



STAR DRIVE™
ADVENTURE

Black Starfall

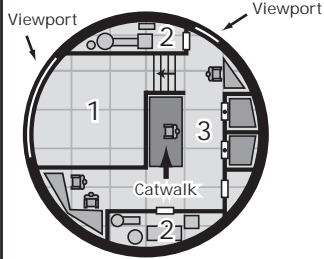


by Richard Baker

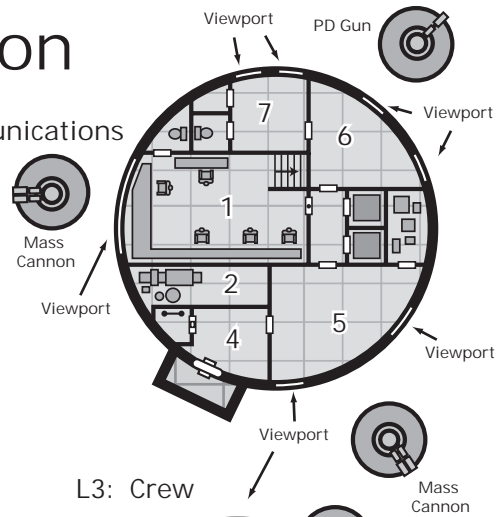


Kendai Relay Station

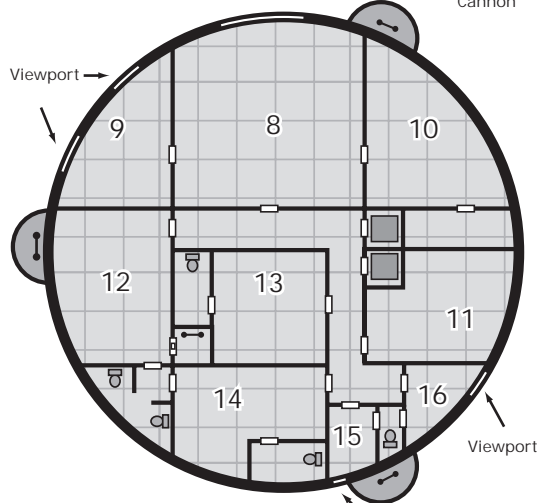
L1: Command



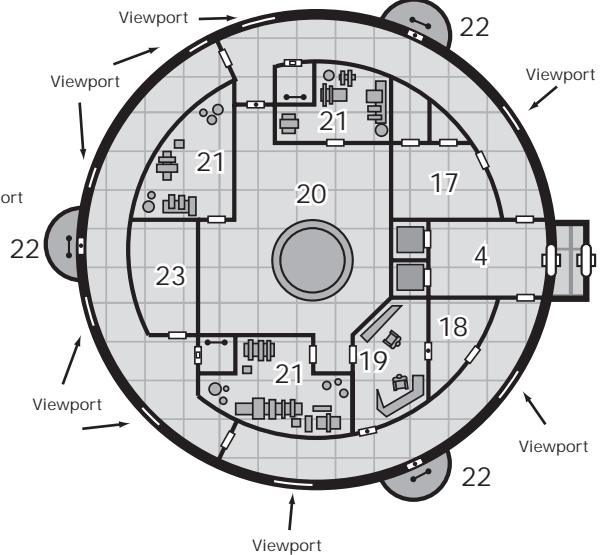
L2: Communications



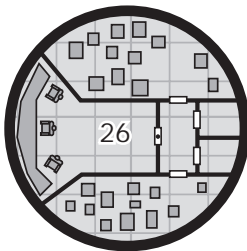
L3: Crew



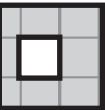
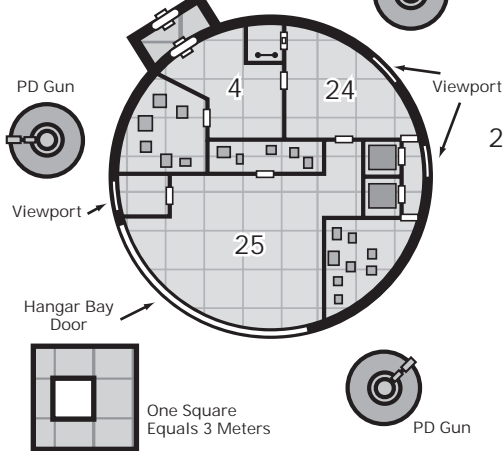
L4: Engineering



L 6: Defenses



L5: Hangar



One Square
Equals 3 Meters

Key

- Vacuum-tight Hatch
- Security Checkpoint
- Access Panel
- Airlock
- Ladder
- Water Closet
- Power Lift

Compartments

1. Comm Pit
2. Electronics
3. Command
4. Airlock
5. Station Admin
6. Commander's Office
7. Commander's Quarters
8. Mess Decks
9. Lounge
10. Galley
11. Sick Bay/Exercise Room
12. Crew Alpha
13. Crew Beta
14. Crew Gamma
15. Chief Engineer's Quarters
16. Master-at-Arms' Quarters
17. Security Office
18. Engineering Office
19. Engineering Control Station
20. Main Engineering
21. Auxiliary Rooms
22. Weapon Platforms
23. Workshop
24. Hangar Ops Office
25. Hangar
26. Secondary Command

TM

STAR*DRIVE™

Campaign Setting

A

Science Fiction
Roleplaying Game

Black Starfall



Welcome to the ALTERNITY® science fiction game. *Black Starfall* is an adventure introducing you to the ALTERNITY game; it also gives a sneak preview of the STAR*DRIVE™ campaign setting. You can play it as a stand-alone adventure, or you can use it as part one of an adventure that concludes in *Red Starrise*.

Here's what you need to do to get started: First, familiarize yourself with the ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook*. Then read through this adventure so you're familiar with the setting, the characters, and the scenes. Of course, you shouldn't show this adventure to the players! If you intend to play a hero in this adventure, stop reading now. The Gamemaster knows how the plot will twist and turn ahead of time, but the players find out as their heroes make decisions, pursue avenues of investigation, and interact with the cast.

Once your players are assembled, help them generate heroes for the game. Most of the material you need is in *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* of the *Player's Handbook*. Offer suggestions about appropriate skill selections or motivations based on what you know about this scenario. For this adventure, it's a good idea to have one or more heroes with skills in Computer Science and System Operation. You can use just the material in *Chapter 1: Fast-Play Rules* if you want to get a quick start. You can also refer to *Chapter 6: Sample Careers* to get more advice on hero creation.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

In this introduction, you'll find information about the STAR*DRIVE campaign setting. After that is a plot synopsis describing what happens during the course of the adventure. "Getting the Heroes Involved" shows you some ways to explain how the heroes came to be on the Kendai station, and why they should care about what's going on.

"The Kendai Relay" describes the space station on which the action takes place, and the supporting characters who may help or hinder the heroes. The adventure begins in "Lights Out," a trigger scene that thrusts the heroes into the thick of things. The heart of the adventure occurs in three scenes: "Virus," "Drivesats," and "Revenge."

The map on the inside front cover shows the spherical Kendai station. On the inside back cover is a flowchart that details the path the heroes must follow to defeat the Geneva Virus in Scene I. You can let the players see the station map, but keep the flowchart to yourself.

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STAR*DRIVE SETTING

The year is 2496. Humanity has spread into space, settling a swath of the Orion Arm with a radius of a thousand light years. With its expansion, humanity has encountered dozens of alien races, including five major species that have joined the quest to explore the stars: the fraal, the mechalus, the sesheyans, the tsa, and the weren. Humans and aliens alike have formed stellar nations; these are great empires consisting of hundreds of star systems. The 12 stellar nations are great powers, locked in a struggle for political, economic, and military supremacy.

THE CONCORD

Standing above the stellar nations is the fledgling Galactic Concord. Twenty-four years ago, the horror of the Second Galactic War ended. Three powerful alliances had ravaged human space for more than a century, and the nations that survived acknowledged the need for peace and reconstruction. The Concord's commission is simple: prevent the specter of warfare from haunting humanity again.

Meanwhile, the stellar nations remain nominally subordinate to the Concord. To all appearances, they strive to follow the accords of the Concord treaty. Some nations, such as the Orion League and the Rigungor Consortium, support the Concord in its quest for peace. The more powerful and expansionistic nations—especially the Thuldan Empire and VOIDCORP®—are restless under this arrangement. The Concord has little power to interfere in the internal affairs of any of its member states, and in truth it exists only through the sufferance of the collected stellar nations.

Most heroes in the STAR*DRIVE setting are citizens of one of the various stellar nations. They're soldiers, traders, mercenaries, agents, and diplomats who owe loyalty to their home nation. Heroes also have the option of being loyal to by the Concord itself.

