen Sorrow, Aiko Nakagawa,
B F G Stock, Creative Stock,
Digital Heavens, DMA Land,
Fantasy Stock, Good WP,
ISO Stock, Jademacalla,
Kawaiiistock, Knovocaine,
Matiii, Planetekrilin, Reddawgi,
Resurgere, Richard A Spake,
Taeliac Stock, Wyldraven.

Cover art

'Shanghai 2075'
by Albert Urmanov
<http://albyu.deviantart.com/>

Direction & Editing

Steff. J. Worthington

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Submissions & Contact

steffworthington@hotmail.com



SIGNALS FROM THE DEEP DARK

TOPICS BEING DISCUSSED ON FACEBOOK, G+, AND ELSEWHERE

FACEBOOK

A Question of Habitability

If I understand the linked paper correctly (<http://arxiv.org/pdf/1402.2378v2.pdf>), Mars-mass worlds in the circumstellar habitable zones of red dwarf stars could remain habitable for up to 10 billion years if they had sufficiently eccentric orbits. The tidal heating caused by these orbits would keep these worlds geologically active for longer, allowing them to maintain plate tectonics and magnetic fields long the point Mars lost it.

Randy McDonald

GOOGLE+

Building Worlds

I've been looking at the original 2300AD star and worldgen system to discover its idiosyncracies and see how it compares to reality. In this first part of the series, I discuss the issues and present some results from some automated worldgen runs (Part 2 - in which I try to solve the issues - will be posted soon!). <http://evildrganymede.net/2014/01/17/gdw-2300ad-worldbuilding-system-part-1/>

Constantine Thomas

MONGOOSE FORUMS

Sung Power

I decided to try and develop some background and ship designs for the Sung, so started to read through the sparse published material. It states that the Sung are as technologically advanced as humanity (more so in medical science) but don't have stutterwarp. Fine. Then it states that their system ships make extensive use of Ion drives and light sails - I simply don't buy this. Why would a civilisation with access to fusion rockets, MHD thrusters and other drive systems subject themselves to in-system travel times in months or years when they have access to faster drive systems? Light sails have barely enough thrust to move the sail, let alone the payload. I can see the Sung using Ion drives in robotic tankers or cargo haulers, for cargos they don't need to get to market for many months, but these drives make no sense whatever for transporting Sung in system.

Ion drives trade off huge fuel efficiency against pathetic thrust, and I bet a Sung's time is as valuable to it as mine is to me, even with its 150 year lifespan.

'Yatima'

Q EDITORIAL

Out of the blue recently came the news that Bryan Gibson, an artist whose excellent work had graced 2300AD and Traveller books, had passed away unexpectedly.

Like many artists Bryan had concerned himself with art and less with material wealth and his sudden death has put his family into a bit of a fix regarding funeral expenses. Usually when I hear of RPG alumni getting into a financial bind it's Americans having to shell out for medical expenses. It's distressing to see your heroes struggle.

I've been lucky. I'm a Briton and have the National Health Service to take care of me if i fall ill but in terms of actually dying then I'm in the same boat as Bryan.

As i get older I begin to notice that many of those I've admired in the RPG industry are retiring like Greg Stafford or, like Lynn Willis and Bryan Gibson, passing away. I recently worked on a major project that Lynn had a hand in and being so close to their work you get a personal perspective on their art.

I had a similar moment when looking for a piece of Bryan's art to accompany the excellent call to arms via Fundrazr made by Rob Caswell. When I posted the notice and picture and asked for donations I noticed in the corner of the image

I'd just posted a little Firefly class transport whizzing past in the sky above a Droyne market stall.

He was also a Browncoat. Instead of giving me the 'warm fuzzies' it made me incredibly sad.

There's little we can do to hold off time except maybe cut back on the snacks and processed foods we gamers seem to be known for. Taking care of ourselves a little better might hold off that sad day when you roll your dice for the last time.

We're a proud, opinionated bunch. But we also stick up for others when it's needed. We only have to look at the bundles on DriveThruRPG that raise astonishing amounts for disaster efforts around the world.

So lets do it again. Bryan's family need our help. No matter how little, it will all help in covering Bryan's funeral expenses and sofetning the financial burden to his loved ones. I'm asking you to dig just a teeny bit into your pocket and help out with the expenses to send a Traveler and a Browncoat on his way.

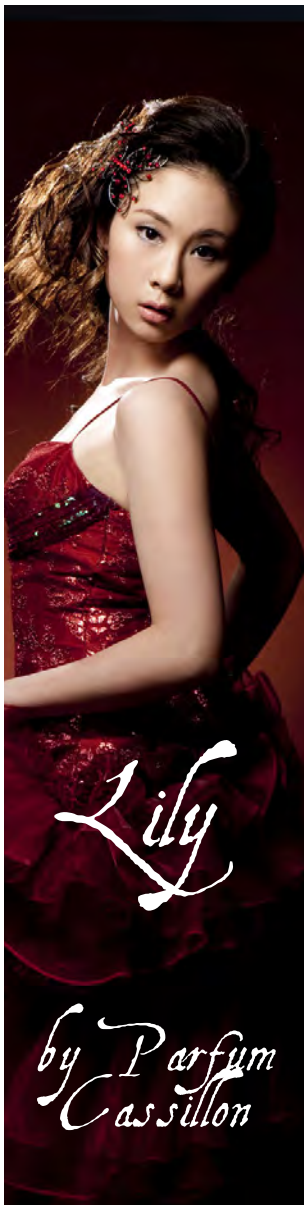
Donate here:
<https://fundrazr.com/campaigns/1hR32/ab/02qoCe>

Steff. J. Worthington
Editor

OPERATION BACK DOOR

THE COMPLETE ADVENTURE BY CHARLES E. GANNON

EPISODE 3 : SABOTEURS & SKULLDUGGERY



BEFORE:

After a journey through unknown space, the mission team of OPERATION BACK DOOR arrived in the home system of the Ylii. There they encountered a special envoy named Vishzuss'zruhna'zhii (nicknamed Vish), a Ylii who established communication with the group and then escorted them to an important meeting with Ylii leaders.

After some discussion, the Ylii decided that they wanted to learn more about the humans, and were also quite interested in allying with them against a mutual foe: the Kafers. The players must return home with this information (and various other data they have gathered), and deliver a Ylii envoy safely to Earth. Vish was selected as this envoy.

NOTE TO THE REFEREE:

This final episode of OPERATION BACK DOOR moves away from exploration and first contact as the primary thrust and drama of the adventure. Instead, detective work and some fierce encounters with the minions of the treacherous Tricolor organization are all but unavoidable. The escalating whirlwind of skullduggery and aggression culminates in an optional naval en-

gagement against the Kafers in the Ylii home system. The author recommends using the STAR CRUISER rules for the resolution of that combat.

Episode Three, The Tricolor Conspiracy, begins as the group leaves Ssuushni'a . . .

DISASTERS AND DOUBLECROSS IN DEEP SPACE

Where: deep space, between systems DM -4 4225 and DM +5 3409

What: The return voyage with the envoy is sabotaged by Dumaine.

After departing Ssuushni'a with Vish on board, the mission team should head back to human space via Back Door with all possible speed. The Ylii leadership will be glad to help them in this regard by providing the group with a full load of fuel prior to their departure.

Things will proceed routinely as the characters retrace their steps through Back Door, L 989-20, and DM -4 4225. Once in orbit around Ploughshare, the Naval and AIA staffs will quickly debrief the group, make duplicates of all their data, refuel the ship (the Cat's Feet), and send them out for a rendezvous with the unmarked Metal-class freighter that serves as this system's stutterwarp tug.

The group will also be told to keep the presence of Vish a secret, and to continue on to system DM +5 3409. However, they are instructed to wait at the edge of the system when they arrive there, rather than continuing in toward the main world of Erie.

Upon rendezvous with the silent Metal-class behemoth, the characters' ship will be maneuvered into a huge modular cargo container. This will be handled by the freighter's remote manipulator craft (otherwise known as grabbers). Practiced naval eyes will realize that this outsized-container is actually the size of nine standard-sized modular freight containers, producing a contiguous cargo volume of nearly 6700 cubic meters. The Cat's Feet is maneuvered into a berthing cradle and the module is sealed up.

As was the case when the group was ferried out of system DM +5 3409 by the unmarked Hudson-class freighter (Episode One), communication with the crew of the tug is minimal and restricted to audio only. After about two days of tug operations, the characters' ship will be offloaded by the now-familiar 'grabbers' and sent on its way with terse wishes of good-luck. Ironically, this is precisely where luck will take a turn for the worse.

With only one day to go to the DM +5 3409 system, any players on-duty at 1800 hours will be stunned out of their stargazing reverie by the shrill klaxon that announces emergency decompression. A split second later, they will feel the hull jar under the force of a muffled explosion from the aft section of the Cat's Feet. The environmental monitoring system fails, meaning that if those parts of the ship are undergoing decompression, there's no way to tell from the bridge. And in that same moment, the stutterwarp drive cuts out, several essential control circuits indicating 100% malfunction.

The referee should really not give the players a lot of time to think about what they're going to do next. Explosive decompression is exactly that: explosive. If your players seem to be unsure of what to do, the NPC's will provide excellent examples as they scramble madly for p-suits (or helmets, if they're already in a suit). The next action will be to connect the suit's external c-clips to any sturdy handhold or protruberance; explosive decompression will suck unsecured individuals right out into space, possibly ripping their suit as they bounce off bulkheads and through doorways.

All told, these precautions --punctuated by the savage pneumatic hiss of pressure-tight bulkheads sealing automatically-- will take only 10-15 seconds. And those

Reactions During Explosive and Sudden Decompression

This is an oft travelled nightmare for all space going people. Such is the danger that how to react in such situations is drummed into each and every crew member from the start.

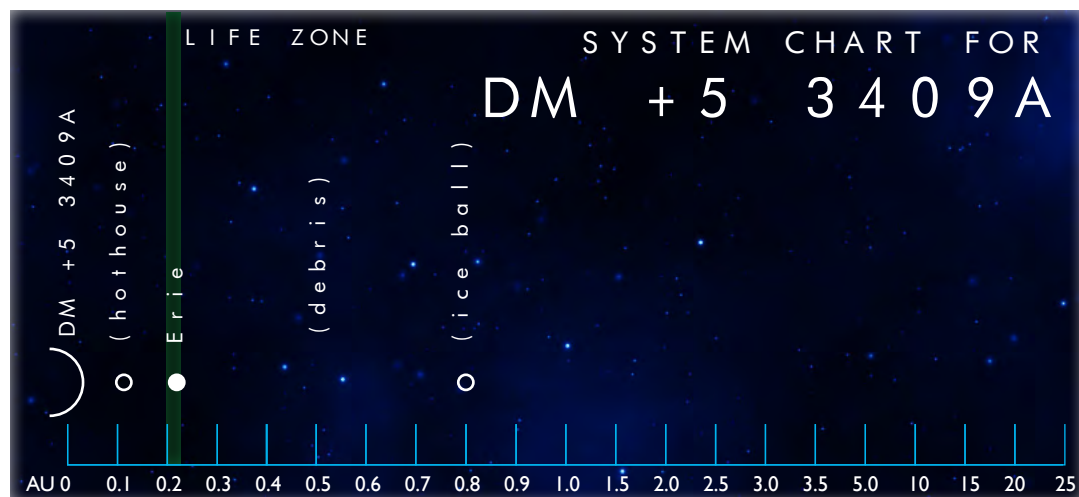
Kindly referees should let this become a Routine task as the player characters slip into instinct and act without thinking. Whatever their upbringing, decompression procedures should be instinctual (else it can get others killed also).

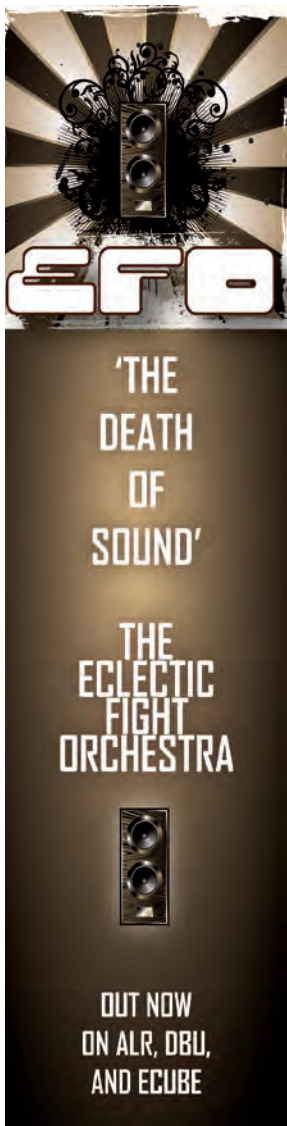
A referee who wishes to make things awkward may increase the difficulty.



**FOOD
EXTRUDER**

IS
YOURS
A
FOOT
LONG?





seconds SHOULD feel like forever. Once everyone is secured and braced for the worst, they can start to think about what comes next: exploring the ship for damage and the source of whatever disaster has befallen them. The answer will be fairly quick in coming.

The on-duty bridge crew and anyone who was off-duty will encounter Dumaine and the Ylii back near the engineering section. The yellow-and-black-striped emergency bulkhead is down and the flashing red light next to it indicates that at least part of engineering section beyond is in full vacuum. A sullen and uncommunicative Dumaine provides little help in the efforts to determine if Hannah --who was on duty in engineering at the time-- is still alive or not. The players will have to use the next set of bulkheads to create a temporary airlock, enter Engineering, and search for her in their p-suits as they waded through the wreckage of the stutterwarp drive.

It turns out that Hannah is indeed alive: she was tending the powerplant --which is in a separate, pressure-tight area-- at the time of the disaster. However, her p-suit had been left in the same compartment as the stutterwarp drive and is now --undoubtedly-- a piece of interstellar debris. She'll need someone to bring her a spare p-suit in order for her to move back to the main section of the ship.

However, it turns out that the stutterwarp drive wasn't the only thing lost; Morgan Lindstrom is dead. And according to Dumaine, that's just as well --for clearly, Lindstrom was a traitor. Dumaine will rouse out of his shock long enough to describe the events leading up to the disaster.

Dumaine and Vish were talking, trying to bridge the cultural confusions and complexities that exist between human and Ylii. Dumaine had brought up the concept of free choice and the Ylii had some questions about the human perspective on this issue. Dumaine suggested that Vish might learn the most by hearing



MORGAN'S UNSCHEDULED SPACE WALK

TWO human perspectives on it --illustrating how human perspective was not at all uniform. Dumaine paged Lindstrom, who had volunteered some of his free time to help Hannah check some powerplant circuitry. The French xenosapientologist invited the American to join the discussion. Lindstrom answered that he'd be delighted and would head forward in a minute.

A few moments later, Dumaine suggested that he and Vish might as well go aft and meet Morgan in Engineering; the Ylii had not spent much time looking over the human stutterwarp technology yet. Arriving at Engineering, Dumaine was stunned to find Lindstrom fiddling around with what looked like a bomb near the stutterwarp unit, his fingers on what looked like a detonator switch. Dumaine told him to put it down. Lindstrom turned, smiled, and told Dumaine that he was about to die. Then Lindstrom focused his attention on the bomb once again.

Staring into the distance, Dumaine explains that he only saw one option; trying to sweep Lindstrom and his bomb out into space. Dumaine hit the emergency override and decompressed the Engineering section by keying in the command to open the aft airlock. Dumaine pulled Vish back beyond the safety bulkhead that came slamming down to shut out the vacuum. But the sudden violence of the explosive decompression apparently caused the bomb to detonate --or Morgan managed to carry out his suicide attack before dying. After he's told his tale, Dumaine will sit in stony, tight-lipped silence.

If questioned, Vish will corroborate Dumaine's story. However, if pressed for details, he will express some confusion regarding some of the final inter-

actions between Dumaine and Lindstrom. As a non-human who's only been exposed to these perplexing, small-eyed sophonts for about a week, Vish still has huge gaps when it comes to understanding human 'body-language' and vernacular, and pref-aces his statements by saying that he just didn't know how to read the last exchange between Lindstrom and Dumaine.

