THOSE DARK PLACES

THE SCI-FI HORROR ROLEPLAYING GAME

PLAYTEST VERSION 1.0

Powered by the

ODDS

SYSTEM

One Die Determines Success

THOSE DARK PLACES: The Sci-Fi Horror Roleplaying Game

Designed and written by JONATHAN HICKS

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ROLEPLAYING

Of course, if you're an old hand at role-playing then you don't need to read this. Carry on to Section 1 – Creating a Character and get involved with THOSE DARK PLACES.

If you're new to roleplaying then this next section is for you.

The Roleplaying Hobby

Roleplaying is a game of the imagination. We've all seen films, read books and comics, been exposed to wild and wonderful things and we have always placed ourselves in the position of the lead character, or placed ourselves in the situation the story portrayed. In some cases we have taken what we have seen or read and thought 'what would I do in that situation' or 'I would have done things differently'. Well, with the roleplaying hobby those choices and paths untrodden are turned into possibilities.

The game revolves around a group of players, usually between four and six, with one of the players taking on the role of the Gamesmaster. The Gamesmaster tells the players what they see, what they hear, even what they smell, basically describing the location and situation to the players. Then the players react to the information they have been given and tell the Gamesmaster what they want to do. The rules decide what the players are capable of and if they succeed in their actions. See Section 8.1 for an example of what a game is like.

Player Characters

The player characters (PC's) are the identities and personalities the players of the game occupy. Imagine them as characters in a story with their own personality and abilities, except that in a story the plot is linear and the outcome predetermined whereas in a roleplaying game the PC's can influence the outcome of a game with their decisions and actions. Players take on the role of their PC's, acting their personalities and demeanour.

The Gamesmaster

The Gamesmaster (GM) is the controller of the game. More information on the GM's role can be found in Section 8. In brief, the GM is probably the single most powerful player at the table, with the most responsibility. The GM has to create the adventure, tell the players what they see and hear, describe the locations and surroundings, play the roles of all the characters the players come across and allow the plot to unfold through their narrative and descriptions.

This role does not mean the GM is 'against' the players, creating an adventure in which the players have to survive, or throwing danger and adventure in huge quantities at the players. The GM not only has to bring the adventures to life, but they must provide an entertaining game for the players to enjoy.

What you will need for this game

All you need is this rulebook, some pencils and some paper, and a single D20 dice, which can be purchased from any hobby shop. Copies of the Character Sheet are also advised.

Copies of the ODDS character sheet can be found at the back of this book.

When the player or GM is called upon to make a roll they will roll the D20 and read the surface result.

Sometimes they may be asked to add or minus a number to this roll, which works like this:

There is also the 1D10 roll, which is rolling the D20 and halving the result, rounding up.

Then there is the 1D5 roll, which is rolling the D20 and dividing the result by 4, rounding up.

ROLEPLAYING IN THE SC-FI HORROR GENRE

An Introduction to the THOSE DARK PLACES game

by

JONATHAN HICKS

When I was very young I was introduced to a movie that would change the way I looked at science fiction cinema. The movie was Ridley Scott's ALIEN.

I had never seen anything like it. I was bought up on the Star Wars movies and one of my favourite shows was Star Trek – it was all very bright and full of adventure. There were heroes and baddies and cute bleeping robots.

Then darkness. The universe was suddenly a dangerous and scary place to be.

This game has been designed with the science fiction horror genre in mind, films such as *Alien, Aliens* and *Event Horizon*, even films with the atmosphere of *Blade Runner* or *Outland*. It is also influenced by survival horror games like *Dead Space*.

The science fiction horror genre doesn't have a huge catalogue of titles but they all have something in common – claustraphobia and the idea that there is no escape from the situation the antagonists find themselves in. The best stories take place far from Earth on space stations or starships or lost colonies in the far corners of the galaxy, far from anyone, far from aid, and they revolve around being cut off in an alien environment, surrounded by things beyond comprehension.

You only have to watch the movie *Alien* to understand my meaning – a small crew of seven (about the size of a gaming group!) on a starship almost a year's travel from Earth. An alien organism that is totally incomprehensible to them, the lifecycle of which is first experience through invasion and violence, a creature that kills indiscriminately. Add to this the fact that those in charge may have actually known of its existence… that's some pretty powerful gaming material right there. The roleplaying and adventure opportunities abound. Skulking the ship trying to find the creature, fighting it off as best you can, running for your life… this setup and others like it just scream (excuse the pun) for a roleplaying game.

The title THOSE DARK PLACES perfectly describes what this game is about. The shadowy corners of space that no one has ever explored – what is there? Is it intelligent? Is it a monster? The deep space stations and outposts that nobody visits – what would happen to a small crew stuck in the back of beyond where even light does not reach? What would that do to your mind? Your sanity?

You can transplant any horror scenario and place it in the science fiction genre. Psychotic murderer in a high school? How about a psychotic murderer on a space station? It's very easy to do. Ridley Scott himself said that one his influences of the feel and atmosphere of *Alien* was from Tobe Hooper's *The exas Chainsaw Massacre*, which is about as a far removed from science fiction as you can get. If you take the elements of a good fright movie or story and transpose it in to a claustrophobic, dark and gritty science fiction setting then you have your game.

I've also included rules for a more adventure-orientated game if that's your wish, such as starship and vehicle combat. You don't see much of that in sci-fi horror but its there if you want to use it.

This document is simply a playtest version and so is incomplete. Please feel free to send comments and constructive criticism to farsightgames@yahoo.co.uk with the subject header 'THOSE DARK PLACES'. The rules will need refining and editing, that much is for sure, and any help or ideas are appreciated.

SECTION 1
CREATING A CHARACTER

Creating a player character (or PC) to portray in the THOSE DARK PLACES Ggme is a relatively short and uncomplicated process, with a lot of the design detail going into the character's personality and emotional state as well as the numbers on the character sheet. Although the stats of the character will bear a significant impact on the welfare of the character, it is not the most important faction of play.

First, it is best to visualise the setting the character is in and then decide on what type of personality would be best to play. If the campaign is going to be military based, then an uniformed and by-the-book PC type may be suitable. A private trader may be more open-minded and relaxed. If the character is on the wrong side of the law, then maybe paranoia would be a good virtue, or maybe a blasé look on life.

These facets of a personality must be established before initial character creation can begin. It would be a shame if the players were more concerned about what the character was capable of instead of thinking about motivation or morals or opinions. This would turn the game into a two-dimensional setting, which is something that is best avoided.

On the other hand, you might not want to get too hung-up about the psychological traits of PC's. THOSE DARK PLACES is designed for dark adventure in space, after all, and it would be a pain if a player agonising over decisions bogs down each heart-stopping action scene or act of drama. After all, when your firing multiple shots at a mutated crewmember that is trying to eat your flesh... well, the chance to think things through at a time like that is impossible. It's not chess. You have to think fast and move faster.

There are a lot of choices for a player to make - what kind of PC to play is probably the most decisive of all of them. They can play scouts, lawkeepers, robbers, troopers, marines, executives, pirates, bounty hunters, doctors... the list goes on and on. There are a lot of professions that probably would not be covered in a comprehensive list. The fact is, the rules give the players the chance to play any character they choose.

All characters are defined by two things - their STATISTICS and their SKILLS.

Section 1.1: STATISTICS

STATISTICS are the basic capabilities of the character. These scores denote their fitness, intelligence and general ability to function. A character has four STATISTICS (or STATS for short), which are scaled with a number between 7 and 16, 7 being the worst, 12 being an average and 16 being the best.

> EXAMPLE 1 - If a character had 16 in AGILITY they would be quite dexterous and able to move quickly and deftly, where a character with an AGILITY of 7 would be quite clumsy and probably trip over his own feet.

There are four initial STATS and these are:

AGILITY (AG) - As described in example 1, this score denotes how agile and dexterous the character is. A character with a high AG will be able to fire weapons accurately, move faster than most and have quick reactions.

INTELLIGENCE (IN) - This score is the characters brain power, and generally covers their mental capability. A low IN score does not denote any kind of mental incapability. It just means that characters with low IN do not have access to the same educational sources as characters with high IN, and therefore do not respond to intellectual situations the same way. Characters with low IN can still learn things that will benefit them in the future.

PERSONALITY (PE) - The social and personal skills of a character are very important to the role-playing aspect of the game, and, after all, not every situation can be resolved with the barrel of a gun. This score describes how charismatic the character can be, and calculates the reaction of NPC's to the character.

STRENGTH (ST) – Things can be dangerous at times, and the overall fitness of a character will determine how physically able the PC is, and how she will withstand the rigours and

pressure put upon the human body during these trials.

CREATING STATISTIC SCORES

To create scores for these STATS, the player must roll 1D10 and add 6 to the roll for each STAT. If they wish, they can take one number from one STAT and swap it with another if they wanted to be more, say, agile and dexterous. The numbers in these STATS are known as STAT LEVELS.

SECTION 1 .2 - SKILLS

After the player has rolled for their STAT scores, they can then move onto the SKILLS the character will need to function in their environment. SKILLS are the capabilities of the character, with capabilities ranging from firing a weapon to healing a wound to flying a starship. Depending upon what the character's role in the setting is will most likely dictate what SKILLS they will have. This is why it is important to decide on what type of character to play before putting points into anything.

A character is given several SKILLS that are an indication of what a character is capable of. The character gets these skills automatically and the score is at the STATISTIC level. Each STAT has a list of skills that are linked directly to that particular capability. AGILITY has a list of skills that require dexterity and quick reactions to perform, INTELLIGENCE a list that are what the character is capable of mentally, PERSONALITY a list which is an indication of their social skills and STRENGTH a list which enables the PC to perform actions which involve physical fitness. Each of these skill lists are only available under the particular STAT heading they are associated with, and can only be performed if the character has them.

Each player then gets two points to spend in each group of skills – they can raise two skill levels by one point, or one skill level by two points.

So what are these skills? Later there will follow a list of skills available to players, all listed under their accompanying STAT heading. The list includes starting skills, too, which will be already included on the Character Sheet. The skills are listed with descriptions on how they can be used and what for.

SECTION 1 .3 - HIT POINTS

Before we go any further, we must just fill in one piece of the Character Sheet. This section is called HP, which stands for HIT POINTS. These points determine how much damage the character can take until unconsciousness or death. That may sound gruesome, but personal injury through violence or accident is a fact of life.

The space after HP is equal to your STRENGTH STATISTIC score. The meaning of this score will be explained in the later section of damage and healing.

SECTION 1 .4 - SKILL LISTS

Listed below are the skills available to the players that they may find useful during a ODDS game. This list is split up into the relevant sections covering each of the STATS and their applicable skill list.

These lists are by no means comprehensive or restrictive. Indeed, there are thousands of skills that are available to players that these lists do not cover.

If, at any time during character creation, a player decides they want a skill not listed, they are quite welcome to decide which STAT the skill would most likely be listed under and add it at the normal skill point costs. The final decision will fall on the GM, however, as to whether the new skill is applicable or even possible. Having a skill such as 'Cookery' may help the PC with socialising with NPC's, but having a skill 'Shrug Off Close Range Energy Shots' is far beyond the realms of realism. If the player and the GM use a bit of common sense and agree on a skill that won't upset game balance or be too ridiculous, the skills open for PC's to use enormous.

As stated before, the skills in the following lists are the most commonly used skills in the ODDS setting and should give the player an idea of what to expect out in the depths of space.

AGILITY BASED SKILLS

JUMPING: Dramatic leaps of huge air vents, jumping to grab the undercarriage of an escaping shuttle... this skill covers all those situations where you have to spring into action. The maximum distance covered is usually one-third of the characters AG in meters, although this can be changed by the GM at her discretion for dramatic purposes.

MELEE: Anyone can swing a blunt or sharpened instrument to inflict damage on an opponent or whatever they are in conflict with, but increasing this skill will enable the wielder to place the strike where it will have the best effect.

THROWING: The ability to throw any viable hand held object. This skill is handy for grenades of most kinds, bottles, chairs, and comes in handy especially during rows about relationships. The distance a PC can throw an object is calculated by multiplying the ST by 2, although, again, this can be up to the GM, depending on the situation.

DRIVE SURFACE VEHICLE: This skill enables the user to control any ground-based vehicles, including transports, trucks, bikes and hovercraft, on both land and water.

FIRE HAND WEAPON / HEAVY WEAPON / STARSHIP WEAPON (Three separate skills): Although this skill will be covered in more detail in the Combat section, it is necessary here to understand what types of weapons it covers. All weapons are broken down into different categories, all of which must be purchased separately, which are:

HAND WEAPON: This covers pistols and rifles. The PC can fire any kind of hand held projectile or energy weapon if they have this skill.

HEAVY WEAPON: This includes rocket launchers, heavier ballistic weapons (such as support weapons) and any kind of ground-based vehicle weapon.

STARSHIP WEAPON: As the title suggests, this skill enables the PC to operate weapons installed on Starships, including energy weapons and missile pods.

HIDE: Sometimes, discretion is called for and the PC may find it useful to be able to tuck themselves away to avoid any unwanted attention. This skill is handy for not getting involved in any situation that could prove disastrous.

PILOT AIR VEHICLE: There are more ways than one to travel on a planets surface, and air travel is fast and comfortable. Characters wishing to fly their starships within an atmosphere must have the PILOT AIR VEHICLE equal to or more than the STAT score, and of course use the STARSHIP HELMSMAN skill to fly the vessel.

RIDE (ANIMAL): This skill covers the ability to ride any kind of animal - be it lizard, mammal, insect, or maybe something a little more exotic. This enables the character to ride both ground and air-based creatures.

STARSHIP HELMSMAN: Travelling through space takes a lot of nerve. Most of the time a helmsman will just plot the course and let the starship do the rest, but sometimes there may be a situation when the person in charge of the vessel will have to make a quick manoeuvre to avoid danger. This is where the STARSHIP HELMSMAN skill comes in. This skill covers vessels of all sizes (control systems can be very similar, unless the GM rules otherwise and imposes penalties).

STEALTH: As with HIDE, the ability to move around undetected has its advantages. Penetrating secure areas, dodging patrols... this is a very handy skill to have, especially if you are on the wrong side of the Law, or are sneaking in after a late night out.

INTELLIGENCE BASED SKILLS

COMPUTER OPERATION: This skill covers the ability to understand, program and do any necessary repairs on a computer system. Computers pretty much control everything in the game and are expected to run at maximum efficiency. This is not always the case, and anyone with this skill may find their abilities invaluable. This skill also covers hacking into systems and any other kind of computer ability usually frowned upon.

DEMOLITION: It's easy for anyone to put a bomb somewhere, but how about putting it somewhere where it will do maximum damage? This skill enables the user to plant charges where they will be their most effective. Bringing down old buildings, taking out a strategic bridge, even blowing a lock is effectively covered by this skill.

ELECTRONICS: Computers and technological items need one thing to function - wires and electrical components. This is

where the ELECTRONICS skill comes in. With this skill a PC can jump-start vehicles, repair small items of importance, and pretty much do anything where getting hold of a few wires and a screwdriver (or more exotic tools) is required. It certainly saves having to bash the equipment with a powerdrill.

MEDICINE FIRST AID / SURGERY (Two separate skills): It's fair enough running round the settled systems blowing up the bad guys and getting into fights galore, but what about the aftermath? Those wounds and accident bruises won't go away by themselves, you know, so the ability to patch up the unwanted cuts and scratches is a must. This skill covers two areas which must be purchased separately- *first aid* and *surgery.* The first is necessary for on the spot treatment, whereas the other is more for the doctor of the family. Because there are so many types of medical procedures, the MEDICINE type *surgery* is more difficult to learn, and therefore costs double the usual amount of skill points to purchase. The *first aid* skill must be purchased before the character can progress to *surgery.*

NAVIGATION PLANETARY / STELLAR (Two separate skills): It helps to know where you are at any given time, and so this skill helps the PC's to locate their position and move in generally the correct direction using vehicles, or even walking, as long as they have a compass or at least some idea of the terrain. The skill is split up into two sections which must be purchased separately- *Planetary* and *Stellar. Planetary* covers any movement on the surface of a planet, whereas *Stellar* covers travel through the stars. If you're flying around in a starship, the *Stellar* version is a necessity to find your way around star systems. When navigating a jump to another star system, the navigator makes a *Navigation – Stellar* skill roll every two rounds and when a roll is successful the ship can jump the next round.

PERCEPTION: Although not strictly a skill based directly on intelligence, perception can be affected by how a person allows themselves to perceive the galaxy about them, and is used whenever the GM wishes them to recall or notice something out of the ordinary.

SCIENCE: This skill is for the player who wants to investigate the galaxy, and covers every available science known to every sentient race. These sciences include chemistry, biology, archaeology, physics, astrophysics, geology, xenobiology... whatever science the player can think of can be learned by the PC. Having a character who knows something about one of the many sciences can often be a great advantage.

STREETWISE: This is a handy skill to have, especially for both the lawmaker and lawbreaker type characters. This skill enables the user to find things out about the shadier side of the future. At the very least it helps the PC to find the best local hangouts, bars and restaurant. Depending on what planet or in what district the PC's are will determine just how successful they are at 'getting in' (or, more importantly, 'getting out') with the underworld or find out details about the location they are staying at.

