

## POWDERKEG #2

BY CHARLES RICE

The year is 2256 and the PCs are about to become part of history. After discovering coded information in the memory banks of the freighter *Sauvegarde*, the PCs decipher it and discover something terrible: war is coming. The common folk of the moons must now make their stand against the largest and most powerful fleet in Earth's history. War is coming.

### ABOUT PROMETHEUS RISING

Prometheus Rising is the signature setting of RPGObjects' series of Future d20 toolkits, *Blood and Space II*. In brief the Prometheus Rising setting is a PL 6 setting technologically and takes place entirely in the Earth solar system. The Prometheus setting is broken down into several distinct eras, allowing it to accommodate many different styles of play. The eras of the setting are: Genetic Age, Age of Discovery, Jovian Wars and Age of Expansion.

**The Genetic Age** encompasses the years 2000 through 2220, is something of a cyberpunk/post apocalyptic. In this age genetic engineering is discovered, various "models" of cloned humans are developed for warfare, labor and pleasure and society gradually deteriorates into a state of open warfare and anarchy. This era also sees the rise of multinational corporations from businesses to political and military entities in their own right.

**The Age of Discovery**, from 2220 through 2300, sees mankind recovering from the warfare of the previous age and attempting to rebuild the shattered Earth, while the corporations begin to explore the solar

system. This era sees the colonization of the moon, the mining of Earth's asteroid belt and numerous exploratory missions to map and explore the planets of the solar system.

This era also introduces aliens to the setting, with humans making first contact with The Prime, a telepathic, aquatic race living in oceans of the Jovian moon Europa, as well as the discovery of numerous ruins suggesting a now extinct alien species had colonized many planets in the Earth system in the distant past.

Finally this era introduces the last of the major fantastic elements to the setting: artificially intelligent robots who are used for work considered too dangerous for human or clone.

**The Jovian Wars**, from 2300 to 2400, this era sees widespread human colonization of the moons of Jupiter, called the "Jovian Moons" in the setting. These colonists, years away from Earth, preyed upon by pirates and at the mercy of the megacorps and a distant Earth government, rebel and attempt to set up their own government, free of Earth and corporate interference. This war sees the United Earth Government and all major corporations on one side and the Jovian colonists, artificially intelligent robots and The Prime on the other. The war ends with the Jovian Moons attaining independence and establishing an uneasy truce with Earth.

Finally, during **The Age of Expansion**, Prometheus Rising begins to see many of the elements typical of space opera. With the discovery of barely understood

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FTL drives, called “quicksilver drives”, humanity’s colonization of the Earth system takes on a much more rapid and intense pace. Jovian moons that were years away are now minutes or hours away and the new frontier becomes the moons of Saturn, Neptune and Uranus. These moons are hotly competed over by the UEG, the corps and the Jovian colonists, with a new round of hostilities possible.

Also, advanced ships with faster FTL drives begin exploring star systems besides the Earth system, encountering more alien ruins and more alien life forms. This era also sees the formation of the Aegis Project, a galactic survey arm of the United Earth Government dedicated to exploring the cosmos and making peaceful contact with alien life forms.

Despite the strong desire for peace on all sides, this era sees first contact with the predatory Fyr’Toll as well, a time traveling race that was attempting to conquer Earth by the path of least resistance, by gaining power over it during it’s primitive past. Now that humanity has acquired FTL and has begun to make contact with friendly alien races, the Fyr’Toll see them as a greater threat and declare war on all humans.

## ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS/OUTLINE

1. The Code: PCs decipher the information gained from the Sauvegarde’s computer. It is the reason the ship was attacked: a coded message they intercepted that orders the blockade force to attack. War is coming to the Jovian Moons.
2. Suppressed Transmission: The PCs attempt to contact their allies in the Jovian moons and can’t get through. The blockade has now extended to the

## PCS VESSEL: THE HOKUSHIN

### AML Hokushin (Fast Freighter)

The Hokushin, or “North Star” has been in the service of the African Mining League since 2286. Currently franchised by Kweku Mutakanyi, Hokushin used to make regular mining runs from Ganymede to the asteroid belt and back. Since the blockade, it has been making a different kind of run: evading the blockade to pick up medical supplies and foodstuffs from an independent hauler in the belt, then back through the blockade. The Hokushin is able to slip through easier than independent ships, as long as it maintains the pretense of being a good corporate franchise vessel.