Vish will reveal that to him, Lindstrom seemed very calm when they found him, and was not at all surprised at being discovered. Lindstrom DID smile --and humans do seem to smile for all sorts of contradictory reasons-- but Vish himself did not sense any psychological imbalance or extreme emotion behind it, nothing that suggested impending suicide. Vish describes the smile as --maybe-- one of satisfaction? It was a very unusual expression. Lastly, Vish (being so focused on human language these days) remembers Lindstrom's last words precisely. They might have been a threat on Dumaine's life, but Vish pleads ignorance of the use of colloquialisms: Morgan's last words were, *'Dumaine, you're finished.'*

A clever player may begin to wonder if Morgan was a saboteur, or was in fact attempting to undo someone else's act of treachery. His last words could be interpreted to mean that the bomb was proof-positive of Dumaine's treachery, and hence, that the Frenchman 'was finished.' Characters with skills in Interviewing and Psychology may have some luck in confronting Dumaine, but not much; Dumaine's 'stunned' state seems to predispose him towards extreme taciturnity when his actions or motives are questioned. However, a very high success result may lead a skilled observer of people to wonder if the post-crisis shock is not in fact a sham.

At any rate, the characters have more immediate problems on their hands, such as

how to effect repairs, since several key components for the stutterwarp drive have been wrecked. That will mean searching for replacements in the stores, and seeing if the system has enough integrity remaining to hold-up under jury-rigged operating conditions.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE REFEREE:

Dumaine is (of course) the saboteur, not Morgan. As has been established in the previous episodes, Dumaine has been subtly working to set the stage for this single, potent act of treachery. And he has managed to make it look like Lindstrom was responsible -- or at least make the other team members unsure.

Dumaine's plan was simple --and elegant. In the initial transit out to Back Door, he sabotaged the navigational sequencer. Of course, during the recent return to DM -4 4225, the combined naval forces at that site now have record of this 'system failure,' since they have copies of the *Cat's Feet*'s log.

With Vish on board, Dumaine has what he --and Tricolor-- always wanted; a live Ylii. However, their plans are a little different than those currently held by the nations of the Adlerhorst Alliance. Consequently, they can't allow Vish to remain in the custody of those nations.

Given the established 'history' of navigational 'system failure' that is currently logged against the Cat's Feet, there would be a logical explanation in the event that the ship never made it all the way to the AIA field headquarters in system DM +5 3409: a second sequencer failure. Such a hypothetical failure would offer a reasonable explanation for why the ship might never be heard from again.

So Dumaine had to find a way to make sure that Cat's Feet never finished its

journey. He did this by planting a bomb near the stutterwarp drive while Lindstrom was working with Hannah on the power-plant. Then Dumaine came back to strike up a conversation with Vish, ask Morgan to join them, and then suggest they go look for the American a moment later.

Dumaine knew that Lindstrom's trained AIA eye would spot the bomb and that he would immediately stop to investigate, assessing the design and the risks before alerting (and possibly panicking) any crewmembers. Dumaine had a motion sensor imbedded in the bomb; when Lindstrom began to handle it, a control element in Dumaine's wristwatch beeped twice.

In this way, Dumaine was able to time it so that he and Vish (the only person on the Cat's Feet who is clearly above suspicion) arrived in Engineering, they 'discovered' Lindstrom manipulating the bomb. Counting on Vish's imperfect knowledge of human behavior, Dumaine played out the scene, reacting with alarm when Lindstrom turned his attention back to the bomb. Dumaine then 'made the decision' to get rid of Morgan and the bomb via emergency decompression. However, the bomb's detonator was radio-linked to a command button on Dumaine's chronometer /calculator, so Dumaine was able to make sure that the bomb detonated as planned, rather than getting sucked out into space. As Dumaine expected, Vish was so stunned at the unexpected turn of events --and the speed at which they moved-- that the Ylii was not able to understand the finer nuances of what he saw transpire.

By now, the players should have the sneaking suspicion that Dumaine is something less than the charming academic that he has seemed to be. Likewise, the referee should be getting a strong feel for just how ruthless and treacherous Dumaine and Tricolor are --a feel which will make the next scene just that much easier to run.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE . . .

Where: deep space, just beyond Oort Cloud of DM +5 3409

What: a 'pirate attack'

While characters with any skill in space drives, electronics and mechanical matters are trying to cobble together a quick fix for the stutterwarp drive (best estimates suggest that it will require as much as three days work), the remaining team members take turns sending out distress calls and trying to overcome feelings of terror and loss.

A day into the repair process, the person on communications duty will be rewarded with a response; a private research vessel named the Questor picked up their distress call while conducting some astrophysical surveys out beyond system DM +5 3409's Oort cloud. If any of the

characters remark that they didn't know such survey missions were common, Helen Asweath will assure them (with a suspicious frown) that they're not. This luck is almost too good to be true.

Only moments after the characters receive the incoming message announcing their imminent salvation, the ship --a Hamid class surveyor-- will show up on sensors. This may seem suspiciously sudden, but it is not, really. After all, since the characters' maydays are only traveling at the speed of light, any potential rescuer would have had to be within 1 light-day's distance to have received the call already. And of course, stutterwarp vessels can travel a light day in almost no time at all.

The Hamid will move quickly into a boarding position. Any attempts to communicate with it will seem to be garbled by some sort of interference; the Hamid seems to be unable to hear the transmissions from the

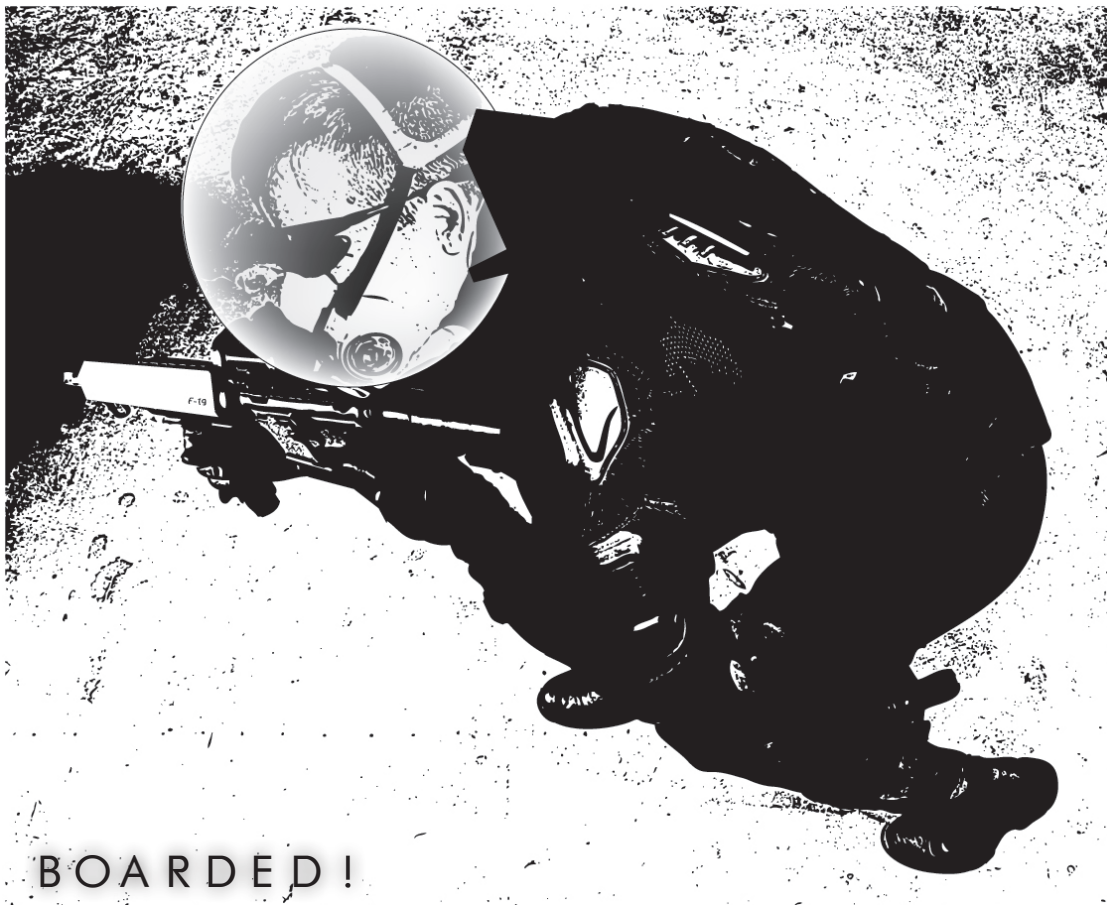
Sample Boarding Party Member (Tricolor Operatives)

The boarding party is armed with non-recoil producing weapons, and therefore is not hampered in this way. The boarders are Veteran and Experienced NPCs.

The outcome of this sudden 'pirate attack' should be pretty inevitable; the players will be overcome (most likely stunned) and left unconscious. Even if the first eight boarders CAN be defeated (good luck), another eight (similarly armed) are ready to finish the job.

**For Mongoose
2300AD stats use the
Mercenary NPC on
page 279 of the Core
rulebook.**

**For GDW 2300AD
stats consult pages
44-45 of the Direc-
tor's Guide on creat-
ing NPCs (remem-
bering that they are
Veteran and Experi-
enced).**



Cat's Feet. And the player's may indeed be trying to communicate that they do not wish to be boarded by an unofficial vessel; after all, Vish is supposed to remain a secret.

If extremely suspicious, the players may try to reject or avoid attempts by the crew of the Questor to sync up a boarding tube to the airlock of the Cat's Feet. Seeing this, Dumaine will insist that the characters have become either mad or paranoid. He will then surreptitiously sneak away to Engineering to override whatever the players are doing to prevent the boarding.

By the time the players can regain control, the Questor crew will have gotten on board and neutralized any circuitry that could interrupt their continued access to the Cat's Feet. If, due to suspicions (or any other reason), Dumaine has been imprisoned, the boarding party from the Questor will use a breaching charge to enter Engineering and seize control of the ship.

The players will quickly realize --whether they are initially trusting or not-- that the Questor boarders are not here to conduct a rescue. Eight large P-suited individuals come storming onto the Cat's Feet. Four are carrying Brandt Audionique AS-3 stun pistols, --and right behind them are the other four with Mueller-Rivera F-19 lasers. This squad will sweep through the Cat's Feet, stunning everyone (except the Ylii). The lasers will only be used as a last resort in order to bring down any well-armed characters who might have holed-up in a near-impregnable defensive position (several such exist in the Engineering section). The referee should remember that since the Cat's Feet is a ship without a spin-habitat, that using recoil-producing weapons is likely to send characters spinning

--making them easier targets for the attackers.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE REFEREE:

The crew of the Hamid-class survey ship Questor are actually agents of Tricolor, operating a vessel acquired through the 'grey market' connections of (ironically) AmeriCo. They have been waiting at 1 light-day's range from this rendezvous point for weeks. Their orders were to wait for a distress signal from the Cat's Feet. If they received one, it meant that Dumaine had managed to 'acquire' a live sample of the 'mystery race' that was helping the Kafers. Upon receiving the message, the Questor was to approach as a rescuing vessel using a scientific cover identity (the Questor) and recover Dumaine and the alien (without taking the risk of even stunning the alien). The remainder of the crew of the Cat's Feet was to be left alive if possible, and minimum damage was to be inflicted to the ship during the boarding action.

The reason for this very 'clean' boarding approach is to provide a 'reasonable explanation' for any forensics experts who might one day stumble across the wreck of the Cat's Feet. Whatever evidence of gunfire may be present, the cause of death will be anoxia, since the unconscious players are being left behind to die. Of course, the Questor's ruthless crew ensures this by disabling a key component of the power plant and removing the spares from the ship's stores. They also remove the spares (and repairs) to the stutterwarp drive before engaging the Cat's Feet's thrusters, giving the ship a 60 minute, 1.5 G push away from the navigational pathway joining DM +5 3409 and DM -4 4225. Then they leave the ship --and its crew-- to its fate, drifting ever further away from the frequented spacelanes.

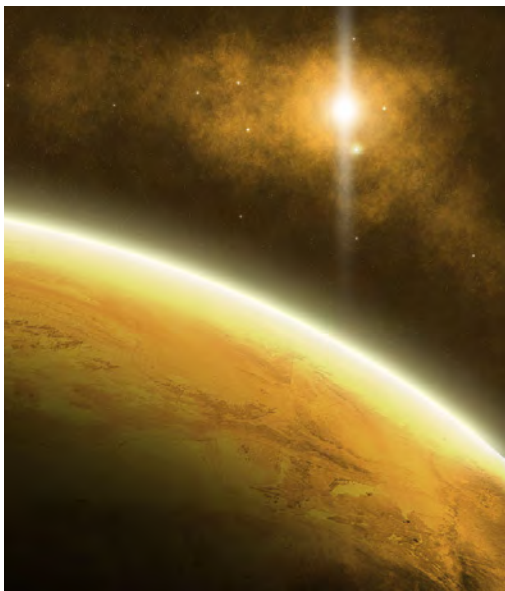
A SIGNAL FLARE AND A MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Where: deep space, just beyond Oort Cloud of DM +5 3409

What: an attempt to attract rescuers

When the characters awake, they will discover that Dumaine and Vish are gone. They will also discover that now both the stutterwarp drive AND the power plant are inoperative (and irreparable). Battery power can supply them with perhaps one day of air at normal consumption rates. A decision to 'thin' the atmosphere will extend the supply to 2.5 days. (For every crewmember other than Dumaine and Morgan who is gone or dead, add 10% to the duration of continued lifesupport) Clearly, the players are going to have to find an answer to their dilemma within that time, or they are sure to perish.

The radios still work, but by the time the message travels even the slight fraction of the light year that still separates Cat's Feet from system DM +5 3409, the characters will be long dead. There would seem to be no options other than crossed fingers . . .



Until one of the characters remembers the SIM-14 missiles that are stored in the launching bay of the IIB model of the Merkur class (of which Cat's Feet is an example). Hopefully a player will think of this, but if not, Hannah might angrily wish that there was some way to use those damn missiles on the Questor (which should jog the player's memory if they've FORGOTTEN about the SIM-14s). With the Merkur's communicator's intact, it is still possible to launch and control the missiles. The only limiting factor is range, for as the missile goes beyond a distance of one light-minute response time will be impracticably slow.

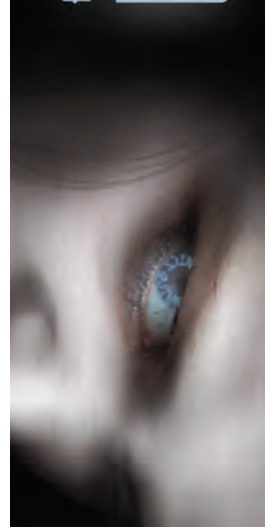
However, if the players pursue this idea, they should quickly come to realize that a preplotted flight trajectory could be programmed into a missile's on board navigation systems. In the final analysis, a missile could be programmed to follow a course that would take it over/under the Oort cloud debris and into the DM +5 3409 system. But would it be seen? And how would rescuers know how to find the Cat's Feet after the missile had drawn their attention?

Answer: rigging the missile to detonate at a predetermined point of its flight. Such a detonation is sure to show up on the ever watchful naval sensors. After thusly attracting some considerable attention, a second missile could follow, traveling more slowly and coming to a dead stop a few million kilometers away from the coordinates of the first missile's detonation. This second missile's warhead could be replaced with data describing the position and status of the Cat's Feet --as well as the apparent treachery that led to its current condition.