TECHNICIAN: Every mode of transport or engine needs a repairman, and the TECHNICIAN skill covers that. Starships and ground vehicles need maintenance or quick modifications, and depending on the size of the vehicle will depend on just how many technicians will be required.

PERSONALITY BASED SKILLS

CHARISMA: This is a reflection of the PC's personal charm and appearance. This skill decides just how popular they are in their social circle, and it also determines how NPC's will react when first meeting them. It is very handy during the situations where actually getting on with an NPC is necessary. Violence is not the answer to everything, and it is best to make friends where they can help you if you fall on difficult times.

BARGAIN: So you want the most out of life, yes? Well, with this skill, the most is what you haggle for. Bargain allows the PC to up or lower a price of an item, make deals with other characters or at least get the best deal they can out of something.

BUREAUCRACY: Handling a diplomatic situation is always a tricky business. If it is a meeting of powerful people, a hostage situation, a very delicate personal matter or any other situation where the PC's actions and words must make an impression on the target audience, this skill is necessary. All high ranking persons have this skill, because negotiation and the ability to talk your way through something are a must.

CON: If you want to talk your way in or out of something, twist your words to confuse your opponent or just lie your way through life then this is the skill to have. Characters with the

Con skill can switch a situation to their advantage. It can get them money, prestige or friends, but watch out - if the recipient of your shady words gets wind of your little plan the consequences could be disastrous.

GAMBLING: Gambling is the fastest way to lose or gain money. It can also be used to bluff an opponent with the truth, unlike Con that just goes with the lie. This skill is handy when getting in on those backroom games of chance, or the machines that pump out the tokens when you hit the right sequence on the display. Making contacts during these games, or getting hold of information from the other players is one way to take advantage of this skill.

LEADERSHIP: If you have the personality, the guts and the impressive nature others find intimidating, then you have the properties of a born leader. This skill is what it is all about, and successful use makes sure that the plans you have for others are carried out. Leadership is handy skill for ranking officer types, with the higher score getting more respect from the underlings, but don't get too much like a megalomaniac. One mistake too many and your followers will start to lose faith.

STRENGTH BASED SKILLS

BRAWLING: Always having a hand held weapon to hand is not always an option. Sometimes characters must defend themselves with nothing but their hands, and this skill enables them to do just that. With this skill they can punch, kick, headbutt... just about every manoeuvre in hand-to-hand combat is covered with this skill. There is more information on this in the Combat section.

CLIMB: Scaling heights is one thing, doing it and not falling off is something else. All people climb a tree or something in their youth, and doing it professionally is a boon to any character who intends to spend a lot of their time exploring, or getting into secure compounds with high walls. Like an orchard.

STAMINA: Having the energy to carry on in gruelling conditions, staying conscious or operating efficiently after a major shock to the system, or just staying upright after a long time drinking is possible if the character has this skill. Stamina is necessary for those who take a lot of physical punishment.

SWIM: Not everyone can swim and this is reflected with this skill. Staying afloat in water takes practice, and if you don't get that practice, you could fall foul of some very wet situations.

It is up to the GM and the player to decide on what skills would benefit the character most, and if the player wants to personalise his PC by adding a skill not listed then he is more than welcome to do so. There are a lot of opportunities in the League of Seven, and having the ability to tackle them head on is what will benefit both PC's and the campaign the most.

SECTION 1.5 – EXPERIENCE POINTS

As the characters adventure their way through the galaxy they will learn and experience new things. This is reflected in the earning of experience points, also known as EX, which they will be able to spend on their skills to increase them and become better at certain abilities, or even learn new ones.

EARNING EXPERIENCE POINTS

After every scenario the players will be awarded Eperience Points (EX) to spend on their characters to increase their skill levels. The points awarded should reflect three things. These are:

Success – How well did the PC's do, and did they succeed at their mission or adventure?

Roleplaying – How well did the players play their PC's? Did they accurately portray the character? Or did they generally disrupt the game or do things that may have seemed unnecessary?

Self sacrifice – did the PC do anything particularly risky during the game? Did they risk all to save a life, or allow themselves to be put in harms way for the greater good?

Each of these three things must be considered by the GM as they calculate how many EX each player will receive. Each will earn the PC between 1 and 4 points, 1 being the lowest, for bad play or failure to overcome the obstacles set or running from danger, and four the highest, for great play, success in the mission and acts of bravery. These points are then awarded and the players are allowed to spend them on their characters. On average, a decent

player will receive between 6 and 8 skill points per gaming session.

SPENDING EXPERIENCE POINTS

Once the players have their points they are allowed to spend them as they see fit on their PC. Points spent can increase the skill levels of a PC, and this is how it works:

To raise a skill to the next level (say, from level 8 to level 9) the players must spend points equal to level they wish to attain. This means that anyone wanting to go from skill level 8 to skill level 9 must spend 9 EX to attain that level. Anyone on skill level 10 wanting to rise to skill level 11 must spend 11 points.

Upon reaching skill level 12, any future skill point expenditure is double the skill level target. This means, for example, that to progress from level 12 to 13 it will cost 26 EX.

STATS cannot be increased at any time.

SKILL INCREASE ALLOWANCE (Optional rule):

The GM may rule that only certain skills may be increased after a game session, to reflect the fact that these skills are used. Spending a whole game fighting and blasting in a starship and then spending EX on a Riding skill might sound a little strange, and the GM may want to have some control over what skills are increased.

During the game, the PC's will make many rolls against their skills and, if they succeed in a skill roll, the player places a tick next to the skill. Only skills with ticks next to them after the game are allowed any EX spent on them. This tick is only placed next to a skill if the roll is successful, to reflect experience and gained knowledge in the successful use of talents. All ticks are removed after a game, whether points were spent on them or not.

SECTION 2

THE RULES

HOW TO INTERPRET THE DICE ROLLS

INTRODUCTION

Well, you've got a clean cut character who has plenty of numbers all over the sheet, but what exactly do they mean, and how will those numbers affect the game?

Although the GM presents a story that changes as players make their choices and play their roles, there must still be a form of stability that makes the game fair for everyone. That's where the rules come in. The rules are designed to allow players to perform actions and, depending on how skilled they are, allows them to do things in the ODDS setting that would be impossible to adjudicate just by narration alone. If the whole thing was just talking, some players may think they are being picked on or pushed in certain directions. The rules give a stable platform for everyone to work off and bring order to the chaos.

SECTION 2 .1 - WHAT THE DICE MEAN

When the player or GM is called upon to make a roll they will roll the D20 and read the surface result.

Sometimes they may be asked to add or minus a number to this roll, which works like this:

There is also the 1D10 roll, which is rolling the D20 and halving the result, rounding up.

Then there is the 1D5 roll, which is rolling the D20 and dividing the result by 4, rounding up.

SECTION 2 .2 - THE SKILL ROLL

This roll is what the GM or player must do to successfully complete an action of some sort. Depending on what the result is read off the dice will determine the outcome of the roller's efforts.

Lets say, for example, that Boon's PC wants to hot-wire a sealed pressure door to get it open. First of all, he must make sure he has the correct skill to perform the task (in this case ELECTRONICS), and then he rolls the die. The score on the die will give a result, and this result will let the players know if he has been successful or not.

> *But how does the roll decide success or failure? Well, let's say the PC's skill level in ELECTRONICS is 10. As long as Boon rolls 10 or less on his D20 then the action is a success. Rolling above 10 denotes failure in the action. This roll applies to most skill usage.*

The die to roll to find out if the action worked or not is the D20. This gives the PC a range of numbers, and as you can see the higher the number in his skill level the better chance he has of pulling it off.

To summarise, when a player is called upon to perform an action, he will be asked to roll a D20. Any roll equalling or lower than his skill level will be a success, and any roll higher than his skill level will be a failure.

Surely, though, not all rolls are that hard or easy? If the action is run of the mill then surely it should be easier for the PC? Well, this is where Difficulty Modifiers come in.

SECTION 2 .3 - DIFFICULTY MODIFIERS

Actions performed by PC's are not always dependent on their skill level. Maybe there are contributing factors to the situation which will make their job easier, or even harder.

Difficulty modifiers reflect this by adding or subtracting numbers from the PC's skill level. If the modifier is a negative number it will, of course, make the action harder. If the modifier is a plus number, then the action is easier. There are ranges of numbers which reflect this element of chance.

For example, let's go back to Boon's PC. If he wanted to fly a shuttle down a straight canyon, then there would be a positive modifier to his roll, making the job easier. If, on the other hand, the canyon was filled with overhangs and he was under fire from pursuers, his modifier would be a minus number.

As you can see, the situation Boon's PC was in changed the difficulty modifier.

Let's not get carried away, though. Not every action calls for a modifier, or even a roll. If the player just wants her PC to stroll down a street and into a shop, then a roll isn't called for. This is an automatic action that any person can accomplish with no problem. If she was under fire or trying to avoid another person then a roll may be required, but at the end of the day, actions must only be rolled for dramatic purposes or if it will have an outcome on the situation. The final decision lies with the GM, and he must be fair in both deciding if the player must roll and what the modifier must be.

Below is a chart giving the type of difficulties of an action and their relevant modifiers. The GM is the final word on what the modifier must be, but he must be fair.

DIFFICULTY	MODIFIER
Simple	+10 to +12
Easy	+6 to +8
Quite Easy	+1 to +3
Average	0
Hard	-1 to -3
Difficult	-6 to -8
Impossible	-10 to -12

The modifiers are presented in a range, like +1 to +3. This gives the GM a range to choose from to reflect the action in question, and so does not restrict him to single numbers that may seem unfair. For example, if the GM rules that an action is Easy but not that Easy, then he may choose a +7. If the action is more than just Simple he may use the +11. As said before, this is GM discretion.

SECTION 2 .4 - THE ACTION ROUND

The action round is how long it takes for a character to do a single action. An action round is five seconds long.

Five seconds may not seem like a long time, but this time limit is necessary when calculating time taken doing something. If a group of characters gets into a fight, then after the encounter the GM can tell them how long it took, and maybe this will have a bearing on the game. During an encounter, the GM can calculate how long it takes a character to complete an action and then continue with the other players whilst that particular PC does their job.

How long different actions take is up to the GM. Firing a shot at an approaching enemy may take a round. Hot-wiring a pressure door may take longer, and the GM may decide it takes several rounds depending on how well the player rolled. For practical purposes, a round exists to put all actions in perspective and it also gives the GM a framework to work from when deciding what a character is capable of doing in that round, and how fast she can get it done.

SECTION 2 .5 - MULTIPLE ACTIONS

It is possible for a PC to perform more than one action in a single round, depending on their skill level and if the actual actions are practically possible to achieve in that round.

Trying to concentrate on more than one thing at a time in a round is tricky, and this is reflected by modifiers to the skill level.

As stated before, a single skill roll is required to perform an action, but if a character player wishes to do more than one thing in that round, then it is possible to make two skill rolls. How?

Well, first of all, look at what skills are needed for each action. If the PC is simply pulling off two shots with a gun, for instance, then two rolls of their FIRE (WEAPON) skill will be needed. But there is a catch... for every extra action performed there is a -3 difficulty modifier imposed on all skill rolls. This modifier is cumulative for every extra action.

For example, if Boon's PC fires two shots at an adversary, he will make two FIRE (WEAPON) skill rolls. Each of his rolls will be subject to the -3 rule for multiple actions. If his FIRE (WEAPON) skill level is 12, say, then he will be making two rolls at skill level 9. If he decided to fire 3 shots, he would be making three skill rolls with a -3 modifier to each roll, making his target number for each roll 3.

You have to remember to be realistic about the PC's multiple actions. If Boon was still trying to open that pressure door with heavy tools and had to make a shot, then that would be impossible. He would need both hands for the job, and suddenly making an ELECTRONICS roll followed by a FIRE (WEAPON) roll in the same round wouldn't sound very realistic. He would have to stop what he was doing and open fire in the next round if he wanted to shoot back. This is all just a matter of common sense.

SECTION 2.6 - OPPOSING ROLLS

Sometimes a character will face off with another character, be it in a feat of strength, wills or simply bargaining for the best deal. It is impossible to judge the outcome of one of these situations with just a normal skill roll - after all, if both the characters succeed, how can you decide who won the battle?

The answer to this is simple - all the characters have to do is roll 1D10 and add it to the applicable skill they are trying to beat the other character with. When both the rolls are made, the scores are totalled and the character with the highest score wins.

For example, let's say that Boon is trying to bargain with a NPC for the price of a pair of thermal goggles. It would be silly to think that Boon could simply make a skill roll against his Bargain skill, and if he passed he got the goggles at a bargain price.

To resolve the situation, both characters roll 1D10 and add the result to their Bargain skills. Boon rolls a 4, and adds it to his Bargain skill level of 10, giving him a total of 14. The NPC rolls a 10, adds to his skill level of 8 and gets 18. The NPC has clearly won the bargain and Boon ends up paying the normal price.

If, at any time, the rolls are tied, then simply roll again until someone wins.

SECTION 2 .7 - USING STATS AS SKILLS

The initial STATS you created for your character have not been put to one side now that you have nice new skills to play with. These levels can play a part in the game, too.

Lets say that Boon's PC has been in a particularly nasty shuttle crash, and crawls from the wreckage. He realises that one of his friends is still trapped inside the burning wreck, and dives inside to save him. He finds his friends pinned under a collapsed hull strut, which is nasty but Boon just may have the strength to lift it off him and drag him out.

Now, there is no skill on the lists that says 'Lift Hull Strut' anywhere, so the player must rely on the base STAT he has chosen for his PC, in this case STRENGTH. The STAT is still prone to the same modifiers listed for the skill rolls, and so Boon makes the 1D20 roll at -2 to his STAT level as the GM decides that the action is Hard. He succeeds and drags his friend to safety just before the shuttle blows.

These STATS play just as important a part as the skills do. If, at any time, the PC is called upon to perform an action that is not covered in the skill lists but may require just a little strength or intelligence, then the STAT is used.

SECTION 3

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Characters can talk and cajole their way out of many unsavoury situations, but there may come a time when the power of negotiation is past, and the time to fight has arrived.

Combat in this game is nasty. Very nasty. It is probably in everyone's best interests to avoid it at all costs, because the chance of serious injury, or even death, is very high.

This system for combat resolution is not meant to be accurate. There is no way a game such as this can reflect the true nature of war and conflict, so there is no point in trying to make it realistic. The system is designed to be fast and flexible, so that the players and GM alike are not continually bookkeeping or checking charts. The game is designed for high adventure, after all, and if everyone is continually checking over tables and statistics the game will grind to a halt as rulings are made.

SECTION 3 .1 - THE COMBAT ROUND

As with normal actions, combat is split up into rounds of 5 seconds. In this 5 seconds the characters are capable of any action; firing a shot, throwing a grenade, diving for cover, shouting for help, punching an adversary or any other thing they wish.

Action rounds are continually played out until either side is dead, have fled or have surrendered. What actions are available in a combat round are described below.

SECTION 3 .2 - INITIATIVE

The first step of combat is to decide who goes first. In any fight there will be a side which draws 'first blood', and the side who wins initiative will do just that.

When combat begins, each player rolls 1D10 and adds it to their AG score. Whoever has the highest goes first, whoever has the next highest goes next, and so on until the lowest roll is determined. If any scores are tied, then roll again - whoever wins gets that turn and the loser goes next.

For instance, Boon and his two friends, Mick and Sara, run into three pirates who decide they want to leave the planet in Boon's starship, and attack them. After the dice rolls have been made, Boon has 10, Mick has 8, Sara scores 13, Pirate 1 has 9, Pirate 2 has 14 and Pirate 3 has 10. The order of actions goes like this:

Pirate 2 goes first, Sara goes second, Boon and Pirate 3 are tied on third, Pirate 1 goes fourth and Mick is last.

Because Boon and Pirate 3 are tied, they roll again and Boon wins. Now he is going third, Pirate 3 is going fourth, Pirate 1 is fifth and Mick is still last.

This order of combat stays the same for every subsequent combat round until someone is knocked unconscious, flees or is killed, and then the character that was below them in the action order takes their place, with everyone below moving up also.

SECTION 3 .3 - MOVEMENT DURING THE COMBAT ROUND

During a combat round a character is almost bound to move about somewhat, and the character's Movement Rate reflects this. The Movement Rate of a character is not recorded on the character sheet because it is quite simple to remember. If a character decides to walk during combat he can do so, at a rate of 5 metres per round. They can jog at 10 metres per round but they have a –2 modifier on actions. If they wish to run, they can cover 15 metres per round, but will have a -4 penalty on any other actions they decide to perform.

SECTION 3 .4 - MAKING A PHYSICAL ATTACK

BRAWLING: The most basic type of attack is any kind of attack made by the human body; a punch, kick or whatever. To do this the attacking character has to make a BRAWLING skill roll. If they succeed, then they have struck their opponent and caused damage.

For instance, Boon has learned that one of Sara's old enemies is trying to head her off in the starport bar. The man who has let this slip makes an attack on him with a punch, and therefore has to roll a successful BRAWLING skill to make the strike. This is done like any other skill roll. He succeeds with the roll and puts his fist where Boon would have preferred it not to be.

PARRYING: It is possible for a character on the receiving end of an attack to try and block the blow. To do this, the character rolls against their own BRAWLING skill level – if they succeed then they have parried the attack but they *lose* their next attack *whether or not they succeed in stopping the strike*. This simulates the skill needed to block a blow.

