SERENITY

ROLE PLAYING GAME

BIG DAMN HEROES
HANDBOOK

SERENITY

ROLE PLAYING GAME

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF GARY GYGAX AND DAVE ARNESON

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"The Miranda Hoax is a cover-up? What do you mean?"

Mal looked at the young man, no threat there. He wasn't the fightin' type. Mal sighed and signaled for another drink.

"It started with a girl . . ."

Everything had been going smooth before River Tam came on board his ship. After that, Mal'd been sucked into more trouble than he could imagine.

River and her brother, Simon, were fugitives from the Alliance, which pretty much painted a bullseye on Serenity's hull. Mal had tried to help them. Doc came in handy with bullet holes and such, but River was special. She was tetched but of use some times.

Life was getting thin having them along, avoiding jobs and old friends in case the fugitives were seen. They were finally tipped to a heist and the job was going shiny when River felt Reavers coming. They got out in the nick of time thanks to Wash's fancy flyin'. Mal and Jayne went to the Maidenhead to pay off the tip, but River followed them. Suddenly, she goes six ways from crazy in a bar, almost to killin' Mal before her brother put her to sleep with some gibberish word. The ruckus was sure to bring lawmen so Mal hustled them back to the ship where questions needed answers. He locked River up for everyone's safety.

Seems the Alliance had experimented on River, training her as a killer while they put a mess of leaks in her brainpan. Simon had spent the family fortune getting into that lab so he could break her out. He'd been protecting her and trying to heal her ever since.

For help, they contacted Mr. Universe, an odd recluse who monitored all the signals across the 'Verse: Cortex, plain talk, and secret stuff too. There was a security monitor at the bar that had captured River's melee. They saw her say "Miranda" before attacking. A subliminal message in a Cortex commercial had triggered her programming. Alliance was desperate to find her.

The crew needed a place to hide, to gather their wits. They flew to Haven, the mining colony where Shepherd Book had gone to live. Book told Mal that the Alliance would send an Operative after River, a man with unshakeable belief in his job, prepared to attack them through their weaknesses to reach his objective.

Before Mal could make a plan, a wave came from Inara. She told a thin story about local problems. Clearly a trap. Seeing the opportunity to learn about their pursuer, they dared the trap, sending Mal into the Companion Training House to meet Inara in secret. The trap was sprung when the Operative arrived. Violence ensued with Mal getting the worse of it until Inara lit a flash bomb, which covered their escape. Running out of options, Mal steered the boat back toward Haven. His attempts to remain the callous, uncaring captain were getting weaker and weaker.

River broke free and got to the bridge, holding Mal off with a gun until she could point to the star charts: "Miranda." Turned out to be an "uninhabitable" planet purged from all Cortex records. Miranda apparently held a secret the Alliance didn't want anyone to know. A quick check of the charts showed that Miranda was separated from the rest of the planets by an area of empty space that served as home territory for the Reavers. No one in their right mind would fly through that.

With this new information fresh in their minds, they arrived to find Haven destroyed. The Operative had struck at them through their friends, razing the mining town and killing everyone. Mal ordered the ship to be disguised as a Reaver ship. The flight through the belt of Reaver ships that surrounded Miranda was nerve-wracking but successful and the Serenity made it to the planet's surface. What they found there was no black rock, such as makes for an inhabitable planet, but a world that used to support thirty million people. And they found

bodies of many of those thirty million. Bodies everywhere. Seems like people had just lay down and died.

They also found a Research and Rescue ship that had come to investigate why Miranda had gone silent. A recording explained the truth. The Alliance had tried to make folk better, reduce their aggression. They drugged the air with G23-PAX but it worked too well. People gave up aggression and after that lost the will to live. But a tenth of one percent didn't give up. Their aggressiveness had increased beyond madness. The Alliance had made the Reavers.

In this terrible tragedy, Mal found another cause to fight for. Someone had to speak for the dead, for the atrocity the Alliance committed on Miranda. They crew decided to return to Mr. Universe so he could broadwave the recording across the 'Verse. Once this heinous act was made public, the Alliance wouldn't be able to deny what was done on Miranda.

The Operative had an Alliance fleet waiting for Serenity behind an ion cloud near Mr. Universe's planet. First Serenity and then a passle of Reavers chasing them emerged from the cloud. Alliance fought Reavers as Serenity tried to slip to the surface. After making a survivable crash landing, Wash was killed by a massive blunt projectile from a Reaver ship. Zoe and the crew had to leave his body as they rushed into the complex.

They found Mr. Universe dead and all his equipment destroyed by the Alliance, but he'd left a final recorded message for Mal. A backup transmitter was hidden deep in the complex. If Mal could reach it, he could send the broadwave. With hordes of Reavers right behind them, the rest of the crew set up a suicidal rear guard to give Mal time to reach the transmitter.

The Operative reappeared and attacked Mal at the secondary transmitter while the rest of the crew fought a losing battle against an endless stream of Reavers. It was only when River unleashed herself on the Reavers that the blood tide was stopped. Below, Mal got the upper hand on the Operative and sent the broadwave, trapping the Operative there to watch the recording, forced to witness the truth he'd tried to avoid.

"So it was true," said the young man quietly.
"Every word. But truth don't fuel a ship, son. Now, about that job…"

THE WAY IT IS

This is the *Big Damn Heroes Handbook*, a rules supplement to the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. True, you're going to need that book in order to make much sense of this one, but this is a mighty fine book all on its own. Here's what you can expect from inside this book, chapter by chapter.

Chapter One: Characters

A crew's got to fit together or it's in for a mess of trouble. This chapter covers rules for managing relationships between the crew characters, a revised character creation process, and tips and tricks for making a crew as a group.

Chapter Two: Traits & Skills

They're what make characters in *Serenity* stand out from one another, so we gave 'em a whole chapter. New Assets and Complications, a new way to use Traits with dice instead of major and minor categories, new applications for Skills, and advice for bringin' all of this together.

Chapter Three: Battles & Brawls

From large-scale military battles to the up-close-and-personal firefights we've all got to suffer through, this chapter's got 'em all. Also included are rules for managing spaceship combat and using Plot Points in dramatic and interestin' ways.

Chapter Four: Folk of the 'Verse

This chapter's packed with stock supporting characters and some as you'd know by name, all written up with game stats and ways to use 'em in your campaign. We round it all up with some helpful advice on bad guys and innocent bystanders and when to use 'em.

Chapter Five: Storytellin' in the Black

There's even more Game Master advice in here, ranging from building new worlds and communities for your Big Damn Heroes to blunder through, to suggestions for running entire campaigns that aren't focused on a crew of a space transport runnin' from the Alliance.

Chapter Six: Zhong Hua in the 26th Century

More Chinese phrases! More background! This chapter goes world by world to help you understand the role of Chinese society in the 'Verse. Add some color and consistency to your campaign, easy as pie.

WHAT ELSE YOU GOT?

You've got the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, and now you've got the *Big Damn Heroes Handbook*. Looking for more? Margaret Weis Productions also publishes some other fine books: the *Serenity Game Master's Screen*, useful for hidin' all of your notes and secrets, as you like; *Out in the Black*, a full-length adventure stuffed to the gills with characters and locations; *Serenity Adventures*, a collection of shorter scenarios from a prison breakout to an encounter with a Reaver ship; and *Six-Shooters and Spaceships*, our sourcebook for gear, guns, and gorram spacecraft. You might also get a lot out of the *Cortex System Role Playing Game*, if only to dress up what you and your crew are doin' with some fancy new variations on game mechanics and characters.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

CHARACTERS

ole playing games are a group effort. For the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, the group of player characters is called a crew, whether they actually work a ship or not. Each player character's a crew character, to distinguish them from the supporting characters you take care of as Game Master. These are people who are working together for a common goal. Whether they've thrown in together out of circumstance or sought each other out, it's them against the 'Verse, winner take all.

This chapter covers a number of new and different ways to look at the role of the crew in the game. From crew creation advice and a revised crew creation procedure to rules for relationships and crew conflict, there's something shiny for all players and Game Masters. Things may not always go smooth, but at least you'll know who you are when you land in *joo fuen chse*!

CREATING THE CREW

Game Masters are advised to talk with your players when first preparing a *Serenity Role Playing Game* campaign. What's the central theme you are exploring? Is it a classic campaign with Browncoat sympathizers crewing a Firefly to keep flyin' free or some other variation from across the broad 'Verse? What's the meat of the campaign: pulling off smuggling jobs, acting as guns for hire, protecting people, trying to beat the underworld at its own game? Does the adventure take place in a fixed location such as the Eavesdown Docks or does the locale change as the ship travels from world to world? Discussing the campaign concept with the players at the start, so that they can create a character to fit in, can reap benefits throughout the life of the game. ('Course, don't give away any nefarious schemes to make the lives of the crew interestin'!)

Crew characters don't need to be perfectly tailored for the concept but they should fit in. If the crew has a spaceship, it's important for all the crew to have a part to play on that ship. Everyone needs something to do—a job, a real role in the outcome of events. If the crew represents a mercenary unit, a crew character who is a cook, terrified of guns, and always gets left on board the ship during the action isn't much fun to play. A supporting character (NPC) is best for that role. (Of course, if the character is the cook *and* a crack shot, that's something else.) You've got

friends sitting around your table waiting to have fun every session. Help them pick roles that keep them in the action.

COOPERATIVE CREW GENERATION

Creating a new crew works really well when the group works together to do it. Creating a crew cooperatively makes sure everyone's on the same page in terms of how crew characters relate to one another. This way, each character's relationships are worked out as the crew is created, thus laying the groundwork for future plot and building in story hooks from the start. Players can bat ideas around from as simple as "Ooh… you're taking the Allergy complication? What if my gal always wears stinky perfume?" to as potentially game-altering as "What if my pilot killed your soldier husband during the War, but you don't know it yet?"

Consider using the first play session of a new campaign to work on crew generation with a short scenario at the end. Alternatively, creating crew does not need to happen around the table. Set up an e-mail list or a forum thread to allow players to post information, share ideas, and get rules advice and rulings from the Game Master during crew generation. Using e-mail is a great tool once regular play gets going, as well.

DETERMINING CREW MOTIVATION

So you're all sitting down at the table, eatin' chips, and players are starting to study the Traits lists and consider how to distribute their Attribute points. You're hoping that the crew the players create will share adventures together for months or years, creating bonds of loyalty and friendship. But what motivates them? What keeps them together when the heat's died down? What's the answer to the mystery of why they have come together as a crew?

Developing a crew motivation is as important as understanding the individual motivations of each characters. Otherwise, why stick together?

The crew could be united by a common goal. Perhaps the same person or same group made their lives hell for a time and now they're seeking revenge. This can be tricky. The players are intent on reaching the goal, so if the adventure's drawn out too long they may get frustrated. If revenge is the hook, is vengeance enough to bind them until other relationships form?

The crew could all be out to obtain credits by any means necessary, including bendin' the law a mite.

If the crew is on the run from the Feds, freedom from pursuit might be their major goal.

A shared view of the 'Verse and what people are tryin' to accomplish in their lives might unify the crew. They could be idealistic, protecting the weak from those who would prey upon them. They might be upholding law and justice as official lawmen or as vigilantes. They could be running a space-travelin' gambling casino.

One of the easiest ways to motivate a crew is to give them a common profession. Salvage men work the depths of the black towing and taking apart wrecks. Asteroid wildcatters hunt for the big score, daring the dangerous to obtain the mother lode. Surveyors and explorers in the wilderness of a newly terriformed settled world will have to deal with predators: animal and human.

Free merchants and smugglers are often the same people on different days. Flyin' the black can be mighty attractive. The crew might own a fancy yacht that carries all manner of elite passengers to shadowy business deals, remote locations, or assists those on run from their enemies. After the war, there are plenty of disagreements that end up needing veteran soldiers on one side or the other, giving a crew plenty of opportunity to work as bodyguards for some VIP or hired guns.

Setting up a villain or criminal organization as the common enemy of the crew is a very strong unifying element. Perhaps all of the

crewmembers were prominent citizens in a frontier town united by their determination to fight the dastardly corporation that is tryin' to seize their hog farms.

These are just some examples and suggestions. Your players may come up with something that they like even better as a crew motivation.

ORIGIN

The origin of a group is a magical thing, a bond born of circumstance, necessity, a meeting of hearts or minds. It's what every gaming group wants to capture—the lightning in a bottle. To some degree, the odds are in your favor. Everyone around the table knows they want this to happen; you just have to provide the circumstances that let them create that bond in a plausible way. This ties right in with the crew motivation, too.

One of the most common ways to create a group is also the weakest: coincidence. They're just strangers who happen to be in the saloon the night the Feds raid it. There are ways to make this scenario work, ways to make that moment in time significant. Perhaps if everyone is on the run like the crew of *Serenity*, it would make sense for them to stick together for the short term. If they have to survive a dangerous situation together, they will be forced to rely on each other to keep on breathin'. While this can be a strong experience, if chance is the only reason the crew comes together, it's far too easy for them go their separate ways once the crisis has passed and they get back to livin' their own lives.

A stronger approach is to create a unifying situation such as: working for a common patron; being hired as crew on the same ship; being members of the same military unit; and the like. This allows the crew to grow together while they're working together. They have the benefit of a history, of shared past experiences and

accomplishments. In addition, the crew can be confronted with resolving problems left over from the past: the jealousy of a husband over his wife's close friendship with the captain, for example.

Shoring up these approaches, you can add other relationships. If some of the crew characters begin as friends, know each other from past experience, are related to each other, or other such relationships, these make it easier for the group as a whole to form a bond. Try using the Pairwise Theory: every crew character has at least one existing relationship with another crew character. These relationships could be as strong or weak as you like: born on the same planet; fought on the same side of the war; distant relatives; alumni of the same school; members of the same association; or saved each others lives. You will find more on Relationships and how they can work for your crew later in this chapter.

Running the Origin Story

Once you've determined your approach to the group's origins, you need to decide if the campaign begins with that origin story or if the story exists as understood history. The latter option leaves the door open to play the origin later as one or more flashbacks, weaving in foreshadowing or plot hooks that may crop up later on in the campaign. Using flashbacks can be a very powerful technique, imbuing those fateful first days with many layers of significance and letting the organic development of the group write the roots of the origin. And flashbacks have the advantage of shovin' the players straight into the action, helping them establish themselves before they're asked to talk about how they relate to one another.

The downside of leaving the origin in the past is that you lose the immediate impact of those critical, exciting adventures. Playing the origin inspires a campaign's direction, introduces supporting characters who become long-running allies and rivals, and provides

ideas for future adventures. That sort of natural development gives everyone at the table a hand in the development of the ongoing story. Just be careful that tangents or contradictory role playing don't derail the bonding of the group. If characters don't get along or don't like each other, that can be a great source of drama, giving the characters chances to grow. But if the hatred is such that two characters draw guns on each other during the origin adventure, you have to start to think that there's no way in the 'Verse these folk would choose to stay together.

Neither method is wrong, but each has its pros and cons.

Solo Character Introductions

If you play out the origin story, you can start the game before the characters have met each other. This gives each character—and each player—all the attention. You can set up separate times to meet or simply run through the solo scenes via email or play-by-post. Using this technique, each character establishes his secrets, gets a good look at what he's running from or fighting for. Work those Assets and Complications in as much as possible.

Once each character's been established, introduce the characters to each other. This meeting can be as complex or as simple as you like. The characters could all come together at your next group gaming session, or you could introduce them pair by pair, group by group.

Another effective technique for introducing crew characters is to create a snapshot moment, frozen in time—perhaps the middle of a firefight that could easily go either way. Then you rewind the clock back to where each character was moments, hours, or weeks ahead of the crisis. Is the captain shielding an injured crewman in the firefight? Is the mechanic too afraid to fire her weapon? Maybe all the characters first met when they fought each other in a brawl on Unification Day. The flashbacks create a lot of context and start the game out with a bang.

CHAPTER 1

FLESHIN' OUT HISTORY

Whether a crew character's just starting out or has been in play awhile, there comes a point where you need a better understanding of the character. Perhaps during play the character made an unexpected decision—even for the player—and you want to explore where that might have come from. Maybe you want to clarify the character's personality. There's many a good reason to flesh out a character's history.

That said, it's always good to leave at least some areas of a crew character's past undefined or at least loosely defined. This allows you to add things later in the campaign to make the past more relevant to the present. With some areas of history left gaping holes, the Game Master can toss in a key plot hook without making it too obvious. Perhaps the character went to university for a couple years before joining the military. All you know is he didn't earn a degree. All manner of folk and anecdotes might be made up based on that information later in play.

But some history is necessary. A good way to develop a past life for a character is to consider touchstones. A touchstone's some element of the past that the character can look back and touch. Touchstones might be objects, people, or moments in time. A touchstone is something vivid, of great personal impact to the character. The touchstone can be revealing about the character's personality if you examine the touchstone and the character's relationship to it.

Object touchstones can be almost anything so long as the object is significant to the character. A good luck charm she's carried through the war reveals a superstitious side to her character. An old pistol he inherited from his father indicates a love of family or maybe what his father stood for. A military uniform she wears with pride years after her involvement with the military ended. A long brown trail coat is a permanent part of his wardrobe, displaying his fierce loyalty to the Independent cause and ideals. A faded picture of a lost love reveals a tender chapter in a hard-bitten mercenary's past life.

People who are touchstones to the character are those folk who had a major impact on his life. This includes long-term associations such as a mentor or parent, or short-term associations like a fellow crew character. The touchstone could be his mother, who taught him everything he knows about keeping a ship running. She might be remembered with quotes: ("Well, Ma always said run the coils a little lean 'til they is broke in.") Perhaps a sergeant at boot camp made the character the tough fighter she is today. The character's credo may have been inspired by the courage of a hero of the Independents who never left a man behind. The words of a Buddhist monk may still ring in his ears when he's tempted to do something illegal.

Finally, there might just be a moment in time so powerful, so life-changing that this moment acts as a touchstone for the character. The horrifying sight of Alliance warships destroying a surrendered village is burned into his brain and fires his hatred of the Alliance. An amorous night with a special woman opened his eyes to the pleasures of a hedonistic lifestyle.

It would be tempting to define a touchstone as a Trait. That's all well and good, but don't miss out on the opportunity to have the touchstone influence multiple Traits. One influential drill sergeant can be the background to Fightin' Type, Tough as Nails, as well as Credo. Not everything about the character has to have come from one touchstone, but these are always a good source of background influence.

Play As You Go

Some players may want to create their characters through game play itself. They like to define only the key details of the character and then let him reveal himself based on the situations that present themselves. After a time, as they come to a better understanding of the character, an appropriate background can be created to support their actions. For players who thrive with this sort of challenge, you might consider allowing them to hold in reserve one Asset and one Complication to be defined

after the beginning of the game. They accept the penalty of not having those Traits available from the start, but when they *do* choose, the Traits can carry more meaning. Set a deadline by which they must choose and have them explain the reasoning behind each choice, based on the game play. Both Traits have to be chosen at the same time. Since this is a one-time opportunity, encourage the player to give these thought, not choose Traits just based on the needs of the moment.

As the story progresses, encourage the player to consider what the events of the campaign mean and find some that have special relevance to the character. Perhaps the character got into a bar fight with former Browncoats who are riled up over the reputation of a controversial commander. Did the character choose sides or try to stop the fight? Perhaps he sees such infighting as the reason the Independents lost the war. The appearance of a transport filled with Chinese refugees might spark a desire in the character to protect them from unscrupulous sweatshops. Did the character spend part of his life in an isolated Chinese community? Perhaps his mother was Chinese and worked in such a sweatshop.

Or maybe the player insists on choosing a Trait that will affect your plot. As the Game Master, you need to be willing to work with this. If the player is using Plot Points to hijack the plot, try jumpin' on the train and going along for the ride. You could give the crew a whole range of people, places, or events to explore.

Role Playing Exercises

During crew creation or during the campaign, an interesting way to develop the crew characters and their relationships is to run role playing exercises. See how one crew character reacted during a particular situation, either in the past or just prior to the start of the campaign. Run this scenario while the other players are listening in. As a general rule, the character's life should not be in danger in the scene, though you may include the use of Skill rolls to help see how the scene unfold.

If two players are ready with their characters, you could explore how these two crew characters met and establish their relationship. The topic of the scene doesn't have to be 'Verse shattering. This meeting could be mundane, but one that holds special significance to them. It could be the first time they fought together or the first time they kissed.

Here are some suggested exercises:

Meet the Family

The character runs into a relative (character's choice). This character is a younger sibling who idolizes the character but is still too young to leave home. Or, he's the character's uncle bringing news of the patriarch's death, here to try to convince the character to come back to run the farm.

A Secret Revealed

Circumstances reveal a minor secret of one crew character to another. It's up to them to see how they want to deal with the accidental revelation. One character finds out a fellow crew member is wanted for murder on the planet to which they're now headed to do a job. A character might stumble across information on another character without anyone else knowing. A crew member finds out his friend is a member of a vicious Tong. What does he do about it?

A Hand in Friendship

Someone gives the crew character a helping hand during a time of trouble. Whether this is done out of the goodness of the heart or if the person wants the character to be in debt to him may be hard to determine. You could also flip the situation and see if the character extends the hand of friendship to someone else.

A Touching Moment

Consider an emotional moment in the life of a crew member. Perhaps she has suffered a life-changing event such as the loss of a loved one. She remembers a place and time when they were happy. Fast forward and place her in a scene where something triggers those memories. Does she do anything about it? Does she reveal or confide her emotions to anyone?

FINDING MOTIVATION

Billions of folk in the 'Verse keep their heads down and plod through life, satisfied to put something away for retirement and keep food on the table for their family. The crew's something different.

Crew characters are the Big Damn Heroes of this place called the 'Verse and they need to have reasons to act like it. Finding suitable motivations can be a difficult task, but without motivation, the character ends up on the drift, going along with events and never really taking charge of them.

If the crew's found a collective motivation, that's a good start. Personal motivations provide individuality and add to the drama. Sure you might have signed on to the ship to stay a step ahead of those bounty hunters, but do you have to put up with the doc who wants to stop and save every dirtside orphan? Are you trying to abide by the law while your crewmates can't keep their hands off of stolen goods? These conflicts of motivation can be the basis for a great role playing experience.

Don't be afraid to define multiple motivations for the characters, even if these seem to contradict each other at times. We humans aren't entirely logical beasts. Coping with inner conflict builds character.

Assets and Complications

The choice of Traits could provide inspiration for a character's personal motivation. Credo is the most obvious example, allowing the player to express exactly what his character believes in. Others can be helpful as well. Both Assets and Complications can set fire to the imagination.

If the character has Fightin' Type, does she embrace combat and violence or is she putting that past behind her? How did the pilot come by those Friends in High (or Low) Places or that Good Name? If you're travelin' with a Registered Companion, does she intend to focus on working as a companion or has her work been replaced by other motivations? And there's always Religiosity, which would naturally color a character's goals and intentions.

A character with Branded needs to figure out if he's going to live up to his bad reputation or try to change it. Someone with a Deadly Enemy tends to focus on survival and putting a stop to the threat on a permanent basis. A character with Amnesia might be driven to discover her lost past. Some Traits hint at the sort of goals the character would prefer: Greedy, Loyal, or Twitchy.

If the Trait heightens your already prodigious skill at something, it's likely that you want to practice that profession in some manner or another: Born Behind the Wheel; CompTech; Home on the Range; Sawbones; or Talented.

While Assets and Complications are not substitutes for larger motivations, they should complement each other at some level. If a Trait can inspire a motivation, problem solved.

DEFININ' CULTURES

Through the long years of the Exodus and even longer centuries of terraforming, humanity prided itself on maintaining its traditions, its faith, and its hope for the future. Though Earth-That-Was is lost to the mists of the past, the peoples of that world live on in the 'Verse. And they brought their home cookin' with them.

Any culture from Earth might still exist in the 'Verse, though transplanted and likely changed with time. Nearly every ethnicity, religion, and tradition still exists somewhere. Some traveled

out to the Rim planets to build settlements the way they wanted them. Others remained in ghettoes in the growing cities in the Core. Still others merged together, keeping some or all of the old traditions and adding those of another.

The two dominant cultures of the 'Verse are American and Chinese. These two global powers from Earth-That-Was created the Generation Ships that traveled through the black. Their people settled on the two prime planets on arrival. Elements from both cultures tend to dominate most areas of society.

Beyond those influences, enough time has passed for new cultures to arise. A person born and raised on Shadow has a different outlook on life than a worker at the Eavesdown Docks on Persephone or a Companion from Sihnon. Remote settlements and colonies may have developed bizarre variations on what others call normal.

Embracing these sorts of cultures can enrich the crew and enrich the campaign.

Qualities in Play

Whether a player wants to portray a strongly ethnic character or the crew wants to play members of a distinctive community in the 'Verse, here are some basic techniques to help them.

Some say they heart of every culture is its food. What folk eat affects their view on life and what they value. When defining an ethnicity consider what the traditional foods are and how they are served and eaten. Does the character eat with chopsticks? Do she use strong spices when she cooks? Is the ingestion of certain meats forbidden; always or on certain days? What's the traditional staple: rice, fish, corn, bread? Something as simple as food and its preparation can affect all the characters. A character cooking fish-head soup in the ship galley, sending odor throughout the ship, can make some drool with hunger or make others run for the head.

Then there's the language. What people say and how they say it says much about their culture. Do they have traditional phrases used for greeting and departure, such as "aloha" and "shalom?" Do they bless Allah or the ancestors regularly in their speech? Do they have distinctive terms of praise or obscenity? Players should make an attempt to learn a few words of their character's chosen ethnicity to spice up their speech. (In fact, whatever research the player is willing to make can only enrich his portrayal.) Unless the characters come from an isolated community, their speech is likely littered with American and Chinese words, collected from the pidgin language of the 'Verse.

In addition to food and language, a character might adopt a culture's traditional style of dress: robes and sandals, shawls and ornately embroidered vests, home-woven hats, elegant finery. The character may not stick to the costume in its entirety but he might to incorporate part of it as a symbol in otherwise typical attire. A character might wear his coveralls while on duty, but bring out the kilt and jacket for a party.

Finally, does the culture have a distinct view of religion? Is the character Buddhist, Christian, or a nonbeliever? Does her religion infuse all aspects of her life or is it a private concern not easily shared? Does the character strictly observe religious holidays through fasting or prayer? (This might make life interesting' if the character refuses to do any work on Sunday!) Does the character have a small shrine in his cabin? A strong religious aspect colors a character's personality, even if he's fallen out of practice. It's hard to forget things taught to you as a child.

CREW RELATIONSHIPS

Crew characters don't exist in a vacuum. Or, at least, not without spacesuits! What drives stories in the 'Verse is how folk, especially the crew, interact with each other. Those interactions are based on and, in turn, alter, their relationships with one another.

Relationships are complicated and tricky things, and this isn't a psychology text, so we'll keep this basic. The two main elements of relationships to consider are *why* you interact with one another (this often forms the basis of the relationship), and *how* you interact with one another. Often, the basic "why" is immutable; it's a matter of history, of when, how, and why you met. Consider Simon and River, for example: the basis of their relationship is that they're siblings. That's never going to change, and it forms the foundation of everything that occurs between them.

The second aspect of relationships describes how crew characters interact. Sure, Simon and River are siblings, but plenty of siblings can't stand each other. That's not true for Simon and River. They would go to the mat for each other, putting their lives on the line to keep the sibling safe.

Of course, these two aspects of character relationships are not easily separated from one another.

When generating their characters, players should consider their own ideas for their characters' backgrounds and where they came from. Compare notes with other players; do any good basic relationships jump out at you?

DEFININ' CREW RELATIONSHIPS— EXAMPLES

Story makes the 'Verse go 'round. But remember that though the story is important, the people living the story are what count. Here are some examples of basic relationships, the *why* type, and how they can lead into more nuanced *how* descriptions. Let's imagine that you are you (real hard, I know) and the other guy is Fred.

Survivors

You and Fred survived some horrible event together. Could be it was a spaceliner disaster. Could be a POW camp. It needn't be dramatic—maybe as kids you were patients in the same oncology ward. You've seen each other at your worst, tearfully begging any god who'd listen to keep you alive, but you've also seen each other at your best and bravest. Maybe you know that when the pressure is on, Fred can freeze up. He knows that you have a gimpy knee that you try to keep secret. But you also know that he can endure more pain than you thought a mortal could. And he knows that you're willing to give up whatever it takes to make sure that he keeps on breathin'. You two have a bond that few others could understand.

Animosity

For some reason, you and Fred really don't like each other. Maybe your dad foreclosed on his dad's spaceship. Maybe he's your ex. Maybe you fought on opposite sides in the Unification War. Whatever it is, you really grate on each other in a very fundamental way that's not likely to change. You have to find a way to work together—you're part of the same crew, after all. Are you always looking over your shoulder, just waiting for Fred to stab you in the back? Or are you able to forgive and forget?

Family

This one's easy to work with and a great source of story hooks. Fred is your brother/father/son/uncle/cousin. But there's more to the relationship than that, of course. Are there unresolved jealousy issues? Is he in line to inherit some significant wealth ahead of you? Is Fred a Companion, and you and your family do not approve of that? Maybe he's a psychic super-soldier on the run from the Alliance, always stalked by a pair of weirdoes with blue gloves and a guy with a wicked sharp sword, and you take it upon yourself to protect him.

Buddies

Maybe you served together in the war. Maybe you grew up together and have been buddies since you were knee high to a grasshopper. For whatever reason, you and Fred are best friends.

You'll go to great lengths to help each other out of a jam. He's the one you don't need to look for when you're staring down the bad guys, because you know he's right there beside you. Of course, things don't always go smooth—how far will you go for a friend? When the money's right or someone has a gun to your head, do things start looking a little different?

Significant Others

This one's similar to family, but toss in a ton of potential baggage such as jealousy, protector syndrome, or an old ex suddenly showing up. Mix well and watch the story unfold.

Common Background

Maybe you and Fred were both war refugees or maybe the war took from both of you people you love. Maybe you both were born to settler families and grew up in the first generation on a new world. Maybe you were both raised in high society. Whatever differences there are between you, you know that Fred "gets it." 'Course, this doesn't mean you see eye to eye all the time, but you at least talk the same language.

GETTIN' MECHANICAL— RELATIONSHIPS AS TRAITS

Keep in mind that nothing thus far has any real impact on the rules of the game. Now we get to the mechanics of relationships. The rules in this section are purely optional, of course. Their purpose is to encourage players to play up their relationships with each other and to encourage them to play out the sorts of arguments and misunderstandings and food fights typical of Big Damn Heroes.

Relationships are represented as Traits. These Traits represent the most interesting aspect of one character's relationship to another. Relationships act as both Assets and as Complications, and can be used as both.

A Relationship Trait is expressed as a sentence. It mentions both characters involved and summarizes the most important element of how one (the owner of the Relationship) feels about the other. This is real important—a Relationship Trait is not intended to represent every nuance and every aspect of how two people relate to one another,

Bryce 09

"Why have rules for this?"

Truth is, most folk playing this game have gotten along fine without 'em. I mean, you're role playing these relationships, right? What's the point of rules in this context?

The long and short of it is that generally players try to do what the rules encourage them to do. The point of rules for Relationships is to encourage interaction among the players as they use and change those Relationships to their advantage.

These rules are most useful for groups whose players are, for whatever reason, reluctant to engage each other in meaty role playing. Some game groups can use a little nudge.

Now, if your group is role playing up a storm, you're good to go. But stay tuned, as some players really enjoy the back-and-forth of combat applied to other forms of conflict. You might want to give these a try.

Optional Rule – Relationships with Objects

"You take a boat in the air you don't love, she'll shake you off sure as the turning of worlds."

Sometimes people form special attachments to inanimate objects—Kaylee and Mal with Serenity, Jayne with Vera, etc. Game Masters might consider allowing heroes to declare a relationship with a ship or a particular bit of gear in their kit. Game Masters shouldn't let players abuse this. The Game Master retains the right to veto any use of a Relationship if you think players are taking unfair advantage of it.

All of the rules for Relationships apply here, though of course the inanimate object's not going to have any Relationship with the character. If the object—ship, gun, pocket watch—ever gets destroyed or ruined beyond repair, the character may shift the Relationship to one of a memory or obsession over that lost object. That in itself makes for some compelling storytelling. On the other hand, as a Game Master, it might be nice to provide that object with some degree of script immunity. If the character throws in some Plot Points, the object is only out of commission long enough to be a frustration.

the trait simply summarizes the aspect that the player thinks is most important for purposes of the game. Additionally, don't bother with a Relationship Trait to explain that Wash is Zoe's husband or that Fred is your character's uncle. These sorts of immutable fundamentals may drive the Relationship, but how your character feels and what he thinks is what's important.

How to Use These Rules

Something to keep in mind is that these rules rely a lot on good judgment. Players looking to abuse this system will almost certainly find a way to do it—so don't be a *huen dahn*. Use the rules to encourage player to player interaction. When everyone around the table trusts the others to be working toward making the game fun for everyone, things are shiny.

GAININ' RELATIONSHIPS

Each crew character has a limited number of Relationship Traits they can use: one for each other crew character; one for an inanimate object or important supporting character (Game Master's discretion here); and one open slot used for transient and temporary Traits.

Here are a few real important points to remember.

- Crew characters do not need to share the same relationships with each other. One character might have "I'm madly in love

"Why can't we have more than one Relationship with someone?"

Well, if we let that happen, this would get powerful complicated, and (perhaps more importantly) some enterprising game-abuser out there would break the system right quick. Game Masters, if you're feeling keen on tinkering, you could try allowing more. But be careful.

with him" and the other has "I don't know she exists."

- Crew characters may never have more than one Relationship directed at another crew character, supporting character, or object. The one exception to this is the temporary slot, but more on this later. Remember, the Relationship is just the most important or interesting aspect of how you deal with the other character, it's not supposed to encompass every last little detail.
- The Relationship Trait is intended to change over time, so don't select something like, "Fred is my uncle." While that may be true, this fact is not as important as the way your character interacts with Fred and what he thinks about him.

When creating your crew character, compose one—and no more than one—Relationship Trait for every other member of the crew (see Choosing Relationships). It's extremely important to develop these cooperatively with the other players. An ideal time might be when you're create the crew together in a tabletop session. If you create crew characters independently of one another, take a few minutes when you come together for the first game to arrange the Relationships rather than make them up independently as well.

Every player should ask the Game Master if he'll be allowed to create a Relationship with an object or important supporting character, since this isn't appropriate for everybody. If it's not a vital part of the character's story, the Game Master may not want to allow it.

Leave the temporary slot open for now.

Not all Relationships need to be assigned right away. Players should assign most (say, at least half) of their available Relationships. But if it makes sense for two crew characters to be starting with a clean slate, that's okay. Feel free to assign the Relationship Trait when it makes sense, even in the middle of a session if something important happens between the two characters to define how they relate to one another. For example, a Companion and the ship's captain may suddenly realize they're in love. How does this affect everyone else on board the ship? The same applies for new crew characters, too. Assign Relationship Traits when it makes sense in the story to do so.

CHOOSIN' RELATIONSHIPS

As we've said before, a Relationship Trait is expressed as a sentence mentioning both people and summarizing how one (the owner of the Relationship) feels about the other. Keep it to one sentence, though it can be a complicated sentence if you want it to be. For example, some of Kaylee's Relationships might be:

- Inara is Kaylee's surrogate sister.
- Kaylee has a huge crush on Simon but is intimidated by his intelligence.
- Kaylee hurts when Serenity hurts.

Careful when composing compound sentences; if someone is using the conjunction "and," they might be wrapping up multiple Relationship aspects rather than explaining a single complicated one.

There is no definitive list of Relationship Traits. Make 'em up yourself, but be sure you express them as in these examples–this is important later. The best Relationships are those that can cut both ways, and all Relationship Traits should be subject to change. Here's a few examples. These relationships belong to the character, Jin. Ling is a placeholder for whatever character that Relationship is directed at.

- Jin respects Ling's authority.
- Jin respects Ling's authority but thinks Ling's a jerk.
- Jin lusts after Ling.
- Ling owes Jin a great deal of money.
- Jin barely notices that Ling exists.
- Jin thinks that Ling is an idiot.
- Jin knows a terrible secret about Ling.
- Jin owes his life to Ling.
- Jin thinks Ling is a liability to the crew.
- You get the idea.

USING RELATIONSHIPS

I'm sure by this point you're asking: "You've been going on about this stuff for a while now, but what the hell do I do with it?"

This is the fun part. When you take an action and you trigger the Relationship Trait, if the trait seems relevant, your Relationship comes into play. If the trait works in your favor, the action benefits from a +2 Skill step (or, if there's no Skill involved, a +2 Attribute step). If the Relationship works against you, you may choose to accept a –2 Skill step penalty (or if there's no Skill involved, a –2 Attribute step) and win a Plot Point for your trouble. Read that again—just like Complications, Relationships are a great way to generate Plot Points.

Alternately, a Relationship trait can be triggered by the Game Master to allow or require a Skill roll where otherwise none would be either allowed or necessary. If this works against the player, the Game Master should pony up a Plot Point. The examples below include an instance of this.

"So what's that temporary slot for?"

Use the temporary Relationship slot to assign Relationships that come up during play that you know will fade quickly. Does the character get seriously ticked off at someone? Did the character catch someone in a state of undress and now feels awkward around them? The Game Master should assign it here. Get rid of the trait when appropriate— usually at the end of the session or maybe a bit longer if that seems logical. This is the only way you can have more than one Relationship Trait directed at another crew character.

Example: Zoe and Jayne

Mal is explaining a complicated plan to the crew. Jayne furrows his brow and says, "Yeah, got it," when Mal asks if it's clear to everyone.

Later, when they're doing the job, Jayne gets confused and fails to show up with the big guns when the Alliance soldiers bust in. Zoe rolls her eyes and says, "I'll pull Hogleg and get ready to shoot."

The Game Master says to Zoe's player, "What's your Relationship to Jayne?"

Zoe's player's eyes light up. "Oh, yeah! It's 'Zoe thinks Jayne is a complete moron.'"

The Game Master says, "Works for me – Zoe, you knew Jayne would get confused and fail to show. If you spend a Plot Point, you get an extra +2 step bonus on your Initiative roll."

Example: Rawhide and Hwa Ling

The crew of *Aces & Eights* has gotten involved in a serious *ma fuhn*. Hwa Ling has been bound by law and the purplebellies are headed for the ship. Maxx's player says "Rawhide, get us out of here before the cops arrive. We'll have to get Ling later."

The Game Master points out that Rawhide's Relationship trait with Hwa Ling is "Rawhide is secretly in love with Hwa Ling." If Rawhide refuses to obey Maxx's orders, the Game Master gives a Plot Point to Rawhide's player, then turns to Maxx. "I need you to make an Average Willpower + Discipline roll or Rawhide's going to continue to refuse to carry out that order and that's going to land you in trouble."

Pretty simple, huh?

CHANGIN' RELATIONSHIPS

Over the course of the game, the crew members will change how they interact with one another. That's what makes the story interesting and keeps it from being just a big ol' shoot-em-up. (Nothing wrong with a big ol' shoot-em-up, but if you haven't given up on reading this section yet, chances are you want something more out of the game.)

There's a few ways Relationship Traits can change. The first one is the simple way—the player can simply explain to the Game Master why the Relationship is no longer true or important and suggest what the new one should be. If the Game Master agrees, then change it. That's simple, but kind of dull. The other ways are a whole lot more interesting.

Discussions

A Discussion is a social conflict system that tries to simulate two or more people having a civil (though not necessarily friendly) non-confrontational conversation attempting to change the status quo in one or more relationships among the people involved in the conversation. Discussion doesn't include negotiation, which is its own bit of fascinating social conflict. For purposes of these rules a Discussion explicitly represents crew characters attempting to change how they relate to one another, and thus their Relationship Traits. Optionally, a Discussion can also include a conversation about one of the crew's

Relationships to a character who is not present. The Game Master needs to use judgment on that.

A Discussion is resolved as a cooperative complex action; all parties involved add their Skill rolls together. The Threshold is Hard (55), but don't be afraid to drop this down to Average (35) if it seems too tough to reach. Each additional party in the Discussion raises the Threshold by one step. Each roll represents an arbitrary length of time; it could be seconds, or it could be an hour. Players should role play the Discussion out, of course, or at least the highlights. Skills rolled should reflect the conversational techniques used by the crew; examples include but are not limited to: Discipline/Morale; Influence/Conversation; Influence/Counseling; Influence/Persuasion; Influence/Seduction; Medical Expertise/Psychiatry; Perception/Empathy; and Performance/Oratory. Game Masters should feel free to award bonuses if someone involved in the Discussion uses an appropriate Asset or Complication Trait.

Interpreting the results is fairly straightforward, and is essentially based on how long it takes the crew to hash things out. Use the following as guidelines.

- If the Threshold is met with three or fewer rolls, the parties are considered to have achieved some breakthrough in how they relate to one another. They redefine their Relationship Traits among themselves and, if the Game Master allows it, with subjects of the Discussion who were not part of the Discussion to reflect the outcome of the Discussion.
- If the Threshold is met with four, five, or six rolls, the Game Master declares that changes to the Relationship Traits must be minor, or perhaps the change must be placed in the temporary slot.
- If the Threshold isn't met after six rolls, the Game Master may leave the Relationship Traits as they are, or may

alter one or more of them if the situation appears to warrant it.

Example: Rawhide and Devil

Rawhide's Relationship with Devil is: "Rawhide likes Devil but disapproves of her scheming." Devil knows she needs Rawhide's support to pull off one particular scam she has going, so her player decides that Rawhide's Relationship trait needs to change. The two are close and decide to talk about it civilly. The players tell the Game Master that they'd like to have a Discussion.

Devil opens, appealing to Rawhide's friendship. She and Rawhide trade some banter. The Game Master calls for Devil to make an Alertness + Influence check—and if Devil has the Conversation Specialty, that would be appropriate. Also note that just because it's Devil's turn, doesn't mean Rawhide can't contribute.

Now it's Rawhide's turn. Rawhide asks some pointed questions about why Devil needs to do what she wants to do and then explains why he has a hard time accepting it. Devil responds by saying she understands, but explains that the money is needed for the good of the crew. The Game Master calls for Rawhide to make a Willpower + Discipline roll. The results are added to Devil's for the first turn.

The Discussion continues until the two have each had three turns. Suppose their total exceeds 75. Rawhide re-composes his Relationship toward Devil as: "Rawhide trusts Devil to act in the crew's best interest.

If someone botches a roll or says something that seems overly inflammatory (the Game Master is final arbiter, although player input should matter), the Discussion has the potential to spiral into an Argument, where things get even more interestin' and maybe downright explosive.

Arguments

On paper, Arguments look a lot like combat, but the fightin's done with social Skills. In a fight, your capability of staying in the brouhaha is measured by Stun and Wound damage compared against your Life Points. In an Argument, reaching your boiling point is measured by Stress compared against Composure. Figure starting Composure much like Life Points, but add Alertness and Willpower dice instead.

The Argument plays out by a series of back-and-forth conversations simulated by social Skill rolls. Don't roll for initiative to see who goes first; it should be pretty clear who started the Argument.

To make an attack, the player declares his character's general intent, if not the actual words or phrase he uses. He and the Game Master decide what Skill represents that salvo—most often some flavor of Influence, but sometimes something else such as Discipline/Leadership or even Technical Expertise if it's a pair of dueling engineers or eggheads. Same thing with the defense roll—the defending player has his character respond, and he and the Game Master decide what Skill he uses to parry the thrust.

Compare the Skill rolls—if the attacker's was higher, the defender gains the difference in Stress.

The first one to accumulate Stress "damage" equal to or greater than his Composure loses the Argument. Role play this in whatever ways make sense. Maybe a character runs away in tears or throws dishes. If a character is really riled, slugging the other guy isn't always out of bounds. Just make sure your table has a consensus on handling crew vs. crew conflict.

The consequences of an Argument are more spectacular than a Discussion. First, both characters involved in the Argument may end up drastically changing their Relationships with each other. Players and Game Master need to use their best judgment here and make the consequences relevant. Second, who lost and who won *does* matter. The loser must give a Plot Point to the winner. If the loser doesn't have any Plot Points, the Game Master hands one over. Furthermore, the loser may alter his temporary Relationship slot in some relevant way, perhaps reflecting some temporary embarrassment or bruised feelings (or a broken nose).

Enforcin' Complications

Sometimes, a player really don't want his Complication to kick in. Under the rules in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, determining when to use the Complication is usually in the player's hands (although some aspects of some Complications are always around, so sometimes the player's just out of luck). An optional rule is to allow the Game Master to force the activation of a Complication—to *enforce* it. In other words, the Game Master can hit the player with consequences stemming from his Complication whether he likes it or not.

The scope of the penalty is left up to the Game Master. A mechanical penalty could be as much as a –2 step penalty, while a non-mechanical penalty could be having a inconvenient supporting character show up, telling a crew character that her fear is getting the better of her, or that his gigantic ego won't let him ignore the Alliance officer's insult. Use this rule to toss a wrench into the works to make things more fun, but be very careful not to overdo it.

Now, a lot of players might cry foul on this, and in the hands of an abusive Game Master they'd have a solid point. But if the Game Master acts responsibly and the crew trusts the Game Master to enforce only Complications when doing so makes the game more fun for everyone, the use of this rule can really enhance the experience.

It's also a source of income for the crew—the Game Master owes them Plot Points when enforcing a Complication. Enforcing a Minor Complication or a negative impact of Relationship Trait is worth one Plot Point; a Major Complication is worth two Plot Points.

Once an Argument begins, one side or the other can attempt to de-escalate. A successful attack with Influence/Conversation, Influence/Persuasion or a similar diplomatic overture against the opponent's Discipline/Morale (or something similar), can be seen as a deliberate attempt by one side to let the other withdraw while saving face. In this case, the two combatants may leave the Argument. The target is free to ignore this overture, but sometimes it's unwise. Stress goes away at a rate of 1 point an hour, so that character probably best avoid getting into another Argument too soon after the last one.

In addition to the people involved in the Argument, there could be bystanders and observers whose opinions might be affected. Anyone witnessing an Argument may alter his temporary Relationship in some relevant way, particularly if one side of the Argument was nasty and bullying or generous and magnanimous.

Sadly Temporary

The final method of changing Relationship Traits is only relevant to temporary Relationships. All temporary Relationship Traits vanish at the end of each game session unless the Game Master and players decide there is a compelling reason for one (or more) to remain. Further, the Relationship Traits can evaporate within the session if this makes narrative sense. They're supposed to represent strong but transitory feelings, so allow them to go away when appropriate.

CREW CREATION, REVISED

Don't matter how long you've been at the game, there's always something new and shiny around the corner. Might be as you've seen some things you like in other games using the Cortex System and thought to yourself, yessir, that right there looks like something I could take

on. Might be as you've been looking for a fresh way to come up with crew for your next Serenity campaign and maybe you don't want to hold too strongly to the connection between Attributes and Traits. Well, here's the deal. This section revises—slightly—the original crew creation rules from the *Serenity Role Playing Game* to match those in later Cortex System RPG games. It doesn't mean you have to replace your old way of doing things at all. It's just another tool in your toolkit.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT? WHAT'S THE SAME?

This revised Crew Creation process has the same number of items on the checklist as the version on page 30 of the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. The biggest difference is the order in which some things are done and how Traits are purchased.

Choose Attributes First

Just as in the standard rules, you'll start out with 42 Attribute points if you're a Greenhorn, 48 if you're a Veteran, and 54 if you're a Big Damn Hero. You won't be spending any of these on buying Traits, so assign them wherever you like, in even numbers, as usual. After you're done with this, figure your Derived Attributes (Life Points and Initiative), although your choice in Traits might affect those.

Choose Traits Next

Here's where things get interestin'. Although you *don't* spend any of your Attribute Points on Traits, you may get a separate pool of Trait Points to spend on Assets. If you're a Greenhorn, you start with 0 Trait Points; you'll need to choose some Complications first in order to give you Trait Points to use to pick up Assets. If you're a Veteran, you'll get 2 Trait Points for free. This translates to a free Minor Asset. If you want more, you'll have to take Complications to pay for them. And finally, if

CHAPTER 1

Revised Crew Creation Checklist

Here's the brief summary of the revisions and changes made to the crew creation, for those of you as want it clear and simple-like.

1. Choose a Heroic Level

The Game Master will determine the Heroic Level for the crew. This decides the player's budget of Attribute Points, Trait Points, and Skill Points:

Heroic Level	Attribute Points	Trait Points	Skill Points
Greenhorn	42	0	62
Veteran	48	2	68
Big Damn Hero	54	4	74

2. Generate Attributes

The player assigns Attribute Points in even-numbered amounts to six Attributes: Agility, Strength, Vitality, Alertness, Intelligence, and Willpower. Points assigned become Attribute dice: 2 points is a d2, 4 points is a d4, and so on. The maximum in any Attribute is d12.

3. Calculate Derived Attributes

Tally and record Life Points (maximum results of Vitality + Willpower dice added together) and Initiative (Agility + Alertness). The player might also want to list the other Attribute Rolls described on page 142 of the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, such as Endurance, Long Haul, and Resistance.

4. Choose Traits

The player must choose at least one Asset and one Complication. Complications give the player extra Trait Points with which to pick up Assets, so if you are a Greenhorn you'll need to choose at least a Minor Complication in order to get a Minor Asset. You can't have more than five Assets or five Complications.

5. Choose Skills

Like Attributes, every Skill has dice rating. Spend your Skill Points to pick up General Skills. Choose Specialty Skills for ratings higher than d6. Greenhorns can't have more than d12 in a Skill, but Veterans can have d12 + d2, and Big Damn Heroes may start the game with d12 + d4.

6. Finishin' Touches

The player should choose gear (with the Game Master's permission), and write down personal details such as physical appearance, background, home world, and such. And don't forget to give the character a name, or else you're just askin' to be mocked.

you're a Big Damn Hero, you start with 4 Trait Points, which means a free Major Asset or two Minor Assets.

The same limitations apply as in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. You have to have at least one Asset and one Complication, and you can't have more than five of each. With the two

higher Heroic Levels, you'll be able to come out with a little more in the way of Assets than Complications because of the freebies, and that's just how it should be.

Those of you familiar with the other Cortex System RPGs might note that this is actually half the number of Trait Points you'd get for

those higher Heroic Levels. That's because the default Trait system of Major and Minor Traits used in *Serenity* is a little different from the dice-based system used in the other games. If you use the variant dice-based rules for Traits in **Chapter Two**, double these amounts (Veterans get 4 bonus Trait Points, Big Damn Heroes gets 8 bonus Trait Points.)

Get Skills

From this point everything proceeds more or less as it did in the usual Crew Creation process. Say you're developing a character. You get a number of Skill Points equal to your starting Attribute Points plus 20. If you're using one of the variant systems for Specialties presented in **Chapter Two**, you might have more or less Skill Points than that, and the cut-off point for General Skills might be different, but let's assume you're sticking to the standard method.

. . . and All the Trimmings

Just as in the regular Crew Creation process, you pick up gear, determine details like hair and eye color, height and weight, all of the biographical stuff that brings your concept and your game statistics together the way you want 'em to. And that's pretty much it.

If you're gear-minded, you may want to take a long hard look at *Six-Shooters and Spaceships*, another fine *Serenity Role Playing Game* sourcebook. It's packed to the gills with new weapons, equipment, trinkets, and doodads you're sure to want to load your character down with. Oh, and there's a whole bunch of boats, mules, and vehicles to moon over and persuade your Game Master to give you.

WHY GO THIS ROUTE?

I know what you're thinking. Why should I change the way characters get created? What's the draw? Well, it's six of one and half-dozen of the other, to be honest. In the standard system, you get to buy up on Traits using your Attribute Points and that's the first thing you do. Makes sense, figuring out those defining aspects of your character. On the other hand, going with this revised method leaves all of your Attribute Points alone, has you figure 'em right up front before you go and add the color. You also get some free points for your trouble, and if you combine this set of rules with the variant dice-based rules in **Chapter Two** you've got a world of customization and flexibility to play in. All that said there's nothing wrong with the original process. In fact, some people won't want to switch, simply because if it ain't broke don't fix it. And that's fine by us.

MOVIN' RIGHT ALONG

So where to now? Assuming you're lookin' to broaden your horizons, **Chapter Two** includes a whole mess of new rules for Traits and Skills that you can use when makin' new crew. **Chapter Three**'s got expanded coverage of brawls and brouhahas of all sorts, and fueling up the action for your Big Damn Heroes. And if you've a need for inspiration, **Chapter Six** goes into more detail about Chinese culture in the 'Verse.

Chapters Four and **Five** bring the focus a little more on supporting characters and Game Mastering, so you can worry about that later, especially if you're a player first and foremost.

CHAPTER 2

TRAITS & SKILLS

You may have heard tell that no two folks are exactly alike. Show me two fellas from the same rim-world town, give 'em the same job, the same dreams, the same friends—and enemies—and I'll wager I can still find a way to tell them apart. When it comes to the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, all of this is handled by the nuts and bolts of stat descriptions—Traits and Skills do more for makin' your crew characters feel like folk with their own identity and purpose than anything else. This chapter simplifies the process, providing new ways to use Traits and Skills and suggestions for changing how to define them in the game.

NEW CHARACTER TRAITS

In the *Serenity Role Playing Game* you'll find a fair few Traits to help your players make their crew characters. Now we're a bunch more. If you're fixin' to take on the 'Verse in a different way than the crew of a certain much-loved Mark-III Firefly Class mid-bulk transport, you may want to experiment with crew characters from far-flung walks of life or with vastly altered abilities.

As a player in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, you should feel free to consult with your Game Master about new Traits for your crew character; as a Game Master, you should go ahead and throw your hat in the ring, writing any new Traits you think your crew will need! But if you don't have the time to go to all that trouble yourself or if you want a heap of new ideas to work with, this chapter provides a list of new Assets and Complications, all polished up and ready to go.

ASSETS

These new Assets follow all of the same rules described in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. In this book, there are a number of new and different spins on this subject you might want to check

on, starting with the Revised Crew Creation rules in the last chapter and the die-based Traits system presented in this one.

A Moment in Time [Major]

You're exceptionally skilled at detaching yourself from your current circumstances. This might be from extensive training or practice or it could be in your nature to be able to compartmentalize physical pain or emotional pain. In combat, this asset allows you to keep fightin' despite an injury. In social interactions, it's impossible for a watcher to 'read' your reactions or your true feelings about anything, unless you want them to. Normal Skill rolls to do so automatically fail. A Reader suffers a –2 Skill step when trying to Read you. You automatically resist the urge to break down (cry, go into hysteria, or similar) upon receiving bad news, though you may need to deal with it at a later time. You still feel the pain, but this Trait lets you ignore it until a more convenient moment to grieve arrives.

Ain't Got Time to Bleed [Major]

You simply don't feel pain as others might. Perhaps you're a freak of nature or you've taken specialized training or you've had some kind of advanced neurosurgery.

When you suffer more Wound damage than half your Life Point score, you take only a –1 Attribute step to all actions instead of the normal –2.

Alternate Identity [Minor/Major]

Somewhere in the 'Verse there's someone who looks a helluva lot like you. Could be you're leading a double life. Or maybe you really do have a look-alike floatin' around the black. Either way, when you encounter someone who knows the 'other' you, you're going to be treated like this person, whether you like it or not . . . and often to the consternation of your crew! As

a Minor Asset, the person is known by only a few people or has only a modest reputation. As a Major Asset, the 'other you' is very well known or is known for something significant. This Asset can give you a +2 Skill step to rolls where a second identity is helpful. Make sure to talk with your Game Master about who exactly you look like, since the GM will need to approve any fringe benefits this grants you.