Preparing the missiles for this mission will take about a day, as will the com-

NICOLAS
FENRIS
RETURNS

ASSASSIN
SEASON 6
1.1-04



putation and programing of an optimal trajectory for the missiles. The referee should construct a number of task rolls, and should remember that one missile-disabling mishap is permissible, since the players have THREE missiles available and they need only two for this operation. However, in the final analysis, they should manage to rig the SIM-14's for this very non-standard mission. Any repeated failures may take the characters dangerously close to the limit of their life support. At any rate, after 1.5 days in thin atmosphere, characters may start suffering from drowsiness, shortness of breath, short-term memory loss, and other anoxic symptoms that will make their last hours a dim memory at best.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE REFEREE:

The flare-and-message plan will work, attracting the attention of numerous naval elements in well-patrolled DM +5 3409 (the ASF presence has been growing ever since Operation Back Door began). After cautiously approaching the second missile, its contents will be studied ONLY by the AIA officer on board whatever ship discovers. This procedure will be followed strictly, since Shamus Larkin (AIA Deputy Director in charge of security for Operation Back Door) already knows that the mission team is overdue for arrival, given messages that have been received from DM -4 4225 regarding their date and time of departure. Larkin will therefore try to contain any unusual news regarding the fate of Operation Back Door to a handful of trusted AIA operatives, rather than letting such information get into the armed forces pipeline.

Accordingly, it will be a vessel from the AIA headquarters in system DM +5 3409 that finds the Cat's Feet and rescues the dazed, semi-conscious survivors. The characters will not remember

their rescue, due to their oxygen-deprived state. Consequently, this scene should end rather abruptly. No sudden blackness of unconsciousness, but rather a sudden entry into the next scene --thereby producing the sense of lost memory without the recollection of losing consciousness.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS: WHAT'S GOING ON BEHIND THE BACK DOOR

Where: AIA complex, Coldseas, system DM +5 3409 B

What: Larkin reveals the reasons behind Dumaine's treachery

IMPORTANT: BEFORE PRESENTING THIS SCENE, THE REFEREE SHOULD READ AND BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, FOUND IN THE DATA ANNEX AT THE END OF THE NEXT EPISODE.

The next thing the players know, they are sitting half-propped up in hospital beds in a windowless medical center. In the room with them is Shamus Larkin, whom they have not seen since he hired them for this mission many weeks ago on Abernathy, King's most-developed moon.

It is highly likely that the players will be filled with questions --and possibly, anger-- for Larkin. The Deputy Director expects this and will endure their vituperation with patience and no small measure of empathy. When they're done venting and/or barraging him with queries, Larkin will begin to explain that --unfortunately-- Operation Back Door was never just a military operation to try to get an advantage on the Kafers; it was a political operation as well. It was



a 'policy offensive' against what many nations --but particularly Germany, America, and Australia-- considered to be French mismanagement of the Kafer Conflict.

Apparently however, some Frenchmen decided to take countermeasures into their own hands. Although Larkin does not have all the details, he is sure that Dumaine and the crew of the Questor did not act alone. Quite the contrary; Dumaine did not become a part of the mission team for Operation Back Door by applying for the job. After all, the job was a secret. Rather, Dumaine was recommended for the job by some very high-placed French officials. Larkin feels sure that somewhere in the French government there must be a radical cabal of ultranationalists who are behind the plot to ruin Operation Back Door --or worse yet, to pervert it into something of their own design. (In effect, without knowing its name, Larkin has deduced the existence of Tricolor, which is detailed fully in an upcoming scene)

This is a natural introduction to Larkin's explanation of the events and attitudes

that give Operation Back Door its tremendous political importance. While it is certainly not necessary to go into all such detail, the following information suggests why the friction between France and the nations of the Adlerhorst Alliance may have motivated Imperial ultranationalists to resort to Dumaine's treachery. Alternately, the referee may choose to photocopy the following section and distribute it to the players; this will approximate the lengthy explanation given by Larkin.

BEHIND THE BACK DOOR

The discovery of BD -111 094307, otherwise known as 'Back Door,' had obvious military implications for subsequent efforts against the Kafer war machine. 'Back Door' provided human forces with an accessway to the enemy's rear flank. Also, the presence of this humble brown dwarf served to catalyze the formation of an even greater military advantage for humanity; true international cooperation. However, one nation stood to lose stature if that kind of cooperation were achieved. France, as world leader, would find its influence

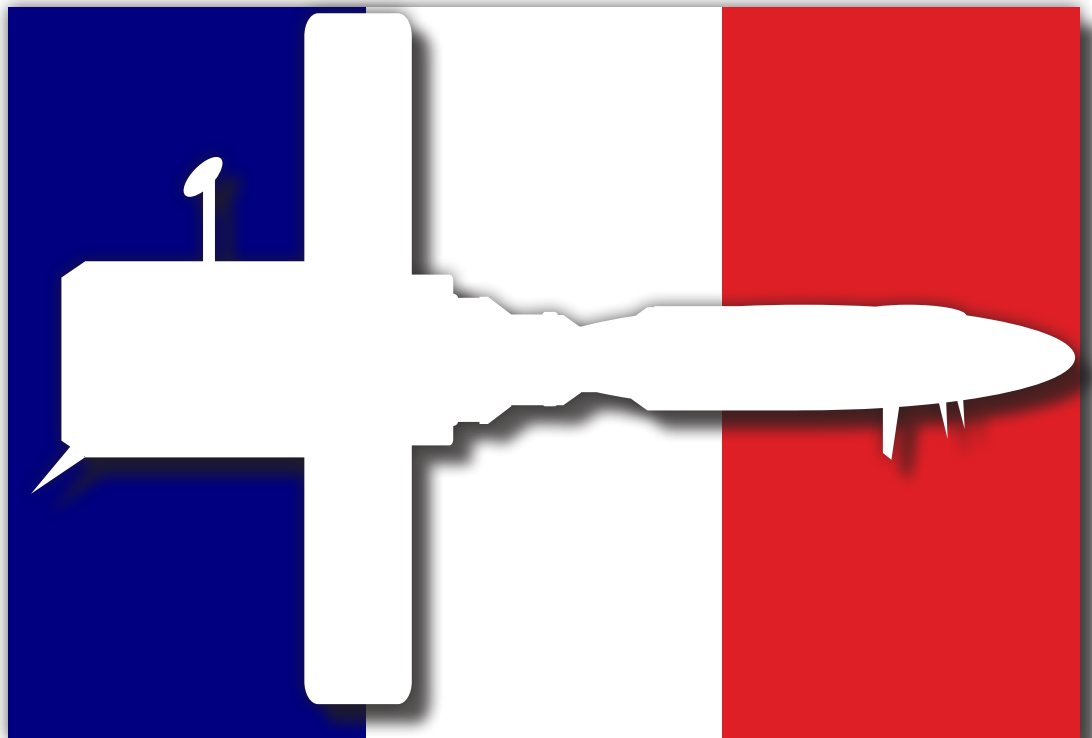
drastically reduced in such a scenario, becoming only an equal peer instead of remaining the preeminent leader amongst nations.

The seeds of strong international co-operation had been planted in July of 2301. During the first two weeks of that month, joint victories in the Vogelheim system (at Adlerhorst) and at Eta Bootis (the ambush at Laodemon and other associated engagements) created an emergent sense of unity between American, German, and Australian units. Their key role in those combats and their willingness to work together stood in sharp contrast to the aloof absolutism of the French commanders. Vice-Admirals DuBoise, Bertrand, and finally Rochemont all evinced an almost petulant insistence that they --and Imperial France-- retain the reins of supreme command over the human efforts against the Kafers. This arrogance not only alienated various non-French commanders, but whole populations of other nations. Despite their insistence on command, this succession of Gallic

Vice-Admirals displayed a tendency to delay and wait, rather than strike when opportunities presented themselves. With the exception of Rochemont's later successes, the only headlines dedicated to French commanders were the announcements of their deaths --each perishing along with a Talleyrand class battleship.

When push finally came to shove in the conclusive Battle of Beowulf (Queen Alice's Star) in July of 2302, it was the American, British, and German forces that carried the day. The contingents of these nations were cited for their courage, commitment, and elan; the French barely warranted a mention in the after-action dispatches. Worse yet, Rochemont was not in position to capitalize on the Kafer retreat to Kimanjano. The fact that this was not due to any inability on his part was a detail that both the press and the public seemed uninterested in.

In actuality, Rochemont's ascension to command in mid-2301 had marked an upswing in the overall quality of Gallic



naval leadership, but the growing sense of dissatisfaction with the style --and apparent lethargy-- of the French commanders had stoked the embers of anti-Imperial sentiment. Many nations still looked askance upon Nicholas Ruffin's ascension to a renewed Imperial throne and the sweeping Gallic elitism it represented. It was hardly a surprise when both naval and civilian leaders from around the world called for the French to step down from their position of naval preeminence.

French resistance to this move was quite extreme in military circles. Rochemont lost his icy cool and slapped the Ukrainian officer who delivered the international request for a new command structure (a major diplomatic incident was narrowly avoided). However, the French people did not rise up to protest the French fall from military leadership as Ruffin and his officers expected. Instead, the public reaction was to voice dismay at their leaders' questionable prosecution of the war. Command staff and government councillors huddled for a long week in Paris, refusing to make any comments to the press. Finally, in a terse statement, Ruffin announced that Vice Admiral Rochemont had 'indicated his willingness to dedicate more of his abilities to the betterment of French naval performance, thereby partially withdrawing from responsibilities of an international nature.' The press spent a week scoffing at and lampooning the pompous bureaucrat, which the Pan-Azarian Herald explained 'is simply the French way of saying, "Rochemont is stepping down."'

However, with the senior command chair open, a new problem arose; who should fill it? Although sentiment for the Ukraine's Borodin and even America's Elkhart ran high, British Vice Admiral Charles Graham got the nod. Press

releases from Great Britain, Germany, America, and the Ukraine emphasized that this decision was based on Graham's seniority and the fact that he had been in command during the decisive Battle of Beowulf. In reality however, the decision was predominantly motivated by diplomatic attempts to appease French sensitivities.

The French still had a bad taste in their mouth from the War of Reunification and were not about to accept a German in command. Borodin's performance had (unintentionally) shamed the indecisive French admirals and damaged Gallic pride. Lastly, giving America the leading role was still anathema to the Empire, and many other nations. Such a move was seen as leading to a new era of superpower politics --a possibility which seemed all too likely as America's titanic military industries went into overdrive in the wake of the Kafer victories of 2301. Furthermore, although the Earth itself was at stake, France still felt that events on its arm of space should not be turned over to 'American interlopers.'

So, by process of elimination, Admiral Graham was officially confirmed as Senior Admiral on September 12, 2302. Unfortunately, Rochemont --who retained the next position in the chain of command-- immediately displayed a willingness to quarrel with 'Chappie' Graham at every occasion. It became fleet scuttlebutt that Rochemont was looking for any opportunity to regain overall command --a fact which eroded Graham's attempt to evolve a team spirit among the naval units in the French Arm.

The German-Australian-American affinity was the counterpoise to the French tendency for dissent. Unfortunately, Graham had to maintain a certain dis-

tance from the commanders of these ~three 'allied' contingents --even though they had his support. This charade was essential, since closer relations on Graham's part might have given Rochemont grounds for complaints of favoritism.

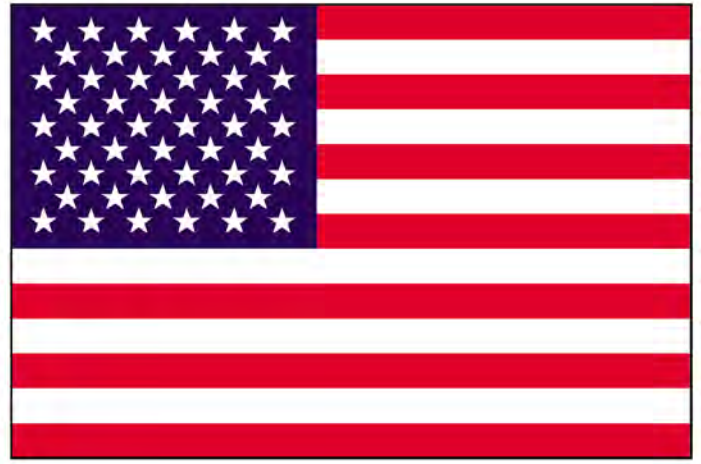
However, the bonds that had been forged in battle were not forgotten. American, German, and Australian commanders continued to work together, share intelligence, and look for opportunities that emphasized joint operations. The discovery of BD -111 094307 in late September, 2302 laid just such an opportunity on the collective doorstep of these three new allies --an opportunity to both beat the Kafers and wrest command initiative away from the French.

Consequently, Operation Back Door became a secret skirmishing ground for a growing rivalry between French supremacists and the nations of the Adlerhorst Alliance.

HIDDEN AGENDAS: A WAR OF ATTITUDES AND IDEAS IN THE PUBLIC ARENA

Prior to the Kafer Conflict, many nations --and colonies-- had been getting sick and tired of the French elitism that exists throughout human space. This pervasive Imperial hauteur became laughable (and brutally satirized) as Gallic performance in the Kafer conflict suggested that France had become senile and incapable of prosecuting a war with vigor and determination.

The American and German publics had



particularly strong feelings regarding changing the French role in both military and global matters. Germany had spent several centuries under the watchful eyes from across the Rhine, eternally on a leash. The proud nationalism that characterizes (often infamously) the German nation did not always suffer this easily or with good grace, and the fruits of that bitterness were only partially tasted during the War of Reunification. Many of the German people and their leaders feel that three centuries of their destiny was 'stolen' by France, and that Germany's presence in space and its prestige among the world's leading nations had suffered as a result. The Germans are not interested in vengeance, but from their perspective, they want to take their rightful place as a highly influential nation --and that will mean usurping some of the influence currently held by France.

America's perspective is different. After the Twilight War, America relapsed into partial isolationism, emerging slowly and cautiously back into the family of nations. By sheer dint of its size, resources, and geographical location, it quickly regained its status as a world power. However, America's attitude had changed; it was no longer interested in being a global policeman. It had spent the latter half of the Twentieth Century trying to fill that role and was nearly obliterated for its troubles.

However, the French return to Imperialism marked the beginning of a counter-swing in American attitudes. The traditional American dislike and distrust of anything even vaguely resembling autocracies (but most of all, monarchies) began to resurface in subtle reaction to the resurgent French nationalism. There was an increased emphasis on military spending, colonization efforts, and industrial capacity. In the words of one noted British news commentator, Washington was beginning a 'dance of defiance; the instinctual threat-display that America employs when confronted with a despot.' He also noted --rightly-- that most Americans were not even aware that it was happening, or that they were participating in it.

Other events fed this slowly mounting tide of American assertiveness. The breaking of the 7.7 light year barrier in 2300 and the location of a brown dwarf that reopened the 'closed' American Arm in the same year began to turn the attitude of protective vigilance into one of expansionism. This rode on a crest of American-led (or enabled) victories over Kafers in the French Arm. From Wall Street to Waikiki, Americans began to ask themselves; what makes France think it has the right to lead, to give orders to the rest of humanity?

In all fairness, it must be said that this attitude is not focused on making America a superpower. Instead, recent events have simply made Americans feel that the French no longer have any right to a position of international preeminence --if they ever did. And if no one else is going to --or is able to-- challenge the French assumption that they have a right to such leadership, then America will. Very few Americans want to their nation to usurp France's role; they just want to establish true equality between the nations of the earth (and beyond).

However, students of the Twilight War are already reminding leaders that such policy is easier to support than it is to conduct. A similar set of convictions got America embroiled in the three World Wars of the Twentieth Century.

In the final analysis, the contemporary German and American attitudes obviously have an affinity for one another and have gone a long way toward cementing the bond between these nations. Both nations have always taken special pride in their militaries, which are now distinguishing themselves as 'giant-killers' in the war against the Kafer goliaths. Consequently, Operation Back Door is more than just a prudent strategic move; it is an attempt to wrest control over the conduct of the war out of French hands. If it works, America, Germany, and Australia will have driven home their unspoken point that France is unfit to lead, and that military matters should be turned over to individuals and nations who move decisively and with determination.

After his explanation of the frictions between the Adlerhorst Alliance and the Empire, Larkin will then try to explain the American Intelligence Agency's role in the operation. Even before Operation Back Door was finalized, the AIA had been the 'secure channel' that was entrusted with all the facts, including the existence of the 'mystery race,' the discovery of Back Door and the significance of the alien crystal artifact. It was logical to make them the operation's watchdog; that way, no new agency or bureau had to be involved --and become a potential source of information leaks.

