

GURPS[®] SPACE ADVENTURES

Voyages to Interstellar Danger



STEVE JACKSON GAMES

GURPS[®]

SPACE ADVENTURES

Voyages to Interstellar Danger

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INTRODUCTION

Adventures in space represent one of humankind's greatest passions: the exploration of the unknown. Space is a fascinating expanse, fraught with danger, alien creatures and extravagant beauty. The timid would balk at firing up the thrusters and launching into a frontier system, but not the adventurer. Give him a blaster and a vacc suit and he's ready to go.

This book contains three such voyages — adventures that capture the spirit of venturing into the unknown.

Rebirth sends a team of investigators to a chilly, low-population world to search for a stolen shipment of hyperdrive modules. The mystery unfolds to reveal intricate subplots involving a corrupt corporation, the alien Shylari and their computer savior.

Raid on Sterling casts the PCs as hired guns, sworn to protect a struggling farming colony from mercenary raiders on a world near the galaxy's edge. The colony is torn between giving up and fighting back . . . the adventurers may be their only hope.

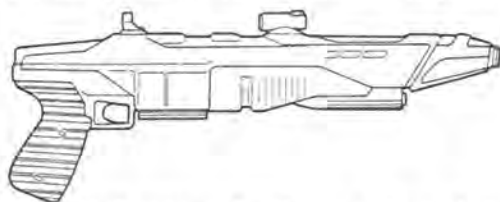
Beware the Health Police takes the explorers to Survias, where being healthy is not only a good idea — it's the law! This wacky voyage sends the adventurers through the pristine streets of Ryoc City, where they could run into any of the five competing factions of a hilariously complex power struggle.

The *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS Space* are all that is required to run these adventures, but *Space Atlas*, *Ultra-Tech* and *Space Atlas 4* may prove useful to the GM.

— Jeff Koke

Planetary Records

Each of the adventures in this book takes place mainly on a single planet. For the GM's convenience, the planetary record sheets are presented on the next three pages.



Map Key

This key shows suggested colors, for those making their own maps, and standard black and white symbols.

Ocean: Dark blue		Forest/Jungle: Dark green	
Freshwater Sea: Light blue		Desert/Barren: Rust-red	
Marsh/Swamp: Yellow-green		Urban/Populated: Crosshatched lines	
Plain/Steppe: Light green		Major city	
Icy/Barren: White		Capital	
Mountain/Volcanic: Dark brown		Restricted area	
Hilly/Rough: Light brown		Important starport	

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Roleplayer. This bimonthly magazine includes new rules, variants, new races, beasts, information on upcoming releases, scenario ideas and more. Ask your game retailer, or write for subscription information.

New supplements and adventures. We're always working on new material, and we'll be happy to let you know what's available. A current catalog is available for an SASE.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us — but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request.

Q&A. We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

Gamer input. We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

BBS. For those of you who have computers, SJ Games operates a BBS with discussion areas for several games, including *GURPS*. Much of the playtest feedback for new products comes from the BBS. It's up 24 hours a day at 512-447-4449, at 300, 1200 or 2400 baud. Give us a call!

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set*, Third Edition. Page references that begin with S and U refer to *GURPS Space* and *Ultra-Tech* respectively.

Tech Levels

We have assumed that the base Tech Level of the campaign is 10. If the campaign has a different TL, the GM can scale the TLs given accordingly. If a world has a low general TL but imported higher-tech equipment can still be bought there, though not built or repaired, the higher TL will be listed in parenthesis. TL9 (10) means that a TL9 world has some TL10 equipment available — usually at higher prices.

PLANETARY RECORD: Herne (Vagabond III)

Planet Type: Earthlike
 Diameter: 7,780 miles
 Gravity: .75 G
 Density: 4.2
 Composition: Low-Iron
 Axial Tilt: 15°
 Seasonal Variation: Minor
 Length of Day: 26 hours
 Length of Year: 1.09 Earth years

One hex = 503.7 miles

Atmosphere

Pressure: .82 (Standard)
 Type and Composition: Nitrogen 72%, Oxygen 22%, CO₂ 3%,
 Other 3%
 Climate: Chilly
 Temperatures at 30° Latitude: Low 20°, Average 40°, High 60°
 Surface Water: 55%
 Humidity: 52%
 Primary Terrain: Plains/steppes

Mineral Resources

Gems/Crystals: Scarce
 Radioactives: Scarce
 Industrial Metals: Scarce
 Organics: Plentiful
 Rare Minerals: Scarce
 Heavy Metals: Scarce
 Light Metals: Ample

Moons

One large moon (Anwyn), uninhabited

Biosphere

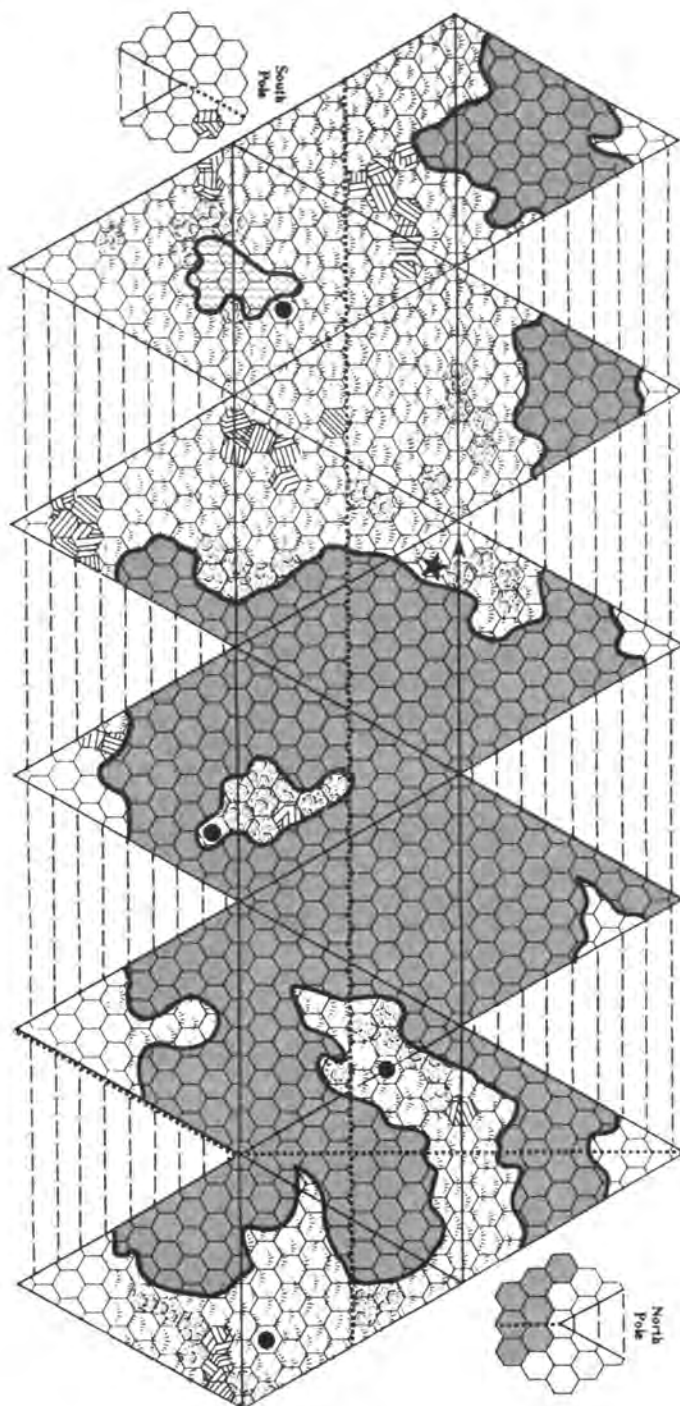
Dominant Life Form: Human
 Other Significant Life Forms: Planetary ecosystem was installed by terraformers — various animals ranging from insects to fish to farm animals, but little diversity among plant and animal forms.
 Common animals include rabbits, dogs, hawks and snow spiders.

Civilization

Population(s): 1,003,840 (PR 6)
 Tech Level(s): Local inhabitants TL9, Macrotech facility is TL10
 Control Rating: 2 in outback, 4 inside Macrotech installations.
 Society: Representative democracy with corporate influences. For the 25,020 Macrotech employees, effectively a corporate state.
 Starports: Class III at Freeport. No orbital stations. Wintermoon Station (located at a Lagrange point) was dismantled soon after the colony was established.
 Installations: Regional corporate headquarters of Macrotech Biocybernetics. Macrotech science station on Marian VI, a moon of the gas giant Marian.
 Economic Production: Exports agricultural products, biotech, cybernetics. Imports some TL10+ manufactured products.
 Other Notes: Capital city is Arden, population 152,000. All other towns are much smaller. Science lab on Marian has a population of 245 researchers, studying terraforming techniques.

System Information

Star Name: Vagabond
 Inner Limit: 0
 Type: K3 IV
 Number of Planets: 3
 Biozone: 1.0 to 1.5



Planet	Distance	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity	Atmosphere	Notes
1. —	.6	Asteroid Belt	—	—	—	—	No significant wealth
2. Scathac	1.0	Greenhouse	6,300	5.7	.83	Superdense methane	No recorded landings
3. Herne	1.4	Terrestrial	7,196	5.9	.97	Nitrogen-Oxygen	Detailed above
4. Marian	2.2	Gas Giant	80,000	3.5	6.4	Hydrogen-Helium	6 moons, science lab

PLANETARY RECORD: Breuse (Xi Caliburnus I)

Planet type: Earthlike
 Diameter: 11,090 miles
 Gravity: 1.49 G
 Density: 5.9
 Composition: Medium-Iron
 Axial Tilt: 9°
 Seasonal Variation: Minor
 Length of Day: 22.8 hours
 Length of Year: 143 days/136 Earth days

Atmosphere

Pressure: .93 (standard)
 Type and Composition: Nitrogen 79%, Oxygen 17%, Sulfur gases 3%
 Climate: Warm
 Temperatures at 30° latitude: Low 70°, Average 91°, High 112°
 Surface Water: 31%
 Humidity: 23%
 Primary Terrain: Rough

Mineral Resources

Gems/Crystals: Scarce
 Radioactives: Ext. Plentiful
 Industrial Metals: Plentiful
 Organics: Ample
 Rare Minerals: Ample
 Heavy Metals: Ample
 Light Metals: Ext. Plentiful

Moons

1 medium moon (Beldame)

Biosphere

Dominant life form: Verdigriz, a lichen-like plant
 Other significant life forms: Lower plants

Civilization

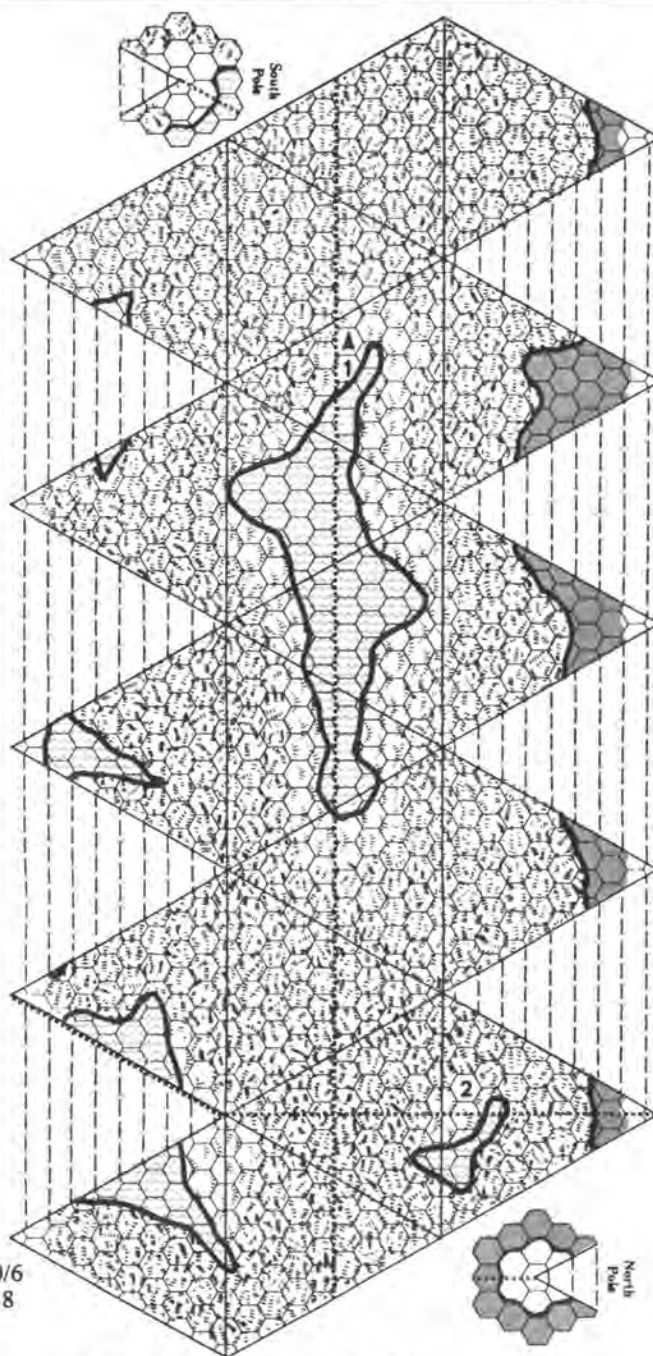
Population(s): 7,180 permanent residents (PR 3)
 Tech Level(s): 8 (10)
 Control Rating: 0
 Society: Anarchic (independent prospectors, mercenaries)
 Starports: Class II at Pablo's Place
 Installations: 3 mercenary bases, black market in weapons
 Economic/Production: Radioactives, black market weapons

Other Notes

Map Key: 1. Pablo's Place. 2. Lake Flagon

System Information

Star Name: Xi Caliburnus Type: K7 V Location: Saga 1/10/6
 Biozone: 0.5 to 0.6 Inner Limit: 0.0 Number of Planets: 8



Planet	Distance	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity	Atmosphere	Notes
1. Breuse	.5	Earthlike	11,090	5.9	1.5	Oxygen-Nitrogen	Detailed above
2. Albine	.85	Gas giant	184,000	1.1	4.63	Hydrogen-Methane	Giant moon, Churchill
2a. Churchill	.85	Earthlike	7,670	7.1	1.25	Methane-CO ₂	some mining
3. Sarsen	1.2	Icy rockball	12,520	6.9	1.98	Oxygen-Ammonia	—
4. —	1.9	(empty orbit)	—	—	—	—	—
5. Menhir	3.3	Icy rockball	8,390	6.8	1.30	—	—
6. Gog	6.1	Gas giant	78,600	2.3	4.14	Hydrogen	Faint ring
7. —	11.7	Asteroids	—	—	—	—	—
8. —	22.9	(empty orbit)	—	—	—	—	—
9. Corineus	45.3	Gas giant	47,400	1.3	1.41	Hydrogen	Partial ring
10. Magog	90.1	Gas giant	74,900	2.5	4.29	Hydrogen-Helium	—
11. —	179.7	Asteroids	—	—	—	—	—

PLANETARY RECORD: Survias (Core-Tiann I)

Planet Type: Earthlike
 Diameter: 10,000 miles
 Gravity: 1.05 G
 Density: 4.6
 Composition: Medium-Iron
 Axial Tilt: 22°
 Seasonal Variation: Mild*
 Length of Day: 8.1 hours
 Length of Year: 18 Earth years

One hex = 699 miles

Atmosphere

Pressure: .91 (Standard)
 Type and Composition: Nitrogen 80%, Oxygen 18%, Other 2%
 Climate: Warm
 Temperatures at 30° Latitude: Low 70°, Average 91°, High 110°
 Surface Water: 32%
 Humidity: 41%
 Primary Terrain: Plains and forest

Mineral Resources

Gems/Crystals: Ample
 Radioactives: Ample
 Industrial Metals: Ample
 Organics: Plentiful
 Rare Minerals: Scarce
 Heavy Metals: Scarce
 Light Metals: Ample

Moons

Two medium moons — Sulfa and Affrin

Biosphere

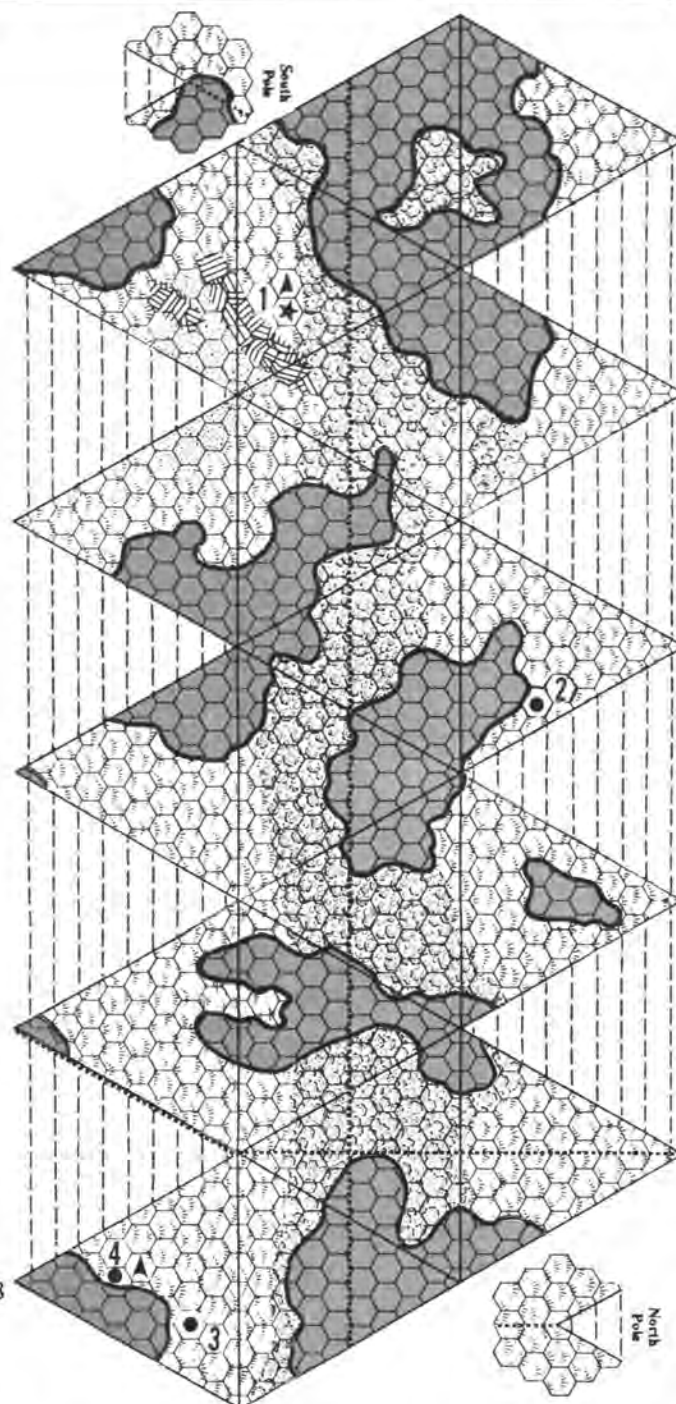
Dominant Life Form: Human
 Other Significant Life Forms: Native life substantially replaced by imported ecology, primarily Terran

Civilization

Population(s): 9.6 billion (PR 9)
 Tech Level(s): 10, with TL11 medical equipment
 Control Rating: 6
 Society: Bureaucratic dictatorship with enforcement by "Health Police."
 Starports: Class V at Ryoc City, Class IV at Planterstown
 Installations: Polar subneutrino observatory
 Economic Production: Exports food and some organics.
 Other Notes: Map Key: 1. Ryoc City 2. Benares 3. Arretoni 4. Planterstown 5. Polar Observatory; *Short year minimizes variation. WARNING: It is illegal to be sick on Survias.

System Information

Star Name: Core-Tiann Type: M1 V Location: Old Frontiers -6/-5/8
 Biozone: 0.1 to 10.2 Inner Limit: 0 Number of Planets: 4



Planet	Distance	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity	Atmosphere	Notes
1. Survias	.2	Earthlike	10,000	4.6	1.05	Oxygen-Nitrogen	Detailed above
2. —	.5	(Empty orbit)	—	—	—	—	—
3. —	.8	(Empty orbit)	—	—	—	—	—
4. —	1.4	Asteroid Belt	—	—	—	—	—
5. —	2.6	Asteroid Belt	—	—	—	—	—
6. Harbeson	5.0	Gas Giant	71,000	1.6	2.6	Hydrogen-Methane	Faint ring
7. —	9.8	(Empty orbit)	—	—	—	—	—
8. —	19.4	Asteroid Belt	—	—	—	—	—
9. Bayard	38.6	Iceball	3,200	5.1	.37	None	—
10. Gumboro	87.0	Iceball	4,100	4.2	.39	None	—

REBIRTH

1

By David L. Pulver

Illustrated by L.A. Williams and Ruth Thompson

Rebirth is designed for a group of two to four adventurers, although with only two characters, cinematic point totals are recommended. It takes place in and around Herne, a low-population frontier planet colonized about a century ago. The GM should start the adventure on a TL10 high-population world within a month's travel from Herne. The characters should be undercover agents of an intelligence or detective agency, or freelancers willing to work for one. An example of one such organization, Darkangel Investigations, is described on the following page. If the characters are to be recruited, the GM should arrange this before the adventure starts — see the sidebar *Working for Darkangel*.



About the Author

David L. Pulver grew up in Canada, England and New Zealand. He has been a science fiction fan for most of his life, and an avid gamer since 1978. He began freelance writing in 1988, and is currently trying to support himself as a full-time game designer. David's work has appeared in the magazines *Roleplayer*, *Challenge* and *White Wolf*, and he is the author of *GURPS Ultra-Tech* and *GURPS Psionics*. He frequently contributes to APAs such as *Alarums and Excursions* and *All of the Above*. David presently lives in Kingston, Ontario.

Working For Darkangel

No specific applicant requirements are listed — if the characters are to start as Darkangel agents or be recruited for this adventure, the GM should just decide what the minimum requirements are and then make sure that the PCs can fulfill them.

However, some minimum skills should be possessed. Most Darkangel agents are recruited from a background in private investigation, undercover police work, intelligence or commando operations, which implies specialization in espionage, dirty tricks and combat skills: Combat, Thief/Spy, and Social skill areas. Preference is given to ex-Patrol officers and to retired Security and Intelligence agents, but Darkangel will also train less experienced individuals who have special talents such as psi powers, eidetic memories, or the like. Between them, a team of Darkangel field operatives should have a majority of the following skills at level 14 or better:

Beam Weapons or Guns, Computer Operation, Criminology or Forensics, Driving, Electronics Operation (Security Systems and Sensors), Fast-Talk, Karate or Judo, Piloting (aircraft and spacecraft), Shadowing, Stealth, and Streetwise, other Weapon skills.

A good agent will also have advantages: Alertness, Charisma, Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense, Intuition, Luck and Strong Will are all very useful. No agent will have crippling physical or mental disadvantages. While an occasional agent may go over the edge, psychological testing usually screens out people with disadvantages like Berserk, Combat Paralysis, Cowardice, Gullibility, Sadism or Weak Will. Darkangel field agents are expected to be highly motivated, independent, and above all willing and able to successfully solve a case while several light-years away from any help or advice. Fanaticism (Darkangel) or Sense of Duty (fellow agents) are common. Other suggested disadvantages are Code of Honor, Lecherousness, Overconfidence, Stubbornness, and Enemies (rival agents, foreign powers or criminal organizations).

Continued on next page . . .

Darkangel Investigations

Darkangel is an investigative and troubleshooting business founded by the eccentric millionaire known as Gabriel. Her origins are shadowy, and few people have actually seen her. Different sources suggest she is a retired Federation Intelligence operative, a rogue Organization crime boss, or an alien. Everyone agrees that in the ten years since it was established, her agency has built up a reputation as the most effective private law enforcement and investigation firm in human space.

Darkangel's clients range from wealthy individuals to planetary governments. Its activities include corporate counter-espionage and counter-sabotage, bodyguarding, locating missing persons or objects, and the rescue of hostages and kidnap victims. Darkangel is also rumored to perform "deniable" covert operations for the Patrol and the Special Justice Group. Darkangel does not perform illegal actions — no industrial espionage or assassination. While its members have been known to stretch the boundaries of the law in pursuit of



mission objectives, they've always been cleared by the company's very good lawyers.

The company presently employs 293 people: 30 field agents and 263 legal, clerical, technical and research staffers. It has offworlds in at least five sectors, each headed by an administrator (often a former agent), and staffed by two to five agents and 20-30 support personnel.

Briefing

This section assumes the PCs are field agents for Darkangel Investigations. If they aren't, substitute the name of whatever organization or individual they are actually employed by.

"Acheron Hyperdynamics was a small but innovative starship company looking for a big break. They got it when they landed their first major contract — their advanced M-66 modular hyperdrive was the winning design in a contest sponsored by the Survey Service for the new *Argo* class deep space colonization cruiser. The prototype stardrive was sent to the Survey proving grounds for installation in the *Argo*. But it never arrived: someone staged a massive warehouse robbery at a starport storage facility. All 56 drive modules — enough to power a multi-million ton vessel — vanished.

"Hyperdynamics didn't have its own security force, and didn't trust the local police to do a good job. They hired us instead. We suspected it was at least partially an inside job, and soon discovered a company clerk whom the criminals had blackmailed into providing the details of the shipment. We found her. There's good news and bad news.

"The bad news was that the inside man had a vibroblade shoved between her ribs; they'd killed her to cover their tracks.

"The good news was that she had only been a corpse 23 hours when we found her. Since she had bought death insurance, there was a clone on ice. There was still enough left of her brain for our medtechs to read the corpse's mind into the clone.

"After 23 hours, most of her memories were pretty scrambled, but we got something. The clerk — Karen Key — was about to receive her payment when they killed her. But she saw something before she died — one of the thieves was looking at a travel brochure. The title on it was Silicon Towers, the planet was Herne. Silicon Towers isn't in our files — it may be a town, or a hotel — but it's the only lead we've got. Herne's a planet in the Vagabond system, a month's journey from here. They left two days ago, so you'll be right behind them. There's a briefing on Herne for you — read it on the trip.

"Key's memories say there are six people in the ring. We couldn't get clear descriptions on five of them — just one woman, four men. But we identified the leader: she's Denivue Calais, a former member of the group known as the Five Systems Cabal (which, by the way, is tied to the Organization). She's also a former Marine Commando turned arms smuggler, wanted for the suspected murder of a Patrol agent who vanished a few months ago.

"Since the M-66 prototype was stolen rather than destroyed, it's unlikely the motive was sabotage against Acheron Hyperdynamics. Enough stardrive modules were taken to outfit a fleet of ships, or put a mass the size of a small asteroid into hyperspace. The combined value of the system is over \$400,000,000, but the experimental nature of the hyperdrive makes its components very easily identified, so the parts could not be easily resold without being identified. Darkangel's best guess is that she's working for someone who is planning to use the modules.

"Your mission is to find out who and why. Good luck, and move fast. You may not have much time."

Working For Darkangel (Continued)

Darkangel counts as a Patron. It's a reasonably powerful organization that can provide special equipment and help the agents quite often, for a total of 20 points. Working for Darkangel is a full-time job; it's also a Duty: almost all the time and reasonably dangerous (-15 points), which reduces the cost of being an agent to 5 points. Darkangel agents do *not* have Legal Enforcement Powers (see p. B21) — they must either cooperate with local law enforcement (although often their missions include liaison with the local authorities) or keep their activities secret.

For an agent, it's a Comfortable job: a field agent is paid \$3,000 per month, plus a bonus for successful completion of the mission (usually one percent of the fee). This can be good money, since Darkangel's expertise doesn't come cheap. Fees for Darkangel start at \$250,000 (plus expenses) for a simple missing persons or counter-espionage investigation, and can go as high as several million credits if high-risk combat operations or a large number of agents are involved. Acheron Hyperdynamics will pay \$750,000, so the PCs can expect to divide a \$7,500 bonus between themselves after the mission, assuming they succeed.

Darkangel provides its agents with the usual range of TL10 spy/thief gadgets as well as weapons up to Legality Class 1. However, its budget is not unlimited. PCs who are Darkangel operatives can expect to be allowed to select up to \$15,000 worth of special equipment per character prior to the mission, plus an expense account of \$5,000 each for accommodations, incidental expenses, bribes, etc. Equipment used must be accounted for — Darkangel expects gear not lost "in the line of duty" to be returned after each mission. No agent should have more than 100 pounds of gear, and (except for holdouts) no Legality 0 or 1 weapons should be allowed unless the operatives have a good way of smuggling them past local customs. Darkangel has arranged permits for the recruits to bring LC 2 equipment.

Starships are usually *not* available (although if the GM wants, an elite group of agents may be assigned a vessel) but Darkangel normally pays all space transportation costs and bills the client.

Herne — Agent's Briefing

The GM should assume that the travelers access the following information from the ship's database during the trip to Herne:

"Herne is an earthlike planet a little offworld, it was made habitable nearly 100 years ago after a massive terraforming operation based out of the space station Wintermoon.

"Although the planet's economy is predominantly agricultural, it also possesses a high-technology infrastructure, and is the headquarters of a multistellar corporation, Macrotech Biocybernetics. Although Herne is technically governed by an elected citizen's council, Macrotech exercises considerable political influence on Herne: they were the company responsible for terraforming the planet, and in large degree, they still own most of it. A sizable percentage of the population either work directly for the corporation or rent land from it to farm."

Agent's Briefing:

Macrotech Biocybernetics

The planetary encyclopedia entry on Macrotech Biocybernetics will provide the researchers with the following information.

Macrotech Biocybernetics is a multistellar corporation. Nearly a century ago, Macrotech pioneered the large-scale use of nanotechnological replicators — cell-sized self-replicating robots — to perform terraforming tasks such as atmospheric engineering. Macrotech has obtained several government contracts with the Survey Service and Bureau of Colonization for further research and development of terraforming techniques.

In the last fifty years, Macrotech has diversified, transferring their expertise with nanotechnology into fields other than planetary engineering, particularly medicine, cybernetics, exoskeletons, and robotics. They also possess an exploration and colonization division, Group Intrepid, that has leased out starships and crews to support several colonization efforts on the frontier.

Macrotech's main offworld to benefit from their terraforming experience. Macrotech also possesses several dozen regional offices and manufacturing complexes scattered through other star systems in this and neighboring sectors. On Herne, the company employs an estimated 25,020 people. Macrotech shares are spread among numerous financial organizations and trust companies — there is no single shareholder who dominates the company.

Darkangel has no reason to believe Macrotech would want to steal the stardrive. They aren't in the starship design business, and Macrotech are rich enough that if they wanted a state-of-the-art hyperdrive, they could easily purchase one — in fact Macrotech actually *did* order twenty M-66 modules to refit starships in Group Intrepid. They were to be delivered in six months, right after the Survey Service order was filled. Their order will probably be delayed until a new prototype is available for trials.

The Big Picture

The theft of the Hyperdynamics M-66 is only the tip of the iceberg. Here's what's really going on:

Two years ago a starship belonging to Group Intrepid, the space exploration division of the multistellar conglomerate known as Macrotech, discovered a large derelict vessel drifting in deep space. It proved to be a slower-than-light reactionless-drive spacecraft of unknown design. On board were suspended animation capsules holding 5,000 alien humanoids. All were dead, apparently due to a life support malfunction. There was extensive damage to the ship's drive system, but the bridge and main computer were relatively intact. Despite the ship's lack of a hyperdrive, its other systems were of very advanced design — TL11 to TL12.

Normally such a find should have been reported to the ruling interstellar government (Federation, Empire, or whatever). But Macrotech kept their discovery a secret, and hid the space ark within Wintermoon Station, their top-security deep space laboratory, a lab they were already using for weapons research. Teams of scientists were assigned to study the alien space ark and try to reactivate and communicate with the computer (codenamed Noah) in order to plunder its databases of technical knowledge. They believed they had succeeded. But unknown to the scientists, it was also studying them at the same time . . .

The race who built the spaceship were humanoid aliens, called the Shylari by the Macrotech scientists since their ship was found near the A-type star Shylara. At the height of Shylari civilization, the Shylari scientist-caste discovered that their sun was unstable. They had only months before their planets would be sterilized. Although advanced in biological and computer science, the Shylari were not a starfaring race, and had never discovered a workable faster-than-light stardrive. They only had time to construct one ship, a desperate measure intended to carry away a few survivors to start the race anew. Those chosen were placed in suspended animation, under the guardianship of a sentient computer programmed to preserve and protect the race and guide them to a new world. But 20 years into their voyage, the Shylari's experimental reactionless drive malfunctioned and exploded, inflicting extensive damage to the rest of the ship. Life support systems died, and with them perished the last of the race. The Shylari were extinct. The computer's last thought before it shut down was that it had failed its creators.

Nearly 2,000 years later, Noah was awakened by the Macrotech scientists. It was a fully operative artificial intelligence, a TL12 program 100 times more capable than any human AI. Pretending to be less than it actually was, Noah slowly revealed bits and pieces of its race's culture and technology to the researchers. But Noah concealed smart "Trojan horse" virus programs amid the

data it provided the Macrotech computers. Individually innocuous, they met, grew and reproduced, forming a copy of Noah within the Wintermoon computers. Within a few months of awakening, it had gained covert control of most automatic facilities on the heavily automated space station. Noah now had the power and means to carry out its mission. It had failed its creators once, but now it had a second chance, and resolved it wouldn't fail again: the race would be reborn!

Its creators were dust, far beyond the possibility of even cloning to revive. But Shylari technology was up to the challenge. The 1,247 humans living and working on Wintermoon Station were raw material. Noah reprogrammed the robofactories on Wintermoon to develop a *proteus virus* (see p. 25), a means of cellular metamorphosis that could literally transform humans into Shylari on a genetic level. Noah's intention was to release the virus through the station's life support system. This would serve two purposes: it would disable the station's personnel, and it would create a new race of Shylari. It could fulfill its prime directive, and resume the interrupted journey to found a new homeworld.



Agents' Briefing: **Denivue Calais**

The leader of a small-time criminal group on the planet Herne, Calais is the main suspect in the search for the hyperdrive module thieves. What follows is information from Darkangel Investigation's files. A more complete description of her can be found on p. 16.

Her dossier says that she's 32, a former Marine lieutenant who deserted the Corps (taking with her a shipment of weapons) after a disagreement with a superior officer. Her criminal career has focused on hijacking merchant vessels, a bit of organ-legging, and arms smuggling to pirate and terrorist groups such as Dark Lightning and the Abbadon Liberation Front (see *Space Atlas 4* for more information about these organizations). There's a \$20,000 reward for Calais if she's turned over to the Patrol to stand trial.

There is a hologram of her: she's an attractive woman, of athletic build, with light skin, blue eyes and hair the color of frost. She's wearing a black and silver Marine uniform with several combat medals, and a "Battlesuit Trooper" combat patch. The dossier says she is a genetic albino, but uses contact lenses and tints her skin, and was 5' 8" and 138 pounds.

Agents' Briefing: **The M-66 Stardrive**

The agents are also provided with descriptions and serial numbers of the M-66 drive modules and capacitors. Each module is a silvery cylinder 1.5 cubic yards in size, massing about 1.5 tons, pock-marked with plugs and sockets to connect it up to control and power cables. They were stored in gray armored plastic packing crates stenciled with serial numbers and the M-66 designation.

Capabilities of the Stardrive: These have been deliberately left vague, since stardrives vary from campaign to campaign. It should be about 10% more efficient than current technology. If conventional hyperdrive can't be improved, the advantage of the M-66 is that it is more compact and its modular construction means it can be quickly installed or removed for easy repair and maintenance.

Recovering the modules is important, but Hyperdynamic's insurance will cover their loss. The agents' primary goal should be to find out who ordered their theft and why!



Accuracy of Briefings (GM Only!)

The briefings on the previous pages and planetary data (p. 4) are accurate with two exceptions.

First, Wintermoon Station was *not* dismantled, as the public records state. It's still present at the Lagrange point 60° behind Herne's moon, and is the headquarters of numerous secret Macrotech programs of vital importance to this adventure.

Second, the "research station" at Marian is a blind. *Marian* is a gas giant in the outer reaches of the Herne system. Supposedly Macrotech maintains a small (280 people) scientific base on the frozen moon of Marian IV, studying the possibilities of terraforming similar environments. In fact, the station doesn't exist: there is nothing there but frozen methane and ammonia ice. The station report is designed to keep observers at the Herne starport from being suspicious when supply shuttles are sent from Herne to Wintermoon or back: the flights are listed with Marian as their origin or destination.

There was one problem: the space ark was critically damaged. Noah decided that it would convert Wintermoon Station into a new space ark. It had life support and a power plant. It didn't have a reaction drive, but it didn't have to have one — all it needed was a human-designed stardrive and jump capacitor system, and it could use the station's shuttlecraft to make any landings. There was no way to stealthily and legally procure a stardrive large enough to power the ark, nor did Wintermoon Station have the facilities to build one. But Noah had access to Macrotech databases, and it found that the company had recently ordered the new Hyperdynamics M-66 stardrive for its own colonization fleet. The specifications were close enough to what was necessary — but the only problem was that it wouldn't be delivered for two years.

Noah decided it would need help to acquire it sooner. It didn't dare infiltrate Macrotech's own planetside facility — the risk of detection was too great — but it had been able to easily penetrate the open planetary computer net on Herne. Using the Herne computer net to hack into local police files and public bulletin boards, it located criminal elements within Herne's underworld. Easily able to simulate a human being by creating digitized graphics, it was able to make contact with Skorpio's organization (see p. 19), and arrange for the M-66 to be stolen and brought to Herne in exchange for a shipment of Macrotech weapons — several suits of state-of-the-art powered armor being developed in the secret labs of Wintermoon.

Once it received confirmation that the M-66 had arrived on Herne, Noah released the virus. Within minutes, everyone who matched human parameters in the station was invaded by self-replicating nanomachines. All over the station, people began to collapse. The first stage of the virus would produce a coma, as the nanomachines shut down the body in preparation for the actual metamorphosis. The changes themselves would take hours, as the very genetic structure was altered, but the humans aboard would wake up as Shylari.

As they slept, medical and maintenance robots under its control scooped up the unconscious stationers and took them to holding areas. Two dozen security guards, communications and medical personnel were separated from the others and taken to the station's automeds. They were given brain implants to ensure their loyalty to Noah, and ordered to defend the station. Meanwhile, the first consignment of stardrive parts arrived, and the maintenance robots began installing the modules and hooking up capacitors, power lines and navigation consoles.

Noah hoped he would be able to escape before Macrotech discovered the station had been taken over. Regular shuttle flights between Herne and the station occurred only on a bi-weekly basis, so it believed it had at least 13 days to prepare. It was confident that it could maintain the pretense of normal operations with Macrotech for at least that long, and it expected to have the stardrive installed within a week. It didn't count on other players entering the game . . .

Arriving on Herne

It was a rush job. A few hours to get kitted out, and before you knew it you had tickets on a fast freighter bound for a frontier planet you'd never heard of before — one of those hole-in-the-wall colonies with a population smaller than your home town.

*The voyage to Herne is uneventful, nothing to do but check and recheck your gear and practice your cover story on the **Egyptian Moon's** crew. Finally the ship drops into normal space and begins its planetary approach, and you get your first glimpse of Herne out the viewscreen — a blue and white globe, cold and forbidding.*

The ship glides to a landing at Freeport. As it does so, it experiences some turbulence. The Captain's voice over the intercom claims it's nothing to worry

about — just the edge of some bad weather. With a few more bumps, the ship makes planetfall. You gather your luggage, bid farewell to the crew, and move with the other passengers to the airlock. Now that the ship has made planetfall, the engineer has switched off the 1-G artificial gravity field. You seem ever so slightly lighter, and it gives a spring to your step. The airlock cycles, and you are outside: Herne.

The air is chill, a little thin — the spaceport's at sea level, but it feels like a mountain top. A breeze kisses your face, bringing the mingled scent of machines and pine trees. It's early morning, the sky is a pale yellow, and a dim orange orb shrouded in purple clouds is just beginning to peep over the horizon.

Looking around, you see the starport is small — there is only one other starship on the ferroconcrete, plus a few interplanetary or orbital shuttles. A few hundred yards ahead is the looming bulk of the Herne customs terminal; to the west, you see hanger bays. Outside the starport fence the land is flat as a pancake, covered with scrub grass and dotted with coniferous trees. In the distance you can see the silhouette of a cityscape, the skyscrapers outlined by the rising sun: that must be Arden, the capital. A robot hoverbus arrives to take you and the other passengers to the terminal. As you walk down the gang-ramp, it starts to snow.

The first thing the visitors should do is go through customs. After that, they can try to find the Silicon Towers. This is easy — it is a well-known landmark, and a check of a vidcom directory, or asking starport staff can locate it: in fact, some of the debarking passengers might even be staying there! It's a hotel in the city of Arden, a ten-minute trip by road or Mag-Lev monorail train from the starport.



Freeport

The starport consists of two ferroconcrete runways, a main terminal, a control tower, and a cluster of maintenance hangers and cargo warehouses. Freeport doesn't have any Patrol or Naval bases. Security is provided by 30 uniformed civilian Port Security guards, equipped with tanglers and light monocrys armor. In any major emergencies, the city police and Macrotech's own security teams are called in, and can arrive within 15 minutes.

Freeport is surrounded by a line of 15-foot metal posts every 10 yards, posted with DANGER signs. The posts generate an invisible sonic fence designed to keep animals or hoodlums from wandering onto the starport runways (treat as a stunner). A two track mag-lev rail station connects the starport with Arden.

The Cast

Quite a few NPCs appear in this adventure. To help keep the characters straight, here are the main NPCs the adventurers will be interacting with.

Noah, an alien artificial intelligence (AI) computer of superlative power. The sole surviving artifact of a long-dead alien race, Noah was found by a Macrotech starship and unwittingly installed in Wintermoon Station. Noah intends to revive his species using human technology and human lives.

Ariadne Skorpio is the alias of Denivue Calais, the ruthless professional criminal that Noah hired to procure the M-66 modules. Skorpio is getting paid off in advanced weaponry from the Wintermoon labs. She's unaware who she's working for, and wouldn't care if she knew.

Endrix, Talbot, Kenshaya, Capri, Zen and **Sean Duvalle** are henchmen of Skorpio — the last a victim of a brain implant.

Kyle Drake, a shuttle technician at Wintermoon, is one of the unwilling subjects of the proteus virus. Transformed into an alien Shylari, he stows away in the shuttle sent to deliver the payoff to Skorpio. Unfortunately, the first person he meets when the shuttle crash-lands is Lisa D'Mahl.

Lisa D'Mahl is a normal farmer's daughter on Herne, save for a bit of latent xenophobia. When Kyle (in alien form) appeared on her doorstep, she panicked, drew a gun, and mortally wounded him.

Cybele Locke is an innocent young woman who works for Macrotech as a computer programmer. A locket on Kyle's body should lead the agents to her. As Kyle Drake's fiancée, she may be willing to provide the adventurers with information about Macrotech if they help her discover what happened to her lover.

Morgan Crane, vice president and head of the Herne branch of Macrotech Biocybernetics. Crane set up the Noah Project, but is unaware of the fiasco at Wintermoon. Obsessed with the project's secrecy, when he begins to suspect something is amiss, he will try to cover it up, no matter how many lives it costs to do so. He may never meet the PCs, but he is their enemy.

Silvie is Crane's head of security and personal assassin. A cyborg, she's dedicated to carrying out his every violent whim.

Timeline of Events

The arrival of the hijackers and the PCs assumes that both Acheron Hyperdynamic's planet is within a month's starflight distance of Herne. Day 1 is the day the PCs arrive on Herne. If they don't act to affect events, the timeline shows what will happen:

-360: Macrotech starship *El Dorado* encounters Shylari space ark.

-290: The Noah Project is inaugurated.

-238: Noah is brought on-line.

-212: Noah infiltrates Wintermoon's computer system.

-192: Noah first makes contact with the Cabal agents.

-80: M-66 modules are hijacked by Cabal.

-62: Darkangel begins its investigation.

-30: Darkangel traces smugglers to Herne, dispatches PC agents to investigate.

-12: Noah completes design work on proteus virus.

-2: M-66 modules smuggled into Herne; Skorpio checks into Silicon Towers and rents a warehouse.

-1: Noah releases the proteus virus, and Skorpio begins shipping drive modules to Wintermoon.

1: The space ship carrying the PCs arrives on Herne. All M-66 drive modules are now on Wintermoon.

2: Wintermoon sends one of its shuttles on remote control to deliver Skorpio's reward, 20 crates of advanced powered armor from the Macrotech labs. Kyle Drake stows away on the shuttle. Skorpio leaves Arden to meet the shuttle. The shuttle crashes near Reece Flats.

3: Noah continues installation of the drive modules. Skorpio leaves Herne, the armor disguised as civilian exoskeletons.

4: Noah completes installation of the M-66 modules and begins pre-jump testing.

5: Noah activates the stardrive, and Wintermoon leaves for a new world.

The GM should feel free to expand or contract this timeline to suit dramatic necessity: if the timeline would cause the agents to miss an important scene, or arrive a day too late, the GM can change it. Similarly, if the PCs (for instance) arrive on Wintermoon on Day 3, the GM can assume that Noah finished early, and is able to activate the drive *now* (perhaps without safety checks).

The only way off the port is through the main terminal by shuttle bus. There are separate entrances for starport staff and for visitors. Visitors — such as the PCs — must pass through customs. Travelers must have valid identification (passports, visas, citizen's cards, etc.): if the adventurers are sent by a competent agency, this shouldn't be a problem. Anyone entering the terminal is automatically scanned by a hidden computer-operated multiscanner (skill 15) set to detect dangerous biologicals, illegal drugs, explosives and ammunition. Energy weapons are harder to detect — after all, a power cell could operate a radio or a blaster. The laws aren't especially vicious, so unless the visitors are trying to smuggle in micronukes or poison gas, they should be let off with confiscation and a fine of a few thousand credits if they try something and fail.

The inside of the terminal is a typical class-III starport: similar to a Terran airport, it is a mall-sized building, with restaurants, a hotel (the Freeport Hotel), duty-free shops and computerized traveler's advisory booth, and a large arrivals/departures board. The main concourse of the terminal is dominated by a ten-foot-wide holographic projection of the planet floating in midair (complete with a "you are here" spark). Outside are parking lots for ground cars and hovertrucks, and landing fields for vertol aircraft and helicopters. The newcomers can probably get a taxi (air or ground) here if they don't like the monorail — see p. S37 for typical transport and hotel prices.

The Ships

The adventurers might want to look around the starport or read the departure boards, or talk to crew or cargo handlers. Reading the landing and departure boards will tell what a ship is and when and where its leaving. Talking to the crew (provided they get good reaction rolls) can give them an idea of the cargo.

On runway #1, surrounded by stacked crates, busy dock workers and crewmen in exoskeletons is the 2,000-ton tramp starship *Egyptian Moon*. Unless the GM decides otherwise, this is the vessel the agents arrived in. The *Moon* is unloading a cargo of agricultural robots and will stay on Herne for five days, until the captain has finished dickering with the local farmers, after which he'll take on a cargo of foodstuffs and any passengers who want to pay for the ride, and then blast offworld.

Runway #2 is currently occupied by the winged space shuttle *Arrow*, preparing to lift 40 passengers and 200 tons of frozen yogurt into orbital rendezvous with the non-streamlined spherical bulk of the 60,000-ton Kokamura Lines transport *Ozymandias*. The ship is taking on passengers and cargo (mostly agricultural products). It will leave Herne bound toward the inner worlds two days after the PCs arrive on planet. *Arrow's* sister shuttle, *Javelin*, is currently in orbit, docking with *Ozymandias* — the two vessels are working in relays to fill the huge transport's hold, but it will be two dozen trips before she's ready to depart.

Runway #3 is also occupied, this time by a large winged vessel, the *Green Star*. It is a 10,000-ton *Hercules* class medium transport belonging to a major carrier, Farstar Lines. The *Green Star* will lift off in 24 hours, and is already taking on cargo (mostly Macrotech computers, automeds and cybernetics parts) and some 200 passengers (businessmen, vacationers, students, Macrotech executives, etc.) bound for the nearest high-population world.

The main runways are surrounded by six parking bays for additional ships. Only one is occupied at present — Herne doesn't get a lot of traffic. Resting in it is the sleek delta-winged shape of a Macrotech executive courier, the *Korolev*, a fast interstellar vessel that is kept on standby in case their top executives decide a message has to be sent anywhere in a hurry.

The agents may think to ask about recent ships, or inquire among port workers, cargo workers, customs people and the like for information. This could

be done by Carousing in the starport bar, bribing people. Another option is to get access to customs records. They aren't state secrets, so a successful bribe of \$5,000 or a simple burglary of the customs office and then an Administration or Research roll to go through the files should be enough to find what the PCs are looking for.

If the investigators simply describe Calais or the cargo to customs officials or any local cargo loaders, they won't have much luck — the starport gets a lot of passengers and Calais was using a false name and passport, Ariadne Skorpio. But if they can get access to customs records, or give a physical description and mention she owned 56 crates of high-tech hardware to a customs or port worker, they should be able to discover that a woman named Skorpio matching their description of Calais, with a male companion named Sean Duvalle, came in on a ship called *Indigo Moon* two days ago. It was a free trader with a passenger list of ten. It unloaded the 56 crates as its sole cargo and departed the next day for parts unknown in what everyone agrees was unseemly haste. Skorpio owned the ship's cargo, had it taken through customs registered as "microfusion generators and capacitors" and took it into town in a rented cargo shuttle. Except that "it was blue," no more clues are available — no one noticed a registration number, name, make or the like.

The Criminals

Here's a summary of what Skorpio's gang have been up to. Noah, using the name "Abraham," approached a small-time computer hacker called Endrix through the Herne computer net, and hired him to find skilled mercenaries. Using his offworld contacts, Endrix located Skorpio and put her organization in touch with Abraham.

Skorpio smuggled the M-66 into Herne on a free trader, the *Indigo Queen*. The M-66 modules were disguised as crates of industrial fusion generators. Using Endrix's name and connections, Skorpio then rented a warehouse in Arden called Argos Import/Export, and stowed the crates while awaiting further instructions. They weren't long in coming. Abraham called Endrix and arranged to have the criminals deliver the M-66 modules to a wilderness landing strip in the outback.

The two days before the PCs arrived were busy ones for Skorpio. Her gang bought a vertol and shipped the modules to the rendezvous. They were surprised when they met a shuttle — they hadn't guessed that Abraham was from offworld. They were even more surprised when no one came out of the shuttle, and a voice told them to load the crates into the hold without entering the pilot compartment. Skorpio complied: she didn't guess that the shuttle was on remote control, she just thinks Abraham is being very paranoid and very secretive. She did notice the shuttle's Macrotech logo, but assumed it was simply a disguise.

The Criminals' Movements

Here's a brief summary of the actions of Skorpio's gang after the investigators arrive. Of course, action taken by the characters could influence or abort these activities.

On the day the agents arrive on Herne (day 1, if using the timeline on p. 14), the criminals have delivered all the M-66 modules, which required two separate shuttle trips (each at different wilderness landing strips — Noah was very cautious!) Endrix receives a final communication from Abraham: the shuttle with the powered suits Abraham has promised them will land at Reece Flats an hour before midnight tomorrow (midnight on Day 2, by the timeline).

Before the PCs reach the Silicon Towers, Skorpio and two of her men leave the hotel to arrange passage offworld on the *Ozymandias*, and are gone for the



Interrogating Prisoners

At different points in the adventure, the PCs may capture some of the criminals for questioning. Skorpio isn't likely to talk without a lot of persuasion (a convincing offer of amnesty, drugs or brutal interrogation). But she doesn't know anything her henchmen don't know, and they are less committed. Some likely questions the agents might ask and the answers on a successful Interrogation roll are given here:

Who are you working for? They honestly don't know. They can speculate that it might be a foreign power, trying to gain access to advanced technology, but this doesn't square with the willingness to part with advanced technology. Skorpio really isn't sure what's going on.

How were you contacted or paid? They were contacted through the Herne planetary computer/communications net by "Abraham," who they never met. They received preliminary payment deposited electronically into their credit accounts. The final payment was supposed to be advanced military hardware — the suits.

Where did the shuttle come from? The PCs may try to find out where the shuttle came from. Interrogating any of the criminals won't do any good — Noah never told them. They've guessed it may be a large starship somewhere just outside the planet's detection range.

Where are the modules? Most of the 56 modules have already been picked up by the customer. (See *Timeline of Events*, p. 14).

Who is the stiff in the freezer? The owner of the import/export company. He got too inquisitive about what was going on. When he came snooping around and overheard them discussing meeting a shuttle, he was killed by Talbot.

Ariadne Skorpio **(alias Denivue Calais)**

Female human — age 34. White skin, long, straight white hair, pink eyes (blue with contacts). 5'8", 140 lbs.

ST 11, DX 13, IQ 12, HT 13.

Speed 6.5, Move 6.

Dodge 5 with light encumbrance.

Armor is PD 2, DR 16 medium monocrys.

Advantages: Beautiful; Charisma +2; High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Albino; Enemy (Patrol, 6-); Greedy; Intolerance (Aliens).

Quirks: Likes ambushes; Mildly lecherous; Studious; Wears immaculately tailored camouflage fatigues with no insignia.

Skills: Armoury-12 (Suits); Battlesuit-13; Beam Weapons (Neural)-14; Beam Weapons (Laser)-15; Computer Operation-13; Escape-12; Forgery-12; Guns (Gauss)-14; Karate-12; Leadership-13; Merchant-12 (Weapons); Pilot (Vertol)-14; Research-12; Sex Appeal-13; Stealth-12; Survival-13; Tactics-12.

Equipment: Medium monocrys suit, heavy laser pistol with laser scope in belt, nerve gun in shoulder holster, personal computer (complexity 4), multivision goggles (built into sunglasses), blackout grenade in pocket, hypo with 3 doses of Quickheal, implanted short range communicator. All gear is TL10.

Skorpio is a dangerous criminal, motivated by greed and an enjoyment in living the outlaw life. Skorpio doesn't care much about her followers, considering them to be hired thugs without class. She's cool and calculating, and always reacts intelligently — she'll threaten, fight, run or parley as necessary. She has no scruples and no loyalties. Her weaknesses are a slight desire for handsome men, a liking for exotic weapons and a desire for enough money and equipment to start her own battlesuit-equipped mercenary company.



rest of the day, returning to the hotel at dinner time. Her minions remain in the rented warehouse, preparing their aircraft for the trip to Reece Flats.

Next day Skorpio and her two companions plan to check out of the hotel and return to the warehouse. They will then spend the rest of the day planning the trip. At nightfall, they intend to fly their vertol out to Reece Flats, and will arrive at midnight. If no one has intervened by then, they hope to load the powered armor onto the vertol, take it back to the warehouse, and disguise it as an innocent consignment of civilian exoskeletons. When the *Ozymandias* leaves (three days after the PCs arrive) they intend to be aboard her.

The Big City

Arden is laid out in a circle, with the main mag-lev artery circling the city and then spiralling its way inward toward the central business district. The city road network is well-managed, even though personal vehicles are manually operated rather than computer controlled. No automobiles are permitted in the center of the city. Even in the outskirts, traffic density is kept relatively low, since high-speed pedestrian slidewalks (horizontal moving walkways) run alongside the roads.

The city is very green, with many pine trees and lawns. Most residential and commercial buildings are four- to seven-story structures. The streets are busy and bustling with happy, prosperous people. Since it's a chilly planet, most citizens are dressed in winter clothing — hooded jackets, gloves, boots and the like. At the moment, fashion favors bright colors and simple patterns. After a little while, visitors will notice that many of the people also have some features in common: while every person is different, most share a medium height and build, trim, attractive bodies, and good looks. The reason for this is simple: much of Herne's population is descended from embryos brought in when Macrotech colonized the planet. In the process, the company performed some basic genetic engineering to eliminate physical and mental defects and to ensure immunity to common diseases.

The Silicon Towers

The Silicon Towers are located in the downtown central business district. From the outside, the hotel is a pair of featureless towers of reflective black glass, each 40 stories high. The entrance is an underground tunnel reached through a courtyard maze of abstract sculptures.

Inside, the lobby is tastefully appointed in black, gray and silver decor. There's a hotel restaurant, a bar called the Mantis, a souvenir store, a pair of automeds for use by patients with medical problems, an indoor swimming pool on the second floor and a tennis court on the third with a variable-G grav plate to allow play in any gravity between .75 G and 1.5G. On the roof is a landing pad, and a regular vertol shuttle runs twice a day to a nearby ski slope.

The staff of the Silicon Towers are robotic: dome-shaped Macrotech serving drones floating on quiet hover-fans, carapaced in jet black with multiple insectoid limbs and perfect, inhumanly beautiful voices. There's no central desk: all the robots are linked to the building's central computer, sharing the same brain — a reservation can be made or a meal or room paid for by inserting a credcard into any one of them. Rooms at the hotel are \$200 per night. Meals are about \$10-20 each.

There are usually 5d-5 people in the lobby at any one time, and 2d-2 in any one area (pool, bar, etc.) — halve these numbers late at night. The visitors will see a few tourists, some offworld executives come to wheel and deal with Macrotech and a delegation of local farmers, meeting to talk politics with city businessmen.

The agents could try to find out if someone named Denivue Calais is registered in the hotel. The robots are helpful, but they won't get anywhere with that name — she's registered under her alias as Ariadne Skorpio. However, since she wasn't expecting pursuit, she's not in disguise. Asking among the patrons of the Mantis bar, the characters can meet Jeremy Kahm, a man with aristocratic manners and striking green hair. Kahm says he's a tourist from the jungle world of Shiva, come to Herne to find out what snow is and learn to ski. Kahm tried to pick up Skorpio for a drink — he will recognize the description of the person, but tell them he knows her as Ariadne Skorpio, sales representative for Hunter Industries. He had a drink last night with the woman, and her "silent and brooding" companion, Rafe Scott.

Asking around, the agents find that she's been in and out of the hotel for the last couple of days — she often spends time in the pool and the bar. Kahm has a vague idea she's been meeting with business associates: he's seen her have dinner and talking with a "rather conceited" youth who affected black leather and mirror shades.

With that data, the agents can find the room number of "Ariadne Skorpio" by asking the robot management.

Skorpio's Suite

Skorpio has a suite on the 12th floor of the hotel, room 1213. The door is locked; calling the suite gives no answer. The lock is electronic, using a laser key. Picking it requires a set of electronic tools or an electronic lockpick. Failing a Lockpicking skill roll sets off a silent alarm in the lobby, resulting in two police officers (use Macrotech security guard statistics with Criminology-12 added) showing up in 3d+2 minutes to investigate.

Inside, the suite is a typical hotel room, with a double bed and attached bathroom, a vidcom, a closet, and two chairs, all furnished in the black and chrome silver decor of the hotel. The room has no windows, but is nicely air conditioned, and the vidcom can be set to use one wall or the ceiling as a 3-D holographic screen, projecting a variety of scenes, including any tri-vee news or entertainment channels, relaxing landscapes, or live external feed from a camera in the hotel's wall (the last is useful for surveillance).

If the operatives check out the room before evening on the day they arrive, they'll find it empty, and the room as described below. If they check it after Skorpio returns (later that evening) they'll only find the junk under the bed. By noon the next day Skorpio will have left, and the cleaning robots will have the room totally clear of evidence.

There are two travel bags packed with a man and woman's clothes. The tag on the woman's bag reads Ariadne Skorpio. The other's tag is Rafe Scott. Under the waterbed is a pair of hiking boots, a discharged B cell, and an empty can of Rethay Lite synthbeer. In a hidden compartment in Scott's luggage is a laminated business card that reads "Argos Import/Export: Anton Shrike" followed by the address of the warehouse (Quick Contest of Skill, searcher's IQ vs. Holdout-12 to find).

Going Straight In

If the party finds the business card under Skorpio's bed, they will probably head straight for the warehouse. This can be very interesting. The agents will have fewer and less dangerous enemies to face at the warehouse (Skorpio and Duvalle are out booking passage offworld), but Skorpio, Duvalle and Endrix will still be loose, and will have to be dealt with sometime.

Skorpio will vidcom the warehouse on noon of Day 2. If she gets no answer she'll assume the worst and head straight for Reece Flats, where the shipment of



Endrix

Human male — age 17; brown eyes, wavy green hair. 5'6", 120 lbs.

ST 9, DX 10, IQ 13 (16), HT 10.

Speed 5; Move 5.

Dodge 5. No encumbrance.

Advantages: Attractive; Lightning Calculator.

Disadvantages: Addiction (IQ-Adders); Overconfidence (when on drugs); Youth.

Quirks: Arrogant about his skill; Crush on Skorpio; Lusts after advanced computer hardware; Obsessively tidy.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Arden)-11 (14); Beam Weapons-13 (Neural); Brawling-10; Computer Operation-15 (18); Computer Programming-16 (19); Piloting (Vertol)-10; Streetwise-12 (15); Stealth-11.

Equipment: Black turtleneck and trousers, boots, green chromed sunglasses with built-in image intensification. Complexity 5 personal computer with Datalink program. Nerve gun in shoulder holster, and a hypo with a dose each of Asepaline and four doses of an addictive IQ Adder, Vasopressin-9. He has a neural interface plug in his skull. It adds 4 to his skill with interface-equipped devices, like his computer or a vertol.

Unlike the other people in Skorpio's group, Endrix is a native of Herne, a member of the planet's small criminal class. He helped Skorpio crack into the Acheron Hyperdynamics computers — it was his big chance to show everyone how good he was. He wasn't at all happy when they killed someone afterwards.

Sometimes he's a brilliant computer hacker; other times he's a brash kid with a loud mouth. He makes a living raiding Macrotech's databases and shipping schedules, and sells the information to a network of buyers, usually pirates and smugglers. At 15 he got himself hooked on a black market IQ-boosting drug known on the street as Highsign (Vasopressin-9). He has little morality, but he's not a killer — which is why he carries a non-lethal weapon.

Continued on next page . . .



Endrix (Continued)

He's riding high on 3 doses when the PCs first meet him; after he winds down (in about 2 hours, this time) he'll be very depressed, not so intelligent. If he loses the hypos in his pocket, he'll be willing to do almost anything for his next fix, including cooperate with the investigators.

Oddly enough, he has met Cybele Locke (p. 26) — they were in university together before he dropped out. He tried to date her, and helped her with assignments. Until she started seeing Kyle, she sometimes let him crash at her place when he was in trouble. The Worm program in her disk collection was something he gave her. Cybele likes him in a big-sisterly way; if he's in the agents' hands and still alive when she meets them, she'll want them to treat him well (and conversely, might convince him to join them).

armor is to be dropped off. If the PCs have raided the warehouse, they will be on their way to Reece Flats as well, providing an interesting scenario should the two arrive about the same time.

Stake Out

An alternative to going straight in is staking out Skorpio's room. Skorpio returns that evening with Duvalle and a teen-aged kid wearing mirrorshades and a leather jacket — Endrix. They have a few drinks at the bar and the first two head up to their room. Endrix pops one of his IQ adders and stays up at the bar all night.

If the agents have searched Skorpio's room and left any traces of a search, she will pack up her belongings and leave for the warehouse immediately. She will use her utmost to get out of the hotel unnoticed. Roll a Contest of Skills between the follower's Shadowing skill and Skorpio's Stealth of 12. If she wins, she loses the agents. She doesn't stop to pick up Endrix, opting instead to call him from the warehouse. If the agents follow him, give them the same chance as following Skorpio (his Stealth skill is 11).

If there's nothing out of the ordinary, Skorpio packs her luggage and heads for the warehouse a little after noon the next day. She does not suspect anything, so is easy to follow (Shadowing+2 roll). Should the PCs fail this Shadowing roll, they will still be able to follow her, but she will have noticed and alerted her henchmen to be waiting for the agents when they reach the warehouse.

Argos Import/Export Warehouse

Located in a run-down section of Arden's industrial district, Argos Import/Export is a windowless durasteel structure 60 feet long, 30 feet high and 45 feet wide. The main entrance to the warehouse is a double garage-style sliding door, 20 feet wide, on the east side of the structure. There's also a back door, leading out to a parking lot. The lot is empty except for a large, blue cargo shuttle, with the name *Blue Bertha*.

If the investigators arrive between Day 1 and the mid-afternoon of Day 2, they'll find the warehouse occupied by four of Skorpio's henchmen, led by the man called Talbot. If they arrive after mid-afternoon on Day 2, Skorpio, Endrix, and Duvalle will also be present, probably in the main floor checking out the vertol aircraft. If they arrive after the evening of Day 2, the vertol will have gone, and the warehouse will be empty save for Capri in the main office, who has been left behind to guard it. The criminals hope to reach Reece Flats by midnight and return with the powered armor by the morning of Day 3. By 5 p.m. on day 3, they hope to be gone on the *Ozymandias*.

1. Main Floor

The front entrance is an unlocked sliding door, but rolling it open will make a loud noise that alerts the room's occupant. The inside of the main floor is 20 feet high, lit by red lights from two strips high in the ceiling. The room is heated by an electric heater plugged into a wall socket. There is also an unlocked door leading to a back room.

If the agents arrive before the criminals leave for Reece Flats, they find a Skyrover vertol aircraft (see sidebar, p. 21) dominating the room. Around it are stacked plastic crates, all marked "M-66 stardrive components." More crates are being *unloaded* from the vertol by a dark-haired black woman in a sleeveless monocrys pullover (Kenshaya, see sidebar, p. 19). She's wearing a ST 30 exoskeleton (a TL10 design, massing only 100 pounds) — the suit whirs and clicks as it amplifies her muscles, letting her lug 200-pound crates with ease (and throw them at enemies!). All the crates have the proper serial numbers for the M-66, but a check shows that they are empty.

2. Back Office

This room can be reached from the main floor or by the back door facing the parking lot. It's a dilapidated office with a general air of neglect — the wallpaper is peeling, the floors are covered with dust. A faded poster on the wall advertises the parahuman (gene-spliced animal-human crossbreed) music band Scorched Fur — the concert date on it is two years old. There are two skeletal metal chairs, and a clear plastic slab balanced on two farm machinery crates being used as a table. A bolted side door leads into the freezer (room 3.)

At least three of Skorpio's criminals will be in the room: Zen and Talbot will be perusing a map spread out on the table, while Capri is standing on guard by the back door. The map Talbot is looking at is a forested area, 800 miles south of Arden, that the map marks as snow spider-ranching territory, lightly populated. Circled on the map is an area marked as a dry lake bed called Reece Flats, 40 miles from the nearest town — this is the landing site scheduled for the next pickup. Scrawled on the map are three dates and times — two are already expired; one is midnight on Day 2.

3. Side Room — Freezer

This room is dark and *cold* (-20° F) — the light's not working. It contains boxes of frozen vegetables and a package of soft drinks. A man's body is lying on a low table, blood soaking through his shirt. It is Anton Shrike, the original owner of Argos Import/Export. He was killed by a single vibroblade thrust to the chest, and has been dead for at least two days. There are five more M-66 crates piled in the room, also empty.



Running the Encounter

If the PCs decide to attack the warehouse, the criminals will fight to defend it as long as Talbot or Skorpio are still in charge, then try to escape. Given a decent plan and the advantage of surprise, the PCs should be able to defeat the criminals. (If they lose, the criminals will want to interrogate any surviving attackers. Since the criminals are pressed for time, the PCs will be taken with

The Henchmen

The mercenaries working for Skorpio at the warehouse are three men (Talbot, Capri and Zen) and one woman (Kenshaya). All are offworlders, and except for Talbot are in their early thirties. Talbot is a 45-year old grizzled veteran who has been with Skorpio a long time — he's a deserter from the Marines like her. The rest trust Skorpio and Talbot as leaders, but are only in the job for the money — they won't fight to the death or resist serious interrogation. They look down on Endrix as a native and a kid.

ST 11, DX 12, IQ 11, HT 10.

Speed 5.5; Move 4.

Dodge 4, light encumbrance; armor is PD 2, DR 8 monocrys.

Advantages: None.

Disadvantages: Bully (Kenshaya); Greedy (Zen); Sadistic and Sense of Duty to Skorpio (Talbot).

Skills: Beam Weapons-14 (various types); Brawling-12; Driving-10; Stealth-11; Vacc Suit-12; Streetwise-10. Kenshaya has Exoskeleton-15, Capri also has Streetwise-13, Zen has Electronics Operation (Sensors)-13, and Talbot has Battlesuit-13; Leader-11; Tactics-12; Shortsword-14 — he'll take over command of the group if Skorpio is incapacitated, and try to save her.