TECHNOLOGY

While the average human lifespan hovers near 200 years, the miracle of the age is the *stardrive*, a technology that spaceships manipulate to leap the vast distances between stars. Invented in the middle of the 22nd century, the stardrive powered humanity's first expansion into the nearby stars. It has carried settlers, colonists, and explorers to the fringe of known space. It's not a cheap technology; many spacefaring vessels are simply system ships, incapable of traveling to other stars. Refer to *Chapter 12: Vehicles* of the *Player's Handbook* for information on space travel.

The stardrive permits a ship to enter the reality known as drivespace. There, space and time don't follow the same rules. A single starfall requires five days (exactly 11^2 hours). The

larger and more powerful the stardrive, the farther a ship can starfall. Most ships starfall 5 or 10 light-years at a time, but mighty fortress ships can span 50 light-years. When a ship emerges from drivespace, it must recharge its stardrive for two to five days before it can leap again.

Stardrive technology also allows faster-than-light communications through *drivespace comm relays*. These stations are surrounded by a constellation of satellites that sink into drivespace to transmit and receive messages. Unlike driveships, which always spend five days in drivespace, drivesats remain in drivespace for less than a second before returning the exact location they left in normal space. In that time, drivesats transmit messages with a drivespace carrier wave. With a total range of 50 light-years, a drivespace message takes 11 hours to reach its destination. (*Black Starfall* takes place on a drivespace comm relay.)

The satellites double as receivers. As the constellation of drivesat are constantly starfalling and starrising into and out of drivespace, they receive message from drivesats within 50 light-years. After a drivesat starrises, it transmits its messages back to the relay station. With a constellation of 10 satellites, a drivesat relay station can guarantees that at least one drivesat is always in drivespace receiving messages.

Throughout the established sectors of space, humans rely on Progress Level 7 technology, with its fantastic advances in the control of gravity. Still, PL 6 items are cheap and common. See *Chapter 9: Goods & Services* for more information about Progress Levels. When your players create heroes for this adventure, allow them to select hardware, gear, and equipment from PL 6 and PL 7. Remember that items that first became available at an earlier Progress Level, including everything from business dress to toolkits, are still produced.

BACKGROUND

During the Second Galactic War, great stretches of human space were laid waste, depopulated, or simply lost. Decades of warfare set back humanity's expansion by generations. One region that slipped out of contact was the stretch of space known as the Verge. This frontier was the leading edge of human exploration over a hundred years ago, but the devastation near the Verge drove the frontier beyond civilization's reach for almost a century.

The Kendai drivespace communications relay, located on the outermost edge of the Stellar Ring, represents a crucial link during these years of reconstruction. During the Second Galactic War it was destroyed, thus isolating the Verge from known space. Now the Concord has taken up the task of repairing the station with the intention of reestablishing normal communications with the long-lost worlds of the Verge. As this adventure opens, the heroes are part of this effort.



INTRODUCTION

WOIDCORP, a giant among the stellar nations, views the reactivation of the Kendai relay as the perfect opportunity to advance its agenda. The megacorporation will use any means necessary to preserve its position as the interstellar economic juggernaut. By installing a destructive computer virus in the station, VOIDCORP intends to destroy not only the Kendai relay but drivespace relays throughout Concord space.

Why? VOIDCORP has three reasons. First, it wants to delay the Concord's return to the Verge. VOIDCORP scouts have secretly assessed the status of the Verge colonies, and VOIDCORP hopes to seize these worlds in their current isolation without the interference of the other stellar nations.

Second, by sabotaging the network, VOIDCORP cripples the Concord. VOIDCORP has an established reputation in the field of computer technology, and it can generate fantastic revenues through sales of "antivirus" solutions.

Finally, this event provides VOIDCORP with a great opportunity to frame its rival and former subsidiary, the stellar nation Insight. Insight seceded from VOIDCORP during the Second Galactic War, and the conflict between these two nations has yet to end. If VOIDCORP succeeds in casting the blame for this monstrous act on Insight, it can turn all of human space against the rebellious subsidiary. Naturally, VOIDCORP has already immunized its own relays against the virus.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The Concord's reconstruction efforts began more than a year ago. Several dozen technicians and computer experts have recently finished the final steps of getting the station up and running. Most of the station crew is employed by AstroSys Shipyards, an independent contractor that won the contract to rebuild the station in the Kendai system. A second company, ComTech, was given the job of installing the station's extensive computers and communications arrays. As the deadline approaches, both companies appear to have completed their commissions both on time and under budget.

The head of the ComTech team, Jax Walken, is a VOIDCORP agent. His mission is to install and transmit the Geneva Virus as soon as the station becomes operational. His ComTech technicians are trained saboteurs. Just before the start of the adventure, they strike to seize control of the station, install the virus in Kendai's computers, and prepare to transmit it to all other relay stations within range. The virus will propagate itself through every relay station in reach of *those* stations, quickly spreading to all stations throughout the Concord. Within a few weeks, interstellar communications will collapse throughout human space.

As the adventure opens, the heroes awaken to discover power and control disrupted throughout the station. As they

restore power and investigate, their first action is to unlock the secret of the Geneva Virus to prevent Kendai's array from being wiped clean (Scene I). Unfortunately, Walken's agents have installed the virus in Kendai's drivesats too. The heroes must prevent the automated launch of Kendai's drivesats to halt the spread of the Geneva Virus and avert a disaster of epic proportions (Scene II). Once the ComTech agents discover their plot has been countered, they arrange a counterattack, staging a fierce combat within the station's corridors (Scene III). Finally, with the villains defeated, the heroes hear the first words from the long-lost Verge (Epilogue).

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

What are the heroes doing on the Kendai relay station? The adventure assumes that the heroes begin the scenario in the station's crew quarters, and that they have a legitimate reason to be there. As the Gamemaster, you should create a story background for each hero in your group to explain why they're working on Kendai, and why they want the effort to succeed. Here are a few suggestions; feel free to mix and match.

Technicians and Engineers: Heroes with Technical Science or Computer Science skills might be employed as technicians by AstroSys, helping with the construction of the station. Or the heroes may be part of a small Concord inspection team, ensuring that the contractors are setting up the relay station properly and according to specifications.

Security Guards: Both AstroSys and the Concord maintain a handful of security guards to watch over the sensitive, expensive equipment and keep peace on the station. It's a pretty dull job for a hero with fighting or law enforcement skills, but it's a paycheck that's difficult to refuse.

Agents and Diplomats: Since the Kendai relay is expected to become operational within a few days, several stellar nations have dispatched low-level couriers and functionaries to prepare for the arrival of ambassadors and representatives who will handle reestablishment of ties to the Verge colonies. Heroes with Interaction or Business skills might be representatives of various governments and businesses, waiting for the station to become operational so that they can send their messages.

Service and Support: The work crew on the Kendai relay includes a number of unskilled and semiskilled space hands, cooks, sanitation specialists, and supply clerks. Heroes that don't seem to fit into the previous categories might be working on the station as contract labor, longshoremen, traders, or even as shuttle pilots or spacecraft maintenance specialists who currently don't have much equipment to work with or on. Of course, they can also be filling such positions until a new opportunity presents itself.



THE KENDAI RELAY

Kendai Relay Station is the setting for this adventure. Take a look at the map on the inside cover; the station has a spherical plan with six decks and more than thirty compartments. However, the map is intended as a guide, not a list of compartments that must be explored; don't force the heroes to explore every compartment.

The Kendai star is a K8 orange dwarf. The gem of the star system is Gobi, Kendai's second planet. Gobi is a lightly settled arid world still recovering from planetary bombardment during the Second Galactic War. The Kendai Relay orbits in Gobi's trailing LaGrange point (like the Trojan asteroids orbiting Jupiter)—far enough to avoid interference from planetary communications, but close in the event of trouble. As a deep-space station, the Kendai Relay is the only significant object for thousands of kilometers. In other words, the heroes are on their own during the course of the adventure.

STATION EXTERIOR

The station is a sphere approximately 40 meters in diameter. The interior compartments are about 36 meters across; a 2-meter thick double hull surrounds the station, filled with water and oxygen tanks. While the station may seem small, it would stand more than 10 stories tall if placed on a planetary surface.

The exterior can be reached through one of three airlocks (marked compartment 22 on the map), or by the hangar bay doors (compartment 25 on the map). You should remind your heroes that going outside the station requires the normal precautions against vacuum. There are a number of viewports located in various places, but they're triple-paned sheets of 100 mm clearsteel, stronger than the hull itself.

Three 20 meter tall cylindrical platforms ring the station's equator. These platforms hold the station's weaponry and defensive systems. None of the station's exterior armament can be trained to fire on the station itself.