Morgan Lindstrom was assigned to the mission team as an insurance against poor judgments that could have threatened the entire mission. However, neither he, nor anyone at the AIA, had

suspected that there was a traitor in the mission team. Dumaine had come highly recommended from Paris, the IEX, and the DGSE (the French intelligence service). Of course, the AIA did its own check, and found everything in order.

But the most disturbing fact is not that there is a French supremacist group that has entwined itself into and around the vital organs of the Empire's government. The critical realization is that these fanatics must also have a mole in the AIA; how else would Dumaine have known that Morgan was an AIA agent? And he clearly had that knowledge from the very first. Upon reconstructing Dumaine's subtle combination of ploys and strategies --starting with his disabling of the navigational sequencer-- he always had things rigged so that if his handiwork was discovered, it was Morgan who would bear the brunt of any suspicion.

Clearly, this gives Larkin a huge problem; he can only be sure that a few people in his local headquarters are loyal: those who were unaware of Morgan's inclusion on the mission team and those who never had any means of communicating that knowledge (on deep-space patrol during the weeks it would have had to have been relayed, etc.). Following this reasoning, Larkin cannot trust ANY other AIA agents; the leak could have occurred anywhere between Cold-seas and Earth. This could mean that any AIA agent with clearance for the project data on Operation Back Door is suspect.

Consequently, Larkin can't mount an internal investigation without tipping his hand to the French ultranationalists. If their mole learns that there is an internal investigation under way, that also means that he will immediately re-

alize that the AIA has found the wreck of the Cat's Feet and determined that the project was sabotaged, not lost. It also means that they strongly suspect (or KNOW) the sabotage was facilitated by an AIA mole. And that means that the AIA suspects the missing Dumaine, whose trail must eventually lead back to at least one of the French leaders who submitted his name for the mission team.

This deductive domino theory all boils down to one key certainty: the members of the conspiracy will know they have been found out the moment Larkin tries to open an investigation. And if Vish is to be saved --and relations with the Ylii to be kept amicable-- that means that the conspirators must not know that they HAVE been found out. The ultranationalists must be taken by surprise, or Vish may disappear forever; he is the most incriminating evidence against them. BUT --explains Larkin with a sheepish look at the characters-- he can't use any of his agents to trace Dumaine and retrieve Vish. The reasons for this include:

- 1) If some of the French conspirators are using official government facilities to further their plot, AIA agents would not be able to proceed. Otherwise, they would be conducting potentially hostile operations against France, possibly creating enough of an incident to incite open warfare. Larkin would require a set of special approvals for such an operation, which can only be given after the initiatives go before the Congressional Committee on National Security. Even a rush, high-priority item such as this would have to travel in proposal form to Earth, be approved, and sent back as confirmation. Larkin could take it there himself, but his unexplained departure from his current post would invite all sorts of speculations as to what was so confidential that he had to han-

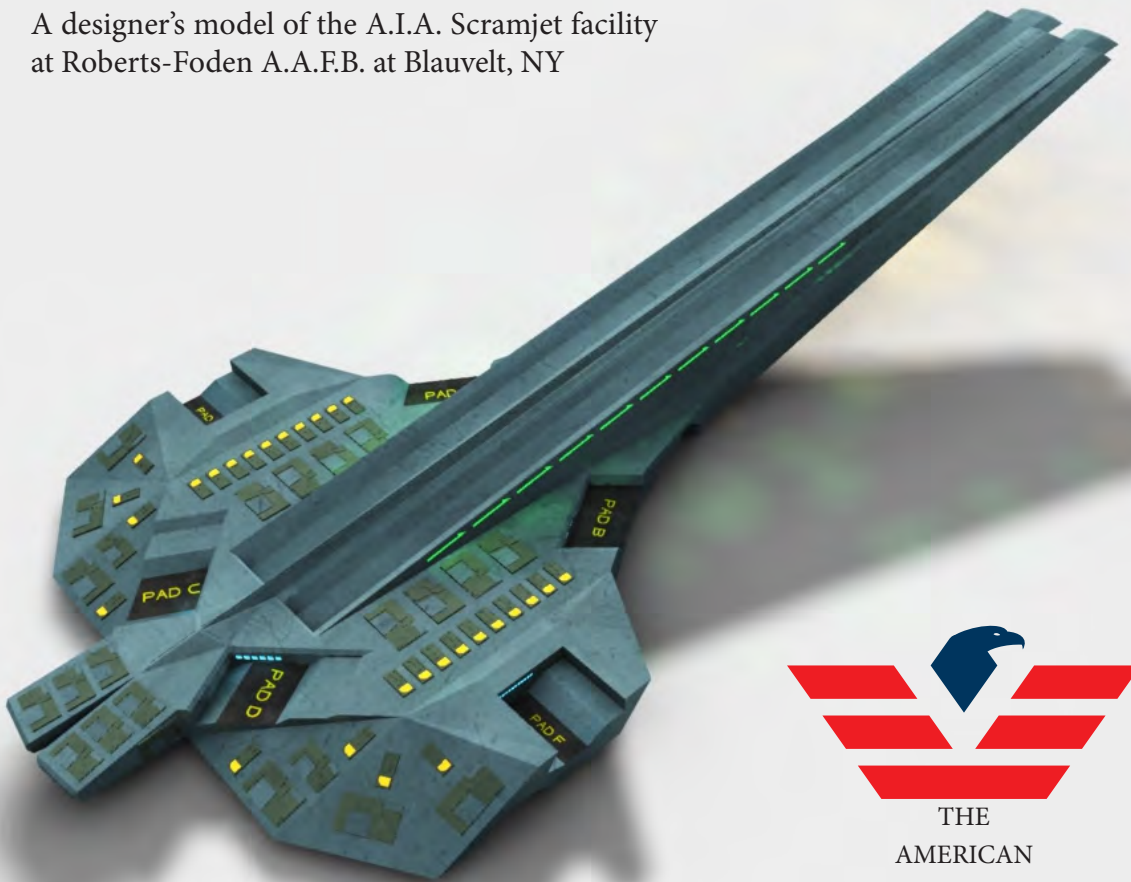
dle it himself. If the conspirators started asking question like that, Larkin would never make it to Earth.

2) The movements of AIA agents must be reported to AIA headquarters in a prompt fashion. Even if he just sends investigators after Dumaine and Vish, those movements will tell the mole that Larkin has found Cat's Feet and possibly debriefed the characters. Even if Larkin were to delay notifying AIA headquarters regarding the movement of his agents, their identities would still show up at any number of checkpoints (such as Orbital Quarantine Control) that employ retinal scans. Either way, the French conspirators would have plenty of time to cover their tracks and dispose of Vish.

3) Larkin can't spare the dozen or so individuals he could trust to conduct this operation. Only THEY know that Cat's Feet was recovered, and are therefore the only people who can keep working on the project according to its true status; everyone else believe the team is gone and the mission over. In addition, Larkin and his inner circle have to 'keep their backs together' and provide security for each other, should the conspirators grow suspicious and try to eliminate them.

Larkin concludes with the inevitable statement: the only people who can put an end to this conspiracy are the characters. As far as anyone knows, they are all dead. Their retinal scans will be removed from data banks, as will their fingerprints. Larkin does not have to re-

A designer's model of the A.I.A. Scramjet facility at Roberts-Foden A.A.F.B. at Blauvelt, NY

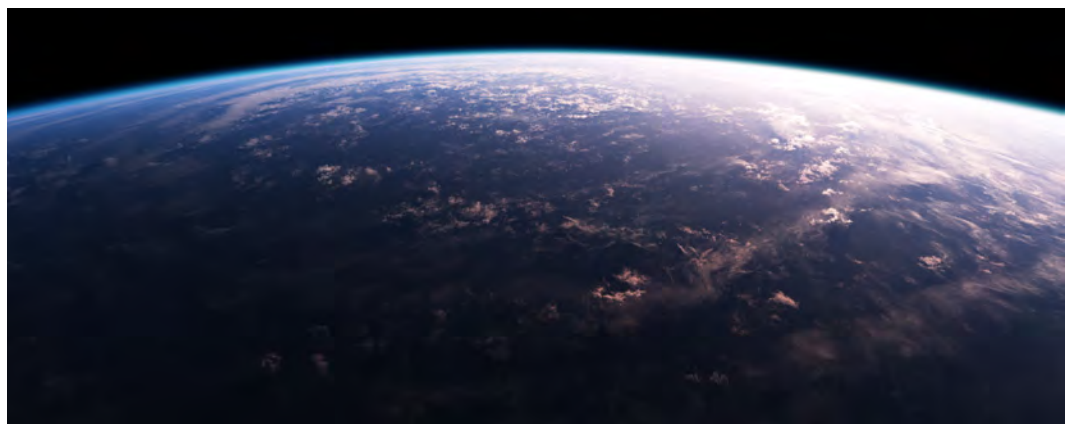


port their movements to anybody and no one will be out looking for them. Additionally, their personal knowledge of Vish means that he is likely to trust them implicitly if they come to rescue him and require his unquestioning cooperation. The only character who is not suitable for this rescue mission is Helen Asweath; her newsworthy discoveries have made her too widely recognized. Larkin will offer the other characters another Lv10,000 each, but if the interaction between Vish and the players has been nurtured properly, the players should be eager to get on with his rescue, regardless of reward.

Larkin can make their mission easier in a number of ways. First, he can issue them a limited number of 'helpful tools' --including one Rottman LK-1 laser and two M-2 Assault rifles. He can also provide them with one S & W ISP 106 and inertial armor vest per person. Ammunition is restricted only by how much the players want to carry. Second, he can issue them permits to transport all the weapons, including permission to CARRY the S & W ISP 106's (weapon stats are included in the DATA ANNEX at the end of next episode). He can also arrange for an unlimited travel account with an international travel reservations agency, and set up a Lv10,000 line of credit for each character with Financia, AG, an international banking cartel with a major outlet in Libreville. Lastly,

he will provide them with new identities as 'security consultants' from Erie, along with appropriate documentation. As 'first-time' travellers from this American backwater, their new identities will have not be expected to have retinal records or fingerprints on file anywhere. Consequently, security systems will not be expecting to find a match for their retinal patterns --and will not do so, since the old records connected with their REAL identities will already have been wiped from the systems.

While the players are off on their mission, Larkin will repair their ship, and keep an eye open for anyone who visits Erie's public records building in Champlain trying to find information on their new identities. Unbeknownst to the players, Larkin will also send two of his men and two 'blind' (or unknowing) couriers to an FBI drop-point to forward all the information he has on the French ultranationalist conspiracy. As the internal affairs arm of the AIA, the FBI has had no reason to even be aware of the details of Operation Back Door, and therefore, is certainly NOT where the French mole resides. Consequently, the FBI could mount an operation against the conspirators without tipping off the mole. But this will take more time, since such an action will require Congressional approval and unusual 'double-blind' security precautions.



Larkin can offer the players one piece of advice; go see a gentleman living in Lubeck, Germany under the name of Herman Untener. The Deputy Director indicates that the characters should tell Untener how they know Larkin, should answer ALL of his questions with complete honesty, and then ask his advice about what to do next --he has ears in the highest offices of the French Government, and may have heard rumors of the ultranationalist group.

After that, Larkin will allow the players to get some rest. But not more than a day; the only passenger-carrying merchant currently in the Erie system is due to depart on the following evening.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE REFEREE:

This is one of the best places for a referee to expand this adventure into a full-blown campaign. The players will have to travel to earth, and there may be occasional travel delays as they wait out the period between their arrival and the next appropriate departure. During such times, they may decide to explore the planet that they're laying-over upon. In addition, the players might encounter NPCs who are interested in joining them (even though the exact 'job' remains unspecified) for the right price. Just as likely, the players may run into less friendly NPCs who want to steal their money, credit vouchers, or weapons.

'LARKIN', AIA DEPUTY DIRECTOR.



Regardless of the plenitude --or lack-- of adventures during the trip Coreward, the players will arrive at Earth and be processed through the OQC clearance facility.

'Operation Back Door' continues and ends in issue #5 of Colonial Times.





G Guerlain

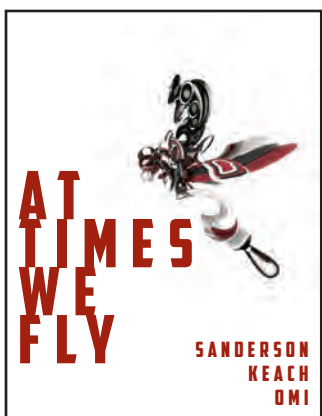
INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL TIMES

Depending on mass & drive, between 0.15 and 9.5 ly per day. The maximum distance a vessel can travel is 7.7ly between stars as a stop in a gravity well is required for drive/crew safety and performance.

Stutterwarp discharge requires approx. 40 hours.

GRAPHIC COMIC BOOKS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS IN 2300 LANGUAGE

BY RM RHODES



In the pre-Twilight years of the late 20th Century, there were three major comic book cultures, organized principally around language and geographical lines – English language (comics), French language (Bandes Desinees or BD) and Japanese language (manga). Of these, only two survived Twilight intact – BD and manga, both of which enjoyed far more robust cultural and economic support.

The English language comics market was largely American based and with the destabilization of that country during Twilight, most of the cultural exports that the country was known for dried up. While the American television and film industries eventually returned, the comics industry was simply not robust enough to fully bounce back.

With the resurgence of the ESA and the increased cultural ties between the UK and France, British comics creators were folded into the BD market in the same way that Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch, Scandinavian and Eastern European creators had been during the pre-Twilight years. A similar process occurred in the Eastern Pacific as the Japanese expanded their cultural and geopolitical influence.

The subsequent rise of France as a cul-

tural and economic superpower expanded the markets for its cultural exports and BD was among the easiest items to introduce. Many countries used BD aimed at children as an excellent resource for teaching French, a common practice today.

As the nations of Earth began to expand to the stars, the logistical considerations of exporting written material (books, magazines, BD) underwent serious scrutiny. Early on, it was determined that the cost of launching paper into orbit – much less shipping it to another solar system – was simply too expensive. Books and magazine articles could be converted into text files, but BD faced a more complex challenge, which was eventually solved with digital imaging. However, text files and digital images did not entirely replicate the ease and convenience of books.

Rene Giraoud, a relatively early settler in Nouvelle Provence, came from the small town of Angouleme – an area of France that has been making paper and printing books for centuries. Settling near what would eventually become the capital city of Mirambeau, Giraoud set up a small plantation of industrial hemp as a supply source for the first off-world paper factory, specifically to ensure that BD could become part of French colo-

nial life – an easy way to remember the homeworld and to record the colonial experience.

Although Giraoud experimented with various types of native Tiranese plant stocks over the years, it was determined that hemp paper was the easiest, cheapest and most sustainable to make. The fact that the industrial hemp could also be used to make clothes also factored into the cost-benefit analysis. Accordingly, the Method Giraoud has become the default model for paper making in colonies across Human Space, regardless of nationality. A paper making operation is, more often than not, among the first industries to be established (often subsidized by local colonial governance – another Giraoud innovation), after the basics like food, water and shelter are set up.

Margot Barineau, a neighbor from the same small town in France, settled near Giraoud and set up the first off-world book bindery and industrial printer specializing in limited print runs. Their intentions dovetailed and her operation eventually grew large enough to export books of all kinds across the planet.

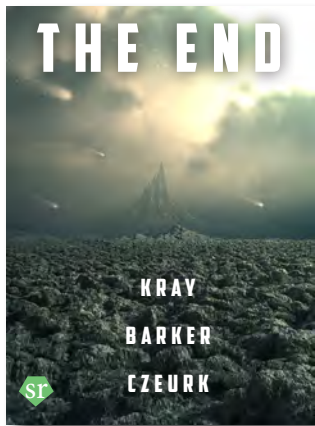
In addition to obvious titles like the Bible and French classics by authors like Dumas and Hugo, Barineau made arrangements with publishers of BD, books and magazines in Paris and Brussels to print licensed copies of their works for the people of Tirane, starting with Tintin and Asterix. As the business model she created proved profitable, so-called Contracts Barineau became the default across Tirane and into the Frontier. More than any one individual, it was her pioneering work that established the paradigm for exporting culture to the colony worlds, regardless of nationality.

