STAR✴DRIVE™

Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

Red Starrise

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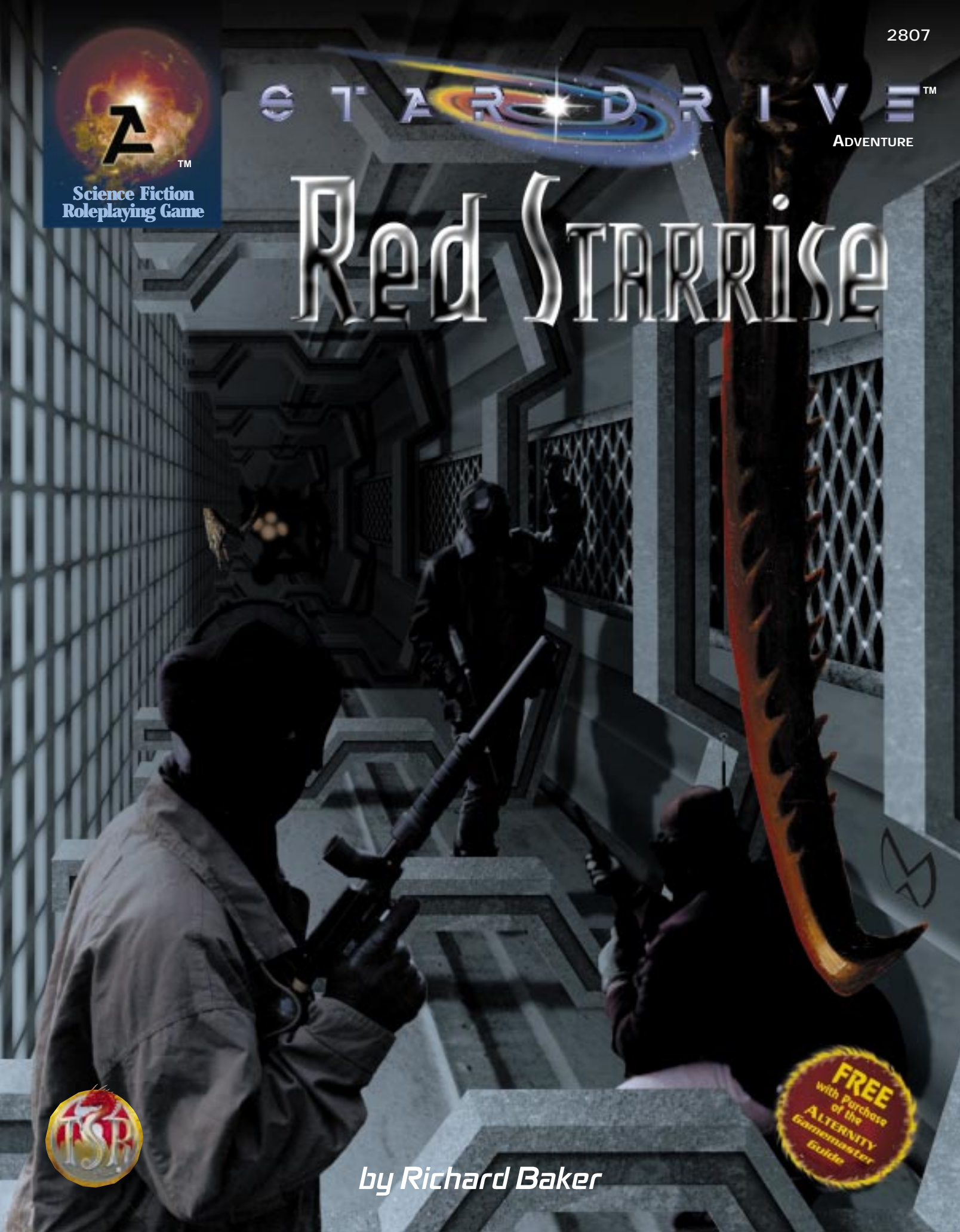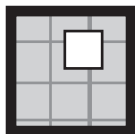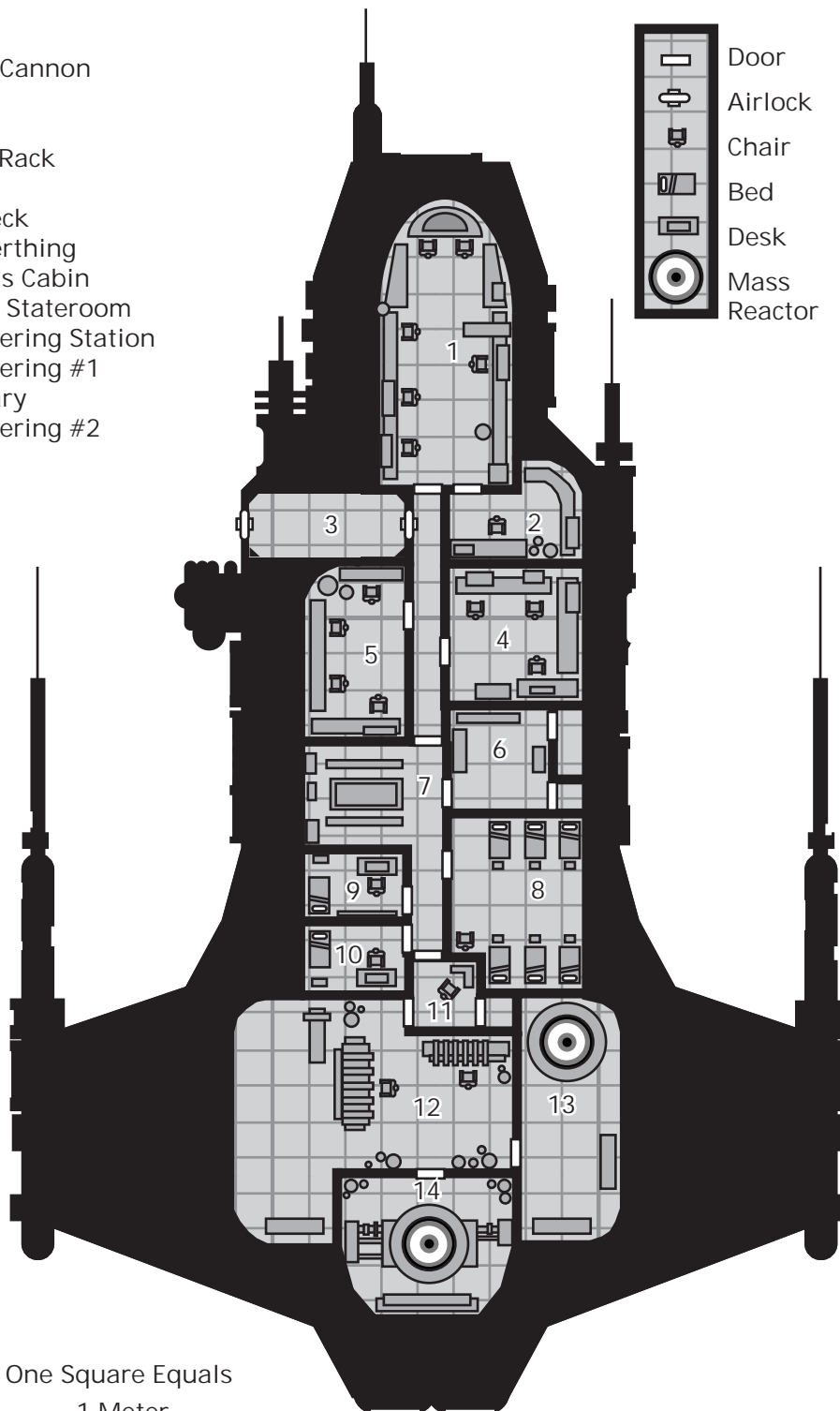
by Richard Baker

C.S.S. SHRIKE

1. Bridge
2. Plasma Cannon
3. Airlock
4. Sensors
5. Launch Rack
6. Galley
7. Mess Deck
8. Crew Berthing
9. Captain's Cabin
10. Officer Stateroom
11. Engineering Station
12. Engineering #1
13. Auxiliary
14. Engineering #2

Door

Airlock

Chair

Bed

Desk

Mass
Reactor

One Square Equals
1 Meter

STAR✴DRIVE™

Campaign Setting

Red Starrise

Welcome to the ALTERNITY® science fiction roleplaying game. *Red Starrise* is an adventure introducing you to the ALTERNITY game; it also gives you 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 two of an adventure that begins in *Black Starfall*, which came with the ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook*.

Here's what you need to get started. First, familiarize yourself with the *Player's Handbook* and *Gamemaster Guide.* Then read through this adventure carefully so you're familiar with the setting, the characters, and the scenes. Your players can use the heroes they created for *Black Starfall,* or make up heroes for this adventure. If you're making up a new group of heroes, it might take an hour or two to help your players prepare their characters for the game. Help them through the process of hero creation described in the *Player's Handbook*, offering suggestions and advice when needed.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

In the introduction, you'll find information about the STAR✴DRIVE campaign setting. *Black Starfall* provided a broad overview of the setting; here you'll find a discussion of the Verge—the rough and unexplored sector at the borders of the human space. After that is a plot synopsis that describes what happens during the course of the adventure. "Getting the Heroes Involved" shows you some way to explain how the heroes were assigned the job of scouting Hammer's Star, and why they should care about their mission.

The "Hammer's Star" section describes the star system in which the action of the adventure takes place, as well as supporting characters. The adventure begins with "Arrival," a trigger scene that drops the heroes into the storm. The heart of the adventure proceeds in three scenes: "Hopeful Survey," "Derelicts," and "Vault." A fourth optional scene, "Homebound" provides an introduction to spaceship combat.