This Asset could also mean that you've got a series of other identities that you can use in a pinch. The downside is that these "people" aren't real. If you start failing actions this Trait benefits, the authorities are going to start getting suspicious. Again, make sure you and the Game Master have a good handle on what this entails.

Finally, this is the Asset to use if you've got a fairly complete—yet completely

fictitious—alternate identity. The Trait probably won't be add steps to any rolls other than as a means of keeping up the ruse (Covert/Disguise, or Performance/Acting), but the rating determines just how established the identity is. You might want to take the Dark Secret Complication if this alternate identity becomes less help and more pain in the ass.

Blastomere Implants [Minor/Major]

Someone's gone and scooped out parts of your insides, replacing 'em with artificially grown versions of the same. These organs run a little hotter than normal, but they make you one tough S.O.B. Your body can keep goin' even when it shouldn't, and any time you take Stun damage you ignore the first point (so, basically, you've got an Armor Rating of 1 S). At the Major level, enough of your guts have been swapped out to ensure that almost anything broken is one of the implants, which heal faster. In addition to the Minor benefits, you recover from Wound damage at twice the normal rate.

Born in the Black [Major]

Folk die in the black all the time. It's only right that some are born there, too. You're one of a small number of folk who were born on and spent most of their childhood aboard a space ship, whether it was a small merchant vessel or one of the Tohoku Class city-ships. You have wide-ranging knowledge about such things as space-survival and maintenance drills. You gain a +2 Skill step on rolls to move about in zero-gravity. You know or remember lots of interestin' and pertinent facts about space travel and spaceships. You can operate basic ship systems such as sensors, emergency systems, and life support. This doesn't make you a better pilot, but it does make you a better navigator.

On the flip side, you are a fish out of water planet-side. You may have trouble dealing with horizons bending the wrong way, cold weather, and hostile ecology.
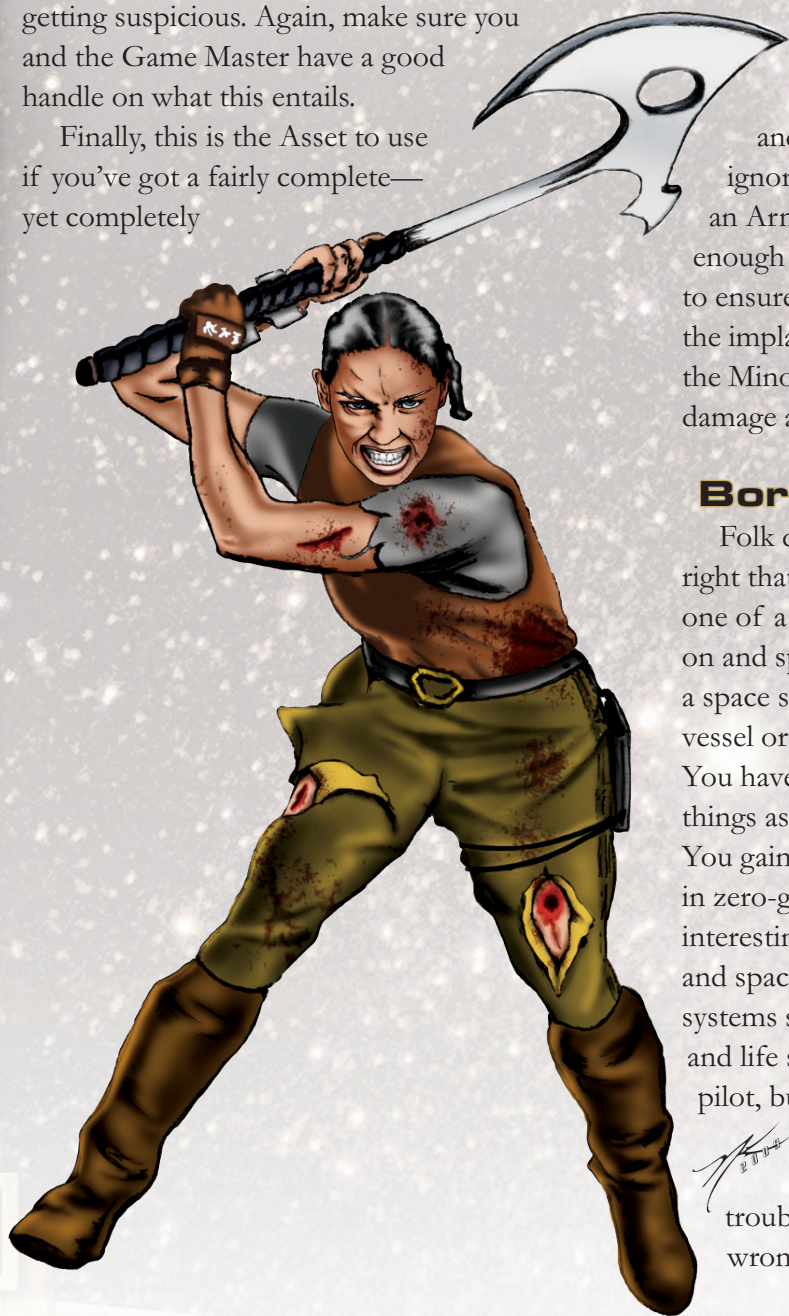
These problems are usually too minor to count as Complications, but if your Game Master uses this Trait to throw problems at you (perhaps a weak auto-immune response to common germs on some planets, leading to a –1 or –2 Attribute step penalty to resist catching cold), then the GM should reward you with a Plot Point or two.

Blue Blood [Minor/Major]

You may be the toughest brawler in the 'Verse, but you come across as a lily-handed dandy. You can't help it if you are well educated and like the finer things in life. You have a title—inherited or earned—or a well-known family name, and this can help you out a bit when interacting with nobility. As a Minor Trait, your status is only recognized by folk on a single planet or moon, or some minor group of like-minded citizens. As a Major Trait, your status is backed by the Alliance, a major Guild, or other 'Verse-spanning organization, and is recognized by governments and officials in most places. You gain a +2 Skill step to rolls to Influence in those power structures, though they may not like you much. Of course, you could run afoul of someone who bears a grudge against your family or just simply hate bluebloods. If your title or name ever causes you problems, the Game Master should reward you with Plot Points as if it were a Complication.

CompTech [Minor/Major]

Some folk have a way with livestock or other people. You have a way with computer systems and the Cortex. Whenever you are working on a program, running sensor sweeps, or hacking your way into an encrypted data pad, you gain a +2 Skill step to your roll. As a Major Trait, any bonus die you get from spending Plot Points is increased by a +2 step. That means that if you spend 1 Plot Point to get a d2, it gets increased to a d6.

Connoisseur [Minor]

You have refined tastes—at least, some folk think so. You have a great deal of knowledge about a particular aspect of society and you're an expert judge in matters in that field. (Examples: wine, breeding prized hunting dogs, growing award-winning geraniums.) Your reputation extends out to the Rim, where most other enthusiasts of the same field welcome you, regardless of class, politics, religion or any other differences. You receive a +2 Skill step when interacting with fellow enthusiasts, and may well find ways to gain entrance to many shindigs and get-togethers with them. Discuss what exactly you're a Connoisseur of with the Game Master when taking this Trait.

Maintaining your status requires exercising your knowledge as a speaker or a judge of competitions, and you might fall out of favor if you fail to live up to these expectations. Also, don't be too surprised if this Trait doesn't help you as soon as conversation turns to something other than geraniums.

Fast on your Feet [Minor/Major]

'He who fights and runs away,' and all that. Your base movement speed is higher than normal. While most folk can walk 15' in one round, you move 20' (at the Minor level) or 25' (at the Major level).

Hideout [Minor/Major]

You have a bolt hole, a safe place that no one knows about. Unless you take folk there on purpose, tell someone about it, or bring a full Alliance investigation down on your head, no one's finding you there. As a Minor Trait, your hidey-hole has room for you and a couple of others to live in cramped quarters, though it's generally stocked with food, water, and sparse furnishings, including the equivalent of a first-aid kit. At the Major level, your Hideout can support up to a dozen crew. When you take this Trait, be sure to talk with the Game Master

about where and what your Hideout is. If your game's mostly spent sailing the black, it might not be possible to make much use of the place.

Home on the Range [Minor/Major]

You have a way with critters. Might be you spent your youth herdin' cattle. Or perhaps you make pets of the fuzzy little guys who eat holes in the ship's food stores. This Trait grants a +2 Skill step to rolls you make when working with animals, whether it's training them or convincin' them you're not lunch. As a Major Trait, any bonus die you get from spending Plot Points is increased by a +2 step. That means that if you spend 1 Plot Point to get a d2, it gets increased to a d6.

In Plain Sight [Minor/Major]

You have a tendency to fade into the background, avoid notice, or otherwise hide more effectively than most. Whether you make a living picking pockets in the streets of Persephone's Eavesdown Docks or you're engaging in corporate espionage, being able to keep your whereabouts under wraps is a valuable Trait. Gain a +2 Skill step to rolls to hide, avoid detection, or disguise yourself as another (nonspecific) person. As a Major Trait, any bonus die you get from spending Plot Points is increased by a +2 step. That means that if you spend 1 Plot Point to get a d2, it gets increased to a d6.

Light Sleeper [Minor]

The slightest noise or disturbance, even a change in the way your ship sings through the Black, wakes you up. It's Impossible to sneak up on you while you're asleep, even though you may not realize what sound woke you. Unfortunately, this may also mean you wind up losing sleep over nothing, since you can't turn it off. If you start to suffer from fatigue or insomnia, the Game Master should award you Plot Points as if this were a Complication.

Middleman [Minor/Major]

You've made yourself king of the hill somewhere, no matter how small and sad a hill it might be. Folks here come to you looking for work (legit or otherwise) to fence goods or when they need to know what you know. Check with the Game Master before taking this Trait, since it means you're tied to one area more than would fit some stories. If the GM approves, put your heads together and decide exactly where you've set yourself up, what kinds of info, job leads, and 'hired help' you have. This Trait might be most appropriate if the campaign is centered around your home turf—for example, following the exploits of your little crime ring, 'stead of folk flyin' the black. This Trait largely deals with character background and circumstances, so be sure you know what you're getting out of it—think of it being more about role playing than providing mechanical benefits. As a Minor Trait, you're small potatoes but have enough sway to get regular work and contacts. As a Major Trait, you have fingers in a lot of pies and in more than one pie shop, and so long as you work at it you shouldn't be hurtin' for things to do.

Mighty Fine Hat [Minor]

There's an item that's become such a part of who you are that you just wouldn't be the same without it. This item helps define you, and you can't be deprived of it for long. It'll be back, even if lost, stolen or badly damaged. The exact nature of the item is up to you. It could be anything you could keep on your person at all times, such as a signature hat, a military uniform, a pair of sunglasses, or a well-worn pistol with a handle grip carved by your father. The object doesn't work any better than a normal one, but it's got *style*. However, since something like a pistol can still be confiscated by guards or similar, you can only hope that the GM will see to it that the object is returned later.

Sawbones [Minor/Major]

It might be that you graduated top of your class at the MedAcad or it might be that you just happen to have a gift when it comes to stitching folk up. Whether you're diagnosing an illness using an advanced neuro-imager or making do with a laser scalpel, you gain a +2 Skill step on rolls involving doctoring of any kind. As a Major Trait, any bonus die you get from spending Plot Points is increased by a +2 step. That means that if you spend 1 Plot Point to get a d2, it gets increased to a d6.

Shareowner [Major]

You're part owner in a major endeavor of some kind. This could be almost anything: a ship, a small planet, a big business, a racehorse, or even a government research project. Unlike the Wealthy Trait, this doesn't automatically provide financial dividends, though it might if you have both Traits. The story might result in you making money off the endeavor but it just isn't automatic. Instead, the investment provides you with access to something you couldn't otherwise afford, such as information, a place to stay, or even a spaceship. It's assumed that you've sunk considerable personal resources into the endeavor. However, note that you're a *part* owner. Any endeavor covered by this Trait has at least three partners, so unless members of your crew hold the other two shares, your ship (or business, or planet or race horse) is still owned (at least in part) by a supporting character or an organization. Be sure to check with the Game Master before taking this Trait; you can only be a Shareowner of something the GM approves. Unless the game is exceptionally high-powered and the Game Master allows it, three crew characters *cannot* each take this Trait and suddenly own an Alliance Cruiser!

COMPLICATIONS

Just like the Assets, this list of new Complications works pretty much like the list in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. You might want to look to the previous chapter on Relationship Traits and the new rules on Assets and Complications later in this chapter for more ways to get complicated. You can take it as read that role playing Complications is a swift way to get more Plot Points!

Absent Minded [Minor]

Whether it's the side effect of too much time spent in the black or imbibin' too much mudder's milk, you tend to forget things. You find it hard to concentrate. New ideas or shiny objects easily distract you. This is more than a mite troublesome when you really need to stay focused and on task. The Game Master might impose a –2 Skill step to your rolls when distractions make it difficult for you to concentrate on a long or involved task or when you try to remember where you put the keys to the spaceship.

Amnesia [Minor/Major]

You just don't know—and you don't even know what it is you don't know. As a Minor Trait, you've forgotten a significant block of time (months, or even years), but you still know who you are and you remember most of your life, though the "lost" portion is a complete blank. As a Major Complication, you have total amnesia. You don't know your own name or remember your past. You have no memories except for vague little feelings urged by memory triggers. You have all your Skills and reflexes from your previous life, even if you can't remember what that life was.

Note: Even if you pick an explanation for your loss of memory (head injury, corporate experimentation, etc), this is only what you *think* happened. The Game Master may weave your problem into the story however the GM sees fit.

Cold As the Black
[Minor]

You have no emotions. You don't cry. You don't laugh. You don't share your feelings with others. Your emotions are nearly non-existent. You might not be a bad person—just damaged, on medication, or so totally stoic that you've forgotten what it's like to feel. Could be you're a violent sociopath. However you look at it, you don't make connections with the people around you. You don't pick up on social signals, tension, humor, or comments related to emotion or intimate issues. You don't react to situations bound to stir emotion in others—such as killing someone or the death of a friend. Depending on the circumstances, you might take a –2 Skill step to social rolls when being your lack of emotion causes problems.

Dark Secret
[Minor/Major]

There's a secret in your past that's pretty bad; the kind that could change your life or cause all manner of problems for you. Work this out privately with the Game Master. If you take this Trait as a Major Complication, the secret's probably worth somebody's life--most likely yours. If you take the Minor version, the secret is more of the humiliating type with short-term consequences. Either way, your Trait imposes a –2 Skill step when trying to explain yourself if the secret gets out. Normally, the Trait's probably just an ongoing reason for you to get nervous. Role play it out, and the Game Master might slide Plot Points your way once in a while.

Family Ties
[Minor/Major]

There's someone in your life that depends on you for protection and care. The person could be a child, an elderly parent, or someone else very important to you. This person is the type that get taken as hostage, hits you up for money, or has other "issues" that come up at the worst possible time.

Dependants have to play a role in the game and can't be simply shoved off into the background of a campaign. If the dependant isn't a significant factor in the character's life, then he doesn't qualify as a Complication, so he's merely part of the character's background (albeit an important one).

As a Minor Complication, you've got one or two dependants who are fairly self sufficient, but occasionally have some problems that need your help. Teenage kids and elderly parents are good examples. At this level, they don't necessarily live or travel with you, but you have to take care of them on a regular basis. Having a spouse and a child back home would fit, so long as you visit and send money to them.

As a Major Complication, this might be a parent or spouse in a wheelchair or a pre-teen child or sibling for whom you're the primary caregiver. At this level, you're likely to get called upon to care for them in most of your spare time. Speak with the Game Master before selecting this Complication as a Major Trait since dependents of this nature aren't a good option in some games.

Good Samaritan [Minor]

You might feel sorry for the downtrodden or maybe you make a habit out of lost causes. Whatever the reason, you tend to align yourself with the underdog in any situation—not because of what that person stands for, usually, but just because he happens to be on the losing side. This is a self-destructive habit, especially once everyone realizes that you'll switch sides as soon as someone else becomes the underdog. This behavior can easily lead to folk seeing you as wishy-washy, juvenile, or immature. It can alienate those you abandon, turning friends into enemies. When interacting with people who dislike your inconstant nature, you receive a –2 Skill step to your social rolls.

Glass Jaw [Minor/Major]

You're a paper tiger. You better hope you don't get hit much, 'cause when you do, you go down a lot faster than most. If you have this as a Minor Complication, take 2 Life Points off your score. If you have this as a Major Complication, take 4 Life Points off.

Glory Hound [Minor]

You'll ride any bull, run to be the first to sign up for any dangerous mission, and go all-out whenever someone's watching you (or if they might hear about it later). You are drawn to the spotlight like a moth to a flame, and you'll probably end up burned just as bad. If your attempts to gain attention turn into a *bie woo lohng*, you'll receive a –2 Skill step to social rolls involving whoever else you drag into the mess and possibly get cited for criminal stupidity.

Idealist [Minor]

You honestly believe that people are basically good, everything will work out for the best, and the 'Verse is a nice place. Bottom line is, you've an unrealistically optimistic outlook. Maybe you're absolutely certain of the benevolence and wisdom of the Alliance or maybe you believe that your captain can do no wrong. Whatever the case, you ignore evidence to the contrary whenever you can (and try to come up with excuses when you can't), and may alienate (or even scare) people who would otherwise be your allies. The Game Master might slap you with a –2 Skill step to rolls to notice or realize the truth of the matter when your judgment is clouded, or
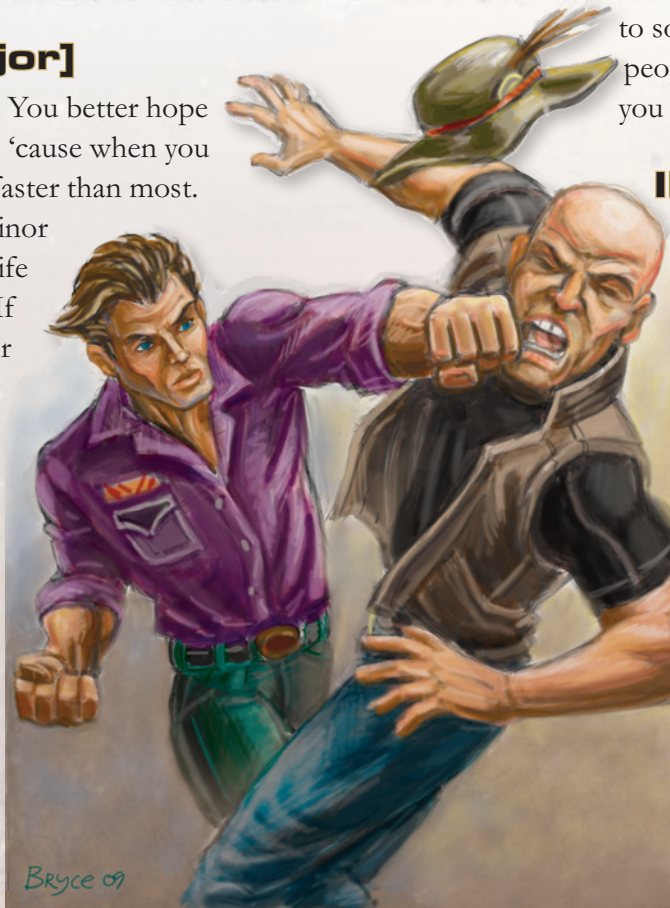
to social rolls to interact with people who don't hold with you on the matter.

Illiterate Backbirth [Minor/Major]

You never learned to read properly. Could be it's a result of your upbringing on some backwater rim-world or your early life on the streets in the blackout zones of the core planets or even a serious neurological problem. As a Minor Trait, you can handle the very basics— writing your name, recognizing common words like street signs and place-names—but you'd never make it to the end of an article on the daily 'Texcast. As a Major Trait, you can't won't recognize your own name. If you're lucky, you can scratch an X on documents if someone points to the right spot.

Illness [Minor/Major]

Most days, you don't feel well. Some days, you feel *jien ta duh guay*. You have a sickness—a disease, a syndrome, a genetic condition—that won't go away on its own. Depending on the symptoms, you might take a –2 Skill step to your actions when suffering from a 'flare up' (once per session, for a scene). As a Minor Trait, it's a relatively inconsequential but permanent condition that only bothers you some of the time, such as a chronic skin rash or a lingering lung infection. As a Major Trait, you're on the long, slow train out of town. Your illness is progressive, and you'll end up dead or occupying a long-term hospital bed if you're not cured.

Bryce 09

Constant treatment slows the progress of the disease, but you must buy off this Complication in order to cure it (which may or may not be possible, depending upon the nature of the condition). Check with your Game Master before taking this Trait at the Major level in order to determine if this Trait is appropriate. If the game's a one-shot or the story is too brief for your illness to be a factor, you should not receive points for it as a Complication.

Neatfreak [Minor/Major]

A little dirt never hurt anybody—'cept maybe you. Clutter, germs, and even good clean mud bother you to no end. As a Minor Complication, your issues are fairly mild and you can handle day-to-day life easily enough. You're still constantly cleaning and tidying, attempting to establish some order in your environment, but you can concentrate on more immediate things when necessary. A significant problem, such as being forced to walk through a sewer, would force you to suffer a –2 Skill step to all actions for the rest of the scene. As a Major Complication, however, this interferes with your life significantly. You don't like to shake hands, prefer to open doors with a handkerchief, and brush your teeth with sterilized water. You suffer the above –2 Skill step whenever you're in an unclean environment, and dealing with something particularly disgusting can send you into a screaming case of hysterics.

Nosy [Minor]

You're driven to investigate when a mystery presents itself, even when the investigation or findin' out the truth might make the wrong people very, very upset with you. Unfortunately for you, mysteries must be explored, be they mundane (why does your boss always have you screen calls from his wife?) or fantastic (what really happened at the mining station that was assigned repair for a damaged transmitter . . . and then nuked from orbit?). You'll take a –2 Skill step to mental and social actions when you're aware of a new or recent mystery *and* you're trying to focus on anything else.

Rebellious [Minor]

You've a serious problem with authority. The Alliance don't sit too well with you, but neither would anyone who tries to tell you what to do. You find ways to avoid following orders without getting shot, but it's all about the attitude. Sometimes this gets you yelled at. Sometimes it might get you locked up . . . or even sentenced to death for mutiny, if you're in an army. This Trait has serious repercussions within any command structure, and you may have to suffer a –2 Skill step to certain actions, particularly whenever you're interacting with your superior officers.

Second Class Citizen [Minor/Major]

For one reason or another, you're considered a second-class citizen (at best) by your society. Maybe you were born on the wrong planet (core worlders on the Rim or Rim worlders in the core), or you wear the wrong color of coat. You are still looked down upon by some folk. Perhaps you're of a certain political or religious persuasion from a planet where those things matter more than a bit. Whatever the case, you're not given the respect and due consideration that others might be given, and some folk take open and aggressive action against you. As a Minor Complication, your status applies against you only in certain areas: a few planets, a swathe of the border, or similar. As a Major Complication, you receive poor treatment almost everywhere you go.

In social situations where it matters, your Trait applies a –2 Skill step on social rolls against those who look down on you.

Shy [Minor]

You're a wallflower, You have trouble talking to girls, guys, or sometimes even yourself. You become uncomfortable when you're the center of attention, even when you really do

have something important to tell the crowd. Especially then. When all eyes are on you and you're expected to perform socially, you're hit with a –2 Skill step to your actions.

Toes the Line [Minor]

You'd get along just fine in the Alliance military corps. You do it by the book, no matter what. You won't break regulations. You always obey your superiors, and you follow instructions to the letter. This can cause all kinds of ruckus. You'll take a –2 Skill step when attempting actions that are specifically against your orders. Even if you need to bend a rule to save your life, you're uncomfortable breaking regs.

Two Left Feet [Minor/Major]

You can't draw your gun without shooting yourself in the foot. For some reason, you can't seem to get the hang of balance and coordination. You bump into doors, fall down stairs, step all over your dance partner. You take a –2 Skill step to all rolls to move, catch something, throw something, or any other action that's impeded by being unbalanced. As a Major Trait, you also botch these rolls more frequently. Instead of botching when all the dice come up showing 1s, you botch if they all show 1s and 2s.

Wisecracker [Minor]

You can't help yourself . . . if the opportunity is there to crack a joke, especially at someone else's expense, you're going to take it even if it earns you a beating or it's completely inappropriate (such as at a funeral!). When this happens, you'll receive a –2 Skill step to interactions with people you've offended. Or maybe you'll receive a punch instead.

VARIANT RULE: DIE-BASED TRAITS

Some things change; some stay the same. The *Serenity Role Playing Game*, on the other hand, can do both.

The rules of the *Serenity Role Playing Game*—not the 'Verse and the setting of the game, but the game mechanics—are based on a set of rules called the Cortex System. Those rules have continued evolving over the years since the *Serenity Role Playing Game* was first written, and one of the biggest changes is a new way of looking at the Traits, both Assets and Complications. This Variant Rule is entirely optional. You may be of an *independent* nature and we're not of a mind to tell you how to play. If you want to do things your way, go ahead, but consider giving it a look-see anyhow. You might find it worth your time.

Traits with Dice

You already know that dice represent the crew's Attributes (Agility, Strength, Vitality, Alertness, Intelligence, and Willpower) and Skills (Athletics, Influence, Guns, and the like). These dice, starting with the two-sided (d2) and heading on upwards (d2, d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d12 + d2, etc), give you a fair idea of how good the crew is at what they do. A crew character with Strength of d10 can dish out more pain than one with a Strength of d4, *dohn ma*? The dice also make it easy to tell how much each level costs: that d10 Strength costs 10 Attribute Points, and that d4 costs 4 Attribute Points.

Traits, on the other hand, have a more limited range in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. Assets and Complications, if you rate them Minor or Major, have only two possible levels. Unlike Attributes and Skills, the terms Minor and Major don't actually tell you how much each level costs. Though it isn't hard to find out that a Minor costs the same as a d2 Attribute, and a Major costs the same as a d4 Attribute, it's a bit

Player-Suggested Traits

You can tell the players are into the game when they suggest a new Trait to better describe their characters. This is all mighty dandy, but make sure the Trait's balanced in the rules, balanced in play, doesn't already exist, and has flavor. If it fails one of these tests, could be it's less than helpful or may do more harm than good. Make your assessment. Often the best response is "Yes, but . . ." with a suggested addition, or "No, but . . ." and a suitable alternative.

A quick gander at the Assets in the *Serenity Role Playing Game* and in this Handbook shows that in terms of rules, Traits should fall into these categories: a step bonus in particular situations, a way to use Plot Points more powerfully or other rules manipulations. Positive Skill and Attribute steps are +2 at the Minor level and add Plot Point effectiveness at the Major level. For Plot Point Assets, spending Plot Points gives benefits, rising with the more points spent. The other Assets provide a non-step benefit such as Life Points from Tough as Nails or getting an extra action from Fightin' Type. Any new player-created Asset should follow these examples.

For Complications, the examples aren't so tidy. Reward the character with Plot Points whenever any of them come into play. There's negative Skill steps (−2 for a minor Complication) and rules modifiers (like Soft modifying damage taken), but most Complications just reward the player with Plot Points when they're played well. Tell him to play his Greedy pilot in a way that hurts him or his crew and he gets Plot Points. Follow these models and you shouldn't be unbalanced with the rules.

Play balance is more subjective. Is the Asset coming into play all the time? Does the Complication never appear? These are signs of problems with play balance. A Complication should have a good chance of coming up at least once every other session (depending on how long those sessions are). An Asset shouldn't apply every session and it shouldn't make the character straight-up better than crew characters created at the same heroic level.

The hardest judgment is on flavor. Your player loves her shiny new Trait but you have a nagging feeling that it doesn't fit in your vision of the 'Verse. This happens plenty often. If a player wants to introduce some NewTech Traits but your campaign favors the gritty, western aspect of the 'Verse, could be the Traits just don't fit. The first step is to work with the player. Remember, "Yes, but . . ." Tell the player how you see it and let her decide if she wants to switch. See if there's a modified version of the Trait you think fits.

Again, do what's right by your game. Rules balance, play balance, and the right flavor are important for your campaign.

of a puzzler as to why we'd have three types of character abilities (Attributes, Skills, and Traits) but use different rules for just one of them.

Die-based Traits smooth out that wrinkle. They give you more options when it comes to Trait levels, and they make buying Assets work a lot more like buying Skills or Attributes. Once you start using that ladder of die steps for Traits, just like Attributes and Skills, crew can have Traits that really are minor (d2), or that are much more prominent than even a Major Asset (d12 or higher!).

What Dice Mean

This change has one big effect on the way crewmembers use their Traits. As Minor or Major Traits, they all needed descriptions of just how powerful they were. Did they add a +2 step to a Skill? Give the crew character exactly 4 extra Life Points? Did the Major level add more or grant a new ability? Instead of making those decisions arbitrarily, now most Traits have an effect based directly on their dice. This means that if you have (for example) Born Behind the Wheel at the d4 level, you add an extra d4 to each roll that Born Behind the Wheel benefits. If you have the Trait at the d8 level or the d12 level, you add that die instead.

If you have Tough as Nails, you might add half the maximum value of its Trait die to your Life Points (so a character with Tough as Nails [d4] would gain 2 Life Points, or one with [d8] would gain 4), since adding the full value for some things might make them a bit too powerful.

Complications work in a similar fashion. Many Complications add a roll of their die to the Difficulty of rolls you make or even as extra dice to rolls against you. Or you might subtract half the maximum value of the die from your Life Points, if you have a die-based version of Glass Jaw (a new Trait from earlier in this chapter).

Not everything is that simple. Some Traits—a lot of Complications especially—don't have a clear-cut bonus or penalty that translates into a number. Some seem like they should have only one value or maybe just two, such as the old Minor and Major versions. How do you decide what dice they should have?

That's where things get tricky and it comes down to your judgment. The more significant the bonus or penalty, the higher the die should be. Some examples are provided in Table 2.1. What if it varies? What if a member of the crew is Crude, but less Crude than Jayne? Or— Buddha preserve us—more so? In those cases, the Game Master and players settle on what feels like an appropriate range. Crude, for example,

might be available at the levels d4, d6, or d8 (written [d4-d8]), to represent that being foul-mouthed can get you in a lot of trouble, but isn't Reaver-style dangerous. The more a player wants to have his crew character get himself in trouble for his Crude behavior, the higher the die he'll take it at. Then it's up to him to role play the right level of Crude behavior and up to the Game Master to apply the Complication's die to the Difficulty or the opposing rolls in social situations.

Keep in mind that some Traits may still have only one or two specific values and exclude all others. A Trait available only at d4 and d8 levels would be noted as [d4/d8], or exist in a particular range, such as [d2-d6]. Some can be bought from the ground up at any value (written as [d2+]). Further examples and suggestions are given in the following sections.

CONVERTING TO DIE-BASED TRAITS

Now that we've whetted your appetite, it's time to get down to business. Here's how to go about converting the *Serenity Role Playing Game*'s Minor/Major Traits to die-based versions.

Table 2.1: Suggested Values for Dice

Trait Die	Suggested Value
d2	Trait is trivial, can't affect the plot significantly, or only negatively affects the crew when the player wants it to. Mal's level of Mighty Fine Hat that represents his browncoat.
d4	Trait is similar to the Minor level, rarely causes real problems/benefits even if it comes up often in role playing. Jayne's level of Crude.
d6	Trait is significant OR comes up often; may provide a slight bonus to Plot Points spent on certain actions. Simon's level of Easy Mark.
d8	Trait is similar to the Major level; may be both significant and a common factor, and may provide particularly unusual abilities. Wash's level of Born Behind the Wheel.
d10	Trait is very powerful and is often useful or debilitating. Mal's Credo to protect his crew.
d12+	Trait may grant entirely unheard-of abilities or permanently disable the character in some way. River's ability to kill you with her brain.

Gut Feeling or Know-How?

Even a Big Damn Hero has to know when to trust his gut . . . and when to check his math. When you're converting Traits from Minor/Major levels to die levels, you're going to have to do both. First you have to make sure the new Traits feel right. Don't go making every Reader an omnipotent, omniscient force—even if one of them *can* be. If it's too cheap or appealing, folk from the core to the Rim aren't going to take it. But don't limit the Trait so much it can't be of use when they somebody does take it, either.

Then, once you've done the converting, make sure you compare numbers a little bit. Don't fret, you don't have to do much; just be sure that most of them line up to the same standards. If you made a version of Things Go Smooth that lets you reroll three failures, for example, the same level of Things Don't Go Smooth should make you reroll three successes, not just one. As the Game Master, you have final say as to what is fair in your 'Verse. As a player doing the converting, make sure you check it over with your Game Master.

Assigning Die-Based Values to Minor/Major Traits

Say . . . just *how* Talented are you, anyway? Or how Sweet and Cheerful? Or how Crude?

There are some common Trait styles you can use to guide your conversions. As you go through the list of Traits, try to divide them up into three types: full range, limited range, and static.

Full Range

Some Traits work just as well at low levels as they do at high ones, especially those that can simply add themselves to Skill rolls (Allure, Athlete, Born Behind the Wheel, Sawbones, Reputation and so on) or to rolls against you/the Difficulty of your rolls (Easy Mark, for example, to tell if someone is lying to you). These can

be given a value of [d2+], since their primary effect is related to a simple roll, either with a specific Skill or in specific situations. However, some Traits that don't directly add to rolls might still fall into this category. Those that grant a rank within an organization, for example, could represent a higher rank at each successive die type. If you convert an Asset like Born Behind the Wheel, which has a special bonus at the Major level (increasing the number of Plot Points spent on certain rolls), you can still apply that bonus. Just make it available to anyone with the Trait at the d6 level or higher. If you want to include an even more powerful special ability, limit it to d12+ levels of the Asset.

Full range works better with Assets than it does with Complications. Why? Because if you let a player take Crude [d12], or Amorous [d12], he gets a lot of Points out of it without any more risk than at the [d4] or [d6] level. Complications like these, which represent aspects of the crew character's personality, will come up only when the player role plays them intentionally, so *they should be available only at very low levels*. Even Complications the player can't control should rarely be made available as [d2+]. When converting them to dice, you should consider making most Complications limited range or static (see next section).

A Trait might work well at full range if it has Minor/Major levels that are very similar or if you can imagine that the effects of such a Trait could grow stronger/worse over time.

Limited Range

If you look at an Asset and think to yourself, "Well sir, this Asset might work at a bunch of different levels, but it seems dreadful strong," then you should consider making it a limited range Asset—available at several different levels, but not all of them. For example, [d2-d6] (d2, d4, or d6) or [d4-d10] (d4, d6, d8, or d10). If the Game Master doesn't want crew characters to start out so Talented or Alluring that they can never be beaten on certain rolls, limiting those Assets to the d2-d6 range is recommended.

The same applies to Complications that represent the crew character's quirks of behavior: Filcher, Crude, Amorous, and so on. Though in some cases the Complication's die can be added to Difficulties or rolls against the crew character, these Traits mostly provide guidance for how the crew member will act, something the player can overrule at any time. The values [d2-d4], [d2-d6], or [d4-d8] are usually the most appropriate in these cases.

Even if their effects are out of the player's hands, most Complications should be limited range (or static) Traits, rather than full range. Individual Complications will likely not come up in games often enough to deserve extremely high values which grant the player even more Trait Points, just as Major Complications grant more Points than Minor ones. For example, even if one person might be more heavily Addicted to booze than another person is, a crew character who takes Addiction at the [d12] level probably won't be in much more trouble than someone at the [d8] level. Since the Game Master will certainly not want to spend every session dealing with just that one Complication and the search for a fix, taking it at [d12] grants Points for nothing. Even if the Game Master *does* enforce that level of the Complication, an Addiction [d12] would have to be debilitating (see Table 2.1). Unless the campaign is meant to focus on an Addiction or other extraordinarily high level Complication as the central plot (which could make a good tale), most Complications should be limited in range.

A Trait might work well in a limited range if it's either Minor or Major, but could be role played at different levels of severity, or if you can imagine it growing stronger/worse over time but think that some levels would be too powerful or disruptive to play.

Static

In truth, most Complications and more than a few Assets probably work best with static dice; that is, with one or two specific levels. If you think a Trait looks shiny as it is in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, then you can leave it that way. If it's a Minor-only Trait, give it a static value of [d4]. If it's a Major-only Trait, give it a [d8]. If it could be either, give it a value of [d4/d8]. 'Course, you can take this opportunity to make some more or less costly than others. For example, if you want being a Reader to be a little more expensive, give it a value of [d6/d12] instead of [d4/d8].

Static values work well when you know exactly how powerful you think a Trait should be. Also, unlike full or limited range Traits, static Traits are a good place to put special abilities that work differently at each level. For example, if you want to convert Things Go Smooth from Minor/Major to die, it wouldn't work real well with a rating of [d2+]. What would each individual level mean? For Traits like that, use static values and define each level carefully. You can still use the Trait's die type as a bonus or penalty to rolls, rather than adding a Skill step modifier, but you can also assign arbitrary benefits or penalties such as one or two rerolls of failed rolls each session. If that sounds sensible, you might want to make Things Go Smooth a [d4/d8] Asset.

Let's Make this Easy for Ya . . .

If you've gone through these conversion rules and think well of 'em, but don't feel like sitting down and working hard to come up with each and every Trait, here's two things to help a body out. The first is a list of a few choices you could make to do a fast-and-dirty conversion of the Traits if you're not worried about exactitude too much. The second is Table 2.2, where you can find a recommended die value for each of the Traits in the *Serenity Role Playing Game* and *The Big Damn Heroes Handbook*. It doesn't include descriptions of each, just a bare-bones list of numbers—but it might make a good starting point and it's a little more fine-tuned than the bullet-points below.

Here's that fast-and-dirty scheme:

- Convert Assets that provide a bonus directly to certain Skills (Allure, Athlete,

Table 2.2: Converted Assets

A Moment in Time [BDH]	d2+
Ain't Got Time to Bleed [BDH]	d6
Allure	d2+
Alternate Identity [BDH]	d2–d6
Athlete	d2+
Blastomere Implants [BDH]	d4/d8
Blue Blood [BDH]	d2–d6
Born Behind the Wheel	d2+
Born in the Black [BDH]	d2+
CompTech [BDH]	d2+
Connoisseur [BDH]	d2+
Cortex Specter	d6/d10
Fast on your Feet [BDH]	d2/d6
Fightin' Type	d10
Friends in High Places	d2+
Friends in Low Places	d2+
Good Name	d2+
Healthy as a Horse	d2+
Heavy Tolerance	d2+
Hideout [BDH]	d6/d12
Highly Educated	d2+
Home on the Range [BDH]	d2+
In Plain Sight [BDH]	d2+
Intimidatin' Manner	d2+
Leadership	d2+
Light Sleeper [BDH]	d4
Lightnin' Reflexes	d2+
Math Whiz	d2+
Mean Left Hook	d4
Mechanical Empathy	d2+
Middleman [BDH]	d4/d8
Mighty Fine Hat [BDH]	d2/d8
Military Rank	d2+
Moneyed Individual	d4/d8
Natural Linguist	d2+
Nature Lover	d2+
Nose for Trouble	d2+
Reader	d4/d8
Registered Companion	d4
Religiosity	d4/d8
Sawbones [BDH]	d2+
Shareowner [BDH]	d6
Sharp Senses	d2+
Steady Calm	d2+
Sweet and Cheerful	d2+
Talented	d2-d6
Things Go Smooth	d4/d8
Total Recall	d4/d8
Tough as Nails	d4/d8
Trustworthy Gut	d4/d8
Walking Timepiece	d4
Wears a Badge	d2+

Table 2.3: Converted Complications

Absent Minded [BDH]	d2–d6
Allergy	d2/d8
Amnesia [BDH]	d4/d8
Amorous	d4–d8
Amputee	d4
Bleeder	d10
Blind	d10
Branded	d2+
Chip on the Shoulder	d2+
Cold [BDH]	d4–d6
Combat Paralysis	d4/d8
Coward	d4–d8
Credo	d4/d8
Crude	d4–d8
Dark Secret [BDH]	d4/d8
Dead Broke	d4/d8
Deadly Enemy	d2+
Deaf	d10
Dull Sense	d4
Easy Mark	d2+
Ego Signature	d4
Family Ties [BDH]	d4/d8
Filcher	d2/d6
Forked Tongue	d6
Good Samaritan [BDH]	d4
Glass Jaw [BDH]	d4/d8
Glory Hound [BDH]	d2–d4
Greedy	d4–d8
Hero Worship	d4
Hooked	d4/d8
Idealist [BDH]	d2–d6
Illiterate Backbirth [BDH]	d4/d8
Illness [BDH]	d4/d8
Leaky Brainpan	d4+
Lightweight	d2–d8
Little Person	d2
Loyal	d4
Memorable	d2–d8
Mute	d8
Neatfreak [BDH]	d4/d8
Non-Fightin' Type	d6
Nosy [BDH]	d2–d6
Overconfident	d4–d10
Paralyzed	d8
Phobia	d2+
Portly	d2–d6
Prejudice	d4
Rebellious [BDH]	d4
Sadistic	d2–d4
Scrawny	d2–d6
Second Class Citizen [BDH]	d4/d8
Shy [BDH]	d6
Slow Learner	d4
Soft	d4
Stingy	d4–d6
Straight Shooter	d2–d6
Superstitious	d2/d6
Things Don't Go Smooth	d4/d8
Toes the Line [BDH]	d4
Traumatic Flashes	d4/d8
Twitchy	d4
Two Left Feet [BDH]	d4/d8
Ugly	d2–d6
Weak	d2–d6
Wisecracker [BDH]	d4

etc) to full range Assets [d2+] or limited range Assets at a certain lower value, probably [d2-d6]. These sorts of Assets should also have an effect that kicks in at the d6 level, one that boosts any bonus dice from Plot Points by a +2 step.

- Convert Assets that provide new special abilities (Things Go Smooth, Reader, Registered Companion, etc) to static Assets. Minor levels become [d4]; Major become [d8].
- Convert Complications related to the crew's personality (Crude, Filcher, Forked Tongue) to limited range Traits. Make them [d2-d4] if they were available only as Minor, or [d4-d8] if they were Minor/Major Complications.
- Convert Complications with specific penalties or special hindrances (Blind, Paralyzed, Mute, etc) to static Traits. Minor levels become [d4]; Major levels become [d8].

For more suggestions and additional rules, check out the *Cortex System RPG* or any of the other Cortex-based role playing games available. While each game has its own take on things such as Trait costs and effects, most use this die-based approach. Might be as you'll learn something from 'em. Or, might be as you'll learn what you *don't* want to include, in the event a low-minded player comes at you with some new idea for a Trait.

SKILLS IN THE GAME

It's not hard to learn how to use the Skills you find in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, but knowing the rules isn't the same as using them to tell a story.

The *Serenity Role Playing Game* and this book include a lot of talk about resolving basic tasks using the rules: combat, mechanical repairs, doctoring, and the like. The Cortex System—the engine driving the *Serenity Role Playing Game*—is meant to be flexible and easy to apply in all of those situations. The rules help players and Game Masters resolve conflicts and determine the outcome of events related to the plot of the story, usually from a very practical standpoint such as: which of two gunslingers is faster on the draw? Is the mechanic observant enough to spot the real problem? Is the pilot canny enough to fly into battle under enemy sensor-nets?

But that's not the only thing the rules are meant to do. While the Attributes and Skills of the crew help answer those oh-so-practical questions, the following sections should teach you how to use those same Attributes and Skills to provide a more abstract look at things—how to use the dice to develop the background, the story, and even the crew. We'll even look at fun things to do with extraordinary success and how to mix things up with Skills to suit your own games in the 'Verse.

PICKING AN ATTRIBUTE

It shouldn't be a surprise that most of the time things go smoothest when you make the obvious decision. Even though the *Serenity Role Playing Game* lets you use any Attribute with any Skill, you probably stick with the same pairings most of the time: Agility + Guns when you're shootin' folk, Strength + Melee Weapon Combat when you're cuttin' on them. Right?

And that's just hunky-dory. If you stopped to think about it every time, the game would slow to a crawl. But sometimes you might want to consider trying out a strange combination. If the situation is a bit unusual, the scene is mighty important, or even if you just want a change of pace, using a different Attribute in a normal roll can let crew shine through where they wouldn't normally stand out. This can help players get to know more about their crew's personality or it can just be exciting to do things a little differently.

Game Masters should call for these unusual combinations when they think the time is right, but they should also consider letting players

suggest them, too. Here're some examples of unusual reasons to substitute each Attribute into a normal roll, thought they aren't comprehensive lists.

Agility

Use Agility when physical coordination is important. Roll Agility + Influence if you try to sweet-talk someone while you're dancing with them, Agility + Perception to feel your way through a darkened room, Agility + Discipline if you're trying to carefully move across a minefield while remembering the correct path.

Strength

Use Strength when bursts of physical effort affect the outcome. Roll Strength + Pilot to remain in your seat and in control during a crash landing, Strength + Performance when competing in an athletic competition judged on technical accuracy of your moves, Strength + Influence when bullying someone around, Strength + Guns when you're so tired or drugged that just holding the damn pistol is a problem.

Vitality

Bring Vitality into play when stamina or health is a factor. If your character's feeling poorly, you might even use Vitality in most of your rolls to represent his fortitude! Roll Vitality + Athletics to run a marathon, Vitality + Mechanical Engineering while working on a Complex repair likely to take 48 hours, Vitality + Perception to be on guard-duty all night, Vitality + Survival to see if you can find water in the desert before passing out, Vitality + Guns to make a good shot even though you're in excruciating pain.

Alertness

Substitute Alertness for another Attribute if there are subtleties, possible nuances, or hidden factors that the character might overlook. Roll Alertness + Covert to sneak through an area with concealed cameras, Alertness + Guns to aim a shot at someone you can't actually see, Alertness + Melee Combat to fight in the dark, Alertness + Influence to pick up on someone's mental and emotional buttons while negotiating with them.

Intelligence

Use Intelligence when problem solving ability, memory, or pure calculation can substitute for another Attribute. Roll Intelligence + Perception to solve a jigsaw puzzle, Intelligence + Athletics to move through a field of laser beams that move in a carefully timed pattern, Intelligence + Performance to recite a poem you learned years ago, Intelligence + Discipline to resist interrogation by intellectualizing your situation.

Takin' Care of Single-Attribute Superstars

Yes, it's entirely possible you'll get that player who sinks all of his advancement and crew character creation into a single, high-ranking Attribute such as Agility or Alertness, and then try to use it for every action he does. Folk are cunning, and gamer folk are more cunning than most. After a while, this kind of play style gets old, of course, and it's really not what the system of loose associations between Attribute and Skill was designed for. As the Game Master, make it plain up front that you're not going to stand for this kind of behavior. It's at best a bore and at worst lazy. Your encouragement of other players with Plot Points for smart thinkin' should give the Single-Attribute Superstar pause, especially when he sees that he's actually not getting anywhere. And at the end of the day, while it's a sure-fire way to scoring the big wins, there's going to be numerous incidents where even the most well-reasoned association of Agility with any and every Skill won't hold water. And when that happens, things won't go smooth.

So what're we saying? No min-maxed crew characters, no packed-to-the-gills optimized character sheets? Not necessarily. That sort of play's as fun as the next one, depending on what table you're sittin' at. We're just saying keep it all up front and honest. Single-Attribute Superstar's going to run into his Single-Attribute Nemesis soon enough.

Willpower

Substitute Willpower if mental resistance, determination, or belief is being challenged or measured. Roll Willpower + Guns to shoot someone you once cared about (or to kill a person for the first time), Willpower + Athletics to jump from the roof of one powerful tall building onto the roof of another, Willpower + Perception to force yourself to notice details you'd prefer weren't there (such as signs of infidelity in your spouse or betrayal by your leader), Willpower + Covert to remain calm when searchers are almost upon you, Willpower + Pilot to ram your ship into another ship despite the danger to yourself.

MOVING THINGS ALONG: PLAYIN' A TALE

Skill rolls in the *Serenity Role Playing Game* can do more'n just tell you the result of a single action or moment. You can use them to generalize larger events, resolve multiple 'actions' when they aren't individually important, or even to give you insight into the mental and emotional condition of the crew and supporting characters. Put another way, you can use them to help play a tale, more than a game.

As Game Master, you might consider calling for these rolls when you want to pass through a scene quickly, but still want to use the rules to decide how favorably or unfavorably events unfold. This can speed up play considerably, but it may not be for everyone. Some crews prefer to make every roll strictly by the book and follow the rules like the rules of a board game. However, if you want to use the *Serenity Role Playing Game* to tell a story, with the numbers and dice as guidelines for description, these rules are right up your alley.

Each of the following rules gives a description of a new way to use Skill rolls in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. Some are meant to advance the story and some are just meant to give insight into the minds of the crew or the supporting characters. They're all optional and you don't have to use all of 'em if you like only one. You can even come up with your own ways to Move Things Along if you want to!

Scenery

Scenery rolls are most useful when you want to let the crew use their Skills and resolve actions impartially by using dice, but without spending a lot of time on less-than-critical events. The term 'scenery' covers any scenes, events, and interactions that aren't really part of the story. They might be entirely player-driven or they might just be the day-to-day stuff the crew has to do, such as purchasing supplies or starting a bar fight. And yes, scenery can include combat, as long as the point is to embellish the game-world and add flavor, background, and connections for the players, and not to move the plot forward.

When the crew decides to do something you want to resolve quickly—or mostly with description—call for a scenery roll: "Can we head to a bar while we're in town? Play some cards, maybe get some local color?"

Then, pick an Attribute and a Skill, have the players roll, and total the result like normal. Set the Difficulty at Easy, Average, or Hard—if the Difficulty should be any higher, then it probably ain't just scenery! For example: "All right, roll Alertness + Unarmed Combat/Brawling against an Average Difficulty."

Once you see whether players botched, failed, passed, or achieved extraordinary success, talk out the scene with them quickly. Use lots of descriptive language, and give them a general idea of what happens: "You rolled an 8, so that beats the scenery Difficulty. You manage to win a little in a card game, but then you get into a tussle with your opponents. You come out with only some split knuckles, but you don't make a lot of cash, either."

Then let the players narrate the exact results, as long as they stay within what you already decided. They can invent place names, the names and personalities of the supporting characters, and so on: "I was playing cards with three guys at the old Half-Time Saloon, but they caught me with my fifth ace and decided they didn't like me very much. One pulled a gun, but I flipped the table on him and Jayne knocked the other two

together before they could jump me. I managed to grab only a few 5-notes, but at least we high-tailed it before anyone else joined in."

When you're picking the Attribute and Skill for a scenery roll, try and judge what is most likely to represent the scene as a whole, rather than just one action from it. In the above example—a card game turned bar-fight—a full set of rolls would cover gambling (both to cheat and to catch a cheater), Initiative, attacks and defenses, and so on. That can take a while, so you reduce it to an Alertness (an Attribute very useful in card games) plus Unarmed Combat/Brawling (very useful for smackin' folk around) scenery roll.

Once you get a little practice with scenery, you might find it can help get the players in the right mindset for a story or establish the beginnings of plots. You might want to start (or end) each session with a few pieces of scenery: the crew buying supplies on a core world, getting their next job from a petty crime lord or even celebrating the completion of a previous job on a backwater world where they can only afford to pay the crew in rainsticks and wives. Scenery also saves a lot of time if the crew splits up during 'shore leave if they each want to go to different (non-plot relevant) places during their free time. And if the main action is following one group (maybe the captain and his favorite mechanic head to a fancy party), you could reward the other players for their patience by letting them have some scenery time (they won't be sitting on their thumbs and bored if they have the chance to plan a cunning escape and rescue op).

One word of caution: depending on how flexible the crew is, you should probably avoid having characters gain or lose significant amounts of money, take or receive more than a few points of damage, or otherwise change status *randomly* in a piece of scenery. Randomly being the key word here. It's all right for them to spend a lot of money on fuel during a scenery event. It's not all right to take away a lot of their money because they rolled poorly and you decide they get mugged. Likewise, they might

that her act caused the deaths of several families, Covert and Mechanical Engineering fit. This is not like most complex actions, so don't select a specific amount of time per roll, and don't set a limit on the maximum number of rolls possible. This complex action should eventually be overcome, since its purpose is to give role playing guidelines to the player and to you.

From that point until it's completed, in any scene where the chosen Skills are used by that crew character, the player makes an additional roll using Willpower + the chosen Skill. The result of this roll is added to the total of the internal struggle's complex action (a botch still increases the Difficulty Threshold, but only on the first one; after that, this action cannot become any more botched). Until the action is fully resolved, the character is still mentally and emotionally dealing with (or *avoiding* dealing with) her issues. In any given scene where a roll is made, if that particular roll is the equivalent in a simple action of an Average success or higher, she makes progress. If the roll is 6 or less, even though it adds to the accumulated total towards the Threshold, she's ignoring her problems or backsliding. It might take a long time to conquer her demons. If she avoids certain actions (perhaps going into retirement from her main job, or similar) she could remain conflicted for the rest of her life.

Keep in mind that these results are purely for purposes of role playing. There is no mechanical penalty for being in the middle of an internal struggle and there is no mechanical benefit to ending one. However, if the player actively role plays her character's journey through the internal conflict, incorporating it into her behavior and actions, she should be rewarded along the way with Plot Points for good role playing and perhaps for completing a goal at the end. The resolution might even make a good turning point for the purchase of a new Asset or the removal of a Complication.

The point is to encourage players to engage with their characters, not to punish them for their actions by adding in an extra chore. If you choose to have crew engage in internal conflicts, avoid letting too many spring up at once, and don't let any one character engage in more than one at a time.

Thrilling Heroics: Extraordinary Success

One thing *Serenity Role Playing Game* players will likely want to hear is just how well they manage to pull off their hijinks. When it comes to Skill rolls, you have a soft option: failure? "You fail." Success? "You succeed." Extraordinary success? "You really succeed!"

If you run games like that, don't blame your players when they oust you from your comfy chair and make someone else the Game Master. Even though, most of the time, it's okay to just tell players they succeed or they fail, extraordinary successes deserve a bit more credit than that. If you want your players to feel like Big Damn Heroes, then you'd better let them know just how impressive they are!

Table 2.3: First Impressions

Roll	Suggested Reaction
Botch	Major social faux-pas; broke local taboo; accidentally violated a law; hostility.
3	Slightly negative reaction, but not open hostility.
7	Neutral reaction, or slightly positive or negative (Game Master's call).
11	Slightly positive reaction, but no open-armed welcoming committee.
15	Friendly reaction; crew welcomed.
19	Very friendly reaction; some measure of trust is offered. Interest in the crew.
23+	Crew welcomed as heroes; songs are sung about them.

When an extraordinary success comes up, give it a bit more description. Don't fuss about it, but add on at least a *single* embellishment. Provide a detail about how clean his shot is, how smooth his piloting is, or how quietly he sneaks down the hall. The benefit isn't usually mechanical (though you can add one of those, too); it makes the players feel like he's accomplished something.