<b>Type:</b> Ultralight	<b>Size:</b> Colossal (–8 size)
<b>Subtype:</b> Fast freighter	<b>Tactical Speed:</b> 3,500 ft. (7 sq.)
<b>Defense:</b> 7	<b>Length:</b> 110 feet
<b>Flat-footed Defense:</b> 5	<b>Weight:</b> 450 tons
<b>Autopilot Defense:</b> 5	<b>Targeting System Bonus:</b> +3
<b>Hardness:</b> 20	<b>Crew:</b> 4 (trained +4)
<b>Hit Dice:</b> 16d20 (320 hp)	<b>Passenger Capacity:</b> 4
<b>Initiative Modifier:</b> +2	<b>Cargo Capacity:</b> 300 tons (100 tons with mines)
<b>Pilot’s Class Bonus:</b> +3	<b>Grapple Modifier:</b> +16
<b>Pilot’s Dex Modifier:</b> +2	<b>Base Purchase DC:</b> 52
<b>Gunner’s Attack Bonus:</b> +2	<b>Restriction:</b> Restricted (+2)

**Attack:** None

**Attack of Opportunity:** None

### Standard PL 6 Design Specs

**Engines:** Ion engine, thrusters

**Armor:** Polymeric

**Defense Systems:** Autopilot system, magnetic field, radiation shielding

**Sensors:** Class II sensor array, targeting system

**Communications:** Laser transceiver, radio transceiver

**Weapons:** Minelayer, 2 Fusion Mines (used in extreme circumstances when being pursued)

**Grappling Systems:** Grapplers

**Equipment Carried on board:** 8 Combat Space Suits (Light Duty Vest, Environment Seal): these are corporate issued survival suits built with combat in mind and are standard issue on all corporate vessels.

electronic frontier, meaning no news of the attack will get to Earth, allowing the blockading force to make up any story they want.

Locating a nearby UEG transmit station, the PCs

receive an unexpected transmission from the base commander and must then decide whether to use force or subtlety to use the station to warn their comrades.

3. The Black Box: After subduing the guards and sending the signal, the PCs must determine what to do with the case around the base commander's wrist. If they kill him, cut the chain holding the case to his wrist or force the lock on the case, a signal is sent to the transmit station that seals the station and activates a self destruct sequence, forcing the PCs to attempt to make their way out of the station as quickly as possible before the station explodes.

## ADVENTURE ENCOUNTERS

### 1. THE CODE

In this episode the crew of the Hokushin deciphers the coded information they took from the memory banks of the Sauvegarde and learns something terrible: that the UEG and Megacorp forces of the blockade have been ordered to execute a surprise attack on the ships and colonies of the Jovian moons and bring them to heel.

**Captain's Briefing:** The coded entries in the Sauvegarde's memory banks might be valuable. They might also give us a clue as to why a corporate raider would slaughter the entire crew. Let's find out what secrets she held.

**Sensor/Computer Logs:** Decoding the message requires a Computer Use skill check. The better the PCs roll, the more information they will be able to retrieve from the coded message. A roll of 10 or less means the PCs learn the UEG is planning an attack, on a roll of 11-20 the PCs learn the attack is coming in 2 weeks and on a roll of 21 or greater the PCs learn the precise attack plan.

**Mission Information:** Depending on the amount of information the PCs are able to gain (and providing they are able to communicate it to the Jovian forces successfully in later encounters) will determine how poorly the Jovians fare in this initial attack.

If the PCs do not successfully warn the rebels of the coming attack, the Jovian forces will be almost completely wiped out and the revolt will end before it can begin.

