



Australian Realms alternative Cyberpunk 2020 setting,
R.Tal approved.

SOLSPACE

Australian Realms' brilliant new role-playing campaign setting, SolSpace is officially approved by R.Talsorian Games as an alternative Cyberpunk™ campaign setting. Join us in issue 25 as SolSpace is launched into deep space with the first of the background articles.

In SolSpace there are a million stories to be told. Come with us on an exciting and intriguing journey through the Solar System of 2037. See how man has adapted to entire new environments... and trashed them. Read more about the RUK. the space colonies of Mars. Jupiter and the Asteroid Belt and the people that inhabit them. In space the streets are even deadlier!

So. swap your 'punk characters' street-cred for a dose of space-cred and come join us in The Dark.

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A POSTCARD FROM SPACE

BY PAUL MITTING AND LEE SHEPPARD

Subspace Message Transfer 08:45:24:07:2037

To: Christopher Taylor
Bjelke-Petersen Residential Block
Brisbane Arcology, Republic of Australia
From: Nathan Taylor
PSV Sirocco
Thru Ceres Transmit Station, Asteroid Belt

Message Reads: "Yo, Groundsider! It's your old Uncle Nathan here again, from my floating workstation somewhere in the greater Asteroid Belt. Your Dad contacted me the other month and told me you'd got some damn fool idea in your head to leave Earth and come out into the Dark. I'm glad to see that you stuck at your work and managed to save up your uplift fare - I'm proud of you for that. But you should have told your Dad earlier about undertaking the acclimatisation program. I have to tell you that your Dad was really pissed, chombatta, what with every- thing that happened to your Mum and all, and he's asked me to try and have a talk to you to put you off the idea.

I think I know you pretty well though, Chris, and anything I say is not going to put you off one bit. I suppose the only way you're finally going to make up your mind about whether you really belong out here is to come and have a look for yourself. "Experiential Learning" is what my old University lecturer would have called it - I'd just call it the School of Hard Knocks. I won't kid you, Christopher - its

"When those heavy boosters kick in, the G-force will really hit you. I'd like to tell you that it won't hurt, but that'd be a lie.

It hurts like a bitch, choomba - you'll swear some drek-head is trying to push the top of your head out through your butt while your kidneys try and work their way up through your body and out of your nose."

Some Terms Explained...

Archie - RUK slang term for Cyborg. From a mid-20th Century comic strip character, Robot Archie. See also Borg

Borg - colloquial term used to describe both Cyborgs and Cyber-evolved life-forms, such as those found in the Mercury colonies.

BSC - British Space Commission. The civilian and scientific arm of the RUK space program, responsible for the maintenance of the Theodorsen Gateways

Ceres - largest asteroid in the Belt A number of Corporate, Military and Private colonies are established on Ceres, providing important facilities for the tens of thousands of space miners who make the Asteroid Belt their home

The Commonwealth - those nations which have realigned themselves with the RUK and forged the new Commonwealth include India, Singapore, Canada and the twin Republics of Australia. In combination with the RUK, the Commonwealth is the most powerful "nation" in space.

Dan Dare - RUK Space Marine pilots are often referred to as "Dan Dares", a reference to a popular British science fiction comic of the 20th Century

Dirt-Sniffer - slang term for one who doesn't live, travel or work in space

ESA - European Space Agency. The second biggest player in the provision of space transport and off-world colonies

Gateway - see Theodorsen Gateway

NASA - where have you been, dirt sniffer?

New Buckingham Palace - Queen Victoria's orbital space station, which incorporates the RUK Parliament and Civil Service Headquarters.

OTV - Orbital Transfer Vessel. Spacecraft designed for transferring cargo and/or passengers from Low Earth Orbit (LEO) to higher orbits, such as the Space Stations or Luna.

Queen Victoria II - current ruler of the RUK and the Commonwealth

RUK - The Re-United Kingdoms. After the bloody civil wars of the late 2020s, England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland reformed as the Re-United Kingdoms under the rule of Her Majesty Queen Victoria the second.

TFM - Theodorsen Field Modulator Spaceships can only use the Gateways if they are fitted with a TFM, a device that effectively acts as a "key" to the entrances to the hyperspatial realm

Theodorsen Gateway - in 2025 Professor P Theodorsen discovered the existence of a "hyperspatial" realm, theorising that this could eventually be used as a "short-cut" to significantly reduce travel time between the planets in our solar system and beyond. Theodorsen, with financial and scientific assistance from the BSC, then created the technology to provide access to this hyperspatial realm. Theodorsen Gateways are now the principal method of transportation for interplanetary travel

Transit Stations - large space stations built to provide accommodation and facilities for Gateway crews, RUK Space Marine Detachments and passengers waiting for flights through the nearest Gateway

United Nations - the UN has official mandate across the solar system, acting to preserve law and order (through UN Marshalls) uphold civil rights and promote free trade among the various colonies and Earth

hard out here, damned hard. There aren't any second chances either - you screw up, no matter how small, and you're dead, pure and simple.

Your Dad isn't going to like me for what I'm about to do for you, but hey. that's my problem now isn't it? Seems that if you've truly made your mind up about coming out here, the very least I can do is give you a few survival pointers to make sure you last longer than a few minutes once you get here.

If you haven't made your transit booking yet, you might want to consider by-passing Cape York Spaceport and scooting over to one of the European spaceports. You'll save a fair bit of money on your uplift, especially if you go via one of the Soviet heavy lifters. They often have stand-by passenger seats available, and you should be able to get on one for about half of what you'd pay for one of the British Space Commission or ESA shuttles. Yeah, I know what you're thinking, I've heard the rumours too, but the Sov Rocket Corps has really got its act together over the past few years. Many of the guys I've worked with out here travelled with the SRC and had no complaints at all (apart from the stewardesses, but then they've always had that problem).

I wish your Dad had let you take that school trip to the moon after your mother died. I suppose it was only natural to have overreacted like he did, but her death was just a freak accident - one of the only Gateway accidents ever to have resulted in fatalities. I've talked to a few people in the know out here since the accident, and some have told me that the Perseus was probably fitted with a dodgy Theodorsen Field Modulator, one of the early counterfeit models, before code encryption was fully operational. I'd really like to get my hands on the bastards that were responsible for fitting that faulty TFM, I'd soon show them the perils of space travel. But anyway, I'm wandering off the track a bit here. What I really wanted to say was that if you'd taken that trip to the moon, then at least you'd have experienced lift-off and zero-grav.

It'll still come as a bit of a shock to your system, regardless of having undergone acclimatisation training. If you've taken my advice, you'll be travelling in one of the Soviet heavy lifter rockets. Now these guys are principally

designed for transporting cargo, so you won't be travelling in the most luxurious comfort. When those heavy boosters kick in, the G-force will really hit you. I'd like to tell you that it won't hurt, but that'd be a lie. It hurts like a bitch, choomba - you'll swear some drek-head is trying to push the top of your head out through your butt while your kidneys try and work their way up through your body and out of your nose. Fortunately, that feeling is only going to last for about fifteen minutes (ha ha- I remember your mother telling me how pleased she was that someone had finally invented a way that men could experience the pain of child-birth).

Once you're up, you'll get your first taste of zero-gravity - and if you're like me, you won't enjoy it one bit. It gives you one hell of a headache the first time, and if you don't heed the warnings and have a big lunch instead of the dry crackers the stewardesses issue you before takeoff, then you're going to be seeing that lunch again real quick. So don't be embarrassed when you do "pull a Kranston", just make sure you get it all into the bag - 'nuff said?

The disadvantage of taking one of the Soviet Rockets is that you won't get an outside view, but that won't really matter, because the view from one of the orbiting space platforms (probably Edinburgh, although you might transit through the older Johnson Space Platform) is well worth the wait. My advice is to take a day or two to get used to the lighter gravity and use some of the money you saved on your uplift to secure a decent trip on an OTV (Orbital Transfer Vessel to you dirt-sniffers). If you can, try and get on one of the French-crewed OTVs out of Edinburgh (or any of the Qantas OTVs out of Johnson) - they have far better facilities and the stewardesses are much better looking (if you're going to see a girl in a skin-suit for the first time. make sure the experience is worth it, I always say). All kidding aside, they also operate the fastest OTVs - Low Earth Orbit to the Theodorsen Gateway Transit Station (Heathrow) in 16 hours, the fastest non-military trip possible at present.

If you leave from Edinburgh Space Platform, make sure you get a seat on the starboard side of the OTV. If you're lucky. and the orbits are right, you'll have a real good chance of seeing New Buckingham Palace as you pull out for your trip to Heathrow. That's where Queen Victoria II and her Parliament now live - right above the old one in London. I shouldn't have to tell you about her though should I, wasn't she technically your "Boss" when you were working for the Government last year? Good luck to her I say, as long as her RUK Marine boys keep those tracking pirates off our back out here in the Belt, she can rule forever as far as I'm concerned.

Which brings me to one important point, Christopher - and one you'd better listen to pretty carefully. It's not the Gold Coast up here. boy. I'm sure you already know that from my previous letters and vids, but don't get any drek-head ideas about getting yourself chipped up with a smart gun or buying one of those fancy gyrojets to protect yourself. You'll be passing through some pretty heavy security before they'll let you board one of the Gateway Liners, and the penalties are tough if you get caught carrying a piece. So don't try anything stupid - you'd hate to spend the first 12 months of your time in the Dark in one of the Belt Prison Mines.

If things do get heavy when you eventually settle down somewhere. I can always put you in contact with a few individuals who can help you out. Just leave the heavy stuff to the professionals - if you can keep your nose out of where it doesn't belong, then you'll be fine - it's only when you start poking your nose into other people's business, or you choose a lifestyle that invites danger (like mine) that you'll run into the sort of situations that need a more direct approach, if you know what I mean.

And while we're talking safety, don't ever forget the Triad - Atmosphere, Radiation and Gravity. Acclimatisation Training covers the basics for you, but you must practice the principles - I honestly can't stress that enough. Check your suit every day, check the Use By dates on your Goop Balls and listen to the Daily Radiation Warnings • they could all make the difference between survival and death.

Woah! - enough of the heavy stuff for the moment. If I'm not careful I'll end up doing just what your Dad asked me to do - put you off taking the trip. OK, by now you've booked yourself on to one of the better OTVs and you're making your way to Heathrow Transit Station at 25,000 kms/hr. It's certainly a sight to behold as you draw closer, all four rings and massive solar panels. Given that the station is over 4 kilometres in diameter, it's really hard to believe that it rotates at 2 complete revolutions a second!

You won't get to see the actual Theodorsen Gateway from Heathrow. as that's over 3.000 kilometres away at one of the Luna LaGrange stationary points, just in case of accidents and the like. What you will be able to see is the dozens of military ships, deep space cruisers and interplanetary cargo and passenger ships that use Heathrow as a transit/repair station. Who would have believed that just 10 years ago that modest collection of ships would have represented the entire combined Deep Space fleets? Shows what a quantum leap in technology the Theodorsen Gateways were, huh?

As for the station itself, if you thought the Space Platforms were amazing, you just honestly won't believe Heathrow. What is it about airports, spaceports and bus stations (a form of transport

before your time, kiddo) that seems to attract all the wackos? I suppose it's the fact that most people heading to the outer colonies have to pass through Heathrow that makes it such a magnet for all of the religious freaks, pickpockets, conmen, salesmen, hookers, fixers, solos and other detritus that always seem to be there, but the place still continues to freak me out every time I visit it. The last time I was there, some guy actually tried to sell me a Persian Rug! For my Zero-G work station! Can you believe it?

Seriously though, if you know the right people to talk to, you can make some really good deals on your equipment. If you haven't bought your space-suit yet, make do with a rental until you get to Heathrow. Look for Delta Designs on Level 3 of the Mercantile deck. Ask for Jenny M'Zinga and tell her how you know me - she'll do you a real good deal on your first space-suit, and it won't run out of warranty the first time you head into zero pressure atmosphere.

And don't worry - Heathrow is not as dangerous as you might think it first looks. Regardless of all of the loonies you might run into while you're visiting, the RUK Space Marines based there maintain a very high level of law and order, and as long as you keep your credit cards close to your body and don't make any deals that you can't cover financially - you'll be fine. If you have the time, take a couple of days to have a look around Heathrow. They have a great tour that lasts a half day that takes you to all but the highest security areas of the station - well worth the time for a groundsider like you!

Now the actual amount of time you'll end up having to spend at Heathrow Transit Station will depend on a number of factors - where you eventually want to go, how long the delays are in getting through the Gateway backlog (any current military actions get first priority for access) and the general availability of empty seats on the passenger ships. Big word of advice here, Christopher - don't take the cheap option when it comes to travelling through the Gateways. Always travel with one of the big three - BSC, ESA or NASA - you'll not only stand a far greater chance of getting to where you want to go, but you'll have a far more enjoyable time getting there. A week in the hyperspatial realm between the Gateways sure beats a year iced and braindancing, but it's still a week.

Remember, you can't look out of the windows when you're in transit through the Gateways or you'll fry your brains, so you'll just have to sit back and enjoy the in-flight virtual entertainment. Me, I always spend a lot of time in the Zero-Gee gymnasium, keeping my body toned for the many months of Zero-G I spend in my workstation out here in the Belt. If you find you get on well with the crew, ask them to run the VirtualNet™ simulation disc I sent with this message disc - a friend of mine says it's a pirate copy of one of the RUK Space Marine training simulators from the DreamPark™ training facility in Bournemouth. Knock yourself out, kid - literally.

I must admit that through all of this I have been assuming that you were always intending to miss the Luna colonies altogether, and make your way out to one of the new planetary colonies. Obviously, if it's your intention to spend some time on one of the dozens of Luna mining or residential colonies to "test the waters", then you don't really need to worry about making your way to Heathrow Transit Station at all. Knowing you though, I can't see you settling for the monotony of the Luna colonies. Geez, if they keep moving entire city populations to the moon the way they have been recently, it won't be long before it becomes as overcrowded as the Earth already is - and that won't be fun for anybody. Why move straight back into what you're trying to get away from by heading out into the Dark in the first place?

My suggestion is for you to make your way out to Mars - the Big Red One. It has some pretty large cities to hang out in nowadays, and there are plenty of employment opportunities for people with your particular skills. It's also the most popular jumping off point for trips to the Asteroid Belt or the Jovian system, if Mars turns out to be a no-go for you. Besides, you shouldn't have any problem getting on a ship heading out to Mars, as 3 out of every 4 ships making the jump through the Gateways seem to hit Mars first. As it stands at present, if you wanted to head straight out to the Belt or Jupiter from Heathrow, you might end up having to wait a week or two until a ship that was headed that way put in an appearance. That's why it's far better to head out to Mars - at least you're half way to where you might eventually want to go, and you get to check out Big Red while you make your final decision.

If you do make your way to Mars, even if it's only for a few months while you finally make up your mind, there's really only two choices when it comes to finding casual work - only Olympus Base and the Carter Colony are big enough to support an itinerant workforce. All the other bases are either too small or exclusively Corporately staffed, so you probably won't be able to get work in any of those unless you've already arranged it before leaving Earth. That doesn't mean you can't have a good look around while you're there though, as all of the bases and colonies are open to visitors.

Mind you - Mars isn't without it's problems. I don't know how much news gets past the political and military censors about what's going on in the Mars colonies at present, but there's certainly a lot more going on there than you'd probably be aware of on Earth. The best that I can do is to tell you

what I've picked up from the crews of the supply ships that make their way out here, bearing in mind that any news I pass on will already be three to six months out of date (even with the number of new colonists coming through Belt Gateway I really only manage to get news updates when I make my quarterly trip to Ceres).

I suppose the biggest news concerning Mars at the moment is the secessionist movement. I've been told that many of the colonists are keen for Mars to declare it's independence, and while that view isn't a new one, I've also heard that some of the members of the Martian Assembly are now being swayed towards popular opinion. I can't see the Earth giving in too easily though, and many of the colonists remember what happened as a result of the attempted coup at Isidis Base in 2025, so both sides will be wanting to tread very carefully.

My advice, if you do end up staying on Mars for more than a few months, is to try and keep out of the secessionist movement altogether. I'm told that there are a lot of lunatic fringes popping up on both sides, and given your strong political views (I still remember our arguments over the Jovian War fiasco when you first started University) I could just see you joining up with the wrong group and getting yourself fragged over some stupid "Freedom for Martian Rocks" movement. I reckon it could get pretty dirty over the next twelve months - why else would the UN be taking such a big interest in procedures? They've even taken two UN Marshalls out of Ceres and re-located them on Mars, and trust me, you don't take any lawmen out of the Belt unless you've got a damned good reason.

Speaking of the Belt, you might be thinking of coming out to visit your favourite Uncle. Hey, I'd certainly love to see you, but I really can't recommend it at the moment, especially while the pirate raids have picked up again. Most of the supply ships that make it out this way are now forming convoys for protection, with a couple of RUK or Commonwealth gunships riding shotgun. I was speaking to a Dan Dare the other month and she let slip that the Archies might be behind some of the pirate raids, as they had picked up a couple of Borgs in a ship they had recently captured. Now what would the Borgs be doing out here attacking supply ships and kidnapping or killing their passengers? Besides, it's one hell of a way from Mercury to the Belt. If the Mercury colony is involved, were talking about a five to ten year plan being put into effect here. Can they really be that far thinking when their brains are that close to the Sun all the time?

Pirates aren't the only problem out in the Belt mind you. Some of the various Rover clans are getting a bit brazen when it comes to claim jumping and squatting in temporarily vacated workstations. A fellow workganger on an asteroid claim near me came back from a supply trip the other month to find his workstation completely stripped. No doubt about it being Rovers, everyone else out here usually obeys the unwritten laws when it comes to being allowed to work a claim unmolested. The frightening thing is that I've picked up rumours of a vigilante movement taking shape to take on the Rovers. I can't see the UN Marshalls letting that go on for too long without stepping in. Looks like there's going to be more popsicles floating about before things calm down again.

I suppose that what I'm really trying to say is that I think the best and safest option for you at present would be to try and pick up some fill-in work on Mars. and then contact me by Subspace Message Transfer when you get settled. Then, if things have finally calmed down out here in the Belt, you can book passage on a Belt-bound supply ship and come and check out my humble workstation.

Anyway, enough for now. Say hello to your Dad for me, and tell him I'll be in contact again soon. Look forward to seeing you soon, chombatta.

Stay happy, groundsider."

AND SO IT BEGINS

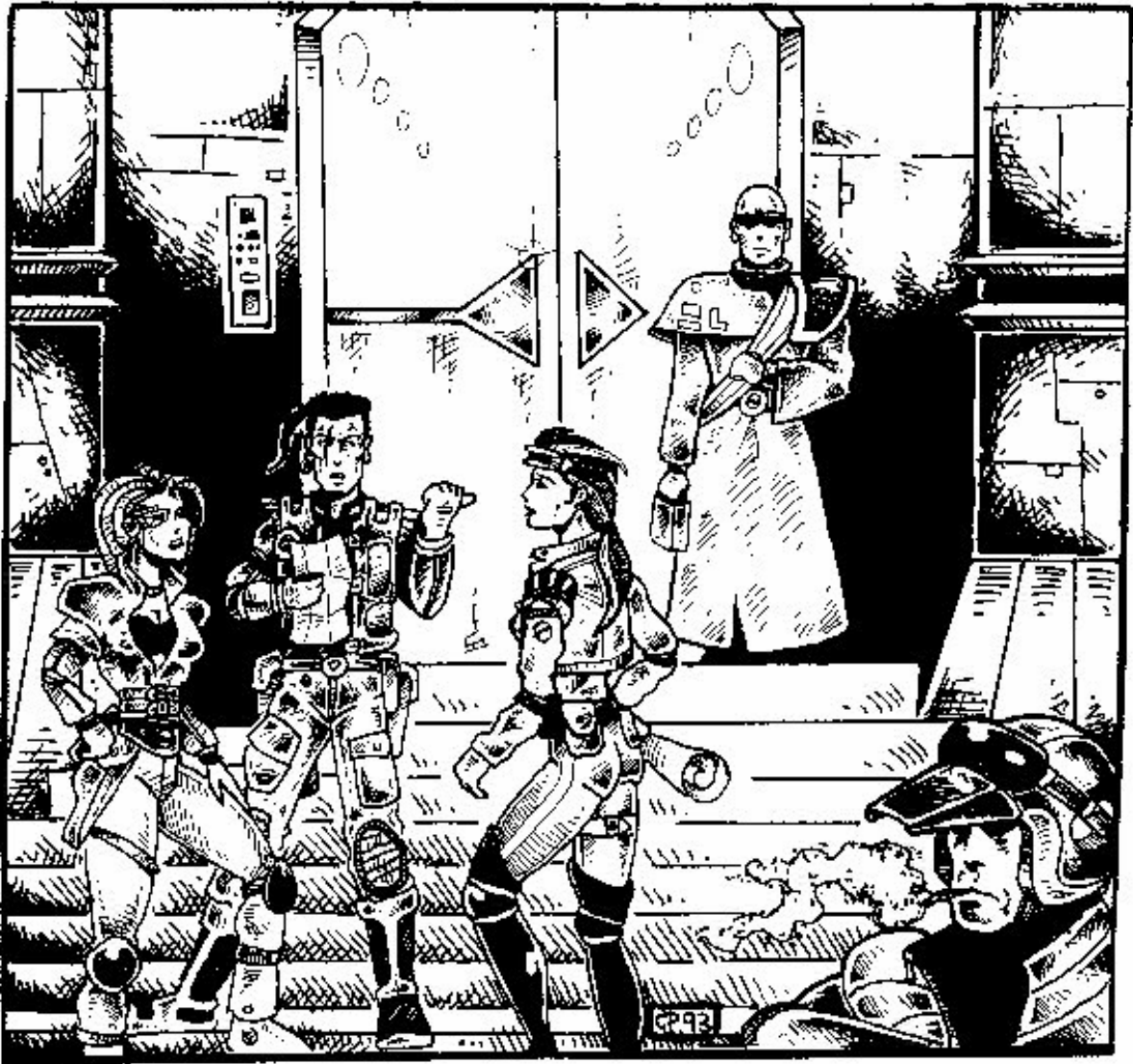
...Australian Realms' brilliant new role-playing campaign setting. SolSpace is officially approved by R.Talsorian Games as an alternative Cyberpunk™ campaign setting. Join us in issue 25 as SolSpace is launched into deep space with the first of the background articles.

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So, swap your 'punk characters' street-cred for a dose of space-cred and come join us in The Dark, as we continue to bring you the best our talented team of authors and artists can deliver, every two months.

**SOLSPACE:
A WHOLE NEW ATTITUDE**

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SOLSPACE

AUSTRALIAN REALMS OFFICIAL CYBERPUNK SETTING
BY PAUL MITTING & LEE SHEPPARD

Cybergeneration™ is but one possible future for the world of Cyberpunk - here is our vision...

A NEW FUTURE...

The year is 2037 and mankind has expanded throughout the Solar System. Worlds are colonised, mining and prospecting occurs in the Asteroid belt and small moons, manufacturing plants orbit high above. Racing through the darkness are Corporate cargo ships. Navy gunships, Pirates and Free traders.

Wars have been fought in the deep reaches of space and tensions are high. Colonists have declared independence and revolts have been crushed. Cyborgs mine the hell world of Mercury and rule their own nation.

Beyond the solar system flies the Gateway station of Project Longreach, accelerating towards our nearest stellar neighbour.

POLITICAL POWER

"There are no streets in space Groundsiders, so your smart-arse street-cred don't mean frak out here in the Dark.

There are no second chances in Zero Gee - you stuff up - you explode.

So you listen to me good you useless little dirt-sniffers, or you gonna be popsicles in no shorty time..."

Sgt Colin Campbell
RUK Space Marines

In 2037, the most powerful nation in space is the Re-United Kingdom (RUK) under the rule of Her Majesty Queen Victoria the Second. A proud but lonely figure, her life marred by personal tragedy, she rules her kingdom from New Buckingham Palace, an armoured space station that lies in Geosynchronous orbit above London. Her Royal Navy guards the precious Gateway stations and patrols the dark reaches of space.