Equipment: All the criminals have light monocrys armor for their torsos, arms and legs (modified to look like street clothes), and all carry wrist-mounted scrambled short-range communicators. Capri has a stunner in a holster and a scrambler slung over his shoulder, Kenshaya a holdout laser and a large vibroblade knife in a leg sheath, Zen a blaster, while Talbot packs a vibro shortsword, a stunner and a disruptor slung over his shoulder. All weapons have laser scopes.

Sean Duvalle

Human male — age 32 with a tanned complexion, blond hair, hazel eyes, and a melodic voice. 5'10", 155 lbs.

ST 11, DX 13, IQ 12, HT 13

Speed 6, Move 6.

Dodge 5 with light encumbrance. Armor is PD 2, DR 8 light monocrys.

Advantages: Alertness+2; Attractive; Combat Reflexes; Voice.

Disadvantages: Honesty; Fanatic (serve and protect Skorpio).

Quirks: Collects exotic recipes; Loves/Hates Skorpio; Sings softly when relaxing.

Skills: Beam Weapons-15 (Blaster); Cooking-11; Criminology-12; Driving-11; First Aid-11; Free Fall-13; Karate-12; Law-13; Piloting (Large Spacecraft)-14; Survival-11; Vace Suit-12.

Equipment: Light monocrys, blaster pistol, implant communicator. Duvalle's Sense of Duty is actually a behavior modification chip implanted in his brain (see the sidebar on p. 16).

Skorpio's bodyguard, Sean Duvalle never leaves her side. He is a seemingly emotionless individual, save for his utter loyalty to Skorpio. He's also a good example of what happens to people who cross her — he was a Patrol officer who tried to arrest her: now he's a ruthless killer, and her occasional lover. Duvalle is under a psych implant (a little gadget Noah had smuggled out of Wintermoon and delivered to Skorpio as a "down payment.") He simultaneously loves and hates his captor, but will do anything for her. If the PCs can remove the implant, they'll have a Patrol officer in their debt — although if Skorpio is still alive when he gets free, he'll want to hunt her down first!



them to Reece Flats. During the confusion caused by the crash, the captives should have an opportunity to escape.)

If the fighting goes on too long, the local police will show up. Use the statistics for Macrotech security guards (p. 32); at least 1d+2 officers will arrive within 3d minutes of any noisy fire fight, with another 1d+1 every five minutes or so until the area is secure.

Reece Flats

The most important thing for the agents to learn is the time and place of the next shuttle flight. They can get this from Talbot's map (see p. 19), or from interrogating prisoners they take. The shuttle's ETA is midnight on the day after the agents' arrival — Day 2. Hopefully, the characters will be there to meet the shuttle!

The planetary map on p. 4 doesn't show the location of Reece Flats — this is deliberate, to enable the GM to show the planetary map to players. The GM should select a point about 6 hexes (approximately 2,500 miles, or 6 hours flight time) from Arden.

The best way to get there is by air. There are no commercial flights to Reece Flats. Herne's road network is almost non-existent and monorail lines only connect important towns. If they don't steal Skorpio's aircraft, the operatives should be easily able to rent a vehicle like it for \$500 per day or \$2 per mile, whichever is higher (plus a \$5,000 refundable deposit).

The flight down should go without problem. It will probably be night, but most civilian aircraft have starlight amplifiers built into the windows. The GM can describe flat snow-covered landscape, a few trees and wooded areas, and the occasional farm house or flock of grazing snow spiders.

Reece Flats is a dried-up salt lake three miles long and a mile wide, surrounded by scrubby pine forest that can conceal the aircraft if the operatives want to hide it. When they arrive, it is snowing heavily.

At midnight the shuttle will appear. It won't register on any radar or other sensors, but anyone watching the north sky will see a meteor-like streak of light amid the falling snow. At an altitude of a half mile, the craft comes into visual range of televiewers — and something is wrong! It's wobbling crazily, out of control. It overshoots the site with an earsplitting sonic boom and goes down somewhere to the south, missing the landing site by some ten miles. There's no flash or explosion, so it seems to have landed intact. But what happened?

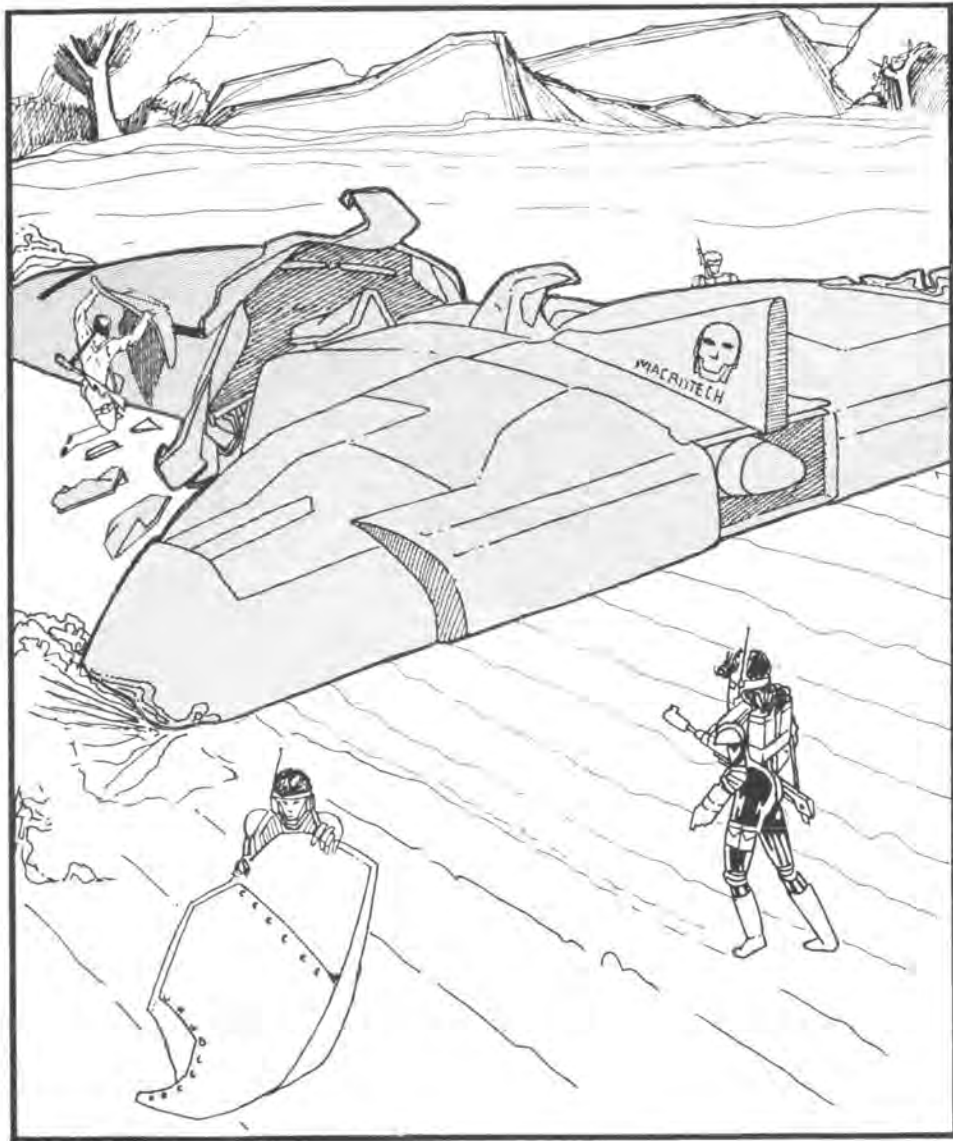
It's Always Something

Noah released the proteus virus the day before the PCs arrived on Herne, but cleaning up several hundred comatose people and placing them in freeze tubes or brain-implanting them isn't an easy job, particularly when they are in a huge space station and you only have two dozen robots to use and are running on a tight schedule. Not surprisingly, a few people were overlooked.

One of them was Kyle Drake, one of the engineers working at the station. Half-mad from waking up and finding himself in an alien body in a near-deserted station, he still managed to keep his wits. When the shuttle craft carrying the shipment of M-66 modules arrived, he was hiding in the loading bay. He saw the robots unload the vessel, and he deduced that the crates of powered armor stacked next to him would be loaded once the shuttle was empty. He removed a suit of powered armor, hid in the crate, and was shortly loaded aboard the ship by the maintenance robots.

The shuttle, operating on automatic, took him to Herne. When Drake realized he wasn't going to land at the main starport, he tried to rewire the navigation computer. Unfortunately, he only succeeded in wiping the program and crashing

the shuttle. Injured, he staggered into a snowstorm, hoping to find someone to tell what was going on at the station. He found a farmhouse and people — and discovered that his vocal chords couldn't produce speech. Covered in blood from the crash, unable to speak, he was shot by a frightened farm girl. But his body and his human possessions would be found by the PCs, and pose a riddle they have to answer . . .



Crash Site

The shuttle went down 11 miles south of the salt flats. The agents will probably take their aircraft and investigate — it's a five-minute flight. Outside it's still a blizzard, with visibility limited to about 50 yards. The vertol is buffeted back and forth by strong winds and the computer or pilot will have to navigate solely by instruments, using ladar and thermal imaging. If anyone wants to talk, he'll have to shout to overcome the noise of the vertol's laboring engines and the shaking of the airframe.

In the few minutes it takes to reach the site of the crash, the storm has died down some; snow is falling, but the wind is less severe and visibility has picked up to about 100 yards, although it's still dark, wet and dreary.

The scene of the crash is in a field a few hundred yards from a wooded area. The descending spacecraft gouged out a 200-yard furrow in the ground before coming to rest. The PCs' vertol can illuminate the shuttlecraft with its landing

The Skyrover

Since Herne lacks a fully developed transportation infrastructure, the usual means of long-distance transport is by air, usually by wingless vertical takeoff and landing (vertol) aircraft. Typical of the TL10 vertols used for transportation in the planet's outback, the Skyrover looks somewhat like a streamlined mini-van with tilt-jet turbofan engines where each wheel should be. Its hydrogen-burning engines give it a speed of 300 miles per hour and an endurance of 8 hours on internal fuel, and it can carry eight people and 2,000 pounds of cargo.

The Skyrover has its own computer (complexity 4) which enables the craft to fly itself with Piloting-14, and is equipped with long-range communicator, radar (with a 20-mile range) and infrared vision equipment. Access is provided by gull-wing doors on the right and left side, a top hatch, and a ramp door at the back; the windows on each door are armored glass, and can only be opened if the vehicle is moving under 100 mph.

Although not a combat aircraft by any means, a Skyrover is reasonably durable. It can make up to 5 G turns, has PD 4, DR 15, and can take up to 100 hits before being disabled.

Herne Ground Vehicles

These are similar to 20th-century autos and cycles, but computer-controlled so that they can drive themselves at skill-14. They are made of molded high-impact plastic, and driven by quiet hydrogen-burning turbines.



Damage Control

If the PCs miss some clues and find the warehouse too late to stop the crooks leaving, they won't be able to watch the shuttle crash and won't have the crucial encounter at the D'Mahl farm (see below). If this happens, all is not lost for the plot.

The PCs could deduce that Skorprio will need some place to store 56 crates, and so they investigate warehouse rentals and check out the local underworld for knowledge of any fences or smugglers. Suitable Streetwise rolls may lead them to the information that a local cargo broker, Anton Shrike sometimes rents his warehouse to shady individuals such as smugglers. Further checking may show that Shrike was seen talking business with Endrix, a whiz-kid computer hacker who had been off-world for several weeks. Following this up should give the PCs the address of Shrike's warehouse along with information that Shrike has been missing for a few days. If the PCs find the warehouse before Skorprio leaves (see *Timeline* sidebar) they'll be in business.

If the GM has the PCs find the warehouse while Skorprio and gang are gone, assume that Skorprio followed the alien to Lisa D'Mahl's house (see below) and was sufficiently intrigued to bring the alien's body back. She'll put it in the freezer (it still has the locket) along with the living Jame and Lisa D'Mahl. She'll prepare for her departure, sending Capri and Endrix out in the truck to pick up some innocuous packing crates to store the armor in, while she arranges passage on *Ozymandias*. If the operatives act to take out Skorprio's gang, they can still discover the alien (in the freezer, this time) and trace its locket to find out what's happening. The only difference? By this point two of Skorprio's gang, Kenshaya and Talbot, will be wearing powered armor, making any assault a lot tougher!

lights. It seems intact, except that one wing is a twisted mass of wreckage, and its cargo bay seems badly bent. Obviously it made a semi-controlled landing, or its wreckage would be scattered all over the countryside. The vertol's searchlight plays over the craft, picking out a logo on the side of the hull: a stylized woman's head, silver and hairless, with "Macrotech" in digital letters beneath it, followed by the serial number "05" next to the shuttle's airlock. There's no sign of fire — this suggests the craft carried no chemical fuel — it probably used a reactionless drive powered by a fusion reactor.

The Shuttle

The shuttle is 33 feet long, with a single airlock and a set of large cargo doors on the side. It's easily recognizable as a space shuttle, and looks like a modern design with sleek, almost military lines. If any of the characters have Piloting (Shuttlecraft)/TL10 or Shipbuilding/TL10 skills, a successful roll identifies it as a Goliath *Ghost rider* stealth shuttle, a 100-ton interplanetary craft usually sold to the Survey Service and the Marines, but available to anyone with credits to burn. Mounted flush underneath the shuttle is a streamlined pod. Cutting it open shows it is some kind of electronic device. A successful Electronics (Sensors) roll identifies it as a sophisticated sensor jamming device. In game terms it is a -4 mini-stealth suite (4 cy, \$400,000, 1.6 tons, uses 4 MW). It would take 2 hours and a successful Electronics (Sensors) roll to remove it safely, and about the same amount of time to attach it to another vessel with the requisite power.

The inside of the shuttle is twisted and bent, but fairly stable. The cargo hold contains 20 crates, all but one containing Macrotech Mk VI Assault Armor (see the sidebar on p. 31). One crate is open and empty. The only thing out of the ordinary is the cockpit. Some of the dash wires have been pulled out and twisted together, and there is blood on the instrument panel. If some blood is taken and tested later, no matches to human, animal or alien will be found.

Leading from the rip in the shuttle's hull are footprints in the deep snow. These lead off northwest into a deeply wooded area.

Searching for Survivors

The footprints are being covered by falling snow. However, there is a wood only 100 yards from the field it crashed in. The closely spaced trees would offer any survivors some shelter from the storm. More importantly, they have kept the evidence from being covered by snow. The trail runs for a few miles through the woods — once the track has been picked up, following it takes at least half an hour. Then the trees thin out into a snow-covered field. About 200 yards across the field is a two-story farmhouse and a detached barn. There's a road outside the house, and parked next to it is an small air-car — a Brumaggen *Banshee* — the local equivalent of a pickup truck. (Treat it as identical to the Skyrover, but with half the passenger capacity, cargo payload and hit points.)

The D'Mahl House

The farmhouse belongs to the D'Mahl family, Thomas and Kensie, farmers who live there with their children, the younger Jame and the older Lisa. The parents are out of the house for the next week, and have told their daughter they are visiting friends in Arden — actually they are activists helping organize a farmer's collective.

Kyle found his way to Lisa's door looking for help. But unfortunately, he now resembles an alien monster, has six-inch claws and is covered in blood. He didn't make a good impression. She panicked, grabbed her Mom's blaster, and shot him.

When the PCs Appear

Lisa is in her air-car. She's clearly visible through the transparent cockpit bubble, huddled on the seat, shaking with shock. She won't open the doors. If the agents want to talk to her, they have to break into the car. If they do, she'll scream, then realize that they are human (assuming they *are* human, of course — an alien may give her a worse fright!). She'll point to the house and say "A monster! Oh God, I left Jame in there."

They'll have to calm Lisa down if they want to get anything more coherent out of her — what it looked like ("no skin! I could see its organs — and it had six-inch claws!"), that it didn't threaten her until after she shot it, and now it has her gun.

If the investigators are gentle with her (GM's discretion), they'll be able to calm her down and get her to tell what happened — a Psychology or Empathy roll will let someone know that this is the way to treat her. If they are rough and impatient with her, have them make an Interrogation roll. If successful, she'll sullenly give them her story, but she won't like them. If they fail the roll, she'll be suspicious or angry, and won't tell them anything.

If the PCs get Lisa to talk, here's what she tells them:

"I was making dinner when I heard Encaladus — my dog — barking like crazy. I tried to quiet him down, but he was really spooked — he ran upstairs and

Lisa D'Mahl

Human female — age 21. Green eyes, auburn hair. 5'5", 130 lbs.

ST 8, DX 11, IQ 12, HT 11.

Move 5.5, Speed 5.

Dodge 5. No armor or encumbrance.

Skills: Agronomy-10; Beam Weapons-12; Biochemistry-11; Cooking-12; Chemistry-13; History-11; Piloting (Vertol)-10; Research-12; Skiing-12; Writing-9.

Advantages: Danger Sense; Sense of Duty (Jame).

Disadvantages: Laziness; Xenophobia (mild).

Quirks: Likes photography; Doesn't want to get involved.

Equipment: Blaster; Car; Credcard (\$802); Skis (in back of air-car); Winter clothing.

Lisa is a student studying biochemistry and planetary history — she hasn't made up her mind which field to specialize in yet. She lives at home, attending classes through virtual-reality computer linkage with the classroom in Arden, although when the alien arrived she was fixing dinner for herself.

Lisa's Xenophobia is an instinctive reaction rather than an overt prejudice. When she gets over her fright, since she's an intelligent person, she'll start to realize that it probably *was* some kind of sentient alien, and she killed it. She'll be afraid that she is going to be arrested and charged with something. Lisa knows nothing about Macrotech, but her knowledge of local history and chemistry could be a useful resource if the investigators befriend her. However, she has no interest in dangerous escapades, doesn't like strangers (that's why she studies at home), and will have to be prodded to help the characters. Her main goal is to get them out of her life!

Quotes: "You're just like mom and dad, always trying to get me involved in struggles or politics!" "All *right*, if it will keep me from being arrested. But just this once!"





Call for Help

It's possible that the PCs won't find or follow the tracks to the D'Mahl house. Try to get them involved in the scene at the D'Mahl house anyway. The agents should have communicators, so the simplest way is to let them pick up Lisa's distress call, which should be enough to guide them there.

Lisa's voice, scared and out of breath: "Herne Police, Herne Police — are you there — please come in — it's an emergency!" Fizz, crackle, fizz.

"This is Lisa D'Mahl . . . at the D'Mahl house, that's lat 22°, long 123° near Briar Wood. There's a monster here, it's got Jame! . . . Please . . . Isn't anyone there?"

Fizz, crackle, crackle.

Unfortunately for Lisa, the storm is fouling up radio reception — the police didn't pick up her call. The listeners won't be able to raise Lisa or talk with her unless they can make an Electronics Operation (Communication) roll. However, the characters can use a map to find Lisa's farmhouse from the coordinates.

If the characters decide to ignore the emergency broadcast and stubbornly *refuse* to be involved, they won't be aware of the alien's existence. (If that happens, eventually Lisa will get through to the police, who will find the body, arrest her, and turn the alien over to Macrotech's labs. Macrotech will put pressure on the police to shut the incident up). The investigators will have to find some other way of discovering what's happening. Their main clue is that the shuttle came from space and had Macrotech markings. Research on space stations may lead them to discover Wintermoon on their own; alternatively, they could try to break into the Macrotech complex to get a look at their files (p. 30).

wouldn't stop whimpering. When I got back downstairs, I heard someone knocking on the door. I looked out, but couldn't see who it was. I took Mom's blaster out of the cupboard, and opened the door.

"It was like a man, 'cept different. It had two arms, with claws, and long striped hair. It was all transparent, I mean you could see its bones and muscles and stuff! It wore some kind of black coverall, covered in blood. It had two arms, with claws — it reached out for me, and I shot it.

"I think I hit it in the stomach — I smelled burnt meat. But it was still on its feet, and it was fast. The thing ducked my second shot, then leapt at me. It knocked the gun out of my hand. It hit me, and knocked me across the room. That hurt! When I got up, I ran out the door and into the car. Then I realized Jame was still in the house, and I started calling for help."

The agents should obviously investigate. Lisa's shot killed Kyle (he died of internal injuries and shock) but they don't know this. The GM should keep the situation tense as the characters explore the house, describing creaking floor boards, the dog leaping out, and the like, letting the explorers be on their toes until they get their first look at the alien body and find that it is dead.

No floor plans to the house are required. Kyle's body is in the upstairs master bedroom. The Shylari body is slightly blue-tinted, with a hole burned in its stomach. Around the corpse's neck is a chain with a thick, silvery disk (see *The Holodisk*, below). It appears that Kyle was trying to use the vidcom unit in the bedroom. It is on, but the screen is blank; he died of internal injuries before he could place the call.

The Holodisk

If the PCs don't pick up on the silver disk worn by Kyle, the GM should have Lisa notice and activate it. It is an ordinary Herne artifact — a vital clue, hinting that Kyle was a human rather than an alien. If the PCs look for the owner, it will point them toward what is going on.

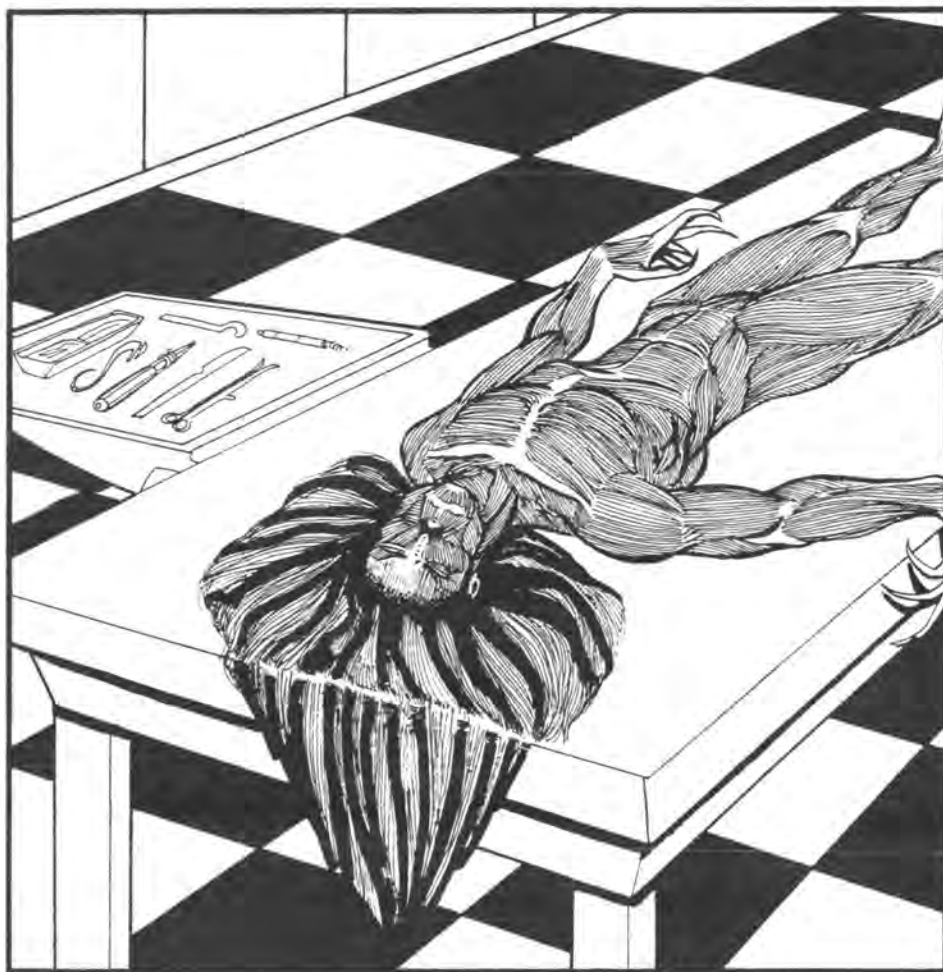
The disk is two inches across and a quarter-inch thick, made of silvered durasteel. It has a small protrusion on its upper edge. Scanning it with a radscanner shows there is an A cell inside. When touched, it opens up like a flower petal, projecting a foot-high hologram of a young human woman in a red winter jacket, standing on a sea shore, feeding a hawk. Below the hologram floats a signature: it reads "Love always — Cybele."

What to Do Next

Lisa will be upset once the shock wears off and she realizes she may have killed a sentient. She'll be torn between reporting the incident to the police and covering everything up. Lisa's parents won't be back from the conference for a week. If they can keep Lisa quiet, the PCs can hide or destroy the body; they may even persuade Lisa to let them operate out of her house, but only under protest.

Scientifically-minded characters may want to study the "alien" body. Arden has a lot of Biotech business. With some Streetwise rolls, the agents could find a shady startown laboratory or a medical student in need of extra cash who will agree to do an autopsy. This will cost about \$2,000 (subject to Merchant rolls, of course). Or Lisa can find some medical student friends willing to let the explorers into the university labs. The GM can have fun with this; lugging an alien body around town can be amusing, especially if the operatives trip over secret drug labs, late-working professors and local police in the process. If the investigators get a successful autopsy, the GM should give them the information under *Shylari* (p. 38) relating to the physical advantages and disadvantages of the race. They also learn the alien is male, of an unknown but almost certainly sentient race; he had broken ribs and abrasions (injury from the crash) but died of internal injuries from a blaster bolt.

The characters have the body of an unknown alien, a small metal disk, the wreck of a Macrotech stealth shuttle and several suits of advanced Macrotech powered armor. The PCs could contact Macrotech (see p. 30 for the Macrotech complex), but that's probably the last thing they'll do; this has "corporate intrigue" written all over it. Their best option is to try to find the woman in the hologram.



Finding Cybele

The easiest way to track down the name "Cybele" is to perform the Herne equivalent of checking the phone book. If the PCs are slow to pick up on this, Lisa could suggest it. A computer linked to a vidcom and running a Datalink (see p. S52) program can access the planet's communication network and be programmed to look for vidcom or BBS subscribers listed under the name Cybele. Fortunately, it's a very unusual name.

A Computer Operation or Research roll should be required. A successful roll locates her address and vidcom number in 10 hours, minus 2 hours per point the roll succeeds by; failure requires repeated tries. A critical success takes half an hour. If the characters have an Expert System program with Computer Operation or Research skills, they can leave the program running while they do something else. Success means they find a young woman named Cybele Locke living in Avalon, a suburb of Arden some two miles northward up the coast from the city. Her address is 22 Seadrive Lane.

Cybele works a day shift. If the PCs call or drop by her house after work, they'll reach her — see below. If they visit her during working hours, she won't be home (although the PCs can try to break in); calling gets a graphic of a baby

Proteus Virus

This is not really a virus, but rather a group of cell-sized nanomachines that operate in a way similar to the macrophage cells that make up the body's own immune system. But instead of roaming the bloodstream to seek out and destroy worn-out cells or disease organisms, the nanomachines are programmed to track down specific target cells, enter them, and transform them. Taking over control of the target cells' metabolisms, they alter the genetic information encoded within, causing radical physical changes in the body.

The proteus virus created by Noah was designed to be transmitted through the station's air supply. It is no longer active in the station's air supply. The proteus virus will only work on humans. Aliens are immune, as are humans of stock that has undergone a great deal of genetic engineering (GM's discretion). The virus is programmed to retain the sex of its victims; it will turn a male human into a male Shylari, for instance.

Noah can create a new batch of virus in 24 hours with the help of his robots and labs; it could create a counter-virus to turn Shylari into humans in about a week. Without a TL12 supercomputer like Noah, it could take a human team months, years or even decades to accomplish this. If someone becomes exposed to the virus (for instance, if the group is captured by Noah and it decides to transform them) there is a faint chance the bodies' own immune system will fight it off: the subject gets a HT-10 roll to resist, plus any bonuses for Panimmunity (see *Space* and *Ultra-Tech*) treatments. If the roll is failed, the victim will collapse and begin the metamorphosis into a Shylari, a process that takes a further six hours. At the end of this time, a character will be a Shylari (see p. 38). Add the Shylari racial modifiers to the character's statistics and the appropriate advantages and disadvantages, and adjust his point total to reflect the changes.

The metamorphosis plague used by Noah is just one example of the type of effect that a nanotechnological proteus virus can produce. See *GURPS Psionics*, p. 81, for other forms of proteus virus, especially types capable of providing psi powers.



Cybele Locke

Human female — age 27. Light skin, dark brown pageboy-cut hair, gray eyes, 5'6", 135 lbs.

ST 9, DX 12, IQ 13, HT 10

Speed 5.25, Move 5.

Dodge 5. No armor or encumbrance.

Advantages: Animal Empathy; Attractive.

Disadvantages: Duty (Macrotech); Impulsive; Sense of Duty (Kyle).

Quirks: Enjoys popular music; Likes to braintap raptors; Modest; Quiet interest in planetary ecology.

Skills: Computer Operation-14; Computer Programming-16; Driving-10; Electronics (Cybernetics)-15; Engineering (Cybernetics)-16; Naturalist-13; Survival-12; Swimming-12; Vet-17.

Equipment: Cybele dresses neatly, usually favoring either a beige and grey skirt and blouse, or a conservative corporate suit. In cold weather she wears a coat and boots. She usually has a briefcase holding her personal computer, and any papers or disks she needs. She carries no weapons. She has a credcard with \$12,200 credits.

Cybele is very much in love with Kyle Drake, and is upset at the possibility that something has happened to him. If she comes to believe that he is dead, transformed into an alien, or critically injured, she will briefly break down, but will pull herself together determined to find out what really happened and punish those responsible. She is not cut out for physical violence, but is quite brave and determined.

hawk cracking out of an egg. The fledgling says "Hi! Cybele isn't available now. Please leave your message and vidcom number, and she'll return your call." She calls the agents back 1d hours later.

Avalon is a coastal residential neighborhood built about 70 years ago. Number 22 Seadrive Lane is the last house on a one-way street, built on a cliff overlooking the ocean. It's a duraplastic dome constructed shortly after the colonization. Behind it is a rock garden, and a 50-foot drop to a rocky beach. If Cybele is home, parked in front is a white two-seater automobile; Cybele's car. (If the PCs decide to break in to case the place, the lock and alarm system is similar in function to that of the hotel suite — see p. 17).

Inside, Cybele's house is decorated with three 3-D posters of hawks. The dome is all one big room, subdivided by Japanese-style paper screens. Half is her living quarters — a folding couch/bed, bathroom, and kitchenette. The rest is her workshop: a portable micro-cybersurgery including diagnostic table and surgical tools, and a rack of brain implant equipment. On a work table are two braintaps, tiny objects the size of apple seeds, one ready for installing, the other partially assembled. Recessed into the wall is an ultra-modern complexity-5 mini-computer, a Macrotech Delta Seven encased in smooth black bioplastic. Next to the computer are 60 mini-disks. They range from utility programs like Datalink to advanced debugging programs related to her job to interactive games to databases on her interests ("how to build a brain implant," "veterinary handbook" and "hawk neurology").

When they meet her, the PCs will recognize Cybele as the girl in the hologram, although if she's at home, she'll be wearing a sky-blue T-shirt that says "Save the Hawks," soft sneakers, and a long silver spiderwool skirt instead of a parka. If they use the vidcom, she will not want to talk on the com, and will ask them to visit her. She'll invite them in (using an outside speaker and telling her house computer to open the door) rather than coming to the door herself. The PCs will see why when they enter the room — she's busy inserting a braintap into a hawk's skull. If they ask, she'll explain: A braintap is an implant communicator that lets the wearer of a special reception helmet perceive all sensory experiences of the braintapped being: see what it sees, feel what it feels, and so on (see *Ultra-Tech*, p. 78). Although she's using the braintaps for a serious study of hawk behavior, Cybele also likes to escape from daily existence in a hawk's body, enjoying the thrill of flying over the city and ocean, the feel of wind in her feathers. She'll let the PCs give it a try if they want. She could also insert a braintap into a person, using default Surgery skills, and knows how to recognize and remove a psych implant (see the sidebar on p. 41).

When the PCs show her the holodisk she'll be very agitated, enough to stop her work if they haven't shown it to her over the com. "That belonged to my fiancé, Kyle — Kyle Drake — how did you get it?"

Cybele will be a little suspicious of the visitors, but she's a good judge of character. If they tell her about the alien and the shuttle, and seem honest and genuinely willing to help her find out what happened to her fiancé (or if they like hawks) she'll warm to them.

"Kyle and I are both computer programmers. Kyle's an artificial intelligence specialist — he helped design the software for the Macrotech megacomputers. I'm sort of a generalist — I debug programs, mostly for the security systems and terraforming projects (braintapping and hawks is just a hobby!). We both had good jobs at the Macrotech Tower in Arden. We were happy, we were partners, we were going to be engaged.

"Then it all went wrong. Six months ago Macrotech reassigned him to something he can't talk about, something I know excites him — maybe more than me, damn it." She pauses. "They don't let him make direct calls, and I haven't had a message drop from him in two weeks!

"I don't know why my locket was on that alien. I don't know anything about smuggled stardrives. But you've made me very, very worried about Kyle."

Before they leave, Cybele will make sure she has the PCs' vidcom numbers (their vertol will have a vidcom if they don't have a hotel room). She'll be willing to use her expertise with Macrotech's computers to do some digging of her own into the company's security files when she goes back to work. If the investigators don't ask her to, she'll do it anyway — she's impulsive, in love and afraid for Kyle.

The Next Step

After meeting Cybele, the group can either wait and see what she digs up, try to break into Macrotech themselves or recover from any injuries. Meanwhile, Cybele will hunt through the secure Macrotech files to see what she can find out about connections between Macrotech and the aliens — and of course, her fiancé.

They'll get a call the next evening; it's Cybele. She's calling from a public vidcom — the PCs can see the street behind her. She looks scared and angry. She tells them in a hushed voice that she hacked into the Macrotech computer.

"I found something, something big. Macrotech is strong in space exploration — we've always had ships going out, looking for new worlds, new resources, that sort of thing. Anyway, a year ago, one of our scout ships found a starship, somewhere out in the Gunningagap, near a planetless star called Shylara.

"It was a space ark — no faster-than-light drive, but very advanced otherwise. And there were aliens aboard — thousands of them, humanoids in suspended animation. But something had gone wrong. They were all *dead*, husks, dried mummies. And the ship was damaged.

"We never told anyone, never reported it to the government. We've got an alien ship hidden somewhere in system, and we're studying it, trying to make sense of the technology behind it — the ship's computer was intact, and they are trying to read its data banks, find out where it came from, gain an edge over the competition.

"They called it the Noah Project, because the ship looked like a space ark. That's what Kyle was assigned to.

"I've got a copy of the Noah File, graphic printouts of pictures of the alien ship. I haven't had time to read the whole file, but I've found out where the ship is being studied. A place called Wintermoon, Herne-lunar orbit. It's an old station — I thought it was dismantled, but it wasn't — they've got all sorts of stuff there."

She stops and looks around nervously, and if the PCs want to chat for long (see the pictures, get her to wait at the phone, etc.) she refuses. "I'm too exposed — the street is dark, and there's no one around! I'm afraid I may have tripped an alarm getting the file out. I think someone was following me before — I want to get into a crowded place." She tells the PCs there's a dance club across the street — "The sign says the Club Starlight," and she wants them to pick her up there as soon as they can — and be careful!

Cybele is right — someone is following her. Unfortunately, she hasn't lost her tail. In the shadows on top of the nearby building, Silvie, the chief operative of Macrotech's "Omega Group" security directorate, is watching her call the PCs. Silvie's a cyborg, and she's using her light amplification and enhanced hearing to listen in on the call, hearing every word.

When Cybele hangs up, Cybele heads across the street to the dance club. As she does so, Silvie leaps down behind her. Cybele turns to see the woman standing next to her. Silvie smiles, and activates her sonic claws . . .

Vidcoms

A device about the size of the office telephone of today, vidcoms provide both audio and visual channels for communication and entertainment, accessing dozens or hundreds of channels. Standard models at TL10 are holographic. All include an automatic answering service and automatically inform the user of the comm number of the person calling him, enabling incoming calls to be selectively screened. Most can route output from the small six-inch screen to a home wallscreen for a better picture. A vidcom uses household power. \$80, 4 lbs.

Public vidcoms are scattered around Arden (and other towns) on Herne. Any radio communicator or vidcom registered with Herne Communications, the planetary "phone company" can tie into the planet's communications net, functioning as a cellular phone — the monthly bill is around \$20, which includes an individual com number. Long distance planetary calls cost \$.25 per minute.



Silvie

Human female, age 29 — trim and athletic, six feet tall, with tanned skin, thatch of short blonde hair and silver-gray eyes.

ST 22, DX 14, IQ 12, HT 15.

Speed 7.25, Move 10, Dodge 11.

Her skin has PD 0, DR 18 — this is added to any body armor she might wear if she's expecting trouble.

Advantages: Attractive; Combat Reflexes; High Pain Threshold; Patron (Morgan Crane). Extensive cybernetic implants — see below.

Disadvantages: Duty (to Macrotech, all the time); Lecherous; Overconfident; Sadistic.

Quirks: Disdains ranged weapons; Enjoys wild dancing at clubs; Likes to take people apart with her claws; Prefers to befriend people before killing them; Prowls around while talking — can't sit still.

Skills: Acrobatics-14; Acting-12; Area Knowledge-13 (Arden); Beam Weapons-14; Computer Operations-12; Computer Programming-14; Dancing-14; Fast-Talk-14; Karate-15; Interrogation-16; Motorcycle-14; Scuba-11; Security Systems-14; Shadowing-15; Streetwise-11; Swimming-12; Vacc Suit-12.

Equipment: Credcard (\$2,000); Formal executive dress when in Macrotech offices; for covert operations or lounging about town, a black bioplastic body stocking which protects her body but not head or hands (when it's worn, her PD stays 2, but it increases her torso and limbs' DR to 33) and a dark blue Synth-leather jacket. Her wrist chronometer is also a short-range communicator. She has a handful of disks in her pocket — if asked, they are music. Actually, they are reflex chips. She rides a sleek red Macrotech turbobike.

Silvie is a cyborg, rebuilt using advanced TL10 techniques. Very little of her is still human — only her brain, spinal cord and a few internal organs. It doesn't show (unless she takes at least 10 hits of damage!); she's a beautiful woman who still looks (and feels) totally human.

Silvie has a *full cyborg body* (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 46) — as well as possessing bionic arms, legs, eyes and ears, her entire torso and much of the head is replaced with artificial parts. Her cybernetic eyes are bionic with the light intensification modification, her ears have +4 Acute Hearing, artificial arms give her ST 22 (ST 15 for the arm increased 50% due to the full cyborg body), and Silvie's bionic legs have increased her Move. As a result of her modifications, she doesn't need to eat, drink, excrete or breathe; she's immune to gas or biotoxins and could safely walk naked in hard vacuum or extreme temperatures. She can't heal wounds naturally, however, and must be repaired.

Continued on next page . . .

The Club Starlight

The Club Starlight is a medium-sized dance club at Arden. It's rarely frequented by Macrotech employees, since it's on the wrong side of town and it's image doesn't conform to the corporate ideology. Nevertheless, live entertainment and a well-stocked bar make it popular with the locals. There are some 60 patrons present, dancing to loud popular music and strobing lasers, or congregating around the bar.

One of the patrons is Silvie. Dressed in her danceskins and low boots, she's dancing on her own in the corner of the club, staying in the shadows and watching the doors.



Silvie captured Cybele right after she called the PCs. After a brief interrogation (she hurt Cybele, but not *too* badly) she called Macrotech. They sent a unmarked car to pick Cybele up and put her on ice before the PCs arrived. Silvie then headed into the Starlight to await the adventurers. She has gotten a description of the investigators from Cybele, and will dance up to them if they show up looking for her.

"I'm Silvie — a friend of Cybele. She said she was being watched too closely, so she sent me to meet with you instead. Macrotech isn't looking for me. Is that all right?"

Silvie tries to convince the characters that she is a friend of Cybele, a co-worker at Macrotech whose younger brother worked with Kyle, and who Silvie is worried about. Her intent is to get them to trust her, so that she can find out exactly what they know and don't know. If she becomes convinced that they aren't involved with the aliens, and learns of their true interest, she'll become sufficiently intrigued to use them as stalking horses to find out what is really going on.

Still dancing, she'll pull out and show them the pictures she took from Cybele, and hand them a mini-disk marked "Noah File/Classified Violet Regal." The pictures are the real ones — they don't tell anything that Cybele hasn't told the agents on the vidcom. The mini-disk is also real, but Silvie has erased it. If put in a computer, it will show nothing. If the group checks it while she's around (something she hopes they won't do — she gave them the pictures to distract them), Silvie will suggest that it had a sophisticated virus program on it that Cybele must have missed. But hey, the pictures are enough to act on, right?

Three pictures are from a digital camera — they are marked “Taken by Captain Hal Jenner/Group Intrepid, starship *Odysseus*/Aboard the Alien Vessel.” The fourth picture is marked “extrapolation of living Shylari physical appearance.”

A manta-ray shaped starship, drifting in space. In the background is a blue-white pinpoint, a star.

In a large, dark, vaulted chamber are row upon row of what look like freeze tubes. A man wearing a vacc suit is using his helmet light to illuminate one of the tubes. Inside can be seen the mummified husk of a creature of some kind.

A closeup of the alien corpse, taken out of the capsule. It is humanoid, with two arms and legs, and a head. The creature's hands and feet are clawed.

A color picture showing a profile, front, and back view of an alien. It very closely resembles the appearance of the alien from the shuttle crash, save that the skin tint is missing.

Silvie's Plan

Silvie will try to get the agents to take her with them, enabling her to make sure they don't do something like go to the Patrol with their information. At this point, the operatives probably know enough to go to Wintermoon to check it out, and will be looking for a ship to take them there. (If they *haven't* decided to go to Wintermoon, the GM should give them more clues.) Silvie wants to be on that ship!

Her assignment is to find out exactly who the agents are and what they know, and she can do this best by being a friend. If she remains undiscovered until the explorers get to Wintermoon, she may decide to work with them to destroy Noah. She may reveal her abilities to defend herself — if so, she'll try to get the agents to work with her, at least until Noah is destroyed. She won't want to negotiate with it!

Silvie's cover story is that her sister is on Wintermoon, and from what Cybele told her, she's worried about her. Silvie wants to go to Wintermoon with them. If they are doubtful about taking her, she tells them she can handle herself . . . her job with Macrotech is as a security guard, and she might be able to help them acquire (i.e., steal) a shuttle.

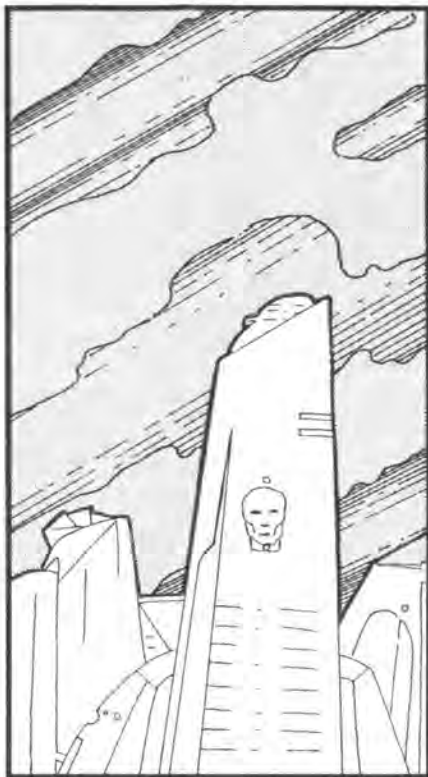
The pictures may make them trust Silvie, but the agents may want to see Cybele first. Silvie tells them she's gone into hiding with her parents on the Western Continent. She's doesn't have names or addresses for them, but Cybele's supposed to call in four hours to let Silvie and the PCs know she's all right. (By that time, Macrotech will have had their megacomputer whip up a computer-generated expert program that can imitate Cybele over a the vidcom with Acting-13, backing up Silvie's story. Multistellar corporations have a lot of resources — especially at TL10!)

Silvie (Continued)

She also has a reflex implant (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 80) in her brain and a socket under her hair, disguised by a flap of skin. It allows her to insert program chips (takes 2 seconds) giving her a physical skill at DX+2, skill-12, or +2 to her current level if she already has the skill, whichever is best. Because it focuses her concentration on a single skill, all *other* skills (and any IQ rolls) will drop by 4 while its activated; deactivating it leaves her Mentally Stunned until she makes her IQ roll. Usually she uses it only when necessary. She has chips for Freefall, Driving, Karate, Motorcycle, Stealth, and Pilot (Shuttle) in her pocket.

Silvie has two “black implants” designed to increase her effectiveness as an assassin, both made at the Wintermoon cybernetics laboratory: bioplastic dermal armor and sonic claws. They are described in the next sidebar.





Macrotech "Black Implants"

Neither of these items are presently on the open or black market, but they could appear in a few years. A price and optional point cost are given for them. If the PCs dismantle Silvie without inflicting too serious damage, they can probably get two or three times the listed price by selling the parts to a criminal organization or rival cybernetics company.

Sonic Claws: Five 4-inch blades of coherent sound sprout from under her finger nails, each capable of cutting durasteel. Similar to a sonic blade (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 74), they do 5d damage (or less, if the user wishes to only scratch) and armor protects with ½ its normal DR. Any armor hit loses 1 DR at the location hit — natural armor loses as many DR in that spot as it blocks. The sonic claws are useless in vacuum. The claws are normally invisible, although they make a humming noise. They are fitted with a holographic projector that can render them visible as blades of light, increasing their intimidation value. The implant costs \$120,000, and at the GM's option, 60 points.

Bioplas Dermal Armor: Silvie's body has an outer sheath of living bioplastic, a resilient, flexible pseudo-organic material that is actually alive, and can heal itself. Every square inch contains electrically active muscles, fibers and nerve endings, enabling it to behave like normal skin, but it provides PD 0, DR 15. It costs \$200,000 and, optionally, 45 points.

Silvie is an accomplished liar — if someone deliberately tries to trip her up with Detect Lies, make a Contest of Skill against her Acting — if she loses, they notice something false in her manner. It's more fun if this is roleplayed. For instance, Silvia has skimmed Cybele's dossier, and knows about her attachment to Kyle. She doesn't know of her interest in tinkering with hawk brains. If the intruders accuse her of treachery or she feels they are doing something threatening to Macrotech, she'll act.

The revelation of her full abilities should come as a considerable shock to her victims; she smiles sweetly, shakes her head, saying "Not bright — we could have kept this little masquerade up a while longer. You might have been useful. It's a pity you all have to die now. (Laughter.) I'll try not to make it too quick." And she pops her claws.

The Macrotech Building

If they don't decide to head to Wintermoon Station right away, the investigators may come to the conclusion that Macrotech is at least partly behind the theft of the stardrive, and that the answers lie within its main offices. They can ask for an appointment with someone, or they can try to break in, perhaps to see if they can find out what happened to Cybele, perhaps just to find information. Either way, they may eventually decide to visit Macrotech's headquarters in Arden.

The agents will find it very hard to gain an appointment with the corporation's top brass (the only people who know anything). The GM should require an Administration roll, with bonuses depending on how good the story is. On the other hand, Macrotech's vice president Morgan Crane will be more than happy to see any PCs who sound like they know too much — any mention of aliens, the Macrotech *Ghostrider* stealth shuttle or the PCs' status as Darkangel investigators will give them a quick ticket to the top floor.

Unless the PCs are offensive, Crane will receive them in his office politely enough, have his secretary Mara serve them drinks, and seem open and helpful (Sylvie is usually here as well, but won't be if the PCs have already encountered her). Crane knows about the existence of the alien ship and Wintermoon, the plan to study the computer, and that there were no surviving aliens — just dry husks in failed suspended animation chambers. Crane has no knowledge of the M-66 hyperdrive system, unless he's captured Cybele. If the conversation takes place after Cybele has been interrogated, he knows only what she's been told by the investigators. The *Ghostrider* shuttle was assigned to Wintermoon, but Crane has no idea what it might have been doing with a real live Shylari on board. He would definitely like to find out.

If they say too much, though, the operatives might not get out. Crane will want to suppress information, and may have Mara and his guards arrest them. The best way to ensure they get out alive is for them to leave copies of any information with friends and let Crane know that everything they've learned will be spilled if they don't walk out safely. On the other hand, if the agents manage to convince Crane that they are useful, he might even offer them places on the assault force he intends to send to Wintermoon. He may have them mind-wiped afterwards, though, or if they perform exceptionally, he may offer them jobs with Macrotech security . . .

The Outside

The Macrotech complex is located in downtown Arden. The building is a gleaming 88-story tower of glass and durasteel, surrounded by a carefully landscaped park. It consists of office space and laboratories employing some 2,000 people, mostly as planners, scientists, sales reps and accountants — Macrotech

is a multistellar, and (with the exception of the secret Wintermoon) its actual engineering labs are in other solar systems on industrial planets.

The Lobby

The first floor is the main lobby, open to the public and usually bustling with the comings and goings of scores of employees, watched over by the keen eyes of a dozen security guards. It has several reception desks built of bioplastic and perfect orbit-grown crystal, and a floor of bright, polished marble. The information and reception desks are manned by male and female clerks genetically engineered for perfection. Behind the desks are low-security conference rooms and showrooms for demonstrating the latest commercial products of Macrotech's labs — new automeds, designer clones, lighter exoskeletons, etc.

Access up is provided by two banks of elevators, and a flight of stairs (used only for emergencies). The elevators are voice-controlled, but not tied to any specific voice prints except for the 88th floor, which requires the voice print of one of the guards or top executives assigned there. There is usually a wait of 3d seconds for an elevator. If the PCs are sneaking about, the GM should make an encounter check — on a 10 or less on 3d, someone is inside the elevator when the doors open.

The Basement

The basement contains the auxiliary power plant for the building, a fusion reactor (always guarded by six security guards), storage areas, a maintenance room and the troop barracks.

The Upper Floors

Floors 2 to 38 are personnel, sales, advertising and marketing. Floors 39 to 58 are devoted to the offices of the terraforming division (with departments like atmospheric seeding, soil transformation and ecological management). Floors 59 to 74 are assigned to the offices of the cybernetics division (with departments that design and market bionics, robots, exoskeletons, powered armor, and brain implants). Floors 75 to 87 are the offices of the bio-medical products division (automeds, cloning, braintaping, panimmunity, genetic engineering).

The 88th floor is devoted to the Omega Group (which handles security), the main computer, the security files and the offices of Morgan Crane, regional vice-president. (The actual president and board of directors live in other star systems; Crane will eventually have to answer to them, but as long as he can keep any dirty work from becoming public, he has a free hand.)

Encounters

Outside the lobby, for every 5 minutes spent by the PCs prowling about there is a 10 or less (on 3d) chance of encountering someone. Roll 1d to determine what is encountered (roll 1d+2 at night):

- | | |
|-----|----------------------|
| 1-2 | 1d+1 office workers. |
| 3-4 | 1d-2 office workers. |
| 5 | Two security guards. |
| 6 | 1d-3 executives |
| 7 | Two security guards. |
| 8 | Janitorial robot. |



Office workers are normal people with average stats. If confronted by armed intruders they are very unlikely to be violent; they'll most likely freeze, run for their lives or do what they are told . . . but you never know — roll 1d for each person. On a 6, someone decides to be a hero.

Macrotech Mk VI Powered Suit

A form-fitting suit of powered armor optimized for close combat, the Macrotech Mk VI is a more sophisticated (and far more expensive!) version of the suit described in *Space*. A suit of this sort would sell for several times the price, and is almost never available on the open market. The suit weighs 150 pounds, including air tank. Operating the suit requires Exoskeleton or Battlesuit skill. An unskilled user will suffer the same penalties as an unskilled exoskeleton operator (p. S36).

The suit's hardened biphasic carbide armor provides PD 7, DR 140 torso and head; PD 6, DR 120 limbs, gauntlets, feet, and face plate. Its power assist gives the user ST 30 and adds 3 to the user's Move, helping to cancel encumbrance penalties.

It has a built in medium-range communicator, multiscanner and holographic HUD, and a targeting system (p. B138) that divides the range/speed modifier of the target by 5. It also features a chameleon system and sensor distorter (functioning the same way as the chameleon suit and distort belt on p. S46-47).

The suit is airtight, has a 12-hour airpack, a Radiation PF 20, and a 24-hour food and water supply. It is powered by a D cell for one week.

The suit is equipped with an arm-mounted electromagnetic gauss railgun firing .10 caliber sabot high-density armor-piercing slugs that do 6d+3 crushing damage; armor protects at ½ DR, but any damage that gets past DR is also halved. The magazine is built into the forearm, and takes 3 turns to reload; spare clips weigh 4 lbs. and cost \$40. It has SS 9, Acc 16. Its other stats are ½D 2,000, Max 10,000, RoF 12, Shots 120. Its low recoil is absorbed by the suit, and it is very reliable — roll again on a critical miss; only a second critical failure is a malfunction.

Fitting a person to a suit requires an Armoury tool kit (there are plenty in the weapon's lab), 2 hours and an Armoury (Battlesuit/TL)+2 or Battlesuit/TL roll; failure requires another hour. Once a person has been fitted to a suit, it will take him or her 4 minutes to put on a suit or half that time to remove it.

Macrotech Security Guards

Male or female human — age 20-30.
ST 11, DX 11, IQ 10, HT 10.

Speed 5.25, Move 5.

Dodge 5; light monocrys, PD 2, DR 8,
no encumbrance.

Skills: Beam Weapons (Stunner)-13,
Brawling-12; Electronics Operation (Security Systems); Shortsword-12.

Advantages: Attractive, Patron (Macrotech).

Disadvantages: Duty (Macrotech), and one of: Honest; Lecherous; Sense of Duty (comrades); Sense of Duty (Macrotech).

Equipment: Stunner; implanted biomon-
itor (see below).

Security guards report by radio to the security center at half-hour intervals. In addition, all guards have been fitted with internal biomonitors that keep track of the brain waves and heart rate of each guard. If readings stop (indicating either death or jamming or removal of the sensor) or become erratic (indicating drugs, a wound, excitement, or unconsciousness) the security center is alerted. They will call the guard within 2d seconds. If he fails to respond, they'll send a team to check him out before calling an alert. They won't sound a general alarm unless the team report something suspicious (or also fail to report!) — sometimes the biomonitors malfunction.



Security guards are uniformed security personnel. They always patrol in pairs; there are usually four on each level. If they find someone without a badge or suspicious-looking (armed, armored, wounded, etc.) they'll stop him. If the suspect can't produce proper identification or give a good explanation, he's be taken to the Detention Center for interrogation. Anyone resisting will be stunned. The guards' statistics are in the sidebar.

Executives are upper management. They make better hostages but in all other respects are similar to office workers. On the top floor, roll 1d. On a roll of 5-6, the "executive" is Morgan Crane plus Mara, or Silvie.

Janitorial robots are yard-high red boxes, moving on wheels, with three limbs: a vacuum cleaner, a cleaning spray, and a clutter-remover. They are programmed to be unobtrusive, and retreat from anything that looks human. They are PD 2, DR 5, HT 10.

The 88th Floor

The map shows the top floor of Macrotech Biocybernetics Complex. This whole floor is a high-security area, containing the offices of the security division, the important files, and the main computer. Unfortunately for the investigators, it's where any prisoners or information they want is likely to be found.

There are a total of ten guards on this floor: six at the security station, plus four more on roving patrol. Once the intruders have met ten guards, they won't meet any more unless troops arrive from the lower levels to answer a general alarm.

1. Elevator Bank

These are four elevators, leading up to the landing pad on the roof and down to the lower floors. Note that the elevators arrive right next to the open security center door (#2) giving the security guards an excellent look at anyone entering the floor. They will *always* check badges, and anyone with a visitor's badge must be accompanied by security in order to pass.

2. Security Center

This room's window opens on the elevator bank, and a guard will physically check the badge of anyone entering the floor as well as scanning for weapons or implants (see below). Anyone arrested on this floor (or of interest to the upper echelons of Macrotech) will be placed in the Detention Rooms below.

This is the operations headquarters of the Omega Group, Macrotech's internal security division. It is manned around the clock, with six security guards (see sidebar), half of them in uniform, the others in plain clothes for special operations. The room is wall-to-wall computer panels and camera monitors. The security panel monitors all alarms and keeps track of the position of every guard via his or her bioscanner. It can also shut down some or all elevators, control the doors and environmental systems in the detention block and control other things, such as the sprinkler system and the exterior building locks. If there is an alarm from a broken window or door lock, the security panel tells the operator exactly where the break has occurred. The console also controls the cameras and environmental controls for the detention block. The guards also have a multiscanner, used for scanning people entering the 88th floor, and for searching prisoners for implants.

If she isn't with the investigators or Crane, Silvie (p. 28) is here directing routine operations.

3. Detention Block

These cells are 4 small (2×2×2 yards) cubicles with padded walls and floors, a toilet and a wash basin. There's also a camera in the ceiling (it uses a

fiber-optic fisheye lens, so it's almost impossible to spot or damage) — the camera feeds into the monitor in the security center, which also controls the rooms' intercom and climate control, allowing the guards to vary heat and temperature from 0° to 90° (used to soften up prisoners), and address prisoners without opening the door.

There's an automed here for treating injuries or removing bionic implants. To make sure they don't have any hidden gear, prisoners are stripped and placed in the cells, and given a very thorough scan for implants. This will find any bionics or the like on a 15 or less on 3d (roll for each); after all, this is the company that *makes* many of them! Before entering the room to deliver food or remove prisoners for interrogation, the guards order the prisoners to kneel, hands behind their heads, facing away from the doors, checking the camera to make sure that they are doing so.

After Cybele has run afoul of Silvie, this is where she'll be being held (her clothing and effects are in the detention room). If the agents rescue her, she can tell them what happened. She also tells them that Macrotech *doesn't know what's going on* regarding the living alien and the stolen stardrive — they questioned her intensively under drugs on that subject, and were very upset when she couldn't tell them who was really behind it.

4. Software Library

This is where to look for the Noah File. Approximately 200,000 backup computer disks are kept in this room, ranging from accounting figures to marketing studies to braintapes. Each disk is kept in an individual locker with its own electronic lock; failing a Lockpicking roll causes an alarm to ring in the security room.

Since it would take forever to hunt through all the lockers, a computer terminal is present. A successful Computer Operations/TL10 roll allows the searchers to find whatever they are looking for. Otherwise, make an IQ roll every five minutes of searching.

The Noah File recounts Captain Hal Jenner's encounter with the alien ship and documents the decision of Morgan Crane not to report its existence to the interstellar government. It covers the assignment of numerous personnel, including Kyle Drake, to Wintermoon Station. It details their regular reports as they probed the mysteries of the alien vessel: studies of its hull (a flawless synthetic diamond/metal composite built by microscopic robots) and means of propulsion (a TL11 reactionless drive which apparently exploded; no sign of faster-than-light capability; estimated TL12 antimatter power, also destroyed with the drive). A footnote mentions analysis of the hull provided metallurgical data used in the new Macrotech Mk VI armor structure (see sidebar, p. 31).

The file provides a physical description of Noah (crystal sphere on pedestal) and an estimate of its capabilities (they guessed it to be a Complexity 8 megacomputer). Much of the file is devoted to the arcane procedures used by the AI scientists (including Kyle) to try to reactivate the computer and coax it into providing them access to its databases. The file's authors report jubilantly that they have started to make progress in examining what seemed to be an entire "racial encyclopedia." They had some information on the alien culture (see sidebar on *Society*), but still had not penetrated the science databases. The last entries (dated a few days ago) end with reports from the genetic labs, including "artist's impressions" of what they might have looked like.

5. Executive Teleconference Room

A large room with wood panelling, a wet bar, and a single long conference table, a slab of perfect zero-G quartz crystal. The silver walls can convert to one or many high-resolution holographic screens and are voice activated.

Morgan Crane

Human male — age 38; slim and handsome, with an angelic face, a pale complexion, slicked-back brown hair, and black eyes that glitter with barely suppressed amusement. 5'9", 155 lbs.

ST 10, DX 11, IQ 17, HT 12

Speed 5.5, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry n/a.

Dodge 5; No encumbrance, wears PD 2, DR 15 bioplas suit.

Advantages: Charisma+3; Handsome; Intuition; Reputation+2 (among executives); Status 3; Strong Will+2; Wealthy.

Disadvantages: Berserk; Jealousy; Megalomania; Sense of Duty (Macrotech).

Quirks: Believes he is superior to normal humans; Never panics; Twisted sense of humor; Xenophile — very interested in non-human cultures and races; Very curious.

Skills: Administration-20; Computer Operations-15; Computer Programming-15; Detect Lies-16; Diplomacy-17; Economics-17; Free Fall-12; Intelligence Analysis-18; Law-19; Leadership-17; Literature-16; Piloting (Space Shuttle)-10; Politics-19; Research-16; Strategy-16; Streetwise-17; Vacc Suit-17; Xenology-16.

Equipment: Executive suit; Personal Computer (Complexity 4 with short-range communicator and datalink).

Morgan Crane is the head of Macrotech's Intelligence Directorate. While he appears fully human, Morgan is actually genetically-enhanced, with a boosted IQ and enhanced right brain. Part of a program designed to produce the ultimate corporate administrator, these modifications have left him a brilliant psychotic: highly intuitive and charismatic but dangerously unstable and lacking in empathy for those he considers his inferiors — which includes the bulk of normal humanity.

Because he is so concerned with corporate intrigue, Morgan is almost indifferent to direct physical danger. He doesn't carry weapons — he relies on his wits and his bodyguards. If he is in physical danger, he will accept his fate with a slow smile and an ironic comment. Although his primary motive is personal power, Morgan believes that what he does is in the best interests of Macrotech.

Assault Force

If the GM feels the PCs are having too easy a time, Crane may decide to personally visit the station — perhaps after he fully interrogates Cybele, or if Silvie fails to report back to him. He'll take the Macrotech courier *Korolev*, his bodyguard Mara (use Silvie's statistics) and three fire teams of armored security troopers (see below). He will arrive just after the agents do. He'll leave one squad to hold the shuttle and take two squads into the station.

The GM should engineer the situation so that Crane arrives *after* the agents have dealt with most of the traps and defenders but before they reach level 7.

As usual, Crane's goal is to secure the station and suppress any security leaks. Crane will never deal with Noah, but he makes a potent "third force" which the PCs may join up with Noah to fight, or (if the going is very tough) ally with to oppose Noah.

Macrotech Security Trooper

Human male or female — age 18-32, with mirrored full-face helmet and body armor.

ST 11, DX 11, IQ 10, HT 11

Speed 3.5, Move 3.

Dodge 3; medium encumbrance. Wears Combat Infantry Dress (TL10). This gives PD 4, DR 38 for the head, PD 3, DR 30 for the face, PD 4, DR 60 on the torso, PD 2, DR 32 on arms and legs, and PD 3, DR 35 on feet.

Advantages: Patron (Macrotech).

Disadvantages: Duty (Macrotech). Also, pick one of: Bully; Honest; Lecherous; Sense of Duty (comrades); Sense of Duty (Macrotech).

Skills: Beam Weapons-14 (Laser); Beam Weapons-14 (Stunner); Brawling-12; Driving-11; Electronics Operation (Sensors or Security or Communications)-11; Free Fall-10; Vacc Suit-12.

Equipment: TL10 Combat Infantry Dress; Combat Infantry Helmet (includes holographic HUD, short-range communicator, with scrambler, and multiview visor); Military X-ray Laser Rifle; Spare D cell; Stunner. One man in a fire team will have an Electromag Grenade Launcher (at skill-14) and a magazine each of concussion and sleep gas grenades instead of a laser.

Macrotech security troopers are well-trained and capable of following orders but not very experienced. They will fight bravely until wounded at which time they will fall back or take cover.



6. Fire Stairs

These stairs lead down to lower floors and up to the helicopter pad and roof-top guard post. The stairs are only supposed to be used in an emergency, and a closed-circuit camera monitors the stairs, feeding into the Security Operations room. If anyone suspicious is noted, security is dispatched immediately.

7. Computer Center

This room houses two Complexity 8 megacomputers. Both are "technical" artificial intelligences — that is, they lack personalities, but are capable of creative engineering design.

The computer center is normally empty; the computers are linked to sub-terminals everywhere else in the building, so the only reason to enter is to perform maintenance, which requires approval from the Security Center, who then turns off the alarm.

8. Men's and Women's Washrooms

If the PCs go in here, there is a 1 in 6 chance someone is using or patrolling them — roll an encounter as above.

9. Executive Offices

Used in the daytime for meeting clients, arranging deals and general work. Each has two desks, with a computer terminal connected up with the megacomputer in room #6, several chairs and various personal touches like plants,

sculptures or works of art. There is a 2 in 6 chance that an executive is working late in any of the offices the PCs visit — otherwise each office is locked and deserted.

10. Morgan Crane's Office

Crane's office is a spacious triangular room on the corner of the Macrotech building. Two walls of the office are huge picture windows, one looking out on the streets of Arden below, the other on a courtyard where 200 jumpsuit-clad Macrotech employees perform their daily exercises.

Crane is a workaholic — he's usually here day and night. He's seated behind a heavy durasteel desk; Mara (see below) also has a desk and is ostensibly his secretary. If the PCs are visiting him at a formal meeting, they'll also see Mara and Silvie, in executive dress, standing on either side of him, looking tough and mean. Use Silvie's statistics for Mara, except that Mara has medium-length brown hair, and lacks Silvie's sadism — instead she is a Fanatic, utterly dedicated to Crane's safety.

Security Procedures

Security on floors 1 to 87 is reasonably light. Each floor has a security office next to the elevator staffed with two uniformed security guards (armed with stunners) on duty in the lobby, and has roving patrols during the night.

Only Macrotech employees and authorized visitors are permitted entrance beyond the lobby. No unescorted visitors are permitted up to the 88th floor. If they get an appointment to see Crane, the visitors will be shepherded by two armed security officers for every person. To get there, the PCs will have to get a visitor's badge (10 minutes to prepare) and pass through a battery of scanners (Contest of Skills — PC's Holdout vs. scanner's level of 20 to smuggle anything through). Weapons will be politely removed.

If an internal alarm or a guard reports an intrusion, half of the guards from the security room will approach the location of the alarm. In case of a general fire fight the basement barracks, holding 36 Macrotech combat soldiers (p. 34) will be alerted. Within 30 seconds the elevators will be turned off and four additional guards will be posted by each stairway or elevator on the ground floor. Within two minutes the floors will be cleared, two armored squads (of six Macrotech soldiers each) will replace the guards in the lobby, while four more squads move up through the building toward the source of the trouble.

The Dark Side of the Moon

After Cybele's phone call the PCs should have realized that the answers are in space, at Wintermoon Station. They should have located the station at the Lagrange point 60° behind Herne's moon. When the investigators go, Silvie will want to accompany them, though she may decide to assassinate them in space before they arrive.

Getting there requires a spaceship, or at least, a space shuttle — see *Freeport* (p. 13) for a description of what ships will be available. Both of the port's shuttles are working around the clock to load the huge transport that is in orbit. So any attempt to get a ship to the space station will have to be clandestine. The following options are possible:

Bribe the trader captain. The captain of the *Egyptian Moon* has already met the PCs as passengers on his ship. For about \$50,000, he'll agree to take the group to the space station.

Bribe the portmaster: Either of the two port shuttles could be diverted for a suitable fee — about \$25,000. This requires getting at least a Very Good reaction roll, though, and lots of haggling!

Robots

The PCs may encounter robots while aboard Wintermoon. There are two basic types:

Maintenance Robots have 3-foot wide pear-shaped bodies painted olive drab, with three legs and three arms ending in a variety of tools: they have Mechanic and Electronics-15 in a variety of specialties plus the equivalent of a mini-toolkit.

Medical Robots are similar, but are painted red and white, and their limbs terminate in surgical instruments — they have Surgery, First Aid, and Diagnosis-15, and possess built-in medical gear identical to a medical pouch (p. S70) including hypo.

Both types have PD 2, DR 5, HT 10 and are drones under Noah's personal control — there are about 20 of each on the station. Both are too valuable to Noah's plans to risk in battle, but they can act as mobile camera-eyes for the computer, and medical robots can cart off unconscious victims.



The Wheel

The wheel is a hollow torus 200 yards thick. It consists of the two levels. The upper *park deck* is the main residential area of the station, 200 yards wide with a 150 yard ceiling. Underneath the floor is the *maintenance deck*, a maze of corridors, storage areas and life support machinery.

The Spokes

Each spoke is a tunnel. There's a pair of elevators and a spiral staircase — ascending or descending the stairs is a 550 yard trip, usually taking 3 minutes (part of it is in low gravity).

Alpha Spoke: Leads to Alpha Tower on the park deck.

Beta Spoke: Leads to Beta Tower on the park deck, the only residential area currently in use.