(Interestingly, this paradigm was quickly adopted by other industries where production can be sourced locally, like clothing, shoes, hats, accessories, toys and other items that are simply too expensive or fragile to be lifted into orbit. With very specific exceptions, most small finished goods for individual use that are transported from one world to another travel with colonists or tourists.)



Barineau also established a series of kiosks across Tirane that allowed a customer to print a single copy of any book in the Barineau library on demand. These distinctive royal purple Barineau kiosks (which always use locally made Papier du Giraoud) are found through the French colonies and in several non-French colonies on French worlds. The only non-French world to feature these kiosks in any great number is Nibelungen. Not everything that is produced is printed, of course – the majority of books, magazines and BD were consumed on computer screens long before Tirane was settled – but the Barineau kiosks allow anyone who wants their entertainment in book form to fulfill that desire.





Despite the fact that the majority of her business was focused on printing established works of proven marketability, Barineau also sought out creators from among the settlers of the nascent colony. A second generation colonist, Anais Quenneville, became the first best-selling cartoonist on Tirane with her BD, *Mirambeau*, about her life in the constantly changing capital city. Barineau licensed the rights to the publisher Dargaud and it became a major hit on Earth, in part due to support by the Colonial Office, who recognized the PR value of a work that depicted a distant colony in a positive light.

As it has for millennia, fashion (in pop culture as well as clothing) in the Frontier usually lags several years behind the Core and it is common for several trends to come and go on Earth or Tirane without ever making it to the Frontier. It is not unusual for a brief trend from the Core to take root on a colony world and persist long after it has become passé. Nevertheless, the colonies always look to the Core in hopes of finding something new and different to emulate.

The most popular publications on any of the Frontier worlds are the ones that offer reviews of what's new, good and worth reading. Those who take up the burden of cataloging the enormous diaspora of material available on each world are fairly well regarded and decently rewarded. More often than not, reviewers and catalogers are better known off-planet than the creators they are curating. It is these tastemakers that drive the bulk of the Frontier-to-Frontier creative trade. Reviews and catalogs of material from the Core face a much larger challenge because of the sheer volume, so only the titles that can survive on word of mouth make their way to the Frontier.

At the same time, relatively unknown titles from the Core have to compete with local products, which are often easier to sell to locals. It is rare for a creator's reputation to make it off-world in both the Core and the Frontier and most of the great cartoonists, writers, creators and designers in the colonies have lived and died without ever making a dent in the Core markets. Historically, those that have – Alain Vibert (*Beowulf*), Denis “Dege” Gendarme (*Beta Canum*), Chez Viel (*Alderhorst*), and Saki Zed (*Joi*) to name but a small few – enjoy wide success.

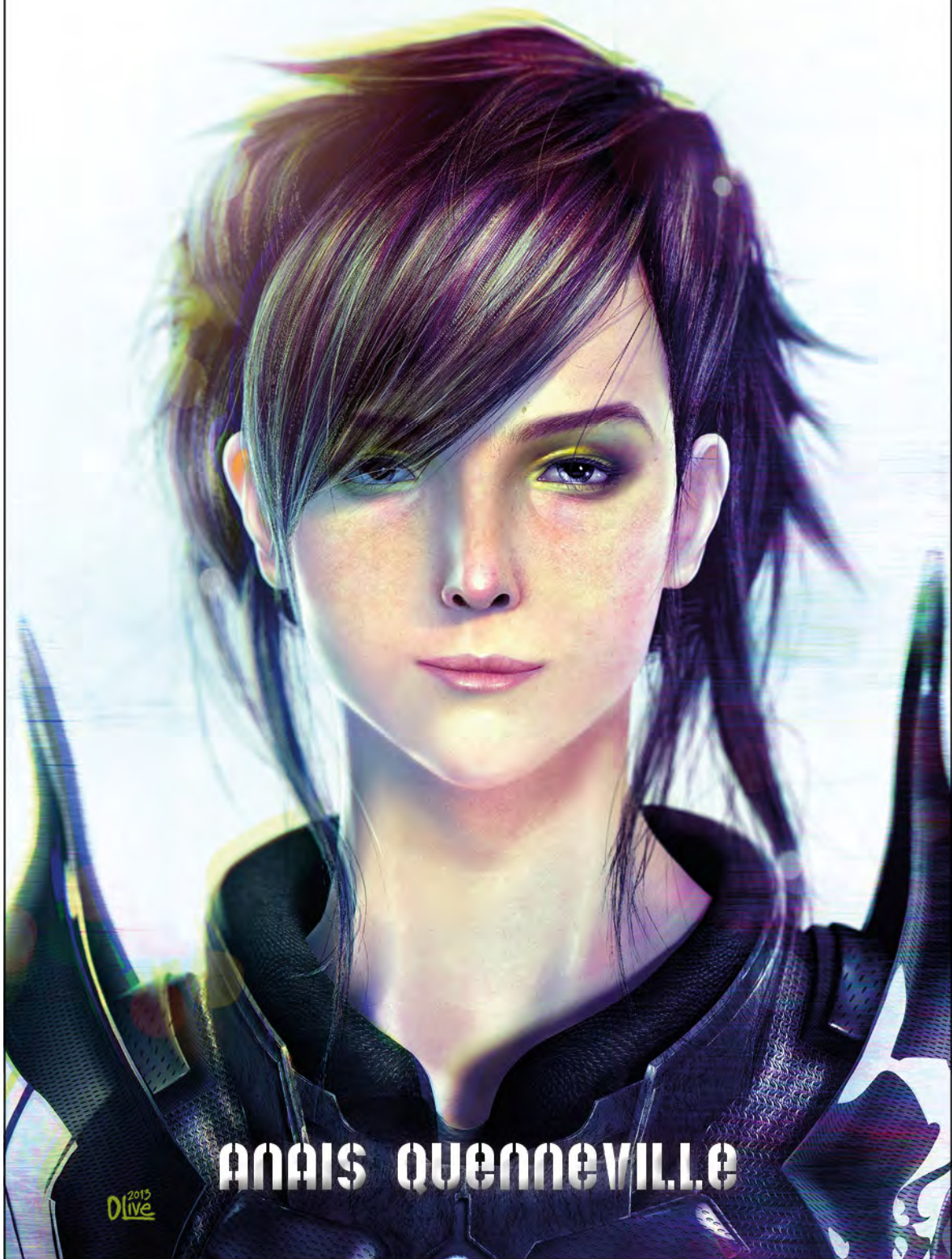
Despite the robust manga markets in the Core, there are far fewer Japanese than French colonies and those that exist do not share the close proximity to other colonial markets that French colonies enjoy. As a result, manga markets are not nearly as robust overall as BD markets. While BD can be found throughout the French Arm and scattered through the American Arm (where far less successful American-made knock off versions of Barineau kiosks provide more or less the same service), manga does not have the same sort of general exposure in the Chinese Arm and is largely limited to Daikoku. (BD is, of course, entirely unknown in the Chinese Arm.)

Unsurprisingly, Tirane boasts a thriving market in both BD and manga, arguably as strong as the markets on Earth. Despite the relatively young age of both the French and Japanese colonies, Joi boasted the biggest BD/manga market in the Frontier during the 2270s, 80s and 90s because of the feedback and mutual support of the two cultures. During and after the war of Elysian Independence, the market on Joi collapsed and the BD half of the market shows no signs of coming back any time soon.



MIRAMBEAU

LE PREMIER VOLUME COMPLET



ANNAIS QUENNEVILLE

DARGAUD
édition cœur



Subsequent to the collapse of the market on Joi, Beta Canum reclaimed the title as the largest producer of BD in the French Arm. One of the reasons for this is the strong presence of the UK creators on New Africa, the only French colony world with more foreign than French creators contributing to the success of the material. The French colonies on Alderhorst, Beowulf, Nous Voila, Aurore and Kimanjano all boast strong BD markets, as does Nibelungen – the only non-French colony world to have any sort of serious reputation among those in the know.

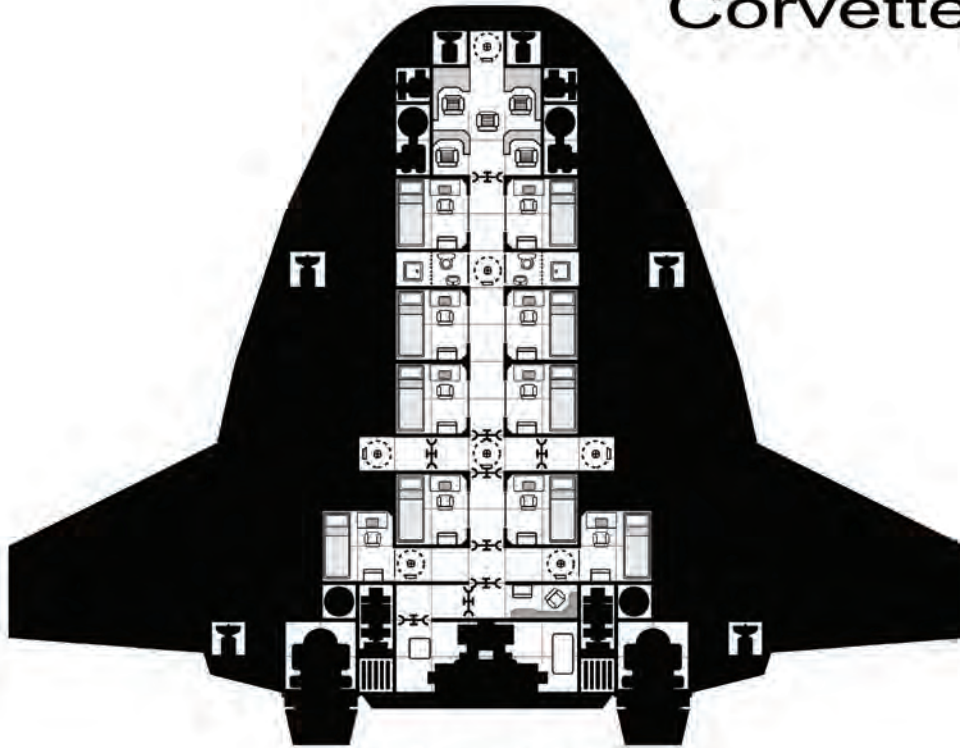
The pre-Twilight BD and manga markets supported a wide variety of genre material and art styles and this has not changed in the post-Twilight era. There was a surge in general science fiction narratives that came with the settlement of Tirane, but that calmed down as colonization became more common. When the Sung, the Xiang, the Pentapods and the Ebers were contacted within the space of a decade, there was a massive interest in first contact narratives, a genre that still enjoys a great deal of

popularity in the Core – it remains to be seen if the Kafer invasion of Aurore will change that opinion.

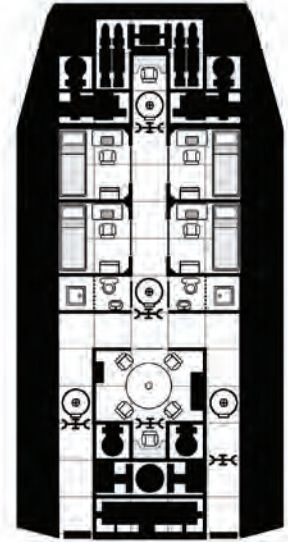
The audiences on different planets in the Frontier favor different kinds of material, judging by what tops the best-seller lists in each market as the 24th Century dawns. Horror, for example, is very popular on Beowulf – especially stories about vampires that take advantage of the planet's long day/night cycle. The Kimanjano market tends to favor pirate fiction and adventure on the high seas – and has seen a real renaissance of artists using the ligne clare style. Nous Voila has a very strong interest in fantasy and folk tales. Beta Canum's audience seems to have an unfortunate enjoyment of goofy stories of bumbling settlers on the Chinese Arm in a retro Charleroi style. With the recent political turmoil on Alderhorst, local cartoonists have turned to documenting the various native pseudo-avian species – a project that has been likened to James Audubon's work and has attracted some strong interest on Tirane. Dominant themes on Aurore have recently switched to war stories and survivor tales from the Kafer invasion. The markets on Joi and Nibelungen are a mixed bag at present, with no clear dominant genre or style.

To the average citizen of Imperial France, BD is merely the ninth art, a medium that has taken a place alongside poetry, painting, music and all the rest. It is an integral part of French society and visitors to the colonies in the French Arm are utterly unsurprised to see that it has travelled to the stars. Few on Earth know the struggles that Giraoud and Barineau went through to establish the infrastructure that would allow BD to thrive on alien soil, but every off-Earth cartoonist is keenly aware of the significant debt owed to these two pioneers.

Storm Petrel Class Corvette



Lower Deck



Upper Deck

Theoretical wartime doctrine requires the Storm Petrel to use its stealth and emissions reduction to act as advanced fleet pickets or as stealthy missile assets. The ship's MHD plant does not provide sufficient power to operate the weapons, sensors and drives at the same time, so the ship has to typically shoot and scoot.

For special forces operations the ship is rarely armed, and relies entirely upon its stealth and speed. The extra space available in the modular bays, plus the vacant cabins for gunnery and remote crew, mean that up to 24 troops can be carried under "hot bunking" conditions. Since the ship's life support is not

sufficient to support this number of crew, the modular quarters unit also includes additional life support supplies and equipment.

The high cost, and relatively small requirement, has kept the Storm Petrel fleet quite small and only four ships of the

class have been built to date, the HMS Isolde, HMS Ygraine, HMS Nimue and HMS Blasine. A planned 5th hull, HMS Ganieda, is currently under construction and a 6th has been planned for, but construction has yet to begin and no name has been allocated. It is widely believed that the class will be considered complete after Ganieda and the 6th hull cancelled, unless events at the end of the French arm suggest an alternative plan.