The Commonwealth has been strengthened and many of the nations that once departed have rejoined. Major countries in the new Commonwealth are India, Canada, South Africa, Singapore, New Zealand and the twin nations of Australia, whose own Australian Navy rivals the Royal Navy in size and skill at deep space warfare.

Another major player is the United Nations, which has the official mandate across the solar system. United Nations space cruisers enforce international and interplanetary law and protect neutral zones from interference. They are responsible for maintaining law and promoting trade. All independent worlds and colonies have to be affirmed by the UN. Once affirmed, their independence is meant to be upheld by the UN forces. In actuality, the nations of the Commonwealth enforce UN policy, and in many cases, decide it.

Other nations and corporations struggle to gain and maintain power and resources in the turbulent worlds and societies forming in the depths of space.

The destruction of Tokyo and the Imperial City in the earthquake of 2027 meant a loss of both wealth and dynasty. Apart from the loss of the Emperor's line, Japan also lost much of its key industry in the quake. To rebuild Tokyo, Japan was forced to call in all of its massive foreign capital, consequently losing both its substantial leverage in international monetary politics, and most of its allies. The Japanese corps that survived fled for their space bases, both in orbit and on Luna and Mars. The Japanese are more than keen to reassert their place in international and interplanetary politics.

Europe (apart from the RUK) almost completely collapsed with the resultant Crash of 2027. It, like the United States, was so closely tied in with world trade that the fall took them down hard. Civil uprisings have crippled the European mainland, and a new Reich is rumoured to be growing in a desperate Germany.

America is now the Incorporated States of America. The American government is controlled (sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly) by a number of powerful corporations. The ISA and its controlling corps suffered badly with the Crash of 27, and it now spends most of its efforts keeping its population under control. In that, it is failing rather badly. Anyone with money or influence has left the States and resides in one of the Orbitals or on Mars at Carter Base.

The Soviet nations survived the Crash better than most, mainly because they still had little to lose. Soviet space industry in fact prospered as more people struggled to leave Earth for the "better life" in space.

In Space, the independent worlds of Lunar and Mercury are spreading their influence. Mars and the Belt are striving to gain independence as nations, and there are constant rumours that revolt is not far off.

THE PEOPLE

Inhabitants of the worlds and colonies are a blend of cultures and motivations. There are the teeming masses of the Mars colonies, the anti-septic corporate Q'Neill stations, the rugged and deadly Asteroid miners, the extended family Rovers who travel where they will, and the desperate people of a dying Earth.

Their occupations and lifestyles are manifold. There are Asteroid Miners, Cargo shippers, Pilots, Naval Personnel, Corporate Soldiers, Algae farmers, Orbital Chemists, Free Traders, Pirates, Privateers, Arms dealers, Fixers, Smugglers, Terrorists and so on. They live in isolated ships in the inky blackness, on small asteroids hollowed out, on Orbiting colonies, in the massive Mars and Luna deep sited bases, on the moons of Jupiter.

The advances in Genetic manipulation, Cybernetics and NanoTech have created many new and different types of humanity.

Cyborgs - On Mercury, and in isolated pockets around the system, Full-Body borgs are developing their own society. They welcome all full conversions, and even those with predominant replacements of organics. New members of the society are typically adults who have undergone the conversion, many on Mercury itself. Programs are rumoured to be well progressed in taking artificially fertilised embryos, raising them in special wombs, and then transplanting the young brains into cyborg bodies.

Cyberforms - Originally developed in the early 2020's, Cyberforms are an engineered amalgamation of organic brains and organs with cybernetic bodies. They are normally used as guards or scouts, or working in hazardous environments. Most people consider them only just intelligent, but

there have been stories of Cyberforms with near human intellect and emotions. This causes the creatures to be generally feared unless under obvious control. Intelligent Cyberforms have been readily accepted into Cyborg culture on Mercury. The distinction between a created Cyberform and a human converted into a full borg is rapidly vanishing.

Martians - The human born on Mars of 2037 will grow to an average height of 2m tall with a slender build and dark skin. Specially engineered nano-viruses keep them as strong as humans from full Earth gravity, and they are far more resistant to extremes of temperature and air pressure.

Jovians - Closer to the Earth norm. Jovians tend to be dark skinned and have standard builds. They do use nano-viruses to protect themselves from the high radiation levels, in particular their reproductive organs.

Spacers - The spacers are experiencing the greatest variations from the human norms in appearance and mentality. Some, such as the Asteroid Highriders and Rovers, are growing with long slender bodies and prehensile feet. They utilise nano-tech viruses and genetic manipulation to give themselves stronger bones and muscles, radiation protection and rumoured mental abilities. Some of the manipulations have been engineered into the basic genetic code, so they breed true.

Solar Roamers - Few in number and falling somewhere between the Cyborgs and Spacers, they have had their brains and essential organs grafted into space ships and roam across space. The Roamers finance their ongoing needs by ferrying cargoes and passengers around the system. Some are employed by Corps and Governments to undertake exploration missions around the system that other regular crewed ships wouldn't take. Some are military ships, run by an organic brain but with a full military crew. These ships are amongst the deadliest fighting vessels ever built, with human mind driving ship systems at computer speeds.

V-Dreamers - The prospect of life in the Virtuality Net (V-Net) has appealed to many since it's inception. Now, many have taken up that dream. Their bodies are kept "alive" in special

SOLSPACE TIME LINE

1997 Tycho/Luna colony founded
 2002 Copernicus/Luna colony founded
 2012 Restoration of Queen Victoria the Second
 2017 Hall Station established on Phobos
 2021 NASA's Chryse base completed on Mars
 2022 Start of the Edgerunner Wars. Marriage of Queen Victoria II to Captain John P. Adams. O'Neill war fought between ESA & Highriders. ESA/Sov Isidis base completed on Mars.
 2023 Birth of Princess Eleanor to Queen Victoria II. Kirkwood station completed on Ceres. Four mining bases established on smaller asteroids.
 2025 First use of virtuality net. Discovery of Gateway technology by Professor Theodorsen. Attempted colonial revolution at Isidis base fails.
 2026 Chevoit Hills uprising. Royal Marines quell revolt with minimal loss of life. Martial law declared across UK. First Gateway built in Lunar Orbit.
 2027 NFU commences terrorist actions against UK Government. Scotland and Ireland attempt to gain independence. Civil and financial chaos. Mercury base established. First solar power stations commence transmitting power to Earth orbit. Mars Gateway completed in orbit.
 2028 Captain Adams and Princess Eleanor killed during attack on Buckingham Palace. Queen Victoria is injured but recovers. Olympus base completed on Mars. RUK Naval Base "New London" completed on Phobos.
 2029 Project LongReach launched from Mars.
 2030 Europa colony founded on Jovian moon system. Mining bases established on various moons.
 2031 First operational Bio-suits developed on Ceres. Polar city established on the northern polar ice-cap. Mars.
 2032 Jovian Corp War ("Moon War") fought.
 2033 Asteroid Gateway completed at Ceres. K471 Massacre - belt mining installation containing 80 space miners attacked and destroyed by pirates, three weeks before RUK Naval Base "Yorkshire" completed on Ceres.
 2035 Belt War fought between pirates and RUK Fleet in asteroid belt. RUK Flagship I'ctorydisappears without trace during conflict.
 2036 Privateer Charter signed by all major space nations. This allows independent actions against Pirates and the arming of Merchant vessels for self defence.
 2037 Present time.

tanks (supercooled, fed and maintained by automated machines and nano-tech viruses in their bodies) while their minds are permanently logged into the V- Net. Most people who undergo this are either old and rich, or rich and just want to spend all their time in the V-net. Some simply run through endless simulations, while others earn money by performing data work. They are often better at this than still-living Runners because they can stay in the V-net permanently.

Earthers - Born on Earth, the human of 2037 is still the same basic shape and comes in the old variety of colours and beliefs. Despite the increasing numbers of modified humans. Earthers and their offspring are still the most common life form in the Solar System. Earthers who travel to space are often extensively checked for viruses, diseases and so on before being allowed into the new planets.

"Do you want to know what my definition of a free-market economy is?

If you can take it from some other poor drek-head without getting yourself caught or fragged by the original owner, the UN Marshalls or the RUK Space Marines, well then it's free..."

Edgar Kilbain
Rover

THE PLANETS

Mankind has come a long way since the beginnings of space travel, when half a dozen astronauts returning from a two-week shuttle mission was a world-shattering event. The establishment of the Theodorsen Gateways has now brought space travel within the reach of the "average" man and woman. Almost 10 million people now call space their home. Luna and Mars are certainly the most populated, with 4 million on the moon and its surrounding orbital space stations, and another 2.5 million on Mars and its moons. The vast economic potential of the Asteroid Belt has turned it into the California Gold fields of the 21st Century, and estimates put the current population at 1.5 million.

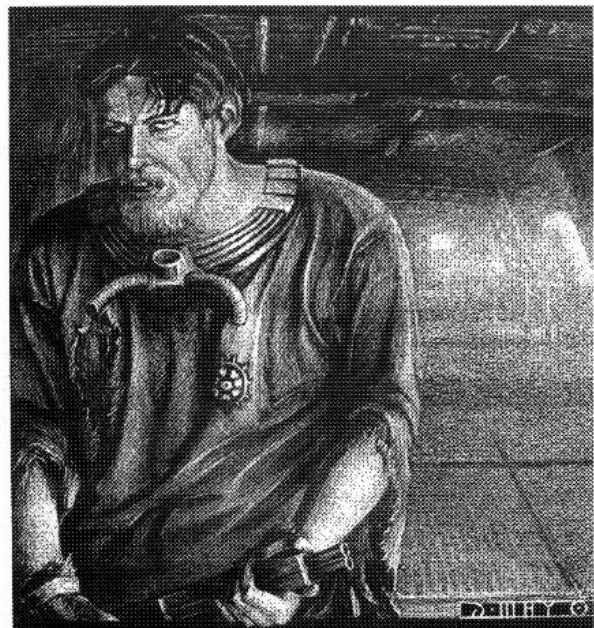
Luna - A trip to the moon is now as commonplace as any form of travel was in the late 20th Century. Many Earthers now use the moon as a holiday destination, or to acclimatise themselves to the idea of living in space on a more permanent basis. Dozens of cities dot the Lunar landscape, providing housing and other facilities for workers, scientists, military personnel and visitors.

Whole populations have been moved to the moon over the past few years, relocated in an effort to alleviate some of the overcrowding problems experienced on Earth. The four Luna cities of Glasgow, Liverpool, Belfast and York are the most recent examples of this, built in 2033 to house over a million people, refugees from the shattered cities the Luna colonies were named after.

Mars - the development of the Theodorsen Gateways did much to speed up the colonisation of Earth's nearest ** habitable** planet. Only a remote scientific outpost 10 years ago. Mars now boasts one of the largest off-Earth cities in the Solar System. Olympus Base. With a population of almost one and a half million. Olympus Base stands as both a symbol of what man has achieved in the last 10 years, and an indicator of the way in which society is likely to react to long-term space settlement. For those who live and work in the Mars Colonies, life is hardly the stuff of dreams, but it sure beats what was left behind.

The Martian Assembly is comprised of members elected from the colonies and bases established on Mars. These representatives have towed the party lines of their respective governments and corporations in the past. Now there is a new unrest - the people of Mars are demanding their own government, free from outside control. Earth is not willing to let this jewel go, and so the unrest is turning into riots. The computer models are predicting civil war within the year.

Asteroid Belt - life in the asteroids of 2037 is dangerous and dirty, with the chances of great wealth offset by the much higher chances of a nasty death. Many of the smaller mining conglomerations (some as small as one person) have mortgaged their great-grandchildren to finance their operations in the Belt, and are consequently prepared to do anything to protect



or establish their claims.

The Belters are a mixed bag of people. Highriders and the more infamous Rover clans make up the largest population groups. Mixed amongst them are Earthers, Martians and the Jovians. Cyborgs of all types are feared, particularly after the rumours of Mercury-funded Pirate ships. The Belt is also home to the infamous Prison Mines. Amongst the Belt there is upwards of 50 large prison mines. These have between 500 and 1000 prisoners. The largest of all is Andrei Base, a facility of 5000 prisoners and 50 guards and techs. Life in the Prison Mines is brutal and deadly. Few survive longer than 3 to 4 years, and those that are paroled are typically broken men and women.

Mercury - Mercury was never considered a world suitable for colonisation. However, the development of human augmentation technology, perhaps best displayed by the creation of cyborgs, meant that Mercury's potential as a source of immense solar power could be fully exploited. The "One Day" war of 2032. when the solar reflectors around Mercury were refocussed to destroy a UN transfer station in Earth orbit, gave complete independence to the now completely cyber-populated planet - There are grave concerns about the future intentions of the Mercury colony, and the various cyberforms which inhabit it. Many rumours exist about Mercury-funded pirate raids, cyborgs posing as humans and even humans being captured by cyborgs for experimentation and as contestants in the famous Cyber Warriors games.

Jupiter - completion of the Jovian Gateway in European orbit in 2034 heralded the opening of the Jovian colonies to full trade with Earth and the Mars and Luna colonies. It also brought a new influx of miners and colonists, which quickly overloaded the facilities available. The lack of living space has seen a rush of new bases being built, nearly all deep sited to avoid the dangerous radiation. Food production has been a major concern in the system, and several new research centres have been established to develop viable lines.

Jovians have embraced life in the harsh worlds with courage and enthusiasm. The people are eager to succeed and will allow very little to stop them.

THE TECHNOLOGY

Deep space travel relies on the Theodorsen Gateways to allow jumps between stations around Luna, Mars, The Belt and Jupiter. In 2025. noted British scientist Patrick Theodorsen discovered the principle of opening a portal between the known physical world and a newly discovered "hyperspatial" realm. The exact nature of this new realm is still under intense scientific research. However, the practical aspects of the discovery have been in use for nearly 10 years.

By building a Gateway station in space, ships can be transported across stellar distances in a fraction of the time taken by realspace travel. Two Gateways are required, one to send the ship on it's way and one to receive the incoming ship and "gate" it back into realspace. Journeys that would normally take 1 to 2 years by conventional spaceships can now be completed in about one week.

Currently the system is only usable within the Solar system, as so far only 4 gates have been built to transport and receive ships. One orbits Luna, another orbits Mars. the third orbits Jupiter and the fourth has just been built in the Belt. A fifth Gateway station is in operation (Project LongReach), but it is being accelerated towards Proxima Centauri in order to open up the Earth's first interstellar path to another system.

The ships are of all sizes, from the enormous Cargo freighters to the tiny Interceptor craft of the military. Space weapons include all types of missiles and rockets, mass drivers and gauss guns, lasers and remote mines.

Stations and colonies use highly efficient reactors and solar collectors to power their life support and defences. Remote controlled weapons stand ready to defend their existence, and semi-sentient computers aid humanity to take and protect lives.

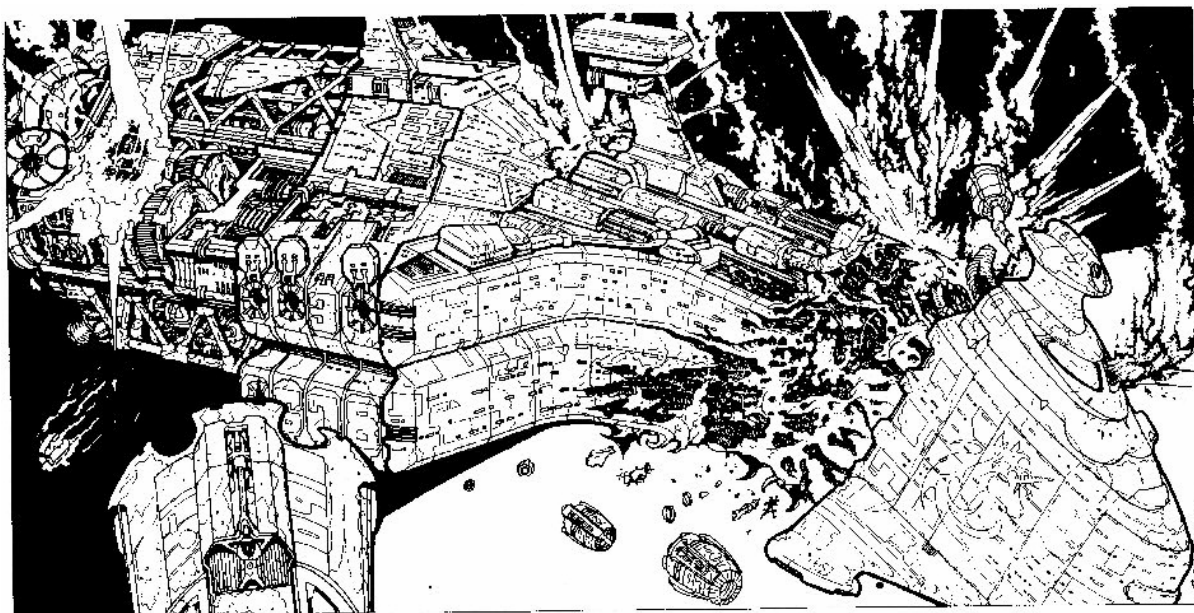
ONWARDS TO ADVENTURE

The scene is set, but we've only just touched the tip of the ice-berg. The next few issues will reveal more about the worlds of 2037. and many of the issues and concerns that currently lie beneath the glossy high- tech surfaces of the deep space cruisers, orbiting stations and planetary bases will begin to come to light.

Future background issues will highlight more about the RUK. the new Commonwealth and the various planets within the SolSpace campaign setting.

Next issue, however, takes us to Mars. the Red Planet, for the first SolSpace scenario. We look forward to seeing you then, dirt- siders.

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OLYMPUS

MARTIAN CAMPAIGN SCENARIO HOOKS FOR SOLSPACE
BY PAUL MITTING, LEE SHEPPARD & COLIN TABER

WELCOME TO MARS, DIRT- SNIFFERS.

The following feature has been written to provide both background information on the principal (and largest) Martian colony of Olympus, and a number of scenario hooks for GMs to get their players started in their own SolSpace campaign. Mars provides the best starting point for adventures in space - it'll have a major role to play in upcoming {we're not telling you yet} events, it's only a short Gateway trip to the Asteroid Belt. it provides in-built campaign hooks for a wide variety of character roles (from solos to netrunners to eco- terrorists) and it boasts enough large cities to satisfy even the most agoraphobic edgerunner.

"The rape of the Martian environment cannot be allowed to go unpunished. Those of you that stand accused of this crime have been judged and found.... guilty.

The sentence for your crimes is death. The execution of that sentence will take place immediately."

- Message from Amanda Jacobs, Leader of Red Storm, to the citizens of Olympus, Mars.
13:00 Hrs-Nov 16-2037.

SolSpace provides a fresh campaign setting for Cyberpunk™ fans. It's a whole new attitude out in the Dark, and your players will need to learn some hard lessons if they expect to survive long enough to make it in this very hostile environment. The scenario hooks provided in this feature are designed for that exact purpose - to push the realities of life in space in your players' faces. We've also thrown in a few long term adventure hooks, ones that'll give your players good reasons to hang around. Next issue will provide additional background information and adventure hooks for the other Martian colonies, as well as some clues as to the reason for the recent increase in terrorist activities by Red Storm, Red Sword and anyone else with an axe to grind.

Once you get your 'punks up into space, they won't be in any hurry to get back to Earth.

"IT'S NOT AT ALL LIKE THE BROCHURES..."

So how do you go about getting your players into space? Beginning a SolSpace campaign with completely new characters will be no problem. But some players, especially those whose characters have built up quite a reputation on Earth may be a little harder to convince. So what about some simple motivators to get you started?

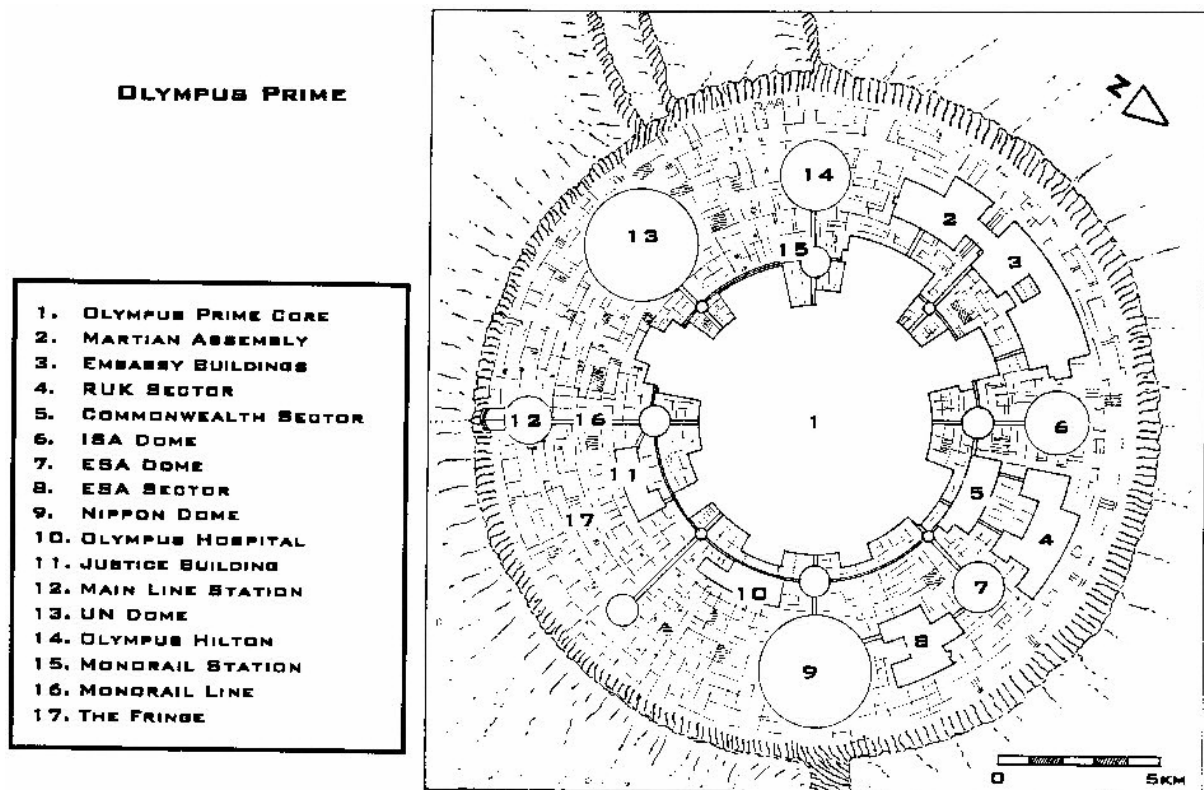
The New Frontier - the new colonies opening up on Luna, Mars, Jupiter and in the Asteroid Belt are a bit like the 21st Century version of the Old West. A wealth of opportunity exists for the skilled solo, netrunner, nomad, cop, techie and/or corporate flunkie. So what if you've mortgaged

yourself to the hilt to set up your first work/mining station? Word is you can make your money back in your first six months out in the Belt (as long as you can keep alive long enough to make it to the bank).

A Great Place to Hide - The players have finally bitten off more than they can handle, and really pissed off a MAJOR Corporation. Every second Solo on the planet now has their portrait, retina print and/or matrix identifier pinned to the side of his/her smart gun; the PCs' car/house/dog just got taken out by a mini-nuke; that secret half- million EB you had put away "Tor a rainy day" just got lifted by a Corporately-funded netrunner. Get the picture, choomba? Now might be a really good time to take that off-world trip you promised yourself. Not all of the Corporations have the same hold out in the Dark as they do on Earth (at least, not yet). S'gotta be safer than where you are now, hasn't it? (Conversely, the PCs could be the "hunters", and the trail they've been following suddenly takes a significant detour.)

