

The Black Hole: A Slipstream Adventure

The entrance to the **Savage Worlds** setting of **Slipstream** is via a black hole, so I got a wild hair to rent Disney's 1979 turkey, **The Black Hole**. I saw this flick in the theater when it was first released and didn't like it, and I hadn't seen it again since. Thirty years later, I still feel the movie is poorly paced, tedious, and just plain boring but the plot is right out of a 1950s scifi movie or vintage *Doctor Who*. Just because the movie is crap doesn't mean that the good bits can't be mined for use in a roleplaying game. I did a little research on the movie, and that only reinforced that fit. To get around the fact that characters seem able to breathe in space, the producers stated in interviews that in addition to all the space debris, the black hole add attracted an atmosphere. Bad science... but it's *exactly* the same bad science of Slipstream!

This is intended as either a first adventure, or a prequel, for the Slipstream setting for Savage Worlds. It begins before the characters are transported into the Slipstream, and ends with their arrival there.

Spoilers follow. If you haven't seen the movie and want to see it first, stop now. Familiarity with the movie is sort of required for this to really make any sense.

While traveling through space, the player characters discover a derelict spaceship. If using the Slipstream version of our solar system, the characters are possibly traveling from Earth to Mars, or possibly from Mars on an expedition to explore further out into the solar system. The movie hand-waves away the specifics of why the crew is in the area they are, so you can do the same or supply some other reason that suits your campaign. Any appropriate skill check will easily identify the ship as the Cygnus, which mysteriously disappeared many years before. As the characters' ship approaches, the lights come on and it's revealed that the ship is not a derelict after all. Attempts to hail the ship will go unanswered, although figures can be seen through the Cygnus's windows.

Normal piloting rolls can be made to land the characters' ship on the Cygnus, which is massive. Once aboard, they will be greeted by Dr. Hans Reinhardt and escorted to the ship's bridge, which is staffed by Humanoid Robots. He will explain that he has been studying a spacial anomaly (not necessarily a visible Black Hole per the movie). Years ago, Reinhardt attests, the ship was ordered to return and the crew left in smaller shuttles and he elected to stay behind to continue his research. He will assert his belief that they returned safely. To maintain the operation of the Cygnus, he created a number of humanoid robots to handle the basic chore and the ship's position relative to the anomaly. He will answer any questions with consistency, maintain his story, and extend his hospitality to the player characters. He will also, restrict their movement to a defined area of the ship, which he will say is for the player characters' own safety as many unused areas of the ship are closed off.

Maximilian stays with Reinhardt at all times, and will protect and defend him if anyone tries anything physical.

If any characters wander off into forbidden areas of the Cygnus, they will first encounter Sentry Robots, who will shoot without warning or provocation. If player characters make it past the Sentry Robots, either by stealth or violence, they will discover the following. The gamemaster can order these encounters as he sees fit.

Crew Quarters

With the exception of some dust, the quarters would appear to be still used. Personal effects such as photos and clothing remain in place and untouched. An appropriate check can be made, if the players don't realize it on their own, that the crew would have taken these items with them when they left.

Greenhouse

The greenhouse was designed to grow food for the crew, and is maintained by the Humanoid Robots. It is guarded by Sentry Robots, who will fire at player characters on sight. It is still operating at near-complete capacity, in spite of Reinhardt being the only person left to feed. Player characters will notice one of the Humanoids walks with a limp.

Firing Range

The firing range is where the Sentry Robots practice shooting. If S.T.A.R. is here, the Sentry Robots will not attack; if he is not, they will shoot the PCs on sight. S.T.A.R. does not speak, but through pantomime will challenge player characters to a shooting competition. Make a series of Shooting rolls for both the character and S.T.A.R. and add the totals. Highest combined total wins. If S.T.A.R. wins, he will laugh at the characters and let them go on their way. If he loses, he and the Sentry Robots will attack.

Funeral

The player characters come across several Humanoid Robots carrying a casket, which they silently but ceremoniously jettison into space. If the players don't come to the conclusion themselves that robots don't typically have funerals, have them make an appropriate check. They may also be misdirected to believe that there was another human on board besides Reinhardt who died recently. If questioned, Reinhardt will deny everything and say they were jettisoning trash.

