THE EXPANSE

ROLEPLAYING GAME

SCI-FI ROLEPLAYING AT HUMANITY'S EDGE

THE EXPANSE ROLEPLAYING GAME

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FOREWORD

Storytelling is a muscle. It gets stronger the more you use it.

The Expanse has been through a lot of incarnations since the muse first struck. It was a pitch for a *Warcraft*-like MMO, a book series, a TV show. And, for a long run, it was a roleplaying game campaign.

Roleplaying games have been a part of both of our lives for decades, long before *The Expanse*. We practiced storytelling in ancient Rome, on an FBI serial killer squad, in fantastic realms and post-apocalyptic wastelands. And, of course, in the vast darkness and unforgiving vacuum between the planets. While the books weren't a simple transcription of the game sessions any more than the show has been a one-to-one recapitulation of the books, they are related.

Every medium of storytelling has its strengths, but RPGs have a list of them: the collaborative freedom of improvisational theater, the narrative breadth of fiction, and a freedom from visual effects budgets of which film can only dream. It was where we cut our teeth, and it's still one of our favorite ways to spend an evening. And if you're reading this, we're guessing that it's one of your favorites, too.

So when the opportunity came to build a system around *The Expanse*, we jumped at it. The crew at Green Ronin let us be involved in everything from the art approvals to the system design, and the result is here in your hands. And, thanks to the overwhelming support of the Kickstarter community, we were even able to put in a little original *Expanse* fiction to help launch things.

The rest will be up to you and your crew, whoever and wherever they may be. If you stay close to the action of the books and show, or if you build your own stories on the foundation we've given you, the stories you tell will—we hope—stay with you and bloom out in your lives the way our games did for us, while your storytelling and imagination keep getting stronger and weirder and more awesome.

James S. A. Corey
March 2019

THE EXPANSE

THE LAST FLIGHT OF THE CASSANDRA

A TALE OF THE EXPANSE

BY JAMES S.A. COREY

My name is James Holden and my ship, the *Canterbury*, was just destroyed by a warship with stealth technology and what appear to be parts stamped with Martian Navy serial numbers. Data stream to follow.

"Well," Darius said. "We're fucked."

Amy's voice came up to the flight deck from the galley below. "Are we fucked again, honey?"

With the *Cassandra* on the float, "down" was a convention more than a direction, but Darius had grown up on Earth, and perception is a habit. He saw her as rising up to him. Her hair was in a bun. Her sweat-stained sleeveless undershirt revealed the tree-shaped electrical scar that ran down her left arm. She wasn't his wife, and she wasn't not his wife. Back in Paris, that might have caused problems for their Basic registration forms. Out here on the ship, she was just Amy, and he was just Darius, and what they were to each other didn't need a bureaucrat's stamp.

Darius gestured to the screen with one angry thumb.

"You see this asshole?" he asked, scrolling the feed back to the start of the message. My name is James Holden.

"Sure," Amy said, grabbing onto a handhold and pulling herself to a stop. "It's all over. Everyone's rebroadcasting. What's he to us?"

"He's why we're fucked."

A thin line appeared on Amy's forehead the way it always did when she was getting annoyed. The heat did that. They'd been leaving the ship five degrees warmer and the oxygen mix thinner than usual. It saved money, but it made them all more irritable. All except Lester, who was unchanging in his irritability.

"The *Canterbury*," Darius said. "It's a water hauler."

"Saturn to Ceres," Amy said. "We're not on that run."

"The market's the market. Ceres won't let itself go dry, so it ups the orders from other places. Ships that were heading for Pallas and Vesta go to Ceres. Luna gets in on it. It's straight supply and demand. Less ice on the market means it costs more to fill the tanks."

"We'll be alright," Amy said.

"We won't. We're running at the edge now. There's no more fat we can cut off the budget."

"We have savings," she said, but they both knew they didn't.

The *Cassandra* wasn't a great ship. In truth, she was barely even a good one. A bubble of steel, ceramic, and air with a fussy Epstein Drive and third-rate recycling systems. They called her a rock-hopper, and even that was a shade more dignified than she deserved. But if she had a fatal flaw, it was that she was thirsty. Her heat radiators didn't have the surface area to shed as fast as Darius would have liked. There were other fluids they could have carried to let out onto the ship's skin to evaporate away, but none that they could also use as reaction mass and tea.

And where they worked made things worse.

The Aten asteroids spent most of their time sunward of Earth's orbit, crossing out for a third or a quarter of their time. Sometimes less. They'd been accessible in the first days of humanity's expansion into the void, and so they were some of the first to be mined. The titanium and platinum and nickel-iron had made fortunes that had grown to the size and power of nations. And some that had withered into shame and history. The push out and out and out into the system—the main belt, the moons of Jupiter and Saturn—had left them behind. But generation by generation, the mining technologies had improved. Now ore that had been exhausted generations before was rich enough for the new techniques to wring out a little more. But only for ships willing to add the sun's punishing light to their drives' waste heat. Sundivers, they were called. It was a good way for a crap ship to grind out enough capital to upgrade. It was also a good way to fail out. Or get killed.

Amy looked away. A sheen of tears covered her eyes, and she grabbed a strap of undershirt to wick them away.

"Get the others, will you?" Darius said, more gently. "I think we need to have a talk."

"Yeah," she said. "All right."

She pushed herself back down in a spiral that put her back to him. He was sorry now that he'd led with his despair. Usually he was better at waiting for his own private darkness to pass before he brought Amy into it. The news had caught him unawares.

The rest of the crew were just Lester and Abril. The four of them living in a space smaller than the flat he and Amy had taken in Paris. He stretched and yawned. The heat in the flight deck was sapping his energy. The breeze from the air recyclers was slow and weak. The thinness of the air put an ache behind his eyes that he knew from experience wouldn't leave until they pumped more oxygen into the system. Which they could get by splitting some water, if they'd had any to spare.

He heard Lester and Amy below him. The concern in the man's voice, the sharp humor in the woman's. And Abril's accented murmur like music. He didn't want to do this.

The *Cassandra* had been a fluke for him. A dream. He'd been living on Basic in a suburb of Paris, spending his days sleeping and his nights playing drums—actually ancient plastic buckets turned mouth-down—with a street band. He and Amy had used the tips to buy cheap marijuana cigarettes from the drugstore dispensers and smoke them with her friends. For Darius, it had felt like having all the time in the world and no time at all. Every day a day where nothing happened except you had one fewer. He'd felt like he was drowning.

And then his parents had both died in the same wreck. They'd left him a bank account with actual money, a two-bedroom house in Bangui, and a choice—uproot his life in Paris and go back to live out his days in the same house he'd been in as a child, or sell the house and live off the money until it was gone and he could go back on the Basic rolls.

He had taken a third option. Two tickets to Luna, a down payment on a used rock-hopper, and a call for crew who might keep the ship alive long enough to turn a profit. He'd wanted to name his new ship the Icarus, but it turned out that every sundiver with their eyes on the Aten and Apollo asteroids had the same idea. There were over two hundred ships already named some variation of Icarus. So they'd named it for Amy's baby sister. He learned later that *Cassandra* was also pulled from mythology, but he'd never gotten around to reading the story.

And just like that, the nature of his life had changed. There were probably thousands of other things he could have done with his inheritance,

but this was the one he'd chosen. If he'd gone to Luna, then he'd be eking out meals and a bed there. If he'd joined up with a ship he didn't own, he'd have been out in the black somewhere. Maybe dead with the *Canterbury*. If he'd left Amy behind, he'd be waking up next to someone else or no one. His life was defined by all the paths he didn't take. And yet somehow, he'd picked the one that had this meeting in it.

Lester was an older man—gray, close-cut hair and pale skin with a scattering of freckles. Abril was Amy's age, with a musical voice, straight black hair, and a strong aversion to being touched. That she was half a meter taller than any of the rest of them and that her head was just a little out of proportion had stopped being strange to Darius months ago. He looked at her and instead of thinking Belter, he thought Abril. That, he thought, was what being a crew meant.

"Que kennst?" Abril asked Darius as he pulled himself into the tiny galley they used as a meeting room. He silently translated it. What's on your mind? Lester, scowling, looked like he already knew, and Amy wouldn't meet his eyes. The heat of the ship was like being locked in a sauna.

"You all know how thin the last runs were," Darius said. "Well, we caught another bad bounce. With water prices going up, I don't see how we make another run and stay safe. We're already late replacing the microfilters. And every drink of sour water reminds me we ought to have flushed the H2O reclamation feed lines last time we were in port. Even if we make the docking fees. . ."

He sighed. He was dancing around it. Better to say the words and be done.

"This is our last run. When we get back to Luna, I'm putting the *Cassandra* up for sale. I've looked at the going rates, and I can't make enough to break even. So this. . . is going to be it. I'm sorry."

His crew didn't say anything. Not even Amy. He pulled himself up to the flight deck and watched newsfeeds for the rest of the shift without really seeing anything. He'd dreamed of making a go of prospecting. Enough money to upgrade the ship or trade it for a new one. Something robust enough to head out for the Jovian moons, maybe. Try his luck in the mainline belt. And now that wouldn't happen. All those possible futures, cut away. His life redefined again. Another path he didn't take.

He left them there to grieve together while he grieved alone.

* * * * *

"What if we found clean ice?" Lester said. "Pure enough we could process it on the ship? I mean, yes, it would mean buying new filters a little sooner, but look at how much we'd save, yeah? Drop our overhead that much, and we could afford at least two more runs. And safely."

Lester's machine shop was hardly more than a wide spot in the hall down near the reactor, but he'd made it his own. The gray metal work stool was painted with emerald-green flowers on silver vines. The drawers and tool shelves were engraved with complex designs. Whatever else Lester might be, he was an incorrigible artist.

Darius folded his arms across his chest like he could hold in the ache. "You have something in mind?"

Lester grinned and pulled up the familiar map of the Aten asteroids. The first time Darius had looked at it, it had felt like watching snow. Now, he saw the patterns in it. Lester shifted the display, lighting up and darkening whole arcs of stone and ore, until only one remained.

"Xi-Mallow 434," Lester said.

It was a small marble of a rock. Not technically an Aten, since it never crossed Earth's orbit. It didn't even make it out as far as Venus.

"It's locked," Lester said. "Always the same face to the sun. Which means always the same face away from it too. Shadowed. If there were ice on the back end of that, it would stay there forever. And looking at visual—" The display jumped. A black dot caught against the sun's corona, pulled up and enhanced until the details hidden in the darkness came clear. "That looks glacial to me."

"How far?"

"It's not perfect," Lester said, "It'll mean a two-day burn to match orbit. But we can do it if we skip 19-Daedelus. Just swap them out on the schedule and change our angle a little before we light the drive up. It's not that big a deal."

Darius felt hope stealing into his chest like an assassin. He shook his head. "No. Free water just sitting here, waiting for someone to come along? People have been scraping at these stones for generations. No way they leave that sitting there all this time."

"That's what I thought," Lester said. "But look. Most of the work gets done closer to Earth orbit. This one never gets that far. It's almost a vulcanoid."

"Still," Darius said. "It has to be high-albedo silicates or something. Not ice."

"And . . ." Lester looked away. Darius felt the hair on his arms stand up.

"And?"

"It's under UNN military quarantine," Lester said. "It has been for a hundred and sixty years. All the prospecting lists neglect it. It doesn't even show up as an option."

"Military. Quarantine."

"You never served, Dar," Lester said. "You don't understand. You think military means well-regulated, controlled, everything buttoned down. I did my twenty, and I'm telling you it's not like that. You heard the story about the guard and the bench?"

"The what?"

Lester waved a hand like he was erasing something. "Old story. It goes like this. There's a fort that gets a new commander. Guy comes in, and he tours the place, and in the middle of the yard, there's this old bench with a guard stationed beside it. Every shift, the guard changes. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Rain, snow, or storm. Doesn't matter. There's always a guard there. So the new commander gets curious. Looks into the records to see why. What is it about this bench that it needs that much attention.

"It takes him weeks to find it, but he does. Fifteen years before, someone painted the bench and the commander put a guard there to make sure no one sat on the wet paint. No one ever rescinded the order. Everyone just forgot." Lester grinned. "That's what it's like. Things fall through the cracks all the time. Always. And this is one like that. I can feel it."

Darius felt the objections rising up in him like bubbles in a beer. Even if Lester was right, other ships might have broken the quarantine and hauled off any good ice decades before. Or maybe there was no good ice. Or maybe the whole place was lined with decaying nukes set by someone's paranoid great-grandfather and just waiting for anyone to touch the tripwire. All the reasons not to. And the one argument in favor: that Lester had thought of all the same things and still wanted to try. That the *Cassandra* meant enough to his crew that they'd take a risk for it. And if Lester would, how could Darius do less?

"Let's figure a course," he said. "Then we take it to Amy and Abril. No pressure, no persuasion. Just lay out the option, and if anyone balks, we don't. Agreed?"

Lester grinned. "Unanimous or nothing."

It wasn't nothing.

The burn was designed not for speed or comfort, but to minimize waste heat. Even then, they agreed to let the internal temperature rise another half degree rather than spend the water to cool the ship, and the recyclers were doing their best to keep the ambient humidity low.

Darius sat in his couch, sweating, and his dreams weren't about wealth or freedom. They were about winter mornings along the Seine and the feeling of ice cubes against his lips. The sounds of the ship changed with every degree of temperature rise as heat expansion changed the tensions and altered how the ship fit together. As soon as they had their orbit set in, Abril shut down the reactor. Even the radiative heat from the sun kept the ship's temperature ticking slowly upward. A point would come, Darius knew, when they'd have gone too far, where the balance of heat and water would mean that all the paths back to Luna ended with them baked to death in their couches. There wouldn't be a warning, either. They could sail past the point of no return without noticing it if they weren't careful. Whenever there was nothing else to do, Darius ran the numbers and planned his exit strategies.

Xi-Mallow 434 was a dot of black, but it grew larger as they got close. At its farthest point from the sun, it was still well inside the orbit of Venus. The solar disk felt oppressive and huge. The braking burn meant taking the temperature up another degree. Even if there was no ice, there would be shadow. Darius felt himself growing hungry for just a little darkness to park the ship in. He had the irrational certainty that the *Cassandra*'s heat sinks would melt, fuse, and lose their surface area.

The braking burn was short and harsh. The supply of reaction mass dropped quickly, the heat rose fast, and Darius watched, unable to affect anything. Then Abril shut the reactor down again, and they were on the float and moving into the pencil-thin shadow of the asteroid. Darius pulled up the external cameras in time to see the silhouette of Xi-Mallow 434 against the vastness of the sun. A dead-black iris in a vast and burning eye. In his baking-hot ship, he shuddered.

"I've got a few places for a decent dock," Amy said. "I'm not seeing any structures, but there are some flat spots we could anchor on."

"Let's take this slow," Darius said. "Coming out all this way to heat shock the hull would be a stupid way to die."

"Dychanie lloga es," Abril said cheerfully. It was a Belter idiom about the transience of life. Darius thought it literally meant "breath is rented".

"Lester?" Darius said. "Make me happy."

"Be happy. That out there? It's not silicates. It may be a little dusty, but it's ice."

Darius closed his eyes, relief flooding into him. "Amy, pick a mooring spot. We'll let the ship cool down before we snuggle up and spill a little heat—"

"Conduction!" Amy sang out like a victory cry.

"—and let's go do a little prospecting. Lester and Abril, meet me in the airlock."

He undid his straps, pulled himself up from his couch. Amy grinned at him, and he pulled himself in to kiss her. Her lips were salty.

"Keep the comms up too," he said softly. "If the UNN starts coming for us, I'd like to be someplace else."

She made a mock salute. Humming merrily to herself, she went back to mapping possible landing sites on the asteroid, and he went to the airlock. The others were already waiting. It took an hour to get all their equipment together—suits, kits, core samplers—and by then Amy had picked a place for them. It was flat, and the stone had been melted at some point recent enough from a geological perspective that the cooled surface was stable.

Once the *Cassandra* was in place, Darius cycled the lock and they went out. It had been a while since he'd heard Abril and Lester through the suit radios instead of the shipboard air, and the thinness of their voices reassured him. When they sounded like this, it meant they were working, and working meant things were going right.

The gravity of the asteroid was hardly more than a suggestion. A strong jump would have been enough for them to part company with it for longer than their air supplies would last, so they moved slowly. The suits all had compressed gas thrusters, but they'd learned not to rely on them.

Darius' first priority was the ice. If the asteroid itself had ore worth hauling, that would be good, rationally speaking. But there was something in the back of Darius' mind that made scraping a little ice off the surface of an asteroid under quarantine feel less dangerous than collecting ore. As if one substance was somehow morally different from another.

"It's not bad," Lester said. "But it's not dense either."

They were a few hundred meters from the *Cassandra* where Amy had brought it to rest. With the sun hidden by the asteroid, it was as dark here as in the depths of space beyond Neptune. Darius played his worklight over the pale crust around them.

"It's castoff," Darius said. "All of this around here. The formations over the horizon might have been here naturally, but this is all either steam from drives or native ice that was heated to steam, cooled, and recollected here.

"It's clean, anyway," Lester said. "We can use it. Fill the tanks and more with all this to work from."

"Coyos?" Abril said in Darius' ear though she was nowhere in sight. There was something in her voice that dropped adrenaline into his blood.

"We're here," Darius said. "Where are you?"

In response, Abril turned on her locator. The cheap heads-up display in Darius' suit pointed him to the far side of the ship and down into a split in the stone body of the asteroid. Long streaks in the frost-like ice showed where Abril had gone. Darius gave in to fear and used his suit's thrusters, driving himself deeper into the fissure. Lester flew at his side, a little slower.

"Abril?" Darius said. "Tell me you're alright?"

"Bist bien," she said, but her voice had a strange tone. Like she was looking at a puzzle she didn't know how to solve.

The fissure bit deeper into the stone than he had expected. The rough sides spoke to a natural formation. Mining would have been smoother and more controlled. Ahead of him and below, Abril's work light glimmered.

And something ahead of her glimmered back.

At the bottom of the fissure was an airlock. The outer doors were half open. The steel frame set into the natural, unworked stone was polished and smooth. Only a thin layer of dust served to dim its mirror finish. Darius braked hard, the jet of nitrogen kicking up fines and dust and tiny crystals of ice like fog rising from a river.

"Lester?" Darius said. "What am I looking at?"

"No idea," Lester said.

Slowly, Abril moved forward, her work light shining into the lock. The inner doors were open too. Darius scanned infrared, but nothing rose above the ambient cold of the stone. Whatever this place had been, someone had vented it intentionally, and a long time ago.

"We sure this is a good idea?" Darius said on the open channel.

"Are we sure what is?" Amy said from the ship, but Abril had already moved inside the lock.

Darius and Lester exchanged a look. "One of us should stay outside," Lester said. "Just in case."

Darius lifted a hand in agreement and moved forward. In the microgravity, he had the uncanny sensation that he was falling down into the airlock like it was a pit. Or a grave. Inside, Abril's worklight was playing over a wide chamber. The walls had been insulated once, but the foam had broken down over time, leaving long strips that had drifted to the floor. The bare stone was polished and worked. The fissure that led here might have been natural, but the chamber had been created. Abril pulled

herself along the wall, and Darius followed, his thrusters off to keep from stirring up more dust. His breath sounded unnaturally loud in his ears.

"Ah," Abril said. "Vise la."

"I am looking."

"No," Abril said, pointing forward. "La."

Thirteen figures were sitting in a semicircle, legs folded beneath them. Their vac suits were all a dusty red color, plasticized fabric that had broken down over decades. The helmets were swept back and weirdly aerodynamic, like something out of a history book on the first days of terraforming. All of them had holstered side arms at their hips and military insignia that Darius didn't recognize. For a few long breaths, he thought the suits were empty, but then his light passed over a faceplate, and the corpse inside it stared out. Gray, desiccated flesh. Sunken, empty eyes. Everything that made a human except for water and life. Abril moved forward slowly, letting her feet drift down to the chamber floor. There were nameplates on the suits. Hoffmann. Gutierrez. Dahl. And ten more beyond them. The ancient dead.

"What the hell is this?" Darius said, as much to himself as to anyone.

Abril agreed with a hand gesture, then looking up, said, "Y que es la?"

Her work light angled up. There, suspended from the wall, was a thick rectangle of dark ceramic. An ancient storage container. The circle and arrow symbol for masculinity stood out in silver and blue, and what looked like three ideograms in a form Darius didn't know. A seam ran around its edge, making it seem like a great, still sarcophagus.

The semicircle of the dead faced it, as if the end had caught them all in a final and terrible act of worship.

* * * * *

"Ah. Well. Could be a number of things," Lester said.

They were back in the *Cassandra*. All four of them in the galley again. The three of them who'd gone outside were still wearing their vac suits, and it made the space feel smaller. Tighter. The dust of Xi-Mallow they'd tracked inside smelled like gunpowder. Darius almost never felt the claustrophobic sense of being buried alive that he'd suffered when they first started flying, but it was tickling at him now.

"A number of things," Amy echoed. It came across as skepticism, but Darius has known her long enough to tell it was only not knowing what else could be said.

"Yes," Lester said. "Could be a religious cult. There were several of those on Mars in the early days. Or this could have been a secret research facility. Mars was all about that back in the day." Then a moment later, "Still is, probably."

"If it's Martian," Amy said, "why's this place under UNN quarantine?"

"When was the Epstein Drive invented?" Darius said. "Did those people in there. . . Did they get here in a flying teakettle? Old chemical rockets, maybe? And what killed them? I mean, they were there to die. You saw how the lock was forced. They were all in suits, and they just sat there and died."

Abril waved a hand like she was shooing away all the questions. "Ab que im eske, sa sa?" But what's in it? She meant the black storage container.

"It has a label on it," Lester said. "The Mars sign, and the writing."

"Mars sign?" Darius asked.

"The circle and arrow. It's an old symbol for Mars."

"Thought it was the old symbol for the pisser you could use standing up," Amy said, but the joke had an overheated quality. Like there was fear behind it.

Lester nodded, and Darius didn't see fear in him, but a growing curiosity. "And the ideograms. . . there was a lot of Chinese influence on Mars at the beginning."

"And these are the traditional Chinese families of Dahl and Hoffmann?" Darius said.

Lester looked hurt. "I didn't say I knew what it was. I said it could be a number of things. But it doesn't matter what it was then. Not really. The point is what it is now. And we do know that." He looked around at them all solemnly. "That thing is our ticket out. We know that, right? Whatever that thing is, it's immediately convertible to money. We put it in the hold, haul it back to Luna. A few words in the right ears, and we'll have buyers lining up. We might even get a bidding war."

Darius knew this was coming, and even so it shocked him a little to hear it said out loud. That he already had arguments for and against the plan—What if it's a nuke? It's been stable here for over a century. We don't have to open it.—told him how much he'd already been thinking about it. About saving the *Cassandra*. His inheritance from his parents. The path he'd chosen. After all, they'd come here trying to get enough water for one more run. This was that hopeful impulse answered a thousandfold. If they left it here. . .

With the ship laid down against the stone, microgravity pulled him gently toward the wall. The others all looked at him like they were expecting a pronouncement. He pulled up the ship's stats. Since they'd made contact, the *Cassandra* had dumped so much waste heat into the asteroid that life support was adding heat to the living space now. If he listened, he could hear the ship ticking to itself as it cooled and contracted. He loved the ship, and he loved the people on it. He felt the weight of his dreams and aspirations on his shoulders, stronger than the actual pull of gravity.

He took Amy's hand, running his thumb along her scars by long, affectionate habit. "Get the drive up. And a path to Luna."

"Yes!" Lester said. "I'll slap together a loading mech and have that thing out in—"

"Anybody who leaves the ship stays here," Darius said. "We're getting out now."

Lester sputtered. "But. . . I mean, the water—"

"Fuck the water," Darius said. "Get us a path to Luna. As soon as we're clear of this place, I'll put in for a berth and an indigence auction. Whatever we get, we split four ways."

Amy squeezed his fingers. "Babe, are you sure?"

"We can get work on Luna," he said. "Maybe we can crew up on some other ship. Find a captain who knows what they're doing, maybe."

He tried out a smile, and the power behind it wasn't sorrow. Or at least it wasn't only sorrow.

"Dar," Lester said, cajoling.

"You want to come back here, Lester," Darius said, "I can't stop you. But the answer now is no. Everyone go make ready. I want to get out of here in the next two hours."

There was a moment of silence in the galley while the others caught up to where Darius already was. Abril lifted an acknowledging hand and Lester nodded. They pulled themselves out of the galley, and a moment later, he heard the unmistakable sounds of them pulling off and stowing their vac suits. He was still holding Amy's hand. He looked into her eyes. He'd been afraid to see tears in them, but they were dry. After a moment, she squeezed his fingers again, and hauled herself toward the flight deck. Darius took a silent moment alone in the galley.

He didn't know what would come next. How he would make his living once the *Cassandra* was gone. Lester and Abril with it. Probably he'd still be with Amy, but that was her choice to make, and he was never perfectly sure. But whatever it was, it wouldn't be what it could have been if he'd made the other decision. His life was defined by all the paths he didn't take.

And the mistakes he avoided.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the future, and the next stage of human history, spreading out into the solar system towards the distant stars: welcome to *The Expanse*. In the 23rd Century, humanity has long since left the cradle of Earth to colonize the solar system. Now an independent Mars vies with old Earth for political power and influence while the settled asteroid belt and the moon systems of Jupiter and Saturn supply the inner planets with the resources they so desperately need. The people of the Belt and the Outer Planets—the Belters—labor and chafe under the rule of the Inners, and unbeknownst to humanity, history is taking a most unexpected turn.

The Expanse Roleplaying Game is a tabletop roleplaying game (or "RPG" for short). It is a game of the imagination, where you and your friends take on the roles of characters in a solar system on the verge of an exciting—and dangerous—new era. It is a moment when people in the right place at the right time willing to do the right thing can potentially change the course of history and the future of humanity, and you can be those people. You may have played other tabletop roleplaying games before, or this may be your introduction to new worlds of storytelling and adventure. Either way, welcome to *The Expanse*.

WHAT IS ROLEPLAYING?

If *The Expanse* RPG is your introduction to the world of fantasy roleplaying games, then you might be wondering, "What is all this 'roleplaying' stuff about?"

Essentially, in a roleplaying game, you and a group of friends (the players) take on the roles of fictional characters in a world fueled by your imagination. One player in the group is the Game Master, or "GM" for short, who acts like the narrator of a story or the director of a play or movie. The Game Master sets the scene and describes what happens in the world around your characters. Then the other players decide what their characters do in response. The GM describes the outcome of those actions, and on you go, creating your own story.

Roleplaying is much like cooperative fan fiction or simulation gaming, where a group of people work together to build a fun and exciting story. Although it's the Game Master's job to portray the various antagonists in the story, as well as the heroes' allies, the GM isn't playing against everyone else. In fact, it's the Game Master's job to help ensure everyone has fun and that the group tells an interesting, enjoyable story.

Think of a roleplaying game like an extended version of various games of make-believe we all played as children, only with rules to help guide the story and a central narrator and manager to set the stage and help keep things moving along smoothly: "next stage make-believe" if you like.

> "His words were full of hope and threat. Like the stars."
>
> — *Abaddon's Gate*

THE EXPANSE FICTION

The following are the various published stories of *The Expanse* universe, in order of publication.

NOVELS

Leviathan Wakes (2011)
Caliban's War (2012)
Abaddon's Gate (2013)
Cibola Burn (2014)
Nemesis Games (2015)
Babylon's Ashes (2016)
Persepolis Rising (2017)
Tiamat's Wrath (2019)

NOVELLAS

"Gods of Risk" (2012)
"The Churn" (2014)
"The Vital Abyss" (2015)
"Strange Dogs" (2017)

SHORT STORIES

"The Butcher of Anderson Station" (2011)
"Drive" (2012)

WHAT IS THE EXPANSE?

The Expanse is a science fiction universe created by James S.A. Corey (the pen name of Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck) starting with the novel *Leviathan Wakes* in 2011 and progressing through seven other novels and various novellas and short stories (see ***The Expanse* Fiction** sidebar). In the future, humanity has spread throughout the solar system using the energy-efficient Epstein Drive, colonizing Mars, the asteroid belt, and the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. An unsteady peace exists between the United Nations of Earth and the Martian Congressional Republic, a balance upset by the events of the first novel.

The Expanse series focuses on the lives and adventures of the crew of the *Rocinante*, a repurposed military ship, as they become entangled with significant events in human history. It also takes in the sweep of events on a larger scale from the points of view of other characters in the solar system. Although *The Expanse* is "hard" science fiction in terms of extrapolating technology and dealing with the realities of orbital mechanics, space travel, and living in non-terrestrial environments, it also features epic science fiction speculation in terms of ancient alien artifacts which change the course of human history.

SPOILER WARNINGS

The Expanse Roleplaying Game focuses on the period between the first and second novels of the series (*Leviathan Wakes* and *Caliban's War*) and contains information about the events in the first novel, some of which may be considered "spoilers" for its plot, and touches upon elements of the second novel. If this book is your introduction to *The Expanse*, you may wish to read *Leviathan Wakes*, and possibly *Caliban's War*, first to ensure nothing here spoils your enjoyment of the story. While future *Expanse* RPG products will detail events and information related to the later books, there shouldn't be any significant spoilers for them in this book.

GETTING STARTED

The first thing you need for an *Expanse* game is a group of friends to play with, and one of you willing to take on the role of Game Master. While you can play with as small a group as one player and a GM, the game works best with a GM and three to six players. It is possible to play with more players, but that can slow down the pace of the game. The Game Master has a key role, so try to make sure they really want the job! Running a game is fun, but it's a different experience from playing. **Chapter 12** explains the Game Master's role in detail.

Once you've settled on a GM, everyone else needs to create characters, also known as Player Characters (PCs) since they are controlled by the players. Your character is your primary responsibility as a player in a roleplaying game. This is your alter ego in the universe of *The Expanse*. Over the course of many adventures, your character will grow and change, but every story needs a beginning. That is exactly what **Chapter 2: Character Creation** provides, giving you not only game stats—the abilities and corresponding numbers that tell you what your character is good at—but also a character concept, starting goals, and relationships with other characters. Once play begins, the portrayal and development of your character is all up to you. Playing your character, achieving goals, and navigating the challenges and perils of a fantastic universe—this is the fun of taking part in a roleplaying game.

PLAYING YOUR CHARACTER

When playing a roleplaying game, ask yourself, "What would my character do?" The Game Master describes a situation, setting the scene for the players. It is then up to you to decide what your character does and why. You tell the GM what you want to do, as do the other players in turn, and then you all work out what happens. Sometimes, you use dice and the rules of the game to resolve actions in a specific order. At other times, you simply interact with the other players and the characters portrayed by the GM, who are known as non-player characters, or NPCs, to differentiate them from the Player Characters.

When you create your *Expanse* character, you choose things like their goals and strong and weak personality traits. You can then flesh your character out further. There are two basic approaches to this. The first is to paint your character in a few broad

strokes and then jump right in to playing. The intention here is to come up with details about your character during the game, often using the springboard of the current story to create connections to their past. This is a common storytelling technique and a perfectly valid approach if you don't want to spend a lot of time working on your character's backstory before starting play. The second approach is to come up with a lot of details and roleplaying ideas before the first game session. If you can come to the table with a good idea of who your character is before the first dice are even rolled, that can help get the game going.

However you approach your character, playing the game will help you refine your ideas. After you have played for a while, you should have a strong sense of your character's personality and an intuitive sense of what they would do in a particular situation. Of course, not all situations present easy choices, and it is from those difficult decisions that tension and drama emerge.

ADVENTURE AND SERIES

An adventure is a discrete story in a roleplaying game. Think of it as a single short story, a chapter of a novel, or an episode of a TV show. There may be several plot threads, but in the end it tells one tale. The difference between a roleplaying adventure and a book or show is that you have authorship. The decisions made by you and your fellow players help drive the story to its conclusion.

A series is made up of interlinked adventures. If an adventure is a chapter or episode, a series is a novel or season of a show, or a series of novels or seasons. Some adventures may have self-contained plots, while others tie together to tell a larger story, what is sometimes referred to as an arc. During a series the characters advance, improve, and change. Over time they gain more abilities, influence, and resources, face greater challenges, and perhaps gain renown for their deeds. A full *Expanse* series can take characters from levels 1 through 20, and provide hundreds of hours of entertainment.

THE GROUP DYNAMIC

Much of this book is focused on teaching you the rules of the game and how to create a character. It is important to remember, however, that roleplaying is a social activity. There are two aspects to this: the character group and the player group.

Your character is one member of a group of characters, often referred to in this book as the crew, since *Expanse* characters are often part of the crew of the same ship or station. Each character in the crew has individual goals, but there should also be larger shared goals. The characters may have their disagreements and even conflicts, but for the game to go on they must remain together. The adventures themselves often ensure this by their plot and structure, but a good group dynamic can help. This can start during character creation when everyone is settling on what they want to play. It's a smart idea, for example, to make sure you have characters with diverse backgrounds, focuses, and talents. When working out things like goals and relationships, you can build in reasons for the characters in the crew to work together. *The Expanse* is often about human relationships and families, both those we choose and those chosen for us by circumstance.

The people gaming with you make up the player group, and that, too, has a dynamic. You and your fellow players are going to be spending a lot of time together, so you want a group of people who fundamentally get along. Roleplaying is meant to be fun for everyone, so be aware of any tensions around the table. Some players try to make the game all about them, hogging the spotlight and attempting to insert themselves into every scene. Don't act that way—it just makes the other players fed up. Everyone likewise deserves a chance to shine, so be ready to take a step back when someone has a good idea or is pursuing something important for their character. Some players may make others uncomfortable with inappropriate behavior. When this happens, it is important for the group as a whole to make it clear such behavior won't be tolerated—the game is about everyone having fun, and that can't happen unless everyone also feels comfortable and at ease.

If a game session didn't go well for some reason, talk it about it afterwards. It won't do any good if everyone just goes home to stew. Try to figure out where things went wrong and see if you can come up with solutions so it doesn't happen again. If players have concerns, encourage them to bring them up for discussion. **CHAPTER 12** offers some advice about handling problems that might crop up in the player group dynamic.

THE ADVENTURE GAME ENGINE

The rules system for *The Expanse* Roleplaying Game is known as the Adventure Game Engine (or AGE) System. It was originally designed by Chris Pramas for the *Dragon Age* RPG, also by Green Ronin Publishing. It was later published in stand-alone books, the *Fantasy AGE Basic Rulebook* and *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, as well as being used to create the *Titansgrave: Ashes of Valkana* setting and adventures and the *Blue Rose Romantic Fantasy Roleplaying* game. If you learn to play *The Expanse*, you can easily pick up other *AGE System* games. Although they are not identical, their basic structure and rules are, and you should find the others easy to learn. If you enjoy playing in the universe of *The Expanse* with the *AGE System*, you may want to explore the family of other worlds and games from Green Ronin Publishing based on it.

BASIC GAME CONCEPTS

Before you dive into the rest of the book, here's a brief overview of the basic concepts of the game. You'll learn more about all of these things in more detail as you read on.

DICE

The Expanse uses six-sided dice, abbreviated as "d6." This is the most common type of die, and they can be found in many classic boardgames if you need to scrounge for some. In general, dice are rolled four different ways in the game:

1D3 Sometimes you need to generate a number from 1-3. In this case you roll a d6 but halve the result, rounding up, so a roll of 1-2 = 1, a roll of 3-4 = 2, and a roll of 5-6 = 3.

1D6 You roll a single die and simply read the result. Sometimes there is a modifier attached, such as 1d6+3 or 1d6–1. In that case, just add or subtract the modifier from the die roll. If you rolled a 2, for example, you'd add the modifier of +3 to get a result of 5, or subtract the modifier of –1 to get a result of 1.

2D6 As 1d6, but you roll two dice and add them together. If you rolled a 3 and a 6, for example, your result would be 9.

3D6 As above, but you roll three dice and add them together. If you are making an ability test, you must ensure that two of the dice are one color and the third a different color, or otherwise differentiated in some way. That third die is known as the Drama Die, and it's important. The result of the Drama Die can determine your level of success and allow you to perform stunts.

CHARACTERS

To play *The Expanse* you create a character. You choose your character's origin (Earth, Mars, or one of the many colonies of the Belt or Outer Planets), as well as background, profession, and what drives your character. Your character begins at level 1 as a novice. By surviving encounters and overcoming challenges, characters gradually gain experience and increase in level (commonly called "leveling up"). Your character may eventually make it to level 20 and become one of the most capable and important people in known space.

TESTS

Your character has nine abilities, such as Intelligence and Strength, each with a numeric rating from –2 to 4, with 1 being average. When your character wants to do something, the Game Master may call for an ability test. This is a dice roll to determine success or failure, and it's the most common roll in the game. To make an ability test, you roll three six-sided dice (3d6), add the results together, and add the appropriate ability. This generates a test result, which you want to be as high as possible.

TEST RESULT = 3D6 + ABILITY

You may have to apply other bonuses or penalties, most commonly ability focuses that represent areas of expertise. Once you determine your test result, the Game Master lets you know if it's a success or a failure and what happens as a result.

> It was a real book—onionskin pages bound in what might have been actual leather. Miller had seen pictures of them before; the idea of that much weight for a single megabyte of data struck him as decadent.
>
> — *Leviathan Wakes*

WHAT'S NEXT?

If you are a player, then the first two sections of this book, **Chapters 1–4** and **Chapters 5–10**, are for you. They provide the key information you need to know about how to play the game and about the setting of *The Expanse*. When you are ready to make a character, go to **Chapter 2: Character Creation**. It explains the process to get you going.

If you are the Game Master, you, too, should familiarize yourself with **Chapters 1–11**, as they contain the core of the game and the setting. Then move on to **Chapters 12–14**. They explain your important role in a tabletop roleplaying game, as well as giving you valuable advice and resources. Once you're acquainted with the game and setting, there's an introductory adventure, "To Sleep, Perchance to Dream," in the back of the book to help launch your new *Expanse* series and start your characters off on their exciting adventures.

PLAYER'S SECTION

1. GAME BASICS

The Expanse Roleplaying Game is based on the *Adventure Game Engine* or *AGE System*, and uses a number of simple rules to drive play. Those rules are what this chapter is all about. First, this chapter gives some practical advice about being a player in an *Expanse* game. Then, it follows up with the basic rules of play, giving you the essentials you need to know when you sit down at the game table. Here you will find rules for ability tests, narrative and action time, and encounters and interludes.

You don't need to memorize all this information in order to play, but it's good to familiarize yourself with it. You can reference this book during the game and the Game Master is there to help adjudicate the rules. You'll pick things up as you go and, the more you play, the more familiar things will become. While reading the rules is important, nothing is a substitute for actual play. It is during a live game that you'll really see how things all fit and work together.

Once you've familiarized yourself with the game basics, take a look at **CHAPTER 5** to see how they're used in game play, or go on to **CHAPTER 2** to begin creating an *Expanse* character and to see how characters are defined in game terms.

PLAYER BASICS

As you may have noticed, this book contains a fair amount of rules material. The nuts and bolts of the game system are explained in the next few chapters, along with plenty of examples to make everything clear. If you've never played a role-playing game before, you may still be wondering what it means to be a player. Before getting into the nitty-gritty of ability tests and such, it's worth taking a step back and reviewing a few basics.

> "It's a simple complex system. That's the technical name for it. Because it's simple, it's prone to cascades, and because it's complex, you can't predict what's going to fail. Or how. It's computationally impossible."
>
> — *Caliban's War*

Your character sheet is a good place to start. You'll find one at the back of the book and you can photocopy this as needed (or download a PDF version from www.greenronin.com). The character sheet is the cornerstone of the character. Make sure you bring it to each game session, as playing your character without it is difficult. Some players leave their character sheets with, or make copies for, the Game Master to make sure this isn't a problem.

You should also ensure your character sheet is up to date. It's up to you to track your character's Fortune, ability increases, talents, specializations, and other details. When you show up for a game, your character should be ready to go. Fortune is going to change the most, going up and down as your hero deals with challenges, has brushes with danger, gets into fights, and then recovers. You may want to track this on scratch paper so you don't have to constantly erase your sheet during play. If your character's Fortune is reduced at the end of a session, be sure to note the current value so you have it ready for next time.

You'll also want to bring dice (at least three six-sided dice, with one of them a different color for the Drama Die), a pencil, some scratch paper for notes, plus any drinks and snacks you might want during play.

PLAYING ADVENTURES

During an *Expanse* game session, it's the Game Master's job to present the adventure and yours to play the role of your chosen character. An adventure is played out in a series of scenes known as encounters and interludes. Each builds on the last and ultimately leads to a climax and a conclusion of that part of the story. One of the great things about roleplaying game adventures is they can continue almost indefinitely, with one story following another, just like the novels in *The Expanse* series itself, as you play out the adventures of your characters.

ABILITY TESTS

During a game session, the Game Master sets the scene, then the players decide how their characters act and what they do. As a player, you narrate the actions of your character. You might say, "I search the lab for evidence of protomolecule experimentation," for example. The Game Master tells you the results of your action, and may introduce new elements into the scene. For example: "You search for ten minutes but, before you find what you are looking for, an angry-looking man in white lab scrubs bursts into the room and confronts you."

When your character is taking everyday actions that do not have a significant chance of failure, you don't need to roll dice or consult the game rules. It's enough to say that your character docks a ship at a known docking port, or walks across a station to stop at a noodle cart and get lunch. When you want your character to do something that requires risk or has a real chance of failure, that's when the dice come out. To resolve such actions you roll an ability test, often simply called a test. Tests are the heart of the *Adventure Game Engine* (or *AGE*) and you'll make many in any given game session.

MAKING ABILITY TESTS

To make an ability test, pick up three six-sided dice (abbreviated 3d6). Two of the dice should be one color and the third a different color. The off-color die is known as the Drama Die (see **The Drama Die** section, following). Roll all three dice and add the numbers they show together; you want to roll high. Then add the score of the ability you're testing and another +2 if you have an applicable ability focus (see **Ability Focuses** in **Chapter 2**). The final number is your test result.

TEST RESULT = 3D6 + ABILITY SCORE + 2 FOR ABILITY FOCUS (IF ANY)

Even if you have several ability focuses that could apply, you can only use one on a given test. You never gain the benefits of more than one focus on an ability test.

EXAMPLE *Your character is chasing a Belter dock-rat and needs to clear an area crowded with crates and cargo. The Game Master decides this is a Dexterity test. You roll 3d6 and get a total of 10 (3 + 3 + 4). Your character's Dexterity score is 3, so you add that for 13, plus your character has an applicable focus (Acrobatics), for an additional +2. Your final test result is 15 (10 + 3 + 2).*

FOCUS REQUIREMENTS

In most cases in *The Expanse* RPG, it does not matter if you have the listed focus or not—you can still attempt the test, you just won't get the bonus a focus provides if you don't have it. However, some tests demand specialized skills or knowledge, and those do require you to have the focus to even attempt the test. If you don't have the required focus, you automatically fail. These tests note this by adding the word "required" after the name of the focus, such as: **Intelligence (Cryptography required) test**.

EXAMPLE *Your character intercepts a transmission, but it is encrypted. You want to decrypt it so you can find out what the message says. The Game Master tells you that the test to do so will be Intelligence (Cryptography required). Your character doesn't have the Cryptography focus, but one of the other players' characters does. That character can attempt the Intelligence test to decrypt the message but your character cannot, regardless of their Intelligence score. If the character who has the Cryptography focus tries the decryption and fails the test, you'll have to come up with some other way of decoding the message to find out what it says.*

DIVISION AND ROUNDING

In cases where the rules call for a value to be divided, such as "half the character's Speed" or "one-quarter of the character's Fortune," round any remaining fractions up to the nearest whole number. So half a character's Speed of 13 is 7: 13 divided by 2 is 6.5, rounded up to 7. A specific exception to this general rule will be called out in the text.

THE DRAMA DIE

You roll three dice when making a test: two dice of one color and one die of another. The off-colored die is known as the Drama Die and it has several uses in the game system. In particular, it is used to measure degrees of success or failure, to break ties, and to generate stunt points (SP). When you see a reference to the Drama Die, just remember it's the off-colored die you roll with ability tests.

DEGREE OF SUCCESS

Most of the time, you only need to know if an ability test succeeds or fails: Did you accomplish the goal or not? Sometimes, it's important to know to what degree you succeeded. This is one of the uses of the Drama Die. Check the dice on your ability test and note the number on the Drama Die. The higher the value, the greater the degree of your success: A 1 on your Drama Die means you barely pulled it off, while a 6 (or better, due to modifiers to the Drama Die) means you did it flawlessly. Note that if you failed the test, the result of the Drama Die is generally irrelevant.

The Game Master tells you when the degree of your test is important and will ask for the Drama Die's value as well as your test total in those cases.

EXAMPLE *In the aftermath of a thankfully non-fatal encounter with some pirates in the Belt, your character is doing a quick patch-job repair to the ship. The GM asks for an ability test to see if you can do it, but also asks for the degree from the Drama Die to see how well you pull it off. With just a 1, the patch might not even last for the whole encounter, while with a 6, it's almost as good as new!*

TIE-BREAKING

In cases of equal test results on opposed tests (see **Opposed Tests**, following) the character with the highest Drama Die value wins the test.

STUNTS

There's a difference between accomplishing something with a test and really accomplishing it with style. That difference comes into play in *The Expanse* with stunts.

When you roll dice for a test and two or more of the dice show the same number, that test generates stunt points (abbreviated SP). If the test is successful, you can use these points to enhance the results of your action, pulling off some special maneuver, trick, or flourish beyond just the benefits of success. You must spend any stunt points you generate on a test or else they disappear at the end of your turn. The kinds of stunts you can achieve depend on the type of action.

As a general rule, only active tests generate stunt points, such as when your character is trying to accomplish or achieve something. Tests you make in response to something else, such as a test to resist an effect, or a follow-up test required by another action, do not generate stunt points. See **CHAPTER 5: GAME PLAY** for lists of stunts for various situations and additional details on how and when to use them.

"Heroism is a label most people get for doing shit they'd never do if they were really thinking about it."

— Abaddon's Gate

EXAMPLE *In your test chasing after that Belter dock-rat, you rolled 3d6 and got 3, 3, and 4 for a total of 10. You also have two matching numbers on the dice (two 3s), so your test generates stunt points. With a result of 4 on the Drama Die (the last die listed), you get 4 SP to spend immediately. Maybe you clear the obstacles so effectively that you're also able to put something into the path of your quarry, helping you to catch up, for example.*

FORTUNE

Characters in *The Expanse* have a resource called Fortune, which represents a measure of survival instinct, dumb luck, good fortune, divine favor, whatever you want to call it. The character you portray as a player starts off with a certain amount of Fortune, which improves with experience, as your character becomes more and more important in the series. Likewise, certain characters controlled by the Game Master have their own Fortune scores. Fortune is measured in Fortune points or FP for short.

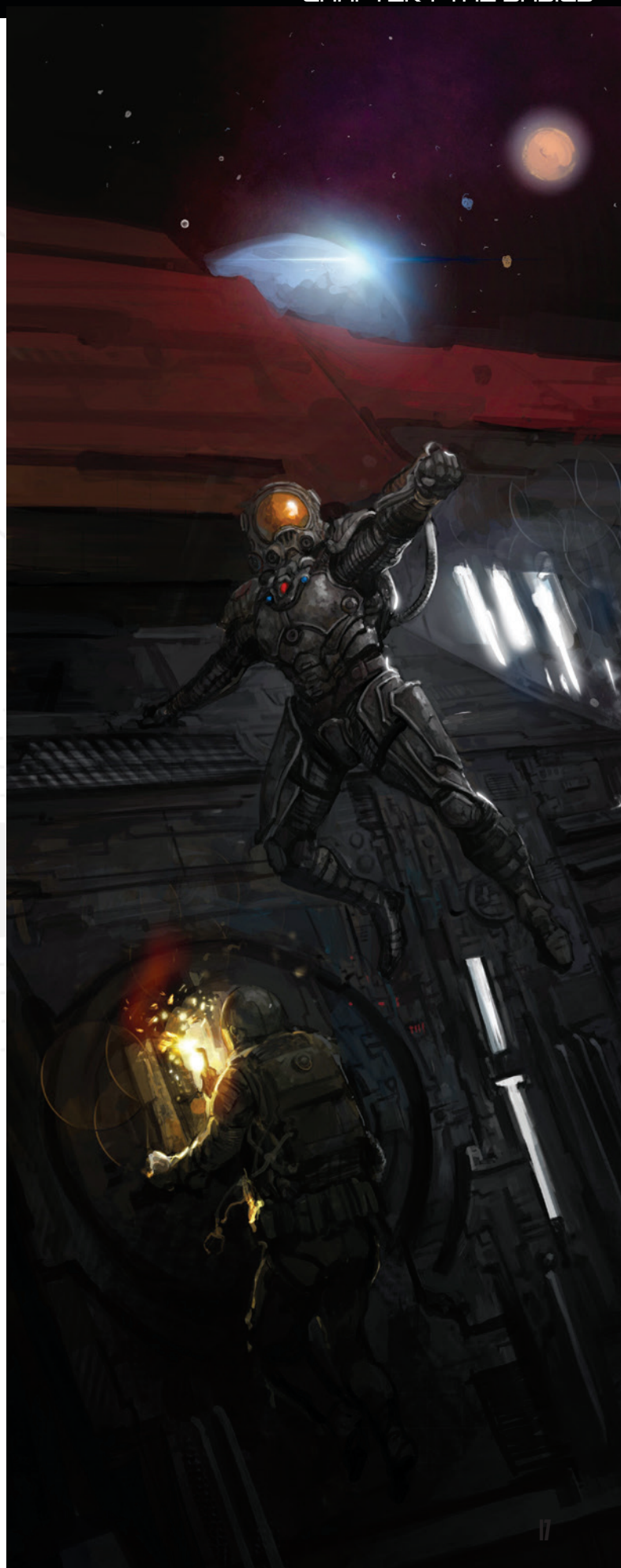
Fortune is used for a number of things, some described later in this book. For the purpose of tests, Fortune is important because you can spend Fortune points, decreasing your current score, in order to improve the results of your tests. You can spend Fortune points to make one die show the value of the number of FP you spend, up to 6. For the Drama Die, this costs twice the usual amount, so the die shows the value of half the number of FP you spend, rounded down. You can only modify one die out of a roll using FP.

EXAMPLE *You roll the dice for a test and get 1, 3, and 3 on the Drama Die, which is a total of 7: not great, especially since you know you need at least a total of 10 in order to succeed. So you tell the Game Master you are spending 4 Fortune points to make the "1" die into a "4" (the die now showing the value of the number of Fortune points you spent). Since you also have double 3s already, your roll now generates stunt points equal to the Drama Die, or 3 SP. If, on the other hand, your initial roll was 3, 3, and 1 on the Drama Die, you would need to spend twice the number of Fortune points to increase the Drama Die to a 4 (8 FP total). But you would also get 4 stunt points out of it rather than 3, since you still have double 3, but the Drama Die now shows a 4.*

TYPES OF TESTS

The essential mechanics of an ability test are applied in *The Expanse* in four primary ways or types of tests, described here. Those ways are: basic tests, opposed tests, advanced tests, and challenge tests.

Generally, the rules and the Game Master decide what type of test applies to a given situation in the game. See **CHAPTER 5: GAME PLAY** for various examples of all of these types of tests. The essential mechanics for how these tests all work are as follows.



BASIC TESTS

A basic test is, just as the name implies, the most basic and common type of ability test using the following steps:

1. You tell the Game Master what you want your character to try and accomplish, such as "I want to open the lock" or "I look around for clues".
2. The Game Master determines the appropriate ability and focus (if any), and assigns a target number for the test based on its overall difficulty.
3. You roll an ability test and determine your test result, including spending Fortune points on the roll, if you wish.
4. If your test result is equal to or greater than the target number, you successfully pass the test and accomplish the desired action. If it is not, your attempt to perform that action fails.

A basic test is rolled against a target number (abbreviated TN) chosen by the Game Master based on an assessment of the test's overall difficulty. The Game Master should take all relevant factors into account in determining the difficulty of the test, including the prevailing conditions. The **Test Target Number** table provides benchmarks for basic test difficulty, with more information in **CHAPTER 12: GAME MASTERING**. The table lists standard target numbers, a description of the approximate test difficulty as a guideline, and the minimum modifier—a combination of ability score and focus—needed for a character to have a 50% chance of success, as well as the minimum bonus needed for an approximately 90% chance of success. Note that a focus, with a standard bonus of +2, effectively makes tests involving that focus one level of difficulty easier.

TEST TARGET NUMBER

TARGET NUMBER	TEST DIFFICULTY	50% CHANCE	90% CHANCE
7	Routine	–3	+1
9	Easy	–1	+3
11	Average	+1	+5
13	Challenging	+3	+7
15	Hard	+5	+9
17	Formidable	+7	+11
19	Imposing	+9	+13
21	Nigh Impossible	+11	+15

When basic tests are referred to in *The Expanse*, they use the following format:

BASIC TEST FORMAT = BASIC TN # ABILITY (FOCUS) TEST

TN stands for target number, or the total you need to succeed on the test. It's followed by the actual number, ranging from 7 to 21. Then comes the ability you add to the roll and the most appropriate focus for that ability. If multiple focuses apply, they are all listed. Examples include:

Basic TN 9 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test
Basic TN 11 Strength (Might) test
Basic TN 13 Perception (Seeing or Hearing) test

OPPOSED TESTS

When your character competes directly against another character, you make an opposed test to see who wins. In this type of test, both characters roll and the results are compared. Essentially, each character's target number is determined by the opposing character's test result. An opposed test uses the following steps:

1. You tell the Game Master what you want your character to try and accomplish, such as "I want to beat this guy at arm wrestling" or "I try to grab the gun before she can."
2. The Game Master determines the appropriate ability and focus (if any), then assigns a target number to the task for you and your opponent, based on the task's overall difficulty.
3. You and your opponent both make ability tests and determine the test results, including spending Fortune points on the roll, if either of you wish.
4. Compare the test results. If you equal or exceed the TN and exceed your opponent's test result, you win. If you both exceed the TN and there's a tie, whoever rolled higher on the Drama Die wins. If it's still a tie, then whoever has the higher ability wins. If that is still a tie, then it's just a tie and nobody wins. The same is the case if both of you fail to exceed the TN.

This same process can be used when more than two characters compete. In such cases, everyone makes an ability test and all of the results are compared. The highest test result wins, with ties broken as in step 4.

Also note that it isn't necessarily the case that all characters use the same ability for an opposed test. That makes sense in something like an arm-wrestling bout, for example, with both characters making Strength (Might) tests. Other situations may pit one ability against a completely different one. A bodyguard trying to penetrate a spy's disguise, for example, would take a Perception (Seeing) test and their opponent a Communication (Disguise) test.

ADVANCED TESTS

An advanced test is used for tasks that take time or planning, when the amount of time required matters, or to determine who accomplishes a task first. Navigating the wilderness to get to safety before a planet-wide storm hits or hacking a computer network to wipe data before an enemy hacker gets there are suitable occasions. If marking time or who succeeds first don't matter, you can use a basic or opposed test.

Advanced tests require multiple rolls, each representing an increment of time, until you either succeed or run out of time. An advanced test uses the following steps:

1. Determine the target number or opposed roll (including modifiers) the character tests against, just like a basic or opposed test.
2. An advanced test has a success threshold. This is the total number of Drama Die points required to complete the task. Each success on a test adds its Drama Die total to the success threshold until you either succeed or run out of time.
3. Each roll requires a time increment. Set it based on the type of activity the test represents. One way to do this is to figure out the typical amount of time the task should take and divide it by half of the success threshold. For instance, if you think the task should take about an hour and have a success threshold of 10, divide one hour by 5 (one half of 10) to get 12 minutes (60 minutes, divided by 5). You may decide to round that off to an even 10 minute time increment per roll.
4. You make an ability test against the target number or opposed roll for each time increment. On a failure, you don't make any headway, and the time passes. On a success, note the number generated by the Drama Die. This represents progress during that increment. Add the Drama Die results from each successful roll together. When the total meets or exceeds the success threshold, you complete the task.

The **Advanced Test Thresholds** table provides some basic benchmarks for success thresholds, though there is no theoretical limit on how high they can get. Additional guidance can be found in **Chapter 5: Game Play** and **Chapter 12: Game Mastering**.

Most advanced tests use the same ability and focus for all of the ability tests towards the success threshold. Some advanced tests, however, may vary the required ability and/or focus, either allowing multiple means to accomplish the test, or even requiring different abilities to combine, in succession, to achieve success. The Game Master decides when this is called for: see **Chapter 12: Game Mastering** for details.

ADVANCED TEST THRESHOLDS

TASK DIFFICULTY	SUCCESS THRESHOLD
Easy	5
Average	10
Challenging	15
Hard	20
Formidable	25

CHALLENGE TESTS

Some of the challenges in *Expanse* adventures don't involve avoiding danger as much as confronting it. Whether dangerous piloting through a debris field, hacking a computer system, or smuggling yourself across a hostile border, these challenge tests can be thought of as advanced tests with consequences. As with an advanced test, the Game Master determines a difficulty and success threshold and how much time each roll represents. The GM also decides on the ability and focus for the ability test, and may vary them or require different abilities or focuses in succession. Unlike an advanced test, a challenge test has consequences for each failed roll. These consequences come in three levels—minor, moderate, and major—and the Game Master determines how many times characters can fail at a challenge test before increasing the level of the consequences.

Minor consequences can:

- Make future tests more difficult, increasing the target number by +2 (one level of difficulty)
- Increase the amount of time needed for each ability test
- Cause some minor complication like giving away the effort, if the challenge is covert

Minor consequences can generally be eliminated with a successful ability test that does not contribute to the success threshold. Examples include:

- Triggering some counter-intrusion protocols that increase difficulty until you make a successful test to override them
- Drawing the attention of a guard, who raises the alarm unless you succeed on an opposed Dexterity (Stealth) versus Perception (Hearing) test

Moderate consequences can:

- Make future tests more difficult, as with a minor consequence, but lasting for the remainder of the challenge test without the ability to undo it
- Eliminate half of your accumulated progress towards the success threshold
- Close off a current avenue of progress, forcing you to adopt a new approach or acquire a new means of progressing towards your goal. This may change the required ability or focus for future tests in the challenge.

Examples of Moderate consequences include:

- Tripping a defensive program that sends you back to an earlier stage of a hack (eliminating accumulated progress)
- Discovering the codes have been changed and needing to steal a new password before continuing

Major consequences potentially jeopardize the entire challenge test, essentially forcing characters to start the test over from the beginning, having lost any expended time, or requiring them to complete another advanced or challenge test in order to pick the previous challenge back up where they left off. Examples include:

- Getting noticed and having a chase challenge or even a conflict before being able to resume
- Getting locked out of a system and having to start an infiltration process over again

EXAMPLE

You need to break into a secure facility. The GM decides this makes sense as a challenge test and sets the success threshold at 15, saying the required abilities are Dexterity (Stealth), Intelligence (Technology), and Perception (Seeing). Any of the characters involved in the challenge can contribute ability checks towards its success. Each check takes about 4 minutes. The GM also sets forth three consequences. As a minor consequence, guards may be alerted to the break-in; a separate Dexterity (Stealth) test against their Perception (Seeing) test is needed to eliminate it, and does not contribute towards success. As a moderate consequence, the facility proves to have more sophisticated security than expected, increasing the TN for Intelligence (Technology) tests by +2 for the rest of the challenge. As a major consequence, guards are immediately alerted to the break-in and begin searching the facility for intruders. The characters must succeed in 30 minutes or the facility locks down and the major consequence kicks in.

For additional examples of creating challenge tests, see **CHAPTER 12: GAME MASTERING**.

CONDITIONS

During game play in *The Expanse*, a number of conditions can affect characters, representing effects imposed by damage, hazards, and so forth. Some conditions are merely bothersome, others far more serious, perhaps even potentially lethal. Recovering and removing one or more conditions usually takes place during interludes. See **CHAPTER 5: GAME PLAY** and **CHAPTER 12: GAME MASTERING** for more on acquiring, recovering from, and using conditions in the game.

The following is a listing and description of the conditions *Expanse* characters may acquire. **CHAPTER 12: GAME MASTERING** covers how to use these conditions to represent the effects of different hazards, consequences, and such.

> "She'd stopped looking tired a while ago and had moved on to whatever tired turns into when it became a lifestyle."
>
> — *Caliban's War*

CONDITION LIST

DEAFENED The character cannot hear and automatically fails ability tests reliant on hearing, such as Perception (Hearing).

DYING The character is in danger of perishing. A dying character loses 1 point of Constitution score each round on the start of the character's turn. When the character's Constitution score reaches –3, the character dies. Successful first aid applied to a dying character stabilizes their condition, making them helpless, unconscious, and wounded instead. They must recover from these conditions normally (see **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5**).

EXHAUSTED The character is severely fatigued. The character's Speed is halved and they cannot take the Charge or Run actions. An exhausted character who receives an additional fatigued or exhausted condition becomes helpless.

FATIGUED The character is tired and cannot take the Charge or Run actions. A fatigued character who receives an additional fatigued condition becomes exhausted.

FREE FALLING The character is effectively weightless in a microgravity or free-fall environment. The character can only move with access to hand-holds, a surface to push off from, or some type of thrust (like from a thruster pack) and, once moving, continues to move with the same speed and trajectory unless acted upon to stop or change their movement.

HELPLESS The character is incapable of doing anything. The character cannot take any actions.

HINDERED The character's Speed is halved (round down) and they cannot take the Charge or Run actions.

INJURED The character is hurt. The character has a –1 penalty to all tests and is fatigued, unable to take the Charge or Run actions. An injured character who receives an additional injured condition becomes wounded.

PRONE The character is lying on the ground. The character cannot take the Charge or Run actions, as they can only move by crawling, and standing up from prone requires a Move action using half the character's Speed. Melee attacks have a +1 bonus against prone characters, while ranged attacks have a –1 penalty.

RESTRAINED The character's Speed becomes 0 and they effectively cannot move. A restrained condition may prevent a character from taking certain other actions as well, defined by the nature of the restraint.

UNCONSCIOUS The character is unaware of their surroundings or the passage of time. The character falls prone and is helpless, unable to take any actions.

WOUNDED The character is severely injured. The character has a –2 penalty to all tests and is exhausted, their Speed halved and unable to take the Charge or Run actions. A wounded character who receives an additional injured or wounded condition becomes dying.

TIME-KEEPING

Time in an *Expanse* game passes in two main ways: real time and game time. Real time is the actual passage of time while you play the game. If you and your friends sit down and play for four hours, then four hours of real time has passed, regardless of how much time has passed in the story for your characters. Real time is rarely referred to in the context of the game except in terms of a "session," which is a real time period of playing *The Expanse*. A game session is expected to be between a couple of hours to four or five hours long. Game time is how much time passes in the context of the game's narrative. It is also divided into two main types: narrative time and action time.

NARRATIVE TIME

Much of the story in an *Expanse* game passes in narrative time, which varies greatly depending on what the characters are doing and what the Game Master describes. For example, you might say your character visits a local bar on a station with friends for the evening. The GM picks things up by saying, "Several hours later..." so it is now several hours later in game time, even though it only took less than a minute of real time for you and the GM to describe it. Narrative time goes with the overall flow of the story; sometimes it is the same as real time, such as during an interaction encounter where everyone is playing out an entire conversation. Other times it compresses or glosses over segments of time, covering them with just a brief narrative, like "It takes a few minutes" or "About a week later." The Game Master generally controls the flow of narrative time in the game.

ACTION TIME

When things get tense and it starts to matter exactly who does what and in what order from moment to moment, narrative time ends and action time begins. Action time is most commonly used to handle fights, but it has other uses as well. Anything that would be considered an action scene in a movie can be handled with action time. Indeed, its primary use in *The*

Expanse RPG is to handle action encounters (see **Encounters**, following). The Game Master usually signals the beginning of action time by telling the players to make an initiative test to determine who goes first and in what order. See **Chapter 5: Game Play** for details.

While narrative time is loose and flexible, action time is more tightly defined. Once it begins, the Game Master tracks time in short increments called rounds. During each round, every character in the encounter gets an opportunity to act, called their turn, in the order of initiative. Once everyone has taken a turn, that round ends and a new one begins. Things keep going, round after round, until the encounter is over and the game returns to narrative time.

ENCOUNTERS

The narrative of an *Expanse* game is divided into encounters and interludes. These can be thought of like chapters in a novel, with each focused on a particular situation or scene. Encounters engage the characters with various situations, while interludes tend to be downtime for characters to use as they want. Encounters are more GM-driven, while interludes tend to be more player-driven. Encounters are further divided into three types:

ACTION ENCOUNTERS	**Action** encounters are the action scenes pitting the characters against various dangers, including fighting enemies, fleeing pursuit, or overcoming hazards.
EXPLORATION ENCOUNTERS	**Exploration** encounters are about exploring and gathering information and generally interacting with the environment. They include investigations and research.
SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS	**Social** encounters are for conversation and personal interaction, whether tense negotiations, clever intrigues, or honest sharing of information and goals.

Each type of encounter has different objectives and good adventure design tends to mix and vary the types of encounters characters have during the course of an *Expanse* adventure (see **Chapter 12: Game Mastering**, particularly **Creating Adventures**). Some encounters even mix types, such as an exploration-social with potential for exploring the environment and interacting with characters in it, or social-action, where a tense negotiation has the potential to turn into a fight or a chase.

Action encounters naturally occur during action time and social encounters usually occur during narrative time. Exploration encounters can go either way, depending on what the characters are doing and the difficulties they face; narrative time for general exploration, action time for dealing with sudden hazards and the like. **Chapter 5: Game Play** covers the three types of encounters and how they work in detail.

> "Show a human a closed door, and no matter how many open doors she finds, she'll be haunted by what might be behind it."
>
> — *Abaddon's Gate*

INTERLUDES

Interludes come between various encounters in an *Expanse* game, although there isn't always an interlude between every encounter. An interlude is a break in the narrative, a bit of downtime where the characters can do things they want or need to do, ranging from resting and recovering to studying, working, or otherwise pursuing their own goals. The most common times for interludes in *The Expanse* are transit times: the hours, days, or even weeks or longer it can take a ship to travel the vast distances between destinations in the System. There's not much point in playing out an hour-by-hour accounting of such a trip, so it is usually summed up as an interlude until something interesting happens, including the ship arriving at its destination. The other common sort of interlude occurs when the characters have time off, such as visiting a station or other port of call, or having a duty rotation, shore leave, or such.

Interludes are when characters perform needed maintenance and upkeep for their equipment, ships, and incomes. Interludes can be opportunities for characters to bond and get to know one another better, which is common on long, confined trips. Conversely, an interlude can also be an opportunity for a group of characters to split up, each going off to do their own things, perhaps for a considerable amount of time before they come back together again. You can find details on interludes and how they play out in the game in **Chapter 5: Game Play**.

2. CHARACTER CREATION

Like a role played by an actor, your character is how you take part in *The Expanse* Roleplaying Game, your alter ego in the context of the game. The player characters are those created by the players for this purpose. Since the stories featured in the game revolve around the Player Characters, it is important to define who they are, what they can do, and what they want. So take some time to consider all of these questions about your character.

GETTING STARTED

This chapter provides all of the steps to create an *Expanse* character, presented in order so you can go through the chapter, step by step, as you build your character. You may encounter unfamiliar rules or game terms here for the first time: Don't worry! They are explained in detail in the following chapters of this book and you can always find an unfamiliar game term in the **INDEX** section at the back of this book, reference it, and then come back to where you left off.

When you begin creating a character, in addition to this book, you will likely want a copy of the character sheet presented in the back of the book. This is a paper record of your character and you can use it as a kind of "worksheet" when building a character as well as a reference during game play. You can photocopy the sheet in the back of the book or download and print out an electronic version of the sheet from greenronin.com. You'll also want some scratch paper for making notes and considering your options, something to write with, and three six-sided dice.

CHARACTER CREATION IN TEN EASY STEPS

Making an *Expanse* character is a process of ten steps, outlined here and detailed in the rest of this chapter. Just follow the steps and, at the end, you'll have a complete new character!

1 **CONCEPT** Consider the type of character you want to play and that character's overall role in the group of characters the other players will create.

2 **ABILITIES** Determine your character's core physical and mental abilities. These are areas where your character is strong or talented, average, or on the weak side.

3 **ORIGIN** Choose a place of origin for your character, whether they are an Earther, Martian, or Belter.

4 **BACKGROUND** Choose a background that describes what your character's earlier life was like, and capabilities the character gained from it.

5 **PROFESSION** Choose a profession that defines what your character does now—or did just before the first adventure—which gives you additional things the character can do.

6 **DRIVE** Decide what drives your character, and why they do the things that they do.

7 **INCOME** Based on background and other factors, find out what your character's Income looks like.

8 **SECONDARY ABILITIES AND FORTUNE** Figure out your character's Defense, Speed, and Toughness scores based on their abilities, and their starting Fortune score.

9 **GOALS AND TIES** Based on everything you've worked out thus far, choose your character's goals, both short- and long-term, and the character's ties with other characters.

10 **NAME AND DESCRIPTION** Lastly, give your character a name and describe both the character's appearance and overall personality and reputation.

STEP 1: CONCEPT

Come up with the type of character you're interested in playing. You may want to read through the options in this and the following chapters for a sense of the range of characters you can create and play, especially if you are not already familiar with *The Expanse* setting and characters. Talk with the GM and the other players in your group about your character concept and how well it will fit into the kind of game the GM is looking to run and the kinds of characters the other players want to create. For example, a hard-bitten ex-mercenary might or might not fit in with a game about Martian naval officers, but could easily have a place in one focusing on a team of for-hire medical experts, even if just as a bodyguard for other characters. You may also want to come up with a set of abilities, as detailed in Step 2, and then consider potential concepts that work with those abilities as a jumping-off point.

> "Rebecca Byers, the comm officer on duty, could have been bred from a shark and a hatchet."
>
> — *Leviathan Wakes*

EXAMPLE *We're creating an Expanse character for a game set in the Belt and the outer planets, and want someone with some experience aboard ships and stations. Let's also focus on a character with some technical skills.*

STEP 2: ABILITIES

AGE System characters are defined by nine abilities. They're scored on a numeric scale from –2 (quite poor) to 4 (truly outstanding). A score of 1 is considered average for Player Characters and other extraordinary people. 0 is average for everyday individuals, the sort of folks who avoid having adventures. Your character's ability scores provide a useful "snapshot" of the areas where your character is outstanding, above average, poor, or just average, and you use ability scores to determine the outcome of most actions in the game via ability tests. The abilities in *The Expanse* are:

ACCURACY

Accuracy measures aim and precision, and measures your ability to hit targets with ranged or thrown weapons.

CONSTITUTION

Constitution is your character's overall health, fortitude, and resistance to harm, illness, and fatigue.

FIGHTING

Fighting is your character's capability and prowess in close combat, ranging from a brawl to wielding weapons.

COMMUNICATION

Communication covers social skills and generally making friends and influencing people.

DEXTERITY

Dexterity covers deftness, agility, and reaction time, affecting how quickly and gracefully you move.

INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence measures a character's reasoning, memory, problem-solving, and overall knowledge.

TALENT REQUIREMENTS

Many of the talents described in **CHAPTER 3** have specific requirements—a certain focus or minimum ability score, for example. These requirements apply only to acquiring the talent through advancement, and do not apply during character creation. If the talent appears as part of your character's background, profession, or drive, then you can ignore the listed requirements.

PERCEPTION

Perception is the ability to pick up on and notice things using any of the character's senses.

STRENGTH

Strength is sheer muscle power and the ability to apply it, from lifting heavy things to feats of athletics.

WILLPOWER

Willpower measures self-control, self-discipline, mental fortitude, and confidence.

DETERMINING ABILITIES

Roll dice to determine your character's starting ability scores. You need three six-sided dice (3d6). Roll all three and add the numbers together to get a result from 3 to 18. If you roll 3, 4, and 6, for example, your result is 13 (3 + 4 + 6 = 13).

Make nine such rolls, one for each ability. Then consult the **Determining Abilities** table to see what ability score each roll gives each ability. A roll of 11 on the table, for example, means the ability's starting score is 1. When you are done with all nine abilities, you can swap any two scores. This gives you a chance to customize your character a bit.

EXAMPLE *Starting off our character's creation process, we make nine 3d6 rolls referencing the **Determining Abilities** table, giving the character the following scores: Accuracy 2, Communication 1, Constitution 0, Dexterity 2, Fighting 1, Intelligence 1, Perception 2, Strength 3, Willpower 2. Since we want more of a technical character, let's swap the rolled Strength and Intelligence scores, for Intelligence 3, Strength 1.*

DETERMINING ABILITIES

3D6 ROLL	ABILITY SCORE
3	–2
4	–1
5	–1
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	1
10	1
11	1
12	2
13	2
14	2
15	3
16	3
17	3
18	4

ABILITY FOCUSES

An ability focus (or just focus for short) is an area of specialty or expertise within the broader ability. For example, while Intelligence determines in general how smart and knowledgeable your character is, the Research focus indicates your character is particularly capable when it comes to digging up information using available resources. In game terms, if you have a focus, your ability is effectively 2 higher than normal when working within that focus or specialty. This is explained in detail in **CHAPTER 3**.

Focuses add detail and definition to your character. While there may be another character in the group who is just as accurate, for example, having the same Accuracy score, your character might have the Pistols focus while the other character does not, but may have different focuses, or none.

Your character gains focuses through background, profession, and drive, so you choose them during those steps. You can find details on specific ability focuses in **CHAPTER 3**.

ABILITY OPTIONS

Character creation in *The Expanse* is presented with beginning gamers in mind. Random rolls make the process easier because they cut down on decision-making. If you have some experience or just prefer more control when determining your character's abilities, you can use one of the following two options, with your GM's permission.

OPTION 1: ARRANGING ABILITIES

Roll your abilities randomly, as described under **Determining Abilities**. However, you can arrange the results in whatever order you wish, deciding which result goes with which ability. Instead of rolling the abilities in order, just make nine rolls on the **Determining Abilities** table and assign the results to the nine abilities as you see fit.

OPTION 2: BUYING ABILITIES

Your character's abilities all start at 0 and you get 12 advancements to increase them. Each advancement increases an ability by 1, but no ability can be greater than 3. You must spend all 12 advancements. The later steps of character creation can increase your abilities, as usual. Note that under this system you cannot have abilities lower than 0, nor do you have a chance of getting an ability score of 4.

STACKED TRAITS

In some instances, combinations of origin, background, profession, and drive may give a character the same ability focus or the same talent more than once. In cases where focuses and talents "stack" use the following general rules:

- If a character already has an ability focus and would acquire that focus again, choose one of the other options available. If no other option is presented, take another focus of your choice.
- If a character already has a degree of a talent and acquires that talent again, gain the next degree of the talent.

The Expanse includes the following focuses. Other focuses may appear in various *AGE System* setting and source books, and your GM may introduce new ones to suit the game.

ACCURACY

Bows, Gunnery, Pistols, Rifles, Throwing

COMMUNICATION

Bargaining, Deception, Disguise, Etiquette, Expression, Gambling, Investigation, Leadership, Performing, Persuasion, Seduction

CONSTITUTION

Running, Stamina, Swimming, Tolerance

DEXTERITY

Acrobatics, Crafting, Driving, Free-fall, Initiative, Piloting, Sleight of Hand, Stealth

FIGHTING

Brawling, Grappling, Heavy Weapons, Light Weapons

INTELLIGENCE

Art, Business, Cryptography, Current Affairs, Demolitions, Engineering, Evaluation, Law, Medicine, Navigation, Research, Science, Security, Tactics, Technology

PERCEPTION

Empathy, Hearing, Intuition, Searching, Seeing, Smelling, Survival, Tasting, Touching, Tracking

STRENGTH

Climbing, Intimidation, Jumping, Might

WILLPOWER

Courage, Faith, Self-Discipline

STEP 3: ORIGIN

As humanity has spread throughout the System, where you are from has increasingly had an effect on who you are. There are people for whom Earth is just a distant story they've heard about and seen on screens, who have never experienced being outside without a vac suit. Consider and choose your character's origin. If you want to decide randomly, just roll a die: **1–2** = **Belter, 3–4** = **Earther, 5–6** = **Martian.**

> "Mom," Holden said. "Earthers and Belters can have kids just fine. We're not a different species."
>
> — *Caliban's War*

ORIGIN AND NATIVE GRAVITY

Each origin has a "native gravity" it is acclimated to: **microgravity** (less than 0.1 g), **low gravity** (between 0.1 and 0.8 g or so), or **normal gravity** (1 g, or slightly more or less). There are also **heavy gravity** (2 g or more) and **very heavy gravity** (4 g or more), which are generally only encountered as a result of acceleration. As a general rule, if current gravity conditions are two heavier than your native gravity, you're hindered (see **Conditions** in **CHAPTER 1**) and you are restrained at three or more categories heavier.

BELTER

You were born and raised in the Black, on a station or ship, and have lived most, if not all, of your life out in the Belt or beyond. Separated from death by nothing more than basic support systems your whole life, you have learned to be cautious and aware of your environment. As a Belter, your character has the following traits:

- Your native gravity is microgravity. Belters are most comfortable "on the float" and handle moving in free-fall easily. You automatically have the Dexterity (Free-fall) focus. Conversely, Earth-normal gravity is crushingly heavy for a Belter.
- You speak Belter Creole, a combination of loan-words and phrases from various languages, combined with gestures useful for communicating while wearing a vac suit and unable to speak.

- Belters tend to be tall and willowy as a result of being raised in low- or microgravity environments. Regimens of bone-density drugs and genetic treatments are needed to keep Belters healthy, and some Belters have minor physical abnormalities because of this.
- Belters often have a diverse ethnic heritage, given the "melting pot" of the Belt, with ancestors from many different Earth cultures.

> "Same here, Cap'n," Amos said. "I got a lot of past in my past."
>
> — *Abaddon's Gate*

EARTHER

With a population of some 30 billion, many Earthers are unemployed and live on government-provided Basic Assistance (generally known as just "Basic") which provides for their essential food, housing, and medical needs, but little else. You are likely one of the few to leave Earth to find a new life elsewhere. As an Earther, your character has the following traits:

- Your native gravity is normal gravity—"Earth-normal" or 1 g. Earthers can and do learn to operate in lower gravity, but lack the instincts of people raised in it.
- Earthers have greater muscle and bone density from being raised in a gravity well, making them shorter and more broadly built than Belters or even native-born Martians, but Earthers in space need regular exercise and medical treatments to avoid muscle atrophy and bone density loss.

MARTIAN

Born in the Martian Congressional Republic, your life has been influenced by the Martian dream: to terraform the Red Planet into a lush and life-sustaining garden. Like the generations before you, you know that you will likely never see the completion of this work in your lifetime. As a Martian, your character has the following traits:

- Your native gravity is low, the gravity of Mars rather than Earth. Martians are more comfortable with microgravity than Earthers, and better able to tolerate a full 1 g than Belters, operating in-between.

EXAMPLE *Since our game takes place out in the Belt, we decide to go with a Belter origin, although some of the characters may have different ones. We take note of the Belter traits; hopefully, the characters won't be spending much time in normal gravity environments like Earth.*

STEP 4: BACKGROUND

Characters do not spring from nowhere, fully formed. Their stories start somewhere, and they had a life and experiences prior to the start of the story being told around the game table. This is the character's background.

Backgrounds are broad by design. They offer room for deciding exactly what a given background means in the context of your character's story. Backgrounds are intended to offer inspiration as to your character's history, early life, and personality.

Determining your character's background involves two rolls: First, roll on the **Social Class** table for your character's origin. Once you have that result, roll on the appropriate backgrounds table for that social class. So if your character is Middle Class, roll 1d6 on the **Backgrounds: Middle Class** table and record the result. At the Game Master's discretion, you can just choose your character's social class, background, or both, rather than rolling on the tables.

Your character's background provides the following benefits:

+1 to an ability score • A choice of one of two ability focuses • A choice of one of two talents
A roll on a benefits table for the background, giving the character one additional benefit

SOCIAL CLASS

2D6 ROLL			SOCIAL CLASS
BELTER	EARTHER	MARTIAN	
2-5	2-3	2	Outsider
6-8	4-6	3-6	Lower Class
9-11	7-10	7-11	Middle Class
12	11-12	12	Upper Class

SOCIAL CLASS DESCRIPTIONS

The exact nature of social class varies in different places in the System but everywhere there are people, they tend to be divided up based on who has what.

OUTSIDER

More of a non-social class, outsiders tend to be outcasts, criminals, or non-conformists who can't or won't live according to society's customs. They often lack access to things other people take for granted and learn to get by on their own, sometimes forming their own support networks and structures outside of those of mainstream society. Some outsiders reject the mainstream by choice, but in many cases, outsiders are pushed out by society's biases.

LOWER CLASS

Hard, usually physical, labor and precarious employment tend to rule the lives of lower class characters. Still, that work is often all that separates them from becoming outsiders, so they cling to it. Lower class characters often depend on family and friends to help keep them out of utter poverty. They might live in failing industrial areas, inner city slums, or hardscrabble farms. In all cases, they make do with what is available and find ways to stretch out resources until the next payday or job comes along.

MIDDLE CLASS

A measure of comfort and security comes with the middle class. A steady job, often skilled labor or "white collar," supplies the means to afford a few luxuries or non-essentials. Middle class characters might start off as a bit insular. They often separate themselves from the struggles of the lower social classes, focusing on the climb towards upper class status. Sometimes that climb leads to a slip. They tumble down to the lower class or even become outsiders. Some settle for stability instead, and prefer not to rock the boat.

UPPER CLASS

Upper class characters sit at a society's summit where they rarely need to worry about resources, except, of course, when they want more. Their concerns are often focused on the responsibilities and privileges associated with their status. Some are born into upper class privilege, inheriting wealth and opportunity, while others worked their way up to join the elite. In some societies, it's almost impossible to work your way to upper class status, and even if you do, you might get less respect compared to hereditary "old money" peers.

EXAMPLE *We roll 2d6 for our character's social class, getting a 6. Consulting the Belter column of the **Backgrounds** table, that indicates Lower Class.*

BACKGROUNDS

OUTSIDER		LOWER CLASS		MIDDLE CLASS		UPPER CLASS	
1D6	BACKGROUND	1D6	BACKGROUND	1D6	BACKGROUND	1D6	BACKGROUND
1–2	Bohemian	1–2	Military	1–2	Academic	1–2	Aristocratic
3–4	Exile	3–4	Laborer	3–4	Suburban	3–4	Corporate
5–6	Outcast	5–6	Urban	5–6	Trade	5–6	Cosmopolitan

BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIONS

Feel free to fill out the framework of your character's background with details about how it affected the character's early life, and how that relates to the traits the background provides. For example, a character with a corporate background might be the scion of an upper class family with an important position in the business world, groomed to inherit the family business, but what business is it, and did the character accept this future or seek to forge a different path? How did those choices bring the character to where they are now?

EXAMPLE *Rolling a die on the **Backgrounds: Lower Class** table, we get a 5 for Urban. Looking at the background, we give our character +1 Dexterity and choose the Misdirection talent, feeling like our techie character is more cunning than athletic. Then we roll once on the **Urban Benefits** table, getting an 8 for +1 Perception.*

ACADEMIC — MIDDLE

You spent a lot more time in schools and academic environments than your peers. Perhaps you lived at a boarding school, or someone in your family worked at a college or university. You're inclined to be a bit more bookish and to know your way around academic institutions.

ABILITY: +1 Intelligence
FOCUS: Intelligence (choose one)
TALENT: Knowledge or Linguistics

ACADEMIC BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Communication
3–4	**Focus:** Intelligence (Research)
5	+2 Income
6	**Focus:** Intelligence (History)
7–8	+1 Perception
9	**Focus:** Willpower (Self-Discipline)
10–11	**Focus:** Intelligence (choose one)
12	+1 Willpower

ARISTOCRATIC — UPPER

You come from a family with a history of privilege and responsibility, although it might have less of both these days. You might be actual nobility from an Earth culture that still has it, or "just" belong to an important family with equivalent wealth and influence.

ABILITY: +1 Communication
FOCUS: Communication (Etiquette) or Intelligence (History)
TALENT: Affluent or Contacts

ARISTOCRATIC BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Accuracy
3–4	+2 Income
5	**Focus:** Communication (Persuasion)
6	**Focus:** Dexterity (Piloting)
7–8	+1 Perception
9	**Focus:** Communication (Gambling)
10–11	**Focus:** Communication (Leadership)
12	+1 Willpower

BOHEMIAN — OUTSIDER

You grew up in an experimental, eccentric, or creative community. Perhaps you belonged to a commune, an artist colony, or some "off the grid" intentional community. You may be the child of a group or polyamorous marriage, particularly on Earth. You're unfamiliar with some of the things people take for granted, but had plenty of opportunities to expand your horizons. You might be trying to fit into mainstream society after some time away, or you might revel in your offbeat lifestyle.

ABILITY: +1 Communication
FOCUS: Communication (Performing) or Intelligence (choose one)
TALENT: Carousing or Performance

"One of your three mothers did the cooking? How traditional," Naomi said with a smirk.

— Leviathan Wakes

BOHEMIAN BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Dexterity
3–4	**Focus:** Perception (Empathy)
5	**Focus:** Willpower (Courage or Faith)
6	**Focus:** Communication (choose one)
7–8	+1 Constitution
9	**Focus:** Dexterity (Acrobatics or Free-fall)
10–11	**Focus:** Communication (Persuasion)
12	+1 Perception

CORPORATE — UPPER

Your early life was tied up in corporate culture, most likely due to family members who built their lives around a company in some fashion. Your family might be influential stockholders or include powerful executives, and they may well have expected you to follow their example—whether you did or not.

ABILITY: +1 Communication
FOCUS: Communication (Bargaining) or Intelligence (Business)
TALENT: Contacts or Intrigue

CORPORATE BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Perception
3–4	**Focus:** Communication (Persuasion)
5	**Focus:** Intelligence (Evaluation)
6	**Focus:** Perception (Empathy)
7–8	+1 Intelligence
9	**Focus:** Communication (Expression)
10–11	**Focus:** Communication (Leadership)
12	+1 Accuracy

COSMOPOLITAN — UPPER

You were raised in a cosmopolitan environment: a big city, or even a series of great cities, where people from all over the world came and mixed. You were exposed to some of the best—and, potentially, the worst—of humanity and human achievement.

ABILITY: +1 Intelligence
FOCUS: Communication (Etiquette) or Intelligence (Current Affairs)
TALENT: Knowledge or Observation

COSMOPOLITAN BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Perception
3–4	**Focus:** Intelligence (choose one)
5	**Focus:** Communication (Persuasion)
6	**Focus:** Intelligence (Art)
7–8	+1 Communication
9	**Focus:** Communication (Bargaining)
10–11	**Focus:** Perception (Seeing)
12	+1 Willpower

EXILE — OUTSIDER

You might have lived a very different life were it not for some event that drove you from society. Feel free to roll again on the **Social Class** and **Background** tables to get a glimpse of what your former life was. Whatever the case, you (and possibly your family) were exiled by war, disaster, disgrace, or some other misfortune, forced to start over with virtually nothing.

ABILITY: +1 Constitution
FOCUS: Fighting (Brawling) or Willpower (Self-Discipline)
TALENT: Affluent or Fringer

EXILE BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Fighting
3–4	**Focus:** Communication (Bargaining)
5	**Focus:** Dexterity (Stealth)
6	**Focus:** Perception (Searching)
7–8	+1 Perception
9	**Focus:** Accuracy (Pistols)
10–11	**Focus:** Dexterity (Driving)
12	+1 Willpower

MILITARY — LOWER

You grew up as a military brat. You were either a dependent with family members in military service, or you lived close by or on a military installation. You're familiar with military culture and picked up a thing or two from it along the way.

ABILITY: +1 Fighting
FOCUS: Accuracy (Pistols) or Intelligence (Tactics)
TALENT: One Combat Style or Observation

MILITARY BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Willpower
3–4	**Focus:** Accuracy (Rifles)
5	**Focus:** Communication (Leadership)
6	**Focus:** Intelligence (Security)
7–8	+1 Strength
9	**Focus:** Perception (Searching)
10–11	**Focus:** Fighting (Brawling)
12	+1 Constitution

OUTCAST — OUTSIDER

Fate singled you out for the life of an outcast on the fringes of society. You might have a criminal background that makes it impossible to find decent work and true respect, or you might belong to a minority group your society rejects. On Earth, you might have been an unlicensed and unregistered birth, a literal non-person. Whatever the case, you had to learn how to survive outside of the safety and structures most people rely upon.

ABILITY: +1 Willpower
FOCUS: Communication (Deception) or Dexterity (Stealth)
TALENT: Fringer or Misdirection

OUTCAST BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Perception
3–4	**Focus:** Perception (Seeing)
5	**Focus:** Fighting (Light Weapons)
6	**Focus:** Intelligence (Technology)
7–8	+1 Constitution
9	**Focus:** Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)
10–11	**Focus:** Willpower (Courage)
12	+1 Communication

LABORER — LOWER

Your family is used to hard, physical work—and so are you. Generations have worked the factory line, the mines, the assembly line, or the dockyards. You might be looking to move on and move up from there, or stick with it, or something might have upended the life you once knew, forcing you to move on.

ABILITY: +1 Constitution
FOCUS: Dexterity (Crafting) or Strength (Might)
TALENT: One Unarmed Combat Style or Carousing

LABORER BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Fighting
3–4	**Focus:** Fighting (Brawling)
5	**Focus:** Intelligence (Engineering)
6	**Focus:** Willpower (Self-Discipline)
7–8	+1 Strength
9	**Focus:** Communication (Gambling)
10–11	**Focus:** Constitution (Stamina)
12	+1 Dexterity

SUBURBAN — MIDDLE

Life for you once existed in the picturesque neighborhoods outside of the city but still just a short ride on public transportation to the shopping center. It might have been just as idyllic for you as the housing development brochures portrayed, or perhaps it was a cookie-cutter, conformist nightmare you couldn't wait to escape.

ABILITY: +1 Communication
FOCUS: Communication (Etiquette) or Intelligence (Current Affairs)
TALENT: Affluent or Contacts

SUBURBAN BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Dexterity
3–4	**Focus:** Intelligence (choose one)
5	+2 Income
6	**Focus:** Communication (Persuasion)
7–8	+1 Perception
9	**Focus:** Perception (choose one)
10–11	**Focus:** Dexterity (Driving)
12	+1 Intelligence

TRADE — MIDDLE

Your family lived off a skilled trade of some sort. It might not have been glamorous (far from it, quite possibly) but it definitely paid the bills. You may have picked up some practical lessons and skills along the way. Perhaps you were ready to enter the family trade yourself, but you yearned for something new—and even dangerous.

ABILITY: +1 Dexterity
FOCUS: Dexterity (Crafting) or Intelligence (Engineering)
TALENT: Improvisation or Maker

TRADE BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Strength
3–4	**Focus:** Intelligence (Technology)
5	**Focus:** Intelligence (Art)
6	**Focus:** Constitution (Tolerance)
7–8	+1 Perception
9	**Focus:** Fighting (Grappling)
10–11	**Focus:** Constitution (Stamina)
12	+1 Constitution

URBAN — LOWER

You lived in the city, not in a high-rise or someplace with private security, but in the city. Its streets and vacant lots were your playgrounds, and you were navigating public transportation long before you could drive (as if you ever needed to drive). You know the ins and outs of an urban environment, even if it's not the particular city where you lived, even if it's a large station in the depths of an asteroid or moon, in fact. You know local eccentrics, dangerous people, and the secrets from the heart of the city.

ABILITY: +1 Dexterity
FOCUS: Communication (Persuasion) or Constitution (Stamina)
TALENT: Agility or Misdirection

URBAN BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Accuracy
3–4	**Focus:** Dexterity (Acrobatics)
5	**Focus:** Communication (Deception)
6	**Focus:** Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)
7–8	+1 Perception
9	**Focus:** Perception (Hearing)
10–11	**Focus:** Strength (Climbing or Jumping)
12	+1 Fighting

STEP 5: PROFESSION

Your character's profession describes what they do, their vocation, training, and often how they earn a living. Roll a profession on the table corresponding to your character's social class, or else choose one. Your character's profession provides the following benefits:

A choice of one of two or more ability focuses • A choice of one of two or more talents.

PROFESSIONS BELOW YOUR CLASS

You can choose a profession from a social class below yours, or to roll on a table below your social class, if you prefer. If you choose or roll for a profession of a lower social class, your character starts with the Income of the profession's social class and gains +1 Income per class that their social class is above that of the chosen profession. So an upper class character who chooses the artist profession, which is outsider class, has +3 Income to that of the usual "starving" artist (Income 3 rather than the base 0 for an outsider profession).

EXAMPLE *Looking at the Lower Class professions, we immediately know that we want Technician and choose that with the GM's permission. Looking at the description, we give our character the Intelligence (Technology) focus and the Novice degree in the Hacker talent.*

PROFESSIONS

OUTSIDER		LOWER CLASS		MIDDLE CLASS		UPPER CLASS	
1D6 ROLL	PROFESSION	1D6 ROLL	PROFESSION	1D6 ROLL	PROFESSION	1D6 ROLL	PROFESSION
1	Brawler	1	Athlete	1	Pilot	1	Commander
2	Survivalist	2	Soldier	2	Security	2	Explorer
3	Criminal	3	Investigator	3	Professional	3	Dilettante
4	Scavenger	4	Technician	4	Scholar	4	Expert
5	Fixer	5	Clergy	5	Merchant	5	Executive
6	Artist	6	Negotiator	6	Politician	6	Socialite

PROFESSION DESCRIPTIONS

As with backgrounds, professions are fairly broad and open to interpretation. Players should feel free to adjust the name, details, and descriptions of professions to fit their character concepts and the overall setting for the game.

ARTIST — SOCIAL, OUTSIDER

You are about expression, whether it is sharing your sense of what is beautiful or expressing your pain or outrage in a form others can understand. You may or may not be making a living at it, but you need to express yourself regardless.

FOCUS: Communication (Expression) or Intelligence (Art)
TALENT: Artistry or Performance

ATHLETE — PHYSICAL, LOWER

You pit yourself against physical challenges, from other teams and rival athletes to your own limits and personal best. Your work involves a lot of training and practice to stay at the top of your game.

FOCUS: Constitution (Running or Swimming), Dexterity (Acrobatics or Free-fall), or Strength (Climbing or Jumping)
TALENT: Agility or Quick Reflexes

BRAWLER — PHYSICAL, OUTSIDER

There are always opportunities for people willing and able to knock some heads together. It's not fancy fighting, and it's certainly not fair, but you'd much rather have a reputation for winning and surviving than anything else.

FOCUS: Fighting (Brawling) or Fighting (Grappling)
TALENT: Grappling Style or Striking Style

CLERGY — SOCIAL, LOWER

People need faith. They need someone to look after their hearts and souls just as much as bodies or minds, perhaps even more so in some ways. You have a calling to do this work, along with tending to your own faith—whatever form that might take.

FOCUS: Intelligence (Theology) or Willpower (Faith)
TALENT: Inspire or Oratory

COMMANDER — PHYSICAL, UPPER

You're trained to lead military personnel in the field, as a noble calling or part of a professional elite. Your responsibility is to get the job done and to ensure as many of those under your command make it back as possible. Does a good commander put the first goal ahead of the second, or vice versa?

FOCUS: Communication (Leadership) or Intelligence (Tactics)
TALENT: Command or Tactical Awareness

CRIMINAL — SKILLED, OUTSIDER

When you're on the outside, you often bend and break the law to survive. You might feel you have no choice in the matter because of circumstances, or maybe you chose those circumstances, loving crime with professional pride, or as a means to some political or personal end. Either way, you know how to work around the law.

FOCUS: Communication (Deception) or Dexterity (Forgery, Sleight of Hand, or Stealth)
TALENT: Burglary or Scouting

DILETTANTE — SKILLED, UPPER

With so many possible things to learn and do, how can you choose? You're happy to sample from the banquet of possibilities laid out before you, learning as much as you can about something before moving on to the next interest or option.

FOCUS: Intelligence (Research) or Perception (choose one)
TALENT: Improvisation or Know-It-All

EXECUTIVE — SOCIAL, UPPER

You are the take-charge type, able to see the big picture and organize people to get things done to move towards those goals. You need vision and the ability to lead people toward it. You decide whether it's all about profit, about the thrill of your ventures, or some other agenda.

FOCUS: Communication (Leadership) or Intelligence (Business)
TALENT: Command or Intrigue

EXPERT — SKILLED, UPPER

There used to be a time when you could know everything, or nearly so, but that's long gone. Still, you're an expert in your chosen field. Experts tend to belong to highly paid and complex fields including finance, law, medicine, and the sciences.

FOCUS: Intelligence (choose one)
TALENT: Expertise or Know-It-All

"I'm an engineer, not a damned hairstylist," Naomi said.

— Caliban's War

EXPLORER — PHYSICAL, UPPER

There are still plenty of places in the System where few if any people have been, and you want to explore them. Your work might be for the expansion of human knowledge and achievement or simply to satisfy your own need to discover someplace new.

FOCUS: Intelligence (Navigation) or Perception (choose one)
TALENT: Pilot or Scouting

FIXER — SOCIAL, OUTSIDER

You are good at getting things done, often in a less-than-strictly-legal fashion or outside of the normal channels. While some Fixers are motivated by profit, others do what they can to help people within the context of a restrictive and often corrupt system.

FOCUS: Communication (Bargaining) or Intelligence (Evaluation)
TALENT: Fringer or Improvisation

INVESTIGATOR — SKILLED, LOWER

People lie and keep secrets. They've been doing it since the dawn of time. Likewise, people like you, who know how to dig up the truth, have always dogged deceivers. You might bring criminals to justice, get information to the public, or find out what a client wants or needs to know.

FOCUS: Communication (Investigation) or Perception (choose one)
TALENT: Intrigue or Observation

MERCHANT — SOCIAL, MIDDLE

Money makes the world go around, and you are a part of that time-honored tradition. You know how to buy at a discount, sell at a profit, and make trades that ensure you come out ahead of the game. You might be involved in trade, work in retail or wholesale, or deal in rarities that require knowledge to identify and eloquence to sell.

FOCUS: Communication (Bargaining) or Intelligence (Business)
TALENT: Affluent or Contacts

NEGOTIATOR — SOCIAL, LOWER

The harder things are, the more people need each other to get by and the more likely it seems they are to disagree.

You know how to get people together, to settle disputes, to find compromises, and to generally grease the rusty wheels of conflicting agendas so they turn in unison once more.

