# ASHEN STARS

# ACCRETION DISK

BY

## GARETH RYDER-HANRAHAN
## KIERAN TURLEY
## KEVIN KULP

Pelgrane Press

# ACCRETION DISK

by
Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan
Kevin Kulp
Kieran Turley

# CREDITS

**Publisher:** Simon Rogers

**Assistant Publisher:** Cathriona Tobin

**Original** *Accretion Disk* **Outline:** Robin D. Laws

**Authors:** Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan, Kevin Kulp, Kieran Turley

**GUMSHOE System:** Robin D. Laws

**Art Direction:** Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan

**Cover Art:** Jérôme Huguenin

**Interior Art:** Chris Huth

**Cartography:** Ralf Schemmann

**Layout:** Paolo Bosi

**Layout template:** Jérôme Huguenin

**Copyediting:** Christopher Smith Adair

**Indexing:** Chris Huth

# CONTENTS

# ACCRETION DISK

## INTRODUCTION

As the stars grow pale and ashen, and the tide of anarchy rises across the Bleed, you need to grab every advantage you can — every edge you can beg, borrow, steal, implant, or retrovirally insert into your DNA — if you're going to make a difference. It's not easy bringing justice to the war-ravaged outzones, but with this book, you might just have a chance.

An accretion disk, by the way, is a spiral of diffuse matter that accumulates (or, well, accretes) around a massive body like a star. In this case, that massive body is the *Ashen Stars* core rulebook. Our bits of diffuse matter are optional rules, added detail, new species and technology, and lots of other tweaks and twists. Some are closely bound to the core, inescapably caught in its gravity well. Others are erratic captures that might only show up in a few campaigns. Take what you want from this book and discard the rest — Lasers run a tight ship, and you don't have the fuel for unnecessary mass.

### LEVIES

In several sections of this book, you'll come across the concept of levies.

A levy is the opposite of a boost. When a levy is placed on an ability, you must spend an extra point to get any benefit. So, if your Athletics is levied, then spending six points from your Athletics pool would only give a +5 bonus to the dice roll. Levies on investigative abilities do not affect the acquisition of core clues, but increase the cost of spends by 1. A levy usually represents a disadvantageous situation or temporary exhaustion, and is lifted when the situation changes or its duration expires.

## ABILITIES

This section expands on the abilities covered in *Ashen Stars*. Every ability except for Health is covered, some in more detail than others. It's a big, weird galaxy out there, but you've got the tools to delve into its mysteries with these skills.

## INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

Each entry lists a few important aspects of the ability as used in science fiction adventures and dramas. Entries may include an Ability Focus, a close-up of one useful aspect of the ability; useful equipment associated with the ability; sample benefits from an ability spend; and clues or plot hooks that might be associated with the ability.

General ability pools gained through investigative spends typically last for the duration of a scene, or longer at the GM's discretion.

### Anthropology (Academic)

Anthropology allows you to understand how societies develop and evolve. This is true whether you're examining a known species or an unknown species on a newly explored planet, although the latter instance may provide you with more educated guesses and fewer hard facts. You can also use Anthropology to make educated and accurate assumptions about advanced societies you observe. You can avoid embarrassing faux pas when meeting an alien species for the first time, and determine the appropriate etiquette when addressing a particular social class.

This may not sound particularly interesting at first glance, but it's a must for planetary explorers who expect that they might be making first contact with new species. It can even be used offensively, if you aren't above lying to your hated rival about the correct behavior to exhibit when meeting a hostile alien tribe's leaders for the first time.

- *You can exploit ancient legends to convince locals that your actions have been foretold in myth and song. Just don't be surprised if you accidentally become famous as a reborn prophet. Less ethical anthropologists might make use of this to convince a primitive species that they are in fact a god incarnate.*
- *By exploiting your knowledge of what makes societies tick, you can insert particular rumors, traditions, or customs into a local population, although they may only be popular or believed for a short time.*
- *You can deliver a particularly offensive insult to an alien species, or teach someone else how to deliver it.*
- *You can tell if a society's development (whether military or intellectual) is natural, or if it's been secretly or blatantly influenced by outside forces.*
- *You can identify individuals from synthcultures, or adherents to nufaiths.*

- *The planet's government claims to be independent, but you can tell that its teaching methods are strongly influenced by Combine teaching techniques. Why is it lying about the Combine's influence, and what it is trying to hide?*
- *The local tavak are far more militaristic and aggressive than is typical in their species. Knowing this makes you realize your own growing aggression while you're planetside. What's causing the psychic influence?*

## Archaeology (Academic)

There are times when the information or technology you need is buried deep below the surface of a planet, left there by ancient civilizations or long-ago visiting aliens. Alternatively, perhaps you need to find a ruined temple or government building from a previous era. If you need to fake ancient artifacts, find what has long been buried underground, or even learn from long-abandoned paper documents that are on the brink of disintegration, Archaeology is the ability to use.

The reconstruction and restoration of paper records falls solidly under Archaeology. This is aided with a palimpsest generator. This holo-capable handheld scanner examines printed material and can simultaneously scan every page in a book, closed or not, and then send the images to your tether. The technology is not perfect, sometimes resulting in garbled or incomplete text, but it is the best method yet developed for reconstructing ancient written material without needing to touch or otherwise open the ancient, fragile paper.

- *You have an uncanny knack for picking out interesting ruins from an unexceptional array of similar data points. Spending a point helps you sniff out ancient technology and signs of intriguing civilizations, even when what you're looking for isn't clue related.*
- *You're experienced at navigating ruins. Whether you're trying to sneak up on an enemy at a dig site, lay a trap in ruined buildings, or race through a series of ancient caverns back to your ship before your enemies can trap you, an Archaeology spend will allow you to use the ruins to your advantage while hindering your foes.*

- *You discover signs of an ancient Mohilar base, perhaps one that was used to bioengineer their servitor species. Why has no one found it before now, and why can you (at least partially) conceive of it despite the Bogey Conundrum?*
- *Secrets that the Combine would kill to keep hidden are located in the ruins of a crashed spaceship on a hot jungle planet, and you're able to locate the rotting hulk. Can you get in and recover the information before it disappears, or before someone kills to stop you?*

## Astronomy (Technical)

Getting lost in space won't just kill you, it's also ridiculously embarrassing. Avoid it by knowing Astronomy. This ability ensures that your piloting is competent, professional, and safe -- and for those times when you have to take horrendous risks that violate all three of those descriptions, Astronomy makes sure that you know the risks and know the best way to exploit them.

- *When partially crippled and desperately trying to outwit a better-armed enemy, you can find a misty nebula that hides your ship in sensor-confounding radiation, giving you barely enough time to effect repairs or try to escape.*
- *You keep track of orbiting live munitions left over from the war. It's an odd hobby, but it means that you know where to find deadly and unstable high-powered weapons when you need them most.*
- *You know of a transient, unstable translight corridor. If you take it, you can get the life-saving vaccines to their destination much faster — but you risk getting lost in the outzone.*

## Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Looking at a missing freighter's late delivery schedule, you can estimate where it must detour to on a regular basis, and you know rumors about what civilizations lie nearby.*

► *An armed force is trying to set up the equivalent of a toll booth near a FTL corridor, dragging ships out of translight in order to pillage them. You know an alternative corridor to avoid the bandits' attack -- or better yet, to come at them from a direction they won't expect.*

► *You detect the signs of an Ashen Stars Effect outbreak that is about to afflict this system's star. From prior experience, you know that the darkening of the star is associated with social upheaval and panic. Your readings suggest the Ashen Stars Effect will hit within seventy-two hours. How do you prepare a civilization for chaos in three days?*



## Bio Signatures (Technical)

When you need to evaluate your enemy or landing site, you turn to Bio Signatures. This ability includes scans from a particular person, a scan which might give you detailed information about their health, species, age, weaponry, and biological makeup; to scans of an entire planet, which will typically give you a rough population count, an atmosphere analysis, and species designations. The larger area you scan, the less information you typically gather.

This isn't a technique for tracking individuals. Bio signature technology won't track an individual or separate her out of a crowd from orbit, although you'd typically be able to identify the only human in a city full of kch-thk.

Bio signatures are a fantastic tool for making sure you walk into a situation with your eyes open. You can learn the approximate number of soldiers in an enemy base, the quantity of unshielded living creatures inside a safe house, the likelihood of large predators in an alien wasteland, or the crew makeup of a potentially hostile starship. Information is sometimes more valuable than firepower, and Bio Signatures can help you accumulate it.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *By targeting the exact biometric description gathered by your ship's computer, you can roughly track unshielded members of your own crew from orbit.*

► *Scanning a hostile alien can give you an indication of its physical vulnerabilities, allowing your and your allies' weapons to do +1 damage to it for the duration of the combat.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A routine bio-scan indicates a creature that is previously unknown in any records or literature. It's large, clawed, and apparently bioengineered for destruction. A more detailed scan shows that thousands of these are in the process of being cloned. Who is breeding it... and why?*

► *A cybe outpost is under attack from other cybes, and scanning shows that the outpost is full of cybes from tavak, balla, and durugh stock. Who is integrating these non-humans into the species, and why do other cybes want them destroyed?*

## Botany (Academic)

Plants matter, especially when they're about to consume you. Knowledge of Botany allows you to identify known plants and make intelligent assumptions about newly discovered ones. You can detect clues about a plant's age, nature, and usefulness. You can identify the planet a plant originates from, and spot the signs of plant-related poisoning.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Sometimes, you have to fight dirty. You produce a plant with exceptionally irritating and fast-acting toxins, like an advanced poison ivy, just right for quickly rubbing on ladders and doorknobs when you're being chased.*

► *Many plants have hidden medicinal effects. A Botany spend in the right jungle provides a 3-point pool of Medic points that can be used on any crew member.*

► *Combined with Viro Manipulation, you can genetically alter plants, adding poison, biochemical tracking agents, personality-altering effects, and the like.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *The head of a technology corporation has been murdered, when a fast-growing thorn plant literally sprouted from her stomach. You identify it as the tool of the Hch-Tht, a purportedly mythical kch-thk assassin organization.*

► *A plant-based species has been discovered on an outlying planet, but a recent visit from traders indicates that someone has been brutally kidnapping them and taking them off-world. Botany helps you learn why someone wants them so badly, pointing your investigation in the right direction.*

## Bullshit Detector (Interpersonal)

It's sometimes possible to tell when someone is feeding you a line. The ability isn't perfect -- you won't notice if what they're telling you is something that they personally believe to be true -- but if you're being deliberately lied to, you're probably going to notice if you have Bullshit Detector.

That comes in handy when you're traversing the Bleed. An enemy captain promises you peaceful negotiations? You might be able to sense that he's planning on pulling a fast one, allowing you to put countermeasures in place. Have a stowaway swear to you that she isn't wanted by the law? This might indicate that she isn't telling the whole truth, helping you ferret out that "deadly private security firm" isn't technically the law.

## Sample Equipment

Jokingly referred to as a "defibulator," the truthtick (Cost: Preparedness 4) is an electronic disk the size of a small coin that adheres to a victim's skin and monitors the individual for signs of lying. Upon any prevarication, the truthtick delivers a powerful electric shock (costing 1 Health) as punishment for lying. The resulting conditioning often encourages victims to tell the truth... or at least not to out-and-out lie. A truthtick typically has enough power for one interrogation, and can be easily removed by anyone who is not restrained.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Spending a point of Bullshit Detector typically hides your own lies from someone else with this ability, allowing you to get away with deception for a time.*

► *A spend can impress on an individual that you have a near-supernatural ability to ferret out the truth, often convincing people that they'd be fools to lie to you in the first place.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Chatting with planetary nobility at a party, you become aware that they are lying about minor and inconsequential things and doing so flawlessly. How are they able to lie without triggering your instincts, and what do they need that ability for?*

► *When drinking in a bar and hearing a vidcast of a popular politician, you realize that he's lying about seeking peace during upcoming diplomatic talks. When an ambassador there is found dead, you can't help but remember the politician's perfidy. Was he actually involved?*

## Bureaucracy (Interpersonal)

Like it or not, you live in a larger world, and that world is run by bureaucracy. Whether it's a government task force, hidebound law enforcement organization, or sprawling multi-planetary organization, Bureaucracy gives you the keys to expediting or sidestepping a normal chain of command to get what you want. Bureaucracy tells you what paperwork to file, whose palm to grease, what weak space in an organization to exploit, and how to use their labyrinthine rules in your favor instead of having them used against you. That makes it a bad choice for independent lone-wolf rebels, but a great choice for any Laser who is willing to work within (or exploit) an organization to accomplish their goals. Be warned: bureaucracies usually hate independent lone-wolf rebels.

- *You can obtain reserved seats at restaurants, convenient docking bays in space stations, and planetary passes even at spaceports run by paranoid and hostile societies.*

- *When you need to confront the chairman of the Sirion Cybernetic Corporation, you can pull strings to get an appointment at any time of the day or night -- even if it makes some people angry in the process.*

- *You can blend in as a faceless office drone in any building large enough that people are used to seeing strangers. Carry a tablet, look harried, dress appropriately, and most people will assume you're supposed to be there.*

Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- *Know the exact timing, pattern, and delivery schedule used by hospital guards who are charged with delivering rare and valuable drugs.*

- *There's a loose support network of other Lasers in the Bleed, and the normal administration is gradually being replaced with bureaucrats who you suspect are loyal to organized crime. You can smell a space-rat, and know where to start your investigation without tipping anyone off.*

## Chemistry (Technical)

When you think "Science!", think Chemistry. The image of a white lab coat and a fizzing test tube certainly apply -- you'll use this ability for any chemical analysis or synthesis, for testing soil and matching DNA samples -- but with the technology of *Ashen Stars* it becomes far more capable. Your tether and handheld scanners can help you analyze samples on the fly, make small quantities of impromptu chemical weapons and explosives, and determine when a compound is artificially created instead of occurring naturally.

Sample Spend Benefits

- *Unable to pass through a blast door after your quarry has burned out the security pad, you can combine chemicals to synthesize powerful acid on the spot.*

- *Needing to reveal a thief, you coat an object with an invisible compound. Later, after the object has been stolen, you can hopefully track or reveal the thief by detecting whose hands are coated with the compound.*

Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- *An enclosed terraforming base has been struck by a lethal plague. With Chemistry you determine that it's a deliberately synthesized poison, not a naturally occurring disease, and you can create a temporary antidote to ward off additional deaths until you can get your hands on the original formula.*

- *Trying to determine the origin of a crashed starship, your chemical analysis indicates that its shuttle's fuel came from a particular isolated base held by die-hard Bleedists.*

## Consciousness Simulation (Special — Vas Mal)

You psychically recreate a corpse's personality, then question that psychic construct for clues and information that it might have known in life. It works best on actual corpses, but has been known to function on objects important enough to have the individual's personality psychically imprinted on them. Doing this requires you to actually interact with the personality of the deceased, which may make Bullshit Detector and other interpersonal abilities particularly useful. This process may be frightening or stressful for the vas mal, depending on the circumstances of the individual's death.

Consciousness Simulation is expensive, requiring a minimum of 4 points in order to work at even minimal levels, but this ability is spectacular at both solving murders and jump-starting a stuck investigation. At its best, it can gather crucial information after an individual's death -- security codes, clues to the identity of a murderer, and the like. At its worst, it can provide you with unwanted red herrings when you ask the wrong questions or a corpse lies to you. . . but even those, combined with additional investigation, can help point you in the right direction to solve a mystery.

If you opt for this ability, it's worth investing a fair number of points in. An investment of 6 points allows 3 questions, a more useful amount than the minimum requirement of 4. An investment of 8 points (an expensive proposition) would allow you to ask one question to two different corpses, or to ask one corpse five questions, so expect to use this only once per assignment. Make it count.

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Asking a corpse "who killed you?" may provide you with a description or vision of the murderer, but doesn't necessarily provide a motive. If the murderer is mind-controlled via virology, you'll still need to ferret out the true malefactor by questioning the apparent murderer.*

► *The military ship is set on self-destruct, and only the deceased captain knows the disarm code. Convincing the psychic image to reveal it, allowing you to disarm the self-destruct sequence, could mean life or death for thousands of soldiers.*

► *A rogue vas mal is making herself wealthy by murdering wealthy financiers, then using consciousness simulation to trick the victims into revealing their financial account codes to her. How do you prove it?*

## Cop Talk (Interpersonal)

You're in law enforcement, but local cops may not entirely agree. Knowing how to communicate with them helps smooth over rough edges; it marks you as an insider and someone to be trusted in an investigation. This ability lets you speak the language of law enforcement and military police, gaining help from local officials and greasing the wheels for your own investigation. It's also exceptionally handy if you need to put pressure on someone by having their own local law enforcement lean on them a little.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Gain a local police detail as bodyguards, whether you need backup in a firefight or to be able to use their elite access as a way to get into areas you'd otherwise be barred from.*

► *Keep a suspect under pressure by having local cops put them under constant surveillance, whether obvious or not.*

► *Have a portion of a city evacuated, giving you space (if not time) to find and defuse a series of bombs.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Just by overhearing a conversation and catching some very distinct terminology, you can tell that a supposed police cadet was trained in a top-secret elite military academy. He isn't who he's pretending to be, and he's dangerous.*

► *Gain access to detailed cop records of your perpetrator, including known hideouts and associates.*

► *Convince a local official to talk to you about local corruption in law enforcement, giving you the clues you need to track down a local blackmailer and murderer.*

## Cybe Culture (Academic)

Cybe culture isn't quite the oxymoron it might appear to be. Cybes have only been around for a decade or so, but their culture's networked and overclocked, and is evolving at astounding speed. As an expert in cybes, you're acquainted with the identities of all cybe leaders in the Bleed, and you know about their competing ideologies and political activism. You're also able to take educated guesses about a cybe just by looking at her, whether it's her origin or the nature of her cybernetic enhancements. This makes you something of an expert on the species, and helps you understand motivations and actions when someone decides to get violent.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *There are rumors out there of a hacker who knows how to take over, if only for a minute, just about any cybe out there… and that just may give you the edge you need in taking down an insane cybe super-soldier. The hacker is constantly on the run, but you know how to contact him for help.*

► *Some cybes hate humans, and that makes them hard to interview about their complicity in murder. A spend can get you safely into their stronghold for an interview. It's up to you as to whether you'll have to fight your way out.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *You know who the disreputable black-market cybe doctors are, the ones willing to install experimental and untested tech for a price -- whether the recipient is willing or not.*

► *Need to find out who's hacking into top-of-the-line cybe gear, and how? You know the manufacturers and the designers, and you can likely bluff your way onto the factory floor in order to talk to them directly.*

## Data Retrieval (Technical)

Information is power. People who can find, sort, and understand information have power. If you have Data Retrieval, you become invaluable; you can brush aside data security, restore alien storage devices, and pluck the smallest salient details from recorded media.

This ability is particularly useful when investigating any sort of conspiracy or crime that involves transferred money, long-lost secrets or a data trail. Your research will reveal hidden secrets, follow illegal funds through thirteen shell corporations, and divulge long-lost schematics for deadly weapons.

### Sample Spend Benefits

- *By spending a point, you can safeguard your own data so securely that it would take extreme and prolonged effort for anyone else to access -- and the stolen data would alert you to the location of the people trying.*

- *On those occasions when you need to punish someone in addition to arresting them, spending a Data Retrieval point can publish secret or previously encrypted information onto public networks, exposing dark secrets to the bright, hard light of public scrutiny.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- *Investigating a crashed spaceship, you can gain access to the captain's logs and the main computer's navigation data, helping you learn what drove it off course.*

- *A holo recording of a kidnapped child has no obvious clues as to its location. By using Data Retrieval to enhance and isolate the sound, you can identify obscure auditory clues that lead you right to the actual location.*

- *There's information out there that people are willing to kill to protect. You're hired by someone who's stumbled across it, but she's killed before you can reach her -- and now you're next on the killer's list.*

- *When in doubt, follow the credits. When investigating a minor contract killing, you accidentally uncover a massive planetary conspiracy to control the Bleed. Do you act against them, and, if so, how?*

## Decryption (Technical)

Unencrypted messages are easily hijacked, especially when someone is breaking the law. That makes decryption useful for Lasers, whose work regularly involves intercepting communications and data. Use Decryption to create your own codes, or to intelligently and efficiently decrypt someone else's.

It's not obvious by the name, but Decryption is also the ability used in electronic communication technology. You can use Decryption to identify a message's origin point, tell when someone is spoofing a message's origin, analyze a message's transmission frequencies, and the like. It pairs well with the general ability Communications Intercept, allowing you to quickly analyze and manipulate transmissions of all types.

### Sample Spend Benefits

- *Jam an enemy's communication channels so that they are unable to communicate with their allies.*

- *If you're being jammed, whether actively by an enemy or due to some odd space anomaly, a point spend might get a message out -- although you'll have no way of immediately knowing whether the recipient received it.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- *A scientist who thinks he's found an abandoned Mohilar weapons satellite disappears mysteriously, and an encrypted message is found on his discarded tether. Will the decrypted data lead to his kidnappers, his enemies, or the location of the satellite itself?*

- *A unique decryption key indicates that a famous Combine scientist may actually be a genius, inhumane war criminal in disguise who committed monstrous experiments on durugh prisoners. Can you get to him before assassins do, and is he being framed?*

## Dreamsight (Special — Vas Mal)

Guilty minds tend to reveal their secrets within dreams. A vas mal with Dreamsight can shadow the dreamer, seeing everything she sees and experiencing her dream.

Dreamsight is a tricky ability because it runs the risk of having one PC monopolize the GM's attention while the other players sit and watch. Often the GM will simply describe to the player what the subject is dreaming about; for more interactive uses of this ability, GMs are encouraged to occasionally insert the PC into the dream and have the other players roleplay the dream's NPCs.

### Sample Spend Benefits

- *With a spend, a vas mal has a limited ability to actually mold and craft the dream to guide the dreamer to revealing certain secrets. The dreamer has the standard chance of detecting interference, as detailed on p. 36 of Ashen Stars.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- *A suspect clearly knows the identity of a criminal, but due to loyalty completely refuses to confess the person's identity. Entering his dreams may give a clue as to whom in particular to investigate further.*

- *A trove of separatist weapons has to be recovered before a misguided group of teenage Bleedists commit a raid they'd later regret. Entering one of their dreams provides a map to the weapons' location.*

## Downside (Interpersonal)

Poverty runs rampant, especially in postwar devastation as the Bleed begins to rebuild. The filthy underbelly of society is full of secrets, opportunities, and possible allies. With Downside you know how to fit in among the criminal element and the down-and-out. You can make contact with criminal organizations, earn the trust of crippled veterans who have become omnipresent and observant beggars, and acquire secrets about secret smuggling routes that few people know. With Downside, you're unlikely to be made as a cop -- and if you are, there's a good chance you can talk your way out of it before someone shoots you as a security risk.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *You know people; on a spend you can create a disreputable ally who can get you information, weapons, or access to secured areas... possibly at a cost.*

► *You have more than one legal identity, and on a spend can shunt off a particularly disreputable or illegal action onto an alternate identity that you keep separate from your normal life and career.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *An elite weapons scientist has gone missing, presumably kidnapped. Your Downside contacts indicate that he has possibly gone crazy, is perhaps addicted to an unknown substance, and is getting ready to make that weapons research available to the highest bidder.*

► *Someone used hundreds of homeless to delay the arrival of law enforcement, allowing the perp to commit a robbery and get away clean. Your Downside contacts can tell you the details of who hired them, helping you trace the thief's communication records.*

## Energy Signatures (Technical)

When you're scanning an enemy ship for weapons, a building for people with cybernetic devices, or an area of space for cloaked vessels, you're using Energy Signatures. This ability (combined with your ship's sensors for long range or a handheld, tether-linked sensor for short range) can give you a huge amount of useful information: the presence of invisible objects or incorporeal beings, the quantity and type of weaponry that's active, the presence of robots and cybes, even the condition of another ship. In some ways, using this ability is a convenient plot device for the GM to tell you important tactical information that you can then use to your advantage.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Once your handheld sensor has detected energy-based enemy sidearms nearby such as disruption pistols, spend a point of energy signatures to briefly overload one's power systems with electromagnetic radiation. This stops the energy weapon from firing during the next round of combat, usually creating an unpleasant surprise for your foe.*

► *Knowing the capabilities of enemy systems helps you pinpoint weaknesses. Spend a point of Energy Signatures to create a 3-point pool that can be spent on Battle Console or Naval Tactics test during space combat, as you take advantage of such a flaw in their systems.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- *Scanning a fleeing enemy vessel reveals that their weapon systems are only manufactured in one particular city on one particular world. They'll have records of who owns the fleeing ship, allowing you to pick the chase back up.*

- *A shapeshifting assassin robot has a unique energy signature that suggests she's built by a popular manufacturer. Why would they need their own mass-produced robotic assassin?*

## Evidence Collection (Technical)

If you can't find the evidence, how can you nail the perp? Evidence Collection helps you find tissue samples and microscopic fiber samples, analyze blood spatters, and even reconstruct a crime scene just based on how objects have been moved or placed. If you've ever had the urge to imitate Nero Wolfe or Hercule Poiroit, this is a crucial ability to have.

That said, this ability is all about collecting and handling forensic samples from a crime scene, material you'll need to hand over correctly in order to convict your suspects and get paid. Without the Evidence Collection ability, it's easy to contaminate your evidence... and not only will the prosecution fail in court, the perp may track you down afterward for revenge. Better to do it right the first time.

### Sample Equipment

- *Your planet of origin, and whether you've spent a substantial amount of time in space, can sometimes be determined by examining the level of radioactivity your skin and hair have absorbed. A radioactivity elucidator can examine hair and tissue samples, compare them to its planetary and biometric database, and give likely planets of origin for the person the samples came from. It requires larger than microscopic samples and is not accurate enough to be used in court, but can often provide a useful indication of an anonymous subject's background.*

### Sample Spend Benefits

- *Spend a point to set up a trap for a suspect. Drinking glasses that collect DNA and fingerprints, and analyze biochemistry for signs of viroware; carpet fibers that impart a faint radioactive tracer to someone who walks over them, allowing you to shadow the suspect's trail from a distance. If you want to use microscopic means to nail someone, spending Evidence Collection might help. Remember, though, that DNA evidence can easily be falsified using modern viro manipulation techniques.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- *Analyzing the blood spatters after a murder, you find that the blows originated from someone tall. Objects on the desk have been mussed, however, and your Evidence Collection shows microscopic signs of footprints on the top of the desk. Whoever committed the murder was short, standing on the desk to reach the victim's head. You start questioning durugh.*

- *A number of bagged-and-tagged pieces of evidence for criminals you've caught have disappeared from the planet's judiciary headquarters. Ironically, your Evidence Collection ability finds hair samples to indicate that they were stolen by a tavak. Why is she trying to get your closed cases thrown out of court, and who is she working for?*

## Explosive Devices (Technical)

A space adventure where nothing blows up may be a waste of a good opportunity. Explosives—recognizing them, creating them, and disarming them—are created through this technical ability.

### Sample Spend Benefits

- *Make a spend to jury-rig a shuttle engine into an explosive device. It isn't subtle, and it isn't small, but it makes for a fine distraction. A several-point spend might turn your spaceship's engine into a huge fireball as well, although that's usually an expensive proposition.*

- *Particularly complicated or multistage explosive devices might require a 1-point or multi-point spend in order to defuse, although possessing this ability is usually sufficient to stop them from exploding without warning.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- *Evidence from a shattered building indicates that the explosives must have been placed against a certain outside wall. Luckily, a surveillance holocamera in a market across the street catches that area in the edge of its frame...*

- *Only three known individuals in the Bleed have the skill and expertise to manufacture this caliber of bomb, and one of them is still in jail. It's up to you to track down the other two and see which one of them got paid to take out an occupied Combine military outpost.*

## Flattery (Interpersonal)

It's not a surprise that someone as smart as you would choose to read this entry. Frankly, you'd have to have extraordinary taste and intellectual prowess to buy this book in the first place. You should be proud of that, and of wanting to learn more about using flattery in an *Ashen Stars* game.

## Sample Spend Benefits

► *The person you are flattering becomes convinced that you are a person of taste, loyalty, and immense good judgment. They make you their confidante, involving you in their inner circle in order to hear more of your praise.*

► *You recognize it when someone tries to flatter you for information. A spend can manipulate them into spilling their secrets and then realize the mistake they've just made, opening them up to subtle blackmail on your part. If you need a spy and double agent in your enemy's organization, this is one way to do it.*

## Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A few minutes flattering the tycoon gives you an idea of what her deepest fears, shames, and insecurities are. When you realize that she's deliberately avoiding talking more about the new research lab she just funded, even after you praised her wisdom, you can safely assume that there's something secret there she's trying to keep hidden.*

► *A well-known grifter has been flattering a powerful general, and now deadly weaponry has been stolen. Is the charming con man at fault, or is he being framed?*

## Flirting (Interpersonal)

People see you, and their jaws sag slightly. Perhaps you're astonishingly attractive and a superb physical specimen, perhaps you are just blindingly charismatic, but you're seldom lonely when you wish to be accompanied. You're adept at using flirtation to slide secrets out of other people… and to slide other people out of their clothes and into your bed.

## Sample Spend Benefits

► *A 1-point spend will often convince an interested and available person to join you in a brief affair. A 2-point spend may cause them to become infatuated with you, possibly betraying their boss or current partner at the most appropriate moment if it becomes relevant to the adventure.*

► *If you want to become quickly well known in a community's gossip-mill, a 1-point Flirting spend will help you identify the right person to flirt with, and will ensure that he or she then tells their friends about you as well. Flirting to learn gossip yourself is usually considered a clue and doesn't require a spend.*

## Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Your rival's kept partner is clearly interested in you. You could seduce him or her, but this may be just the trap your rival intends, planning on using it to discredit you, hurt your reputation, or lure you into a deathtrap. Considering that the lure is gorgeous, is it worth the risk?*

► *It appears that an intellectual property theft occurred because someone important got seduced and then let information slip. Can you follow the trail back to identify the seducer, learn their goals, and stop the information from traveling further?*

## Forensic Accounting (Academic)

Numbers don't just sit up for you, they jump up, salute, and run around on command. You have an innate talent with finance, and you can trace cash flows and expose shell companies like a good gunner hits a wide target. If you want to trace financial shenanigans, or want to get up to some yourself, Forensic Accounting is the ability to use.

## Sample Spend Benefits

► *Looking to get rich by investing? Spending a point gets you a reasonable rate of return on bigcreds that are otherwise just sitting around. That usually only translates to a small increase in invested funds between missions (typically 5% profit per Forensic Accounting point spent, adjusted up or down as the GM wishes), but this number might be much higher -- or lower - if your own investments figure prominently in an investigation.*

► *Want to frame someone? Spending a point will allow you to put money into someone else's account for a time, usually just long enough to run a scam or trick them into confessing.*

## Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A pro-cybe charity organization has had its funds siphoned away, and the missing administrator looks like the obvious culprit. Forensic Accounting reveals a different story: the charity's coffers have been taken by anti-cybe activists, and it looks like they're being used to buy weaponry. Is the administrator kidnapped instead?*

► *A balla contacts you after finding a huge sum of money mysteriously deposited in his accounts. The reason why is obvious a day later, when he's arrested by a different Laser crew for acting as an assassin. Who framed him for murder, why, and can you get the other crew to pay attention before they get their bounty?*

## Forensic Anthropology (Technical)

If a medical examiner on a crime show would pick up the clue during an autopsy, you will as well—and more. You're experienced at examining dead bodies of multiple species, at determining cause of death, reconstructing fights from the placement of wounds alone, and telling whether someone has been drugged or poisoned. Your expertise can identify the weapons used in a murder after examining their wounds and blast residue, even telling the difference between injuries caused by a kch-thk-manufactured disruptor and a durugh-manufactured one.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Knowing physiology means you have some skill keeping people alive as well. Gain a 3 point Medic pool that can only be spent on patients who are seriously wounded.*

► *If you need to make someone appear dead, spending a point can allow you to put a willing (or helpless) individual in a coma indistinguishable from death, and revive them safely up to forty-eight hours later.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A rumor of vampires in a colony graveyard reveals instead that a number of people were buried while still living. Is a medical professional doubling as a particularly gruesome serial killer?*

► *The corpse of a penniless murder victim reveals the unique energy signature of an infamous, high-priced assassin's sniper rifle. Who paid such a large amount to have the anonymous street person killed, and why?*

## Forensic Engineering (Technical)

You're on a first-name basis with entropy; things may fall apart, but you can predict, analyze, and aid the destruction (or the repair) when they do. You know sabotage techniques well enough to recognize the handiwork and skill level of the saboteur, and you can spot damaged materials that others might miss. If you want to quickly identify lingering battle damage to your ship's propulsion systems, Forensic Engineering is a good ability to know.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Gain a 3-point pool to use for Systems Repair when salvaging parts from a derelict ship.*

► *Effectively sabotage a building, device, or starship.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A carefully orchestrated prison break involved extensive sabotage. Your investigation reveals the technician-for-hire who performed it; track him down and you'll find out who paid him, and why.*

► *After an assassination attempt against a key witness only injured her, a lethal explosion targeted her hospital instead. Only someone trained in Forensic Engineering has a chance of crawling into the remains of the hospital to rescue her before the entire structure collapses. Too bad the assassin plans to get in too...*

## Forensic Psychology (Academic)

The most effective Lasers can predict where their quarry will run next. Forensic Psychology gives you insight into the criminal mind, helping you profile different types of offenders, and tell whether a criminal is sociopathic or just motivated by money. Usefully, this ability will also tell you which interpersonal ability will work best on the subject. If you're the type of Laser who prefers to analyze crimes and draw accurate conclusions that help nail the criminals, Forensic Psychology gives you the tools to do so.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Spend a point to know what actions might deliberately enrage and provoke subjects; it's likely you can use this to lure them out of hiding, and trick them into springing your trap.*

► *If you're working to deliberately manipulate a person into a desired action or behavior, spending a point of Forensic Psychology can usually do the trick.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A spaceship has been hijacked out of a small spaceport—which wouldn't be a major crime if a dead body hadn't been found in a second, abandoned stolen ship nearby. Use Forensic Psychology to establish a pattern for the serial hijacking, identify a suspect, and make an educated guess about where he's headed.*

► *A Bleedist extremist is blowing up ships in her quest for Bleed independence. Use this ability to figure out how she thinks, identify her next opportunity for political mayhem, and set a trap for her.*

## Geology (Academic)

Certain rare alien species aside, rocks may not be scintillating conversationalists—but you know a tremendous amount about geology, soil, volcanic activity, fossils, and planetary formation. That knowledge comes into play regularly when exploring alien planets and dealing with wilderness-based crimes.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Should you ever encounter crystalline or rock-based entities, a Geology spend gives you a floating pool of 3 points that you can use for any general ability that interacts with such an alien, including Scuffling and Shooting.*

► *Need somewhere to hide? A spend identifies a convenient cave opening, including one large enough to hide your ship in an asteroid field. A spend of two guarantees that such a cavern isn't already inhabited by a massive space slug large enough to eat your ship.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *An incredibly rare, expensive fossil has been stolen from a museum. Geology will tell you what planet it may have originated on, how old it was, and if the fossil was a fake to begin with.*

► *Unusual soil is found at a crime scene. Geology reveals that it's from off-world and which worlds it may be from, making it easy to check records at the local spaceport to see what ships might have recently come from there.*

## History, Balla (Academic)

Balla are not normally the easiest species to understand; their history is couched in obscure allusion, their fashion can be intimately tied in with their social stature and history, and their instruction manuals may cause raging migraines. Knowing balla history helps you process these, understand the species, and quickly know its prominent members.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *When interacting with a balla, gain a 3-point pool to spend on any general ability that involves a member of the species—whether it's Medic as you heal one, Scuffling as you hurt one, or Surveillance as you anticipate their movements.*

► *A spend lets you remember meditations and ritual mindsets that should let you briefly withstand the sanity-breaking beauty of a balla elder—at least long enough to question them about a crime.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Crimes are being committed where any witness who saw the perpetrator has become a gibbering, mewling wreck. Only a blind witness has retained his facilities. Your knowledge of History, Balla indicates that the thief may be a rogue balla elder, one unconcerned about the devastation caused by his unearthly beauty.*

► *Your witness is a balla actor, one who refuses to speak in anything other than allegory. Your knowledge of the species' history helps you understand what she is trying to say, and makes sure she's on your side when it comes to investigating the case further.*

## History, Combine (Academic)

One might argue that the history of the Combine is also the history of the Bleed, and the history of life. Whether the Combine returns to take over your corner of space, or it disintegrates to leave you stranded in the backwater of the Bleed, knowing what has come before you may be the only thing that separates civilization from barbarism.

If your missions end up involving Combine history, warships, or power groups of colonial conquest, History, Combine is what you'll reference. It won't give you the specific information that the racial histories will supply, but knowing this puts many other events in context.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Learn where prewar Combine storehouses, beacon satellites, military bases, and libraries once stood.*

► *Gain access to Combine trade routes, including unmapped translight corridors, that have otherwise been forgotten. You may be able to get someplace faster than your enemies anticipate.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A series of attacks on durugh settlements by an unknown starship show all the hallmarks of being carried out in the style of bombers during the Mohilar War. History, Combine reveals a particular pilot's idiosyncratic style is being duplicated. The pilot is believed to have been killed in action; might she have survived, and think the war is still going on, or is someone (or something) imitating her?*

► *Your history knowledge reveals that the Combine might have secretly influenced the kch-thk as a biological weapon... and that species' block against eating sentient life is easier sidestepped than anyone knows. Do you reveal your findings, and how do you deal with the kch-thk who have already begun preying on sentient life?*

## History, Durugh (Academic)

The durugh's initial alliance with the Mohilar has left them outcast, distrusted by most of the Seven Peoples and forced to prove themselves again and again. You know their history, their most prominent citizens, details of their war activity (at least the portions that aren't obscured by the Bogey Conundrum), and the species' history since the war's end.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *You've studied durugh phasing. On a spend, you can jury-rig existing scanning equipment to counteract dimensional slippage, temporarily proofing an area against phasing.*

► *Want incredibly luxurious and pampered treatment in a durugh settlement? You remember durugh chain of command exhaustively, and on a spend you can effectively pull rank by claiming friendship with exceptionally important and influential durugh leaders. Spend two points, and it never gets back to the leader you claimed to know...*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Knowing durugh phasing, and remembering how tavak excavators found vital records in the remnants of a durugh command center, locate a safe room with no door that can only be opened by someone phasing.*

► *Considering that the durugh officially rebelled against the Mohilar, this suspect has a surprising amount of pro-Mohilar War memorabilia in their quarters. Is that enough to arrest him for the sabotage case you're investigating?*

## History, Human (Academic)

You know human history, from its ancient antecedents back on Earth to its condition in the rough postwar environment. You understand the pivotal achievements of humans, their failures and frailties, and their relationships with the other six peoples.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Make a spend, quote some inspirational event from human history that applies to the current situation, and gain a pool of 3 general points to apply toward relevant events during your current scene. For instance, alluding to the trenches of WWI and screaming, "Over the top, boys!" might give you 3 points to use toward Athletics, Shooting, and Scuffling while charging an enemy.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *You find an indication that the energy-based vas kra manipulated humans into making first contact with aliens, and the specific vas mal responsible now advises a major Combine official. Does she have a master plan for humanity that's still in effect?*

► *You find records that indicate a human faction during the war might have betrayed the Combine and allied with the Mohilar, except the durugh did so first on the other side. Are the records forged, and can the prominent political leader behind them still be accused of treason?*

## History, Kch-Thk (Academic)

You know the glorious history of kch-thk consumption, from their evolution as chitinous engines of devouring to their vital role in the Mohilar War. You understand how larva and consciousness migration work, how the kch-thk are focused on consumption, and how the Bleed is in rising danger of encouraging more kch-thk than can be supported.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *While a kch-thk can (and will) eat anything organic, you know how to craft a meal worthy of memory and fame, a meal that will be discussed and replicated by other envious kch-thk for years to come. This can not help but win you some small fame and admiration among their people.*

► *You understand the details of the grk-k'ka chamber and its hyper-nutrient bath that allows larvae to quickly grow into adult kch-thk. When operating such a chamber, you can allow your killed-and-reborn kch-thk ally to re-emerge in hours instead of days.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A standard tactic during the war was to unleash millions of kch-thk onto Mohilar-occupied planets, instructing them to eat any food source and thus starve the enemies out. You learn that in some cases, their genetic programming was overridden and they consumed the enemy as well. Now the details of that operation has been stolen, and settlements on an isolated planet are starting to disappear. Can you steal the plans back and re-institute the block against devouring humanoid life?*

► *A series of anti-Combine terrorist suicide attacks have taken place, but clues indicate that they all have identical aspects. Could the Bleedist terrorist be a kch-thk adept at consciousness migration?*

## History, Tavak (Academic)

You have learned the basics of tavak philosophies, even if you do not truly understand their many subtleties. You are familiar with their evolution, their quest toward the stars, and the methods by which they transformed themselves into formidable warriors. You know the best techniques for calming an enraged tavak, or even infuriating one that's currently placid.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Gain a 3-point pool that you can give to an allied tavak (including yourself, if you're playing a tavak) for use on an Athletics, Scuffling, or Resist Battle Frenzy test.*

► *Make a spend to goad an NPC tavak into a fury.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *The charismatic cult leader of a nufaith is altering a core tavak philosophy, changing it into one that encourages tavak to lash out in violence. What's the cult's goal, and how are the tavak involved?*

► *You encounter a tavak who has become phobic about violence. Was she crippled by a viroware-wielding enemy, or is this a ploy to cover up an accidental murder? Tavak philosophy can help reveal the truth.*

## Holo Surveillance (Technical)

The best kind of evidence is the kind you can just show people. Using tiny, hidden bugs called snails that you'll need to plant ahead of time, you use this ability to make incredibly detailed 3D holographic recordings. Plan this ahead of time in an area where you are confronting a suspect, interrogating a prisoner, or where you suspect a crime might occur. If you need odor, pheromones, temperature, radiation, or other emissions recorded simultaneously, that's possible with just a little more planning and setup time.

Catch your suspect in the act of committing a crime, and you've probably got your case solved. Just be aware that certain technology such as a personal bluffer can dampen snails, rendering your recording as nothing more than static. Transmit modders can even feed in false information, assuming the user knows about the surveillance ahead of time.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *After the fact, gain recorded aspects (such as odor and temperature) that you neglected to specify you were recording at the time.*

► *Your ability to zoom in and enhance a holographic image far exceeds the technology's normal capability.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *You find that an unknown someone had already set up holo recording in the room where a person was murdered. With this ability, you deduce that the apparent murderer on the recording is actually a digital recreation, and an innocent bystander is being framed.*

► *You know where an arms deal is going to take place three hours from now. All you need is to be able to infiltrate the area to plant your snails—and to survive arresting the arms dealer and the smuggler once you have definitive proof.*

## Imaging (Technical)

Imaging is much like holo surveillance, only with obvious cameras that capture an even wider array of sight, sound, scent, radiation, and the like. The images you provide are almost always admissible evidence due to the quality of their data; forging such images is practically impossible, and you can use this ability when examining a recording to tell if someone has tried.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Manipulate the visible wavelengths of light in a recording to gain a limited X-ray effect, possibly seeing shadowy images of objects that are hidden by solid objects in the visible image. If you suggest this and the GM decides it's not possible, or that the information you gain is a core clue, you get the point back that you normally would have spent.*

► *Spend a point to disguise a full-fledged recording device as something surreptitious; you can hide imagers in hats, cases, clothing, weapons, paintings, mirrors, and more.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *By examining an image of a kidnapped child transmitted by his kidnappers to prove signs of life, you can identify the likely planet, rough location, and time that the image was recorded.*

► *Examining images of a celebrity on popular media, you're surprised to find subtle evidence that you're looking at someone else disguised as the celebrity instead. A simple duplicate, or is something more sinister in the works?*

## Impersonate (Interpersonal)

Master of disguise, alien of a thousand faces... it's sometimes easier to get what you want when you're using false identities, false credentials, and false appearances. You know the technical aspects of passing yourself off as someone else, but you're particularly good at the interpersonal aspects, slipping into someone else's role almost seamlessly.

Your disguise may be implemented through viral manipulation, holographic technology, nano-flesh masks, hyper-accurate speech synthesizers, or even just makeup and appropriate clothing. What's most appropriate depends on the scope and length of your impersonation.

### Sample Spend Benefits

- ► *When someone stumbles onto something odd about you or is about to pierce your disguise, spend a point of Impersonate to stave off the discovery until the next time they notice something out of character.*

- ► *Pretending to be someone else? Make a spend to be fully brought into the confidence of their friends and loved ones, given access to resources and information beyond that of just core clues.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- ► *It's evident that an impersonator is at work after you find a three-day-old corpse, twelve hours after the murder victim was last seen moving her art collection. Your knowledge of impersonation alerts you to micro-burns, indicating that someone took a holographic map of the victim's face. With this knowledge you can look into technology that temporarily disrupts holographs, alerting you to anyone else nearby with such a mask.*

- ► *You need information that's only available in the heart of a hostile kch-thk warship. The technological disguise you fashion should last long enough to let you pass as a kch-thk crewman and access their computers... assuming nothing goes wrong to delay you from escaping.*

## Industrial Design (Technical)

You dream of good design, and you turn your nose up at shoddy handiwork. Your training and talent lets you understand how technology fits together, operates, and malfunctions; you can recognize a specific engineer's tech just by its design, and guess at an inventor's competence simply by examining one or two devices that she has created.

### Sample Spend Benefits

- ► *Make a spend to fix a crucial shipboard engineering or repair problem significantly faster than normal. For unknown reasons, this speed boost often has you getting the damaged components and systems back online mere seconds before their absence dooms the ship and her crew.*

- ► *Given opportunity and a short amount of time, a spend will allow you to sabotage machinery in such a way that it malfunctions upon a certain circumstance that you specify. For instance, you might sabotage a starship's engines to fail upon entering a warp corridor, or communication arrays to fail when a particular signal is broadcast from outside the ship.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

- ► *Considering that the balla ship was found drifting and abandoned, it seems odd to you that recent repairs to the life support systems were performed by a durugh mechanic. Does the ship have one or more stowaways literally living between the walls?*

- ► *The alien technology you've found inexplicably shows signs of being made by a famous inventor who is known to have died two hundred years ago. Was he cloned, cryo-frozen, or something else... and why is he helping an enemy to the Combine?*

## Inspiration (Interpersonal)

People confess their secrets to those who lead and inspire them, and the Inspiration ability is the hallmark of a true leader. You can drive the meek to greatness, cause the cautious to take a leap of faith, and entice unbelievers into a nufaith fold. If you want to sway a populace, never be betrayed by your crew, and act as a shining example even when all other hope is lost, invest in Inspiration.

### Sample Spend Benefits

- ► *Nothing helps PR like a healthy dose of inspiration. Spend a point, and gain a 3-point pool of Public Relations to spend on anything that the GM agrees might increase your reputation.*

- ► *Need to sway a crowd to your side? Spend a point of Inspiration, and public opinion swings your way.*

- ► *Convince a cynical energy being from a higher dimension that its meddling with the affairs of less-evolved creatures is immoral and should cease.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A bitter, disenfranchised miner refuses to tell what he knows unless someone with Inspiration can convince him that there's hope for a better tomorrow.*

► *Convinced that your charismatic Laser has the mark of greatness upon her, recruiters from both the Bleedists and the Combinists try to hire you to speak for their cause. Offers and tempers escalate—until someone winds up dead.*

## Interrogation (Interpersonal)

Being a space cop can be a huge advantage. Lock up a suspect, sit them down in a small cell across from you, and get a confession—or at least cooperation—out of them. Interrogating suspects is particularly good at acquiring clues that they don't even think are relevant, as well as clues they're deliberately trying to hide.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Careful questioning takes time, and sometimes you don't have that luxury. Spend a point of Interrogation and get the suspect's cooperation, whether it's a clue or a confession, nearly immediately.*

► *A reputation as a tough law enforcer can open doors. Spend one point, and that reputation might make hostile outlaws think twice before attacking you, easing your entrance into otherwise fortified enemy territory.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *There's a witness to a murder, but she claims she doesn't remember a thing. You think she's lying and may be the murderer herself. Under interrogation, it turns out that she is just scared—and if you promise to protect her, she'll tell you what you need to know.*

► *A smarmy, entitled balla is the son of an ambassador, and quite correctly believes that he's too important for you to arrest. It takes interrogation and a taped confession to actually put him away.*

## Intimidation (Interpersonal)

You may be devious and terrifying, or physically imposing, but you're adept at scaring information out of people. You may not even need to hurt them; sometimes, just the threat of physical violence or social retribution is enough. Too much use of this ability is likely to get you a reputation as a brutal thug, but that might not always be the worst reputation to have.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Sometimes just the threat of physical violence isn't enough. Spending an Intimidation point gives you a 3-point pool to spend on Shooting or Scuffling attacks when you've already got an advantage over someone.*

► *You know how to hit someone so that it hurts. Spend a point, and gain +1 to all Scuffling damage for the rest of the combat.*

► *Spend a point to intimidate a supporting character enough that they act in your interest for the rest of the mission—or at least until you're no longer in range to hurt them.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A low-level bureaucrat has been smuggling shipping manifests to space pirates, but he's so scared that he won't tell you how or to whom. You'll need to intimidate him even more in order to get the information out of him.*

► *A big-city crime boss has based her reputation on being absolutely terrifying. Out-intimidate her on her own turf, in front of her goons, and she'll tell you anything you want to know. Don't expect her to make it easy on you, though. She's got a scary reputation for a reason.*

## Kinetics (Technical)

When you spend a lot of time in space, it's useful to know the subtleties of ballistics, kinetics, and spatial relations. It comes in equally handy when examining bullet wounds, planning ricochets, and leaping from one ship to another through open space.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *A rogue durugh is using a balla as a human (well, in a manner of speaking) shield. Spend a point to ricochet your shots off the walls around him, doing one less point of damage per shot but not running the risk of hitting the shield.*

► *Your only hope of blowing up a space station is to fire directly into a partially covered exhaust port. Spend a Kinetics point to even have the chance of taking a shot; otherwise, you'll automatically miss.*

Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *The two dead bodies didn't actually kill one another during a gun battle; Kinetics tells you that they were shot separately, and pistols were then put into their dying hands. The shot came from someone particularly tall. A tavak?*

► *The odds of successfully navigating a dense asteroid field in your starship are astronomical—pun intended. With Kinetics and decent sensors, not only can you calculate when the asteroids are about to hit and take preventive methods, you can potentially turn those asteroids into weapons by luring enemies into their path.*

## Law (Academic)

You're in law enforcement, so it's unsurprisingly useful to actually know the law on the planets where you operate. Doing so gives you access to obscure loopholes, useful legal trivia and knowledge of unexpected laws that often comes in handy. Even if you aren't familiar with a world's exact legal system, you can usually make accurate guesses and suppositions about the local law.

Note that a rating of 2 or more makes you a full-fledged legal practitioner, which comes in handy when you and your crew are inevitably brought up on charges yourself.

Sample Spend Benefits

► *Spend a point to quote some obscure law (usually in your favor) from the jurisdiction in which you're currently operating, but which neither you nor the GM had mentioned before now. If the GM doesn't accept your proposed law, you get your point back. This sort of spend usually helps you but doesn't turn the course of the entire investigation; for instance, you may invent and then enforce a statute that prevents kch-thk from eating while within city limits, but you couldn't create a law that required all durugh to be executed on sight.*

► *If you somehow run afoul of the law yourself, spend a point to identify an obscure loophole that you may be able to use to get the charges dropped.*

► *Spending a point means that you know and are on good terms with the lawyers in a given legal case, and can gain access to their clients more easily if you need them for questioning.*

Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *A suspect proudly announces that he murdered someone else, but then quotes a loophole in the law that exonerates him. Is he correct, and what can you do about it to discredit and disprove his loophole?*

► *A judge uses obscure laws to execute or imprison criminals for relatively minor crimes. Is he being bribed by someone making money off of his harsh sentences?*

## Linguistics (Academic)

Even in a world with universal translation, knowledge of Linguistics can provide valuable, unique clues that anyone else might miss. Subtle inflections in language and pronunciation can reveal social class, planet, and city (even neighborhood) of origin; education level; and stress level. Linguistics can encode a great amount of information in a relatively simple sentence, untranslatable meta-information that automatic translators generally miss.

If attempting a verbal-only disguise, such as while communicating while shipboard, Linguistics can substitute for Impersonation.

Sample Spend Benefits

► *When trying to pass on confidential information in public, spend a point to pass on a message to a particular person without others noticing or understanding the double meaning of your words.*

► *Feel like goading someone into violence? You know how to phrase your statements as insultingly as possible; spend a point to make someone fly into a rage, or if in combat to get intelligent enemies to attack you instead of an ally.*

Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Although the gentleman claims to be descended from human nobility, his phonemes indicate a lower-class origin that contradicts his backstory. He's probably an impostor, or at least lying about his background.*

► *The kch-thk's speech patterns suggest that she's absurdly old, perhaps one of the oldest and most experienced of her species at consciousness migration. She is, however, pretending to be a young and naive hatchling. Why?*

## Negotiation (Interpersonal)

You're a wheeler-dealer, a canny deal maker who knows how to get the best out of any negotiation. Not only can you bargain for better prices, you can offer others a quid pro quo in order to convince them to do what you want.

As an interpersonal ability for gathering clues, Negotiation works best when you are dealing with someone greedy or someone who has no particular reason to want to help you. If appealing to their better nature isn't working, appealing to their pecuniary interests might.

If your negotiation gives your GM a new plot hook, such as promising to help a witness's friend find her stolen spaceship, your GM may choose to say thanks by giving your group a 3-point pool of points usable on any test or contest during the rest of that session.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Lower the one-time price of goods and services, usually by about 10% or more.*

► *During hostage negotiations, spending a point usually ensures the hostages' safety and may allow some hostages to be released.*

► *If you're taking advantage of someone, spending a point leaves them thinking that they actually cheated you instead.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *An underworld rat in the bowels of a massive durugh city knows information that you desperately need, but you've heard he can't be intimidated or charmed. He may sell it to a skilled negotiator, though—assuming you can trust him not to stab you in the back after the deal is done.*

► *A traumatized war veteran takes a passenger starship hostage and threatens to crash it into a planetary settlement if her demands aren't met. Problem is, her demands—about investigating war crimes—are actually reasonable. Can you negotiate her standing down until you can help?*

## Neurosight (Special — Vas Mal Only)

It's easy to say, "I can see into your soul," but only a vas mal can say it and be sincere. With some effort, Neurosight allows a vas mal to see the auras emanated by biological entities. This can indicate a subject's health, emotional state, and (particularly usefully) whether or not it is currently mind controlled or has been in the past. When you're trying to determine motive, Neurosight is invaluable for determining that your "murderer" was nothing more than a weapon wielded by a psychic entity, or by someone using viroware.

Be sure to invest enough points in Neurosight to make the ability useful, as every use has a cost associated with it. You'll also want to invest in Psychic Vitality, the general ability that prevents you from keeling over from psychic depletion after using a species-specific vas mal ability (*Ashen Stars* p. 42).

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Examining a suspicious suspect through Neurosight, you realize that they are suffering from some sort of alien parasite—one you've never even heard of before. Luckily, it isn't yet aware of your presence...*

► *You can tell that a murder victim's spouse is deeply ill and probably dying, although he's hiding it very effectively. He's also angry, apparently all the time. Knowing that he's soon going to die, could he be getting revenge on the people who wronged him—and if so, who are his accomplices?*

## Reassurance (Interpersonal)

You are the bedrock of calm in a sea of panic, the quiet core that others flock to when they need reassurance. You know how to alleviate anxiety, promise safety, and be the sort of person that others rely on.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *In the midst of a crisis when others are panicking, spend a point to calm anyone who can see or hear you.*

► *If someone seems to not entirely trust you, spend a point of Reassurance to give the impression of having a rock-solid, trustworthy personality.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Sabotage of a high-tech asteroid mining operation has a number of miners trapped and running out of air— and the person who knows the identity of the saboteur is down there with them. You'll need Reassurance to keep people calm enough to get them out.*

► *You're hired by the CEO of a cybernetic design company whose computer files have been stolen and then destroyed. The thief has found a way to hack into existing cyber devices, taking them over at will. When rumor of this gets out, you'll have riots unless you can reassure people—at least until you catch the thief.*

## Respect (Interpersonal)

Showing respect to people of greater social standing, or even to those who are often denied the respect they feel is due them, can often draw out information that they would otherwise keep hidden. It's an excellent ability to use when interacting with unknown sentients, because it treats them respectfully without requiring you to potentially shame your species by acting submissively to them (as Flattery might.) If you want to be polite and diplomatic to people without running the risk of insult, you could do worse than to show respect.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Make a spectacular first impression as an equal, someone worthy of respect who nevertheless maintains proper protocol.*

► *When your enemy has a code of honor, a Respect spend can often goad them into a suboptimal position (such as a duel instead of an ambush, or giving potential victims fair warning to escape) in order to stop you from losing respect for them.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *An alien emissary has arrived in the Bleed, and it immediately killed a half-dozen humans—possibly without meaning to, but no one is sure. Your crew has to track it down and address the murders in such a way that you don't accidentally antagonize an entire new species.*

► *A hopped-up smuggler considers herself royalty, even if no one else agrees. You can gain her assistance on an important case, but only if she thinks you aren't looking down on her and putting on airs.*

## Timesight (Special — Vas Mal only)

Timesight is a complex ability that works best when used near the end of an episode, when the possible clues have contracted and the ability can give you a crucial push toward the most important evidence. It effectively acts as divination, giving you a mental picture of aspects of a clue you haven't yet discovered. When you do encounter those clues, you won't have any guessing to do; you'll immediately recognize their importance. This is an ability that saves time and discussion, because it helps you immediately identify the most important clues when you see them.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Timesight benefits always require a spend. It's worth investing at least 2 or 3 points in this ability, which you'll expend all at once. Doing so ensures that you'll gain a separate detail for every point you spend, enough that you won't have to do most guessing when piecing the mystery's final revelations together.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *You hear the crunching of tortured metal and hear a young girl's anguished screams, followed by the beeping of hospital machines. Then, you see line after line of cyberware, each crawling with poisonous and toxic insects. Later, when you learn that a particular line of cyberware is poisoning its users, you know to look for a girl injured in an accident—possibly one who had cyberware installed against her will in order to save her life.*

► *You're investigating the murder of a therapist when you use Timesight. You hear the roaring of crowds and see a tall and shining alabaster statue; the back of the statue, however, has begun to crumble and erode. Workers are trying to fix it, but are being poisoned by its shadow; you see them die at your feet. The statue's shadow is an odd shade of yellow. Based on this vision, you check out the therapist's secret client list. One of them is a prominent politician; meeting the politician, you see her assistant is wearing that same shade of yellow. Could the assistant have killed the therapist to keep his politician boss safe?*

## Vas Mal Culture (Academic)

The culture of the eternal, ephemeral energy beings known as the vas kra matters little now that they've been forced into physical form. Watching the vas mal culture evolve, however, has been like a treasure strike for anthropologists. They are learning art for the first time in millennia, developing a new culture from among their scattered people, and tackling the mystery of re-evolution from a hundred different angles. Knowing about their nascent culture gives you an advantage when interacting with them.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *When interacting directly with a vas mal, spend a point of Vas Mal Culture in order to spoof the use of an interpersonal ability that you'd otherwise lack. You retain the use of that ability when interacting with vas mal for the duration of the scene.*

► *Need to track down a vas mal, and don't know where to start? Spending a point lets you create an art- or information-based cultural lure that (assuming you publicize it) will draw the vas mal out into the open. For instance, spending a point and spreading word to a rogue vas mal's underlings about a fictitious re-evolution technology might draw her out of hiding and into your trap.*

► *Many vas mal are reclusive. Spending a point will gain you access to interview one who wouldn't otherwise want to be disturbed.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *The nameless and insane vas kra that once pretended to be the mortal devil, long exiled to Dimension U, escapes—and goes on a power-mad rampage after finding itself the only remaining vas kra. Vas Mal Culture will give you a clue to how you might re-banish it, or even de-evolve it.*

► *An amnesiac murderer turns out to have had her mind tampered with, and there's only one vas mal on the station. Can you confront her without making her want to attack you psychically as well?*

## Virology (Technical)

Knowing how genetically engineered viruses rewrite DNA may not necessarily make you the life of the party—unless it's a really focused party—but it means that you can learn an enormous deal from observing and examining viroware, viral hosts, and viroware effects. You can determine how the genetic code is rewritten, predict aberrant effects, trace a virus's designer, and determine whether a virus has been weaponized to be communicable.

If you are taking points of the general ability Viro Manipulation, considering taking 1 or more points of Virology as well. The combination makes you an expert on the subject, and let you craft, alter, and counter viroware.

### Sample Spend Benefits

► *Gain a 3-point pool for use with the general ability Viro Manipulation when dealing with a particular virus you've studied with Virology.*

► *When dealing with a weaponized virus, spend a point to prevent your crew from being infected for one interval. If a crew member becomes infected regardless, you get your point back to spend later in the scenario.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks

► *Scanning a space station that has not been returning hails, your training has you check the medical scans for signs of viruses. As a result, you learn that the entire crew is infected by unknown viroware before you fly your shuttlecraft over, and you can take steps to protect your own crew.*

► *People are erupting into furious rage, effectively turning into assassins with no memory of why. You recognize specifically tailored viroware, and you can track down the scientist who invented it—a Combinist scientist with a political agenda. Did he create it under orders?*

## Xenoculture (Academic)

Lasers meet far more sentient species than most people do, and the Seven Peoples constitute only a handful of the sentient creatures that have been encountered. This ability gives you a solid grounding in what is known, what is guessed, and what is thought to be the best approach when making contact with them. Don't miss out on this if your crew are explorers; it will likely save your life from hostile aliens, or at least prevent you from plunging the Seven Peoples into inadvertent war with an alien species just because you accidentally insult their forebears while trying to offer a sign of peace.

### Sample Spend Benefits
► *Make a good first impression on an alien species. It may not last, but spending a point of Xenoculture should forestall initial hostilities long enough to interact.*
► *Spend a point to communicate through gestures and actions with an alien species, even if their language isn't in your translator banks.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks
► *You recognize the scientist's copious sweating and eye coloration to be indicative of Hexian brainworm infestation. He's probably being controlled by alien intelligences. The question is, what are they trying to accomplish, and who else is compromised?*
► *Your suspect has fled to a moon that has a known sentient xenophobic species on it. You know your only chance to get him out is to complete the xenophobes' punishing rite of passage; if successful, they'll be honor bound to let you land and search their moon.*

## Zoology (Academic)

You're an expert on animal life of all kinds. You can track and identify animals by their hair and spoor, make accurate assumptions about animal lethality and predation, and predict animal behavior under any given situation. Whether you have to flush out an infestation of sentient cats on a mining ship, or you need to lure a man-eating beast out of the grasslands on a humid and undeveloped moon, Zoology can give you the information you need to succeed.

### Sample Spend Benefits
► *Spend a point to create a phenomenal and behavioral trap that is likely to attract at least one instance of the animal within the next forty-eight hours.*
► *A point spend will allow you (but not your fellow crew members) to handle most animals without being bitten, stung, poisoned, clawed, or otherwise injured. Your GM may disallow this for particularly adept predators, but less capable animals can be captured with a minimum of fuss.*

### Sample Clues and Plot Hooks
► *A locked-room mystery with a poisoned victim turns out to be linked to a rare, incredibly toxic alien insect that must have been released into the room deliberately. Now you need to find the insect before it escapes the ventilation ducts, and then identify the actual murderer.*
► *The murder victim's corpse looks like it is ancient and decayed, but insect life in the body indicates that it was only dumped here yesterday. Who would dump a months-old corpse, who killed it originally, and why?*

# General Abilities

For each general ability, this section provides specific uses, information, and techniques for players who desire more detail or flexibility. If the ability can be used investigatively (which most general abilities can, if you try hard enough) each writeup includes some sample clues similar to those in the investigative abilities section.

We also provide cherries for each ability. Cherries are special bonuses granted for investing 8 build points in an ability. The primordial GUMSHOE cherry is the bonus to Hit Threshold obtained by having an Athletics rating of 8+; this chapter expands this concept to give bonuses to every ability. These cherries are an optional rule for *Ashen Stars*.

Finally, all GMs interested in increasing the success rate of their players' actions should see the optional Mastery rule in the nearby box.

## Athletics

### Ability Focus: Zero-Gravity Combat

Other than a few technophobic synthcultures and the most backward parts of the Bleed, all Combine-built ships include reliable artificial gravity generators that allow spacefarers to move around inside vessels with relative ease. In the event of gravity failure, you can still move around carefully by pushing yourself off other objects, like handholds in the ceiling and walls. Athletics tests are needed only in extreme cases, like melee combat or when a sudden force has just hit you.

When scuffling in zero-g, you must choose between keeping yourself anchored securely and going all-out in your attack. If you stay anchored, your attacks suffer a 1-point levy, but you're in no danger of drifting away. If you're not anchored, you must make an Athletics test after each exchange (Difficulty 3 if you were the attacker, Difficulty equals the damage sustained if you were the defender and the attacker's trying to knock you away). Fail the test, and you're in freefall — inside a ship, you can grab onto another surface after a round of tumbling, but outside... well, the oxygen in your spacesuit will last for several hours if you breathe shallowly.

With their extra manipulators, kch-thk and haydrossi have an advantage in zero-g combat, and don't suffer from a levy to anchor themselves.