If the PCs learn of the attack and communicate that to the rebels, the attack will be a serious defeat for the rebels but enough of their leaders and combat vessels will survive to salvage the situation and keep the rebellion going.

If the PCs learn the timing of the attack (a roll of 11-20) then the attack will be a mild victory for the UEG forces. The rebels will look like a very credible fighting force to have fares so well despite being outnumbered and outgunned.

If the PCs learn the entire battle plan (roll of 21+) the battle will be a bloody draw with the UEG forces losing more ships than the rebels. This will force the UEG to temporarily withdraw and will leave them without enough ships to enforce the blockade, allowing trade in and out of the region to occur much more easily.

### 2. SUPPRESSED TRANSMISSION

Now that the PCs have the information on the attack, they must attempt to warn the Jovian colonists before the attack is launched. After attempting to contact the Jovians, the PCs realize that all transmissions to the region are being jammed by the blockading force. The PCs must now find a way to contact their comrades before the attack.

**Captain's Briefing:** Since we can't get a signal through to the moons, we have to find a way to contact our friends at home. There's a sparsely populated

military transmission station near here that's our best bet, so I want plans for getting a signal through as soon as possible.

**Sensor/Computer Logs:** On a Computer Use check the PCs can find the following information about the transmit station:

(DC 15) The UEG transmit station provides secure transmissions, mail services, lasernet access and entertainment to the moons, along with secure, powerful military transmissions on restricted frequencies (this is what will be needed to penetrate the blockade jamming).

(DC 20) The transmit station is protected by a battery of UEG marines. Depending on the level of pirate activity, from one to two dozen marines will be present at a given time.

(DC 25) Besides the attack option, it is possible the PCs could hack into the systems of the transmit station to send their message remotely.

Also make a Knowledge (streetwise) check for any PCs who have ranks in the skill. On a DC 15 or better, reveal the following information to the PC in question: many UEG officers are open to "side jobs" as a way to supplement their meager incomes. It might be possible to approach the commander of the base and, with a suitable offering, convince him to send the message himself.

The PCs have several options to use the UEG station to send their message to the colonists. Of course there are many more ways the PCs might tackle the situation, but most approaches will involve some combination of the main approaches (force or subtlety). If the PCs come up with something truly inventive, the GM will have to adjudicate how well it works (or doesn't work).

And of course the PCs might use more than one approach. If their attempt to hack the base fails, they might then try to bribe the base commander, only to turn around and attack the station when his



asking price is too high! Although the PCs are not in command, have the Captain defer to their judgment on the best course of action. Whatever the PCs *do* decide to do, the captain will place them in charge of it. So if they decide to board the station by force, the PCs will lead the first wave of the attack. Isn't being a hero grand?

**Complication (Voice in the Dark):** Regardless of the PC's plans, when they first approach the base, something unexpected will happen.

As soon as they come into sensor range, the base commander will hail *them* with the following message:

*"Thank God! What took you so long! You were supposed to be here days ago! And here I sit all alone on this dinky little transmit station with just a squad of marines to protect it. This thing is like a weight around my neck. The longer I sit here with it the heavier it gets!"*

What's called for here is some quick thinking on the PCs' part. If they jump right in quickly and confidently, they can Bluff their way through on a skill check (DC 15). Make a mental count in your head or glance at your watch after reading the above text, raising the DC by one for each second the PCs wait before responding (try to be subtle about this, don't click a big stop watch as soon as you finish reading the flavor text, the PCs shouldn't realize they're "on the clock"). Also note that Captain Mutakanyi will *not* jump in on his own. He's a freighter captain, and despite his Charisma, simply will not seize the initiative here. That's up to the PCs. If this seems to stretch the boundaries for you, you could have the Captain temporarily off the bridge when the message is received. Either way, this is a moment for the PCs to shine (or not). If the PCs fail their check, or transmit no messages for 30 seconds or more, the base

commander realizes what a stupid thing he just did. In either case, read the following:

*"Oh, damn! Who... Sergeant! Scan that vessel this instant! Attention unknown vessel, you are approaching a highly secure facility of the United Earth Government. Do not approach or we will blow you out of the air!"*

The PCs now have one last chance to jump in with a Bluff (DC 30). Succeeding at either check will get the base commander to let them dock and meet them with a few of the base marines, who won't be paying particularly close attention. The PCs will have an excellent opportunity to seize the base with minimal conflict. They *will* have to fight however, even if they manage to capture the base commander. Turns out the Joes that work for him don't much like him and have no intention of surrendering to a freighter crew. If the base commander gets fragged in the crossfire, that's a bonus.