Power Play - Got a healthy hankering for some heavy fire power? Does the thought of slipping into a tight Assisted Combat Personnel Armour suit make your players go all squishy inside? No problem - join the RUK Space Marines ('ere we go, 'ere we go...), travel to distant planets, see exotic spaceships, meet colourful interplanetary troublemakers and then blow the living CRAP out of all of them!!

Making a Difference - It may be too late to save the Earth (although there are those who still think the battle can be won), but we still have time to ensure we don't make the same mistakes in the rest of the Solar System. Whether you are part of the team that is determined to turn Mars into a green wonderland, or one of those willing to give your life to ensure that the planets stay as nature created them, one thing is for sure - it isn't being done right at the moment. In the rush to exploit mineral riches for a resource-starved home planet, or the hasty terraforming of a world that has yet to be proved completely dead, the same mistakes are being made all over again. It's time to put a stop to it, whatever it takes.



OLYMPUS PRIME

The core of Olympus Prime is the huge multi- level building that was started 9 years ago as a large research station and fledgling colony. It has now expanded to a 20 level, kilometres across maze of mono-rail tubes, corridors, living quarters, malls, workshops and so on. An entire city jammed cheek by jowl.

Much of the core is separated into rough "national" boundaries. For example, the northern end of the core is RUK dominated, with many of their nationals living there. Other sectors are dominated by the Japanese, Americans, Europeans, Australians and so forth.

Lifestyles in Olympus Prime vary considerably. The wealthy and influential inhabit the upper levels, often with polarised windows showing the bright sky above. Mid levels are the domain of the minor executives, government officials, well-off workers and so forth. The lowest levels are the home of the factory workers, farm hands and miners. As you might expect, the deeper you go in Olympus, the harder life gets.

Around the almost orderly core of Olympus are the spokes, the monorail transport corridors mainly flanked by rammed-soil buildings and greenhouses. The gaps between these eight spokes is generally made up of more buildings and further out there are cheap pressure domes.

In the outer regions of the city are the various company and public landing pads for planes, airships and skimmers. About 5 kilometres out along the spokes, there is the ring rail that circles the city. Beyond them is the Olympus Fringe, a shanty city of cheap domes, bubbles and rammed-soil homes. Through this mess travels the main hub-line, providing the link between the farms, starport, manufactories and mining bases with the main city.

Martian Assembly: these new buildings are the grandest ever constructed on Mars. Built from a selection of Martian sands and minerals, the interior and exterior glow with a thousand hues (actually 87 according to the guide books) and visiting dignitaries and tourists alike are awed by its lofty halls and spacious chambers. Despite its grandiose design, the Assembly building can withstand external missile attacks and has a sophisticated security system layered throughout its levels. The Martians feel a lot of pride in the seat of their Government, although Red Sword have called it "Rainbow Vomit" and openly declared their intent to blow it apart.

Embassy Buildings: all the major nations and corporations of Earth and Luna have embassy staff and offices located here. The upper levels are dedicated to the personal living quarters of the dignitaries and executives, with the mid levels housing the offices and reception rooms. At the bottom levels are the cramped quarters and workrooms of the junior staff and minor executives.

The Fringe: when you can't actually afford to live on Mars, but you find yourself here anyway, you live in the Olympus Fringe. Mars is not a world for those who are unemployed or work on the edge of society. Yet they have come to Mars anyway and need to live somewhere. This is where.

Unlike the core of Olympus, the Fringe has no central building to contain it. It is scattered between hundreds of small domes, houses, cheap malls and pressure tents. Linking them are cobbled together tubes, underground tunnels and even open walkways. Law enforcement is nearly non-existent in the Fringe. Death is often as not caused by a blowout during some shooting match as by the bullets themselves.

The Olympus Fringe is home to many of the renegade groups on Mars. and it is here that many of the new "recruits" are signed up. It is also in the Fringe where the first real face of Martian culture is being born. Its markets are legendary across Mars. As they say, if it isn't for sale in the Fringe, it hasn't been made yet.

In the Fringe, everyone still remembers The Blow Out of '35 where a cheap dome collapsed on the shanty, sending four hundred people flying into the poisonous Martian atmosphere. The authorities try and tell you that since then the Fringe has started to become a more regulated area. A lot of what they say about it still being rough and cut is hype. Sure it is. If you believe anything the suits say.

OLYMPUS

Location: Olympus Mons

Founded: 2028

Population: 1.5 million + 25,000 transients

Industries: Mineral Processing, Food, Textiles, Domes, Education, Government, Aerospace and Surface Vehicles.

Olympus, City of Dreams. Home to one and a half million people (officially - in reality around two million call this crowded pot home). It is often said: Mars is Olympus, and Olympus is Mars.

Olympus is a city growing at a tremendous rate. Just under a decade ago it was a European research station, all be it a pretty big one. Today it's a sprawl of domes, buildings, monorails, landing pads, greenhouses, more domes, ruins and shanties. All built within the caldera of the great volcano, Olympus Mons. Ten years of haphazard building under the best of intentions has meant that Olympus is damn impressive. It's as messy as a third world boom city back on Earth, but this boom is showing no signs of abating.

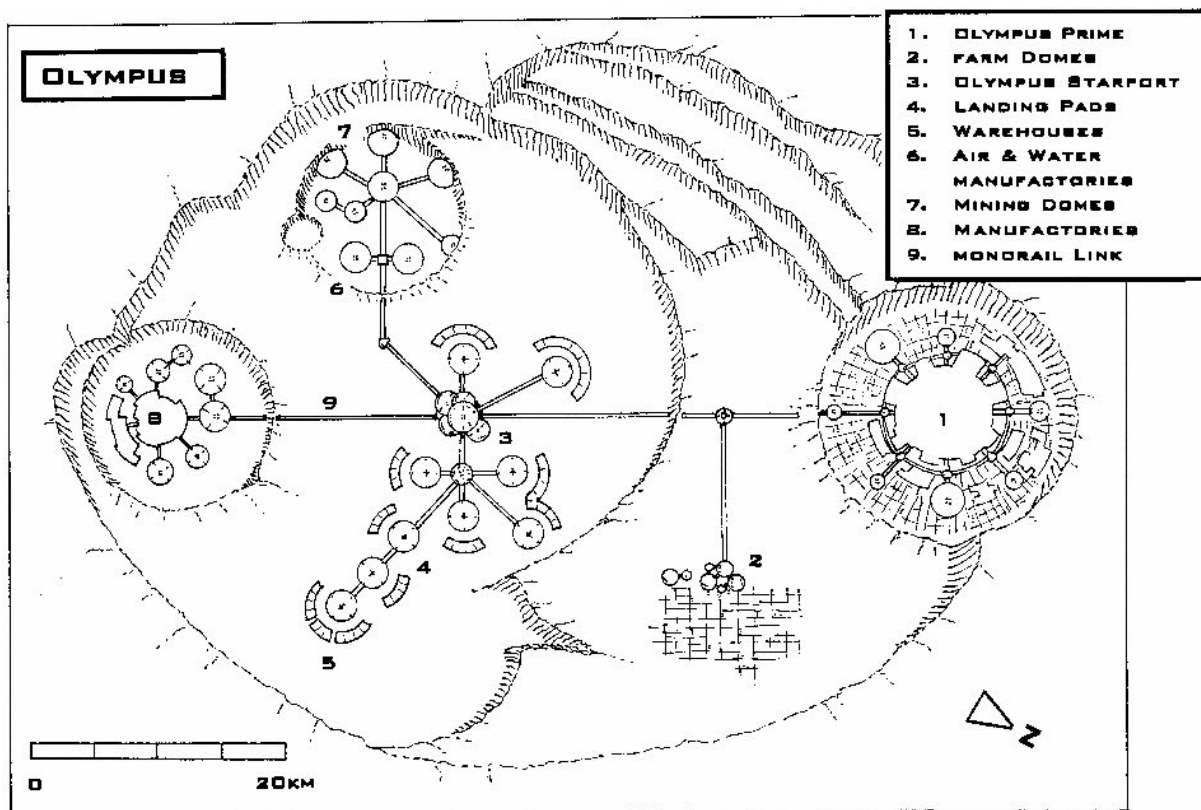
Olympus has three main sectors. In the northern section of the main caldera lies Olympus Prime, home to the majority of the official citizens of Olympus. Here are the residential quarters, malls, workshops, embassies and the buildings that house the Martian Assembly.

In the central plain of the caldera lies the Olympus Starport, with landing pads for off-world ships and huge warehousing facilities. This umbilical cord connects Olympus to the solar system; most trade to and from Mars passes through here, a fact not lost on Red Storm.

On a plateau between the Starport and Olympus Prime are the domed farms that feed much of Olympus and the Asteroid Belt. Considerable effort has been spent on developing high yield grains and vegetables to enable Mars to be self sufficient. Over 30% of their food production is exported to colonies in the Asteroid Belt and the Jovian system.

The southern sub-caldera contains the manufactories that employ many Olympians. A wide variety of products are built here, from both local and imported materials. A growing industry in surface and space vehicles has given a much needed boost to Olympus prosperity.

Finally, the western sub-caldera houses the mining bases which tunnel deep into the heart of Olympus Mons. Much of the main caldera has mine tunnels and shafts running beneath it, but beneath the mining bases are literally thousands of kilometres of machine-drilled holes. Located here also are the water and air manufacturing plants which supply the majority of Olympus' needs.



FACTIONS OF MARS

Red Storm: in the wake of the rush to terraform Mars can be found those who wish to keep the planet as it is, in its natural state. One of these groups is known as Red Storm.

A strong para-military organisation, the leadership believes the Martian environment should be kept as close as possible to its natural state. They actively oppose terraforming efforts, even going as far as terrorism. As the activities of the terraforming groups increase so too does Red Storm's actions. Every month the damage and the number of innocents killed gets higher and higher.

Red Storm is lead by Amanda Jacobs, a geologist who came to Mars and fell in love with its untouched beauty. She is extremely charismatic, having gathered around her hundreds of dedicated young men and women.

The Green Path: as much as Red Storm (and the splinter group Red Sword) want the surface kept as it was, Green Path want to bring it alive with plants, animals and a human-viable atmosphere. Their members mostly live in small communities where they develop new bacteria, algae, plants and insects that can survive in the thin Martian atmosphere. Naturally, they have supporters scattered

throughout many of the corporate terraforming projects currently underway across the red planet. While the membership is very passive, well equipped security teams can be found in each domed community, a necessity due to the activities of Red Sword and some cells of Red Storm. Much of the funding for these facilities come from multinationals and government sources.

While no formal leadership structure is evident in the organisation, it is thought that Dawn Attenborough is the most well known and respected of Green Path members. She is often called upon to act as the (somewhat reluctant) spokeswoman for Green Path and it's aims.

Red Sword: several years ago a splinter group based around an expelled Red Storm radical (Mario Vokturi) was formed. Red Sword advocates nothing less than the removal of all humanity from Mars, and works towards this end diligently. They are violent, unbalanced and completely unpredictable. Luckily for the settlements of Mars they are supposedly low on resources, and membership. Red Storm has often condemned their even more radical offspring, yet the ties between the two factions cannot be denied.

The Cult of Mars: as more of the young of Mars are disaffected by the emerging society (largely dominated by capitalist influences which praise mineral exploitation above all else) many are turning to radical groups and gangs. One such group is the Cult of Mars.

The followers of the cult have revived the worshipping of Mars, the god of war. Often seen in settlements clad in red armour and clothing, they carry the biggest guns their money can buy, or their hands can steal. The cultists make vicious fighters, and half a dozen will bring down the best Solo.

Officially the cult is outlawed, but enforcing such laws is difficult in the resource stretched settlements of the surface. The biggest chapters are found in Olympus, especially active in the Fringe domes and malls.

Each chapter is lead by a Warmaster. This individual leads the group in daily prayers and can also act as a fixer for work for members, generally in the role of bodyguards.

Independent Mars: this is a loosely affiliated body of members from the many colonies, settlements, mines and cities on Mars. The group is a passive network which is working towards complete Martian independence. They were instrumental in the establishment of the Martian Assembly, the first step towards independence.

IM is non-violent in their approach, preferring negotiation to acts of revolution. This pacifist attitude has not earned them the respect of the more radical elements of Mars, but it has given them a willing ear amongst the Corps and Government embassies.

Recently IM has picked up more support with rumours of Terran governments looking at the possibilities of using their bases on Mars as a penal colony. As a follow on from this. elements of IM have been suspected of becoming militant and even talking about revolt.

Looks like the rumours were true...

WHILE YOU WERE AWAY.

A week is a long time in the Hyperspatial Realm...

As the PCs begin their journey into the Theodorsen Gateway (see Postcard From Space - Issue 24 for an idea of how the first stage of this journey might begin) they will have no idea of the coming hostilities on Mars. The day after the PCs' space vessel enters the Gateway to Mars, Amanda Jacobs makes her threat to the populace of Olympus through a simultaneous broadcast on all communications media (at least, the threat is attributed to Amanda Jacobs). Two minutes later, explosive devices are detonated at three separate locations - at one of the manufactories, the Olympus Starport and in one of the mining domes. In all, 37 people are killed, 173 injured.

UN Forces respond quickly. While the UN mandate restricts their actions (the events are largely considered an internal security problem at this stage, and thus beyond the direct involvement of the UN), they do have the power to intervene with force if there appears to be a serious threat to the welfare of the colony. As a consequence, UN Marshall Wong immediately institutes Operation Wind Chime. In a well-rehearsed military exercise, all essential life support facilities are secured within 30 minutes by UN forces (RUK troops, seconded under a standing agreement). With these vital objectives secured UN forces will take no further action unless attacked themselves, or at the direct request of the Martian Assembly. This last event is unlikely though, as failure to (internally) control this situation is sure to seriously affect any chances of Martian independence being granted.

Over the next three days more random terrorist attacks are made. The resulting panic quickly spreads to the fringe dwellers. They are rightly concerned for their safety, as hardly any of the buildings in the fringe have any safety measures fitted - if you blow a hole in one of these domes, there aren't any automatic sealing procedures, rescue teams or emergency EVAC suits to help you

Key Players in Olympus:

Mayor Eunice Joyce: Mayor Joyce is the principal local official of Olympus. She rules the diverse city with a firm hand, and has frequently been denounced by the Martian Assembly and the media for her actions. Most famous for her speech against Red Sword, when she ordered the survivors of a terrorist strike team to be "evicted" from Olympus via the nearest airlock.

Corporate (INT 7, COOL 6) Oratory 9, Accting 5, Education 8

Lazlo Jacques ("Three Eyes"): no-one dares call Mr Jacques "Three Eyes" to his face, or at least no-one alive has. He is the most powerful fixer in the Fringe, and by default in Olympus. His unusual name stems from his third cyberoptic eye fitted in the centre of his forehead. Why he has three eyes is a mystery, although he has been seen to have a cybernetic arm and speedware implants. Mr Jacques' influence extends through all levels of Olympus society. He can be visiting a wounded gunboy in the Fringe at noon and dining with the RUK ambassador that evening in the core.

See Stats included in text.

Kumi Kazamuri, Media Star: once a little known Media reporter, she had the luck to be working in the Belt on assignment when the Pirate War erupted two years ago. This earned her immediate system wide fame, and the undying wrath of the RUK and Commonwealth Navies. On Olympus, she produces and stars in a nightly media extravaganza known as "Kumi Live"

See Stats included in text.

Rajit Singh ("Songbird"): born to a Captain in the Commonwealth Navy, Singh spent his early life on Mars. He soon grew to love the desolate wastes of the red planet, and fell in with Red Storm. When Vokturi split from them and formed Red Sword, Singh followed and became his most trusted lieutenant. Singh gained the name Songbird as a joke - he is quite tone deaf and speaks in a voice which raises and lowers inflections randomly. None the less, he has become a seasoned killer and enjoys his name for the irony it represents.

Solo (REF 11, COOL 9) Combat Sense 8, Handgun 5

Commissioner Edward Fisk: head of the Olympus Security Forces, Fisk is responsible for all Police and Judicial functions. He was once a UN Marshall, but three years ago was offered the post of Olympus Security Commissioner and took it eagerly. Fisk is suspected to be involved with much of the illegal activity around Olympus and even Mars, not the least being drugs and gun-running. Unfortunately, anyone willing to testify against Fisk has met untimely deaths.

Cop (INT 5, COOL 4) Authority 7, Interrogation 6

UN Marshall Linda Wong: most people expect UN Marshalls to be big, burly individuals. Linda Wong is a shade over 5 ft tall, lightly built (though athletic) and softly spoken. Except on the topic of Commissioner Fisk. Then she gets fired up, and you begin to realise the strength of purpose that has made her a worthy supporter of UN laws. Twice the Luna champion in Aikido, her transfer to Olympus was seen by some as a demotion. Not to Linda.

Cop (INT 9, EMP 8) Authority 11, Martial Arts 6

Heinrik Schwarz, Warmaster: before he came to Mars, Heinrik was a Security Trooper with the ESA. He had come to Mars to explore a new frontier, but found the same old limits and rules holding him back. He had tried to find a way out, yet he felt that every move seemed to be countered by some damn law or restriction. His frustration lost him his job in Olympus, and he ended up in the Fringe. Then he met a Warmaster of the growing Mars cult, and quickly rose to being the Warmaster of a Fringe gang. He has over 50 disciples in his chapter, and regularly runs "jobs" for Three-Eyes.

Solo (REF 9, COOL 6) Melee 7, SMG 4, Stealth 5

out. Within a day, riots are widespread, and internal security forces are forced to make a proactive (read lethal) response. Bad move. SEE MARS AND DIE...

The first the player characters know about the trouble at Olympus (there has been, to this stage, a fairly successful media blackout over Olympus) is when the transport shuttle they are travelling in is hit by a surface-to-air missile. Unfortunately for the PCs, their shuttle has been chosen by a Red Sword strike team as today's target.

The shuttle shakes violently from the impact, and then all hell breaks loose. Alarms sound, lights flash, steam gushes and an annoyingly calm computer voice constantly broadcasts "Warning. Hull breach ... Complete atmosphere loss imminent ... Please evacuate immediately ... Warning. Hull..." (GMs can add to the effect of this scenario by playing, at full volume, the "evacuation" scenes from either the Alien or Aliens movie in the background).

By now the players should be wishing that they had listened to your prelaunch safety talk. And while, like many airline stewardesses must do, you might feel a strong urge to just let them die, it's probably for the best if you let them make it to one of the escape pods. Doesn't mean you have to let them take all of their luggage (and its very important contents) with them though, does it?

The escape pod will come down somewhere near the manufactories in the southern sub-caldera. Unfortunately a rescue is not yet possible as the threat of further surface-to-air attacks has to be neutralised first (a task that is currently underway. after a surface scan from a RUK destroyer in near orbit). What a really bad time to get a pressure leak in the escape pod! ("Hey, shuttle companies have gotta save a few EBs here and there you know. and nobody

expects one of these things to ever have to be used"). Time to put on those EVAC suits (with the 30 minute air supply) that came with the shuttle and make a break for the nearest airlock.

If the PCs take things easily by not running, or trying to carry too much extra equipment, they should make it to an entrance to the nearest manufactory with a couple of minutes of air to spare. If they indulge in strenuous activity, however, then their air is going to run out and there isn't any buddy breathing allowed in these conditions. To illustrate the point perhaps the shuttle also contained some other passengers, one of whom suffers for his desire to drag his heavy suitcase with him. Not a very pleasant way to go, but it serves as a valuable first lesson for the newbies.

MARTIAN ENQUIRER

After making it to the airlock, the PCs have their first encounter with Kumi Kazamuri who immediately shoves a microphone, strobe lights and holo-camera in the PCs' faces. "So how does it feel to be targeted by Red Sword? What do you know that has them scared? Is it true that you were seen with (insert male/female holostar's name here)?" Kumi is one aggressive media personality, used to getting her way and will bait the PCs until she gets a response ("The citizens of Olympus have a right to know what's going on!"). A violent response probably wouldn't be a good idea though, as Kumi is always attended by her own squad of well paid, highly skilled and very loyal bodyguards. So much for coming to Mars to hide...

*Kumi Kazamuri,
Media (INT 8, EMP 6)
Persuasion 5, Seduction 5,
Interview 6, Credibility 4*

Once the PCs have been processed, and any minor injuries seen to by med-techs, they are free to go about their business. If the PCs make any enquiries as to the return of their equipment they are advised that all cargo on the shuttle was completely destroyed, and that salvage of the escape pods contents is regarded as an extremely low priority. Of course, the PCs are welcome to try a recovery mission on their own, but will find that someone has already beaten them to it.

Adventure Hook - having the news is worth nothing if no-one ever gets to see it. Influential as she is, Kumi is frustrated by the current media blackout, and would pay well to have her news vids smuggled out of Olympus. Be warned though, Kumi is being watched by more than her loyal fans.

Regardless of the reason for the PCs journeying to Mars, they will probably have to make their way to Olympus Prime. It is here, or in the surrounding fringe, that most of the PCs' contacts will be staying/made. The outer areas of Olympus are heavily geared towards industry, mining and transport, not accommodation and leisure. Besides, the characters might now be without any of their equipment, clothing and/or money. So unless the PCs have urgent business in one of the manufactories, farms, mines or the Starport, they should take the monorail to Olympus Prime.

If the characters were not afforded a view of Olympus as they made their way towards planet fall (no pun intended), they will get a pretty good look at it from the monorail as it travels the 50 kilometres from the manufactories to Olympus Prime. Regardless what the player characters might personally feel about it, Olympus Prime is still an impressive sight. (GMs are advised to think in terms of the movies Blade Runner, Judge Dredd and Total Recall when describing the central core of Olympus Prime). As the monorail stops at the various transit stations, the signs of obvious conflict can be brought to the PCs' attention. Separatist, cult and other graffiti is painted on the walls; internal security checks are frequent, with guards armed with both lasers and conventional (flechette, bolt-throwers, gyrojets) firearms; even recent blast damage can be seen being repaired. The passengers on the monorail also seem to be on edge, perhaps expecting an attack on the link or one of the monorails itself.

This thought proves somewhat prophetic, as the monorail suddenly pulls to a stop. Passengers are advised that the main line station to Olympus Prime has been closed due to a bomb threat, and that they have the option of waiting on the monorail, or making their own way through the Fringe. Many passengers take the second option, not wishing to be "sitting ducks" on the stationary monorail, and disembark to make their way through transit corridors to the fringe. (GMs - These sorts of diversions and inconveniences should occur often, at least while the unrest continues.)

STRANGE ACQUAINTANCE

While the PCs are making their way through the transit corridor, they are given a violent demonstration of what fringe living can do to an individual. One of the passengers from the monorail, a particularly anxious looking character, suddenly draws a flechette pistol and pumps four rounds into a very ordinary clerical worker, screaming hysterically "Get away from me you bastard! Stop following me! You're never gonna get me, you hear?"

Adventure Hook - it's only much later that the PCs discover that there is a Priority One alert out for this guy, with a substantial reward for his capture (alive) and presentation to the nearest RUK military installation. Have the PCs run into him again. After a suitably difficult chase and possibly violent confrontation, have them capture him. This guy remains desperate to escape, convinced that being handed over to the RUK is tantamount to getting the death penalty. Once he realises that escape is no longer possible though, he becomes resigned to his fate, and tells the PCs his story.

He then turns his gun on the general crowd, not firing, but telling everyone to get back, yelling *"You all want to know my secret, don't you? Well, I'm not going to tell any of you. It's my secret, and they want to kill me for it, but I'm not going to let them."* Trained solos will realise that this guy has really lost it. He's probably juiced to the eyeballs with 'dorphs, and will shoot anyone who even looks the

wrong way at him. Best to just give this whacko what he wants... room to get away.

His name is Robert Cockington (*"call me Cockeyed Bob"*), and he used to be one of the best freelance netrunners that money could buy. Six months ago he was employed by a front-man for an unidentified corp (although he has strong reason to believe it was the IEC) to break into the "blue sky" section of the British Space Commission (BSC), the owners of the Gateway technology. He was instructed to extract any information that could assist in any "speculative investment" by his employer. Incredibly, and he still has no real idea how he did it, Cockington actually broke into the internal security grid for New Buckingham Palace. Before his intrusion was detected he had managed to copy some random computer files.