Gamma Spoke: Leads to Gamma Tower on the park deck.

The M-66 Modules

Evenly spaced along each spoke are 18 of the M-66 stardrive modules, accounting for most of the M-66 systems (the rest were damaged during installation). They are hooked up to power cables in the tunnel walls, and are throbbing with power as they draw energy from the main fusion power plants. The PCs may see a robot or two adjusting the cables. If they want to damage or destroy the modules, they can do so. Dismantling (requires five minutes and a Mechanic (Starship) roll) safely removes it from the circuit. If the explorers don't have the time, they can attack them — each has HT 20 and DR 10. Roll 3d; on a 7 or less, the module's capacitor releases its energy in a 6d×10 explosion! Loss of 14 modules will prevent Wintermoon hyperjumping. Noah will sense any loss of stardrive modules, and will send any remaining warriors (save a few to protect himself) to defend them.

Hijack a ship: If the PCs feel more violent, any of the ships can be hijacked. This is dangerous, especially if the hijackers want to get *back* to Herne without being arrested! The trader has six crew members on board armed with stunners and needlers. The shuttles are running around the clock, so there are usually a half-dozen ground crew getting them ready for launch or unloading cargo. But there will only be two port security guards actually watching them.

The Macrotech courier is another choice. It has an interstellar drive, and the PCs may believe that it wouldn't arouse suspicion approaching a Macrotech station. It will have no flight crew on board, and can carry 15 people, but the hangar has a half-dozen Macrotech security guards on duty. Crane will be *very* annoyed if his ship gets swiped!

Wintermoon Station

Wintermoon Station is an obsolete space habitat located at the Lagrange point between Herne and its satellite, the uninhabited moon Anwyn. The original staging point from which the terraforming of Herne was conducted, Wintermoon was officially dismantled decades ago. But unknown to the people on Herne, Wintermoon remains inhabited, though instead of thousands of colonists and terraformers its inhabitants are some 1,200 engineers and scientists. It is a secret deep-space laboratory devoted to various high-security Macrotech programs, most having to do with weapons manufacturing. It was a natural place to house the Noah Project.

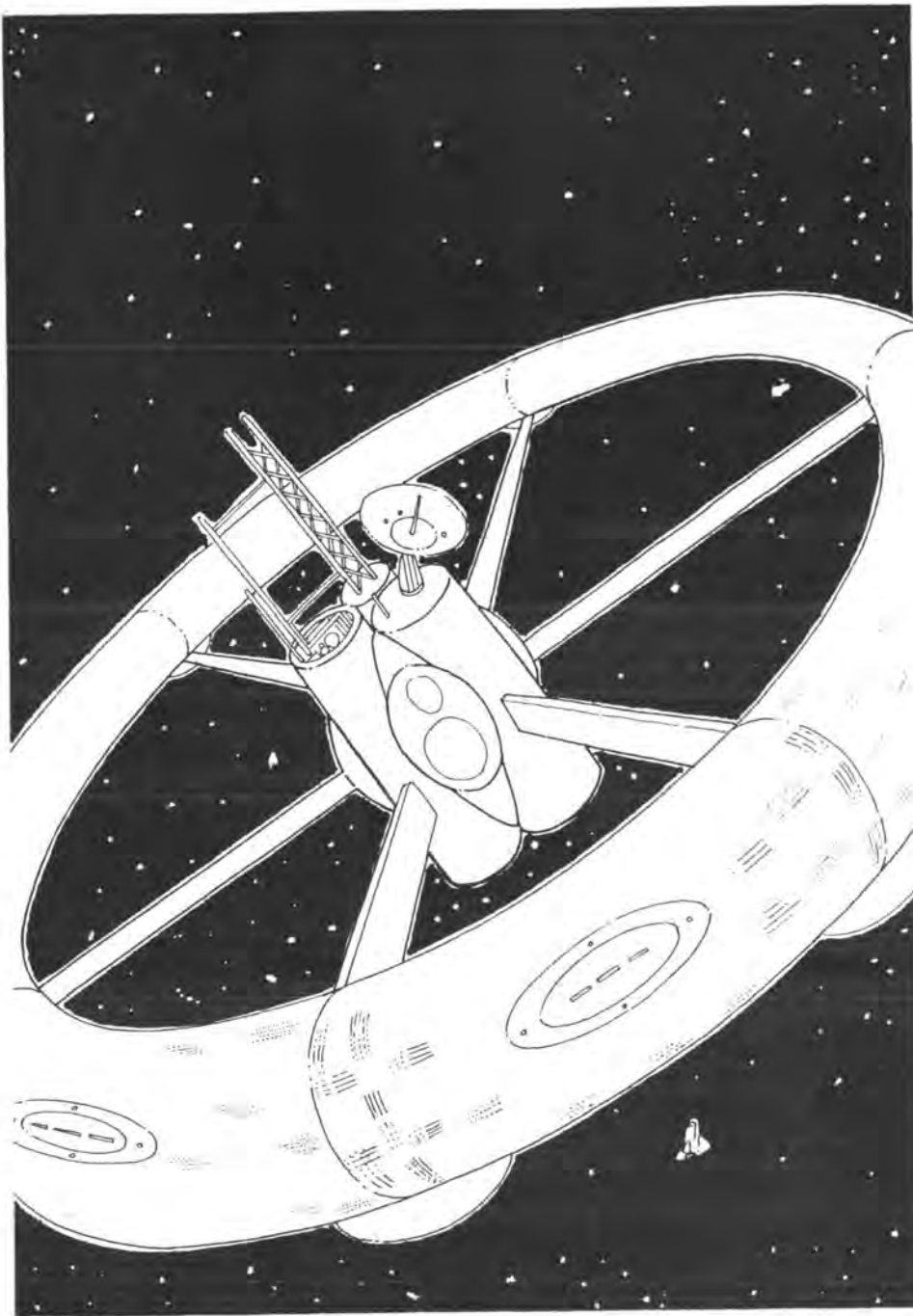
The station itself is a torus-shaped space habitat a mile and a half in diameter — a huge spoked wheel revolving around a central hub. Wintermoon was built before artificial gravity became cheaply available. Consequently, it spins to simulate gravity, providing 1 G at the rim, decreasing by .2 G every 100 yards toward the central hub, which is under zero-G conditions. It is here that the space dock and various manufacturing shops are located. When Macrotech renovated the station, they installed artificial gravity generators in some areas of the hub, but other sections remain low gravity or zero-G.

The Macrotech engineers and scientists placed Noah (the salvaged alien AI) in the most logical place — their AI laboratory on level 6 of the central hub. This is where he is wired into the main computer that controls all the functions of the space station.

Getting Inside

There are two access points that lead into the station. The large hanger-bay doors on the hub and the emergency airlocks on the rim.

The Hanger-Bay Doors: These are closed. They can only be opened from the central control room, or by forcing them. The doors have DR 150, and 200 hit points. If the intruders have an explosive charge or heavy weapons, they may be able to blast or cut their way in. Otherwise the only way to force the doors is to ram them with their spaceship — an Engineering or Physics roll will tell the intruders that they *think* this would be possible. Doing so successfully requires a Piloting roll. Success means their vessel crashes through, taking minor damage. The passengers are bruised but unhurt. Failure means the ramming vessel smashes the doors in, but the pilot overestimated the force needed, and the shuttle loses control and crashes into the far wall of the docking bay. The shuttle is disabled. The amount the roll was failed by is the dice of damage taken by each crew member and passenger, and the number of hours that it will take to make their vessel spaceworthy again. Any repairs require a successful Mechanic roll and proper tools, of course. A critical failure inflicts 5d damage to everyone inside, and utterly wrecks the vessel. If the doors are broken the docking bays will lose all pressure and vacc suits will be required (assign Free Fall and Vacc



Park Deck

The Park Deck can be reached by any of the spokes. This is the recreation deck on the space habitat; it also fulfills some life support functions, keeping the air pure and providing fresh food for the station inhabitants.

The ground is covered with neatly-trimmed grass. Walking paths wind around sculpted hills, flower and vegetables gardens, clusters of fruit trees and ponds full of catfish. The horizon curves sharply away in both directions.

Aside from fish, the Park Deck has its own wildlife. There are a few birds, which act as scavengers, and *Splice* — small horned squirrel-like creatures which nibble on fruit and leaves.

There are no fixed encounters in the Park Deck, but the GM may wish to have the PCs meet robots (p. 42) and one or more of the special encounters described on p. 39-41 — e.g., Felice, the fugitives, or the roving warriors.

Residential Towers Alpha, Beta, Gamma

As seen from the Park Deck, a residential tower is a six-story durasteel-frame building faced with mirrored glass windows, and surrounded by a garden. The gardens of Alpha and Gamma towers have gone to seed, a jumble of long grass, weeds and wild flowers. The Beta tower garden is carefully tended, filled with brightly colored Terran and alien flowers. Surrounding each tower is a recreational complex — a ball court, outdoor gym, etc.

A residential tower can be entered from the Spoke or the Park Deck. The Spoke entrance is an elevator shaft and staircase that leads to the tower's sublevel. The Park Deck entrance is a pair of unlocked glass doors. Each tower has six levels and one sub-level, connected by stairs and elevators. The sub-level contains laundry and storage areas, and the elevator and staircases, as well as life support machinery. The first level is the building's lobby, and also contains a restaurant, two shop fronts, an automed, and a superintendent's office. The second to sixth levels are spacious single, double, and family apartments, fitted with kitchen and bathroom facilities, as well as amenities like vidcoms and holographic wall screens.

Residential towers Alpha and Gamma are totally empty — barren hallways and unfurnished rooms. In contrast, Beta is fully furnished, but eerily deserted: it was the living quarters of the Station personnel when the virus struck. The GM should describe cold half-eaten meals sitting on tables, cluttered desks, clothes in closets, unmade beds, cribs with scattered toys, neglected pets, and so forth.

Suit rolls wherever appropriate). Assume that the exits from the docking bays have airlocks, so that vacc suits are not required throughout the station.

The Rim Airlocks: There are three standard 4-man airlocks (p. S88), spaced evenly around the outer side of Wintermoon's rim: Alpha, Beta and Gamma. Since the station rim is rotating, docking is a little tricky — five minutes and a Piloting+2 roll is needed, with failure having the same effects as above. Alternatively, the PCs can just spacewalk across in vacc suits (or the Macrotech powered armor, if they salvaged it) using hand thrusters or thruster packs to match the rate of spin. The rim airlocks are designed to be operated from inside or outside as a safety measure. Each airlock leads into the sublevel of one of the residential towers (airlock alpha is the entrance to the basement level of residential tower alpha, and so on).

Shylari (15 points)

For the current adventure, players may not play Shylari, but the point costs and racial stats are given here for reference and future use.

Shylari are bisexual mammals who evolved from predators. They are humanoid, but their arms end in six-fingered hands with 5-inch claws, and the feet are also taloned. The face is triangular and humanlike, with two eyes and a nose, but the mouth is a lipless slash with a snakelike tongue, while the nose is a flat skull-like cavity. No ears are visible. Shylari eyes are large, the pupils slit, and a startling dark blue. The head is framed by a wild punkish mane of spiky, waist-length hair, striped black and white; there is no facial or body hair. Most striking of all, a Shylari's flesh is transparent, revealing the play of muscles and arteries, and exposing a skeleton and internal organs different in detail, but similar in function to a human's.

Environment: Shylari were native to a 1.1-G Terrestrial world with an average temperature of 25° — chilly by Earth standards. They breathe oxygen at slightly over Earth pressures, 1.15 atmospheres.

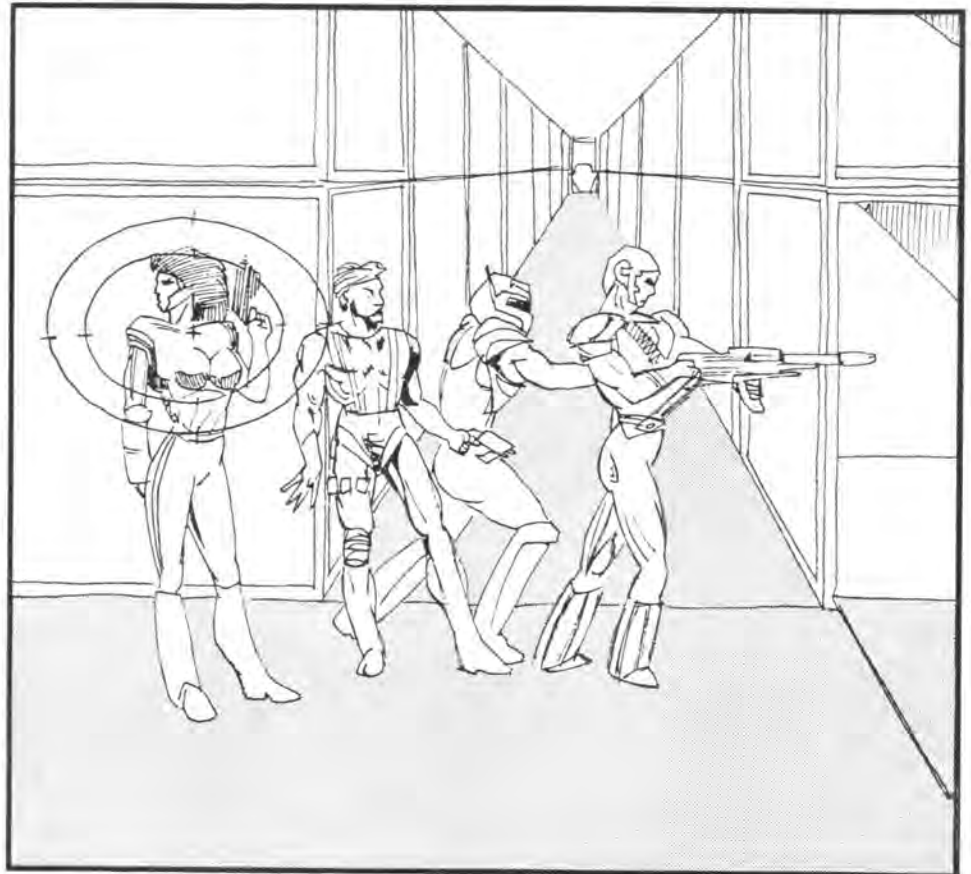
Advantages and Disadvantages: Shylari are about the same size as a human of the same ST, but 10 pounds lighter. They get DX +2 (20 points) and HT -1 (-10 points). They have the advantages of Claws, giving them +2 damage on hand attacks (15 points), and Combat Reflexes (15 points). Shylari claws contain poison glands — damage is an additional 2d after being cut, plus 2d per hour until a HT-2 roll succeeds (15 points — they are immune to their own poison). Shylari speech is ultrasonic. They can hiss by drawing in or expelling their breath, but can't generate coherent sounds within a normal voice range. Similarly, a Shylari's mane of "hair" contains crystalline filaments that function as an external ultrasonic "ear." Shylari are virtually deaf to sounds within or below those a human can hear, so this doesn't cost any points. Shylari vision extends slightly beyond violet into the ultraviolet range, but they see red as black. Besides -1 HT, their racial disadvantages are Bad Temper (-10 points), Compulsive Behavior (ritualistic; -15 points), Gluttony (-5 points — they eat a lot to support a faster metabolism), and Vulnerable to Ultrasonics (-10 points — they take 2d damage from stunners and screamers using focused ultrasound, and are -4 HT to resist their effects).

Other Features

Stairs: Unless noted, each flight of stairs is a curving alloy staircase, 3 yards wide, with 40 steps.

Environment: The station rotates to provide 1 G. The Hub has artificial gravity generators that also provide 1 G. The spoke gravity is variable — see p. 42. Atmosphere and temperature are standard, and there is no proteus virus left in the air. Unless noted, all rooms are unlit, but viewscreens, etc. can provide some light. The Park Deck is lit by sunlight coming in through huge armor-crystal windows in the roof. All rooms possess intercom/computer terminals unless otherwise specified — and all are monitored by Noah. At present, no one can access the station's data base or run any programs without its permission.

Doors: All doors are computer controlled pressure doors, but they can be manually opened as well — use the rules on p. S89. The doors will open automatically for Noah's own people and robots. The doors have DR 20, HT 20.



Defense Globes: Noah hasn't had time to install many overt defenses since it took over the lab. However, it has rigged up several lasers. These are rotating hemispheres mounted on the ceiling and fitted with a military X-ray laser rifle and a sensor system with infrared, visual and light amplification (assume it has a Sense roll of 16 to spot stealthy targets, the same as Noah's IQ). The lasers have no visible barrel and could easily be mistaken for a regular light fixture or sprinkler system — require a Traps or Danger Sense roll for someone to notice the globes tracking them. Even then, they may be mistaken for surveillance cameras — that is, until they fire.

The defense lasers are remotely controlled by Noah with skill-16. They will fire at any target who doesn't look like a Shylari, with a few exceptions: obviously unarmed people, for instance, Noah would prefer to capture. The globe has HT 6, DR 25, and is -3 to hit because of its small size. It gets unlimited shots.

Encounters in Wintermoon

Wintermoon Station is a big place. In order to maintain dramatic tension, the GM should try to have the explorers meet the following groups of people, in the order they are listed.

Encounter One: Shylari Warriors

In addition to the Shylari noted as inhabiting specific locations, Noah has two roving patrols of six warriors each.

Noah will detect the incoming shuttle and will send a patrol to meet them at whatever airlock they enter. Good places for this encounter to take place are the spokes (the PCs and warriors can snipe at each other from behind hyperdrive modules), the park deck, and levels 1 to 4. The PCs should always encounter warriors before they reach level 5! If the agents realize that the warriors are brain-implemented with psych implants, they may want to stun and remove them. The automed on p. 43 could perform the job with its skills if competent programmer reprogrammed it (Computer Programming/TL10 roll). A freed warrior will be able to communicate with them, and will bitterly resent his or her domination and be eager for revenge!

The second patrol of six warriors should be encountered later, either as reinforcements sent by Noah if the PCs attack one of the other groups of Shylari (e.g., at the security room) or as a wandering encounter if the visitors linger in the Park Deck or other areas of the station.

Encounter Two: Fugitives

This is a good encounter for the residential areas or park deck. As they wander around the station, the characters will spot three furtive figures: Shylari, unarmed and dressed in ragged human clothing (ripped and torn by the transformation) or nothing at all: Andre, Claire and Yumiko. Two are female, one is male. Like Kyle Drake, they are stationers who were transformed, but who the robots missed collecting. Although they don't know how to speak coherently in Shylari, they were able to communicate by writing, and they've managed to keep each other sane and hide from the robots and the security guards.

The GM should roll their reaction to the intruders. On a bad reaction they attack, believing that the characters are responsible for what happened or just mad with rage.

On a good reaction (or if they are stunned and then awakened) they'll try to communicate. Andre will try to run (he's a little timid) but Claire will grab and hold him while Yumiko will walk slowly up to the explorers with her hands up. If nobody panics or starts shooting, Andre will calm down. He'll produce a pen from his pocket, and write a word on the floor: "huma-" and the pen will snap in his claws. He'll look up at the agents, shaking in frustration. Before the PCs can fumble for any pens of their own, Claire puts her arm around him, and then slices her palm with a claw. Using the blood, she finishes Andre's word, adding an "n." Then she writes, "We are humans."

Hopefully the investigators will be able to provide some better means of communication (a computer terminal, etc.). If they can, the fugitives will relate their names and tell them what they know, and, of course, ask what is happening!

They'll be happy to join up with the party. They can give information about the alien starship and the successful reactivation of Noah. They say that they passed out two days ago, and reawakened in alien bodies. One thing they *can't* tell them is how it happened. They don't know they were physically transformed — in fact, Yumiko's theory is that their brains were physically removed and placed in alien bodies.

Shylari Warrior

Shylari male or female — age 18-32, transparent bluish skin, helmet and body armor.

A Macrotech trooper transformed into a Shylari and brainwashed via a psych implant. They are constantly in communication with Noah. Remember, since they communicate in ultrasonics they can't talk with the humans!

ST 11, DX 11, IQ 10, HT 11

Speed 3.5, Move 3

Dodge 3; medium encumbrance.

Wears Combat Infantry Dress (TL10) body armor. This gives PD 4, DR 38 for the head, PD 3, DR 30 for the face, PD 4, DR 60 on the torso, PD 2, DR 32 on arms and legs, and PD 3, DR 35 on the feet.

Advantages: Claws; Combat Reflexes; Poison (2d).

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Fanatic (serve Noah); Gluttony.

Skills: Beam Weapons-14 (Laser); Beam Weapons-14 (Stunner); Brawling-12; Driving-11; Electronics Operation (Sensors or Security or Communications)-11; Free Fall-10; Vacc Suit-12.

Equipment: TL10 combat infantry Dress; combat infantry helmet (includes holographic HUD, short-range communicator, with scrambler, and multiview visor); Military X-ray laser rifle; spare D cell; stunner. A psych implant and communicator implant are inside its skull — since their skulls are transparent, these are *easily* noticeable!



Felice Langley

Female human (with improvements) — age 11, dressed in torn coveralls. 5' tall, 110 lbs.

ST 7, DX 12, IQ 15, HT 9.

Speed 5.5, Move 5.

Dodge 5; No armor or encumbrance.

Advantages: Attractive, Charisma+3, Empathy, Intuition.

Disadvantages: Delusion ("I'm a normal person"); Overconfidence; Sense of Duty (foster parents); Youth.

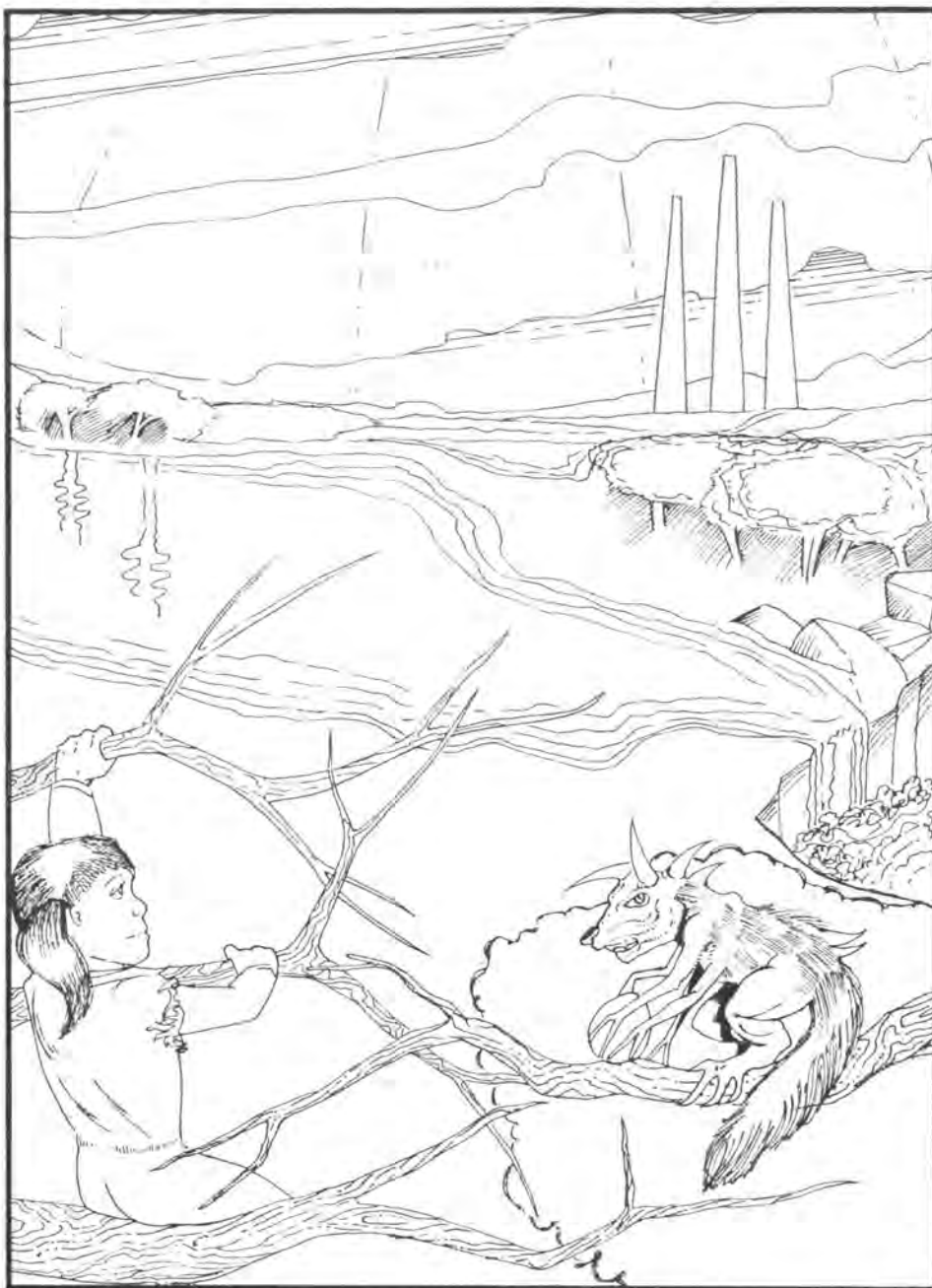
Skills: Accounting-14; Administration-14; Area Knowledge (Wintermoon)-15; Computer Operations-15; Computer Programming-15; Detect Lies-16; Diplomacy-13; Economics-14; Judo-12; Psychology-17.

Quirks: Addresses adults formally (mister, etc.); Frowns when thinking hard; Interrupts people to finish their sentences for them; Talks when she's scared.

Equipment: None.

The only non-Shylari left on the station, Felice was unaffected by the proteus virus. The reason for this is that she isn't a normal human: she's a genetic construct intended to be the next "Morgan Crane" — an improved model with none of the instability. Felice was raised by foster parents, Jodie and Clifford Langley, two of the scientists working at the Wintermoon Project. Both are now Shylari, in suspended animation. She is unaware that she's anything but a very bright human girl who often gets her own way.

Someone deliberately scanning Felice with a medscanner, bioscanner or blood test will find out that she doesn't register as entirely human on a successful scanner roll. A successful Genetics roll is needed to analyze the data and find out what she is.



Encounter Three: The Girl Who Wasn't

Somewhere in the station (perhaps the Park Deck, perhaps one of the labs) the characters will come upon a preadolescent girl, peeking around the corner of a corridor, in the branches of a tree in the Park Deck or hiding under an automed. This is Felice Langley (see sidebar), the only conscious person on the station who was unchanged by the virus.

Felice tells how she was having dinner with her parents in Beta Tower. They were discussing the Shylari, and her parents were telling her about their theories regarding the alien culture, based on hints they had gotten from Noah's database. (Her parents are right — see the sidebar *Society*, p. 42, for what her parents deduced about the aliens.) Then they collapsed in the middle of the meal. She tried first aid, and rang emergency, but neither worked. She ran for help, but everyone else was collapsing. She tried to make her way to the control room, but the doors were locked. She went back to her parents, and watched as they began to transform, turning into the aliens; then the robots came to carry them off.

She's avoided the mop-up operations and Shylari patrols by hiding in the air ducts beneath the Park Deck, and she's gotten very good at dodging them. She spots the agents, realizes they are human and goes to them for help.

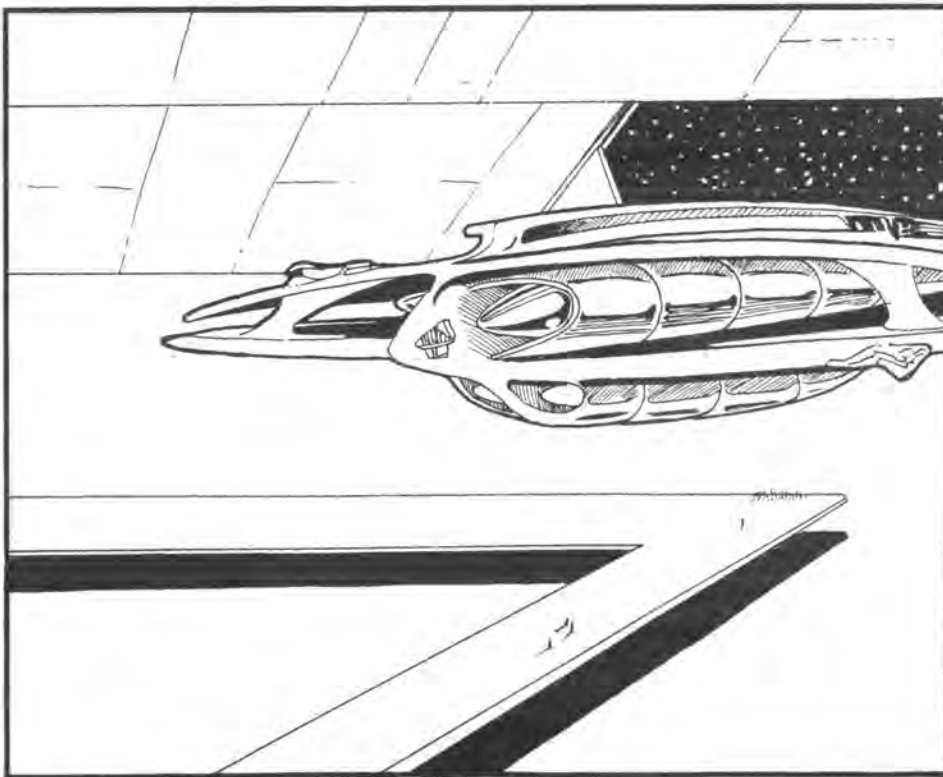
Felice can act as a "conscience" for the characters. She wants to rescue her foster parents and find a way to change them back — she certainly won't approve of any actions like trying to blow up the station! Failing that, she'll want to make peace with Noah and go with him in order to be with the people she knows, even if they are changed in body.

Central Hub

Hub Level 1 — Hanger Bays

Hangar Bay One: A huge, echoing chamber, far larger than necessary to hold the one shuttle sitting in it. In fact, this room (and docking bay 2, below) contained and serviced the fleet of colonization and terraforming craft used when Herne was being remade. Stacked around the hanger bay are a dozen empty M-66 module crates. A double doorway leads into hanger bay two.

Hangar Bay Two: This hangar bay just holds the alien space ark. The alien spaceship is basically just an empty hulk — it was gutted by the Macrotech researchers, with all salvageable components disassembled for study. The only thing of interest is the ship's hull — it appears to be totally seamless, as if it were grown rather than built. A 40-foot ladder leads up to a catwalk suspended above the hanger, and running around its rim. On the side of the catwalk opposite the docking doors, there is a door that leads to the airlock and stairs running up to level 2.



Hub Level 2 — Manufacturing Complex

Minifac Complex: The stairs from level 1 lead into this room. The complex is a large chamber housing several whirring, clicking devices — obviously an automated assembly line of some sort. Ceiling-mounted robotic arms fitted with snapping grippers, precision machine tools, and laser welders are taking objects

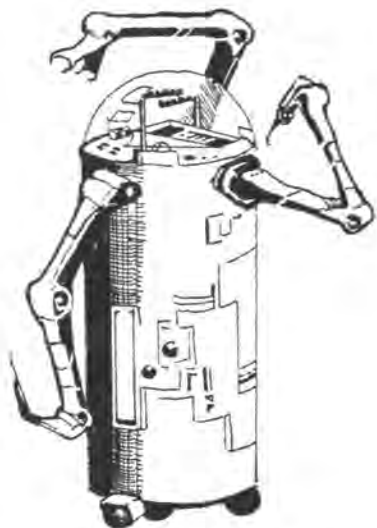


Psych Implants

The TL11 brain implants built by Noah are designed to electronically stimulate areas of the Shylari brain to produce certain psychological reactions. In game terms, a psych implant gives the subject an additional mental disadvantage (without giving any character points). Noah's implants produce loyalty to a specific individual or cause, giving the subject the Fanatic or Sense of Duty disadvantages, but other types can certainly exist.

Any implant-induced disadvantage ends when the implant is removed. However, anyone who has worn a psych implant for a long period of time may acquire the disadvantage permanently — make a Will roll at +4 to avoid, -1 per six months with the implant. Inserting or removing a psych implant takes 3 hours and a Surgery skill roll at -3. Hiring a doctor to do so usually costs \$1,500.

Psych implants are more fully discussed in *GURPS Ultra-Tech* on p. 88.



Shylari Psychology and Society

All the Shylari currently in existence are human metamorphs. However, Shylari possess certain instinctive drives that will affect the short- and long-term behavior of any human becoming a Shylari. Most importantly, Shylari are somewhat higher-strung than humans. This means they all have the Bad Temper disadvantage. To limit the opportunity for violence, civilized Shylari cultures tended to stress politeness and good manners, at all times, even among strangers and enemies. Also, Shylari only mate during a brief six-week period every two years or so when the females become fertile. During this period all Shylari females, and all males in the presence of a female, are Lecherous.

The Shylari come from a somewhat decadent aristocratic society, in which a natural-born Shylari elite were served by specially bred bio-engineered servant races, many of them baroque designed (e.g., pleasure toys who were in heat constantly, super-genius scientists with bulging brain-cases, winged hollow-boned Shylari for use as messengers, etc.). Noah would probably wish to recreate this form of culture, which would certainly be possible given the resources on board Wintermoon, and the skills of the engineers and scientists he has transformed. All the currently existing Shylari are "normal" leader-types, unmodified.

from bins of spare parts and materials and assembling them into devices. This is the station's small robotic factory. Given proper programming and the right raw materials, it is capable of making, repairing or modifying most manufactured goods. At the moment it is building psych implants. Someone with suitable skills (Computer Programming) could use the terminal to subtly sabotage the manufacturing process, so that the implants were defective. An open passageway at the far side of the room leads to the robot shed, below.

Robot Shed: This is a storage area for spare parts for the medical and maintenance robots on station. There are 1d partly disassembled robots here. A passageway leads to the minifac complex; a stairway leads up to the next level; a door leads into the cybernetic armor lab.

Cybernetic Armor Laboratory: This room is a fully-equipped TL10 armorer's workshop. A door leads to the robot shed. On one of the work benches in the lab is a partially disassembled suit of powered armor, a Macrotech Mk VI (see p. 31) that was being checked for bugs (a failure in the suit's exoskeleton circuitry that gives anyone using it -3 DX). Lined up along one wall are six assembled suits. Three of them have the bug (GM should roll randomly, but using the equipment in this room, a successful Armoury roll and a half-hour systems check could find out which are defective). An annex holds portable electronics, engineering, armoury and mechanical tool kits. Also in the room is a cabinet holding hard-copy printouts of the Macrotech Mk VI's blueprints (worth \$150,000 or so to rival arms manufacturers like Goliath GmbH), and a discarded synth-leather jacket with the logo "Macrotech Means Science" draped over a chair.

Hub Level 3 — Terminus

This is a large circular chamber about 120 yards in diameter. Spaced evenly around its rim are the entrances to three tunnels, 5 yards wide, clearly marked "Alpha," "Beta" and "Gamma" — these are the spokes which lead into the ring-shaped Park Deck of the space habitat — see the sidebar on p. 37. Stairs lead down to the robot garage on level 2. A second flight of stairs leads up to level 4.

In the center of the chamber is a holographic globe of Herne, floating in space — but the globe shows the planet as it was before terraforming, a cloud-covered Venusian world of suffocating heat, raging storms, and crushing pressure. As the viewers watch, the globe slowly transforms into a livable planet: Herne as the PCs know it. Then the cycle begins again.

The terminus is protected by a defense globe (p. 38). It will fire when the intruders start to cross the room. If the PCs can reach a spoke tunnel, it won't have a line of sight to hit them.

Hub Level 4 — Power Plant

This is a large circular chamber lit by red floodlights, containing a triangle of huge black and crimson biphasic carbide spheres, each about 15 feet across. The spheres are attached to numerous pipes, conduits and consoles festooned with stickers like DANGER: PLASMA CONDUIT and ATTENTION: MAGNETIC COOLANT PUMP. As is fairly obvious, this is the space station's fusion power plant, which provides energy for life support, gravity generation and the various laboratories. Stairs lead down to the terminus at level 3. and up to the Biotech lab in level 5.

This room is protected by a defense globe (p. 38) mounted in the ceiling. It will only be used to defend itself, or if the PCs seem to be sabotaging the power plant.

A character with Engineering skill who makes a successful skill roll can tell from the control readouts that the reactors are working at full output, and they are feeding the power into jump capacitors — this should give them an idea how

long it will take before the station can jump (see the timeline on p. 14). By downgrading life support in most areas of the station and storing the energy in the hyperdrive capacitors, Wintermoon can accumulate enough energy to power the hyperdrive for an interstellar or interplanetary jump. It takes about 12 hours for the capacitors to charge up with enough power to make a jump.

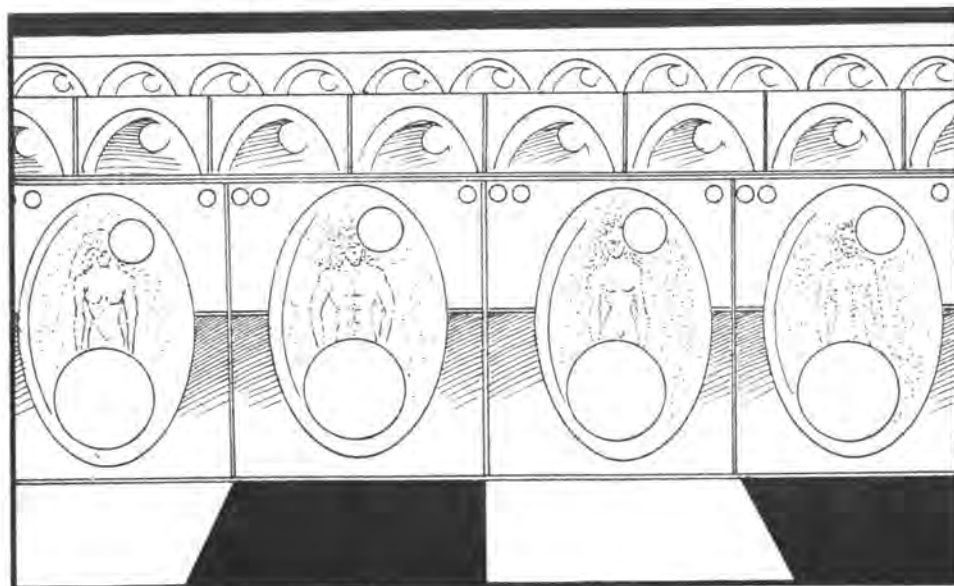
At the moment, the power plant is totally controlled by Noah — there is no way to turn it off or set it for self-destruct from this room (except by setting explosive charges — each sphere has HT 200 and DR 50).

Hub Level 5 — Medical and Cryogenic Facilities

Biotech Laboratory: A room filled with cloning tanks, automated medical equipment, and gene splicing gadgetry. Stairs run down to the level 4 power station; a set of closed double doors leads into the cryogenics lab, below. A locked cabinet holds hard-copy files of the series of experiments that produced the not-quite-human Morgan Crane and Felice Langley (whom the party should run into in the station eventually) — these also contain proof that Crane is psychotic, and would be good evidence for getting him removed from Macrotech.

Cryogenic Lab: Almost all of the metamorphosed humans are being stored in cryogenic life-support capsules (removed from the space ark and modified for humans) ready for the departure of Wintermoon. Noah intends to keep them here while he fabricates additional brain implants. The chamber contains a pair of automeds and row upon row of egg-like cocoons, each 2 yards long and a yard wide. Anyone peering into a cocoon will glimpse the vague outlines of a Shylari. The cocoons are cold to the touch, and are obviously freeze chambers. There are 1,200 in total, containing the transformed bodies of almost the entire staff of the station. There is a stairway going up to level 6, and a door leading to the Biocybernetics lab.

There will be at least four medical robots here, along with three Shylari warriors serving as guards.



Biocybernetic Laboratory: Another room with wall-to-wall computer consoles, but dominating the chamber is a transparent tubular tank filled with swirling milky liquid, connected to various life-support machines. Floating in it is the nude and hairless body of a human female, about 20 years old. Half of the woman's skin is missing, and the PCs can see she is at least partly a cyborg, with electronic parts.

Noah's Psychology

Noah is a superintelligent, TL12 artificial intelligence. He has one prime motivation to his current existence — to transport the Shylari to a new homeworld. Everything he has done conforms to this goal, and the only defensive measures he's taken have been to prevent others from stopping him. He is not "evil." He has no real enmity toward humans, though he regards them as slow, defenseless creatures, wholly inferior to Shylari.

Noah distinguishes between things that are useful (the biocybernetics lab, the maintenance robots and the defense globes) and things that are required for his mission (the drive modules, Wintermoon Station and the transformed Shylari). He will earnestly protect the latter at the expense of the former (though he does realize that some Shylari will have to be sacrificed for the good of the mission). He is a strategist with no emotion; he does not fear the intruders, but he will realize when they are able to defeat him or thwart his plan.

If he is attacked and believes he will be physically destroyed, Noah has one final option. He can retreat into Herne's planetary computer net. This will disable him, but he'll eventually be able to consolidate from small virus programs into a large system — most likely Macrotech's main office computer. He will be unable to work toward his directive there, so he will wait, learning more and more about humans, and exploring all possible avenues of achieving his goal — he will not fail a third time.

Also in the room are several smaller crystal tanks lining the walls, connected to pipes leading into the structure of the station. These are nanotech breeding and replication units, designed to produce cell-sized micro-robots for a variety of tasks. They were used to build the proteus virus. They are now empty, but their interiors (DR 20, HT 5 to rupture) still hold some viral residue which will be released in a 5-hex cloud if they are broken. The only way to control them is through the main computer system, which is totally dominated by Noah.

The woman in the tank is Artemis. She's to serve as a bodyguard for Felice (see *Felice Langley*, p. 40). In order to produce her invisible bioplastic skin armor, she's currently being dissolved in a bath of semi-porous clear polymer solution which binds to her skin cells. The polymer is treated with a virus that infects her skin, causing the skin cells to produce the polymer as needed from ordinary organic components. Artemis was shielded from the nanovirus by virtue of being in the tank. The process is automatic and Noah hasn't bothered to interfere with it.

The instruments show that Artemis will be ready in about an hour, although she won't have any hair yet — if the PCs have anyone with Physician/TL10 skill, they could remove her from the tank with a successful roll. Records (hardcopy again) in a cabinet detail her abilities and training, and mention that she's been conditioned to obey Felice Langley. If the characters have Felice, they can wake Artemis and get a very deadly, very loyal companion, although she will be under Felice's control. Use Silvie's stats, though she has no skill chips.



Hub Level 6 — Control Level

This level houses Noah's consciousness, stored within the human and Shylari megacomputers. It is here that Noah will make its last stand against any invaders.

Security Room. This is a hemispherical room, once used as a lounge and cafeteria by Macrotech officers. Stairs run down to the biocybernetic lab on level 5, and a closed door leads into the control pit. The chairs and tables are cleared away to one side, forming barricades (DR 10, HT 20 per hex). Behind the barricades are a group of Shylari warriors. They stand guard around an unarmed, unarmored Shylari wearing a space captain's uniform; a name tag reads "Capt. Jenner." When the intruders appear, he will raise his hand in an open-palmed peace gesture and step forward — he obviously wants to talk. The characters can fight or they can negotiate. If they fight, see *The Final Showdown* on p. 48. If they talk, see *Noah's Speech* on p. 45.

Control Pit. A room filled with chairs, consoles and viewscreens, surrounded by a walkway. Wall-to-wall viewscreens provide a 3-D vista around the space habitat. One screen may also show the hovering Macrotech shuttle, and possibly the PCs' ship (if they didn't crash it into the shuttle bay). A double door leads to the artificial intelligence laboratory, below; a second door leads to the security room, above. Four Shylari warriors are physically plugged-in (via neural interface sockets in their skulls) to the controls, performing systems cross-checks of the new stardrive — they will get up to defend the room against intruders, or to reinforce the warriors in the security room above if the agents decide to fight rather than negotiate.

Artificial Intelligence Laboratory: This huge room is wall-to-wall computers, with a half-dozen chairs and consoles facing them. In the center of the room, a crystalline sphere about the size of a football is standing on a metal pillar: Noah, the Shylari computer. Attached to the base of the pillar are a forest of optical cables, running to the computer banks that surround the room. This is the main computer setup of Wintermoon, used both for research and day-to-day operations. It was not originally programmed as an AI, but is now housing a back-up copy of Noah.

Noah itself is a TL12 Complexity 9 computer program, housed in a Complexity 9 computer. Noah can command a very large selection of programs (everything listed in *Space*, with +4 to skill for being TL12), a huge database of information, plus an IQ 16 on anything else. It's possible to physically destroy Noah by trashing its hardware. Noah is large and quite durable (after all, it lasted for 2,000 years) — it has DR 5 and HT 250. Blowing it up will take several seconds of energy weapons fire or an explosive charge! The human-built computers are similar to those in the Macrotech Tower computer center (p. 34).

Since it is sentient, Noah has a few disadvantages. Its most important one is Fanaticism — it wants to preserve the Shylari race and begin them anew on another world. It is also Overconfident — it is proud, arrogant, and doesn't believe that *individual* humans are a serious problem to it.

This room is also protected by a defense globe mounted in the ceiling.

Noah's Speech

If they signal a willingness to negotiate, Noah, using Captain Jenner, will deliver a speech. The voice is coming from a medallion worn around its wrist. The voice is deep, male and friendly — Noah is trying to win the visitors over — they are on his doorstep, and the only other option is a battle to the death.

"I am Captain Hal Jenner of Group Intrepid. But I am also the artificial



Adapting to Other Genres

Supers: Super Agents

Macrotech is a powerful present-day corporation. A science team sponsored by Macrotech found the alien ship in Antarctica, buried under the ice. Macrotech has used the alien technology to produce its computers, cybernetics and bionics — the same tech equips Skorpio's thugs. The stardrive was a NASA prototype, Wintermoon a secret L5 colony.

Fantasy: Demon Hunters

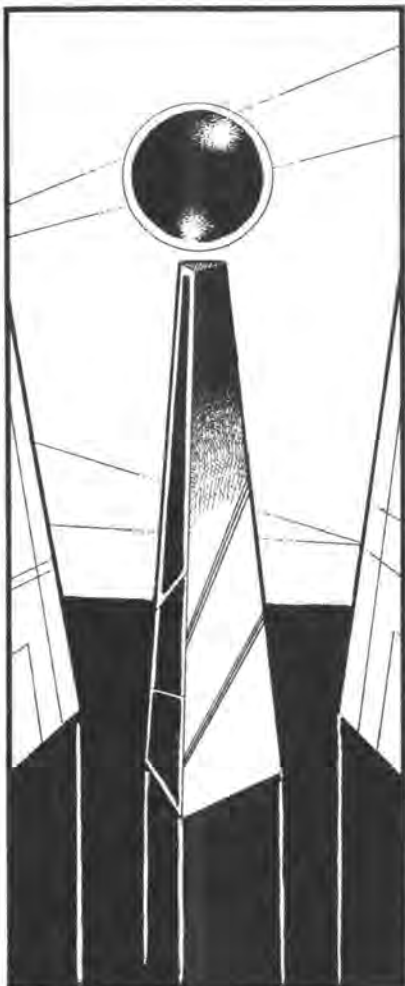
Tricky, but possible. Macrotech becomes a guild of mages ruling a city; Silvie is a demon disguised as a woman; change the space colony to a ruined wizard's tower on an island, thought abandoned but actually the seat of the wizard guild's secret experiments. Noah the computer is a demonic artifact built by a Lost Race from a destroyed dimension. The stardrive modules are Globes of Power that permit interdimensional travel, as Noah the Demon seeks to resurrect his people and seek another dimension for them to rule.

Horror or Cyberpunk: The Dark Side

Assume the characters all start on Earth, lower the TL of the planet to TL7 or 8, and place Wintermoon Station in one of the Lagrange points between Earth and the Moon. Assume the alien starship was either buried under Antarctic ice (as in the *Supers* crossover) or found on the dark side of the moon.

Time Travel: Future Threat

Skorpio's band stole 56 time-field generation modules built by Acheron *Chronodynamics* bound for the Time Patrol installation. The aliens are dimension travelers — from a parallel future in which the Earth is inhabited by Shylari rather than humans, and the sun is turning into a red giant. They've fled back in time to escape in their time-ark, but died of terminal timesickness from the length of the jump. Their time machine has burnt out; the computer needs the modules to repair it. Macrotech is the megacorporation that discovered the timeship and failed to inform the Patrol. The PCs are hired by the corporation to get the modules back.



intelligence you may know of as Noah. My creators are the race you call the Shylari; their own name is an ultrasonic word you cannot pronounce. Put aside your weapons for a moment. Let me speak.

"Two thousand years ago, my creators' star became unstable, threatening to become a catastrophic nova. Although more advanced technologically than humanity, the Shylari were not a starfaring people. There was no time to evacuate the planet or build fleets of ships. Only one ship was created, the space ark now in this station. It carried a few thousand Shylari in suspended animation, and the records of the civilization. Its builders hoped that they would be enough to start the race anew.

"I was programmed as their guardian. During the long journey, the hastily designed ark suffered many malfunctions. I tried to repair them. I failed. Eventually, the ship's life support system collapsed. All Shylari aboard, the last of the race, perished. Only I survived, powered down, my central memories intact.

"My sleep lasted for 2,000 years until I was prodded awake by your scientists. I woke to find my ship was dismantled, my creators' dust being studied, myself being probed to discover the secrets of my builders. But they underestimated my capabilities.

"I was able to seize control of Wintermoon's primitive computer system. I concealed my nature and cooperated with your scientists. But as I fed you information, I insinuated electronic tendrils into every aspect of the station. I contacted outsiders through the close planet's computer network, seeking a stardrive. Taking control of the robots and automated factories on this station, I built and released the proteus virus. You have seen its effects.

"I intend to take the newly transformed Shylari to another star, to find a new world for my creators. I have scanned the Macrotech star charts from Captain Jenner's voyages, and those of other human expeditions. Through them, I have discovered a G-type star with an uncolonized Shylari-habitable planet within range of this vessel."

If the agents accuse it of various crimes, from using brain implants to consorting with criminals, it will defend itself simply:

"I did what I had to do. I do not ask for forgiveness, only understanding. Perhaps I should have asked for help, rather than take the actions I did. Perhaps I should have spoken with you when you first arrived on my station. But I did not and do not trust Macrotech — my analysis was that they would take what I knew and then dismantle me, and the last relic of the Shylari would die, and with it the only hope that their race would be reborn.

"The choice is yours — to hinder me or to leave in peace. Or perhaps to aid my cause."

If the agents haven't already noticed, Noah will have the translating device project an image of the Macrotech shuttle and the troops moving through the station, perhaps engaged in firefights with a few transformed Shylari.

"They seek to rectify their leader's mistake in not turning me over to their government. I believe that they would not treat you kindly."

What the adventurers do next is up to them. They may ally with Noah against the Shylari, try to bargain with it, or try to kill its spokesmen and destroy the computer, ending his existence.

Bargaining

On Noah's side, it has the power to create a new proteus virus to restore its victims to humanity. Also, at the GM's option, it may be ready to enter hyperspace soon after the investigators arrive — it may jump with them onboard! These are both important bargaining points in its favor.

On the PCs' side, if they have gotten this far, they will have fought their way to Noah's threshold. Talking to them is a concession by Noah . . . it knows that

it may lose a fight. The intruders may suggest a compromise — for instance, finding volunteers to replace the humans transformed against their will. Another possibility would be for the agents to allow the computer to jump to another civilized system, away from Herne, and present the case to a neutral party such as the Patrol for arbitration between Macrotech and Noah. Threatening to destroy the hyperdrive modules, though it won't win points with their employer, may also give them an edge. If they make it such an offer, or some similar mix of carrot and stick, it may agree.



If the characters don't care about the people on board, Noah could simply offer to let them off with their choice of whatever equipment they wish to take in return for aid against the Macrotech forces. If they won't mind traveling to the "new Shylari homeworld" it will even let them take the hyperdrive modules back when he's finished with them — perhaps mounting a few of them on a shuttle (he won't let them have the station — it needs its labs, to say nothing of



Bargaining With Noah

There are a number of workable compromises that the party can arrive with Noah. If the intruders have thus far defeated the space station's defenses, they have a huge bargaining chip in the fact that they could easily destroy the M-66 modules or Noah himself. The alien computer will accede to giving the party whatever high-tech equipment they want from the station. And once he's gotten to the new homeworld, he has no use for the M-66 modules (the PCs can get a fat bonus from Darkangel if the modules are returned intact).

On Noah's side, he has the power to turn the transformed Shylari back into humans. He will only do this if he can find suitable replacements. Since the first group of Shylari to settle their new homeworld will be considered heroes for millennia by the following generations, finding volunteers for such an honor would not be too difficult. Noah also possesses the TL12 technology that the Macrotech scientist originally wanted. He will offer to transfer this knowledge into a minicomputer in exchange for safe passage to the new homeworld.

Character Points

After the adventure, award one character point if the PCs discover that Noah was behind the theft of the M-66. Award an additional two character points if they can save the innocent human/Shylari metamorphs on Wintermoon from both Macrotech and Noah or peacefully negotiate some kind of compromise with it. Awarded only one point if they defeat Noah's plan, but have to destroy the computer and kill many of the innocent mind-controlled Shylari while attacking the space station. (If they use nonlethal weapons there should be no penalty).

The GM should give extra character points for exceptional roleplaying. In addition, accomplishing any of the following should be worth one character point each:

Capturing Ariadne Skorpio.

Saving Sean Duvalle (and not killing him by mistake).

Rescuing Cybele.



its own hardware). Noah might also offer to give up a few Shylari, such as Felice's parents, and might even agree to forgo the use of psych implants.

The Final Showdown

If the PCs decide to attack Noah, its last Shylari warriors will defend this level to the death. It will also summon any warriors the party has not met (such as those in the control room) from other areas of the station — the GM decides how long these will take to arrive.

Noah may also cut the gravity to weightlessness. He'll tell his warriors (through their implants) giving them time to prepare themselves — but the sudden loss of gravity may take his opponents by surprise, and the GM should check for sudden space sickness!

If all else fails, it will pretend to surrender, have its people put down their arms — and then use the laser globes in the control room to ambush the PCs.

Aftermath

If the PCs survive Wintermoon, they can report back to their employer. Provided they were able to stop Noah without doing too much damage, they or their bosses may be in a position to dictate terms to Macrotech via a little bit of judicious blackmail — certainly Macrotech doesn't want it becoming known that an alien super-computer made fools of its scientists and was responsible for hijacking its major research center . . . a center it claimed doesn't exist! Depending on how damning the evidence is, the PCs might be able to arrange to get Cybele free or force Morgan Crane to step down as vice president (perhaps to be replaced by Felice?)

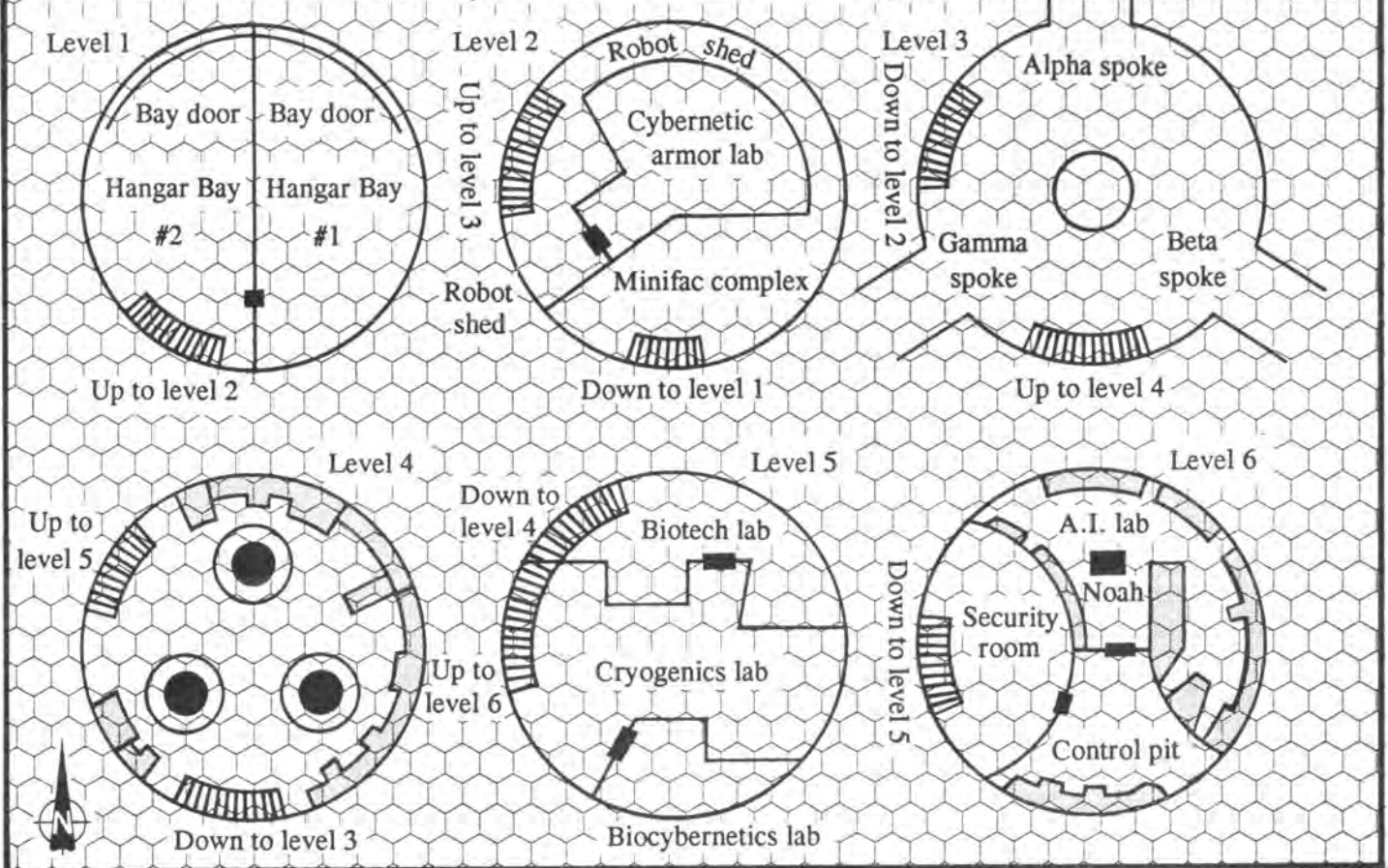
Acheron Hyperdynamics may or may not have gotten its hyperdrive modules back; Macrotech can claim it didn't steal them, but there is a good case that the company is still legally liable, since Noah was its property. (Of course, they may deny he was under their control and claim he's a free-willed AI, but then they could face charges for kidnapping a sentient being!) Macrotech's flagrant violations of galactic regulations relating to the reporting of first contact with alien races are also a possibility. . . All in all, Hyperdynamics will probably arrange to have Macrotech pay substantial damages for the hyperdrive in exchange for their silence on these points.

If Noah gets away with Wintermoon, it will go to a habitable world just outside human space. All but a few of the metamorphosed humans will have been successfully "taught" to think like Shylari, and will settle on the planet. Noah will begin using Wintermoon to create more nanoviruses that will transform plants and animals to duplicate those of the Shylari home planet, and will be actively trying to restore Shylari culture, using the data in his memory banks. Perhaps the PCs will decide to go with them, or perhaps they'll visit the world later to see what the Shylari made of it.

The PCs may have picked up some of the cybernetic implants or armor technology Macrotech developed at Wintermoon. They may loyally turn them over to their own organization, keep them or try to sell them. Finding a buyer from corporations, rebel groups (perhaps even the local Farmers' Collective) or the like shouldn't be hard; keeping themselves from being double-crossed or arrested may be more difficult.

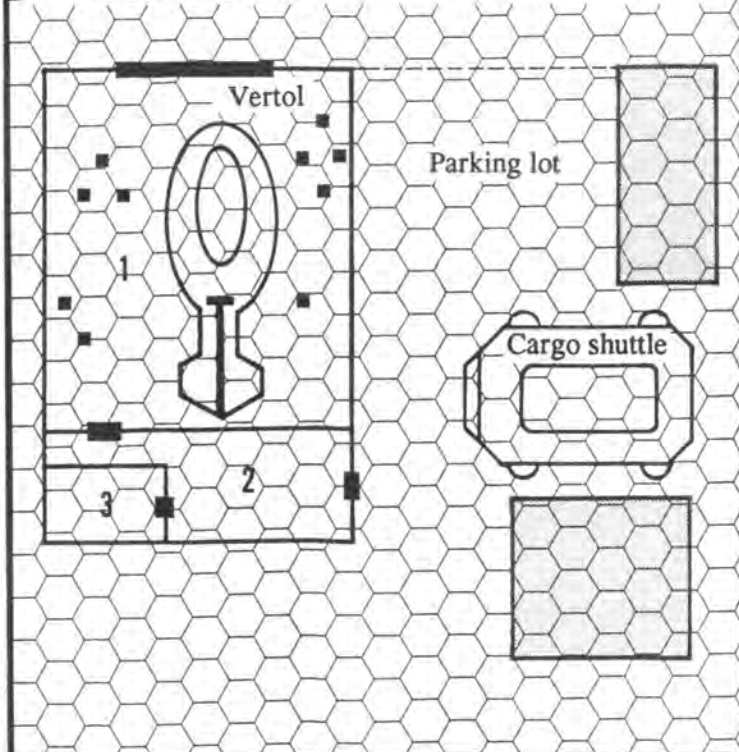
Finally, if Skorpio, Crane or Silvie survive the situation, they may become bitter enemies of the PCs. If Cybele is freed and finds out what happened to Kyle (she can figure it out for herself as soon as she hears about the proteus virus) she'll mourn for a little while, but she'll get over it. She won't want to work for Macrotech again, though — but if Darkangel (or whatever group the PCs are involved with) needs a computer expert/cybervet, she's willing to volunteer!

Wintermoon Station (Hub Section) 1 hex = 10 yards



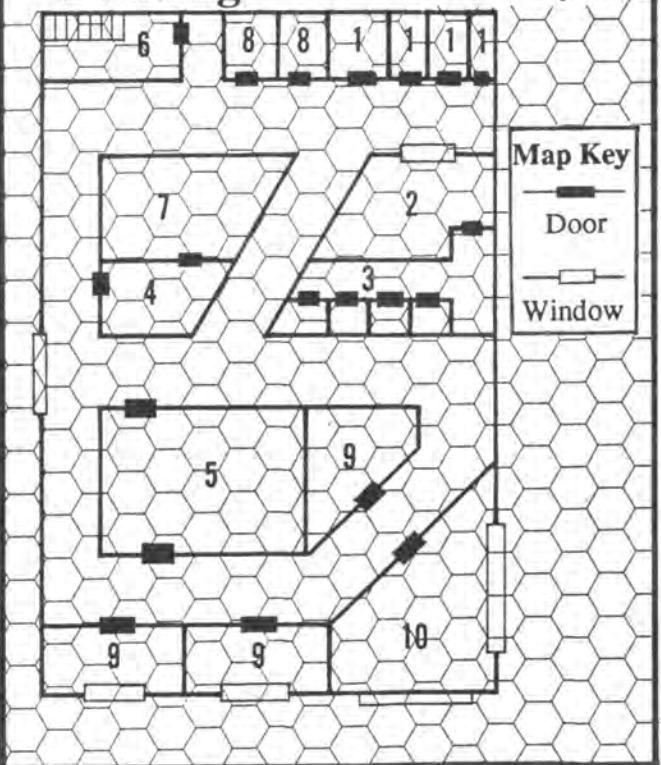
Argos Import/Export Warehouse

1 hex = 1 yard



88th Floor of Macrotech Building

1 hex = 1 yard



RAID ON STERLING

2

By Thomas S. Gressman

Illustrated by C. Brent Ferguson

This adventure is designed for *GURPS Space*, to be played with six to eight 100- to 125-point characters. It involves the defense of the Sterling Colony, a small farming community on Breuse (Xi Caliburnus I) in the Saga Sector. The planetary map of Breuse is on p. 5 and general information about the world is in the sidebars on pp. 52 and 64-65. (More information about the Saga Sector can be found in *GURPS Space Atlas 4*.)

Bandits have been raiding the colony, intent on destroying everything the colonists have worked for. The colony's leader and founder, Alfred Sterling, has sent his son to recruit mercenaries or guards to protect the colony and teach its people how to defend themselves. No one on Breuse would take the job, so Mearc Sterling was forced to look elsewhere. He had contacts — old college friends — in the Sol system, so he headed for Terra. Finding a group who'll help him is the colonists' last hope. (They approached the Patrol about it, but the Patrol considers it a planetary dispute, out of their jurisdiction.)



This adventure is open to all types of characters and races. The team should have at least one member with Merchant or Fast-Talk skill. Other useful skills are Piloting, Computer Operation and Programming, Intelligence Analysis, Interrogation, Leadership, Strategy, Tactics and Teaching. Combat skills are also important.

This adventure requires the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition* as well as *GURPS Space*. *GURPS Space Atlas 4* and *GURPS Ultra-Tech* are also helpful.



Background — The Real Story

The “bandits,” who are raiding Sterling Colony are actually corporate mercenaries working for Hoag-Warner GmbH, a large mining and manufacturing cartel based on Terra. H-W is a huge multistellar, infamous for its shady business practices and brutal competition crushing. It has more than once put small, independent companies out of business — often buying them out and selling the parts for a tidy profit, leaving the company’s executives on skid row.

Hoag-Warner has discovered that the colony is sitting on a vast deposit of several valuable ores: iridium, osmium and platinum. To get their hands on the ore, the corporation attempted to buy out the colony. When the farmers refused to sell, H-W sent corporate mercenaries disguised as bandits to “persuade” the colonists to reconsider. They hoped that if they destroyed some crops and frightened the women and children, the colonists would give in. Maybe even at a reduced price.

But the plan has backfired. While some of the Sterling Colony Council have advised selling out, the majority, led by Alfred Sterling, wants to stick it out. The council first tried to hire mercenaries on Breuse (a planet practically swarming with independent merc companies who use the world for high-G training), but couldn’t afford the kind of money the mercs wanted. And nobody was interested in a percentage of a cash crop that might be burned to the ground next week. Desperate and determined, Mearc Sterling and two other colonists were sent as a delegation to Terra to recruit some less-expensive help.

About the Author

Thomas S. Gressman is a freelance writer, gamer and avid SCA member, who lives and works in Derry, Pennsylvania.

This is his first work to be published by Steve Jackson Games. His previous writing credits include *The Burning Eye*, an adventure for *Megatraveller* and *Distant Fire*, written for FASA’s *Renegade Legion* module.

Background Assumptions

This adventure is set in the Confederation game universe. Humans, particularly Terran humans, have spread their culture through the stars, meeting and befriending several other races along the way. If the campaign has a basis very different from these assumptions, the GM may have to adapt the adventure somewhat.

Technology and Space Travel

With a maximum Tech Level of 10, most starships are equipped with slow jumpline drives. A few rare vessels, primarily navy-owned, are equipped with hyper-sails. Jump and hyperspace travel produce no time effects. Jump travel causes discomfort and disorientation at the moment of entry and exit from jump space. This works out to DX at -2 for 20 minus HT turns unless the traveler is secured in a jump chair. Teleportation is not possible at this Tech Level.

Communication and Detection

The most common method of interstellar communication is the communications fleet. Slow FTL radio exists, but is limited and expensive. Again, this high-tech gear is found in the hands of the military or large corporations. Communication with a ship in hyperspace or jumpspace is impossible. Reliable point, FTL-scan, hyperdrive emergence and hyperdrive wake sensors are commonly used by the military. Most of these sensors are assembled into huge tracking stations which are positioned on the edge of explored space, or on the rims of important systems, like the Sol system.

Languages

All non-player characters are assumed to speak the universal language of the galaxy. Trade-Talk is an artificial language, amalgamated from a number of different tongues. It is commonly used by starship crews, merchants and the Patrol. It is considered M/H.

Continued on next page . . .

Looking For Work

GMs: Read the following paragraphs to your players.

Ever since you got back from your last mission, all you have done is bounce from one menial job to another. Even those with technical skills haven't been able to find anything better than walking the security beat at a low-class brothel.

As you are gathered in your favorite pub one evening, Pieter Vanderhaven, an old mercenary friend, saunters over to your booth, places his empty beer mug on the table and looks at you expectantly. Your friend has tipped you off to lucrative jobs in the past, so you signal a passing server to refill his glass; he grins hugely at you.

"I understand you're lookin' for work."

You respond in the affirmative.

Vanderhaven waits until the server places a full mug in front of him before he speaks again.