When the PCs first see the base commander, they will notice he carries a slick, black briefcase fitted with a complex magnetic lock. On a Spot check (DC 20) they will notice that this case is handcuffed to his wrist. The case is a key component of the adventure and if the base commander is killed, the case is detached from the chain on his wrist or the lock on the case is forced then proceed immediately to the events described under Encounter #3 The Black Box below.

**Mission Information:** Depending on how the PCs handle the complication above, they could either bypass this information entirely, having talked their way right onto the transmit station, or they will be left with the original three options they pondered before the encounter began. Of course the complication complicates things (duh) so PCs originally planning on hacking their way through the encounter might scrap that plan in favor of an assault to get a look at

the "weight" around the base commander's neck.

**Base Assault:** If the PCs decide to assault the base, they will need to pop the airlock with a Disable Device skill check (DC 20) and then face a relatively light compliment of marines (one dozen) led by the station commander. If the PCs fail to pop the lock they will need to cut their way through the airlock. This will allow the defenders time to set up a barrier providing ½ Cover and allow the defenders an upper hand in the battle to come, automatically winning Initiative (take the highest PC initiative roll and set the defenders' initiative one higher).

The base commander will lead his troops in this fight, a strange black case in one hand and a laser pistol in the other. On a Spot check (DC 25) they will notice the case is handcuffed to his wrist.

Though he is leading his troops in the fight, the base commander has no intention of dying with them if he can avoid it. Should the fight turn against his forces (if the PCs outnumber the station marines at any point in the battle or the station commander is reduced below 13 HP), the station commander will throw up his hands and say the following:

*"Whoa! Whoa! I... I mean we surrender! Listen, this case, the one chained to my wrist, it's worth a lot of money to the UEG. You guarantee my safety and you'll be rewarded, beyond... well let's just say it'll be worth your while. And if you kill me or take the case, this whole place will go sky high!"*

How the PCs respond to this is up to them. They might assume the UEG will arrest rather than reward them if they hand over the station commander with the case intact (true) or that the station commander is simply lying through his teeth to save his own skin over those of his men (false- he is telling the truth about everything except a reward for the PCs).

**Hack the communications array:** If the PCs try

to hack into the system, they must succeed at a skill vs. skill Computer Use test against the station commander, who also serves as the station's system administrator. If the PC fails this check, then the base commander will be alerted and will scramble all outgoing communications while he finds what the PCs implanted in the system.

The ship will have to approach the station and ask to transmit mail and cargo manifests back to Earth as a cover, since the station will be able to detect them once they are close enough to hack the system. If the PCs fail to do this, sitting in space and ignoring hails from the station while they try to hack in, the base commander will scramble all outgoing communications (he's not stupid).

*Bribe the base commander:* Lastly there is bribing the commander. In this instance the ship will approach and ask to transmit mail back to Earth as above but then the PCs will have a chance to speak to the base commander privately.

**Base Marines (Joe Tough Hero 3):** CR 3; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d10+6 plus 3; HP 26; Mas 15; Init +3; Spd 25 ft; Defense 20, touch 14, flatfooted 18 (+0 size, +2 Dex, +2 class, +6 equipment); BAB +2; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2/19-20, Metal Baton), or +5 ranged (2d8+0, Laser Pistol); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL UEG; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +2; AP 1; Rep +1; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 8.