Outside the station, twenty drivesats orbit in a constellation about 1 kilometer from the station's hull. Once the station is in operation, about half of these drivesats will be in drivespace at any given time. From the station's viewports, they're visible as small, dark silhouettes.

STATION INTERIOR

The station remains under construction; corridors and compartments are littered with access panels, loose wiring, exposed piping, unpainted bulkheads, and juryrigged lighting and power conduits. The crew quarters are slightly more fin-

ished, along with the command and communication decks. Despite the rough edges, just about everything works, and the heroes don't have to worry about electrocuting themselves or opening a door that leads to vacuum.

A powerlift shaft runs the entire height of the station, allowing easy access from one deck to the next. In addition, several decks are joined by an emergency access shaft should the powerlifts become nonfunctional. At the beginning of the adventure, the powerlifts have been deactivated by the ComTech team to limit movement throughout the station.

Most station doors are *vacuum-tight hatches*. They can stand up to sudden depressurization and automatically lock using both mechanical and electronic devices if a significant pressure differential is detected. Some are also *security checkpoints*, which don't open unless someone with the proper clearance registers a bioelectric scan at a panel beside the hatch. Opening a sealed hatch requires a successful Manipulation or Technical Science skill check, but defeating a security checkpoint requires a successful Security—*security devices* skill check.

DECK A: COMMAND

The powerlift doors to this deck are a security checkpoint; without the proper clearance, the heroes can't get out of the powerlift. Most of the deck is open, overlooking the comm pit on Deck B (compartment 1 on the map of Deck A and Deck B). The station's local communications, security, defense, sensor, and command posts are located on the open mezzanine deck (compartment 3). In Scene I, the heroes must make their way to the command deck to deactivate the Geneva Virus.

The station's main computer is located here. It can be used in Scene I to neutralize the Geneva Virus.

DECK B: COMMUNICATIONS

The main feature of this deck is the comm pit (compartment 1), the station's center for managing drivespace communications. It's a large room filled with data storage towers and powerful communications computers. The door leading into the comm pit is a security checkpoint.

Compartment 4 is one of the station's three docking rings and airlocks. An emergency access shaft near the airlock allows travel from Deck B to Deck E and all decks in between. Nearby is the administrative office (compartment 5), a cluttered room full of personnel files, contractor records, and station plans. The station commander's office is located on this deck, in compartment 7. The station CO is Brian Rouen, a retired Star Force officer described later in this section. The commander's quarters are just beyond, in compartment 6.



DECK C: CREW

This deck is reserved for crew quarters, mess facilities, and recreation. Kendai is not intended to be a permanent posting; the Concord expects to rotate crews through the station every six months. The crew facilities are spartan. The heroes begin the opening scene locked in compartment 12 (Crew Berthing Alpha). There are about a dozen other crewmen and contractors locked in berthing rooms Beta and Gamma (compartments 13 and 14). Teri Reed, the station's chief engineer, lives in compartment 15 and begins the adventure locked in her stateroom; the station's security officer, Rieger Bloch, has a room of his own in compartment 16. He begins the adventure dead in compartment 22 on Deck E.

The station's exercise room (compartment 11) is equipped with treadmills, weights, and gravclimbers. It also serves as the station's sick bay—the exercise equipment can be stowed and the medical facilities deployed automatically with the flip of a switch. Three paramedics have also been assigned to the station; they're part of the crew that begin the adventure locked in their quarters like the heroes.

Most of this deck is devoted to the mess, lounge, and galley (compartments 8, 9, and 10). The lounge is currently used as an electronics workshop, littered with test benches, printed circuit boards, disassembled consoles, and dozens of tools.

DECK D: ENGINEERING

The heart of the station, the engineering deck contains Kendai's power plant, life support systems, sanitation systems, and damage control stations. It's ringed by a circular corridor that serves as a walking and jogging track for crewmen who feel the need to stretch their legs. The station's security office is located in compartment 17; this is where the heroes' weapons are stored. This deck also holds the station's second docking ring and airlock, just outside the security office.

Compartment 18 is the engineering office, where maintenance records, blueprints, and technical documents are kept. Doors into compartment 19, the engineering control station, are controlled by security checkpoints. From the control booth, a knowledgeable character can selectively power or depower any system on the station. Heroes may travel to this compartment during the opening scene to restore power and gravity throughout the station.

Compartment 20 is main engineering, dominated by the station's mass reactor and power distribution banks. The door leading in from the outer passageway is a security checkpoint. Main engineering is ringed by several auxiliary rooms (compartments 19) which contain the life support and sanitation systems. Compartment 23 is a mechanical workshop, equipped with heavy power tools for serious repair jobs.

The outer corridor deck leads to the station's three defense platforms (22). The doors to each of these platforms are security checkpoints; narrow ladders lead up and down to the actual weapon installations, which sit on the ends of the platforms. Normally, the platforms aren't manned for station defense—the weapon systems can be controlled remotely from

either the command stations on Decks A or F. Kendai's defensive armament consists of six mass cannons and three point-defense guns.

DECK E: HANGAR

The primary function of the station is fulfilled by its drivespace relays; the most important maintenance job on a drivespace comm station is looking after the drivesats. Kendai's twenty drivesats must be kept in perfect working order to ensure that its daily rotation takes place exactly on schedule; a missed starfall produces unacceptable delays or even gaps in communications coverage. The hangar deck allows station personnel to retrieve malfunctioning satellites and bring them inside for repairs and maintenance.

The hangar operations office (compartment 24) serves as the station's center for external operations. Dozens of e-suits, zero-g webs, magnetic boots, and space construction toolkits are stowed in neat lockers in this room. The hangar (compartment 25) has sliding doors which create a bay opening 10 meters wide and 4 meters tall. This is plenty of room to bring a drivesat or even a small launch aboard. Extendable tracks permit a heavy crane to reach drivesats within 10 meters of the door, cradle them, and bring them inside with absolute precision. This crane is operated from the small booth near the bay opening.

The third station docking ring and airlock is located here, outside the hangar ops office. This deck also contains a pair of large food storage rooms for the galley (marked S).

DECK F: DEFENSES

The loneliest portion of the station, this deck is usually unmanned. Two large storerooms hold additional supplies, emergency generators, and life support systems. Compartment 26 functions as a secondary command deck and comm pit. If the station's upper command decks are damaged through accident or enemy action, the systems on Deck F can take over and run the station's defenses and message traffic. The door leading to compartment 26 is a security checkpoint.



SUPPORTING CAST

In addition to the heroes, 30 people are stationed on the Kendai station. Only a few of them come into play during this adventure, but feel free to create additional supporting characters to use as you see fit.

The descriptions of the cast include Ability Scores, important skills, and primary attack forms. When referring to the skill scores listed below, remember that use of a broad skill indicates a +d4 base situation die while use of the appropriate specialty skill indicates a +d0 base situation die. See *Chapter 4: Skills* for more information.

BRIAN ROUEN, STATION COMMANDER

Human Diplomat (Tech Op specialty), 4th level

STR	8	[+1]	INT	12	[+2]
DEX	9	[+1]	WIL	11	[+2]
CON	9		PER	11	

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 12+/11/5/2
 Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed-*brawl* 9/4/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [8]; Unarmed [8]-*brawl* [9]; Modern Ranged Weapons [9]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [9]; Computer [12]-*hardware* [13], *programming* [13]; Knowledge [12]-*language (Standard)* [15]; System [12]-*communications* [15], *defenses* [13], *engineering* [13], *sensors* [13], *weapons* [13]; Technical [12]-*drivespace communications* [13]; Administration [11]-*bureaucracy* [12], *management* [12]; Awareness [11]; Culture [11]-*alien (t'san)* [12]; Interaction [11]-*interrogate* [12]; Leadership [11]-*inspire* [12].

Commander Rouen (Roo-AH) is a tough, smart veteran of the Concord Star Force. He spent his career working in military communications, and upon retirement took service in the Concord Communications Commission (3C)-the organization that oversees the drivespace comm relays. He's a level-headed man of 80 years, well in his prime, with an athletic build and a square, severe face.

Before the adventure opens, Rouen is kidnapped by the ComTech agents and departs with them when they flee on the station's launch. He remains there until Jax leads the ComTech counterattack during Scene III, bringing Rouen back to the station to use as a hostage.

TERI REED, CHIEF ENGINEER

Human Tech Op, 3rd level

STR	9		INT	12	[+1]
DEX	12	[+1]	WIL	8	
CON	10		PER	10	

Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action check: 14+/13/6/3
 Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed-*power* 11/5/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O
 11mm ch pistol 14/7/3 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m HI/O

Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [9]; Unarmed Attack [9]; Modern [12]-*pistol* [13]; Vehicle [12]-*space* [13]; Stamina [10]-*endurance* [11]; Computer [12]-*hardware* [13], *programming* [13]; Knowledge [12]-*language (Standard)* [15]; Security [12]; System [12]-*communications* [13], *engineering* [15], *sensors* [13]; Technical [12]-*invention* [13], *juryrig* [14], *repair* [15], *knowledge* [13]; Awareness [8]; Culture [10]; Interaction [10].