Robert Cockington,
Netrunner (INT 8)
Interface 6, System Knowledge 10.
Programming 7, Cyberdeck Design 9

Upon later examination of those files. Cockington made a discovery that was to lead to his present status as the RUK's most wanted man. Regardless of how much the PCs cajole him however, he will not reveal what he found, stating that it is now the only bargaining chip he has left. His copies of the files are very well hidden and he hopes that he may be able to negotiate his release in exchange for them. He will not give the location of the copies to the PCs.

If the PCs hand Cockington over to the RUK, he is immediately whisked away by a Royal Marines security team (which is somewhat unusual, given that serving RUK troops on Olympus come from the British Combined Orbital Forces). Cockington has the last laugh on the "greedy" player characters, however. Just before the Royal Marines drag him away, Cockington yells to the PCs *"Don't forget what I told you boys! Do you hear? It's all up to you now!"* Quick thinking PCs should realise that Cockington has just dumped them right in it, especially when the security team Commander demands that the PCs also come in to *"help us with our enquiries"*. Surprisingly though, it is Cockington himself who provides just enough of a distraction for the PCs to make a quick break for it (throwing himself at a couple of his guards), and the PCs should just get away (but feel free to wound one or two of them) amid a hail of flechette rounds. As they do so, they hear Cockington laughing hysterically, and screaming after them *"Enjoy the chase, mates! Enjoy the chase!"*

The PCs now find themselves on the wanted list. and with a number of serious questions yet to be answered. Where are Cockington's copies of the information, and what's on them that's so important? How did Cockington get through to New Buckingham Palace, one of the most secure security grids in all of the Solar System? Why are the Royal Marines involved, and not just conventional RUK forces? Who was his real employer, and what were they really after? And just how are the PCs going to get out of this mess?

MR FIX-IT

Lazlo Jacques,
Fixer (INT 9, COOL 7)
Resources 8, Intimidate
5, Streetdeal 6, Social 4

Eventually, the player characters are probably going to have to deal with Lazlo Jacques, or at least in the first instance, one of his employees. If they are wounded from their run-in with the RM Security Team, or need something that you just can't buy off the shelf, or just wish to hire out their particular skills, then Lazlo Jacques is the best one to see. Of course, unless the PCs have built up some serious street cred, it's more likely that for the first few deals at least, they'll probably just work through an intermediary. If they prove their worth (by completing assigned tasks, or making large. regular repayments) then they will eventually come to the attention of Lazlo himself.

It would be fair to say that very little goes on in Olympus without Lazlo Jacques at least knowing about it, if not actually supplying both sides. To meet him is certainly unnerving, and not just because of his cyberoptic implant. He always manages to remain quite calm and composed, especially while ordering your execution. The last thing you ever want to hear him say is 'That's very

Campaign Hook

Dealing with Lazlo could prove a gold mine of opportunity for the PCs. He is capable of providing the PCs with whatever they need, from weapons to security passes to backyard biosculpting. While his minions will most usually accept cash up front as payment for goods and services, Lazlo is more likely to demand "favours" in return for his personal help. Here are a few suggested jobs that the PCs could be asked to undertake as recompense.

Rumour - *"Hey. I heard from a contact of mine that *Three Eyes* has had more than an eye and an arm fixed, you know what I'm saying?"* Comment attributed to Zoltan Grimal, small-time fixer, just two hours before his disappearance.

Pick-Up - the PCs are given the co-ordinates of the next illegal weapons/drugs/cyberwear drop. Due in two days, the drop will be made in a nearby (200 kms distant) natural chasm. The PCs are provided with fake requisition and authorisation forms for a planetary skimmer, the Mars version of an AV-4. Their cover is that they are posing as a mining survey team. The mission should be a straight-in, straight-out pick up. Pity that nothing ever seems to go that easily...

Repo Men - someone has disappointed Mr Jacques, and you know how he feels about that. The PCs are given a simple instruction - frag Jennifer Martin, a socialator at the ESA dome. She's fallen behind on her payments for the last time. Sad thing is, she's not only young and very beautiful, she borrowed the money to keep her 4 year old daughter in brain-dance in the Olympus medical facility while she had a serious condition corrected by nano-surgery. Jennifer's is a typical story in the colonies, and one the PCs are going to come across more and more often, the longer they continue to work for Lazlo. (It's guilt-trip time for your players, GMs.) Do the PCs do the dirty deed, or do they try to come to some other arrangement, and run the risk of "disappointing" Mr Jacques themselves? Who said life was easy in 2037?

All's Fair - if the PCs have a runner among them, they can be asked to try and break into the financial records of one of Lazlo Jacques's main competitors, April Shower, a Hong Kong bom fixer with a strong connection to the Triads. Lazlo would like to know who her main supplier is, so that he can have a friendly word in the right ear (probably one of his RUK contacts) in the hope of having that supplier receive some unwelcome attention. Assuming the PCs are successful, then they could suddenly find themselves the target of some vengeful triad assassins, keen on a retributive strike against those who have dishonoured their leader.

Down Among the Dead Men - PCs who possess more technical skills could be tasked with trying to discover what's going on in Mine Shaft E31. Apparently, there was some sort of chemical spill down there, because the whole section of the mine has been designated a no-go area while it's being cleaned up. So why was an Arasaka bio-chemist spotted entering the mine with some Corporate big-wigs? Those Corp guys never leave Olympus Prime unless there's some monetary gain in the offing.

Mind you, the PCs could always just end up being employed by one of Lazlo Jacques's rivals, or operating even more "officially" - as a black-ops hit team. Just don't let any of the fringe dwellers find out who they're working for. Lazlo has many friends on Olympus. Powerful friends...

disappointing..." as it usually means it really will be the last thing you hear him (or anyone else) ever say. If you always do the right thing by Jacques however, then he can be one of the best contacts you could ever hope to make.

Lazlo no longer has any real need for monetary wealth per se, other than as a convenient means of doing business (ie he keeps a few million EB lying around for those that prefer such a "vulgar form of payment"). Lazlo much prefers to deal in power, information and social credit.

NEXT ISSUE...

We continue our coverage of Mars, with further background information on the other Martian colonies. And you think Olympus has its problems...

We'll also provide details on some of the other pivotal figures in the current unrest on Mars. You'll also get plenty of new scenario and campaign hooks for your own SolSpace players, this time centering on both the terrorist and terraforming groups.

See you in two months,
Chombatta...

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BLOOD RED

MORE FACTS & SECRETS OF THE BIG RED ONE REVEALED
BY PAUL MITTING, LEE SHEPPARD & COLIN TABER

"I'm telling you, Johan, this sort of growth just isn't possible in the time frame we've allowed.

I mean, look at these latest bio-readouts. The figures just don't make any sense. The growth to nutrient quotient is more than 12%, and what's this anomaly here?

Hang on.... Oh, Jesus Christ! I know what it is, I know what it is! Get me Doctor Muir - NOW!

And damn scientific protocol, Johan, turn that FRACKING recorder off..."

- Segment of what is believed to be an illegally intercepted standard scientific log recording, found on the body of a suspected Red Storm activist.

Last issue we provided the first hunk of background info on Mars for our approved Cyberpunk SolSpace campaign. Concentrating on Olympus, the largest colony on the big red one, we also served up a number of exciting adventure and campaign hooks to help kick start your campaign.

In this issue's instalment of SolSpace we take a gander at the other Martian colonies, and reveal some of the causes of the current "unrest" on this troubled planet.

A GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND...

Mars has played host to humanity now for over 20 years. In that time a growing multi-cultural population has taken advantage of the red planet's massive mineral reserves. In a wave of pioneering 3rd exploration not seen since the nineteenth century of Earth, humanity grabbed the Martian opportunity with both hands and beat it into shape.

It has been agreed by the United Nations (and thus a majority of Terran governments) and the Martian Assembly to terraform the red planet. So far this has occurred in a haphazard way that has seen duplication of projects, methods and waste. Slowly a consensus is being formed between Terran governments, one that the UN will soon present to the Martian Assembly for approval.

The major stumbling block to this coordinated terraforming plan has been the efforts of Red Storm and, to a lesser extent, those of the radical splinter group, Red Sword. Until recently however, the targets of these two eco-terrorist groups have usually been restricted to attacks on mining, terraforming and industrial complexes and personnel. As last issue's events so graphically showed, however, this policy seems to have changed. Following an all-media announcement attributed to Amanda Jacobs, terrorist attacks were made on a number of "civilian" locations within the boundaries of Olympus Base.

While some of these attacks can be directly linked to the two major eco-terrorist groups, many others are in fact the work of some of the lunatic fringe groups that also exist within the Olympus Colony. Whether those groups are politically motivated (Independent Mars) or just a ragtag collection of vicious thugs and punks (The Cult of Mars), all have chosen the current confusion to make their own plays for power, thereby adding to the chaos. Many of the so-called "innocent" victims of the unrest have since actually turned out to be rival gang members, or fixers with a less tolerant loan repayment plan. More than ever, it is getting harder and harder to know who you can trust on this frontier world.

This is something that Amanda Jacobs found out for herself only recently, after she came into possession of some information that was soon to have major repercussions.

A SPANNER IN THE WORKS

Amanda Jacobs knew that Dawn Attenborough had begun to have phenomenal success with her work in Sherwood Canyon. Although tight security blankets the entire project (the very best that Corporate funding can supply), it soon became obvious that something big was happening in the valley. The simple fact that the number of secure transmissions between "The Canyon" and Olympus had increased ten-fold was enough incentive for Amanda to try and insert a spy into the project.

Amanda Jacobs,
Tech (INT 9, EMP 8)
Geology 5, Leadership 6,
Martian Survival 4

While the insertion was successful, the extraction was far from perfect. The spy was detected during the escape attempt and gunned down before he could pass on the information he'd uncovered. His death only

served to confirm Amanda's suspicions though, and inspired an act of desperation that she is sure to regret for a very long time to come. She contacted Mario Vokturi and asked him for help.

Popular rumour has it that Amanda and Mario Vokturi were once lovers, but split when their mutual desire to see Mars kept as natural as possible took widely divergent paths. A documentary made last year by Kumi Kazamuri (see issue 26 for her details) even claimed that Jacobs had given birth to a child by Vokturi, and that the child lives with a guardian somewhere in Olympus. Like most of

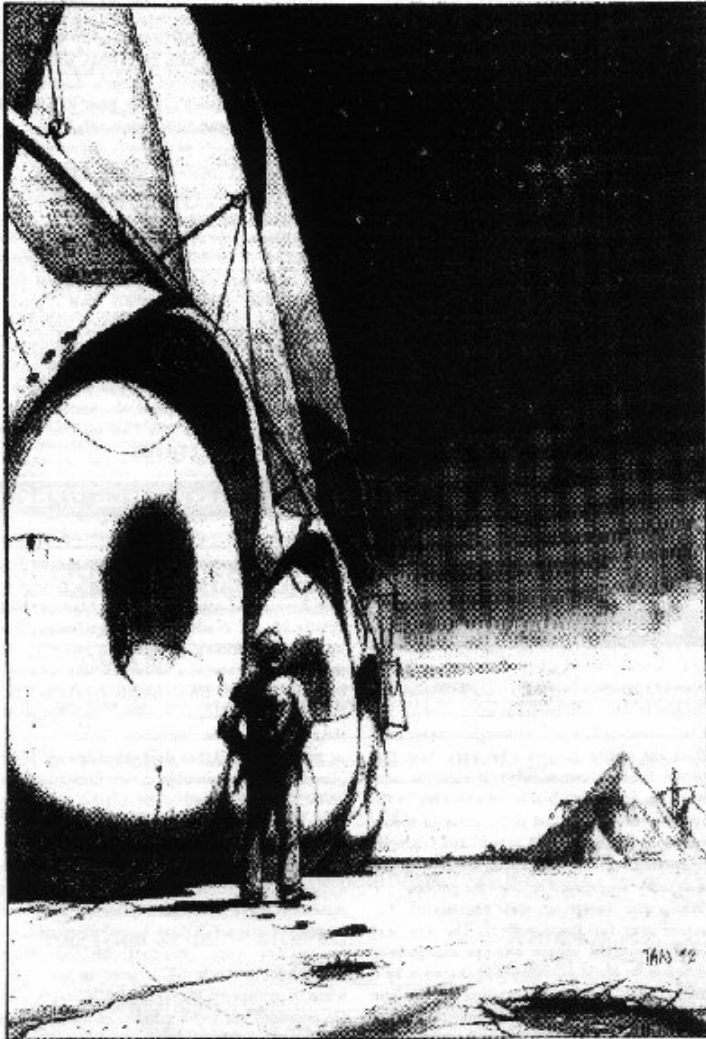
Mario Vokturi,
Nomad (COOL 6, REF 8)
Endurance 7, Intimidate 5,
Zero-G Combat 6

Kumi's documentaries. however, this appears to have been 10% hard fact, 40% conjecture and 50% pure media hype.

Nevertheless, when Amanda Jacobs finally approached Mario Vokturi with her suspicions about Sherwood Canyon, in the hope that the Red Sword leader might have his own information sources, he decided to use his own tried and true methods to obtain some answers - kidnapping, torture and murder. Once the right communications officer had been taken, and the right amount of physical persuasion applied, the general thrust of what was going on in The Canyon was no longer restricted to official channels.

YOU SCRATCH OUR BACK.

The information Mario was able to extract suggests that Dawn Attenborough's project team may have found something in the Martian soil (full details are not available) that significantly speeds up the terraforming process. So much so that a terraformed Mars now comes within what could only



be described (in Corporate-speak) as a "short to mid-term investment window". In other words, if the successes of the Sherwood Canyon project can be maintained and then duplicated elsewhere on the planet, it may be possible to terraform Mars within 25 to 30 years, instead of the original projections of 70 to 90 years.

While this news was certainly upsetting to the eco-terrorist leaders, there was worse to come. It appears that some members of the Martian Assembly have subsequently struck deals with a number of powerful Earth-bound Corporations. In return for their support of the Martian Independence move (ie. a word in the right ear when it comes to the crucial UN vote), certain Corporations are to be granted exclusive rights to develop their own sections of the planet, once the terraforming process is completed. Given the heavy profit incentive to be gained from the acceptance of these conditions, most Corporations invited to show their support have eagerly complied.

This in some way, helps to explain the change in tactics that the two eco-terrorist groups have now undertaken. If the terrorists can cause enough disruption, the Martian Assembly will be forced to call on the UN for help. And while UN forces remain on the planet, it is

highly unlikely that Mars will be granted its independence (even with the support of the Corps); if the Martian Assembly alone cannot control troublemakers in Olympus, how can it guarantee the safety of colonists over the entire planet?

THE BATTLEGROUND

The Green Valley: Mars is an old world, as old as Earth. Such a world has its own myths and legends, even though they may have only come into the telling in the past few decades. One of these myths tells of a place amidst the north polar ice cap, a valley full of abundant living green, filled by agents of a druidic society from the RUK who have been creating their own piece of Eden under the guise of terraforming and biotechnology experiments. The truth according to the stories is that they found a series of thermal springs only a few short kilometres from the polar cap's edge, and at a depth that put them less than a hundred meters under the ice. A series of small fractures and vapour chimneys is what gave a RUK terraforming working group the idea of using the area as a base, lab and nursery for the much larger terraforming projects that are envisaged for the red planet.

The original program was headed by Dawn Attenborough, but has since been taken over by a school of scientists with druidic connections. They have, over the past decade, changed what was originally a lab with a series of interconnected domes into a truly wondrous place, now known across Mars as 'The Green Valley'. The Valley is both hard to get to and very secretive. Its location and research has the highest classification.

Today the Valley is the first self-supporting environment on Mars. The thing that nurses this fragile ecosystem is the domes. Even should they collapse, however, it is estimated that ten percent of plant life in the valley would still survive in the bitter conditions, mainly the hardy varieties of oaks, lavenders, elderberry and a thousand types of algae that have adapted to the harsh environment.

The valley is a prime target of the eco-terrorists faction. Red Storm has covertly tried to completely destroy the valley on at least one occasion. But this amazing place is the stuff of legends. You can't kill a legend.

Sherwood Canyon: When Dawn Attenborough was stripped of her office in the Green Valley project she moved on with those who would follow her to establish and head a corporately funded terraforming centre. While this project initially failed to produce the outright success of the Green Valley project, its nature, history and recent successes now make it look far more relevant to the future of the red planet. While the druids in the Green Valley worship the Mother on Mars, in the place known as "the Canyon" an alliance of multinationals sponsor the emergence of dome covered wonderlands of greenery and a truly determined group of people willing to die for the cause of greening Mars. The talk might all be of Red

<p><i>Dawn Attenborough,</i> MedTech (INT 10, TECH 6) Botany 7, Expert (Planetology) 5, First Aid 4</p>

Storm, but that's because no one has noticed the Green Cyclone arriving.

This group holds over five hundred people in its tented canyons. Here can be found a series of specialised communities of scientists who are working on establishing and releasing varieties of flora that can survive the rigours of Mars. From algae, to fungi and small colonising shrubs for the half Mars, half Earth environments that make up the Canyon. They are, like Green Valley, reasonably self-sufficient, although the canyon does still require an artificial water supply.

Red Storm is particularly active in trying to gather further information on the base and its projects. Consequently, the Canyon is very heavily defended by corporate security.

Moria: Moria is but a nickname for BHP-Utah mine site 270-East, the solar system's biggest (ever) platinum mine. The nickname was originally a handy media label (inspired by the incredible worth of the mine), but the label has stuck and is now in common use. According to popular rumour, BHP-Utah has discovered a deposit of such size that they have been forced to ration its release and sale so as not to cause a veritable collapse in the mineral's price throughout SolSpace.

The mine at the south-eastern exit of Valles Marineris reputedly holds the best working conditions to be found on Mars, the site also enjoys the highest morale of any mine in the solar system with the possible exception of Earth. All indicators point to the mine being a very rich deposit. Although the mine is very well guarded by a private security force, it has still been the target of three successful Red Storm actions.

In addition, the very first recorded action of the highly radical fringe group Red Sword was targeted at the living quarters and dome of the work site, resulting in 58 deaths four years ago. To date this anti-settlement operation has been the most successful directly attributed to Red Sword.

Eden: To some this is a misleading name, for it is actually the name for the base of Red Storm. This is not a place of sponsored terraforming, but a place of protected Martian ecology. Domed to keep out the new additions to the external Martian system from terraforming projects, this area is and will forever be a sample of the true pristine Martian environment, protected by a determined Red Storm.

THE OTHER MARTIAN COLONIES.

New London

Location: Phobos (moon)

Founded: 2028

Population: 750 Full time personnel with capacity for 500 more.

Industries: Ship building and repair.

RUK Naval Base. It is the largest Naval facility out of Earth orbit. It has a large garrison and incorporates a UN contingent.

Chryse Base

Location: Chryse Planitia

Founded: 2021

Population: 27,500

Industries: Mineral

Processing. Water.

This base was originally built as a joint US-Japanese venture, using nano- technology to fuse the Martian sand into structure walls, giving the original city a unique organic look. From a distance the domes and arcs of the city has a vague Giger-like appearance. A major industry of the city is the manufacture of nano-tech building factories, which can be air-shipped to the required site and commenced operations within 48 hours. These factories are always rented out with a tech crew, never sold.

Isidis Base

Location: Isidis Planitia

Founded: 2022

Population: 45,000

Industries: Medical Research and Manufacture, Genetic Research.

Isidis Base was built and managed by the ESA. In 2025, early in its development, there was an attempted revolution by the colonists against ESA control. This was thwarted by local security forces and ever since Isidis has had a reputation as the most secure colony on Mars. The largely European occupants are industrious and on the surface happy with their lives. However, popular rumour has it that the revolution just went deeper underground and a day of reckoning will come soon.

Isidis is also well known around Mars for its ground breaking work in developing viable flora and fauna for the Martian environment. Many of these still need partially controlled environments for survival, yet they are showing the way to other research teams. Rumours also abound since 2025 of the Isidis involvement in human genetic research and modification. This is of course denied, but why are there so many high security and concealed sections to Isidis?

New Tokyo

Location: Valles Marineris

Founded: 2034

Population: 35,000

Industries: Agriculture, Electronics, Plastics.

Similar to Polar City, New Tokyo is owned by a consortium of four major Japanese corps. Principal among these is Arasaka, who use the city as their prime off-Earth training centre and HQ. Also based here are some of their weapons and equipment manufacturing sites. The city has strict laws, enforced of course by Arasaka security troops. Although sited in a canal, with the city itself arrayed along both sides of the canal walls, there is also a substantial part of the city above ground on the land to either side. Located here are the huge agriculture domes, factory modules and landing pads. Topside is where the well known theme park "MarsWorld" is situated. Here the more fanciful images of Mars, past and present, fact and fiction, are presented in a mind-boggling display. Tourism at the centre accounts for nearly 15% of New Tokyo income.

"Oh yeah, I love the place. We call it the Rock. No gravity, no bars, no fun. I'll swap you a tour at Yorkshire anytime. At least in the Belt they have a decent night life. Maybe get some Rover action once in a while."

- Sergeant William "Bonedome" Harris,
23rdd RUK Strike Force.
New London Garrison.

"Marsworld? I hate the place. I went there once - damn thing is a glorification of terraforming and the so-called vision of the Martian future. It's on our list, friend, it's on our list. And when we blow it, I'm gonna be punching the detonator meself"

- Skippy Johansen, Red Sword Activist

Polar City

Location: Chasma Boreale, Northern Ice Cap

Founded: 2031

Population: 68.000

Industries: Water. Fuel. Agriculture. Textiles.

Founded by a consortium of Japanese interests, principally JAB, this base was founded in the polar ice cap to ensure they had a lead in the mining and selling of water and fuel to Mars colonies. The colony has expanded substantially over the six years it has been in existence, and is considered the principal seat of off-Earth Japanese government and corporate control. Headquartered here are the offices for JAB and Mitsubishi / Koridansu, as well as a number of smaller corps. Access to Polar City for gain (outsiders to Nipponese culture) is restricted to the central city area and the landing port.

Avalon

Location: Valles Marineris

Founded: 2032

Population: 42.000

Industries: Ship components. Vehicle manufacture. Agriculture.

This is a RUK colony based deep in one of the canals. It has a surface base also which encompasses a spaceport and support facilities for New London base. Avalon is the primary home city for Re-United Kingdom people on Mars, other than the multi-cultural Olympus. It boasts a Marine training camp and Pilot School.

Carter Colony

Location: Valles Marineris

Founded: 2027

Population: 850,000 + 40,000 transients

Industries: Tourism. Aquiculture. Agriculture

Another deep-sited canal base in the Marineris system. ISA interests helped establish the base in an effort to keep Mars for themselves. It was planned to be the showcase colony for Mars, and still has many features which make it the premier living environment on the planet. The walls of the canal are lined with luxury apartments, and the canal base is water filled. Here programs are in place to enhance the already famous Carter fish farms, which accounts for 20% of their income. Entertainments available include swimming, water skiing and scuba diving. It is worth noting that another 30-50% of the city's income is generated from tourism. Carter Colony prides itself on its liberal laws, which allow many drugs and cyberware for recreational use that other cities ban. Nonetheless, they maintain a sizable security force "just in case".

THE RED AND THE GREEN

These adventure seeds are broken into which side of the argument your players decide to support - are they followers of the Green Path or the Red Storm, or are they just in it for themselves (or another interested party)?

Terraform: For supporters of the plan to terraform the Martian landscape (regardless of whether that be the careful, gradual method or the "stuff the consequences, I want this place green within the decade" method), there is really only one task that oversees all others in the early stages - interdicting Red Storm and Red Sword before they can seriously sabotage those plans.