**Occupation:** Military (Knowledge [Tactics], Pilot)

**Skills:** Craft (structural) +2, Drive +5, Intimidate +2, Knowledge (Tactics) +3, Listen +3, Pilot +4, Spot +4

**Feats:** Alertness, Armor Proficiency (light), Armor Proficiency (medium), Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency

**Talents (Tough Hero):** Robust, Fire Resistance

**Possessions:** Tactical Vest, Metal Baton, Laser Pistol

**Base Commander (Earther Charismatic Hero 3):** CR 3; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d6+3; HP 14; Mas 13; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 15, touch 12, flatfooted 14 (+0 size, +1 Dex, +1 class, +3 equipment); BAB +1; Grap +0; Atk +0 melee (1d6+1/19-20, Metal Baton), or +2 ranged (2d8+0, Laser Pistol); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL none; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +0; AP 1; Rep +2; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 8, Cha 17.

**Occupation:** Technician (Computer Use, Knowledge [Technology], Repair)

**Skills:** Bluff +9, Computer Use +10, Craft (writing) +8, Diplomacy +9, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (Civics) +8, Knowledge (Current Events) +8, Knowledge (Technology) +8, Repair +10

**Feats:** Armor Proficiency (light), Gearhead, Lightning Reflexes, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency

**Talents (Charismatic Hero):** Coordinate, Inspiration

**Possessions:** Undercover Vest, Metal Baton, Laser Pistol

## 3. THE BLACK BOX

This encounter can be triggered at any time by one or more of the following events: the base commander is killed, the chain holding the black box to the base commander is severed or the black box is opened. Doing any of these things will trigger a signal to the transmit station reactor that will rig it to blow in 3 minutes. This will require the PCs to quickly send the transmission warning the colonists about the impending attack, get back to the Hokushin and then get as *far* away as possible.

**Captain's Briefing (only once mission is triggered):** Hokushin to boarding party, Hokushin to boarding party, we are registering some very unusual energy readings from the station's core. Can you confirm?

**Sensor/Computer Logs:** On a Computer Use check (DC 20) the PCs will be able to determine that a transmission passed from the black box to the station's computer which has initiated an overload of the station's fusion reactor. This reaction cannot be stopped. The station will explode in minutes.

**Mission Information:** The PCs have three minutes (30 rounds) until the station explodes. The damage from this explosion will be 300 points of damage. Each round the Hokushin gets to put distance between it and the station will reduce this damage by 10 points (meaning the ship will have to leave right away, without the PCs, to take no damage at all).

How long it will take for the PCs to make their way to the command center and finish their business will depend on the timing of the activation of this encounter. If the base commander is killed by a lucky shot while all his troops are still alive, the PCs will have to dispense with the marines, make their way to the station and then send the message (assume 5-10 or 1d6+4 rounds once all opposition is dealt with) then make their way off the ship and back to the Hokushin (3-6 or 1d4+2 rounds).

## CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Hopefully the PCs have made their way off the station before it explodes, in which case the Hokushin should be able to weather the explosion unless it is very close and/or seriously damaged from a previous adventure. Depending on the outcome, there are several directions the game master could take the adventure from here.

First, if the PCs didn't make it off the station, then the PCs will be rolling up new characters. Captain Mutakanyi will leave if it becomes clear the PCs aren't going to make it back and will take the heavily damaged Hokushin to Casino, the illicit smuggler's

port hidden in the asteroid belt, for repairs and to recruit new crewmembers. While at the station, a corporate spy could put two and two together (the destruction of the transmit station and a heavily burned starship) and alert the authorities to the PCs' presence.