Still find that's too much work? Then adjust the extraordinary success rule to this Thrilling Heroics option: whenever a player rolls a total 7 or more points above the Difficulty on a Skill roll, he has the option of describing the exact results as if he had spent 3 Plot Points on a story edit. This doesn't increase the total of his roll, but it lets him alter the story to produce a cosmetic effect or moderate benefit, giving him some control over the results of his action. Some examples:

Simon, while treating an unconscious Jayne, rolls an extraordinary success. You let Simon's player decide exactly what his Thrilling Heroics are. After thinking about it, he suggests to you: "I used a sedative to knock out Jayne's motor functions while I worked. When he comes to, I can use the fact that I had him paralyzed but didn't hurt him to make it clear we're on the same team. So maybe he stops trying to sell me out." You decide you likes it, so Jayne gets a little scare when he wakes up!

Gus, captain of the *Gurh'Jwi*, wants to Intimidate a couple of intruders he caught aboard his ship into revealing who sent them. When he rolls an extraordinary success, you decide it's time for some Thrilling Heroics. Gus's player suggests that he not only convinces the hapless captives to spill their guts, but they also turn out to be just some mercs without any particular loyalties—perfectly willing to turn the tables on their former employers.

Mal, who is tired of waiting for Patience to give up and pay him already, decides to shoot her horse so she can't hide behind it. He rolls 10 above the horse's defense—poor thing—and you say he's earned some Thrilling Heroics. Mal's player suggests that the horse collapses on top of the old biddy, trapping her and ending the fight.

CAMPAIGN-SPECIFIC SKILL LISTS

Hey, Game Masters! Take a look at the Skill list when your group is making a crew for the next Serenity campaign. Does it do what you want it to do? Are all the bases covered? The list in the *Serenity Role Playing Game* was tailored for the standard Serenity campaign—a crew flyin' a mid-bulk transport, trying to make ends meet and avoid unwanted attention from authorities. But not everybody plays in the standard Serenity campaign. If you take a look at **Chapter Five**, you'll see there's a whole range of alternate campaign ideas that you can make use of, and not all of them are going to line up perfectly with the standard General Skills and Specialty Skills.

So here's the deal. Change the list! There's no Watercraft Skill in the standard list, but if you've got a campaign based on some blue world with a lot of oceans and folks are going to be skimmin' over waves on a routine basis in various kinds of boat, ship, or skiff, then you'll want a Skill designed to accommodate that. Normally, you'd use Planetary Vehicles for this, but since that also includes driving land vehicles and riding a glider, it could be considered to be too broad.

The best thing to consider when you're looking at playing with the Skill list is to ask yourself this question: can a new General Skill support a whole range of Specialty Skills? For instance, let's say you're planning a more intrigue-heavy campaign, with the players taking on the role of Alliance intelligence operatives who're going rogue and leaning toward the Browncoat cause. Would an Intrigue Skill help? It's a little like Covert and a little like Influence. It's even got a little Perception rolled in there. What sort of Specialties could you come up with? Bribes, Red Tape, Gossip, Favors, Anonymous Sources . . . it might do just fine.

Remember, you're not going to break the game by playing around with things like Skills or Traits. Sure, there's the small matter of converting over existing supporting character stats to your new version of the list, but overall it's probably not a bad idea to keep this in mind. Just don't go overboard and make up a dozen new Skills for all kinds of things that your players are never going to do. If it fits your campaign themes, go for it. If it's just character sheet clutter, keep it under your very fine hat for the next campaign.

VARIANT RULE: MESSING WITH SPECIALTY SKILLS

In the standard *Serenity Role Playing Game*, a Specialty Skill is a narrow subset of a broader General Skill. If you've got a General Skill, you've got the Specialty Skill, as well, up to and including the d6 level. Once you get more experience, though, you can't default to the General Skill any longer and have to pick and choose your Specialties. That d6 cut-off point is there to establish a kind of benchmark for when a character needs to focus more. For most campaigns, this is fine, but you might have a need to play around with that cut-off point. Here's a few options to play with.

Broader Skills

With this variant, you can advance General Skills as high as d8 before you need to pick up a Specialty Skill. If you do this, you won't see Specialty Skills lower than d10, and you'll see a lot more General Skills being picked up. The reason for this is that with a higher cut-off point, your Skill Points aren't used up buying lots of Specialty Skills. The main reason to do this is that you have fewer than the average number of players or crew characters, and you can't get enough coverage of key Skills. Thus, you want it to be easier to pick up higher levels in General Skills, and you get a well-rounded crew.

On the other hand, you could end up with too many General Skills when all you really wanted was for them to be more general at higher dice. If that's the case, consider cutting

back on the number of Skill Points you start with at character generation to 14 plus the points spent on Attributes and Traits (so, 56 for Greenhorns, 62 for Veterans, and 68 for Big Damn Heroes.)

Narrower Skills

This variant lowers the cut-off for General Skills to d4. If you go this route, you need to start purchasing Specialty Skills at d6, and this also means that you'll see more experts in narrow fields and fewer well-rounded crew characters. The best reason to do this is if you've got a pretty large group of players or if your campaign doesn't have that many crew in different roles. They could all be smugglers or mercenaries or medical staff at a Skyplex. In situations like this you really want the differentiation that comes from Specialty Skills, making it more likely that players must decide where to invest their Skill Points and what Skills to leave low.

This method can result in fewer Skills overall because most of the points are sunk into picking up Specialty Skills. If all you're looking to do is make characters different from one another in the Skill area, give them 6 more points at character generation than normal. This would have Greenhorns starting at 68 points, Veterans at 74, and Big Damn Heroes at 80. That's a lot of points, so expect a lot of Specialty Skills.

Really Broad or Really Narrow Skills

These two options are the extremes. Think carefully about them before you decide to adopt them.

With Really Broad Skills, there aren't any Specialty Skills. Everybody buys dice in General Skills and they can go as high as you like. You'll have Guns d12 + d4 at the table and Covert d12 + d6. To keep the craziness to a minimum, drop the number of points to spend to 10 points less than normal (52 for Greenhorns, 58 for Veterans, 64 for Big Damn Heroes) or cap the Skill dice at d12 for starting characters.

Really Narrow Skills is the opposite. You're looking at crew who can put dice only into Specialty Skills, starting from d2 onwards. No General Skills at all. Again, if you do this you'll have to adjust the points unless you really want to force crew to remain completely incompetent at a lot of things: Greenhorns 72, Veterans 78, and Big Damn Heroes 84.

So why would you use either of these options? Again, it's about the game and the number of players. It's also about simplicity versus complexity. A quick, gung-ho, balls-to-the-wall *Serenity* campaign with a short but potent list of Skills for each crew character would benefit from the Really Broad option. A more detailed, intrigue-based or realism-heavy campaign with several players taking up very similar roles would require Specialties to be the signifying characteristic. In that instance, you're better off with Really Narrow Skills.

MOVING' RIGHT ALONG

If you've not already absorbed the suggestions in **Chapter One** on creating new crews and establishing relationships between crew characters, you might want to consider going there to apply some of this chapter's new Trait and Skill options to that process. Otherwise, skip ahead to **Chapter Three**, where there's plenty of action and adventure options to read up on and **Chapter Five**, with the focus on storytellin' in the 'Verse. You'll note that the supporting characters and personalities in **Chapter Four** don't have any of these new options included, so feel free to doxy 'em up as you please. So much to tinker with, so little time.

CHAPTER 3

BATTLES & BRAWLS

What's a Big Damn Hero without action? This chapter's all about that very thing—new rules and *jing chai* options giving the crew more to do when shootin', flyin', or holdin' the Serenity Valley against the Alliance. Well, maybe that last bit's already *tian duhn di fu*, but you get the idea. We call it "Battles & Brawls," but the tricks and tips in this chapter can apply to any dramatic situation where the dice are hittin' the table and the crew is geared up for some thrillin' heroics.

ROLLING DICE AND TELLING STORIES

Role playing games are two things wrapped up into one shiny package: exercises in cooperative storytelling and games with rules and outcomes dictated by the arbitrary whimsy of the dice. Might be these register incompatible to some. After all, how can you tell a coherent story with those little polygonal agents of chaos at the helm? The simple answer is not to let dice get in the way. In other words, put 'em in their place.

NARRATING THE ACTION AND DECIPHERING THE DICE

What is the proper place for the dice? That's a judgment call, and different groups have different preferences about that. Generally, games like the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, which are intended to tell stories in the 'Verse and concentrate on role playing characters, do better when groups don't treat the dice as sacrosanct.

This doesn't mean you should ignore results—far from it. A better strategy is to know *when* to roll the dice. Use die rolls to put the outcome in doubt and to increase the tension. If you're going to end up with an anticlimactic outcome or the outcome just plain doesn't matter, don't roll. If there's no real consequence

to failure or no conceivable way a character should be able to fail, don't roll. Just describe what happens.

What if the consequences of a failed roll would end the game? *Maybe* you want the players to roll. Think about why the game would end. Does a big explosion take out most of the crew? Pick up the bones and cross your fingers. What if the players need to find an essential clue to keep the game going? Say they get sidetracked and miss it and spend the rest of the evening doing a whole lot of nothing. In that case, don't bother to roll—just have them find the clue!

Complex actions help you narrate the action with the dice. Suppose some of the crew are stuck in a pit. They'll be able to climb out given enough time. There's no point in calling for standard Athletics rolls and watchin' them fall on their faces repeatedly just to get out. If time's an issue, consider tossing a complex action at them to see if they can work together to get out in time. Each turn in a complex action, have the players describe what they're doing (and them ask them to roll on an appropriate Skill). Perhaps they're trying to use a tree limb as a makeshift ladder—then there's a Craft Skill rather than Athletics.

A great technique's hinted at in the previous paragraph: letting the players narrate as much of the action as they feel up to. If a player succeeds at a roll, let him describe how his crew character does it. Encourage players to invent details that flesh out the world, especially if the hero has an Asset or Complication related to it.

Hopefully you're startin' to get the idea that the players are just as invested in the outcome of this game as you are. And, of course, you might already be wise to this. Truth is, you and the dice don't need to walk 'em through the motions. It's been said by some uncommon talented folk before this, but it bears repeatin'. If the player wants to do something and it's going to move the story forward, either say yes or roll the dice.

BOTCHES

When a player throws a pair of snake eyes, the groans and cussing follow pretty quick. While players tend to see this as failure, Game Masters should look at a botch as an opportunity. Like all opportunities, use it wisely—preferably to make the story more fun for everyone.

Change the Situation

Maybe the hero even succeeds on the action, but at the last second the circumstances change to make the action he took to be a supremely bad idea. For example: Mal throws a punch at a fellow bar patron, but botches the roll. The Game Master rules that the punch lands, doing 1d2 Stun damage, but the target spills his beer all over the feller next to him—an off-duty law officer, who give Mal a look that says he's fixin' for some imminent violence.

Check out the Complications

Does the hero have any Complications that are relevant to this situation? If so, now's the time to trigger them. In fact, now's a good time to turn a Minor Complication into a Major one, if the situation fits. A nicer Game Master won't let that stand for too long, though. Consider it a temporary setback.

Let the Player Narrate the Botch

Your players are perhaps your best source of great ideas. Give the player who rolled the botch the stage—see how far he's willing to *gun* his own hero. If the player is creative and/or ruthless enough (while being appropriate to the situation and, most importantly, making the story more fun for everyone), give him that Plot Point.

EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS

Just like botches, extraordinary successes are an opportunity to change the game for the fun of it. The core rules cover this fairly well, but here are some extra ideas for Game Masters lookin' to do a bit more with excellent dice rolls.

Change the Situation

If a crew character gets an extraordinary success in an attack, give the player the choice to switch out the potential extra damage in favor of describing a small change to the scene, something that gives him or his crew a greater advantage.

Mighty Fast Work

With an extraordinary success, perhaps the character accomplishes the task much quicker than usual, squeezing in an extra action without incurring a multiple action penalty. Keep a right rein on this one, though, just in case it gets abused.

Keep it Quiet

If the crew's trying to sneak around, consider allowing an extraordinary success on an attack, an attempt to pick a lock, or whatever other skullduggery they're up to, just to represent that they did it real quiet like. No need to make the opposition roll their Perception checks; they fail.

Trigger an Asset

If the crew character has a relevant Asset that would be useful in this situation, allow the player to trigger it (free of charge, if Plot Points usually need to be spent to activate it).

CHAPTER 3
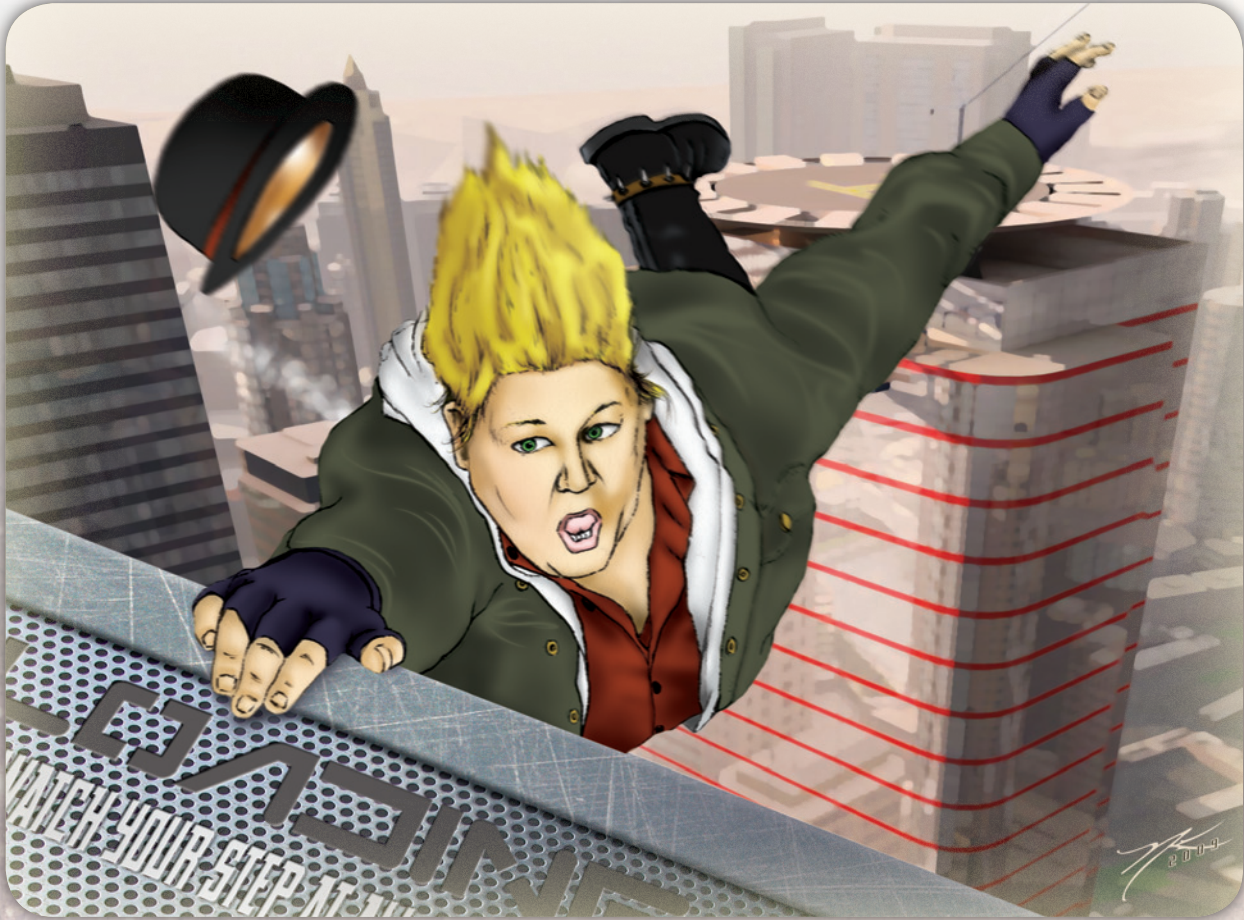
FAILURE IS GOOD

That section heading you just read? Read that again.

It's counterintuitive for a lot of gamers, but failing can make your game better, not only for the crew in general but even for the sorry individual who fails. Many Complications take advantage of this, using misfortune to make the game better for everyone. Here's how.

FAILURE LEADS TO CHARACTER GROWTH

At some point in history, some smart gent said, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." Despite the fact that the person he was talkin' to punched him right in the mouth, it's often true—especially in a role playing game. A character who's had failures, who's had dark moments in his past, is often the most fun

to play. Dramatic failure creates scars, both physical and (more importantly) emotional. Failure gives him something to struggle against, something to overcome. It can also demonstrate his limitations. Maybe he'll be less eager to try whatever it was he failed at next time, and the player comes up with an interesting alternative.

FAILURE LEADS TO UNEXPECTED PLOT TWISTS

Sometimes a failure leads the action in a direction nobody expected. Failing to tail the pickpocket to his fence might instead lead to witnessing a murder. Failing to notice the ambush might result in capture and a conversation with the bandits, which in turn leads to an unexpected alliance. Failing a hurried

Pilot or Technical Engineering roll might lead to getting stranded somewhere, with all the adventures that can come from that.

FAILURE LETS OTHER CHARACTERS STEP UP

Sometimes the second stringer has to get the job done if the go-to guy blows his roll. This enhances tension, encourages characters to be more than one-trick ponies, and spreads around the spotlight some. If the crew's pilot (who never wears his seat belt) fails his Agility roll and flies out of his seat during a violent maneuver, someone else has to grab the stick while the pilot sees to his headache. If the sniper misses his shot, the hostage has to wrestle the kidnapper. If the captain botches his Persuasion roll, the first mate has to convince the pirates to take the cargo and let the crew keep breathin'.

FAILURE IS FUN

Failure leads to some of the most memorable moments in any story. Listen in next time you hear folks talking about their games from days gone by—most often, what they're laughing loud and long about is the time so-and-so botched a vital roll, with hilarity ensuing. Failure stings at the moment it happens, but someday everybody will look back on it and laugh.

TAKIN' TIME AND CUTTIN' CORNERS

Whether somebody's a low-life gun hand or a corporate exec at Blue Sun's home office, everybody uses the same rules in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. When something important needs doing, the dice come out. A little time's spent on it, what needs to be done is done . . . and that somebody either succeeds or he fails.

Now, the *Serenity Role Playing Game* is designed to give most folks a chance at some thrilling heroics, while still keeping even Big Damn Heroes from getting too big for their britches. That's 'cause the dice roll any which way, making it hard to guess whether you'll make the cut or if you'll fall short of the mark. Nobody's immune to rollin' those snake-eyes. And that's how it should be. Sometimes failure leads to a more interesting game.

All that said, though, you might still find yourself in a position where you want the players to succeed at something, but they roll a botch. You don't want to just overrule the dice—you might feel that sets a bad precedent or gives the players the wrong idea. They might wonder why they are they rolling dice if you're just going to decide matters. Or maybe your crewmembers are so sure of themselves they don't want to waste the time to do things up proper. If so, look no further. The optional rules below (and they are *optional* rules—use 'em if you want to use 'em) should help out some.

DO IT RIGHT

If you want to keep the crew limited to what the dice say they can do, but you don't want to make them roll for everything, then this optional rule might fit the bill. When they'd otherwise roll for an action, they can sometimes opt to "Do It Right." This changes the action.

Rolls: Don't have them roll dice. Instead, add up the maximum possible results of the Attribute + Skill they're using.

Timing: The attempt takes three times as long as it normally would. Complex actions take three times as long to make each roll. Characters can't try to Do It Right when they're rushed or under a normal time limit, so they can't use this option in combat unless you decide it's a special occasion.

Plot Points: If the player spends Plot Points to buy bonus dice on a roll where he's Doing It Right, those dice are rolled as normal. (At this

point, we suggest you use the rules for minimum success on bonus dice gained from Plot Points on page 58.)

Aiding Others: Whether it's Direct or Indirect Assistance (See **Chapter Five** in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*), the character's helpful assistants don't roll either. They use their maximum possible results as well.

Degree of Success: It might be apparent that you can't botch a roll if you're Doing It Right, but you can't achieve extraordinary success either. A character just plain fails or succeeds, even if he scored 7 or more points above the Difficulty. If a player wants a shot at an extraordinary success, he's going to need to roll the dice and live with the consequences.

For example, let's say the crew of *Serenity's* having a relaxin' afternoon at Eavesdown Docks, completely unaware that Badger's got plans for 'em later. Kaylee's player figures now's a good a time to adjust that loose hydraulic stabilizer that's been worryin' her, so she asks you if she can take the time to Do It Right. You figure that even if she spends three times as long to fix it, she's still going to be done before Badger's goons show up, so you agree. It's tricky (Hard Difficulty), but still just maintenance, so Kaylee's player takes her d10 Intelligence and d10 Technical Engineering/Maintenance dice, sets 'em down to the maximum, and announces a result of 20. That easily beats the 11 she needed, but even though her result's more than 7 points over the Difficulty, it doesn't count as an extraordinary success. If she was shootin' for that, she should have rolled the bones.

DO IT FAST

Maybe they just don't have their heads screwed on right, but some folk are in such a rush they're willing to chance a slip-shod job. If your crew wants to get done with something quick-like, then this optional rule can help out, so long as they're willing to risk it. This changes the action:

Rolls: Have the player pick up her Attribute + Skill dice like normal, but don't have her roll the Skill die. Instead, she rolls just the Attribute die and adds half the maximum result of her Skill to the total. If the Skill die's a d6, she adds 3; if it's d12, she adds 6. This kind of thing's a switch from the normal probability, mind. Cortex doesn't use flat bonuses, so be aware of how this will flatten that out.

Timing: The attempt takes half the normal amount of time. It still counts as an action just like normal, though, so if a character tries it in combat she won't get a free action out of it. Complex actions take half as long to make each roll.

Plot Points: Have her roll and add bonus dice from Plot Points just like normal.

Aiding Others: Whether it's Direct or Indirect Assistance (See **Chapter Five** in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*), the character's friendly helpers don't roll their Skill dice either. They make their rolls just like she does, rolling their Attribute dice and adding half their maximum Skill dice results.

Degree of Success: Hopefully, the player succeeds on her rolls, but doing a rush job isn't always the brightest idea. She can still achieve extraordinary success like usual (beating the Difficulty by 7 or more), but she can botch more easily, since she's only counting the dice she actually rolls when checking for a botch. For example, if her roll to Do It Fast is d6 (from the Attribute) + 5 (from a d10 Skill), and the d6 rolls a 1, she botches even though her total is 6 (1 + 5). Plot Point bonus dice make it a little harder to botch, since you get to roll them and (if you use the revised rules on page 58) there's a minimum result for bonus dice, but crew shouldn't get cocky. If you Do It Fast, you're much more likely to screw up.

PLOT POINTS

One shiny thing about the *Serenity Role Playing Game* is the use of Plot Points to make sure characters have a shot at success. When the crew

think an action's important or a character wants to alter the story to be more personal—Plot Points are uncommon useful.

Unfortunately, sometimes the Plot Point rules in the *Serenity Role Playing Game* book don't feel like they have enough of a kick. Big Damn Heroes should be getting their money's worth, *dohn ma*? If you want to make sure your crew gets what they deserve out of their Plot Points, you might want to make the following changes. They read like pretty small stuff and may not seem like a big deal, but they make a difference.

BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

A crew character can spend Plot Points after he makes a roll, adding +1 to his total for each Plot Point spent. With this revision he gets even more for buying a bonus die before he makes the roll.

Whenever a character spends Plot Points to buy a bonus die (see **Chapter Five** in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*), whether to add it to a roll or to reduce the damage he takes from an attack, that die now has a minimum result. If the result on the die is less than the number of Plot Points spent on adding the bonus die, round it up to that number. If the Plot Points added two dice

(i.e., he spends 7 Plot Points and gets a d12 + d2 bonus) his Plot Point cost is the minimum total result, not the minimum result on each die.

For example, Mal spends 6 Plot Points to add a d12 on an attack roll against a certain Agent Dobson, who has taken River hostage. If the bonus die comes up showing a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, he ignores that and adds 6 to his total. If it comes up 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12, he adds that to his total. If he spent 8 Plot Points, he adds a d12 + d4, and the combined total of those two dice could not be less than 8. See Table 3.1 for more details.

If your dice all come up 1s, including the bonus die from Plot Points, but your minimum result on the bonus die would push the total up to the Difficulty, then you have what's called a twisted success. You manage to do what you were trying to do, but in the process you introduced some kind of plot twist that makes things a lot more interesting in the Confucian sense.

If your dice all come up 1s and the total doesn't reach the Difficulty, then it's still a botch. Your Game Master may cut you a little slack, but not a heck of a lot.

Table 3.1: Plot Point Bonus Dice

Plot Points Spent	Die Type	Minimum Bonus
1	d2	1
2	d4	2
3	d6	3
4	d8	4
5	d10	5
6	d12	6
7	d12+d2	7
8	d12+d4	8
9	d12+d6	9
10	d12+d8	10
11	d12+d10	11
12	d12+d12	12

FALLING LIKE RAIN

Even if their Plot Points are makin' themselves heard, that won't do much good if the heroes don't have enough to spend. Though this bit here is more like a handful of guidelines than a set of rules, the Game Master should take this to heart like a preacher-man embraces his deity of choice: **Plot Points should fall like rain**. If you notice your crew is running short of Plot Points, check to make sure you're doing the following:

Keep Them Handy

Using coins, candies, poker chips, playing cards, or empty shell casings to represent Plot Points makes it easier to trade them back and forth. If you always make sure to hold some in one hand, you'll remember to hand them out more often. Once it gets to be habit, you'll hardly even realize you're doing it.

Be Generous

Look for opportunities to hand out a few Plot Points, and give the players the benefit of the doubt. Reward even minor appearances of their Complications at least once a session, and more often if the Complications cause major problems. For example, the first time a Crude crew character makes an off-color joke, give him a Plot Point even if the joke doesn't cause him any hardship—just the first time each session, though, or there won't be nothing but cussin' at your table. However, make sure you still reward serious penalties from those Complications. If he later makes an unkind remark that lands him in the middle of a bar-fight, give him two or three more Plot Points. If one of his Relationships (an optional rule presented in **Chapter One**) causes a problem, then treat that like it was a Complication, too.

Remind the Players

Ask the players if they want you to bring their Complications into the plot more often (phobias, enemies, and so on), or if they want to do so themselves. Remind 'em that they can earn Plot Points by inserting Complication-related problems into the story, perhaps the character gives in to addiction just before a big fight, hits on someone even though flirting will land the character in deep water, or by acting so overconfident that she almost gets herself killed.

Inflict Them

Whenever you bring up a crew character's Complication out of the blue or even when you just have to arbitrarily inflict some unfortunate circumstance on somebody, award him a Plot Point or two. This ties into the suggestions for enforcing Complications in **Chapter One**.

Delegate Some

This requires a cooperative crew, who want to have fun more than they want to push the limits of the rules. If everybody's on board with it, give each player two extra Plot Points at the beginning of each session. They can't spend these two on their own actions, but they can award them to another player at any time, for any reason they feel justified in doing so (even if you or other players also hand out a reward for the same thing). This gets everyone involved, but be careful. It might also lead to hurt feelings if one player feels left out 'cause they never earn Plot Points from their crew. Don't let it become a popularity contest. Make sure your group's mature enough to handle it.

FIGHTIN'

Even though you can run a perfectly good bar-brawl or gunfight using the rules as presented in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, you might feel they could use a little tweaking. If you want to avoid carrying over multiple-action penalties and suchlike from one turn to another or if you want to upgrade with a few changes to some of the situational rules to make fights a bit more balanced, then give these options a look-see. They've been tested out in newer versions

of the *Cortex System Role Playing Game* and should be mighty easy to use with the rest of the *Serenity* rules.

MULTIPLE ACTIONS

One way to speed up combat—and keep you from having to carry over step penalties from one turn to the next—is to change the way crew members make more than one action in a turn.

During a tussle, time's divided up into turns, each about three seconds long. In so short a time, there's only so much the crew can do, but they can take a sensible number of multiple actions. The key word here being *sensible*. If they're trying to perform complex computer programming while under fire, sure as hell they're not going to be trying to toss hand grenades at the same time!

When any character makes more than one action in a turn, the first action's always the most controlled, while later ones are raggedy and slap-dash. Each action after the first takes a –1 Skill step. That means his second action is hit by a –1 step and his third's down by a –2 step. Generally

3 actions is a reasonable—sensible—limit. You need to be wary of letting players make any more than that.

Also, if a multiple action penalty reduces a character's Skill die below d0 (the untrained level), he's out of luck. He can't attempt it, 'cause he's so busy with everything else he's doing. Keep in mind that some actions such as running might not require a roll most of the time. In that case, the action still boosts the penalty for any actions a character takes afterward in that turn. You've got to decide if his attempt is hindered in some other way. For example, if you think he's trying to do too much at once, you might reduce the distance he can run by 5' or 10' or make him roll the dice to avoid tripping and falling flat on his face.

If you use these rules, they replace the rules found in the Multiple Actions section of the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. You don't need to declare all your actions at once. Each action's penalty is counted when you make the action and resets every time you get back to the beginning of the Initiative order.

For example, say Captain Reynolds winds up in a bar fight (not such a strange thing). The guy with the pool cue goes first and takes a

swing at Mal, so he dodges. That takes an action, his first of the turn; no step penalty. Mal goes next, and he throws a punch. That's his second action of the turn, so he get a –1 Skill step. The other guy uses his Innate Defense, which isn't an action, so he gets no penalty to his roll. Mal's player decides to take a second swing at the guy, his third action for the turn, with a –2 Skill step. The miscreant dodges this time; that's his second action, so it gets a –1 Skill step. Captain Reynolds might want to make another attack, but you remind his player that he's already made three actions, so he'll have to wait 'til the next turn.

AUTOMATIC WEAPONS

If you want to make automatic weapons a mite easier to use, switch to the following. Any *Serenity Role Playing Game* weapon with autofire can use both the Autofire and Spray options below.

Burst

The attacker fires three bullets using one attack action against one target. The weapon's damage die advances by +1 step. Burst fire counts as one action, but you can't do it more than twice each turn. Called shots can't be bursts. You can't benefit from aiming.

Autofire

Autofire's a single attack roll that uses up a third of the weapon's ammo against a single target. The weapon's damage die gains a +4 step. You can't take any other actions in the same turn as you use autofire, which includes dodging or moving. Autofire can't be used for called shots or benefit from aiming.

Spray

Spray fire uses as many bullets as autofire but directs them at an area roughly 5–10 feet wide, rather than a single target. The attack is a single sustained action. Everybody in the area or who moves through the area until the shooter's next

turn has to defend against the attack. Cover bonuses to Difficulty are halved (rounding up) in the face of spray fire. Any successful hit gains a +2 step to the weapon's damage die. Like autofire, spray fire prevents the shooter from taking any other actions in the turn and can't be used for called shots or gain benefits from aiming.

If the shooter's rendered unconscious, knocked down, disarmed, or otherwise prevented from standing and unloading his weapon, your target area stops being dangerous to enter or move through. This attack reduces visibility penalties by –2, since you're not really targeting anything.

CALLED SHOTS

To bring the rules for called shots in line with the rules for cover and obscured vision, you can swap in this option. In this instance, called shots increase the Difficulty of the attack (adding to the Defense of the target) instead of giving a Skill step reduction to the attacker.

Full Target: In general, you shoot the other feller wherever you can, which probably means the center of body mass. This also applies to targeting something the size of a person, such as a doorway or similar. Normal Difficulty.

Moderate Target: This means targeting a leg, arm, or torso, or an object about the size of a chair. Difficulty of the attack action increases by +4.

Small Target: Attacking a hand, foot, or head, or an object about the size of a book, rifle, or helmet. Difficulty of the attack action increases by +8.

Miniscule Target: Targeting something as small as the heart, kneecap, or eye (or doorknob, whisky glass, etc). Difficulty of the attack action increases by +12.

Called shots to specific body parts cause greater harm. The exact results are up to you, but some suggestions follow:
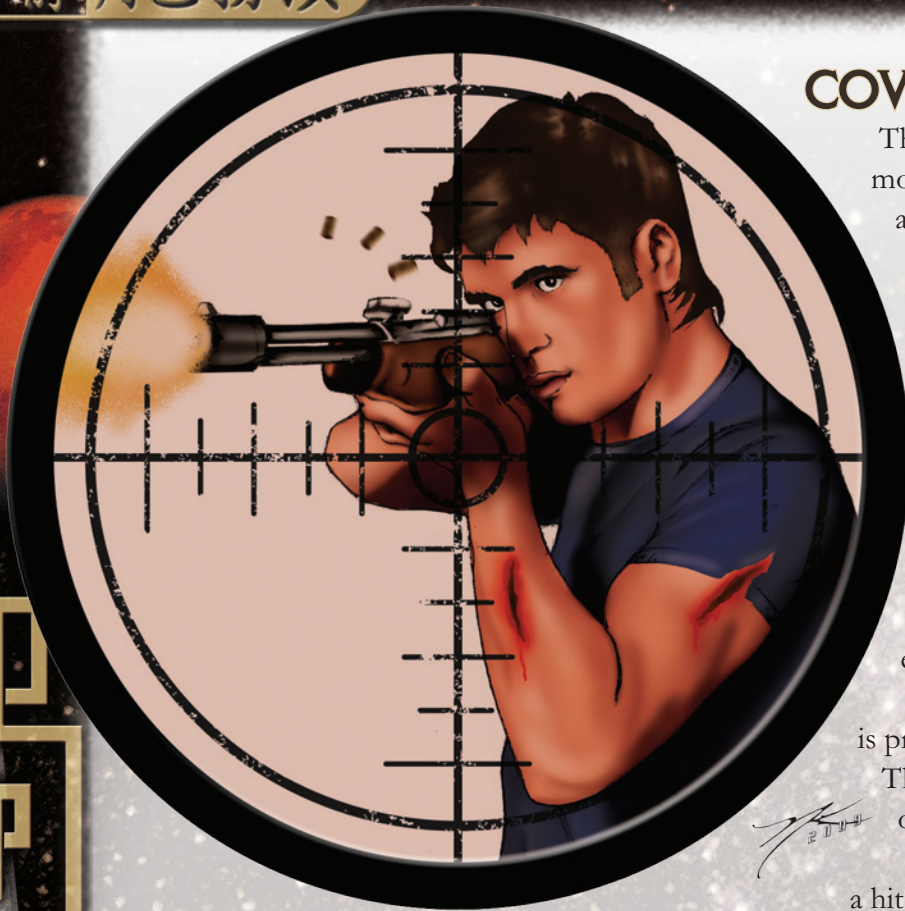
Leg/Arm: The limb is useless, which may reduce or eliminate movement or the ability to take certain actions. The damage should not kill the target outright (reduce the damage or convert it all to Stun).

Torso/Stomach/Back: Target must make an Endurance roll against the attack roll. If it fails, the character is stunned for two turns and cannot take any actions (though Innate Defense is still possible).

Vital Area: Causes additional Wound damage. Increase the attacking weapon's damage die by +1 step and always inflict Wound damage. In addition the target begins bleeding. If you're fighting unarmed, your attack does Basic damage instead of Stun. If you've got the Mean Left Hook Asset, your unarmed attack does Wound damage. No Vital Area is less than a +8 Difficulty (small target), however, and a lot of the time that area's going to be pretty well protected. Word o' warning for those trying to make called shots to the head.

COVER

The cover rules have always used modifiers to the Difficulty of attacks against folk, but they've been ratcheted back a bit to make 'em more fair and to help a bit against grenades and the like.

Light Cover: Up to half the target is covered. This adds +2 to the Difficulty. Remove one die of explosion damage.

Medium Cover: More than half the target is safe. Add +4 to the Difficulty. Drop two dice of explosion damage.

Heavy Cover: Almost all the target is protected. Add +6 to the Difficulty. Three dice of explosion damage are left off.

Total Cover: Target can't be hit. If a hit is possible for some reason (defender is peeking through a hole in a bulkhead) or might do damage anyway (a heavy, but portable, piece of metal could fall on the target), add +16 to the Difficulty. Explosive damage loses 4 dice.

Cover bonuses apply only if you decide that the blocking object's tough enough. Substances that conceal but don't block fully are treated as armor.

Cover bonuses can be avoided by using a called shot. Called shots are possible only against a body part that isn't behind cover. The defense doesn't get the bonus from cover but the Difficulty is still increased by the called shot.

OBSCURED VISION

Like cover, the rules for obscured vision have been modified a bit. These new numbers are more balanced with cover, attacks, and defenses.

Dim Light, Thin Smoke/Fog: +2 Difficulty to all attack actions or attempts to see more than 10 feet (except automatic spray attacks).

Dark, Thick Smoke/Fog: +4 Difficulty to all attack actions or attempts to see more than 10 feet (only +2 for automatic spray attacks).

Pitch Black, Blinded: Make an Alertness + Perception/Hearing (or other sense) roll to locate a target in conditions of zero visibility. The Difficulty's Average for a target who is shouting or making a lot of noise, Hard for anyone talking or making a moderate amount of noise, Heroic for someone not moving or making much noise, and Ridiculous for someone making a stealth roll (the roll must also be higher than the target's stealth roll, if he beats a Ridiculous Difficulty). Success allows the attacker to make an attack on his target. The actual attack action is still affected by poor visibility. Add +4 to the Difficulty of any close combat attack action and +6 to the Difficulty of any attack at range (except automatic spray attacks, which receive only +4 Difficulty instead).

DEALING WITH NON-COMBATANTS

Not all Big Damn Heroes are natural-born killers of men. Simon can barely hold a pistol—and docs aren't supposed to be shooting folk! Kaylee's apt to freeze up when the battle starts.

Most games, like as not, will include a big battle or two. Now, one way to keep the game fun for all is to make sure you include several non-fightin' scenes for the non-fightin' types. That's probably the most common way to keep things even. Create a few challenges that take cunning and brains or social interactions. This means a little planning, though, so be sure that you keep in mind the variety of Skills in your crew. If one player made a Companion character so as she could smooth the way with words and you never let her talk her way out of a fight or into a high-class party, then that player's gonna feel a mite left out.

Another way you can deal with non-combatant crew members is to make sure there are helpful things they can do even during battles. Even if they've never touched a gun in their life, here's a few ways they can get involved:

Skill Use

A character doesn't have to be able to shoot to help out their side in a fight. They can drop boxes from a cargo crane, climb aboard a mule and ram them, release a flood of water, mix up some knockout gas, pump out the O2, or distract the target with a speech on the nature o' mercy. The character might be able to turn the tables or even end the battle all together. Let players bring unusual Skills into play. For example, they might turn their Intelligence + Mechanical Engineering roll into an "attack" with a cunning floor trap. They might use Technical Engineering to make lights go out or flash and blind the baddies, yet leaves the crew unaffected. Animal Handling can be used to send an attack dog into action.

Plot Points

If the crew can't think of something to do with the Skills they have, then let them spend Plot Points to come up with something interesting. Maybe they make a wild shot with a pistol, completely missing their target—but hitting a conduit and causing a shower of sparks that startles the bad guy and makes him misfire. They wouldn't even have to roll an attack, just spend their Plot Points and describe the results.

Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch

Could be that one shot—from either side!—punctured something important and the engine's about to explode. Maybe while the fight is going on, the baddies are also trying to hack into the computer system. Crew not involved in the battle might suddenly discover other, equally important things to do. If they can't keep that hacker out, they might find themselves spaced even if they win the fight against the boarding

party! The doc might need to start surgery before the fightin's done. For more on this, take a look at "A Matter of Drama" sidebar on page 73.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS IN COMBAT

Even if all the crew members get their time to shine in a big battle, you may still have a few questions to answer. What do the supporting characters do? Do the bad guys surrender, run, or fight to the death? Most of the time, the answers should be pretty simple. Not every bandit on a rim world is an evil S.O.B. who wants to kill first and rob corpses later. And in a 'Verse with advanced forensic technology, it may be smart to avoid killing even your worst enemies.

And while it may be easy to forget, try to remind the players that killing's not usually considered heroic. Part of being a Big Damn Hero may be getting into dangerous situations and fighting with folk who genuinely deserve a bullet in the brain-pan, but one thing that separates heroes from Reavers is how they deal with moral quandaries. Even if they can get away with murder, do they really want to?

When you're trying to decide if the miscreants will capture the crew instead of killing 'em or if they'll let themselves be caught (or surrender) before they're killed, here's a couple of factors to consider.

Motivation

What do the supporting characters want and how badly do they want it? A robber might be a bad man with the Complications Greedy and Overconfident, willing to do anything for some platinum. Or he might be a man whose crops failed and who needs to feed his wife and kids. The first guy will probably either fight to the death or run. The second might surrender as soon as he meets real resistance. A smooth talker would probably get through to our family man and talk him down, while he might just piss off the first guy.

Bravery & Cowardice

Even if their Traits don't make them stoic or yellow-bellied, try to decide how much nerve the supporting characters have before you let them all get gunned down. You might consider making morale rolls. If the baddies lose more than half their number, their leader goes down, or something else unfortunate happens (they're greatly outnumbered, the crew start using Big Guns, or their spaceship shows up and threatens to blow a new crater in the landscape), have one or more of them make a Willpower + Discipline/Morale roll against an Average or Hard Difficulty (or against the crew character's Willpower + Intimidation roll). If the baddies fail, they give it up, surrender, or start a fighting retreat.

SHIP BATTLES AND VEHICULAR VIOLENCE

The *Serenity Role Playing Game* has rules for combat involving vehicles and ships and even tricks out the stat blocks for such things with Attributes, Skills, Traits, and the works. However, there's a little more to wrap your pretty head around in some cases when it comes to conflicts involving heavy equipment. Whether you're running a campaign centering on boats with big guns or your crew likes to take on miscreants in armed mules or fighters, here's a convenient summary of how this plays out and some additional information and support for those as have a mind for carnage.

RANGE

When you're running fights involving vehicles, the range scales up accordin' to the size of the vehicles involved. **Chapter Four** of the *Serenity Role Playing Game* lists the distances using the same basic format as ranged combat between fightin' types on the Personal Scale. In a pitched battle, most pilots fixin' to deliver some ruination to their targets aim to keep their boat (or mule, or interceptor) at Short range, which is as much as a mile away on the Vehicle Scale and six miles for spacecraft. Short range keeps some healthy room for evasion and maneuvers, though the up-front and personal nature of Point Blank is beneficial if you're confident (or suicidal).

If the distance slips out further, it's because one ship's trying to get away from the other or because the vehicles are armed with top-class artillery and want to keep out of the range of any fallout.

Range affects attack rolls in the same way as it does on the Personal scale for ranged weapons. Ramming another vehicle is a different story; that's always going to happen at Point Blank and no special benefit is gained for being that close (other than the ability to collide).

VEHICLE ACTIONS

Vehicle actions are handled just like any character action. You don't need to roll for everything, especially if it's a routine movement or a maneuver that the ship or vehicle can make on auto-pilot. A player whose crew character's got some Skill in Pilot or Planetary Vehicles doesn't need you to make his life miserable. Accidental or first-time pilots on the other hand should be ready to face any number of amusin' rolls before they get acclimated.

Most dramatic actions, on the other hand, involve a degree of chance and are important. For these rolls, you'll need to determine the right Attribute and Skill and roll the appropriate dice, adjusted as necessary by Assets or Complications. Have 'em add up the total and compare it to the Difficulty, just like any other action.

When it comes to vehicles, both the pilot (and occasionally other members of the crew) and the vehicle have important roles to play. Most all of the vehicle rolls in the game will use a vehicle's Attribute combined with the pilot's Skill. This represents the training and talent of the pilot in making the vehicle to do what he wants it to do. Some pilots don't have what it takes to use the vessel to its fullest, though, and that's when they're in for some unhappiness.

Control Rolls

A pilot's got to meet some basic requirements to get a ship to do what he wants. A really fast and maneuverable ship can be too much for somebody who's not quick on the uptake. Unless

the pilot's Agility and Alertness are as good as or better than that of the ship, he's going to run into trouble.

If either or both of the pilot's Attributes are below those of the ship, he needs to make what's called a control roll at the beginning of any engagement. This is an opposed Agility + Alertness roll, the pilot versus the ship. No Skill die is added, but bonus dice from Plot Points are added to the rolls. Traits like Born Behind the Wheel can kick up the pilot's Attribute die.

If the operator wins the roll, everything's *jahn!* All actions the pilot makes in that engagement use the vehicle's Attribute + his Skill. If he fails the roll, the vehicle doesn't perform. The vehicle's Attribute is replaced by the pilot's lower Attribute for the remainder of the fight and botches are triggered on any roll that comes up all 1s, all 2s, or any combination, regardless of the total.

Movement

When it comes to spacecraft in the black, changing range relative to another ship normally takes an action. No roll is needed, the craft simple spends sufficient turns to close or retreat.

It takes most vehicles one turn to shift between range categories. Of course, that other ship might not want to let that gap open up.

For engagements between ground vehicles, atmospheric vehicles, or the smallest spacecraft, the process is a bit more complicated. Fast-moving small craft have to match directions and overtake their target or engage in multiple short passes, constantly turning and pulling switchbacks to keep their sights aligned. The small craft pilot's got three choices: move to or remain in short range, evade or leave short range, or not do anything. The first couple of options require actions. The last one doesn't. Ground vehicles can also remain at or evade at point blank range, since there's less chance of overshooting the other vehicle, but the same rules basically apply.

Where both vehicles are at the end of the turn depends on the choices the pilots make. If both vehicles choose stay at short (or point blank) range or one stays and the other does nothing, nobody needs to make rolls for movement. The range is maintained. If both evade, both do nothing, or one evades and the

other does nothing, no rolls are made. The vehicles move one range category apart unless both of them stop moving.

If one pilot tries to close or remain at range, while the other tries to disengage, opposed Agility + Pilot or Planetary Vehicles rolls are made. The winner decides whether or not to move between range categories.

If skirmish range is maintained, the pilots can attack or perform other actions that turn. If an action was devoted to movement, subsequent rolls that turn incur multiple action penalties.

Variant: Speed Class Advantage

Although it's specifically stated in the *Serenity Role Playing Game* that the Speed Class of a ship's only important when it comes to how far a ship can travel and Agility's the key to maneuvering in a dogfight, you might want to have the game reflect more than that. If you decide to go this route, the difference in the Speed Class of the two vehicles maneuvering in combat grants an Attribute step bonus to the faster vehicle's roll, and an Attribute step penalty to the slower craft's roll.

For example, *Rascal Puff* is a heavily modified Bernard Class salvage vessel that rescues folk beyond the Rim. Her pilot, Kim Lu, wants to outrun a Knorr Class light cargo transport overrun by Reavers. *Rascal Puff*'s Speed Class is an ungainly 4, while the Reaver ship has a Speed Class of 5. Kim suffers a –1 Agility step on her roll; the Reaver gains a +1 Agility step. It's not looking so good for the *Rascal Puff*.

Vehicle and Spaceship Initiative

Some vehicles are pretty much just a means to get from one place to another. They don't have any kind of expert systems or sensor guidance. In combat, these vehicles use the pilot or driver's Initiative (Agility + Alertness). Larger vehicles with onboard systems, such as transports, cruisers, and even shuttles, have their own Initiative that's used to determine when the pilot acts. If the pilot has to make a control roll at the beginning of combat and blows it, use the pilot's lower Agility or Alertness (or both).

The easiest way to determine whether to use the ship's Initiative or the pilot's is to look at the vehicle stats. Does the vehicle have the shorthand P and M Attributes? Use the pilot's stats. Does it have a full suite of Attributes? Go with the ship's Initiative. Finally, any vehicle without an Alertness score will use the pilot or driver's Alertness, whether or not it uses the pilot's Agility.

It also goes without saying that if the scene works, let the pilot use the ship's Initiative and the rest of the crew roll their own Initiative for actions they do during the battle. Your ship's doctor don't care whether the ship handles well or not, just whether he can get to the wounded.

Other Actions

All things considered, ship and vehicle combat's not a lot different from straight-up brawls or firefights. Initiative is rolled for each vehicle and actions are conducted in turn order. Reaction rolls are made as needed for defense or in response to actions made against a vehicle.

Any rolls made to do things in vehicle combat use the vehicle's Attribute with the pilot's Skill. Unleashing a ship's cannon as an attack, for example, uses the vehicle's Agility + the crew character's Heavy Weapons (perhaps with an appropriate specialty, like Ship's Cannons). A missile launch might use the vehicle's Alertness + the character's Heavy Weapons or Technical Engineering (depending on the delivery system). Dodging likely uses the vehicle's Agility + the character's Pilot Skill.

Aiming, called shots, sneak attacks, innate defense, dodging, cover, and armor all work more or less the same as in personal combat. Aiming differs in that the vehicles can be moving, but not actively maneuvering (i.e., dodging) while aiming. Disarming, grappling, and blocking can be achieved with grapplers or the use of other defensive systems. Some things, though, need a little more explaining.

Sensors and Scanners

Use the ship's Alertness for most actions involving the active use of the ship's sensors and scanners. Ship's Sensors as a Skill Specialty could fall under Pilot, Technical Engineering, or Planetary Vehicles (for atmospheric craft). Successful use of the ship's sensors (an Average Difficulty, at minimum) could be used to assist in an attack or in countermeasures using the Assisting Action rules in **Chapter Five** of the *Serenity Role Playing Game*.

Defense

All higher scale vessels are Easy targets against lower scale weapons. They can't use innate defense against smaller opponents and can't dodge smaller scale attacks. Shootin' the broad side of a mid-bulk transport ain't difficult. Otherwise, all the standard defensive actions work in ship-to-ship combat. If the pilot takes care of the maneuvering and another crewmember takes control of the weapons systems, multiple action penalties don't take effect. Want some more defensive options? Keep reading.

Escaping Missile Lock

If a fire-and-forget missile attack is successful, the weapon system locks onto the target and races toward it. The target can attempt to break a weapon's lock by out-flying it or tricking it. To out-fly a missile, the pilot must make three Average Agility + Pilot or Planetary Vehicle rolls. The big problem with trying to out-maneuver a missile is that the ship that fired the missile is likely still around and ready to do so again. And again.

To trick a missile, the pilot's going to need some sort of equipment such as jamming frequencies, an anti-missile flare, or chaff. The pilot or some other crewmember engages the countermeasure and makes an Average Intelligence + Pilot, Planetary Vehicle, or Technical Engineering check, depending on the nature of the countermeasures.

Feinting

Feinting might be feasible—call it trick flying or fancy driving—but the other pilot's probably got all the sensors and expert systems you have (or better), so feinting is very difficult. Feinting's best done at Point Blank range, because you'll get the bonus for range to your roll, but this can approach suicidal levels unless the crew has a really good pilot.

To manage a successful feint, the pilot rolls the vehicle's Agility + his Pilot or Planetary Vehicle Skill versus the opposing ship's Alertness + enemy pilot's Pilot or Planetary Vehicle roll. A success gives the feinting pilot a +1 Skill step to his next roll against that opponent, even an action to evade or rabbit. With an extraordinary success the pilot not only gets the +1 step, he ignores the first multiple action penalty on the following turn. That, and you should also throw a Plot Point his way if he describes the maneuver he just pulled off.

DAMAGE

Much as you'd do with a donnybrook or gunfight, attacks made by ships and other armed vehicles inflict Basic damage (attack roll – defense roll), which is divided between Stun and Wound damage (favoring Stun). Usually, the weapon used also adds a damage die. The damage dealt, the range, and any special qualities are listed in the weapon's descriptions.

Vehicles suffer Stun and Wound damage just like characters do, though on their own scale (Vehicle or Spacecraft Scale). Wound damage represents serious problems—missing or destroyed components, ripped heat shielding, punctured containment. Stun damage indicates temporary problems caused by overloads, short-circuits, loss of power, and other such disabilities. Stun damage mostly arises from initial damage and represents stress, sparks flying up from the instrument panels, and so on. Few vehicle weapons, outside specifically designed missile weapon system exceptions, inflict Stun damage only.

CHAPTER 3

Scale and Damage

Big ships and the weapons mounted on them do a lot of damage to smaller ships. This is reflected by the use of scale. One point of damage from a Vehicle Scale weapon does 10 points of Personal Scale damage; one point of damage from a Spacecraft Scale weapon does 100 points of Personal Scale damage or 10 points of Vehicle Scale. On the flip side, it takes 10 points of Personal Scale damage to inflict one point of damage to a Vehicle Scale target. All personal damage is rounded down to the nearest 10 before figuring Vehicle Scale damage; 10, 14, and 18 points of Personal Scale damage all translate to one point of Vehicle Scale damage. Same thing happens between Vehicle Scale damage and Spacecraft Scale damage. Spacecraft pretty much ignore damage from Personal Scale sources. It takes 100 points on the Personal Scale to inflict one point of Spacecraft Scale damage.

It's pretty simple. When moving up scales, multiply the damage caused by 10. Generally, higher scale weapons make a mess of lower scale targets.

Armor

Armor is scaled just like weapons. Vehicle Scale protection rated as 1 W stops 10 Personal Scale points of Wound, one point of Vehicle Scale Wound damage, and is useless (preventing only 1/10 of a point) against Spacecraft Scale Wound damage. It's the factor of ten, once again.

Loss of Integrity

When a vehicle's Wounds are greater than half its Life Points, it takes on a –2 Attribute step to all actions until repairs are affected.

When a vehicle's Wound damage equals or exceeds its Life Points, the pilot (or the mechanic) makes an Endurance (Vitality + Willpower) roll every minute using the vehicle's Attributes. You could justify the mechanic using her own Willpower on the roll if she role plays it right. This reflects the mechanic being stubborn or confident in her ability to hold the ship together. A failure on this roll means the vehicle just stops functioning correctly. The checks start off Easy, but a cumulative +4 is added to the Difficulty on each subsequent roll. "Not functioning correctly" means different things depending on the ship, of course. Typically, a vessel the size of *Serenity* is going to experience one or two critical system breakdowns. For an atmospheric interceptor, it means the thing's gonna drop out of the sky.

When a vehicle's Wound damage reaches twice the vehicle's Life Points, the vehicle is destroyed—in most situations, this occurs in a truly spectacular fashion. The pilot or other crewmembers might survive such a calamity if the vehicle has a safety ejection or escape pod system of some kind, though if it's a space transport you might consider the "destroyed" part to occur after a delay. For pilots of single-crew ships and fighters, an Average Agility + Strength roll gets the pilot out of immediate danger. You might also allow the player to spend a Plot Point to automatically escape from a destroyed vehicle.

Pilots and crew can spend Plot Points to diminish a damage roll against their ship, but this must be done at the time of the attack and they need to come up with a clever explanation of what they did to stave off the wreckage.

If a vehicle's total damage from both Stun and Wounds equals the vehicle's Life Points, the vehicle must make an Average Endurance (Vitality + Willpower) roll. If successful, every turn after that (unless the vehicle is somehow repaired back over its Life Points total) requires another roll with a cumulative +4 to the Difficulty. Failure means a systems crash—the vehicle goes dark.

Going back to the example, *Rascal Puff* is trading cannon fire for a few turns with a Reaver vessel, against Captain Jack Paper's better judgment, and the Reaver ship gets the upper hand. One well-placed warhead from the Reavers puts the total damage equal to the *Rascal Puff's* Life Points.

Captain Jack's player makes a Vitality + Willpower roll (using the *Rascal Puff's* Attributes) against an Average Difficulty and comes up with double 4s—and a result of 8 is a success! *Rascal Puff's* still holding together, at least for one more turn, but her damage control systems are in hysterics. The next turn, Captain Jack must make a Hard Vitality + Willpower roll. If that fails, the crew of the *Puff's* gonna be wishing Jack had paid for escape pods.