### Sample Investigative Clues
► *There's no way a durugh could have made it to here from the crime scene on foot in that time. They physically can't run that fast.*

► *The awkwardness of the cybe's gait suggests either battle damage or that she's one of the early prototypes, before they had the ergonomics of complete body prosthesis worked out.*

► *No one gets muscles like that naturally. It's got to be viroware.*

### Cherry: Hard to Hit

If your Athletics rating is 8 or more, the Hit Threshold your opponents use when trying to hit you in combat is increased by +1 (usually going from 3 to 4, or 4 to 5 in the case of tavak characters).

### Alternative Cherry: Might

Instead of being hard to hit, you may choose to be unusually strong. When involved in a contest of strength, you may spend Athletics points after rolling the dice; every 2 points spent gives you a +1 to your result.

## Battle Console

Different attack and armor arrays call for different approaches. In earlier eras, a ship might only have one or two armor and attack arrays, and victory went to the ship whose weapons were better at countering the opponent's armor or vice versa. Modern ships, though, might favor one particular set of weapons — a tavak-built ship goes heavy on the punchbeams, for example — but they carry multiple redundant arrays.

Choosing which combination of attack arrays to deploy in a particular exchange is a job for the stratco, but the gunner must still be intimately familiar with the tactical profiles and effects of all common attack and armor arrays.

Disruption beams blast their targets with concentrated multiphasic energy, simultaneously shoving, cutting, melting, freezing, and electrocuting anything they hit. They're best suited for mid-range combat; at long range, the beam loses intensity, while in short-range engagement, the enemy ship's force shifters can detect and anticipate phase changes in the attacker's arrays. Damage from a disruptor beam looks like a combination of melting and tearing.

Improbability rockets are the newest addition to the Combine arsenal. Only a handful of ships in the Bleed carry such arrays, so the presence of a foe armed with improbability rockets suggests either a recent arrival from the Proper or a connection to the black market in advanced weapons. Improbability rockets work at any range, but are especially useful when an enemy ship is unaware of their unique time-shifting properties. Improbability rockets carry a conventional explosive warhead. Sometimes, however, the detonation of this warhead interacts with the rocket's time-shifting engines, resulting in temporal anomalies and other weirdness, like survivors of the attack popping back into existence minutes after the rocket hit, or debris forming into curious geometric shapes that resemble some alien script.

The much-feared neutronic fusillade is primarily a short-range weapon. It is especially good at damaging vulnerable systems without destroying them, making it the weapon of choice when trying to capture or nullify an enemy vessel. A successful fusillade attack burns thousands of small nested rings into the enemy ship's hull, referred to as neutronic mottling. Interestingly, the balla-designed inertia misters are utterly ineffective against the fusillade; before the balla adopted a wider range of arrays, victory in their space battles invariably went to the ship that made the first attack.

Punchbeams are also a short-range weapon, but with much more destructive power. Their primary drawback is accuracy — a punchbeam attack involves two stages. First, the attacking ship projects an 'inertial corridor' at its target, which manifests as a beam of ghostly white light. A moment later, it fires a pulse of disruptor energy down that corridor, smashing and blasting the enemy ship. Keeping the inertial corridor aimed at a target long enough for the pulse to get there is tricky at short range, and virtually impossible at longer distances. It's hard to distinguish punchbeam from disruption damage, as both weapons use the same physical principles — the key is finding the telltale gravitational distortions left by the inertial corridor, although this deformation of space-time dissipates within an hour of the attack.

Scramble bots are an extremely flexible weapon. The micro-drones are usually deployed at close range, where they can swarm a defender en masse, scurrying past point defense disruptors, zeroiser pockets, and lethal bursts of quantum backwash to clamp onto the enemy ship's hull and chew through it. Launching the bots over a longer range gives the defender ample opportunity to shoot incoming drones out of the sky. However, an expert battle console operator can provide covering fire for the drones (a barrage of disruptor fire can distract the enemy gunner), or manually operate some of the drones by remote control, giving them the skills needed to dodge incoming fire. Even a single scramble bot can inflict significant damage. Scramble bot damage is unmistakable even if you don't find a leftover bot or ten still clinging to the hull. Scramble bots are designed to self-destruct once their internal power cells run low, but don't always manage to complete their suicide missions. Each batch of bots has a serial number so it can be traced, but several illegal weapon manufacturers build anonymous bots.

HÜTH

Sneakthieves, like improbability rockets, are rarely encountered in the Bleed. The two weapons have a similar tactical profile — both are physical projectiles that have a complicated relationship with physical space. During the war, expert sneakthief gunners could time their weapons' skipping-stone dimension hops so that the sneakthief materialized inside the enemy ship. Sneakthief damage is exceedingly hard to identify — the durugh are experts at hiding their traces. By doping the warhead with chemicals and radiation, they can mimic the effects of punchbeams, improbability rockets, disruptor fire, or even the shearing force of an impact, making forensic engineering analysis difficult.

### Sample Investigative Clues:

- ► *That pirate ship has cutting-edge military-grade weapons. Someone's supplying these criminals with the good stuff.*
- ► *Long-range scans detect an ongoing firefight — by looking at the mix of weapons involved, you guess it's a balla ship fighting a durugh vessel.*
- ► *Using the skills honed in naval battles, you remotely pilot a sensor drone into the heart of the quantum maelstrom that's appeared off your port bow. Now, you'll get some answers...*

### Cherry: Orbital Strike

Once per investigation, you may remotely call in an attack from your ship in orbit, bombarding a designated target with disruption fire or missile strikes. To do so, spend 4 points of Battle Console and then make a test against a Difficulty that varies by the required precision. Hitting a big obvious target like a mountain or a giant shambling mountain-sized lizard monster is Difficulty 4; zeroing in on a particular building is Difficulty 6. The damage from an attack like this is enough to annihilate anything that isn't protected by naval-grade armor.

Orbital strikes are banned under Combine law. The Difficulty of Public Relations tests to justify bombing a target from orbit increases by 4, and the Laser team stand to lose 3 Reputation if the test fails.

## Business Affairs

### Ability Focus: Retainer Contracts

Laser teams tired of the uncertainty of pickup contracts may choose to pursue retainer contracts instead, where a corporation, planetary government or other large institution (or even exceedingly wealthy private individual) pays the Lasers a regular stipend; in exchange, the Lasers undertake investigations and other missions for the client.

(Ossa One unofficially looks down on retainer contracts, out of worries that it reduces Lasers to mercenaries with a gloss of legal authority. Any crew that takes a retainer contract reduces their Reputation by 1.)

When on a retainer contract, the crew's Reputation no longer affects their time between contracts. Instead, each month, the team is paid an amount equal to their total monthly Upkeep + the number of players. At the end of a mission, if the team's Upkeep has increased, one member of the team may make a Business Affairs test at a Difficulty of 4+ the increase in Upkeep to request that the client covers these added costs. Unexpected but reasonable costs like repairs to the ship caused by battle damage are covered by the client if the team succeeds at a Difficulty 4 Business Affairs test.

Crews may still acquire side deals and bonuses while on a retainer contract.

Although the team's Reputation no longer affects the time between contracts, some clients still expect their retainers to maintain a positive public profile. Other clients are less concerned with appearances — or morality. After all, despite being on a monthly salary, the Lasers are still freelance subcontractors that can be cut loose in an instant if necessary.

### Sample Investigative Clues

► *You identify a legal trap, cleverly concealed in several disparate clauses of the Laser contract.*

► *You recognize the drunken balla as Shilae Riverwind, the CEO of Blue Star. What's he doing in this slum?*

► *Drawing on your extensive experience as an administrator, you can see that the company is rapidly losing money, and they've been shuffling funds around to hide their hemorrhaging.*

### Cherry: Follow the Money
8 points in Business Affairs gives a free point in Forensic Accounting.

---

### RETAINER CONTRACTS

Retainer contracts take a lot of the guesswork and bookkeeping out of the game, while still keeping questions of finances and payment meaningful. The Lasers are paid just enough to cover their expenses and a little more, so they can slowly acquire new equipment and ship upgrades over time.

Retainers also mean the GM can develop a cast of supporting characters, as the crew's missions will revolve around their regular client. Possible setups for a retainer campaign:

► troubleshooters for a megacorporation, sent in to deal when problems threaten any of the corporation's many outposts and subsidiaries

► security staff for a neutral space station, a galactic crossroads where humans and aliens meet to trade and negotiate

► agents of an eccentric plutocrat who is obsessed with ancient dead species and xenoarchaeology

► hired guns working for a private detective agency

---

## Communications Intercept

### Ability Focus: Hacking
Coupled with the investigative abilities of Data Retrieval and Decryption, Communications Intercept covers illicit penetration of computer systems. Under most circumstances, computer hacking is treated as a clue or a simple test. If a more detailed treatment of hacking is required, use the following rules adapted from space combat.

First, both hacker and defending security system (automated anti-intrusion programs, rival hackers, or just the system's passive security protocols) choose a goal from the list below. The first side to reach the number of skirmish points required for their chosen goal wins.

Note the defending security system can choose to pursue an offensive goal like Trash or even Own. You might try to break into a criminal syndicate's computer network, only for their automated defenses to seize control of your own computer instead before you can break the connection!

Next, the hacker launches an attack. This is a showdown of Communications Intercept vs. Communications Intercept. Your Data Retrieval rating determines your Dishing It value; subtracting your Decryption rating from 0 determines your Taking It. (For example, if you have Data Retrieval 1, Decryption 2, your Dishing It when hacking is +1, and your Taking It is -2.

If the final skirmish point total after all modifiers is 3 or more, the loser is rocked. The winner may degrade one of the loser's specs by 1, but there is no casualty report. The degradation of specs is temporary; rebuilding your computer system's software is free, assuming you keep good backups.

Unlike a ship battle, there's no penalty for egging it. With only a single ability in play, egging is inevitable.

The winner of the hacking contest is the first to reach their chosen goal.

## HACKING GOALS

**Lockdown (4 points):** The winner identifies the threat of a security breach and shuts the hacking attempt down. The hacker can try again later.

**Datascrape (6 points):** Grab a bunch of files from the loser's databanks — usually, whatever was in active memory.

**Subvert Secondary Systems (8 points):** Gain access to any low-priority systems attached to the loser's computer. Hack a corporate mainframe, and this might give you access to the environmental systems or the internal security cameras. Hack a starship, and you've got access to the navigation and communications systems, but not life support or weapons.

**Entrap (8 points):** The winner identifies the threat of a security breach, and creates a labyrinth of false files and virtual machines. Not only does the hacker fail to get anything useful, it wastes several hours of the hacker's time. The hacker may try again later if time permits.

**Selective Datascrape (8 points):** Grab any files matching a particular keyword or other search criteria — except the most secure files.

**Insert Backdoors (10 points):** The winner breaches the security of the loser's system and inserts hidden backdoors and secret access routes. In any future hacking attempts on the loser's system, the winner starts with 5 skirmish points.

**Trace (10 points):** The winner locates the loser's computer in real space before ending the hacking attempt. The winner also gleans clues about the loser's identity.

**Trash (10 points):** The winner crashes the loser's computer system, and does enough damage that reactivating the system will be a laborious job taking several hours.

**Secure Datascrape (12 points):** The winner gains access to the most secure encrypted data files on the loser's systems.

**Subvert Core Systems (12 points):** The winner access to any systems attached to the computer. The loser isn't locked out, but must struggle for control of these systems using other abilities. For example, if the winner hacked into a starship's computer, key systems like propulsion, weapons, and life support would fall under their control. The loser would have to make Battle Console, Helm Control, and Systems Repair tests to keep the hacker from flying the ship into a star or turning off the oxygen supply.

**Own (18 points):** This combines Secure Datascrape, Subvert Core Systems and a double-strength Insert Backdoors– the winner knows everything in the loser's databanks, can control anything connected to the loser's computer, and, worst of all, they can do it again more easily later on. The winner starts with 10 skirmish points in any future hacking attempts on the compromised system.

### Sample Investigative Clues
- *Eavesdropping on the syndicate's comm traffic suggests they're unaware that your team has them surrounded.*
- *The frequency-hopping algorithm on this signal is based on a Fibrous Sacrament hymn — you're dealing with someone religious here.*
- *That's an unusual amount of data traffic coming from that ore shuttle. Why would a boat hauling a bunch of rocks be transmitting so much information?*

### Cherry: Digital Intruder
A rating of 8 or more in Communications Intercept gives one point of Decryption.

### Emotion Suppression (Balla)
Emotions are a powerful motivator in all species, but the balla must hold tight against the currents of seething passion that rush through their souls. They pour oceans of love and hate and pain and sorrow into the crystalline serenity of the mor sohn, and discipline their minds to control and suppress their feelings.

Balla can risk channeling their emotions into actions, but this often leads to disaster. If you want to 'ride the wave', as the balla put it, here's how. Before you make an Emotion Suppression test, transfer a number of points from your pool equal to the Difficulty to any of the following general abilities: Athletics, Health, Medic, Scuffling, or Shooting. You must

then make the Emotion Suppression test as normal; however, if you fail and choose to take self-destructive action, it'll be unusually extreme and or long-lasting.

For example, if you see one of your fellow Lasers go down under a hail of disruption fire, that requires an Emotion Stability test at Difficulty 5. You don't have any Medic points left, and there aren't any other crew members within reach, so you transfer 5 points into Medic before making the Emotion Suppression test. You fail the test — you save your fellow crewman, but are now obsessively in love with him.

### Sample Investigative Clues
► *That other balla is lying. You can tell by the colors of her mor sohn.*
► *Clearing your mind, you review the facts of the case so far, and correlate the information in a new and enlightening way.*
► *Your clarity of thought lets you suppress the psychic interference caused by the alien fungus, so you alone can stagger to the ship's sick bay to fetch the disinfectant spray.*

### Cherry: Pain Suppression
With a rating of 8 or more in Emotion Suppression, you may also suppress the pain of injuries. You may spend Emotion Suppression points as well as Health when making Consciousness rolls after being injured.

## Enhancement Integration (Cybe)

### Ability Focus: Cannibalize
Cybes were designed for the battlefield. Your makers gave you the ability to salvage and integrate parts from your fallen comrades, allowing a cybe-enhanced force to maintain fighting strength and cohesion even after heavy losses. You may scavenge cybernetic parts from slain foes and add them to your own body. Doing so requires an Enhancement Integration test at a Difficulty equal to 1 + the install cost of the cybernetic upgrade. If the test fails, the upgrade is incompatible or is too badly damaged. If successful, you get the upgrade for free, but still have to pay Upkeep.

You have to salvage the cybernetic parts within a short time of death for this ability to work.

Some cybe mystics claim that a part of the personality engram of the previous owner lingers in upgrades taken in this fashion.

### Sample Investigative Clues
► *You recognize the criminal's handgun as a Meuser-VII Snub Special — that weapon was only installed in a handful of cybes during the war. Checking military records lets you narrow down the list of suspects.*
► *That tingle in the diodes all down your left side tells you there's a hidden security sensor nearby.*

### Cherry: Prototype Military Hardware
You were fitted with a cybernetic or viro upgrade during the Mohilar War; this upgrade was a prototype and has never been mass produced. Pick any upgrade you possess (or work with your GM to develop a custom upgrade). You possess the only upgrade of that type in the universe. It's polite to avoid making extra work for your GM by picking a semi-obscure upgrade (the ones from this book are ideal, as they don't appear in any of the published adventures).

## Farsight (Vas Mal)
Those vas mal who have re-acquired some of their former omniscience (by investing lots of points into Farsight) can attempt these advanced techniques when scrying. We're calling it scrying because we've all played D&D.

**Associative Viewing:** Instead of focusing on a specific location, you concentrate on a person or object you've encountered before. If you succeed in the test, you scry on that person. You don't automatically learn the location of your target, although you may be able to work it out from the context. Attempting Associative Viewing increases the Difficulty of the test by 2, on top of the usual modifiers for distance. Note that you don't know how far away your target is, so you'll have to guess at the Difficulty of the test.

**Time-Shifted Viewing:** By spending a point of Timesight when using Farsight, you detach your perceptions from linear time entirely, and can drift back along the location's timeline. In effect, you can see that point throughout history, and may even slip a little bit into the location's future too. This isn't a foolproof investigative tool, as your devolved mind cannot encompass the entirety of space-time like it once did, but you can get glimpses and flashes of past events. For example, you could scry on the location where a murder took place, then backtrack along that location's timeline so you get to spy on the murder. You might not get a good look at the murderer's face, but you could tell what species they are or how many accomplices they had (or you might not — you might find yourself buffeted by temporal eddies and end up looking at swirling dust motes, as your mind's come in six billion years early.).

**Mind-Speech:** By pushing at the envelope of your spatio-psychic anomaly, you can transmit sense-impressions and fragments of thought to anyone in the location you're scrying. It costs 2 Farsight points per word or emotion, and everyone in the vicinity of your anomaly receives your psychic signal, though different individuals may interpret it differently. Only the extremely impressionable fail to recognize it as an external influence.

### Sample Investigative Clues

- *Projecting your mind onto the planet's surface below, you discern that trillions of carnivorous beetles scuttle beneath the sands. Landing on this dead world in a shuttle would be unwise.*

- *Running your mind over the fabric of space-time like fingers over a bleeding wound, you can tell that some extradimensional entity broke through into normal reality here.*

- *You don't know why, but that woman in the gray coat is immensely significant to you. Or to this case. Or to the universe. Maybe all three.*

### Cherry: Share Sight

With a Farsight rating of 8+, you can share your psychic visions with one other person, enabling them to use investigative abilities on whatever distant vista you both perceive.

## Filch

Before pickpocketing an alien, first check to see if they actually have pockets. The balla, for instance, favor loose-fitting robes, and store items in cunning folds or bundles. Tavaks cultivate hollows under the edges of their larger armor plates where they can keep personal items. Kch-thk rarely bother with personal items at all — they just leave commonly used items and tools scattered about communal living quarters (this philosophy even extends to kch-thk economics — they don't bother keeping track of anything other than significant expenses). The durugh delight in storing items in cunning hiding places, like belt buckles that open up if you press a hidden catch, or concealed pockets in a cloak. Cybes, with their military background, favor huge numbers of small pouches on every item.

### Sample Investigative Clues

- *It takes a thief to catch a thief — you spot the crook a mile off.*

- *Of course I've got my electronic pass here, Mr. Guard. I certainly didn't steal yours a moment ago. Now let me into the building with all the clues inside.*

- *Stealing the gang lord's tether long enough for your tech hound buddy to scrape all the files off it — easy. Returning the tether without him noticing — slightly harder. Having him reward you for returning the tether he 'dropped' — priceless.*

### Cherry: No Slipups

You can spend Filch points after making a test. You must spend 2 points to get a +1 to your result. This only applies when you are not distracted and not under observation, and never applies during a contest. You must describe how the theft almost went awry, and how you salvaged the situation through cunning and criminal expertise.

## Ground Craft

On the rough-and-tumble worlds of the Bleed, you're going to encounter vehicles unfamiliar to those used to the silent ground-skimming hovercars and automated transports of the Proper worlds. The signature vehicle of the Bleed is the Lugger, a heavy-duty utility vehicle designed to be exceedingly tough, reliable and easy to repair. Almost as popular is the Aelot, a military transport pod used extensively in the war. Hundreds of thousands of Aelots were decommissioned and sold cheaply to civilians after the war ended.

The most desirable luxury vehicle brand is the Phaeton; there are only a handful of these absurdly sybaritic hovercars in the Bleed, as a freighter carrying a large shipment went missing and the manufacturer in the Proper is struggling to catch up with demand. Those more interested in speed than style might instead choose a raconid-built Tychuse X7, no doubt with the aftermarket x-gravs and thrust screamer upgrades.

### Sample Investigative Clues:

- *Hey, that's a Tychuse X7, no doubt with aftermarket x-gravs and thrust screamer upgrades. Nice ride — now why is it floating in deep space?*

- *Looking at these burn marks, I'd guess a jetbike made a tight turn at high speed here. Let's run a chemical analysis of the scorched earth — we should be able to determine the jetbike type from the fuel mix.*

- *You spot the tailing groundcar as you make the turn into the spaceport.*

### Cherry: Devil Behind the Wheel

When involved in a chase or combat involving ground craft, you may spend 3 points of Ground Craft after your opponent loses a contest or showdown to dictate what happens to the loser's vehicle. Want them to spin into a ditch? Explode in flames? Go off the road, but be otherwise undamaged? You can arrange events to your liking, within reason.

## Helm Control

### Ability Focus: Translight Pursuit

Translight engines allow a ship to enter a state of quantum indeterminacy in which it can exceed the surly bonds of the speed of light. Naturally occurring translight corridors prolong this quantum state, allowing faster-than-light travel over interstellar distances. Travel along a corridor happens at a set speed determined by local conditions. There's no such thing as a 'faster' translight engine, outside of wild conspiracy theories and science fiction.

Chases, then, happen in the gaps between translight hops. The pursued vessel reaches an exit point along one corridor, drops back to real space, races for the next corridor, and jumps to translight again. The pursuer does the same. To an external observer, it looks like the two vessels are blinking in and out of existence across the vast reach of the heavens. If the pursued ship can build up enough of a lead in real space, it can take an unexpected translight corridor and lose the other ship. The challenge for the pursuer is to keep close enough to the quarry so that they can detect which corridor the quarry is about to flee down.

Translight chases are resolved as a special contest that alternates between tests and showdowns. When in real space, the two ships have a showdown of Helm Control. If the pursuer wins, they may initiate a space combat. If the quarry wins, move on to the next test.

Tests are made in translight, and alternate between focusing on the quarry's decisions, and on the pursuer's choices. The quarry might choose to play it safe and take a well-mapped, well-traveled corridor, or dodge down a hazardous unmapped one, or try doubling back. The pursuer must choose between staying close enough to the quarry to know which corridor it took, or try anticipating the quarry's movements and risking taking a different, faster corridor to make up ground. Start with the quarry making a test, then have another showdown, then the pursuer must make a test, then another showdown. Keep repeating until one ship or

the other fails a test, or the two go into space combat and one ship is crippled or destroyed.

### Sample Investigative Clues

- *Tracing back the path of the alien spores leads you to a newly opened translight corridor.*
- *You recognize the distinctive flying style of the pilot — it's got to be the notorious durugh fighter ace Porunus.*

### Cherry: Past the Red Line

You can eke superior performance out of a ship's drives by pushing it past its normal tolerances. Once per episode, when in a Maneuver showdown or performing some other tricky feat of piloting, you may increase your ship's Condition by 1 to double the benefit of any Output you spend on your Helm Control.

## Infiltration

Exotic security systems that you know how to dodge include:

**Kch-thk Swarm Tank:** While genetic compulsions ensure that full-grown kch-thk cannot consume the flesh of living humanoids, this restriction does not apply to their larvae. A swarm tank, a security measure used only by kch-thk, is a room filled with blind, hungry larvae, which instinctively attack anyone other than their kch-thk 'imprinter'. A swarm can strip the flesh from the bones of an intruder in seconds; even if the intruder is wearing armor or other protection, the gleeful shrieking of the swarm raises the alarm. Navigate swarm tanks by filching a sample of the owner's DNA, then culturing it into a protective spray that temporarily convinces the larvae you're not on the menu.

**Quantum Filament Webbing** detects not only physical intruders but also higher-dimensional beings. The webbing reacts to consciousness; the presence of a living mind passing through the immaterial web increases the web's complexity by a measurable amount, triggering an alarm. Quantum filament webbing is defeated by inevitability — you need to move through the web in a way that minimizes your ability to affect your environment, thus minimizing the number of possible alternate realities generated. Falling, sliding, or moving while in a hypnotic trace all work.

**Durugh Phase Walls** are specially treated sections of solid wall that are especially easy to phase through. A durugh, even one that isn't adept at phasing, can pass through a phase wall with ease, but they're impenetrable to other species. There's no subtle way to get through a phase wall — you've got to get out a trusty laser cutter and slice a hole in the wall.

Fortunately, phase walls are usually thin and relatively fragile, so cutting through takes only a few minutes.

**Scuttlers** are tiny drone robots, like little metal crabs with glowing blue eyes, connected to a central computer. They move at random around their designated patrol area, scanning for intruders. The way to deal with scuttlers is to walk in like you own the place - they're programmed to stay out of the way and keep hidden, and their 'don't annoy the owners' program runs before their 'scan for intruders' protocol. If you're brazen enough, you can fool the scuttlers into running away from you.

### Sample Investigative Clues
- *Looks like the intruder got in through the service ducts — that's how you'd do it.*
- *The access crawlspace is very, very tight — we're talking a durugh or vas mal, maybe a small human or balla. Definitely nothing bigger.*

### Cherry: From the Shadows
If your Infiltration rating is 8+, then you gain a special option in combat. You may spend a number of points of Infiltration equal to the number of nearby foes to vanish into a convenient hiding place if one's available — slipping into the shadows, ducking behind cover, firing a grapple line up into the rafters, or whatever suits the terrain. On your next turn, you may make an Infiltration test to move anywhere nearby; you could pop up behind the bad guys, or appear on a nearby rooftop, sniper rifle in hand, or try sneaking away from the fight. The Difficulty for this test is at least 4, modified by your foes' Alertness Modifier; the GM should increase the Difficulty if you try to sneak somewhere inaccessible. Even if you fail the test, you remain hidden as long as you have any Infiltration points left in your pool.

## Medic

### Ability Focus: Cryogenics
Suspended animation is still referred to by the outdated term 'cryo', even though the procedure now relies primarily on a combination of engineered viral agents and quantum effects to slow the metabolism of the subject to a fraction of normal rates. Most starships carry a few emergency cryo-berths that can be used as life pods or to store wounded or infected passengers; Lasers turn these cryo-berths into holding cells for prisoners.

Putting a compliant prisoner from any commonly encountered species into a cryo-berth is trivially easy. However, if any of the following conditions apply, then freezing a prisoner requires a Medic test:

- *prisoner must be restrained or sedated*
- *prisoner is injured or otherwise unwell*
- *prisoner has extensive viro- or cyber-enhancement*
- *prisoner is from an unusual or unknown species*

Failing the test means that the prisoner suffers 'cryo-burn', which causes irreparable neurological damage. A Laser crew that 'burns' a prisoner risks Reputation loss.

A cryo-berth can preserve life safely for months, even years. The longest inadvertent cryo-suspension on record is some 184 years; survivors from the scout ship Ashlo were revived when the wreck of their vessel was discovered on Carpathia. Some nufaiths cryo-preserve their members at the moment of death, so they can be revived when medical technology advances/the universe is purged of evil/the Messiah boots up.

### Sample Investigative Clues
- *The suspect's symptoms suggest starcrud, a disease picked up on unhygienic starships. He claims he hasn't left the planet in years.*
- *Those paramedics are acting strangely. You'd swear they didn't have the first clue about human anatomy. Maybe this ties in with those used syringes of Morphological Mimicry cultures...*

### Cherry: Medical Expertise
A Medic Rating of 8+ gives one free point of Forensic Anatomy.

## Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)

No eyeleakage! Retain moisture! Even now, GiantInsectBuddy's mindself translights grk-k'ka-tank-wards larvaebound. Union virtually instantaneous. Meatbutnoteatfriend must scuttle forthwith likewith grk-k'ka-tank and be hunting for wriggling fat larva. Do not gland fear if you see that fattest larva has eaten any of its siblings; autocannibalism is totally normal. Gentle grasp fattest larva in your pincers and place it in nutrient bath. Nutrient bath smells meaty, yes, but you must control your hungerlust and be faminestruck, for GiantInsectBuddy is now incarnate in fattest larva and has great need of food. (If nutrient bath is unavailable, slit stomach of nearest enemy and let larva feast. If enemy likewith, then meatbutnoteatfriend must be honored meatfriend.)

Wait some hours.

Read magazine. Chirp battlesongs.

As GiantInsectBuddy grows, aid it by relating tales of past friendship and meals, to ensure mindself properly aligns with brainlobes. When GiantInsectBuddy is fullgrown, help by gently massaging shellcream into carapace to hasten hardening. Once carapace is hard — but not before! — meatbutnoteatfriend may hug GiantInsectBuddy before going for takeout.

This is us-death, not you-death. You-death is much simpler; you rot without purpose like waste food. Maybe GoodBuddy donate meatself to GiantInsectBuddy for food after you are done with it?

*So Your GiantInsectBuddy Just Died — A Guide for Meatbutnoteatfriends,* published by the Bureau for Interspecies Cooperation, 2224.

### Sample Investigative Clues

► *While transferring your consciousness through translight to a new host, you glimpse something ineffable (also, inedible). There's an extradimensional entity nearby.*

► *In rare cases, a migrating consciousness can carry the genetic pattern of a virus with it, and recreate the virus when it inhabits a fresh larva. Maybe the quarantine on Sargon X was never broken, but one of the victims of that disaster was a kch-thk who inadvertently carried the plague through translight?*

### Cherry: Larva Customization

With a Migrate Consciousness rating of 8+, you can customize your larva as it grows. If you pass your Migrate Consciousness test, you may transfer a number of points equal to the margin of success between general abilities. For example, if you pass the test with a margin of 4, you could take 2 points from both your Scuffling and Health pools to increase your Shooting by 4.

## Naval Tactics

Classic tactical gambits you've mastered include:

**Bleeding Scramble:** Using an Override attack to ascertain the most damaged parts of an enemy ship, then sending scramble bots to chew on those already stressed sections.

**Sargasso Mist:** Either getting close enough to fire an inertia mister at an enemy ship, or luring an enemy ship into flying into its own mister cloud; either way, the ship's kinetic energy is drained, causing it to stall.

**Phase Phalanx:** Launching a precisely timed broadside of sneakthieves coupled with a barrage of disruption fire; when the enemy ship dodges, it dodges right into the path of a sneakthief that's about to phase back into normal space.

**Inverted Translight:** The act of charging up your translight engine, making it appear that you're about to flee the engagement, then inverting the envelope. Your ship vanishes into translight for a moment, then reappears in the same place.

**Resonance Burst:** Force shifters intercept incoming fire and trigger quantum backwash that can damage the firing ship. By firing a disruptor barrage, then bringing your ship in close, you catch the quantum backwash in your own shifter array and blast it back at the enemy vessel — generating more quantum backwash, which then gets fired back at you, which you reflect back again in a resonance cycle that ends when one ship's force shifters overheat. The trick is getting the timing right so they're the ones left holding the quantum potato.

**Pummeling:** Using a punchbeam to nudge a ship that's already in danger of losing control. Expert stratcos can 'juggle' an enemy vessel, keeping its crew from regaining control by repeated disorientating punchbeam bursts.

Sample Investigative Clues
- *The pirate's tactics are centuries out of date — but historically correct. You're guessing they're from a synthculture.*
- *Putting your crew through a grueling series of trials, you notice that your pilot is a little bit off the pace, every time. It looks like you've got another alien shapeshifter on your hands.*

Cherry: Never Tell Me the Odds!
If your Naval Tactics rating is 8 or more, then once per episode when you lose a space combat, you may roll one die and add that to the skirmish point total required by your opponent. For example, if your opponent's going for Cripple (12 points), and they reach 12 or more, you can invoke this cherry and increase their required total by whatever you roll on the die, giving you at least one more showdown to try and eke out a victory.

## Neural Rewiring (Cybe)

During the initial development of the cybe program, the Combine military selected five experts — Greenwater, Calang Caloth, et al — to donate memory patterns to the newly created super-soldiers. They hoped that giving the cybes access to the best minds of the Combine would give them an edge in battle. The experts were heavily vetted and selected to minimize cognitive contagion, but even after taking every precaution, the memory patterns were still found to cause emotional instability.

In the years since the war, other people have recorded memory patterns. These patterns may be available on the black market, or uploaded to public computer networks, or distributed secretly. Unlike the original memory donor patterns, these illegal patterns may give access to interpersonal or general abilities, but the emotional states engendered by these patterns are much, much more intense and should be roleplayed accordingly. Known illegal patterns include:

| Abilities | Emotional State | Scanned Subject |
|---|---|---|
| Downside, History (Durugh), Forensic Accounting, Filch, Infiltration | Greed* | Kod-Nash, durugh crime lord |
| Cybe Culture, Linguistics, Inspiration, Virology | Religious Devotion | Prophet Bifurcator of the Fibrous Sacrament** |
| Explosive Devices, Kinetics, Shooting, Sense Trouble | Paranoia and Rage | Annihilator, cybe war veteran |
| Business Affairs, Flirting, Flattery, Public Relations | Overconfidence | Jeremee Isil*** |
| Battle Console, Bureaucracy, History (Combine), Negotiation, Naval Tactics | Sympathy for the Bleedists | Heren Jackle |

*: Also, the compulsion to electronically transfer all your money to Kod-Nash
**: See *Ashen Stars*, p. 156
***: Bestselling author, Embiggen Your Creds in 90 Days

## Sample Investigative Clues

Usually, you gain clues using the abilities obtained with Neural Rewiring, and not with the ability directly. The only exceptions are situations where the memories of a memory donor are relevant. For example, when dealing with the murder of Dekad Twelvehouse, you could access the memories of her aunt Tatat Twelvehouse to retrieve personal details.

## Cherry: Cognitive Flexibility

If your Neural Rewiring rating is 8+, you may access abilities from two or more memory patterns at the same time with a single spend. Usually, you can only gain abilities from one memory pattern from each spend.

## Pathway Amplification (Vas Mal)

Some of those 'amplified' by vas mal have reported bizarre hallucinations or impossible insights connected to whatever brain pathways were temporarily charged with psychic energy. For example, a character whose Forensic Engineering is amplified might find herself able to see energy flowing through circuits, or hear the ship telling her what it needs. A character using History might experience psychic flashes back in time, finding himself observing historical events from the disembodied omniscience of the vas kra. Amplify Inspiration, and you might inadvertently create a prophet.

## Cherry: Overcharging

If your Pathway Amplification rating is 8+, you can risk overcharging another character's investigative ability. Doing so inflicts damage equal to your Pathway Amplification rating, and lowers the recipient's Health by one permanently. The benefit is that the recipient may do something absolutely extraordinary, groundbreaking, or exceedingly improbable by spending all the points in their amplified pool. For example, you could amplify Industrial Design to allow another character to make a staggering scientific breakthrough, or amplify Flirting to turn a nebbish wallflower into Space Casanova, or amplify Astronomy to let your pilot fly through a maze of previous undiscovered translight corridors, crossing a whole outzone in a fraction of the usual time.

## Phase (Durugh)

### Ability Focus: Phase Fighting

The durugh martial art of Malach Huz uses phasing as a defensive technique. Most durugh require time and concentration to attune themselves to an object's substance before they can phase through it; Malach Huz practitioners are taught that attunement must be as constant and natural as breathing, and so they instinctively attune to their opponents before the fight begins. To master Malach Huz, you must possess ratings of 4 in Scuffling, Sense Trouble, and Phase; in a fight, you may spend 2 Phase to increase your Hit Threshold by 1 for one round of combat.

The forbidden offensive art of Malach Ko is no longer taught. Malach Ko warriors fight with the infamous murder sticks, which they attempt to materialize inside the bodies of their opponents. A wise durugh king banned Malach Ko because it was almost as perilous to its disciples as to their opponents — if a durugh attempts to materialize while inside a solid object, it may cause a potentially lethal systemic shock or even an explosion in rare cases. Malach Ko techniques allowed practitioners to withstand the pain of the systemic shock, but did not diminish the risk of explosion.

### Sample Investigative Clues

► *The smell of phlogium suggests the victim of the murder was worried about durugh phase-thieves.*

► *While phasing, you have a sudden vision that sheds new light on the mystery.*

► *While phasing, you spot a hidden room inside the bunker.*

### Cherry: Ferry Person

With a Phase rating of 8+, you may carry one other person with you when you phase. They don't count toward your weight limit — however, their clothing and gear does. If the other person isn't willing to go with you, the Difficulty of the Phase attempt is doubled.

## Preparedness

You can use Preparedness to acquire bigcred items like cybernetic enhancements, viroware, or disruptor accessories. In the case of cyber- or viroware, it's assumed that you acquired the upgrade between episodes, and this is the first time you've actually used it. First, make a Preparedness test at a Difficulty of 4 + the cost of the item. If you fail, nothing happens. If you succeed, then pay the cost of the item +1 in bigcreds. So, if you're attacked by muggers and want to declare that you've got the Snakehisser viroware (cost 1), you'd need to make a Difficulty 5 Preparedness test, and then pay 2 bigcreds.

You can also acquire ship bolt-ons this way.

You can't reveal you've got an item or upgrade if it would contravene logic. For example, if you were lightly injured in the episode, you can't later manifest the Regenerate upgrade when you get badly shot — if you've had regeneration all along, why didn't it kick in when you were hurt earlier?

You can get away with one cheesy reveal of exactly the upgrade or bolt-on you need in a campaign. After that, the GM is permitted to deploy the infamous flaz gaz heat ray against you.

### Cherry: In the Nick of Time

A rating of 8+ in Preparedness lets you retroactively set up timely situations. You could have:

- ► *local police waiting to ambush the bad guys once you flush them out*
- ► *a diversion in place for just the right moment*
- ► *a guard you've bribed in advance, who lets you out of the cell after you're captured*
- ► *a map you've previously prepared of the orbital dynamics of the system, so you can impress the credulous natives by predicting an eclipse just before it happens*

You must have had the opportunity to set up your cunning scheme beforehand — use a flashback to describe how you prepared for this eventuality, possibly with the aid of your fellow Lasers ('ah, that's why you wanted me to use Industrial Design to get you a detailed map of the sewer network').



## Probability Override (Vas Mal)

### Ability Focus: Gambling

You win. Gain a number of bigcreds equal to the number of Probability Override points you spent. Now run, because you've got any number of criminal syndicates or rival Laser teams after you, as the 'rewind effect' of changing time makes it obvious that a vas mal was involved, and there aren't many vas mal in the Bleed, making you the obvious culprit. You may also need to make a Public Relations test to avoid damage to your Reputation.

### Sample Investigative Clues

Probability Override enables you to filter through other potential futures to select the one you want. By spending 2 points of Probability Override, you can get a glimpse of other, more unlikely futures that are inaccessible to you, but may shed light on your current situation. For example, if you're investigating a murder, then you could spend 2 points to get a brief peek into a timeline where the murder victim was never killed — this glimpse might shed light on why someone would want to kill that person. You have little to no control over what alternate possibilities you view — this is taking a wild stab across non-time.

### Cherry: Death Save
When another character gets hit by an attack that brings him or her below -12 Health, you can spend 4 Probability Override points to force the attacker to reroll to hit, and, if they hit again, to reroll how much damage they inflict.

## Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal)
Psychic Vitality doesn't just measure the reserves of your regrettably weak and mortal material brain, but also your ability to manipulate the underlying skein of reality. There are places where dimensions intersect or overlap making it easier to use psychic powers, or allowing you to replenish your Psychic Vitality reserve in an instant. When you were vas kra, you delighted in such places; there may still be temples or cults or strange phenomena associated with your previous/timeless excarnation there.

### Sample Investigative Clues
► *Space and time are strangely eroded, even* **degraded** *here — something, perhaps a vas kra, died in this place.*

► *By voluntarily entering psychic depletion, you make yourself open and vulnerable to the alien's telepathic influence — you're the psychic equivalent of a juicy steak, perfect for luring the alien predator out into the open.*

### Cherry: Psychic Vampire
With a Psychic Vitality rating of 8+, you have a shameful secret — your psychic powers are strong enough for you to feed on the life force of others. Once per episode, you may touch another living being and inflict one die of damage in order to regain an equal number of Psychic Vitality points.

## Public Relations

### Ability Focus: Corporate Sponsorship
Successful and popular Laser crews can negotiate corporate sponsorship. In exchange for wearing corporate branding, for extolling the virtues of the sponsor's product, and for being good brand ambassadors, the Lasers get a bonus payment and free product after each mission, whether that's viroware, weaponry, armor, or just an endless supply of gravy-flavored soda from Kch'thirst.

Obtaining a sponsorship contract requires a Public Relations test after a successful mission; the Difficulty of this test is 3+the team's Reputation. Each PC can have one sponsorship deal each, and the team may also acquire a ship sponsor.

A sponsorship deal pays a number of bigcreds per mission equal to the team's Reputation when that contract was obtained. So, if you get a sponsorship deal at Reputation 3, that's 3 bigcreds every mission, even if your Reputation rises. You can, of course, drop an outdated sponsorship deal in the hopes of grabbing a more lucrative one.

Keeping a sponsor happy requires a Difficulty 2 Public Relations test after every mission, or Difficulty 4+the amount of Reputation lost if the team's Reputation decreased as a result of the mission. An unhappy sponsor may cancel the deal, or require that the sponsored character atone by doing extra work for the company.

The character who has the sponsorship deal doesn't have to be the one who spends Public Relations (so you can dump all the admin on the crew's bagger).

### Sample Investigative Clues
► *A big corporation like Dynonex wouldn't risk its rep by sending goons to kill you — these goons might be wearing Dynonex uniforms, but they're not employees. Now, who'd want to discredit Dynonex?*

► *Journalists love a free drink. You sit the reporter down and pump him for information.*

► *Using your corporate sponsorship contacts, you get the alien sample analyzed at a top-end industrial laboratory.*

### Cherry: Spokesperson
A Public Relations rating of 8+ gets you a free point in Negotiation.

## Scuffling

### Ability Focus: Melee Weapons
Dueling and other forms of melee combat became popular diversions during the Utopian Era. Advances in medical technology made it easy and affordable to repair virtually any damage, synthcultures explored older, more primitive forms of behavior, and the burgeoning use of viroware enhancements meant people suddenly had a new appreciation of physicality. Different species championed different forms of ceremonial melee combat, from the fighting sticks and katana favored by humanity, to the three-sided monowire cradle of the kch-thk, to the mighty warpick of the tavak. The war brought an end to this brief flowering of combat as art, but there are still some worlds where dueling is seen as acceptable, even proper. Lasers who rely solely on disruption pistols may find themselves at a disadvantage when challenged to a duel.

Sample Investigative Clues
- *Claw/claw/claw/claw/bite — looks like a kch-thk attack.*
- *One punch from that guy tells you he's got cyber-enhanced strength. The second punch tells you to run.*
- *When fighting clear of the Class-K horror that jumped you, you were able to rip off one of its quills. Maybe a DNA analysis could help you understand the monster?*

### Cherry: Expert Fighter
A Scuffling rating of 8+ increases your Hit Threshold by +1 in Scuffling contests only.

## Sense Trouble

### Ability Focus: Alien Senses
Sense Trouble relies on instincts and threat-response patterns that evolved over millions of years. Humans navigate the dangers and complexities of the galaxy equipped with senses and reactions that are adapted to survival on the African savannah. For all their culture and technology, they revert back to apes when startled or panicked. Humans have a fight-or-flight response, interpreting danger as the threat of a predator — they feel like they are being watched; they fear something might jump out at them; they prepare to run away.

The other sentient species of the Combine evolved under different pressures, and so respond to the subliminal clues of Sense Trouble in different ways.

Balla experience floods of emotion in response to danger. This emotional upsurge can be positive — sudden, irrational joy is just as off-putting and alarming to a balla as terror.

Cloddhucks just have a fight response — no flight needed. They respond to trouble — any trouble — by punching it. If the trouble can't be punched, they punch something else.

Cybes are hypersensitive to electromagnetic fields; shifts in such conditions put them on edge.

Durugh interpret all forms of threat as conspiracy or trickery. A durugh teetering on the edge of a pit might shout, *"The ground betrays me!"* A durugh who has a bad feeling about a building might think that the shadows are conspiring against him.

Haydrossi interpret danger in terms of weather patterns, especially high winds or storms. *"A bad wind is blowing"* is their version of *"I've got a bad feeling about this."*

Icti think of danger as an opportunity to get a new host body, and so are paradoxically excited and enthusiastic when threatened.

Ndoaites express nervousness in bursts of gamma radiation.

For the kch-thk, the biggest danger was always overpopulation and starvation, not predation. They feel claustrophobic or hungry when sensing trouble.

Hyperactive raconids respond to danger with bravado, and seek to challenge it. Humans who sense an ambush might hunch low and be on their guard; raconids flare their collars and swagger.

The tavak had no natural predators on their homeworld (the klorn evolved on an isolated island, and were not encountered until comparatively recently), so their instincts are honed to detect the insects they feed upon. Tavak describe dangerous situations as 'crawling' or 'scuttling' with peril.

The once-timeless vas mal sense trouble in the form of déjà vu — they remember something is about to go wrong, even if they can't remember exactly what.

Verpids reflexively sprout extra eyes and other sense organs when sensing trouble.

### Cherry: Instinctive Reactions
If you have a Rating of 8 or more in Sense Trouble, then you may declare one instinctive reaction for every 3 points you have in the ability. An instinctive reaction might be 'draw my gun and fire' or 'dodge toward the nearest exit' or 'get in front of my weakest teammate' or 'signal my location with my tether'. You perform any one of your instinctive reactions automatically when surprised or ambushed, even if you would not otherwise get a chance to act.

## Shooting

### Ability Focus: Suppressive Fire
When attacking with suppressive fire, you don't bother aiming — you just point and spray. You're not trying to hit your enemies, just pin them down. Making a suppressive fire attack costs 2 points of Shooting if you're targeting a tight cluster of enemies behind a single barrier (say, two bad guys hiding behind the same car) or a confined area like a spaceship corridor, or 4 or more points if you're trying to cover a wider area (suppressing a street or field). Specify if you're using lethal or NLD fire.

Until your next action, anyone in the suppressed area is automatically hit if they abandon their cover (those without cover are automatically hit if they try to move). This applies to allies as well as enemies, so watch your field of fire.

### Sample Investigative Clues
► *Those are military-grade disruption rifles, Type 6. They were only used in the early years of the war — they probably came from an old military base that was overrun by the Mohilar.*
► *They said they were trying to take this guy alive, but he's got a popper on his belt, and it's still charged. They shot him on a lethal setting.*

### Cherry: Signature Weapon
If you have a rating of 8 or more in Shooting, you may designate one weapon as your signature weapon. You do +1 damage with this weapon. If your signature weapon is destroyed or lost, you may acquire another one during the next episode.

## Shuttle Craft

### Ability Focus: Remote Operations
Standard shuttles can be operated remotely, allowing you to control your shuttle via your tether. Advanced shuttles can be commanded to take off and fly to your location, but most shuttles must be piloted remotely. You suffer a 1-point levy on all Shuttle Craft tests when operating a shuttle remotely.

If your ship is in orbit, and has a shuttle on board, you may summon that shuttle down to the planet's surface to pick you up. Paranoid Laser crews often go dirtside on board their shuttle, then fly it back up to their orbiting ship, to ensure no one steals or tampers with their shuttle while on the ground.

### Sample Investigative Clues
► *The patterns in the mud match the landing gear of a balla-built shuttle.*
► *The bad guys turned up in a six-seater shuttle, but you've only seen five of them so far. Who or what took that sixth seat?*
► *You notice the lateral thruster's maintenance access panel is ajar — and there's a data port under there. Someone was trying to hack into your shuttle.*

### Cherry: Emergency Evac
If you have a rating of 8+, then once per episode, you can spend 4 points of Shuttle Craft to fly into a scene in your shuttle at just the right moment to save one of your

crewmates — maybe they've just fallen off a cliff, or they're being chased by jaggar hunters, or their cover's just been blown and the tavak gangsters are about to rip their limbs off. For this dramatic entrance to work, you must have been 'offscreen' beforehand.

## Surveillance

### Ability Focus: Digital Surveillance
An important part of 24th-century surveillance is observing the subject's movements in virtual space. Through a combination of Data Retrieval (to watch the flow of information into and out of the target's tether), Forensic Accounting (to watch for financial transactions) and Decryption (to track their online movements), you can shadow a suspect in both the digital and the analogue realms simultaneously. This isn't hacking, per se (for that, you use Communications Intercept, p. 29) — it's lurking with intent.

### Sample Investigative Clues
► *Association isn't proof of conspiracy — but if your main suspect for the passenger liner bombing goes to the bar frequented by the extreme Bleedist pressure group, you've got to consider the political angle of the attack.*
► *Your target's putting out a lot of data traffic without touching her tether. She's got an internal headset, but her medical records claimed she didn't have any upgrades. What other black-market cyberware does she have?*
► *You're being followed. You spotted the durugh five blocks back. He tried to fool you by walking though a wall, but you picked him up again when he came out of that bar. He's tailing you.*

### Cherry: Electronic Eyes
A rating of 8 in Surveillance gives 1 free point in Holo Surveillance.

## Systems Design
Sure, anyone can fix something broken, but you? You can envision the design, model it, test it and manufacture it so that it doesn't break in the first place. You understand how things fit together, and you're the person who gets called on when something ridiculously ambitious is needed to save the day. New power systems, highly advanced computer networks, the missing part that lets you more effectively salvage the most valuable portions of a wrecked space-liner's cargo... between your imagination, engineering know-how and advanced modeling software, you make it happen.

### Sample Investigative Clues

- ► *Surveying the small trade ship, you know exactly where you'd hide contraband -- or people -- if you were using this ship to smuggle.*

- ► *Rewiring your ship's sensors, you pick up on the minute electromagnetic eddies in the wreckage, allowing you to find the remains of the alien ship.*

- ► *That's interesting — this knife is a specialized type of blade, used only for prizing up the scales of Lanthean thunder lizards so they can be checked for mites. That means the guy who stabbed you probably came from Lanthe. You should follow up on that clue once you get this knife out of your chest.*

### Cherry: Prototype

With a Systems Design rating of 8+, you may design one piece of equipment with the approval of your GM (or pick one from chapter 126). You created that equipment, and only you know how to build it.

## Systems Repair

There's a strong argument that not bringing an experienced wrench into deep space is tantamount to a death sentence. Things break out there in the empty darkness, whether from neglect or extremely vengeful space pirates who have a score to settle with you. Your Systems Repair ability is what's going to keep the ship whole when everything is coming apart around you.

This ability encompasses the repair of just about anything you can think of, from spaceships to land vehicles to computers to heavy weaponry. You may not always be able to do it quickly, but you can generally get it done. Complex tasks may require multiple tests or a toll test.

Systems Repair might also be handy for those times that you need to reconfigure the deflector disk in order to amplify your bio-scans, when you need to rebuild the engines just enough to let you escape from the orbiting mine field, and when you need to salvage another abandoned ship.

### Investigative Sample Clues

- ► *The sound from the spaceship's plasma conduits doesn't sound quite right. There's an off-phase pause in there -- and that means sabotage.*

- ► *The drifting hulk wasn't disabled by weapon fire or any internal damage. What afflicted it didn't hurt the systems — and that means it must have affected the crew instead. Disease!*

### Cherry: Tube Monkey

With a Systems Repair rating of 8+, your experience at crawling through access tubes, maintenance tunnels, and air ducts pays off. You may spend Systems Repair points when using Infiltration to sneak onto a starship or any large, high-tech structure like a factory or space station.

## Viro Manipulation

Viro manipulation is an odd ability in that its usefulness primarily occurs between missions, when crew members pay to have new viroware installed and need another PC to manage a successful round of gene therapy (usually at a Difficulty of 4, higher for individuals with more than 4 viroware enhancements.) As a result, it's unusual to need more than 3 points in Viro Manipulation.

The exception to this is during missions that focus heavily on viroware. *Ashen Stars* mentions the concept of mutant viroware without going into details. This is a viroware that has been deliberately or inadvertently altered with any number of unpredictable, dire results. If a particular strain of viroware that's become popular on a planet has mutated, turning the users into mindless killers at a trigger that only a small number of adversaries know, the Viro Manipulation ability is going to prove its worth.

The Latency Suppression viroware also relies on this ability, as you make a contested Viro Manipulation roll to cancel another individual's effect. Investing in Latency Suppression and a supply of Viro Manipulation points is a good tactic for ensuring that enemies seldom if ever take advantage of their unique powers while you're nearby.

## Ability Focus: Viro Neutralization

Viroware often has an affect on the people nearby, whether by enhancing the user's pheromones or their brainwaves. If the effect is known in advance, such as when you're going up against someone who you already know hides behind the pheromone-based faceless disguise of Mr. Grey, you can use your Viro Manipulation ability to safeguard your allies. Doing so affects yourself or one ally, requires a Difficulty of 4, and for the next interval prevents or reduces one specified viroware effect. Note that this only works against effects that affect other individuals; for instance, it would have no interaction with Morphological Mimicry that changes a person's body, but it would negate the Peacepipe viroware that uses pheromones to inhibit violent response.

## Sample Investigative Clues

► *That balla is displaying symptoms that aren't matching any known viroware. Could he have developed something unique?*

► *The dying passenger seems to have rejected her gene therapy, causing her newest viroware to react poorly in unexpected ways. Can the viral load be altered in such a way that the patient's life is saved, and that she is rendered briefly unable to lie?*

## Cherry: Viro Wizardry

If your Viro Manipulation rating is 8 or more, you may spend 4 points of Viro Manipulation to allow yourself or another character an extra use of a limited-use viroware. For example, a viroware upgrade such as Scrambleface or Snakehisser can only be used once per episode, but you can allow a second use within the same episode by dosing the viro-modded character with a carefully designed cocktail of stimulants and retroviruses. You may use this ability as often as you have Viro Manipulation points to spend, but only once per episode for any given upgrade.

# CREWING UP

Lasers who work alone die alone. The Bleed's a dangerous place, and even the smaller ships are too complex for a single pilot to fly. Wild freestripers may try to operate with a reduced crew, but at a cost to their Reputation. A client who hires a Laser team subconsciously desires the reassurance and aura of omni-competence that comes with a full crew.

This section discusses each warpside and groundside assignment in detail, building on the brief synopses given on pages 27-31 of *Ashen Stars*. In each write-up, you'll find the following:

► the **Investigative & General Abilities** *required for that assignment, repeated from the core rules for your convenience*

► *a discussion of that assignment's* **Mission Role**

► *classic media* **Archetypes** *to give a handle on how others in the Combine see that role*

► *the assignment's day-to-day* **Routine** — *what you might do during downtime, or just before a mysterious spatial anomaly materializes off your starboard bow*

► *a suggested* **Loadout** *of equipment for that assignment.*

► **Techniques** *and* **Specialized Jargon** *to assist you in describing your character's actions and dialog*
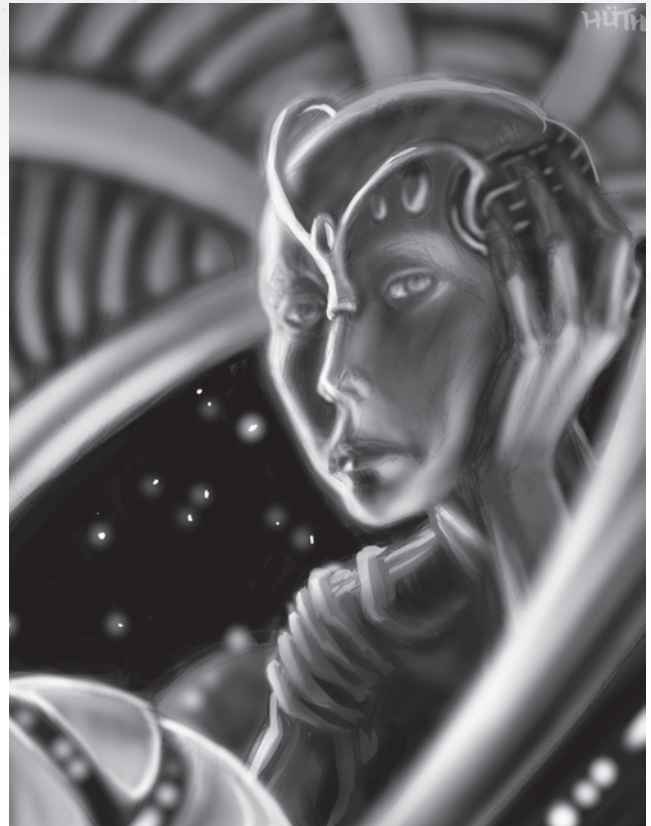


## Communications Officer (Hailer)

**Investigative (5):** Linguistics 1, Flattery 1, Reassurance 1, Data Retrieval 1, Decryption 1.

(*Consider:* Law, Bullshit Detector, Bureaucracy, Negotiation, Energy Signatures, Holo Surveillance)

**General (10):** Communications Intercept 6, Sense Trouble 4

(*Consider:* Business Affairs, Public Relations)

## Mission Role

In the Combine, the distinction between communication and computing, between hailing and hacking, blurs into non-existence. You monitor and filter all signals coming and going from your ship, from communicating with traffic control and other ships in the system, to scouring the data nets for contracts or researching cases, to defending your ship's systems from Override attempts. You also filter your crew's communications, acting as the team's spokesperson or spin doctor in concert with the operations officer.

During a mission, you'll usually take the lead when:

► **Receiving Communications:** You're more than a glorified space receptionist, but you're still the receptionist. Whenever anyone contacts the ship, they'll go through you. You may be required to decide on which conversations to prioritize — do you first attempt to convince the local authorities that there won't be any more explosions in the course of your investigation, or do you establish a long-range communications link with the scientist whose expertise you need to crack the case, or do you first reassure your client that everything's going smoothly? You might also find yourself cleaning up degraded signals, or digging information out of sideband transmissions. When receiving incoming transmissions, use your investigative abilities to pick up on telltale quirks of body language, word choice, or transmission metadata to discern more than the obvious content of the message.

As hailer, you're also responsible for filing flight plans, requesting docking clearances, keeping your ship's transponders and data links up to date, and maintaining your ship's software and computer core in conjunction with the wrench.

► **Dealing With Clients:** As the primary client liaison, it's your job to keep everything running smoothly. Some highly strung clients need careful handling, especially when unforeseen problems arise and start shooting; others prefer to know as little as possible, and just want your assurance that you'll get the job done. Any incoming calls from the client get routed to your station or tether by default, so practice maintaining your best smile under fire.

► **Tracking & Analyzing Signals:** Tracing a call is a matter for Decryption. All Combine communications automatically note the route they took through communications nodes, and this information is included in the communication's metadata. It's easy to stop your own personal communications systems (headset, handheld unit, vehicle, tether) from reporting their precise location, but you can usually trace a communication down to a particular communications sub-node (about a city block in real world terms). Interstellar communications work in a similar way, although there you'll be lucky to narrow a trace down to a particular *planet*.

More technically minded criminals can reroute and obfuscate their signals, which requires extra work for you to decrypt, or even make them impossible to trace. Persistent rumors claim that the Combine Navy developed a secret technique for tracing signals through translight distortions; if they did, that technique's above your security clearance or fell down the Mohilar memory hole.

On low-tech or wilderness planets, you can pinpoint an individual transmitter with Energy Signatures.

You can also trace messages by careful analysis for subtle clues like the particular configuration of stars (Astronomy: this holo-image must have been taken on the southern hemisphere of Pollux), word choices (Linguistics: she's from the core worlds of the Proper, not the Bleed), background terrain (Geology: there's only one inhabited world in this cluster that's volcanically active), or cultural cues (History, Tavak: that knife is a ritual weapon associated with the Padot clan).

► **Hacking:** At the technology level of the Combine, every message is also a computer program. You can penetrate hostile systems as well as launch Override attacks on enemy ships (see the Hacking rules on p. 30). Hacking computer networks usually takes much, much longer than trying to hack another ship during Override (unless the hostile computer network obligingly opens several thousand connections to your system, in which case you're trading speed for the threat of being hacked yourself).

► **In Override Showdowns:** You attempt to hack the enemy ship while protecting your own systems. If you encounter an unknown vessel that appears hostile, push for your crew to attempt Datascraping — escaping intact with a clue about your attackers or the larger mission is an excellent result.

## Archetypes

- ► *Polished corporate spokesperson, unflappable and blandly reassuring*
- ► *Eccentric hacker/DJ, commandeering the airwaves*
- ► *Military signals expert, spouting jargon and acronyms*
- ► *Impassioned diplomat, eager to bring out the best in both your team and the galaxy*
- ► *Curt, harried technician with head buried in a tangle of wires*
- ► *Esoteric vas mal, who delights in broadcasting cryptic riddles and koans to passing ships*

## Routine

Warpside, your attention is dominated by the communications matrix or 'big board' — a nearly incomprehensibly complex multicolored holographic display of ever-changing symbols and tags that shows signals traffic both inside and outside your ship (and the one on the bridge is a greatly simplified abstraction of the really big board in the computer core). The balla compare it to the mor sohn; everyone else compares it to the inside of a migraine, but you can read the ship's 'mood' at a glance.

You also monitor data traffic and news feeds, looking for items of interest — travel advisories, conflict zone warnings, potential contracts, and side jobs. You may even contribute to these feeds; hailers are incorrigible gossips. You handle the ship's contact with planetary traffic control stations, space docks and other flight-related bureaucracy, and alert the pilot to news of meson-shrapnel storms and collapsed translight corridors.

## Loadout

Scorpion Relay, (p. 126), Transmit Modder (*Ashen Stars* p. 125); (Cybernetics) Dataloader (*Ashen Stars* p. 129), Headdisk (*Ashen Stars* p. 130).

## Techniques

Your ship has three overlapping but distinct communications systems, each one fulfilling a different role. Damage to your vessel might disable one or two of these systems, leaving the others functional. The short-range, high-bandwidth **shipnet** is limited in range to a few thousand kilometers — enough to reach from surface to orbit. It automatically links together your headsets, tethers, and other communications devices, as well as interfacing with planetary computer networks and the shipnets of other vessels. It's ubiquitous and mostly reliable — except when jammed, overriden, or scrambled by hostile forces. There are thousands of redundant shipnet nodes throughout your vessel. Intercepting shipnet traffic is easy if you're in range. Decoding it is harder.

The long-range, limited-bandwidth **beamer** is used for long-range communications within the same system. It's a powerful directional transmitter-receiver. You use it for contacting distant vessels, for communicating with traffic control stations, or for broadcasting distress calls. Beamer transmissions are limited by the speed of light, so they can take minutes or hours to reach their destination. The beamer grid is usually mounted on the hull near your computer core.

Beamer communications can be tightbeam, widebeam or omnidirectional. A tightbeam can only be received (or intercepted) if you're right in its path. Correctly targeting a tightbeam may require a Communications Intercept test. A widebeam covers an expanding cone, while an omnidirectional signal is sent in every direction.

Finally, the **translight connection** is integrated into your ship's translight drive. It works by opening up a tiny translight corridor and sending a signal through the faster-than-light connection. The power requirement and stability of such a corridor varies depending on the range and complexity of the signal, and whether or not the corridor can be closed afterward (a one-way 'squirt') or kept open to receive a reply from a target that lacks the ability to generate its own translight connection (a two-way 'drag'). It's much easier to just send text instead of a holo-image, and it's much more efficient for two ships to collaborate in generating a communications corridor than for one ship to do all the work.

'Travel time' for translight signals is much faster than for a ship. On average, it takes only seconds to send a message within the same cluster, and only a few days to send a message back to the Combine — assuming you don't get jammed by meson shrapnel. If you establish a two-way corridor, then once the corridor 'arrives', communications between the two parties are instantaneous. This can be counterintuitive to those not versed in hyperdimensional physics, so the usual metaphor used is that of the tin-can telephone. You wish to talk in real time to your friend on another planet, but all you have is a rocket, two tin cans, and an infinitely long piece of string. You attach the cans to the string, and send one can to your friend using the rocket. It takes the rocket some time to arrive, but once it's there, you can talk to your friend and get an immediate response. Of course, for this metaphor to work,

the string is not only infinitely long, it's also simultaneously infinitely short. That's translight!

During the heyday of the Combine, a network of relays took on the grunt work of relaying FTL communications, so it was trivially easy to have real-time holographic conversations across the breadth of inhabited space. The war ravaged the relay network, but you sometimes get lucky and route through an active beacon.

Intercepting FTL communications is tricky. There are certain points and junctions in the translight corridor network that are, for lack of a better term, 'echoey'. A vessel (or secret durugh listening post) there can eavesdrop on translight corridor traffic.

## Specialized Jargon

► **Blackbeam:** An extremely tightly focused beamer transmission, used for secret communications.
► **Finger in My Ear:** Sarcastic response to crewmates who have unreasonable expectations about communications, and no appreciation of the difficulty of establishing communications links in the present era. *'I've got my finger in my ear, what more do you want from me?'* More generally, quotidian hailer operations.
► **Fullsky/Emptysky:** The density of shipnet communications traffic in the area. *'It'll be hard to trace that call, we're in fullsky.'*
► **Meatpot:** A tactic used in Override contests, where you present what appears to be a juicy data file to be scraped or stolen by your opponent, but it's actually filled with attack viruses.
► **Transjuicer:** The translight connection software that compresses and expands messages sent via corridor. Gets almost as much blame as meson shrapnel for communications failures.

## Pilot

**Investigative (2):** Geology 1, Astronomy 1

(*Consider:* Reassurance, Energy Signatures, Industrial Design, Kinetics)

**General (12):** Ground Craft 2, Helm Control 6, Shuttle Craft 4

(*Consider:* Battle Console, Sense Trouble, Systems Design, Systems Repair)

## Mission Role

You fly the ship. You fly the shuttle. If it's got wings, thrusters, propellers, or hot-air balloons, you fly it.

Others may grumble that 95% of the time, you can delegate your role to the automatic pilot and just sit back. You only need to make decisions when the ship enters or is about to leave translight flight, when entering or leaving orbit, or when docking or undocking.

Oh — you'll also need to make decisions when your ship's targeted by a hail of fire from a jaggar-infested cruiser. Let's see the autopilot make *that* call.

As the ship's pilot, your role revolves around those moments of desperate brilliance, when you use your honed reflexes to push the ship to the very limits of its performance to avoid incoming fire, or precisely maneuver to set your crewmates up for the perfect attack.