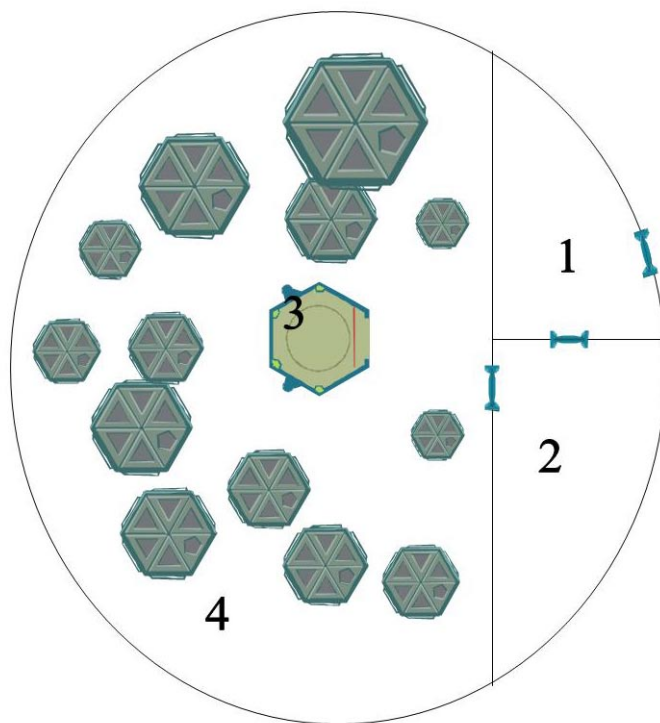
If the PCs make it off the station with the black box intact, what does it contain? Clearly something precious enough to destroy a very expensive government facility to keep a secret. And there could possibly be other hidden transmitters in the box, leading to more encounters with UEG personnel eager to get it back.

Lastly, there is the next part of this adventure from yours truly, which will answer several of these questions.

Stay Tuned and thanks for playing Powderkeg Part II.

## TRANSMIT STATION KEY

Since the UEG Transmit Station is a key location in the adventure, maps of two of the station levels have been provided, along with this handy key. There is at least one other level to the station and the game master could add more levels either to flesh out this adventure, or to represent a different kind of station the PCs wind up exploring or fighting in.

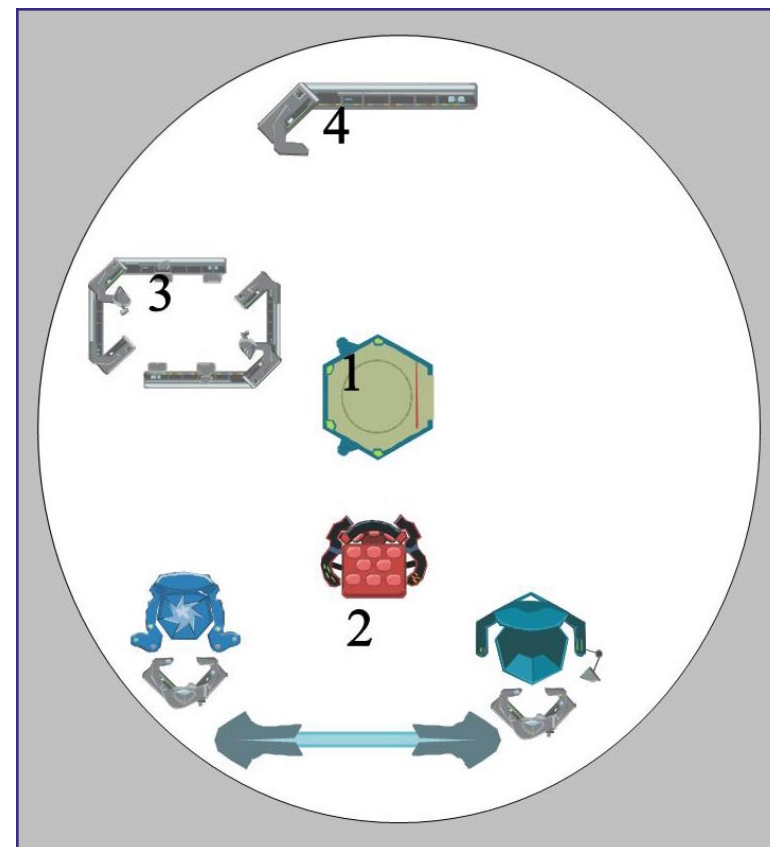


### LEVEL 1: STATION CARGO BAY

This area will be the first area of the station the PCs visit since it is where the airlock is located.

