

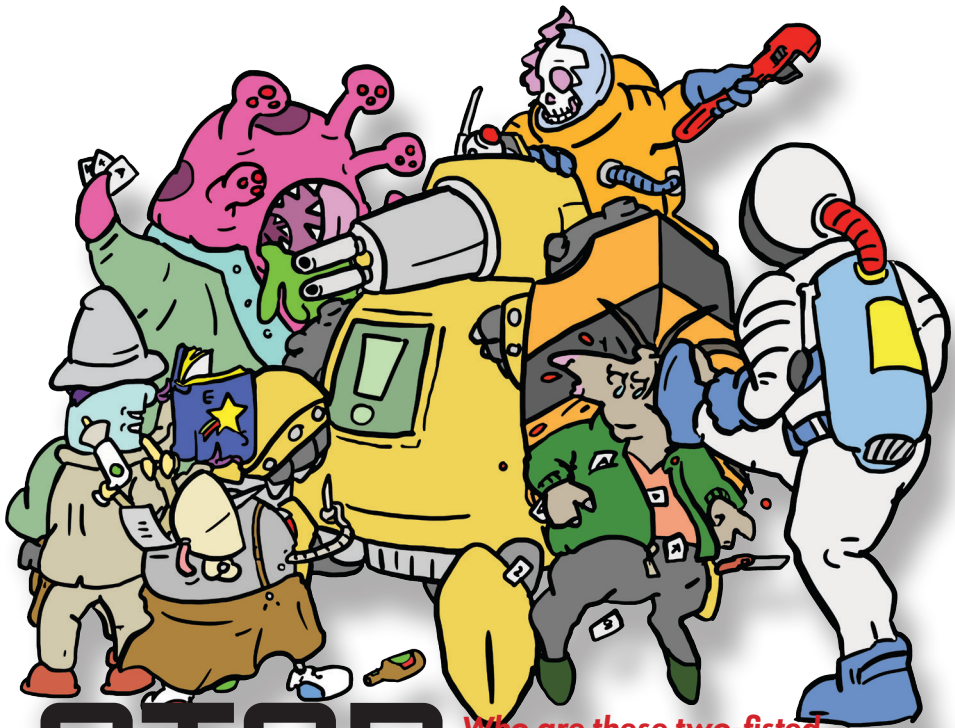
Revisiting Route 66³

A place to get your kicks, or a kicking?

Exclusive:
Down and out
in Barbet City

The Spend-o-Max
a bargain hunter's guide

S PACE Q3 2047 SPECIAL EDITION EXPLORATION QUARTERLY



STAR
*Who are these two-fisted
menaces and what can
be done to stop them?*
BASTARDS



Star Bastards

A Two-Fisted Sci-Fi Gamebook
by Herman Skull.



One of the last books written by Herman Skull before his involuntary retirement in 1993, *Star Bastards* was an attempt to reclaim the gamebook market which had been steadily leaking away thanks to the advance of personal computing. Following on from the commercially unsuccessful **Void Racers** (1991), the book tells the tale of Miroslaw Hermaszewski, the Ten-Foot Space Exploration Pole (every Two-Fisted Fantasy featured a ten-foot Pole but this was the first to star one as a main character) and his run from the law, manifested in the form of the diminutive but determined Leo Canid. With two stories, a multitude of endings and a fine-tuned version of the Void Racers game mechanics it was a final roll of the dice for Herman Skull and Two-Fisted Fantasy - a roll that failed amid lacklustre sales, poor distribution, worker strikes at the unsafe Nicaraguan factories where the books were produced and, finally, a mysterious warehouse fire which destroyed most of the inventory. By 1994 Two-Fisted Fantasy was bankrupt and gamebooks in general were considered a thing of the past.

In recent years gamebooks have been making something of a comeback, probably due to people discovering they'd still quite like something to read.