FOCUS: Communication (Bargaining or Persuasion) or Perception (Empathy)
TALENT: Intrigue or Oratory

PILOT — PHYSICAL, MIDDLE

You are at your best when you're at the controls. You have the nerve and the skill needed to make your ship do what you need it to do. It becomes an extension of your body, its humming as essential as the beat of your heart.

FOCUS: Dexterity (Piloting)
TALENT: Pilot

POLITICIAN — SOCIAL, MIDDLE

From neighborhoods to nations, people need to be organized for society to function. You know the tricks it takes to get people to cooperate in that process, sometimes whether they want to or not. Your speeches help people devise collective political dreams, but behind closed doors you deal in the art of the possible. You might be virtuous or corrupt, but isn't that a matter of perspective?

FOCUS: Communication (Deception or Persuasion) or Intelligence (Current Affairs or Law)
TALENT: Contacts or Oratory

PROFESSIONAL — SKILLED, MIDDLE

Whether from time toiling in a cubicle farm or your own private office, you know the "white collar" professional world. You might see it as a career path or a stepping stone towards something else, but you know your job and the skills and challenges that come with it.

FOCUS: Communication (Bargaining or Expression) or Intelligence (Business, Computers, or Research)
TALENT: Affluent or Expertise

SCAVENGER — SKILLED, OUTSIDER

Most people would be amazed at the things that get thrown away and forgotten, but not you. You are all too familiar with that bounty: how to find it, salvage it, and make the best use of it.

FOCUS: Intelligence (Technology) or Perception (Searching)
TALENT: Evaluation or Maker

> He'd never been to military pilot school, but he knew that years of training had compartmentalized Alex's brain into two halves: piloting problems and, secondarily, everything else.
>
> — *Leviathan Wakes*

SCHOLAR — SKILLED, MIDDLE

Knowledge and understanding are your fields, focused on a specific area of interest. Whereas the expert profession tends to be about applied knowledge, you focus on knowledge for knowledge's sake. You might work in a university, or have an amateur obsession. You look to expand your own understanding of your field and, in so doing, perhaps expand the world's understanding as well.

FOCUS: Intelligence (choose one)
TALENT: Expertise or Knowledge

SECURITY — PHYSICAL, MIDDLE

You work to protect things—and people—providing the peace of mind others need to get their jobs done, or even just to live their lives. You might be a law-enforcement officer or a private security guard or consultant, but either way you focus on keeping the bad guys from getting what they want and keeping your charges safe.

FOCUS: Intelligence (Security) or Perception (Empathy, Intuition, or Seeing)
TALENT: One Fighting Style or Protect

SOCIALITE — SOCIAL, UPPER

Life is a never-ending series of social engagements, from parties and receptions to fundraisers, weddings, and even funerals, and you navigate all of them with style. Your social obligations might be a burden or a source of enjoyment for you but, whatever the case, they're yours, and you handle them well. You might lead a life of pure recreation, but your engagements could have political or charitable dimensions as well.

FOCUS: Communication (Etiquette or Seduction) or Constitution (Tolerance)
TALENT: Attractive or Contacts

SOLDIER — PHYSICAL, LOWER

Your nation and people need someone to defend them, to stand on the front lines and, sometimes, to go to war against their enemies. You're trained to follow orders, to fight, and to do what needs doing. Rather than duty to home and

country, you might be a soldier-for-hire, working for whatever client can meet your fee.

FOCUS: Accuracy (Pistols or Rifles) or Fighting (Brawling)
TALENT: One Fighting Style or Tactical Awareness

SURVIVALIST — PHYSICAL, OUTSIDER

Survival is the most basic challenge of life, and you have learned how to do it, whether because you had to or because you prefer it that way. You know how to make do without many of the products and social networks most people depend upon for their everyday lives.

FOCUS: Accuracy (Bows or Pistols) or Perception (Survival)
TALENT: Fringer or Tactical Awareness

TECHNICIAN — SKILLED, LOWER

You fix things. Whether you're a mechanic, maintenance technician, or even work in information technologies, people depend on you to keep it working. You might work in vast server farms, in lightless tunnels, in a massive factory, or in a nondescript office. These are all points where you maintain part of the System's vast infrastructure.

FOCUS: Intelligence (Engineering or Technology)
TALENT: Expertise, Hacking, or Maker

STEP 6: DRIVE

DRIVE

ROLL 1D6: 1–3 = ROLL ON COLUMN 1, 4–6 = ROLL ON COLUMN 2

1D6 ROLL	COLUMN 1	COLUMN 2
1	Achiever	Networker
2	Builder	Penitent
3	Caregiver	Protector
4	Ecstatic	Rebel
5	Judge	Survivor
6	Leader	Visionary

Your character's drive describes what motivates them to act, to say "yes" to an opportunity. Just like an Epstein on a ship, drive is what moves your character forward. Drive gives you cues for action as a player and provides the GM with "hooks" to encourage your character to take action. Choose a drive for your character or roll on the **Drive** table for one. Your character's drive provides the following benefits:

One of the following improvements: Fortune (+5 increase), Membership (rank 1), Income (+2 increase), Relationship (rank 1), or Reputation (rank 1).
A quality and a downfall. These help to guide roleplaying and your character's choices.
A choice of **one of two specific talents.** These are given in the drive's description.

For details on Memberships, Relationships, and Reputation, see **CHAPTER 14**.

DRIVE DESCRIPTIONS

The following are a dozen drives. Players wanting to create their own can do so with the permission of the GM, using the guidelines provided previously and with these drives as examples. The key thing to remember with drive is it encourages characters to act. Avoid "drives" that encourage characters to do nothing or just sit on the sidelines.

EXAMPLE *Looking over the drives, there are several appealing ones. Unsure which to choose, let's roll randomly: We get a 5, indicating Column 2, and a 4, giving us Rebel, suggesting this character is a nonconformist who has gotten in trouble in the past. That fits. From this drive, we choose Improvisation to add to the character's talents and Reputation for our improvement.*

ACHIEVER

You want to accomplish things, ideally lasting things for which you will be recognized. Some achievers want success, fame, and accolades, while others are looking to leave a legacy, something for which they will be remembered. But all achievers are keenly aware that life is short and everyone has the same number of hours in a day; it's how you spend them that matters.

QUALITY: Ambition, knowing what you want and going after it.
DOWNFALL: Obsession, becoming too focused on your goals and unable to see anything (or anyone) else.
TALENT: Expertise or Inspire

"There's a right thing to do," Holden said.
"You don't have a right thing, friend," Miller said. "You've got a whole plateful of maybe a little less wrong."

— Leviathan Wakes

BUILDER

You want to create something lasting. It might be an institution, an organization, a movement, a community, or something else. Unlike the Achiever, who is all about the accomplishment, you're all about the end product, and willing to do what it takes, for as long as it takes, to get there.

QUALITY: **Organization**, being able to figure out how to structure things so they work.

DOWNFALL: **Stubbornness**, becoming so caught up in structure that you lose flexibility.

TALENT: Maker or Oratory

CAREGIVER

You're here to help as many people as you can, however you can. You might not be able to help everyone, but you are certainly going to try, and you have a difficult time turning away from anyone in need.

QUALITY: **Compassion**, naturally feeling and responding to others needs.

DOWNFALL: **Self-sacrifice**, a tendency to place the needs and even physical safety of others above your own.

TALENT: Inspire or Medic

ECSTATIC

Life is a banquet and most poor suckers are starving to death! Not you, though You aim to squeeze every drop of juice out of your limited time in this world, and you generally encourage your friends to join you, although you're willing to go off on your own if none of them do.

QUALITY: **Zest for life** and a general willingness to find enjoyment in things and try new experiences.

DOWNFALL: **Irresponsibility**, a tendency to overdo enjoyment at the expense of more practical matters.

TALENT: Attractive or Carousing

JUDGE

Life is all about making decisions and exercising good judgment. You believe in finding out as much as you can about things so you can make informed and carefully considered judgements about them.

QUALITY: **Discernment**, paying close attention to details and information.

DOWNFALL: **Aloofness**, a tendency to distance yourself from the world around you to remain objective.

TALENT: Knowledge or Observation

LEADER

Somebody needs to stand up, take responsibility, and get things done. You might relish the opportunity to lead or take it up reluctantly, but either way, you're a natural at it and it's hard to resist an opportunity to take charge.

QUALITY: Responsibility, the ability to take on and make decisions and live with the outcome.

DOWNFALL: Isolation, the distance imposed by your role as leader, which can affect relationships and how close you can be with people you lead.

TALENT: Command or Inspire

NETWORKER

You're here to make friends, because it is all about who you know. You may be a genuine "people person" with a knack for making a good first impression or a first-class manipulator who understands how to get what you want from people.

QUALITY: Gregariousness. You're good with people and at home in social situations, and tend to seek them out.

DOWNFALL: Overwrought. You tend to get caught up in social conflicts, and think finding just the right person is the solution to every problem, making you prone to overly complex schemes.

TALENTS: Contract or Intrigue

PENITENT

You screwed up. Maybe you didn't mean to, or maybe you did and should have known better. Whatever the case, you're trying to make it right now by doing better. You may or may not want anyone else to know about your past mistakes, but what happens next is what really matters.

QUALITY: Humility. You have fallen low and learned from it, so you're not quick to judge or to accept accolades.

DOWNFALL: Guilt, as you're sometimes haunted by your past mistakes and feel any new missteps heavily.

TALENT: Fringer or Know-It-All

PROTECTOR

There are a lot of threats out in the world, and you are going to guard against them. Exactly what you consider a threat, and who or what you are protecting from it, might vary but the most important thing is you are not going to stand idly by when you could act.

QUALITY: Devotion to those under your protection and to your ideals, no matter what challenges lie in your path.

DOWNFALL: Recklessness when it comes to putting yourself (and even others) in harm's way to protect your charges.

TALENT: Misdirection or Protect

REBEL

Authority needs to be questioned. You may think all forms of authority are inherently oppressive and need to be brought down, or just that healthy institutions require periodic house-cleanings—or purging fires. Whatever the case, you threw out doing things "by the book" some time ago.

QUALITY: Innovation, the ability to look at things from angles no one else has considered.

DOWNFALL: Defiance, a dislike of conformity, conventionality, and doing what you're told.

TALENT: Expertise or Improvisation

SURVIVOR

Life is hard, but you are going to make it, no matter what. You may have already had to struggle to survive in your early life, or you are simply preparing for the struggle you know is coming—whether anyone else believes it or not.

QUALITY: Preparedness. You survive by being ready for anything and knowing what to do in any situation.

DOWNFALL: Cynicism. You are always anticipating and preparing for the worst, such that it's difficult for you to see the good in anything.

TALENT: Fringer or Tactical Awareness

VISIONARY

You have a vision to share with the world, sometimes whether the world wants it or not. This vision might be your unique artistic expression, a personal philosophy, or religious or spiritual gnosis, but you're driven to share it, regardless of the risks.

QUALITY: Faith in your vision and its ability to reach the right people, given the opportunity.

DOWNFALL: Zealotry. Your vision becomes confused with absolute truth, which might lead you to offer it where it is unwelcome or to try and eliminate other visions you see as false or competition. Alternatively, your downfall is **Doubt**, where you experience a crisis of faith and are uncertain how to follow your vision—or if you should continue to follow it at all.

TALENT: Artistry, Oratory, or Performance

STEP 7: INCOME AND EQUIPMENT

To prepare your character for adventure, determine the character's Income based on profession with modifiers from background, talents, and drive, and then use that Income to determine your character's access to equipment.

INCOME

The Expanse characters have an Income score, a composite of material resources and available cash, credit, income, and access that works much like other ability scores. The Income score serves as the basis for Income tests, used to acquire goods and services.

STARTING INCOME

A character's starting Income score is based on social class, adjusted by talent or improvements from drive. Over the course of play, a character's Income score may decrease from major expenditures and increase as the character gains wealth and access to resources. A character's Income score can never fall below –2, but there is no effective limit to how high Income can increase.

Since Income score is an abstract concept, it's sometimes difficult to determine exactly how materially well-off a character is. To get a general sense, check the **Income Score** table.

STARTING INCOME

SOCIAL CLASS	INCOME SCORE
Outsider	0
Lower	2
Middle	4
Upper	6

INCOME SCORE

INCOME SCORE	FINANCIAL CONDITION
–2 to +0	Impoverished or in debt
+1 to +2	Struggling
+3 to +5	Middle class
+6 to +8	Affluent
+9 to +10	Wealthy
+11 to +13	Rich
+14 or higher	Very rich

THE INCOME TEST

Income tests are used to determine what you can afford and what goods and services you can reasonably access. Income score reflects a character's buying power. Every item has a target number to purchase, also called its **cost**. To purchase an item, make an Income test against the item's cost.

An Income test is just like a regular ability test: a 3d6 roll plus your current Income score. If your test result equals or exceeds the cost of an item, you successfully purchase it. If you fail, you can't afford it at this time.

INCOME TEST = 3D6 + INCOME SCORE VS. COST (PURCHASE TARGET NUMBER)

AUTOMATIC SUCCESS

If your current Income score plus 4 is equal to or greater than an item's cost, you don't need to make an Income test, you automatically succeed. The cost of the item is negligible for someone of your Income. So if you have Income +5, for example, you can purchase items with a routine or easy cost (TN 7–9) without a test. The GM may set reasonable limits on this, as it's not meant to represent the ability to buy an infinite number of low-cost items.

RESOURCE DEPLETION

If you successfully purchase something with a cost greater than your current Income score plus 10, your Income score decreases (see **Depleting Income** for details).

TRY AGAIN?

You may be able to try again if you fail an Income test, but not until you have spent an additional number of hours equal to the cost of the item "shopping around" and looking for other options and venues.

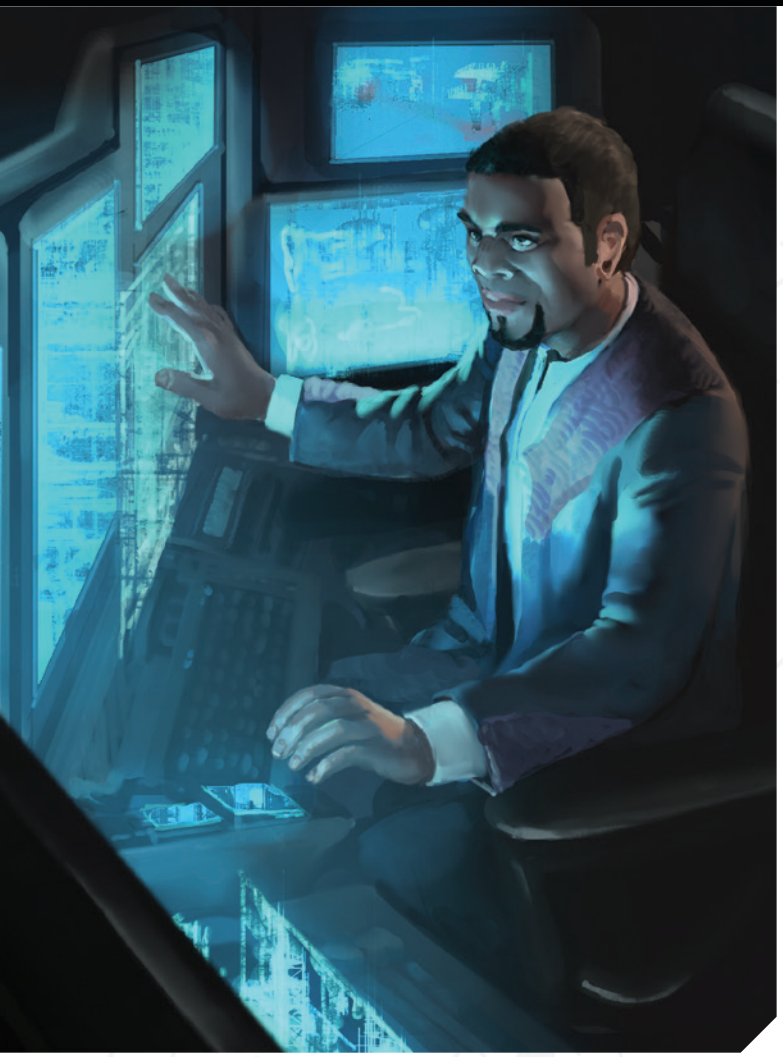
PURCHASING AND TIME

Purchasing items may take additional time, reflecting the time needed for you to locate the item(s) and arrange their purchase. This is at the GM's discretion.

MATERIAL SUPPORT

One character can help another to buy something, so long as the assisting character's Income is equal to or greater than that of the purchasing character. In this case, you provide the other person with a +2 bonus on the Income test to buy that item. If the item's cost is above your current Income score +10, you also deplete your Income to reflect the financial assistance you've given.

> Owning your own racing ship wasn't even wealth. It was like speciation. It was conspicuous consumption befitting ancient Earth royalty, a pharaoh's pyramid with a reaction drive.
>
> — *Caliban's War*



SELLING THINGS

In some cases, characters may want to sell a particular valuable item. To do so, first determine the item's cost, as if purchasing it. The item's value is equal to its cost minus 1. If the item's value is greater than the seller's Income, selling the item grants a +1 increase in Income. If its value is 6 or more greater than the seller's Income, selling the item grants a +2 increase.

This assumes the item is sold legally: Selling something illegally—either due to how it was obtained, or because it is illegal by nature—reduces its value by an additional 1 (so cost –2) and the GM may require a Communication (Bargaining) test to avoid the notice of the authorities. Failure means the sale does not go through, and the character may have to evade arrest!

Generally speaking, the GM should handle the acquisition and sale of valuables acquired from the characters' adventures with an Income award (previously) rather than managing the value and sale of individual items to minimize book-keeping and smooth game play.

DEPLETING INCOME

Any time you purchase something with a cost greater than your current Income score +10, your Income score decreases by 1, representing a significant depletion of your available Income. Your Income score only decreases if you successfully purchase something. If you attempt an Income test and fail, your score is unaffected.

GAINING INCOME

The GM may grant an Income award at the end of an adventure where the characters acquired wealth or received particular financial rewards. This is generally a +1 increase in Income, although the GM may award a +2 increase in cases where the characters acquired a significant windfall. Characters can also restore 1 point of depleted Income upon gaining a new level. Otherwise, Income score only increases from GM granted rewards. See the **REWARDS** chapter for details.

POOLING INCOME

The crew may wish to pool their Income, especially in cases where characters go into business together or have joint ownership of a ship or the like. This is a more permanent arrangement than offering material support (previously). Take the highest Income score among the combined characters and reduce it by 1 to determine the crew's combined Income. This becomes the new Income score for all of the characters. If their Income scores are all equal when they pool them, the new combined Income score remains the same.

If the crew ever splits up and wishes to divide their Income again, everyone involved has a new, personal Income score equal to the pooled score minus 1, reflecting the costs of splitting things up. The characters' resources then increase or decrease separately, as before they were combined.

EQUIPMENT

In *The Expanse* RPG, characters start out with certain basic equipment and possessions, as follows:

Ordinary clothing
Essential tools or items of the character's profession (if any)
Any weapon the character has an associated focus or talent for using

Beyond these basics, available equipment and the character's overall lifestyle—things like a home, vehicle, and other day-to-day necessities—are determined by Income. Some items, particularly military-grade equipment, may be limited in terms of availability.

EXAMPLE *Our lower class Belter technician has Income 2, not an extravagant lifestyle! It's pretty clear the character just makes ends meet, and can be described as struggling. The character lives a lifestyle of cramped quarters and eating mostly kibble and cheap noodles, but does at least have essential technical tools and equipment.*

STEP 8: SECONDARY ABILITIES AND FORTUNE

Calculate your character's Defense, Speed, and Toughness, based on ability scores and modifiers from profession and talents, and Fortune, based on any improvements added by drive.

DEFENSE

Defense measures how difficult it is to hit your character with attacks in combat. The higher the Defense score, the better. Your character's Defense is equal to:

DEFENSE = 10 + DEXTERITY SCORE

Some characters have particular bonuses to Defense from talents, most of which temporarily modify Defense under specific circumstances given in the talent description.

SPEED

Speed is how quickly a character can move, usually measured in meters per Move action during action time (see **CHAPTER 5** for details). Like Defense, your character's Speed is equal to:

SPEED = 10 + DEXTERITY SCORE

Some conditions limit your Speed: If you are hindered, your Speed is halved (round down). If restrained, your Speed becomes 0, you cannot move from where you are, and your other movements may be limited as well.

TOUGHNESS

Expanse characters have a Toughness score equal to their Constitution score, which reduces the damage from attacks.

TOUGHNESS = CONSTITUTION SCORE

If your character also wears armor, it adds a bonus to your Toughness for reducing damage. See **CHAPTER 4** and **CHAPTER 5** for details.

FORTUNE

Characters start out with a Fortune score of 15, modified by any improvement from drive, which can give the character a starting Fortune score of 20. Fortune improves as characters gain in levels and overall importance.

EXAMPLE *So our character's starting Fortune is 15, unmodified because we applied the improvement from drive to Reputation. The character's Dexterity is 2, giving us Defense 12 (10 + 2) and Speed 12, and their Constitution is 0, so the character has Toughness 0. Sounds like our Belter techie is going to want to stay off the front lines in a fight!*

STEP 9: GOALS AND TIES

A character's drive is what moves them forward. The character's goals are what they are moving towards. Characters also have ties to other people. Consider your character's goals and what ties they might have with other characters in the group.

GOALS

Expanse characters can have any number of goals, but think of up to three for your character to start. Goals are often connected with a character's drive, or at least their drive is how they tend to pursue their goals. Ideally, goals should help to define what is important to your character, and offer the GM inspiration for stories and ways to involve your character in adventures.

When considering goals, try for a mix of short-term and long-term ones. Short-term goals are fairly immediate and provide the GM with ways to involve your character in adventures right away, such as looking for a particular person, thing, or piece of information. Long-term goals may take years to achieve and can be played out over much of the campaign, depending on how they're set up, including things like bringing down a powerful nemesis, making a scientific breakthrough, or achieving tremendous success in a particular field.

If you can't come up with any goals for your character right away, that's alright. Think about the character's goals in the first few game sessions. As you play your character, ideas for goals may suggest themselves. If you can, come up with just one short-term goal for your character to follow initially until you think of some others. The GM may also set up or define goals for your character as part of the start of the game, ranging from finding a missing person to surviving the destruction of your ship.

> An idealist. The most dangerous kind of man there was.
>
> — *Caliban's War*

EXAMPLE *Consider who our Belter techie is. Let's say that she came up from a lower class background but her smarts and technical savvy helped her to make it. Unfortunately, she occasionally needed help from less than legal elements to get what she needed for her education and repaid them with the occasional favor. Now she wants to get out from under the thumb of said criminal elements and go legit, but opportunities are thin. Longer-term, she wants to change the system that kept a smart Belter kid from realizing her potential without having to work the black market, although she's not sure that she agrees with all of the OPA's politics, particularly the more radical factions.*

TIES

While some roleplaying games start the characters off not knowing each other, thrown together by circumstances, the group's cohesion is stronger if they have some existing ties. This doesn't necessarily mean the characters all know each other, much less like each other, before the game begins, just that there is something tying them together. For example, two characters might have served together in the same theater of war, or worked for the same employer, even if they didn't meet then. Characters might be distant family members, have a shared enemy, or have a mutual encounter with a strange phenomenon. Of course, it's equally possible for two or more characters to be long-time acquaintances with a lot of history behind them.

Try and come up with at least one tie for each of the other Player Characters. The group's relationships will evolve and grow during play, but these ties set some useful starting points.

EXAMPLE *As a low-class Belter and hacker, our character has plenty of opportunities to make both friends and enemies. She may know fellow Belters and have run into characters with Lower Class or Criminal backgrounds, or who worked security or some other job that brought them to her part of the station. As a hacker, she may know some characters from online interactions, maybe some who think she is someone else entirely, such as corresponding with another character with mutual interests who doesn't yet know their friend is a Belter with no formal education.*

STEP 10: NAME AND DESCRIPTION

Lastly, what is your character's name and what are they like? Although this step is the end of character creation, don't make it an afterthought. You're likely to be hearing your character's name a lot, and the right name can really help bring your character to life. Likewise, paint a picture with your character's appearance and personality that tells the other players something about who that character is as a person. You might want to focus on including at least one or two memorable details.

Keep in mind that the future of *The Expanse* is a diverse one: Humans from everywhere on Earth went out into space to colonize Mars, the Belt, and the Outer Planets, and some of their descendants have been living out in the Black for generations. So your character can belong to any ethnic or racial heritage, or many, melded together over the centuries. You can likewise play a character of any gender, or gender-fluid, gender-neutral, or trans-gender, and of any romantic or sexual orientation. Consider using the opportunity to step into someone else's life for your game by playing a character different from your own experience.

EXAMPLE *We work out some more details of our character: We decided somewhere along the line that it's a woman and the notion that she's of Asian heritage comes to mind. Since she's a Belter, we decide her heritage is mixed, a combination of Korean, Indian, and Brazilian in her more recent ancestry. Searching some online resources for suitable names, we come up with Isabella Anika Moon, who is ready for her first adventure!*

ADVANCEMENT

As *Expanse* characters adventure and overcome challenges, they advance in level, representing the sum total of their experiences. Advancement in level gives characters opportunities to improve their abilities and talents, and possibly some other things as well.

The GM decides when the characters have achieved enough to gain a level. This usually happens after a major achievement in the game, such as the end of an adventure or plot arc, but an achievement can happen during a game session, especially if there is a lot of in-game downtime.

LEVELING IMPROVEMENTS

When characters gain a level, they gain various improvements:

FORTUNE Your character gains 3 Fortune points per level for levels 2–10. After level 10, the character gains 2 Fortune points per level up to level 20, for a total gain of 47 Fortune by level 20.

DEFENSE AND TOUGHNESS At level 4, add 1 to either your character's Defense or Toughness, doing so again every 4 levels for a total of five increases. You cannot increase the same trait (Defense or Toughness) twice in a row, but must alternate between them.

ABILITY ADVANCEMENT Each level, you get one advancement to spend on one ability of your choice. You cannot advance the same ability two levels in a row. The number of advancements needed to improve your ability's score by 1 depends on the new score you wish to obtain: For scores up to 5, it requires one advancement. For abilities from 6 to 8, it requires two. For abilities from 9 to 12, it requires three. You get no benefit from advancements until you've gained enough for the new score, so keep track of advancements spent that have not yet increased the ability score. Improvement of an ability score improves everything based on that score as well, such as secondary abilities. So when your character's Dexterity increases, for example, their Defense and Speed improve as well. These are in addition to improvements in Defense and Toughness gained separately as part of advancement (previously).

ABILITY FOCUS Each level, you can choose one new ability focus for your character. You cannot choose a new focus for the same ability two levels in a row. Starting at level 11, you can choose a focus you already have and increase its bonus from +2 to +3.

TALENT IMPROVEMENT Each level, you can choose a new novice talent for your character, or gain a degree in a talent your character already has. At level 4, you can take a specialization as your character's talent choice for that level, and another at level 12, provided your character meets all of the requirements. See **Specializations** in **CHAPTER 3** for details.

INCOME When your character gains a level, they can regain 1 point of depleted Income, as described in Income, previously. You can find more about Income and the lifestyle it can provide in **CHAPTER 4: TECHNOLOGY & EQUIPMENT**

GOALS In addition, when your character gains a level, take stock of your character's goals. Have any been achieved? Have any changed from the last level? Based on events since the last level, does your character have any new goals? A new level is a good time to take stock.

EXAMPLE *After an initial adventure with her new crew, Isabella has earned a new level! Looking over the checklist, we improve her Fortune by 3, from 15 to 18. She gets one ability advancement, which we decide to put into Constitution to improve her long-term chances, also giving Isabella a point of Toughness. We can choose a new ability focus and either improve an existing talent by one degree or choose a novice degree in a new talent. We decide to add Intelligence (Research) and to improve her Hacking talent to Expert. Recent events have helped to solidify Isabella's reputation as a hacker, and have already offered some opportunities for her to shake off the influence of her past, if she chooses to pursue them.*

3. CHARACTER TRAITS

Character traits like focuses, talents, and specializations are the building blocks of your *Expanse* character. All provide ways to define and make your character unique.

Your character starts with focuses and talents through the process of character creation, and earns more of each by gaining levels in play (see **Advancement** in **Chapter 2**). Focuses and talents provide game system benefits, but also give you background and story hooks. Let's say your character has the Hacking talent. Well, where did you learn such cutting-edge skills? Perhaps you have an advanced degree in computer science from a prestigious university in the System, or maybe you learned to code on your own—and possibly did something with those skills that will come back to haunt you later in the campaign. You can come up with anything you like, but answering such questions tells you more about your character.

You further customize your character with specializations. They represent advanced training and experience, so you do not start with any at level 1. You earn them at higher levels, and each one adds special talent ranks unavailable to characters without the specialization.

ABILITY FOCUSES

As noted in **Chapter 2: Character Creation**, a focus is an area of expertise within a larger ability. A character with Communication 3 and the Deception focus is a good communicator in general, but excels at fooling others. Some focuses represent special knowledge and at times the GM may decide to give extra information to characters with specific focuses. Lastly, some focuses allow characters to attempt tests those lacking the focus cannot, as detailed in **Chapter 1: Basic Rules**.

If you have a focus, you get a +2 bonus when making an ability test related to it. The GM will usually let you know what focus applies to a test, but if it isn't clear don't be afraid to ask if a focus applies. If you are level 6 or higher, the focus also adds to the Drama Die for the test's degree of success.

LEVEL 6+ = YOUR ABILITY FOCUS ADDS TO THE DRAMA DIE FOR DEGREE OF SUCCESS

The ability focuses available to *Expanse* characters are as follows:

ACCURACY FOCUSES

BOWS: Proficiency with string-fired weapons, from a hand-drawn compound bow to a mechanical crossbow.

GUNNERY: Proficiency with precision heavy ranged weapons, including ship-mounted weapons.

PISTOLS: Proficiency with single-grip, short-barrel ballistic weapons.

RIFLES: Proficiency with double-grip, long-barrel ballistic weapons.

THROWING: Proficiency with thrown weapons, including grenades.

COMMUNICATION FOCUSES

BARGAINING: Negotiating with others and making deals.

DECEPTION: Tricking and lying to other people.

DISGUISE: Changing your appearance to look like someone else.

ETIQUETTE: Knowing the social niceties of various cultures.

EXPRESSION: Conveying thoughts and ideas effectively through words.

GAMBLING: Playing games of chance and profiting from them.

INVESTIGATION: Interviewing people for information and finding and deciphering clues.

LEADERSHIP: Guiding, directing, and inspiring others.

PERFORMING: Entertaining an audience with a type of performance art.

PERSUASION: Convincing others to agree with you.

SEDUCTION: Getting attention through romantic and sexual allure.

CONSTITUTION FOCUSES

RUNNING: Moving quickly in both short sprints and long-distance hauls.

STAMINA: Enduring fatigue, disease, and privation.

SWIMMING: Moving across water and staying afloat.

TOLERANCE: Withstanding the effects of potentially toxic substances, imbibed for recreation or unwitting exposure.

DEXTERITY FOCUSES

ACROBATICS: Executing gymnastic, balancing, and tumbling maneuvers.

CRAFTING: Making things with manual skills, including the various fine and plastic arts. Examples of specific Crafting focuses include Carpentry, Carving, Drawing, Glass-blowing, Leather-working, Painting, Origami, Sculpting, and so forth, but feel free to come up with your own. See the **Unusual Focuses** sidebar for more.

DRIVING: Handling surface vehicles like cars, trucks, or motorized carts, to name a few.

FREE-FALL: Maneuvering and moving while in free-fall, usually in microgravity.

INITIATIVE: Reacting quickly under pressure.

PILOTING: Operating vehicles that move in three dimensions like aircraft, drones, and spaceships.

SLEIGHT OF HAND: Using sleight of hand and deft movements to trick others, hide things, or pick pockets.

STEALTH: Moving around without being noticed.

FIGHTING FOCUSES

BRAWLING: Proficiency in fighting unarmed, from bare-knuckle boxing to various styles of martial arts.

GRAPPLING: Proficiency in unarmed techniques intended to immobilize and restrain.

HEAVY WEAPONS: Proficiency with large or heavy close combat weapons like axes, clubs, hammers, and large swords, to name a few.

LIGHT WEAPONS: Proficiency with light close combat weapons like batons, knives, light staffs, and swords, among others.

INTELLIGENCE FOCUSES

ART: Knowledge of artistic movements, styles, artists, and works in any of the fine arts. Making art uses the Crafting focus.

BUSINESS: Knowledge of running a business as well as of the business and corporate world.

CRYPTOGRAPHY: Creating and deciphering codes and ciphers.

CURRENT AFFAIRS: Knowledge of politics, newsworthy events, and popular culture.

DEMOLITIONS: Identifying, using, and safely handling explosives, as well as understanding their effects and detonation methods.

ENGINEERING: Making, repairing, and maintaining technological items as well as knowledge of the principles and practicalities of their design and development.

EVALUATION: Knowledge of the value of goods, works of art, and other valuables.

LAW: Knowledge of codes, regulations, and different legal proceedings of all levels of the judiciary and law enforcement.

OPTIONAL: UNUSUAL FOCUSES

The ability focuses in *The Expanse* are fairly broad, but still do not cover every aspect of human endeavor, just the major sorts of things characters might be good at. If you come up with a particular area where you'd like to focus your character's abilities that's not given on the list in this chapter, feel free to ask the Game Master if you can make it a suitable focus for your character anyway.

For example, Horticulture is a Science focus for Intelligence, and building small scale models is a specific kind of Crafting focus for Dexterity, but what about playing video games or sailing? The latter might be a sort of Piloting focus, but seems more like its own thing, even if sailing on water isn't likely to come up much in *The Expanse*. Likewise, video games don't really fall under Gambling, so you ask the GM and get permission to make it a new Dexterity focus. Who knows? It might even come in handy when dealing with some video game-like interfaces or test situations.

Other *AGE System* games, particularly *Modern AGE*, offer more detailed lists of ability focuses applicable to settings and situations outside of those usually encountered in an *Expanse* series. Feel free to use them as resources for unusual focuses in your game.

MEDICINE: Tending to the sick and injured, and understanding medical and anatomical knowledge.

NAVIGATION: Planning and following a route from one place to another, interpreting maps and cartographic data, and figuring out where you are.

RESEARCH: Conducting a systematic search for information, usually using records, archives, and books.

SCIENCE: Knowledge of an organized field of study and the ability to understand things related to it. Examples of Science focuses include Anthropology, Astronomy, Botany, Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Genetics, History, Planetary or "Earth" Sciences, Physics, Psychology, and Theology, but you can choose another scientific field, if you wish (see the **Unusual Focuses** sidebar).

SECURITY: Knowledge of different security devices, systems, protocols, and personnel.

TACTICS: Knowledge of strategy, tactics, and famous applications thereof.

TECHNOLOGY: Knowledge of the design and operation of technology, particularly computers, which are incorporated into nearly all technological items in The Expanse.

PERCEPTION FOCUSES

EMPATHY: Picking up on and interpreting the feelings and emotions of others.

HEARING: Perceiving using your auditory sense.

INTUITION: Having a "gut feeling" about certain things you can't otherwise sense.

SEARCHING: Finding things that are hidden or obscured, such as hidden compartments.

SEEING: Perceiving using your visual sense.

SMELLING: Perceiving using your olfactory sense.

SURVIVAL: Practical skills of wilderness survival.

TASTING: Perceiving using your gustatory sense.

TOUCHING: Perceiving using your tactile sense.

TRACKING: Following tracks and other signs of passage.

STRENGTH FOCUSES

CLIMBING: Scaling walls and other vertical obstacles.

INTIMIDATION: Overawing others with your physical presence and threats.

JUMPING: Making standing or running jumps.

MIGHT: Feats of raw power, such as lifting or holding up heavy objects.

WILLPOWER FOCUSES

COURAGE: Overcoming fear in the face of adversity.

FAITH: Deriving inner strength through spiritual or moral belief.

SELF-DISCIPLINE: Focusing your mental energy or controlling your impulses and emotions.

IMPROVING FOCUSES

Focuses grant a flat +2 bonus to ability tests. At higher levels, characters can take a focus a second time to improve their bonus. Starting at level 11, when you would gain a new focus you may instead select a focus you already have and increase your bonus with that focus to +3 instead of +2. Underline the focus on your sheet to indicate you've chosen it a second time and have an increased bonus with it. Remember that you cannot select a focus from the same ability two levels in a row.

LEVEL II = MAY IMPROVE A FOCUS FROM +2 TO +3 IN PLACE OF TAKING A NEW FOCUS.

TALENTS

Your character has areas of natural aptitude and special training called talents. They provide a way to customize your character that goes beyond their background. Choosing talents is thus an important part of developing your character.

Each talent is divided into three degrees: Novice, Expert, and Master. (Note that "Expert" replaces the "Journeyman" degree found in other *Adventure Game Engine System* games, and they should be considered equivalent.) Each degree provides a game system benefit. You have to be a Novice in a talent before you can become an Expert, and an Expert before you can become a Master.

You acquire your initial talents at character creation, from your background, profession, and drive (see **Chapter 2**). You gain new talents and new degrees by gaining levels (see **Advancement** in **Chapter 2**). Most talents also have requirements, like a score in an ability or having a specific ability focus. Unless you acquire the talent at character creation, you cannot take the talent through advancement unless you meet these requirements.

When talents are listed for a character, the standard format is talent name, followed by the degree achieved in parentheses, such as Command (Expert) or Hacking (Novice). For shorthand, the degree can be abbreviated by its first letter: Novice (N), Expert (E), and Master (M), such as Command (E) and Hacking (N).

A listing of available talents follows. A number of talents refer to particular stunts. See **Chapter 5: Game Play**. Talents use the format shown at right.

TALENT NAME

REQUIREMENTS: You cannot take this talent through advancement unless you have the specified requirement(s).

A short description of the talent.

NOVICE The benefit gained when you acquire the talent and become a Novice.

EXPERT The benefit gained when you become an Expert in the talent.

MASTER The benefit gained when you become a Master of the talent.

AFFLUENT

REQUIREMENTS: None

You have access to greater resources than most.

NOVICE When you select this talent, increase your Income by +2.

EXPERT When you gain this degree, increase your Income by +1. You may add 2 to your Income score when comparing your score with an item's cost to purchase it automatically, without a test, or to determine whether the purchase will deplete your Income. You enjoy this benefit only once per game session, and you must choose whether it applies to an automatic purchase or to avoid depleting your Income.

MASTER When you gain this degree, increase your Income by +1. You can re-roll a failed Income test, but must keep the result of the second roll.

AGILITY

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity 2 and the Dexterity (Acrobatics) focus

You move with grace, speed, and ease.

NOVICE Every move you make is part of one fluid motion. Using the Move action to stand up, climb, dismount, etc. does not reduce your Speed. See **Chapter 5** for details.

EXPERT When you move, terrain-based hazards do not reduce your Speed. When you fall, if you succeed at a Dexterity (Acrobatics) test with a TN determined by the GM based on height and nearby surfaces, you suffer only half damage.

MASTER Impressive acrobatics are just the way you naturally move. You can re-roll any die result of 1 on each die for Dexterity (Acrobatics), Stamina (Running), and Strength (Climbing, Jumping) tests, but must keep the results of the second roll.

ARTISTRY

REQUIREMENTS: Communication 1 or higher and the Dexterity (Crafting) focus or Communication (Expression) focus

You can create fine works of art. For the performing arts, see the Performance talent.

NOVICE You can use the Dexterity (Crafting) or Communication (Expression) focuses to create works of art. Choose a field of visual (painting, sculpture, illustration, animation, photography, etc.) or literary (poetry, fiction, scriptwriting, journalism, etc.) arts. The GM determines the time and TN of the test, depending on your intentions, and the Drama Die determines your work's quality if you succeed. You can sell your work if you know a buyer, giving you a temporary bonus to Income tests equal to half the result of the Drama Die (minimum 1); this bonus disap-

pears upon your first successful Income test to purchase something, or at the end of the current story if you have not used it. As an option you can waive the bonus to Income and gain a temporary reputation instead. This reputation fades over time if you don't produce other works of similar quality. Any reputation derived from your art disappears after a number of months equal to the result of the Drama Die.

EXPERT You grow as an artist, deepening your mastery of your craft or diversifying your talents. You learn the tools and tricks of a new artistic field or gain a +1 bonus to ability tests to create works of art in a field you are trained in. This bonus also applies to the Drama Die result to determine the quality of your work.

MASTER You become an undisputed master of your craft. You learn the tools and tricks of a number of artistic fields equal to your Communication, or select one of the fields you are trained in and add your Willpower to the Drama Die to determine the quality of your work. Upon successfully creating a work of art, you can re-roll the Drama Die to determine its quality, but must keep the result of the second roll.

ATTRACTIVE

REQUIREMENTS: None

You have that special something that catches and holds people's attention and interest.

NOVICE Your presence is as stunning upon the second impression as it is on the first. You can use the Making an Entrance social stunt a second time at any point of an encounter. Also, if an NPC could be attracted to you, their initial attitude is one step more favorable towards you. See **Social Encounters** in **CHAPTER 5** for details.

EXPERT You know how to best exploit your appearance. You can perform the Flirt social stunt for 3 SP instead of its normal cost, and the target of your efforts can have a Neutral attitude instead of Open.

MASTER Every move you make captures the attention and interest of others. When interacting with characters who would be attracted to you, you can re-roll a failed Communication (Deception, Performing, Persuasion, or Seduction) test, but must keep the result of the second roll.

BURGLARY

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity 2 or higher

You know how to bypass security to enter a place and take anything that strikes your fancy.

NOVICE You know your way around security systems. When you succeed at an Intelligence (Security) test to study a lock, alarm, guards, or any part of a security system or protocol, the GM provides you with one more piece of information.

EXPERT Security measures cannot stop you. If you fail an Intelligence (Technology) test involving a security measure, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

MASTER No valuable escapes your notice. If you fail a Perception (Searching) test, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

CAROUSING

REQUIREMENTS: Communication and Constitution 1 or higher

You take your fun seriously, and use it to good effect.

NOVICE You can drink other people under the table. When making Constitution (Tolerance) tests as part of an advanced test, you gain a +1 bonus to the result of each Drama Die.

EXPERT Choose one of the following focuses: Communication (Seduction) or Perception (Empathy). If you fail a test with your chosen focus, you can re-roll it but must keep the result of the second roll.

MASTER When you're having a good time, you're invincible! Or so you think. Choose the Benefit of the Doubt or Flirt stunt. You can perform that stunt for 1 SP less than its normal cost.

COMMAND

REQUIREMENTS: Communication 2 or higher

You are a skilled and capable leader.

NOVICE Your presence inspires allies. If you take a major action to offer guidance, your allies gain a +1 bonus to Willpower (Courage) and Willpower (Morale) tests for the rest of the encounter. You can do this once per encounter.

EXPERT Your allies follow your lead. Any NPCs you lead gain a +1 bonus when rolling for initiative.

MASTER When you stand firm, your allies stand with you. When you lead NPCs in an encounter, they do not have to make a Willpower (Morale) test until more than two-thirds of your side's combatants are out of the fight (dead or incapacitated). If you leave the fight or are taken out, this benefit is lost.

CONTACTS

REQUIREMENTS: Communication 1 or higher

You have a large web of social connections, and know people even in the unlikeliest places.

NOVICE You can attempt to make a contact out of an NPC with a Neutral or better attitude toward you with a successful Communication (Persuasion) test. The GM sets the target number based on the likelihood of you knowing the character or having mutual friends. The more distant the character's origin or social class from yours, the more difficult the test. If you succeed, the new contact's attitude shifts one step in your favor and they readily provide information without a test, as long as it wouldn't harm them. They will not perform other favors without further persuasion.

EXPERT Once you've established a contact, you can try to get a favor from them with a single successful Communication (Persuasion) test, regardless of their attitude toward you and without engaging in a complex social interaction. The target number is based on the nature of the favor and whether it puts the contact in any danger.

MASTER Your social skills can turn a contact into an trusted ally. If you do a significant favor for an established contact, they become Very Friendly towards you, and any potential risk in the favors you ask of them does not affect the target number of the Communication (Persuasion) test from the Expert degree. If they're already Very Friendly, they become zealously loyal; you do not need to make an ability test to ask favors of them, regardless of the danger involved, and the GM can use your ally to provide prompts if you become stuck in the course of a story in the form of unsolicited advice or favors. Allies' attitudes can degrade if they're not treated well, but do not do so simply with the passage of time. You can drift apart for a decade and they'll still be as loyal as when you last met.

DOCTOR

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence (Medicine) focus

You have the skills to heal wounds and treat illness and other conditions. See **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5** for additional details.

NOVICE You're skilled in treating patients. You can re-roll any dice with a result of 1 or 2 when making an Intelligence (Medicine) test.

EXPERT With access to medical supplies and tools, you can treat some conditions. With an hour and a basic TN 11 Intelligence (Medicine) test you can remove a wounded condition, leaving the patient only injured (see **Conditions** in **Chapter 1**). You can also remove other medical-related conditions with proper time and treatment, at the GM's discretion, using the Interlude guidelines in **Chapter 5**.

MASTER You can perform complex medical procedures to restore a patient to a normal, healthy condition, and you can re-roll any failed Intelligence (Medicine) test, but must keep the result of the second roll. When using Intelligence (Medicine) as a primary investigation focus, you generate +1 SP on any roll that generates stunt points.

DUAL WEAPON STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity 2 or higher

You can fight in hand-to-hand combat with a weapon in your primary hand and another in your off-hand (a secondary weapon). Unless otherwise stated, attacks come from the primary weapon.

NOVICE While wielding two close combat weapons, if you take the Activate action, you gain either a +1 bonus on your melee attack rolls or a +1 Defense bonus vs. melee attacks until the end of the encounter. You can switch the bonus with another Activate action.

EXPERT You can perform the Lightning Attack stunt for 2 SP instead of the usual 3, but the extra attack must come from your secondary weapon.

MASTER You can overwhelm opponents with attacks from both weapons. If you make a Melee Attack with your primary weapon and you are not charging, you can make another attack with your secondary weapon as a minor action. The second attack cannot generate stunt points, and you only add half of your Strength (rounded down) to damage.

EXPERTISE (FOCUS)

REQUIREMENTS: None

You are a specialist in your field.

NOVICE Select an ability focus you have and choose a narrower task or field within it. For example, You can choose "hacking" for Intelligence (Technology) or "drones" for Dexterity (Piloting). You gain a +1 bonus for ability tests covered by the narrower task. You can select this talent multiple times, each time applicable to a different focus You can only choose Expertise once for a particular focus.

EXPERT If you fail an ability test covered by your chosen expertise, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

MASTER Select one type of stunt (action, exploration, social, or command) relevant to your chosen expertise. When generating stunt points with ability tests involving your chosen expertise, you gain +1 SP for the chosen type of stunt.

FRINGER

REQUIREMENT:s Communication 1 or higher

You know how to navigate and survive on the fringes of civilization.

NOVICE You cover your own tracks well. Other characters suffer a –2 penalty to any tests to find information about you or your activities. This stacks with the Cover Your Tracks stunt (see **Chapter 5**).

EXPERT You know how to find and navigate the local black market. Once per session, you can gain a +2 bonus on an Income test by using black market channels, but your Income is depleted by 1 regardless of the test result and the cost of the item.

MASTER You are experienced at living life hidden from the system. The penalty for tests to find information about you increases to –3, and when you buy on the black market, your Income score is depleted following the normal rules given in **Chapter 2**.

GRAPPLING STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Fighting (Grappling) focus

You're skilled in restraining and subduing opponents in unarmed combat.

NOVICE If you fail an opposed Fighting (Grappling) test to avoid being grappled, as per the Grapple stunt's description in **Chapter 5**, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

EXPERT If you successfully hit an opponent with an unarmed attack and choose a stunt from the Grappling category, you gain 1 additional SP to apply.

MASTER You can perform the Pin stunt for 3 SP instead of the usual 4. In addition, your penalty to Defense when using the Grapple and Pin stunts is halved.

HACKING

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence (Security) and Intelligence (Technology) focuses

Computer security systems and safeguards are more suggestions to you than anything else.

NOVICE When you succeed at an Intelligence (Cryptography) or Intelligence (Security) test, the GM can provide you with an extra item of information about the subject. Also, you can use the Intelligence (Technology) focus instead of Communication (Investigation) and Intelligence (Research) if the information you seek can be found in an accessible computer system.

EXPERT If you fail an Intelligence (Technology) test, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

MASTER When you make an advanced test using Intelligence (Cryptography) or Intelligence (Technology), add +2 to the result of the Drama Die for the purpose of reaching the test's threshold. You can perform the Cover Your Tracks stunt on tests involving the Cryptography and Technology focuses for 2 SP.

IMPROVISATION

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence 1 or Willpower 1 or higher

Whatever the situation is, you're sure you can handle it.

NOVICE You adapt to the situation. You can make an ability test that requires a specific focus, even if you don't have that focus. You don't gain the focus bonus to your roll and don't generate SP on such rolls, but in investigations you are always considered to have a tangential focus (see **Investigation Focuses** in **CHAPTER 5**).

EXPERT Anything is a potential weapon or a tool in your hands. When you perform the Whatever's Handy combat stunt, the penalty of your makeshift weapon is reduced by 1 and it lasts 2d6 rounds before breaking. If improvising a tool instead of a weapon, you can perform tests that require the tool, but you don't generate SP while doing so.

MASTER You can turn failure into some measure of success. If you roll doubles on a failed test, you generate SP equal to the result of the Drama Die –2 (minimum 1). The test still fails, but you can try to salvage the situation with a stunt you perform with the SP you gain. Unfortunately, your stunt cannot achieve your original intended action. The GM determines if the desired stunt is permitted, based on the situation.

INSPIRE

REQUIREMENTS: Communication 2 or higher

Your words and presence motivate others to action. The benefits of Inspire do not stack, if you happen to have multiple characters on the same side who have it, other than their ability to continue inspiring their side after one or more of them has been taken out.

NOVICE You inspire your friends and allies. If you are conscious and they are within sight of you, your allies gain a +1 bonus to all Willpower-related tests.

EXPERT You inspire greatness in your friends and allies. If you are conscious and they are within sight of you, any ally generating stunt points gains +1 SP.

MASTER With you around, things don't seem quite as bad. Once per encounter, you can spend two minor actions to offer words of inspiration to your allies. All who hear these words regain 1d6 + your Communication in Fortune, and receive a +2 bonus on their next test.

INTRIGUE

REQUIREMENTS: Communication 2 or higher

You are a master of secrets.

NOVICE You understand how to navigate complex social situations. Choose one of the following Communication focuses: Deception, Etiquette, or Seduction. If you fail a Communication test with your chosen focus, you can re-roll it but must keep the result of the second roll.

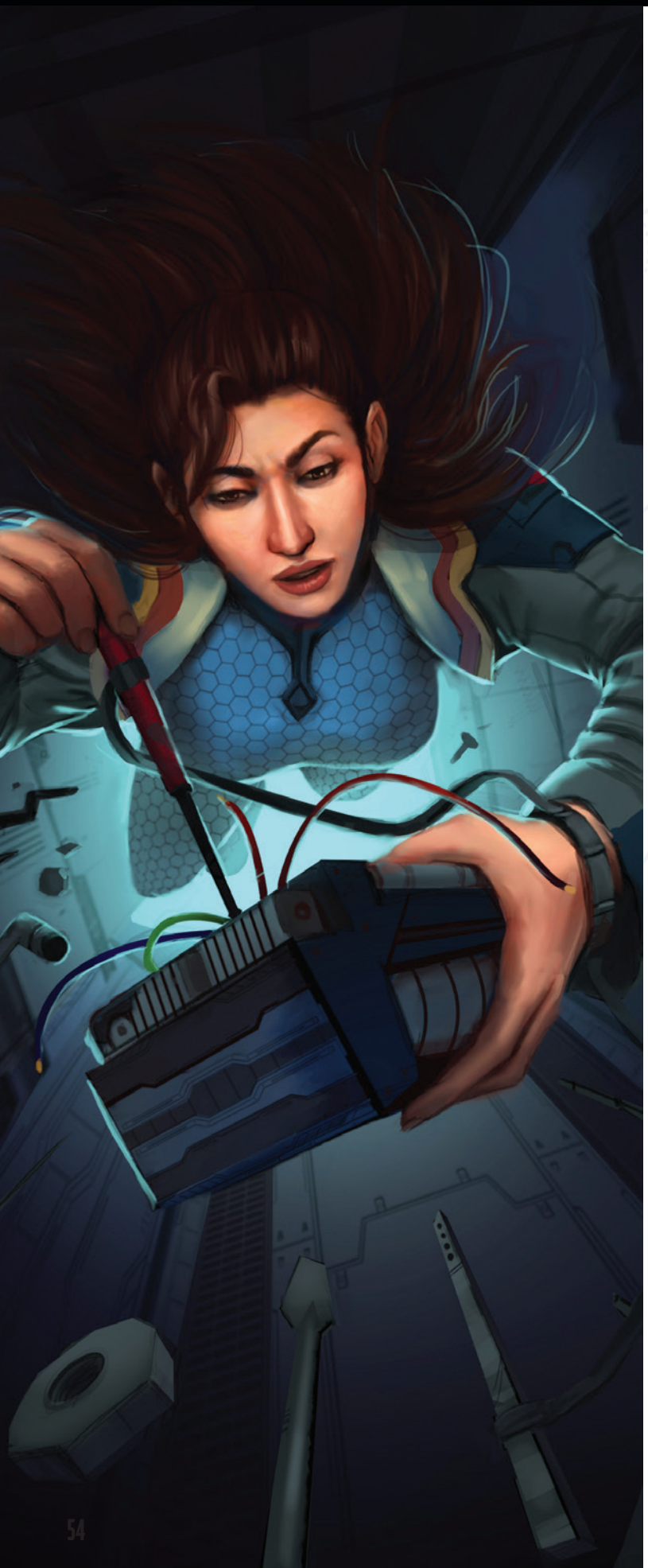
EXPERT You can squeeze information from the most reluctant sources. If the focus you chose in the Novice degree is considered a tangential focus during an investigation (see **CHAPTER 5**), you ignore the +2 increase to the TN of the test. In addition, if you use the focus you chose in the Novice degree to successfully complete a task in a complex social interaction, you clear two shifts instead of only one.

MASTER The secrets you know can raise or ruin anyone's good standing. You can perform the Cast Out and Oozing Confidence social stunts for 1 SP lower than their normal cost. In addition, you can use Oozing Confidence to benefit another character.

KNOW-IT-ALL

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence 2 or higher

You can bring your considerable knowledge to bear on any situation.



NOVICE You can attempt a test using an Intelligence focus somehow related to the test at hand rather than the called for ability, but with a –1 penalty. For example, using Intelligence (Business) instead of Communication (Persuasion) to convince a corporate middle-manager to agree with you. If this would be a tangential investigation focus, you do not suffer the +2 increase in TN.

EXPERT You leverage every bit of information. You can perform the Breakthrough exploration stunt for 2 SP.

MASTER When you succeed at an ability test with a knowledge focus, you gain a +1 bonus to the result of each Drama Die on tests using related focuses for the duration of the encounter. For example, an Intelligence (Law) test can benefit Communication (Oratory) tests in a courtroom, or an Intelligence (Medicine) test can benefit a Perception (Intuition) test in a diagnosis.

KNOWLEDGE

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence 2 or higher

You have an inquisitive mind and you're a fast learner.

NOVICE When you make a successful Intelligence test with a knowledge focus, the GM should give you an extra piece of information on the topic. A knowledge focus is any Intelligence focus with a description that starts with "Knowledge", such as Business or Science. The GM determines the nature of the additional information and it may or may not be pertinent to the main question at hand.

EXPERT When making Intelligence (Research) tests as part of an advanced test, you gain a +1 bonus to the result of each Drama Die. See **Advanced Tests** in **CHAPTER 1** for details.

MASTER Pick any two of your knowledge focuses. When making tests using those focuses, you can re-roll a failed test but must keep the result of the second roll.

LINGUISTICS

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence 1 or higher

You pick up new languages easily. When you learn a new language, you learn to both speak and read it.

NOVICE You learn an additional language.

EXPERT You learn two additional languages for a total of three plus your native language(s). You can also imitate a specific dialect with a successful Communication (Performance) test.

MASTER You learn three additional languages for a total of six plus your native language(s). You can also pick any one additional language you know and speak it like a native—that is, without any trace of an accent.

MAKER

REQUIREMENTS: Any manufacturing focus (see below)

Make-it-yourself is your motto and you use manufacturing focuses to do just that. Use Dexterity (Craft) for most handcrafted and artistic items and Intelligence (Engineering) for most technological items. The GM may approve other manufacturing focuses as appropriate for certain items.

NOVICE You can use a manufacturing focus to make any item with the appropriate tools and access to a workshop. See **Make** or **Repair** under **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5** for details.

EXPERT Your workmanship is reliable and steady. If you fail a test with a manufacturing focus, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

MASTER When you perform an advanced test with a manufacturing focus, you gain a +1 bonus to the result of each Drama Die for the purpose of reaching the success threshold.

MEDIC

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence 1 or higher

You can treat certain conditions in the field. See **Conditions** in **CHAPTER 1** for details.

NOVICE Your treatment allows a patient to add your Intelligence (and Medicine focus, if any) to a test to avoid or overcome a medical hazard, or grants the patient a new test to overcome that hazard, if there is one. This includes saving a patient from dying and reviving an unconscious character.

EXPERT If you treat a patient, you can alleviate the effects of the exhausted, fatigued, injured, or wounded conditions. This takes an advanced TN 11 Intelligence (Medicine) test (threshold 5) with each roll taking one minute. If you succeed, the patient ignores the effects of those conditions for 1d6 hours. The conditions are still present, however, and the effects return when the duration ends or if any of the conditions worsen, such as an injured character becoming wounded, for example.

MASTER You can quickly treat wounds to prevent them from becoming serious. If you treat a wounded condition within an hour of it occurring, you can make a basic TN 13 Intelligence (Medicine) test. Success downgrades the wounded condition to injured.

MISDIRECTION

REQUIREMENTS: Communication (Deception) focus

You can sow confusion among friends and foes alike.

NOVICE As a major action, you can make a Communication (Deception) test opposed by an opponent's Willpower (Self-Discipline); if you succeed, your opponent cannot perform stunts until the end of your next turn.

EXPERT Your targets become too focused on you to do anything else. When you use the Over Here! exploration stunt, the bonus your allies gain is +2 instead of +1, and you gain a +1 bonus yourself.

MASTER When you use a Communication focus in combat and roll doubles, you gain +1 SP.

OBSERVATION

REQUIREMENTS: Perception 2 or higher

You have an eye for detail.

NOVICE You notice things others do not. Choose a Perception focus. If you fail a Perception test with your chosen focus, you can re-roll it but must keep the result of the second roll.

EXPERT Analysis of your observation often leads to insight. On a successful Perception test, you can spend 2 SP to make a second, immediate Perception test with the same TN but with a different focus than the first, and gain additional information (if any) from a successful test with the second focus. This includes additional information when you uncover the clue within a lead.

MASTER Nothing escapes your scrutiny. On a successful Perception test, you can spend 2 SP and gain a +2 bonus to all Perception tests involving the same object or subject as the first test for the duration of the encounter.

ORATORY

REQUIREMENTS: Communication (Persuasion) focus

You are a skilled public speaker who can sway others with your words.

NOVICE You know how to work a crowd. If you fail a Communication (Persuasion) test when trying to convince a group (not an individual), you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

EXPERT Each time you perform the Sway the Crowd social stunt, you affect three additional people instead of one.

MASTER You can agitate a crowd. If you make a successful Communication (Persuasion) test when addressing a group and the result of your Drama Die is 5 or 6, you rouse them to immediate action. You can't necessarily control what they do, though you can try to do so with Communication (Leadership) tests, but they take your words to heart and act on them regardless.

OVERWHELM STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Fighting 2 or higher

In hand-to-hand combat, you are relentless and overwhelming.

NOVICE When you make a close combat attack, you can take up to a –3 penalty on your attack roll to receive a corresponding bonus to your damage roll.

EXPERT Your expertise makes you dangerous. When you succeed with a close combat attack, you can add your focus bonus for that attack to your damage total.

MASTER You break opponent's defenses with brutal or relentless attacks. If you spend 3 SP after a successful attack, your target must make an opposed Strength (Might) test against your attack roll; if they fail, they suffer a –2 penalty to Defense until the end of your next turn.

PERFORMANCE

REQUIREMENTS: Communication (Performing) focus

You have a talent for the performing arts.

NOVICE Choose a form of performance art, such as playing a musical instrument, singing, acting, dancing, miming, stand-up comedy, juggling, or any other art performed in front of an audience. You are an accomplished performer in your chosen art. In addition, you may perform the From the Heart and Sway the Crowd stunts for 1 SP less than their normal cost.

EXPERT You can add an additional form of performance. You get a feel for a room and adapt accordingly. If you have at least 15 minutes to observe a crowd before performing or speaking in front of them, you gain a +1 bonus to any Communication-based tests to persuade or entertain them. You can also choose a number of individuals in the crowd equal to your Perception (minimum 1); at the end of the 15 minutes of observation you know their initial attitudes toward you, and you know if they changed by the end of your performance and, if so, by how much.

MASTER You can add an additional form of performance to your repertoire. When performing, you exude confidence and style. You may perform the With a Flourish stunt while performing in front of an audience for 3 SP, and its effects last until the end of the day.

PILOT

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity (Driving or Piloting) focus

Any vehicle under your control becomes like an extension of yourself.

NOVICE You are quick to get things going. Starting up a vehicle is a free action for you, and you can perform Dexterity (Driving or Piloting) tests as a minor action.

EXPERT You push the performance of your means of transportation. When you control a vehicle, it gains a +2 bonus to tests involving its speed.

MASTER If you fail an ability test to control a vehicle, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll. In addition, while you are at the controls, your vehicle gains a +2 bonus to Defense as long as it is moving.

PINPOINT ACCURACY

REQUIREMENTS: Accuracy or Fighting 1 or higher, and Dexterity 1 or higher

If you can see it, you can hit it. Hard.

NOVICE You strike where it hurts the most. Once per round, you can add 1d6 to the damage of a successful attack if your Dexterity is greater than your target's.

EXPERT Your instinct is as sharp as your eyes. When you take the Aim action, the attack bonus you gain is +2 instead of +1.

MASTER You can perform the Called Shot action stunt for 3 SP. You can also use it with any weapon, not just guns.

PISTOL STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Accuracy (Pistols) focus

Between the quick and the dead, you prefer the former.

NOVICE You are deadlier close-up. You gain a +1 bonus to damage with pistols against targets within 6 meters.

EXPERT If you have a pistol in your hand, or draw or grab one as your first available action, you can roll initiative with an Accuracy (Pistols) test instead of a Dexterity (Initiative) test. You can also generate stunt points with this test, unlike a normal initiative roll, and spend them on general combat or gun stunts.

MASTER When hitting a target with a shot from a pistol, you can add your Dexterity to the damage total.

PROTECTOR

REQUIREMENTS: Perception and Willpower 1 or higher

You are the shield that protects your friends.

NOVICE Your desire to protect others lends you speed. When you perform the Blockade action stunt, you can move up to 6 meters instead of 3.

EXPERT You react quickly to put yourself in harm's way. When you perform the Guardian Angel action stunt, the amount of damage you take instead of your ally is equal to the number of SP spent +2.

MASTER You become the shadow of those who would hurt others. If you are standing next to an opponent and that opponent moves within 2 meters of one of your allies, you can move adjacent to the opponent before they finish their turn, even if it would surpass your Speed. Your Speed is 0 on your next turn.

QUICK REFLEXES

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity 2 or higher

You react to threats instantly and instinctually.

NOVICE You can prepare for action in an instant. Once per round on your turn you can use Ready as a free action.

EXPERT You can go prone or stand up as a free action rather than as part of a Move action.

MASTER It is hard to get the drop on you. You may re-roll your initiative roll at the start of a combat encounter, but must keep the results of the second roll.

RIFLE STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Accuracy (Rifles) focus

A rifle is far more dangerous in your hands.

NOVICE You can assume a highly ready stance; as long as you are not moving more than half your normal speed, you can make an attack with a loaded rifle you are holding as a reaction *before* rolling initiative, even if surprised. This attack uses up your major action for the round, which means that you only have a minor action available during your next turn.

EXPERT You trust in your weapon's power to punch through cover. The attack roll modifier for a target behind light cover does not apply to your attacks with a rifle. This includes the penalty from the Human Shield action stunt.

MASTER Penalties to the attack roll due to range do not apply to your attacks with a rifle.

SCOUTING

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity 2 or higher

You are skilled in reconnaissance and infiltration.

NOVICE If you fail a Dexterity (Stealth) test, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

EXPERT You know how to get the drop on opponents. You can perform the Seize the Initiative stunt for 2 SP.

MASTER You are a skilled observer. If you fail a Perception (Seeing) test, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

SELF-DEFENSE STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Fighting (Brawling) focus

You are trained in martial arts focused on defense and deflection.

NOVICE You use your opponent's momentum against them. When a melee attack misses you, you can use the Grapple action stunt as a reaction without spending any SP. In addition, you can perform the Knock Prone action stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2 against an opponent you have grappled.

EXPERT Your grip is difficult to break. If you fail a Fighting (Grappling) test, you can re-roll it, but must keep the results of the second roll.

MASTER You counter an opponent with grace and skill. When you perform the Disarm stunt, you can retain hold of the weapon. In addition, when you spend SP on Knock Prone after making a Fighting (Grappling) attack, you may automatically move your opponent 2 yards for no additional SP cost. You may increase this distance with the Skirmish stunt. The enemy falls prone after being moved.

SINGLE WEAPON STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Perception 2 or higher

You can fight more effectively wielding a single-handed melee weapon.

NOVICE Fighting with a single-handed weapon demands increased awareness. If you take the Activate action, you gain a +1 Defense bonus until the end of the encounter while fighting in this style.

EXPERT You can wield your weapon to block and parry attacks. Your bonus to Defense increases to +2 while fighting in this style.

MASTER You know how to fight several enemies at once. Opponents making melee attacks against you never gain a bonus on their attack rolls for outnumbering you.

STRIKING STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Fighting (Brawling) focus

By training or raw talent, your unarmed strikes leave a lasting impression.

NOVICE When you attack unarmed, you inflict 1d6 damage instead of 1d3.

EXPERT Your punch can drop the toughest opponents. You can perform the Knock Prone stunt for 1 SP when attacking unarmed.

MASTER You can perform the Injure or Vicious Blow action stunts for 1 SP when attacking unarmed.

TACTICAL AWARENESS

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity and Perception 1 or higher

You move calmly and expertly while in combat.

NOVICE You can take the Melee Attack or Ranged Attack action at any point during your movement. Normally you have to finish your movement before attacking.

EXPERT You seem to have eyes in the back of your head. When you perform the Take One for the Team exploration stunt, you only take half the damage from a trap or hazard and your ally remains unscathed.

MASTER You are hard to pin down in combat. Opponents do not gain an attack bonus for outnumbering you in melee. If you also have the Expert degree in the Single Weapon Style, your Defense bonus increases to +3 when fighting in that style.

THROWN WEAPON STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: None

You are adept with weapons thrown by hand.

NOVICE You gain a +1 bonus on attack rolls with thrown weapons.

EXPERT You can Ready a throwing weapon or grenade as a free action instead of a minor action.

MASTER Add your Accuracy score in meters to the range of throwing weapons and grenades when you throw them.

TWO-HANDED STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Strength 3 or higher and Fighting 1 or higher

You are deadly with heavy melee weapons.

NOVICE Your weapon and the power of your attacks force foes to yield ground. When you hit with a melee attack with a heavy weapon, you can move the target 2 meters in any direction like the Skirmish stunt.

EXPERT You strike fearsome blows with your weapon. You can perform the Vicious Blow stunt for 1 SP when wielding a heavy weapon.

MASTER You and your weapon are as one. When you are wielding a heavy weapon and gain SP, you gain +2 SP to use exclusively for the following stunts: Expose, Knock Prone, Shock and Awe, Skirmish, and Wound.

SPECIALIZATIONS

Specializations help you to realize your character's full potential. Each specialization has a theme on which you can build your character concept. Your character might work for a government agency or corporation, for example, but that could mean being a computer expert, or a researcher, or a master of unarmed combat, among other things. Every specialization has its own unique talent.

You can take your first specialization at level 4, gaining the Novice degree in the specialization's talent. At levels 6, 8, 12, 14, and 16, you may either improve the specialization you acquired or improve a second specialization, also starting at the Novice degree. You can never acquire more than two specializations. For instance, you might start with Academic at level 4, improve it to Expert at level 6, but then switch to Socialite at level 8. Specialization talents are acquired like other talents, and take up your talent choice for that level. Since specializations are not acquired during character creation, characters must meet their requirements in order to take them. This is something to keep in mind for your character's advancement (see **Advancement** in **CHAPTER 2**).

When you take a second specialization, think about how the two might work together, and what the combination says about your character. You might, for instance, imagine your character as a Martial Artist-Gunfighter action hero or as an Agent-Executive spymaster. Combinations that might not seem to make immediate sense can create some interesting concepts—consider an heiress who moonlights as an assassin (Socialite-Sniper), a musician who solves crimes (Performer-Investigator) or a peerless miner of data (Academic-Hacker). The Synergies section of each specialization suggests some possible ideas.

The specializations in this book are: Academic, Ace, Agent, Commando, Executive, Gunfighter, Hacker, Investigator, Martial Artist, Sniper, Socialite, Star, and Thief. Supplements for *The Expanse* may include additional specializations. Check with your Game Master whether a particular specialization might be allowed in your game.

ACADEMIC

While the notion of "academic" often equates to irrelevant, you know that knowledge is power. You know how to find information and put it to work in order to achieve your goals, and you understand the value of information in the right hands.

SYNERGIES An Academic-Hacker has the skills to find data anywhere, even in places where others might be unable to go. An Academic-Star might be a celebrity scientist, or a pop star with a secret PhD. An Academic-Executive might be the head of a government agency with access to all the information in the world.

ACADEMIC TALENT

REQUIREMENT: Intelligence 2 or higher and the Intelligence (Research) focus.

You are trained in finding information and putting it to use.

NOVICE You have a real skill in not only finding facts, but knowing where to look. If you fail an Intelligence (Research) test, you can re-roll it, but must keep the result of the second roll.

EXPERT You have become adept at recalling relevant information. When you perform the A-Ha! stunt, you gain one free extra use of it; that is, if you spend 1 SP, you can perform the stunt twice, if you spend 2 SP, you can use it three times, and so on.

MASTER Your fact-finding abilities are unparalleled. When you make an Intelligence (Research) test as part of an advanced test, you gain a +1 bonus to the result of each Drama Die. This increases your total roll, and allows you to reach the success threshold faster.

ACE

You're in the cockpit, in the command chair, at the stick. You make your ship like an extension of yourself, maneuvering through tight spaces, coaxing out those extra few Gs, and praying to whoever you pray to that it all holds together through just one more burn to get you where you're going. Plenty of people can fly from point A to point B, but only a handful of them are true pilots, and you're one of them.

SYNERGIES An Ace-Agent could be an undercover spy or an agent skilled in transportation of valuable cargo (or passengers). An Ace-Performer might be a showboat stunt performer, while an Ace-Executive might be a naval officer or ship captain, especially one promoted from the pilot's seat.

ACE TALENT

REQUIREMENT: Dexterity 3 or higher and the Dexterity (Piloting) focus.

Few can fly like you do.

NOVICE You can coax more out of your ship than most. When you perform the Punch It chase stunt, you gain an extra +1 bonus on your next chase test, above the bonus gained for the stunt (so the bonus is +2 when you spend 1 SP, +3 when you spend 2 SP and so on).

EXPERT Add +2 to the Drama Die when making tests using the Dexterity (Piloting) focus.

MASTER You are a peerless pilot. Add +1 to tests made using Dexterity (Piloting) and you may re-roll a failed test, although you don't get the bonus on the re-roll and must take the result of the second roll.

AGENT

You hide in plain sight and deal in secrets. You work undercover and make few friends, and lying is second nature to you. You might have been in place for years, gaining authority in a group you are supposed to subvert, or even starting a family.

SYNERGIES An Agent-Sniper is a peerless assassin. An Agent-Socialite is the suave sophisticate, as much at home in a casino or ballroom as in the field. An Agent-Ace is a great getaway artist, while an Agent-Investigator is the classic spy-catcher, or a delver into mysteries the police cannot touch. An Agent-Thief is a shadowy chameleon who avoids detection.

AGENT TALENT

REQUIREMENT: Perception 2 or higher and the Perception (Empathy) and Communication (Deception) focuses.

You're a skilled spy and infiltrator.

NOVICE You built your life on lies. If you fail a Communication (Deception) test, you can re-roll it, but must keep the result of the second roll.

EXPERT You are also adept at seeing through deception. When you use the Read the Room stunt, add +3 to your Perception (Empathy) roll when the stunt is opposed.

MASTER You are a masterful spy. You gain two of the following focuses if you don't have them already: Communication (Disguise), Communication (Investigation), Dexterity (Stealth), Intelligence (Cryptography), and Intelligence (Security). If you already have all of these, pick two and add +1 to all rolls made using them.

COMMANDO

For as long as there have been people, there have been wars, and there have been soldiers to fight them. You're not just any soldier, however. You are one of the best there is: the elite special forces, like a UN commando or Martian Marine, or perhaps an OPA veteran of countless conflicts who knows all of the tricks. You might also be a mercenary, either working for corporate security or your latest client.

SYNERGIES: A Commando-Executive might be a commanding officer while a Commando-Gunfighter or Commando-Sniper is probably a weapon specialist. A Commando-Thief might be a trained infiltration expert; the same for a Commando-Agent.

COMMANDO TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Constitution 2 or higher and the Willpower (Self-Discipline) focus.

You are trained to fight, and to win, no matter the odds.

NOVICE If you fail a Constitution or Willpower (Self-Discipline) test, you can re-roll, but must keep the result of the second roll.

EXPERT You know how to work with a team to get things done. At this degree, you gain an intensity 1 Relationship with your team, whoever that may be, and you keep the relationship even if the membership of your team changes. You can increase the intensity of this Relationship normally. See the **REWARDS** chapter for details on Relationships.

MASTER You can overcome the effects of some conditions through sheer grit. When you acquire the exhausted, fatigued, injured, or wounded conditions, make a TN 13 Constitution (Stamina) or Willpower (Self-Discipline) test; if you succeed, you ignore the effects of the condition for the remainder of the encounter, although the condition itself remains.

EXECUTIVE

You're the boss—the responsibility is yours, but so is the guiding vision for your organization. A good Executive is a leader, someone who inspires others and makes things happen. You know what you're doing. You're the leader who gets their hands dirty to get the job done. You don't have to be a business executive. You might just as easily be a criminal ringleader, a high-ranking military officer, a politician, or a handler in an espionage agency.

SYNERGIES An Executive-Academic might be the head of a faculty, while an Executive-Sniper or Executive-Gunfighter could be the leader of a crack commando unit. An Executive-Performer or Executive-Socialite might be a polished politician who knows how to work a crowd.

STACKED TALENTS AND SPECIALIZATIONS

Typically, if more than one talent or specialization provides a bonus to the same test, these benefits stack.

One exception is when such advancements provide multiple opportunities to re-roll a test and keep the second result. If you have more than one opportunity to re-roll, each opportunity beyond the first adds +1 to the result on the Drama Die to your second roll. This both increases your roll (you count this as part of your total) and provides additional stunt points in the event that you roll doubles.

Another exception is when stacked talents and specializations would reduce the cost of a stunt to 0 stunt points. If that happens, the stunt's cost is still 1 SP, but you gain +1 SP to use as you see fit, provided you can perform a stunt in the first place.

EXECUTIVE TALENT

REQUIREMENT: Communication 2 or higher and the Communication (Persuasion) focus.

You claim authority and leadership in an organization.

NOVICE You have experience in negotiating the byways of your organization. You acquire a Membership in a new organization or advance to the next rank with an existing Membership (see the **REWARDS** chapter for details on **Memberships**). You can re-roll any test to access privileges from, or influence members of, the organization behind this acquired or improved Membership, but must keep the results of the second roll.

EXPERT Your authority extends to calling in a subordinate to support you. Once per day you may make a Communication (Persuasion) test. If you succeed, you can call in a subordinate from the organization you chose at the Novice rank to aid you. Use one of the profiles found in the **THREATS** chapter. If your character is level 5-8, this subordinate can be no more than a Minor threat, called at a test TN of 11. If your character is level 9-12, you may choose a Moderate-threat subordinate instead, at a test TN of 13. If your character is level 13 or above, you have the option of a subordinate who's a Major threat in their own right, if you succeed at a TN 15 test. You do not gain the novice re-roll benefit on this test.

MASTER Because you have influence in your organization, you have constant access to resources. Add your Membership rank in the organization to your Income whenever you can call upon your organization. Furthermore, if your Income score decreases, you regain the lost point during the next interlude when you interact with the organization.

GUNFIGHTER

Few can match your skill with a gun. You might be a swashbuckling revolutionary, a talented private soldier, a bodyguard, or a cop. Perhaps you trained your whole life, but maybe it's a knack. Do you regret the lives you've taken, or have you only ever hit the bullseye in virtual simulations? Maybe you've killed, and don't sleep easy—or maybe you sleep just fine, which could be a problem of its own.

SYNERGIES A Gunfighter-Sniper is deadly, taking quiet, patient aim from afar. A Gunfighter-Socialite could be a level-headed duelist or a real show-off. A Gunfighter-Investigator matches keen insight with perfect aim.

GUNFIGHTER TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity 2 and Accuracy 2 or higher.

No one shoots as quickly or as accurately as you.

NOVICE Your accuracy is instinctive. Pick Accuracy (Pistols) or Accuracy (Rifles). You gain a +1 to attack and damage rolls for attacks made using your chosen focus.

EXPERT You're fast and precise. You may pick the other focus from the Novice degree and apply the Novice benefit to it, or improve the bonus for the focus you picked at Novice rank to +2 to your attack and damage rolls.

MASTER You're one with the gun. Choose one of the following stunts: Lightning Attack, Overwatch, Lethal Blow, or Wound. You can perform the chosen stunt for 1 SP less than usual when wielding a firearm. In the case of Overwatch, spending 1 SP gives you the effects of spending 2 SP, and spending 2 SP gives you the 3 SP effect. See **CHAPTER 5** for details on these stunts.

HACKER

For some, computers are opaque, just appliances, but to you they speak a language you understand intimately. For you, code is intuitive, almost lyrical, and you know how to make it sing your own compositions. You might be a digital Robin Hood, breaking into systems to share the secrets of the powerful with desperate people. You could be a security professional instead, keeping other hackers out whether you work for the police or organized crime, or a government "cyber-soldier" specializing in a unique kind of warfare.

SYNERGIES A Hacker-Academic is a true master of information in all its forms. A Hacker-Sniper supple-

ments a keen eye and a steady hand with the technical knowledge necessary to know exactly when and where a target will be. A Hacker-Performer might be able to make some amazing electronic music.

HACKER TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence 2 or higher and the Intelligence (Technology) focus.

You excel at the use and abuse of computer systems.

NOVICE You are skilled in navigating computer systems. Add +1 to Intelligence (Technology) tests.

EXPERT When things go wrong or don't work quite how you want them to, you're skilled in finding backdoors and loopholes. You can perform the High Tech Hustle stunt for 2 SP. In advanced tests involving computer systems, add +1 to your Drama Die roll. This increases your total test result and allows you to complete advanced tests faster.

MASTER Breaking into a system is one thing, but getting in and then out without getting caught is another. While using a computer system, you may perform the Cover Your Tracks stunt for 1 SP. Add another +1 to your Drama Die result while performing advanced tests for a total of +2, otherwise the same as the Expert degree benefit.

INVESTIGATOR

Just as the suspect is leaving, you have "just one more thing" to ask. You see the bead of sweat, the flicker of an eye, and it speaks volumes about their guilt. A room is just as telling as a suspect. A misplaced hair, an unidentified smudge, the angle of a piece of furniture: these things speak to you. You might not be a police investigator; you might just as easily work for a corporation or as a freelancer for whoever can meet your going rate.

SYNERGIES An Investigator-Executive might be a police captain, the head of an Internal Affairs Bureau, or an executive of an investigation agency. An Investigator-Socialite could be a high-class amateur detective. Similarly, an Investigator-Performer might be a well known artist or performer who moonlights solving mysteries.

INVESTIGATOR TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Perception and Intelligence 2 or higher and least one Perception focus.

You're a skilled detective.

NOVICE You can always make a test to unlock a lead, even if you don't have a primary or tangential focus relevant to the investigation, although you take a +2 increase in TN when you don't have either (see **Investigation** in **CHAPTER 5** for details). If you do have a primary or tangential focus for the lead, you get a +1 bonus to the test with a primary focus (in addition to the focus bonus) and no increase in TN for using a tangential focus.

EXPERT The real trick to being a great investigator isn't finding clues, it's knowing how to use them. You may use the Intuition stunt for 1 SP. Furthermore, if you have the primary focus required to unlock a lead, add another +1 to your roll to do so for a total of +2.

MASTER When all the evidence is gathered, you only need a flash of inspiration to put it together and find the solution. You can use the Breakthrough stunt on an investigation for only 3 SP.

MARTIAL ARTIST

To you, close combat is an art, a dance, with a savage beauty you can express through many weapons, from your own body to a flashing sword. Your study of the martial arts could be just a hobby, or it could be an integral part of your training, perhaps as a special forces operative or a secret agent. It might be something you've trained in since you were a child, as part of your heritage.

SYNERGIES A Martial Artist-Thief is a graceful and skilled warrior of the night, while a Martial Artist-Agent could be a spy trained as a living weapon or the deadliest of assassins. A Martial Artist-Gunfighter is dangerous both close up and from afar.

MARTIAL ARTIST TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Fighting 2 or better and at least Novice rank in one hand-to-hand combat style, including Dual Weapon Style, Grappling Style, Overwhelm Style, Self-Defense Style, Single Weapon Style, Striking Style, or Two-Handed Style. Other combat style talents like these may also satisfy this requirement, at the GM's discretion.

You are a master of hand-to-hand combat.

NOVICE When you make a Fighting-based attack roll, add +1 to damage on a successful hit.

EXPERT You have excellent speed and timing. When you perform the Momentum stunt with SP gained from a Fighting attack roll, you gain a bonus to your initiative as

if you spent one more SP than you have. So, if you spend 1 SP, you gain a +6 bonus to initiative; if you spend 2 SP, you gain a bonus of +9.

MASTER You are a master of many close combat techniques. When you perform the Stunt Attack action with a Fighting attack roll, you automatically generate 2 SP.

SNIPER

While the Gunfighter dazzles with speed and accuracy at short range, it's the Sniper who makes the most difficult shots. A Sniper could be an assassin or someone trained in supplying covering fire. Snipers often work for the police, military, security, or some informal militia (often after being drummed out of one of the previous jobs).

SYNERGIES A Sniper-Martial Artist probably has strong opinions about who, what, and how to shoot, while a Sniper-Investigator relentlessly tracks quarry; no more peerless hunter exists.

SNIPER TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Accuracy 3 or better and the Accuracy (Rifles) focus.

You are a crack shot.

NOVICE You know how to quietly set up a decisive shot. If you're hidden from your target, you can re-roll your first Accuracy (Rifles) attack during an encounter, but must keep the results of the second roll.

EXPERT You know how to wait for a perfect shot to present itself. If you use the Aim action for an Accuracy (Rifles) attack, add a bonus to damage equal to the attack roll bonus your Aim provides. This includes any bonus from the Precision Marksmanship stunt.

MASTER You are a deadly shot. When you are using the Accuracy (Rifles) focus, you can perform the Called Shot stunt for 2 SP.

SOCIALITE

If there's a party, you are there, and likely the life of it. You know how to talk to people and get your way with them. It's not about your social class, although that might play a part, or about how much money you've got (although you know how to look like you've got plenty). You've got a magnetic personality and people know you, and want to know you. You might be a corporate mover-and-shaker, a political negotiator, the face of a black market syndicate, or a soulless manipulator but, regardless, you know how to work a room and get people talking.

SYNERGIES A Socialite-Performer could be a well-known artist or simply an arbiter of fashion. On the other hand, the Socialite-Sniper might be a debonair assassin. The Socialite-Hacker can relate to people online as easily as face to face, and can probably mobilize plenty of aid on short notice.

SOCIALITE TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Communication and Perception 2 or higher.

You know people, and how to get what you want from them.

NOVICE Your natural charm causes people to like you. You may perform the On the Fence stunt for 1 SP.

EXPERT When you attempt a detailed social maneuver (see **CHAPTER 5: GAME PLAY**), you require one fewer shift (to a minimum of 1) to succeed. If the situation only requires a simple social maneuver, add +1 to your roll.

MASTER Wherever you go, you fit in with ease. When you interact with people who would have an attitude of Neutral or worse toward you, they automatically shift it one step in your favor. This benefit disappears if subjects feel physically threatened by you or your allies, however.

STAR

You love an audience, and they love you. A bad day might see you booed or savaged in reviews, but you're already a star, one of the best, and your good days bring you the adulations of millions, perhaps even billions. However you captivate your audience, be it music, acting, dance, or rhetoric, you have the talent and skill to be famous and beloved—at least for now.

SYNERGIES A Star-Executive could be a politician with a knack for working a crowd. A Star-Martial Artist performs graceful, acrobatic movements—maybe you're a street dancer or an actor in martial arts movies. A Star-Gunfighter might be a trick shot, while a Star-Thief could be an expert escapologist or stage magician.

STAR TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Communication 2 or higher and the Communication (Performing) focus.

You can sway people with your performance, personal charisma, and fame.

NOVICE When using the Communication (Performing) focus, you may perform the Sway the Crowd stunt for 1 SP.

EXPERT A good performance opens doors, and makes people want to know you. You can perform the Oozing Confidence stunt for 2 SP.

MASTER When you need to, you can pull out all of the stops with a performance. When you attempt a social grand gesture (see **CHAPTER 5: GAME PLAY**), your success threshold for each shift is one less than it would normally be.

THIEF

You've got a knack—some might say a calling—for taking things that don't belong to you. You might work for a government agency, a corporation, or a criminal syndicate, or you may be a solo act motivated by greed, the thrill of the take, sticking it to the rich, or some other goal. Maybe you're a thief because you always have been, or because someone has dirt on you and you don't have a choice.

SYNERGIES A Thief-Performer might be a street entertainer with a knack for picking pockets, or a master of sleight of hand and stage illusion. Meanwhile, a Thief-Academic, whether a relic hunter or a burglar with exquisite taste, knows exactly what to steal. A Thief-Executive might run a criminal network or steal from peers. A Thief-Socialite is the most charming of rogues, a criminal whose tracks vanish under a veneer of genteel charm. A Thief-Gunfighter could be an armed robber or a freedom fighter.

THIEF TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity 2 or higher and the Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) and Dexterity (Stealth) focuses.

You are adept at stealing things and avoiding getting caught.

NOVICE The first thing a skilled thief perfects is the ability to work unnoticed. You add +1 to all tests made with the Dexterity (Stealth) or the Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) focuses. Choose which focus receives this benefit when you attain this degree.

EXPERT When you make a Dexterity test to hide or steal an object, you can re-roll the test if you choose, but must keep the result of the second roll. You become an expert in avoiding suspicion. You may perform the It Wasn't Me stunt for 2 SP.

MASTER Add another +1 to tests using either Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or Dexterity (Stealth), selecting the focus when you attain this degree.

4. TECHNOLOGY & EQUIPMENT

Life beyond Earth would be impossible without technology. It first allowed humans to leave Earth and then establish a foothold in the expanse and survive there. Technology is so omnipresent it sometimes fades into the background—until a simple failure leads to catastrophe, reminding everyone how critical it is.

Technology in the system is full of wonders—expert systems running on ever-more-powerful computers; missing limbs replaced with cybernetic units hardwired to the wearer's nervous system; and vast new ships intended to make the multi-generational trip between the stars. Technology in the system is also old and ubiquitous. The majority of ships are decades old, built using technology that hasn't changed in generations; the majority of stations and colonies, even older. Technology is familiar, reliable, and useful.

The equipment listed in this chapter runs the gamut from weapons and armor to tools and items essential to survival in the expanse. Whether the crew is relying on their vac suits in the event of a hull breach or their weapons to fend off harm, having the right equipment can make the difference between life and death.

GEAR AND EQUIPMENT

Humans are tool-using creatures, and a lot of what constitutes gear or equipment are the various tools and devices we use to make life easier. Although the gear in *The Expanse* has gotten more sophisticated in a number of ways, it still largely serves the same function.

> "Everyone too busy trying to survive to spend any time creating something new."
>
> —*Leviathan Wakes*

ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY

In order to purchase or acquire an item at all, it must first be available, and the character must have access to it. Some items are restricted by legality, either requiring special permits or licensing or being restricted to only active-duty security or military personnel. Other items are restricted by rarity; while you can buy a new hand terminal at almost any station in the system, finding a custom-made item with all of the qualities you want may require you to shop in the right places.

An *Expanse* GM can use access and availability in two ways. First, a GM can prevent the Player Characters from buying something just because they happen to have sufficient Income and are feeling lucky with their next Income test. Feel free to tell them that the item is not available, either at all or in the place where they are looking. The second use of availability is as a story hook. If a PC *really* wants something, dangling an opportunity to get it in front of them is a great way to get the crew involved in a story, and a good way to reward the players if they do well. Even if it's nigh-impossible to buy a suit of military-grade power armor (even on the black market), you can still arrange things in an adventure to give a character a shot at acquiring some, provided they're willing to put up with looking after it.

MAINTENANCE AND UPKEEP

Speaking of looking after things, many of a character's possessions require maintenance and upkeep of one sort or another. Guns need ammo and regular cleaning; armor needs patching and mending; software needs updating and debugging; supplies of medicines and pharmaceuticals need replenishing; and more sophisticated technology needs regular maintenance work, such as the aforementioned power armor. All of this contributes to the character's maintenance workload and the cost of maintaining the character's lifestyle. The more there is, the more involved it gets. GMs should modify the maintenance demands on the crew during interludes based on how much stuff they're hauling around with them, and modify the Cost of their lifestyle as well. See **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5: GAME PLAY** for details.

ITEM QUALITIES AND FLAWS

Not all things are made equally and, much like characters have their focuses and talents, items may have qualities that reflect certain improvements over common items of that type, or they may have flaws, which are drawbacks or problems compared to common items. Being able to afford flawless equipment, much less items of high quality, is a common goal for *Expanse* characters when they are starting out and have to make do with what they have.

As a general guideline, each quality an item has increases its Cost for Income tests to acquire it by +1, while each flaw decreases Cost by –1. The GM decides if a particular quality or flaw can apply to a particular item, as not all of them may be appropriate. If a quality or flaw is limited to a particular type of item, it generally says so in the description. Some special qualities and flaws are listed alongside specific types of items in this chapter as well.

ITEM QUALITIES

DURABLE The item is built to last. Under normal conditions, it lasts twice as long and for tests involving damaging it, it has +2 Toughness.

EFFECTIVE The item works better than a regular item of its type, gaining a +1 bonus to one of its abilities. This could be damage, armor bonus, or some other ability used for outcome or effectiveness but not for tests (see **Fine**, following, for that quality) or a 50% improvement in overall output. A Very Effective item has two qualities and provides a +2 bonus or a 100% improvement.

FAST The item works fast. It takes half the usual time to use a regular item of its type. For something used during action time, the character gains a +2 bonus to initiative when using the item (see **Initiative** in **CHAPTER 5**).

FAVORED STUNT The item is either especially well-suited for performing a particular stunt, granting a –1 SP modifier to its cost, or else the item grants access to a unique stunt the character can perform while wielding or using it. Each favored stunt is a separate quality and an item can have more than one.

FINE The item's quality is such that the character gains a +1 bonus to tests for using or wielding it. Very Fine items have two qualities and provide a +2 bonus.

IMPRESSIVE The item's quality is clearly apparent, providing a +1 bonus to social and roleplaying tests where such things are noteworthy, such as trying to make a good impression while wearing an Impressive outfit or intimidating someone with an Impressive weapon. Very Impressive items have two qualities and provide a +2 bonus.

LIGHT The item is lighter and more compact than normal, reducing any penalty to Dexterity and Speed it normally imposes by 1. Very Light items have two qualities and reduce penalties by 2.

ITEM FLAWS

FRAGILE The item wasn't made to take much punishment. A deliberate attempt to break it always succeeds. Furthermore, when a test to use the item fails and the Drama Die is 3 or less, the item breaks.

HEAVY The item is heavier or bulkier than normal, imposing a –1 penalty to the Dexterity and Speed of a character carrying or wearing it. Very Heavy items have two flaws and impose a –2 penalty to Dexterity and Speed.

INEFFECTIVE The item can't inflict damage as easily as a proper weapon, imposing a –1 or –2 penalty to damage rolls, with a minimum damage roll of 1.

POOR The overall poor quality of the item imposes a –1 penalty to tests using or wielding it. Very Poor items have two flaws and impose a –2 penalty.

SHODDY The item's flaws are glaringly apparent, imposing a –1 penalty to social and roleplaying tests where such things are noteworthy, such as trying to intimidate someone with a Shoddy weapon, or make a good first impression in a Shoddy outfit. The GM may adjust the penalty, depending on the circumstances, but it is always negative.

SLOW The item works, but not fast. It takes twice as much time to use as a regular item of its type. For something that can be used with a major action during action time, a Slow item requires a Ready action after it is used each time to prepare it to be used again.

UNRELIABLE The item works...most of the time. When a test involving the item fails and the Drama Die is a 3 or less, the item stops working. If the item does not require a test to use, the GM should roll 3d6 when the item needs to work. On a total roll of 10 or less where the Drama Die is a 3 or less, the item stops working. Getting an Unreliable item working again takes either an interlude to fix it or, during action time, a TN 13 challenge test with a success threshold of 10 and a time increment of 1 round.

GENERAL EQUIPMENT

Generally, any character with Income above 0 will have at least their own hand terminal and access to a local network unless they are under some kind of restriction (imprisoned, for example). Stationary computer terminals are a part of every ship, workplace, and home, and their quality varies based on where they are found. A new hand terminal is generally an Income TN of 11, but can be higher based on quality and availability.

Most computer-related tests are Intelligence (Technology), although no test is required for routine operation of a terminal to access unrestricted files, search networks, place calls, send messages, and so forth. The GM may apply a modifier to any required test based on the quality of the terminal, the local network, and the character's access.

HAND TERMINAL

Almost everyone has a hand terminal, a palm-sized portable computer used to display information or run programs. Hand terminals have onboard processing and memory, allowing them to run "simple experts" to help organize the user's daily life,

DATA SECURITY

When data is moved around on nearby parts of a network, individual files are manipulated as easily as if they were on the user's local terminal. But when data is moved across a connection where broadcast times are measured in significant fractions of a light-second, users sometimes take the time to assemble data into broadcast packets of related data. Distant or isolated partitions are called drop-sites, often used for long-term storage of data or the passing of data between anonymous users; a "black drop-site" was found running on a terminal and partition attached to an independent power source and mounted with a broadcast array on the exterior of an isolated asteroid. The truly paranoid or security conscious don't trust their data to *any* communications network, maintaining an "air gap" and physically moving it from one place to another on physical media like a hand terminal or memory wafer.

play games and other entertainment software, or let the user read books, listen to music, or watch videos from the network or its internal library. A hand terminal can be used via controls displayed on its touchscreen or through voice recognition, letting the user give it commands in everyday language. Hand terminals are cheap and ubiquitously available, and when one is lost or damaged it is easily replaced and the user's profile reloaded from backup on a partition.

TERMINAL

Other terminals range from portable networked data pads to fixed location terminals set on a desk- or table-top, or mounted on an articulated swing arm at a workstation, particularly on board a ship or station. Terminals can be paired with a stylus used to draw or write on the screen, processed by software able to turn the handwriting into plain text or calligraphy. Users can use gestures to "flick" or throw files across the network to nearby devices, as easily as tossing a physical object. Earbuds or a headset allow a wearer to privately listen to audio feeds or communicate and control the terminal sub-vocally via built-in microphones. Keyboards are available for those who prefer them as a form of input, and many professions have their own unique keyboard layouts, like the programing keyboards preferred by software engineers and hackers. On terminals with a fixed location, like home terminals, privacy baffles can be attached, preventing anyone other than the current user from seeing or interacting with what's on the display. In technical environments, terminals can be attached to smart tables facilitating the collection of data, letting the user view and interact with three-dimensional visualizations of data in real time.

HEADS-UP DISPLAY (HUD)

Many spacesuit helmets include a heads-up display (HUD), projecting visual information onto the wearer's field of vision. This can include anything normally displayed on a terminal, but tends to focus on operational information from helmet camera feeds to data about the suit-wearer's vital signs, or the location of other members of a crew or squad. Tactical information like overview maps or highlighting the positions of enemy combatants are also common HUD displays.

PARTITION

Partitions are portions of computer memory on a device or in a larger archive, and a user typically has access to multiple partitions based on their needs to help keep their data secure. A hand terminal has a device partition on its own hardware, but it can be connected to a family partition on a home terminal, a local partition maintained by a ship, city, or other organization, or even a public partition shared by many users. These partitions can be open or locked with a password, and the files placed into them can similarly be left open or given multiple layers of security.

SOFTWARE

The software on all these devices is simple to use, but more complex in the underlying code. By swapping back and forth among command profiles on a single display, a lone crew member can direct operations for an entire spaceship up to and sometimes including crisis situations or combat. This is greatly due to the rise of expert systems which can be called upon to perform with inhuman skill in their specified task.

These systems began with simple pattern recognition, ancestors to the systems that can identify ships by merging telescope, radar, and infrared heat data to verify radioed transponder codes. Encryption and decryption systems help keep voice and data traffic secure from uninvited parties. Multiple expert systems make up the targeting packages on board military vessels, gathering telemetry, filtering it to identify targets and their capabilities, helping the user select and prioritize targets, and firing the best available weapons to meet the desired combat solution, letting humans focus on tactical decisions rather than their implementation. Medical expert systems serve as auto-docs, allowing users to provide medical care as easily as operating a terminal.

Expert systems can generate identity masks for communications, injecting convincing artificial voices and dialects in place of the originals. Larger processing arrays, like those onboard military vessels or in major outposts, run expert systems as gel software on biologic networks that can grow back after combat damage or route around permanently damaged segments (though errors or chance mutations can cause the system to grow incorrectly and require it to be completely replaced in order to restore system capacity).