Position Crew

Bridge 15

Lasers 2

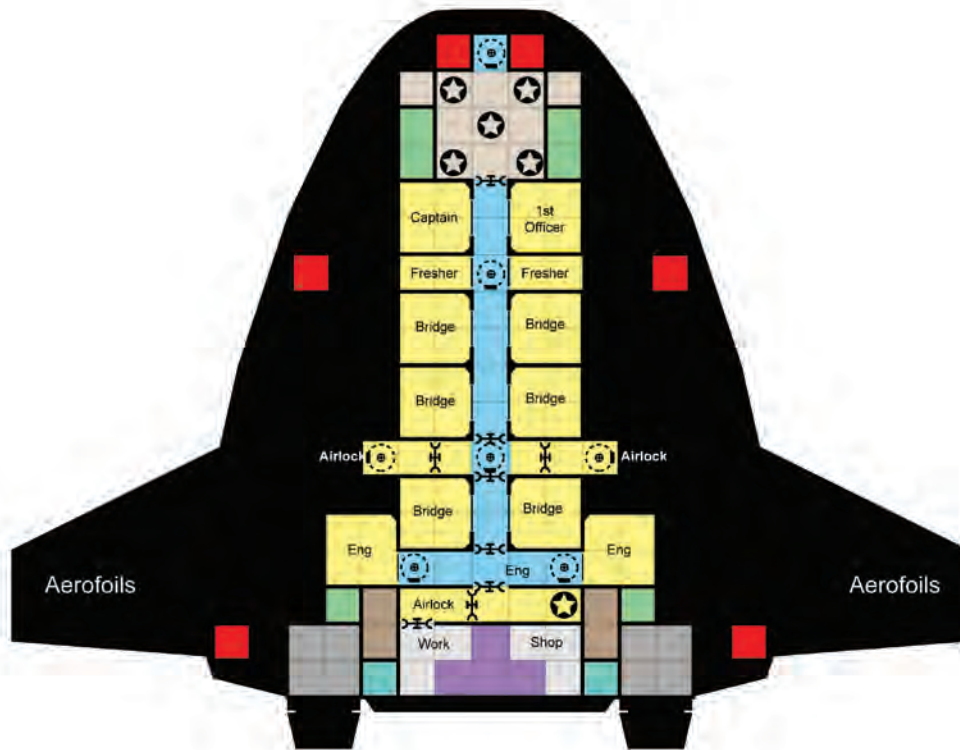
Engineering 3

Remote 2

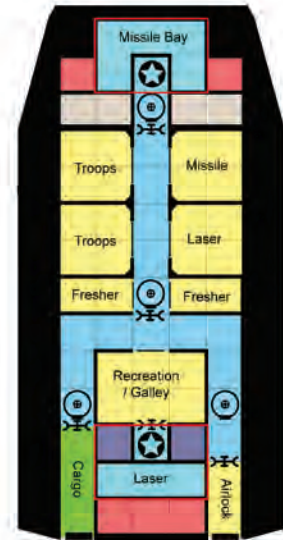
Ships Troops 8

Total: 26

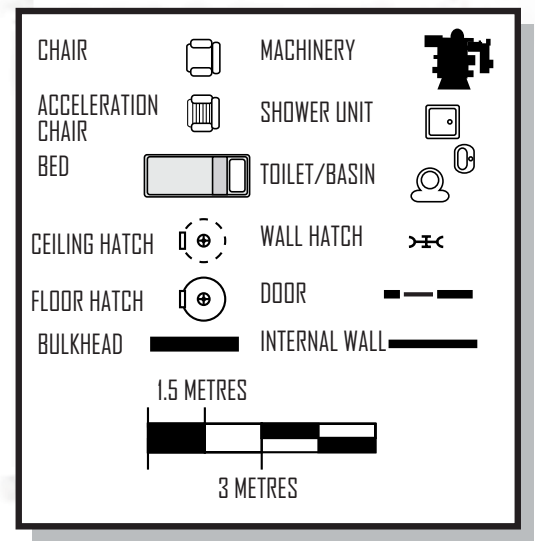
Lower Deck



Upper Deck



- Engineering
- Passageway
- Crew
- Weapons
- Sensors
- STOL
- Radiators
- Fuel/Structure
- Bridge Avionics
- Powerplant
- Stutterwarp
- Thruster
- UTES
- Cargo Space
- Modular Space (6t)
- ★ Workstation



<i>Hull</i>			<i>Size</i>	<i>Cost</i>
<i>150 Ton Hybrid LB SL</i>	150			
<i>Hull</i>	3	<i>Structure</i>	3	2.6
	Hybrid LB		1.5	1.5
	STOL		3	0.4
	Heat Shielding			1.5
	Stealth Hull			15
<i>Armour</i>	Composite	3	3.75	0.625
<i>Stutterwarp Drive</i>	Unloaded	2.32	1.78	5.34
<i>New Military G</i>	Loaded	2.02		
	Tactical	4		
<i>Reaction Drive</i>	Air Breathing Thruster B	2g	3.6	9.6
<i>Power Plant</i>	MHD Turbine G		1.43	0.5
<i>Radiators</i>	Radiators H		0.2	0.01
<i>Weapons</i>				
<i>Laser Turret A</i>	2 x EAA-1000 Laser		2	5.5
<i>UTES</i>			1	0.6
<i>Missile Bay 1</i>	4 x Silka		2.2	0.022
<i>Remote Object Controllers</i>	1		0.25	0.5
<i>Screens</i>				
<i>Bridge</i>	Hardened, Holo		8	1.125
<i>Computer</i>	Mod 2			0.16
<i>Software</i>	Stutterwarp/B			0.2
	Library			0
	Maneuver/0			0
	FC/1			2
	Evade/1			1
<i>Electronics/Sensors</i>	Advanced Military (TL12)		5	4
<i>Fuel</i>	Thrusters	7 hours	21	
	Power Plant	10 days	33.6	
<i>Cargo</i>			0.89	
<i>Staterooms</i>	14		58	1.4
<i>Other Fixtures</i>	Recreation		2.8	0.0014
<i>Spin Habitat</i>				
<i>Comfort</i>	-1			
<i>Maintenance Cost</i>				0.045
<i>Life Support Cost</i>				0.041
<i>Total Cost</i>				53.5834



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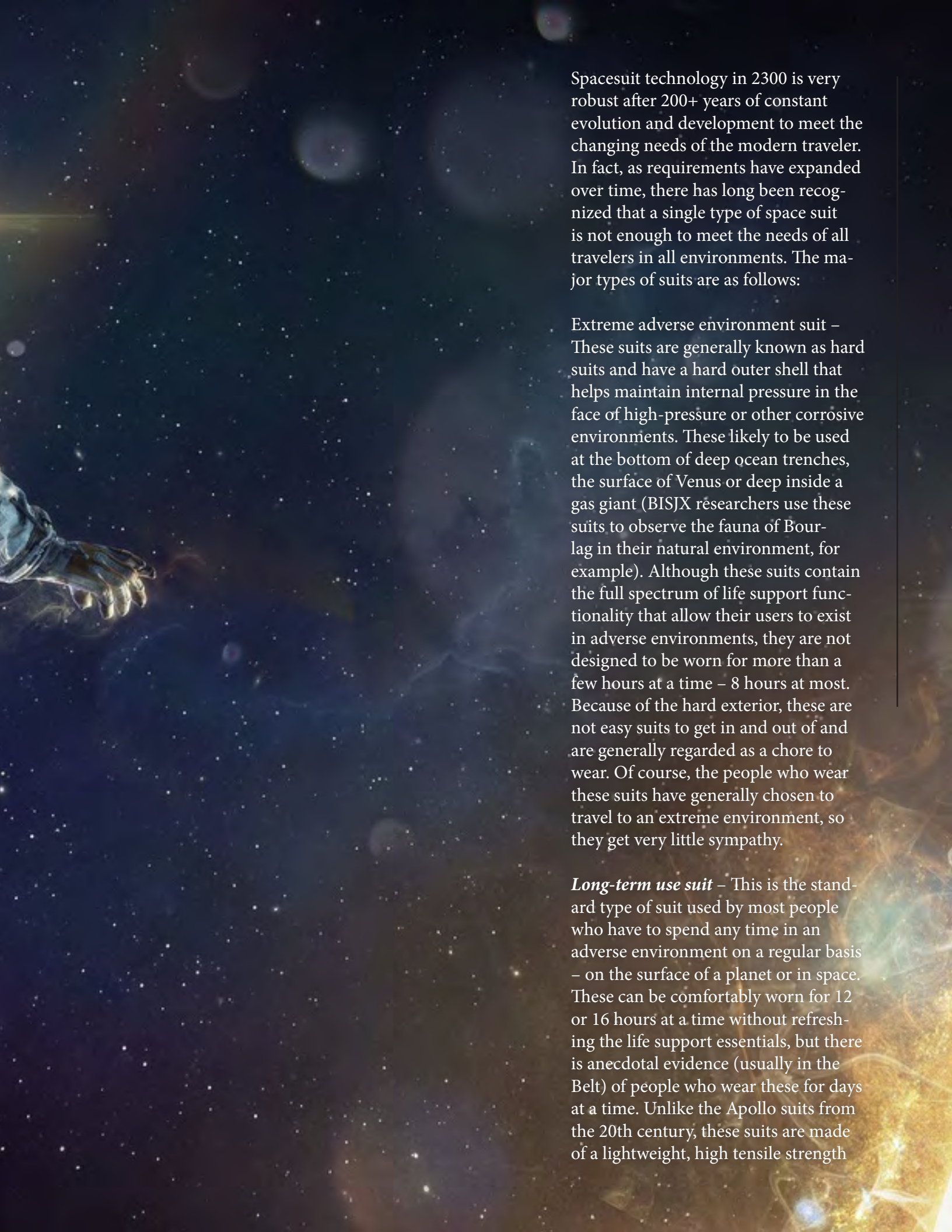
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A full-page background image of an astronaut in a white and orange NASA space suit floating in space. The astronaut is oriented vertically, with their head at the top. The suit has "NASA" printed on the chest. A large, dark, cratered planet (likely Mars) is visible in the upper left corner. The background is a deep blue space filled with stars.

THIN SKIN

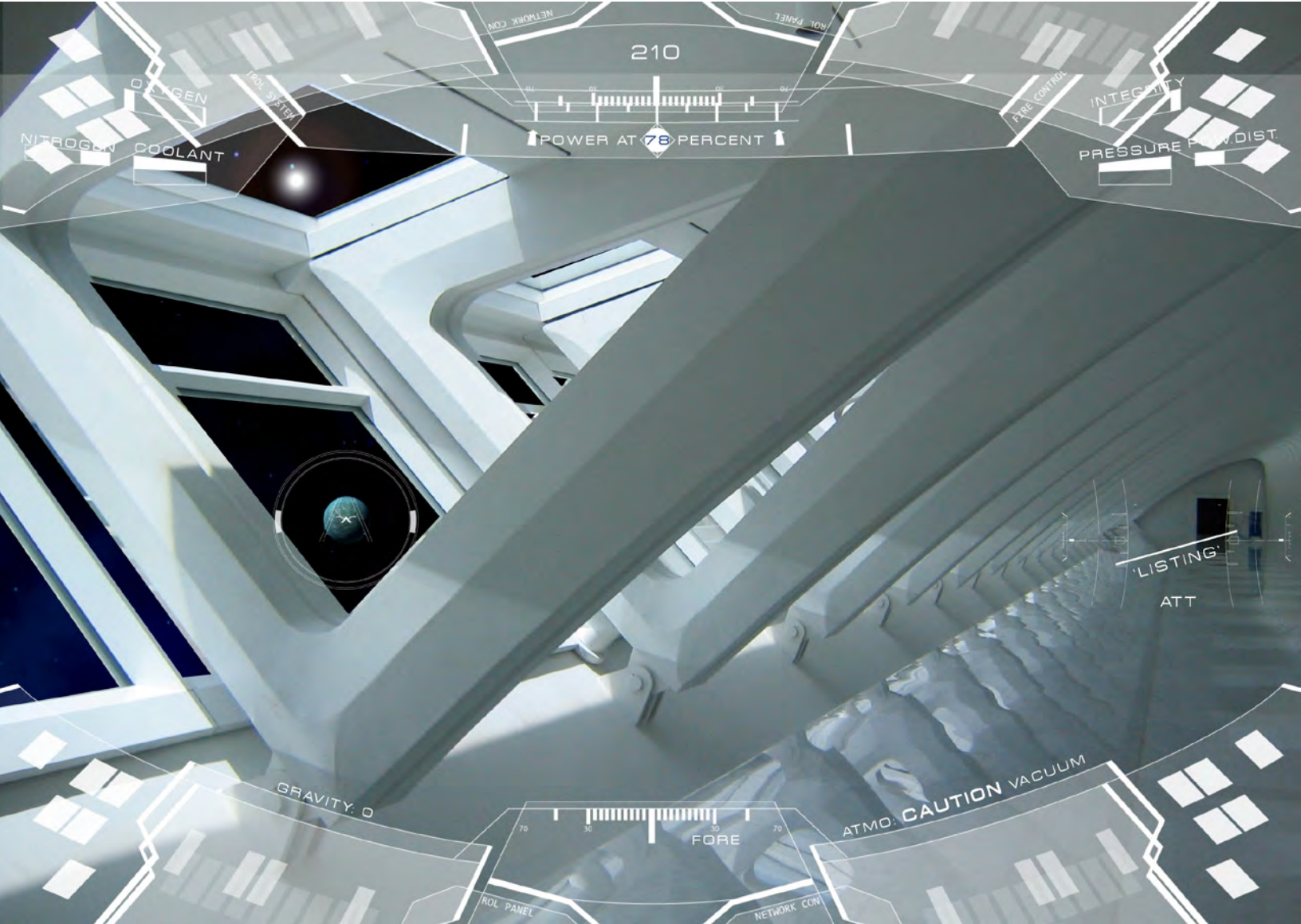
PRESSURE SUITS IN 2300AD
BY MATT RHODES

A hand in a futuristic space suit, with a metallic, segmented appearance, reaches out from the left side of the frame. The background is a deep blue space filled with numerous small, bright stars and some larger, faint nebulae. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the suit's hand.

Spacesuit technology in 2300 is very robust after 200+ years of constant evolution and development to meet the changing needs of the modern traveler. In fact, as requirements have expanded over time, there has long been recognized that a single type of space suit is not enough to meet the needs of all travelers in all environments. The major types of suits are as follows:

Extreme adverse environment suit – These suits are generally known as hard suits and have a hard outer shell that helps maintain internal pressure in the face of high-pressure or other corrosive environments. These likely to be used at the bottom of deep ocean trenches, the surface of Venus or deep inside a gas giant (BISJX researchers use these suits to observe the fauna of Bourlag in their natural environment, for example). Although these suits contain the full spectrum of life support functionality that allow their users to exist in adverse environments, they are not designed to be worn for more than a few hours at a time – 8 hours at most. Because of the hard exterior, these are not easy suits to get in and out of and are generally regarded as a chore to wear. Of course, the people who wear these suits have generally chosen to travel to an extreme environment, so they get very little sympathy.

Long-term use suit – This is the standard type of suit used by most people who have to spend any time in an adverse environment on a regular basis – on the surface of a planet or in space. These can be comfortably worn for 12 or 16 hours at a time without refreshing the life support essentials, but there is anecdotal evidence (usually in the Belt) of people who wear these for days at a time. Unlike the Apollo suits from the 20th century, these suits are made of a lightweight, high tensile strength



So what happens should a suit fail?

Conventional fiction comes up with all sorts of unfortunate events when a suit rips or tears but the actuality of such an event is different than is usually portrayed in cinema.

There have been, thankfully, very few opportunities to study a body after exposure to vacuum but it has happened. It all depends on the length of exposure and how that

exposure occurs.



material and are fairly easy to get in and out of; and can be put on in a matter of minutes, if necessary. Anyone who has to wear this type of suit probably owns their own and many owners have customized theirs to suit personal preference. In many cases, their suit is the most expensive thing they own.

Short-term use suit – These are often known as tourist suits or emergency suits and are often easy to spot because they show very little evidence of daily use and are usually not customized. They are not rated for long-term use and the life support will start to provide warnings at 3 hours and fail completely at 6. Most suits of this type do not have the robust communications, command and control features of working suits and cannot be easily customized to fit

the needs of their wearers. These suits are remarkably easy to get in and out of, however, which is why they are generally issued for emergency use.

Skinsuit – Similar to a wetsuit, the skinsuit is little more than an unpressurized body stocking made of the same high tensile strength material that other suits are made of, with a plastic retractable helmet and a small oxygen bottle with barely an hour of use. It is very common for people wearing hard suits and long term suits to wear a skinsuit under their normal suit as an emergency backup and, in these cases, the life support for the exterior suit can be switched over to the skinsuit. Suitsuits are often used by explorers in alien oceans who don't want to expose their skin to unknown waters.

It is common for hard suits and long-term use suits to be modified to meet specific environmental circumstances, given that these are almost always used in a single environment. In addition, many of these suits are outfitted with computers that can be used for command and control of drones or other remotes.

Many long-term suits sport custom paint jobs and/or decoration that makes it easier to identify individuals when in use. Some employers frown on this kind of thing, but most allow it as long as the decoration is not pornographic and does not impede mobility.

Because long-term use suits are the most common type of suit in current use, there are a number of aftermarket options available including (but not limited to) flexible helmets and face screens, work boots with steel toes and/or magnetic soles, head's up display (HUD) on the inside of the helmet, integral video cameras, simple video games, long range radio transmitters, Geiger counters and emergency beacons. In most jurisdictions, it is illegal to install weapons in a space suit, but some of the less legal customization shops might be willing to, for a price.

Because these suits have become such an essential and ubiquitous item, there are many different manufacturers from all of the major spacefaring nations. In general, parts from one manufacturer will not work with parts from another without a lot of modification – something that almost never happens. There are the usual complaints about backwards compatibility when a manufacturer comes out with a new model sporting newer features and the inevitable disagreements over which manufacturers make better suits. Some employers require all workers to use

the same kind of suit to minimize the amount of maintenance equipment necessary on a worksite, but this is usually only found in the larger installations.