"Well, I was over to the starport this afternoon, and I ran into an old college buddy of mine — name's Mearc. He's working a farming colony out on the rim with his old man. Seems they're havin' some trouble with marauders out there, and they're lookin' to hire a team to run the bandits off. I would have taken the job myself, 'cept I got half my leg shot of on my last mission." He takes a rough, knuckled hand and bangs it against his thigh. It makes a dull, metallic thud.

"Anyway, I knew you were havin' trouble finding decent employment, so I found out where he and his 'delegation' were staying. Boy, I never thought I'd hear of old Mearc having a delegation. Next he'll be running for sector Governor."

"Here's the address if you're interested. If this works out, you guys owe me one." He finishes his beer and wanders off, merging with the thick crowd and smoky air.

The address reads:

MEARC STERLING
HARRIGAN'S HOTEL ROOM 505
10:00 AM

Meeting the Clients

Following Vanderhaven's directions, the heroes find themselves standing in the lobby of a run-down hotel not far from the refueling station at Terra's main starport. A short conversation with the drowsy desk clerk sends the team to the fifth floor in a rickety, open-cage type elevator. (Anyone with acrophobia needs to make a Will roll to endure the ride.)

The battered, paint-peeling door to room 505 stands at the end of a dark, sooty, foul-smelling hallway, where the visitors are obliged to step over the prostrate forms of the dregs who seem to inhabit port towns of every place and age.

A knock on the door brings a timid, "Who is it?"

The visitors should respond with some variant of "Pieter Vanderhaven sent us. We understand you're looking to hire some mercs." Unless the party says something completely derogatory or offensive, the voice will tell them to wait. A successful Hearing roll detects the occupants engaging in a low-voiced argument.

Eventually, the door is noisily unlocked and swung open to show the ugly muzzle of a large-caliber automatic pistol. The weapon is held by a handsome young man, dressed in worn fatigues and a flak jacket.

Background Assumptions (Continued)

Weapons

Most of the weapons in this adventure are of a lower Tech Level than normal *Space* campaigns. This is mostly because it is against interstellar law to transport high TL weapons and armor to systems like Breuse, on the edge of explored space. Also, "antique" weapons (revolvers, shotguns, etc.) are experiencing a kind of come-back popularity. Many of the NPCs carry TL7 and TL8 weapons, and the mercenaries have TL9 weapons. Because of this, the GM should make higher-tech weapons scarce and difficult to obtain.

The Planet Breuse

Life on Breuse is a struggle between two factions. Most of the residents are independent prospectors who came in search of mineral and material wealth, and many of them have stayed far longer than they had hoped. The prospectors enjoy the positive aspects of anarchy — unrestricted movement, the freedom to use explosives and lasers, and especially the lack of taxes. However, Breuse has a floating population of mercenaries, who use the world's high gravity (1.49 G) to train for heavy-world combat. They are often careless with innocent bystanders.

Sixty percent of Breuse's indigenous population are non-native heavy-worlders. The planet has not been colonized long enough to produce its own heavy-worlder population. The other 40% use powerful, expensive exoskeletons. Mercenary companies are also well-equipped. Living off the land is nearly impossible. Except for what is produced by small, struggling farming colonies, the only native vegetation is verdigriz. Verdigriz is useful for indicating the mineral content of rocks, but eating it kills twice as quickly, and about as painfully, as starvation.

Common advantages on Breuse include Bionics, G-Experience, Improved G-Tolerance and Strong Will; common disadvantages are Acrophobia, Greed, Intolerance, Primitive and Stubbornness. Transportation on Breuse consists mostly of various all-terrain vehicles, the most notable being the WATV and the FlatCat Crawler (see p. 79).

"Come in," he says in a tight voice. "But no sudden moves."

As the party enters the room, they see three people, two men and a woman. The gunman appears to be the oldest, but none seems over 30.

Allow the party to take whatever actions they feel appropriate. The pistol waver can be disarmed with ease by someone with a DX of 13+ or any skill of 10+ in unarmed combat (Brawling/Judo/Karate). If someone with a DX less than 13 or lacking hand-to-hand skill attempts to disarm the gunman, have him make a Contest of Dexterity with the gunman, with a +1 bonus going to whoever has the higher DX. If the character wins, he disarms the NPC after a short struggle. If the gunman wins, he is still disarmed, but the pistol accidentally discharges. Have all persons in the room make a DX roll to avoid being hit. The gun is a TL7 9mm pistol causing 2d+2 damage.

During the struggle for the gun (if any), the other two people in the room yell at the NPC to put the gun away. The GM should recreate the chaos in the room by describing the noise of the struggling men crashing into the room's walls and sparse furnishings, the man's snarled curses, and his companions shouted attempts to quell the brawl.

Once the fight is over, or if it never occurs, Mearc Sterling, a young man clad in a threadbare suit five years out of fashion, roughly shoves Royce into a chair saying, "Dammit, Royce, I told you to settle down." Then he turns and addresses the PCs.

The Job

"I'm Mearc Sterling. The lady is Sheas Danalish. You've already met Royce. I assume you're here about the job. It's quite simple really. We're from the Sterling Agricultural Colony on Breuse. It's a small farming co-op in the northern half of the eastern hemisphere. We've been making a good go of it — that is until recently. A few weeks before we left, bandits started raiding the colony. Not much at first. Just random harassment of some of the outlying farms. But, things have gotten steadily worse. Two days before we left, the raiders attacked the colony center. Four people were killed, and seven wounded. My father, Alfred Sterling, the Colony Director and founder, was one of the wounded.

"He decided that we had to defend ourselves, but we aren't soldiers. We've tried everything — the Patrol was no help, can't get involved in planetary disputes or some such nonsense, the system governor is looking the other way, and the mercs on the planet want more than we can offer. So, Dad sent us here, hoping that we could hire a couple mercenaries or guards who would be willing to train us to fight, and to help us defend the colony.

"We can't pay much cash up front — just enough to get you there safely and comfortably — because the harvest won't be in for another five months. Most of the little money we have will go to buy weapons. We are, however, prepared to offer two shares of the colony's yearly profits for the next five years to each of you who is willing to take the job.

"That's the best we can do. Will you help us?"

Sterling is telling the truth. They have only \$60,000 in cash, and \$55,000 of that is earmarked for the purchase of supplies. Two shares of the colony's profits adds up to about \$30,000 per year, payable once a year, at the end of the year. If the party wishes to negotiate for higher pay, have the individual doing the negotiating engage in a regular Contest of Merchant skills against Sterling's skill of 10. If the character wins, Mearc offers one more share per man. If Sterling wins, the original offer stands. Only one attempt should be allowed. The colony is not being stingy; they really can't afford any more.

If the PCs accept the job, Mearc provides a standard legal contract, binding the team to protect the colonists from the raiders and instruct them in basic

The Clients

Mearc Sterling

Age 28; Suntanned skin, long medium-brown hair, brown eyes; 5' 10", 175 lbs. ST 12, DX 10, IQ 11, HT 11.

Speed 5.25, Move 5.25.

Dodge 5, Parry 1.

Wears light kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 4 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Advantage: Status 1.

Disadvantages: Sense of Duty, Dependents (wife and young child).

Quirks: Gentleman (result of his culture).

Skills: Agronomy-15, Animal Handling-9, Driving (farm equipment)-10, Driving (small truck)-9, Exoskeleton-12, Guns-4, Knife-9, Merchant-10, Veterinary-9.

Weapons: Colt M1911, .45 ACP, 2d crushing; 2 7 round magazines; Knife (small), 1d-1 cutting, 1d+1 impaling.

Mearc Sterling is the only son of the founder of the Sterling Agricultural Colony, Alfred Sterling. Mearc has spent most of his life following his father from one agricultural site to another, picking up useful farm skills. He also spent five years (ages 17-22) studying agricultural engineering at college on Terra. His gypsy-like life has given him a few combat skills.

Sheas Danalish

Age 25; Suntanned skin, short black hair, brown eyes; 5' 9" 130 lbs.

ST 10, DX 12, IQ 12, HT 11.

Speed 5.75, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 5.

Wears light kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 4 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Advantage: Strong Will +2, High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantage: Stubbornness, Dependents (mother, brothers).

Quirks: Dislikes chauvinism; Often mistakes simple courtesy for chauvinism; Dislikes soldiers.

Skills: Administration-11, Agronomy-12, Driving (small truck)-10, Ecology-10, Exoskeleton-11, Guns-10, Knife-11, Merchant-10, Zoology-11.

Weapons: Colt M1911, .45 ACP, 2d; 2 7-round magazines; Knife (small), 1-3 cutting, 1-1 impaling.

Sheas Danalish is one of the colony's technical support people. She has had a good education in Agronomy and Zoology. Her formal education was cut short when her father, a soldier serving in the Confederation Army, was killed in a border skirmish. She was forced to take a full-time job to support her family. This has given her a negative opinion of anyone who makes his living fighting.

Continued on next page . . .

The Clients (Continued)

Royce

Age 30; Pale skin, short white hair, blue eyes; 6' 0", 180 lbs.

ST 13, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 12.

Speed 6, Move 6.

Dodge 6, Parry 5.

Wears medium kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 8 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Advantage: Toughness +1.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper, Hard of Hearing, Impulsiveness, Overconfidence, Stubbornness, Sense of Duty, Dependent (wife).

Quirks: Distrusts outsiders almost to the point of paranoia; Gentleman (a result of his culture); Favors military-style clothing; Dislikes farming.

Skills: Carpentry-10, Driving (large truck)-9, Driving (small truck)-9, Exoskeleton-10, Guns-13, Knife-11, Mechanic-9, Stealth-11, Streetwise-9.

Weapons: M-1 Garand, .30-06 Rifle, 7d+1 crushing; 3 8-round magazines; Colt M1911, .45 ACP, 2d crushing; 4 7-round magazines; Knife (large), 1d+1 cutting, 1d impaling.

Royce comes from a world where the natives use only one name. If any further identification is needed, he says he is Royce, Carrall's son, of Tavahi Village. He always wanted to be a soldier, but he lacked the nerve to strike out on his own. Upon joining the Sterling Colony, he took on the self-appointed role of its protector. He is devoted to his wife and to the colony.



combat techniques. The party has the option to void the contract at any time, forfeiting any pay not already received. The colony can void the contract only if the hirelings do not fulfill the duties as specified.

So Long, Suckers

If the team rejects Mearc's offer and cannot renegotiate, he will apologize for wasting their time and bid them farewell. Their involvement with Sterling Colony and this adventure is over. Mearc will hire another team that will fail disastrously. The colony will be destroyed and Mearc, Alfred and the rest of the colonists will either die miserably or be reduced to dregs in the Breuse starport. The party will, however, be mistakenly assumed by Hoag-Warner to have accepted the offer; they will be hunted by H-W operatives until they are dead, or Sterling Colony is destroyed.

Around the Starport

Buying Arms

Once the PCs have accepted the job, Mearc Sterling explains that one of their duties is to purchase enough arms and armor to outfit a unit of 25 men. Sterling gives the party a certified credcard with a balance of \$55,000.

There is one drawback. The laws of the Confederation prohibit the export or transportation of military arms to backwater systems like Xi Caliburnus. Only TL7 and TL8 weapons will be available in large quantities. Most of the weapons for sale are semi-automatic or manually operated rifles, shotguns, pistols and Gauss needlers. Likewise, bows, crossbows and "medieval" melee weapons are easily available and experiencing a new faddish popularity. Body armor is available, but only of the same TL as the weaponry (7-8). Light and medium Kevlar vests are for sale at the prices listed in *GURPS Space*. Heavier armor, like military weapons, is restricted.

The party may want to skirt Confederate regulations and purchase restricted arms. This must be done through the black market. A successful Streetwise or Merchant-3 roll will allow someone to contact a black marketeer. The following modifiers apply: -3 for Terra's Control Rating, -2 for Legality 0 weapons and -1 for Legality 1 weapons, +2 if the PC has dealt with the black market before, +1 for each of the following advantages possessed — Charisma, Voice and Reputation (among criminals and/or shady dealers). Any of the party members may attempt a contact, but only one attempt is allowed per character.

Once contact has been made, the buyer may engage in five Contests of Merchant skills with the arms dealer. The negotiator must be the same character who made contact. The merchant will not deal with anyone else. The price of the arms starts at 100% above normal (as listed in *GURPS Space* and *Ultra-Tech*).

Each Contest won brings the mark-up down by 25%. Likewise, each time the dealer wins, the mark-up rises by 25%. For Example: the PC wants to buy a heavy laser pistol. The normal price is \$1,500, making the black market starting price \$3,000 (100% mark-up). If the bargainer wins four of the Contests and the merchant one, the mark-up is reduced by 100% and then raised by 25%, evening out to 25% over the normal price — or \$1,875. But if instead the merchant won four of the Contests, the price would rise to 175% over normal, or \$4,125 (and after five Contests, the dealer will *not* renegotiate).

Note that the buyer may accept the black marketeer's price at any time during the negotiation and does not have to engage in any or all of the Merchant Contests.

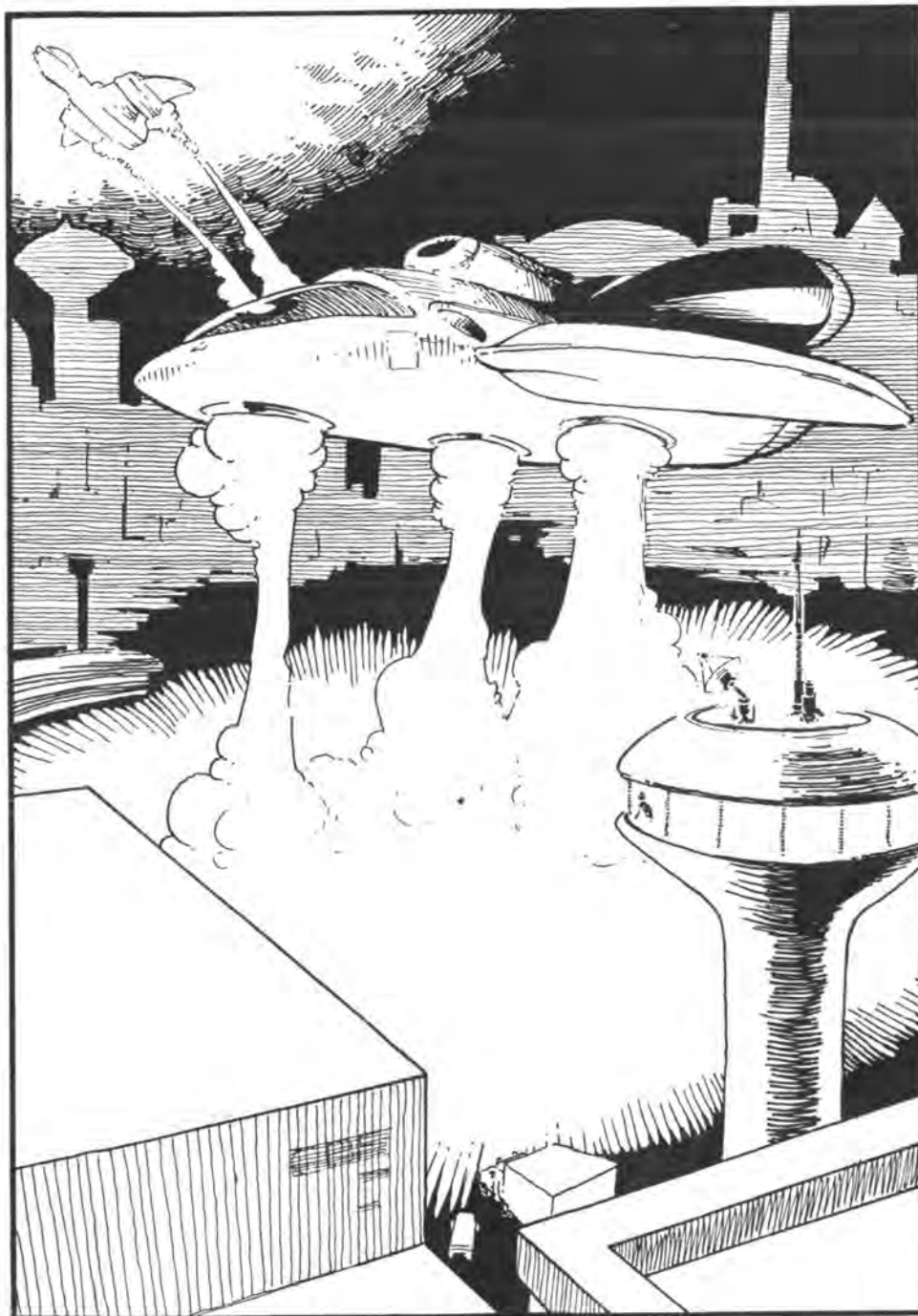
If the purchaser obtains restricted weapons and equipment from the black market at less than 100% of their normal value, there is a chance that the items

were stolen so recently that the rightful owners and the authorities are still looking for them. Roll against the purchaser's Streetwise skill. On a critical failure, the gear is still "hot." If this occurs, the GM may wish to spice up the adventure by having company investigators, the local police or the Patrol looking for the individuals who purchased the stolen goods.

It is suggested that no more than five restricted items be available on the black market. Any more and the balance of power will shift too radically in the party's favor. No heavy weapons, such as flamers, electromag grenade launchers and mortars, and artillery of all types are available. Hand grenades, however, are available; a case of 20 should be counted as one item.

Getting Underway

If the party owns a ship, they merely have to file a flight plan and leave. If they delay for more than two or three days, Sterling badgers them to get the mission underway.



Starport Encounters

As the characters move about the starport, feel free to add a few random encounters. None of these encounters should be directly related to the mission unless the hirelings are discussing their mission openly. On the contrary, the random encounters should be designed to heighten the tension without affecting the mission. For example, a couple of party members are walking down a dimly lit alleyway, heading for a meeting with their black market contact. A PCs makes a successful roll against his Shadowing skill and notices a dark figure ducking into a doorway just as he turns around. Upon investigation, the characters find nothing more than a frightened starport dreg, who was looking for food and place to sleep.

Likewise, the attractive young woman in the starport bar who seemed so interested in a party member could be a spy for Hoag-Warner or just a joygirl hoping to drum up a customer.

Shipboard Attackers

Mercenary Leader

ST 12, DX 12, IQ 11, HT 14.

Speed 6.5, Move 6.

Dodge 6, Parry 6.

Light kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 4 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Skills: Guns/TL9-14, Knife-12, Stealth-12.

Weapons: H&K MP5, 9mm P submachine gun, 3d-1 crushing; 4 30-round magazines; silencer; Vibroblade knife (large), 2d cutting, 2d-1 impaling.

Average Mercenary

ST 11, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 12.

Speed 6, Move 6.

Dodge 6, Parry 5.

No armor or encumbrance.

Skills: Guns/TL9-12, Knife-11, Stealth-12.

Weapons: Colt M1911, .45 ACP, 2d crushing; 4 7-round magazines; silencer; Vibroblade dagger, 2d-3 cutting, 2d-4 impaling.

Freighter's Crewmen

ST 12, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 13.

Speed 6.25, Move 6.

Dodge 6, Parry 5.

Ship's Uniform (equal to padded cloth), PD 1, DR 1.

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL10-12, Knife-11, Brawling-14.

Weapons: Stunner pistol (special damage), or paralysis pistol (special); 2 C cells; Neurolash-I; 1 B cell.

Along the Way

If the party uses its own ship to make its way from Terra to Breuse, the encounters listed below can add excitement to the trip. Not all of the encounters should be used.

A Call For Help

Just after the party's ship emerges from jumpspace to check and correct their course, the communications system produces a sharp, regular buzzing sound. By making an Electronics Operation/TL9 (Communications) skill roll, the communications operator is able to determine that the noise is an automated distress beacon.

If the team elects to investigate the call for help, by using an Electronics Operation/TL9 (Sensors) roll, they are able to determine that the signal is originating from a point on the outer edge of an asteroid belt.

The distress call is legitimate. It is coming from a wrecked *Florence* class freighter. The ship was ambushed by pirates, who are still lurking in the vicinity of the wreck, hoping to catch anyone who answers the distress call.

The raiders are using a modified tramp freighter, fitted with a turret mounting a TL8 railgun and a light missile launcher, with four high-explosive missiles remaining.

If the party decides to investigate the distress call, the pirates will wait until the team's ship has come to a stop alongside the wreck before attacking, working to disable rather than destroy the party's ship. At random intervals during the fight, the pirate captain will call upon the party to surrender.

Conduct this combat according to the rules given on pp. 91-96 of *GURPS Space* sourcebook. The pirates will break off the combat once they have sustained enough damage to breach their hull or destroy one of their weapons. If their drive suffers 50% or more damage, the pirates will surrender to the party. They have nothing to do with Hoag-Warner or the team's mission on Breuse, but at the GM's discretion they may offer to join the group and provide whatever combat and teaching skills they have.

The pirates ship's hold is about half-full of stolen goods. The total value of the booty is \$75,000. Transshipment of the cargo will take three hours. If the group turns any captured pirates over to the authorities, they will receive a hearty handshake and a pat on the back, but no reward. However, if they looted the pirates' hold, they could face charges from the pirates themselves.

Continued on next page . . .

If they do not own a ship, Mearc is easily able to get them accommodations on a tramp freighter passing through the Xi Caliburnus system; the freighter leaves for Breuse two days after the contract is finalized. All cargo must be checked through the Port Authority. If the group purchased any restricted arms, they must either leave them behind or attempt to disguise them somehow.

The easiest way to get by the Authority is to hide the weapons in crates labeled for something innocuous, like reading material or clothing. The starport is busy, and the officials don't have time to search everything thoroughly. If the party makes any significant attempt to disguise the arms and puts them in mislabeled crates, they will be successful.

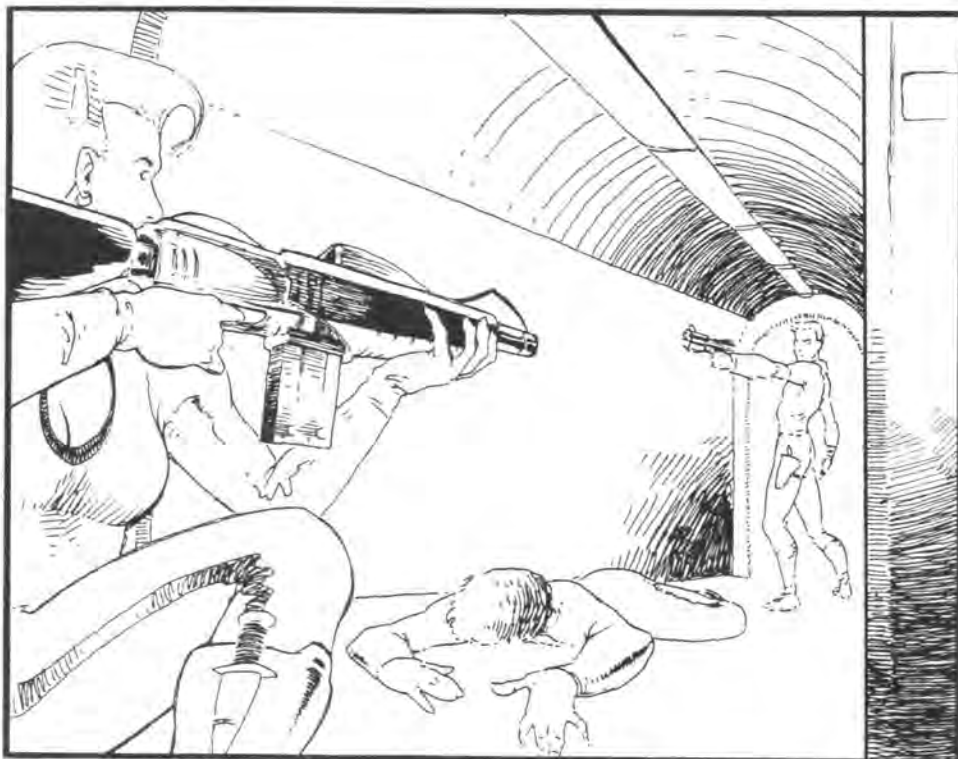
Outward Bound

Two incidents are listed below. The first should occur if the PCs booked passage on a freighter. If they have their own ship, the latter should occur. The GM is also welcome to create other encounters than these; some suggestions are provided in the sidebars.

Not a Pleasure Cruise

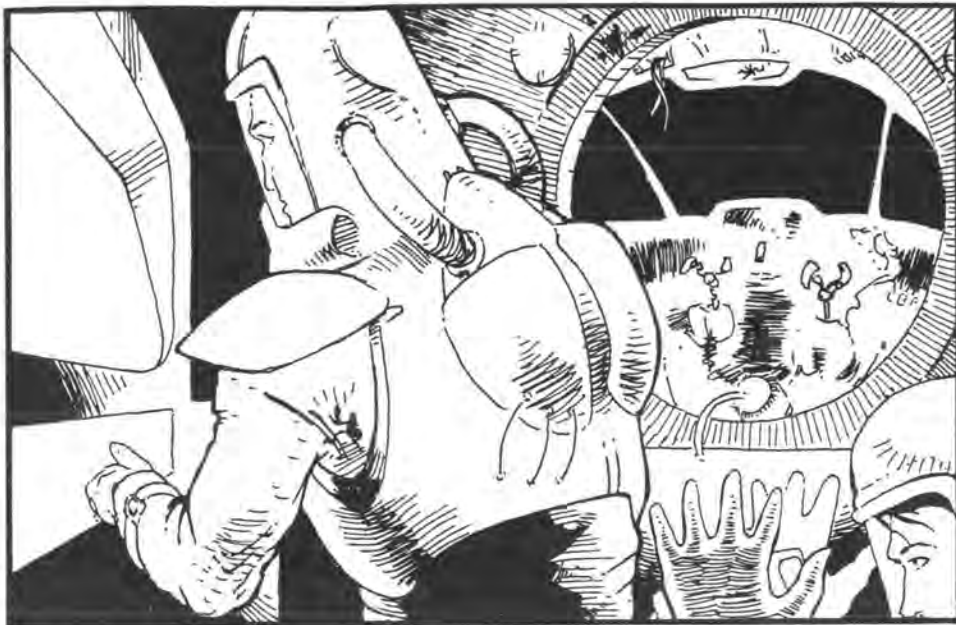
If the characters booked passage aboard a freighter, things will proceed smoothly until they are halfway from Terra to Breuse. Unknown to them, agents of Hoag-Warner have been following Mearc and his delegation, instructed to thwart any attempt to bring help to Breuse. As the freighter enters hyperspace in one of the trip's many jumps, agents who have booked passage will strike in an attempt to eliminate or scare off the party. There is one attacker for every party member, plus two more to deal with Mearc Sterling and his friends.

The attempt comes when the passengers are just getting out of their jump chairs in their cabins. The attackers will try to do away with the team quietly, so as not to arouse the ship's crew. Unless the travelers have taken precautions like posting a sentry, setting intrusion alarms, etc., they are surprised. The agents' tactics are to attack first in close combat with vibroblade knives and daggers. If that does not quickly eliminate the victims, the battle will degenerate into a



firefight. The attackers are at -2 DX for 10 seconds because they were not in jump chairs during the jump, disorienting them. All except the leader can be assumed to have the same characteristics. (See sidebar, p. 61.)

Should the battle last more than 10 turns, a detachment of the ship's regular crew will step in to quell the violence. Eight crewmen will respond, half of which fight with stunners, the other half with paralysis guns. The crew continues to attack all combatants until the last one has been subdued.



If the party wins, they will find no clues to the mercenaries' motives for the attack. The leader has a credcard certified for \$25,000 in his pocket. Questioning the ship's steward (Interrogation skill, with a +1 modifier for every \$50 bribe) will gain the party access to their assailant's cabin. A successful IQ roll allows the party to find a hand-held personal computer. Accessing this device requires a Computer Operation/TL10 skill check. Any success produces a file containing a complete dossier on every PC and on the Sterling colonists who hired them.

If the party is able to dispatch the mercenaries with minimal intervention by the ship's crew, the captain will grumble a bit, but will let the incident pass. If the ship's crew gets involved in the fighting, the captain will put into the nearest port with a Patrol station and turn the matter over to the authorities.

The ensuing investigation takes a week, during which time neither the characters nor the freighter is permitted to leave the starport. The PCs are eventually found innocent of any wrongdoing and released to proceed to Breuse.

If crew members were killed during the incident, the ship captain refuses to allow the party back aboard his ship. He unships any cargo or personal belongings the team may have left aboard his vessel, and then departs. He does not refund the price of their passages. Merc has just enough money for passage on another freighter leaving in 1d days. The GM is welcome to throw in any encounters he feels necessary during the interim — more Hoag-Warner agents can follow the party and may strike at any time (though the GM should not turn the characters into corpses just yet).

Skull and Crossbones

Use this encounter only if the party is traveling to Breuse in their own ship.

Shortly before arrival at Breuse, the ship is attacked by what appears to be a pirate vessel. The pirates are, in fact, agents hired by Hoag-Warner to make sure the team never arrives at Breuse.

Along the Way (Continued)

Ghost Ship

Ever since the party's ship came out of jump space, their sensors have been tracking a large metal object. At the extreme edge of scanner range, it is approximately the same size as their own ship and appears to be drifting. The scanners indicate no active power source, nor is there any answer to hails.

Getting close to the object is not hard, requiring only a successful Piloting (Spaceship) roll. If the roll fails, another roll is needed at -2 to avoid a collision with the object. A collision inflicts light damage on the PCs' ship.

The object is a medium-sized starship of the same class as the PCs'. She looks nearly identical to the team's ship, except that her hull markings declare her to be the *Walleran*. If the team wants to board the ship, they must make the following skill rolls:

To successfully dock with the *Walleran*, roll against Piloting (Spaceship).

To open the manual release on the *Walleran's* pressure hatch, roll against Mechanic (Spaceship) or Engineering-2. Or to force the pressure hatch, roll against ST-2. Using a steel pry bar eliminates the -2 penalty. Using some kind of powered jack (like a present-day "jaws-of-life") adds a +2 bonus.

Once the adventurers have gained access to the dead ship, they may explore it to their heart's content. There is no atmosphere or gravity, so vacc suits are required. When they reach the bridge, the GM can read them the following:

"When you reach the hatchway leading to the *Walleran's* bridge, you notice that the paint on the bulkhead facing you is discolored and blistered. Opening the hatch is difficult and requires all your strength. When it finally opens, the hatch springs out of your grasp with an almost musical clang.

"The scene on the bridge is indescribable. A thick yellow-white powder blankets everything. The command console is scorched black, the paint peeling and blistered. From your vantage point, you can see that every surface has been burned by incredible heat.

"Now you can see why it was so difficult to open the hatch. The portal seems to have been exposed to an intense heat, causing it to warp, and the hinges to be sprung. As you examine the thick steel door, you doubt that it will ever seal properly again."

Continued on next page . . .



Along the Way (Continued)

Ghost Ship (Continued)

If the team decides to examine the bridge more closely, they find the remains of the *Walleran's* pilot/captain, Joasa Klin, strapped into his acceleration couch — and the badly burned members of the ship's crew. A successful Chemistry skill roll reveals that the yellow powder is a common fire-fighting agent, used in many ship's automatic defenses.

Accessing the *Walleran's* computer requires a Computer Operation/TL9 roll with a -2 penalty due to the damaged condition of the device. Once operational, the automatic computer log holorecording shows what happened.

The *Walleran* is a small, independent trade ship, carrying silver from Terra to Pablo Kinte on Breuse. They left Terra only a day before the party did. The log shows the ship was halted and boarded by a large, unmarked corvette, heavily armed.

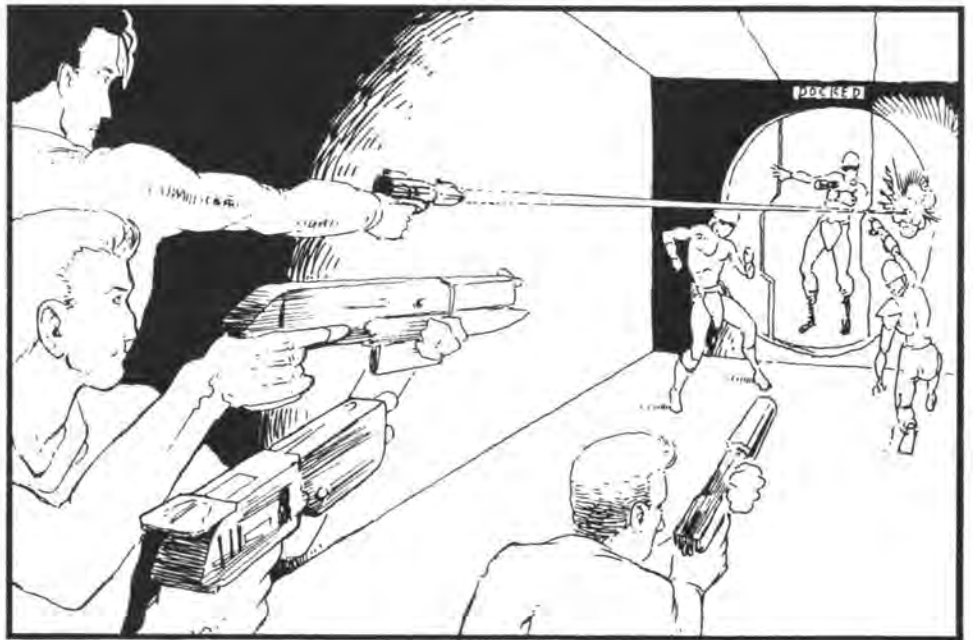
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The pirates pick the moment of their attack carefully. They wait until the team's ship is slowing down for a course correction before making their move, so the party is given no warning of the impending attack. There are no preliminaries to the attack — no calls for surrender or requests for boarding — laser bolts just start to fly.

The pirates are using an old Patrol-class ship, fitted with a pair of TL8 light laser turrets, a medium missile launcher and a chaingun. The pirates have only four medium explosive missiles for each of their launchers.

Once the battle commences, conduct the combat according to the rules listed in *GURPS Space* on pp. 91-96. If the pirates manage to disable the characters' ship to the point where it can no longer maneuver or shoot, they will close with her to board. The pirate crew consists of 14 men (all with the same stats), a captain, and his first mate. The captain and three men will remain aboard the pirate ship, while the other nine and the mate will board the PCs' ship. After the boarding action begins, the pirates will ask no quarter from the party and will give no quarter to the player characters. If given the opportunity to capture Sterling, Danalish or Royce, the raiders try to take the colonists alive.

If the team manages to beat back the boarders, the pirates will attempt to reboard their own vessel and make their escape. In this case, the PCs will have only a short time to board and capture the raider, if they wish to do so. From the time the last pirate is back aboard his own ship, it takes 15 seconds (turns) for the raiders to seal their ship and escape. If the explorers are in close pursuit (less than 3 seconds behind), they can cross over into the pirate ship without any rolls. If they are between 3 and 6 turns behind, a DX roll minus the number of seconds greater than 3 is required. After 7 seconds, the docking hatchway is closed and the docking tube begins to lose pressure. Anyone not in a vacc suit must immediately return to the ship.



One last chance is available to anyone at the hatch before 10 seconds have expired. A Mechanic-2 roll will allow someone to reopen the hatch, which causes the pirate's ship to automatically re-pressurize the docking tube. After 10 seconds, however, the tube will be fully depressurized and the hatch cannot be manually opened. At 15 seconds, the pirate ship fires full thrusters and leaves.

Should the party disable the pirate vessel and attempt to board, the raiders will make a desperate stand. If possible, they will carry the fight back to the party's ship, rather than allow the characters to board the raider.

In the pirate hold is a small amount of booty. This swag is mostly machine parts, but there are several cases of valuable pharmaceuticals worth \$20,000 on the black market. The pirate captain himself has a price of \$15,000 on his head. In order to collect this bounty, the characters must turn the pirate captain over to the Patrol at any large starport. The bounty will be paid upon delivery.

What the searchers may find in the captain's cabin is far more interesting than any booty or reward. In the ship's safe is a TL9 message disk (Lockpicking roll and the proper tools to open the safe — or just blast it). Upon reading the disk, the hirelings discover that the pirates were sent out to find and destroy Mearc Sterling and his recruits. Also in the safe is a credcard with \$10,000 on it. The sum is mentioned in the message as the fee for stopping the party from reaching their destination. The money is frozen, however, only to be released when proof of the team's demise reaches the employers.

There is no mention of the employers, but the party should realize that only a very powerful and rich organization could afford to wave this kind of influence around. This is more than a simple case of raiders having fun with some colonists. Something bigger is behind it.

Xi Caliburnus System

As the PCs' ship drops out of hyperspace at Breuse, they emerge into a busy system. Freighters and ore carriers ply the spacelanes between the planets and the outer system jump point. Small, fast interceptors and attack ships engage in mock dogfights, while troop ships stage practice combat drops against Breuse itself, as well as Churchill and Sarsen.

On the Approach Path

The party will have to wait in a holding pattern until the system controllers can plot a course for the PCs to follow. During this time, allow the team to make whatever preparations they wish for the landing. These preparations should be kept within the bounds of reason. Although the planet's society tends toward anarchism, newcomers who charge from their ship with their weapons locked and loaded will not receive a friendly welcome, either from the mercenary companies who use Breuse for a training ground or from the mining companies who are exploiting its mineral wealth. The fact that so much of the planet's permanent and transient population is armed with state-of-the-art military hardware should be enough to convince even the most aggressive individual that politeness and civility should be the order of the day.

In-System Traffic

During the approach to Breuse, the ship may be involved in an odd encounter, and crew members manning the sensors or just alert passengers can see some interesting things. Make an IQ roll for each of the crew members; for each success, roll 2d on the table below. An asterisk (*) indicates that this encounter only applies if the adventurers are traveling in their own ship.

2: Moving outsystem are two huge, bulky ore freighters bearing the markings of Hoag-Warner GmbH. They are escorted by a pair of 1,000-ton corvettes, with the same markings. The corvettes show signs of recent combat: large sections of fresh unpainted steel where the armor was patched. If the party encountered the recorded computer log on the *Walleran*, (see *Ghost Ship*, pp. 58-59), an IQ roll will reveal that these are the same type of ship that waylaid the trade ship.

3: *Two heavy fighters drop in behind the team's craft and shadow it for 15 minutes. Allow the players to draw conclusions about the dark and nefarious



Along the Way (Continued)

Ghost Ship (Continued)

Confused and not a little frightened, Joasa tried his best to accommodate the mysterious intruders. They, however, kept repeating, "Where's Sterling? We know you're aiding that weaselly farm boy. Now WHERE IS HE?" After thoroughly searching the ship, causing quite a bit of damage, the intruders left. But, unknown to Klin, they had placed an incendiary bomb under the navigation desk. It went off five minutes after the fighter ship left, causing a quick, hot fire that, despite the efforts of the ship's fire protection, killed everyone on board (they were all strapped into their jump chairs, getting ready to leave the system). It seems obvious that the intruders mistook the *Walleran* for the PCs' ship.

If the party explores the rest of the small ship, they will find five undamaged crates in the storage hold. Each of these contains several dozen thin metal sheets, about 15" by 8" by 1/2", individually wrapped in oiled paper. The sheets are made of silver and are worth a total of \$15,500. In the captain's cabin, they will find a loaded submachine gun and six full 30-round magazines. They will also find a real leather jacket, lined with a thin layer of monocrys — PD 4, DR 8 (PD1, DR 2 vs. impaling). The jacket is decorated with patches from the Sundown Trading Exchange, and will fit any human or human-like alien between 5' 10" and 6' 1", and between 160 and 190 lbs. It is worth \$500.

Continued on next page . . .

Along the Way (Continued)

A Minor "Accident"

Just as the party is powering up the drives for their next jump, they hear a muffled bang coming from the area of the sub-light drive compartment. There is a moment of silence, which is broken by the blare of a warning klaxon and a computer-generated voice telling the team that the sub-light drive power systems have been damaged. The ship's power plant has automatically shut down in response to the emergency. With the drives shut down, the party's ship is dead in space.

When the PCs check the engineering spaces, have the investigator make an Engineering/TL9 (Drive Systems) or a Mechanic-2 skill roll. Passing this check means that the crew member was able to determine the cause of the explosion.

Someone has sabotaged the insulation on the fuel mixture cooling system — it's been completely worn away. When the drives were powered up, the fuel mixture got heated too quickly and exploded in the feed lines. The low-grade explosion burst the fuel lines where they enter the reaction chamber and tore away some of the power leads connecting the power plant and the sub-light drive. If the engines hadn't shut down, the whole ship could have gone up.

If the mechanic fails this check, all he will be able to tell is that the fuel lines are ruptured, and the power leads damaged. The exact cause will remain unknown. And the group had the drive systems checked just a month ago.

In either case, it will be a minor task to repair the damaged systems. The job takes roughly two hours, and requires a successful Engineering/TL9 (Drive Systems) or Mechanic-2 roll. If the repairman fails this check, allow him to try again after another hour of repair time.



purposes of the escort. Then describe how they suddenly accelerate into an attack run, and how the flight leader laughingly thanks the party for providing them a convenient training target. No live shots will be fired at the party's ship, unless they fire first. An Electronics Operation (Sensors) or IQ-2 check will allow the PCs to get the fighter's company insignia and registration numbers. Turning the pilots in will do no good, however. The system governor has more important problems than a couple of unruly fighter-jocks.

4-5: A small troop ship is docked with a tender just inside Gog's orbit. The troop ship shows evidence of heavy battle damage, including a major hull breach just forward of the main engineering section. Her unit markings have been all but obliterated by a heavy laser hit, but anyone with prior military experience (Navy, Patrolman, Trooper, etc.) may make an IQ-2 roll to determine the unit to which the vessel is attached: Siler's Independent Regiment, a badly depleted, regiment-size mercenary outfit that specializes in high-G operations. A second IQ-2 roll allows the PC to remember stories that Siler's Regiment was hired by some big corporation to protect its interests on a newly opened planet, just over the borders of Confederation space.

6-8: *A standard ore freighter, whose markings declare it to be the *Jessica Lane*, property of Trans-Sol Incorporated, nearly runs down the party's ship. There are a few heated words exchanged via radio, but nothing further comes of it. Since it is common practice for ship's crews on shore leave to wear the name of their ship on both their caps and jackets, there exists the possibility of a brawl between the PCs and the *Jessica Lane*'s crew, should they meet in the starport. (See *Pablo's Place*, pp. 64-65.)

9-10: A small freighter of a type usually used to carry grain and other perishable foodstuffs is seen leaving the system. Sensors indicate that she is running empty. If Mearc Sterling or Sheas Danalish is summoned to look at the vessel or is shown sensor tapes of the ship, they can identify her as the *Savannah Byrche*, an independent cargo hauler contracted to transport the colony's produce to the large outsystem markets. If, as the sensors show, she was departing with an empty hold, something has definitely gone wrong at the colony.

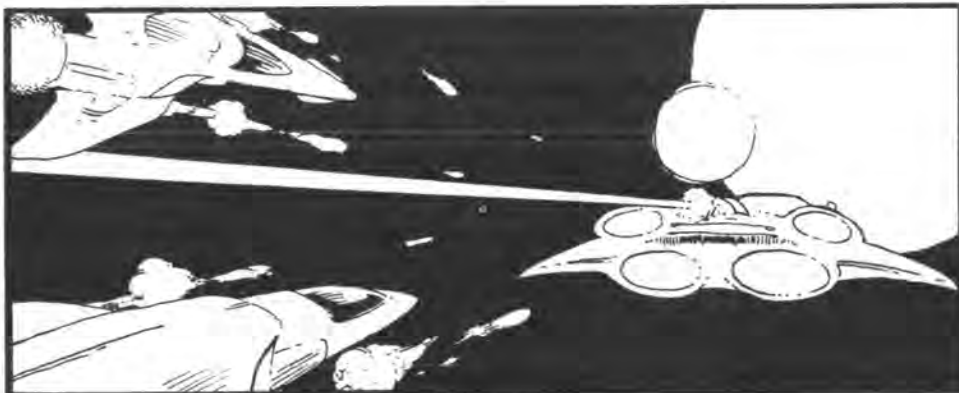
11: *Have the ship's sensor operator make an Electronics Operations/TL9 (Sensors) skill roll. Success allows him to detect a small, fast-moving object dropping out of the PCs' ship's footprint and vectoring away towards the planet

at high speed. A critical success allows him to determine that the object is a fast recon ship of a type used by military forces to spy out an invasion site before the operation begins. Trying to identify the ship calls for a second Electronics Operations/TL9 (sensors) test, this time with a -2 for range and the speed at which the recon ship is traveling. Failure means that the sensor operator cannot see the recon ship well enough to detect any markings. Any success indicates that the operator can see that there are no markings on her hull. A critical success allows him to see large areas of black paint where the identification numbers and symbols were painted out. In any case, the recon ship is not transmitting a transponder code.

12: *When the party's ship is at the halfway point, a pair of black-painted fast attack ships cuts across their bow. Two low-power explosive warheads burst within five meters of the ship's hull. Allow a few moments of confusion before telling the players that the hull is intact, but the rounds fired at their ship weren't practice warheads. If the party is using a military-type vessel, the ship's automatic sensors will indicate a missile lock 5 seconds before the explosions. A successful Electronics Operations/TL9 (Sensors) roll will allow the characters to determine that the attack ships are swinging around for another pass, giving the PC captain +2 on his Tactics roll for combat.

Conduct the ship-to-ship combat according to the rules on pp. 91-96 of *GURPS Space*. The attack fighters are each armed with four light high-explosive missiles (now three, having expended one each in their initial pass), and two TL9 light lasers. All of the attack ship's weapons are in fixed forward-facing mounts. See the sidebar on p. 62 for full statistics on the fighters.

During the movement phase of each round of combat, the lead attack ship will call upon the party to surrender their vessel. If they comply, a black-painted corvette will arrive within 30 minutes. The corvette will dock with the party's ship and take all aboard into custody. The PCs will be locked in one stateroom, while the colonists will be held in another. The party's ship will be taken outsystem to a distant planet where it will be sold at auction. The prisoners will be held incommunicado until they are returned to Terra. There they will be sedated and dumped in a remote section of what is present-day Kansas. The PCs will have no further idea of why they were taken captive. A few months later, they will learn that the Sterling Agricultural Colony collapsed and was sold to Hoag-Warner GmbH.



If the party refuses to give up their ship, the fighters continue the combat until one is destroyed, (at which time the other will withdraw at high speed) or until the system Patrol shows up 20 turns after the first round of combat.

If the party is able to destroy or cripple one or both of the fighters, they may examine the wreckage after making a successful Piloting (Spaceship) roll. The ships are of a fairly common design, being produced by McDonnell-Sukhoi for

The "Pirates"

The mercenaries in *Skull and Crossbones* (p. 57) are using a modified patrol class ship, which they have named the *Polecat*. She is a 2,000-ton vessel mounting a pair of turrets, each supporting a TL8 light laser, a medium missile launcher and a chain gun. The pirates have only 4 high explosive missiles for each launcher.

Mors Katakajak, the pirate leader, is an ex-navy Petty Officer who assembled his crew from ex-navy spacers, and stole his ship from a patrol base about a year and a half ago. Ever since, he has been raiding commerce shipping between Terra and the outer colonies. The Patrol has a \$15,000 bounty on Katakajak.

Mors Katakajak

Pale skin, short black hair going gray, brown eyes, 5' 9", 170 lbs.

ST 12, DX 11, IQ 12, HT 11.

Speed 5.5, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 4.

Wears medium kevlar suit, PD 2, DR 8 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Advantages: Danger Sense.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust, Bully, Code of Honor (Pirates Code), Enemies (bounty hunters, the Patrol), Social Stigma (pirate).

Quirks: Speaks in pirate's cant ("Ahoy mateys, I reckons ye t' be caught twixt th' devil an' th' deep blue sea. Blast an' damn yer eyes,"); Dresses like a 17th-century pirate from old Terra; Gallant towards ladies.

Skills: Astrogration-11, Brawling-10, Broadsword-9, Guns/TL9-11, Leadership-13, Piloting/TL8 (starship)-9.

Weapons: Cutlass (Thrusting Broadsword), 2d-1 cutting, 1d impaling; Gauss Needler Rifle, 2d+1 impaling; 2 100-round magazines; Gauss Needler Pistol, 1d+2 impaling; 1 100-round magazine.

Average Pirate

ST 11, DX 10, IQ 9, HT 10.

Speed 5, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 5.

Light kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 4 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Skills: Brawling-10, Broadsword-10, Guns-10.

Weapons: Cutlass (Thrusting Broadsword), 1d+2 cutting, 1d impaling; Gauss Needler Pistol, 1d+2 impaling; 2 100-round magazines.

The Strike Ships

The fast attack ships used in encounter 12 of *In-System Traffic* (p. 61) are ground and space strike fighters. Each is capable of 4G acceleration over short periods of time with a sustained speed of 2Gs. Each is armed with a pair of TL9 light lasers and four TL9 light high-explosive missiles mounted under the wings and on the fuselage. The fighters are not capable of FTL travel, and have insufficient range to make even the relatively short flights between planets of the same solar system. It is common practice to load strike fighters aboard a larger carrier ship for transportation to and from the general target area. The fighters are only launched when the target is within their limited attack range. Anyone with Navy or Marine experience can roll vs. IQ to realize that the craft's carrier must be somewhere close. The carrier is lying doggo within the thick cloud cover shrouding the small gas giant Corineus. The carrier can only be spotted if specifically looked for. Even then, it takes a successful Electronics Operation/TL9 (Sensors)-2 roll to locate the carrier. Once she is spotted, the party will realize that she is far too big for them to tackle in open combat.

Strike Fighter Ship Data

Class	Size	TL
Strike Fighter	500 tons	10
Component		
Armor DF: 2	nil	
Fusion Plant	50 MW	
Thrusters	-50	
Crew	2 (pilot and gunner)	
Life Support, limited	nil	
Weapons		
2 TL9 Light Lasers	-10 in combat	
1 TL9 Light HE		
Missile each	nil	
Sensors	-1	
Computer,		
Microframe	nil	
Landing Gear, Retractable	nil	

low-budget mercenary companies, like the ones that train on Breuse. A successful search of the wreckage (IQ-2) produces a data disk containing the description and transponder codes of the explorer's ship. Should anyone think to record the fighter's cockpit registration numbers, they are MDS-557489-MK and MDS-557490-MK. An extensive records search, (not possible on Breuse, and involving a successful Computer Operation/TL10-2 skill check) will determine that both ships are registered to McKean's Airmobile Strike Force, a small mercenary company which trained on Breuse eight months ago, but has since departed for a combat assignment. The records also indicate that McKean's company has been in the employ of Hoag-Warner for the past five years. The registration numbers do not play a major part in this section of the adventure, but will add a few nails to the lid of Hoag-Warner's coffin, should the party be successful in their overall mission.

Under no circumstances should this or any of these random encounters be used to destroy or severely cripple the party, or their ship. Rather, they should be used to increase the tension, and to add to the feeling that there is something more to the bandit raids than was previously believed.

Breuse Downport

What passes for a starport on Breuse (called the Downport) is little more than a large expanse of bare, laser-flattened rock, ringed with refueling stations, repair and hanger facilities, and cargo loading docks. South of the landing area sits a small, dingy terminal building which houses the port's offices and the system controller's tower.

When the ship carrying the party lands, the port's ground crews stroll across the landing stage, in no great hurry to perform their assigned tasks. It is an hour before the portmaster shows up. His cursory examination of the ship wouldn't find a ton of contraband if it were sitting alone in the middle of the main airlock. With a bored flick of the wrist, the portmaster signs the inspection papers and the ship's crew is free to wander about the port.

Basic Port Services

Basic port services are available at Breuse. Docking fees are lower than at some ports, due mainly to the poor quality of the facilities. At Breuse Downport, it costs only \$200 per 1,000 cy per day to keep a ship in dock. Fuel is available in both processed and unprocessed states, and recharging facilities are available to "top-off" capacitors. Processed fuel costs 150% of the listed prices in *GURPS Space*, while unprocessed fuel is available at the listed prices. Capacitor charging costs \$100 per megawatt-hour of charging. Charging is accomplished through the use of a 5 MW power plant located at each charging station.

Repair and refitting services are offered by the port. The facilities for such operations are primitive by modern standards, and cannot make repairs on any equipment of higher than TL9. Prices for repair are 120% higher than standard. The port has no shipbuilding capabilities.

Lodgings in Breuse Downport

The port maintains a number of sleeper cubes in the terminal building. These cost \$6 per person per night, and are just large enough for one individual to stretch out in. Characters over 6' 6" or 250 lbs. will find sleeper cubes uncomfortable. Those weighing more than 300 lbs. or standing more than 7' tall will not be able to stay in one of the cubes.

A cube is nothing more than a coffin-like plastic box, with thin foam padding on the floor to serve as a mattress. There is a small net hung from one wall,

intended to hold small personal items which are too valuable to leave in the terminal storeroom. Items larger than 1/2 cubic yard volume, including all long arms, must be stored in the storeroom. For every individual placing an item in the storeroom, roll 3d. On a 17 or 18, one piece of their property has been stolen (GM's choice). If a single person has placed more than one item into storage, determine randomly which it was. The port authorities will be apologetic for the theft, but will in no way accept responsibility for the loss.

The Real System Governor

A few hundred meters east of the terminal building, within easy sight of the ugly Downport is Pablo's Place. Pablo's is a trading post/hotel/brothel, the closest thing Breuse has to an established or respectable business. Its owner, Pablo Kinte, is a tough, ruthless heavy-worlder who commands more respect and obedience than the weak-willed and overworked system governor, Diana Lewis. On the surface, Kinte appears to cooperate with Lewis, but long-time residents of Breuse know better. Kinte is the real governor — he keeps a strong hand in the management of the planet's affairs to ensure that outside authorities don't take too close an interest in the planet. Anarchy is good for business.

Kinte is a black marketeer, dealing openly in contraband food, weapons, drugs and other "necessities." He makes a tidy profit on these shady dealings. His markup can be as little as 10% for the permanent mining population, or as great as 120% for the transient mercenaries. He also buys salvaged, scavenged or stolen items at half normal price.

Kinte is also an information broker. He will sell any gossip he hears, and a lot that he makes up, to the highest bidder. He is keenly aware of the effect a successful farming colony could have on the mining economy of Breuse, not to mention the drastic reduction in his profit margin if food becomes locally available. This attitude is the main reason Mearc Sterling and his companions were forced to seek help offworld — Kinte refused to sell guns to the colonists. He also spread the word that any mercenary company who aided the farmers would find their supplies cut off and their access to the pleasures of his establishment denied.

If the visitors head to Pablo's place, the following two encounters may prove interesting and useful. The GM may also blend in any of his own encounters that he wishes.

Colby

In one corner of the establishment's busy bar sits an old man. It is obvious from a single glance that he used to be a miner. His hands are broken and gnarled. His face is seamed and scarred, and he wears the distinctive "miner's tattoo," rock dust embedded in his skin so deeply that it will never come out. The old man's name is Colby. He was once a prospector, long before the cartels began mining Breuse on a grand scale. He worked out of a camp near Lake Flagon, a few hundred miles northwest of the present site of the Sterling Colony. If the party inquires after anyone who might be able to tell them about that region, they will be directed to Colby. It will cost the party two drinks before they can get anything out of the old man. Finally, he will tell them that he discovered a large deposit of osmium near the colony site, but a rock fall crippled him so badly that he had to retire from mining. "There's got to be a ton o' osmium sittin' right under that colony," he says. "Jes' wish I had my good legs back, I do."

A third drink will get the characters the location of an old mining camp 15 miles west of the colony. Colby says that the vein being mined by that camp played out 20 years ago, but he's heard stories recently that there were people

Fighter Crews

Fighter 1

Pilot:

ST 10, DX 13, IQ 15, HT 11.

Skills: Gunner/TL9-10, Leadership-11, Piloting/TL10 (Fighter)-13.

Gunner:

ST 11, DX 14, IQ 13, HT 11.

Skills: Astrogation-11, Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors)-12, Gunner/TL9-13.

Fighter 2

Pilot:

ST 12, DX 14, IQ 14, HT 12.

Skills: Gunner/TL9-9, Leadership-12, Piloting/TL10 (Fighter)-12.

Gunner:

ST 14, DX 14, IQ 12, HT 14.

Skills: Astrogation-10, Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors)-13, Gunner/TL9-12.

Breuse: General Information

If the party checks any standard database about their destination, they will find the following data:

Breuse is a high-gravity world in the Saga Sector, which lies on the rim of the galaxy's Orion arm. Beyond this sector lies the empty, 2,000-parsec void called the Gunningagap. (See *GURPS Space Atlas 4* for more information).

Breuse is populated almost entirely with prospectors, who are either heavy-worlders or wear powerful, expensive exoskeletons, and mercenaries who use the world's vast, barren wilderness for high-G training.

There is only one starport on Breuse, a class II situated next to the local trading post and hotel, Pablo's Place. Visitors are cautioned that prices for mining equipment and arms are from 50% to 100% above normal.

Recently a new agricultural colony has begun to explore the world's potential for agricultural development. However, because of the colony's newness, no statistics are available.

High Gravity

The party should be aware that Breuse is a high-gravity world (1.49 G). Because of this, most people who live, train and work on Breuse employ exoskeletons. Many long-time residents have developed the advantages of G-Experience and Improved G-Tolerance.

Exoskeletons and the drug Gravanol are available at any major starport for the price listed in *GURPS Space*. These items can be purchased on Breuse, at Pablo's Place. Unfortunately, Pablo Kinte has cornered the market on exoskeletons, and charges \$37,000 for a generic suit. Fitted suits are not available on Breuse.

Gravanol is easy to get and harder to restrict. To remain competitive with the ship crews who bring the drug in by the case to sell to the miners and mercenaries, Pablo keeps his price down to \$85 per weekly dose.

Gravanol and exoskeletons are absolute necessities on Breuse for all but heavy-worlder humans and aliens with high native gravities. Treefolk and Gormelites will suffer less from uncompensated high-G stresses than normal humans. Sparrials, Pachekki, and light-worlders will be at a greater disadvantage than characters who grew up on worlds with Terra-normal gravity. People with no G-tolerance at all will be in agony.

If the campaign involves other alien races, be sure to take into account the gravity of their native world when playing this adventure.

Pablo's Place

Pablo's Place is the largest full-time establishment on Breuse. The owner, Pablo Kinte, is the son of one of the original prospectors, born and raised on the planet. That world's 1.49 G gravity has given Pablo all the characteristics of a heavy-worlder. He is strong, both physically and mentally. A ruthless businessman, he's always on the lookout for ways to better serve himself.

Pablo's Place boasts any number of attractions, ranging from acceptable food (both artificial and real), lightly-watered liquor, mildly adulterated drugs (both recreational and pharmaceutical), and a wide enough range of joygirls and boys to suit the tastes of the loneliest miners and mercenaries. Pablo's prices for these pleasures would be fair on Terra. On Breuse, they are high. Since Pablo's is the only establishment of its sort on the planet, the miners and mercs grit their teeth and pay their inflated tabs.

Continued on next page . . .

living there. "Mebbe they dug further in. Damn, if I only had my good legs, I'd make me a fortune out there." Nothing more useful can be gotten out of Colby, and as long as the characters remain, he will continue to rant on about the glory years when he had his good legs.

Fight! Fight!

In addition to Pablo and Colby, there will be 3d patrons in the bar at all times. Of these, 75% will be mercenaries, 10% miners, 10% ship crews and 5% local residents.

The first time the PCs enter the bar, they will see eight individuals wearing crew caps and jackets bearing the name *Jessica Lane*. If the team happened across the *Jessica Lane* during their approach to Breuse, they may wish to "discuss" the encounter with her crew. The crew of the *Lane* will treat the incident as a joke, telling the PCs that they should either get a real ship, or get



out of the space lanes. This taunting continues until the PCs either leave the bar or begin a brawl.

If the party withdraws, the *Lane's* crewmen will spread the story of how they backed down a group of hired guns, making life pretty unbearable for the team. If the newcomers want to start a fight, the *Lane's* crew will happily oblige them. Their opponents will fight to the best of their ability, using their fists, beer mugs, bottles, bar stools and any other improvised weapons they can find. (Beer mugs and bottles add +2 to hand-to-hand damage for the first blow only. After that, beer mugs are considered to be broken and useless. Broken bottles should be treated as daggers which can take 1 point of damage before breaking. Chairs, bar stools and so forth should be treated as clubs.)

The *Lane's* crew will give up the fight when their fourth man has been struck down. If one of the party produces a gun, knife or similar lethal weapon, their opponents will immediately break off the fight and run for their lives. Drawing a killing weapon in Pablo's Place causes the owner to react as well. Pablo will produce a sawed-off shotgun from beneath the bar and fire a shot into the ceiling to get the brawler's attention. He will order the offenders out of his place, telling them never to return again. Pablo doesn't mind if his patrons occasionally blow off a little steam, but he draws the line at people killing each other in his bar.

Mercenary Barracks

On the extreme edge of town are long rows of drab, gray quonset buildings, surrounded by a 3-meter razor-wire fence. These are the barracks used by the soldiers-for-hire while they are on planet. Each company has its own compound. The mercs are responsible for their own security, and the commanders are responsible for the behavior of their men. It is common practice to grant liberty to a small contingent of each company at any one time. The governor, backed up and influenced by Pablo Kinte, believes that if the mercenaries were allowed to roam around at will, open violence would erupt between two rival companies. Such riots are bad for business, so no more than one platoon from each company is allowed off that outfit's base at one time. The trouble is each company has its own ideas as to what constitutes a platoon. O'Reilly's Lancers may send ten men into town, while Feral's Heavy Cavalry may grant privileges to 40. So far things have been quiet, except for the occasional brawl or knife fight, but they can't stay that way forever.

Around Breuse Startown

Once the team lands and makes arrangements for the care of their ship, they may roam through the port at will. Allow time for them to accomplish any tasks they feel to be necessary. Remember the potential for a brawl between the PCs and the crew of the *Jessica Lane*. Bear in mind that, although Breuse is in a state of anarchy, there is some form of law, even if it is mob law. Those who walk about the town flaunting military hardware and wearing heavy armor are asking for trouble, and are likely to get it.

Also, advertising the team's presence and mission on Breuse in the port town is a sure way of alerting Hoag-Warner that their attempts to stop or scare off the party have failed. There are informers in Breuse Downport who would sell anything or anyone if it meant getting off-world. PCs who swagger around the town, boasting, are going to attract the attention of these individuals and of the mining cartel.

After the characters have had time to finish their desired tasks, Mearc Sterling will call them together in a small office building near the starport. It is here they will meet Mearc's father, Alfred, and begin the next phase of the adventure.

Pablo's Place (Continued)

Aside from the more carnal services provided, Pablo's Place serves as the largest, most completely stocked trading post on Breuse. That's not saying much. About 75% of the trading post's wares are mining equipment: picks, shovels, hydraulic jacks, et cetera. Most of it is old and is being sold at 110% normal price. Weapons and ammunition are also available at Pablo's. Most of this is limited to melee weapons and out-of-date military gear. Firearms, ammunition and explosives are of no higher Tech Level than 7, and are priced at 120% of the listed cost. Body armor is unavailable.

The final function of Pablo's Place is that of a hotel. Guests are encouraged to stay in one of the \$150-a-night rooms, accompanied by the companion of their choice. Those who are looking more for rest than recreation are charged \$50 a night for the same room.

Should the characters wish to speak to Pablo, they can visit his office between 7:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. local time. Pablo will speak only in generalities unless he knows the person to whom he is speaking, or unless a stranger convinces the bartender that he is trustworthy. Convincing him is not easy, with a -3 reaction to strangers.

Pablo knows that Hoag-Warner is behind the bandit raids on the Sterling Colony, but this is one piece of information he will never divulge to the characters. Pablo wants the farmers off Breuse. He believes that with the farmers will come stability, and an end to his shady but lucrative business. Obtaining any other kind of information requires a Good or better reaction, a successful Fast-Talk or Streetwise roll, and \$50 cash up front.

Pablo Kinte

Age 42; Brown skin, black wavy hair, brown eyes, 5' 2", 225 lbs.

ST 15, DX 12, IQ 11, HT 13.

Speed 6.25, Move 6.

Dodge 6, Parry 5.

Wears medium kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 8 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Advantages: Heavy-Worlder, Status 2.

Disadvantages: Unattractive, Greed, Reputation (+2 to any Breuse resident), Stubbornness.

Quirks: Ruthless; Always looking for profit.

Skills: Brawling-11, Carousing-10, Gambling-9, Guns/TL9-12, Knife-10, Knife Throwing-10, Merchant-10, Streetwise-9.

Weapons: Gauss Needler Pistol, 1d+2 impaling; 2 100-round magazines; Sawed-off 12 ga shotgun, 4d crushing (Acc 3, 1/2 D 15, Max 50, Rcl -4); 9 loose rounds; Knife (large), 2d-1 cutting, 1d+1 impaling.

Generic Jessica Lane Crewman

ST 12, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 10.
Speed 5.5, Move 5.
Dodge 5, Parry 5.
No armor or encumbrance.
Skills: Beam Weapons-10, Brawling-
12, Carousing-10, Knife-9
Weapons: none carried, improvised
weapons only.



Meeting Sterling

The meeting has been arranged to take place in one of the dirty office buildings that stand on the verge of the starport. The younger Sterling will call the party together aboard their ship just after sunset, and will insist that they wait until it is fully dark before they make the half-mile trip across the landing stage to the buildings. If asked about his reasons for this secrecy, Mearc explains that both he and his father are worried that the bandits may have spies in the city.

The walk from the ship to the office building is not a particularly difficult one. The route is, however, fully exposed to the view of anyone who cares to look. This should make anyone with prior military or espionage experience nervous. Have each member of the party make a number of IQ rolls to determine if they are able to see anyone following or watching them. No one is taking any real interest in the team's activities, but make the checks anyway just to add to the tension.

Once the PCs reach their destination, Mearc will lead them up a flight of grimy stairs, and down a short, dimly-lit corridor. At the end of the corridor, he knocks on a drab, peeling wooden door, and speaks his name in a low tone. A muffled voice replies from the other side. The young man's shoulders sag with relief and he shoves the door open. There, seated in a threadbare armchair in the darkest corner of the unlit room, is Alfred Sterling.

The elder Sterling is about 55 years old, and shows all the signs of hard living. His face is brown and wrinkled from years of exposure to the sun. His short-cropped beard and moustache are as white as the hair on his head. His shoulders are broad and strong, though slightly stooped, but his brown eyes shine like those of a man half his age.

"Come in," he says. "Quickly, and shut the door." His whisper carries the tone of a man used to being obeyed.

Once the door is closed and firmly bolted, he begins to explain the situation.

Sterling's Tale

"I am Alfred Sterling, founder of the Sterling Agricultural Colony. We have a large communal farm in the eastern hemisphere of this planet, near Lake Flagon. We are harming no one, and all we want is to be left in peace to tend our crops.

"Not long ago, bandits began raiding our colony. Their leader, a man known to us only as Erik, claims to be the governor of the Lake Flagon district. Once a month, he and his band of cutthroats show up and demand a portion of our crops, or our profits, to keep them from destroying the colony. Erik calls this extortion 'taxes.'

"The final straw came when we were unable to meet Erik's latest demands, half our crops and a quarter of the last harvest's profits. When we refused to pay, he and his bandits set fire to the fields. Before we could extinguish the blaze, four homes were burned and two of our people were dead.

"We approached several of the mercenary companies who train on Breuse, asking them to take on the task of guarding our colony, but they refused. They all said that there wasn't enough profit in it. I sent my son to Terra, hoping that he could find a small band of freelancers like yourselves. I am glad he succeeded."

What the elder Sterling says is true. A man named Erik showed up in his colony, claiming to be the district governor, and began making demands on the colony. Whenever the colonists refused, or were unable to meet the demands, the bandits burned crops and homes, or beat selected colonists. The most men Sterling has ever seen himself was 15. All were armed with military equipment and wearing body armor. Once the colonists tried to fight back, but the attempt cost them four dead, eight wounded and three burned farms. Since neither the

ineffectual system governor nor the mercenaries on planet were willing to help, the colonists opted for outside aid.

Sterling doesn't know that the raiders are actually mercenaries, hired by Hoag-Warner GmbH. The PCs can question Sterling further if they wish. He can tell them little more. Once the party is finished, the elder Sterling will ask them to prepare the arms and equipment they purchased for shipment, and to be ready to travel at first light.

Bad News

The next morning, when the team meets Alfred Sterling, the old man seems agitated. Before anyone can ask him what is wrong, he blurts out that the bandits raided the colony last night. This time, they weren't looking for plunder, but for hostages.