For example, Boon's friend Sara has a run in with her 'old friend' Jorda in a starport bar. Jorda throws a punch at Sara, and she elects to block the blow. She has a BRAWLING skill level of 10, and decides to parry if Jorda is successful. Three things can happen - first, Jorda fails in his attempt to hit Sara, in which case she may strike back as normal. The second thing is that Jorda's attack is successful but Sara manages to parry, in which case she loses her next attack. The third is that Jorda's strike gets through and Sara still takes damage. Even though she failed to block the blow she will still lose her next attack.

Multiple attacks can be stopped by multiple parries but with the same –3 modifier to the skill level for every extra action.

MELEE: Sometimes a character may wish to use a solid object, or a sharp one, as an attacking weapon. This skill covers the use of knives, clubs, long blades, chairs... anything a character can hold in her hand and strike an opponent with. The skill roll is made in exactly the same way as a BRAWLING attack, with the same rules for parrying applying as long as the defending character has a suitable weapon to parry with. Any character that does not have a suitable item for defence cannot parry a melee attack.

SECTION 3 .5 - MAKING A RANGED ATTACK

The most effective way of stopping a foe is with some form of ranged weapon, namely a thrown weapon or a hand held projectile weapon. These weapons are nasty and brutal, and a single shot from a powerful weapon, or an accurate shot from a weak one, will stop many combatants dead. Literally.

The chance of success of making a ranged weapon skill roll depends on the range, the attackers skill and any other factors which may be considered important, such as terrain, cover, visibility and whether the defender is trying to get out of the way.

THROWN WEAPONS: The simplest way of striking an opponent with a weapon is by throwing something at him. This may take the form of a rock, a knife or a grenade. The character simply makes a THROWING skill roll to see if they strike their opponent. There are modifiers that may affect the outcome of this roll, which are explained later on.

GRENADES: Explosives are dangerous and untrustworthy, but handy for laying out area damage. When a grenade goes off, any target within its blast radius is damaged if they do not get out of the way fast enough.

When a grenade lands and detonates, everything within a 6 meter radius will be affected by whatever damage the explosive does. They can, if they wish, make a dodge roll to avoid the initial throw, and can even still try to dive for cover as the grenade explodes. If they dive for cover from the blast, they must make a successful AGILITY roll. If they succeed, they only take half damage but automatically lose their next action. After all, getting out of the way of an explosion takes it out of you.

If a grenade throw misses the intended target, then the explosive has landed somewhere not intended. To simulate this, roll 1D5. The score rolled is the distance in meters the grenade has landed off-target. Then roll to see where it has landed by rolling the 1D5 again. If a 1 is rolled, then the grenade has fallen short. If a 2 is rolled it has fallen to the left of the target. If

a 3 is rolled, it has landed to the right. Any other number rolled means it has overshot.

PROJECTILE WEAPONS: These weapons fire a solid mass or a supercharged amount of energy at their target, doing more damage than simple punch or knife throws could dream of. The FIRE (WEAPONS) skill level is used to decide whether a shot lands or not, with modifiers if they are needed.

AIMING: If a character wishes, they may spend time aiming their weapon at a target. To do this they must concentrate on what they are shooting at, and for every round aiming they get a +1 modifier to their skill level with a maximum of +4. If they are forced to make another action at any time during the aiming they lose the bonus.

RANGE: The further away a target is the less chance a character will have to hit it. This is reflected in the weapon's range.

The range of a weapon varies, depending on the power or accuracy of the weapon in question. The capabilities of these weapons are covered later, but in the meantime the difficulty modifiers for the range are listed below. Each of the ranges (short, medium, long and extreme) is known as RANGE LEVELS.

RANGE	MODIFIER
SHORT	+2 to +5
MEDIUM	0
LONG	-4 to -6
EXTREME	-8 to -12

SECTION 3 .6 – HIT LOCATION

Where a character is hit may affect the seriousness of a wound, and rolling on the Hit Location table reflects this. Simply roll 1D6 to decide where the shot landed. For brawling/melee attacks, you may add 2 to the D6 roll.

ROLL	LOCATION	EFFECT
1	ARM (random)	-1 damage
2	LEG (random)	-1 damage
3-5	TORSO	Normal damage
6	HEAD	+1 damage

SECTION 3 .7 – MULTIPLE ACTIONS

As with normal non-combat skills, it is possible for a character to make multiple attacks. They can throw two punches, even three, or even fire more than one shot if they wish to do so. Each roll has to be made separately as per normal, with each damage roll being made separately for each successful attack.

SECTION 3 .8 - WEAPON ABILITIES

Listed below are the capabilities of the weapons the characters will most likely use during their escapades around the settled systems. Each weapon has three defining characteristics, their Damage Value (DV) and their Range (R).

The DV of a weapon is the modifier the character adds to a 1D5 roll when making a successful attack. The total number is the amount of points deducted from the stricken characters HP value, the effects of which will be explained later.

Sometimes, a character's STRENGTH (ST) score will be used as a DV. This is done by dividing the STRENGTH score by 4, rounding up, and using any modifiers indicated.

The R is the maximum distance a weapon can cover. The number given is just the base Short range of the weapon in question. The other ranges are worked out like this:

To calculate the weapon's Medium range, double the Short range number.

To calculate the weapon's Long range, double the Medium range number.

To calculate the weapon's Extreme range, double the Long range number.

So, in effect, if a weapon has an R of 10, then the short range would be 10, medium would be 20, long would be 40 and extreme would be 80. If the weapon being used is for melee purposes, then the R will be denoted as 'personal'. If the R denotes using a characters ST score, then the character's ST is the base short range number.

WEAPON	DV	RANGE
Punch/kick/head butt	½ ST	Personal
Knife	½ ST +2	Personal
Club	½ ST +1	Personal
Thrown Weapon	As weapon -1	ST
Bow	+4	15
Crossbow	+4	10
Projectile Pistol	+4	10
Projectile Rifle	+5	25
Beam Pistol	+5	20
Beam Rifle	+6	30
Energy Bolt Pistol	+5	25
Energy Bolt Rifle	+6	50
Grenade	+6 (Blast radius 6m)	ST

WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

PUNCH/KICK/HEADBUTT: These types of attacks are simple physical strikes, which are used in absence of any other effective weapon.

BLADE: A small blade that inflicts serious wounds on an opponent. If the player wishes to use a longer blade, such as a sabre or a sword, they can add +1 to the DV level for every extra 50cm in length the blade is. The DV on the chart is for a simple 10cm knife.

CLUB: A cudgel, a plank, a stool... if you can hold it and swing it, you can use any item as a club. The DV given on the chart is for a normal blackjack-type weapon, but if the GM wishes he can +1 to the DV for every 5kg the object weighs.

THROWN WEAPON: As with the club, if the object is good enough to be thrown you can do so. A Thrown weapon has all the strike capabilities as the item thrown, except, because of lack of power put behind the item after launching, there is a -1 modifier to the DV.

BOW/CROSSBOW: These old-style weapons are still used for sporting and hunting purposes. Although they are an outdated form of missile weapon, they are liked for their good stopping power and ruggedness. After all, you don't have to worry about a bow's ammo jamming or exploding on you. Cost – 50 tokens (Bow), 75 tokens (crossbow).

SOLID PROJECTILE PISTOL / RIFLE: These weapons are standard ballistic weapons which fire a small weighted bullet or sphere. They are rugged and reliable, although the ammunition used is prone to jam in the barrel sometimes. Cost 500 tokens (Pistol), 750 tokens (rifle).

Optional Rule: To simulate the possibility of jamming, when a character fires the gun and rolls a natural 12 on the skill level roll, the gun may jam. The player should roll 1D6. If a 1 is rolled, the gun is jammed but will clear after 1 combat round. If a 6 is rolled, the gun is jammed and will clear in 1D6 + 1 combat rounds.

BEAM PISTOL/RIFLE: Lasers use a coherent beam of light to carry intensely charged energy particles to their target. When a laser is fired, all you see is thin beam of coloured light flash between the weapon and the target, with a flash like a miniature lightning strike. Lasers are also hard to dodge, for moving out of the way of a beam of light is almost impossible. The only way a character can move fast enough is if they know they are about to be shot at. All dodges are halved for this reason. Lasers are also susceptible to dissipation. If a laser hits a gaseous mass, like smoke or some form of mist, then the light in the laser is refracted, causing less damage to the intended target by subtracting 1D6 of the total damage rolled. Some energy weapons can be used as stun weapons, set to knock out an opponent and only doing stun damage. Cost 800 (pistol), 1200 (rifle).

Optional Rule: Some weapons can overheat, which shuts them down for a brief time. If a character rolls a natural 20 on the skill level roll, then they must roll 1D20. If they roll more than 10 then the laser is inoperative for 2 combat rounds. Lasers are also hard to dodge, for moving out of the way of a beam of light is almost impossible. The only way a character can move fast enough is if they know they are about to be shot at. All dodges are halved for this reason. Lasers are also susceptible to dissipation. If a laser hits a gaseous mass, like smoke or some form of mist, then the light in the laser is refracted, causing less damage to the intended target by subtracting 1D5 of the total damage rolled.

ENERGY BOLT PISTOL/RIFLE: These weapons fire a ball or bolt of energy that explodes on contact with the target.

Cost 900 (pistol), 1300 (rifle).

Optional Rule: Some of these weapons are prone to overheat more than a laser, and therefore cannot be fired more than once a round. If they are fired more than once, the shooter rolls 1D10. If a 1 or 2 is rolled, the gun shuts down for the next combat round. If a 9 or 10 are rolled, the gun shuts down for 1D5 combat rounds.

GRENADE: Grenades come in three types - Fragmentation (frag), Smoke (smoker) and Concussion (stun). A frag does the damage indicated by the DV on the chart. A Smoker is completely harmless and just obscures vision. A Stun does the same damage as the DV, but is designed to send out a concussion wave to knock an opponent out. Grenades must be thrown after arming, because they will go off within 1 combat round.

Cost 300 (smoke), 400 (stun), 500 (frag).

SECTION 4

DAMAGE AND HEALING

When a character is punched, shot or simply falls off a ledge, they will take damage. Wounds and other forms of hurt can hinder a character severely, slowing down reactions, causing unconsciousness when you would rather be awake, and even death.

Medicine in the settled systems is very advanced, with rejuvenation tanks, laser surgery, accelerated healing and even stasis freezing to keep the severely injured intact until they reach a medical facility. Unfortunately, even in an advanced culture like this there is no cure for the mortally wounded. Taking large amounts of damage because a doctor may be able to put you back together later with his fantastic technology is not recommended. Not even a computer can resuscitate the dead.

SECTION 4 .1 - TAKING DAMAGE

Every time a character takes a point of damage they subtract it from their HP score. These subtractions are cumulative. The more damage they take the less likely they are to survive the next hit.

When a character takes damage she crosses the amount of damage taken off the HP level.

If the HP level goes below the first number, which it will with any initial hit, the character has a Flesh Wound. This is a small injury which may slow the character down.

If the HP level gets to exactly 0, then the character has a Potentially Fatal Wound, automatically falls unconscious and will die in their STRENGTH score in combat rounds unless medical attention is received.

If the HP level goes below 0 then the character is dead.

For instance, Sara has finally got the upper hand against Jorda and slams a bottle over his head, knocking him to the floor. She rolls her damage.

Jorda's ST is 10, which gives him a HP level of 10. If he takes between 1 and 9 points of damage, he will have a Flesh Wound. If he

takes 10 points he will have a Potentially Fatal Wound. If he takes more than 10 points of damage he will die.

SECTION 4 .2 - THE EFFECTS OF DAMAGE

FLESH WOUNDS: If a character takes a Flesh Wound, they suffer a penalty to all their rolls to simulate the confusion and pain suffered during the hit. They will operate at an automatic -3 modifier to all their actions until the wound is treated.

POTENTIALLY FATAL WOUND: This is a nasty wound to take for the sheer reason that it invites death. Any character getting into this situation automatically falls unconscious and will die in their STRENGTH score in combat rounds if they do not receive medical attention (a successful FIRST AID skill roll will stabilise them).

STUN DAMAGE: If a character wishes he may opt to Stun an opponent with a weapon or strike. The attack is done the same way as a normal attack, but any damage taken by the target is counted as Stun damage, which means that there is no danger of serious injury, just unconsciousness.

To Stun an opponent, the attacker declares they will attempt a Stun attack and rolls as normal. All combat is carried out as per the usual rules, but all damage done is counted as non-fatal. All modifiers for the particular wound levels are used, as are the rolls to remain conscious, but the danger of death is non-existent.

It is best to be realistic about this, however. Although opting to Stun an opponent is allowed at any time, it is best to make sure the way the character is stunned is possible. A punch or a strike with a cudgel is realistic, but smashing an iron bar over someone's head or shooting someone with an energy bolt gun cannot really be used as a Stun attack.

SECTION 4 .3 - TAKING DAMAGE FROM OTHER SOURCES

Violent conflict is not the only way a character can get hurt. Falling from great heights, being hit by a vehicle or just having a household accident can affect the HP levels of a character. The other common forms of taking damage are listed below.

BURNING: Depending on the intensity of the fire, characters can take serious wound damage from burning. If the fire is just a flash or only one part of the body is consumed, the character takes 1D5 points of damage per round of exposure. If the fire could consume the victim totally, then roll 1D5 - the number rolled is the amount of times a D5 must be rolled. Each roll of the D5 indicates the amount of damage taken and the location of the body the fire is doing damage.

COLLISION: Being hit by a speeding vehicle, or being hurled into a stationary object, is pretty dangerous. In effect, for every 10 kilometres an hour of speed upon contact, the character takes 1D5 points of damage.

FALLING: If a character falls 3 meters, they take an automatic 1D5 points of damage. For every 3 meters past that they take an extra 3 hits. So if a character falls 12 meters, they will take 1D5+9 hits.

SUFFOCATION/DROWNING: There are three ways a character can lose the ability to gather air - submersion in water (drowning), vacuum (lack of atmosphere) and smothering (smoke inhalation etc). For every round the character is denied air they take 3 points of damage.

SECTION 4 .4 - HEALING

Now that your character has been knocked about somewhat, what steps can be taken to reverse the effects of damage?

FIRST AID: Any character with any kind of medical skill can perform FIRST AID. FIRST AID is on-the-spot medical attention for those who need it. It is only urgently required when a character has a Potentially Fatal wound. The character performing the FIRST AID must roll against their relevant skill level, with a modifier depending on the type of wound. The modifier is a minus number, and that number is the amount of damage points the character has suffered below zero. If the character administering the help succeeds in their roll, they stabilise the wounded individual, keeping them alive long enough to reach a medical facility. If they fail their roll, they may try again in two rounds time.

For example, Jorda has been quite severely hurt by Sara's blow, and she realises that she needs him alive and must save his life. She has a medical skill of 11, and so decides to perform First Aid. If she rolls above 11, she has failed and can try again in two rounds, in which time Jorda may die from his wounds. If she rolls 11 or less, she has stabilised his condition and can call for medical aid.

MEDICAL FACILITIES: When a character has suffered any kind of wound, they can be healed at any medical facility that has the relevant equipment to help them. Depending on the kind of wound they have suffered, they may spend quite a while in hospital.

If a character has a Flesh Wound, then, after treatment, they will regain 1 HP per day.

If a character has a Potentially Fatal wound, they will need Intensive Care treatment, and will regain 1 HP back per week until they reach Flesh Wound status.

Stun damage is somewhat different. A character will get back 2 HP's per hour after regaining consciousness.

Such are the benefits of accelerated healing.

NATURAL HEALING: If the wound is not that bad then the character can heal naturally. Flesh Wounds heal at a rate of 1 HP every three days, even if the medical attention is minimal.

SECTION 5
VEHICLES

A player character seems to get into scrapes quite quickly, and lets face it, the faster they get there the faster the problems can start.

Vehicles are modes of transportation ground and air based. The following rules are to use for deciding the speed characters can travel overland, and, if necessary, the outcome of any conflict.

There are three types of overland transport - personal vehicles (such as wheelers and hovercraft), tracked vehicles (such as trains) and aircraft (such as jetcraft and helicraft).

VEHICLE STATISTICS

Vehicles have three main statistics; SPEED, BODY STRENGTH and HIT POINTS.

SPEED is the fastest speed, in kilometres per hour, the vehicle is capable of travelling. This can range from 120 kph for a normal family wheeler to 1,300 kph for a jetcraft.

BODY STRENGTH is how sturdy the vehicle is. This number indicates how much damage the vehicle can absorb before damage is done to affect the craft.

HIT POINTS works in a similar way as a characters HP, with damage done to the vehicle affecting it's capability, although vehicles do not have a negative score.

VEHICLES AND DAMAGE

Every time a vehicle takes a hit from some source, the damage done to it will seriously affect its capability.

First, calculate how much damage the vehicle has taken the same way you would calculate a damage roll on a character. When the damage has been calculated, deduct the vehicles BODY STRENGTH from the damage total. The remaining points go through to the vehicle's HIT POINTS.

If a vehicle's HIT POINTS go below it's initial score, the character driving or piloting the craft will suffer a -4 modifier to all her skill rolls. This simulates the loss of control over a damaged vehicle. The vehicle's top speed will also be reduced by a quarter, rounding up any fractions.