Sam Iacob is an avid collector of Herman Skulls works and has a nearly complete collection of Two-Fisted Fantasy adventures. With the growing interest in gaembooks he approached Herman Skull, now in retirement and unspeakably ancient, and coerced him into allowing a reprint of his works. Sam Iacob has worked tirelessly to update these classics for modern sensibilities, removing much of the racist and sexist overtones and re-drawing the frankly offensive artwork for impressionable audiences.

What you have in front of you is the re-issued edition of *Star Bastards*! Sam Iacob started with this one because of the current interest in sci-fi related things and because it's two adventures in one, giving first-time Two-Fisted Fantasy gamebookers a sample of the sorts of adventures you can expect from Herman Skull in the near future.

I hope you enjoy this guide to the Universe of *Star Bastards*!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. IACOB". The letters are bold and somewhat irregular, with a small black dot below the 'O'.

S. I. on behalf of H. S.
Quarter 3, 2047

The Universe of Star Bastards

It is the far future of Earth year 2047. Humanity and countless other species have taken to the stars. Utilising the power of the Jump the sentient beings of the universe are now able to cross the interstellar void, opening up a new era of cooperation, trade and advancement.

Well, that was the idea. The truth is that the universe is, as always, a dangerous and impoverished place, and the heedless rush to develop jump technology has made things much worse. Perhaps a history of our planet, Earth, would be instructive, from the official United States of Humanity Citizenship Handbook:

"In the late twentieth century the continued existence of humanity seemed to be on the brink. The forces of freedom were being pushed back by the communist



Flag of the United States of Humanity

menace and their domino strategy. All seemed lost until the election in the then United States of America of the great President Ronald Reagan I. With his unbridled love of freedom, markets and free markets, he united humanity against the communists and inflicted a powerful defeat on their main forces in Nicaragua, leading to the collapse of communism. With no alternative ideology to follow the world looked to the USA for guidance and leadership. Proclaiming, "There are no limits to the stars on this flag", Reagan began accepting state membership for any free country that wanted it and imposing freedom and state membership on those that didn't. By the year 2000 (Reagan I's sixth term in office) the entire

world had joined the USA. The USA had become the USH - the United States of Humanity.

"The people of Earth are a freedom loving folk, who love mom, apple pie and Jesus. Second Amendment rights are mandatory within the USH and the off-world colonies, and all humans are heavily armed at all times. Unfortunately in order to spread humanity's message of freedom to the stars, sacrifices had to be made. In order to build and furnish the skilled crew for the human jump ship, the USSS Bel Air, the Earth's population had to be strictly monitored, regulated and subject to constant testing and screening. The planet's biosphere and mineral resources have been exhausted and the population now lives in a few densely-populated megadomes established in geologically stable areas. Rationing is very tight and martial law with a strict curfew has been necessary to maintain order in the domes and the colonies. The USH has also recently instituted a Brain Po-

lice to ensure that all thoughts are compatible with maintaining the freedoms that their beloved President Reagan I has fought for and secured over his 18 consecutive terms."

The people of Earth are a freedom loving folk, who love mom, apple pie and Jesus.

Before the construction of the jump ships travel was slow - even with limited faster-than-light drives it takes years to get anywhere. Large colonies are essentially ungovernable and in any case almost impossible to establish due to the difficulty of surviving on alien worlds - before the advent of the jump drive any established colony would declare independence as soon as possible. While the discovery of the jump drive made it possible to cross vast distances quickly, the construction also comes at a horrible cost - the sheer amount of resources (sentient and otherwise) required to construct

the jump drive is enough to deplete even the most mineral rich planet, and the skills and personal qualities needed to crew the colossal jump engine vessels are only found in tiny numbers per billion. In short it takes a highly developed world's full resources to build, maintain and crew a single jump ship, and the effects on the planet's society are almost always devastating. Once built and in space the jump ship must then plunder other worlds for the resources it needs for its repair and refuelling, as its home world is now just a husk that at best functions as a giant training camp for replacement crew members. This reality means that any nearby technologically advanced civilisation must immediately build a jump ship of their own for the defence of their population or run the risk of becoming prey to the insatiable requirements of their neighbours. And so it goes- but life continues, and in the more settled parts of the galaxy there are trade networks, sector-spanning alliances and in