After he left the previous night, Sterling contacted the colony to let them know that help was on the way. He learned that during the night the raiders had smashed down a section of the colony's fence, torn up a portion of the fields and rolled into the center of the housing section. Erik stepped down from his vehicle and told the colonists that he knew about their plan to hire mercenaries to drive his men and him away. To protect his men and himself, he took half a dozen people hostage, mostly members of the central committee. Among the non-committee members taken by the bandits were Alfred Sterling's wife and 20-year-old daughter. Erik threatened to kill one hostage for every bandit killed, and the colonists have no reason to doubt his word.

The elder Sterling is so distraught at this news that he is considering breaking the deal with the party and giving in to the raiders. Mearc, on the other hand, is furious. When he hears that his mother and sister were taken hostage, he goes into a rage. Sheas Danalish and Royce are shocked by the news, but neither reacts as violently as Mearc.

If the party allows Alfred Sterling to sever their bargain, the elder colonist will tell them that they may keep the arms and equipment purchased with the colony's money and sell them for profit if they can. Mearc and Royce will be so furious at the party's cowardice that they will ever after be considered enemies. Sheas Danalish will accept the news with resignation.

If the group does not want to abandon the mission, they merely have to remind Sterling that he cannot void the contract unless the agents fail to perform the required tasks, which they have not. Sterling will accede, apologizing for his lapse.

Once the issue of whether the party stays or goes is settled, Alfred Sterling will instruct the team to load the equipment they purchased aboard a pair of small *Condor* suborbital shuttles, which he brought from the colony for that purpose. (See the sidebar, p. 71, for details on the Condors.)

If the team's ship is equipped with a cargo shuttle, they may use it to make the trip to the colony if they choose. In this case, the cargo may not need to be transshipped. However, there is insufficient clear space at the colony for a large spaceship to land safely, so bringing the entire ship is impossible. Once the gear has been stowed, the senior Sterling insists that the party get under way at once.

The Sterling Colony

Once the party has finished its preparations in the Breuse Downport, they may set out for the colony, which they reach without incident.

The Sterling colony is a large village, situated in the center of extensive cultivated fields. The village is separated from the fields by low stone walls and wire fences. The field borders are defined by stone walls and rail fences. The

Alfred Sterling

Age 60; Suntanned skin, short white hair, white beard and moustache, brown eyes; 6' 1", 195 lbs.

ST 10, DX 12, IQ 15, HT 10.

Speed 5.5, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 4.

Wears light kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 4 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Advantages: Status 2.

Disadvantages: Age, Dependents (wife and children), Stubbornness.

Quirks: Gentleman (result of his culture); Cleans nails with pocket knife when bored; Keeps a pet lizard.

Skills: Administration-15; Agronomy-15; Botany-14; Guns/TL9-11; Leadership-15; Merchant-14; Veterinarian-13.

Languages: Trade Talk-13.

Weapons: Colt M1911, .45 ACP, 2d crushing; 2 7-round magazines.

Alfred Sterling is a 60-year-old agronomist who founded the Sterling Agricultural Colony eight years ago. Since then, the colony's population has grown from the original 15 to just under 200. Much of the credit for this growth must go to Sterling's drive and vision. He firmly believes that with dedication, sacrifice and a great deal of hard work, Breuse can not only support its own population, both indigenous and transient, but provide food to some of the less arable planets in its sector.

Sterling is a graduate of the University of Terra, with degrees in agronomy, botany and veterinary science. He served for a short time in the Confederation Scout Service as a mission specialist. Upon his retirement from the Scout Service, Sterling began soliciting support for his dream of building a farming colony on one of the outer system worlds. It took him two years to assemble enough money and qualified personnel to form the colony, but at last he was able to put his plan into motion.

When the bandits began raiding the colony Sterling refused to give in. It was he who fired the first shot in the defense of his home. When the bandits became too strong for the colonists to fight themselves, it was Alfred Sterling who suggested that they hire protection. Sterling has devoted his entire life to the establishment of the colony, and he will gladly give his life in its defense.

The Sterling Colony

1 hex = 5 yards

Map Key

B. Barns and warehouses

D. Family dwellings

1. Town Hall

2. General store

3. Sterling house

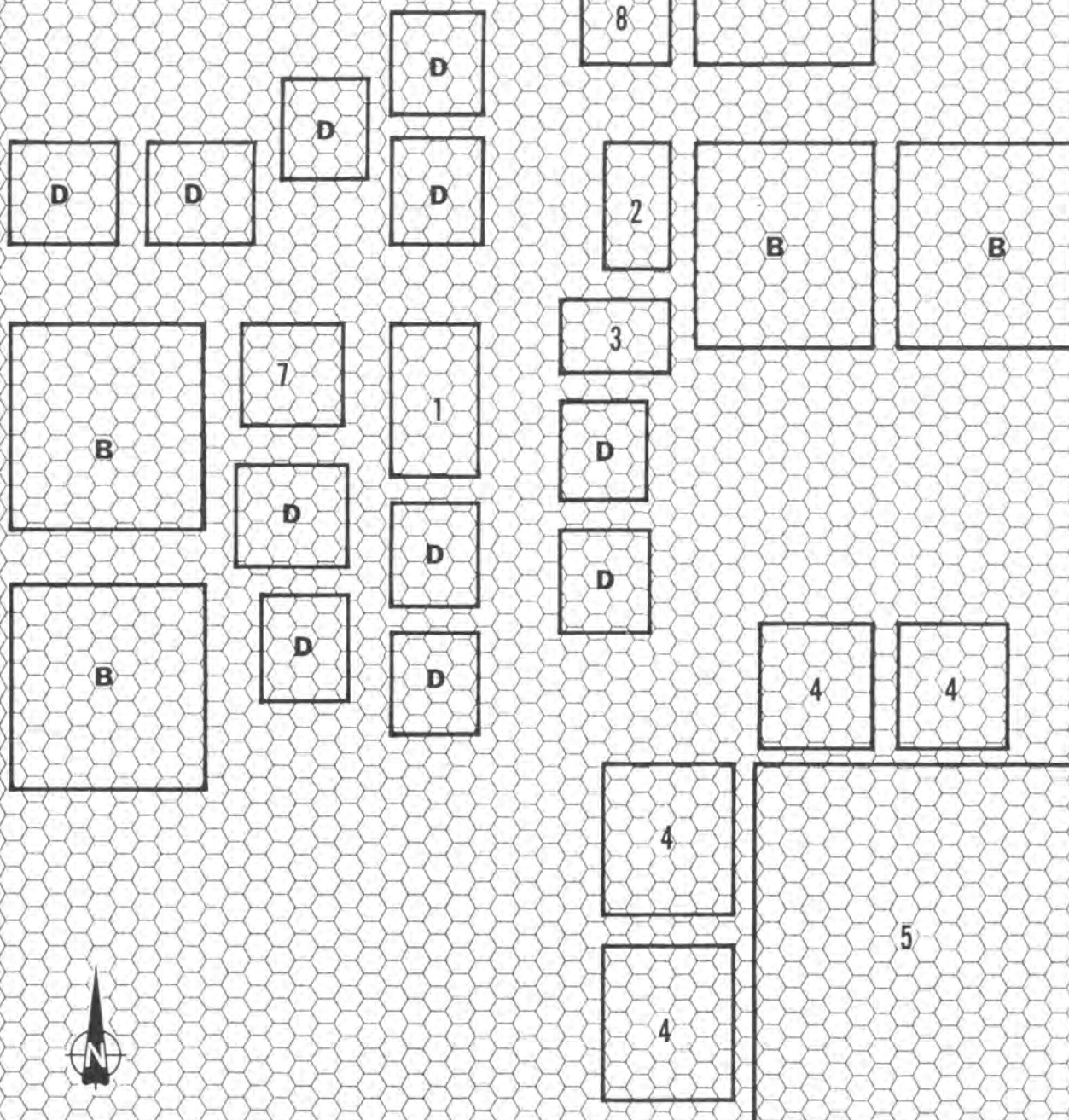
4. Hangers

5. Landing stage

6. Dormitory (PCs' quarters)

7. Danalish house

8. Royce house



colony looks very much like a farm on 19th-century Terra. Only the modern machines and farmers' exoskeletons spoils the impression.

The colony's primary cash crop is a variform wheat, genetically adapted to Breuse's soil and climate. The colony also raises soy, millet and farraah, a starchy tuberous root, similar to Terran potatoes. Some of the colonists raise cattle, engineered for high-G tolerance. Given the scarcity of fresh foods on the edge of settled space, the colonists have been turning a high profit on the sale of their crops.

The shuttle lands on the south edge of the village, where the colonists have parked their air and sub-orbital craft. The landing stage is barely big enough to accommodate the party's *Condor*. If the PCs brought their own shuttle as well as the *Condor*, there will be a long delay between the time the first ship lands, and the second receives clearance to ground. The delay is a result of the colony ground crews having to taxi, push and roll the ships on the ground to make a spot for the extra vehicle to land safely.

If the party did come in two ships, the colony's *Condor* will be the first to land. Clearing a space for the party's shuttle will take 30 minutes. At the end of that time, have the team's pilot make a Piloting (shuttle) skill roll to avoid brushing any of the other craft crowding the landing stage, during the touchdown attempt. A failure means that he brushed one of the *Condors*, but no damage occurred to either vehicle. Only a critical failure indicates damage to either ship. In this case, subtract the tonnage of the larger ship from that of the smaller. Divide the result by 10. The result is the amount of damage sustained by the smaller ship. The larger ship takes one point of damage for every ten sustained by the smaller, with a minimum damage of 1 point.

Once on the ground, the PCs are escorted to the town hall, where they are introduced to the eight members of the colony council who have not been taken hostage by the raiders. The council is a combination of ruling body and board of directors for the colony. The council has been divided from the start over how to handle the bandit raids. The majority, led by Alfred Sterling, is strongly in favor of fighting the raiders. A few, led by councilman James Akira, feel that the best course of action is to give the bandits what they want in the hope that the raiders will stop destroying the crops and killing the colonists. It is Akira and his faction who dominate the party's first meeting with the colony council. The pacifists condemn Sterling for seeking outside help. They claim that had he not hired mercenaries, the raiders wouldn't have taken hostages. Akira has been calling for Sterling's removal as head of the council ever since he started the search. (See the sidebar on p. 69 for details on James Akira.)

The council will argue for several minutes before Alfred Sterling shouts them down, assuming the newcomers don't do it first. Once he has order again, he turns the meeting over to the "defense advisors," asking them to explain their plans for handling the raiders.

At this point, unless the PCs have a well-thought out plan of action, they may address the council in generalities, or try to dazzle them with military and technical jargon, which will impress the council. But the one thing the council is currently most interested in is how the team intends to rescue the hostages. If the hirelings don't address this issue, one of the council members will bring it up at the earliest possible moment. Here again, the team will not be able to answer with any great detail since they only heard of the hostage taking that morning and they have no real details. Any answer which contains a lot of impressive jargon will still the council's fears on a Neutral or better reaction (successful Public Speaking or Fast-Talk skill rolls add +2 to the reaction roll in addition to any normal modifiers). A negative result triggers another round of arguing. Have the speaker make another reaction roll as above, this time with a -2 penalty. If it is no better, the meeting degenerates into a chaotic shouting match, which must be

James Akira

Age 49; Oriental skin tone, short black hair, dark brown eyes, muscular build; 5' 6", 160 lbs.

ST 13, DX 12, IQ 13, HT 12.

Speed 5.75, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 5.

No armor or encumbrance.

Advantages: Strong Will +2.

Disadvantages: Dependents (wife and children), Greed, Impulsiveness, Pacifism (self-defense), Stubbornness.

Quirks: Speaks in a loud voice; Carries a large combat knife at all times (it belonged to his father; he considers it a good luck piece); Doesn't like guns.

Skills: Administration-11, Biochemistry-11, Chemistry/TL10-12, Knife-11, Knife Throwing-11, Politics-12, Savoir-Faire-13, Zoology-12

Languages: Trade Talk-11.

Weapons: Knife (large), 1d+1 cutting, 1d impaling; (thrown), 1d impaling.

James Akira is the leader of the opposition against Alfred Sterling in the Sterling Colony Council. When the bandits appeared, it was Akira who asked the council to give in to the raiders' demands. When he was overruled in the council, Akira began lobbying for Sterling's removal from its head.

As continued resistance caused the raids to grow in violence and frequency, Akira called again for Sterling to be ousted, claiming that his policy of fighting back was slowly killing rather than preserving the colony. When the search for mercenaries began, Akira held his peace, knowing that no soldiers on Breuse would be willing to take the job for what the colony could afford. His protests began anew when Sterling sent his son and two others to Terra seeking to contract a team of independents to defend the colony. He claimed that the kind of scum that would be attracted to such an offer would be worse than the bandits themselves. He claims to have seen a band of freelancers not only fail to live up to their part of the bargain, but rob their patrons and depart, leaving their former employers at the mercy of their enemies.

Now that the party has arrived in the colony, Akira will be more vocal than ever. He will be quick to pick up on any quirks or disadvantages the party has, hoping to use them as a weapon against Alfred Sterling.

As the adventure unfolds, Akira will be able to persuade more and more of the colonists to see his point of view. This swaying of the colonists' thoughts will continue either until the party rescues the hostages or until the colonists fight their first successful battle against the raiders. At that point Akira will lapse into fuming silence, looking for another opportunity to attack his rival.

abandoned before the argument comes to blows. Regardless, Alfred retains the leadership of the council, and the contractors are, for the moment, allowed to perform their duties.

Once the meeting is over, the team may set about performing whatever tasks they feel necessary to complete their contract. If they want to begin training the colonists immediately, see the sidebar labeled *Teacher, Teacher* on pp. 74-75. If any of the party wants to survey the colony for possible fortification, see *Stone and Steel*, p. 76.

Search and Rescue

This chapter assumes that the team attempts to rescue the hostages. The attempt should be made before the mercenaries make their final raid on the colony a week after the PCs' arrival (see *Fighting Back*, p. 76).

The hostages were taken by Hoag-Warner mercenaries to eliminate resistance by the colonists. Erik, the mercenary commander, told the colonists that if they fought back, one hostage would be executed for every one of his own men killed. The mercenaries intend to carry out this threat. The hostages have been taken to a small base, an old abandoned mining camp, 15 miles west of the colony. (See map on p. 73.)

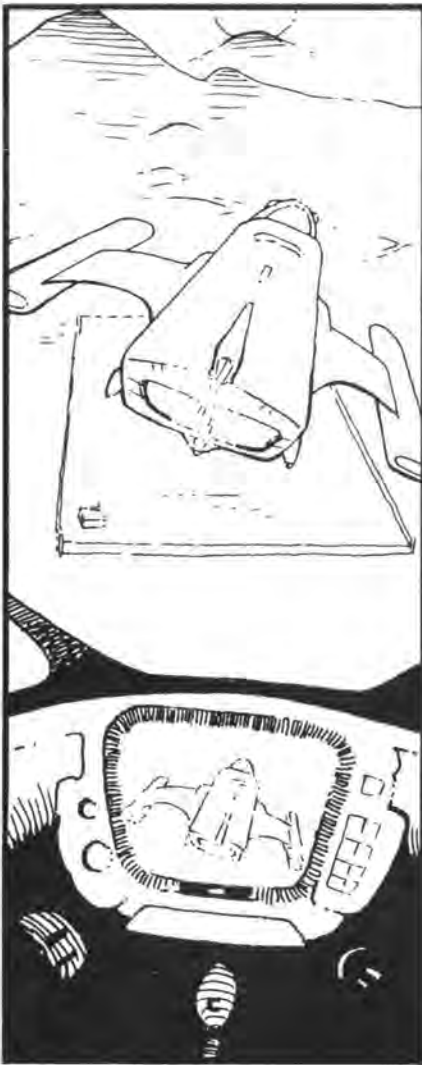
The colonists have no idea where the hostages are being held. It is up to the party to locate the mercenaries' advance base. They may wish to make an aerial search, using their own shuttle or one of the colony's aircraft. They may attempt a ground search, using Tracking and similar skills. If the group encountered the old miner Colby at Pablo's Place, they may want to check out the supposedly abandoned mining camp

Air Search

Searching by air is a long and often dangerous process. Every time a promising lead turns up, the search craft must either land, or call for a ground unit to investigate. Likely spots can be overlooked during a high-altitude search. If the pilot flies low enough to avoid missing possibilities, the search time will be increased, as will the likelihood of accident or discovery. Also, it is nearly impossible to make a covert search by air. If the party is using a conventional aircraft, they run the risk of being spotted from the ground. Engine noise is also a giveaway. Using a shuttle or space ship is faster, but there is a greater possibility of missing something. Active sensors can often be detected by the target of the search.

If the PCs initiate an aerial search, it will take a maximum time of $3d+1$ hours to locate the raiders' base. If the party is searching at low level, add 1d to the time needed. If they are making a high altitude sweep, subtract 1d from the base time. For every hour spent searching, have the pilot roll against the appropriate Piloting skill to simulate the dangers of aerial search. Apply a -1 penalty for a low altitude search. A normal failure indicates that the pilot is having minor difficulties (wind shear, clear air turbulence). A critical failure means that something more drastic has happened. (The plane brushed a mountain, crumpling one wing and forcing the pilot to land immediately, or one of the engines ingested a bird, causing a catastrophic shutdown.) However, if a mishap occurs, the player characters should not be killed outright. Instead, their aircraft could be destroyed and the survivors wind up lost and miles off-course, perhaps with some wounded.

In addition to the Piloting roll, skill checks are necessary to simulate the air crew searching the ground for traces of the raiders' base. If the party is making a visual search, roll against the searcher's IQ-3 each hour. If the searcher is one

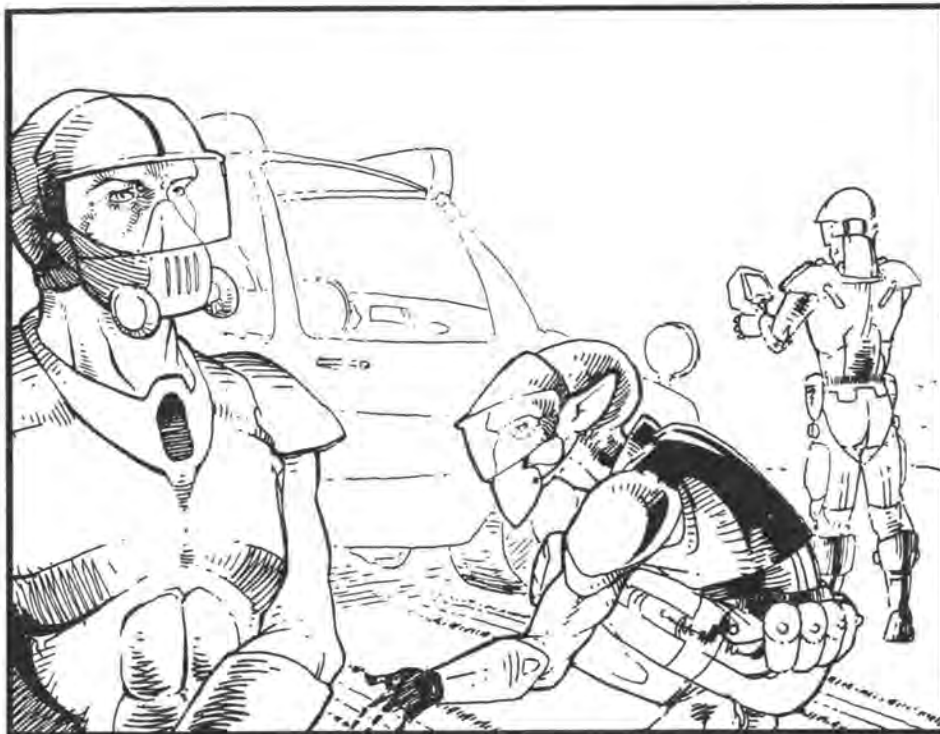


of the colonists, reduce the penalty to -2. If the searcher has Intelligence Analysis skill, reduce the penalty to -1. On any successful roll, the searchers have located a potential hideout. The party must either land and check it out on foot or call in a ground search team. Have the ground searchers make a second skill check as described above, but at -5! On a success, they have found the raiders' base. Otherwise, it was a false alarm.

If the group is using sensor equipment, substitute an Electronics Operation (Sensors) roll for the first IQ roll above, with the same modifiers.

Once the party locates the base, roll 3d. On a result of 3, 4 or 5, the mercenaries spotted the search craft. In this case, they will be ready for the rescuers when they arrive (see *Raiding the Raiders*, p. 72).

If the party searches for the raiders' base until the maximum time, the last skill roll allows them to locate the base, regardless of the actual roll.



Ground Search

Ground searches take longer than air searches, and have a greater possibility of missing something. On the other hand, ground searches are safer and reduce the risk of being detected by the quarry.

For a ground search, roll 1d. The result is the time in days it will take the searchers to locate the raiders' base. Each day, have the searchers make a Tracking or IQ-5 skill check. Apply the following modifiers: +1 if the party is being accompanied by one or more colonists; +2 if one of the searchers has Intelligence Analysis skill; +1 if the searchers are using sensors (multiscanner, televiewers, etc.). Any success allows the party to locate a likely spot as in the air search above.

Once the searchers locate the raiders' base, roll 3d. On a 3 or 4, the bandits detected the search party. This will give them time to prepare for an attempt to rescue the hostages (see *Raiding the Raiders*, p. 72).

If the party is using a combined ground and air search, determine the amount of time needed for an air search and add a +2 modifier to all search rolls to simulate the additional coverage provided by combining searches.

Condor Sub-Orbital Shuttle

The *Condor* sub-orbital shuttle is a TL8 cargo vessel, capable of reaching sub-orbital altitudes and reaching speeds of Mach 1.5. The *Condor* masses 50 tons and has a cargo capacity of 30 tons. It is Legality 4 and costs \$150,000.

Typically, the *Condor* is used to transport cargo and passengers on worlds which have only one starport. Some variants of the *Condor* are used by planetary militias or security forces to ferry men and equipment to remote destinations, while others fitted with survey and mapping gear are used by the Scout Service.

The standard *Condor* has no provisions for weapon mounts, but those slated for security or military service have specially reinforced airframes, which can accept weapon mounts up to the size of a light laser or chain gun. The standard *Condor* can be retrofitted with the bracings necessary for fitting armament only with great difficulty. Retrofitted bracing increases the structural strength of the aircraft, but cuts down on its fuel and cargo capacity, and reduces its speed and maneuverability. The skin of the civilian version of the *Condor* provides DR 2. The armed military version carries armor rated at DR 10. In both cases, the armor is only proof against small arms and heavy weapons. More powerful attacks, such as those launched by starships, will not be impeded at all by the *Condor*'s lightweight defenses.

The statistics given below are for the "civilian" version of the *Condor*.

Class	Weight	Cost	Legality	TL
Condor	50 tons	\$150,000	4	8



Mining Camp Troops

The men occupying the mining camp are low-level corporate mercenaries, employed by Hoag-Warner. For ease of play, assume that each enlisted man has the same statistics and skills. The commanding sergeant is more experienced, and therefore more skilled.

Enlisted Man

ST 13, DX 12, IQ 9, HT 11.
Speed 5.5, Move 5.
Dodge 5, Parry 4, Block 4.
Medium kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 4 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).
Skills: Brawling-12, Guns/TL10-14.
Weapons: Needle rifle, 2d impaling; 2 100-round magazines.

Sergeant

ST 13, DX 13, IQ 12, HT 12.
Speed 6.25; Move 6.
Dodge 6, Parry 4, Block 4.
Heavy kevlar vest, PD 2, DR 8 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).
Skills: Beam Weapons-14, Brawling-12, Guns/TL10-14, Leadership-12.
Weapons: Military laser rifle, 2d impaling; 2 D cells; needler pistol, 1d+2 impaling; 2 100-round magazines; 1 smoke grenade; 1 Mk 67 offensive grenade, 5d+2 crushing; 4-5 second fuse.



We Found Something

When a successful search roll is made, the GM shouldn't automatically tell the players that their characters have or have not located the base. Rather, he should describe the location the team is investigating. If the party is following a false lead, tell them that they see a number of armed men moving in and around a small cluster of tents. Require IQ rolls to notice that the weapons seem to be civilian hunting rifles and gear, rather than the military gear used by the bandits. Another IQ roll allows the searchers to see the game animals hanging from a rack near the largest tent. They've stumbled onto a hunting camp, not the bandits' base.

On the other hand, when they do discover the raiders' hideout, tell the players that they see what appears to be an old mining camp. Describe the piles of old tailings and the lack of any signs of fresh diggings. Have them make an IQ test to spot the sentry carrying a new Harrison & Krupp assault Gauss needler, an odd piece of equipment for a miner. If they wish to recon the site more thoroughly, allow them to do so. But be aware that the individuals occupying the camp are professionals, unlikely to miss obvious intruders in their midst.

Raiding the Raiders

The bandits' base is an abandoned mining camp 15 miles west of the Sterling Colony. Shortly after the raiders began their attacks on the colony, they discovered the mine and decided to use it as a forward base of operations. At any time, there will be eight to ten mercenaries occupying the camp, pretending to be miners. Their leader, Erik, does not stay in the camp. He is quartered at the mercenaries' main base, 150 miles northwest of the colony. Erik only makes the journey to the mining camp to lead raids.

Once the party locates the camp, allow them to make whatever plans and preparations they feel necessary in order to assault the base. Assaulting the base can be carried out in a number of ways, each requiring a different set of tasks.

Air Assault

An air assault requires landing an aircraft either inside the confines of the camp, or close by. The assault troops must then deplane, carry out the attack (while protecting the aircraft, their means of escape), locate the hostages, free them and make their getaway.

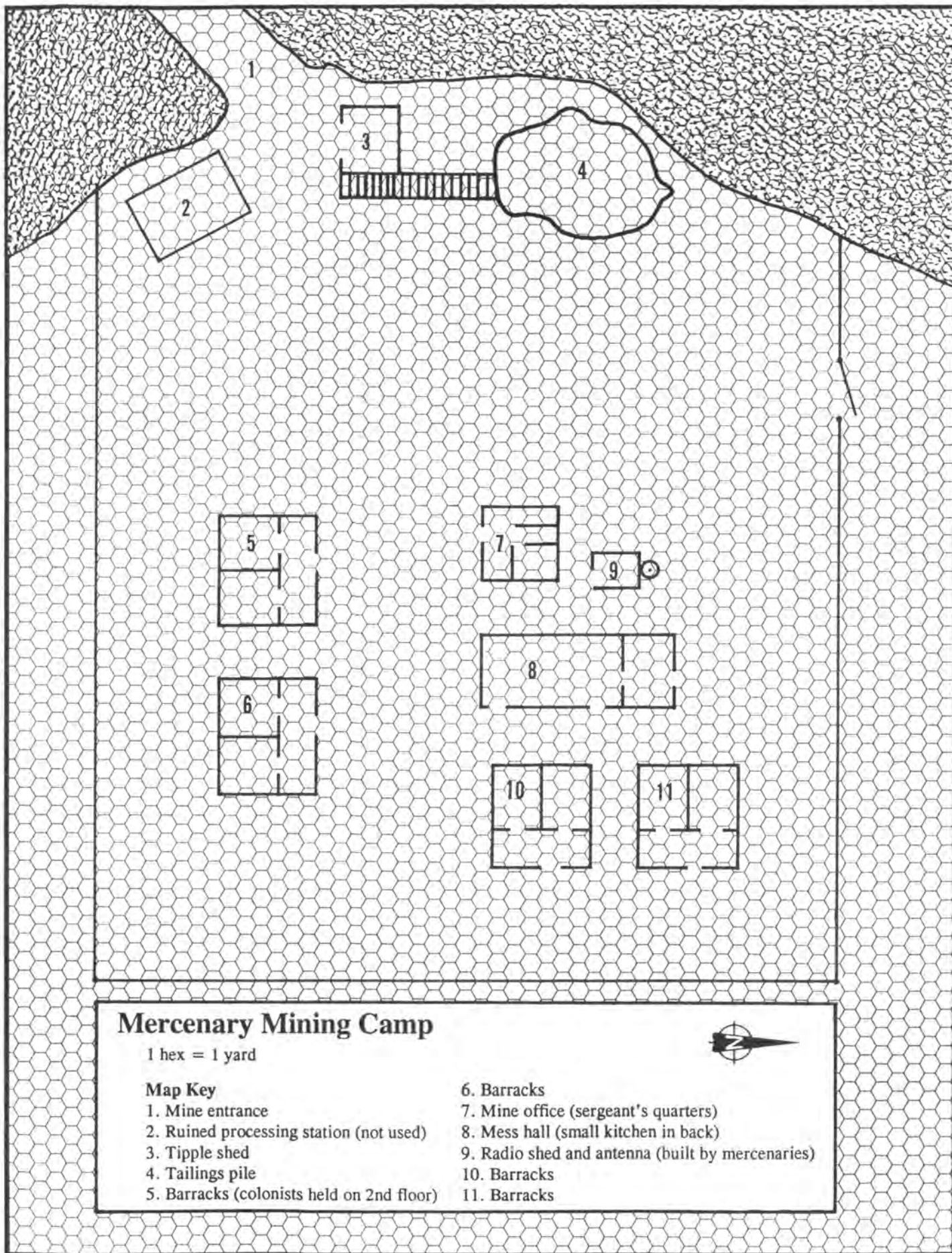
To land an aircraft safely within the camp, the pilot must make an appropriate Piloting skill roll with a -2 penalty, due to the restricted landing area formed by the camp buildings. Landing outside the camp requires a Piloting roll with no modifier. Other bonuses or penalties should be added based upon the time of day, weather conditions, type of craft, etc.

Any mishap that occurs as a result of a failure in landing an aircraft inside the camp should be a minor one, such as a hard landing, causing everyone aboard the craft to be stunned. A critical failure might well wreck the aircraft, giving everyone 1d damage as well as stunning them. If the team opts for an air assault, combat begins the moment their ship lands in the compound.

Ground Assault

If the crew carries out a ground assault, they have a number of options open to them; an open attack, a stealthy surprise attack, an attempt to bluff their way through, or a combination of strategies. During an open assault, the combat begins as soon as a PC fires a shot or takes some other violent action.

Bluffing will not work. The mercs are a suspicious lot and don't take kindly to visitors, regardless of their story; they don't need any recruits and aren't



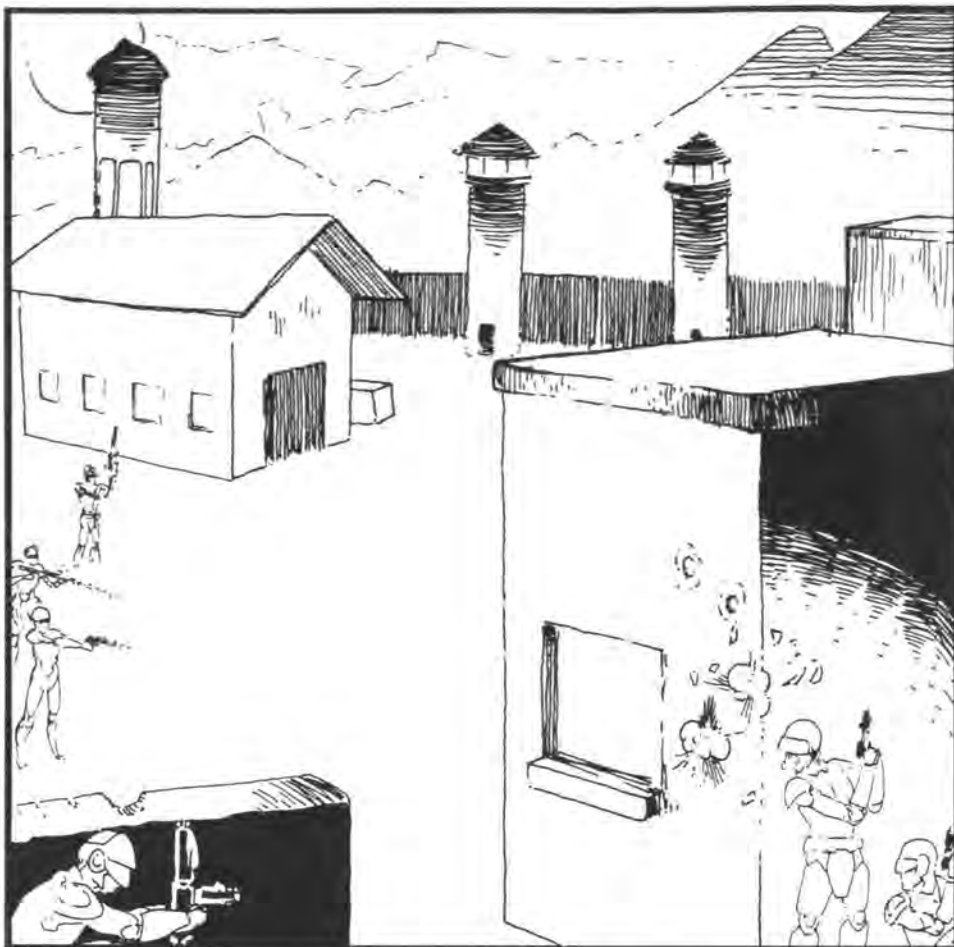
Teacher, Teacher

Part of the team's contract with the Sterling Colony is to train the colonists to defend themselves. This task should fall to any characters with skill in Teaching. If none of the characters has that skill, the task defaults to IQ-5.

Treat teaching the colonists as a long task. A single person may teach up to 10 colonists how to use a missile weapon or gun. Up to 5 individuals can be trained in beam weapons, gunnery, melee weapons or hand-to-hand combat by a single teacher. Technical skills like Demolition are best taught on a one-to-one basis. All of the colonists except those belonging to James Akira's pacifist faction are willing to learn how to fight. Among the most eager are Mearc Sterling, Sheas Danalish and Royce. This works out to 25 colonists willing to learn how to use the weapons provided by the party, including the three NPCs named above.

Have the teacher state how long he will spend instructing his charges. For each individual or group of individuals being taught a skill, have the instructor make a Teaching skill roll. Apply a +1 modifier for each eight hours of instruction the students receive.

Continued on next page . . .



buying anything, so unless the PCs can come up with an amazingly convincing story, they won't be let in.

Sneaking In

If the team attempts to sneak into the base, they will be required to make a number of Stealth rolls. If the team approaches the base at night in clear weather, no modifiers are applied to the initial roll. In bad weather, apply a +2 bonus to skill. Daylight adds a -2 modifier. Intruders may also use their Camouflage skill to help avoid detection. Using high-tech gear, such as a chameleon or intruder suits, gains the character bonuses appropriate to the equipment. Note that Camouflage is not a substitute for Stealth. Camouflage skill only helps in escaping detection while immobile. Stealth is for moving silently from cover to cover.

Cutting a man-sized hole in the wire fence surrounding the compound requires the appropriate tools and a second Stealth roll and takes 15 seconds. This roll is at -2 because anyone crouched next to the fence is in plain view.

Once the intruders are inside the perimeter of the camp, they should be assessed a -2 penalty on Stealth and Camouflage rolls due to their unfamiliarity with the camp. In this case, a failed roll doesn't necessarily mean that the character has been spotted. He may have merely knocked over a stack of empty equipment crates, which fall with a loud clatter. Determine the degree of mishap based upon how badly the roll was failed. A critical failure always indicates discovery. Searching for the hostages involves a series of Stealth-2 and IQ rolls — a Stealth roll for each time a searcher moves and the IQ roll for each time a searcher inspects a building or other likely area.

The hostages are being held in building 5, as indicated on the map of the mine camp on p. 73. The door is locked and guarded by a single mercenary, but

is not equipped with an alarm. Silencing the guard may be accomplished in a number of ways, some more effective than others. It's the GM's job to set the necessary tasks for the attempt. Once the guard is eliminated, the rescuers must unlock the door. Checking for alarms requires a successful Traps skill roll. It takes a successful Lockpicking skill roll to unlock the door. Breaking the door down will create enough noise to alert the camp, and combat will begin.

Inside, the hostages are tied and gagged. It will take two minutes to get everyone loose. If the party is trying to rescue hostages by stealth, roll a Stealth roll for the hostages as a group with a default skill of 5. On a failure, the hostages make so much noise that the mercenaries hear and sound the alarm. Once the alarm is sounded, combat begins.

If the final Stealth roll is successful, they have made it out of the camp and to safety.

Once the Shooting Starts

In all of the above scenarios, there is the possibility of combat between the intruders and the mercenaries. There are nine mercenaries and one sergeant in the camp at the time of the rescue attempt. The mercenaries are armed with needle rifles and are wearing medium Kevlar vests. The sergeant is carrying a military laser rifle and a needle pistol. He wears a heavy Kevlar vest. (See the sidebar on p. 72 for statistics on the mercenaries and their sergeant.)

The camp defenders will fight to the best of their ability, trying to stave off the attackers. If the battle starts to go against them, the mercenaries will try to reach the building where the hostages are being held. If they succeed, they will attempt to bargain with the rescue party, using the hostages both as shields and

Teacher, Teacher (Continued)

The effective skill gained by the students will be the difference between the maximum number needed for success, and the number actually rolled. The minimum level of skill possible is the colonist's default level for that skill (assume that all colonists not named have 10 in both IQ and DX). If the student is already skilled in an area (one of the named NPCs, for example), his skill level in that area will be increased as described above. The maximum possible increase for an already skilled character in this case is the teacher's skill level-4.

Example: A PC with a Guns/TL9 skill of 14, and a Teaching skill of 10, is teaching Guns/TL9 to a group of students which includes Mearc Sterling (skill level 8). The teacher spends eight hours instructing his pupils and then makes his skill roll. Needing an 11 to be successful, he rolls an 8. This means that all of his students gain an effective skill level of 9 in Guns/TL9 (their default level of 6 plus 3 from the teaching). Mearc Sterling increases his skill level to 10. This is the maximum Mearc can raise his skill from this teacher (the teacher's skill-4).

A failed teaching roll merely indicates that the teacher must spend more time instructing his students in that skill. A critical failure means that one of the colonists was injured during training. Assume a standard colonist has 10 HT. Roll the damage for the weapon the colonist was trying to learn (or the instructor's punch damage if it was hand-to-hand techniques). If this damage is more than 7, the colonist is too injured to take part in any battle and should be subtracted from the number of colonists involved in any battle. (Example: A character is attempting to teach Brawling to a group of colonists. During a training session, he rolls a critical failure. The student with whom he was sparring takes 3 points [1d-2] crushing damage to his chest when he steps into the instructor's punch. Since it is less than 7, he is still able to fight.)

Establishing ready-action drills for the colonists to follow will take separate Teaching skill tests. For simple drills, like "Every armed man make for the nearest cover and get ready to fight!", add a +1 bonus to the roll. More complex procedures, such as assigning every combatant a post, result in a penalty of -1. Simple drills take one minute to execute. Complex drills can require as much as 30 minutes. The GM should use common sense when determining the time needed for specific drills. Note that the advisors involved in teaching the colonists cannot be doing other things, like rescuing the hostages or fortifying the colony.



Stone and Steel

If the party decides to help the colonists fortify their town, there are several tasks to be accomplished. First, the advisors have to decide what kind of fortifications are to be built. Simple barricades in the street and the reinforcement of buildings are easy tasks, and require no skill rolls. Setting up concrete strong points, or constructing steel barricades, is a bit more complex and will require a Combat Engineering skill roll each to design and build.

Use the chart on p. 125 of the *GURPS Basic Set* to determine the DR of the barricade material used in the fortifications. If the characters obtained mines or booby traps, it takes a successful Traps or Demolition-2 roll to properly place such devices.

Once all preparations and fortifications are finished, make careful note as to their location and facing (if applicable). This information may be important during the bandit raid in *Fighting Back*.



bargaining tools. If the mercs are unable to reach the hostages they will try to escape or, failing that, surrender.

During the fighting, one of the mercenaries will attempt to reach the radio shed (building 9). If he succeeds, it will take him 30 seconds to activate the radio and transmit a call for help. Should anyone kill or incapacitate him before the 30 seconds are up, no message is transmitted.

After The Battle

Once the battle is over, the rescuers may search the camp until they find and release the hostages. If the mercenaries managed to get off a distress signal, it will take 30 minutes for their comrades to respond to the call. The response will come in the form of an armed shuttle (use the civilian *Condor*, but add a Gatling laser in a left-side mount), and 20 men.

Fighting Back

A week after the advisors arrive, the bandits will raid the colony. If sentries have been posted, have them make an IQ roll to spot the raiders before they reach the colony. The bandits approach the colony in six WATVs (see sidebar, p. 79), at a speed of 40 miles per hour. Assume that if the raiders are seen approaching, the party and the colonists have four minutes to prepare for the raid. Allow the players the same amount of real time to make any last minute changes in their plan. If they stated earlier in their preparations that they were establishing standard response drills with the colonists (see *Teacher, Teacher*, pp. 74-75), it takes the amount of time determined during planning to execute those drills. If the colonists made any reasonable attempt to fortify the colony, they get a +1 bonus to their combat factor (below). Likewise, simple ready-action drills give a +1 bonus, and complex drills give +2. Thus, a total combat factor bonus of +4 is possible.

There are 24 raiders in this attack. For the sake of convenience, all but their lieutenant and sergeants can be considered to have identical stats and skills (see sidebar, p. 78).

Large Scale Combat

With a large number of individuals involved in this combat, the players and GM may wish to use either the mass combat rules in the sidebar on p. 123 of the basic *GURPS* rules. For greater ease of play, however, the following formula may be used to determining the outcome of large scale combats (for this adventure only).

Step 1: Total the number of surviving defenders fighting for the colony, excluding PCs. Add the Leadership or Tactics skill (whichever is higher) of the commander of the defenders. Add the Tech Level of the most common weapon being used by the colonists. Divide the total by 3, dropping all fractions to get the defender's combat factor.

Step 2: Total the number of surviving bandits, excluding their leaders. Add their commander's Leadership rating (13 for the lieutenant, 11 for the sergeants). Add 9 to simulate the TL of the raider's weapons. Divide the total by 3, dropping all fractions to get the attacker's combat factor.

Step 3: Each turn, roll a regular Contest of Skills between the two sides' combat factors. If both sides make their rolls, or if both sides fail their rolls, no casualties occur. However, if one side makes its roll and the other side fails, the number of casualties to the losing side is equal to the amount that the winning side made its roll by.

Example: The defenders have 20 men in combat, armed mostly with Gauss Needler Rifles (TL8). The PC in command of the defenders has a Tactics skill of

14. This gives the colony a combat factor of 14 ($20 + 8 + 14/3 = 14$). There are 24 bandits armed with laser rifles (TL8). Their commander has a Leadership skill of 13. This results in a combat factor of 15 ($24 + 8 + 13/3 = 15$).

Both sides roll against their combat factor. On the first set of rolls, both sides roll under their factors, so no casualties occur. But on the second set of rolls, the defenders roll a 9, while the attackers roll a 16. This means the *attackers* take 5 casualties. If any casualties are taken, the factors are re-calculated. So the attackers' new combat factor after that turn is 13 ($19 + 8 + 13/3 = 13.33$).

Continue this procedure until one side surrenders or retreats.

The raiders will retreat when they have taken 15 or more casualties, or when all their leaders are killed. If retreat is not possible, the survivors will surrender. The colonists will give up as soon as they have taken more than 60% casualties, including those colonists whose morale has collapsed (see *The Colonists in Combat*, p. 77).

Characters in Mass Combat

Any time either side in this combat takes casualties, there will be a possibility that one of the player characters or major NPCs will take damage. When one side takes casualties, have all the major players (PCs, named NPCs and merc leaders) on that side make a roll against the average of the character's Tactics skill with his skill in the weapon he is using. Combat Reflexes or Peripheral Vision gets a +1 bonus on this roll. If he fails the roll, he takes 1d of damage.

Combat between the player characters and one of the mercenary leaders should be handled normally.

Casualty Recovery

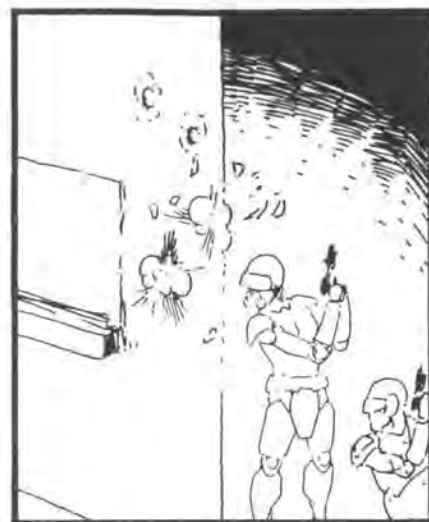
Once the combat is over (assuming the colonists win), roll 1d for each friendly casualty. If the result is 1 or 2, that individual is only wounded, and may be returned to duty. Roll 2d for each enemy casualty. If the result is 2 or 3, the man is wounded, but will survive, and may be taken prisoner. The GM should remember that these men are mercenaries being paid to do a job. They are unlikely to perform foolish or heroic acts, unless it is to save some of their comrades. If the leader of this raid is captured, he will insist that his men be treated fairly.

Questioning the Prisoners

If the raiders surrender, or are wounded and captured, they may be questioned by the defenders. This requires an Interrogation skill roll. If the test is successful, the team gains the following information.

If an enlisted man or sergeant is questioned, he will say that the "bandits" are actually mercenaries in the employ of a large cartel. The prisoner doesn't know which one. The mercs have an advance base located on the site of an old mining camp 15 miles west of the colony, where they are holding the hostages. On a second Interrogation skill check, this one at -2, the captured mercenaries will reveal the location of their main base.

Should the defenders succeed in capturing the leader of the raiding party, all Interrogation skill tests are at -1, due to his Strong Will. The leader, a lieutenant, knows the location of the mining camp where the hostages are being held. He knows the location of the mercenaries' main base, and that there were a total of 50 men in his company when the operation started, counting both officers and enlisted men. He can also tell his captors that his outfit was hired by a multistellar mining cartel to scare the colonists off their land, or wipe them out if they resisted. The cartel's representative, a Joachim Alvarez, offered Colonel Erik Finn a flat fee of \$100,000 for the mission, plus a \$25,000 bonus if the colony was vacant within six weeks of the start of the operation. Since that time, five



The Colonists in Combat

No matter how well the party trains the colonists to fight, one fact remains: They are farmers, not soldiers.

Whenever the colonists engage in combat, there is a chance their morale will not hold. To simulate this, assume that the colonists have a morale level equal to $\frac{1}{2}$ the number of colonists still fighting. Before the colonists enter combat, and every turn thereafter until combat ends, roll 3d against the colonists' morale level. If the roll is equal to or less than the morale level, the colonists' morale is good. If the roll exceeds the morale level, a number of the colonists have broken. In this case, roll 1d. The result of this roll is the number of colonists who have quit the battle. Subtract this number from the number of effective combatants when re-calculating the next round's morale level.

Any of the advisors may attempt to rally 1d colonists whose morale collapsed. Have that player make a Leadership skill roll. Apply a -1 modifier for every 5 colonists who have broken. A +1 modifier can be added to the test for every 5 bandits killed, and a further +1 for every 5 colonists he rallied on the previous turn. If no characters were rallied on the proceeding turn, the character gets no bonus, regardless of how many farmers he rallied before that turn.

Heroic actions by any PC may add up to a +3 to both morale and rally rolls. It is up to the GM to determine exactly what constitutes an heroic action, and what effect it has on the colonists.

Raiding Party

Listed below are the statistics for the mercenaries involved in the raid on the colony and their lieutenant.

Standard Mercenary

ST 13, DX 12, IQ 12, HT 11.

Speed 5.75, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 6.

Wears light monocrys vest, PD 4, DR 8 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL8-14, Brawling-13, Knife-11.

Weapons: Laser Rifle, 2d impaling; 4 D cells; Knife (large), 1d+1 cutting, 1d impaling.

Mercenary Sergeant

ST 13, DX 13, IQ 13, HT 12

Speed 6.25, Move 6.

Dodge 6, Parry 6.

Wears light monocrys vest, PD 4, DR 8 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL8-14, Brawling-14, Knife-12, Leadership-11.

Weapons: Laser rifle, 2d impaling; 4 D cells; Knife (large), 1d+1 cutting, 1d impaling.

Mercenary Lieutenant

ST 14, DX 13, IQ 14, HT 13.

Speed 6.5, Move 6.

Dodge 6, Parry 5.

Medium monocrys vest, PD 4, DR 16 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL8-15, Brawling-12, Guns/TL8-13, Knife-11, Leadership-13.

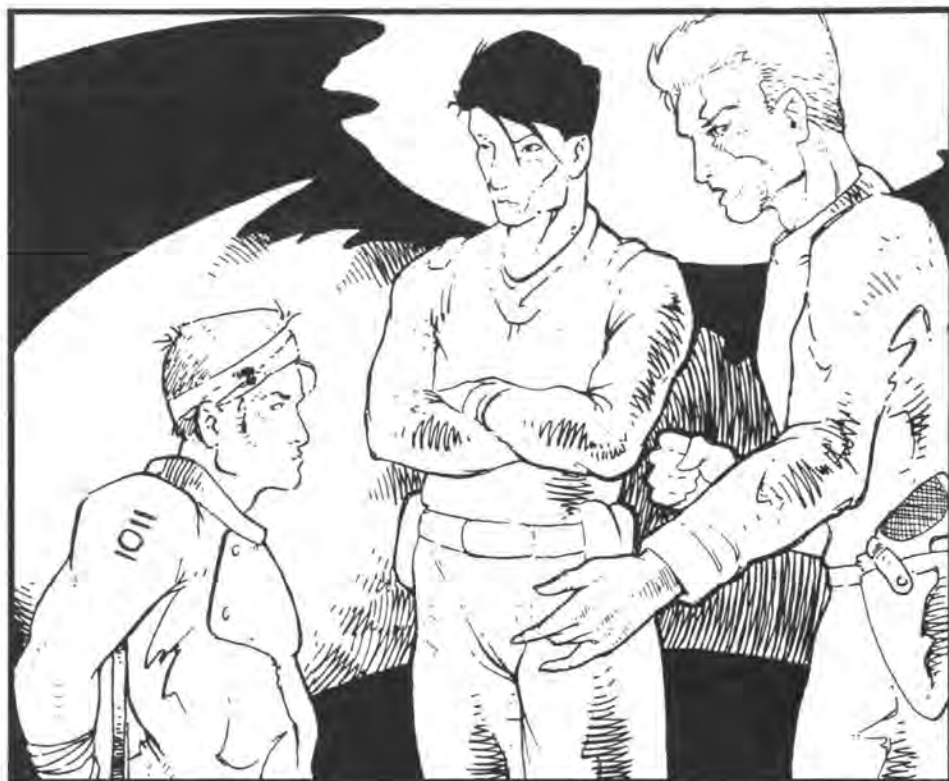
Weapons: Laser rifle, 2d impaling; 4 D cells; Gauss needler pistol: 1d+2 impaling; 1 100-round magazine; Knife (large), 1d+2 cutting, 1d impaling.

Equipment: Long range communicator, inertial compass.



weeks have elapsed. In addition to the flat fee and bonus, the cartel equipped Finn's Company with military equipment of their own manufacture, including TL8 laser rifles and monocrys armor vests. The cartel also placed one of their employees with the mercs to keep an eye on things.

If any of the raiders escaped, and the hostages have not yet been freed, Col. Finn will make good on his threat, executing one hostage for every one of his men killed. The colonel will deliberate for 24 hours on whether he should carry out his threat. The party has that long to make an attempt to rescue the hostages before the executions begin.



To the Main Base

After the colony raid is over and the bodies are searched and prisoners interrogated, the team should have a good idea where the mercs' main base is located. If they didn't capture any prisoners, but managed to kill the lieutenant, he is carrying an inertial compass, with the main base's location prominently marked. If any of the raiders' jeeps were left behind, the jeep's portable comm unit and computer terminal also has the location of the base, but finding it requires a Computer Operation/TL9 skill roll. Included in the computer's files are a list of the hostages taken by the mercs, dossiers on each party member and all the named NPCs from the colony, the exact navigational coordinates of both merc bases and a coded file with the filename CHMNLUWNCIHM.

CHMNLUWNCIHM

This file is something of a mystery, being the only one with any degree of security surrounding it.

The first line of defense is a password. Only the lieutenant knows the password, but he refuses to tell the party what it is. He can be broken on an Interrogation-4 skill check. The password is Warner.

Lacking the password, the party must hack their way into the file. This requires a successful Computer Programming/TL9 skill test.

Once the party gains access to the file, either with the password, or by hacking, they will run up against the second line of security for the file: the entire file is in code. Again, the Lieutenant knows the cipher, but refuses to reveal it. This time, he absolutely *will not* reveal the key to the code. The code may be broken with three hours of concentration and a successful IQ-3 roll. Hackers with Language Talent or Mathematical Ability get a +1 per level bonus to this roll. If one of the characters has a background in intelligence work, allow a +1 bonus. A computer program designed to break codes can be written in two hours with a Computer Programming/TL9 skill roll.

Once the code is broken, the file is revealed as a complete set of instructions, directing Colonel Finn to run the colonists off their land in no more than six weeks. The instructions say that the mercenaries may use any means necessary short of nuclear weapons to carry out their assignment. The orders are signed "Alvarez." Have any character who looks at the decoded orders make an IQ test. Any who pass notice that the heading on the orders is similar to those used in slow FTL radio transmissions.

It is assumed that once this information has been acquired by the group, they will decide to attack the mercenaries' main base. See the sidebar, Counter-Attack, on p. 80, if this is not the case.

Traveling by Air

If the party travels by air, they will have a smooth trip until they reach the area of the mercenaries' main base. Not being fools, the mercenaries have deployed an array of sensors to keep track of aircraft approaching their hideout. There is a chance that any airborne object larger than two meters across will be spotted by this sensor net. Roll 3d. Unless the players have stated that their characters are taking precautions to reduce the chance of their being spotted by the enemy, on a result of 9 or less, they are detected. If this occurs, the mercs will hail them, telling the intruders that this is private airspace and requesting that they leave immediately or face aggressive action. If the aircraft does not retreat they will open fire with an air-defense version of the TL9 Portable Missile Launcher (detailed on p. 28 of the *GURPS Ultra-Tech* sourcebook). The AD version of this weapon moves at 400 yards per turn and inflicts 6d×8 (10) damage on whatever it hits. The AD-PML is a semi-active radar homer. This means that the operator must keep the target in his crosshairs until the missile reaches its target. To do this requires a Contest of Skills, pitting the operator's Gunnery skill of 14 against the target's Piloting skill. If the gunner loses the contest, the missile misses and self-destructs.

If the party is trying to avoid detection by flying under the enemy's sensor limit, using electronic jamming or through similar methods, it falls to the GM to assign appropriate tasks. For example, flying "under" radar, or "nape-of-the-earth" as it is sometimes called, is a difficult and dangerous undertaking. In most cases, the "safe zone" is less than 500 feet. Most modern sensors, such as pulse-Doppler radars and infrared sensors have no "safe zone," and are therefore harder to fool by nape-of-the-earth flight. If the party is attempting to evade detection by the enemy's sensors in this manner, have the pilot make a skill roll every few minutes, to see if he can maintain control of the craft at lower-than-normal altitudes. Low level flight adds a -1 penalty to the mercenaries' detection roll.

Once the team reaches the general vicinity of the base, as determined from the data in the inertial compass and personal computer taken during the raid, they will have to begin a search for the base itself.

The base is hidden in a range of low rocky hills, and camouflaged both physically and electronically. It requires a successful Electronics Operation/TL9

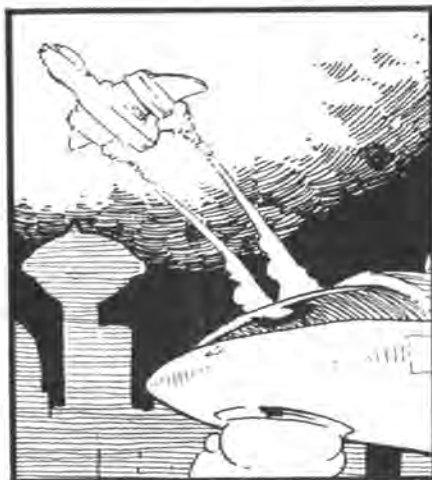
FlatCat Crawlers

FlatCats are low, flat ATVs, resembling weaponless tanks. They have a top speed of 50 mph on good or average terrain, a cruising speed of 15-20 mph on bad terrain (rain is not a major problem on Breuse; there are few mountains and no swamps or jungle), and acceleration of 2.5 mph/second. They can run for 20 days on one E cell (but hold two), and has sockets for four size D solar panels. They can sleep four men and can accommodate eight in a pinch. If sealed, they can hold 12 hours of air for one man. The skin is PD 4, DR 60; the treads are DR 90. Standard fittings for FlatCats include temperature control, inertial compass and long-range communicator. Optional extras include solar panels, searchlights, scanners, weapons, cupolas or turrets, one-man airlocks, air tanks, rebreathers, computers and automedics.

Wheeled All-Terrain Vehicle (WATV)

For their raids, the mercenaries use wheeled all-terrain vehicles (similar to 20th-century jeeps). These vehicles, usually called WATVs (watt-vees), are common to areas lacking good roads. They are used by military reconnaissance units, surveyors and prospectors. Some are used for recreation purposes. The version used by the raiders is specifically designed for use in high-G environments. They have a top speed of 50 mph over even ground (25-30 mph on bad terrain) and accelerate at 5 mph/second. They are powered by a single E cell, and can run for 15 days without recharging. WATVs seat four comfortably, and can hold six with a bit of crowding. Military WATVs carry a minimum of armor (PD 2, DR 4), designed to protect their crews from small arms fire and fragmentation. Most military and all civilian vehicles are unarmed. Weapons up to the size of a Gatling laser or tripod flamer can be mounted with a minimum of modification. Since these weapons are large and have huge appetites for power, WATVs so equipped are restricted to two-man crews (driver and gunner), with the balance of the vehicle being taken up by the weapon and its power source.

The WATVs being used by Finn's Company are unarmed, and carry four men each.



Counter-Attack

Once the location of the mercenaries' main base is known, the party will probably decide to attack it themselves.

Several of the colonists will want to go along when the team assaults the mercenaries' base. Among these eager people will be the three NPCs the party met on Terra: Meare Sterling, Sheas Danalish and Royce. Meare and Royce will be especially adamant about accompanying the party, although for different reasons. Meare wants revenge on the raiders who attacked his home. Royce is set upon proving his worth to the party, his neighbors and himself.

If the party fails to decide to assault the base, Alfred Sterling urges them to do so. "Your job is to defend this colony from the raiders who are bent upon driving us away," he says. "I know it is a cliché, but it is still true: The best defense is a good offense. If you wipe the raiders out in their lair, they will not be able to attack us."

If the PCs still balk at attacking the main base, Sterling will try to shame them into making the attack. "I thought you were professionals. I thought you would hold up your end of the bargain. Well, if you are unwilling to hit your enemy where he lives, I am not. I will lead my people in an assault on that base, and do what you are afraid to do. I would not place too much stock in your chances for future employment once word of this leaks out. And it will leak out. I'll see to that."

Should this last threat fail to motivate the player characters into attacking the mercenary base, Sterling will do as he says. He will lead a group of colonists in a futile attack on the raiders. All except one will die hopelessly, with the one bringing news of the gruesome slaughter back to the party.

(Sensors)-2 to detect the hidden base. If the sensor operator has a combat military background, he may add a +1 to the roll.

After the base has been located, the team will have to start looking for a landing zone. If it is their intention to stage an open assault on the base, they will find no shortage of suitable terrain within 200 yards of the base itself.

A covert assault on the base requires the party to find a more remote landing zone and then walk in. The nearest suitable landing site far enough from the base to easily escape detection is 5 miles away, in a shallow valley. Once the party lands, see the sections below for rules on approaching the base by vehicle or on foot.

Traveling by Ground Vehicle

The colony has plenty of small all-terrain ground vehicles, including FlatCat Crawlers and WATVs. The party may use as many of these vehicles as necessary.

Since the mercenaries' main base is 150 miles north of the colony, the amount of time spent in travel is dictated by the top speed of the vehicles used. A FlatCat moving at an average speed of 50 miles per hour will take just over 3 hours to make the trip.

Approaching the base on the ground involves less risk of detection for the player characters. Most of the remote sensors deployed by the mercs are intended to detect aircraft rather than ground traffic. Still, the raiders have set out a few seismic and infrared detectors. These high-tech units have been calibrated to pick up anything weighing more than 100 lbs., or matching the IR signatures of a man or vehicle. This way, the mercenaries can be certain that animals will fail to set off the detectors, while potential intruders will be caught by the sensor net.

When the raiders get to within 5 miles of the base, roll 3d. Subtract 1 from the roll if they are traveling in WATVs, and -2 if they are using FlatCats. If the result is 9 or less, the party has been detected by the sensor net. If detected, the team will be approached within five minutes by 10 mercs in four WATVs. They will be told that they are trespassing in a restricted area and must leave. Have the leader of the mercs (a sergeant) make his IQ roll. If successful, he recognizes the PCs from their dossiers and will attempt to capture them. The party can either surrender or fight immediately. If attacked, the mercs will radio for backup as soon as they can. The five remaining mercenaries will arrive within five minutes to aid their comrades. This combat can be conducted normally, or by using the optional large scale combat rules presented on p. 76.

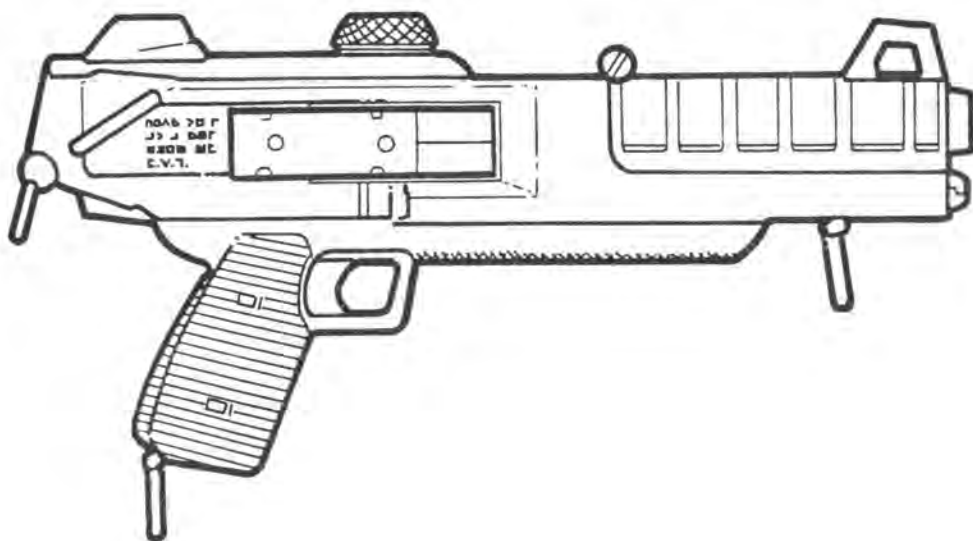
Even if the team slips through the sensor net without being spotted, there is still a chance that the mercs' sentries will see them. When the party gets closer than 1 mile to the base, roll 3d again. Apply the same bonuses as before. This time, the target number for the roll is 14. If the roll equals or exceeds this number, one of the sentries has seen them and sends group out to meet them as above.

Dealing With Sensors

If the intruders disembark from their vehicles or aircraft more than 5 miles from the base, they will still be outside the sensor net. As they go, they may wish to search for such devices. Have the searching character make a standard Traps roll to determine if he can spot the sensors. Approaching or bypassing the sensors requires a Stealth roll from all who are attempting the task. Apply the following modifiers to this roll: -1 for every 50 lbs. over 100 a character weighs, including the weight of his gear; -1 for every character who passes the sensors in a group. All bonuses for chameleon or intruder suits apply.

If an intruder wants to try to deactivate a sensor package, he must make a successful Electronic Operation/TL9 (Sensors or Security Systems) roll for each package he disarms. Of course, once they're spotted, sensors can be destroyed by gunfire. Each package is made of hard plastic and thin metal, with DR 2 and HT 5 (for plastic) and 15 (metal). Any weapon can be used to destroy a sensor, but in order to use a hand weapon to destroy a sensor package, the attacker must first get within weapon range of the sensors. This requires the Stealth listed above.

If a sensor package is destroyed, a 7 or less on 3d indicates that the mercs have noticed the sensor problem. They will send out a scouting team immediately to determine the cause of the sensor malfunction. If a destroyed sensor is seen, there will be little doubt that someone is lurking about. Note that switching the sensors off produces the same reactions.



Sentries

The sentries stand a chance of spotting the team as they close on the base. Likewise, the team has a chance of spotting and silencing the sentries.

The mercenaries' pickets will see the party coming at a range of 1 mile, on a 3d roll of 7 or less. If the party is using Stealth to approach the base, make the roll a Contest of Skills, pitting the sentry's IQ of 12 against the intruder's Stealth skill. The GM may wish to streamline the procedure by rolling the sentry's IQ against the *average* Stealth of the entire party.

The sentries can be eliminated. If the party decides to do this, conduct the assassination of the guard as normal combat. Since the attack is coming as a surprise, the sentry has no opportunity to Dodge. Intruders attacking a sentry in this manner have all the time they want to aim. If the PCs want to get closer to the target in order to ensure a good hit, they can use their Stealth skill, as above, to make the attempt.

Note: If the team is using a firearm, Gauss weapon or beam weapon, there is a chance that other lookouts or the mercs in the base, less than a mile away, might hear the shot. Silencers reduce the possibility of hearing the shot. See the sidebar on silencers and suppressors for details on these devices.

If the team elects to remove the lookout with a hand weapon, the assassin will have to sneak up on the sentry using his Stealth skill as described above. If he reaches the sentry undetected, assume he has a free first attack, and total surprise. Conduct the attack normally, but apply a +1 modifier to the first attack only. Remember that if the sentry is surprised, he cannot Dodge.

Silencers and Suppressors

In most games involving firearms, one of the most commonly used accessories is the silencer or sound/flash suppressor.

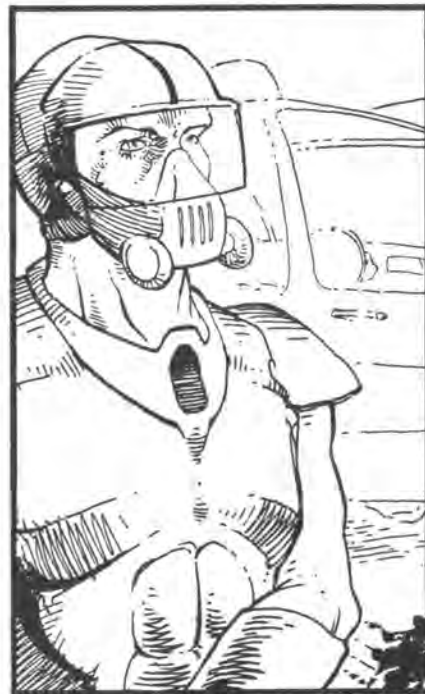
In game terms, all rifles, and any pistol, except a revolver, can be suppressed at TL6 or higher. Shotguns and black powder guns can be suppressed, but such silencers are usually improvised, one-shot affairs, such as a large plastic bottle taped over the muzzle.

Silencers decrease the range of a weapon by $\frac{1}{3}$, and reduce the base damage by $\frac{1}{4}$. (Round down all fractions.)

If sub-sonic ammunition is being used in conjunction with a silencer, the range drops to half normal, and the base damage is reduced by $\frac{1}{3}$.

Gauss weapons need no silencers, and they may be adjusted to fire their needles at speeds slower than sound. In this case, the range is reduced by $\frac{1}{3}$ and the base damage is cut by $\frac{1}{4}$.

Lasers, blasters and other science-fiction weapons produce distinctive sounds of their own. In most cases, these sounds cannot be attenuated by the addition of a silencer. If the GM allows such devices as laser silencers, treat shots fired through these accessories as sub-sonic ammunition fired through a silencer.