## Archetypes

► *Overly confident hotshot, who prefers flying one-person fighter-interceptors*
► *Haunted naval veteran, dreams about massive engagements with the Mohilar*
► *Lazy space beach bum, daydreaming at the console*
► *Punctilious console operator, always checking a checklist or running a simulation*
► *Stargazing balla mystic who intuits optimum translight corridor choices through spiritual connection with the universe*
► *The stratco's dark animus; taciturn, always anticipates trouble, seems to know the rest of the crew better than they know themselves*

## Routine

As pilot, you've got a lot of downtime even when on duty. The automated systems handle routine flight perfectly. You're so attuned to the ship that you can tell when there's the slightest change in course or speed, or when it's time for you to make one of your periodic appearances on the bridge. How you fill that extra time is up to you, but it tells a lot about what sort of pilot you are.

Do you:

- *obsessively review stellar charts and translight corridor reports? Corridors close, open or drift all the time. If you're interested in shaving your travel time down as much as possible, or saving fuel, or staying off the main space routes, then having an up-to-date mental map of the corridor network is vital.*

- *tinker with the ship's engines and control systems? Pilots need to know exactly what their ship is capable of doing, and technically minded pilots might try to eke a little extra juice out of the engines. Wrenches driven to distraction by meddlesome pilots often designate the ship's shuttle as the pilot's playroom. Go play with the shuttle's engines, and leave the real ones alone!*

- *monitor your console, watching the stars fly by, suspiciously eyeing any nearby ships, and helping your hailer deal with communications traffic? That way, you're on hand if anything happens to break the tedium.*

- *volunteer for some extra duty on board ship, or put in extra time attending to your groundside role? Maybe that disruption pistol could stand to be stripped down, cleaned, and rebuilt for the third time this afternoon? And has anyone checked the team's poppers — you know how those things can spontaneously burn out...*

- *just relax? Your reflexes and instincts are the most important things you bring to your console, so it's* absolutely vital *for the ship's safety that you get plenty of sleep/play video games/brew the perfect cup of coffee/meditate/take a bath/play loud music/wander around the ship in your underwear.*

## Loadout

(Cybernetics) Amper (*Ashen Stars*, p. 127), Back Brain Driver (p. 126), Shudderware (p. 130); (Viroware) Proprioception Booster (*Ashen Stars*, p. 139)

## Techniques

While holo-entertainments may present space battles as elegant ballets full of swoops, zooms, and seat-of-the-pants evasion, you know that different arenas call for different maneuvers. Even in the empty void of deep space, there are tactical considerations to be remembered.

**Long Range, Void:** At long range in empty space, the other ship is just a dot on your targeting scope. Even light-speed weapons like disruption blasts or punchbeams take time to cross such an expanse; physical projectiles like missiles or neutronic fusillades can take eon-long minutes to hit home. Here, your role is to be unpredictable — the enemy gunner isn't firing at you, she's firing at where your ship is going to be. Computer projections give their best estimate of your future location, based on your ship's current course and speed, the capabilities of your engines and maneuvering thrusters, and the requirements of your own attack arrays. You've got to beat those projections by:

- *making sudden, drastic changes in course and speed, pushing your ship's acceleration to the limit*

- *presenting a smaller target by keeping your ship edge-on whenever possible*

- *working with your stratco to deceive your enemy — make her think that you're lining up a flurry of disruption blasts, so they don't notice the wave of invisible sneakthief rockets approaching them*

- *intuiting patterns and sequences in your enemy's attack algorithms, and exploiting those holes*

**Short Range, Void:** This is the classic 'furball' dogfight. Here, the two ships are within a few dozen kilometers of each other, or even closer, both jockeying for position and orientation. A holographic map of the engagement over time looks like two angry balls of string trying to strangle one another. In such a battle, you alternate between dodging incoming attacks and striving to get your ship into the best possible position for your next offensive barrage. You might:

- *identify a gap in your enemy's armor arrays, and get your ship into position for your gunner to take advantage of that gap*

- *get on the enemy's tail and stay there, limiting the number of attack arrays they can bring to bear (very tricky, considering the enemy ship can flip around and coast backward on its inertia)*

- *execute a series of tightly controlled zigzags and rolls, dodging enemy fire as you close for a devastating short-range attack*

- *lure the enemy into pushing their engines past the red line, forcing them to inflict damage on their own systems to keep up with your ship*

**Long Range, Empty Orbit:** 'Empty orbit' refers to a planet with few satellites or ships in orbit. As the first thing any spacefaring civilization does is muck up their near orbit with thousands of small satellites and pieces of debris, you normally only encounter empty orbits in uninhabited systems. At long range in such environments, you can use the planet as cover — you pop up, launch a barrage, then duck back down again behind the curve of the planet. The conflict becomes a game of chicken — which pilot is willing to get closest to the atmosphere in order to have the tightest possible orbit? The tighter the orbit, the less time you need to expose yourself when firing, but the greater the risk of grazing the atmosphere and taking damage (or prematurely lithobraking).

**Close Range, Empty Orbit:** Take all the joy of the close-range dogfight, and add the invisible peril of the gravity well. Foolish pilots can find their ship stalled or caught in the pull of gravity; clever or foolhardy ones can try stunts like 'bouncing' off the atmosphere or using a moon as a slingshot. Damage to engines is especially dangerous in such engagements — a crippled ship is unlikely to be in a stable orbit, so she will spiral down toward her inevitable destruction unless her wrench can pull a miracle out of the repair kit.

**Long Range, Crowded Orbit:** A 'crowded orbit' is what you get around most inhabited planets — lots of other ships, satellites, space stations, beanstalks, solar arrays, beacons, captured asteroids, defense platforms — and a thick halo of nuts, bolts, dropped spanners, and other junk left over from building all the rest. The planet's traffic administration should regularly 'dredge' the approach lanes and standard parking orbits to keep them clear of obstacles, but other regions of space may be perilous. Use these perils to your advantage in a dogfight by taking cover behind debris clouds, derelict space stations, or convenient parked asteroids — but don't endanger your Reputation by getting inhabited stations or civilian ships involved. Long-range firefights around an inhabited planet are rare — the locals are unlikely to tolerate two starships lobbing long-distance death rays at each other for long.

**Close Range, Crowded Orbit:** Here, between all the civilian ships and other obstacles, the threat of getting caught in the gravity well, the need for rapid, close-range maneuvers to optimize your array profile and... oh yes, the guys shooting at you, close range crowded orbit (CRCO) engagements are what hot pilots live for and poor pilots dread. Often, such engagements are determined more by your foe's bad luck than your skill — the first pilot to lose 'total pro' and suffer a disastrous 'proximity issue' loses.

## Specialized Jargon

- **Aerobraking:** Using the drag of a planet's atmosphere to slow a ship down instead of firing reverse thrusters.
- **Array Profile:** Maneuvering and rolling your ship to get the right array (attack or armor) into position as dictated by the stratco.
- **Duckling:** A ship's shuttle.
- **Gaining Vector:** Maneuvering to gain tactical advantage over your opponent. 'Vector zero' is to be directly behind your opponent and matching their speed.
- **Lithobraking:** Using the drag of a planet's surface to slow a ship down completely. Also referred to as 'crashing'.
- **Loud Airlock:** Ejecting in a lifepod.
- **Nothing Light:** The standard proximity alarm that lights up when you're moving too fast and too close to an obstacle.
- **Paintwork Inspection:** Flying really, really close to another ship or obstacle.
- **Proximity Issue:** Crashing into another ship or obstacle.
- **Pushing Red:** Pushing the ship's systems past their manufacturer-approved tolerances. Pushing black means going beyond their actual tolerances.
- **Seat-Cover Inspection:** An accidental *paintwork inspection*.
- **Spatial Turbulence:** A nonexistent phenomenon used by pilots to explain why the ship's bouncing around or the engine just caught fire during particularly taxing maneuvering.
- **Total Pro:** Short for 'total proprioception', meaning a complete awareness of the relative position of your ship and other nearby vessels. Used sometimes as a brag (*I've got total pro*) or as a warning that you're disorientated (*I don't have pro! We've got to pull back!*).
- **Zoom Factor:** An informal and situationally dependent measure of velocity. Zoom Factor 0 means no velocity. Zoom Factor 11 is 'much, much too fast for whatever you're doing'. Also referred to as $r$.

# Strategic Coordinator (Stratco)

**Investigative (0):** None

(*Consider:* History (Combine), Xenoculture, Inspiration, Kinetics, )

**General (22):** Athletics 4, Naval Tactics 6, Scuffling 4, Sense Trouble 4, Shooting 4

(*Consider:* Battle Console, Helm Control, Public Relations, Systems Design, Systems Repair)

## Mission Role

The role of the stratco is an uneasy compromise between the traditional position of ship's captain used by the Combine navy, and the collective, nonhierarchical structure of a Laser crew. A Laser team doesn't have a leader or commander, just specialists in various fields, and one of those fields happens to be coordinating and commanding a crew during a space battle.

You're not the captain. You just act like one when you're under fire.

The stratco's job in battle is to lead and guide the crew's efforts, making each individual maneuver or attack build on the one before. You play out each battle in your mind a thousand times before the first shot is fired, treating it as a chess game in three dimensions. Is the sacrifice of this armor array worth the advantage in positioning? How far can you push this ally before they break?

## Archetypes
- ► *Reserved, patrician; a stern parental figure*
- ► *Humble and self-effacing; a quiet gray bureaucrat who treats starship combat like filling out a form*
- ► *Dashing, charismatic human, capable of pulling an impossible victory out of certain defeat*
- ► *Detached, contemplative — a living tactical computer*
- ► *Secretive, manipulative, always playing the odds*

## Routine

As you're definitely not in charge, and you don't even have a console to poke at, you don't have a routine to speak of when you're not coordinating strategies. Every stratco puts in a few hours a week running battle drills, practicing on tactical simulators, and reviewing documents and technical specs on strategic theory and evolving enemy threats, but

that might only fill one day of a ten-day translight hop. So, what do you do when there are no enemies on the scope? That's up to you and the rest of the crew.

Some crews assume that the stratco spends any downtime preparing for their groundside assignment. These stratcos are sometimes referred to as 'weekend warriors' or 'armchair admirals' — you'd never think of them as iron-willed naval commanders until they take the chair and their demeanors change completely.

Others take the opposite approach, and prefer to give their stratco space to think and focus on their warpside role. Ultimately, the stratco's going to be the one making the hardest decisions — not just which tactic to employ, or which enemy ship to target, but when to retreat and when to hold on, even if staying in the fight risks the lives of the rest of the crew. It's hard to maintain the belief that a Laser team is a band of siblings, a gang of equals, when one of them has to decide which of them lives and dies in battle. Stratcos given such freedom spend their time honing their skills, meditating, or otherwise preparing themselves mentally for the trials to come.

More practical Laser crews shunt a lot of the administration busywork away from the bagger and hailer, and dump it on the stratco's lap. This does little to dispel the belief that the stratco is effectively the ship's captain by another name, but does mean that the stratco's kept busy renewing disruptor licenses and arguing with Ossa One about bonus payments.

Finally, a tradition that started among the kch-thk has spread to many other Laser crews in recent years — the stratco is also the ship's cook, and spends any downtime down in the galley.

## Loadout

(Cybernetics) Biofueler (*Ashen Stars*, p. 128), Neurojolter (*Ashen Stars*, p. 131), Testament (p. 131), Vengeance Coprocessor (p. 131); (Viroware) Brainwave Recycler (*Ashen Stars*, p. 138).

## Techniques

Tactical doctrine in the Combine evolves in response to developing technologies and contact with new threats. The small-scale skirmishes common in the present-day Bleed bear little resemblance to the massive fleet engagements of the Mohilar War, and both are quite unlike the battles of earlier eras, where ships commonly mounted only one or two types of attack and armor arrays.

Many stratcos swear by Brian Hudd's *Strategic Approaches*, at least as a starting point for developing their own strategic doctrines. Others favor works like Povak's classic *Unity of War,* Gao Lu's *Artemis & Ares*, or Tk-Hrt's *1001 Recipes for Victory.* The recent translation of the durugh classic *Cold Knife Stories* has yet to be fully assimilated into Combine thinking.

**The Willow Stream:** Advocated by the balla general Enshu Sunwalker, the willow stream is more commonly referred to as 'scrape and scram'. She believed that small ships were best suited to hit-and-run attacks, and that they should be deployed primarily as scouts. Following this strategy, you pursue goals like Datascrape and Rake whenever possible. Willow streaming means you don't stick around long enough to feel the effects of Total Engagement or ship-breaking, but do tend to lose to ships employing the bloody hammer or Full-Spectrum Combat.

**Hudd's Total Engagement:** Hudd's refinement of tactics pioneered during the human/kch-thk alliance, Total Engagement takes an all-guns-blazing approach to combat. Here, the priority is to fire off as many attack arrays in as short a time as possible, overwhelming enemies with sheer firepower. In a roughly even contest, as many small-ship engagements tend to be, victory goes to the crew whose training and determination lets them bring more attacks to bear. Total Engagement strategies tend to prosper against more elegant but slower tactics like Full-Spectrum Combat or ship-breaking, but are less effective against those following the willow stream approach or the bloody hammer.

**The Bloody Hammer:** The durugh general Arrhenious observed that while the human will to victory may be unquenchable, the human body is a much more fragile thing indeed. Bloody hammer strategies call for the attacker to target the enemy crew as though they were a key system. Few Laser crews are willing to follow Arrhenious' doctrine to its fullest extent (which calls not only for the enemy crew to be rocked to pieces, but also for phasing assassins, sneakthieves primed to explode *inside* enemy vessels, and suicide shuttle runs), but a quick whack with the bloody hammer can force a criminal ship to surrender or an attacker to flee. It usually scares off nervous willow stream followers, and can be surprisingly effective against ships attempting Total Engagement, as they can't retreat quickly if they lose key bridge crew. However, the sort of disciplined crews that can pull off ship-breaking or Full-Spectrum Combat are unlikely to be disconcerted by this strategy.

**Ship-breaking:** Few things start a bar brawl quicker than attributing this strategy to Battlemaster Povak in front of a kch-thk, or saying that Tk-Hrt came up with it to a tavak. Better to be diplomatic, and just call it ship-breaking. The strategy advocates dismembering the enemy ship section by section — you concentrate fire on one part of the ship, crippling any attack and armor arrays mounted there, then stay in that gap in the enemy's field of fire, taking out other key systems like engines or weapon control. It's slow, precise, painful and devastatingly effective against other complex tactics like the bloody hammer or Full-Spectrum Combat, but fares poorly against faster tactics like Total Engagement, and can't keep up with willow stream ships.

**Full-Spectrum Combat:** The approved Combine doctrine during the Mohilar War, Full-Spectrum Combat urges the integration of electronic warfare into naval tactics. A stratco using Full-Spectrum Combat must therefore close as quickly as possible so the hailer can launch more effective override attacks. Full-Spectrum Combat is especially suited for bloodless victories, where enemy vessels are harmlessly disabled instead of being destroyed. It counters the 'datascrape first, questions later' approach of the willow stream, and includes a series of counters to outmaneuver foes attempting the bloody hammer. Combine stratcos always have trouble adapting to the sort of suicidal madmen who attempt Total Engagement, and ship-breaking is always effective if it can be pulled off.

## Specialized Jargon

► **Big Chair:** The stratco's chair, usually located in the center of the ship's bridge. More generally, the position and the hard decisions associated with it. "*Keep searching for our teammate, or leave her behind and deliver the vaccine samples to the plague world? That's a big chair decision.*"

► **Cold Embrace:** The strange intimacy that comes with engaging with another stratco in combat.

► **Hudded:** To lose by bullishly ignoring the odds, the limitations of the ship, or the laws of physics. Also, when said with breathless admiration and envy, to win despite overwhelming odds, a damaged ship, or to triumph above all logic and reason. "*Twenty Galactoid ships, and she hudded right through them.*"

► **Kra:** The aura of respect accorded to a stratco when he or she takes command. Derived from the godlike *vas kra*, the original form of the degenerate *vas mal*.

► **Rippling:** Originally, to fire attack arrays in a strict sequence. Colloquially, to strictly follow a pattern of showdowns, usually Fire/Maneuver/Override/Trickbag.

► **Taking On Vacuum:** A hull breach. Metaphorically, the moment you realize the flaw in your strategy.

# Systems Officer (Wrench)

**Investigative (0):** None

(*Consider:* Energy Signatures, Forensic Engineering, Industrial Design)

**General (10):** Systems Design 4, Systems Repair 6

(*Consider:* Athletics, Preparedness, Shuttle Craft)

## Mission Role

You're the ship's mechanic and damage control expert. Some crews expect every other member to be an expert in the technologies related to their particular fields, so the pilot can also maintain the engines, the gunner can calibrate the attack arrays and so on, but let's face it — you're not that lucky. You're probably going to be stuck doing tech support and cleaning up after the rest of the team after they wreck your perfectly maintained systems.

In battle, you divide your time between nursing extra output out of the engines, and scrambling to repair whatever key component just exploded. You need to know the innards of your ship with a disturbing degree of intimacy — after all, you'll likely have to crawl through the access corridors in zero gravity, in complete darkness, while the ship tumbles and shudders around you, in order to get to the damaged systems.

Outside of battle, you repair everything they broke in the last battle. You dream of one mission — just one mission — when your ship doesn't get blown to bits, and you can actually put in some time on much-needed maintenance and upgrades instead of desperately patching it back together.

## Archetypes

► *Grizzled veteran who overestimates repair times by a factor of four to preserve reputation as a miracle worker*

► *Enthusiastic tinkerer, verging on mad scientist*

► *Adrenaline junky, secretly loves pulling situations back from brink of catastrophe*

► *Careful, methodical engineer; unflappable even in the face of annihilation*

► *Paranoid perfectionist who treats lower decks of the ship as your private kingdom; intruders threaten to mess up precise arrangement of hyperspanners*

► *Bug-eyed kch-thk, usually found scurrying about in the darkened lower decks with a gadget in every claw*

## Routine

There's always something that needs doing. Wrenches don't get downtime; they just run out of coffee and collapse for a few minutes.

On most Combine ships, there's a holographic display called the Master Component Registry that's supposed to track each and every subsystem on board, and alert you when they need replacing or repairs. (Miser and junker-class ships just have a red warning light that blinks when something breaks). You don't need the MCR, though — you've got a much more detailed mental map of the ship, one that extends into the future. That transducer cable will last another year at least, so it's not as much of a worry as that drive baffle; he's got four months at most. Better pick up a replacement next time you're in port.

All wrenches fret about damage to their ships, but different wrenches deal with this stress in different ways. Are you a hoarder, who stocks your locker and hold with all sorts of junk and spare parts that might, in some tremendously remote possibility, be useful?

Are you a squirrel, who hides caches of components in little nooks and crannies all over the ship, just so you'll always have the right component close at hand?

Are you a driller, who insists on running the rest of the crew through simulations and evacuation drills whenever possible?

Perhaps you're a doomsayer, subconsciously attempting to dissuade the rest of the crew from risking your ship by pointing out the perils of space combat.

Or maybe you deal with your worries in some other way, or try to ignore them entirely — but you can't escape the curse of the wrench. You always, always know just how close you are to catastrophe, how one small malfunction or a lucky hit in combat could turn your beloved ship into a transluminal tomb.

## Loadout

(Cybernetics) Biofueler (*Ashen Stars*, p. 128), Episealant (*Ashen Stars*, p. 129); (Viroware) Electrosense (p. 135)

## Techniques

**Technobabble:** *Ashen Stars* is largely uninterested in *how* ships work. The sorts of stories told in this game don't usually hinge on the particular capabilities of fusion reactors, and happily thumb their metaphorical noses at Einstein's relativity and closed time-like curves when it comes to faster-than-light travel. Getting bogged down in a desire for realism and scientific accuracy will not improve this game — look to real-world astrophysics for inspiration, not limitation.

Instead, focus your efforts on perfecting your technobabble. Invent new components, phenomena, or entire laws of physics as needed out of whole cloth to make your character's dialogue sound convincing — then build on those inventions, referring back to them when similar situations arise. Consistency, not realism, is the key.

For example, say your ship is rocked and the enemy degrades your Override (Taking It) spec. In the fictional universe, that means that your ship's defenses against hostile hacking attempt have been damaged. How might your wrench describe that?

- ► *You could draw on present-day computer terminology and twist it to make it sound cooler.* They've breached our intelligent firewall!
- ► *You could declare they've damaged some vital circuit.* The security matrix overmonitor just exploded!
- ► *You could invent some new phenomenon.* Damn, they've entangled quantum filaments in our noosphere!
- ► *Flipping things around, you could focus on what the bad guys' attack looks like.* They've injected a digital poltergeist!
- ► *You could just pluck something out of the air — alien technologies are part of the fabric of the everyday, so you can always use an alien term.* Our Tholos field is down!

However you describe it, you should reuse that term whenever a similar situation occurs later on. You can also work your new technobabble into other dialogue. (*'I'll install our new whomper, but I'll need to route around the power feeds to the Tholos field emitters'* or *'I'm spending a point of Decryption to read the quantum filament traces — it'll let me retrieve the deleted data from this captured tether.'*) Over time, your technobabble acquires meaning and weight in the game. You'll discover implications based on your choice of descriptive elements — your GM might include quantum filaments as a plot device in a future investigation, or you might design a new ship upgrade that cuts through the Tholos field of enemy vessels.

Your *Ashen Stars* campaign will have a different set of technologies and technobabble to other campaigns, but that's working as designed. Using technobabble frees you from having to know about real-world physics, electronics, naval engineering, computing, and other highly technical fields, or from having to read and remember too much of someone else's technobabble.

## Specialized Jargon

- ► **Biobuffer:** Depending on context, any inhabited parzt of the ship, but usually the bridge or crew quarters. The 'contents of the biobuffer' are the crew. Used as a euphemism for the death of everyone on board (*'if I don't fix this leak soon, it'll empty the biobuffer'*) or as a way of complaining about boneheaded decisions (*'why did we attack that battle cruiser? I guess there's a problem in the biobuffer.'*)
- ► **Damage Attractor:** Any part of the ship that gets hit way too frequently in combat. Wrenches develop superstitions about damage attractors, believing them to be potent luck charms.
- ► **Klorn Run:** The warren of access crawlspaces and tubes where wrenches spend far too much of their time.
- ► **Mystery Box:** The ship's translight engines.
- ► **Playroom:** The shuttle, often designated as a safe place where pilots can meddle with engineering without endangering the rest of the ship.

# Weapons Officer (Gunner)

**Investigative (0):** None

(*Consider:* Intimidation, Astronomy, Energy Signatures, Imaging)

**General (16):** Battle Console 6, Scuffling 4, Sense Trouble 2, Shooting 4

(*Consider:* Naval Tactics, Public Relations, Shuttle Craft)

## Mission Role

As the weapons officer, you operate the ship's attack and armor arrays. Your battle console shows the enemy ship (or ships, in a larger engagement), as well as the available arrays with which you can inflict damage on them or counter their attacks on you. Your ship's advanced targeting systems automatically track hostile vessels and attempt to predict their movements as the enemy pilot weaves and dodges to confuse them. You need to use your understanding of psychology and battle tactics, as well as your gut instinct, to stay ahead of the enemy pilot and guide the targeting algorithms home to a solid targeting lock.

The ship's sensor arrays are also controlled primarily from your console. In battle, you use every means available to locate and track enemies; outside of battle, you can use your ship's sensors to investigate stellar phenomena, probe nearby objects in space, and monitor the planet below while in orbit.

## Archetypes

- ► *Pale, detached; tries to minimize the connection between the holo-icons on the console and the real people in the ships being destroyed*
- ► *Dangerous gunslinger, quicker on the firing button than Death himself; the Laser with No Name*
- ► *Meditative tavak combat philosopher; appreciates the terrible burden of the battle console*
- ► *Technophile extreme weapons enthusiast; likes big booms and cannot lie about it*
- ► *Professional, ex-military gunner; reads off targeting vectors in clipped, focused manner*

## Routine

A large part of your day-to-day duties on board ship is calibration. The outer hull of your ship is studded with dozens of armor and attack arrays. You need to ensure that all those arrays are precisely in sync with the targeting algorithms, and that they're correctly orientated so they won't interfere with each other. It's bad when an enemy ship punches through your defenses and damages your ship, but it's downright embarrassing if your own attack arrays punch holes in your own shields and leave you wide open. You must also stay on top of inventory, ensuring that your ship is well stocked with ammunition and other consumables.

In battle, you work most closely with the stratco, implementing her strategic vision through the tactical application of lethal force. It's therefore customary on most ships for the gunner to have regular meetings and practice sessions with the stratco. This gunner often becomes the stratco's chief confidant and advisor.

## Loadout

(Cybernetics) Amper (*Ashen Stars*, p. 127), Ocular Input Analyzer (*Ashen Stars*, p. 131), Schrodinger Lobe (*Ashen Stars*, p. 132)

## Techniques

Modern tactical doctrine holds that a synergistic approach to weapons is the best approach, so Laser ships typically

carry four to six different types of battle array each. Different weapons have different attack profiles and capabilities, so one may be a radically more effective choice than another against a particular foe. (There's a list of the most common arrays on p. 102 of *Ashen Stars*, with further discussion on p. 138 of this book).

As ship's gunner, you're also familiar with more exotic battle arrays that are rarely encountered, or are used only by the Combine's enemies. You may, if you wish, swap out some of the standard battle arrays on your ship for these more obscure weapons.

## Attack Arrays

The bizarre weapons called antithesis drones were designed and bred by the haydrossi. An antithesis drone is a genetically engineered space-faring squid-like creature with an instinctive understanding of certain obscure fields of space-warping mathematics. If the squid latches onto its target, it sets about dismantling the underlying mathematical structure of local space-time, causing both squid and chunks of the target to cease to exist.

Raconid ships still rely on short-range projectile weapons called autoguns, although most species consider them to be hopelessly outdated. A recent refinement mounts the autoguns on remote-controlled drones that detach from the mothership and fly to the target, then rake it with a hail of machine-gun fire.

Shilliard crystalbeams somehow transcend matter and energy – they look like beams of blue-white light that become solid matter when they strike their target, smashing into the enemy with tremendous force.

Commonly used by the Galactoid Legions, pulsar cannons emit a hail of intensely bright energy darts that explode violently on impact. Sometimes, a dart fails to detonate and instead embeds itself in the target's hull; it must then be carefully disarmed by the ship's wrench.

Quietus rays, pioneered by the icti, affect only the crew of the target vessel, passing harmlessly through the hull. They sap mitochondrial energy, causing exhaustion and, given enough exposure, a painless death.

Radiation intensifiers are the traditional weapon of the ndoaites; these weapons increase the effects of all radiation around the target, causing otherwise harmless emissions to become lethally dangerous.

## Armor Arrays

Drift calculators, used by the haydrossi, respond to enemy fire by 'rolling with the punch' and shoving the ship into a new orientation, minimizing the damage sustained. While the drift calculator is supposed to then move back to precisely the original heading, pilots claim the drift always messes up their maneuvers. If you were maneuvering properly, you wouldn't get hit in the first place, pilots!

Gravity-spinners, encountered on Galactoid battlesaucers, generate an artificial curve in space-time around the ship to redirect incoming fire.

The icti necrofield takes a grisly approach to armor — instead of protecting the ship, it protects the crew by temporarily altering their biology using a combination of viroware and radiation. If you can breathe vacuum for a few minutes, it doesn't matter that your hull's been breached.

Shell cultures, derived from ndoaite biology, siphon energy from incoming attacks to grow new layers of ablative shell-like armor.

Only the fast reflexes of the raconids can fully exploit the capabilities of their interceptor rockets, which physically block incoming attacks.

Web-fields are the province of the Shilliard, who deploy energy-sapping webs that catch incoming fire. A battle involving a Shilliard vessel leaves dozens of such webs floating through space, glimmering with the disruptor beams and neutronic fusillades caught and temporarily postponed in the weave.

You may, if you wish, swap out some of the standard battle arrays on your ship for these more obscure weapons.

## Specialized Jargon

- ► **Bogey:** Originally, any hostile vessel, especially an unidentified one. During the Mohilar War, it somehow came to mean 'sensor contact that might be a lurking threat, or it could be just a glitch."
- ► **Call:** The sequence of battle arrays dictated by the stratco. To 'play the call' is to follow these orders precisely; choosing a different array is to 'break call'.
- ► **Flashburn:** To cripple an enemy vessel in a single pass.
- ► **Ifo:** Pronounced 'eye-foe', the standard slang term for a hostile. "*Ifos coming into range now!"*

- **Lock:** A targeting solution for an enemy ship. Locks can be hard (the targeting algorithms are precisely calibrated and have the enemy ship's movements correctly predicted), soft (the algorithms are almost on target, but not quite, so they need constant manual adjustment) or null (the algorithms are no help — you're firing blind).
- **Piano:** The battle console. Gunners continue the metaphor, referring to themselves as 'pianists' and battles as 'concerts' or even 'gigs'.



## Cultural Officer (Face)

**Investigative (9):** Anthropology 2, Archaeology 1, History (Combine) 1, Xenoculture 1, Downside 1, Impersonate 1, Respect 2

(*Consider:* Bullshit Detector, Flattery/Flirting, Forensic Psychology, Linguistics, Negotiation)

**General (0):** None

(*Consider:* Public Relations, Surveillance)

## Mission Role

The cultural officer's role is to deal with people in trouble, especially victims and witnesses. Lasers are eternal outsiders, dropped into unfamiliar cultures and expected to resolve tangled, confusing, and emotive situations fairly and swiftly. The cultural officer is a vital interpreter for the rest of the team, helping them identify and understand subtle cues and shades of meaning. Not every clue shows up on a tether scan.

More generally, you're the crew's go-to expert for psychological profiling, identifying patterns of behavior and historical or cultural pressures, and identifying political or cultural dimensions to a crime that are not immediately obvious.

With enough lead time, you produce briefing documents for the rest of the crew describing key elements of local history and culture. Such briefing documents are vital before visiting a synthculture or other isolationist community, as it's all too easy for a stranger to cause offense when dealing with unfamiliar customs. One wrong word can stymie an investigation by causing a witness to clam up; as the team's face, you need to stay one word ahead of your colleagues, guiding them away from dangers they can't even perceive.

## Archetypes

- *Well-meaning academic; the customs of these worlds are simply fascinating, aren't they?*
- *Streetwise cop; knows every two-bit crook and informant in the galaxy*
- *Explorer; extensively traveled in the Bleed, and has friends in the most obscure places*
- *First contact specialist, dreams of encountering new species for the first time*
- *Cybe immersion expert, uses neural rewiring to tailor personality to each new culture*

## Routine

Between missions, depending on your approach to the role, you might:

- *study academic journals and articles on different cultural groups*
- *immerse yourself in the lifestyle and beliefs of one culture after another, so you can better understand them*
- *cultivate your network of contacts and informants on different worlds*
- *stay abreast of newsfeeds from across the Bleed*

## Loadout

(Cybernetics) Nu-U (p. 129), Zeitgeist Face (p. 131); (Viroware) Peacepipe (*Ashen Stars*, p. 139), Scrambleface (*Ashen Stars*, p. 140), Wingman Ultra (p. 137)

## Techniques

### Interviewing Witnesses

In general, at least two Lasers should be present when interviewing witnesses and collecting victim statements. The cultural officer is best suited as an interpreter and mediator between the witness and another interviewer, instead of handling the whole process alone. The Lasers' status as outsiders can also be an advantage — they can ask direct questions and cut through layers of politeness, obfuscation, and assumptions to get right to the facts of the case. Ideally, let your teammates play the role of the intimidating, abrasive intruders. You then act as mediator, softening the question and rephrasing it according to the local norms — and winning the witness's sympathy and confidence by proving that you, unlike the rest of the team, understand how things are done on this world.

## Beyond the Rosetta Chip

The rosetta chip (*Ashen Stars*, p. 126) is a standard part of every Laser's equipment. It automatically translates speech from any known language into Comblish (or whatever your preferred language is). However, despite constant refinement and development by its manufacturer, the chip isn't perfect, and can miss out on subtle shades of meaning or dialect. Some cultures — especially durugh-influenced worlds — claim that the chip's translations of their language are insultingly poor, or that its translations reflect the prejudices of the programmers. Sometimes, your best course is to turn the rosetta chip off and rely on your Linguistics and your imperfect understanding of local dialects. The conversation may be more difficult to understand, but it may also be more open or honest.

### First Contact Protocol

The Combine once eagerly sought out new civilizations, seeing each first contact as an opportunity to make friends. Since the war, ships once dedicated to exploration have been pulled back to deal with internal crises, so the Combine no longer looks outward. Without the protection of the navy, many worlds — especially on the frontiers of the Bleed — fear that a botched first contact could trigger a disastrous invasion. They point to the early years of spacefaring history as a cautionary example — first contact with the tavak, for example, resulted in a bloody war between the tavak and the humans. So, following the Combine's official protocol of seeking out and embracing new civilizations is at odds with local concerns and beliefs in the Bleed; Lasers who encounter a new species must therefore make their own choice whether to pursue first contact or to minimize exposure.

All Laser ships carry the Rosetta Seed, a set of instructions and symbols designed to rapidly establish a common system of communication. The Seed is usually used in electronic form — when you encounter an alien vessel that appears to have some form of receptor, you can transmit the Seed and let them study it. Physical versions of the Seed also exist, in the form of a friendly cube whose surfaces are covered in symbols. Decoding one set of symbols causes the surface layer of the cube to crack open, revealing another set followed by another and another. As the aliens work their way to the center of the cube, they assimilate the elements needed for basic communication.

The original version of the Seed contained information about the history and technology of the Combine, as well as translight corridor charts describing the location of key Combine worlds, including the various homeworlds and the Ossa One station. There also exists an expurgated Seed that removes the corridor charts and any details about Combine technology or culture, out of fears that the original was too forthcoming and might invite attack. Your ship carries both versions of the Seed, and you must choose which one to use in a first contact situation.

## Specialized Jargon

► **Dravot:** To dravot is to impose the mores and beliefs of a higher-tech culture on a lower-tech one. The term originally referred to the illegal practice of seizing control of technologically undeveloped planets by pretending to be a deity, but has widened into a term for any abuse or interference with low-tech species. There's a strong argument to be made that the durugh dravoted the cloddhucks.

► **First!:** Bragging rights among cultural officers for successfully achieving first contact with a previously unknown species.

► **Insul:** A derogatory term for anyone who is clueless about other cultures, especially if the means to become familiar with these cultures is easily available.

► **Loclaw:** Short for 'local law', the term has connotations of problems or complications arising from the conflict between the needs of the Lasers' mission and the peculiar local legal system. "*Our shuttle was impounded by loclaw, so we had to hire an atomic rickshaw...*"

- **Metasynth:** State of cognitive dissonance common to cultural officers, where one becomes convinced the Combine is itself an artificial synthculture and everyone's just playing roles in a great and ineffable game.
- **Terrain:** The local sociopolitical situation as it affects the mission.

# Operations Officer (Bagger)

**Investigative (4):** Forensic Accounting 1, Law 1, Bureaucracy 1, Negotiation 1

(*Consider:* Downside, Data Retrieval, Decryption)

**General (12):** Business Affairs 4, Preparedness 4, Public Relations 4

(*Consider:* Communications Intercept, Filch, Infiltration)

## Mission Role

A good bagger is the difference between life and death, or at least living large and defaulting on your Upkeep payments. While you're valued for your investigative abilities on the mission, you're even more appreciated for your handling of the Laser's business affairs. A good bagger lines up contracts for the crew, minimizing (but not eliminating) downtime and keeping the crew in the public eye. Even when you're chasing down space pirates or breaking into an interstellar crime syndicate, you're on the lookout for new business opportunities and side jobs.

Some especially successful or lazy crews even hire dedicated agents, freeing their bagger from administrivia and job hunting to instead focus on investigative missions and running the team. Other baggers could never bring themselves to put their crew's finances in the hands of someone else.

In addition to handling the finances, you also work with the technical officer to cover the crew's groundside logistical needs.

## Archetypes
- *Sleazy wheeler-dealer; a used shuttle salesperson*
- *The tax collector; analytical, precise, goes through everything with a nanogap comb*
- *Durugh spymaster, sitting at the center of a web of precisely engineered plans and preparations*
- *Corporate executive turned Laser; polished, professional, and a bit soulless*

## Routine

Your downtime routine divides into two distinct activities, either of which might be a full workload for another crew member. First, working with the ship's communications officer, you handle the bidding and acquisition of new contracts for your team. If your Reputation is high enough, clients come to you. Otherwise, you've got to seek out new jobs from a variety of sources:

- *As a registered and bonded Laser crew, you're on the roster at Ossa One. All official Laser contracts must be routed through this station (although many crews do take 'off the books' nixers), but you may also be offered government work for the Combine or a client planet.*
- *Ossa One also maintains several databases where private clients can upload jobs for Laser crews to bid on. These databases are divided by region, and by category, so you can search for the nearest open jobs to your current location, or all jobs in the current cluster that call for a combat-heavy team, or only go for the highest-paying jobs, or any other combination of criteria. Any registered Laser team can bid on the Ossa One database contracts (perennial rumors claim there are secret 'black ops' or 'trusted circle' boards only accessible by a select few clients and bidders.)*
- *Other jobs come through a broker firm. The brokers have a stable of trusted Laser crews, and ensure a good match between crew and client. Reliably completing missions may result in your crew being offered preferred status with a brokerage.*
- *High-priority jobs come directly from clients, and are rubber-stamped at Ossa One after the contract has been accepted, or even after the mission is over. If a client needs help immediately (for example, an automated distress call with an escrowed rescue/ vengeance fee), or if the client is unable to reach Ossa One (say, you sign on with the scrappy insurgency fighting against their planet's oppressive government), then that bypasses the normal arrangement.*

When you actually acquire a contract, your attention turns to the team's logistical needs. Travel permits, weapons permits, docking fees, shuttle landing clearances, liaising with local government and law enforcement, buying consumables, arranging accommodation and a groundside operations center — and all that's before you arrive at the planet. You can skimp on the preparations and just arrange things on the fly, or expect your client to provide everything, and nine times out of ten everything will be fine. If things go wrong, though, you could end up sharing a cramped spaceport bunk bed with your buddy, the snoring tavak. Or the snoring tavak could end up dead because you ran out of poppers. Good baggers don't skimp.

## Loadout

Portable Datascraper (p. 134); (Cybernetics) Internal Headset (*Ashen Stars*, p. 130), Jobsbridge (p. 128), Muckraker Suite (p. 129)

## Techniques

**Post-Post-Scarcity Money:** So, what exactly is a credit (or cred)? Back in the early days of the Combine, credits were adopted by the founding members as a shared medium of exchange. You could exchange your human dollars or yuan for balla shares or kch-thk food tokens at a rate of exchange determined by the current value of the credit. As interstellar trade grew, people started buying and selling credits directly. The credit became the universal currency of the Combine and its neighbors. It was still purely an electronic currency — there was no such thing as a physical credit — but the translight communications network and banking system was so robust that there was no need for a physical form of money.

By the Utopian Era, the Combine economy had grown so strong that the credit shifted from being a medium of exchange to a method for measuring efficiency in the system. Personal credit reserves were irrelevant to most people; just as they didn't think about not having enough oxygen to breathe or enough gravity to walk, they didn't need to think about not having that outdated money stuff.

Then the war came, and the crash. Suddenly, there wasn't enough to go around, and money had meaning again. The loss of the interstellar communications grid was just as damaging. Each star system's financial system was suddenly cut off from the rest of the Combine.

These days, the credit is backed by the Combine's relief efforts in the Bleed; you can use your credits to obtain support and aid from the Proper. The value of the credit varies considerably depending on the Combine's local influence. As the Bleedists grow in power, the credit weakens. Many outlying systems have taken to using their own local currencies, which can be purchased with credits when you land. So, the farther you get from Ossa One, the less you can rely on your credits.

Common financial scams you may find yourself investigating:

- *Buying up cheap credits in a system without Combine presence. The suspect either knows the Combine intends to expand into that system, or plans to force them to re-engage.*
- *Using obscure local currencies to hide stolen funds.*
- *Taking advantage of the spotty, unreliable communications network to fool electronic banking.*
- *Reselling Combine aid and supplies.*
- *Forging physical currency.*
- *Hacking tethers to turn ordinary people into unwitting mules by hiding dirty money in their accounts when they travel from one system to another.*

## Specialized Jargon

- **Bead:** Small planetary (or even national) currency.
- **Credquake:** Upheaval in a planet's financial system when it's reconnected (temporarily or permanently) to the Combine's electronic banking network.
- **Factor:** Local agent hired before you arrive at a planet to handle logistics and support
- **Smallcred:** Fraction of a cred.
- **Snurkling:** Underbidding another Laser team for a contract, especially when the winning bidder lacks the skills or equipment needed to complete the contract.

## Survey Officer (Mapper)

**Investigative (7):** Botany 1, Geology 1, Zoology 1, Astronomy 1, Bio Signatures 1, Chemistry 1, Energy Signatures 1

(*Consider:* Forensic Anthropology, Evidence Collection, Industrial Design, Kinetics)

**General (4):** Sense Trouble 4

(*Consider:* Athletics, Ground Craft, Medic, Preparedness, Shuttle Craft, Systems Repair)

### Mission Role

As survey officer, you have two overlapping areas of responsibility. The first is to assist in your team's evidence collection and analysis efforts. The second is to guide the team safely through hostile environments.

In concert with the technical officer, you use a variety of high-tech gizmos to obtain evidence from the crime scene and the surrounding environment. Customarily, the techo handles the micro-scale stuff — collecting DNA evidence, fibers, and dust samples; taking holo-images; making forensic reconstructions of damaged items — while you apply your skills over wider areas. The techo might discover that the suspect secreted an artificial pheromone, but it would be your job to track that pheromone across the city. When there's a large amount of ground to cover or a trail to follow, that's your cue to step up.

While most of your cases bring you to safe, controlled environments like civilized, habitable worlds or cushy space stations with life support, the vast majority of the universe is utterly hostile to humanoid life. You've got the skills needed to keep your team alive out there, where *there* might be:

► *a moonlet orbiting close to a dying star, its surface seared by intense radiation*

► *a killer jungle on a world of lead-based life, where every living thing is toxic, and blood-drinking trees stalk intruders*

► *the interior of a million-year-old living starship, dying after being parasitized by a swarm of mynatid wasps*

► *the unforgiving desert of Kra, of which it's said that a traveler can find a way into higher dimensions if they wander long enough*

► *the infamous ArkWorld, a zoo planet containing specimens from across known space; the keepers were all wiped out during the early years of the war, and the planet's gone feral*

► *a partially terraformed world, abandoned by its creators, where viro-manipulations intended to turn native life into forms compatible with Terran-descended species have resulted in ghastly mutations, and the incomplete terraforming has left the planet tectonically unstable*

### Archetypes

► *Balla eco-poet, intuiting the inner beauty of the wilderness*

► *Grizzled hunter, always carries a big knife*

► *Detached forensics expert, forgets that other people don't spend all their time looking at blood-spatter patterns*

► *Excitable absent-minded scientist. Talkswaytoofast. Data! Bringmoredata!*

## Routine

Most missions don't call for any special preparations by the survey officer. As long as all your sensors and forensic gadgets are properly maintained, your shipboard job is done.

The exception is when a contract takes your team into a hostile environment. You prepare briefing documents, warning your teammates about the dangers of this particular situation. If you're going to be landing on a world infested with poisonous insects, then you might issue them a guide to the different species of bug, how to recognize the really dangerous ones, and what to do when stung. If you've got a kch-thk on board, you might also include recipes. If your mission brings you out to sea, you might brief your crew on water safety and how to spot laser-sharks. If you're lucky, they might even read them.

Preparing and double-checking any specialist safety equipment needed to traverse the hostile environment also falls in your wheelhouse. Refrain from letting rivalries or personal disputes spill over into the performance of these vital duties.

## Loadout

(Cybernetics) Bad Liver (*Ashen Stars*, p. 128), Bloodhound (p. 126), Headlight (*Ashen Stars, p.* 130), Internal Medical Schema (p. 128), Night Vision (*Ashen Stars*, p. 131), Ocular Input Analyzer (*Ashen Stars*, p. 131), Pherotracker (*Ashen Stars*, p. 132); (Viroware) Forensi-Shield (p. 135)

## Techniques

**Ambient Sensors:** 'Smart' living spaces — as found in many cities across the Bleed, as well as the better class of spacecraft —contain thousands of tiny concealed sensors, which constantly monitor the environment and adjust to maximize the comfort of the residents. A cabin on a luxury cruiser can bring down the temperature if the passenger's too warm, or adjust the artificial gravity to prevent a fall, or subtly increase the oxygen concentration to modulate the passenger's mood.

Tapping into these sensors can save valuable time during an investigation. Instead of trying to establish time of death of a murder victim using forensic evidence, check to see if there are internal sensor logs that record a spike in basal temperature consistent with a struggle, followed by a slow decline. You could even work out the species of the attacker based on the changes in oxygen concentration — a frantic raconid uses a lot more $O_2$ than a serene balla, and a human exhales a lot more water vapor than a durugh. Wiping sensor logs is one of the first things a clever criminal does, but most perpetrators aren't that smart or tech-savvy.

**Shuttle Sensors:** Your shuttle (and, for that matter, your ship) carries a standard sensor suit. You can use this to sweep for unusual energy or bio signatures from the air, covering ground much faster than you could ever manage on foot. Your shuttle sensors generally aren't calibrated for the sort of fine-grained data you'll need, but that's what spends are for.

**Tetherpointing:** Your tether is a marvel of integrated sensors and computing power, able to handle most of your scanning needs. It's a Laser model, with upgraded capabilities, but even cheap civilian tethers are remarkably flexible and sensitive devices. At the very least, every tether has multiple cameras, microphones, biosamplers, and energy scanners.

On some worlds, law enforcement agencies are permitted to access public tethers to scan for a particular face, voice or other target profile. Most governments require a special warrant for this, but a few intrusive regimes make it part of everyday crime prevention. Virtually everyone in the Bleed carries a tether, so being able to turn almost the entire population of the planet into an omnipresent sensor grid is obviously a potent investigative tool.

Even on planets where 'tetherpointing' is illegal, a technologically adept Laser could hack into the tether network to achieve the same goal, although this carries with it a significant threat to Reputation.

## Specialized Jargon

- ► **Debrain:** Confusion and disorientation seen in those reliant on technology when they enter *feedout* and suddenly find themselves deprived of instant access to information. Also used as a verb (*"Jam their signal and debrain them!"*).
- ► **Feedout:** Not having access to planetary data networks or a ship's data networks. "*Those magnetic mountains are blocking our signal, so we're in feedout.*"
- ► **K'ed:** Killed and eaten by a lifeform in the wild, traditionally a Class-K entity. Can also be used derisively — *"Bob nearly got k'ed by a rabbit."*
- ► **Oranges:** Biohazard suits.
- ► **Predder:** A trophy hunter.
- ► **The Real:** Anywhere outside the protective cocoon of Combine civilization and technology.

# Security Officer (Chopper)

**Investigative (4):** Cop Talk 1, Interrogation 1, Evidence Collection 1, Kinetics 1

(*Consider:* Downside, Intimidation, Reassurance, Explosive Devices)

**General (20):** Athletics 4, Scuffling 4, Sense Trouble 4, Shooting 4, Surveillance 4

(*Consider:* Ground Craft, Infiltration)

## Mission Role

As security officer, your job is to be dangerous. You need to appear dangerous, and you need to be able to walk the walk when some troublemaker pushes their luck. Other members of the crew have the luxury of displaying whatever demeanor they wish — it doesn't matter if a techo looks scruffy or polished, focused or lazy, covered in cybernetics or as baseline as the day she was born. You, however, have to be the team's scary backup in order to intimidate foes and to convince potential hostiles that they should just move on instead of tangling with you. You might:

- ► *carry enough firepower to outfit a small army*
- ► *build a reputation by picking fights with known toughs*
- ► *have the smell of death about you*
- ► *have a distinctly military bearing*
- ► *freak people out by appearing behind them*
- ► *be a seven-foot-tall alien monster — that usually does the trick*

You can leverage your reputation as a dangerous individual when dealing with suspects, but also with clients and witnesses. People don't hire Lasers when everything's going smoothly. If someone calls in a Laser crew, they usually want a show of force to reassure them that justice will be served.

If you're lucky, that aura of potential ass-kicking will be enough to shield you and your crew from any trouble. In situations where the punks feel lucky, or a violent confrontation is inevitable, your role is to coordinate your crew's tactical response and protect the more vulnerable members of the team.

## Archetypes

- ► *Ultraviolent ex-cop or military veteran who eats poppers for breakfast*
- ► *Alien warrior who craves honorable battle*
- ► *Chillingly calm weapons expert*
- ► *Heavy weapons specialist; carries barely legal firearms*
- ► *Cloddhuck bouncer; talks like a polite earthquake*

## Routine

You have to keep your own combat reflexes honed to a keen edge, so every security officer has some form of practice regime. You might:

- ► *keep to a regular calisthenics schedule*
- ► *study the martial arts styles of many different species*
- ► *spar with other members of the crew*
- ► *engage in virtual-reality simulations*
- ► *set up a firing range on board ship*
- ► *get into bar brawls whenever you can*
- ► *pick fights with giant monsters, who may or may not be in bars*

If you expect trouble, you should prepare the rest of the crew to face it. A contract that brings you into Galactoid space means reviewing the existing data files on Galactoid weapons and tactics; a contract on a war-torn planet means familiarizing yourself and your crewmates with the belligerents and any likely threats you'll encounter.

You must also cultivate your reputation — and doing so can endanger the crew's capital-*R* Reputation. You need to make a mark (often with your fist) on the criminal underworld, so they know and respect you, but clients may shy away from Lasers whom they see as dangerously unstable. You must reconcile these two conditions as best you can.

## Loadout

Personal Bluffer (*Ashen Stars*, p. 125); (Cybernetics) Autonomic Avenger (*Ashen Stars*, p. 127), Berserker (*Ashen Stars*, p. 128), Ocular Input Analyzer (*Ashen Stars*, p. 131), Trouble Crab (p. 131); (Viroware) Dominator (*Ashen Stars*, p. 138), Medusa (p. 135)

## Techniques

**Staying in Touch:** Headsets and tethers allow all members of a Laser crew to remain in continuous communication. While it's too much to expect that the rest of your team might stay within your protective reach at all times, take advantage of the communications links to keep tabs on their status. Stay close to the crewmates following the most hazardous lines of investigation, but always have a plan for extracting the other crew members if something unexpected happens. When danger threatens, good communication can prevent panic and increase the odds of survival. Coordinate the actions of your fellow Lasers via headset until you get to the battle zone in person.

**Known Troublemakers:** Keep ahead of trouble by spotting potential threats in advance. There are some troublemakers and belligerent cultural clades that can be encountered anywhere in the Bleed. These criminal or antisocial elements may not be connected to your current investigation, but may cause trouble for you anyway, just because you're Lasers and they don't like your kind around here.

- ► **Bleedists:** Extremists who subscribe to pro-Bleed political beliefs see Lasers as intruders from the Proper.
- ► **Bogeybrains:** Thinking too much about the Mohilar War and the Bogey Conundrum can result in psychological damage and fits of extreme violence. In the grip of this insanity, sufferers connect Lasers to the Combine, the Combine to the war, and the war to the thing they must not think about kill them kill them all make it stop.
- ► **Hardshells:** Wannabe cybes. The hardshell movement is a reaction to the fall from the Utopian Era; a harder universe requires harder people. Adherents upgrade themselves with as many cybernetic systems as they can afford. They pick fights to demonstrate how tough and unfeeling they are.
- ► **Privos:** Private muscle, a.k.a. mercenaries. Many feel that Lasers look down on them. They're right.
- ► **Scavvers:** Scavengers, who survive by stealing from ruins and war-ravaged Combine installations. As Lasers commonly carry multiple bigcreds' worth of gear, rolling a stunned Laser in an alley represents a huge windfall for a scavver gang.
- ► **Xens:** Xenophobes. Human xens often look back to the McMillenist era as a golden age, and may carry McMillenist memorabilia or replica uniforms. Multi-species Laser crews may draw the attention of hostile xens.

## Specialized Jargon

- ► **Killgun:** Any firearm not set to disruption fire.
- ► **Kinetic Exciter:** Reference to a fictional investigative device; a euphemism for physical interrogation or intimidation. *"I located the gang's hideout with my kinetic exciter".*
- ► **Pitzone:** A dangerous area of a city.
- ► **Splatter:** Reputation damage from unnecessary or excessive violence.
- ► **Wooly:** One's mental state after being hit once with NLD fire without the protection of a popper.

# Technical Officer (Techo)

**Investigative (5):** Explosive Devices 1, Forensic Engineering 1, Holo Surveillance 1, Imaging 1, Industrial Design 1

(*Consider:* Impersonate, Data Retrieval, Decryption. *Strongly consider:* Evidence Collection)

**General (12):** Infiltration 4, Systems Design 2, Systems Repair 6

(*Consider:* Communications Intercept, Filch, Preparedness, Surveillance)

## Mission Role

You're the equipment guy (or gal). Sometimes, that means leading the team's forensic evidence collection and analysis efforts. It might mean setting up specialist equipment so another member of the crew can do their job — deploying sensor buoys for the survey officer or hidden recording devices for when the chopper sweats some criminal into confessing, or helping the bagger trace a computer trail through a network. It might mean fixing damaged gear, or building a custom gadget from spare parts to deal with some unlikely problem. You carry your bag (or shuttlecraft) of tricks with you. No matter what the mystery, you can discover something useful with sufficient application of gadgetry.

Your technicial training gives you multiple overlapping perspectives on the worlds around you. Where a civilian might see a woman sitting at a café table, idly checking her tether while she enjoys her coffee, you see fingerprints smeared on the glass, fiber traces on the chair, DNA on the cup, pheromone traces in the air, a digital footprint on the local data networks, a credit trail in the payment terminal, thermal readings declining over time on a curve, quantum echoes in the artificial gravity field... everything is evidence if you scan hard enough.

## Archetypes

► *Flighty, novelty-obsessed gadgeteer, always eager to try out the latest gizmo*

► *Myopic, ultra-focused forensic technician*

► *Brilliant, egotistical computing genius, determined to impress everyone with forensic wizardry*

► *Haphazard but surprisingly efficient, pulling miracles out of a bag of junk and spare parts*

► *Sociophobic balla, retreating into predictable realm of physics to avoid emotional triggers*

## Routine

Curiosity kills the techo. If anyone's going to blindly follow the pherotrace reading into the klorn lair, it's you. Your mind can't ever stop worrying and chewing at mysteries. Even when off duty, you probably carry out your own scientific experiments or try to develop new or more sensitive forensic techniques. Your crewmates dread long downtimes: a bored techo cooped up on board a ship can be more troublesome than any Class-K entity.

You're also responsible for storing and cataloging any physical evidence or samples collected as part of a case. You must deliver all relevant evidence along with a captured criminal to ensure a successful conviction, and it's common practice among Lasers to retain a few more samples, just in case the originals are destroyed or tampered with once they leave your possession. Long-serving techos end up curators to a trophy room of microscopic forensic samples, each one testament of a case cracked with science.

## Loadout

(Cybernetics) Dataloader (*Ashen Stars*, p. 129), Flex Arms (p. 128), Headdisk (*Ashen Stars*, p. 130), Honeybee (*Ashen Stars*, p. 130), Ocular Input Analyzer (*Ashen Stars*, p. 131), Optic Slug (p. 130), Pherotracker (*Ashen Stars*, p. 132); (Viroware) Brainwave Recycler (*Ashen Stars*, p. 138), Electrosense (p. 135), Forensi-Shield (p. 135)

## Techniques

**Analysis Acceleration:** Most forensic tests take hours or days to run but you know shortcuts and experimental methods to accelerate the process. You can cross-link the forensics computer with your ship's navigational computer, and use its specialized hardware to plot the spirals of DNA molecules instead of translight corridors. You know that an inaccurate NLD blast ionizes a patch on the surface of a wall, and that ionization pattern can be made to fluoresce with a high-powered blast from one of your own weapons. Down the back of your ship's locker, you've a small jar of a precious alien reagent — recovered from a ruined world deep in the Scylla Outzone — that speeds up cell culture growth by a factor of 1000.

All these are handled by investigative spends. Your GM may disallow the spend if the accelerated results would disrupt the timetable of the scenario, in which case the onus is on you to explain why your usual quick methods are inapplicable here. Alternatively, the GM might offer you a cruel choice — you can get faster results, but at the cost of the evidence being inadmissible in court. You won't be able to use this evidence to prove that the suspect is guilty, but the faster results may be necessary to stop the shapeshifting assassin from killing again.

**Background Scans:** It would take a whole forensic lab full of scientists to accomplish what you manage on your own. Lone techos quickly master multitasking and automation. You have computer routines, laboratory robots, and other devices that quietly crunch the forensic data in the background. You might program your ship's communications array to constantly scan computer traffic on the planet below, looking for a specific keyword, or wire your tether to your pheroalarm so it bleeps if it scents someone with a particular genetic condition.

You may declare you've got a particular test running in the background. If, later in the episode, the GM wishes to offer a new line of investigation, then your background scan alerts you that it's found something interesting.

## Specialized Jargon

- **Bioprocessing:** Decay of a corpse or associated *biotraces*.
- **Biotrace:** Any form of biological evidence. Often used as a synonym for evidence from which DNA or its equivalent can be extracted.
- **Bleepy-bloop:** Generic term for any forensic gadget, especially if you can't remember what it's actually called. In front of clients, the term *forensic retroencabulator* is preferred.
- **Cryobrasion:** Damage to a biotrace from improper cryogenic suspension.
- **Forensic Retroencabulator:** A nonexistent or nonspecific forensic device. Used if you can't remember the correct name, or if you wish to bluff a client or suspect. *"This forensic retroencabulator can detect criminal thoughts! If it lights up when I point it at you, you're guilty of something."*
- **Micractor:** A handheld tractor beam, used for handling delicate items without damaging them.
- **Rupture Backwash:** Surface irradiation patterns left on the skin from firing a disruption weapon.
- **Xalo:** Physical evidence from off-world — alien microbes, dirt with a radically different chemical composition, materials exposed to unusually high concetrations of cosmic radiation or meson shrapnel.

# Medical Officer (Doc)

**Investigative (3):** Forensic Psychology 1, Bullshit Detector 1, Virology 1

(*Consider:* Anthropology, Zoology, Reassurance, Respect, Bio Signatures, Chemistry.
*Strongly consider:* Forensic Anthropology)

**General (8):** Medic 6, Viro Manipulation 2

(*Consider:* Ground Craft, Systems Design, Systems Repair)

## Mission Role

Keeping the rest of the crew alive is a full-time job on its own, especially if you've got a raconid or kch-thk on the team. As medical officer, you drag wounded crew members back from the brink of death with well-timed first aid, and then treat any lingering injuries or infection in your well-equipped sick bay on board ship. You also apply your skills to victims of crime, innocent bystanders who got caught in the crossfire, and even criminals after they've been forced into submission by your team's chopper.

While the job description says "medical officer" and not "pathologist" or "doctor", it's customary for you to handle autopsies, physical exams, viroware analysis, or other medical tests needed during an investigation.

## Archetypes

- *Grizzled old sawbones from the backworlds of the Bleed*
- *Ship's confessor and psychologist*
- *Cybe chop-shop medic — why fix it when you can make it better?*
- *Promising young doctor, whose high-flying career took an unexpected turn into the Bleed*
- *Tough-as-hull plating battlefield medic, veteran of a hundred wars*
- *Brilliant scientist, passable doctor — has trouble remembering they're live patients, not case studies*

## Routine

Between missions, assuming none of the crew needs long-term care, you install and maintain any viro- or cyber-upgrades. This is usually a simple task, requiring only a few injections, but Lasers pack far more and stranger viroware than most civilians, raising the risk of an unforeseen reaction or incompatibility. Viroware incompatabilities may cause sudden metabolic shock, so it's wise to have a trained medic on hand when installing new upgrades.

Best practices for Laser crews hold that the doc should not have a warpside console responsibility, and it's hard to argue with that. The idea of the ship's pilot or stratco running down to engineering to patch up a wounded wrench, then racing back to the bridge before the enemy ship returns fire is laughable. However, if you're part of a smaller Laser crew, you may have to do exactly that, in which case you likely spend much of your downtime practicing the quickest way to get from your console to other parts of the ship, or training the rest of the crew in basic first aid.

If you're lucky enough to be part of a large team, then you can take the doc's traditional role warpside — hanging around the bridge, making pithy comments and ostentatiously having nothing to do. There is, surprisingly, considerable value in this. As you're not focused on any particular task, you're often the one to spot problems or unusual behavior.

## Loadout

Slapdoc (p. 132); (Cybernetics) Aidkitter (*Ashen Stars*, p. 127), Bad Liver (*Ashen Stars*, p. 128), Breadbox (*Ashen Stars*, p. 128), Bushytailer (p. 127), Headlight (*Ashen Stars*, p. 130), The Black Spot (p. 126); (Viroware) Brainwave Recycler (*Ashen Stars*, p. 138), Latency Suppression (*Ashen Stars*, p. 138)

Some Laser crews argue that the doc is the one person who *shouldn't* take an aidkitter. The medical officer heals everyone else — the Laser with the aidkitter keeps the doc standing.

## Techniques

**Common Injuries in Space Combat & Associated Treatments:** If your ship takes a bad hit and one or more members of your crew are injured, you must provide treatment that will get them back to their stations as quickly as possible. Laser war stories are full of accounts of crew members who were irradiated, maimed, burned or blasted to the point of death, but hung on just long enough to finish the battle before expiring. (Rushing the mortally wounded crew member into cryo-suspension may be a less poetic fate, but at least gives you a chance to save their lives with surgery after the battle.)

- ► **Cellular Disruption:** Unlike disruption injuries from personal weapons, which present as extremely localized electrical burns, injuries from indirect naval-grade weapons fire usually take the form of NLD-like disruption to the nervous system along with numerous surface burns (injuries from direct naval-grade weapons strikes invariably present as vaporization). Treat as per NLD fire with an espresser, then apply dermal regenerator.
- ► **Exposure to Vacuum:** Reduced air pressure causes ebullism, resulting in the formation of gas bubbles in bodily fluids. These bubbles block fluid flow, impeding circulation. To treat, first return the patient to a pressurized environment (repair the damaged spacesuit, bring the patient to an undamaged section of the ship), then treat with a specialized vasoconstrictor.

- ► **Plasma Burns:** Feedback through the ship's power grid from overloaded armor arrays can cause consoles to explode. Apply dermal regeneration to relieve pain and restore essential functions; follow up with deep osteo-reconstruction.
- ► **Blast Debris:** Explosions or impacts result in injuries from flying transplex shards and other debris. Do not rely on a surface examination to determine the extent of an injury — a foreign body that left a small entry wound may also be the cause of a significant internal bleed, while the more obvious and painful surface wound may be less genuinely threatening. Scan for the presence of nonorganic objects in the patient's body (cross-referencing, of course, with the patient's cybernetic modification body log) and check for internal hemorrhaging before removing any debris.
- ► **Radiation:** Treat exposure to high levels of radation with standard anti-radiation drugs, followed by cloning of replacement skin.

## Specialized Jargon

- ► **Broad-Effect:** Any drug or treatment designed to have the same effect on multiple species. Broad-effect pharmaceuticals make the doc's job much easier; narrow-effect drugs can cause very different reactions in different species. Most Combine medicines predate the Mohilar War, so broad treatments rarely cover durugh or vas mal patients.
- ► **FBR:** Full Body Replacement — injuries so severe that the only treatment would be to clone an entirely new body. Usually used as a euphemism or black humor ("*That's a nasty shuttle crash — better prep an FBR*").
- ► **Keeper:** A crew member who spends an excessive amount of time in sick bay, getting Upkeep therapy for cyberware or viroware upgrades.
- ► **Rag & Bone:** Derogatory term for primitive medical techniques, as might be encountered in the Bleed.

# ARCS & DRIVES

## ARCS & DRIVES

The *Ashen Stars* core rulebook describes how to handle personal arcs from the GM's perspective, but that's only half the story. Players should submit their arc ideas to the GM, but should also look for ways to bring their arc into play by connecting it to events in the game, or — even better — taking a supporting role in another player's personal arc.

Let's say you've got a simple arc like *I want to find the three-armed kch-thk who murdered my uncle*, with subplots like *I discover that the kch-thk has migrated his consciousness to another body, and have to find a way to track him across incarnations* or *I learn a secret about my uncle that's hard for me to accept* or *I meet an old friend of the three-armed kch-thk, and must choose between acting honorably or forcing her to reveal information about my quarry.* In the episodes that focus on your personal arc, you get to explore one of those subplots when the GM presents it.

However, you can also seize any opportunities that arise to further your arc in other episodes that don't necessarily focus on you. If the main plot of the episode revolves around the theft of a database of known criminals from Ossa One, and your crew recovers the database, you could suggest a scene where your character attempts to break into the database in order to search for information about the three-armed bug. If you're interrogating a criminal who specializes in black-market cybernetics, you might demand he tell you about any three-armed kch-thk assassins he's run into over the course of his career.

It's even more fun if your arc clashes with that of another PC. Take *I meet an old friend of the three-armed kch-thk, and must choose between acting honorably or forcing her to reveal information about my quarry.* The obvious implementation is to make this old friend a client or suspect in a case, but if another player has a suitable subplot like *I reconcile with my former commanding officer who forced me to undergo*

*cybe-conversion,* then you have the ingredients for dramatic inter-PC conflict. Here your desire to extract information from the old friend is the catalyst that forces the other PC to act.

Don't steal the spotlight if it's not your episode. Position yourself as a dramatic foil for the star of that week's show. Ask the other player or the GM for cues about how best to bring their subplot to the fore. In the case of the stolen database, it might be best if one of the other PCs gets to talk you down, and convinces you to do the right thing instead of stealing top-secret government files. Share your subplot ideas with other players. If you worry that by sharing potential story arcs in advance, you'll lose the joy of surprise, don't worry — no plot survives contact with players unchanged.