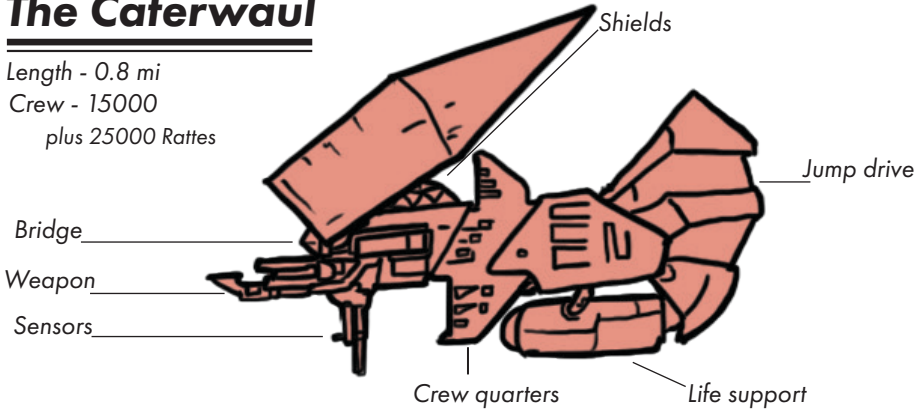
some cases even a measure of prosperity. Fortunately for Mirosław and Leo, Star Bastards takes place in one such part of the universe and not the barbarian backwater of the rim worlds to which Earth belongs. However the central facts remain true out here - that each planet produces only one jump ship and that it consumes the resources of that planet and much more besides. It's a universe where equally powerful aliens coexist in a wary, fragile and heavily-armed peace. These realities underlie the fragile peace of the sector known as the Conglomerate-Volan Freedom and Mutual Understanding Zone.



Human captain and the USSS BEL-AIR, the United States of Humanity's jump ship.

Catte Empire Jump Ship The Caterwaul

Length - 0.8 mi
Crew - 15000
plus 25000 Rattes



Jump ships are all pretty much identical in function although their particulars vary wildly. They all contain a jump drive - a huge engine that folds space, piloted by a navigator who can somehow "see" the ripples in space and safely chart a course through them (this "seeing" is usually a result of a rare, fried brain or a powerful drug known as "spice"). In unknown space it can take a stellar day or more to plot a course and power up the drives enough to move on. Around this engine are built quarters for the crew that maintain it and run the other ship functions, an array of manoeuvring engines to allow the jump ship to move in normal space, the sen-

sors and communications arrays needed to navigate, energy shield emitters to protect against damage and, inevitably, some matter of doomsday weapon to defend this irreplaceable piece of hardware. The ships tend to be a mile or even two long and have crews ranging from a few thousand to tens of thousands.

Along with these behemoths are the less important ships ranging from tiny shuttles to large freighters. These are often fitted with faster-than-light drives, and sometimes shields and weapons, though they are orders of magnitude weaker than the planet-destroying guns of the jump ships. Most of these ves-

sels were built before whichever homeworld developed the jump ship, for obvious reasons, so they tend to be somewhat obsolete and in poor repair. Unlike jump ships they either have to crawl across space for months or years to get anywhere, or - in the case of some shuttles like the Soyuz-30 - they can hitch a lift.

THE SECTOR

The sector where Star Bastards is set is dominated by two large space empires - the Conglomerate of Reasonable Beings and the Volan Empire. Between them is a large tract of space dominated by the dangerous and impenetrable Void Nebula. Around this are two major tracks - Interstellar Highway 40 (the i40) and its predecessor, the derelict Route 66³. Further rimwards are the barbarian Rimworlds, a vast tract of space unknown to the beings of this sector. The distant United States of Humanity call this part of the universe home, as do the Sexless Threshers.