Reed is a petite, active woman in her late 30s, with a rumpled jumpsuit and a general unkempt look. As a young woman she enlisted in the Orion Navy as an engineer; about 10 years later she went to work for the Concord Space Authority, the civilian counterpart to the Star Force. Despite her disheveled appearance and abrasive manner, Reed is an outstanding engineer, respected by those who work for her. More importantly, Reed knows the station better than anyone. Reed is locked in her quarters (compartment 15) when the adventure begins.

JAX WALKEN, COMTECH TEAM LEADER

Human Free Agent, 4th level

STR	9		INT	11	[+1]
DEX	12	[+1]	WIL	9	
CON	10		PER	10	

Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action check: 14+/13/6/3
 Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 3

Attacks

Unarmed-*power* 11/5/2 d6s/d6+2s/d4w LI/O
 11mm ch pistol 14/7/3 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m HI/O

Defenses

Deflection inducer: +2 to STR and DEX resistance modifiers
 CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)



Skills

Athletics [9]; Unarmed [9]–*power 2* [11]; Modern [12]–*pistol* [15]; Vehicle [12]–*space* [12]; Stamina [10]–*endurance* [11]; Business [11]–*corporate* [12]; Computer [11]–*programming* [12], *hacking* [12], *hardware* [14]; Knowledge [11]–*language (Standard)* [14]; Security [11]–*security devices* [12]; System [11]–*communications* [13], *engineering* [12]; Awareness [9]; Interaction [10]; Deception [10]–*bluff* [11].

Jax Walken is the leader of the ComTech team. For the last four months, he and his subordinates have been working to install the station’s comm system . . . with a hidden agenda. Jax is a good-looking, likable man in his mid-40s, with dark hair and a wiry build. He has a quick smile, a rapier wit, and a hint of ice behind his eyes. He retains a sense of humor even during a confrontation—but he’ll follow up on his wisecracks and repartee with thoughtful and deliberate efforts to make sure the heroes don’t interfere with his plan. Above all, Walken is unscrupulous and pragmatic.

As a major villain, Walken starts the adventure with 3 last resort points. He uses these last resort points defensively, to stay alive and avoid injury.

EXTRAS

About thirty more Concord and AstroSys workers are on board, most of whom are nonprofessionals who will avoid the fight in Scene III. If asked, they might provide assistance during the trigger scene and in Scenes I and II.

RIEGER BLOCH, SECURITY OFFICER

Bloch is killed before the adventure opens. He came across the ComTech agents in the hangar deck and was shot down. His body has been dragged to the airlock on Deck E. The keys to the station’s arms locker are on his belt, although his sidearm has been removed.

ASTROSYS EMPLOYEES

A dozen AstroSys technicians and construction specialists work on the station. Most are locked in Crew Berthing Beta when the adventure opens, and won’t be able to help unless freed by the heroes.

A typical AstroSys worker has a skill score of 10 in technical fields or repair work.

CONCORD TECHNICIANS

About a dozen Concord technicians and supervisors are on board. Most are locked into Crew Berthing Gamma.

Any AstroSys or Concord personnel rescued from a hostage situation or let out of locked compartments are naturally grateful to the heroes. They won’t be ready to pick up guns and start shooting, but they’ll render any reasonable assistance they can.

COMTECH AGENTS

Jax Walken leads a team of eight ComTech technicians. They were quartered in berthing compartments Alpha and Beta, but deliberately set up their schedules in order to cover the third shift. The agents had their weapons and equipment stashed in the storeroom on the hangar deck. Twenty minutes before the start of the adventure, they assembled, armed themselves, planted the virus, and then departed in a system launch before their treachery could be discovered. Each ComTech agent has the following statistics:

COMTECH AGENT

Human Nonprofessional

STR	10	INT	9
DEX	10	WIL	8
CON	9	PER	8
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action Check: 10+/9/4/2	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last Resorts: 0	

Attacks

Unarmed– <i>brawl</i>	12/6/3	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
9mm ch SMG	12/6/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	HI/0

Defenses

Battle jacket: d8 (L), d4+2 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Armor Operation [10]; Athletics [10]; Unarmed [10]–*brawl* [12]; Modern [10]–*SMG* [12]; Vehicle [10]–*space* [12]; Stamina [9]–*endurance* [10]; Computer Science [9]; Knowledge [9]–*language (Standard)* [12]; Technical Science [9]; Awareness [9].

Add more detail to the adventure and outfit each agent with special weapons and tactics if you desire. Generally, these agents are mediocre technicians and ruthless commandoes. As far as they’re concerned, the only way they’ll finish this job is if they allow no distractions or unexpected interference to get in their way.

As the most minor of villains, Comtech agents are assumed to have no last resort points (see “Villains” in Chapter 6 of the *Gamemaster Guide*).



TRIGGER: LIGHTS OUT

When you're ready, the adventure opens with the following trigger scene. Read the background information below to the players, so they know where their heroes are and what they're doing when the adventure starts.

For the past month, you've been employed on the Kendai drivespace communications relay. The comm relay is a small space station in the Kendai star system, situated in a LaGrange-point orbit trailing the world Gobi, Kendai's second planet. Set in interplanetary space, the station is thousands of kilometers and several hours from the nearest outpost.

The Kendai station is still under construction, but scheduled to become operational in only a few days. Once activated, the functioning station will fill a crucial gap in communications coverage, allowing the Concord to restore communications to the isolated frontier of space known as the Verge. Reestablishing contact with Verge worlds is an important event, and a number of diplomats are expected to arrive in the next few days to transmit the first messages to the Verge and receive the first replies.

Station Commander Rouen plans to launch the first message-bearing drivesat at midnight tomorrow. The first responses from the Verge should return six days later.

Show the players the map of the station and answer any questions they may have. Generally, they have a good familiarity with the station, so you can answer any questions about it or its importance in the communications network. When you're ready, read the following opening scene:

You've turned in for the night, retiring to your cubicles in Berthing Compartment Alpha. Fifteen bunks crowd the compartment, but tonight you're the only occupants. You've been working long hours lately, and you're taking pleasure in some well-deserved rest—until suddenly you're falling in the dark!

In a moment, you realize that the station's artificial gravity must have cut out, leaving you drifting in your bunks. Power's out too, and the weak red-glowing emergency lamps provide the only light in the chamber. Your eyes stare at a room that's shockingly unfamiliar as belongings float in the air, casting curious shadows. What do you do?

The ComTech operatives have just departed the station, after succeeding in their mission to plant the virus. As they left, they cut off the lights, interior communications, power, power-lifts, and gravity. Using the damage control systems in engineering, they've tricked the station's automated systems into believing that the berthing compartments have lost their atmospheres. The vacuum-tight hatches leading to the berthing compartments have been locked down in response.

In this trigger scene, allow the heroes to wonder about what's happened and reexplore the station. Other crew members might help if they're freed from the other crew berths. Eventually, though, the heroes should reach the command deck and discover the virus.

Here are a few story decisions the players might think of:

LEAVE

Both doors in the berthing compartment are locked by remote computer control. In order to open a door, a hero must succeed in using any of the following skills: Security—*security devices*, Manipulation—*lockpick*, or Technical Science—*juryrig*.

There's another way out of the compartment, if the heroes think to make use of it. The compartment is adjacent to the emergency access shaft, which allows passage between decks. The access panel must be removed. For a character skilled in Technical Science—*repair* or System Operation—*engineering*, this is a simple skill check. Give the player a -3 bonus to his skill check.

CALL SOMEONE

The intercom system is shut off at the command deck (Deck A). Until the intercom system is reactivated, none of the station's internal communications can function. The comm system can only be reactivated from the command deck.

RESTORE POWER, LIGHTS, GRAVITY

In order to get the lights and gravity back on, the heroes must get down to the engineering deck (Deck D). If the heroes seem stuck, allow them to attempt Knowledge—*deduce* or Technical Science checks to figure out where they need to go in order to get the station's systems up and running again.

GET ARMED

All privately owned firearms and melee weapons are stored in the weapons locker in the security office. If the heroes want to get to their weapons, they'll have to go down to compartment 17 on Deck D.

If the heroes don't seem to know what to do at this point, encourage them to get out of their berthing compartment and find out what's going on. Shouts from the neighboring crew berth should urge the heroes on as other crew members discover their predicament.



GETTING AROUND

As the heroes explore, several obstacles stand in their way.