If the vehicle's HIT POINTS ever reach zero, the vehicle is destroyed, and 1D5 must be rolled. If 1 to 3 is rolled, then the vehicle just crashes if it is in movement. If 4 to 5 is rolled, then the vehicle explodes with a blast radius equalling its initial HIT POINTS in meters. The damage done to anything in this radius will be the same as that of a grenade.

SOURCES OF DAMAGE

There are two sources of damage a vehicle can take - weapons fire and collision damage.

Collision damage is calculated the same way as character collision damage, with 1D5 being rolled for every 10 kph the vehicle is travelling. If there is a head-on collision, then the damage is rolled for each vehicle separately, adding each other's totals together for a maximum number. Any characters inside the vehicles take this damage, too.

Weapon fire is comes in the form of Heavy Weapons. These can be any vehicle or mounted weapon, consisting of heavier versions of the small arms listed in the Resolving Conflict section, or missiles. Heavy Weapons are basically larger versions of their small arms counterparts. Resolving the damage is simple - the character fires the weapon with their applicable FIRE (HEAVY WEAPONS) skill, and damage is done to a vehicle as described above. For heavy weapons, simply double all the statistics of the versions of the ranged weapons listed, including the 1D3 rolled. That means a Heavy Beam Weapon would have DV +12, R 80, with a 2D5 roll for the damage caused. Missiles are just heavier versions of grenades, except their Range is 30.

SECTION 5.1 - VEHICLE STATISTICS

Following is a small list of the most common types of transportation. GM's should feel free to change any statistics they wish to reflect different models or makes, or create their own.

BIKE (wheeled or hover)

SPEED: 140

BODY STRENGTH: 7

HIT POINTS: 10

COST: 2000

HOVERCAR OR WHEELED CAR

SPEED: 120

BODY STRENGTH: 11

HIT POINTS: 20

COST: 5,000

SPORTS HOVERCAR OR WHEELED CAR

SPEED: 150

BODY STRENGTH: 10

HIT POINTS: 12

COST: 8,000

HEAVY TRUCK

SPEED: 80

BODY STRENGTH: 15

HIT POINTS: 30

COST: 12,000

PUBLIC TRAIN (ground, monorail, maglev)

SPEED: 250

BODY STRENGTH: 16

HIT POINTS: 30

COST: 20,000

AIR CRAFT (hover or prop) (PERSONAL)

SPEED: 200

BODY STRENGTH: 14

HIT POINTS: 20

COST: 20,000

AIR CRAFT (TRANSPORT)

SPEED: 180

BODY STRENGTH: 18

HIT POINTS: 30

COST: 50,000

SKY SPEEDER (PERSONAL)

SPEED: 1,300

BODY STRENGTH: 12

HIT POINTS: 16

COST: 75,000

SKY SPEEDER (FIGHTER)

SPEED: 2,000

BODY STRENGTH: 16

HIT POINTS: 20

Fighter Jet craft are armed with 2 Heavy Energy Bolt weapons and 4 missiles.

SKY SPEEDER (COMMERCIAL)

SPEED: 1,000

BODY STRENGTH: 16

HIT POINTS: 26

COST: 250,000

Military versions of commercial jetcraft are fitted with 2 Heavy Beam weapons for defence.

SECTION 6

STARSHIPS

Although Starships follow pretty much the same rules as any other type of vehicle, they still require a section of their own to cover some more interesting aspects. Travelling through space requires a lot of nerve, and the proper attitude and the starships, being complicated pieces of machinery, require more complicated rules.

The rules presented below are the necessary rules you will need to use starships in your campaign.

STARSHIP STATISTICS

All space vessels have statistics in much the same way as normal vehicles, with some differences to explain ability, propulsion and other factors you will not find planet-bound. There is a guide to designing your own vessels, as the designs vary from company to company, much like any other vehicle industry.

LENGTH: The basic length of the vessel will decide much about what that ship is capable of and designed for, where it can and cannot land/dock.

SPEED: As with ground-based vehicles, starships have a speed statistic represented by a single number.

JUMP ENGINE RANGE: This covers what the range of the jump engine the starship uses to travel from star to star and how far that engine can take a single vessel before recharging is necessary. The jump is instantaneous, the vessel seems to blur and then disappears, appearing immediately at its destination.

SHIELDING: This denotes what kind of energy shielding the vessels has and how much damage it can deflect.

HULL: If any damage gets through the shields, then the hull takes damage. These points work in exactly the same way as HIT POINTS.

CREW: How many personnel it takes to man the vessel.

CARGO SPACE: Civilian vessels are usually cargo haulers, and all starships need some form of cargo space to haul belongings and passengers. This space is worked out in metric tons.

WEAPONS: What the starship is armed with. This armament can take the form of energy cannons, missiles and other weapons.

SCANNERS: The range and ability of a ships sensor systems, used to detect other ships and scan planets and other stellar bodies.

SECTION 6 .1 – THE TEN STEPS OF VESSEL DESIGN

The following optional guidelines will enable you to design your own starships for use in ODDS. The step-by-step instructions allow flexibility and free choice. GM's who wish to disregard these guidelines and design their own vessels to suit the broadness of the ODDS games are welcome to do so.

Letting players design their own vessels can be fun. The amount of imagination that goes into the design of a ship is vast indeed, for everyone has a different idea as to what a starship should look like, and using your imagination is the core of role-playing. But try not to go for the 'coolest, fastest ship in the fleet' approach. Start from scratch as it makes a powerful vessel much more effective if the players earn it through their own sweat.

STEP 1 : THE SIZE OF THE VESSEL

First of all, you must calculate the length of the vessel from nose to stern. Vessels can be as small as fifteen meters but the largest ever built is six hundred due to the limits of technology. The fact is that different Clans will build all kinds of designs for different tasks. Any vessel larger than one hundred metres is incapable of atmospheric insertion and can only dock in

orbit of a world, using shuttles to move equipment and personnel to the surface of a world.

STEP 2 : SPEED

The speed score of the vessel is a number between 1 and 10. This number is the speed of the vessel, and, at full speed, denotes millions of kilometres per hour cruising. During chases, this number can be used to decide the range and the pace of fighting vessels.

The energy core of a ship is a powerful thing and vessels can fly for decades in normal space without the need for recharging. It is only when a vessel uses its jump engine it uses vast amounts of energy.

STEP 3 : JUMP ENGINE RANGE

Jump Engine Range covers any kind of faster-than-light drive. It is up to the GM how fast a starship can travel based on their setting. Starhips might take hours, days or even months to travel several light years, or even across a single star system. For simplicity, the default drive in this game is a Fold Drive – instantaneous travel from one star system to another.

The vessel has a rating that denotes how many light years it can travel in total. The speed is calculated as light years per jump (known as the Lyj Rating in spacer speak). So, if a ship can do 10 Lyj, it can travel a total of 10 light years, round trip. The effective range of the vessel would be 5 Lyj as it would need the last 5 Lyj of it's total 10 Lyj rating for the return trip (unless, of course, it arrives at a place where it can recharge). If it could do 30 Lyj, it could travel a total of 30 light years. Vessels can make as many jumps as needed, providing the total number of light years covered does not exceed the Jump Engine Range. Vessels must be at least 20 million kilometres from the nearest gravity well (planet, sun etc) to be able to make or exit from a safe jump. The Navigation Planetary skill is used to plot a jump, at an Average difficulty level.

Also, to send a message through space to another star system uses up 0.5 Lyj of power for every minute of transmission time taken, the range of the transmission being twice the Jump Engine Range of the vessel sending the message. The 0.5 Lyj use is taken from a vessel's range no matter how far they send the message. So, a vessel with a Jump Engine Range of 20 could send a message 40 light years at the cost of 0.5 Lyj per minute.

To recharge, ships need to dock with a stellar station or land at any kind of surface landing facility. It is also possible to transfer energy from one ship to another via the two vessels connecting their power recharge booms together, simply exchanging the power from one ship to another. So, a ship with only 5 Lyj left may need an extra 5 Lyj to reach a certain destination, and a ship with 20 Lyj can dock and transfer the power, taking 5 Lyj from it's own power core and transferring it to the other.

STEP 4 : SHIELDING

Shielding is an energy field projected by the ship to protect it from natural occurrence and weapons fire. The Shield Rating is represented by a number between 1 and 10, typically 5 for vessels a hundred metres or less, 8 from one hundred to three hundred metres and 10 from three hundred to six hundred metres.

The shield rating is reduced from any damage taken from weapons or impact, with a reduction of 1 point of the shield score after the hit has taken place and penetrated the shields, simulating the overloaded energy shields being damaged. Any hit which does not exceed the shield score does no damage to the hull, and the shield score is not reduced.

> *For example, the warship Mot has a shield rating of 8 . If it takes a hit, the damage is rolled and the shield rating is deducted from the damage. So, if the damage is 8 or less, the shot fails to penetrate the shields and the vessel is not affected. If the damage roll is 9 or more, the reduced damage is taken from the ship's hull score. The shield score is reduced by 1.*
>
> *So, a hit doing 10 points of damage would be reduced by 8, doing 2 points to the hull. The shield score is then reduced by 1 point to 7.*

Shields can be re-energised after a battle, at a rate of 1 point per hour, but only if the shield rating has at least one point in it. Any shields reduced to zero are permanently off-line and the ship will need repair work at a dock.

STEP 5 : HULL

The hull is the most important part of a starship, for as soon as the armour is penetrated the superstructure starts to take damage. The hull rating works the same way

as HIT POINTS. Typically, the vessel will have hit points based on its length. For every ten metres the ship is in length the vessel receives 1 hit point and the hull is calculated as a player character's hit points. So, a ship fifty metres in length would have 5 hull points. A ship 300 metres in length would have 30 hull points.

Instead of Flesh Wound and Potentially Fatal Wound, the starship version is:

Hull Damage (Flesh Wound): -2 to all rolls regarding the vessel, such as maneauvering or weaponsfire. With every hit whilst the vessel is in the Hull Damage range, roll once on the Critical Hits table.

Dead in Space (Potentially Fatal Wound): Vessel is dead in space and can make no rolls. Once the points have run out the ship is a drifting hulk but is salvageble.

If the hit points go below 0 points due to damage taken the vessel explodes.

STEP 6: CREW

The size of the ship will dictate how many personnel it takes to control it. For ships of a length less than a hundred meters, this can work out to a handful of crewmembers for every operational system on the vessel. If the ship is over 100 meters, then the crew complement can run into the hundreds.

STEP 7: CALCULATING CARGO SPACE

This step is easy. Simply take the number of the ships length in meters and double it - the number you are left with is the ships cargo space in metric tons. Therefore a vessel of 40 meters length will have 80 tons of cargo space. Vessels designed specifically for cargo transport have double this number.

STEP 9 : WEAPONS

Most civilian vessels are fitted with some form of defence, and warships are loaded to the eyeballs with offensive weaponry. The designer decides upon the amount of weapons a vessel can have, but it is best to be realistic about the armament the vessel has, and not make it 'bristling with weapons'.

One other thing to consider is where the weapon is placed. If a ship is attacking your aft and your weapons are placed on your fore, then you will not get a shot off until the ship has been manoeuvred into a suitable firing position.

STEP 10 : SCANNERS

Initially, vessels will have to know they are not alone before anything else, good or bad, can happen. All vessels are equipped with scanners and sensors that can detect another vessel at a range of the vessel's length x one million kilometres. Therefore, a vessel 100 metres in length will have a 100 million km scanner range. At this range the ship, unless transmitting an identification signal, is nothing but a blip on a screen. Only when the vessels come within one quarter of the scanner range (rounded down to the nearest million) can they be positively identified. So, using the 100 metre vessel as a guide, a ship between 100 million km and 25 million km is just a blip on the scanner screen, but once it comes within 25 million km of the scanning vessel it can be positively identified.

Scanners can tell an operator the size of a vessel, it's crew complement and what kind of condition they are in, whether they are ready for battle or if they are already damaged, when a ship reaches scanning range. This information can help build a picture of the ship's intentions. Scanners can also look for basic life signs, check the atmospheric details of a planet and identify energy readings.

The scanning range can be entered under the other ship's systems and can be represented by two numbers. The first number is the ships scanner range in millions of km, the second is the range in which the scanning vessel can get a positive identification.

So, when the details of the starship have been decided then it should be laid out on a Starship description sheet similar to the one below.

Starship name:

Starship type:

Affiliation:

Length:

Speed:

Jump Engine Range:

Shielding:

Hull:

Crew:

Cargo space:

Weapons:

Scanners:

SECTION 6.2 – STARSHIPS IN COMBAT

It is a sad fact that even the ravages of warfare born from warring planets can spread out into the solitude of space. Starships can get into trouble with enemy forces, pirates or just about anything that inky blackness can throw at them. The following rules are very much like the vehicle combat rules, but with a few changes to reflect the dangers of fighting in hard vacuum.

FACING

A thing to consider before anything else is how the vessels are positioned in relation to each other. As explained in the ship design section, the weapons facings play a great deal in space warfare. It must be judged first of all how the ships are facing to adjudicate this fairly. This can be worked out with small drawings or maybe with small pieces of card with an indication of what facings are where drawn onto them.

Vessels approaching a vessel can only fire its fore mounted weapons. If a vessel is behind, it can only fire its aft mounted weapons. If a vessel approaches from either side (or above or below) it can only us half its fore and half its aft weapons complement.

For example, let's say the navy battleship Mot has come face to face with an enemy pirate vessel, the Blackwing. The Mot is approaching the pirate vessel on the Blackwing's left, which means any firing done is with the fore weapons systems of the Mot and the left-hand weapons of the Blackwing (half its fore weapons and half its aft weapons). If any hits are taken, the Mot will take damage on its fore, and the Blackwing will take damage on its fore or aft, determined randomly.

FIRING ON ANOTHER VESSEL

As with the vehicle conflict rules, starship gunners have to use the applicable FIRE skill to successfully fire a weapon or launch a missile, in this case FIRE STARSHIP WEAPONS.

Firing a weapon has the usual skill level rolls involved, with modifications for range or any spatial conditions that may affect the outcome of that roll. The effects of damage are detailed in the STEP 5: HULL section.

DODGING INCOMING FIRE

It is possible for a helmsman to pilot a ship out of harms way only if they are at medium range or further, of the weapon fired, because being at short range will not give time for the pilot to react to the threat. The skill used for this dodge is the pilot's HELMSMAN skill level. Although starships are incredibly manoeuvrable in space, only vessels one hundred and fifty metres or smaller can effectively dodge fire due to the sheer size of the larger ships.

For instance, the Mot has fired a laser shot at the Blackwing at long range. The pilot of the Blackwing has to roll lower than his STARSHIP HELMSMAN skill level roll to avoid the shot. Success means that no damage is taken.

CRITICAL HITS

Because a starship is riddled with systems and sub-systems they are quite prone to serious damage.

When the hull starts taking hits and the damage gets into the Critical Hull Damage zone, this results in a Critical Hit. Depending on the facing hit will depend on what damage has been done. Roll 1D10 on the following table and follow the instructions under the entry of whatever number was rolled. Only one roll is needed for every attack that hits the vessel whilst it taking damage in the Critical Hull Damage zone.

CRITICAL HIT CHART

If the hit was from a ship firing from the aft, minus two from the roll (minimum 1).

If the hit was from a ship firing from the fore, add two to the roll (maximum 12).

If the hit was from either side or from above or below, there are no modifiers.

1: Engine damage. The vessel's speed is reduced by half (rounding fraction down). If this critical is rolled again the starship thrust will be dead, and no manoeuvres can be made, although all other systems will be functional.

2: Manoeuvring thrusters damaged. The pilot now has a -2 modifier from his STARSHIP HELMSMAN for any manoeuvres he thinks are necessary. All other rolls on this critical are

cumulative. Takes one hour per roll on this critical to repair.

3: Life support damage. For an instant life support fails and all crew on duty will have to make an Easy ST skill roll or be made dizzy, giving them a -2 modifier to any skill rolls made for the next 4 rounds. If this is critical rolled again, same details but with a –4 modifier. If this critical is rolled a third time, then the crew have the vessels hull rating in rounds to don pressure suit or die. Life support, being important, can be repaired quickly and a roll against the TECHNICIAN skill with no modifiers can repair it. If a large crew, then the skill level is 12. One roll can be made every three rounds. Crew operates at –4 until repaired (except the character making the TECHNICIAN skill roll).

4: Scanner damage. All ship's sensors are now damaged, reducing both the scanner range numbers by half giving a -2 modifier to any rolls involving firing weapons. All other rolls on this critical are cumulative. Takes two hours per roll on this critical to repair. If this critical rolled three times or more, docking required to repair.

5: Bridge hit. All characters on the bridge have to make a successful unmodified AG test or take 1D5 damage from exploding panels and violent ship movement.

6: Jump engine systems damaged. Current Jump Engine Range is halved (round fractions down to nearest 0.5 or whole number). If this critical is rolled again, the ship is incapable of travelling out of star system until repaired. Takes Jump Engine Range in hours to repair. If this critical is rolled a third time, ship is adrift and will need to be rescued by another vessel which can transfer energy, and docking required to repair.

7: Lose 1 extra SHIELD point. Docking required to be repaired.

8: Lose 2 extra points of HULL.

9: 1 weapon on facing is knocked out. If there is more than one weapon on that facing then decides randomly which one has been put out of action. If there are no weapons, then lose 1 point of HULL instead. The ship will need to dock with a starship facility to repair the weapon.