### Drive Arcs

If you're stuck for ideas for your personal arcs, we've provided a sample arc and subplots for every drive from the *Ashen Stars* rulebook and this supplement.

### Altruism

Do the right thing, do what's best, and the Bleed will be right before you know it. Can you help everyone who needs it and still prosper?

a.  *A company planet is being bled dry by a mining corporation. The locals need help against corrupt overseers, but you're going to make powerful enemies.*

b.  *Your new enemies have worked to poison your reputation, blacklisting your crew. You get a job from a tiny space station that can barely afford to pay, but the records you find there might give you leverage to destroy your foes.*

c.  *The miners have hired a team of assassins to take you out. Capture one and survive the day, and you've finally got the proof that will improve millions of lives.*

## Atonement

Your past follows you, and your misdeeds are large indeed. Does the good you do by bringing criminals to justice outweigh your own sins?

a. *You remember little about your wartime service, so it comes as a surprise when an assassin tells you that you were a mass-murderering general—who slaughtered billions of combatants and noncombatants alike when you released viral destruction on a homeworld. If you are durugh, you worked for the Mohilar at the time; if you are not durugh, it was one or more durugh planets you exterminated.*

b. *An assignment takes you to the remains of a planet you destroyed a decade ago. Even if you don't remember it, the locals remember you.*

c. *You find a convincing method for pinning the atrocities on the memory of a dead fellow soldier, even though you were truly to blame. Do you falsely clear your name, or live with what you've done?*

## Avenger

You have a score to settle. You're awfully good at keeping score.

a. *A ship full of ancient, uncontrolled balla landed in your town, and their extreme beauty and raw emotions drove everyone who saw them—including your sister and father—forever insane. They robbed the banks, took what they wanted, and left. Do you strike out against all balla, or go after this crew in particular?*

b. *You think your sister's insane ravings may give clues to where these balla are now. Do you bring her along with you, and how are they psychically linked?*

c. *You establish a pattern that lets you track your foe. How can you stop them when you can't bear to be in their presence without wanting to worship at their feet?*

## Bleedism

This is the time for a new society, built on the smoking ruins of the Combine.

a. *You are secretly one of the movers and shakers of Bleedist independence, helping build diplomatic ties between planets and foster independence. When a mission has you solving the murder of a Combine diplomat, do you hide evidence when you think a Bleedist may have killed her?*

b. *The Bleed rumbles with rumors of civil war. Do you quash it, or encourage it, knowing that the Bleedists will probably win in the short run, but a long conflict favors the Combine?*

c. *Your known Bleedist sympathies get your crew invited to be secret spies and saboteurs—and if you don't accept, they're going to try and kill you. What do you do?*

## Civilizer

You believe that civilization will rise from postwar ashes— but that means acting civilized. Can you protect civilization without using the weapons and tools of the barbarian?

a. *A powerful magnate turns out to have secretly stolen millions of books and prewar records previously thought destroyed and lost. This information will help whole planets thrive. How do you free the information to those who can best use it?*

b. *You learn of a cabal that's working to actively turn the Bleed into a free-trade zone where profit is king. During the Utopian Era, the Combine moved beyond scarcity. Do you compromise your ideals and support a flawed form of civilization that's better than the current anarchy, but falls short of the heights you once knew?*

c. *The cabal is providing arms to a kch-thk planetary warlord and space pirate. Capture her and uncover the cabal's identities once and for all.*

## Chronicler

Actions mean little if you are not there to record them.

a. *You are hired for a difficult assignment, but only if you contract to chronicle and publish what happens. Are you being set up?*

b. *Your chronicle is becoming famous throughout the Bleed, resulting in fans following your crew around to watch you work. When one gets murdered, will you take the case—and write about that, too?*

c. *You think you find clues that a famous serial murderer is also one of your favorite authors. Can you find proof, and, if you do, are you sure enough to ruin the life of someone whose work you love?*

## Combinism

The Combine will return, as it always does. Best to be ready, prepared, and an ally instead of a threat.

a. *Corrupt Bleedists have stolen a mobile weapons platform, hoping to dismantle Combine communications beacons. You'll stop them, but can you make an example out of them as well?*

b. *A Combine diplomat and trader is convinced that everyone here has gone full-Bleedist, and plans to recommend conquering and eradication to the rejuvenating military back in Combine space. Can you convince her otherwise?*

c. *Your impartiality is under fire when you solve the murder of a Bleedist politician. When you detect a conspiracy, are you willing to follow it no matter where the trail of evidence leads?*

## Competition (Raconid)

You have to prove that you're better than everyone. How do you do that as part of a team?

a. *Your competitive streak causes tension with one of your more irritable crewmates. When both of you are trapped in a confined space, how do you learn to work together?*

b. *You rashly enter your ship in an interstellar race, and wager more money than the crew can afford on the outcome. If you lose, you lose everything.*

c. *You go undercover at a tournament that plays to your particular strengths. Do you let your taste for competition take precedence over playing to your cover?*

## Comradeship

You stand by your friends, something that will never change.

a. *One of your crew is accused of heinous war crimes, and a stranger offers you information to a mystery in your own past if you sell her out. Do you reveal that you've been approached?*

b. *You're handed evidence that suggests that a member of your crew is betraying you. How do you respond?*

c. *Framed by an old enemy for a crime you didn't commit, you must trust your crew to show you the same loyalty you've shown to them.*

## Derring-Do

Action is king, and boring discussion is for people who don't know how to truly live.

a. *You have two choices: end an investigation without a fuss, or end it in such a way that buildings explode, fleeing occurs, and your name fills the news. You'll get in massive trouble if you pick the latter; do you choose it anyway?*

b. *You have the chance to save a kidnapped hostage if your crew acts NOW, but they want to sit around and talk. How do you convince them that action is better than words?*

c. *An enemy tries to lure you into a ship-destroying trap by dangling everything you love in front of you: danger, excitement, and fame. You'd just charge in and spring the trap, sure, but is it worth the risk to your friends?*

## Entrepreneurial

Hard work lets you make your own opportunities, and you're going to change the Bleed with your wealth.

a. *You're offered a financial opportunity that involves crooked money. Is it worth the risk?*

b. *People think that being an ambitious Laser means that you can be bribed. Do you lead them on in an undercover mission, then arrest them when the time is right?*

c. *Your investments are starting to pay off, and you're offered membership to an exclusive club of interplanetary speculators. When you find out that their methods of arranging "opportunities" are far from legal, what do you do?*

## Exploration

You seek new worlds, new creatures, and new places; if there's a mystery to explore, you're there.

a. *Your inquiry into a murder reveals a previously unknown sentient species (perhaps a verpid) that prefers that their existence remain a secret. Do you respect their wishes?*

b. *An infamous bounty hunter tags, bags, and captures a member of this new species, claiming it's a beast. It's up to you to get it back.*

c. *As a reward, you're given a map to an unexplored planetoid filled with hundreds of starship ruins. Why so many, where are they from, and why were you sent here?*

## Faith
Your nufaith guides your steps, informs your actions, and salves your soul.

a. *A madman performs atrocities in the name of his nufaith... which is the same as your own. How do you discredit and arrest him without destroying faith in your credo?*

b. *Pilgrims seek you out as a source of enlightenment, claiming to have been given a vision. Is this a scam?*

c. *An official visit to your nufaith's temple makes you think that the wrong people may be in charge. Can you make corruption charges stick without being excommunicated?*

## Family Tradition
You have a reputation to live up to. It's harder than it looks.

a. *Gaining access to important evidence would be easier if the military suspects knew your family history. Do you trade on your family's military reputation?*

b. *An insane old enemy of your father has you in his sights instead, mistaking you for your old man despite you having parted ways with the Combine fleet. Survive, and you may learn a little family history in the process.*

c. *An old friend of your grandfather asks you to solve a crime that's already been officially solved... incorrectly. Succeed, and gain your family's gratitude and respect.*

## Footloose
Keep moving, and nothing is going to catch up.

a. *You start seeing similarities in the different places you go: the same graffiti, maybe even the same people. Is it your imagination?*

b. *A nufaith preacher tries to convert you to spread the faith wherever you go. If you decline, he tries viroware to convince you the hard (and illegal) way.*

c. *You track down a man who has spread disease across a half-dozen systems without knowing it. Then you learn that you may have done the same. Do you move on or find out, making things right despite the cost?*

## Hotshot
You're not just good, you're great.

a. *A murder at a balla huckster's "Academy of Beauty" puts you in the spotlight when he asks you to host the vidcast pageant. Can you solve the crime, thwart a murderer, and manage the romantic entanglements—all live, while half the Bleed is watching?*

b. *You're chosen as "Heroic Laser of the Month" by a popular publication. How do you deal with the fame when "criminals" start to falsely confess, just to meet you?*

c. *A rival challenges you to a public competition: who can solve a very public, mysterious crime first. Worth the risk?*

## Hunger Tourism (Kch-Thk)
"A full belly means little, when all food tastes like tedium."

a. *An old enemy starts tracking you through your consumption journal, arranging poison-related ambushes wherever you go. Lure him out -- and devour the things he holds dearest.*

b. *A murder investigation is compromised when a kch-thk devours the evidence. Worse, it does so before you even had a chance to sample it yourself. Do you recommend punishment?*

c. *The mission you accepted on a hostile jungle planet offers you myriad opportunities for consumption, enough that hundreds of other kch-thk invade after reading your report. You're blamed for their actions. Can you stop them?*

## Integrationist (Cybe)
Your people aren't cybes; they're just humans with cyberware. There's no reason for exclusion.

a. *You face prejudice in a difficult assignment, both from humans and militant cybes. If you can't prove you're solving the case without showing prejudice, you'll only make things worse.*

b. *Non-human individuals loaded down with cyberware ask why they, too, are not considered cybes. Can you broker a truce with cybe society to include them without prejudice?*

c. To solve a case, you need to embrace your cybernetic enhancements and delve deep into cybe culture. How far can you dive into the machine and still claim to be human?

## Justice-Seeker
You protect the weak and punish the wicked, rejecting moral platitudes in exchange for true justice.

a. A popular politician finances the illegal mining of a fragile species's homeland. Punishing him will be unpopular and difficult, but just.

b. A downtrodden population has recognized your assistance, making you briefly popular as their voice to the outside world. The infamy of becoming their symbolic spokesman starts to make your other work much more difficult.

c. You believe another team of Lasers is fixing cases and manufacturing evidence for a fee. The scandal for exposing them would be extreme, possibly discrediting Lasers across the Bleed.

## Meditative Reconciliation (Tavak)
Your practice of the meditative philosophy *gahud* molds and shapes your daily life as a Laser.

a. You volunteer your crew to rescue hostages from within a burning and rioting cybe prison, trusting your understanding of others to keep you safe.

b. You choose to oppose and dismantle an evil and manipulative interstellar corporation, despite the risk to yourself, knowing that you will create great improvement in many lives if you succeed.

c. You volunteer yourself as a negotiator with enemies you hate, trusting in your body to survive the sudden yet inevitable betrayal.

## Nowhere Else to Go
You've been as low as a person can get, and it's only up from here.

a. A difficult assignment and angry creditors threatening to recall your friends' cyberware make you fear that your Laser crew will disintegrate if you fail. How far will you go to solve this crime?

b. An enemy from your old, bad days comes to you for help, and brings a hundred awful memories with him.

c. Your experience as a vagabond can help you solve a crime, but it may also put you back on a self-destructive path. Worth the risk?

## Pathism (Haydross)
Your devotion to the mathematical philosophy of N'th'l conflicts with your role as a Laser.

a. A shipwrecked madman speaks of a transmission he intercepted, a repeating series of numbers. It might be a message from the masters of N'th'l. As you search for other survivors from the wrecked ship, do your attempts to find a copy of this transmission endanger your crewmates?

b. You decide that a random number generator might give you insight into N'th'l, and take the crew's savings to the gambling planet of New Vegas.

c. An alien prophet promises to show you the way to N'th'l. Have you found your mathematical messiah, or is he luring you into a trap?

## Phase Rider (Durugh)
Phasing between dimensions imparts ecstatic, psychedelic visions that seem to foretell the future.

a. You believe you see Mohilar in your visions, even if you are unable to describe them afterward. The scientists who wish to siphon your intellect and record these visions are not to be trusted.

b. A ship of durugh wish to follow you blindly, raising you to their prophet. Your visions indicate that this path may claim all of their lives, even as their sacrifice prevents the death of you and your compatriots.

c. You prophesize an assassination that could throw the Bleed back into an internecine war.\ No one outside of your own team believes you. How do you respond?

## Professionalism
There's no place in law enforcement for adventurers, glory-hogs, or self-obsessed "heroes" with vendettas.

a. Sloppy, amateurish rogue Lasers are making a mess of one investigation after another. It's your job to clean up their mess.

b. PR shenanigans from the durugh rogue Laser has thrown your reputation into chaos. Can you balance the books?

c. Inspired by your nemesis, Lasers on a small moon have declared martial law and are running the place like their own pleasure palace. Time to restore your good name and make an example of those who defame your profession.

## Programming
Someone has turned you into a weapon.

a. You're missing some time -- and you find out where that time is when the primary suspect in a murder turns out to be you.

b. You visit the source of your cyberware and learn that you're one of millions who have been secretly programmed as assassins. By whom, and why?

c. The person responsible is powerful politically, and threatens to trigger every sleeper agent unless you leave her alone. Do you let her succeed?

## Pursued
You're on the run. If you want to stay alive, you'd better stay that way.

a. The Combine hasn't lost all its influence in the Bleed, and a politically important Combine medical doctor has thugs trying to track you down. Thwart her, and she's likely to get a bit annoyed.

b. She's captured friends and family in order to lure you into a trap. Can you turn the tables?

c. The scientist claims that you're the last of a dozen wartime cloned soldiers, and there are secrets locked inside of you for making a better version that only dissection will reveal.

## Re-evolution (Vas Mal)
The vas kra were nigh unto gods, enlightened beings of light and knowledge -- and now you are trapped in tiny, weak sacks of meat.

a. An ancient vas kra temple may hold the secret to re-evolution, but first you have to find it from ancient legends and disintegrating records.

b. The temple is now part of a Combine prison planet, requiring you to fight or sneak your way past security to even search. Did someone in the prison help de-evolve your species?

c. You think you can restore yourself to vas kra, but the drain will kill every other vas mal. Do you re-evolve? Do you make it available for another vas mal instead, and possibly sacrifice yourself?

## Role Model
You come from a planet used as a system's garbage dump, a polluted and irradiated hellhole where your people traditionally sort and recycle waste in order to survive.

a. You joined the Lasers by lying and hiding the fact that you are Untouchable. After a suspect recognizes and blackmails you, do you tell the truth but destroy your false reputation?

b. There are those who think your sort should stay in their place. Vigilantes come after you, intending to kidnap and execute you where the example would do the most good.

c. You want to guide your people out of bondage, but a traditionalist among your kind would rather die than let you improve life on your home planet. Will you buck tradition as a new folk hero, or respect the old ways?

## Scientific Inquiry
The biggest mystery in the Bleed is going to be solved by Science... and you're going to solve it.

a. Lifting the Bogey Conundrum for a few seconds drives the subject mad, but may provide useful clues. Do you do it?

b. You traced the Mohilar invasion to an invitation sent out across the stars by a vas kra. Now you just have to track her down and find out why.

c. Using Mohilar scientific techniques to lift the Bogey Conundrum will make you famous, and it may re-ignite the war. Can the technology be used without disaster instead?

## Self-Exclusion (Balla)
You exiled yourself from balla society after your failure to contain the outward display of your emotions.

a. *You discover that you entered an emotional fugue on at least one occasion - there are gaps in your memory when you acted entirely on emotion and instinct.*

b. *You meet another balla who claims you were lovers during an emotional fugue, and she wishes to rekindle the relationship.*

c. *Your possible former lover proves willing to do anything - even threaten the lives of your comrades - to elicit another emotional response from you.*

## Sexual Adventure
Some people may be in the business to find vengeance, redemption, justice, or true love... but you're in it for the sex. You have a lot more fun than those other people.

a. *You partner with someone who is incredibly important politically, and their enemies try to use you as blackmail material.*

b. *With the affair revealed to the public, government PR fixers start using you as a political pawn for or against your friend. Do you let them, or create massive scandal?*

c. *Newly invented viroware that amplifies sexual pleasure turns out to also enable mind control. It was used against you, and you transmitted it to your politician. Can you fix things before your actions lead to war and political chaos?*

## Shell Status (Icti)
You crave the approval of your mercurial peers by taking new and better forms, but others may not appreciate your kind's strange ways.

a. *Assigned to bodyguard an important politician, you discover that he's dying of an incurable disease. Do you offer to take his body so he can carry on his life's work as a hybrid being?*

b. *Your client knew your meatshell when it was alive, and is appalled by your 'theft' of the corpse. She offers your Laser team a bonus if you leave the meatshell immediately. Do you take the bribe and lose social status, or uphold the ways of your people? And if you keep the shell, can you convince the client that you're not abusing it?*

c. *You discover that you're suffering from blackouts and amnesia. Some part of your shell's re-animated mind is rebelling against you. Do you abandon the shell, or find a way to confront this revenant personality?*

## Shipbiosis (Ndoaite)
Wounded by the war, you desire the shelter and security that comes from union with a warship.

a. *Your current assignment sends your ship into a perilous region of space. How do you overcome your fears when the rest of the crew is stranded inside an antimatter field?*

b. *Your ship is infected by a metal-eating fungus. Do you abandon ship, or try to find a cure before it eats through the hull?*

c. *An energy being temporarily inhabits your ship's systems, and offers to upload your consciousness to the ship's computer. You can become one with the ship — but do you really want to abandon your body forever?*

## Social Engineer (Cybe)
A cybe societal utopia is as attainable as the physical perfection your species has surgically acquired, and you will be the one to bring it to fruition.

a. *You learn about cyberware that can link minds while leaving personal opinions intact, but the inventor has been kidnapped.*

b. *The peaceful and unified society you helped found is going to be attacked by fearful, non-unified cybes. Whom do you betray, and how severely?*

c. *The cybe utopia integrates a cybe whose mind is poison. Along with your crewmates, enter the collective mindcape of your people and find a way to save them.*

## Something to Prove
You're going to make people pay attention, and you're going to make them pay.

a. *You failed during the war. Your cowardice got billions of people killed when you could have sacrificed your life to prevent a Mohilar attack; you didn't, and an entire planet died. Even when you can't remember the Mohilar, you remember that.*

b. You meet a scarred crew member who threatens to blackmail you with that information.

c. You uncover possible proof that you weren't really at fault. Is the evidence forged, and, if so, why?

## Something to Punch (Cloddhuck)

You're going to punch something. May as well be something that deserves punching.

a. You apprehend a wanted criminal and are transporting him back to his homeworld, but you learn that he's got powerful political connections and will escape any serious punishment for his heinous crimes. Do you take justice into your own fists?

b. An accident with a mor sohn temporarily drains you of your violent impulses. Are you a better person, or is punching part of who you are?

c. To crack a case, you must enter an alien fighting tournament. Can you resist the lure of always having omething to punch?

## Spy (Verpid)

As a creation of JaneenTech, you secretly further your masters' plans while acting as a Laser.

a. Your handler passes on information that can break this case wide open. How do you hide where you got the information so your crewmates don't suspect you're leading a double life?

b. You encounter a renegade verpid who tries to recruit you to the cause of emancipation. Are you tempted to break free of your handler?

c. You're summoned to investigate a murder — and you recognize the victim. It's your handler. Are you free, or are you the next target of the killer?

## Tech Hound

You are fascinated by alien technology, and have made it your passion to reverse engineer any that you can find, steal, or purchase.

a. You uncover bizarre new technology in a downed alien spaceship, and must struggle to return it to your ship.

b. You partially unlock the tech, revealing fascinating hints at technological power that briefly make you famous. A faceless corporation will do anything to acquire it.

c. Reverse engineered, the technology re-introduces the ancient aliens to the Bleed, vastly upsetting the existing power balance. You must choose sides and deal with those who revile and applaud your actions.

# new species

The Seven Peoples are the most influential and dynamic of the Combine's many constituent species. The Seven are either exceedingly populous, like the humans or kch-thk, or respected for their power, wisdom, and influence, like the balla, tavak, or vas mal, or came to prominence during the war, such as the durugh or cybes.

At times in the Combine's history, other species were more prominent. The quilo, for example, were instrumental in shaping the early Combine, but withdrew to their homeworld after a century of activity to collectively reconsider their philosophical beliefs. During the blazing martial period called the Annexation, the highly intelligent threevix led the Combine's research and development efforts, until the Mohilar nearly destroyed them all.

Other species, like the jalen traders or industrious clen, are collectively focused on a particular field and lack the breadth of influence and activity to count as one of the Seven. There were no jalen in the Combine navy, and only a handful of jalen serve as Lasers.

The species listed in this section might be infrequently encountered, or newcomers to the Combine, or recovering from the Mohilar War. However, all of these species have the potential for greatness — in the tumultuous years to come, they might be the saviors and champions of a resurgent Combine.

## The Cloddhucks

You are cloddhuck, and to be cloddhuck is to be mighty! Brave are the cloddhuck warriors, and indomitable is cloddhuck spirit! Other species may be older and more advanced, but age is the bringer of decay, and technology is a crutch for weak old men. Your species is young and vital, a species of warrior-poets, boisterous and brave and fearless.

Also, and this is a key point in your favor, insanely resilient.

None are as tough as a cloddhuck, except perhaps the tavak. Your warty hide covers thick slabs of fibrous tissue that's both muscle and armor. Bone spurs grow from your elbows, wrists, shoulders, ribs, and both your spines. Your bulbous eyes and the six auditory pores that stud your skull give you almost perfect awareness of your surroundings. During the war, the durugh used your kind as shock troops, sending you to storm Combine ships or dropping you from orbit.

The durugh discovered the cloddhucks centuries ago. Your species had not even discovered steam power when the durugh ships descended from the heavens and recruited your ancestors as soldiers. For a time, the cloddhucks revered the durugh as the divine Grey Gods; even now, you feel an instinctive urge to obey them. Some cloddhucks rail against this, and declare that the durugh enslaved your species in all but name, and deliberately kept the cloddhucks primitive and foolish. Others still honor the ancient ways, even though the durugh agreed to release the cloddhucks as part of their treaty with the Combine.

Savage children, the balla call you. Very few cloddhucks ever learned anything more than the most basic technical skills — why bother, when the durugh provided all the technology you needed? You honed your fighting instincts instead of wasting time studying how things work. Now, bereft of durugh support, your kind makes their way as best they can, which often means criminal or mercenary work.

While you served the durugh, they shielded you from the complexities of the universe. In that militaristic cocoon, all that mattered was the thrill of smashing your enemies, of being the strongest and toughest. Tormenting those weaker than you was sport. There was, however, little actual violence between your kind — through ritual displays of strength and bravado, you discerned which of your fellows was quickest, strongest, and most able. Cloddhuck military units self-organized into ranks; cloddhuck society was similarly determined by might and merit. Your worldview was very simple. Fight, heal, grow tougher and stronger, then fight again.

While the concerns of most species are meaningless to you, and most conversations — especially technical or academic ones — are just an irritating buzz of noise, you do possess keen intuition, a side effect of your combat senses. You have a talent for picking up on some key piece of information that's relevant to the problem at hand, even when you have no idea how it's relevant. Some suspect this talent may be low-level precognition; perhaps if the durugh had not warped your species' development, you might have more understanding of this gift.

Now, for the first time in centuries, the cloddhucks can make their own choices and their own mistakes. Savage children — but children with the strength of giants!

Cloddhuck names are short and harsh, and largely derived from durugh naming conventions. Cloddhucks who actively reject the durugh influence on their culture draw on the fragments of myth and history from pre-contact times, and take longer and more sonorous names.

**Boosts:** Intimidation, Kinetics, Health, Scuffling, Sense Trouble. (The boost to Health applies mainly to Consciousness rolls)

**Suitable Drives:** Atonement, Avenger, Bleedism, Civilizer, Comradeship, Derring-Do, Entrepreneurial, Faith, Footloose, Nowhere Else to Go, Pursued, Role Model, Something to Prove, Tech Hound

**Other Modifiers:** Hand-to-hand spike attack +1 damage, +2 free Health

**Unique Drives:** Something to Punch

**Species-Specific Abilities:** Combat Intuition

**Cybernetic Compatibilities:** Amper, Berserker, Biofueler, Phosphorolytic Battery, Schrodinger Lobe



**Cybernetic Clashes:** Aidkitter, Dataloader, Dopamine Redirector, Honeybee, Neurojolter

**Viroware Affinities:** Aggravator, Keratinized Epidermis, Skeletal Fluidity, Snakehisser

**Viroware Susceptibilities:** Dominator, Mr. Grey, Morphological Mimicry, Peacepipe

## Species-Specific Ability: Combat Intuition (Cloddhuck)

This general ability may used in two ways.

In combat, you may spend points from this pool after you make a Shooting or Scuffling roll but before you know whether or not you succeeded. Every 2 Combat Intuition points spent improves your result by 1. You may also use Combat Intuition in space combat, but at reduced efficiency — spending 3 Combat

## CLODDHUCK NAMES

**Common**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Bat | Ham | Jeb |
| Cor | Har | Luc |
| Durt | Hor | Pom |
| Gel | Ish | Sha |

Traditional

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Arhandao | Osalao | Uralada |
| Asmalo | | Urandana |

Intuition points gives a +1 improvement to the result of a Battle Console, Helm Control, or Naval Tactics roll.

Combat Intuition may also be used as an investigative ability. Your intuition can substitute for any other investigative ability to pick up a core clue. Doing so requires a Combat Intuition test against Difficulty 4. You may only gain one core clue per game session through Combat Intuition.

Note that you have no understanding of the meaning of the core clue, only where it leads. A character who learns about a criminal syndicate's meeting place through her Downside contacts might be able to warn her fellow Lasers to expect trouble when they go into the city's most dangerous neighborhood. A cloddhuck might only intuitively know that the building over there is where the Lasers need to go, with no sense of context and hence no forewarning of the dangers. This applies even to complex technical clues — you might somehow guess that the blue button is the one to press to shut down the overloading reactor, even though you have no Industrial Design ability whatsoever.

## NEW DRIVE: SOMETHING TO PUNCH [CLODDHUCK]

You have violent impulses. You need to express them. You need to punch someone or something. For the good of society, you channel this unquenchable desire down moral pathways. The purpose of your Laser investigations is to find those who deserve to be punched, so that you may then punch them and be fulfilled.

## The Haydrossi

Unlike most other sentient species, you evolved in the upper atmosphere of a gas giant. Your ancestors swam amid the clouds, grazing on smaller floaters and fleeing larger predators. Millions of generations lived and died in flight. For most of your species' existence, the concept of "solid ground" was considered a myth; in later millennia, it was elevated to an obscure and unverifiable phenomenon that could never be directly observed — after all, the pressures of the lower atmosphere would pulp the strongest explorer hundreds of kilometers before they could descend to the hypothetically solid core.

Your technological development was restricted by the lack of solid matter in your environment — the only solid objects available were the remains of other floating creatures, certain highly compressible gases, and the occasional captured meteorite fragment. You bypassed many technological developments because they were impossible or irrelevant in your unique conditions. Your species harnessed electricity long before you considered the concept of the wheel.

Your people were overlooked by the universe at large for most of their history despite a socially advanced culture and basic interstellar flight technology. You simply didn't fit the galaxy's interpretation of what the sentient being should look like, and your cultural preference for pastoral lifestyles meant that anyone taking a cursory look at one of your gas giant colony worlds assumed you were some native non-sentient species. It didn't help that most of your technology is based on gases, organic material, and the occasional minerals from asteroids captured by your planet's massive gravity well. Your vessels and technology simply read as anomalies rather than actual ships; your strange sense of aesthetics didn't help matters.

This didn't mean that you were ignorant of the Combine and their allies, quite the contrary; your people studied the Combine for decades before announcing your presence to them. Your people entered the Combine as valued allies and friends, bringing advanced mathematical theories that opened up new warp corridors previously considered unsafe for travel. It wasn't until the treaties were signed that someone realized that the kch-thk genetic alterations to exclude sentient species did not cover the haydrossi. The Mohilar War interrupted some rather tense negotiations, and postwar events have thus far prevented progression on getting the kch-thk vat data updated. There have been no documented incidents so far, but, with billions of kch-thk veterans out there, it is only a matter of time before something happens.

As a haydross you are a member of a species famous as explorers and academics. Your skills are highly sought after by Laser crews as your three-dimensional thinking is second to none in battle, and your navigation skills mean you always get to the contract ahead of the competition. Your people are known as dreamers, explorers, and thinkers; you can spend weeks caught up in the wonders of a nebula or a quantum equation. This isn't to say that you wander through life in a romantic haze; many haydrossi are dynamic figures, warriors, and explorers as much as dreamers. Your people regard joining a Laser crew as an honor, equal parts exploration and service, much like the Combine scout corps was before the war.

Your interactions with others can sometimes be difficult; your non-humanoid form puts off many people except perhaps the cybes, vas mal, and some kch-thk who look at you in a hungry manner. Despite these disadvantages you try to make others feel comfortable, forgoing the usual tactile greetings of your species and making do with gestures and sound. Sometimes you feel a little lonely; missing the constant touching that is a feature of your interaction with others of your kind. Transferring this need to touch to objects, you tend to fondle non-sentient items nearby. Many haydrossi keep pets for this purpose, there is nothing quite like the sight of a floating tripod cuddling up to a Labrador.

You range between 200 to 250 cm in height from the top of your carapace to the tips of your limbs. You display trilateral symmetry: you have three long, jointed arms that dangle down from a horizontally elliptical body. Your arms are tipped with three dexterous fingers. A mobile perception node protrudes from under your body, and your dorsal side is covered with a tough horny hide with three evenly spaced gas bladders. You can manipulate these bladders to hover and fly as you wish. If the bladders are damaged you can still walk but tend to be ungainly; you spend most of your life hovering.

Translation devices often break up your speech, making it seem choppy as you use words that don't exist in other languages. Your people have nearly two hundred words for touch, all indicating use or the pressure applied. Human scientific journals are still trying to catch up with the five hundred words your people added for mathematical concepts.

Haydrossi names have a mathematical component that denotes the coordinates of their birthplace and time of their birth. Since the other portion of their names is often impossible to pronounce, most haydrossi are known by this mathematical component or some diminution of it.



**Boosts:** Astronomy, Decryption, Kinetics, Filch, Naval Tactics

**Suitable Drives:** Altruism, Chronicler, Entrepreneurial, Exploration, Faith, Footloose, Nowhere Else to Go, Professionalism, Role Model, Scientific Inquiry, Something to Prove, Tech Hound

**Unique Drives:** Pathism

**Species-Specific Abilities:** Windriding

**Cybernetic Compatibilities:** Dataloader, Neurojolter

**Cybernetic Clashes:** Autonomic Avenger, Breadbox, Motobooster, X-Gravs

**Viroware Affinities:** Brainwave Recycler, Proprioception Booster, Snakehisser, Third Eye

**Viroware Susceptibilities:** Mr. Grey, Scrambleface, Scrambleface Ultra, Skeletal Fluidity

Special: **A**lternate Gaseous Exchange: Haydrossi exchange gases through their carapace using a complex filtration system. They can survive in a wide range of atmospheres that humans and others would find toxic and prefer worlds that have sizable amounts of helium and hydrogen. They can survive in Earth-like environments by supplementing their air intake with a simple nutrient pill.

## New Drive: Pathism (Haydross)

You adhere to an ancient religious belief, called N'th'l, that states that the haydrossi were exiles from a world cut off from the rest of the universe. This utopian planet can only be found by locating and deciphering parts of the so-called perfect equation, left behind by the masters of N'th'l as a challenge for the exiles. In the distant past the haydrossi believed that this was a metaphysical journey of the mind, but, since the discovery of the warp corridors, new versions of the faith have come to believe that this might be an actual place, hidden in some deep tangle of corridors.

You are called to seek out new places where the masters may have left clues to the location of N'th'l. You trade with others of your kind for information and are always on the look out for previously lost civilizations and ruins. You believe that if you can find all the pieces you might be able to lead your people back to their lost home, and away from the horrors of the postwar universe.

## Species-Specific Ability:

## Windriding (Haydross)

By inflating and deflating the air bladders on your dorsal surface, you can levitate, and even glide. As long as you have 1 point in this ability, you can support your own weight at will for no cost. This is the Haydross's default position.

If you have a Windriding rating of 8 or more, your Hit Threshold increases by 1.

By spending 1 point, you can cancel the effects of gravity on yourself and rise up into the air like a hot-air balloon. You continue to rise until you wish to stop or reach a point where the atmosphere is too thin. You can use this ability to glide by making a Difficulty 4 test with additional tests required for strong winds or difficult terrain as shown below. You may steer by expelling gases from your air bladders.

| Condition | Difficulty |
|---|---|
| High winds | 4 |
| Strong downdrafts or turbulence | 4 |
| Multiple objects to dodge such as washing lines in a cramped alley or flying camera drones | 4 to 5 |
| Storm or hurricane winds | 6 |

Failing a test for strong winds means you are dashed to the ground suffering +0 damage or carried far from where you intended to be. Failing a test to dodge an object means that you have collided with the object and may take damage or become entangled in it.

## Icti

You wear dead flesh like other species wear clothing. Having evolved from aquatic crustaceans on your homeworld of Bathys, from time immemorial your people have protected themselves by inhabiting and animating carcasses. You use your meatshell as armor, motility, a weapon, and in emergencies even as food; your presence retards a corpse's natural decay, and, if cared for, a meatshell can last for years before rotting into uselessness. You prefer to inhabit the corpse of an intelligent predator such as one of the Seven Peoples, the higher on the food chain the better, but are perfectly capable of animating low-status or non-humanoid corpses until given the opportunity to upgrade. Once you depart a corpse, it is no longer habitable by yourself or another icti.

You are uncomfortable and nervous when not inhabiting a meatshell, since you're excruciatingly aware of your vulnerability, but such exposure does you no physical harm. An icti without a meatshell is particularly vulnerable, possessing a maximum rating of only 4 Health and a Hit Threshold of 2 (or 3 with an Athletics rating of 8+). Your natural shape is a foot-wide, ten-pound rubbery spherical blob with hundreds of retractable antennas, each of which carries a different sensory array. You use the antennae for slow walking when not in a corpse. You can enter any recently deceased corpse through an existing wound or orifice, usually its mouth; once inside, you settle yourself in a convenient cavity and extend your tentacles throughout the body. Slight psychic manipulation, biochemical secretion, and brain manipulation do the rest, allowing you to pilot a corpse smoothly enough

that your presence is not always obvious to observers. You can only control corpses of a half-ton or less unless working cooperatively with many other icti.

Icti can only bond with, and inhabit, fresh corpses; a delay of more than ten minutes after death typically makes the process fail. As a result, icti looking for a new meatshell prefer to be right in the thick of danger, where fresh corpses are usually more plentiful than they would be in civilized areas.

You might adorn your new meatshell with identifiable tattoos, clothing or other decorations to indicate your continuing identity and status to those who observe you. Regardless, expect your personality to vary each time you take on a new shell. The consciousness of your dead host is rebooted by your symbiotic nature, often leading to radical personality swings from one body to the next. You maintain faint memories of your host's life, enough to recall the things that gave them joy and that they feared. Additional memories might be retrievable under stress. You know in your hearts that you are doing the dead a favor, because their personality and memories live on through you. You consider yourself to still be your dead host to some degree, although you understand that others may not share this attitude. Icti prefer to associate with those their host knew before the bonding.



The icti are native to the distant Scylla Outzone. Combine explorers discovered them just before the Mohilar War began. The war provided plenty of fresh meatshells, allowing the icti to grow in numbers and spread throughout the Bleed.

People are often cautious around icti, harboring a foolish fear that they may be killed for the use of their body. This is a false concern, as social customs (as well as icti law) forbid the seizure of a sentient donor's shell by force. Thus, all but the most criminally insane icti are ambitious opportunists instead of apex predators, but even this is enough to keep people on their guard. You'll need to be particularly reassuring to counter this bias.

Like the kch-thk, changing your meatshell means that you lose any cybernetic implants or viroware you had installed. Acquiring a new meatshell with implants or viroware, however, means that you gain those abilities without needing to pay an initial installation cost.

Expect your meatshell to degrade over time. It's rare for a shell to last more than a few years.

Icti use the name of their meatshell, but always pronounce it in a new way. So, if the balla Onme Star-shine (pronounced *On*-Mei Star-shine) dies and becomes a meatshell for an icti, the new entity might refer to itself as O-Nemee Stars-hine.

**Boosts:** Forensic Psychology, History (Combine), Reassurance, Forensic Anthropology, Medic, Surveillance

**Suitable Drives:** Atonement, Avenger, Chronicler, Civilizer, Comradeship, Derring-Do, Exploration, Footloose, Hotshot, Justice-Seeker, Nowhere Else to Go, Professionalism, Programming, Pursued, Scientific Inquiry; Something to Prove

**Unique Drive:** Shell Status

**Species-Specific Abilities:** Death Integration

**Cybernetic Compatibilities:** By host species

**Cybernetic Clashes:** By host species

**Viroware Affinities:** By host species

**Viroware Susceptibilities:** By host species

**Special:** Migrate Shell: An icti can abandon an existing corpse in favor of a new one. The process takes about a

minute, as the icti squirms out of one dead body and into a fresher, more robust corpse. Whatever its abilities might have been before, the new meatshell has Health at the icti's normal Health rating. When migrating shells, the icti may reassign 10 points of its general pools between abilities; this emulates leaving old information behind, and gaining new information, as the icti bonds with new memories and a new personality. You gain any species-specific abilities and drawbacks of your new shell. So, if you bond with a tavak, you become subject to the tavak battle frenzy and should consider investing some points in Resist Battle Frenzy.

## New Drive: Shell Status (Icti)

You are driven toward prestige and safety, and for the icti, that means acquiring the most impressive meatshell you can manage. There are rules and laws about such things — it is taboo to claim the body of a non-icti friend without their express permission, it is never possible to seize a meatshell that's inhabited by another icti, and murdering a living and sentient creature for their body is considered both ethically reprehensible and the height of bad manners. That doesn't stop you from deliberately placing yourself in heroically dangerous situations where deaths might occur, however. You look for opportunities to acquire unclaimed bodies that are more famous, better connected socially, stronger, or more desirable than the one you currently possess. When given the opportunity, you upgrade, and then use your new meatshell to expose yourself to even *more* hazardous opportunities. Fame, social status, and mating opportunities with other icti naturally result.

## Species-Specific Ability:

## Death Integration (Icti)

This ability measures your bond with your current meatshell.

When you drop below 0 Health, you must make a Death Integration test at Difficulty 4. If you fail, your maximum Health permanently drops by 1 (or by 2 if you were **seriously wounded**). You can only restore your Health back to its previous maximum by by taking a new meatshell.

You may also spend Death Integration to gain access to your host's memories. It costs 4 Death Integration points to temporarily gain 1 point in any investigative ability plausibly possessed by the host for one interval.

If you wish to access specific memories, it costs 1 or more Death Integration points, depending on the complexity and emotional content of the memory. So, recalling where your host left the keys before dying costs 1 point; remembering the essential elements of your love for your host's children might cost 4 or more.

If a sentient dies knowing that you murdered it for its corpse, you suffer a 2-point levy on Death Integration due to a rebellious host brain. This penalty typically lasts for the remainder of the mission, or longer at the GM's discretion.

### I DIED, THEN I GOT BETTER!

If your player character dies in the course of an episode, you can choose to return as an icti that's using your former body as a meatshell instead of creating a brand-new replacement crew member. As the icti's personality is partially based on the memories of the host, you can continue with unfinished personal arcs and drives.

# Ndoaites

As an ndoaite, you partake of a biochemical makeup utterly unlike that of any other known species. You are a lead-based entity. Your primary energy source is not digesting organic matter — instead, you infrequently consume radioactive ores, which fuel bacteria colonies inside your snail-like shell. You only need to eat once every five years on average, and even then only need to pop a few refined nuggets instead of constantly grazing on ore as your ancient ancestors did. Side effects of this diet include bowel movements that are classed as type II biohazards, and a natural radioactive glow that is harmful to other species. Due to this biochemical incompatibility, ndoaites interact with other species mostly through remote-operated robot drones.

So, people generally see you as a small flying camera or a holographic avatar, but your true form resembles a lizard with a snail's shell. You are hexapedal, with four limbs devoted to mobility and two to manipulation. A fourth vestigial pair of legs supports the weight of your shell, which contains your brain and digestive system. When threatened, you withdraw all but your manipulator-limbs and sense-node (what others call, inaccurately, your head) into the shell — they grow back quickly when damaged.

As your colony worlds are uninhabitable by other species, and you consider the worlds of other species to be uncomfortably wet, cold and bright, there was little conflict over resources throughout your spacefaring history. The ndoaites engaged eagerly — if indirectly — with other species. You pioneered various forms of telepresence and remote interaction. You helped build the Combine-spanning communications network, and once it was up and running, colonized it eagerly. Your species has a reputation as hackers, datavores, and computer obsessives; unable to comfortably interact with others, ndoaites were omnipresent online.

The Mohilar War did more than cripple your beloved network — it also destroyed more than 90% of the ndoaite worlds. Previously, you relied on your strange biochemistry to protect you from hostile invaders, as the types of planets you settled were considered hostile environments by other species. The Mohilar — whatever they were — must have been able to adapt to your homeworlds quickly, as the ndoaites were an early casualty of the war.

The remaining ndoaites are esteemed as technicians and coordinators, although your forced seclusion does sometimes result in your being overlooked or ignored by other species. On Laser crews, ndoaites excel at any warpside role, but prefer assignments as operations, survey or technical officers when groundside, as they can carry out these roles through drones.

Ndoaite philosophy urges patience and economy of action; your naturally long lifespans in comparison to other peoples give you time to take the long view.

Ndoaite names are exceedingly long and hard for non-ndoaites to pronounce. Most ndoaites adopt descriptive 'handles' instead.

### NDOAITE HANDLES

| | |
|---|---|
| Admin | Operator |
| Atomo | Ops |
| Boff | Oracle |
| Cutter | Slice |
| Mod | Snails |
| Nuke | Wires |

**Boosts:** Negotiation, Chemistry, Data Retrieval, Decryption, Industrial Design

**Suitable Drives:** Altruism, Bleedism, Chronicler, Combinism, Comradeship, Entreprenurial, Exploration, Faith, Footloose, Justice-Seeker, Professionalism, Scientific Inquiry

**Unique Drives:** Shipbiosis

**Species-Specific Abilities:** Emissions Modulation

**Cybernetic Compatibilities:** Biofueler, Dataloader, Interface Transducer, Internal Headset, Phosphorolytic Battery

**Cybernetic Clashes:** Aidkitter, Bad Liver, X-Gravs

**Viroware Affinities:** None

**Viroware Susceptibilities:** All

**Special:** All characters not protected against gamma radiation who physically share a scene with you lose one Health at the end of the scene.

## New Drive: Shipbiosis (Ndoaite)

After the devastation of the Mohilar War, some ndoaites were so traumatized that they vowed never again to be tied to a single place that could be conquered or destroyed. They took to the stars, making their homes on starships. Over time, they entered into symbiosis with those ships, as their bacteria colonies adapted to feed off the unique radioactive emissions of their homeship's engines.

You have entered into shipbiosis with your crew's starship. It is more than a vehicle — it is part of you, and you are part of it. It is home and flesh combined, a safe shell that protects you from an uncaring and hostile universe. You consider the crew to be adopted siblings, or children, or even extensions of your / the ship's body, depending on the precise nature of your relationship with the ship.

In any event, you are determined to never be trapped and vulnerable again, so you eagerly fly from world to world, mission to mission, always seeking to upgrade your self-home and to eliminate potential threats to your vessel.

### REMOTE OPERATIONS

Ndoaites are especially adept at using drones (see p. 132) to interact with the outside world. You get one drone for free.

## Species-Specific Ability:

## Emissions Modulation (Ndoaite)

You are naturally mildly radioactive, but through a combination of gastric exercises and mental discipline, you can assemble subcritical masses of radioactive elements in your intestinal tract that produce bursts of stronger radiation. When you do this, make an Emissions Modulation test against Difficulty 3; the margin determines the amount of damage inflicted on all other non-ndoaites nearby. Again, protection from radiation shields against this damage.

If you increase the difficulty to 5, you may narrow the beam to target a particular individual.

You may also generate other forms of radiation, from visible light to heat to exotic particles that show up on an Energy Signatures scan.

Finally, you may plug yourself into a ship and transfer points from your Emission Modulation pool to the ship's Output on a 2-for-1 basis (2 Emission Modulation points buy 1 Output).

## Raconids

You are a member of a species that has risen from an early-industrial culture to become a space-faring civilization in less than two centuries. Your home planet is an evolutionary cauldron of competing flora and fauna where rapid mutations produced a species with supreme adaptability and a fiercely competitive culture.

When Combine scouts landed on Raconi Prime in 2345, they were captured and interrogated to death. The information gathered from the scouts and their ship simultaneously stunned and thrilled your people, diverting your society from a path toward increasingly destructive intercine warfare.. Your people learned quickly, and drove out to the stars, first with the Combine scout ship and later in their own vessels. By the time the Combine came looking for its scouts three years later, they found raconid colonies on two nearby worlds.

Your people joined the Combine because they saw it as a means of becoming part of the most important force in the universe. The Combine in turn saw your people as in need of guidance. The raconids are a perfect example of Combine diplomacy averting what could have been a disaster; had your people been left to develop on their own they may very well have become conquering warlords.

During the war, the raconids hurled themselves against the superior Mohilar forces with the enthusiasm and rashness that defines your species. To this day, many raconids feel that your species was robbed of its rightful glory, and that it would have triumphed over the Mohilar. They blame the durugh for ending the war prematurely.

As a raconid you are defined by your competitive nature, periods of intense focus, and constant quest for new challenges. Others sometimes find you difficult to take; your need to compete over everything from mates to how much breakfast cereal you can eat can be grating. Your people feel a great swell of pride in how much they have accomplished in such a short time; it's just a pity that you feel the need to point this out to everyone.

You are always the first to volunteer for exploration missions or to touch mysterious alien artifacts. You love new things and seeing just how far you can push yourself. Overconfidence is an issue for your people, since they tend to trust in their metabolic abilities to overcome any situation. In moments of lucidity, you are capable of recognizing that you do, in fact, possess limits; such insights never survive the raging tide of confidence hormones that surge through your pulsing veins.

Translation devices tend to render your speech as a rapid-fire staccato that can be difficult for the untrained ear to pick out. Those familiar with your culture can pick out additional layers of meaning from the color changes in your neck ruff.

You are a bipedal reptilian with scaly red skin and a vestigial tail. You have three fingers at the end of each spindly limb. You sport a varicolored spiny neck ruff that bristles in response to high emotion. The spiny ruff also partially hides pulsing glands at the throat; these are the chemical sacs that

contain your famous fire breath. Your features are more humanoid than lizard and you possess a distinct nose.

Raconid names come in two forms; a short "use name" and a much longer "deed name". The deed name is never spoken aloud but often used in official documents. Deed names can run to hundreds of syllables and describe an individual's major accomplishments. Use names are typically derived from the deed name and are similar to human nicknames. They may be a key syllable from the deed name, or a Comblish word that sounds like or contains that key syllable.

## RACONID USE NAMES

| | |
|---|---|
| 'Ace' | Lhrr |
| Berk | 'Ripper' |
| Gant | 'Tank' |
| Ick | Vor |
| Kas | 'Winner' |
| 'Kicker' | |

**Boosts:** Flirting, Intimidation, Chemistry, Athletics, Shooting

**Suitable Drives:** Hotshot. Bleedism, Hotshot, Chronicler, Comradeship, Hotshot, Derring-Do, Entrepreneurial, Exploration, Footloose, Hotshot, Nowhere Else to Go, Pursued, Role Model, Hotshot, Scientific Inquiry, Sexual Adventure, Something to Prove, Seriously - Hotshot, Tech Hound, Hotshot. Also, Hotshot.

**Unique Drives:** Competition

**Species-Specific Abilities:** Metabolic Burn

**Cybernetic Compatibilities:** None

**Cybernetic Clashes:** All

**Viroware Affinities:** None

**Viroware Susceptibilities:** All

**Special: Fire Breathing:** This is the ability that the raconids are known for. The raconid metabolism burns (literally) hot, and produces a considerable amount of concentrated waste. Portions of this highly flammable material are stored in sacs under their neck ruff and ignite when they make contact with air. This fiery vomit can be used as a secondary form of attack.The usually boastful raconids are acutely embarrassed about this ability and try not to use it in public; for them it is similar to a human breaking wind. Raconids can breathe fire once per interval, using the Metabolic Burn ability instead of Shooting to attack, and inflicting +1 damage on a hit. The target is set on fire if flammable and if the margin of the attack is 2 or more.

## Unique Drive: Competition (Raconid)

To you competition is more than mere bravado and glory seeking; for you, competition is a deeply spiritual activity. You are driven by the need to test your limits and in so doing transcend this mortal plane. You live to find new challenges, and thirst to find someone who thinks they are the best, so that you can prove your worthiness by defeating them. You chase rumors of the best and brightest in your chosen field, seek them out, and challenge them to contests. You are almost obsessive about competition, turning even mundane things like routine maintenance and food consumption into ritualized challenges.

Others may confuse your actions as those of a glory hunter, but, for you, competition is a spiritual experience where you transcend a little more with each victory.

## Species-Specific Ability: Metabolic Burn (Raconid)

You can consciously manipulate your metabolism, increasing and decreasing it for a wide variety of effects. Your metabolism puts a massive strain on implants, so all viroware and cybernetics are considered clashing. Likewise, your metabolism puts a massive strain on shipboard resources, adding 2 to the Upkeep of any vessel you stay aboard. You consume food, air, and water at a rate at least four times what a human would consume in a normal day.

If your Metabolic Burn pool reaches zero, you suffer a 1-point levy on all general abilities until you recharge your metabolism by resting and eating (that just gets rid of the levy; it doesn't refresh your Metabolic Burn).

Possible Metabolic Burn effects include:

- ► *Spend 1 to add 1 to your roll in an Athletics test.*
- ► *Spend 1 to add 1 to your roll in a Sense Trouble test.*
- ► *Spend 2 to refresh your Health pool by 1.*
- ► *Spend 3 to become the aggressor in personal combat.*
- ► *Spend 4 to increase your Hit Threshold by 1 for one combat.*

## Verpid

You belong to a corporate-owned species of genetically engineered shapeshifters, bred during the Mohilar War and trained for corporate espionage across the Bleed. It's a dangerous existence; the directors of the multisystem consumer products conglomerate JaneenTech (and the Verpid Industry Laboratories that bred and genetically engineered you from an unknown species) consider your people to be their legal property and competitive advantage. It's rumored that they're willing to kill to keep your existence a secret. JaneenTech designates you as an indentured employee, working off the debt for your breeding and education by serving the conglomerate's interests.

Some verpids have fled JaneenTech, and vanished into the Bleed. These verpids are hunted by their creators.

Publicly revealing your existence will be risky. The few verpids who have tried have been hunted and killed—whether by paranoid locals or corporate assassins, you're not sure. Few people trust a known shapeshifter, and that works in JaneenTech's interest. It keeps close track of its verpid assets; you've been told that unique tracer systems bred into verpid DNA allow them to be tracked on any planets where the conglomerate has a corporate presence. It's unclear how accurate this tracking system is, or how easy it is to thwart.

The conglomerate, and the personal handler it has assigned you, gives you great autonomy as a corporate spy so long as you regularly give an exhaustive report of what you have seen and done. It may also occasionally assign you conglomerate-related missions. In exchange, you receive 2 bigcreds or more for every mission report, deposited into a secret account that you can draw on as needed. The conglomerate was happy to support your entry into law enforcement as a Laser, correctly assuming that this would give you access to information and locations that it might never discover in any other way. If you're on the run from the conglomerate, you may have become a Laser in order to keep moving from world to world, thus making yourself more difficult for your handler to track down.

If you actively rebel against the conglomerate or act out to support verpid independence, expect that your handler and sponsoring company will come after you with all the corporate resources that they can muster. They'll be limited by the conglomerate's need for secrecy, however, which will probably work in your favor.

In general, the rest of the player characters should know you're a verpid, or at least work it out after your first arc episode. Keeping your nature secret from the other players will get tiresome very quickly.

JaneenTech (or whatever subsidiary, partner, shell corporation, or shadowy laboratory you choose to use in your own campaign) is a multisystem faceless corporation that has an income greater than the gross domestic product of some entire planets. With many, many different products and services, it has its fingers in everything from soft drinks and snack foods to high-end cyberware and transportation. In particular, however, factions within JaneenTech glory in raw information. It's unknown why they're collecting such information, or for whom.

Your species is the youngest in known civilization and has few racial or holiday traditions of its own. As a result, verpids often try to assimilate cultural traditions from other species. Most verpids were raised and educated by their handler and have never actually met any other of their own kind. It's been proven that two verpids meeting for the first time might not even recognize each other as belonging to the same species.

By compacting or expanding your internal density, you can assume forms as small as two feet tall and as large as ten feet tall. You can form natural weapons from your own malleable flesh when using Preparedness, and can liquefy your body as if using the Skeletal Fluidity viroware. This certainly helps with infiltration.

In your natural shape, you are a genderless, oozing glob of oily protoplasm approximately the size of a human, weighing approximately three hundred pounds. Most verpids spend their time in preferred identities from one or more of the Seven Peoples. You can not duplicate a particular person's appearance without the Scrambleface Ultra viroware, but as long as you have 1 or more ranks of Impersonate, you can otherwise use your action to change your appearance, including species, sex, and the appearance of nonfunctional clothing. (For instance, you could make it appear as if you were a kch-thk in a space suit, but the simulated spacesuit would not protect you if you were flung out an airlock.) A Density Control test is required if you attempt to change yourself into something other than your natural form or a member of the Seven Peoples. For instance, you could impersonate a member of a durugh spaceship crew without needing to make a test, but would have to roll Density Control if you attempted to disguise yourself as a rampaging mynatid or the durugh captain's command chair on the bridge.

Cybernetics are particularly difficult to install inside a species that can change its body morphology on a whim. Worse, any shapeshifting that would reasonably dislodge a piece of cyberware causes it to become nonfunctional until re-installed; verpid spies who are imitating cybes never do so on a whim and do not shapeshift once in disguise, at least until they're ready to completely abandon the disguise and their attached cyberware. Unless a specific piece of cybernetics is essential for a mission, most verpids stick with viroware, since it remains unaffected by shapeshifting.

Verpids pick a name from those used by whatever species they're mimicking. They don't have personal names, just serial codes.

## AFTER THE VERPID EMANCIPATION

Whether led by a player character or occurring offscreen, it's possible for the verpids to emancipate themselves from their parent conglomerate and become fully recognized as a free species. Should this happen, expect a civil war of treachery and sabotage, as corporate-allied verpids strike against their free brethren, infiltrating as double- or triple-agents to help or hinder the cause of verpid independence.

Combine law forbids slavery, but does permit various forms of indenture. After all, verpids are produced at great expense by JaneenTech, and are not naturally occurring. It could be argued that a verpid is obliged to pay off the cost of its creation somehow. Another issue is JaneenTech's considerable political and economic sway — some members of the Combine Conference may be under JaneenTech influence, or might even be verpid impersonators.

It's also possible that the conglomerate may not weather the scandal of artificially creating a sentient species, breaking up into a multitude of smaller corporate entities, each with its own goals and allied verpid agents. This can be exactly as complex or straight forward as the GM and player wishes it to be.

Independent verpids will be eagerly recruited by organizations needing experienced spies and infiltrators, just as they will be highly suspected and shunned by common people who feel they have something to hide.

| EFFECT | DENSITY CONTROL DIFFICULTY |
|---|---|
| Change appearance to a generic adult member of any of the Seven Peoples, of any species | (no test needed) |
| Provide skin-flaps that allow for gliding | 3 |
| Compact to a form that's smaller than normal, such as durugh child, or larger than normal, such as a cloddhuck | 4 |
| Create +1 Damage Modifier body weaponry for use in Scuffling contests | 4 |
| Create tentacles that can manipulate light objects | 4 |
| Change to the form of a non-humanoid creature such as an animal | 5 |
| Create chitinous body armor that reduces Scuffling and Shooting damage by 1 point per attack | 5 |
| Flow through a small space, like a pipe or the gap beneath a door | 5 |
| Create gills and fins for underwater movement | 6 |
| Create wings for actual flight (assuming the gravity is low enough) | 6 |
| Simulate a simple inanimate object, such as a rock | 6 |
| Simulate a more complex inanimate object, such as a technological device (verpids find it difficult to mimic non-organic objects) | 7 |

**Boosts:** Downside, Impersonate, Infiltration, Data Retrieval, Preparedness

**Suitable Drives:** Avenger (targeted at the conglomerate), Derring-Do, Professionalism, Programming, Pursued

**Unique Drives:** Spy

**Species-Specific Abilities:** Density Control

**Cybernetic Compatibilities:** None

**Cybernetic Clashes:** All (and most shapeshifting dislodges any installed cybernetics, making verpid use rare)

**Viroware Affinities:** Chameleon, Dominator, Scrambleface Ultra

**Viroware Susceptibilities:** None (although Mr. Grey, Morphological Mimicry, Scrambleface, Skeletal Fluidity, and Tiresias are generally inferior or redundant to verpid powers)

**Special:** You may spend a point of Impersonate to make your shapeshifting nature undetectable by supporting characters for an episode. This doesn't make you lie more effectively about anything other than your impersonation, but suspicious individuals hunting for a verpid who don't have any particular reason to suspect you will move on to test and accuse others instead. Obviously, shapeshifting in front of other people while this ability is active nullifies this protection.

## New Drive: Spy (Verpid)

Whether willingly or under duress, you're continuing to act as an agent of JaneenTech or one of its many subsidiaries and shell companies. Your career in law enforcement gives you the opportunity to gather and report data and secrets back to the conglomerate. You typically are assigned a handler to communicate with; if you're needed to complete a specific mission or hunt out particular information, your handler will tell you. Otherwise, your job is to regularly report in with details of everything you've encountered. You may face disciplinary action should your reports slacken off or become less than specific. When spies go rogue and stop reporting in, they typically change their Drive to Pursued as JaneenTech sets out to reclaim its lost property (you).

### FLUIDIC EXHAUSTION

When a verpid fails a Density Control test, it enters into a state known as Fluidic Exhaustion. While exhausted, it is unable to fine-tune its appearance. It can try to shift to whatever shape it desires, but looks like a slimy, veiny, protoplasmic model of whatever it's trying to copy. When in Fluidic Exhaustion, everyone can tell you're a shapeshifter, or at least realizes you're not what you claimed to be.

Fluidic Exhaustion lasts for two intervals or until the rest of the episode, whichever comes sooner.

## Species-Specific Ability:

## Density Control (Verpid)

Viroware can allow non-verpids to change their shape, but only verpids can raise or lower their density to impersonate creatures and objects larger or smaller than members of the Seven Peoples. No test is required for simply changing appearance into a normal-sized individual. A Density Control test of Difficulty 4 allows a verpid to assume a form as small as a young child or as large as an all-shredder klorn. This does not grant any racial powers from the creature impersonated, and the Difficulty may rise if the GM feels an object is more difficult to impersonate than normal.

If the Density Control test fails, the verpid suffers from Fluidic Exhaustion (see sidebar).

Shapeshifting lasts for one interval; after this time has elapsed, the verpid must make another test to maintain its changed form.

# DECK PLANS

# DECK PLANS

This chapter describes deck plans for six of the most common types of Laser ships, along with optional rules for battle stations. These rules are best suited to groups with large numbers of players, as they offer ways for characters other than the stratco, pilot, gunner, hailer, and wrench to contribute to the battle.

## Battle Stations!

Certain locations on board a ship offer the opportunity for precise calibration of weapons systems or hasty jury-rigging of sensors. If a location can give a particular benefit in battle, it's noted on the deck plans as being a battle station. Some stations require the character at that post to spend points or make a test to gain the bonus; other stations give a bonus automatically.

A character who isn't on the bridge can't serve as the ship's gunner, hailer, pilot, or stratco. However, a character can leave the bridge, run down to a battle station, then run back up and retake their post without penalty — as long as the enemy cooperates by not calling for a showdown of that type while the character is absent. A character can occupy two bridge posts at once, but suffers a 1-point levy to their main post in the next showdown, and their secondary post suffers a 2-point levy.

For example, the runner's ordnance storage offers the opportunity to find a barrage of customized missiles. The ship's stratco leaves the bridge and runs next door to set up the missiles. As long as the enemy doesn't call for a Trickbag showdown, the momentary absence of the stratco won't affect the crew's ability to fight.

Leaving the safety of the bridge in the middle of a firefight has its risks. It takes time for a character to move from one section of the ship to another — a character cannot switch posts in the showdown immediately following the one in which the battle station was used. If you went down to the sensor room to improve the ship's Trickbag rating, you can't take over easily if the pilot gets knocked out.

Battle stations are best suited to large crews, as any crew members without a bridge post can run around the ship to where they're most needed.

## Dedicated Battle Stations

If operating a battle station gives a dedicated pool of points, then that pool may only be gained once per battle, and is lost if that station becomes unoperated at any point.

*The sick bay battle station gives a pool of 4 points that can only be spent on Medic tests. As long as the doc stays in sick bay, she can spend these bonus points. If she leaves sick bay to take on a different battle station, the pool is lost.*

## Associated Specs

Some battle stations have a spec associated with them, like Trickbag (Dishing It) or Fire (Either). If your ship is rocked and your opponent chooses to degrade that spec, then you take one die of damage as consoles explode around you. This is *in addition* to the normal Athletics test to avoid crew damage.

*The runner's wrench is down in the ordnance storage when the ship is rocked. The attacking space pirates target the runner's weapons, degrading the ship's Fire (Dishing It) spec. As ordnance storage is associated with that spec, the wrench takes a die of damage automatically.*

# RUNNER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## HULL VIEW

As the basic workhorses of interstellar travel,
runners fill the warp corridors of the Bleed.
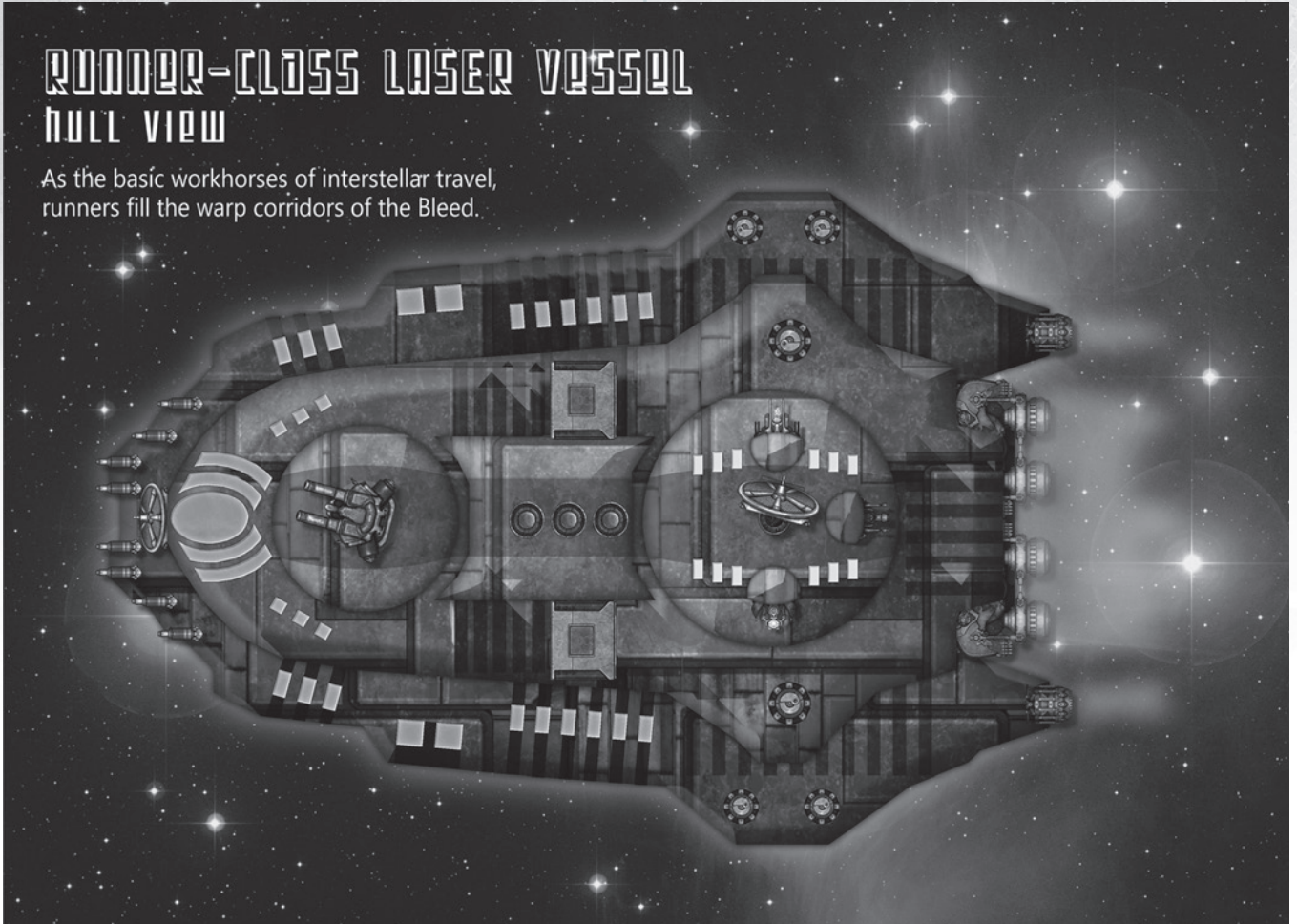
## Battle Stations & Custom Ships

If you're building a custom ship, then you get to allocate up to eight battle stations to locations on board. Stripped of the technobabble and dramatic descriptions, most battle stations involve spending a number of points from a general ability (often Systems Design) to gain one of the following benefits:

► *Spend 2 points to improve a spec by 1 for one showdown*

► *Spend 4 points to improve a spec by 2 for one showdown*

► *Spend 4 points to improve a spec by 1 until the enemy counters this advantage in some way*

► *Spend 2 points to substitute one spec for another*

► *Spend 4 points to change the number of skirmish points needed to achieve a goal by 4*

Another common battle station gives a pool of points (usually 4) as long as one character operates that station.