THE CONGLOMERATE-VOLAN FREEDOM AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING ZONE

These two star-spanning empires in do not have much the other wants, aside from some trade goods to keep each others populations happy. They're also only empires in theory - the Conglomerate is a fragile affiliation of worlds that are pooling a couple of functions (like policing) to reduce the burden on their creaking homeworlds. The Volans are little more than scam artists who had the novel idea of pretending that they were gods to any pre-jump civilisations they encountered. Their hold on their subjects is also pretty fragile. Route 66³ was established to ease the flow of goods between the two space polities and to make navigation around the Void safer and easier. As trade became more regular a new route was set up corewards of the Void Nebula to allow for a single jump between the core worlds of the Volans and the Conglomerate. Route 66³ fell

into disuse.

The Void Nebula is home to a large number of distressing species. It causes hallucinations and damage when a ship passes through it at any speed, but the faster the ship is moving the worse the effects. It's almost impossible to scan it or communicate with it, and the worlds and beings inside are considered to be both dangerous and weird. Worst of all, the thing is constantly moving and the encroachment of the Void onto Route 66³ has caused the Route to be shifted several times, and eventually played a part in its abandonment. The most frequently annoying and dangerous Void denizens in this sector are the Scrodes, barbarian space pirates with an affinity for technology who have somehow succeeded in capturing a whole jump ship.

The Rimworlds are considered to begin just rimwards of Route 66³. It's a dangerous and undeveloped part of space, full

of barbaric species and weird anomalies. Very little is known about this huge area aside from the info gleaned from barbarian visitors on maiden space flights and the information picked up by explorers.

There are rumours of several jump-capable, if barbaric, species existing further rimwards but the distance between these species and this section of space means it's unlikely that contact will ever be made. The species detected include the United States of Humanity, Disco Alliance, Catte Empire, Caiman Republic and the Sexless Threshers.

ROUTE 66³

Route 66³ begins in the Jolia system in Conglomerate space, passes along the rimward side of the Void through dozens of populated systems before it reaches the midway point at Kitalpha, then continues onwards through an ever-patchier and broken route through a num-

ber of uninhabited systems and abandoned stations on the way to Volan space. The maps tend to show a clean line but that's not really the case - the drifting of the Void, barbarian incursions and people abandoning no-longer-viable systems has made the Route fairly twisted and difficult to follow.

There are a number of interesting systems on the Conglomerate side of the Route (as mentioned before the Volans tend to just build space stations due to their ability to trick their captive populations into making the things). Of these systems I've picked a few to discuss at random : Matar, Terebellum, Sham and Kitalpha.

MATAR

The Matar System is pretty close to the Route's beginnings in Jolia and in days past it used to be the first rest-stop on the way. There's a single inhabited world there - Barbet - and a space station.

The closure of the Route hit both places hard - the station closed and was partially scrapped and the alien population of the planet largely bled away.

Barbet is a planet made up mostly of a pink silica desert and a few pools of barely potable water protected from the dessicant pink dust by an algae

whose blooms give the sky its teal colour. While beautiful it's not a nice place to live - the atmosphere is in turns choking and cloying. There's a large native population, called the Matari - lanky, pink-skinned beings who are taking advantage of the declining alien population by pressuring the remaining settlers for their land back. The hundreds of remaining non-Matari residents consider themselves locals and



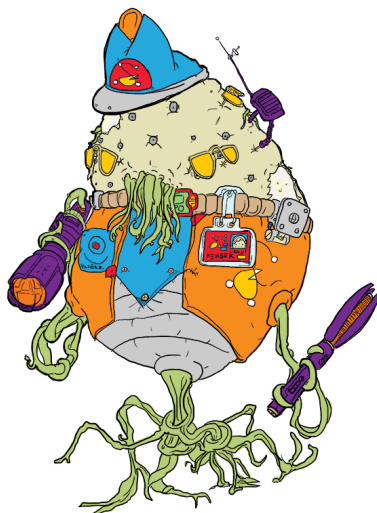
*A native Matari
gunslinger*

live in the few intact buildings on the main strip at the centre of Barbet City. Having been here this long they have no intention of leaving now, and the resulting tensions between Matari and settlers frequently turn into riots.