The map on the inside front cover shows the CSS *Shrike*, the scout ship the heroes are given to complete their mission. On the inside back cover is a map of the Hammer's Star system, and a map detailing an important section of the Borealis cruiser. You can let the players see the CSS *Shrike* map; eventually, they may also be given the other maps.

STAR*DRIVE SETTING

The year is 2497. Humanity has colonized much of the Orion arm of the Milky Way, expanding from its homeworld almost 1,000 light-years in every direction. Along the way, humanity has made contact with innumerable alien species, including five major ones: the fraal, the mechalus, the sesheyans, the t'sa, and the weren. As the end of the twenty-fifth century approaches, humans and aliens are divided into stellar nations, great empires of hundreds of star systems. Born out of colonial empires of Earth, the mighty powers are locked in a struggle for political, economic, and military supremacy.

The Concord

Above the other stellar nations stands the Galactic Concord. Founded twenty-five years ago at the end of the Second Galactic War, the Concord is dedicated to preventing interstellar war at any cost. The Treaty of Concord (2472) demanded the end of international military conflict. Each nation donated territory, resources, and personnel to the formation of the Concord as an independent, peacekeeping state. Today, the Concord struggles to find its place as an emerging stellar nation and keeper of the peace.

Each of the nations in the Stellar Ring are, officially at least, subordinate to the Galactic Concord. Some nations, such as the Orlamu Theocracy and the StarMech Collective, are counted among the active supporters of the Concord's efforts. For the most part, they can be counted on to support its efforts to bring peace. Regrettably, after three decades of rebuilding, the more powerful and expansionist nations have already grown restless under this arrangement. The Concord has little power to interfere in the internal affairs of any of its member states, and 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 may take up careers as soldiers, traders, merchants, agents, diplomats, or anything they can imagine. For this adventure, the heroes are assumed to be members of the Galactic Concord, or independents who have accepted a Concord commission.

Technology

Miracles abound as humanity nears the end of the Gravity Age in the STAR*DRIVE setting. Two-hundred-year-old humans live fulfilling lives, physically fit and able well into their second century. The Grid connects all of human space in a network that conveys all forms of information ranging from encrypted messages to the most popular holobroadcast entertainment programs. Gravity induction demonstrates effective control over weight, and skycars shuttle across the length of a planet in a day.

Expensive research facilities and scientific advancements begin to prepare humanity for Progress Level 8, the Energy Age. Most of the Stellar Ring maintains Progress Level 7 technology, although PL 6 items are both inexpensive and common. See *Chapter 9: Goods & Services* in the *Player's Handbook* for more information about Progress Levels.

To the satisfaction of professional troubleshooters and heroes everywhere, personal weaponry has continued to evolve. Projectile weapons are in their final days as energy weapons begin to emerge. While somewhat crude and unreliable at first, laser and mass weapons demonstrate clear superiority over the standard slugthrower. Meanwhile, melee weapons have experienced a renaissance as the demands of a new political age bring military tactics focused on intervention in small, quiet confrontations.

On a larger scale, the mass reactor offers energy to power cities, colonies, or starships. Relying on principles of energy physics incomprehensible to all but a fraction of its users, the mass reactor harnesses and activates the energy potential of the universe's dark matter. It also powers the *stardrive*, an invention of the 22nd century that permits ships to cross the vast space between the stars. Armed with the stardrive, humanity exploded outward from its solar system.

A stardrive submerges a ship in the alternate dimension known as drivespace. There, time and space follow different rules. A single starfall requires 5 days (exactly 11^2 hours). The larger and more powerful the stardrive, the farther a ship can travel. Most ships starfall 5 to 10 light-years at a time, but mighty fortress ships traverse 50 light-years in a starfall. When a ship emerges from drivespace, it must recharge its stardrive for 2 to 5 days before it can leap again.

Stardrive technology also allows faster-than-light communication through drivespace relays. These stations are surrounded by a constellation of satellites that sink into drivespace on a regular schedule to transmit and receive messages. A message takes 11 hours to reach its destination–any other drive relay within 50 light-years. Unlike starships, the satellites spend only a fraction of a second within drivespace, sending and receiving tightly compressed message traffic that together forms the interstellar Grid.

The first introductory ALTERNITY adventure, *Black Starfall*, centers around the Kendai drivespace comm relay, an installation set at the very edge of what's considered the Stellar Ring. The newly repaired Kendai drivespace relay has restored communications with the Verge after a century's silence. In fact, it's the message that Kendai received that brings about the events of this adventure.

THE VERGE

A century ago, human civilization exploded outward from its older borders, expanding to claim thousands of star systems in an era of peace after the First Galactic War. As each system was colonized, dozens of additional stars were opened for exploration and exploitation. The prospect of adventure, territory, and riches drew millions to this ever-growing frontier. With each passing decade, the frontier systems drew farther and farther from each other and from the long-settled worlds of the Stellar Ring, until mankind owned a 1,000-light-year slice of the galaxy's Orion Arm.

The frontier region that stretched toward the closest edge of the Orion Arm of the galaxy became known as the Verge. Stellar nations, large corporations, and private concerns joined in a race to chart and colonize Verge worlds. The cycle of expansion, exploration, and settlement continued to turn, faster and faster—until the coming of the Second Galactic War.

The First Galactic War had been a struggle of the interstellar colonies to slip free from the shackles of old-Earth imperialism, but it had sown the seeds for a much more devastating conflict. The Second Galactic War laid waste to vast portions of human space. Orbital bombardment and asteroid strikes cracked worlds open and cleaned them of life. Eventually, the surging course of war raged across the region of space where the Stellar Ring extended toward the Verge, destroying vital communications links and leaving the new frontier completely isolated. In the Verge, this period was known as the Long Silence.

As the war raged on, this abandonment lasted more than a century. A brief while ago, the reconstruction of a communication relay at Kendai ended the silence. For the first time, the stellar nations of Old Space are returning to the Verge. To their surprise, the nations have found that much of the Verge population has grown used to independence and is quite happy to manage its own affairs without interference.

GEOGRAPHY

The Verge is an apron of star systems slanting across more than 100 light-years toward the brilliant Lightning Nebula. Across this reach of space are several hundred star systems. Many of these have been colonized and explored; seven now constitute prominent settlements.

The gateway to the Verge is the Tendril system, dominated by the mercantile world of Alaundril. Once a possession of the StarMech Collective, the Tendril system is now independent.

Next is Corrivale, home to the moon Grith. Today, this former VOIDCORP possession is under the control of independent sesheyans who have thus far escaped the corporation's merciless grasp.

Beyond Corrivale is Lucullus, an inhospitable trinary system cluttered with barren rocks and gas giants. The major

settlement in this system is Penates, a former penal colony now home to the descendants of its one-time inmates.

Aegis, a yellow star, is the metropolitan heart of the Verge. It and the ocean world of Bluefall may be one of the closest Earth-analogues yet discovered. The original settlers from the Orion League disappeared, leaving way for refugees from the Second Galactic War to emigrate and establish the independent Regency of Bluefall. As the stellar nations return to the Verge, Aegis is assuming the role of diplomatic and economic capital. Most of the stellar nations have established embassies and consulates on one of Bluefall's numerous islands. Today the Regency of Bluefall is the most powerful government local to the Verge.

Oberon is the next major population center, another inhospitable star orbited by barren planets. However, it possesses great mineral wealth and industrial capacity. Formerly an outpost owned by the interests from the Rigunmor Star Consortium, the planet Lison won its independence during the Long Silence.

After Oberon, more than 40 light-years into the Verge, lies the Algemron system. Algemron's two major planets—Alitar and Galvin—are locked in a fierce war that has endured for decades.

The last of the major Verge systems is the distant Hammer's Star. Before the onset of the Second Galactic War, the colony of Spes promised continued expansion and exploration onward to the next great arm of the galaxy. The Borealis Republic, sponsor of the Hammer's Star settlement, tirelessly poured resources and manpower into Spes, erecting a strong military base and a small but thriving colony.

THREAT

Abandoned by their home nations, the Verge worlds fought, made peace, and fought again, governed by the vagaries of circumstance and the fortunes of war. Eventually, most of the Verge worlds grew tired of fighting the wars of the remote stellar nations, and a restless peace settled over much of the region.

This tense silence was broken eight years ago by the destruction of the Borealin colony at Hammer's Star. Among the most heavily defended colonies in the Verge, Spes was crushed by a powerful, unknown fleet.

For the rest of the Concord, only the vaguest rumors have appeared concerning the fall of Hammer's Star. The only message to emerge was the colony's call for help: "Borealin colony Silver Bell at Hammer's Star, calling any FreeSpace Alliance vessel . . . We are under attack by . . . Repeat, the colony is under attack by unknown forces. Send help. Repeat, send help. It's May 3, 2489. We need help, damn it! Please . . ."

INTRODUCTION

Since reestablishing contact with the Verge, the Concord has dispatched one of its precious fortress ships to the frontier. The *Monitor*'s mission is threefold: First, to conduct a system-by-system assessment of the state of the Verge, updating the Concord's outdated information on this region of space; second, to establish diplomatic ties with the independent Verge governments; and, perhaps most important, to investigate the destruction of the Silver Bell colony in the Hammer's Star system.