Repairs

When vehicles take damage, they need to be repaired—it's that simple. Some ships, especially the larger ones and them as are kept in good repair by wealthy owners, have automated systems. These will put out fires and create emergency work-arounds, such as bulkhead doors sealing off a given sector of a ship to prevent greater damage to the whole ship. Even so, mechanics must do real repairs if the ship's going to be of any further service.

Stun Damage

Stun damage is easily repaired—assuming the mechanic can reach the affected system. You determine how long that takes—the control panel or system could be easily accessible, it could be locked beyond a bulkhead or in a part of the ship that has been vented into space. Time for the mechanic to suit up.

Once the system is accessed, the mechanic (or whoever's filling in her job) makes a repair roll, using Intelligence + Mechanical or Technical Engineering/Repair rolls. Each roll takes at least ten minutes under ideal conditions and is made against a Difficulty equal to the current amount of Stun damage. A success reduces the Stun damage by the difference between the roll result and the Difficulty. A botch causes d2 additional Stun damage instead of doing any repairing. Repairs can be speeded up, but this kicks the Difficulty up by +4 (to reduce each roll to 1 minute) or by +8 (for one of those miracle patch-jobs in the middle of combat). And if that doesn't help, see the next section.

Damage Control

Once per combat scene, a pilot (through last-minute maneuvers) or mechanic (re-routing critical systems) may be able to cut corners and avoid taking Stun damage. Whoever's performing the damage control rolls either the ship's Strength or Willpower die and eliminates that much accumulated Stun.

Wound Damage

Wound damage to a vehicle takes a lot more time and money to repair. Wound damage repair uses complex actions. The time increment is up to you, but it should reflect the severity of the damage. Repairs on atmospheric or ground vehicles should take from ten minutes to an hour per roll. Crew transports and larger ships, such as *Serenity*, need at least an hour if not several hours per roll and repairs are best done in dock. Generally, smaller vessels have shorter time increments. The Threshold of the

Table 3.2—Repair Requirements

Wounds	Difficulty	Parts Needed
1-2	Easy (3)	Few, extremely common parts (sheeting, pipes)
3-4	Average (7)	Common parts (hoses, cables)
5-6	Hard (11)	Common parts, few complex pieces (filters, pumps)
7-8	Formidable (15)	Complex parts (converters, a gimble)
9-10	Heroic (19)	Few specialized components (compression coil, grav boot)
11-14	Incredible (23)	Some specialized components (hull sections)
15-18	Ridiculous (27)	Ship system components (atmospheric engine, scanner array)
19+	Impossible (31)	Entire vital system (pulse engine, bridge)

repair action is directly related to the amount of Wound damage the ship's taken. See the "Repair Requirements" Table for details. The "Repair Requirements" Table also gives you a fair idea of the resources required to effect repairs. You should estimate the supplies needed, but it could be that finding the right parts amounts to an adventure all of its own.

Botched repair rolls just plain make things worse. The vehicle takes a point of Wound damage with each botch. The crew might complicate matters further—a bulkhead door suddenly slams shut and the chamber begins to lose pressure, for example. In that case, depending on how immediate the danger, a number of Plot Points should be awarded.

BIG DAMN BATTLES

Not everyone fought in the Unification War, but those as did will remember it for the rest of their days. When armies march and folk choose sides you can tell some thrilling tales. But the *Serenity Role Playing Game* isn't a miniatures game or even a war-game; it's a role playing game. Tactics and planning are fun, exciting, and dramatic, but rather than playing out every blow of a huge battle person by person—which might take considerable time—use these rules to abstract the conflict so that the details can be decided in terms of story and plot. These rules allow you and your crew the fun of leading armies, choosing tactics, engaging in sprawling melees, and diving once more into the breach without having to roll for every single individual action that takes place.

However, even these might be a bit too heavy on the rules and rolling for some folk. If the outcome of a battle is gonna be decided more by the plot and the actions of the crew than by the soldiers and leaders of the armies, then see the sidebar "A Matter of Drama" later in this chapter. That'll tell you how to deal with a major war even if the crewmembers aren't directly involved, especially if you don't want the outcome to be random.

When there's a war on, here's how you can play it out in a few easy steps:

STEP 1: HIGH NOON, IN THE MIDDLE OF TOWN . . .

First, you gotta know who it is that's fighting who and get all sides prepared. There might be more than two sides in a battle, but each army needs to be defined and have a leader all picked out. The Alertness, Intelligence, and Willpower Attributes, and the Discipline, Covert, and Influence Skills are important qualities for a good leader.

Once you know who's leading each side in a battle, you need to work out how much Integrity each side has. Integrity is to armies what Life Points are to characters. Integrity represents how hard the army is to kill off. However, it's a bit more abstract here, since each point of Integrity represents changes from battle to battle. When units fight each other, they inflict Disruption, just as normal folk inflict Stun and Wound. Here's how it works:

Base Integrity: The smallest or weakest army gets 6 Integrity.

Army Size Bonus: Based on that, each other army gets a proportional number of Integrity. If both armies are the same size, both have 6. If one is twice as big (or is the same size, but has troops twice as well armed!), one has 6 and the other has 12. It's ultimately up to you as to what determines the Integrity of the armies, but quality of gear, amount of training, and number of troops (or ships) should all factor in.

Initiative: Each army gets an Initiative score just as each character does, but in this case it's the leader's Alertness + Discipline/Leadership, rather than Agility + Alertness.

Nobody in Charge: Armies without leaders are pretty much humped; they roll d4 + d4 for everything from Initiative to attacks and defenses.

STEP 2: CHECK YOUR GUN

Once you know your leader, his Integrity, and his Initiative, the leader picks out the Tactics he'll be using for the battle. These don't change during the course of the fight, though the leader might pick new Tactics for different engagements. Armies without leaders don't get to pick Tactics.

Aggressive: Add a +2 Skill step to the leader's attack rolls.

Defensive: Add a +2 Skill step to the leader's defense rolls.

Suicidal: Inflict +1 extra point of Disruption each turn but take +1 extra point of Disruption each turn.

STEP 3: TWENTY PACES! DRAW!

Each turn of a normal fight takes 3 seconds. Each turn of a battle can take anywhere from 3 seconds to 30 seconds for an engagement between ships and up to an hour or even days for protracted trench warfare. You and the crew agree to a time frame and the leaders roll Initiative. Highest goes first.

On his turn, each leader gets to make a single attack. Just like in a normal fight, you pick which Attribute and Skill's most appropriate. Likewise, the defender uses different Attribute and Skill combinations in the face of different attacks. In either case, this is an opportunity for leaders and armies to show some individuality, flavor or style which makes them different from each other. Suggestions include:

Frontal Assault: Willpower + Discipline/Leadership vs. Willpower + Discipline/Morale

Tricky Maneuvers: Intelligence + Covert/Stealth Ops vs. Alertness + Perception/Tactics

Wary Opportunism: Alertness + Discipline/Tactics vs. Alertness + Discipline/Tactics

Remember that some Specialty Skills are found under multiple General Skills, such as Tactics in the above examples. Keep in mind that the goal here's to provide an interesting way to abstract the leader's decisions and the actions of his troops—not to punish him for having a slightly different set of Skills! Let players have some input in picking the appropriate Skills, even though you've got the final say. If they chose the Leadership Specialty instead of the Morale Specialty, then perhaps let those two be interchangeable.

One thing worth noting: normally, Plot Points can't be spent on these rolls. The exception's when the leader is a crew character with the Leadership Asset or a similar Asset that you've decided should apply. If this is the case, he can spend Plot Points on his attack and defense rolls.

After the dice are chosen, each leader rolls and totals his result. Unlike in crew-level combat, the difference between the attack roll and the defense roll doesn't become part of the damage. Instead, if the attacker wins, the defender gains a point of Disruption. If the attacker gets an extraordinary success, the defender takes +2 points of Disruption. If the defender wins, she takes nothing. If she gains an extraordinary success, the attacker takes a point of Disruption instead!

After each leader's had one turn, they can choose to keep fighting, retreat, surrender, or make other special actions. If negotiations break out, those might interrupt the rolls for the larger combat, but the fighting isn't considered over immediately. The battle may keep ragin' round the commanders! Unless one side retreats or both choose to cease fighting, the battle continues until one side has taken an amount of Disruption equal to or greater than its Integrity.

STEP 4: BLOOD ON THE GROUND.

Whether the battle continues to the bitter end or only until one side gives in, what exactly does it mean when an army suffers Disruption?

Well, there are a few possibilities. Disruption can represent dead folk, simple enough. But it can also represent units that got scattered to the wind. They can't fight effectively, but still manage to survive. Soldiers could be captured

A Matter of Drama

Even large scale combat, whether you're talking ground-troops in Serenity Valley or fleet clashes between the Alliance and Reavers, should be about the dramatic, dynamic story you and your players are creating. Unless the action is entirely in the background—and the players only hear about it later or watch from afar—scenes that involve Big Damn Battles should still take the crew into account. Remember, you don't have all the pretty pictures from the silver screen or professional special effects, but you do have the imagination and description to do even better. Only problem is, dice rolls don't always make for the most inspiring descriptions, while randomly rolling to see which space fleet wins a battle might derail the plot if the Reavers eat everyone.

In short, this is the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, not a miniatures wargame or a real-time strategy computer game. For the players, the most important part of any combat comes from the point-of-view of their characters. Massive battles are certainly dramatic, but in a role playing game, they are more plot device than game mechanic. Engagements on such huge scales occur mostly in the background, while the focus remains on the personal level. The same is also true for battles between ships, cruisers, and fighters.

During any large group or spacecraft battle, Game Masters should describe the overall action, but "run" only small scenes at the character's eye level. Imagine Wash and the crew of Serenity trapped between warring Reaver and Alliance special-forces ships. The players succeed if Wash makes his rolls to pilot through the chaos, Kaylee keeps the engines running, Mal can keep everyone on-task. Then, while that is happening, the Game Master could cut to a scene where the Operative has to make Alertness-based rolls to pick out the best targets. If he fails to spot them, his ship will quickly be overwhelmed.

Then zoom out. Stitch these individual scenes together with description of the overall direction of the battle, the dramatic moments where Reaver weapons rip Alliance ships apart or where skilled Alliance interceptor pilots take out key Reaver aggressors. These moments aren't rolled-for directly, but are descriptions based on plot necessity and influenced by the successes or failures of the 'key rolls' that happened in the small scenes. For example, if the Operative spots the right target, describe his ship blowing the Reaver vessel to the hot place. If not, describe his ship being sliced practically in two by a high-energy weapon. Don't bother rolling for the actual attacks or damage.

And then remember to zoom back in to the crew. Don't be afraid to set real and deadly challenges, but be sure that a single failed roll doesn't instantly end the game—or the players' fun! For example, if Wash fails a piloting roll, maybe an EMP blast clips Serenity and knocks out her power. Spiraling out of control is a bad thing, but it gives Wash and Kaylee both a moment to shine, pulling off the most heroic actions of their lives.

It's all a matter of setting-up drama, resolving a few actions, shifting away at appropriate moments to create bite-size cliffhangers, then repeat. Players should be eager to see what happens next, whether this involves their characters or others.

The only time a roll is needed is when something dramatic is about to happen, when there's a real question to be resolved. But remember, don't roll if a failure would ruin the story or the fun. Just let the event happen. If a scene calls for a Reaver vessel to crash headlong into the Operative's ship and destroy it, don't roll for piloting or damage, just let it happen and focus on the Operative's race to his escape pod!

instead of killed or maybe they lost morale and routed. This is a role playing game, so keep the story in mind here.

After the battle is over, decide what the remaining Disruption totals actually mean to each army. If you like, bring the players in on this too, and have them decide the fates of their opponents if they lost at least in general terms. If the players lost, they can narrate that as well. What do the survivors from the losing side do? Even if they can't fight as an army, they might still refuse to surrender and wind up being hunted down, or escaping into the black. There might be pockets of heavy resistance, especially if the crewmembers were involved on the losing side! In fact, a well-known valley became legendary as the result of one particular sergeant refusing to lay down arms.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS: CREW IN THE HOT ZONE.

The point of using these rules for Big Damn Battles is to avoid having to roll for every single attack or action that all have to happen in 3-second turns of combat, acted out in Initiative order—for potentially thousands of troops. But even then, if you want to make a big tussle like a U-War battle go fast, the crewmembers aren't gonna want to sit by and twiddle their thumbs. If you're using these rules, here's how the crew makes a difference.

During Step 3, while leaders are taking their turns whacking at each other with their armies, give the players a chance to act as well, just before their leader rolls. If the leader is a crew character, he doesn't get to participate in this step, since he's busy leadin'!

Ask each player to describe what it is he's doing to help out in the fight. Could be anything from front-line combat to medical aid back in the tents. Then have the player make an appropriate roll, based on his description, against an Average Difficulty. The hotshot on the front lines might roll Agility + Guns/Rifle, the doc might toss Intelligence + Medical Expertise/ Surgery. Each successful roll adds a +1 Skill step to the leader's attack roll for that turn, while each extraordinary success adds a +2 Skill step. Unfortunately, a botch on this roll not only adds nothing to the leader's attempt, but it also inflicts d6 Basic damage on the crewmember. Players can spend Plot Points on their own rolls if they want to do so.

This sort of thing also applies to any combat where you think half the players are just going to end up sittin' there cooling their heels. Pitched ship to ship battle? Sounds like the ideal time for the doctor to step up to the plate. Let the Companion roll for the scanners. Everybody can join in!

CRAFTY CREW

Sometimes, especially if they get themselves involved in a long-runnin' campaign, the crew might find an opportunity to use their Skills to make, build, or design a new piece of gear or even a vehicle. Whether they're strictly practical in their goals or if they're stretchin' for the height of Newtech capability, the rules here might help you when it comes to deciding what exactly the crew can do and how much it's gonna cost 'em.

This section also includes an update to the "Patching Up" rules from **Chapter Five** of the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, clarifying how folk heal on their own without the help a good doctor.

IMPROVING STUFF

One of the first things a ship's engineer is bound to ask is: "Can I make her better?" Or maybe the crew's local gun-nut wants to customize his very favorite gun. Either way, if you want to have some concrete rules to turn to, look no further. There's still plenty of ways you can tweak these to fit what you want to work in your game, but the rules here should cover most things.

Step One

First, you need to figure the cost of the upgrade. For gear, consult the "Newtech" rules in **Chapter Three** of the *Serenity Role Playing Game* and figure out what a new version of the item would cost if the crew just up and spent their platinum on it. If the upgrade is too minor to qualify for Newtech, use the base price of the item as-is. Making the upgrade costs one half (1/2, rounded up) of the difference between the chosen price and the price of the base item (extremely minor upgrades are free). This cost is for spare parts, extra components, and scrap, which the crew can get by disassembling other items, searching a junkyard, buying outright. If they're upgrading a ship, the cost in components is likewise one half the difference in price between ship's new value and the ship's original value (calculated as if it were a brand-new ship in both instances).

Step Two

Second, pick an Attribute and Skill combination, and then call for a complex action. Select a Threshold and tell the crew how much time each roll represents. Usually, Intelligence or Alertness fits the bill, and the Skill is Mechanical or Technical Engineering/ Design (or Construction, or Repair; you can be flexible here). The Threshold should match how complicated you think the process is: minor upgrades without a significant mechanical bonus should probably be Easy; upgrades equivalent to low levels of Newtech should be Average or Hard; more complicated or advanced-Newtech versions would require Heroic or higher. The time per roll for upgrades is usually thirty minutes to two hours or up to twelve hours if working on upgrading a whole spaceship.

Step Three

All that decided, the player doin' the lion's share of the work needs to start making rolls and beat that complex action. Generally, she can receive aid from others on these rolls, but only one crewmember can provide direct assistance.

Any others involved can provide only indirect assistance. It's usually acceptable for significant time to pass between rolls, unless the player is trying to complete the project by a certain time. If she botches twice (resulting in automatic failure), the cost of the components has to be spent again to begin another attempt.

If one of the crew makes his character with the intent to spend a lot of time upgrading equipment or ships, you may want to spend some extra time fleshing out these rules with more specific details. You'll want to consider the quality of available tools or the amount of time the crewmember has. Here's some possible modifiers to these rules, which could be used whole, piecemeal, or modified:

Time

Doubling the amount of time spent per roll allows you to treat the first botch of the attempt as merely a failure.

Tools

Usually, crafting something requires the proper facilities, but you should be lenient for those crafty crewmembers looking as to make minor upgrades. It doesn't take a full machine shop to attach a scope to a rifle! For those using better-than-normal facilities, lower the Threshold by one category to a minimum of Easy. Using inadequate facilities raises the Threshold by one category.

Components

Doubling the cost of the components adds a +2 Skill step to all rolls on the complex action. Spending only half the cost of the components imposes a –2 Skill step to all rolls or makes the upgrade impossible if you decide that the components are too vital to skimp on.

CHAPTER 3

Get Flyin'

If the crew starts out without a ship of their own, these rules can be used to give them a decent shot at putting one together, if you're willing, and if they don't mind having to use a little extra elbow grease to keep her in the air.

Have the players create or select a ship model and find the appropriate price. Chances are that even one half that market price will be beyond their means. If they want to build the ship instead of buying it, they can add the Seen Better Days Complication to lower the cost. As a Minor Complication, the ship's market value drops to one quarter of its original price. Building it halves that again, making the price to build a ship with Seen Better Days [Minor] one-eighth (12.5%) the normal price of a new version.

On the other hand, the crew might be able to get their hands on a complete junker, a wreck of a ship with Seen Better Days [Major] that doesn't even fly. That would cost 5% or less of the original market price (some might even be free, if they can drag it out of the scrap yard). Then they could 'upgrade' it to a ship with only the Minor level of Seen Better Days, meaning it would start working again . . . with a few quirks. In this case, the price of the upgrade would be about 7.5% of the ship's market value. If you're kind, you might round that to 5%, making this the cheapest option—especially because restoring a ship will be easier for a crew to do on their own and might not require a drydock facility if they're lucky!

Putting a ship together themselves or restoring a scrapped hulk can be an incredible opportunity for character development, interaction between crew members, background scenes (see "Scenery" in **Chapter Two** of this book), or even to simply work a bit of personality into the ship itself. Both the crew's intentions and the accidents of construction (in other words, your own whimsy and cruel plot twists!) build quirks, Assets, and Complications into the craft—which may not become apparent until she's out in the black.

Keeping a ship with Seen Better Days flying requires higher maintenance costs, but crafting the ship almost always grants her the Loved Asset, though that would be your call based upon the actions and feelings of the crew. If you want to make the construction of the crew's ship a part of the story, consider running several short adventures and pieces of scenery over the course of the building/repair process. Make certain each crew character is involved in at least one scene so that she can leave her mark on the ship somehow, whether it's purchasing a fancy set of easy chairs for the ship's mess or spending extra time to get the fuel intakes right.

MAKING STUFF

If she fancies herself enough of a grease-monkey to make her stuff better, a Big Damn Hero might be of a mind to build her own gear from the ground up—guns, computers or even spaceships!

Fortunately, the rules for doing so don't need to be a lot more complicated than the rules for upgrading gear. It'll take longer and cost more, though. Follow the same steps as listed in "Improving Stuff" but with these changes:

Cost

The cost of the components when building gear from scratch is one half (1/2) the final market value. As a guideline, you might let relatively normal gear uses a slightly cheaper price. Newtech-quality gear and all spaceships probably shouldn't be discounted further (though see the sidebar **Get Flyin'** for a description of how a new crew might use these rules to build their own ship). Also, if they're building a ship, getting a hold of some of the parts might make a good adventure by itself!

Complex Action

The Threshold of the complex action shouldn't be less than Average, and should be at least Heroic for the construction of a shuttle or vehicle, and at least Incredible for creating a larger ship like a Firefly Class transport. Also, the time spent per roll should range from one to four hours for gear and from one to five 12-hour workdays for a ship.

Tools

When it comes to building gear from scratch, the tools and facilities required are much more substantial. Crafting a gun takes at least enough machinery to shape and bore metal. Building a ship bigger than a shuttle requires at least a small drydock facility. Even crafting a shuttle requires access to power lifters and a crane to raise metal sheeting into position.

PATCHING UP

A few changes to the rules regarding medical attention as they're described in **Chapter Five** of the *Serenity Role Playing Game* may keep Big Damn Heroes alive and kickin' a little longer. In some cases, the following are more for clarification than actual changes.

First Aid

A successful Hard Alertness + Medical Expertise/Specialty roll can stop a character from Dying, this usually comes about in the form of taking extra damage from an extraordinary success on an attack. It also stops the character from having to make Endurance rolls to stay alive if his Wound damage exceeds his Life Points, at least for the time being. Any further damage causes him to begin Dying again, making Endurance rolls every minute until he fails one and passes on. Even when stabilized by first aid, such a badly injured character needs surgery to get On the Mend. Otherwise, he'll remain comatose and probably die eventually. Performing First Aid takes about a minute; the patient need not make Endurance rolls to stay alive until after the attempt is complete and then he only need to roll if the first aid attempt failed.

Reviving the Dead

When someone kicks the bucket by failing an Endurance roll to keep from Dying, you might have a few minutes to bring him back. This takes the same roll and modifiers as first aid, but the Difficulty is Formidable and increases by +2 for each minute the patient has been clinically dead. If successful, the patient gets to make another Endurance roll at the same Difficulty as the one she failed, causing her to die. If she beats that Difficulty, she comes back to life. Unfortunately, she continues Dying (making Endurance rolls at the same increasing Difficulty) until a normal first aid attempt stabilizes her. Crew killed by massive damage (suffering more than twice their Life Points in Wound damage) can't be revived. The doc can't find enough of them to stitch back together.

Surgery

Surgery works as printed in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, but note that patients receiving surgery don't have to keep making Endurance checks to avoid Dying. They're stabilized when surgery begins and continue Dying only if the surgery attempt fails, the surgeon stops for some reason or botches twice.

MOVIN' RIGHT ALONG

Now that you've got a handle on some new tricks with actions, battles, and being beat up, it's time to check out the next chapter. There's whole mess of people your crew might have a powerful need to use these rules on. Take a look back at the first two chapters if you haven't already, as there's a lot of new stuff in there about Traits, Skills, and adding the dramatic flair which should do you right in combat scenes.

Especially if you're going to play around with more ship battles or buildin' things, it's worth your while to pick up a copy of *Six-Shooters and Spaceships*, the sourcebook on guns, gear, mules, transports, and other matters technological.

CHAPTER 4

FOLK IN THE 'VERSE

supporting characters, also known as NPCs or non-player characters, are the characters played by the Game Master. They're not just moving set pieces that bleed. Many are mooks for the heroes (or anti-heroes as the case may be) to take out in order to reach the end goal, that's true. But the 'Verse is filled with a huge variety of folks which is what makes it such an enticing, intriguing, and interesting place. Supporting characters are the people who interact with the crew. These are the people that challenge, terrify, amuse, and change 'em for good or evil.

Mal and his crew meet, interact, and are touched by a lot of folk and you can find many of them in this chapter. They're as important as the boat the crew flies in and the weapons they use to defend themselves. These people all have lives, careers, wants, needs, fears, addictions—everything that makes folk folk. Bringing these crunchy bits into play will make the game you're running much more real and immersive.

ORDINARY FOLK

Though the 'Verse seems like nothing but a big empty space, it's hardly that way at all. Some days it feels like you can't swing a cat without hittin' someone else. This section expands on Fellow Travelers from **Chapter Six** of the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, providing you with a variety of stock characters you can use to populate any town, Skyplex, spaceport, or watering hole. These characters can be brought out as-is or customized for the occasion. Most are presented with at least one dramatic hook if you don't already have a purpose in mind when makin' introductions. This hook defines the supporting character in relation to the crew. Feel free to ignore it if it doesn't make any sense. Not every supporting character needs a dramatic hook: sometimes a bartender is just a bartender.

For your convenience, this section divides supporting characters into four rough categories: *People on the Run*; *People in Trouble*; *People Who Can Help*; and *People Best Avoided*. These aren't cut-and-dried categories, and there's a muddy, muddy line between them you can ignore whenever you see fit. In fact, you're encouraged to read all these supporting characters to see what new plot ideas might percolate.

PEOPLE ON THE RUN

In a classic *Serenity* campaign, the crew's got a space transport, they're looking for work, and they're trying to stay out of trouble. People on the run are the exact sort of trouble the crew should avoid. People like River and Simon Tam. Good people, but often they're coming in fast with a lot of heat on their heels. As they said back on Earth-That-Was, these folk enter from stage left, pursued by Furies.

Gambler

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d10 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d10; **LP** 14

Traits Friends in High Places [m], Friends in Low Places [m], Greedy [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Superstitious [m], Trustworthy Gut [m]

Skills Covert d6/Sleight of Hand d10, Streetwise d10, Influence d6/Barter d8/Conversation d8, Knowledge d4, Perception d6/Gambling d10/Intuition d8

Description He enjoys a game of dice or cards, and it's gotten him into trouble more than once. From high-stakes games with heavy hitters to simple tosses of the dice, the gambler craves the uncertainty of chance. He may be in trouble with nasty customers who need their money back right now or he might know about a "sure thing" and he's looking for a sucker . . . er . . . entrepreneur to bankroll it.

Mnemonic Courier

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d10 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d10; **LP** 16

Traits Cortex Specter [m], Friends in Low Places [m], Leaky Brainpan [m], Total Recall [M], Traumatic Flashes [M]

Skills Athletics d4, Covert d6/Streetwise d8, Discipline d6/Concentration d12 + d2, Influence d4, Knowledge d4, Medical Expertise d6/Neurology d8, Perception d4

Description Long ago (she can't remember when), she realized she looked innocuous to the point where people just didn't notice her. She started work as a courier and then upgraded. Someone cut out a chunk of her brain and replaced it with wetware—a soft drive that stores incredible amounts of mnemonically-stored information. The process works like this: she goes into a room and a trigger is spoken. Her brain turns off and she soaks up recorded information—images, sound, data—to capacity. She wakes up with a headache, and can't access any of what's been stored there. She transports the data where it needs to go. At the other end is another room and another code word, where she unloads everything stored in her head. She wakes up with a nice handful of cash and another headache. All shiny for a time, but now something's gone wrong. Maybe she's got data she shouldn't have or she's accessing when she shouldn't be able to. Either way, she's on the run from people who want like to see her brain emptied and then spattered across a wall.

Office Drone

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d8 **Wil** d6
Init d6 + d6; **LP** 12

Traits Coward [m], Math Whiz [m]

Skills Influence d6/Administration d8/Bureaucracy d10, Knowledge d6, Perception d6/Investigation d8, Technical Engineering d4

Description His job's essential, yet without meaning. He's a paper pusher for a massive organization or political body, such as the Alliance, Iskellian Technology Solutions, Blue Sun, etc. One day he came across a file he shouldn't have seen. Maybe it was misrouted or was accidentally included in a message thread. He grabbed the files and came home from work and threw some things into a suitcase, knowing how his bosses would respond when they found out. Now he's on the run, in possession of information that will make life very difficult for people who would rather not have their private dealings made public.

Reformed Assassin

Agi d10 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d10 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8
Init d12 + d10; **LP** 16

Traits Branded [M], Credo (Renounce Violence) [M], Deadly Enemy [M], Fighting Type [M], Friends in Low Places [m], Intimidatin' Manner [m], Lightnin' Reflexes [M], Things Don't Go Smooth [M], Two-Fisted [M]

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8, Covert d6/Stealth d10/Streetwise d8, Discipline d6/Intimidation d8, Guns d6/Assault Rifles d8/Gunsmithing d8/Machine Guns d8/Pistols d12/Rifles d12 + d2/Shotguns d8/Sniper Rifles d12, Influence d4, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Knives d8, Perception d6/Investigation d8/Sight d10, Tracking d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Martial Art (Wing Chun-style kung fu) d10

Description She once killed people for the Tong, until the day she accidentally took an

innocent life. Wracked with guilt, she swore to renounce violence and never kill again. Atonement was what she sought, so she tried to lose herself in the vastness of the black. Unfortunately, her former employers decided that her knowledge of their activities is too valuable to have her running around loose, and they're eager to close any potential leaks. Now she's forced to take up the ways of violence again, and the crew may get caught in the crossfire.

Runaway Bride or Groom

Agi d6 **Str** d6x **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8
   Init d6 + d6; **LP** 14

Traits Allure [m], Religiosity [m], Soft [m], Superstitious [m]

Skills Artistry d6/Poetry d8, Athletics d6/Riding d8/Running d8, Influence d4, Knowledge d6/Culture d8, Performance d4

Description In some parts of the 'Verse, arranged marriages are still a legitimate means of cementin' alliances between families or even repayin' a debt. This marriage could have been arranged by a traditional Chinese family or one of the fundamentalist sects found throughout the Rim. This young woman wanted no part of her chosen husband, so the night before the wedding she skipped town with nothing but a satchel full of clothing and a meager sum of credits. She'll book any outward passage she can that's affordable or travel as a stow away if the price is beyond her means. There's no reason this supporting character to be female: a feller might just as easily balk at marryin' a stranger or he might be flyin' off somewhere to meet the gal he truly loves.

Urchin

Agi d8 **Str** d4 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6
   Init d8 + d8; **LP** 10

Traits Sweet and Cheerful [m], Little Person (child) [m]

Skills Athletics d4, Covert d6/Stealth d8/Streetwise d8, Influence d6/Persuasion d8, Perception d4

Description She lost her parents early. No relative stepped up to take care of her and she didn't take to the orphanage they put her in. On her own, this kid has scraped by on a combination of pluck and streetwise. Unfortunately, that's not enough. She picked the wrong pocket and now she's in a hurry to get off-planet, fearful of the authorities or the crime boss whose wallet she stole. She's small and quiet enough to sneak onboard most any boat, and light enough that she's not going to show up on most internal sensors.

PEOPLE IN TROUBLE

These folks aren't on the run, but they definitely need help and will look for it in the form of the crew. They may be connected to the crew by old bonds of friendship ("Your old roommate from flight school sends you a letter, asking for your help") or they might simply be willing to pay enough to make the crew take notice. A great method of introducing these sorts of folks is to have the crew inadvertently be partially connected to the reason these folks need help. Maybe the crew stole some medical supplies these people desperately need or something the crew did on a previous job has brought a heap of misery onto one of these poor souls. Now it's up to the crew to make things right.

Note that many folk labled a "he" could just as easily be a "she" and vice versa.

Freelance Pharmacist

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d6
Init d6 + d8; **LP** 12

Traits Branded [m], Friends in Low Places [m], Heavy Tolerance [m], Hooked [M], Highly Educated [m]

Skills Covert d6/Streetwise d10, Guns d4, Influence d4, Knowledge d6, Medical Expertise d6/First Aid d8/Pharmaceuticals d12/Toxicology d8, Perception d4, Scientific Expertise d6/Chemistry d10

Description Working out of a small, concealed lab, maybe even a transport, the freelance pharmacist is an inventor and manufacturer of various drugs. Maybe he's a drug dealer, creating high-end designer hallucinogens or he may even be a philanthropist, developing vaccines, experimental medicines, advanced pharmaceuticals, and other treatments that bypass the Alliance's medical restrictions. The crew may need to find this guy and ask him to develop a new vaccine for an emerging disease strain the Alliance medicrats won't treat. Or he might be offering his services to the crew as a "consultant" in return for protection.

Frontier Schoolmarm

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8
Init d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Allure [m], Highly Educated [m], Non-Fightin' Type [m], Straight Shooter [m]

Skills Artistry d4, Craft d6/Sewing d8, Influence d6, Knowledge d6/Culture d8/History d8/Literature d8/Philosophy d8/Religion d8, Perception d4, Performance d6/Oratory d8

Description Back in the Core worlds, she found she no longer had a purpose in life. Learning computers and the Cortex feed had replaced solid teaching. So she packed a bag and set out for the Border planets, her goal to find a job as a teacher in a settlement. When a job didn't come, she went further out to the Rim to see what she could do there. She's not in teaching for the money, as her parents provide her a nice stipend. Instead, it's the challenge of making a positive difference in the 'Verse. She may need transport or she's already settled and requires assistance. Maybe some in her community don't take kindly to their children learning new-fangled notions. Perhaps one of the crew is an old schoolmate of hers or a former student.

The Kid

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6
Init d8 + d6; **LP** 12

Traits Hero Worship (crew character) [m], Sweet and Cheerful [m]

Skills Artistry d6/Mud Sculpture d8, Knowledge d6/Mudder Lore d8, Perception d4, Performance d6/Singing Folk Songs d8, Survival d4, Unarmed Combat d4

Description Younger than most of the folk who set out on their own, she dreams of something bigger, something grander, and when the crew cross her path, she'll latch onto them, picking one in particular to idolize. She'll volunteer for any job, no matter how menial, just to impress the crew character. This isn't a romantic fixation, more like she wants to be partners. This sort of situation can only lead to trouble, and more'n likely someone unscrupulous is going to put the kid's life at risk.

Miner

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8
Init d6 + d6; **LP** 16

Traits Crude [m], Nature Lover [m]

Skills Guns d4, Mechanical Engineering d6/Mechanical Repairs d8, Scientific Expertise d6/Geosciences d10, Survival d6/Outdoor Life d8/Specific Environment (Underground) d8, Unarmed Combat d4

Description There's gold out there in the Black, as they say, and where there's no gold, there's other useful metals and minerals. Mining has always been hard work—whether done in the depths of a cave or in the vacuum of space—but the rewards can be immense. A miner can be working for himself or in small crews. He could be employed by a massive corporate outfit like the Corone Mining Consortium who

is now set on striking out on his own. He may be a member of the Miner's Guild seeking assistance from the crew in dealing with the CMC. He may hire the crew to transport him to a moon like Haven so he can stake his claim or he may have already discovered the motherlode and needs help defending his claim.

Political Dissident

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8
   Init d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Deadly Enemy [M], Highly Educated [m], Nose for Trouble [M], Twitchy [m]

Skills Artistry d6/Writing d10, Influence d6/ Politics d8, Knowledge d6/History d8/Law d8, Perception d6/Investigation d8, Performance d6/Oratory d8, Technical Engineering d6/ Hacking d10

Description It may have been the news about the Alliance's role in the creation of the Reavers or another of their crimes that turned her into an activist. Now she unearths information the Alliance (or another major organization) wants to keep buried. Worse yet, she intends to broadcast that info to bring them down. The powers-that-be are concerned and would like to have her silenced. She may be a valuable source of information, like Mr. Universe, or she may be desperately in need of allies who'll help her survive and get the word out to the public.

Showman

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d6
   Init d8 + d8; **LP** 12

Traits Forked Tongue [m], Trustworthy Gut [m]

Skills Animal Handling d6/Animal Care d8/Animal Training d8, Influence d6/ Administration d8/Barter d8/Leadership d10/Persuasion d8, Knowledge d4, Perception d6/Empathy d8, Performance d6/Oratory d10/Sleight of Hand d8/Stage Magic d8

Description In the Old West of Earth-That-Was, he'd have been called a snake oil salesman, a purveyor of sham products to unsuspecting rubes. Now he's turned his gift for entertaining into show business. He bought a rusting old transport, spangled it with bright colors, and

staffed it with a small crew of entertainers, festival rides, animals, and other curiosities. He brings this traveling show to the small towns and settlements out on the Border and the Rim, a welcome sight for those rural folks accustomed to dreary lives of hardship. Such a show is always cash-strapped and usually on the edge of some kind of trouble. Maybe the crew can help transport the show or fill in for injured or sick entertainers.

PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP

Not everyone in the 'Verse is out to get you, though it might sometimes seem that way. This is a selection of folk who might be turned to in a time of want, whether to lend a hand in a rough scrape, supply some much-needed shelter or offer some other skill set not covered by the crew. Any of these might be an old friend, a former business partner, or just a stranger willing to lend a hand, especially if the price is agreeable.

Freelance Cortex Reporter

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8
   Init d8 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Cortex Specter [m], Ego Signature [m], Highly Educated [m], Overconfident [m]

Skills Artistry d6/Writing d8, Covert d6/ Streetwise d10, Influence d6/Politics d8, Knowledge d6, Perception d6/Investigation d10/Search d8, Technical Engineering d6/ Hacking d8

Description Though the Alliance has locked down the news media and floods the infosphere with propaganda, there are places you can go on the Cortex feed that'll give you the straight news about what's really happening in the 'Verse. Unlike Mr. Universe, content to watch passively and sell info when it amuses him, the freelance Cortex feed reporter is out there in the field, discovering the covered-up and revealing the truth.

Lawyer

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d6
Init d6 + d8; **LP** 12

Traits Coward [m], Highly Educated [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Non-Fightin' Type [m], Overconfident [m]

Skills Influence d6/Bureaucracy d8/ Conversation d8/Interrogation d8/Persuasion d10, Knowledge d6/Law d10, Perception d6/ Deduction d8/Investigation d8, Performance d6/Oratory d8

Description No matter where you go, one thing's certain: folk's will get to disagreein' in a legal fashion. If it don't come to gunplay (and even sometimes if it does) there'll be lawyers involved. This gent is extremely knowledgable on the Alliance law. He's familiar with how it's practiced and applied out in the sometimes lawless Rim. Whether he's an honest and plain-speaking country lawyer or a strange hybrid of accountant and shark, this lawyer puts his clients first. He is better as an ally than an enemy.

Security Consultant

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d10 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8
Init d8 + d10; **LP** 14

Traits Allure [m], Amorous [m], Cortex Specter [M], Deadly Enemy [m], Ego Signature [m], Friends in High Places [m], Friends in Low Places [m], Greedy [m], Memorable [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Non-Fightin' Type [m], Overconfident [m]

Skills Athletics d4, Covert d6/Disable Devices d8/Forgery d8/Open Locks d8/Sabotage d12/Streetwise d10, Influence d6/ Conversation d8/Persuasion d8/Seduction d8, Knowledge d6/Appraisal d8/Law d8/ Philosophy d8, Perception d6/Intuition d8/ Search d8/Tactics d10, Technical Engineering d6/Computer Programming d12 + d2/ Electronics d12/Hacking d12 + d2

Description Once she worked corporate security. When she realized the money she could make on the open market, she left to become a consultant. She used her contacts and skills to erase her old identity and now she's remade anew. Her clients are of two sorts: those who need help breaking into a computer system and those who need to keep folks like those others out. She claims she'll never take a job where she's on both sides of that equation—conflict of interest and all that—but she uses so many false identities and proxies that no one can be sure if she's playing both sides.

Shipyard Mechanic

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d6
Init d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Crude [m], Mechanical Empathy [m]

Skills Mechanical Engineering d6/Create Mechanical Device d8/Mechanical Repairs d10/Ship Design d8, Perception d6, Pilot d4, Planetary Vehicles d4, Technical Engineering d6/Electronics d10/Repair Electrical Systems d8

Description He's not as much a peach as *Serenity's* mechanic Kaylee Frye, but he's a good shipyard mechanic and as such is an indispensable ally in any port of call. Sometimes systems break down in the Black and can't be fixed nowhere except on land or within the vac-dock of a Skyplex. Treat him right, and he'll do right by you.

Trail Hand

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6
Init d8 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Loyal (Landowner) [m], Nature Lover [m]

Skills Animal Handling d6/Riding d10, Guns d6/ Pistols d8/Rifles d10, Perception d4, Survival d6/Foraging d8/Outdoor Life d10/Tracking d10, Unarmed Combat d4

Description He grew up in the Rim territories, where it made sense to sign on with the biggest rancher in the area. The job should have been simple: camp in the brush and herd the cattle. Then he got asked to ride along with the trail boss on a deal. Turned out the deal wasn't particularly legit and, of course, it went bad. People got killed, and now he's the only witness.

He lit out of there and is camping in the brush, figurin' rightly that the trail boss has pinned the whole thing on him.

Translator

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8 **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Combat Paralysis [m], Natural Linguist [m], Reader [m], Traumatic Flashes [m]

Skills Discipline d4, Influence d6/Conversation d10/Interpretation d10/Persuasion d8, Knowledge d6/Culture d8/Language (Chinese) d12/Language (Farsi) d8/ Language (Hindi) d8/Language (Russian) d10/Language (Spanish) d10, Perception d6/Hearing d10/ Read Lips d8

Description He's got an almost supernatural propensity for learning the lingo of any culture he's comes across. As such, he figured that there was good money in translation services. Though there are many technological methods of translating via Cortex stream, he specializes in interpreting for customers who prefer their business remain off the record. He's unaware that he's actually a low-grade psychic, a Reader able to pick up on more'n just spoken words.

Unemployed Pilot

Agi 8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d10 **Int** d8 **Wil** d6 **Init** d8 + d10; **LP** 12

Traits Born Behind the Wheel [m], Dead Broke [m], Hooked [m], Military Rank (Veteran) [m]

Skills Guns d4, Mechanical Engineering d6/ Mechanical Repairs d8, Perception d6/ Sight d8, Pilot d6/Astrogation d8/Mid-bulk Transports d8, Technical Engineering d6/ Communications Systems d8/Electronics d8

Description Some years back she flew transit missions for the Alliance. She shuttled materiel to Alliance forces on the front lines of the War for Unification. After Independence forces shot down her boat, she was captured and hospitalized. As she healed, she realized she wasn't too fond of the Alliance's position in the

war and sympathized with the Independent faction. She was ready to switch sides when the battle of Serenity Valley put an end to the war. She received a medal for serving time as a P.O.W. and mustered out as rapidly as she was able. Now she's looking for work—any work—as a pilot, hopefully for a captain she feels good about.

Weapons Dealer

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d10 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d10; **LP** 14

Traits Branded [m], Friends in High Places [m], Friends in Low Places [m], Greedy [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Stingy [m], Twitchy [m]

Skills Covert d6/Forgery d8/Open Locks d8/ Streetwise d10, Guns d6/Gunsmithing d10/ Pistols d8, Heavy Weapons d4, Influence d6/ Barter d10, Perception d4

Description When you are in the mood to cause the bad guys some hurt, this is the guy that can provide the fire power. He never steals. He acquires. He may have come across a few cases of Hoglegs that happened to fall off the back of a freighter in a docking bay or a shipment of grenades that were misplaced in transit. Or it could be that the antiaircraft gun he's sellin' was used only once by a little old lady on Persephone. Whatever the case, this weapons' dealer is a no-nonsense kind of fellow. He deals only in cash and only with people he trusts. In addition to his caches of regular wares, he can lay hands on more advanced ordnance, including major artillery, for enough credits. He might even be willing to barter, if you've got something shiny to trade.

PEOPLE BEST AVOIDED

Even the black is sometimes not big enough or dark enough to avoid the folks listed in this section. The 'Verse being the place it is, more'n likely a crew is going to be runnin' into one or more of these dastardly customers. These supporting characters exist primarily to make life hell for the crew, whether through malice, part of a job, or simple dumb luck.

Alliance Investigator

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Loyal (Alliance) [m], Wears a Badge [M]

Skills Covert d6/Stealth d8, Guns d6/ Pistols d10, Influence d6/Conversation d8/Interrogation d10/Intimidation d10/ Persuasion d8, Knowledge d6/Appraisal d8/ History d8/Law d8, Perception d6/Deduction d10/Investigation d10, Planetary Vehicles d6, Unarmed Combat d4

Description Unlike the Operative, the Alliance investigator is nowhere near as deadly. She's simply a troubleshooter, armed with a badge and the proverbial "mop and bucket", trying to find out why things went wrong. She doesn't act on her findings: that's for someone with more clearance and authority. She works within the Alliance's hierarchy, and is usually kept in the dark about the big picture she's investigating.

Boozy Old Browncoat

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6 **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 18

Traits Chip on the Shoulder [m], Hooked (Alcohol) [M], Mean Left Hook [m], Military Rank (Veteran) [m], Prejudice (Alliance) [m], Tough as Nails [M]

Skills Guns d6/Assault Rifles d8/Grenade Launcher d8 /Pistols d8, Heavy Weapons d6/Artillery d8/Vehicle Mounted Guns d8, Planetary Vehicles d6/Military Vehicles d8, Survival d6/Outdoor Life d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d10

Description The spirit of Independence burns forever, just like the cheap rotgut this old soldier's pickled himself in. He didn't take to the Unification, and now he sits and stews, his brown coat stained with spilled booze. If an Alliance officer walks by, he keeps his head down, but he'll find his spine whenever he thinks he's among Independents. If someone's trying to keep a low profile, the last thing they want is this guy, reeking of a week-long bender, stumbling into the middle of things and mumbling how the Independents will rise

again. He may know one of the crew (if any Browncoats are among them) or maybe he's just a drunk with a big mouth.

Customs Official

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8
Init d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Greedy [m], Intimidatin' Manner [m], Loyal (Alliance) [m], Wears a Badge [m]

Skills Discipline d6/Interrogation d8/Intimidation d8, Guns d4, Influence d6/Administration d8/Bureaucracy d8, Knowledge d6/Law d8, Perception d6/Investigation d10/Search d12/Sight d8

Description Assigned to an Alliance-controlled Skyplex, her job is to screen out the riffraff from the honest citizens. She views herself as the station's last line of defense and takes that role with grave seriousness. When a ramshackle boat with a scruffy crew disembarks and seeks to do business, she's the one who gets to decide whether to let them through or rummage their personal possessions. She is by-the-book and if she so much as smells trouble, she'll be on the horn to her superiors. Don't even think of trying to offer her a bribe! She may have a team capable of running molecular-level scans on cargo (and crew) or it may be just her and a databoard. Either way, she's Alliance, and that's enough to worry about.

Frontier Judge

Agi d4 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8
Init d4 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Credo [m], Friends in High Places [m], Non-Fightin' Type [m], Portly [m], Wears a Badge [M]

Skills Discipline d6/Interrogation d8/Intimidation d8, Influence d6/Administration d8/Politics d8, Knowledge d6/History d10/Law d10, Perception d6/Deduction d8/Investigation d8, Performance d6/Oratory d10

Description Traveling a never-ending circuit of the Rim planets, the frontier judge passes sentence on the usual assortment of reprobates, scoundrels, thugs, and outright crooks captured in communities too small to maintain a court. His routine is the same every time: land, check with constabulary for any cases on the docket, and render judgment. Sometimes he listens to the case for the defense, but most times not. The miscreant's been arrested, right? He must be guilty. This judge doesn't like to see repeat offenders back in his courtrooom so no matter what the charge, his sentence is usually lifetime confinement or death.

Reaver Victim

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8
Init d6 + d6; **LP** 20

Traits Intimidatin' Manner [m], Leaky Brainpan [m], Tough as Nails [M], Traumatic Flashes [m], Ugly as Sin [m]

Skills Athletics d4, Covert d4, Discipline d6, Mechanical Engineering d4, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Knives d8, Perception d4, Unarmed Combat d4

Description The doctors said it was a miracle he was alive, but if there's a better term for hell, he's unfamiliar with it. When the Reavers landed and tore up the settlement he lived in, he was the sole survivor . . . mutilated and damaged so badly even the Reavers mistook him for dead. He suffered beyond anything a sane man can imagine, and saw worse done to his family and neighbors. Doctors patched him up as best they could, but some of the scars still show. He shut down emotionally, enough to pass their evaluation, and now that he's out of the hospital he's ready to inflict his pain on someone else. He wants to take his fight to Reavers, but if they're not around, could be he'll inflict his pain on anyone convenient. Trouble with him is, he seems normal . . .

CHAPTER 4

NOT-SO-ORDINARY FOLK

Below are a series of named characters from the 'Verse. Some of them are dead by the time Captain Reynolds and his crew take care of that little problem with Miranda and the Operative. However, that doesn't mean they can't be used in some way in a *Serenity* campaign. It all depends on the timing of the campaign and what you do with them. Your character could be Rance Burgess's brother out for revenge on those responsible for his death. The 'Verse is wide and vast and its inhabitants are here for your amusement.

And don't forget the Golden Rule of tellin' stories. If you want to use a named character that died in the movie, you can still use him. It's shiny. Rumors of the character's death were greatly exaggerated. Or in your story's time line the character escaped death by inches. All of these characters are here for the enrichment of your story and your crew. If you have a player who's a real stickler for the "true story," just change the name of the character in question. Your players may meet a small time crime boss who talks with a Cockney accent named Woodchuck.

Badger

Small Time Mobster with Delusions of Grandeur
Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d10 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8
Init d6 + d10; **LP** 14
Traits Branded [m], Cortex Specter [M], Coward [m], Filcher [m], Friends in High Places [m], Friends in Low Places [m], Greedy [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Non-Fightin' Type [m], Stingy [m], Superstitious [m]
Skills Covert d6/Forgery d8/Sleight of Hand d8/Streetwise d10, Guns d4, Influence d6/Administration d8/Intimidation d8/Leadership d8/Persuasion d8, Knowledge d6/Appraisal d10/History d8/Law d8, Perception d6/Deduction d8/Search d8, Planetary Vehicles d4

Description Badger is "an honest businessman" from the moon-planet Persephone. He speaks with a Cockney accent and is one of the underworld contacts for the crew of *Serenity*. Always in it for himself, Badger once refused to pay for cargo he commissioned the crew to retrieve because it had the Alliance mark on it, making it traceable. Despite the frequent disagreements between *Serenity's* crew and Badger, Mal still does business with them on a regular basis.

While Badger's clearly a small time criminal, he considers himself a businessman who is merely meeting demand with supply. To this end, Badger is willing to cut Reynolds in on deals when it is in Badger's own best interest—especially when Mal can go places Badger not. Badger is mostly consistent with the pay and the crew of *Serenity* will continue to work with him if the money is right.

Quote "I'm very sorry. Did I give you the impression that I was asking?"

Story Uses Badger is good as a fence, for finding jobs, or for forcing a job on the crew. He will pay up—eventually—but he makes things as uncomfortable as possible to keep people off their game. Don't be afraid to have him betray the crew if they mess up, bring back marked goods, or set off Alliance alarms.

Bester

No-Good Ship Mechanic
Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6
Init d8 + d6; **LP** 14
Traits Allure [m], Amorous [m], Athlete [m], Overconfident [m]
Skills Athletics d6, Guns d4, Influence d6/Persuasion d8/Seduction d8, Mechanical Engineering d6/Fix Mechanical Systems d8/Machinery Maintenance d8, Perception d4, Pilot d6/Mid-Bulk Transports d8, Planetary Vehicles d6/Ground Vehicle Repair d10, Technical Engineering d6/Electronics d8/Technical Repair d8, Unarmed Combat d4
Description The original engine mechanic for Serenity, Bester is more of a lady's man than mechanic. Malcolm Reynolds discovered this

after interrupting Bester and Kaylee getting well acquainted in the engine room. Mal was more concerned with Bester was doing Kaylee and not his job and demanded to know how long it would take to get Serenity up and running again. When Bester stated that the Serenity's engine was too broken to fix immediately, Kaylee disagreed and quickly repaired the engine in front of both men. Mal hired Kaylee right then to replace Bester, leaving Bester stranded.

Quote "No can do, Cap'n. Secondary grav boot's shot."

Story Uses Most likely, this guy is in trouble. He has some skills as a mechanic and would be good in a pinch, but his eye for the ladies will get him in trouble every time. He might hire the crew to find something or beg to be a passenger on the boat to get away from a jealous husband or boyfriend or angry father or betrayed lover.

Sheriff Bourne

Conflicted Lawman

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Good Name [m], Leadership [m], Loyal [m], Straight Shooter [m], Wears a Badge [m]

Skills Animal Handling d6/Riding d8, Athletics d4, Guns d6/Pistols d10/Rifles d10/Shotguns d8, Influence d8/Interrogation d8/Leadership d8/Streetwise d8, Knowledge d6/Planet (Regina) d8, Law d8, Melee Weapon Combat d4, Perception d6/Deduction d8/Investigation d8/Surveillance d8, Planetary Vehicles d6/Horse-Drawn Conveyances d8/Hovercraft d8, Survival d6/Land Survival d8/Nature d8/Tracking d8, Unarmed Combat d4

Description The Sheriff of Paradiso, a mining town on Regina, Bourne is a good man in a bad situation. He had a town full of sick people and a train robbed of its much-needed medicine. He questioned Mal and Zoe who were left behind on the train after the robbery. He didn't buy their story about being newlyweds and wasn't surprised when Inara showed up to collect her indentured servants. He let Mal and Zoe go,

but when the crew of *Serenity* tried to return the stolen medicine to Paradiso, Sheriff Bourne was there waiting for 'em. A smart man, Sheriff Bourne figured that even with Inara's involvement, Mal and Zoe's story smelled too off to be right and he kept watch on them. A just man as well as a smart one, Sheriff Bourne allowed the Serenity crew to go free since they did bring the medicine back once they realized people were suffering without the medicine.

Quote "Sometimes, people get mixed up things when they don't have all the details. But, once they have the details, I figure, then they have a choice."

Story Uses This is a man who understands that sometimes you need to do bad things in the name of good. Or, you have to deal with a bigger bad by using the lesser of two evils. He'd be a man to hire a mercenary crew to help him get back something his town needed or to help protect his town from thugs. He may not like having to work with scoundrels, but he's a realist. Life is tough on the Border planets.

Rance Burgess

Big Man in Town

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Friends in High Places [m], Good Name [m], Leadership [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Overconfident [m], Prejudice (Prostitutes) [m]

Skills Animal Handling d6/Riding d8, Athletics d4, Guns d6/Energy Weapons d10, Influence d6/Administration d8/Bureaucracy d8/Leadership d8, Knowledge d6, Medical Expertise d2, Perception d4, Planetary Vehicles d6/Hovercraft d8, Unarmed Combat d4

Description Rance Burgess was a misogynistic rancher who waged war against a brothel to take back the son he fathered with one of the working girls , Petaline. The brothel belonged to Nandi, a former Companion and a friend of Inara. Rance Burgess was described as the planet's richest man, somebody who made a hobby of keeping everyone else poor so he could continue to be king of the mountain.

He kept people under his control in the most violent and degrading ways possible. Inara and Nandi hired the Serenity crew to help with the situation. Mal agreed to the contract despite being opposed to Inara and Nandi's professional trades. Rance and his minions lost the battle. Petaline shot and killed Rance Burgess and saved her child.

Quote "Now, Chari here, she understands a whore's place, don't she? But Nandi and those others, they spit on our town! They've no respect for the sanctity of fatherhood, or... decency, or family! They have my child held hostage to their decadent ways and that I will not abide. We will show them what power is! We will show them what their position in this town is! Let us all remember, right here and now, what a woman is to a man!"

Story Uses The perfect villain in any caper, Rance has stolen something or kidnapped someone or is just being despicable. Beating him is the goal, no matter what the job is.

Chari

Ranch-Style Prostitute

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6 **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 12

Traits Allure [m], Forked Tongue [m]

Skills Covert d4, Craft d4, Influence d6/ Conversation d8/Seduction d8, Perception d4, Performance d2, Unarmed Combat d2

Description Chari was a prostitute for Nandi's brothel. A petty, ambitious woman, she was also a spy for Rance Burgess. She told him everything she knew about the brothel's defenses, including the hiring of the *Serenity* crew, even while Rance humiliated her in front of his men. She continued to help him during the fight and sneaked him into the brothel to steal his son. After Rance was killed and the brothel was safe, Chari was turned out from the brothel to ply her trade as best she could among Rance's surviving men.

Quote "I'm ready. What do you want me to do?"

Story Uses This supporting character can go two ways. She could go worse into betrayal, playing the damsel-in-distress to lead the crew into danger to get what she wants. Or, she could be the woman seeking redemption for her betrayal of Nandi and the others of the ranch.