ZERO-G

Heroes can “walk” by dragging themselves along handrails found in all station corridors, or “run” by jumping from any surface. Heroes without the *Acrobatics-zero-g training* skill suffer a +3 penalty to physical actions they attempt in zero-g, and a +1 penalty to actions that only employ small physical motions—such as juryrigging a door or operating a computer. Heroes with the zero-g training skill suffer smaller penalties; refer to the skill description in *Chapter 4: Skills* of the *Player’s Handbook*.

LOCKED DOORS

The three berthing compartments have been locked by the station’s damage control system. The appropriate doors are marked on the station map to remind you that they’re locked. The heroes must first exit their bunkroom as above; allow successful use of *Technical Science-juryrig*, *Security-security devices*, or *Manipulation-lockpick* to open these doors.

Most other doors, with the exception of security checkpoints, aren’t locked. Normally, the heroes are registered with the security system and can pass through simply by placing their hands on a bioelectric recognition plate. Unfortunately, the ComTech agents further complicated things by setting the station to a high-level security alert. Now, the checkpoints can only be opened by someone inside the room, or remotely from the command deck. Of course, the heroes can try to crack a security checkpoint with successful use of *Security-security devices*.

POWERLIFTS

The biggest obstacle to getting around is the deactivation of the powerlifts, preventing travel between decks. One powerlift car is stopped at Deck F, and the other at Deck D. The cars have emergency access panels in both their ceilings and floors, so it’s possible to climb through them.

There are several ways around the powerlifts. First, the heroes can force open the powerlift doors and climb up or down the shafts. The doors can be forced by a successful *Strength feat* check or any skill that could open a security checkpoint. As long as the station’s in zero-g, this is a fairly safe way to travel. When gravity’s restored the heroes must use the *Athletics-climb* skill in order to go up or down a shaft. Refer to the skill description in *Chapter 4: Skills*.

Consider each deck to be 6 meters high, so a character who falls from Deck A to the bottom of the powerlift shaft would fall 30 meters. Information on falling can be found in *Chapter 3: Heroes in Action*.

Once power is restored in engineering, the heroes can ride the powerlifts to any deck. Of course, security checkpoints remain in place, including those in Deck A and the comm pit (compartment 1) on Deck B.

EMERGENCY SHAFTS

Two emergency shafts allow travel through most of the station. The primary shaft connects Decks B, C, and D. A secondary shaft links Decks D and Deck E. No emergency shaft extends to Deck A or Deck F. To use an emergency shaft, an access panel must first be opened with a successful *Technical Science-repair* or *System Operation-engineering* skill check. Moving around in the emergency shaft is easily accomplished while the station’s gravity systems are deactivated. Once artificial gravity is restored, a successful *Athletics-climb* skill check is required to move between decks.

EVA

A final option for getting between decks is to travel outside the station itself in the vacuum of space. Soft e-suits and magnetic boots are stored at each airlock. The heroes can only come back inside at another airlock (compartments 4) or the hangar bay (compartment 25).

WEAPONS

The heroes’ firearms are stowed in an arms locker in the security office (compartment 15). The outer door is open, but the locker is secured by a biolock keyed to respond only to the security officer and the commander of the station. The heroes can defeat this security system with a successful *Security-security devices* skill check. However, the sophistication of this security system provides a +2 penalty to deactivate it.

In addition to any weapons the heroes may own, the arms locker contains two stutter pistols, an autoflechette shotgun, two 11mm charge rifles, two 11mm zero-g rifles, six stun grenades, six plasma grenades, and two stun batons. For more information on these weapons, refer to *Chapter 11: Weapons & Armor* of the *Player’s Handbook*.

If the heroes can’t get to their weapons, they can improvise, using common tools such as wrenches or piping. Decide if the weapon is more like a knife or a club, and use the appropriate statistics in the *Player’s Handbook*. Since the station’s under construction, there are dozens of such tools and large objects around.

ROGER BLOCH

The security officer has a pass key to the arms locker. It’s on his body, in the airlock just outside the hangar bay on Deck E.



SCENE I: VIRUS

Locking the heroes in their quarters and deactivating power throughout the station are only distractions designed by Walken and his men. Their real task was to install the Geneva Virus on the station's communication computer, the powerful machine that sorts, addresses, and encodes all message traffic transmitted and received through the drivesat relays.

Allow the heroes to wander about the station, restoring power and exploring. Eventually, they should discover two important facts. When the characters check the crew quarters, they discover that the ComTech crew, the station commander, and the security officer are missing. Unknown to them, the ComTech crew set the virus, kidnapped the commander, killed the security officer, and left.

When the heroes take the time to search compartment 1 (the comm pit), they have the first chance to discover the virus. Read the following:

As you survey the main comm array computer, a flickering message ghosts across the display screen. It reads: GENEVA 1:14:55 . . . 54 . . . 53 . . . 52 . . .

Naturally, the players will besiege you with questions about what this is, what it means, and how to stop it. Here are some of the more likely questions, and some ways to respond:

WHAT DOES THE MESSAGE MEAN?

Any hero can tell at a glance that the computer's running a program. A hero who succeeds in a Computer Science skill check can determine that the computer's operating system has been suborned by a program entitled "Geneva." Remember, you can allow characters without the Computer Science broad skill to make untrained checks at half their Ability Score (in this case, Intelligence) or let them use Knowledge—*computer operation*. The keyboard, touchpads, and vocal interfaces have all been cut out, so initial attempts to break into the program or query the computer fail. It's going to take a hacker to find out what's going on. See "The Computer" in the following section.

WHAT SYSTEMS ARE IN DANGER?

The station has two major computer systems. The first is the station computer, which handles all of Kendai's engineering, defense, security, and administration functions. This computer's primary interfaces are located in compartment 3 on Deck A.

The second is the communications computer, which is designed to sort, address, encode, and transmit millions of messages through drivespace each day. The communications computer is the reason for the station's existence here in the Kendai system. The Geneva Virus has been installed on the communications computer. The communications computer is located in compartment 1 on Deck B. The computer can't be controlled from any other location.

There are dozens of other minor computer systems on board, but most of these are subsidiaries of the station computer.

When the heroes begin to consider deactivating the virus somehow, refer to "The Computer" on the next page.

DID THE COMTECH AGENTS DO THIS?

Since only the ComTech team took the third duty shift, there are no witnesses among the supporting cast who can tell the heroes who installed the virus or who killed Roger Bloch, the security officer. Questioning the station personnel won't produce much in the way of results; the ComTech staff was friendly and no one expected the treachery.

There are only two witnesses who can tell the heroes what happened. The first is station commander Brian Rouen, who is held captive by the ComTech team. The other is the station itself. Internal monitoring cameras record events throughout the relay station. With a successful System Operation—*sensors* skill check, a hero can access the video logs and witness the ComTech crew complete their betrayal, only an hour ago. Jax Walken can be seen working on the comm computer for a long time. He loaded and started the Geneva Virus. Then the ComTech team went to engineering, deactivated power, and left on a launch, killing Bloch along the way.

TURN IT OFF!

Any hero with Computer Science or Technical Science skills can realize that simply depowering the communications system could be a risky move. The station computer can inform the heroes of this, if no hero has the proper background. There's no telling what the Geneva Virus might be doing or not doing, and shutting it down could abruptly trigger all kinds of catastrophic effects.

If the heroes shut down or destroy the comm computer without attempting to stop the Geneva Virus, nothing happens until the countdown (which is now invisible to the heroes) ends . . . at which point, the first drivesat prepares for launch! The Kendai computer announces the imminent launch before it actually happens, but the heroes have to move very fast in Scene II.

THE COMPUTER

The challenge of this scene is to analyze the program running on the communications system and devise a strategy for dealing with it. Refer to the flowchart on the inside back cover; it shows the steps necessary to defeat the Geneva Virus. Each step along the flowchart requires an action on the part of the heroes, and usually involves making a skill check.

THE RIGHT SKILL FOR THE JOB

This challenge focuses on heroes with Computer Science–*hacking* or *hardware*. If none of your heroes possess one or these specialty skills or its broad skill, don't despair. The heroes can still succeed. Allow the heroes to substitute Technical Science or System Operation–*communications*. Apply a +2 penalty, since the heroes aren't using the most appropriate skill for the job.

If the heroes *still* have no relevant skills, allow the station computer to suggest that the characters attempt to communicate with the communications computer directly (use the Deception path).

The heroes' first choice is which strategy to use. They can try to crack the communication computer's password (PASSWORD), break into the system by hacking its program (SYSTEM BREAK), or use a ploy to deceive the program (DECEPTION). Each of these methods leads the heroes along a different path, as indicated at the top of the flowchart.

As the heroes reach a new step on the chart, consult the appropriate text below. *Virtual Reality (VR)* descriptions are included with each step for characters who can project their consciousness into the computer by means of a gridcaster (see *Chapter 10: Computers*) or a psionic ability (see *Chapter 14: Psionics*). These are presented as areas of shaded text.