Services still available on Barbet include refreshments, refuelling and gambling.

TEREBELLUM

Terebellum is a quadrilateral of stars, at the centre of which is a huge space station called the Terebellum Spend-o-Max. Once a major shopping destination it has fallen into disuse and disrepair. It's still frequented by barbarians who mistake it for an alien base and by bargain hunters who happen to be passing by, but it no longer has the gravitational pull of yesteryear. Most ships give the system a miss because of an incident relating to the Spend-o-Max's atmospheric filters - a failure to keep them clean led to the evolution



*Vegetoid security guard,
Terebellum Spend-o-Max*

of a race of sentient amoeboids calling themselves the Legion who temporarily conquered the station and held everyone to ransom until the Conglomerate Police Directorate showed up and knocked their endoplasm together. Individual amoeboids from the Legion can be found around the sector to this day.. The station could operate for another million years thanks to its automated fusion plant but there have been rumours that the Volans and the Conglomerate have been considering scrapping the place, though talks are stalled over who will pay to haul the thing away.

SHAM

Towards the middle of the Route, Sham is a rare example of a system that has done well despite Route 66³'s closure. Sham contains two habitable worlds - the large red desert world Nezval and the blue water moon Orma. Both planets are inhabited by the same species, an intelligent land-squid called the Squidges. While Nezval is a dusty wasteland offering nothing in particular, Orma's ocean (which

covers nearly the whole moon) teems with a mostly-edible fish that breeds uncontrollably. In the distant past some pioneering alien species set up an automated plant for processing this fish into a protein slurry, containerising it and flinging it up into space. These same aliens abducted some Squidges from their native Nezval and trained them to look after the plant, which they do to this day.

In a universe short on food the protein slurry sells well and



A squidge from Orma (left) and Nezval (right).

barbarian species in particular love the taste. The royalty cheques keep the Orman Squides in comfort, and thanks to the freighters and jump ships they even get a fair bit of tourism. Nezval on the other hand is sparsely populated by wandering tribes of primitive Squidges and various kinds of unpleasant beasts about which very little is known.

KITALPHA



The Fuel 'n Gruel, Kitalpha

At the midpoint of Route 66³, Kitalpha sits at the nexus of the Glom, the Volan Empire, the rim-worlds and the less insane of the Void systems. There's no planet here, just a small station called the Fuel 'n Gruel which serves as a bar, ship mechanic and plotting place for the sector's biggest miscreants. While it's technically under the jurisdiction of the Volan-Conglomerate treaty Kitalpha is far enough away from everything and crammed so full of unpleasant and heavily-armed aliens that it's pretty much left to its own devices.

DENIZENS OF THE ROUTE

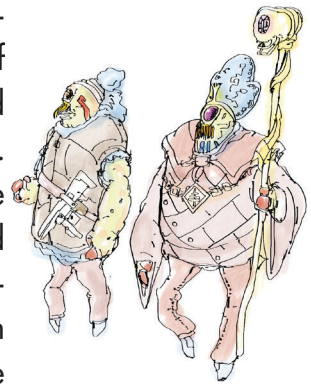
ERINACEANS

The Erinaceans are a species of hedgehog-like aliens that come from a planet somewhere on the other side of the Conglomerate. They've recently set a sophisticated gambling operation, implanting agents on most of the

populated worlds and stations in the neutral space of the region, and their star ship does the rounds to collect the takings, rough up debtors and purchase or steal supplies to keep the species going. They're notorious cheats but Space Whist is a dirty game and their tables are still relatively clean compared to most.



their section of the Void Nebula. They're a weird species - although they have a pre-