Dr. Caron

Rescue Doc

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8 **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Combat Paralysis [m], Cortex Specter (posthumous) [M], Good Name (when alive) [m], Highly Educated [m], Loyal [m]

Skills Influence d6/Administration d10/ Counseling d10/Leadership d8, Knowledge d6/Cultures d8/History d8, Medical Expertise d6/Forensics d8/Neurology d10/Pharmaceuticals d10/Psychiatry d8/ Toxicology d8, Perception d6/Deduction d8/ Investigation d8, Scientific Expertise d6/Life Sciences d10, Technical Engineering d6/ Communications Systems d8

Description Dr. Caron was a member of the medical rescue team that investigated Miranda and the sudden deaths of the planet's thirty million strong population of colonists. Once on the planet, her team discovered that the chemical, Pax, which was put in the air supply to keep the population calm, was the cause of 99% of the population's death. The other 1% of the people became violent, animalistic beings that the rest of the universe now knows as "Reavers." She was the last survivor of the crew and her final message revealing the truth about the Pax was recorded as she tried to commit suicide before the out-of-control Pax survivors broke into her ship and murdered her. Dr. Caron's confession and her final screams of agony were heard on the recording that Mal broadcast from Mr. Universe's home base for the 'Verse to hear.

Quote "The people here stopped fighting. And then they stopped everything else. They stopped going to work, they stopped breeding, talking, eating. There's thirty million people here, and they all just let themselves die."

Story Uses This supporting character died years ago, but parents or friends of the crew could have known her. Maybe she has a grown child

who would like the crew to do a job for him. Or, if the campaign is set that long ago, she could have had hired the crew themselves to do escort duty.

Crow

Crime Lord's Muscle

Agi d10 **Str** d12 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6 **Init** d10 + d6; **LP** 20

Traits Branded [m], Chip on the Shoulder [m], Ego Signature (only uses blades) [m], Fightin' Type [M], Intimidatin' Manner [m], Loyal (Niska) [m], Mean Left Hook [m], Memorable [m], Sadistic [M], Tough as Nails [M]

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8/Weight Lifting d10, Covert d4, Discipline d6/Interrogation d8/Intimidation d10, Linguist d6/Russian d8, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Knives d12, Perception d4, Ranged Weapons d6/Throwing Knives d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d10

Description Crow was a large man of many tattoos and few words. He was Adelei Niska's main muscle and enforcer of all business deals. When Malcolm and his crew failed to hold up their end of a deal, Niska sent Crow after them to collect the debt in blood. Crow was unflinchingly loyal to Niska. When Mal tried to give back the crime lord's money to make the debt even, Crow refused to take it and continued to threaten the lives of Mal's crew. Seeing that Crow wasn't the type to be reasoned with, Mal kicked him into *Serenity's* engine intake, killing him.

Quote "Keep the money. Use it to buy a funeral. It don't matter where you go or how far you fly – I will hunt you down, and the last thing you see will be my blade."

Story Uses This guy was a dumb thug, but a skilled thug. He threatened when he should have bargained. However, big dumb dangerous minions are fun to have around. Good cannon fodder.

Lawrence Dobson

Undercover Alliance Agent

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Nose for Trouble [m], Things Don't Go Smooth [m], Wears a Badge [m]

Skills Covert d6/Disable Devices d8/Infiltration d8/Open Locks d8/Sabotage d8/Stealth d8/Streetwise d8/Surveillance d10, Discipline d4, Guns d6/Pistols d8/Rifles d8, Influence d6/Persuasion d8, Knowledge d2, Perception d6/Deduction d8/Investigation d8/Tracking d8, Planetary Vehicles d6/Cars d8/Hovercraft d8, Survival d4, Technical Engineering d6/Communications Systems d8/Hacking d8/Technical Security Systems d8, Unarmed Combat d2

Gear After being shot and left for dead by Mal Reynolds, Dobson was fitted with an ocular implant that gives him the Sharp Sense (Sight) [m] Trait, shortens all range increments by 1 step, and provides night-vision enough to offset the penalty for darkness. It also gives Dobson the Marked [m] Trait, being quite distinctive.

Description Once an undercover Alliance agent looking for Simon and River Tam, Lawrence Dobson decided to freelance after being on the losing end of his first encounter with the crew of *Serenity*. Caught after making a transmission to the Alliance, Dobson shot Kaylee and was then knocked unconscious by Shepherd Book. Dobson was locked up, but bribed Jayne to free him. Failing once again to contact the Alliance, Dobson tried to escape with River Tam as his hostage. Dobson was shot in the face and tossed overboard for his troubles.

This wasn't the end of Lawrence Dobson, however. He survived the shot to the head and was fitted with an ocular implant. Now he has a strong need for vengeance. He became an independent contractor and joined the Hands of Blue men to find Serenity. In the ensuing fight, Mal shot Dobson again and made sure he was dead this time.

Quote "They're going to come after you long after I'm dead."

Story Uses This man is a right bastard when he wants to be. He is sneaky, talented and deadly. He is also a man obsessed: first with finding the Tams, second with killing Mal. If you're players are the Serenity's crew, they will be shocked to learn that Dobson managed to survive yet again. If you have a different crew, Dobson can be used as a man hiring them to acquire something or fly somewhere. What is important with this supporting character is that the crew isn't Dobson's focus. He's after the Tams and Malcolm Reynolds. Everyone else is just in his way or a means to get what he wants

Jubal Early

Bounty hunter

Agi d10 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d10 **Int** d8 **Wil** d10 **Init** d10 + d10; **LP** 22

Traits Athlete [m], Cortex Specter [M], Dull Sense [m], Fightin' Type [M], Friends in Low Places [m], Intimidatin' Manner [m], Leaky Brainpan [m], Lightnin' Reflexes [M], Memorable [m], Nose for Trouble [m], Sadistic [M], Sharp Sense (Taste) [m], Steady Calm [m], Superstitious [m], Tough as Nails [M], Traumatic Flashes [m], Twitchy [m],

Skills Athletics d6/Climbing d8/Dodge d10/Jumping d8, Covert d6/Disable Devices d8/Infiltration d12/Open Locks d10/Stealth d12/Streetwise d10/Surveillance d10, Discipline d6/Concentration d8/Interrogation d10/Intimidation d10, Guns d6/Gunsmithing d8/Pistols d10/Rifles d8, Influence d4, Knowledge d6/Cultures d8/Philosophy d8, Medical Expertise d4, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Knives d8, Perception d6/Deduction d8/Investigation d8/Search d8/Tactics 8, Taste d8, Pilot d6/Aerial Navigation d8/Astrogation d8, Planetary Vehicles d6, Survival d6/Space Survival d8/Tracking d12/Trapping d8, Technical Engineering d6/Communications Systems d8/Create and Alter Technical Devices d8/Hacking d8/Technical Security Systems d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Aikido d10/Wrestling d8

Description Jubal Early is a bounty hunter with a huge ego who once sneaked aboard *Serenity* while she was out in the black in an attempt to take River Tam and collect the bounty on her. Sharing his name with the Confederate Civil War General on Earth-That-Was, Jubal Anderson Early was prone to eccentric philosophical ramblings. Adept at psychological manipulation, he threatened to violate Kaylee if she did not do as he asked and used this same threat of harm to Kaylee to keep Simon under control. Athletic and skilled at unarmed combat, Early took pleasure in hurting Simon, stating that doctors ought to know the pain they are inflicting. River and Mal tricked Jubal into leaving *Serenity* and left him floating in the black, wearing only a spacesuit. His fate is unknown.

Quote "You oughtta be shot, or stabbed, lose a leg. To be a surgeon, you know? Know what kind of pain you're dealing with. They make psychiatrists get psychoanalyzed before they can get certified, but they don't make a surgeon get cut on. That seem right to you?"

Story Uses Best use of this guy is that he is out to claim the bounty on one of your crew. He is rich in personality and skill and should pose a challenge. He is also crazy as a loon.

The Hands of Blue

Mysterious Operatives

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Cortex Specter [M], Friends in High Places [m], Highly Educated [m], Memorable [m], Steady Calm [M]

Skills Covert d6/Disable Devices d8/Infiltration d10/Open Locks d8/Sabotage d8/Stealth d8/Surveillance d8, Discipline d6/Concentration d8/Interrogation d8/Mental Resistance d10, Knowledge d4, Medical Expertise d6/Neurology d8, Perception d6/Deduction d8/Empathy d8/Intuition d10/Investigation d10/Search d10, Pilot d6/Astrogation d8/Short-Range Shuttles d8, Planetary Vehicles d6, Scientific Expertise d6/Life Sciences d8, Technical Engineering d6/

Communications Systems d8/Create or Alter Technical Devices d8/Hacking d10/Technical Security Systems d10

Gear The Hands of Blue carry or have access to a variety of sophisticated communication and security equipment, covert ops gear, and Newtech devices. Their primary weapon is the neural disruptor, described in detail in the *Six-Shooters & Spaceships* sourcebook. In brief, neural disrupters have a 25-foot radius and cause fatal nervous deterioration, bleeding from various bodily orifices. All victims in range must make a Formidable Vitality + Vitality roll each turn the neural disrupter is being used. Success means the victim takes d4 Basic damage; failure inflicts d8 Basic damage.

Description The "Hands of Blue"–so named because they wear blue gloves at all times– were a pair of laconic, suit-wearing independent contractors. The Hands of Blue almost always murdered anyone who had come into contact with River Tam, including Alliance personnel. The weapon of choice was a handheld sonic weapon known as a neural disruptor (see description under "Gear"). They were immune to their own weapon's effect. At least two of the Hands of Blue were working for the Operative and were killed during an ambush on Mal and his crew when *Serenity's* engine thrust incinerated their boat. There are undoubtedly others, however.

Quote "We didn't fly eighty-six million miles to track down a box of band-aids, Colonel."

Story Uses The "Hands of Blue" are wonderful villains, too good to lose. There could be a whole organization of these independent contractors who can be hired by almost anyone with enough credits to do what needs doing.

Commander Harken

Alliance Commander

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Credo (Alliance regulations) [m], Friends in High Places [m], Leadership [m], Military Rank (Commander) [m], Straight Shooter [m]

Skills Discipline d6/Interrogation d10/ Intimidation d8/Leadership d8, Guns d6/ Pistols d8, Influence d6/Administration d10/ Bureaucracy d8, Knowledge d6/Law d10, Perception d6/Investigation d8/Sight d8/ Tactics 8, Technical Engineering d4

Description Commander Harken is the commanding officer of an Alliance cruiser that seized *Serenity* in the mistaken belief that Mal and his crew had murdered everyone on a transport vessel before salvaging it. Harken didn't believe Mal when he told the commander that the transport vessel had been the victim of a Reaver attack. Based on the condition of the sole survivor, Harkin decided that Reynolds and his crew had tortured the transport crew and then murdered them. However, after the survivor murdered all the Alliance medical crew and then fled back to *Serenity*, Commander Harken began to reconsider his position. He allowed Mal and his crew to search for the rogue survivor. Despite the fact that Mal saved Commander Harken's life, Harken confiscated the salvaged goods. He did allow *Serenity* and her crew to go free.

Quote "Well, I'm not about to have these surprises on a routine check. We run into these two, we shoot first. The brass can sort it out later."

Story Uses Commander Harken was a by-the-book Alliance man, believing all mercenaries are bad guys and stories of Reavers just barroom tales. All this changed for Harken when a Reaver survivor attacked him and one of those bad-guy mercenaries saved his life. This supporting character can go both ways. He could not be sympathetic to the border worlds

and willing to go easier on "businessmen" or he could have gone the opposite, thinking all mercenaries are as bad as Reavers.

Sir Warwick Harrow

Gentleman-in-Need

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Friends in High Places [m], Good Name [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Portly [m], Straight Shooter [m], Trustworthy Gut [m]

Skills Animal Handling d6/Animal Care d10/ Riding d8/Veterinary d8, Influence d6/ Administration d8/Streetwise d8, Knowledge d6/Appraisal d8/Cultures d8, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Swords d8, Perception d6/ Intuition d8

Description Sir Warwick Harrow, a Persephone nobleman, owned some property that needed to be sold off-planet. He couldn't manage the job himself, due to planetary restrictions. Although willing to work with independent businessmen, Sir Harrow refused to work with Badger due to the man's unfortunate reputation. Badger hired Captain Malcolm Reynolds as a go-between in order to get the mutually beneficial business. Sir Harrow became Mal's second in a duel with Atherton Wing. After watching Mal deal with both his opponent and ballroom dancing, Sir Harrow decided that he liked Mal and decided to do business with him. As it turned out, Sir Harrow's property was a herd of cattle, much to the surprise of Mal and the crew of *Serenity*.

Quote "You're mistaken, sir. I'm an honest man."

Story Uses A gentleman in need is a friend indeed. Perhaps he's got another job for a not-quite-legitimate crew to help him with. Perhaps he has made an enemy of Atherton Wing and needs a little underhanded assistance.

Stitch Hessian

Man Looking For Revenge

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8 **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 20

Traits Branded [m], Chip on the Shoulder [M], Crude [m], Dull Sense (Sight) [m], Friends in Low Places [m], Healthy as a Horse [m], Intimidatin' Manner [m], Mean Left Hook [m], Sadistic [M], Tough as Nails [m], Ugly as Sin [M]

Skills Athletics d4, Covert d2, Discipline d6/ Intimidation d8/Mental Resistance d10, Guns d6/Shotguns d10, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Knives d8, Perception d4, Survival d6/ Land Survival d8/Tracking d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d10

Description Stitch Hessian was an old partner of Jayne Cobb's. The two pulled off a robbery together on Higgins' Moon. Boss Higgins' men captured Stitch when the operation went south. During Stitch and Jayne's attempted escape, Stitch claims that Jayne kicked him off their getaway craft. Jayne asserted the boat was hit by antiaircraft fire and was damaged. Boss put Stitch into solitary confinement for years until Jayne and the *Serenity* crew returned to Higgins' Moon. Higginis released Stitch, knowing he'd go after Jayne. Bent on revenge, Stitch tried to kill Jayne as payback for betraying him. Stitch also revealed to the people of Higgins' Moon that their hero, Jayne, didn't drop a load of money from the getaway craft out of generosity but out of self-preservation. Stitch took a shot at Jayne but a mudder from the town took the bullet, giving Jayne the time he needed to deal with his "old friend" by stabbing him in the chest.

Quote "For six months, we run together. He turned me out 'fore I could scream!"

Story Uses Stich was locked up for years before Jayne and the *Serenity* crew encountered him. He could be out now and thirsty for revenge against Jayne or some other old "partner" who done him wrong. Or the crew might encounter him still locked up. He'd offer to do anything for someone who freed him, but he can't be trusted.

Fess Higgins

Son of a Magistrate

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6
  Init d6 + d6; **LP** 12

Traits Moneyed Individual [M], Straight Shooter [m]

Skills Artistry d6, Influence d4, Knowledge d6/ History d8/Literature d8, Perception d4, Scientific Expertise d4

Description Fess Higgins is the son of Boss Higgins, the egomaniac magistrate of Higgins' Moon. Boss Higgins contracted the Registered Companion, Inara, to "make a man" out of Fess. Inara taught Fess more than just the physical side of becoming a man. She taught him to work through his insecurities and learn to deal with his father's overbearing ways. As a result, Fess became the man his father could never be. Fess stood up to his father and defied him, allowing *Serenity* to leave Higgins' Moon when Boss Higgins tried to keep the crew there to gain revenge on Jayne.

Quote "He stole a ton of money from my dad and gave it to the poor, to my father's workers. He's become kind of a folk hero in Canton."

Story Uses Fess is a young man with a good heart. He would be willing to hire the crew for jobs or to help them in times in need. It would be interesting to explore his relations with his father and how he might try to improve the lives of the mudders, over his father's objections.

Magistrate Higgins

The Last Word of the Law

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d8 **Wil** d10
  Init d6 + d6; **LP** 16

Traits Intimidatin' Manner [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Prejudice (Mudders) [m], Stingy [m]

Skills Animal Handling d4, Discipline d6/ Intimidation d8, Guns d4, Influence d6/ Administration d10/Marketing d8, Knowledge d4, Perception d4, Scientific Expertise d6/ Earth Sciences d8

Description Known to the locals as "Boss" Higgins, this man's the biggest fish in the muddy pond of Higgins' Moon, a small moon whose primary export is mud. He's the law and does everything in his power to make sure everyone knows it. He treats the mudders poorly and harshly punishes anyone who crosses him. Boss Higgins hired Inara to "make a man" of his son, Fess, because he was concerned with the fact that his son was a virgin. Boss Higgins got more than he bargained for when Inara encouraged his son to get a backbone. Fess openly defied his father by allowing the *Serenity* to lift off when Boss Higgins wanted to keep Jayne Cobb planet side as punishment for embarrassing him years ago.

Quote ". . . I only make the people I own use my title. Mister Higgins will do fine."

Story Uses Boss HIggins has already been betrayed by his son once. He wanted his son to become a "man" but did not want him to become this much of a man! He may try to get rid of his son, especially if the young man takes up the cause of the mudders. Boss Higgins is a cad in need of a serious smackdown.

Monty

Good-Natured Mercenary

Agi d6 **Str** d12 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d4 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6
  Init d6 + d4; **LP** 20

Traits Crude [m], Easy Mark [M], Friends in Low Places [m], Healthy as a Horse [m], Mean Left Hook [m], Portly [m], Straight Shooter [m], Sweet and Cheerful [m], Tough as Nails [M],

Skills Guns d6, Heavy Weapons d6/Mounted Guns d8, Influence d6/Barter d8/Leadership d8/Streetwise d8, Mechanical Engineering d4, Perception d2, Pilot d4, Planetary Vehicles d4, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Boxing d10/Brawling d12/Wrestling d10

Description Monty, a former Browncoat who fought on the side of the Independents in the Unification War, is a long-time friend of Captain Malcolm Reynolds and Zoe (who affectionately refers to him as a "sasquatch"). He is a huge man with a generous and happy soul. He's

also known for being a skilled, expert brawler. Much to everyone's surprise, Monty shaved his trademark beard and mustache for his new bride, who was then revealed to be Saffron, the con-woman who once married Mal. Monty was broken-hearted at this revelation and incensed because he'd shaved his prize whiskers for nothing.

Quote "Damn you, Bridget! Damn you ta Hades! You broke my heart in a million pieces! You made me love you, and then y– I SHAVED MY BEARD FOR YOU, DEVIL WOMAN!"

Story Uses Monty is a good "go to" guy for information. He is informed, if a bit naïve, though, less naïve after being conned by "Bridget". He probably has an inherent distrust of women, particularly red-haired women!

Nandi

Brothel Madam

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Allure [m], Deadly Enemy (Rance Burgess) [m], Loyal (Employees) [m]

Skills Artistry d6/Appraisal d8, Covert d4, Guns d6/Rifles d8, Influence d6/Administration d10/Conversation d10/Leadership d8/Marketing d8/Persuasion d10/Seduction d12, Knowledge d6/Appraisal d8/Cultures d10/Literature d8, Linguist d6/Chinese d8, Medical Expertise d4, Perception d6/Empathy d10/Intuition d8, Performance d6/Dancing d8/Singing d8, Planetary Vehicles d4

Description Nandi was once a Companion and friend of Inara, who gave up the lifestyle because it was too restrictive. She became a madam of a brothel, taking care of working girls and boys on an outer planet. She was the archetypical hooker with a heart of gold. She called Inara for help after a local landowner, Rance Burgess, began attacking her and hers in order to take away the son he fathered with one of her girls. Nandi's people paid for *Serenity's* protection in trade of services—which pleased Jayne to no end. While Mal and his crew were protecting the brothel ranch, Nandi and Mal had an affair. Shortly after, Nandi died

in the final gunfight to save her brothel and her people. Their affair made Inara realize that she loved Mal and she decided it was time for her to leave the crew of the *Serenity*.

Quote "Captain Reynolds, it took me years to cut this piece of territory out of other men's hands to build this business up from nothing."

Story Uses Nandi died in a gunfight, but that don't mean her story is over. It is possible and probable that someone from her Companion House will be most vexed at her death and will want revenge against those that helped Rance kill her. Or maybe the crew comes to visit Nandi's place long before the fight ever happens. Or could be that Inara finds out that Nandi had a child who is now in trouble.

Adelei Niska

Dangerous Crime Lord

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d10 **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Branded [M], Dull Sense (Sight) [m], Friends in High Places [m], Friends in Low Places [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Sadistic [M]

Skills Covert d6, Discipline d6/Interrogation d12/Intimidation d10/Leadership d10, Guns d4, Influence d6/Administration d10/Streetwise d12+d2, Knowledge d6/Appraisal d8/Law d10/Literature d8/Philosophy d10, Linguist d6/Czech d10, Perception d6/Investigation d8

Description Adelei Niska looks to be a frail old man with a benign, grandfatherly visage. Truth is, he's of the most dangerous men in the 'Verse. A major crime lord with a reputation for being extremely vicious when things don't go his way, Niska's headquarters is a Skyplex that orbits the planet Ezra. A dedicated 'businessman', Niska doesn't accept failure as an option. You complete your end of the bargain or you pay, and you pay with everything you have. He prides himself on his uncompromising reputation.

Niska's voice is soft and he speaks with a Slavic accent. He is fond of elegant things. His pride is the Tiffany lamp on his desk. He wears cardigan sweaters. Although he seems the kindly

grandfather, that illusion is soon shattered by the blood spattered on the walls of his torture chamber.

Quote "I also have reputation. Not so pleasant. I think you know."

Story Uses Niska is a major crime lord. Being on the losing end of the deal to Mal and his crew doesn't change this. He hires people all the time. He has people killed all the time. Perhaps someone is on the run from him. Perhaps the crew has been hired to find someone for him. The evil schemes involving Niska and the crew are endless.

Ott

Inked Thief

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Cortex Specter [m], Fightin' Type [M], Friends in Low Places [m], Greedy [m], Memorable [m], Overconfident [m], Twitchy [m]

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8, Covert d6/Open Locks d8/Stealth d8/Streetwise d8, Guns d6/Pistols d10/Shotguns d8, Melee Weapon Combat d4, Perception d4, Unarmed Combat d4

Description Ott was the leader of a small gang of thieves in the town of Constance. He and his gang stole a large sum of money from Malcolm and his crew while they were doing a job for Badger. Ott has Chinese characters tattooed along the right side of his face, which may mean he's involved with a Tong or may mean he just likes tattoos. He looks to be nothing more than common underworld scum, though looks can be deceiving.

Quote "You were about to surrender the coin to me or I was about to shoot you in the face. Your choice."

Story Uses This guy can be used as a rival for jobs or as a vulture to swoop in and steal the coin after the job is done. Of course, if you need a good bad guy to kill, he'll do in a pinch.

Patience

Matriarch of Whitefall

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8 **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Greedy [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Portly [m]

Skills Animal Handling d6/Riding d8, Discipline d4, Guns d6/Pistols d8/Rifles d8/Shotguns d8, Influence d6/Administration d8/Barter d8/Leadership d10/Streetwise d8, Perception d4, Survival d4,

Description Patience is the matriarchal leader of a backwater moon called Whitefall. She will betray those she works with if she thinks she can get away with it. She does this for the good of her people, or so she claims. She once shot Mal due to a "legitimate conflict of interests" while dealing with him. Patience is an old woman and tough as they come. She agreed to take on some Alliance-stamped cargo from Mal and tried to get out of paying for it. She ended up paying when he shot up her men and killed her horse.

Quote "I like that you're up front about it. We can deal."

Story Uses Patience is a self-serving, pragmatic woman. Maybe she wants revenge on Mal and his crew. Maybe she doesn't trust any mercenaries any more. She is not a woman to be trusted but she just might have the coin your crew needs. The other use is that she has died and a child of hers needs help shoring up the town.

Saffron

Con-Artist and Femme Fatale

Agi d12 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d10 **Int** d10 **Wil** d12 **Init** d12 + d10; **LP** 18

Traits Allure (M), Cortex Specter [m], Talented (Seduction, M); Greedy (m), Overconfident (m)

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d10/Running d10, Covert d6/Pickpocket d12/Forgery d10/Sabotage d10, Guns d6/Pistol d10, Influence d6/Persuasion d10/Seduction d12 + d6, Knowledge d6/Poisons d8, Perception d6/Search d10

Description Saffron (also known as Bridget, Yolanda, Elizabeth, and countless other names) is one of the most successful con-women in the 'Verse. Nobody's sure what her real name is but one thing's certain: if Saffron is in town, check your wallet and count your fingers to make sure they're still there. Saffron is a beautiful redhead with big wide eyes, a voluptuous figure, and creamy skin. She's skilled at a great many things. According to rumor, she's had Companion training, but where and how's a mystery.

Married multiple times—both allegedly and in fact—including to Captain Malcolm Reynolds, Saffron uses her "husbands" to get whatever she wants at the time: a boat, a priceless treasure from Earth-That-Was, a weapon or cold hard cash. Wealth isn't her only objective. For her, money is a means to power and a way to prove her superiority over others. Among her many sayings is "You're assuming the pay-off's the point."

Whether or not that's true, Saffron will step on anyone to get what she wants. When cornered, she reverts to feminine wiles which are usually followed by acts of aggression. She has utter contempt for her victims. Despite this, Saffron does have a soft spot. In her way, she has honest feelings for Durran Haymer, the only one of her husbands she regretted having betrayed.

Quote "Everybody plays each other. That's all anybody ever does. We play parts."

Story Uses Saffron is a dangerous woman. She is sweet and alluring as she lifts your wallet. If a crew runs across her, they'll be lucky to come out with unscathed. You can use Saffron for many a story of thievery and betrayal. Heck, maybe one of her husbands hires the crew to get her out of jail!

Tracey Smith

Smuggler

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8 **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 16

Traits Dead Broke [m], Deadly Enemy [m], Friends in Low Places [m]

Skills Covert d4, Guns d6/Assault Rifles d8/Pistols d8, Heavy Weapons d4, Influence d2, Perception d4, Planetary Vehicles d4, Survival d6/Arctic Survival d8/Land Survival d8, Unarmed Combat d4

Description Tracey Smith was friend to both Captain Reynolds and Zoe in the war against the Alliance. The two of them kept Tracey safe on the front line during the Battle of Serenity Valley. After the war, Tracey drifted around, doing odd, illegal jobs here and there until he fell in with organ smugglers who used his body to smuggle the organs. However, instead of following through with his end of the deal, he had his "dead" body shipped to Mal and Zoe with instructions to "send home". He did this because he knew his friends were "saps" who would help him.

After Tracey came out of his drug-induced coma, he convinced Mal and Zoe that he was being hunted and needed help. The crew of *Serenity* ended up cornered by Tracey's enemies. They planned to escape by bluffing their way out. Judging others by himself, Tracey assumed that Mal was going to betray him and took Kaylee hostage in an attempt to escape. Zoe and Mal both shot him to rescue their mechanic. So, as it turned out, Mal and Zoe did have to send his dead body home—just like his cover story said.

Quote "When you can't run, you crawl. And when you can't crawl, when you can't do that…"

Story Uses Before he died, Tracey could be used as a smuggler looking for passage on a boat or he wants to hire the crew to guard his cowardly butt. Or his family could take an interest in knowing more about his death.

CHAPTER 4

Gabriel and Regan Tam

Nobles Supporting the Alliance

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d8 **Wil** d6
Init d6 + d6; **LP** 12

Traits Friends in High Places [m], Good Name [m], Highly Educated [m], Moneyed Individual [M], Non-Fightin' Type [m], Straight Shooter [m]

Skills Artistry d4, Influence d6/Administration d8/Bureaucracy d8/Marketing d8, Knowledge d6/Appraisal d8/Cultures d8/History d8, Planetary Vehicles d4/Cars d8/Equestrian d8/Sailing d8,

Description Gabriel and Regan Tam are Simon and River's parents. Part of high society, they took pride in their social achievements and their own prestigious positions. They wanted everything for their children. The better their children did, the better society looked upon them and their family. They were proud of Simon becoming a doctor and especially proud of River being chosen for the special Alliance school for overachievers.

Not believing that the Alliance would do them harm, they were puzzled at Simon's concern that River was in trouble. They dismissed his worries as nothing more that Simon 'being lost without his baby sister.' When Simon started seriously working to free his sister and was caught by the Alliance, Regan threatened to cut Simon off from the family if this ever happened again.

Gabriel and Regan Tam are the epitome of the upper crust who believe in the government and how the system works. They aren't bad people. They don't want anything to upset their comfortable lives.

Quote "I won't come for you again, Simon. If you end up in jail again or get mixed up in something worse, I won't come for you again. You're on your own."

Story Uses People like the Tams may be used as victims of crimes; as parents looking for their children, all while turning a blind eye to the truth; or as people caught in the crossfire between the Alliance and the outlaws. They have needs, wants and ambitions that can be used to affect the crew for good or ill.

Atherton Wing

Arrogant Nobleman

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8
Init d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Fightin' Type [M], Friends in High Places [m], Good Name [m/M], Moneyed Individual [M], Overconfident [m], Prejudice (Lower Class) [m]

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8, Influence d6/Conversation d8, Knowledge d6/Appraisal d8/Cultures d10, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Swords d12+2, Perception d4

Description Atheron Wing is an arrogant young Persephone nobleman with a large fortune and an even larger ego. He has hired Inara as his Companion on several occasions and frequently requested a more permanent arrangement, trying to persuade her to be his personal Companion. Despite the attractive offer, Inara always turned him down. At a shindig where Mal danced with Inara, Atherton made it clear he considered Inara to be a valuable piece of property he'd paid for. This inspired Mal to punch him. Atherton challenged Mal to a duel. Atherton lost, due to Inara's interference.

Atherton threatened Inara with physical and professional harm, not realizing until too late that by doing so he harmed himself. Atherton now has a black mark against him in the Companion books and no Companion will ever accept another contract with him again.

Quote "I know what's mine."

Story Uses Arrogant noblemen have their uses. They always want something—money, revenge, contraband. Atherton could be a man who hires the crew for a job or his home could be the target of a job. Just don't get caught. He is an accomplished swordsman who carries a grudge.

Agent Womack
Alliance Federal Agent

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8
Init d8 + d8; **LP** 20

Traits Fightin' Type [M], Intimidatin' Manner [m], Tough as Nails [M], Wears a Badge [m/M],

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8, Covert d6/ Surveillance d8, Discipline d6/Interrogation d8/Intimidation d8, Guns d6/Machine Guns d8/Pistols d10/Rifles d8, Heavy Weapons d6/Ship's Cannons d8, Influence d6/ Streetwise d8, Melee Weapon Combat d4, Perception d6/Investigation d8/Search d8, Pilot d6/Aerial Navigation d8/Astrogation d8/ Patrol Vessels d10, Planetary Vehicles d6/ Cars d8/Hovercraft d8, Survival d6/General Navigation d8/Land Survival d8/Tracking d10, Unarmed Combat d6

Description Lieutenant Womack was a crooked Alliance Federal Agent on the trail of his wayward organ smuggling courier, Tracey Smith. His jurisdiction centered on the Silverhold Colonies in the Silverhold System. As the man behind the organ smuggling, he couldn't allow Tracy to just steal the organs. Lt. Womack tracked Tracy to *Serenity* where he bluffed his way on board to collect Tracey with threats to the ship and her crew. Shepherd Book informed everyone that Womack was out of his jurisdiction and would not be missed should he come up with a sudden case of dead. When Zoe and Mal shot Tracey for holding Kaylee hostage, Lt. Womack decided not to make an issue of it. After all, his goods were spoiled anyway.

Quote "I'm a dangerous man on a ship loaded with hurt. Why you got me chattin' with your peons?"

Story Uses Agent Womack, and other agents like him play the system to their advantage. They steal, smuggle and kill for their own gain, then they run to hide behing the skirts of the Alliance. He would be a good villain for the crew to go up against.

WHERE TO FIND FOLK

Anyone and everyone the crew meets can become an important supporting character—no matter what their job, their lifestyle is, or how they act. Look around you on your daily routine and notice everyone you come in contact. You meet cab drivers, janitors, waiters, baristas, bartenders, repairmen, doctors, couriers, housewives, students, mail carriers and office workers on a daily basis. These same people also exist in the 'Verse. They can be fleeting acquaintaces for the crew or turn out to be deadly foes.

Border Planets
On Border planets that are less developed, there's fewer luxuries or specialized jobs. Most of the folk are farmers for whatever the world produces, along with town folk who support the farmers. On Border worlds, the law's in the hands of those who can back up their words with action. Niceties such as hospitals are few and far between. That don't mean there isn't medical help and those who offer it. The people on the Border worlds have their own way of doing things and any supporting character willing to give assistance or information to the crew is invaluable. That person could be a kid, an outcast, or simply a gossipy town clerk. There's less red tape but more suspicion on these worlds. Examples of supporting characters on Border worlds include: bartenders, townsfolk, farmers, miners, prostitutes, mayors, lawmen, bully boys, barbers, town drunks, shopkeepers, religious types, war veterans.

Core Worlds
All businesses on the Core worlds are regulated by the Alliance: schools, hospitals, law enforcement, and military service; a place for everything and everything in its place. The Core works like a well-oiled machine and the trick to it is to find the cog or two that isn't happy with

his lot in life. Most everyone can use a few extra credits in his bank account and some want some excitement to liven things up.

The librarian might have a secret hatred for the Alliance officer you need to find and she might know his routine. The housewife could be a bored socialite who thirsts for "fun". The doorman for the four-star hotel might be one hell of a gambler who could be lured away for a game. Core world or not, there's no shortage of useful folk for your campaign. Core world supporting characters include: historians, Companions, Alliance officials, government officials, aristocrats, noble men and women, servants to those higher up, seamstresses, medical personnel, artists, private guards, rich merchants, poor merchants, inquisitive children, teachers, and drivers.

Alliance Ships

While it's more trouble for independents to infiltrate, Alliance boats carry the same people as planets. Some are all about being by the book and some ain't. Some are in the Alliance for the cause and some are in it for a paycheck. Offer these folk something more and maybe they'll jump at it. A few may even be secretly sympathetic to the Browncoats and other independents. Alliance crewmembers are people just like the crew. Harder to manipulate, maybe, but they can still surprise the heck out of you. Supporting characters include: officers, enlisted men, administrators, police, research and development, medical personnel, ship cooks, maintenance crew, salvage crew, mechanics and pilots.

Space Station Ports

Space stations and Skyplexes can be either Alliance or independent or a mixture of both. They are small worlds of their own, with the drawbacks and benefits of both Core worlds and Border worlds. The law is regulated by whoever can keep the peace—whether that's the Alliance or a private force. Most of the niceties of the Core aren't available but the technology is. Supporting characters from space stations are a varied as the stations themselves. You can meet the space station owner, the port commander, the black market crime lord, the stowaway urchin, the bartender. And all of these people have their value and their price. Supporting characters on space stations include: station personnel, environmental specialists, Companions, merchants, mechanics, pilots, mercenaries, bartenders, medical personnel, Alliance spies, black market fences and space rat urchins.

RUNNING FRIENDS AND FOES

Players are a cautious lot; they think plans through ten times before saying "go." They like to resolve issues, eliminate problems, fight the bad guys, and live the good life through the crew. It's your job to give 'em angst and anxiety, challenge their plans for success, and threaten their trip to Easy Street. Tension is the source of drama. As Game Master, your job is to create tension in your adventures. **Chapter One** dropped crew conflicts and relationship turmoil into the soup. You can add to internal struggles by introducing external dangers.

Social conflict is a great source of tension. Unfortunately, humanity didn't leave its prejudices and bad impulses behind on Earth-That-Was. People fight over race or ethnicity. Folks on the Border might not take kindly to visitors from the Core. Core Worlders see Border folk as uneducated simpletons. Noble snobs frown on the crude and graceless. Ugly envies beauty, which shies away in turn. The poor are jealous of the rich who often abuse the poor. Some people call themselves idealistic. Others call them as naive. Pragmatic folk can be seen as self-serving. Loyalties to former affiliations such as Browncoat against Purplebelly run deep and fierce in the years after the war.

The 'Verse itself can be a challenge. Space travel is hazardous and can be deadly if the ship malfunctions or breaks down, gets struck by meteor or atacked by Reavers, pirates, and others. Life planetside invites danger from all manner of folk, from gangs to less-than-savory hot dog vendors. Wandering in the wilds presents challenges of its own, everything from snakes to malaria.

Always think of ways to add unexpected tension and drama to the story. Your players may not thank you, but they will have more fun.

VILLAINY IN THE 'VERSE

Great heroes are defined by great villains. The villian may be as easy to spot as the sadistic underworld kingpin or as ominously elusive as an Alliance Intelligence Operative. Crafting enemies worthy of your players' characters is a vital job for a Serenity Game Master.

Villains generally fall into three categories: those the crew can defeat handily, those that take more concerted effort extending over a long period of time, and those that are nigh impossible to overcome. There's always someone more powerful than you in the 'Verse.

Low-level opportunists are a good example of the small fry category. A smuggler hides contraband inside an innocuous shipment and then hires the crew for transport. He's almost certain to have brought trouble in the form of Alliance interdiction, cheated partners, defrauded buyers. Con men ally themselves with the crew, then steal their money or even their ship. If confronted, this sort of villain is easy to defeat since he's got few allies and isn't formidable in a fight. He can do more damage with his actions and deceit than his fists. If one of these irritants really catches the interest of the crew, you might elevate the villain to the next level and make him a continuing source of trouble. Let the villain score it big or ally himself with a nefarious organization.

Villains in charge of others or who have notable personal power are good candidates for mid-level wickedness. Black market kings, gang bosses, big time con artists, crooked sheriffs, greedy mine bosses, low level members of the Alliance government, freelance hit men, amoral scientists, and small-time anarchists all make good mid level villains. Their plots tend to be more complex. Their motives are harder to figure out and their crimes harder to stop. Might take several run-ins with the villain's people before the crucial opportunity to confront the villain herself arrives. (And the villain will no doubt be waiting for them!) This kind of bad guy makes a concerted effort to eliminate threats to herself that prove too troublesome, either framing people to cover her own unwholesome work or simply spacing them into the black.

The cream of the evil crop is your headliner villain. This guy lurks behind the scenes early on, leaving only frustrating traces of his own existence to puzzle the crew. Later, as the campaign develops, he slowly comes into view, entwined with the main thematic plot of the campaign. The secret to the creation of the Reavers emerged in bits and pieces. The villain in that case turned out to be so large and powerful that the only way to stop it was to reveal its secrets to everyone in the 'Verse. Even then, the damage was merely contained, not ended. The group within the Alliance survived to be a villain in the future.

So—groom your villains carefully and unleash them on your heroes in measured doses. They can be the key to a vibrant, enjoyable story.

A Memorable Villain

Faceless thugs and nameless Alliance goons don't hold the attention for long. They don't inspire fear or hatred from your players. A good villain is memorable. Think long and hard on a villain's Assets and Complications and make them count.

Good Assets for a villain include: Allure, Alternate Identity, Blue Blood (as part of his power base), Cortex Specter, Fightin' Type, Friends in High/

Low Places, Hideout, Intimidatin' Manner, Leadership, Middleman, Military Rank, Moneyed Individual, Reader, Steady Calm, Trustworthy Gut, or Wears a Badge.

Recommended Complications include: Amnesia, Amorous, Branded, Chip on the Shoulder, Cold, Crude, Ego Signature, Greedy, Illness, Memorable, Neat Freak, Phobia, Portly, Sadistic, or Superstitious.

Select one or two of these as truly defining characteristics and play them up big. If the villain is Cold, then he's the "coldest gorram hitman in the 'Verse." If he's a Blue Blood, make it clear that he's a highly regarded noble who is nearly "untouchable."

The villain's style and manner of exerting his power is common knowledge in his circles. Whether he's insanely sadistic or as elusive as a shadow, these things are known by more'n a few and should be easy for the crew to learn. Let the players paint a picture of the villain through indirect sources (someone who has been harmed by him hires the crew for a job) or even a brief cut scene showing the villain doing his worst. By the time the crew members meet the villain, they should be fully aware of how powerful and dangerous this person can be.

Villains of this caliber are often hidden in plain sight. Uncovering the true identity is very difficult on account of their evil doings being shrouded in disguises and subterfuge. Some could even maintain multiple alternate identities to allow them to do anything they need to do— one of these perhaps being to befriend the crew!

Give some time to defining each villain. Low-level bad guys might not need more than a hook and some combat stats. A top-level villain deserves your considered thought and a rich background. In addition to the supporting characters provided earlier in this chapter (such as the People Best Avoided) here are a few miscreants of assorted levels of power, ready to go.

The Corporate Cleaner

One Trick Pony

Agi d12 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d10; **Init** d12 + d8; **LP** 18

Traits Cortex Specter (M), Heavy Tolerance (m), Friends in Low Places (m), In Plain Sight (M), Mean Left Hook (m), Credo (M, the Corporation comes first); Hooked (m, cigarettes), Loyal (m), Sadistic (M)

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d10, Covert d6/ Disable Devices d10/Sabotage d10/ Surveillance d8, Discipline d4, Guns d6/Pistols d8, Influence d6/Interrogation d10, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Knives d10, Perception d4, Planetary Vehicles d2, Unarmed Combat d6/Martial Arts d10

Gear Pistol (d6 W), 2 Combat Knives (d4 W), Garrote (d6 W)

Description The Cleaner doesn't stand out and keeps to himself. He's a middle-aged man who looks like he's been around the 'Verse more than a few times. He has the disciplined bearing of an army sergeant or prison guard. It doesn't matter where he came from or where he goes when he's done. He has a job to do and he'll do it, come hell or high water.

Story Uses The crew could stumble across the dirty dealings of a corporation in any number of ways: looking too closely at cargo they were paid to transport, helping someone on the run from the corporation, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. If the a big boss thinks they know too much, he'll send the Cleaner to make the problem go away. The Cleaner might board their ship as a passenger to determine how much the crew knows and then attack when the crew is most vulnerable, using whatever comes to hand.

CHAPTER 4

Professor Rufus Pettifog

Recurring Character

Agi d10 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d10 **Int** d12+d2 **Wil** d10;

Init d10 + d10; **LP** 18

Traits Blue Blood (M), Friends in High Places (m), Moneyed Individual (M); Amorous (m), Former Life (M), Lightweight (m), Memorable (m), Overconfident (m)

Skills Artistry d6, Athletics d4, Covert d6, Craft d6, Discipline d2, Guns d4, Influence d6/Barter d8/Marketing d10/Streetwise d8, Perception d6/Intuition d10, Performance d6/Oratory d10, Pilot d2, Planetary Vehicles d2, Unarmed Combat d2

Gear A pair of Derringer pistols (d2 W), Red Velvet Top Hat and Cape

Description The good professor is a most affable man, ready to chat with anyone and expound upon his decades of experience travelin' the 'Verse, meetin' and entertain' its people. He is proud of his past as a magician, but Pettifog has moved on. He is now making his living as a "trader", specializing in bringing "needed basics" to those brave souls on the frontier of civilization. Truth is that he's a shyster and scam artist, always lookin' for the next big score. He will happily sell out the crew the moment the money's good enough.

Story Uses Pettifog will pay the going rate for the crew to take his cargo of woven blankets to an outpost colony as well as passage for himself. During the trip he will entertain the crew with his stories, which are notable for being mainly about vampires. Observant crew might notice that his skin is unusually pale and he doesn't go out in daylight. Once planetside, he will sell the blankets and the cargo hidden inside the bundles: Vampire Blood, an elixir of his own creation which he touts as having the properties to heal all your maladies, make you prettier, charge up your sex life, and give you inhuman strength. He'll never claim it, but he hints broadly that he is a vampire himself. He'll

likely come running back to the ship begging for protection from the locals when purchasers of his Vampire Blood start dropping like flies.

The Boss/ Baron Thaddeus Le Meer

Headliner Character

Agi d10 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d10 **Int** d12 + d2 **Wil** d10;

Init d10 + d10; **LP** 16

Traits Blue Blood (M), Friends in High Places (m), Moneyed Individual (M), Amorous (m), Former Life (M), Lightweight (m), Memorable (m), Overconfident (m)

Skills Animal Handling d4, Athletics d6, Covert d4, Discipline d6/Concentration d8, Guns d6/Pistol d8, Influence d6/Persuasion d12/Politics d10, Knowledge d6, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Sword d12, Perception d6, Planetary Vehicles d2, Unarmed Combat d2

Gear Sword Cane (d4 W), Baron's Longcoat and fancy dress

Description Baron Le Meer is the epitome of a gentleman. He is handsome, suave, sophisticated. He is the heir to a noble family, raised on Sihnon, attended school with the monks of Yheza Fao, served in the Alliance as a staff officer, and now he is a prominent noble in Persephone's burgeoning high society. Thaddeus is all about the proper way to do things. As Baron, he organized workers on his massive land grant, improving operations until they were providing him a healthy profit. In his role as informal advisor to Persephone's governor, he has been influencing local politics since his arrival on the planet after the war. Baron Thaddeus Le Meer is an "very important person".

That's what most folks see, at least. The real story on Thomas Mirofsky is quite different. He was born on Sihnon, but his family was far from noble. He was, in fact, rescued from the gutter. The Yheza Fao monks took him in as an orphan, teaching young Tom discipline and focus. As he grew older, Chen Lo, head of the

order, recognized Tom had special qualities which might be useful to the shadowy order. Tom was provided with a new name, a new background, the right recommendations, and a small stake for his new life. He also emerged with a debt to the monks he will have to repay some day.

Now known as Thaddeus Le Meer, Tom passed examinations and was inducted as a staff officer into the Alliance military. He quickly sharpened his social graces. He became known as having a talent for swaying decisions to his liking without appearing to be advocating one side over another. He grew to be a favorite of Grand Admiral Wesley Cobb, who took him on as his personal adjutant. After the war, Cobb rewarded Tom with a land grant out on the border world, Persephone. While Tom had hoped to stay close to the centers of power on the Core worlds, a discussion with Chen Lo convinced him that living as a big frog on Persephone would be an ideal way to build up a power base. He could then return to politics in the Core from a position of strength. Tom accepted the grant and gave himself the title of Baron.

Once on Persephone, Baron Le Meer devoted himself to making money. He brought in overseers to keep the sharecroppers on their toes. He made sure all the settlers on his land were in debt to him. Once things were arranged to his satisfaction, he put his holding under the stewardship of his right-hand man, Bill Mallet, notable for being right handy with a pistol. The Baron was then free to turn his focus Persephone politics, gathering allies, and cozing up to the new governor. The Baron's plans and schemes are straight forward. He wants simpley to increase his wealth and his power.

Le Meer is taller than average and blessed with good looks. He is in his thirties, slender and well-built. He sports a fashionable moustache. He is always impeccably dressed in the latest styles and carries a cane as an affectation.

Story Uses Baron Le Meer could first appear as a name in the headlines or as host to a high society shindig to which some member of the crew is invited. Le Meer might end up hiring the crew for legitimate jobs, though he will almost certainly see to it that the crew ends up in his debt. He will always play the good guy as he draws the crew into his web. Little by little, the crew could encounter clues of a well-funded criminal enterprise and wonder who's behind it. Only much later will the players have enough clues to identify Le Meer as the Boss.

Doctor Rudolf

Headliner Character

Agi d10 **Str** d4 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d10 **Int** d12 + d2 **Wil** d12;

  Init d10 + d10; **LP** 16

Traits Hideout (M), Sawbones (M), Talented (M, Surgery]; Leaky Brainpan (m), Overconfident (m), Prejudice (m), Twitchy (m), Ugly as Sin (M)

Skills Discipline d6/Concentration d8, Guns d2, Influence d6/Intimidation d12, Knowledge d6, Medical Expertise d6/Surgery d12 + d4/Forensics d10/Pharmaceuticals d12, Perception d6, Scientific Expertise d6/Life Sciences d10, Technical Engineering d4

Gear Scalpel, Datapad, and surgical smock.

Description Abulard Rudoff was among the leading names in prosthetics and synthetics within the Alliance's medical services. Dedicated to improving the lives of Alliance citizens, he was instrumental during the period of recovery following the War of Unification. His pioneering work on muscle and organ replacement set him on course for a position as Chief Research Surgeon on Ariel, until his efforts to cut corners led to a key Federal officer's lung transplant going horribly wrong. The Alliance subsequently cut his funding, and the officer's vengeful family tried to have him "removed." When this failed, they hired a guy to throw him out a twelfth-floor window.

Against all odds, Doctor Rudolf survived the fall. A handful of research assistants used Rudolf's own techniques on him, but without access to Alliance resources, they had to turn to the same underworld contacts that Rudolf himself had relied upon for inexpensive materials and donor organs. Rudolf's assistants saved his life,

Quick and Dirty Supporting Characters

So you've got pages and pages of fully-fleshed out friends, villains, and recurring characters ready to throw at the crew. You're all set, right? Well, almost. While it's great to have all the trimmings for Major Bad Guy or Useful Good Guy, sometimes you just don't need to spend much time on the supporting characters because they are here one moment, gone the next. So how do you come up with the store clerk, the bartender, the guy at the shindig playin' the fiddle?

Quick and dirty supporting characters can be created within a couple of minutes or even on the fly. Here's an example. Let's say you want a standard off-the-cuff mercenary to use in between major scenes. You could flip open the *Serenity Role Playing Game* and grab one you find there, but you really don't need all the details. Let's assume he has a d6 in all of his Attributes. Give him a catch-all Skill called "Mercenary" that covers everything a mercenary would do, such as shoot at the crew or deal with employers. Give the rank-and-file mercs a Mercenary Skill at d6, and their mercenary sergeant a d8. You don't need to give them any other Skills or worry about Specialties. For Life Points and Initiative, take the default d6 and the catch-all Skill and use those together for 12 Life Points and d6 + d6 Initiative for the rank-and-file, and 14 Life Points and d6 + d8 Initiative for the sergeant

Mercenary d6, LP 12, Init d6 + d6
Mercenary Sergeant d8, LP 14, Init d6 + d8

You can do this with almost any walk-on supporting character from belly dancer to thug. Remember: assume the default d6 and give the supporting character one or two catch-all Skills to cover his role in the adventure. And that's it.

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but at the cost of his long-term health. When he finally awoke, Rudolf was a broken man. The family of the man he'd killed was still on the hunt for him. The doctor fled to the Border worlds, where he recreated his medical laboratory in less than optimal conditions.

Doctor Rudolf is now obsessed with continuing his work and proving the Alliance medical community that they had mistreated him. In the process, he continues to resort to criminals to keep him in business, never questioning where his research subjects or organs come from. Horribly disfigured from this fall, Rudolf also relies upon his assistants, who are convinced they are helping a great man achieve justice.

Story Uses A body is found near the crew's ship. The body has been mutilated; death is due to blunt-force trauma. Anyone familiar with Reavers will see obvious similarities to the way they treat their victims and probably jump to the conclusion that Reavers are in the area. If the crew investigates, they will find that a number of local people have mysteriously gone missing. Again, they may connect this

with Reavers. Rumors spread like wildfire. The crew might follow up on this independently, or they may be hired by locals to hunt down the Reavers. Doctor Rudolf's assistants could be the first step in uncovering the Doctor's abhorrent practices. They will work tirelessly to keep the crew from finding him. If anyone reaches his laboratory, the assistants will move him to another hideout, setting self-destruct charges to get rid of the evidence. When the crew finally encounters the Doctor, they will probably be shocked at how oblivious he seems to be to the depraved deeds he and his assistants have done in the name of medical science.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE

Not everybody in the 'Verse is out to get our heroes. There are folk who have the makings of trusted allies, fine friends, drinking buddies, lovers. All manner of interestin' times can

come from such. Friends often need help with personal problems or can be counted on to provide lucrative opportunities. Friends can sneak in under the radar, openin' up all types of possibilities for landin' everyone in danger. Often friends can be useful in allowing the crew show off their skills and play out their traits.

Folks You Can't Forget

Two word descriptions of a shop clerk serve the purpose at times, but you want to watch for opportunities to introduce people with more potential to catch the players' interest. Just like villains, friends should be colorful and memorable, with their own goals, Traits, and personality. Pick one or two Traits and play them up. The friend might have a valuable Skill he uses in his occupation. He could possess a rare object from Earth-That-Was or Newtech nobody else has seen. He might be the expert on hacking into computer systems.

The friend should have her own social circles where she's well known and appreciated. If players ask around for her, she should be easy to find. Making the potential friend larger than life isn't a bad thing. Once the players pick up on people they like and continue to interact with, you can broaden that person's background and introduce more opportunities for adventure connected with her.

Your players might even decide they're friends with somebody without you havin' to do a thing. That's a big plus. Encourage your players to define a few friends from their own past, then you can bring into the game, if only in cameo roles. A use of someone from the past can provide depth to the player's character.

The "People Who Can Help" section's got a number of good stock characters you can use for friends who might help the Big Damn Heroes out. Here's a few more specifically designed for use in your campaign.

John Mommad

One Shot Character

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d12; **Init** d6+d8, **LP** 18

Traits Friends in Low Places (m), Nose for Trouble (m), Sweet and Cheerful (m); Portly (m), Soft (m), Weak Stomach (M)

Skills Guns d4, Influence d6/Barter d12/ Streetwise d8/Persuasion d12+d4/Marketing d10, Knowledge d4, Mechanical Engineering d6, Perception d6/Intuition d12/Deduction d8/Gambling d10, Pilot d4, Technical Engineering d4

Gear Datapad, chronometer

Description John Mommad's a mountain of a man, heavy and tall at 6'7". He looks to be sweating all the time, mopping his face with a handkerchief from the pocket of his pale three-piece suit. He's a friendly sort, with laughing eyes. He works buying and selling ships at the Eavesdown Docks. He arranges for parts and repair contracts.

Story Uses If the crew's in the market for a ship or repairs, John would be a fine man to go to. He'd also do well acting as a broker if it's made worth his while. His cheerful nature might get the crew an invitation to eat at his home where they can meet the wife and kids.

Lucas "The Parson" Zhou

Recurring Character

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d10 **Int** d12 **Wil** d10; **Init** d6 + d10, **LP** 16

Traits Friends in High Places (m), Friends in Low Places (m), Good Name (m), Middleman (M), Religiosity (M); Bleeder (M), Credo (M), Dark Secret (M), Hooked (m), Non-fightin' Type

Skills Animal Handling d6, Athletics d4, Covert d6, Stealth d8, Discipline d6, Guns d6, Influence d6/Persuasion d8, Knowledge d6/Christian Bible d12, Medical Expertise d6, Perception d6/Intuition d8, Planetary Vehicles d2, Unarmed Combat d2

Weapons/Gear A Bible in a metal cover

CHAPTER 4

Description Known simply as "the Parson" to most of the people in his community, Lucas is Chinese and tends to minster to that community. He works hard to serve the best interests of his 'flock', providing counseling, advice, and teaching from the Bible. He wears clerical black with a liturgical collar and the Good Book is always with him. He looks to be in his forties with a world-weary face.

Story Uses The Parson serves more than the spiritual needs of his people. For those 'in the know', he's also an honest broker and middleman, even in shady deals. He says that it's better that a man of God should be involved than try to pretend that such things don't on. He works to prevent violence and make sure deals are fair. He is trusted by all the local Tongs and has stopped more than one gang war. The Parson is also a great source of information, since he has friends in all walks of society. The Parson might contact the crew when he needs a favor or when he's been asked to give them a message or a job. One of the crew might be an old friend and spend time visiting with him. The Parson has a dark past he is trying to hide. He is truly repentent for his misdeeds and works hard to atone for them. Unfortunately, someday his past will catch up with him.