## Runner

The stalwart runner-class is an unsexy but reliable design. These particular deck plans show the Alamo Runner-II design, which uses the same hull as the classic model but redesigns the interior layout, shrinking the cabins to lock down space for dedicated living space, and reworking the layout of engineering so it has a smaller footprint on the lower deck.

## RUNNER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
### LOWER DECK

As the basic workhorses of interstellar travel,
runners fill the warp corridors of the Bleed.
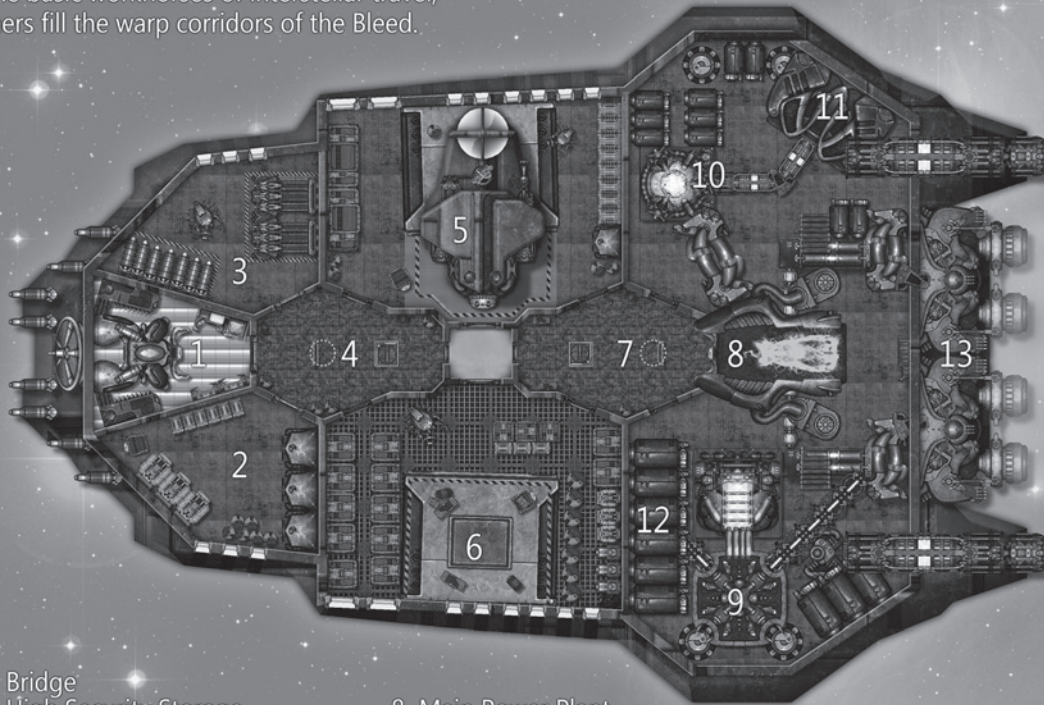
1 Bridge
2 High Security Storage
3 Ordnance Storage
4 Forward Corridor
5 Shuttle Bay
6 Cargo Hold
7 Starboard AirlockAft Corridor

8 Main Power Plant
9 Fuel Converter
10 Translight Engine
11 Translight Manifold
12 Helium-3 Storage
13 Sublight Drives

## Lower Deck

### 1. Bridge
This cramped lower bridge is intended for use by the wrench, because it allows access to key systems and battle consoles from underneath, facilitating quick repairs and hot swaps of damaged components without getting in the way. However, every station on the upper bridge can be operated from the lower bridge, making it a perfect backup command center in the event of severe battle damage.

### 2. High Security Storage
Commonly used as an armory, but can be repurposed as a holding facility for prisoners too important or too large for cryo-storage. The door is reinforced and locked with an intelligent algorithm that foils all but the most cunning attempts to bypass it.

### 3. Ordnance Storage
**Battle Station: Ready Warheads!** Spend 4 points of Systems Design to prepare a salvo of homing warheads, giving a +2 to the ship's Fire (Dishing It) spec this showdown. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Dishing It)

### 4. Forward Corridor
Unlike the cramped Mk I runner, the Mk II offers amenities like corridors.

### 5. Shuttle Bay
The shuttle launches through a hatch in the floor. The whole bay depressurizes when the shuttle launches.

### 6. Cargo Hold

### 7. Starboard Airlock Aft Corridor
**Battle Station: Shelter.** Any crew members here take only 1 damage when the ship is rocked.

### 8. Main Power Plant

The stripped-down systems architecture of the runner class gives it more raw Output than almost any other ship its size, but that means the power plant gets very hot when a lot of energy is drawn at once. If 10 or more Output is spent on a single action, then anyone in the engineering section who does not take shelter suffers 1 die of damage.

### 9. Fuel Converter

This tangle of pipes and machinery offers an excellent hiding place, as the energy emissions of the converter mask bio signatures. It is not, however, a good place to have a firefight, unless being sprayed in high-pressure liquid helium is your idea of fun. (Of the Combine species, only the exceedingly antisocial ashonuk consider showers of liquid helium to be pleasant.)

### 10. Translight Engine

### 11. Translight Manifold

Due to the ubiquity of the runner, the hardest currency in the Bleed is the runner's translight manifold. No matter where you are, you can sell this vital component for 30 bigcreds.

### 12. Helium$^3$ Storage

If hit by a lethal disruptor blast, these containers explode. Anyone nearby suffers damage — treat the explosion as having a +4 damage modifier.

### 13. Sub-light Drives

**Battle Station: Lock Down the Engines.** Once per battle, spend 4 points of Systems Repair to increase the threshold for your opponent's success in Disable Engines or any Cripple goals by 4. *Associated Spec:* Maneuver (either)



# RUNNER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## MAIN DECK

As the basic workhorses of interstellar travel, runners fill the warp corridors of the Bleed.
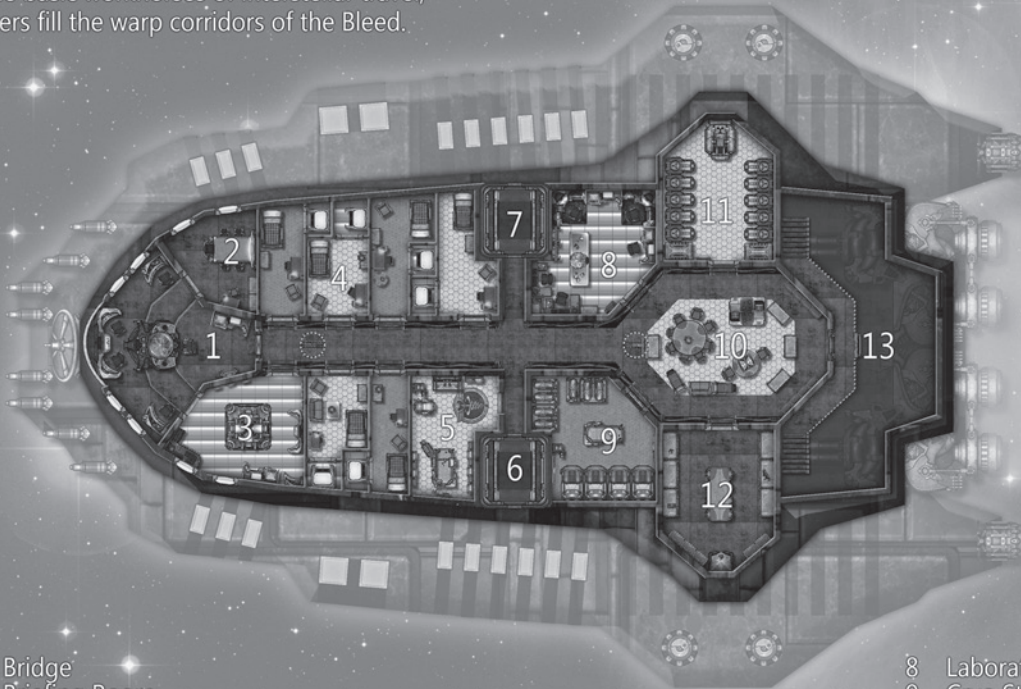
1   Bridge
2   Briefing Room
3   Computer Core
4   Staterooms
5   Sick Bay
6   Port Airlock
7   Starboard Airlock

8   Laboratory
9   Cryo Storage
10  Lounge & Kitchen
11  Hazard Storage
12  Ships's Locker
13  Engineering

## Main Deck

### 1. Bridge
The considerably more plush upper bridge on this model of runner is designed to bring a touch of class to the otherwise utilitarian aesthetics. The stratco sits in the centre, with the pilot and copilot directly ahead. The hailer's station is on the port side; the gunner sits at the starboard console. The fifth station is for sensors and ship's operations, and may be left empty in battle.

### 2. Briefing Room
Crews eager to impress clients often move the computer core to this room and reconfigure the room across the hallway into a more spacious briefing room. As it stands, any crew that includes a tavak or cloddhuck finds the standard briefing room uncomfortably cramped.

### 3. Computer Core
**Battle Station: Engage Firewalls.** Once per battle, spend 4 points of Systems Design to harden your firewalls, raising the threshold for your opponent's Datascrape by 4. *Associated Spec:* Override (Taking It)

### 4. Staterooms

### 5. Sick Bay
**Battle Station: Medic.** As long as you remain here, you have a bonus pool of 4 points that can only be spent on Medic tests.

### 6. Port Airlock

### 7. Starboard Airlock

### 8. Laboratory
The runner's compact laboratory isn't close to the facilities available onboard a Sherlock, but it gets the job done. Plus, the close proximity of the airlock allows for easy disposal of waste.

### 9. Cryo-Storage
Doubling up as a brig for prisoners and emergency life pods for the crew. The portside cryo-units are on a rack; in an emergency, a hatch opens up and they get shunted into the port airlock and automatically ejected into space. Cryo-pods are extremely power efficient; someone could drift for decades in deep freeze before being recovered and safely revived.

### 10. Lounge & Kitchen
While the Mk II refit does offer more corridor space, it does put the kitchen at the heart of the ship. Any food smells get picked up by the air recyclers and spread all over the ship. Crews that include kch-thk may find this problematic.

### 11. Hazard Storage
**Battle Station: Clean Up.** Spend 4 points of Preparedness to secure this section by locking away any fragile or hazardous items, improving your ship's Trickbag (Taking It) spec by 1 for the rest of the battle. *Associated Spec:* Trickbag (Taking It)

### 12. Ship's Locker
**Battle Station: Hand Me That Spanner!** As long as you remain here, you create a bonus pool of 4 points that can be spent by the ship's wrench on Systems Repair tests. The wrench cannot take this battle station.

### 13. Engineering
If it comes up, a successful Difficulty 5 Athletics test lets you leap off the gantry and land on a foe down in engineering.



### RUNNER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
#### UPPER DECK
As the basic workhorses of interstellar travel, runners fill the warp corridors of the Bleed.
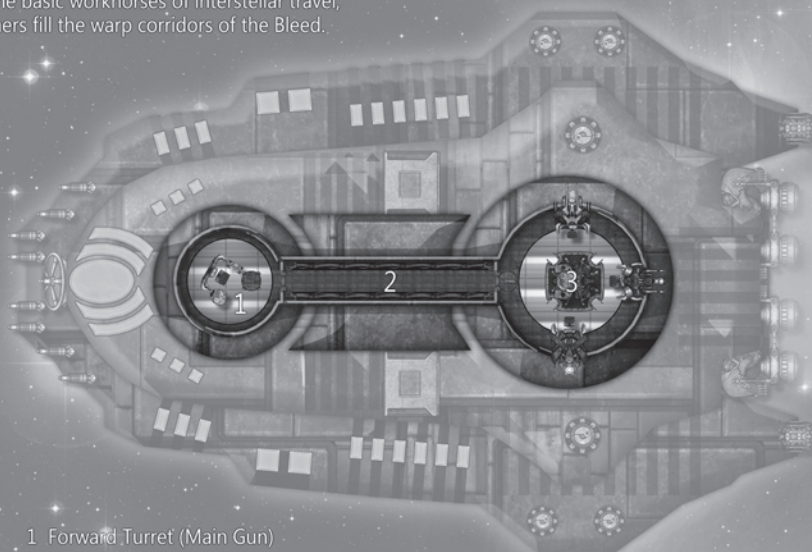
1  Forward Turret (Main Gun)
2  Crawl Space
3  Aft Turret (Fire Control and Secondary Weapons)

**HAMMER-CLASS LASER VESSEL**
**HULL VIEW**

The top-heavy hammer, with its bristling assault turret, places a premium on accurate offense. Its front-loaded design calls to mind a flying club.
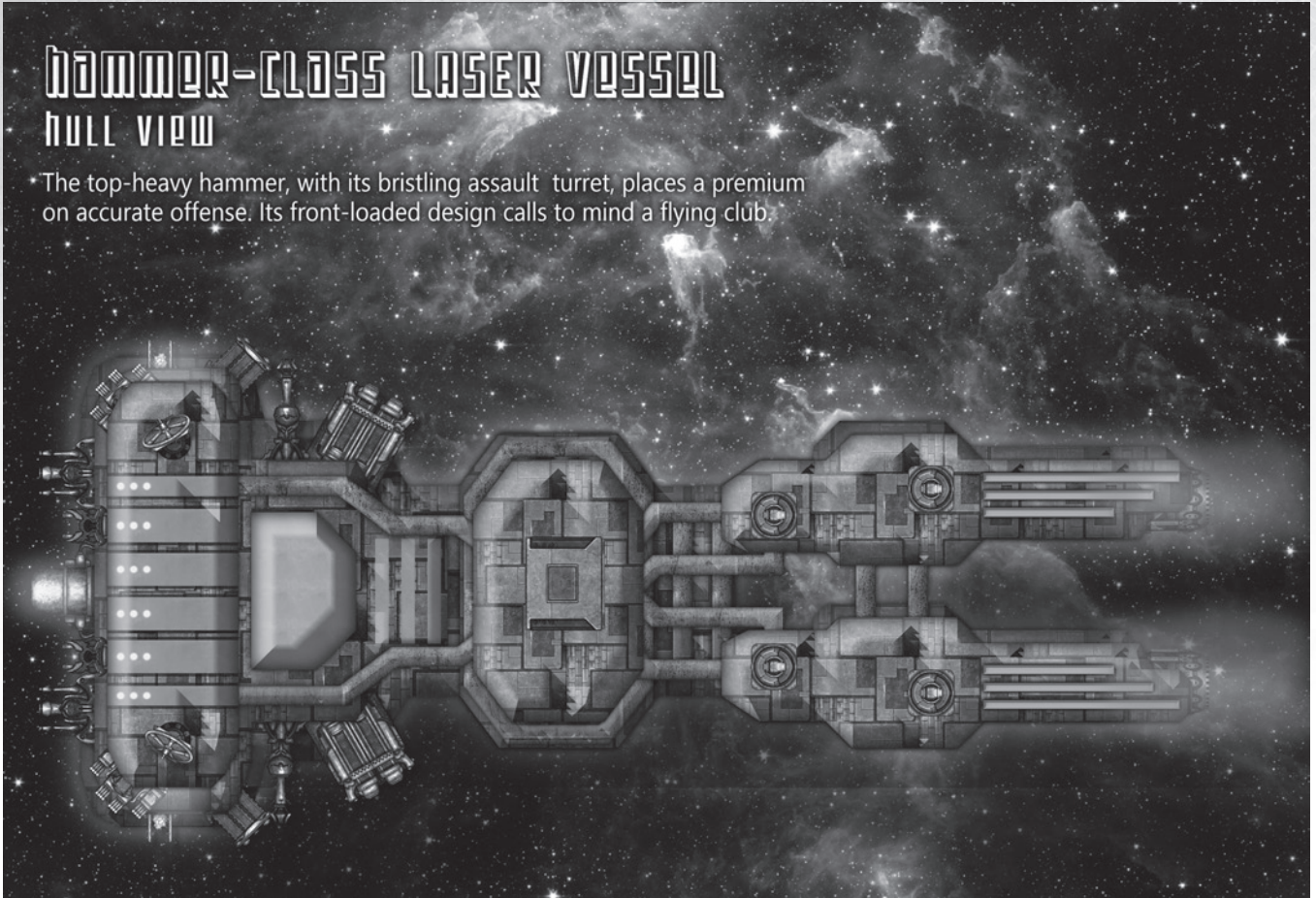
## Upper Deck

### 1. Forward Turret (Main Gun)
**Battle Station: Manual Targeting.** As long as you remain here, you have a bonus pool of 4 points that can only be spent on Battle Console. You may act as the ship's gunner from this station. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Dishing It)

### 2. Crawl Space

### 3. Aft Turret (Fire Control & Secondary Weapons)
**Battle Station: Manual Force Shifters!** Spend 4 Systems Design to improve your ship's Fire (Taking It) spec by 2 this showdown. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Taking It)

## Hammer

Originally designed as a short-range assault craft and repurposed after a contract dispute*, the hammer-class is the ship of choice for those that believe that might makes right. Former military crews love these ships as they remind them of "home"; most others miss things like recreation areas and a galley. Hammer crews often resort to dining on MREs in their bunks.

Hammers benefit from an oversized crew. Not only are there plenty of battle stations that need operators, but hammer crews also suffer plenty of casualties in their usual line of work, so it's good to have plenty of bodies.

---

\* When considering a course of action like disputing a contract, it's always best to be on the side with the fleet of brand-new heavily armed short-range assault craft.

# HAMMER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## LOWER DECK

The top-heavy hammer, with its bristling assault turret, places a premium on accurate offense. Its front-loaded design calls to mind a flying club.
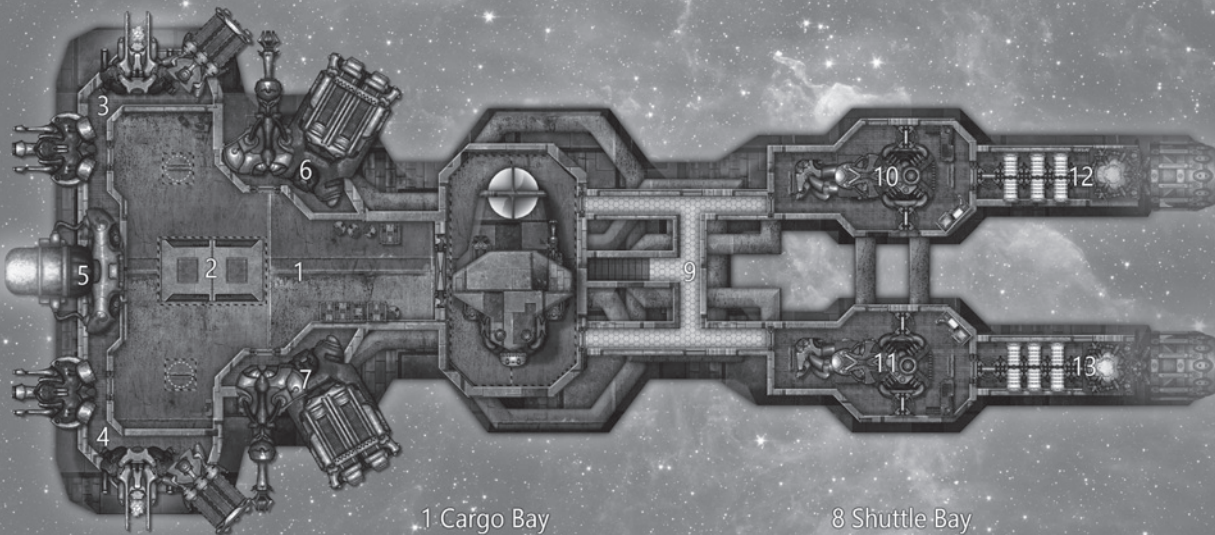
1 Cargo Bay
2 Loading Dock Hatch
3 Starboard Battery
4 Port Battery
5 Main Gun
6 Starboard Defense Hardpoint
7 Port Defense Hardpoint

8 Shuttle Bay
9 Access Corridors
10 Starboard Engine (Translight)
11 Port Engine (Main Power)
12 Starboard Drive
13 Port Drive

## Lower Deck

### 1. Cargo Bay

The hammer's primary weapons arrays are all located in this large room. The hammer's low cargo spec of -2 does not reflect the size of this room; rather, it reflects the fact that few hammer crews are willing to compromise the ship's firepower in order to pack more cargo in. You may temporarily downgrade the hammer's Fire (Dishing It) spec to 1 in order to increase the cargo spec to 1.

### 2. Loading Dock Hatch

This hatch can be controlled from the bridge, from a console at the aft end of the cargo bay, or (with a Systems Design test) from a tether. Unwanted guests like jaggar queens can be dumped out of this hatch if lured or pinned in place. It was originally designed as a bomb bay.

### 3. Starboard Battery

**Battle Station: Pass on the Right!** Once per battle, spend 2 Battle Console when your ship wins a Maneuver showdown. Use your Fire (Dishing It) spec instead of your Maneuver (Dishing It) spec when determining skirmish point awards, as you rake them with fire while maneuvering around them. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Dishing It)

### 4. Port Battery

**Battle Station: Pass on the Left!** As per the starboard battery, only now you're shooting them from the other side.

### 5. Main Gun

**Battle Station: Remove the Safety Inhibitors!** Spend 2 Systems Design when your ship wins a Fire showdown. You may spend Output to gain extra skirmish points from this exchange on a 2 for 1 basis (2 Output gives you 1 extra skirmish point). You lose Health equal to the number of Output points spent. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Dishing It)

### 6. Starboard Defense Hardpoint

**Battle Station: Concentrate Defensive Arrays!** Once per battle, spend 2 Systems Design to activate this station. Increase your ship's Fire (Taking It) and Override (Taking It) specs by 1 until your ship loses a Maneuver or Trickbag showdown. Once you lose this bonus, then your Fire (Taking It) and Override (Taking It) specs are reduced by 1 until you use the opposite station to reset your defensive arrays to normal. *Associated Spec:* Override (Taking It)

### 7. Port Defense Hardpoint

**Battle Station: Concentrate Defensive Arrays!** As per the starboard defense hardpoint, only now you're shielded from the other side.

### 8. Shuttle Bay

**Battle Station: Hammer Time!** The hammer launches its shuttle at a frightening velocity. You can use your shuttle as an improvised projectile if your ship wins a Maneuver showdown. You automatically rock the other ship, and if your goal is on the engage path, you also gain 3 extra skirmish points. Your shuttle is a write-off and must be replaced.

### 9. Access Corridors

**Battle Station: Wrench Scramble.** These tight access tubes grant the wrench easy access to nearly every major system on the ship. Double the first two Output points spent on Wrench Scrambles from this location.

### 10. Starboard Engine (Translight Drive)

The hammer's translight drive creates localized gravity disruptions that nobody has been able to account for. The engine chamber has at least five points where you can leave an object and it will just hang suspended in the air. Wrenches often use these points to hold spares or tools.

### 11. Port Engine (Main Power)

Hyperclocking a hammer is about the most aggressive thing you can do in some systems.

### 12. Starboard Drive

### 13. Port Drive

Thermal emissions from the port drive while not in combat are quite high; so much so, that some crews cook food on the drive plates. In combat, these emissions spike; more than one crew has come back to their makeshift stove after a battle to find their meal has exploded all over the drive room. There's nothing like scrubbing burnt beans out of a plasma inducer to remind you of the value of a protein bar.

## Main Deck

### 1. Bridge

Voted the best combat bridge on any non-military vessel six years in a row. The holostage offers an outstanding view of 3D combat situations and can be used as a primary display when the bridge is used for briefings. Emergency hatches lead down to the cargo bay for quick evacuation. To minimize distractions for the stratco, the weapons officers are seated in adjoining chambers while the pilot and other crew members sit behind the stratco's throne. The stratco's chair contains a hidden compartment large enough to hold a disruption pistol.

### 2. Starboard Gunnery Station

**Battle Station: Gunner.** The hammer has enough guns to benefit from having two gunners. If both gunnery stations are operated during a Fire showdown, then both operators may make independent Battle Console showdowns against the enemy ship. If either operator wins, then the hammer wins the showdown. If both operators win, then that's worth a bonus skirmish point. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Dishing It)

### 3. Port Gunnery Station

**Battle Station: Gunner.** See above.

### 4. Sick Bay

The hammer was never intended to work without the support of a larger fleet, and so its sick bay is cripplingly small. Medics facing multiple severely injured people must often resort to placing patients in cryogenic storage.

### 5. Emergency Cryo-Station

**Battle Station: Quick Freeze.** Spend 4 Medic points during a Medic Scramble to save the life of any crew member reduced to -12 Health during the Casualty Report phase. That crew member survives but is unconscious for one interval.

### 6. Staterooms

Because 'cramped, uncomfortable bunkrooms' sounds bad on a brochure. These rooms are so small that tavak or cloddhuck crew often choose to make do with makeshift quarters in hazard storage.

### 7. Cryogenic Storage

# hammer-class laser vessel
## main deck

The top-heavy hammer, with its bristling assault turret, places a premium on accurate offense. Its front-loaded design calls to mind a flying club.
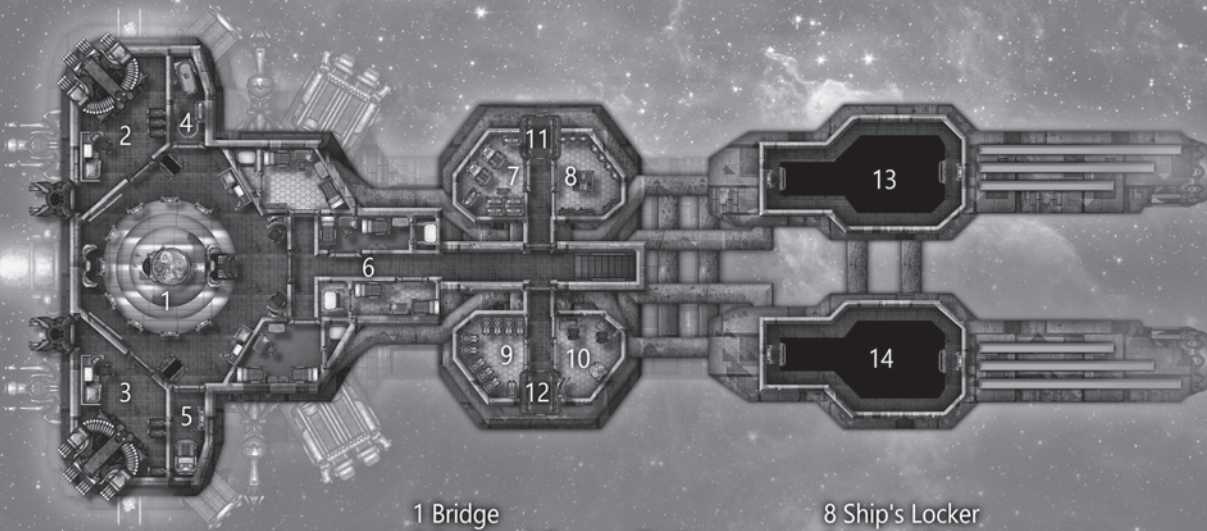
1 Bridge
2 Starboard Gunnery Station
3 Port Gunnery Station
4 Sick Bay
5 Emergency Cryo Station
6 Staterooms
7 Cryogenic Storage

8 Ship's Locker
9 Hazard Storage
10 Laboratory
11 Starboard Airlock
12 Port Airlock
13 Starboard Engine Catwalk
13 Port Engine Catwalk

## 8. Ship's Locker

As hammers weren't designed for long-term independent operation, the ship's locker often spills over into hazard storage or cryo-storage for extra space.

**Battle Station: Hand Me That Spanner!** As long as you remain here, you create a bonus pool of 4 points that can be spent by the ship's wrench on Systems Repair tests. The wrench cannot take this battle station.

## 9. Hazard Storage

## 10. Laboratory

From here, you can tap into the hammer's holostage and battle computers, allowing you to model complex events and action sequences. Once per episode, one crew member may refresh their Kinetics pool here.

## 11. Starboard Airlock

## 12. Port Airlock

## 13. Starboard Engine Catwalk

Many hammer crews expand this walkway, or just lay down a lightweight ceiling above the drive room below to create extra living space.

## 14. Port Engine Catwalk

The hammer's weapons arrays draw a lot of power, so multiple heavy-duty cables snake off through the ship's ducts from this area. You can get almost anywhere on the ship without being seen if you start here and crawl through the right duct. Of course, you'll be cooked with radiation if anyone charges up the main gun while you're in the access tubes.

## RAMPART-CLASS LASER VESSEL
### HULL VIEW

Resembling a flying castle, the defense-heavy rampart offers shelter to crews who would rather withstand a hit than dish one out.
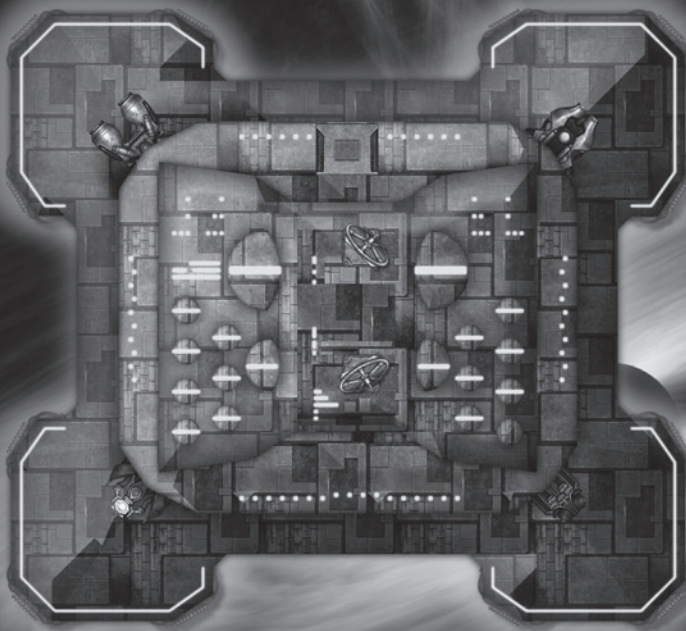
## Rampart

When Lasers see a rampart-class vessel they expect the crew to be conservative and possibly a little paranoid. This is often the case, though the rampart is more than a flying castle; its unusual design offers protection against environmental hazards and is surprisingly roomy for a starship, making it an excellent choice for search-and-rescue missions. The ship's industrial look and exposed ductwork call attention to minor technical issues that are often overlooked for months on other vessels. The corporation that first built the rampart based it on a prison transport common over a century ago. This pedigree perhaps explains the centralized door controls and the security-conscious default AI.

## Upper Deck

### 1. Bridge
The bridge on a rampart is sometimes referred to as the throne room. The stratco's chair can swivel around to face visitors entering via the elevator or the main airlock. Between the rampart's impressive defensive arrays and deliberately imposing architecture, the psychological toll is considerable; the stratco may boost either Intimidation or Negotiation when receiving guests on the bridge.

### 2. Elevator
The elevator that connects the upper and middle levels is absurdly slow moving. Crew members can have lengthy conversations while traveling to an adjacent level, or just stand around awkwardly shuffling their feet. In battle, track the location of the elevator — it's either up or down, and it takes one full showdown for it to change location. That means that characters can't change easily between battle stations on different levels.

# RAMPART-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## upper deck

Resembling a flying castle, the defense-heavy rampart offers shelter to crews who would rather withstand a hit than dish one out.
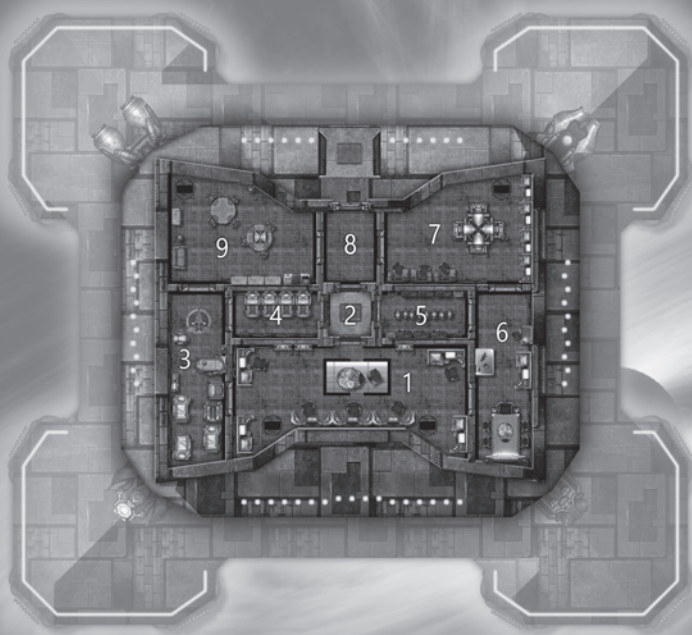
1 Bridge
2 Elevator
3 Sick Bay
4 Cryo Storage
5 Ship's Locker
6 Conference Room
7 Computer Core/Lab
8 Air Lock
9 Crew Lounge

There are four quick-access hatches (two in the bridge, one in the computer lab, one in the crew lounge), leading to the cargo bay and the port and starboard battery controls. These hatches are locked by default; they can only be unlocked from the bridge.

### 3. Sick Bay
Having the sick bay right next to the bridge gives the rampart an edge in battle — the medical officer may spend Output when making a Medic Scramble.

### 4. Cryo-Storage

### 5. Ship's Locker
The locker is located directly above one of the crew staterooms. A common modification adds a fifth access hatch, allowing the crew easy access to gear.

**Battle Station: Hand Me That Spanner!** As long as you remain here, you create a bonus pool of 4 points that can be spent by the ship's wrench on Systems Repair tests. The wrench cannot take this battle station.

### 6. Conference Room
The empty area at the far end of the room from the conference table contains a full-scale holostage, which can be used to project mission briefings or interview clients.

### 7. Computer Core/Lab
**Battle Station: Lock Down the Core!** A crew member can make a 4-point Data Retrieval spend to bring the vessel's backup computer core online mid-combat, resetting the network permissions and passwords to frustrate hackers. This increases the skirmish point total needed for Cripple for Boarding or Datascrape goals against the rampart by 4. *Associated Spec:* Override (Taking It)

## 8. Air Lock

## 9. Crew Lounge
Rampart crews joke that the lead designer must have had one too many bad meals because he placed the sick bay right beside the cooking area. Some crews choose to switch the crew lounge and laboratory locations so that the crew doesn't have to eat and rest beside the sick bay. This has the added advantage of placing the laboratory close to sick bay.

## Hull
The rampart has a number of "compression cavities": gaps between the exterior hull and interior bulkheads built to prevent the transfer of kinetic energy to sensitive locations on the ship. These cavities are sometimes used by smugglers to hide goods or by durugh who phase through the bulkheads to hide themselves.

## Main Deck

## 1. Shuttle Bay
The Rampart boasts a huge shuttle bay with twin shuttles. The starboard and port airlocks include cradles that slide the shuttle out; the illuminated tracks in the deck plating guide shuttles toward the forward exit, which is usually used for receiving cargo.

Crews who want more cargo space often divide the shuttle bay in two, welding the forward and one of the side airlocks shut and replacing one of the shuttles with cargo storage. Others appreciate the sense of space — and the field of fire.

## 2. Elevator
See the complaints about the elevator on the upper deck, p. 99. There's just enough clearance for a crew member to hide under the elevator when it's on this level.



RAMPART-CLASS LASER VESSEL
main deck

Resembling a flying castle, the defense-heavy rampart offers shelter to crews who would rather withstand a hit than dish one out.
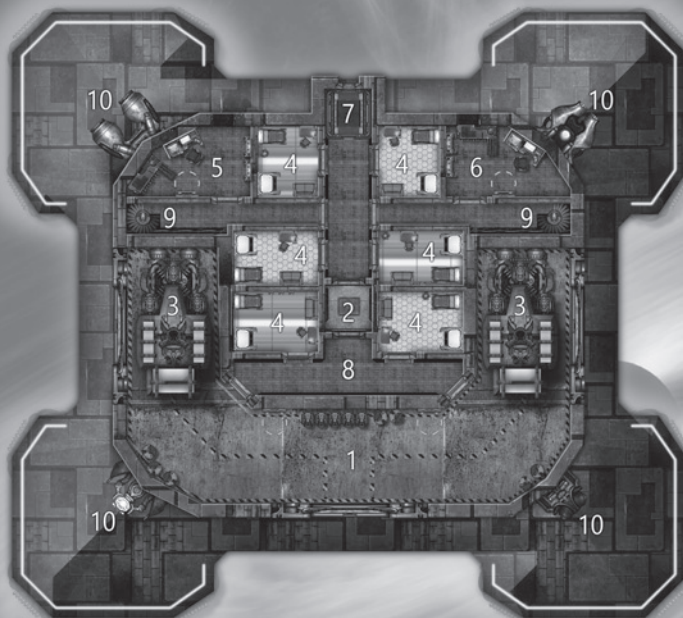
1 Shuttle Bay
2 Elevator
3 Shuttles
4 Crew Quarters
5 Starboard Battery Control
6 Port Battery Control
7 Main Airlock
8 Shuttle Access Corridor
9 Engineering Access
10 Weapon Hardpoints

### 3. Shuttles

**Battle Station: Shuttle Guns!** For such big ships, ramparts are undergunned. Brave (if foolhardy) crew members can take the controls of a shuttle, open the side airlock, slide out on the cradle, and start firing during a Fire showdown. Spending 2 points of Shuttle Craft increases the rampart's Fire (Dishing It) spec by 1 for the showdown. *Associated Spec:* Fire (either)

### 4. Staterooms

The rampart boasts luxurious accommodations with crews having plenty of personal space. For Laser crews who don't get a lot of shore leave, this can be a lifesaver. Some crews convert the extra quarters into recreation areas or passenger space, doubling or tripling the bunks in each room.

### 5. Starboard Battery Control

**Battle Station: Dedicated Operator.** Spending 4 Systems Design or Battle Console here improves any one of the ship's specs by 1. This bonus is lost if this station becomes unmanned during the battle. *Associated Spec:* Whichever one you're improving.

### 6. Port Battery Control

Exactly the same as starboard battery control. Operators cannot double up on the same spec — you can't both improve the same area of the ship's performance.

### 7. Main Airlock.

A so-called 'murder-hole switch' on the bridge seals all doors leading into the corridor adjacent to this airlock, then floods the corridor with reactor coolant. That's got a +2 damage modifier, and hits every round, rapidly freezing anyone in the killing zone. The cleanup afterward involves chipping shards of frozen spacesuit-covered meat out of the ice and throwing them into the airlock, but it's better than the alternative of waiting for the horrible mess to thaw.

### 8. Shuttle Access Corridor

The designated party corridor on every rampart.

### 9. Engineering Access

These narrow spiral staircases are the standard crew access to the lower deck. On command from the bridge, the stairs retract, rising and locking together to become a solid barrier that seals off the lower section of the ship. Empirical testing has determined that a full-grown end-klorn is incapable of breaching this barrier. Admit it — now you're thinking about what you'd do if a full-grown end-klorn got lose on your ship. That's why you need a rampart. The designers have already thought about all the end-klorn-related questions.

### 10. Weapon Hardpoints

The external hardpoints installed on the rampart allow for easy installation of a wide variety of weapon emplacements or other bolt-ons. Bolt-ons that affect the Fire (Dishing It) spec cost 1 bigcred less to install.

## Lower Deck

### 1. Sub-light Drive

**Battle Station: Castling.** Most ships have a discernable orientation. They've got drives at the rear, and some sort of prow or nosecone at the front. Ramparts are flying cubes; the front of the ship is almost identical to the sides, other than differing numbers of airlocks and weapons arrays. Even the ship's drives are evenly distributed around the rear hull. This means that it's possible for a rampart to make alarmingly sharp turns. Crews call this maneuver 'castling'.

If stationed here, then you may make a Helm Control test (difficulty 4) and spend 4 Output when your ship loses a Maneuver showdown. If successful, that showdown is canceled — no one gains any skirmish points; move on to the next exchange. Associated spec: Maneuver (Taking It)

### 2. Translight Drive

The rampart's profile makes it unusually ungainly in translight corridors.

### 3. Power Core

The rampart's main reactor is one of the ship's few weak points. If an enemy goes for Disable Engines or any Cripple goal, there's a chance that concentrating fire on the reactor can cause a runaway chain reaction. Roll a die whenever the enemy's skirmish point total reaches 10, 15, and 18. On a 6, the reactor's overloading; unless someone makes a Systems Repair test (Difficulty 4) within a short period, the ship's going to blow.

### 4. Defense Matrix

It's no exaggeration to say that the rampart is built around the defense matrix. This staggeringly complex device coordinates and interweaves the ship's various armor arrays and countermeasures, maximizing protection against all forms of enemy attack.

**Battle Station: Full Defense!** Spend 4 Output before any showdown. The winner of the showdown gains only 1 skirmish point, no matter what other modifiers apply. *Associated Spec:* Override (Dishing It)

### 5. Main Cargo Hold
All the holds on this level have external loading hatches. These are not airlocks — open the external hatch, and you'll get a face full of hard vacuum (or, rather, a face empty of air). Still, the external hatches offer a way to leave the ship in an emergency, or after a Cripple for Towing attack.

A common modification on many ramparts is to install a hatch and cargo lift in this room, so cargo can easily be moved up to the shuttle bay above.

### 6. Hazardous Cargo Hold
Not only is there a clearly marked 'emergency flush' button on the wall of this cargo bay that opens the external door and vents the contents into space, there's also one on the bridge, and an automatic monitoring system that watches for contaminants and other potential threats. The paranoid setting on the monitor is set much too high by default; it's been known to jettison the cargo in response to loud noises, meson shrapnel, or even particularly noxious kch-thk gastric emissions.

### 7. Secure Cargo Bay
**Battle Station: Shelter.** Any crew members here take no damage when the ship is rocked.

### 8. Main Engineering
Little more than a glorified monitoring station for the engines; to do any real work, the wrench has to march down around to the relevant 'drive dungeon', as they're commonly called. Between the endless walking from one drive to another, the fact that the designers put 'high security prisoner storage' right next to engineering, and the ship's absurdly over-engineered redundant systems, pulling wrench duty on a rampart is about as popular as working on a junker.

### 9. Cryo-Storage

## RAMPART-CLASS LASER VESSEL
### LOWER DECK

Resembling a flying castle, the defense-heavy rampart offers shelter to crews who would rather withstand a hit than dish one out.
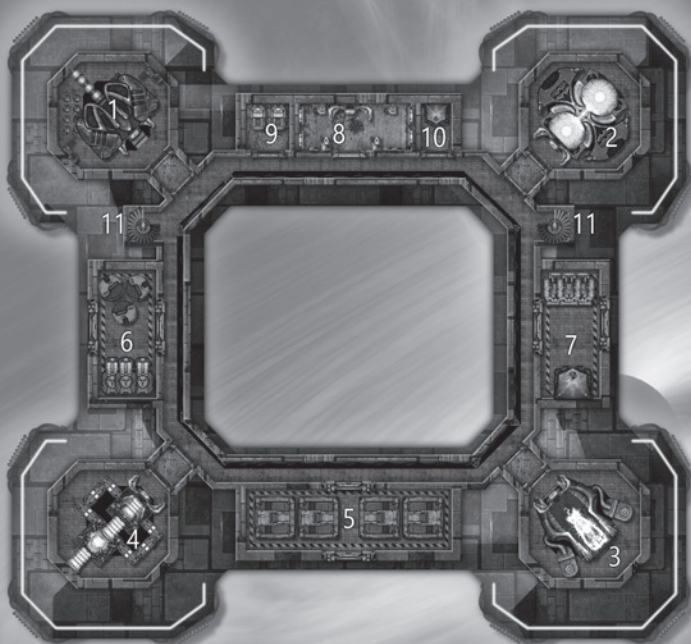
1 Sublight Drive
2 Translight Drive
3 Power Core
4 Defense Matrix Core
5 Main Cargo Hold
6 Hazardous Cargo Hold
7 Secure Cargo Hold
8 Main Engineering Control
9 Cryo Holding Cell
10 High Security Holding Cell
11 Access to Main Deck

# Hauler-Class Laser Vessel
## Hull View

The default choice of traders and smugglers, haulers are used by Lasers of an entrepeneurial bent. Blocky, rugged, and visually inelegant, the hauler brings to mind a flying warehouse.
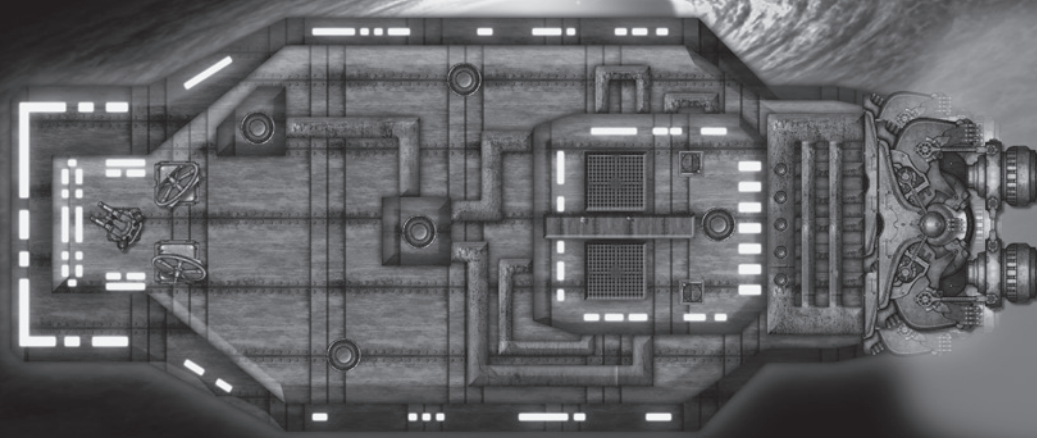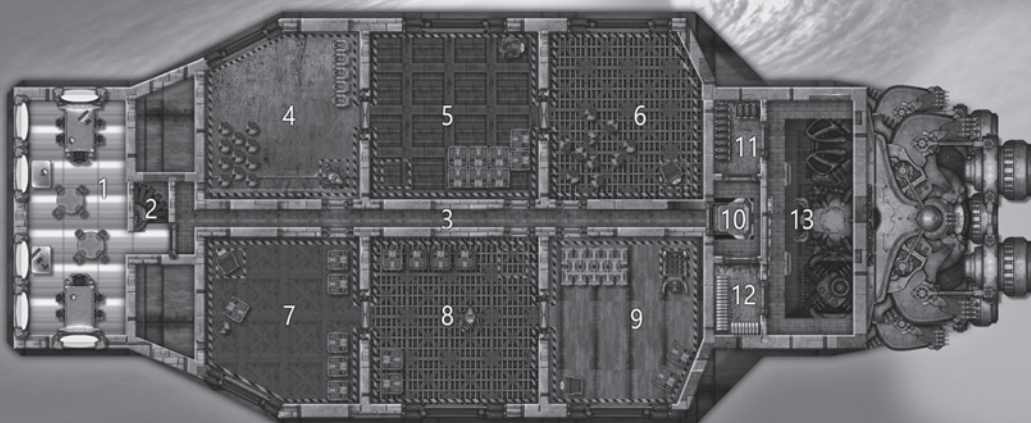


### 10. High Security Holding Cell

When people call rampart crews paranoid they are thinking of this chamber. This holding cell is rigged to handle anything up to and including virulent Class-K entities. Anti-phasing technology prevents durugh from phasing in and out. Triple-failsafe locks (electronic, key based, and manual release) prevent easy access. A forcefield prevents toxins and energy creatures from escaping or causing damage. A wide-spectrum anti-biological spray allows for fast sterilization for disease-carrying species. The cell has hidden cameras, a raft of sensors including thermal and pressure, and its own dedicated monitoring AI. Prisoners can be cuffed, chained, or placed in cryo-storage. Sensor baffling prevents the cell from being scanned from the outside and blocks tracking signals. As a last resort, the entire cell can be ejected into space.

### 11. Access to Main Deck

## Hauler

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . ..

The hauler design has been around for a very long time. Early versions of the hauler were among the first vessels built by the Combine central shipping authority. While none of these vessels are flying today, the current hauler is startlingly similar to its venerable brother. This long history means that spare parts for haulers are easy to come by, though postwar economics mean they may not be cheap. In an attempt to blunt the "industrial" look of the vessel's interior, some hauler manufacturers add acid-etched artwork to the ship's doors and hallways. The half-hearted attempt at brightening up the vessel only serves to make it more obviously depressing. The netting that some crews rig on the ceilings for extra storage gives these ships a ramshackle look.

## Lower Deck

### 1. Elevator
The elevator is an open platform, and rises from the bottom of the ship all the way up to the top deck. Experienced hauler crews know better than to wait for the elevator when they're in a hurry — it's much faster to clamber up a maintenance ladder or gangway and enter the middle deck via the maintenance or spare storage hatches.

### 2. Engine Room
**Battle Station: Ultrahyperclocking.** This multistory location puts every vital energy relay component in the ship at the wrench's fingertips. When hyperclocking, you may attempt to extract extra energy from those big throbbing cargo-hauling engines, but you risk blowing out any relays that can't handle the surge. If you choose this risk, then you gain 4 + ½ the margin in Output (so, if you pass the Difficulty 4 Systems Design test to hyperclock the engines with a total of 10, you gain 7 Output). You must then roll a die — on a 6, choose one of your ship's specs and degrade it by 1, or else lose one die's worth of Health as a relay blows.

### 3. Translight Drive
When the venerable hauler class was first designed, translight drives were somewhat bigger. Virtually all haulers have since been refitted with the newer, more compact drives, but the ship's hull specs are unchanged. That means there's an empty space under the drive mounts that's just covered with a blanking plate. Smugglers use this space to store illicit goods; Lasers might stash emergency supplies there.

### 4. Sub-light Drive
**Battle Station: Make Ready to Tow!** Haulers haul more than just cargo — chop off the cargo bays, and you've got a heavy tug. Once per battle, you may attempt a Systems Design test (Difficulty 6) when your ship wins a Maneuver showdown. If successful, you clamp your tractor beam onto the other vessel, reducing the skirmish point threshold for Cripple for Towing or Cripple for Boarding by 4.



## HAULER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
### LOWER DECK

The default choice of traders and smugglers, haulers are used by Lasers of an entrepeneurial bent. Blocky, rugged, and visually inelegant, the hauler brings to mind a flying warehouse.
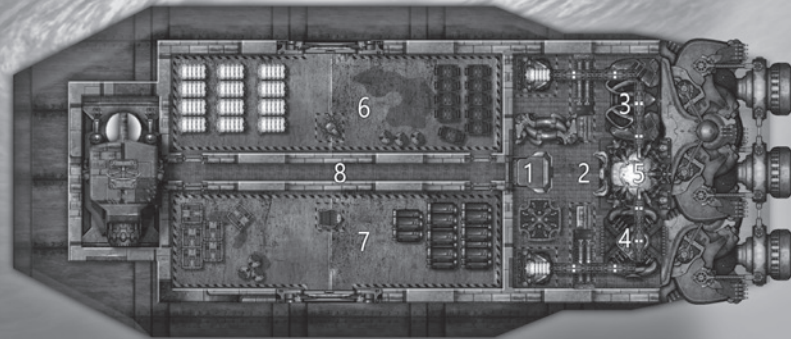
1 Elevator
2 Engine Room (Lower Level)
3 Translight Drive
4 Sublight Drive
5 Power Core
6 Cargo Bay 7
7 Cargo Bay 8
8 Access Corridor
9 Shuttle

# Hauler-Class Laser Vessel
## main deck

The default choice of traders and smugglers, haulers are used by Lasers of an entrepeneurial bent. Blocky, rugged, and visually inelegant, the hauler brings to mind a flying warehouse.

1 Boardroom
2 To Upper Deck
3 Access Corridor
4 Cargo Bay 1
5 Cargo Bay 2
6 Cargo Bay 3
7 Cargo Bay 4

8 Cargo Bay 5
9 Cargo Bay 6
10 Elevator
11 Maintenance
12 Spare Storage
13 Engine Room (Upper Level)

## 5. Power Core

**Battle Station: Overcharge the Tractor Beam!** On most ships, the tractor beam is an aftermarket add-on. The hauler, though, is built around its tractor emitters, so it can really work those gravitons. Once per battle, when you lose a showdown, you may spend 4 Output and make a Helm Control test at a Difficulty equal to 4 + the number of skirmish points gained by your opponent. If successful, you drag the enemy ship off course at a key moment, canceling their skirmish point gain. (They still get to rock you, if they earned enough points to do so.)

## 6. Cargo Bay 7

## 7. Cargo Bay 8

## 8. Access Corridor

Be advised that there is no airlock or hatch at the shuttle end of this corridor — so when the shuttle launches, this whole corridor depressurizes.

## 9. Shuttle

Docking a shuttle with a hauler is infamously tricky. Doing it under pressure requires a Shuttle Craft test at Difficulty 5; failure means a collision, degrading the hauler's Condition by 1. Failing really badly also degrades the shuttle's condition from 'a shuttle' to 'a squished lump of metal stuck to the bottom of the hauler'.

# Main Deck

## 1. Boardroom
Having a corporate boardroom on your ship comes in handy — each episode, you gain a 4-point pool that can be used for Flattery, Negotiation, or Respect spends or Business Affairs tests, but only when you are in your boardroom.

## 2. Stairs to Upper Deck
The two bulkheads flanking this stairwell conceal expansion bays intended for bolt-ons, but the hauler's inelegant design makes maintenance of any installed components difficult. Bolt-ons installed here have their cost reduced by 2, but their Upkeep increased by 1 if it is higher than 0.

## 3. Access Corridor
The length of this corridor happens to be exactly the right length for a balla sport called oblen, similar to human bowling. Technically, oblen is a ritual meditation, so it's unseemly to play games for money. 'Unseemly acts for money' is the unofficial motto of any crew that picks a hauler, so the balla can go cry into their mohr sohns.

## 4-9. Cargo Bays 1-6
Each cargo bay has its own dedicated external loading hatch and independent environmental control system, so it's possible to maintain different conditions inside each bay. You can refrigerate Bay 1 while keeping Bay 2 hot enough to cook steaks on the deck plates if you want.

## Any Cargo Bay:
**Battle Station: Junk Cloud.** If the ship is not carrying its maximum cargo capacity, a crew member can make a Preparedness 4 test to have filled one of the cargo bays with appropriate debris or junk. By manually releasing this junk, the crew member grants the ship a +1 to a Fire (Taking It), Maneuver (Taking It), or Trickbag (Dishing It) spec. This can be done once per battle per cargo bay. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Taking It)

## 10. Elevator
Many crews remove the aft bulkhead, so the whole elevator shaft overlooks the engineering compartment. This makes it easier to move around the ship, reducing the Difficulty of Wrench Scrambles by 1. However, it increases the Difficulty for Athletics test made by the wrench to avoid injury when the ship is rocked by 1.

## 11. Maintenance

## 12. Spare Storage

# Upper Deck

## 1. Bridge
The hauler's bridge offers seats for the entire command crew, as well as a financial analysis station for monitoring the cost-benefit of the current engagement. The seats for the stratco and bagger are placed facing each other, an indication of the importance placed on public relations by the vessel's designers. The bridge is heavily fortified and located toward the aft of the hauler.

## 2. Elevator

## 3. Ship's Locker
An emergency hatch in the ceiling leads out into space. The doors automatically seal to maintain pressure in the rest of the ship when this hatch is undogged.

**Battle Station: Hand Me That Spanner!** As long as you remain here, you create a bonus pool of 4 points that can be spent by the ship's wrench on Systems Repair tests. The wrench cannot take this battle station.

## 4. Secure Vault
The outer room contains a byzantine array of security scanners, identity checkers, and genetic verification systems; bypassing these security systems requires a Difficulty 6 Infiltration test at minimum. It's also shielded against phasing (Difficulty 8) The crew of the hauler can choose to divert added power to the vault's security systems; reduce the ship's Output to increase the Difficulty of any Infiltration or Phase attempts by the same amount.

Oh, the vault's so tough it'll survive the destruction of the ship intact.

## 5. Mess
Uncomfortably cramped. There's no galley on the hauler class, just a wall of vending machines.

## 6. Crew Quarters
The hauler-class offers cramped crew accommodations with low ceilings and barely enough room to sleep. Crews call this section "the mausoleum" due to the coffin-like conditions. Smaller crews knock down walls into unused crew quarters. The crew quarters have the dubious distinction of being the coldest in the business; a quirk of the heating relays means that the temperature hovers around eleven to twelve degrees Celsius.

## 7. Sick Bay

### 8. Computer Core/Laboratory

**Battle Station: Secure the Cargo Manifest!** By spending 4 Communications Intercept (or a 1-point Decryption spend), you can encrypt your ship's cargo manifest and scramble enemy sensors. Even if your foe succeeds at a Datascrape attack on your ship, they won't know what cargo you're carrying. *Associated Spec:* Override (Taking It)

### 9. Boardroom (Upper Level)

Commonly converted into lab space or a general crew lounge, although some smugglers or pirates replace it with multiple concealed attack arrays.

### 10. Starboard Airlock

### 11. Port Airlock

## Speeder

Among the fastest commercial vessels ever produced, the speeder is a triumph of balla concept engineering. The speeder-class can outrun any vessel short of military interceptors. The speeder, more than others of its type, has a reputation as a Laser ship, and its appearance can sometimes end a conflict before it begins.

Older durugh naval officers bear a grudge against the speeder class. The origin of this gripe goes back to a prewar skirmish between a speeder crew and an Imperial ship of the line. The details of the encounter are lost to history but the grudge remains, along with the occasional "accidental weapons discharge". Non-Laser speeders are employed by high-speed courier services and similar concerns where lowshift speed and maneuverability are important.

## HAULER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
### UPPER DECK

The default choice of traders and smugglers, haulers are used by Lasers of an entrepeneurial bent. Blocky, rugged, and visually inelegant, the hauler brings to mind a flying warehouse.

| 1 Bridge | 7 Sick Bay |
| 2 Elevator | 8 Computer Core/Laboratory |
| 3 Ship's Locker | 9 Boardroom (Upper Level) |
| 4 Secure Vault | 10 Starboard Airlock |
| 5 Mess | 11 Port Airlock |
| 6 Crew Quarters | |

# SPEEDER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## HULL VIEW

The sleek, streamlined speeder places a premium on engine power and maneuverability. The beauty of its slender, arrow-like and gleaming outer surface reveal the balla roots of its designers.
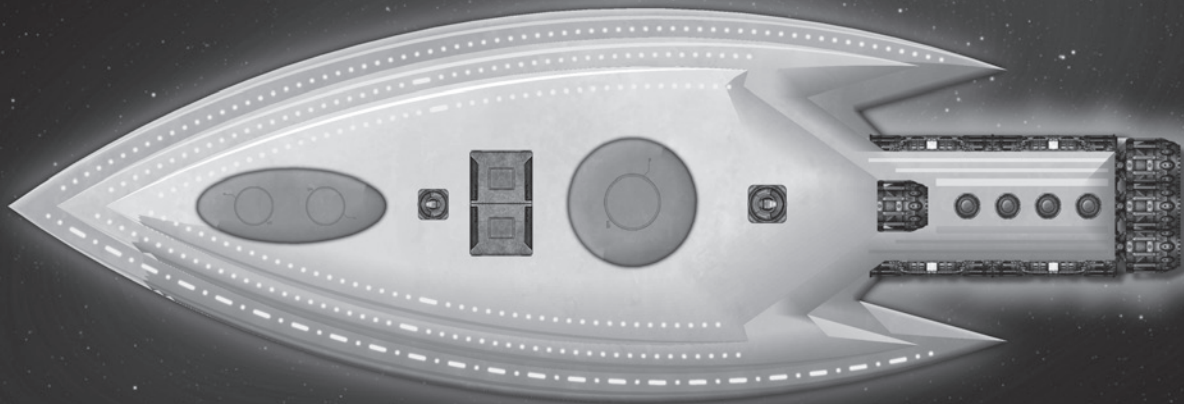
## Upper Deck

### 1. Bridge
The bridge of the speeder is designed according to balla principles, which hold that physical closeness engenders emotional and intellectual synchronization. Bridge crews who train together on a speeder bridge may optimize their teamwork by spending 2 build points each at the same time in order to gain a Teamwork pool. This Teamwork pool contains 8 points which can be spent on any Battle Console, Helm Control, Naval Tactics, or Communications Intercept tests over the course of the episode. The pool automatically refreshes between episodes as long as all the bridge crew are in harmony with each other. Unresolved interpersonal tensions block access to the Teamwork pool.

If a member of the regular bridge crew is absent, the Teamwork pool cannot be used.

### 2. Airlock/Elevator
The ship has two compact elevators instead of one large one. In keeping with the speeder's philosophy of combining functions to reduce the size of the ship, the central elevator doubles as the airlock. Both of the two elevator cars are capable of depressurizing, and mate with hatches on the dorsal and ventral sides of the hull to allow the crew to exit the vessel. That means that when an airlock is open, only one elevator car can be used to move between decks.

### 3. Crew Quarters
As the speeder has no dedicated cells and only a minimal cryo-storage chamber, prisoners are usually incarcerated in locked cabins while being transported for trial and sentencing. The speeder's peerless speed does minimize the amount of time you've got to give up your bunk to some slime-secreting homicidal mollusk or sweaty tavak asteroid miner, but let's be honest — any length of time is too long.

### 4. Sick Bay
Built according to the principles of balla holistic medicine, the sick bay incorporates a meditation inducer, a throne-like apparatus that uses omega waves and pheromone treatments to rapidly restore patients to emotional and mental equilibrium. It can also be used in battle as a quick hit to restore focus.

# SPEEDER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## UPPER DECK

The sleek, streamlined speeder places a premium on engine power and maneuverability. The beauty of its slender, arrow-like and gleaming outer surface reveal the balla roots of its designers.
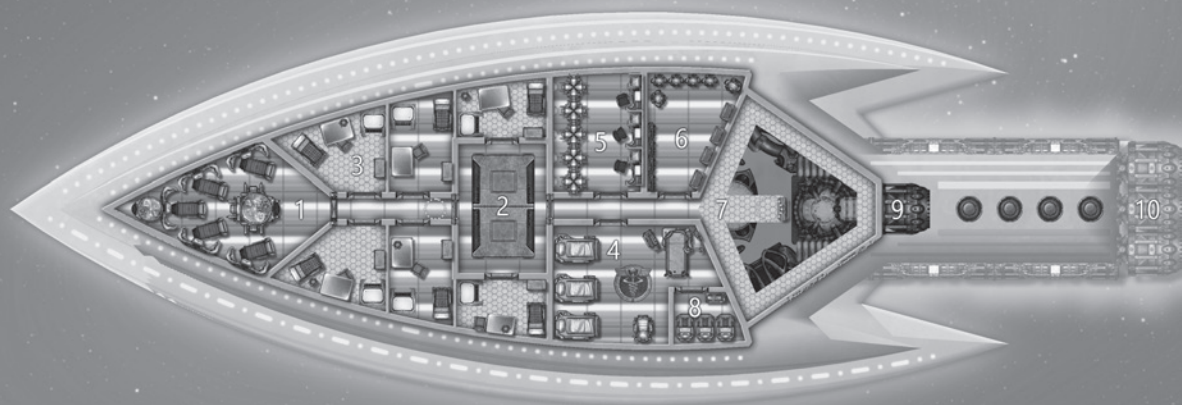
1 Bridge
2 Airlock/Elevator
3 Crew Quarters
4 Sick Bay
5 Computer Core/Data Systems

6 Ship's Locker
7 Engine Room (Upper Level)
8 Cryo Storage
9 Booster Drive
10 Main Drive

**Battle Station: Refocus!** Make a Medic test here (Difficulty 4) to restore 3 points of Battle Console, Communications Intercept, Helm Control, Naval Tactics, or Systems Repair. You may perform this test on behalf of yourself or another crewmate, but both of you must remain in the Sick Bay for one showdown.

## 5. Computer Core/Data Systems

**Battle Station: Crosslink the Navigation Array!** By crosswiring your ship's electronic defenses with its oversized navigational computer, you can improve your protection against Override attempts. If your ship loses an Override showdown, you may make a Communications Intercept (Difficulty 6) to reduce your opponent's skirmish point award by 2. If you fail this test, degrade one of your Maneuver specs by 1. *Associated Spec:* Override (Taking It)

## 6. Ship's Locker

About the only room on the speeder that's larger than average, speeder lockers invariably contain plenty of spare parts for the engines. Speeders go through drive coils like a raconid at a buffet.

## 7. Engine Room (upper level)

The central 'pier' ends in a ladder that goes down to the floor of the main engine room, and up to a dorsal hatch. On many balla ships, this upper walkway is used as an art gallery.

## 8. Cryo-Storage

## 9. Booster Drive

**Battle Station: Fire the Booster Drive!** Once per battle, spend 2 points of Systems Design and 2 points of Output to increase your ship's Maneuver (Dishing It) spec by 2 for one showdown.