NETWORKS

All these devices and systems communicate via a constantly shifting network of connections. Every element has its own network address, identifying it so commands and data can be transmitted to and from it no matter where it connects. Sometimes these elements are part of a simple local network, such as a hand terminal paired with its earbuds or a family's closed network of home terminals, and keeping them isolated is a simple matter. As soon as an element of the network is connected to a network bridge or an open comm array, it becomes part of a larger network. Passwords, magnetic security cards, and biometric locks are common security measures, as are simple expert systems for networks with sufficient processing power. But hackers and the powerful expert systems employed by governments and corporations are formidable enough to penetrate nearly any connected network given access and time, so those who truly have data to hide do their best to keep it disconnected from the larger information networks of the solar system.

Given the physical isolation experienced by ships in the depths of space and the small populations of most established communities, most people are happy to keep a network connection open to communicate with others at a distance. The public network is made up of a seemingly infinite number of information feeds, from Martian planetary news feeds to entertainment feeds of live music and commentary. Some are open feeds intended for a broad audience, while others are "narrowcasts" created for a specific audience and sometimes limited to only those who have the password or paid for access. Some feeds allow users to participate, welcoming them into discussion groups or singles circles for those seeking romantic relationships. When bandwidth becomes a concern, feeds can limit themselves to audio- or text-only content. It can be an overwhelming amount of information, so many terminals come preinstalled with simple feed managers to help curate feeds and offer only the content of the user's choice. The user's personal correspondence comes via feed connections as

INFORMATION ACCESS

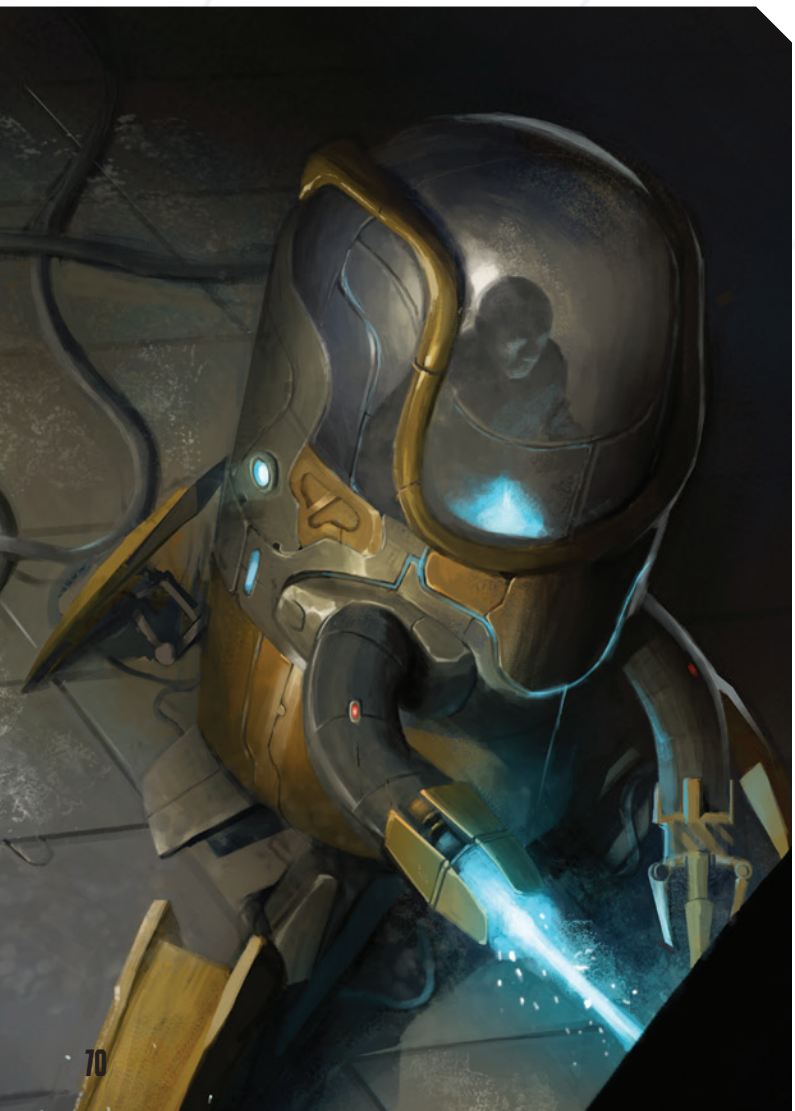
One of the aspects of *The Expanse* setting is access to a *lot* of information: Anyone with a hand terminal can look up anything publicly available on the local network, and communicate with anyone publicly connected to that network. The Game Master is advised to keep these things in mind when it comes to creating challenges for the crew. Answering simple questions and finding people who are not deliberately trying to hide is as easy as asking. That said, some information is restricted, or only available from another network with a significant light-speed transmission delay, and there are plenty of times when you don't want anyone else to know you're looking into something. Also, information isn't everything: Just because you can look up the schematics of a fusion reactor doesn't mean you can use them to shut the reactor down in a crisis in time to prevent it from going super-critical. There are lots of situations where access to information is no substitute for knowledge, training, and experience.

well, and feed managers help ensure they don't miss important communications—and can block unwelcome messages and flag high-priority or secure connections.

Like all forms of communication, networks are limited by the speed of light in transmitting and receiving data. On board a ship, station, or on a planet or moon, this delay is too brief to be noticed, but it can extend to hours out in the system. Therefore, network software tends to queue data-traffic for transmission whenever there is an opportunity, updating the local network data as transmissions are received. See **Communications**, following, and **System Communication and Travel Times** in **CHAPTER 6** for additional information.

COMMUNICATIONS

The actual communications connections between devices are often simple radio, though feeds broadcast this way are open to anyone with an antenna listening at the proper frequency. Private communications require laser arrays for tightbeam transmissions only receivable where the laser is aimed. The greater the distance between sender and receiver, the harder it is to keep the broadcast laser focused. To keep the broadcast laser as tight as possible across enormous distances, equally enormous and powerful comm lasers like the one aboard Tycho Station must be used. Tightbeam transmissions also require knowledge of the target's position, speed, and trajectory.



To help tightbeams maintain coherence, relays are set up across the solar system to receive a transmission laser, then rebroadcast it toward the intended recipient. Though these relay services work hard to maintain the trust of those who use them, corporations and intelligence agencies maintain private relays with onboard drop-sites, moving in orbits unknown to anyone but their owners and requiring not just the encryption keys necessary for communication but knowledge of the relay's exactly position in order to beam a message at it.

DRONES AND MECHS

Drones are semi-autonomous vehicles, most commonly small aerostats with propellers that allow them to hover and fly like helicopters in an atmosphere, or micro-thrusters that let them "teakettle" maneuver in microgravity, with or without an atmosphere. Some drones are ground-bound, using either tracked or wheeled drives or multiple robotic legs to maneuver. Those designed for microgravity have magnetic adhesion, much like a vac suit's boots. Drones are equipped with on-board computers and expert systems, allowing them to handle some simple tasks on their own, but most are remote controlled from a terminal, with the operator making Dexterity (Piloting) or Intelligence (Technology) tests to operate the drone.

Drones are useful for surveillance, relying on their small size and maneuverability to record sensor data or send back live

feeds. They can also easily go into areas too tight or hazardous for people, either to gather information or to perform minor repairs or similar operations. Of course, these tasks can just as easily include sabotage. Drones may be equipped with weapons dependent on their size. A small drone is capable of carrying a weapon about as lethal as a pistol, although drone weapons are often designed to do stunning damage (see **Stunning Weapons** later in this chapter). See the **THREATS** chapter for an example of a larger drone equipped for combat and security work.

Mechs are bulky exoskeletons, offering no actual life support but amplifying the wearer's strength considerably. Mechs range from a simple arrangement strapped over the user's shoulders, with mechanical, articulated arms, to an egg-shaped open cage with the wearer strapped into its center, equipped with four articulated limbs. These provide stability and utility, as each limb ends in a foot that can be rotated back to deploy a variety of cutting and welding tools. Mechs also have tether points where crew-mates can connect themselves to be carried to and from a labor site, and where loads of parts, salvage, or ore can be stowed.

Construction and labor mechs provide a substantial Strength bonus (usually +10), which affects Strength (Might) tests. Full-sized mechs are equivalent to vehicles, with their own Speed, and offer a measure of cover to someone strapped in, generally enough for a +2 armor bonus. See **Vehicles in Combat** in **CHAPTER 5** for additional useful guidelines for these types of mechs.

LIFE SUPPORT

Surviving exposure to the void of space for more than a moment requires a spacesuit of some kind, making such life support equipment essential and common everywhere outside of Earth's gravity well.

ENVIRONMENT SUITS

The cheapest and most common spacesuit is the hooded environment suit, found by the dozen in emergency lockers on every ship and station. The thin plastic suits are airtight and have integrated short-duration air bladders with rebreathers, but provide little radiation shielding and are prone to tearing. Environment suits are designed to help wearers survive in an area of failing life support long enough for rescue or repair, although in extreme emergencies they have been used for treks across the surface of Mars and asteroids in the Belt in search of shelter.

VAC SUITS

Heavier vac suits have corrugated joints connecting hardened plastic segments, helmets with thick transparent faceplates, and connections for separate air-supply units. Despite vac suits' bulk, regular wearers complain they're poorly insulated for use in space. They do have integrated magnetic boots and communications rigs, along with water tanks and food supplies running to dispensers inside the helmet. They're also easy to repair, with some vac suits passed down from one generation to another among Belter mining families.

FORM-FITTING SUITS

More expensive, modern spacesuits are as light as the riot gear worn by law enforcement and just as tough, with heating and cooling systems sewn into a body sleeve worn beneath the impact-resistant segments of the outer shell. Also in the inner sleeve is a sensor network that provides data for a medical data feed shown on a HUD inside the helmet, as well as to other members of the wearer's team. The suit gathers information from environmental sensors in the outer shell to monitor temperature, radiation, and local atmospheric conditions, projected on the HUD alongside overlays of technical specs for a ship's maintenance crew, or geological survey data for a scientific scouting team. Display of this data along with other suit systems is manipulated via chin controls, as well as blinks and other eye movement. The most expensive suits are custom-sized and tailored for their wearers.

SUIT ACCESSORIES

Nearly any suit can be customized in lesser ways to meet the needs of the wearer or the task. Exterior spotlights or wrist-mounted flashlights provide more illumination. For longer missions, additional water or food supplies can be attached in belt packs, as can an emergency first aid kit packed with drugs like adrenaline or amphetamines to supplement simple painkiller tabs dispensed in the helmet. Versatile tether ports on a suit's belt or back can be used to simply secure the

wearer to a fixed point so they can't accidentally drift away, or they can be the attachment point for cables providing a constant feed of suit consumables or a shielded communications line immune to local jamming or radiation interference. Vac suits have simple thruster-packs for spacewalks, and some Belters even use them to "hop" from one dig to another. Thrusters are controlled by an on-board computer that calculates trajectories and use of reaction mass, making most short trips relatively easy and safe.

TOOLS

Lots of jobs, particularly technical ones, require various tools and characters make use of portable toolkits and in-place workshops to get their jobs done. Tools are necessary for tests involving the following focuses: Communication (Disguise), Dexterity (Crafting), and Intelligence (Demolitions, Engineering, Research, or Technology). Without the necessary tools, characters cannot easily perform tasks involving those focuses; it's hard to create a disguise out of nothing and harder still to repair a reactor or hack a network without the right equipment!

TOOL QUALITIES AND FLAWS

Normally, tools simply enable characters to perform their associated tasks but, like other equipment, good tools may have certain qualities and poor or makeshift tools may have certain flaws, affecting how useful those tools are. So an engineer with a Fine and Effective workshop has a better chance of success and creates more effective work, while a spy making do with a Slow and Shoddy disguise kit takes longer to prepare and has a penalty in terms of carrying out the deception.

WEAPONS

Although humans have continued to refine tools for killing each other, many of the essential qualities of weapons used in the system have remained the same for centuries. Although weapons are often regulated in settled or populated areas, out in the expanse, it is usually wise to have a weapon close at hand.

CLOSE WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

While many view close combat weapons as archaic, the truth is that sometimes cracking heads up close and personal is how things get done. Most modern close combat weapons tend to be batons and similar things wielded by security, or simple knives or shivs used (and often made) by those with nothing else available. The most common close combat weapon remains the empty hand or closed fist, and characters with the Self-Defense Style and Striking Style talents have some advantages in unarmed combat (see **CHAPTER 3**).

LIGHT WEAPONS

Light weapons tend to be quick and easy to wield, lending themselves to a fast and agile fighting style. They include things like batons or similar short clubs, knives and short or light blades, light staff weapons (like the bo staff), knuckle-dusters like brass knuckles, and so forth. Light weapons can add either the wielder's Dexterity or Strength score as a modifier to damage, depending on how they're wielded.

HEAVY WEAPONS

Heavy weapons rely much more on strength to wield, ranging from a sledgehammer or other heavy tool to literally "getting medieval" on an opponent with a heavy sword, axe, or similar weapon. Heavy weapons do more damage, but are limited to adding the wielder's Strength score as a damage bonus, since finesse is not a part of their style.

MAKESHIFT WEAPONS

Characters sometimes use objects not intended or designed for combat as makeshift weapons, ranging from a piece of construction rebar to a tool case or a heavy mug from a galley. When a character uses a makeshift weapon, the GM may apply one or more of the following flaws: Fragile, Ineffective, or Poor. See **Item Qualities** and **Flaws** earlier in this chapter for details.

STUNNING WEAPONS

Some weapons are designed specifically to incapacitate without wounding their targets, particularly useful for security personnel or even civilians, as stunning weapons tend to be permitted for personal defense more than lethal weaponry. They include things like stun-guns and tasers, which use charges of electricity, or close range chemical weapons like mace or pepper spray.

As a general guideline, a stunning weapon does penetrating damage (see **Penetrating Damage** in **CHAPTER 5**) but inflicts one die less damage than a comparable lethal weapon, so tasers do 1d6 damage versus a pistol's 2d6, for example. A target taken out by the damage from a stunning weapon cannot have the dying condition applied to them, since such weapons aren't lethal. See **Taken Out** under **Applying Damage** in **CHAPTER 5** for more.

RANGED WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

Various forms of slug-throwers, using chemical propellants to fire projectiles, remain the standard ranged weapons. Although guns in *The Expanse* can use caseless ammo with its own accelerant to be fired in a vacuum, modern composite materials, and on-board chips for systems management, a gun is still a gun.

RANGED WEAPON QUALITIES

In addition to the regular qualities listed for equipment under **Item Qualities and Flaws**, ranged weapons can have the following:

ARMOR PIERCING The weapon's rounds reduce the Toughness bonus of worn armor by –2 in terms of reducing their damage. Unfortunately, armor-piercing rounds also have the ability to punch through vacuum-sealed bulkheads, so a missed attack with one on a spaceship or station near an outside wall may cause a hull breach. Roll 1d6; on a roll of 1 or 2, a breach occurs and the air begins rushing out of the compartment. See the **THREATS** chapter for details on suffocation hazards.

AUTOMATIC The weapon reloads and fires automatically so long as its trigger is depressed. This makes the weapon capable of performing stunts with the (Automatic) quality on the **Gun Stunts** table in **CHAPTER 5**.

HIGH CAPACITY The weapon carries a substantial amount of ammunition. Ignore the first roll indicating the weapon has run out of ammo (see **Weapon Capacity**, following).

LONG RANGE The weapon's effective ranges are doubled. See **Range** under **Making Attacks** in **CHAPTER 5** for details.

SPREADING The weapon fires a spreading cone of pellets, shot, or similar small ammunition, like a shotgun. It does one die less damage, but can hit all targets within a roughly 30-degree angle in front of the shooter.

TRACER The weapon fires rounds that glow, leaving visible trails (tracers) behind. A tracer weapon allows the user to take the Aim action as a free action so long as the weapon was fired on the previous round (see **Aim** under **Minor Actions** in **CHAPTER 5**).

TRANQUILIZER A tranquilizer or tranq weapon fires a hypodermic dart preloaded with a dose of a drug, usually a powerful tranquilizer to knock out its target. The dart won't penetrate any armor, but if it hits an unarmored target, the character must make a TN 13 Constitution (Tolerance) test or become unconscious. A successful test means the character is only fatigued.

PISTOLS

Pistols are single-grip ranged weapons, usually semi-automatic slug-throwers. Cheap, second-hand, or makeshift pistols of the sort commonly traded on the black market usually have various flaws like Ineffective, Poor, Shoddy, or Unreliable, while higher-quality—usually security or military-grade—pistols have qualities like Durable, Effective, Fine, or Impressive.

Most slug-throwers in *The Expanse* fire ammo designed to flatten against rigid targets to prevent possible hull breaches on board ships and stations.

TASER A taser is a stunning pistol (see **Stunning Weapons**, previously) that fires a pair of darts that carry a powerful electrical charge that inflicts penetrating damage, but can only incapacitate the target.

RIFLES

Rifles are double-grip ranged weapons, usually semi-automatic slug-throwers like pistols, with similar qualities and flaws for high- and low-end models. Shotguns have the Spreading quality. Military-grade rifles may also have the Automatic quality, while sniper rifles have a Long Range quality that doubles their effective range.

THROWN WEAPONS

Characters can throw a variety of weapons, including many light close combat weapons such as knives, heavy close combat weapons designed to be thrown like spears, and light weapons designed strictly for throwing like Japanese *shuriken*. Most thrown weapons in *The Expanse* tend to be makeshift weapons, using whatever is at hand and not fastened down (see **Makeshift Weapons**, previously) but some characters do still carry and use throwing weapons.

WEAPONS

WEAPON	DAMAGE	COST
Light Close	1d6 + Str or Dex	6
Heavy Close	2d6 + Str	7
Pistol	2d6 + Per	10
Rifle	3d6 + Per	12
Grenade	3d6 (2 meter radius)	15

WEAPON CAPACITY

Guns have limited amounts of ammunition and are subject to mechanical problems like jamming. In game play, rather than having to track every round fired, you can use the following guideline to handle things like misfires, jams, and running out of ammo.

When an attack with a gun misses and the number on the Drama Die is a 6, then the weapon has jammed or run out of ammo. Reloading the gun or clearing the problem takes a minor action. The Rapid Reload stunt can reduce this time, as can some talents.

The GM can also have a gun jam or run out of ammo as a minor effect of the Churn and additionally say the weapon cannot be cleared or reloaded (because the character has no more ammo) as a major effect. See **The Churn** in the **GAME MASTERING** chapter for additional details.

GRENADES AND EXPLOSIVES

Unlike attacks with ranged weapons that must be aimed, you don't need to score a direct hit on a target with a grenade or other explosive device, just get close enough to catch them in the blast.

> "The mechanic had laid out two suits of their Martian-made light combat armor, a number of rifles and shotguns, and stacks of ammunition and explosives.
> "What," Holden said, "is all this?"
> "You said to gear up for the drop."
> "I meant, like, underwear and toothbrushes."
>
> —*Cibola Burn*

GRENADES

Grenades are thrown weapons with a range of 10 + Strength meters. Use the Ready action to have the grenade in your hand, and then you can take a Ranged Attack action to throw it. Grenade launchers load and fire grenades automatically with the range of a rifle and don't require a Ready action, but they're subject to running out of grenades or jamming, as described under **Weapon Capacity**.

A grenade attack is a TN 11 Accuracy (Thrown) test, modified for difficult throws at the GM's discretion. Success means the grenade lands and detonates where you intended, but failure means the grenade lands up to 1d6 meters away in a direction of the GM's choosing, and *then* explodes. Grenades affect everything and everyone within 5 meters of the explosion, dealing damage and any additional effects.

You can use action stunts with grenade attacks. Each stunt can affect only one target, but you need not assign all stunts to the same target. If you catch two foes in the blast of a grenade and generate 4 SP, for example, you could use Overcome Toughness on one foe and Knock Prone on the other.

EXPLOSIVES

Handling other types of explosives like demolition or breaching charges is generally an Intelligence (Demolitions) test, with the difficulty based on the task being performed and the Drama Die result determining the effectiveness of the outcome. So setting a charge to blow through a bulkhead door might require a TN 11 test, for example, with a 6 on the Drama Die meaning a perfect execution while a 1 means the door is just barely breached and might need an extra round to push open.

ARMOR

ARMOR

ARMOR TYPE	ARMOR BONUS	ARMOR PENALTY	COST
Padding	+1	0	8
Light armor	+2	–1	12
Medium armor	+4	–2	14
Heavy armor	+6	–3	16
Power armor	+12	0	*

SHIELD TYPE	DEFENSE BONUS	COST
Riot shield	+2	13
Ballistic shield	+3	14

** Not available for purchase*

When expecting combat, characters may make use of protective armor, although wearing armor also sends a signal that you *are* expecting a fight. While padding or light armor may escape notice, especially in the rough-and-tumble places of the Belt, medium and heavy armor tend to be restricted to military, police, and security personnel on-duty and, even then, to personnel who are prepared for a fight. Waltzing onto the docks of a station in full armor is sure to get station security wondering what kind of trouble you are expecting—or looking for.

ARMOR DESCRIPTIONS

Armor in *The Expanse* has two traits: its **armor bonus**, which is an increase in the wearer's Toughness, and an **armor penalty**, which represents the armor's bulk and restriction and applies as a penalty to a character's Dexterity-based tests and Speed. The **Armor** table lists all this, and also lists the usual Income target number to purchase that type of armor. Note that most armor above ballistic cloth may be restricted to military and licensed security personnel and thus only available on the black market to anyone lacking membership in those groups. Medium and heavy armor (to say nothing of power armor) can draw unwanted attention, especially in heavily populated areas.

ARMOR QUALITIES & FLAWS

Qualities particular to armor in *The Expanse* include Effective (increased armor bonus), Impressive, and Light (reduced armor penalty). Common armor flaws include Heavy, Poor, and Shoddy, reducing the armor's overall effectiveness.

PADDING

This is any kind of heavy or thick material a character wears that can serve as armor, such as heavy leather or similar artificial material. An ordinary vac suit provides padding as well. Lacking the benefits of engineered anti-ballistic or impact-absorbing materials, padding tends to be fairly bulky and obvious, and of only limited benefit.

LIGHT ARMOR

Light body armor is made from modern anti-ballistic materials intended to stop bullets and other weapons from penetrating to minimize damage. It is similar in weight to a light jacket or lined jumpsuit, and thus fairly easy to wear without drawing a great deal of notice.

MEDIUM ARMOR

Bullet-resistant chest- and thigh-plates strapped over light armor and a helmet with a reinforced face plate provide medium armor, usually limited to security forces expecting a riot or on a raid where they expect violent resistance, or military personnel on security detail.

HEAVY ARMOR

Heavy armor used by soldiers and security forces for combat duty is a layered affair of a body sheath of multiple layers of anti-ballistic material, impact gel, and an integrated medical sensor net capable of injecting the wearer with painkillers, amphetamines, or anti-nausea medications as needed. On top of that goes a pressure-rated environment suit infused with self-sealing gel to close any knife or bullet punctures and maintain atmosphere. Finally, they add strap-on armor plating. Helmets have a built-in communications network, and officers can be equipped with a command terminal, letting their HUD show medical readouts from members of their squad as well as maps and other tactical overlays.

SHIELDS

Shields are essentially hand-held cover against attacks, providing the user with a bonus to Defense, rather than an armor rating. Any attack that misses the character due to the Defense bonus can be assumed to have glanced off the shield.

RIOT SHIELD A small body shield, usually made of an anti-ballistic and impact-resistant polymer. Riot shields are commonly transparent, so as not to obstruct the user's field of vision.

BALLISTIC SHIELD A larger and heavier shield sufficient to crouch behind for cover, typically with a transparent viewing slit made of riot shield material. Ballistic shields are intended for cover in heavier fire, particularly for security needing to remain in place rather than seek cover elsewhere.

POWER ARMOR

One of the most fearsome sights on the battlefield is military power armor, like the *Goliath* suits worn by Martian Marines. Two and a half meters tall and weighing 400 kilograms even before a soldier climbs inside, power armor provides both a formidable offense and defense. Half armor and half spacesuit, the armor has radiation shielding sufficient to let soldiers walk through a nuclear bomb crater minutes after the blast. The armor's titanium and ceramic-composite exterior shielding is typically painted with camouflage patterns appropriate to the assignment, and enemies are often surprised just how well an enormous soldier in power armor can blend into the environment when they stand still.

The armor's hydraulics system magnifies the wearer's strength, much like a mech rig, and carries most of the weight of the suit, allowing soldiers in power armor to undertake marathon hikes and move surprisingly fast. They also enable the armor to carry heavy weaponry, typically a rotary machine gun and sometimes a grenade launcher or micro-missile pack. Sensor packages feed data to the wearer on the helmet's HUD, allowing them to identify and track infrared targeting lasers used by opponents' weapons, and even visually parse those weapons using the suit's camera feeds to match them against an internal database. Those same cameras monitor in all directions, sending feeds back to squad officers and their military command center, which can monitor the life signs of both the soldiers and opponents who have been detected and attacked.

Despite all these capabilities, power armor is still designed for maneuverability in tight spaces, enabling infantry to move in microgravity and storm their way through the narrow confines of ships. Less so is a newer addition to the Martian arsenal: 4-meter tall, 9-ton combat mechs, walking tanks carrying rail guns and missiles adapted from ship weapon systems. They are strictly ground-assault troops, and there are few installations or opponents able to stand against them for long.

In *The Expanse* game terms, power armor grants the wearer the following:

ARMOR +12 armor bonus with no armor penalty, so long as the armor is operational.

PHYSICAL ENHANCEMENT +10 effective bonus to Strength and Strength (Might) tests.

MOBILITY ENHANCEMENT +2 bonus to Speed and +4 bonus to Constitution (Endurance) tests.

WEAPONRY An integral rifle doing 3d6 + Perception damage and capable of performing automatic weapon gun stunts. May also have grenade or missile systems doing 3d6 damage in a 5 meter radius.

CAMOUFLAGE PACKAGE +2 bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) tests compatible with the unit's camouflage.

SENSORS +2 bonus to Perception tests where the armor's sensor package applies.

LIFE SUPPORT All of the benefits of a vac suit (see **Vac Suits** under **Life Support**, previously).

If power armor loses power, it becomes massive deadweight, effectively leaving the wearer restrained and unable to use any of the armor's systems.

Power armor requires regular maintenance activities during interludes to remain in full working order (see **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5**).

EQUIPMENT LIST

ITEM	COST
ARMOR	
Padding	8
Light Armor	12
Medium Armor	14
Heavy Armor	16
DATA	
Hand Terminal	8
Heads-up Display	10
Virtual Display	12
DRONES AND MECHS	
Small Drone	14
Shoulder Mech	15
Construction Mech	16
LIFESTYLE*	
Impoverished	8
Basic	11
Middle Class	13
Affluent	16
Wealthy	19
Rich	21
Very Rich	24
LIFE SUPPORT	
Environment Suit	9
Vac Suit	11
Form-fitting Suit	13
MEDICINE	
Medications	11**
Medical Treatment	13**
Limb or organ replacement	15**
TOOLS	
Tool Kit	8
Workshop	10
WEAPONS	
Close Light Weapon	6
Close Heavy Weapon	7
Throwing Weapon (set of 4–6)	6
Pistol	10
Rifle	12
Grenade	15

*No income test needed if the character's income is in the lifestyle's bracket.
**These costs may be up to 3–4 more for advanced treatments.

INCOME AND LIFESTYLE

As detailed in **CHAPTER 2**, *Expanse* characters have an Income rating measuring their overall financial resources and buying power. In the System, most financial transactions are handled electronically, and most credits—the standard of currency—are recorded and stored online as well. Of course, there are still instances where forms of "hard" currency are in use, such as bearer bonds, bank notes, or corporate script. Some of a character's assets may also be tied up in property or trade goods of various sorts. Different governments, and even corporations, issue their own currency as well and exchange rates are set by various market factors. Barter is also still in use on the fringes of civilization. Among other things, barter, trade, and hard currency do not leave data trails and transaction records, which is important to some individuals.

Generally, the ins and outs of various means of exchange in *The Expanse* are background color, to be used by the players and the GM to liven up descriptions and perhaps explain things like momentary "shortages" when an Income check fails, or prices unexpectedly climb. The GM can also use these elements as key parts of a story, such as tracking down transactions made entirely in hard currency, a sudden surge in counterfeit currency on a station or settlement, bargains struck in currencies other than standard credits, or the crew's reward turning out to be corporate script or some other asset rather than a direct credit deposit to their accounts. How do they convert their newfound resources into easily spendable credit without losing too much of its value? You can use the Selling Things guidelines in **CHAPTER 2** for these situations.

LIFESTYLE

A character's Income ensures a certain lifestyle, the ability to live at a particular level of accommodation, diet, entertainment, and common "household" possessions and comforts. Lifestyle is largely determined by Income score, as given in **CHAPTER 2** and described here.

IMPOVERISHED (INCOME –2 TO 0)

The character's circumstances are fairly difficult, involving cramped, often makeshift living arrangements and scavenging for even necessities like food and clean water. Spending on anything else is pretty much out of the question, although some people at this level find ways to acquire drugs or alcohol to numb their situation. If a character spends more than a month in this lifestyle, the GM may impose an ongoing fatigued condition—and the inability to recover from it—to reflect the rigors of it.

BASIC (INCOME 1 TO 2)

This is the subsistence level of much of Earth's population, consisting of a small apartment or the equivalent for housing, essential nutrition provided by bulk foodstuffs that don't vary much in quality or flavor, and access to online entertainment and information channels and a steady, if not lavish, supply of legal recreational drugs. Clothing is pre-fabricated and as utilitarian as everything else. Getting around is limited to public transportation and personal possessions are few and far between.

MIDDLE CLASS (INCOME 3 TO 5)

A modest lift out of the doldrums of Basic to an Income level where some personalization of one's lifestyle is possible. This includes slightly better or larger living quarters, maybe in a better area of the character's choice, a greater variety of food with the possibility of occasionally patronizing restaurants, and some personal possessions of significance. Owning a vehicle outside of one required for work is still relatively rare.

AFFLUENT (INCOME 6 TO 8)

A noticeable amount of creature comforts, what people at the Impoverished or Basic levels think of as luxury, including possibly owning a house or some land or the equivalent in a dome or station

off-Earth, a varied diet including a number of fresh foods, and little, if any, concern over small day-to-day purchases. The character can afford to enjoy regular entertainment, from nights-out to catered nights-in; albeit not *every* night, but easily a few times a month, maybe with the occasional trip or vacation in there.

WEALTHY (INCOME 9 TO 10)

Most of the expenses that concern Middle Class and lower people don't worry the Wealthy at all. They have sufficient Income or expense accounts to largely live where they want, to eat what they want when they want it, and to enjoy most of what the world has to offer. At this level, a personal vehicle of some kind is common, and Wealthy characters may even have multiple homes, or one fairly lavish one.

RICH (INCOME 11 TO 13)

The truly Rich concern themselves with very little, except the opinions and goodwill of their peers (if that). This Income ensures personal quarters that would accommodate multiple families on Basic, and luxuries they could not afford with more than a year's Income. The Rich have all of the benefits of the Wealthy and then some, including perhaps some significant quasi-legal ones.

VERY RICH (INCOME 14 OR GREATER)

It's difficult for lower-Income characters to entirely conceive of this lifestyle, which often throws away and recycles more than the lower level lifestyles have. Characters living the Very Rich lifestyle live in mansions or even palaces (or their equivalent), usually with a staff of personnel to attend to their needs. They move freely using personal vehicles, including their own orbital lifters and spacecraft.

MAINTENANCE

Of course, for most characters, Income is not self-maintaining. It requires a regular amount of work in order to maintain an Income, and often a great deal of work to improve it by any significant amount. Even the Wealthy must usually devote some time to the management of their various assets, overseeing (if not directly running) their business interests, keeping up important connections, and so forth.

LIVING ABOVE YOUR MEANS

Generally, characters who maintain their Income can live at its lifestyle level indefinitely without any need for a test so long as they put in the work, barring some misfortune. Still, there are those occasions when a character wants or needs something that's routinely beyond their reach, either a specific purchase or just an opportunity to enjoy a taste of the good life (or, at least, a better life). When characters look to live above their means, use the following guidelines.

1. The character makes an Income check with a difficulty of the minimum Income for the increase lifestyle +9. So, for example, a character wanting to gain a benefit of the Affluent lifestyle would test Income against TN 15 (9 + the minimum Income for Affluent).
2. This success depletes the character's Income, as described under **Depleting Income** in **CHAPTER 2**. Thus, living above their means for any length of time will rapidly decrease a character's Income.
3. If the test succeeds, the character gains the benefit of that lifestyle, whether it is a lavish party, a personal item (ranging from a piece of jewelry or clothing to personal electronics or a household item), or a temporary improvement in living conditions.

Since living above your means depletes your Income, it may mean the character's lifestyle for the following month drops. For example, if Income is depleted from 6 to 5, the character drops from the Affluent to Middle Class lifestyle. This may mean some belt-tightening until the character's Income recovers. If the character wants to maintain the higher lifestyle, then that's another Income test, which further depletes Income, leading to a potentially rapid decline.

At the GM's discretion, a short-term windfall (see the **REWARDS** chapter) may temporarily grant the benefits of living at a higher lifestyle until the windfall is depleted and the character returns to the regular lifestyle level determined by their Income.

FOOD

Food is a constant human need and complex biologicals originate only on Earth, although humanity has adapted. The simplest foodstuffs are wheat pastes mixed with honey or spices for flavor and dried fruit for texture. These are familiar to anyone who has tongued them out of a helmet-tube while working in an environment suit, but also available to those looking for nothing more than the simplest of fuels for their body. Equally infamous is the Martian Navy's "slop," a heated high-protein, high-carb food mix. Textured proteins derived from soy and mushrooms take all kinds of forms from fake eggs to fake cheese and fake bacon to fake steak. Belters are used to different kinds of "kibble," protein pellets or crumbles with seasonings and flavor sauces, or versions of noodle bowls or similar food.

> Now that the OPA ran Ceres, there were also other options. Dhejet and egg curry, cow-style noodle bowl, red kibble. The foods of her childhood. Belter foods.
>
> *—Nemesis Games*

Better food is available, but its price scales with its quality. Vat-grown meat is said to be as good as the real thing—though few truly believe it. Microgravity fish farms produce shrimp, salmon, and other seafood well suited for microgravity. Hydroponic rigs are common, from family-scale up to the industrial, but fresh strawberries still command a fair price. Mushrooms and myco-proteins are a staple, easily grown and fertilized with organic waste. Among the rarest of foods is real cheese, worth more per ounce than precious metals out in the Belt, leading to a thriving black market.

DRINKS

Beverages vary just as much as food, both in type and quality. A common late-night argument is whether or not it's truly safe to drink ice-melt straight from Saturn, but the debate doesn't keep Belter miners from doing it when needed. Others prefer the water after it's been run through their particular local set of filters. Those who claim a particularly refined sense of taste seek out pricy water with clarity and taste improved through lengthy filtration and remineralization, using tweaked versions of the same systems used to provide precise water-mineral balance to high-end hydroponics.

> "Right," Holden said. "No coffee. This is a terrible, terrible planet."
>
> *—Cibola Burn*

Even if they are indifferent about water, everybody has their preferences when it comes to liquor. Nearly every ship and station where the rules allow (and most where they can be bent) has stills and distilleries turning out a wide variety of beer and wine from cheap and terrible to surprisingly good. Drinks like fungal-culture whiskey started as desperate experiments and exploded into full-grown industries, and tweaks to recipes for pseudotequila and cheap Belter scotch are regularly traded while passing bottles of the end product.

HOUSING

A "hole" on Mars. A "cabin" on an ice freighter headed toward Saturn. A "common" on a mining family's ship out past Anderson Station. There are an infinite variety of places space-going humanity calls home, but they have much in common.

SPACE

First and foremost, every cubic meter of space humans make into a home has to be claimed from a hostile environment and then defended from it. On a planet like Mars or a planetoid like Ceres, these spaces are mined out from solid rock and their walls sealed with a coating of plastic, tunnels off of tunnels in the warrens making up those habitats. On ships the walls are metal, often with the ship's water tanks just beyond providing the radiation shielding that rock does planetside. Both rock and metal walls seal in a critical bubble of air. Of course, as the saying goes, "The only place air's free is Earth." Simple greenery like snake plants and devil's ivy are common in many homes, staples of first-generation air recycling schemes now kept as good luck charms by those hoping for the most efficient use of expensive air consumed by the home.

AMENITIES

Once claimed, a space can be made into a home. Full-spectrum LEDs provide any level of illumination from candlelight to sunlight, and can be programmed to a custom cycle of day, night, and mood lighting. Most standard designs have a tiny shower, toilet, and half-sink crammed into a tight corner, not only for space efficiency but to make it easier for water vapor to

be reclaimed from the air, and allowing the remaining volume to be divided up however the inhabitant desires. Sometimes utility channels allow wiring and ductwork to be hidden beyond the walls, but just as often it is attached to and painted the same color as the ceiling. For a touch of comfort or luxury, rock or metal surfaces can be given a veneer of wood-textured laminate or even a thin layer of real wood; lodge-pole pine has proven the most robust variety for growth in low gravity. Shipboard, when multiple travelers or crew share quarters, each still tends to have their own pressed-metal footlocker, with its edges magnetized to keep it stuck to deck plating during maneuvers or wall plating so it can act as a hanging cabinet. When space is particularly tight, even planetside, home furnishings take a cue from spaceships and are designed to fold against the walls. A home terminal linked to the inhabitants' hand terminals and local memory partitions is standard. Some homes have screen walls, large high-resolution film displays covering entire walls that can mirror local data from terminals, show programming from a variety of feeds, or act as "windows" linked to cameras across the solar system. Real windows are follies on ships and stations, needless weak points and risks.

RECYCLING

Personal possessions tend to be useful or particularly valued by the inhabitants. Not every home has its own fabricator, sending the inhabitants to nearby shops or stores for their needs, but every home has a recycler, to ensure as little raw matter as possible goes to waste. A separate capture and disposal system takes care of organic waste, shunting it into its own processing system. Despite sparse possessions and quick disposal of unwanted material, the end appearance is not a spartan home but one that is simple and clean. Off Earth, it takes wealth, effort, or both to live in cluttered squalor.

MEDICINE

Most medical tech is covered under the **Recovering** interlude (see **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5**) and the care of a physician or auto-doc. At the GM's discretion, a character who has ongoing medical needs like blood screenings, anti-cancer meds, or other regular treatments may have a +1 or +2 increase in the Income requirement for their lifestyle to reflect the additional expense. A one-time medical expense like the replacement of a limb or organ is generally Income TN 15 to 18 or more depending on the quality of the replacement, from a relatively inexpensive prosthetic to a new cloned limb.

When it comes to modern medicine, the question largely isn't whether miracles are possible, but if they're available and affordable. The need to maintain the body during long periods living in microgravity and surviving bursts of high acceleration has led to revolutions in the understanding of biology and physiology. Generations of biochemists working in microgravity have produced pharmaceuticals undreamed of before humanity left Earth, and the greatest accidental genetics experiment of all time—the rise of Belters through the influence of their environment—has given geneticists more data than even their expert systems can process. If necessity is the mother of invention, humanity's settlement of space has placed a whole new set of demands on medical science, which has invented the means to meet them.

PHARMACEUTICALS

Everyone who lives and travels in space is familiar with standard medical supplements issued to encourage bone growth and density, descendants of the same drugs that once allowed short duration visits to orbit, but now enable humans to travel and live indefinitely in deep space. Similar improvements led to topical coagulation boosters which quickly staunch the flow

of blood from a wound, critical for fighting blood loss in microgravity, and a variety of autophagic drugs helping control everything from fatigue to systemic cellular breakdown. Anti-cancer medications are necessary for those who have experienced significant radiation exposure due to poor shielding.

DRUGS AND CONDITIONS

A primary use of pharmaceuticals is to mitigate and ease various conditions (see **Conditions** in **CHAPTER 1**). From amphetamine derivatives intended to ward off being fatigued and exhausted to pain-killers to shrug off the effects of being injured or wounded, and even life-saving drugs to save people from dying, the right pharmaceutical cocktail can alleviate the effects of a condition, at least temporarily. The problem is that while drugs can treat the symptoms (and the game modifiers), generally only proper treatment can actually remove the underlying condition. See **Recovering** in the **Interludes** section of **CHAPTER 5** for details.

DRUGS AND MAINTENANCE

Some medical conditions require an ongoing regimen of pharmaceuticals (and other treatments), such as anti-cancer medications, antivirals, blood filtration, and similar treatments. So long as the patient has these treatments, chronic conditions remain manageable and are often held at bay. This kind of medical maintenance can usually be reflected with a small (+1 or +2) increase to the Income requirement of the character's lifestyle, representing the additional cost. The only problem arises when the character cannot afford the necessary treatment, or misses it for other reasons, such as lack of access. In those cases, the patient's condition might change, as the GM imposes conditions reflecting the character's declining health until they have the opportunity to partake of Recovering during an interlude.

DRUGS AND BONUSES

Certain drugs may grant a short-term bonus to certain abilities and ability tests. This is usually the equivalent of gaining an associated ability focus, like Constitution (Stamina), Perception (Empathy or Intuition), or Willpower (Courage). If the character already has the associated focus, then its bonus increases by +1. The benefits of an enhancement drug usually only last 2d6 minutes or so, and some cause conditions like fatigued as after-effects.

THE JUICE

Perhaps the greatest pharmacological development for space travel is "the juice," a cocktail of drugs to help travelers endure the rigors of high-g acceleration. Passengers get a mix of the juice which protects and sedates them during the journey. The crew, however, gets a version that keeps them hyper-awake and -aware despite any pain or stress, mixing in focusing pharmaceuticals that push emotions into the background and reduce the mind to pure executive function.

Even on the juice, there tends to be a practical max of 7 to 8 g for prolonged acceleration and short bursts of up to 12 g for emergency maneuvers. Any more and the risk of medical problems rises precipitously as constant pressure on the body turns minute physiological flaws into crises, with blood pooling, weak arteries rupturing in aneurysms, hearts going into cardiac arrest, and lungs and digestive tracts collapsing. Strokes at high-g aren't uncommon, and acceleration calculations often include what percentage of the crew and passengers are expected to have cardiac problems given the planned level and duration of acceleration. Even with the juice, recent travelers can sometimes be identified from black eyes and other pressure bruising, and the "acceleration swagger" from deep joint pain as cartilage slowly shifts back to its natural form and function.

As detailed in **CHAPTER 6: SPACESHIPS**, the juice allows characters to take fatigued and exhausted conditions to mitigate acceleration damage before having to take injured and wounded conditions. The Cost of the supply of juice is included in the maintenance and upkeep of a ship.

LIMB AND ORGAN REPLACEMENT

The high number of mining and construction accidents during the settlement of Mars and deep-space harvesting of ore and ice quickly led to improvements in prosthetics to allow the injured to rejoin the workforce as quickly as possible. The connections between artificial limbs and the wearer's nervous system have been refined over the years until the best modern limbs have force feedback, pressure and temperature sensors, and fine-motor software. While the prosthetics appear to be the same limbs they replace, few can pass the most casual inspection by touch. Experimental procedures on Earth, typically limited to the wealthy, use tailored biogel to grow connections between the patient and entirely new cloned limbs.

5. GAME PLAY

Game play in *The Expanse* unfolds in a series of encounters and interludes. Think of these like the chapters or scenes of a novel. Encounters are further broken down into three types: action, exploration, and social, depending on the focus of the encounter. This chapter looks at the three types of encounters and how they play out using the basic rules given in **Chapter 1**, along with the interludes placed in between encounters, giving the characters some down time and the opportunity to pursue their own goals, or to simply recover from their last few encounters!

ACTION ENCOUNTERS

When things get tense and it matters who does what, when, and in which order, action time begins. Action time is most commonly used to handle combat, but has other uses as well. Anything that would be considered an action scene in a movie can be handled as an action encounter.

INITIATIVE

While narrative time is loose, action time is more tightly defined. Once it begins, the GM tracks time in 15-second increments called rounds (so there are 4 rounds in a minute). During each round, every individual in the encounter gets an opportunity to do something (called their turn) during which they can take a certain number of actions (see **Taking Actions**, following). Once everyone has taken their turn, the round ends, and a new round begins.

When action time begins, the following procedure takes effect.

1. The GM tells the players, “Roll for initiative.” Action time is now in effect.
2. Each player makes an initiative roll for their respective characters. This is a Dexterity (Initiative) test, essentially a “who goes first?” opposed test. The GM rolls initiative for each major NPC and each group of minor NPCs (major NPCs act individually, while minor NPCs generally act together in groups). Note that initiative rolls do not generate SP, even when the dice score doubles.

3. The GM compares the test results of all the characters and arranges them in a list from highest to lowest. This is the order in which characters take their turns for each round of the combat. If there's a tie, whoever rolled higher on the Drama Die wins. If it's still a tie, whoever has the higher Dexterity score wins. The GM also determines if anyone involved in the conflict is surprised, as detailed in the **GAME MASTERING** chapter.
4. The character at the top of the initiative list takes a turn. On their turn, a character can take a major action and a minor action, or two minor actions. Once these actions are resolved, the character's turn is over. Surprised characters do not act on the first round of combat.
5. The next character on the initiative list takes a turn.
6. Repeat step 5 until every character has taken a turn.
7. Once every character has taken a turn, the round ends and a new one begins. Continue steps 4–7 each round. Initiative does not need to be rolled each round. The order remains set for the duration of the encounter. If new characters join the encounter, they roll initiative at the start of the round in which they appear, and get added to the initiative list. Some stunts can change characters' placement in the initiative order as well.
8. When the encounter is finished, the GM declares action time is over. Narrative time resumes.

EXAMPLE *Amos and Holden, accompanied by Dr. Praxidike Meng and some Pinkwater mercenaries, face off against a dozen armed people in an isolated room on Ganymede. Amos hits one of them in the ribs with the butt of his rifle, knocking him down. Desperate to find his daughter, Dr. Meng cocks his pistol, and then everyone in the room goes for their weapon. "Roll for initiative," the GM tells the players. They report initiative test results of 15 for Amos, 13 for Holden, and 9 for Prax. The GM also rolls for the Pinkwater crew and the characters' opponents, since they are both NPCs, getting test results of 12 for the Pinkwater mercs and 10 for the opposition. So the initiative order for this encounter is: Amos (15), Holden (13), Pinkwater (12), the opposition (10), and Meng (9).*

TAKING ACTIONS

When it's your turn during a round, you tell the GM what you want your character to do. On your turn, you may take a major action and a minor action. You can take your actions in any order, and can take fewer actions if you like. You may also replace your major action with a second minor action, if you want.

MAJOR ACTIONS

A major action requires a focused effort, often affecting something or someone else, and requiring an ability test. Taking a swing at an opponent, trying to override a lock in the midst of a firefight, and providing first aid to a wounded ally are all examples of major actions.

MINOR ACTIONS

A minor action is not as involved as a major action, but still represents a deliberate effort on the character's part and usually works automatically with no test involved. Things like running toward a new position, fetching an item from a container, or reloading a gun are all examples of minor actions.

FREE ACTIONS

A free action takes a negligible amount of time, and doesn't count toward your usual limitation on actions. The rules note when something is a free action. The GM can restrict the number of free actions you can take, if it wouldn't be realistic for you to perform them all on your turn. You can talk as a free action, for example, but since a round is only 15 seconds long, what you can say in that time is limited.

ACTION LISTINGS

A list of the most common major and minor actions follows. If you want to do something else, just say so and the GM can adjudicate it. The GM may require you to roll an ability test for your character depending on what you are trying to do.

MAJOR ACTIONS

ALL-OUT ATTACK You attack one adjacent enemy in close combat, throwing the full force of your Strength behind the attack at the cost of your ability to defend yourself. If your attack hits, you do +1 damage, but whether or not the attack hits, you have a –1 to your Defense until the start of your next turn.

CHARGE You move up to half your Speed (rounded down) in meters and finish with a close combat attack against an adjacent enemy. If you moved at least 4 meters in a straight line before reaching your target, you gain a +1 bonus on your attack roll. You cannot take this action if you are prone (you'd need to use the Move action to stand up first).

DEFEND You focus on defending yourself. Until the start of your next turn, you gain a +2 bonus to your Defense.

MELEE ATTACK You attack an enemy within 2 meters of you in hand-to-hand combat. See **Making Attacks**, following.

RANGED ATTACK You fire or throw a ranged weapon at one visible enemy within range. See **Making Attacks**, following.

RUN You move up to twice your Speed in meters, sacrificing the ability to perform another action so you can move farther. You cannot take this action if you are prone (you'd need to use the Move action to stand up first).

STUNT ATTACK Instead of trying to damage an opponent, you focus on performing a specific action stunt, like subduing an enemy with a hold instead of hurting them (a Grapple stunt). Roll an attack test as usual. A successful test awards you 1 SP of a type appropriate for the attack, but the attack itself inflicts no damage. If you roll doubles, you earn additional SP as normal and may choose a stunt that damages your opponent, but there is still no damage from the base attack. You can attempt stunt attacks against objects as well as opponents, though the GM may rule that some stunts do not apply. See **Attacking Objects** in this chapter for more information.

MINOR ACTIONS

ACTIVATE This action allows you to start using certain abilities or items, such as certain talents or technology.

AIM You take the measure of your opponent and plan your next strike. If your next action after Aim is a melee or ranged attack, you gain a +1 bonus on your attack roll.

GUARD UP You balance action and defense. Add +1 or +2 (your choice) to your Defense until the end of the round. However, the same modifier becomes a penalty to all tests you make, even opposed tests, until the end of the round as well (unlike the Defend action, which lasts until the beginning of your next turn). If you choose this minor action, you must do it before any major action on your turn, and you cannot Defend on the same turn.

MOVE You move up to your Speed in meters and can combine this with actions like dropping prone, standing up, or climbing into a vehicle, but each of these types of actions consumes half your Speed (rounded down).

PREPARE When you take this action, you postpone your major action. You declare one major action and your choice to Prepare it. After you do so, the next person in the initiative order acts, and so on, but at any time until the beginning of your next turn, you can interrupt another character and take your prepared action immediately. If you don't use the prepared action by your next turn, you lose it.

PRESS THE ATTACK You stand ready to pursue an enemy if they fall back or flee. You can take this action after successfully striking an enemy target with a melee attack (whether you inflict damage or not). After you declare this action, if that foe moves away from you, you may immediately move up to your Speed in meters in direct pursuit at no additional cost in actions. This occurs immediately after your foe's movement, before they can do anything else.

READY You draw a weapon, pull out a device, or otherwise ready a stowed item. As part of this action, you can put away something already in hand. You could holster a pistol and pull out a grenade with the same Ready action, for example.

STAND FIRM You stand firm and prepare to resist any effort to move you. Until the start of your next turn, any enemy using the Skirmish or Knock Prone stunts to move you or knock you to the ground must succeed in an opposed test of their Strength (Might) against your choice of your own Strength (Might) or Dexterity (Acrobatics). If you win the test, the attempt fails. If the attacker wins, the attempt proceeds normally. The attacker still spends the stunt points, regardless of whether the attempt to move you succeeds or fails.

MAKING ATTACKS

There are two basic types of attack: melee and ranged. Both are handled the same way:

1. **CHOOSE A TARGET** Pick who or what you you want to attack. To make a melee attack, you must be no more than 2 meters away from your target. To make a ranged attack, you must have a line of sight to your target and be within range of your target.
2. **MAKE AN ATTACK ROLL** An attack roll is an ability test based on the type of attack you are making—Fighting for a melee attack, Accuracy for a ranged attack. This is modified by a focus, if applicable, and any other relevant bonuses (talents and actions such as aiming, charging, etc.). Your target number is your opponent's Defense.
3. **DETERMINE THE RESULT** If your test result is equal to or greater than your opponent's Defense, your attack hits. If it is less than your target's Defense, the attack misses. If you miss with a gun attack, check the Drama Die for weapon capacity; your gun might jam or be out of ammo (see **Weapon Capacity**, following).

ATTACK ROLL = 3D6 + FIGHTING (MELEE) OR ACCURACY (RANGED) + FOCUS VS. DEFENSE

EXAMPLE *It's Bobbie's turn. She sees an opponent 4 meters away and uses the charge action to close the distance and attack. Bobbie's player makes an attack roll. This is a Fighting (Brawling) test, right up Bobbie's alley. The roll is a 9, and she gets +3 for her Fighting ability, +2 because she has the Brawling focus, and another +1 for charging. Her test result for the attack roll totals 15 (9 + 3 + 2 + 1). This handily beats the target's 11 Defense, so Bobbie lands a solid hit.*

> It's all fun and games till someone shoots back, Holden thought.
>
> —*Leviathan Wakes*

RANGE

Melee attacks occur only in close combat, a distance of about 2 meters, with the assumption that foes are moving slightly and shifting position; lunging forward to attack, then ducking and weaving to dodge attacks. Opponents within range for melee combat are also referred to as adjacent.

Ranged attacks take place over a distance, with each type of weapon having a range, given on the **Weapon Range** table. Attacks out to the weapon's listed range are made without a modifier. Attacks beyond that range, out to the weapon's maximum range (150% of range), have a –2 modifier to the attack roll. Unless you're using a battle-map and miniatures or tokens to mark out distances, the GM determines and describes the range between combatants and determines range modifiers, if any.

WEAPON RANGE

WEAPON TYPE	RANGE	MAXIMUM RANGE
Bow	100 meters	150 meters
Pistol	50 meters	75 meters
Rifle	200 meters	300 meters
Thrown	10 + Str meters	—

ATTACK DAMAGE

ATTACK TYPE	DAMAGE
Unarmed	1d3* + Str
Makeshift	1d6** + Str
Light Melee	1d6 + Str or Dex
Heavy Melee	2d6 + Str
Pistol	2d6 + Per
Rifle	3d6 + Per
Grenade	3d6 (5 meter radius)

*1d6 if you have Striking Style (see **CHAPTER 3**)
Makeshift weapons have certain drawbacks (see **Makeshift Weapons). Some may inflict greater damage, or use a different ability score for damage, at the GM's discretion.

DETERMINING DAMAGE

Once an attack hits, you determine the attack's damage, unless you're doing something like a stunt attack. You roll dice based on the type of attack (as shown on the **Attack Damage** table), modified by your abilities and the effects of any actions or stunts:

ATTACK DAMAGE = ATTACK TYPE DICE ROLL + ABILITY + MODIFIERS

EXAMPLE *Since Bobbie's landed her blow effectively, it's time to calculate her damage. Bobbie has Striking Style, so her unarmed hits do 1d6 damage, plus her Strength score of 3. Her player rolls a 4, so that's 7 points of damage to the target.*

For any unusual weapons that may come up, the GM should determine their damage and the ability modifier (if any) that applies to it, and whether or not the attack counts as using a makeshift weapon.

MAKESHIFT WEAPONS

Characters sometimes use objects not intended or designed for combat as makeshift weapons, ranging from a piece of construction rebar to a tool case or a heavy mug from a galley. When a character uses a makeshift weapon, the GM may apply one or more of the following drawbacks:

CLUMSY The weapon is awkward to wield, imposing a –1 or –2 penalty to attack tests.

FRAGILE The weapon wasn't made to take much punishment. When an attack with it misses and the Drama Die is 3 or less, the object breaks and becomes useless as a weapon.

WEAK The object can't inflict damage as easily as a proper weapon, imposing a –1 or –2 penalty to damage rolls, with a minimum damage roll of 1.

STUNNING WEAPONS

> "I'm not asking you to sleep with him."
> "Good, because I don't use sex as a weapon," Bobbie said. "I use weapons as weapons."
>
> —*Caliban's War*

Some weapons are designed specifically to incapacitate without wounding their targets, particularly useful for security personnel or even civilians, as stunning weapons tend to be permitted for personal defense more than lethal weaponry. They include things like stun-guns and tasers, which use charges of electricity, or some short range chemical weapons like mace or pepper spray.

As a general guideline, a stunning weapon does penetrating damage (see **Penetrating Damage**, following) but inflicts one die less damage than a comparable lethal weapon, so tasers do 1d6 damage versus a pistol's 2d6, for example. A target taken out by the damage from a stunning weapon cannot have the dying condition applied to them, since such weapons aren't lethal. See **Taken Out** under **Applying Damage** for more.

APPLYING DAMAGE

Once you've determined the attack's damage, figure out what effect it has on the target:

1. Subtract the target's Toughness—including armor, if any—from the damage.
2. Spend Fortune to eliminate some or all of the remaining damage.
3. Take an injured or wounded condition to account for the remaining damage.
4. If any damage remains, the target is taken out.

TOUGHNESS

First, subtract the target's Toughness from the damage. For most characters, their Toughness is equal to their Constitution score, which can be 0, but not negative.

Some characters also wear armor, which enhances their Toughness, sometimes quite a lot, such as in the case of military power armor. Armor has an armor rating, which increases the wearer's Toughness, and an armor penalty that decreases Dexterity and Speed, as shown on the **Armor** table. See **Armor** in **CHAPTER 4** for details on the kinds of armor commonly used in *The Expanse*.

EXAMPLE *Bobbie's opponent has Toughness 1 from Constitution and is wearing 1 point of armor for a total Toughness of 2. That reduces the damage from her hit from 7 to 5.*

ARMOR

ARMOR TYPE	ARMOR BONUS	ARMOR PENALTY
Padding	+1	0
Light body armor	+2	–1
Medium body armor	+4	–2
Heavy body armor	+6	–3
Power armor	+12	0

SHIELD TYPE	DEFENSE BONUS
Riot shield	+2
Ballistic shield	+3

PENETRATING DAMAGE

Some damage is defined as penetrating, meaning it ignores a character's Toughness. This includes some forms of energy and damage that affects a target internally or is applied with such precision that it bypasses the protection afforded by Toughness. If a target is hit with penetrating damage, ignore Toughness and move on to the next step.

FORTUNE

While Toughness measures how hard a target is to hurt, Fortune measures how difficult they are to take out due to sheer luck, cunning, and overall importance to the story. *The Expanse* is about fictional heroes and, as we all know, some characters in a story are more important than others.

Characters can spend points from their Fortune total to eliminate damage on a 1-to-1 basis: 1 FP removing 1 point of damage. If the damage is reduced to 0, the attack has no effect beyond the merely cosmetic; it might rip the character's jacket or muss their hair, perhaps even leave a slight bruise, but nothing more than that. Characters with no Fortune points don't have this option; any damage over their Toughness and they either need to take an injury or wound or be taken out.

"Violence is what people do when they run out of good ideas. It's attractive because it's simple, it's direct, it's almost always available as an option. When you can't think of a good rebuttal for your opponent's argument, you can always punch them in the face."

—Abaddon's Gate

EXAMPLE *The tough Bobbie hit is a nobody with no Fortune, so he can't reduce her damage that way. If he were a more important character with a Fortune of, say, 15 points, he could just spend 5 of those points and take no damage from the hit, turning it into a glancing blow.*

INJURIES & WOUNDS

If Fortune isn't enough to completely spare a character from damage, then it is going to hurt. The character is either going to be taken out (see the following) or needs to take an injured or wounded condition to reflect the remaining damage. See **Conditions** in **CHAPTER 1** for details on injured and wounded.

If the character accepts an injured condition, the damage is reduced by 1d6. If any damage remains, or the character is already injured, the character must accept a wounded condition or be taken out. If the character accepts a wounded condition, the damage is further reduced by 1d6. If any damage remains, the character is taken out. Once a character has the wounded condition, any damage that gets past Fortune takes them out.

EXAMPLE *Since the tough is still facing 5 points of damage and doesn't want to be taken out, he takes the option of an injury and rolls 1d6, getting a 2. That still leaves 3 points of damage. Ouch! So he decides to take a wound as well and rolls 1d6 again, getting another 2. Unfortunately for the poor tough, that still leaves a point of damage. If he'd rolled a 3 instead, he would have just avoiding being taken out, albeit still with a wounded condition.*

TAKEN OUT

If damage remains after applying Toughness, Fortune, and taking an injury or a wound, then the target is taken out of the encounter. The attacker may choose to impose any one condition from the list in **CHAPTER 1** that is reasonable for the type of attack which takes out the target. So, for example, an attacker may choose to take out a target with a gunshot and leave them dying, wounded, or even just unconscious, if the GM agrees that's reasonable and that the shot may have just stunned the target due to armor or the like. Similarly, a target taken out by a roundhouse punch or kick might be unconscious or even dying, or merely exhausted. The key point is that the attacker decides on the target's condition.

"Last man standing," Amos replied with another grin. "It's in my job description."

—Cibola Burn

EXAMPLE *With a point of damage left, the tough is taken out. Bobbie's player decides he's unconscious, not dying, although he's also still wounded. She definitely broke something though, hitting him that hard. If she really needed the tough conscious, Bobbie's player might have decided he was only helpless when taken out: defeated, but still able to answer questions.*

ROLLING OVER

An *Expanse* character can also choose to roll over in an encounter. In essence, the character's player chooses to take that character out of the encounter, much like a taken out result (previously) except the player chooses the character's condition, subject to the approval of the GM, rather than leaving their fate up to their opponent. Rolling over is a "live to fight another day" tactic for when it's clear a character is overmatched and doesn't have much of a chance otherwise. You can only roll over in an encounter before you are taken out. Once you begin applying damage from an attack that has the potential to take you out, it's too late to roll over.

EXAMPLE *That tough could have spared himself a beating and just rolled over to Bobbie, either getting out of her way, or accepting just being unconscious if the Martian Marine was in the mood for a beat-down and would accept no less. At least then he wouldn't have to recover from being wounded afterward!*

BREATHERS

After an encounter, characters get a breather, a moment to recoup and catch a short break. When they do so, they regain 1d6 + Constitution + Level in Fortune. Regaining additional Fortune points or recovering from conditions requires an interlude and possibly the recovering activity. See **Interludes** later in this chapter for details.

DEFENSE AND COVER

You usually don't have to take any action to avoid attacks. It's a reflex, and covered by your Defense score. You might take actions to modify your Defense, however, such as Defend, Guard Up, or a stunt attack that boosts Defense (see **Taking Actions**, previously).

TAKING COVER

Taking cover is a special case. The presence of guns often makes it prudent to put something solid between you and an opponent's firing arc. You can take cover in two ways. First, you can jump behind cover using the Take Cover stunt as part of your action. Second, you can move behind cover as part of your movement. You may need to drop prone in order to gain the most benefit from available cover.

COVER

RATING	ARMOR BONUS	RANGED ATTACK PENALTY
1	+2	–1
2	+3	–2
3	+4	–3
Total	Can't be attacked at range	Can't make ranged attacks

COVER EFFECTS

Cover provides a bonus to your Armor Rating against all ranged attacks except for those that inflict penetrating damage, and imposes a penalty to your own ranged attacks. Total cover, where you are completely hidden, means you can't be targeted with ranged attacks but you likewise cannot target ranged attacks at anyone on the other side of the cover. See the **Cover** table for details.

EXAMPLE *In a flophouse on Eros, Amos draws on the woman holding a gun on the crew and a dozen men and women with automatic weapons burst into the room. Amos throws himself prone after shooting the woman with the taser, giving ranged attacks against him a –1 penalty, while Holden uses his action to drag Naomi behind the check-in desk, giving them total cover for the moment, as a hail of bullets fills the air. On his next turn, Amos rolls sideways to the desk, improving his cover just in time as more bullets tear up the floor and wall.*

ATTACKING OBJECTS

There are times you might want to shoot out a lock or kick in a door, essentially attacking an object. Attacking an object during combat is much like attacking a living opponent. You make an attack roll as usual, but instead of Defense, use a TN based on the object's size, using the **Object Combat Target Numbers** table as a guideline.

OBJECT COMBAT TARGET NUMBERS

TARGET SIZE	TARGET NUMBER
Very large (a truck, a tool shed)	7
Large (a motorized cart, a dumpster)	9
Human-sized (a bicycle, a kiosk)	11
Small (a vehicle tire, a specific window)	13
Very small (a small drone, a lamppost)	15
Diminutive (a wielded handgun, a bicycle tire)	17
Minuscule (a switch, a door handle)	19
Almost invisible (a keyhole, a spy camera)	21

The GM may increase the TN if the object is moving, and based on other factors. In addition, if you're adjacent to the object and it isn't moving, it's easy to hit; you get a +5 bonus to your attack roll—after all, it's easy to hit a standing kiosk with a baseball bat if you're standing right in front of it.

In some cases, an attack roll isn't appropriate. If the object would be easy to hit, or what you really want to do is to disable or modify it instead of just wrecking it, a basic test might be called for instead. The GM decides which approach to use. Finally, note that some stunts bypass the rules here; in those cases, use the rules listed for the stunt, instead of those in this section.

You'll often attack an object as part of the Stunt Attack action, in which case attacking it has whatever effect the stunt designates, or as an action where the results are determined by the GM. If an object might be gradually battered apart, the GM can assign it Toughness and Fortune based on the desired goal (it takes more damage to destroy a door than to just kick it open). The GM can also determine that some attacks inflict double damage to particular objects (roll damage dice twice and add them together), while others inflict half damage. The GM may decide that some attacks are penetrating, or even useless against given targets. This represents the fact that, for example, an axe will readily chop down a tree, but a bullet or a kick won't.

WEAPON CAPACITY

Guns have limited amounts of ammunition and are subject to mechanical problems like jamming. In game play, rather than having to track every round fired, you can use the following guidelines to handle things like misfires, jams, and running out of ammo.

WEAPON JAMS

When an attack with a gun misses and the number on the Drama Die is a 6, then the weapon has jammed or run out of ammo. Reloading the gun or clearing the problem takes a minor action. The Rapid Reload stunt can reduce this time, as can some talents.

THE CHURN AND FIREARMS

The GM can also spend points from the Churn Pool (see **CHAPTER 12**) on a missed firearms attack, reducing the Churn Pool by 1 to cause a gun to jam or run out of ammo, or reducing the Pool by 2 to say the weapon cannot be cleared without a Fixing interlude (see **CHAPTER 5**).

EXPLOSIVES

Unlike attacks with ranged weapons that must be aimed, you don't need to score a direct hit on a target with a grenade or other explosive device, just get close enough to catch them in the blast.

Grenades are thrown weapons with a range of 10 + Strength meters. Use the Ready action to have the grenade in your hand, and then you can take a Ranged Attack action to throw it. Grenade launchers load and fire grenades automatically and don't require a Ready action, but they're subject to running out of grenades or jamming, as described under **Weapon Capacity**, previously.

A grenade attack is a TN 11 Accuracy (Thrown) test, modified for difficult throws at the GM's discretion. Success means the grenade lands and detonates where you intended, but failure means the grenade lands up to 1d6 meters away in a direction of the GM's choosing, and then explodes. Grenades affect everything and everyone within 5 meters of the explosion, dealing damage and any additional effects.

You can use action stunts with grenade attacks. Each stunt can only affect one target but you need not assign all stunts to the same target. If you catch two foes in the blast of a grenade and generate 4 SP, for example, you could use Overcome Toughness on one foe and Knock Prone on the other.

VEHICLES IN COMBAT

Combat between ships in space is covered in **CHAPTER 6**. Although it's not often that *Expanse* characters make use of conventional air or ground vehicles in combat, here are guidelines for doing so:

- Operating a vehicle counts as your Move action. If a vehicle provides cover, it hinders you as you shoot out an open window or attack in some other way, as per the usual rules for Defense and Cover, previously.
- Characters in a vehicle can use the Activate action to operate built-in weaponry, if any.
- Attacks on vehicles are variations of the Stunt Attack action. Generated stunt points are used to inflict damage with Vehicle Combat Stunts (see **Vehicle Combat Stunts**). If the vehicle has a Hull rating, an attack must spend SP on the Penetrate Hull stunt to overcome it before devoting them to other Vehicle Combat Stunts.

The GM can disallow certain attacks against vehicles for being inherently ineffective. Stabbing a car with a knife is unlikely to cause more than cosmetic damage, for example; the same for shooting a ship's hull with a conventional firearm.

Furthermore, using the rules for attacking objects (presented earlier in this chapter), the GM can adjudicate damage to specific vehicle parts, and invent effects when those specific parts are damaged or destroyed. For instance, if a character shoots out the tire of a ground vehicle, the GM might decide this prompts a test to prevent a crash and, in any event, slows the vehicle down.

CRASHES

Certain circumstances—usually loss of control—result in a crash. Crashes inflict damage to passengers by default, based on the vehicle's Speed at the time, but can inflict more, less, or different forms of damage based on the situation. The GM decides when these circumstances arise. For example, crashing a boat may inflict little damage to the passengers, but force them into the water to sink or swim. The GM likewise decides on the conditions imposed if crash damage takes out any characters in the vehicle; a minor crash might leave someone unconscious or injured, but a more serious crash can leave a character wounded, dying, or even result in instant death—such as in the case of a high-velocity spaceship crash.

CRASH DAMAGE

SPEED	DAMAGE
Slow	1d3
Average	1d6
Fast	2d6
Very Fast	4d6
Extreme	6d6

A crash leaves a vehicle inoperative. Temporary repairs may be possible at the GM's discretion, with the result of the Drama Die indicating how effective they are and how long they last. At the least, the repaired vehicle has a penalty to tests to operate it equal to 7 minus the result of the Drama Die on the repair test until it undergoes more complete repair.

CHASES

Other action scenes revolve around chases. One or more characters are trying to get away or reach a specific destination while another character or group of characters try to catch or stop them. They might be leaping over obstacles on foot, tearing through narrow streets in a car, or blasting through space making high-g maneuvers. Like combats, chases occur during action time, with 1-round intervals that can include combat as well.

CHASE TEST DIFFICULTIES

CONDITIONS	TARGET NUMBER	EXAMPLE
Ideal	9	A clear, unobstructed path
Average	11	Occasional obstacles or maneuvering
Rough	13	Regular obstacles or maneuvering
Hard	15	Constant obstacles or maneuvering
Almost Impossible	18	Constant maneuvering to avoid dangerous obstacles

CHASE TESTS

Chases begin when one character takes the Run action, and at least one other character follows in pursuit. Each round, all chase participants must take the Run action and make a chase test based on the method of movement, such as Constitution (Running or Swimming) or Dexterity (Driving or Piloting). The GM decides on the appropriate ability and focus for a chase test, based on the situation. Passengers do not make chase tests, they're just along for the ride.

The TN for a chase test depends on the conditions and how difficult it is to maneuver in a given area. Use the **Chase Test Difficulties** table as a guideline.

TRACKING THE CHASE

As in other advanced tests, characters keep a running total of the Drama Die results from successful chase tests. This is known as the chase total. Participants with chase totals within 10 of each other can attack with ranged weapons at their maximum range. Participants with chase totals within 5 of each other can make ranged attacks at normal range. Characters with chase totals within 2 of each other may perform close or ramming attacks. In most cases, attacks must be delivered by passengers, since keeping up with the chase is a major action, but vehicle operators may use the Activate action to operate vehicular weaponry or to ram with the vehicle itself.

RELATIVE SPEED

Faster chasers naturally have an advantage over slower ones. For every 2 points of Speed a chaser has over the slowest participant in the chase, they gain a +1 bonus to the Drama Die for chase tests. For spaceships, every Size category

smaller than the largest participant in the chase grants a +1 bonus to the Drama Die for chase tests, as smaller ships tend to be faster and more maneuverable.

EXAMPLE *Characters with Speed 10, 11, and 13 are engaged in a chase. The character with Speed 13 has a +1 bonus to chase tests, having a 3-point Speed advantage over the slowest character, which is 1.5 when divided by 2 and rounds down to 1. The character with Speed 11 has no modifier. For a chase between Small, Medium, and Gigantic spaceships, the Small ship has a +4 bonus, the Medium ship a +3 bonus, and the Gigantic ship no modifier due to Size.*

The bonus applies to both the chase test result and the chase total based on the Drama Die.

COMPLICATIONS

Characters moving at high speeds during a chase have a chance of going out of control if they fail a chase test, and complications during the chase may impose other adverse conditions, like those listed in the **Challenge Test** rules in **CHAPTER 1**.

MINOR The character, mount, or vehicle experiences some sort of problem, ranging from a pulled hamstring to engine trouble. Increase the chase test target number by +2 unless the character switches methods to get around the problem. For a ship, a TN 13 Intelligence (Engineering) test can eliminate this penalty for rounds equal to the result of the Drama Die.

MODERATE The character suffers a serious stumble or spins out of control. This eliminates half of the character's accumulated chase total. Alternately, a wrong turn or vehicle trouble prompts a test determined by the GM (typically TN 13) that must be accomplished before the character can resume the chase.

MAJOR The character loses half their accumulated chase total and suffers a crash. See **Crashes**, earlier in this chapter.

PLANNING A CHASE

Chases work best if handled fairly abstractly. The respective chase totals provide the relative positions of the participants. Trying to track the precise distance of all involve just bogs things down, especially at the vast distances in space. The impor-

tant things players want to know are the general difficulty of maneuvering and whether their characters are close enough to interact with other participants in the chase. The GM may want to keep track of the types of conditions for the chase, modifying them according to how things unfold, such as if a character leads the chase through more difficult conditions, looking to lose pursuers.

RESOLVING A CHASE

The GM decides when a chase ends, choosing from the following options:

SUCCESS THRESHOLD

Characters who hit the success threshold first escape. In the case of multiple participants, characters continue to make chase tests until either all the pursued characters have gotten away or the first pursuer reaches the success threshold, at which point any remaining pursued characters are caught.

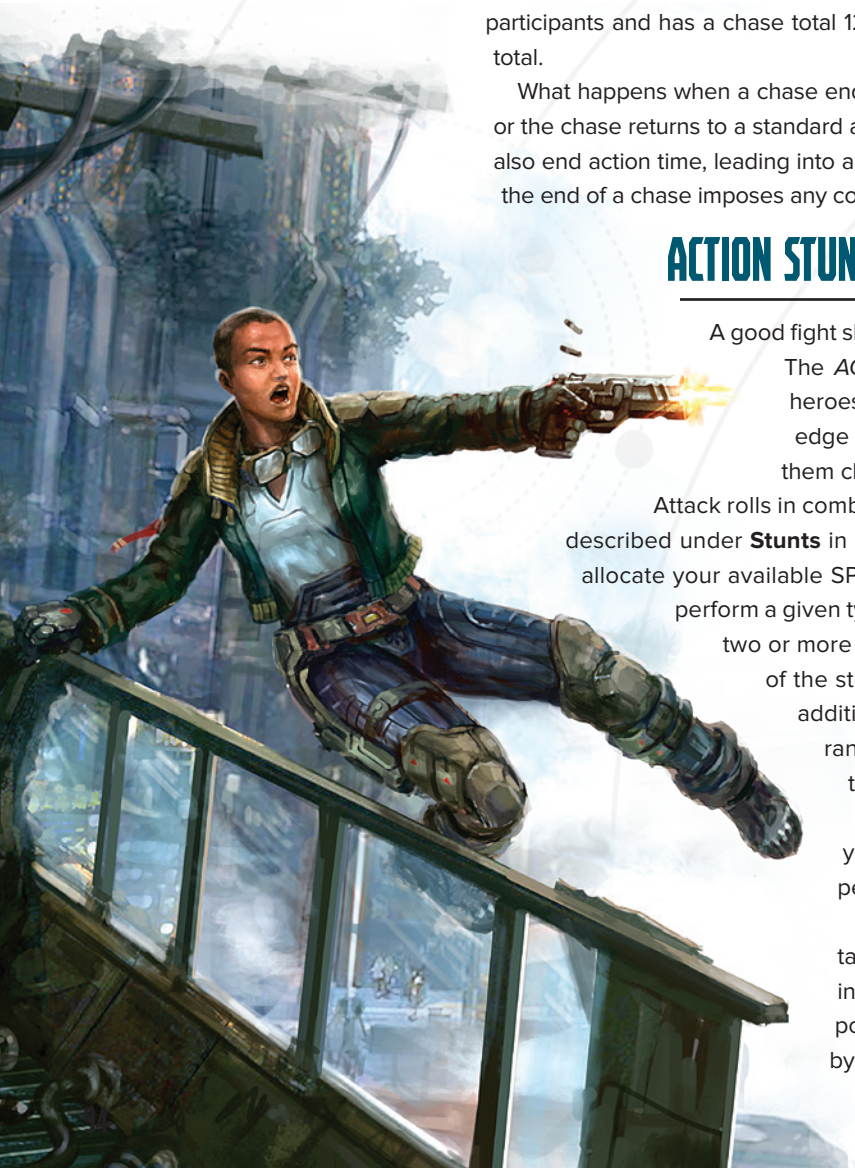
TIME

The chase runs for a set number of rounds. In that case, rank the final chase totals from highest to lowest (breaking ties with comparative speeds or die rolls). All the pursued characters with chase totals higher than all of the pursuers get away. All other pursued characters are caught.

CIRCUMSTANCES

A chase can end for many other reasons, such as a crash, a character disappearing from sight, or attaining an unassailable lead in their chase total. This last circumstance occurs when the character with the lead can't be attacked or affected by any other participants and has a chase total 12 or more greater than the participant with the next highest total.

What happens when a chase ends? It depends on the situation. The lead characters escape, or the chase returns to a standard action encounter, such as a combat. The end of a chase may also end action time, leading into an exploration or social encounter. The GM can also decide if the end of a chase imposes any conditions on either the pursuers or the pursued.



ACTION STUNTS

A good fight should be dynamic and feature a lot of movement and action. The *AGE System* uses stunts to represent those special moves heroes perform to throw their opponents off-balance, gain an edge in a fight, or simply do something spectacular that brings them closer to victory.

Attack rolls in combat generate stunt points according to the standard system described under **Stunts** in **CHAPTER 1**. Reference the stunt tables in this section and allocate your available SP to stunts suited to the action you're performing. You can perform a given type of stunt only once in a round, though you may combine two or more different stunts as long as they make sense in the context of the story. If a stunt has a "+" listed after its cost, you can spend additional SP to enhance the basic effect of the stunt. If it has a range of numbers listed, you can choose to spend SP within that range for the stunt's effect.

Once you have decided on what stunts you want to use, you can narrate how your character pulls them off. You can perform the stunts in any order you wish.

If you don't want to trust your options to the dice, you can take the Stunt Attack action (see **Taking Actions** previously in this chapter). This action ensures you have at least 1 stunt point available, but in exchange your attack will do no damage by itself, which could be what you had planned anyway.

CHASE STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1+	**(CORE) PUNCH IT:** You gain a +1 bonus on your next chase test for each 1 SP you spend.
2	**EVASIVE MANEUVER:** Until your next turn, attacks against you and your vehicle (if any) suffer a -2 penalty.
2	**FOLLOW THE LEADER:** Make a test with a TN you choose and an ability focus you work out with the GM for pulling off a tricky maneuver, such as Dexterity (Acrobatics) to slip through a small opening on the run, or Dexterity (Piloting) to do the same while flying. If you fail, you crash. Anyone following you using the same method of transport must make the same test or crash.
3	**ATTACK ON THE MOVE:** You can make a bonus melee or ranged attack, or use a bonus Activate action to use an in-built weapon system. You must have a loaded missile weapon to make a ranged attack.
3	**KEEP IT STEADY:** Until the beginning of your next turn, passengers gain a +1 bonus when making attacks or making other ability tests that would benefit from a stable platform (leaping from vehicle to vehicle, for example).
4	**INTERFERENCE:** A character of your choice suffers a -2 penalty on their next chase test.
5	**SHORT CUT:** Add an additional +2 to your chase total.

GENERAL COMBAT STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	**(CORE) ADRENALINE RUSH:** Regain Fortune equal to the SP spent.
1-3	**(CORE) MOMENTUM:** Gain +3 to initiative per SP spent, changing your place in the initiative order.
1-3	**(CORE) DUCK AND WEAVE:** Gain +1 to Defense per SP spent until the beginning of your next turn.
1-3	**TAKE COVER:** If there is cover available in your immediate vicinity, gain a cover rating equal to the SP spent, up to the maximum rating available.
1+	**GUARDIAN ANGEL:** Choose an ally within 5 meters of you. If they would take damage before your next turn, 1 damage point per SP spent transfers to you instead as you interpose yourself in front of the attack.
1+	**SKIRMISH:** Move yourself or your attack's target 2 meters in any direction for each 1 SP you spend. If this movement would expose the target to a hazard, such as pushing them off a ledge, roll an opposed test of your attacking ability versus the target's Strength (Might) or Dexterity (Acrobatics), whichever is higher. If you lose the test, the target doesn't move.
1	**WHATEVER'S HANDY:** Immediately arm yourself with anything in your environment you can reasonably wield as a makeshift weapon (see **Makeshift Weapons** in this chapter).
2+	**GROUP TACTICS:** Choose one ally to move 2 meters in a direction of their choosing for each 2 SP spent.
2	**DOUBLE-TEAM:** Choose one ally to make an immediate attack on your target, who must be within range and sight of the ally's attack.
2	**INJURE:** If your target has lost half or more of their Fortune, your attack imposes an injured condition so long as its damage exceeds the target's Toughness. This condition does not reduce the attack's damage.
2	**KNOCK PRONE:** Knock your enemy prone (see **Prone** under **Conditions** in **CHAPTER 1**).
2	**OVERCOME TOUGHNESS:** Against this attack's damage, the target's Toughness is considered to be half its normal value, rounded down.

SP COST	STUNT
2	**TAUNT:** Roll an opposed test of Communication (Deception) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) against any target within 10 meters of you; if you win, they must attack or oppose you in some way on their next turn.
2	**VICIOUS BLOW:** Inflict an extra 1d6 damage on this attack.
3	**BLOCKADE:** Move up to 3 meters, positioning yourself between a foe and a target. Until the start of your next turn, the foe must succeed on a minor action Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Might) test vs. your Defense to reach the target you're protecting.
3	**EXPOSE:** Destroy or move any one object in weapon range, such as a door or crate, that could provide cover. This can take out small sections of larger objects like pillars or walls. The GM may rule some objects are too heavy or tough to be removed by this stunt, such as the bulkheads of spaceships and stations.
3	**LIGHTNING ATTACK:** Make a second attack on your turn, either against the same target or a different target.
3	**SHOCK AND AWE:** When you succeed at a non-attack physical feat or take an opponent out, anyone who witnesses it rolls Willpower (Courage or Morale) vs. your Strength (Intimidation). If you win, they suffer a −1 to the next opposed roll they make against you, or a −1 to their Defense vs. your next attack against them, whichever comes first.
4	**KNOCK OUT:** If your target has lost half or more of their Fortune, your attack imposes an unconscious condition so long as its damage exceeds the target's Toughness.
4	**SEIZE THE INITIATIVE:** Move to the top of the initiative order until someone else seizes the initiative. You may get to take another turn before some others act again.
5	**LETHAL BLOW:** Inflict an extra 2d6 damage on this attack.
5	**WOUND:** If your target has lost half or more of their Fortune, your attack imposes a wounded condition so long as its damage exceeds the target's Toughness. This condition does not reduce the attack's damage.

GUN STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	**(CORE) OVERWATCH:** Your opponent suffers −1 to attack rolls per SP spent until the start of your next turn.
1-4	**(CORE) PRECISION MARKSMANSHIP:** If you make an attack with a firearm that benefits from an Aim bonus before the end of your next turn, increase the aim bonus by +1 per SP spent.
1-3	**RICOCHET:** Make a trick shot that ignores (SP spent) of the armor rating of a target behind cover.
1-3	**SHORT BURST (AUTOMATIC):** Ignore one point of your opponent's Toughness per SP spent.
1-3	**STRAFE (AUTOMATIC):** Immediately move up to (SP spent) meters in any direction, and apply this attack to anyone within (SP spent) meters of your original target; you can't selectively exclude anyone in the area. Halve the damage dealt to the additional targets (round up).
1-5	**SUPPRESSIVE FIRE (AUTOMATIC):** At the end of each character's turn until the start of your next turn (including allies and your current target), make a new attack against that character if they're within (SP) meters of the spot where your target stands right now.
1	**RAPID RELOAD:** The next time you need to reload a firearm, in this encounter, you may do so as a free action.
2+	**EFFICIENT GUNNER:** Next time you miss with a firearm, subtract 1 from the Drama Die's result for each 2 SP spent, for purposes of checking against Capacity.
2	**LONG BURST (AUTOMATIC):** Make a second attack against the same target or a different one within 5 meters of the first; take a -2 to this attack roll, but gain a +2 to the damage roll if you hit. Roll a separate test for Weapon Capacity afterward (see p. 75).
3	**PISTOL WHIP (PISTOL):** If the attack hits an opponent adjacent to you, or next time you miss with a firearm against an opponent adjacent to you and run out of ammo, make a second attack against the same target with Accuracy (Pistols) to club them with the gun, inflicting 1d6 + Strength damage.
4	**CALLED SHOT:** You target an exposed part of your opponent's body. The attack's damage becomes penetrating.
4	**SNIPER'S PERCH:** You find high ground or another advantageous shooting position. If you attack with a firearm on your next turn, double your weapon's range and maximum range for that turn.
5	**SPRAY AND PRAY (AUTOMATIC):** Apply this attack to every target within a 5-meter radius of your original target, including allies, using the same attack test result. All additional targets gain +1 to Defense against this attack.

Note: *You may only choose stunts from this list when you earn the SP while making an attack with a gun. Some gun stunts require a specific type of gun, such as a pistol, rifle, or automatic weapon.*

GRAPPLING STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	**(CORE) HINDER:** Melee attacks your opponent makes before the start of your next turn reduce their damage by 2 per SP spent.
1	**(CORE) GRAPPLE:** You and your target make opposed Fighting (Grappling) rolls; if you win, they can't move from where they are on their next turn. You and the target both take a −2 Defense penalty until the beginning of your next turn.
2	**TAKEDOWN:** You and your target make opposed Fighting (Grappling) rolls; if you win, you and your target fall prone. Your target takes an additional 1d6 damage and can't stand up until you do, or until they succeed at an attack against you.
3	**HUMAN SHIELD:** You and your target make opposed Fighting (Grappling) rolls; if you win, any failed ranged attack against you hits your target instead, and ranged attacks against you take a −2 penalty, until the beginning of your next turn.
3	**STRANGLE:** Roll Fighting (Grappling) vs. your target's Constitution (Stamina); if you win, the target loses their minor action catching their breath on their next turn.
4	**HOSTAGE:** You and your target make opposed Fighting (Grappling) rolls; if you win, you maneuver them into a vulnerable position. If they do anything other than a free action on their next turn, or if anyone attacks you or your allies before the beginning of your next turn, you may make an immediate attack against your target with a +2 bonus to the Drama Die.
4	**PIN:** You and your target make opposed Fighting (Grappling) rolls; if you win, they can't do anything other than a free action on their next turn. You and the target both take a −4 Defense penalty until the beginning of your next turn.
5	**RESTRAIN:** If you have appropriate equipment in hand, like handcuffs or rope, you and your target make opposed Fighting (Grappling) rolls; if you win, they become restrained (see **Conditions** in **CHAPTER 1**) and can't do anything other than try to escape with a Strength (Might) or Dexterity (Sabotage) test as a major action, TN = 10 + (your Fighting (Grappling) score).

Note: *You may only choose stunts from this list when you earn the SP while making a Fighting (Grappling) attack.*

MELEE STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	**(CORE) PARRY:** Your opponent suffers −1 to Defense per SP spent until your next turn, as you guide their limb or weapon off-center, throwing off their balance.
1+	**(CORE) FOOTWORK:** You maneuver effortlessly. Gain +1 per SP spent to one combat-related test of your choice before the end of your next turn.
1	**FEINT:** Reduce your target's initiative by 1 (to a minimum of 1) for the rest of the encounter.
2	**DISARM:** You and your target make opposed melee attack rolls; if you win, knock your enemy's weapon 1d6 + Strength meters away in a direction of your choice.
3	**HAMSTRING:** Cumulatively reduce your target's Speed by 3 for the rest of the encounter. If it's reduced to 0, they become restrained for the rest of the encounter and cannot move.
3	**BIND WEAPON:** You and your opponent make opposed melee attack rolls; if you win, your opponent's next melee attack against you automatically misses.
4	**ARMOR CRUSH:** Convert up to 3 points of damage you would inflict on your foe with this attack into a penalty to their worn armor instead, based on the type of damage you dealt. This penalty lasts for 1d6 rounds or until they take a major action to readjust their armor, whichever comes first.
5	**BREAK WEAPON:** You and your opponent make opposed melee attack rolls; if you win, your destroy your opponent's weapon, rendering it unusable.

Note: *You may only choose stunts from this list when you earn the SP while making a melee attack.*

VEHICLE COMBAT STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	**SYSTEM DAMAGE:** Your attack damages the vehicle's Handling, Sensors, or Weapons. Impose a –1 penalty per SP spent to the damaged ability (up to 3). Handling imposes a modifier on tests to operate the vehicle. This penalty remains until the vehicle is repaired. Damage control with a TN 13 Intelligence (Engineering) test can negate (but not remove) the penalty for rounds equal to the Drama Die result. If the ability is reduced below –2, the vehicle automatically fails tests calling for it. If Handling is reduced below –2, the vehicle is out of control and helpless.
1+	**PENETRATE HULL:** Your attack overcomes the vehicle's resistance to damage. If a vehicle has a Hull rating, you must spend SP equal to it on this stunt before spending SP on other stunts.
2	**OFF-COURSE:** The vehicle is thrown off-course and the operator must make a TN 15 test to maintain control. A new test can be made each round to regain control if it is lost.
2	**SCUTTLE:** Your attack destroys the target vehicle. This stunt is only available against a helpless vehicle.
2+	**SHRAPNEL:** The attack causes a damaging explosion in the vehicle's interior. The operator and all passengers in the same compartment suffer 1d6 damage for 2 SP or 2d6 damage for 4 SP.
3+	**HULL BREACH:** You inflict significant damage to the vehicle, reducing its Hull rating by 1 per 3 SP spent. The loss of Hull rating lasts until repaired.
3	**SLOWDOWN:** You damage the vehicle's propulsion, dropping its Speed class by one category. If it drops to Slow or less, the operator must make a TN 15 test to maintain control. The slowdown remains until repaired. Damage control with a TN 13 Intelligence (Engineering) test can negate (but not remove) the penalty for rounds equal to the Drama Die result.
4	**DISABLE DRIVE:** Your attack disables the vehicle's propulsion. The operator must make a TN 15 test to maintain control and, even if they succeed, must deal with a vehicle that can no longer move or maneuver under its own power. The vehicle is helpless. Damage control with a TN 13 Intelligence (Engineering) test can restore the vehicle's propulsion for rounds equal to the Drama Die result.
4+	**SKEWER:** Your attack is in just the right place to do serious damage inside the vehicle: One character suffers 4d6 damage for 4 SP, or for 6 SP, 6d6 damage or the full damage of your weapon +2d6, whichever is less.
5	**RUPTURE:** Your attack ruptures a fuel line or power conduit, causing an internal explosion. This deals 3d6 penetrating damage to everyone in a compartment of the vehicle and also causes the effects of either a System Damage (3 SP) or Slowdown stunt.
6	**DISABLE ENGINE:** Your attack disables the vehicle's engine or main power, such as a ship's reactor, causing the effect of a Disable Drive stunt and leaving the vehicle completely without power other than emergency back-ups and essentially helpless. Damage control with a TN 13 Intelligence (Engineering) test can restore power for rounds equal to the Drama Die result. Otherwise the power remains offline until repaired.

Note: *Stunts from this table are used when attacking or sabotaging a vehicle.*

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTERS

Exploration encounters do not necessarily put the characters' lives in danger and, because they happen mostly in narrative time, they do not require as many detailed rules as combat. Much of the time, exploration encounters can be resolved through roleplaying or describing the situation, or using advanced tests (see **Advanced Tests** in **CHAPTER 1** and in the **GAME MASTERING** chapter).

Exploration encounters involve exploring or searching an area, investigating a mystery, making or modifying machines and other objects, and doing pretty much anything where the focus is on places, objects, and information instead of action or social exchanges. But there's no strict division between encounter types, so exploration encounters flow into action encounters, and are punctuated with social situations.

EXPLORATION & INFILTRATION STUNTS

As with action encounters, ability tests during exploration encounters generate stunt points according to the standard system described under **Stunts** in **CHAPTER 1**. Reference the **Action Stunts** section earlier in this chapter for general guidelines for spending stunt points.

Exploration stunts are most often used during encounters that revolve around investigation and discovery, covert operations, sabotage, and other kinds of adventure that don't fall into the action category. Almost any kind of test can produce exploration stunts, at the GM's discretion. However, if the GM has no more information to give or the characters are really barking up the wrong tree, the GM can simply rule an exploration stunt ineffective, signaling the players to look for a different approach.

Infiltration stunts may apply when physically breaking in somewhere or exploring a new place, hacking into a computer or network, pulling a con job, or otherwise evading consequences and getting away with things.

GENERAL EXPLORATION STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	**(CORE) WHEN A PLAN COMES TOGETHER:** You reveal this test was part of your plan all along, granting a bonus equal to the SP spent on one ally's next test during the same encounter to accomplish the same goal. If desired, you can split the bonus among multiple allies, giving each a minimum +1. You must make this decision before any ally rolls.
1+	**A STITCH IN TIME:** You put in the effort to do it right the first time, setting yourself up for greater success later. Gain +1 per SP spent on your next test related to this one during this encounter, as long as this roll was part of an advanced test.
1+	**PAY DIRT:** In the course of your endeavor, you win a bet, happen across a conveniently abandoned stash, or discover something valuable you can pawn to make a buck, among other possibilities. Temporarily gain +1 Income per SP spent; this increase lasts until you next fail an Income test. Instances of this stunt don't stack; only the highest bonus applies.
2	**JURY RIG:** You find or improvise a piece of equipment you need to be more effective. Negate any situational penalties you would suffer for lacking proper equipment on tests appropriate to the improvisation, for the rest of the encounter.
2	**SPEED DEMON:** You complete your test in half the time it would otherwise take.
3	**THE UPPER HAND:** If your success leads to combat within the encounter, you receive a +3 on your initiative roll.
4	**WITH A FLOURISH:** You impress everyone who watches you with your ability. Gain a +1 to opposed tests against them for the rest of the encounter.
5	**FRUGAL:** You use only what you must to get the job done, saving resources for a rainy day. This Income test doesn't deplete your Income even if it normally would.

INFILTRATION STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1+	**(CORE) JUST A SHADOW:** Gain +1 per SP spent to your next test during this encounter as long as you remain unnoticed.
1	**(CORE) GOOD INSTINCTS:** Make a Perception test using an appropriate focus (GM's choice) with the same TN as the test you just made to learn the most likely immediate consequence of the action you just performed.
1+	**CALMING THE WATERS:** Reduce the current Churn Pool by the SP spent. See **The Churn** in **CHAPTER 12** for details.
1	**BRAVERY:** Your success bolsters your courage, granting you 1d6 extra Toughness against the next damaging hazard you face in this encounter.
2	**OVER HERE!:** Your flashy action makes you the center of attention. Each of your allies gains +1 to their next test to hide or pass scrutiny in this encounter, such as Dexterity (Legerdemain or Stealth) or Communication (Disguise). Any action an opponent takes until then automatically targets you.
2	**TAKE ONE FOR THE TEAM:** When you successfully avoid damage from a hazard but an ally doesn't, you may take the damage for that ally while they remain unaffected.
3	**COVER YOUR TRACKS:** Whether you're hacking into a network, evading the cops, or infiltrating a military base, you impose a −2 on all future rolls to follow your trail related to this test.
3	**HIGH TECH HUSTLE:** With an injection of technobabble or a quick mod to a device, you sidestep one minor complication impeding your current goal, or give yourself the ability to perform one task you otherwise couldn't in the current situation, at the GM's discretion.
4	**IT WASN'T ME:** You leave evidence another character is responsible for the results of your test, such as breaking and entering, cheating at cards, or uploading a computer virus. All failed tests to investigate the truth reveal that person as the culprit, and such tests suffer a −2 penalty.
5	**FANCY MEETING YOU HERE:** Choose a focus or talent your character doesn't possess. An NPC of the GM's choice with that focus or talent appears in the scene within a few minutes, or a few rounds if your action leads directly to action time. This doesn't dictate anything about their situation, attitude, or identity; these are all up to the GM.

HAZARDS

Opponents aren't the only threats the characters face. They might contend with fire, vacuum, sudden falls and impacts, mechanical failures, and other perils. All these come under the general header of "hazards."

The *AGE System* handles hazards with a general system for simulating everything from explosions to drowning. Adventures define specific hazards, but when you need to adjudicate them on your own, answer the following questions:

What is the nature of the hazard? Can it be avoided? How dangerous is the hazard? Does it have any special effects? How long does it last?

"How many times can you get yourself massively irradiated before it catches up with you?"
"At least once more?"

—Caliban's War

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE HAZARD?

Describe the nature of the hazard in a general way. It could be a treacherous path leading up the side of a mountain, a raging fire, or a tripwire that sets off an explosive. Define the broad parameters.

CAN IT BE AVOIDED?

Some hazards, particularly traps, are hidden dangers. These might be detected with a Perception test, using a focus appropriate for the hazard. Use Seeing to notice a patch of disturbed earth over a buried landmine, for example. If there is a chance of detection, set the TN for the ability test as usual. PCs who make a successful test can avoid the hazard, or at least get a clue that may help them do so. Those that fail walk right into it.

HOW DANGEROUS IS THE HAZARD?

Just as you assess difficulty for ability tests, so too must you assess the danger of hazards. Consult the **Hazard Category** table and pick the one that best suits the nature of the hazard. This determines the base damage the hazard inflicts. You might decide, for example, that falling from a height is a major hazard, so that would inflict 3d6 damage. Only rare, dangerous hazards inflict more than 6d6 damage.

HAZARD CATEGORY

CATEGORY	DAMAGE	EXAMPLE
Minor Hazard	1d6	Floor littered with glass and debris
Moderate Hazard	2d6	High-g exposure
Major Hazard	3d6	Exploding panel
Arduous Hazard	4d6	Shuttle crash
Harrowing Hazard	5d6	Radiation poisoning
Murderous Hazard	6d6	Space vacuum exposure

You can also allow an ability test to mitigate the hazard's damage. A good guideline is that a successful test means the character suffers only half damage (rounded down). The falling character, for example, could be given a chance to make a TN 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to halve the damage.

Also decide if the hazard's damage is penetrating or if Toughness protects against it, as usual, and the condition applied if a character is taken out by the hazard (see **Taken Out** under **Action Encounters**, previously). For deadly hazards, this is usually dying, but others may simply leave characters unconscious or helpless instead.

