

CEPHEUS JOURNAL

In this issue:

Issue #010

Raider's Lament Part 4

The Human Destiny

The Alchemist

The Junk

And More...



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From The Editors

Welcome to 2022 and our first double digit issue! When the team and I started this fanzine back in late 2020 we had no idea whether this idea we had of promoting all things Cepheus Engine would even have legs, let alone get to issue 10. So, to celebrate our double-digit issue, or binary 2 for those with a computer bent, we've tried a little artificial intelligence on this issue's cover. Check out P-O Bergstedt's article for further information on using AI art in your games.

Right then, let's get into this issue's content. We have a couple of articles again from Jo Jaquinta, the first one exploring rare metals and minerals and their use in games, as well as one on a quirky design of the space junk – including a deck plan. Plus, he's given us the fourth episode of his fiction story 'The Raiders Lament'.

Our own Paul Drye has written an expansion of a Sword of Cepheus role, the Alchemist, with lots of potion information to give some zing to your fantasy games. Norton Glover gives us an adventure for Zaibatsu for 3 to 6 players that's sure to challenge your street samurai.

Jon F. Zeigler outlines 'The Human Destiny', a space opera setting of his own devising. Can't wait to see more of that Jon. And finally, we have a couple articles from our own P-O Bergstedt. As mentioned at the start he presents an outline of some of the resources online that use artificial intelligence to create art, as well as some examples. P-O's other article is on world generation in the Hostile setting, as well as a spectacular map he designed with it.

Finally, I round out this issue with a teaser for a setting I'm working on, as well as everything Cepheus Engine related that has been published since the last issue.

Anyway, enough of that, please enjoy Cepheus Journal issue 10.

Brett Kruger

Cepheus Journal Editorial Team

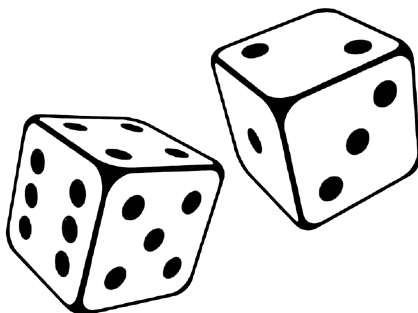
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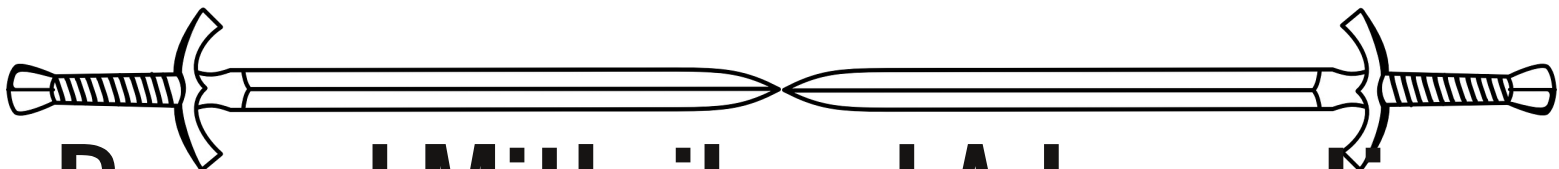
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Beyond Mithril and Adamantine

By Joseph Jaquinta

Overview

Magical items, with which fantasy worlds are populated, are often constructed from mystical, rare materials. These can be important plot points, McGuffins to chase, or pre-requisites for player's ambitions. Different legends speak of varied materials, which is great for background. However, a game system benefits from having a more systematized approach to this.

In this article we present a number of "true metals". These, as described, can give inspiration for use in a game. But they can also be seen as a template for creating as many more as needed. We will talk about ways to use this in a standard fantasy game, some suggested plots, and possibilities for use in other settings.

In our real world, there are a number of metals based on simple elements, like iron, silver, and gold. These can be forged and tempered in different ways to bring out certain properties. Like working iron into steel. They can be also mixed with other materials to create alloys with different properties, such as bronze and brass.

One approach is that magic enables the capability of new techniques. For example, it may be as simple as magically powered forges that can achieve higher temperatures than a normal medieval furnace, allowing such elements as aluminum and tungsten to be forged.

Taking a different approach, a fantasy world contains many esoteric substances that are candidates for alloying with metals. Or even that magic, itself, can be imbued in the substance during forging.

Either way the aim is to take the features that are normally present in the primary material and accentuate them to supernatural levels. The result is a substance that can be used to make wonderous objects.