People who use and wear space suits on a regular basis are fastidious about maintaining them and ensuring that they are ready to be worn at a moment's notice. Those that do not pick up this habit early on don't tend to survive in the extreme environments that these suits protect against. A common deprecating remark is that someone "can't even take care of his suit," indicating that they are incapable of paying attention to the little things.



Touching or modifying someone else's suit without permission is a major offense and can even lead to accusations of attempted murder – the suit is life. By the same token, suit technicians are among the most valuable members of the team and people often go out of their way to make friends with them – even those workers that are notoriously anti-social work to maintain good relationships with the people who keep them alive.

In a catastrophic accident similar to that seen in the movie 'Gravity' then there's so much shrapnel dancing around you at speed that your odds are slim. If the trauma doesn't kill you then you have hard vacuum to contend with. That means you have about END x2 in seconds before you lose consciousness (provided you've remembered to exhale. Failure to do so will show you a very literal demonstration of 'explosive decompression' as your lungs burst.)

*On one shuttle mission an astronaut had an itchy right palm and just ignored it until he got back on board. It turns out part of the structure had ripped a small hole in the palm of his suit and the blood from his small wound froze and, after a fashion, resealed the suit and slowed down the decompression. The general effects are fogging of vision as your surface water evaporates, unconsciousness in about 16 seconds, and death from hypoxia or heart failure soon after. You do not freeze or boil. 'If recovered and pressurised within about 2 minutes the victim can recover swiftly with few ill effects.'*¹

Source

¹Bioastronautics Data Book, Parker, West 1973



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‘Horizon’

(Created with Cosmic Pack 3D currently in Beta)

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PATRONS by STEFF. WORTHINGTON

SILAS CANTRELL ON EARTH

The Graffiti Movement

Post-WW3 Japan was reinvigorating itself and was expanding into foreign territories initially to aid in relief efforts. This turned to possession once Japan's government could see the value in claiming resources before other nations did. This brought sorrow to His imperial highness but he was powerless to intervene in the face of such need at home. The populace too were unhappy as they had already seen war and it's dire effects and were once again the targets of destructive weapons. The last thing the Japanese wanted was an excuse for right wing

Silas is an art collector of some renown and has built up his small but profitable business, Salamander, from the ground up and it is now widely considered one of the foremost art houses in the Core. His reputation is vitally important to him and it is in the capacity of 'discrete investigators' that the Player Characters are to be hired.

Based initially in the American capital of Reston, he found it necessary to move his entire operation to London so he could access European markets, visit the French art sellers in Paris, and to utilise favourable trade and duty tariffs between the countries of the European Co-Prosperity Sphere, or ECoPS (Britain, France, Spain, Flanders, Ireland, The Netherlands, & The Scandinavian Union).

Brought up in an austere community in west Pennsylvania, Silas knew from an

early age that items that were not utilitarian were of little practical use. Silas' ancestors during Twilight and for a century after formed part of the West Penn Communes. A group of townships and farming communities that banded together during the worst years to feed each other, defend against bandits, and finally, to demand concessions from the re-formed union of American states. Fiercely independent they resisted inducements to re-join the union prematurely and instead relied on their own resources until the memory of U.S. infighting faded after a generation.

Despite this austere and practical outlook Silas began to notice the effect that precious things would have on others. Enamoured with such artists as Delit, Nilsen, Nacario, and other members of the Post-Americana movement, Silas left his home and journeyed to Reston to work for a

small auction house, Franklin's, specialising in pre-Twilight art. He quickly learned his trade and started out on his own with his savings and a small community bank loan.

His business grew because he was only interested in reclaiming famous art from before Twilight as opposed to everything, and because he also had an uncanny eye for what was going to break into the art world a short time before it did. This made him popular with investors who trust his judgment without question. He now owns 12 branches of Salamander which are split between America and Europe and he plans to open a branch in Wellon by the year's end.

All that may be suddenly thrown into jeopardy if the PC's cannot help him recover an item stolen from his London office.

About 7pm last Wednesday a young man on a hoverbike drove past the Salamander gallery on the corner of Duncannon Street & the Strand in London and threw an Systeme Audionique concussion grenade at 2 guards transporting a priceless work of art to a waiting van. The vehicle transponders and the rider's license signal in his helmet had been disabled. This has meant that the rider's identity is unknown to both the police and to the gallery. Unfortunately, because Cantrell wanted the police to be discrete, they arrived a little later than was helpful and the rider got away with the painting. They sent up a drone from their Bridgeport Jailbird to seek out and tag or EMP the bike but he was gone. The police are trying in vain to track all the hover bikes in London but Cantrell needs a swift resolution as his reputation is on the line.

The rider may have disabled his I.D.

markers but judging by the excellent video from security cameras outside the gallery he knew exactly where to go and also his escape route. It is a fair assumption that the thief knows the gallery well.

Inspector Reg. Miller of New Scotland Yard is a self important little man who thinks he's right and any dissenters are obviously wrong. He's convinced himself that it was a crime of theft perpetrated by an organised crime syndicate that he's had a few run ins with, the White Dragon. A small but effective Asian criminal gang akin to the Triads, the White Dragon have cornered the upper class drug market and use corrupt city traders to be the middle men for their trade. Miller is obsessed with taking them down after his son overdosed on drugs 3 years ago.

Sensing a degree of narrow mindedness from the Inspector, Cantrell hires the PCs through their agency to track down the artwork before it's owner, Mr Hinata Omuru, and his wider client base hears about the theft.

If the PCs think to check the security footage for the past 2 weeks they notice an oddly nervous young Japanese male walking into the gallery on a couple of occasions and going straight to 'Time Changes' by Lady Aiko Nakagawa whilst ignoring all other pieces. The PCs should get the feeling he's casing the place. After a week he stops visiting and on his last visit looks considerably frustrated before striding out. It is at this point the suspect decides to rob the painting when it's being put back into storage at the end of it's run in the gallery (frequent patrons know that each artwork, if unsold, will stay in the gallery for a month and then go back into storage or to their owners).

Due to Inspector Miller's blinkered approach, the police are yet to check the security footage inside the gallery.

parties to go on another empire building expedition, further causing calamity for the people in the home islands.

At this time of social conflict, where national pre-Twilight guilt clashed with social need, vibrant new expressions were taking place. Theatre, sculpture, and painting all showed schizophrenic dichotomy and a need to rebel but also be respectful to culture and it's mores.

The graffiti movement was a way for artists to be anonymous and show their dislike of the regime. After a year or two the National Police Agency or NPA, were no nearer to catching the artists than they were previously and frustrations were starting to set in. That all changed when a Time Magazine interview with the Emperor was accompanied with photographs of him in his sitting room at the palace. On the wall in one of the photographs was an image of '21st Century Samurai' by Arata (depicting a samurai wielding an AR-15 on battlements). Once the people saw that the Emperor approved then political pressure was off and the graffiti of various

artists was highly sought after. In truth, the whole 'Emperor loves graffiti' idea was an embarrassing misunderstanding. The TIME photo was taken at the exact moment there was a projection of a news broadcast showing the picture in a bulletin about how to report graffiti artists for the good of the nation. The Emperor has never endorsed an art form and, as usual, has remained silent on the issue of common media and culture.

Lady Aiko Nakagawa's paintings and prints are highly sought after and 'Time Changes' was sold to the late Mrs. Omuru for ¥1.4m as a gift to her husband. The image shows a tableaux of people in various stages of a kiss and embrace and was created in 2008. It imbues pop art with deepening sexuality.



'Time Changes'



'Mr. Omuru's Keepsake'

What's Really Going On: Roll a D6 or select whichever one of the following situations appeals to you the most:

- **1** All is as represented. Cantrell wants the artwork found before the artworld discovers that his company can't keep valuable items safe. The young Japanese man is a fan and simply wants to keep it for himself. He sees himself as the only person devoted enough to the picture to be able to look after it and appreciate it.

A relatively simple facial recognition check should reveal his name and whereabouts.

- **2** The thief is Riku Harusha and intends to sell the painting to a local fence so he can return home to Joi. He isn't intrinsically bad, he's just broke. The problem is that Mr Omuru is the leader of 'White Dragon' and the gallery has been laundering money for the gang. He will not rest until he sees Harusha at the bottom of the River Thames. Again, his face should give him away but the White Dragon may already be hot on his trail.

- **3** The owner, Hinata Omuru, recently lost his wife and had a breakdown. As the CEO of the Manila-Okinawa Trust Bank the share price will plummet if the public become aware of Mr. Omuru's 'predicament'.

To save face, Mr Omuru's *Fuku* (or deputy) has stepped forward and arranged for Mr. Omuru to visit the Civic Free Hospital to receive bereavement counselling. In truth, his deputy (Mr Nori Himura) arranged for his memory to be altered by a Quinn technician so that he can function without memory of his wife. It was Mr Himura who has put 'Time Changes' up for sale at Salamander.

However, he did not anticipate that Taro Matsuoka (Mr Omouru's estranged son) would emerge to pay his respects. Himura was unaware of his existence. Knowing what the painting represents to his father, Taro has stolen the painting unaware that his father no longer remembers it.

Mr Himura will go to any lengths to secure the company's future and to, as he sees it, protect his honourable employer from more grief. Grief that, he believes, would lead to his employer's

suicide. Mrs Omuru committed suicide after suffering a lengthy depression. Mr Omuru, would have killed himself to be with his wife in the next world and considered the act *Shinjū*, or double suicide between lovers, even though his wife has been gone for 3 months.

While Mr Himura saved him from this he knows that Omuru's son is a problem and has decided, using hired Yakuza, to have Omuru's son 'disappeared'. He already knows of the theft of the painting and of the PC 'Gaijin' (foreigners) involved in this debacle he has found himself the centre of. His first thought is to way-lay the PCs to find out what they know. Ultimately, the quest may lead back to a very tense situation in the Omuru mansion in Berkshire between father, son, the PCs, and Himura and his hired Yakuza muscle.

One possible resolution would be filling Mr Omuru in on all he's lost (essentially his married life and his dearest love) and watching Omuru wail in anguish at Himura. Shamed, Himura will then commit Seppuku, or ritual suicide to atone for his shame and misdeeds to his employer in front of him (or his house if communication is not face-to-face). His Yakuza hirelings however, have been paid to do a job and will not stop until dead.

- **4** The painting is a forgery. Both Cantrell and Matsuoka know this and the young Japanese man is determined to prove it. Matsuoka was once part of the arts division of the National Police Agency of Japan until he was framed by Cantrell to get him off his tail. Matsuoka escaped from prison and shame is driving

him to extraordinary lengths to finish Cantrell. Cantrell asks the PCs to track him down and retrieve the painting. He will then pay White Dragon hitmen to kill Matsuoka and remove the threat once and for all. The length of the PCs involvement depends on how much they want to question Matsuoka. If Cantrell suspects the PCs are siding with his nemesis then they too will become targets of the White Dragon.

- **5** Salamander has made some uncharacteristically bad investments and Silas Cantrell appears to have lost his touch. He is watching his business crumble so pays a young Japanese acquaintance to steal the painting. Silas will claim on the insurance, then Matsuoka will use his contacts to sell the painting on the black market. Unbeknownst to each of them, the other is planning to murder his associate and keep the entire money.

- **6** In actuality there has been no theft. Both Matsuoka and 'Inspector' Miller are hirelings of Cantrell's. This has all been a test in order to see how efficient the PCs are at their work, how quick to the use of force, and how discrete they can be. Cantrell has been approached by a Canadian who is acting on behalf of a prominent Sung family who wish to acquire Human art. If successful, the PCs are to take 'Time Changes' to Stark and act as intermediaries between the seller, Mr Omuru and Cantrell, and the leader of the Sung family. If they break the law or use force at any point they will have failed the test. The picture is genuine.

Further events are up to the referee.



**CAN
YOU
FILL
THIS
SPACE?**

**THEN
COLONIAL
TIMES
NEEDS
YOU!**

**WE
NEED
ART
AND
TEXT**

**SEE
CONTACT
INFO
ON
CONTENT'S
PAGE**



STYGIAN FOX



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Thought'*

"It amazes me that before the discovery of Tirane, it was widely speculated by sophisticated, educated people that the discovery of life on other worlds might somehow present difficulties for people of faith. Yet, the discovery of Tirane was one great moments in human spiritual history.

Here is this place, of all the worlds we have found, best suited to us, other than our own Earth. Every variable, every feature is pleasant for us. Right next door, waiting for human beings. And this was a chance occurrence?

A lucky convergence of natural law? The odds of Tirane being what it is, where it is, is so remote that it defies any explanation that does not invoke the benevo-

History

When Tirane was discovered and explored, humans were taken aback. Leading theorists had speculated that Earth-type life would be rare, and that these Earth-type biospheres would likely be quite deadly to unprotected humans, triggering fatal allergic attacks or inflicting lethal for unprepared humans. The discovery that, orbiting Alpha Centauri A, there existed an world that not only possessed as complex a biosphere as Terra's but one that was just as hospitable to humans as Terra, stunned many. More, as at least one observer noted, the fact was that Tirane was arguably more suitable for humanity than Earth, with a distribution of biomes (fewer deserts, less tundra, somewhat smaller polar ice caps) that made relatively more of Tirane's land surface available to human habitation than Terra's. Orthodox religious authorities were able to adapt to this discovery,

The later discovery of Nibelungen and Beowulf on the French Arm in the 2140s, followed by the explorations of Han Shan and Chengdu on the Chinese Arm and Beta Canum on the French Arm later in the 22nd century, revealed that broadly Earth-compatible biospheres quite commonly existed on the very different worlds in the stars

that happened to be closest to Sol. Garden worlds could orbit very young stars like Neubayern or Epsilon Indi or old and highly evolved stars like Delta Pavonis, be tidelocked like Nibelungen or possess a normal rotation period like Chengdu, be low-G like Nibelungen or high-G like Chengdu--it didn't seem to matter. How, a large number of people asked themselves, did this all come about? Orthodox religions tended to argue that the abundance of worlds constituted proof of intelligent design. Others of a more secular bent believed this to be confirmation of the theory of natural panspermia, with the implications that the galaxy would be populated by Earth-like garden worlds. More adventurous groups, like the Edenites of Wellon who believe that Tirane was the actual Biblical Eden, adapted existing religions.

Others were unsatisfied by these two arguments. In 2198, Emmeline Gbagbo, an electronics engineer who had immigrated several years earlier to Nouveau Provence from the Guinea Coast, had a series of disturbing dreams, of earlier residents of Tirane and war. Concerned and confused, at a voodoo ceremony in her new home of Mirambeau Gbagbo presented herself for an extended exorcism. Gbagbo astonished everyone present when she announced that she was possessed by Ramtha, an ancient Terran warrior who possessed great knowl-

edge about past history and guidelines for present conduct and was actually an aspect of the orisha Ogoun, lord of war and metal and the entity that found the first land for human beings. At future sessions, Gbagbo continued to channel Ramtha, who not only communicated an ethical system based on the denial of the concepts of original sin and an undesirable material world and the embrace of knowledge in all its forms, but told listeners that life was everywhere in the neighbourhood of Sol because of the Precursors, an amazingly advanced civilization with parapsychical and physical manifestations. For thousands of millions of years, the Precursors had roamed the universe, seeding life on lifeless worlds and protecting living worlds from catastrophes. Alpha Centauri was a major Precursor centre, with two garden worlds, one each orbiting A and B. Eight hundred million years ago, a great conflict broke

out within this civilization when a faction of would-be conquerors tried to make these seeded worlds into an empire. The war ended up destroying both sides, with the last survivors of the original Precursors sealed on underground caverns on a Ramtha--Limbes--made an uninhabitable hell. It was humanity's responsibility, Ramtha said, to free them.

Gbagbo's visions were mocked by most Tiraneans, but her undeniable charisma and the content of her communications were taken seriously by a few. Many fellow practitioners of voodoo believed in the authenticity of Ramtha and made Gbagbo his priestess. Some members of Tirane's New Age religious movements claimed Ramtha as their own and also came closer to Gbagbo's orbit. Elsewhere, the Ramtha Cult's emphasis on the need for critical thought and research appealed to many technically trained people, particularly to Garten-

ers who saw links between the Cult and their colonies' well-managed planning. After Gbagbo's death in 2254, the Cult survived, slowly evolving and elaborating over time. Gbagbo's appointed heir, Nordgartener Lena Schneider, continued in her tradition, expanding on the first revelations and formalized the training the Enlightened, spiritually and socially attuned members of the Ramtha Cult who would propagate the movement's goals--and membership--in wider Tiranean society.