MOVIN' RIGHT ALONG

No matter where your story or your crew goes in the 'Verse, they will run into supporting characters. These people take out the trash, provide food to eat, fuel and spare parts for ships, entertainment, and places to sleep. Supporting characters make the 'Verse go round and help keep your ship flyin'.

That said, the next place you should be headin' is **Chapter Five**, where you can figure out how to make good use of these supporting characters and everything else in your campaign. Or take a look back to **Chapter Two** and tweak the stats in this chapter to suit your changin' tastes. And, if you haven't already done so, enjoy the dazzlin' array of new options for battles and brawls in **Chapter Three**.

It's also worth noting here that if it's supporting characters and stat blocks that tickle you, there are plenty to be had in the *Out in the Black* mega-adventure, the *Serenity Adventures* collection, and half a dozen new crews in *Six-Shooters and Spaceships*. Looks like you're good to go, *dohn ma*?

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

STORYTELLING IN THE BLACK

By now, you're probably aware that a hefty chunk of this book's devoted to you, the Game Master. That's doubly true for this chapter, which expands on the fine information in **Chapter Six** of the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. Kickin' off with advice on dealin' with Traits and Plot Points, the lion's share of this chapter deals with buildin' new stories, new worlds, and new communities for the crew to be Big Damn Heroes in.

DEALING WITH TRAITS

More than the Attributes, Skills, and gear, Traits bring the *Serenity Role Playing Game* to life. By spelling out a system for rewarding good role playing and for investing their characters with history and depth, the game rises above tactical exercises and becomes a story about these people, their hopes and dreams, as well as their failings.

As a Game Master, pay special attention to all of the crew character Traits and use them to guide the course of the game. Nothing's more deflating than purchasing hooks for your character such as Deadly Enemy and then never having that enemy make an appearance. A good rule of thumb is to try to identify a Trait for each character that will come into play each session. Might be that some Traits don't rightly affect the game at the moment, but the process keeps the Traits in your mind and encourages both you and the player to find a way to make them important. Using a character's Traits makes the player feel that he has something special to offer the game play and rewards him for the time and effort spent during character creation.

ACQUIRING ASSETS

The right Assets are powerful tools in a *Serenity* campaign. A pilot with Talented (Pilot) and Born Behind the Wheel really shines in a story with a lot of daring ship maneuvers. But what happens when the crew loses their ship in a game of poker? What if that crack pilot has to consider another line of work after an injury damages his eyes? There'll come times when a player wants a new Asset.

Acquiring an Asset after the campaign's begun requires the investment of Advancement Points. A minor Asset such as Highly Educated would cost 10 APs while a major Asset like Lightnin' Reflexes costs 20 APs. Beyond the mechanics, the desired Asset has to make sense within the reality of the campaign and the story. Some Assets are meant to be in-born talents and would take serious justification for you to allow their purchase. There can easily be other sacrifices, such as time and money, required beyond the APs.

Take Lightnin' Reflexes for example. One justification for allowing the purchase of that Asset would be the investment by the crew character in a serious amount of time spent in training. The teacher might have to be a mystic expert of the martial arts who helps the character unlock their inner speed. If the teacher requires payment in money or services and if the time invested causes other effects in the game, all's the better. In any case, assigning such an Asset shouldn't be allowed without strong supporting logic.

It's possible a game situation opens the door to a new Asset. Perhaps a crew character saves the life of a wealthy noble. The resulting gratitude turns into a gift of money to the crew and the general goodwill of the noble. A player could take the opportunity to purchase a related Asset based on those events. If a player wanted to purchase Moneyed Individual, she spends the 20 APs and suggesst that the wealthy noble took a specific interest in her and granted her a special trust fund. If she doesn't enough APs at the time, perhaps the event triggers an ongoing friendship that

results in substantial funds when the APs come available. Assets emerging from game play help reinforce the story.

LOSING ASSETS

Although this doesn't come up often, it's possible for a character to lose an Asset through game play. This should naturally be quite rare, even more rare than gaining a new Complication, but still possible. Consulting the player beforehand is smart, just to make sure he understands the logic of it and doesn't feel unfairly treated. The loss should be accompanied by lots of juicy focus on the character and opportunities to earn other non-Trait rewards.

A character's Allure might be lost after a disfiguring accident, perhaps even giving him the Ugly As Sin Complication. An Alliance "ghost hunter" might assemble a dossier on a Cortex Specter re-establishing her identity within official records. Friends in High or Low Places could be lost if the general community feels betrayed by the character—or an Operative "burns the ground." A Good

Name could be ruined by foul acts or by being framed. Military Rank could be lost if the character is dishonorably discharged or court-martialed. A Moneyed Individual might lose it all in a big gamble or ransoming the life of a friend caught in the clutches of a madman. A Registered Companion could lose her license for flagrant behavior, which violates the Guild Code; a lawman could lose his badge.

Take great care with Assets and consider the benefits to the overall story and enjoyment of the game before deciding to take away something the player paid to get.

ACQUIRING COMPLICATIONS

While getting a new Asset takes effort, getting a new Complication can be frighteningly easy. A bad knock on the head and you've got yourself some Amnesia. Scrounging in the *feh wu* of abandoned junkyards too long? Say hello to a new Illness.

Everything but your left foot made it through the airlock before it closed? Check your contract about Amputee benefits.

Naturally, the new Complication needs to make sense considering events in the game. Often the opportunity will present itself without much warning, based on a critical botch or other unexpected circumstances. A Complication that rises from events will be more common than a Complication you've identified in your plotting ahead of time.

Many Complications could be acquired through surviving an illness or a terrible injury: Amnesia, Amputee, Bleeder, Blind, Cold, Deaf, Dull Sense, Hooked, Illness, Lightweight, Mute, Paralyzed, Scrawny, Two Left Feet, or Ugly As Sin. An extreme trauma can cause all manner of mental problems including: Cold, Combat Paralysis, Ego Signature, Leaky Brainpan, Phobia, Traumatic Flashes, and Twitchy.

Inflicting a crew character with a new Complication can be a touchy thing. In general, players like their characters to get better, not worse, through game play. Discuss the possibility with them first to make sure that they are ready as players for the challenge of a new Complication. Remind them that it just gives them more ways to earn Plot Points so they can commit acts of unbridled heroism. If the player strongly objects to getting a new Complication, consider dropping it or finding a player who is more willing.

BUYING OFF COMPLICATIONS

As stated in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*, some Complications can be removed or reduced in severity through the application of Advancement Points. With your permission, a Major Complication can be reduced to a Minor for 10 APs or can be removed for 20 APs. A Minor Complication can be removed for 10 APs. Naturally, the change in the character

must be accompanied by logical circumstances that would explain the change. It could involve additional burdens such as spending money, carrying out tasks, or changing relationships to achieve the removal.

The reason for removal of a Complication should be considered. Does the change represent actual growth on the character's part? Or does the player simply want to reduce the number of problems you can throw at him? The former should receive far more consideration than the latter. If the player's doing the work to propose a flavorful and logical reason for the change, one that creates more adventures or twists to the plot, that's a good sign. Don't let yourself be convinced by an off-hand explanation.

The sort of Complications you can buy off fall into certain categories. Perhaps the most common will be physical ailments and issues that could be corrected through the use of medical therapies, prosthetics, or even cybernetics. In each case, such procedures usually incur high costs and often involve medical treatment or use of technologies that are restricted or dangerous. The removal of a major physical complication with cybernetics might introduce a minor Hooked complication for anti-rejection drugs.

A character could be affected by a change of heart or change in personality. These are harder to justify since it's rare for people to truly change. In most cases you could decide that it would make sense to only allow a Major Complication to be bought down to Minor status, understanding that the character will never be totally rid of it.

Finally, a character's history can be hard to live down. Perhaps a Branded individual performs selfless and heroic deeds to try to better himself in the public's eye.

PESKY PLOT POINTS

Plot Points are the currency of drama in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. They empower the crew to act boldly and have a hand in shaping the course of the story. If Plot Points sit idle or are forgotten, everyone at the table loses out. It's important for you and the players to use them fully.

USE FOR CREW

Plot Points can make the job run smooth or save the crew's *pi gu*. Plot Points should be flowing fast both ways. For that, you need to fix plenty of opportunities for the players to spend them. While this may sound obvious, a game can easily slip into a mode where the crew characters are cautious and go out of their way to avoid trouble and complications. Treat the crew as if they have the Things Don't Go Smooth complication as a group. Not everything should be difficult

and troublesome, but happy days get boring fast. If the plot doesn't generate enough opportunities on its own, consider adding events, interruptions, delays, and other excuses to engage the crew, encourage them to use their Complications and get them to spend those Plot Points.

Unexpected encounters, whether they occur during space travel or planetside, can upset careful and cautious planning, forcing the crew to take action they were hopin' to avoid. Remember that stability and predictability gets boring. The more interesting the times, the more reasons the players will find to spend their Plot Points.

Never Say No

Embrace your players' attempts to use Plot Points. It is a great sign of their involvement and interest in the campaign and *Serenity* as a game. If what they're asking to do isn't clear at first, take a minute or two to consider it further. Perhaps you have a villain you've been setting up for some time. Not knowing the Baron is really a spy for the Alliance, one of

the players wants to spend some Plot Points to make the Baron an old friend from her past. Your first reaction might be to block the attempt since that would muddy up the plot as you thought it would play out. But think about it. If these two were friends or seemed to be friends, that makes the eventual betrayal that much more exciting. Maybe the friendship enables the crew discover his villainy in the first place.

If what the players want to try just isn't feasible, find an alternative that might serve as well without violating the facts as you know them. If the crew has been captured and put into a cell in a maximum security prison, they won't be able to use Plot Points and a spoon to tunnel their way out. But spending Plot Points to bribe with a guard or communicate with another prisoner might give them a place to start.

Creative Interpretations

Although the use of Plot Points is a game mechanic, it's important you describe any such use in the context of the story. Why didn't the bullet kill the character? What made it so much easier for the character to use that Skill well? Why did that Asset come into play? Flavorful descriptions of these notable moments help spice up the flavor of the campaign. And it's even better when the players bring their own stories to the table.

The use of Plot Points to tweak the plot or adjust circumstances should come with consequences. A few Plot Points might get Kaylee out of a jam, but leaves her indebted to her rescuer. Escaping a gun battle might lead Jayne into a compromising situation when a lawman sees him carryin' the bank's loot. These added consequences shouldn't take away the benefit the player just purchased with the Plot Points, but could make things a little more interesting.
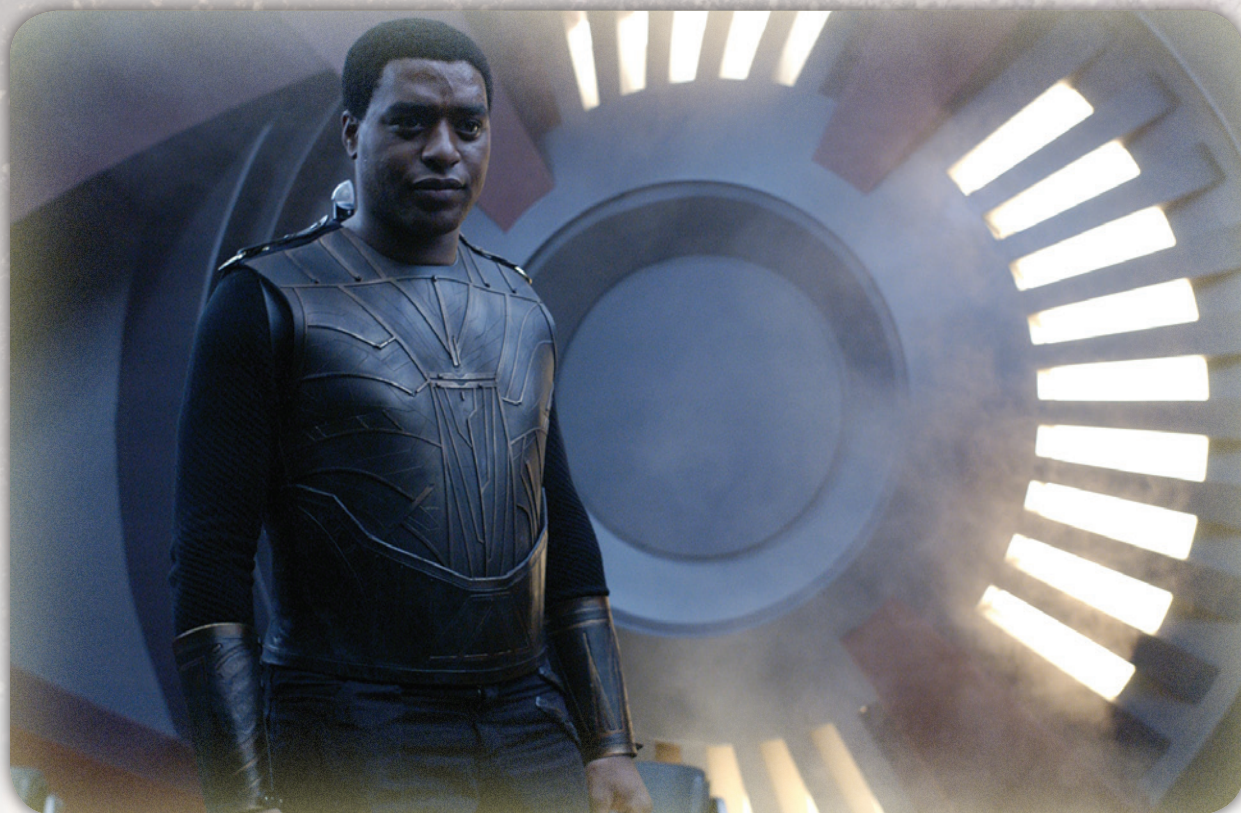
USE BY SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

As important as Plot Points are to the crew, they can be just as important to the supporting characters. They're a great tool for managing the flow of the game.

Bigger Challenge

Unless you've given the villains significantly more points than the heroes have, their foes will be roughly as powerful as the crew. To make sure the enemy is truly challenging, don't hesitate to have him use Plot Points in the same ways that the players do. A few points and Mal doesn't recognize the Operative when he walks past him until it's too late. Spend a few more Plot Points and a clueless innocent walks right into the bank while it's being robbed, giving the villain a convenient hostage. Add Plot Points to critical rolls where the villain makes a daring maneuver to set off his machinations or to put a bullet into one of these infuriating heroes.

Important friends deserve the same consideration. While it's tempting to use the death of a friend to raise the stakes and tension of the adventure, make sure these characters have the opportunity to use their own Plot Points to prevent their death. Once they are out of points, the grim reaper can come to call.

Fair's fair, of course. You have unlimited supplies of Points and the crew doesn't. Every time you spend a Plot Point on the supporting characters to put an obstacle in the path of the players, hand the point over directly. Put 'em into a collective pool of Plot Points that any of the crew can draw on, but set an appropriate maximum. Six is a pretty good number; if the crew doesn't spent them, they either don't need them or you're not making life dangerous enough!

Keep 'em Alive

Plot Points can be vital for keeping villains and important allies alive. A lucky shot might put a quick end to a villain you've crafted carefully and plotted out into the future. You have the option of letting the man die as a quirk of fate and redesigning your adventure or you can use Plot Points to give him a miraculous escape. Maybe he's got to sacrifice a prize, a loyal bodyguard, or give him some other penalty, but he lives to scheme another day. Villains who escape time and time again can capture the imagination and passion of the players, becoming the focal point of a campaign as you'd intended.

If the crew isn't much into shootin' people, they might actually turn the villain over to the authorities. Plot Points can quietly grease the wheels of justice, enabling his eventual escape or the dismissal of all charges against him. Remember, villains get Plot Points for acting their Traits just as the heroes do. The Game Master needs to remember to award these points to the supporting characters as regularly as they do to the crew.

ALTERNATE CAMPAIGN CONCEPTS

The classic model for a *Serenity* campaign is where the players are the crew of an independently owned transport operating along the Border and Rim planets, taking on a variety of odd jobs (usually with complications). This setup allows for all manner of diverse capers and hi-jinks, but it may not be suitable for everyone. You and your players might have a hankering to use one of a variety of alternate campaign models, either as a change of pace or to better suit play styles and preferences. A group of players who've already played a lot of *Serenity* might

be up for something new, to step outside the classic style of play and explore other avenues of life in the 'Verse.

The *Serenity Role Playing Game* provides some ideas for alternate campaign concepts. This here section expands considerably on those ideas and presents even more. These can be used as-is, expanded, altered, reinterpreted, and even combined. Do what you gotta do. Each campaign concept identifies some strengths and potential weaknesses for the crew and makes suggestions for adventures.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Although most of the 'Verse has been terraformed and settled by the 2500s, there's still a few places no man has set foot upon. Some planets or moons are "black rocks", where the terraforming didn't take hold. Such places are uninhabitable without spacesuits. Others are under quarantine for classified reasons, perhaps undergoing the final work of the Terraforming Consortium. These are the last new worlds.

The Consortium's been working on Columbiana in the Blue Sun sector for over a century. Few know what problems have been holding up the process: technological, bureaucratic, financial, or something more sinister. The campaign could begin with rumors that Columbiana is finally going to be opened for settlement. Ships and people begin to journey to Muir, Meridian, and other jumping-off points. They buy tools to stake claims, search for geologic deposits, fence off farm lands. Ships are at a premium and the price of passage rises. The competition is fierce and can be deadly. Alliance ships maintain a blockade of the planet, but some are willing to try to bust through to get in early. Others sit back on Persephone and cut the deals that will shape the politics of the planet. A small Consortium outpost holds prime

real estate that will likely become the primary spaceport for the world, dominating trade and government.

Whether the crew's happy to collect bonuses for ferrying settlers and their gear to the world, or wants to try to run the blockade to stake their own claim, there's a lot of opportunity for adventure in such a situation. Look to the Oklahoma Land Rush for inspiration.

DESPERADOES

Whether they're marked for a crime they did not commit or they are outright criminals guilty as charged, the crew characters are a band of outlaws on the run from Alliance forces. Maybe they've hijacked a ship and made good their escape or maybe they've got allies and resources they can still access despite being on the run. At any rate, this is a fast and likely a grim campaign, due to end in capture or death. Such a campaign could begin with the crew being brought together on a prison transport, en route to a prison moon or to serve a spell as an indentured workers on a sinkhole like Higgins' Moon. Due to a lapse in security, the crew are able to liberate themselves and take to their heels. Alternately, the characters could meet in prison and hatch a plan to escape. Executing that plan can be the initial sessions of play.

Such a campaign doesn't need to be as cut-and-dried as being on the lam. Having the crew wrongly accused gives them a reason to seek retribution and the evidence that will prove their innocence. There may be powerful forces at work aiding the crew, such as a secret benefactor hoping the crew will uncover a politically advantageous piece of information in their attempt at clearing their own names. An Alliance investigator may pursue them, growing increasingly curious about why the crew constantly risks themselves to help others or to find the truth. Another spin on this sort of campaign is that the crew aren't being

pursued by the authorities at the moment, but any little thing could tip the Alliance off. Or the crew may be an assemblage of lowlifes and riffraff in the service of someone like the major crime lord Adelei Niska or even a middling crime boss like Badger.

THE DRESSLER REPORT

The exodus from Earth-That-Was was an achievement on a scale unheard-of in human history. Massive amounts of technology, machinery were used to carry folk across the heavens to a new universe that promised miraculous possibilities. Planets were settled, terraforming began, and in the short time of a few hundred years, dozens of planets were human habitable.

As planets became more difficult to terraform, the work lost the support of the Core Worlds. The effort became more expensive and much slower. Funds for the terraforming process competed with the needs of a quickly growing population on the Core worlds. There came a point where the drain on the government's resources became too great and many terraforming efforts bogged down completely.

Most of this is common knowledge to anyone in "the know": businessmen, senior government officials, masters of the guilds and the like. What isn't generally known is contained a suppressed document called the Dressler Report. Hiram Dressler, a sharp analyst for a forgotten government bureau, concluded that the financial base of the 'Verse, of the mighty Alliance itself, was deteriorating rapidly and there was no way the government could maintain its size and scope. To attempt to do so would undoubtedly hasten the inevitable violent economic crash.

The implications of the Dressler Report are staggering. Anyone in government will likely lose power. The markets would crash, taking massive amounts of wealth with them. A military coup might be in offing, as the 'Verse

descends into chaos and war. The vaunted Alliance could very well shatter, as the Core worlds look to their own.

Those few who read the Dressler Report were alarmed and decided that the best way to prevent the coming crash was to suppress the report. Some believe that faith in the government process will overcome the forces of economics and human nature. Others are more proactive. They decide to change the rules of the game, adjust human nature, and they can avoid the prophesied end.

Several variations present themselves for introducing knowledge of this suppressed report into the game. For example, what ever happened to Hiram Dressler? Maybe he's still on the run, keeping his secret, perhaps even trying to flee it and its consequences. Is the Alliance hunting him? Do folk think he's dead, only to discover that he's still alive through something the crew does. Maybe Dressler's wife is trying to find him after he fled government assassins. Maybe she hires the crew (all unknowing) to find him. Enemies of the Alliance could seek him as well, hopin' to start the crash early.

Perhaps a copy of the report is stolen with the intent to use it to blackmail certain high up individuals. That copy gets lost and eventually comes into the possession of the crew. Do they know what it means? They might have a good reason to hang on to it, even if they don't have a clue. Later, when they learn how important it is, they'll have big decisions to make.

Finally, the report could be released somewhere and send shockwaves across the 'Verse. The predicted end starts to come to pass. How you conceive of playing this out is up to you and how drastically you want to affect your version of the 'Verse. Does the Alliance shatter into independent factions? Is travel and connection to the Core worlds restricted or even cut off with the collapse of the Cortex?

Consider the Dressler Report, its secret that could shake the foundations of the 'Verse, and how it might bring epic gravity to the story in much the same way as the Miranda revelation.

THE GREATEST SHOW IN THE 'VERSE

For a lighter-hearted *Serenity* campaign the crew might all be entertainers in a traveling circus or carnival bringing joy to the hard-living folks of the Rim and Border planets. Each crewmember would have a particular specialty, whether it's some talent to demonstrate: trick shooting, acrobatics, stage magic, mind-reading (the Reader Asset), animal tricks, weight-lifting, etc. Or some freakish aspect of appearance (any number of Complications might apply here). A sideshow might allow the character to demonstrate some other Asset or Complication. The crew will more than likely have to take on actual spacer jobs to keep flyin', leading to such odd combos as the acrobat-mechanic or lion-taming pilot.

Naturally, this line of work is best used as a backdrop to the story, since there's got to be some form of action or drama to keep things interesting. There are plenty of fascinating reasons the characters would either join a traveling circus (such as a dark secret in their past) or form one themselves. (Perhaps the circus is a cover for the fact that they're a secret and highly trained commando unit). In any case, trouble follows closely behind. Perhaps they operate on a very slim profit margin. They'll be eager to perform almost anywhere. That'll likely take them into some dangerous areas. They may even get involved with the locals. For example, religious zealots might kidnap a teenage girl in the middle of the circus. The characters are suspects (seein' as they are strangers in town) and are responsible for finding her and seeing that she's returned without harm.

JUNKYARD DOGS

For a low-key, extremely humble campaign, the crew is a group of scavengers, seeking to make ends meet by stripping down abandoned ships and hauling someone else's junk from one end of the 'Verse to another. It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it. Assuming the crew opt for the slightly more interestin' role of salvage, this could lead to some exciting game play, where every ship found drifting is a potential riddle, offering questions such as why was it abandoned? Who owned it? What's inside?

The *Serenity Role Playing Game* describes United Reclamation, the premier garbage hauling and collection organization in the 'Verse, with an exclusive contract to the Alliance giving them rights to all reclamation and salvage everywhere. The crew may have a sub-contract with United Reclamation which lets them conduct salvage operations within a limited range, or they may be conducting unlicensed salvage operations, a practice looked upon unfavorably by both the Alliance and United Reclamation. Out on the Rim, the chance of running into Reavers increases dramatically, and a seemingly abandoned ship might be the site of unimaginable carnage. Reavers are cunning, and often leave an abandoned ship relatively intact, with an emergency beacon activated. A rescue or salvage crew comes running, and the Reavers swoop in for a two-for-one bonanza.

The garbage dump of a planet called Beylix (described in the *Serenity Role Playing Game*) is a more-than-appropriate place to set a junkyard dog campaign, as it's haven to scavengers, unlicensed salvagers, and smugglers. The planet is layered with refuse, from old starships to contraband awaiting pickup. Even a simple garbage run can be turn into a dangerous adventure. What if someone inadvertently dumps something priceless (such as an antique laser pistol) into the trash? Who would be out to recover it and how far would they go?

LEAVE IT TO REAVER

For the most radical departure from your classic *Serenity* game, and perhaps best suited for a short, short campaign, the crew might be a group of Reavers. Perhaps the player-controlled Reavers are more intelligent and less bestial than the rest or they may be just as horrible as the worst ghouls out there. So little is known about the Reavers there's considerable leeway in how they might be portrayed in a game. The Reavers we've seen so far may not be the only sort of Reavers out there. The horde of ravenous, near-bestial brutes who attack Mal and his crew might be the most savage examples of Reaverdom, berserker shock troops good for little but mindless slaughter. It's hard to imagine such howling maniacs can calibrate a starship's engine or go through a preflight checklist, much less customize starships with elaborate (though somewhat insane) weapon systems as those deployed against the Alliance forces. A group of player Reavers might have completely different goals than cannibalizing their victims, and may be considerably craftier and subtler in achieving their goals.

In the American Old West, the sensational literature of the time depicted Native Americans as howling savages without even the vestige of civilization. Reavers may be victims of similar bias. A wacky and humorous take on the 'Verse might make the Reavers simple victims of propaganda and utterly unlike the stories of their violence. A completely off-the-wall campaign might involve the Alliance's forcible reintegration of Pax "victims" (Reavers) into Alliance society, mainstreaming them into established communities where they must contend with all of the strictures of the civilization they have so vigorously rejected.

Such a story line should be given a lot of thought by both you and your players. Encourage your players to take their roles seriously (not just go off on mindless bloody rampages).

MANHUNTERS

A grittier and more action-oriented campaign focuses on a group of bounty hunters, working together (strength in numbers) to bring down a rogues gallery of foes. Owning a better-armed ship than a Firefly Class transport, the crew take jobs from a variety of patrons: the Alliance; the law in the Border and Rim planets; major commercial concerns such as Blue Sun; or even criminal groups like the Syndicate or the Tongs. The characters travel from planet to planet, moon to Skyplex, on the trail of prey ranging from dangerous criminals to political dissidents.

This is a highly episodic campaign, with a series of "bring 'em back alive" mission adventures culminating in the capture or death of the wanted. To add more cohesion to the campaign, the Game Master may choose to have the characters specialize in tracking down a particular group or criminal organization—a subfaction of the Tong, a terrorist cell, or even a former Browncoat squad. Their prey has considerable political pull, resources, and quasi-legal connections which can serve to make life hell for the crew. This can allow for a cast of semi-recurring characters and a sense of progress as the crew captures each member of the organization.

A variant of this involves the crew as mercenaries, a special ops team of hired guns going where they're paid to go, doing jobs for the all sort of contractors. The crew may find themselves in a Magnificent Seven-style adventure, defending a small town against predatory bandits or Reavers. Or they could be a corporate strike force battling rival business concerns across the stars.

THE ORBITAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Simon Tam had help breaking his sister River out of the Alliance compound. His allies alerted him to what was being done to her, and helped them both escape. Though Simon never went into detail about it, there's obviously a lot more to this group than he lets on. The existence of an "orbital" underground railroad for fugitives of Alliance experimentation is an excellent setup for a crew trying to make a difference in the 'Verse. Though the option of opposing the Alliance head-on is near-to-suicidal, the crew can help save people's lives.

An orbital underground railroad campaign is a clandestine adventure, as characters hack Alliance records, stealthily break into secure compounds, and are forced to defend the "payload" long enough to get these folk to safety. Maybe the crew does such work for altruistic reasons or maybe they charge exorbitant fees to deliver loved ones from the Alliance's clutches. Either way, sessions of this sort of campaign might fall into short story arcs, with the planning and research of a particular rescue filling the early sessions and the actual rescue played out as the finale. Actions like this get the attention of the Alliance and when they strike back, they will do it with all their might, which might make for a follow-up campaign.

OUT ON THE BLUE

Not every frontier has to be about the black. Terraformed waterworlds such as Bellepheron or Newhall are prime candidates for thrillin' heroics. Instead of a starship, the crew's home is a submersible, a surface craft, or some hybrid of the two. Space stations are replaced with island bases, underwater stations, and floating industrial platforms. The conflict between major industrial developers and settlers is easily transplanted, and the jobs are more or less the same as those from a classic *Serenity* campaign. They're played against a background of a water world rather than out in space.

Exchanging the cold dark of space for the endless deep blue of an ocean adds many interesting new dynamics to play. Space in and of itself is mostly static, while an ocean environment is rich in life and can present threats in the form of extreme weather, navigational hazards, or monsters of the deep. Encounters in space are fairly rare, while those on a single planet's surface are much more common, increasing the chance for conflict.

Most importantly, a water world environment adds an element many *Serenity* campaigns might lack: beauty. Most oceans are full of gorgeous and magnificent vistas on a scale folk can barely comprehend, and it's not

hard to imagine that terraforming efforts have created oceans teeming with life as magnificent and exotic as that found on Earth-That-Was. The vastness of the open sea has inspired poetry and art throughout human history.

OUT ON THE RIM

The crew's a group of settlers out on the Rim. Much like the pioneers in the Old West, they have banded together to build homesteads and make life for themselves in remote areas. The most obvious and playable way to approach this kind of setting is to put the crew into the roles of community leaders, tying them together in some fashion, such as making them the town leaders of a small settlement. Maybe they're even related by blood. Perhaps they are members of a wealthy family in a small frontier town. This is a different sort of game, dealing in large part with managing interpersonal relationships, governing a community, and politics in a place where the "shoot first and get out of town in a hurry" approach to problem solving isn't possible. For example, a mining community might be torn between the politics of the Corone Mining Consortium and the Mining Guild.

To prevent this kind of story from turning into a tedious simulation of agricultural yield forecasts, copious resource management, and interminable civil committee meetings, have the locals involved in some sort of turmoil, from the ever-constant threat of Reavers or predatory humans. A range war played out in the Rim planets would be perfectly suited for a Serenity campaign. Depending on the timing of such a campaign, you could set it during the early days of the Unification War, where communities were torn apart through disagreement over politics or even served as the site of conflict.

A grimmer version of this sort of campaign can be set on a "black rock," a planet where terraforming failed to take hold and

environmental collapse is looming. For one reason or another, the crew may either be stuck on the planet's surface or unwilling to leave in the face of a potentially inhospitable environment. The planet may rich in mineral wealth, and the crew want to keep searching for gold until the last moment. They might have crashed on the planet and areunable to contact help. They may be prisoners sent to a black rock moon, abandoned by the Alliance, and left to die. Environmental challenges and survival are the order of the day. The stakes in a battle of humankind versus nature-gone-mad are much greater, the foe less forgiving than even a big time crime boss.

PILGRIM'S TALES

Consider a journey of disparate people traveling a vast distance to reach a spiritual goal. In the 'Verse, these people may be aboard a transport ship, traveling together to Sihnon, the ocean of light. Some may be Buddhists making a pilgrimage to a legendary temple. Others may be making a secular journey to see the world and its wonders. Even the journey itself across the black is an achievement for these people, who've lived their whole lives dirtside.

The concept provides an ideal way to bring together all manner of people on a ship, giving them a common purpose or destination. While some may be traveling for spiritual reasons, others may be fleeing their own dark deeds or retribution. The campaign could be as short as one run for a convention tournament or drawn out with complications and delays. Their route may not be direct if the owners of the ship decide to pick up lucrative business on the way. Trouble and misfortune might stall the journey until fuel or parts can be obtained.

Such a journey also gives you a vehicle to take the players to different parts of the 'Verse where they might not ordinarily go. Describe the wonders of Sihnon and the Core Worlds to Rim-born settlers. They may

stop at Bernadette to see its churches and the ark Prometheus. There's a lot of room in the 'Verse for you to introduce your own worlds, moons, and awe-inspiring natural phenomena.

THE PRODIGAL ONES

For this high-powered campaign, the crew are the Alliance's dream: a covert team made up of psychically gifted and highly-trained operatives at the scale of River Tam. For a campaign like this, the team is the creation of an organization like Blue Sun on contract to the Alliance. Or they could be escapees from the Alliance seeking revenge.

After the experiment with River Tam proved a failure, the Alliance decided that psychics were too dangerous and a threat to security. The crew may be the unfortunate psychics doomed to be "neutralized". A dangerous group of pyschics, psychologically unstable and capable of unbelievable violence, would be the Alliance's worst nightmare.

In such a campaign, you might pump up the starting character point totals, creating an altogether new category of character called "Prodigy". Prodigies are simply better than everyone else. Gifted students recruited at an early age into one of the Alliance's secret human weapon projects, they were cut off from their families and underwent experiments designed to fully manifest their psychic powers. Prodigy characters begin with 60 Attribute points, and can start with Attributes as high as d12 + d6. They are still limited to five Assets and five Complications, but at least one of the Assets must be Reader [Minor or Major] or another psychic Trait described in **Chapter Two: Traits & Skills**. A Prodigy begins with 80 Skills Points and can assign up to 1d12 + 1d6 in any desired Skills to start.

Such a group of player characters will be a force to be reckoned with, and you should throw suitably challenging opposition at them, using high-powered characters equivalent to the Operative as potential foes.

SKYPLEX NIGHTS

Classic *Serenity* campaigns feature a crew character group with a great deal of mobility, usually owning or at least in command of a spaceship of some sort. This really showcases the transitory role of the crew in the 'Verse, always in motion and calling a ship home. To turn this whole concept on its ear, give the crew a home base, a place they live and work and are determined to defend. One of the best options for this sort of setting is one of the massive orbital space stations called "skyplexes". Each skyplex is a virtual city unto itself, with thousands or even tens of thousands of inhabitants.

A skyplex is a complex and labyrinthine social environment full of intrigue and potential adventure. It provides a steady stream of visitors in transit, giving you the opportunity to develop a stable cast of recurring supporting characters. Player characters can be important figures on a skyplex, whether staff or prominent members of the community. They can be united in their goals or they are simply known to one another, their paths crossing from time to time. Instead of traveling to adventure, the crew has adventure come to them, and the stakes are raised dramatically when there's no place else to run.

Considering the incalculable expense building a skyplex, there's the question of who financed it and who owns it now. It may have fallen into the hands of a criminal element such as that run by Adelei Niska, or maybe it's run by a more legitimate organization such as the Traders' Guild. The Alliance might operate the skyplex, strictly supervised, or the skyplex may even have fallen off the grid and operate as an "anything-goes" freehold. Corporate espionage may become a major theme of the campaign, with the crew caught between warring factions. The skyplex may be located way out on the Rim, serving as a lighthouse for spaceships and a stronghold against Reaver

CHAPTER 5

incursions. The skyplex may have its own defense force. The characters might be fighter pilots, who fly patrols and fight off unwelcome visitors.

THE UNIFICATION WAR

The 'Verse was shaped by the events spinning out of the Unification War. While most of these options for alternate campaigns are set in different aspects of the 'Verse, a powerful campaign can be set in the time period of the Unification War. The *Serenity Role Playing Game* discusses the events of the war. Hints about the events that transpired during that time are scattered throughout the book. Setting a campaign during wartime can lead to dramatic and heartbreaking stories, especially if the crew are Browncoats on the side of the Independent faction. There were plenty of battles before Serenity Valley, and the crew may be a squad of soldiers fighting on any of the Border or Rim planets before the war ended.

Another potential setting is to have the crew as the Last Browncoats, a group of holdouts that haven't given up fighting and are holed out on some distant and remote moon or planet, keeping the fires of independence burning. They've avoided being captured due to keepin' their heads down, but now they've decided to unite and are determined to take the war back to the Alliance. They could do so in an outright military fashion, given enough allies and some tactical ingenuity, or they may be more subtle, a team of saboteurs working against the Alliance through acts of domestic terrorism, sabotage, and other forms of misbehavin'.

THE 'VERSE EXPRESS

The crew is part of a small-to-large organization with an established home base. They make a living running errands or otherwise going where they're told and doing what they're paid for. This sort of campaign is extremely similar to the function of the crew of *Serenity*, though in this case no single player is the ship owner and there's more-than-likely chance that an "established" supporting character will be on hand to dispense orders. Every adventure might even begin with "Great news, everyone!"

This sort of campaign has advantages over the free-roaming model. There's a definite structure and mission plans, as well as a home base for the crew to explore. This could be a skyplex or a settlement on a Core or Border planet. A home base allows the Game Master the opportunity to create a regular cast of supporting characters outside of the confines of the ship and crew.

Downsides to this sort of campaign is the potential feeling lack of free will. The crew doesn't really make their own choices about the adventures they undertake. This can be avoided by throwing curve balls at the players (maybe after a few sessions, their employer sells them out and they're forced to operate on their own), or by emphasizing the complexity of each mission. *Serenity* should be a game with plenty of room for dramatic action and moral conflict. Routine jobs should occur as background setup. "It seemed like a routine job, but then things went *chui se*."

ADVENTURE IDEAS & PLOT HOOKS

Being a Game Master and shepherding a crew through the 'Verse can be a daunting experience. For most crews, things rarely go according to plan if the crew even has a plan. Could be your crew is more comfortable winging it. In your role as the Game Master, you're the one person in the room who should always have a plan. It's certainly possible to run a game of *Serenity* without setting out a basic plot or adventure idea, just seeing how the crew reacts to various situations and

Serenity: A Movie in Three Acts

Need an example? The movie Serenity follows the three-act structure fairly closely (with some additional flourishes), and provides a perfectly appropriate illustration of the three-act structure in action.

The film opens with a **Prologue**: opens in young River Tam's classroom, providing background on the 'Verse and a glimpse into the Alliance's philosophies. River states the whole premise of the film, about people not wanting to be told how or what to think. The prologue is nested into another prologue, which takes place inside the lab. River's brother Simon is introduced, their relationship established, and their plight defined. Their escape is nested into yet another prologue, as security footage. This last prologue introduces the Operative and establishes his goal. By the end of this series of prologues, the audience knows that the Alliance is arrogant and controlling; that it experiments on unwilling subjects; that River and Simon Tam are on the run; and that the Operative is a capable and deadly foe.

Act One begins with the crew of *Serenity* (the ship) about to embark on a robbery. The crew's personalities and relationships to one another are revealed and the tone is set. River and Simon are shown to be part of the crew, linking the Prologues to Act One and establishing that some time has passed between the breakout and the "now" of the film. The robbery and ensuing chase establish the Setup: the crew are part-time thieves (they're not good enough at it to be full-timers); they're in the Wild West equivalent of the 'Verse; River is psychic; Reavers are very scary; and the crew is otherwise good at what they do. Later in Act One, the crew goes to Beaumonde and River goes berserk, then they visit Mr. Universe. Supporting characters in the forms of Inara and Book are introduced here. The Premise is now established: the Alliance wants River very badly; River is unexpectedly capable of extraordinary violence, and the Alliance did something to her that makes them desperate to recover her. The initial Stakes are also on the table: River's life and the crew's wellbeing are in danger. Not all the Stakes are known, however.

Act Two presents a series of obstacles, the first two being that Mal must rescue Inara from an apparent trap and that Mal must survive his confrontation with the Operative (in which the Operative raises the Stakes). More information is provided: River's dream reveals that the Reavers are tied to her loosely and to the overall story, the mystery of Miranda becomes the apparent goal. This is the First (False) Culmination, where the crew seemingly has achieved what they want. Everyone is safe and they've shaken the Alliance. There's not a lot motivating them at this time, so here's where the Stakes get raised again. The crew loses an ally (Shepherd Book), and the Operative reveals that he's willing to kill everyone they know to get what he wants. This is the Low Point. The crew's morale is shattered. Mal realizes that he has no choice but to go to Miranda to strike back at the Operative and hatches a desperate and dangerous plan to get there.

Act Three takes the crew to Miranda, through Reaver territory, with the Alliance somewhere out there in pursuit. On Miranda they discover the Alliance's secret: that it's responsible for the creation of the Reavers and the deaths of millions of civilians. At Stake for the Alliance is their reputation, as they will be crippled should this news get out. In order to win (revenge for their lost friend and to have people learn the truth about the Alliance), the crew must reveal the secret of Miranda. The crew doesn't realize it, but another obstacle has come to them in the form of Mr. Universe's betrayal. This brings about the final Confrontation, which is a multi-part battle set in space (Serenity vs. the Alliance, using the Reaver fleet as a secret weapon), on the ground in two different locations (the crew versus Reavers and Mal versus the Operative). Some stakes are lost

Serenity: A Movie in Three Acts (cont.)

(the ship Serenity is seriously damaged and a character dies). In the Confrontation, River and the crew defeat the Reavers and Mal defeats the Operative. Mal sucessfully broadcasts the signal that will damage the Alliance. Finally, the Dénouement has the crew burying their dead and repairing Serenity. The former Operative informs them that the Alliance is weakened, but not gone, and that River and Simon (along with the rest of the crew) are no longer wanted. A new order has emerged. River steps up to assume Wash's metaphorical place as the pilot and a humorous beat reminds us that nothing has changed overmuch and that Serenity is still a bit of a junk-heap.

what trouble they seek out on their own, but that might not work for everyone. In most cases, games run like that lack urgency or a cohesive shape. The crew won't feel especially threatened or they'll come to the game-killing conclusion that the less they do, the safer they'll be.

And that ain't right.

An adventure should live up to the name. It should be full of thrills and peril with a natural beginning, middle, and end. Challenges and dangers should be spaced just about right with the events so that they come naturally, with the proper level of suspense. The best way to achieve this is with planning, to decide what happens now and what comes next, which aspects of the plot will most heavily involve which members of the crew, and how action should rise and fall to get the maximum effect.

This section provides some guidelines and suggestions for running adventures in the 'Verse based on the classic three-act model. It covers some basic storytelling techniques that should help you through the rough patches if you're a Greenhorn Game Master and it may even provide Veteran Game Master's a new trick or two. Even if you're Big Damn Hero of a Game Master, you still might want to read this section. Possible you might learn somethin'.

THREE-ACT ADVENTURES

A classic model of dramatic construction that works excellently for putting together adventures is the three-act structure. This dates back to the ancient Greeks on Earth-That-Was, and will probably be around until the suns go dark and cold. Though the model has gone through periods when it fell out of favor, it's never disappeared completely. It resonates to most everyone because it's ingrained into cultural storytelling, and because it also tends to mirror the attention span of the average person, providing the right kind of stimulus and complexity at just about the right times. The classic model of the three-act adventure will seem extremely familiar because it has been used for all forms of entertainment (movies, plays, operas, short stories, novels, and even music). It is highly suitable for role playing games.

The three-act model is broken up into three acts (no surprise there). The acts can be of equal length, though most of the time the time ratio is 1:2:1, where the first and third acts are roughly equal in length and the second act is twice that long. If a game session is four hours long, think of it as one hour for Act One, two hours for Act Two, and an hour for Act Three. This isn't a set-in-stone ratio. You should feel free to shift it around to fit the group and the

outcome of events, but the three-act structure is always a good guideline to keep in mind when planning an adventure.

Prologue (Optional)

The prologue is sort of a teaser, a little snippet of game that helps set the tone for things to come. It is often part of the Setup in Act One (described below), and is optional and sometimes unnecessary. A prologue can foreshadow major events later on, add the ground work for a big plot twist, or introduce a previously-unseen supporting character who will emerge later at a key moment. The prologue is also a means of hinting to the players (not the player characters) that all isn't as it seems, adding to the tension as the players know their characters are in for a surprise, though they may not know when or how the blow will fall. A prologue might even be entirely narrated by the Game Master, a little "off camera" scene, and there can even be multiple prologues (but keep it simple to avoid the players dozing off).

Act One—The Setup

This act establishes the crew in terms of who they are and what they do for a living. It also introduces the setting. For a classic *Serenity* game, the setup introduces the crew and establishes that they've got a ship and they fly around the 'Verse trying to make ends meet, a job that frequently puts them in danger. Other significant characters are introduced in act one, and usually there's some take on how the members of the crew relate to one another and how any supporting characters might relate to the crew. In the case of an ongoing campaign, where the crew already knows who they are and what they're doing, this sort of introduction is unnecessary and the crew's part of it can be skipped, though you could take the opportunity to introduce new characters who will play a major role in their lives. (Preacher Book decides to book passage with them.)

The next element of the *Setup* is the *Premise*. That's where the story comes in. The Premise introduces the Challenge; something that needs to be accomplished, or an incident that needs to be dealt with. Essentially, dealing with the Challenge is what the characters are supposed to do in the adventure and presents the circumstances surrounding the Challenge. The Challenge can be introduced as a problem (the crew's ship breaks down), or as a task the crew has been asked to undertake (they're hired to deliver cargo to some remote mining camp). Neither of these situations is particularly dramatic, so it's your job to enliven them and add a level of tension, turning them into something dramatic. For example, the first story idea might be changed to "The crew's ship breaks down, and they spot Reavers on their long-range sensors." You might turn the second adventure into "The crew is hired to haul explosives over rough terrain in a twitchy hovermule."

Act One should also include an introduction of the Stake(s). The Stake is what it sounds like: it's what's at stake. The Stake is the prize, the goal, a condition or maybe a combination of all three. The Stake is also a measure of what loss of the Stake will cost the crew. Might be money. Might be their lives. Sometimes the loss is more than that, such as the villain getting away or the theft of something treasured and valuable. There can be multiple Stakes, some shared by the entire crew and some personal. Many times all of the Stakes aren't known up front, which could be tough to deal with later. Finally, the Stakes will in all likelihood get raised as the game progresses. In some cases, the crew will have one set of Stakes, while the opposition will have another. Make sure you know both!

Act One should end with the crew deciding what to do with their choice of action clearly defined. This is where the planning phase ends and the action begins. This can also be a point where some new and potentially unexpected element enters the picture, changing the game

plan entirely. Reacting to the unexpected can be the same as having a course laid clear. The challenge may have gotten a bit more complicated or become something other than expected, but it's still a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Act Two

This begins with the crew knowing what they have to do to gain the objective and now they are putting the plan into action. The Premise is understood. The Stakes are established. The Challenge is known. Now all that's left is to actually do the thing. Act Two is where the going gets tough. In this act, the crew must face one or more significant obstacles that prevent them from reaching their goal. This is the most straightforward in terms of what happens, but it should contain two significant elements: the *First Culmination* and the *Low Point*.

The First Culmination (also called the *False Culmination*) is usually when things look like they'll work out well and the path to achieving the goal is apparently readily within reach. This can happen at the end of an obstacle. The First Culmination ends in success that turns out to be failure. (The crew works hard to break into a bank vault, only to discover that others have beat them to the prize and carried it off.) The crew should realize they're much further from victory then initially seemed. (Now we have to find who took the prize and go after it!) Success may even seem impossible or not worth the effort. This realization almost always naturally flows into the Low Point, the absolute bottom emotionally, where the crew is confronted with loss and must overcome the desire to quit and go home. This can be tought for Game Master if you're a nice person, as it's basically putting the screws to your crew and letting them suffer for a little while. You're also letting them rise to the challenge.

The Low Point is where the Stakes have been raised and now all is on the table. Some Stakes may even have been lost at this point. Can the crew still meet the initial Challenge?

Act Three

This is the resolution of the three acts and consists of the *Confrontation* and the *Dénouement*. In the Confrontation, the crew must encounter the force representing the Challenge and overcome it (or be overcome, for a downer ending). Some part of the Stakes may be lost during this act. The ultimate goal of the Challenge should be able to be achieved after this confrontation and the Stakes resolved.

The Dénouement is the new state of affairs once the Challenge has been met. Sometimes it's a return to the status quo or it resolves into a new order, where things are similar to the way they were but changed enough to reflect the events of the previous acts. Some roles may be realigned (an enemy becomes weaker or transforms), but there should be a clear sense that things are back the way they should be (or as much as can be achieved).

STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES

The three-act structure is a solid framework for adventure building, but it's only a framework. You can take it as-is and put together adventures until the 'Verse collapses in on itself, but such adventures are going to repeat one another almost note-for-note, and that song'll get old mighty quick. This section deals with some basic narrative techniques to help you convey the story to your crew and make the three-act structure seem fresher and more original.

The ABCs of Plot

A standard means of television plotting is to break up the events on a show into two or three categories, usually labeled A and B (as in "the A-plot" and "the B-plot"). These are mentioned in **Chapter Six** of the Serenity Role Playing Game. They're designated in order of importance, the A-plot is the most important and the B-plot is less important. Sometimes you can have multiple B-plots, so it's convenient to label them the C-plot, D-plot, etc. to keep them straight. Anything after the initial B-plot is usually something entirely character-based with an outcome that's not that significant to the shape of the overall plot. The A-plot drives the action of the whole story, while the B-plot adds additional emotional resonance. Any further plot threads (C and above) are either there because they're not ready to be resolved in the adventure at hand or they're solely character-based. They might even be comic relief. The A-plot of the movie Serenity is the Alliance's attempts to keep their actions on Miranda a secret. The B-plot is River and Simon being pursued. The C-plot is Mal and Inara's troubled relationship.

Action! Action! Action!

The master detective author Raymond Chandler once said, "When in doubt, have a man come through the door with a gun in his hand." Any Serenity plot or campaign should have no shortage of men with guns, willing to hurt or otherwise intimidate the crew. Action can serve two purposes: emphasize the danger the crew already faces and jump-start a stalled scene or sequence. The crew will need to deal with this gunman and then there'll be questions that need answering. Who was the gunman? Who sent him? How'd he find the crew? What did he want? The threat doesn't have to be a gun battle. They could pulled over by an Alliance cruiser, discover a Reaver ship on the long-range sensors, and so on. If the crew is in their ship in the middle of space, maybe they'll find they've got a stowaway with a grudge or a woman claiming to be someone's wife. The best part of this trick is that it doesn't even have to be part of the main plot. It can be about something that happened a while ago or something that might happen later. It can deepen the mystery, especially if the gunman doesn't know exactly who sent him. He just got his orders through a blind

information drop. The important thing is that something happens,and the crew has to deal with it.

"As You Well Know. . ."

From Raymond Chandler we move to science fiction author, Roger Zelazny and a technique he used frequently. When Zelazny didn't know where his story was going next, he'd have a short sequence where he would have the protagonist recap previous events either to himself (and the audience) or to an ally. When he got to the end of this recap, Zelazny would usually have a better handle on what should happen next, as he now understood what the protagonist was expecting (or wanted) to happen. In television this technique is frequently used at the beginning of an episode to remind the audience of the Premise. It's sometimes a good idea to remind the players why the characters are where they are and what they're supposed to be doing. For a multi-part adventure, it can never hurt to have someone periodically show up asking questions to get the crew (and the players) to explain things and internalize their goals.

Come in Late and Leave Early

This mantra is a classic screenwriter's goal for storytelling economy and it's also a wonderful guideline you can use in adventure design and scene management. Essentially, it means to begin a scene at the last possible second and then cut a scene almost brutally short at the end, rather than doing a bunch of wrap up and "bridging" narration. This technique lets you slice through a lot of potentially problematic preparation and setup, and get straight into the dramatic and exciting bits. It's not as dramatic a cut as *in media res* (described later on), but uses a similar principle for the setup. Instead of dealing with the whole negotiation of how things got to where they are, you simply present the setup as if it's

already occurred and that the crew has agreed to it. When a scene is more-or-less wrapped up, don't dwell overmuch on cleanup and bookkeeping, just cut to the next important bit, even if it's the wrap-up on the ship where the crew talks about what went wrong. You should think of a scene like a party and the crew as celebrity guests: they should be able to show up late after all the food and drinks have been served and when everyone else can see them arrive. They should be able to mingle when the other guests are already chatty and warmed up; and they should be able to leave before people start putting the empty dishes away and conversation begins to falter.

Cut Scenes

Described in the *Serenity Role Playing Game* as interludes, cut scenes are essentially scenes where the "camera" cuts away from the crew and goes to focus on someone else or some other event. This might represent an exchange of information between one supporting character and another, a dramatic confrontation, a secret unknown to the crew, or some aspect of the plot that becomes known to the crew later on. It can also contain spoilers, out-of-character information that could potentially spoil a surprise, but foreshadows it enough that the players can get the extra thrill out of the revelation. Running a cut scene is tricky, and some Game Masters dislike using them. The most basic way is to write a scene out and narrate it, with you taking on all of the parts. A more interesting means might be to hand out a script of the scene to the players and let them read it. A proper cut scene can be difficult to run if you're trying to keep information from the players, so it should be done only if it will add to the adventure, rather than detract from it.

The End is the Beginning

Begin with the crew in the middle of an improbable or highly dramatic situation, with no explanation as to how they got there. Let

them react for a short time and then take the scene to a point where resolution is almost at hand. For example, an adventure might begin with the announcement "The cargo hold is cold and dark and you're not sure how much more air is left. Outside, you hear Reavers howling as they try to breach the armored door. Then you hear a sudden grinding noise, and a white-hot flame begins cutting through the door: a plasma torch. They'll be through in a few moments. What are you doing?" When the players rightfully ask how they got into this predicament, tell them something like: "It was three days ago, back on Lilac. You'd just delivered your cargo, and flush with cash, you decided to spend some of it. Little did you know that you would end up in the wrong place at the wrong time." The rest of the session builds to a dramatic point, explaining how the crew wound up in a cargo hold. Once the game play reaches the point of the opening sequence, then it finishes as normal and resolves as it normally would. That sort of beginning doesn't always work and might take some quick thinking or revision to make it fit with the events that actually get played out, so you should use it sparingly.

In Medias Res

This is a Latin phrase from Earth-That-Was, translating roughly as "in the middle of things." Using this technique, you place the characters where they need to be, in the middle of the story, and fill in the blanks about how they got there through some simple narration or a flashback sequence. It's a little like the End is the Beginning, without going back and playing through the whole story to that point. This narrative method emphasizes getting the audience (the crew) rapidly immersed into a situation and cuts out a lot of potentially tedious setup in favor of a gripping start. It also emphasizes the "reality" of the crews' lives, as if they continue to have adventures even when they're not sitting around the table. A tried-and-true method of using *in medias res* in a game is to begin play a second or two before a gunfight or significant action sequence breaks out, with a statement like, "You're in the warehouse, crouched around the cargo module, when the lights suddenly go on and an alarm klaxon blares. Guards begin to shout. What are you doing?" Emphasize the action first and let the crew extricate themselves from danger, then, when they're recovering, fill them in on how they got there. This can even be done in the middle of the gunfight. If one of the player characters asks "What the hell am I doing here?" You might answer, "Funny how things turn out. You had just landed on Triumph looking to offload your cargo, when . . ."