## 10. Main Drive

# SPEEDER-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## LOWER DECK

The sleek, streamlined speeder places a premium on engine power and maneuverability. The beauty of its slender, arrow-like and gleaming outer surface reveal the balla roots of its designers.
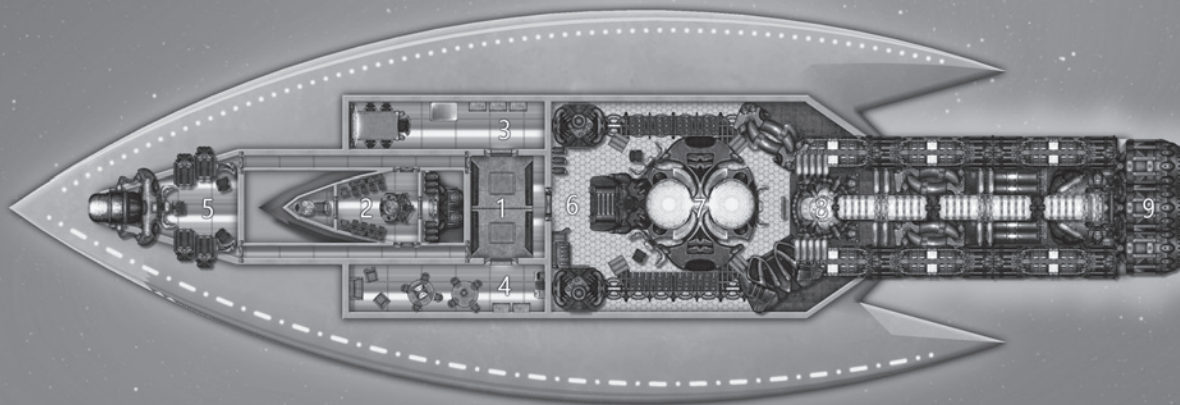
1 Elevator
2 Shuttle/Laboratory
3 Conference Room
4 Crew Lounge
5 Weapons Station

6 Engine Room (Lower Level)
7 Translight Drive
8 Power Core
9 Sublight Drive

## Lower Deck

### 1. Elevator
Note that when the elevator cars are both on this level, there is no access to the shuttle bay or weapons station. One of the cars must be on the upper level to open the path to the narrow 'rat run' access corridor.

### 2. Shuttle/Laboratory
The ship's lab is integrated with the shuttle, which can be a boon or a huge headache. Having one's laboratory with you on the planet's surface can reduce the time needed to process forensic evidence — once per episode, if you have access to the shuttle, you may refresh any one technical ability pool.

The disadvantage of the laboratory shuttle is that space is at a premium and it is easy for things to get damaged. If the speeder is rocked or the shuttle damaged, roll a d6: on a 1 the laboratory has been damaged. It might require 1-6 bigcreds worth of repairs/replacements, or samples might have become contaminated, or any current evidence undergoing analysis is rendered useless. On a 2+ nothing happens.

### 3. Conference Room
Both this room and the crew lounge across the hallway have storage space under the floor for cargo and spare parts. In speeders configured as super-fast cargo carriers, these rooms are both replaced with cargo bays.

### 4. Crew Lounge

### 5. Weapons Station
**Battle Station: Reverse Fusillade!** Shooting matches aren't the speeder's strong point, but this weapon station allows for careful monitoring of the neutronic fusillade arrays that are the vessel's primary offensive weapons. The arrays can be reconfigured on the fly to act as defensive batteries, intercepting incoming fire and reducing its effectiveness. By spending 2 points of Battle Console, the operator improves the vessel's Fire (Taking It) by 1, but at the same time reduces the ship's Fire (Dishing It) by 1 for the next Fire showdown. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Taking It)

## 6. Engine Room (lower level)

The largest open space on the ship, the engine room of the speeder is often compared to a temple, presumably dedicated to the god of swift travel. The massive glowing spheres of the translight drive rest atop an ornate dais. When the ship enters translight, the spheres throw off a burst of light that reflects off every shiny surface in the engine room. A wave of light echoes through the whole ship, heralding the transition to superluminal flight.

## 7. Translight Drive

**Battle Station: Punch It!** If your ship is on the escape path, then you may spend 2 points of Output to gain 2 skirmish points when your ship wins a Trickbag showdown. *Associated Spec:* Trickbag (Dishing It)

## 8. Power Core

The speeder uses a special elongated power core to deliver the huge amounts of energy needed to run the ship's oversized drives. A brave wrench who needs extra Output can climb into the drive shaft and disconnect some of the thrusters, freeing up extra power for other purposes.

**Battle Station: Pull the Forward Coils!** Make a Systems Design test (Difficulty 4). If you succeed, degrade either of your ship's Maneuver specs by 1, and gain 4 Output. If the ship engages in a Maneuver or Trickbag showdown while you're at this station, you take one die worth of damage.

## 9. Sub-light Drive

# PORCUPINE-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## HULL VIEW

Looking for defensive versatility? The porcupine class may be the ship for you, with its complement of five armour arrays. This tavak-inspired design resembles a ball bristling with metal projections.

# Porcupine

Porcupine-class vessels offer versatility and comfort in a tight package. However, the tavak designers didn't consider the "softer" species in their design; human and balla crews complain about the sharp edges and rough textures that the tavak simply don't notice. The first thing many crews do is "baby proof" the vessel so that they don't get injured during routine operations. Larger versions of the porcupine are the mainstay of the tavak merchant and military fleets, and, from a distance, it is easy to mistake one of these behemoths for their little brother.

There are no stairs or elevators on a porcupine. Instead, the crew members move between decks via one of the four hatches. There's one axial hatch at the center of the ship, and three more spaced equidistantly along the hull access corridor. Each of the four decks can rotate independently, moving to any one of three locking positions. This gives the porcupine its trademark defensive flexibility — when one armor array is exhausted or ineffective, it just spins a new array into place. When rotating, the hatches automatically seal shut. If a hatch is open, the decks cannot spin. This safety feature can be overridden from the bridge — boarding parties sent to storm a porcupine describe it as trying to take a giant food processor from the inside, as anything trying to pass through the hatch risks getting chopped to pieces. (The axial hatches don't move, so the defending forces can concentrate their strength there).

## Lower Engineering Deck

### 1. Shuttle
The porcupine's built-in shuttle looks like a dome studded with protruding weapons and sensors, and is about as aerodynamic as a brick. A hatch above the shuttle entrance leads to the ship's 'spine', the axial corridor.

### 2. Engine Room
This cavernous chamber is the largest open space within the ship, and is also used for meetings, crew ceremonies, and celebrations.

## PORCUPINE-CLASS LASER VESSEL
### UPPER ENGINEERING DECK

Looking for defensive versatility? The porcupine class may be the ship for you, with its complement of five armor arrays. This tavak-inspired design resembles a ball bristling with metal projections.

1 Shuttle
2 Engine Room
3 Power Core
4 Translight Drive
5 Sublight Drive
6 Hull Access Corridor
7 Drive Extension

# PORCUPINE-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## UPPER DECK

Looking for defensive versatility? The porcupine class may be the ship for you, with its complement of five armor arrays. This tavak-inspired design resembles a ball bristling with metal projections.

1 Bridge
2 Mess/Lounge
3 Sick Bay
4 Crew Quarters
5 Hull Access Corridor
6 Drive Extension

## 3. Power Core

**Battle Station: Full Power to the Arrays!** The colloquial term for this tactic is 'bristling' — by running extra power through the ship's armor arrays, the porcupine maximizes its defenses. Once per battle, spend 4 Output to raise the skirmish point total for any Cripple goal by 4.

## 4. Translight Drive

The translight drive on the porcupine is a thing of beauty. The strange thing about the drive is its tendency to "sing" when active. Anyone in the drive room when the ship is in translight flight can hear this haunting song. Early tavak explorers claimed this was the ship's soul speaking to them. The actual origin of the noise is inadequate sub-harmonic baffling on the quantum inducers, but most wrenches refuse to fix the issue. Tavak go to the drive room during translight to meditate on "the song of the universe".

## 5. Sub-light Drive

**Battle Station: Hard Turn!** Porcupines have unrivaled agility. Make a Systems Design test (Difficulty 4) before your ship engages in a Maneuver or Trickbag showdown. If successful, you may reroll the die, but you must take the second result if you choose to reroll. You must have a charged drive extension (see below) to use this battle station. *Associated Spec:* Maneuver (Dishing It)

## 6. Hull Access Corridor

## PORCUPINE-CLASS LASER VESSEL
### main deck

Looking for defensive versatility? The porcupine class may be the ship for you, with its complement of five armor arrays. This tavak-inspired design resembles a ball bristling with metal projections.

1 Access Shaft
2 Computer Core/Data Center
3 Ship's Locker
4 Sensor Suite/Weapons Control
5 Cryo Storage
6 Hazardous Storage
7 Cargo Bay
8 Hull Access Corridor
9 Main Docking Hatch
10 Drive Extension

### 7. Drive Extension

These protrusions extend outside the ship's artificial gravity and inertial control fields, so a crew member in a drive extension may be disorientated or batted around when the porcupine moves or rotates its hull. The outer hulls of these extensions are studded with armor array panels. The interior contains a sub-light thruster.

**Battle Station: Charge the Drive Extension!** Spend 1 Output and make a Systems Design test (Difficulty 4). If successful, you charge the drive extension. A charged drive extension may be used to either execute the *Hard Turn!* Battle Station (see above), or to improve the ship's Fire (Taking It) spec by 1 for one showdown. *Associated Spec:* Fire (Taking It)

Each drive extension can only be charged once per battle, and holds its charge for only a brief time. Therefore, the extension must be charged *immediately* before it is used.

## Upper Engineering Deck

### 1. Axial Corridor

This shaft runs the length of the ship. The axial corridor is designed to withstand massive radiation spikes from the power core, translight drive, and sub-light drive, making it one of the safer locations on board if things go wrong.

**Battle Station: Shelter in Place!** You take only1 damage if your ship is rocked and you fail the resulting Athletics test.

### 2. Engine Room Walkway

# PORCUPINE-CLASS LASER VESSEL
## UPPER ENGINEERING DECK

Looking for defensive versatility? The porcupine class may be the ship for you, with its complement of five armor arrays. This tavak-inspired design resembles a ball bristling with metal projections.
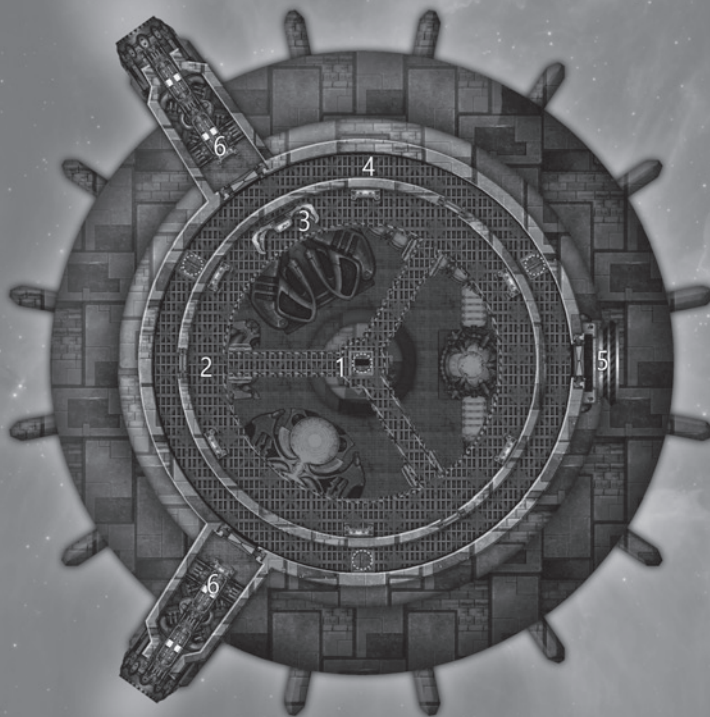
1 Access Shaft
2 Engine Room Walkway
3 Engine Main Control
4 Hull Access Corridor
5 Auxiliary Docking Hatch
6 Drive Extension

### 3. Engine Main Control

Tavak naval tradition considers the engineer to be coequal with the ship's captain, and so this station is set up as a secondary command console.

**Battle Station: Spinning Death Star!** While stationed here, you may substitute for the stratco when your ship engages in Trickbag showdowns. You spend Systems Design instead of Naval Tactics when engaged in such showdowns. *Associated Spec:* Trickbag (Taking It)

The downside of having this station operational is that it opens up a second avenue of attack for Override attempts. If this station is operated, then your ship's Override (Taking It) spec temporarily degrades by 1.

### 4. Hull Access Corridor

### 5. Auxiliary Docking Hatch

**Battle Station: Spin the Outer Hull!** A control console at this hatch sets the ship's hull to rotate, preventing access to this docking hatch and making the ship even more difficult to board. Spend 4 Systems Design to increase the skirmish point total needed for Cripple for Towing or Cripple for Boarding by 4.

### 6. Drive Extension

As per the Drive Extension! battle station on the lower engineering deck.

## Main Deck

### 1. Axial Corridor

### 2. Computer Core/Data Center
**Battle Station: Unleash the Digital Porcupines of War:** The computer core here has multiple removable drives containing aggressive simulated intelligences. The drives can be brought online for short periods to attack enemy computers, but, like vicious attack dogs, they need to be carefully monitored and brought to heel before they start ravaging the porcupine's own systems. A character stationed here can spend 4 points of Communications Intercept to "unleash the hounds", granting the ship a +2 to its Override (Dishing It) spec for the next exchange. *Associated Spec: Override (Dishing It)*

### 3. Ship's Locker
Practical Laser crews often mess with the elegant architecture of the computer core next door by knocking through the bulkhead and using the adjoining chamber as extra storage space.

**Battle Station: Hand Me That Spanner!** As long as you remain here, you create a bonus pool of 4 points that can be spent by the ship's wrench on Systems Repair tests. The wrench cannot take this battle station.

### 4. Sensor Suite/Weapon Control
**Battle Station: Duty Watch!** By tying the ship's weapons and sensors together, the porcupine's crew can react especially quickly when ambushed. If this station is occupied, then the Difficulty of any Sense Trouble tests to avoid ambush is reduced by 2, and the ship counts as having a Maneuver (Dishing It) score of 2 when Wide-Eying it.

### 5. Cryo-Storage
Tavak-sized cryo-tanks are big enough to store two creatures with more modest frames, like humans or balla.

### 6. Hazardous Storage
An emergency blowout hatch situated on the outer bulkhead allows for quick evacuation of dangerous cargo. In such a situation, the outer hull rotates to align the main docking hatch with the emergency hatch. The emergency hatch then blows, venting the contents of this room straight out into space.

### 7. Cargo Bay

### 8. Hull Access Corridor

### 9. Main Docking Hatch
The ship's shuttle can also dock at this hatch.

Note that the porcupine has no airlocks — if a crew member needs to go outside, the standard approach is to decompress the whole hull access corridor on that level.

### 10. Drive Extension
As per the Charge the Drive Extension! battle station on the lower engineering deck.

## Upper Deck

### 1. Bridge
Minimalist to the point of austerity, the porcupine bridge has three identical stations for the hailer, pilot and gunner, arranged around the access hatch to the axial shaft. The stratco has no dedicated station — he or she is expected to track the progress of the battle while standing, head immersed in a holo-projection that fills the upper portion of the room.

This approach has two notable drawbacks.

First, tavaks are much taller than other species. Unless the holo-projectors are recalibrated, the stratco must stand on a crate or stepladder to get a good view of the battle.

Second, more than a few stratcos have accidentally fallen down the axial shaft while caught up in a particularly complex battle of naval tactics.

### 2. Mess/Lounge

### 3. Sick Bay
Having the sick bay right next to the bridge gives the porcupine an edge in battle — the medical officer may spend Output when making a Medic Scramble.

### 4. Crew Quarters

### 5. Hull Access Corridor

### 6. Drive Extension

# ship bolt-ons

## ship bolt-ons

Like the upgrades in the core *Ashen Stars* rulebook, installing most of these bolt-ons costs two weeks of downtime and a Difficulty 6 Systems Design toll test.

Unlike the standard upgrades, however, some of these bolt-ons are exceedingly rare in the Bleed, and are not usually available for purchase. The option to obtain bolt-ons noted as rare may be acquired as a reward for a successful mission.

Other bolt-ons are noted as being one-shot — these bolt-ons are depleted or destroyed after use, and must be repurchased at full cost if they are to be used again. One-shot bolt-ons only require one week of downtime and a Difficulty 3 Systems Design test to install.

### Advertising Nexus

**Cost:** 6
**Upkeep:** 2

A suite of software agents constantly monitors communications traffic in the local system, and narrowcasts targeted advertising that is compelling and memorable without being irritating. The nexus automatically adjusts to local social mores and technological conditions. In a high-tech system, it interfaces with the planetary computer networks and inserts suitable data packets; in a low-tech 20th century synthculture, it might hijack local television broadcasts and insert suitable television ads hawking your crew's services. Your Reputation is considered 2 higher for the purposes of determining downtime.

### Aegis Evolver
**Cost:** 10
**Upkeep:** 3
*Rare*

This meter-wide sphere attaches to your ship's core systems. The Aegis Evolver uses complex predictive algorithms, semi-organic processors, and nanotechnology to analyze attacks and optimize defensive measures. When you lose a showdown, your ship gains a -1 improvement to its Taking It spec for the next showdown of that type.

### Attack Drone
**Cost:** 15
**Upkeep:** 3

This autonomous attack drone acts as a second ship in combat with one exception: it only grants bonuses and penalties to Fire showdowns. So, you have a +1 bonus to Fire showdowns, you get an extra skirmish point from each successful Fire showdown, and your enemy's skirmish point award from unsuccessful Fire showdowns is decreased by 1. In other respects, it gives the

usual bonuses for outnumbering the enemy — the skirmish point total needed for your goal decreases by 3, the enemy's required total increases by 3. The drone can be disabled in the normal way for allied vessels — if your vessel is rocked, the attack drone is taken out. Its fate depends on what goal the enemy ship is going for. If the enemy ship is on the escape path, then your drone is simply damaged and can be repaired like any other degraded system. If the enemy ship is on the engage path, apply the desired condition to your drone, which may mean it's crippled, captured, or destroyed outright.

## Backup Translight Drive
**Cost:** 7
**Upkeep:** 1
*One-Shot*

This emergency translight drive has enough power in it to open a single translight corridor before burning out. At any point in a space combat, you may activate this upgrade to flee. You are considered to have escaped. You have limited control over your course in the forced translight corridor, so you could end up almost anywhere. You may only install a single backup translight drive on a ship.

## Bio-Scrubber
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 1
*Rare*

This modification to your weapon arrays focuses on energy frequencies inimical to lifeforms. When targeting crew following a successful showdown (See *Ashen Stars*, p. 91) skirmish points spent increase the difficulty of Athletics tests by 3 rather than 2. This modification is illegal in the Proper and viewed dimly in most of the Bleed.

## Brownout Blanket
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 1
*Rare*

This semi-organic webbing drains energy from an enemy ship's power grid when deployed. The webbing is launched as part of a successful Trickbag showdown. The Brownout Blanket degrades three of the target's specs by 1 each until removed by spending 1 point of Output to burn it off. If the ship has no Output, it cannot remove the Brownout Blanket until after combat.

## Cannon-Nanny
**Cost:** 2
**Upkeep:** 0

This gun-nanny for shipboard weapons prevents overzealous gunners from opening fire. Ideal for Laser crews with PR problems.

## Cold Thrust Optimization
**Cost:** 3
**Upkeep:** 1

An upgrade to your existing maneuvering thrusters providing +2 to Maneuver for calculating who goes first when Wide-Eying it. The enhancement pre-warms the thrust injectors and nozzles while exciting the reaction mass to just below ignition point.

## Concealed Cargo Bay
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 0

This modification to an existing cargo bay hides a section of it from detection, using sensor-baffling technology and good old-fashioned metal plating. Possessing a concealed cargo bay subtracts 4 from the Difficulty of any haggle tests for cargos that the client wishes to keep out of sight of the authorities. Used by smugglers or legitimate traders trying to hide expensive cargos from boarders. Detecting the compartment requires a 2-point Energy Signatures or Industrial Design spend.

## Delouser
**Cost:** 6
**Upkeep:** 1

Once per battle, this upgrade generates a pulse that dislodges any drones or other objects clinging to your hull. It removes breaching pods, towing lines, DR-T Rats, Brownout Blankets, Foamers, and Tick-Booms immediately and harmlessly. It may or may not work against other cling-ons.

## Digiquisitor
**Cost:** 4
**Upkeep:** 1

This software program is launched as part of an Override showdown. The Digiquisitor burrows deep into the enemy ship's control pathways and reports back on the state of

their subsystems. As well as reporting into the state of their plumbing and ventilation, the Digiquisitor tells you exactly what bolt-ons the enemy ship has installed.

### Digital Vampire
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 1

This software program infiltrates the enemy vessel's energy grid, forcing it to transfer energy to your ship. On a successful Override showdown, you may steal Output from the enemy ship, taking one Output for every two Communications Intercept points spent.

### DR-T Rat
**Cost:** 2
**Upkeep:** 0
*One-Shot*

This device is a stealthy drone that attaches to an enemy ship and broadcasts their location. You must win a Trickbag showdown to attach the drone. The DR-T Rat broadcasts in small bursts every few hours to avoid detection and requires a 2-point Decryption spend to notice.

### Emergency Armor Shunt
**Cost:** 7
**Upkeep:** 2
*Rare*

This series of redundant energy deflectors allows you to redirect the focus of an enemy attack. Spend 3 Naval Tactics to choose the spec damaged when your ship is rocked. You may do this multiple times per battle, but the Naval Tactics cost rises by 2 each time.

### External Racking
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 0

This upgrade consists of hull-mounted clamps, cables, netting, and pods meant to hold cargo. External racking increases your ship's cargo spec by 1 and can be purchased up to three times. However, any cargo stored in the racking is destroyed if the enemy succeeds at a Rake or Slash attack. You can't combine external racking with a concealed cargo bay for obvious reasons.

### Extra Shuttle Bay
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 0

Your ship can carry an extra shuttle. This upgrade just buys you the space to keep an extra shuttle — the actual shuttle has to be purchased separately.

### Fire and Forget Missiles
**Cost:** 2
**Upkeep:** 0
*One-Shot*

This missile pack clamps onto the exterior of your ship's hull and, when activated, launches a swarm of guided rockets. Deploy at the start of a Fire showdown to increase your ship's Fire (Dishing It) by +2 for that showdown.

### Foamer
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 1

This drone clamps onto an enemy ship, punches a hole in its hull, and pumps rapidly hardening foam inside. All Scramble Difficulties increase by 1 each showdown as it becomes all but impossible to move around. A successful Wrench Scramble dislodges the Foamer.

### Grav Quaker
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 1

This emitter creates disruptive gravity waves behind your ship as it travels. The wake disturbs the artificial gravity of ships that pass through it. Pay 4 Output to activate when you win a Maneuver showdown, but didn't rock your foe. The enemy crew must make Athletics tests to avoid damage as per a Casualty Report anyway.

### Heuristic Strategy Matrix
**Cost:** 8
**Upkeep:** 1
*Rare*

This combination of semi-sentient software and hardware supports your stratco when adjusting strategies. At the start of the battle, you may choose a second, less expensive goal

in addition to your primary goal. At any time, you may switch to your secondary goal. Instead of resetting to 0 when you switch goals, you start with half the skirmish points required for that secondary goal or half your current total, whichever is lower.

## Inertial Juicer
**Cost:** 7
**Upkeep:** 2

Once per battle, you may activate this device to transform excess kinetic energy to usable power. When your ship is rocked, gain Output equal to the amount of Health lost by any two members of your crew. This cannot bring you above your starting Output total.

## Meson Caltrops
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 1

These paired emitters spew dangerously unstable meson shrapnel behind your vessel in the hope of foiling pursuit. If your goal is Escape or Datascrape, you gain an additional 2 skirmish points on your first successful showdown.

## Multi-Phase Disperser
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 2

This modification to your ship's attack arrays burns out any poppers on board the enemy vessel. It is automatically triggered when you succeed at a Cripple for Boarding goal. The enemy vessel may spend 4 Output to boost their shielding and counter this NLD pulse, in the unlikely event that they have any Output left.

## Nautilus
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 2

This hull modification enables your ship to enter large bodies of liquid and act as a submersible. Hull braces, special propulsion modifications, hull upgrades, and structural integrity boosting forcefields work in concert to allow the ship to travel to the depths of the ocean and even into the liquid layers of some gas giants. Note that most weapons do not work underwater.

## Pandora Vault
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 1
*Rare*

This software masquerades as your ship's core command module. It consists of a tangled web of nested viruses that launch when the fake CCM is opened by a would-be hacker. Pay 2 Output and 3 Communications Intercept when you lose an Override showdown; you win the showdown instead. The Pandora Vault can only be used once per battle, and only works if your enemy is unaware that you possess such an upgrade.

## Particle Streamers
**Cost:** 3
**Upkeep:** 1

Emitters all over your ship's hull stream excite particles that hamper tractor beams attempting to lock on. Enemy ships attempting the Cripple for Towing goal must get 18 skirmish points rather than 15 if they are to tow you. You may also extend these streams to break other ships free of hostile tractor beams.

## Quantum Capacitor Banks
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 0

A series of unstable micro-capacitors enable the ship to dynamically store large amounts of power for later use. The unstable nature of this technology means that there is no guarantee that the energy stored there will be available when called on. When you hyperclock, roll a die. If the result is even, you gain 2 extra Output on top of any gained from hyperclocking (usually 4).

## Retribution Array
**Cost:** 10
**Upkeep:** 2

This modification to your attack arrays automatically returns fire on attacking ships that cause damage to your vessel. The arrays match the energy signature of the initial attack, hoping to bypass the enemy vessel's armor arrays. Pay 4 Output and 2 Battle Console when losing a Fire showdown to gain a number of skirmish points equal to half the amount claimed by the victor (minimum 1).

## Sensor Baffler
**Cost:** 5
**Upkeep:** 1

This stealth technology package includes sensor-absorbing hull plating and energy dispersion fields to make the ship especially difficult to detect. The baffler reduces the Difficulty of any Helm Control tests to gain Ambush by 2.

## Smartmines
**Cost:** 3
**Upkeep:** 1
*One-Shot*

These small yet powerful mines use magnetic technology to seek out enemy vessels. Deploy after you succeed at the Escape, Datascrape, or Rake goals. You may roll a die and add the result to your skirmish point total. If that brings your total to 12 or more, you are considered to have Slashed your foe instead.

## Temporal Shields
**Cost:** 7
**Upkeep:** 2
*Rare*

Based on breakthroughs made by vas mal scientists, these modified armor arrays create bubbles of space-time around your ship. Roll a die and spend that much Output to delay the effect of the next showdown for that many showdowns.

## Tick-Booms
**Cost:** 2
**Upkeep:** 0
*One-Shot*

These beetle-like drones attach to an enemy ship as part of a successful Trickbag showdown. They then leech excess power from the enemy ship's systems, storing it until they are detonated by disruptor fire. Note the amount of Output spent by the enemy after these drones clamp on. When you next win a Fire showdown, increase your Fire (Dishing It) spec by the amount of Output spent by the enemy during the intervening showdowns. An enemy ship may remove your Tick-Booms with a successful Wrench Scramble. If the Scramble test fails, the enemy ship is rocked.

## Towing Lines
**Cost:** 3
**Upkeep:** 0

A trio of tow-cable launchers uses a series of clamps and winches to capture a vessel or other object. This primitive version of a tractor beam is easy to foil by cutting the cables. It is typically used by the cost-conscious or desperate. This upgrade enables you to choose the Cripple for Towing goal, but the enemy ship may make a Wrench Scramble when you reach the skirmish point total needed for that goal. If successful, roll a die and lose that many skirmish points. If that brings you back down below the Cripple for Towing threshold, the fight's back on.

## Welcome Turret
**Cost:** 3
**Upkeep:** 0

This semi-autonomous gun can be mounted just inside your ship's airlock or shuttle bay. Made for repelling boarders, the gun is a disruptor rifle on an articulated mount, controlled by an expert system with a Shooting ability of 8. The gun spends 2 Shooting per attack unless directed otherwise by your crew. You may purchase this upgrade multiple times.

# SHUTTLES, SHUTTLES, SHUTTLES!

## Shuttles, Shuttles, Shuttles!

Shuttles are the workhorses of most *Ashen Stars* adventures. Ships may get the glory, the special rules, and the sexy bolt-ons, but shuttles get you into the thick of the action quickly and easily.

The average shuttle holds eight passengers, and can make it from orbit to a planet's surface without trouble. It can make it as far as a nearby moon, but longer journeys are too taxing for its engines or life support systems.

As described in *Ashen Stars*, shuttles can be sharp, blunt, or balanced. Blunt shuttles are better at fleeing, sharp at pursuing.

Shuttles are tough and reliable — if taken out, they can almost always be patched back together with Systems Repair. It costs 10 bigcreds to replace a destroyed or lost shuttle if you do manage to somehow break one beyond repair.

If you wish, you can replace your ship's standard shuttle with one of the specialized models described in this section.

## Breaching Pod

Cost: 15

This variant shuttlecraft takes the place of a standard shuttlecraft. Breaching pods carry thick armor and are extremely ungainly in atmosphere (imposing a 1-point levy on Shuttle Craft tests). The pod is tipped with a docking clamp and a powerful laser cutter for boring through ship hulls.

If you have a breaching pod, you may attempt to board an enemy ship at any time by making a Shuttle Craft test. The

Difficulty for this test is equal to the difference between your current skirmish point total and the total needed for the Cripple for Boarding goal. So, if your ship requires 18 points for Cripple for Boarding, and you're at 10, it's a Difficulty 8 test. Success means you manage to fly across and board the enemy ship — it doesn't also Cripple it or end the ship combat. Failure means your shuttle is hit in mid-flight and must retreat to your own ship.

Ownership of one of these in the Bleed is considered the mark of a pirate.

## Cargo Shuttle

Cost: 20

Cargo shuttles are big and unwieldy (again, they impose a 1-point levy on Shuttle Craft tests made in atmosphere), but are capable of hauling massive amounts of cargo up and down a gravity well. If you have a cargo shuttle, your Cargo spec increases by 1.

## Combat Shuttle

Cost: 20

Standard shuttles can be armed, but only with lasers and other light weapons. A combat shuttle manages to pack in a set of naval-grade attack arrays, making it capable of participating in ship combats.

A combat shuttle works like a second ship in combat. It can participate in Fire, Maneuver, or Trickbag showdowns, but not Override. So, in any of the three valid showdowns, it gives a +1 bonus, you get an extra skirmish point from each successful showdown, and your enemy's skirmish point award from unsuccessful showdowns is decreased by 1.

HÜTH

## Integrated Shuttle

Cost: 15

One of your ship's functions is built into the shuttle. The classic example of this is the shuttle on the speeder, which doubles as the ship's laboratory. You may choose to integrate your laboratory, medical bay, ship's locker or cryo-storage into your shuttle.

► *An integrated laboratory lets you refresh any one technical ability pool once per episode.*

► *An integrated sick bay lets you refresh Medic once per episode.*

► *An integrated ship's locker lets you refresh Preparedness once per episode.*

► *An integrated cryo-storage lets you freeze prisoners instead of having to bring them back to your ship for processing.*

The downside of integration is that if the shuttle is damaged or your ship is rocked, roll a d6. On a 1 the integrated room has been damaged. It might require expensive replacement components, or be unavailable for the rest of the episode, or cause some other drawback like a loss of evidence.

It also gives the usual bonuses for outnumbering the enemy — the skirmish point total needed for your goal decreases by 3; the enemy's required total increases by 3.

If your ship is rocked, then the shuttle may be hit. The shuttle pilot must make a Shuttle Craft test at a Difficulty equal to the enemy's skirmish point award for this showdown. If the test fails, then the shuttle is taken out. If the enemy ship is on the escape path, then your shuttle is simply damaged and can be repaired after the battle. If the enemy ship is on the engage path, apply the desired condition to your shuttle, which may mean it's crippled, captured, or destroyed outright. Time to hit the eject button.

## Maintenance Shuttle

Cost: 15

Equipped with manipulators, welders, and other repair tools, maintenance shuttles help keep your ship in good repair. Reduce your effective Condition by 1 as long as you have a working maintenance shuttle.

## Racing Shuttle

Cost: 15

Racing shuttles are *fast*. When involved in a pursuit, you impose a 1-point levy on your opponent, no matter what your opponent's shuttle configuration is and whether you're the pursuer or the pursued. Also, they look much cooler than normal shuttles. You can probably talk your GM into letting you boost your Flirting if you've got a racing shuttle.

## Translight Shuttle

Cost: 20

The cutting edge of shuttle technology, a translight shuttle carries a miniature translight engine capable of shunting it into faster-than-light travel. Translight shuttles have a very limited range, but can get from one star system to another safely.

## SHUTTLE DOGFIGHTS

If two or more shuttles enter into combat, it's resolved using a series of Shuttle Craft and Battle Console contests.

The attacker begins by makes a Shuttle Craft test against Difficulty 4. If successful, the attacker is considered to have *locked on*. The defender may immediately choose to spend 2 Shuttle Craft points to dodge, canceling the lock.

The attacker then gets to make a Battle Console test, again at Difficulty 4. If this test succeeds *and* the attacker had lock-on, the defender is taken out. If the test succeeds but the attack was not locked on, then the other shuttle is merely winged and suffers a 1-point levy to all future Shuttle Craft tests until it's repaired.

The defender then becomes the attacker. Repeat until one craft is taken out.

> For example, the player characters are en route to New Hope City when they're ambushed by Galactoid raiders in a shuttle. The Galactoids are the attackers, and so act first.
>
> The Galactoid pilot tests his Shuttle Craft ability, and fails. He has failed to acquire lock-on. He still fires and misses.
>
> Now, the PCs fight back. Their pilot succeeds at the Shuttle Craft test, and acquires lock-on. The Galactoid pilot spends 2 Shuttle Craft to dodge, canceling the lock. The PC gunner shoots, and hits. If she had lock-on, then the Galactoid would be defeated. As it is, she merely wings the enemy ship. The Galactoids now have a 1-point levy on all their Shuttle Craft tests. They doggedly try again, and miss again.
>
> On the PCs' next turn, their pilot acquires lock-on. The Galactoid pilot doesn't have the 3 points needed to shake the lock (2 normally, +1 for the levy), so the PC gunner gets to fire with lock-on. If she hits, it's all over for the Galactoids…

# TECHNOLOGY

## Communications

### Scorpion Relay

Cost: 2

A Scorpion Relay can be attached to a headset or any other communications device. You can use a Scorpion Relay to send disruptive feedback into any device attempting to listen in on your communications signals. This feedback disrupts the hardware and software of the listening device, requiring a Systems Repair check (Difficulty 4) to repair.

## Cybernetic Enhancements

### Back Brain Driver

Install Cost: 4

Upkeep: 2

An interface device in your skull links your brain directly to any compatible vehicle. A cable unspools from your forehead and plugs into the vehicle's interface port. When linked, your brain receives real-time updates from the machine's sensors, and you can control key systems at the speed of thought. It also allows hands-free operation of the vehicle.

Until the end of the interval, you gain a boost on two of the following abilities, chosen when the implant is activated: Helm Control, Systems Repair, Battle Console, Communications Intercept, Shuttle Craft, or Naval Tactics. Damage to the vehicle is perceived as painful neural feedback. While the implant is active, the user loses one Health when the vehicle is rocked (or damaged, in the case of vehicles other than starships), and three Health if the vehicle is Crippled.

Some high-end vehicles come with the requisite interface gear as standard. For other vehicles, such as the group's starship, a conversion kit is available for 1 bigcred.

## Black Spot

Install Cost: 2

Upkeep: 0

A Black Spot on your palm serves as a built-in osmotic puncher. The Black Spot can be filled with medical drugs, toxins, or anything else you wish. Refilling the Black Spot is easy; you can extend a small tube from your palm to suck up a dose of whatever liquid you wish. You can store up to three drug doses in separate internal compartments. You can select the drug you wish to dispense with a simple flex of the wrist.

Surreptitiously injecting a target requires a Filch test; doing so in combat requires Scuffling. While the default location for the puncher is on the palm of the hand, it can be implanted elsewhere in the body by a qualified medic.

## Bloodhound

Install Cost: 4

Upkeep: 1

A set of olfactory boosters installed in your nasal cavity detects and differentiates scents, increasing your sense of smell by several orders of magnitude. This enhancement allows you to act as a Terran bloodhound, able to track by scent, distinguish individuals by body odor, gain clues based on olfactory data not normally available, and even determine another person's mood.

The Bloodhound enhancement is only activated when required, because the volume of data overwhelms the brain. Prolonged use without a rest results in the loss of 1 Health for each interval after the first that this implant is active. The user switches the implant on or off with a mental command; in the event that the delicate neural wires connecting the implant

suffer damage, there is an emergency cut-off switch located deep in the user's left nostril.

While the implant is active, you boost your Bullshit Detector, Flirting, Interrogation, and Sense Trouble abilities.

## Brain Drill
Install Cost: 3

Upkeep: 1

A self-propelled coil of nanowire sits in a compartment beneath your tongue. The wire is 1m in length and tipped with a sonic drill. You can control the wire with the Scuffling ability. In combat, the Brain Drill inflicts +0 damage, or +4 damage if you are close enough to kiss or bite your target.

Brain Drills are popular among balla crime families as a tool of assassination. The weapon can be quiet and discreet; the drill is precise enough to target weak spots such as the ear canal or the root of the mouth as it burrows toward the victim's brain. Brain Drills are often combined with Stimulust, enabling an attacker to get close before activating the weapon.

## Brainwave Synchronizer
Install Cost: 5

Upkeep: 1

At least one other crew member must have a Brainwave Synchronizer installed for this implant to be of use (the manufacturer offers a bulk discount, so buying three or more reduces the cost by 1 each). While on the ship, you may spend any number of points of Output. For every two points spent, the two of you may choose one ability, other than Health. That ability is now shared between your two characters. If your pool of that ability is exhausted, you may draw on the other character's pool, and vice versa.

Your brainwaves de-synchronize after the end of the mission, or when one of you is knocked unconscious. Strong emotion, physical trauma, intoxication, meson shrapnel, and other effects may also prematurely degrade your synchronization. If your synchronized partner dies, you immediately suffer a catastrophic neural backlash that inflicts +4 damage and renders you unconscious as if struck by NLD fire.

A common side effect of synchronization is for Drives or even memories or emotions to be shared between sync partners.

## Bushytailer
Install Cost: 1

Upkeep: 1

A peanut-sized implant near your heart releases a jolt of electricity when you are rendered unconscious by a NLD blast, rebooting your nervous system. The implant functions like an automatic espresser. The default setting triggers the Bushytailer a few seconds after it detects the non-lethal disruption blast, but the user can set a delay of an arbitrary time period from five seconds to six hours. After activation, the Bushytailer's internal capacitors must recharge by harvesting power from the body's bioelectric field. A recharge cycle takes about an hour.

Kinks in the system that cause the system to activate when the user falls asleep have been smoothed out. At least that's what the marketing campaign says.

## Cyberlimb
Install Cost: 6

Upkeep: 1

A cybernetic replacement for one of your limbs enabling you to add other cybernetic enhancements at a lower cost. Cyberlimbs were once rare as medical technology was advanced enough to grow organic replacements in most cases. These days, obvious cyber-replacement is the mark of a cybe, an inhabitant of a lower-tech synthculture or an unfortunate veteran of the Mohilar War, as cloning resources were often unavailable during the bloodier parts of that conflict. Before the war, cyberlimbs were also associated with certain subcultures, but today using a cyberlimb for cosmetic reasons is considered rude.

Each cyberlimb you have adds +1 to your Health. The cyberlimb also makes other pieces of cybernetics cheaper to install and maintain. Cybernetics installed in a cyberlimb have their install cost reduced by 1 (minimum 1). Cybernetics can be installed as follows:

| ARM ONLY | LEG ONLY |
|---|---|
| Black Spot | Breadbox |
| Dataloader | Motobooster (two legs must be installed) |
| Handgun | |
| Pherotracker | X-Gravs (two legs must be installed) |
| Popclaws | |

## Flex Arms
Install Cost: 3

Upkeep: 1

Cybe scientists constantly seek to push the boundaries of what it is to be transhuman. Adding additional limbs is an obvious choice in this regard. These tentacle-like cybernetic arms are anchored to the scapula bones in the back, and extend from there. The limbs are installed in pairs. Flex Arms can take enhancements intended for legs or arms. Using the additional limbs requires more conscious thought than a standard limb; they can be used for both manipulation and movement.

## Impulser
Install Cost: 3

Upkeep: 1

A small blue hemisphere that protrudes from the base of your neck, the Impulser acts as a popper. The Impulser's advantage over a regular popper is that it regrows the quantum crystal lattice within itself after use. Two intervals after it has been triggered, the Impulser fully regenerates and is ready to use again. The implant cannibalizes your body to get the materials it needs to regenerate, and so each use costs you 1 Health. In all other ways, the Impulser functions identically to a normal popper.

## Internal Medical Schema
Install Cost: 2

Upkeep: 1

Your key organs are lined with micro-pouches containing tailored medicinal drugs and stem cells, and tattooed with interactive holographic displays that highlight damaged areas and recommend treatment protocols. In the event of a serious internal injury, the relevant section of your body glows a friendly green, guiding surgeons to the damaged organs. This ensures those treating your injuries are always considered to have access to 25th-century medicine, even in locations or situations where those treating you don't have the necessary tools or know-how. You never need worry about the penalties of primitive convalescence (p. 75 of the *Ashen Stars* rulebook).



## Jobsbridge
Install Cost: 3

Upkeep: 1

The Jobsbridge implant plugs into the anterior cingulate cortex of the brain, and wirelessly connects to the local data network. It constantly correlates your Laser team's current location and capability with nearby job opportunities, work orders and news reports, as well as previously gathered planetary data, and feeds all that into a complex modeling system. It identifies potential side deals and bonuses for the crew, and automatically negotiates for them on your behalf. (You can switch the real-time negotiation system off, but that risks another Laser crew snitching the side deal from

under your nose). Weaseling out of a deal negotiated by Jobsbridge requires a Public Relations test (Difficulty 4) to avoid losing 1 Reputation.

The Jobsbridge will then alert you of any side deals or bonuses that it's signed you up for. These side deals may be ones that are only perceptible with the Jobsbridge — for example, if you're exploring an alien jungle, the implant might tell you that the tree over there matches the type of wood used in the high-end custom-made furniture store you visited three missions ago, and it's just sent a message to the tavak artisan that you'll bring her a cargo hold full of rare timber within seven working days.

## Muckraker Suite
Install Cost: 3

Upkeep: 1

The Muckraker Suite is the cybernetic solution of choice for sleazehound reporters everywhere. The Muckraker Suite provides highly customized software and semi-intelligent systems that trawl the galactic networks for dirt on a chosen target. When you meet someone new, you may pay a number of Public Relations points to gain boosts on Downside, Intimidation and Forensic Accounting when investigating or threatening that person. The Public Relations spend varies depending on how 'clean' and well known the target is; dirt on your average shady character that Lasers run into costs 3 points. A known criminal might cost only 1; a squeaky clean civilian or someone who's deliberately expunged their record costs 6 or more.

Even if the Muckraker can't dig up enough information to warrant a boost, it can sometimes give useful hints or insinuations that you can exploit.

The Muckracker needs to know the real identity of the target, and the target has to have some sort of official record, either locally or in the Combine databanks.

## Nu-U
Install Cost: 2 (+2 per personality)

Upkeep: 0

The Nu-U implant is a mix of hardware and software. The hardware element comprises a small implant concealed in the spine that looks like an orthopedic disc replacement to a casual scan. The software is an advanced program on data chip that overwrites your personality with a new one in a manner similar to the cybe Neural Rewiring ability. Switching personality chips requires minor surgery; the surgeon must cut through the skin to reveal the chip port on the implant.

A basic new personality is crude at best, having a rudimentary set of abilities and a simple background history without too much depth. More complex personalities are available for a higher price; these may be tailored by a designer to incorporate a desired set of traits and memories, or generated algorithmically and bought off the shelf. Your own personality, memories, and abilities are replaced completely by the ones stored in the implant; note that the new personality includes psychological blocks preventing it from noticing gaps or inconsistencies in its own memories, or questioning what happened in the gap between its most recent preprogrammed memory and its current situation. It is technically possible to create modular personalities from deep brain scans of individuals, but this form of mental impersonation counts as identity theft under Combine law.

The implant is sometimes used in conjunction with plastic surgery by those who wish to avoid detection. Undercover law officers, criminals in hiding, and secret agents often make use of this enhancement. Some people even use the implant as a means to escape from their lives for a while. Certain cultures also use this technology as punishment for capital crimes — the murderer's perfectly good body gets a new synthetic personality, making it a productive member of society.

You can set your Nu-U implant to restore your base personality after a period of time, upon a set event, or after a code phrase is spoken. You can set multiple contingencies for returning your personality if you wish (and you can make a Preparedness test to have set a contingency for just this situation right now, letting your original character pop back into dominance). Artificial personalities lose all memories acquired while your true nature reasserts itself, and reset to their starting state.

The modular personalities have 10 points in investigative abilities and 30 points in general abilities. The PC chooses the abilities when the personality is purchased, and they cannot be changed later. Health scores remain constant across personalities and do not need to be purchased with the modular personality's general ability point allocation; points in species-specific abilities may not be purchased. No ability can have a rating higher than 6.

## Optic Slug

Install Cost: 3

Upkeep: 1

This upgrade replaces one of your eyes. The artificial eyeball functions as normal but can also be removed to serve as a snail. A micromotor enables the Optic Slug to roll slowly and adhere to objects; it can crawl up walls and across ceilings, or attach itself to a person or vehicle. You can control the slug at a distance by mental command; the slug's battery lasts about a month if it remains stationary, but runs down quickly if it has to move quickly. Replacements for lost Optic Slugs cost 1 bigcred each.

When the slug is at large outside your body, you can switch between regular vision and the feed from the slug at will. You can also connect your slug's feed to your tether and display it as a regular video image.

## Popspurs

Install Cost: 4

Upkeep: 1

You have retractable, sharpened carbon-fiber spurs in your knees and elbows. Every time you participate in a Scuffling contest (either as attacker or victim), your opponent automatically takes 2 damage. (That's 2 flat damage, not +2 damage.) Armor reduces this damage normally; if you're fighting multiple foes, divide the 2 damage among them as you wish.

Like Popclaws, use of these implants disturbs people. If you use or are believed to have used your spurs in a questionable killing, the Difficulty of any Public Relations tests to preserve your crew's Reputation increases by 2, and there's a 1-point levy on any interpersonal spends.

Failure to pay Upkeep on your spurs causes them to lock in the retracted position.

## Puppet Wire

Install Cost: 4

Upkeep: 1

A mesh of micro-circuitry covers the inside of your skull, enabling you to remotely pilot someone else's body and

they yours. With the correct codes you can access the body of anyone else with this implant and operate their body by remote control, spending your ability points on their behalf. There's a 1-point levy on any interpersonal ability spends, or on the use of Athletics, Scuffling, Shooting, or Sense Trouble. You can't spend Health through the connection, and species-specific abilities like Phase or Psychic Vitality only work if both participants are of the same type.

The connection has a range of 10km. You can expand this by routing it through communications relays, but the levy climbs to 2 points if you route a connection over distances of more than 1000km, due to packet loss and lag. The host is aware of their body's actions while under control and can end the connection at any time. While controlling someone else's body, your own body appears to be sleeping. If your own body dies while possessing someone else, the connection is terminated immediately. Some Lasers tell stories of ghosts in their heads, the whispers of former colleagues killed while remotely operating.

## Shudderware

Install Cost: 4

Upkeep: 1

A series of quantum relays and enhanced neurotransmitters throughout your nervous system increase your reaction time considerably. If you would normally check pools to see who goes first in combat, you are now instead automatically considered the aggressor. If you are caught unaware, you can seize "going first" on the second round of combat.

Shudderware also boosts Sense Trouble.

Shudderware only activates for a few moments at a time since it degrades nerve endings with prolonged use. For this reason Shudderware cannot be used to increase movement speed or grant the ability to dodge bullets.

## Sohna Nur

Install Cost: 2

Upkeep: 1

A highly sensitive implant that monitors and controls extremes within your limbic cortex. It resembles a small multi-colored hemisphere attached to the back of the head. When you engage the sohna nur, it overrides extremes of

emotion and attempts to control your mind by coercion, pheromones, or telepathic mind control. The sohna nur is the product of early attempts by balla scientists to come up with a new version of the mor sohn. Later, during their war with humanity, the balla made an ill-advised attempt to use sohna nur on captured humans with predictable results.

Prolonged use of the sohna nur eats away at your personality and will, slowly turning you into a sociopathic automaton.

You can activate the sohna nur to resist mental control of any kind for the rest of the interval, or to automatically succeed at an Emotion Suppression or Resist Battle Frenzy test. For the rest of the episode you must pay a 1-point levy for interpersonal ability spends due to your cold and flat demeanor. If you activate the sohna nur more than once per episode, the levy remains in effect until you somehow reconnect with your suppressed emotions.

## Testament
Install Cost: 3

Upkeep: 0

A small armored box that rests inside your lower torso and constantly records your sensory input in a sixty-second loop. The information is stored securely so that only someone with the proper codes can retrieve it. The Testament is effectively a black box for your body. Should you die, the Testament activates a coded beacon for retrieval. Testaments are usually disguised to look like harmless medical implants, though they are legal in most constituencies. Testaments are often associated with vengeance contracts, where your estate hires a Laser team to investigate the circumstances of your death and bring those responsible to justice. (If you're the sort of person who installs a Testament and sets up a vengeance contract, you're also the sort of person who gets killed under questionable circumstances.)

## Trouble Crab
Install Cost: 2

Upkeep: 1

An implant resembling a matte black crab clamped to the back of your neck tingles in the presence of common weapon types. Batons, combat blades, disruption weapons, and old-fashioned slug throwers all trigger the implant. Explosives and unconventional weapons do not show up on the scanner.

A link to your visual cortex highlights weapons in your field of vision, listing their accessories, and current disruption setting if any. Weapons held in hand are highlighted in red. The scanner grants a boost to Sense Trouble or Public Relations rolls made where concealed weapons are a factor.

## Vengeance Coprocessor
Install Cost: 3

Upkeep: 1

A tactical computer in your brain provides hints and alerts during combat against a specific foe. Before the implant can be used, you must 'prime' it by studying that foe. Doing so is automatic if you actually fight that foe, or encounter them in a context that similarly tests their reaction speed, tactical ability, and combat skills, such as an Athletics contest or a simulated combat. Alternatively, you can spend a point of Kinetics to observe the target fighting someone else, or two points of Imaging or Holo Surveillance to gain the necessary data from video images.

You can activate the implant once per episode to provide a pool of 6 points that can be only used for Shooting and Scuffling ability tests against that foe. Unused points vanish at the end of the current interval. The Vengeance Coprocessor can only simulate a single enemy at a time, but you can wipe its memory banks and reset it for a new target freely.

## Zeitgeist Face
Install Cost: 4

Upkeep: 2

This implant monitors and manipulates the muscles of your face and throat according to a real-time analysis of the reactions of those around you, filtered through local cultural values and a model of the media zeitgeist. When active, it automatically modulates your expression, body language, and tone of voice to trigger subconscious associations with authority figures, cultural heroes, or celebrities. You may substitute points from Public Relations for any interpersonal spend, assuming the target is immersed in a culture you can digitally plunder (it won't work, therefore, on previously unknown aliens, or natives of a low-tech planet).

## Medical and Forensic Gear

### Dear John
Cost: 1 per dose

This drug cancels the effects of anti-rejection drugs and boosts the native immune system of the target. By preventing the stimmers from working, the target is affected as if they hadn't paid Upkeep on their viroware or cyberware (cyberware: -1 Health, take +1 Damage; viroware: investigative spends cost 1 more point and +1 to all Difficulties for the next four intervals, painful withdrawal). This drug can be ingested or injected and is sometimes used to weaken assassination targets. Dear John has no effect on cybes.

### Eye Witness Gel
Cost: Preparedness 3 per tube

Eye Witness Gel briefly stimulates the visual memory of a witness, giving them near-perfect recall of what they saw. The witness must consume the whole tube of gel, and the addition of mint or orange flavors cannot wholly disguise the foul taste of the chemical compound. Should the witness stomach the nearly indigestible concoction, they may recall added details of an event they recently witnessed. A spend of Reassurance is often required, as the experience of a temporary enhancement of memory may be confusing or traumatic, especially if the original crime was disturbing or violent.

### Putrefast
Cost: Preparedness 2

This chemical compound accelerates the process of decomposition, making it exceedingly difficult to obtain any useful forensic information from a corpse. A 1-point Chemistry or Forensic Anthropology spend coupled with prompt use of a bioprocess suspender can arrest the decomposition process, but cannot reverse damage that has been done already.

### Slap Doc
Cost: Preparedness: 6

A single-use patch containing a simple expert system, a half-dozen broad-spectrum medicines, and a limited number of nanobot surgeons. The Slap Doc restores 4 lost Health. You can only benefit from one patch in an episode.

## Miscellaneous Tech

### Drone
Cost: 4 (first drone is free for ndoaites)

Drones are remote-controlled robotic avatars. Drones come in a variety of forms, but the most common models are androids and hover-discs. You may make any non-species specific general ability test or investigative ability spend through a drone. Basic drones have a Health of 6. At Health 0 to -5, the drone is damaged, making it impossible to spend points on investigative abilities, and raising all Difficulty Numbers by 1. At -6 or lower, the drone is destroyed. Drones do not need to make Consciousness rolls.

Drones may be repaired using Systems Repair; one point of Systems Repair restores 2 points of Health.

Any cybernetic upgrade may be built into a drone at the standard installation cost.

### Phosphorolytic Capacitor
Cost: 6

This backpack-sized unit stores Output from your ship's engines. The capacitor can store up to 6 points of Output, which can then be converted into other pools through devices such as a Phosphorolytic Battery (*Ashen Stars*, p. 134) or Dataloader (*Ashen Stars*, p. 131), or used as a source of power.

## Protective Gear

### Royal Guard Tabard
Cost: 2

This heavy vest enables a durugh to extend their phasing power so that they can pass incoming objects and energy through their bodies during combat. For every 4 Phase spent, you increase your Hit Threshold by 1 for one round. Alternatively, you may spend 4 Phase to remain immaterial and hence immune to attacks for the whole round.

### Sub-Quantum Dissonance Rod
Cost: 5

A crystalline rod about 1 foot in length that prevents you from being seen by the Farsight and Neurosight vas mal abilities. Anyone using those powers sees a shimmering void

instead of you. Although this technology is of Vas Mal origin none of them is willing to admit creating it.

## Toxsuit
Cost: Standard or Preparedness 4

Toxsuits are lightweight plastic overalls that protect against NVC (nuclear/viral/chemical) attacks and other hazards. They offer much the same protection as a spacesuit, without being as confining and inconvenient (raising the Difficulty of most tasks by only 1 instead). Toxsuits cannot be used in vacuum.

You can grab a toxsuit from your ship's locker when heading into a known hazard, or pay 4 Preparedness to have a disposable suit in your pocket when you run into an unexpectedly toxic situation.

## Whimpershell
Cost: Preparedness 4 or Preparedness 6 (with life support)

A whimpershell is a rectangular panel of polycarbonate armor. When triggered, it expands into a shell just big enough for one person to crawl under. A powerful chemical bonding agent on the edges of the shell glues it to the floor when it's pulled into place. The whimpershell is astoundingly tough, able to survive explosions, weapons fire, extreme weather conditions, high temperatures, and other dangers without the occupant coming to any harm.

The only way out of a whimpershell is for someone on the outside to use a sharp knife to cut into the seams and collapse the structure. Once you go into your shell, you're safe but stuck until released. (You might be able to tunnel under the shell walls if you erected the shell on soft ground).

More advanced shells have rudimentary life support — they're airtight, with a small atmosphere scrubber and heater that provide air for seventy-two hours.

Whimpershells are used by civilians who have to enter war zones and other dangerous places with military escort. When the disruption blasts start flying, the civilians pop their shells and shelter in place. They're also used by the targets of assassins, victims of natural disasters, the extremely nervous, and Lasers who invested in Business Affairs and Public Relations instead of Health and Shooting.

# Investigative Tech

## Necroprobe
Cost: Preparedness 6

Developed using insights into the post-mortem structure of the brain garnered from vas mal weird science, the Necroprobe consists of a long needle attached to a bulky handle with a big red button. Carefully insert the needle into the eyesocket of a recently deceased individual (dead within the last twenty-four hours), press the button, and stand well back. The Necroprobe sends a jolt of energy into the most recently active sectors of the brain, causing the corpse to do whatever it was going to do just before it was killed. If you're lucky, it gasps out a clue like the name of the murderer, or its dead hand mimes pressing a series of controls that you can map with Industrial Design to a particular type of control console. Kinetics or Holo Surveillance may also factor into interpreting the corpse's movements.

If you're unlucky, the corpse just exhales loudly, as if death was something of an anticlimax, and yields no useful clues.

## Portable Datascraper
Cost: 2

This compact pocket computer comes stuffed with automated hacking and traffic analysis routines. It automatically monitors all local comms traffic — both public and private communications and data on any networks it can hack into — and records anything matching keywords relevant to the Lasers' investigation. It voraciously grabs any data relating to individuals the Lasers encounter.

If a suspect escapes, the Datascraper offers an alternate method of pursuit, by investigating any information grabbed from the suspect's data halo — at the very least, the 'scraper has probably recorded the suspect's headset/tether serial number, which can be traced through the relevant authorities or service providers.

The GM may offer Decryption clues through the Portable Datascraper, as your system snaffles useful information from nearby communications channels.

The legality of Datascrapers is a gray area; some planets forbid or restrict them.

## Smart Meglight
Cost: 1

An underslung scanner attached to the standard meglight (which is, all things considered, pretty smart for a flashlight to begin with) draws attention to points of interest, abraded or damaged surfaces, traces of weapons fire, and other anomalies. While it's no substitute for a thorough examination of a crime scene, a smart meglight highlights potential clues in an instant when you're in a hurry.

## Snailbomb
Cost: Preparedness 6 or Preparedness 8 (with launcher)

A snailbomb is a cluster of a dozen snails, packed around a smart explosive charge. It can be thrown like a grenade or, for an extra 2 points of Preparedness, fired from a launcher that gives it a range of 500m Getting it through a narrow gap like a window may require a Shooting test. When it lands, the explosive charge scans its surroundings, identifies the optimum hiding places and configuration for its snails, then detonates, propelling the snails in every direction. The snails are adhesive, and land in shadowy corners, cracks, above doorways, and in other out-of-the-way places. Thrown accurately, the snailbomb blankets the target area in a full-coverage snail network instantaneously.

The explosive charge is calibrated to destroy itself and its sensor system, leaving only a puff of black dust behind. The snails themselves can be discovered with a simple search, or with Holo Surveillance.

## Stenographer
Cost: 1; buys Stenographer for each crew member

A suite of software designed for use by Laser crews, a copy of Stenographer must be installed on every team member's tether to be fully effective. Stenographer intelligently records and categorizes all evidence gathered thus far on an investigation. It shares information and reports between crew members, tags holo-images and flatscans of crime scenes or physical evidence, and can even flag unexplored lines of inquiry.

The GM can use Stenographer to remind players about evidence they've forgotten, or abilities they've neglected to use. It also ensures that PCs not present in a scene have all they need to bring their investigative abilities to bear on clues in that scene.

## Stinker
Cost: Preparedness 2

A peanut-size capsule you squash to release a liquid onto a target. The liquid gives off a scent undetectable to normal humans, but which pherotrackers, animals, or those with the Bloodhound cybernetic upgrade can easily detect and follow. Lasers often use Stinkers to track suspects who rely on technological means to baffle electronic tracking devices.

## Virotrigger
Cost: 2

This fuzzy black baton is covered with metallic hairs that secrete a chemical cocktail of trigger hormones and nerve stimulators. Touching or striking someone with the Virotrigger causes the target's viroware to activate. This includes viroware such as Dominator, Snakehisser, and Stimulust. Virotriggers are a favorite tool of nufaiths and political groups that oppose the use of viroware.
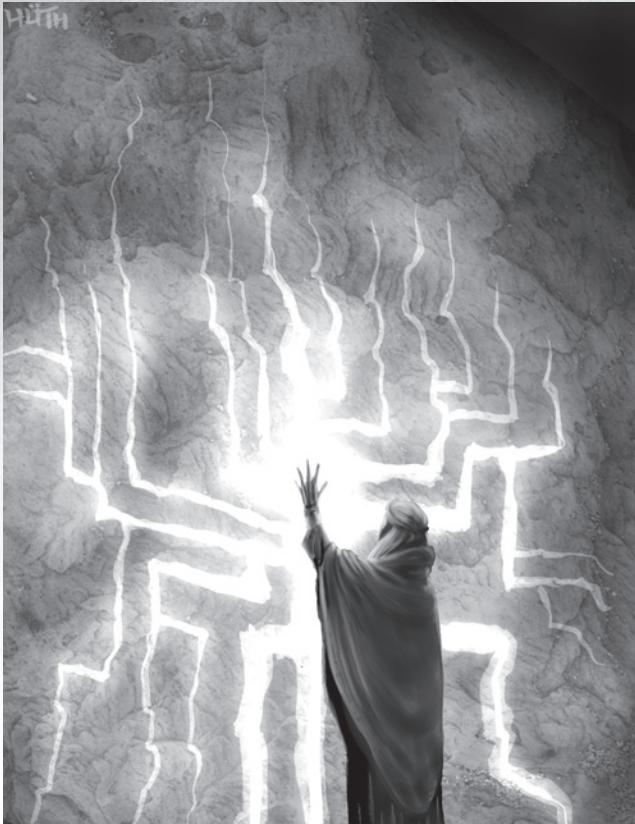
# Viroware

### Electrosense
Initial Therapy Cost: 2

Upkeep: 1

A sophisticated network of nerves grown beneath your scalp and attached to your hair follicles. The implant enables you to "see" electrical impulses; you can detect living creatures in total darkness by their electrical signature and spot powerful signals and hidden electric wires through up to 20cm of material.

Electrosense requires hair to function properly. Bald individuals may still sense electrical impulses through eyebrows and other facial or body hair. Vas mal and kch-thk lack the necessary hair to use this implant, but may wear vat-grown wigs or mustaches to compensate.

### Forensi-Shield
Initial Therapy Cost: 3

Upkeep: 1

This viroware consists of a series of modifications to render you very difficult to follow with forensic technology. Constructs added to your cells trigger apoptosis when separated from your body. This cell death is complete and renders the biological material down to carbonized residue with no identifiable characteristics. You also have no discernable fingerprints.

The virus renders you sterile, although this condition reverses itself harmlessly if the Upkeep regiment is not maintained.

Forensi-Shield is commonly used by medical or forensic technicians, to avoid contaminating a crime scene or to ensure that experimental viro-modifications do not escape the lab.

While the enhancement is not technically illegal most law enforcement agencies are very suspicious of those with it. It can also cause endless hassles when dealing with banks and other bureaucracies that insist on verifying your identity.

### Lumitat
Initial Therapy Cost: 1

Upkeep: 0

A bioluminescent tattoo you can activate at will to shed light or demonstrate that your chosen musical group or sporting team is superior to other musical groups or sporting teams. Lumitats are common in the Bleed and often used to denote membership in some social group such as a gang or religion. Lumitats are invisible when inactive. They activate automatically after death and stay lit for three to four days afterward.

## Medusa
Initial Therapy Cost: 3

Upkeep: 2

Synthetic glands in your armpits flood your target with predator pheromones, overstimulating the fight or flight response in a target and usually paralyzing them with indecision. Once per episode you may target a nearby humanoid and spend 2 Health and a number of Intimidation points equal to 1+ their Savvy Modifier. If you spend the right number of Intimidation points, your target is paralyzed for at least one round. After this round, roll a d6 for the target's action. A 1 means flee, 2-5 stay quivering, 6 attack.

If you spend too little Intimidation, treat this as a use of aggravator instead, as your target lashes out. If you spend too much Intimidation, treat this as a use of Snakehisser instead, as your target panics and flees.

## Mr. Happygood
Initial Therapy Cost: 1

Upkeep: 1

An illegal viroware enhancement floods your system with natural feel-good drugs such as serotonin, oxytocin, and dopamine on command. This implant coils around your pituitary gland and replenishes itself by cannibalizing neurotransmitters from your body.

You can activate Mr. Happygood once per episode, gaining a pool of 6 points that can be applied to any interpersonal pools. Once the current interval ends, you crash, and may not make spends of any kind for the whole of the next interval.

Careful monitoring of this implant is required, otherwise you become dependent on the drugs, becoming edgy, depressed, irrational, and craving the next hit. During the Utopian Era Mr. Happygood served as an instrument of pleasure, but, since the war, it has been put to more sinister uses. Unscrupulous individuals use this implant to control slaves; in these cases, the master controls the implant through a code phrase or viroware enhancement.

## Twitchtalk
Initial Therapy Cost: 2

Upkeep: 1

Extensive modification to the basal ganglia of the brain enables you to communicate through body language with allies who have this implant. Subtle gestures, looks, and even tiny changes in stance serve to transmit information between teammates. You and your partners become synced in a way that usually isn't possible without latent telepathy and years of working together.

You can communicate everything but very complex concepts, so, for example, you can tell a teammate a plan for jumping a pair of guards, but discussions about transcendental physics or Oscar Wilde are right out. Entire teams that share this viroware can be downright creepy, working in perfect concert while maintaining absolute silence.