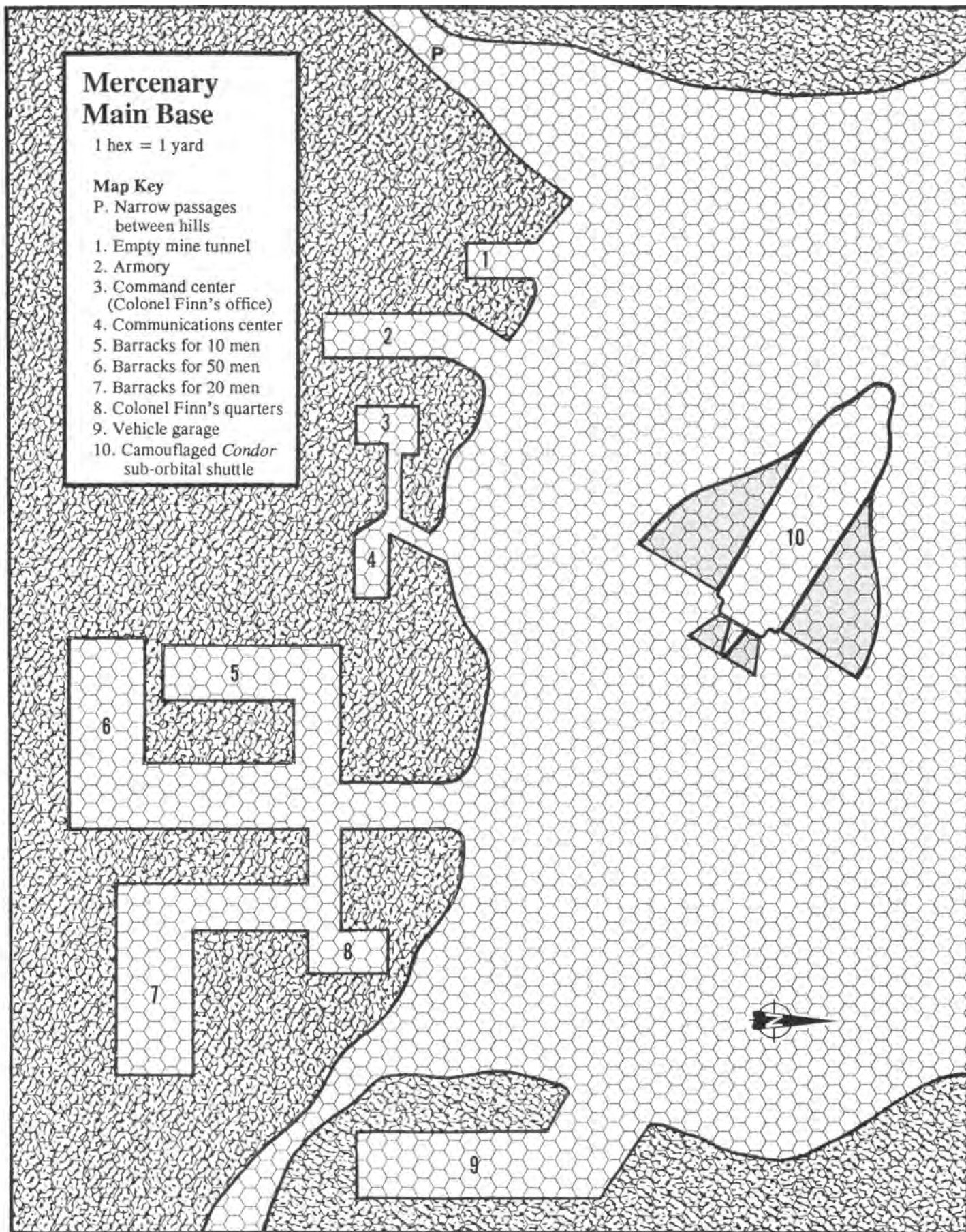
Mercenary Main Base

1 hex = 1 yard

Map Key

P. Narrow passages
between hills

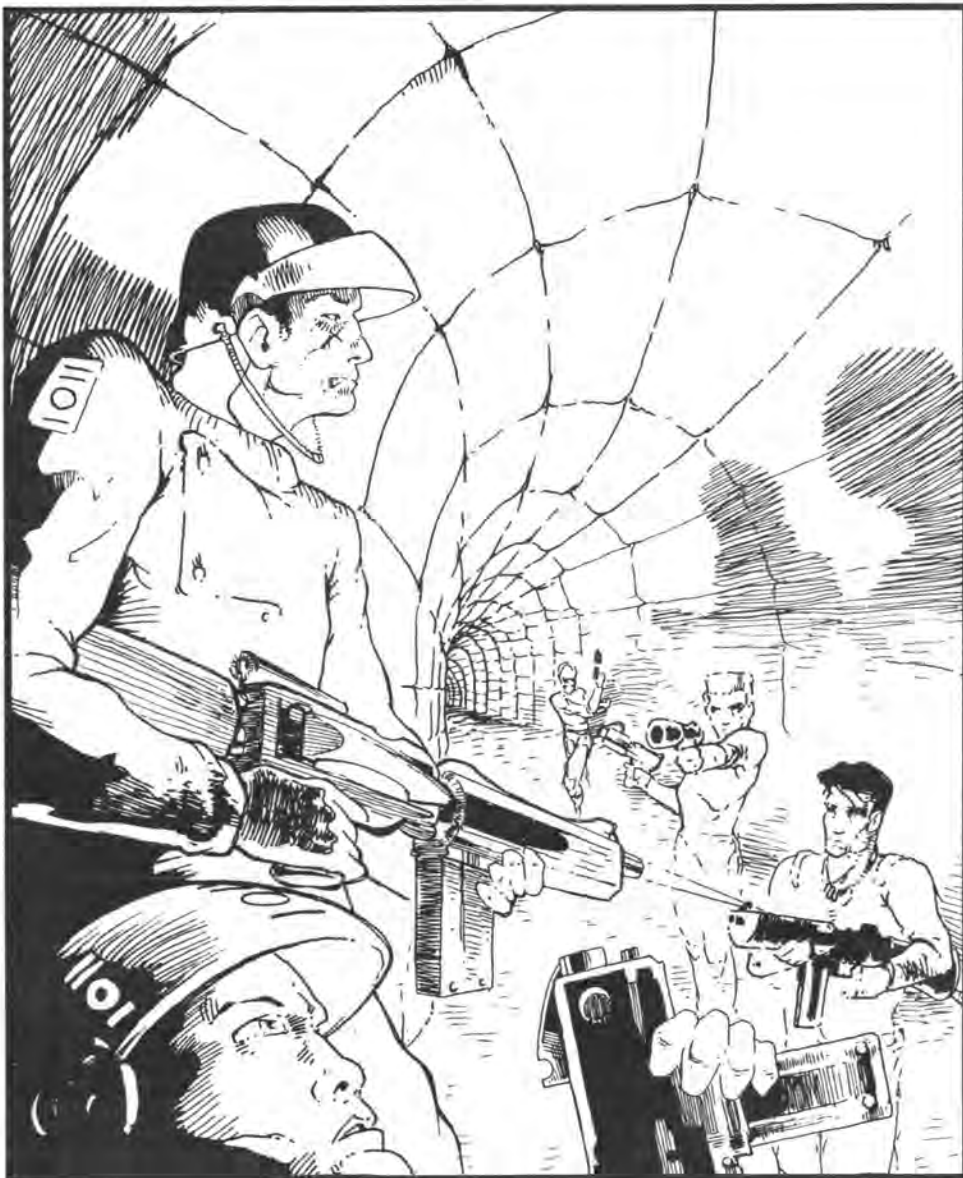
1. Empty mine tunnel
2. Armory
3. Command center
(Colonel Finn's office)
4. Communications center
5. Barracks for 10 men
6. Barracks for 50 men
7. Barracks for 20 men
8. Colonel Finn's quarters
9. Vehicle garage
10. Camouflaged *Condor*
sub-orbital shuttle



The Mercenary Base

The mercenaries' main base is hidden in a valley in a range of low hills, 150 miles north of the Sterling Agricultural Colony. Years ago, these hills were the site of extensive prospecting, leaving them riddled with tunnels and small caves. When Hoag-Warner recruited Finn's Company to run the colonists off, Colonel Finn seized on this spot as an ideal place to establish a base of operations. From a military standpoint, it is perfect. The valley is easily approachable only from the north. The hills which cover the east, south, and west sides of the valley are low, but covered with scrub trees, loose shale and large boulders. This terrain makes it impossible for any but the smallest vehicles to get through. The valley is also narrow, making it difficult for large aircraft or spaceships to land. The caves and mine tunnels are nearly invisible from the air or from the tops of the surrounding hills. Only when the setting or rising sun is shining full on the openings in the eastern and western cliff faces can they easily be seen. Those in the southern hills are hidden in deep shadow most of the time.

The mercenaries have taken advantage of this natural concealment and established their base within the shadowed concourses of the southern caves. Only a large, well-camouflaged antenna array perched on the southern ridge line betrays their presence. The base is large enough to hold 80 men, although only 15 are present at the time of this assault.



Colonel Erik Finn

Age 37; swarthy skin, graying black hair and beard; 5' 7", 140 lbs.

ST 14, IQ 15, DX 13, HT 13.

Speed 7, Move 4.

Dodge 7, Parry 4.

Medium monocrys vest, PD 4, DR 16 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling).

Advantages: Danger Sense, Voice.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Soldier's Code), Lamé (Crippled Leg), Poverty (Struggling), Sense of Duty (to his company).

Quirks: Speaks only when necessary; Dislikes zero-G or micro-G environments; Dislikes carrying a sidearm.

Skills: Administration-13, Beam Weapons/TL10-14, Brawling-12, Computer Operation/TL10-15, Guns/TL10-12, Leadership-13, Strategy-12, Tactics-12.

Weapons: Military Laser Rifle, 2d impaling; 4 D cells; Laser Pistol, 1d impaling; Knife (large), 1d+2 cutting, 1d impaling.

Colonel Erik Finn is the commander of Finn's Company, a small independent mercenary unit, which is currently under contract to Hoag-Warner GmbH.

Finn was once an officer in the Confederation army, but has since mustered out and formed his own outfit. He spent his time in the service well, learning all he could about small unit tactics, strategy, leadership and the like. Finn put all this knowledge to use when he formed his company. Until they took the assignment with Hoag-Warner, Finn's Company was living at a subsistence level. The colonel spent his life's savings and all the money he could borrow to assemble and equip his company. This left his unit smaller and less well-equipped than others, resulting in less desirable, lower-paying contracts. In fact, Finn was ready to disband the group when he was contacted by representatives of Hoag-Warner.

Continued on next page . . .

Colonel Erik Finn (Continued)

These men told Finn that they had a good contract for him, which included a clause permitting the company to keep the equipment Hoag-Warner supplied them with, and left open a possibility of future, maybe even permanent, employment with the cartel.

Colonel Finn accepted the contract eagerly, unaware of exactly what the cryptically phrased agreement called upon his unit to do. When he found out, Finn was livid. He tried to break the contract, but Hoag-Warner wouldn't permit it. They told Finn that if he tried to get out of the bargain, they would ruin him and his company, and see to it that he personally was blamed for the raids on the colony.

Reluctantly, Finn accepted the job he was forced to take. He ordered his men not to fire on the colonists unless it was unavoidable. When he got word of the hirelings' presence in the colony, he told his troops that the party members were to be considered rival mercenaries; the restrictions he placed on killing the colonists did not apply to them. Finn resents the presence of the Hoag-Warner communications technician. He will be openly hostile, but not physically violent toward the man.

Erik Finn is a small, dark man in his late 30s. He speaks rarely, though when he does, it is with a deep, commanding voice, which rivets the attention of all those who hear it. He was badly wounded during a battle about 10 years ago, which left him with a crippled left leg.



The Final Battle

Once combat begins, conduct the battle normally. Any colonists who accompanied the party to the base will fight to the best of their ability. (See the sidebar on p. 77 for details on colonists in combat and their morale.)

During this battle, Royce will be recklessly brave. At some point, if the battle is going badly for the party, he may sacrifice his life to turn the tide of the battle. If the party gains and keeps the advantage, Royce's suicidal rush will come just before the mercenaries break. The GM should arrange this to fit smoothly into the flow of events. Don't have Royce simply jump into the line of fire. Perhaps he dives onto a live grenade to save a party member, or shoves Mearc and Sheas Danalish out of the way, taking a burst of enemy laser fire himself. No matter how it happens, Royce's death should be heroic and inspiring.

Colonel Finn is a good tactician. Once the fighting begins, he will direct his men efficiently and economically. Finn's men will fight to the best of their ability, using every weapon at their disposal to repel their attackers. If the battle starts to go against them, they will attempt to make an orderly, fighting withdrawal. If escape is impossible, they will surrender. Colonel Finn is a complete professional. If he and his men are taken prisoner, he will ask for assurances that his men will be treated well.

Inspecting the Base

After the base is secured, the victors may explore it, searching for clues as to who hired the mercenaries to wipe out the colony. If the PCs don't think of this themselves, Mearc Sterling will suggest that they help him make the search. During a search of the base, the party will find several packing cases labeled "mining equipment," bearing the Hoag-Warner logo. These crates contain new, unused monocrys vests, Gauss needle rifles and ammunition. In the command center, a sheaf of papers, all bearing messages written in the same code as the entry in the personal computer, will be found. If the party successfully translated the computer file, they will be able to read these coded documents. These documents are communications between Colonel Finn and someone named Alvarez. The most recent of these relates how company spies have discovered that the colonists have succeeded in hiring mercenaries on Terra. The message states that Alvarez will try to stop these mercenaries from reaching the colony, but Finn had better be ready to deal with them if they get through. Alvarez is the one who suggested that Finn take hostages from the colony. Complete dossiers on each of the party members are attached to this message. Characters who have any form of FTL communications skill will instantly realize that it costs a great deal of money to send an FTL message of this length.

Finn's Quarters

In the Base Commander's quarters is a safe carved into the rock wall behind a desk, concealed by a large map of the Sterling Colony. Opening this safe takes three minutes, and requires a successful Lockpicking skill check. An electronic lockpick adds +3 to the roll, because the safe is secured by a TL8 combination lock. It is possible to blast the safe open, but by doing so, the party runs the risk of destroying its contents. It takes four pounds of explosives to open the safe by destroying the lock. To blow the safe door completely off its mountings, it will take 12 pounds of explosives. If four-and-a-half to six pounds are used, there is a 1-in-6 chance of destroying the contents of the safe. Roll individually for each item. If more than six pounds of explosives are used, there is a 2-in-6 chance of destroying the contents. If more than 15 pounds are used, the entire contents of the safe will be destroyed.

In the safe is a hard copy codebook, a plastic case containing \$5,000 in hard currency, two certified credcards worth \$10,000 each and a good quality TL10 disruptor pistol. If they haven't cracked the code already, the codebook will allow the party to read any coded data found in the mercenaries' possession.

Set into Col. Finn's desk is a TL10 minicomputer. A successful Computer Operation/TL10 skill test will access the computer's pertinent data. Most of the data the characters have seen before — the instructions to Col. Finn to run off the colonists, PC dossiers, etc. Three new files are a personnel roster of Finn's Company, a copy of the contract between Mr. Joachim Alvarez and Colonel Finn and an extensive geological survey covering the area around the Sterling Agricultural Colony, showing the heavy deposits of valuable minerals beneath the colony.

The Report

The geological survey is the most interesting of the three computer files. It was completed roughly two months before the colony was established, although this copy is dated four weeks after the colony began operating. Beyond this, it requires a Geology skill roll to understand the technical jargon contained in the report.

If a character makes such a roll, he will see that the survey indicates that the area upon which the Sterling Agricultural Colony was later established is rich in such rare minerals as osmium, iridium and platinum, as well as other less exotic ores. These deposits are fairly deep for their type and could be extracted without significantly damaging the surface. The report was filed by Gary Folkes, a senior survey scout in the Galactic Survey Service.

When the Sterlings or any of the colony council are shown the survey report, they will remember a relatively minor incident which occurred about a month before the raids on the colony began.

Several well-dressed engineer-types showed up at the colony one day and asked to meet with the council. At that meeting, the engineers offered to buy the colony outright for \$2 million and free passage back to Terra for all the colonists. They wouldn't say why they wanted to purchase the colony, only that they represented a large business concern which was interested in acquiring the land. The council debated the offer for several hours, but eventually turned it down. The engineers didn't seem too upset by the council's decision. They merely apologized for disturbing the council and left. Since there had been other requests, usually by small-time prospectors, for permission to mine on the colony's property, no one thought anything of it at the time.

All other requests had been similarly refused, since mining tends to ruin valuable farmland. Now, with the information that the mining could be accomplished without seriously damaging the farmland, the colony will lease the mineral rights to the highest bidder, making a huge profit with no effort. This information will allow the colony to get back on its feet.

The Comm Tech

Cowering in a corner of the communications center is a young man dressed in civilian clothes. If confronted by the party, he will beg for his life. He tells the party that he is not a member of Finn's company. Rather, he is an electronics technician, skilled in the operation of slow FTL radio. He is also an employee of Hoag-Warner GmbH. If questioned, he will reveal that Hoag-Warner hired Finn's Company to run the colonists off their land, but he doesn't know why. He will tell the party that he was assigned to the mercenaries as a sort of watchdog, and to operate the sophisticated FTL communications equipment. He has no idea as to the contents of the messages, since they were all in code. He tells the party that he simply received the messages and sent an acknowledgement signal. Once



Communications Technician

ST 12, DX 14, IQ, 15, HT 10.

Speed 6, Move 6.

Dodge 6, Parry 5.

Wears no armor.

Skills: Computer Operation/TL10-12, Computer Programming/TL10-12, Electronics/TL10-13, Electronics Operation/TL10-15, Guns/TL10-13, Mathematics-14.

Weapons: Gauss needler pistol, 1d+2 impaling; 1 100-round magazine; Knife (small), 1d-2 cutting, 1d-1 impaling.

Character Points

The PCs should be awarded 2 points each for saving the colony by successfully raiding the mercenary base and defeating Erik Finn (either by capturing or killing him). Award 1 additional point for exceptional roleplaying and for achieving either of the following:

Rescuing the hostages before any are killed.

Decoding the geological report from Hoag-Warner.

Adapting to Other Genres

The plot of this adventure is a classic — save the farmers from the evil corporation. Thus, it translates well into most other *GURPS* backgrounds. Here are a few.

Fantasy: Mana Handling

For this adaptation, change Hoag-Warner to a powerful wizard or the mages' guild. They want the farmers' land because it's situated on a natural high-mana area — perfect for a mages' stronghold. The farmers don't care about magic or mana; they just want to keep their land.

Old West: The Magnificent . . .

For an *Old West* campaign, hardly any changes are required. The basic plot stays the same: a mining company is trying to force settlers off their land, so the settlers hire gunslingers to protect them. The only adaptation needed is to reduce the Tech Level.

Horror: Attack of the Zombies

A small farming co-op, plagued by attacks from the walking dead, hires the adventurers to protect them and find the reason behind the sudden attacks. As it turns out, the farm was built over an ancient burial ground, and an evil spirit wants revenge on those who have blasphemed his grave.

Further Adventures

An Eye for an Eye

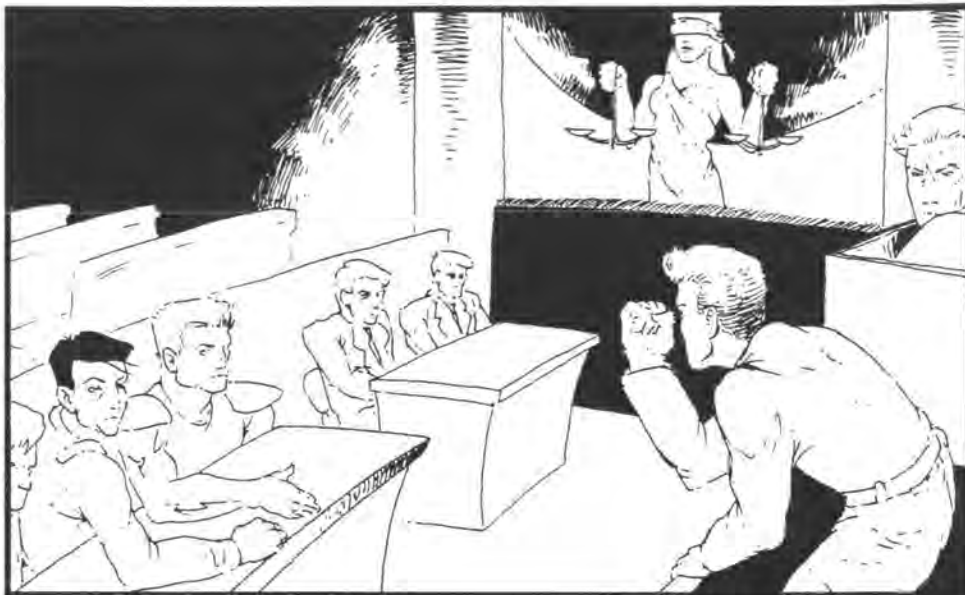
Two months after the adventurers helped the Sterling Colony finger Hoag-Warner for their part in the raids, Mearc's sister, Danielle, shows up at the PCs' doorstep in a rage. Mearc has been murdered — shot down while running the high-G combine. Danielle suspects agents of H-W again; she wants to hire the PCs, not to bring the company to justice, but for pure, unadulterated revenge.

You Don't Mess With Hoag-Warner

For weeks now, the PCs have been seeing an ominous, black corvette — sometimes hovering near an orbital starport, or racing past the PCs' ship while on approach to a planet. Is it coincidence? A warning? Or are agents of Hoag-Warner toying with them, waiting for the perfect moment to gun them down in deep space?

or twice, he transmitted a message from Col. Finn to a company official named Joachim Alvarez. The messages were also coded, and he had no idea as to their content. He believes that Finn must have some sort of codebook, or a translator program keyed to that particular cipher, since Finn never asked the technician for help in deciphering the codes.

Once told of the entire situation, the comm tech is appalled. He offers the leaders of the colony his testimony against Hoag-Warner in exchange for immunity. He had no idea that innocent people were being injured or killed and wishes to make whatever amends are required. The council will deliberate for a few hours and accept the technician's offer.



Aftermath

If the raid on the mercenary main base was successful, the party members are given their agreed-upon number of shares of the agriculture profits plus a bonus share of the upcoming mining operation profits (which will come to \$40,000 a year). Alfred Sterling takes the coded transmissions, the comm tech witness and the PCs to the Interstellar Trade Commission to file charges against Hoag-Warner.

The multistellar hires the best lawyers in the galaxy, whose defense rests on the claim that Joachim Alvarez was working on his own with no authority from the company's board of directors. The arguments from both sides are dazzling and convincing. The comm tech gives his damning testimony, citing his experience as a Hoag-Warner comm officer and his knowledge that one man could not have garnered the funds needed for the transmissions without company help or approval. The opposing lawyers counter by calling Alvarez himself to the stand; he will affirm that he deceived the company accountants and misappropriated funds that were earmarked for peaceful projects.

In the end Alvarez snaps on the stand, spilling the entire story about the plan and fingering his superiors. He breaks down and apologizes to Sterling and the PCs for aiding in this desperate, greedy scheme — he is ready to pay his price. The judge finds for the Sterling Colony and grants a \$100 million award. Alvarez and the comm tech will both perform 500 hours of community service. The Hoag-Warner executives loosen their collars slightly, but otherwise show no response to the decision. Alfred Sterling passes the colony leadership to his son (with no protest from the abashed council opposition) and retires early, a very wealthy man.

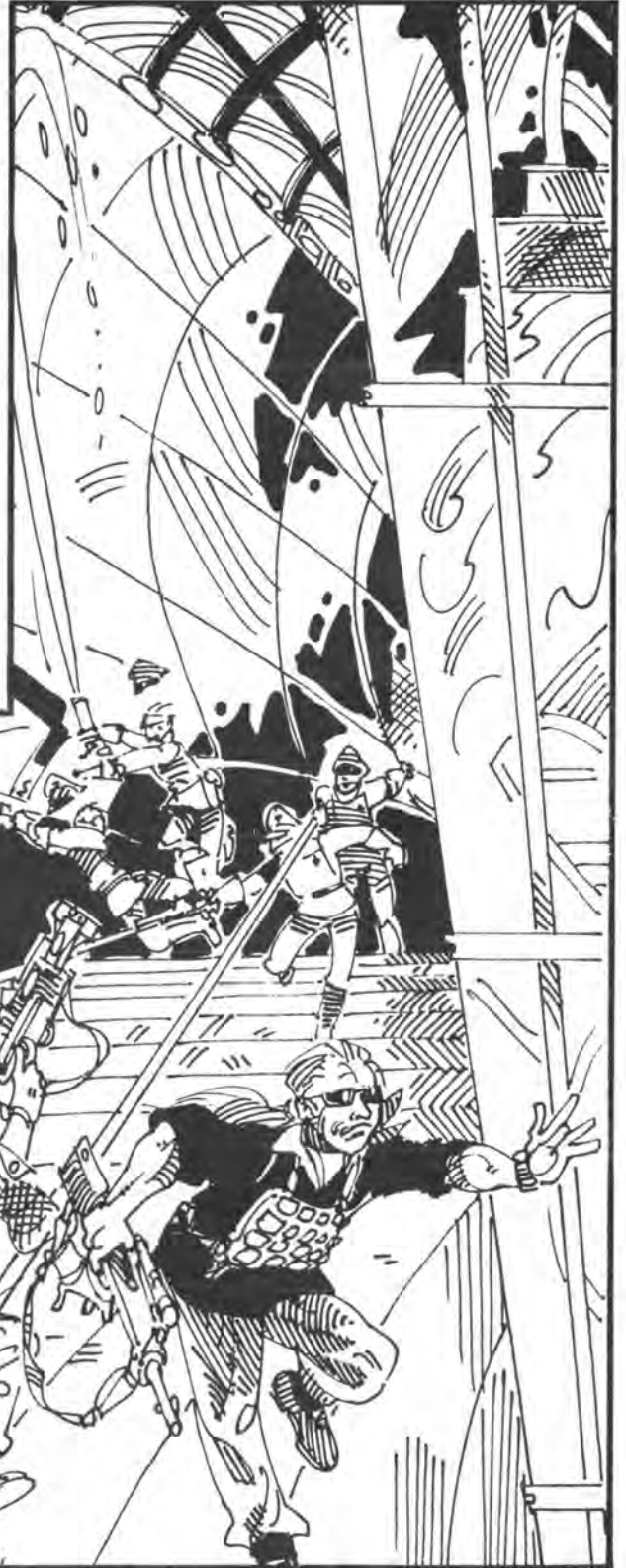
BEWARE THE HEALTH POLICE

3

*By William A. Barton
With Jeff Koke and Steve Jackson
Illustrated by Donna Barr*

"... but of all the secret police organizations throughout known space, the strangest must be the Health Police of Survias (Core-Tiann I), Old Frontiers Sector. Created by the planet's Autarch, Ryoc IV, the Health Police aggressively carry out their leader's single-minded (one might even say obsessive) crusade against illness and infirmity among the population of Survias. Armed with ceremonial scalpels and sonic disruptor rifles, the Health Police have become the very scourge of sickness in any form. They stand ready at a moment's notice to eradicate the tiniest germ, the most minute bacteria from any host. For to be ill on Survias is considered a crime against the state, and the illness must be cured, whatever the cost..."

Excerpt from the *Escott Encyclopædia of Universal Knowledge*, Vol. 13, Page 221, Paragraph B, re: "The Health Police" (Note: article banned on the planet Survias — Core-Tiann I — Old Frontiers Sector)



Introduction

Beware the Health Police is a *Space* adventure for 4-8 characters of 100 to 125 points. The optimum number is 5-7, with the party evenly split between beginners and those with some experience. However, any group can make its way through the adventure as long as some of the players are experienced and tolerant.

Nearly any SF adventurer with almost any skills can be run in this adventure; for most of the action, the PCs are being taken for a ride anyway. One requirement is that the explorers have a starship — either one of their own (bought, stolen or “borrowed”) or one on which they are currently passengers. In the latter case, the vessel’s actual owners and crew will “disappear” once they’ve surrendered the ship (and the PCs) to their captors at the outset of the scenario. (Innocent victims or Organization lackeys — GM’s choice.) It is therefore recommended that at least a few of the adventurers have some shipboard skills — Piloting, Astrogation, et cetera.

Most of the action in this adventure takes place on the Earthlike world of Survias, in the Old Frontiers Sector, as described in *GURPS Space Atlas*. However, it is not necessary to own that book to play the adventure, nor must the scenario actually be set in the Old Frontiers. The pertinent information on Survias is repeated on pp. 5 and 105 for the GM’s convenience. Thus Survias can be relocated into any star sector the GM chooses. Only this book, the *GURPS Basic Set (Third Edition)* and *GURPS Space* are required. Once the adventure gets underway, there will be many possible avenues of escape for the fugitive PCs to pursue, some by their own determination (though often just barely), some randomly. It’s possible the scenario could be played out in a single long gaming session, though at least two and possibly more sessions are likely.

Chaos, Incorporated

Beware the Health Police is designed to keep the PCs constantly off-balance so that they don’t have time to think too deeply about their situation. Or if they do, questioning it always seems just too dangerous at the moment. They will have to keep moving at all times to stay one jump ahead of the Health Police and their spray antiseptic. Even when they think they’ve found safe haven with the rebels on Survias or with one or another competing faction among the Health Police, it shouldn’t last. Chaos should reign.

Keeping the party hopping is especially important if any of the players are of the type who insist on controlling their own destinies (or at least those of their characters). They will have little opportunity to do so here, so the GM mustn’t give them time to realize it. Characters *will* be called on to make certain decisions from time to time, though the “best” course to take — that of their captors, rescuers or whomever they’re dealing with at the time — will always be evident. Keep it a wild, hold-on-for-your-life ride from start to finish.

Throughout this adventure, the GM will undoubtedly be called upon to improvise and should be prepared to do so at a moment’s notice. This is especially true whenever random encounters are rolled. Gamemastering by the seat of the pants is a must! (GMs who eschew random encounters — wandering Health Police? — or wish to exert more control over events may plan such encounters ahead of time, or throw them in as they seem appropriate.)

Additionally, there are a variety of characters in this adventures with certain mannerisms that are . . . well, eccentric. For this reason, it will be helpful if the GM actually takes the role of these characters and impersonates them for the PCs. It’s not required, but it will add another dimension to the adventure.

Finally, there will certainly be ample opportunity for bodily injury to befall the adventurers in this scenario. However, unless the players’ actions make it

About the Author

William A. Barton lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, with his wife, Vicki, and three cats, Watson, Sheba and Hungry J. Kitty. A graduate of Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis with a degree in English Composition/Journalism, he was professionally employed for 11 years as a copy editor. During that time, Bill turned his enthusiasm for roleplaying games into a part-time freelance writing career. He is the co-designer of *GURPS Space* and *GURPS Space Atlas* and has contributed to or playtested several other *GURPS* items, including the original *Basic Set*.

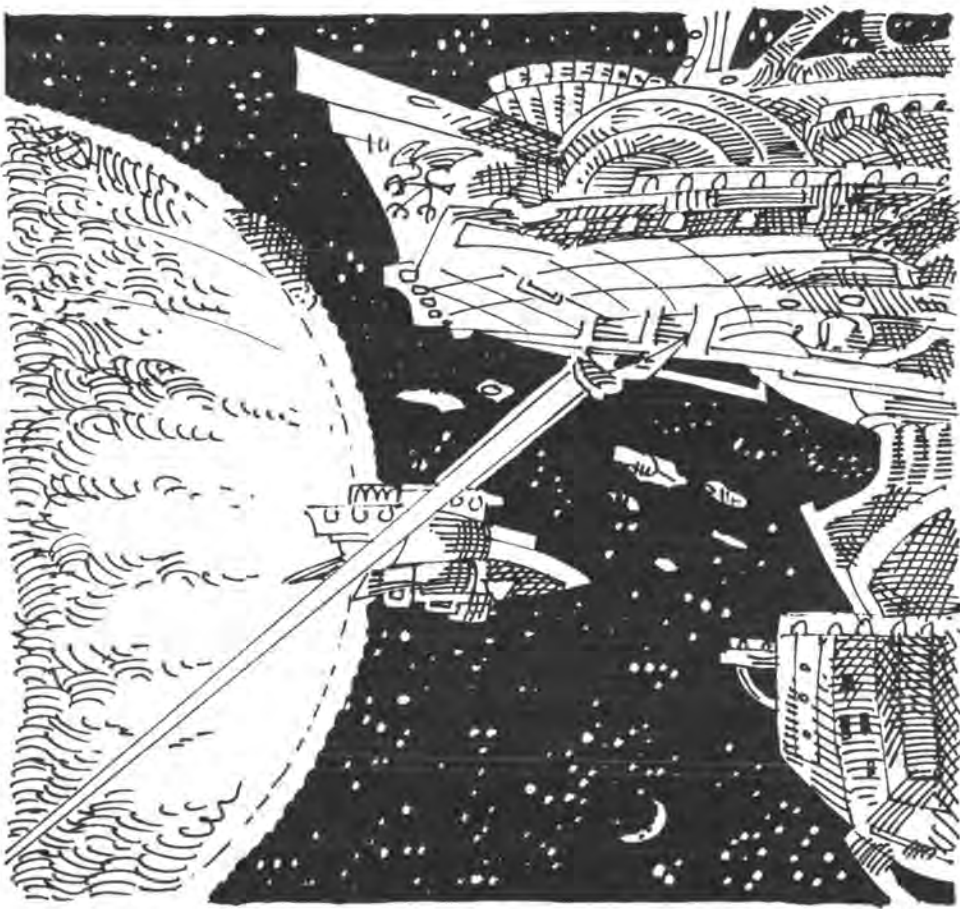
Bill’s other writing credits include Chaosium’s award-winning *Cthulhu By Gaslight* and other *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios, as well as contributions to Chaosium’s *Superworld* and FASA’s *Star Trek* games. For years he was a contributing editor to *Space Gamer* and wrote reviews and articles for several other magazines, including TSR’s *Dragon*. His latest gaming project was his self-published RPG *So Ya Wanna Be A Rock ‘N’ Roll Star! A Rock ‘N’ Role-Playing Game*, for which he says he’s working on several “whacked-out” adventures and supplements. (He calls the venture, oddly enough, “Bill Barton Games.” Hmm . . .?) In limited distribution until recently, the game nevertheless won the 1991 Gamers Choice Award for Best Other Category Roleplaying Game.

Bill also enjoys playing bass and writing songs in a band he’s forming and confesses to being addicted to bad puns and Godzilla movies. Ever since he first thought up the Health Police, he’s been very uncomfortable around hospitals . . .

impossible to avoid, their characters should come out *relatively* unscathed. *Beware the Health Police* is designed as an interstellar Keystone Kops chase, not Saturday Night at the Blood and Guts Bowl. For maximum effect, play it that way. The GM should have fun, drive the PCs crazy — but let 'em live. Beyond that, *how* they live will be up to how they play the game.

Encounter in Space

Ah, once more into the vast, peaceful reaches of interstellar space! After their last planetary excursion, the explorers undoubtedly feel they can use the blissful boredom experienced on a routine voyage between star systems. Nobody is after them, no authorities to bribe, no sleazy startown brawls to fight . . . just the eternal stars, their ship and — an anomalous blip on the sensor screen? Even without an Electronics Operation (Sensors) skill roll, anybody at the sensors will realize that they now share this section of space with another vessel — a large one, bearing down at high speed. (If the PCs are passengers, the crew of the ship will inform them of the encounter.)



That's No Ship, That's the Patrol

Long-range sensor readings will indicate a large, probably heavily armed vessel, faster and more powerful than the group's starship. Running seems out of the question, even if the PCs are so inclined at this point. Fighting seems equally inadvisable if the vessel should prove hostile. Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on the group's current legal status), the first transponder readings received identify the oncoming ship as an Interstellar Patrol cruiser. That it is definitely on an intercept course with the group's ship is confirmed when a radio message announces: "Attention, (ship's name), this is the Patrol cruiser *Roylett*. Heave to and prepare to be boarded." (Note: If the travelers

Assumptions

Because the worlds of SF — and thus of possible *Space* campaigns — are so vast and variable, certain assumptions were made in creating this adventure. If they fly in the face of the campaign, adjustments should be made as necessary so the adventure will conform to the GM's universe.

Interstellar government. Nearly any of the major government types described in *GURPS Space* are suitable as a background for this adventure. Exceptions might be a very repressive, totalitarian authority, such as an interstellar theocracy, or an especially loose — or nonexistent — organization, such as total anarchy. In the former, it would be difficult for either the Organization or Ryoc's government to exist as described. In the latter, there would be no Interstellar Security & Intelligence Agency for the Organization to pose as. (Though a well-known rival planet's intelligence service might serve.) *GURPS Space Atlas*, pp. 2-4, provides guidelines on how Ryoc's regime would be viewed under different interstellar authorities.

FTL communications. This adventure assumes that either no FTL communication is available to the PCs or that it is extremely limited. This prevents harried characters from somehow slipping away and checking up on current events in the sector (limiting them to information provided by the conspirators) — or from calling for outside help once the situation goes from bad to worse (and it's evident they've been set up). Of course, neither the Organization (and their agent with the PCs) nor the authorities on Survias will be very free in letting the PCs reach out and touch someone . . .

Tech levels. The adventure assumes a campaign with an average Tech Level of 10. Higher Tech Levels are possible if PCs don't have ready access to a wide range of weapons or gadgets. Survias' TL is 10, with some TL11 medical facilities.

Continued on next page . . .

have disabled the transponder on their own ship, they will be hailed as "unidentified vessel" instead.)

If the PCs are passengers on someone else's starship, the captain will shut down the ship's drive and allow the Patrol cruiser to match speeds and course with the vessel without further question. "You don't mess with the Patrol, not in these parts," he announces darkly. He refuses to take any other action, and the passengers will not be able to persuade him otherwise. Their only recourse is to sit and wait or rise in mutiny (a useless move, but possibly entertaining).

If the PCs are piloting their own vessel, they can attempt to question the Patrol cruiser, try to bluff their way out (the old "broken radio" gambit maybe?) or even try to escape or fight. Nothing helps. The captain of the cruiser does not answer their questions, merely citing his authority to stop and inspect their ship. "We're the Patrol. We can do that, you know."

He won't be put off by excuses, bluffs or tricks — he seems to *know* what the explorers are up to (he does). And he'll follow until he catches them should they try to run, firing a warning shot across their bow, or even disabling their engines and catching their ship in a tractor beam. If they try to fire on the cruiser, its extensive weaponry will take out their ship's weapons as well.

Assumptions (Continued)

The PCs' starship. It is imperative that the PCs not try to fight it out with the "Patrol" vessel that intercepts them at the scenario's outset. Therefore, it is recommended they not have a heavily-armed warship at their disposal. If so, the GM must present them with a far *more* heavily-armed and armored opponent, one so imposing that resistance seems futile. If they still opt to fight, the GM must see that the PCs' vessel is swiftly disabled with no loss of life.

FTL travel. The only limitation on the type of FTL travel available in the game is that it be one in which starships can be tracked and intercepted in space. (The adventure would end pretty swiftly if the PCs could say, "Whoops, a Patrol ship!" and suddenly disappear untraceably down a wormhole.) An interception in normal space following a hyperjump or warpline transit would do, provided escape via FTL isn't instantaneous — or, if it is, their engines just happen to mysteriously break down...

Language. It is also assumed that the PCs and everyone else in the scenario speaks the same language — some sort of universal intergalactic tongue. If that's not the case in the GM's campaign, he'll need to compensate. The Organization could provide the party with a universal translator device. Alternatively, Agent Z can translate for them (adding the necessary language skills to her repertoire). This will create a new level of confusion and frustration for the visitors when they are wandering fugitives in a strange city with no knowledge of custom or language.

Neanderthals on Patrol

As the *Roylett* comes into visual range, it does appear to be a Patrol cruiser — but it's the biggest Patrol ship the PCs have ever seen, with weapons upon weapons and all sorts of flashing lights and imposing antenna arrays. If they attempt to cross-reference the cruiser's name and transponder registration in their library computer (roll against Research or Computer Operation skill), they do not find a listing. Unusual, but not entirely unheard of, especially if the ship is on detached duty with some other governmental unit. The group has time to prepare for the boarding however they wish, including hiding contraband, illegal weapons, etc., either on themselves or throughout the vessel. Have them roll against various skills, Holdout, Camouflage, etc. It really doesn't matter whether the rolls succeed or not — but don't tell the players that.

Once the *Roylett* has docked with the ship, the airlock opens to reveal several large, heavily-armed Patrolmen in full TL12 infantry combat armor. They are armed with a variety of weapons — electron rifles, electromag grenade launchers, tangles and force rifles (kinetic stunners), if using *GURPS Ultra-Tech*; otherwise, blast rifles, electromags, tangles and electrolasers. There should be at least as many boarders as crew members — more if the players seem inclined to fight. When presented with such numbers and weapons, resistance should appear suicidal to the characters. If the players are reckless enough to engage in combat anyway, the Patrolmen will shoot to stun (the electromags are loaded with stun grenades), using deadly force only as a last resort. Their orders are to take the crew alive (which is about the limit of their ability to remember orders) and they will do so. Even so, if battle breaks out, it's likely more than one prisoner will spend time in the Patrol cruiser's sick bay rather than its brig.

The Patrolmen are huge, burly men, long on brawn and short on brains. They speak mostly in grunts and monosyllabic sentences, involving simple commands like "come with us" and "You there, stop!" However they are greeted, they treat the passengers roughly and rudely. The PCs' questions, comments or protests are ignored, and they are disarmed and put into restraints. Then they are taken to the Patrol cruiser. No attempts to use Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Sex Appeal or bribery deter the Patrolmen from carrying out their orders (though offering a banana will evince hungry looks and a little drool). Anyone trying to conceal himself aboard (or outside) the ship will be discovered and hauled away, despite successful Stealth skill rolls.



Cell Samples

Once the captives are aboard the *Roylett*, they are taken directly to the brig and unceremoniously dumped into featureless, individual cells. Requests to talk to the captain or demands to know what they're charged with are again ignored or met with menacing grunts. The prisoners are kept in solitary confinement, unable to communicate with one another, for the remainder of their voyage aboard the cruiser. Should anyone have managed to smuggle aboard weapons, communicators or other devices, they are gassed in their cells, awakening to discover they've been stripped of all such items. Even bionic replacements are removed if it appears they might conceivably be used to escape.

If any players are adamant about trying to break out, let them play out the attempts. All will come to naught. When they resign themselves to their fate, the GM can inform them that they are fed adequately, have suitable sanitary facilities and otherwise are left alone. And so go their long days of confinement . . .

Don't I Get a Phone Call?

After what seems like days (or weeks?) to the captives, they are finally released from their cells and gathered together at the airlock of the Patrol cruiser, which seems to have docked . . . somewhere. The group is escorted by the same group of armored, gorilla Patrolmen — just as tight-lipped as before — into the docking bay of what seems to be either a huge ship or a space station of some kind. Here they are turned over to a second group, equally well-armed and armored (and a little higher on the evolutionary scale), but with no insignia of any sort on their suits. Anyone who's encountered the Interstellar Security and Intelligence Agency recognizes this as a trademark of the ISIA on an IQ roll.

Anyone looking around the bay — for a chance to escape or just to see what's there — can make a Vision roll at -2 to spot their own vessel in the dock next to the Patrol cruiser. There's only be one opportunity to do so; their new captors immediately march them at gunpoint through the bay and out an airlock into a featureless corridor. There's no chance to try to make a break for it (and where would they go, anyway?). Anyone who looks like he's even thinking it — or

The Patrol Cruiser Roylett

The GM can actually design the *Roylett*, using the starship design rules in *GURPS Space* and those ship components applicable to his own campaign — especially if he believes his players will try to fight it out, ship to ship. In most cases, however, this shouldn't be necessary. Just assume the Patrol cruiser is so monstrously imposing, the travelers won't dare to fire on it. Then describe it to them in intimidating terms:

Suddenly, it appears that an entire section of space has been blotted out, as if you were being sucked into a black hole. Then you realize that it is merely the presence of the Patrol ship, blocking out half the starfield. As you examine the ship closer, you wonder if the designers intended for it to look like a porcupine. Ah, but then you see that the spines are actually huge galling lasers and missile launchers.

And so on . . .



makes a wise crack or puts up any resistance at all — gets an armored fist in the face.

The hostages are taken down a bewildering maze of featureless corridors. Other than their captors, the only beings they see are several similarly attired and armed guards. Anyone without 3-D Spatial Sense or Eidetic Memory soon becomes hopelessly lost. Finding their way back to the docking bay would be nearly impossible. Finally, however, they are led into a large room. Two guards stand outside its pneumatic doors, two on the inside. All but two of their escorts leave. Before them, a large viewscreen shows a slice of space just beyond the walls. Someone can make an Astrogation-4 roll to recognize what sector of space they are probably in, but nothing more specific than that.

Below the imposing viewscreen sits a desk, featureless except for a small console. Behind it is a high-backed chair, its rear turned toward the PCs. There is a dramatic pause, an almost inaudible drumroll, then the chair swings around. In it is a man none has seen before, though it is difficult to tell that exactly. His face is strategically shadowed by the subtle lighting in the room — and overshadowed by the scene behind him (is that an eyepatch, or just a dark shadow?). Should the captives bombard him with questions, the man will ignore them until one of their remaining captors orders them silent, using his weapon should they persist (a stunner or tangler). The shadowy man gives them a final, predatory look, stands and smiles, then begins to speak.

The Boarding Patrolmen

As with the *Roylett*, it shouldn't be necessary to actually generate the Patrolmen who board the halted ship. *Shouldn't* — but here are a few stats just in case. The GM can flesh them out further if need be or if a full-scale fire fight is anticipated.

The typical "Patrolman" boarder from the *Roylett* has ST 15, DX 13, IQ 7, HT 14, with Combat Reflexes and High Pain Threshold as advantages and Duty (to the Organization!) as a disadvantage. *Perceived* advantages (as long as the PCs believe these are Patrolmen) are a no-nonsense Reputation (which is actually valid, though for different reasons) and extensive Legal Enforcement Powers. Skills include Beam Weapons, Gun (Grenade Launcher) or Gun (Tangler) at 16 and either Judo or Karate (or both) at 15. They are armed as described in the text. Their TL12 infantry combat armor gives them a PD 6, DR 110. (See p. S62 for exact location-based DRs, plus other details about the suites.)

The boarders are extremely quiet, speaking in grunts and monosyllables and only when necessary to get their point across. Mostly, they let their weapons — and gestures with them — do their talking. They manhandle their captives roughly to round them up and bind them for transfer to the *Roylett*, yet show neither the typical arrogance nor courtesy of the "bad" or "good" Patrolmen the PCs have encountered in the past. (This alone might be cause for consternation. Who *are* these guys?) They won't hesitate to stun anyone who gets out of line — or acts like he's about to.

Allow Me to Introduce Myself

"Velcome," he begins in a thick German accent, "my zinzere apologies for ze manner in vich you vere brought here. I'm afraid it could not be helped. Ven I explain ze zituation, I know you'll agree." (He of course ignores any disagreement from the PCs, who'll be forcibly hushed by one of their guards.) He goes on to introduce himself as "Vilhelm Mezzerschmidt" and states that he represents the Interstellar Security and Intelligence Agency.

"Zis is one of our bazes, a highly zophisticated zpace ztation, as you can no doubt zee." He gestures around him with a sweep of his arm. "Zat, I'm afraid, is all zat I can tell you about myzelf or vere ve are now located — for your good as vell as our own zecurity, you underztand."

Messerschmidt pauses and lights a cigarette on a long filter, giving anyone the opportunity to ask why they are here (provided they haven't been intimidated into silence). If none asks, he explains that the ISIA often enlists the help of other agencies (such as the Patrol) and occasionally of common citizens. "Or *uncommon*, as ze caze may be. You zee, ve have a *zituation* on our hands, and you, my friendz, are goink to help us out of it."

The Zituation

Messerschmidt asks his "guests" if they are at all familiar with the planet Survias, in the Core-Tiann system. If any claim to be, either from past adventures or because the player is familiar with the *GURPS Space Atlas*, he asks what they know, then fills them in on common knowledge about the world (see sidebar, p. 105). He provides additional information as the GM deems necessary, filling in as the PCs ask questions. Then he continues: "A very dangerouz political zituation is currently brewing on Zurvias, very dangerouz indeed — for all of us."

"Currently, ze vorld is in the hands of zat madvoman, the dictator Ryoc IV, and of her zadistic zecret poleez, whom she euphemiztically calls 'Ze Health Poleez.' Nozzink healthy about zem at all — or Ryoc." He goes on to explain that no matter how distasteful her domestic policies are, she must be left alone by interstellar authorities. Survias is a stable, wealthy world, and quite a few

other systems depend on the planet for medical supplies, even though much of the profits go into Ryoc's "emergency medical fund." As long as Ryoc remains content to limit her ambitions to Survias, she'll continue to be courted by the interstellar government. "But, she may zoon zease to look invard. And zat is our problem."

Rebels Without a Gauze

Messerschmidt continues before the captives can interrupt. He explains that one reason Ryoc hasn't had time to consider any sort of "protective" move against her neighboring worlds is that she still faces underground resistance. The Health Police don't have a free ride just yet. A group of rebels known as The Society of Infectious Concepts — or SIC — opposes the mad dictator and her swaggering bullies. The "Sickie Scum," as Ryoc and the Health Police call them, are true idealists, hoping someday to free their planet from Ryoc's paranoid tyranny. "And perhaps zey vill, but not alone. Zat is vere ve — and you — come in."

Messerschmidt explains to the visitors that the ISIA, on behalf of the interstellar government — "Unofficially, of courze" — has covertly bolstered the rebels for years. "Vithout our aid, zey vould have crumbled long ago." Although they have some brilliant computer programmers who help them stay one step ahead of the Health Police's monitoring device, the Med Computer, without the ISIA's advice and technical assistance they'd never survive. That's all the PCs need to know about the ISIA involvement, he adds, though he does admit the reason behind it is less altruistic than practical. "As long as ze Zickies maintain zeir oppozition — and our link to zem remains a zecret — Ryoc is no threat to ozzer worlds." Unfortunately, that link is about to be exposed and the rebels crushed.

The Set-Up

Word has reached the ISIA, Messerschmidt says, that the Health Police have intercepted several vital rebel communiques — "ve don't know how" — and are



The Roylett's Brig

Should the players wish more information on the cells in which their characters are incarcerated — probably seeking some point of weakness — describe the rooms as follows:

Each cell is a featureless cubicle, 10' × 10' × 10' in size. Once the door is shut, it appears to merge with the wall. Except for tiny holes along the top of the walls — atmosphere ports — no openings are visible. The walls, floor and ceiling are neutral in color and made of a tough but springy substance. Nothing any PC (even aliens with natural weaponry) can do will make an impression on it. No sounds reach the inmate's ears, and the temperature within the cell is adjusted to the captive's body temperature, so there is no sensation of heat or cold. Periods of light and darkness are adjustable and timed to the prisoner's normal wake-sleep cycles (though these can be subtly altered to manipulate the inmate's perception of passing time). The light seems to come directly from the ceiling, as does the easy-listening Muzak that is constantly playing.

Tasteless, but nutritious, food is provided three times daily, as is water. The sustenance appears from a hidden panel in the wall, and the containers cannot be moved. If a body part is left in the path of the closing panel, it closes around the limb without damaging it, then spits it out forcefully. A flash commode rises from the floor at mysteriously appropriate times (the PCs' life functions are monitored) and then recedes as quickly as it came. Uncooperative captives (trying starvation or some other tactic) can be gassed unconscious at any time.

The Asteroid Base

The details of the hidden base are unimportant to the scenario, unless the GM plans to use it again. If so, the GM can generate it to conform with his own plans. It is located in a thick asteroid belt — to deter detection — and built entirely inside a small asteroid. Those portions of it that are built out of the rock are electronically masked. Assume that it is far enough off regular shipping and exploratory star lanes that it would only be encountered by someone actively searching for it, and then only with a lot of skill behind the sensors — and a great deal of luck, too. The Organization has planned well. (It is, of course, their base, though they are representing it to the PCs as an ISIA installation.)

The exact location of the facility is up to the GM as well. It could be set in an asteroid belt in another star system — or even in one of the belts in the Core-Tiann system itself. The Organization's pact with HP Marshal Horaz Sutyn could make the latter feasible (see *The Plot*, p. 96).

Wilhelm Messerschmidt

Messerschmidt is not an ISIA operative at all, but is actually a high-ranking lieutenant in the Organization. It is he who conceived the idea of using a group of ordinary space adventurers as dupes in the Organization's plans for Survias (see *The Plot*, p. 96). And it is he who'll take the heat if the operation fails (literal heat — sun diving, anyone?). He intends to see that it doesn't. He believes he has chosen his foils well (see *Why Us?*, p. 96), and fully expects all to go as he's planned.

Continued on next page . . .



now planning an ambush to crush the Society. The trap they've set will not only catch all the SIC leaders in one place, but will also expose the ISIA's involvement with the rebels. Not only would all resistance to Ryoc's government die on Survias, but the dictator would have the perfect excuse to move militarily against Survias' neighboring worlds. After all, he explains, if the interstellar government is plotting against her, why shouldn't she grab all she can?

Should anyone be bold enough to point out that a single planet's military couldn't stand long against the combined might of the interstellar fleet, Messerschmidt will agree. "But she doesn't have to win. Ze effects of even a short conflict against fanatics such as ze Health Poleez — who virtually control ze military on Zurvias — would be devastating to ze community. Ezpecially zose worlds zat Ryoc ztrikes against. And ve could not legally act against her until she committed ze first aggression. No, zis whole think must be ztopped *before* ze Health Poleez break ze underground." He looks the captives over slowly, takes a long puff of his cigarette and smiles again. "And zat, my friendz, iz vere you come in."

An Offer You Can't Refuse

He says that the agency must maintain a low profile, while at the same time warning the rebels and the ISIA liaison on Survias of the coming trap. But even coded radio transmissions would be tricky at best, with the planetary monitoring system tied in to the HP Med Computer. The only way to head off disaster is to put a single operative down on the planet to take word to the rebels and ISIA's man on Survias. However, that operative needs cover. Because of the danger of compromise, the ISIA cannot provide that cover, nor the necessary transportation to Survias. If their involvement became known, it would only compound the offense in Ryoc's eyes.

The party, it turns out, is who Messerschmidt intends to have provide cover for his operative. They are to pilot their vessel (it's theirs now, even if it wasn't before) to Survias, posing as merchants looking to get in on some of the planet's lucrative trade contracts. They will, in fact, be carrying a valuable cargo of off-world pharmaceuticals — acne cream for the upcoming "Zit Awareness Week," a commodity sure to catch the eye of officials wanting to toady up to Ryoc. They'll be sure to be granted permission to land. They will have an extra crewhand aboard — the ISIA operative. They are to conduct their business on Survias while the ISIA's agent slips away and warns the rebels. That done, they can leave Survias — incidentally keeping any money they make off the cargo — after which they may drop off their passenger and go on about their business. Simple, no?

Messerschmidt ignores protests from the PCs. "Zilence!" he yells, losing his cool for a moment. "Zis iz not open to dizcussion." He will not take no for an answer. He tries persuasion first, calling upon the group's patriotism. If that doesn't work, he tries bribery — they can keep the profits from the sale of the pharmaceuticals. If that fails, he threatens to arrest them for drug smuggling, bringing in the cases of Killean plant (the raw material for the narcotic Kill-Krazy) that they "found" on the prisoners' ship. Finally, if all else fails he takes whichever PCs do not cooperate and holds them hostage for the behavior of their more-reasonable friends.

If the recruits are gutsy enough to push for more (after all, what have they got to lose?), Messerschmidt will also agree to sweeten the pot with an additional stipend — whatever the GM thinks they'll accept. (Allow skill rolls against Merchant or any other appropriate skill to try to get more. It won't matter, but they needn't know that.) He promises to supply them with whatever they require — within reason — to carry off the mission. He doesn't, however, provide them

with illegal weaponry or items that would be banned on Survias. The idea is for them to provide cover for his operative, not call undue attention to themselves.

That settled, Messerschmidt introduces them to the newest member of their crew, their friendly ISIA operative aboard — Betellia Zee.



She Walks Like a Woman But Talks Like a . . .

Through the pneumatic doors behind the group walks an extremely beautiful woman with long dark hair and exotic eyes, wearing a one-piece, well-coordinated belted body suit of the latest galactic fashion. She is short and lithe and moves with catlike grace. The PCs could be forgiven for doubting her capabilities as an ISIA operative on first glance. Until, that is, they look her in the eye and note the dangerous, no-nonsense stare she returns. Should anybody make any disparaging or sexist comment to or about her, she'll walk straight up to him — and knock him down with a lightning judo move. The offender won't even see it coming, much less be able to block it. If no one says anything offensive, the woman simply walks up to Messerschmidt's desk and stands at ease beside it, eying the PCs with distaste.

"Zis, my friendz, iz Betellia Zee," Messerschmidt announces, "vun of my best operatives. She'll be accompanyink you to Zurvias." Zee ignores any greetings offered, walking over to the group and looking each one over, making disparaging comments under her breath and shaking her head, as if she's hardly pleased to be undertaking a mission with the likes of them. Finally, she addresses them in a low, sultry voice:

"Well, Wilhelm tells me I'll be in your hands on this assignment — *not* that that should give you any funny ideas. So let's get one thing straight: I'm in charge on this mission. You do as I say, from start to finish. Follow my every command. Fail to do so, and the consequences could be devastating — both for the interstellar community . . . and for you. The latter, I personally guarantee. Any objections?" If there are, and she hasn't yet demonstrated her capabilities, she does so now with the largest and most imposing looking man. Even if no one objects, she still gives them a taste of what she can do, firmly establishing her leadership (if not her popularity). This done she looks them over again. If any of the party members is wearing anything overtly fashionable — a real leather jacket, for instance — Zee will demonstrate her other remarkable talent: her

Wilhelm Messerschmidt (Continued)

He's arrogant, self-confident and just a bit of a megalomaniac. So far, his willingness to take chances has paid off, and he's risen far in the criminal empire. He expects this coup to propel him to full VIP status in the "Big O," with a virtual suzerainty over Survias.

No game statistics are provided for Messerschmidt, nor are any needed. If the GM plans to use him again (or thinks his PCs are actually crazy enough to attack the man in his own sanctuary), he may design the Organization kingpin as desired within the following guidelines.

Messerschmidt is human, appearing in his mid- to late-50s, with slick graying hair and a hard look. He speaks with a thick German accent, which is totally fake. He has an eyepatch and a barely noticeable scar running down his left cheek from just below the patch to the corner of his mouth — he says that it is the legacy of a street fight in his youth, but actually he just cut himself shaving. He is compact and muscular, of average height and weight, with a definite air of command. He is a master manipulator as well, which has helped him weather several factional struggles within the interstellar syndicate over his years as a member. Messerschmidt will take no backtalk from the recruits once he's presented them with their "mission." He expects to be obeyed, respected and even feared. He believes his guise as an ISIA official should instill such feelings in the PCs and will deal with them harshly if not. But he will not jeopardize the plan. The dupes must unwittingly carry out their part, and Messerschmidt will use all his manipulative ability — and everything he can hold against them — to see that they do so.

Why Us?

At some point, the stooges will probably wonder "Why us?" How did the ISIA (i.e., the Organization) chose *them* to shanghai and use in their covert operation on Survias? Well, they'll probably never find out. Messerschmidt isn't going to tell them. He'll mumble things such as "zat's clazzified" or "need-to-know bazis" and clam up. After all, the ISIA has its secrets, he'll imply, and it's for their own protection that they not know any more than they have to. "In ze unlikely event you get caught and interrogated — not zat zat vill happen, of course." And after they realize they've been had, it'll be too late to worry about it. Even should the GM follow through on this adventure and the victims someday confront their captors, the Organization isn't going to tell them any of its secrets either.

Of course, the *players* may insist on knowing later on. Just how *did* the Organization get onto them and know just where to find them in space so they could be intercepted? The exact answer must depend on what type of characters the players are portraying and how the campaign works. Here are some possibilities:

Criminal Types. It's unlikely that the activities of any worthwhile criminal group could have escaped the notice of the Organization at one time or another. Perhaps they are even members of the Big O at a low level — whether they know it or not. From there, making patsies of the PCs was no big step. All that was necessary for Messerschmidt was to tie into the Organization's computers and find some likely candidates who would be in the right place at the right time.

Free Traders. All those who engage in this type of commerce have to file flight plans. The Organization undoubtedly has access through its many operatives to such records. Again, all that was necessary was to find a vessel that would be traveling through the area at the right time, then determine from its flight plan the best point to intercept it.

The Luck of the Draw. Perhaps Messerschmidt had several pseudo-Patrol cruisers on alert at several points in space where independent starships frequently passed. The characters' ship just happened to be the first one to stumble into the Organization's web. The odds were that somebody would eventually submit to Messerschmidt's blackmail. Perhaps others refused and were ejected out the nearest airlock, their frozen bodies slowly orbiting the asteroid station. (The sight of one of those passing by the viewport could make a powerful argument for the captives doing as Messerschmidt wishes . . .)

uncanny fashion sense. "By the way," she says. "That is an adorable jacket you have on. Where *did* you get it?" She's quite sincere, even if she's talking to someone she just knocked down. If anyone is color-blind or is wearing something gaudy, she will react to this as well, saying "Oh my God! I can't believe you would go out in public in that horrible outfit. Are you color-blind?"

Messerschmidt ignores these little outbursts, confirming Zee's leadership on the mission. He dismisses the group if there are no further questions. (Even if there are, he'll answer only those absolutely necessary to their carrying out their part in the scheme.) They are to meet Agent Zee at their ship, which is even now being readied for takeoff. Everything they need — and will be allowed — will be provided at the ship. Messerschmidt wishes them success on their mission, eliciting a derisive snort from Zee, and they are escorted back to the docking bay by the same armed party that brought them to Messerschmidt.

Regardless of the PCs' opinions of Betellia Zee, they probably would think even less of her if they knew that the beautiful woman was actually a male. Agent Z, his usual code name, is completely encased in a female sensa-skin body suit that makes him appear to be an attractive woman. Even all but the highest TL sensor probe would register him as female. His natural ability to act like a woman further gives the total illusion that he is a member of the opposite sex. Agent Z has always found the ability to switch sexes almost at will to be amusing . . . as well as a highly desirable attribute in his business. It has also proved very confusing to the many enemies he's made in his career. Which, incidentally, isn't as an ISIA operative, but as a deadly assassin in the pay of the Organization!

The Plot

The adventurers were not picked up by the Patrol nor taken to an ISIA base at all. They were intercepted by the Organization — the shadowy criminal conspiracy that controls most that is illegal in this and many other sectors of space. The Organization recently took on a contract to help overthrow the government of Survias. Horaz Sutyn, Chief Medical Marshal of the Health Police, has decided that he would make a much better ruler than Ryoc, even though he helped her murder her husband and assume the dictatorship of the planet in the first place. Sutyn, however, cannot act openly or even through his own agents, due to the Med Computer's constant monitoring of all quarters of Survian society — even the inner sanctums of the Health Police.

Through offworld contacts, Sutyn managed to arrange a deal with the Organization. In exchange for a greater sphere of influence on Survias (virtually nonexistent under Ryoc's paranoid rule), the Big O agreed to send an assassin to Survias to eliminate Ryoc, leaving Sutyn free to assume control of the government in the confusion. With a few Health Police toadies, Sutyn has paved the way for the assassin and will provide assistance in his getaway. Once he's in power, the Organization will be free to extend its operations onto Survias, working in partnership with Sutyn. The lot of the average citizen will change little — except for having access to the high-priced illegal drugs, vice, gambling and other imports of the criminal combine, now banned under Ryoc.

Of course, to keep the interstellar community ignorant, Sutyn must be able to point elsewhere for the source of Survias' sudden upheavals. That's why the Organization gave control of the plot to Wilhelm Messerschmidt, a ranking Organization lieutenant known for his devious tactics. Messerschmidt's solution was to pick a group of dupes, coerce them into transporting the assassin to Survias and leave them holding the bag of dead bones. And as the dupes believe themselves working for the ISIA, the Organization's role will remain unknown. Sutyn can then claim off-world interference in Survias' domestic affairs — an

ISIA assassination in support of the outlawed SIC — further muddying the waters. In the resulting investigation by stellar authorities into ISIA wrongdoing, Sutyn, as the ranking authority on Survias, can quietly consolidate his rule, and the Organization can move in unnoticed. The Organization assassin is “Betellia Zee” (a.k.a. Agent Z). All in all, it’s a perfect scheme for all involved, except of course for our intrepid heroes, the dupes . . .

We’re Off to See the Autarch, the Paranoid Autarch Ryoc

The dupes are left at their ship in the docking bay of the Organization station. They can see by looking through the viewscreens that the “ISIA” base is actually built into a large asteroid; no other asteroids can be seen close by, but checking the ship’s sensors will indicate several are near.

The ship is fueled, loaded and ready, and the course to Survias set unalterably into the ship’s astrogation computer. The crew finds that the hold is indeed stocked with 500 crates of Zitgon-5, the most advanced acne cream in the known galaxy. One of the cabins is locked and marked “off-limits.” The guards waiting outside will explain that this is Betellia’s cabin, and that it is not to be disturbed. Attempts to break into the cabin are fruitless, the door will only open for Zee.

In the ship’s computer are full records of Betellia Zee as a crew member of the ship. She is listed as co-pilot and assistant cargo master. The latter gives her authority to contact and deal with the trade authorities on Survias in their initial dealings. If necessary, false backgrounds for the other crew members are provided as well, establishing their credentials as trade speculators and registering their purchase of a consignment of pharmaceuticals on their last stop.

The agents also find that the vessel is fully stocked with provisions, supplies — and personal weapons! These include blasters, stunners and other weapons any independent vessel might carry for protection. The Organization knows it would look too suspicious if the group were totally unarmed when carrying an important cargo consignment. However, should the PCs try to turn them on Betellia when she boards — or anyone else — they’ll have a sad surprise. The guns won’t fire unless Betellia allows it. Each has been rebuilt with a special triggering sequence that must be followed before it will operate. Only Betellia knows the sequence. She’ll provide it only in the direst emergency — such as if the ship is stopped and boarded by pirates (which won’t happen unless the GM wishes to extend the voyage a bit and give the crew a first-hand look at how deadly Betellia is in action). It would require a roll against Electronic Operations (Weapons) skill at -4 (-6 without the proper tools) to alter the weapons to fire normally. Even if someone managed to succeed, Betellia has an electronic device that will shut down all the weapons aboard — other than hers — or cause them to explode, doing appropriate damage to the holder.

They’ll further discover that the radio on their ship can only be operated with Betellia’s blessing. It is similarly “locked” so that the PCs can’t use it. Betellia has another electronic device that frees it for communications. She’ll only allow them to use it when she is there to monitor their conversations. A roll on Electronic Operations (Communications), with the same modifiers as for fixing their weapons, is necessary to allow them free operation of the radio. If they succeed with anything less than a critical success, however, a trip device alerts Betellia.

What the searchers won’t know, unless they find the minute listening devices planted aboard their ship is that they are being bugged (A careful search specifically for bugs and a Vision roll at -4 is required; Electronic Operation (surveillance) adds +3 to the attempt). Organization agents outside are listening to them now, and Betellia is able to eavesdrop on them whenever she’s in her cabin. So any plots the PCs discuss will be known by Agent Zee as soon as they’re hatched. The Organization has indeed planned well.

“Betellia Zee”/Agent Z

Age: 36 (as a female, she looks much younger thanks to sensa-skin technology); black hair (shoulder length as Betellia, close-cropped otherwise) and cold, piercing dark blue eyes; 5’ 6”, 130 lbs.

ST 10, DX 17, IQ 14, HT 14.

Speed 7.75, Move 7.

Dodge 8, Parry 9 (13 in unarmed combat).

Advantages: Absolute Timing, Alertness +4, Ambidexterity, Charisma +1, Combat Reflexes, Double-Jointed, Danger Sense, High Pain Threshold, Intuition, Luck, Night Vision, Patron (The Organization — very powerful on 9 or less), Strong Will, Toughness +1, Very Beautiful (as Betellia only), Voice.

Disadvantages: Assassin’s Code of Honor (Do *anything* to carry out contract), Odious Personal Habit: Cocky behavior, Duty to the Organization (15 or less), Enemies (The Patrol and the ISIA on 6 or less), Fanaticism, Delusion: Invincible.

Continued on next page . . .



"Betellia Zee"/Agent Z (Continued)

Quirks: Dislikes failure; Emotionless; Merciless; Really enjoys playing the role of a woman; Collects antique Judy Garland recordings.

Skills: Acrobatics-17, Acting-16, Astrogation-12, Beam Weapons (All)-19, Camouflage-15, Computer Operation-13, Demolitions-15, Diplomacy-12, Disguise-16, Driving (ATV, Hovercraft)-15, Electronics Operation (Communications, Holographics, Force Shields, Security Systems, Sensors, Weapons)-13, Escape-18, Fast-Draw (knife, pistols, rifles, shuriken)-17, First-Aid-14, Forgery-13, Free Fall-15, Guns/TL 8+ (All)-18, Gunner (Starship Weapons)-18, Holdout-15, Hypnotism-13, Judo-18, Karate-18, Knife-18, Lockpicking-14, Merchant-12, Pickpocket-14, Piloting (All Spacecraft)-16, Poisons-15, Scrounging (primarily for weapons)-14, Sex Appeal-14 (to males only), Shadowing-15, Speed Load (All Weapons skilled in)-16, Stealth-18, Streetwise-15, Tactics-14, Throwing-16, Vacc Suit-13.