Hospital

The hospital is heavily guarded by Sentry Robots. If the players are noticed by the Sentry Robots, rather than shooting they will first attempt to capture them and strap them into a piece of machinery that will turn the player

characters into Humanoid robots. If a player character is incapacitated and hauled away, assume they will be “converted” within one hour unless they somehow escape or are rescued. If player characters attempt to run away, then the Sentry Robots will shoot.

Shuttles

All of the shuttles, which the crew would have used to leave the Cygnus, are still aboard in hangar bays. This was a plot hole in the movie that was never resolved, and this is my solution. The hangar bay will be guarded by Sentry Robots but is otherwise abandoned. All of the shuttles have been scuttled and cannot be repaired in under a week’s time, as it would require salvaging parts from multiple shuttles to construct one functional one.

The Player Characters’ Ship

If the players leave someone behind after docking with the Cygnus and going to see Reinhardt, they will be attacked by Sentry Robots once the other player characters have left the area. If the ship is left unattended, it will be scuttled by the Sentry Robots and will require a few days to repair.

Denouement

Once Reinhardt’s secret- that the Humanoid Robots are the lobotomized, cybernetically-enslaved members of the crew – is revealed, he will announce that his master plan is to enter the spacial anomaly, which he believes (correctly, in the case of Slipstream) is a hole in reality leading to another dimension. The ship will already be headed in that direction at that point. If the players attempt to stop Reinhardt, Maximilian and Sentry Robots will attack. If the player characters manage to overcome Reinhardt, they can make Piloting rolls to steer the ship intact through the rift, but they will be sucked into the rift. If the Piloting rolls are successful, the Cygnus survives with damage but is operational. If they fail, the Cygnus will be damaged beyond repair but will protect them through the journey.

The gamemaster should be descriptive of the journey through the rift as a journey first through Hell, then Heaven. Reinhardt, dead or alive, will be seen to merge with Maximilian as a form of ironic justice, trapping Reinhardt’s mind in a robot body as he did to the Humanoids. Some of the Humanoids will remain in Hell to torment Reinhardt, others will transform into angels in Heaven. S.T.A.R. and the Sentry Robots will become inoperable for no discernible reason, and cannot be repaired once in the Slipstream. From a roleplaying game standpoint, it leaves room for him to return later after somehow escaping Hell, seeking vengeance on the player characters for spoiling his plot and creating his current state.

The player characters will emerge in the pocket universe. Welcome to the Slipstream.

Dr. Hans Reinhardt

Wild Card, Veteran Earthling Mad Scientist (55 points)

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d10, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Guts d6, Healing d6, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Astronomy) d10+2, Knowledge (Medicine) d8, Knowledge (Robotics) d10+2, Persuasion d6, Piloting d6, Repair d10+2, Taunt d6, Weird Science d10

Hindrances: Overconfident, Stubborn, Vengeful

Edges: Arcane Background (Weird Science), Engineer, Genius, Scholar, Superscientist

Pace: 6 Parry: 2 Toughness: 5

A note about the Reinhardt’s robots: I have used the “Robot Nature” Hindrance from Encounter Savage to differential Reinhardt’s robots from the Robot Men of Slipstream. Where the Robot Men have free will, Reinhardt’s robots will only follow their programming and obey his commands.

No mention of it is made in the movie, but I find it telling that all of Reinhardt’s creations – Maximilian, S.T.A.R., the Sentry Robots and the Humanoids – are all mute. He doesn’t just get the last word every time, he gets the only word. That may be something to consider when the player characters interact with him.

Maximilian

Wild Card, Veteran, Robot (50 points)

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Shooting d10

Hindrances: Clunky, Machine, Robot Nature

Edges: Ambidextrous, Arcane Background: (Armor, Blast, Fly, Smite), Florentine, Hard to Kill, Harder to Kill

Pace: 5 Parry: 7 Toughness: 5

As Reinhardt built Maximilian using his Weird Science Edges, he does not required Power Points to use his powers. For his beam weapons, use the statistics for laser pistol. For his whirling blades of death, use the statistics for chainsaw in the Savage Worlds Explorer edition. Maximilian can use the Florentine Edge with his eviscerating blades.

Maximilian is mute, and expresses himself through the limited body language his form allows.