The return to the Verge is a politically charged issue, both at home and abroad. All of the stellar nations–including some that were destroyed during the Second Galactic War–have settlements, facilities, and interests in the Verge systems. The stellar nations aren't happy to discover that their former possessions are now independent states. Similarly, some of the Verge governments aren't pleased with the idea of giving up their hard-won independence to become client states. These tensions were the deciding factor in assembling the *Monitor*'s itinerary; the *Monitor* and her escorts represent the most significant military power to navigate Verge space in more than a century.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

As the adventure opens, the *Monitor* has completed a tour through six of the seven major systems. After leaving war-torn Algemron, the *Monitor* traveled through drivespace to reach Meriden, an insignificant red dwarf star only 10 light-years distant from Hammer's Star. From this point, the fortress ship will starfall to Hammer's Star . . . eventually. A fortress ship is far too valuable to risk in potentially dangerous territory without taking every reasonable step to scout ahead.

In this case, the *Monitor* is dispatching a scout to starfall into the Hammer's Star system, find out as much as possible about what happened, and make certain that there's no enemy presence before the rest of the task force makes the leap. The heroes are the scouts for the task force; they fill in as crew members, diplomats, trade representatives, and scientists in the *Monitor*'s task force.

In the opening scene, the heroes arrive into Hammer's Star and find the system mostly empty . . . with the exception of a field of asteroids and stellar matter that the heroes must avoid. In Scene I, they proceed to the planet Spes and search for signs of life, or at least evidence of what has happened. They find a derelict warship nearby. In Scene II, the heroes investigate the downed cruiser and discover that a motley band of human salvagers, led by Captain Marcus Corge, are at work looting the wreckage. In Scene III, the heroes stumble into the heart of the derelict, and are ambushed by a group of bizarre, unknown aliens. It's a trap, and the heroes must shoot their way out to survive. Finally, Scene IV is an optional scene that can you can use to introduce spaceship combat to your players.

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

Before you start playing this adventure, you should think about the kind of heroes the players created and how they wound up serving as the *Monitor*'s scout team. It's important to give the players a reason for their heroes to be involved and concerned with events. *Red Starrise* assumes that the heroes are in command of their own starship and that they'll be willing to take serious risks in order to fulfill their mission. Whether or not the players are using the same heroes they played in *Black Starfall,* there are several pretexts you can use to get them involved:

• Heroes serving in the military, administrative, or diplomatic corps of the Concord assigned to the *Monitor.*

• Heroes working for private contractors hired out to the Concord by their employers for technical expertise.

• Independent traders or mercenaries hired as guides, scouts, or provisioners.

• Ambitious heroes with no other ties who volunteer to accompany the expedition in search of profit or opportunity.

THE MISSION

One of the crucial steps in setting up the adventure is assigning the heroes a ship of their own. The *Shrike* is a fast, lightly armed scout that has been impressed into the Concord Survey Service. If the heroes are independent, the *Shrike*'s their boat–they've accepted a contract to serve as scouts for the *Monitor*'s voyage. If the heroes have strong ties to the Concord (for example, if one or more of them are military professionals), they've been assigned to crew the *Shrike*. The *Shrike* only requires a crew of four or five, so the heroes can handle the job in either case. Try to find a position on board the *Shrike* for each of the heroes. You can use supporting characters to fill important jobs the heroes can't or don't want to handle, and you'll find a complete description of the *Shrike* on page 7.

Captain: A hero with good shipboard skills and a little skill in Leadership, Resolve, or Administration can be designated the ship's captain.

Engineer: Heroes with Technical Science or System Operation skills are needed to serve as the ship's engineers. The most experienced hero of this type is the Chief Engineer.

Pilots/Operators: Heroes with Vehicle Operation or System Operation skills may fill various roles such as helmsman, weapons officer, comm officer, etc.

Science Officer/Expert: Characters with science skills may be assigned to perform analyses or offer unusual insights.

Contact Specialists: Heroes with interactive or business skills might be representatives of various governments and businesses, assigned to relay messages or build contacts in the Verge.

HAMMER'S STAR

The events of *Red Starrise* take place in the Hammer's Star system, site of the ruined Borealin colony of Silver Bell. The heroes arrive in the system during the opening scene, "Arrival." Because they must wait at least two days for the *Shrike*'s tachyon accumulators to recharge its stardrive, they're stuck here at the edge of known space for as long as it takes for this adventure to run its course. During this time, the *Monitor* waits orbiting the nearby star Meriden, a barren system that's only remarkable in that it lies just within the drivespace range of the heroes' scoutship.

AT FIRST GLANCE

Hammer's Star is a fairly typical system. The primary, Hammer Alpha, is a class G5 yellow dwarf not too dissimilar from Sol. Sometimes referred to as "the Hammer," this star possesses a small collection of planets and two dense asteroid belts. The most important of the Hammer Star's worlds is Spes, an Earthlike planet that was once the home of the Silver Bell colony. Further out is Platon and its icy moon Arist. Beyond Platon is the Revik belt, the first and smaller of the system's two asteroid fields. Then comes the impressive gas giant Iniad and its many moons. The dense Vicek asteroid belt and the distant planet Bruelt finish out the system.

SPES

Orbiting the Hammer at a distance of 0.88 AU, Spes is a Class 1 world with plentiful natural resources. Although the dimmer star was a bit cooler than Earth's sun, it offered its colonists a reasonable home. Ultimately, it was the stellar nation known as the Borealis Republic that came to stake its claim to this distant corner of the frontier. And while the Borealins are better known for their academic, philosophical, and lofty scientific pursuits, their modest colony set on a mountainous plateau prospered.

More than 200,000 Borealins and various independents came to live together on Spes in peace. Records of trading and communication from other Verge star systems—mostly the cosmopolitan Aegis system—have revealed that the colonists managed to survive despite the challenges of dwindling supplies and frequent raids by pirates and other criminals that hid out at the edge of known space.

All that changed eight years ago in 2489. It's a mystery just what happened in the Hammer's Star system, but a few things have been determined thanks to information provided by those who visited the system after May 3, 2489. The colony of Silver Bell was completely annihilated. The ships and satellites that once defended the colony and the planet were gone—destroyed. Wreckage litters in orbit of Spes, and desolate ruin could be seen across the planet's surface. About the only thing that survived was the system's drivespace communications relay—a relay that never stopped sending a distress call that wouldn't be answered.

Who did it? No one in the Verge colonies knows. Some theorized that it was the pirates out in the Hammer's Star system itself that finally did in the colony. Others blame one of their own number, believing that the agents of a stellar nation hostile to the Borealis Republic took an opportunity to strike at a foe. But no can answer the question with any certainty, and that's a greater worry.

The worst part has yet to be described. Sometime during the attack or soon after, an asteroid from one of the system's belts collided into Spes. It destroyed all remnants of the Silver Bell settlement and also set off terrible climactic effects on Spes. The fine particulate matter kicked up by the impact has begun to raise Spes' surface temperature considerably. The ice caps at the poles have melted, and unless something is done, Spes may soon be comparable to Venus, not Earth. Where the colony once stood, now a deep crater is the only remnant.

THE ASTEROID BELTS

Despite the destruction—or perhaps thanks to it—the infestation of criminals, buccaneers, and raiders in the outer parts of the system hadn't ended, and so the people of the Verge did their best to avoid the star system. While it remained a cause of worry and fear, the Verge colonies couldn't do much about the situation.

The Vicek belt has always been a source of trouble, but once its asteroids were also home to a small handful of space industries and settlements. With the dissolution of all central authority and law in Hammer's Star, the system became a lawless border region, a haven for the most wretched and desperate sort of space refuse imaginable. The Vicek belt is home to dozens of pirate bands and groups with varying degrees of organization and firepower. From the Vicek belt's reeking dens, these fortune-seekers and prospectors launch their expeditions to ruined Spes in search of booty. They also take advantage of any merchant craft unwise enough to stray into the system, and have been known to raid settlements in nearby systems.

As yet unknown to agents of the Galactic Concord, the Hammer's Star system has also become home to a threat that may prove even more troublesome: a hostile alien species. They're "external," meaning that the Concord doesn't know where they're from.

THE PIT

Beyond Hammer's Star lies one of the galaxy's more incredible marvels, the Pit. The Pit is one of only a handful of black holes that humanity has discovered in its travels in the Orion arm of the Milky Way. Fortunately, it's also more than 900 AU—just over 5 light-days—from the rest of the solar system. To viewers from Spes, it's simply a small dark patch in the sky that flares whenever a comet or asteroid ventures too close and is annihilated.

SUPPORTING CAST

The supporting cast members presented here serve multiple purposes. First, you'll find several qualified ship operators. Depending on how the players built their heroes, they may not have selected the critical skills necessary to run a starship. While the *Shrike* is pretty small as starships go, she still requires four or five knowledgeable crewmen to maneuver and fight with any hope of success. You can use as many or as few of the Concord personnel listed here as you need to round out the ship's crew.

The heroes will encounter several secondary characters in the course of the adventure. Marcus Corge is an important racketeer encountered during Scene II. Finally, in addition the characters presented here, you can create characters to round out the adventure to your taste. For example, maybe the Borealis Republic will send along an annoying diplomat with the *Shrike*, determined to make contact with any survivors.