**1. Airlock Stage One:** This is where visitors enter from space (if making an EVA) or from the airlock of their vessel. This area will be an airless vacuum if entering from space, otherwise it will contain a normal atmosphere.

**2. Airlock Stage Two:** This area is used to remove and don spacesuits for EVA operations outside the



station. There are a number of spacesuits here, as well as locker facilities to change.

**3. Elevator Tube:** This elevator is used to navigate the three levels of the station.

**4. Cargo Storage:** This is where the station stores are kept. Most of these crates contain food and medicine for station personnel, as well as similar supplies that UEG vessels might need should they stop by the transmit station for resupply.



## LEVEL 2: CREW QUARTERS (NO MAP PROVIDED)

Since the PCs are unlikely to spend much time here. This level contains private quarters for up to 4 dozen personnel but only about one-fourth of this area is typically occupied.

## LEVEL 3: STATION BRIDGE

This area is where the station's communication array is controlled and is essential to successfully completing the adventure.

**1. Elevator Tube:** This elevator is used to navigate the three levels of the station.

**2. Station Control:** This is where the station's communications are controlled as well as other essential functions such as energy management and life support.

**3 and 4. Station Computer Control:** These computers store information waiting for later transmission including mail bound for Earth or the Jovian colonies as well as televised entertainment and news bound for the Jovian colonies.

## LEVEL 4: ENGINEERING (NO MAP)

This area is unlikely to figure into the adventure unless a signal from the black box triggers a self-destruct sequence, in which case this area will be dangerous. Each round a character spends in this area without proper protection (full radiation gear) he suffers 1-6 points of damage. If the character *is* wearing some sort of Hazmat gear to shield him from some of the radiation, he suffers half damage, rounded down (meaning no damage is suffered on a roll of 1).

## CAPTAIN KWEKI MUTAKANYI

Kweki came up through the ranks of the African Mining League slowly, beginning as a surveyor on Earth, he specialized in finding fresh veins in mines long considered exhausted. After being promoted to the space mining division, Kweki made a small fortune mining the asteroid belt and parleyed those commissions (through shrewd investing) into enough credits to purchase his own ship franchise. Seeing enormous opportunities for someone of his skill on the frontier, where big strikes were being made daily it seemed, Kweki took his ship and moved out to Ganymede. At first the moons were a place of work but in the decade since his arrival, Kweki has come to consider them his home. Now that home is threatened by a government years away, by politicians who have never been further away from Earth than the Do Gwoon orbital station. Although he has always been a man of peace, not even allowing his ship to be armed, Kweki has come to see war as inevitable and is determined to do his best to aid the Jovians despite his peace-loving nature. With piracy on the rise he's begun carrying mines to deter pursuit and is beginning to seriously consider arming the ship.

**Appearance:** 6'4", 224 lbs, brown skin, black hair, green eyes

**Captain Kweki Mutakanyi (Earther Dedicated Hero 3/Explorer 2):** CR 5; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d6+3 plus 2d8+2; HP 25; Mas 13; Init -1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 15, touch 12, flatfooted 16 (+0 size, -1 Dex, +3 class, +3 equipment); BAB +3; Grap +3; Atk +3 melee (1d6+0/19-20, Metal Baton), or +2 ranged (2d8+0, Laser Pistol); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL Jovian Rebels; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +6; AP 2; Rep +1; Str 10, Dex 8, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 18.

**Occupation:** Asteroid Prospector (Pilot, Search)

**Skills:** Bluff +8, Gather Information +8, Knowledge (Earth and Life Sciences) +6, Knowledge (Physical Sciences) +4, Listen +8, Pilot +4, Search +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +10, Survival +8

**Feats:** Alertness, Armor Proficiency (light), Miner, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Starship Operations (Ultralight)

**Talents (Dedicated Hero):** Skill Emphasis (Search), Aware

**Talents (Explorer):** Explorer Lore, Survivalist, Resolve, Skilled Searcher

**Possessions:** Light Combat Armor, Metal Baton, Laser Pistol

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