10: Shields knocked out permanently. Docking required for repair.

WEAPON STATISTICS

Starship weapons are huge counterparts to their smaller cousins, and their statistics are listed below. GM's should feel free to adjust the damage of the weapons to suit their own designs, but these are the general guidelines for the main weapons used in the galaxy. As a suggestion, any weapon's range should be reduced if the stopping power is increased. A 1D3 roll plus the DV is required to calculate damage.

WEAPON	DV	RANGE (KM)
BEAM WEAPON	+6	2,000
RAPID CANNON	+2/+4	1,000
MASS DRIVER	+12	2,000

WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

BEAM WEAPON: These work on exactly the same principles as a hand-held weapon.

RAPID FIRE CANNON: This is basically a miniature energy launcher, which fires small self-propelled missiles at the target at a high rate and incredible speeds. Every shot from a RFC is actually a small group of these missiles, and they streak towards their target like tiny white balls of light. Each shot does slight but effective damage, especially to small and unarmoured targets. There is a civilian version (+2) and a military version (+4).

MISSILE/MASS DRIVER: These are missiles that fly in a straight line to their target. They are only really effective against slow moving or static targets,

because they are not self-guiding as over long distances the missile can be detected, countermeasures launched and the missile avoided. The missile accelerates as it approaches its target and can cover 1 range level per round. For every level of range the missile has to cover, the defending ship's helmsman has a +2 modifier to his skill roll to avoid the shot. There is an ammunition limit dependent on the size of the vessel.

Another version is the Mass Driver, great cylindrical pipes which throw varying size metallic objects by using the propelling force of magnetic coils. These can be lethal when

used as orbital bombardment weapons, and are cheap to re-arm as any metallic item, even ship's hulls and metal-rich asteroids, can be used as ammunition.

There is a military version called the Supermass Driver, but this is not available on the open market.

Optional Rule – Starship Modifications

Everyone wants to tinker with his or her starship and this game should be no different. The sheer amount of individual designs and personalised vessels throughout the League of Seven is because of the diversity of ship design and systems and the requirements of those who want to fly them.

In general, the modification will cost two things – League Tokens and Cargo space as new systems take up room. The general rule is this:

For every point of extra damage a weapon is capable of, it costs 10,000 tokens and 10 tons of cargo space, up to a maximum of 3 extra damage points. For every new weapon hardpoint, it costs the weapons initial DV x 20,000 and the DV x 15 in cargo space.

So, on a 100 ton cargo capacity vessel, increasing the damage of an existing +2 DV civilian weapon from +2 to +3 would cost 10,000 tokens and 10 tons of space, reducing the cargo capacity to 90 tons. Increasing it to +4 would cost 20,000 tokens and reduce the cargo capacity to 80 tons. Adding a new +2 weapon would cost 40,000 tokens and take up 30 tons of cargo space, reducing the cargo capacity to 70 tons.

Increasing speed is done in much the same way. To increase the speed of a vessel by 1 point (to a maximum of 10) costs the target speed rating x 10,000 tokens and x 3 tons of cargo space. So, to increase a vessel's speed rating from 4 to 5 would cost 50,000 tokens and cost 15 tons of cargo space.

The only part of a starship that does not cost cargo space is the Hull rating. To increase the Hull rating by one point on the middle number costs the target number x 5,000 tokens and minuses the speed rating by 1. So, to increase the hull from 5 to 6 costs 30,000 tokens and will reduce the speed rating by one. This will change the Hull rating from 10/5/-3 to 12/6/-3.

To increase the Jump Engine Range by 1 light year costs 10,000 tokens and 1 ton of cargo space. So, to increase the range of a jump engine from 20 Lyj to 25 Lyj would cost 50,000 tokens and 5 tons of cargo space.

To add a hangar to your ship, the vessel must be at least five times the length of the vessel that you wish to have docked and takes up the docked vessel's cargo space x2. So, to add a 15 metre shuttle to a ship, the vessel needs to be at least 75 metres long and it uses up 60 tons of cargo space. Remember to vacate the hangar before opening the doors!

SAMPLE STARSHIPS

Following is a short list of common starships throughout the galaxy, used by a myriad of different people for a myriad of purposes. Use these statistics as guidelines when designing your own vessels.

Starship type: Surface-to-orbit shuttle

Length – 15 meters

Speed – 1

Jump Engine Range – No jump engine

Shielding - 2

Hull – 2

Crew – 2 (with space for twelve passengers)

Cargo space – 30 metric tons

Weapons – Rapid fire cannon (civilian)

Scanners – 15/7

Cost – 25,000 tokens

Starship type: Cargo ship

Length – 50 meters

Speed – 3

Jump Engine Range – 30 Lyj

Shielding - 5

Hull – 10

Crew - 8

Cargo space – 200 metric tons

Weapons – 2 Beam Weapons, 1 fore and 1 aft

Scanners – 50/12

Cost – 75,000 tokens.

Starship type: Scout ship

Length – 100 meters

Max Speed – 5

Jump Engine Range - 50

Shielding - 8

Hull – 20

Crew – 4

Cargo space – 200 metric tons (mainly research equipment, and a small surface-to-orbit shuttle docked in hangar bay)

Weapons – 1 Beam weapon (turret, all facings)

Scanners – 100/25

Cost – 150,000 tokens

Starship type: Research ship

Length – 150 meters

Max Speed – 5

Jump Engine Range - 20

Shielding - 8

Hull – 30

Crew – 12, with at least 12 scientists

Cargo space – 300 metric tons (mainly research equipment, and a small surface-to-orbit shuttle docked in hangar bay)

Weapons – None, but if yes, Rapid fire cannon (civilian)

Scanners – 150/37

Cost – 350,000 tokens

Starship type: Fleet Gunboat

Length – 50 meters

Max Speed – 10

Jump Engine Range - 30

Shielding - 5

Hull – 20

Crew - 100

Cargo space – 800 metric tons

Weapons – 1 Beam Weapon (fore), 2 Rapid fire cannons (military) (fore), 4 Missiles (2 fore, 2 aft)

Scanners – 50/12

Cost – (Unavailable on open market)

Starship type: Fleet Frigate

Length – 200 meters

Max Speed – 9

Jump Engine Range - 30

Shielding - 8

Hull – 40

Crew - 100

Cargo space – 800 metric tons

Weapons – 2 Beam Weapons (1 fore and 1 aft), 4 Rapid fire cannons (military) (3 fore, 1 aft), 10 Missiles (6 fore, 4 aft)

Scanners – 200/50

Cost – (Not available on open market)

Starship type: Fleet Destroyer

Length – 300 meters

Speed – 8

Jump Engine Range - 30

Shielding - 9

Hull – 60

Crew - 150

Cargo space – 1200 metric tons

Weapons – 2 Energy Bolt Weapons (2 fore), 2 Beam Weapons (1 fore and 1 aft), 5 Rapid fire cannons (military) (3 fore, 2 aft), 15 Missiles (10 fore, 5 aft), hangars for up to 5 shuttles.

Scanners – 300/75

Cost – (Not available on open market)

Starship type: Fleet Dreadnought

Length – 600 meters

Speed – 7

Jump Engine Range – 30

Shielding - 10

Hull – 100

Crew - 250

Cargo space – 1600 metric tons

Weapons – 4 Energy Bolt Weapons (3 fore, 1 aft), 2 Beam Weapons (1 fore and 1 aft), 6 Rapid fire cannons (military) (3 fore, 3 aft), 25 Missiles (15 fore, 10 aft), 1 forward firing only Supermass Driver (DV+20 Ammo 5), hangars for up to 5 shuttles and 2 Fleet Gunboats.

Scanners – 600/150

Cost – (Not available on open market)

SECTION 7

EQUIPMENT

The list presented below is to give the GM and players alike an idea of the tools useful to characters in the ODDS setting. Each item is accompanied by any bonuses to certain skills or any other special capability. Money is referred to as 'tokens', but you can change it to suit your game.

CLOTHING

Casual suit - 150

Work clothes – 200

Dinner suit – 500

Flight suit – For use in aircraft or starships, with built in G-force compensatory and cooling unit – Cost 600

Environmental Clothes – For sub-zero or radiation exposure, one suit for each environment – Cost 500

Wet Suit – Including air tanks for 1 hour of underwater activity – Cost 900

Space Suit – For extended high-risk environment or space walking – Cost 2500

Armoured vest – protects chest area from damage (-4 to damage rolls to torso) – Cost 150

Helmet – With built-in comlink (-4 to head damage) – Cost 250

Arm/leg protectors – (-4 to limb damage) – Cost 100 per limb

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

First aid kit – for use 'in the field' (to help administer immediate help) – Cost 200 per intended skill use.

Medical centre – Portable units for extended use (Aids medical skills by one difficulty level) – Cost 600 per intended skill use.

Medical unit – A station you'd find in a hospital or starship (Aids medical skills by two difficulty levels) – Cost 3500

TOOLS

Power tools – Drill, saw, hammer etc - Cost 50 per item

Welder – Joins/cuts metallic objects – Cost 150

Technical kit – contains screwdrivers, pliers and other tools – Cost 100

Fine tools – Tweezers, computer tools etc – Cost 75

COMMUNICATIONS

Com – basic radio with 150 kilometre range – Cost 50

Personal comphone – Basically a mobile phone with world-wide range – Cost 100

Orbital uplink – Folding dish and keyboard to communicate with satellites or starships in orbit, usually in backpack – Cost 700

FOOD AND BOARD

Meal – Basic food supplement – Cost 3

Expensive meal – Restaurant quality – Cost 5 to 15

Rations – Enough for 3 days in the field – Cost 15

Room – Standard cost 15 per night, expensive cost 30 per night, 'opulence' cost 75-100 per night

TRANSPORT

HoverTaxi fare – Cost 2 per kilometre

Air fare – Cost 10 per 100 kilometre

Starship passage – Liner 150 per light year range, private hire 1000 per light year range.

1 light year's worth of recharge on jump engine – 200.

MISCELLANEOUS

Flashlight – Lamp or torch – Cost 50

Binoculars – Standard cost 100, Infra-red or zoom focus cost 200

Rifle scope – Lowers range by 1 level – Cost 200, 350 with infra red

Portable computer – 250

Flares – Cost 50 for 3

Gas mask – Filters most non-corrosive gases - Cost 200

SECTION 8

GAMESMASTER'S SECTION

The Gamesmaster's Role

It is the Gamesmaster's (GM's) job, *responsibility,* to create a game that all can become involved in and enjoy.

What does this entail? Hard work, imagination, a flair for the dramatic, the ability to improvise, a working knowledge of the rules, a sharp wit, the ability to arbitrarily interpret the rules and make decisions based on dice rolls and common sense… sounds daunting yes?

Well, yes and no. It's true that, out of all the players sat around the gaming table, the GM will have the hardest job, but all the requirements listed above are not a necessity. It's true that GM's need some flair and a lot of imagination, but you wouldn't have this rulebook in your hands if you had none of that, would you?

GM's are the anchor of the game – they design the adventure, talk the players through the game and generally control the events and unfolding plot that are generated by the game. The GM will be the one who plays all the NPC's and bring their characters to life.

So, let's have a look at the two main requirements of the GM and address them one at a time.

The GM must know the rules – This goes without saying. The rules have been created to decide the outcome of decisions and actions and are the basis of the game. It is the GM's responsibility to know the rules, as well as if not better than the players. This is not an immediate requirement, as there is a learning curve inherent in all new games and pastimes, but at the end of the day the GM will need to know the mechanics of the game and how to implement those mechanics. So, read up on the rules, make some test dice rolls to come to grips with the mechanics, and take it from there. Expect stoppages and pauses as you refer to the rulebook during your first few games, as there is a lot of information here and knowing it all off by heart straight away is, whilst fanciful, almost impossible.

The GM must be a storyteller – This is true also. One reason why GM's take on the role is so that they can express themselves as storytellers, narrators if you will. It is the

GM's responsibility to do two major things as far as running the game is concerned:

Describe the setting to the players – they must describe the location, what the players can see and smell.

Play the roles of the NPCs – There may be a lot of Non Player Characters for the GM to portray, each with their own personality and visual distinction, which is also part of describing the setting. Some NPC's may have goals and objectives of their own, others may be bit players and hand over information or help in passing. Think of it as movie billings – there's a lot of major characters who are important people, whose characters need detailing, then there's the walk-on parts who need little decoration, and then there's the extras who are, for all intents and purposes, window dressing.

Above all, the GM is the arbiter of the rules. They decide on the situation and what merits a dice roll and what doesn't. They decide on the difficulty and the nature of the threat but this is not a game where the GM designs something to see if the players survive or not. This is a game that tells a story and, even though there will be moments of adventure and suspense, the GM should not be 'out to get' the players. Games that revolve around plot enhancement, such as conversations with NPC's and situations that do not always require violence to resolve. Their decisions should be balanced and represent the adventurous nature of the ODDS roleplaying game.

SECTION 8 .1 - Example of play

The GM is running a game set at a deserted survey landing site. The player characters, Boon, Mick and Sara, have just landed in a small freighter and are having a look around.

GM: The ground is scorched from the blast engines of the survey ship, and three tents and

larger habitat bubble appear intact. But, as you walk down the ramp, you see several pieces of expensive survey equipment lying abandoned on the ground. The three tents are torn and the habitat bubble is deflated slightly, the flimsy plastic melted. The moss-like grass crunches underfoot and the bending trees sway in the wind. The sky is a pale pink with the great ringed sister-planet hanging huge in the sky. What do you want to do?

Boon: (To others) I don't like the look of this. (To GM) I'll walk to the habitat bubble, with my pistol drawn.

Mick: I'll check out the tents.

Sara: I'll go through the discarded equipment.

GM: Boon first, then. The habitat bubble has been stripped inside, and on the floor you find spent laser pistol capacitors, a really old design. The tables have been overturned and some of the computers have been smashed. Mick, the tents are empty, there are no personal effects inside, not even sleeping bags. There's a moist protein snack bar on the ground in front of one. Sara, you find that some of the equipment has been smashed, but other stuff has just been dropped. The smashed stuff is mainly recording equipment.

Mick: (To others, in character) This can't have happened too long ago, if the protein bar hasn't gone stale.

Boon: Lots of spent ammo lying around, there was a big fight here.

Sara: And a lot of the measuring and recording equipment has been smashed. Someone didn't want these guys doing their job.

Boon: Or recording what was going on. This whole thing stinks.

GM: Hoots and whistles of unknown creatures echo from the swaying, rubber-like trees.

Boon: Anyone ever been here before?

The others check their notes, but they both answer in the negative.

Sara: I wish some of the survey devices were still intact, it might give us an idea of what's going on here…

GM: You suddenly hear the sounds of laser fire off to the north. A laser beam shoots into the air like a flash of lightning and dissipates.

Sara: Well, someone's shooting at something. I'll draw my pistol and wave the others to follow. Let's go!

Boon: I'll run after her, weapon ready.

Mick: Should I stay with the ship? I'll stay with the ship, just in case.

Boon: Good idea. Keep her warmed up!

GM: How are you proceeding through the trees? They're pretty thick with undergrowth.

Boon: That's handy. I'll move fast but keep low, try to stay out of sight.

GM: Make a sneak roll. The difficulty is… plus 4 to your skill level thanks to the undergrowth.

Sara: I'll do the same.

Boon: (Rolls 1D20) I passed.

Sara: (Rolls 1D20) So did I. What do we see?

GM: The trees are thick and bend like rubber under the wind. Strange creatures with wide eyes scuttle out of your way, but they appear to be running themselves, away from the laser fire. You hear more laser fire and the sound of a man shouting, but you can't understand the words. You burst through the trees and you see a huge hollow tree where a man with a gun is leaning half out and shooting at three ugly bony creatures in the trees. They have six limbs, long sinuous necks and huge teeth, about the size of a large dog. They hiss and cackle and have surrounded the tree. Several of the creatures lie dead around the base of the tree. Thanks to your passed sneak rolls, none of them have noticed your approach.

Boon: I'll take aim at the closest creature.

Sara: I'll pull off two shots at the two creatures closest to the tree.

GM: Make your rolls. The range gives you a minus 2 modifier to your roll. Sara, you get a further minus 3 for the two shots.

Boon: Eat this, bony! Damn! I missed!

GM: They've seen you!

Sara: I hit the first one, missed the second.

GM: Roll your damage.

Sara: I'll roll damage.

GM: Well done. The creatures can't be very strong, as your pistol flashes with a thump and the beam hits it in the chest. It falls from the tree, twitches and dies. But the shots draw the attention of the others. Boon, the one you shot at leaps through the branches and leaps straight at you.

Boon: Damn! I'll dive out of the way.

GM: Roll your agility.

Boon: I'll use it all.

GM: That gives the creature a minus… I roll a… 19. It misses you.

Boon: Yes! As I dive I'll shoot the thing!

GM: Alright, no need to shout. Make your roll but remember to minus your half agility.

Boon: (Rolls die) Nailed him! Damage is… 7.

GM: That's good enough! It goes down in a tangle of arms and legs, dead. Sara, here comes the other one, straight at you!

Sara: I'll pull my other pistol and take aim with both weapons as it comes at me, not moving an inch.

GM: Are you sure? You won't be able to defend.

Sara: Trust me. I'll fire as soon as it's on me.