ACKNOWLEDGED

Once this step is reached, the heroes can attempt to issue commands and scan the operating system to see what the Geneva Virus is doing. At this stage, the hero recognizes that the virus intends to delete all message addresses and communications control systems—when the countdown ends, Kendai's comm manager will be wiped clean, completely incapacitating the system. The drivesats will spread the effect through space.

From here, they can attempt to communicate with the Geneva Virus or launch an assault to destroy it.

You confront a great, golden obelisk rising from the dim terrain of the operating system. The OS whispers and flits around you, manipulated by beams of light playing from the obelisk's peak.

ASSAULT

Through attack programs or command overrides, the heroes attempt to contain the virus and destroy it. This requires a Computer Science–*hacking* check with a +2 penalty due to the virus' defenses. If the heroes use corrupt programs that they bought on their own, they may receive a bonus (see *Chapter 10: Computers*); if it works, the heroes gain authorized access to the operating system.

Guns blazing, you attack the obelisk with a battery of destructive weapons.

AUTHORIZED

The program recognizes the heroes as authorized users and will accept their commands. From here the heroes can attempt to shut it down.

One surface of the obelisk rotates to reveal a serene, inhuman face. "Awaiting instructions," it prompts at even intervals.

COMMUNICATE

Programs and computers possess a rudimentary intelligence of their own; hence, a hero may open a dialogue with the virus and attempt to persuade or deceive it into authorizing the hero to access the program and issue commands. Allow the heroes to proceed by means of an Interaction or Deception skill check. Use a complex skill check (as per "Crack Password" below) to build suspense; give bonuses for good role-playing.

The Geneva Virus has only the most basic personality emulation—it's cold, mechanical, and single-minded, but brilliant in its own way. Ask the players to think up an angle that might work:

We're from Insight: The virus asks for a password to verify the statement. Since the heroes don't have one, they'll have to bluff. The heroes suffer a +3 penalty to their skill checks to resolve the situation.

You'll destroy yourself: It's true that when the virus activates, it self-destructs. However, the virus places no value on its own existence. The heroes suffer a +5 penalty to skill checks to gain access through a threat or warning of this nature.

We'll destroy you: See above.

You don't know everything that's going on: Bluffing the virus is the best bet. The heroes may be able to convince the Geneva Virus that it should wait for official confirmation from an authorized Insight (or VOIDCORP) representative. Allow the heroes a Deception–*bluff* skill check to pull this off.

The face in the obelisk opens its eyes and speaks in a cold, thundering voice, shaking the dark cityscape that surrounds you.



KEEPING EVERYONE BUSY

Heroes with technical skills have a lot to do during this scene. One character should lead the effort, but other characters can try to help out. See “Combining Actions” on page 50 of the *Player’s Handbook*.

Of course, characters without technical skills may feel left out. Allow them to continue the exploration of the station, converse with other crew members, and theorize over the reason for the ComTech defection. They can also use the sensors to scan for the station’s missing launch . . . without success.

You can also give the other heroes errands to run to make the computer operator’s job easier. Maybe they can track down a special circuit board that will provide the computer operator with a –2 bonus to his skill check, if it’s installed just right.

COUNTERMEASURES

The hero’s failure results in the virus deciding to implement self-defense protocols, downloading attack programs to a pair of maintenance robots in compartment 23 on Deck E. They appear in Scene II, interfering with the heroes’ attempts to stop the drivesats from launching.

The obelisk fires a laser-like beam off into the darkness, pulsing a coded burst too fast to read.

CRACK PASSWORD

This option seeks to break the program’s password using a Computer Science skill. Unfortunately, this takes time. Use the mechanics for a *complex skill check* described on page 62 of the *Player’s Handbook*. Multiple skill checks accumulate successes. Assume that the conditions are Marginal (no penalty or bonus) and that the Complexity is Good (a total of 6 successes are required). Remember that an Ordinary result counts as 1 success, a Good result count as 2 successes, and an Amazing result counts as 3 successes.

Heroes can make skill checks to accumulate successes once every 10 minutes; when the heroes accumulate 6 successes, they get the password. Move to “Authorized” above.

If characters possess a decode program of their own, they receive a bonus. See *Chapter 10: Computers* in the *Player’s Handbook*.

You hero faces an armored gate in a great city wall, trying key after key.

DUMP

The heroes are dumped out of the program without ceremony. Whatever strategic path they were following becomes unusable; they’ll have to start over and try another tack.

The golden obelisk turns a fiery, incandescent beam on you, blasting you into a smear of carbon. You regain consciousness in the real world, dazed and confused.

INTERRUPT

This path is designed to hack into the program by brute force and give the heroes access to the operating system. Use a complex skill check as described under “Crack Password” above. If a hero has purchased a break-in program, it may apply a bonus to his skill checks.

You streak over a dark cityscape and find your way barred by towering defenses. Beyond, you can see a golden obelisk that opposes your actions. You must use tools to cut your way past the defenses to the building beyond.

SHUTDOWN

Once the program recognizes the heroes as authorized users, they can delete the virus from the comm computer with a successful skill check. This isn’t automatic—deciphering the program’s command structure and identifying the components they need to manipulate takes expertise.

Opening the obelisk, you reveal a column of sparkling conduits and coppery wires that can be cut, severed, and ripped out.

DONE

The heroes successfully remove the Geneva Virus from the comm manager. Kendai’s drivespace communication system is safe and won’t be affected. Unfortunately, the virus has already copied itself to certain drivesat relays. As the program ends, the heroes see that the comm computer is timing a drivesat launch:

Before your eyes, the comm computer’s display clears. The Geneva message vanishes, replaced by the normal operating system interface screen.

But, at the bottom of the screen, there’s a flashing icon with a running countdown just beneath it:
00:18:58 . . . 57 . . . 56 . . .

FAILURE?

What happens if the heroes can’t defeat the Geneva Virus and expunge it from the comm manager? Well, your players never need to know that they were *supposed* to beat the virus. Just read the boxed text above, and the players will probably think that the virus downloaded because they failed. Move along to Scene II: Drivesats.



SCENE II: DRIVESATS

The heroes' work is far from over. In this scene, the heroes must prevent Kendai's drivesats from starfalling into drivespace. If they fail, the drivesats transmit the Geneva Virus to other stations, where it replicates. Within a few days, the virus destroys interstellar communications throughout the Stellar Ring, initiating a catastrophe of epic magnitude.

The Geneva Virus is currently loaded on five of Kendai's 20 drivesats. Drivesat 1 is due to starfall at 0600, 18 minutes from now. Drivesats 2, 3, 4, and 5 follow at 5-minute intervals. The virus has maximized its chances by co-opting as many drivesats as possible. Unless the heroes think to check the communications manager system, don't tell them about the programmed launch of drivesats beyond the first. Use the additional satellites as a nasty surprise when the time is right.

The chief complication in this scene is that the drivesats orbit the station in a constellation about 1 kilometer distant, and the Geneva Virus shut down communications between the drivesats and the station. Basically, there's no way for the heroes in the station to remotely interface with the satellites. In order to change the drivesats' launch orders, they have to go EVA to the drivesat, open an access panel, and work on the satellite directly.

From this point on, you should play up a sense of urgency in the adventure. Time is critical, and seconds count! You want the players to feel the pressure of the countdown. Give them updates when a minute or even a few seconds have passed or been wasted. Of course, one minute of game time might take you five or ten minutes of real time to resolve. Do your best to keep up the tension.

EVA

In order to reach the drivesat, the heroes must go EVA, leaving the station to spacewalk to Drivesat 1. There are e-suits and magnetic boots at each airlock, as well as in the hangar ops office; it only takes a minute or so to suit up. It's possible to jump from the station to the drivesats, but extremely hard—if the heroes can't find any other mode of transport, they can try it with an Athletics-*jump* skill check. (Don't forget the +3 zero-g penalty.) The heroes cover about 200 meters per minute in a jump.

A better way is to use a zero-g web (see *Chapter 9: Goods & Services*). A dozen of these small thruster units are in the hangar ops office (compartment 23). Using a zero-g web, the heroes cover 500 meters a minute without a skill check; combat maneuvers using the zero-g web use the Acrobatics-*zero-g training* skill.