The PCs have a number of roles to play, making full use of their particular skills. Solos can act as either simple muscle (guarding successfully terraformed locations or laboratories), or as counter-terrorist troops (seek, locate and destroy). Fixers and Net-Runners can help locate and provide equipment, personnel and set up secure communications grids. Techies will be so busy fixing and installing equipment that they won't know what day of the week it is.

If the PCs have managed to become close associates of Dawn Attenborough (and we'll leave it up to referees and players to work this one out...), they will probably soon develop a view of events similar to hers, in that she wishes to ensure that the terraforming process does not allow the same mistakes that were made on Earth to be repeated on Mars. In this situation, the players are not only going to have to deal with overt terrorist attacks. but pressure of a more "Corporate" kind. It's up to the cyberpunks and their associates to ensure that the terraforming target dates are not constantly being brought forward, or that key (and loyal) personnel aren't suddenly replaced with corporate lap dogs. It pays to be mindful of that popular corporate slogan - "Profit Before Perfection."

Terrorist: If, on the other hand, your players are more likely to fall in with Amanda Jacobs (or, by crikey, Mario Vokturi and his gang of crazies!) then their role is also clear - Purity or Death!

The PCs will soon be involved in various acts of terrorism (completely indiscriminate if working for Red Sword) in their efforts to upset the terraforming projects. Remember though, not all terrorist acts have to be of the "large explosion in the face" kind. 'Runners holding up staff wages through the Net, or infiltrating a laboratory simply to alter important test results can also have a major effect on critical project target dates.

Conversely, the players might also use their time and skills by trying to set up some of the Corporations that are actively supporting the terraforming project. Perhaps they could pit one Corporation against another by spreading rumours of planned hostile takeovers? Try to encourage your players to think a bit more laterally than pumping bullets into the back of the head.

Propaganda also has a strong role to play in this battle, for both sides. While Mario Vokturi probably doesn't really care what anyone thinks of his tactics, Amanda Jacobs is well aware of what negative publicity can do both for and against her movement. Too many holo-vids of innocent children injured by Red Swords indiscriminate bombings (Amanda just wants everyone to leave Mars alone, she doesn't necessarily want everyone to leave in a body bag...) and it won't be long before the UN is forced to send in the heavy firepower in retaliation. Amanda knows that she is playing a very fine line here. Her initial goal is to delay (but preferably stop altogether) the Martian Independence movement. A united Mars is a united terraforming process - something that she just can't allow to happen.

Directly related to this propaganda issue is another important scenario hook. The all-media announcement that has subsequently led to Amanda Jacobs placed being on the UN's "most-wanted" list, was not her doing. Logic suggests that it was Mario Vokturi that used her name, as Amanda does seem to have more popular support than the Red Sword leader. Mario has denied this of course, but Amanda would look well on any individual or group that could determine the real truth behind this matter. Enterprising PCs might find themselves with a scoop to sell to Kumi Kazamuri.

Vested Interests: It may be that the PCs don't end up taking either side directly. Even so, players can still get very much involved in the many events unfolding on the Red Planet. As in all Cyberpunk campaigns, information is power in SolSpace, and power is a very profitable commodity. It may be that, during the course of an unrelated adventure hook, the PCs end up coming across some important information relating to the discoveries of the

"Mars, Home to two and a half million on people, all working together to build a new home, on a new world, for humanity. What they have achieved in the past decade is enough to bring a smile to any conservationist's lips. If this is a taste of our destiny, then the future is a nation we will all want to call home. March on Humanis, Welcome Pax Terriana!"

- From the foreword to the 2037 CIEC (Commission for Interplanetary Environmental Control) Annual Report.

"More like four million rats living in two score holes that also serve as sewers and worse. This is no future, and it's certainly no better than any of humanity's bitter pasts."

- Mario Vokturi, Red Sword

Sherwood Canyon Project and offer it to a Corporation that hasn't yet got a stake in the red planet. The Corporations that do have a stake in a terraformed Mars are not going to like a new player entering the scene, and the PCs can expect a bit of aggravation in return for their indiscretions.

The PCs don't even have to get involved with the big Corporations to make a few good EBs out of the enterprise. Player character Fixers stand to make a killing if they can edge out a few competitors when bidding for lucrative supply contracts. If the PCs have enough resources at their disposal, they might even try their hand at a few development projects of their own. A bit of clever netrunning here and there, the odd accident when important documents are being lodged, and the PCs could soon end up owning their own little bit Mars. Holding on to it for any length of time though is going to be another adventure in itself.

The Official Line: and finally, although many referees may think that this last option is well beyond their players, the PCs may not be in it for themselves at all, but

actually serve the forces of law and order! The player characters may be UN Marshals under deep cover, Interpol agents, RUK (or even other Governments!!!) black-ops hit teams, Olympus Security staff, or a Corporately-funded anti-terrorist unit. The detection, prevention and/or extermination of terrorist groups (not just Red Storm and Red Sword, mind you) will probably be the group's initial briefing, but hey, why stop there when you're on a roll? Mars is full of bad dudes of all levels of notoriety, be they terrorists, arms dealers, drug smugglers, assassins. You name them, Mars has got them, and someone has got to look out for Honest Joanne... (referees might want to do themselves a favour and have another look at the Scan Connery film Outland before running these types of adventures - now that's a SolSpace campaign).

Whatever your players do get up to on Mars though, please write and let us know. Like our other popular campaign setting, Unae, SolSpace will continue to grow and develop as a direct result of your input. So, if you have any questions about anything that you have read so far, or would like the magazine to cover any particular area in greater detail, just drop us a line - we'd love to hear from you. And now, it's outrageous plug time...

NEXT ISSUE...

We leave the Red Planet behind us for a while, and make our way out into the Asteroid Belt. It's time to pack your goop balls, extra tanks of oxygen and your gyrojet pistol,s choombas, 'cause you never know when the next asteroid's going to be hiding a rover, a pirate or. if the rumours are true, a cyborg assassin.
It's a whole new attitude out there in the dark...

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THE BELT

DEATH AWAITS THE UNWARY IN THE SOLSPACE FRONTIER
BY PAUL MITTING

THE BELT

"Mayday, Mayday. Can anyone hear me? This is Personal Mining Vessel Gwynevere. I am located at Belt Grid Reference 235-764-193. I am under attack. I repeat, I am under attack. They've disabled my main engine and fraged my automatic mining unit.

Oh god, someone please help me. They're cutting through the airlock bulkhead. I can't hold them off by myself. Anyone within range, please assist..."

Last recorded message from PMV Gwynevere.

Tumbling through the void between Mars and Jupiter is the main Asteroid Belt, composed of thousands of "Tmown" asteroids and a vast number of others which have never been catalogued. It is estimated there are over half a million asteroids with diameters larger than 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) and untold numbers of smaller rocks.

The largest asteroid is Ceres, a spherical world with a radius of 930 km. It orbits the solar system every 4.61 years and has a rotation period of 9.08 hours. Its size is approximately one quarter that of Luna and contains one third of the entire mass of the Belt. Other notable asteroids include Pallas (diam. 523 km) and Vesta (diam. 501km).

High speed collisions between asteroids are gradually resulting in their break up, causing an occasional hazard to travellers in the Belt. The asteroids themselves tend to be dusty, cratered objects similar to the moons of Mars.

HISTORY

The first manned base was set up on Ceres in 2023. This was Kirkwood station, originally designed to provide accommodation for any prospectors or scientists in the Belt. Over the intervening years the rise in the Belt population has seen Kirkwood expand to house a community of 5000, with accommodation for a further 2000 transients.

As Kirkwood was established mining bases (remote and manned) were being set up on nearby asteroids. These were the start of the wholesale development and mining of the Belt which is today taken for granted. Mass drivers and refineries sprang up around Ceres which has become the nexus of all Belt activity. Prospectors, Highrider families and Corp mining expeditions alike use Ceres as their main refuelling and resupply point.

In 2026 Algernon base was established on the far side of Ceres opposite to Kirkwood. This base housed 1000 miners in simple comfort and in recent years has expanded to nearly three times that size, now boasting the largest casino in the Belt as well as a number of bars and the excellent Tumbling Rock restaurant.

Rover clans were first formed in 2030 after a split with Highrider factions. They gained in strength and became responsible for many raids, piracy and acts of terror in the Belt. The infamous K471 massacre in 2033 prompted direct RUK and UN intervention in the region. Once the conflict between Rovers and military forces commenced it escalated to the nine month Belt War of 2035. The final battle of the war at Lilith Base, the original pirate haven, saw some of the bloodiest space combat seen to date. It was in the lead up to that climactic engagement that the RUK flagship, the Victory, was lost without trace.

THE BELT TODAY

Life in the asteroids of 2037 is dangerous and dirty, with the lure of instant wealth offset by the better chances of a very unpleasant death. Many have opted to take this risk, flocking to the Belt to live the dream of striking it rich in an environment of lax laws and personal freedom. The SolSpace Belt is a wild frontier in the tradition of the gold rush eras of the Yukon, California and Ballarat.

The Belters are a mixed bag of people. Highriders and the infamous Rover clans make up the largest population groups. Mixed amongst them are Earthers, Martians and Jovians. Cyborgs of any type are feared, particularly after the rumours of Mercury-funded pirate ships.

Most Belters live in the asteroid bases, such as on Ceres. Smaller bases are scattered across thousands of other rocks. Some are miners' survival shacks, barely large enough to support one or two people for a few months. Others are rogue bases, heavily armed and well concealed, supplying the elusive Pirates and Rovers.

Floating between the rock bases are the two O'Neill colonies of Longway and Golden Tree. Both are privately owned constructions, Longway belonging to a European consortium and Golden Tree to a Chinese consortium. They encourage trade in the common sectors of the habitats, but access to the living areas is strictly controlled. Both are rumoured to house over 5,000 people each.

The nexus of all Belt life lies at Ceres and the scattered asteroids around it. Here are the largest concentrations of people, industry and entertainment. Algernon base is famed for the quality of its Strip and the range of diversions offered. A rival Strip has been developed at Farhome base and both can boast a regular crowd of nearly 2000 off duty personnel and civilians.

Ceres: Shaped like a small moon, Ceres has the typical cratered surface of most space bodies. On the surface can be found the very thin layer of ice and frost which gives Ceres its minimal atmosphere. The asteroid itself is of the carbonaceous chondrite type, meaning it is made up of a matrix of carbon rich minerals imbedded with chondrules (small spheres of silicate minerals). There is also a high percentage of water mixed in, sometimes as much as 20%. This has meant that Ceres was able to supply much of its own needs for water, oxygen and organic products early in its colonisation. The main element that is shipped regularly to the asteroid is nitrogen, essential for the Ceres agri-farms.

The two biggest bases built on Ceres are Kirkwood and Algernon. There are some smaller research bases and private estates but these are not open to the average traveller.

Kirkwood: The largest settlement on Ceres, Kirkwood has grown substantially in recent years. Based here are the UN Marshall's Office, Interpol Court and the RUK Military Base, Yorkshire. Other facilities include cargo and passenger terminals, ship repair and building facilities and a Belt Bus terminal.

Algernon: Algernon base was built on the far side of Ceres to provide alternative accommodation and facilities for the huge numbers of people and trade moving through the Belt. There are smaller but more modern cargo and passenger terminals here, as well as the ubiquitous Belt Bus.

The Algernon Strip bustles with many bars, hotels, and the Ceres Casino. It is also home to the renowned Tumbling Rock restaurant, which has begun to develop a unique Belt cuisine mixing locally grown produce with imported Martian and Earth foodstuffs.

Yorkshire: Although the RUK base is located alongside Kirkwood it is definitely a separate facility. Access to non-Commonwealth personnel is limited to the public viewing gallery near the main landing pads. The Belt fleet, and any visiting Commonwealth or UN ships use the docks for repairs, re-fits and of course R&R. Ceres Casino profitability relies on the regular influx of well-paid Marines and Pilots. Although the base can build small OTVs and shuttles at need, its regular duty is to keep the

fleet repaired and equipped. A high security BSC facility within the base provides repairs and upgrades to Theodorsen Gateway units.

The Belt Gateway: Located in a matching orbit with Ceres around the Sun floats the Gateway Station Lyonesse. Fully completed in 2034, the station is protected by the RUK naval forces situated at Yorkshire base. Lyonesse Station is quite large, being equipped mainly for the handling of inbound and outbound cargo shipping. Passengers can locate good accommodation there at either the Belt Ritz or the Lyonesse Hilton. Both are small hotels however, as Lyonesse is only a stopover point for nearby Ceres. Travelling to and from Lyonesse takes about two hours (from Ceres), with passenger shuttles leaving every 8 hours.

GOVERNMENT

There is no government in the Belt. The UN and RUK fleets maintain order where possible and uphold international space law. In the main, however, it is not possible for their jurisdictions to extend to the myriad individual bases. There, locals are responsible for setting and maintaining law and order. Some of the 'laws' in these mini-bases reflect the personality of their owners and can be a trap for the unwary: *'What d'ya mean our shuttle isn't painted in regulation colours?'*

Private firms run the security of many larger bases. Only Kirkwood and Yorkshire have actual UN and RUK police forces. Interpol has jurisdiction there as well, which means any trials for piracy are conducted there.

Kirkwood is managed by a Mayor, with a Council of five elected positions, and one UN nominated position. The elections are scrupulously monitored by the UN, but invariably the Mayor and her stooges are corp backed (they can afford to buy the popular vote). The UN rep spends most of his time vetting their plans and decisions to ensure they are to the benefit of Kirkwood's inhabitants. Local security at Kirkwood is provided by Interpol officers and Council-funded private Police.

Algernon has a Council of ten elected officials, of which one is nominated as Chief Executive Officer. There is no RUK or UN presence within the Council, although any decisions which may affect them are run past them first. Local security at Algernon is provided by Ceres Security Forces, a subsidiary of Arasaka.

FACTIONS IN THE BELT

RUK: Not surprisingly, the RUK maintains a sizeable presence in the Belt to protect their Gateway and bases. What many people don't realise is how much mining is conducted by RUK citizens and corps, and as a consequence the RUK government wishes them to be well defended against Pirate actions. The actual political power of the RUK is minor in the Belt, but with control of the Gateway they exert considerable financial influence over other political and corporate factions.

The aim of the RUK is to ensure fair trade, a good return on their investments, and the eradication of the Pirate menace.

JAB: Always a powerful corp, even the crash of 2027 didn't stop them exploiting the Belt for all its worth. They were among the first to utilise robot mining ships to strip the wealth from the asteroids and fire them home.

JAB maintains a large presence around Ceres, with a fleet of cargo freighters and security ships. They also have their own repair stations (two so far, with a third nearing completion) amongst the better mining zones. JAB robot miners are hated by most freelance prospectors as they can scan and lock onto valuable asteroids quicker than a human crew. By the same token, the freelancers are not averse to following them down to a likely site and then working it simultaneously.

JAB are very protective of their equipment, mining claims and personnel. Few people willingly cross the corp. as they have a reputation for having trouble makers vanish.

Ceres Miners Association: The Association is a loose agreement between the freelance miners and prospectors who inhabit the Belt. They try to ensure fair treatment of its members by corps and local government. Although individual members may be aggressive in their approach, the Association has so far been outspoken but refused direct conflict with its opponents.

Main activities of the group are the abolition of the prison mines, disputing member's mining claims with corps (and other freelancers - claim jumping is rife in the Belt) and playing Zee-Ball. It is worth noting that the two Solar Roamers who live in the Belt (Johann Zwiedorf and Patricia Ling) both support the Association with their considerable resources of wealth and influence.

Belt Bus: An offshoot of the Mars Bus line. Belt Bus tries to provide a regular shuttle service between major population centres in the Belt. Like its parent. Belt Bus has always encouraged trade

and (recently) tourism. Naturally they make a healthy profit from both so their interest is not always unselfish.

For reasons that are widely speculated upon, no Belt Bus vessel or crew has ever been attacked by Rover clans. UN investigations, both covert and official, have not been able to link the company to any obvious Rover connections.

NASA: The American space program suffered badly with the Crash of 2027. One of the few government enterprises to survive largely intact was NASA. Their developments of Mars and the Belt were profitable and self-sustaining. NASA was one of the first to begin mining the Belt (Kirkwood was once a NASA base) and they have expanded successfully ever since. A standing joke among Belters is more Americans live in the Belt than in the Incorporated States. Certainly a recent census of Ceres showed at least 3 in 10 inhabitants were ISA citizens. A good proportion of them were NASA employees or freelancers.

Rumours abound that NASA has obtained some of the old USAF gunships, deltas and crews to help defend its interests in the Belt. A number of miners have reported seeing large unidentified vessels, probably some type of warship, on their sensors. It is interesting to note that the RUK considers these reports serious enough to warrant reinforcing the 17th Strike Force only two months ago.

SRC: The Soviet Rocket Corp's interest in the Belt has begun only recently with their plans to actually propel the more valuable asteroids directly into Earth/Luna orbit and mine them there. With their expertise in heavy lift vehicles their initial results have been very promising. They have a small presence on Ceres for supporting their Belt operations, and three research crews searching for suitable asteroids. Once located, they attach large nuclear drive units which use powdered rock and mineral as a propellant.

This project has caused an angry backlash from local miners, who see it as a threat to their livelihoods. No actual conflict has occurred to date but tempers are rising with each success of the SRC.

Rovers: No one knows exactly how many Rovers there are in the Belt, their fierce independence and free lifestyle resists an accurate census, but there are twelve known Clans. Clan Libertas is the largest clan followed next by the Belt Bandicoots and the Claws. Such clans are recent developments, the first being formed in 2030 under Nozumo Takohoto.

Personalities of the Belt

Alan Devries, Owner/Operator of the Ceres Casino: Devries originally came to the Belt as a technician with the early NASA missions. He established the first Casino in a rented pressure dome, providing entertainment and gambling for the prospectors who began to flood the Belt. Now he owns the most profitable venue on Ceres, and also manages a lot of the illicit drug and weapons trade. He is friendly and personable, and has been known to be generous to many miners who experienced financial difficulties. Cross him though, and he will be as ruthless as a Yakuza hitman.

Fixer (INT 8, COOL 8) Resources 6, Streetdeal 7

Jacques Treloar, Interpol Police Commissioner: is considered too old at sixty five to be responsible for running Ceres Interpol. Based at Kirkwood, his 3 years has seen him personally involved in 2 firefights, a ship to ship battle with a Rover scavenger and a number of fist fights with recalcitrant miners. This has earned him considerable respect among the Belt community and the officers who serve with him.

Cop (INT 7, EMP 7) Authority 10, Handgun 4

Toshiro Sameda, Head of JAB (Belt Division): Sameda is a no nonsense operator. If you work for him, he expects reliability and obedience. His leadership of the JAB enterprises in the Belt has sustained the corp through it's hardest times since the Crash. According to a leaked dossier, he was once head of a JAB Black Ops team. Now in his late forties, he is still personally intimidating, though he can be charming and urbane when needed.

Corporate (INT 7, COOL 8) Resources 9, Martial Arts 7

Johann Zwiedorf, Solar Roamer: Johann made it rich back on Earth. At one point he was rumoured to be head researcher for a major corp, but managed to successfully leave and create his own company. In 2032 he was diagnosed as having terminal bone cancer. Due to some unique medical problems, his only solution was a Gemini style full body conversion. Having taken that step, his love for space travel compelled him to buy a second hand USAF support ship and have himself installed within it. He still keeps his Gemini body, run by remote control, for more personal interactions.

Netrunner (INT 9) Interface 7, System Knowledge 9

Leroy Jackson, Belt Bus Pilot and Fixer: If you ever caught a bus in the Belt, you probably had Leroy for your driver. He turns up in more places than unwanted body hair, and is less popular. Despite this, he is one of the best Information Brokers around Ceres. Leroy has contacts in every Corp, military base and habitat, even a friendly UN Marshall. From his varied sources he can piece together pretty reliable data, and can even give you predictions on activity in the Belt. Just be prepared to listen to him harp on his favourite subject - Zee-Ball.

Nomad (COOL 4, REF 5) Pilot (OTV) 7, Tech 5

Simon Nevarre, UN Marshall: Nevarre was first trained as a USAF Marine, and saw some limited action in the O'Neil War. He was recruited by the UN in 2033 and has spent his last 2 years on duty in the Belt. He has few friends, but they are firm ones, including the disreputable Leroy Jackson. Off duty, Nevarre likes to haunt the bars at Algernon or Farhome and see what he can chase up.

Cop (INT 6, EMP 6) Melee 8, Zero-G Combat 7

The Pirate War of 2035 occurred in the height of the Rover activity. Clans had formed together based on religion, family ties or mercenary greed. The War hurt them badly yet they survived and have since striven to regrow. Most Pirate activity in the Belt, and even around Mars and the Jovian system, has been attributed to the Rover Clans.

The truth is that some Clans will raid when they think they can get away with it, but just as many mine, trade and ship cargo as legitimate businesses. The major difference between Clans and their earthly Nomad equivalents is the environment they live in.

Rovers are accepted on Ceres and most major bases, although they are always under the gaze of security forces or even military soldiers. On the smaller bases, they are often refused entry or must surrender hostages before trade can occur. The attitude of most Belters is wary acceptance of them, which can turn to hate or friendship in an instant.

MILITARY FORCES

Yorkshire Base currently has two RUK Strike Forces operating in the Belt region. They are the 12th under Admiral Janice Evans and the 17th under Admiral Randolph Tacsker. Each Strike Force is comprised of two Gunships, a Marine Carrier, a Fighter Carrier and a Support Freighter. The 17th has been reinforced with two Frigates from Luna.

In support are a combined Commonwealth Strike Force comprised of an Australian Republic Gunship, two New Zealand Frigates and the Indian Carrier Ghandi. UN forces are represented by the USAF Gunship Lincoln and the Carrier Washington. Note that the two USAF ships are also available for deployment to defend NASA interests if required.

JAB and NASA are both known to have their own military style vessels to defend their interests. It is suspected that each have access to at least one Gunship of the old 2025 pattern, and possibly a number of Deltas or even dedicated space Fighters such as used by the RUK.

Speculation is rife that a corp has obtained an automated plant for building spacecraft components. This theory was supported by the discovery of a cache of space craft weapon systems and targeting sensor packages in the Belt. It was a lucky find by a UN Marshall who was actually looking for a suspected Rover base.

RUMOURS

Next issue we plan to bring you an adventure set in the Asteroid Belt plus more background material. Until then here are a few rumours that your 'punks might like to explore the veracity of.

- * There is an automated factory making spaceships. Someone is building a fleet, hidden in the Belt.
- * Cyborgs have been attacking ships to strip them of their cargo and vital components. Crew and passengers are being taken to Mercury for use in their CyberWarrior games.
- * Rovers are in league with the Asteroid Prison Mines to supply them with workers. When an inspection team is due the Rovers ship them off to another mine or hold them in special bases.
- * JAB robot miners have been programmed to defend their mining sites. They use their mining lasers and explosives to destroy other vessels if they approach the asteroid they are working.
- * The Victory has been discovered by a NASA mining team and is being refitted for use by the ISA.
- * A small escape pod has been found by an RUK Gunship from a ship supposedly lost during a Gate transfer. They are holding the survivors at a remote station because they claim an alien ship rescued them from the hyperspatial realm. This is why the Belt fleet was re-inforced.
- * Highriders at Farhome claim they can prove the existence of telepathy between children born there recently. A team of scientists who went there have sent their findings to the UN in a classified report.

See you next issue, Earthers.

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FREE THE SLAVES!

PART ONE OF AN EXCITING TWO-PART SOLSPACE SCENARIO
BY JONATHAN A. SPEAR

THE ADVENTURE

The players are hired by Amnesty Interspatial to ensure the safety of an offshoot group of radical activists in the Belt, who call themselves "Free The Slaves". Having arrived in the Belt, on the asteroid of Ceres, the AI team find that they are too late to help "Free The Slaves", whose office is blown up before their eyes! Having cleared themselves of any blame, they are recruited by the local UN Marshall to help investigate the bombing, which is eventually linked to Consolidated Asteroid Mining (CAM), with possible Rover involvement. The adventure then moves to CAM'S main asteroid prison mine, Andrei, where further links to Rovers, the bombing, and human rights abuses may be discovered. Finally, if the player are brave and competent, in Part Two of this scenario they may be able to discover the secret base of The Claws, a Rover clan, and foil an alliance between these piratical scum and the feared Cyborgs of Mercury!