Keep Things Movin'

You should always be thinking of a way to keep things moving. This is obviously good advice for plotting, but it can also be applied for objects, environments, and supporting characters. When there's a chance for some form of physical movement or sense of movement in a scene, use it. Instead of a supporting character sitting in a static location while members of the crew talk to him, have that supporting character moving in an appropriate fashion through his environment. For example, when the crew comes to talk to a crime lord like Adelei Niska, you might say that Niska wants to walk through one of the thoroughfares of his Skyplex as he speaks to them. Describe the passage through the corridors and the reactions of those they pass and how Niska's men move with him. Or if the crew comes to talk to a lawman out on a Rim Planet, have him chat with them while he's on his rounds, walking around the community he polices. In the more civilized planets of the Core, the crew can meet people on public transportation as it buzzes through the urban landscape. The crew doesn't have to be moving, either. Simply describing some activity in a scene engages the senses in a way that a fixed locale doesn't. Having movement

conveys an impression of dynamic action, even during something as mundane as a conversation. Unlike films or television, role playing games have an unlimited budget, and there's no reason you can't take the crew on a tour of their location anytime you feel like it.

Switch Gears

An action sequence such as a shootout, a space battle, or a chase scene doesn't have to be the same old *yong chwen mien* every time. You should always be thinking on ways to change gears in an action sequence, reestablish the ground rules and force the crew to adapt to the new situation. A running gun battle through an Alliance-controlled Skyplex can suddenly turn into a desperate struggle for survival if an explosion causes a massive hull breach and atmosphere begins howling out of the station, threatening to drag friend and foe into space unless they work together to fix the problem. A spaceship chase can end in an exhilarating display of piloting when Wash safely lands the ship, then turn into a running ground battle that eventually culminates in a single man-to-man fistfight. Perhaps it's a situation where the pilot, accustomed to sitting in a position of relative safety, is suddenly struggling to gain control of the ship when a stowaway enters the bridge while he's in the middle of evasive maneuvers. Everyone on board is being thrown around in the ship wondering what's going on, while on the bridge the pilot and the stowaway are throwing punches and grappling to control the steering yoke. Introducing the unexpected into the middle of a fairly standard encounter turns a simple battle into something really memorable.

Split 'em Up

Refereeing a gun fight with six characters shootin' at ten of Badger's thugs inside the cargo hold of a Firefly can be a bit daunting. Sometimes a more effective way of dealing with action sequences is to separate the crew and put them in different locations according to their fields of expertise and the needs of the story. Again, look at the final confrontation of *Serenity* for inspiration. In that battle, the crew of the ship is united when the ship crashes, then split up into three separate battles: the crew versus Reavers in a ranged firefight, River versus the Reavers in melee combat, and Mal versus the Operative in a swordfight that turns into a bare-knuckle brawl. Not only is this easier on you, as far as keepin' track of everything, but dividing the group into smaller numbers gives all the characters more time to shine.

Switch Partners

The mechanic fixes the ship. The tough guy shoots people. The pilot sits in the chair and flies the ship. You can get a lot of mileage out of mixing things up and putting the crew into one another's boots from time to time. If it's done right and done sparingly, pushing characters outside their comfort zone can yield entertaining results. What if the day before the big showdown with Niska's bounty hunters, Mal and Jayne and Zoe get stomach flu and are puking up their guts when they need to be fighting? Don't be afraid to force the crew to switch roles, so that the sweet-tempered mechanic has to try to bandage the doctor's chest wound while riding in the back of a runaway hovermule, the foul-mouthed mercenary must try to pass himself off as a jaded aristocrat at a big society shindig, the cook is forced to pilot the ship at high speed through an Alliance blockade.

Go Out With a Bang, Not a Whimper

This should be self-explanatory. You should try to end most of your adventures with white-knuckled edge-of-the-seat action sequences. Use some or all of the tricks described above and conclude with a high-stakes roll of the dice where every member of the crew feels important and gets a chance to shine.

Adventures where everything goes off without a hitch, no blood is spilt, and the crew is never in any danger are . . . well . . . not adventures.

QUICK STORY IDEAS

Here's a list of story ideas for you to adapt for your campaigns. None of these are fleshed out enough to use without some detail being added, but each can provide the primary concept to hang the rest of the adventure around. You should look at each of these with an eye towards, "What might happen if *my* crew were the ones involved" and adapt accordingly. Some of these story ideas are classic themes, while others are slight variations.

Each story idea has a title, a description, and some possible variations listed. The variations might be an alternate spin on the main story idea, a secret explanation, or an additional detail that adds new dimension.

All in the Syndicate

As part of the crew's line of work, they've likely owe folk a few outstanding favors. In this case, a *Ser Toh* (crime boss) calls in a favor, and the crew can't refuse him. He tells them there's going to be a sit-down between the Syndicate and the town's lesser crime bosses. This *Ser Toh* will be sworn into the Syndicate and the crew had best be on his good side. There's obvious potential for danger, especially when the crime boss insists that the crew transport him and his inner circle to the meeting. The crew has demonstrated they can handle themselves (and are probably more competent than his thugs), and this will make everything even between them. Just before setting down, the boss's crew is taken out through something like a flu, food poisoning, etc. Nothing suspicious, but enough to make it impossible for them to go with him. Now the crime boss demands that the crew act as if they're part of his organization. If one of the crew is female, he may insist that she pretend to be his wife or mistress. Now the crew is rubbing shoulders with some of the most notorious criminals in the 'Verse.

Variations: The event is being disguised as a big social event, such as the don's daughter's wedding. The contrast between the criminal meetings behind the scenes and the public gaiety should be emphasized, including wedding shenanigans such as the bride-to-be taking a liking to one of the characters. The bride-to-be may even decide that a Syndicate wedding isn't for her or that she hates her potential husband (arranged marriage) and begs the crew to take her away. This might also be an attempt by the Syndicate to whack the *Ser Toh* the crew is accompanying, meaning that they're in a heap of trouble.

Bad Deal Gone Worse

The crew is lookin' to unload their cargo. The buyers show up to inspect it and announce that it's bogus (cheap junk, irradiated, contaminated, not as advertised, etc.). They won't pay. The crew is fairly certain that when the cargo was first taken on board the ship, it was shiny. The original sellers have skedaddled and can't be reached and the buyers aren't the sort to let the situation turn all bygones be bygones and suchlike. Now the crew has cargo they may or may not be able to resell and an increasingly twitchy group of clients demanding to know where the goods are. *Juh shi suh mo go dohng shee?*

Variations: This is a setup with the sellers hoping the crew will take out the buyers or maybe figuring the buyers will take out the crew. Or the buyers themselves contaminated the cargo (though not permanently), planning to get it dirt cheap. Or there is something majorly wrong with the cargo and this is only the beginning of their troubles . . .

Corporate Extraction

The spouse of an old ally contacts a member of the crew. She has a problem. Her husband was working for Blue Sun's, doing

Black Rocks

Sure, there were mistakes made, planets where terraforming went bad and created what were known as "black rocks." The Alliance has invested a lot of money to make sure that no one ever sees these failed experiments. They've been swept under the galactic carpet, as it were, and if you have business on one, you have to either find it on your own, bribe someone who knows where it is, and then face the possibility of havin' to run an Alliance blockade to reach it. But there are dozens (maybe many more) of these black rocks out there in the 'Verse and the Alliance can't patrol them all. Though it's hard to imagine that anyone would ever want to go near such inhospitable (and downright nasty) hunks of rock, they make ideal locations for secret meetings, contraband storage, illegal salvaging or mining operations, and hideouts for any number of folk. But those squattin' on such places will have to work mighty hard to just keep breathin'. Meanin' they are few and far between.

some mundane job in one of their mundane divisions, when suddenly he went missing. The company claims he stole corporate property and took off. The wife doesn't believe it. She is very eager to recover him. Blue Sun wants their property. The wife received a cryptic communication from him, through a friend, telling her that he was on the run and she was in great danger due to something he'd learned at work. She wants her husband found. Unfortunately, her contact with the character has now put the crew under the eye of the Blue Sun.

Variations: Blue Sun is actually clear of any shenanigans. The spouse doesn't know it, but her husband was having an affair and he's run off with a co-worker. Both husband and wife are attempting to sell company secrets to Iskellian Technology Solutions, Blue Sun's largest rival. For a more lighthearted resolution, the company secret could be something innocuous, such as a new flavor of Fruity Oaty Bar.

Diverted

Takin' on passengers is always a bit of a risk and this time is no exception. While transporting some pharmacorp execs to Greenleaf, the crew's ship is waylaid by a group of drug smugglers working for one of Greenleaf's many cartels. Heavily armed, the smugglers seize the passengers and hold them hostage (and maybe one or more of the characters, though that's not much fun for a character who has to sit in a chair with duct tape over his mouth). The crew watches as cartel gunmen load their ship with bales of restricted narcotics in unprocessed leafy form. In the skies above, Alliance cruisers are stoppin' everything that flies, lookin' for contraband. How is the crew going to turn this around?

Variation: The cartel members are in hire to a rival pharmacorp and have bribed an Alliance officer to look the other way, though the crew doesn't know this and spends a few tense moments while he does his inspection. 'Course after that, the cargo still has to be delivered. The hired guns may decide not to honor the terms of their deal with the cartel, but plan to steal the drugs themselves, making the whole situation a dicy one.

Escape from Paradise

On a supposedly routine delivery of food and medical supplies to a small moon called Paradise. The crew knows that Paradise is home to a corporate-run prison (run by Iskellian Technology Solutions, Blue Sun, or someone else), and that the supplies are going to that very installation. What the crew doesn't know until after they've set down and

offloaded their cargo is that the inmates have taken over the prison and have decided to use the crew's ship as their escape vehicle.

Variations: The corporate overseers have treated the prisoners inhumanely and this is what prompted the takeover. The inmates are all dangerous psychopaths who should not be loosed on an unsuspectin' populace. For a lighthearted spin, the prison is for "white collar" crimes and the crew finds themselves at the mercy of a group of computer hackers, embezzlers, and accountants who have no idea what to do with the ship now they have it.

High Rollers

This unauthorized, high-stakes game of Faro is one of the most exclusive games in the 'Verse. A powerful and influential politician has contacted the crew through confidential channels. He plans to take part in the event and is looking for an allied player, one who cannot be traced back to him, who will help insure that he wins. He has created a false identity for the crewmember, presenting the player character as a filthy rich heir to a wealthy Rim family. The politician offers to bankroll this operation and asks that the rest of the crew pose as his personal staff. To preserve confidentiality, the benefactor keeps his true identity concealed up to the point just before the game begins, when he will reveal himself. Security for the event is tight. The participants in the game are among the 'Verse's wealthiest and most elite. Anyone caught cheating is dead.

Variations: The game might be Baccarat, poker, or even Mahjong (throw in the Tong to ratchet up the tension). The game might take place in an exclusive casino on Santo or on the personal floating estate of a wealthy landowner on Bellerophon. The politican is not what he claims. He could be anyone from a Federal officer to a con artist.

Hot Potato

A member of the crew is unwittingly given an illegal item just before heading through a Skyplex customs screening in some remote Alliance checkpoint. The item (contraband, an unlicensed weapon, stolen data, etc.) is incredibly valuable. The crew character (or even the entire crew) is arrested, but when the Alliance customs official learns that someone non-Alliance is looking for this item, he plans to keep it for himself and offers the crew a deal. Help defend the checkpoint and the matter will be dropped. The crew suspects a double-cross.

Variations: The Alliance officer is actually a decent person and the offer is on the level. Alternately, instead of Alliance, the security checkpoint is some regional government with no strong desire to have the Alliance involved, and both the Alliance and Blue Sun are on the way to recover the item.

Imposters

In the middle of a routine passage through an Alliance checkpoint, the crew learns that their ship has been identified as participating in illegal activities during the past week. The ship's identifier code was recorded as it passed through prohibited space and the Alliance is curious as to what they were doin' there. The trouble is, the crew has no idea. This time, they're innocent. Investigation reveals that there's another ship out there using the same supposedly unique identifier beacon. Unbeknownst to the crew, an unscrupulous crew with a similar enough ship copied their transponder code and has been up to no good, hoping that any heat will chase after the crew. Now the characters have got to clear their names and find the imposters, before they land in trouble for more crimes they didn't commit.

Variations: Someone known to the crew is captain of the other ship, and this is his means of getting even for a perceived wrong.

The captain of the other ship is planning something big: a heist or even political assassination.

Lifeboats

The crew comes across a huge luxury passenger liner (usually of the sort that travels the Central Planets) drifting out of control and besieged by a Reaver ships. The Reavers have breached the hull and are committing atrocities beyond the scope of anything the crew has encountered. There are still civilians onboard, either hiding or locked in a desperate battle. The crew sees escape pods floating in the black and the Reavers coming for them.

Variations: The crew arrives shortly after the cruise ship is pillaged, all passengers and crew defiled and slain. They're on hand to witness the attackers and discover they're not Reavers. The guilty parties are mercenaries who have gone to a lot of trouble to make it look like a Reaver attack. But why? Alliance ships arrive on the scene, destroy the Reavers, then blow up the cruise liner and any trace of evidence. The crew barely escape with their lives. Now they are the only ones who know the truth of what happened, if not the why.

Mistaken Identity

While on a Skyplex or other habitation, a crewmember is mistaken for someone who has achieved some fame in that locale. Everyone loves this person, or so it seems. The authorities provide the character (and the crew by extension) with luxury accommodations and all the amenities free of charge. The character may or may not try to explain the truth of the matter. Even if he does, no one believes him, figurin' he just wants to escape his adoring public. Unfortunately it turns out that not everyone loves this person. Some enemies arrive, lookin' to settle old scores. Now the character is fighting for his life against people he doesn't know, for something

he didn't do. And no one believes him when he claims they got the wrong guy. (Even his fellow crew might have their doubts.)

Variations: The original person the character is mistaken for comes out of hiding, angry that someone's cashing in on his good name. Or he's using the character to set an ambush for his foes.

The Rescue Party

The crew is in transit through the Rim Planets when they are contacted by a nearby Alliance cruiser. No, they're not in trouble. All ships in the area are being requested to take part in a mandatory, system-wide, emergency search-and-rescue exercise, looking for a missing transport full of civilians. An Alliance officer is assigned to each ship to coordinate the search operations. As luck would have it, the search leads the crew to the edge of safe space and into Reaver territory. They receive a rescue beacon and quickly realize that the civilian ship is still intact and on a small asteroid and Reavers are closing in on it. No time to wait for reinforcements to arrive.

Variations: The crew is carrying some illicit cargo they don't want the Alliance officer discoverin'. This is a trap, with the Reavers broadcasting the emergency beacon hoping to lure rescue ships.

Scapegoats

The crew is in the middle of a salvage operation (or something else mundane) when an Alliance cruiser shows up, twitchy and looking for trouble. This could turn into a chase that ends in capture. During the crew's interrogation, it turns out that someone else did something to rile up the Alliance and the players are going to take the fall for it unless they can clear their names.

Variations: Instead of the Alliance, the crew is captured by the Tongs, the Syndicate, local militia, or some corporate concern. Alternately, the original crew of the salvaged ship was up to no good (smuggling weapons, drugs, or

other contraband; conducting illegal biological experimentation; or some other crime such as kidnapping). They've left behind an incredibly valuable and highly incriminating cargo.

The Spanner Gang

The crew is hired for a routine passenger transport mission to a planet near a large corporate installation (Blue Sun, Iskellian Technology Solutions, etc.). Midway through the voyage, some of the passengers reveal themselves to be terrorists and seize the ship, taking hostages if need be. They reveal that part of their cargo is high-yield explosives. They're going to use the crew's ship as a bomb, aimed at destroying the corporate base as a retributive strike or to halt some activity to which they are morally opposed (weapons testing, animal testing, genetic experimentation on humans, environmental pollution, terraforming, etc.). The crew have to deal with frightened passengers as well as the terrorists as they try to take their ship back and stop the terrorists.

Variations: Not all of the terrorists are unified in the action and can be pitted against one another. One of the terrorists may know a crew character from way back. The terrorists could be Browncoats who never gave up fighting.

Worker's Revolution

The crew has landed on a city with a pretty sizeable port authority to pick up a time-sensitive shipment. They've just received the goods when the space docks shut down as part of an organized and perfectly lawful labor strike. Now the crew has got the cargo, a countdown for delivery, and it turns out that the cargo isn't exactly lawful. Separated from their ship by lines of picketers, the crew must keep the cargo safe, work out some sort of accommodation with the Dockworker's Guild, and get the heck out of there before Alliance labor negotiation teams arrive in full force.

Variations: The local militia arrests the original owners of the cargo. The crew might need to break the owners out of jail or be implicated for possession.

PLANETS & MOONS

The crewmembers have a mighty big 'Verse in which to find adventures: a star system comprising three or four suns and proto-stars, with almost two hundred habitable planets and moons. Centuries of dedicated terraforming efforts have created a huge range of habitable environments, most of them resembling those from Earth-That-Was.

When humanity had to flee Earth-That-Was, the most important mandate was to get everyone off planet. All of humanity could have been expunged, eradicated utterly, by a single stellar incident or an unexpected solar eruption. When the massive space arcs reached the cluster of stars that makes up what we call the 'Verse, they began the decades-long processes of terraforming, seeding these strange and inhospitable worlds to turn them into places fit for humans to habitate. Generations of folks lived on these huge ships, waiting for the atmospheres to become breathable, life was seeded and thrived, and planet-wide environmental toxins were (mostly) eventually neutralized. Then the colonization began.

The upshot of all this is that there are a greater-than-imaginable number of planets and moons on which people can live. The oldest and most populace are the Central planets, with fewer people on the Border planets, and a scant population out along the Rim where terraforming efforts are still ongoing. This frontier has created an environment not unlike that of the Old West of Earth-That-Was, with the Central planets representing the large and "civilized" cities of the eastern United States and the Border and Rim worlds the wild and untamed West.

DEFINING WORLDS

Due to the Alliance's efforts at terraforming (literally, making another planet resemble the Earth) the planets and moons that crewmembers will visit should almost always be fairly Earthlike in appearance, environment, and fauna. That isn't to say that there can't be some variety and odd characteristics, with some vistas a bit stranger than others. But it's best to keep the strangeness to a minimum.

A planet that's nothin' but volcanoes belching up huge rivers of magma can be visually spectacular, but also wholly impractical. Molten rock gives off superheated air and toxic gasses. Why would anyone build a base or community in such a place? Radically different gravities and environmental conditions make life a challenge for humankind, as a result such places aren't as commonly visited and there shouldn't be many reasons for crew to journey there.

Let's face it, the notion of terraforming a couple hundred moons and planets to make them habitable for humans is stretching belief. Still the 'Verse is presented as a practical place. People settle in areas because they see a future there for themselves and their families. They may set up scientific research bases in extreme environments, and conduct limited resource-gathering operations, but they'll rarely choose to make those places their homes.

Though there are many factors that can be considered in defining a habitable planet or moon, only a few are relevant given that the environment is going to have to support life as we know it. This means breathable atmosphere (the proper levels of nitrogen or another inert gas, and a plant life system that recycles carbon dioxide and turns it into breathable oxygen), gravity relatively close to Earth's, temperatures ranging from −50° to 150° (temperatures outside that range are only accommodated in rare cases), a minimal level of background radiation, and no significant airborne or environmental toxins.

When a crew arrives at a new world, they should be thinkin *"This place has a lot of valleys and steep rock formations. We could not have picked a worse place to avoid an ambush if we tried."* and *"It'll be hot down there . . . too hot to wear body armor."* If you feel compelled to make up a "fact sheet handout" for a world the crewmembers visit, provinding information on the seasonal variations, the exact circumference of the planet, its mass, tectonic makeup, rotational speed, solar year, and axial tilt, you're missin' the point.

This section will walk you through a series of steps to help you generate a suitable world for your crew, with emphasis on the dramatic and practical concerns of the environment rather than the astronomy of it. First off, two questions must be answered: "**Where is it?**" and "**What is it called?**"

Where is It?

In the 'Verse, this question can have a lot of different answers. If this is a Central Planet, home to the heart of the Alliance and one of the older of the terraformed worlds, all of the amenities of civilization can be found here, though at a serious cost to personal liberty. The Alliance provides everything people want except true freedom. If this is a Border Planet, a bit less civilized region, but one with wide population and rapidly-growing economies, you can find a mix of untamed wilderness, established cities and communities, though these are nowhere as developed as those in the Central region. it If this is a Rim Planet, one of the near-lawless frontier worlds populated by the most daring of colonists and hardiest of settlers, you'll find primitive living conditions. Maybe no electricity, no fuel for vehicles and therefore no vehicles. The only food is that you can grow yourself. Medical facilities consist of a doctor who drinks to keep his hands from shaking while he operates.

CHAPTER 5

Table 5-1: Category

Roll 2d12	Category	Note
2	Dwarf Planet	A smallish planet with its own gravity and an orbital path full of stellar detritus. Found frequently on the fringe of a solar system, dim, frigid, and without much light. Rarely terraformed.
3	Asteroid	Very small (10-500 meters in size) and often irregularly shaped, without any surface atmosphere, gravity, or intrinsic life. Minimally inhabited, usually used only for mining, scientific research, or as refueling stops. Often little more than a solid core sheathed in ice.
4-7	Small Moon	A smallish moon, usually one of several orbiting a planet. Easy to terraform, hence so common.
8	Large Moon	A larger moon, usually one of several orbiting a planet.
9–13	Small Planet	The prime target for terraformers, these Earthlike planets are easiest to turn into a terrestrial environment. They often feature a wide range of biome types. A small planet usually has only a few moons or sometimes only one.
14–18	Medium Planet	A planet roughly the size of the planet Mars, often dominated by a limited number of extreme biomes (see Step Four below). A medium planet may have one to several moons.
19–21	Large Planet	A huge planet, often dominated by a single extreme biome (see Step Four below). Huge planets may have dozens or more moons.
22	Skyplex or Space Station	A manmade installation. Roll 1d6: 1-4 it's a space station, 5-6 it's a Skyplex. Roll a second 1d6: 1-5 it's in orbit around a planet, 6 it's isolated. Skyplexes are rarely if ever located in the Rim. Space stations can be used for refueling, research, industrial, observation, or other purposes, and are much smaller than Skyplexes.
23	Gas Giant	A huge planet with a solid core, usually wreathed in many layers of hydrogen, helium, or other gases. Gas giants often have a ring and are orbited by dozens or even hundreds of moons.
24	Ice Giant	Similar to a gas giant, with a rocky core but with an "atmosphere" made up of a frozen or semi-frozen liquid, often methane. Usually surrounded with a ring made up of frozen debris and many small moons.

Table 5-2: Moons

Category	Moons	Note
Dwarf Planet	1d2	Moons will often be irregular in size, with distant and irregular orbit. Both moon and planet will be small.
Asteroid	Rarely, 1d2 if so	Asteroids may have a corona or surrounding field of icy dust. Moons will be rare and small.
Small Moon	—	Consult the Category column for planet type and use that result for this step.
Large Moon	—	Consult the Category column for planet type and use that result for this step.
Small Planet	1d4	Roll 1d6 for each moon: 1–3 it's uninhabited and small, 4 it's uninhabited and large, 5 it's inhabited and small, 6 it's inhabited and large.
Medium Planet	1d6	See "Small Planet" above. Roll 1d6: 1–2 it has a ring, 3–6 no ring.
Large Planet	2d12	See "Small Planet" above. Roll 1d6: 1–4 it has a ring, 5–6 no ring.
Gas Giant	4d12	See "Small Planet" above. Roll 1d6: 1–5 it has a ring, 6 no ring.
Ice Giant	6d12	See "Small Planet" above. Roll 1d6: 1–5 it has a ring, 6 no ring.
Skyplex	—	Roll or pick to determine what sort of world it orbits (if any) and use that result for this step.

Table 5-3: System

Roll d12	Sun	Note
1–2	White Sun (Bai Hu)	Centermost of the suns, the central point of the 'Verse as humans now define it (it's replaced Old Sol for that honor). Surrounding the White Sun are the Central Planets (among them Ariel, Bernadette, Londinium, Osiris, Sihnon, etc.) and some of the Border Planets (Bellerophon, Persephone, Santo, etc.). It's surrounded by the Halo, a spherical expanse of stellar dust and debris.
3–5	Georgia (Huang Long)	Most of the planets orbiting the yellow sun Georgia are Border Planets (Boros, Hera, etc.), though some are categorized as Rim Planets (Athens, Ezra, Regina, Shadow, etc.). Georgia shares its orbit with the Red Sun (below).
6–8	Red Sun (Zu Que)	Most of the planets orbiting the Red Sun are Border planets (Paquin, etc.), though some are categorized as Rim Planets (Greenleaf, Jiangyin, St. Albans, Triumph, etc.). The Red Sun shares an orbit with Georgia (above). Higgins' Moon is also located here. Surrounding the Red Sun is a sphere of stellar dust and debris called the Motherlode.
9–11	Kalidasa (Xuan Wu)	Most planets orbiting the orange sun Kalidasa are Border Planets (Beaumonde, Newhall, Verbena, etc.), though some are categorized as Rim Planets (Beylix, etc.).
12	Blue Sun (Qing Long)	Named for the odd color of its sun, the Blue Sun system is furthest from the White Sun. It is surprisingly free of Alliance presence, despite the Blue Sun Corporation being headquartered here. The moon Lilac is in the Blue Sun system. It's not on any map, but Miranda is in the Blue Sun system. Surrounding the Blue Sun is a ring of stellar dust and debris called the Uroboros.

Table 5-4: Biome

Roll 2d12	Biome	Note
2	Glacial	Extremely inhospitable. Heavy cold weather gear required, and sealed living environments. See "Environmental Hazards" on page 157 of the core rulebook for these conditions, though Stun damage is increased to every 1 minute, not per hour if adequate protection isn't worn.
3	Tundra	Fairly inhospitable. Cold weather gear required. See "Environmental Hazards" on page 157 of the core rulebook for these conditions.
4	Taiga	A subarctic evergreen forest usually covered in snow throughout the year. Often the ground is hard with permafrost. Inhabitable, but not optimal.
5–6	Volcanic Plain	Mostly lifeless, with little plant growth. Rainfall is scarce. Not much animal life other than birds, small reptiles, and insects. A "near miss" in terraforming terms.
7–9	Scrub Plain	Covered with craggy hills, rocks, gravel, scrub brush and wild grass. Mining operations more likely than not. Good enough for colonization.
10–13	Grasslands	Vibrant and covered with grassy swards and small copses of trees. An ideal result from terraforming. These planets form the breadbasket of the 'Verse.
14–17	Forest	Heavy to light forest, and lots of indigenous life. Large-scale lumber and mining operations likely. Another ideal result from terraforming.
18–19	Jungle	Dense jungle or thick tropical forest with heavy rainfall, teeming with all forms of life. Many medicinal plants grow in these forests.
20–21	Marshlands	Marshy bogs and swamps, teeming with dense plant life and a great variety of animal and insect species. Habitation is often on man-made islands or platforms above the marshes.
22	Savannah	Arid plains covered with scrub brush, wild grasses, and irrigated with shallow rivers. Less-than-ideal, but still inhabitable.
23	Desert	Arid desert plains, usually with sparse animal and plant life. High winds, likely extreme temperatures during the day/night cycle. Rarely inhabited by anyone other than moisture farmers and junk scavengers.
24	Aquatic	Completely aquatic or interspersed with small island chains, this environment is highly prized due to the mineral wealth beneath the water's surface, yet often prohibitively expensive to colonize. Many exclusive resorts and wealthy estates can be found in aquatic biomes. Submerged bases are uncommon, but not unheard of.

Table 5-5: Distinguishing Feature

Roll 2d12	Feature	Note
2–6	None	The world is straightforward with no unusual feature.
7	Unusual Lighting Condition	Some aspect of the atmosphere filters light strangely, causing it to be too bright, too dim, hazy, sparkly, unusual colored, or some other quirk. This has no in-game effect, but makes for interestin' postcards.
8	Unusual Coloration	Though the world is otherwise normal in appearance and environment, some aspect of coloration is unusual, such as green-tinted skies, bluish snow, red oceans, etc. The special coloration has no game effect and can be otherwise ignored.
9	Unusual Night/Day Cycle	Some aspect of the night/day cycle seems a bit off, whether it's from multiple moons that are too bright, a dramatically short day or night, lengthy period of darkness or brightness, or a pitch-black night with no moons or stars.
10	Unusual Smell	Something about the world seems "off" scent-wise. The odor could be pleasant or sickening and could potentially cause distress to characters with the Allergy Complication. This smell has no other in-game effect.
11	Unusual Aural Feature	Whether constant whistling winds, a continual groaning sound coming from the ground, or weird echoes, something about the place doesn't sound right. The noise might raise the Difficulty by one step to any attempts at hearing things outdoors or might have no game effect. The noise takes a while to get used to, so it might also disrupt sleep.
12–13	Unusual Weather Condition	There's a non-Earthlike aspect to the weather. Examples might be flame winds that sweep across arid savannahs on a yearly cycle, lightning-filled snowstorms, mud rain, gigantic hailstones, etc.
15–16	Terraforming Failure	Some aspect of the terraforming process failed to take and some key aspect of the world is missing, dying, or otherwise out of balance. Examples could be all plant life slowly dying, a particular strain of plant life is running amok, or torrential rains are destroying all arable land.
17–18	Juxtaposed Biomes	Terraforming didn't sit exactly right in a couple of places and there's a curious overlap between biomes, such as a taiga forest that's now underwater or some other improbable combination of biomes that wouldn't occur naturally.
19–20	Warring Biomes	One or more biomes are at war with each another in some dramatic fashion, usually jumping over a gradient or two (instead of savannah and desert, it's glacial vs. grasslands or some other unlikely confrontation). Animal species are fleeing and human inhabitants are either trying to stave off the environmental conflict or retreating from it.
21	Disease-Ridden	The world has an unusually high concentration of virulent diseases either caused by terraforming or which terraforming was unable to eradicate. Inhabitants are regularly inoculated against the viral threat, but newcomers might contract the disease despite preventive measures. This world might be deadly to someone with the Lightweight Complication. See the rules for illness on page 158 of the core rulebook.
22	Irradiated	The world has an unduly high amount of background radiation, so much so that inhabitants must take frequent anti-radiation meds or wear protective gear. See page 158 of the core rulebook for information on radiation.
23	Tectonic Instability	The world suffers an unusually high amount of seismic activity. Inhabitants have adjusted to the constant shaking, though the potential for major earthquakes is dramatically high and should be foreshadowed and utilized by the Game Master at a key moment. See the rules for unstable terrain on page 155 of the core rulebook.
24	Environmental Collapse	Terraforming went awry and the world is in full-scale meltdown. Roll 1d4 times more on this table. Not a fun place to visit and any inhabitants just want to leave.

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An Example of World Building: Oberon

So you decide to create a new world for your campaign. Shiny.

The crew tends to stay shy of the Alliance, with most of their adventures set out along the Rim, so you're going to place your new world in the Rim. As for the name, you like those names that evoke classic myth and folklore from Earth-That-Was, so you settle on the moniker "Oberon" for the world in question. Oberon was the king of the fairies in the Shakespeare play A Midsummer Night's Dream. It's also a name from one of Uranus's moons, so it seems appropriate.

In Step One, you roll 2d12 and come up with a result of 17, signifying a Medium Planet, not unlike the size of Earth-That-Was or Mars. You decide it'll be more the size of Mars.

In Step Two, you consult the table and roll 1d6, with a result of two moons. You're going to continue with the Shakespeare theme and name the moons Titania and Puck (two other characters from the same play, Oberon's wife and mischievous servant, respectively). You roll again and get a result of 2, signifying that Oberon has a ring. You decide that the moons are uninhabited and lifeless. The terraformers will get to them eventually.

In Step Three, since you've already determined it's a Rim planet, you pick Kalidasa as the sun it orbits rather than roll randomly to determine the solar system.

In Step Four, you roll 2d12 twice (you want the players to have to stop in two different parts of the world), and get results of 4 (Volcanic Plain) and 11 (Grassland). Both are suitable for your plans, so you decide to run with each of them. The starkness of the volcanic plain contrasts nicely with the rolling grasslands, adding a visually dramatic signifier between the two regions you plan on using.

In Step Five, you roll 2d12 and get a 12 (Unusual Weather Condition). You decide that a corrosive rain is suitably unusual without being too weird. Most plant life survives, though it looks scraggly, (the rains are a semi-annual thing, not a regular event) and all human habitations are stripped of paint and streaked with scorch marks. (A result of many years of the corrosive effect of the rain.) You don't want to make the rain a big tactical issue, so you decide that the rain is more of an irritant, causing only minor skin irritation if the drops come in contact with bare skin, rather than doing serious damage. The rainfall is confined to the volcanic plains, a side effect of the volcanic activity.

Putting it all together, the world Oberon emerges as a somewhat rough and dismal place despite the fancy name. A Rim planet with two moons and a ring with regions of volcanic plain and grasslands. A corrosive rainfall makes life for those in the volcanic plains miserable. Just the sort of place for the crew to get into trouble.

What's it Called?

Names in the 'Verse are a curious mix from a variety of sources: Puritan/colonial names (Patience, Constance, Haven, etc.); Biblical names (Ezra, etc.); the ancient and classic worlds (Osiris, Bellepheron, Hera, etc.); names from Earth-That-Was' antiquity (Londonium, Aberdeen, etc.); and those from Chinese (Jiangyin, Sihnon, etc.). Then you have those that express a concept (Triumph, Shadow, etc.); evoke an aspect of nature or geography (Lilac, Three Hills, etc.); are idiosyncratic (Beylix, etc.); or honor their founders (Higgins' Moon, for example). A name should be suitable for the world it's applied to, whether it's straightforward and evocative (Shadow is now a desolate ghost-world) or ironic (Lilac being a barely-inhabitable dustbowl at the edge of Reaver territory).

THE WORLD CREATION PROCESS

Once you know where your world is and what it's called, go through this handy five-step process for world buildin'. Five qualities are

defined here: Category, Neighbors, System, Biome, and Distinguishing Feature. Choose results or roll randomly to determine them.

Step One: Category

There's a lot of variety in celestial bodies and the following chart (while not exhaustive) provides a list of most of them, with the more common ones grouped in the center. As most have been terraformed to equal degrees and have the same range of environments, you need to decide what impression you're trying to convey. A planet feels secure and solid, central to the action, while a moon evokes the feeling of being peripheral, temporary, small-scale. Settlers inhabit a planet, while smugglers conduct their business on a moon. A planet feels like home. A moon is a place where someone might work for extended periods in activities like mining, etc.

There are, of course, differences in the lengths of days, etc., but these are more a concern for those who live there full-time than those arriving for a brief visit.

Table 5-6: Nature

Roll 2d12	Nature	Note
2	Refueling	A small community that functions as a way-stop for travelers and long-distance transports, providing fuel, supplies, and other amenities. Likely on a fringe or out in wilderness.
3	Observation	An Alliance waypoint, established for checking transport in the area or for surveillance. May provide limited trade areas and accommodations.
4	Research	A scientific base, established by the Alliance, Blue Sun, terraformers, Iskellian Technology Solutions, etc. This may be restricted or open (but always strictly controlled).
5	Spiritual	A religious community, either cloistered with an associated community offering support services or an open community with a specific shared religious goal. A commune, temple, or holy site.
6	Educational	A learning institute, monastery, or collegium of some sort. This can be an Alliance-run school or a Companions' Guild academy such as the one on Sihnon.
7-8	Industrial	A community centered around the manufacturing of some goods or range of goods owned by a single corporate entity or several. All or most of the relevant support services and community aspects are provided for free or at a nominal cost by the corporation.
9-10	Mining	Either mines or some other resource extraction, they could be part of a massive corporate extraction or individual claims. The Miner's Guild likely has a strong presence here.
11-13	Farming	Agricultural cultivation and harvesting done on a massive corporate scale or individual farms. The community that has emerged supports the farmers and their families.
14-17	Trade	Either a single corporate-owned trade emporium or more likely an association of free traders, offering a variety of amenities (food, entertainment, accommodations, etc.) to facilitate trade activities.
18-19	Tourism	A community existing to spotlight some activity that attracts visitors willing to spend money. This could range from medicinal spas, resort communities, gambling casinos, historical sites of significance, or simply a vista of (increasingly rare) natural beauty. Some entrepreneurs offer "wilderness" retreats on Rim Planets for jaded citizens of the Core Planets.
20	Salvage	A salvage community attached to a large dump or scrap yard, either attempting to reclaim materials otherwise discarded or to manage and destroy that waste.
21	Estates	A community made up specifically of the rich and their attendant households, with goods and services centralized. Often heavily guarded and patrolled.
22	Military	A military base and the outlying community of families and support services. Likely to be crawling with Alliance soldiers and officers.
23	Penal	A prison, ranging from low security to high security, with a community around it to support vital services. This can also represent a community of indentured servants.
24	Restricted	An off-limits community either quarantined or cordoned off by the Alliance. It could be a gulag or an experiment gone awry. Few people even know it exists.

Step Two: Neighbors

If it's a planet, how many moons does it have and how many are habitable? If it's a moon, what planet does it orbit and how many other moons are there? These issues may not be important at all, but they're good to know if the crew characters decide in the middle of a session to bug out and go lick their wounds in a hiding hole or to unexpectedly stop at the nearest planet for refueling.

Use the Category derived from Step One and consult table 5.2.

Step Three: System

Five solar systems make up the extent of human-occupied territory within the 'Verse, and whatever planet you're creating should be from one of them. Four of these solar systems--Georgia, the Red Sun, Kalidasa, and the Blue Sun--orbit the White Sun, the center of the 'Verse. Head out from the White Sun and you're flying towards the Rim. Frustratingly to astronomers and surveyors, the categories of Central, Border, and Rim planets are vaguely defined and not applied

Table 5-7: History

Roll 2d12	History	Note
2–6	Unexceptional	It was founded anywhere from centuries to decades ago and grew steadily to its current size and state. Nothing exceptional about it.
7	Breakaway	The folks here were originally somewhere else and made this their new home. They still exhibit aspects of their old culture, but define themselves by their new community identity.
8	Brand New	The community was founded recently and is undergoing growth pains. Maybe some vital goods and services aren't entirely there yet or are makeshift in nature. Most of the inhabitants are younger and idealistic. The Game Master may choose to adjust prices downward by 10% to reflect new businesses trying to get a foothold.
9–10	Boomtown	The community has blossomed seemingly overnight to take advantage of a particular resource or the sudden opening of a newly terraformed world. This could be an older community faced with a sudden and dramatic rush of opportunistic inhabitants. Goods and services may be as much as twice normal cost, due to the high influx of cash.
13	Independent	Formerly loyal to the Independent Faction, this community was dragged kicking and screaming into Unification. Now the Alliance keeps a close eye on the community for fear that it fosters Browncoat sympathizers and anti-Alliance insurgents.
14	Notorious	Something about the community was famous, long ago. Maybe it was the site of a famous battle, or someone important came from here. Everyone knows about it and wants to see the battle grounds or the house where this person was born. Otherwise it has no impact on the place currently.
15–17	Repurposed	This community was founded for one purpose and now has another. Maybe it used to be a prison but is now a trade emporium, grounded cargo modules turned into residences, or some other unlikely combination. Roll or select from the Purpose chart (above) to determine what the community used to be. Maybe some of the same inhabitants are still on hand.
18	First Wave	The community is old, one of the first to be established by the terraformers. It may even predate the Central Planets (first attempts before moving onto the big projects), and folks here have long and established families and traditions.
19–20	Legitimized	Originally a criminal or outlaw refuge, a lawless and decadent place, the community has now become respectable (in appearance at least) with honest folk doing business here. There are still signs of its origins, though the brothels and gambling houses may be fancied up some to look legit.
21–22	Revitalized	The community was almost dead when some big money came in from somewhere to revitalize everything. The old-timers grumble that they wouldn't know the place anymore. Others wonder if this newfound lease on life has come at too steep a price.
23	Fading	The community is on the ropes, going down fast. There's been an exodus of folk out of the community and now vital goods and services are even getting scarce. This exodus may be due to a drought or other resource depletion or for political reasons.
24	Ghost Town	The community is a shell of its former self. Empty and abandoned homes and businesses line the dust-covered streets. There's hardly any Alliance presence here because no one cares what happens. The inhabitants are a mix of those who like privacy or are too old or poor to get out.

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evenly throughout the 'Verse. Solar systems are always in motion, and borders aren't always easy to accurately gauge, so sometimes Rim Planets can be closer to the White Sun than Border Planets.

This information is drawn from *The Official Map of the Verse*, published by QMX (2008).

Step Four: Biome

What's it like there? These are not exact biomes as defined by ecologists or climatologists, but instead are rough categories of readily-recognizable environments suitable for human habitation, with the most commonly-encountered biomes placed in the center. Most planets have more than one of the biomes listed below (Earth-That-Was had all of them), but unless crewmembers are landing on multiple parts of a single world, it's usually enough to roll once on this table. You should decide how much diversity you want and roll a number of times equal to that. If the players are going to travel on multiple continents or in areas geographically distant from one another, do multiple rolls. Otherwise, a single roll per landing site should be sufficient.

Table 5-8: Size

Roll d12	Size	Note
1–4	Tiny	Population is between 10–50 people. Equivalent to small trade outpost or even the crew of a transport. Goods and services are likely extremely scarce or nonexistent. Crew characters will be very noticeable.
5–6	Small	Population 51–2,000 people. Equivalent to a suburb, small village, or small space station. Goods and services are likely scarce and expensive. Crew characters are likely to be noticed.
7–8	Modest	Population 2,001–5,000 people. Equivalent to a small town ship, or large space station. Crew characters may or may not be noticed.
9–10	Medium	Population 5,001–50,000 people. Equivalent to a small city, a Skyplex, or an Alliance Cruiser. Crew characters may or may not be noticed.
11	Large	Population 50,001–1,000,000 people. A large city. Lots of business, with goods and services priced up to 10% less. Crew characters will most likely not be noticed.
12	Huge	Population 1,000,001+. A metropolis. Goods and services are likely plentiful and competitively priced (up to 25% cheaper). Crew characters are utterly anonymous.

Table 5-9: Culture

Roll d12	Culture	Note
1–3	Melting Pot	The area is a true cosmopolitan melting pot, with no single culture or ethnicity prominent.
4–5	Balanced	The 'Verse's primary cultures and ethnicities are balanced in relative proportion to the overall population.
6–7	Predominantly Chinese	Chinese dominate the area, culturally and socially. Getting by without basic fluency in Chinese (and by that, knowing more than just how to swear!) will be a mite difficult.
8–9	Predominantly Other	Some other ethnicity dominates the area, whether Caucasian, Russian, Indian, Hispanic, African, Brazilian, Japanese, or some other general cultural group that has retained its sense of identity from Earth-That-Was.
10	Other	Primarily a single culture or ethnicity. Crewmembers not of this group will stick out like a sore thumb. Communication may be problematic if the culture uses a language other than English or Chinese.
11	Culturally Isolated	A cultural, religious, or ethnic group that has secluded itself and is distrustful of outsiders. Crewmembers outside this group will be highly noticeable and may suffer disadvantages with communicating and doing business.
12	Corporate	Culture has been abandoned as detrimental to profit. Some corporation's identity has been completely superimposed on the population to the point where they don't think of themselves as Chinese or Serbian but instead as being from Iskellian Technology Solutions or Blue Sun.

Step Five: Distinguishing Feature

This is a loosely defined quality that differentiates one planet from another. Many are simply cosmetic features, while others can become plot elements in their own right. Only a dozen options are presented for inspiration, with hundreds of options potentially available. Roll randomly on this table or pick a desired result.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Unless the crew is interested in the great outdoors as a destination, most of the time they'll be visiting communities. These might be huge sprawling cities in the Central planets or outposts on the isolated moons and planets of the Rim. The crewmembers could call one of these communities home or they may almost never set down in the same place twice, preferring to make their home on their mode of transport. Whichever the case, you're likely to want to develop new communities for the crew characters to visit and interact with.

Generally, the community should have something wrong with it: something that needs doing, some injustice about to occur, or some dark secret. At the very least, some aspect of the community causes problems for the crew. Because *Serenity* is a game about dramatic action, it's important to approach building these communities as a stage for dramatic opportunities, rather than as static environments.

Table 5-10: Authority

Roll 1d6	Type	Note
– 1	Independent	Authorities in the community still view themselves as Independent and do not respect the Alliance. This isn't advertised, but Browncoats are welcome here and will find ready allies for anti-Alliance activities.
0	Lawless	An outlaw community existing outside Alliance law. Government is either a single powerful crime boss (or alliance of several) or a free-for-all society such as a pirate haven.
1–2	Neutral	A truly neutral community, respecting Alliance, corporate, and Independent interests. Business is what's important.
3–4	Local Law	A small militia or regional government claims autonomy but cooperates with the Alliance.
5	Corporate	Corporate security. Usually cooperating with the Alliance in public matters, it may be secretly at cross-purposes to Alliance goals.
6–8	Alliance	Alliance through-and-through. Nothing happens without the Alliance wanting to know about it. Crewmembers should definitely feel that someone's watching them in these communities.

Table 5-11: Attitude

Roll 1d6	Tone	Note
1	Corrupt	Authority is utterly corrupt and can be bought openly. None of the inhabitants trust the authority.
2	Ineffectual	Authority is well-meaning but blind to, or outgunned by, the opposition. Crewmembers may be called in to help out.
3	Permissive	Authority is permissive and turns a blind eye towards the greater good. Crewmembers may run afoul of the authority or find a ready ally, depending on what they're up to.
4	Average	Authority behaves according to its mandate, making no exceptions.
5	Imposing	Authority is prominent and may threaten or bully the inhabitants. Crewmembers will get attention from them.
6	Oppressive	Authority is omnipresent and overzealous, exceeding all normal reason. The populace lives in fear of authority, and the crewmembers will be subject to exceptional attention and evaluation.

An Example of Community Building: Arden

You've chosen to create a community on Oberon, the world you previously generated. You're going to set this adventure in the grassland region. You name the community Arden, after an ancient forest from Earth-That-Was which purportedly had mythical properties.

For Step One, you roll 2d12 and get a result of 12 (a pretty average result), indicating a farming community. You want a bit more variety, so you roll once more and get a result of 5 (Spiritual). You decide that it's a farming community with a nearby temple that attracts pilgrims.

For Step Two, you roll 2d12 and get a 23, indicating that the community is fading. This is intriguing, so you decide that blight has hit the area and, aside from the influx of pilgrims, there's not much left in the town. This could mean empty farm houses and dead fields. A pretty bleak place.

For Step Three, you pick "small" as the size, with less than three hundred people. The temple has another hundred or so, meaning that the crew will stand out quite a bit amongst the regular populace, though they might be able to pass themselves off as pilgrims if need be.

For Step Four, you roll and get a result of 8 (Predominantly Other). Perhaps you were recently reading an article about Brazil and like the idea of an influx of that culture into his campaign. So you decide that the majority of the inhabitants identify themselves culturally as equivalent to Brazilian from Earth-That-Was.

For Step Five, you roll a d6 and modify it by –2 because Oberon's a Rim Planet. You get a result of 3–2=1, making the place neutral in terms of authority. That seems reasonable. Maybe the town has a sheriff and the temple has a small security force of its own, made up of the faithful. A second roll (this time on the Attitude table) results in a result of 2, meaning that the authority in Arden is ineffectual. That's perfect for what you have in mind.

Wrapping it all up, the results for Arden are a small farming community with a nearby religious center. Blight has wiped out much of the town's crops and the population has almost entirely migrated elsewhere. Deserted farmhouses and blighted fields surround it and the town center is full of empty shops and businesses. As there's still a stream of pilgrims to the nearby temple (you can make it a once-prestigious but now isolated Catholic monastery, perhaps with some story of a miracle or water that has healing properties), some vital services still in place. The authority is a single sheriff and deputy, both without much experience and in over their heads when violence erupts. The temple has a few monks who are capable of handling themselves in a fight and they provide security.

The stage is set.

Where is It?

The community is either on a world you've created or is be on an existing world from those presented in the core rulebook or other reference sources.

What's it Called?

See "Defining Worlds" for advice on naming conventions throughout the 'Verse. All of the same guidelines apply.

THE COMMUNITY BUILDING PROCESS

Five additional aspects are defined here: Nature, History, Size, Culture, and Authority. Each of these has an effect on the community's character. While you can randomly determine these qualities, ideally every community should be selected for dramatic purposes, with aspects of the community chosen specifically to emphasize the community's role in the adventure

or campaign. An excellent example of a community desigend to suit an adventure is the mining town featured the Serenity Role Playing Game adventure, Out in the Black.

Step One: Nature

The nature of a community can be thought of as the defining the primary purpose of the community, though the prupose may not be one in which everyone is directly involved. For example, a mining community also needs education (for the children of miners) and trade, but these are subsidiary to the main purpose. Roll randomly or pick a primary purpose for each community and assume that other necessary services and required functions are subsumed within that primary purpose. A large city on a Core world would have all these and more, although you might want to more narrowly define a certain portion of that city as "industrial" or "tourist".

Step Two: History

This section covers the origins of a community, giving it that "lived in" look. With a little bit of history behind it, the most conventional community suddenly has character, a dark secret, or another aspect to which the crew characters can relate. Think of this as an informal version of Assets and Complications for a community. Roll or pick a suitable history. More than one is possible, though some of these could be incompatible.

Step Three: Size

The size of a community can affect how easily the crewmembers can lay their hands on a particular piece of gear or how likely they are to be noticed (significant concerns for most crews!).

Roll or select a size from the table below. Results on that table specifically describe population, not the actual physical size of the community. If you would like something different, you can determine two values: the size of the population and the actual size of

the community, ignoring any unfeasible results. A significant contrast between the two sizes can create an interesting social dynamic, as well as suggesting additional aspects to the community. For example, a modest-sized community with a large population is going to be overcrowded, putting a strain on resources, with people living cheek-to-jowl in gigantic skyscraper apartments.

Step Four: Culture

Once the size of a community's population has been determined, the next step is to determine who inhabits this community. The 'Verse is a great melting pot of human cultures and ethnicities, with the largest segment being Chinese. The type of people who make up a community can have a great deal of effect on the reception the crew receives. Roll or select a result from the table below.

Step Five: Authority

The crew aiming to misbehave will get a reception based on the community they're in. Roll or pick a result from the table below, adding +2 for a Rim Planet and subtracting –2 for a Central Planet. Border Planet rolls are unmodified.

How the authority behaves towards the crewmembers will determine how events in the campaign or adventure turn out. Ideally, you should decide on this aspect or just roll on the table below.

HOW TO DEAL WITH DEATH

The 'Verse is full of dangers no matter what side of the line you're on. Alliance characters have to deal with outlaws who terrorize the Rim. Mercenary players have to deal with the Alliance, other mercenaries and desperate people on the border planets. Everyone, if they are not careful, has to deal with Reavers and no one wants that.

Memorial Service

Often a player has invested considerable time and effort in a character and will naturally feel a real sense of loss if that character dies. In the end of the movie, Serenity, the crew came together to say good-bye to their loved ones. You can suggest that the crew hold their own service for the dead crewmember. Perhaps it's a simple and dignified ceremony with just the crew attending. Perhaps it's a large funeral with all the local underworld crime bosses showing up to pay their respects. Perhaps the character died fighting off bad guys who were raiding a town and the locals have decided to erect a statue in his honor. Finding a way to honor the fallen can help everyone adjust to the change in their lives.

Character death is going to happen: whether it's a supporting character or a crew character. Sometimes the death advances the storyline, sometimes a character runs into bad luck, and sometimes the crew make ill-advised decisions such raiding Niska's stronghold without a real plan on how to get it or get out.

The death of a character death affects some or all of the crew. They may feel anger, fear, a need for revenge, and a myriad other emotions. All of this can fuel a plotline and intensify the pleasure of the role playing experience for the players or it can lead to resentment and anger. How you handle the death has a lot to do with how players accept it.

Every character death, especially deaths among the crew, should provide an opportunity for the crewmember to die a Big Damn Hero. It is up to you and the player to ensure this happens. Make the death mean something.

DEATH OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Supporting characters die all the time in a role playing game. There are many reasons for this: revenge, information gathering, they were mooks (scenery that bleeds), sacrifice of the one to save the many, to prove a point, and a variety of other explanations. However, all supporting character deaths are done with a purpose: to drive the story arc forward.

There's nothing like the death of a favorite supporting character at the hands of Niska to get the crew frothing at the mouth and eager for gunplay. This is a time-honored ploy by all Game Masters to invoke a reaction, especially if the supporting character is an innocent such as a child or even a beloved pet.

However, after the confrontation or revenge (or lack of revenge as the case may be), the crew needs to deal with the loss of that supporting character either emotionally or as it affects the way they do business. If they were an information broker or a black market fence who always take the goods to Badger and Badger is suddenly dead, they need to find a new person to handle such services. This breaks the crew out of the complacency that happens from time to time and allows you to bring in new supporting characters with fresh new plotlines.

For some crewmembers, the loss of the supporting characters is much more personal. While the crew may be upset at needing to find a new fence or someone to work for, a much more intimate story of loss could be played out by a single member of the crew. Perhaps the reason the crew went to that one fence was because he was a sibling or a lover. The death of this supporting character allows for, and encourages, character growth and change within a single crewmember that may eventually affect the rest of the crew in the future.

The one thing you need to be cautious of is not to murder a supporting character just for the heck of it. Yeah, sometimes, *f'n zse* happens; but if a supporting character has worked closely with the crew for a long time, don't murder him just because you're tired of playing the guy or faking his Cockney accent.

DEATH OF CREW

Crew deaths are rare in most campaigns. The death of crew characters is can be shocking and traumatic, affecting every member of the crew on some level. For most, it's the loss of a friend, a companion and someone they trust in an untrustworthy universe. For some, it's even more painful— the loss of family, a loved one. The death of a character has consequences that reverberate throughout every part of the ship.

The first consequence is the dynamic change of roles on the ship. No matter what role the dead character played on the ship, there's a change in power and crew dynamics. If the pilot dies, someone else needs to take on that task. If the mechanic dies, someone else needs to make sure the ship will still fly. If it the doctor dies, the characters have to be extra careful or figure out who is best suited to fill that role. When a ship is in the blackness of space, every person aboard has an important role to play in the survival of ship and crew.

The second consequence is how the visible change will affect others outside the crew. A crew may have selected on person with a glib tongue do the talking for them when it comes to making deals. Perhaps they have on board passenger with Friends in High Places they use to gain entrance to Core worlds. Perhaps one of the crewmembers has an "in" with the black market mercenaries who will only do business with her. Perhaps someone with an Alliance background provides cover for their illegal dealings. No matter what this person's role was, the advantage the person provided is gone and the crew needs to find new methods to deal with the change.

The third consequence is the need to fill the gap left behind and that brings it's own problems. Often, a crew works together like a

well-oiled machine and when one part of that machine breaks, they can be left on the drift in the black. In order to make things work, someone needs to fill the shoes of the dearly departed. Of course, this ain't an easy task.

HEROIC DEATH VS. THE OTHER KIND

There's a real possibility that if a character dies, he will die senselessly. Shot, stabbed, stuffed in an airlock without a spacesuit or killed in some other ignominious manner. This manner of death isn't not shiny but it could be heroic depending on how you handle it. There are three immediate examples of "dying like a punk" that come to mind but each of them has a different heroic value.

The first is Wash. You have to admit, he died like a punk with a massive Reaver harpoon impaling him to his pilot's chair. However, he still died a hero's death. Just before the harpoon got him, he flew the best, most heroic, flight of his life, getting his crew and the ship safely out of battle between the Reavers and the Alliance, and then landing a ship that had lost power. The ship was damaged but he kept his crew safe.