COUNTERMEASURES

If the heroes tripped the virus's countermeasures in Scene I, the virus takes control of two maintenance robots in the station hangar bay and sends them out after the spacewalking heroes. The robots have the following statistics:

Maintenance Robots

STR	15	[+3]	INT	6	
DEX	6	[-1]	WIL	2	[-1]
CON	12		PER	2	[-1]
Durability: 12/12/6/6			Action check: 7+/6/3/1		
Move: walk 2, fly 50			#Actions: 3		
Reaction score: Marginal/1			Last resorts: 0		

Attacks

Claw	13/6/3	LI/0	d6+2s/d4+2w/d6+3w
Laser	6/4/2	En/0	d4w/d6+1w/d4m

Defenses

Armor: 2d4 (LI), d6 (HI), d6+1 (En)

Skills

None

Each robot is armed with a manipulator claw and a laser cutting torch. The laser torch has a range of 10 meters. The robots can't be rendered unconscious through loss of stun points or with an Amazing hit, and they suffer no penalties for attacking in zero-g.

If you think the players are having too easy a time, activate the robots whether or not the heroes tripped the countermeasures in the Scene I. Read the following to any heroes on board the station when the robots activate:

Heroes on the station may choose to suit up and pursue the robots, or they could attempt to use the station's weapons against them. See "If All Else Fails . . ." on the next page.

A warning light flashes on the console nearby. The station computer reports: "Warning! Unauthorized maintenance vehicle operation in progress. The hangar deck has been depressurized."

The console flickers to a view from the hangar control station. Two bulky maintenance robots are drifting into space, propulsors glowing as they head out toward the drivesats and your comrades. "I cannot establish communications with remote units M04 and M07," the station computer reports.



DISARMING THE DRIVESATS

Working on a drivesat that is only minutes away from starfalling is extremely risky. If the device submerges into drivespace while a character is clinging to its exterior, that character will be lost forever. Emphasize the imminent departure of the satellite as a very real threat to the heroes working on it. There are several ways to prevent the satellite from starfalling and transmitting the Geneva Virus.

DISABLE THE STARDRIVE

If the satellite can't enter drivespace, it won't transmit. This buys the heroes hours or days to cleanse the drivesat's comm computer at their leisure. Shutting down the stardrive requires the use of the Technical Science—*technical knowledge* or System Operation—*engineering* skills and a complex skill check. Complex skill checks are described on page 62 of the *Player's Handbook*. Allow the hero one check per minute; the stardrive system shuts down when the hero accumulates 4 successes. There's no penalty for a Failure result, other than the loss of time.

DISABLE THE TRANSMITTER

If it's not possible to prevent the satellite's starfall, it might be possible to make sure that it can't transmit after it starfalls. This works just like knocking out the stardrive described above, except the appropriate skills are Computer Science—*hardware* and System Operation—*communications*.

INSTALL AN ANTI-VIRUS

If the heroes defeated the Geneva Virus in Scene I, they can create an antivirus program designed to remove it from the satellite's system. Computer Science—*hacking* is required. Creation of the antivirus program requires a complex skill check, and a total of 6 successes. Allow skill checks every minute.

With the patch, it's easy to destroy the virus. A Computer Science—*hacking* check, with a -2 bonus, eradicates the virus on a drivesat instantly.

SABOTAGE

Sabotaging the drivesat by ripping out handfuls of important-looking stuff is another way to prevent it from starfalling . . . but it's not a sure thing. Allow a Technical Science—*juryrig* check. Untrained characters make a check using one-half their Intelligence score. If the result is a Failure, the hero sets off a small explosion or power surge that inflicts d12 points of

wound damage (En/O) in a 5-meter radius. On a Critical Failure, the drivesat starfalls immediately with the character attached.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS. . .

There's another way to prevent the drivesats from launching into drivespace: Destroy them. This is an expensive option, and you should reinforce the notion that each satellite costs millions of Concord dollars. Allow one of the crew—perhaps engineer Teri Reed—to make a cursory objection. Of course, if this is the only way to prevent the spread of the virus through human space, it's worth it.

DEMOLITIONS

A satellite can be disabled by rigging it with an explosive device of any kind. A demolitions pack, hand grenade, or even an oxygen tank placed in the right spot and then detonated wrecks the satellite. Allow a hero a Demolitions skill check to position and detonate the charge. A successful result on the skill check indicates the drivesat has been destroyed.

STATION WEAPONS

One hit from the station's mass cannons destroys a drivesat (or the maintenance robots from "Countermeasures" above) automatically. The Kendai station computer refuses to aim the station's weapons at the drivesats or robots—interlocks prevent them from being targeted by the weapons control stations.

The heroes can circumvent the computer by firing the weapons locally from the weapon platforms on Deck D, instead of using the command deck's weapon station. Once inside one of the three weapon mounts (compartments 22), a hero can cut out the computer, then train and fire the mass cannon manually.

Switching a platform to local control takes about a minute and requires a hero to succeed in either a Technical Science—*juryrig*, Computer Science—*hardware*, System Operation—*engineering*, or System Operation—*weapons* skill check. Aiming and firing the mass cannons requires a System Operation—*weapons* skill check. This action suffers a +2 penalty since none of the targeting systems is operational. The mass cannons can fire once per round. As noted, a mass cannon obliterates a satellite or a robot with a successful hit.

The five satellites that have been infected aren't spaced equally around the station—one platform bears on two of them, the second platform bears on two more, and the third cannon can hit the fifth satellite. The heroes must move from platform to platform in order to destroy all of the targets.



SCENE III: REVENGE

Jax Walken and his ComTech agents, their plan unraveling, return to the Kendai station in this scene to eliminate the heroes, retake control, and replant the virus in Kendai's drivesats.

Give the heroes a little time to recover from the previous scene. They should return to the station from their EVA trip out to the drivesats and reunite with any heroes who stayed onboard. With the end of the scene, any stun damage that was suffered disappears, but heroes who were more seriously wounded may require medical attention. Fill the moment with a sense of closure; allow the heroes to think they've succeeded and that the threat has passed. Any station personnel they've freed congratulate them for their daring escapades—asking how they did it as the heroes relish their victory.

After several minutes of such celebration, or when the heroes begin to seriously wonder about who did all of this, and why—begin Scene III.

COMTECH'S RIDE

About half an hour after the end of Scene II, the ComTech escape vehicle shows up—a launch silently drifting into the hangar bay (compartment 25) on Deck E. Aboard the launch are Walken, his eight agents, and a hostage—station commander Brian Rouen. Walken is careful to take no actions that might harm the station; he needs Kendai fully operational in order to launch drivesats infected with the Geneva Virus.

If the heroes are in or around the Command Deck or the Secondary Command Deck, the Kendai station computer reports the approach of the launch: "Attention, please. Unauthorized docking procedure in progress. There is an *Alpha*-class vessel commencing docking in the hangar bay. I have received no transponder codes from the vessel."

If the heroes take immediate action, they can use the station's weapons to destroy the launch with a single hit before it enters the hangar bay. Otherwise, the vessel immediately docks in the hangar bay. Of course, at this point the heroes don't know who's on the launch—and if they do open fire, station commander Rouen is sure to die.

The ComTech agents aren't likely to shoot unarmed heroes out of hand; if unarmed heroes encounter ComTech agents during the scene, the saboteurs threaten the heroes with their SMGs and demand surrender. If necessary, they lock unarmed hostages into a storage room. On the other hand, the ComTech agents won't hesitate a moment to open up on armed heroes. See pages 6 and 7 for information on the ComTech agents and Jax Walken.

ACTION

Run this scene as a fast-moving, hard-hitting action sequence. The ComTech team seeks to seize control of the station, and it's up to the heroes to stop them. Keep the station map handy; you're likely to need it as the agents and the heroes scurry about the station in move and countermove.

Immediately after docking, Jax divides his agents into three teams. Each team has a different objective, and each agent has a comm gear headset and can communicate with the others by encrypted transmissions. Given the chance, they report any contact with heroes, keeping Walken posted continuously.

Walken's first team of three agents attempts to seize control of engineering. They travel through the emergency access shaft from Deck E to Deck D. From the control station (compartment 19) they can monitor all station systems, and the control booth's windows overlook the power plant (compartment 20).

The second team of three agents has the goal of capturing the command deck (compartment 3). They use one of the powerlifts to make the trip. Once these first two teams are in place, they await further orders.

Walken, two agents, and their hostage remain on Deck E until the other teams report success or failure. If the second team succeeds, Walken moves to the command deck. If the agents' plans meet with success, they lock the surviving heroes and crew inside storage lockers while they replant the Geneva Virus. See "Ending the Scene," below.

REACTION

You won't be able to predict how your heroes will handle this takeover attempt. Generally, neither the heroes nor the villains know exactly what the opposition is up to. But as long as the heroes control the command deck, they might think to use the station's internal cameras to monitor where the ComTech agents are going and what they're doing.

If the heroes are armed, they should be able to dispatch the first few ComTech agents without too much trouble. If either team gets attacked, Walken's first reaction will be to dispatch the first team to assist. He'll also send one of his agents on Deck E to help out.