AMNESTY INTERSPACIAL

Amnesty Interspatial was formed in 2025, after the brutal repression of the attempted colonial revolution at Isidis Base. Seeing the growing number of human rights violations that were occurring throughout SolSpace's various growing points of habitation, Amnesty Interspatial began to regularly report such deep space violations to the UN. Amnesty International were bombed out of their London headquarters in 2014, and are now based in New Zealand where they help to co-ordinate the activities of Amnesty Interspatial in orbit and beyond.

Constantly short of funds and skilled personnel, AI often hire freelance edgerunners to undertake particularly risky, difficult or sensitive tasks. Unsurprisingly, AI are an extremely controversial organisation who are sometimes actively persecuted by corporations, governments and criminals - often with violent results.

Some more radical members of AI have formed a new front called "Free The Slaves", its avowed aim to release all inmates of prison and slaves mines, by force of arms if necessary. Having

"Abused, beaten, forced to work until they die. These are the hidden slaves of the Belt. Look at those lacerations and bruises- are they caused in the course of normal labour? Of course not!

The Belt mining companies treat prisoners worse than cyberforms, beating them until they work for twenty hours a day in the lethal vacuum of the asteroid mines.

Human rights? Ignored.

UN inquiries? Ignored.

Consolidated Asteroid Mining. Guilty!

The Andrei Base has a prisoner casualty rate of seven men and women per day. Those prisoners are dead. Sentenced to labour in the asteroid mines, those convicts who labour under CAM'S stun rods are given a virtual death sentence! Some labourers are not even convicts - they are slaves who are bought from unscrupulous criminals and forced to labour for the profit of the corporation!

Belt Mines Inc. Guilty!

Solar Mines. Guilty!

Enough is enough. The time for change is now! Free the Slaves!"

"Free The Slaves" Media Campaign -
Amnesty Interspatial.

recently opened offices on the asteroid Ceres, "Free The Slaves" are planning to run a very frank media campaign against the three big corporations who AI allege are responsible for treating prison and slave miners with "heartless brutality". Unsurprisingly, the more moderate members of AI are concerned that "Free The Slaves" are taking a too radical approach, and may have bitten off more than they can chew.

RECRUITMENT

In order to ensure the continuing safety of the radical "Free The Slaves" activists, the coordinators of AI wish to send a team to investigate the security of the radicals on Ceres. Given that the activists received seven death threats on the first day that they arrived, the AI coordinators believe that the new anti-prison and slave mining offices on Ceres will need tight security in order to operate.

Enter the player characters! Wherever they may be, whether the battle zones of the Olympus Fringe, the slums of Luna, or the void of deep space, Ricky "The Ferret" Cavanaugh (see Non Player Characters) will find them. An amiable but deadly field operative for AI, Ricky will approach the player characters and offer them *"a H! bitta work, ya know. almost like an 'oliday sorta"*. AI wish to hire them because (a) they are well known as reliable operatives, or (b) they are cheap, depending on the background, experience and reputation of the group.

What's the job? AI want the player characters to travel out to Ceres asteroid in the Belt with Ricky, to assess

and maintain the security of the "Free The Slaves" group. Despite the fact that they disapprove of the radical fringe, the AI leaders have many friends and former associates who are now working for "Free The Slaves", and they do not want to see their comrades dead! AI are willing to foot the bill for the transport of the characters to and around the Belt, their meals and accommodation on Ceres, vital equipment such as space suits, and any other equipment which Ricky (i.e. you, the referee) deems to be vital for their task. The duration of employment by AI is negotiable, depending on the ongoing need for the player characters as security consultants on Ceres.

The remuneration for the job is not huge, a few hundred eurobucks each per day plus expenses, paid weekly, but as Ricky will point out: *"Bleedin' 'ell, we're not Arasaka ya know! We're AI, defenders of the weak and innocent! Any'ow, watcha complainin' 'bout, ya get free fares out ta the Belt. Once ya there, ya can make a killin' doin' what ya like after ya've finished workin' for AI"*. As the referee, feel free to alter the deal, within reason, if the players seem hesitant to take up Ricky's offer. Perhaps the player characters will even do the job for AI cheaply, out of the goodness of their hearts! Excuse me? Goodness in the hearts of Cyberpunks? Ha, ha, ha!

Ricky will demand that the team leave for Ceres the very next day, giving the player characters only a little time to conclude any business that they have at their current location, and to prepare for the coming job.

CERES BOUND

The trip out to the Belt and onto Ceres gives the referee (you!) a chance to indulge his whims and make creative use of previously published SolSpace material in Australian Realms and Deep Space. Surely the trip won't be uneventful?! What about motion-sickness, pressure leaks, faulty equipment, Rover harrasment. getting through Customs with all those implanted cy be r-weapons,

radiation storms, RUK Space Marine surprise searches, rogue asteroids, crazy merchants or smugglers, and the trip through the Theodorsen Gateway? Make things interesting and use your imagination and knowledge of the SolSpace background! In SolSpace, nothing is ever easy, safe and unchallenging!

Eventually, Ricky and the player characters should arrive at the dim, dirty and crowded Algernon base on Ceres (see issue 27). Upon entry to Algernon, the player characters will have to pass through a search by the private base security company - none other than an orbital subsidiary of Arasaka! The player characters had better hope they've done nothing in the past to blatantly "frag off the Boys in Black! Any illegal equipment or weaponry that the player characters have, including weaponry that is inappropriate and dangerous to use in space, will be temporarily or permanently confiscated (or deactivated in the case of cyberwear). Appropriate sidearms such as flechettes, bolters, gyrojets and blades are permitted in Algernon.

Ricky has booked a large room for the AI team to operate from in a cheap and dirty little hotel simply called "The Rock" close by the shipping docks of Algernon. Ricky suggests that the team settle into their accommodation, then quickly check out the new "Free The Slaves" offices near the casino and Strip (around ten minutes walk away).

Having settled into their shady but reasonably secure hotel room, it's time to see the site that the team have travelled so far to protect. A ten minute stroll through the crowded and dirty halls of Algernon will put the player characters in the busy casino and Strip area - within sight of the new "Free The Slaves" headquarters. However, the mission is about to take a slightly unexpected turn...

KABOOM!!! When the player characters are around 40 meters away from the small, glass-fronted "Free The Slaves" office, a massive explosion rips through the building and the surrounding Strip area! With an explosive radius of around 25 meters (plus 10 meters of shrapnel), the player characters are blown off their feet, scratched by flying shrapnel and slightly singed by the heat of the explosion, but otherwise unharmed.

Stunned, surrounded by flaming debris and ears ringing, the player characters may be able to make out a shrill screaming sound. Those with deep space experience will recognise this sound as being that of the local atmosphere rapidly escaping into the vacuum of space! Despite the fact that this area of the Strip was below the surface of the asteroid, the explosion created several small holes between the pressurised Algernon base and the void outside. Any players with an ounce of sense will realise that it is time to leave the area quickly, before it is sealed off by emergency blast-doors. The nearest blast-door is 20 meters away and will close in 30 seconds, giving enough time for the team to escape the vacuum if they can fight their way through the hysterical fleeing crowd. Any character who fails to escape the area and cannot find a space suit will discover first-hand the adverse effects of dropping air pressure within a short time.

Having (hopefully) escaped the explosion and depressurisation, the AI team will be rapidly arrested by the base Arasaka security troops. As suspicious, recently arrived strangers who were seen fleeing from the area of the bombing, the player characters are high on the list of potential perpetrators. The security troops will be polite but firm in their manner, but any attempt to resist or escape arrest will be viewed as an admission of guilt - and will be met with pursuit and "termination with extreme prejudice"! If the AI team go quietly with the Arasaka troops, they will be placed in a high-security holding cell until the Algernon UN Marshall arrives for questioning.

It seems that the player characters arrived just too late to ensure the safety of the "Free The Slaves" activists! The effects of the bombing were devastating. 37 people were killed in the blast and subsequent vacuum, including all the "Free The Slaves" activists on Ceres, as an important strategy meeting was in progress at the time. Their office was utterly destroyed by the explosion, as were several surrounding buildings in the Strip. Authorities estimate that the damage will cost millions of eurobucks to rectify, and will damage the Algernon Strip's popularity around the Belt. No one claims responsibility for the blast - it looks like the player characters are in trouble!

WHODUNNIT?

UN Marshall Andreas Dukovi (see Non Player Characters) has the questionable honour of clearing up the messy investigation into the bombing. Dukovi will arrive at the player's holding cell, tired and extremely annoyed that such an act of terrorism has occurred on "his base". The Marshall knows, through various sources, who the player characters are and that they are working for AI. He is, however, still extremely suspicious of the team and is actively looking for a scapegoat to blame for the bombing and quickly tie up the investigation. Now is the time for some inspired reasoning and roleplaying by the players, in order to persuade Dukovi of their innocence. Ricky will aid their plight by offering to help investigate the bombing - whether the players like it or not! The team will be released

PRISONS IN SPACE -

Life as a Prisoner in 2037

The rise in crimes among the space and earth populations has seen the need for larger prison facilities. The Gateways have enabled transportation of long-term prisoners quickly and cheaply. At first, penal colonies were set up on Mars and Luna. However, it was soon realised that these prisoners could serve society much more usefully as labour. Thus the Prison Mines of the Belt were established. The Belt mines are run by private corporations, with regular audits by the UN to ensure no undue harshness or dangers are allowed to risk prisoner lives. In actuality, life in the Prison Mines is brutal and deadly. Few survive longer than 3 to 4 years, and those that are paroled are typically broken men and women.

Controlling Prisoners: Keeping the prisoners under control relies on a number of elements. The first is the harsh environment. Outside of the mines and barracks is the cold vacuum of the asteroid belt. There are no ships permanently at the mines - cargo vessels, prison transports etc all arrive and leave within 24 hours. Most mines have a monthly shipment of new prisoners and supplies, and a cargo out of refined ores and paroled prisoners.

The second common element is explosive collars. Locked around the neck, a collar can be detonated by either remote control or by crossing the perimeter markers of the mine. Only the mine warden and his guards have the remote controls, as well as guns and lasers for regular crowd control. Each collar has a unique code to activate and deactivate/unlock it. This code is usually stored in the base computers, heavily encrypted to prevent unauthorised access. Typically, only the mine warden, the chief security officer, and one or two chosen deputies will know the access codes to deactivate a collar.

A third control element is the trustee system. If a prisoner helps the guards do their jobs (ie snitch on fellow inmates, reveal hidden items etc) then they get easier duties and maybe even reduced sentences. On some mines, trustees are even armed with stun rods and shields.

Escaping: Few people have ever managed to escape from a prison mine without external assistance. Most escapes actually occur from the ships carrying the prisoners to the mine, when a pirate or Rover clan ship attacks. These attacks are to rescue specific individuals, or sometimes to recruit members. Often the balance of the prisoners and crews are sold as slaves to other mining operations.

Corporations: Among the three corps who run Prison Mines, the largest and most feared is Consolidated Asteroid Mining. The CAM mines are the most productive, but inmates have a substantially shorter lifespan. Repeated calls for UN investigation have gone unanswered. The few reviews of CAM facilities have been superficial and contrived.

Belt Mines Inc are the second largest, and they operate both regular mines and prison mines. The conditions are similar in both set-ups, but in one the workers do get paid (not very well considering the hazards and poor living conditions). Belt Mines advocate the Trustee system, and are well known for allowing their armed Trustees to "enforce discipline" amongst the inmates.

The third prominent corp is Inner Solar Mines and Refineries (referred to as Solar Mines). This corp runs both prison mines and large refineries in both the Belt and on Mars itself. They have been accused of regularly breaching UN regulations in the past, but a recent change of directors has seen a marked improvement. Given a choice, most prisoners would prefer to work out their sentence with this corp.

Mines: Amongst the Belt, there is upwards of 50 large prison mines. These have between 500 and 1000 prisoners. The largest of all is Andrei Base, a facility of 5000 prisoners and 50 guards and techs. It is run by CAM and has maintained record profits since its second year of operations.

Working in the Mines: Life in a prison mine is dirty, dangerous and often lethal. In general, only the barracks and refinery areas are pressurised. Work in the mines themselves is done in pressure suits. These suits are cheaply made, with poor quality seals and minimal radiation shielding. They carry about 4 hours supply. The only saving grace is that they are reasonably resistant to tearing or punctures. Even so, many prisoners lose their lives to suit blowouts, as a laser drill or even a good blow from a pick will stuff the suits integrity really quick.

The shafts and tunnels are dimly lit, with helmet lights providing most of the illumination. Experienced workers can find their way around their own work tunnel by touch, conserving the precious suit batteries to run heating.

Mining itself is done by robot drills, which bore their way into an asteroid's side with lasers and power hammers. Some of the better skilled prisoners run these, often as trustees. The bulk of the prisoners then follow behind them, working the sides of the tunnels for poorer strains of metals and ores.

the day after the bombing on two conditions. Firstly, they must not leave Algernon without Dukovi's permission, and must report to him daily. Secondly, he takes the team up on Ricky's offer. It seems that the player's mission has changed, as they must now find out "whodunnit?".

If they have been reasonably polite and helpful, Dukovi will provide the players with the current investigative report on the bombing. Amongst the bureaucratic jumble, the players will find the following possibly useful information:

THE UN REPORT

(a) Of the 37 bodies recovered from the blast area and vacuum outside, only 36 of the victims have been identified. The 37th body remains in the local mortuary awaiting identification.

(b) The type of explosive used in the bombing was not the common C-6, but rather, a rare variant called C-9, according to the UN forensics team. C-9 was designed for deep space mining, requiring little oxygen in order to detonate effectively, but is hideously expensive.

(c) Several witnesses reported seeing a large man with tattoos on his face being sucked into the void during the depressurisation after the blast. The same witnesses swear that the man was smiling and laughing hysterically! UN investigators are regarding this report rather dubiously, as no corresponding body has been recovered.

(d) The explosion was centred exactly outside the "Free The Slaves" office, yet no trash cans, drains, boxes, vehicles or other possible receptacles for the bomb were reported outside the building prior to the blast. Yet, UN forensics experts insist that the explosion was caused by a stationary bomb detonated at ground level, not a rocket or grenade.

Armed with such preliminary information, it is now up to the players to ascertain who they believe was responsible for the brutal killing of so many people. Whilst it is impossible to predict all the various means by which they may investigate the bombing, there are several avenues of exploration which seem likely, and may be suggested by Ricky:

Investigating the Bombing Site: The bomb crater and "Free The Slaves" office has been partitioned from the remainder of the Strip, and is under guard by RUK Space Marines. A combined Interpol, UN and RUK investigation and forensics team is slowly combing through the rubble in search of further clues. The office itself was utterly destroyed in the explosion, and the subsequent vacuum irrevocably sucked much prospective evidence into the void, leaving precious few clues. With the permission of Marshall Dukovi, the Marines will let the PCs into the partitioned area, on condition that they do not overly hinder the investigative team. If they choose to search through the wreckage around the ruined building and large crater, make an Awareness/Notice roll for each player character (Difficulty 20+), to determine whether they spot an unusually bright and gleaming metallic fragment that is embedded in one of the ruined walls of the destroyed office.

Upon extraction, the bent and scratched fragment will appear to be a small serial number plate, upon which is engraved: "CYMERC- 70316\MINEX". If the fragment is analysed, it will prove to be an extremely resilient alloy named Mercusteel, which is produced only from the mines of Mercury. Exhaustive enquiries into stock and shipping records, manufacturing codes, production licensing and other relevant areas may allow interpretation of the serial number. "CYMERC" is a Mercury-based cybernetics and cyberform manufacturing company, and "MINEX" is a class of small (50cm cube) wheeled cyberform that is used by mining companies for surveying purposes. Further enquiries (Difficulty 25+) will reveal that this particular unit, "70316", was registered to Consolidated Asteroid Mining (CAM). Why was a CAM surveying cyberform in the Strip of Algernon when the bomb went off? Could the bomb have been concealed in the cyberform? CAM officially denies all knowledge of the MINEX unit, and claims that all of its cyberform are accounted for.

The Unidentified 37th Body: The player characters may wish to visit the Algernon mortuary, in order to view the body that was mentioned in the UN report. The body is a mess, having been struck by shrapnel from the blast, then exposed to the resulting vacuum. A young male, the victim was wearing industrial coveralls, under which was a black skinsuit, several mono-knives, and a large bolt pistol. The pistol and knives both have small red claw symbols embossed upon them, whilst if a button near the collar of the skinsuit is depressed, the drab black garment lights up with a multitude of similar flashing red claws. The other noteworthy fact about the victim is that he has six fingers on his left hand and an unusually elongated body, perhaps suggesting that he was a Highrider.

Inhabitants of the Strip may be questioned about the unidentified man, but there is nothing of value that can be gleaned. However, if the claw insignia is mentioned to someone on the Strip or a law enforcer, they will become reticent to speak and attempt to leave. If pressed, someone may reveal that the claw symbol is that of the anarchistic rogue Rover clan. The Claws. Is it mere coincidence that a member of this outlawed clan risked entering Algernon and was unluckily caught in the explosion, or could The Claws be involved?

The C-9: Given that the initial investigative report states that the explosive used in the bombing, C-9, is rare and expensive, the PCs may wish to investigate its origins. If local miners and other inhabitants of Algernon are questioned about C-9, most will never have heard of it. Better informed asteroid miners may complain that they wish they could use C-9 in their small scale mining operations, but its rarity and expense limits the use of the explosive to wealthy mining corps. Once again, searches of relevant transit and sales records around Ceres will reveal that only the Belt mining

corporations use C-9 (Difficulty 15+), and that the only corporation which currently stockpiles and uses C-9 is CAM (Difficulty 25+). Hmmmm...

The Tattooed Man: Any inquiries as to the existence and identity of the mysterious tattooed man who was reported to have been sucked into the void will lead to a total blank. It seems that the UN authorities may have been right in disregarding this sighting. Perhaps...

The Mining Companies: If inquiries are made around Algernon, it will become apparent to the players that the big three Belt mining companies all have a motive to disrupt the "Free The Slaves" campaign. As the PCs will probably have already discovered, the proposed "Free The Slaves" media campaign was harsh, shocking, and disturbingly credible - a public relations disaster for all the Belt mining companies. Noteworthy, however, is the past reputation and behaviour of each of the three companies. The Director of Solar Mines, Nigel Hawkes, is known to have instigated a rather "soft" policy on the prisoners in his mines, and the company has markedly improved its human rights record recently. Belt Mines Inc. have a reasonable reputation amongst the Belters, as they actually pay their inmates on prison mines and prisoner casualties, whilst common, are not viewed as excessive by the UN. Conversely. Consolidated Asteroid Mining stands out amongst the pack as both the most profitable and feared mining company in the Belt. CAM prisoners have the shortest lifespan of all inmates in the prison mines, constantly ignore or hinder UN investigations, and are undoubtedly responsible for many human rights abuses. What is more, the corporation was particularly targeted in the "Free The Slaves" media campaign, whose accusation that CAM run some of their mines with slaves provided by Rovers is backed up by local rumours!

A powerful and ruthless company with much to lose at the hands of "Free The Slaves", CAM could well be behind the bombing. Further evidence such as the limited use of C-9 in the Belt and the serial number on the destroyed cyberform would seem to support this theory. This is, however, simply not enough solid evidence for the UN and Interpol to condemn CAM without further inquiries, as Dukovi will point out. When the PCs feel that they have substantially completed their investigations on Ceres (don't let this drag on for too long), then have Marshall Dukovi summon them to his office in Algernon. Given that CAM is now a prime suspect, Dukovi orders (yes, orders!) the player characters to travel out to CAM'S main Belt prison mine, Andrei. He will provide the AI team with any vital equipment (referee's discretion), a small unarmed Deep Space OTV, and a letter giving the PCs UN authority to search CAM'S Andrei Base. Dukovi will add that CAM have a reputation of hindering and ignoring the UN in the past, so they should not place too much weight upon his letter. With a warning that he will be keeping his eye on them. and that they are to regularly report to Algernon, Dukovi bids the player characters farewell.

ANDREI BASE

The journey from Ceres to Andrei base should take several days, depending upon the whims of the player characters and how much trouble they can get themselves into. Trouble? You bet! Once again, it's time for you, Mr Referee, to use your imagination and the previously published SolSpace material that details the Asteroid Belt (see issue 27).

Upon arrival, gaining access and useful information from Andrei Base is fraught with difficulties for the players. CAM do not appreciate visitors to their prison mine, especially when such visitors come under the guise of a UN investigative team. The letter of authorisation to search Andrei that they have is unlikely to get them too far. At best, the Marshall's authorisation will allow the PCs to enter Andrei and interview Jonas Velat.

JONAS VELAT

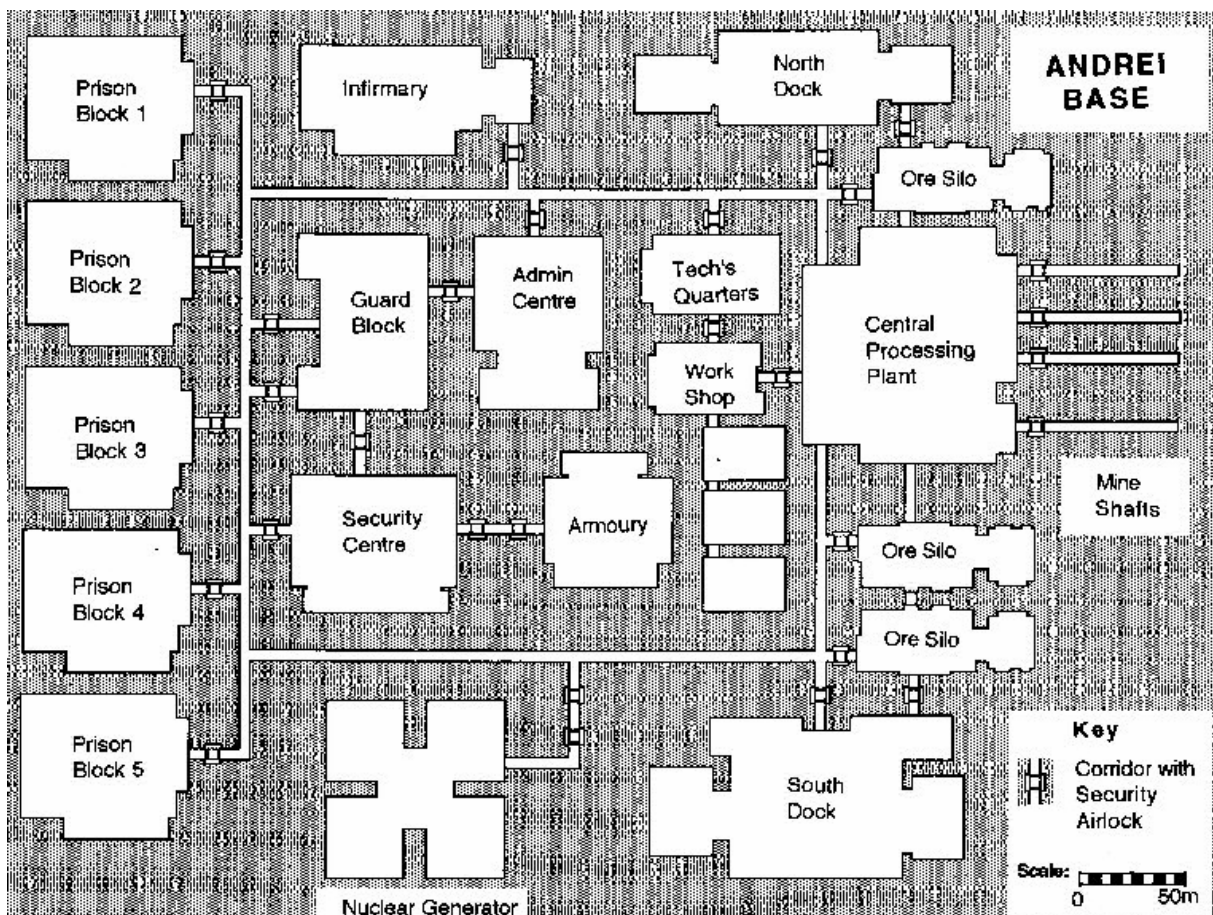
The administrator of CAM'S largest Belt mine, Jonas Velat, is not a likable man. In fact, the responsibility of running the large and profitable Andrei Base, with 5000 prisoners. 50 guards and 50 technicians, has transformed Velat into a tyrannical monster! If the PCs are able to arrange an interview with the CAM administrator, on the weight of Dukovi's authorisation, they will be permitted to dock at Andrei and will be escorted by armed guards to Velat's luxurious office. Filled with antique furniture, wooden panelling, Persian rugs, expensive artworks, and a reinforced window which gives a clear view of the surrounding Belt, Velat's office reeks of wealth and power.