The second is Mr. Universe. He died after he was forced to betray the crew of the *Serenity*. The Operative stabbed him with a sword, killing him like a punk. However, his death was heroic because he used his last few dying moments to record a message for Mal that allowed Mal to get the word about Miranda and the Reavers out to the 'Verse.

The third is Crow who worked for Niska. He died like a punk when he not only refused to accept Niska's money back and deliver a message to his boss, he threatened to hunt down the entire crew and kill them himself. Mal got tired of his threats and kicked him into the engine intake. Crow's death a perfect example of dying like a punk and deserving

to die that way. This is exactly the type of death players don't want to happen to their characters.

NEW WAY OF THINGS

People die. Life goes on. That is the way of things. The 'Verse doesn't stop turning because one person has left it—no matter how much his friends believes it should. The next question is "Now what? That depends on the Game Master

Some games die when a character dies. However, most crews are made of heartier stuff and they keep on keeping on through one of three ways: filling the gap themselves, filling the gap with a supporting character, finding a new crewmember.

The option of having the crew fill the gap of the dead character themselves often comes from the player of the dead character having to leave the game on a permanent basis. Frequently, tight knit gaming circles are reluctant to bring in new blood because of the possible (damaging) change in the group dynamic.

The option of having a new supporting character brought in to fill the gap for the dead character will fill the need, but will put the burden of the supporting character back on you while minimizing the pain of the loss of the original character. This is perhaps the least preferable way of dealing with a character death.

The option of bringing a new crew character happens when the player is still around, though his character is dead. His presence keeps the crewmember's death in the forefront of people's minds while filling the gap in the ship. At the same time, it allows for a change within the group dynamic. New people with new personalities shake up the status quo for good or ill. With a new character, the players can all shift their roles around a bit making things more interesting for everyone.

Life goes one. Change hurts. But often, change is for the better.

Introducing New Characters

Bringing a new character into a tight knit and possibly paranoid crew is a tetchy proposition. The best bet to integrate someone new with the least amount of problems possible is to have that person be someone already linked to at least one other crewmember. This is someone they trust and that trust can be returned. There's less of a chance of the new character winding up with a bullet in his brain pan when the go-se hits the fan for the first time.

However, not everyone's character concept has these kinds of convenient ties. If that's the case, toss the new character headfirst into the fray. While the enemy of my enemy isn't always my friend, in a tight situation allowances can be made. Throwing everyone together in an Alliance (or backwater) jail and forcing them to work together to get out of mess is one good way to bring the characters together.

Finally, there's the passenger (or stowaway) method of introducing the crew. A person signs on as mere passengers (or sneaks on) but the story forces them to reveal their value and worth to the crew. Call it the Tam Option.

However you introduce the new character, their presence will shake up the rest of the crew in one way or another and help lead everyone on a new adventure.

MOVIN' RIGHT ALONG

New worlds, new communities. If you've been reading through from the start, then you've got one last stop—**Chapter Six**, which covers Chinese culture in the 'Verse. If you've been skipping chapters, then head back and read 'em over. Of note is **Chapter Four**, with all of the supporting characters you could ask for and **Chapter Three**, with new rules and ways to let the players find adventure in these shiny new worlds.

For a fully detailed and ready-to-use community packed with adventure and colorful locals, pick up *Out in the Black*, our mega-adventure by Tracy Hickman.

CHAPTER 6

WELCOME TO
الحلاك
丁香伐丙
LILAC

乔毛主崩　马乍乎　散生干乌

ZHONG GUO HUA
IN THE 26TH CENTURY

"I call that a *piao leong* string of ruthlessness you laid on Chong back there, Inara. Working your way up the rungs of us petty thieves?"

"You know what they say, Mal, *wu du bu juhn fu.*"

"You're not a man."

"I'm not a whore either, but you never could seem to wrap your mind around that."

"Thought we agreed not to discuss your profession . . . Besides, I fully support every whore's right to sell her bunk time to whomever she chooses. Now, Chong's biggest client makes his hay on Jintei, not too far from here, and we know how much he loves his new toys, which we now have the codes to."

"You mean the tong boss with enough weapons to make Chong look like a Sunday School teacher?"

"Yes ma'am!"

"No, you are not thinking . . ."

"You know what they say, Inara . . ."

"Yeah, *Ni Nio Ru Hai.*"

CHINESE CULTURE IN THE 'VERSE

Chinese culture is over five thousand years old. Naturally, a lot of customs and traditions were developed over that time, so wherever the Chinese people go, they're sure to bring their culture with them—even to the far end of a new universe.

This is not to say the culture hasn't changed. Chinese folk learned to adjust and adapt to their new ways of life, and have created fresh customs along the way.

Take holidays, for instance. The Chinese New Year is the most celebrated occasion of the year, despite the fact that the old lunar calendar was useless when they arrived in worlds that had different lunar cycles or perhaps even numerous moons. Now folk use the old lunar calendar solely to figure out when the next New Year falls so they can prepare shindigs. The Chinese also celebrate a new holiday--Ark Day, a hybrid between Halloween and Chinese Moon Festival, when folk put on costumes in homage to the original pioneers and race replica arks on lakes.

Chinese traditions of formal etiquette have not altered in the 'Verse. The giving of gifts, which shows respect, marks relationships and partnerships—including those of a business nature. If you can offer no gift to the host, you're better off staying home. Such the rules are more lenient for the impoverished, especially out in the frontier, where simply clasping your fist at chest level to show the ancient Chinese greeting will suffice.

Anyone entering into the catering trade would do well in a Chinese community. The upper class Chinese who live in the Core will find any excuse to hold elaborate ceremonies. Marriages and religious rituals, graduations and naming a newborn are all occasions to celebrate and feast with family and friends.

The home is sacred to the Chinese, a place for ancestor worship. Folk erect shrines dedicated to their forebears in their house, or ship quarters for spacers. As with gifts, the size of such a shrine does not matter. It may be an elaborate holo-shrine or it might be an old photograph handed down through generations.

It's impossible to miss influences of the Chinese culture on the 'Verse. The Chinese language is already so widespread and comprehended that instructions seldom need to be bilingual; on the other hand, people read Chinese from left to right now, instead of right to left. It's shiny, even mandatory in certain circles, to incorporate Chinese elements into your wardrobe, following basic guidelines such as dragon motifs for men, phoenix for women. Eastern arts intermingle freely with Western arts, and just as many aficionados from the West attend Chinese operas as the other way around. Virtuoso calligraphers are held in the same high regard as legendary artists such as Picasso. People of all ancestries huddle animatedly over a friendly (or not-so-friendly) game of *mah jong*. While the frontier folk use an abacus in the absence of high tech calculators, the wealthy of the Core use the

abacus for fun or to show off for their friends. And in light of all the scientific advents, folk from all walks of life from big corporations to outer-world scrappers still prefer good *feng shui* to bad.

POLITICS AND LAW

The Chinese have a long history of monarchy, dating back to the first emperor, Hwong Di, and on through the various dynasties. Even when the nation eventually abolished the Imperial system in favor of Communism, the governing body remained a firm, central figure able to impose decisions on all manners of life, unopposed by the people. Sure, the government softened its hard line stance from the 22nd century until the Exodus, adopting its own variant of neo-communism that actually incorporated state-monitored individual capitalism. Meanwhile, the Chinese people did give equal-opportunities-for-all a few whirls, but ultimately always fell back to the good old ways for one reason or another. To this day, the idea of a Chinese democracy is still as much an oxymoron as honest politicians.

The fact that the Alliance is much more controlling than many Western folk might like is a perfect example of the Chinese political influence. It is widely documented that Chinese and American ideologies butted heads during the formation of the Anglo-Sino Alliance, a mighty clash of Eastern societal conformity versus Western individualism. The end compromise was a republican Parliament in the heart of a seemingly iron-fisted regime.

Moral Oversight

One major element of the iron fist in the velvet glove is the reinstatement of an old Chinese concept, the Censors. Censors "protected" the morals of the empire by closely monitoring the communications of its citizens, deciding what information could be broadcast and what was best kept secret "for the good of the populace" and burning books considered unethical. Its Alliance equivalent, the Ministry of Ethics, operates on similar moral high ground, and while it cannot

legally suppress materials it judges to be offensive without Parliament consent, it has its own secret police to effect their removal—often with the Parliament turning a blind eye. The Ministry has proven to be a valuable publicity machine for the Alliance as well, reiterating the Alliance's virtues and inciting citizens to hand over dissidents. Lately, though, the Ministry's preoccupied with denouncing a recording supposedly obtained on the "restricted" planet of Miranda.

The two superpowers did agree on something--the wheel of bureaucracy should turn s-l-o-w-l-y. On the Core planets, the Chinese trademark of bottleneck politics is readily apparent. Unless an issue is of urgent interest to the state, it rises up the ladder only as high as the dignitaries you know and/or bribe. On a brighter note, a considerable amount of folk of Chinese descent hold jobs as civil servants, constituting as much as 35% of the Parliament alone. So if you are of Chinese ancestry, you just might uncover a favorable branch on the family tree and find a long-lost cousin in the Department of Motor Vehicles who could speed along the process of providing you with a license for your shuttlecraft.

Border worlds tend to follow the Chinese tradition of ruling through the use of governors and magistrates. As in imperial China, the magistrate may be judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one. No need to wait for some circuit judge to come around every six months to hold trials. No need for those pesky juries who might find the defendant innocent. It's far simpler for the magistrate to make the decision. The magistrates' deputies tend to be enforcers, rather than investigators, and may often resort to torture to exact a "confession" out of the accused. The only gorram politics going on in those parts is how much money you got for bribes or protection. The only law is how big a thug can you buy.

The Examination Model

To their credit, the Parliament recently explored solutions to the rampant corruption and fraud outside the Core worlds. They dug once again into China's past for the answer and uncovered the examination system.

In the China on Earth-That-Was, any male of age could try to pass imperial written examinations in order to attain one of the five to ten coveted Civil Service seats. Only those with the highest scores were granted placements, with the score matching the importance of the responsibilities and prestige of the Office. There were stages in the exam to test the person on various areas of expertise: literature, law, philosophy and writing. Occasionally, someone was talented enough to impress even the Emperor. In that case he moved straight into the Imperial Palace as a Minister.

As you can probably imagine, picking just five to ten folk out of the huge Chinese population made for a grueling competition. And as in any competition with such high stakes, people cheated. Moneyed individuals tried to buy their son's way past the screening tests and right to take the higher exams. Many local officials arranged deals to ensure the acceptance of a powerful politician's son over someone who may have scored better in the provincial exam, but lacked influence.

The Alliance has instituted trial runs of this examination system on certain Chinese-dominated worlds such as Sihnon, Liann Jiun, and Gonghe. In this new model, all submissions go through a double-blind process to foil cheating. Judges are randomly selected by the State Ministry from a panel of qualified candidates, drawn from the provincial offices and universities. Their identities are not disclosed until after the exams' completion, ensuring a fair, honest contest. Moreover, the topics for the qualifying and final rounds are chosen randomly from a dozen submitted on day of the exam to ensure fairness. Finally, the examinations are open to all comers of legal age, male or female, of noble birth or sharecropper.

Notices are sent out starting in January announcing a two-month screening period beginning in March. Whereas the State Ministry broadcasts the general announcement, each world advertises the specifics regarding site and positions. Customarily, the larger worlds will set aside or create a choice opening or two (such as Provincial Minister) to make the test highly competitive. The smaller worlds and moons may either have an abundance of lesser seats that rule over nowhere or no seats at all.

The application process involves a non-refundable registration fee from one hundred fifty credits for common posts to upward of thousands for seats of real power on real worlds, payable at the local office only. (If you're not dedicated enough to make the trip, the government reasons, you're not dedicated enough for the job.)

The money buys you a near-future appointment for an interview with the Registrars. Such an interview lasts no more than ten minutes and is usually done in five. Mostly, the Registrars just want to get an impression of you, confirming that your shoes are polished and your hair combed, you can put together two coherent sentences, and you have a modicum of credentials. They keep you longer only if you're someone worth fawning over, or worse, they feel the need to grill you because of dubious qualifications.

Having a good connection can spare you the trouble. If you have a Friend in High Places, you can bypass the fees and pre-evaluations and go straight to the examination. A notable sponsor such as a distinguished professor, retired admiral, or generous donor to the Alliance cause can at least get the costs waived.

There are two rounds to the actual examination. In the preliminary rounds, you are given five questions and an hour to write your answers. Assuming you pass this, you have two hours to take the final, given a week later. During the final, the Mystery Essay Question is at last revealed, causing every examinee's blood pressure to straight through atmo. The question could be on any subject from law to religion or any combination thereof. At the lower

Earning an Official Seat

Say you got the gumption to take the test so you can try your hands at making laws instead of breaking them for a change. Now what?

Well, first, if you're a Browncoat or a known Independent sympathizer, don't bother to apply. You'll only be contributing money to the Alliance coffer.

If you are of legal age (which can range from eighteen to twenty-one, depending on the laws in your area) and you have one hundred fifty credits, you can apply. Next comes the interview and when that happens depends on how busy the Registars are and how persistent you are. This is a Hard complex action requiring Willpower + Influence rolls, each roll representing a week in game time. If you fail after eight rolls or two botches in a row, you are rejected for reasons unknown. Assets such as Allure, Good Name, Highly Educated, Friends in High Places and Moneyed Individual can reduce the Threshold to Average or even Easy.

For the interview, passing an Average Intelligence + Influence or academic Knowledge roll will be sufficient to prove your mettle. Otherwise, you may have to come back for "further evaluations" of your abilities.

Now to the qualifier. Because the test's difficulty correlates directly to the value of the office you seek to acquire, the Threshold for this complex action varies between Average and Formidable. You'll try five Knowledge rolls, one each of Intelligence + History, + Economics, + Law, + Philosophy, and + Politics. Match or beat the Threshold with the total and you're in the Final Round. As you probably could guess, this weeds out the less educated.

For the final stage, the Game Master randomly picks two academic subjects in advance. You must first make a Hard Vitality + Willpower roll to endure the physical and mental toll of the examination or take 2d10 Stun. Falling unconscious is cause for immediate dismissal. After that, roll again, using three dice: one for Intelligence, one for Knowledge of the first subject, one for Knowledge of the second subject. If you any specific nemesis lookin' to take you down, the Game Master rolls for them and compares the results to yours. Either way, you must exceed your rivals' rolls or Difficulty of 10 + 1d8 (rolled by the Game Master in secret to reflect the unpredictable level of competition). Because coveted jobs are given to the top five to ten scorers, you may still receive an offer with a reasonably high roll (albeit a lower office holding). The administrators could also leave the top positions unfilled if they think no one scored high enough.

levels, prospects may receive such questions as: "Contrast the early-Londinum egalitarian movement with the Second Gustav-Russo Charter." Those who aim high may have a chance to elucidate on the implied political philosophies of an ancient Chinese poem, "On Climbing You-Chou Terrace," as it relates to the proposed new law on search-and-seizure recently debated in Parliament.

Yes, people do faint during the testing. The officials expect it.

Proponents point out that this system emphasizes a candidate's education, reasoning and judgment skills. No longer do yokels fit only for running a mud farm inherit government offices or incompetent buffoons become magistrates because of daddy's money. While the initial results are encouraging, detractors fear another step toward abolishment of democracy should this become fully enacted—and they don't want to lose any more rights than those the Alliance has already taken away.

TONGS

Where there are Chinese, there are tongs—sometimes several. Those tongs that comprise the current Chinese gangs are splintered remnants of the old Earth-That-Was Tong 14K Triad, which became decentralized when the arks began sailing the black. The mass Exodus posed logistical and organizational nightmares for the 14K Triads.

Tongs Doing Good

As the *Serenity Role Playing Game* suggests, not all of the tongs in the 'Verse are gangs of thugs and criminals. There are many tongs that operate with the best intentions and the purest of motives. The 14K Triad likes to find ways to infiltrate such tongs to take over, often forcibly removing any opposition. This can make for some interesting game scenarios. Perhaps a supporting character from one of these good tongs comes to the crew looking for help against the 14K Triads who are trying to move in on them. Perhaps the tong's leader is the supporting character's father. His life has been threatened. Or perhaps in some campaigns the crew might even be part of a tong, either one that is law-abiding, out to do good, or one that aims to misbehave.

They couldn't disperse the higher-ups without risking losing communication as each person's ship sailed for the different corners of no and where. On the other hand, if the heads of a 14K Triad stayed together on one ship, they would lose control over the members who were in other ships. Or the ship carrying the powerful leaders might end up on the drift, never to be heard from again. They decided to divide up the leadership among various ships, keeping the organization in tact. Once they finally settled on solid ground, the 14K Triads were back in business. Many of them infiltrated independent tongs, drawing them into criminal activity.

The criminal tongs continue to proliferate among Chinese communities, particularly on the farther reaches of the 'Verse, engaging in the usual lawless enterprises: smuggling, racketeering, gambling and opium trafficking—when they're not feuding with other tongs. Grudges often last forever, to the point that everyone has forgotten why they're fighting in the first place. On worlds where tongs exert sufficient control, such as New Kasmir and Lazarus, the battles take to the heavens, with ships exchanging gunfire in near-space. The authorities are well paid to sit back and watch.

Tongs tend to be tight-knit. Loyalty is the best currency for upward mobility. If you're willing to take a bullet or two for the *da gher* ("big brother"), you just might find yourself at his right hand (assuming you survived). Betrayals and coups do happen, but not nearly as much as Alliance's anti-gang propaganda would like you to think. What usually happens when a leader retires is that he selects his most trusted second as the successor. All others have the choice of pledging allegiance to the new big brother or being corpse-ified.

Tongs seldom solicit outside help; members are expected to be self-sufficient and take care of their own. They normally recruit specialists only for the highly technical jobs (such as piloting or security hacking), though they will sometime seek extra muscles to bolster their ranks in anticipation of a coming gang war. They fully expect the hired hands to show the same loyalty as a brother while in employment. Given their lavish pay scale, they have very little problem keeping a mercenary's fealty.

All criminal tongs, as they say, "do business." Guns, in particular. The bigger, the better. And grenades, by the dozens. Ain't no sense bringing knives to a firefight, less so when the other tong boys are aiming to end you any which way. Every buck a gang makes, bet on fifty cents going to weapons. Shooters to sell and a good price in mind will get you a shiny in with any tong.

Nearly all tongs restrict their activities, keeping business within a city or other manageable area. This has more to do with a tong's limited resources than ambition, as most gangs operate in low-income or undesirable places and are essentially small packs of greenhorn punks. Only large, prominent tongs can afford to expand into other cities. Every once in a while, a *ser toh* may remove the opposition and proclaim himself the "warlord" of a world (the Ming Brothers of Victoria out in Kawalsa come immediately to

mind). Especially out on the Rim, spacers know that even if you don't respect the ser toh's claim, you respect his arsenal.

The Alliance worked hard to eradicate the tongs from the Core worlds, with the result that most simply packed their bags and moved out to the Rim. However, it may be premature to pronounce the death of the 14K Triads. There is talk of a movement to restore the 14K Triad system to its former glory in the Core worlds. This tone is led by a mysterious figure known solely as Shiung Tzu, or "Master of the Mountain," the traditional title for the 14K Triad's grand boss. Evidence suggests that Shiung Tzu has friends within the Parliament--either that or he may be a member of Parliament himself!

CHINESE WORLDS OF INTEREST

Chinese civilizations have spread throughout the 'Verse; most habitable planets and moon count the Chinese among their citizens. On some worlds, however, the majority of the populace is Chinese. Each of China's diverse ethnicities tends to inject its own flavor into a world. Following are descriptions for the more notable Chinese worlds.

DI YU

"Di Yu" is Chinese for hell, an apt name for this fiery world. A cloak of thin gray smoke hugs this world, visible as soon as you break into atmo. It's always overcast here, the sun appearing like dim, hazy coin on a good day.

Di Yu has a small population; the bulk of the inhabitants are of Mongolian ancestry, not Chinese. They claim the Chinese lured them into settling here with promises of technological aids. About the only tech they got was the portable hydroponic farms they use to grow the vegetables and feed for the animals to sustain themselves.

Folk here are resilient nomads who have banded together to form large tribes that roam the countryside, forced to keep moving before the local sulfuric cycle builds up to unbearable levels. The world has no capital or discernible "modern" city. Instead huge tents dominate the harsh landscape. Water is a precious commodity on Di Yu, to the point of being the unspoken currency. Water is more valuable than credits or platinum, both virtually worthless to the natives. They typically equate each gallon of fresh water to one credit in value in trades. Foreign traders coming primarily to barter for the indigenously raised "fire goats" which are considered an exotic delicacy, are advised to "adopt" a tribe and travel with them during their stay. People of religious dedication journey here as well with one purpose in mind: to test their faith and devotion by visiting "hell".

Access to Di Yu is heavily restricted due to the fact that the Alliance built the infamous Hong Shing Penitentiary here. The prison is the largest in the Georgia System and one of this world's rare permanent structures. Prisoners are shuttled here from all over the 'Verse on a regular basis and incarcerated alongside local inmates (some repeat offenders have even picked up the Mongolian language). Security is fairly lax since it's much preferable to be on the inside than out! (Not that any escapees will roam far with the fully armed *IAV Khangoya* patrolling the world.) The prison authority, incidentally, also performs the background checks of all travelers to Di Yu prior to landing and issues time-sensitive passes at 10 credits per daily pass, 30 per weekly.

GONGHE

Gonghe is considered the entertainment hub of the Chinese worlds. Whereas Sihnon is unrivaled for its natural beauty, Gonghe is known for man-made elegance. First-time visitors are generally awe-struck when seeing Gonghe's capital, Gongbuei, from the air for the first time. Majestic theater complexes, graceful studio towers and vibrant hillside holo-promos epitomize modern architectural genuis.

A rigid, intolerant Commission runs the city. All new buildings in the major cities must comply with the Commision's meticulous standard of

Eastern aesthetics and feng shui. Every design must blend harmoniously with all existing structures to form one congruous, gigantic work of art.

Gonghe was originally intended to be a chief Chinese agricultural world, to take full advantage of its fertile environment and temperate climate. But when the Chinese-owned Ruby Phoenix Multimedia was looking for a place to film another of its blockbuster new series, they chose Gonghe for its rustic beauty and inexpensive labor. *Hu Dieh Yin* became one of the most popular (and profitable) dramas of all time. Other studios came to Gonghe to try to cash in and, as their margins continued to stay healthily in black, they drove the world's economy in a totally unforeseen direction.

Patches of rice paddies and pastures still exist on Gonghe, though farming has unquestionably become a distant also-ran to the booming entertainment industry. Currently fifty-five percent of the populace either works for or help support the major studios. Gonghe's diverse terrain provides the production companies with the perfect backdrop for almost any scene without going off-planet. Underneath the glitz and glamour, the local flavor is strongly Hokkien, a modernized rural culture better associated with Taiwan on Earth-That-Was. Thus, the Minnan dialect is almost as prevalently spoken as Chinese and English, to the extent of approaching trade-speak status among insiders.

Naturally, Gonghe attracts prospective starlets and anyone with show biz aspirations. There's no shortage of the star-struck wandering the big cities, seeking to meet the big media celebrities and producers as dreams of stardom shine in their eyes. Who knows? A future celebrity might even wait on your table tonight.

Gonghe is also famous for holding the grandest, most lavish Chinese New Year celebrations in the 'Verse. Metropolises such as Gongbuei, Suhduong, or even Lo Mi Ta on the Xing Yun moon spare no expense in staging amazing parades, fireworks, star-studded operas, sumptuous street fairs and festive block parties (often hiring off-world talent for the occasion).

All this plus the mega-parties the entertainment conglomerates throw, featuring their star performers, makes up for one shiny weeklong shindig.

LIANN JIUN

Liann Jiun is the gateway to Chinese commerce. The enormous skyplex, Gowye, circles high above the planet and is home to hundreds of import-export outlets, suppliers and affiliates. Gowye is so well known that the Sihnon guilds send special regulatory attaches to monitor and adjudicate all the skyplex's business transactions.

The surface world boasts numerous port towns. The biggest, Shing Hong Kong, has perhaps the toughest, most powerful union of dockworkers anywhere, making it costly to unload a haul. Unfortunately, it's almost inevitable that every serious merchant will have to consummate deals here someday. A great many corporations have their headquarters in this city of five million people, which is also home to the primary Chinese stock exchange, the Luxia Index. The other notable corporations, Haimun, Mongku and Loon Se, aren't much easier to negotiate with either, plus there are whispers of tong infiltration in regard to these three.

Things do go smoother once you have made whatever deal you can with the union bosses. Liann Jiun's municipalities are home to many legal and illegal retail operations (some are both!). If you're in the mood to buy, you're bound to find goods of nearly all kinds, especially of Chinese manufacture. If you're in the mood to sell, you're bound to find buyers for just about anything. Just remember that on this world, everyone loves to bargain. Folk here haggle for haggling's sake, either selling or buying.

Another caution: scams are provinces of the locals. If an outsider tries run the same scams or pass off the same shoddy knock-offs as a local, the outsider will be the one who ends up in the hoosegow.

Lastly, Liann Jiun is famous for fantastic cuisine, heavily influenced by folk of Cantonese descent who dominate the planet's population. Sealing a deal over a full-course meal is not only obligatory, but often more binding than any contract on a personal level. Note: monkey brains are considered a delicacy. And if you don't eat them, you could offend your host.

PERSEPHONE

Persephone's Chinese community is reminiscent of the city of San Francisco back on Earth-That-Was. Surrounding the Eavesdown Docks, the district features old-fashioned Chinese architecture in even older disrepair. The people practice many of the ancient traditions. You can find food prepared the way it was thousands of years ago, aged storytellers who are living annals of the Eastern lore, herbs and medicines and practioners of the old medical arts. Unfortunately residents of the Chinese community have declared it off-limits to non-Chinese outsiders. Seems that after a nephew of a local nobleman was found severely beaten following a drunken binge in the area, the noble has threatened to seek revenge.

Like most everyone else on Persephone, the Chinese are barely scraping by. A lot of folk eke out a living pushing hot bun carts or pulling rickshaws through the streets. Those seeking employment stake out spots on the pads and wait for offers of temp work off world. Needless to say, the tongs are very active on this world.

SANTO

Chinese are a gambling people and Santo is a gambler's paradise.

Elderly and retired Chinese arrive by shiploads every day to try their luck in the casinos of Santo. This influx of cash has had a very positive effect on Santo's economy. Astute resort owners have started catering to their swelling Chinese clientele, featuring popular Eastern gambling games and employing Chinese to serve as table bosses and host/hostesses. It is now increasingly common to see Chinese players participating in high-stake tournaments.

There may be trouble brewing, however. The infamous Nine Dragons tong is said to be competing with other tongs to for a place at the table. As much as the casino folk would like to deny it, scouts from the Nine Dragons and those from rival tongs have been spotted among the crowds in the casinos, lending credence to the speculations that a gang war in imminent.

SIHNON

Sihnon is undisputedly the shining prototypical center of Eastern culture, epitomized by the Tian Bao Guan: a splendid repository of priceless Asian antiques, nestled at the foot of Falsim Mountain. These artifacts made their trek to the New World on a Chinese ark dedicated to their preservation under the watchful care of historians and guardians, many of whose progenies still work for the museum. Visitors can behold the wonders of Earth-That-Was, displayed safely inside secured steel-glass cases within the original ark.

Sihnon is also home to revered Ching Shian University, the dean of educational institutes, which has produced esteemed alumni from prime ministers to billionaire philanthropists. There is still no better place to study Eastern history, law, culture, and philosophy.

Unlike what is often portrayed on vid screens, the temples and monasteries on Sihnon do not teach or practice martial arts. Taifei is the lone exception. Monks of this secluded convent in the Three Moon Valley north of the Piaoyen Village are said to be trained in ancient deadly fighting styles that they teach only to those few who have proven themselves worthy. Whether this is true or mere myth, no one knows, for those who learn these arts are sworn to secrecy and may use them only in the defense of themselves or the innocent.

INSTITUTIONS & PERSONALITIES OF INTEREST

As with worlds, it would take volumes to mention all the important Chinese institutions and personalities in the 'Verse. Here's just a sample.

BAI CHIH WEI

The incumbent Minister of Ethics, Bai Chih Wei personifies the authoritarian mastery exerted by the Alliance. Minister Bai commenced his ascent as an Alliance Intelligence officer after graduating from Ching Shian, narrowly missing the very top of his class—something he attributes to the professors disliking his conservative views.

When the Unification War broke out, Bai saw the Browncoats as a major threat to the very existence of the Alliance. His hardcore adherence to the Alliance ideals of a subservient utopia diametrically opposed that of the Independent tenet, "Live Free, Die Free." He was then head of Alliance Intelligence and is said to be responsible for that agency's determination to use any means possible to find weakness in their enemies-- including torture.

Immediately after their victory, the Alliance established the Ministry of Ethics to ensure "proper virtue guidance" and to curtail all challenges to their supreme authority. An ardent proponent of its creation, Bai was appointed to lead this office of moral enforcement.

Any Browncoat or even plain Rim world folk who didn't involve themselves in the War will know Bai's name and spit on it. They've either suffered Bai's atrocities first hand or heard tales of what he and his subordinates did to folk. Those favoring the Alliance cause view him as a hero, who has their best interests at heart. These folk all have one thing in common in regard to Minister Bai. They're all afraid of him.

DA DONG FONG (THE GREAT EAST CORPORATION)

Walk into any clinic, hospital, pharmacy, or medical school of repute anywhere in the 'Verse and you will see medical equipment and medicines marked with the familiar Great East Corporation logo—a red crane on yellow background.

Da Dong Fong is the head of gigantic medical and pharmaceutical corporation, which has its "roost" in Ariel. Here he dictates policies to countless research labs, distributors and subsidiaries, particularly on worlds it dominates such as Greenleaf and Hera. The Great East maintains a stranglehold on the medical market throughout the 'Verse with proven moneymakers from the popular A-OK Menderfoam to "neuro-vaccines" and complex holoscans. Their products are synonymous with quality. Great East is said to be responsible for most of the major medical advancements in recent history.

This is a long way from the corporation's modest beginning on Liann Jiun, when the founding couple, known simply as Mr. and Mrs. Leong, peddled their synthetic remedies all around the then-nascent Core. Their company was humbly dubbed Shao Dong Fong ("Small East"). By the time the venture expanded into the Border worlds, it was *shao* no more; the third generation of Leongs was leading a universally recognized brand, under the new banner of Da Dong Fong to reflect its prosperity and power.

Nonetheless, it didn't truly rise to prominence until the Unification War. Consorting with the Alliance on record, Great East also owned and ran numerous secret shells that sold meds to the Independents. Money knows no allegiance, after all. It is said that Great East was one of the few war's few winners.

Great East still has plenty of clout with the Alliance as the official, exclusive medical supplier for all Alliance hospitals, courtesy of a sweet deal made during the war that runs for another hundred years. The Alliance has "consulted," if

not outright contracted, Great East resources for biomedical projects—some more hush-hush than others. For instance, there are whispers about the corporation's role in light of this recent little expose on Miranda.

There are, of course, the usual rumors of trial drugs being tested on subjects living on faraway back-born moons such as Mycroft and Pi Gu, or in remote penal colonies where they use prisoners as subjects. And it is said that the corporation secretly controls the Pharmacists' Guild in order to cover up the shadier practices. And you do hear accusations on how Great East deliberately engineered diseases on the Border and Rim worlds in order to increase the sales of their meds—some of which rumored to be highly experimental.

Of course, Great East's top brass denies all allegations, deftly adding that folk are confusing their corporation with their rival, Blue Sun.

JO LONG BONG (NINE DRAGONS)

Long distinguished as one of the most dangerous tongs, Jo Long Bong was organized by nine hardened street criminals who fancied themselves the embodiments of nine great dragons. Luckily, this tong has been mostly content with terrorizing the sizeable Chinese population of Persephone and nearby worlds, though it is said to looking to expand.

But though they are based on Persephone, their reach extends far afield. Every spacer worth his *luh suh* ship knows at least one utterly ruthless, reliable contract killer who carries the gang's calling card—a medallion depicting nine dragon heads, which he proudly leaves at kills. If you run across one of these assassins, you know someone has paid dearly for him.

According to Alliance report, Jo Long Bong numbers around three thousand five hundred strong and is gaining new recruits every day. Three of the nine original *long toh* ("Dragon Head") have retired and one was killed in a recent skirmish with the hated Shing Moh Tong on Beaumonde.

The others are still in place. The nine leaders shared equal power, though one, Aflendar Qin, stood out because he purportedly masterminded the incredulously ballsy heist of priceless artifacts on Sihnon and had the savvy to coerce a beautiful and famous Companion to work with him. The Dragon leaders strive to cultivate an air of mystery, demanding that their subordinates revere them as the fantastical creatures. They rarely make themselves known to their associates, preferring to relay their wishes through trusted seconds. So, although members may know the nine by name, only the *long toh duh* closest confidants can identify them in person.

Jo Long practically owns half of the Eavesdown Docks on Persephone, where there's enough jo's—the Chinese character for nine—scrawled on walls to leave no doubt as to who rules this territory. The docks are also teeming with "brothers" the Nine Dragons forcibly push administrators and laborers into hiring. You can't go anywhere without bumping into someone sporting approved gang tattoos, and they don't bother hiding their affiliations. Doing business in the Nine Dragons' part of Eavesdown requires "paying respect" to the tong, normally in additional credits. Most folk figure it's worth the cost, since things are less likely to go wrong if you're under the gang's protection (providing you do nothing to upset them). They also "license" places for folk to set up shop on the docks (no government authority is foolish enough to challenge the Dragons on their turf). It's open secret among seasoned spacers that if you have specific business with the Nine Dragons, head for Dock Nine. And steer clear of that dock if you don't!

TAM MA MA

The face featured on Tam Ma Ma's Fusion Protein products belongs to a self-made wave star, Tam Ma Ma ("Auntie Tam," real name Tam Mi Ri). She first rose to fame on the public waveband, NiCapture, with amateurish uploads of the "Tam Ma Ma's Magic Jerky Shop" comedy cooking

show. Featuring herself as the eponymous cook/proprietor, Tam Ma Ma was always able to conjure appetizing morsels out of any scrap her bumbling husband had managed to scrounge that day. The show was a smash hit, teaching subscribers how to turn cheap grub into a decent meal. Border and Rim worlders especially tuned in for the latest tricks which allowed them in Ma's words to "ediblize and beautify" their own scraps.

Legions of fans started requesting Tam Ma Ma for her signature specialties, such as oolong jerky, thermo chop hash, and the confection recipe widely believed to have inspired Fruity Oaty Bar. Try as she might, Ma could not meet all the demands. Thankfully, some enterprising individuals arrived at her door with an offer she couldn't refuse. A John Hancock on the dotted line later, she had her own chain of quick-chow diners replicating her culinary concoctions.

Now, at forty-eight, Tam Ma Ma heads a small fast food empire that has over eighty franchisees to serve the Border planets alone. A celebrity with a cult following, she regularly ventures away from the Lo Mi Ta city headquarters on Xing Par to promote her fledgling line of market pre-packs and the new "Magic Jerky" shops. Her antics and impromptu demonstrations draw crowds, especially when she applies her skills to the "mystery ingredients" brought by the audience from their homes.

THEA LI-TING ZHUO

Daughter of a former musician for a Chinese opera troupe, Thea Zhuo has been performing on stage since age five. Her spirited song and dance numbers during intermissions were the first indication of her boundless talent. She quickly caught the director's attention and soon became a regular cast member.

The prodigy landed her big break at seven years old when she auditioned for the classic "Cao Yang Snow," produced by the famous media mogul, Breton Strauss. Strauss was so impressed with her talent that he ordered the starring role rewritten to feature young Thea's lovely voice and

countenance. The musical enjoyed an extremely successful run and catapulted Thea into the limelight.

Since then, she has been a perennial headliner for almost two decades, reigning over the entertainment landscape as a Chinese opera diva and pop princess. Her music tops the charts. Tickets to the traditional Gonghe concert she headlines every Chinese New Year, wearing her traditional jade green silk dress, are harder to come by than water on Di Yu. Her holos have graced the walls of many a fan in all corners of the 'Verse.

Although this *chiao gu niun* has repeatedly been linked to numerous suitors of influence, she's still single. It's common knowledge that when Thea was three, slavers abducted her mother, who has never been heard from since, despite Thea spending incredible amounts to search for her. The incident spurred Thea to devote virtually all her time outside performing to act as a fiercely outspoken crusader against slave rings. Even after one major assassination attempt on a Border world and several "accidents," likely in retaliation for her alleged funding of mercenaries to track and disrupt their operations, Thea remains steadfast in her conviction to foil the slavers and find her mother.

YI DAO (RIGHTEOUS BLADE)

Chinese are fond of secret societies. And although the Alliance hasn't come close to the worst despots in Chinese history (yet), its stifling control has inspired resistance.

One such band of freedom fighters is Yi Dao, the Righteous Blade. Yi Dao has roots tracing back to long before the Unification War, when the Alliance was showing budding signs of "meddling" in people's lives on the outer planets. The Purplebellies would typically send token lackeys to set up shop on the likes of Ezra, Lilac, Shadow and their moons, knowing these belligerent *chuo dong shi* would mix with the local

color like oil and water. As it usually happens when folk could take no more, they fought back. That's exactly what Alliance wanted, because now they had an excuse to come *en force* to squash the "rebellion".

After a couple rinses n' repeats of this, a bunch of Chinese frontier folk wised up and decided to take retribution. They adopted their name from the fictional hero of a popular wuxia novel (which, to the author's ire, has since been banned by the Ministry of Ethics), as well as the motif of black outfit, purple veil over the lower half of face, and a Chinese saber. These folk sabotaged and raided Alliance stations, outposts, supply bases and transports. Once in a while, a Righteous Blade would be killed or arrested, but that only inspired the rest to rally around the martyr. The Alliance tried hard to bust Yi Dao and suspected associates, but the locals didn't take kindly to turning over their protectors.

Common belief holds that Righteous Blade was originally from the planet, Shadow, for that is the place responsible for most of the legends. (Plus, the planet's devastation during the War did correspond to a noticeable drop in Yi Dao activities.) It is unclear whether the leadership recruited off-world later or if there were imitators, but Yi Dao presence soon spread among the outer planets. When the War finally broke out, non-Chinese were indoctrinated into the brotherhood, so long as they were willing to combat Alliance oppression.

Unlike the Browncoats, Yi Dao did not disband after the War—an advantage of being a secret society. The disadvantage is that now Interpol and Alliance Intelligence have declared them terrorists. Core propaganda paints an unflattering picture of the Yi Dao as cowardly, traitorous brigands. Bounties are offered throughout the 'Verse for the capture of known members, dead or alive. Anybody caught with Yi Dao ties or paraphernalia can look forward to harsh interrogations, if not long imprisonment.

Nonetheless, the Righteous Blade continues to survive despite constant persecution. About the worst nightmare that Alliance cronies could face in the frontier is still a vigilante of justice clad in black, with a purple veil covering the face, a Chinese saber in hand. Just ask them.

LANGUAGE

Nowadays, you'd be hard-pressed to find a single soul that can't back-talk you in English and front-curse you in Chinese—a definitive proof of the co-mingling of the two superpowers of Earth-That-Was, America and China. Colorful insults aside, the Chinese language is one of the oldest yet most straightforward around. The grammar is simple. There are no verb tenses. All verbs have just one form. For example, changing "I fly to Beaumonde" to "we fly to Beaumonde" requires you to simply insert *muhn* behind "I" to make it plural. As well, to differentiate between flying to Beaumonde today, tomorrow, or yesterday, merely add the respective words for the intended time. Chinese is free of conjugations, adjective changes, and verb-noun suffixes. It's like someone tailor-made a language for Jayne.

What makes it not quite the perfect language for Jayne are the characters of the written form. All told, there are nearly 10,000 different characters in the Chinese language. You need to learn a couple thousands of them to break the literacy barrier, twice as many to read a newspaper, and three times as many to be considered educated and to comprehend the older masterpieces. Adding to the complication is that some characters make no sense by themselves, such as *pwu* in *pwu tao* (grape) or *hu* in *hu dieh* (butterfly), and must couple with another to make a word.

Fortunately, most basic characters have their origins in pictograms, starting off as pictorial representations. Hence, sun was literally a circle with short rays, wood was a log or stick with a few branches, horse was a very stylized drawing of the four-legged animal, and so on. Over time, the characters evolved into the more complicated characters used today, but the root means they do lend clues for you to decipher what a character might mean and, sometimes, how to pronounce it.

Common Personal Names

Listed here are some of the common Chinese personal names with their meanings. Nouns and adjectives are interchangeable, so while Bei is north, for instance, it can also be northern.

Ahn: Serene, peaceful, harmony
Bai: White
Bao: Treasure, precious
Bei: North
Chuen: Spring
Chi: Energy
Chien: Humble, modesty
Chih: Ambition, motivation
Ching: Clear, clarity
Dong: East
Fei: Flying, dynamic
Fong: Wind, honest, region
Gao: High, tall
Guo: Nation
Hong: Red
Hu: Tiger
Hua: Flower
Huo: Fire
Hsieh: Unity, union
Jian: Healthy, strong, vigor
Jiao: Delicate, lovely
Jieh: Extraordinary, hero
Jin: Stillness, quiet, peace
Jing: Gold
Lei: Flower bud (feminine); thunder (masculine)

Li: Elegant, beautiful (feminine); strength, power (masculine)
Liang: Lotus
Lin: Forest, woodland, grove
Ling: Chime, bell
Long: Dragon
Mei: Plum, beauty
Ming: Bright, comprehending, intelligent
Mu: Wood
Na: Poised, slender
Nung: South
Ping: Balance, peace; duckweed (feminine)
Shi: West
Shing: Heart, new, star
Shung: Mountain
Swei: Water
Tian: Sky, heaven, paradise
Tieh: Iron
Ting: Graceful, pretty
Xiong: Hero, brave, male
Xue: Snow
Yi: Righteous
Yin: Shadow, silver
Yu: Jade
Yuen: Cloud
Wan: Ten thousand, myriad
Wong: King, royal
Zhong: Loyalty

Comparable to the English prefixes and suffixes, Chinese characters have telltale signs called "radicals" as their building blocks. Identifying the radical of a character will frequently explain its nature. For instance, the character for "bright", *ming*, has the character for sun; *ri*, as the radical; and is paired with the moon, *yueh*, to the right. It doesn't take a Core world professor to figure out the sky gets very "bright" if you put both the sun and moon together. And although you might not recognize the character for ant (*yee*), you know it has something to do with insects from its "bug" radical. However, because the Chinese never take the easy route, they created over two hundred of these radicals and not all of them are readily identifiable in a character.

Several centuries prior to leaving the Earth-That-Was, China switched to a system of simplified characters. This facilitated literacy among the pioneers whose native tongue was not Chinese and has continued as the standard in the new worlds.

Once you learned the thousand or so characters necessary, the comprehension will come *ming* as a clear day. Chinese is a highly intuitive and descriptive language. In English, you might have no idea what the word "radio" meant is if you didn't know what a radio was. In Chinese "radio" consists of the three characters for "receive," "sound" and "machine." How about those maritime menaces called the pirates? Combine "sea" (*hai*) with "thief" (*dao*).

Computers are "electric brain" (*dian nao*). "Water" (*swei*) and "disaster" (*jai*) give you flood. Elephant diarrhea has to blast all the way up to the heavens.

Can't get much more visual than that.

NAMING CONVENTIONS

The Chinese always believed each person's name should have significance. Parents often consult fortune tellers, astrologers, monks and scholars when choosing a name for their newborn, since the Chinese believe that the name of a person will strongly influence his/her fate and destiny.

First, as a culture of honor and respect, the Chinese put their family name before personal name. "Jayne Cobb" would be addressed as "Cobb Jayne" in Chinese, and Kuo Fei would be "Mr. Kuo," not "Mr. Fei." In a 'Verse where Eastern and Western sides have dallied together for centuries, rules become a bit lax. In recent generations, parents have taken to mixing Chinese names with Western ones and vice versa. From this practice a new convention emerged: Personal name first if the Western name is (or intended to be) more prominent, such as Thea Li-Ting Zhuo or where there is no Chinese personal name, such as Aflendar Michael Qin. The reverse is true for Chinese in a Western name, so if a certain Mr. Cobb had a predominately or strictly Chinese personal name, Cobb would lead off his full appellation.

Married women conventionally put their husband's family name before their maiden name. For example, Lee-Lin Yui Hua is Mrs. Lee and her maiden name is Lin.

Generally, Chinese personal names have two characters, although sometimes just one. Parents often give a baby a *ru ming* ("milk name" or nickname) at birth, such as *Shao Gueh* (Little Turtle) or two repeating characters as in *Ling Ling*.

Given the thousands of characters available, folk can produce very colorful names. Furthermore, whereas the meanings for occidental names are hard to discern, Chinese names are readily meaningful: *Ahn Jing* could mean "harmonious gold" or serenity and golden. Difference in order will yield a slightly different result (*Long Chih* is "ambition of a dragon"; reverse it to *Chih Long* and you have "ambitious dragon").

CHINESE FAMILY NAMES

There are far too many family names in China to list here, especially when a lot of them sound identical to the Western ear. So, we'll just go with the popular "Hundred Old Family Names" (which, incidentally, is an expression for "common folk"):

Ahn, Bai, Bao, Bei, Chai, Chan, Chang, Chen, Cheng, Chien, Chu, Chung, Dai, Deng, Ding, Du, Fan, Fei, Fong, Fu, Gao, Gong, He, Ho, Hong, Hsia, Hsieh, Hsu, Hu, Hwan, Jia, Jiang, Jing, Jung, Kan, Ke, Kong, Kuo, Kwan, Lai, Lee, Lei, Leong, Li, Liang, Liao, Lin, Ling, Liu, Long, Lu, Luo, Ma, Mai, Mao, Mei, Miao, Mong, Ni, Pan, Pei, Peng, Qiao, Qin, Sha, Shao, Shen, Shi, Song, Sun, Tam, Tan, Tang, Tao, Tien, Ting, Tsai, Tsang, Tsao, Tse, Tsui, Tung, Wei, Wan, Wang, Wen, Wing, Wong, Wu, Yan, Yang, Yao, Yi, Yin, Yu, Yung, Zhao, Zhong, Zhu, Zhuo.

MORE ZHON GUO HUA FOR SPACERS

Alcoholic: *Jo Guei*.

Alliance, the: *Liang Shing Mong*, or *Shing Mong* for short; *Tze Fu* for "Purplebellies."

Alliance Agents (slang): *Tze Du*; "Purple Bellies."

Appellation or designation: *Cheng How*.

Bar: *Jo Ba*; *Jo Diang* for saloon.

Bombastic; talk big but little to nothing to show for: *Lei Sh'un Da Yui Dian Shao*, "loud thunder, small raindrop."

Black, the: *Hei Kong*.

Blue Sun Sector: *Dong Fong Qing Long* ("Eastern Blue Dragon"), or *Qing Long* for short.

Belle of society: *Da Shao Jei*, also used sarcastically for sassy or attention-seeking girls.

CHAPTER 6

Border, the: *Biang Jeh.*
Buddhist monk: *Her Sung.*
Budget: *Jing Fei.*
Burning the midnight oil: *Kai Yeh Ch'uh,* literally "driving the night train."
Captain (of a ship): *Chuan Zung.*
Card shark: *Pai Chien.*
Central planets: *Zhong Shing.*
Commercial or merchant ship: *Shang Chuan.*
Common folk: *Lao Bai Shin.*
Companion (as profession): *Bahn Leu.*
Comrade in arms, fellow soldier: *Jahn Yo.*
Con artist: *Lao Chien;* add *Neu* (female) in front for con woman.
Core, the: *Her Shing.*
Corrupt collusion: *Mao Su Tohn Mian,* "cat and rat sleeping together."
Cortex: *Kuo Tieh Sze,* phonetic translation.
Countermeasure or proof against something: *Jao Yeow Jing,* from Chinese Taoism, literally a tiny mirror hung over doorway to frighten away evil spirits.
Crocodile tears: *Mao Ku Lao Su,* "cat crying over dead rat."
Cut the bullcrap, stop bluffing or lying: *Shao Gai.*
Dance hall girl: *Wu Nu; Jio Nu* for saloon girl.
Deserving of a thousand deaths: *Tzwei Gai Won Shi.*
Determined effort, or when there's a will, there's a way: *Yu Gong Yi Shung,* from the Chinese folktale about an old man determined to move the mountain that was blocking his home, one stone at a time.
Earth-That-Was, the: *Lao Di Chio.*
Endless tangling and involvement: *Tse Tse La La,* "tugging at strings."
Exhaust one's talent or energy: *Jiung Lung Chai Jing.*
Fight a decisive battle: *Jyue Ts'u Shong.*
Flagship: *Chi Chiang.*
Fringe, the: *Biang Jeh.*
Gambler: *Du Shen* for a great gambler, *Du Guei* for an addictive gambler; *Du J'er* for everybody else.

Georgia Sector: *Jong Shing Huang Long* ("Central Yellow Dragon"), or *Huang Long* for short.
Go crazy, lose sanity: *Da Fa Shen Jing.*
Greater is the support, greater is the achievement: *Ni Duo Fuo Da,* "the more the clay, the bigger the Buddha statue."
Hopeless person: *Hsiu Mu Fen Tu,* "decayed wood and filthy soil."
Hospital or infirmary: *Yi Yuan.*
Idle moments or too much spare time: *Zhong Shi Shi Jiang,* literally "Core System time," a slang derived from the common belief that life is so great in the Core, everyone has ample free time. (Probably a corruption of *mei guo shi jiang,* or "American time," an Earth-That-Was slang of same meaning.)
Ignorant masses/multitude: *Yu Fu Yu Fu,* heavier tone on the second "fu"; literally "stupid common men, foolish common women."
Intrepid but foolish; foolhardy: *Bao Hu Peng Her,* "fighting a tiger barehanded and crossing a river without a boat."
Invite trouble with kindness: *Shao Tze Ing Guei,* from the Chinese tradition of burning imitation paper money as a tribute to the deceased, so they would not be poor and inconvenienced in the afterlife. (Unfortunately, the act sometimes also attracts derelict ghosts, hence the phrase.)
Jinx (said of a woman): *Bai Hu Shing.*
Kalwasa Sector: *Bei Fong Xuan Wu* ("Northern Turtle"), *Xuan Wu* for short.
Like a pig's fart: *Shi'ung Zhu Pi Yi Yung.*
Loud-mouthed shrew: *T'su Lao Hu,* colloquialism, literally "tigress."
Lynch Mob: *Bao Min.*
Mechanic: *Ji Kong.*
Mediocre appearance: *Mao Bu Jing Ren;* replace *Mao* with *Ji* for mediocre skills or ability; with *Yian* for performance.
Mercenary: *Gu Kong.*
Old Sol System: *Gu Lao Tai Yung.*
On the Drift: *Kong Lio.*
Orator or speaker: *Yan Shuo Jia.*

No chance of return, or a plan doomed to fail: *Ni Nio Ru Hai*, "cattle made of mud submerging into the sea."

Password, secret word or signal: *Ahn How.*

Piece of Crap: *Lun Dong Shi.*

Pig-Brained: *Zhu Toh Zhu Nao.*

Pilot: *Fei Shin Yuan.*

Preacher: *Shuan Jiao Shi.*

Pretty lady: *Chiao Gu Niun*

Public nuisance: *Chueh Duh Gueh*, literally "a wily ghost lacking in principles."

Pumpkin (or any similar affectionate term for a young girl): *Ya Toh.*

Rags to riches: *Bai Sho Cheng Jia*, "build a house from bare hand."

Reap what you sow: *Jong Mai Duh Mai*, "sow wheat, receive wheat."

Reavers: *Ruo Guei*, "ghost in flesh."

Recklessly bold, extremely audacious: *Dun Da Bao Tian*, "gall big enough to swallow the sky."

Red Sun Sector: *Nung Fong Zhu Que* ("Southern Red Phoenix"), or *Zhu Que* for short.

Repair, or as slang for inflicting physical punishment: *Shio Li.*

Reveal the whole truth, disclose every fact: *Her Pung Tuo Chu*, "drag out the entire plate."

Rim, the: *Wai Yuen.*

Rim planets: *Wai Shing.*

Ruined by last-minute mistake or negligence: *Wei Sun Jio Jen Gong Kwei Yi Kwei*, literally "the lack of one basketful of earth spoils the whole effort to build a mountain range."

Saber-rattling; ready for a fight: *Muo Chuan Chia Jiung*, "rubbing one's own fists and palms."

Sail across an ocean (or prolonged distance, like stars): *Piao Yung Guo Hai.*

Scared as a rat: *Dun Shiao Ru Su.*

Scheme befitting a stupid donkey: *Dai Liu Chih Ji.*

Secret code: *Mi Ma.*

Shiny, pretty, nice, sleek: *Piao Leong.* (A better translation than previous.)

Show friendship (often with a selfish motive) or seeking the friendship of influential people: *La Jiao Ching.*

Skyplex: *Tian Ta.*

Someone (especially a criminal) who has escaped doom or punishment: *Luo Wong Chih Yu*, "fish that has slipped through the net."

Space station: *Tai Kong Jahn.*

Spacers: *Shing So*, "star hand."

Speed up, hasten up or catch up: *Kai Kwai Ch'uh*, "driving the express train."

Stiffer than dry Canton mud: *Bi Kwung Dong Ni Hai Yin.*

Strive for vindication or to prove one's worth: *Jeng Yi Ko Chi*, literally "fighting for a breath."

Stupid person: *Dai Shing Ren*, meaning "alien from a moronic planet."

Super: Chao Ji.

To deflate someone: *Luo Chi*, "leaking air."

To insult or shame: *Wu Ru.*

To scheme or plot in vain: *Bai Fei Shing Ji.*

To stall or give a runaround: *Da Tai Chi*, literally "practice tai chi," equating the slow motions of the martial art to stalling.

Unification War, the: *Tohn Yi Da Jahn*, or *Tohn Jahn* for short.

Using a beautiful woman as bait: *Mei Ren Ji.*

Utterly insincere, or suave and sly: *Yo Chung Hua Dow*, "slick lungs, slippery tone."

Vagabond: *Lio Lung Ren.*

Very capable or resourceful: Yi Shung Dao Hai, "move the mountain and inverse the sea."

'Verse, the: *Ren Lei Yu Juo*, or *Ren Juo* for short.

Vulgar folk who value money above everything else: *Shi Jing Chih Tu*; originally meaning "tradesmen."

Warship: *Jahn Chiang.*

Wave (as in communication): *Wung Bao.*

White Sun Sector: *Shi Fong Bai Hu* ("Western White Tiger"), or *Bai Hu* for short.

Win the first battle, match or contest: *Chi Kai Duh Shung*, "victory upon unfurling the flag."

Time for some thrillin' heroics...

Big damn heroes. That's you and your crew. Don't matter where you are in the 'Verse or how you aim to pay for those Fruity Oaty bars. Could be you're flyin' a ship held together by spit and duct tape, haulin' cargo that the Feds would consider a mite questionable. Could be you're flyin' in a Piao Leong cruiser, doin' righteous work for the Alliance. You and yours are Big Damn Heroes and, as such, you need a Big Damn Handbook.

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There's an awful lot more in this very fine book, but we're runnin' out of room to tell you about it, so best you just pick it up.

Here's to you and your Big Damn Heroes. Keep flyin'!

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