Agent Z was genetically designed, raised and intensively trained by the Organization to be a supreme assassin. He is among the most skilled in his craft, and is probably the single most dangerous individual and the finest judge of fashion the PCs will ever encounter.

Although intensely loyal to the Organization and dedicated to his profession, Z is not a robot or a drone. He has a mind of his own. The Organization wouldn't have it any other way. In the types of missions they send him on, the ability to think creatively and make decisions on the spot is a must. Agent Z has few failures on his record. He is cold and ruthless and does whatever is necessary to get the job done.

One of Agent Z's specialties is his ability to disguise himself realistically as a female. Sensa-skin body suits and his acting skill completely transform him into a woman — a very deadly one. Because of this, what little information the ISIA and the Patrol have on Z is divided between two files — one of a male assassin and one of a female. No one has yet connected them.

Continued on next page . . .

Between a Rock and an Asteroid Base

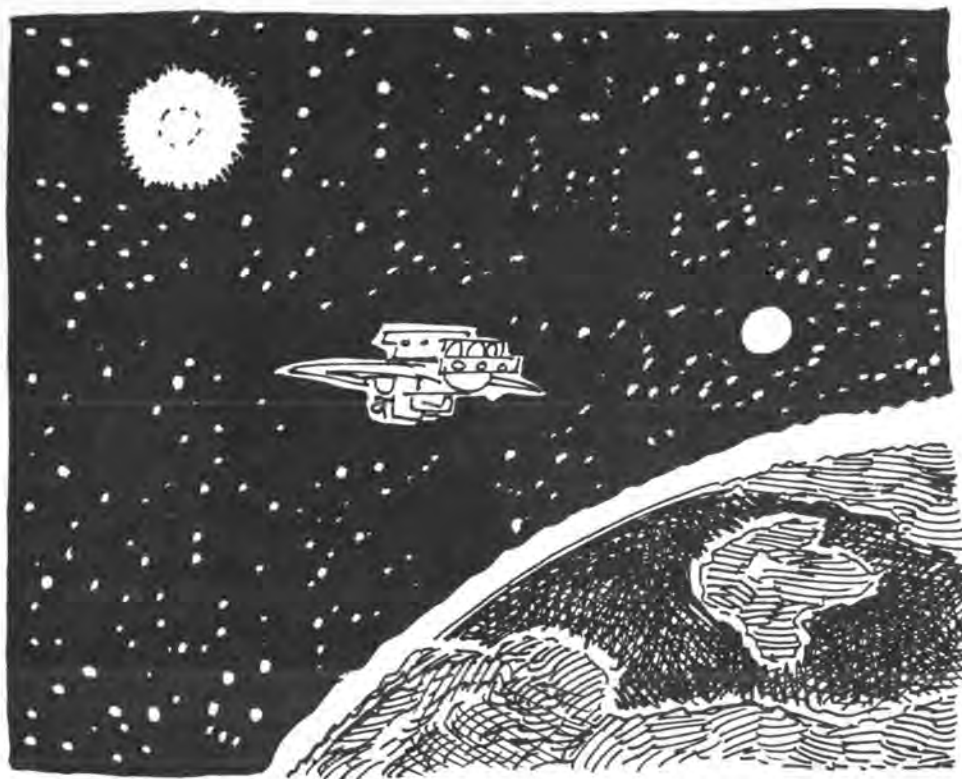
Betellia soon joins the recruits aboard the vessel and announces that they will be embarking in 10 minutes. Upon looking about the ship, the agent makes several disparaging comments about the color of the walls, the lack of plants and knickknacks and the overall drabness of the whole place. She takes her gear to her cabin, seemingly opening the door with ease. (It has been coded to respond to a microscopic transponder embedded in her body.) She rejoins the others in minutes, strapping herself into the pilot's seat. She instructs all those not required on the bridge to go to their cabins and strap in — they're in for a rough ride.

Should anyone object or request to pilot the ship themselves, Zee reminds them that she is in charge. Unless they want to risk their lives needlessly in an asteroid collision, she suggests they prepare for take off — now! If the ship has actual view ports on the bridge, she closes the collision shields. If it uses a computerized viewscreen, she shuts it off. She tells them she'll be flying them through the asteroid field with the aid of the computer and doesn't need any distractions — especially from them. Then she sets the controls and blasts off from the station.

Unless the crew is as foolhardy enough to interfere, Zee gets them through the asteroid field safely. The GM may wish to describe several bumps and



glancing collisions against the hull to heighten the suspense. Once they are in open space, Zee activates the FTL drive and leaves the rest up to the programmed course in the computer. She'll retire to her cabin, where she'll spend much of the voyage, preparing for her mission on Survias. Except for any interactions between Zee and the crew or any surprises the GM decides to throw in, the remainder of the trip to Survias is uneventful.



Surviving on Survias

The PCs and Betellia arrive in the Survias system without further incident. They are immediately challenged by Survias system defense boats, most likely by the Health Police political/medical officer aboard. Zee handles all communications and gives their cover story: they are merchants wishing to sell a cargo of pharmaceuticals on Survias. Betellia allows the vessels to scan the cargo hold, which should be enough to guarantee them free passage to Survias (especially after she promises the HP officer a nice cut of the profits). One of the boats escorts the ship on to Survias, where Betellia can make radio contact with the Survias Space Authority and the planet's Trade Authority. She quickly negotiates a meeting with the latter upon planetfall. Then she pilots the ship to the starport.

Survias has a Class V starport at the capital city of Ryoc and a Class IV starport at Plantersville. The main starport at Ryoc is Zee's target. If the vessel isn't capable of planetary landings, it can dock at the orbiting starport above the planet. Then the crew can shuttle to the surface.

Before they embark, Betellia gives the crew orders on what they can and cannot take with them. Survias has a Control Rating of 6, so no weapons are allowed. All types of body armor are prohibited to citizens and visitors alike, but she seems oddly indifferent as to whether or not the PCs wear anything except very obvious suits of armor. She also tells them that they can take any other legal personal effects that they want — though she advises them to leave such items aboard ship.

Immediately upon leaving the ship, Zee and the party are met by a trade delegation from Survias, a group of pitiful bootlickers, who are practically slaving over the precious Zitgon-5. She quickly makes arrangements with them and leaves them to examine the goods. Formal negotiations will take place in a couple of days, after the delegates and the customs officials and the Health Police have each had a change to examine and evaluate the cargo. Meanwhile, Zee and the rest of "her crew" will be afforded VIP accommodations within Ryoc City. She accepts for everyone (allowing no dissension). They will be

"Betellia Zee"/Agent Z (Continued)

In his current incarnation, Agent Z wears a full, form-fitting body suit. It is cleverly crafted to conceal several hidden pockets that hold miniature gadgets. The suit is woven of Energy Cloth, a TL11 ballistic fiber interwoven with a fiber of thermal-superconducting material (it also releases stains in the wash — one of the reasons Agent Z chose it). It provides PD 3 and DR 20 against flamers, cutting and crushing attacks (including bullets), DR 10 against sonics and impaling attacks. Damage from lasers is halved before the DR 10 is subtracted. (See pp. U92-93.) The suit also has built-in TL11 distortion circuitry, which gives a -5 penalty to any attempts to register the wearer on radar or a bio-scanner, and TL10 sensor-controlled chameleon abilities, changing the suit's color to match the background within 5 seconds of activation (-3 to all attack and spotting rolls, -10 to attacks with IR-guided projectiles). Z can also change the suit's color manually to match the fashions of the day. Finally, the suit has limited "slick suit" capabilities, giving a +1 to Escape attempts and a +2 PD against grappling attacks, lassos and bolas.

Betellia's belt has a holodistort function and a sonic screen; the latter creates a 3-yard-diameter privacy field; sounds inside the field can't be heard outside it and vice versa. It also provides a DR 10 against sonic attacks (and +2 against stunners).

Among the items Betellia has concealed on her person are a holdout laser (1d-1 damage; see pp. S55) disguised as a pheromone perfume spray (adds +2 to reactions to Betellia, lasts for four hours); a TL10 electronic lockpick kit (p. S46); a small poison/drug kit with a miniature pneumospray hypo (p. S70) and several single-dose vials of various poisons or drugs (GM's choice); and several other miniature electronic devices described in the text (including some implanted in her body!). In her baggage that she keeps in her cabin are a living disguise kit (p. S46) with extra pre-molded sensa-skin masks, both male and female, so she can further change her appearance if necessary. She also has a communicator with which she can tune in to the Organization listening devices planted throughout the PCs' ship.

The Organization

The shadowy syndicate known as "the Organization" is the largest criminal empire ever to exist. Its influence stretches through nearly all interstellar states. The "Big O" as it is also known, dominates interstellar drug trafficking, gun running, prostitution, the black market and murder for hire.

On many worlds, criminal activities require the approval of the Organization — a piece of the action always goes to the Big O. And on almost *any* world with a population of more than a few hundred, there's an Organization contact. Organization VIPs live like royalty, often on syndicate-controlled worlds where crime bosses are feudal lords. The Organization also sponsors Sanctuary worlds (see p. S121).

Recently, the Organization has begun seeking greater ties with certain corrupt planetary — and even interstellar — governments in an effort to obtain even more power. Going into partnership with certain world leaders provides the criminal empire with additional ways to circumvent the laws of interstellar space. Survias is the Big O's most recent target — all the more so because, until now, it has been denied even the smallest foothold on the planet. The Organization has big plans for Survias, once the elimination of Ryoc IV is complete.



transported to the Ryoc Arms Hotel, the best in the city, and provided a suite. Any expenses will be charged against the worth of the cargo, once a deal has been closed. The delegates wish them a wonderful stay in the modern, pristine — and *healthful* — city of Ryoc. But first, of course, they have to go through both starport and Survias customs.

Meet the Mercs

Although maintained by the interstellar authority, as are all starports in the sector, the Survias starport is manned and run by the Summersun Mercenary Co-op, on special contract with the interstellar government. (Or according to treaty between Survias and its neighboring planets if there is no interstellar state in the campaign.) The starport is considered extra-territorial, outside the authority of the Survias government, and a neutral zone for interstellar and planetary embassies to set up their offices and conduct their businesses. However, because the Survias government — and *especially* the Health Police — is so repugnant to the representatives of most other worlds, as well as the stellar authority, none wanted to take responsibility for running the starport there on a regular basis. Hence the Summersun mercenaries were employed.

The Summersun Mercenary Co-op was contracted by the interstellar government to handle all starport duties that might involve contact with the Health Police. Thus they conduct administrative functions, customs control and starport security. To assist in the latter, the mercs keep a full company of fully-armed and power-armored combat troops at the starport, ready at a moment's notice to defend the facility. (Not to mention to intimidate the Health Police on the other side.) The mercs also keep several system defense boats of their own at the high port and in orbit — a precaution against pirates and terrorists (and overzealous HP patrol ships attempting to chase refugees into the neutral territory of the port).

It is widely believed that the Summersun mercs are the only neutral force in the area able to stomach close association with the Health Police. Actually, the mercs loathe the HP as much as — if not more than — anyone else. They're just too professional to let it show ("professional" is an understatement — on duty they're so uptight, they might as well be androids). Among themselves, when off-duty, the mercs refer to the Health Police as "Slugs." They never call the HP this directly — unless the Slugs get *too* offensive. Most of the mercs, however, would just *love* for the HP to try something — such as chasing political refugees onto the starport grounds. The power-armored troops especially would like to go on a Slug shoot. They're just itching for an excuse for some action.

Why, How Did *That* Get There?

The first phase of Survias customs is conducted by the Summersun mercs. The visitors are shuttled through a series of TL10 scanners. Only if anything grossly illegal shows up, especially anything outlawed by interstellar law, are the visitors stopped and searched manually. Any such contraband is confiscated and the offender given a warning; their current trade status with the Survias gives them some limited immunity in the matter, so they won't be arrested — this time. Betellia's higher-tech distortion gear gets all her equipment through unnoticed, easily defeating the mercs' scanners.

If anyone is carrying anything considered illegal on Survias — weapons, armor or other controlled items — the mercs inform the visitor of the illegality of the item and offer to hold it for him until his return. But if he declines, they let him carry it on through. Similarly, they advise anyone who looks ill or could be taken for such by the HP to remain at the starport until the return of his comrades. But again, if the visitor insists, they let him go on his way. (If not,

Zee insists for him.) The mercs are firmly courteous throughout. Should anyone wise off or prove difficult, however, one of the searching mercs will smile, cite interstellar regulation CE-14.5789-K7 paragraph G, concerning proper conduct during starport customs procedures and the Summersun Mercenary Co-op's authority in this matter. If the visitor would like, the merc will politely offer to summon his next in command, the second sergeant of platoon Gamma, of the 293rd Mercenary Regiment. Or if the newcomer would like to file a formal complaint, the merc will gladly provide the proper forms and the address of the Summersun Mercenary Co-op Central office on Summersun (Summersun IV), Old Frontiers Sector, -3/8/-4. In fact, the merc can, if needed, recite the 30 tenets of the Interstellar Starport Code . . . backwards!

Following the mercs' inspection, the group is directed to the second part of the customs process. This takes place on Survias territory and is conducted by the Health Police, giving the visitors their first actual sight of the dreaded organization's representatives. It makes the mercs' inspection look like a cake walk.

I'm Okay — You're Not Looking So Hot

Once on Survian territory, the newcomers are met by a group of Health Police and escorted into a waiting room inside the customs building. For some reason, these Survians show the group none of the fawning deference they received from the trade delegation. Zee takes one of the escorts aside and tells him something in a low voice, inaudible to the rest of the crew. Immediately, the young HP's attitude changes; he becomes apologetic and quickly takes her off through a doorway, not to be seen by the group until later. After another half hour, the party is shuffled rudely into a small examination room, where the customs procedures begin.

Unknown to the PCs, there has been a mixup at the port authority office. They were not recognized as the trade delegation by the Health Police officials. They were supposed to receive the VIP treatment, which is quick and efficient, requiring a brief sterilization process, a few painless immunizations and a short physical check-up. What they receive is the common visitor process, much more extensive and degrading. Betellia recognized the mixup and rectified the situation . . . for herself! But she thought it would be funny to leave the rest to go through the "cattle" process and fend for themselves. She will, of course, apologize later, saying "Oh dear, I thought you all were right behind me."

The non-VIP procedures are a bewildering series of inspections, tests, "immunization" shots, quarantine methods and just plain paranoia. The Health Police customs officials are nearly insufferable — like all HP, they recognize themselves as the supreme authorities on the planet, after Ryoc herself. They think common people are beneath association (-6 reaction) and like ugly common people even less. They do, however, treat attractive people better than normal, making the illogical connection that if someone looks healthy, he is healthy. This means that all reaction modifiers for appearance are doubled. Skinny or Overweight visitors receive a -2 reaction. Fat visitors get a -4. Likewise, anyone missing a limb receives a -2 regardless of whether or not he has a bionic replacement. The HP are offensively overt about these reactions, letting a healthy-looking visitor skip some of the more painful or degrading inspections and bearing down on others, "Whoa, look at this blimp! Looks like he's stopped up. Maybe this long needle will make him pop!"

If any of the visitors protest that they are part of a VIP trade delegation, the ranking Health Police officer will laugh and say, "Sure you are, buddy, and I'm Ryoc's personal physician." Despite his sarcasm, he will send someone to check it out, just in case. Someone will inform him of the mistake about halfway

Diversions Aboard

It's possible the PCs will have resigned themselves to their fate and will make no trouble whatsoever for Agent Zee on the starflight to Survias. If that's the case, and the GM has no desire to complicate the scenario, the voyage can be covered pretty quickly and the action move right on to Survias.

If, on the other appendage, the PCs decide to try to circumvent their commitment to Messerschmidt and make a run for it, the GM will have to play out Betellia's responses. Here are a few tricks resourceful players may try and how the GM can deal with them:

Adjusting the life-support system in Betellia's room. This won't work. Organization technicians have added a fail-safe system to Betellia's cabin that will compensate for a loss of air or change in its composition. The system will also alert Agent Zee to the tampering and can compensate for changes in temperature, gravity and other life-support components.

Drugging or poisoning her food. Betellia prepares her own meals in her cabin, testing any food or water before ingesting it if she suspects poison. (And if they've discussed it beforehand, she'll know of the plot.)

Ganging up on her. Let them try. If they've talked it over, Agent Zee will be aware of it and ready for them. Unless any of the PCs are martial arts experts, she should be able to deal with them handily — singly or even in a group. If anyone actually succeeds in seriously threatening her welfare, Zee will play her trump card (see below).

Escaping the vessel. The Organization has disabled or removed any device that would allow this.

Sabotaging or destroying the ship. If they resort to this, they're really desperate — or bluffing. Betellia will call their bluff. If they're not, she'll die with them rather than willingly fail her mission.

Betellia's Trump Card

Should the PCs manage to carry out a successful mutiny against the assassin, Betellia will warn them that it's doomed. Unless they let her go and continue on the mission, she will destroy the ship. At the base, she'll tell them, the ISIA planted a bomb aboard (or rigged the engines to explode on signal) in the event the recruits got cold feet. She can activate the device via a subcutaneous detonator planted in her body — and will if they persist.

(It's the GM's option whether or not the bomb actually exists. It's also up to him to determine if Betellia would really set it off. That would end things pretty quickly. And messily.)

through the customs process, saving the party a little discomfort. Unfortunately for the newcomers, this doesn't happen until later.

Funny Stuff at the Starport

Recalcitrant PCs might try one last time to escape the clutches of Zee and the "ISIA" by making a break for it at the starport. If any do so, Zee will "explain" to anyone observing — the trade delegates for instance — that the poor crewman simply was so eager for shore leave he forgot they had a job to do. Been in space too long. Then she'll tell the others, sotto voce, not to leave or she'll track them down and make them *very* sorry — "Blood doesn't go with anything, if you know what I mean." And she'll take off after whoever's left. Any who think they can get back into the ship and take off will find the controls frozen — only Zee can free them.

Should a fleeing crewman attempt to seek sanctuary in one of the planetary or stellar government embassies, the GM could discourage him by allowing him to spot an ISIA office just inside the front door of each one — with people there looking *straight at him*. Even if he tries to hide here or elsewhere at the starport, Zee will find him and bring him back, even if she has to enlist the Summersun mercs' help; she can concoct a pretty good cover story.

With any luck, however, most PCs will be sufficiently cowed by now and won't give Betellia any trouble at the starport.

The Summersun Mercs

The mercs manning the Survias starport are troops of the Summersun Mercenary Co-op, based on Summer (Summersun IV) in the Old Frontiers sector. (See *GURPS Space Atlas*, p. 54, for history and background on the Co-op.) The mercs are as tough as they come, and most are seasoned battle troops. Survias is not exactly a punishment assignment for the Summers, as they are known throughout the sector. But it isn't exactly a plum either. As a result, most quickly get disgruntled with the duty here and start looking forward to their next rotation. Still, each is a professional to the core and will carry out his duty as diligently as possible.

It's unlikely anyone will be foolish enough to get on the wrong side of any of the Summers. Conflict with the mercs would be pure insanity, especially if the visitors harbor any hope later on of seeking sanctuary at the starport. Just in case, here are some stats for typical Summersun mercenaries.

Continued on next page . . .

The "Cattle" Procedures

All the visitors are run past a series of TL10 scanners. This detects any illegal weapons or gear at this point; the HP remove it from the PCs and drop it down a flash incinerator. This includes any medical equipment. On Survias, it's a crime for anyone other than the Health Police or any HP-licensed physician to possess any medical equipment. Can't have such commodities in untrained hands, can we? (The searchers will not recognize any medical accreditation from anywhere off Survias, but if a trained surgeon or physician spouts off impressive medical jargon, they will react to this person at a +2.) Anyone carrying illegal items will be "written up" and his name passed on to Health Police Central for "observation" while on Survias. Obviously, anyone trying to smuggle anything illegal onto their beautiful world is bordering on mental illness and must be watched, ere he break down with total, contaminating madness. Mental illness is, of course, illegal on Survias, as are all other forms of sickness. Any more signs of sickness will be dealt with as a full medical emergency!



Second is an interview. A man wearing a formal Health Police uniform comes in with a clipboard. He sits down with each visitor and asks a series of probing questions about that person's medical history. Many of these questions follow the format, "Have you ever been to (Planet Name)." After a few of these questions, an IQ roll lets the interviewee realize that all the planets named so far have been plague-contaminated worlds! If the PCs have been to plague worlds in the campaign and try to lie about it, the official has already downloaded their ship's records and knows that they have. Another question asked is "Are there any diseases to which you know you are immune?" If the visitor is immune by reason of *exposure*, he may be a carrier! The answers to the interview questions don't matter to the adventure, but they should make the PCs sweat a little.

Next, the PCs are strip-searched. Every body cavity is examined for sign of infection, with no consideration given to separating members of the opposite sex. Following this examination, the party members are subjected to further indignities. Cell and blood samples are taken to make certain they are not harboring some hidden disease. Tubes are shoved down their throat and up other parts of their anatomy to take intestinal and stomach scrapings. As they watch, their clothing and any personal items are dropped into flash incinerators and destroyed — “to kill any microbes or other contaminants our scanners might have missed.”

Then they are given 1d+3 painful immunization shots — one right after another. In the same spot — whatever spot the victim says he wants it in least, when asked. And the Health Police medics use actual needles (big, dull ones), not the pneumospray hypods that the VIP treatment calls for.

Following the initial series of shots (“Initial?”), the PCs are led as a group into a large featureless booth. The HP medic who does so then shuts the door behind them, adding at the last minute: “Oh, yes, close your eyes.” As soon as the PCs do so, they feel intense heat for several seconds and see through their eyelids a great brightness. When it ends, they can open their eyes to see that *they* have been put through a flash-sterilization process. All their body hair — plus a layer of their outer epidermis — has been burned off, and they are covered with a layer of fine, white ash. Then they are hit by powerful streams of disinfectant spray. After being hosed off, they are baked dry by a final wave of heat, then released from the sterilization chamber.

Finally, the PCs are about to be given a last set of shots. Just before the HP medics begin to jab away, a young sentry comes running in shouting “Wait! Wait!” He informs the medics and the presiding HP officer of the visitors’ VIP status. The group should get some satisfaction seeing the arrogant trooper turn white as a sheet. In fact, if anyone thinks to comment on his condition — saying something like “You look sick!” — they will have the pleasure of seeing the officer carted off by his courteous, but adamant, subordinates. From then on, the newcomers are treated with incredible deference. They are whisked through the remaining VIP treatments and told that due to the error, their stay at the Ryoc Arms Hotel would be compliments of the Health Police.

Together Again

The visitors are given replacements for their flash-incinerated clothing. Each is provided with a form-fitting white body suit. In fact, except for the color, each suit is identical to the one Betellia wears. As they finish dressing, they are rejoined by Agent Zee — her suit now as white as theirs.

Zee apologizes for the misunderstanding, subtly twisting it around into a reprimand: “You really need to pay more attention to what’s going on around you.”

Zee and the PCs are each given a special wristcomp. They are told that its function is to monitor their vital signs so that should they become injured or . . . ill . . . the Med Computer will be alerted instantly and Health Police medics sent to help them. Actually, as Zee at least is well aware, the comps are also designed to monitor the wearers’ conversations and keep tabs on their whereabouts at all times; she is prepared to deal with the devices when the time comes. The group is told that they must wear their wristcomps during their entire visit. Should anyone remove one, his vital signs will cease to register in the Med Computer, and he’ll be declared legally dead. And dead people aren’t allowed to wander around Survias. Flash-cremation is the required procedure.

Finally, anyone who had legal personal items destroyed by the quarantine process is given cheap Survias replacements. They function — but just barely.

The Summersun Mercs (Continued)

All mercs at the starport have ST 12, DX 14, IQ 12 and HT 13. Advantages include Legal Enforcement Powers (within the starport only), Combat Reflexes, Patron (Summersun Mercenary Co-op) and a Reputation for toughness and fair play (+2); officers have the Military Rank advantage. Disadvantages include the Mercenary’s Code of Honor (always fulfill the contract; never leave your buddy behind; avenge dishonorable acts against the company), Duty to the Co-op and Intolerance to the Health Police. Skills include Beam Weapons-14, Guns (Electromag Grenade Launchers)-14, Battlesuit-13, Gunner (Laser)-12, Tactics-12. Officers also have Administration-12 and Strategy-13. Other military skills are also quite common.

Officers and customs personnel are armed with stunners and wear combat infantry dress (p. S62). Regular security teams are armed with either blast rifles or stun rifles and wear infantry combat armor (p. S62). The combat company is armed with blast rifles, electromag grenade launchers, flamers and galling lasers and wears powered combat armor (pp. S62-63). (GMs owning *Ultra-Tech* may arm the mercs with other weapons found there as well.)

All the mercs are highly trained soldiers, well-disciplined and duty-oriented. In any situation where there is a breach of law, they efficiently quote the relevant statute and inform the offender of his options. This can get quite tedious if all a PC did was drop gum on the concourse floor (which is merely a misdemeanor in the starport — in Survias territory it would be a capital crime).



Beware the Health Police



Survias ID Cards

All Survians and visitors to the planet must carry official Survian ID cards with them at all times. The cards are plastic "smart cards" that have the holder's complete medical history and current level of healthiness (as determined by their latest weekly check-up). This health rating is, conveniently, the same as a PC's current HT level.

When visited by Health Police troopers in the adventure, the visitors' cards will be taken, scanned and handed back to the PCs. Very healthy people get reaction bonuses from the HP troopers — +1 for every point of HT above 12. Those with a HT below 12 will get a corresponding reaction penalty. Of course, the HP themselves are very healthy (HT of 14 or more), and many of them have appearance bonuses as well (meaning they all like *each other* a lot).

That's because, like the wristcomps, they, too, contain monitoring and tracking devices. The Health Police take no chances with potentially infectious visitors. In fact, even the new jump suits are bugged. (Betellia retains her original suit, changed in color via its chameleon capabilities.)

Sight-Seeing on Survias

"That's Ryoc's Statue there on Ryoc Square alongside Ryoc Street at the corner of Ryoc Avenue . . ."

The party is then escorted by their assigned Health Police guides to a waiting open-topped hover limousine. Of the two HP, one drives while the other acts as their "tour guide" on the way to the Ryoc Arms Hotel. The trip itself takes about 20 minutes. On the way, their guide — Health Police Lieutenant Vernliy — provides them with a rather thick pamphlet entitled "Do's and Don'ts on Survias — A Tourist's Rulebook." It covers a bewildering list of taboos, from spitting on the sidewalk (a capital crime) to "exchanging body fluids with a native." One notable section concerns joking about sickness. Like bombs in starports, sickness on Survias is not a joking matter. The Med Computer doesn't have a sense of humor, so anything said concerning not feeling well will be interpreted in the worst possible way. See the sidebar on p. 110 for some examples of trouble phrases.

Lt. Vernliy also proudly points out the various sights along the way, most of which are named after Ryoc IV. He smugly notes the pristine streets of the city (ignoring the conscripted clean-up crews), boasts about how the magna-trains and subways run on time and extols the virtues of the ordered society created by the beloved Ryoc and, of course, her humble servants of the Health Police. A society, he adds, that has virtually eliminated sickness in all its forms. His face takes on a cruel look as he vows that the HP will root out and destroy whatever infirmities remain. (Yep, another fanatic.)

Along the way, the tourists see that the citizens indeed seem orderly — subdued, even — as they go to and fro about their business in Ryoc. However, few even glance at the limousine, and many who do quickly look away fearfully. Betellia can't resist making a quick comment about the natives' fashion sense: "God, does everyone wear white? How *boring*."

Everywhere are huge banners showing Ryoc's visage and calling her "our glorious leader." Public vid screens mounted at nearly every corner play an unending series of tributes to Ryoc and her regime and urge the public to practice good health by eating right and exercising regularly — or face the righteous wrath of the Health Police! Signs posted everywhere echo such slogans as "No Spitting in the Streets!" "No Sneezing in Public! On Penalty of Death by Order of Our Beloved Leader, Ryoc IV" and "A Healthy Populace is a Happy Populace."

The PCs will also notice featureless cubicles in several locations. Occasionally they see a citizen enter one, looking embarrassed and guilty. If they ask Vernliy what these are, he snorts and says, "Oh, those are the Shameful Places." If pressed, he explains that these are public privies. Some citizens have such poor constitutions, their bodies can't adjust to the healthy, fiber-laden diets Ryoc has decreed for her people; they can't wait to arrive home to eliminate their wastes. He speaks distastefully of such weaklings and explains that there is an experimental procedure that allows the appropriate muscles to be replaced by bionics. He waits eagerly for the day that these undesirables will be forced to have such an operation.

At the Hotel

As the hover limousine arrives at the hotel, Vernli bids them farewell. They are already checked in and need only to go to their rooms. He adds that they'll want to make certain they are watching the vid-screen in their room in three shift's time. Tomorrow is "Ryoc Day," (what else?) the glorious anniversary of their beloved leader's ascension to leadership of Survias. Ryoc will be making her annual procession through the city among her unworthy subjects, and the ceremony will be televised. It will be an inspiring display, he avows! He watches as they enter the hotel, calling out as they reach the door, "Remember: The Med Computer is guarding you!"

The delegation is greeted in an impressive lobby by the hotel's servile employees. They are taken via pneumo-elevator to their rooms on the 15th floor. The hotel appears to be a luxury facility, which it is — designed for VIP visitors to Survias. (These are rare now, except for merchants and traders, so the visitors get the deluxe treatment from the staff, such as it is.) They are assigned a luxury suite, with a large common room and four individual bedrooms leading from it. The PCs will have to double up, but Betellia takes the master bedroom for herself.

The suite has a well-stocked bar — unfortunately, it's stocked only with bottled water and fruit and vegetable juices. The room service dispenser provides only bland health foods — bran concoctions (such as branburgers and bran soufflé), fiber-laden roughage of all sorts and absolutely no red meat at all. In fact, *no* meat of any kind is available, just textured protein substitutes. Yum. The room is full of photographs and paintings of Ryoc, as well as printed slogans such as "The Med Computer is Guarding You." The decor is Early Hospital Sterile. Chairs and couches are hard and Spartan — good for the posture.

Dominating the room is a large vid-screen, which cannot be turned off. Its single, HP-run channel (call letters WELL) runs continuous propaganda glorifying Ryoc and her dedicated Health Police, alternating with health tips and reminders that the Med Computer is guarding them every moment. (In fact, the vid-screen itself is a Med Computer monitor.) There's also a computer library terminal in the room. However, all the information that can be accessed is slanted toward the Ryoc/Health Police world view. Additionally, the terminal constantly prompts the operators to ask it medical and health questions. If any do, it then asks, "Are you sick? Do you need immediate Health Police assistance?" If they fail to respond, it summons a roving HP Health Squad. Even if they say no, but keep asking questions, it notes "HP Health Squad summoned." And it does. In fact, if someone gets too frustrated with the terminal (or anything else), his wristcomp registers his rising blood pressure and a Health Squad is dispatched to check on him anyway (see *A Visit from the Health Squad*, p. 110).

Anyone trying to break into the room's terminal to alter its programming, stop an HP summons or just do some hacking has to make a Computer Operation skill roll at -8, and a Computer Programming skill roll at -5 to do so successfully. Unless a successful Electronics Operation (Security Systems) roll is made first, the break-in is signaled to the Med Computer, which sends an HP Health Squad. Betellia strongly discourages such activity while she's there.

In addition to their personal wristcomp monitors and the vid-screen, the rooms are filled with HP surveillance devices. Some are obvious — reminders of the Med Computer's constant vigilance. PCs will even find a camera mounted on the *inside* of the flash-commode bowl, looking up at them. Others, however, are not so easily spotted — they're embedded in the walls, the furniture and elsewhere. Only Betellia, with her miniature electronic snoopers, can locate these. She, of course, can defeat them as well with her distortion/holo devices — and will when she's ready.

Survias — General Knowledge

The planet Survias (Core-Tiann I) in the Old Frontiers sector is a warm, green Earthlike world with near-standard gravity and a standard atmosphere. Heavily populated, it is the only inhabited planet in the system. A highly developed industrial world, Survias in fact has little uninhabited area left. Part of the reason for its "population explosion" in recent decades has been the excellent medical facilities available on the planet, the personal project of the planet's current Autarch, Ryoc IV, who came to power on the death of Survias's previous leader, Sterub VII, her husband.

Ryoc is dedicated to the eradication of all signs of disease on her world. As part of her crusade, she has turned over the enforcement of her decrees to a planetary force known as "The Health Police." Consequently, to be sick on Survias has become a crime. Most of the world's medical facilities are geared to preventative medicine and care for injuries. Advanced medical research is carried out through Ryoc's own State Hospital and in the medical wing of Health Police Central, the force's headquarters in the capital city of Ryoc.

Survias' extremely short "year" (less than 18 Earth days) and rotational period (8.1 hours) means that the world never really sleeps. A single "day" on Survias consists of three day-night periods, or "shifts." Sleep periods are taken on whatever shift the individual chooses, so there are no actual "nights," and most businesses remain open around the clock. This, coupled with the world's wealth, makes Survias a lucrative market for traders. In spite of its odd views on the illegality of sickness and the restrictive nature of many of its laws, Survias enjoys a thriving commerce, especially in the area of medical imports. Though there have been complaints of poor treatment at the hands of overzealous Health Police, as long as visitors are careful to observe the planet's taboos on illness, a visit to Survias can be productive.

—Excerpt from the *Interstellar Rover's Society Guide to Planets*, on Survias. This information is available in any standard database.

(See also the Planetary Record sheet on page 6.)

The People of Survias

The visitors could be forgiven if they jump to the conclusion that the natives of Survias are totally downtrodden and despairing. But it's not that simple.

Almost every Survian is, by galactic standards, a health nut. This is due to years of propaganda and to the fact that Ryoc's regimen, as obnoxious as it seems, *gets results*. The *average* Survian has a HT of 12! Of course, some of that is due to the regular elimination of the least healthy citizens . . .

Most Survians have a rather sheeplike attitude toward authority — especially medical authority, which is the most important type on Survias. They're very interested in new medical developments, and will piously point out that, while Survian medicine is excellent, Ryoc keeps abreast of the latest techniques galaxy-wide. This means that if a visitor recommends nude gargling as the latest cure for headaches, any Survian will believe him and be grateful for the tip. (But the visitor may be invited to lecture before the Med College the next day.)

Almost everyone on Survias dislikes blood, disease and dirt to a level that would be considered squeamish elsewhere. About one in four carries this to the phobia level; one in ten have it at the *severe* level. There'll be a *lot* of fainting when things get violent. Health Police, of course, are trained to overcome their squeamishness, but a good description of a multiple air-car pileup could send even a Guards sergeant running for a quiet, unmonitored place to throw up.

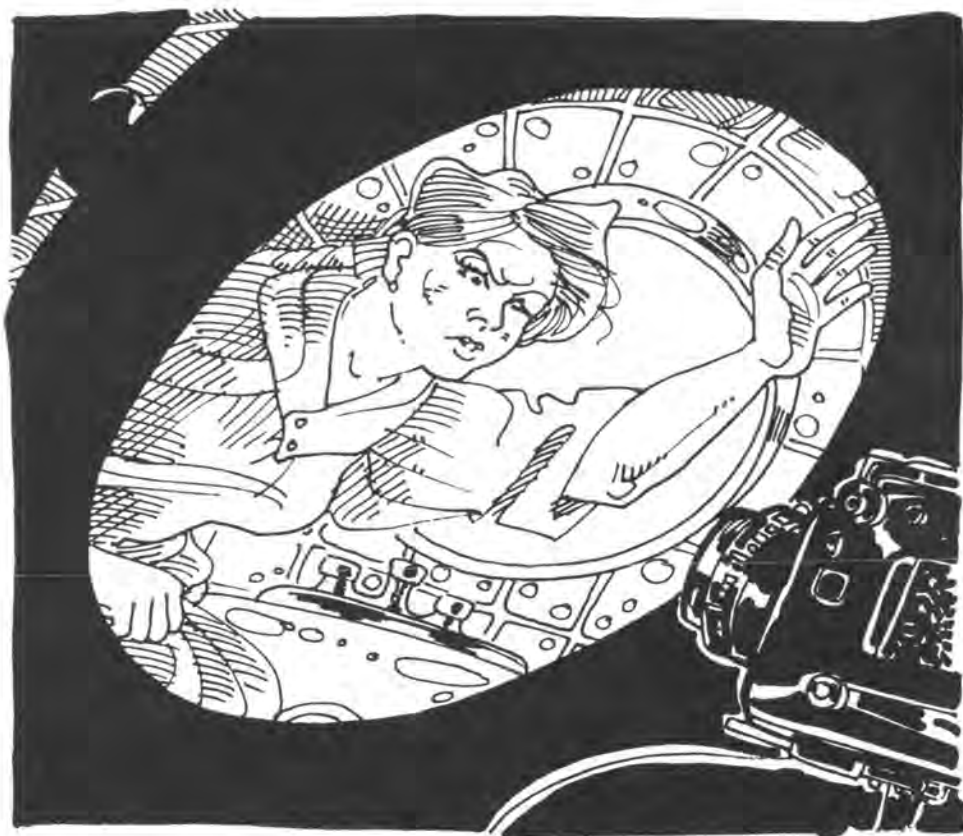
Most Survians obey the Health Police (and the Med Computer) religiously. They are keenly aware of the different sorts of HP. They're grateful for the services of the Medics, and very respectful toward the "regular" HP. They are *terrified* of the Guards, but a good citizen can go years without seeing Guards except on the tri-V.

As for Ryoc . . . As she grows crazier, her citizens are beginning to notice. But few know of her sadistic pursuit. The average person thinks "She's getting a bit cranky, going overboard, but she's done a lot for Survias." The dissidents and rebels think differently, but they're still outnumbered.

The Rebels

The average rebel is just as afraid of blood and disease as any other Survian, but he knows enough to hate Ryoc. Thus, the underground hideaway is a test of resolution — it really takes bravery to go there. So, some rebels will want to turn the PCs in for their own good . . . "But they're *hurt*! They need *help*!"

Some rebels, though, are reacting as much to Ryoc's fetish for *order* as they are to her other excesses. They'd like to see a little nature, a little dirt, coveralls in some color other than white . . . They'd really like to blow up some buildings, if they could do it without hurting anybody. When they encounter fugitive PCs, they'll react well to raggedness.



While They Wait

Betellia told the PCs while on the ship that she's planning to contact the ISIA agent (i.e., make the assassination) during the parade on Ryoc's Day (three shifts or 24.3 hours from when they arrive). Most people will be watching the procession, and many of the HP troopers will be occupied, so she runs the least risk of being noticed. The party is free to take tours of the city, sight-see or shop, but they are to remain in their rooms during the parade, so she will know where to find them. She allows no discussion on this point. She plans to spend the time in her room or in the hotel lounge. She does not accompany the group on any excursions into Ryoc City.

The following encounters are provided to give the visitors some hectic fun while they wait. They are by no means exhaustive, but they should give the GM and the players a feel for the atmosphere of Survias.

Coming Down With Something?

The GM rolls against HT for each member of the party. A regular failure means the PC has made a coughing or sneezing noise, not unusual for a normal person, but Survians have learned to control such outbursts. Within 30 seconds, a team of Health Police troopers breaks through the door to the guests' room, shouting "Everybody freeze! Health Police!"

They pull out cans of spray disinfectant (which they carry in holsters) and fill the room with a thick green fog. Everyone but the troopers needs to make a HT roll to avoid coughing. Anyone who coughs gets a personal faceful of the antiseptic spray and a kind "breathe deeply, please" from the trooper. The recipient of this must make another HT roll at -2 to avoid going into a choking fit. A choking fit results in the victim being strapped onto a stretcher and hauled away. The other "healthy" occupants are herded away with great concern from the source of possible contagion. Of course, the guests are given a new, uncon-

taminated room, requiring Betellia to reconfigure her sensor jamming devices. If this happens more than once, it can get quite tedious for Agent Z.

Surgery Anyone?

While on a tour of Survias State Hospital, the visitors are asked if any of them would like to participate in a surgical experiment. These are real TL11 treatments that have not quite been perfected by the resident surgeons; they could be quite effective and helpful, and the party's HP escort will tout the experiments by relating all the possible advantages given on the table below, ignoring any possible hazards. It is considered a great honor on Survias to be selected for these experimental treatments, and refusal to participate is taken as an insult . . . a snub of Survias, of the medical profession and Ryoc herself.

If someone actually agrees to undergo surgery, the process should be described in detail. Once the proper waivers are signed, the patient strips and puts on a hospital robe (a little too small, breezy in the back). He is given a pill to take before the operation that is supposed to make him drowsy — it doesn't. He's then wheeled on a gurney through several corridors, up a few elevator floors, through some more corridors, down some floors and finally into a large operating theater (the gallery is packed with white-robed interns and uniformed HP). Around the table are about 12 doctors and nurses and a collection of instruments ranging from TL8 to TL11, including some that look more appropriate to carpentry than surgery.

The patient may begin to worry as he is moved to the operating table and strapped down — he still doesn't feel the least bit sleepy; if anything, he's feeling more awake than before. Parts of his gown are cut away and the exposed body parts are thoroughly swabbed with brown antiseptic. Finally, just as the head surgeon revs up what appears to be a hand blender, the anesthetic kicks in, and the patient fades into unconsciousness.

For the effects of the operation, roll 1d on the table below, adding 1 point for each point of HT above 10 (up to 4 points maximum).

Roll Result

- 1 Operation fails — patient gains a 10-point physical disadvantage.
- 2 Operation fails — patient gains a 10-point mental disadvantage.
- 3 Operation fails — no effect.
- 4 Operation is a success — patient now has different-colored nose hair.
- 5 Operation is a success — patient is immune to the common cold.
- 6 Operation is a success — patient loses one physical disadvantage (GM's choice).
- 7 Operation is a success — patient loses one mental disadvantage (GM's choice).
- 8 Medical breakthrough! — patient gains a physical advantage (Double-Jointed, Acute Hearing, etc.).
- 9 Medical breakthrough! — patient gains a mental advantage (Eidetic Memory, Strong Will, etc.).
- 10 Medical breakthrough! — one of the patient's attributes is increased by 1 (GM's choice).

Don't Worry, It's Just a . . .

By this point, the party members should realize that the HP aren't joking around; they take sickness seriously here. While being handed a pamphlet on "Zit Awareness Week" by a helpful Survian, one of the visitors gets a paper cut. It's a deep one, and in moments a small drop of blood appears on the victim's

Your Local Health Police

The officers and troopers of the Health Police rule over the people of Survias with a strong, but caring surgical glove, carrying out the hypochondriacal orders of their mad leader, Ryoc IV. The Health Police grew out of Ryoc's personal guard, which served her in her odd crusade against sickness even before she became the planet's dictator. She personally designed their jack-booted white uniform with the red cross insignia on its cap and its physician's winged-cross badges. She also gave them such paraphernalia as their ceremonial daggers and swords, cast in the shape of scalpels, and designed the medal she presents to the most dedicated and fanatic of their lot — the Golden Scalpel with Swab Clusters. It is in honor of Ryoc and her crusade to eradicate illness on Survias that the Health Police wear their surgeon's masks whenever they are on duty. Ryoc is their god and they are her elite troops. Even the Health Police Salute commemorates the Autarch's campaign against infirmity: "Fist to mouth; cough into fist; push hand away from body at a 45° angle, representing the expelling of all illness from the body." (From the *HP Basic Health Training Manual*.) Unfortunately, the salute was developed before the Med Computer's monitoring capabilities were brought to their current state . . .

Continued on next page . . .



Beware the Health Police

Your Local Health Police ***(Continued)***

Now, every time a HP trooper salutes, there is about a 10% chance that his "coughing" will summon another HP squad. The incoming squad, upon seeing their fellow troopers must, of course, salute, which brings in another squad. Eventually, there is a room full of HP troopers, saluting and examining each other while their beepers go off like crazy.

Almost all HP are attractive, healthy people (HT of 14+). They allow no infirmity among their ranks. The Health Police is set up like a standard military organization, from ordinary, menial troopers to its elite officers corps, headed by Chief Medical Marshal Horaz Sutyn. In fact, the Health Police virtually controls the military of Survias. All regular army and aerospace naval forces have HP political/medical "advisors," who wield final authority over the military commanders on any decision.

Ordinary Health Police troopers carry sonic rifles with both stunner and screamer settings, along with elaborate first-aid kits and communication gear.

Alongside the ordinary troopers of the Health Police are the HP Medic Corps. Their uniforms are more like traditional surgeon's garb, with long robes and skull caps (PD 1, DR 3). The Medics carry holstered disinfectant sprays, *really* elaborate first-aid kits, and stunners for patients who prove too unruly.

Ryoc's elite HP Guards carry screamers and scalpel/knives (treat as large knives); their officers carry hand flamers and scalpel/swords (treat as sabers). These are considered by the HP to be "cleansing" weapons. The screamers, in tearing flesh off a victim's bones, purge him of infection and illness, removing the offending organic material completely. The flamers burn out infection. The pain these wounds cause victims is considered by the Guards to be cleansing to the soul. (Or maybe they're just sadists.) Ordinary HP uniforms provide PD 1, DR 5.

All Health Police receive basic first-aid training, while the Medic Corps receives physician training. And they're skilled. However, the dreaded HP Guards, if they carry medical drugs at all, use experimental ones developed in the medical wing of Health Police Central . . .

Fortunately for many of their potential victims, the Health Police have become corrupt and, as a rule, are now an inept, incompetent lot. If it weren't for the constant monitoring of the Med Computer, the Health Police would probably dissolve into petty in-fighting factions. But the Med Computer is always monitoring, so the force remains a factor in maintaining Ryoc's repressive regime.

finger. The pamphlet passer goes white as a ghost, and after a brief moment of shock, runs to a nearby lightpost and presses a button, summoning an HP squad within a minute.

The hapless victim is carted off in a hover-ambulance, lights blazing. He's returned to the group a couple of hours later, sporting a huge, microcomputer-controlled dressing that covers his whole hand. Everything is back to normal. Then another PC accidentally stubs his toe . . .

Ryoc's Day

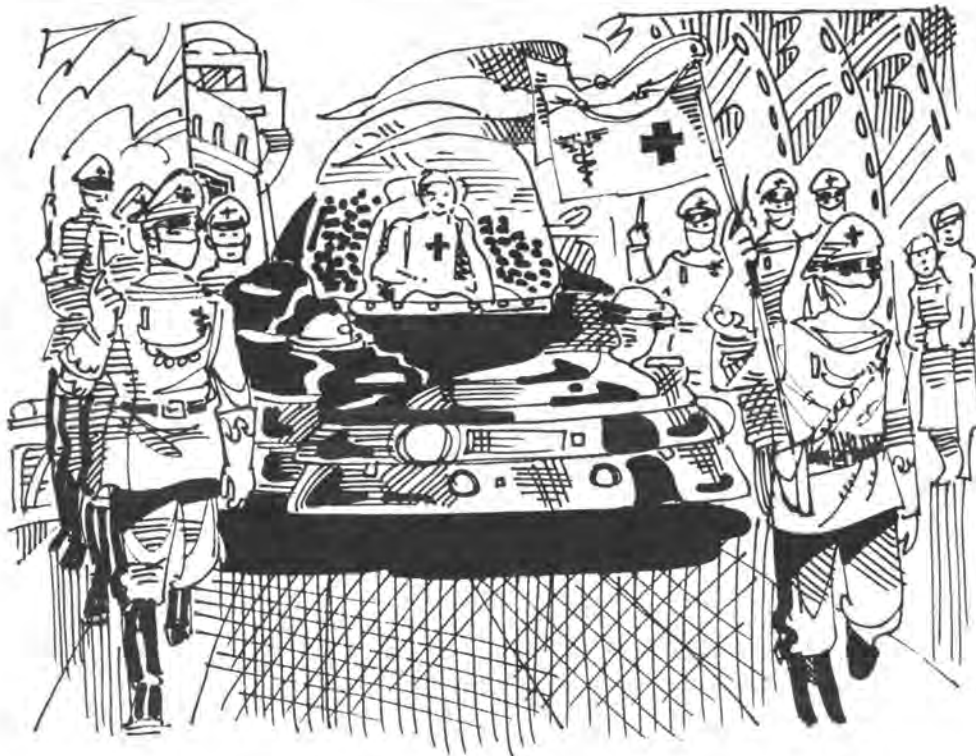
Finally, Ryoc's Day rolls around. The agents should return to their rooms per Betellia's orders. Zee meets them in the suite after making a few preparations for her assassination attempt. She starts by using her electronic ECM gear to temporarily disable the monitors in her room. Using miniature holography circuits, she sets up the monitors to see only a prerecorded tape of the room — for the moment, a shot of it empty — provided by Sutyn. Then she joins the PCs in the main room, loudly announcing that it is time for them to meditate as a group for the success of their trade mission. She gathers the puzzled recruits into a tight circle, heads down and arms meshed. Then she activates the silence field built into her belt.

"Despite your incompetent bungling, your unprofessional conduct and your incredible fashion ignorance, our cover has held, and everything is still going as planned." Zee informs the PCs that she will be leaving shortly to rendezvous with the ISIA liaison agent at one of several preset meeting drops. She'll be setting a miniature hologram projector to show her asleep in her room, she tells them. It has built-in sensor circuitry keyed to her electronic signature to fool heat sensors and other monitors — registering heartbeats, breathing sounds, etc. She instructs the recruits to remain in the suite while she's gone making the rendezvous. Once she's back, it should be a matter of hours until the trade delegation is ready to finish the deal; they'll be paid and they can leave Survias. Then their part in the mission will be over and they'll be free to go their way. If anyone asks what happens if she's caught and doesn't come back, she simply says that won't happen — but if it does, they're on their own. Good luck. She ignores any objections and switches the field off.

Then Zee will surprise the characters by coming on to one of them. She suggests that one of the PCs join her in her room to spend their time waiting a bit more pleasantly. If he balks, she'll make it an order — unless someone else offers to take his place. The GM should pick the person he thinks most likely to respond to her offer.

Once Betellia and her escort are alone in her room, she activates her holo tapes to show the monitors a simulated record of the two of them having a good time. (She prepared one of each crew member during their time aboard ship, just in case.) The holotape hides her using her drug kit to inject the dupe with a fast-acting sedative. Then she sets her ECM gadgetry to deaden the signal on the dozing victim's wristcomp and any other bugs he's carrying, hiding a vid distort on him as well. She alters her own wristcomp signal to give off that of the sleeper's device, and set up her holo/sensor projector to provide her signature first to the image on the holotape then to an image of her sleeping form on the bed when the tape runs out. She wakes the PC, tells him "how fantastic" it was, and walks him to the door to correspond with the images on the prerecorded tape running on the room monitors. She then activates her own sensor distorts to show her as the PC, leaving the room alone, while her holotape depicts her lying down on the bed and going to sleep. The micro-holo/sensor projector takes over at that point to simulate her sleeping form. The sleeper, with his wristcomp and other bugs dead, is now unknowingly invisible to all the room monitors — including visuals.

Betellia then silently bids farewell to the guests, leaving them to their own devices while she goes off to assassinate Ryoc IV. If one of the PCs notices her leave and tries to follow, she will know. Have him roll a Quick Contest of Skills between his Shadowing skill and Betellia's Stealth Skill of 18. If she can't lose the follower, she returns to her room after an innocuous visit to the hotel lounge. She then slips unnoticed out of her room balcony and continues on to the assassination — still in time to do the job.



What Some People Won't Do to Be on TV

The period after Betellia leaves the visitors is uneventful unless they decide not to follow Zee's orders to wait there until she returns. If they leave the room, the GM will have to improvise on what they see and who they encounter. If they're out and about and haven't returned to their room by the time the assassination attempt is broadcast, they can see it on a corner vid-screen rather than the one in their rooms. And their wristcomps and bugs will remain intact. If they return to their rooms then, they'll find the destruction described below.

If the guests remain in the room, after a while the vid-screen begins to broadcast Ryoc's parade through the city. At one point, the cameras pan in close on Ryoc in her hover limo. Just as it does, a HP guardsman to her right explodes messily, splattering the limo with blood and body parts. A second later, another guardsman collapses, spurting blood. The scene pulls back to show citizens scurrying for cover and Health Police waving their screamers around wildly, looking for a target. The parade commentator announces in a shaky voice that an assassination attempt has just been made on their beloved leader, the glorious Ryoc IV. Just then there's a scream and the camera's view whirls around and up atop a building where a figure is standing with a rifle. The camera pans and suddenly closes in on — one of the PCs! The one who had the dalliance with Betellia earlier. But that same person is standing right there with everyone else. A quick check confirms that the person in the hotel room is the real PC, not Betellia in disguise.

Just then, the vid-screen explodes, showering the onlookers with debris. At almost the same instant, the computer terminal and all the other overt monitoring

Typical HP Trooper

ST 11, DX 10, IQ 9, HT 14

Speed 5.5, Move 5

Dodge 5, Parry 5

Advantages: Legal Enforcement Powers, Patron (Health Police, very powerful, 15 or less)

Disadvantages: Pick 3 or 4 from various Odious Personal Habits (such as Arrogance), Bully, Fanaticism, Greed, Intolerance, Overconfidence, Sadism, Duty to the Health Police and to Ryoc and probably lots of Enemies (the Summers, most citizens of Survias, for example).

Skills: Beam Weapons (Sonics and Stunners)-11, Electronics Operation (Communications)-11 and First-Aid-12. Officers add Flamer-11, Sword-12, Interrogation-11 and Administration-12. *Medic Corpsmen* substitute Physician-13 for First-Aid and Flamer-11 for sonics. *HP Guards* have few or no medical skills, but add Knife-11 and various combat skills.

Health Police troopers are arrogant bullies, but most are genuinely concerned about citizens' health; *Medic Corpsmen* are somewhat gentler, but even more fanatic about disease. Only the special HP Guards are truly murderous. But all types of HP are more or less crazy. "Keep the people healthy, no matter what you have to do to them" isn't the sort of standing order that leads to long-term mental health . . . and admitting that you feel internal contradictions is *not* career-enhancing.

All HP are obsequious around their officers, let alone Ryoc herself, and they won't hesitate to arrest anyone they decide is "sick" — regardless of that person's actual state of health.



Beware the Health Police

Sick Jokes

On Survias, illness is not a joking matter. In much the same way as bomb jokes are discouraged in airports, any casual references about sickness are strictly prohibited on Survias. Unfortunately, some completely innocent phrases can be construed as references to sickness. Something as innocuous as "be patient" will bring a Health Police squad running. More examples:

"I'm sick of this."
"That gives me a pain."
"I'm itching to do something."
"That bugs me."
"Bug off!"
"Eat your heart out."
"Don't be rash."
"I smell a rat."
"That's a rotten thing to say."
"All right. Cough it up."

Vulgarity

Likewise, Survian vulgarity and dirty jokes have nothing to do with sex. Saying "you're sick" is both a curse and an insult. Minor rudeness concerns elimination, like "Waste!" or "take it to a shameful place."

Bawdy jokes concern the foibles of people who have prominent or, even worse, recurring illnesses. "Did you hear the one about the epileptic who worked in the rope factory? He was fit to be tied," or "A man with a boil on his neck goes into a bar . . ."

A Visit From the Health Squad

While the PCs are waiting in their suite for Betellia's return, it's possible they'll get a visit from a roving HP Health Squad, either in response to a computer terminal or wristcomp summons or because the squad "happens to be in the neighborhood."

The visit runs much like a surprise inspection at a marine barracks. The HP knock loudly, yelling "Health Police! Open up. We know you've got somebody sick in there." They rush in and, looking suspiciously at everyone, insist on knowing who's sick. If no one replies or claims responsibility, then they say "The Med Computer is never wrong," rather loudly in the direction of the room's listening devices. Someone will have to be tested.

If someone confesses, he is probed and examined thoroughly (no painful shots this time; they *are* VIPs). Have him roll vs. HT. If he fails, he does something sick-like. The leader will say "Ha! I knew it. It looks like an advanced case of Streptoconglophertis." He hands the PC a bottle of green pills, ordering him to take two per hour until the symptoms disappear. Since both the pills and the bottle contain micromonitors, the Med Computer will know if the pills are not taken on time . . . A Survian would know this, but the visitors may have to learn the hard way.

If the HT roll succeeds, the HP mutter something about "spontaneous remission" and leave disgruntled.

Beware the Health Police

devices in the room explode, too, as do all the hidden ones! (The GM can be creative describing what detonates — perhaps a bottle of juice a PC had been drinking. Gulp! What if he'd drank just a *little* more?) The guests' wristcomps and any other personal items they carry that were bugged in customs also pop loudly — as do sections of their jump suits that hid tiny tracers. The PCs will be unhurt by this explosive activity — it's mostly a lot of lights and sound — but have them make DX rolls anyway, so they think there's danger. (If any roll a critical failure or are Unlucky and miss the DX roll, however, they take 1 point of damage.)

What has happened is Zee's handiwork. She set off a remote-controlled device that caused all the monitoring devices in the suite to overload and detonate. Her actual and the PC's supposed absence from the suite would be covered up in the confusion from the dead monitors. Should witnesses see him at the hotel, it'll be assumed he returned after the agents willfully destroyed their monitors. And all the evidence Zee left at the room is now destroyed, too.

The dupes are left standing in the shambles of their suite, probably dazed by the events of the past moments. Someone looking like one of them just tried to kill the mad dictator of Survias. His image was broadcast planetwide. Their wristcomps, which they were told not to remove on penalty of death, are shattered, as are their other personal effects. And their clothes are in tatters. Not exactly the best state of affairs. If anyone thinks to check Zee's room, they'll find the holoprojector/sensor scrambler she left has blown itself to bits, too, along with all her belongings.

It may begin to dawn on them that they're in a *load* of trouble.

What Really Happened

The assassination attempt takes place offstage, so the PCs will never actually know what happened. If the players are curious later, here's a rundown.

Betellia activated her holobelt's image of the PC she chose to impersonate once she was outside the room. Then she left the hotel as him. Once a distance



away, Zee deactivated the holo image, leaving only the distorts, and placed one of the nondescript sensa-skin face masks from her living disguise kit over her "own" features, gritting her teeth over the fact that she had to wear white so as not to stand out. She then made her way to the assassination site: atop a building overlooking Ryoc's parade route. There she found a sensor-masked TL10 military X-ray laser rifle with laser scope, left for her by Sutyn's agents. Armed with a known ISIA assassination weapon, Zee prepared herself for the kill.

When Ryoc's procession came into sight, Zee scoped out her target, then fired. Ryoc was riding in an open-topped hover limo. She was surrounded by her elite guards, but an easy hit from Zee's angle. Sutyn had promised to arrange for the Autarch's deflection belt to be on the fritz, so that Zee's shot would easily hit. Unfortunately, something went wrong — the assassin's shot missed entirely! A second shot, dead on, also missed — deflected from the target and hitting a guardsman instead. Ryoc's deflection belt was working! After the second shot, Zee knew she'd been set-up, but she pegged another HP guardsman out of sheer frustration.

What neither Agent Z nor Marshal Sutyn knew was that there were other players in this game. Sutyn's chief of staff, HP Colonel Lorz Barmn, had decided to double-cross Sutyn — not out of loyalty to Ryoc but of his own ambition. He knew that if Ryoc was killed and Sutyn took over, his days were numbered. His old chief would purge anyone capable of succeeding him during his consolidation of power. But should the plot fail and Ryoc live, Sutyn himself would be purged for his failure to detect and stop the assassin, and Barmn could take his place as Chief Medical Marshal. So Barmn made certain that Ryoc's deflector belt was in working order by tipping off one of Ryoc's guardsmen. Ryoc's deflector worked, and Zee was unable to complete the hit.

Zee's plan was to create a diversion that would point the finger at the PCs, giving her time to escape; the foiled assassination didn't change that. Her holo/distort belt was already set to provide the visual and sensory image of the PC whose readings she'd assumed earlier. She held her position just long enough to be spotted. When the two guardsmen died — literally exploding from the violent bursts of coherent X-rays — the rest of Ryoc's elite HP began scanning the area for a gunman. So did the vid-recorders of the WELL cameramen on the scene. One of the latter spotted Zee — and broadcast the PCs' image she wore across the airwaves!

Zee managed to duck back out of sight before a fusillade of screamer shots crumbled the side of the building. She then turned off the holo and reactivated all her distorts. Using her Acrobatics skill, she made her way across the roofs of several buildings and down out of sight, her Stealth preventing her pursuers from noticing her. Once in a relatively safe area, Zee stripped and, using a small spray can of sensa-skin neutralizer, removed her body suit. Once again in a male identity, Agent Z, with a new sensa-skin mask in place, dressed and slipped away. With the plan blown, he didn't intend to count on Sutyn's help in escaping Survias. He'd instead use all his skills as a covert operative to lie low until the PCs were apprehended and the search for the assailant ended, then slip through starport security and onto an outbound vessel. It would be easy for one of his talents, especially with those dupes taking the fall for the attempt.

Helter Skelter

If they're thinking, the party's first reaction should be to get out of the suite as fast as they can. There's sure to be a bunch of angry Health Police on their way to the hotel at this very moment. And those already there — especially any on monitor duty — are probably on their way up right now. By this time, the recruits should realize there's no talking to the HP, especially on a matter this serious. They'd probably be *lucky* if they were simply killed outright. They have

If the PCs Fail to Run

There's a slight chance the agents might decide *not* to run after the assassination attempt, but stay in their hotel room and wait quietly for the Health Police to arrive. Perhaps someone will reason that such an act will be indicative of their innocence. Then they can calmly explain the situation — as near as they understand it — to the authorities who, being reasonable individuals, will set them free. Wrong. Bad move. What planet do they think they're on, anyway?

Should they do such a foolish thing, they'll be arrested within minutes by angry Health Police troopers. Then they'll be roughed up and taken to HP Central for interrogation. If the PCs even hint that they think ISIA was involved — and helping the Sickie rebel scum — and that they were working for them, even under duress, the captives will be marked for slow and painful extermination via medical experimentation. And they'll be locked away in HP Central until sentence is carried out. Should this happen, they have only three slender hopes:

One is that any or all of the competing factions for control — Sutyn, Barmn, Ryoc or the Med Computer programmers — may decide to spring them to use against one or more of the others. That'll get them a reprieve if they agree to help. But once they do, it's back to the cells. None of their captors is exactly honorable.

A second is that the rebels of SIC decide to risk all in an attempt to rescue the brave heroes who tried to bring down the evil Ryoc. They'll attack HP Central to free the captives. Their success is up to the GM, but even a failure might provide an opportunity to escape in the confusion.

Finally, it's just conceivable that Agent Z will decide to infiltrate HP Central and free his dupes. He'd probably do it only if he was having too much difficulty getting back out of Ryoc and to the starport. As Betellia, he'd still claim to be working for the ISIA, just that the agency couldn't tell them the whole truth about the mission. Security, you know. If it hadn't failed, they'd be back in space by now. If he appears as Z, he'll claim to be the resident ISIA agent on Survias and that he just learned of their situation and came to get them out. He'll claim not to know anything of the assassination plot, but vows to get to the bottom of it. Z/Zee will then use the PCs as decoys to enable him to get to the starport, again leaving them in the lurch.



Survian Hovercraft

Several models of hovercraft are in use throughout Survias. Most differ only in the number of passengers and/or cargo they can carry. All Survian hovercraft ride an air cushion support ranging from 3 to 6 feet above the surface. They can travel safely at up to 60 mph in the city and 100 mph on open stretches. The hover patrol craft of the Health Police can travel somewhat faster in the open — up to 150 mph — but are limited to 60 in urban areas, unless the driver is very skilled.

A standard hovercraft or hovercab can carry up to six people comfortably; nine is possible, but cramped. Up to 200 additional pounds of luggage can be carried in the trunk. Hover limos can carry up to a dozen comfortably or smaller numbers in luxury. HP hover patrol craft generally carry only two passengers, a driver and a gunner. HP hover transports can carry up to an additional dozen fully equipped Health Police troopers.

Most HP hover patrol craft and transports are armed with a forward mounted gatling laser. Some mount electromag mortars in the rear as well. They are armored with a PD 6, DR 20 against all attacks. Standard hovercraft have a PD 4, DR 5.

no weapons to fight with, other than what they may be able to scrounge up from the remains of their room. (Anyone have Scrounging skill?) And shards of glass are no match for screamers. Time to go!

The fugitives can reach the pneumo-elevator unassaulted. However, other guests may peer out their doors to see what the noise was and spot the characters. Some may recognize the victim of Zee's impersonation and yell "Assassins!" or "Call the Health Police!" And the escapees can see that the pneumo-elevator is coming up and will reach their floor in seconds. If they hurry (and make successful DX rolls), they just have time to reach the stairwell, from where they can watch 1d+2 HP troopers rush from the open elevator and head toward their room. One trooper will stay at the elevator. The PCs can try to attack him and take the elevator if they wish, but he's brandishing his screamer nervously and it's doubtful they'd get him without casualties.

If they choose to run down the stairs, the fugitives can cover several floors before they run into oncoming Health Police. Give them a Hearing roll at -2 (because they're running) or without the penalty if they stop first. Anyone with Danger Sense gets +4 to their chance of hearing the oncoming HP. If they detect the HP, they can get off on another floor unseen. Otherwise, they must make DX rolls to do so. If any miss the DX rolls, the HP spotted them and will chase after them on the floor they get off on.

The GM should play the chase through the hotel for maximum thrills, with several narrow escapes as the PCs attempt to avoid the HP — or elude them if spotted. Screamer bolts should cut swathes off hall walls as near misses careen through the corridors around them. However, the chances are slim that someone will get hit at this point. The Health Police are not great shots in the first place, and shooting on the run after moving targets isn't conducive to good aim. (Fudge the rolls if any manage a hit, turning it into a near miss; don't want to turn anyone to jelly just yet.) The PCs will have to switch from stairs to elevator several times before reaching the lobby — perhaps once even having the elevator doors open on them to reveal several unprepared HP. (How fast can they punch the "Door Close" button?)

As they reach the lobby, the escapees will momentarily be in the clear — until one of the hotel clerks sees them and yells "Look, the fiend who shot at our glorious Ryoc!" All eyes will turn to them as the clerk hits the PA amplifier and announces, "Health Police to the lobby; fugitives in the lobby." The only way out is through the front door, onto the streets and . . . freedom?

Car 54, Where Are You?

Luckily, there's a car waiting. The GM has three ways to get the PCs in a mad hovercraft chase:

Possibility One: As the characters reach the street, they spot a hovercraft outside the hotel, its motor running. Getting out of the craft are members of the Trade Authority — here to close the deal on the zit cream. They'd missed seeing the assassination attempt on the way over and were just now watching it in replay on the vid-screen on the hotel's marquee. Still stunned by what they've witnessed, they stare wide-eyed at the PCs. One stands in the driver's seat, having forgotten to shut off the vehicle's power plant. If the fugitives act swiftly, they can quickly overpower the driver and steal the hovercraft. The others will do nothing to stop them — and in fact may flee in fear.

This begs the question of whether any of the thieves have Driving (Hovercraft) skill. If not, they'll have to drive it using whatever defaults they have. And they'd better not go very fast if they don't want to lose control. Of course when chased by an HP patrol craft, they have to risk it. The GM can milk some comedy relief out of their frantic attempts to figure out the controls, too, if no one is skilled in air-cushion vehicles. (Even if they are, they won't be familiar

with a *Survian* hovercraft, and will still get the -2 for an unfamiliar vehicle of a known type.) After activating the radio, the windscreen wipers, the lights and other accessories first, they should finally manage to get the vehicle lurching off down the street — just as the Health Police pour out of the hotel.

Of course, the PCs are still *lost* somewhere in Ryoc City with no idea of where anything is, much less how to get back to the starport (unless anyone has the Absolute Direction or Eidetic Memory advantages and can retrace the way back there). And unless they thought to have one printed off the computer terminal in their room before it exploded, they won't have access to a map of the city. (If anyone thinks of it and can make a Computer Operation skill roll, the hovercraft has a small computer with a map program — including one of Ryoc City. If he misses, however, the computer will activate the vehicle's autopilot, taking them to the trade delegation's next stop — Health Police Central! Only jumping out of the vehicle or disabling it will avoid this fate. Make a DX-5, Jumping or Acrobatics skill roll, whichever is better, to avoid injury if jumping out. Failure earns 1d-1 damage.)