LIEUTENANT DREY GERRIN

Level 2 Human Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR	9	[+1]	INT	11	[+2]
DEX	11	[+2]	WIL	11	[+2]
CON	7		PER	11	

  Durability: 7/7/4/4   Action check: 13+/12/6/3
  Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4   # Actions: 2
  Reaction score: Ordinary/2   Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed Attack[1]	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Laser pistol	12/6/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/0

Defenses
CF long coat: d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d6−2 (En)
[1] +d4 base situation die

Skills

Athletics [9]; Modern [11]–*pistol [12]*; Vehicle [11]–*space [13]*; Stamina [7]; Knowledge [11]–*language (Standard) [14]*; Navigation [11]–*drivespace [12], system [12]*; System [11]–*sensors [13], weapons [13]*; Tactics [11]–*space [13]*; Awareness [11]; Culture [11]; Interaction [11]; Leadership [11].

Lieutenant Gerrin is a young but capable officer of the Concord Star Force. He's a rising star–ambitious, intelligent, and completely trustworthy. Gerrin is a straight-shooter, stubbornly loyal to the Concord and uncompromising in his devotion to duty. This makes him a little stiff-necked and curt, even off duty.

If one of the heroes commands the *Shrike* for the Concord, Gerrin can be assigned as the executive officer, or second in command. He follows orders implicitly, unless the captain tells him to commit high treason. If the *Shrike* is a private vessel chartered or commandeered for the expedition, Gerrin can function as an observer and liaison officer for the Concord, with the task of making sure the *Shrike* does what it's supposed to do. Finally, if none of the heroes is capable of commanding a starship, Gerrin can serve the captain of the *Shrike*. In this role, he will expect the heroes to comply with his orders and respect his authority at all times.

BARRONS, CSAPO, NGARU, AND WU

Human Nonprofessionals

STR	9		INT	10
DEX	9		WIL	9
CON	9		PER	8

  Durability: 9/9/5/5   Action check: 10+/9/4/2
  Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4   # Actions: 2
  Reaction score: Marginal/1   Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed–*power*	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
9mm ch pistol	10/5/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	HI/0

Defenses
CF long coat: d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d6−2 (En)

Skills

Athletics [9]; Unarmed [9]–*power [10];* Modern [9]–*pistol [10]*; Vehicle [9]–*air [10], land [10]*; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [10]–*computer [11], first aid [11], language (Standard) [13]*; Navigation [10]; System Operation [10]; Awareness [9]; Interaction [8].

Barrons, Csapo, Ngaru, and Wu are junior officers in the Concord Star Force, trained to run a ship with some degree of competence. Use these characters to man any stations the heroes and Lieutenant Gerrin can't handle between them.

Eliza Barrons is a small, soft-spoken woman who specializes in communications. In addition to the skills listed above, Barrons has rank 2 in System Operation–*communications*.

Terin Csapo is a fiery, hot-tempered engineer originally from the Orlamu Theocracy. His disagreeable personality has been largely ignored thanks to his reasonable competence. In addition to the skills listed above, he has achieved rank 2 in Technical Science–*repair* and System Operation–*engineering*.

Brian Ngaru is the sensors operator, the youngest of the Concord officers here at 20 years old, only recently a graduate of the Star Force's academy on the planet Vition. He's green and overly eager to please, but willing to pitch in whenever he can. Ngaru has achieved rank 1 in Vehicle Operation–*space vehicle* and System Operation–*sensors*.

Miranda Wu is a cold, intimidating woman who maintains the ship's weapons. Regular psychological exams monitor

her antisocial behavior, but she's managed to keep her more violent tendencies bottled up inside. In addition to the skills listed above, she has acquired rank 1 in System Operations–*weapons* and *defenses.*

Marcus Corge

Level 3 Human Free Agent

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

Durability: 10/10/5/5   Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4   # Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2   Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed–*brawl*	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
11mm ch pistol	11/5/2	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	HI/0

Defenses
Battle vest: d6–3 (LI), d6–2 (HI), d4–2 (En)

Skills
Athletics [9]; Unarmed [9]–*brawl [10]*; Modern [9]–*pistol [11], rifle [10]*; Vehicle [11]–*space [12]*; Stamina [10]–*endurance [11]*; Business [11]–*illicit [12];* Knowledge [11]–*language (Standard) [14]*; Navigation [11]–*system [12]*; System Operation [11]; Awareness [10]–*intuition [11]*; Street Smart [10]–*knowledge (Hammer's Star) [11]*; Deception [11]; Interaction [11].

Marcus Corge is a survivor. Once a low-grade racketeer and smuggler in the Verge, Corge came to the largely deserted Hammer's Star system only a few months ago. He avoided the more violent pirate elements out in the asteroid belts and took his turn at scavenging the once-populous planet of Spes. Most of the major population centers have been cleaned out, and now Corge is stripping down a cruiser that crashed on Spes seven years ago.

Marcus is a big, beefy man with black hair pulled back in a ponytail and a coarse, abrasive manner. He's surprisingly nimble and shows flashes of cold, ruthless calculation on those rare occasions when he falls silent.

Marcus could be a source of trouble. The heroes should meet him in Scene II, leading a band of salvagers working on the derelict of the BSS *Conjecture.* He's heard rumors of the Concord moving into the Verge, and at first he'll try to ingratiate himself with the heroes, hoping that they'll see fit to leave his profitable operation alone. It's possible that the heroes could reach a compromise and work together with the smuggler, or a confrontation with his desperate and avaricious followers could arise.

CSS *Shrike* Concord *Sparrow*-class Scout

Compartments: 6		Dur: 30
Maneuver Rating: 0		Acc: 2 Mpp
Cruise Speed: 1.5 AU/hour		Berthing: 12

Armament: Plasma cannon (Range 4/8/16 Mm)
                d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m (En (e)/A)
                Launch rack w/8 missiles (4 MRB, 4 ARN)
Defenses: Chaff dispenser
Armor: Moderate neutronite (3 dur)
          d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)
Computer: Ordinary computer core, Ordinary battle and
          navigation dedicated computers
Engines: Induction engine
Power: 2 mass reactors rated for 25 power factors
Drive: 10 light-years per starfall

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1–2	Command	Plasma cannon (3/3)	10/10/5
		Chaff (1/0)	
		Multiband radar (0/0)	
		EM detector (0/0)	
		Laser transceiver (0/1)	
		Radio transceiver (0/1)	
		Airlock (0/0)	
		Ordinary computer core (1/0)	
3–4	Engineering 1	Induction engine (4/4)	14/14/7
		Stardrive (3/*)	
		Reentry capsule (0/0)	
5–7	Auxiliary	Mass reactor (4/*)	12/12/6
		Autosupport (0/2)	
		Escape pod (2/0)	
8–10	Engineering 2	Mass reactor (6/*)	12/12/6
11–14	Crew	Crew quarters (2/0)	4/4/2
15–20	Weapons	Launch rack (2/1)	4/4/2

Bridge (Command): The *Shrike's* bridge is the control center of the ship, with stations provided for helm, plasma cannon battery, missile control, comm, sensors, engineering, computer, and defenses. Station functions can be combined or transferred as necessary.

Weapons control (Weapons): This room contains the machinery and local control stations for the ship's missile rack. The ship's arms locker includes two suits of assault gear, three 11mm assault rifles, one heavy charge machine gun, and six laser pistols.

Crew Berthing (Crew): All hands live in this berthing area. The captain, engineer, and first officer have staterooms, and mess decks are included.

Engineering Control Station (Engineering 1): This small booth is cluttered with control consoles and displays. From here, the chief engineer can run all engineering and power systems, or he can put these controls on auto and run them from the bridge.

TRIGGER: ARRIVAL

W hen the players have finished creating their heroes and you've looked over the characters involved, it's time to start the adventure. Begin by reading the boxed text below to the players.

> For several months, your ship–the CSS *Shrike*–has proceeded through the Verge with the Concord fortress ship *Monitor.* The Verge was cut off from the rest of human space for more than 100 years by a devastating war, and the *Monitor*'s voyage represents the first direct contact between the isolated Verge systems, the stellar nations, and the Galactic Concord.
>
> Now you're facing the last stop on your journey, the remote system of Hammer's Star–a big reason why the *Monitor* was dispatched in the first place. The first message from the Verge came from Hammer's Star. The colony of Silver Bell was under heavy attack by unknown forces, and desperately requested help. By the time the *Monitor* reached the Verge, you'd learned that the Hammer's Star message was an automated signal, eight years old. Whatever happened to Silver Bell is long over with, and the contacts you've made with other Verge systems have made it clear that Silver Bell was annihilated during the attack. But who did it, and why?
>
> Assuming the worst, the *Monitor* and the rest of the task force are waiting at the nearby Meriden system while the *Shrike* speeds ahead to make sure that Hammer's Star is safe. Your orders are to search for any signs of enemy forces and compile any data regarding the previous attack. To assist you, the former owner of Silver Bell, the Borealis Republic, has provided you with transponder frequencies that should help you locate anything on the planet. You're to return as soon as your stardrive's tachyon capacitors have recharged. Since recharging takes from two to five days, you can expect to be in the system for several days.

The heroes have spent the last five days in the featureless void of drivespace. Give the heroes a chance to settle in, ask questions about the parameters of the mission, and make any final preparations. Feel free to show the players the diagram of the Hammer's Star system. Answer any reasonable questions they may have about the system (refer to page 5).

Take a moment to roll d4+1 to determine the length of time the heroes will be in the system–or you can arbitrarily decide for yourself based on how long you want the adventure to last.