In recent years, the Cult has gone from strength to strength. Freihafen and Tirania have become a major focus of the Enlightened, as the unsettled social condition in the two countries combines with the technocratism of Freihafen in particular to create interesting potential markets, but the Cult has established at least a nominal presence in nearly all of the Tiranean societies. It hasn't hurt that the movement has made a series of canny political choices, opting to remain quiet in Nouvelle Provence during the junta, supporting Freihafen's independence movement, and applauding the establishment of a rationally-planned French Empire. Some of the beliefs of the Cult have begun to spread into mainstream religions, certain believers rationalizing Ramtha as an angel or a djinn. The Cult has even begun to spread beyond Tirane, taken to a Terra that's seen as playing a critical role in the liberation of the Limbes Precursors and to a Nibelungen that's seen as one of the Precursors' last, greatest achievements. With an estimated two million followers, the Ramtha Cult is a movement to watch.

Ideology

The Ramtha Cult is an increasingly well-disciplined movement that's devoted to

lence of a divine creator is obviously insufficient. This planet is the very proof theologians have sought all along of Intelligent Design.” ~ Father Maximillian Adolfo.



The Ramtha Cult's emblem/motif.

the perfection of knowledge about the spiritual and physical worlds, as communicated by Ramtha through Gbagbo, Schneider, and their eventual successors. The Cult is flexible: it can be practiced as a polytheistic religion, with different loa appearing in different forms, or as a monotheistic religion, with different loa all ultimately subordinate to a supreme creator. As such, it's potentially compatible with established religions: at no point has Ramtha explicitly denied (say) the divinity of Jesus Christ or Muhammad, or the precepts of Buddhism, or the existence of the Hindu pantheon. It's quite possible for members of the Cult to consider themselves in good faith to be good Lutherans or Ismaili, whatever their fellows might think.

Members of the Cult are concerned with achieving Enlightenment, a state of being marked by--in Gbagbo's original words--"a lucidity that will illuminate the universe." This Enlightenment has traditionally been achieved by the engagement of the body and the mind with the mysteries of the Precursors, through activity devoted to the betterment of the human community and through a process of self-examination traditionally achieved by meditation, although the ingestion of psychotropics has also played a role. Cybernetic enhancements are also starting to be used towards this end, particularly those which expand the capabilities of the mind, although they are still controversial to the body of Cult members.

Once Cult members achieve Enlightenment, they are expected to work toward the Cult's goal of freeing the Precursors from their Limbesian exile. Simple methods, like simply blasting the Limbesian crust away, are profoundly unacceptable, as no difference from the acts of the Destroyers. Instead, the

Cult believes that the Precursors can only be freed once Limbes becomes a beautiful garden world again. To do this, Cult theology teaches that human knowledge and technology must advance rapidly, with bio/nanotechnology and information technology and space technology all combining to produce a technology capable of shifting Limbes in its orbit and stripping away its superdense carbon dioxide atmosphere for a garden environment. As soon as that task is achieved, humans--and other, suitable, sapient species--can become as one with the Precursors. Until that time, humans must work to perfect their technology, spreading life to as many worlds as it can.

Different sects of the Ramtha Cult practice their faith in different ways. Some more orthodox sects borrow extensively from voodoo, for instance additionally invoking the psychopomp Papa Guédé as an intermediary between the physical world in the afterlife. Others place an emphasis on the use of technology as part of a general philosophy of self-improvement that has as its aim contact with parapsychical realms. All the different sects share a common belief in Ramtha as a parapsychical messenger from the Precursors.

Activities

The Ramtha Cult has gotten quite a lot of derisory press attention thanks to the activities of less rigorous Ramtha Cultists who have been attracted to oddities on Tirane, to places like the Watchtower in south-central Wellon and those who play a major role in the unofficial Ramtha research program of Provincia do Brasil's University of Nova Ostia. This has exacerbated significant tensions within the Ramtha Cult between the more and less rigorous factions of

the Cult, with Schneider--before her current career, an aerospace engineer--mostly coming down on the side of the more scientific factions while generously allowing for the possibility that other technological civilizations may well have visited Tirane between the Precursors' departure and humanity's arrival. They just aren't that important.

What does matter to the Cult, and what disturbs many who are in the knowl- edge, is the emphasis placed by the Cult on its members' acquisition of scientific and technological prowess. Many serious Ramtha Cultists are interested in megascale engineering, especially terra- forming: The activities of the French on Nous Voila and Sans Souci, the Ameri- cans on Ellis, the Australians on King- sland, and the Manchurians and UAR on Syun in the Zeta Tucanae system are all studied in detail by Cultists, even if these efforts don't include any Cultists as workers or planners. Other Cultists seek to develop the advanced biotech- nologies necessary to alter planetary atmospheres, perhaps also with the ad- dition of cybertech that could help co- ordinate these projects and the devel- opment of stutterwarp drives capable of longer trips to more worlds offering more potential.

Cultists' views of politics vary, although the bulk of members (and Schneider herself) would prefer that humanity unite in a federation of some kind, in- cluding whatever alien species would be interested in joining humans in their great adventure. The protection of ecol- ogies everywhere from overexploitation is a central concern, although many Cultists see nothing wrong with com- bining species from different worlds--if all species and ecologies on most worlds have the same origins, the trans- plantation of species to different worlds could help accelerate evolution. (Terra's

Orbital Quarantine Control has already had some run-ins with Cultists.) Ram- tha Cultists are almost uniformly hos- tile to the Kafers, seeing them as beings like the Destroyers, casual devastators of lives, worlds, and civilizations. Some Cultist organizations are involved in aid efforts on Beta Canum and Kimanjano.

The Cult has numerous enemies. With- in the Cult itself, the "technocrats" and "Illuminated" are locked in conflict over control of the future direction of the movement. Outside the Cult, most of the established religions of Tirane are strongly opposed to the Cult, deeming it a mistake at best and a heresy at worst. (Despite its similarites to Afro-Brazilian religions, the Brazilian church's vigi- lance kept the Cult from getting a foot- hold in Provincia do Brasil.) Many Ti- ranean intelligence and police agencies are concerned that the Ramtha Cult's members are becoming increasingly prominent in various fields of scientific and technological research in Tirane, with Freihafen's Nachrichtendienst go- ing so far as to open a secret department dedicated to the surveillance of the Cult and its members. It doesn't help matters that there is some overlap in member- ship between the Ramtha Cult and the Pro-Entwicklung movement, owing to the movements' shared interest in de- veloping advanced technologies and using them to transcend the mundane human condition.





INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL TIMES

Depending on mass & drive, between 0.15 and 9.5 ly per day. The maximum distance a vessel can travel is 7.7ly between stars as a stop in a gravity well is required for drive/crew safety and performance.

Stutterwarp discharge requires approx. 40 hours.

circa 2300AD

●

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YOUR WORLD

THE LATEST NEWS BROUGHT TO YOUR FINGERTIPS



Not So Blue Moon

This photograph, which seemingly shows the moon alight, won the Patrick Zaentz Jury Prize in the nature category. It triumphed over some remarkable competition to win the \$15,000 prize. The artist, Maria Gergorian, told us she was going to use the prize to give up her regular job as a store assistant and go freelance. With quality images of this caliber, we can see why.

“They must breed ‘em dumb on Beowulf.”

An antique weapon is still a weapon and OQC official Cpt Mike Bridges pulled no punches in his evaluation of the Beowulf man who tried to sneak this priceless .357 onto Earth. The big Texan arrested the suspect but also had praise for his maintenance of the firearm.

“She’s a beauty. Lovingly maintained. I reckon she must be pre-Twilight. Three hundred years old and not a scratch on her.” It will be up to the courts to decide the man’s fate and also the fate of the weapon. Many at OQC think it should be admired in a museum.



“An Opportunity To Heal.”

In Brussels’ Palace of Justice (seen left) the Reconciliation Commission convenes to hear the tragic cases of abuse, murder, and rape that took place during the Flemish war of independence. Judge Choatan set out the way he saw the sessions as “An opportunity to heal. An opportunity to hear the wrongs, and the rights, of the vile conflict which cost so many lives. We are here as witnesses for the dead, but we must also remember that Flanders lives on and we must heal together, whatever our side in the war. I will not be swayed.”

Judge Choatan alluding there to the murder of his predecessor Judge Gillissen who was shot by the Pro-French terrorist group ‘Unite’ last month.

YOUR WORLD



When is 'you', still 'you'?

We've seen enormous advances in recent years in the field of surgery but an interesting argument is taking place on the *Drift*™ channels. French housewife Marie Fonstad (seen left) recently had a full facial transplant after a horrific house collapse in Lyon. We think the results of the surgery are amazing but many still balk at the idea of wearing a dead person's face. The late donor's husband is suing the hospital and, while these operations are run of the mill, feelings still run deep on such issues. Fonstad is still suffering some personality disphasia and sometimes doesn't feel she is still who she's grown up to be. Doctors think she will make a full recovery.

He's back. Naturally.

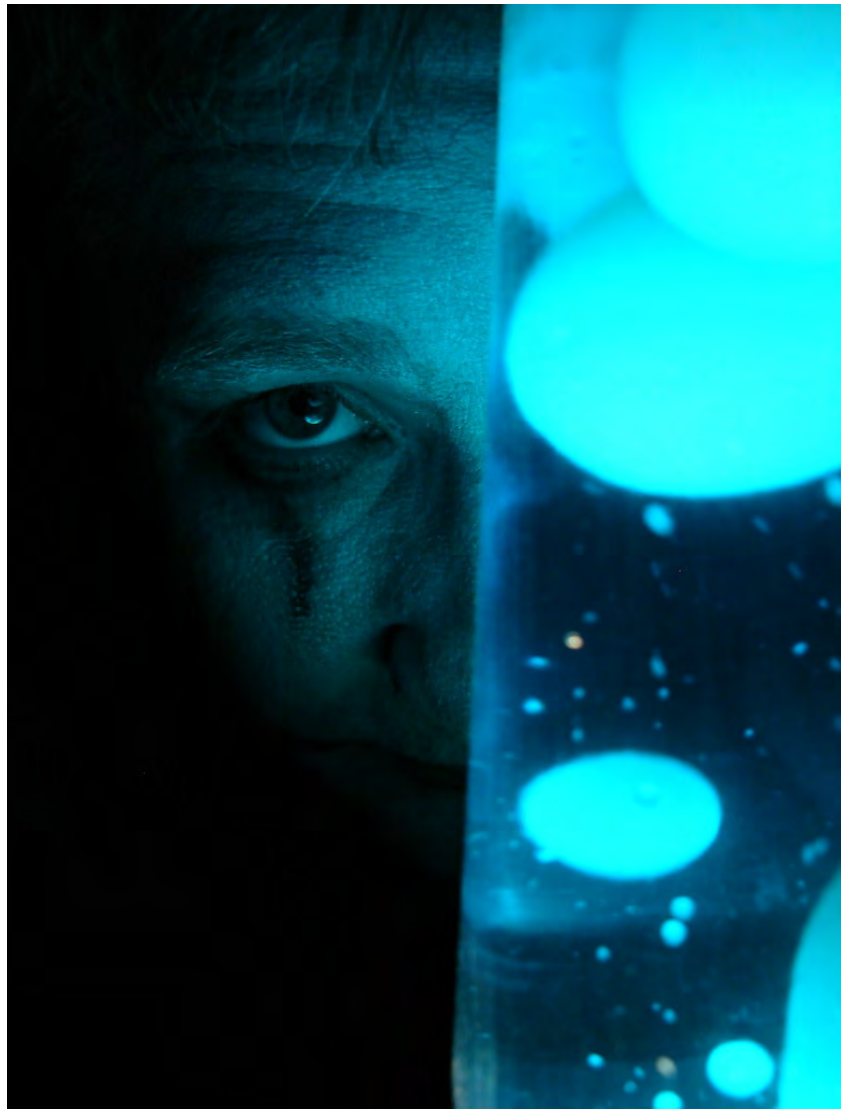
'Killing Time', has been wowing it's fans for the past 3 seasons and it seems that people can't get enough of everybody's favourite psychopath, Mr Nathaniel August.

The playboy billionaire (played by Kris Weisman) returns after a brief absence while on vacation to Paris (the actor had theatre commitments) to his usual stomping ground of Premiere, BCV.

This season, premiering 08-April on Earth, will see August face his demons over his dead father, seek to bring down corrupt police chief Duvallier, and evade capture by the PCM.

The rumour mill is rife with speculation about the return of one of Augusts foes to the series but cast and production members are keeping tight lipped.

'Killing Time' has broken all viewing records for major channels with an average of 120m viewers per episode (location adjusted).





'Empty Gestures'

This is the scene on most tube trains in Victoria, Wellon, today as citizens protest the 15% increase in fares by simply staying away. GNAL had recently acquired the transit system and had immediately raised it's prices to offset the cost of buying the network. Officials from GNAL have offered to enter talks with passenger groups but this has been described as "an empty gesture" by consumer groups.

For the most part, the tram system has been picking up the slack but the possible loss of revenue has even alarmed the Governor General.



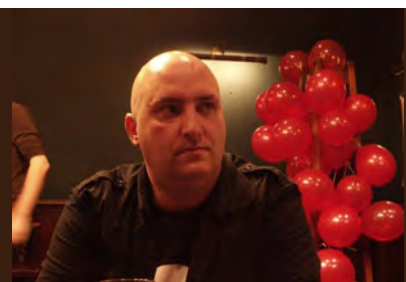
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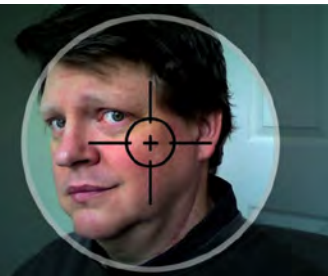
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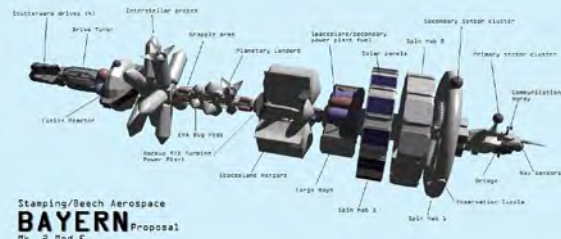


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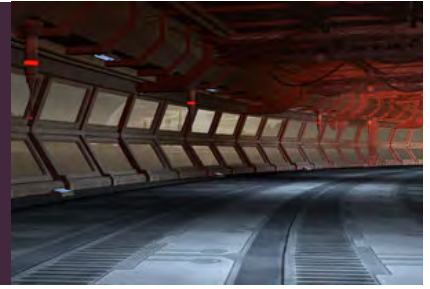
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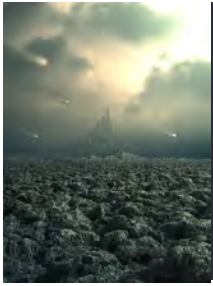
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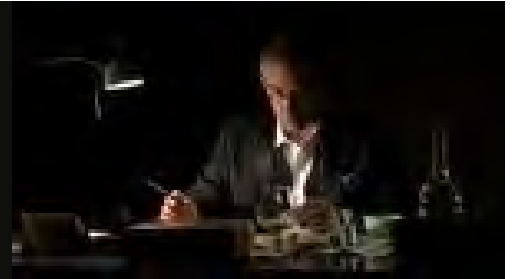


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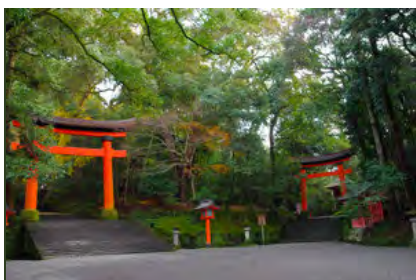


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