HOSTAGE

If Walken's infiltration teams are defeated and he finds himself facing uncomfortable odds, he retreats to the hangar bay with his hostage and any agents who have survived. He stalls for time if the heroes have taken out most of the rest of his team, contacting the heroes via intercom or by comm gear.



EPILOGUE

The intercom crackles to life. “This is Walken,” says the voice, with a clipped Insight accent. “I have Rouen, and I’ll kill him if you don’t do exactly what I say.”

Walken’s threat is a bluff. If the heroes go along, he’d love to salvage the mission with a virus-infected drivesat. More realistically, he’s hoping to escape with his life.

ENDING THE SCENE

The best way to end this scene is for the heroes to defeat Walken’s infiltration teams and then take out Walken himself after securing the rest of the station.

If the heroes are defeated or surrender, the ComTech agents hold them at gunpoint for a couple of hours while they replant the Geneva Virus on a drivesat and watch it starfall. Then they leave on board a system launch. The scene might end in a stalemate, where the heroes control part of the station but don’t hold it all. After a couple of hours, Walken negotiates the release of his hostage in exchange for free passage to the nearest airlock, where he and his surviving agents board the system launch and leave. If the heroes are stubborn, Commander Rouen orders them to stand down and abide by the agreement.

CONCLUSION

As the adventure ends, the heroes have defeated the ComTech team and destroyed, disabled, or deprogrammed the five corrupted drivesats. With the Geneva Virus bottled up at Kendai, the Concord’s communication net is safe. Award the heroes 1 achievement point for successfully completing the adventure, and an additional achievement point to any player whose role-playing, ingenuity, or good play merited reward.

If the heroes don’t stop the virus in time, you might craft another adventure around the search for a self-replicating patch that could ride the coattails of the Geneva Virus and restore communications. If the drivesat was damaged before it sank into drivespace, there’s a chance the virus won’t propagate. Finally, you might give the heroes a chance to radio the next communication relay and warn its personnel to stop the virus’s spread there. Several hours might pass between the receipt of the Geneva Virus and the next scheduled drivesat launch, so the heroes might have a narrow window in which to act.

If the adventure ended in success, only a few hours of hasty repair work are needed to bring Kendai operational on schedule. The first drivesat with its burst of messages submerges the next day, after diplomats and couriers dump hundreds of messages for Verge colonies into its comm banks.

It takes about three days for the messages to reach the Verge, then another three days for a reply. It’s a full day after the events when the heroes are part of a celebratory gathering in Kendai’s mess decks to listen to the first replies from the Verge.

The station’s mess decks have been arrayed in brilliant banners representing each of the stellar nations for a great diplomatic gathering to commemorate the first words from the Verge. Dignitaries have been pouring into the station for days now—all available spaces have been converted to temporary guest berthing, and hundreds of visitors are residing in the small fleet of starships drifting in orbit nearby.

For the ceremonial first message, a special holographic screen has been set up, filling one end of the hall. As the appointed hour approaches, the room fills with an excited buzz. The station commander steps up to the podium and activates an external camera. Shimmering into view, Drivesat 1 rises from the depths of drivespace. The commander checks a display and smiles. “Fellow sentients, we have over 5,000 messages logged from the Tendril drivespace relay. The Verge is ours once again.” The delegates cheer.

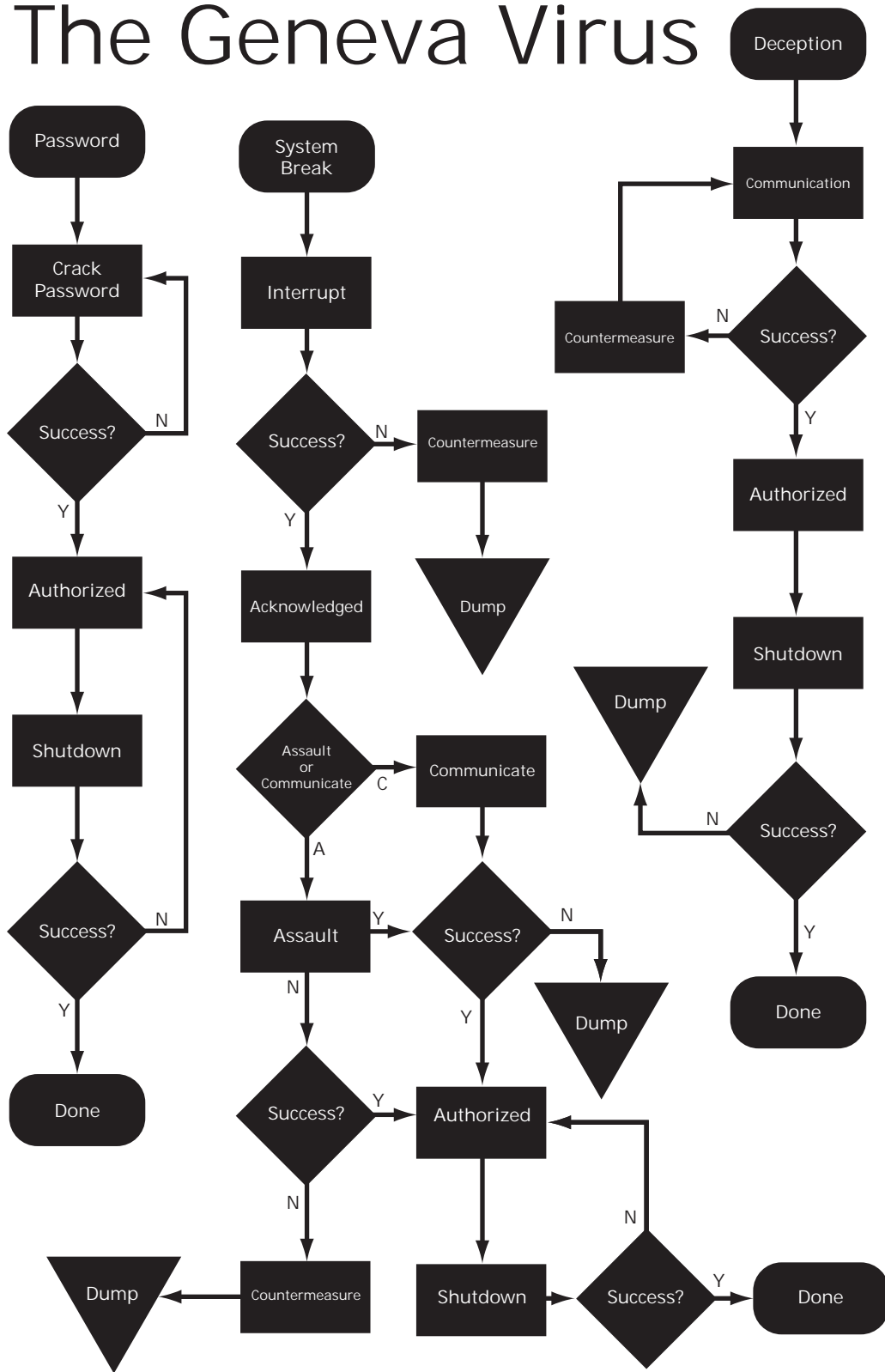
He cues up the first message, which appears on the screen before you. A grim-faced man in formal military dress gazes from the holographic projection. “Greetings, Kendai. My name is Scott Williamson, and I represent the independent government of Alaundril—”

The message is suddenly interrupted. The screen fades into static-filled darkness. “Hold on,” a communication officer reports, adjusting the console. “The Alaundril message has been preempted by an Alpha Class emergency override. Another message is coming through.”

The audio speakers fill with a garbled static hiss. The room falls silent. “. . . Borealis colony Silver Bell at Hammer’s Star, calling any FreeSpace Alliance vessel . . . We are under attack by . . . Repeat, the colony is under heavy attack by unknown forces. Send help. Repeat, send help. It’s May 3, 2489. We need help, damn it! Please . . .”



The Geneva Virus



STAR*DRIVE™
ADVENTURE

Black Starfall

by Richard Baker

In the far future, human space has just emerged from a century-long galactic war. The dark times are over. Now the rebuilding begins. It starts at the Kendai communications relay, where the newly formed Galactic Concord hopes to reestablish contact with a frontier region that was cut off at the height of the conflict. A region known to those of Old Space as the Verge. . . .

Now a group of heavily armed terrorists has grabbed Kendai and plans to use the relay to destroy the entire Concord communications network. Your group of heroes is all that stands between the terrorists, the spread of a deadly computer supervirus, and the collapse of the fragile galactic peace accords.

Black Starfall is an ALTERNITY® adventure that serves as a prelude to the STAR*DRIVE™ campaign setting. This pulse-pounding, far-future technothriller is designed for level 1 heroes and makes a great introduction to the ALTERNITY game.

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