Initially, Velat will allow the player characters to ask a few questions, all of which will receive non-committal answers or direct denials. As far as Velat is concerned, he has heard nothing, seen nothing and thought nothing about the bombing. He even states that he did not know the bombing had occurred! Any characters with psychology, interrogation or interview skill will detect quite easily (Difficulty 15+) that Velat appears quite smug and is not telling the whole truth. Before too many

questions can be asked, however, Velat changes tack and becomes rather aggressive. The administrator will demand to know why his time is being wasted, why he and CAM are being harrassed, and how long "pathetic little snot-dribbling punks like you" have been Marshall Dukovi's lapdogs! Velat will rudely demand that the player characters leave, and guards will enter to escort them (perhaps forcibly) back to the docks.

During the return trip to the docks, the PCs will hear from behind them: "Help me! I'm from the Royal Navy! I've been..." THUD! If they turn around, the team will see a man in prison uniform being dragged through a door by two guards, who are beating the prisoner with stun rods. The player's own guards will prevent any pursuit, and laugh off the situation: "These convicts will try anything to escape! Pathetic! Ha, ha, ha!". The PCs will not see the unfortunate prisoner again.

By now, the aggressive behaviour of Jonas Velat and the strange plea from the desperate prisoner should have aroused the player character's suspicions even further. No doubt, they will not be too keen to leave Andrei before they have made some further investigations. The team will be permitted to remain on their OTV at the docks for 24 hours, in which time they may refuel, repair any damage, and rest. After this time has elapsed, the CAM personnel will bluntly tell the AI team to leave Andrei. A guided tour of the asteroid is totally out of the question. Therefore, it will be up to the players, perhaps with a few suggestions from Ricky, to find a way of investigating the base for any further clues related to the bombing. In addition, Ricky will point out that this would be a perfect opportunity to gain further evidence as to prisoner conditions on Andrei, which could be used by AI against CAM. As always, there are an almost infinite variety of ways which the player characters may devise to gain access to Andrei Base, and the referee must determine whether or not these are feasible on a case-by-case basis. Use the supplied map and these descriptions of the main areas of Andrei Base to run this section of the adventure:



North Dock: The dock on the North pole of Andrei Base is where the PCs' OTV is docked. Various gantries, spaceship maintenance facilities, and fuel tanks are present in this area, along with armoured airlocks that permit access to the base itself. No vessels other than the AI team's OTV will be docked in this area. The North Dock is watched over by 5 weary guards, who have orders not to allow the player characters to leave the area.

Administration: As well as housing the luxurious office and living quarters of the base administrator, this area is the workplace of 5 technical personnel who monitor prison records, shipping, production and supplies. Several computer terminals are present, with access to the base datafortress(!). Two guards patrol here at all times.

Non Player Characters

Ricky "The Ferret" Cavanaugh: As one of AI's most competent field operatives. Ricky gained the nickname "The Ferret" due to his consistent ferreting out of the truth in human rights investigations. An amiable but deadly fellow, Ricky is a competent marksman, brawler and knife-fighter, in addition to his skills as an investigator, interrogator and space pilot.

Andreas Dukovi: One of the UN Marshalls assigned to the Belt, Andreas Dukovi is a tired, cynical and rather bitter man whose greying beard, lined face and bloodshot eyes allude to the stressful and difficult job he has to contend with. Dukovi is suspicious of everyone, believing this to be a wise policy in the lawless Belt, although the player characters may gain his trust, knowledge and considerable influence through hard and honest work. The Marshall is not the combative type, preferring to leave physical conflicts to the RUK Space Marines.

Jonas Velat: The administrator of CAM'S huge Andrei Base mining operation, the player characters will find this man to be a tyrannical and uncooperative monster. Velat is tough talking and aggressive, believing that in the anarchistic Belt those who have the most force and money, such as CAM, should also wield the most power. The administrator is blatantly disrespectful towards the UN's authority, and was certainly arrogant and ruthless enough to have masterminded the bombing of the "Free The Slaves" office, in cooperation with The Claws.

Lukreta: This former Rover is a pirate with revenge on her mind. As her elaborate tattoos demonstrate, Lukor was one a member of The Claws, but was betrayed by competing clan members and convicted of piracy. Cunning, aggressive and self-centered, Lukor will nevertheless be grateful if the characters save her life in the mines of Andrei. and doubly so if they can manage to remove the explosive collar that all prisoners must wear around their necks! Lukor hopes that her "reward" of leading the player characters to The Claws base will also result in some form of revenge against her former comrades.

Vorax: The mysterious and awe-inspiring tattooed man, this Gemini Cyborg is a combat monster! Wielding a huge United Armaments CLAW and an exponent of the Full 'Borg martial art Panzerfaust (see Solo of Fortune 2, pp.66-71), Vorax combines these weapons with an extra-reinforced body. boosted strength and reflexes, cyber- senses. and the ability to survive and function in a vacuum. Vorax originates from Mercury, but has been stationed in the Belt for several years as an advisor to the allied Rover clan, The Claws. Why are the Cyborgs so interested in the affairs of the Belt? Only time will tell...

Guards Quarters: This section of the base comprises personal sleeping areas, a cafeteria, gymnasium, and a holo-vid recreation centre for the 50 Andrei Base guards when they are off duty.

Technicians Quarters: Smaller but otherwise identical to the Guards Quarters, and houses the 50 base technical personnel when they are off duty.

Armoury and Security Centre: A heavily armoured and protected zone. the armoury and security centre is the nexus of control over Andrei Base's prisoners, computers, armament and power generators. This area is completely surrounded by a Security Zone, is guarded by 5 heavily armed, armoured and cybered troopers, and houses 5 technical security personnel. The armoury may only be accessed through two armoured airlocks, and contains weapons ranging from small knives, lasers and stun rods to a variety of heavy weapons, along with a large stockpile of explosives. What type of explosive? Why, C-9 of course! In addition, 4 spare remote control explosive collar detonators are stored in the armoury (see Prisons in Space).

The base mainframe computer is housed here, along with several access terminals, and the datafortress is constantly watched over by rotating shifts of Pro-level system operators. The exact layout and capabilities of the Andrei datafortress are up to the referee's discretion, but any attempt to attack the system should be a formidable task! In addition, the Andrei mainframe is very rarely open to intrusion, and will probably have to be accessed physically within the base if a netrunner wishes to wreak havoc upon the system! If one of the players manages to get past the lethal intrusion counter-measures and Pro-level systems operator, they may find the following piece of bizarre information:

Mechanical Depot and Workshop: The depot and workshop is usually unguarded, and consists of three large storage areas that are filled with mining drills, small vehicles, spare parts, tools, electronic equipment, working benches and similar technical apparatus. Technicians are always in this area, preoccupied with whatever job they are currently performing. If the depot and workshop is searched, the player characters may come across a storage container labelled: "MINEX UNITS". Inside, there are nine of the 50cm cube wheeled cyberforms, with space for a tenth. Where is the tenth MINEX cyberform? Perhaps scattered in a thousand pieces around the Algneron Strip by 20 kilograms of C-9?

Infirmary: The high security infirmary divided into two sections - one for staff and one for prisoners, and has a staff of two doctors. The excellent medical facilities available here seem to

keep the base personnel fit and healthy, yet very few prisoners ever get to see it! In fact whilst there is one guard present in the infirmary (recovering from prisoner-induced concussion), there are no sick prisoners. It seems that most prisoners are left to die in the mines or cells, rather than receiving expensive medical treatment.

MEMO: Administrator Velat to All Security Staff.
SUBJECT: South Dock - Restriction Code Black.
SECURITY PRIORITY: Black.
TEXT: All personnel are to henceforth be banned from entering the South Dock area for 48 hours, especially whilst our UN visitors are present on the base. The UN visitors are to be kept tightly restricted to the North Dock. Other visitors are due at the South Dock within 24 hours. All personnel are to avoid the South Dock, which is to be kept open for docking at all times. Navigation and shipping technicians are to be advised not to be concerned with the sudden appearance of a visiting vessel at the South Dock, even if it does not appear on their monitors and scanners.
END MEMO.

If the player characters unearth this strange memo, they would probably be wondering what it all means. Good! Whatever the case, the AI team will probably want to investigate the South Dock.

Solar and Nuclear Generators: Andrei Base is powered largely by a vast array of solar panels. As a backup power source which is often needed power mining equipment, a nuclear generator has also been installed in the radiation-shielded core the asteroid.

Security Zone: Several areas of Andrei Base are surrounded by Security Zones. Each zone is a ten meter diameter tunnel carved through the asteroid and laced with a variety of traps and defences. Systems include automated weapons motion-sensitive mines, explosive collar

perimeter markers, combat cyberforms, gas vents, mono-wires, stun grenades, electrified flooring and razor-wire. Constantly monitored and patrolled, such areas are sometimes left scattered with the bones of previous escapees to add an extra factor of horror to the Security Zones. To date, no one has ever escaped Andrei Base.

Prisoners Quarters: The 5000 prisoners on the asteroid are divided into 5 separate living areas. Within each living area are 10 cells, each housing 100 prisoners in cramped, dark and unsanitary conditions. Dead bodies are left to rot in these cells as casualties amongst prisoners due to infighting, rebellion, sickness and accidents are common. The guards largely avoid these areas, leaving discipline and monitoring up to automated cameras, guns and the feared explosive collars. There are no recreation areas, prisoners rarely wash, and the "food" served is a horrific combination of recycled algae and contraceptive chemicals.

Central Processing Plant and Storage Silos: The most important area of Andrei Base for CAM, the Central Processing Plant takes the raw material mined by prisoners from the asteroids, and processes it into a reasonably pure form of ore. The processed ore is placed into storage silos until it is ready for shipping out of the Belt. Around 20 techs oversee the careful running of the plant and the mining equipment, whilst 10 armed guards patrol the area, as it is a popular avenue of attempted escape by prisoners who jump on the conveyor belt from the mine shafts to the Processing Plant.

Mine Shafts: Dark, filthy, unpressurised and extremely dangerous, the mine shafts of Andrei are the frequent site of prisoner casualties. Once again, the guards avoid this prisoner-filled area, preferring to maintain discipline by indirect means.

South Dock: If the PCs manage to reach the South Dock, they

Sometime during their explorations, the player characters come across the prone form of Lukreta, an imprisoned Rover who is a member of The Claws. Lukreta has similar tattoos to those on the unidentified 37th victim of the Algneron bombing, and is in desperate need of help. The Rover's spacesuit is leaking, and one of her legs was broken by a rival prisoner, who happened to be an old adversary from The Claws. Rather than kill her outright, Lukreta's rival left his victim unable to move and sure to die from depressurisation! If the PCs show mercy to Lukreta and rescue her, the Rover will promise to reward the AI team with information that the UN and RUK would pay millions of eurobucks for. All the characters have to do is help Lukreta escape from Andrei Base, then she will lead them to their reward somewhere in the Belt. What is the reward? The PCs will have to wait and see, but Lukreta seems to be genuine.

Actually getting Lukreta off Andrei alive will prove to be a significant challenge. Apart from avoiding the numerous guards, security systems and dangerous prisoners, the explosive collar around Lukreta's neck will have to be removed before she leaves the asteroid. Defusing the explosive in the collar is a Very Difficult Demolitions task (25+), whilst actually unlocking and deactivating the security collar is a Nearly Impossible Electronic Security task (30+). Any failed attempt to tamper with the collar will alert security personnel, whilst a Fumble (roll of 1) will lead to automatic detonation! Ouch! Alternatively, a skilled Netrunner could infiltrate the Andrei Base datafortress and attempt to discover the heavily encrypted access code for Lukreta's collar - a truly formidable task.

will find that the airlock leading to this area is blocked by 5 alert guards. If the guards are eliminated, distracted or otherwise bypassed, and if the PCs can get through the locked and armoured airlock, they will find the layout of the South Dock to be identical to that of the North. What is in the dock, however, is far more surprising. Some sort of armed deep space OTV is preparing to leave the dock, and the markings on the vessel are undoubtedly those of The Claws! What are the Rovers doing in the dock of CAM'S largest Prison Mine? There are ten Rovers scurrying about, all armed to the teeth, hastily packing boxes onto the OTV, completing last minute preparations, and dragging a large number of chains and manacles on board. Observant PCs will notice that the chains and manacles seem to be human-sized, and some are glistening with fresh blood! Perhaps the rumours about CAM buying slaves from the Rovers are true?

If the PCs continue to observe the Rovers unnoticed, rather than rushing into combat, they will gain further insights. Characters with military or extensive deep space experience may notice that atop the Rover's OTV is a large spherical object, which may well be some sort of electronic countermeasures device (ECM). Judging by the size of the ECM device, it is probably extremely effective. Where in the universe did The Claws get their paws on complex ECM technology? Hmm...

In addition, a massively muscled and tall man will soon stride out of the OTV, carrying with him some sort of massive automatic shotgun! What will most catch the PC's eyes, however, is the number of bright tattoos which cover his face. Could this be the mysterious tattooed man? The huge man is actually Vorax, a Full-Conversion Gemini Cyborg, although the PC will probably not be able to detect this. Using his wide range of cyber-senses, Vorax may be able to detect the PCs if they are watching from a concealed position (test to see if this is so). If the AI team are detected, Vorax will let out a mighty roar, bring up his huge shotgun, and start blasting indiscriminately in the direction that he suspects the PCs are lurking in! The remaining Rovers will retreat to the OTV, provide Vorax with covering fire, and take off from the docks within a minute. Vorax will either accompany The Claws if he can, or simply leap into the vacuum and catch up with the Rovers later. Whatever the case, Vorax will survive this encounter to fight another day.

If Vorax does not detect the PCs, then the initiative falls to them as to what action should be taken. The tactics of Vorax and the Rovers, if combat should arise, will be to secure their escape. Alternatively, the AI team could attempt to sabotage the OTV, blow it up. or stow away on the vessel. Their chances of success will depend on their skills, luck, and preferences of the referee. Essentially, however, Vorax and the Rovers should escape from the players in this encounter, unless a truly brilliant plan is devised, which is then carried out perfectly!

But don't let your players worry - they'll be seeing their new "friends" soon enough!

NEXT ISSUE...

We conclude this exciting scenario, with a fateful confrontation with a derelict spaceship, vengeful Rovers, lunatic cyborgs and a pack of trigger-happy player characters. This one's got the lot!

We'll also be providing some further background information on the Rover Clans, those vikings of the space-lanes. Are they really bloodthirsty killers, or the new pioneers of the solar system? Only we know for sure...and we aren't telling.

Don't miss it...

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NED KELLY'S LAST STAND!

EXPLOSIVE CONCLUSION TO A TWO-PART SOLSPACE
BY JONATHAN A. SPEAR

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE...

"My work here may have been compromised by UN Investigators appointed by Marshall Dukovi. They have infiltrated base security and discovered the involvement of the Claws in the Ceres incident. I regret to inform you that Operative Unit Vorax was unable to liquidate them.

I do not know how much other information they may have discovered, but I shall keep you advised. Suggest that you alert all other Operative Units to possible security breach.

Removal of liabilities will begin immediately..."

Message from Andrei Base,
destination unknown.

In the first part of this adventure, the PCs were hired by Amnesty Interspatial to ensure the safety of one of that group's more radical units (based on Ceres). Unfortunately, within hours of their arrival on Ceres, the "Free the Slaves" office was destroyed in a massive explosion. The PCs were cleared of any involvement but found themselves press-ganged into helping with the UN investigation into the bombing.

Clues pointed to the involvement of the Claws, a notorious Rover gang, but the hardest evidence implicated Consolidated Asteroid Mining, the biggest of the three Belt mining companies. Armed with authorisation papers, the PCs journeyed to Andrei Base, CAMs main Belt Prison Mine. There they received a less than pleasant welcome from Jonas Velat, Andrei Base's administrator.

"Unauthorised investigations" by the PCs revealed that Andrei Base held numerous dirty secrets, including RUK prisoners. Rover clans involved in slavery and the presence of the "Tattooed Man", a vicious cyborg killer linked to the explosion on Ceres. Not wishing to "come in for questioning",

the cyborg instead engaged the PCs in a savage fire-fight before making good his escape.

A TIME FOR CHOICES

By this stage, the player characters probably have three options which they may pursue. Firstly, they may wish to return to Algernon and report their findings, hopefully with some evidence, to Marshall Dukovi. This may lead to the UN's bombing investigation being focussed upon CAM'S involvement, and its links to The Claws. A lengthy lawsuit and punitive action against CAM and The Claws is likely to follow. Unfortunately, if this option is taken, there is very little chance of the player characters being able to catch The Claws whom they may have found on Andrei. In addition, Lukreta will not be at all keen on going to Algernon, as she may well be the first successful escapee from Andrei - and therefore a very wanted woman!

Secondly, if Lukreta escapes from Andrei she may come good with her promise and lead the AI team to the main headquarters of the Claws, although she will not tell the player characters this until they have arrived! Lukreta will then demand to be set free on a nearby asteroid where she has a secret bolt-hole, and will soon vanish into the Belt if allowed to leave. Why would Lukreta betray her former clan? Because it was her own competing clan members from the Claws who sold her out to the authorities in the first place, thereby resulting in a conviction for piracy and a lifetime in the mines. Such treachery is common amongst The Claws, and Lukreta hopes to see herself revenged when the player characters discover, and hopefully deal with, the base of her treacherous comrades!

Finally, the player characters may wish to immediately pursue the fleeing Rovers in their OTV. This will not be easy, as the Claws speed through the Belt to their home base with a head start on the AI team. Fortunately for the player characters, the ECM array was not properly activated and slightly damaged during the Rovers' speedy departure, therefore allowing them to be tracked with some difficulty. The various tests and modifiers which are applicable in this pursuit should be determined by the referee, in consultation with the rules of Deep Space. On the other hand, if the player characters

have managed to stow away on the Rovers' OTV, all they have to do is hang on tight, keep quiet, and pray that they are not discovered!

A TRAITOROUS VICTORY

Whether with Lukreta's help or by their own cunning, the player characters may eventually discover the secret headquarters of the Claws'. The Rover clan's headquarters consists of nothing less than the Ned Kelly, an RUK prison ship which was captured seven months ago by the Claws in a brilliant display of piratical cunning and treachery!

The Ned Kelly was actually captured virtually intact by the Claws, and was converted into their secret mobile headquarters. The Claws have equipped the Ned Kelly with sophisticated gear similar to that which the player characters may have seen on the Rover OTV which escaped from Andrei Base. The former prison ship is not only concealed electronically, however, as the entire vessel has had a multitude of small asteroids fixed to its outer hull. The resulting visual effect, from a distance, is that of a elongated asteroid which has successfully fooled several Royal Navy patrol vessels in the past. Concealed visually and electronically, yet still fully operational and crewed by the majority of the Claws, the capture of the Ned Kelly is a major coup and secret weapon for the Rovers!

How was the Ned Kelly captured? Treachery! Several members of the Claws had managed to infiltrate the Prisons Division two years prior to the Belt War, in anticipation of a conflict between the RUK and the Rovers. Assigned to the Ned Kelly, these Rovers masqueraded as loyal personnel until the time was right to strike. When the prison ship was deep into the Belt and its escorts had been diverted by other Rover activity, the traitors on the Ned Kelly received their coded instructions to act. Having subverted the Ned Kelly's hardened circuitry and EMP sponges, the Rovers detonated several powerful EMP bombs within the prison ship, precisely at the moment when a vast wave of Claws were descending upon the vessel! With the ship's systems crippled and betrayed by their own crew members, even the RUK Space Marines aboard the Ned Kelly were unable to put up much resistance. Rapidly captured and towed to a concealed location, RUK investigators found nothing in the vacuum by the time they had pinpointed the Ned Kelly's last reported location.

LAST STAND

If the player characters chose to follow the Rover's OTV from Andrei Base, or allowed Lukreta to lead them to her "secret reward", they may well find themselves confronted with the Claws' traitorously- acquired headquarters drifting deep in the Belt. Perceptive characters may notice that a large spaceship seems to be concealed beneath the conglomeration of small asteroids, and those with a military background or good knowledge of Belt history may actually suspect that the spaceship is a prison ship. Drifting alongside the Ned Kelly is a vessel that could only be described as a sleek metallic shark, a craft of obvious speed and sophistication! Rovers can be seen swarming around the two vessels in a manner akin to Bio-Suit equipped insects, whilst a group of five large metallic humanoids cross the void from the shark-like ship to the Ned Kelly. Full conversion Cyborgs! What are the feared Cyborgs, presumably from the hell-world of Mercury, doing in the Belt dealing with the Claws? More importantly, what are the player characters going to do about it?

Once again, the players are likely to formulate a number of maniac and memorable plans, whose viability must be assessed by the referee. Those who value their skins may desire to flee back to Ceres, inform Marshall Dukovi of their disturbing discovery, and stand back as the Royal Navy works itself into a frenzy of revenge! The resulting strike by the RUK forces is likely to see the recapture or destruction of their former prison vessel, yet this will be too late to foil the dastardly scheme that is being plotted between the Claws and the Cyborgs.