This opening scene serves as an introduction to the teamwork that a ship's command crew can demonstrate. It shouldn't be a very dangerous encounter, and any minor damage that the ship suffers can be repaired before it pro-

> The ship's klaxons signal the *Shrike*'s imminent return to space. You initialize the ship's sensors, weapons, and defensive systems. As the ship rises from drivespace, shimmering ripples in the fabric of space bring the stars closer. With a burst of light, the *Shrike* surges free. The ship comes alive, sensors scrolling to report new data. A composite appears on the viewscreens– you're about 4 AU from Hammer's Star, a class G5 yellow dwarf. Your computer reports that the planet Spes is presently on the other side of the system, probably about 5 or 6 hours away. Closer is the gas giant planet Platon and its moons. Closer still–very close– are numerous rocks and large asteroids.
>
> Collision alarms sound throughout the ship. You've arrived in a crowded sector of the Rivek asteroid belt, and the gravitic energy from your starrise has only aggravated the potential for trouble. Several asteroids are on a collision course, and you're going to have to navigate out before you're pulverized.

ceeds further on its mission. The first decision should be that of the captain or navigator. How to leave the Rivek asteroid belt? The correct answer is toward its closest edge. If this answer is chosen, assume the heroes have 15 potential collisions to worry about. If they choose to go toward Spes or anything else, it's 30.

Assume that 3 asteroid impacts will occur at the end of each round. Roll action checks as normal. Each crew member can probably act in two phases of each round. The crew has several options on how to avoid the impacts, and a successful skill check using any of the options averts a single asteroid. The helmsman can dodge using Vehicle Operation–*space vehicle.* A weapons officer–or two–can use the plasma cannon or launch rack to destroy an asteroid with a successful System Operation–*weapons* skill check. Meanwhile, the sensor operator can make skill checks to avoid an asteroid that will impact next round. Other officers can provide bonuses to these active officers, depending on their own skill checks (–1/–2/–3 steps, depending on the degree of success). A copilot can assist the helmsman, and the ship's commander can use Leadership to offer a similar bonus to any of the crew.

It's possible with a couple of bad rolls that the *Shrike* might suffer an impact or two during its escape. Roll randomly to determine where it hits. (See the leftmost column of the *Shrike*'s list of compartments on page 7). Each asteroid does 2d4 wounds of damage, but don't forget to account for the effects of armor. Also don't forget that ships suffer secondary damage.

For more complete rules on spaceships, related skills, and damage, take a look at Chapter 11 of the *Gamemaster Guide.* With System Operation–*engineering* or Technical Science–*repair* it's possible for the ship's damage control officers to successfully deal with any damage.

HOPEFUL SURVEY

he heroes are going to need to perform a cursory inspection of the system–and sooner or later, they'll have to respond to the distress beacon from Spes. In this scene, the heroes investigate the devastated world of Spes and the wreckage of the Silver Bell colony.

Exploring the System

The major features of the Hammer's Star system have been described previously (see page 5). Allow the heroes to pilot their ship all over the system map if they want to–each hex is 1 AU in diameter, so they could spend a day or more zipping around. As far as this adventure is concerned, the heroes won't find anything important elsewhere in the system, although they could encounter other salvagers, abandoned mining stations or satellites, or even hidden smuggler bases in the moons of Iniad or the Vicek belt if you wish to flesh out this adventure by adding more material. Note that the mysterious enemy is conspicuously absent–they don't want to be seen, so they're keeping well out of sight in the depths of the system.

Surveying Spes

Eventually, the heroes should bring their interest around to investigating Spes. Every hour, the drivesats in orbit around Spes repeat their distress transmission. If the heroes seem to be dragging their feet about investigating the distress call, Lieutenant Gerrin may remind the heroes that their orders include making contact with survivors.

When the heroes make any kind of close approach or orbital insertion to Spes, read the boxed text below. If Corge isn't with the heroes, they can derive most of the information in his comments from their sensors.

Carefully, you've guided the *Shrike* into an orbit around the planet Spes. Your sensor operator and computer have reinforced the need for caution. There's a considerable amount of debris in orbit, including wrecked defense satellites and chunks of rock from the impact.

Below you lies the planet of Spes–once an Earthlike world, home to a thriving colony. As your first sensor readings are returned, the worst news is confirmed. The Silver Bell colony has been eradicated. The mountainous plateau on which it once stood is now only a blast crater. Nothing has been left behind. The *Shrike*'s vid-systems can't see through the murky clouds, the ship's electromagnetic scanners pick up nothing but scattered radio static, and the radar shows a tortured landscape below It's clear that you'll have to conduct a more extensive survey if anything is to be discovered.

The heroes have several options at their command in this scene, which is focused on gathering intelligence about the current situation on Spes. The scene can be as detailed, long, and involved as you choose to make it. Ultimately, it should serve as the means to discovering the fallen Spes cruiser *Conjecture* and the scavengers around it.

The Drivespace Relay

The heroes may choose to pay a visit to the orbiting relay, and perhaps finally silence its neverending distress call. You can use the drive relay station presented in *Black Starfall* as a model. Unfortunately, the drive relay here provides little information. About the only thing that records aboard reveal is that communications with the Silver Bell colony ended three hours after the distress call was first transmitted.

Radar

Radar is the first of a few options that the heroes have to examine the situation on Spes before they consider descending. Allow the hero operating the radar a System Operation–*sensors* skill check to see if he correctly tunes the radar for the current atmospheric conditions. With a successful result, several details can be divined. Examination of Silver Bell uncovers a site that's just gone. Maybe a specialized team can get something from all that compressed rock at the crater basin, but it's not going to offer any of the quick answers that the heroes were sent to retrieve. Radar also points out the existence of more than a dozen smaller settlements on the surface, and even more sites of downed spaceships.

Topographical & Climactic Data

Use of additional *sensors* or Physical Science skill checks can reveal details about what has happened to Spes. Data from the planet contradicts the records of Spes that the heroes were provided. Most noticeably, the average surface temperature is some 14 degrees warmer, and while that change may seem mild, it's begun to cause serious climatic changes. The equatorial belt is becoming a desert and the ice caps are shrinking.

Signal Analysis

The heroes have been equipped with a transponder frequency used by the Spes colonists. If they search for active signals, they're likely to be disappointed. Require a System Operation–*communications* skill check. A successful result reveals that the drivespace relay in orbit responds, of course. But on the surface, the many settlements that dotted the planet have gone silent.

Few active signals can be detected. The communication towers of a few scattered settlements somehow managed to weather the assault on Spes, even if the inhabitants didn't. One site in particular, on the southern continent, responds clearly. A second skill check reveals its transponder code is that of a Spes Navy cruiser, the *Conjecture*. It also shows that the cruiser is generating localized radio traffic. Did someone survive?

DERELICTS

In this scene, the heroes discover that Hammer's Star hasn't been completely abandoned–looters, salvage specialists, and other lowlifes find the lack of central authority to be conducive to their business. The focus of the adventure now shifts from an exploration of the system to the investigation of a specific location: the grasslands of Spes where the *Conjecture* went down. This scene revolves around interaction with smugglers that are attempting to salvage valuable materials and technological parts from the once proud cruiser.

APPROACHING THE CONJECTURE

When the heroes enter Spes atmosphere and make their way toward the *Conjecture*, read the text below. You may have to make minor modifications to the section to reflect the experiences of your heroes in the system.

> The atmosphere of Spes is murky and turbulent, torn by occasional storms and filled with dust and debris.. About 2,000 meters above the ground, you break through the cloud cover and find yourselves soaring over an ochre plain. "There are two objects emitting electromagnetic energy in sensor range," the ship's AI announces. In a few moments, you enter visual range. You can see two outlines on the planetary surface. A narrow valley of torn earth leads from the west to where the two objects rest. Neither of the two is moving.

Magnification reveals that two vessels lie within a few meters of one another. The larger of the two outsizes the smaller by a factor of ten. In addition, three or four human-sized forms can be seen moving around in the space between the two craft.

System Operation–*sensors* skill checks can reveal more information. First, the source of the transponder is the larger of the two vessels, the BSS *Conjecture*. A scan of the *Conjecture* reveals it to be a cruiser-class vessel of more than 100 compartments. It's been extensively damaged, partially from weapons fire and partially from a controlled crash here on the surface eight years ago. It appears to have fallen to the ground, now lying on its starboard side.

A second skill check should be made if the heroes attempt to scan the second vessel, the independent light freighter *Seishimi*. An Ordinary result reveals only the vessel's class. A Good result reveals the overall layout of the freighter and the purpose of each of its compartments. An Amazing success reveals the systems in each of her compartments. The *Seishimi* isn't emitting a transponder code of any kind.

Meanwhile, the captain of the scavenger below will take action. The *Seishimi* powers up–activating its sensors and battle systems. Marcus Corge attempts to hail the heroes

OTHER SETTLEMENTS & SITES

It's possible that heroes investigating the Hammer's Star system and its planet Spes may choose to wander around a bit, checking into other settlements on the surface, making examinations of the changes to the planet's biosphere, and so forth. Such expeditions lie beyond the scope of this short adventure, but you should feel free to take your heroes on a tour of a ravaged planet, describing scenes of desolation and destruction at your whim.

The smaller settlements of Spes–and the few elsewhere in Hammer's Star–have been the target of fairly conventional attacks. Bombardment and blast from the air or space demolished many of them; it may be possible to find a site or two where the buildings are largely intact but broken skeletons demonstrate that someone paid the town an unfriendly visit. No matter where they wander, the only living beings they're likely to encounter are scavengers such as the ones described in this scene. Or they could encounter some nonsentient fauna native to Spes; use the descriptions of the bovine or the echinoderm in Chapter 17 of the *Gamemaster Guide*. If you want to spice things up a bit, it's also possible that they run into some independent pirates and criminals around Spes. The larger pirate bands are in the Vicek belt, and with luck the heroes won't encounter them.