DOES IT HAVE ANY SPECIAL CONDITIONS OR EFFECTS?

Some hazards impose a temporary condition. Examples might include such things as smoke from a fire leaving characters blinded, or a blast leaving them deafened, an impact knocking characters prone, or special effects like reducing a character's Speed, imposing a penalty for certain tests. The GM decides if any such effects are part of the hazard, and whether or not an ability test can mitigate them, much like reducing the hazard's damage (previously). See **Conditions** in **Chapter 1** for options.

HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

Many hazards happen once and then end. An explosive trap, for example, explodes once when triggered. Other hazards can be ongoing. Characters running through a burning building suffer damage each round until they escape, and characters exposed to radiation or vacuum likewise suffer damage every round. Use common sense as your guide to determine whether the hazard is a single incident or reoccurring and, if so, how often it reoccurs.

For specific examples of hazards and how they are handled, see **Chapter 13: Threats**.

INVESTIGATIONS

Information is power and, in *The Expanse*, finding information can be a major focus of an adventure. Note that some investigations have social components, and may mix with a social encounter (see **Social Encounters**, following).

SIMPLE INVESTIGATIONS

Some investigation encounters are simple. Succeed on an ability test against a TN set by the GM, and you get the information you need. You just need to be in the right place at the right time. In some cases, a roll isn't even required. The information is either

obvious once you get there, or the GM assumes your character has the interest and ability to find it. The GM may also ask for a specific focus that represents the required knowledge or intuition to notice the information.

EXAMPLE *Miller visits Julie Mao's hole on Ceres for a look around. The GM asks for an Intelligence (Investigation) test. Miller finds an OPA armband, and scans through the files on Julie's partition, as well as coming across an award granting Julie Mao—not Juliette—purple belt status with the Ceres Center for Jiu Jitsu. Some solid leads to follow.*

DETAILED INVESTIGATIONS

Some investigations must be carried out across multiple steps, forming an investigative trail. Each step on the trail is a lead, and discovering the significance of a lead unearths a clue and a new lead. Discovering all of the clues produces a reveal: the ultimate truth the clues uncover.

A trail doesn't need to be linear. It can have many branches, but in most cases following any branch to the end produces the same reveal. The GM should avoid putting dead ends in an investigation, unless an enemy blocks the trail deliberately, or as a momentary setback that can be reversed by creative heroes.

"Too many dots," Miller said. "Not enough lines."

—Leviathan Wakes

The GM doesn't need to pre-plan the trail—they can improvise depending on what the heroes do. Instead, the GM creates several leads whose clues connect them. The GM must determine the following things for each lead.

SITUATION

What brings the characters to the lead, and what is the lead in the story? A discarded piece of clothing could be a lead, as could an anonymous email that, at first glance, seems to be full of nothing but digital gibberish. A combat encounter could also constitute a lead.

UNLOCKING METHOD

What events or actions unveils the clue and points toward the next lead? The following options are available.

AUTOMATIC Just showing up, finding the object, or otherwise doing whatever is necessary brings forth the clue. The GM can tell you when you need to know based on your character's prior knowledge or common sense. An NPC might be willing to spill the beans.

HAVING THE FOCUS Like the automatic method, no roll is needed, but the character examining the lead must have one or more specific focuses. Noticing a gunman never intended to hit his target might be automatic for anyone examining bullet holes or a video of the firefight, as long as they possess any gun-related Accuracy focus. A character with the Intelligence (Art) focus might notice an obvious forgery, and so forth.

ABILITY TEST Most commonly, unlocking a lead requires a character to succeed at an ability test. This is often an Intelligence, Communication, or Perception test, but any ability might be useful depending on the circumstances. For instance, a Fighting test might reveal that an enemy studied at a particular martial arts school. The GM determines the most useful, or primary focuses, and any tangential, or less useful focuses, along with the TN of the test. See **Investigation Focuses** for more details.

CLUE AND NEXT LEAD

Determine the payoff: the clue and next lead. The clue is simply information. The GM tells you what the unlocked lead means. The GM should not just provide information based on the lead itself, but add whatever the character's previous knowledge and common sense would bring forth. The resolved lead points toward a new lead, until you've uncovered enough clues for the full reveal.

EXAMPLE *Miller visits the Ceres Center for Jiu Jitsu and talks to the instructor, convincing him—through some interaction—that he wants to help Julie in spite of being on an official investigation without a warrant. He learns a bit more about Julie's time training with the school but, more importantly, that she did light freighter work down on the docks, with a possible lead on the ship or ships she was working.*

It was a simple mental exercise. Look at the facts without judgment ... Statement after statement, fact after fact, facet after facet. He didn't try to put them in order or make some kind of narrative out of them; that would all come later.

—Leviathan Wakes

INVESTIGATION FOCUSES

The GM decides which, if any, focuses are helpful or required to unlock a lead. A focus best suited to unlock a lead is the primary focus. If an ability test is required, roll the dice and apply the focus as usual.

Some focuses are useful, but less than ideal. These are tangential focuses. For instance, you might not have Intelligence (Demolitions), the primary focus to examine a detonator, but you might ask the GM if your Intelligence (Technology) might help. The GM decides it's a tangential focus and reveals less information, or information more suited to the focus in question. If an ability test is required, the TN increases by +2 for a test with a tangential focus.

If you don't have a primary or tangential focus, the GM decides whether you can make a test to unlock the lead at all, especially for tests with a required focus (see **CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER TRAITS**).

The GM doesn't need to decide on primary and tangential focuses ahead of time, and can define them after talking to the players. If you present a good enough argument, an unlikely focus might become a tangential focus, or even a primary one!

EXAMPLE *The GM decides the primary investigation focus for the Ceres Center is Communication (Persuasion), and that other Communication focuses like Bargaining and Deception are tangential, as is Fighting (Brawling) for connecting with the martial arts culture of the school. Fortunately, Miller has the primary focus, so he's able to persuade the instructor without any added difficulty.*

THE REVEAL

Once the GM decides you've unlocked enough leads and deciphered enough clues along the trail, they provide the reveal: the final truth about the subjects being investigated. The GM can simply inform you, or provide it through an NPC, discovered documents, and other elements of the story. Again, the GM draws on your prior knowledge and common sense. The reveal's facts should be either scattered throughout the clues you've discovered, or the clues should bring you somewhere where it all comes to light.

The GM doesn't always have to provide a moment for the reveal. You may discover it with the facts at hand. If the GM thinks it would be useful, they can inform you that you've figured everything out, and perhaps grant additional rewards to recognize your cleverness.

EXAMPLE *Following leads to the* Scopuli, *Protogen, and the Outer Planets Alliance, Miller books passage to Eros following Holden and the crew of the* Rocinante. *In a flophouse in one of its rougher neighborhoods, his investigation comes to an end when he finds what's left of Julie Mao.*

INVESTIGATION STUNTS

Some investigation stunts have different effects depending on whether you are pursuing a simple or detailed investigation, denoted by parenthetical tags.

INVESTIGATION STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	**(CORE) A-HA!:** The GM reveals an additional useful fact about the object of your test per SP spent (Simple); gain +1 per SP spent to your next test following up on the lead you just unlocked (Detailed).
1	**FLASHBACK:** This test reminds you of something important you forgot. The GM reveals the identity or existence of another source of information you didn't know about (Simple); treat one of your tangential focuses as a primary one on the next test you make to unlock a lead related to this test (Detailed).
2	**INTUITION:** The GM reveals a fact about the object of your test you could not have noticed or deduced simply by interacting with it (Simple); when you uncover a clue, you gain two new leads instead of one, making the path branch (Detailed).
3	**LUCKY BREAK (DETAILED):** This test's result leads fortuitously to putting two and two together later. Treat one irrelevant focus as a tangential one on the next test you make to unlock a lead related to this test.
4	**DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE (DETAILED):** If this test led to a reveal, the GM also provides a brand new lead about a new subject that will lead to greater rewards.
5	**BREAKTHROUGH:** You gain not only information but some form of incontrovertible proof (Simple); reduce the total number of leads on the path by one, jumping to a further point in the investigation immediately (Detailed).

SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

Social encounters involve interactions between people, and often combine with exploration or action encounters, as well as fitting in between them. An investigation might require interviews, and combat can stop or start at the utterance of a single, critical word.

The GM may choose to run social encounters as a pure roleplaying exercise, without any rules. The GM plays the part of any NPCs, while you speak as your character, or tell the GM the sorts of things you'd like your hero to say. The rules in this section aren't meant to get in the way of roleplaying, but to provide inspiration for social scenes, align improvised dialogue with the goals of the story, and streamline interactions that might be awkward or dull otherwise.

> "Players at their level didn't deceive each other. They won even though their opponents knew exactly what was happening. Just like he was winning against her right now."
>
> —*Caliban's War*

Morale rules, covering an NPC's willingness to fight, are covered in **CHAPTER 12: GAME MASTERING**.

IMPRESSIONS AND ATTITUDES

First impressions matter. The GM decides how an NPC feels about you based on that character's motives and emotions. In other words, the GM sets the NPC's attitude. The GM doesn't need to use any rules, but might find it useful to select an attitude from the **Attitudes** table, or roll 3d6, adding the following modifiers:

COMMUNICATION Add the Communication ability score of the character taking the lead in making contact. If a Communication focus would apply to the first impression, add its bonus as well.

REPUTATION Add +2 for a Reputation that would impress the NPC. Impose -2 for a Reputation that would offend the NPC. See the **REWARDS** chapter for more about Reputation.

OTHER MODIFIERS The GM can add other modifiers to the roll based on the NPC's known feelings and motives.

One overriding rule is that NPCs will never defy their most deeply held values or sacrifice their personal safety without an exceptional circumstance coming into play. Violent threats using Strength (Intimidation) are one way to sway an unwilling NPC. Blackmail, lies, and other methods may work as well, but the NPC may resent you for this, with potential consequences in the future.

ATTITUDES

3D6 ROLL	ATTITUDE	INTERACTION MODIFIER
3 or less	Very Hostile	-3
4-5	Hostile	-2
6-8	Standoffish	-1
9-11	Neutral	+0
12-14	Open	+1
15-17	Friendly	+2
18+	Very Friendly	+3

VERY HOSTILE The very hostile NPC can barely contain their dislike, and is inclined to respond to contact with either violence or by leaving the characters' presence. They may nurse a grudge and oppose the characters in the future. This is a rare spontaneous impression, and the GM should come up with a specific reason why any first impression would get a Very Hostile response.

HOSTILE The hostile NPC reacts to contact with ire, but might disguise this. They either refuse to provide help, or undermine the characters' apparent interests.

STANDOFFISH The standoffish NPC would prefer that the characters just leave them alone. They either avoid the characters, ignore them, or firmly ask interlopers to go away.

NEUTRAL The neutral NPC hasn't decided things either way about characters making contact, and responds with cool caution, bored disinterest, or polite detachment, depending on their personality.

OPEN The open NPC is curious or inclined to listen to the characters, and reacts appropriately based on their own motives and interests. Things could go either way. A negative variation of Open is **Cowed**, where the NPC is a bit afraid of what the characters might do if they don't act receptive. Once the threat appears to be gone, the NPC becomes Standoffish.

FRIENDLY The friendly NPC takes a shine to characters making contact and is inclined to help them, but hesitates to provide any assistance that could cause them problems. A negative variation of Friendly is **Shaken**, where the NPC provides assistance out of fear. Once the threat appears to be gone, the NPC becomes Hostile.

VERY FRIENDLY The very friendly NPC is exceptionally welcoming, and provides gestures of respect or hospitality without being prompted. The NPC may provide extraordinary help, though nothing that contradicts their values. This is a rare spontaneous impression, and the GM should come up with a specific reason why any first impression would get a Very Friendly response. A negative variation of Very Friendly is **Terrified**, where the NPC anxiously does anything possible to avoid a perceived (or very real) threat. Once the threat is gone and the NPC feels safe, their attitude shifts to Very Hostile.

INTERACTIONS

It's possible to roleplay social interactions without using any rules, but sometimes the element of chance can create unexpected twists and inspire creative strategies.

SIMPLE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

The simplest way to carry out social interactions is to decide what you want from an NPC, and how you'd like to convince them to achieve it. After that, make an opposed test of your chosen strategy (often a Communication test with an appropriate focus) versus the NPC's Willpower, which might apply a focus the GM considers relevant for the attempt (see **CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER TRAITS**).

> Soren's smirk was of the psychic variety; his face didn't change at all.
>
> —*Caliban's War*

If the GM has decided on the NPC's attitude beforehand, you may gain a bonus or suffer a penalty to your interaction test based on the NPC's attitude, as shown on the **Attitudes** table. Unless events in the story dictate otherwise, most NPCs begin interactions with a Neutral attitude.

The GM can always decide an NPC will never do certain things, or acquiesces to some requests automatically. Otherwise, if you win the opposed test, the NPC basically does as you wish, though not always exactly as you might prefer.

EXAMPLE *When Miller talks to the instructor of the Ceres Center, the GM decides the man's attitude is Standoffish because Miller is a cop. That's a -1 to Miller's Communication (Persuasion) test. However, Miller wisely goes the route of appealing to the instructor's fondness for Julie by explaining that he thinks she's in trouble. The GM decides that shifts his attitude to Open for a +1 modifier. Miller succeeds on the ability test and learns what the man knows.*

DETAILED SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Sometimes you want to flex your social muscles, or get involved in deep intrigue. This is where detailed social interaction comes in. In these rules, the goal is to change an NPC's attitude to one where they feel inclined to do something in your favor. This may involve significant effort, so this system is better applied to major favors or changes in a relationship with the NPC. Again, some NPCs may never act in certain ways, as it contradicts their strongest beliefs.

The effort involved to achieve such significant influence is measured in shifts. A shift represents a change in attitude, opinion, object of attention, or any other social hurdle you must overcome.

SOCIAL RULES FOR PLAYER CHARACTERS

The rules in this section are normally only used to sway NPCs, but you can use them with other players to guide your roleplaying. In this case, the rules serve as advice, telling you what you might do, not what you must do. You select your own starting attitude.

If you change your attitude and put yourself at a disadvantage because the rules suggest your character would be swayed by social maneuvering, the GM may reward you in some fashion, including restoring Fortune or an award of Reputation, Relationship, or Membership rank.

SOCIAL "COMBAT"

The GM decides the NPC's current attitude, and the attitude required to comply with your wishes. Note the number of shifts required to move along the scale from the current attitude to the target attitude. For instance, moving from Standoffish, to Neutral, to Open, to Friendly is 3 shifts. Add 1 shift to focus the NPC's attention toward doing what you wish. Furthermore, the GM can add 1 or 2 shifts to represent the NPC's greater resistance to your efforts if the desired actions would inconvenience or trouble them in some way.

The final number of shifts can be achieved in two ways: through social maneuvers, or in a grand gesture.

SOCIAL MANEUVERS

Each shift becomes an action you perform to adjust the NPC's attitude. You can suggest an action, or the GM can require one. These may be opposed tests with the NPC or specific tasks for you to complete, such as giving the NPC a gift or laying low one of their rivals. These tasks clear any additional shifts that represent resistance first. Subsequent shifts improve the NPC's attitude, and your last task directs them to your goal. Utterly blowing a task may set back progress by one or more shifts at the GM's discretion, but in many cases nothing may happen, though any change in attitude can linger, providing a partial benefit. Thus, shifting attitudes is something that can happen between other encounters, as a gradual process.

EXAMPLE *Chrisjen Avasarala confronts Jules-Pierre Mao, who is Hostile toward the UN, even if he is cooperating outwardly. She wants to adjust his attitude (with a hammer, if necessary) to get him to cooperate, but she starts by trying to appeal to him and persuade him, first telling him she needs more information about the protomolecule and that their conversation is off the record and unmonitored. Even with Avasarala's Communication score, Mao's considerable Willpower and the negative modifier mean it yields nothing, which doesn't surprise her, so she tries the tactic of following up on Mao's daughter, Julie. Unfortunately, all that does is shift Mao's attitude to Very Hostile, at least outwardly, worsening the modifier. That means the next two tests are unsuccessful as well, and Mao leaves the meeting with Avasarala learning nothing other than that he is clearly hiding something.*

THE GRAND GESTURE

Instead of performing many small tasks to clear shifts, the GM may allow you to perform a single ambitious gesture intended to influence the NPC in one fell swoop. The grand gesture is an advanced test representing any complex project that might win the NPC's favor. A grand gesture test has a success threshold of 3-5 (determined by the GM) multiplied by the number of shifts, with interval times and other details set by the GM. If you complete the gesture in time, you produce the desired attitude and response, but if you fall short, you get nothing.

EXAMPLE *Avasarala knows Martian Marine Bobbie Draper is important because of what she saw on Ganymede. Not having time to faff around and needing to find out more about what happened on Ganymede and how it relates to the protomolecule and Venus, Avasarala makes the grand gesture of dropping in on the Dasihari Longue where Draper is drinking, sitting down and talking with her, and offering her a job. Bobbie's initial attitude is Neutral, so the GM sets a success threshold of 10 to shift her to Friendly. A few Communication tests later, the Marine accepts Avasarala's private number with an agreement to think about her offer.*

SOCIAL STUNTS

Social stunts are those most commonly used during social encounters, but a social stunt during an action scene might help turn the tide of a battle or even suspend hostilities, if the GM sees fit. Include a description of your interactions along with a social stunt, and the two must be consistent. You can't have your character deliver a scathing dressing-down and then use Class Clown to say it's funny (at least, not without a really clever justification).

Some social stunts have different effects depending on whether you use the simple or detailed social interaction rules, denoted by parenthetical tags. A stunt that worsens other characters' attitudes toward you or another character can also negate the effects of one relevant Reputation or Membership benefit per shift instead for the rest of the session, at the option of whoever chose the stunt.

ATTITUDE STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	**(CORE) MAKING AN OFFER:** Your test implies a promise or olive branch, temporarily shifting the target's Attitude toward you up by one per SP spent (even if this test already shifted it); it shifts back by the same amount as soon as you fail a social test against them. Inapplicable when performing a grand gesture.
1	**READ THE ROOM:** The GM reveals the current Attitude, or an intention or mood indicator, for one character present of your choice, in reaction to your test. You can choose this stunt multiple times per roll. Characters with either the Communication (Deception) or Willpower (Self-Discipline) focus may roll vs. your Perception (Empathy) to avoid this.
2	**ON THE FENCE:** Choose a character you didn't target who's Standoffish, Neutral, or Open toward you. They're convinced to take your side in the conflict, as long as they don't already oppose you (Simple); shift their Attitude toward you up by one for the rest of the encounter (Detailed).
3	**BAD FORM:** Immediately regain the SP you spent on this stunt, plus 1 more. Then choose any character present; they now consider you a rival, threat, or enemy, shifting their Attitude to Hostile if it was Standoffish or Neutral, or shifting it to its negative variation if it was more positive. Inapplicable if all NPCs present are already Hostile toward you.
3	**CAST OUT:** Your action shames or embarrasses another character present, imposing a −2 penalty on their next social roll against anyone but you in this encounter (Simple) or worsening the Attitude of one other character present toward them by one shift (Detailed).
4	**RISKY BUSINESS:** Your action reveals a secret or contains a significant lie, shifting your target's Attitude toward another character in the scene from Neutral or worse to Very Hostile; it also worsens your target's Attitude toward you by one shift, as they're inclined to shoot the messenger. If you lied and the target later finds out, their Attitude toward you shifts to Very Hostile as well.
5	**MEDDLE:** Your action brings others together or drives a wedge between them. Choose two other characters present and shift their Attitudes toward each other up or down by one (both in the same direction).

MEMBERSHIP & REPUTATION STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1	**(CORE) BON MOT:** You tag the perfect witty remark onto the end of your action. If you can't think of one, let the group brainstorm and pick one among their ideas. Gain a temporary honorific you can use for passive Reputation only, for the rest of the session.
1	**STICK YOUR NECK OUT:** Your test puts your own Reputation in jeopardy to help someone else. An ally of your choice gains a +2 bonus to their next social test in this encounter; if they fail, you lose all Reputation bonuses from one honorific for the rest of the session.
2	**IN GOOD STANDING:** When targeting a member of an organization in which you have Membership, treat your rank as one higher for the purpose of gaining access to resources for the rest of this encounter.
3	**BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT:** Your action impresses or charms any one character present. Roll Communication (Persuasion) vs. Willpower (Self-Discipline) to affect someone with an Attitude of Hostile or worse; no roll is necessary for others. Increase all relevant Membership and Reputation bonuses by +1 while interacting with that character for the rest of the session; this may improve their Attitude toward you, at the GM's discretion.
3	**GO VIRAL:** Whether via you or others sharing a video or audio recording, news gets out quickly about what you've just done. For the rest of the session, the honorific most related to this test applies even in situations where it seems unrelated.
4	**OOZING CONFIDENCE:** Your action impresses or fools all the right people. Gain one temporary Reputation honorific or rank of Membership for the rest of the session, or until you next fail a test relevant to this influence, whichever comes first.
5	**NAME-DROPPING:** Your action displays your affiliation with someone whose Membership rank is higher than yours in an organization to which you belong, or who has a relevant honorific you don't. You may use their Reputation or Membership benefits with that honorific or organization as your own for the rest of the session; if they find out and disapprove, worsen their Attitude toward you by one shift.

NPCS AND SOCIAL STUNTS

Remember, social stunts are available to NPCs, too. Turnabout is fair play! But be sure to communicate openly when social stunts seem to take away the players' agency to choose how their characters act. GMs should work with players to make sure no one is uncomfortable with the direction of the scene. In cases where a stunt doesn't make sense for an NPC to use, such as when it would impact Attitude (which Player Characters don't have) or Relationships (which NPCs don't have), the GM can either approximate the results through roleplay with the player's permission, or just choose something else. The GM might give Reputation or Membership to some important NPCs so they can participate in stunts that call on those traits; see the **THREATS** chapter for more on this.

Using Attitude rules for Player Characters can help make NPCs' social stunts feel less intrusive, since anyone who tries to change a character's behavior or actions that way must do so gradually, with obvious steps to follow. Like NPCs, PCs can have certain inalienable values no social stunt can make them defy, and players may draw a hard line such that not even violent threats or coercion can change a character's mind on these principles.

At the same time, players should keep in mind that good fun can arise from social influence on their characters, even if it leads in directions they wouldn't necessarily choose themselves. As the Attitude rules suggest, the GM should make sure to reward players with Relationships, Reputation, etc. if they allow social stunts to put their characters at a disadvantage.

Ultimately, if everyone at the table doesn't agree on how a social stunt should affect a character, just skip it and choose a different one.

GENERAL SOCIAL STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1–3	**(CORE) IMPRESS:** Gain a +1 per SP spent to your next social test against the same target as this test, during this encounter.
1	**CARDS ON THE TABLE:** If you were completely honest when making this test, your target must be completely honest in the next social test they make against you during this encounter. This doesn't stop either character from omitting information or offering misleading truths.
1	**MAKING AN ENTRANCE:** If this is your first action of the encounter, gain +1 to your next opposed roll against one character who witnessed it. You can choose this stunt multiple times per roll.
2	**AND ANOTHER THING:** Make a second, related test as part of your action, before anyone else has a chance to respond or make any tests of their own.
2	**HIDDEN MESSAGE:** Your words convey a different message to one person than to everyone else who hears them; the character you choose is the only one who can decipher your true meaning.
2	**SWAY THE CROWD:** Your words affect one additional person of your choice. You may choose this stunt multiple times per roll, but if someone opposed your test, you can't expand the effect to anyone with a higher ability + focus total than the original target.
3	**GOOD COP/BAD COP:** Choose an ally to immediately make a test in seeming opposition to the one you just made, with the same target. If they succeed, rather than garnering the usual results, they prompt the target to give up a secret you didn't already know.
3	**LET'S MAKE A DEAL:** Your action turns out to benefit a character you didn't target, who now owes you a favor, however grudgingly.
3	**OBJECTION!:** You step in on someone else's behalf. Another character in the scene may use your ability + focus score instead of their own next time they oppose a test during this encounter.
4	**CLASS CLOWN:** Your words lighten the mood, imposing a –2 penalty to all enemies' initiative rolls if a fight breaks out during this encounter.
4	**FLIRT:** Roll Communication (Seduction) vs. your target's Willpower (Self-Discipline) as a simple social roll against a character whose Attitude toward you is Open or better, with a positive bent; if you win, they become enamored with your character, opening the door to future romance or intimacy. How this proceeds is up to you and the GM to work out together.
4	**FROM THE HEART:** You believe wholeheartedly in what you say. Choose one Willpower focus. If you don't have it already, gain it for the rest of the encounter. If you do, it adds +3 instead of +2 to rolls you make with it.
4	**SLEEP WITH ONE EYE OPEN:** Applies to a test targeting someone you have a negative Relationship with, or who has harmed someone you have a Relationship with. The next attack you make against that target in this session is automatically a surprise attack, as long as they weren't already in combat.
5	**ENRAGE:** Choose one character present whose Attitude toward you is Neutral or worse, or a negative variant of a more positive Attitude. They must immediately either attack you or storm out of the scene. If they attack, it needn't be deadly, though it can be.
5	**PATTER:** Your rapid-fire words confuse your target, who must succeed at a Perception (Empathy) roll vs. your Communication (Deception), or automatically fail their next non-attack test against you.
7	**MY WORD IS MY BOND:** Applies to a test relevant to completing a task you've promised someone you have a Relationship with you'll perform. Gain +2 to tests directly related to completing this task until the end of the session. This stunt requires bonus SP available from a Relationship in order to meet the necessary cost.

INTERLUDES

Whereas encounters are largely GM-driven, with the GM presenting players with a situation and then adjudicating their characters' actions, interludes are largely player-driven. These are segments of downtime in between encounters in the narrative of the game. The most common interludes in *The Expanse* occur during long travel times between destinations in the system, or during off-ship breaks like shore-leave on a station or colony. An interlude allows characters time to pursue their own interests and goals, to recover from the exertions of their adventures, and to handle the routine tasks of life that get pushed aside in the press of encounters and action time. The process for handling interludes in play is as follows:

1. The GM informs the players of an interlude, such as, "Your trip to Ganymede is going to take about a week, so you have an interlude." In some cases, the players can also request an interlude like, "When we dock at the station, we want to take some time for an interlude." The GM decides when an interlude begins, however, since the players may not be aware of the circumstances, such as trouble awaiting them on the station with at least one (if not several!) encounters before they get a break.
2. The players declare how their characters will spend their time during the interlude. Depending on the length of time available, they may pursue one activity or several, depending on their requirements. The characters may cooperate on some goals or split up for others.
3. Players and the GM make any necessary tests for the characters' declared activities to see how they progress or succeed, or not. Some interlude activities require no test so long as there is sufficient time, while others need a test to see if they are successful and, if so, to what degree.
4. Once all character activities during the interlude are resolved, the GM declares the end of the interlude and begins the next encounter. By definition, an encounter always follows an interlude; two or more interludes simply add up to a single, longer interlude with more options for activities.

INTERLUDES BETWEEN ADVENTURES

> "Downtime's easier to enjoy when I know it'll end."
>
> —*Leviathan Wakes*

Generally, unless a game session ends on a cliffhanger in the middle of an encounter or leads directly into another encounter, it is common to insert an interlude between the end of one *Expanse* game session and the beginning of the next. The GM should decide whether to play out the interlude as the end of the session or the start of the next, as time and circumstances allow. You can even play out the interlude during the time between game sessions, with the players and the GM communicating via email or other means, so at the start of the next game, the interlude is already concluded and play jumps right into the next encounter.

INTERLUDES AND FORTUNE

Generally, during an interlude, characters recover expended Fortune points, returning to their usual starting total (see **Fortune** in **CHAPTER 1** and **CHAPTER 2**). This reflects the opportunity for characters to regroup, gather their wits, and generally prepare themselves for whatever challenges await them next.

While Recovering, characters regain 10 + level Fortune every 8 hours. Additionally, a character can choose one favored activity where they regain Fortune at the same rate as Recovering: This might be Relating for a social character, Researching for a bookworm, and so forth. The character's player chooses the activity, approved by the GM. Otherwise, characters regain 5 + level Fortune during an interlude.

RECOVERING OR FAVORED ACTIVITY = 10 + LEVEL FORTUNE PER 8 HOURS **OTHER ACTIVITIES = 5 + LEVEL FORTUNE PER INTERLUDE**

INTERLUDE ACTIVITIES

Depending on the length of the interlude, characters can engage in one or more activities. These are similar to actions taken during action time, but on a more narrative time scale, and interlude activities are largely simultaneous, rather than handled in rounds like action time. This section describes the most common interlude activities but, like the **Actions** section of this chapter, players should feel free to come up with their own, with the GM adjudicating them using existing activities as guidelines.

In some cases, an interlude activity requires an advanced test, with the test total determining how long it takes the character to complete the activity (see **Advanced Tests** in **CHAPTER 1**). If the character does not complete the activity in the time of the interlude, it's up to the GM whether or not those efforts carry forward to the next interlude, where the characters have the opportunity to pick up the activities where they left off. Generally, this should be the case, unless there's a compelling reason why the initial time invested into the activity would be lost, such as changing conditions or time-sensitive work.

ADVANCEMENT

During the interlude, you spend time consolidating an advancement within an organization.

REQUIREMENTS You must have received an advancement in Membership as a reward prior to the start of the interlude (see **Membership** in **CHAPTER 14**).

RESOLUTION This requires a test only if the GM feels it is needed to close the deal of an award of advancement in rank, in which case it should generally be an advanced test of Communication, unless the organization prizes some other ability you can use to demonstrate your worthiness. The test should have a fairly low success threshold, between 5 and 10, reflecting your already existing value to the organization.

INTERLUDES VS. ENCOUNTERS

Some of the activities described for interludes also fit the parameters for exploration or social encounters. So how do you decide which is which? Generally speaking, interludes are relatively brief parts of the narrative, even if they last for long periods of game time. They can usually be summed up with just a sentence or paragraph, such as, "Over the next couple of weeks, you recover, and then set to work on rebuilding that damaged cargo bay hatch" or "During the week-long trip, you spend some time together outside of doing routine ship maintenance, getting to know one another better." The stakes in interludes also tend to be lower. The characters aren't under pressure and usually the worst consequence is not having enough time or the right requirements to complete an activity.

Encounters, on the other hand, tend to focus on the moment-by-moment aspects of things. Exploration and social encounters may not break time down as minutely as action encounters do, but they still tend to progress with a fair amount of attention to detail: who does and says what when to whom and so forth. That doesn't mean you might not want to role-play out parts of an interlude activity, especially Relating, or gloss over some of the details of a social encounter with an ability test, but keep in mind the differences between them.

MAINTENANCE

You make sure things are functioning properly.

REQUIREMENTS You need the necessary tools, parts, and equipment. If you're lacking them, or they are of poor quality, the GM may say your maintenance work takes longer or is less effective. If you need to acquire them, then an Income test is needed, with a Cost set by the GM using the guidelines in **CHAPTERS 3** and **4**.

RESOLUTION Usually, no test is required, although the GM may require a character to have the appropriate focus, like Intelligence (Engineering or Technology) to do the work, and sufficient time and resources.

MAKING OR FIXING

You spend time making or fixing something.

REQUIREMENTS You need the necessary materials (which can be acquired with an Income test with a TN equal to the item's value –5) and necessary tools and equipment. If you are lacking in the latter, the GM may apply a penalty to the advanced test. If you are fixing rather than building something, subtract an additional 2 from the TN of the Income test.

RESOLUTION Make an advanced test using the appropriate focus, such as Dexterity (Crafting), Intelligence (Engineering), or Intelligence (Chemistry) with a TN equal to the item's cost –2. The GM determines the success threshold based on the item's complexity: 5 for a simple item; 10 to 15 for more complex ones; up to 20 to 25 for truly complex works or pieces of equipment. Lower the success threshold by as much as half for fixing something rather than building it from scratch, so a threshold of 20 might become 10, for example. The GM can adjust this based on the extent of the repairs needed. Each roll represents 6 hours of work. When you reach the threshold, the item is complete.

RECOVERING

Sometimes, you need to spend an interlude, perhaps even several, recovering from the results of your prior encounters.

REQUIREMENTS While recovering, the character needs to engage in only light activity: resting, reading, conversation, and so forth. No other activities can be undertaken during the same interlude while recovering.

RESOLUTION Make an advanced TN 11 Constitution (Stamina) test every 24 hours. If you are under medical care, your physician (or auto-doc) can make an Intelligence (Medicine) test against the same TN and you can use the better of the two rolls. Track the result of the Drama Die for each successful test. At a success threshold of 5, you can remove an injured condition. At a success threshold of 15, you can remove a wounded condition. For recovering from additional conditions due to hazards, the GM sets the necessary success threshold. If recovery conditions are less than ideal—like trying to recover in the wilderness with little shelter or food, or on a ship low on supplies with minimal life support—the GM may increase the TN of the test.

RELATING

You take time to get to know someone better, or to change the nature of your relationship.

REQUIREMENTS Relating only requires time and someone willing to relate to you, or given no choice but to do so by circumstances. At the GM's discretion, you might need to at least get someone else to an attitude of Neutral toward you in a social encounter before you can really relate to them during an interlude.

RESOLUTION No test is required (except perhaps to improve the other person's initial attitude, see **Requirements**). You just take time to either change your relationship with someone (see **Changing Relationships** in **CHAPTER 14**) or to establish or strengthen a Bond (see **Adding Relationships** in **CHAPTER 14**). The GM determines how long this takes: It might be anywhere from a heartfelt conversation for an hour or two to spending days or even longer together.

REPUTATION

You live up to your reputation, or create a new one for yourself.

REQUIREMENTS Either an existing reputation to maintain or a new one you are aiming for. See **Reputation** in **CHAPTER 14** for details.

RESOLUTION You spend time doing things in accordance with your reputation in order to maintain it; reputations and fame can be fleeting, and a known pattern of behavior can reinforce them. Exactly what depends on your reputation, but during an interlude it is often making your actions known in some way, whether it is giving an interview or broadcasting a video or a piece of writing out to the system. In some cases, the GM may require a

test, such as Communication (Expression or Performing) to measure the effectiveness of your efforts. You can likewise do things counter to a current reputation in order to try and rid yourself of it, or something new in order to gain a new reputation. The GM decides when it is appropriate to drop an old reputation or to award you a new one, as given in **Chapter 14**.

RESEARCHING

You spend time looking up (or digging for) information.

REQUIREMENTS You need access to sources of information, usually your hand terminal and a network, although some research might also require specific sources of data or even subjects of study, such as biological or material samples.

RESOLUTION Make an advanced Intelligence (Research) test with a TN based on how obscure or difficult to find the information you're looking for is. Each test represents 4 hours of work. The GM sets the success threshold for when you find what you're looking for. Optionally, the GM can set multiple thresholds, each revealing a particular piece of information about the subject, until you have found out everything there is to know about it.

TRAINING

Practice makes perfect, or at least secures progress.

REQUIREMENTS You need the time and the right conditions to train with whatever focus or talent you're practicing. This may also call for certain equipment, at the GM's discretion, such as a shooting range (or at least a virtual simulator) to train with guns, for example.

RESOLUTION No test is needed, but you need a hundred hours of training (cumulative) to acquire a new focus or new degree in a talent, or to advance an ability after gaining a level (see **Advancement** in **Chapter 1**). The GM is free to reduce or even waive this time as best suits the overall story. Otherwise, interludes after characters gain a level can be assumed to be taken up with at least some training time.

UPKEEP

You put time and Income into maintaining a lifestyle.

REQUIREMENTS The necessary Income.

RESOLUTION No test is required, unless the characters is trying to live above their means and enjoy a higher lifestyle than their Income would normally allow. In that case, reduce the character's Income by 1 per additional class of lifestyle, just like overextending Income on a purchase. Naturally, this makes this sort of living quite unsustainable.

WORKING

A prime way to handle upkeep is by working to get paid.

REQUIREMENTS A paying job the character can perform.

RESOLUTION Characters can spend interludes working a job, either for a particular employer or a freelance or gig approach of getting paid for certain tasks. The default is that the character maintains their Income score, and may recover from any reduction in Income from expenses prior to the interlude, at the GM's discretion. Alternately, the character can take a riskier approach, making a test with a suitable focus for the work against TN 13. If successful, the character scores a temporary windfall, a +1 to Income that lasts until after the next purchase requiring an Income test. However, if the test fails, the character suffers a reversal: a –1 penalty to Income that lasts until the character's next opportunity to increase or restore Income by reward, leveling, or interlude.

INTERLUDE PRIORITIES

Game Masters should emphasize the necessity of Maintenance, Upkeep, and Working during interludes, if the crew intends to maintain all of their equipment, technology, and their general Income and lifestyle (see **Income** in **Chapter 3** and **Lifestyle** in **Chapter 4**). If these key activities are neglected, the GM should feel free to do things like lower the characters' Income scores, apply Flaws to their equipment (or their ship!), have creditors come after them, impose trouble with finding (or leaving) a berth at a space-dock, and so forth until they take the necessary interludes to make up for lost time and effort. Sometimes this requires characters to juggle their priorities, especially when they would rather be pursuing some other activity (like Relating or Advancement) when they need to partake in an activity like Recovering. Fulfilling their needed interludes is a useful story hook as well; when the crew needs Income, time off, supplies, or a safe harbor, it gets them thinking and planning about their next moves.

6. SPACESHIPS

While water-borne ships still sail the seas of Earth, in *The Expanse*, most understand a "ship" to mean a vessel that sails the vast void of space. The number of different spaceships operating in the System is nearly impossible to list. From scout ships so small the crew can't bend over to scratch their feet to movable city-sized installations like Tycho Station, ships aren't bound by the design limits of terrestrial vessels like boats and aircraft. They come in a wide range of shapes and sizes, from tiny "rock-hoppers" to vast military battleships. Older ships rarely fall completely out of service, continuously patched and refitted, with once top-of-the-line colony transports repurposed into ore- and ice-haulers. New ships are constantly under construction, from the Bush Shipyards at Luna to ad hoc OPA construction frameworks near Saturn, and while engineers make improvements and innovations with each ship they build, there are commonalities among nearly every ship found between Sol and Pluto, and have been for generations.

SPACE TRAVEL

While the Epstein Drive has overcome some of the limits of space travel and opened the solar system up to humanity, it is still far from previous imaginary visions of spaceships able to zip from place to place without any regard for the laws of physics or the motion of all of the various bodies in the system. This section offers a brief summary of the kinds of considerations ships (and their pilots and navigators) must take into account. This information is provided as a helpful reference to inspire your *Expanse* game, not to bog it down in excessive technical detail. A lot of space travel during the game is handled as an interlude (see **Interludes** in **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 5**) in order to get on with the important parts of the story.

MOTION

Understanding space travel depends on understanding motion—how things move through the universe. There are two key measures of motion: an object's velocity (how fast it's moving), and its relative velocity (how fast it's moving compared to another object).

If you're standing on a planet or a moon, you appear still relative to the body beneath you, but you're still moving through space. The body is moving in several ways: it's rotating beneath you, it may be orbiting around a planet, and it's

orbiting around a star. It's also moving in two other ways: the star is revolving around the center of the galaxy, and the galaxy is moving away from other galaxies. (These last two types of movement aren't relevant unless you're planning an interstellar or intergalactic trip.)

Using the example of a person standing on Earth, that person is traveling, in a measure of kilometers per second (km/s):

0.46 km/s because of the Earth's rotation **30 km/s relative to the sun (orbiting around the sun)**
230 km/s relative to the center of the galaxy **600 km/s relative to other galaxies (approximately)**

VELOCITY

When you're standing still, your relative velocity is 0 meters per second (m/s). All travel, including space travel, requires changes in velocity, symbolized by Δv (or "delta-vee"). You change your velocity by applying some sort of force. The simplest examples are taking a step forward, or accelerating in a car.

Space travel is the same, whether you're launching from an object or maneuvering in space. To accelerate to low Earth orbit from resting on the Earth's surface requires a Δv (change in velocity) of approximately 9,400 m/s. Transferring from a low Earth orbit to intercept Luna requires an additional 3,260 m/s of Δv. Think of Δv as the "cost" of any maneuver in space, which you pay for using force, typically powered by an engine.

THRUST AND MASS

> "We're back up and commencing burn in thirty seconds unless someone says otherwise. Everybody get ready to weigh something."
>
> —*Caliban's War*

While the amount of Δv required to perform a specific maneuver is constant, the amount of thrust required for that maneuver depends on the mass of the object you're trying to move. The more massive the object, the more thrust is required to achieve the same amount of Δv. A tiny communications satellite requires far less thrust to move than a massive space station. Losing mass while keeping the same amount of thrust is an effective way to speed up a ship that might need to accelerate faster than normal.

MASS, SPIN, AND THRUST GRAVITY

Three things effectively cause masses to have weight: the gravity of other large masses (like planetary bodies), the centrifugal force of a spinning object like a station, and the momentum of an object under thrust (acceleration) like a ship, generally referred to as mass, spin, and thrust gravity, respectively. Mass gravity pulls towards the center of the mass, so objects on the surface of a planet, for example, have a consistent weight based on the planet's mass. Spin gravity pulls out away from the center of the spin, effectively flinging objects outward, so "down" on a station points away from the center around which the station rotates. Thrust gravity likewise pulls in the opposite direction of the thrust, so "down" on an accelerating ship is towards the drive, or opposite the direction the ship is moving.

All of these different forms are defined in terms of numbers of "g" a measurement of weight at Earth-normal gravity. So a planetoid or station might have only 0.3 g, for example, where things weigh less than a third of what they would on Earth, while a ship making a fast burn might subject people to forces of 6 g or more, where someone weighing just 80 kilos on Earth would effectively weigh 480 kilograms, or nearly half a metric ton!

ROCKETRY AND THE EPSTEIN DRIVE

Prior to the advent of the Epstein Drive, space travel required vast amounts of fuel to generate the thrust for the required Δv. From traditional rockets to ion drives to nuclear-fueled engines, the ship needed enough space to hold the fuel to provide the thrust, and would then consume the fuel as it fired its engines. This led to what physicists call the "tyranny of rocketry" equation, one of the main limitations to pre-Epstein space travel: more mass meant more fuel to generate thrust, and the more fuel the ship contained the more mass it had, but the more mass it had, the more thrust was required, and so forth to a point where adding additional engines and fuel became impractical for large ships.

The Epstein Drive changed all that. A modified fusion reactor, the Epstein Drive could generate nearly limitless thrust without the need for enormous stores of fuel, which drastically reduced the mass of ships and eliminated the tyranny of rocketry limitation. The solar system truly opened when the Epstein Drive went into wide use, as nearly any sized ship could generate the Δv required to transfer and maneuver to any other destination in the system.

ORBITAL TERMINOLOGY

Apoapsis and periapsis are generic terms applicable to any center of mass. Some bodies have more specific suffixes for the prefixes peri- and apo-, which allow pilots and physicists to describe maneuvers in shorthand:

PLANETARY ORIENTATIONS

RELATIVE TO	SUFFIX
Sol	-helion
Mercury	-hermion
Venus	-cytherion
Earth	-gee
Luna	-cynthion
Mars	-areion
Jupiter	-jove
Saturn	-krone
Uranus	-uranion
Neptune	-poseidon
Pluto	-hadion
Other stars	-astron
Galaxies	-galacticon

LAUNCHING ROCKETS

Even with the advent of the Epstein Drive, lift engines or fuel-powered rockets are still the primary means of moving objects into orbit from planets, moons, and asteroids in the Belt. It's helpful to understand a few basics about launching rockets, and a few bits of terminology about maneuvering in space.

Rockets begin by launching directly up, that is, away from the center of gravity. A planet's or moon's atmosphere thins exponentially as you climb, so launching directly up until the rocket achieves a velocity near the speed of sound (320 m/s on Earth) ensures maximum thrust with minimal drag.

At around 320 m/s (much less on smaller bodies with no atmospheres), most launches begin what's called a gravity turn, angling in the same direction that the body beneath them is rotating. This technique adds the body's rotational velocity to the rocket's velocity, reducing the required Δv for the launch. Because the rocket is already in motion in that direction, the thrust continues that motion—imagine throwing a baseball from a moving car's window in the direction the car is traveling.

APOAPSIS AND PERIAPSIS

All orbits have two points, measured from the surface of the object you're orbiting: the apoapsis, which is the highest (farthest) point from the object, and the periapsis, which is the lowest (closest) point from the object. For example, an almost-circular orbit around Earth might have an apoapsis (or apogee) of 300 km and a periapsis (or perigee) of 280 km.

As the rocket launches, its apoapsis continues to grow based on the velocity it acquires from thrust. To put it another way, the faster the rocket's going, the higher it will travel, and the apoapsis is the point where the force of gravity overtakes the rocket's velocity and it stops climbing and begins falling.

Once the launching rocket's momentum will take it to the desired apoapsis, it stops accelerating. At this point, it doesn't need to add velocity, so the ship coasts, although small burns may be required based on atmospheric resistance (which reduces velocity) depending on the design of the ship.

CIRCULARIZING ORBIT

The most efficient (and accurate) way to change a ship's apoapsis or periapsis is to burn at the opposite point. In our example, our rocket's apoapsis will be around 300 km, but its periapsis is still at the ground. If it did not burn any more, the ship would simply fly into space and come back down in an arc, with the apoapsis as its highest point. So it needs to change its periapsis (currently 0 m) by burning at the apoapsis. This is called a circularization burn, because it circularizes the ship's orbit.

Orbiting a body is similar to what a great 20th century philosopher wrote about flying. It's like throwing yourself at the ground and missing. Once the ship reaches apoapsis, the remaining Δv is spent achieving a high enough velocity to overcome the force of gravity on the ship. Without going fast enough, the ship would eventually fall back to Earth. Once it achieves orbital velocity, the ship will continue to orbit Earth (constantly "missing" the ground because it's going so fast).

HOHMANN TRANSFERS

The most basic way to move between bodies in space is called a Hohmann transfer. This takes the ship from one circular orbit to another. Let's say the ship in our example wanted to encounter Luna. Both the ship and Luna are in near-circular orbits over Earth. The ship would then wait until the point in its orbit was close enough to Luna to burn prograde, changing its apoapsis to that of Luna's. If aligned correctly, the ship would encounter Luna at the ship's new apoapsis.

Before the advent of the Epstein Drive, this maneuver was the root of all travel in the system, from docking two ships together to encountering asteroids to transferring from Earth to Neptune. Now it's mostly used to transfer to higher and lower orbits around the same body; for example, when traveling from Luna to a space station or satellite. More devious individuals could use Hohmann transfers to fling massive objects at orbiting bodies or stations. Even a 50-meter rock transferred in this way would be nearly undetectable until it struck its target and inflicted massive damage.

PROGRADE AND RETROGRADE

There are two basic directions a ship can burn: prograde and retrograde. Prograde burns with the direction of the orbit, while retrograde burns against it. A car traveling down the highway and accelerating could be said to be burning prograde, while a car rolling backward down a hill and trying to accelerate in the other direction could be said to be burning retrograde.

In our rocket example, the ship circularizes by burning prograde. Burning prograde at or near apoapsis increases its periapsis, which increases its orbital velocity. Likewise, burning retrograde near apoapsis reduces your periapsis—which is how a ship lands on a body.

Changing apoapsis requires burning near periapsis; a launch is simply a prograde burn with a periapsis of 0 m. Burning retrograde at periapsis decreases your apoapsis, which is the most useful way to achieve a planetary capture and eventual circular orbit when moving between bodies.

BRACHISTOCHRONE TRAJECTORIES AND HARD BURNS

Because the Epstein Drive removed Δv limitations to space travel, ships no longer needed to execute Hohmann transfers to maneuver between bodies. To transfer, ships can simply burn prograde at a constant rate, then flip around and decelerate by burning retrograde. This maneuver is called a Brachistochrone trajectory, from the Greek meaning "shortest time." A course using this maneuver tends to be curved as it uses the sun's gravity to increase the ship's acceleration.

The time it takes to execute a flight path along a Brachistochrone trajectory depends on two factors: the distance between the two points, and the acceleration of the ship. The greater the acceleration, the less time it takes to travel, but the multiple g-forces created by these "hard burns" are extremely stressful on the human body. Crash couches and pharmaceutical cocktails like "the juice" alleviate some, but not all, of the damage inflicted by the hardest burns.

A Brachistochrone trajectory also has the added benefit of not making a ship's destination easy to calculate until it flips and begins its deceleration burn. Most deceleration burns are calculated in advance—but a truly skilled pilot can execute them on the fly. The deceleration burn does not need to be at the same rate as the acceleration burn, which means a ship can quickly flip and decelerate hard to surprise pursuers or trackers.

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

Every object has its own gravitational pull, based on its mass. The more massive an object, the greater its gravity. When a ship is affected by another object's gravity, it is within that object's sphere of influence (SOI). Any object orbiting another is automatically within the larger object's SOI; once you pass beyond the object's SOI, orbiting is no longer possible. Generally speaking, an object's velocity is measured relative to the closest SOI. If our rocket transferred to Luna, for example, its velocity would be measured against the Earth until it encountered Luna's SOI, after which its velocity would be measured relative to Luna.

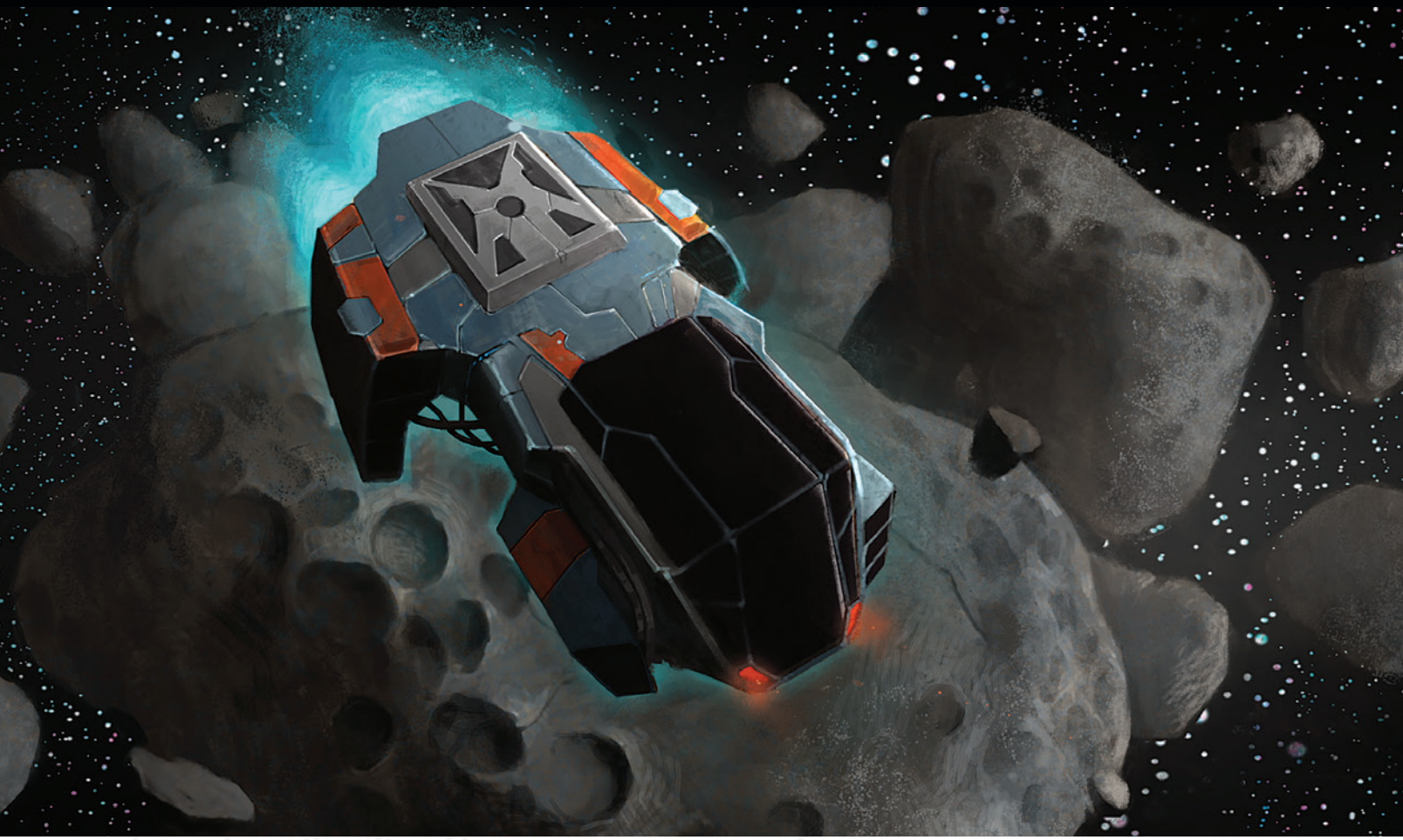
Every object in the solar system is within the sun's SOI, which means everything orbits around the sun. Each planet, dwarf planet, Kuiper belt object, comet, station, and asteroid has its own SOI as well. A ship could be within a station's SOI, orbiting the station; while also in Ganymede's SOI, as the station orbits over Ganymede; while also in Jupiter's SOI, as the moon orbits the gas giant; while also in Sol's SOI, as the planet orbits the sun.

THRUST TO WEIGHT RATIO

A ship's acceleration is limited by the power of its drive and its overall weight. Weight, unlike mass, changes based on the effects of nearby objects' gravity on the ship (a ship weighs more on a launchpad on Earth than it does in orbit, even though it masses the same). A ship's engines can only output a maximum amount of thrust. The greater the weight, which is variable based on the ship's location, the more thrust it takes to move a ship. This is called a thrust to weight ratio (TWR).

The lower the ratio, the longer it takes a ship to accelerate and decelerate. For example, a sleek 500-ton military corvette might make Earth-to-Jupiter transfer in 6 days with its Epstein Drive. The same distance with the same drive might take 6 months on a fully loaded 5,000-ton bulk freighter.

In order to launch from a body, a ship must have a TWR greater than 1.0; if it doesn't, it will sit on the launchpad and burn. An effective means of sabotaging launches is to either weigh a ship down or reduce its engines' thrust to the point where it can't take off.



THE STARS OUR DESTINATION

Whether you're transferring from Ganymede to Europa or Mars to Neptune, the concept is the same: you plot a Brachistochrone trajectory that changes your apoapsis so it encounters the other body's sphere of influence. Once there, unless the ship executes an additional burn, it will simply encounter the object and fly by (it has escape velocity unless it slows down). The ship needs to perform a capture burn so its orbit lies entirely within the target body's SOI. This is the point where it becomes clear whether a ship intends to simply fly by the object or slow down and enter orbit.

Essentially, this requires changing an apoapsis that lies outside the object's SOI into one inside the object's SOI. Burning prograde at periapsis is the simplest way to do this; it reduces velocity, allowing the ship to be "captured" by the target's gravity. These burns can be incredibly intense if the ship is attempting to "sneak" into orbit. A crafty pilot can more or less combine the deceleration burn with the capture burn, although the thrust required to do so is very high, depending on the ship's velocity as it approaches the body.

Atmospheres can also be used for aerobraking, which reduces the amount of thrust required for orbital capture. Any body with an atmosphere can help a ship aerobrake, but the thicker the atmosphere, the more stress and heat the maneuver generates. Some ships have enormous inflatable heat shields that are designed to dip into atmospheres for aerobraking maneuvers.

A ship typically still needs to fire up its engines for a capture burn even if it's aerobraking, although the maneuver subtracts from the overall Δv required for the burn so the engines don't need to burn as long or as hard. Aerobraking produces an enormous amount of friction and heat. The best pilots swear they can aerobrake in the gas or ice giants, although the unpredictable heights and compositions of their atmospheres make this one of the most dangerous maneuvers a pilot can execute.

SYSTEM COMMUNICATION AND TRAVEL TIMES

One of the few true constants in the universe remains the speed of light. Whether communications are sent as radio waves or on the laser of a tightbeam, they travel 300,000 kilometers per second. Often a message can be slowed while the receiver waits for redundant copies of lost packets of data to arrive, or for a message to work its way to the top of the queue at a

TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATIONS

TABLE 1: AVERAGE DISTANCE BETWEEN LOCATIONS (IN AU)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	0.33	0.61	1.13	2.38	4.81	9.15	18.75	29.67	39.14
VENUS	0.33	0	0.28	0.8	2.04	4.48	8.82	18.42	29.34	38.81
EARTH	0.61	0.28	0	0.52	1.77	4.2	8.54	18.14	29.06	38.53
MARS	1.13	0.8	0.52	0	1.24	3.68	8.02	17.62	28.54	38.01
CERES	2.38	2.04	1.77	1.24	0	2.44	6.79	16.42	27.34	36.76
JUPITER	4.81	4.48	4.2	3.68	2.44	0	4.34	13.94	24.86	34.33
SATURN	9.15	8.82	8.54	8.02	6.79	4.34	0	9.6	20.52	29.97
URANUS	18.75	18.42	18.14	17.62	16.42	13.94	9.6	0	10.92	20.34
NEPTUNE	29.67	29.34	29.06	28.54	27.34	24.86	20.52	10.92	0	9.42
PLUTO	39.14	38.81	38.53	38.01	36.76	34.33	29.97	20.34	9.42	0

TABLE 2: AVERAGE COMMUNICATION TIME BETWEEN LOCATIONS (IN MINUTES)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	3	5	9	20	40	76	156	247	325
VENUS	3	0	2	7	17	37	73	153	244	323
EARTH	5	2	0	4	15	35	71	151	242	320
MARS	9	7	4	0	10	31	67	146	237	316
CERES	20	17	15	10	0	20	56	136	227	306
JUPITER	40	37	35	31	20	0	36	116	207	285
SATURN	76	73	71	67	56	36	0	80	171	249
URANUS	156	153	151	146	136	116	80	0	91	169
NEPTUNE	247	244	242	237	227	207	171	91	0	78
PLUTO	325	323	320	316	306	285	249	169	78	0

tightbeam relay station and get passed along on the next stage of its journey. Worse, a distance of 15 light minutes between Earth and Ceres doesn't mean it takes 15 minutes to establish a connection: it means it takes 15 minutes for the first part of the message to travel the distance ("How are you?"), then another 15 minutes for the reply to return ("I'm fine, thanks."). Conversations of alternating messages can take hours or days to complete. Because of this, most transmitted conversations are sent as recorded messages rather than attempting a live conversation, unless the light-speed delay is only a few seconds.

Ship transit times are even more variable, as the distances between planets, planetoids, and stations in the solar system change as they follow their individual orbits around the sun. For example, Jupiter and Saturn can be as close as 4.3 AU (about 643 million kilometers) or as far apart as just over 2 billion kilometers, if their orbits happen to put them on opposite sides of the sun. The average acceleration of a ship as it travels to its destination also affects travel time. Though use of the juice allows travelers to survive prolonged periods of high acceleration (and deceleration as the ship flips halfway through its journey and starts slowing down), emergency maneuvers might happen at even higher speeds and ships carrying fragile cargo or passengers inexperienced with space travel tend to travel considerably slower.

The following tables offer a variety of information. **Table 1** offers the raw average distance between locations in the solar system in Astronomical Units, where 1 AU is the average distance between Earth and the sun, or 150 million kilometers. **Table 2** takes that distance and converts it to the average communication lag time between those locations. **Table 3** Shows the time to travel the average distance between the two locations at an average acceleration of 1 g (standard travel speed), 7 g (fast travel speed), and 12 g (extreme travel speed), presented as total required travel time under acceleration without any of the necessary breaks taken into consideration.

This information is included as a useful reference and guideline, not to put bounds on the storytelling in your *Expanse* series! As noted previously, any number of factors can affect communication and travel times, so feel free to tinker with these basic numbers as best suits your particular story or adventure. Often the narrative taking place during a transit or involving intra-system communication involves an interlude during or between adventures (see **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5** for details).

TABLE 3A: AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME BETWEEN LOCATIONS (AT .3G) (IN HOURS)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	72	97.9	133.2	193.3	274.8	379.1	542.7	682.6	784
VENUS	72	0	66.3	112.1	179	265.3	372.2	537.9	678.8	780.7
EARTH	97.9	66.3	0	90.4	166.7	256.8	366.2	533.8	675.6	777.9
MARS	133.2	112.1	90.4	0	139.6	240.4	354.9	526	669.5	772.6
CERES	193.3	179	166.7	139.6	0	195.8	326.6	507.8	655.3	759.8
JUPITER	274.8	265.3	256.8	240.4	195.8	0	261.1	467.9	624.8	734.3
SATURN	379.1	372.2	366.2	354.9	326.6	261.1	0	388.3	567.7	686.1
URANUS	542.7	537.9	533.8	526	507.8	467.9	388.3	0	414.1	565.2
NEPTUNE	682.6	678.8	675.6	669.5	655.3	624.8	567.7	414.1	0	384.6
PLUTO	784	780.7	777.9	772.6	759.8	734.3	686.1	565.2	384.6	0

TABLE 3B: AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME BETWEEN LOCATIONS (AT 1G) (IN HOURS)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	39.4	53.6	73	105.9	150.5	207.6	297.2	373.9	429.4
VENUS	39.4	0	36.3	61.4	98	145.3	203.9	294.6	371.8	427.6
EARTH	53.6	36.3	0	49.5	91.3	140.7	200.6	292.3	370	426.1
MARS	73	61.4	49.5	0	76.4	131.7	194.4	288.1	366.7	423.2
CERES	105.9	98	91.3	76.4	0	107.2	178.9	278.1	358.9	416.2
JUPITER	150.5	145.3	140.7	131.7	107.2	0	143	256.3	342.2	402.2
SATURN	207.6	203.9	200.6	194.4	178.9	143	0	212.7	310.9	375.8
URANUS	297.2	294.6	292.3	288.1	278.1	256.3	212.7	0	226.8	309.6
NEPTUNE	373.9	371.8	370	366.7	358.9	342.2	310.9	226.8	0	210.7
PLUTO	429.4	427.6	426.1	423.2	416.2	402.2	375.8	309.6	210.7	0

TABLE 3C: AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME BETWEEN LOCATIONS (AT 7G) (IN HOURS)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	14.9	20.3	27.6	40	56.9	78.5	112.3	141.3	162.3
VENUS	14.9	0	13.7	23.2	37.1	54.9	77	111.3	140.5	161.6
EARTH	20.3	13.7	0	18.7	34.5	53.2	75.8	110.5	139.9	161
MARS	27.6	23.2	18.7	0	28.9	49.8	73.5	108.9	138.6	159.9
CERES	40	37.1	34.5	28.9	0	40.5	67.6	105.1	135.7	157.3
JUPITER	56.9	54.9	53.2	49.8	40.5	0	54	96.9	129.4	152
SATURN	78.5	77	75.8	73.5	67.6	54	0	80.4	117.5	142
URANUS	112.3	111.3	110.5	108.9	105.1	96.9	80.4	0	85.7	117
NEPTUNE	141.3	140.5	139.9	138.6	135.7	129.4	117.5	85.7	0	79.6
PLUTO	162.3	161.6	161	159.9	157.3	152	142	117	79.6	0

TABLE 3D: AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME BETWEEN LOCATIONS (AT 12G) (IN HOURS)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	11.4	15.5	21.1	30.6	43.5	59.9	85.8	107.9	124
VENUS	11.4	0	10.5	17.7	28.3	41.9	58.8	85	107.3	123.4
EARTH	15.5	10.5	0	14.3	26.4	40.6	57.9	84.4	106.8	123
MARS	21.1	17.7	14.3	0	22.1	38	56.1	83.2	105.9	122.2
CERES	30.6	28.3	26.4	22.1	0	31	51.6	80.3	103.6	120.1
JUPITER	43.5	41.9	40.6	38	31	0	41.3	74	98.8	116.1
SATURN	59.9	58.8	57.9	56.1	51.6	41.3	0	61.4	89.8	108.5
URANUS	85.8	85	84.4	83.2	80.3	74	61.4	0	65.5	89.4
NEPTUNE	107.9	107.3	106.8	105.9	103.6	98.8	89.8	65.5	0	60.8
PLUTO	124	123.4	123	122.2	120.1	116.1	108.5	89.4	60.8	0

SPACESHIPS

Ships in *The Expanse* Roleplaying Game are created much like characters, in that the ship is defined by a set of abilities and equipped with a variety of technologies in order to do its job. This section provides all of the guidelines for creating a ship in *The Expanse* along with some examples of known ships.

Ships are defined by the following traits: **Size** (which determines its Hull rating and crew requirements), **Drive**, **Sensors**, and **Weapons**. Like a character's abilities, these traits define the overall capabilities of the ship. Additionally, a ship has various qualities, including additional utilities and systems, which function much like a character's equipment and may have various flaws as well, just like other technology (see **Chapter 4: Technology and Equipment** for details). The ship traits in detail are as follows.

SHIP SIZES

SIZE CATEGORY	LENGTH	HULL	CREW	EXAMPLE
Tiny	5 m	1	1 (2)	Breaching pod
Small	10 m	1d3	1 (2)	Shuttle or skiff
Medium	25 m	1d6	2 (4)	Ship's boat, drop ship
Large	50 m	2d6	4 (16)	Frigate
Huge	100 m	3d6	16 (64)	Destroyer
Gigantic	250 m	4d6	64 (512)	Cruiser
Colossal	500 m	5d6	256 (2,048)	Battleship
Titanic	1 km+	6d6	1024 (8,192)	Colony generation-ship

SIZE

The primary trait of a ship is its Size. This is one of eight size categories, ranging from a Tiny rock-hopper to a Colossal battleship or truly Titanic vessel the size of a station. Size determines things like the ship's Hull score, its needed and average crew complements, and its capacity for certain utilities. Generally, the larger the ship, the more potentially powerful it is, but some larger ships are not equipped for combat whereas some smaller ships are, so Size is not the sole indicator of power. A Colossal freighter can easily be destroyed by a Medium ship with the right armaments.

HULL

A ship's Hull measures its overall structural strength. Hull functions much like a character's Toughness, taking into account that larger ships are not necessarily made of stronger materials, but simply a great deal more of them. Larger ships can also more easily soak up damage that misses any of the ship's vital systems due to their overall massive size.

CREW

Whether it carries passengers or cargo, the responsibility for getting the ship to its destination lies with its crew. The **Ship Sizes** table lists the minimum crew needed to run a ship of that size at full efficiency, along with an estimate of a more regular crew complement for that size. For each category the ship's crew drops, apply a –2 modifier to tests involving control or oversight of the ship's systems. So a crew of 16 trying to run a Colossal battleship would leave the ship at a –4 penalty to crew-overseen tests.

ONE REDUCTION IN CREW SIZE = –2 MODIFIER TO SHIP SYSTEM TESTS

Controlling a ship is so decentralized that various command functions can be passed from one terminal to another, even to a hand terminal connected to the ship's network when necessary. Still, most ships have a bridge or ops (operations) deck where the crew gathers to oversee its various functions.

CREW COMPETENCE

When the ship's crew is made up of Player Characters, they use their own abilities (modified by focuses and talents) to handle the shipboard tests described in this chapter. In cases where a ship's crew is made up of unknown NPCs, or when the GM simply wants some useful shorthand, you can choose roughly how competent the crew is to determine their relevant bonuses. These guidelines assume competent crews are at least somewhat trained in—and therefore good at—their jobs.

CREW COMPETENCE

COMPETENCE	BONUS
Incompetent	0
Poor	1
Average	2
Capable	3
Skilled	4
Elite	5

Each ops position has an acceleration couch with terminal screens and controls within easy reach, even while the ship is under acceleration, keeping in mind that crews under heavy g-forces are barely capable of moving. Some crew stations have controls that make particular tasks easier, such as thruster control joysticks and throttles for the reaction engines at the pilot's station, traditionally the most forward station on the ops deck. Other stations may have interfaces particular to the crew member manning them, like a virtual reality headset for threat monitoring at a battle station.

Nearly every command position is aided by expert systems, and while corporations might like to believe all ships should be programmed to fly themselves, emergencies arise often enough to make human decisions necessary—and ships left to their own devices are quickly confounded by unexpected situations.

DRIVE

Any ship operating between planetary orbits is equipped with an Epstein Drive, powered by an on-board fusion reactor. The speeds allowed by an Epstein require an acceleration couch for each crew member or passenger to cushion them against the crushing g-forces and to administer "the juice," a cocktail of drugs to help endure rapid acceleration. Although Epstein Drives allow for travel at considerable speeds, even the juice doesn't allow human beings to survive using the drive at anywhere near its full potential, and even then not for long, as Solomon Epstein learned himself on his fateful flight.

> "The Epstein Drive hadn't given humanity the stars, but it had delivered the planets."
>
> —*Leviathan Wakes*

Even at a high-g burn, regular breaks must be taken for the crew to attend to their biological needs and recover, which means that ships must have stores of food, water, air, medicine, and other consumables in proportion to the crew and the distance the ship plans to travel. In the smallest of ships everything happens without the crew leaving their couches, but that kind of confinement can lead to mental problems alongside physical ones. Most ships provide galleys, toilets, showers, medical bays, and all the other necessities for shuttling living beings from one place to another.

An Epstein Drive plume is visible and detectable over a considerable distance, meaning a ship on the burn is fairly easy to track. The plume itself is capable of reducing any matter in it down to its constituent atoms, and firing a drive in close proximity to a station, an asteroid, or another ship can cause considerable damage.

THRUSTERS

In addition to an Epstein, ships are equipped with maneuvering thrusters for making adjustments in their orientation and heading and for things like station-keeping, matching the rotation or vector of another ship or station, for example. These thrusters use super-heated steam as propellant, leading to the expression "flying teakettle" from ship crews to refer to thruster-based maneuvers.

Some smaller vessels also have rocket thrusters intended for use in a gravity well, for ships intended to take off from or land on the surface of a planet. The ship uses these thrusters for braking as it comes in for a landing, or to reach orbital escape velocity upon departure. Some small orbital vessels like shuttles are equipped solely with these types of thrusters and lack an Epstein Drive altogether, making them only useful for relatively short trips to high orbit and back.

SENSORS

Ships use a variety of information gathering devices, including optical telescopes, radio reception, radar, and ladar (laser-based range finding and scanning) to sweep nearby space. The ship's computer assembles this data into usable information for the crew, fed to their terminals. A ship's Sensors score measures the overall effectiveness of this equipment, on a range from –2 to 6 or more, from the most minimal and broken-down sensor equipment to state-of-the-art systems found primarily in military ships. A Sensors score above 6 is extraordinary, found only in a one-of-a-kind or cutting-edge vessel.

SENSORS SCORE = –2 TO 6 (OR GREATER) USED FOR SENSORS TESTS

A ship always has at least passive sensors running, plus a mix of radar and ladar scanning the nearby regions of space, software-defined radio packages running broad spectrum sweeps for communications traffic, and automated optical tracking systems parsing data from the ship's telescopes. Passive sensors can be set to trigger alerts whenever they return a particular result, or when they detect predefined profiles such as those matching ship classes recorded in the onboard database or a specific ship transponder signal.

When the crew decides something is of particular interest, they can use active sensors, which employ the same equipment but focus the area analyzed and increase the power—also making it easier to detect the ship as it sends out radar and laser emissions. Aboard military vessels, the operations and battle stations are linked by expert systems making up a broad-spectrum intelligence package combing all sets of incoming data in real-time, filtering it, and helping the ship's crew focus on priority targets.

When sensors detect trouble, a ship's crew will usually ready whatever weapons systems they have available, using the sensors to target them, but most ships also have defensive countermeasures packages used to help keep enemies from targeting them. Communications arrays can broadcast cycling bursts of radio static across commonly used frequencies to jam communications, and at close enough range, communications lasers can be used to try and blind enemy targeting optics. Physical chaff can be ejected into space between the ship and enemies, spreading out clutter to interfere with targeting lasers or radar.

WEAPONS

While civilian ships are unarmed, military and security craft have a variety of weapons, as do some pirates and similar illegal ships. Like piloting, targeting of a ship's weaponry is rarely left entirely to computers. Usually, command codes restrict firing any weapons until one or all are set to free fire by the captain or another officer, at which point they can be fired by the ship's targeting software or crew at one of its command stations. Usually, weapons-fire is a mix of computer and crew, with humans selecting and prioritizing targets from those within range of the ship's weapons, which are then optimally fired by the computer using data from the ship's sensors, though manual targeting via gun cameras is possible when necessary.

A properly calibrated weapons targeting system will hit any target within range automatically if all factors (trajectory, speed, and so forth) remain unchanged. In combat, though, enemy ships are constantly maneuvering, using electronic countermeasures, and laying down defensive fire to evade incoming attacks, meaning a hit is less certain.

GRAPPLERS

Although not a weapons system as such, military ships—and Belter pirates even more so—use magnetic grapplers to attach to a target ship and pull in close enough for a boarding action. Grapplers, electromagnetic pads on long tow-cables, are also fired to grab and reel in nearby objects.

POINT DEFENSE CANNONS

Point defense cannons (or PDCs for short) are rotary Gatling-style guns firing streams of Teflon-coated tungsten slugs. They are the most common ship-mounted weapons, primarily intended as a defensive measure to shoot down incoming attacks or to destroy micro-meteors or other debris that might pose a threat to the ship. At close range, distances of a few kilometers, PDCs are also effective offensive weapons, able to chew up targets. At greater distances, it's fairly easy for a ship to track and evade the incoming rounds.

RAIL GUNS

Ships with heavier weaponry usually begin with a magnetic rail gun, spinal-mounted along the length of the ship so firing stresses don't tear the ship apart, and therefore requiring the ship to be pointed directly at or directly away from its target

GOING NUCLEAR

The most powerful weapons in space combat are torpedoes armed with nuclear warheads. A nuclear torpedo is an effective instant-kill when it hits its target; everything in the blast radius is annihilated, reduced to a thin cloud of plasma, with no need to calculate or apply damage. That said, nuclear torpedoes are the very definition of a strategic military weapon. They are available to only military units (or possibly illegal corporate black operations) and even then their use is restricted if any lesser weapon can be reasonably expected to do the job.

Note that the blast radius of a nuclear torpedo is about a kilometer, so even a proximity detonation can be devastating. But anything outside of that area is relatively safe, other than from the radiation and any possible debris, and most ships in *The Expanse* are heavily shielded against radiation already. In general, *Expanse* GMs are well-advised to reserve nuclear weapons as plot devices under their strict control and to keep them out of the hands of the PCs!

(depending on which direction the rail gun faces). Gigantic or larger ships can mount a rail gun on a rotating turret to allow for a wider range of firing arcs. Rail guns fire heavier one-kilogram versions of the tungsten slugs used by PDCs, with a depleted uranium core for added density. An on-target rail gun round can puncture a ship from stem to stern.

TORPEDOES

The longest-range weapons are self-guided torpedoes, essentially a tiny Epstein Drive carrying an explosive warhead. Since they are tiny and unmanned, torpedoes can accelerate much faster than any ship, making it almost impossible to outrun them. Torpedoes follow the direction of shipboard targeting lasers used to "paint" an enemy, switching over to their own internal guidance systems when necessary. A primary function of point defense cannons is to shoot down incoming torpedoes before they can reach the ship, with electronic warfare countermeasures looking to confuse and throw off their guidance systems so a capable pilot can evade them.

QUALITIES AND FLAWS

Like character-scale equipment, ships may have various qualities, including a range of utilities from basic creature comforts to vital medical systems to defensive or powerful offensive weapons systems. Similarly, some ships may have various flaws, from design problems to ongoing systems issues or the like.

SHIP QUALITIES

ADVANCED SENSOR PACKAGE The ship's sensor package and associated software are upgraded, providing a +1 increase in Sensors score for each time this quality is applied. So Advanced Sensor Package III, for example, is a +3 increase in Sensors. The Sensors score usually maxs out at 6, unless the GM chooses to make an exception.

GOOD JUICE The ship's supply of acceleration tolerance drugs (the juice) is especially high-quality, providing a +2 bonus on Constitution (Stamina) tests against high-acceleration maneuvers.

HANGAR BAY The ship has a hangar capable of carrying ships three or more Size categories smaller than it. For example, a Colossal ship can have a Hangar Bay able to carry ships up to Large size. The Hangar Bay has all of the necessary equipment for maintenance on the ships it can contain (see **Maintenance** under **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5**).

HIDDEN COMPARTMENTS The ship has hidden compartments designed for smuggling or otherwise concealing cargo from inspections or borders.

HULL PLATING The ship has a +1 bonus when determining its Hull total against damage (see **Hull Total** under **Space Combat**). A ship can have this quality multiple times, up to a maximum equal to its Hull score in dice.

IMPROVED STORES The ship is capable of stocking supplies for extended travel for its crew and a number of passengers equal to half its optimal crew listing.

LUXURY AMENITIES The ship has especially fine or luxurious accommodations including acceleration couches, a fully stocked bar and galley, exercise facilities, and more, adding +1 to the Lifestyle Cost to maintain the ship (see **Upkeep** in **CHAPTER 5**). The crew can eliminate the increase to Cost by losing this quality.

MANEUVERABLE The ship is fast and maneuverable, considered one Size category smaller than its actual Size for tests to change range, to evade attacks, and for chases. This usually amounts to a +1 bonus to those tests. For two qualities, the ship can be Highly Maneuverable, effectively two Size categories smaller.

MEDICAL EXPERT SYSTEM The ship's medical facilities include a medical expert system—also known as an "auto-doc"—able to provide treatment (see **Recovery** in **Interludes** in **CHAPTER 5**) like a trained character with the Intelligence (Medicine) focus with a +2 bonus. It can diagnose conditions, dispense pharmaceuticals from drug-banks, and provide other treatments, along with issuing instructions to human crew members on how to provide treatments it cannot, such as setting a broken bone or relocating a joint. Additional applications of this option provide an Advanced Medical Expert System with an additional +1 bonus per option, to a maximum of +5.

PLASMA TORPEDOES The ship must have a Torpedo Launcher quality (see **Weapon System**, following). The ship is equipped with plasma torpedoes, designed to burn through hulls and inflict focused damage. The torpedo does 1 die less damage, but the targeted ship also reduces its Hull score by one category against it.

SELF-DESTRUCT SYSTEM The ship has an onboard system that can be programmed to drop the containment on the ship's fusion reactor, causing an explosion that annihilates the ship and anything on board. The self-destruct can be set on a countdown or a dead-man's switch that activates automatically when a control is pressed or released.

STEALTH The ship has an energy-absorbing surface coating and powerful internal heat-sinks. While the ship is at rest, with its drive inactive and using only passive sensors, it is effectively invisible and undetectable to ship sensors.

WEAPON SYSTEM The ship has one weapon system from the list under **Weapons** previously in this chapter: a point defense cannon, a rail gun, or a torpedo launcher. Weapon System qualities have the following limitations:

POINT DEFENSE CANNON One selection of this quality provides PDCs to cover the ship's forward arc, roughly 180° from the amidships forward. Two qualities sets up a PDC network that covers all angles around the ship.

RAIL GUN The ship must be at least Medium-sized. The rail gun is spinal-mounted with either a forward or rear firing position. Large or larger ships can mount two rail guns (one in each direction). A Gigantic or larger ship can mount rail guns on turrets, covering a half-spherical range of fire on one side of the ship.

TORPEDO LAUNCHER The ship must be at least Medium-sized to mount a single torpedo launcher. Each additional Size category adds capacity for one launcher (two at Large, three at Huge, and so on).

SHIP FLAWS

BAD JUICE The ship's juice is not of the highest quality, imposing a –1 penalty to Constitution tests involving acceleration hazards.

FAULTY SYSTEM One of the ship's systems does not work as reliably as it should. The first time in an encounter when it is important that the system works, roll a die: On a 1 or 2, the system stops working, just like a loss due to damage (see **Losses** under **Space Combat**) and it requires a similar damage control effort to get it working again (a TN 11 advanced Intelligence (Engineering) test with a success threshold of 5). Until repaired, the non-functional system cannot be used.

FRAGILE The ship is not as structurally sound as it should be (or perhaps, once was); reduce its Hull score to that of the Size category one below the ship's Size. So a Fragile Colossal freighter, for example, has a Hull score of 3d6 (that of a Gigantic ship) rather than the usual 4d6 for a Colossal ship.

HIGH MAINTENANCE The ship is finicky and needs some tender-loving care to stay in operational condition. The GM should require additional Maintenance activities during interludes (see **Interludes** in the **Game Play** chapter) and increase the Lifestyle Cost of maintaining the ship by +1.

LUMBERING The ship is considered one Size category larger than its actual Size in terms of maneuvering tests to change range, to evade attacks, and for chases. This usually amounts to a –1 penalty to such tests.

POOR AMENITIES The ship's living quarters and other amenities are poor, so much so that Recovering activities on board take 50% longer. See **Recovering** under **Interludes** in the **Game Play** chapter.

VULNERABLE SYSTEMS When the ship takes losses, choose an additional loss condition, so three for a 1d6 loss, and five for 2d6. See **Losses** under **Space Combat**.

WANTED The ship is trouble and somebody, perhaps even several somebodies, are after it. This can cause problems docking at legitimate ports, or might mean the ship needs to avoid certain places or routes in order to avoid further trouble. The GM should use this flaw as a story hook and cause trouble for the crew so long as the ship has it.

ACQUIRING A SHIP

The Cost target number of even a Small ship is fairly astronomical, such that privately owned ships tend to be much like houses. Some individuals or crews can manage to own a Tiny to Medium-sized one, usually without a lot of qualities, either through inheritance or a regular mortgage payment. Large and bigger ships tend to be owned either by corporations or governments, with military-grade ships limited primarily to the Earth and Martian navies and a handful of corporations and Outer Planets factions.

In other words, whether or not the crew has a ship, what type of ship it is, its game traits, and who ultimately owns it are all largely up to the GM in an *Expanse* game. If the series calls for the crew to have or own a ship, the GM can provide opportunities, either from the start of the game or after a few initial adventures—much like how the survivors of the *Canterbury* acquire a Martian Naval frigate and rename it the *Rocinante* in the first book of *The Expanse* series. **Chapter 15** provides more on different starting points and series frameworks, while **Chapter 14** looks at rewards and **Chapter 12** at the GM's job overall.

SHIP MAINTENANCE AND UPKEEP

The life of a ship-owner and -operator is one focused on keeping the ship going, since a ship breakdown isn't like having trouble with your ground vehicle. There isn't likely to be anyone you can call for help, and "towing service" is hard to find out in the vastness of space. Adventures can also be pretty hard on a ship, especially if it comes to a fight (see **Space Combat** later in this chapter). That means putting in regularly for repairs, maintenance, and resupply.

SHIP MAINTENANCE AND INTERLUDES

As with equipment, the GM should take the crew's need to maintain their ship into account for maintenance activities during interludes, and remind players that neglecting these responsibilities may lead to the ship developing flaws (see **Ship Flaws**, previously) or even suffering some losses, as if it were damaged (see **Losses** under **Space Combat**, following). As with other forms of upkeep, taking care of the needs of a ship can provide a number of useful story-hooks, including finding a safe docking port, sources of supplies and spare parts, and skilled technicians and engineers (to assist or supplement the work of the crew), and maintaining the necessary level of Income to keep the ship in good condition.

SHUTTLE

SIZE Small (10 meters long)
HULL 1d3 **CREW** 1 (2)
COMPETANCE Poor to Average
DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters
SENSORS 0
QUALITIES
None
FLAWS
None, although one or more is common for a poorly maintained or old shuttle, particularly Faulty System or Fragile.

SHIP'S BOAT

SIZE Medium (25 meters long)
HULL 1d6 **CREW** 2 (4)
COMPETANCE Average
DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters
SENSORS 1
WEAPONS
None. A military ship's boat might have a PDC.
QUALITIES
Usually none.
FLAWS
Usually none.

DROP SHIP

SIZE Medium (25 meters long)
HULL 1d6 **CREW** 2 (4)
COMPETANCE Average to Capable
DRIVE Thrusters (surface-to-orbit and ship-to-ship only)
SENSORS 1
WEAPONS
None. A military drop ship might have a PDC.
QUALITIES
Usually none. A military drop ship might have Hull Plating, possibly an Advanced Sensor Package.
FLAWS
Usually none.

FRIGATE

SIZE Large (45 meters long)

HULL 2d6 **CREW** 4 (16)

COMPETANCE Capable to Skilled

DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters

SENSORS 1

WEAPONS

Two Torpedo Tubes: Long Range, 4d6 Damage

Point Defense Network: full coverage, Close Range, 2d6 Damage

QUALITIES

Good Juice, Improved Stores, Medical Expert System. Other common Qualities include an Advanced Sensor Package, Hull Plating, an improved Medical Expert System, or an additional Weapon System, like a spinal-mounted Rail Gun.

FLAWS

Usually none.

SMALL FREIGHTER

SIZE Large (50 meters long)

HULL 2d6 **CREW** 4 (16)

COMPETANCE Poor to Average

DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters

SENSORS 0

WEAPONS

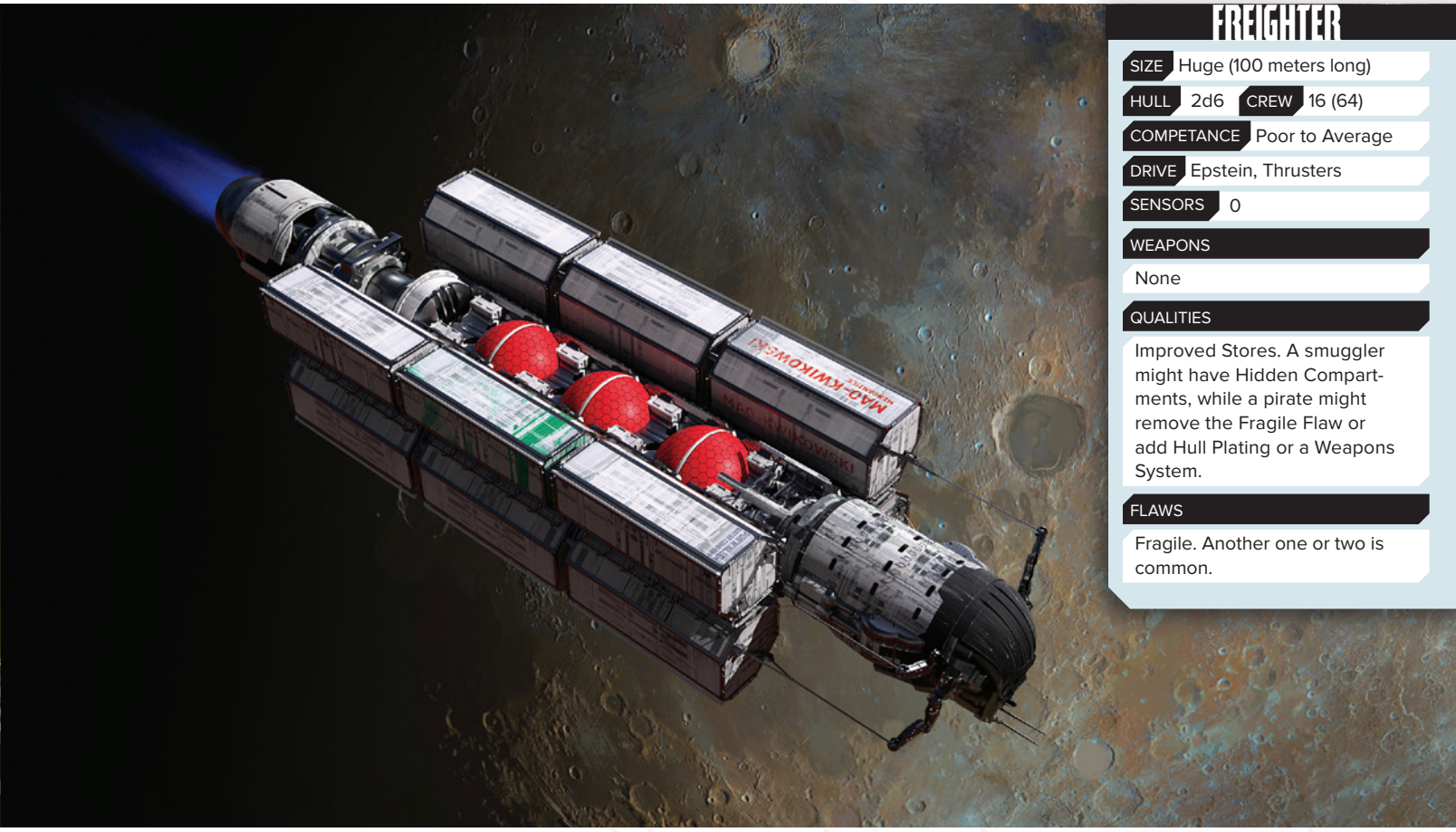
None.

QUALITIES

Improved Stores. A smuggler might have Hidden Compartments, while a pirate might remote the Fragile Flaw or add Hull Plating or a Weapons System.

FLAWS

Fragile. Another one or two is common.



FREIGHTER

SIZE Huge (100 meters long)

HULL 2d6 **CREW** 16 (64)

COMPETANCE Poor to Average

DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters

SENSORS 0

WEAPONS

None

QUALITIES

Improved Stores. A smuggler might have Hidden Compartments, while a pirate might remove the Fragile Flaw or add Hull Plating or a Weapons System.

FLAWS

Fragile. Another one or two is common.

DESTROYER

SIZE huge (100 meters long)

HULL 3d6+1 **CREW** 16 (64)

COMPETANCE Average to Skilled

DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters

SENSORS 2

WEAPONS

Point Defense Network: full coverage, Close Range, 2d6 Damage

Rail Gun: Medium Range, 3d6 Damage

Two Torpedo Tubes: Long Range, 4d6 Damage

QUALITIES

Advanced Sensor Package (+1), Good Juice, Hull Plating (+1), Self-Destruct System

FLAWS

Usually none.

MEDIUM FREIGHTER

SIZE Gigantic (250 meters long)
HULL 3d6 **CREW** 64 (512)
COMPETANCE Poor to Average
DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters
SENSORS 0

WEAPONS

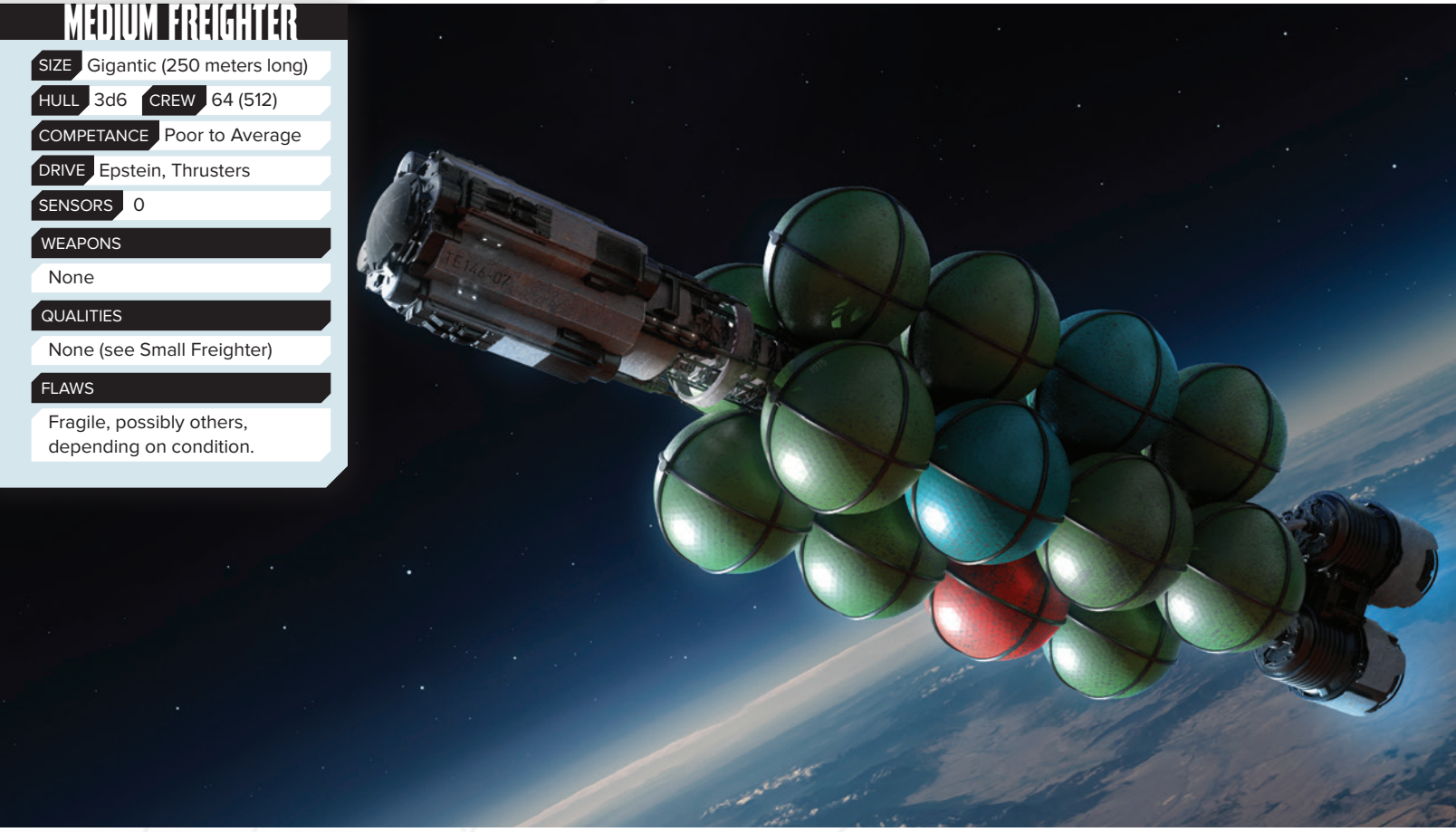
None

QUALITIES

None (see Small Freighter)

FLAWS

Fragile, possibly others, depending on condition.



CRUISER

SIZE Gigantic (250 meters long)
HULL 4d6 **CREW** 64 (512)
COMPETANCE Skilled to Elite
DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters
SENSORS 2

WEAPONS

Point Defense Network: full coverage, Close Range, 2d6 Damage

Rail Gun Turret: Medium Range, 3d6 Damage

Three Torpedo Tubes: Long Range, 4d6 Damage

QUALITIES

Advanced Sensor Package (+2), Good Juice, Hangar Bay, Improved Stores, Medical Expert System, Plasma Torpedoes, Self-Destruct System

FLAWS

None.

LARGE FREIGHTER

SIZE Colossal (500 meters long)

HULL 4d6 **CREW** 256 (2,048)

COMPETANCE Poor to Capable

DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters

SENSORS 0

WEAPONS

Point Defense Network: full coverage, Close Range, 2d6 Damage)

QUALITIES

Improved Stores (see **Small Freighter**)

FLAWS

Fragile, High Maintenance (or another Flaw that has developed due to lack of maintenance)

BATTLESHIP

SIZE Colossal (500 meters long)

HULL 5d6 **CREW** 256 (2,048)

COMPETANCE Skilled to Elite

DRIVE Epstein, Thrusters

SENSORS 3

WEAPONS

Point Defense Network: full coverage, Close Range, 2d6 Damage

Two Rail Gun Turrets: Medium Range, 3d6 Damage

Four Torpedo Tubes: Long Range, 4d6 Damage

QUALITIES

Advanced Sensor Package (+2), Good Juice, Hangar Bay, Improved Stores, Medical Expert System, Plasma Torpedoes, Self-Destruct System

FLAWS

None.

SPACE COMBAT

Combat between ships in *The Expanse* is similar in some regards to combat between characters, but on a much larger (and often slower) scale and more simultaneous in execution than character-scale combat. Space combat uses the following series of steps:

1. **COMMAND** The character in command of the ship issues orders, determining how hard the crew can push themselves this turn and what advantages the commander's leadership grants.
2. **MANEUVERS** At the start of a round of combat, determine the range between the ships involved. Space combat ranges fall into one of three broad bands: Long Range, Medium Range, and Close Range or CQB (Close Quarters Battle). Range determines effective weapon attacks and defenses. Ships can attempt to maneuver to extend or close the distance between them.
3. **ELECTRONIC WARFARE** Determine the effectiveness of the ship's sensor information and any efforts to deceive enemy sensors, and therefore targeting, using electronic warfare techniques.
4. **WEAPON ATTACKS** All ships involved in the combat select targets and make attacks with their available weapons.
5. **DEFENSIVE ACTIONS** All targets of weapon attacks take defensive actions, including evasion and the use of point defense weapons.
6. **ATTACK DAMAGE** Resolve the damage of any weapon attack that successfully gets past defenses in Step 5.
7. **DAMAGE CONTROL** If a ship is suffers losses due to damage but is not taken out, its crew can attempt to minimize the effects of the losses.

Then repeat the process starting at Step 1 again until all ships on one side of the battle are either taken out or choose to roll over, much like character-scale combat described in **CHAPTER 5**.

A round of space combat tends to be a bit longer than a round of character-scale combat, upward of a minute or so, although the exact time is flexible as with character-scale combat. It's long enough for all of the ships involved to execute all of the steps listed previously.

COMMAND

At the start of each round of combat, the character in command of the ship can make a TN 11 Communication (Leadership) test. If successful, the commander generates 1 stunt point, plus additional SP equal to the value of the Drama Die if the roll contains doubles, much like a Stunt Attack action (see **Chapter 5**).

The commander may spend SP generated from the command test on other ship combat actions that round. This is an exception to the general rule that SP must be spent immediately—they can apply to any test by the ship's crew that round. Once a new round of ship combat begins, any unspent command SP from the prior round are lost, and the commander makes a new command test.

COMMAND TEST = COMMUNICATION (LEADERSHIP) VS. TN 11

SUCCESS = 1 STUNT POINT (+ DRAMA DIE SP WITH DOUBLES)

Command stunt points may be spent on the stunts listed on the **Command Stunts** table.

MANEUVERS

For combat to occur between ships, they must be within range of each other's weapons. Ship combat at the longest range uses torpedoes, then medium range weapons like rail guns, and finally relatively short-distance weapons like point defense cannons, primarily used defensively to shoot down incoming projectiles, but also used offensively in close quarters. If a ship is not within range to use its weapons, it can execute all of the other steps of combat, but cannot effectively attack the opposing ship.

LONG RANGE (100 TO 1,000 KM OR MORE)

At this distance, self-guided torpedoes are the only really effective weapons, as other attacks are too easy to predict and dodge under normal circumstances.

MEDIUM RANGE (5 TO 100 KM)

At this distance, direct fire weapons like rail guns are effective, whereas they are fairly easy to evade at longer ranges.