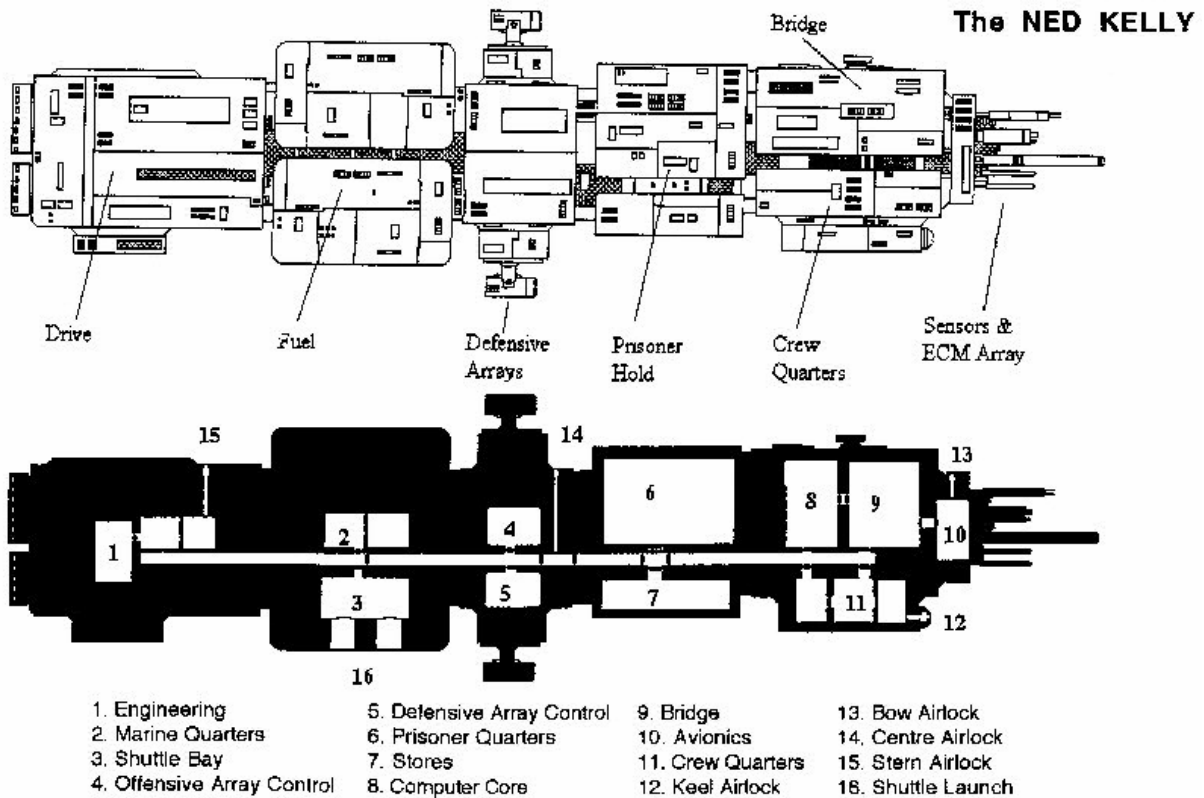
Brave, reckless or cunning player characters may formulate some means of attacking or disrupting the gathering of Rovers and Cyborgs, be this by a diversionary attack, sabotage, netrun, sowing suspicion, infiltration or other means. Consult the Ship Map and the following location descriptions for further information:

The Cyborg's Vessel: This silver shark-like craft is extremely swift, well armed and armoured with the latest technology of Mercury. The Cyborg's vessel has a number of complex security systems, its datafortress cannot be accessed externally, and its airlocks are sealed tight.

In other words, the player characters would be ill-advised to go anywhere near it, especially given that two combat cyborgs and a Wingman cyborg pilot (see Chromebook 2 pp.77-78) are still on board!

The OTV from Andrei: The Rover's OTV that escaped from Andrei Base is drifting next to the Ned Kelly. and several of the Claws are still on board keeping guard and repairing systems such as

the ECM array. The tattooed man (Vorax) is not here, however, as he has joined the gathering on board the flagship. The OTV is armed with a laser and two missiles, which provide the Rovers with enough firepower to harrass most Privateers.



Ned Kelly Exterior:

The prison ship's exterior is covered with small asteroids which have been attached to the vessel, giving the impression of a large elongated asteroid from a distance. In doing so, the Claws have sacrificed much speed and maneuverability of the Ned Kelly, in favour of retaining the secrecy of their headquarters. Up close, the drives, weapon systems, antennae, airlocks and some windows may be seen and accessed. The exterior of the Ned Kelly is crawling with Bio-Suit equipped Rovers, who are watching for any treachery by the Cyborgs or other interference. Due to the vast size of the vessel and constantly shifting asteroids, it may be possible for the player characters to reach the exterior of the Ned Kelly undetected. All airlocks into the vessel are guarded by two Rovers, however.

Access Shafts and Elevators: Travel between each deck of the Ned Kelly is accomplished by means of elevators or corresponding access shafts. It should be noted that some of the shafts and all of the elevators are fitted with security cameras who display their images to the bridge.

Engineering: The aft decks of the prison ship consist of the drives, nuclear power systems, fuel storage, damage control facilities, spare parts store and workshop. These areas are dimly lit, filthy, convoluted, and only inhabited by a few of the lower ranked members of the Claws and some technicians.

Weapon Systems: The Ned Kelly possesses a limited array of weapons, including lasers, kinetic-kill devices, and conventional missiles. Whilst these were damaged during the Claws* capture of the vessel, all the weapon systems have since been reconstructed with scavenged and stolen spare parts. Most weapon systems are manned and guarded by several Rovers who are trained in their use.

Defensive Systems: In addition to the prison ship's armour and asteroid covering, the Ned Kelly retains functioning defences such as chaff, flares, counter-missiles, and aerosols which are activated from the Bridge. The ship's military jamming system was damaged beyond repair as a result of the EMP blast during the ship's capture, but the Rovers replaced this system with a complex ECM array.

Prisoner Transport Hold: Ironically, this area is now the home to the majority of the Claws when they are not prowling the Belt. Basically consisting of one huge cell, the Prisoner Transport Hold has enough room to transport 100 prisoners in extremely uncomfortable conditions. Automated lasers and lasers, coupled with floors which may be electrified, are still present in the hold and may be activated from the bridge. The Rovers' personal hygiene and housekeeping skills leave much to be desired! Around thirty young men, mothers and children will be present here during the meeting

between the Rovers and the Cyborgs. These dependents should not be underestimated, however, as they are all armed and very dangerous!

Bridge and Datafortress: As the nerve-centre of the vessel, the Bridge is guarded by five wary Rovers and manned constantly by three of the Claws' technicians. A complex array of monitors and control systems fill this deck, some of which the Rovers have still not deduced how to operate! Only a character with extensive experience in operating large deep space vessels would have any idea how to run the Ned Kelly in a safe and effective manner. The ship's defensive and security systems may all be controlled from the Bridge, as can the drives, power plant, and weapon systems.

In addition, the prison ship's mainframe computer is physically located in the Bridge and is attended by two Weefle-Level Systems Operators (see Guide to the Net p. 151). The Weefles are the

The NED KELLY (converted Armed Freighter)

Armed Freighter* 1000*8*10* Chemical, Nuclear* 8.10* Nuclear.Batteries.Fuel Cel 1 * 80%* 4* 200m* 4*8* 2*20* 7*2 Cargo OTV

Built originally as an armed cargo carrier for the military and corps, this particular ship has found a lot of employment in the Belt as a Prison Transport. Its capacious cargo hold is converted into cramped living quarters for up to 100 prisoners. The original ship had a crew of 8, of which 4 were pilots for the OTVs. Passenger space was split into a 6-man Marine quarters and 2 extra with the crew. Some freighters carried fighters in lieu of the OTVs if travelling in dangerous zones, while others carried Passenger OTVs if used for transporting prisoners.

The Ned Kelly was armed with a Laser array. Kinetic Kill weapon and 1 Missile rack. For defense it carried 2 Chaff/Flare launchers, 2 Aerosol launchers and 1 Jammer.

Damage Points:

(4)BW(3)BD(2)BPBSBWBPBDBSBPBS7654321

MERCURY ARMED CLIPPER

Armed Clipper* 1000*2*6* Chemical, Nuclear* 8.10* Nuclear. Batteries* 85%* 5* 30m* 6*5* 2*10*4*1 Flitter

One of a new generation of sleek craft from Mercury, this ship is a borderline blend of civilian cargo ship and warcraft. It has state of the art cybernetic control interfaces and is extremely fuel efficient. The life support aboard is geared towards mostly cyborg crews and passengers, allowing substantial weight and space savings. This means that the ship can be a lot smaller than an equivalent capability "meat" ship.

Typical weapon array is 1 Laser and 1 Missile Rack. coupled with 1 Chaff/Flares launcher and 2 sophisticated Jammers (two in conjunction can cause -60% to enemy sensor locks and prevent any radio communications for a 1000km radius in space. One has half the effect)

Damage Points:

(2)B W (2)B PB SBWDB4321

least of an intruding netrunner's problems, however. Apart from the fact that the Ned Kelly's datafortress must be accessed physically from within the vessel, all the Royal Navy's secret and deadly black ice is still operative within the system! Any intruder will have to tread very carefully past these merciless military programs if they are to access the ship's vital systems. The exact layout, defenses, and programs of the Ned Kelly's datafortress is left up to the referee's discretion, but remember that this is a hard military target!

Marine Quarters & Flight Deck:

This area was once the barracks for the now-deceased RUK Space Marine contingent on board the Ned Kelly. It contains bunks, an armoury and a virtual training cell. This deck was the scene of much fierce fighting between the loyal RUK crew and the Claws during the capture of the Ned Kelly. As a result, most of the quarters are still awaiting repair before the area is habitable again, although the deck has been sealed and repressurised by Rover work crews.

Crew Quarters: The cramped Crew Quarters once included bunks, washrooms, a mess area, and recreation area. This is now the reserved quarters for the Claws' more important members.

It is in the mess room that the leaders of the Claws and the Cyborgs will meet if the player characters do not initially disrupt proceedings. The area will be heavily guarded by 4 Bio-suited Rovers, whilst 5 leaders of the Claws hunch around a table with the 5 Full Conversion Cyborgs (Vorax the tattooed Gemini, 2 Copernicus cyborgs, a Burroughs cyborg and a modified Alpha class - see Chromebooks 2 & 3). A nasty conglomeration of hardware indeed.

If the characters manage to overhear the discussion taking place, it seems that the Claws and the Cyborgs are negotiating *"...another pact of mutual co-operation, assistance, protection, and supply of advanced technology."* The conversation seems to revolve around amounts and costs of advanced technology that is to be supplied to the Claws by the Mercury Cyborgs! If the

players cannot somehow disrupt the negotiations within half an hour of the Cyborgs' entry onto the Ned Kelly. then the agreement will be concluded and the metalheads will depart in their sleek vessel.

The consequences of continued supply of advanced technology by the Cyborgs to the Rovers are likely to be extremely ugly for the Privateers. Miners and authorities in the Belt! Will the player characters be able to foil this insidious alliance?

CONCLUSION

The ramifications of the players' investigation and actions may be significant, depending upon their success, bravery and skill - assuming that they survived the perils of the Belt! AI will pay the player characters their expected wage in full, with gratitude for their efforts. Having demonstrated their abilities. AI will keep the characters in mind for future missions of importance. Similarly, the UN and RUK will be extremely grateful for their efforts, possibly granting them a substantial award (referee's discretion), especially if their involvement in Lukreta's escape remains secret! In addition, the team will probably have earned a valuable friend and ally in Marshall Dukovi.

If the AI team have been at all competent, then CAM are sure to be in major legal trouble, with the UN and RUK hounding them for justice and revenge due to the mining company's apparent links to the bombing, co-operation with the Claws, lying to UN investigators, possible involvement in Rover slave trading, and blatant human rights abuses. Amnesty Interspatial may have a similar field-day at CAM'S expense.

The Claws may be even more unpopular with the UN and RUK for their suspected involvement in carrying out the bombing, co-operation with the Mercury Cyborgs, slave trading, and capture of the Ned Kelly- in addition to the substantial assortment of crimes which they are already wanted for! Similarly, other Rover clans will cast a dim view upon the terrorist bombing of Algernon, co-operation with CAM, and treacherous alliance with the Cyborgs.

And the Mercury Cyborgs? If the player characters reveal and foil their alliance with the Claws, the Cyborgs will be grinding their metal jaws in fury. Despite this, no direct action will be taken in revenge. The Cyborgs can wait, their time shall come...

Jonathan Spear is a very organised and prolific writer who manages to fit his many contributions to Australian Realms in between his law course work and his gaming activities. Jonathan lives in Victoria and loves a good hamburger.

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SOLSPACE ROVERS

BY JONATHAN A. SPEAR & PAUL MITTING

PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE

"Back in 2035, we had those Rovers licked. It was a mean fight, and the RUK lost their flagship, but the UN, RUK and Commonwealth had those scum running through the Belt like useless little popsicles. Sure, I nearly died, but those Dan Dares saved my sorry little butt from those loony Clan Libertas raiders! Lilith Base was popped open like a can of Smash, and all our Rover problems were over..."

That should've been it! The end! But no, back they come like vermin on Black Lace! Ships looted and stripped, mines and workshacks destroyed, slaves taken, more drugs, more extortion, more smuggling, Highriders sacrificed to some stupid god or something...

I used to think that the UN was doing a good job out here, that we were winning along with the RUK. Now, I dunno... If only we could find out where those Rovers are getting all their military hardware..."

- UN Marshall Andreas Dukovi.

Stalking the Asteroid Belt like voracious jackals, the Rover clans pose a significant threat to the miners, corporations and privateers who ply this tiarsh and rocky void. Cunning, determined, and often desperate these piratical rogues prey upon the unwary and unprepared: killing, looting and enslaving commercial spacecraft. Despite the extensive and bloody Belt War of 2035, the RUK, Commonwealth and UN forces were far from successful in completely eliminating the malevolent Rover presence amongst the dense asteroids. The Privateer Charter of 2036, allowing the arming of civilian vessels and bases, coupled with a mandate for private actions to be taken against Pirate activity, has proved to be controversial and rather ineffectual. Conversely, the Rover clans seem to have gained in strength, ruthlessness and skill since the Belt War, as the number and effect of pirate raids become ever more devastating.

Now, in 2037, it seems that the Rovers are ready to reclaim their tide of PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE!

ROVER ORIGINS

The Rovers originated as dissidents from Mars and Luna, attracted to the more open and lawless lifestyle of the Belt. Pooling their resources they constructed Freedom colony on the Ramirez asteroid during 2030. However, it was not long before the more radical elements tried to force a takeover of the fledgling colony. The anarchic political system which the radicals wished to impose was a philosophy of lawlessness and individualism too great even for most Belters. The instigators and their more dedicated followers were evicted from Freedom, in a political battle that devolved into a brutal struggle of arms. The expulsion of the radicals was aided by the first UN Marshalls and agents to filter into the Belt, followed by a platoon of ACPA suited RUK Space Marines who intimidated the dissidents into leaving.

Taking with them a gaggle of secondhand mining and small cargo ships, the radicals bore a wellspring of enmity for the RUK, UN and the "lapdog" Freedom colony Belters. Determined to bring their version of enlightened government to SolSpace, these dissidents formed the first of what became known as the Rover clans.

THE LOOK

Above all else the Rover clans value freedom and individualism, a philosophy that is reflected in their diverse appearance. Like most Spacers and Asteroid Highriders, the Rovers experience great deviations from Dirtsides physical norms. Their harsh lifestyle, coupled with nano-tech viruses and genetic manipulation results in most Rovers being stronger, tougher and more radiation-resistant than the average Dirtsider. Gradually, the Rovers are growing longer, more slender bodies. A few are even developing benevolent mutations, such as prehensile feet, better tolerance to extremes of temperature and air pressure, extra digits, solar flare resistant eyes, the ability to use less and retain more oxygen in the body, oddly hued skin, curvature of the bones, and excellent resistance to motion sickness.

There have even been rumours circulating around the Belt of Rovers demonstrating extraordinary mental powers, although the "witnesses" to such events proved rather unreliable under questioning. The UN has written off such "sightings" as hallucinations caused by the stresses of Belt life, coupled with poorly adjusted atmosphere and oxygen levels in spacesuits and workshacks!

The clothing worn by Rovers is as diverse as their gradually altering bodies (and minds if the rumours are of any substance). When relaxing at home in their rogue bases, bolt-holes and workshacks, most clan members opt to wear the practical Skinsuits which continue to dominate

Highrider fashion. What sets each Rover apart is their individual decoration of their Skinsuit, primarily with patterns that reflect the heritage, lifestyle and status of the clan and self. The more radical Rovers consider gruesome jewelry and trophies, pagan symbols, "scalp badges", weapon harnesses, zero-gravity defying haircuts, ornate holo-tattoos and body-piercing to be ideal fashion accessories!

BIO-SUITS

These powered space suits are a blend of refined ACPA technology and advances cyberforms. Each suit has an integral ceretronic brain and life support systems, with its own sensory arrays and movement capability. The wearer "jacks in" like an ACPA, but the linking of the onboard brain and the wearer's allows a higher level of movement and awareness than in conventional suits.

It takes about 24 to 36 hours of use to adapt the cyberform to your own body's movements and senses. Thereafter, while jacked, the wearer can operate with almost normal movement. Their Awareness skills are enhanced by +2 to all attempts due to the sophisticated sensor feedback. Effective strength (BOD) is raised by +2 for all purposes (except BOD saves when wounded). Reflexes are boosted by +1 as the bio-suit matches and enhances the wearer's actions.

Life support for the wearer is 24 hours of hard use. This is longer if the person remains passive or has minimal life support needs (eg: heavily augmented). Rad protection is 10 RSP per turn. Bio-Suits are self sealing in the case of punctures or cuts up to 3cm across.

COMBAT STATS:

Location	SP	SDP (to disable)	SDP (to destroy)	Option Spaces
Head	30	6	10	1+4 Optic / Sensor Spaces
Torso	30	15	20	2
Arms (each)	30	6	10	2
Legs (each)	30	12	18	2

EV: +0 if adapted to suit and jacked. -1 if not adapted. -5 if not jacked to suit. Hits to the suit that penetrate do half damage to the location's SDP and half to the wearer. COST: 8000 to 12000 Eb, depending on local demand and supply. If bought outside the Belt, prices can be up to double this, even for older suits.

ROVER CHROME

When on the job, be it piracy, mining, smuggling, slave-trading, extortion or negotiating illicit dealings. Rovers arm and armour themselves to the teeth. Their entire lifestyle is one of danger, death and struggle against the hated "system", and their fearsome working equipment reflects this. Custom painted and modified cybernetic Bio-Suits, often scavenged from fallen foes, are the armour of choice for virtually all adult Rovers. Recently, a number of Rover clans have appeared in expensive state-of-the-Edge Bio-Suits, leading the UN Marshalls puzzled as to how they were acquired, and from whom.

A similarly disturbing recent trend is the sudden increase in the number and substantial armament of small Rover raiding craft and rogue bases. Sophisticated personal and heavy weaponry has been used by Pirates to great effect, crushing all resistance with a combination of deadly firepower, superb armour, and raw ferocity! The UN

and RUK are becoming extremely anxious to trace the source of the potentially devastating new technology which the Rovers seem to be acquiring so rapidly. The numerous but poorly equipped and disunited rabble that the RUK faced in the 2035 Belt War are being replaced by a far more cohesive and well armed Rover threat in 2037...

CLAN SHIPS

The most common vessel used by the Clans are Deep Space OTVs, often extensively modified and upgunned. Many were legitimately purchased, usually second hand, but a number have been acquired by hijacking and piracy. All are kept in excellent operational order, with many spare parts hand made by skilled clan techs.

Clans tend to keep all of the ships together in a small fleet. At the core will be the OTVs, with Cargo Clippers and Freighters carrying many of the families and clan possessions. Around them will be a screen of Sting Ships and remote Gun Drones. When the Clan engages in hazardous missions, the main fleet will be left in deep space or tethered to an asteroid while the fighting ships move off.

Clan Ubertas has been known to field at least 3 Deltas, a captured Commonwealth Gunship and over a dozen Sting ships in one raid alone.

FEALTY & FEUDING

Living as vicious outlaws and pirates in one of the harshest locations in the Solar System may have gained the Rovers a fearsome reputation, but the price they pay is great. The high incidence of ruthless conflict in an unforgiving environment between the Rovers and the UN, RUK, corporations, privateers and other clans results in an extremely short life-expectancy for most clan members. This problem is exacerbated by the poor quality of Rover living conditions, limited access to medical treatment, high exposure to radiation and a "gung-ho" attitude - "Live fast, die young and float a good-looking corpse in the vacuum".

Such a lifestyle demands strong cohesion, as each member must trust their brothers and sisters to support and fight with them in order to survive against the opposition and nature itself. The resulting sense of family loyalty and personal honour within the clans is very strong, as internal clan rivalries are usually settled with minimal disruption and outright betrayal is almost unheard of. When one member of a Rover clan is insulted or attacked, its certain that the family will support them without question - or wreak terrible revenge upon the perpetrator!

The sense of clan loyalty does not apply very strongly between different Rover clans. Whilst different clans often make alliances, these are usually only for practical business and military purposes, and are temporary in nature. An uneasy truce and loose network of alliances unites the Rover Clans as a whole, but backstabbing and double-crossing are common occurrences between the clans.

The Rover clans have established a form of government amongst themselves. Each clan has a leader, sometimes elected but usually the most powerful individual, and these clan leaders meet occasionally at a Clan Allthing. The Allthing is held at different locations and times which are transmitted only to Rovers. Here the clans discuss those issues that they need to, resolve conflicts, and occasionally declare war between clans. A clan may be declared "outcast", and such a pronouncement usually means that its members will be attacked on sight by other Rover clans.

MOTHER SOL

Whilst much of the RUK Nomadic Movement on the Dirtsides worship the Earth and Nature in a Pagan revival, the Rover clans take a somewhat different attitude towards religion. The Rovers have developed their own unique pagan beliefs based upon worship of Mother Sol, the Sun, and her three aspects, the Triad of Atmosphere, Radiation and Gravity. Knowledge of the Triad is vital to the survival of all Highriders, but the Rover clans have transformed this necessity into a religion, as Sol Shamans dwell within each clan and serve as spiritual, medical and political advisors to the clan leader.

Mother Sol is particularly worshipped when a solar flare or conjunction of planets with the Sun occurs. In fact, fanatically devout clans have been known to strap captives onto ceremonial altars,

leaving them exposed to strong solar flares and a hideous radiation-induced death! Such human sacrifices are said to please Mother Sol, who will protect the Rover clan from the effects of the Triad.



It is important to remember that not all clans follow this new religion, and some only pay lip service in order to trade with believers.

THE CLANS

The Rovers of the Asteroid Belt are divided into many clans, whose sizes vary from that of a small family to several hundred members. Despite the fact that the fortunes of the clans tend to rise and fall very rapidly, there are several clans who have long remained large and influential forces within the loose Rover network.

Clan Libertas - The core of the original radical movement on Freedom base. Clan Libertas consists of approximately five hundred members. Still the dominant political force within the Rover government and at Clan Allthings, this clan has the most politically experienced leader amongst the clans - Chief Nozumo Takohoto. A veteran of early rebellions on Mars and the leader of the radicals at Freedom Base, Takohoto has managed to cling to power, despite the many setbacks the Rovers suffered during their expulsion and subsequent Belt War defeat.

Clan Libertas' great numbers provide them with substantial military power, coupled with a wide-ranging web of illegal activities that generate a substantial income. The Clan originated the worship of Mother Sol, and has some of the most fanatical followers. Interestingly, Chief Takohoto has often been accused of deliberately creating the following (of which he is Patriarch) purely for political means. The accusers were killed of course in trial by combat.

Bandicoots - Regardless of their ridiculous name, which was originally inspired by the large number of former Australian citizens in the clan, the Bandicoots remain a power in the region surrounding the Danson asteroid and Farhome base. This clan is notable for its moderate political views and (comparatively) peaceful means of operation. The Bandicoots prefer to operate extensive extortion rackets throughout their territory, rather than engaging in overt piracy and destruction. The Bandicoots have managed to keep in the good books of a number of large Belt colonies and are the principal traders between Belters and Rovers. Among their prized possessions are two TFM fitted cargo ships that they use to run cargo (and occasionally illicit goods) between Mars, Europa and the Asteroid Belt.

The Claws - As a radical fringe group that is growing in numbers and power, The Claws are a clan to watch in the future. They have rejected the views of Clan Libertas, which they regard as too "soft", and advocate the sabotage and destruction of all government organisations and institutions, including the Clan Allthing and worship of Mother Sol!

True anarchists and lacking any honour. The Claws are constantly fighting amongst themselves and with the other Rover Clans. Having been branded as "outcasts" at a recent Clan Allthing, this radical fringe continues to attract members from amongst those Belters who share The Claws' extreme view of freedom. Ships and bases operated by the Claws tend to be old, worn and badly in need of a good cleaning. Their current aim is to obtain some new fighting ships, and they have been noted as willing to go to any lengths to get them.

Clan McGregor - An offshoot of the original group of dissidents, this clan formed around Warmaster Erik McGregor. He was indoctrinated a few years ago into the Cult of Mars, and has successfully led his clan to a number of raids against corporate and military bases. This has given him two major edges over Libertas - advanced stolen weaponry and ships, and a reputation you could never buy. Word across the comm net is that McGregor is looking to oust Libertas as the preeminent clan of Rovers.

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