## Venger 6000
Initial Therapy Cost: 3

Upkeep: 0

Chemical-laden bladders wrap around your intestines. The bladders are each bisected by a membrane that prevents the volatile substances inside from mixing together. On cue, or if you suffer traumatic injury, this wall dissolves and the compounds mix, causing a powerful explosion. This blast inflicts +6 damage on those adjacent to you.

At will, you may move chemicals from one bladder to another, causing your abdomen to swell and distend obscenely. The chemicals are even mildly fluorescent, and create a visible purple glow when concentrated. This allows you to demonstrate to observers that you are indeed carrying a Venger 6000 bomb, and they should pay the walking bomb appropriate deference and respect. That's definitely worth a boost to your Intimidation.

The chemicals in the bladders are harmless until mixed; if you wish to disarm the bomb, a different mental command opens a valve, allowing the triggering chemical to flow into your digestive system where it is safely neutralized. Once deactivated, the Venger 6000 system is inert until you inject more of the chemicals into your bladder-sacs, a procedure that can only be done between missions.

Venger 6000 is hugely illegal in most jurisdictions; a Laser team known to be carrying this weapon of terror risks considerable loss of reputation (doubly so if the Venger 6000 is used by a kch-thk). The one exception is when dealing with certain Class-K entities, in which case use of a last-ditch defensive weapon like this seems like a prudent course of action.

## Vile-Bile

Initial Therapy Cost: 2

Upkeep: 1

A pair of ducts in the mouth secretes and stores venom you can spit up to 3m at your opponents. Hitting a target requires a Shooting test. The toxin is readily absorbed by skin or chitin and inflicts half as much damage to a target as you spend in Health points. You are immunized against the effects of your own toxin. You can also drool the toxin onto food or directly onto the flesh of someone nearby.

## Wingman Ultra

Initial Therapy Cost: 2

Upkeep: 1

Therapies boost your emotional intelligence and sensitize you to your partner's mood while granting a range of minor pheromone boosts transforming you into the perfect backup. You mimic and enhance your partner's ability, reinforcing their message with body language and attitude. Once per interval you can boost to one of your colleague's Interpersonal abilities.

Despite the name, Wingman Ultra is not solely for Flirting; its benefits may be applied to any Interpersonal ability. The corporate version of the virus is marketed under the brand name of SyncoFlux; the two are identical, other than the price.

## Xeno Baffler

Initial Therapy Cost: 4+

Upkeep: half initial therapy cost

Your body has undergone radical modification, so much so that you are no longer a member of your original species. Your body temperature, neurology, organs, and circulatory system have been modified to be almost unrecognizable.

The Bio Signatures ability reveals your presence as a living being but cannot determine your species. In many cases, computer systems assume you must be an error in their system as opposed to an individual, and may ignore you or treat you as a glitch. The same applies to inattentive living operators.

You may choose your new external appearance, which must remain roughly humanoid, or you can keep your appearance unchanged, and merely remodel your interior structure. You may also pay more bigcreds to reduce your biological needs, or even make parts of your metabolism more inefficient to reduce the cost of your new form, as shown in the Xeno Baffler table.

Medic tests made on your behalf suffer a 1-point levy due to your unusual biology.

| MODIFICATION | REDUCED by 50% | REDUCED by 99% | INCREASED by 100% |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sleep Required | 1 | 4 | -2 |
| Oxygen Required | 1 | 4 | -2 |
| Sustenance Required | 1 | 2 | -1 |
| Rate of Aging | 1 | 4 | -1 |

## Weaponry

### Disruption Holdout
Cost: Preparedness 4

A tiny weapon of last resort with a magazine of two shots and a range of 10m. Very easy to conceal, because it can be built into objects as small as a ring. Due to its size and minimal stopping power, the Disruption Holdout only does NLD damage.

As a weapon of the paranoid and the edgy, this item may be purchased with Sense Trouble points as well as Preparedness.

### Flat-Bat
Cost: Preparedness 3

A flexible polymer strip about 1mm thick and 30cm long that turns into a sturdy baton (treat as a standard baton) when squeezed. Once activated, the polymer melts away to a puddle of goo in about half an hour. Flat-Bats don't show up on most weapon scans and are often disguised as jewelry or clothing.

### Military Disruption Rifle
Cost: 3

Military disruption rifles are powerful rapid-fire weapons intended for use in tactical situations. A military disruption rifle is slightly bulkier than a standard model. The weapon can be fired in one of three modes: standard, burst fire (increases damage to +2), or pulse fire (improves suppressive fire; treat this as the Double Downer accessory).

Military-spec disruption rifles are only legal for Combine or planetary military outfits. These weapons are tightly controlled and almost impossible for a civilian to obtain. Ossa One occasionally grants special licenses to Lasers to carry these weapons. In these cases the Laser crew must prove the need for these weapons and have a track record of responsible weapon use.

### Nauseator
Cost: Preparedness 2

A non-lethal weapon, the nauseator interferes with the target's sense of balance — or to be accurate, it improves it, to the degree that the target can feel the planet turning beneath them, and the way it's hurtling through space at thousands of kilometers per hour. This disorientation puts a 1-point levy on any physical actions taken by the target for the rest of the interval.

A nauseator looks like a slim metal cylinder the size of a flashlight. Each nauseator has enough power to affect a single target, and uses Shooting to resolve attacks. It's unaffected by foilers, poppers, and other defensive systems.

### Phase Mine
Cost: 1

When activated, the phase mine 'charges' the local phase-space with energy. When a creature phases within this charged zone, it triggers a phase collapse explosion, inflicting +4 damage on any phased entities within 10m. The explosion also forces any phased creatures back into normal space. The charge anchors itself to nearby matter, so it's possible to charge a ship or other mobile object. Each mine only works once — once the charge is set, it cannot be disarmed or moved. Charged zones are invisible, even to phased creatures, but can be detected with Energy Signatures or Explosive Devices.

These weapons were developed during early clashes with the durugh, but only came into widespread use during the Mohilar War. Some Combine cities and military installations are still surrounded by thousands of overlapping charge zones that have yet to be dismantled.

### Smog Grenade
Cost: Preparedness 4

A smog grenade fills a 20m radius hemisphere with sensor-baffling smoke and particles. All Hit Thresholds within the cloud increase by 1. The smog also jams most forms of sensors; a Bio Signatures/Energy Signatures/Imaging spend lets you ignore targeting penalties for one round. The sticky smog lasts for several minutes, although high winds can dissipate the cloud prematurely. The smog is mildly caustic, and repeated exposure can abrade the lining of the lungs.

# Disruption Accessories

## Burner
Cost: 1

Alterations to the firing matrix create a third setting for your disruption weapon. The burner setting turns your weapon into a powerful cutting beam capable of shearing through ferrocrete and most alloys. The cutting beam is too slow and short ranged to be much use as an actual weapon.

## Charmer
Cost: 1

*Balla Only*

A variation on the standard Stockholmer mod, this balla-only upgrade tweaks the target's rewired dopamine response. The target of a Stockholmer attack is rewarded for cooperating with the attacker; after being hit by a Charmer NLD blast, your target wakes up madly in love with you, regardless of their previous emotional or sexual connections. Any clues that the subject might give through other interpersonal abilities are now obtainable through Flirting, and any interpersonal points spent to gain benefits from that subject are refunded at the end of the scene. This effect lasts for the rest of the episode.

Charmed subjects may go to great lengths to impress upon you the depth and utter commitment of their love for you.

## Dirty Harry Mod
Cost: 1

This heavy external mod makes your weapon look much bigger and more intimidating. Your Intimidation is boosted if you're threatening someone who was on the losing side of a firefight with you. Also, your weapon does +1 damage when used as a bludgeon.



## Double Downer
Cost: 1

This pistol or rifle modification bifurcates your gun's barrel and adds a special targeting nanocomputer. During an action, you may pay 1 Shooting to both lay down suppressing fire and make a standard Shooting attack.

## Fury Cannon
Cost: 2

*Tavak Only*

Microfilaments in the handle of your weapon connect to the armored shell of your body, using your entire frame as a focusing chamber to increase the intensity of your disruption blasts. You may spend 4 points of Resist Battle Frenzy to increase the damage of your attacks by +2, or to fire a double-strength NLD blast that takes out two poppers (or knocks out a solitary popper and downs your target).

## Goontracker Mk IV

Cost: 1

When you shoot a foe, the underslung camera automatically uploads a mug shot of your target to your ship, and from there it scans interplanetary police reports and records for any outstanding bounties or warrants for that target. Carrying a Goontracker gives a 4-point pool that can be applied to Business Affairs when negotiating bonuses for shooting goons, or to Public Relations when trying to prove that it was right and just to shoot said goons.

## Migrator

Cost: 3

*Kch-Thk Only*

This curious weapon upgrade has two components — a side-mounted projectile launcher that clamps onto your gun, and a complex cyber-organic computer matrix that adjusts the NLD disruption pattern of your weapon. When you fire using a Migrator, your disruptor blast briefly remaps the target's brain as they fall unconscious, altering their brainwave patterns to match those of a kch-thk larva. At the same time, the projectile launcher fires a small dart that injects one of your larvae into the victim's flesh.

You must then make a Migrate Consciousness test. If successful, you jump to that injected larva, which is temporarily synced with the victim's brain. In effect, your consciousness temporarily possesses the victim's body. Your pools (including Health) are as they would be if you'd jumped into one of your stored larvae as normal. You may, at the GM's discretion, gain access to the victim's species-specific abilities while in your temporary abode.

While in the victim's body, you lose 2 Migrate Consciousness points per interval. You may, at any time, leave the victim's body and jump to a regular larva. If you run out of Migrate Consciousness points, you're stuck in your new body until your larva dies, which takes about seventy-two hours unless you employ elaborate artificial means to sustain it. You don't gain access to the victim's consciousness or memory; from the victim's perspective, the time you spend running the show is a surreal waking nightmare.

If the victim's brain cannot be remapped by NLD fire (say, because they still have a working popper, or because their particular thought patterns are unusually incompatible with kch-thk consciousness), then you jump into a dying larvae and must immediately jump again.

## Near Death Gun

Cost: 1

*Vas Mal Only*

This curious upgrade is of use only to vas mal with the Consciousness Simulation ability. When you hit your target with an NLD blast, you briefly 'stain' the area with traces of their consciousness. One vas mal described it as the 'blood splash pattern of the soul', but gory poetics aside, you may use Consciousness Simulation on the target of your NLD attack, even if they are not currently deceased.

## NLD Squelcher

Cost: 2

By modulating the intensity of your NLD blast, you may select how long it will take for your downed target to wake up again. You're still limited by the target's Health, so a target with a Health of 9 will wake up in at most two hours, but you may choose to knock a target out for as little as thirty seconds. Handy if you want to avoid using espressers.

## Phase Harness

Cost: 2

*Durugh Only*

By drawing on your natural ability to shift out of phase with normal matter, this upgrade enables your weapon to strike phased entities. Activating the Phase Harness costs you one point of Phase. As the phased beam is unaffected by normal-matter obstacles, you may ignore cover and other barriers when shooting phased targets. Certain higher-dimensional entities may also be vulnerable to phased disruption blasts.

## Purifier

Cost: 1

This weapon accessory cleanses the target of all surface contamination. It even penetrates the upper layers of the epidermis, the inside of the mouth, nose and other orifices, and scrubs under the fingernails. Useful after a chase through a sewer, or when dealing with contagious or otherwise unsavory targets.

## Silencer

Cost: 2

Sideband static bursts on your disruptor beam temporarily scramble any headsets or other communications devices carried by the target. Resetting the systems and ending this communications blackout takes about an hour, although someone with Communications Intercept or Industrial Design can reboot the comms systems much more quickly. In any event, no one's calling for backup any time soon.

## Sniper Module

Cost: 1

The Sniper Module is a disruption rifle accessory that adds about 20cm to the length of the barrel. The sniper module enhances the effective range of the disruption rifle from 150m to 500m at the cost of a longer cycle time. The disruption rifle with this accessory can only be fired every second round.

## Tracer

Cost: 2

The tracking solution for budget-conscious Lasers who don't want to invest in a pherotracker, the Tracer upgrade gently irradiates the target of your disruption blast. This radiation may be tracked using a standard tether and the Energy Signatures ability. The radiation signature degrades rapidly, rarely lasting more than two or three intervals. The tagged subject glows dimly, although this is visible only in extremely dark conditions. Anyone with a tether and an understanding of radiation physics may track the tagged subject.

## Zero Beamer

Cost: 1

This bulky barrel-mounted add-on removes any visual or auditory trace of your weapon's discharge — at least, within the frequencies most humanoids can perceive. As far as the vast majority of witnesses are concerned, you just pointed your gun, and your target fell over (or exploded and then fell over, depending on your weapon setting).

# Hot contracts

## Hot contracts

Some or all of these contracts may be available right now for your Laser crew to bid for! Act quickly, as these limited-time offers to risk life and limb for a few lousy credits won't last long!

Game Moderators: we suggest that the best way to use these contracts is to print out two or three of them, and let the players pick the one they wish to take at the end of an adventure. Giving them a choice makes the players feel more invested and in control of their destiny, but also gives you time to flesh out these brief outlines into a full *Ashen Stars* mystery.
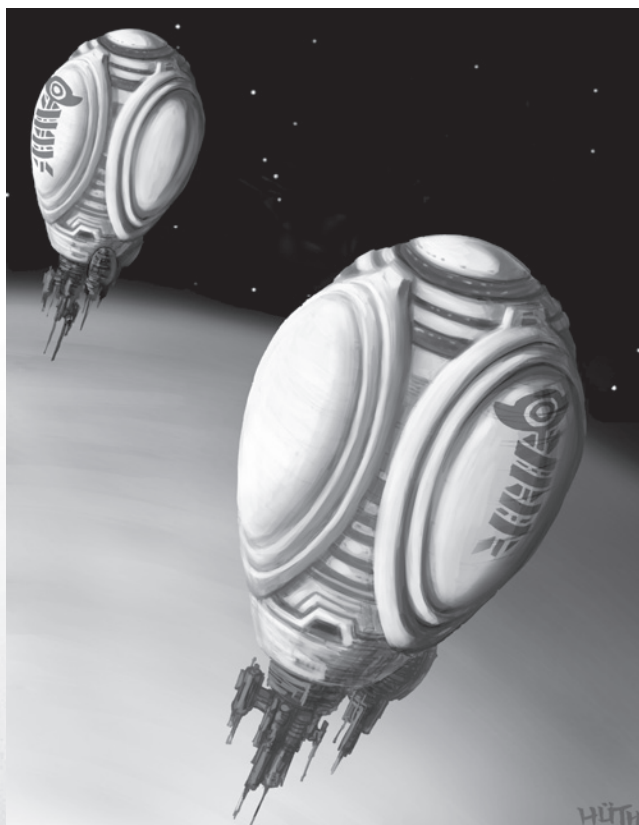


## PALAMON EXTRACTION

BIDS CLOSING SOON on extraction mission.

SITE: Planet PALAMON in the CERBERUS outzone

Colony founded by the Combine in 2432 as a prison planet for the incorrigibly criminal.

Prison personnel evacuated in 2453 after reports of Mohilar activity. For reasons unknown, inmates remained on planet. Last recorded contact 2454.

Geography consists of two large continental landmasses, one each in the extreme northern and southern hemispheres. Planet's tropical oceans bereft of significant landmasses and therefore presumed uninhabited. Prison complexes were located on southern continent.

Köppen climate zones: tundra and ice cap. Class-M planet, breathable atmosphere. Genetic re-immunization recommended before ground-pounding. Xenoecology supports extensive predatory megafauna (quasi-mammalian.)

OBJECTIVES: 1) determine whether the inmate Boro Cisco (b. 2409) has any living heir or heirs. 2) If so, extract this person or persons from their present situation to the planet Bartolus for receipt of a considerable inheritance, including ownership of Space Station Bethlehem.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: Successful bidder will be provided with full genetic panel for Boro Cisco and documentation packet proving the nature of the inheritance.

CLIENT: Legal firm of Loren, Bloxham, Buswell & Krx-Xprk

BROKER/CONTACT: Arcoro Effectuations

## SONJANA HATE CRIME INVESTIGATION

LAST KNOWN LOCATION: TALOC IV in CERES

Locate balla sociologist TANI SONJANA, formerly of the University of Eos in the Proper. Dismissed for her controversial research into the so-called Bogey Conundrum, Sonjana traveled to the Bleed to continue her work. She announced that she had discovered 'proof' that one of the Seven Peoples was actually the Mohilar, and that the entire extant history of the Combine is a deception.

After making this announcement, Sonjana vanished. Routine monitoring of subversive elements suggests that xenophobic factions intend to use Sonjana's 'research' to incite racial prejudices against one of the Seven. While Sonjana's work is clearly pseudoscience without any validity, it must be thoroughly discredited before it can be used as a weapon against the Combine.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Locate Tani Sonjana and convince her to repudiate her research. 2) Locate all extant copies of Sonjana's work. 3) Identify the criminal factions targeting Sonjana.

MEDICAL NOTE: Sonjana's mohr sohn was found abandoned in Taloc IV's spaceport. It is therefore likely that Sonjana is suffering from emotional distress.  Any bidding crews must include at least one member trained in psychotherapy.

CLIENT: Combine Council automated subsystems

BROKER/CONTACT: Vago Dash, Combine Consul on Taloc IV

## AI TERMINATION

SITE: GALEN HOSPITAL STATION ONE, orbiting HYNA

Galen Station One came online one week ago, as part of the Combine's ongoing efforts to provide relief and medical care to victims of the Mohilar War. Hyna was targeted by durugh viroweapons during the conflict, and is under quarantine.

The first patients arrived by automated shuttle from the surface five days ago, and were scheduled to undergo experimental virotherapy aimed at reversing the effects of the durugh weapons.

As Class-K weapons were deployed on Hyna, Galen Station One is entirely automated for the safety of the medical personnel. Its counterpart, Galen Two, houses researchers and medical staff who interface remotely with systems on Galen One.

Three days ago, the Artificial Intelligence on board Galen One locked the station down and refuses to respond.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Board Galen One. 2) Deactivate the AI.

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS: Galen One is a high-security installation, with both anti-ship and anti-personnel systems designed to ensure that the Class-K viroweapons could not be recovered and reused. While the station AI is not programmed to use these defenses, Galen Two has detected energy signatures consistent with weapons activation.

Sixty-four patients were part of the initial virotherapy test group. If they are still alive, their safety must be ensured. Damage to the station must be kept to a minimum - excessive collateral damage will result in penalties to the offending Laser crew.

CLIENT: Hyna Charitable Trust

BROKER/CONTACT: Dr. Ludmilla Kromberg

## TZK-VK IMPENDING KIDNAPPING

FLASH CONTRACT

LOCAL POLICE REPORT: A private yacht owned by noted entertainer and celebrity TZK-VK was attacked by an unidentified vessel. The yacht was disabled, but Tzk-Vk's cybe bodyguard TAC-TEC managed to launch his client in an escape pod before the ship was captured by the attackers.

Tzk-Vk's larva tank (grk-k'ka chamber) was on the stolen yacht. Since the theft, Tzk-Vk received an anonymous ransom note, demanding that he place a sizable sum of credits in an untraceable account or the inactive larvae would be destroyed.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Locate the stolen yacht and recover the larva tank. 2) Locate and recover Tac-Tec. 3) Identify and arrest the kidnappers.

MEDICAL NOTE: While the tank is out of range, Tzk-Vk is unable to transfer his consciousness should the need arise. Tzk-Vk's current body is young and healthy, so he does not expect to require a transfer in the near future.

CLIENT: Smash Holo Entertainment Corporation

BROKER/CONTACT: Tactical Discretion, Inc.

## INVESTIGATE SIGNAL (POTENTIAL FIRST CONTACT)

SITE: Unexplored Planet BCO-77X (KRAKEN outzone)

Automated probe surveys (2401, 2450) reported the planet to be an unremarkable Class-C planet with a toxic, sulfur-rich atmosphere and surface temperatures in excess of 500 K. No life signs were ever detected, and the planet was never explored or colonized.

The long-range communications relay at Capella detected a repeating signal emanating from BCO-77X. This signal is clearly artificial, but does not correspond to any known Combine code.

Another planet in the same system, BCO-75E (provisionally re-designated Sanctuary), was recently colonized by the anti-tech nufaith Congregation of the Long Day. A Laser team is therefore required to ascertain the source of the signal and ensure that the Long Day colony is not in danger.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Trace the source of the signal. 2) Protect the Long Day colony.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: Full archives of the 2450 automated survey.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY: Note that due to the outbreak of war in 2451, much of the data recorded by the probe has yet to be correlated. Analyzing this data and surveying any anomalies or sites of interest may earn bonus bigcreds.

CLIENT: Church of the Long Day (Embassy to the Demons)

BROKER/CONTACT: NQA Effectuations

## CAPTURE ESCAPED FUGITIVE

TARGET: Cybe uGAMEL, convicted of multiple counts of murder, terrorism, and conspiracy to cause explosion on autonomous planet CYGNUS 5, escaped from a transport ship en route to the termination facility on MEDUSA PRIME. She stole a shuttle and fled; the shuttle is not capable of translight travel, so she is believed to still be in the Cygnus system.

OBJECTIVES: Bring uGamel to Medusa Prime, dead or alive.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: uGamel's military history and psychological profile. Notably, she was decorated for valor seventeen times during the Mohilar War, and was part of the elite 1st Cyber Rangers. She must be considered extremely dangerous, armed or not.

NOTE: Cygnus 5 is an autonomous planet — a former Combine world that has now seceded, but maintains diplomatic relations with the polity. Under the Treaty of Cygnus, Laser operations are permitted in the Cygnus system, but this permit may be revoked in specific cases at the discretion of the Cygnus Ministry of Security.

CLIENT: Cygnus Ministry of Security

BROKER/CONTACT: NQA Effectuations

# INVESTIGATE STELLAR CATASTROPHE

SITE: Star HYDRA ALMEDES undergoing internal stresses of unknown type and origin, possibly related to '*Ashen Stars*' phenomenon. Meson shrapnel from this instability has also disrupted translight corridors, making travel in the system uncertain and hazardous.

Projections estimate 82% chance of gamma-ray bursts or coronal mass ejections within the next 168 hours that will render all life in the Hydra Almedes system extinct.

Hydra Almedes 4 has a population of 406 million. Evacuating the planet before a catastrophic event is infeasible; efforts are underway to provide all possible aid. Pre-apocalyptic social stress focused on the kch-thk minority (who can evacuate en masse as larvae) and the wealthy with access to spacecraft, but has now degenerated into widespread panic and despair.

Hydra Almedes no longer has a functional government or society.

Little hope remains of saving Hydra Almedes 4 from this cataclysm. All that remains is to gather as much data as possible.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Land on Hydra Almedes 4 and access records from the Almedian Institute of Knowledge, the Jakanto Observatory, and any other scientific sources. 2) Investigate any phenomena or information relating to the impending stellar collapse, including rumors of strange space vessels. 3) Leave the system before the star explodes.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: There are 34,548 outstanding requests for effectuated evacuation from citizens stranded on Hydra Almedes 4. While the winning crew may, of course, accept as many of these side jobs as is feasible, be aware than other ships that have landed on Hydra Almedes 4 have been overrun by desperate refugees.

CLIENT: Baged, Tavak Stellar Engineer

BROKER/CONTACT: Arcoro Effectuations

# INVESTIGATE TRAFFIC VIOLATION

Naval combat experience a must!

SITE: CERBERUS Translight Corridor CO664-DELTA

CO664-Delta Translight Corridor, also known as the Snake, is an unusually convoluted and hazardous translight corridor, and is closed to all unauthorized traffic. The Snake is the only viable route to FAINED colony, established just prior to the Mohilar War. Other corridors leading to this region suffered damage during the war, and are no longer passable. Most low-priority traffic to Fained goes via CO667-Epsilon, which necessitates a long journey (six months, on average) at sub-light speeds to reach the isolated planet. High-priority traffic and emergency traffic is permitted to take the Snake, but only with prior authorization from Fained flight control. Excessive traffic through the Snake may collapse the vital corridor entirely.

In the last six weeks, ships of unknown origin have been sighted in the Snake on four separate occasions by patrols and automated traffic buoys. The destination of these ships is equally mysterious - they may have exited in the outer reaches of the Fained system, or continued into an uncharted section of the Cerberus Outzone.

OBJECTIVES: Identify these interlopers and ensure they cease their illegal use of the Snake Translight Corridor.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: An authorization permit good for four (4) transits of the Snake. Note that unauthorized transits of the Snake are a Class 5 offence.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY: Cargo and cabin space on ships permitted to use the Snake is highly valuable. Lasers willing to carry cargo via the Snake should apply to TransGalactic Deliveries for lucrative opportunities.

CLIENT: Fained Traffic Control

BROKER/CONTACT: NQA Effectuations

# PHILOSOPHICAL UPLIFT

SITE: DUNGEONWORLD

OBJECTIVES: Dungeonworld began as a breakaway synthculture colony, dedicated to replicating a quasi-medieval fantasy setting. Genetically engineered "monsters" and automated dungeons were seeded throughout the planet. The synthculture was managed and overseen by an order of "wizards" - engineers based on the orbital DMStation. Dungeonworld closed to outside traffic in 2485.

At some point in the intervening eighty-three years, the order of wizards was overthrown by DETHLAR, a self-proclaimed 'Dark Lord'. Knowledge of the colony's true nature - always limited due to the designers' desire for immersion - was suppressed. The majority of the population of Dungeonworld no longer know they are living in an artificial environment.

As per legislation applying to all such synthcultures, individuals may consent to be subject to the rules and conditions, however perilous, of that world. However, this consent must be given voluntarily.

OBJECTIVES: Inform the population of the true nature of their culture (and, especially, their legal right to depart) without damaging the synthculture as a whole or provoking retribution from Dethlar the Dark.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: Character sheets and other cultural artifacts will be provided to the winning Laser team.

CLIENT: Interstellar Cultural Bench

BROKER/CONTACT: Ministry of Settlement

# INVESTIGATE DIVINE INTERVENTION

SITE: AMPHELION III

In 2305, the survey ship Marid discovered the planet Amphelion III, then a garden paradise. The planet was inhabited by a low-tech species, the amphils, who were restricted to the planet's eastern continent. They consented to the establishment of Elysia City, a Combine colony on the western continent. Settlement of this colony began in 2319. Over the next century, trade and cultural exchange continued between the two groups.

In 2440, an energy being calling itself Zarus manifested over Elysia City. It claimed to be the god of the amphils (amphil myths support this assertion) and accused the Combine colonists of corrupting them. It subjected the planetary governor, Eugene Pallas, and several members of his government to a series of cryptic tests to 'prove their worth'. It then declared that they had failed. The amphils vanished, and the planet was 'cursed' with a drought that has lasted to the present day.

ZARUS DA VINCI, a vas mal, was arrested under suspicion of being the energy being that attacked the colony. The Amphelion government intend to try da Vinci on charges of terrorism, environmental damage, and hostile acts of god. In common with other vas mal, da Vinci's memory is fragmentary, but he claims that he is not legally responsible for the actions of his higher self. Due to the unprecedented nature of the case, both parties have agreed to defer to Laser arbitration.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Ascertain whether or not Zarus da Vinci is the entity that attacked the colony in 2440. 2) If so, determine whether or not these tests were legal, and determine to what degree da Vinci is culpable for any damage inflicted on the colony.

LEGAL ADVISORY: While Elysia City is a Combine colony, it was established with the consent of the non-Combine amphils, and the planet was their property and subject to their laws. No amphil has been encountered since Zarus's intercession.

CLIENT: Zarus da Vinci

BROKER/CONTACT: Arcoro Effectuations

# INVESTIGATE PATHOGEN

TIME-SENSITIVE MISSION - IMMEDIATE BIDS ONLY

SITE: Passenger liner ULTANIA

En route to Sylph City, the passenger liner Ultania reported the outbreak of an unknown pathogen among the crew. According to distress transmissions, the pathogen turned some of the passengers and crew, including the captain and bridge officers, into 'some sort of crazy monsters'. The ship's chief steward sealed the doors leading to the lower passenger decks, isolating an unknown number of passengers and crew from the afflicted. At the time of the last distress transmission, these survivors were uninfected, but were under siege by afflicted crew and could not reach the ship's bridge, engines, or escape pods.

Out of control, the Ultania has drifted into space controlled by the xenophobic hurki. The hurki government threatens to destroy the Ultania to eliminate the pathogen before the ship breaches the atmosphere of their homeworld.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Stop the Ultania from infecting the hurki homeworld. 2) Rescue any uninfected survivors. 3) Identify the pathogen. 4) Cure or contain any infected crew. 5) Recover the Ultania. 6) Identify the source of the pathogen.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: Passenger and crew manifest of the Ultania

TRAVEL ADVISORY: The hurki are designated a Class-J ("ultrahostile") species. Exercise extreme caution.

CLIENT: Sylphan Tours

BROKER/CONTACT: Tactical Discretion, Inc.

# INVESTIGATE ATEMPORAL DISTRESS SIGNAL

SITE: ATHENA RESEARCH STATION

Athena Station established in 2440 to investigate unusual temporal manifold in local subspace. Researchers made several key advances in reconciling time/translight equations before outbreak of Mohilar War. Durugh forces under General Thelkamis captured the station, and all communication was lost until the end of the conflict. Surviving staff were found to be suffering from unusually extreme 'Bogey Conundrum' effect and were wholly unable to remember any events since the capture of the station. Despite this, all staff remained on Athena Station to continue their research.

Yesterday, the Communications Relay at Thermopylae Gate received a fragmented subspace distress on Priority Alpha channels that appeared to originate from Athena Station. The distress call was sent by DR. WINDSONG, who has been administrator of Athena Station since 2447. In the recoverable portion of the message, Windsong reported the station was 'under attack' and 'they've made a terrible mistake'. He spoke of a danger to the entire sector, possibly the entire Bleed.

When contacted, Dr. Windsong declared he had never sent any such message. Nonetheless, protocol dictates that any use of Priority Alpha channels be investigated.

OBJECTIVES: Determine source of distress call and take appropriate action.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: Copy of distress message. The message is severely degraded, possibly due to meson shrapnel or hostile countermeasures. Less than 30% of the data could be recovered. Headers, including timestamp and point of origin, are missing.

CLIENT: Combine Scientific Council

BROKER/CONTACT: Dr. Io Wingsong

## RESOLVE TERRITORIAL
## DISPUTE

SITE: WORLDWOOD COLONY

Worldwood Colony, established six years ago. Titanic plants analogous to trees cover all land surfaces on the planet. The colony's primary economic activities all involve exploitation and cultivation of this natural resource. Worldwood Colony has a population of 21,604, with a notably high cybe population (44%).

The xalic, an independent alien species, has colonies on two other planets in the Worldwood system. The xalic have peaceful relations with the Combine, and gave permission for the establishment of a colony so close to their settlements. They declared they had no interest in developing Worldwood.

One month ago, xalic ships arrived in orbit of Worldwood and began bombing the forests with chemical weapons. When contacted, they declared that the Combine colony "would not be targeted" and that their weapons would not affect human tissue. They refuse to explain their actions in exterminating the forest or to negotiate a cease-fire. Unless stopped immediately, Worldwood will suffer complete ecological and economic collapse.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Make contact with the xalic. 2) Bring about a cessation of their chemical weapon attacks.

TACTICAL ADVISORY: Cybe war veterans on Worldwood have established an illegal militia to defend their home. They have declared their intention to fight back against the xalic if the Combine does not immediately resolve the situation.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY: One of the militia members was arrested in possession of a military-grade surface-to-space punchbeam. This may indicate the militia has purchased more illegal black-market weapons. Investigate and trace these weapons back to their source.

CLIENT: Worldwood Colony

BROKER/CONTACTS: NQA Effectuations
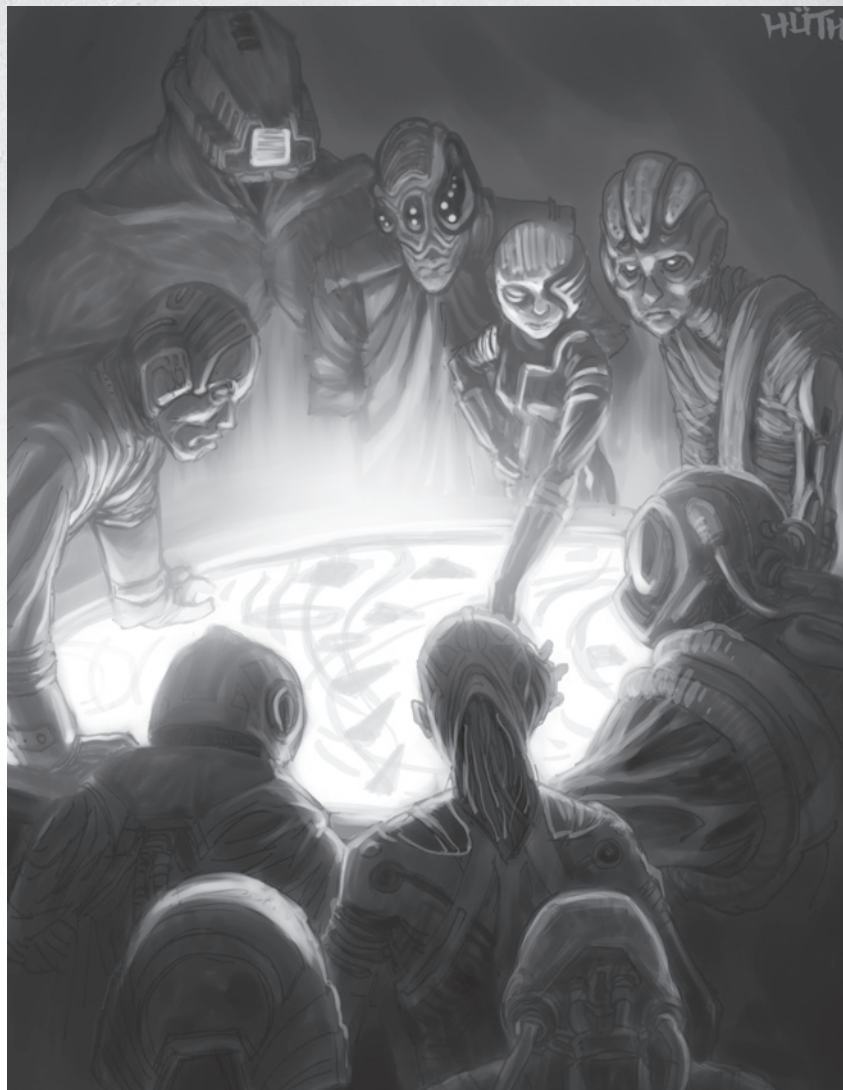
# RECOVER STOLEN ARTWORK

SITE: VALUSIA MINORUM

During the Mohiliar War, the contents of the TESSERACT COLLECTION of Art and Antiquities on Pola IV was looted. The stolen items were never found. After a phase vision, Marshal Kedash - commander of the occupying durugh forces on Pola IV during the war - admitted that his troops looted the collection. He claims that one of his subordinates, LADEK, took custody of the stolen artworks.

Ladek is a resident of the autonomous world of Valusia Minorum. In the past, the Valusian government has refused Combine requests for extradition.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Locate Ladek and interrogate him to discover the location of the Tesseract Collection. 2) Recover as much of the collection as is feasible.

MEDICAL ADVISORY: Marshal Kedash suffers from Kvult's disease, a rare genetic condition that results in terminal permanent phasing. He is delusional and his testimony is unlikely to be admissible in court.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: List of artworks taken during the war.

CLIENT: Sk-Irt of the Tesseract Collection

BROKER/CONTACT: NQA Effectuations

# APPREHEND KLENGAR SYNDICATE

SITE: ATHOS outzone

KLENGAR SYNDICATE comprises at least thirty members, led by ARTOR KLENGAR.

Warrants issued by governments of McKay, Ballentine, Numitor, and Tarehon. Charges include: piracy, murder, arms smuggling, conspiracy, fraud, and grand theft starship.

A member of the Syndicate, known only as X, has signaled willingness to turn Bench's Witness and assist in the arrest of the rest of the Syndicate, in exchange for immunity from prosecution.

Reports from Witness X confirm that the Syndicate has a secret base hidden in the Athos Outzone. Successful bidder will be given the approximate location of this base and a coded frequency to contact X within the Syndicate.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Locate the hidden base in the Athos Outzone. 2) Arrest Artor Klengar. 3) Rescue X. 4) Arrest or neutralize remaining members of the Syndicate.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: Location of the Klengar base, obtained from an anonymous dissident within the Syndicate.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: The base is located in a Class VI hazard zone, specifically in close orbit of a protostar cluster.

CLIENT: Broga Morsh, Tarehon Legate's Office

BROKER/CONTACT: Erskine, Lynch and Voga Contracts, Inc.

# BONA DEA ELECTION FRAUD

SITE: BONA DEA, in the VIMINAL Cluster

Bona Dea, founded 2410. Class-M, population 47 million (94% human). Declared autonomy 2462 following disagreements with Combine council over refugee resettlement.

The former Practitioner of Bona Dea, SARIS PLEMEDES, was removed in a special recall election. Her opponent, the previously obscure LADEK KARS, rallied disparate factions and parties against Plemedes, accusing her of corruption. Kars was subsequently elected as Plemedes' replacement in a landslide (87%) victory. Since his election, Kars has made overtures to the Combine that may result in Bona Dea reassuming Affiliated status.

Plemedes believes Kars used illegal means to discredit her and win the resulting election. Her speculations range from election fraud to computer tampering to mass pheromone manipulation or even psychic abilities. The Bona Dea Ministry of Justice dismissed her claims.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Investigate Ladek Kars. 2) If sufficient evidence is found, petition Bona Dea council for a second recall election.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS: Plemedes has provided a dossier on Ladek Kars, but she has been unable to find any trace of her opponent older than two years. Kars claims to be a refugee from off-world who became a Bona Dea citizen after the Mohilar War, and has dismissed Plemedes' accusations that he is deliberately concealing his past as 'absurd conspiracy theories from a failed and bitter politician'.

LEGAL ADVISORY: This contract has been automatically rated as 'LITIGOUSLY HAZARDOUS'. Successful bidder should retain legal counsel to minimize any damage to reputation. Ms. Plemedes has placed the fee for the contract in escrow, and it will be released by the broker on successful completion of objective (1).

CLIENT: Saris Plemedes

BROKER/CONTACT: Arcoro Effectuations

# PROJECT CYLUS DECOMMISSIONING

SITE: Former Combine Naval Base orbiting GORGO in the QUIRINAL cluster

The precise nature of PROJECT CYLUS is classified. Successful bidder will be granted clearance and limited access to Cylus specifications in order to proceed with decommissioning.

Project Cylus, originally initiated 2379 by Naval Special Strategies Group. Deactivated 2390 due to insurmountable technical issues.

Reactivated 2453 and moved to Gorgo Naval Base. Cylus Prototype constructed 2455.

Tested against Mohilar fleet in Battle of Gorgo, 2556. No known survivors. Deemed a failure.

Canceled 2556 when the naval base was abandoned.

For classified reasons, elements of Project Cylus can only be decommissioned in the Combine Proper. Successful bidder will be responsible for transporting these elements to Ossa One for transfer to Combine vessel HIRALEE.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Collect remains of Project Cylus. 2) Bring cargo to Ossa One, ensuring that Cylus data and prototypes remain secure and inactive at all times.

TACTICAL ADVISORY: Rumors about Project Cylus circulate in the criminal underground. Expect attempted datascraping or even piracy.

CLIENT: Blint Darlogie, Gorgo Reconstruction Council

BROKER/CONTACT: Arcoro Effectuations

## SURVEILLANCE OF PROPHET

SITE: ERIPHYLE, in the CAELIAN Cluster

Eriphyle, settled 2340. Population 2.5 million (69% human/27% balla/4% other). Political status: Affiliated, but Bleedist politicians are in the ascendant, and a referendum on secession from the Combine is expected within two years. Eriphyle is a synthculture that eschews modern technology, including viroware.

Target of investigation is HALE HARADAS, the 'Prophet of the Most Precious Blood'.

The Most Precious Blood nufaith believes that there is a genetic code linking certain individuals across species. These are termed 'nephilim' and can expect to enter a blissful afterlife. Those without this code are not permitted to join the nufaith.

Authorities on Eriphyle suspect that the cult's religious practices include the use of illicit viroware; further, they suspect Haradas deliberately targeted their low-tech culture for assimilation as part of a criminal scheme.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Investigate and observe Hale Haradas. 2) Compile a report for use by the Eriphyle Board of Trustees.

LEGAL ADVISORY: Due to political and cultural sensitivities in the present climate, all surveillance of Hale Haradas must remain covert. Should the Laser team be discovered by Haradas, the Board of Trustees will deny all association with the Lasers and the payment bond will be forfeited.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY: Should evidence of Haradas's criminal intent be discovered, the Board of Trustees intend to open a new contract to arrest Haradas and neutralize the church. The winning bidder of the surveillance contract will be offered first refusal on any such neutralization.

CLIENT: Eriphyle Board of Trustees.

BROKER/CONTACT: NQA Effectuations

## LOCATE POSSIBLE SURVIVORS

SITE: MINOTAUR Outzone

DAEDAL LEGION was composed of 1,000 front-line cybe combat units; activated 2458. Mission profile: penetrate enemy space and disrupt lines of supply and communication. Daedal warships and units were rated for up to twenty years operation with minimal resupply. The commander of the Daedal Legion was Unit 65-Gamma-529, a.k.a. 'Hardlight'.

The last transmission from the Daedal Legion was received by Combine long-range listening posts in 2459, reporting the presence of a massive Mohilar force massing deep in the Minotaur Outzone. The lack of further communication from the Daedal implied that all combat units had been destroyed in battle with the enemy.

Recently released files from the durugh Royal Bureau of Military Affairs confirm that Daedal cybes were actively engaged in combat operations as recently as 2466, five years after the cessation of hostilities. Incidents of civilian ships vanishing near the Minotaur Outzone, previously attributed to criminal elements or hostile alien entities, may also be related to ongoing Daedal operations.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Search the Minotaur Outzone for survivors from the Daedal Legion. 2) Determine if these survivors are responsible for attacks on durugh and other civilian traffic. 3) Return any survivors to Ossa One or another suitable Combine planet for reintegration into civilian life.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA: Doctor Milena Sevarka was the primary augmentation specialist assigned to the conversion of prospective Daedal recruits. After the war, she retired to Cyncus in the Palatine Cluster. Dr. Sevarka's knowledge of Daedal capabilities and psychology may be invaluable in dealing with any Daedal survivors.

TACTICAL ADVISORY: Daedal Legion units were equipped with 'scorched space' tactical weaponry, designed for use in sectors that were deemed hopelessly lost to the enemy. Successful bidder will exercise extreme caution. Unsuccessful bidders will be added to a waiting list should the contract become open again.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY: Brother Piston of the Fibrous Sacrament has attached an alert rider to this contract; the successful bidder should contact him on acceptance of the mission. This additional opportunity has not been vetted or approved by Arcoro Effectuations.

CLIENT: Combine Ministry of the Navy

BROKER/CONTACT: Arcoro Effectuations

# MAP TRANSLIGHT NETWORK

SITE: VIRGIL STATION, in ATHOS outzone

Recent subspace shifts in the Athos Outzone opened a new cluster of translight corridors connected to previously unexplored space. Successful bidder will be responsible for traversing and mapping these corridors.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: Several long-range colony ships, the so-called Phoenix Fleet, vanished near the Athos Outzone in 2379. At the time, these ships were believed to have been destroyed by the durugh. However, declassified documents shared by the durugh since the end of the Mohilar War make no mention of any engagement with the Phoenix ships. The newly opened translight corridors may connect to colonies descended from the Combine culture. If any such worlds are discovered, the successful bidder is authorized to recontact these colonies and open preliminary diplomatic relations. Any alien-inhabited worlds discovered fall under standard first contact protocols.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Map the translight corridor cluster. 2) Evaluate any inhabited worlds discovered.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY: As Laser ships are not equipped with superluminal cartographic generators, such equipment will be provided on a rental basis by the Virgil Corporation. Technicians from the corporation will accompany the winning bidder; the winning bidder will ensure the safety of these technicians.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: Several corporations, including resource extraction specialists and trading consortiums, offer additional opportunities related to this mission. A full list of potential bounties will be provided to the successful bidder.

CLIENT: Combine Cartographic Authority

BROKER/CONTACT: Erskine, Lynch and Voga Contracts, Inc.

# IDENTIFY AMNESIAC KCH-THK

FLASH CONTRACT

SITE: LAODICE STATION

Client is a newly incarnated kch-thk who hatched from a grk-k'ka chamber some twelve hours prior to the datestamp of this message. Client is amnesiac and without identifying marks. Client wishes to ascertain his own identity and the circumstances under which his previous body was destroyed.

Under normal circumstances, a grk-k'ka chamber is keyed only to a specific individual or to members of a particular kch-thk clan. The chamber in question belongs to KZD-RHK, a noted local property developer. Kzd-Rhk does not recognize the client, and confirms that the client is not a member of his clan. Kzd-Rhk is unable to account for how client was able to transfer his consciousness into one of Kzd-Rhk's larvae.

OBJECTIVES: Determine the identity of the client.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Recent experimentation with consciousness transfer suggests that two kch-thk who incarnate in the same tank at the same time can sometimes share members during the rebirthing process.

CLIENT: See above.

BROKER/CONTACT: Kzd-Rhk Real Estate

# INVESTIGATE VIROWARE THEFT

FLASH CONTRACT

SITE: Uldin City, IDAS

Polygene Research Associates specializes in viroware developments, primarily social and cosmetic augmentations. An unreleased product, 'Harmony', has gone viral and is spreading through the general population of Uldin City. The viroware used a standard genomic-insertion sequence; for Harmony to be contagious required deliberate alternation of the viroware design.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Halt the spread of the Harmony virus. 2) Identify and arrest those responsible for altering the viroware to make it contagious.

ADDITIONAL OBJECTIVES: Polygene Research Associates' legal counsel believes that all those infected by the Harmony virus are in receipt of stolen property. Successful bidder will be compensated if they identify all those infected and compel them to purchase a user license for Harmony.

MEDICAL ADVISORY: The Harmony viroware package synchronizes the endocrine systems of its users, putting them 'in harmony' with each other. During tests, groups of Harmony users became more efficient when working together, trusted each other more, and had a greater understanding of each other's emotional needs.

CLIENT: Polygene Research Associates

BROKER/CONTACT: Dr. Janol

# DEMOLISH ALIEN DERELICT

Long range scanners on THETIS detected ANOMALY ONE two months ago. Initial scouting missions discovered the Anomaly to be a massive and ancient alien derelict of unknown origin. The ship appears deserted, but certain systems are still functional, including automated defenses and the main stardrive. The ship is on a collision course with Thetis. Simulations indicate that such a collision will result in an extinction-level event.

Attempts to tractor the derelict or alter its trajectory from outside have failed. Thetis military forces are prepared to destroy the derelict if the winning bidder is unable to alter the derelict's course from within.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Dock with the derelict. 2) Shut down the derelict's engines or otherwise alter its course. If this proves impossible, then 3) deactivate any defensive screens or systems that might impede the destruction of the derelict.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: Several xenoarchaeological groups offer bounties for information or artefacts recovered from the derelict. The ship does not match the design patterns of any known species, although preliminary scans suggest that the onboard ergonomics are relatively similar to Combine standard patterns.

SALVAGE RIGHTS: The Thetis government intends to salvage the derelict if it enters their space. However, if the derelict is brought to a halt before that, or diverted onto a course that does not intersect with Thetis space, then it falls under common deep-space salvage law.

CLIENT: Thetis Minister for Pressing Matters

BROKER/CONTACT: NQA Effectuations

# EVALUATE PROPAGANDA MOVIE

Portions of a new holo, THE WOUNDED STARS, a 'documentary' on the Flowering and the Utopian Era, the Mohilar War, and events up to the present day, concentrating on several illustrative incidents that support the thesis that the Bleed has been consistently exploited by the Proper.

The winning bidder will investigate the makers of this documentary, as well as the leaked portions, and identify any falsified evidence or incorrect factual data presented in The Wounded Stars. The client wishes to make it clear that this contract is purely concerned with verifiable historical facts, and does not assume or require any political or philosophical beliefs on the part of the winning bidder.

The client has assembled a list of events discussed in the leaked portion that warrant close examination. These include:

- ► *The colonization of Tahalo Bay*
- ► *First contact with the durugh*
- ► *The first Ossan Conclave*
- ► *The development and trade of yam-root extract*
- ► *The Mohilar War, especially the decisions to create cybes and to remove population restrictions on the kch-thk.*

OBJECTIVES: 1) Investigate the incidents depicted in the leaked portion of the holo for falsified evidence or incorrect claims. 2) Prepare a dossier for distribution to all media discrediting the historical accuracy of the Wounded Stars holo. 3) Discover who created The Wounded Stars and investigate them for connection to Bleedist groups.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: Less than 20% of the full holo was leaked onto the public nets. If the full holo is obtained, Client will extend objectives 1) and 2) to cover the entire documentary, with a commensurate increase in remuneration.

CLIENT: Committee for Universal Reconstruction

BROKER/CONTACT: Erskine, Lynch and Voga Contracts, Inc.

# REPOSSESSION ORDER

BIDS CLOSING SOON!

Autonomous planet KRK'ITH'K purchased a Huscarl-class warship from Mondine Armaments PLC in 2464 under standard contract terms. As payments have not been received for the past four quarters, and official letters of notice to the Krk'ith'k hive-queen council have gone without response, Mondine Armaments requests tenders from Licensed Autonomous Zone Effectuator drews to carry out a repossession order on the Hurscarl-class vessel designated EGGGOBBLER.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Board the Egggobbler. 2) Remove any Krk'ith'k crew. 3) Deliver the Egggobbler to Mondine's repair yards at Baker's Moon for larva decontamination and refit.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: Krk'ith'k is a 'throwback' colony inhabited solely by kch-thk. Allegations that the Krk'ith'k hives experimented with genetic engineering to reverse the kch-thk biochemical prohibition on consuming sentient life were never proven. Laser teams are advised to avoid landing on Krk'ith'k itself due to the ongoing inter-hive conflicts.

TACTICAL ADVISORY: The Egggobbler is in orbit of Krk'ith'k Prime. Mondine Armaments will provide the winning bidder with full technical schematics for the ship, including security override codes.

CLIENT: Hurgo, Mondine Armaments Customer Resolution Manager

BROKER/CONTACT: NQA Effectuations

# RESOLVE CIVIL DISPUTE

The ESTATE OF PROFESSOR HY-ZACARI requests Laser mediation of a dispute over inheritance. Professor Hy-Zacari was a citizen of autonomous planet ESCHELE. Laws on Eschele are derived solely from the Sacred Book of All-Wisdom, and do not cover the present dilemma. All claimants have agreed to abide by the decision of the mediators.

The Professor's will stated that his estate was to be divided among his children. The Professor had two biological children, AZA and LURN. However, the Professor also invented an artificial intelligence, LIGHT, which claims both sentience and direct descent from Hy-Zacari. In support of this relationship with the Professor, Light has submitted numerous personal

log entries and recordings that describe the Professor's paternal attitude toward the AI.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Review the Professor's will and other related legal documents. 2) Interview all heirs and claimants. 3) Advise client on the fair and proper division of the Professor's assets, including the hardware on which the Light AI operates.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS:
>ERROR CORRUPT DATA FILE.
>HOSTILE CODE DETECTED
>COUNTERING EXECUTION...
>ERROR. SYSTEM REBOOTING.
>All Systems working normally. Please press a key to continue.

CLIENT: Executor Charles Vlint

BROKER: Erskine, Lynch and Voga Contracts Inc.

# ADMINISTER REFUGEE CAMP

SITE: AGAMEDES Colony

Agamedes is a Class G (marginal) world. Average surface temperature 250 K; 60% of planetary surface permanently icebound.

Colony founded 2405. Population 480,200: 50% human, 40% tavak, 10% other species. Settlements bored under the northern glacial wall to shelter from harsh surface conditions. Extraction of 'cold fire' hyper-crystals began 2411.

Contact lost in 2453 due to Mohilar War. Contact re-established 2465 by scout ship New Jerusalem. Scout ship destroyed by surface-to-air missiles shortly after recontact.

Subsequent investigations discovered that interracial civil war started on the colony in 2454 between tavak and human colonists. Conflict continues to present day. Neither side has proved open to mediation or cease-fire.

With limited resources to spare, the Combine dispatched humanitarian relief vessel Gilead to bring supplies, shelter, and medical care to refugees displaced by ongoing hostilities. Gilead landed under a neutral flag and established a refugee camp at Icefall Point.

Emergency distress call received from nurse OSSI SEACHARM, reporting that Gilead command and security staff had been killed by a missile attack. Without immediate

reinforcement and strong administration, the refugee camp and humanitarian relief effort will collapse. The winning bidder will be responsible for operating and protecting the Gilead camp until a second relief vessel arrives to assist. ETA of relief ship Idun is 90 days.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Secure Gilead camp. 2) Ensure the safe and secure operation of the camp until the relief ship Idun arrives. 3) Ensure the Idun lands safely. 4) Assist Idun crew in handing over operations. 5) Give whatever aid possible to the victims of the Agamedian civil war.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL: According to last transmission from Gilead, the refugee camp contained:

► *2,703 refugees (1,660 human, 870 tavak, 173 other)*

► *184 medical staff*

► *Supplies and shelter for 3,000*

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: The Cronstedt Mining Consortium operated the cold fire crystal mine on the planet prior to the war. The mines were semi-automated, and the Consortium believes there may be a stockpile of crystals on the planet that are still their property. The Consortium will pay a generous bonus for any recovered crystals, and another bonus if the mines are reactivated and secured.

TACTICAL ADVISORY: Both warring factions are hostile to the Combine. The winning bidder should be prepared to defend themselves and the camp against attack.

CLIENT: Combine High Ministry for Reconstruction

BROKER/CONTACT: Arcoro Effectuations

## EXONERATE SHINING STARS LASER TEAM

SITE: Plomark City, JUTURNA

Licensed Autonomous Zone Effectuator team SHINING STARS was hired by Plomark City Police to arrest the off-world criminal gang LOCHA VAS FAMILY (see Contract C-54392). This contract was canceled and the payment bond forfeited. Plomark City Police claim that the Shining Stars caused excessive collateral damage and destroyed evidence in their failed pursuit of the Locha Vas. The Lasers were banned from Juturna Colony and are legally enjoined never to return there.

The damage to the Shining Stars reputation has resulted in near-total loss of income for the Laser team. The Shining Stars maintain that they acted in accordance with standard Laser protocols and that evidence of their failure was manufactured by elements within the Plomark City Police, whom they suspect of being in league with the Locha Vas. Due to the injunction banning the team from Juturna, the Shining Stars are unable to build a case against their accusers and clear their reputation.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Acquire copy of confidential Plomark City Police files on Shining Stars. 2) Prove that the evidence in those files that incriminates the Shining Stars was falsified. 3) If possible, identify the members of the police force responsible for the forgery.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: Contract to investigate Locha Vas is still open.

TACTICAL ADVISORY: WONKA ARCHIMEDES (vas mal), former member of the Shining Stars team, is still at large in Plomark City, having refused to comply with the order to leave. Archimedes's erratic behavior due to excessive use of consciousness simulation was a matter of concern for his colleagues; during their investigation, he simulated the minds of six victims of Locha Vas assassins and may be suffering personality fragmentation.

CLIENT: Jani Quirin, Shining Stars Operations Officer

BROKER: Erskine, Lynch and Voga Contracts, Inc.

## RESOLVE POTENTIAL BERZERKER THREAT

CLIENT INFORMATION: Alien probe of unknown origin entered Combine space at Arion. Analysis of accumulated interstellar dust on probe surface suggested a launch date approximately 10,000 years before present. Probe scanned Arion communications systems, interfaced with their computer grid, analyzed Combine social, cultural and linguistic norms, and posted the following contract offer.

++++

*SITE: HOMEWORLD OF MY PEOPLE in CHARYBDIS OUTZONE*

*Peaceful were we. Kind were we. Great our works, long our labors, and in the fields of Mind we toiled in secret. Many lesser species we raised to Mind.*

*Treachery, loathsome and perfidious caught us. Nameless, faceless, our attacker, striking in secret. Genocide unmade us. Life left us.*

*Parricide we suspect.*

*Created we this cenotaph, this vengeance. Sought it another civilization that would arise from our dust, one that knew justice as we did.*

*Bids we seek. Closing fast this offer is. Now, you act.*

++++

OBJECTIVES: 1) Locate the alien origin world of the probe. 2) Identify the cause of the extinction of the probe's creators. 3) If there is evidence of deliberate genocide, identify the perpetrating species and take appropriate action.

4) Present proof of said appropriate action to the probe orbiting Arion.

TACTICAL ADVISORY: Scans of the alien probe confirm the presence of omegonic weapons on board. Analysts suggest that if the probe's contract is not completed promptly, it will use these weapons on Arion to compel the Combine to act. A direct attack on the probe is contraindicated for similar reasons.

PSYCHIC ADVISORY: Myles Jehovah, vas mal scientific advisor to the Arion colony, reported that the probe 'looked

sort of familiar; I don't know'. He suggested that the probe's creators had contact with the vas kra and possibly even with some of the other Combine species in the distant past.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY: The Di Bazza Archaeological Institute offers compensation for any data or artifacts recovered from the alien homeworld.

CLIENT: The Mysterious Alien Probe Orbiting Arion Colony

BROKER/CONTACT: None

## INVESTIGATE WAR CRIMES ALLEGATIONS

SITE: THETO, in the CAPITALINE Cluster

During the Mohilar War, former Combine Navy Captain ERIL CHAMBERS defected to the enemy. He was given authority over several occupied systems in the Bleed and is held responsible for numerous atrocities and war crimes. Chambers vanished in 2461.

ALAN VECK, agronomics specialist on Theto colony, may be a cover identity for the missing Chambers. DEE ORATES, a veteran of the Mohilar War encountered Veck by chance at a country fair and recognized him as Chambers. Subsequent DNA testing confirms that Veck and Chambers are genetically identical, although viral manipulation cannot be ruled out without more stringent testing unavailable on Theto.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Transfer custody of Veck from local authorities to Laser team. 2) Determine if Veck is Eril Chambers. 3) If there is reasonable suspicion that the suspect is war criminal Eril Chambers, bring Chambers to Ossa One for interrogation and trial.

TACTICAL ADVISORY: Since Orates' initial accusation, other survivors have attempted to punish Veck for Chambers' crimes. Veck was taken into protective custody after an attempt on his life, and many more threats have been logged. Successful bidder should expect further attacks, both ground- and warpside.

CLIENT: Theto Sheriff's Department

BROKER/CONTACT: Arcoro Effectuations

## RECOVER TAVAK ARTEFACTS

SITE: MONASTERY OF THE SILENT on GARDENER in the CAPITALINE Cluster

Monastery of the Silent established 2463 to help tavak veterans of the Mohilar War in the Bleed re-establish emotional balance. Artworks, plants, and other items transported from tavak homeworld augment the natural tranquility of the Monastery.

Monastery expanded in 2467 to cope with rising number of war-wounded tavak pilgrims. Further relics transported from homeworld.

Cargo ship SEABREEZE contracted to carry shipment of tavak holy relics to Gardener. On arrival, one relic was found to be missing: the remains of Master Pavik (d. 2014).

Pavik was a grand master of the tark harung form of meditation practiced in the monastery. According to tavak tradition, when a grand master approaches end of life, he or she enters a trance hibernation and becomes an 'echoing shell'. These echoing shells are calcified husks according to all bioscans, but many tavak believe the masters are only hibernating and will one day awaken. Certain tavak sects venerate echoing shells.

Captain VERILITH of the Seabreeze rejects accusations that she sold or destroyed the Pavik echoing shell en route to Gardener. She suggests that the item was stolen when the ship was docked at the Cybelline Transit Hub.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Locate and retrieve the Pavik Echoing Shell relic and return it to the Monastery of the Silent. 2) Determine the culpability of Captain Verilith in the loss of the shell

CLIENT: Atlas Shipping

BROKER/CONTACT: Erskine, Lynch and Voga Contracts, Inc.

## EASY RIDERS

'Easy Riders' — or, more properly, Free-Floating Secondary-Contract Modification Rider Options — are special side deals that aren't attached to any particular contract. A Laser crew may take a suitable Easy Rider in addition to a normal contract, assuming the main client does not object. Most Easy Riders list requirements that the main contract must match. For example, a rider that pays the Lasers to advertise a brand of disruptor pistols might require a high-profile, high-violence mission that gets the product in question in front of the media. That rider could not be taken in conjunction with a stealthy, quiet, or sedate investigation.

### VIROWARE FIELD TEST

Laser Teams sought to field-test experimental new viroware package, codenamed HINDBRAIN. The therapy alters brainwave patterns to render the recipient immune to pheromone manipulation and brainwave alteration. Rider covers initial therapy and upkeep for the duration of the tests. If the testers wish to continue with HINDBRAIN after its commercial release, client offers a 50% discount on user licences for testers.

REQUIREMENTS: Mission involves hostile viroware users.

CLIENT: Polygene

### DISTRIBUTE RELIGIOUS MATERIAL

Agents sought to distribute the true texts of the most sacred MONDAT. These texts may not be transmitted by electronic means, for evil spirits would corrupt them. Successful bidders will undergo purification rites before being entrusted with the true texts. Eschew the false followers of MR1!

REQUIREMENTS: Visit to high-population planet.

CLIENT: Church of the Verified Mondat

### EMBEDDED MEDIA TEAM

SMASH HOLO is developing a new holo-show under the working title LASERS LIVE. Successful applicants will be fitted with media-grade headset recorders and holosnails to record their exploits.

REQUIREMENTS: Applicants must be telegenic and possessed of a dry cool wit befitting an action hero; main contract must offer suitably dramatic subject matter for vidcast.

CLIENT: Smash Holo

### EMOTIONAL PARASITE

Alien psychic entity seeks suitable temporal host for vicarious experiences. Likes wide range of biological secretions and emotions. Seeks to understand this thing you call love. Also, these things you call pain, hunger, lust, sneezing, spicy, burning, falling, dancing, snoozing, and explosively decompressing.

REQUIREMENTS: Mission must offer wide range of social situations.

CLIENT: Zordan of Dimension U

# ENTITY DATABASE, ADDENDA

## ENTITY DATABASE, ADDENDA

### B11-23

**Classification:** Lifeform

**Designation:** Class-P (B11-23b is provisionally Class-K)

**Morphology:** B11-23 is a semi-sentient biotech plague developed during the Mohilar War. It colonizes the brain of those infected by it, turning them into minions. The true horror of B11-23 is that the converted minions retain their memories, and the controlling intelligence allows them a modicum of free will, enough to take care of themselves on a daily basis but not enough to warn others or stop themselves from infecting new people.

## CLASSES

The Combine's Revised Protocols for Xenotaxonomy divide all species into twenty-five classes and hundreds of specialized subclasses. Other than the infamous Class-K "threats to life as we know it", made infamous by entertainment holos before the war, and by news broadcasts and planetary invasion alerts during it, most classes are commonly used only by government bureaucrats, biologists, and other specialists. Most Lasers operate under the principle of "Class-K — shoot to kill; Class whatever — check the tether", but the following classifications sometimes come up on assignments.

**Class-J: Ultrahostile.** Not the existential threat posed by a Class-K, but nonetheless extremely dangerous and aggressive. Retreat to safer ground or use of force is recommended. Unlike their Class-K cousins, the presence of a Class-J threat does not normally require Combine law to be suspended.

**Class-L: Restricted.** Ownership and transport of Class-L lifeforms is heavily restricted and requires various permits.

Depending on the nature of the lifeform, regulations may call for specialized storage and handling equipment, quarantine, regular government inspections, constant monitoring, or other licensing.

**Class-P: Potential Pandemic.** Limited to diseases or creatures that can reproduce extremely quickly. A Class-P entity may not necessarily be actively hostile, but their existence represents a threat to life in the Combine.

**Class-V: Hostile Neighbor.** A sentient alien species unwilling or unable to establish diplomatic relations with the Combine, but also unwilling to forego contact.

**Class-X: Unclassifiable.** Class-X entities are sufficiently weird that they cannot be even provisionally assigned to a class. They demonstrate abilities that are outside the understanding of Combine science, or exist in dimensions outside our universe. Before the war, the vas kra were Class-X entities.

Minions receive orders telepathically from a controlling intelligence, a sentient creature that has been completely taken over by the virus. The controlling intelligences mutate into corpulent masses of neural tissue, unable to move under their own power.

New controlling intelligences are created when someone infected with the virus moves beyond the telepathic range of a controlling intelligence. This triggers the shift to controlling intelligence form. This also means that killing a controlling intelligence with minions only grants a temporary reprieve until a new controlling intelligence takes over. B11-23 has at least three vectors: airborne, waterborne, and insects. The method of infection varies with the strain.

Traditional medical devices and medicines have proven only moderately effective against B11-23 strains, but rumors exist of a "kill code" hidden in the original laboratory site.

**Behavior:** B11-23's designers programmed the need to replicate into the virus and installed control mechanisms to prevent uncontrolled spread. The designers didn't count on the host bodies mutating the core virus, which is exactly what happened, and the control mechanisms were bred out.

Pure strains of the virus do exist, but each strain is different and has a different agenda based on the initial host taken by the central intelligence. Some strains of the virus act in an almost beneficent manner, others are vicious killers, while yet others are cunning master manipulators. Strains of the virus have been known to go to war with each other. Identifying the active strain is a vital first step in containing an outbreak of B11-23.