It's also possible that your heroes stumble onto the wreckage of other ships. According to other Verge observers, Spes had almost 50 defensive craft and orbital satellites defending it prior to the attack in 2489. A few key facts should be constant. First of all, no survivors of the attack can be found. The decayed remains of ship crew can be found here and there, and the identity of a few of these personnel may even match the list of colonists included in the information the heroes had for their mission. Many won't appear on the list, as the records for the colony grew incomplete and outdated as Spes grew more independent.

Eventually, the heroes' investigations should lead them to the site of the *Conjecture,* either through communications intercept of the smugglers talking to one another over radio, a message fragment in a ruined settlement mentioning where the cruiser was downed, or simple process of elimination.

immediately after his own ship is scanned or after the heroes begin to approach. When the heroes respond to Corge's hail, read the boxed text below.

> Your holoscreen crackles, and a corpulent, harsh man dressed in a stained and worn jumpsuit appears before you. You can see that he's wearing a battle vest over his jumpsuit, and he's armed with a charge pistol. He scowls. "Welcome, strangers. You know, it's always good to make new friends out here, but I'm a bit busy here working *my* claim, and I'm sure that your crew has its own prospecting to do somewhere else. And if you have any trouble understanding that, tradition demands I warn you that I'm sitting on a pair of mass cannons and I'm very willing to use them."

Encourage the players to begin a conversation with Corge–if you have to, remind them that they're supposed to keep an eye open for survivors of the attack from eight years ago, and that Corge might be a good source of information. You'll want to roleplay this conversation, putting yourself in Corge's shoes. He has the potential to be overbearing and coarse, especially when he's trying to be suave and charming. Have a little fun with the encounter; it's your opportunity to take on a character's voice much as the heroes do.

Corge knows from the *Shrike*'s own transponder and markings that she's a ship of the Galactic Concord, the peacekeeping organization that he's heard of. Since his information comes from pirates that roam this region of space and call the Hammer's Star system home, Corge isn't delighted to see the heroes. He'll try to gain the advantage by first feigning ignorance of who the heroes are and whom they work for. At first, he'll pretend to believe that the heroes are another group of scavengers; he wants to make the point that the *Conjecture* is his now. Corge is also bluffing about his eagerness to fight.

Try to resolve this encounter through roleplaying, without resorting to dice rolls. If one of your players announces that he wants to make a *charm, bluff, interrogate, intimidate,* etc. skill check against Corge, ask the player how his hero's going about it, then allow the player to roll the dice. Apply modifiers to the skill check as you desire. At the opening of the encounter, you may apply a penalty of up to +3 steps to reflect that Corge knows what's going on. As the heroes learn what he's doing and what he wants, you may reduce the modifier.

Possibilities

Where the scene goes from here is largely based on the course of action chosen by the heroes. Their best option is to open a dialogue and eventually a negotiation. They may also choose to take a more aggressive stance. Some likely player responses or courses of action are discussed below.

Let's Make a Deal

Perhaps the easiest option, the first step in beginning negotiations, will be to assure Corge that the heroes aren't here to jump his claim. Then the real give-and-take begins. At first, the only thing that Corge will exchange is information. After a few minutes of weaseling, he may get a better sense of the heroes. Assuming that they manage to appear friendly and nonaggressive, he may eventually offer to allow them a chance to take a look around the *Conjecture* and examine everything. He'll even reveal that his crew is just about to open the seals on the cruiser's command section and its data vaults. Of course, he'll expect to get something out of the deal.

Threaten

In order to answer Corge's bluff, the heroes might decide to fashion one of their own. It should be pointed out to the heroes that the Concord may frown upon the slaughter, or even the coercion, of civilians.

At first, Corge's reaction to any threat will be sheer surprise. This isn't the Concord he's heard of. Then he'll bluster, hoping to call the heroes' bluff. If the heroes are truly convincing–maybe they prove their aggressive sincerity with an example such as a shot across his beam–Corge will give up and make a run for it with the bits of salvage he's gotten so far.

Force

It's also possible that the heroes might be inclined to attack Corge. Relevant data on Corge's spacehands and his ship is found on the next page. This option may be easiest, but it may make the heroes job tougher in the next scene. When things start to go badly for him, Corge will take the first opportunity to flee, or even surrender.

What Corge Says

Corge will happily give the heroes a sanitized version of his personal history. He was an asteroid miner living and working in the Oberon system when Silver Bell was attacked back in '89. When the mines he was working dried up the same year, he decided to take his chances here, seizing at the many opportunities for salvage. Corge and his crew make a living by stripping the wrecks of Silver Bell's satellites, warships, and outposts. He's scavenged more than a dozen empty wrecks of the former Spes colonists. Corge will neglect to mention that he often works with contraband smugglers and pirates–and that he takes similar careers himself.

Corge explains that he and his crew are stripping intact circuit boards and control computers from the *Conjecture* for salvage. The derelict is irreparable, but it's full of valuable parts. They've been at the job for several days and expect to be working on the *Conjecture* for another week.

What Corge Wants

Corge's pirate buddies in the system have already provided him with a lot of information–he knows that the *Monitor* and her escorts are in the Verge, and it's not an unreasonable guess that the heroes are scouting for her task force. Here are his goals:

- He wants to determine the exact nature of the heroes' mission, and if and when they're supposed to report back to the *Monitor.*
- Corge wants to know when the *Monitor* is coming; he can sell this information to others in the system.
- Corge wants the heroes to acknowledge his rights to the salvage of the *Conjecture.*
- If the heroes want to inspect the derelict, Corge wants something in return. A few thousand Concord dollars could do. Or the heroes could promise that the Concord will recognize Corge as the licensed salvager of the Spes wrecks.

If possible, add personality and detail to his remarks to reinforce his cover and back story.

CORGE'S SPACEHANDS

Human Nonprofessionals

STR	10	INT	9
DEX	9	WIL	8
CON	10	PER	8

  Durability: 10/10/5/5   Action check: 10+/9/4/2
  Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4   # Actions: 2
  Reaction score: Marginal/1   Last resorts: 1

Attacks

| Unarmed Attack[1] | 10/5/2 | d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s | LI/0 |
| 9mm ch pistol | 10/5/2 | d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m | HI/0 |

Defenses

CF short coat: d4−1 (LI), d4−1 (HI), d6−3 (En)
[1] +d4 base situation die

Skills

Athletics [9]; Unarmed Attack [10]; Modern [9]–*pistol [10]*; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [10]; Knowledge [9]–*language (Standard) [12]*; System Operation [10]; Awareness [8]; Interaction [8].

These smugglers have taken up with Corge thanks to the reputation he has gained locally for making a good profit. Of course, their paid loyalty only goes so far, and despite the gruff exterior they put up to survive in Hammer's Star, most of them would just as soon avoid a confrontation.

RESULTS

The ultimate object of the scene is to get the heroes into the *Conjecture* and on to Scene III. As Corge may tell the heroes, his salvage crew is just about to enter the cruiser's command deck, where its computer core promises the most lucrative source of profit. With luck, the heroes can convince Corge to escort them aboard.

Other possibilities include violence, which is likely to leave the heroes less prepared for the next scene. Of course, heroes sometimes invent plans that can't be foreseen, and you may have to adapt to their actions. For example, it's possible that the heroes elect to leave the area completely in search of easier sources of information.

SEISHIMI INDEPENDENT LIGHT FREIGHTER

Compartments: 8   Dur: 32
Maneuver Rating: +1   Acc: 1 Mpp
Cruise Speed: 1 AU/hour   Berthing: 18
Armament: Mass cannon (Range 5/10/15 Mm)
            d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w (LI (p)/A)
Defenses: Jammer
Armor: Light alloy (0 dur)
            d6−1 (LI), d6−1 (HI), d4−1 (En)
Computer: Marginal computer core
Engines: Induction engine
Power: Fusion generators rated for 9 power factors
Drive: None

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
––	Command	Turret: mass cannon (3/3)	10/10/5
		Jammer (0/1)	
		Multiband radar (0/0)	
		EM detector (0/0)	
		Radio transceiver (0/1)	
		Airlock (0/0)	
		Escape pod (2/0)	
		Marginal computer core (0/0)	
1–2	Engineering	Induction engine (4/4)	12/12/6
		Fusion generator (2/*)	
		Autosupport (0/2)	
3–4	Auxiliary	Fusion generator (4/*)	12/12/6
		Workshop (2/0)	
5–6	Crew	Crew quarters (3/0)	6/6/3
		Reentry capsule (0/0)	
7–9	Cargo	Fuel tank (3/0)	6/6/3
10–12	Cargo	Autocargo (3/3)	6/6/3
13–16	Cargo	Cargo space (2/0)	6/6/3
17–20	Cargo	Cargo space (2/0)	6/6/3

Bridge (Command): The *Seishimi*'s bridge is the control center of the ship from which captain Marcus Corge issues orders. Stations control the ship's systems.

Weapons control (Command): This room contains the machinery and local control stations for the ship's mass cannon. The *Seishimi*'s largely empty arms locker, also located here, includes two 11mm assault rifles and three 9mm charge pistols.

Engineering Control Station (Engineering): The freighter's engineering room is spacious, thanks to the impressive fusion torch engine it houses. From here, an operator can direct all engineering and power systems.

Crew Berthing (Crew): Half of the crew berth spaces are empty. Corge has the largest stateroom and a second room as an office. A mess deck is located here.

Autocargo (Cargo): The cargo bay's loading hatch is open while the *Seishimi*'s crew bring materials from the *Conjecture* for storage or examination in the ship's workspace facilities in the auxiliary compartment.