CLOSE RANGE (5 KM OR LESS)

At this distance, a ship's point defense cannons make effective ship-to-ship weapons for close quarters battle.

CHANGING RANGE

In the maneuver phase, ships can shift their relative positions by one range band, moving from Long to Medium Range, for example, or from Short to Medium Range. If a ship wants to maintain the distance between it and a pursuing attacker, roll an opposed Dexterity (Piloting) test between the two ships, with the smaller (and therefore faster and more maneuverable) ship getting a +1 bonus per Size category smaller than the larger ship. So,

COMMAND STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1+	**(CORE) GUIDANCE:** You grant a +1 bonus to a chosen ship combat test this round for each 1 SP you spend. Choose one of the following: maneuver test, electronic warfare test, evasion test, point defense test, or damage control test.
1+	**BLINDING MANEUVER:** You maneuver your ship in such a way as to blind or limit an opponent's Sensors. Each SP you spend reduces an opposing ship's Sensors score by 1 (to a minimum score of –2) until the start of the next round.
2	**MULTI-TARGETING:** Your ship's point defense cannons (if any) can both attack and defend this round without any penalty (see **Point Defense** under **Defensive Actions**).
2+	**ON-TARGET:** Every 2 SP you spend increases the TN of tests to evade your ship's weapon attacks that round by +1.
2+	**TACTICS:** Every 2 SP you spend increases the TN of an opposing ship commander's next command test by +1.
3+	**EVASIVE ACTION:** Every 3 SP you spend grants a +1d6 Hull bonus to your ship that round for resisting damage from successful weapon attacks.
3	**PERCEIVED WEAKNESS:** You increase the damage of one successful weapon attack by 1d6. This stunt is a risk, as it has to come in Step 5 of the round, and requires a successful hit.
4	**PRECISE HIT:** One of your successful weapon attacks results in an additional Loss, even if the target's Hull completely eliminated the damage.
4+	**SET-UP:** You maneuver an opposing ship into a hazard, such as a normally shorter range weapon, a field of debris, or even a floating rock. This stunt is considered a weapon attack (see **Weapon Attacks**) inflicting damage dice equal to half the SP spent (round down). The Set-Up can be evaded (see **Evasion** under **Defensive Actions**); the TN is 10 + your Intelligence + Leadership focus (if any) + half the SP spent. So if a character with Intelligence 2 and Leadership spends 5 SP on this stunt, the TN to evade the Set-Up is (10 + 2 + 2 + 2.5, rounded down to 2) or 16, and a failure on the evasion test results in 2d6 damage to the target ship.

for example, a Large ship maneuvering against a Gigantic ship has a +2 bonus for being two Size categories smaller. If the maintaining ship wins, the relative range remains unchanged. If the closing ship wins, it decreases by one range band.

EXAMPLE *The* Rocinante *is at Medium Range from a closing UN frigate and wants to keep it that way, so Alex rolls a Dexterity (Piloting) test against the Dexterity (Piloting) test result of the frigate's pilot, who the GM rates as Capable (a +3 bonus). Neither ship has a Size modifier for maneuverability. Alex wins the roll with a total of 13 versus the frigate's 11, so the* Roci *remains at Medium Range.*

HIGH-G MANEUVERING

A pilot has the option of going for a high-g maneuver, adding a bonus from +1 to +6 to the maneuver test result and allowing the ship to shift up to two range bands. This puts strain on everyone on board the ship, however, requiring a Constitution (Stamina) test with a TN of 8 + maneuver bonus. On a failure, the character suffers 1d6 penetrating damage per point of maneuver bonus, half that (rounded down) with a successful test. For a +1 bonus, that means a successful Constitution test results in no damage. Characters with access to the juice can take fatigued and exhausted conditions first to mitigate the damage before they take injured or wounded conditions, otherwise they have to take just injured and wounded conditions.

If one ship is simply trying to escape from another, use the Chase rules from **Chapter 5**.

ELECTRONIC WARFARE

In order to effectively fight, a ship must be able to detect its opponents to target and out-maneuver them while working to fool their sensors and present as little of a target as possible. Roll an electronic warfare test for each ship involved in the combat. This is an opposed Intelligence (Technology) test plus the ship's Sensors score, against a target number of 11.

ELECTRONIC WARFARE TEST = 3D6 + INTELLIGENCE (TECHNOLOGY) + SENSORS VS. TN 11

The winner of the test gains a bonus equal to half the Drama Die (round up), which can be applied to either all defensive actions or the TN to evade the winning ship's attacks that round. The character performing the electronic warfare test determines how the bonus is divided between the two options.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Each round, each of the ship's weapons within range can attack an available target designated by a crew member with weapons control. Sensor-guided targeting and computer-controlled firing mean a weapon attack within the weapon's range automatically hits unless the target ship executes a defensive action to evade it (see **Defensive Actions**, following).

SHIP WEAPON ATTACKS

WEAPON	RANGE	DAMAGE
Grapplers	Close	n/a
Point Defense Cannon	Close	2d6
Rail Gun	Medium	3d6
Torpedo	Long	4d6

GRAPPLERS

Grapplers do not inflict damage and can only be used at Close Range (usually a kilometer or less). A grappler hit that is not evaded locks on to the target ship and, when it moves, the grappling ship moves with it. The grappled ship is treated as having a Size category equal to one greater than the Size of the larger of the two ships, if its drive is moving their total mass. Once a ship is grappled, neither ship can evade the other, which is why grappling is usually only performed on ships unable to fire weapons.

POINT DEFENSE CANNONS

Primarily defensive weapons, PDCs can be used for attacks at Close Range (5 kilometers or less). A PDC hit does 2d6 damage. If the ship's PDCs are used to attack that round, the TN for any Point Defense test increases by +2 (see **Point Defense** under **Defensive Actions**, following).

RAIL GUNS

Rail guns are useful out to Medium Range, after which their shots are easy to evade. A rail gun attack can only be made against a target in the gun's firing arc, either in front of or behind the ship (for spinal-mounted rail guns) or along one side of the ship (for turret-mounted rail guns). A rail gun hit does 3d6 damage.

WEAPON ATTACKS AT CHARACTER SCALE

What happens if a ship fires its weapons at a character rather than another ship? Basically, the character is instantly dead. Even "mere" point defense cannons fire streams of high-velocity tungsten rounds that can pulp targets in power armor, and no human-scale character can move fast enough to evade a computer-guided, ship-mounted weapon system. Fortunately, this type of ship-character scale interaction is rare. It's largely limited to a ship in a hangar bay or on the ground firing its PDCs, since rail guns are direct-fire weapons, and torpedoes are used at longer ranges. As a general rule, if there's an instance where a character is hit by a ship weapon, they're done.

TORPEDOES

Torpedoes are Long Range weapons since they can accelerate faster than any ship, becoming virtually impossible to evade, although they can still be shot down with PDCs. A torpedo hit does 4d6 damage. Plasma torpedoes (see **Ship Qualities**) do 3d6 damage, but reduce the target ship's Hull score by one category against their damage.

TORPEDO ACCELERATION

Torpedoes have to accelerate towards their target, using the firing ship's targeting and their own internal guidance systems. Torpedoes fired at Close Range reach their target on the same round. At longer ranges, it takes the torpedo an additional round per range band, so at Medium Range the torpedo reaches its target on Step 4 of the following round. At Long Range, it reaches its target on Step 4, 2 rounds after launch. On the other hand, torpedoes fired at longer ranges are traveling faster when they reach their targets, making them more difficult—or even impossible—to evade (see **Evasion** under **Defensive Actions**, following).

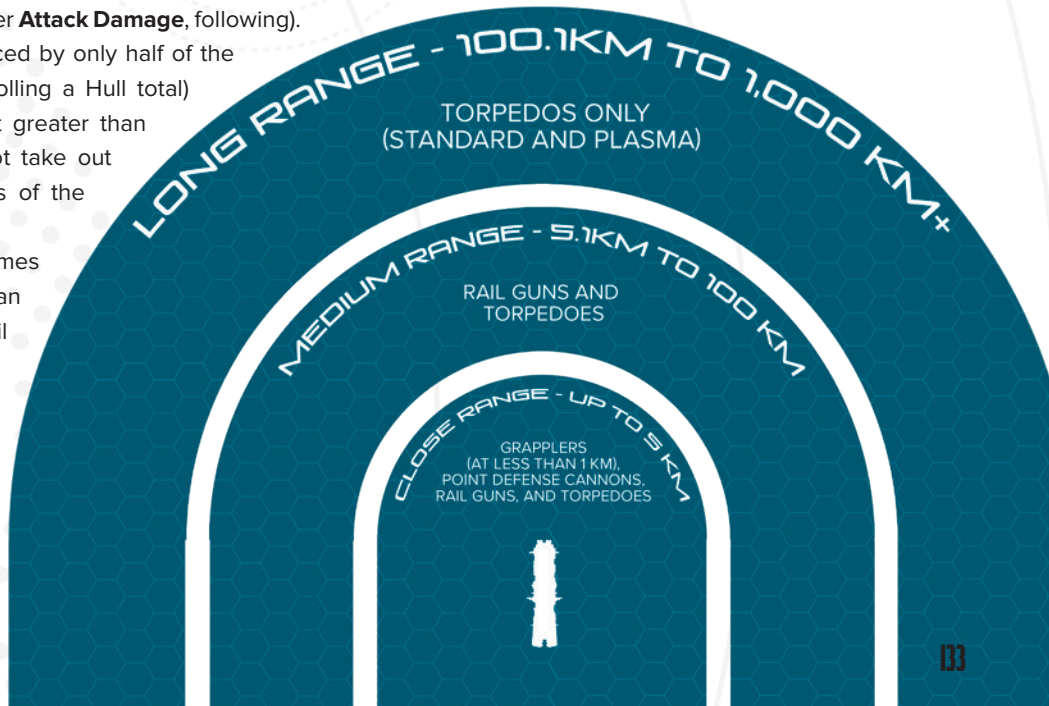
TORPEDO CHASES

At the GM's discretion, a ship can attempt to outrun incoming torpedoes as a chase (see **Chases** in **CHAPTER 5**). Torpedoes are treated as Tiny Size ships with an additional +2 bonus to chase tests due to size and speed, and a +2 bonus to the Drama Die result added to their Chase Total, so they have a substantial advantage. The targeted ship starts with a Chase Total of 2 for Close Range, 5 for Medium Range, and 10 for Long Range, but there is no success threshold at which the ship escapes unless the torpedo hits something else or is shot down or otherwise disabled. When the torpedo's Chase Total exceeds the ship's Chase Total, the torpedo hits. Therefore, outrunning a torpedo is a strictly temporary measure that might buy a little time, but that's all.

TARGETED WEAPON ATTACKS

Weapon attacks are normally assumed to be aimed to inflict the greatest possible damage to their targets. Characters can choose, however, to fire a targeted weapon attack aimed at causing a particular type of loss to the target (see **Losses** under **Attack Damage**, following). In this case, a successful attack is reduced by only half of the target's Hull score (round down after rolling a Hull total) but the attack cannot cause any effect greater than the intended loss, and therefore cannot take out the target ship. Any damage in excess of the intended loss has no effect.

Targeted weapon attacks are sometimes the only effective attacks small ships can make against much larger targets, until they have inflicted enough losses on the target's systems to give them an advantage. The GM rules if a particular targeted weapon attack is reasonable, given the nature of the target, and may choose to modify the Hull penalty against the target accordingly.



DEFENSIVE ACTIONS

Once attacks are declared, targeted ships can take defensive actions. There are two ways to defend against incoming weapon attacks: evasion and point defense. A ship can do both during a round.

EVASION

The targeted ship's pilot can make a Dexterity (Piloting) test to maneuver the ship out of the path of a weapon attack. The target number is 10 + the attacking ship's Sensors score, plus any bonus from command stunts and electronic warfare this round (see the **Command** and **Electronic Warfare** steps, previously). If the test is successful, the attack misses the ship. If it fails, the attack still hits.

EVASION TEST = 3D6 + DEXTERITY (PILOTING) VS. TN 10 + ATTACKING SHIP'S SENSORS

If outside the weapon's effective range, an evasion test is automatically successful. Rail gun and PDC rounds don't just disappear beyond Medium and Close Range—they keep on flying at the same speed through space until they hit something—but evading them becomes child's play at that distance.

TORPEDOES

Evading a torpedo actually increases in difficulty with range, as the torpedo accelerates to greater and greater speeds. At Medium Range, the TN to evade a torpedo is 12 + the attacking ship's Sensors. At Long Range, ships cannot evade torpedoes and can only use point defense to shoot them down, as the torpedoes are moving too fast. If the ship doesn't have PDCs, it cannot defend itself against a Long Range torpedo attack.

HIGH-G MANEUVERING

The pilot has the option of going for a high-g evasive maneuver, adding a bonus from +1 to +6 to the maneuver test result, much the same as a high-g maneuver for changing range (see **High-g Maneuvering** under **Maneuvers**, previously). This requires the same Constitution (Stamina) test to avoid damage from the maneuver.

EXAMPLE *Needing to pull a high-g maneuver to get the* Roci *out of danger, Alex yells, "Here comes the juice!" He decides to go for a +3 maneuver bonus, requiring the* Roci*'s crew to make a TN 11 (base 8 + 3 bonus) Constitution (Stamina) test. If they succeed, they take 1d6 penetrating damage (half of 3 rounded down) but if they fail they take 3d6 penetrating damage. The juice lets them take fatigued and exhausted conditions to reduce the damage by 1d6 and 2d6, respectively, before they take injured or wounded conditions.*

A high-g evasive maneuver has another cost—it throws off targeting. If a pilot chooses it, the bonus from the maneuver test also applies as a bonus to the evasion tests of other ships trying to evade the attacks from the pilot's ship that round.

EXAMPLE *Although Alex's high-g maneuver is successful, giving him the bonus needed to evade an attack on the* Roci*, that safety comes with a price: it also grants other ships the +3 bonus to avoid the* Roci*'s own attacks this round, making it more likely everyone gets missed.*

POINT DEFENSE

Ships can also defend against torpedo attacks with point defense cannons, using them to shoot down the incoming attack before it hits. This is a test of the ship's Sensors, since the reaction time required is faster than the best human gunner. The target number is the same as evasion: 10 + the attacking ship's Sensors score, plus any bonus from electronic warfare and command stunts this round.

POINT DEFENSE TEST = 3D6 + SENSORS VS. TN 10 + ATTACKING SHIP'S SENSORS

If the defending ship's PDCs were used to attack during the weapon attacks step of the round, the TN for the point defense test is increased by +2 to 12 + the attacking ship's Sensors. For this reason, some ship commanders and weapon officers will conserve PDC fire for defensive purposes.

ATTACK DAMAGE

If defensive action fails to prevent an attack, it may inflict damage on the targeted ship. This is similar in many ways to damage against characters from **Chapter 5**. Roll dice equal to the weapon's damage to determine its effect.

ATTACK DAMAGE = WEAPON TYPE DICE ROLL

The ship can then absorb that damage in a series of steps:

- Take the ship's Hull score and subtract that from the damage. If the ship's Hull score is rated in a number of dice, roll that many dice, add them together, and subtract the total from the damage.
- Apply loss conditions to the ship to further reduce the damage by 1d6 or 2d6.

If any damage remains, the ship is taken out.

HULL TOTAL

Generally, the ship's full Hull score is used against any weapon damage to the ship, with some exceptions:

- A targeted weapon attack halves the target's Hull total (after the dice are rolled), rounded down. However, the attack cannot inflict more than its intended loss (see **Targeted Weapon Attacks**, previously).
- A plasma torpedo treats the target's Hull score as one category lower, from 3d6 to 2d6, or from 1d3 to 1, for example. See **Plasma Torpedoes** under **Ship Qualities**, previously.

LOSSES

If damage remains after subtracting the ship's Hull total, the ship may suffer one or two losses to further reduce the damage. One loss reduces damage by 1d6 and imposes two of the following loss conditions:

COLLATERAL Crew members in one compartment of the ship suffer 1d6 damage. If there are crew members in multiple areas, the GM chooses which area(s) are affected.

HULL Damage to the hull imposes a –1 penalty on Hull score totals (after dice are rolled).

MANEUVERABILITY Damage to the ship's thrusters or navigation imposes a –1 penalty on Dexterity (Piloting) checks.

SENSORS Damage to the ship's sensors reduces its Sensors score by 1.

WEAPONS Damage to the ship's weapons imposes a –1 penalty to the target numbers to evade attacks with those weapons and –1 to the weapons' damage.

You can choose the same loss condition twice, in which case its effects stack, such as –2 to Hull score totals or –2 to Sensors, for example. A ship cannot take the same loss condition more than six times total.

To determine a loss condition randomly roll 1d6 on the **Spaceship Loss Condition** table. Re-roll results of 5 if the ship has no weapons.

Two losses reduce damage by 2d6 and impose four of the previous conditions or one of the following serious loss conditions:

REACTOR OFFLINE Damage to the ship's reactor or power systems takes the main drive offline; the ship is incapable of high-g maneuvers and suffers a –2 penalty to evasion defensive actions.

WEAPON OFFLINE Damage leaves one of the ship's weapon systems non-functional. The GM may choose or roll randomly to determine the affected weapon.

SPACESHIP LOSS CONDITIONS

D6 ROLL	NORMAL LOSS	SERIOUS LOSS
1	Collateral	
2	Hull	Reactor Offline
3	Maneuverability	
4	Sensors	
5	Weapons*	Weapon Offline**
6	Re-roll	

**Re-roll results of 5 if the ship has no weapons.*
***If the ship has no weapon systems, Reactor Offline is the only serious loss it can take.*

To randomly determine a serious loss condition, roll a 1d6 on the **Spaceship Loss Condition** table. If the ship has no weapon systems, Reactor Offline is the only serious loss it can take.

TAKEN OUT

If damage remains after applying all losses, then the target ship is taken out. This is similar to when a character is taken out in a conflict. The attacker chooses the target's condition, ranging from crippled and helpless to destroyed outright.

ROLLING OVER

Also like personal combat, a ship can choose to roll over. The ship's captain chooses to take the ship out of the encounter, and the player (or GM for a GM-controlled ship) chooses the ship's condition. As with personal combat, a ship can only roll over before the application of damage in a round, although this can be after the defensive action step before damage is calculated and applied.

DAMAGE CONTROL

After a ship takes damage its engineering crew gets to work. On the smallest vessels, an engineer might have only their training, a database of schematics, and a toolkit to work with, but many ships dedicate space near the drive to an engineering bay. A good engineering bay is a machine shop where any part of the ship can be repaired from everything but the most catastrophic damage. A great engineering bay in the hands of a skilled engineer is a place where replacement parts can be fabricated from scratch, if materials are available.

A single loss to Maneuverability, Sensors, or Weapons can be eliminated with a damage control test: Intelligence (Engineering) vs. TN 11 and a success threshold of 5. Two losses require a success threshold of 10. Damage control in combat cannot eliminate Collateral or Hull losses.

DAMAGE CONTROL ADVANCED TEST =
3D6 + INTELLIGENCE (ENGINEERING) VS. TN 11,
SUCCESS THRESHOLD 5 FOR ONE LOSS, 10 FOR TWO LOSSES

SPACE COMBAT EXAMPLE: ATTACK ON THOTH STATION

Here's a look at how space combat in *The Expanse* RPG works with an example from the first novel of *The Expanse* series, *Leviathan Wakes*.

SET-UP

The *Rocinante* approaches Thoth Station with its reactor and drive shut down, atmosphere vented, using the cover story of an out-of-control cargo container broadcast by the nearby Guy Molinari. They hope the station's passive sensors won't notice them until they can get within Close Range. The GM decides their plan is a good one and their gambit is successful. The crew of the *Roci* power up all of its systems once they reach the go point and the action begins!

ROUND ONE

COMMAND

Holden gives the crew their orders, rolling Command (Leadership). He gets a success, but no doubles, giving him only 1 SP to spend this round.

MANEUVERS

The *Roci* executes a high-g braking maneuver. The GM calls for a TN 9 Constitution (Stamina) test from the crew to avoid 1d6 damage. They're successful, so no damage. They're now at Close Range to the station, close enough that their sensors show there are two stealth ships, not just one, both firing their engines and splitting up!

ELECTRONIC WARFARE

Naomi begins broadcasting chatter to disrupt ladar scans from the station. The stealth ships also spray chaff and laser chatter as they move in opposite directions. This is an Intelligence (Technology) test, plus the *Rocinante's* Sensors. Naomi rolls poorly while the stealth ships roll well, giving them a bonus equal to half the Drama Die, or +2, to apply to either defensive actions or evasion target numbers this round.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Alex fires a torpedo at one of the stealth ships. The station fires its rail gun at the *Rocinante*. The GM decides the stealth ships are still maneuvering for position.

DEFENSIVE ACTION

The targeted stealth ship rolls to evade: The GM applies their +2 from electronic warfare, along with a +1 from the *Roci*'s high-g maneuver, against TN 14 (10 + the *Roci's* Sensors). They succeed and the torpedo misses. The *Roci* is not so lucky. Alex rolls Dexterity (Piloting) for evasion against TN 14 (10 + the station's Sensors) and fails, badly enough that even Holden's 1 SP spent on a Guidance stunt isn't enough to succeed. The *Rocinante* gets hit by the gauss round from the rail gun.

ATTACK DAMAGE

The GM rolls 3d6 for the rail gun's damage, getting a total of 10. The *Rocinante's* Hull subtracts 2d6 damage but the roll is only a 7. That leaves 3 damage, meaning the ship has to suffer a loss. Holden's player chooses Maneuverability twice—the port maneuvering thrusters—meaning a –2 penalty to Alex's Dexterity (Piloting) tests.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Amos reports the pressure leak in the port thrusters, but can't begin damage control until the next round, when he can get to them.

ROUND TWO

COMMAND

Holden orders Alex to make a torpedo run at the station so they can take out its comm system. He rolls Communication (Leadership) vs. TN 11 and succeeds, this time with 4 SP.

MANEUVERS

The GM notes it is likely for the rest of the battle to be played out at Close Range, since the station isn't going anywhere, and the ships are likely to stay in close to take advantage of their maneuverability.

ELECTRONIC WARFARE

Naomi targets the *Roci's* comm laser and starts dropping chaff to confuse the stealth ships and hopefully keep them off their backs for a moment. She's successful this round, and gains the crew a +2 bonus.

WEAPON ATTACKS

Thoth Station's PDC network opens up with a web of tungsten rounds. Alex fires a torpedo, making a targeted attack at the station's comm system, while the stealth ships fire a pair of torpedoes at the *Rocinante*.

DEFENSIVE ACTION

The stealth ships aren't targeted this round and don't need to take defensive action. Thoth Station can't evade, but its PDCs have a chance to shoot down the torpedo, a test of the station's Sensors against TN 14. Alex wants to make it count, so he asks to use part of the electronic warfare bonus to make the TN 15 and for Holden to apply 2 SP to an On Target stunt to make that a 16. It's enough that the station fails its defense roll. Alex maneuvers the *Roci* to evade the station's PDC fire and uses the ship's own PDCs to shoot down the incoming torpedoes. He rolls

Dexterity (Piloting) against TN 13 (10 + the stealth ship's Sensors) with a –2 penalty and succeeds. He then rolls the *Roci's* Sensors against TN 14 (10 + the station's Sensors), using the remaining +1 electronic warfare bonus. He misses the roll by 2 and asks Holden's player to use the 2 remaining SP for Guidance to make up the difference. Holden strongly agrees, making Alex's roll a success, evading all of the attacks.

ATTACK DAMAGE

The torpedo hits the station and Alex's player rolls 4d6 for its damage, scoring a 14. Since it's a targeted weapon attack, the GM rolls 5d6 for Thoth Station's Hull and divides the result by 2, rounding down, getting an 8. That leaves 6 damage. The GM rolls 1d6 and gets a 4 for the first loss, and decides since two are required, the station's loss is automatically the comm system. The station is effectively blind, deaf, and mute.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Amos tackles the thruster leak. It's one loss, and a TN 11 Intelligence (Engineering) advanced test with a success threshold of 5. He succeeds on the first test with a 2 on the Drama Die, so should be able to lock it down pretty quickly.

ROUND THREE

COMMAND

Alex's player says he won't bother with the PDCs, but Holden's player tells him not to get them all killed just to conserve ammo! He makes his Command (Leadership) test, succeeding and gaining 2 SP.

MANEUVERS

The *Rocinante* and the second stealth ship make attack runs at each other at Close Range.

ELECTRONIC WARFARE

Naomi works to keep the first stealth ship occupied, rolling Intelligence (Technology) and scoring a success with a +3 bonus. She asks to use the whole bonus to prevent the first stealth ship from attacking this round, and the GM agrees.

WEAPON ATTACKS

The incoming stealth ship fires two torpedoes at the *Rocinante*, which fires a torpedo in return.

DEFENSIVE MANEUVERS

The stealth ship evades, a Dexterity (Piloting) test against TN 14, and rolls a total of 12, a failure. The *Rocinante*'s PDCs fire to intercept the incoming torpedoes, two Sensor tests against TN 13. The first test fails and Holden uses his 2 SP on Guidance to make it a success. Then the second test also fails. The *Roci* takes a hit.

ATTACK DAMAGE

The *Roci*'s torpedo does 4d6 damage, a total of 15! The stealth ship's Hull only subtracts 2, leaving 13. Even two losses will only reduce the damage to 1 at best, so the ship is taken out.

The stealth ship's torpedo does 15 damage. The *Roci*'s Hull reduces it by 8 to 7. This could be close! Fortunately, the roll for the first loss is a 5, and the roll for the second loss is a 4. The *Rocinante* suffers another –1 penalty to Dexterity (Piloting) and a –1 to its PDC tests. It also takes some collateral damage—Amos takes 2d6 damage, which results in him taking an injured condition, which the GM describes as busting a rib against a hull brace.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Amos rolls a 12 on his Intelligence (Engineering) test, reduced to 11 because of his injury penalty...just enough to succeed! He likewise scores a 3 on the Drama Die, just enough to finish. At least Alex's piloting penalty to keep the *Rocinante* under control is reduced from –3 to –1.

ROUND FOUR

COMMAND

Holden orders Alex to get into a firing position to attack the other stealth ship. His Communication (Leadership) test fails this round, so the crew can't rely on any stunt points to help them.

MANEUVERS

The ships are still at Close Range.

ELECTRONIC WARFARE

Naomi succeeds at her electronic warfare test, scoring the *Roci* a +2 bonus.

WEAPON ATTACKS

The *Roci* fires a torpedo at the stealth ship as it opens up with its rail gun.

DEFENSIVE ACTIONS

The stealth ship evades. Alex wants to end this and applies the electronic warfare bonus to make the TN 16. The stealth ship fails. The *Rocinante* evades, Dexterity (Piloting) vs. TN 13 at a –1 penalty. Alex just misses the roll. The *Roci* is hit as well.

ATTACK DAMAGE

The *Rocinante*'s torpedo does 15 damage again. The GM knows from last round this is enough for the stealth ship to be taken out.

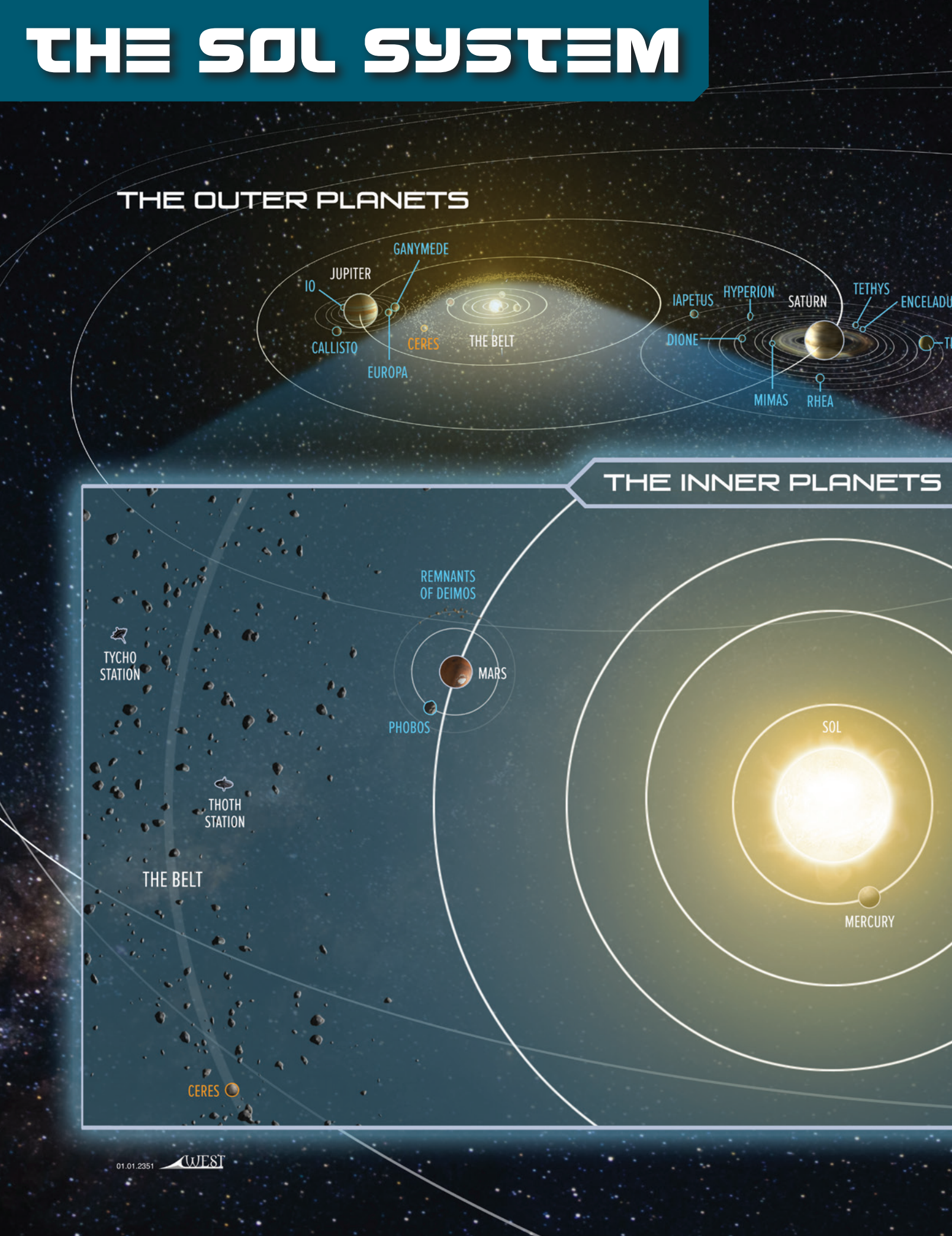
The rail gun does 14 damage. This time the *Roci*'s Hull reduces it by 7 to 7. Two losses are slightly more than needed to cover the remaining damage; the Martian corvette takes a –2 Hull penalty and Holden takes an injury from flying debris on the command deck (2d6 collateral damage). Although the *Rocinante* (and her crew) are battered, the stealth ships are down and Thoth Station is ready to be boarded.

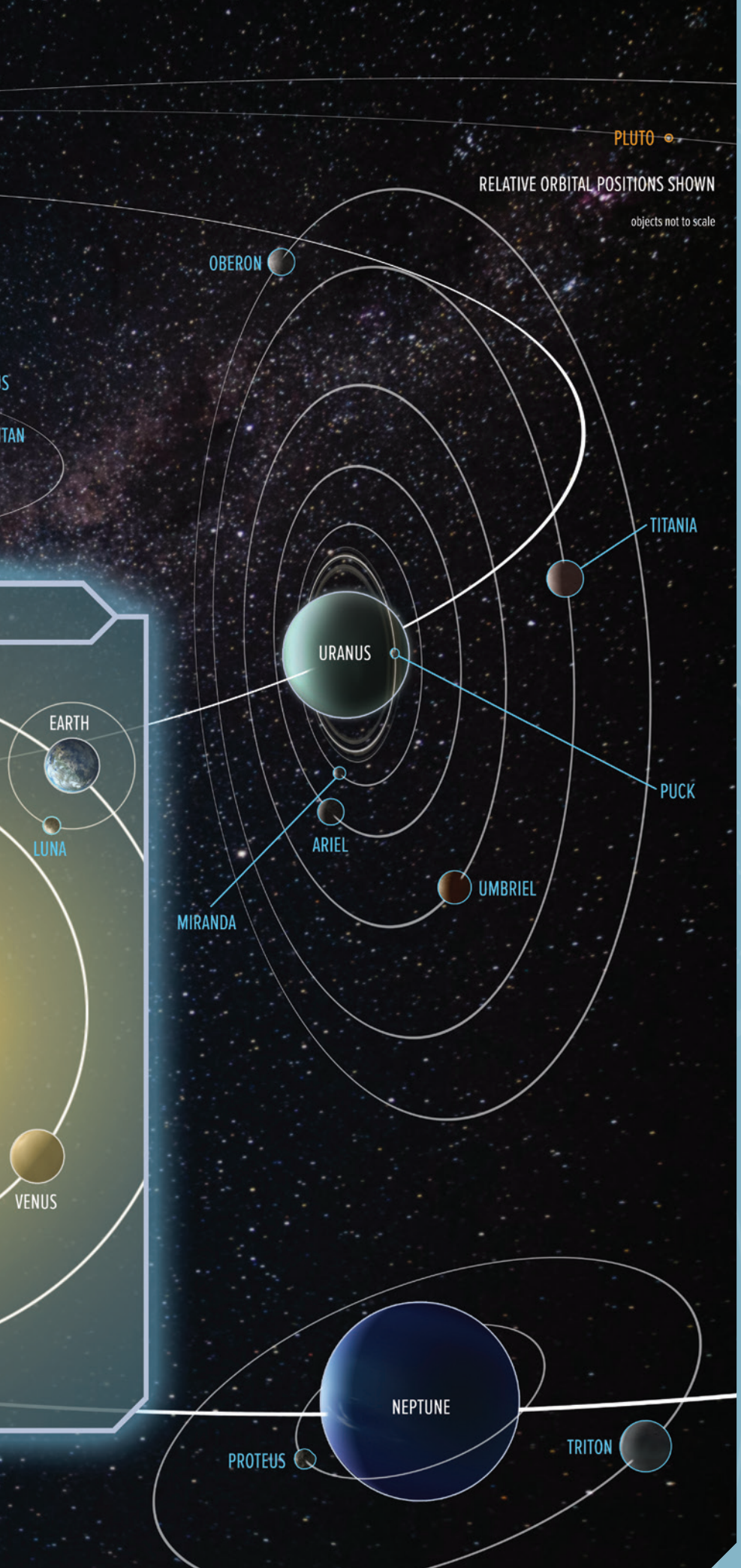
DAMAGE CONTROL

The crew begins seeing what they can do to minimize the damage, but the Hull damage will have to wait until they have access to a repair facility and an interlude.

A GUIDE TO THE EXPANSE

THE SOL SYSTEM





AVERAGE DISTANCE BETWEEN LOCATIONS (IN AU)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	0.33	0.61	1.13	2.38	4.81	9.15	18.75	29.67	39.14
VENUS	0.33	0	0.28	0.8	2.04	4.48	8.82	18.42	29.34	38.81
EARTH	0.61	0.28	0	0.52	1.77	4.2	8.54	18.14	29.06	38.53
MARS	1.13	0.8	0.52	0	1.24	3.68	8.02	17.62	28.54	38.01
CERES	2.38	2.04	1.77	1.24	0	2.44	6.79	16.42	27.34	36.76
JUPITER	4.81	4.48	4.2	3.68	2.44	0	4.34	13.94	24.86	34.33
SATURN	9.15	8.82	8.54	8.02	6.79	4.34	0	9.6	20.52	29.97
URANUS	18.75	18.42	18.14	17.62	16.42	13.94	9.6	0	10.92	20.34
NEPTUNE	29.67	29.34	29.06	28.54	27.34	24.86	20.52	10.92	0	9.42
PLUTO	39.14	38.81	38.53	38.01	36.76	34.33	29.97	20.34	9.42	0

AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME BETWEEN LOCATIONS

TRAVEL AT .3G (IN HOURS)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	72	97.9	133.2	193.3	274.8	379.1	542.7	682.6	784
VENUS	72	0	66.3	112.1	179	265.3	372.2	537.9	678.8	780.7
EARTH	97.9	66.3	0	90.4	166.7	256.8	366.2	533.8	675.6	777.9
MARS	133.2	112.1	90.4	0	139.6	240.4	354.9	526	669.5	772.6
CERES	193.3	179	166.7	139.6	0	195.8	326.6	507.8	655.3	759.8
JUPITER	274.8	265.3	256.8	240.4	195.8	0	261.1	467.9	624.8	734.3
SATURN	379.1	372.2	366.2	354.9	326.6	261.1	0	388.3	567.7	686.1
URANUS	542.7	537.9	533.8	526	507.8	467.9	388.3	0	414.1	565.2
NEPTUNE	682.6	678.8	675.6	669.5	655.3	624.8	567.7	414.1	0	384.6
PLUTO	784	780.7	777.9	772.6	759.8	734.3	686.1	565.2	384.6	0

TRAVEL AT 1G (IN HOURS)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	39.4	53.6	73	105.9	150.5	207.6	297.2	373.9	429.4
VENUS	39.4	0	36.3	61.4	98	145.3	203.9	294.6	371.8	427.6
EARTH	53.6	36.3	0	49.5	91.3	140.7	200.6	292.3	370	426.1
MARS	73	61.4	49.5	0	76.4	131.7	194.4	288.1	366.7	423.2
CERES	105.9	98	91.3	76.4	0	107.2	178.9	278.1	358.9	416.2
JUPITER	150.5	145.3	140.7	131.7	107.2	0	143	256.3	342.2	402.2
SATURN	207.6	203.9	200.6	194.4	178.9	143	0	212.7	310.9	375.8
URANUS	297.2	294.6	292.3	288.1	278.1	256.3	212.7	0	226.8	309.6
NEPTUNE	373.9	371.8	370	366.7	358.9	342.2	310.9	226.8	0	210.7
PLUTO	429.4	427.6	426.1	423.2	416.2	402.2	375.8	309.6	210.7	0

TRAVEL AT 7G (IN HOURS)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	14.9	20.3	27.6	40	56.9	78.5	112.3	141.3	162.3
VENUS	14.9	0	13.7	23.2	37.1	54.9	77	111.3	140.5	161.6
EARTH	20.3	13.7	0	18.7	34.5	53.2	75.8	110.5	139.9	161
MARS	27.6	23.2	18.7	0	28.9	49.8	73.5	108.9	138.6	159.9
CERES	40	37.1	34.5	28.9	0	40.5	67.6	105.1	135.7	157.3
JUPITER	56.9	54.9	53.2	49.8	40.5	0	54	96.9	129.4	152
SATURN	78.5	77	75.8	73.5	67.6	54	0	80.4	117.5	142
URANUS	112.3	111.3	110.5	108.9	105.1	96.9	80.4	0	85.7	117
NEPTUNE	141.3	140.5	139.9	138.6	135.7	129.4	117.5	85.7	0	79.6
PLUTO	162.3	161.6	161	159.9	157.3	152	142	117	79.6	0

TRAVEL AT 12G (IN HOURS)

	MERCURY	VENUS	EARTH	MARS	CERES	JUPITER	SATURN	URANUS	NEPTUNE	PLUTO
MERCURY	0	11.4	15.5	21.1	30.6	43.5	59.9	85.8	107.9	124
VENUS	11.4	0	10.5	17.7	28.3	41.9	58.8	85	107.3	123.4
EARTH	15.5	10.5	0	14.3	26.4	40.6	57.9	84.4	106.8	123
MARS	21.1	17.7	14.3	0	22.1	38	56.1	83.2	105.9	122.2
CERES	30.6	28.3	26.4	22.1	0	31	51.6	80.3	103.6	120.1
JUPITER	43.5	41.9	40.6	38	31	0	41.3	74	98.8	116.1
SATURN	59.9	58.8	57.9	56.1	51.6	41.3	0	61.4	89.8	108.5
URANUS	85.8	85	84.4	83.2	80.3	74	61.4	0	65.5	89.4
NEPTUNE	107.9	107.3	106.8	105.9	103.6	98.8	89.8	65.5	0	60.8
PLUTO	124	123.4	123	122.2	120.1	116.1	108.5	89.4	60.8	0

7. FUTURE HISTORY

In the beginning, more than 13 billion years ago, all matter in the universe was compressed into a single point, infinitely hot and dense. Then in an instant it exploded and expanded, thrusting that matter apart. As the matter separated, an ever-growing void formed between the bits that clung together—and the *Expanse* was born.

Some of those bits of matter clinging together grew denser and hotter until they ignited to form a star, and around that star spun planets, one of which would someday be called Earth. Eons passed while the Earth cooled and stabilized, until finally the conditions were right for abiogenesis—the birth of life. Yet it was not the only home to life in the universe: 2.3 billion years ago, while simple multi-celled eukaryotes were still struggling to evolve on Earth, a large mass of matter invaded its solar system, on a course to collide with the planet. But chance intervened, and the gravity of the ringed planet Saturn perturbed the invader's course, drawing it close into a stable orbit where it would one day be mistaken for one of Saturn's native moons.

PRE-SPACE FLIGHT

Undisturbed, life continued to evolve on Earth. Six million years ago, humans walked the planet for the first time. Two and a half million years ago, they began to make the tools to survive, thrive, and spread across the surface of the planet. Exploration at walking pace gave way to riding the Earth's beasts, then building boats that took them across the planet's lakes, seas, and oceans. Their use of both spoken and written language allowed them to develop writing, mathematics, and science that accelerated their progress, helping them become the dominant form of life on the planet, and perhaps the universe. To the best of their knowledge, they were alone.

Still, using simple, hand-ground lenses, humanity used telescopes to scan the skies, watching for signs of life. When they developed the technology that let them augment their written records with visual ones through photography, some of their earliest pictures were used to record the heavens, looking for the subtlest clues that would help them learn more. In the last days of what they called the nineteenth century, an astronomer studying one of these photographs was the first to use a photograph to discover a planetoid orbiting another planet, Saturn. He and other astronomers determined the newly discovered object was a locally born moon of Saturn and named it Phoebe, unaware of the planetoid's true origins far outside the solar system.

In the decades that followed in the twentieth century of human history, humans left the surface of Earth and took to the skies. First they used aircraft to travel around their planet through its atmosphere. Then they left the planet using spacecraft to reach into orbit and then to the surface of Earth's moon. Caught up in the excitement of a "space race", dozens of unmanned probes were cast into space, helping humanity to learn about other planets in the solar system as well as revealing the enormous wealth of raw materials that awaited them if they could ever reach them.

MARS AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Much as humanity's journey around its home planet was undertaken in fits and starts, its first steps into space proceeded in the same way. After those heady early days, humans maintained only a small toehold in space through orbital stations around their home planet. Progress only came years later when humanity took a bold leap through space to Earth's nearest neighbor, the planet Mars. Later expeditions included colonists who went to stay. These scientists, engineers, and laborers developed the terraforming technologies needed to undertake the long project of turning Mars into a second home for humanity. In search of new work and new opportunities, entire families left their home planet and committed to the effort. Though on Earth they were from separate places and had been Chinese, Indians, or Texans, here they lived side by side and became one people, Martians.

The Martians needed a steady supply of raw materials unavailable on their new home world, which meant regular ships traveling between Earth and Mars. Supply missions were coordinated by an Earth coalition, the United Nations, which soon determined that a new shipyard was needed for constructing the new ships required for regular supply runs. To keep the construction as high as possible in Earth's gravity well, the Bush Orbital Shipyards were established in orbit near Earth's moon. Tiny outposts on that moon's surface blossomed into colonies in their own right as construction companies, corporations with Martian interests, and even the UN established offices on the moon to be closer to their zero-gravity operations while also providing places where they could operate under a modicum of gravity when desired.

Down on Earth, the cost of humanity's long journey was finally coming due. For thousands of years humans had extracted resources from the planet in ever-increasing amounts, and Earth's exploding population had either disturbed or out-and-out replaced countless natural cycles and habitats. Worse, little had been done to remediate the effects of technological and industrial development, polluting much of the planet and leaving some parts nearly uninhabitable. The planet's ecosystem teetered on the brink of collapse, and with it came a severe economic slump. When the disorganized leadership of the planet's nations proved unable to turn the world back from disaster, their desperate people seized upon those who offered a chance for salvation: the United Nations.

> A hundred and fifty years before, when the parochial disagreements between Earth and Mars had been on the verge of war, the Belt had been a far horizon of tremendous mineral wealth beyond viable economic reach, and the outer planets had been beyond even the most unrealistic corporate dream.
>
> *— Leviathan Wakes*

For years the United Nations had been coordinating a mix of governments, corporations, and organizations from all over the world, sending resources from Earth to Mars. Now the UN assembled a plan to bring back what Earth most needed: the technological breakthroughs in environmental manipulation developed on Mars that could be used to help terraform Earth back to health. It was an ambitious project, but those nations that joined saw progress and prosperity slowly return, while those that continued on their own either clung to their status quo or slipped into chaos. One by one the nations of Earth gave up their authority to the United Nations, until eventually the majority of the world followed its lead. Drawing not just upon technology but also their logistical and organizational expertise, UN technocrats reshaped the world into "Shared Interest Zones". Often built upon former state or national boundaries, Shared Interest Zones allowed residents of an area to work toward improving their lives and the lives of their neighbors, while also being part of an effort working to meet humanity's needs wherever they were in the solar system.

As the authority and operations of the United Nations grew, so did its headquarters in the Hague. Similarly, the UN's Martian Logistics Offices in the Moon's Lovell City were expanded and officially given what had long been their nickname: New Hague. The UN established a program called "Basic" to ensure all of the population's basic needs would be met regardless of what they chose to do with their lives. Those who did choose to do more were assigned tasks by the UN as pathways to further education, military service, or employment.

Martian scientists and engineers bringing their expertise back to Earth during the early years of the UN's projects on Earth joined teams of Earthlings who volunteered to forego Basic, working together to repair Earth's damaged ecosystem. But despite medications intended to help them adjust, Martians struggled not just with Earth's gravity but also the growing cultural gap between Mars and Earth. The stories

they told upon returning home only added to the frustrations Martians felt with Earth and the United Nations for drawing resources away as they were beginning to make progress in the Martian terraforming project.

THE EPSTEIN DRIVE

For decades the United Nations allowed Martians to refuse assignments on Earth, if they chose. While their numbers were always increasing, replacements could be found on Mars or trained on Earth. As Mars approached the possibility of self-sufficiency, the UN even tolerated widely distributed secessionist manifestos as the "free voice of the people".

What the UN wouldn't tolerate, however, was when Mars attempted to build eighteen cargo ships to decrease their dependence on the UN vessels that carried vital supplies from Earth to Mars. Invoking the breakaway province rule in their charter, forty UN warships immediately set out from Earth toward Mars. Everyone was certain humanity was on the brink of its first interplanetary war. To the surprise of nearly everyone, diplomacy won the day and the warships returned to Earth. But the damage had been done and tension between the worlds was now a constant.

As news feeds and diplomatic channels between the planets overflowed with bombast, employees of corporations and industrial conglomerates with their own interplanetary ties tried to exert a stabilizing influence. Yet critical elements to both worlds like lithium, molybdenum, and tungsten ran in shorter supply every year, despite deep mining into ancient landfills on Earth. Worse, the United Nations declared that all future ships were required to be built in Earth's Bush Shipyards, and that Mars' own shipyards were to be closed. Once again the two planets came to the brink of war.

Luckily, before war could begin, humanity's journey took its next leap forward, a leap that began in the Martian shipyards at the heart of the crisis. For several years, Martian scientist Solomon Epstein had been laboring to improve starship engine efficiency. As the deadline for the shipyards' closure approached, Epstein took the three-man yacht he had outfitted with his engine prototype into orbit for a rushed test, started the burn sequence...and discovered he had succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. His yacht accelerated to speeds beyond anything previously achieved by human technology, speeds that could only be measured as a fraction of the speed of light. Tragically, the ship's unstoppable acceleration put Epstein under such intense pressure that he couldn't lift his hand to turn the drive off. Telescopes on both Earth and Mars watched Epstein's ship shoot toward the edges of the solar system and then beyond.

Though Epstein and his prototype were gone forever, he had left the plans for what would become known as the Epstein Drive on his home computer. Knowing they couldn't keep its secrets to themselves for long, Mars instead chose to give them to the United Nations in exchange for independence. Mars formed its own government, the Martian Congressional Republic, and some of the first ships outfitted

with the Epstein Drive were those belonging to the new Martian Congressional Republic Navy.

THE BELT AND THE OUTER PLANETS

The Epstein Drive didn't just put Mars and Earth on equal political and military footing. It also solved the worlds' resource pressures by opening new frontiers in the solar system. Scouting and science expeditions ventured to most major bodies in the system, the announcements of first footsteps on yet another world soon becoming a routine feature of news feeds. But the main frontier for the first wave of expansion was the belt of asteroids between Mars and Jupiter, where increasingly rare materials on Earth or Mars could be found in abundance.

Mining vessels were quick to arrive in the asteroid belt, sent out by the wealthy conglomerates and eventually joined by smaller and smaller ships, some home to a single family of miners. Some of these prospectors struck it rich with claims that escaped the notice of the corporations, but many more traveled from rock to rock in search of their lucky strike. Soon the asteroid belt was just "the Belt" and those who called it home were "Belters".

Whether small or large, every mining operation in the Belt measured their operations not just in what they managed to extract, but in what their human crew needed to survive while doing so, their "consumables". So one of the biggest success stories in the early days of the Belt wasn't a mining operation but that of Tycho Manufacturing and Engineering, which used a small fleet of ships to capture a comet as it passed through the solar system and parked it in a stable orbit within the Belt. Mining the comet's ice, Tycho extracted both water and oxygen, resupplying Belters' most critical consumables.

Though every Belter came to Tycho's resupply station, the company wouldn't allow Belters to establish their own businesses in the vicinity, or allow the security risk of ships docking long enough for lengthy repairs. Further, both Belter entrepreneurs and ship mechanics needed a place where they could operate in gravity that didn't come from a ship under thrust. They had no gathering place in the Belt they could call home, so the Belters decided to build one. Eros, one of the first large asteroids to have been heavily prospected and mined, was considered but rejected when it was determined that its irregular shape made it too difficult for a pilot project. Instead, the enormous and more spherical Belt planetoid Ceres became the chosen location. Miners used their equipment to turn mining shafts into an organized network of tunnels and chambers, and hired Tycho to build a system of enormous reaction drives that imparted Ceres with a stable spin and gravity. It took a decade, but when the Ceres project was complete, the Belt had its first major city and Tycho's engineering expertise was famous throughout the system. A similar set of reaction drives was installed to give Eros a spin, but Ceres would ever after be the mercantile center of the Belt. Instead, Eros became a center for ship manufacture and repair, as well as casinos and other entertainment facilities intended to separate crews in port from their money.

> "Then Solomon Epstein had built his little modified fusion drive, popped it on the back of his three-man yacht, and turned it on. With a good scope, you could still see his ship going at a marginal percentage of the speed of light, heading out into the big empty. The best, longest funeral in the history of mankind. Fortunately, he'd left the plans on his home computer. The Epstein Drive hadn't given humanity the stars, but it had delivered the planets."
>
> *— Leviathan Wakes*

Not long after Ceres and Eros came up to spin, the last of Tycho's captured comet was broken down into consumables. But even this was to Tycho's plan: their facilities on the comet had been prefabricated, broken down and moved to a new job as easily as they had been constructed, and the last cometary ice was sold just as prices tumbled downward. Ships that had taken colonists to establish Helium-3 refineries on the moons of Saturn had been retooled to return with loads of water-ice from the near-infinite supplies in the planet's rings.

Meanwhile, Tycho's engineers moved on to assist in another ambitious project in the outer planets beyond the Belt: upgrades to the agricultural stations on Jupiter's moon Ganymede. Ganymede was one of the first permanent settlements in the outer planets, chosen because its magnetosphere was strong enough to shield the surface from Jupiter's harsh radiation belts. Combined with heavy shielding, it was enough to allow crops to grow in hothouse domes built on Ganymede's surface. Small mining stations could maintain their own hydroponic garden, if they were willing to dedicate consumables to the effort. But if they weren't coming from Earth or Mars, quantities of real meat and vegetables came from only one place, Ganymede. More importantly, the same shielding that protected crops and herds also shielded human embryos in utero from the genetic defects that occurred out in open space. Common wisdom in the Belt and beyond was that if you wanted to have a healthy child, you conceived and gave birth to them on Ganymede. These two insatiable needs gave Ganymede the resources and drive it needed to enlarge and improve. Nearly every outer planets engineering firm, including Tycho, came to Ganymede to build new, larger domes and a set of enormous orbiting mirrors that gathered

CHRISJEN AVASARALA

DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS, EARTHER

There are the people who appear to run things in the solar system and then there are the people who really run things. Chrisjen Avasarala, UN Deputy Undersecretary of Executive Administration, is one of the latter, and you had better not fucking forget it. Avasarala is a long-time player in Earth politics, having served as the Treasurer of the Workers Provident Fund and district governor of the Maharashtra-Karnataka-Goa Communal Interest Zone prior to her work at the UN. She knows everyone, and anyone with sense in government circles knows her and her true level of influence.

It would be easy to mistake a tiny Indian woman in her seventies, with long gray hair and dressed in a colorful traditional sari, as a kindly grandmother, and that's just as Avasarala prefers it. Much of the time, she's happy to sit in the background of meetings, quietly snacking on pistachios from her handbag, while she absorbs information and plans out the next moves of the UN government. It's far easier to do with people focusing on popular figureheads and not paying any attention to the real levers of power. When questioned, she has been known to swear like a career Marine.

That said, Avasarala is also a kind grandmother. Her daughter Ashanti has two children, Kiki and Suri, whom she dotes upon. Chrisjen is married to a poet named Arjun, and his kind nature helps to soothe her, a rare opportunity to lower the mask she must wear in dealing with people professionally. The two of them also had a son named Charanpal, who died in a skiing accident as a teenager. Madame Avasarala carefully keeps her family life and her professional life separate to maintain an island of sanity in the middle of the often-harsh realities of her work.

CHRISJEN AVASARALA

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

ACCURACY 0, **COMMUNICATION** 4 (LEADERSHIP, PERSUASION), **CONSTITUTION** 1, **DEXTERITY** 0, **FIGHTING** -1, **INTELLIGENCE** 3 (CURRENT AFFAIRS, LAW), **PERCEPTION** 3 (EMPATHY), **STRENGTH** -1, **WILLPOWER** 4 (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOUGHNESS
10	27	10	1

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
PISTOL	+0	2D6+3
UNARMED	–1	1D3–1

SPECIAL FEATURES

FAVORED STUNTS: And Another Thing, Bad Form, Cards on the Table, Oozing Confidence

TALENTS: Contacts (Novice), Executive (UN, Expert), Intrigue (Expert), Oratory (Novice)

EQUIPMENT: Hand terminal. Avasarala is rarely armed and is only equipped for operating in space when she absolutely has to be.

THREAT: MODERATE

the rays of the distant sun and concentrated them on the domes below.

Eventually a tiny outpost was even established on one of the moons of distant Uranus, but humanity wasn't only pushing outward. An enormous and well-funded investment group contracted Tycho to design a network of colony cities that would float high in the atmosphere of the planet Venus. But just as the blueprints were being finalized, it was discovered that some members of the investment group didn't have the rights to use their funds for off-planet development, while others had the rights but not the money they had promised. The entire group dissolved into a tangle of lawsuits, and aside from Tycho the only group to prosper from the plan was one of the legal firms that mediated the eternal dispute. Funneling their profits into shipping and interplanetary transport, the legal firm was soon dwarfed by its one-time subsidiary Mao Mercantile, the heart of a new fortune. Tycho, meanwhile, moved on to a new project for the Church of Latter-Day Saints, construction of a gigantic generation ship they planned to use for the long journey to colonize another star system.

THE OUTER PLANETS ALLIANCE

As decades passed and whole generations were born, lived, and died in the Belt, life without gravity made Belters taller and leaner than humans from Earth or Mars. Isolation also led Belters to develop their own language, a "Belter Creole" incorporating words and phrases from a wide range of Earth languages, along with gestures and body language easily seen while wearing a vac suit. It was the slow, invisible growth of a new culture, a new people. There was one thing even the first Belters knew they had in common and shared wherever they got together, from Eros to the distant docking of two prospector family ships: complaints about the corporations of the inner planets, now working in conjunction with planetary governments as the Earth-Mars Coalition. Belters extracted enormously valuable raw materials from the Belt, but saw little of that wealth when it came time to sell their ore to the Coalition. For smaller outfits, what profits they did make were sometimes almost entirely eaten up in purchasing the consumables they needed to survive like oxygen, water, and fuel—consumables sold by the same conglomerates purchasing the ore. Independence and self-reliance were core beliefs among Belters, but even the most stubborn could feel the noose tightening. If they didn't stand together and advocate for their rights as a group, they could risk becoming indentured employees of the inner planets. From those complaints and conversations, a new group formed: the Outer Planets Alliance.

As anyone could declare themselves a member of the Outer Planets Alliance, the OPA had a thousand demands

but no single voice. Attempts to negotiate by regional OPA groups were often ignored by inner planet corporations. Events came to a head after the administrator of a distant Belt resupply station run by the Anderson-Hyosung Cooperative Industries Group increased the rates charged for consumables. These increased costs drove miners beyond the point of desperation, enough so that they gathered what aging weapons they could muster and seized control of the station. In response, the Coalition sent in their Marine Corps, armed with cutting-edge heavy weaponry to retake the station by force. Led by Colonel Fred Johnson, the marines killed more than a hundred OPA insurgents and a thousand civilians in a decisive strike intended to be a deterrent against future actions. Only in the aftermath was it discovered that during the entire three-day attack, the OPA had broadcast surveillance footage from the massacre, including their surrender just before the attack began. Labeled the "Butcher of Anderson Station" by the public and furious that his superiors had ordered the slaughter in an attempt to brand the OPA as extremists unwilling to negotiate, Anderson resigned and publicly

apologized for his role in events. Retreating to Ceres and ready to drink himself to death, Anderson was instead recruited by the OPA, proving as apt at political strategy as he had been at military strategy and rising through its ranks to become the leader and voice it had lacked.

THE PROTOMOLECULE

Meanwhile, a Martian scientific survey crew on a routine mission to explore Saturn's moons made a landing on Phoebe. Drawing core samples to see if ice might be mined from the moon as it was from the planet's rings, the scientists found unexpected silicate anomalies. To investigate the mystery, the Martian government contracted the Protogen Corporation to operate a research facility on the moon.

Protogen was quick to discover answers that it kept secret, even from its Martian partners: the entire moon was in fact an object that had arrived from outside the solar system billions of years ago, captured by Saturn's gravity before it could reach its true destination, Earth. What's more, deep inside the planetoid Protogen found what they believed to be the payload Phoebe was intended to bring to Earth: an adaptable set of encodings able to replicate and manipulate matter at a molecular level. Set free, Protogen believed these would have used early life on Earth as raw materials, rebuilding and replacing it with whatever was desired by its creators. Though the origins of the planetoid and the final goals of those who sent it were a mystery, Protogen recognized the power of the tool they had discovered and gave it a name: the protomolecule.

Protogen's plan to investigate the power of the protomolecule was quick and increasingly ruthless. First, they trapped their Martian partner scientists in a lab on Phoebe and exposed them to the protomolecule. When that failed to provide enough data due to lack of raw genetic material for the protomolecule to transform, Protogen destroyed the station to hide their tracks, framing the OPA for the damage. They then framed Mars for an attack on an Earth ship, to spark tensions between the two planets and distract them from Protogen's actions until it was too late. Setting up a secret lab on Eros Station in the Belt, they unleashed the protomolecule upon the station's population. Finally free to pursue its agenda, the alien molecular machine painfully and horrifically transformed all 1.5 million people on the station.

In charge of Tycho Station and its construction projects, the OPA tried to use the enormous bulk of the generation ship *Nauvoo* to push Eros into the sun to destroy the protomolecule—only to have the station suddenly and impossibly dodge the approaching ship. In apparent defiance of everything humanity knew about thrust, momentum, and acceleration, the asteroid began moving—towards Earth. A desperate attempt to destroy Eros using Earth's entire arsenal of nuclear missiles not only failed when Eros somehow cloaked itself against all conventional sensors, but left the missiles under the control of the OPA, enormously increasing the Alliance's military might.

In the end, Earth was spared by two people, a missing young woman who had been one of the protomolecule's first victims, the "seed crystal" of its growth on Eros, and the Belter detective hired to find her. Although they were both absorbed by the protomolecule, together they managed to have enough influence over it to guide the asteroid to a crash landing on another world in the system: the uninhabited planet Venus. Thick clouds closed in over the impact site and the protomolecule continued its mysterious work on a planetary scale, raising mysterious crystalline towers and making flickering, ghostly lights visible to probes. Everyone now knew that humanity was not alone in the Expanse.

Whether humanity is ready or not, the next great step in their journey is about to begin.

0. EARTH

The third planet from the Sun and the birthplace of humanity, Earth stands as the cultural, political, and economic center of the solar system, even as its children have spread outward to Luna, Mars, the Belt, and beyond. It remains the only world in the system with a breathable atmosphere where people can live outdoors under an open sky. Home to 30 billion people, Earth struggles under the effects of climate change, environmental pollution, overpopulation, and widespread unemployment, but its corporations are the wealthiest and most powerful in the system. It is heavily reliant on the resources of the Belt to keep the engine of its economy running, yet the grip Earth once held on its interplanetary colonies is slowly slipping away.

THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations governs both Earth and its satellites, including Luna and hundreds of orbital stations. Founded in the mid-20th century, the United Nations was originally a transnational organization for intergovernmental cooperation. But by the end of the 21st century, in the face of rampant environmental degradation that threatened the planet's entire ecosphere, Earth's nations ceded their sovereignty to the UN, creating a unified global government. Under the United Nations, Earth established colonies on Luna, on Mars, and in the Asteroid Belt, but technological limitations prevented further expansion into the outer solar system. In exchange for sharing the discovery of the Epstein Drive, Mars gained its independence from Earth, and the new technology opened the Outer Planets to settlement as well. Eventually, the United Nations initiated policies to manage the further effects of climate change and pollution and begin to restore Earth's damaged ecosystem. Many of these policies are still in effect, though population growth remains a serious issue, and thirty percent of the Earth's energy output is dedicated to recycling systems to manage the waste of 30 billion people.

> When he stood up in the full gravity of Earth to walk off the shuttle, he wanted it to feel wrong, oppressive after all his years away. But the truth was that something deep in him, maybe down at the genetic level, rejoiced. His ancestors had spent a few billion years building all their internal structures around the constant of one g downward pull, and his organism breathed a sigh of relief at the amazing rightness of it.
>
> *—Nemesis Games*

EARTH

DIAMETER	12,753 km
GRAVITY	1 g (normal)
LENGTH OF DAY	24 Earth Standard hours
LENGTH OF YEAR	1 Earth Standard year
ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE	101.325 kPa
ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION	78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, 0.9% argon, plus trace gases
TEMPERATURE	−89 °C (min), 15 °C (average), 57 °C (max)
GOVERNMENT	Representative democratic republic
HEAD OF STATE	Secretary-General Esteban Sorrento-Gillis
EXECUTIVE BRANCH	United Nations Security Council
LEGISLATIVE BRANCH	United Nations General Assembly
JUDICIAL BRANCH	United Nations Court of Justice
MILITARY BRANCH	United Nations Armed Forces, UN Navy, UN Marines
CAPITAL	New York City
LARGEST CITY	New York City
POPULATION	ca. 31 billion
GDP	Trillions of UN$
CURRENCY	UN Dollar (UN$)

NEW YORK CITY

Earth's capital is New York City, home to the government and military of the United Nations of Earth, though the UN's administrative offices and the headquarters of its judicial branch are in the Hague. The old nation-states of Earth no longer exist. Instead, the United Nations has divided the planet into regional administrative zones, such as the West African Shared Interest Zone, the North American Shared Interest Zone, the Common European Interest Zone, the Maharashtra-Karnataka-Goa Communal Interest Zone, the Persian Gulf Shared Interest Zone, the Balkan Shared Interest Zone, and the Pashwiri Autonomous Zone. These regional zones are determined by the "common interests" shared by the people living within them. Their boundaries bear little relation to the ancient borders that once covered Earth's maps and often divided culturally similar populations among multiple independent nation-states. Climate change has caused sea levels on Earth to rise, flooding many coastal cities and turning them in whole or in part into crumbling, waterlogged ruins jutting from the sea. Other coastal population centers are protected by great sea walls that hold back the rising tide.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Leadership of Earth rests in the hands of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who has broad powers as chief executive and head of state. The secretary-general serves as commander-in-chief of Earth's military and commands the United Nations' nuclear arsenal, though Earth's nuclear capability has been drastically reduced since it launched its entire complement of thousands of interplanetary nuclear missiles at Eros Station following the recent Eros Incident. The United Nations Security Council, comprising the secretary-general, the UN undersecretaries, and the admirals and generals commanding Earth's military, holds executive authority over interplanetary matters involving other human polities in the system.

The current secretary-general is Esteban Sorrento-Gillis, a former political prisoner. A popular politician, Secretary-General Sorrento-Gillis has dedicated his career to finding and eliminating corruption in government, but he is more of a figurehead than a true leader, relying on his subordinates and advisors for guidance on most major issues. Sorrento-Gillis officially leads the UN Security Council, but his Undersecretary of Executive Administration, Sadavir Errinwright, dictates much of the UN's policies, effectively making him the second most powerful person in the solar system. Errinwright's own deputy, Assistant Undersecretary Chrisjen Avasarala, is a shrewd career politician with decades of experience maneuvering through the halls of power, and she wields considerable influence of her own throughout Earth's government.

EARTH MILITARY

Earth's military, primarily the United Nations Navy and the United Nations Marine Corps, is arguably the most powerful combined military force in the system. Most of the UN Navy is spread throughout the solar system, overseeing and protecting Earth's interests in the Belt and the Outers or keeping the peace as part of the Earth-Mars Coalition Navy. While not as technologically advanced as the navy of the Martian Congressional Republic, the United Nations Navy is considerably larger, consisting of capital ships such as dreadnoughts and battleships, as well as smaller vessels like cruisers, destroyers, frigates, corvettes, and more. Nevertheless, projections have shown that the technological superiority of Mars would give them the edge against

JAMES HOLDEN

CAPTAIN OF THE *ROCINANTE*, EARTHER

James "Jim" Holden was born and raised on a family co-operative farm in Montana on Earth, the only child of eight parents—five fathers and three mothers. Eight adults having only one child between them provided enough of a tax break for the family to afford twenty-two acres of decent farmland. Mother Elise carried and gave birth to Jim and stayed home much of the time to raise him, but all of his parents contributed to his genetic mix.

When he was eighteen, Holden signed up with the UN Navy. He served for seven years, making it to First Lieutenant, but his issues with authority eventually got him discharged when he assaulted a superior officer on board the *UNN Zhang Fei*. Like many malcontents and people with black marks on their records, Holden found his way to the bottom of the shipboard food-chain, finding work on the ice-freighter *Cantebury* for the Pur'n'Kleen Water Company on the Ceres-Saturn run.

Holden and four of his crew-mates were investigating a distress signal from the freighter *Scopuli* on astroid CA-2216862 when a stealth ship of unknown origin destroyed the *Cantebury*. The events that followed led to Holden and company escaping from the destruction of the Martian battleship *Donnager* on board a corvette class light frigate, the *Tachi*. Holden renamed the ship *Rocinante* and became captain to its crew.

Jim Holden has a reputation as something of a glory-hound due to his initial system-wide broadcast about the destruction of the *Cantebury*, implying Mars was responsible. He's passionately devoted to doing what he feels is right, and has a tendency to throw himself into harm's way in order to do so, often without first thinking things through. He's fiercely devoted to his new family on board the *Roci* and remains suspicious of authority while generally supporting the notions of civilization and the rule of law.

JAMES HOLDEN

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols), **Communication** 2 (Leadership), **Constitution** 2, **Dexterity** 1 (Initiative), **Fighting** 2 (Brawling), **Intelligence** 1, **Perception** 1 (Intuition), **Strength** 2, **Willpower** 1 (Courage)

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOUGHNESS
11	32	12	4 (2 armor)

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Pistol	+4	2d6+1
Unarmed	+4	1d6+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: Bravery, Lucky Break, Over Here!, Take One for the Team

Talents: Attractive (Novice), Command (Expert), Improvisation (Novice), Inspire (Novice), Striking Style (Novice)

Equipment: Hand terminal, light armor (medium, if expecting a fight), pistol, vac suit

Threat: Moderate

Earth's numbers in any major conflict between the two planets.

The United Nations Marine Corps serves aboard UN Navy vessels and guards Earth outposts in the Belt and beyond. Marines wear vacuum-rated and radiation shielded powered armor, enabling them to engage in combat operations virtually anywhere in the system. The UNMC can place over 100 million troops on the battlefield, far outnumbering the ground forces of any other nation including Mars, and the fact that UN marines are born, raised, live, and train in the one full gravity of Earth gives them a considerable advantage against opponents accustomed to the lower gravities of Mars or the Belt. The current leader of the Outer Planets Alliance, Fred Johnson, was formerly a colonel in the United Nations Marine Corps, where he gained infamy throughout the system as the "Butcher of Anderson Station."

EARTH SOCIETY

Earth society is highly stratified. With 30 billion inhabitants, resources are scarce and there are simply not enough jobs for everyone on the planet. Although many Earth corporations and the United Nations itself are extremely wealthy, much of the planet's population lives in severe poverty. Broadly, Earth's citizens can be divided into two groups: those with jobs and those on Basic Assistance. The employed drive the economy, both with their purchasing power and their surplus production, which supports the rest of the planet's population. The simple fact that they have currency is a mark of both status and social class. Nevertheless, there are still sharp divisions among the employed based on just how much money they have. The extremely wealthy live and shop in their own enclaves, and private security ensures they never have to mingle with low or middle income earners, much less anyone else.

Those with jobs have access to high quality food and medical care, the ability to purchase land and property, and the right to have children, provided they can afford the license and taxes to do so. Instituted by the United Nations in an attempt to curb Earth's overpopulation, the so-called "baby tax" is prohibitively expensive, so it is not unheard of for groups of people to form civil unions or family co-ops where multiple parents share the tax burden (and even DNA) for one child. It is, of course, possible to have children without paying the baby tax, though only if one relies on the black market and unlicensed doctors, or wins one of the few opportunities for exemption each year.

LIVING ON BASIC

For those unable or unwilling to find employment, there is Basic Assistance, the United Nations' global welfare program Over half of Earth's populace relies on it for survival. Without jobs, these people have no money, so Basic provides shared accommodations in government housing complexes, meager food in the form of gray-tasting textured protein and enriched rice, minimal medical care in government clinics, and even recycled paper clothing, dispensed from automated kiosks with a thumbprint. All of these services are provided free of charge, but those on Basic are subject to mandatory contraception and cannot legally have children, apart from the regular "baby lottery" allowing for a small number of births each year. People on Basic are uneducated and contribute little to Earth's official economy, but they do engage in a vibrant barter economy among themselves, as well as create their own gray market industries and unlicensed services that are small enough to function without attracting much attention from the government.

The only way off Basic is to get a job or an education. However, to apply to a university or other educational institution, a prospective student must have at least one year's worth of work credits to demonstrate their commitment and work ethic, so that educational resources and classroom space are not wasted on those who will not utilize them

fully to contribute to society. There are uplift programs that provide educational or job training opportunities for people on Basic who are self-taught or can meet strict entrance requirements, but they are highly competitive and waiting lists to earn a spot in a vocational program can be upwards of ten years long. As a result, these programs are only an option for a select few. For most people, life on Basic is the only one they will ever know, the newsfeeds, dramas, and pornography on their terminal screens their only escape from the boredom of their existence.

THE UNREGISTERED

Regardless of class, both the employed and those on Basic are considered full citizens of the United Nations, their births and the details of their lives registered in countless government databases. Unofficially, however, there's also a third group of people on Earth living on the margins of society: the unregistered. Whether the products of unlicensed birth or criminals who have erased all public traces of their existence, the unregistered are united by the fact that there are no records of their births or lives in the vast UN databases. It's impossible to know exactly how many unregistered people live on Earth, eking out an existence in the cracks of society. Religious radicals and fringe groups are the sources of most unregistered births, followed by the unlicensed children of the prostitution trade. Without even the rudimentary resources of those on Basic, the unregistered frequently live in condemned buildings and run-down squats, and often turn to the black market and crime to support themselves.

An unregistered person can register themselves with the government at any time, though few do so willingly, preferring the freedom that would be denied to them in a life on Basic, even if their unregistered existence is harder. Regional governments occasionally launch security sweeps of Basic housing and low-income or high-crime-rate neighborhoods, and any unregistered people caught up in these sweeps are arrested and entered into the system. Those who refuse to provide their names for registration have new names assigned to them. Provided they're not found guilty of some crime, they are registered on the Basic rolls and monitored by the government for the rest of their lives.

THE URBAN CENTERS

With such a high population, most of Earth's citizens congregate in its teeming cities, which sprawl across the planet's surface. At one time, the Urban Arcology movement attempted to address Earth's overpopulation problem by building vast structures to house dense concentrations of people with minimal impact on their surrounding environment. Powered by their own self-contained fusion reactors, these arcologies were designed to exist as self-sustaining ecosystems, but the technology did not yet exist to fully exploit the concept. Nevertheless, failed arcologies litter many cities on Earth, towering into the sky or stretching for miles through the urban landscape. Some people still inhabit these crumbling monoliths from a more optimistic time, but the Urban Arcology movement never lived up to its promise.

> Only here on Earth, where food grew on its own, where air was just a by-product of random untended plants, where resources lay thick on the ground, could a person actually choose not to do anything at all. There was enough extra created by those who felt the need to work that the surplus could feed the rest. A world no longer of the haves and the have-nots, but of the engaged and the apathetic.
>
> *—Caliban's War*

Today, most cities have a central commercial district, filled with skyscrapers housing corporate offices and luxury residential apartments for the wealthy. Basic and minimal-income housing neighborhoods ring the commercial districts and stretch for miles, making up the largest proportion of real estate in most cities. Even with this much area, space is at a premium. Basic housing is crowded, and government apartment blocks are often old, underfunded, and derelict. Shared accommodations are usually mandated, and extended families inhabit squalid living spaces designed for half as many people. Low-income homes are an improvement over Basic housing, consisting of either simple apartments or small, mass-produced, single-story houses on tiny plots of land. Their key distinction is that their residents pay rent or mortgages for them, and thus get some say over their condition and location. Finally, on the outskirts of the cities sit the orderly grids of middle-income suburbs and strip malls.

The roads linking the various city districts together incorporate an electric network that powers and directs vehicles, from private cars to public transit such as the free automated bus service provided by Basic in most urban centers. Streets are invariably crowded with automated traffic and the packed throngs of people, either those with jobs traveling to and from work at shift change, or the aimless masses of those on Basic, wandering the streets and searching for some meaning in their small, dismal lives.

What open land remains outside Earth's sprawling urban centers is dedicated mostly to automated industrial farming, where machines labor to produce the food and other organics to sustain not only Earth's population, but

AMOS BURTON

MECHANIC OF THE *ROCINANTE*, EARTHER

Amos Burton's story begins, ends, and begins again in the city of Baltimore on Earth. That's where Amos Burton was a crime boss, running a number of illegal operations in the city's underworld. Those included unlicensed prostitution, which resulted in the equally unlicensed birth of a boy named Timmy, who was himself turned out as a prostitute as a child. Later, when Timmy was a physically strong teenager, he was recruited into Burton's syndicate by his childhood friend Erich, who worked for the organization as a hacker. Faced with the choice of killing his friend in order to prove himself, Timmy met with Burton empty-handed and killed the crime boss instead.

Erich stole Amos Burton's identity and gave it to Timmy, along with a coveted apprenticeship on Luna and a ticket off of Earth, both to offer his thanks and at least partially to ensure that his friend would leave Baltimore for good. Adopting "Amos Burton" as his new name, the young man left Earth and all he knew behind. Amos learned to be a ship mechanic, and served on at least a couple other ships before finding himself on the *Cantebury*, working for Pur'n'Kleen. Always a survivor, Amos later became the chief engineer and mechanic on board the newly named *Rocinante*.

Having experienced considerable trauma in his early years, Amos is capable of swift and savage violence without remorse as well as remarkable empathy and kindness. He's fiercely, even violently, protective of the people he cares about and intensely pragmatic towards everyone else, with his own sense of justice and the need for the strong to protect the weak.

AMOS BURTON

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols, Rifles), **Communication** 0, **Constitution** 3 (Stamina), **Dexterity** 2, **Fighting** 3 (Brawling), **Intelligence** 1 (Engineering), **Perception** 1, **Strength** 3 (Intimidation), **Willpower** 2

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOUGHNESS
12	32	12	6 (2 armor)

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Pistol	+4	2d6+1
Rifle	+4	3d6+1
Unarmed	+5	1d6+3

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: Jury Rig, The Upper Hand, Vicious Blow

Talents: Carousing (Novice), Fringer (Expert), Maker (Novice), Overwhelm Style (Expert), Striking Style (Novice)

Equipment: Hand terminal, light armor (medium, if expecting a fight), pistol, vac suit

Threat: Major

much of the solar system as well. Private land ownership is rare outside the ranks of the ultra-wealthy, though small family farms do persist in some areas, contributing their own tiny share to the planet's total food production. High-speed rail lines connect major cities to one another, and vast solar-powered cargo vessels carry humanity's trade across Earth's polluted oceans.

EARTH AND THE SYSTEM

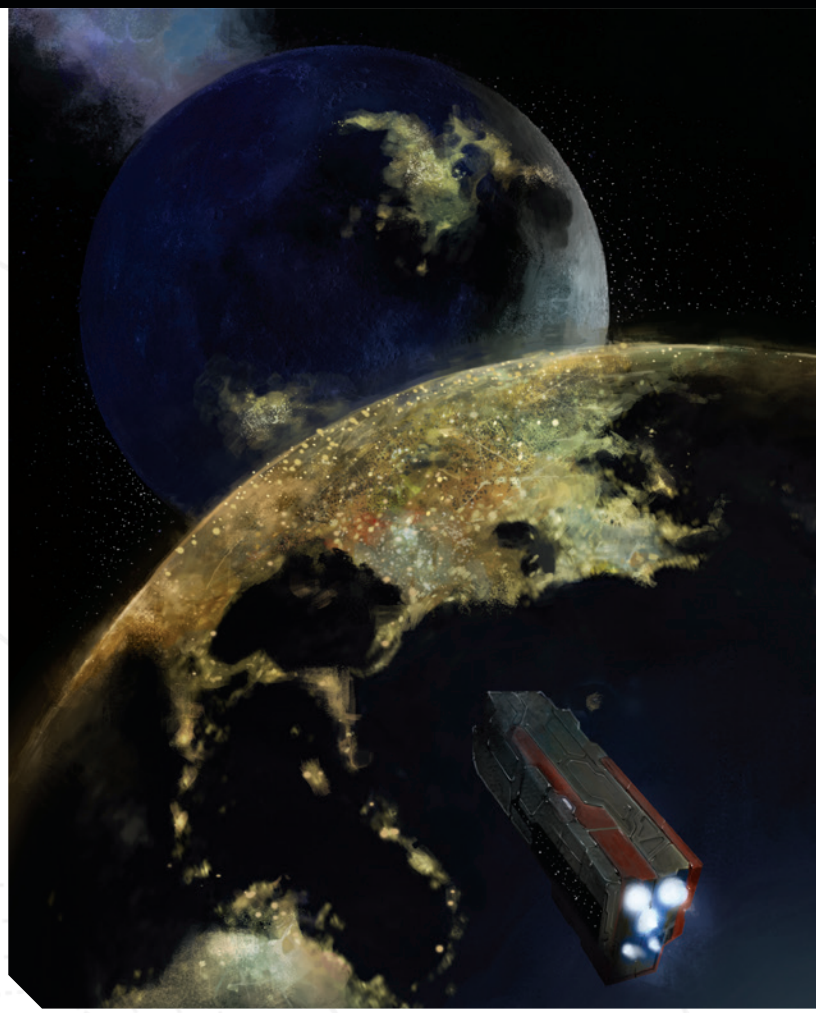
Earth's crowded conditions and lack of opportunity push many of its citizens to seek their fortunes in space. Many on Earth view the Belt as the "wild west," a frontier where people can make their marks based on their abilities or their skills, not who they are or where they come from. While that romantic notion might not strictly be true, Earthers can find a measure of freedom in space scarce dreamed of by their unfortunate counterparts on Basic back home. Others find that in the outer reaches of the solar system, far from Earth's teeming billions, their actions can actually make a difference in people's lives.

THE MARTIAN QUESTION

These same dreams and ambitions carried the ancestors of the Martians and the Belters on their initial voyages far from the world of their birth, though Earth's relationship with her colonial children has not always been easy, nor even friendly. If there is one theme that has run through history since humanity settled the solar system, it's one of recurring tensions between Earth and Mars. Earth has always hated Mars, and feels betrayed by its former colony because Mars used the Epstein Drive to achieve its independence from Earth. Earth didn't want to let go of Mars, and now that Mars has surpassed Earth in many ways, Earth fears its eventual defeat at the hands of its own child.

Mars, on the other hand, sees Earth as a civilization in decline. Martians believe Earthers are a coddled, lazy people who live off their government, which oppresses its colonies to enrich the politicians who run it. To a citizen of Mars, where unemployment is almost nonexistent, the fact that a person can sit around doing nothing but watch the entertainment feeds while waiting for their government handout is almost unbelievable. Of course, jealousy plays its part in Mars' views of Earth. Life on Mars is difficult and the planet itself is inhospitable to human life, but Earth has air, water, resources, and the capacity to allow half of its citizens to live off the excess, a luxury that is untold generations in the future for Mars.

Although it has never turned to outright war, this rivalry between Earth and Mars fluctuates between periods of peace and open hostility. Currently, the two planets are neutral toward one another, both more concerned with maintaining their control over their off-world colonies. The Earth-Mars Coalition Navy (comprising elements of both the United Nations Navy and the Martian Congressional Republic Navy) has policed the solar system for more than a century, cooperatively maintaining the inner system's hegemony of the Outers. The recent Eros Incident, however, has once more revealed the cracks of tension between the two solar superpowers, and relations between Earth and Mars have soured significantly in recent months.



> The ocean, just outside, seeped into everything. An olfactory reminder to everyone passing through the Ellis Island of the space age that Earth was absolutely unique to the human race. The birthplace of everything. The salt water flowing in everyone's veins first pulled from the same oceans right outside the building. The seas had been around longer than humans, had helped create them, and then when they were all dead, it'd take their water back without a thought.
>
> *—Nemesis Games*

LUNA

Luna is Earth's only natural satellite. It is only a quarter of Earth's diameter, with a gravity of 0.16 g—lighter than many spin stations in the Belt. Only 384,402 kilometers away from Earth, Luna was the site of humanity's first landing on another planet, as well as the location of Earth's first interplanetary colony, established in the early 21st century. This first permanent lunar base was a shared military and scientific endeavor, and while elements of both remain, Luna is now much more of a civilian station. Like Earth, Luna is governed by the United Nations, and the approximately one billion inhabitants of Luna are considered full UN citizens. Basic Assistance does not extend to Luna, so its citizens are generally wealthier than most of their counterparts on Earth. Lunar natives tend to have thinner frames, a result of life in the moon's low gravity, but are not as tall and thin as Belters.

Luna functions as a way station between Earth and the rest of the solar system, and serves as a natural meeting place between residents of the Inner Planets and inhabitants of the Belt and Outers. Due to its lower gravity, Luna is the only planet in the Inner System that Belters can easily visit and where they can comfortably remain for any substantial period of time. Just as on Earth, Luna hosts numerous corporate headquarters as well as respected universities and scientific institutes. It is a hub for commerce and travel, with frequent shuttle flights to and from Earth as well as regular long-haul transport and passenger service to the Outers.

A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

With no atmosphere to speak of, Luna is subject to intense solar radiation and a constant rain of micro-meteors, so surface domes such as can be found on Mars would be a significant safety risk. As a result, virtually all of Luna's habitats and infrastructure are located underground, though view screens throughout the station serve as "windows" offering views of the lunar surface. Only Luna's spaceport and access ports to the subterranean tunnels are above ground. As Earth's oldest non-terrestrial settlement, much of Luna Station is old and worn, though of course newer construction was added in the intervening centuries. A unique feature of Luna is the stink of gunpowder in the air that every visitor notices when they arrive, the result of lunar dust so fine it passes right through air filters.

LOVELL CITY

Luna's largest settlement and de facto capital, Lovell City, spreads out around the primary lunar spaceport, though

VENUS

Venus is the solar system's second planet, and while similar in size and mass to Earth, it is strikingly different in almost every other way. Venus has a retrograde rotation, meaning it rotates clockwise, as opposed to the counter-clockwise rotations of most of the solar system's other planets, and its rotational period of 243 days is the slowest of all the planets. Venus' day is also longer than its year, which is only 224.7 days long. Although Venus' gravity is just slightly lower than that of Earth, the planet's incredibly dense carbon dioxide atmosphere results in crushing atmospheric pressure at the surface 92 times greater than Earth's. It also creates a powerful greenhouse effect, leading to surface temperatures of 735 K, making Venus the hottest planet in the solar system—hotter even than the surface of Mercury. Venus has no moons.

Although it was the first planet to be visited and landed on by unmanned spacecraft from Earth in the 20th century, Venus has never been colonized by humans. Almost eighty years ago, Tycho Manufacturing and Engineering Concern was set to begin constructing a network of floating "cloud cities" in Venus' upper atmosphere, but legal disputes over development rights halted the project and continue to this day. Mao-Kwikowski Mercantile, originally a legal firm involved in the litigation, used the profits it made from these lawsuits to expand its business interests and become one of Earth's leading corporations. In any event, no cities were ever built in the skies above Venus, no colonists arrived, and the whole endeavor is now viewed as an epic failure in interplanetary colonization.

THE INCIDENT

The attention of the entire solar system once more turned to Venus, however, when Eros Station crashed into the planet's surface following the recent Eros Incident—the most widely recorded and broadcast event in the history of humanity. Having traveled into the inner solar system from the Belt at almost impossible speeds, Eros halted in orbit above Venus, then split apart into hundreds of identical pieces that spread across the entire planet, depositing the extraterrestrial protomolecule on its surface.

> "The binder for what we do if something comes up from Venus? It's three pages long, and it begins Step One: Find God."
>
> —*Caliban's War*

What exactly the protomolecule has been doing on Venus for the past several months remains a mystery, as Venus' dense sulfuric acid clouds completely obscure the surface of the planet from view. The harsh conditions on Venus would be completely inimical to terrestrial life, but the protomolecule appears to have survived both the impact and the environment. What little data scientific readings and visual observation have managed to gather are bewildering and frightening, as the protomolecule seems to be partially remaking the planet itself. Two-kilometer-high crystal towers were observed, as well as a network of interconnected filament hexagons fifty kilometers wide, carrying electrical currents and superheated water for some unknown purpose. Venus' gravity has marginally increased, as has its volcanic activity, which was nonexistent before. No one knows what is happening on Venus, but everyone is watching...and waiting.

little of the city is visible from the surface. Just like its sister cities on Earth, Lovell City contains warehouses, commercial centers, office complexes, shipyards, convention centers, hotels, prisons, residential areas, and schools. Pedicabs carry passengers on short trips through the city's tunnels, but mass transit tube stations are scattered throughout Lovell City, connecting its farther-flung districts. Lovell City's spaceport is almost unique in the system, its ancient docks having been dug out of the lunar surface. Tugs guide vessels in and out of the docks, which are large enough to house entire ships within them. And unlike in the spin stations of the Belt, where vessels sit in vacuum while docked, Luna's docks have retractable seals, allowing them to be filled with air so maintenance and repair crews can comfortably work on the parked ships.

NEW HAGUE

New Hague is a district in Lovell City that contains Luna's United Nations complex, including administrative offices and courts. Anyone unwilling or unable to go down the well to the UN's main headquarters in New York can conduct their business with the government here. The United Nations Science Service is based in New Hague as well. The science service has had a presence on Luna since the days of the original moon base, and constructed the first broad-array telescope on the moon, free from the distorting effects of Earth's atmosphere. Over the centuries, however, the frontiers of science have moved to the Outers, leaving the UN science service a shadow of its former self.

UN PRESENCE

Luna is also home to the Outer Planets Governing Board, which manages and oversees Earth's colonies, stations, and interests in the Belt and Outers. Outer Planets Command, known as OPCOM, the branch of the United Nations military responsible for operations in the outer system, is based here as well. The UN Navy maintains a local military presence at Luna Base, where UN marines train in the low lunar gravity to accustom themselves to operations in vacuum. Earth's primary shipbuilding facilities, the Bush Orbital Shipyards, are located in orbit around Luna. The Bush shipyards build most of the UN Navy's warships as well as a sizeable number of civilian ships. Only the facilities at Tycho Station in the Belt have the capacity to construct larger vessels, such as the immense Mormon generation ship *Nauvoo*.

9. MARS

Mangala, Fire Star, Nergal...Ever since humanity started ascribing names to the stars, the striking color of the fourth planet has not gone unnoticed. It is the color of blood, and for Earth, Mars has ever been a portent of martial spirit and war. It still is in this jaded age, but for far more concrete reasons.The Martian Congressional Republic rules over four billion people who are spread across Mars, associated orbital stations, and the small but highly advanced military fleets cruising the solar system.

Settled in the 21st century after a number of lengthy exploratory missions, Mars is a world of dreamers, devoted to a single vision: the greening of the red planet. It is a world of survivors, eking out every last erg of efficiency from machinery in a pitched centuries-long battle against an environment never meant for them. And Mars is a world of warriors, believing themselves stronger, smarter, and more determined than everything else under the sun.

Terraforming the Red Planet goes slowly, though the entire planet is focused on the endeavor in some capacity or another. Not a blade of grass grows on Mars that's not under a dome, the planet's sifting soil sterile as ever. Every person on Mars contributes to the work of terraforming—or in the military, to protect those who work. The whole of Mars is devoted to the great project, even as each generation knows they won't be the ones to see its fruition. As the saying goes, great people plant trees knowing they'll never sit in their shade, and Martians plant trees in red soil in hopes of a green future. To Martians, Earthers are lazy and indolent, living off the government dole without faith and without drive. Earth is the dying past, and Mars is the bold future, a desperate attempt to beat the ticking clock of extinction.

"Earth. Mars. They're not that different," Miller said.
"Try telling that to a Martian," Havelock said with a bitter laugh. "They'll kick your ass for you."

— Leviathan Wakes

THE MARTIANS

The first Martians were colonists from Earth, weary from long months of travel. They were scientists and explorers, religionists of every stripe, from Jainists to Mormons to born-again Christians (all of whom shunned the alcohol preferred by their fellows for surviving in a hostile land, but who still attended local honky-tonks for the company of their compatriots). The third planet sent their best and brightest, but that only ever resulted in long-term distress,

as the first settlers treated the new Martians poorly. The distance between the third and fourth planets was vast, and Earth ruled the Red Planet as a colony. War might have been inevitable, and came within a hair's breadth of happening a few times, but the UN invoked the breakaway province rule.

Freed from the mother world, Mars grew into a regional power, and eventually Earth's only true rival in the Sol system. Mars' lighter gravity caused minute but defined changes to human physiology over hundreds of years, much like the Belters, who were shaped by living in microgravity. Natural selection and lesser gravity mean Martians have less muscle mass and bone density compared to Earthers, leaving them slender and taller than Earth norms, though not unusually so—hormone treatments are widely available most on Mars. Blood oxygen boosters, muscle fatigue inhibitors, and bone density enhancers allow Martians to tolerate even Earth, albeit with physical discomfort at the gravity and emotional discomfort at the barely disguised glee of United Nations diplomats. Martian selection pressures have favored those with better tolerances for low oxygen environments, however, and Martians use slightly less oxygen on average than other humans in the Sol system.

AGORAPHOBIA

Martians spend their entire lives inside domed cities and tunnels underneath the surface of Mars, not experiencing the vastness of space the way that Belters do. Generations spent in the underground cities and tunnels of Mars mean many Martians suffer from agoraphobia, though few would characterize it as suffering. Martians exposed to the wide skies and seas of Earth are left gasping and hyperventilating, panicking at the shocking openness. The atmosphere is too thick, the sky too far. Martian visitors are often brought to Earth on the dark side of the planet, and told to focus only on the horizon when they leave. Compared to Mars, the average Earth city is an overcrowded assault on every physical and moral sense imaginable; their home tunnels are kept clean and well-lit, but even with teeming billions living in cramped quarters, there's quiet to be found that is lost on Earth.

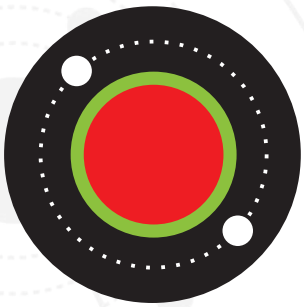
MARTIAN CHARACTER

Modern Martian life expectancy exceeds 120 Earth-years; the oldest generation of Martians remembers the days when the best Martian entertainment was alcohol and an entertainment feed from Earth, which frequently issued directives to a people more technologically advanced than they.

The revolution for independence is still within living memory as well, and it is this sense of entitlement and

MARS

6,779 km	DIAMETER
0.376 g (light)	GRAVITY
24 hours, 39 minutes, Earth Standard Time	LENGTH OF DAY
1.9 Earth Standard years	LENGTH OF YEAR
0.636 kPa	ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE
95.97% carbon dioxide, 1.93% argon, 1.89% nitrogen	ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION
−143 °C (min), −63 °C (average), 35 °C (max)	TEMPERATURE
Congressional democratic republic	GOVERNMENT
Prime Minister Nathan Smith Books	HEAD OF STATE
Martian Cabinet	EXECUTIVE BRANCH
Martian Congress	LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
Martian Court	JUDICIAL BRANCH
Ministry of Defense, Martian Congressional Republic Navy, Martian Marine Corps	MILITARY BRANCH
Londres Nova	CAPITAL
Londres Nova	LARGEST CITY
ca. 4 billion	POPULATION
Trillions of MCR$	GDP
Martian Dollar (MCR$)	CURRENCY



defiance that forms the bedrock and strata of Martian society. That generation of settlers built better ships, developed environmental science that outstripped Earth's by decades, and reached a significant degree of self-sufficiency—and that was before a born-and-bred Martian opened up the solar system to humanity with the Epstein Drive. This generation, still ensconced within high-ranking government and military positions, is now challenged by a generation that refuses to see the forest for the trees—partly because they've never seen a forest, or trees for that matter, first-hand.

By contrast, the younger generation is far more concerned with Martian lives and Martian supremacy, but in that order. They see their parents, and grandparents' focus on terraforming as myopic and ignorant of the political and military realities of being one of the solar system's superpowers. Mars has just over a tenth of the popula-

tion of Earth and a mere fraction of the industrial base, but every Martian is consumed by the driving need to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" and make Mars dominant, not just a rival to the cradle of humanity. This manifests as a strong and single-minded work ethic, and also in a disproportionately strong military and well-funded scientific research concerns, which in turn means the military gets first cut of new technology such as stealth ships. Until a generation ago, routine air raid drills for schools were common, and three generations ago the inevitable victory of Earth in a war hung like a dust storm over every would-be revolutionary's fiery rhetoric. Things have changed, but all the same, the youngest native Martians resent their lot in life. For the first time, Mars is a victim of its own success, and unrest festers at the thought of constant readiness for battle and the slow progress of terraforming.

MARTIAN MILITARY

The Martian Congressional Republic is often in direct competition with the UN. This competitive spirit extends to the Martian Navy and the UNN, the Martian Marines and the UNMC, and virtually every parallel organization.

In contrast to the bloated bureaucracy and centuries-old grudges of the UN, however, the MCR is driven by a united political will. Despite the smaller population, this unity and drive makes Mars a worthy rival to Earth. The Martian Congressional Republic Navy, although smaller, is acknowledged by all to be more advanced. Whether or not their superiority can overcome Earth's far greater numbers is a question that has been asked for generations, but that neither side has dared to truly try to answer.

Mars's disproportionate expenditures on military research and development mean their ships are on the cutting edge. Mars makes technological breakthroughs with startling frequency, despite—or perhaps because of—their relative lack of infrastructure compared to Earth. Many companies retain concerns on Mars, and corporate citizens are a common sight on the planet. Yet of all the areas of competition both subtle and gross between Mars and Earth, research and commerce aren't among them. Both planets coordinate in maintaining research stations on various moons and parts of the system, and cooperate in joint projects such as research into space elevators for both planets. Both superpowers jointly control and exploit the bountiful resources of the Belt.

THE RED PLANET

Life on Mars is a world of domes and vacuum-sealed, high-speed railways, shielded from a too-thin atmosphere and a too-harsh yet too-distant sun. It is a world of spaceports, underground apartments (called "holes"), and massive hydroponic farms. Humanity dug deep into the soil and rock when they reached their second home, crafting underground cities with UV sunlamps strung high overhead, using the soil as insulation and radiation shielding in lieu of a planetary magnetosphere. The clear insulating ceramic used by the earliest settlers to construct their walls and holes is starting to scratch and gray in the oldest settlements, warping and bubbling from the constant heat of humanity warring against the chill of the Martian atmosphere. Few on the Red Planet have much in the way of luxuries, from printed books to personal amenities. Luxuries are for public consumption or private expenditures outside the home.

LIFE ON MARS

Mars' large population centers required a standardized language of military and government, and even today many Martians default to English. Immigrants from Eastern and South Asia, the Americas, and other parts of Earth in the first and second generations led to a riotous variety of accents, maintained with characteristic Martian pride and equally characteristic stubbornness. It's not unusual to meet

ALEX KAMAL

PILOT OF THE *ROCINANTE*, MARTIAN

Born in the Mariner Valley on Mars, Alex Kamal attended school in Londres Nova and eventually enlisted in the Martian Congressional Republic Navy, where he served for some twenty years. He was stationed at Hecate Base on Olympus Mons and also served aboard ships, including the *MCRN Bandon*. During this time, Alex met and married his wife Talissa, although the two of them later divorced when it became clear that Alex was "married" first and foremost to being a pilot.