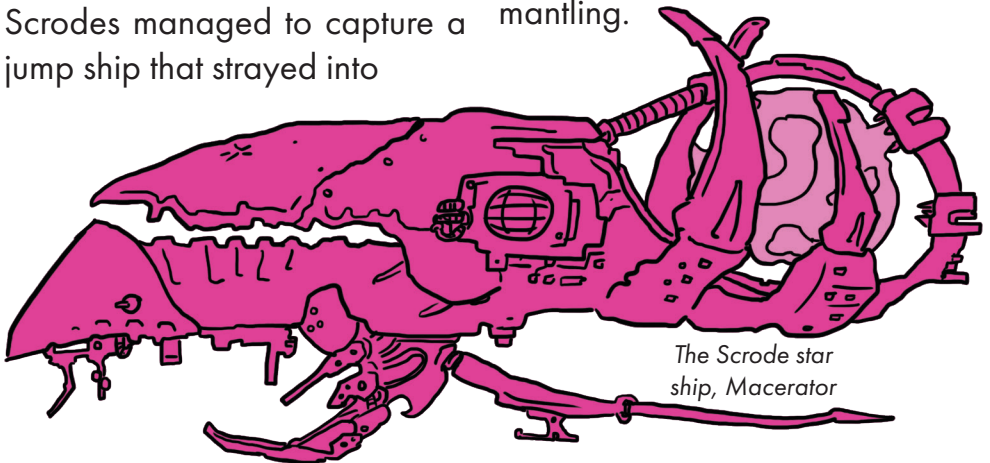


Scrode raider and captain

natural affinity for technology they distrust it and wouldn't be able to explain how anything worked if you asked them. Then again if you got close enough to ask them they'd probably rob you and/or kill you. Their jump ship, the Macerator, has been modified to open up like a giant pair of jaws, allowing them to bring things the size of a small space station aboard for dis-

SCRODES

Several stellar cycles ago the technologically-backwards Scrodes managed to capture a jump ship that strayed into

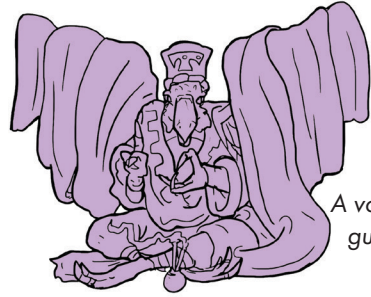
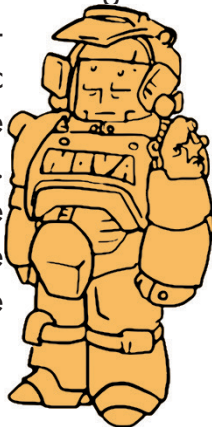


The Scrode star ship, Macerator

HOMEWORLDBERS

The Homeworlders of the Conglomerate Capitol are notoriously boring, fussy and bureaucratic, which is probably why they've found their galactic niche managing interstellar public services and collecting taxes. They look like slabs of pressed ham stuffed into their meticulously ironed and starched uniforms. Their star ship is the Interlocutor, a boxy and functional vessel which is usually sent to collect taxes from unwilling member states and back up Conglomerate negotiations. The Conglomerate is not as strong as it looks - the thirty or so constituent species are united only by a slight economic advantage and by the surprising diplomatic cunning of the Homeworlders. It wouldn't take much of a shove to knock the whole thing over.

*Homeworlder in
blast armour*



*A volan
guru*

VOLANS

The four-armed winged avians of the Volan Empire are the undisputed masters of space on the other side of the sector from the Conglomerate. They operate a theocracy from their homeworld which has taken in many species in the area. No one is sure whether the Volans believe their own patter or not. Like the Conglomerate the Volan hold on their territory is rather more tenuous than it appears - while they can muster at least a couple of dozen jump ships with Volan commanders the ships themselves are maintained and crewed by the species that made them, and these are always on the brink of discovering that they've been duped by their supposedly holy masters.

SEXLESS THRESHERS



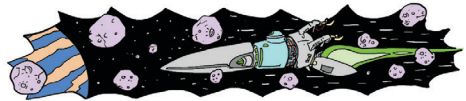
archival image of beings that could be the Threshers

A dire threat on the far horizon, coming from far beyond the furthest known space. The Threshers appear to have a fleet of jump ships carved out of asteroids. They seem to have been agitated by the actions of several jump-capable Rimworld species who are leading them towards the Void Nebula for some unknown reason.