VAULT

This scene forms the climax of the adventure, centering around a hostile first encounter. It introduces what could be a nasty enemy not just for the heroes, but for the future inhabitants of Hammer's Star.

The scene assumes that the heroes are now exiting the *Shrike* in order to enter the *Conjecture*.

> The two ships rest before you, your own not far away. The smaller is the light freighter *Seishimi*, a vessel that's old and worn by today's standards. Around the freighter, powerful floodlights have been set up on its hull to illuminate the nearby cruiser. Cranes, gantries, and cargoloaders fill their area, along with various pieces of cargo and technical equipment.
>
> The *Conjecture* is a giant 200 meters in length, and more than a dozen stories tall–at least she was. Now pieces of her hull litter the area with debris, partially buried by the passage of time. The once tall and majestic warship vessel lies tipped onto her starboard side. Her neutronite-armored hull is pitted and scored by battle damage and the impact. Gaping holes show in its structure, and it's through one of the larger of these openings that the salvage team has been passing into the cruiser.

Allow your heroes a moment to survey the scene and prepare. Meanwhile, get a sense of what the heroes are bringing–especially in terms of weapons and armor. The atmosphere outside is breathable, so they don't need to wear e-suits. It is, however, quite warm; temperatures are about 30° C here near the equator.

An examination of the cruiser's exterior reveals only one fact that's not obvious. An Awareness–*perception* or Technical Science skill check allows a hero notice that cleats and fasteners have been welded to the cruiser's hull. If he's around, Corge will explain that he once thought to lift the cruiser and take it home wholesale. His team abandoned the idea when they discovered that the *Conjecture* is unstable and might break apart. If he's present, Corge and two of his men lead the heroes inside.

> You pass through the *Conjecture*'s hull. It's a surreal world that you've entered: misty, warm, and tragically askew. You're now standing on what should be the right wall of the ship section. To your right, lamps and piping clutter what used to be the room's ceiling. To your left, tables and bunks reveal that this used to be someone's quarters. Lockers and furniture have fallen into a chaotic mess, but they don't prevent you from noticing a body, now well decayed, contorted and partially hanging from a hallway on what is now the ceiling.

INTO THE *CONJECTURE*

Compared to the heroes' tiny *Shrike*, the *Conjecture* is a titan of size and power. It's divided into fourteen decks, with innumerable individual corridors and compartments. Exploring this cruiser might prove interesting, especially given its current situation, tipped on its side like a piece of modern art. They'll find the grim evidence of a lost space battle–wrecked compartments, damaged equipment, and the many corpses of the *Conjecture*'s crew. However, such an exploration isn't the focus of this scene, or even the adventure. The course of investigation you should encourage is to retrieve the ship's computer core and examine its logs.

Whether they're led by Marcus Corge and two of his salvagers or they have to wander around by themselves, the heroes should eventually make their way to the command deck, located in the heart of the ship on decks 6 and 7. Refer to the map on the inside cover. Assume that the heroes enter the bridge on deck 6, standing on what was once the right wall. Once the heroes have arrived, allow them to examine it as well.

The computer vault lies just below the command deck on deck 6. The doors to the computer vault, once easily accessible on the back wall of the bridge, are now high above the heroes, on a curving ceiling 8 meters up. To open the doors, it will be necessary for a hero to first make a successful Athletics–*climb* skill check. The other option is to cut up the furniture and control stations and stack them.

It's just as some hero is stretching himself and opening the doors that the attack occurs.

> The door sweeps open with a mechanical hiss. For a moment, light spills into the computer section, illuminating banks of control panels and holographic displays. And you see four spiderlike forms, moving with long, pointed legs that tick noisily now on the deckplate as they approach. You feel a wave of nausea and weakness come over you.

If you wish, you can show the heroes the illustration of a klick that appears on the next page. Then the combat begins. The first thing to do is have everyone roll a Stamina–*endurance* skill check. This is a result of being near the weakness field of the klicks (see the description on the next page). Then, start the encounter by having each hero roll an action check. For the klicks, you can either roll a group action check or individual action checks, or use the reaction score listed (Ordinary/2).

There are four klicks in the computer vault, and their objective is to spring down from their high ground and begin to use their deadly pincers on the heroes. They don't hesitate before attacking, and there's no chance for a discussion.

Klick Warrior

STR	11	(d4+8)	INT	9	(d4+6)
DEX	11	(d4+8)	WIL	8	(d4+5)
CON	10	(d4+7)	PER	6	(d4+3)

Durability: 20/10/5/5 Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 26, run 16, walk 6 # Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 0

Attacks

Pincers ×2 14/7/3 d6w/d6+2w/d8+2w LI/0
Blacklaser
  SMG 12/6/3 d6+1w/d6+3w/d4+1m En/0
Bioweakness field: Opponents within 10 meters of a klick make Stamina-*endurance* checks at the beginning of every round. Failure indicates that the opponent suffers d4–1 points of stun damage. For every klick after the first in the radius of an opponent, the skill check is made with a +1 penalty, up to a maximum of +6.

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d4 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6–1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [11]–*climb [16], jump [12]*; Unarmed [11]–*brawl [14]*; Modern [11]–*SMG [12]*; Movement [10], Stamina [10]–*endurance [14]*; Stealth [12]–*hide [14], sneak [13]*; Awareness [8]–*perception [11]*.

Description: To humans, a klick most resembles an arachnid–because of the multi-jointed legs that carry its wedge-shaped body. Each leg ends in wickedly pointed pincers. The wedge-shaped body measures about two meters long and about one meter thick at its widest point. It's covered with smooth, chitinous armor across the top, and plates of the same material along its belly. Only the bulbous sensory organs are exposed. These cover a large, globular mass that descends beneath the thinner, forward portion of the wedge. Two forelimbs reach out from beside the sensory organs. The pincers at the end of these limbs are more dexterous than those attached to the legs, capable of manipulating weapons or technology.

Encounter: Klicks possess a high degree of intelligence, demonstrated primarily by their cooperation and teamwork. The use of technology–both starships and their "blacklaser" energy weapons–confirms an applied intelligence of some kind. Language, social structure, and origin are unknown. All encounters end with violence.

Klick teams make use of ambushes. They attack in numbers, swarming quickly over small groups. Then they fight savagely, taking no prisoners. Klicks are considerably durable in regards to stun damage If a klick is somehow captured, it quickly dies.
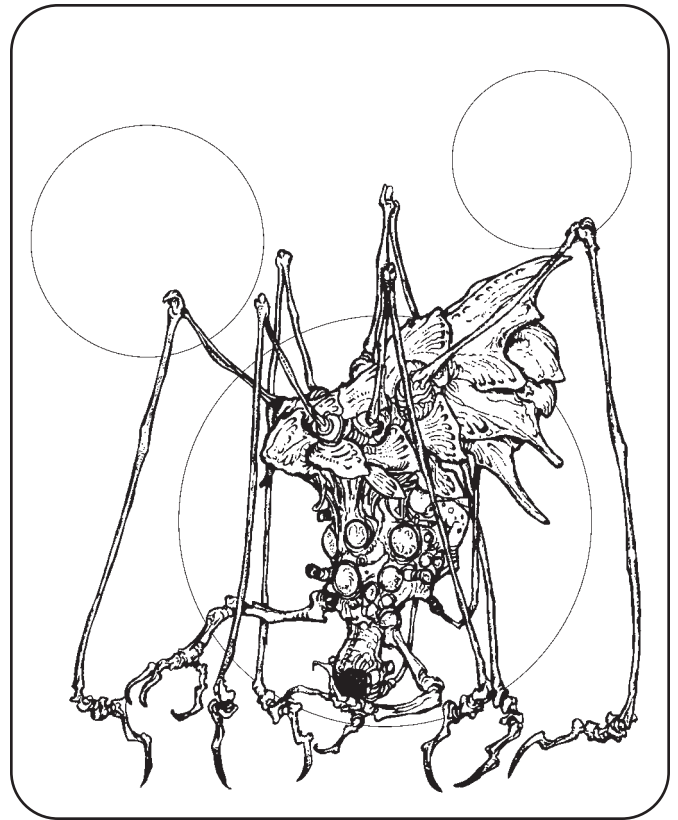
Outcome

The battle with the klicks should be a challenging–and somewhat horrifying–scene for the heroes. They're facing unknown foes that show no compassion, reserve, or pity. Their pincers should be the inspiration of nightmares, and the bioweakness field a steady cause of frustration. As for the klicks themselves, they fight to the death.

It's up to you to moderate the pace of the scene and the level of challenge you wish to present. You can reduce the number of klicks present if your heroes are few in number or underpowered. You can also make use of Marcus Corge and his two salvagers, who may have led the heroes to the *Conjecture*'s computer vault. If the heroes appear to handle things easily, the salvagers can run away in terror. Otherwise, they can stay and help out. Or maybe you can increase the horror by having one or two of them killed, the first klick victims.

Once the conflict is over, the heroes can get at the computer vaults. Damaged as the computer banks are, the *Conjecture*'s records aren't complete, but the heroes can download all of the ship's logs and recorder data. Hopefully, the Concord's technicians can read something off it. Over the next few hours, if a hero can succeed in a Technical Science or Computer Science complex skill check (6 successes) at a +1 step penalty, he can rebuild enough of the computer to read off the *Conjecture*'s logs. These contain sensor readouts on the unidentified ships that destroyed the *Conjecture* and the rest of Spes's defenders.