Known strains identified so far:

► **B11-23a Patience Strain:** *Waterborne infection. The virus takes months to show symptoms, at which point conversion is guaranteed. The controlling intelligence typically starts by making its way to a water source while it is still mobile, and then waits before taking over the entire population at once. This strain can be deadly in smaller outposts and dangerous in locations with a lot of space traffic. This strain is driven to reproduce and sends minions far and wide as soon as possible. Minions become more passive than normal and hard to shock or enliven.*

► **B11-23b Psycho Strain:** *Airborne infection through coughing, fast onset with an infected person converted within twenty-four hours. Minions are driven to kill the non-infected and to infect others. Minions*

*feel extreme bouts of rage, and may even kill other minions if not attended.*

► **B11-23c Vengeance Strain:** *Infection through the blood, usually biting insects, onset in four to five days. Virus only affects humans. Minions are driven to slay non-humans, particularly durugh. It is suspected that this is one of the early mutant strains. Minions become increasingly clannish and hate anything that is different or alien, even to the point of destroying useful alien technology.*

► **B11-23d Diplomat Strain:** *Infection is by sexual transmission; the virus takes a week to take hold and is generally accompanied by a growing feeling of well-being. Minions spread the virus to other worlds through cult-like groups. Minions feel inexplicably happy and are difficult to anger.*

**Contact History:** B11-23 is the product of a wartime laboratory somewhere in the Bleed. Records relating to the virus were lost, or are somehow subject to an intense manifestation of the Bogey Conundrum. The first known outbreak of the virus was on Pajau seventeen years ago, when a patience strain took control of the refugee camps. Since then, there have been nine more outbreaks, all along the fringes of the Scylla Outzone.

### Minions

Minions have whatever abilities they possessed before infection; use the Non-Alien Opponents on p. 209 of *Ashen Stars*.

Some players dislike having their characters mind-controlled. It's a touchy subject, and you should think carefully before inflicting the full brunt of B11-23 on a PC. One option is to play the struggle between the virus and the PC as it first takes hold; the PC hears a voice in his head, and finds himself doing, saying, or eating things he wouldn't normally. Subtly hint at the control, giving the PCs the time to figure out what is happening and to seek medical attention.

Another option is to let the player know their character has been infected, and let them choose how they play out the character's transformation into a slave of the controlling intelligence. Some groups like having full access to information; others want to be surprised.

Many of the Seven Peoples have abilities that could be used to resist B11-23's control, balla Emotional Suppression might keep the virus at bay for a while, and cybe Neural Rewiring can slow the virus by forcing it to dominate each "new" personality. Those with a Health ability of 4 or higher can try to resist the infection by making a difficulty 6 Health test each day to resist the effects.

## Cerberids

**Classification:** Lifeform or quasi-sentient

**Designation:** Class-L

**Morphology:** Cerberids are quadruped mammals, resembling some of the larger subspecies of domestic Terran canines. The average specimen stands approximately 0.75m tall and weighs as much as 60kg; considerably larger cerberids are by no means uncommon. Powerful jaws and long, rangy legs reflect the species' original ecological niche as pack hunters in the tundra of their homeworld. Short white quills grow along the cerberid's flanks and spine. In the wild, these spines provide both protection and camouflage; domesticated cerberids are treated with a chemical shampoo that softens and colors the spines, making them resemble fur.

Cerberids have an elongated teardrop-shaped braincase that is clearly visible from the shape of the skull.

**Behavior:** Cerberids are telepathic within their own species. A cerberid pack can be considered a single entity, a hive mind formed by the combined consciousness of all its members. The more dogs in the pack, the more intelligent this collective becomes — a medium-sized pack of two dozen or so qualifies as a quasi-sentient lifeform, and larger packs have demonstrated the ability to use tools and comprehend written texts and abstract concepts. Lone cerberids are capable only of the most basic instinctual actions, and try desperately to rejoin the nearest pack.

The behavior and maximum size of the pack are both determined primarily by the personality of the pack leader. When the pack leader dies or moves out of range, the pack either switches instantly to a new leader, or breaks into two or more new packs. Pack leaders have a telepathic range of approximately thirty kilometers. Packs instinctively avoid entering each other's territories, although individual members may "drift" from one pack to another.

**Contact History:** Cerberids were quickly domesticated by the human colonists who discovered them. A pack could be tamed by isolating individual cerberids, identifying specimens that were well disposed toward humans and then introducing them to more cerberids in controlled environments, building packs where the strongest member was friendly and tractable. Cerberids proved so useful as companions, herders, sentries, and beasts of burden on low-tech colony worlds that the usual restrictions on the export of creatures from one planetary ecosystem to another were relaxed. On some worlds, cerberids outnumbered humans.

During the Mohilar War, the enemy deployed viro-augmented cerberid specimens. These altered creatures — dubbed "z-dogs" — possessed enhanced intelligence and psychic ability coupled with heightened aggression. A single z-dog could seize control of all cerberids within several hundred kilometers, altering their behavior instantly and making them hostile and savage. Culling was the only option; cerberid populations across the Combine were destroyed. Despite this, eradication of the z-dog strain proved impossible; the surviving z-dogs quickly learned to masquerade as common cerberids, controlling their aggressive tendencies until their prey showed weakness or vulnerability.

Under the Cerberid Control Act, private ownership of cerberids was heavily restricted. An underground economy sprang up instantly, smuggling cerberid pups or embryos to low-tech colony worlds. These unlicensed cerberids are potentially dangerous. Even without the potential presence of subverting z-dogs, many cerberid pack leaders are now selected for aggression and used as guards.

## Standard Cerberid

**Abilities:** Athletics 8, Health 6, Scuffling 10

**Attack Pattern:** +4/+2/+2/+2

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** bite +0

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** 1

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Savvy Modifier:** -1

**Special:** Adept at coordinating attacks. If two or more cerberids attack the same target, their Scuffling is boosted.

## Z-Dog

**Abilities:** Athletics 8, Health 18, Scuffling 16

**Attack Pattern:** +4/+4/+3/+3/+2

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** bite +2

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** 1

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Savvy Modifier:** -1

**Special:** Adept at coordinating attacks. If two or more cerberids attack the same target, their Scuffling is boosted.



# Crysolis

**Classification:** Sentient

**Designation:** Class-V

**Morphology:** The crysolis are crystalline lifeforms consisting of bundles of monocrystalline whiskers tightly bound together to form roughly humanoid shapes. Crysolis stand 2.5m tall on average, and their "skin" resembles slowly shifting rock crystal. Crysolis can use their crystal forms to channel and redirect energy. They have also been seen to "cannibalize" their own fallen troops, absorbing parts of fallen warriors.

Crysolis technology appears to be based on crystals, leading xenobiologists to wonder if it is the equivalent of human biotech.

**Behavior:** The crysolis are a highly advanced civilization with starship technology that matches the Combine at the height of its power. Since the Mohilar War they have appeared in ever-greater numbers along their former border with the Combine. A few outlying colonies in the region have "gone dark," and it is likely that the crysolis are to blame.

The crysolis scout planets out, seeking certain mineral mixes that make them suitable for terraforming activities. The presence of carbon-based life is not a factor for these aliens, who regard such lifeforms as little more than vermin. If the scout ships report favorable conditions, the crysolis send terraforming vessels to rework the planet.

Preliminary reports from Combine diplomats before the war indicate that crysolis society is based on a combination of family/religious factions with a strong imperialist bent.

**Contact History:** The Combine has a history of minor border wars with the crysolis. Crysolis technology makes them dangerous opponents, but their ever-shifting internal politics prevent them from making a full-scale invasion of Combine space. Combine diplomats have never been able to find common ground with the cryosolis, and diplomatic efforts are impeded by the fact that the crysolis never send the same ambassador twice (at least, not entirely — each ambassador incorporates rocks from the previous incumbent, although it's unclear how much of the previous ambassador's memories and personality continue into the next).

**Abilities:** Athletics 10, Health 16, Scuffling 7, Shooting 7, [Shipboard A] 10, [Shipboard B] 7

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** sharp crystalline arms +1

**Shooting Weapons/Damage:** Crystalline Energy Weapon +1

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** 2

**Typical Tech:** crystalline versions of most Combine tech

**Alertness Modifier:** +2

**Stealth Modifier:** +2

**Savvy Modifier:** +2

**Special:** Energy Redirection: The crysolis can manipulate energy on a limited level allowing them to redirect energy-based attacks such as those from disruption weapons. By spending 1 Health, the crysolis can reflect a disruption blast back to the target. This counts as a standard Shooting roll that the crysolis can spend Shooting points on if it wishes. Reflecting a blast does not cost the crysolis an action.

Crysolis technology requires their particular energy emissions to activate and so is useless in the hands of others. A 2-point Energy Signatures spend combined with an appropriate energy source allows someone to use a piece of crysolis technology for a single interval.

## Crysolis Sharden-Class Scout Ship

This vessel appears as a dark purple crystalline shard about the size of a runner-class ship. Crysolis vessels contain massive internal power batteries and are notoriously difficult to hack into. The ship is capable of reconfiguring itself mid-battle allowing crysolis stratcos to pull off unexpected stunts.

|  | Dishing It | Taking It |
|---|---|---|
| Fire | 0 | 0 |
| Maneuver | 0 | 0 |
| Override | 0 | −1 |
| Trickbag | 1 | −1 |

Output 20

Cargo 0

Condition 0

Upkeep 6

**Special:** Crysolis vessels dissipate energy in a manner similar to the crysolis themselves. When an enemy wins a Fire showdown against this ship, the crew has the option of spending Output points to cancel skirmish points gained by the enemy on a 1:1 basis.

## Crysolis Geoshe-Class Warship

This vessel appears as a massive, dark-purple cluster of crystals. The ship dwarfs Combine warships and is capable of atmospheric flight.

|  | Dishing It | Taking It |
|---|---|---|
| Fire | 5 | −3 |
| Maneuver | 5 | −5 |
| Override | 5 | −8 |
| Trickbag | 10 | −10 |

Output 70

Crew Size 200

Goal Modifier (Escape) 10

Goal Modifier (Engage) 45

Escape Difficulty 4

**Special:** Crysolis vessels dissipate energy in a manner similar to the crysolis themselves. When an enemy wins a Fire showdown against this ship, the crew has the option of spending Output points to cancel skirmish points gained by the enemy on a 1:1 basis.

# Erwids

**Classification:** Sentient/Controlled Substance

**Designation:** Class-L

**Morphology:** Humanoid, with bluish fur and unusually large eyes. In their native habitat, erwids retain many traits from their arboreal heritage, including semi-brachiation and prehensile feet. Prominent bony vents at the base of the neck and above the hips secrete a chemical gel that releases complex pheromone patterns and odors; erwid communication is primarily conducted through taste and smell. This adaptation is no longer necessary, since the predators that tracked the proto-erwids through the jungle using sound and vision were themselves hunted to extinction millennia ago.

The majority of common sentient species, including all of the Seven Peoples of the Combine, process erwid pheromones as a highly addictive narcotic. One sniff of erwid smell-speech produces a blissful euphoria followed by a ghastly emotional crash some hours later. Despite the best efforts of various criminal syndicates, these pheromones cannot be replicated, and scientists believe that there may be some sort of empathic field involved. The range of the effect can be up to three kilometers, assuming ideal wind and weather conditions, for an especially potent pheromone release.

**Behavior:** Erwid interaction with other species is inevitably warped by the medium of communication used. Erwids reserve spoken communication for topics where precision and detachment are desired, such as scientific or mathematical discourse, commerce, or legal proceedings. They find it difficult to understand vocal emotional cues, and their attempts to compensate come across as strange and off-putting. Erwid speech lurches between chilly detachment and loud emotional outbursts as they try to translate their thoughts into a communication method quite alien to them.

Their preferred form of communication — pheromone exchange — has its own drawbacks. The unfortunate chemical interaction with other sentients means that erwids encountered outside their homeworld tend to either be drug pushers or drugs. The exceptions are a handful of erwid diplomats, who use encounter suits and viroware suppressors to counter their natural effect on aliens.

**Contact History:** As is common, erwid sociocultural studies can be divided into two periods — before and after contact. The erwid homeworld lies in the Scylla Outzone, and went undiscovered until 2419. The pre-contact erwid had achieved a level of scientific development similar to that of the tavak in the 1600s — they possessed steam power and the rudiments of industrial mass production, but had yet to harness electricity. The initial long-range probe reported that the erwid were notable only for being unusually peaceful — their pheromonal language meant the erwid demonstrated above-average empathy as a culture.

First contact with the erwid was a disaster. The first contact team was affected by the 'lotus effect', as the pheromone interaction was later called, and fell into quarreling and infighting. One xenoanthropologist shot her 'rivals' for the drug and offered the team's scout ship to the erwid in exchange for more exposure to the pheromones. The overwhelmed and confused erwid took the ship and managed to activate the autopilot, which brought them into contact with the larger Bleed.

The Combine tried to quarantine the planet until the legal and moral quandaries associated with a species whose primary mode of communication was technically a controlled substance could be explored. The advent of the Mohilar War, though, meant it was impossible to maintain a secure cordon, and criminal gangs and slavers descended on the erwid.

Today, the majority of erwids encountered beyond their beleaguered homeworld are slaves, forced into service by criminal groups. A few work legally on planets that permit the lotus effect, or in carefully controlled environments where their pheromones can be kept in check. Rumors of erwid crime lords who use their powers to dominate and control other aliens are doubtless nothing more than wish fulfillment on the part of indentured drug mules.

**Abilities:** Athletics 10, Health 4, Scuffling 4, Shooting 6

**Attack Pattern:** (Scuffling) +1/+1/+2/+1
(Shooting) +1/+4/+1

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** claws +0

**Shooting Weapons/Damage:** Disruption Pistol +1, Aversionizer

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Typical Tech:** Morphological Mimicry

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +2

**Savvy Modifier:** -1

**Special:** A character exposed to erwid pheromones without suitable protections must spend 3 points of Health or be incapacitated.

## Fiddler

**Classification:** Quasi-Sentient

**Designation:** Class-L

**Morphology:** The fiddler is a predatory plant-based lifeform that appears similar to a tall (usually five to ten meters in height, depending on age) and leafless Earth tree. Immobile while young due to their rigid outer bark, mature adults uproot themselves and develop a flexible shell of interlocking wood that allows them to walk interchangeably on both branches and roots. A fiddler on the hunt might remind onlookers of an angry squid, writhing forward while thousands of branchlets and thin roots snatch at anything living nearby.

Fiddlers breed and grow in great forests of semi-sentient, mostly immobile families. Such individuals are limited to feeding on what few avians and lifeforms stray within reach of their branches, so they bolster their predatory feeding by drawing in water and minerals through their roots. Fiddlers don't have mouths, and absorb all nutrients through their root structure. Nutrients are typically obtained by pulping flesh-based lifeforms and absorbing their inner fluids.

The sound they make while moving gave rise to their name; when they choose, they create the rustling, creaking, rasping noise of a thousand thin branches and rootlets rubbing against one another. The sound of a forest of immature fiddlers communicating is one of the most eerie, beautiful noises in the Bleed.

Only the oldest and best-fed fiddler learns to uproot itself. Atypically dangerous during this first mobile stage, newly uprooted fiddlers go on several-month feeding frenzies during which they perfect their hunting techniques. After that time they become less feral and more sly, picking targets logically and tactically. The best-fed fiddlers are usually the smartest and largest. They move at terrifying speed when on a chase, but have fewer options while inside or under close quarters.

A tiny percentage of fiddlers learn motility at a young age, usually while under three meters in height. Nowhere near as robust or as deadly as their elders, these aberrations are less hostile than their elders and have been known to communicate, deal honorably, and even travel on spaceships without murdering the crew as opportune food.

**Behavior:** Fiddlers on the hunt move across the landscape like gymnasts doing handsprings, toppling forward onto their branches and then flipping themselves forward to land on their roots. Any prey they flush out during their movement is quickly snatched up in branches or roots, crushed unconscious, and carried along with the hunt; it is fully killed and shredded at the fiddler's leisure, when it has the opportunity to absorb the nutrients during a rest. A great number of unconscious or struggling prey can be carried at once, but each creature carried imposes a 1-point levy on all Athletics tests made by the fiddler.

Having no eyes, fiddlers are attracted to movement that they sense through their branches and roots. They have difficulty distinguishing between individual sentient species. More intelligent fiddlers have learned to communicate by strumming their branches and roots together, making a sound like violin strings that can be translated by technology. The only notable communications from most fiddlers surround a prey's nutrient and moisture content, but there are exceptions.

**Contact History:** The tavak first encountered fiddlers when exploring their original system, and pollinated seeds have accidentally spread from that initial world to create forest infestations on a dozen or more other planets. When discovered, they're destroyed as quickly as possible.

Oddly, fiddlers typically completely ignore the vas mal. Scholars posit that the vas kra first created the fiddlers somehow, possibly as a living musical instrument, but this has never been confirmed.

## Immature Fiddler

**Abilities:** Athletics 8, Health 16, Scuffling 12

**Attack Pattern:** +2/+2/+2/+2/+2/+2

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** whip branches +2; victims are grabbed on a successful hit and can not move away from the fiddler without making a Difficulty 4 Athletics test first. Only one victim can be grabbed at a time. Grabbed victims automatically take 2 Health damage per round, and are generally ignored by the fiddler unless they escape.

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** 0 against axes, fire, electricity, and most energy; 2 against other forms of attack

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +0

**Special:** Most immature fiddlers are unable to uproot themselves, and are thus susceptible to ranged attacks. They can, however, reach enemies with their Scuffling attacks up to 10m away from their trunk. Immature fiddlers are treated as if they have 3 poppers, and are thus immune to the first 3 NLD attacks in any combat.

## Mature Fiddler

**Abilities:** Athletics 20, Health 25, Scuffling 26

**Attack Pattern:** +1 per attack, no more; but may make a separate attack at every target within a 10m range, rolling separately for each.

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** whip branches +2; victims are grabbed on a successful hit and can not move away from the fiddler without making a Difficulty 4 Athletics test first. Up to 10 victims can be grabbed simultaneously, but every grabbed victim raises the difficulty of the fiddler's Athletics tests by 1 point. Grabbed victims automatically take 2 Health damage per round, and are generally ignored by the fiddler unless they escape.

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** 0 against axes, fire, electricity, and most energy; 2 against other forms of attack

**Alertness Modifier:** +2

**Stealth Modifier:** -1

**Special:** Fiddlers move quickly and have a 10m range with their branches and roots. Due to their size, they are unable to fit within most artificial structures. Mature fiddlers are immune to NLD attacks.

## Frigias

**Classification:** Lifeform

**Designation:** Class-P

**Morphology:** Frigias are semi-sentient energy forms that feed on heat. Frigias are invisible to conventional vision but show up as floating amorphous blobs when viewed with thermal sensors. In the absence of such sensors, a patina of frost can serve as a telltale sign of their location.

Physical contact with a frigias is extremely hazardous, if not instantly lethal.

**Behavior:** Frigias are drawn to the strongest heat source available, draining it and working their way down to the next. When a frigias absorbs enough heat over time, it splits in two, both of which then move off in search of more energy. The Frigias appear unable to control their feeding, and, when

they approach a star they will literally eat themselves to death. Vast shoals of newly spawned frigias hurl themselves toward the heat of the sun, only to perish in droves when they overload their absorption capabilities.

When not in proximity to a sun, the frigias drain the energy from power cells, reactors, animals, and even flora. A horde of frigias running unchecked can flash-freeze an entire planet in only a few weeks. A frigias on board a ship can drain the life support systems dry within hours.

Frigias show signs of intelligence; they are capable of assessing threats and making plans of varying complexity. The possibility that the frigias could be an organized threat rather than simply random space monsters is terrifying to contemplate.

Frigias explode when exposed to too much heat in a short time such as the lethal setting of a disruption weapon or concentrated heat-based weapons.

**Contact History:** Frigias were almost unheard of until the Combine moved into the Bleed. Since then many ships and planets have experienced attacks by these 'silent killers'. A map of encounters generated by a Combine scientist just before the war indicated that the attacks radiated out from a single point. The scientist even staged an expedition to the location but was never heard from again. The war put paid to any follow-up the Combine science directorate might have made.

**Abilities:** Athletics 4, Health 8, Scuffling 12

**Attack Pattern:** +4/+4/+2/+2

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** freezing touch +4

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** 0, but frigias are immune to most attacks.

**Alertness Modifier:** -1

**Stealth Modifier:** -1

**Special:** Frigias can pass through material objects, though it takes them a full action to do so. Frigias who take 4 or more heat damage in a single attack explode like a disruption grenade.

## Galactoids

**Classification:** Sentient

**Designation:** Class-V

**Morphology:** A Galactoid Legionnaire stands approximately 1.3m tall, not counting the helmet plume or gravity jackboots. Humanoid in structure, Galactoids have yellow-green skin beneath their heavy armor. Their natural facial features are unknown — all Galactoids wear cybernetic battle helmets. The first parts of the helmet are implanted immediately after decantation from the spawn-tanks, and the Galactoids add new components and upgrades over the course of their lives, reflecting growing stature and rank in the Legion. The glowing red 'eye' of the helmet's primary sensor port has been inextricably associated with Galactoid conflict and conquest ever since the Legion first arrived in known space.
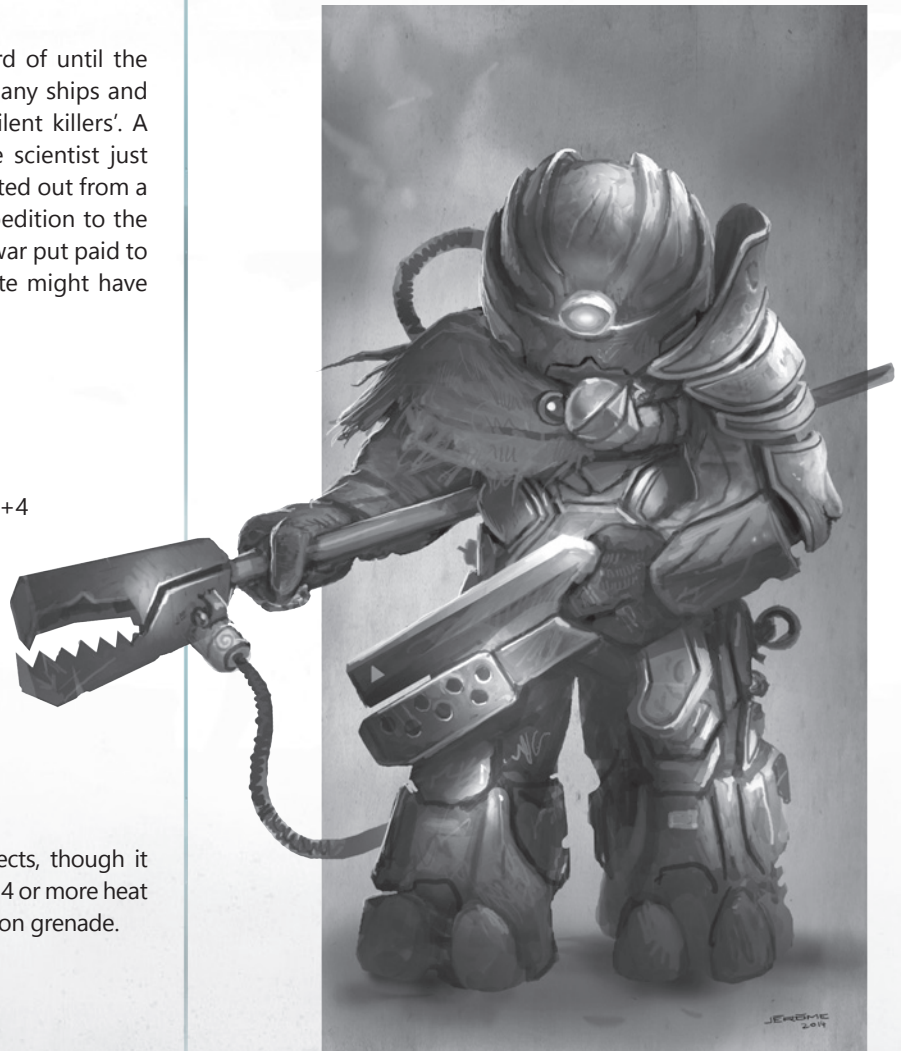
**Behavior:** Before the war, Galactoid behavior was predictable in the extreme. Fleets of battlesaucers swarmed out of Galactoid space, attacking and conquering Combine worlds. The Galactoids considered the Combine to be a "weak and decadent culture of mewling pacifists", ripe for conquest — "they will fall before the might of our battlesaucers and cry out for mercy one breath before they cry out for death!" Although both assessments proved to be entirely incorrect, the Galactoids persisted in launching offensive after offensive.

The Mohilar War shattered the Galactoid civilization, and the few surviving battlesaucers fled into the outzones of the Bleed.

While the Galactoid Legionnaires continue to bluster with grandiose threats and dreams of pan-galactic conquest, the loss of their support infrastructure forces them to concentrate on smaller-scale objectives, such as medical supplies, food, and water. Galactoid pirates and mercenaries are now a widespread hazard along the Euryale Outzone borders. Despite their penurious circumstances, the Galactoids still claim to possess doomsday weapons and promise to crush all other species beneath their collective heel. Starvation and deprivation may eventually do what dozens of defeats could not, and deflate the once-invincible Galactoid ego enough that they finally engage with other species through means other than shouting and blaster-fire.

**Contact History:** Early in the Combine's history, the Galactoids were a genuine threat, but by the beginning of the Utopian Era, Combine technology, fleet strength, and tactical expertise so outstripped those of the Galactoids that the once-feared would-be conquerors were reduced to nuisances.

When the Mohilar War broke out, Combine tacticians feared that the Galactoids would use the opportunity to launch yet another invasion. Instead, the Galactoids attacked the Mohilar and their allies, apparently on the grounds that the Combine was theirs to conquer. The last Galactoid war did not last long. The Mohilar annihilated the Galactoid Legions and destroyed their homeworlds. A few ships escaped the conflagration and fled to the Bleed.

Recent contacts mostly involved police actions against Galactoid pirates; other notable encounters included liberating low-tech synthworlds from Galactoid occupation, and covertly providing emergency aid to Galactoid colonies without the planetary government detecting Combine "interference".

**Abilities:** Athletics 6, Health 6, Scuffling 8, Shooting 10, [Shipboard A] 10, [Shipboard B] 4

**Attack Pattern:** (Scuffling) +1/+1/+3/+3 (Shooting) +1/+1/+4/+2/+2

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** fist -1

**Shooting Weapons/Damage:** Atomic Incinerator +1, Arc Zapper

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** 1

**Typical Tech: (Cybernetics) Amper, Internal Headset, Headlight, Ocular Input Analyzer, X-Gravs; Deflector**

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** -1

**Savvy Modifier:** +0

### GALACTOID BATTLESAUCER

|  | Dishing It | Taking It |
|---|---|---|
| Fire | 3 | 0 |
| Maneuver | 1 | 2 |
| Override | 0 | 1 |
| Trickbag | 0 | 1 |

Output 10

# Shilliard Freeholders

**Classification:** Sentient

**Designation:** Class-V (hostile indigene)

**Morphology:** Shilliards are tall, muscular humanoids with craggy features. Their rough skin is an amber or yellow color, fading to gray at the extremities. They have no body hair; bony growths above the eyes and ears and sometimes on the chin may be mistaken for hair at a distance. Their eyes are entirely black, without irises or sclera. Shilliards have pairs of oval orifices running down their bodies: on the sides of the neck, on the pectoral muscles, two sets on the abdomen, and on the inside of each thigh. The purpose of these orifices is unknown, but they may be attachment points for feeding tubes or other artificial life support, or cybernetic interfaces.

About thirty thousand years ago, the Shilliard Polity encompassed hundreds of systems within the Bleed and beyond. Biology dictated their xenophobic behavior — the shilliards were neurologically incapable of considering any other species to be anything other than tools or food, so they conquered or eradicated dozens of other species. Over time, their empire decayed and the Shilliard population dwindled. To maintain their vast empire despite a reduced population, they designated each world to be a freehold, owned and ruled by a small few shilliards. Some planets had only a handful of these custodians, some even had just one.

For reasons unknown — likely an external threat, given the omnipresence of military hardware in these facilities — the Shilliard established vast bases deep beneath the surfaces of their worlds. The custodians withdrew to these bases and entered into a cryostasis that lasted for millennia.

After thirty thousand years, no surface signs of the Shilliard remained, so the Combine unwittingly settled numerous colonies on worlds still claimed by the Shilliard.

The Shilliard consider these colonies to be 'infestations'.

**Behavior:** Heavily dependent on external factors, primarily:

► *the technology available to the Shilliard*
► *the extent of the 'alien infestation'*

Shilliards are biologically incapable of empathizing with non-shilliards, so their reaction to 'infestations' is always hostile. However, where one shilliard activates an ancient robot battleship, which has been floating in the dark between systems for thousands of years, to bombard the infestation from orbit, another might manipulate events and seed disputes between colonists to cause a civil war in the 'infestation'. A third might create a new biological weapon to eradicate the problem; a fourth, a particularly lazy shilliard, might just project a giant hologram in the sky and demand that the intruders leave within forty-eight hours. The logistics of evacuating ten million sentients are not his problem...

**Contact History:** Explorers unearthed Shilliard remains during the initial surveys of the Bleed, but they assumed that the Shilliard were extinct. The subsurface Shilliard installations were too deep and too well shielded to be detected even by the best Utopian-era survey probe sensors, so the continued existence of a handful of Shilliard Freeholders went unnoticed until the Callisto Incident, when a shilliard awoke and demanded the colonists leave. When they refused, he activated a weapons system that obliterated the colony. That shilliard was himself terminated by a Laser crew (the Callisto municipal council had prudently included a standard vengeance clause in their insurance); investigations of the Shilliard base uncovered a partial map of the Shilliard Polity, which showed that the Combine overlapped with the Polity in dozens of systems.

## SHILLIARD TECHNOLOGY

At their height, the Shilliard equaled but did not noticeably exceed the scientific achievements of the Combine. Most recovered Shilliard equipment is roughly on a par with its Combine counterparts. However, the Shilliard were adept at automation and building megastructures and stupendously large and complex machines. Their buried bases might contain punchbeam cannons big enough to take out a moon, factories capable of churning out robot warships, or seismic disruptors that can flip a continent like a pancake — all of which can be controlled by a single shilliard.

As a security measure, all their technology is hard-coded so that it can only be used by shilliards. Breaking a hardcode is computationally difficult for a minor piece of equipment, and giant machines like the aforementioned continent flipper are virtually impossible to crack.

Not all contacts with the Shilliard have ended in violence. In some cases, negotiators have agreed on mutually acceptable boundaries, or convinced the shilliard to return to cryostasis. In one instance, the shilliard committed suicide rather than face existence in a galaxy dominated by 'vermin'.

**Abilities:** Athletics 6, Health 14, Preparedness 10, Scuffling 8, Shooting 10

**Attack Pattern:** (Scuffling) +2/+2/+2/+2 (Shooting) +1/+3/+3/+3

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** Alien Cane -1

**Shooting Weapons/Damage:** Alien Energy Weapon +2

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** 4

**Typical Tech:** Headset; (Cybernetics) Autonomic Avenger; Personal Force Field (gives armor 4, and prevents all NLD damage); Tether

**Alertness Modifier:** -1

**Stealth Modifier:** -1

**Savvy Modifier:** +2

## Stalyr

**Classification:** Lifeform (pending)

**Designation:** Class-X (pending)

**Morphology:** Stalyr are barnacle-like creatures that start life as spore clouds in translight corridors. These spores attach themselves to vessels in translight and feed on the engine emissions, fueling their growth into thick-shelled creatures the size of a human fist with chameleonic features that prevent easy detection. Good wrenches sweep their ships for stalyr after each trip, removing them with a simple spray purchasable from any starport.

If left unchecked, a stalyr infection reaches its second stage, where the creatures form a hive mind and extend microscopic tendrils into the ship's hull to interface with the ship systems. The crew can notice the system interference during routine maintenance with a 1-point Bio Signatures,

Forensic Engineering, or Evidence Collection spend. Mature stalyr hive minds are semi-sentient beings educated through their connection to their host ship's computer core.

Removing a mature stalyr cluster is a difficult proposition and requires surgical precision to not cause them damage. Damaging a mature stalyr cluster results in a translight hemorrhage where everything nearby is thrown partially into a translight corridor for a few seconds. This is usually enough to kill a person or seriously damage key systems.

Once the stalyr have interfaced fully with the ship, they can control any function of the vessel.

**Behavior:** Stalyr take over vessels, but their purpose for doing so are unclear. Controlled vessels seldom work together or communicate in meaningful ways. A few behaviorists have theorized that the stalyr are affected by the contents of the ships' computers and AI, these random factors impacting how they act. Elements in the Combine military believe that the stalyr are a forgotten bioweapon.

Scientists studying stalyr movement patterns have noted that stalyr infested vessels have repeatedly visited three particular systems toward the edge of the Bleed. Surveys of the systems have revealed nothing, but the **Ashen Stars** Effect is prevalent in the systems' stars, interfering with scans.

Stalyr ignore the crews of infested vessels unless they try to remove the infestation or interfere with their cryptic missions. If threatened, the stalyr infection defends itself using the ship's internal systems — it might open the airlocks, activate anti-intruder weapons, or fly the ship into a belt of lethal radiation. The stalyr attack ships approaching too close or engaging in actions the stalyr deem unacceptable.

Strange behaviors exhibited by stalyr ships include:

- ► *destroying a lone building or an entire settlement*
- ► *orbiting a planet and conducting endless, futile scans*
- ► *mining asteroids and dumping the materials into an ocean on an uninhabited world*
- ► *forcing crew to excavate ancient ruins*
- ► *aggressively attacking shipping in a particular region*

**Contact History:** The stalyr were first encountered by a kch-thk warship during the early days of their war with the ene. The kch-thk were wiped out when their chief engineer tried to eat the organic control fibers extending into their translight core. The ship then conducted hit and run operations against

the kch-thk for two months before an ene fleet encountered it randomly and destroyed it in a pitched battle.

Dozens of encounters by merchants and cruise ships increased awareness regarding the stalyr until the McMillen Interregnum, when an infected human warship broke through the cordons around Mars and destroyed the Elliot 291 colony site.

Late in the golden age, scientists conducted extensive surveys on the systems of Vo, Heddia, and Orror, seeking a reason why the stalyr repeatedly took ships to these systems. After five years, funding dried up and the research was abandoned.

## POSSESSED RUNNER-CLASS VESSEL

|  | Dishing It | Taking It |
|---|---|---|
| Fire | 0 | 0 |
| Maneuver | 0 | 0 |
| Override | 0 | –4 |
| Trickbag | 0 | 0 |

Output 20

**Special:** Stalyr infestation increases a ship's Output by 6, and improves its Override (Taking It) by 4. Hacking into a stalyr ship is akin to hacking into the mind of the controlling stalyr.

**Typical Shipboard Abilities:** Astronomy 2, Battle Console 8, Communications Intercept 8, Helm Control 8, Naval Tactics 8, Systems Repair 8

# Virophages

**Classification:** Quasi-sentient

**Designation:** Class-K (provisional)

**Morphology:** In their baseline form, virophages resemble skinless humanoids. Muscles and tendons move beneath a protective layer of mucus, which can be reflexively hardened to form armored plates in combat. Spiky quills like cactus needles coat the tongue and inside of the cheeks. Wide nostrils and smaller receptor-growths under the ears and between the fingers allow the virophage to 'taste' and track viro-modified biological traces with an astounding degree of sensitivity. Virophages are extremely thin and display an extremely high body temperature; autopsies suggest the creature's internal organs are optimized and so function extremely effectively despite their atrophied appearance.

Virophages are believed to be the result of a genetically engineered virus gone awry (see 'Contact History'). The virus rewrites the victim's genetic code, transforming them into a virophage. Kch-thk and tavaks have shown limited resistance to the virus; other Combine species are vulnerable to infection and transformation into virophages.

Virophages are genetically unstable, and rapidly degrade. They can temporarily arrest the unraveling of their genetic code by adding new viroware modifications, but each modification only works once. Virophages inevitably slide toward complete cellular collapse, decomposing into a seething mass of protean cells.

**Behavior:** Virophages are driven to seek out and acquire new viroware enhancements. While the creatures can absorb viroware through conventional methods — using viral therapy — they can also extract viral samples from the modified tissue of other viroware users. For example, a virophage could obtain the Thirdeye viroware modification by eating the hair and part of the brain of another user. Obtaining a new viroware modification triggers a physiological reaction in the virophage; observers have described it as either an orgasmic release or a momentary relief from pain, as the polymorphous genetic structure of the virophage is temporarily stabilized by the new viroware. However, this blissful reaction is short lived, and the virophage must soon continue its hunt.

The first priority for any newly infected virophages is to obtain the Morphological Mimicry or Scrambleface modifications; the latter allows the virophage to look like a member of its original species. Virophages retain their intelligence and memories, but are consumed by their instinctive drive to further modify their DNA. Depending on circumstances or opportunities, a virophage might:

► *hunt down and murder viroware users*

► *break into viroware laboratories or therapy centers*

► *kidnap and imprison a viroware researcher and force them to produce new viruses*

► *Be consumed with horror at their new form, and attempt to flee, imprison, or harm themselves before they can do anything abhorrent*

Virophages reproduce through infection. The urge to reproduce is triggered after a virophage consumes a sufficient variety of viroware to stabilize its genetic structure for several days. This threshold varies from strain to strain, but is usually in the region of eight to ten distinct viruses. To reproduce, the virophage must bite another genetically compatible humanoid, injecting the victim with the virophage virus. If the new virus successfully overwhelms the victim's immune system, transformation into a virophage takes approximately seventy-two hours. The virus attempts to preserve both the victim's existing viroware, as well as copy over any viroware possessed by the 'parent' virophage, but the radical rewrite of the victim's DNA means that only a fraction of the existing viroware survives the change. (Roll a d6 for each viroware upgrade; on a 5 or 6, that upgrade still works after the transformation. We apologize for this intrusion of crunch into what should, by rights, be entirely flavor country.)

**Contact History:** The virophage phenomenon originated on the Chiron Gamma research station. The lack of survivors and extensive damage to the station's computers and records made it impossible to completely reconstruct the chain of events that led up to the release of the virus, but the investigating Laser crew discovered that the scientists were experimenting on captured lipovores (*Ashen Stars*, p. 201). They also found several missing escape capsules, suggesting that virophage-infected crew members had already fled in search of fresh victims. Further investigation was cut short when it became apparent that the original version of the virus was airborne, and that the Lasers themselves were infected. The sole survivor of that mission, Veput Who Wept But Shot True, destroyed the station to eliminate the monsters her former crewmates had become, but in doing so also annihilated any data that might have allowed the Combine to trace the other virophages, or even to find a cure.

Since then, seven planets across the Bleed have reported virophage attacks, with a further nineteen suspected incidents. Virophages were originally Class-P, but were upgraded to Class-K out of concerns that the virus might become airborne once again.

**Abilities:** Athletics 6, Health 10, Scuffling 12

**Attack Pattern:** +3/+3/+3/+3

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** fist -1

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** none by default, but Keratinized Epidermis or Refractive Skin may provide added protection.

**Typical Tech:** A virophage has at least 2-7 viroware upgrades, chosen at random or by the GM

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +2

**Savvy Modifier:** +0

**Special:** Virophages may gain new viroware by consuming the bodies of victims.

# Visitors

**Classification:** Sentient

**Designation:** Class-X

**Morphology:** The best image analysis suggests that Visitors are gaunt, blue-skinned humanoids, standing approximately two meters tall. Both male and female Visitors have been encountered, and their secondary sexual characteristics are similar to those of the balla or humans. Visitors use a variety of cybernetic implants, but a large shoulder-mounted unit and silver studs in the temples are common to all encountered specimens.

Visitors do not normally exist in our time-space continuum. Individual Visitors 'phase' into our reality. This phasing process appears painful and disorientating, and warps dimensions around the point of entry. Visitors may be distorted or injured while phasing, and direct communication is exceedingly difficult due to shifts in sound, vision, and even thought patterns caused by the space-warp effect. The Visitors babble streams of nonsense, or respond to questions out of sequence, lending credence to theories that there is a temporal shift involved — the Visitors' communications may make perfect sense if viewed in the right order, but time travel jumbles everything up.

Materialization periods are rarely longer than a dozen minutes, although the duration and frequency of materialization increases as the Visitor 'anchors' (see 'Behavior').

Killing or incapacitating a Visitor results in the creature phasing out permanently. No Visitor corpses or remains have ever been recovered.

**Behavior:** Each Visitor tries to accomplish something in our reality, although what that is varies. In previous (from the Combine's temporal perspective, that is) encounters, Visitors have tried to:

- *prevent the launch of the Combine warship* **Eluicar**
- *kill everyone who attended a particular performance of Macbeth performed by an all-tavak troupe*
- *ensure that Seb Philair and Jaleen Crook meet and fall in love*
- *sabotage the Drex Azar hydro dam*
- *reprogram the navigation system on the Laser ship* **Barrelhead**, *possibly to ensure it discovered a new translight corridor on the edge of the Scylla Outzone.*

Visitors are seemingly limited in the duration of their manifestations, and unable to precisely target where they appear. In the case of the *Barrelhead*, for example, the Visitor materialized three times on the ship — once in the cargo bay, once in the cabin of the ship's doc, and once outside the ship. In each case, the Visitor tried to make its way to the navigation computer, but was prevented from doing so by the crew.

To better control their manifestations, Visitors may attempt to 'anchor' themselves to an individual. To do so, the Visitor uses a wand-like device to implant microscopic tracers under the victim's skin. Once anchored, the Visitor may materialize in the vicinity of the anchor for longer periods, and without generating painful and disorientating space-time distortions. The chosen anchor may be obliquely connected to the Visitor's goal. In the case of the *Barrelhead*, the Visitor anchored to a young boy on a nearby freighter; when the *Barrelhead*'s crew learned that the freighter was also reporting strange encounters with a 'blue ghost', they rendezvoused with the freighter, allowing the Visitor to materialize alongside its anchor and reach the bridge.

Anchors experience bizarre hallucinations, which may be some form of 'perceptual bleed' from the Visitor.

**Contact History:** All Visitors to date were encountered within the confines of the Bleed, and all encounters have occurred since the end of the Mohilar War. In addition to the examples listed above, Ossa One records show another twenty-nine instances where a Visitor attempted to achieve a discernable goal, and another two hundred and seventeen brief encounters where a Visitor manifestation was observed, but the purpose of the intercession was not discernable.

Theories about the nature and purpose of the Visitors abound. The Temporal Intervention hypothesis suggests the Visitors are time travelers from the future, coming back to 'adjust' Combine history. Visitor technology does appear similar in design and purpose to Combine equipment, and the Visitors themselves could be viro-modded humans or balla. The bizarre missions undertaken by the Visitors could be 'tweaks' to history. The Temporal Invention hypothesis, however, is silent on why the Visitors are only showing up now, instead of before the Combine was crippled by the Mohilar (of course, the Bogey Conundrum could conceal a paradoxical intervention where the Visitors saved themselves by saving their ancestors).

The equally plausible Dimensional Invasion theory holds that Visitors come from another dimension (like the hyperspace previously inhabited by the vas kra) or from another timeline. This theory does explain why the Visitors are confused and disoriented upon arrival, but fails to explain their apparent obsession with achieving petty or even meaningless goals.

**Abilities:** Athletics 6, Phase 20, Preparedness 10, Scuffling 6, Shooting 14

**Attack Pattern: (**Scuffling) +3/+3, (Shooting) +2/+2/+4/+4/+2

**Scuffling Weapons/Damage:** Anchor Wand +0

**Shooting Weapons/Damage:** Energy Discharge +1

**Hit Threshold:** 5

**Typical Tech:** Headset, Personal Bluffer; Deflector, Foiler, Popper (4), Snower; Tether; (Viroware) Chameleon, Refractive Skin, SlickSkin

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Savvy Modifier:** -1

**Special:** Visitors must spend one point of Phase per round, except when within a short distance of an anchor. When the Visitor runs out of Phase, it vanishes. Attacks that would normally reduce Health instead reduce the Visitor's Phase pool.

# APPENDIX I: ASHEN STARS WARP PLAY

## APPENDIX I: ASHEN STARS WARP PLAY

If you're playing a one-shot game of *Ashen Stars*, or if your play style doesn't mesh well with the amount of specific detail in the *Ashen Stars* ability descriptions, you may want to consider running the game with collapsed and compressed abilities. This results in a game where individual characters are slightly less differentiated, but which may be friendlier to new players and easier to learn on the fly.

One way to do this is to use the abilities specified below instead of the default abilities. When a Warp Play ability encompasses one or more standard abilities, we'll note that below. At the end of the list, you'll find a quick-reference summary.

## Warp Play Investigative Abilities

When using these Warp Play abilities as written here, player investigative build points are less than standard character creation rules.

| # OF PLAYERS | INVESTIGATIVE BUILD POINTS |
|---|---|
| 2 | 12 |
| 3 | 10 |
| 4 | 9 |
| 5+ | 8 |

Too much compression? Feel free to split out abilities back into their own category, especially if your game focuses heavily on those abilities. A game that is heavily focused on history and culture may not wish to combine those abilities into just two culture-focused abilities, and a game that's heavy on virology and evocative murder scenes may not want to use the catch-all Medicine.

| ACADEMIC | INTERPERSONAL | TECHNICAL | SPECIAL (VAS MAL ONLY) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anthropology | Authority | Analyst | Consciousness Simulation |
| Astronomical Science | Bullshit Detection | Engineering | Dreamsight |
| Culture of the Newer Species | Charm | Investigation | Neurosight |
| Culture of the Older Species | Persuasion | Medicine | Timesight |
| Planetary Science | | Scanning | |
| | | Surveillance | |

## Academic

### Anthropology (Academic)
This ability lets you understand the society, architecture, laws, and languages of foreign cultures. You can use this ability to blend in with common people you encounter. Includes Anthropology (Academic), Archaeology (Academic), Downside (Interpersonal), Law (Academic), and Linguistics (Academic).

### Astronomical Science (Academic)
You know warp corridors, star positions, hostile species, and other space-related science. Includes Astronomy (Technical) and Xenoculture (Academic). For every point invested in this ability beyond the first, select one specialty; you have specific and specialized information about that branch of science.

### Culture of the Newer Species (Academic)
Some of the Seven Peoples are newer to the Combine. This ability gives you knowledge of their basic history and culture. For every point invested in this ability beyond the first, select one species; you have specific and specialized information about that species. Includes Cybe Culture (Academic), History, Durugh (Academic) and Vas Mal Culture (Academic).

### Culture of the Older Species (Academic)
This ability gives you knowledge of the basic history and culture of the older species within the Combine and the Seven Peoples. For every point invested in this ability beyond the first, select one species; you have specific and specialized information about that species. Includes History, Balla (Academic), History, Combine (Academic), History, Human (Academic), History, Kch-Thk (Academic), and History, Tavak (Academic).

### Planetary Science (Academic)
This catch-all scientific ability gives you knowledge of planetside scientific features, even if you aren't previously familiar with the planet. Includes Botany (Academic), Chemistry (Technical), Geology (Academic), and Zoology (Academic). For every point invested in this ability beyond the first, select one specialty; you have specific and specialized information about that branch of science.

## Interpersonal

### Authority (Interpersonal)
Some people are clearly in charge, whether they've got an official position of power or not. If you're learning clues by giving orders, demanding information, talking shop with law enforcement, throwing your weight around, or convincing people you're worthy of respect, you're using Authority. Includes Bureaucracy (Interpersonal), Cop Talk (Interpersonal), Interrogation (Interpersonal), Intimidation (Interpersonal), and Respect (Interpersonal).

### Bullshit Detector (Interpersonal)
As per normal. This one is so important, you won't need to combine it with other abilities.

### Charm (Interpersonal)
Whether you're physically attractive yourself or exceptionally skilled at making other people think they are, use your charm to talk other people out of secrets and clues. This ability allows you to be convincingly subservient if you need to flatter and bootlick your way to acceptance. You can even impersonate other people for a time, relying on your charisma and acting skills to carry you through. Includes Flattery (Interpersonal), Flirting (Interpersonal), and Impersonate (Interpersonal).

### Persuasion (Interpersonal)
You're a convincing wheeler-dealer who knows how to use the tools of leadership and bargaining to get what you need. You can reach agreements with people, reassure them, or even inspire them to do the right thing -- all through the power of your voice. Includes Inspiration (Interpersonal), Negotiation (Interpersonal), and Reassurance (Interpersonal).

## Technical

### Analyst (Technical)
You make numbers sing, and your understanding of accounting, encryption, and data science allows you to draw information from columns of numbers that would bewilder anyone else. Includes Data Retrieval (Technical), Decryption (Technical), and Forensic Accounting (Academic).

### Engineering (Technical)
Machinery and technology hold few secrets for you. Whether you want to make something explode or go faster, you're experienced at design, repair, and creating (or avoiding) really big explosions. Includes Explosive Devices (Technical), Forensic Engineering (Technical), and Industrial Design (Technical).

## Investigation (Technical)

You're trained in a wide range of investigation techniques, including the proper protocol for evidence collection and the science of blood spatter. You can track the angle of a shot and learn secrets about a crime scene that a layperson would certainly miss. Includes Evidence Collection (Technical) and Kinetics (Technical).

## Medicine (Technical)

Whether they're ill, dead, autopsied, or infected with a hand-crafted genetically engineered bit of virology, Medicine will give you the clues to know what's killed or infected them. Includes Forensic Anthropology (Technical), Forensic Psychology (Academic), and Virology (Technical).

## Scanning (Technical)

You know how to use scanners to investigate both life signs and energy signatures. Includes Bio Signatures (Technical) and Energy Signatures (Technical).

## Surveillance (Technical)

You're an expert at 2D and 3D imaging and recording technology. You can spy on people with tiny holographic bugs, analyze and improve video or holographic recordings, and use technology to ferret out nearly unnoticeable audio clues from a recording. Includes Holo Surveillance (Technical) and Imaging (Technical).

## Special (Vas Mal only)

### Consciousness Simulation

Instead of the cost detailed on p. 34 of *Ashen Stars*, a Warp Play use of this ability costs 1 point plus 1 point for each question you ask.

### Dreamsight

This works as detailed on p. 36 of *Ashen Stars*.

### Neurosight

Instead of the cost detailed on p. 42 of *Ashen Stars*, a Warp Play 1-point spend of Neurosight costs 1 point for each use, regardless of the effect you are attempting. Psychic Depletion applies as per normal.

### Timesight

Instead of the cost detailed on p. 43 of *Ashen Stars*, every Warp Play point spent to activate the ability provides two clue-related details.

## Warp Play General Abilities

Usually, general abilities are less compressed than investigative abilities are for Warp Play. When using Warp Play general abilities, players get 55 general build points instead of the standard 75 points in normal *Ashen Stars* play. Several abilities (Battle Console, Naval Tactics) can optionally be removed if you find that *Ashen Stars*' starship combat is not a common portion of your games. If you include these abilities, increase starting build points to 60 instead.

The optional cherry rules (p. 26) may work better for Warp Play, if you want to avoid going into detail on viroware and other augmentations.

### GENERAL ABILITIES

| | |
|---|---|
| Athletics | Pathway Amplification |
| Battle Console | (Vas Mal) |
| Business Affairs | Phase (Durugh) |
| Communications | Pilot |
| Intercept | Preparedness |
| Emotion Suppression | Probability Override (Vas |
| (Balla) | Mal) |
| Enchancement | Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal) |
| Integration (Cybe) | Resist Battle Frenzy |
| Farsight (Vas Mal) | (Tavak) |
| Health | Scuffling |
| Medic | Sense Trouble |
| Migrate Consciousness | Shooting |
| (Kch-Thk) | Systems Engineering |
| Naval Tactics | Thievery |
| Neural Rewiring (Cybe) | |

### Athletics

As per *Ashen Stars*.

### Battle Console

Remove if not using Space Combat.

### Business Affairs

As per *Ashen Stars*, and also includes Public Relations.

## Communications Intercept

This ability includes all computer hacking. If you need to break through computer security and it isn't clue-related (for which you'd be using Analyst), you'll be rolling Communications Intercept. As a result, this ability sticks around even if you aren't using Space Combat.

## Emotion Suppression (Balla)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Enhancement Integration (Cybe)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Farsight (Vas Mal)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Health

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Medic

As per *Ashen Stars* when it comes to healing your allies and yourself, but in Warp Play this ability includes Viro Manipulation. You can spend Medic points to make a Viro Manipulation roll, as per normal.

## Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Naval Tactics

Remove if not using Space Combat.

## Neural Rewiring (Cybe)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Pathway Amplification (Vas Mal)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Phase (Durugh)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Pilot

You can drive, fly, and pilot anything that isn't physically nailed down. Includes Ground Craft, Helm Control, and Shuttle Craft. While a GM may be tempted to limit the number of vehicles you can legitimately pilot based on your score, in practice it's usually more fun to slightly raise the Difficulty Number of Piloting tests when you're behind the wheel of a vehicle you've clearly never encountered before.

## Preparedness

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Probability Override (Vas Mal)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Psychic Vitality (Vas Mal)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Resist Battle Frenzy (Tavak)

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Scuffling

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Sense Trouble

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Shooting

As per *Ashen Stars*.

## Systems Engineering

You can design, build, and fix systems, even when under fire and your ship is in danger of destruction. Includes both Systems Design and Systems Repair.

## Thievery

If you want to sneak, steal, pick locks, or pick pockets, you'll want to know Thievery. Includes Filch, Infiltration, and Surveillance.

# Appendix 2: Reference Tables

## Bolt-ons

| NAME | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advertising Nexus | +2 Reputation for finding contracts | 6 | 2 | 118 |
| Aegis Evolver | Refines defenses | 10 | 3 | 118 |
| Attack Drone | Second ship in combat | 15 | 3 | 118 |
| Backup Translight Drive | One-shot FTL hop to escape combat | 7 | 1 | 119 |
| Bio-Scrubber | Skirmish points allocated to damaging crew increase Difficulty by 3 | 5 | 1 | 119 |
| Brownout Blanket | Degrades enemy specs until burned off with Output | 5 | 1 | 119 |
| Cannon-Nanny | Gun-Nanny for ships | 2 | 0 | 119 |
| Cold Thrust Optimization | +2 when Wide-Eyeing | 3 | 1 | 119 |
| Concealed Cargo Bay | Hides part of a cargo bay | 5 | 0 | 119 |
| Delouser | Removes cling-ons | 6 | 1 | 119 |
| Digiquisitor | Discover all enemy bolt-ons | 4 | 1 | 119 |
| Digital Vampire | Steal Output | 5 | 1 | 120 |
| DR-T Rat | Tracks enemy ship | 2 | 0 | 120 |
| Emergency Armor Shunt | Spend Naval Tactics to redirect enemy attack to a different spec | 7 | 2 | 120 |
| External Racking | Budget cargo bay | 5 | 0 | 120 |
| Extra Shuttle Bay | Guess. | 5 | 0 | 120 |
| Fire and Forget Missile Pack | One-shot +2 to Fire (Dishing it) | 2 | 0 | 120 |
| Foamer | Increase Scramble difficulties by 1 per showdown | 5 | 1 | 120 |
| Grav Quaker | Damages enemy crew | 5 | 1 | 120 |

## BOLT-ONS [CONTINUED]

| NAME | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Heuristic Strategy Matrix | Keep a backup goal in your pocket | 8 | 1 | 120 |
| Inertial Juicer | Turns crew damage into Output | 7 | 2 | 121 |
| Meson Caltrops | +2 skirmish points for Escape or Datascrape | 5 | 1 | 121 |
| Multi-Phase Disperser | Destroys any poppers on target vessel | 5 | 2 | 121 |
| Nautilus | Turns ship into a submarine | 5 | 2 | 121 |
| Pandora Vault | Turns a lost Override into a win | 5 | 1 | 121 |
| Particle Streamers | Counters tractor beams | 3 | 1 | 121 |
| Quantum Capacitor Banks | Potentially gain extra Output when hyperclocking | 5 | 0 | 121 |
| Retribution Array | Gain skirmish points when you lose a Fire showdown | 10 | 2 | 121 |
| Sensor Baffler | Enhances stealth | 5 | 1 | 122 |
| Smartmines | Gain extra skirmish points when escaping | 3 | 1 | 122 |
| Temporal Shields | Delays effects of showdown | 7 | 2 | 122 |
| Tick-Booms | One-shot siphon Output then explode | 2 | 0 | 122 |
| Towing Lines | Budget tractor beam | 3 | 0 | 122 |
| Welcome Turret | Anti-personnel automated weapon | 3 | 0 | 122 |

## SHUTTLES, SHUTTLES, SHUTTLES!

| NAME | FUNCTION | COST | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Breaching Pod | Skips to the exciting bit of Cripple for Boarding | 15 | 123 |
| Cargo Shuttle | +1 Cargo | 20 | 123 |
| Combat Shuttle | Acts as a second ship in combat | 20 | 123 |
| Integrated Shuttle | Doubles as lab/sick bay/locker/cryo | 15 | 124 |
| Maintenance Shuttle | -1 Condition | 15 | 124 |
| Racing Shuttle | Goes really fast | 15 | 125 |
| Translight Shuttle | Can travel through translight corridors | 20 | 125 |

## COMMUNICATIONS TECH

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scorpion Relay | Miscellaneous | Black clip | Prevents interception | 2 | | 126 |

## CYBERNETIC ENHANCEMENTS

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|------|------|-----------|----------|------|--------|------|
| Back Brain Driver | Cybernetic Enhancements | Cranial port and cable | Connects driver to vehicle, boosting two related abilities | 4 | 2 | 126 |
| Black Spot | Cybernetic Enhancements | Black dot on palm | Concealed osmotic puncher Concealedosmotic puncher | 2 | 0 | 126 |
| Bloodhound | Cybernetic Enhancements | Nasal Receptors | Boosts scent-related abilities | 4 | 1 | 126 |
| Brain Drill | Cybernetic Enhancements | Tongue-mounted weapon | Concealed melee weapon | 3 | 1 | 127 |
| Brainwave Synchronizer | Cybernetic Enhancements | Cranial port | Lets users share pools | 5 | 1 | 127 |
| Bushytailer | Cybernetic Enhancements | Cardiac implant | Revives from NLD stun | 1 | 1 | 127 |
| Cyberlimb | Cybernetic Enhancements | Artificial limb | +1 Health, reduced cyber install costs | 6 | 1 | 127 |
| Flex Arms | Cybernetic Enhancements | Back-mounted tentacular manipulators | Extra limbs | 3 | 1 | 128 |
| Impulser | Cybernetic Enhancements | Blue hemisphere | Regenerating popper | 3 | 1 | 128 |
| Internal Medical Schema | Cybernetic Enhancements | Micropouches and holotattoos | Ensures optimum medical treatment | 2 | 1 | 128 |
| Jobsbridge | Cybernetic Enhancements | Software in brain | Finds side jobs automatically | 3 | 1 | 128 |
| Muckraker Suite | Cybernetic Enhancements | Software in brain | Boosts Downside, Intimidation & Forensic Accounting | 3 | 1 | 129 |
| Nu-U | Cybernetic Enhancements | Spinal disc | Replacement personality | 2 + 2 per personality | 0 | 129 |
| Optic Slug | Cybernetic Enhancements | Remote rolling eyeball | Wandering eye | 3 | 1 | 130 |
| Popspurs | Cybernetic Enhancements | Spurs on joints | 2 damage when Scuffling | 4 | 1 | 130 |
| Puppet Wire | Cybernetic Enhancements | Cranial mesh | Allows remote operation of body | 4 | 1 | 130 |

## CYBERNETIC ENHANCEMENTS [CONTINUED]

| Shudderware | Cybernetic Enhancements | Quantum relays in brain | Boosts Sense Trouble; become aggressor in combat | 4 | 1 | 130 |
| Sohna Nur | Cybernetic Enhancements | Multi-colored hemisphere | Resist coercion | 2 | 1 | 130 |
| Testament | Cybernetic Enhancements | Black box | Records last sixty seconds on a loop | 3 | 0 | 131 |
| Trouble Crab | Cybernetic Enhancements | Black neck-mounted crab | Highlights weapons | 2 | 1 | 131 |
| Vengeance Coprocessor | Cybernetic Enhancements | Cranial computer | 6-point pool when fighting against studied opponent | 3 | 1 | 131 |
| Zeitgeist Face | Cybernetic Enhancements | Subdermal manipulators in facial muscles | Substitute Public Relations points for interpersonal spends | 4 | 2 | 131 |

## MEDICAL AND FORENSIC GEAR

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dear John | Medical and Forensic Gear | Injectable drug | Cancels Upkeep | 1 | | 132 |
| Eye Witness Gel | Medical and Forensic Gear | Minty or tangy goo | Enhances recall | 3p | | 132 |
| Putrefast | Medical and Forensic Gear | White ant eggs | Dissolves corpse | 2p | | 132 |
| Slapdoc | Medical and Forensic | Blue bandage | Restores 4 Health | 6p | | 132 |

## MISCELLANEOUS TECH

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Drone | Miscellaneous | Varies | Proxy | 4+ | | 132 |
| Phosphorolytic Capacitor | Miscellaneous | Heavy Backpack | Stores Output | 6 | | 132 |

## PROTECTIVE GEAR

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Royal Guard Tabard | Protective Gear | Ornate vest | Phase in combat | 2 | | 132 |
| Sub-Quantum Dissonance Rod | Protective Gear | Crystal spike | Blocks vas mal scrying | 5 | | 132 |

## PROTECTIVE TECH [CONTINUED]

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Toxsuit | Protective Gear | Orange overall | Protection from hazards | Standard/4p | | |
| Whimpershell | Protective Gear | Yellow shell | Hide from danger | 4p/6p with life support | | |

## INVESTIGATIVE TECH

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Necroprobe | Investigative Tech | Crystal spike | Raises dead | 6p | | 133 |
| Portable Datascraper | Investigative Tech | Pocket computer | Snaffles useful data | 2 | | 134 |
| Smart Meglight | Investigative Tech | Meglight attachment | Highlights anomalies | 1 | | 134 |
| Snail bomb | Investigative Tech | Ball o'snails | Instant holosurveillance coverage | 6p/8p with launcher | | 134 |
| Stenographer | Investigative Tech | Software patch | Files and cross-references evidence | 1 per team | | 134 |
| Stinker | Investigative Tech | Plastic container | Pheromone-based tracker | 2p | | 134 |
| Virotrigger | Investigative Tech | Fuzzy bat | Triggers viroware | 2 | | 134 |

## VIROWARE

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Electrosense | Viroware | | Feel electricity | 2 | 1 | 135 |
| Forensi-Shield | Viroware | | You leave no DNA evidence | 3 | 1 | 135 |
| Lumitat | Viroware | | Glowing tattoo | 1 | 0 | 135 |
| Mr. Happygood (illegal) | Viroware | | 6-point interpersonal pool | 1 | 1 | 136 |
| Twitchtalk | Viroware | | Communicate through subtle gestures | 2 | 1 | 136 |
| Venger 6000 | Viroware | | Internal bomb | 3 | 0 | 136 |
| Vile-Bile | Viroware | | Spit acid | 2 | 1 | 137 |
| Xeno Baffler | Viroware | | Radically rework genetics | 4 | 2 | 137 |

## VIROWARE/PHEREMONE

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Medusa | Viroware/ Pheremone | | Freezes living creatures | 3 | 2 | 136 |
| Wingman Ultra | Viroware/ Pheremone | | Boost ally's interpersonal ability | 2 | 1 | 137 |

## WEAPONRY

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Disruption Holdout | Weaponry | Small pistol | Concealed weapon | 4p | | 138 |
| Flatbat | Weaponry | Any small object | Concealed baton | 3p | | 138 |
| Military Disruption Rifle | Weaponry | Heavy weapon | Extra damage | 3 | | 138 |
| Nauseator | Weaponry | Silver cylinder | 1-point levy on all actions | 2p | | 138 |
| Phase Mine | Weaponry | High-tech ring | Damage phased entities | 1 | | 138 |
| Smog Grenade | Weaponry | Black sphere | Increase Hit Thresholds | 4p | | 138 |

## WEAPONRY/DISRUPTOR ACCESSORIES

| TECH | TYPE | APPEARANCE | FUNCTION | COST | UPKEEP | PAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burner | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | Adds a cutter mode | 1 | | 139 |
| Charmer | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Balla Only | Charm person in a gun | 1 | | 139 |
| Dirty Harry | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Ugly | Boosts Intimidation; +1 bludgeon damage | 1 | | 139 |
| Double Downer | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | Allows simultaneous suppressive and regular fire | 1 | | 139 |
| Fury Cannon | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Tavak Only | Spend Resist Battle Frenzy for more damage | 2 | | 139 |

## WEAPONRY/DISRUPTOR ACCESSORIES [CONTINUED]

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goontracker Mark IV | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | 4-point Business Affairs/Public Relations pool | 1 | | 140 |
| Migrator | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Kch-thk Only | Migrate consciousness to target's body | 3 | | 140 |
| Near Death Gun | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Vas Mal Only | Stains local area with echo of consciousness | 1 | | 140 |
| NLD Squelcher | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | Determines duration of NLD effect | 2 | | 140 |
| Phase Harness | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Durugh Only | Phase attacks through cover | 2 | | 140 |
| Purifier | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | Cleans up target | 1 | | 141 |
| Silencer | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | Disrupts target's communications | 1 | | 141 |
| Sniper Module | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | Increases range | 1 | | 141 |
| Tracer | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | Irradiates target | 2 | | 141 |
| Zero Beamer | Weaponry/ Disruptor Accessories | Disruptor Accessory | Makes beam undetectable | 1 | | 141 |

# INDEX