GM: Make your roll. Firing both weapons counts as two shots, so minus 2 from your rolls, but the aiming reduces that to a minus 1.

Sara: (Rolls 1D20 twice) A hit. And a hit! Damage is… 7 and 8.

GM: It's wasted.

Boon: How cool was that!

Sara: I'll head over to the man.

GM: He is wearing the uniform of a scout, and he has a rough beard with a shaggy head of hair. He's wounded on the head. The slumped body of a woman, half-conscious, lies inside the hollow tree. 'Thank the Light!' he shouts. 'We thought no-one was coming!'

Sara: What happened?

GM: (As NPC) 'Oh, we were doing our normal stuff, research, you know, and suddenly these things come screaming at us. We've never seen them before, and we've been here three weeks! There were dozens. We lost two in the first attack, but the next was so savage we had to abandon the camp. That was an hour ago'.

Boon: Are there of you many left? Who are you?

GM: 'Sorry, I'm Vero Much, I'm the team leader. This is Dori Grey, my assistant. She's wounded.'

Sara: Hold on, did you say there were dozens of these things?

GM: Mick, back to you. What were you doing?

Mick: I'll have got on board the ship and warmed her up. I'll get on the scanners and see if I can get a fix on the others in case they need a pick up.

GM: As you do so, you hear a strange skittering noise across the hull, on the top of the ship, and strange cackles.

Mick: (Thinking of what just happened to Sara and Boon) Oh, crap. I'll draw my pistol.

The adventures continue…

SECTION 8 .2 – Non-Player Characters

Non Player Characters (NPC's) are the characters played by the GM, and will be the personalities that the players will come across and communicate with during their travels across the League of Seven and further.

An NPC is basically a character in their own right, with statistics filled out like any other character. Each will have their own skills and abilities, but they will also have their own agendas and personalities.

When designing an NPC, consider their role in the campaign or scenario. Consider what it is they want and how they intend to go about it.

First, write in their personality, from something as simple as 'Happy-go-lucky', to 'Quite a pleasant well-spoken man, but prone to outbursts of anger when riled'.

Then, decide on what they want. To help the PC's? Money? Power? Fame? What is driving the NPC and how do they fit in to the game?

Stock Characters

There are a lot NPC's of varying skills, so designing those ones that the PC's may come across during the course of their adventure may be a good idea. The merchants, bodyguards, specialists and average citizens will probably dot the game and the PC's will ignore most, some asked simple questions but that's it. Having a few stock NPC's with the basics listed for their personality and skills may be a good idea if you see the game going in a certain direction and you need a character to get the PC's back on track or to accompany them on their new course. Like a fully-fledged character, the stock NPC will have limited details but enough to use within the confines of the game.

In general, NPC's can be put into three categories; Normal, Experienced, Skilled and Master.

Normal NPC's will have 10 points in each STAT and at least one random skill at skill level 12. This is an average person which populates the League.

Experienced NPC's will have the same 10 points but, somewhere they will have a STAT of 12, usually the STAT that covers their profession. They will have a skill level at 14 in their chosen profession. This is the kind of skill that a few people in a city might have.

Skilled NPC's are the individuals who have the most experience and have seen a lot of the League, their high skill level being the equivalent of a player character after many adventures. They will have 12 in each of their STATs and have skill level 16 in their chosen profession. This denotes the abilities of a few people of an entire continent.

Master NPC's are one of the very few, perhaps one person on a whole world, who have the most experience. They have 14 in each of their STATS and their primary skill level will be 19. These people are few and far between and should be encountered very, very rarely.

The three examples above are useful if you need a quick NPC. Just choose their experience, Normal, Experienced, Skilled or Master, and put the points in. You don't even have to make many notes.

Using NPC Lists

The second way to handle NPC's is to create three lists – one of different templates covering trades and skills, the next a simple list of male and female names, and the third a brief line on personality. When the PC's come across an NPC and it looks as though the NPC may become a longer-than-anticipated fixture, take a template, choose a name and a personality and that's it – instant NPC. The great thing about that is once you've created the lists, you don't need to do anymore and the lists are even applicable in any future campaigns. This also means that any holes you may have left in your initial campaign design can be instantly plugged.

So, to summarise:

i) Choose a skill level, such as Normal or Skilled.

ii) Create a list of male and female names.

iii) Create a list of basic personalities (i.e. 'Very nervous', 'Always angry', 'Very suspicious')

iv) When a quick NPC is needed, choose one of each list and the stock character is ready for use.

Using Index Cards And Filing

A great to keep track of all those NPC's, even the off-the-cuff ones you created using the lists, is by writing the details of the NPC on a filing card or a single sheet of paper and placing the character in alphabetical order in a filing box/folder. This makes life so much easier when you need to find the NPC. Filing cards are especially good, because then you just flip through the box to the wanted NPC. This cuts out the long-winded searches for misplaced characters, and reduces the amount of clutter in front of you.

SECTION 8 .3 - Creatures

The many creatures of the League of Seven and beyond cannot be listed in full – there are far too many to even contemplate. However, it is easy to assign a creature abilities by deciding on the creatures STATS and a skill just for animals called REACTION.

A creature only needs two STATS, AGILITY and STRENGTH. They have no skills. These STATS can be as high or as low as the GM wants depending on the size of the creature. The creature itself can be anything the GM can picture, lizard, mammal, piscine, bird etc.

A creatures STATS are decided by its size. If a creature is very small it might have a high AGILITY but very low STRENGTH, and vice versa for large creatures. A rough guide to animal size and abilities is listed later.

An attacking creature uses its AGILITY skill to attack with. It cannot make more than one attack at a time and cannot parry. Most animals reduced to less than half HIT POINTS may decide to flee (GM's decision).

A creature's HIT POINTS are decided by its STRENGTH as normal.

In addition to the creature STATS, there is also the extra skill REACTION. This is basically the reaction the creature will have when confronted. The reaction is based on these.

IGNORE – The creature will ignore any approach. This is true of many herbivores or very large creatures.

CURIOUS – The creature will be curious of those approaching it and investigate.

FLEE – The creature will run from any confrontation.

PROTECT – The creature will run but will fight if cornered or if its young are threatened.

ATTACK – The creature will attack on sight.

It is possible to combine these reactions. So, for example, the creature might have CURIOUS/FLEE, which means the creature will sniff around the players until confronted, in which case it will run. Or IGNORE/ATTACK, in which case the creature will ignore the players until confronted, in which case it will defend itself.

Below is a list of possible abilities of creatures depending on their size. The GM is free to decide on the actual abilities and the REACTION of the creature.

TINY (Insects) – AGILITY 3, STRENGTH 1

VERY SMALL (Rodent, small birds) – AGILITY 4, STRENGTH 2

SMALL (Domestic pets, lizards) – AGILITY 5, STRENGTH 4

MEDIUM (Riding animals, predators) – AGILITY 5, STRENGTH 6

LARGE (Herd animals) – AGILITY 3, STRENGTH 6

VERY LARGE (Large herbivores, huge fish) – AGILITY 2, STRENGTH 8

HUGE (Be imaginative!) – AGILITY 1, STRENGTH 10

So, an average Creature Template would look like this:

CREATURE NAME AND TYPE:

REACTION:

AGILITY:

STRENGTH:

SECTION 8 .4 - Adventures

Designing adventures is one of the most important jobs of the GM. The adventure can last an evening, known more commonly as a scenario, or it could last for a very long time, weeks or even months. These are known as campaigns.

The Players

Figure out what kind of game the players are used to playing, and also think about each of the Player Character's aims and styles of character. Try and give a little of something for each player to do to spread out the involvement of each player, try not to create a scenario that only one player can really get stuck into. If all the players are used to high-energy games, then create an original story but with the same amount of guns and action. The flipside to this is to turn the entire story on it's head; the players are big action characters, so turn down the fire and get serious, switching the explosions for dark corridors and torches, or something a lot more investigative. Many players will respond quite eagerly to a complete change of style of play, and then be more willing to explore different aspects of the game.

Plot

The plot is the biggest thing of all. It is the flow and content of the story the players will remember. If all they remember is how they took down the enemy, blew up armies or defeated the bad guys, then they should be playing a wargame and not a role-playing game. If they kill enough nasties and uncover enough plots they will soon get bored by the whole thing and look for something else to play. If you make games memorable with the situation you put the players in and the problems and characters they come across, the players will be a lot more interested to 'see what happens next'. This is what makes soap operas successful.

It has been said that there are only nine basic plots for all types of story to cover, love stories and murder mysteries etc. This is a bit of a pain. How can you make the story original if you have already exhausted a hundred storylines with different *modus operandi*? Well, the key thing to remember is that it is not

the reason behind the story that drives the plot - it is the route the players or the unfolding events take that make the game memorable. As long as the players get to do something different every week they should keep coming back for more. They won't care that there was another murder in this week's game, but they will care about how the murder took place and for what reasons. Be careful not to try and re-kindle old ideas and make them bigger and better than before. The players will know straight away that you are trying to recapture the highs of a past game and won't respond to it as well. It is *originality* that keeps the players attending.

Style

First, the style of the game must be established, meaning that the atmosphere must be created for the game effectively. If the game is energetic and fast, then the action and style of writing must reflect the speed and urgency of the situation. Alternatively, if the game is to be slow, mysterious and dark, then attempts must be made to keep the atmosphere smooth and detailed, so that the players can absorb the story and characters.

Atmosphere

To maintain the atmosphere during writing, and to keep the style consistent, it is best to keep your surroundings similar every time you sit down to write. Keep an ambient music tape playing softly in the background with a tune that will reflect the game. Play this every time you sit to write your material. If your writing a fast-paced game, play a soundtrack, keep up the adrenaline with the thought that a film you are trying to emulate will be what the players are expecting to play. If your writing a darker game, keep the tone dark with a sombre brooding soundtrack, and try to draw the atmosphere into the scenario by trying to imagine how players would react to the designs you are creating.

Length

How long do you intend the game to last for? This depends on whether you want to run a campaign or a single- or two-night session.

When writing a long campaign it is always best to design the basic situation, with a rough sequence of events and the lists of goals and NPC's to pace out the story. That way, when the players finish the game for the night, you can make a few notes about what they did and

accomplished and make it affect the next game. If you just play out the game week by week to a set cirriculum that you have designed to turn into a long campaign, then the players will not only get a little bored with having their characters led about by the nose, they will also be less willing to turn up for the next game if they think the same thing will happen again because it is the next instalment of the campaign. That makes the hard work you have put into the campaign design worthless, especially if the players give up on you. The golden rule is that the game is for the players, not the pages and pages of linear material you slaved over for this very reason.

Detail

A lot of GM's are concerned about how much detail they should put into the game design. Should they list every possible outcome of the story? Should every nuance and capability of every NPC be listed in detail? The truth is, it doesn't matter how much detail you put into the game design. It depends on what you feel comfortable with. If you need all that information then go ahead and get it all down on paper. If you think you can do without it and that all the information you haven't put down is easily winged, then go ahead and wing it. A lot of the time, it will depend on how experienced the GM is, and so there are no real guidelines for any GM to help them through the creation process.

Designing a fresh and imaginative game for keen players is not an easy task if you're new to the hobby, but it gets easier with practice and exposure to the game. After a while, new GM's will get the feedback from players that will make their games more suited to the group's needs. There are some experienced GM's who still enjoy working out every fine detail of the upcoming campaign, there are others who just write a very brief synopses of the story and take it from there, embellishing the game as it progresses. If you're comfortable with it, do it. But don't forget to take the above details under a little advisement; after all, everyone who sits around that gaming table wants something from the role-playing experience, and it is up to you to provide it.

SECTION 8 .5 - SCI-FI CAMPAIGN PREPARATION

Sci-fi opens up so many opportunities for setting and scope that the sheer numbers of plot ideas cannot be covered all at once in a single volume. This short list covers the basics and throws a few ideas around as far as the preparation goes, as in locations, NPC creation and game pace.

1 – You Are Here: Gaming Within the Setting

So, you've got the plot idea and the story germinating in your head, but where to set it. You have a choice, a large choice, but as a GM, you have to be familiar with your chosen setting, that's a given. Not only must you be familiar with the setting, but also you must be aware of the limitations. The limitations of the setting means the boundaries covered within the game that you may be restricted to. A certain choice of setting may limit you to one planet or one solar system but always be aware that you are the GM, it's your game and you are well within your rights to break those boundaries and go further. It may make a nice surprise for the players, also, to be allowed that amount of free reign within a game they thought constrictive. As a first time GM in your first campaign it may be wise to stick to the boundaries of a small area, as then you're within the area you know and some of the pressure is off as you concentrate on what you have. The course of the campaign should help to keep the players on track as they follow the plot, but players can be unpredictable so at least be prepared to improvise with a couple of ideas in case they leave the course of the game.

2 – The Game: Using And Implementing The Rules

There won't be much of a game if you don't know that much about the rules, so make yourself aware of all the rules that will matter to you the most.

a) Using Rulebooks

For clarity, highlight certain sections you think may be necessary, and for ease of reference place titled bookmarks in the pages of the books you are using. This saves you having to flip to certain areas and slow the pace of the game, so having a bookmark entitled 'Combat' or 'Skill List' at the pages you need is a good idea.

b) Initial Rules Use

Try to keep dice rolls to a minimum for the first game or two as you settle into the role of GM, and if you do have to get into a lot of dice rolling then take it slowly and calmly. Many first-time GM's tend to panic when an action sequence hots up, thinking that taking their time or searching for rules in books will slow the game down and ruin the atmosphere. Don't be concerned about that. As a first-time GM the players will be aware that a little time will be needed to settle in. GM'ing the same rules that you have previously played in will be a bonus as you will already be aware of the system and know most of what will be required.

c) Using Different Rules Within The Game

Sci-fi games are usually more comprehensive rules-wise than most other games, as not only are the rules encompassing the world and the people, they have to cover different weapons types, starship capabilities and a variety of ground and airborne vehicle, not to mention other possibilities. To deal with these, and to not overload yourself in the first gaming session, try to space out the different aspects of the game across the first few adventures. In the first game, deal with fist fights and maybe ranged combat, coupled with skill use and any of the run-of-the-mill game mechanics. The next game, insert a bit of vehicle combat or use, building up the encounters so that you can use a different aspect of the rules, all the way up to starship stuff and the rules encompassing larger things. Don't just throw them in, make them part of the plot so that the game flows along with the learning curve. This way, you can get used to the rules and build the game to a satisfactory climax, with lots of different things happening.

d) Choosing Which Rules To Use

Don't be afraid to disregard certain rules if you cannot fully come to grips with them in the first one or two games. There may be a complicated chart or interpretation that slows down the action, and if the roll isn't too important then cast it to one side and judge it in favour of the PC's. This shouldn't be

repeated too often, as the players will feel that chance is no longer a part of the game and the GM is deciding on success and failure. This should only be used when the game comes to a standstill because of a ruling. After the game, read and re-read the section you became stuck on, set up some examples with NPC's and make the rolls yourself several times until the rule is clear in most circumstances. This can lead to the use of 'House Rules', modified rules that are used within your particular gaming group. But don't make that a priority at the moment. Try to use the rules as printed and see if you're comfortable with them.

3 – Locations

The PC's will probably be jetting off to one place after another, and the fact is, in a sci-fi game, they can usually get to where they're going pretty quickly.

Make sure that you have the main locations created and detailed, but that you've got some fall-back locations in case the players go in the wrong direction or decide to head in another direction to rest, recuperate and plan their next move. To do this, create a few stock locations, from a normal everyday shelter and the surrounding area to huge cities and generic space stations. Design the location so that it can fit into any environment so that continuity isn't disrupted. By this I mean you should be able to slip the location into any environment, be it forest, snow or desert.

This is a necessity, as sci-fi games usually cover longer distances faster than any of the normal fantasy genres. In fantasy the GM has the luxury of being able to stretch out the long journeys between locations, stalling until the next game so that he/she can design the place the PC's are heading for. In sci-fi games, it's usually a flick of a switch and – pop – there they are. Having a several places to hand is a good idea, then you can just grab one, change it slightly to suit the environment the players have headed for, and go from there. With your NPC lists, it should make creating a location easier, either off-the-cuff during the game or pre-designed for use within a game.