Similarly, Alex's retirement from the Martian Navy didn't go well. He was restive and unhappy when no longer at the helm of a ship. He became a freighter pilot, eventually working for Pur'n'Kleen aboard the *Cantebury*. Alex was the pilot chosen to fly the *Knight*, the ship's shuttle, over to investigate the *Scopuli* and its distress signal. Later, when the survivors of the *Knight* fled the doomed Martian battleship *Donnager*, Alex was tasked with piloting the corvette-class frigate *Tachi*, as he was the most qualified surviving pilot among the escapees.

Alex quickly settled into the prospect of full-time pilot of the renamed *Rocinante*, joining its crew on a permanent basis. Although Jim Holden is captain of the *Rocinante*, Alex thinks of her as "his" ship and frequently talks to her in his Mariner Valley Texan twang, referring to the ship as "darlin'". He's most comfortable on board and in his acceleration couch at the helm, and not fond of leaving the ship for too long.

ALEX KAMAL

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

ACCURACY 2 (GUNNERY), **COMMUNICATION** 0, **CONSTITUTION** 1 (TOLERANCE), **DEXTERITY** 3 (FREE-FALL, PILOTING), **FIGHTING** 1, **INTELLIGENCE** 1 (NAVIGATION), **PERCEPTION** 2 (SEEING), **STRENGTH** 1, **WILLPOWER** 1

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOUGHNESS
13	27	13	3 (2 ARMOR)

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
PISTOL	+2	2D6+2
UNARMED	+1	1D3+1

SPECIAL FEATURES

FAVORED STUNTS: Attack on the Move, Evasive Maneuver, When a Plan Comes Together

TALENTS: Expertise (Piloting, drones, Novice), Observation (Seeing, Novice), Pilot (Master), Pistol Style (Novice)

EQUIPMENT: Hand terminal, light armor (medium, if expecting a fight), pistol, vac suit

THREAT: MODERATE

MARS AND THE PROTOMOLECULE

The discovery of the protomolecule is a prime example of how generational stratification on Mars affects Martian policy. MCN-sponsored miners landed on the ice moon Phoebe to survey it for ice mining. However, when core samples from the moon were investigated, silicate samples with organic signatures were found. The highest echelons of the Martian government approached the Earth-based company Protogen as a cosponsor of a long-term research facility. Backed by Mao-Kwikowski Mercantile, one of the research project resulting from this relationship—code-named Project Caliban—aimed to create hybrid super-soldiers for the Martian military. If this whole thing was made public, there are many in the current MCN that would be absolutely horrified that their leaders would throw away Martian lives for some sort of strategic advantage over Earth.

a Martian with a strong Texan (especially from the Mariner Valley) or British-English accent, no matter their apparent Earther ethnic heritage. Martian farms grow crops in soil carefully cultured from dirt and organisms drawn from Earth, either naturally selected over hundreds of years or otherwise meticulously crafted in planetside laboratories. They're fed by melted water from deep under the surface or piped in from the polar ice caps, but this is a paltry harvest compared to hydration-rich Ganymede and Europa. Few Martians eat completely fresh food, the majority being potatoes, mushrooms, and varieties of coffee. Most eat meat grown in vats, along with varieties of vegetable paste resembling hummus. Their lasagnas are spread between layers of fake grains and smothered in fake tomato sauce and fake cheese, an evening's repast to go with the morning's breakfast of fake eggs. Martians visiting Earth, Ganymede, or Europa take the opportunity to gorge. Real food still tends to be dehydrated and full of preservatives. Despite this, Martians enjoy restaurants with some regularity, gorging themselves on a dizzyingly ethnic palate from a planet many have never seen and many more despise: Thai hot pots, Italian pasta, Japanese ramen.

Gone are the ramshackle bars of centuries past, fit only for entertainment screens and potato vodka. On Mars today, teahouses with elegant décor evoke old Parisian cafés. Martian hotels have wall fountains, a luxury unimagined by previous generations. Martians define opulence and excess by the cultures they've left behind; to their minds, the difference between Martians and Earthers is that the former work hard and deserve their trappings of wealth, while the latter are squander money on the lazy and undeserving..

OLYMPUS MONS

The largest mountain in the solar system, Olympus Mons is the only natural monument large enough to truly represent Martian ambition. Several smaller cities, farms, and prisons populated by rock-breaking chain gangs cut deep into the slopes of Olympus Mons, the most prominent of which is Hecate Base: the main training facility for the Martian Navy. The base has undergone renovation in the past few years, but few things change in the massive steel facility visible from low orbit. Sure, the crappy handball courts are gone and the Steel Cactus Mexican Grill is a Thai place now, but the complex still contains the pride of the Martian cadet corps. The slopes of Olympus Mons also host a dizzying array of towns and small cities. Syria Planum enjoys its closeness to Olympus, with a preponderance of Algerian and European immigrants leading to a long tradition of dense and complicated native Martian folk music going back generations.

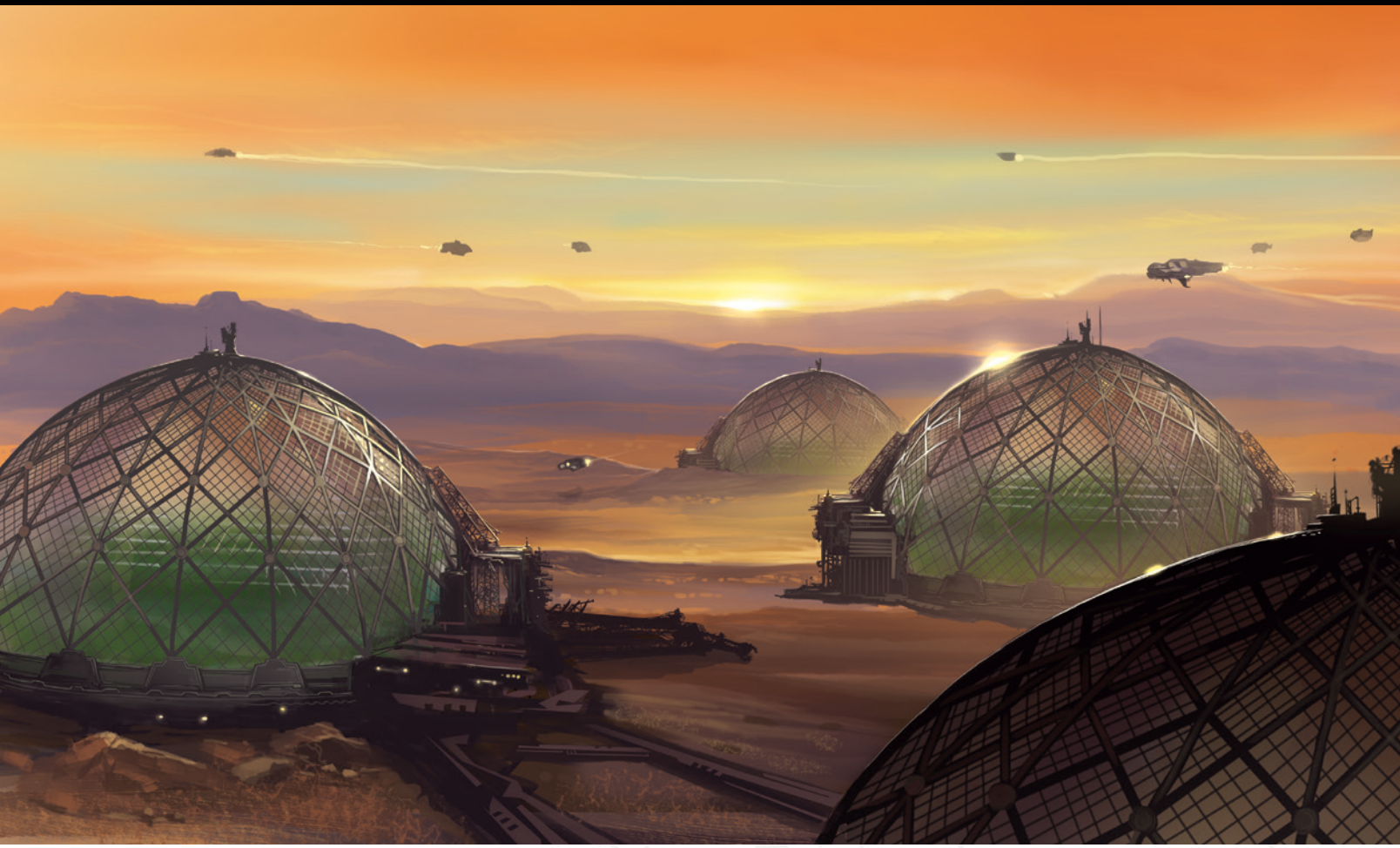
> On Mars, the joke went, a man's hole was his castle where values of castle approached dorm room.
>
> — "Drive"

THE MARINER VALLEY

Valles Marineris stretches across the planet's surface, a canyon beyond grand, four thousand kilometers of protection from the admittedly ungentle Martian elements. The Mariner Valley was settled by Chinese, East Indian, and Texan immigrants in one of the earliest waves of migration, and it remains one of the most well-developed sections of Mars today. Sprawling across the sides of the canyons, five neighborhoods are linked by Haizhe, a network of bridges and tubes resembling nothing so much as a cartoon jellyfish. A high-speed rail line connects the Valley to Londres Nova. Spurred by their ancient heritage on Earth, the residents of the Valley maintain a cowboy attitude and manner of speech, leading to an affected plain-spoken style and a propensity for drinking. It also led to a propensity for sports; football matches played in low Martian gravity are long-distance and graceful affairs, and the Mariner Valley teams enjoy a planet-wide fanbase.

LONDRES NOVA

Londres Nova, "New London," is a city located in the northern reach of the Aurorae Sinus. Like most Martian cities, it's a partly underground webwork of tunnels under permafrost, dotted with tube stations determining the social structure of the long since built-up residential areas. Ten agricultural domes press out to the surface, and seven neighborhoods radiate out below the surface. The oldest



parts of the city bear the early marks of colonization, the scars carved into the planet by automated construction robots and the preference of the earliest colonists for function over form.

Aterpol is considered the "downtown" of the city, with tube connections to all other neighborhoods, and shops and restaurants catering to the high-class residents able to afford the neighborhood. The Martian Congressional Republic keeps their offices in Aterpol, right beside the downtown area known as Olympia. The government regularly broadcasts sessions in debate, but few find them as lively as the byzantine politics of Earth.

Salton has a high-speed surface monorail to the observatory at Dhanbad Nova, neatly connecting the upper university and technical clinics with the lower university in middle-class Breach Candy. Londres Nova's two former industrial neighborhoods, Nariman and Martineztown, are struggling to reinvent themselves in the wake of obsolescence from technological development, with mostly lower-class families living there. The worst parts of town are Innis Deep and Innis Shallows. Each has only a single tube route, making them cul-de-sacs and havens for Belter-like Martians: antisocial, independent, intolerant. Despite this, they're perhaps the most welcoming to outsiders (if only because outsiders can't get an apartment anywhere else), and Martians involved in social outreach move there to help the dispossessed. Drug dealers prowl the underbelly of the city, recruiting young chemists from the university to cook high-quality narcotics for sale to the Martian population.

DHANBAD NOVA

The research center at Dhanbad Nova remains one of the largest on Mars, host to a wide variety of government-funded initiatives and regional research wings. The anti-cancer regimens available aboard every Martian ship were developed here, as were water reclamation techniques in wide use today and the beginnings of the Epstein Drive at Masstech. Today, Dhanbad Nova is still a hub of research, but has the standard complement of Martian hotels with all the supposed decadence of an Earther—fancy soaps, large baths, fluffy towels. Visitors to the research facilities can enjoy all the luxuries of home, no matter where they hail from—and they hail from everywhere. Powerful conglomerates such as Masstech and interplanetary concerns such as Kwikowski Mutual Interest Group maintain large stakes in the laboratories of Dhanbad Nova. Their corporate structures occupy massive levels both above and below the surface, between the noodle bars and the other evidence of ancient colonization.

DEIMOS

Deimos no longer exists as such. Following nuclear annihilation of the Earth-Mars joint Phoebe Research Station and the Saturnian satellite in the wake of the Eros Incident, the United Nations destroyed one of Mars' two moons. Prior to becoming a smudge in the Martian sky, Deimos hosted military facilities and a deep radar station. Earth's government declared the Phoebe demolition a provocation, despite Earth itself previously sending its own ship to trail Martian ships at a number of stations.

THE MARTIAN CONGRESSIONAL REPUBLIC NAVY

In the wake of the Eros incident, Earth and Mars are at war: sometimes hot, sometimes cold. Long-simmering rivalries have boiled up, and tactical plans are being drawn up on both sides. Prior to this, their space navies were officially part of a coalition, policing the solar system against the threat of piracy and passing through Ceres on its way to Saturn, Jupiter, and the stations of the Belt, and this was where most Martian officers got their combat experience. Assignment to a pirate-hunting cruiser such as the *Donnager* was considered a prime posting. In the wake of the destruction of Eros, the once unified Earth-Mars Coalition Navy forces are now divided. Now, Deimos is a ring around Mars, a thin band of shattered rock encircling a planet girded for war. The fleets of the UNN and the MCRN jockey for position and supremacy in a crowded solar system.

The exploratory and military arms of Mars have the finest ships in the system, barring the exotic UN flagships funded by the ultra-wealthy of Earth. Pound for pound, any Martian ship can defeat an equivalent Earth or Belter craft. The MCRN consists of two fleets: the Home Fleet, stationed at Mars; and the Jupiter Fleet, cruising between Ceres and Ganymede. Both fleets see action from pirates and raiders, and both engage in exploratory cruises, classified weapons testing, and diplomatic transport missions.

DESIGN & DEPLOYMENT

Most Martian ships are constructed in the same basic configuration, floor by floor from the drive cone and reactors. First is the engineering deck, then specialty compartments, then galley, followed by crew cabins. The next two decks are medical bays and interrogation chambers. The storage deck and airlocks follow, with the command deck and pilot (or the bridge in larger ships) at the "top". Under thrust, Martian ships are essentially skyscrapers, with elevators and ladders connecting the various decks.

MRCN ships generally cruise separately from one another, or in pairs for smaller ships. The third-generation battleships are well armed enough to be considered fleets unto themselves. The pride of the MCRN is the *Donnager*-class dreadnought, named after the former flagship of the navy. *Donnager* dreadnoughts measure nearly 500 meters long, or the length of a 130-story office building, and bristle with torpedo tubes, point defense cannons, and massive rail guns. They serve as flagships for MCRN fleets, and are large enough to carry smaller missile or escort frigates or escort within them.

Second-generation battleships still have a place in the MRCN, serving alongside fast-attack cruisers, destroyers and frigates capable of patrolling the entire Solar system. Mars also has advanced stealth technology, though dreadnoughts and larger ships typically avoid this in favor of the intimidating effect of an aggressive battle posture. Larger ships are basically mobile bases, carrying marines and military interrogators aided by pharmaceuticals. By virtue of superior technology, fiercer armament, and better-trained crew, the battlefleets of Mars are unmatched. Martians never cease to remind others of this, and make their military pride known at any and every opportunity.

ROBERTA "BOBBIE" DRAPER

GUNNERY SERGEANT, MMC, MARTIAN

Gunnery Sergeant Roberta "Bobbie" Draper, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force, MMC, hails from a military family on her native Mars. Over two meters tall and an athletic and muscular 100 kilos, Draper served in the Martian Marine Corps for some eighteen years before she and her platoon of Marines were assigned to Ganymede following the Eros incident. Monitoring UN troop movement and patrolling the surface greenhouse domes, Draper's platoon encountered a jamming signal and a group of UN Marines rushing their position. Initially assuming an attack, Draper quickly realized the UN troops were instead fleeing from something that turned out to be a protomolecule hybrid. The creature wiped out both the UN and Martian soldiers, and nearly finished Bobbie before it exploded, leaving her the sole survivor.

Sgt. Draper later attended a meeting between Martian and UN officials on Earth to discuss the Ganymede incident, where she blurted out the existence of the protomolecule "monster" that attacked her platoon. Admonished by her superiors, Draper ended up meeting Chrisjen Avasarala while drinking in a bar. Avasarala offered her a job as liaison with the Martian military, which she later accepted. This decision likely saved Avasarala's life when Bobbie accompanied her on board Jules-Pierre Mao's yacht, the *Guanshiyin*, serving as the undersecretary's escort and using her military training—and Martian Goliath-Mk.III power armor—to seize control of the ship.

ROBERTA "BOBBIE" DRAPER

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 3 (Rifles), **Communication** 0, **Constitution** 4 (Running), **Dexterity** 2 (Initiative), **Fighting** 3 (Brawling), **Intelligence** 1 (Tactics), **Perception** 1, **Strength** 3, **Willpower** 2 (Self-Discipline)

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOUGHNESS
12	32	12	7+ (2+ armor)

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Pistol	+3	2D6+1
Rifle	+5	3D6+1
Unarmed	+5	1D6+3

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: Cards on the Table, Footwork, Knock Prone

Talents: Attractive (Novice), Commando (Novice), Protector (Expert), Striking Style (Novice), Tactical Awareness (Novice)

Equipment: Hand terminal, light armor (power armor, if expecting a fight), pistol, vac suit

Threat: Moderate

10. THE BELT

Fifty million people live in the rocks and habitats beyond Earth and Mars, according to the United Nations. If you ask census-takers who live there how many are in the Belt, they'll say the number edges up to a hundred million. The latter would go further to state that it's rare for those who live outside the Belt to consider those who live within to be human. The inhabitants of the Belt are the dispossessed and forgotten of those who came from Earth. Marked by a sense of abandonment, self-reliance in the face of an obvious lack of self-sufficiency, and quiet resilience, the Belter psyche endures as a powerful force simmering and ratcheting up the instability between the great powers.

Out beyond the terrestrial planets, in the shadow of the giants rivaling Sol, the Belters eke out a precarious existence dedicated to fueling the ambitions of others, grimacing as they're stepped on. They're often styled as colonists, but unlike the hopes of Martians, nobody believes the Belt will ever be more habitable than it is. Air finds no purchase, crops will not grow in solid rock, and few natural resources exist to support life. Those who work in the asteroid belt harvest minerals for funding and send massive haulers to break great, icy asteroids apart for water. The two solar superpowers have become dependent on the mineral and scientific wealth of the Belt to maintain their standards of living, but they give little in return to the Belters. The nominal capital of the Belt, inasmuch as it can be said to have one, is Ceres, the dwarf planet in the asteroids and one of the largest objects in the Belt.

Prior to the Eros incident, Ceres and much of the rest of the Belt were technically a United Nations protectorate governed by Earth—though one living under constant fear of seizure by Mars in a system-wide war. Earth would naturally launch a full-scale war in retaliation, leaving the Belt to lose no matter who won the conflict. In the wake of Eros, however, various cells and Belter nationalist factions have attempted to set themselves apart as a third independent system power: the Outer Planets Alliance (OPA).

> "Aggression against the Belt is what Earth and Mars survive on. Our weakness is their strength," the masked woman said from Miller's terminal screen. The split circle of the OPA draped behind her, like something painted on a sheet. "Don't be afraid of them. Their only power is your fear."
>
> "Well, that and a hundred or so gunships," Havelock said.
>
> *— Leviathan Wakes*

THE BELTERS

The earliest Belters were miners, living out of ships and sustaining themselves on years' worth of food reserves. It wasn't until the Epstein Drive that the Belt truly opened

to humanity, allowing life and culture to flourish. Humans have been in the asteroids for a shorter amount of time than they have been on Mars, but more than a century of living, breeding, and growing in microgravity have led to physical changes in Belters. Eros and Ceres have been spun up to generate their own gravity, but this is a poor substitute for even the lesser gravity of Mars. Those Belters who can't afford proper hormone treatments or periodic trips to higher-gravity environments grow to seven feet or taller, bones stretched thin and brittle. Even hormone treatments don't address all of the physical concerns, as Belters have a tendency to be slender and less-muscled than Earthers or Martians, with obvious physical signs such as spine ridges where the bones didn't fuse properly. These Belters suffer from a number of physical ailments, and can't tolerate Earth's gravity outside large, liquid-filled buoyancy tanks—being forced into Earth's gravity well outside these tanks is torture for them, both legally and literally. The smallest settlements in the Belt are nearly zero-g; the unfortunate Belters who live there cannot return to gravity for the rest of their short, troubled lives.

Besides the physical ailments caused by microgravity, and many children suffer brain damage caused by hypoxia—the result of improperly cleaned air filters or low oxygen levels present from living on a cold asteroid. Many other Belters suffer from malnutrition, as nearly all food must be imported from Earth, Mars, or the Belter breadbasket, greenhouses on Europa and Ganymede. Dehydration is also a constant worry, as all water in the Belt is either heavily recycled or comes from massive ice chunks brought in by haulers from the rest of the Belt or from the rings of Saturn. Mining is dangerous work no matter what's being mined—a disproportionately large number of Belters replace damaged or destroyed limbs with prosthetics, an affordable option despite the ability to regrow missing limbs being widely available, at least on the inner planets.

BELTER HOMES

Most Belters live in small apartments they call holes, often enough literal holes bored into the rock of asteroids. The nicer areas are lit by recessed lights, with green floors and blue ceilings to try and trick the body into thinking of Earth. The trickery is aided by pseudo scents to drown out the antiseptic smell of sealant and recycled air and water. Vast neighborhoods are separated by corridors, linked by air filtration systems and massive metal ducts that collect fungi and detritus unless they're constantly scrubbed clean. This deep sense of community lends itself to an odd combination of civic pride and self-reliance, reinforced by the close quarters. Belters walk from corridor to corridor, take public transport tubes, and live their lives within close reach of their neighbors.

THE BELT

GOVERNMENT TYPE	Corporate representation and anarcho-syndicalism; factional cells of the Outer Planets Alliance
CORPORATE REPRESENTATION	Pur'N'Kleen Water Company, Star Helix Security, Far Horizons Foundation, Pinkwater, Tycho Manufacturing and Engineering Concern, Mao-Kwikowski Mercantile, Anderson-Hyosung Cooperative Industries Group
LARGEST HABITATS	Ceres, Eros, Anderson Station, Tycho Station
POPULATION	ca. 50-100 million

No asteroid in the Belt is naturally fit for human life or habitation, nor can they be terraformed like Mars. Nothing will ever grow in solid rock and no air will cling to a dwarf planet. Every breath a Belter takes comes through an air filter, and every breath is shared with a thousand others in tight quarters. Keeping filters clean, gray-water purifiers humming, and the fungus tanks properly shielded is a task for the entire community. When the authorities are shipped in from corporations on Luna or Earth, they can't be trusted. Belters look out for one another as a matter of habit and course, and when a Belter fails in their duties or screws over another, it's dealt with as a community matter. When something breaks, it gets fixed—if not by a Belter, then by someone they tell immediately, since nobody else can be expected to fix it. Belters are just as likely to fix malfunctioning equipment themselves without bothering a landlord as they are to summarily murder administrators who won't keep the air filters clean. Justice can't be relied on to be doled out by anyone else, either.

Consequently, Belters tend to see the Inner residents of the solar system, as interminably lazy. Even the Martian work ethic gets corrupted by their need for someone to oversee their work.

RELATIONS WITH INNERS

There's a truism in the Belt: Belters are needed, but not wanted. The Inners who dock within the Belt are happy to drink Belter liquor and blow off steam in Belter brothels, buy Belter metal and sell third-rate materials back. Earth and Mars rely on the minerals of the Belt for technology and industry, yet they continually oppress the Belters and refuse to allow them to rule themselves. The choicest fruits (and grains, and beef) of Europa and Ganymede go to Mars, and even Earth, before they come to the Belt. The Earth corporations most Belters work for cut corners, resulting in unsafe work conditions for asteroid and water miners. Basic necessities such as water and air are tightly controlled, and shorted during times of financial hardship (for the corporation, that is). Belter habitats are outfitted with recycled and reused air scrubber units, adding to the plague of hypoxia among Belters.

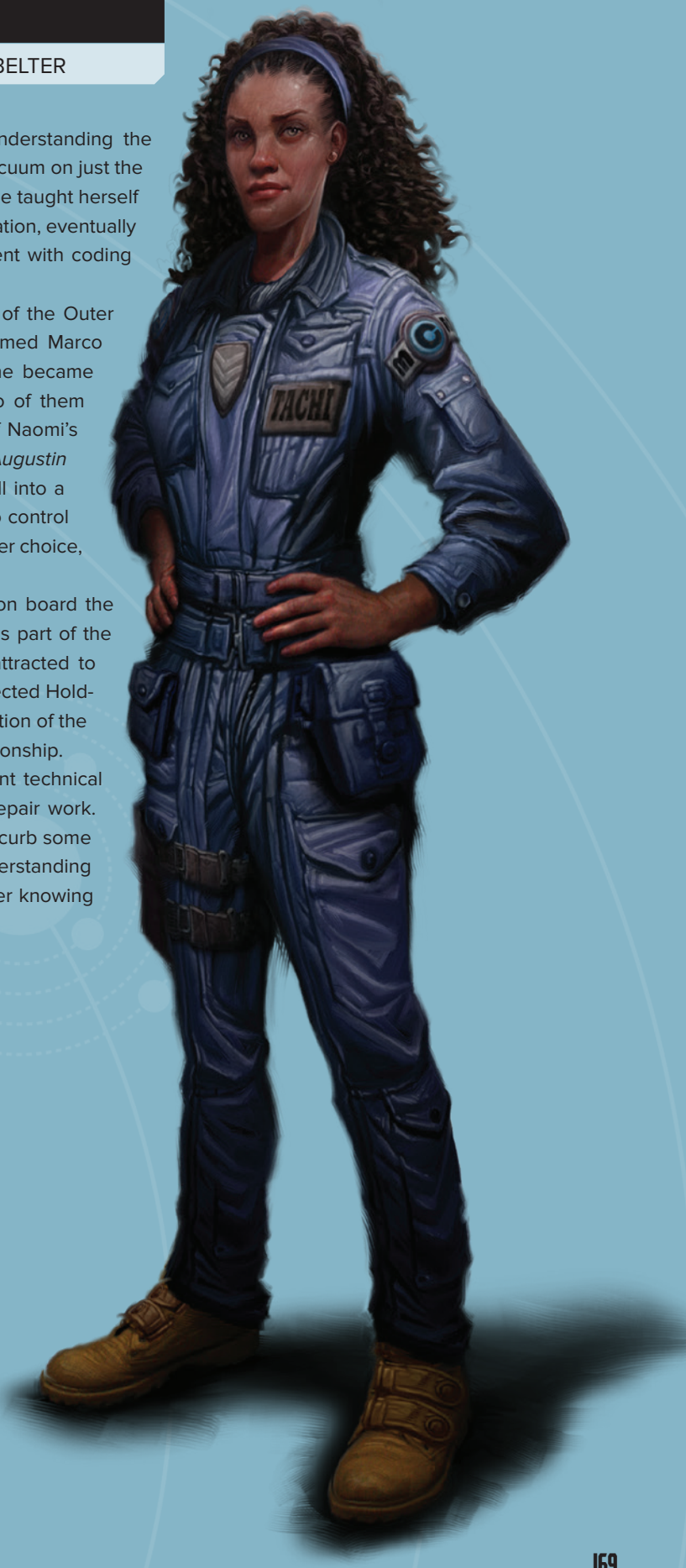
THE OPA

There's no one Outer Planets Alliance; even OPA-affiliated tattoos differ radically, from a broken circle tattoo around the neck (symbolizing Belter solidarity, and reminiscent of the contact burns from the first generation of Belters and their faulty mining suits) to a stylized anarchy symbol (symbolizing breaking from Earth and Mars permanently). The Alliance is, in actuality, an umbrella term for a collection of independent cells ostensibly seeking to form an independent Belter nation. Some are nothing more than terrorist cells or criminal gangs, seeking and dealing out violence, and assassinating Inners in the name of Belter unity. Other cells work with student groups or seek to foster goodwill, attempting to work towards Belter independence through diplomacy. Still others, such as the Belters who work aboard Tycho Station, look to consolidate the mineral wealth of the Belt and use it as leverage at the bargaining table.

Two figures loom large within the OPA: Anderson Dawes of Ceres and Fred Johnson of Tycho (who isn't even a Belter, but from Earth). Between political might and force of personality, they've banded several OPA cells to work together for the common goal of an independent Belt, hoping a unified front will lead to a legitimate government. When the UN withdrew from Ceres, both laid claim to the station in the name of the Belt. Neither has a singular vision for how to achieve this unity going forward; Dawes seeks legitimacy through force, while Johnson seeks legitimacy through managing resources.

NAOMI NAGATA

EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE *ROCINANTE*, BELTER



Born and raised in the Belt, Naomi Nagata grew up understanding the precariousness of life that comes from living with hard vacuum on just the other side of a bulkhead. Clever and technically gifted, she taught herself a great deal from downloads and online access to information, eventually earning two advanced degrees and demonstrating a real talent with coding and programming.

That same talent made Naomi valuable to certain factions of the Outer Planets Alliance, in particular a charismatic young leader named Marco Inaros. He and Naomi became romantically involved, and she became increasingly involved with Inaros' politics. Eventually, the two of them had a son, Filip. Around that same time, Inaros used some of Naomi's programming work to sabotage and destroy the transport ship *Augustin Gamarra* out of Ceres. When Naomi learned the truth, she fell into a deep depression. Eventually, she left Inaros, who attempted to control her by taking custody of their infant son. Feeling she had no other choice, Naomi left them both behind.

She eventually found her way to working as an engineer on board the *Cantebury* for the Pur'n'Kleen Water Company, where she was part of the crew sent to investigate the *Scopuli*. Although Naomi was attracted to fellow crew member and executive officer Jim Holden, she rejected Holden's initial advances due to their situation following the destruction of the *Cantebury*. Eventually, the two of them started a romantic relationship.

Naomi is the executive officer of the *Rocinante* and resident technical expert, although Amos handles the engine room and most repair work. She's Jim Holden's sounding board and does what she can to curb some of his impulses with sound reason, while at the same time understanding that she can't change him, even if it would make her feel better knowing he was safer.

NAOMI NAGATA

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 1 (Pistols), **Communication** 2 (Deception), **Constitution** 0, **Dexterity** 2 (Free-fall), **Fighting** 1, **Intelligence** 4 (Cryptography, Technology), **Perception** 2, **Strength** 0, **Willpower** 2 (Self-Discipline)

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOUGHNESS
12	27	13	0

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Pistol	+3	2d6+2
Unarmed	+1	1d3

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: Cover Your Tracks, Jury Rig, When a Plan Comes Together

Talents: Fringer (Novice), Hacking (Expert), Improvisation (Novice), Knowledge (Novice)

Equipment: Hand terminal, light armor (medium, if expecting a fight), pistol, vac suit

Threat: Moderate

CRIMINAL GANGS

Criminal gangs are common in the Belt, running black markets, protection schemes, gray-water reclamation scams, and generally working to advance their own meager ends at the expense of Inners, or other Belters in a pinch. Notable gangs tend to form around the ethnic groups who make up the Belt's creole culture, such as the Aryan Flyers, or the Loca Greiga.

BELTER HABITATS

Every Belter asteroid, habitat, or structure is purpose-built for human habitation. Nothing natural survives in space. Natural lighting is rare, since the Belt is too far from the Sun for proper health. UV lamps flicker in cramped, rock-hewn hallways with moisture collecting on the walls. Most walls are meters thick, keeping Belters safe from the radiation that pervades the Belt. Even the rare greenhouses have massive lamps strung up or rely on the reflected light and heat of Jupiter.

CERES

Ceres (official designation 1 Ceres) is the largest known asteroid, the only dwarf planet in the inner solar system, and the first asteroid discovered by humanity. Nine hundred fifty-five kilometers in diameter, the now-hollowed-out asteroid houses Ceres Station, one of the first sites of human colonization. Half a generation after first settlement, the venerable Tycho Manufacturing corporation spun up the asteroid in a dramatic feat of engineering, granting it a gravity of 0.3 g. Consisting of tens of thousands of kilometers of tunnels, the asteroid houses millions of inhabitants in corridors lit by false suns and reeking of manufactured scents.

The most important port of call in the Belt, Ceres has a population of approximately six million permanent residents, with a transient population of one million or so passing through at any given time. Eight hundred to a thousand ships are docked at Ceres every day, swarmed by Belter dockhands and watched by a million eyes.

The top levels of Ceres are a long corridor wrapping around the outer edge of the station, topped by a dome that shows an approximation of sky, meant to comfort visitors and residents alike. Many Belters grow to adulthood staring up at a sight meant to replicate something they've never actually seen. Only the rich and the gainfully employed live up near the faux-sunlit apartments; the rest live deep within the rock, walking on dirt-strewn ground in a world lit by neon and sputtering lamps, cut with the glare of lights on electric carts that whir their way through the tunnels.

The black and grey markets thrive on Ceres, reinforced with dozens of ships criss-crossing the Belt—and virtually any Belter on board a ship might be tasked with helping

out their fellows with the acquisition of hard to fin goods. Carved crevices and repurposed cargo containers play host to all manner of humanity, from miners to prostitutes to mechanics. Belters congregate around stools in restaurants that sell noodles and whiskey. The gravity lessens the deeper one goes into the poorer sections, and a pronounced Coriolis effect presents itself. Poured liquids curve in the air, while people stumble and suffer from dizziness, nausea, and seasickness millions of miles from the nearest sea. Water on the station is rationed, carefully monitored and trickling down in ever-decreasing amounts from the outer edges of the station.

Previously governed by the UN, Ceres' security was handled by the private security firm Star Helix Security, with a staff of mostly Earthers (and Belters who didn't mind the culture or working against their own kind). In the aftermath of the Eros Incident, the OPA has seized governorship of the station, claiming de jure what was already a de facto situation. The OPA symbol, already omnipresent on the lower levels between layers of graffiti, has sprung up all throughout the upper layers.

EROS

One and a half million people lived within Eros, an asteroid that crossed the orbit of both Earth and Mars. Roughly the shape of a potato, Eros spun far faster than Ceres due to its smaller size; despite this, it was the second-largest near-Earth asteroid.

Eros birthed the Belt. It was the first port of call for expansion. Sol was a distant memory, shining off in the darkness; the raw ore of the asteroid gave way to furnaces, then docks for water haulers and gas harvesters, and finally permanent settlements and casinos, brothels, and all the comforts of Earth. The spiderweb docks of the old shipyards protruded from the lumpy potato of Eros, dotted with warning lights sparkling in the dark. Eros defined Belter culture before it existed: a light alone in the dark, where a hauler could find warm arms and a cold drink.

Eros had been a port of call for decades, but after Ceres spun up, it became a port of rest; less of the hustle and bustle of Ceres, but with more creature comforts and a sense of history. Private security was handled by a company called Protogen until they were replaced by Carne Por la Machina, a front set up by Protogen as they withdrew most of their people upon setting up the most vicious and inhumane scientific experiment in human history.

Humanity's first venture beyond the inner planets vanished in the Eros Incident and the unleashing of the protomolecule. What remains of Eros is scattered across the surface of Venus, corroding and disintegrating in the harsh atmosphere, or else...changing in as yet unknown ways.

ANDERSON STATION

Anderson Station is a resupply station for Anderson-Hyosung Cooperative Industries Group at the far end of the colonized Belt. Ten thousand people live here, orbiting at the opposite end of the Belt from Ceres. As a consequence, Anderson is a far harsher frontier.

When the Earth-Mars Coalition administrator implemented a surcharge on already scarce supply transfers, an insurgency took control of the station. Although they surrendered, the Coalition Marine Corps force led by Colonel Fred Johnson was ordered to retake the station by force (and prevented from hearing the insurgents' surrender), killing thousands as a deterrent. Surveillance cameras broadcasted the three days of slaughter across the entire Sol System.

Fred Johnson was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions, but in the Belt he became infamous as the "Butcher of Anderson Station". Johnson resigned and publicly apologized for the tragedy, and today runs Tycho Station, attempting to atone for his actions.

TYCHO STATION

The Belt headquarters of Tycho Manufacturing and Engineering Concern (and the Outer Planets Alliance) is the largest mobile construction platform in the Sol System and one of the only structures in the Belt that's completely artificial. Fifteen thousand workers and their families live within Tycho, building megastructures or massive ships far beyond the reach of a planet.

A ring station built around a sphere half a kilometer across with more than sixty-five million cubic meters of manufacturing and storage space inside, Tycho Station boasts two counter-rotating habitation rings circling the sphere that provide the same standard microgravity as the rest of the Belt. The top of the manufacturing sphere features massive construction waldos capable of grasping a heavy freighter or securing singularly large ships, such as the LDS generation ship *Nauvoo*. A capital-ship-class fusion reactor and drive system projecting out of an elongated nozzle make Tycho the largest mobile construction platform ever created, capable of relocating itself around the Belt for differing work needs and locales. Each compartment within the titanic rings was built on a swivel system that allows the chambers to reorient to thrust gravity, orienting around an internal modular construction.

Tycho makes regular campaign contributions to Earth and Mars politicians, ensuring protection by the Earth-Mars Coalition Navy—and even if they didn't, Tycho is more than capable of fleeing at high speeds. With the loss of *Nauvoo*, Tycho is playing host to far more OPA sympathizers than ever before. Fred Johnson's guilt-borne sympathies and the harsh nature of life aboard the station means that Belt-native fleet construction occurs out of Tycho.

BELTER CREOLE

Humanity's expansion into the solar system led to the co-mingling of people from many walks of life and many regions of Earth or Mars who often didn't speak the same language. They developed a pidgin creole, lang Belta, to communicate. Spoken Lang Belta is interspersed with grammar rules and vocabulary from Russian, Esperanto, Korean, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, German, Italian, Hungarian, Turkish, and Arabic. It also makes use of a lot of gestures visible while wearing a vac suit, for when comms are out or unreliable.

When playing or interacting with Belter characters, don't try to construct more than simple phrases, sabe? It gets painful aŭdi and makes the game mal, coyo. After the first sentence or two in-game, call for a Communication (Expression) roll *kennst lang Belta* if the character is an Inner and unfamiliar with Belters. Otherwise, pepper the dialogue with a few choice phrases from the glossary below and assume the characters speak *tényleges lang Belta* too thick to understand and you're *gut*. The trick is, like lang Belta itself, to ensure your players get the gist of communication, sa-sa? Most older or young educated Belters speak several languages, but won't do so around Inners and will otherwise relish their confusion.

BELTER CREOLE PHRASES

ACIMA: Above

AŬDI: To hear

BÉBÉ: Baby

BIST BIEN: Are you okay?

BOITE: Box

BOSSLET: Boss, possibly a ship's captain

BOSMANG: Dockside boss, chief, not a ship's captain

CHAPEAU: Hat

COYO: guy, dude, sometimes small animal or pest (disrespectful)

DANGSIN-EUN JUNBIGA?: Are you ready?

DUI: True

DZHEMANG (JEMANG): asshole; literally "man with a crooked dick"

GE GUT: To get well

GUT: Good, well

GÚTEGOW: "Good to go": Ready, prepared

HOY: Hey, hello

IDO: Dock, exit, out

IM: he/him, she/her, it

JI-RAL: Bullshit

KENNST: (you) understand

LA: No

LANG BELTA: Belter language, Belter creole

MAL: Bad

MI: I/me

MIT?: Do you want to come with me?

NA: No/Not

NA KHOROCHO: Not good

NICHTS: Nothing

ORBAS: Eyes

OSO TO: Me too

PAMPAW: Grandfather

PINCHÉ: Fucking

POW: Now

QUE SI?: Right?

ROSSE BUURT: Red light district

SA?: So?

SA-SA: To know (about)

SABAKA: Dog (insult)

SABE: You know

SASA KE?: Do you know?

SABEZ: I know

SCHLAUCH: Transit tube

SETESHANG: Station

SPIN: Spin (direction)

TÉNYLEGES: Actual

TODA: All

UNOKABÁTYA: Cousin

ÜZGÜN: Sorry

YA: Yes

BELTER SIGN LANGUAGE

"CUTTING" OR "CHOPPING" THROAT WITH A FLAT HAND: Low oxygen, oxygen malfunction

FOLDING BOTH ARMS ACROSS CHEST: No; negative; Stop!

LIFTING A FIST: Greeting; nodding, affirmative

LIFTING THE HAND: Asking a question

(MOVE FOREARM BACK AND FORTH TOWARDS EAR): Comms not working, comms malfunction

NAIL OF INDEX FINGER TOUCHING THE THUMB'S INNER SIDE BETWEEN THE 2 DIGITS, FORMING A CIRCLE, WHILE THE OTHER 3 FINGERS ARE STRAIGHT: Fuck you!

ONE OR BOTH HANDS, PALM-UP: Shrugging

11. THE OUTERS

Like the gold rush sent Americans to the wilderness to seek their fortune, once the stars were in reach humanity spread across the Belt and beyond for similar reasons: the hope of a better life and a better future. The hundreds of small settlements, stations, and ships that form the Belt were built at the same time as the shipyards, bases, mines, and farms of the Outer Planets. Though Belters are considered the heart and soul of the OPA, it was named the Outer Planets Alliance for a reason.

The Inners have even gained control here, in the deepest, furthest reaches of the solar system. The major moons of Jupiter and Saturn have fully functioning settlements on them, some protected by UN and/or MCRN ships and troops, the extent determined by strategic and economic importance. The Jovian and Saturnian Systems are so large and well-populated that they could be almost be considered tiny solar systems of their own. The Uranian and Neptunian Systems are far more sparsely populated, and often ignored by the Inners unless it's time to collect tariffs or taxes. Though not actually within the Belt, these systems are considered to be a large part of it—and their inhabitants have similar concerns and complaints.

> "The inner planets look on us as their labor force. They tax us. They direct what we do. They enforce their laws and ignore ours in the name of stability. In the last year, they've doubled the tariffs to Titania. Five thousand people on an ice ball orbiting Neptune, months from anywhere. The sun's just a bright star to them. Do you think they're in a position to get redress?"
>
> *— Leviathan Wakes*

THE JOVIAN SYSTEM

Named for the gas giant it surrounds, the Jovian System has drawn the largest population in the Outer Planets to Jupiter's moons. The planet itself is—of course—uninhabitable, but there are dozens of settlements and orbiting space stations around it and its moons. Metis, Adrastea, Amalthea, and Thebe are unpopulated primarily due to their proximity to Jupiter and location in its harsh radiation belt—even aboveground structures on moons further from the planet require heavy shielding. Leda, Himalia, Lysithea, Elara, Ananke, Carme, Pasiphae, and Sinope are all too small to support a colony.

The Jovian System is responsible for growing and distributing most of the food in the Outers and the Belt. Most extrasolar astronomy was done in the Jovian System before the Uranian System was colonized. It is a vital piece of humanity's survival in the furthest reaches of the solar system, and of the Belt's economy.

CALLISTO

This large moon's tectonic stability and significant deposits of rare minerals made it an ideal location for Mars' shipyards, the largest in the Outers. Most of the MCRN's fleet has been built orbiting Callisto, where the shipyards are capable of building hulls up to 700 meters in length: *Donnager* class ships.

Port Hampton is the moon's only settlement, dug into the walls of a large crater used as a launching point for ships carrying minerals up to the orbiting shipyards. Like many cities built around industries that require hard physical labor and long hours and weeks on shift, it has a frontier town reputation: a place for the jarheads and contractors to party and blow off steam on shore leave. Most of its permanent inhabitants are involved in businesses that profit from said shore leaves. A security force is maintained to handle any issues that stem from drunk marines and miners, supplemented by an MCRN battle group on station near the docks. MCRN's most significant presence is, of course, in orbit.

Callisto is one of the only moons of Jupiter where radioactive minerals are close enough to the surface for easy extraction, however it hasn't created a strong economy. Mining and shipbuilding are the only sources of revenue, and revenue that comes only from Mars. The moon is one of the truest examples of a buyer's market.

JUPITER

ORBIT	778,330,000 km (5.20 AU) from the sun
DIAMETER	142,984 km
GRAVITY	2.528 g (heavy)
LENGTH OF DAY	9 hours, 56 minutes, Earth Standard Time
LENGTH OF YEAR	12 Earth Standard years
ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE	100 kPa
ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION	89.8% hydrogen, 10.2% helium, 0.3% methane
TEMPERATURE	−145 °C (average)

CALLISTO

DIAMETER	4,820 km
GRAVITY	0.126 g (light)
LENGTH OF DAY	16.7 days, Earth Standard Time
LENGTH OF YEAR	Jupiter orbit, 17 days, Earth Standard Time; Sun orbit, 12 Earth Standard years
ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE	7.5×10−10 kPa
ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION	Carbon dioxide, molecular oxygen; thin
TEMPERATURE	−218 °C (average)
GOVERNMENT	Martian Colony
CAPITAL	Port Hampton
POPULATION	ca. 3 million
CURRENCY	Martian Dollar (MCR$)

EUROPA

DIAMETER	6,200 km
GRAVITY	0.134 g (light)
LENGTH OF DAY	3.551 days, Earth Standard Time
LENGTH OF YEAR	Jupiter orbit, 3.551 days, Earth Standard Time; Sun orbit, 12 Earth Standard years
ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE	0.1 µPa
ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION	Molecular oxygen; thin
TEMPERATURE	−171 °C (average)
GOVERNMENT	Earth Colony
CAPITAL	Kensington
POPULATION	ca. 23 million
CURRENCY	UN Dollar (UN$)

EUROPA

One of the most populated of Jupiter's moons, Europa has some similarities to Ganymede—they both have stable tectonics and aboveground dome greenhouses, and were amongst the first moons to be colonized. Earthers, Belters, and Martians (including Jim Holden and Naomi Nagata) all store eggs and sperm on Europa and Ganymede, as well as Luna and Earth. However, while Ganymede has significantly increased its investment in agricultural and medical technology over the decades, Europa has fallen behind—possibly due to the lower radiation levels on Ganymede that allow crops to thrive there that faltered on Europa.

Now, the moon's primary advantage is its thick surface layer of ice, which allows its settlements to supply themselves with water and oxygen without outside help. A large percentage of Europans work in surface construction, a difficult job requiring long days in a heavy vaccuum suit, as the moon plays catch up with its more advanced sibling. Europans are not poor by Belt standards, but by no means are well-off by Earth standards.

Europa has a significant population of Methodists, under the pastorship of Reverend Doctor Anna Volovodov.

GANYMEDE

Ganymede Station is the bread basket and the main birthing center for the Outers and the Belt, one of the first permanent human toeholds in the outer planets, and a center of civilization in the far reaches of the solar system. It is the safest station in the Jovian system, where people

come to give birth, avoiding the defects that can come with carrying to term in low or zero g. Until recently, the inner planets had shared Ganymede and most of the solar system like one big, happy, slightly dysfunctional family. Then came Eros. And Protogen. And Pheobe. After that, the two superpowers began to divide stations and moons between them like belongings after a divorce, and the one moon neither side was or is willing to give up to the other is Ganymede.

As the only moon with any magnetosphere, it's the only place where dome-grown crops stand a chance in Jupiter's harsh radiation belt, even with heavy shielding on the domes and habitats. Ganymede is also unique in its intricate system of orbital mirror stations that shine concentrated sunlight down onto the dome greenhouses that produce vegetables, fruits, and even some meat for those that can afford it in the Outers. The moon's ice, on the surface and reaching into the depths of the moon, provides all the water necessary for life; human, plant, and animal. With wide hallways lush with plantlife, lit with full-spectrum LEDs that mimic the white-gold of sunlight, it is as close to living on Earth as one is likely to get in space.

Ganymede's construction has continued over decades, with narrower, older first generation tunnels abandoned or disused as newer, wider, more attractive areas were built, with plants to supplement the oxygen production, better

GANYMEDE

5,268 km	DIAMETER
0.146 g (light)	GRAVITY
Tidally locked	LENGTH OF DAY
Jupiter orbit, 7 days, Earth Standard Time; Sun orbit, 12 Earth Standard years	LENGTH OF YEAR
Trace	ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE
Oxygen	ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION
−171 to −297 °C (average)	TEMPERATURE
Disputed	GOVERNMENT
N/A	CAPITAL
ca. 17 million	POPULATION
Mixed	CURRENCY

It had been built with the long term in mind, not only in its own architecture, but also in how it would fit with the grand human expansion out into the darkness at the edge of the solar system. The possibility of catastrophe was in its DNA and had been from the beginning.

— Caliban's War

IO	
DIAMETER	3,643 km
GRAVITY	0.183 g (light)
LENGTH OF DAY	Tidally locked
LENGTH OF YEAR	Jupiter orbit, 1.77 days, Earth Standard Time; Sun orbit, 12 Earth Standard years
ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE	Trace
ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION	90% sulfur dioxide
TEMPERATURE	−163 °C (average)
GOVERNMENT	Earth Colony
CAPITAL	Kelvin
POPULATION	ca. 1.2 million
CURRENCY	UN Dollar (UN$)

"Make no mistake," Bobbie said. "Io is one of the worst places in the solar system. Tectonically unstable and radioactive as hell. Easy to see why they hid here, but do not underestimate the peril that just being on this shit moon carries."

— Caliban's War

lighting, and large common areas. Not all of Ganymede's residents have completely neglected the old tunnels however; they've been found to have their uses, most commonly illicit, untaxed marijuana hydroponic grow-ops. There are persistent rumors of unapproved tunnelling and construction in some of the older areas of the station, but so far there's been little more than that.

As might be expected, Ganymede's economy is strong, with hundreds of transports a day shipping foodstuffs offworld. Top doctors, botanists, and agriculturalists are employed on the moon, and there are enough of them to support service industries: schools and parks for their children, restaurants and bars for relaxing, theatres and clubs for entertainment. The moon's stability has proven attractive to many families, and even during the worst of Martian-Earth hostilities post-protomolecule, violence on Ganymede was limited to a small revolt ending in sixteen dead. It could have been worse.

Ganymede's security center is on the third level down from the surface, independently powered in case of emergencies. The hospital is a state-of-the-art facility with a massive maternity wing. Put simply, Ganymede was designed for safety and longevity.

IO

One of Jupiter's larger moons, Io is an extremely hostile and unforgiving environment for colonists. Its atmosphere of sulfur dixoide and hot spots of volcanic and tectonic activity make Io a very dangerous environment for humanity. What would make people consider living there? Money.

Io's volcanos produce vents of heat in excess of 2,000° K, and the moon itself creates an intense electrical field when its nickel and iron core passes through Jupiter's magnetic field, producing in excess of 1 trillion watts. Power stations dotted around the surface converting heat transfer and atmospheric electrical charge into usable energy have made Io one of the primary storable energy production facilities in the Outer Planets. The need for energy in the Outers and the Belt has made Io's economy strong for a moon that few would choose to live on otherwise. Ships leave Io almost on the hour loaded with power cells for moons and stations across the solar system.

Due to its atmosphere, most habitats for Io's workers are underground in the few tectonically stable areas of the moon. Work at the power stations on the surface is both difficult and dangerous, but the pay is high enough that new workers are continually drawn in by the idea of making a quick buck.

Some workers who live on Io have sworn there's a science station on the surface of the moon, but neither Earth nor Mars are known to have built anything like that there, nor is there much left to study about its magnetic field and tectonics. Most believe that the stress of the jobs on Io leads to conspiracy theories.

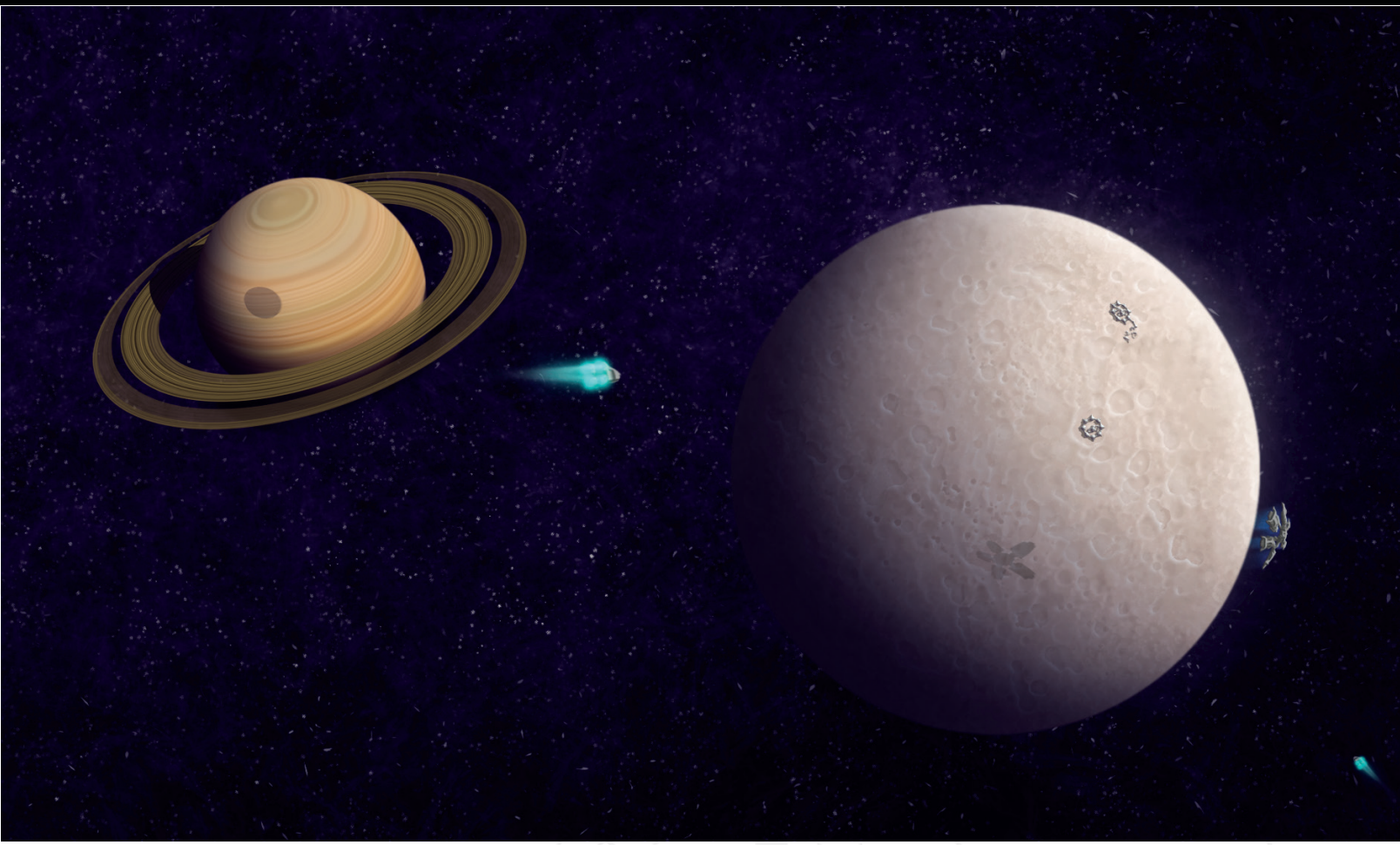
THE SATURNIAN SYSTEM

Surrounding the second largest gas giant in the solar system, the Saturnian System has—or had—one large orbiting station functioning as a way point for exploration and resource harvesting inside Saturn's rings, and a few settled moons. Pan, Atlas, Prometheus, Pandora, Epimetheus, Janus, Mimas, Enceladus, Tethys, Telesto, Calypso, Dione, and Helene all exist within the rings of Saturn and are too small to support any long-term habitat. Hyperion has not yet been developed.

The Saturnian System is now infamous for Pheobe Station, which thanks to Mars, no longer exists. Whether that is a blessing or a curse remains to be seen.

RHEA

One of the frontiers of human civilization, Rhea is only just large enough for a colony, and primarily composed of water, ice, and rock. The only thing the moon has to offer the rest



of the system is Helium-3 deposits, and some small mineral mining operations.

Rhea's several small underground habitats provide all the living space required for its population, mostly comprised of miners and workers in the Helium-3 refineries. Most of their food must be imported from Titan, increasing costs, and mineral and Helium-3 exports do not bring much money into the local economy.

The fact that anyone lives on Rhea at all is a testament to human stubbornness and determination. Humanity will try to live and thrive just about anywhere.

PHOEBE

Eight years ago, the first manned landing was made on Phoebe. Now, it's nothing more than dust, if even that, nuked by the planet that helped the protomolecule spread across the solar system, infecting Eros Station.

In the early days of Phoebe's colonization, the story was that a science station was established there by Mars in collaboration with the Protogen corporation to study early solar system formation and Oort cloud objects. Study of the moon suggested, from its unique, eccentric, retrograde orbit and unusual albedo, that it might have been a captured comet or Kuiper Belt object.

SATURN

1,429,400,000 km (9.54 AU) from the sun	ORBIT
120,536 km	DIAMETER
1.065 g (average)	GRAVITY
10 hours, 42 minutes, Earth Standard Time	LENGTH OF DAY
29.5 Earth Standard years	LENGTH OF YEAR
140 kPa	ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE
96.3% hydrogen, 3.25% helium, 0.45% methane	ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION
−178 °C (average)	TEMPERATURE

> Miller nodded. "The Phoebe science station," he said. "Mars quarantined it."
>
> "Fuck that, Pampaw. Autoclaved it, them. Moon is gone. Dropped enough nukes on it to split it subatomic."
>
> — *Leviathan Wakes*

Wherever it came from, it proved to be unique in other ways. Scientists discovered what appeared to be the remnants of bacterial life forms, making Phoebe perhaps

the only body in the solar system other than Earth that once supported life. With the hubris of humans who had always been top of the food chain on any planet, moon, or rock they chose to claim, the scientists named the bacterial lifeform after the corporation they worked for: the protomolecule.

Protogen's analyses came to the conclusion that the protomolecule was a two billion year old weapon, meant to hijack and reprogram biological life on a basic, cellular level. Despite this, they chose to continue studying and testing it with the goal of using it against other humans, for no other reason than greater glory for Protogen.

This initiative, ambition, and bold action resulted in the protomolecule's release on the *Scopuli*, then, through Julie Mao, on Eros. Releasing the 'viral agent' on Eros had been the plan from the beginning. A million and a half people were sacrificed in the name of science, technology, and proof that humanity was not alone in the universe.

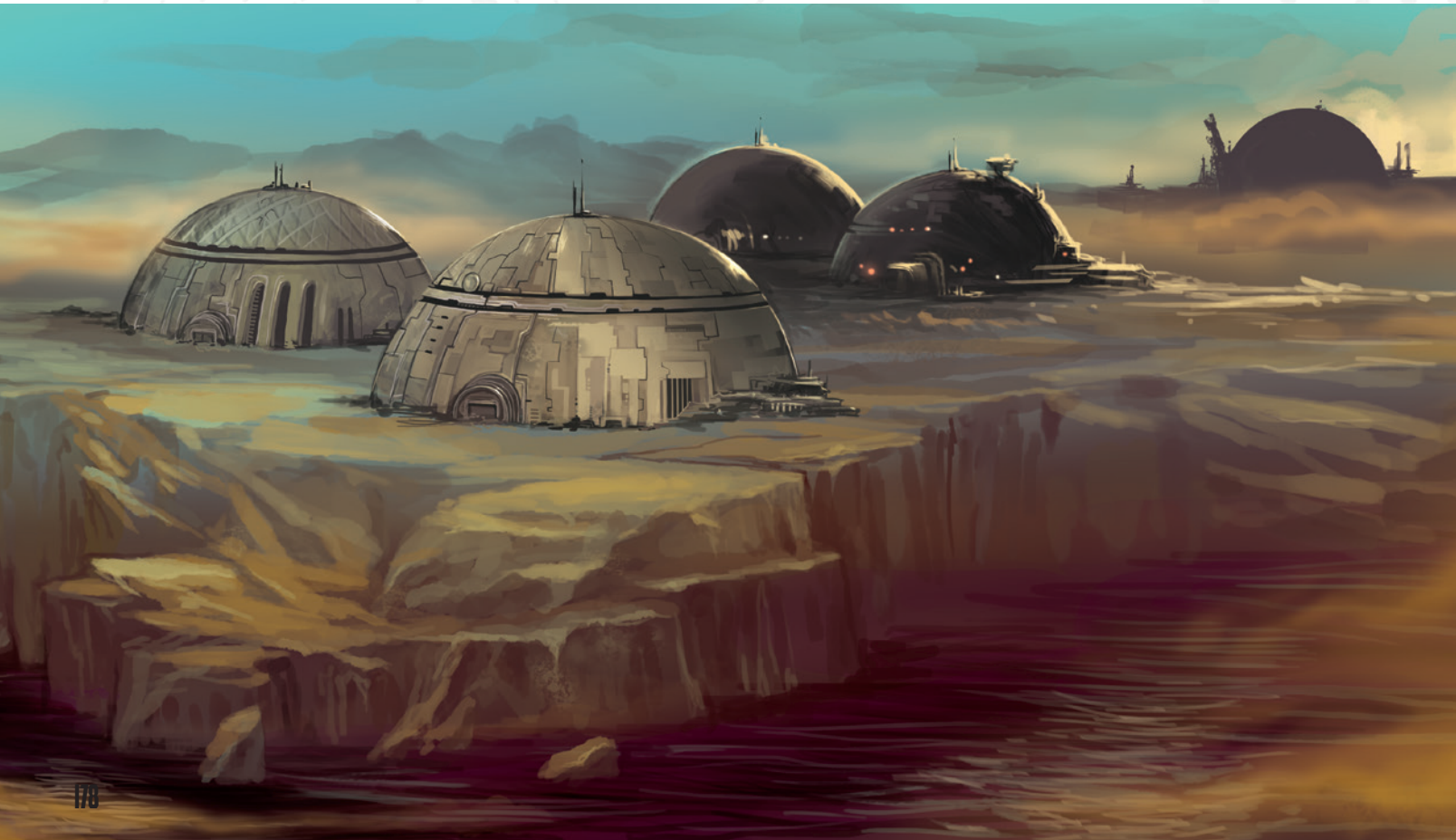
Once the news went out about Phoebe and Thoth Station, the feeds from Eros had more than done their job in instilling horror and fear across the Belt and the Outers, and even deep down the gravity well. The Martian Navy seemed to cut their losses, and Phoebe was no more.

TITAN	
DIAMETER	5,151 km
GRAVITY	0.14 g (light)
LENGTH OF DAY	15 days, 22 hours, Earth Standard Time
LENGTH OF YEAR	Saturn orbit, 15 days, 22 hours Earth Standard Time; Sun orbit, 12 Earth Standard years
ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE	146.7 kPa
ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION	98% nitrogen, 1.4% methane, 0.2% hydrogen
TEMPERATURE	−179°C (average)
GOVERNMENT	Martian Colony
CAPITAL	Titan City
POPULATION	ca. 18 million
CURRENCY	Martian Dollar (MCR$)

TITAN

The most populous moon in the system has a thick cloud cover that generates strange and beautiful solar wind displays as the moon moves in and out of Saturn's powerful magnetic field. These stunning storms and formations are visible through the aboveground domed habitats on Titan, providing the moon's main source of income: tourism. The moon is a popular vacation spot for visitors from the Outers, and sometimes even those from the Inner Planets will make the long trip to spend a few weeks on Titan, watching the spectacle of colorful clouds and eating in the best restaurants the Outer Planets have to offer.

Titan is also the most chemically active body in the solar system, aside from Earth. Both the atmosphere and icy surface of the moon are filled with organic compounds not



found anywhere else. Easy access to ice suitable for oxygen and water production and a lack of available sunlight have put Titan on the forefront of sunlight-free food production. The yeasts and other compounds produced as food on the moon might be considered strange to those accustomed to their food being grown in the dirt, or walking on it—but Titan is a long, long way from Earth.

Due to both food production and tourist cash, Titan's economy is strong. If someone on the moon isn't working, it's because they don't want to, or are unable.

> He'd never been to Titan. Suddenly he wanted to go there very much. A few weeks of sleeping late, eating in fine restaurants, and lying on a hammock, watching Titan's colorful atmosphere storm above him sounded like heaven.
>
> — *Leviathan Wakes*

IAPETUS

Since Pheobe has been obliterated, Iapetus is the only one of Saturn's moons that does not orbit within range of the planet's equator. Aside from that, the moon is primarily known for its leading and trailing hemispheres being radically different. The albedo of most of the leading hemisphere is as dark as lampblack, while the trailing hemisphere's albedo is as bright as Europa. The most recent prevailing theory for this odd dark/light phenomenon is that Iapetus must have absorbed another, darker body at some point over the millennia: the remnants of another moon, one of Saturn's rings... or after Phoebe, perhaps something more sinister.

Whatever it was, and whatever the cause, the 'dark' side of Iapetus is covered in minerals ready for harvesting right there on the surface. The colonists have built special mechs that make regular runs to sweep the surface for these materials for export and sale off-moon. This type of 'mining' costs so much less than traditional methods that the moon has been able to support itself entirely through mineral sweeping and sales. Recent discovery of Helium-3 deposits and the building of refineries has only strengthened and diversified their economy. Most of Iapetus' residents work in the collection and refinement of minerals for export, and live in its small group of underground habitats.

THE URANIAN SYSTEM

Another gas giant, Uranus' mysterious outer layer of thick blue gas gives no indication as to what might lie beneath. Its delicate, barely perceptible set of rings, sideways orbit, and unusual weather patterns make it unique amongst the planets. Only one of its many moons has been settled: Cordelia, Ophelia, Bianca, Cressida, Desdemona, Juliet, Portia, Rosalind, Belinda, Puck, Miranda, Ariel, and Umbriel are still undeveloped, along with Oberon, Caliban, Sycorax, Prospero, Setebos, Stephano, and Trinculo. Most extrasolar astronomy is now done in the Uranian System.

The system is among the last colonized, in the farthest reaches of the solar system. This and the Neptunian system are the edge of human civilization, where only the fearless and the desperate venture—for better or worse.

URANUS

2,870,990,000 km (19.218 AU) from the sun	ORBIT
51,118 km	DIAMETER
0.886 g (light)	GRAVITY
17 hours, 40 minutes, Earth Standard Time	LENGTH OF DAY
84.3 Earth Standard years	LENGTH OF YEAR
Variable	ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE
83.3% hydrogen, 15.3% helium, 2.3% methane	ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION
−197 °C (average)	TEMPERATURE

> "You know how they usually send supplies out there? They load them into a single-use braking rocket, and fling them at Uranus' orbit with a rail gun."
>
> — *Abaddon's Gate*

TITANIA

The first and only of Uranus' moons to be settled by colonists for the long term, this 'ice ball' orbiting Uranus is so far from the sun that almost no solar energy can be captured. Materials must be imported from other systems to generate fusion energy, though there is hope amongst Titanians that the necessary materials can be found in the other moons surrounding them. Ice is the one thing that is plentiful, so water and oxygen are not an issue, but organic material is practically non-existent otherwise and must be imported as well. The five thousand Titanians living on the moon are pioneers, and their existence is accordingly basic.

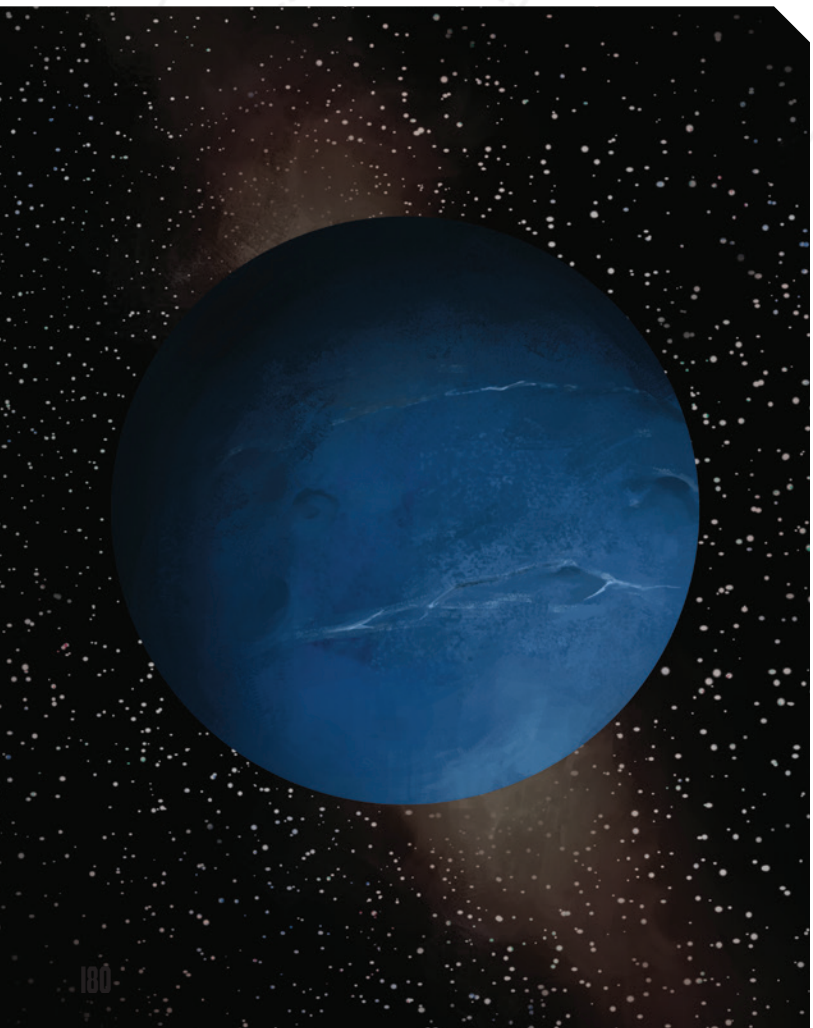
Skepticism about the odds for a colony like Titania's becoming a stable foothold for humanity so far from the sun is high across the solar system, but it was the same for the Saturnian System 100 years past, and so it will be for every great venture humanity takes as time marches on.

THE NEPTUNIAN SYSTEM

The most distant of the planets, the ice giant Neptune is dark, cold, and constantly under the force of supersonic windstorms. Its moons are not much better, so far from the sun they barely receive any light or solar energy. They are largely considered uninhabitable at this time, but so were the moons of Uranus, once upon a time. Even so, no one has yet set mag boot on Naiad, Thalassa, Despina, Galatea, Larissa, Proteus, Nereid, Pluto, or Charon.

NEPTUNE

ORBIT	4,504,000,000 km (30.06 AU) from the sun
DIAMETER	49,532 km
GRAVITY	1.14 g (average)
LENGTH OF DAY	24 hours, Earth Standard Time
LENGTH OF YEAR	165 Earth Standard years
ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE	10 kPa
ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION	80% hydrogen, 19% helium, 1.5% methane
TEMPERATURE	−201°C (average)



TRITON

Of Neptune's moons, Triton is the largest, and the only moon in the solar system with a retrograde orbit. Due to this orbit and a composition that is comparable to Pluto's, scientists believe that the moon may have been a dwarf planet from the Kuiper Belt, captured in Neptune's orbit. The mass of ice on its surface and below ground can produce both water and oxygen—one advantage the moon does have. Tectonic activity on the moon, with nitrogen gas geysers, makes work directly on the surface perilous, but underground habitats in stable tectonic areas are thought to be safe.

Only a hardy and motley band of astronomers and prospectors live on Triton—the furthest any human has ever lived from Earth. The deep astronomy labs are responsible for charting into the unexplored reaches of the galaxy, while the prospectors are exploring mining possibilities on Neptune's moons.

During the Protogen incidents, the labs were occupied by a handful of prospectors sympathetic to the OPA, who turned the array in-system and broadcasted the location of every Martian ship in the system along with high-definition images of the surface of Mars, down to the topless sunbathers in the dome parks. Though Mars was not impressed and threats were made, they saved their nukes for Phoebe. The astronomers regained the lab, and most of the prospectors went on to mine another day.

BEYOND

Out past the orbit of Neptune, humanity has sent numerous automated probes and landers to study bodies like Pluto, Charon, and the Oort Cloud beyond. But even with the Epstein Drive, the human need to explore and settle hasn't reached this far yet. To most, the next step beyond the Outer Planets isn't the farthest reaches, but leapfrogging over them altogether and launching generation ships like the *Nauvoo* out towards the distant stars.

There is little of interest in the far reaches of the System to draw anyone out here, although the knowledge that Phoebe originated from somewhere beyond may spark expeditions looking for other evidence of extra-solar intervention. Given the existence of the protomolecule, who knows what else might be out there, waiting?

Want to find out?

GAME MASTER'S SECTION

12: GAME MASTERING

If you are reading this, then you've likely chosen to take on the vital role of Game Master. This is an important and challenging job, but also a rewarding one. The Game Master, or "GM" for short, is equal parts storyteller, movie director, and referee. This section of *The Expanse* RPG is intended to teach you not only how to plan and run a game but also how to apply the rules presented in the **Player's Section.** In addition, it provides guidance on using a unique element of *The Expanse* universe: The Churn.

THE GM'S JOB

Every successful GM should know the basics of how to play the game. You don't need to memorize every single rule but should know basic concepts, such as rolling dice, meeting target numbers on opposed tests, reading the Drama Die, and resolving combat. For specific rules and advice on game play in *The Expanse*, see **CHAPTER 1: BASIC RULES** and **CHAPTER 5: GAME PLAY**.

While players are responsible for tracking their characters and deciding their actions, the Game Master is responsible for everything else in the game. A good GM handles the events that occur in game play while making the game run as smoothly as possible and enjoyable for everyone. Although this chapter covers the basics behind being a Game Master, experience is the best way to improve your Game Mastering skills. The more you do it, the better you will be and the more confident you will become. The following are the essential parts of a Game Master's role.

ADJUDICATING THE RULES

In a game of imagination, it is impossible for the written rules to cover every possible circumstance that may arise. When the unexpected happens, the Game Master steps in to make the call, even if it means modifying rules that don't work well in your game, or coming up with a totally new application of the rules to resolve the situation and keep the game moving.

"You're the captain, Cap'n," Amos said.

— Leviathan Wakes

It's a good idea for a prospective GM to read through the entire book carefully and have good working knowledge of the game. Every RPG has rules and those rules may require interpretation to determine an outcome during game play.

TO ROLL OR NOT TO ROLL

Not every situation requires a roll. If a task can be performed in a calm environment with an adequate amount of time, there's no need to call for a roll. For example, treating moderate injuries in a spinning ship requires a test, while treating them in a top-notch hospital may not. A specific ability focus or character trait may allow automatic success. A shuttle pilot doesn't need to make a roll to start up the engines and pull out of the landing bay under normal conditions.

Also, avoid creating situations where the characters are required to succeed in order for the story to continue. Instead, let the characters succeed and have the results dictate the quality of their success. For example, the characters ply an NPC for information with drinks. The basic result—getting the NPC to talk—simply succeeds. Better rolls provide better intel and hint at growing friendship with the NPC. Likewise, beware of piling multiple rolls onto characters, as all you do is increase the chances they will fail. Rather than a series of Dexterity (Stealth) tests to go unseen, for example, consider making the infiltration of a secure site into a challenge test as outlined in **CHAPTER 1**.

In *The Expanse* RPG, the majority of this interpretation is in determining the resolution of various types of ability tests, then describing these results as dramatic in-game events.

HANDLING ABILITY TESTS

Ability tests are the heart of the *The Expanse* RPG system, as they are most dice rolls during play. Your main task as GM is to adjudicate fairly while keeping the adventure moving along. Rather than provide a huge lists of actions and modifiers, *The Expanse* uses a simple but robust system. It's a toolbox that handles most situations easily.

To review, an ability test uses three six-sided dice (3d6). Two of the dice should be one color and the third a different color. The off-color die is the Drama Die. The three dice are rolled and added together, and you want to roll high. Then add the ability you are testing and another +2 if you have an applicable ability focus. The final number is the test result.

TEST RESULT = 3D6 + ABILITY + FOCUS

The test result is compared to a target number (TN) in the case of a basic test or the test result of another character in an opposed test. A character wins a basic test by meeting or beating the target number and an opposed test by beating the opponent's test result. The results of the Drama Die can be used to determine the degree of success and to break ties in the case of an opposed test.

When adjudicating any ability test in *The Expanse* RPG, there are four key decisions to make as GM:

Which ability to use? Which focuses apply? How long does it take?
What are the results of success and the consequences for failure?

WHICH ABILITY TO USE?

When a player tries to do something with a chance of failure, you should declare an ability test. Everyday or easy tasks (pulling up a file on a hand terminal, taking the tube train) do not require die rolls or tests.

For riskier tasks, the player describes the attempted action. As GM, you announce which ability is relevant and which focus applies. If a character is trying to force a door open, for example, you'd call for a Strength (Might) test. Each of the abilities is broadly defined, and picking the right one is intuitive.

WHAT FOCUSES APPLY?

Picking a focus requires a bit more thought than using an ability. Some are obvious, like sneaking around a cargo hold is a Dexterity (Stealth) test. Other times, no focus applies at all and it's just a straight ability test. Encourage your players to make suggestions. If they can give a credible explanation for using a particular focus, you should allow it.

If a test requires highly specialized knowledge or skill, you can make a specific focus a requirement to even attempt the test. As an example, you might call for an Intelligence (Engineering required) test; those without that required focus automatically fail the test.

For opposed tests, remember that different abilities and focuses may apply. For example, a crooked vendor may try to trick a character into overspending for a new engine part. The merchant makes a Communication (Bargaining) test while the character rolls a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test.

HOW LONG DOES A TEST TAKE?

The time it takes to resolve an ability test in-game can vary. It can represent anywhere from a few seconds to even days or longer depending on what the character is trying to achieve. During narrative time, the increments tend to be longer. A character trying to do some legwork for an investigation, for example, may spend an hour or more interviewing different people.

In action time, however, keeping track of time is important. Remember, each round of action time is about 15 seconds, where a character can take either a major action and a minor action or two minor actions. Use these action types when defining how long a test takes; a long test might take a major action and a minor action, or two major actions, something that stretches across two rounds.

Lastly, there are ability tests that are reactions. Certain hazards require the player to make a test in order for their character to escape certain effects. Such tests take no time, as they usually take place outside of the character's turn.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS FOR SUCCESS AND CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE?

What happens when a character succeeds? Sometimes the results are obvious, such as the character making the jump from one platform to another. If possible, try to define the majority of your tests as pass/fail. But if a binary choice is not enough, use the Drama Die to determine a character's degree of success. A 1 means the character barely pulled it off while a 6 means stellar results.

Using our last example, a 1 on the Drama Die could mean the jumping character is hanging off a railing with the possibility of falling; a 2-3 means they landed prone and need extra time to get up. A 4-5 could mean they landed on their feet while a 6 could mean they not only landed on their feet but got enough extra distance to make it to the next door.

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT ABILITY TESTS

- Only one focus applies to a given test.
- Leave the dice on the table after a roll because the result of the Drama Die may be important.
- The Drama Die only counts for successful tests.
- In opposed tests, ties are broken by the Drama Die, or the higher ability if those are also tied.
- For basic tests, assess the situation and assign a difficulty.
- For opposed tests, circumstances can be represented with bonuses and penalties of 1-3.

But then, what happens if a roll fails? Bad rolls happen, and sometimes they even happen in succession in a dire situation. Again, sometimes the test can be defined as pass/fail. A character attempts to read the markings on a quickly passing ship, and fails their Perception (Seeing) test. There are no further consequences other than not learning where the ship is from. The character who failed a jump takes damage as they plummet to the next level. You must then decide how badly they are damaged and whether or not the character can mitigate the damage by, for example, making a separate Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to roll with the impact of the fall.

There are also scenarios where the characters can attempt to make a roll again. If circumstances allow, you are free to say yes and even include additional conditions or stipulations along with the re-roll. If you feel there is insufficient time to make the attempt, they may attempt to do so, but you may decide that the character needs assistance or a different approach to the task. You could also just decide, due to difficulties or lack of time, there can be no second try. You want to remain objective on whether or not to allow re-rolls, but don't bog down the game.

BASIC TEST DIFFICULTY

TEST DIFFICULTY	TARGET NUMBER
Routine	7
Easy	9
Average	11
Challenging	13
Hard	15
Formidable	17
Imposing	19
Nigh Impossible	21

BASIC TESTS

Unless a character is actively opposed by another character or monster, you should use basic tests. Basic tests are the easiest to handle as a GM, since all that's required is a base difficulty. The **Basic Test Difficulty** table provides benchmarks for test difficulties. Use it often and, with time, it will become second nature to you when setting target numbers.

When setting the target number, take all important circumstances into account. Does the terminal they are accessing have encryption? Use an Intelligence (Technology) test. Are there loose or noisy grates? Use a Dexterity (Stealth) test. These circumstances define how difficult the task may actually be.

It's always best to make a quick assessment of them and just make the call. The player then makes the roll and tells you their result. Though you can tell the players the TN they are rolling against, keeping it a secret provides the players with an additional

level of suspense and also reduces the chance of an argument resulting with the players. For a middle ground between keeping the TN secret and telling the players, use the test difficulty terms as a guideline for describing the test difficulty to the players like, "This looks pretty hard to you, but doable" or "Your chances of pulling this off aren't good."

OPPOSED TESTS

Opposed tests work a little differently from basic tests. A character is not trying to meet or beat a fixed number but overcome an opposing character's test result. Generally, you should grant bonuses or impose penalties of 1-3 if there are circumstances affecting one or more characters. You might, for example, give a character trying to jump in rocky terrain a –2 penalty to the Strength (Jumping) test.

Factors you may consider for bonuses and/or penalties to ability tests include equipment available, weather conditions, time constraints, distractions, assistance from others, lighting conditions, and good roleplaying where appropriate. Let players know any bonuses or penalties before they roll. One factor you should generally not adjust for is the opponent's level of ability, since the result of their opposing test takes that into account.

ADVANCED TESTS

Certain tasks require a lot of time and/or planning, such as navigating through a debris field or hacking a security terminal to get identification codes before the enemy ship you're trying to fool blasts you into space dust. These situations call for an advanced test. If keeping track of time or who succeeds first aren't factors, use basic or opposed tests as usual. Rules on how to resolve advanced tests are covered in **CHAPTER 1: BASIC RULES** The **Advanced Tests** table is provided here for reference, along with some additional advice on which options to use when setting up an advanced test.

ADVANCED TESTS

TASK DIFFICULTY	SUCCESS THRESHOLD
Easy	5
Average	10
Challenging	15
Hard	20
Formidable	25

USING FIXED TARGET NUMBERS

If keeping track of time or who succeeds first aren't factors, use basic or opposed tests as usual. But when lots of expertise, time, or planning is needed, a GM should consider an advanced test against a fixed target number.

Some examples of advanced tests would be for extended research, lengthy repairs to a critical system on an outpost, rebooting a ship's main computer, or an extended diplomatic (or business) negotiation.

USING OPPOSED ROLLS

Chases and competitions are good ways to use advanced tests with opposed target numbers. While the stakes are usually implicit with an opposed test, the tension can drain out quickly if a GM forces her players to simply reroll dice repeatedly.

You can avoid this in two ways. The simplest is to keep the success threshold low. The other is for the GM to describe the push-pull of the results in dramatic fashion.

- Who is edging out ahead?
- Who seems to be tiring out faster?
- After that blunder, is the one currently losing also losing their cool?
- Did the lead ship get too close to that asteroid before losing their lead?

EXAMPLE

Sabaka! Mining a small asteroid offers razor thin margins, so buying a refurbed air filtration system seemed smart. But that welwala at Ceres sold you flat out junk, so now you have to salvage what you can to keep your family breathing until you can get help—and then owe even mo' debt to an Inners' corp.

Filip, a Belter, is trying to repair the filtration system. The GM decides this will be a series of Intelligence (Engineering) tests with a success threshold of 15. The target number for the tests is 13 and each represents an hour of time. It takes Filip six tests altogether before he can get the cobbled system back online. The first and fifth tests are unsuccessful, so the Drama Die results for those don't count. The four successful tests have Drama Die results of 2, 5, 4, and 6. Their total of 17 is greater than the success threshold, so after the six hours of work, many people can breathe easier. Until Filip finds out that there was a lot less air in the lower tunnels. The casualty reports will be coming in soon.

LAST DITCH EFFORT

Sometimes failure is not an option when the stakes are high, but bad dice rolls have sabotaged any hope of even a meager victory. For example, two characters have been zapped with large amounts of radiation, but keep failing their Constitution tests as they race back to the med-bay of their ship. In cases like this, the GM can consider the last ditch effort optional rule when a player has failed several advanced tests rolls.

For what will be the last test, the player can declare a last ditch effort and spend Fortune Points to reduce the success threshold, at a rate of 1 FP per –1 to the threshold. Then the last test is made and the running total of the Drama Die is compared against the new, lowered, threshold. Fortune can be spent to modify this test as well. Note that even if the last ditch effort allows a player to reduce the success threshold to zero, or less than the existing running total, the advanced test is not completed until a successful roll is made. Even when success seems assured, Lady Luck is given her due.

CHALLENGE TESTS

When designing a challenge test, consider the difficulty of individual tasks (determining their Target Numbers) as well as the overall complexity and readiness of the opposition (determining the success threshold). High target numbers but a low success threshold may represent suspicious guards for an otherwise insecure or understaffed facility, or an advanced but small computer network. Low target numbers but a high success threshold instead imply a larger, more complex or involved goal with outdated security or complacent guardians. A good rule of thumb is one Ability test for every five points of success threshold, with a minimum of three distinct tests.

Select diverse ability focuses when planning the challenge test to allow more characters to participate, or possibly even force characters to recruit additional help for specialized tasks. Characters should be allowed a chance to gather intelligence or scout out a potential challenge beforehand to learn what focuses they need, possibly requiring separate ability tests or even advanced tests to represent research, like buying drinks for guards or tracking down criminals who have failed at the same challenge test. You may even allow the players to determine their own plan after researching their target, suggesting which focuses they could use and why they make sense, but allowing you to determine the target number for each test and success threshold for the overall task.

Challenge tests are a montage-style tool to play out complex tasks quickly, but not a replacement for an adventure. They offer a means to gain resources needed for an adventure or get characters to the next stage, providing a challenge to overcome much like a combat encounter.

SAMPLE CHALLENGE TESTS

Here are three sample challenge tests. You can use these as listed or modify them to suit your own adventures and use them as models for creating your own challenges.

HACK A COMPUTER NETWORK

Gaining illicit access to a computer network requires a healthy amount of knowledge about computers and hardware, but may also require sweet-talking user credentials from at least a low-level user. Gaining any measure of control or access to restricted data or high-security networks vastly increases the success threshold and likely requires multiple passwords or specialized equipment.

HACK A COMPUTER NETWORK

SUCCESS THRESHOLD: 10
ABILITY FOCUSES: Communication (Persuasion) TN 11, limit 1 success; Intelligence (Computers) TN 15; Intelligence (Cryptography) TN 15

CONSEQUENCES

MINOR The system has unfamiliar encryption, increasing the TN of Intelligence (Cryptography) tests by +2 until the characters can succeed at an Intelligence (Research) test to track down more information.

MODERATE The stolen user credentials the characters are using are blocked, and they must secure a new password before they can resume their hacking attempt.

MAJOR Clumsy hacking attempts alert a systems administrator, who begins actively opposing the challenge test, and may trace the characters' location and alert security forces with a successful opposed Intelligence (Computers) check.

INFILTRATE A GANG

Gaining the trust of a gang or local militia allows you to learn their secrets, but requires the right mix of charm, strength, and caution. Infiltrating more official organizations may require Dexterity (Forgery) in place of the Strength (Intimidation) focus. Better organized, militia-style groups, or tight-knit groups like cults represent challenges with higher target numbers and may require specialized knowledge like Intelligence (Theology).

INFILTRATE A GANG

SUCCESS THRESHOLD: 20
ABILITY FOCUSES: Communication (Persuasion) TN 13, Perception (Empathy) TN 11, Strength (Intimidation) TN 13, Willpower (Self-Discipline) TN 13

CONSEQUENCES

MINOR The character wrongs one or two minor gang members, exposing them to extra scrutiny. Increase the target number of Communication (Deception) checks by +2 until the character can either win over the suspicious members or somehow destroy their credibility.

MODERATE A slip-up damages a character's credibility, wiping out half of the accumulated successes.

MAJOR At least one member of the infiltrating party is exposed as an infiltrating agent and must flee or be captured.

BREAK INTO A SECURE FACILITY

Penetrating a secure facility like a military installation, criminal stronghold, or research lab requires avoiding notice, disabling locks and alarms, and understanding the psychology of people with something to hide. Gaining access to more secure locations increases both the target number of the various checks and the success threshold, and may add additional ability tests such as Communication (Disguise) to avoid facial-recognition software or even Willpower (Courage) tests to walk confidently into the figurative lion's den.

BREAK INTO A SECURE FACILITY

SUCCESS THRESHOLD: 15
ABILITY FOCUSES: Dexterity (Sabotage) TN 17, Dexterity (Stealth) TN 13, Intelligence (Security) TN 15

CONSEQUENCES

MINOR The facility has unexpected guards or security, increasing the TN of Intelligence (Security) checks by +2 until a character succeeds at a Perception (Seeing) test to adapt to the situation.

MODERATE An unexpected alarm or clumsy misstep draws 1–3 (1d6 divided by 2) guards to investigate.

MAJOR The entire facility is placed on alert and guards begin actively searching for intruders.

As can be seen in some of the major consequences in these examples, failure on a challenge test may result in a change of scene. For example, shifting from the challenge test to an action encounter, where the characters now have to fight, escape, or deal with a new hazard.

SECRET TEST RESULTS

Sometimes players don't immediately know the outcome of a test. For example, you may want to make Perception tests secretly for the players. If the test fails, then the player shouldn't know, because the character failed to notice something (or there just wasn't anything there to notice in the first place). Establish with the players occasions when you are likely to make certain tests for their characters in secret.

One GM trick is to make a list of random rolls in advance. When there's a need for a secret test during the game, mark off a roll from your list and use it for the result. This way, the players don't even know you are making a secret roll for them, since you don't have to roll any dice.

GAME MASTER FIAT

On occasion a particular die roll may result in an anticlimactic or just plain dumb outcome. In such a case, feel free to change things to make the outcome more interesting or more in line with how the game should go. This is called Game Master Fiat, since the GM's judgment overrides the strict letter of the rules.

Is this cheating? In a literal manner of speaking, you could call it that. However, it is more of a function of the GM's role in making the game more interesting and fun for everyone involved. So long as this is not done with malicious intent, and is used to ensure the game is fun, interesting, and challenging, you shouldn't have a problem. Besides, the players don't have to know you change the occasional die roll behind the scenes. With this in mind, it's a good idea for the Game Master to keep their die rolls out of sight of the players and simply announce the results.

However, most good adventures are designed so you can use Game Master Fiat sparingly. Look at other aspects such as the level of challenges or the overall strength of the characters if you feel you are utilizing it too often. Those things may be in need of adjustment.

THE FINAL CALL

There may be occasions where disagreements happen over how a rule functions or is implemented. When this occurs, the GM's decision is the final call. This doesn't mean you have to memorize every rule. Some players may have more knowledge on a particular set of rules and you can take advice or opinions from others about a ruling. You can also ask players who are otherwise unoccupied to find a particular rule in this book during play for you. Do your best to avoid a debate which halts the game.

However, in the end, it's your job to decide how to handle the situation and get right back to the game. Even if you feel you might be wrong about how a rule is written, you are still right about how it works in the game which you are currently running.

THE CHURN

In *The Expanse*, even when you're on a job handling one complication after another, the unexpected can happen, and happen fast. These events are dangerous more often than not, and always seem to happen at just the wrong time. And when you think things are bad, they get really bad, like how stopping a rampant alien infection becomes about chasing a rapidly accelerating asteroid before it hits the Earth. That kind of bad.

Sometimes you can still breeze through it. Other times, it engulfs you. There are lots of names for it: karma, mojo, bad juju, etc. In *The Expanse* RPG, this concept is known as the Churn. If you want to have the effects of one of the more pervasive elements of *The Expanse* setting, the following is available as an optional rule for use in your campaign.

THE CHURN POOL

To use the concept of the Churn in the game, the GM keeps track of what's called the Churn Pool. It represents a buildup of events during an adventure, where every twist and turn adds its weight to the Churn, that swirl of fickle fate that eventually boils over and bites the heroes right in the tail.

At the beginning of each adventure, the Churn Pool is "reset," starting at 0. Add 1 to the Churn Pool each time one of the following events occurs:

A character succeeds on an ability test with a 6 on the Drama Die

The characters successfully overcome an encounter or hazard

A character spends 4 or more stunt points to perform a stunt

A character spends Fortune points to alter a die roll

The characters complete a section of the adventure

When the Churn Pool reaches 10 and 20, roll 1d6 and consult the **Churn Over** table.

The Churn Pool then continues building. When it reaches 30, an Epic Effect occurs automatically (no die roll required) and the pool "resets" to 0 and begins building again.

MINOR

The characters face a setback, a minor complication that makes things more difficult for them. Examples include:

CHALLENGE A character automatically fails an ability test, or has to make a second, follow-up test, to complete a task. The crew suffers a moderate consequence on a challenge test.

HAZARD A new hazard appears, or an existing hazard increases by one level.

INVESTIGATION It takes an additional test or special circumstance to unlock a clue.

SOCIAL An NPC's attitude shifts one step less favorable or can only be maintained through extra effort from the characters.

MAJOR

The characters have to deal with a more serious setback, such as:

CHALLENGE An existing threat is increased to the next rank (normal to Elite, etc. see **CHAPTER 13: THREATS** for more details). The crew has go though an unexpected challenge test.

HAZARD A new hazard appears, or an existing hazard increases by two levels. The crew suffers a Loss to their ship (see **Losses** under **Space Combat** in **CHAPTER 6**).

INVESTIGATION Opposing forces are alerted to the investigation and misdirect it so an additional lead or clue must be investigated to progress.

SOCIAL An NPC's attitude shifts two steps less favorable or can only be maintained by performing a difficult task. An NPC learns a secret detrimental to the characters. The PCs make a new minor enemy.

EPIC

Things go from bad to really bad. A whole new threat enters the story, and its worse than whatever the crew is already dealing with. Examples include:

CHALLENGE A test can only succeed at a significant price, sacrificing lives, valuable equipment, or social standing. A new Epic adversary enters the plot, or an existing adversary is upgraded to that level.

HAZARD A new Murderous Hazard enters the plot, or an existing hazard is upgraded to that level.

INVESTIGATION The investigation leads to a trap, where characters might be ambushed, framed, or otherwise seriously harmed.

SOCIAL An NPC with a favorable attitude becomes Hostile or one with an unfavorable attitude becomes Very Hostile. An NPC learns a secret that could have disastrous effects on the characters.

CHURN OVER

CHURN POOL	D6 RESULT 1–3	D6 RESULT 4–6
10	Minor Effect	No Effect
20	Major Effect	Minor Effect

DESCRIBING THE CHURN

Though the Churn has a rule-based method, the effects should be presented in-game with their own storied flavor, depending on the stage and effect. For example, if a character is firing their pistol and subject to a minor Churn effect, they might end up stepping on a loose floor panel, whereas if they were subject to an epic effect, their shot might ricochet into a power conduit that explodes and punctures the outer hull. Now the crew has a sabaka problem! The effects given on the previous page are just guidelines and suggestions, and the GM should feel free to improvise suitable additional effects as suits the story.

THE STORY WITHIN THE CHURN

Another way to utilize Churn effects is to plan ahead for when they might occur. You can even tailor your own effects directly connected to the story or game you're running, using the table as a guideline. These rules are meant primarily to add flavor, challenge, and additional story elements for the enjoyment of everyone at the table. You may even wish to reward your players with a recovery of Fortune points if they handle the Churn event skillfully, or present creative ideas or great roleplaying. It is not meant to punish players or be malicious, but to keep the game interesting and challenging.

RULES AND ROLEPLAYING

During any adventure in *The Expanse*, there should be a balance between rolling for tests, resolving combat, and roleplaying characters. A game focusing entirely on just one aspect or another may not provide fun and exciting elements to every player.

In some games, players can spend hours roleplaying and not a single die is cast. There are other games where most of the time is spent facing threats and performing feats of heroism. Good adventures have a healthy balance of both. What is a good balance of roleplaying and dice rolling for your game? The answer is different for everyone.

SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS AND THE RULES

A regular concern is the difference between the social skills of a player and those of their character. When is it appropriate to roleplay an interaction out and when is it appropriate to just roll dice? What if you do some roleplaying but also roll dice? What if a character has a lousy Communication ability but the player is glib? What if the player who's tongue-tied in real life wants to play a character who's a great orator?

These issues don't come up during combat or exploration encounters for the most part. No one expects a player to actually be able to fight or decipher an ancient script. People are content to let dice rolling handle such things. When it comes to roleplaying, however, players can talk and interact. They are doing so in character but it is the players using their own social skills to roleplay.

So let's imagine a scene in which the PCs have to convince a Star Helix officer that a friend of theirs was being wrongfully detained. There are four different ways to run this scene:

ROLEPLAYING Everyone can just roleplay the scene. The players present their arguments verbally, while you play as the security officer hearing them out. If the players are convincing enough, you (in the role of the security officer) decide that their friend can go free.

ABILITY TEST You could choose to have one or more players make an ability test, in this case a Communication (Persuasion) test versus the officer's Communication (Leadership) test.

COMBINATION TEST You could combine roleplaying and ability tests by letting the players roleplay verbally, then applying bonuses or penalties to the test based off of how well they presented their arguments.

COMBINATION ADVANCED TEST You could run the scene as an advanced test by setting a success threshold and deciding on how much time the players have to convince the officer. If, for example, the officer will only listen for five minutes, each Communication (Persuasion) roll takes a minute of time. You could also provide bonuses or penalties to each player's rolls based off of how they roleplay the situation. Though the outcome is decided by the dice, good roleplay usually gets rewarded with a favorable outcome.

Though there is no wrong choice, you should decide what's best for handling these scenes in your game, even if it means having to mix and match approaches based on the situation. Take the players' preferences into consideration as well. The important thing is to figure out what works best and provides the most fun for your group.

COMBAT CONSIDERATIONS

When it's time for the characters to throw down against a mob of thugs or shake free of a ship's target lock, the Game Master should take a few things into account. Is the fight too hard or too easy for the players? Can the players get the drop on the enemy, and if so, what bonuses do they get? Is the enemy even looking for a fight? Does the conversation end as soon as the first gun is drawn? Combat is the most rules intensive part of the game, with many different combatants and actions for you to keep track of. Deciding certain things in advance can make things easier for you and your players, and create a smoother, more fun and engaging environment before the first die even hits the table. In addition to having a grasp on the basics presented in **Chapter 5**, the following is useful to running fun combat encounters in *The Expanse*.