My decision to make Maximilian a Wild Card was based on the fact that the player characters are more likely to be combat-oriented than the characters in the movie. That’s also why I upped his badass factor above where I feel a strict movie adaptation would be.

S.T.A.R. (“Special Troops/Arms Regiment”)

Veteran Wild Card Robot

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Shooting d10

Hindrances: Robot Nature, Arrogant

Edges: Ambidextrous, Armor, Command (Sentry Robots), Quick Draw, Two-Fisted

Gear: Laser pistols

Pace: 6 Parry: 7 Toughness: 6

Created as the predecessor to Maximilian, S.T.A.R. commands the Sentry Robots and was their prototype. While he does have the Robot Nature Hindrance, he definitely expresses more free will in how he executes his programming. He is arrogant, vain, and expresses like and dislikes. S.T.A.R. is more humanoid in form than Maximilian and is thus able to express himself better through body language, although he is mute and unable to speak. S.T.A.R.’s relationship with Maximilian is never seen in the movie, but given his competitive nature (as seen in the shooting competition with V.I.N.CENT and B.O.B.’s description of previous competitions) one can assume it to be a rivalry, with S.T.A.R. jealous or angry at being replaced by unable to act on it directly due to his Robot Nature. He may even harbor resentment toward Reinhardt for demoting him. My personal feeling is that S.T.A.R. might be lured into aiding the player characters against Maximilian and even Reinhardt, not through direct action but by looking the other way or diverting the Sentry Robots away from areas of the Cygnus where they’re planning to take action. This is, of course, up to the gamemaster to decide, but I feel this interpretation fits some facts of the movie and opens some possibilities for the roleplaying adventure.

Sentry Robots

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Shooting d6

Monstrous Abilities: Ambidextrous, Armor, Construct

Gear: Laser pistols

Pace: 6 Parry: 5 Toughness: 5

The Sentry Robots are based upon S.T.A.R. but possess no free will or personalities. They are not Wild Cards, and should be considered monsters. There is no indication in the movie as to how many of them are aboard the Cygnus, but for the sake of a roleplaying adventure the answer should be “as many as you need”.

It’s not explained in the movie why Reinhardt has Sentry Robots when there’s no one around to defend against. Maximilian would surely be enough of a personal bodyguard. My personal theory is that S.T.A.R. and the Sentry Robots were created to help capture, contain and subjugate the crew and convert them into the Humanoids. Once that objective was accomplished, Reinhardt kept them around in case something went wrong and the Humanoids potentially turned against him. As the Cygnus has no apparent lack of energy or resources, there’s no reason for Reinhardt to have shut them down once they were no longer necessary. It’s possible that they’re bored, which explains the shooting gallery and the fervor with which they attack the Palomino crew in the movie (and the player characters in the adventure).

Humanoids

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Knowledge (Astronomy) d6, Knowledge (Gardening) d6, Piloting d6, Repair d6

Pace: 5 Parry: 2 Toughness: 4

The Humanoids were once the crew of the Cygnus, converted into cybernetic zombies who operate the ship without question so Reinhardt can pursue his research without question or interruption. They have no free will, are not Wild Cards, will neither flee nor attack, and are pretty much mooks at best and furniture at worst. They really don’t do anything other than take up space. It’s assumed, based on the theories I’ve pitched above, that they will obey orders from Reinhardt, but also take direction from Maximilian, S.T.A.R., or the Sentry Robots.

I did not stat of V.I.N.CENT or Old B.O.B., for a couple of reasons. First, V.I.N.CENT was one of the Palomino crew. Second, while it could be useful to have an ally “on the inside”, for game purposes he was an extraneous character. I think it’s much more interesting to have the player characters figure things out on their own than to have an NPC explain it to them. It also makes it more challenging for the PC to not have an extra set of guns in combats with Maximilian, S.T.A.R. and the Sentry Robots.

Afterword

This adventure is admittedly rough. Were I writing it for publication, I’d certainly polish it, add more specifics for skill challenges, and draw some maps. Because it’s just some fanboy woolgathering, and because Disney’s legal staff would likely jump me if I did anything slicker, I’ll leave it as it is. Hopefully it’s enough to be useful. I might run it as a demo or one-off at a game day or convention (changing names and not telling the players its origin), at which point I’ll follow up with some actual play notes.