4 – Common Problems

There will be a few things a new GM may come across in their first few games. Here are a few pointers to help you through it:

a) Don't panic! Try to keep yourself calm and think through everything that challenges you cleanly and methodically. Pace it out, don't try to handle everything all at once. Before the game starts, let the players know that you're still settling into your role – at the end of the day it's a completely new system and the players will be as new to it as you are. It'll be a learning experience for all of you.

b) Try to keep your GM's area tidy. Notes and papers and scraps of info hurriedly written down can make things difficult and clutter can get in the way. If you need something quick and there are all kinds of scrap lying about it'll only make things harder for you.

c) Don't let the players control the game. If you've played but not GM'd, don't always listen to the player's interpretation of the rules, as it will almost always lean in their favour. Check and double check rules either during or after a game, but don't dwell. If you think the ruling may take a while to check out, quickly make a decision and then check on the ruling after the game is finished.

d) On the flipside, don't be afraid to ask for a little help from anyone who may know the rules more than you, especially if one of the players is the ex-GM. You may hit a snag or a problem, and a quick word or piece of advice from the players may help push things along.

e) If you get to a point where you really are stumped, just hold up your hands and call a time out whilst you figure out the problem. The players will be a lot more appreciative that you stopped the proceedings to smooth things out properly than just blundering through, hoping things would sort themselves out.

f) Don't push the players in the direction you want them to go. A gentle guiding hand with scraps of information and clues and leads to where the players should go next should be all they need to follow your game, giving the illusion of free will. Blatantly pushing them along a set path can frustrate the players.

g) The players are part of your role-playing group – they are not your enemy, so don't treat them as such. If the game was a simple combat simulator then you should be playing a wargame. GM's are not solely there to throw the players into death-dealing battles and traps, but to supply an enjoyable adventure and gaming experience. Don't be out to get them.

h) Try to be fair and consistent with each player, and be attentive to each of them. You don't want players feeling ignored or picked on, so try to spread your attention equally between them.

i) Most important of all – be prepared! Make sure you have your plot notes, locations, characters, ideas, maps, dice, books, sheets and all the stuff you'll need present and accounted for. Take a deep breath and get in there – don't be thrown if the players decide to go off in different directions or miss leads. Go with the flow. If the players are enjoying a certain aspect, go with it. If you see they're not too impressed, then don't try to force the issue but veer off in a different direction. As long as the story isn't unduly affected by the change of course, then things should be fine. If it does go so far off track, them don't force the players back on path, but move the story slightly to intercept the player's path and draw them back into it.

SECTION 9

CREATING WORLDS AND STAR SYSTEMS

This section is to help the GM design and implement solar systems and planets, to thrill and entertain the space faring PC's zipping about the cosmos.

Simplicity is usually the key as far as some games go. A certain type of terrain, such as desert-worlds or ice-worlds, can usually represent a planet, but they can be far more diverse than that.

SECTION 9.1 - PLANETS

To begin with, make a checklist of what you will have to address when designing a new world. Take the approach that you are travelling to a specific point on the planet's surface from the outer edge of the solar system the world is within. This way you can deal with each point in turn. Bear in mind that these points are the very basics and would not hold much sway under scientific scrutiny. There will be 'reality' inconsistencies, here, but it's what works for your game that counts.

In general, a planet will have the following template:

SYSTEM DATA: This is what is in the star system, the number of planets and any other bodies, with a brief description (or more detailed, if you so wish).

HOMEWORLD: If the star system has a central colonised or hub world its name is put here and the details of that world are entered below.

TERRAIN: What is the surface of the world like? Forested? Desert? Or is it a mix of many? Detail the world's surface here and any anomalies or finer points you think are relevant to the game.

LENGTH OF DAY: The length, hours, of an average day.

LENGTH OF YEAR: The length, in days, of the average year.

GENERAL INFORMATION: All pertinent information should be entered here, such as the type of colony (see 9.2 COLONIES) or settlement, population, exports, the pulse of the people… everything that makes the world a detailed place should be listed here. See 9.3 and 9.4 for more information.

SECTION 9 .2 - COLONIES

Colonising planets is impossible if the system in question does not have the correct conditions to sustain life on any of its orbiting worlds. To keep it simple: if a planet is constructed by the same forces that created one planet then the conditions on other worlds should be the same or at least similar. This means that many planets surveyed can be capable of sustaining limited settlements, even if the settlers have to live in habitat shelters or require anti-bacterial inoculations and gland surgery to survive.

In general, there are three kinds of settlements - a Colony, a Research Facility and an Industrial Settlement.

A Colony is what the name suggests; it is a large community of humans re-located to another habitable world to work a living from their new surroundings and spread mankind throughout the stars. The largest colonies are huge cities that are basically re-creations of cities back home.

A Research Facility is a planet or moon that was not deemed suitable for general colonisation and chosen instead to house one of the governments many research stations. These stations scan each of the new properties of the location, including mineral, vegetable matter and any lifeforms present, to see if they have any industrial or scientific use.

An Industrial Settlement is set up when a research facility finds usable materials on the surface on the planetoid. These huge complexes house hundreds of workers who remove enough of the materials to use in industry. Some scientists were known to limit the amount of industrial removal that goes on at these settlements, so that the extraction of resources does not damage the environment.

Settling a new world offers adventure in the extreme, with new discoveries and scientific innovations occurring long after the world has been settled.

SECTION 9.3 - STAR SYSTEMS

Let's say you're on an exploratory vessel, and you're flying to a destination planet from the edge of the system. As you go in you will encounter and learn of each of the details of the new discovery and, finally, the world in question.

a) How many planets are in the system?

b) What position is the world you are travelling to within the solar system?

c) How close are the planets together?

d) How many natural satellites does the planet have?

e) What is the layout of the planet's surface?

f) What is on the planet's surface?

g) What is the planet's mass?

h) What is the atmosphere like?

i) What flora and fauna populates the planet?

j) What are the weather patterns and seasons like?

k) Are there any geological anomalies?

So, to address each point in turn:

a) How many planets are in the system?

As in our own solar system, several planets of varying size and atmosphere may exist circling the same sun. They may be airless planetoids, great misty gas giants, or they may even be habitable, like the world you are heading for.

Take into account that moons are capable of retaining atmospheres and may have ecologies of their own. These could be encircling the larger barren worlds, or even the target world itself. There is also the chance of asteroids and comets – adventures in themselves – as many things can populate a solar system.

b) What position is the world you are travelling to within the solar system?

Is the target world the third planet from the sun? Is it the fifth? The closer to the sun, the warmer the world will be, the further the colder. Earth, as an example, exists within a 'safe zone', a distance from our own sun that has a heat and radiation level which is acceptable to the magnetic field of the earth and us, it's denizens. This, in turn, enables life. Does the target world have the same conditions? If it's too close to the sun then it may be a barren wasteland, or a desert/scrub world suitable for very little life. If it's too far, it may be a cold and bleak, with great seas of ice populated by mere plankton.

c) How close are the planets together?

Planets that share or are close together in orbit of a sun could have an effect on each other. As they pass, great gravitational forces push and pull, creating geological disturbances or abnormal weather patterns. Seasonal meteor showers could create a great adventure hook. At the very least it would make a great visual, as the PC's walk across a new world they could have a great ringed planet hanging overhead, or two moons.

d) How many natural satellites does the planet have?

Does it have one moon? Two moons? Three? Or no moons at all? The moons themselves could be air and rocky like our own, or they could have some kind of atmosphere. They could even just be huge asteroids caught by the planet's gravity well. They may have minerals and ores essential for the PC's own organisation or world, which would make them very valuable and worthy of investigation.

e) What is the layout of the planet's surface?

How are the continents, if any arranged? Does the world have huge landmasses, or is it a smattering of large islands? A map of the world is essential, or at least a map of the area the PC's will be landing in. Also, the sea to

land ratio must be ascertained. Our own world is covered in roughly 75% of water, so how much does the target planet have? And does it have ice caps?

f) What is on the planet's surface?

Depending on the position of the world and how close it is to the sun, the planet will have varying types of surface. It could be barren and hot, or cold with a smattering of green at the equator. It could be mountainous or flat, or it may even be covered in active volcanoes. Also, are there any cities down there? If so, where are they and whose there? What are they capable of? The denizens may be at a medieval state, with feudal lords and simple sail/horse power. Or they may be interstellar explorers themselves, with great shipyards and orbital facilities.

g) What is the planet's mass?

A planet's mass and size will determine the gravity the PC's will encounter on the surface. A large dense world will mean a heavier gravity – the PC's may find it difficult to move about when they weigh four times as much as they do normally, and will their ship bear the strain? Remember that size does not dictate mass. A large world may not be very dense and therefore the PC's can leap long distances and carry more than usual, where in contrast a small world may be so compact and dense that movement may be difficult.

h) What is the atmosphere like?

Put simply, can the PC's breath it? Our own air is a mixture of nitrogen, oxygen and inert gases, but the atmosphere of another world may be different. It may be high in methane or hydrogen making it unpleasant, even fatal, when breathed normally. This will dictate whether the PC's will have to travel about in spacesuits or facemasks, and how dangerous it would be if said suits and masks were damaged.

i) What flora and fauna populates the planet?

Is the planet covered in lush, green jungle? Or is it a sparse scrubland? Perhaps the trees go no higher than a man, or perhaps they tower into the heavens, hundreds of feet, with trunks dozens of feet wide. Taking existing locations of our own world and twisting them all out of proportion and colour works wonders to get across a feeling of alienism. Also, what

animals are here? If the world is lush and green then perhaps the creatures are herbivores, hardly a threat, with great dinosaur-type animals roaming the land or small mammals snuffling in the bushes. But not all animals will be of no threat – where there are succulent, leaf eating creatures, there are usually predators, large and powerful or small and fast. In contrast, the world may be scrubland, so eking out a living may be difficult. Virtually the whole world may be predatory, living off each other, and visitors, for survival.

j) What are the weather patterns and seasons like?

On average, our Earth encircles the sun every 365 days, and takes roughly 24 hours to spin on it's own axis once. During those 365 days, the Earth tilts on its axis, creating four distinct seasons; summer, autumn, winter and spring. The length of days and nights change, varying the temperature and therefore having varying effects on the weather. So why did I just tell you what you already know? Well, that's an example. Your world might be vastly different. It may take decades to encircle the sun, resulting in winter or summer seasons that last for years. This, in turn, would seriously affect the weather. Long, arduous droughts, or continuous rainfall may cover the planet. The entire surface of the world may be one huge dust storm (like the ones that cover Mars sometimes), or tornadoes might pepper the landmasses.

k) Are there any geological anomalies?

Is the surface of the planet smooth, bumpy, or downright treacherous? As on our own world, a planet could have varying levels of landmass, but imagine if the world was covered in great fissures and volcanoes. The land would be mountainous, covered in cracks and earthquakes and noxious smoke. If you think of great places on our own world, such as the mountains of the Himalayas, the great plateaus of South America, or the strange rock formations in mid-west America, then you have an idea of what I'm talking about. The planet itself may be a great pattern of age-old impact craters – weird!

It may be a simple case of taking our own world and twisting it out of proportion – this gives the PC's something to latch on to visually but then the visual is alien because it is different. Saying that, you'll find that creating the whole solar system, with attention

on the main planet to be used, will help define your setting and add a sense of realism to it. Anything else can be seen as a throwaway world, and you don't want your players to see it that way.

SECTION 9.4 - DESIGNING LOCATIONS

There are many strange places in THOSE DARK PLACES, many strange worlds, cities, stations and starships. The trick is making each of these locations work for your game and the reality of the world you are gaming in. The locations have no need to be grounded in the realms of possibility; after all, this is science fiction.

Following are some hints and tips on how to create such places. Although it is impossible to anticipate every environment and ecology, these tips should give you some idea of what to think about when designing a new place for the PC's to visit – or avoid. Locations, even terrestrial ones, are diverse and many, so being able to give comprehensive hints on how to create original and visually memorable places would be foolhardy – the best this article can offer is how to approach the design of the location, and hopefully act as a springboard for your own ideas.

Location design can be divided into four categories: a rural location, an urban location, a space-based location, and the name of the location, which will dictate the lay of the land and what is to be found there, either cities or towns or natural occurrences, and it's identity.

RURAL

Rural locations are what the heading suggests – open areas of natural growth. This can cover many types of terrain, such as forest, plains, mountains or even endless water, but it is important to remember that a single type of terrain is not indicative of the surface of the entire planet. Use our own world as a template – many different terrains cover our planet, from steaming jungles to arid deserts to vast expanses of water, as our seasonal climate is subject to change from pole to pole. There is no need to represent a whole planet with ice fields, jungles or desert unless you want to keep it simple.

When we speak of sci-fi locations we are usually talking of out-of-this world places that are reachable by the PC's in the game. There are only so many places of varying identity that a GM can visit before repeating themselves, so ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the atmosphere like? Breathable? If it is breathable then you're most likely looking at a world with an atmosphere and ecology much like our own. Toxic? If it is toxic then the world may be far from similar, with growths and terrain far from what we know as human beings. Great natural funnels could be belching sulphur into the air, with lakes of bubbling acidic liquid burning everything around. Natural vegetation could excrete a gas that is lethal to off-world visitors, only breathable by the local life forms indigenous to the planet, or the microscopic bacteria could be of a kind not suitable for human exposure. The visual style can be handled the same way as the breathable atmosphere, except the PC's will have to spend their time on the world with masks on, or even fully suited in spacesuits.

- What does the landscape look like on this particular part of the planet you have landed on? Either atmosphere may give rise to terrain and vegetation similar to our own world, with a few twists to improve the visual style. Perhaps there's no grass anywhere, but a moss-like growth that covers open land. The trees could grow like huge flowers, supple and bending in the sun, or they could be waist-height and cover the area like ferns. Sometimes it pays to think of either exaggerating the natural order of things ('the trees are half a mile wide at the trunk and rise two miles into the air!') or downsizing them ('the highest hills are less than a hundred feet, and stretch off into the distance').

- How similar is the landscape to our own? A twist on the look or style that human perception is used to can make normal things appear much more alien. Get hold of a copy of a natural history book or something similar and check out some of the weird and wonderful places on our own planet. You may not have to look very far for something that seems very far removed from what we know.

So, to surmise, to create a rural landscape you have to ask yourself some basic questions. Can the PC's survive the atmosphere, and how different is the landscape from our own? Even

colour can make the difference. The sky may be tinged with a continual pink, with a two moons hanging low and huge even in the daytime. The leaves of the tree may be blue. Just picture everything a person would look at when viewing a natural landscape and twist it. Remember, you don't have to have a reason as to why the world is the way it is. If it serves the plot and makes for a memorable location, then going into minute detail about the ecological history of the world is not necessary.

- Here's a little trick for quick descriptions. If you go from orbit to sky to land, you can build a picture of what the PC's see, standing on the surface of the planet. Starting with the orbit, they may see more than one moon there, or another planet, or even a massive spacestation hanging in the sky. Moving down, the sky itself may be coloured red because of atmospheric aberrations, or long stringy blue clouds might be thinned by high winds, or even glow of a night time with their own phosphorescence. The ground can be as described above, with twisting trees and blue moss-like grass that clings to everything.

URBAN

Now that the rural landscape has been established, it's time to decide what kind of cities exist there, and how they thrive in relation to the landscape they have chosen as their home. The style of an urban area will depend on two of the things already established by the rural setting, atmosphere and terrain, and also the purpose of the facility.

- What kind of constructs are they? Buildings will be designed and erected to suit the conditions of the place chosen for settlement, be it settlers who are indigenous to the world or colonists new to the planet. Think about the surroundings, the weather patterns, and the usefulness of local vegetation and/or minerals. In real terms, the size and type of the settlements will depend on the technology level and consumable resources about the site, but there is no reason to go into that kind of detail. Unless the PC's are planning to take up permanent residence on the world, then there is little point in going into sociological and architectural detail.

- What kind of atmosphere is the settlement constructed in? Let's say the atmosphere is toxic. Indigenous life forms will have no compunction living in areas that suit their biological needs, as they are immune to the effects of the world. Visitors, however, may need to take drastic measures. Glass and steel domes that protect the inhabitants from the lethal atmosphere may encapsulate great cities, with their own ecosystem installed bought in from the home world to sustain them. Huge underground caverns cleaned of toxins could house a subterranean populace. If the atmosphere is of a heavy gas and low lying, the cities could be on huge stilts that stand above the poisonous clouds.

- What kind of weather must the buildings resist? If the weather is extreme, measures may be required to protect the denizens of lashing winds, violent rain or even periodic meteor showers. They may have huge armoured upper levels to resist heavy impacts, they may be bullet shaped so winds slip over them. Low domes with reflective surfaces may help resist heat, whilst other weather might be kept out by constructing the city into the side of a mountain…

- What kinds of people live there? In this respect, it helps to think of technology level.

- Are the people warlike or peaceful? Warlike people may have buildings built for battle, with defensive emplacements, stark, brutal construction and sterile corridors. Peaceful races may be more graceful, with flowing architecture and wide-open natural spaces.

- How advanced are the people? A technologically backward settlement may live in mud huts or caves, or rudimentary castles. It may help to mix and match different cultures from our own world to visualize this – Aztec Ziggurats surrounded by Norman castle walls, in which Viking-like long houses are built, the people travelling the land in huge zeppelins? Advanced settlements may have great silver cities, with sprawling starship bays, anti-grav sleds flitting between the buildings and myriads of brightly coloured beings walking the streets. The best thing to do – choose a period in history and mix it with other styles of culture from all over our world, exaggerate size or flamboyancy and you have your own style, with elements the players can visualize which makes your job that much easier.

- What is the terrain like? The actual formation of the land will also play a role in the design of the urban area. In mountainous areas the city might be low-lying in the valleys, or actually built into the mountain itself, with roadways and between the peaks. On plains the city may be like earth-bound sprawls, in jungles the cities may be covered in vines and growths, or part of the huge trees. On water planets, the

cities may be standing on stilts above the crashing waves, or underwater where it's cool. Imagine how we survive in different places on our own planet and you have a starting point, with twists on the reality of it to suit your game. Not all cities need to be plain downtown/suburban creations. After all, it's the physical design that will stick in the minds of the players, and having he layout of the place similar from one world to the next will make locations indistinguishable from each other, which may result in a lesser involvement in the game.