OPTION: DEAD-TO-RIGHTS

If you want a slightly more lethal *Expanse* game, consider the following option: In any situation where one character has another "dead-to-rights," the target character cannot spend Fortune to eliminate damage. All damage must be accounted for with Toughness, injuries, or wounds, and any excess results in the character being taken out, as usual. Standard situations where a character is dead-to-rights include being completely surprised by an attack (such as shot by an unseen sniper, for example) or having the helpless condition, completely unable to avoid an attack or hazard. It's up to you to define situations that leave a character dead-to-rights, and to tell the players in advance. For example, if you want them to respect guns a good deal more, make it clear that someone holding a gun on you means they have you dead-to-rights, unless you can somehow distract their attention. This means characters will probably be less likely to rush armed opponents, for example. Try not to use this option as an excuse to arbitrarily kill off the Player Characters in a surprise fashion, but instead as a tool to help the players make informed decisions about the risks their characters are taking.

MAJOR AND MINOR NPCS

There are two types of non-player characters in *The Expanse*: major and minor. Major NPCs are prominent characters with reoccurring roles. Minor NPCs have very little effect on the story. Most won't even have names. They're just background elements. These two types are handled differently when dealing with them in combat.

INITIATIVE

In combat encounters, you should roll initiative for each major NPC separately. You can break minor NPCs up into groups by type and then make an initiative roll for each group. If you had three thugs and four miners in a combat, for example, you'd roll initiative once for the thugs and once for the miners, each group taking their entire turn when their initiatives come up.

DAMAGE AND DYING

You may, at your option, apply the rules for dying characters to major NPCs. If you do, a major NPC who is taken out may have the dying condition (see **Conditions** in **Chapter 1**). Minor NPCs who are taken out of the encounter are just dead (or unconscious) without having to worry much about their condition or ultimate fate.

SURPRISE

In combat attacking first is often the key to victory, which is why ambush is an age-old tactic. At the start of a combat encounter, determine if one side gets the drop on the other. Determining surprise is a three part process:

1. **CONSIDER THE SITUATION** Is one side concealed or hidden in some way? Is the other side wary or oblivious? Did both sides just blunder into one another by accident?

2. **TEST OR NO TEST** Next, decide if one or both sides get a chance to detect the other before contact is made. In some situations, you may decide there is no test. In that case, one side automatically gets the drop on the other. If you decide there is a chance of detection, you can have characters make Perception tests with focuses as appropriate (though Seeing is most common). This can be a basic test, in which case you assign a TN based on circumstances, or you can make it an opposed test of Perception vs. Dexterity (Stealth). It is possible that some characters will be surprised while others on the same side will not. As mentioned under **Secret Test Results** in this chapter, you may wish to determine the results of this test secretly.

3. **COMBAT BEGINS** Everyone rolls for initiative as action time begins and the combat starts. Any characters who were surprised do not get a turn during the first round of the fight. On the second round, everyone gets to act as usual.

ATTACK ROLL MODIFIERS

MODIFIER	CIRCUMSTANCE
–5	Attacker is blind or otherwise completely unable to see the target.
–3	Defender in heavy cover, such as a building or stone wall. Melee attacker in heavy snow.
–2	Defender in light cover, such as a hedge or the woods. Melee attacker in the mud. Ranged attack vs. defender engaged in melee combat. Combat at night.
–1	Rain, mist, or smoke obscures the defender. Combat in low light conditions.
0	Normal circumstances.
+1	Attacker is on higher ground. Defender is prone. Melee attacker and allies outnumber defender 2 to 1.
+2	Melee attacker and allies outnumber defender 3 to 1. Defender is drunk.
+3	Defender is unaware of the attack.

ATTACK ROLLS AND CIRCUMSTANCE

An attack roll is the most common ability test in combat. It is a basic test, but the target number is equal to the opponent's Defense. The attack roll is modified by a focus if applicable and any other relevant bonuses (such as aiming, charging, equipment, talents, etc.). You can also assign bonuses and penalties to the attack roll to reflect the circumstances of the encounter, just as you do in opposed tests. In general, these bonuses and penalties should range from 1 to 3. They can take into account anything that would affect the attacker's ability to hit the target, such as lighting, terrain, tactics, and concealment. The **Attack Roll Modifiers** table displays some example modifiers based on common circumstances. Use them as a guideline when assigning bonuses and penalties to attack rolls.

MORALE

In many games combat is an all or nothing affair. Opponents fight until one side or the other is wiped out. War is indeed bloody, but it'd be infinitely more so if it was prosecuted in this way. In truth, most combats end when the morale of one side breaks and its combatants flee or surrender. Most combat in *The Expanse* is against NPC adversaries who have at least some sense of self-preservation. You can simulate this with Willpower (Morale) tests if you wish. Characters who fail a test attempt to break off from combat or even surrender.

When is it appropriate to test Morale? That is up to you, but consider making a test under the following conditions:

When more than half of the side's combatants are taken out of the fight	When the side's leader or champion is taken out of the fight	When fighting on will clearly mean being trapped or surrounded	When the other side reveals a serious or overwhelming advantage

You can handle this one of two ways. Your first option is to make one Willpower (Morale) test for the side using the Willpower of its leader (or best available if there is no clear leader). This has the advantage of being simple and can end a combat with one die roll. Your other option is to roll once for each major NPC and group of minor NPCs. This can mean some combatants flee while others stand and fight.

In general you want to use morale tests with NPCs only. Players should have the choice of whether their characters fight or flee in a given situation.

EXAMPLE *Holden and Amos are fighting off an ambush by a group of OPA thugs. After four rounds of combat, only a leader (a major NPC) and two thugs (a group of minor NPCs) survive. The GM decides it's a good time to test morale, since less than half of the attackers are still in the fight. He rolls once for the leader and once for the thugs, getting a 14 and an 8 respectively. The GM set the TN at 11, so the leader makes a successful test but the thugs fail. The next time the thugs take a turn, they attempt to flee. The OPA leader now has a tough decision to make: Should he fight on alone, or follow his team?*

CREATING ADVENTURES

The Expanse focuses on the exploits of characters controlled by the players. These Player Characters (or "PCs") are the protagonists of the story created by your game. It's the Game Master's job to create adventure scenarios for the players as well as story hooks to directly involve the player's characters, allowing them to take on the challenges presented to them. This can be accomplished with a pre-written adventure (such as the one presented in this book) or something of your own design. Creating an adventure can be just as involving a task as running one. A well-constructed adventure is both easy to run and fun to play. A good GM creates their adventures with those two factors in mind. If you're working with a pre-written adventure, there are methods to modify it to suit your needs. Several key elements go into adventure design.

> "Point of clarification," Alex said, raising his hand. "We have an apocalypse comin'? Was that a thing we knew about?"
> "Venus," Avasarala said.
> "Oh. That apocalypse," Alex said, lowering his hand. "Right."
>
> — *Caliban's War*

WHAT'S THE STORY?

The Expanse has a rich universe in which you can craft amazing sci-fi adventures, anything from a system-wide riot at a space station, to a cat and mouse hunt through a planetary system, to negotiating terms between Belters and their UNN "benefactors." Each of these stories, however, starts with the Player Characters. In *The Expanse*, a great starting point for creating an adventure is the notion that the characters are a crew taking on a job where things might get complicated. Those complications turn into problems the crew has to decide how to handle, with their decisions leading to benefits or consequences that branch into other events or even into the next storyline. A typical adventure story contains several basic elements.

OVERALL PLOT

When you have an idea for a suitable storyline, give some thought as to where it starts, the nature in which the characters are directly involved, and a series of major events that unfold over the course of the adventure. This plot doesn't have to be as detailed as a book. In fact, it's better if it is not, to leave room for lots of options. What's important is that you have a basic outline of events so when you reach a certain point, you know (or can easily determine) which way the story will go next.

CHALLENGES

It's important to identify the various threats that the crew faces. Is it a corrupt politician with a rogue military force at their command, or two rival factions trying to come to terms aboard a derelict space station? Any of these present challenges you can create, as well as tailoring suitable hazards and adversaries for them, many of which can be found in **CHAPTER 13: THREATS**.

HARD AND NOT-SO-HARD SCIENCE

When running a game in a science-fiction universe, it's important to note the various elements defining the "science" aspect of that universe. The science and technology in *The Expanse* are what's considered "hard" sci-fi. A lot of these elements present themselves during play. They could be simple things such as the tube tram at Ceres Station, the basic use of a hand terminal or scanner, or electronic locks requiring key cards. Others may be situational, such as dealing with the oxygen venting from a pressurized cabin, or how to avoid passing out during a high-g ship maneuver.

To everyone living within this universe, these things are a part of everyday life. So, when presenting these aspects as part of the setting, it's best to treat the hard science elements like you would a minor character in a story. They can be easily melded into whatever description you provide when running your game without necessarily becoming the focus of whatever is going on until you need them to be. The story should always take precedence over the technicalities of a science-heavy setting unless such technicalities become a major part of the situation at hand.

This should be the same when the players are interacting with the environment around them. A pilot powering up their ship may not require a play-by-play of the start-up checklist or even the dynamics of how it flies. That changes when there's a leak in the ship's thruster and the engineer needs to patch it while enemy bogeys are taking shots at you. This gives you the option to establish the bright lights and shiny panels at any time without slowing down the flow of your game.

> Holden was starting to feel like they were all monkeys playing with a microwave. Push a button, a light comes on inside, so it's a light. Push a different button and stick your hand inside, it burns you, so it's a weapon. Learn to open and close the door, it's a place to hide things. Never grasping what it actually did, and maybe not even having the framework necessary to figure it out.
>
> *— Abaddon's Gate*

STORY CLIMAX

After all the characters deal with the different personalities and face a stream of challenges, hazards, and tests, where does all their hard work lead them? Perhaps it's a climactic battle with an enemy force, a race against time versus an oncoming catastrophe, or solving the mystery that has plagued them since the very beginning. Whatever the case, this is when events in the adventure come to a head and it's time for the heroes to step up and save the day.

CONCLUSION AND REWARDS

This is where you finish up anything after the climax of the adventure. It's where the heroes find out any remaining information, resolve the adventure's mysteries, claim their rewards, and so forth. There may still be some dangling plot threads left over—which you can spin out into later adventures—but generally things should be tied up and resolved by the end. In addition, the characters can reap whatever reward, prize, or accolade they may receive for all their efforts while getting a chance to rest before the next job.

LATERAL SOLUTIONS

A lot of the challenges faced by *Expanse* characters are much bigger than "shoot 'em until they die." Indeed, some of the problems the crew may face may seem well beyond the confines of the game's resolution systems, in that not even a challenge test seems enough to overcome them. That is just as it should be; the stakes in *The Expanse* get pretty high, like fate of the future of humanity high sometimes, and the solutions the characters choose to try are not run-of-the-mill problem solving, but creative (and often desperate) "Hail Mary" passes they hope will work.

Take the threat of Eros for example: Under the control of the protomolecule, the asteroid was capable of cloaking against all known sensors and maneuvering at high-g with no apparent means of propulsion, and able to turn on a dime without any acceleration effects! Outside efforts to push the asteroid into the Sun or destroy it with a fleet of nuclear missiles failed, such that the only solutions were in the hands of the Belter detective Miller, who was on board: Set off a nuke in the heart of the asteroid using a dead man's switch, or make a last, desperate effort to reach whatever was left of Julie Mao in the depths of Eros' new "control network." Miller chose the latter and was successful, at least partly because he made such a bold choice, and not just because his player rolled a great Communication test result, although you can bet Miller spent all the Fortune he had on it!

This means in *The Expanse* you can confront your players (and their characters) with seemingly impossible odds, but be willing to entertain whatever creative and desperate ploy they come up with to try and overcome the challenge, and give it a fair chance of success. This is especially true if the characters are willing to go to great lengths to succeed, including perhaps making the ultimate sacrifice. Encourage your players to think—and roleplay—outside of the "box" of the game system and the rules. Their characters are not just game pieces moving so many spaces and executing pre-defined "moves" they're people with hopes, dreams, fears, and determination.

DEALING WITH CANON

The Expanse series details major characters and events that establish the setting where your story happens. Much of this is described in The Guide to the System. But when you're writing an adventure, how much of the canon should affect what you're writing and, if it does, does it matter if you change it? When designing your game, you'll be faced with deciding how much the existing setting affects your story. The following are some techniques to use when dealing with it.

INSPIRATION

You can use the existing canon as a springboard for your storyline. Use of existing characters and events gives you a healthy pool of stories, personalities, and ideas from which to create a foundation for a great campaign. This also creates an immediate level of recognition for you and players familiar with *The Expanse* series. The trade-off is that you are bound to those portions of the canon you incorporate into your game. For example, if you decide to use Miller as a major NPC in your game, you are limited to a certain period of time where that would be possible, and you have to be aware of Miller's ultimate fate (and the fact that your players may know it as well).

FLEXIBLE CANON

You can use canonic elements in your game, such as the setting or past events, but choose to change some things that would conflict with your planned storyline. All of the major components can remain prevalent, such as the major factions and locations, but with tweaks in the events that follow. What if there were more survivors of the *Canterbury*? What if the Player Characters were the ones hired to track down Julie Mao? What if your story involved the crew of the *Rocinante* as major NPCs?

IGNORE CANON

You can bypass canon altogether, or base your story around events with little to no effect on existing canon. *The Expanse* setting is vast and you could tailor stories and events that barely even touch the established canon outlined in the fiction. An entire campaign could focus on a crisis on one of the many different stations, or on an exploration crew traversing the outer planets.

COMMUNICATE CHANGES

Whatever you decide, make sure if your players are aware of existing canon, they are also aware of any changes you make to avoid confusion. In addition, if you do alter major events, be aware of the chain reaction it may have on other events and characters down the road.

MYSTERIES

A multitude of mysteries introduced in *The Expanse* have yet to be resolved in the main story presented in the books. A primary example is the full nature of the protomolecule and its alien creators. Though these have not yet been fully defined, there is nothing to stop you from using these as elements to expand upon in your game. Just bear in mind that you should be prepared if, in future novels, these elements develop in scope and story that vary greatly from your own design. If you want to run a game that remains true to the existing canon you should tread carefully when introducing explanations for existing mysteries into your campaign.

THROUGH-LINES AND SUBPLOTS

As you gain experience as a GM, you may want to weave through-lines or subplots into your campaign. They can be related or unrelated to the adventure at hand and serve to mix things up and keep the players guessing. Subplots are also a great way to use the goals and ties of the characters and you should keep your eye out for opportunities to do so. Interconnecting plot points are a staple of great storytelling, and help to both keep the players engaged, and to breathe new life into already existing events. A search for a missing ship could turn into a discovery that the ship may have been a part of a smuggling convoy and that the crew's employer is actually trying to recover the valuable stolen cargo aboard. This, in turn, could be military secrets stolen from a secret Martian military installation. The secrets themselves may be directly connected to the whereabouts of a missing relative of one of the PCs. Any or all of these connections could either result in a larger story, or a chain of related, yet completely different stories.

RUNNING THE GAME

In addition to preparing the adventure before a game session, you have to prepare a real-world location in which to run the game and manage things during the game. Some of these tasks can be delegated to the players, but you must be aware of what's available and make sure everything gets done. These elements can be broken into three broad categories: the play environment, information management, and play styles.

THE PLAY ENVIRONMENT

The success or failure of a game session can hinge on factors completely outside the scope of the game itself. When a good mood is established and players are enjoying themselves, things go more smoothly. Bad rules calls get ignored, poor rolls are laughed off, and conflicts between characters are viewed as heroic drama. When a bad mood is in place, the slightest setback can lead to complaints and annoyance. Similarly, a group of players may begin a game happy and excited, but become bored and disinterested before the game is over.

CHOOSING A PLAY SPACE

Where you play your game affects the mood and atmosphere of the game itself. It's best to have a well-lit gaming space large enough to accommodate all of your players comfortably with enough space for books, dice, and materials. You also want to leave yourself enough room to easily lay out your adventure materials to avoid having to shuffle and keep track of your information. All of these things slow down the game. Playing in an uncomfortable environment can also lead to unnecessary tension, while game pauses tend to quickly create boredom. If there isn't sufficient space at a private residence, there are always public places to game, such as a library hall, community centers, or your local gaming store.

TAKING A BREAK

If a game session is going badly no matter what you try, it may be time to step back from the game for a bit. In the short term, a game session can break for everyone to stretch, get a drink, or even go get something to eat. Much like changing the focus within the game, getting everyone's attention off the game entirely can shake things up and allow a fresh start later on. The length of the break should be carefully considered—doing something that takes too long may result in the group not wanting to go back to playing the game with just a little time left.

TABLE RULES

Each game group also establishes its own "table rules" for how everyone is expected to behave at the game table in order for the game to run smoothly and for everyone to have a good time. Beyond just expecting courtesy and polite behavior, table rules might include things like whether or not players should be using mobile devices; while atmospheric for a sci-fi setting like *The Expanse*, if used outside of a game context they can be distracting. At the least they should be silenced during game play. Similarly, you can establish table rules for whether a die that rolls off the table counts or should be picked up and re-rolled.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

While players have only their character sheet and bits of adventure information to review, the GM has a significant amount of information to keep track of. This could be notes on NPCs, adventure plots, subplots, encounters, areas, ships, items, and more. To avoid being overwhelmed, try to do as much preparation as possible outside of play time.

Keep the different types of notes you need handy in separate sections of a folder or notebook for easy reference. When keeping track of time, make a note of the in-game date and time between sessions as an easy reference to pick back up from the next time you play, as well as having references to important dates and events that occur within the campaign.

CAMPAIGN LOG

It's a good idea to keep a campaign log as a record of the games you have run in the campaign. A good campaign log should have the following information, organized so you can find it fairly easily and quickly.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

A summary of each adventure: the date(s) on which you ran it, and when and where it took place in the setting. It should include a brief description of the events, characters involved, and any victories or setbacks for the heroes, including experience point awards, jobs completed, and so forth. It is easiest to write this summary in between game sessions while the events are still fresh in your mind.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

A list of important characters in the setting and campaign to date, primarily just names and brief notes, so if the players want to know the name of that OPA operative they dealt with a week ago, you can find it at a glance. Also consider highlighting (or otherwise calling out) the names of important characters and details in your adventure summaries, so you can find them quickly.

SCHEMES AND PLOTS

Information on any ongoing plots, sub-plots, and developments in the game. With several main characters, there may be a lot going on in terms of individual stories. Keeping notes on their progress can help you keep track of them and ensure you don't lose a particular plot thread somewhere along the way.

GAME NOTES

In addition to your campaign journal, you can have a separate page or notepad where you can jot down notes to yourself during play. You can use these notes later when you put together a more detailed summary for your campaign log in order to keep track of important things, such as when certain NPCs were encountered or the particulars of a conversation that happened between the heroes and one of their contacts.

PLAY STYLES

Two games of *The Expanse* could use the same exact rules, main characters, and scenarios, yet still have entirely different play styles. How you interact with the players and how the players view each other and the game world are matters of play style. Different styles produce different kinds of games. It's one of the great things about tabletop roleplaying games. Understanding your own play style, the style of your players, and how those styles work together is critical to avoiding problems and gives you the ability to change the feel of the game based on how you present your scenarios.

So long as you follow some basic guidelines, there is no right or wrong style of play. Some GM styles work with certain types of players and some don't. The key is finding the right balance so everyone can have a fun time playing with very limited chance of conflicts.

GM STYLES

Different GMs approach their jobs differently. The following are a few common GM styles. Examine how and when you use these styles and how players react to them. Sometimes a game's main problem is a clash between how you run your game and how the players like to play. It is something that can be fixed with a little effort and practice.

ADVERSARIAL

The adversarial GM is one who tries to get the heroes into trouble—a lot. Foes act with ruthless efficiency and are often designed specifically to overcome the characters. Adversarial GMs tend to play very much by the book. If this kind of GM has house rules, they're run how the GM interprets them, as are all core rules. Players are allowed to decide what actions their characters attempt but have little to no other input into the world. As well, the GM specifically arranges encounters and NPCs in such a way as to put PCs at risk and doesn't back down from taking out characters, even killing them.

The number of players who enjoy a GM who's out to get them is extremely small. Logically, there's nothing a player can do to "beat" a GM. No matter how tough the heroes are, a GM can always have them attacked by an army of mercenaries or some other overwhelming threat. The idea that a GM would actually want to "defeat" players through any possible means is silly—the GM would always win, and the players would likely walk away and not want to play again.

Some players, however, enjoy games in which the GM appears to be out to get them. The sense of danger and risk is increased, and therefore the feeling of accomplishment is increased if the players succeed.

> The name ROCINANTE was on the wall in letters as broad as his hand, and someone had added a stencil of a spray of yellow narcissus. It looked desperately out of place and very appropriate at the same time. When he thought about it that way, it seemed to fit most things about the ship. Her crew, for instance.
>
> *— Caliban's War*

Adventures designed by this kind of GM must be within a reasonable power level of the Player Characters. Having the PCs all poisoned by a master assassin when they're incapable of detecting or thwarting the danger is unfair. Making more dangerous adventures available is fine, but they should clearly be dangerous at the outset. The GM should stick to encounters within the group's ability to handle, or at least give the players the option to back down from the ones they cannot. A crew that decides to attack a veteran officer right from the start chooses its fate, but if the enemy simply appears out of nowhere and attacks, that's unfair.

Even the best and most even-handed adversarial GM can rub players the wrong way. It's too easy for this style to seem like having fun at the players' expense, and no one likes a bully. The only legit use of this style is to heighten the players' excitement, and that only works if they enjoy it. Many players are more interested in telling a good story or enjoying the fruits of their labors than constantly risking the loss of their characters to a never-ending gauntlet of dangers.

In most cases, the adversarial style should be reserved for only the most epic of climaxes, and then it must come with a warning. Fudging results and saving heroes through deus ex machina most of the time and then throwing them to the wolves is unfair. If changing tone for a dramatic moment, make sure the players receive warning that this time there won't be any sudden changes of heart or second chances. Then let the dice fall where they may.

BENEVOLENT

The benevolent GM is an arbiter of the rules who's trying to make sure everything is both fun and fair. Like the adversarial GM, the benevolent GM tends to play tightly to the game rules, but not to find ways to create greater challenges for the players or to take advantage when they do something stupid. Game rules can be modified or even ignored if they conflict with logic, but exceptions aren't made just to help along a good story.

Done well, this style of Game Mastering produces fun and flexible games in which everyone knows both how the world works (as there are consistent rules) and that the rules won't be used to enforce an unreasonable outcome. Benevolent GMs often fall prey to assumption clashes (as covered later in this chapter) if they bend a rule once but refuse to do so under different circumstances. These GMs also sometimes give their players too much free reign, allowing a game to devolve into dead-end side-plots and aimless wandering.

DIRECTOR

A director tries to get players to act as the GM feels is appropriate to situations and storylines. Most adventures have a "right" course of action, and players are rewarded if they find it, but punished if they do not. This style of play often puts the needs of the story told ahead of the rules of the game and the desires of the players.

A director who successfully guides players without limiting their freedom of choice and opportunity to have fun can produce the memorable story arcs and dramatic moments many roleplayers love. This type of game often has a strong sense of style, setting it apart from less focused campaigns and allowing it to recreate dramatic moments like those found in *The Expanse* fiction. Tense stand offs between armed crew members on the bridge, scrambling to figure out a firing solution after the targeting system has gone offline, sneaking past crooked corporate cops in the middle of Belter riots, or trying to decipher a strange code that came with the box that everyone is dying to recover are all easier in games in which the GM gives subtle hints and gentle nudges to direct the story.

On the negative side, a director can steamroll players who are just trying to have some fun in the game. A director-style GM's biases become obvious and can impact reactions to Player Character actions. Bad directors penalize players who take reasonable actions that don't fit into the GM's plans, or otherwise attempt to "railroad" the group into following a particular path, whether they want to or not.

KNOWING YOUR GROUP

To create a world players enjoy exploring, you need to know your players. Understanding how they're likely to react to situations, what sorts of games they enjoy, and how they interact with one another allows you to tailor the game world and its challenges to match their preferences, giving them foes they want to seek out and causes for which they want to fight. Knowing a group of gamers well enough to predict their reactions and build adventures they'll enjoy is both the hardest and most important part of being a GM. With understanding of the players, everything else gets easier.

There are no real short cuts for getting to know a group of players. Although a few types of player personalities crop up a lot, every player is an individual with their own quirks and hot-button topics. You have to spend time with players before you really get to know them, leaving you with little to go on early in a group's history. The best route is to have initial games hit on common tropes—suspicious cargo, troublesome gangs, rescuing a trade ship—and save more complex plots for when you know your players better. Talk to your players in between games to get a sense of what they liked and didn't about the previous games, and what they would like to see in the future. Engaging in non-roleplaying game social activities together, such as seeing movies or getting together for a meal, can also be useful.

PROBLEM PLAYER TYPES

The focus in the following list is on problem player types, because non-problem players are, by definition, easy to deal with. Problem players tend to fall into a few broad categories, and these categories can help you understand how to handle these kinds of players. However, this is just a starting point. Most players have a smattering of several different play styles. A player may be a rules lawyer when paired with a thespian, but become a motivator when in a larger group of muder hoboes. You may need to try different solutions before finding one that works with a particular player.

If one or more players are being disruptive, discuss the matter with them. You should not penalize PCs in-character for player transgressions made out-of-character. Instead, disruptive players should be talked to, possibly privately, depending on your feelings and your perception of the players' group dynamic. A player shouldn't feel ganged up on, but sometimes a group needs to discuss matters together.

Avoid bullying or intimidating a player. Outside the game world, you have no real authority. It's your job to talk to disruptive players because you're essentially the host of the game. If problems continue, involve the whole group. No one should be lied to, ostracized, or mistreated, but if a player is causing problems, the group should address them directly and maturely. Moving game nights and not telling the offending player may seem easier, but ultimately this just causes bad feelings and more problems. Some people aren't meant to play together, and a mature group is willing to say so and move on.

It's also worthwhile for you to see if you fall into any of these categories. Knowing your own biases and preferences can often allow you to see potential conflicts with players of other types before they even occur. A Game Master who is a murder hobo player can guess early on that a thespian may be dissatisfied with the campaign unless the GM adds numerous opportunities to roleplay and act out scenes. A good GM finds ways to accommodate player's desires without sacrificing his own gaming style.

THESPIAN

A thespian is most interested in playing the role of their character to the hilt. They may insist on acting out their PC's actions, talking through every conversation of every day, and staying in character even when other players don't. If a thespian isn't being disruptive, leave them alone—they're getting into the role and can add flair and detail to a game world. Sometimes, however, these players take things too far. A player who insists on responding to someone saying they have a real-life phone call with an in-character query about this strange thing called a "phone" is just being a problem. So is one who's unwilling to skip through a long, uneventful trip to Earth from Ceres station because "something important might be discussed," and the player wants to talk through every possible conversation.

You can sometimes reach a thespian by putting things in movie or television terms. Rather than stating a journey will not be played out, say the scene cuts to ten days later. Explain minor events must be skipped not to get to the fight, but to allow for the scenes of important drama. A player who acts out everything may need boundaries about how much time is appropriate to describe a single action. Demonstrating how a soldier draws his gun with a flourish is fine, but taking two minutes to detail an attack that is not a stunt and may not even succeed is not.

GRIEFER

Also known as a "troll", a griefer just enjoys upsetting other players and the GM. Thankfully, such players are rare. If you realize you have a griefer, a polite but firm talk is needed. If the griefer can moderate their ways to no longer aggravate other players, allow them to stay, but be wary of griefers who proclaim a willingness to change (and declare their aggravating actions are not intentional) but don't actually moderate their behavior. If a griefer can't stop being a problem, the gaming group as a whole should disinvite them from playing.

MURDER HOBO

The murder hobo is most interested in killing things. Every challenge is likely seen in terms of what needs to be killed and how best to kill it. This player often gets bored with roleplaying and exploration encounters. The upside is the murder hobo enjoys something the game naturally focuses on, fighting, and they're easy to please. The downside is they may grow disinterested with anything else, talking to and distracting other players or even complaining about any action that delays the next fight.

Sometimes the murder hobo can be drawn into non-combat sequences by discovering what's important to both player and character. An up-front and honest conversation between GM and player about what sorts of non-combat events interest the player can be fruitful, as can appealing to their character's history or having NPCs talk in terms of how great a fighter the character is. If information must be given in such a way the player pays attention, try having a foe slip that into witty banter during a fight.

Ultimately, if nothing but combat interests the player, simply be sure to provide plenty of fights. Most players understand the game is for the enjoyment of all, so interspersing combat encounters with other types can generally keep the murder hobo from being disruptive and keep their interest level high enough to stay in touch with the campaign. Don't expect the murder hobo to negotiate with NPCs, solve riddles, or get involved in great romances unless the player has indicated an interest in doing so. Encourage roleplaying gently, but don't try to force it.

HANGER-ON

A hanger-on isn't really interested in the game as such; they're just there to spend time with one or more other people. Hangers-on are usually the friend or significant other of another player. As long as a hanger-on isn't disruptive, simply leaving them alone is normally best.

You may occasionally try to get a hanger-on more deeply involved with the game, but if such efforts regularly fail, there's no point in trying harder. Check in with a hanger-on to be sure they're not actually a wallflower who'd like to be more involved; otherwise, hangers-on are beyond your ability to get involved. Roleplaying games aren't for everyone, and some people are willing to play for convenience but just won't get deeply involved. There's no need to spend the time and energy trying to change your campaign to draw in these players if they just aren't interested.

MOTIVATOR

The motivator just wants to get things done. Now. As long as the crew is on track to accomplish some goal, the motivator is happy, but side-treks, down time, and goofing off all annoy them. Some motivators restrict themselves to keeping the crew on track, while others want the players and GM to stay focused on the game as well. A motivator can be useful when a group strays too far from a game's plot (or gets distracted from gaming in general). If too demanding, however, motivators are often perceived as bossy, clashing with other players.

A bothersome motivator may be handled by scheduling some down time, both in-character and as a group of players. If you state you intend for the characters to have an interlude, the motivator knows there's no need to encourage everyone to get moving. If a group of players decides to begin actually playing within an hour of getting together, and the GM announces periodic breaks, the motivator may be satisfied. Failing that, make sure the motivator isn't annoying other players and encourage them to remain polite and cordial when suggesting it's time to get a move on.

RULES LAWYER

The dreaded rules lawyer is one of the most common problem player types. The rules lawyer uses the rules of the game as a bludgeon to beat other players and even the GM. They abuse loopholes, design characters to take advantage of them, and correct others when they make mistakes. The rules lawyer often quotes rules and "official" interpretations of them as justification for their behavior, and argues with rules decisions they disagree with.

A player familiar with the rules of *The Expanse* can be useful, helping you find relevant rules quickly and possibly even answering basic rules questions from other players to save you time. The problem comes when a rules lawyer takes up game time arguing, abuses rules to get away with something unreasonable, or ruins the fun of playing by bickering about the quality of other players' rules knowledge.

Often, a rules lawyer's motivation is one of fairness. If a player has been in games run by a GM who favored one or two players, the rules lawyer may see the equal application of rules as a way to keep a game fair. In this case, an even-handed treatment of all players, even when deviating from the rules, is a good first step to dealing with the rules lawyer.

Other rules lawyers see knowledge of the rules as a way to compete with the GM. By pointing out your mistakes, these players try to score points and control the flow of a campaign. A roleplaying game is a cooperative effort, and you must work

with players, but as the Game Master you have final say on how the rules are interpreted. If a rules lawyer attempts to control how rules are applied, take firm actions to establish your authority without being rude or tyrannical.

The best way to do this is to establish guidelines for handling rules disagreements before they come up. Inform players you will run your game based on the rules, but not enslaved to them. A rules call should be made quickly to keep the action of a game going. Allow anyone who disagrees with a rules call a moment to explain their objection. If you agree, there's nothing wrong with changing a ruling; if not, state that the discussion is tabled, and re-examine the matter after the game. If you later decide to run the rule differently, inform the players of it at the beginning of the next session.

If a rules lawyer continues to be a problem, you are well within your rights to insist all questions about rules wait until the end of the session, when they can be handled without making everyone wait. The rules lawyer can write down any questions, and the two of you can hash them out on your own time.

SPOTLIGHT HOG

A spotlight hog wants to be the one doing whatever is being done. Spotlight hogs often want to play more than one character or play characters with something that sets them apart. These players crave attention, both for themselves and for their characters. Spotlight hogs can be useful because they get excited and involved in a campaign, and that excitement can positively affect other players. A spotlight hog who actually manages to garner significantly more time "on-screen" may be a problem, however, preventing others from enjoying the game fully.

There's not much that can be done with a spotlight hog who's a problem other than talking to them and asking them to tone it down. If necessary, you can craft plots to focus on other players' characters, but doing so is fair only if the spotlight hog gets their fair time in the sun, too. It's also worthwhile to check with other players to see if they mind the spotlight hog's actions—a group of murder hobos and wallflowers may be fine with a spotlight hog doing all the talking, for example.

WALLFLOWER

A wallflower is the opposite of a spotlight hog. This player doesn't seem at all involved, barely speaks, and allows others to plan everything. Wallflowers are only disruptive if they stall a game's pacing by refusing to answer questions, make initiative checks, or take their turn. The most frustrating thing about such players is they often claim they greatly enjoy a campaign even though they hardly seem present when it's run.

If you can discover the cause of a wallflower's silence, most wallflowers become active participants. Some wallflowers simply don't know the game rules well (especially in a game with many alternate rules). In that case, assigning another player to help the wallflower plan actions and respond to your input can be helpful (this may be a great way to use a rules lawyer's talents constructively). Other players of this type simply need time to become comfortable with a campaign or a particular group of players, while some never get more involved. Check periodically to see if wallflowers feel something is missing from a campaign, but failing that just leave them alone and make sure they don't slow down a game.

ASSUMPTION CLASHES

> "Yes, you're in charge. That makes me XO, and it's the XO's job to tell the captain when he's being an idiot. You're being an idiot, sir."
>
> — *Leviathan Wakes*

One of the greatest risks any Game Master can face is an assumption clash. This happens when a player assumes one thing and you another. For example, if a GM notes that five tough-looking NPCs threaten a PC, the character's player may assume the NPCs are unarmed thugs—that the description "tough-looking" means they look like "tough" unarmed thugs. But maybe the GM actually means the NPCs look tough, like they will be hard to defeat, and is envisioning them in heavy armor and carrying weapons. Because neither GM nor player realizes a miscommunication has occurred, the player may make a decision about how to react that seems baffling to the GM and may lead to a bad game event.

The reason assumption clashes are so dangerous is they often aren't recognized until after the fact. Sometimes assumption clashes never get ironed out, leaving hard feelings on both sides. In the case above, if a fight doesn't break out, the player may leave the encounter without ever realizing they had mis-evaluated their opponents. They discover the group is part of a large gang holding the station hostage, but continue to see the NPCs as unarmed toughs. The player convinces their adventuring group to attack the gang's stronghold, since they're sure the fight is winnable. The group plans and maneuvers for three game sessions before attacking the stronghold, only to find it manned by mercenaries in heavy armor. The player cries foul, only to be told the gang members have always been well armed and equipped. The player feels the GM changed the reality of the game, and the GM feels the player just hasn't been paying attention.

There's no perfect way to avoid assumption clashes. Giving examples whenever possible and checking to see if your players understand the example helps. Also helpful is to know that assumption clashes occur and to keep a high degree of

patience when a player seems to assume something other than what you meant. An occasional assumption clash can be fixed by allowing players to change past actions when a reasonable assumption is proved false. For minor issues, you can even change the game reality to match the false assumption (especially if you realize an assumption clash has occurred before the players do). If such clashes become common, find a way to communicate more clearly, possibly including using illustrations, distributing handouts, describing things in different ways, and having a recap of events at the beginning of each game session.

UNSPOKEN RULES

There are certain unspoken rules about being a Game Master that come with the job. The following are some things you should always remember when taking on the role.

RULE 1: BE FAIR

In any group activity, you're supposed to treat everyone fairly. Don't play favorites. You need to adjudicate the rules fairly, for everyone. A TN 13 problem for one Player Character should almost always be TN 13 for another. Fairness also means helping people who aren't having as much fun or feel excluded, so sometimes you can "cheat" on their behalf—but only to help them, never to make things more difficult, or in a way that crosses the line into constantly giving one player an unfair advantage.

RULE 2: BE ACTIVE

Nothing kills the fun in any activity like sitting around, waiting for something to happen. In a roleplaying game, it's up to you to keep the story moving! Have the supporting cast and opponents who the protagonists meet make their own decisive actions. Create consequences for the characters which make players feel like their decisions matter. Encourage people to stay focused—but build in time for breaks, when players can relax and refresh their powers of concentration. Roleplaying is creative, and the best creative activity happens when people have the energy to get involved, and feel a sense of "flow," where their ideas naturally contribute to the whole.

RULE 3: BE INCLUSIVE

Group activities should welcome everyone who can get along and participate in good faith. That means when people have perspectives other than your own or hot-button issues they don't want to deal with, you need to take those into account. Plus of course, no decent person intentionally discriminates against people based on gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or level of ability among other aspects of who we are. All these guidelines apply to roleplaying games. Remember that there are some events in the game that happen to characters which might upset players who identify with them. This means that you should check before introducing elements that would likely upset someone if they experienced them in real life, or a film. Players may have other things that would ruin their fun that you might not think of. Encourage them to speak up and make it clear if anything makes them uncomfortable.

RULE 4: BE PROACTIVE

As a Game Master, when the players sit down to play, they are playing at your table. These players are relying on you to present them with a fun, immersive, entertaining game session. Even when a pre-written adventure is designed to give you those tools, it is up to you to make best use of them. If you know there's an event in your game where something might generate some confusion, make a plan for it. If you feel there needs to be some additional information or something on a map that may help the players along, make sure to add it. If you think something might derail the scenario with the types of players you have, then it might be best to simply remove it. Once you get the hang of this and the players become accustomed to how you handle situations, everyone can sit down at the table knowing that they're bound to have a great time.

RULE 5: BE ACCEPTING

The one, single truth about adventures is that each one will run differently at different times with different players. Once you accept this, you have already taken your first step toward adjusting for the things that you can control when running your game, and accepting the things you can't control, regardless of which scenario you happen to be running that day. No one becomes an expert Game Master overnight, and the best GMs already know that no one ever truly "masters" it. But with a little time, practice, and preparation, it becomes easier a lot sooner than you'd think, and the game becomes just as fun for each person no matter which side of the screen you play on.

13. THREATS

Every job has complications. Every mission has its dangers and it wouldn't be called an adventure if there weren't extraordinary challenges to overcome. Conflict and danger are a huge part of drama. Strange phenomena, harsh environments, hidden dangers, and ruthless adversaries can be found all throughout *The Expanse* and are part of any campaign you design as a Game Master. This chapter provides the tools to create the many threats our heroes may come across as they make their way across the stars. There are two major types of threats in *The Expanse*: Hazards and Adversaries.

HAZARDS

As detailed in **Chapter 5**, *Expanse* characters can encounter a number of hazards that can harm or even kill them. That chapter presents basic guidelines for how hazards are constructed and how they work in play.

COMMON HAZARDS

The following are sample hazards using the guidelines presented in **Chapter 5**. You can modify these or use them as examples to create your own hazards in-game. Additional hazards will appear in adventures and supplemental material for *The Expanse* Roleplaying Game.

ACCELERATION

High-g acceleration has a punishing effect on relatively fragile human biology. The effective substantial increase in weight can cause fainting and bruising as blood pools or is pushed "downward." More severely, acceleration can cause difficulty breathing, organ failure, stroke, or cardiac arrest. This usually involves a measure of damage based on the intensity of the acceleration; the drug cocktail known as "the juice" helps mitigate this and keep crew members conscious and able to function under high acceleration.

> "I see," Avasarala said. "And what's your plan?" Holden barked out a laugh with no humor in it. "Plan? My plan is to die in a ball of superheated plasma."
>
> —*Caliban's War*

In action scenes, acceleration is usually a consequence of a challenge test (see **Challenge Tests** in **CHAPTER 1**), where a failed test results in a measure of damage from 1d6 to as much as 4d6 or more. Characters can use Fortune and conditions to keep this damage from taking them out, as usual. Characters using the juice can take fatigued and exhausted conditions to mitigate damage before having to take injured and wounded conditions. Acceleration may also be an effect of ship maneuvers (see **Space Combat** in **CHAPTER 6**) or long-term acceleration during an interlude. In the latter case, the GM may simply assign a fatigued or exhausted condition to the characters to reflect the arduous nature of their travel, or ask for a Constitution (Stamina) test, with the result determining the characters' condition at the end of the trip.

EXPOSURE

Humans have a fairly narrow range of comfortable temperatures, which environmental systems on ships and stations work hard to maintain. Prolonged exposure to intense heat or cold is a definite hazard. Characters must make periodic Constitution (Stamina) tests, starting at TN 9 with the difficulty escalating +1 per additional test. A failed test results in 1d6 damage. A character can take a fatigued or exhausted condition in place of the damage. Any character taken out by damage is unconscious and any further damage results in a dying condition. How often the Constitution (Stamina) test is required depends on the intensity of the exposure, ranging from every hour or so to every minute for fairly intense, but still terrestrial, hot or cold environments.

GRAVITY

Gravity tends to be a hazard primarily in terms of Acceleration and Impact (see those sections for details) but local gravity can also pose some other difficulties for characters. Each character has a native gravity defined by their origin, as detailed in **CHAPTER 2**: microgravity for Belters, low gravity for Martians, and normal gravity for Earthers. If current gravity conditions are two heavier than your native gravity, you're hindered. Three heavier than your native gravity, and you are restrained (see **Conditions** in **CHAPTER 1**).

Additionally, heavier gravity conditions may require Constitution (Stamina) tests to avoid fatigue. This usually begins with a TN 9 test, with the TN increasing by +1 per additional test until the character can rest and recover. The interval of the test depends on the conditions, as often as once a minute for physical activity under gravity two or more categories heavier than your native gravity, or once an hour or so for physical activity under gravity one category heavier.

Characters operating in microgravity are affected by the free-fall condition and need either anchor points (such as handholds, a tether, or magnetic boots) or some form of thrust in order to move. Moving in microgravity may require a Dexterity (Free-fall) test, ranging from TN 7 for the simplest maneuvers to TN 13 or more for difficult ones. A failed test usually means the character doesn't move as planned, while a failed test with a 1 on the Drama Die might leave the character free-floating without an anchor until they float to a surface they can grab onto.

ILLNESS, TOXINS, & RADIATION

When characters come into contact with a potential infection, they must make a Constitution (Tolerance) test with a TN based on the virulence of the disease, ranging from TN 7 for a slight chance to TN 15 or more for direct exposure. Generally, the course of an illness is a challenge test involving further Constitution (Tolerance) tests, with the potential for Intelligence (Medicine) tests to add to the success threshold. The time interval for the tests is based on the progress of the disease, usually a day or so, but some may be only hours. Consequences can include increased difficulty for further tests to resist or the development of advanced symptoms in the form of different conditions (see **Conditions** in **CHAPTER 1**). For a deadly disease, the major consequence is the patient acquiring the dying condition.

The same approach can be taken with some toxins and with radiation exposure: an initial Constitution (Tolerance) test to resist or mitigate the effect, followed by a challenge test measuring the course of the condition, with achieving the success threshold meaning the character's condition stabilizes and the hazard has run its course. Some diseases, toxins, or radiation exposure may be able to achieve the success threshold for stabilization only with medical assistance; otherwise, it's just a matter of time until the character suffers the worst consequence of the hazard.

EXAMPLE *After exposure to a burst of high-intensity radiation, Miller and Holden face a Constitution (Tolerance) challenge test with a TN of 15, a success threshold of 20, and a test interval of 15 minutes, with the consequences of failed tests including fatigued, exhausted, and hindered. The GM also rules they cannot achieve the success threshold without anti-radiation treatment, so they need to get back on board the* Roci *before it's too late. Even if they survive, they'll need to go on anti-cancer meds for the rest of their lives.*

IMPACT

Falling in an environment with variable or microgravity is often more an issue of impact. As they say, it's not the fall, it's the sudden stop (or change in inertia) that hurts. An impact roughly equivalent to a short fall (3 to 4 meters) in 1 g is around 2d6 damage, while longer falls do more damage, up to 6d6. In some situations, characters can make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to halve the damage from an impact by rolling with it and landing to absorb some of the shock. Some "impacts" result from sudden changes in acceleration, throwing characters hard against the bulkheads of ships or stations. Generally, acceleration couches mitigate this (although see **Acceleration**, previously) but someone who isn't strapped in when a ship suddenly accelerates, decelerates, or maneuvers can suffer damage equivalent to a serious fall.

STARVATION AND DEHYDRATION

Humans can go without water for a day. After this, a TN 9 Constitution (Stamina) test is required to avoid acquiring the fatigued condition. An additional test is required for each hour without water, increasing the TN by +1 per test. A second failed test results in an exhausted condition, then unconscious, and finally dying, unless the character gets water before then. Likewise, a character can go without food for 3 days, after which they must make a TN 9 Constitution (Stamina) test, the same as for dehydration, except additional tests are once per day. The character cannot recover from the acquired conditions until they receive the necessary nutrition and hydration.

SUFFOCATION

In the absence of breathable air, characters can hold their breath for a number of rounds equal to twice their Constitution score. After that, they must make a TN 9 Constitution (Stamina) test each round, with the TN increasing by +1 per round, to continue holding their breath. Failing the test means the character is unconscious. On the following round, the character's condition becomes dying and the character cannot stabilize until they are able to breathe again. A character stabilized from dying due to suffocation is exhausted, rather than helpless, unconscious, and wounded, as usual.

VACUUM

Exposure to the vacuum of space is a constant danger in the *Expanse*, and almost invariably fatal. On the round following exposure, the character's condition becomes dying. The character additionally suffers 6d6 damage at the start of each round of exposure to the cold and radiation of space. A TN 15 Constitution (Tolerance) test halves this damage. A character taken out by exposure damage is immediately dead. Generally, either Constitution loss or damage will kill the character quickly, although there is a slight chance of survival if they are brought into a safe environment before either of those things happens and their dying condition is stabilized.

THE PROTOMOLECULE

In addition to all the antagonists, complications, and other threats characters face in *The Expanse*, a hazard particular to the setting requires special attention: the protomolecule.

ORIGINS

The protomolecule is an extra-terrestrial particle discovered on Phoebe by the Martian Congressional Republic. When the Martians landed on Phoebe for an ice mining survey, samples of the protomolecule were discovered in core ice and Mars contacted Protogen, a research-based corporation. Protogen named the substance the "protomolecule" and began running different tests and experiments. They discovered its ability to radically alter infected life forms and repurpose their biology for its own objectives. Scientists theorize the protomolecule was sent to the solar system billions of years ago, aimed at hijacking developing life on Earth, but it was captured by Saturn's gravity until it was discovered by humanity. Protogen later betrayed the Martians, deliberately infecting them to initially test the protomolecule, then destroying the research base and taking samples to be studied elsewhere. They engineered the mass infection of the population of Eros Station, some million and a half people, as detailed in **CHAPTER 7**.

PROTOMOLECULE EFFECTS

At of the start of most *Expanse* series, the only known sample of the protomolecule is in Fred Johnson's secure vault on Tycho Station, so the chances of characters directly encountering it are slim. If you choose to use the protomolecule in your campaign, the following rules are recommended.

The protomolecule only affects biological life and only by contact.

It is anaerobic and cannot be transmitted through the air.

Any character who comes into contact with the protomolecule must make a TN 18 Constitution (Tolerance) test or become immediately infected.

Once the character is infected, the GM rolls 2d6 and adds the character's Constitution. This is the number of days the character has before they are overcome by the effects of the protomolecule. In the event they are exposed to high levels of radiation, the time to total infection changes to hours instead of days.

PROTOMOLECULE INFECTION SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of the protomeolecule start out like those of a mild cold, quickly transforming into something similar to a violent fever. The character becomes increasingly disoriented and fatigued. As the infection spreads, brown fluid begins to leak from their orifices until the victim is completely debilitated. The victim also begins to hallucinate and may require Willpower (Self-Discipline) tests to focus on anything or avoid random outbursts of emotion (usually rage or sadness). After half the infection time, dark splotchy brown and black marks spread across the skin and the characters begins to stagger about uncontrollably, vomiting infectious brown fluid at other life forms. Human hosts at this stage are nicknamed "vomit zombies." At this point, the victim is no longer a Player Character, but under the control of the protomolecule; they become an NPC controlled by the GM.

There is no known cure for protomolecule infection. A character who is infected is ultimately doomed; it's just a matter of time. See **CHAPTER 15** for some additional ideas on dealing with the protomolecule in your own *Expanse* series.

ADVERSARIES

Hauling goods across the Belt isn't always safe. Heading through the seedier parts of a station's lower decks is even more risky, and forget not being ready for a fight if you're stirring up trouble with the local gangs or any of the factions. Dangerous people stand in the way of the characters in *The Expanse*. The NPCs the crew are likely to come into conflict with are known as adversaries or antagonists.

Adversaries come in many forms, and pose different dangers depending on their roles in the story and their level of antagonism toward the protagonists. This chapter contains a selection of adversaries from all lifestyles to include in a campaign. These are starting points; use them as templates to design your own. Feel free to make them stronger or weaker, or alter anything else. The selection below ranges from the everyday to the weird, to suit a variety of campaigns.

STATISTICS FORMAT

Adversary game statistics appear in a standard format, encompassing their descriptions, abilities, focuses, talents, common equipment, and favored stunts. Not every adversary of the type described should use every stunt listed, and the GM should feel free to utilize any stunt if the story dictates its need.

ADVERSARY CREATION GUIDELINES

The adversaries in this chapter do not necessarily conform to the same rules as Player Characters. That's the case for non-player characters in general and especially for non-human adversaries like drones, robots, or creations of the protomolecule. As Game Master, you can create adversaries and NPCs using the same character creation guidelines the players use for their characters if you like, but you don't need to do it this way. You can also simply assign whatever abilities, focuses, talents, and stunts you deem appropriate for any non-player character. Adversaries and other supporting characters don't need to meet the same prerequisites as Player Characters for talents, specializations, or other game traits, either.

ADVERSARY FOCUSES

Adversaries use the same ability focuses as the protagonists, except in cases where the adversaries are non-humans requiring special attacks. Most protagonists will be unable to take these focuses, unless something bizarre occurs during a campaign rendering a character more likely to brandish claws instead of a gun, for example.

ADVERSARY THREAT

To help a GM find the most suitable adversary for the players' party, each adversary receives a descriptive threat level from Minor all the way to Legendary. The **Adversary Threat** table tells you the typical Player Character level required for an adversary of a given threat level to present a mid-range to tough combat challenge, or be a general foil in a story. The threat level below that rank would be an easy challenge; the threat level above it is especially dangerous, and best suited to major enemies.

Threat is a general indicator of danger, but you can customize adversaries to the situation at hand. A soldier is an intimidating threat in the best of situations: drilled, fit, and armed to the teeth. Consider how the threat level might change if the soldier is drunk, is already wounded, has only one bullet for his rifle, or lacks orders from headquarters.

ADVERSARY THREAT LEVEL

THREAT LEVEL	PC LEVEL RANGE
Minor	Levels 1–4
Moderate	Levels 5–8
Major	Levels 9–12
Dire	Levels 13–17
Legendary	Levels 18–20

Additionally, Player Character preparedness, weapons, and skills may affect an antagonist's threat level. A physically impressive character might beat down a threat in a street fight, while a reclusive lab technician takes a beating, instead. The different Player Characters see the opposing thug as a threat at various levels. Conversely, a scientist may outfox a saboteur attacking the station, while his brawler buddy can do little more than stand watch. Game Masters should be aware of the characters' individual capabilities and any significant abilties or equipment that might make them more or less effective against a particular adversary.

Also note that threats at the lower range of the threat level are more likely to appear in small groups—as many there are members of the crew, even—while threats at the top of the range tend to appear singly, alongside an inferior or two or, rarely, in pairs.

ADVERSARY IMPROVEMENT

The stats presented in this chapter are average for an adversary of that type but you can change them to be tougher or more competent. It's a simple matter to modify the weapons and armor of many adversaries to create different tactical challenges: A Soldier or Veteran becomes a whole different class of foe equipped with power armor, for example! (See **Power Armor** in **CHAPTER 4** for details.) If you want a tougher, more capable adversary, you can also modify the stats however you wish. We recommend the following adjustments:

ELITE ADVERSARY

To make an adversary a little tougher than average, add 1 to any three abilities, add two focuses, and increase Fortune by 5. You can also make the NPC a novice in a new talent or add a degree to an existing talent.

HEROIC ADVERSARY

To make an adversary who is highly capable, add 2 to any two abilities, add 1 to any three other abilities, add four focuses, and increase Fortune by 15. You can also make the NPC a novice in two new talents or add two degrees to existing ones.

EPIC ADVERSARY

To make an adversary who is extremely potent, add 3 to one ability, 2 to any two other abilities, and 1 to any three others. Add five focuses, increase the adversary's Fortune by 20, and increase armor rating by 2 or more. You can also add three degrees to new or existing talents.

> "When it comes to scrapes, I'm what you might call a talented amateur. But I've gotten a good look at that woman in and out of that fancy mechanical shell she wears. She's a pro. We're not playing the same sport."
>
> *— Caliban's War*

SOCIAL ADVERSARIES

Adversaries and other NPCs with a social focus raise the question of their effectiveness. Use their social abilities—particularly Communication and Willpower—as a benchmark for how they interact with other NPCs. In most cases, dice rolls aren't necessary; look at the relevant statistics and ongoing story, then decide how it will work out. When it comes to NPCs performing social actions against PCs, see **Social Encounters** in **CHAPTER 5**, particularly **Social Rules for Player Characters**. Generally, social adversaries should have social ability scores (including relevant focuses) about the same as the Player Characters, adding +1 for each adversary improvement (Elite, Heroic, and Epic) with Epic social adversaries also having a +3 bonus for two or three of their relevant social ability focuses.

Adversaries generally don't have Resources scores, but have wealth described in rough, real-world terms. They can acquire whatever seems reasonable for their wealth and fits the needs of the story. Use this guideline for other game rules when it makes sense to overlook them when it comes to non-player characters. A simple description is often enough.

SUPPORTING CAST

JOURNALIST

ACCURACY 1, **COMMUNICATION** 3 (EXPRESSION), **CONSTITUTION** 1, **DEXTERITY** 2 (STEALTH), **FIGHTING** 0, **INTELLIGENCE** 2 (COMPUTERS, CURRENT AFFAIRS), **PERCEPTION** 2 (SEARCHING, SEEING), **STRENGTH** 1, **WILLPOWER** 1 (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

Some supporting characters the protagonists encounter are friendly, passive, or simply bystanders not looking for a fight. These NPCs do not require full stat blocks, as they appear only for a handful of roleplaying encounters. The Journalist abbreviated stat block illustrates a supporting cast character's abilities and focuses, sufficient for a background journalist who receives occasional interaction. This abbreviated stat block is also useful for social adversaries who aren't expected to fight the characters. The GM can easily expand these stats into a full stat block, should the NPC's other abilities become important later in the narrative.

NON-COMBATANTS

Some NPCs are non-combatants: characters who have little chance of fighting back or out-thinking the Player Characters. They make every effort to avoid combative situations, and if forced, will lose against the protagonists without dice rolls required, unless the GM believes something tilts the scales in their favor. In such a case, the abbreviated supporting cast stat block is useable. Average non-combatants have no Fortune score and a score of 0 in all abilities. Some non-combatants, such as children or the elderly, have even lower abilities.

OPTION: MINOR ADVERSARIES

At the Game Master's option, minor adversaries (those unimportant to the story and not intended to be a major challenge for the crew) can be considered to have Fortune scores of 0, unable to spend Fortune to reduce the effects of damage. This means minor adversaries are entirely reliant on Toughness, injuries, and wounds, and odds are good that 2–3 dice of damage will take them out. This is a good option for when you don't want to track a lot of adversary Fortune scores and just need to know if a minor adversary is injured, wounded, or taken out.

SAMPLE ADVERSARIES

Some adversaries wish to disable, obstruct, or kill the characters. The type of adversary who would use their fists instead of the law, or a gun instead of a side room bargain, is an action adversary. While security guards, soldiers, and thugs are all ostensibly capable of communication, independent thought, and even reason, they excel in the field of violence. Some of these NPCs are low-threat hired muscle, while others fit the bill of a "boss fight." The GM should adjust any traits they see fit for the purposes of the scenario, using the guidelines under **Adversary Improvement**.

BOUNTY HUNTER

AKA: Hound, Recovery Agent, Tracker

When people slip past security, evade the authorities, and escape the military, they become prey for bounty hunters.

BOUNTY HUNTER

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols), **Communication** 1 (Bargaining), **Constitution** 2 (Stamina), **Dexterity** 2 (Piloting, Stealth), **Fighting** 2 (Light Weapons), **Intelligence** 1 (Law), **Perception** 3 (Seeing, Tracking), **Strength** 2, **Willpower** 1

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
13	22	13	4

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Knife	+4	1D6+2
Pistol	+4	2D6+3
Stun Gun	+4	1D6+3

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Skirmish, Efficient Gunner, Called Shot*

Talents: Expertise (Tracking, Expert), Living on the Fringe (Expert), Scouting (Expert)

Equipment: knife, pistol, stun gun, light body armor, hand terminal, survival gear

Threat: Moderate

Bounty hunters are kept on retainer by corporations, including some security providers, and operate on their own or as a part of a larger team of hunters. Depending on their level of ethics, many prefer to earn their pay by bringing in the target dead rather than alive. Most of the time, it's just easier that way.

These stats represent a fairly professional bounty hunter, as opposed to a hooligan or a pirate looking to make some quick credits or a security guard or soldier with a side job. See those adversaries for less "formal" bounty hunters. Those with years of experience have a correspondingly higher threat level (see **Adversary Improvement**).

COMBAT DRONE

AKA: Security Drone

Combat drones are used in various situations. They patrol government buildings such as the UNN or MCRN facilities and outposts. They are often used as deterrents on properties owned or operated by large corporations or wealthy individuals. They also serve in combat training exercises for soldiers and marines.

A wide variety of other drones and semi-autonomous robots exist for combat, security, and surveillance purposes, from small roto-drones that are little more than flying grenades to remote-piloted and programmed vehicles with heavy weapons (see **Vehicles in Combat** in **Chapter 5** for some useful guidelines for creating and using these). You can also create more robust combat drones by applying the guidelines under **Adversary Improvement** to the stats given here to create Major and higher threat level drones.

You can treat some combat drones as having no Fortune score, but being capable of taking multiple injured and wounded conditions to deal with damage that gets past their armor, until the drone suffers enough losses to be rendered non-functional.

COMBAT DRONE

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Gunnery), **Communication** -2, **Constitution** 3 (Stamina), **Dexterity** 4, **Fighting** 2 (Light Weapons), **Intelligence** 0, **Perception** 1 (Seeing), **Strength** 3, **Willpower** 0

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
14*	25	14	6

*Flying 18

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Mounted Guns	+4	2D6+3
Stun Baton	+4	1D6+4 Penetrating

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Lightning Attack, Skirmish*

Threat: Moderate

GANG BOSS

AKA: Crime Boss, Drug Lord, Head Goon

Gang bosses carve out territories in the seedier parts of cities, outposts, and space stations. They coordinate their

GANG BOSS

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols), **Communication** 2 (Bargaining, Leadership), **Constitution** 1, **Dexterity** 3, **Fighting** 3 (Brawling, Light Weapons), **Intelligence** 1 (Evaluation, Law), **Perception** 3, **Strength** 2 (Intimidation), **Willpower** 2 (Morale)

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
13	21	13	2

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Combat Knife	+5	1D6+3
Knuckles Dusters	+5	1D3+3
Light Chain	+5	1D6+2
Pistol	+4	2D6+1

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Adrenaline Rush, Vicious Blow*

Talents: Contacts (Expert), Inspire (Novice), Intrigue (Novice)

Equipment: brass knuckles, combat knife, drug paraphernalia, gang colors, light chain, pistol

Threat: Minor

goons to gain a hold over the populace either through distribution of drugs, intimidation, or subversion of law enforcement. Though many work behind the scenes, they often keep their lot in line through malicious shows of force and cruelty. The gang boss is seldom encountered on their own, usually accompanied by several minions who act as both enforcers and bodyguards. See the statistics for the **Thug** later in this chapter for more details.

HOOLIGAN

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 1, **Communication** 2, **Constitution** 2, **Dexterity** 2, **Fighting** 3 (Brawling, Light Weapons), **Intelligence** -1, **Perception** 0, **Strength** 2 (Intimidation), **Willpower** 1

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
12	12	12	3

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Club	+5	1D6+3
Light Chain	+5	1D6+2
Knuckle Dusters	+5	1D3+3

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Adrenaline Rush, Whatever's Handy*

Talents: Party Animal (Novice), Thrown Weapon Style (Novice)

Equipment: knuckle dusters, makeshift club, heavy leathers (or equivalent)

Threat: Minor

HOOLIGAN

AKA: Drunk, Yob, Bushwhacker

With several pints of lager in the tank, and raring for a brawl, the hooligan is a destructive force of nature. Unlikely to enter the membership of a criminal gang or anything so formal, a hooligan's drunkenness and desire to spar play out more often in pubs, dark streets, and the stands of sports matches. In his mind, the hooligan is having a good time, and anyone who disagrees needs their mind changed with his fists.

PILOT

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 0, **Communication** 1, **Constitution** 2 (Stamina), **Dexterity** 3 (Piloting, Initiative), **Fighting** 0, **Intelligence** 1 (Astronomy, Engineering), **Perception** 2 (Seeing), **Strength** 1, **Willpower** 1

Speed	Fortune	Defense	AR + TOU
13	12	13	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Pistol	+0	2D6+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Jury Rig, Punch It, Speed Demon*

Talents: Pilot (Expert)

Equipment: pistol, personal ship, vac suit

Threat: Minor

PIRATE

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols), **Communication** 0, **Constitution** 1, **Dexterity** 2 (Piloting, Stealth), **Fighting** 2, **Intelligence** 0 (Engineering, Evaluation), **Perception** 1 (Seeing), **Strength** 1 (Intimidation), **Willpower** 1

Speed	Fortune	Defense	AR + TOU
13	22	13	4

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Club	+2	1D6+1
Knife	+2	1D6+2
Pistol	+4	2D6+1

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Knock Prone, Lightning Attack*

Talents: Living on the Fringe (Novice), Quick Reflexes (Novice)

Equipment: flight coveralls, machine tools, makeshift club, pistol, utility knife

Threat: Minor

POLICE DETECTIVE

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols), **Communication** 3 (Bargaining, Investigation), **Constitution** 1, **Dexterity** 2, **Fighting** 2 (Brawling), **Intelligence** 1 (Law), **Perception** 1, **Strength** 0, **Willpower** -1

Speed	Fortune	Defense	AR + TOU
12	11	12	1

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Pistol	+4	2D6+1

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Bad Form, Good Cop/Bad Cop, Take Cover*

Talents: Intrigue (Novice), Contacts (Expert)

Equipment: badge and ID, hand terminal, pistol

Threat: Minor

POLICE OFFICER

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols), **Communication** 2 (Persuasion), **Constitution** 1, **Dexterity** 2 (Driving), **Fighting** 2 (Brawling), **Intelligence** 1 (Law), **Perception** 1, **Strength** 0, **Willpower** 0

Speed	Fortune	Defense	AR + TOU
12	11	12	1

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Pistol	+4	2D6+1
Taser	+2	1D6-3

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Benefit of the Doubt, Good Cop/Bad Cop, Short Burst*

Talents: Intrigue (Novice), Contacts (Novice)

Equipment: badge and ID, hand terminal, pistol, restraints, taser

Threat: Minor

PILOT

AKA: Ace, Space Jockey

Pilots live for the rush of blasting off into the stars or through the clouds. The hum of the engine, the speed and power with just a brush of the controls, and the feeling that you can go anywhere are the lifeblood of many pilots. A pilot's skill is invaluable in every portion of life in the galaxy, from trade, to military, to recreation.

PIRATE

AKA: Ship Raider, Hijacker

Ships hauling materials, fuel, and ice through the outer planets are targets for piracy. Pirates hide in the midst of small planetoids and debris along normal trade routes, waiting to ambush vessels with little to no security or defense. Many are part of independent crews, but some also work as arms of criminal organizations or corrupt corporations. Dealing with pirates out in the Belt was one of the primary duties of the navies of Earth and Mars prior to more recent conflicts, but now piracy is on the rise and patrols are fewer.

POLICE DETECTIVE

AKA: Bent Copper, Burnout

In the more densely populated cities and outposts, it's nearly impossible to tell the dirty cops from the clean ones. Plain-clothes cops and security confuse matters, as they attempt to blend in and "empathize" with the people they want to interview or interrogate. A whole bunch of them will turn the other way if given enough cash. They say once the cop comes out of the uniform, the protective layer guarding them from the reality of crime is gone for good. It certainly seems to be the case that the detectives, who have to wade deepest into the festering mire of crime, come out the dirtiest.

SABOTEUR

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols, Throwing), **Communication** 1 (Disguise), **Constitution** 1 (Running), **Dexterity** 3 (Sleight of Hand, Stealth), **Fighting** 2 (Brawling), **Intelligence** 4 (Demolitions, Engineering, Technology), **Perception** 2, **Strength** 1, **Willpower** 2 (Courage, Self-Discipline)

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
13	16	13	3

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Grenade	+4	3D6
Pistol	+4	2D6+2
Unarmed	+4	1D3+1

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Collateral Damage, Cover Your Tracks, It Wasn't Me*

Talents: Contacts (Novice), Fringer (Expert)

Equipment: kit of tools and disguises, various explosives, pistol, light body armor

Threat: Moderate

POLICE OFFICER

AKA: Copper, Flatfoot

In many cities, a uniform isn't enough to inspire confidence in a beleaguered populace. Victims cannot trust the police to take a crime seriously, because sometimes the police allowed the crime to take place. Clean uniformed cops struggle to keep their heads above the water as the city runs with filth. Too many fear becoming their corrupt superiors, jaded and disillusioned with the job. It is made more complicated by the fact that many police departments are owned and operated by large corporations, each with their own interests.

SABOTEUR

AKA: Detractor, Rebel, Terrorist

Saboteurs walk a fine line. They may have once been activists who turned to more extreme methods. If they work for a cause they truly believe in, they may not pay too much attention to their moral compass. Some see them as assets in corporate conflicts, others as either terrorists or crusaders and freedom fighters against the overreaching powers that be.

SECURITY GUARD

AKA: Bodyguards, Sentinels

The least threatening security guard is the retiree, often a former cop, looking to earn a steady wage. The most threatening version is the grizzled ex-cop or ex-soldier, hired for a reputation of loyalty, violence, and willingness to take a bullet for their employer. Security guards protect a location, specific people, or their valuables. The level to which they're armed and armored depends on their assignment.

SOLDIER

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 3 (Pistols, Rifles), **Communication** 2, **Constitution** 3 (Stamina), **Dexterity** 2, **Fighting** 1 (Brawling), **Intelligence** 1, **Perception** 1 (Hearing), **Strength** 2, **Willpower** 2 (Courage, Morale)

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
12	23	12	5

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Pistol	+5	2D6+1
Rifle	+5	3D6+1

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Covering Fire, Group Tactics, Skirmish, Short Burst, Strafe, Take Cover*

Talents: Command (Novice), Rifle Style (Expert), Tactical Awareness (Expert)

Equipment: light body armor, pistol, rifle, uniform and insignia

Threat: Moderate

SECURITY GUARD

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols), **Communication** 2 (Investigation), **Constitution** 1, **Dexterity** 1, **Fighting** 2 (Brawling, Grappling), **Intelligence** 0, **Perception** 1, **Strength** 2, **Willpower** 1

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
11	11	11	1

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Pistol	+4	2D6+3
Taser	+4	1D6
Unarmed	+4	1D3+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Guardian Angel, Skirmish*

Talents: Protect (Novice), Tactical Awareness (Novice)

Equipment: hand terminal, pistol, scanner, taser, uniform

Threat: Minor

SOLDIER

AKA: Marines, Honor Guards, Mercs

Most soldiers belong to armies or small military detachments, following the orders of a military or government superior. Other soldiers operate independently, acting as hired killers or tacticians for private companies. The soldier in a standing army has access to the resources provided to any of their peers in the same unit. The soldier of fortune has less institutional protection, having to rely on their wits and training instead of a swift request for more reinforcements or supplies. One type of soldier works with legitimacy, the other does not, and the latter may be willing to perform tasks prohibited by established treaties and contracts. In the modern system, the line between the two types of soldiers is increasingly blurred.

SPY

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 1, **Communication** 2 (Deception), **Constitution** 1 (Stamina), **Dexterity** 3 (Sleight of Hand, Stealth), **Fighting** 2, **Intelligence** 2 (Security, Technology), **Perception** 3 (Hearing, Seeing), **Strength** 1, **Willpower** 2 (Self-Discipline)

Speed	Fortune	Defense	AR + TOU
13	11	13	1

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Knife	+1	1D6+1
Pistol	+1	1D6+3
Stun Gun	+1	1D6+3

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Disarm, It Wasn't Me, Take Cover*

Talents: Burglary (Expert), Contacts (Master), Misdirection (Expert)

Equipment: knife, pistol, stun gun, various tool kits and covert gear

Threat: Minor

THUG

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 0 (Pistols), **Communication** 0 (Bargaining, Deception), **Constitution** 2, **Dexterity** 1, **Fighting** 2, **Intelligence** 0, **Perception** 1, **Strength** 2, **Willpower** 0

Speed	Fortune	Defense	AR + Toughness
11	17	11	2

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Knife	+2	1D6+2
Knuckle Dusters	+2	1D3+2
Pistol	+2	2D6+1

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Adrenaline Rush, Benefit of the Doubt, Taunt*

Talents: Contacts (Novice), Intrigue (Novice)

Equipment: knife, knuckle dusters, hand terminal, pistol

Threat: Minor

SPY

AKA: Agent, Operative

Information is one of the most valuable commodities in the system. Governments, corporations, and organizations go through costly measures to obtain data on their allies and enemies, employing those who specialize in obtaining it. Spies have networks of contacts in both government and the criminal underworld. Some follow a code or represent a cause, while others take pride in playing all sides against each other for the highest price.

THUG

AKA: Gang Member, Drug Dealer

Thugs run the gamut from heavies working for organized crime to drug dealers operating out of seedy dens in the outer planets, or opportunists stealing water from reclamation facilities. Typically armed with a handgun to fend off rival criminals, these gangsters are less prone to attacking innocents, knowing that attention from the law is detrimental to business. A thug acts as a valuable source of information if his loyalty is successfully bought, but snitches tend to disappear if their employers and allies discover their duplicity.

VETERAN

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 3 (Pistols, Rifles, Throwing), **Communication** 1 (Leadership), **Constitution** 3 (Running, Stamina), **Dexterity** 3 (Initiative), **Fighting** 3 (Brawling, Light Weapons), **Intelligence** 1 (Demolitions, Tactics), **Perception** 2 (Seeing, Tracking), **Strength** 3 (Climbing), **Willpower** 2 (Courage, Morale)

Speed	Fortune	Defense	AR + Toughness
13	28	13	7

Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage
Grenade	+5	3D6
Pistol	+5	2D6+2
Rifle	+5	3D6+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Blockade, Covering Fire, Group Tactics, Long Burst, Skirmish, Short Burst*

Talents: Command (Expert), Improvisation (Expert), Inspire (Novice), Tactical Awareness (Master)

Equipment: automatic rifle, pistol, grenades, hand terminal, medium body armor, tactical gear

Threat: Major

VETERAN

AKA: Ranking Officer, Elite Soldier, Squad Commander

Veterans have been through the worst of the worst of conflicts and survived to tell of it. If there was an order they couldn't follow, they reinvented it in a way in which they could. They are the elite, the best, and expect no less from the soldiers under their command. Those who don't have a command still find themselves as trainers or retired officers. A few that fall out of their cause find work as mercenaries with a fearsome reputation.

UNUSUAL ADVERSARIES

The following are adversaries most *Expanse* characters should hope not to encounter, as they are creations of the alien protomolecule and therefore extremely dangerous, either because of their own abilities or their potential to infect others with the deadly molecular technology. Game Masters should include these adversaries with care in an *Expanse* game, but they are included here for reference and completeness, should the crew delve into the mysteries of the protomolecule and those looking to harness and weaponize it.

VOMIT ZOMBIE

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 0, **Communication** –2, **Constitution** 5, **Dexterity** -2, **Fighting** 1, **Intelligence** -2, **Perception** -1, **Strength** 2, **Willpower** 1

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
8	0	8	5

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Unarmed	+1	1d3+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Disgorge (2 SP), Knock Prone*

Disgorge (2 SP): A vomit zombie performing the Disgorge stunt vomits brown fluid all over an adjacent target. If the target is a living creature, they are subject to being infected by the protomolecule (see **The Protomolecule** under **Hazards** in this chapter).

Swarm Tactics: If a vomit zombie is attacking with at least two other zombies, it can perform action stunts, including Disgorge, for 1 less SP than normal.

Threat: Moderate

VOMIT ZOMBIE

AKA: protomolecule infected

Those unfortunate enough to become infected with the protomolecule are inevitably consumed by it, becoming stumbling, fevered puppets with the sole purpose of spewing their infectious fluids over any other creatures they encounter before the protomolecule eventually disassembles them into raw material for its work.

PROJECT CALIBAN HYBRID

AKA: Mao protomolecule hybrid

Project Caliban is a secret effort by Mao-Kwikowski Mercantile (parent corporation of Protogen), in cooperation with the Martian government, to deliberately infect test subjects with the protomolecule to create super-soldiers. They at least partially succeeded using human subjects without immune systems, creating a hybrid creature with tremendous strength, durability, and speed, able to survive in vacuum unaided. Without incinerating them, caliban hybrids are very difficult to kill.

Caliban hybrids are humanoid, but tall, with enlarged heads and elongated arms and limbs. Their skin is flat black and covered in armored scales and their eyes glow with a cold blue light associated with protomolecule creations. The hybrids are drawn to sources of radiation, which feed the protomolecule. Their creators implanted caliban hybrids with incendiary devices in their torsos, intended to destroy them if they got out of control, but the adaptability of the protomolecule allowed some of the hybrids to expel these devices without setting them off.

PROJECT CALIBAN HYBRID

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Throwing), **Communication** –2, **Constitution** 7 (Tolerance), **Dexterity** 3, **Fighting** 5, **Intelligence** 1, **Perception** 3, **Strength** 14 (Might), **Willpower** 4

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
13	35	13	12

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Unarmed	+5	1d6+14

SPECIAL FEATURES

Favored Stunts: *Grapple, Skirmish*

Burst of Speed: When a caliban hybrid takes the Run action, it moves at ten times its Speed, rather than double.

Immunity: A caliban hybrid can operate in hard vacuum without a vac suit and suffers no harm from any associated environmental hazards.

Regeneration: The hybrid recovers quickly from any damage that bypasses its Toughness. At the start of each of its turns, roll a die for SP for a special stunt: the caliban can remove an injured condition (2 SP), remove a wounded condition (4 SP), or recover Fortune Points equal to the SP spent in any combination. The hybrid cannot regenerate on the round immediately after taking burning damage, such as from acid or fire.

Signal Jamming: A caliban hybrid can emit a jamming transmission that blocks all communications signals within a kilometer of it.

Talents: Grappling Style (Expert), Overwhelm Style (Master)

Threat: Dire

14. REWARDS

Characters in *The Expanse* Roleplaying Game live exciting, dangerous lives. They face threats to themselves (and potentially all of humanity) that force them to grow and overcome, or else get swept away by the tide of events. Overcoming these challenges brings many rewards, in terms of personal development as well as swelling bank accounts and the respect of System-spanning organizations.

Some rewards carry mechanical benefits. Characters raise their Abilities over time and increase their Income or gain access to special gear when they get paid for a job. They can also gain the perks of membership in various organizations or recognition by one of the major political groups. This can lead to improved reputations and bonuses when dealing with members of those groups (though it may make things more difficult when dealing with opposing groups). Other times, rewards are more intangible and personal. These rewards affect interaction with specific NPCs, or build off of a character's background to continue their personal story. The rate at which the GM hands out both types of rewards can affect the pacing of a campaign.

INCOME

As detailed in **Chapter 2**, Income is an important part of any campaign. Regardless of any other motivations they may have, many characters take on a life of danger and adventure at least partly for the money. Even those characters who aren't in it for the money still need to make ends meet. Because of this, GMs should take care to award Income carefully and fairly. Hand out too few, and the players may feel like their characters have a hard time improving their equipment and meeting their goals. Hand out too much, and many challenges can simply be overcome with Income, reducing the story's tension.

Most adventures should increase the characters' Income scores by +1. GMs may opt to boost the Income increase to +2 in the case of significant windfalls or provide temporary Income (see sidebar). Particularly challenging adventures may call for greater rewards, but GMs should be careful only to do so if the story supports the characters accessing such riches. A better way to improve characters' buying power may be to grant them access to an organization's resources, as described in **Membership** later in this chapter.

TEMPORARY INCOME BONUSES

Instead of increasing characters' scores, GMs may opt to grant a temporary bonus that represents a limited windfall. The character gains a +1 to +3 bonus to the next Income test. If the test succeeds, the bonus is used up and gone. A character has the option of dividing up a temporary Income bonus among different Income tests but, once the test succeeds, that portion of the bonus is gone. Also, any depletion of the character's Income comes off the temporary bonus first and lost bonus points cannot be recovered.

REPUTATION

Rewards don't always need to be in the form of Income or levels. Characters earn renown and reputation through great deeds (or at least the rumor of them). Whether they're called the "Butcher of Anderson Station" after a brutal military assault, or just known as the best private eye in the Belt, characters can leverage their reputation to smooth social interactions or get access to things out of the reach of other people. This can make the difference between being treated as a suspicious outsider or a trusted ally, based on name alone.

Reputation may be tied to a character's specialization or talents. A hotshot racing pilot's reputation for resisting high-gravity maneuvers speaks to her innate toughness, while a glory-hungry political firebrand's reputation for rousing speeches speaks to his skill at reading and molding crowds of supporters. These reputations arise from the characters' actions in play, and usually grant some kind of mechanical benefit when they engage in their area of expertise.

> "Reputation never has very much to do with reality. I could name half a dozen paragons of virtue that are horrible, small-souled, evil people. And some of the best men I know, you'd walk out of the room if you heard their names. No one on the screen is who they are when you breathe their air."
>
> — Chrisjen Avasarala, *Caliban's War*

It's important to remember that reputations are rarely permanent, especially when they run up against conflicting evidence. When the racing pilot loses a widely watched race, or the political firebrand makes an embarrassing gaffe during a live broadcast, their reputations can fade or change entirely. Characters who face this shift in fortunes may not have an easy time reclaiming former titles.

It is also notable that reputations do not need to be entirely deserved, or even true. Some characters pick up unearned reputations, or manage to fool people into thinking they are something they are not. Others carry the burden of others' opinions or even accusations, which can prove difficult to shake.

Interludes offer characters the opportunity to grow or change their reputations, as detailed in the **Interlude Activities** section in **CHAPTER 5**. Characters who choose the Reputation activity during an interlude may work to bolster or diminish a current or nascent honorific. The GM decides when the character has done enough to gain or lose a specific reputation, but anything short of System-wide notoriety shouldn't take more than a few interludes to influence.

HONORIFICS

Reputation is often represented in the titles a character carries. These honorifics are potent, but entirely situational. A champion athlete can't usually count on their notoriety on the field to help sway people to their side in a tense political debate, for example, unless the policy being discussed somehow relates to their sport. The GM has the final say over whether an honorific provides its mechanical benefits within any given situation, though creative applications should always be encouraged and rewarded.

PERSONAL REPUTATION

Characters can invoke their reputation to gain an advantage in a conflict. When they tell someone of their honorific, or impart the story of how they gained it, they gain a psychological edge. In an opposed test involving the character's famed skill or natural ability, opponents suffer a -1 penalty to their opposing roll as they second-guess their actions while up against a known expert.

SUPPORTIVE REPUTATION

Characters also benefit mechanically when others, friends or foes, invoke their honorific in support of their actions. This use of reputation requires someone other than the character to talk up their title or tell convincing stories of the deeds required to earn it to someone outside of the character's party. During the scene this occurs in, the character with the reputation being supported gains a +2 bonus to any roll in which they demonstrate the abilities they're known for. A renowned hacker gets in the zone when the chat room they're in posts nothing but memes about them, while a superlative lover is at their most seductive when approaching a potential one night stand in view of an awed rival.

INSPIRED REPUTATION

A character using their honorific outside of their field of interest or expertise is calling on it for an inspired purpose. Examples include the Bane of the Belt telling stories of their assaults on OPA terrorist cells to win the trust of a group of Martian mercenaries, or a famously loyal bodyguard invoking numerous injuries they received in the line of duty to convince a reluctant

doctor to trust them during a tense triage. Inspired use of reputation grants a character a +1 bonus to the result of the Drama Die when the player rolls it to achieve an aim in which they demonstrate smart use of the honorific.

PASSIVE REPUTATION

Characters generally make passive use of their honorifics more often than active use. When dealing with a group or individual aware of a character's reputation and likely to be affected by it directly, GMs should color the interaction appropriately. A character considered true OPA is likely to be warmly received in a bar near the center of Ceres, but security contractors working for Earth are likely to stop and frisk them with little provocation. In social situations, characters benefit from a free single step attitude shift in the direction suited to their reputation. This step isn't always positive, as some people will dislike or mistrust a given honorific.

SAMPLE HONORIFICS

Honorifics are simple titles or nicknames characters can earn for many reasons. Sample honorifics are provided here, along with alternative options for similar reputations. Game Masters and players may also devise their own honorifics based on the events of a campaign.

THE ABSOLUTE

The character is a paragon of a particular sub-culture or cause, and this honorific is a somewhat tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement. The character embodies their group's preferred traits and is beloved by friends and contemporaries as a champion of their cause. Those opposing that cause or group also accept the character as its champion. They attack the character relentlessly and look for any betrayal of their stated traits to publicly reveal them as a hypocrite.

ALTERNATIVES The Absolute Punk, The Absolute Union, The Absolute Coyo

BANE OF THE BELT

The character's crusade against pirates and OPA terrorists throughout the Belt earns them a reputation as someone who enforces the law in a lawless region. They may ruthlessly pursue those they hunt, or perhaps they merely keep an ear to the comings and goings of criminal groups; regardless, they have earned the gratitude of those who want the Belt to be safe and profitable and the wrath of Belter independence groups.

ALTERNATIVES Bane of Earth, Bane of Mars, Bane of Star Helix

CHAMPION ATHLETE

The character is a star in their chosen sport, having won a notable trophy or title event. They're known throughout the sport itself, as well as potentially across their planet or station. This makes the character both an admired figure and a target for jealous rivals to unseat. Until that happens, they receive recognition for their prowess.

ALTERNATIVES Star Athlete, Champion Go Player, Judo Champion, Doyen of the Catwalk Competition

DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

No matter what the character attempts, they succeed beyond anyone's expectations. Such an unstoppable rise to fame is sure to create rivals and enemies who believe the character's glory is undeserved, and who will work to end their streak of successes.

ALTERNATIVES Sold Their Soul to the Devil, Guardian Angel, Marked by Misfortune, Charmed Life

EXPERT IN THE FIELD

Characters who dedicate themselves to a single professional pursuit or area of study can become recognized for their knowledge and achievements. Such a professional reputation doesn't always translate to name recognition with the general public, but no one who sees them work can doubt their competence. Of course, this expertise can be recognized by rivals in their field who still disagree with their results and want to discredit them.

ALTERNATIVES Technical Genius, Famous Polymath, Oddball Professor

EXTREMELY ONLINE

A character who is extremely online is embedded deeply in the web of information flowing through the solar system. They're recognized for their prowess with technology or media, whether it's for legal or illegal ends, as well as their connection to many divergent streams of information. Such characters attract a wide range of enemies, from memers looking to insult and mislead, to rival hackers and coders who want them exposed and arrested.

ALTERNATIVES Drive Whisperer, Social Media Personality, Luddite, Truth-Teller

LOYAL

The character has a reputation for sticking to their friends no matter what, even when doing so is clearly a bad idea. This reputation can also be earned for dogged service, but only if the character goes above and beyond what's expected of them, taking a metaphorical (or maybe literal) bullet for their employer. Many people respect such loyalty and seek to reward it, but others see it as a trait to be exploited and taken advantage of.

ALTERNATIVES Swore an Oath, Ride or Die, Looks Out for Number One

LUCKY

Things always seem to work out for this character. They may not rise to the pinnacle of greatness like some, but things always seem to turn out well for them, even in the face of overwhelming odds. A lucky character escapes criminal charges due to technicalities, or goes on to win the whole pot after betting their last credits in a card game. Such constant winning breeds resentment, and many people who lose to such a character may go out of their way to bring them low.

ALTERNATIVES Blessed, Hustler, Jinxed

NATURAL APTITUDE

A character admired for their natural aptitude is seen as succeeding due to innate ability, rather than long training. This reputation may take a long time to build up, slowly amassing credence as the character racks up victories against equally- or better-trained opponents. Of course, such a reputation can vanish immediately should the character ever become impaired or lose spectacularly.

ALTERNATIVES Perfect Body Type, Natural Genius, Naturally Deficient

PROTECTOR OF INNOCENTS

The character is known for defending those who cannot defend themselves. Whether it was one small group, a whole town, or an entire station, they are praised for their bravery and righteousness by everyone who has heard of their actions. Due to their fame, characters with this honorific have access to important people in the government and media, but fame can be a two-edged sword. Certain elements of the public are always waiting to bring their heroes low, and whomever it was the character thwarted to gain the reputation is likely to seek revenge.

ALTERNATIVES Hero of Io, The Workers' Shield, The Butcher of Anderson Station

TRUE OPA

There's OPA, and then there's OPA. The character is seen as a loyal member of the more rebellious, potentially violent parts of the Outer Planets Alliance. This earns them the respect—and potentially fear—of Belters sympathetic to the OPA's cause, but security forces and people from the Inner Planets react to them with outright suspicion, if not hatred.

ALTERNATIVES Made Man, Top Secret Security Clearance, Poseur

SUPERLATIVE LOVER

A character known as a superlative lover has a reputation for romantic and sexual prowess, certainly, but is also known for their compassion and generosity in a relationship. Such characters can wave their reputation like a banner to attract people

to them, or wield it more subtly to get just what they want in a conversation. People can become jealous of romantic rivals, though, and go to great lengths to discredit them when they feel jilted or ignored.

ALTERNATIVES Libertine, Soulmate, Abuser, Player

SURVIVOR

The character has faced a litany of disasters and tragedies, but come through the experience unscathed–or at least alive. It seems that no matter what odds they face, whether they ultimately succeed or fail, they'll still find a way through to face the next challenge. Stories of their tenacity tend to impress others and earn their respect, but some will view the character's reputation as a challenge to be overcome.

ALTERNATIVES Unkillable, Walking Disaster, Bullet Magnet

VISIONARY ARTIST

A character honored as a visionary artist has earned fame in a particular medium through great skill and clever marketing. They likely have the attention of wealthy patrons looking to show off their cultural cachet, as well as legions of up and coming artists who want to follow the path they blazed. That said, critics are always eager to proclaim an artistic misstep or lament a descent into comfortable mediocrity. Newer artists are also likely to see an established visionary as the tired status quo they need to rebel against.

ALTERNATIVES Unappreciated Genius, Infamous Taboo Breaker, Hack

MEMBERSHIP

Exceptional individuals in *The Expanse* can act as the fulcrums of important events, but the larger organizations they represent are the levers that truly move history. No one person has the reach and impact of an organization that spans a station, a planet, or the whole solar system.

Characters can obtain membership in organizations based on their backgrounds or professions, but their influence within those organizations depends upon their rank. Game Masters can decide a character's rank based on their accomplishments on behalf of the organization, as well as the length of their tenure and the strength of their reputation. For example, a miner's union will recognize a character's length of time on the job and their work ethic, but they're unlikely to support that character representing the union in political circles if they're gruff and have few friends in the union.

Organizations have great diversity in their structures and reasons for existing. Many seek greater social control for their members, but one may try to achieve this through strict regimentation and collaboration while another is a loose conglomeration of people with similar political philosophies. Such organizations can likewise differ greatly in scope. One may wield sway over a single profession throughout the System but be completely unknown by everyone else, while a local political group may have name recognition in the media but only wield power in a small area.

Characters move through the ranks of organizations only after the GM has awarded them a rank increase and they spend an interlude performing the Advancement activity, as detailed in the **Interlude Activities** section in **CHAPTER 5**.

RANK 1: RECRUIT

Characters newly inducted into an organization's ranks receive a +1 bonus to all rolls related to positive dealings within the ranks. This bonus builds upon any prior good relations with the group, rising to a total +2 bonus for such characters.

New recruits are often kept at arm's length for a while. They are tested and evaluated—sometimes openly, sometimes covertly—before being trusted with greater access to the organization and its inner workings. They rarely know anyone beyond

DIFFERING RANKS

GMs should take care when awarding characters disparate ranks across their respective organizations, or even within a single one. One character may come to wield more power than the others, creating undesirable conflict within the group. Similarly, different groups may come into conflict during the events of the campaign, pitting the characters against one another. Both of these situations can result in great roleplaying opportunities, but groups should consider if they want them to be the focus of play.

As in all such cases, GMs need to consult the players to determine their comfort with such conflicts.

their fellow recruits and immediate superiors. Even at this level, membership brings perks. Characters may access the group's basic resources, including things like provided services, shared credit accounts, or company housing. Political groups may offer access to related people in positions of power, while professional groups may provide certain services at a discount or even for free. Security and military organizations provide many of their members' needs, as well as granting them access to equipment and weapons not readily available to civilians.

It's understood that new recruits often have an outsized sense of their role in an organization. That's why groups limit the support of their new members, thereby limiting the degree to which the organization's resources can be expended just to brag in a bar. New members are expected to prove themselves and earn greater trust. Should they fail to live up to expectations, many organizations won't hesitate to sever ties.

RANK 2: RESPECTED MEMBER

After passing through the trials of their early tenure and gaining the respect of their superiors, characters can rise to the rank of respected member of an organization. Organizations differ greatly in terms of which traits they prize in members, but most make clear what actions characters should undertake to get ahead. When they have finally reached this level, characters gain a +2 bonus to any tests involving other members of their organization at their rank or lower. Respected members also gain a +1 bonus in social interactions with non-members who have reason to respect or fear the organization.

At this rank, characters gain access to their group's full organizational resources, usually including other personnel. They may command subordinates to perform easy encounters on their behalf, or use organization resources to pay recruits to handle encounters of average difficulty. These members are not totally subservient (unless they're members of a cult, or something similar). They work for the respected member in order to gain recognition within the organization, as well as the pay.

"Political favors are how I express affection."

— Chrisjen Avasarala, *Caliban's War*

Finally, full members have access to all of their group's resources, within reason. This includes wealth and equipment, as well as information and access to high-ranking people with connections to the organization. At this rank, most groups expect characters to act in the group's best interests, and not to waste resources on their own goals. Should a character abuse these resources, the leaders of the group may step in.

RANK 3: AUTHORITY FIGURE

The true height of power within an organization, Rank 3 can be difficult to reach unless a character started the group themselves. Members of this rank wield tremendous power over other members of the organization, setting policy and controlling access to the group's resources and personnel. There is no mechanical bonus granted to characters with this level of control; instead, they have full control over the group's priorities and actions. GMs should keep in mind that this control doesn't extend to what members think about the group, only what they must do in order to remain loyal. Characters in a position of authority over a group do gain a +1 bonus in social situations where their control of the group would impress non-members, in addition to the social bonus from Rank 2, for a total of +2.

Authority figures who focus their organization's resources only on their own personal interests or vendettas may find the group's power or influence begins to slip. They may face greater opposition from allies or other members of the group who disagree with its new direction. Should the character continue their selfish course, they could face a full-blown internal coup.

RELATIONSHIPS

Where honorifics describe how the world reacts to a character, and memberships in organizations model that character's connection to large groups of people, relationships represent more intimate connections. Such relationships may be deliberately cultivated or the result of larger forces beyond a character's control, but all relationships are personal and intimate, to some degree.

Relationships should ideally form during play, arising from how a character treats another individual over time. Recurring non-player characters can provide memorable opportunities for roleplaying, and those experiences can be made more enjoyable by basing them on ongoing relationships. From the surly mechanic who regularly works on the crew's ship, to the annoyingly cheery security chief who routinely tosses one of them in the drunk tank, relationships should form naturally and mean something to the NPCs and PCs alike.

In addition to those that grow out of roleplaying, GMs can use relationships as rewards. These relationships are measured by their Bond and Intensity. The Bond is the nature of the relationship between the characters, such as friendship, hatred, or romance. The Intensity is the measure of that relationship's strength.

RELATIONSHIP BOND

A character's relationships can be simple and straightforward, or so complex they defy easy explanation. Both types have something to offer to a game, and so they are worth recording as Bonds. Bonds can exist between friends, bosses and employees, and even bitter rivals. Some characters may honor bonds between themselves and deceased loved ones, carrying on their legacy or resenting them for leaving the character too soon. It is important for both GMs and players to understand the foundation for the Bond between two characters and to track when it has grown and strengthened, or possibly atrophied and been replaced with something new.

Here are some sample Bonds:

I WOULD RISK MY LIFE FOR YOU.

This is a strong Bond that can act as a major driver of the character's decision making. It may represent voluntary devotion built on a romantic relationship, or a contract for bodyguard work.

I WON'T STOP UNTIL YOU ARE DEAD.

This Bond represents a character's burning desire to end another's life. It is a strong Bond, not easily ignored or changed through everyday action.

WE'VE GONE THROUGH HELL TOGETHER.

This Bond represents a character's respect and devotion to a comrade in arms. This could be literal, in the case of the char-

acters surviving a harrowing combat experience, or figurative, in the case of siblings surviving a horribly abusive childhood. Either way, strong bonds of trust and interdependence have been forged between them.

I TRUST YOU TO BE MY CONSCIENCE.

The PC has created a dependency on another, trusting that person to make important decisions for them due to what they see as a deficiency in themselves. This Bond implies a certain level of devotion to the other person, though it can be easily exploited if the character relies too much upon it.

YOU ARE SOMEONE I LOVE AND RESPECT, BUT WE CAN NEVER BE TOGETHER IN THE WAY I WANT.

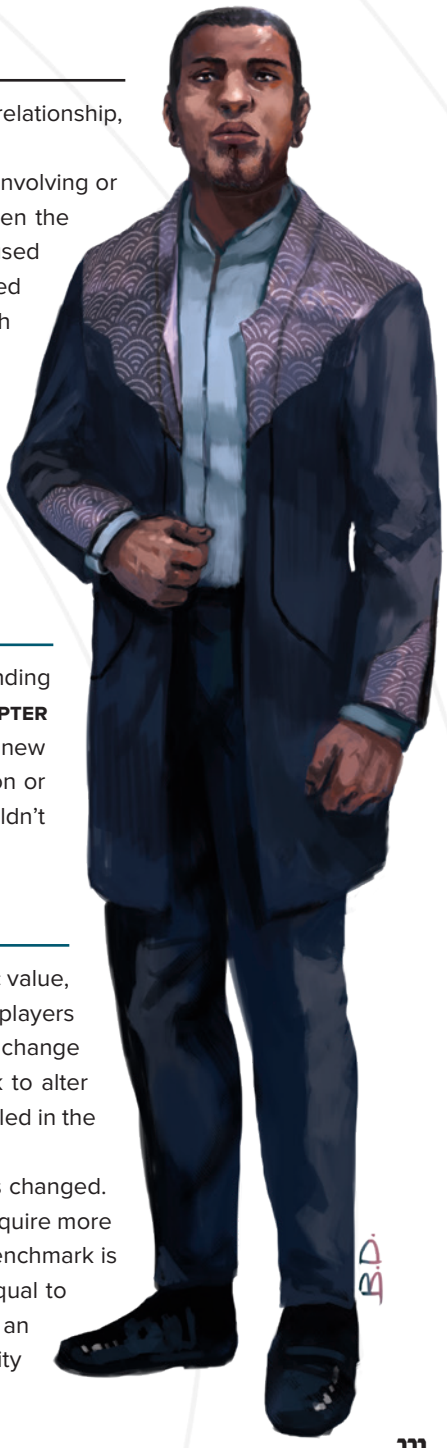
This Bond represents a quiet yearning for something the character knows cannot be. It may be known or unknown to the subject of their desire, but the character likely doesn't wish to acknowledge the gap between what they want and what they have, lest they lose even that.

RELATIONSHIP INTENSITY

Relationship Intensity is measured with a rating of 1 to 5, with 1 being a new but significant relationship, and 5 being the kind of Bond characters experience only once in their lifetime.

For each rank of Intensity, a character gets a free stunt point they can use only for stunts involving or connected to the relationship. These SP can only be spent once per session, and only when the character's actions are directly motivated by the relationship. Intensity stunt points can be used on any test, however, not just when the player rolls doubles. The Intensity SP can be combined with SP generated by rolling doubles. Intensity stunt points are available at the start of each game session, though GMs can rule that they refresh after a particularly cathartic interlude.

EXAMPLE *Ade Akintola has the relationship Bond "You are like one of my little sisters" with fellow crewmate Nico Velez, with an Intensity of 2. Ade gains up to 2 stunt points per adventure from drawing upon this Bond in any situation where he is taking action involving treating Nico like his younger sister, from helping her out to trying to protect her, but he cannot use these SP for tests that don't concern or involve Nico in some way.*



ADDING RELATIONSHIPS

With the GM's permission, characters may attempt to forge a new Bond with someone by spending an interlude performing the Relating activity, found in the **Interlude Activities** section in **CHAPTER 5**. This activity requires the characters to have an existing relationship on which to build. A new relationship should start at Intensity 1, though GMs may ask for a Communication (Expression or Seduction) test for particularly powerful Bonds to start at Intensity 2. New relationships shouldn't start any higher, as such Intensity requires time to grow and deepen.

CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

The nature of a Bond can change as a relationship changes over time. Intensity is not a static value, waxing and waning as characters grow closer or further apart in their daily lives. GMs and players should review a character's relationships whenever they gain a level, to decide whether to change the type of Bonds they have, and the Intensity of each. Characters may also actively work to alter their existing Relationships by spending an interlude performing the Relating activity, as detailed in the **Interlude Activities** section in **CHAPTER 5**.

During this activity, the player and the GM should collaborate on how the relationship has changed. GMs may require only a single interlude to slightly change the wording of a Bond, but may require more for a greater change. Changing Intensity is likewise up to the GM's discretion, but a good benchmark is to require the character to spend a number of interludes performing the Relating activity equal to the level of Intensity they desire, either up or down one step. For example, a character with an Intensity 2 relationship would need to spend 3 interludes working on it to increase the Intensity to 3, but only a single interlude to reduce the Intensity to 1.