RETICKS

While theoretically a species of nerds who spend their whole time on peaceful voyages of discovery, just like most other species who have built a jump ship the Reticks spend their days warding off starvation and plundering nearby planets for resources. Their immediate stellar neighbourhood is resource

poor so their membership of the Conglomerate was quite crucial - unfortunately though they tend to fall behind on their payments and have been threatened with a visit from the Interlocutor or expulsion from the Conglomerate on several occasions.



The Retick Discoverer, on a food gathering mission

CHARACTERS

We finish up with a quick introduction to a few of the more colourful denizens of this sector.

MOC

Moc's an alarmingly charismatic alien door-to-door encyclopedia salesbeing. The Encyclopedia Stellaris set doesn't sell all that well in civilised space so Moc's main line of work is in illegally breaking the Main Principle and flogging



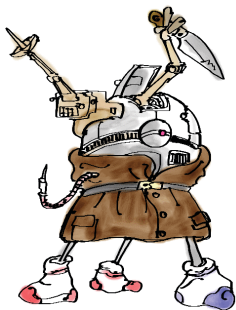
Moc

the things to backwards worlds. He's hoping to hitch a lift to Kitalpha from where he'll turn rimward to peddle his trade in the backwaters.

As he spends lots of time alone in lawless territories, Moc is no stranger to danger. He carries a huge laser revolver and he's pretty damn fast on the draw.

HORIZON-8

Originally a deep-space probe fired by some backward civilisation long ago. After drifting through space, probably for millennia, Horizon-8 (HATE to its friends) became sentient and aimed itself at an inhabited world where it sorted itself out with some clothing and weapons. HATE would quite like to return to its planet of origin to settle the score and would be grateful for a lift.



Horizon-8

"FARMING" GOCKY

Gocky's a country-being from an agricultural world on the edge of Volan space. He always figured himself something special and left home to make his mark in the Conglomerate - a few weeks later, broke, bewildered and thoroughly disillusioned, the young alien is making his way back home any way he can.



"Farming" Gocky

He's a gentle soul but as a towering six-armed agriworlder he looks quite threatening to beings not used to him.

ELWOO BLUE

Elwoo was sentenced to five cycles in the Jolian Supermax for sticking up the Fuel 'n Gruel at Kitalpha but he's hoping to get out on a release program.

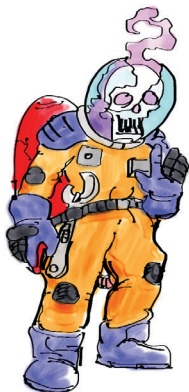


Elwoo Blue

Aside from being a great blues-being he's also one of the best pilots in the sector. His brother, Jak Blue, is waiting for him on the outside and he'll even work with the rollers if it'll give him a shot at getting the band back together.

BONES

Bones is one of the weirdest things getting around a sector full of strange things - he's an animated skeleton in a bright orange space suit. He and the Ten-Foot Space Exploration Pole go back a long way, and they're often seen plotting some escape



Bones

or another together. Bones isn't just a freaky space anomaly - he's also one of the sector's best mechanics and gamblers. As he's been barred from most casinos in civilised space he has to work the Space Whist tables along the Route for his fix.

TARLEE

Tarlee is a mercenary who grew tired of garrison duty in her planetary militia and decided to set out on her own.

A veteran of many scrapes, she's a great shot with her heavy plasma rifle. She's pretty well known for her rough manners, foul mouth and short fuse, but she's tough as nails and excellent at what she does, which is killing things. She's trying to hitch a lift to where the action is - if there's no money to be made in the Conglomerate maybe the Volans are hiring.



Tarlee

Thank you for reading and I hope you enjoy playing Star Bastards nearly as much as I did writing it. To keep up-to-date on Two-Fisted Fantasy check out the facebook page at facebook.com/twofistedfantasy or go to twofistedfantasy.com



**The companion booklet to
STAR BASTARDS
from Two-Fisted Fantasy
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