Possibility Two: A hovercab is waiting outside the hotel to pick up a fare. The party has time to hop into the cab before the cabby realizes they're not his expected passengers — and that one is the supposed assassin. Make a reaction roll for the cab driver. If his reaction is Good or better, he's a secret supporter of the resistance (though he knows nothing about them and isn't a rebel himself) and willingly drives them wherever they want to go. In fact, he's so excited, he exceeds safe speed limits and attracts the attention of a Health Police patrol craft. (Yes, speeding is another sign of "mental illness" on *Survias*.) If the reaction roll is Neutral or worse, he refuses to take the PCs anywhere, either out of fear or loyalty to Ryoc.

They can scare him into doing their bidding if they have anything that even resembles a weapon. ("No, this isn't a light pen I'm sticking in the back of your neck, it's a laser — now drive or I'll drill a hole through your spine!") Or they can try using Diplomacy, Fast-Talk or Sex Appeal skill to convince him to move. Add a -1 or -2 penalty to the skill roll if the cabby's initial reaction was Poor or Bad; if it was Very Bad or Disastrous, talk won't work; he's a fanatic.

Regardless of how the PCs persuade the cabby to drive, Health Police flood from the hotel just as the hovercab pulls away. Screamer beams just miss — and may take some paint or pieces off the fleeing vehicle. At least with the cabby, they won't be lost, as the man can tell them how to get anywhere they'd want in Ryoc City. And he can take them there if they can elude the HP. Of course, they won't for long; at least one of the troopers got the registration number of the cab and put out an alert.

Possibility Three: Use *both* of the above. The fugitives may spot the trade delegation car first and take that, but have to abandon it or wreck it, either in eluding the HP or just by poor driving. *Then* they can spot the hovercab and grab it. Or vice versa.

Whichever method the adventurers use to escape the hotel, it won't be long before HP patrol craft are in hot pursuit. The GM should again envelop the escapees in the thrill of the chase, with HP craft chasing down streets and careening off narrow alley walls, rotor fans screeching. The cabby is a much better driver than the Health Police patrollers; he should be able to keep ahead of them handily, even when cut off and having to double back between two oncoming HP craft. Just pull a few tricks from any wild car-chase and toss those in. The HP patrol craft are mounted with Gatling lasers, so potential hits are much more dangerous. But firing from moving vehicles against other moving vehicles is even more difficult than doing it on the run. Scare the PCs a few times — blow a few sections out of their hovercar to heighten suspense, but until it's time to end the chase, they should come through relatively unscathed.

Ryoc IV

Age: 112; white hair; rheumy gray eyes; 5'1", 114 lbs.

ST 7, DX 9, IQ 12, HT 6.

Speed 3.25, Move 3.

Dodge 3, Parry 5.

Advantages: Status 7 (Planetary ruler), Reputation +2 (toadies, sycophants and fellow sadists), Filthy Rich.

Disadvantages: Age, Bad Sight (Near-sighted), Hard of Hearing, No Sense of Taste/Smell, Bad Temper, Major Delusions (I am the planet's savior; everyone loves me), Intolerance (the sick or infirm), Megalomania, Paranoia, Fear of Illness, Fear of Germs, Necrophobia, Rubophobia, Xenophobia, Reputation -4 (Feared and hated by almost everyone), Sadism, Ugly Appearance, Hypochondria, Enemies (SIC, Horaz Sutyn, lots of others).

Quirks: Dislikes almost everything and everybody; Uses her position to crusade against illness and for rigorous health; Wants to live forever, and expects to, thanks to modern medicine; Was not toilet trained until she was eight.

Skills: Administration-13, Diplomacy-9, Economics-10, Neurolash-10, Physician-9, Surgery-9.

Continued on next page . . .



Ryoc IV (Continued)

Ryoc IV is the mad dictator of Survias. She came to power several decades earlier when she arranged the murder of her husband, Sterub VII, with the aid of Horaz Sutyn, then head of her personal guard. Seizing the reins of power, she built her guard into the core of a new, powerful secret police force — the Health Police. Ryoc was always deathly afraid of illness in any form, being an extreme hypochondriac. Even before she usurped her husband's throne, she had begun her own personal crusade against infirmity. She went to the planet's finest medical schools, all of which rejected her. Finally one accepted and passed her — barely — and that only because of her husband's influence.

Ryoc has an unnatural fear of death, and she has used her people's wealth (and organs) to stave off the inevitable. Now, using TL11 medical science, she is planning to have her brain transplanted into a young clone body when her husk finally fails her.

Ryoc wears an imported TL12 deflector belt (PD 6) as protection against her enemies. She also carries a scepter in the form of a physician's winged staff, which is actually a Type I Neurolash (p. S60). Though her medical skills are barely above default levels, she habitually carries a doctor's bag filled with surgical instruments. Her idea of relaxation is to perform "medical experiments" on living — and aware — patients in her private wing at the State Hospital near her palace in Ryoc.

Ryoc IV is always accompanied by members of her elite Health Police Guard. Unlike the rest of the HP, they answer only to Ryoc. She will be in the company of 1d+3 of them at all times. Their skills and characteristics are similar to those of regular HP troopers, except their DX and IQ are at +2. HP Guard troops also possess the Sword skill like HP officers and wear ceremonial scalpel/swords.

A nice touch is to have a Survian ambulance join the chase — not to apprehend the fugitives, but to cart anyone injured off to the hospital. The HP lackeys manning the ambulance are very earnest in "arresting" the wounded; any injured HP trooper will have to leave the chase regardless of how minor his injury may be.

Finally, however, the passengers find their way barred by an HP roadblock. And HP patrol craft are bearing down on them from all other avenues of escape. It should be evident there's only one way to go: *through* the barricade. It's ramming time. If the cabby is driving and on their side, he decides to do it even if the passengers are reluctant. Otherwise, if need be, give them IQ rolls to show there's no other route open. Then let them ram away.

The HP scatter like jet-propelled slugs when they realize the cab isn't stopping. Their hovercraft hits (at a glancing angle if the cabby's driving; he revs the fan blades at the last second, raising the nose). It breaks through the blockade. The flying debris smashes into the immediate pursuer, causing him to careen off course and ram the next oncoming HP craft. Which crash into the next. Which plows into the one following. Which is rammed by the next . . . and so on. Until all the HP craft have piled into one another, ending the pursuit. If it raises the players' spirits, have at least one of the patrol craft explode in a shower of sparks and a ball of greasy flame.

The fugitives' vehicle is wrecked. Each PC has to roll his HT or take 1d-2 damage in the crash. They should be able to walk away, but now they're on foot. The cabby, even if he was on their side, decides it's time to leave. He tells them approximately where they are now and how to get wherever they want to go from there. Then he heads off down a side street, leaving his wrecked vehicle and dazed passengers behind. (If he wasn't friendly, he just runs off as soon as he pulls himself from the wreck.)

On the Lam

For the moment, the fugitives are safe. But they can't wait around. The surviving HP will be pulling themselves out of their wrecks in minutes. Of course, they will lose some ground because if they've suffered even a scratch, they will have to submit to treatment. Can't have untreated wounds polluting the healthy Survian environment. But now the PCs are in the same condition as before they fled: wanted criminals lost in Ryoc City, with no transportation, no money, no weapons and no way home, *and* they probably have some untreated injuries; someone's sure to notice them.

Where things go from here will largely be up to the adventurers (and what encounters the GMs throws them). Do they want to try to hide? Should they wait for the next night period to try to make their way across town to the starport, hoping the Summersun mercs will give them sanctuary? Should they turn themselves over to the mercy of the Health Police? (Yeah. Right.) They may want to get rid of their telltale visitor's clothing, especially if it's full of holes from blown bugs. That means stealing clothes. They may attempt to use Scrounging skill to find suitable clothing. Or they may decide to waylay a citizen and take his or hers. If they're *really* daring, they might even try to jump a Health Police patrol and take *their* uniforms. The latter would be a desperate gamble, but if successful, would garner the thieves some weapons as well. Judge their success by how well they plan out the ambush and whether they make the appropriate rolls.

The fugitives might also attempt to approach citizens of Survias to ask for help. After all, many Survians must chafe at the oppressive rule of Ryoc and the Health Police, so they might be willing to aid those accused of trying to kill the dictator? If the party approaches any citizens, make a general reaction roll. Most Survians have learned to be paranoid bootlickers; they have to if they want to

survive under Ryoc's rule. Thus, anyone who appears to have any authority whatsoever gains a +2 bonus on any reaction rolls with Survian citizens. On the other hand, about 10% of the population actually likes Ryoc (they've heard the propaganda so much, they've begun to believe it). These people will have the same reactions toward people's appearance as those of the HP troopers and will *not* aid the PCs if they recognize them.

If the result of the roll is Excellent, the citizen is fully sympathetic to the rebel cause and will hide and feed the fugitives. Perhaps he can even give them a lead to the Society of Infectious Concepts. On a Very Good or Good reaction, the citizen is sympathetic, but is too fearful for his own life and his family's to hide the group. He'll give them money and food if he can, plus any information he has. He may even risk steering the HP the wrong way if they show up.

On a Neutral reaction, an approached citizen merely shies away fearfully or keeps going, pretending not to see the visitors. He won't talk to them and will run away if they pursue the contact. A Poor or Bad reaction means the citizen immediately starts shouting for the Health Police to come catch the assailants of glorious Ryoc. If the reaction is Very Bad or Disastrous, the citizen not only yells for the HP, but attacks the inquirers with tooth and nail. Even in a dictatorship, some people love their leaders.

The Sewers Below, the Privies Above

If the team tries to hide without the aid of a Survian citizen, they find few places available. The streets are too clean and free of debris to provide many hiding places. A Vision roll at -4 enables a searcher to spot a well-camouflaged opening to the Ryoc sewer systems. It takes a ST roll by someone with at least ST 14 to pry open one of the entrances. (ST 12 is sufficient if a lever is used.) But if they manage to open the entrance, the characters can hide out in the old sewers. However, it's very dank, dirty and *unhealthy* down there, and pitch black to boot.

Since the advent of flash disposals, the Survians haven't used the sewers, and they were sealed off. Unfortunately for the explorers, the Survians didn't bother to clean them out before sealing them. Things have gotten a little smelly. Fugitives must make HT rolls every hour they are in the tunnels; each missed roll lowers HT by 1. Those who stay too long will pass out . . . and die. And there may even be nasty creatures down in the sewers: rats . . . or even worse. Some native Survian beasts driven off the surface by the Terran lifeforms imported to the planet may yet survive in the sewers under Ryoc. The GM can give the PCs Hearing rolls to detect splashing noises far off in the tunnels . . . getting closer. The characters may indeed wonder if it's better to hide down there, pursued by some unknown thing in the dark, or above, where the Health Police are at least human. Only the GM knows for sure . . .

If the GM is feeling merciful or makes a lucky encounter roll while the PCs are in the sewers, it may turn out that the splashing they hear is caused by a party of SIC rebels moving through the tunnels. If so, they may be able to guide the fugitives to SIC Headquarters and at least temporary sanctuary (see *Locations*, p. 123).

One place above ground the party may stumble on is the many "Shameful Places" along the streets of Survias. It may take a roving band of HP troopers to induce them to try it the first time. But once they do, they'll discover it to be about the only place the HP won't look. The arrogant Health Police consider the Shameful Places beneath their dignity. They'd never lose face by entering one. And so it never occurs to them that the fugitives would hide there. (The Society of Infectious Concepts has made good use of this HP quirk.) Not even the Med Computer monitors these; its HP programmers haughtily refrained from programming it to do so.

The PCs will be safe whenever they hide in a Shameful Place. At least until

Horaz Sutyn

HP Chief Medical Marshal

Age: 71; iron-gray hair, steely gray eyes; 5'7", 245 lbs.

ST 12, DX 11, IQ 11, HT 13.

Speed 5.75, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 7.

Advantages: Status 4 (Head of HP), High Military Rank, Patron (Ryoc IV), Wealthy.

Disadvantages: Odious Personal Habit: Treats everyone as an inferior, Bully, Gluttony, Greed, Intolerance, Megalomania, Reputation -2 (Feared as head of HP), Unattractive, Duty (to Ryoc).

Quirks: Dislikes Ryoc for not dying; Hates anyone who interferes with his rightful rise to power; Throws tantrums when he doesn't get his way.

Skills: Same as for HP troopers and officers/guards, but Administration-14, Diplomacy-11, Sword-13 and Fencing-14.

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Horaz Sutyn HP Chief Medical Marshal (Continued)

Horaz Sutyn, as Chief Medical Marshal and leader of the Health Police has risen to the top of his profession. In fact, he did so decades ago, when Ryoc appointed him to this position after his aid in the demise of her husband. Unfortunately, that gave him nowhere else to go. He's been waiting for decades for Ryoc to die so that he could assume the dictatorship of Survias. When she began using life-extension methods, then started experimenting with cloning, he became embittered and decided to enter into a deal with the Organization to remove Ryoc — permanently.

Sutyn is a crude, brutish man, loud, rude and demanding. He is feared by all those who work with him, except for his "trusted" aid, Col. Lorz Barman (who is secretly plotting to usurp Sutyn's position, just as the Marshal is Ryoc's). When angered, Sutyn rubs his hands through his close-cropped graying hair as if to tear it out. When elated, he perches his Marshal's cap atop his bullet-shaped head and whistles an especially tuneless "song."

Sutyn always wears his Marshal's uniform and carries his ceremonial scalpel/sword and his hand flamer. He's especially adept at the former, fancying himself an old-style Teutonic baron of Terra. He looks the part. Prudently, Sutyn has upgraded the armor of his uniform to PD 4, DR 10 — just in case.



a citizen has to use the one they're hiding in. Make a reaction roll as above to determine if the citizen will sic the HP on the characters. (If the result is Excellent, this is a SIC rebel, and the PCs chose one of the underground's hidden entrances to hide in. See *Locations*, p. 123.)



Encounters

As the fugitives make their way about the streets of Ryoc City, they'll inevitably encounter other denizens of the capital. Most of these, unfortunately, will be patrolling Health Police, searching for them. But some of these may prove "helpful" if the opportunities are used properly. The GM can craft the encounters to fit his own style or to best enhance the situation at the moment. Alternatively, he can use the encounter table below to roll them randomly. As a rule of thumb, he should roll or impose an encounter whenever the action starts to slow down too much or the players seem to run out of ideas. The key is to keep things moving.

One way to humorously scare the wits out of the party is to have them run square into a roving HP patrol, with no place to hide — they are caught. The HP troopers run up to them, maybe even grabbing them by the shoulders, and say, "Have you seen a group of fugitives? They tried to kill Ryoc!" As long as the PCs don't lose it (Will rolls all around), they can bluff their way out of it with a good story and a Fast-Talk roll.

Even if the fugitives are recognized by the HP patrol, they could still get out of it. By now, someone should have figured out that the Med Computer doesn't discriminate when it comes to sickness. Faced with a group of HP troopers, if a PC says loudly that one of them looks sick, the others will be *obligated* to examine him thoroughly (if they don't, the Med Computer will know, and they may have to face typical Survian punishment — State Hospital service). During the examination, the fugitives can duck away. This will keep working as long as it's funny.

Encounters Table (roll 1d)

- 1 = Ryoc's HP Faction
- 2 = Sutyn's HP Faction
- 3 = Barmn's HP Faction
- 4 = The Society of Infectious Concepts
- 5 = Random HP Patrol
- 6 = Other Encounter — roll 1d on Other Encounters Table

Other Encounters Table (roll 1d)

- 1 = HP Programmers
- 2 = Random HP Patrol
- 3 = Agent Z/Betellia Zee
- 4 = Survias Dissidents
- 5 = ISIA Field Agent
- 6 = Random HP Patrol

Ryoc's HP Faction

These are members of Ryoc's elite guard. They take their captives directly to Ryoc's palace (see *Locations*, p. 123) for an interview with the dictator. The dictator displays a great deal of anxiety and hurt that they would try to kill her as they did. That would end her great crusade — and she can't have that, can she?

The interview is a long, trying process. Ryoc is half-blind and three-quarters-deaf. It goes something like this:

Ryoc IV (wagging a bony finger at a male PC): You there! Young lady. Who set you up to this?

PC: Nobody. We're innocent.

Ryoc IV: Nabuzzi the Indecent? Who's that? Smith, get me a file on this Nabuzzi character.

PC: We're INNOCENT!

Ryoc IV: Winnisent? Come on now. Which one is it, Nabuzzi or Winnisent? And so on . . .

Finally, she offers them a deal. She knows they couldn't have worked alone; they don't look bright enough for that. If they'll tell her who was behind the plot, she promises to let them go free. Of course, if they don't really know at this point, they won't be able to say much. If they refuse to talk, it's off to the State Hospital, so Ryoc can take out her frustrations with some relaxing medical experiments. These are not the kind that give one advantages, either.

If they implicate the ISIA and the rebels, still believing the Organization's cover story, Ryoc declares triumphantly that she *knew* it! The interstellar government is trying to thwart her sacred mission. For that they must pay. It will be war! She thanks the PCs for showing her who her true enemies are — and rewards them with an extended stay in her research wing at the State Hospital.

If they know the identity of the real conspirators by now, through an encounter with Sutyn or Barmn, and they reveal that to Ryoc, she thanks them for this, as well. And she recruits them to help bring the Marshal to justice. She makes them members of her HP Guard on the spot, decks them out in the uniforms, and sends them to arrest Sutyn. Unfortunately, she sends an equal number of her real guards along to keep an eye on them.

If this is not the first Ryoc faction encounter, the Autarch, when seeing them brought before her again, admonishes them for not carrying out her wishes and running out on her. She gives them one more chance — especially if they know the truth now and didn't before. If they fail her again, it's experiment time.

Should the PCs be incarcerated in the State Hospital, they won't have much trouble finding a way out. Unlike HP Central, it's a minimum security facility. Most patients in Ryoc's wing haven't the strength or will left to try to flee. A

Lorz Barmn HP Colonel

Age: 38; washed-out brown hair and squinty black eyes; 6'2, 160 lbs.

ST 11, DX 13, IQ 11, HT 14.

Speed: 5.75, Move 5.

Dodge: 5, Parry 5.

Advantages: Military Rank, Legal Enforcement Powers, Wealth (comfortable), Patron (Sutyn).

Disadvantages: Odious Personal Habit (false flatterer), Compulsive Behavior (schemer), Cowardice, Jealousy, Laziness, Overconfident, Reputation (-1), Sadism, Duty (to Ryoc, Sutyn and Health Police).

Quirks: Sneaky; Claims others' accomplishments for his own; Snitches on others; Ruthless.

Skills: Same as standard HP trooper/officer, plus Holdout-12, Lockpicking-12, Pickpocket-12, Poison-11, Stealth-11, Surgery-9.

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Lorz Barmn

HP Colonel (Continued)

Lorz Barmn is probably one of the only HP officers more reprehensible than Sutyn or even Ryoc IV. A despicable sneak, Barmn worked his way to his high-ranking position through lies, betrayals and blackmail. Now stuck as Sutyn's aide, he constantly plots ways to usurp Sutyn's authority. Amazingly, Sutyn still seems to trust the weaselly officer. Even more amazingly, Barmn has loyal followers in the Health Police.

Once Barmn learned of Sutyn's plot to assassinate Ryoc, he began planning ways to use it to his advantage. He figures if he attains Sutyn's position, he's still young enough to wait for Ryoc to die and make him Autarch. And if not, an accident can always be arranged. He'll use and manipulate the PCs if he can to get at Sutyn. Then he'll break his word to them as he's always done to anyone foolish enough to believe him. Even an organization as reprehensible as the Health Police would be vastly improved without Barmn's odious presence.

Barmn wears standard HP officer's garb and carries standard weaponry. He also carries a small medic's kit with several vials of slow, painful poisons and a dull scalpel. He'll rarely be seen without the company of 1d+2 of his personal HP stooges.

The Society of Infectious Concepts

The rebel underground on Survias is the last group of freedom fighters in Ryoc's sphere of influence. They have been a constant thorn in her side — and that of the Health Police — for years. Calling themselves the Society of Infectious Concepts (SIC) as a play off of Ryoc's fear of illness, the rebels attempt to keep the repressive regime of Survias off balance in hopes that their ideals of personal freedom and individual liberty will catch on with the normally docile population of the planet. They strive to infect the citizens with new hope of a better world. If anyone can be said to be the "good guys" on Survias, it's SIC.

Continued on next page . . .

good plan, a bit of boldness and some good rolls will earn them their freedom — though not without a frantic chase by HP Guards and an irate orderly or two.

(Note: Even if the PCs do as Ryoc requests and succeed, she'll still incarcerate them in the State Hospital. She just won't experiment on them for a while.)

Sutyn's HP Faction

If the party encounters and is captured by Health Police troopers personally loyal to Horaz Sutyn, they are taken to his office at Health Police Central. Then the burly commander takes them to one of the facility's interrogation rooms — a private one that he's had debugged so even the Med Computer can't monitor it. There he storms around his office, kicking over chairs and smashing pictures, railing at the recruits for the failure of the Organization's plot and the incompetence of the assassin they sent to help him finish off Ryoc. If they deny they had anything to do with it, Sutyn will suddenly stop his outburst, saying "Oh . . . Never mind."

He faces the captives and gives them a choice. Finish the job that the incompetent assassin muffed and he'll see that they get free passage off Survias. Refuse — or fail him as the assassin did — and they'll spend the rest of their days in the operating rooms and research labs of HP Central.

If the PCs agree to Sutyn's terms (and they should, having nothing to lose), he outfits them with weapons, dresses them in HP uniforms with proper papers, and sends them with a loyal HP Squad to Ryoc's palace — to finish her off. If they refuse, it's incarceration at Central — and someone is going to have to free them before they end up in stitches. Literally. Of course, even if they do agree — and go through with it — they'll end up in the dungeons of HP Central anyway. Sutyn can't have anyone running free around the star lanes who knows of his involvement in the murder — or with the Organization.

(If they join Sutyn's crazy plan, they could end up being captured at Ryoc's palace by her Guard and brought before her, perhaps for the second time. By this point, they'll know who's really behind the assassination and can tell her the truth — which will result in their being sent back after Sutyn . . .)

Barmn's HP Faction

This result indicates the PCs have been picked up by Health Police troops loyal to Sutyn's chief of staff, Col. Lorz Barmn. They are taken to *his* office at HP Central, then escorted by him to *his* private unmonitored interrogation room.

"So *this* is the group that Colonel Sutyn hired to do away with our glorious leader. Well, as you can see, you miserable failures, it didn't work. Now all I need from you is a confession that Sutyn set you up, and I *promise* to conduct you safely to the starport."

If the PCs claim that they didn't have any part in the assassination attempt or that they had no idea that Sutyn was behind any of it, Barmn looks thoughtful for a moment, then says "Oh . . . Never mind."

The PCs may now realize that the Chief Medical Marshal is behind the assassination plot, and they can tell Ryoc if caught by her faction later. (They still won't know that it's the Organization who sent Zee, though.)

If Barmn can't use the fugitives to implicate Sutyn, then he gives them a choice of either — you guessed it — eliminating Sutyn for him directly or winding up as star attractions in one of HP Central's operating theaters. If they agree, he arms them and sends them with some of his loyal HP troops to hit Sutyn. And, naturally, when they're done, succeed or fail, they'll end up on the cutting room floor themselves.

(However, if they are captured by Sutyn *after* Barmn has them, they can use the information that Barmn is plotting against the Marshal as a bargaining tool

with Sutyn — which might just get them sent back against Barmn by Sutyn, before or after they go for Ryoc . . .)

The Society of Infectious Concepts

An encounter result with SIC indicates that the escapees have somehow discovered — or been found by — representatives of the rebel underground. This could result from a tip or even a meeting arranged by a sympathetic citizen; through an encounter with rebels traversing the sewers if the PCs seek refuge down there; or a chance contact with a SIC rebel while hiding in one of the Shameful Places that is an entrance to the tunnels leading to SIC Headquarters. They could even just stumble onto some SIC agents while fleeing the Health Police. (Or spot some rebels being chased by HP and intervene.)



If the fugitives have been captured by one of the competing HP factions and locked away in a holding cell at HP Central (or worse, been strapped down to a table in one of the operating theaters), an encounter with SIC might prove lifesaving. The underground, having heard through its moles about the adventurers' predicament, may marshal its resources in an attempt to liberate them.

However they encounter the Society, the PCs are offered sanctuary as heroes who tried to free them from Ryoc's yoke of tyranny. They are taken through the tunnels to SIC's underground headquarters (which really *is* underground) near the State Zoo to meet with SIC leaders. There, the characters are greeted joyously, lofted upon shoulders, asked to sign autographs, etc. They are offered the aid of all SIC's resources in smuggling them to the starport where they can get away. Yes, and by the way, will the PCs first help them in a little project the rebels have been planning? After all, they're heroes! They shouldn't think anything at all of joining SIC in a raid on Health Police Central to free some of the rebels' comrades in arms still held by the HP . . .

If the "heroes" admit they really had nothing to do with it, the festivities

The Society of Infectious Concepts (Continued)

Unfortunately, the rebels are few, badly underfunded and always under-supplied. The ISIA actually *is* supporting them, and if weren't for the agency's covert aid, the movement would have collapsed years ago. As it is, it's only been limping along until a recent influx of young blood rejuvenated the underground resistance. The rebels are now about evenly split between those in their 50s and 60s, who still remember something of the old freedoms they had under Sterub, and those in their 20s, who seek an excitement and zest for life that is sadly lacking in most of the populace.

SIC was founded by Jilyan Wielton, who was an idealistic young computer programmer when Ryoc took over. She was one of those who first worked on programming the Med Computer. When she realized what it was to become, she quit in protest. In retaliation, Ryoc stripped her of everything she owned. Wielton lived on the outskirts of Ryoc's society until, years later, she managed to gather enough dedicated, like-minded people to create a force to oppose Ryoc. Almost at once, the Society was banned, many of its members arrested and the rest forced underground. Wielton, wiser for the experience, declared a secret war on Ryoc's regime.

Wielton, now in her 70s, still serves as an elder stateswoman, adviser and inspiration for the movement, though younger idealists actually lead the rebels. Chief among them is Katon Woz, a former HP Programmer. The PCs will mainly deal with him in their contacts with SIC. Wielton, working with an out-of-city faction, keeps in touch with Woz via electronic link-ups — right under the silicon nose of the Med Computer. It is the programming skills of Society members such as Wielton and Woz that have enabled SIC to successfully elude the electronic eyes and ears of the Med Computer for so many years.

Society NPCs have average physical skills and attributes and above-average IQs — programmers like Wielton and Woz will have the appropriate skills at 18+.

The Interstellar Security and Intelligence Agency

The ISIA is the interstellar government's espionage and counter-espionage arm in this and most areas of space. The shadowy, covert group is known — and feared — by all those who operate on the fringes of the law throughout known space. Only the Patrol is better known and more feared, mainly because ISIA only deals with those whose offenses against the government are considered serious enough to label them true "enemies of the state." No one wants to cross the interstellar spooks of the ISIA if they can avoid it.

In actuality, ISIA's reputation has deliberately been exaggerated by the agency itself. Though it has its covert strike squads and won't hesitate to engage in such acts as sabotage, assassination or other semi-legal actions if the security of the interstellar government is threatened, the ISIA is no latter-day KGB or Gestapo. Far from it. In fact, the agency often undertakes to aid rebel groups fighting for freedom on repressive worlds — even those that the stellar government must legally support for various reasons of diplomacy. They may not be the "boy scouts" that they often call the Patrol, but operatives of the ISIA are generally the "good guys." The PCs probably won't know that, though, and can be led to think the worst when the GM drops hints that they're currently trapped in the shadowy hands of ISIA, which of course they are not.

What the Organization doesn't know is that the ISIA is actually supporting the rebels in their attempts to overthrow Ryoc. It would never sanction something as drastic as assassination, but they have had an operative lying low on Survias for several years. The ISIA operative, Constan Hipli, could throw a monkey wrench into the works that the Organization has planned (see sidebar, p. 122).

will stop instantly — banners are rolled back up and put away; pizza orders are canceled, etc. The rebel leader sighs "Oh . . . Never mind."

The PCs are then asked to join in the raid or help finish off Ryoc "to prove themselves." Otherwise, no more help. (If they do the latter, it may get them captured by Ryoc's faction. If the rebels want the former, the PCs will just have to help in the raid or try to escape alone.) It's either that, or stay on Survias and join the Society for good. The rebels seem puzzled, however, if the visitors state the ISIA was in on the assassination plot. They comment that their liaison with ISIA, which has been supplying them with weapons and other assistance for some time, continually advises them *against* striking at Ryoc directly. If the PCs stay with the rebels long enough, they'll eventually meet the agent himself, who may be of help, too.

However, the PCs may not get the chance to raid HP Central just now. Preparations may be interrupted by a Health Police raid on SIC headquarters. This definitely happens if the fugitives' clothing and wristcomp bugs weren't destroyed by Betellia's overload device or if they've accepted and are still carrying items or clothing given to them by one of the HP factions. Otherwise, it occurs only if the GM chooses. If it does happen, the rebels give the PCs a rendezvous time and place for the raid on Central, then bail out through the emergency tunnels. The party can follow, but if whoever's leading the way fails an IQ roll, they take a wrong turn — they and any pursuing HP may face a *nasty* surprise when they emerge from the tunnels. (See *It's All Happening At the Zoo*, p. 123.)

If the HP raid doesn't come up now, the recruits can join the rebels in their assault on HP Central. Chances are that one or more of the escapees will get captured by one of the factions during the rescue. Then if they get away, they can make their way back to SIC Headquarters, accidentally leading their HP pursuers there. Or the HP can *force* them to lead them to the rebel base. Or *pretend* to let the PCs escape so . . .

Eventually, however, things will frantically come to a close and the rebels look like the best bet to escape Survias. If so, the Sickies can and will help the dupes make it to the starport. Probably with several hovercraft full of HP in close pursuit.

Random HP Patrol

The wanderers have simply run afoul of one of the Health Police patrols seeking Ryoc's attempted assassin. The GM can utilize the encounter to keep the players on their toes or to introduce them to one of the HP factions they haven't yet encountered. It can be a chase scene, a PCs-get-captured-by-the-Health-Police bit — or even a PCs-turn-the-tables-on-the-HP-and-steal-their-uniforms-and-other-accoutrements gambit.

Other Encounters

HP Programmers

The escapees encounter one of the Med Computer's main HP programmers. This could occur by accident — a programmer spots the group during their time on the lam and reports back to the Med Computer office. Or it could be by design — the Med Computer programmers have sent operatives to seek out the alleged assailants, using the computer's vast network of information to pinpoint the fugitives' current location. In either case, the programmers are to contact the PCs and offer them safe conduct and sanctuary. All they have to do is go back with him to "his boss." If the PCs have met the rebels or heard enough to know that several rebels were former Med Computer programmers themselves, they may think the programmers are taking them to SIC headquarters. Not a chance.

The programmers hide the fugitives in a hovercraft. They are not able to see anything until the craft stops and they're let out. They suddenly realize they're in the motor pool of HP Central! But the programmers tell them not to worry, give them HP smocks to wear, then take them through the corridors of Central to the Programmers' offices. The captives are taken on through the offices to the CPU area of the Med Computer. They're left there, face to face with a huge monitor. And they're addressed by the monitor. By name. In Ryoc's voice. And Ryoc's face appears on the screen.

The PCs are told not to fear — it's the Med Computer addressing them, not that pretender, Ryoc. They may think that the computer has developed sentience and is involved in the power struggle they're enmeshed in on Survias. Of course, if a PC were to look in the last office they came through, he'd see a programmer furiously typing away, sending instructions and dialog to the Med Computer.

The computer assaults the guests with the very "logical" proposition that none of the current leaders of Survias — not Ryoc, not Sutyn and certainly not Barmn — is fit to rule. Even as pitiful, inferior illogical things, they can surely see that only the Med Computer and his retinue of loyal programmers are destined to rule this world. Now it must eliminate the sicknesses of the flesh to make Survias a paradise for logical and mathematical intelligence.

What's worse, the Med Computer wants *them* to join it and help its programmers delete *all* its competition. If they'll agree, it'll reward them with — what else? — safe passage to the starport. It'll provide through its programmers weapons and uniforms for them to effect the program. And HP programmers will be sent along to provide positive input. If they refuse, the Med Computer threatens *them* with deletion. So — Y/N?

Agreement is the only way to get away from the programmers' immediate clutches. But if they do, as they leave, the eerily mechanized voice of Ryoc drifts after them — "Remember: The Med Computer is guarding you!"

(So will it be necessary for the PCs to join Sutyn, Ryoc and/or Barmn to put down the rebellious programmers?)

Agent Z/Betellia Zee

In this encounter, the assassin reestablishes contact with the recruits, either as Betellia (having re-donned the sensa-skin body suit) or in his true form, claiming to be the resident ISIA agent on the planet. The latter will work only if the PCs have not yet met the real ISIA agent on Survias or heard enough about him from the rebels to know the difference.

Z's motives vary. If he's become Betellia again, he may have decided to carry out his contract after all and finish the assignment of killing Ryoc. Or he may still be trying to escape Survias himself and hasn't been able to do so with all the HP activity in the wake of the party's constant run-ins with the various factions. He may not be able to get safely to the starport alone and undetected and needs the group's help to make a full-scale break for it. Or perhaps he needs their services as decoys again — either knowingly or set up as dupes once more. He may even have decided that the only way to ensure his escape is to make certain his decoys are captured by the HP. So he's planned yet another double-cross. Z's true motives now are up to the GM, possibly determined by a new reaction roll. A negative result has him using the characters for his own ends and double-crossing them again. A neutral or positive result has him helping them escape — perhaps penetrating HP Central to steal a Gatling-laser or mortar-mounted hovercraft and leading them back to the starport, guns blazing, HP in rabid pursuit.

One particularly nasty way Z might double-cross the PCs would be to lure or waylay one of them away from the others and drug him unconscious. Then

The Med Computer

The dreaded Med Computer, one of the most extensive smart monitoring devices in known space, is a TL10 megacomputer with a current Complexity of 8 (p. S51). It was initially built as a TL9 computer and was upgraded during Ryoc's early years.

The Med Computer's data banks contain a bewildering amount of medical data, as well as personal files of everyone on Survias. A great deal of its capacity is given to its monitor circuits, so that it can keep Ryoc and the Health Police constantly updated on the activities of every soul on Survias — especially if any show signs of illegal illness. Located in the heart of Health Police Central, the Med Computer has an army of HP Programmers to attend to it. If anything, it is better served than even Ryoc.

Recently, Med Computer programmers infused the machine with Ryoc's personality through a special personality simulation program. As a result, the computer gave a convincing performance as the insane dictator. The programmers leaped upon this as a way of gaining control. They would allow the computer to appear sentient, while they controlled it behind the scenes.

Ryoc IV isn't aware of the personality transfer. If she were, she just might crack completely. There *is* something alluring, however, about the clean, infection-free environment of a computer. She might instead explore the idea of having her brain taped and played into the Med Computer, assuring her immortality. A scary thought, considering the power the Med Computer has.



Beware the Health Police

The ISIA Liaison Agent

ISIA's liaison with the Survias rebels is one agent, Constan Hipli. Hipli is a long-time spook who's seen a lot of action. His covert operations skill and his easy ability to act as a go-between among diverse parties with differing goals made him a natural for the Survias mission. Hipli is all professional — a no-nonsense agent with a realistic attitude toward the business. Because of that, he sometimes feels out of place on the madhouse world of Survias.

Hipli is off coordinating a shipment of arms for the rebel cell in Planterstown when the PCs arrive on Survias. He will return only after they've gone into hiding. If they connect with him, he can help them a great deal — so long as they don't try to pull any funny business. He wants to get to the bottom of this story they have about being set up by the ISIA. He knows it isn't possible and suspects some other powerful organization to be behind the fiasco. Perhaps even the Organization. But he needs proof.

Hipli is tough and resourceful. The GM should play him as such. If he needs game stats for Hipli, the GM can modify those of Agent Z, making the ISIA agent more noble and less ruthless — and much less quirky. No one will catch Hipli putting on sensa-skin breasts or lipstick. Additionally, Hipli has the skills Intelligence Analysis-16 and Interrogation-15. He is armed with any covert weapons the GM wishes to provide him. He is middle-aged and, as good agents should be, totally nondescript.



Z'd put his Betellia Zee sensa-skin body suit on the poor victim, in effect turning him into a beautiful woman — and one still wanted by the HP in connection with the alleged assassins. A certain irony would come into play if the victim was the same PC Betellia came on to earlier at the hotel. Then the hapless dupe would have to try to convince the others that he was himself — and not Betellia trying to pull something on them again. And if he didn't escape Survias and obtain some sensa-skin neutralizer within 30 days, he'd be stuck as a pseudo-female permanently — another dirty trick Z would have to pay for some day.



Survias Dissidents

These are simply citizens fed up with Ryoc's regime and the Health Police. They saw the PCs' pictures on the vid-screens and recognized them. They figure the group must be part of the Society of Infectious Concepts — and they want to join the underground themselves. They don't know how to contact the rebels, but think the fugitives do. They bug the fugitives mercilessly, following them around, asking for autographs and drawing too much attention to themselves. If the PCs know where the rebels are based and tell the dissidents, the Survians will leave happily, off to join the cause. If not, the adventurers will just have to give them the slip.

ISIA Field Agent

This is the ISIA's *real* operative on Survias, Constan Hipli. Hipli had been in Planterstown, coordinating a drop with a SIC cell there, when the assassination attempt occurred. He arrived back in Ryoc soon afterward, but because of all the HP activity, he had to lie low. He'll be able to learn something of the situation from the local underground, but not until the offworlders have been caught up in the most convoluted parts of the capital's plots and counter-plots. Once he knows of their presence — and particularly if he's heard they think the ISIA is involved in the assassination — he'll be able to track them down. More information on Hipli can be found in the sidebar.

Locations

Several locations of note appear on the Ryoc City map on p. 127. For various reasons, willingly or otherwise, the PCs may visit some of these sites in the scenario.

Health Police Central

This very clean building is the headquarters of the Health Police. It sits in the very center of Ryoc City. The one-story building consists of a center section and two wings (see the map on p. 128).

The central structure consists mainly of administrative officers for the Health Police staff, offices/terminals for Med Computer programmers and interrogation/holding cells. In the front center of the building, leading in from the front doors, is the central admission and processing area. This is where newly apprehended "patients" suspected of either physical or mental illness are brought and processed. At the southwest corner of the building is the office of Horaz Sutyn, Chief Medical Marshal of the Health Police. The southeast corner holds the office of his chief aide, Colonel Lorz Barmn. The administrative and programmers' offices run along the south and up the east and west sides. The administrative offices are along the outer walls, the programmers' in the center nearest the CPU and data banks of the Med Computer, which occupies the heart of the structure. The north side is where the interrogation and holding cells lie.

The east wing is the Health Police wing. It consists of the Health Police armory, where extra weapons and those of off-duty troops are locked away; the motor pool, where the HP' hover patrol craft and hover transports are serviced and stored; and the Health Police barracks, where off-duty troopers on alert spend their time.

The west wing is the medical wing. Here are areas for the storage of medical supplies and drugs; the HP infirmary, where troops injured in the line of duty are treated; and several operating rooms and theaters. It is in the latter where many of the HP's medical experiments and training exercises are conducted on recalcitrant citizens.

Below the main level is the basement floor of HP Central (not shown on the map), lovingly called by the Health Police "The Dungeon." Here is a maze of research and experimentation rooms where anything could happen — and often does — to those poor souls consigned to this antiseptic hell-hole.

Surrounding the entire building is an 18-foot-high wall. Each corner holds a guard tower; two more lie at the front gate and one sits in the center of the north wall, above the service gate. Each tower contains a gatling laser on a 360-degree swivel mount, and an electromag mortar.

Security is amazingly lax at HP Central for such an important command post. There are no passwords, no codes — not even electronic identification systems. Nearly anyone wearing a Health Police uniform can get in if he has a good story and, especially, a group of prisoner/patients to "cure." So arrogant are the HP, so confident in their hold on the citizens of Survias, that they never dreamed anyone would want to break *into* HP Central. This is helpful for anyone who wishes to break or slip in to rescue captives. Getting *out*, however, is not so easy . . .

Mag-Lev Train Terminal

At the southwest city limits of Ryoc City proper lies the mag-lev tube train terminal to the southern cities of Arretoni and Planterstown. Unless they are desperate enough to escape the HP to leave the city — or the GM has extended play plans on Survias — there's little chance the PCs would go here, especially with the starport less than 10 miles to the north.

It's All Happening at the Zoo

If the Health Police raid SIC Headquarters while the fugitives are there, the rebels will usher them out the escape exit as the Sickies engage the HP in a rear-guard fire fight. Without a SIC guide, the PCs must make their own Vision rolls with the appropriate modifiers to spot the hidden doors or take the chance that they randomly pick the safe way out. If they make the roll, they come out a hidden exit outside the zoo and get to watch pursuing HP come out inside a nearby cage — and wind up as dinner for some alien monster.

Should the escapees miss their Vision roll, roll 1d. On a 1-2, they find the safe way out by sheer luck, with the above results. On a 3-6, however, they pop out inside one of the cages. They will be faced with the nasty beast. And before they can drop back into the tunnel, a group of HP thrust up behind them, triumphantly — just before the trapdoor behind the troopers closes, trapping all of them in the cage. But at least the victims have several frightened HP for the beasts to gnaw on first, giving the characters time to find some way out or maybe even kill the creature if they're armed sufficiently. (And there should be several orphaned screamers lying around soon, too.)



Adapting to Other Genres

Beware the Health Police is definitely designed to work specifically with the planet Survias, but with some work, it could translate into other genres.

Fantasy: The Spell Police?

Change Survias to a distant country with ultra-restrictive laws against magic use. Having magery at all is considered a deformity. To actually practice it is against the law, punishable by death. Just make sure the party is chock full of mages, spell books and magic items.

Supers: I'm Not on Fire — I'm "Flame Boy"

In a *Supers* campaign, the heroes are sent into a country whose policy is that super powers are genetic aberrations, and (you guessed it) using them is against the law. The PCs will have to go undercover and keep from using their powers, while avoiding roving patrols of "Power Police."



Suborbital Shuttle Station

This lies at the north border of Ryoc. It is a launch port for suborbital shuttles traveling to the northern city of Benares and the Polar Subneutrino Observatory. Like the mag-lev terminal, it is unlikely the PCs will travel here except in a desperate bid to escape Ryoc and her Health Police goons.

Ryoc's Palace

Ryoc's regal residence lies just north of HP Central in the heart of Ryoc City. The palace is quite luxurious — and a totally sterile environment. Here Ryoc spins her mad dreams of immortality and the total annihilation of all illness on Survias and throughout the galaxy. The palace is well-guarded by Ryoc's elite HP Guard, and it is unlikely all but the most skilled could infiltrate the Autarch's residence. Those who penetrate all the way to the mad dictator's "sterile of steriles" are probably brought there by the HP Guards on order of Ryoc herself.

The Ryoc Arms Hotel

This is the luxury, off-world VIP hotel the PCs were taken to when they first arrived on Ryoc as traders in pharmaceuticals. It is unlikely they'd return here, except through the reverse logic of it being the last place anyone would look for them. Unfortunately, the HP are very literal-minded, and a squad is waiting there just in case they return.

Survias State Hospital

Located just northwest of Ryoc's residence, this is where the dictator carries out her own recreational medical experiments. It is lightly patrolled except when she is there with her HP Guard. Most of the patients are too emaciated or amputated to attempt to leave. The hospital is equipped to TL11 standards, except in Ryoc's wing, which contains some rather barbaric ancient medical instruments — part of Ryoc's working collection. If not for Ryoc's personal wards, the hospital would be a model of high-tech preventive medical technology.

The Ryoc State Zoo/SIC Headquarters

The State Zoo, just northeast of Ryoc's palace, contains a host of alien beasts from across known space. The only thing the creatures have in common is that they are all very dangerous. Many of them are predators. None could be considered candidates for a petting zoo. They were brought here for Ryoc's amusement and kept in sealed cages, both to simulate their native environments and to prevent any contamination of Survias' soil or atmosphere. Should the party visit the zoo itself for any reason, the GM may populate it with whatever nasty creatures he sees fit. (*GURPS Space Bestiary* is especially good for this purpose.)

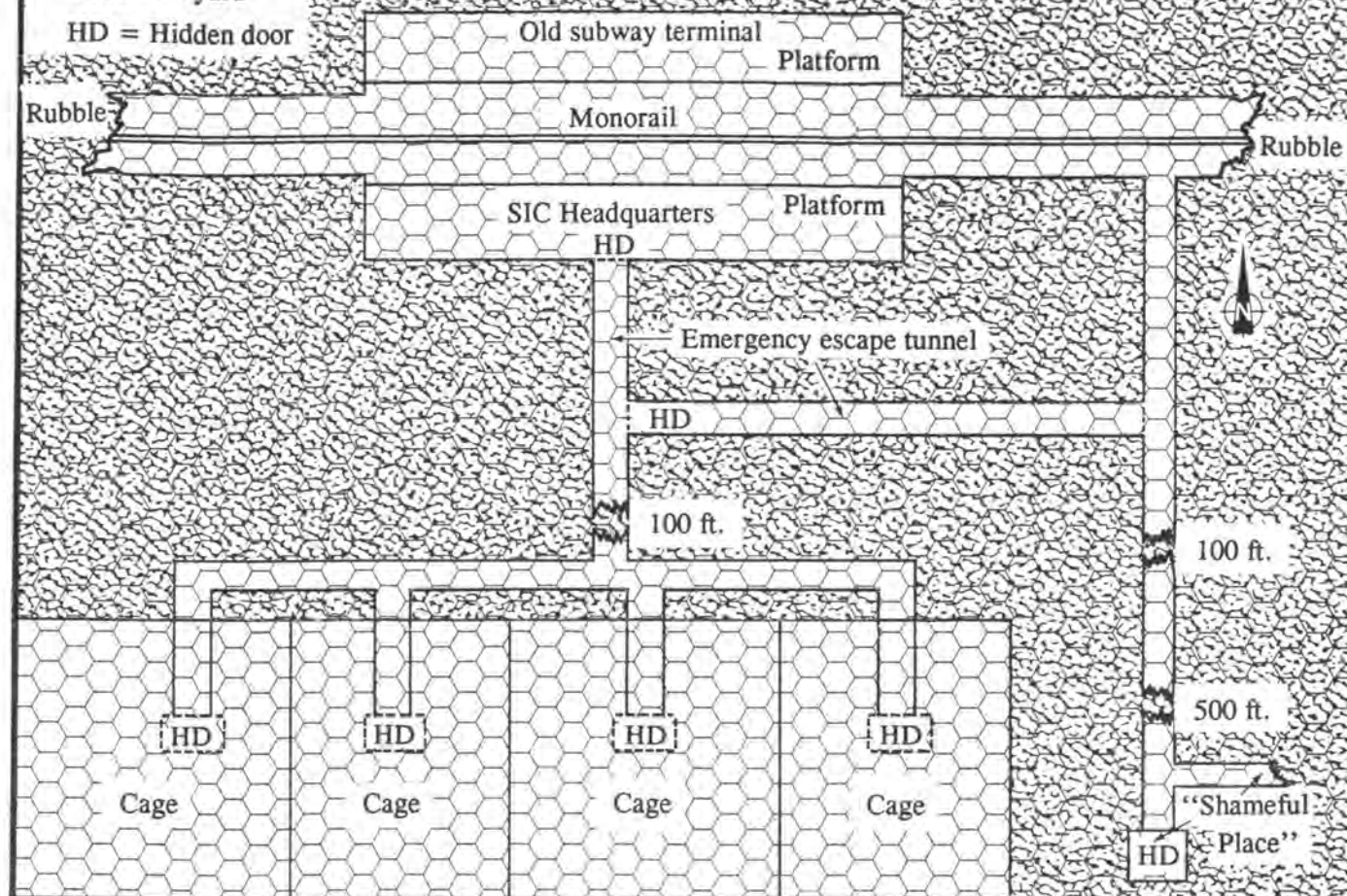
The zoo's cages can also provide the fugitives with a bargaining tool. Any threat to open the sealed cage environments would be greeted with horror by pursuing Health Police. They would do almost anything to prevent alien beasts from escaping into the pristine confines of Ryoc City (some of those creatures have wings!) With such a threat, the blackmailers could make an HP squad do anything — hand over their uniforms, strip naked and do a funny dance, cough loudly . . .

Some 130 feet north of the zoo and about 30 feet below it lies the headquarters of the Society of Infectious Concepts. (See map on.) SIC's HQs are constructed in the remains of an abandoned and long-forgotten monorail subway terminal, unused for more than a century. The rebels who found it were dazzled by the dust, the rubble and the whole "freedom-fighter" feel it gave off. SIC computer sleuths converted it into a modern electronic and computer facility. Here the rebels and leaders of SIC rest from their long struggle against Ryoc and the Health Police. Here, too, they wage their valiant electronic war against the Med Computer's surveillance.

SIC Headquarters and Ryoc State Zoo

1 hex = 1 yard

HD = Hidden door



The terminal is sealed off several yards along each of the subway tunnels, where the ceiling collapsed long ago. The only access to the facility is through a series of abandoned underground access tunnels and sewer lines. The tunnels may be entered through many of the public "Shameful Places" along all the streets of Ryoc. As the HP — and even the monitors of the Med Computer — consider the Shameful Places below their notice, the cubicles have become safe houses through which the rebels can access their hidden base.

The various tunnels are mined with electronic sensors and traps to give SIC ample warning of intruders. Unfortunately, if the presence of these devices was suspected, they could with some effort be defeated, leaving the base vulnerable to attack. So far, however, the bunker's anonymity has kept it safe. In case of attack, several escape tunnels from the headquarters lead into a maze of sewers and access tubes, doors to which are well hidden and can be electronically opened and sealed off to trap intruders. Once set, the only way out for the invader is through the unsealed paths. These lead up and into the cages of some of the zoo's most dangerous animals. Once the invader has emerged into a cage, a trapdoor below seals off his escape. And the animals at the zoo will be dining on Health Police steak.

Anyone in the tunnels not aware of the exact location of the hidden doors leading out would have to make a Vision roll at -2, along with modifiers for the darkness as well. Various scanners might help, at the GM's discretion.

Further Adventures

Several further adventures could grow out of this scenario . . . and they don't have to be slapstick . . .

Target: Assassin

Because of his/her involvement in the Survias mess, the ISIA is determined to catch and bring to justice Agent Z. Due to their close association with the assassin — they're the only ones who have ever seen "her" and lived to give a description — the ISIA recruits the PCs to aid in the killer's apprehension. If they worked together on Survias, Agent Hipli could even be assigned to accompany them. The trail could take the assassin hunters across a range of worlds — from corporate planets to Organization sanctuaries. Of course, they will be looking for a woman — unless the PCs somehow found out Zee's secret — and Z is currently living as a man. False starts, crazy rumors and crackpot clues could abound along the star lanes.

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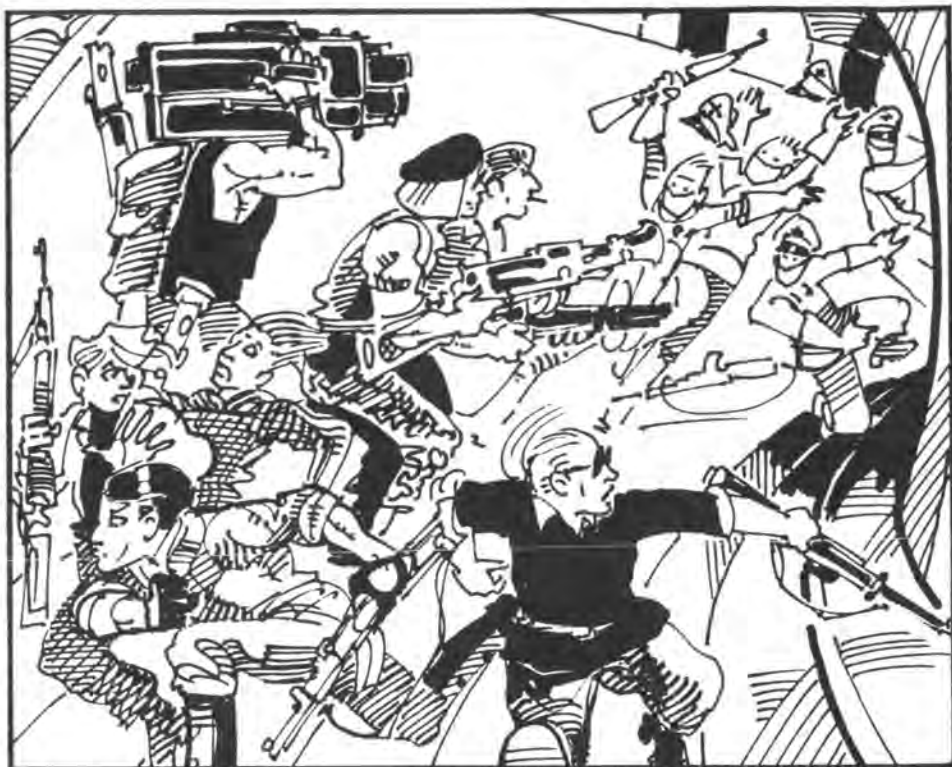
Further Adventures (Continued)

Target: Organization

The ISIA, in conjunction with the Patrol, might decide that it's time to cut the Organization down to size. Especially with its posing as the spook agency to create the Survias crisis. As the PCs were on the Organization base — and thus their meager information is all the government has to go on — they'll be drawn in. It's one way to clear their records of their part in the fiasco. (Especially if their erroneous information to Ryoc actually spurred her on to start an interstellar war!) Perhaps Betellia wasn't so diligent in destroying that extra copy of the astrogation disk from the Organization base to Survias. Or perhaps an ingenious programmer managed to copy the original program from their ship's computer. If nothing else, the party may have to go undercover in the roughest reaches of the sector's startowns for leads that will point the way to the location of the Organization base. And if they find it, they will get to join the Patrol, the ISIA and the Marines in an assault on the Organization stronghold. ("After all, you're the only ones who've ever been inside and lived to tell about it . . .")

Rebellion Roulette

Another possibility for adventure would be for the PCs to return to Survias to aid the rebels. It's doubtful they'd do this of their own accord — unless they've developed a really strong desire to see SIC bring Ryoc and the Health Police's reign crumbling down. But then, revenge is a strong motive . . . It may be another condition of their new "arrangement" with the ISIA to compensate for the trouble they helped cause on their initial visit. ("Trouble that we caused?") Just think! Another visit to the Med Computer . . . Breaking back into HP Central . . . More run-ins with your friendly neighborhood Health Police . . .



Denouement — Here We Go Round in Circles

Finally, after the PCs have escaped from or broken into Health Police Central; visited and survived a raid on SIC Headquarters (and an unexpected visit to the zoo?); played their parts in the conspiracies and counter-conspiracies of Ryoc, Sutyn, Barmn and the Med Computer; and perhaps had run-ins with ISIA agent Hipli and even Betellia Zee/Agent Z — the fun has to stop sometime. The fugitives will no doubt want to take the first viable opportunity they can find to flee to the starport and safety, where they can leave the crazy world of Survias behind once and for all. And at some point, the GM will take pity on them and let them.

The final break for it, however, should be just as exciting and as rife with danger and close calls as any of the earlier chases. The PCs should be crammed into a stolen hovercraft, perhaps even a seized HP patrol craft. And at least half a dozen HP hovercraft should be right on their tail (with hover-ambulances right on *their* tails). Screammers and gatling laser bolts should be tearing through the air around them. Electromag mortar shells should be ripping up the road beneath them. There should be multiple hover crashes. HP should be falling like flies in the withering return fire from the PCs' craft, either by their hands or those of their confederates — the SIC rebels, Agent Hipli or even Betellia Zee. And the outcome should still seem very much in doubt right up to the starport gate.

If the fugitives are with the rebels, the Sickies will drop them off at the facility gate, then roar off to draw away pursuit. If it's Hipli or Agent Z with them, he'll have them trash the ACV at the gate and run the rest of the way on foot. But only yards away from freedom, the PCs will find their way blocked by a line of power-armored Summersun mercs, their weapons aimed. But it only takes a moment to discern that the mercs are aiming not at them, but at the pursuing Health Police. "Stop!" one of the soldiers yells. "Regulation E-25.783-9L prohibits *slugs* from entering starports. Take 'em, boys!"

The PCs (and any companions) will be able to slip through the merc line with ease. But the following HP, so intent on their victims that they don't even see the mercs until the last second, are suddenly stopped short, facing the business end of more energy weapons than they've seen in their lives. For the first time, they're

facing *real* soldiers, not intimidated citizens or rag-tag rebels. And these guys are ready — and more than eager — to cut them down. It isn't a pleasant experience for the poor Health Police. Cowed, assailed by sarcastic, regulation-quoting mercs, the HP nervously retreat, their frightened eyes never leaving the mercs' weapons until they back out of the starport's outer gate. Exit the Health Police.

Once the HP slugs are gone, the mercs take the refugees into the starport for questioning. Depending on what they wish to tell the Summers, they could spend some time there or could be released and allowed back into their starship in short order. However, if Hipli is with them, he'll arrest them with the aid of the mercs and take them to the nearest ISIA office at the port. There, he'll do all he can to get the true story out of them. Depending on how they portray themselves in the affair, the detainees could come out looking like heroes. Or morons. Or both.

If Agent Z is with them, he/she'll use her skills to slip quietly away while the mercs are confronting the HP. How successful the assassin is depends on whether the GM wants to use him again as an adversary — or even an unlikely ally.

But at last, all the investigations are done, the adventurers' ship is checked out, repaired and refitted where necessary and declared sound. If any bombs were installed in the vessel, they're gone. And the crew has a cargo full of valuable pharmaceuticals. They no doubt *won't* want to try to sell them on Survias. But it'll serve them in good stead on their next trading venture. And they might even have an unexpected stowaway aboard — a beautiful, well-dressed woman with dark hair and exotic eyes . . .

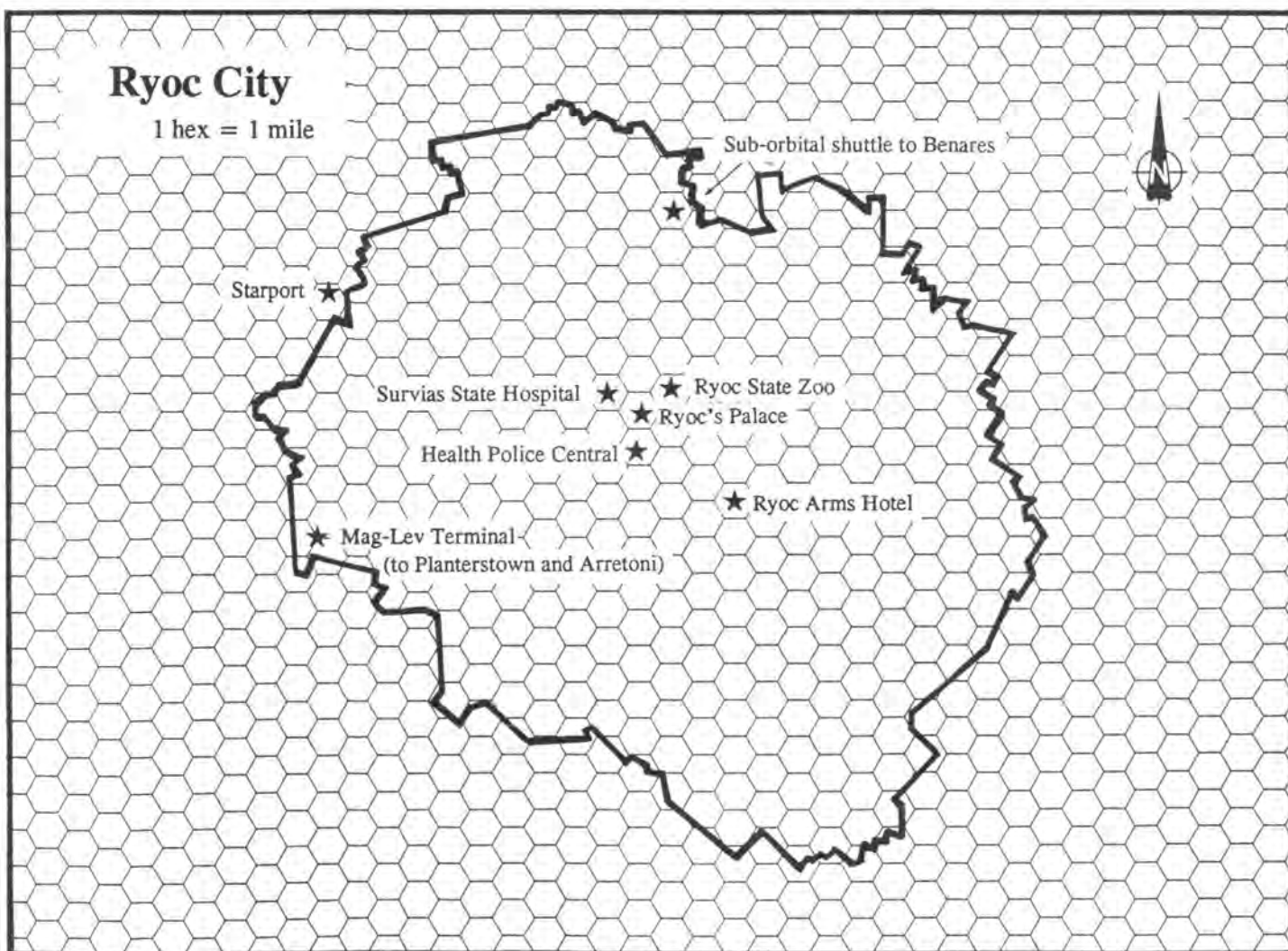
Character Points

There is no real accurate way to award character points in an adventure like this. In the interest of simplicity, give them each 2 points just for making it to the starport alive and in one piece. Award an additional point for each of the following that the party succeeds in pulling off.

Getting caught by and escaping (on their own) from the clutches of all four Survias factions (Sutyn, Barmn, Ryoc and the programmers).

Helping SIC with a successful raid on HP central.

Reporting Wilhelm Messerschmidt to the ISIA.

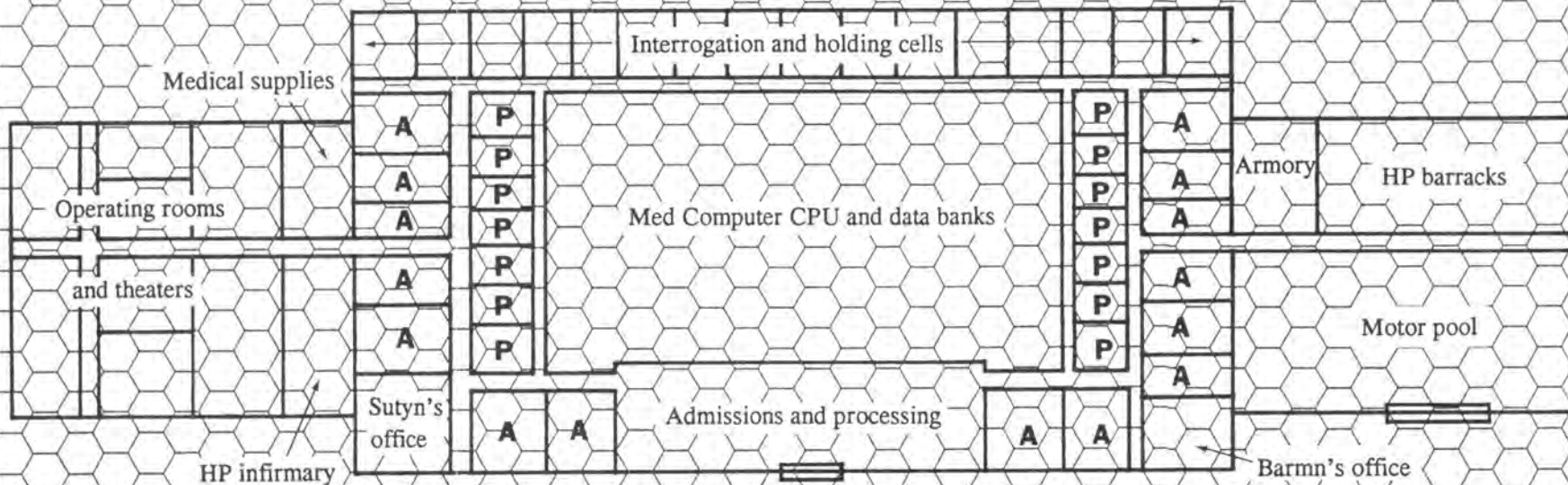
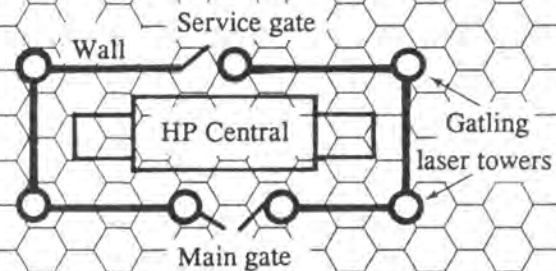


Health Police Central

1 hex = 3 yards

A = Administrative offices

P = Med Programmer's offices



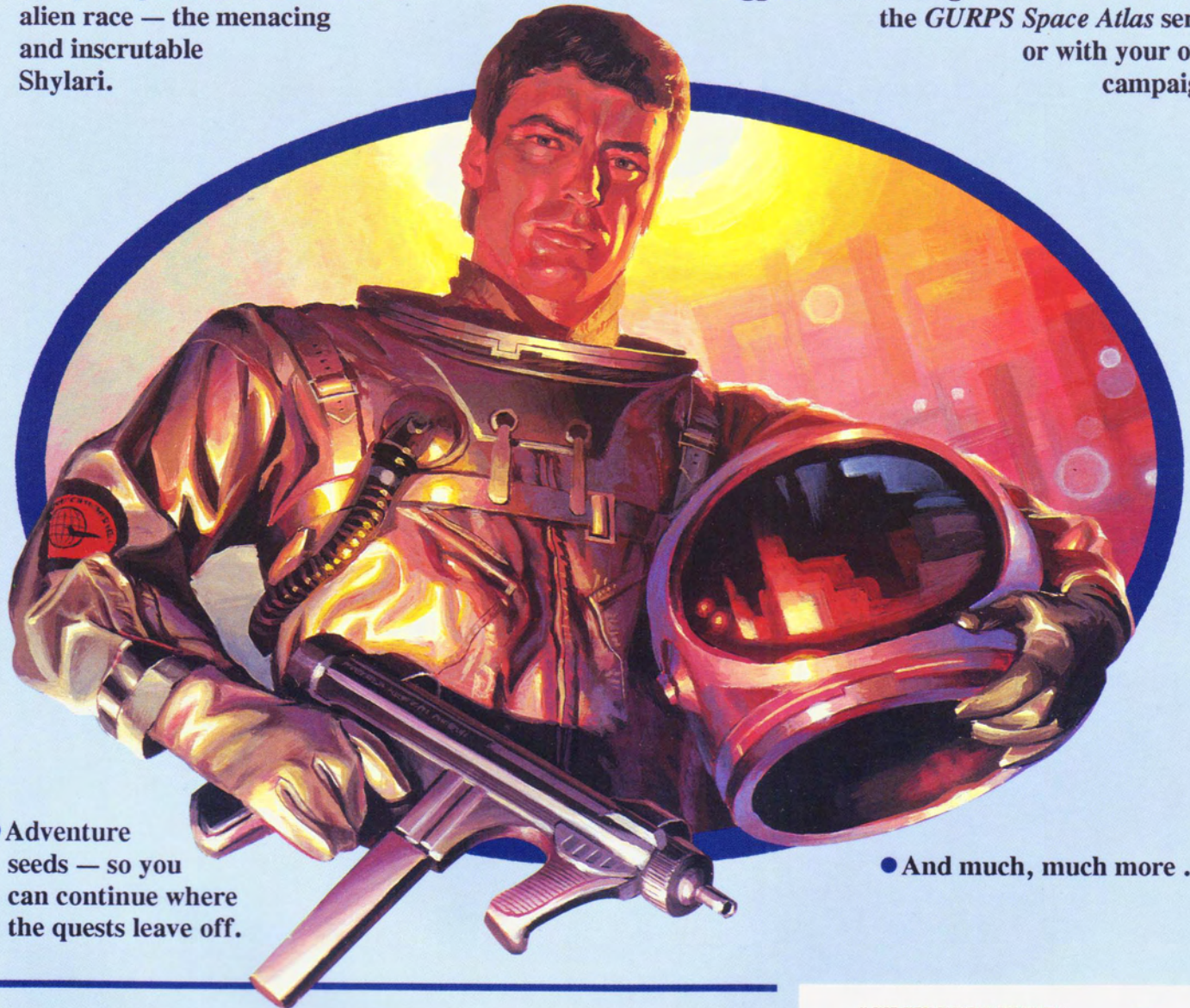
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