HOMEBOUND

his is an optional scene. If your group has had enough, you can leave it aside for another day. Or, this scene can act as the finale to the adventure. It sends a strong signal that, despite the heroes' success and the defeat of a few klick warriors, the menace here in the Verge is anything but over.

This scene should introduce you and your players to the thrills of spaceship combat, as presented in Chapter 11 of the *Gamemaster Guide*.

SET-UP

Time the scene to begin just an hour or so before the *Shrike*'s stardrive is recharged. This can take anywhere from two to five days after its arrival, and you can arbitrarily decide just when the *Shrike*'s computer monitors report an imminent readiness to travel.

Just how the heroes made their way through Scenes II and III should determine how and when you begin this scene. If your heroes proceeded directly to Spes and the wreck of the *Conjecture*, they may have a day or more to explore the system. Your heroes may want to spend time interacting with Marcus Corge and his crew. Unfortunately, it's obvious that they don't know any more than the heroes do about those hostile aliens. Or you might want to delay the heroes' departure. The sidebar "Other Settlements and Sites" on page 10 may have some more information on such endeavors.

Whatever course they follow, eventually your heroes should leave behind Spes and prepare to leave. That's when the klick scout ship makes its appearance.

> "ALERT!" blares your ship's computer. "Unidentified contact approaching at high speed, bearing 230 mark 025 relative, range 30,000 kilometers!"

Sensor readings confirm the computer's statement, but no information can be gained. The vessel has no transponder, and it doesn't respond to communication attempts. The objective of the klicks in this encounter is to neutralize the heroes before they can tell anyone what they found.

The heroes have a simple choice. They can close with the craft, either to learn more or in hopes of another fight. They can choose to turn the *Shrike* away and run. Or your heroes could race down into Spes's atmosphere and hide. Since it's possible your heroes may change strategies sometime during the scene, be sure to look over all three sections below.

FLEE

Discretion is the better of valor. Yet the klick ship accelerates just as fast as the heroes', and it's already moving faster. So running away not going to be easy.

To resolve the flight attempt, use a complex skill check. The complexity demands that the hero attempting it must accumulate a total of 8 successes to succeed. (See the rules in Chapter 4 of the *Player's Handbook* and *Gamemaster Guide*.) The helmsman can make skill checks every minute using his Vehicle Operation–*space vehicle* skill. Other players can assist, applying –1, –2, or –3 step bonuses to the helmsman with successful use of System Operation–*sensors* (getting a precise fix on the klicks' heading), Navigation–*system navigation* (plotting the best course to take advantage of local gravity) or System Operation–*engineering* (harnessing every joule of the *Shrike*'s mass reactor to power its engines).

If the heroes succeed, they escape the klick vessel. They may know exactly what's going on, but their stardrive is now fully charged and they can complete the mission. If the heroes fail the complex skill check–the result of the pilot rolling a Critical Failure or a total of three Failure results–go to "Fight" below.

HIDE

If the heroes dive right back into the cloud cover of Spes, they can break contact long enough to ground the ship somewhere on the planet's surface. Use the complex skill check mechanics as described under "Flee," but in this instance the ship's contain wants to accumulate 8 successes using Tactics–*space tactics* skill checks. Other players may assist as above, using either Vehicle Operation–*space vehicle* or System Operation–*sensors*.

If the heroes succeed, they can remain hidden long enough to make starfall. If they fail, see "Fight" below.

FIGHT

Your first option is to use the easy narrative system–ignoring the details of the tactical situation and summarizing events with intents to break, open, hold, or close the distance between the ships. This system is described in Chapter 12 of the *Player's Handbook* and Chapter 11 of the *Gamemaster Guide*.

Assume that the conditions are clear in open space and that the klick ship begins with an intent to close; the heroes' intent is up to them. Every round, the heroes and klicks make action checks. In each phase, the pilot of each vehicle makes a Vehicle Operation–*space vehicle* skill check. This determines whether the klicks or the heroes get to succeed in their intention (break, open, hold, or close). Meanwhile, the other operators aboard can take action such as shooting (or any of the standard options presented on pages 205–209 of the *Player's Handbook*).

You can also use a visual system to present the combat, using symbols on a hex map to represent ships that perform maneuvers in every phase of the combat. This system is described in Chapter 11 of the *Gamemaster Guide*. The klicks arrive traveling at about 3 Megameters per phase (3 million

kph). Assume the starting range is 30 Megameters. As in the visual system, heroes make action checks and take actions as usual–with one exception. The ships continue to move in each phase, and the pilot of each vessel can attempt Ordinary maneuvers (simple turns and drifts) even when he doesn't have an action available.

The heroes' secondary weapons system–the launch rack–should give them a slight edge in the encounter. But if your heroes begin to lose, you have a few options. In an unprecedented feat of heroism, Corge could show up to help in the *Seishimi*. Or just before the klicks threaten to end the heroes' lives, the *Shrike*'s stardrive can whisk them to the barren safety of drivespace.

The klicks travel in fast spacefaring vessels of unknown design, made of a black, unidentified material, and armed with weapons of mass destruction. However, most encounters with the klick ships end quickly; these aliens prefer hit-and-run tactics over than prolonged encounters against equal foes. For simplicity, consider the klicks manning the ship's controls to have skill scores of 12 in Vehicle Operation–*space vehicle,* Technical Science–*repair*, and all System Operation specialty skills. Like the klick warriors, these klicks have action check scores of 12.

KLICK SCOUT SHIP

Compartments: 6   Dur: 30
Maneuver Rating: 0   Acc: 2 Mpp
Cruise Speed: 2 AU/hour   Berthing: 24
Armament: Particle beam (Range 6/12/18 Mm)
               d6+3s/d4+1m/d4+3m (En (e)/A)
Defenses: Jammer, damage control [Good]
Armor: Moderate [unknown] (3 dur)
               d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6+2 (En)
Computer: Marginal computer core
Engines: Induction engine
Power: Grav-fusion cell rated for 10 power factors
Drive: None

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1–2	Engineering 1	Grav-fusion cell (5/*)	12/12/6
		Accumulator (1/*)	
		Autosupport (0/2)	
3–4	Command	Mass detector (1/1)	12/12/6
		Multiband radar (0/0)	
		Spectroanalyzer (1/1)	
		Remote network (2/2)	
		Radio transceiver (0/1)	
		Damage control [Good] (2/2)	
		Jammer (0/1)	
		Marginal computer core (0/0)	
		Airlock (0/0)	
5–7	Engineering 2	Induction engine (4/4)	8/8/4
8–10	Weapons	Turret: particle beam (5/5)	10/10/5
11–14	Cargo	Fuel tank (4/0)	8/8/4
15–20	Crew	Crew quarters (2/0)	4/4/2

CONCLUSION

Award the heroes 1 achievement point for successfully completing the adventure, and an additional point to any player whose roleplaying, ingenuity, or good play merited reward.

EPILOGUE

The return to Meriden takes 5 days while the heroes travel through drivespace. After starrise they land in one of the *Monitor*'s hangar bays. Aboard the fortress ship, the Concord Star Force and interstellar diplomats from every nation of the Stellar Ring eagerly await the heroes' news.

In the last few days, scientists have been studying the objects and information that you've brought back. More than a dozen debriefing officers have consumed your waking hours plumbing your knowledge of the Hammer's Star system. Everyone has a question to ask, but none of them seem confident of what to do or say. It's a week later that Michael Thayne, a Minister of the Concord Galactic Consulate, calls a meeting of senior diplomats and military personnel. You're invited.

Once the introductions are complete, Minister Thayne rises to address the crowd that's gathered. "Honored delegates, as rumor has no doubt informed you, the news from Hammer's Star is not good.

"At present, only a few facts are clear. The colony of Silver Bell is no more. As we feared, the colony was destroyed nine years ago–by the impact of an asteroid. However, the implications of the distress call, and the sheer improbability of an impact of that magnitude striking Silver Bell so precisely, leads the Concord to believe that malice was involved.

"None of us can say with certainty who's responsible for this genocidal attack. But one of our suspects must be the hostile external species found on Spes."

The collected body of ambassadors and their military advisors raises a noisy clamor. In moments, they begin to question the Concord's unsubstantiated conclusion. Are the sensor readings accurate? What of the news of organized piracy in the system? Could another stellar nation have orchestrated the destruction of Spes? Is the Concord inventing a threat in order to demand more resources? Accusations begin to fly, and it seems as if the nations have resumed their typical bickering.

"Over the next five days, we'll be inviting everyone to study the analysis that has been completed from the system. In a few moments, the *Monitor* and her escorts will make starfall for the Hammer's Star system."

Your adventures in this setting continue with the STAR*DRIVE *Campaign Setting*, available in July.

Hammer's Star

Revik Asteroid Belt

Spes

Platon

Bruelt

Vicek Asteroid Belt

Iniad

0.5 AU

To the Pit (923 AU)

Each Square Equals 3.0 AU

BSS Conjecture

Plan View
Bridge/Level 6

Engineering

Weapons

Holographic area

Helm

Sensors

Defenses

Computer room

Communications

Command Deck/Level 7

One Square Equals 2 Meters

Door

Rail

Ladder

Table

Chair

STAR DRIVE™

Red Starrise

by Richard Baker

In the far future, representatives of the Galactic Concord make the first trip to the Verge in almost a century. It starts with a call for help, and now a rescue mission speeds through drivespace toward a distant colony at Hammer's Star. The mighty fortress ship *Monitor* and its support fleet rush across hundreds of light-years, desperate to answer the distress call and unravel the riddle of the outpost on the farthest edge of the Verge. . . .

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