SPACE

This is where things get interesting yet simple. There are so many choices to be made in the creation of a space-bound location that listing them here would be impossible. Instead, simply take what you have designed regarding the planet-bound location and transplant them into vacuum. Honestly, it's as easy as that – make the location airtight and the jobs done. Consider the following -

- What is the purpose of the location? All you have to consider, in general terms, is the size and shape of the place. Is it a huge sphere, covered in sensor towers and hangars? Is it cylindrical, with huge solar arrays generating power? Is it the classic doughnut shape, spinning to create its own gravity? A station could be so huge that artificially created landscapes could exist within its walls, with gardens and fields and lakes, to help the species the station belongs to relax.

Scientific stations might be bright and sterile, with white corridors devoid of decoration illustrating the seriousness of the locations purpose. Military stations might be bristling with defensive weapons and have berths for many warships, troops and war machines littering the sparse, industrial-like construction, and picket vessels hanging in permanent readiness challenging every vessel that approaches. Trade ports may be huge, able to berth dozens of starships at a time, with thousands of beings utilizing trade halls and entertainment venues.

The size of the place may well reflect the purpose, but that is not always the case. Simply judge why the location exists and go from there.

- Is the location part of a natural occurrence? Perhaps the place has been constructed in a hollowed-out asteroid, or part of a shattered moon. It helps to combine the design with a natural space-based occurrence so that the players have a visual they can latch on to. Describing a space station is fine, even showing a picture can help, but a three-dimensional image, especially that of a moon or asteroid, gives the players a picture to latch on to and helps the suspension of disbelief.

- What is in the vicinity of the location? I'm not talking about within a few hundred yards, or even kilometers – the nearest visual 'landmark' might be dozens of light years away in the form of a huge nebulae. Just imagine what the players might be able to see from the location, or as they approach it. Is there a long string of multicoloured stellar dust glowing in the distance, or huge nebulae that fills the view ports? Is the world the station orbits blue or green or purple, or an airless barren rock? Is there an asteroid belt the PC's should be aware of? Are there many ships flying around, or just one or two? Are there two suns, and what colour are they? A great red giant could cast a scarlet glow over everything and everyone, turning a pleasant station into a vision of hell. Perhaps there has been a battle, and the station is what is left of a huge warship, with the wrecks of smaller vessels locked in the same orbit.

In conclusion, the thing to remember about creating a sci-fi location is the 'twist', giving a place a certain element of difference to make it stick in the player's minds. You can base it on earth-bound cultures or terrains, or go far out there with weird and wonderful designs of your own. It's best to keep the notes you made and file them, referring to them when you create something new so that you don't repeat or copy yourself. You don't want the players to visit acid lakes on one world, and then do the same thing on another world a couple of weeks later. Science fiction, especially that which deals with exploration and adventure of the galaxy, is a genre of discovery. Travelling across the Game to find that the architecture on most planets is the same as downtown isn't very exciting, is it?

SECTION 10
EDWARD

An Adventure for THOSE DARK PLACES

'Welcome to the Greylight*. You're going to die here'.*

(This section under construction)

This is an introductory adventure for THOSE DARK PLACES. Set on board the research station *Greylight*, the PCs play operatives on board the Deep Space Salvage Vessel *Dan Tanner*. They are sent to the station by the Commission to investigate why the station is refusing to communicate.

LOCATIONS

Research Station *Greylight* – several pods of similar design and layout put together in a string. It is 13 days out from the closest habitated outpost.

There are several pods strung out, connected by 10 meter long transit tubes. Each pod is a different section of the station and designed so that they can be removed and replaced by other pods depending on the station's research and laboratory/equipment requirements.

DSSV *Dan Tanner* – 100 metre long salvage vessel captained and piloted by SAM-7, an artificial intelligence designed to fly, navigate and maintain the ship. SAM-7 runs the ship and the crew, the PCs, are the cargo. Although the PCs can take over the ship if SAM-7 is incapacitated there is no need – at the moment the *Dan Tanner* is just a means of transporting the players to the adventure destination and makes things easier on the GM, considering that this is the first adventure.

It also makes it easier to keep the PCs together as SAM-7 will run the ship whilst the whole group is away. Not only that, SAM-7 will refuse to pick up the players from the station as the Commission controls it – it will not end the mission until it is completed and will tell the players this even if they scream for extraction. SAM-7 always taks in a calm, level voice and does not use contractions.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

The PCs can be chosen from a selection of 6 templates or can be designed by the players to suit their style. Templates include:

Investigator

AGILITY 10

INTELLIGENCE 14

PERSONALITY 12

STRENGTH 11

Diplomat

AGILITY 9

INTELLIGENCE 14

PERSONALITY 15

STRENGTH 9

Combat Specialist

AGILITY 15

INTELLIGENCE 10

PERSONALITY 9

STRENGTH 14

Engineer

AGILITY 10

INTELLIGENCE 15

PERSONALITY 12

STRENGTH 12

Medic

AGILITY 9

INTELLIGENCE 15

PERSONALITY 11

STRENGTH 10

Scientist

AGILITY 9

INTELLIGENCE 15

PERSONALITY 12

STRENGTH 9

The adventure is split into sections, each section being a single pod of the research station. Each entry is split into three sections:

Entries in normal typeface – GM information

Entries in **Bold typeface – Player information**

Entries in *Italics typeface – Rules implications*

THE ADVENTURE

The story begins on board the Deep Space Salvage Vessel (DSSV) *Dan Tanner*, a one hundred metre long starship that appears rather old and dilapidated.

Read this to the players:

SAM-7 calls you all onto the main bridge. It activates a screen on one of the computer stations.

'I have just taken a Commission Contract to head out to a deep space research station and find out why they are having a communications blackout. Contract Broker Vincent on Pluto Station sent me this message. I shall play it for you'.

An image flickers into life. A static-covered screen appears and you can barely see the moustache and thick glasses of Vincent, a Contract Broker back in the Sol System.

'Hi – it's Vincent. Hope you're well. Look, we've got a weird one here and you're the only ship in the vicinity that can get there in a decent amount of time.

There's a research station called Greylight in the Eta Bootis Sector drifting in the middle of nowhere doing all kinds of secret work for the Commission. Yes, I know you said no more Government jobs but the Commission want a result sooner rather than later and you're only about thirteen days out from Greylight. The nearest cruiser is a good eighteen days out so they need the Dan Tanner.

Between you and me I reckon they're desperate because they've offered twice the going rate already, so if you want to haggle price then it'll be in your favour, plus they'll cover bonuses and expenses. They were also quite eager to have a salvage ship go instead of their own vessels, so they've obviously got an idea of what's going on.

Typically, and in time-honoured Commission fashion, they've neglected to give us full details of the mission. All they're saying is that they need the station investigated, possibly salvaged, with all pods present and no questions asked. They've given me a transcript of their last communication with the Greylight and they seem honestly confused by the situation. Here, I'll read it out for you.'

'STATIC

Greylight Station this is Commission Control, please respond. Greylight Station, we have not had any reports from you for three days,please advise us of your situation, over.

STATIC

Greylight Station, do you require assistance, over.

This is Greylight. We do not require assistance.

Who is this? Please identify, over.

We do not require assistance and there will be no further communication.

Greylight Station, please verify your last statement. Why do you not wish to communicate, over?

We do not choose to communicate. Over and out.

Greylight Station, please advise us of your situation, do you require asistance, over. Greylight Station, please respond. Greylight Station, do you require asistance, over. Greylight Station, please advise, over.'

And that's pretty much it. Not much to go on, I agree, but the Commission seems to think it's pretty important that their multi-million credit installation has decided it doesn't want to chat anymore.

Now, you know how Commission contracts work. No questions asked, and they will not give information unless they feel we need to know. So the brief is this:

Jump to Greylight.

Investigate why they decided they didn't want to talk anymore.

Report back.

That's it.

All they'll tell me is that the station is has a low-importance Artificial Intelligence research project going on, but they wouldn't tell me why it's been sent out to the back end of nowhere to do it's job if it's low-importance. Do you know what that tells me? That tells me there might be something expensive going on out there, which might mean prize salvage.

Get back to me. Have a look at the credit ticket they're offering – honestly, you can't say no, can you? One hundred thousand, plus expenses and bonuses? You could buy another ship for that!

Speak soon… oh, and Karen sends her love.

SAM-7 then says, 'I have accepted the contract on your behalf. What you saw on the message is all I know but I am expecting trouble. If the Commission is desperate enough for answers that they will

send a private contractor in to check on one of their stations then I am assuming that there is a major problem. We are making the jump in an hour.'

POD 1

DOCKING AND STORAGE.

Here the players will be able to access the station. There are no other access points as it appears that the external airlocks have been welded shut. If the PCs want to try anything else to get in they will be overruled by SAM-7 Hideo – this is a multi-million credit station and the Commission will not suffer any further damage to it. The PCs must enter here.

Describe how there are no automated docking systems and that everything is done manually. The *Dan Tannner* docks by tube and not in a hangar, and so the PCs can make their way in. Captain Hideo directs the team from his command chair in the ship.

The main area and storage is well kept and in good condition. Except for a layer of dust there doesn't appear to be any problems. The power on the station is low, enough for artificial gravity and life support, but any computers and workstations are locked. To continue, the PCs must travel through the transit tube to POD 2.

There are no rules implications here. The GM may want to have the PCs do a few test rolls for trying to access computers, maybe even have some false start jumps such as an overloaded light exploding and the PCs testing against their easy Agility to dodge hot sparks.

POD 2

ENGINEERING AND POWER CORE.

This is where the PCs will have their first taste of problems. The light is low, the engineering section is noisy and cramped, and the shadows are deep. It is also where they wil find their first body, stuffed into a corner and left. It's not much of a body – it has been practically skinned and the head is missing. There are some scraps of clothing on it, however, and in one of these scraps is a pocket with a logstick in it. Upon pressing the 'play' button they get a garbled log recording:

'I can't be the only one. There has to be others. There has to be other survivors. I can't believe… why is he doing this? We made him immortal, the ungrateful bastard! Immortal! Why is he killing us?'

This is a dangerous place and the first encounter the PCs suffer. Once they play the log they will be attacked by small cat-sized four-legged machines that they will know to be automated service drones. The only difference is that someone has bolted the severed heads of people to the casing of the machine, and they have been reprogrammed to attack. They have all kinds of engineering tools as weapons – screwdrivers, hammers, welders, that kind of thing – and they attack en masse. Even though they are only small and easily broken there are a lot of them.

The heads are rotten, the eyeballs white and the hair patchy. These are the heads of the station's crew and personell. The bolt goes through the top of the head so that they face forwards and the nut of the bolt is on the scalp. The individual machines are low in strength and spindly, like thin crabs.

POD 3

PERSONELL QUARTERS

This is where there appears to be a lot of damage. Doors to rooms rent open, blood on the walls and floor, belongings and cupboards torn open. Parts of bodies are stuffed into corners in piles, internal organs and offal left splashed across the floor. The smell is almost unbearable. It is here that they can go through belongings and personal logs, maybe even find equipment that might help them. Also, there are larger machines here - converted loading exoskeletons, a little larger than a man, with the body of a pilot bolted into place. The arms and legs of the machine are also covered in strips of flesh and the very top of the frame, once again, has a human head bolted onto it. The machine attacks, and they number half the PC number (rounded up) as they are quite strong.

The loading exoskeletons are large and dangerous, and will attack as soon as they see the PCs. They make no sound other than the clanking of the arms and legs, and a rotating light on the shoulder acts like a strobelight. They are not armed. PCs may also find equipment that may help them – logs with information, medical kits if they need them, and maybe weapons depending on their progress so far.

The loading exoskeletons are tough and strong, but lack combat ability. They give no quarter and only stop fighting once they are completely destroyed.

POD 4

MEDICAL, COMMAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL/LIFE SUPPORT

In the Medical suite there a lot of bodies, skinned and decapitated, all spread out on the tables and stuffed into storgae lockers. There are more small automated service drones here, stripping the flesh of dead bodies, and putting the strips over the frames of loading exoskeletons. It's a grisly sight.

In command there are no bodies but there are signs of fighting. The major systems of the station appear to have been destroyed, but the power from the core is being chanelled to POD 7. The PCs cannot access any systems from here.

The drones will ignore the PCs as they work on the exoskeletons, but will attack if disturbed. There is an exoskeleton in the command centre and it will hide in the shadows and attack if the PCs try to access any systems. Any wounded PCs can be healed in the Medical suite.

More stats for drones and exoskeletons.

TRANSIT TUBE FROM POD 4 TO POD 5

The tube has been ruptured so the PCs must use spacesuits to jump the zero-g gap from POD 4 to POD 5. This one is a puzzler – there are one less spacesuits than the PC group's number, ie if there are four PCs there are only 3 spacesuits available. This Means that they must figure out a way to get themslves over to POD 5 and get a spacesuit back for the spare PC. All the while the PC left behind is plunged into darkness as all the klights go out, after the other PCs have left - there is something in the dark. It's an exoskeleton and it stalks the PC who elected (or was voted!) to stay behind.

POD 5

LABORATORIES (BIOLOGICAL)

As the medical suites, but there is something else - brains in jars. The labs are stark white and clean, and there are all kinds of areas where brains have been wired into computers, sensors, and machines. Calling up any logs or workstations will reveal the following information:

'We are successful. Our aim was to transfer human consciousness to a silicon machine, basically digitising a brain. The idea was that downloading thought and memory to a machine could achieve a form of immortality, and then all you'd have to do is repair and replace parts to keep going. The implications were enormous – artificial intelligence with emotional responses, expanded knowledge. At first we tested primate and donated brains from already dead donors, but what we needed was a test subject.

Luckily, a terminally ill man named Edward Tarkovsky volunteered to be the guinea pig – he was going to die anyway, so what did he have to lose? So we wired his brain into a machine and downloaded his consciousness – and it worked.'

This is where the log ends, as suddenly the lights go out and all is dark. Then they are stalked by another exoskeleton that is almost completely wrapped in human skin.

This is a respite for the PCs – a chance to catch their collective breaths. The bright white lights and the clean labs are a bit of a lure as they suggest no dark corners, shadows, and safety. There is nothing here they can use.

Usual stats for the exoskeleton, maybe consider making PC actions more difficult due to the darkness.

POD 6

LABORATORIES (TECHNICAL)

These labs are technical workbenches, great rooms of wires and computers. There is a lot of damage here, and it appears that someone has purposefuly destroyed several of the labs. Also, the drones and the exoskeletons are being repaired and built here, so the whole place is like a workshop full of working drones and exoskeletons. As before, they will not attack unless disturbed.

Through logs, the PCs will discover the following:

'This is where the mind of Edward Tarkovsky was placed into the receptacle. The consciousness was put into an artificial brain and then transferred into a huge exoskeleton, a human shaped robot. Edward could move limbs and do what a normal human could do, except he was stronger and faster. He loved his immortal body, and the scientists patted each other on the back.

But what we hadn't realised is that a human mind needs a human body to exist in. Edward could not properly hear, he couldn't properly see, he did not articulate words with a mouth, he just thought them and got frustrated when people did not fully understand his intentions. He could not smell, or touch, or feel, or catch his breath. Worst of all, he could not dream. His mind could never turn off. This lead to anger, frustration, then mental instability, and finally, after two months of tests and existence, finally psychosis. Edward needed to be back in a human body, so he has decided… to build himself one. He killed the crew, tore the skin from their bodies, and placed it over his own robotic skeleton in a grisly parody of flesh. For company he put bodies in exoskeltons and bolted the heads of the dead on other machines... I must get out. I must get out.'

As the PCs realise this, they hear a man sobbing over the tannoy system.

'It's rotten…. It's all rotten…'

This is a plot revelation location. Some PCs may be able find heavy duty tools to help them fight if the have to, such as plasma welders and powertools. The drones and exoskeletons will fight if pushed, but they will actually herd the PCs to the transit tube from POD 6 to POD 7.

Normal stats.

POD 7

LABORATORIES (FINAL DESTINATION)

Finally, this is the place where Edward has retreated to. He has had the walls torn out so the pod is one huge room, and the wires and equipment gathered make the floor a carpet of tubes and wires and the walls dark and oppresive. In the centre of it all is Edward, wires and tubes plugged into his massive skeletal robot body, rotten skin and organs hanging from the frame and it is dark, hot and oppressive.

Edward watches the PCs in silence. They can say what they wish here, but words do nothing. It's as if he is studying them. It's only once they make a threatening move on him that he acts. He stands to his full three-metre height, the wires and tubes popping out of him, and he says:

'I have a station to run. I need fresh flesh'.

Then he will attack. His hands are razors, he is strong but, because of the wires and tubes still attached, he's not very fast.

The PCs can fight him as they are but he is very strong and has high strength. There is a chance that one of them might notice a thick cable attached to Edwards lower back, which appears to be quite important. It is, in fact, Edwards main power lead that he needs now that he runs the whole station. If they destroy or sever that, and it is quite flimsy, they defeat Edward.

Either way, once he is defeated, he collapses, and as the light fades from his circuits his last words are, 'Can I sleep now, mommy?'

This is where the adventure ends. SAM-7 on the *Dan Tanner* will now pick them up.

This is the final stage. There is nothing here the PCs can use to fight Edward and they will have to rely on what they have already found and salvaged from the station as they travelled through it.

Edward is VERY strong and direct attacks will do damage but very, very slowly. Only his lack of mobility stops him from fighting at his full capacity. If it seems the PCs are defeating him too easily then have some drones or exoskeletons join the fray.