15. THE EXPANSE SERIES

A roleplaying game series shares much in common with a serial television series, both being collections of short stories that tell a larger story. **Chapter 12** is full of information on how to run an individual adventure, but this chapter offers advice on how to design an *Expanse* series. It examines many of the themes found in *The Expanse* and how to bring them into your series. It also explores possible starting points for your series, such as at what point during the novels the series takes place and how that timing affects your story. Finally, it covers an array of series frameworks that describe many of the different settings or types of stories that may be told in the universe of *The Expanse*–everything from independent merchants to a military special ops team to OPA rebels.

PLANNING THE SERIES

A well thought out and carefully planned series can not only make a GM's job easier but also can be more fun for the players. Of course, even the most carefully planned-out series is going to need to be flexible enough to survive contact with the players. The GM must be ready to adapt and change the story based on the actions of the players. Rather than detailing every aspect of a series in advance, an overarching theme and storyline allow the GM to more easily adapt the story when the players make unpredictable choices or go in unexpected directions. With a solid theme and story in mind, the GM can react to just about anything and keep the story on track. Involving the players in the initial outline of the series can also help the GM in crafting a series the players are going to enjoy. After all, if the players aren't enjoying the story the series isn't going to last for long.

CONSULTING PLAYERS

When you begin planning an ongoing *Expanse* series, you should discuss with the players what sorts of stories are of interest to them. You may even want to play through a short, one-shot adventure with the players, such as the sample adventure in this book. This experience can give the players a better understanding of how the game works, the universe, and the types of characters they enjoy playing. Afterwards, you can discuss what they would like to see in an ongoing series. Once you begin playing, the details of the stories are going to be in your hands. This is your chance to let the players be a part of the creative process.

Think of a few things that you want to ask your players. What about *The Expanse* universe interests the players? What aspects of science fiction intrigue them? What do they like and dislike about *The Expanse*? How do they see their characters working together and what are their goals? Take the answers to these questions into account when designing your series and you'll end up creating something that is more fun and memorable for everyone. This sort of collaboration between the GM and the players is one of the wonderful aspects of roleplaying games, so make sure to take advantage of the opportunity.

Take the time to discuss the series styles and formats described in the following sections. Pay attention to what appeals to the players and, just as importantly, what they don't like. If the players have already created characters, find out more about each character's history and goals, and discuss how the character can fit into the story. If they haven't created characters yet, find out what kinds of characters they want to play. Work with the players so that they make characters that not only fit in with the story but relate to one another. Pay close attention to this because if a player creates a character that doesn't fit in with the series framework you have decided upon, or with the other characters in the group, that player isn't going to have fun, or worse, they may become disruptive. If the group decides they want to be a group of free traders, they will want to make sure they have all aspects of a ship's crew covered: a pilot, a mechanic, a gunner, and maybe an ex-marine or another type capable of hand-to-hand combat. Who is going to negotiate with merchants, or with patrons? Who intimidates the pirates that are threatening to blow up the ship? If everyone is the group wants to play a pilot, or everyone wants to play a con artist, you might want to consider a different series framework. Of course, the most important thing is to make sure that everyone enjoys the story you intend to tell together.

THEMES

The Expanse explores a variety of themes which can be reflected in your series. Before you begin planning your series, consider the type of story you want to tell in the context of these themes. A series might have a recurring theme that presents itself time and time again, but individual adventures might have their own themes. The themes described here are a few presented and explored in *The Expanse* novels, but feel free to create and explore your own.

THE ARC OF HISTORY

Martin Luther King Jr. paraphrasing Theodore Parker said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." In the universe of *The Expanse*, one could say, "The arc of history is long, and leads toward the stars." Some events forever alter the course of history, and some leave an indelible mark on humanity. Gutenberg's printing press, World Wars I and II (or perhaps, more importantly, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), the Moon landing, the colonization of Mars, and the invention of the Epstein Drive are all events that left their marks and set humanity on a new path. The discovery of the protomolecule is the next step in that arc. A series featuring this theme might revolve around humanity's constant march toward to the stars: new discoveries, taking wild risks, and momentous events define this theme. Also, consider the permanent impact of these events on humans and the way that they change the way we act and think.

ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Newton's Third Law of Motion, "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction," applies to the course of history as well as physics. We see time and time again that the choices made by Holden and the crew of the *Rocinante* have consequences, sometimes far outreaching their initial intentions. We witness how one person can change the course of humanity. Holden's transmission before being captured by the MCRN *Donnager* sends Earth and Mars to the brink of war. While certainly not his intent, it is a repercussion of his action. Miller's decision, even compulsion, to find and help Julie Mao ultimately saves Earth and tens of billions of people.

The solar system is a big place, but every action the players take can have an impact even on a faraway moon or station. The failure of a ship carrying ice or foodstuffs to arrive on time might lead to deaths on a distant station. As a result, a starving family might resort to piracy, leading to the loss of another vital shipment. On and on this goes in a never-ending cycle. A series that revolves around this theme tells stories that require the characters to make hard choices that have repercussions throughout the solar system. The concept of and system for the Churn presented in **CHAPTER 12** are intended to help reinforce this theme in the game.

THE WAY THROUGH IS FORWARD, NOT BACKWARDS

Once committed to a course of action, the only thing to do is to see it through. Trying to reverse course almost always leads to disaster. Stories focusing on this theme require the characters to push forward to find their way out of a problem. New ideas and new solutions are required to save the day. This concept is reflected in *The Expanse* in that, as a species, humans must grow and evolve, socially and perhaps even physically, if we are to survive in space. This change is perhaps most clearly reflected in humans who are born and raised in the Belt and the Outer Planets. Belters cannot return to the planets that birthed their parents and grandparents. They must continually adapt to the new environments in which they live if they are going to survive. They can never go back. This theme is reflected over and over in the story of *Leviathan Wakes*. Holden and his crew are continually propelled forward, especially in the first part of the novel. They leave the *Canterbury* on board the Knight, are rescued by the *Donnager*, and finally find their home in the *Rocinante*. At no point can they go back; they must always press onward.

PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE OF BOTH GREAT AND TERRIBLE THINGS

From Miller to Holden and crew to Protogen, *The Expanse* reveals the dichotomy of the human psyche. Individual people are capable of great acts of kindness and generosity and yet also terrible acts of brutality and horror. Fred Johnson is a hero and a leader to many of the people of Tycho Station, but he is also the "Butcher of Anderson Station." This conflict of history and purpose can be hard to reconcile, yet duality is true of every human being. Stories that involve this theme might require the characters to take what seem to be terrible actions for the better good, or look to redeem wrongful actions taken in the past.

LOVE AND SACRIFICE

Love is a powerful force in *The Expanse* and sacrifice is often necessary for those who choose to make their home in the coldness of space. Miller pursues Julie Mao across the solar system largely because he is in love with her, though it takes him a while to realize it. Then in the end, he sacrifices himself, at least in part, because of his love for her. These are both powerful themes that you can employ in your stories. Love can propel people to the stars; love of family, a spouse, children, or even a country, planet, or ideal can drive people to perform great acts of heroism. Just surviving in the outer planets often requires sacrifice. Creature comforts that might be considered common on Earth are often scarce or even impossible to come by. The captain of every spaceship and commander of every station knows that sacrifice is often necessary for the safety of the crew.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

A fleet of ships can win a battle, but it is the knowledge and expertise of a good leader that wins the war. The pursuit of knowledge drives humankind into space. Governments seek knowledge of their enemies' secrets. Even a seemingly benign discovery, such as how to fertilize a soybean plant so that it produces more food, impacts how far and how fast humanity expands into the solar system. Of course, the discovery of the Epstein Drive changed the course of humanity for all time. So did efforts to unlock the secrets of the protomolecule. Everyone from politicians and military commanders to scientists and independent merchants understands the power of knowledge. This theme can show up in almost any kind of series.

STARTING POINTS

The setting described in this book takes place just after the events of *Leviathan Wakes*, but that doesn't mean you have to set your story at that point. This rulebook focuses on that time and setting but this is your game so choose the time that is most comfortable for you and when you want to tell a story. You could go back to the beginning of *Leviathan Wakes* and tell a story that runs parallel to the adventures of the crew of the *Rocinante* or even have your players' characters take their place. Alternately, if you prefer, you could run a game set in the period of the later novels or a time much earlier, when humanity is first reaching for the planets. This book doesn't provide source material for either of these possibilities (though you can expect to see later history covered in future *Expanse* RPG books) but that shouldn't prevent you from doing what you want.

EARLY HISTORY

As shown in **CHAPTER 7**, the early history of *The Expanse* is ripe with campaign and adventure possibilities. The novellas "Drive" and "The Butcher of Anderson Station" offer insights into history before *Leviathan Wakes*.

The early expansion and colonization of the Belt offers a lot of potential stories and adventures. Rival companies vie for influence and control. Newly established colonies in the outer planets smuggle the goods and supplies needed to survive. The early days of the expansion from Earth and Mars are much like the Wild West as humanity spreads out into the solar system in search a new and better life—anything to escape the overpopulated cities of Earth.

The novella "The Churn" describes the crime-ridden, overpopulated city of Baltimore. Crime bosses and their "families" smuggle weapons and illegal cybernetic implants while engaging in all-out war with the authorities. Players could be part of one of the underground smuggling operations or the desperate authorities trying to stem the tide of crime.

Corporations vie for power and influence as humanity reaches out to colonize asteroids, moons, and planetoids throughout the solar system. Early pirates prey on ships that travel the vast, empty spaces between worlds. Most of the early pirates are essentially privateers in the employ of corporations, using the greedy and morally compromised to do their dirty work for them.

The Outer Planets Alliance (OPA) springs from the wants and needs of the citizens of the planets beyond Earth and Mars. The Belters find themselves perilously close to slavery since they are dependent on resources controlled by Earth. The characters could be early members of the OPA struggling to keep the people of the Belt free and dreaming of a day when they control their own destinies. "The Butcher of Anderson Station" is a perfect example of the conflict between the OPA and the inner planets.

AFTER *LEVIATHAN WAKES*

This period is the default setting for *The Expanse* roleplaying game. We pick up right after Eros crashes into Venus. The MCR and UN begin repositioning their ships throughout the system. The MCR and UN split control of the planetoid with marines on the ground and naval ships hovering overhead, just waiting for a spark that will ignite the powder keg of war.

The series frameworks described in the next section assume a starting point at this time. Many of them are easily adaptable to other starting points. The solar system is on a razor's edge, which provides ample material for stories of any kind.

FUTURE STORIES

Future supplements for *The Expanse* will explore the events of *Caliban's War* and beyond, but don't let that limit when you set your stories. The struggle for power continues as humanity travels out into the stars. For the time being, stories in this time are up to the devices of the GM. You could use the novels as inspiration, telling stories that run parallel to those in the books, or the characters could take the place of the protagonists in those novels but with the opportunity to take the story in their own direction. You could also choose to take a completely different course with the story.

Perhaps the protomolecule does something completely different after landing on Venus. Maybe it creates a city on Venus inhabitable by humans. It could create a gate that allows aliens to arrive that could threaten Earth, Mars,and the Outer Planets. Perhaps these aliens are friendly, at least at first, but as they spread into the solar system they pose a more existential threat to humanity. You could go in a more fantastic direction, and the gate could lead to alternate dimensions or timelines. Or, the protomolecule could create a race of mutant humans which could lead to a sci-fi/superhero hybrid story.

SERIES FRAMEWORKS

The Expanse offers a lot of possibilities for stories and adventures. This section looks at some possible series frameworks, ranging from freelancers scrounging to make enough money to keep their ship running, to corporate spies trying to steal Mao-Kwikowski Corporation's latest R&D project, to OPA rebels fighting for equality in the outer planets. Or maybe the characters start out as political operatives or spies who discover another hidden cache of the protomolecule. *The Expanse* is an incredibly rich setting offering many possible stories to tell. Each section has a sidebar that details several "story hooks" for each framework. Feel free to use what you find here, mix and match, or come up with something original to create your own series.

FREELANCER STORY HOOKS

These are a few "story hooks" you can use to launch a group of freelancers into an adventure.

SALVAGE

UN law states that any salvaged ship or equipment becomes the property of those who recover it. The crew could come across an abandoned ship and board it to claim any cargo or other equipment they can salvage. Of course, such a ship might be a lure set by pirates or booby-trapped by those forced to abandon it. Perhaps the communications systems are down, and there are survivors on board or someone else has their eye on the opportunity. Clues discovered on a salvaged ship could point to different mysteries and lead to many later adventures.

VIP PASSENGER

The crew takes on a guest who has special needs, placing hardships on the ship or crew. Maybe the passenger cannot handle high-g maneuvers, or maybe they are the privileged child of a corporate CEO, a popular entertainer or journalist, or even a powerful politician. Each of these might create different problems for the crew.

PRECIOUS CARGO

The crew is hired to transport cargo that is especially delicate or has special requirements (must remain at low-g or at a particular temperature). They could also be shipping perishable food or medicine that is vital to a station in the outer planets. The possibilities are endless. Of course, it's also possible that there are others out there, pirates or the OPA, who want to get their hands on the cargo. The crew must protect their charge and keep it safe if they're going to get paid.

THE SCOOP

A freelancer journalist learns of an incredible scoop somewhere in the outer planets: an eyewitness to the horrors of Eros, a personal interview with Fred Johnson, or a scientist who claims to know more about the nature of the protomolecule, for example. The problem is the contact insists on meeting in the outer planets. Maybe someone doesn't want the journalist to make the meeting.

ILLICIT GOODS

The crew is hired to deliver a cargo crate to one of the outer planets, possibly even a secret location, no questions asked. Complications occur when they learn that their original contact has turned up dead and the Martian Navy is looking for a crate matching the description of the one in the crew's hold. Do they open it? If so, what do they find inside?

FREELANCER SERIES

The solar system offers incredible opportunities for those brave enough to reach for them. Most of the tens of billions of humans are content to live their lives in the relative safety of the planet or even asteroid where they are born. Many of the residents of the Outer Planets live, grow old, and die on the same station, never venturing out into space. Only the most daring ever venture beyond the metal shell, dome, or atmosphere that keeps them safe. Those who dare to risk the void often gather together for safety as teams of explorers or the crew of a ship.

In this series framework, the characters are those bold enough to travel out into space to seek their fortunes. They may be traders, smugglers, explorers, itinerant wanderers, or maybe even a group of traveling musicians or entertainers. They trek around the Outer Planets from station to asteroid to station conducting their business and seeking their fortune, or at least a decent living. Adventure often arises when they become embroiled in local events. A mysterious stranger might seek passage on their ship, or they might get caught up in a feud between rival gangs, or become involved in a murder investigation. They may arrive just in time to save a small outpost from pirates, or they might be enlisted in a mercy mission to deliver life-saving medicines.

Adventures in a freelancer series can share a lot in common with adventures in a military series except the characters have more independence. No one is ordering them to undertake a mission; rather, they are doing it for profit or out of the goodness of their hearts. They are subject to the laws of the local stations or governments, but otherwise, they can do as they wish, forging their own destinies. With the exception of certain areas of space declared off-limits by a government, there is no limit to where they can travel in search of riches and adventure. They can search the asteroid belt for unclaimed mineral riches, smuggle illegal implants, sell information about Martian shipping lanes to the OPA on Tycho Station, or visit the bars, clubs, and gambling houses on Ceres.

This series framework very much follows the format of the "traditional" space adventure story. A group sets out to the stars in search of adventure and opportunity. Each of the characters likely has their own reasons and motivation for leaving their previous life behind and heading out into space. Motivations might include

profit, excitement, boredom, or even escape from a dark past. Virtually any character profession or background can fit into this framework, provided they have a reason to travel together.

FREE TRADERS

This framework can begin with the characters as the crew of a small ship, traveling from port to port buying and selling goods and taking on passengers. The crew of the ship could be just the characters and maybe a supporting NPC or two to fill out necessary shipboard positions. Or, on a larger ship, the characters could represent just a fraction of the crew. This could lead to stories involving the interactions of the crew, with the characters, with each other, and with outsiders.

The makeup of the characters and crew impacts how they interact with outsiders and potential employers. If the entire crew are Martian, you can expect there to be friction or even violence when dealing with Earthers. A crew of mixed origins may be comfortable dealing with anyone–as long as they're willing to pay.

Free traders face many dangers and more wind up dead–freezing or suffocating in the cold vacuum of space, or killed by marauding pirates–than ever attain the fortune they seek. Keeping a ship running is an expensive prospect, and many find themselves broke, homeless, or stranded on one of the many stations in the Outer Planets. Of course, this could form the springboard for a new series of adventures as the desperate crew is willing to take any contract offered, no matter how dangerous, to earn enough money to get their ship up and running again (or out of hock from wherever it is docked).

This series can focus on the crew's journey from port to port and the adventures they encounter along the way, or perhaps the crew gets caught up in the conflict between Mars, Earth, and the Outer Planets Alliance. The threat of war creates many opportunities for freelancers willing to take risks, but it also creates a lot of new dangers. Can they maintain their independence or do they ally themselves with a faction? Each creates its own set of opportunities and obstacles. In the end, it is up to the crew to forge their own destiny.

SMUGGLERS

Smuggling takes many forms in the outer planets. Illegal goods, drugs, pirated data, contraband technology, even people are smuggled throughout the system. Smugglers usually pose as free traders, and in fact, much of their business can often be legitimate. Many smuggling ships do have hidden compartments built into their cargo holds but knowing who to bribe and how to avoid patrols is more important. If customs boards your ship you're probably doing it wrong, though even the best get boarded from time to time.

A smuggler series is much the same as a free trader series with a little more moral flexibility amongst the characters. The crew might be the Robin Hoods of the outer planets–smuggling ice or medical supplies to Belters in need. They might be smugglers for a particular faction, such as the OPA, or they might work for a crime syndicate, smuggling drugs and illegal tech from Earth to the outer planets.

JOURNALISTS

Remarkably, journalists still have a lot of freedom in *The Expanse*, and they and their teams can be found tracking down stories throughout the inner and outer planets. A player group could consist of an entire journalistic team seeking scoops and fame amongst the asteroids. A team could consist of a writer/reporter, a cameraperson, a technician, security, and a producer. They could easily become involved in capers of all types as they pursue a story. Journalists could even get caught up in political entanglements and be hired by or become the inadvertent pawns of various governments.

MILITARY SERIES

The solar system in *The Expanse* has been kept safe for over a century by the militaries of Mars and Earth. Pirates lurk behind asteroids waiting to ambush innocent free traders, OPA terrorists threaten civilian transports, and out-of-date cargo haulers break down in between ports, leaving them adrift. However, the EMCN (Earth-Mars Coalition Navy) and the Marine Corps (Martian and United Nations) have been there to protect them, keep the peace, and rescue those in need.

At the end of *Leviathan Wakes*, everything changes.

Mars and Earth stand at the brink of mutual annihilation. Naval ships hover over Ganymede, the garden of the outer planets, with rail guns and missiles aimed at one another. Pirates and other ne'er-do-wells are quick to take advantage of the distraction and shipping becomes more dangerous than it has been in living memory. The OPA is emboldened and begins amassing ships for its own navy, nothing to compare to the might of Earth and Mars, but enough to be a thorn in their sides.

A military series framework might involve Earth, Mars, or even the OPA. The characters can be active military, or they might be part of a paramilitary, mercenaries or even private security. A military series might cross over into a political series since the military and political organizations are very much intertwined. The characters travel throughout the solar system, dealing with new threats as they arise, all in service to their chosen faction.

MILITARY STORY HOOKS

The military can be found almost anywhere in the solar system conducting a wide array of operations. These are just a few suggestions for the possible missions a unit might be assigned to undertake.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Military units are often called upon to rescue people from a variety of disasters from drive failures to asteroid collisions and more. They also search for missing ships, especially if someone important was on board. Rescue missions could easily lead to additional adventures.

PIRATE PATROL

Pirates are found throughout the Belt and Outer Planets, preying on civilian transports and cargo ships. A large part of the military's duty is to protect the shipping lanes from pirates. Hunting for pirates could lead to other adventures. The crew could stumble across a hidden space station somewhere in the Belt, or maybe a group of pirates steals a cargo that is of particular value or kidnapps an important person. Not every mission can be solved with guns. The kidnapping of a high-ranking politician or stolen medical supplies are problems that can't be solved with a salvo of missiles.

ESCORT DUTY

A naval ship might be assigned to escort an important diplomat, or a group of marines might be an honor guard for a UN envoy on Mars. The unit may have to fend off an assassination attempt or protect their ship from pirates or other corporate rivals.

GUARD DUTY

Marines and various private security firms keep the peace on stations throughout the solar system. They might be ordered to protect an individual, a weapons depot or a science lab, or even keep the peace on a station such as Ceres or Ganymede. They must do what they can to keep their charge safe. If they fail, the unit may find themselves trying to solve the murder of the person in their charge or track down important goods that were stolen out from under their noses.

SUPPRESS REBELLION

Small uprisings and protests are common in the Belt, usually instigated by OPA agitators. However, from time to time, a station goes into full revolt, usually over shortages or medical supplies. The infamous Anderson Station was one such revolt. The characters are assigned to quell an uprising that threatens to become a full-scale rebellion. Successfully halting the rebellion might lead to other stories. The characters might learn that the ringleaders are part of a larger network of conspirators or that a corporation was backing the insurrection to cover nefarious activities. Like the Anderson Station incident, they might also find themselves on the wrong side of a dispute, if the rebels have legitimate grievances the brass or the government-types can't be bothered to hear.

ASSEMBLING A UNIT

Military characters can be of any concept though a governmental military unit will likely all be of the same origin: Earther, Martian, or Belter. There are, of course, exceptions–an Earther ex-pat might end up serving in the Martian military or a frustrated Martian might join the OPA. The Belters don't technically have their own official military but they do operate several paramilitary groups, and they are in the early stages of forming their own navy.

A good military unit has a "combined arms" approach with a mix of professions: brawlers and soldiers to handle combat, a commander to lead the unit, a pilot to fly the ship, mechanics and technicians to keep the ship in good repair, medics to patch up the wounded, and even chaplains to tend to religious needs. Some units might include a diplomat, though that role is often filled by the commander. Scientists are sometimes embedded in military units to gather information about unexplored regions of the solar system. In small units, some of the characters may do double- or even triple-duty to fill out the necessary roles. All the members of the unit must work together to accomplish a mission.

THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

Members of a military unit, even a mercenary company, are subject to the chain of command. Military groups have superiors that they have to report to and they are expected to follow orders. At times, they may be given some leeway in how they perform their duties, but they are always accountable for their actions. They may even be issued orders they don't agree with, which may lead to a hard decision: obey the orders or violate them and face a court martial and possibly prison time.

Characters who find themselves unable to reconcile their consciences with the orders they receive may find themselves transitioning from a military series to a freelancer series. An excellent starting point, or prelude adventure, for a freelancer series could involve a military unit given orders they refuse to follow. They might be ordered to massacre civilians or commit some other atrocity. This could be compounded if they discover their commanding officer isn't issuing the orders on behalf of their government but to further the goals of a corporation or other private entity.

The other thing to consider with a military series is the likelihood some characters will outrank others. Some players may chafe at having another player's character outrank them. If you feel having players of different ranks will be an issue you have a couple of options. You can make all the characters of the same rank and have an NPC as the unit leader, or you can run a different kind of series.

NAVY

The Eros Incident has created a schism in the Earth Mars Coalition Navy (EMCN) which kept watch over the solar systemfor over 100 years. After the Eros incident, the EMCN split into the United Nations Navy (UNN) and the Martian Congressional Republic Navy (MCRN), which now face off over Ganymede. Before the Eros Incident, navies mostly performed pirate patrol, keeping the space lanes safe for shipping. They also made occasional inspections of merchant ships, looking for smuggled cargo.

Characters in a naval series could be the crew of a relatively small, multi-purpose ship like the *Rocinante* (originally the *Tachi*). After the events of *Leviathan Wakes*, most naval ships are redeployed throughout the solar system to protect Earth and Mars interests, their original pirate-hunting and protection duties on hold, though a few remain to protect the most important shipping lines. The characters' ship might be part of the Ganymede standoff, or they may be assigned to pirate hunting, or maybe a secret spying or scouting mission to a moon of one of the outer planets.

MARINES

The UN Marine Corps and the Martian Marine Corps can be found on board naval ships throughout the solar system. Marines also perform guard duty and patrols in sensitive and high-risk locations. They are always the first on the ground (or onto an enemy ship) in any combat situation and are often called upon to perform highly dangerous tasks. Marines also perform guard duty for important diplomats and envoys when they travel in a dangerous region.

A marine series could easily cross over with another series. A few marines could be assigned to protect a high-level diplomat, or assigned to a naval corvette. They might be stationed on Ganymede, or another Mars/Earth contested outpost, staring across a no-man's-land of barren rock at a unit of opposing marines. If you choose to begin your series at the start of *Caliban's War*, the characters could be UN survivors of the attack by the protomolecule hybrid. Maybe there's another hybrid on another station or outpost and the characters are the only survivors of the attack.

MERCENARIES

Mercenaries are used throughout the inner words and outer planets for a wide variety of purposes. They are employed by almost every conceivable faction in *The Expanse* and can serve as everything from corporate security to private armies.

Some mercenaries remain in the employ of a single government, organization, or corporation for years, while others change employers weekly. Companies range from small units of a dozen or fewer members up to paramilitary outfits with hundreds or even thousands of members and dozens of ships.

A series framework based around mercenaries could easily fall under the freelancer series, but it is included here because of its inherent military structure. Following the events of *Leviathan Wakes*, mercenary units are hired to undertake roles traditionally performed by the Navy such as pirate-hunting and shipping lane patrol. Mercenaries might be hired to protect an important shipment or personage, or even deliver a valuable cargo.

PRIVATE SECURITY

Many stations and corporations in the outer planets employ private security firms for law enforcement and protection. Star Helix Security, which polices Ceres Station among others, is one of many such organizations. Star Helix is probably one of the larger private security firms, but hundreds more exist–some as small as a dozen people with a single specialized contract and others that number in the hundreds and thousands of employees with contracts throughout the inner and outer planets.

It is sometimes hard to differentiate between a private security firm and a mercenary group, and in fact, they are sometimes one and the same. Private security firms tend to focus more on law enforcement and security for a base or even a single building. Mercenaries tend to undertake more active operations such as occupying a moon or asteroid or to suppress a riot or rebellion, but the lines often blur, especially when there's money to be made.

POLITICAL SERIES

Politics touches upon every aspect of the lives of every one of the tens of billions of people in *The Expanse*. Even miners and researchers in the furthest reaches of the system are affected by the political machinations of Earth, Mars, and the OPA. This series framework allows players to explore the dangerous world of interplanetary politics. In a political series, the story focuses more on intrigue and investigation than combat, though that doesn't mean that there won't be moments of action and terror. Political intrigue in *The Expanse* can be fraught with danger.

A political series might focus on agents of one of the planetary governments trying to discover what the other knows about the protomolecule. Political operatives must deal with all sorts of threats. One day they may be investigating rumors of illegal experiments conducted in the outer planets: the next they might be tracking down the base of a new group of pirates using suspiciously advanced ships.

Outside the occasional assassination attempt, a political series isn't likely to have a lot of action. To give your players the opportunity to shoot some bad guys, you could consider running a political series in parallel with another series. This is discussed further under **Parallel Series**, following.

CHAPTERS 8–11 of this book provide detailed information about Earth, Mars, the Belt, and the Outer Planets. The following focuses more on how the characters might be involved with these factions.

EARTH AND MARS

Not long ago, the primary concerns of both Earth and Mars were pirates and OPA terrorists, but after the Eros incident, the two superpowers are focused on each other. Spies from both sides wage a covert war to gain the upper hand. Shadow organizations exist within governments as factions and compete to implement their own plans. On Earth, many, such as Deputy Undersecretary of Executive Administration Chrisjen Avasarala, struggle to learn all they can about the protomolecule while simultaneously trying to avert war between Earth and Mars. Meanwhile, other factions plot to start a war and use the protomolecule for their own purposes.

The United Nations and the Martian Congressional Republic still don't fully recognize the Outer Planets Alliance as an independent political group. However, Fred Johnson's and the OPA's assistance during the Eros Incident earned Johnson a seat at the table in interstellar politics.

A series made up entirely of politicians might not make for a particularly exciting story (see the section on **Parallel Series**), but characters could certainly be the agents of high ranking officials or even spies and secret agents in service to either the military or civilian governments. This series could involve agents in service to one of the many factions within a government vying for power. Or, they could be undercover on Ganymede, spying on the opposing side and trying to determine fleet make-ups and numbers of marines on the planet.

THE OUTER PLANETS ALLIANCE

With renewed conflict between Earth and Mars, the OPA, under Fred Johnson, has seized its first chance at legitimacy. Possession of the last sample of protomolecule has given Johnson the leverage he needs to open official negotiations with the UN and the MCR. Also, unbeknownst to Earth, the OPA has control over the vast number of nuclear missiles launched at Eros. The OPA finally has the leverage to get a seat at the table with the inner planets. How they chose to use that seat is yet to be seen.

Since the Martian and Earth Navies are busy maneuvering around one another, the OPA is forced to pick up the slack out in the Belt, protecting shipping from pirates and conducting search-and-rescue operations. Fred Johnson, operating out of Tycho Station, has begun hiring freelancers willing to take on the operations forsaken by Earth and Mars, a good connection between a political-themed series and a freelancer series (previously).

AGENTS

Government employees are sometimes more than what they seem. Low-level functionaries are often cover identities for spies. The characters might be spies posing as low-ranking government employees or as other menial positions able to go unnoticed by most. Both the UN and MCR are scrambling to know what the other side knows, and both sides are using every resource at their disposal.

DIPLOMAT & ATTACHÉS

The characters might be part of a diplomatic team dealing with territorial disputes throughout the Belt and outer planets. The deepening schism between Earth and Mars has made such disputes more common, especially in locations like Ganymede that produce food and other supplies vital to the system.

Politicians regularly dispatch teams of attachés (sometimes embedded with agents) to political hotspots throughout the system. They meet with their counterparts from different governments, share information, and try to keep war at bay. Earth and Mars are old hat at this game, with the OPA being the new kids on the block. Their attachés and representatives tend to be unskilled at the game of politics and have a tendency to speak and act more bluntly, which can be dangerous in this delicate work.

POLITICAL STORY HOOKS

Here are a few common "story hooks" you can use to entangle a group of characters in the web of politics.

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

The characters are assigned to obtain important information in possession of an ambassador who is traveling by luxury liner. The characters might pose as attachés for another diplomat or work undercover as the crew on board the liner. Maybe a third party is trying to obtain the same information.

DELIVERY

A group of political attachés are responsible for delivering important information, too sensitive to send by regular communications, to a contact in the outer planets. Or maybe they are supposed to meet a contact to get information, but when they get there, the contact has been murdered.

NEGOTIATIONS

The characters are part of a team of diplomats involved in intense negotiations between Mars and Earth at a neutral station in the Belt. The meetings are disrupted by OPA protests and threatened by an OPA terrorist attack, or at least what appears to be an OPA terrorist attack.

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

The characters are political operatives assigned to prevent a threatened assassination attempt or to investigate one that has already taken place. Uncovering the truth can be dangerous and, if exposed, the truth could lead to war. Perhaps the assassination is an inside job between political rivals. Exposure could lead to a dangerous schism within the government. Sometimes there are no good answers.

REBELLION SERIES

Not all Belters have fallen in line under Fred Johnson, the unelected Prime Minister of the OPA. Many see the political rift between Earth and Mars as an opportunity–a chance to drive the wedge between the two planets even deeper, creating more room and influence for Belters. Rather than being a part of the peace process, they want to use this schism to push further and declare their independence from the inner planets, through force if necessary.

Being a rebel can be complicated. One part terrorist and one part humanitarian, the characters might find themselves planting bombs at a Martian shipyard one day and delivering much-needed consumables to a forgotten Belter outpost the next. It's a complicated life where one wrong move can lead to disaster.

Another thing to consider is that an organized rebellion might have a command structure much like a military. You'll have to determine where the characters fit into this structure or if they are outside of an official structure–possibly part of an independent cell. As with a military series, you want to take your players' comfort level into consideration. Some players are fine with being a part of a chain of command, while others find it to be uncomfortable or just not fun.

REBELLION STORY HOOKS

The following are a few "story hooks" you can use in a rebellion series.

KIDNAPPING

Rebels want to kidnap a powerful diplomat or other high-profile figure for information or maybe to hold for ransom. The characters are assigned to perform the kidnapping and must carefully plan the appropriate time and place to attempt the abduction.

RELIEF EFFORT

The tense standoff between the inner planets has caused a lot of shipping delays as well as increased pirate activity, leading to vital shortages at stations throughout the Belt. The characters might be assigned to transport water or other supplies to a station in need. Of course, pirates might see such a relief ship as easy prey.

SUPPLY RUN

An inner planets supply depot has been left lightly guarded, and the rebels see it as a double opportunity: grab some much-needed supplies while striking a blow against the enemy. The characters are given the responsibility of organizing and conducting the raid. Of course, the rebels are notoriously light on supplies so the characters get very little logistical support.

RECRUITMENT

An independent station deep in the Belt has offered a haven and an operational repair dock to the rebellion. The only catch is they need help with one little problem first. The crew is sent to find out what they need and to help get it done. They might have pirate troubles or maybe they want the characters to be the pirates and obtain something from an unprotected convoy. Are the station operators legit, or is it a trap to catch rebel operatives?

HUNTED

Rebels who become too well known are often hunted down, usually so that an example can be made of them. If the characters have been too successful in their rebellion, Mars or Earth might decide they have had enough and lay a trap to capture the crew. A false message could be sent out to lure them in. Their capture could lead to another series of stories where the characters try to escape imprisonment, or maybe they have particular talents useful to their captors and can negotiate their release.

FOR FREEDOM

The characters might be part of an organized resistance against Mars and Earth. Now, with the rise of Fred Johnson, they find themselves at odds with elements of the OPA. Adventures can focus on the struggle to obtain ships, supplies, and equipment to keep the resistance running. Public relations and recruitment are also important. You can't run a rebellion without people backing you. And how do they decide to deal with Fred Johnson: Do they try to sway Johnson's faction of the OPA to their side? Do they join with Johnson's faction of the OPA and try to influence them from within? Or, do they go their own way, maybe forming a fourth faction?

PRIVATEERS

The "official" center of the OPA, based out of Tycho Station, has taken on the duty of patrolling the Belt and the outer planets to protect the shipping lanes from pirates. A few splinter groups have started unofficially sponsoring pirates and those willing to take risks on behalf of the OPA. These privateers choose their targets carefully, selecting ships carrying supplies to the inner worlds or even VIPs they can capture and hold hostage, demanding exorbitant ransoms.

A series could revolve around a privateer ship going after valuable inner planet resources. The life of a privateer is dangerous and morally treacherous as well. Unless they are careful, the crew could find themselves pursued by the faster and more powerful ships of the UN and MCR navies. Of course, the rift between the two worlds means they are, for the time being, distracted elsewhere. Still, piracy is a dangerous venture and characters might be short-lived compared to those in other series frameworks.

As the GM, you might want to use this framework as a springboard to other adventures. A crew of privateers might stumble across more than they expected in a haul. Maybe a ship they raid is carrying a sample of the protomolecule or a VIP traveling in secret. The unsuspecting crew could find themselves right in the center of interplanetary politics.

PROTOMOLECULE SERIES

The discovery of the protomolecule has changed everything. Both Earth and Mars scramble to learn what the other knows. Fred Johnson and the OPA parlay their possession of the only remaining sample into a seat at the table with the UN and MCR. After Eros crashes into Venus, all eyes are on the protomolecule and what might happen next.

One of the important aspects of any *Expanse* series is deciding how the discovery of the protomolecule is going to affect your story and where the characters are going to fit in. It is likely that a protomolecule series will overlap with another type of series. The following section explores different possibilities of how the characters become involved with the protomolecule story. Do they take the place of the crew of the *Rocinante*, following the same path as the characters in the novels? This works if the GM is the only one to have read the novels, but lacks the element of surprise and suspense if the players have read them. Alternately, the series can run parallel to the novels with the characters finding their own way and reacting to the events as they unfold. You could also change the nature of the protomolecule or even simply ignore its existence. The universe of *The Expanse* is rich with possibilities, and the GM and the players should feel free to make it their own in the context of their own series.

PARALLELS

A parallel series runs concurrent to the events in *The Expanse* novels, but the players experience their own story created by the GM. Some of these might connect to the adventures of the crew of the *Rocinante*. A parallel series requires a little care by the GM if you want to keep to the timeline of the novels, but there is still plenty of room for unique adventures without making too many changes.

At the end of *Leviathan Wakes*, is it believed that the last of the protomolecule in possession of Protogen has either been accounted for or hitched a ride on Eros to crash into Venus. But what if that isn't the case? What if Protogen still has a hidden research base out there somewhere; maybe a rogue scientist or some other off-the-books operation. The players might come across another conspiracy.

REPLACEMENT

Alternately, the GM could have the characters take the place of Holden and company. The story could play out the same, or completely differently. Of course, some events have to occur if the main storyline of the novels is going to take place, but there's a lot of wiggle room for many aspects of the story to play out differently.

This type of series can offer the GM more freedom since there is a lot of room for the story to go in a different direction. What if Eros did crash into Earth? Perhaps the vast majority of humanity was destroyed in a single day. Mars and the outer planets are now the only hope for the survival of humanity, bracing for whatever might arise from the shattered ruins of the mother world. Or, the perhaps the Eros catastrophe is prevented altogether, but Protogen is still out there looking to unleash the protomolecule to find out what it does.

Some players and GMs may prefer a grittier and more grounded sci-fi series, in which case you could choose to eliminate the existence of the protomolecule altogether. Or maybe the protomolecule doesn't escape at all and the story centers more on politics and survival in the solar system. Any of these extremes or anything in between is possible. The choices are limited only by the imagination of the GM and the players.

PARALLEL SERIES

Another kind of parallel to consider is to run two (or more) series parallel to one another. If you have enough players or just want to explore different aspects of *The Expanse*, another possibility is to run two series parallel to one another but with some interaction. One group might play high-level politicians, making backroom deals and negotiating treaties while the other, more action-oriented, group has to deal with the fallout of the political machinations or maybe even perform missions on their behalf. The novel *Caliban's War* offers a good look at how this kind of

PROTOMOLECULE STORY HOOKS

These protomolecule "story hooks" only scratch the surface of the possibilities, especially if you, as the GM, are willing to break with canon. The hooks described here both fit within the established story and offer ideas for those willing to explore beyond the novels.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

The crew could be hired to track down all of Protogen's corporate and political connections and discover if there are any remnants of the company still out there and, if there are, what they know. Almost any type of crew could become involved with this story. Politicians could pull strings and use connections, a military unit could stumble across new information on a seized pirate ship, or freelancers could be hired or take it upon themselves much like the *Rocinante* and her crew.

CLEAN UP CREW

Protogen might not have been the only one out there with samples of the protomolecule. The characters could be part of a team hired or ordered to seek out other samples and eliminate them before anyone else can acquire them—and another Eros can happen.

EROS AND PSYCHE

The crew is made up of people all connected to someone lost on Eros, with the skills, talents, and drive to see to it that whoever is responsible pays for it and to ensure it never happens again. Of course, such stalwarts face some serious roadblocks in the form of government interference, cover-ups, and the quick and efficient dismantling of Protogen and the disappearance of almost everyone associated with it. Things get even more complicated when one or more of the characters pick up transmissions coming from Venus, containing fragmentary messages in their loved one's voice.

series might play out. The characters in each series can be played by the same players or by another group. The actions characters in each series take could impact the other.

The high-end political series could work well for players who don't have the time to commit to a regular game or players who can't make it for a face-to-face game. This sort of series could work well to play online either through an online RPG platform or by email or text. You could even have players representing different factions of Earth, Mars, or the OPA. Meanwhile, your regular gaming group, the more action-oriented team, could be forced to react to the machinations of the planetary governments.

BEYOND CANON

Even without the protomolecule, *The Expanse* novels provide a rich science fiction setting full of political intrigue, corporate espionage, pirates, smugglers, and more. The protomolecule need never enter into the equation for an exciting series set in this universe. Perhaps the protomolecule was destroyed when it crashed into Venus and that was the end of it, or you could decide that it never existed at all. Earth is overpopulated, with crowded, crime-ridden cities. "The Churn" offers a great look at the city of Baltimore during this period and offers enough fodder for a complete series without ever leaving Earth's gravity well.

Another alternative is to change the nature of the protomolecule. Come up with your own reasons for its existence. Rather than being alien, it could have been manufactured by human scientists. If so, how was this accomplished and what are its effects? This opens the door to many fantastic possibilities. Is it a new means of transportation allowing ships to attain near-light-speed or even faster-than-light travel? Does it turn people into super soldiers? Maybe it opens up psychic abilities. Any of these drastically changes the story of *The Expanse*, but this is your tale–make it your own.

PLOTTING THE ARC

Once you've worked out the basic concepts of the series with the players—theme, starting point, and series framework—you can consider of the overall arc of the story.

OUTLINING THE SERIES

Once you have determined the arc of the series, you can begin breaking it down into individual stories. You might want to try to keep the stories to a length that can be played in a single session with maybe a few multi-session arcs. Break the larger arc into smaller sections or collections of adventures. Think of each collection of stories as a novel with the series made up of several novels.

BEYOND CANON CONCEPTS

The following are a few ideas for series set in *The Expanse* universe that venture beyond existing canon. Talk it over with your players in advance if you plan to run this type of series. It could come as quite a shock for players expecting a more traditional *Expanse* story.

MUTATIONS

The protomolecule causes mental or physical mutations–turning humans into virtual superheroes. The characters are tasked with destroying the last of the protomolecule. They might have to overcome mutated humans who jealously protect the protomolecule and intend to use it for their own purposes, or maybe they want to release it on Earth or Mars, changing humanity forever. During a battle, the crew might become infected as well. What do they do now that they have become the enemy they have been fighting?

This type of series requires a lot of additional work by the GM since you'll have to come up with rules outside the bounds of this rulebook to cover the characters' protomolecule-granted super-powers. The arcane and psychic abilities from the *Modern AGE* game are a good compatible place to start.

PROTO-DRIVE

In this series, the power of the protomolecule is harnessed to allow faster-than-light travel. Perhaps the characters are one of the first crews aboard a "proto-drive" starship, sent out to explore the stars. They might encounter other alien species or even the creators of the protomolecule out there.

POST-EARTH

What if Eros crashed into Earth? *The Expanse* after the annihilation and transformation of all life on Earth could be interesting to explore. How does humanity survive without the food and resources of Earth? What happens to the protomolecule when it comes across such a wealth of biological structures to transform? Such a series could mean a lot of work for the GM, but offers a lot of possibilities.

THE WONDERS OF VENUS

This series supposes that when the protomolecule crashed into Venus, it grew into a beautiful crystalline city capable of supporting human life. What mysteries does this city hold? Perhaps there are portals to other dimensions or other worlds. What happens when visitors arrive from these other worlds and meet people from the system sent to explore the strange, alien city?

Take your time in the beginning. Make sure to give lots of detail and let the players explore. Give them time to get to know the world and get a feel for their characters. You may want to experiment with different types of stories and encounters to find out what you and the players enjoy the most. You may decide you want to modify some of what you had planned for future stories based on those experiences.

Once you've finished outlining the first part of your series, your first "novel" so to speak, you can begin writing your first adventure (see **Creating Adventures** in **Chapter 12**). Published adventures can save you time and prep work. However, even if you choose to use a published adventure it's worth taking a little time to customize the adventure to fit your series and characters.

SKETCHING THE ENDING

While your *Expanse* series may go on for quite some time, lasting many game sessions, eventually it will come to an end. Having that ending in mind from the beginning allows you to move the story in that direction so, when you feel the time is right, you can bring the story to a close. Maybe the characters are coming close to achieving their goals, the players are becoming restless, or outside forces require you to put the game on hiatus for a time. Whatever the reason, all good things come to an end.

No matter how much time you invest in planning the series, be prepared for it to go off in unexpected directions. That's part of the fun and challenge of a tabletop roleplaying game. Players make unexpected choices and you may find that the story idea you originally thought was really cool just doesn't work anymore. Remember the players are a part of this creative process and they're going to influence the course of the story, which may affect the ending you had in mind. Ultimately, be prepared to be flexible and go in the direction that makes the most sense and will be the most fun for everyone involved.

Keep in mind that ending a series does not mean that is the end for the characters. You can always start a new series in *The Expanse* with existing characters, either picking up shortly after the end of your previous series, or skipping ahead some time. You can also start completely fresh with a new crew of characters ready to tell new stories.

LEVIATHAN WAKES AS AN ARC

When thinking about how to lay out your story into chapters, you can always look at the source material. The following is a series outline for *Leviathan Wakes* presented as GM notes for an adventure series.

STORY 1

While returning home to the ice-hauler *Canterbury* a distress signal is detected, and the crew is dispatched in a shuttle to investigate. The source of the signal turns out to be an abandoned transport vessel called the *Scopuli*. There is no sign of crew or cargo on board the *Scopuli*, but the characters do find a beacon that is the source of the distress signal. (The beacon can be removed if the characters wish. Later examination reveals the components are of Martian origin.) Just as the characters return to their shuttle, several stealth ships appear and open fire. The *Canterbury* is destroyed by a nuclear weapon. Debris from the destruction of the *Canterbury* leaves the shuttle damaged, and the characters must rush to make repairs before they run out of oxygen.

STORY 2

The characters manage to repair their shuttle, but don't have enough fuel to get to safety before the oxygen is depleted. If the characters mention the involvement of Mars or stealth ships in their distress signal, they are contacted by Fred Johnson of the OPA and offered assistance. Before any other ship can arrive, however, the shuttle is picked up by a Martian battleship, the MCRN *Donnager*. The captain of the *Donnager* is suspicious of the crew and questions them individually. (Note: Separate the players and maybe set up space to roleplay the interrogations.) The *Donnager* comes under attack by the same stealth ships that attacked the *Canterbury*. Assuming the characters told the whole story, the captain realizes the ships are trying to kill the characters and sends a team of marines to evacuate them. The *Donnager* is boarded by the attackers, and the characters have a running gun fight all the way to the hanger bay. The last marine is killed as they get to the light frigate *Tachi* ,which is docked in the *Donnager*'s hanger. The characters blast their way free, escaping at high burn as the *Donnager* self-destructs.

STORY 3

Need to get the crew to Tycho Station. If they were already contacted by Fred Johnson, remind them that he offered safe haven. Also, they are currently on a stolen Martian ship and might want to go somewhere neutral since either Earth or Mars will likely impound the ship. If necessary, the *Tachi* could have been damaged while fleeing the *Donnager* and they might still be in need of Johnson's assistance. There's an interlude between their escape from the *Donnager* and their arrival at Tycho Station.

Once at Tycho Station they meet with Johnson (play up the uncertainty of docking at a nominally OPA station with a Martian warship). Assuming the characters share what they know with Johnson, he offers to help them. He tells them there is an OPA operative on Eros who might know more. He wants the characters to go to Eros and make contact with the operative. He's also willing to set up the Martian ship with new transponder codes and make some external modifications to make it look like a gas hauler or something similar. (The players need to come up with a new name for their ship.) The characters have time for an interlude on Tycho Station.

The characters arrive on Eros without a hitch. They find out their contact "Lionel Polanski" is staying at a hotel. At the hotel, the characters are ambushed by a group of well-armed thugs. (This might be an excellent time to introduce a player's new detective character to the group. Maybe he's on a missing persons case?) The characters overcome the thugs and get to Polanski's room. "Polanski" turns out to be a young woman named Julie Mao. Her body is covered in a strange organic growth. The characters find her personal terminal containing logs of about the progression of her affliction, which seems fueled by exposure to radiation and energy. They also find the coordinates of an asteroid. As the characters begin to leave the station, radiation alarms go off all over the station.

Leaving the detail of the rest of the series until later. I want to see what the players enjoy before planning out much further. Roughly the rest of the outline goes as follows:

1. Characters have to fight their way off the station as it is being taken over by the mysterious protomolecule.
2. Find the *Anubis* abandoned on an asteroid. Find video explaining the origin of the protomolecule.
3. Characters learn about a secret base researching the protomolecule. Board the station with the help of Fred Johnson?
4. Protomolecule is growing out of control on Eros. Characters must help come up with a plan to contain or destroy Eros.
5. Plan fails, and Eros begins heading toward Earth. The characters can pursue or even board the station and have to come up with a plan to stop the asteroid from crashing into Earth.

The planned ending is for Eros to end up crashing into Venus as an alternative to Earth. Who knows what the players might do though....

TO SLEEP PERCHANCE TO DREAM

To Sleep, Perchance to Dream is an *Expanse* RPG adventure suitable for a crew of three to six characters, levels 1 to 3. The crew become involved in a search for a pair of missing scientists out among the outer planets, which points to a larger scheme on the part of a corporate magnate with dreams of visiting another star, dreams he's willing to go to murderous lengths to achieve.

INTRODUCTION

From the time he was a child, Sebastian Pope had a dream—to visit another star and to walk on another world without the need for a space suit or environmental domes. The arc of history moves too slowly for him, and he fears that he will not live to achieve his dream. The Mormons are the only group taking interstellar exploration seriously, though they plan to use a generation ship which, even if he could secure a place on board, would not allow him to achieve his dream because he would be dead long before arrival. The only other option was to apply his considerable personal wealth and resources towards the development of new technologies. After years of research and consultation, Pope concluded his best hope for attaining his dream was to come up with a viable means of suspended animation or cryo-sleep.

Pope hired his chief consultant, Nari Dreik, to lead a team of scientists to develop viable cryo-sleep. Unfortunately, the kind of human trials that would be required to make advancements in the field at the rate Pope desired were prevented by United Nations law. So, at the advice of Dreik, Pope spent a sizable portion of his wealth establishing a secret research facility in an abandoned mine on the asteroid 532 Herculina. Pope kept this project entirely secret, purchasing the necessary goods and materials through a number of shell companies to avoid any notice from the government.

Pope gave Dreik complete control of the cryo-project, dubbed project "Sandman," including resources from some of Pope's legitimate companies. She quietly recruited some of the best minds she could find for the project. Unfortunately, many of the very best were either employed by the government or working for the Mormons on the Nauvoo project. After two years of failures, Pope began to grow anxious and started putting pressure on Dreik to show results. Even someone as wealthy as Pope couldn't keep an off-the-books science lab running forever, at least not without attracting some notice. With growing pressure from Pope to show results, Dreik decided to take drastic measures. The top two scientists in the

PERSONAL CONNECTION

Before the game begins, the GM should establish that one of the characters has a previous relationship with one of the scientists, providing a sense of urgency and connection beyond just getting another paycheck. The GM can decide which of the characters has a previous connection to one of the scientists, but you might want to work with the player on the nature of the relationship. A character who has some connection to the Mormon church would be an ideal choice. The scientist could be a former co-worker, friend, former lover, or even a relative. This personal relationship might also be an important factor as to why the Mormons chose the characters, especially if they are somewhat disreputable sorts.

fields of neurophysiology and environmental controls/life support were involved with the Mormon Nauvoo project. First, Dreik sent out feelers to see if they might be willing to defect but both flatly refused. Desperate for a breakthrough, Dreik used resources at her disposal through two of Pope's companies, Pope-Sanchez Shipping (PSS) and Vector Security, to kidnap the two scientists and to pick up a fresh batch of "research subjects."

GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

The characters enter the picture when they are recruited by the Mormons on Tycho Station to locate their missing scientists. When they start poking around, they also discover that a number of unemployed Belters without families went missing around the same time. If they dig too deeply, they are attacked by operatives from Vector Security who try to dissuade them from digging any further or maybe even kill them. After doing some legwork, the characters discover that the missing scientists, as well as the Belters, all departed on a ship bound for Vesta—the *Ebenezer Hazard*—only none of them ever arrived. Examining the flight plan and transit time turns up only one likely detour, an abandoned mining facility on 532 Herculina. If the characters don't have a ship, they have to figure out a way of getting to Herculina; either borrow one or maybe even hijack the next PSS ship bound for Vesta.

Once the characters arrive at Herculina, they must get inside, avoid booby-traps, and deal with Vector Security, before they locate the scientists. Dreik is present in the labs, overseeing the work of the scientists. She doesn't go down without a fight and tries to set the station's self-destruct sequence. The characters might also have to contend with the scientists, since most of them have undergone a procedure that makes them more efficient but renders them conscience-less sociopaths. With the rescued scientists in tow, the characters must fight their way off the station, possibly racing against the station's countdown to self-destruction.

Once back at Tycho, the Mormons pay handsomely for the return of their scientists (assuming they survived) and the characters have the eternal gratitude of any test subjects they rescued. They've also made a bitter enemy in the form of a very powerful man—Sebastian Pope.

INCORPORATING TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM INTO A SERIES

This adventure is easily adaptable to almost any series framework. The set-up for this adventure assumes the characters are a freelancer or mercenary group hired by the Mormons to locate the missing scientists. However, there are a lot of other possibilities that require only minimal changes, mostly to **Scene 1**.

A missing biochemist/neuroscientist might arouse the suspicions of the Earth and Mars governments, who fear another protomolecule incident. The last thing they want is another Eros, so either of them might send an undercover team to Tycho Station to investigate. The OPA and Fred Johnson might come to the same conclusions and begin an investigation of their own. Characters who are part of a private security firm like Star Helix could be offered a side job, much like Miller's "missing persons" case in *Leviathan Wakes*. Almost any group of characters could be drawn in by a personal connection to one of the missing scientists. They could start an investigation on their own which might lead to involvement with Mars, Earth, the OPA, the Mormons, or any combination thereof. An extremely clever or ambitious group could find themselves working for more than one of these groups.

PART I

MISSING PERSONS

The story begins with the characters being hired by the Mormon church to locate and return two scientists who recently vanished—both of them vital to Nauvoo project. The first to disappear was Dr. Anna Bagenholm three months ago. The second is Dr. Matteo Cerri, who went missing a little over three weeks ago.

The Nauvoo project is currently in a state of crisis as the *Nauvoo* is speeding away at high-g after being commandeered by Fred Johnson in the hopes of using it to knock Eros off its course for Earth. The attempt failed, and the unmanned ship is now racing toward the edge of the solar system. Johnson has promised to mount an expedition to recover the ship and has already begun construction of a high-speed ship that should be able to catch the *Nauvoo* before it is gone forever. To top this off, two important scientists involved with the design of the *Nauvoo*'s life support systems have gone missing.

In **Part 1**, the characters are invited to meet with Apostle Birch of the Mormon leadership to discuss finding and returning the missing scientists. After doing some leg-work, the characters discover that the scientists were kidnapped and most likely taken to a secret base on the asteroid 532 Herculina. If they don't own a ship, they'll need to procure one and head out to Herculina.

SCENE 1

THE JOB — SOCIAL ENCOUNTER

The scene opens with the characters receiving an invitation to meet with Apostle Birch, the highest-ranking Mormon on Tycho Station. The invitation is directed at the character who has the personal connection with one of the scientists, but states that they may bring along any of their "business associates." As soon as the characters arrive at the Mormon offices on Tycho Station, they are immediately ushered into Apostle Birch's large office.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The room is large, well-lit and carpeted, with simulated wood paneling and bookshelves. The bookshelves hold what is probably the largest collection of real books any of you have seen. The air is slightly stuffy and smells of new carpet and cigar smoke. A large wooden veneer desk dominates one end of the room. There are some family pictures on the desk and the walls as well as a painting of Joseph Smith kneeling and holding the golden plates as an angelic being floats above. Another painting depicts the Mormon Temple on Earth at sunrise. A large black, leather-bound book, The Book of Mormon etched in gold on the front, sits in a prominent place on the desk. Several chairs are laid out in front of the desk (enough for all of you) and behind the desk an elderly man with thinning white hair sits on a large leather chair that seems a little too big for him. As you enter, he rises and gestures for you to sit.

"Welcome. Thank you for coming. I know it may seem unusual, but I've invited you here because we have need of your particular... err... talents. That, and <insert appropriate character name> *has a personal interest in what I am about to tell you.*

"Two very important scientists, Dr. Anna Bragenholm and Dr. Matteo Cerri, both of whom were working on the Nauvoo project, have gone missing. Dr. Bragenholm vanished about three months ago and Dr. Cerri just over three weeks ago. When Dr. Bragenholm went missing, we thought maybe it was of her own volition, but with Dr. Cerri's disappearance this is starting to look like a pattern; either someone wants to sabotage the Nauvoo project, or they wanted our scientists for some other purpose. We have, umm... concerns about Fred Johnson and the OPA. Some of our members are suspicious that they might be involved somehow, which is why we are turning to you for help. Either way, we want them back!"

Apostle Birch answers any questions he can and provides the characters with a brief file on both scientists. He also gives them contact information to the scientists' co-workers and in Dr. Cerri's case, his family.

This information is provided to the characters or is easily available:

DR. ANNA BRAGENHOLM

Dr. Bragenholm is 32 years old and has the tall and slender build of a person born outside a gravity well (in her case, on Luna). Her face is also long and narrow with prominent cheekbones, deep-set blue eyes, and long, straw-colored hair that she usually wears back in a pony-tail.

CLUE 1 Dr. Bragenholm is an ECLSS (environmental control and life support specialist) engineer who has been working with the Nauvoo project for over five years and is responsible for the design of much of its environmental systems.

CLUE 2 She is single with no family. Her parents and younger sister were killed when a rogue asteroid struck the transport they were traveling on 14 years ago. Anna was away at college at the time.

CLUE 3 She was last seen leaving her station in the Nauvoo Project offices three months ago at 5:24 PM (Tycho Station time).

CLUE 4 She was a bit of a loner and tended to keep to herself. She is known to be a devout Mormon and attends services regularly, though she rarely attends social activities.

The following information can be learned by inquiring with the other scientists she worked with and making a **TN 13 Communication (Investigation)** test:

CLUE 5 She had recently expressed some dissatisfaction and boredom in her work as the project neared completion. She has also had some friction with co-workers.

CLUE 6 About two months before she disappeared, she mentioned to one of her co-workers that she had received an interesting job offer for a lot more money. She claimed to have turned it down because she didn't want to lose her spot on the *Nauvoo*.

DR. MATTEO CERRI

This information is provided to the characters or is easily available:

CLUE 1 Dr. Cerri is 47 years old, from Earth, and has a short and squat build even for an Earther. He has jagged short hair that he dyes neon blue, dark brown eyes with bushy eyebrows, and a square, cleft jaw. He often has a few days of stubble.

CLUE 2 Dr. Matteo Cerri is a biochemist/neurophysiologist who worked alongside the ECLSS engineers to make sure the passengers on board the Nauvoo would be safe and healthy during their voyage. He has been with the Nauvoo project for three years.

CLUE 3 He is married to Fiona Tan and they have two children, Alexa and Cesare (17 and 13). All of them live on board Tycho Station.

CLUE 4 He was last seen leaving his station in the Nauvoo project offices a little over three weeks ago at 6:33 PM (Tycho Station time).

The following information can be learned by inquiring with the other scientists he worked with and making a **TN 13 Communication (Investigation)** test:

CLUE 6 They regularly attend Mormon services but are not considered to be the most devout. Cerri's wife has been known to speak out against some Mormon policies, particularly a lack of leadership roles for women amongst the clergy.

CLUE 6 He is well-liked and respected by the other members of his team, very engaged and often organizing after-work outings and activities. He is also widely regarded as one of the best in his field.

SCENE 2

DOING THE LEGWORK

EXPLORATION/SOCIAL ENCOUNTER

The characters can ask around the docks about Dr. Cerri. A successful **TN 11 Communication (Investigation)** test reveals that Dr. Cerri was seen boarding a Pope-Sanchez Shipping cargo hauler and he was in the company of two men wearing PSS jumpsuits.

STALKING DR. CERRI

Characters with connections on Tycho Station might be able to utilize the station's security cameras to follow Dr. Cerri after he leaves work or they might be able to convince Tycho Station security or Fred Johnson to let them search the data logs. Without any additional leverage (such as having a connection), convincing Tycho security to let them review the logs requires a successful **TN 15 Communication (Persuasion)** test. The characters can also hack into Tycho Station's security net, a dangerous proposition requiring a **TN 17 Intelligence (Technology)** test. If they are caught hacking station security, proceed to the **Optional Scene: Enter Mr. Johnson**.

Once they have access to the security logs, they can make a **TN 9 Intelligence (Technology)** or **Perception (Searching)** test to search for Dr. Cerri using facial recognition software. Success means that they manage to track Dr. Cerri's movements from the time he leaves work. The cameras show him leaving work and heading toward home. As he passes through a crowded market area, the cameras lose him. (According to Tycho Station security, the cameras in that area were vandalized. In fact, they were damaged by the Vector Security operatives.)

An additional **TN 9 Intelligence (Technology)** or **Perception (Searching)** test shows him being escorted through a docking area by two burly men in generic-looking jumpsuits. They are leading him so that his face mostly avoids the cameras, but he turns his head a couple of times, allowing him to be identified. A **TN 13 Perception (Empathy or Intuition)** test reveal that his body language indicates that he is not going willingly with the two men. The men usher him on board the *Ebenezer Hazard*, a cargo freighter registered to Pope-Sanchez Shipping (PSS).

POPE-SANCHEZ SHIPPING

A freight shipping company based out of Durham, NC. They specialize in fast and regular deliveries. They maintain regular shipping routes throughout the solar system with standard service between many locations and offer special courier services as well. They also offer limited, no frills passenger service for those willing to pay a premium. Need fast and secure shipping between Mars and Ceres? PSS is the company for you!

The company's primary shareholders and founders are Sebastian Pope and Enrique Sanchez, who merged their smaller shipping companies to form Pope-Sanchez. Sanchez is mostly retired to his Lunar estate. Pope is still very active in the business world and has controlling interests in a number of companies including Vector Security.

THE EBENEZER HAZARD

It is public record and in fact advertised (no test required) that the *Ebenezer Hazard* is currently making a routine round-trip mail/delivery run from Tycho Station to Vesta. The *Hazard* is scheduled to dock tomorrow and leaves two days later. Digging a little further and a successful **TN 9 Intelligence (Technology)** test reveals that during both trips with the kidnapped scientists (and Belters) , their flight plan took 14 hours longer than the usual run. Analyzing navigational charts and a successful **TN 11 Intelligence (Navigation)** test reveal that there is an abandoned mining facility on an asteroid called 532 Herculina that would require a detour of almost exactly 14 hours. If the characters make an inquiry with the port authority on Vesta (requiring a successful **TN 9 Communication (Persuasion)** test), they learn that no passengers fitting the names or descriptions of the two scientists or any of the other missing Belters disembarked on Vesta.

SCENE 3

MISSING BELTERS

SOCIAL ENCOUNTER

This scene takes place if the characters spend any time asking around the station about the missing scientists. The encounter can take place at a bar, around the port, or anywhere on the station. One of the characters is approached by a young Belter woman named Nicola asking for help. She explains that she overheard the characters asking around about the missing scientists and that her boyfriend, Pedro Gwong, also went missing about three weeks ago. She tells them that he left their hole early in the morning, saying that he had a possible lead on a job, but he never came back. She's also learned that at least three other Belters went missing around the same time. All of them were unemployed and looking for work. (A total of six Belters were abducted, but the other two had no connections at all.) She's able to provide a picture of Gwong and one of the other missing Belters, a woman named Liz Greene. She doesn't have any other information on the other two.

If the characters have access to the security recordings of the *Ebenezer Hazard,* they see Gwong, Greene, and four other Belters being ushered onto the ship around the same time as Dr. Cerri.

SCENE 4

AMBUSH!

ACTION ENCOUNTER

Asking around the docks attracts the attention of Vector Security operatives who have been left behind for the express purpose of making sure no one asks too many questions. How the operatives approach the characters depends largely upon the crew's approach and appearance. If the characters appear to be private investigators or inquiring friends, they try to intimidate them. If they are clearly military or special ops, they go for a more lethal approach.

If the Vector operatives just want to intimidate the characters, they might approach them in a bar or while they are passing through a sparsely populated area of the station. They try to rough them up a little and warn them to back off the investigation.

If they intend something more lethal, they try to organize an ambush, luring the characters into a deserted cargo bay with the hint of providing more information. There are Vector Security operatives equal to the number of characters +1.

VECTOR SECURITY OPERATIVES

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 2 (Pistols, Rifles), **Communication** 2 (Investigation), **Constitution** 1, **Dexterity** 1, **Fighting** 2 (Brawling, Grappling), **Intelligence** 0, **Perception** 1, **Strength** 2, **Willpower** 1

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
11	11	11	3

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Pistol	+4	2D6+1
Taser	+4	1D6+1 penetrating
Unarmed	+4	1D3+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

Talents: Intrigue (Novice), Tactical Awareness (Novice)

Equipment: hand terminal, light body armor, pistol, taser, uniform

Threat: Minor

Either way, they don't identify themselves as being with Vector Security. If the characters are in danger of being injured or even killed, have Tycho Station security show up in the nick of time to save them.

If the Vector operatives are captured and searched, the characters can make a **TN 11 Perception (Searching)** test to find ID hidden on one of them that indicates that they are Vector Security. They refuse to talk, but if interrogated a successful **TN 15 Strength (Intimidation)** or **TN 17 Communication (Persuasion)** test gets them to reveal that they were hired to kidnap both Dr. Bragenholm and Dr. Cerri and deliver them to a PSS ship just before take off. On both occasions, they were also ordered to round up six random Belters. The orders were to find drifters and the like—unemployed Belters without family who wouldn't be noticed if they went missing. They insist that Vector Security isn't directly connected, but that it was an independent contract. This is technically true, and Vector Security doesn't have anything about this job on the books. Both operatives are listed as being on extended leave. They don't know who actually hired them, but the arrangements are always made by a fixer who contacts them. The money is deposited anonymously into their accounts.

OPTIONAL SCENE

ENTER MR. JOHNSON

SOCIAL ENCOUNTER

Fred Johnson, the de facto leader of the OPA and commander of Tycho Station, can become involved in some different circumstances. If any of the characters have connections with Johnson or the OPA, Johnson might be the one to hire them in the first place (simply change the opening appropriately). The characters might come to him or Tycho Station security,

or they might even get arrested by security for getting into a fight with the Vector Security operatives or trying to break into the *Hazard*.

Fred Johnson is an intimidating man, and he uses his imposing figure to find out exactly what is going on. If he learns that a couple of scientists have gone missing, he becomes concerned that it might have something to do with the protomolecule—possibly more experiments—and he'll give the characters as much support as he can. He may even offer them a bonus if they can find out the reason that the scientists were abducted. If he knows about their mission to the base on Herculina, he asks them to recover any data they can.

SCENE 5

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

SOCIAL/ACTION ENCOUNTER

Once the characters have learned the missing scientists have been taken on board the *Ebenezer Hazard* and that the ship is currently docked at Tycho, they will likely want to investigate the crew and maybe the ship. The players can pick and choose, doing whichever encounters they wish in any order. Bear in mind that if they make too much noise, if they haven't already spoken with Fred Johnson, he will certainly reach out now by issuing an invitation via Tycho Station security.

The three-person crew of the *Hazard* are staying at a hotel near the port, and the pilots can be found relaxing at a nearby bar while they wait for their ship to be resupplied and cargo brought on board. They are Mia Gallager the pilot, Jay Chen the co-pilot, and Kolton Hague of Vector Security. Hague is also responsible for overseeing the loading and offloading of the cargo. They are the same crewmembers who transported Dr. Cerri and Dr. Bragenholm to the secret base on Herculina.

QUESTIONING THE PILOTS

Gallager and Chen have been doing the Tycho-Vesta run for over two years. They are reluctant to talk since they have been ordered not to discuss or even admit their detour to Herculina, but they both like to drink while on a layover and can be persuaded to talk with a successful social test (see more information in the **Social Interactions** section of **CHAPTER 5**). The characters can choose whatever approach they desire: persuasion, seduction, intimidation, or even bribery. The Attitude of both pilots begins as Standoffish (-1) but this can be modified by actions such as buying them a drink or bribery. They knew something unusual was going on since the passengers were locked in their staterooms for the entire journey. If they are convinced to talk, they admit that they are occasionally given orders to redirect to Herculina for an "unscheduled" delivery. Kolton Hague, the Vector Security officer, handles the deliveries while they remain on the ship. All they know is that they dock at an old mining station there and depart as soon as the cargo is offloaded, usually under an hour. Gallager has a security key to the *Ebenezer Hazard*.

GALLAGER AND CHEN, PSS PILOTS

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

ACCURACY 0, **COMMUNICATION** 1, **CONSTITUTION** 2 (PROPELLING), **DEXTERITY** 3 (CRAFTING, PILOTING, INITIATIVE), **FIGHTING** 0, **INTELLIGENCE** 1, **PERCEPTION** 2 (SEEING), **STRENGTH** 1, **WILLPOWER** 1

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
13	12	13	2

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
PISTOL	+3	2D6+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

TALENTS: Pilot (Expert), Quick Reflexes

EQUIPMENT: PSS flight suit, pistol, keycard for *Ebenezer Hazard* (Gallager)

THREAT: MINOR

QUESTIONING HAGUE

Hague knows a lot more about what's going on, but even he doesn't know the full picture. And as part of Vector Security and a professional, he is a lot more difficult to get to talk. He doesn't drink and spends most of his time overseeing the loading/unloading of the ship. No amount of persuasion is going to get him to tell the characters anything, and he can't be bribed. Given enough pressure, he might crack under interrogation. His Attitude is Hostile for purposes of interrogation.

Hague knows that in both instances a scientist and six other Belters were delivered to the *Hazard,* at which point he secured them inside cabins on board the ship. He is fully aware that they were all kidnap jobs. He also has a security key to the *Ebenezer Hazard*.

DEALING WITH THE *HAZARD*

At some point, the characters are likely to want to search or maybe even steal the *Ebenezer Hazard*. If the characters have contacts in the port authority or Tycho Station, getting access to the ship isn't that hard. They may need to offer a bribe or something to convince the authority to look the other way. But since Pope-Sanchez is an Earth company, the Belters working at the port aren't that hard to persuade. Their Attitude for a social test begins at Neutral (Friendly if the character is a Belter).

Security isn't very tight, and if they want to break in, they just have to make sure Hague isn't around. Both the pilot and Hague have security keys so the characters could get access by stealing those, or they can bypass the security lock with a successful **TN 15 Intelligence (Security)** test.

The interior of the ship doesn't offer any clues. The staterooms have all been cleaned since the kidnapping and so scoured of any evidence. If the characters can access the ship's computer, requiring a **TN 13 Intelligence (Technology)** test to hack into the system, they can find navigational records that show the deviations to Herculina. They can also get the docking codes for the ship docking ports at Herculina.

HIJACKING THE *HAZARD*

If the crew decides to hijack the *Hazard* they have a few options. They could book passage and try to take control while on board. This could be difficult since they will be unarmed (all weapons are required to be placed in the ship's locker) and Hague is armed. Plus, the pilots have control of the ship's security systems. The other option is to kidnap (or kill) Hague and the pilots while they are on the station. This gives them the ship's security key, at which point they just have to bribe or bluff the port authority, a **TN 11 Communication (Persuasion)** test, to allow them to undock. Finally, the characters might be able to provide enough evidence to Tycho Station security or Fred Johnson to warrant having the crew of the *Hazard* arrested or at least detained. Use the Small Freighter from **Chapter 6** for the *Hazard*, removing the Fragile Flaw and adding a Weapon System Quality: one torpedo tube.

PART 2

INTO THE MISSING SCIENTISTS

The characters have to figure out how to board the station, find the scientists, and then get free. How this part of the adventure plays out is largely in the hands of the characters. They can go in guns blazing or try to stealth their way through the complex. There will almost certainly be some fighting during the raid, but with stealth and guile they can keep it to a minimum.

SCENE 1

GETTING TO HERCULINA

SOCIAL/EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The crew has a good idea where the scientists are, but they have to get there. If the characters have their own ship, they can take it but if not, they must acquire one. If they were hired by the Mormons, they could ask to borrow one, or if they have met with Fred Johnson, he might loan them a ship. The characters could also commandeer or hijack the PSS ship, the *Ebenezer Hazard*, from the previous scene.

The trip to Herculina takes just a little over a week, though the time can be reduced with a hard burn. The asteroid was originally a zero-g environment since gravity was not necessary for the mining operation. Pope spent a small fortune spinning up the asteroid since some degree of gravity was deemed necessary for some of the experiments being conducted.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players as they approach Herculina:

> *532 Herculina is a large asteroid, approximately 260 by 220 by 215 km. It's not spherical, but rather has a blocky shape. The asteroid has been given artificial spin, giving it a gravity of approximately .28 g. Two external ship ports are visible on the exterior of the asteroid. A small freighter is already docked at one of the ports. There are also several other smaller airlocks (for access to the asteroid's surface) and external venting shafts at different locations around the asteroid.*

SCENE 2

BOARDING THE STATION

ACTION/EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

When they arrive, the characters need to decide how they are going to board the station. They can dock the ship at the remaining docking port, or they can establish an orbit and get to the asteroid using vac suits and EVA packs to access one of the vent shafts or airlocks. Each approach has its own obstacles and difficulties. If they land on the asteroid and enter through one of the airlocks, they have a much better chance of taking the security forces on the station by surprise. If they dock, they'll need to be ready to go in hot, ready for a fight. Of course, if the characters are a military unit or mercenaries this may be their preference.

THE ASTEROID

The characters can land the ship just about anywhere on the asteroid without being detected. Matching the asteroid's spin and successfully landing requires a **TN 9 Dexterity (Piloting)** test. Once landed, they can use vac suits to traverse the asteroid to one of the airlocks or the vent shafts.

The outer doors for the airlocks open easily, but the inner doors are locked. The characters can bypass the locking mechanism by making a **TN 11 Intelligence (Security)** test, or they could cut through or blow them open with explosives. If the latter options are employed, emergency doors slam shut further down the corridor to prevent decompression, which also alerts Vector Security and places the station on alert. One of the Vector Security guards is placed on watch just on the other side of the emergency door. The airlocks all join up to one maintenance corridor that is indicated on the map.

The venting shafts are there in case an area of the mine needs to be vented because of a fire or chemical hazard. They go deep into the asteroid, requiring a lot of careful climbing in bulky vac suits and some climbing gear due to several long, vertical drops. The vents open into the mines deep below. Exploring the mines leads to an elevator that leads to the station proper.

Before Pope purchased the mines, they were used by a group of pirates who booby-trapped the vent shafts and outer airlock approaches. Rather than take the risk of removing the booby-traps, Vector Security left them in place. If the characters enter the station using the surface airlocks, the GM can pick one or more of the following Hazards to throw in their way or make up one of their own (see **Hazards** in **Chapter 5**). The Game Master should feel free to modify the difficulties based on any special precautions the characters take.

PRESSURE PLATE ACTIVATED EXPLOSIVE

A pressure plate that triggers an explosive device. Characters who are taking precautions can notice the pressure plate with a successful **TN 11 Perception (Searching or Seeing)** test. The trigger can be deactivated by one character making a **TN 13 Intelligence (Demolitions or Security)** test or every character making a **TN 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** text. This is a Major Hazard and failure inflicts 3d6 Damage (2-meter range).

LASER TRIPWIRE ACTIVATED EXPLOSIVE

A laser tripwire that triggers an explosive device. Characters who are taking precautions can notice the tripwire with a successful **TN 15 Perception (Searching or Seeing)** test. The laser trigger can be deactivated by one character making a **TN 13 Intelligence (Demolitions or Security)** test or every character making a **TN 9 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test. This is a Major Hazard and failure inflicts 3d6 Damage (2-meter range).

UNSTABLE MINES

Parts of the mines are unstable and may collapse if the characters are not careful. Noticing the instability requires a **TN 11 Intelligence (Engineering)** test. Once noticed, the unstable area can be easily avoided. This is a Moderate Hazard and failure inflicts 2d6 Damage (3-meter range).

USING THE DOCKING PORT

The characters can use the ship's docking clamps and either bypass the electronic lock or cut or blast their way through the outer airlock. Either way, as soon as they get through the outer airlock, they are faced with armed Vector Security officers.

If the characters have Hague or the pilot's electronic key, then they have the codes to open the port's outer airlock—but they still have to open the inner airlock, which is controlled from the security room on board Herculina.

SECURITY ON HERCULINA STATION

Herculina Station relies more on secrecy than on defenses. There is a small garrison of Vector Security troops, and security cameras cover sensitive areas. The unused portions of the station were booby-trapped long ago by a group of pirates who used the station as a base of operations before Pope's acquisition. Vector Security decided to leave the booby-traps in place rather than risk removing them.

SECURITY PERSONNEL

There are a total of nine Vector Security guards on the station (the GM should feel free to adjust this based on the make-up of the party). At any one time, three of them are asleep unless the characters have tripped an alarm. Unless the station is under alert, three more can be found in the break room, usually playing cards or something similar. Two remain stationed in the security room while the last one patrols the station.

SURVEILLANCE

Cameras are located inside the airlocks of both docking ports and in the main entrance chamber. It is rather boring out here, so they are not particularly alert. If the characters pass through an area covered by cameras quickly, there is a reasonable chance they won't be noticed (successful opposed Stealth test, or for every round the characters are in sight of the cameras, roll 1d6 and characters are only noticed on a 1-2). If one of the cameras is destroyed, the roaming security guard will show up in 1-6 minutes to investigate.

None of the interior doors are locked unless the guards are alerted, in which case they can lock any of the interior doors, either manually or remotely from the security room. The doors use simple alphanumeric keypads and can be opened with a **TN 11 Intelligence (Security or Technology)** test. The doors are all solid steel and pressure sealed, which works to the characters' advantage since they are fairly soundproof. Unless there is a large explosion it is unlikely NPCs in even an adjacent room will hear anything.

HERCULINA STATION SECURITY

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

ACCURACY 2 (PISTOLS, RIFLES), **COMMUNICATION** 2 (INVESTIGATION), **CONSTITUTION** 1, **DEXTERITY** 1, **FIGHTING** 2 (BRAWLING, GRAPPLING), **INTELLIGENCE** 0, **PERCEPTION** 1, **STRENGTH** 2, **WILLPOWER** 1

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
11	11	11	3

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
PISTOL	+4	2D6+1
RIFLE	+4	3D6+1
TASER	+4	1D6+1 PENETRATING
UNARMED	+4	1D3+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

TALENTS: Intrigue (Novice), Tactical Awareness (Novice)

EQUIPMENT: hand terminal, light body armor, pistol, taser, uniform

THREAT: MINOR

SCENE 3

EXPLORING THE STATION

ACTION/SOCIAL/EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

Herculina Station has been totally repurposed and mostly rebuilt from its original mining use, all under the direction of Nari Dreik. The interior is mostly carved stone outfitted with molded plastic where needed. The rooms and hallways are quite spartan with no attention paid to décor.

SECURITY CENTER

This is a small room where the Vector Security guards maintain a vigil over the entire station. The control panels here control the doors and cameras throughout the station. Fortunately for the characters, the guards are usually incredibly bored and spend most of their time surfing news and playing games on their personal terminals rather than paying attention to the cameras. A successful **TN 13 Intelligence (Technology)** test grants access to the security systems.

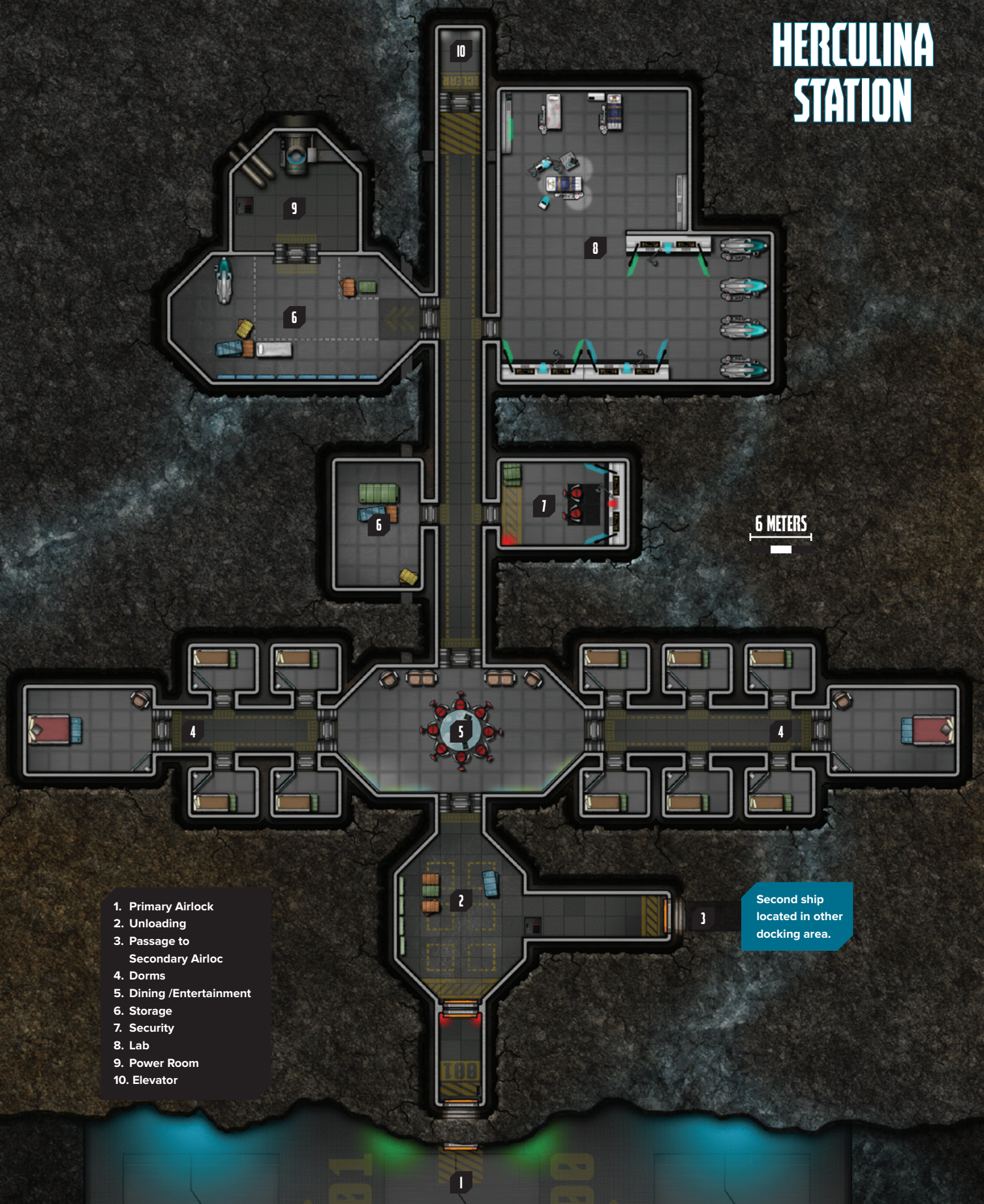
LIVING QUARTERS

The living quarters are small and spartan. The scientists have almost no personal effects. Each room has one or two bunk beds. The guards share two rooms with two of the guards sharing bunks. Dreik has a room to herself. There is a central dining and recreation area, but it shows only the most cursory signs of being used.

STORAGE ROOMS

There are a couple of large storage rooms that are filled with empty crates, food, and spare and dis-used medical supplies. They aren't checked by the guards with any regularity.

HERCULINA STATION



POWER ROOM

This room houses Herculina's reactor and support equipment. The reactor provides all of the station's power needs, and access to the power room is restricted to authorized personnel only (**TN 13 Intelligence (Technology)** test to override those lock-outs). Characters with access to the reactor can shut it down in a few minutes with a **TN 11 Intelligence (Engineering)** test, but only if they have the Engineering or Technology focuses. This puts the station on emergency battery power until the reactor is reactivated. Shutting down the reactor does not stop the self-destruct sequence, if it has been activated.

CORPORATE OVERSEER

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 1, **Communication** 3 (Deception, Leadership), **Constitution** 0, **Dexterity** 2, **Fighting** 0, **Intelligence** 2 (Business, Technology), **Perception** 2, **Strength** 0, **Willpower** 3

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
12	10	10	0

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Pistol	+1	2d6+2

SPECIAL FEATURES

Talents: Oratory (Expert)

Equipment: keycard for all doors on the station, pistol

Threat: Minor

SCIENTISTS

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

Accuracy 0, **Communication** 0, **Constitution** 2, **Dexterity** 2 , **Fighting** 0, **Intelligence** 3 (Biology, Medicine, Technology), **Perception** 2, **Strength** 0, **Willpower** 3 (Courage)

SPEED	FORTUNE	DEFENSE	AR + TOU
12	5	10	0

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
Knife	+0	1d6
Makeshift Weapon	+0	1d6-1

SPECIAL FEATURES

Talents: Expertise (choose one Intelligence focus, Expert)

Equipment: weak makeshift weapon (random medical implement), some have knives

Threat: Minor

THE LAB

The lab is the real heart of the nasty business being conducted on Herculina. Read or paraphrase the following to the players when they enter the lab:

The room beyond hums and beeps with the sound of electronics and the air has an antiseptic scent. The room is filled with high end medical and scientific equipment. Computer monitors displaying data and monitoring life signs line the walls as several people walk around, making notes on their personal terminals. In the center of the room, there are several large tables covered in vials and beakers and hand terminals. At the far end are four upright, sarcophagus-like boxes or tubes. Four of them appear lifeless: the glass "faceplates" on the front are dark. Two appear to be illuminated from within, and variety of indicator lights blink mysteriously on the sides, but the glass is frosted or misted over.

A clear window fills almost the entire wall to the left. On the other side is what appears to be an operating theater. There are three metal operating tables in the center of the room. Two of them are currently occupied, and several people in medical scrubs hover about them. One subject is clearly dead, the brain having been removed. The other is very much alive and restrained on the table. Tubes from an IV and sensors are connected to various parts of the person's anatomy, and the mouth is covered in a respirator. One of the doctors is drilling a hole into the side of the individual's head as his eyes dart around in terror.

There are a total of seven doctors and scientists in the room. There are four more that are currently asleep or resting in their rooms. Dreik is also here when the characters arrive. Dreik immediately tries to contact security or keep the characters talking until security arrives.

"THE PROCEDURE"

All of the research team, except Dr. Cerri, have undergone a medical procedure that has altered structural elements of the brain. These alterations create a deep sociopathy amongst the researchers, granting them extreme abilities to focus on results-oriented research while freeing them of moral or ethical constraints. This also makes all of the scientists prone to violent outbursts if they are disturbed while working. The GM can feel free to play this out however they wish, but none of them are interested in leaving and get agitated, angry, or even violent if anyone interrupts their work. If Dreik orders them, they grab medical implements and attack as a frothing, angry mob.

DR. BRAGENHOLM

Having undergone the procedure more recently, Dr. Bragenholm is a little more level-headed (she does not join the mob-like attack) and tries to conceal the effect. Then she attempts to sabotage the rescue attempt at the earliest opportunity. She might grab a fallen security guard's gun and attempt to shoot Dr. Cerri or even trigger the self-destruct sequence for the station. The only way to get her off the ship is to render her unconscious and carry her. Anyone interacting with her can attempt a **TN 11 Perception (Empathy or Intuition)** test to realize that she isn't behaving normally. If she is the NPC that has a connection with one of the characters, that character gets a +3 to the test.

SCENE 4

ESCAPE FROM HERCULINA STATION

ACTION ENCOUNTER

The difficulty of escaping depends largely upon the actions taken earlier by the characters and whether they are racing against time to get off the station. Several possibilities are outlined here.

RUN FOR YOUR LIVES

If the station alarm has been tripped and there are still living security guards, they may have a running gun battle to get back to their ship. If the security station is still intact, Venture Security can remotely lock any of the doors in the station. They can also trigger the self-destruction of the station. Once the self-destruct has been activated it cannot be turned off, and the fusion reactor that powers the station explodes, destroying the entire base. The GM can set the timing for the self-destruct sequence for the best dramatic effect. The characters should have enough time to get off the station, but just barely.

THE OTHER SHIP

A small freighter is docked in the station. If for some reason the characters can't get to their own ship in time, they can escape using this ship. Use the Small Freighter from **CHAPTER 6** with the addition of a Weapon System Quality: one torpedo tube. If the self-destruct has been triggered, any surviving Vector Security guards try to get to the freighter, too. If the characters don't have their own ship and came to the station on a borrowed ship, they can also steal this one and claim it as "salvage."

A CHASE IN SPACE

If the characters escape in their own ship, you can add a little more excitement to the scene by having the freighter docked at the station pursue them. See **Chases** in **CHAPTER 5** for details and **Space Combat** in **CHAPTER 6** if the crew decides to make a fight of it.

CONCLUSION

Assuming they bring back both scientists, the characters are paid in full. If Dr. Bragenholm is killed, the payment might be slightly reduced. The characters have gained a powerful ally in the form of the Mormon Church, but they have made an enemy of Sebastian Pope, whose dream of reaching the stars may yet come true.

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THE EXPANSE

NAME

ORIGIN

BACKGROUND

SOCIAL CLASS

PROFESSION

DRIVE

ACCURACY	❑	RATING
COMMUNICATION	❑	RATING
CONSTITUTION	❑	RATING
DEXTERITY	❑	RATING
FIGHTING	❑	RATING
INTELLIGENCE	❑	RATING
PERCEPTION	❑	RATING
STRENGTH	❑	RATING
WILLPOWER	❑	RATING

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

MOVE

RUN

SPEED	DEFENSE	TOUGHNESS	ARMOR	PENALTY

LEVEL

ARMOR TYPE

FORTUNE

TALENTS & SPECIALIZATIONS

RELATIONSHIPS

CONDITIONS

- ❑ BLINDED
- ❑ DEAFENED
- ❑ DYING
- ❑ EXHAUSTED
- ❑ FATIGUED
- ❑ FREE-FALLING
- ❑ HELPLESS
- ❑ HINDERED
- ❑ INJURED
- ❑ PRONE
- ❑ RESTRAINED
- ❑ UNCONSCIOUS
- ❑ WOUNDED

EQUIPMENT

GOALS

EXPERIENCE

INCOME

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE

WEAPON GROUPS

PREFERRED STUNTS

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TALENT NAME	DEGREE	TALENT EFFECT

SPACESHIP STATISTICS

NAME **TYPE** **DRIVE**

SENSORS

HULL

CREW

WEAPONS

QUALITIES

FLAWS

CREW ROLE **ROLE TEST**

CONDITIONS SUMMARY

BLINDED: The character cannot see and automatically fails ability tests reliant on sight, such as Perception (Seeing).

DEAFENED: The character cannot hear and automatically fails ability tests reliant on hearing, such as Perception (Hearing).

DYING: The character loses 1 point of Constitution score each round on the start of the character's turn. When the character's Constitution score reaches –3, the character dies. Successful first aid applied to a Dying character stabilizes their condition, making them Helpless, Unconscious, and Wounded instead. They must recover from these conditions normally.

EXHAUSTED: The character's Speed is halved and they cannot take the Charge or Run actions. An Exhausted character who receives an additional Fatigued or Exhausted condition becomes Helpless.

FATIGUED: The character cannot take the Charge or Run actions. A Fatigued character who receives an additional Fatigued condition becomes Exhausted.

FREE-FALLING: A free-falling character is effectively weightless in a microgravity or free-fall environment. The character can only move with access to hand-holds or a surface to push off from or some type of thrust (such as from a thruster pack) and, once moving, continues to move with the same speed and trajectory unless acted upon to stop of change their movement.

HELPLESS: The character cannot take any actions.

HINDERED: The character's Speed is halved (round down) and they cannot take the Charge or Run actions.

INJURED: The character has a –1 penalty to all tests and is Fatigued, unable to take the Charge or Run actions. An Injured character who receives an additional Injured condition becomes Wounded.

PRONE: The character cannot take the Charge or Run actions, as they can only move by crawling, and standing up from Prone requires a Move action using half the character's Speed. Melee attacks have a +1 bonus against Prone characters, while ranged attacks have a –1 penalty.

RESTRAINED: The character's Speed becomes 0 and they effectively cannot move. A Restrained condition may prevent a character from taking certain other actions as well, defined by the nature of the restraint.

UNCONSCIOUS: The character is unaware of their surroundings or the passage of time. The character falls Prone and is Helpless, unable to take any actions.

WOUNDED: The character has a –2 penalty to all tests and is exhausted, their Speed halved and unable to take the Charge or Run actions. A Wounded character who receives an additional Injured or Wounded condition becomes Dying.

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CHURN TRACKER

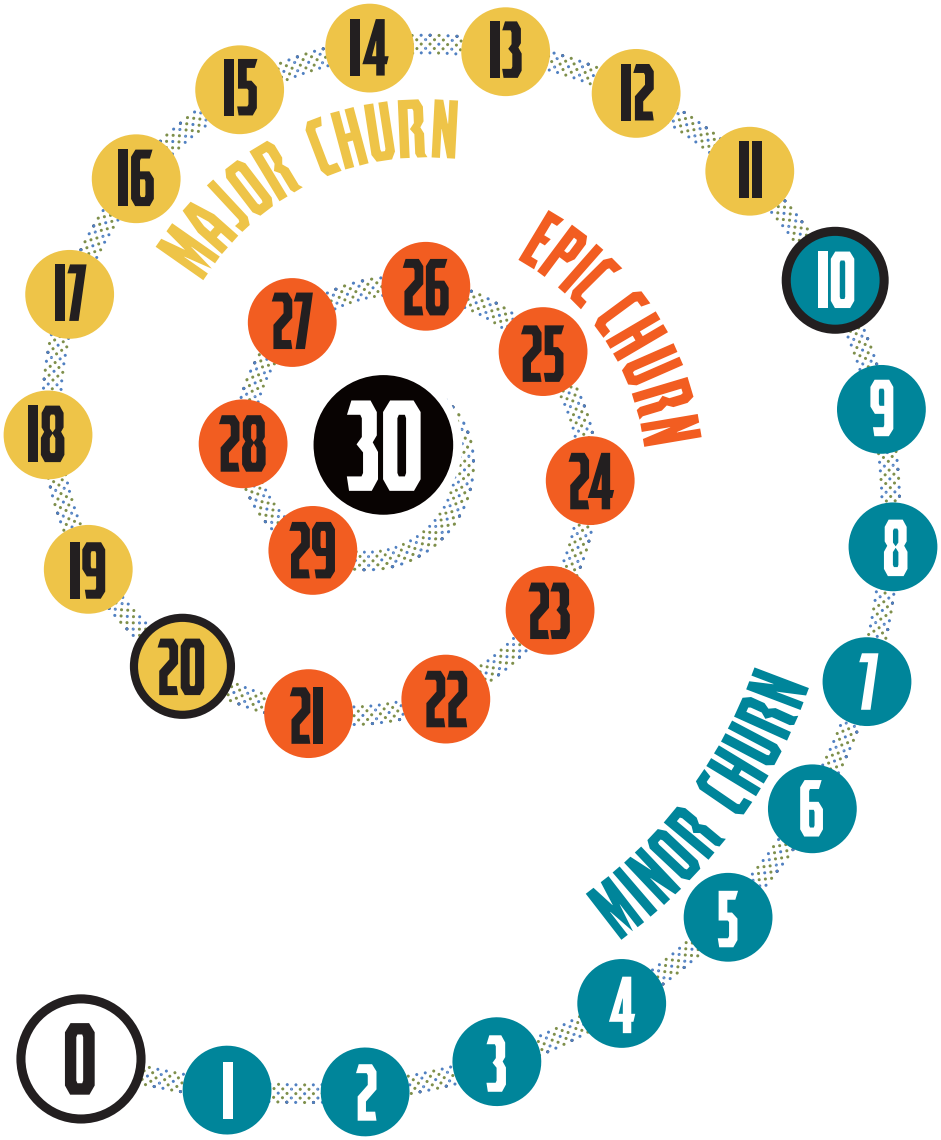
THE CHURN POOL

At the beginning of each adventure, the Churn Pool is "reset," starting at 0. Add 1 to the Churn Pool each time one of the following events occurs:

- **A character succeeds on an ability test and rolls a 6 on the Drama Die**
- **A character spends 4 or more stunt points to perform a stunt**
- **Fortune points are spent to alter a die roll**
- **The characters successfully overcome an encounter or hazard**
- **At the end of a scene in the adventure**

When the Churn Pool reaches 10 and 20, roll 1d6 and consult the **Churn Over** table.

The Churn Pool then continues building. When it reaches 30, an Epic Effect occurs automatically (no die roll required) and the pool "resets" to 0 and begins building again.



CHURN EFFECTS

MINOR: The characters face a setback, a minor complication that makes things more difficult for them. Examples include:

CHALLENGE: A character automatically fails an ability test, or has to make a second, follow-up test, to complete a task. The crew suffers a moderate consequence on a challenge test.

HAZARD: A new hazard appears, or an existing hazard increases by one level.

INVESTIGATION: It takes an additional test or special circumstance to unlock a clue.

SOCIAL: An NPC's attitude shifts one step less favorable or can only be maintained through extra effort from the characters.

MAJOR: The characters have to deal with a more serious setback, such as:

CHALLENGE: An existing threat is increased to the next rank (normal to Elite, etc. see **Chapter 13**). The crew has go through an unexpected challenge test.

HAZARD: A new hazard appears, or an existing hazard increases by two levels. The crew suffers a Loss to their ship (see **Losses** under **Space Combat** in **Chapter 6**).

INVESTIGATION: Opposing forces are alerted to the investigation and misdirect it so an additional lead or clue must be investigated to progress.

SOCIAL: An NPC's attitude shifts two steps less favorable or can only be maintained by performing a difficult task. An NPC learns a secret detrimental to the characters. The PCs make a new minor enemy.

EPIC: Things go from bad to really bad. A whole new threat enters the story, and it's worse than whatever the crew is already dealing with. Examples include:

CHALLENGE: A test can only succeed at a significant price, sacrificing lives, valuable equipment, or social standing. A new Epic adversary enters the plot, or an existing adversary is upgraded to that level.

HAZARD: A new Murderous Hazard enters the plot, or an existing hazard is upgraded to that level.

INVESTIGATION: The investigation leads to a trap, where characters might be ambushed, framed, or otherwise seriously harmed.

SOCIAL: An NPC with a favorable attitude becomes Hostile or one with an unfavorable attitude becomes Very Hostile. An NPC learns a secret that could have disastrous effects on the characters.

CHURN OVER

Churn Pool	d6 Result 1–3	d6 Result 4–6
10	Minor Effect	No Effect
20	Major Effect	Minor Effect

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