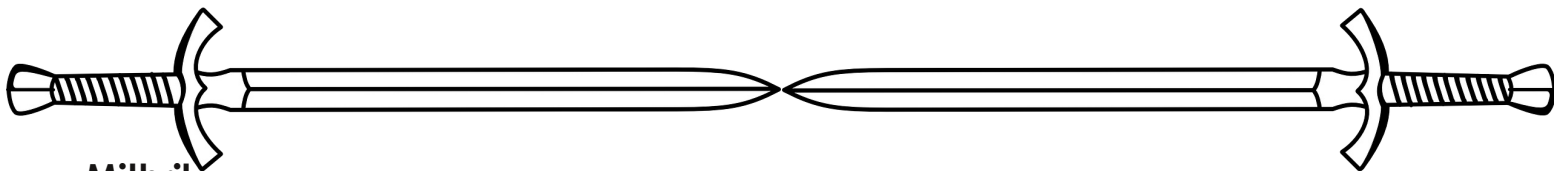
Adamantine

This material comes to us from Greek legends. It was the substance of Perseus's sword that could withstand gorgon's blood, the chains of Prometheus, or the doors of Tartarus. Representing it in this system, it is a form of "true iron". It is made from magically smelted iron, alloyed with powdered diamonds, giant bones, or dragon claws.

It is a deep flat black in appearance but can be polished to a high shine. It is extremely rigid and strong and can be sharpened to a very fine edge. It is somewhat heavy and is most prized for making edged or pointed weapons. It is readily amenable to magic and can be overlaid with even the strongest enchantments.

It is the most sought after of all the true metals and can easily fetch 10,000 times its weight in gold, unworked.





Mithril

Anyone who has read the works of J. R. R. Tolkien knows of this metal. Prized of the dwarves it is known for its beauty as much as its properties. This is “true silver” and is forged of the highest purity silver, alloyed with cobwebs of ethereal spiders, shards of the spheres of heaven, or the first light of the dawn of the first day of spring.

It is easily worked and can be drawn out into wire from stout rods to a fine gauge. This makes it particularly suited to making chain mail. It can conduct magic even more than adamantine but does not have the same capacity. Since it can be finely worked, it is good for making runes and sigils to set into other items. And its high conductivity makes it excellent for making rechargeable items.

Although more broadly useful than adamantium, it is easier to produce, and so generally costs less. When available it can be found for 7,000 times its weight in gold.



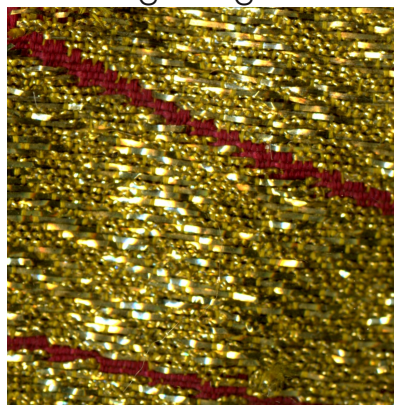
Aurum

Although made from the most precious of non-magical metals, “true gold” is not the most valuable of the magical metals. When worked and polished, its luster is not as bright as pure gold, and is closer to white gold. It is not very strong at all and cannot hold an edge. It can be drawn more finely than Mithril but is too weak for very long

strands. A common practice, so, is to weave this with other substances to give it the strength and resiliency it lacks naturally.

It is especially good at magic involving compelling, beguiling, or coercing. So, it is often used to make certain magic circles for binding demons, devils and other creatures from beyond. It is woven into cloth-of-gold garments and ensorcelled with stature enhancing magics. Or in light weight, magical shackles to bind and compel creatures.

When it can be found it often goes for 4,000 times its weight in gold.

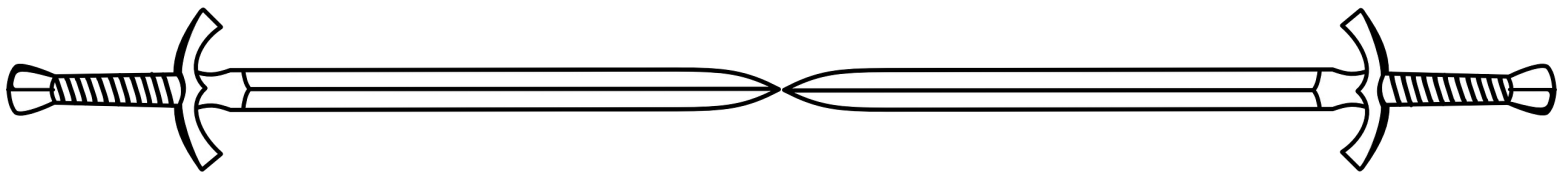


Quoborium

This rare and specialized metal is also known as “true lead”. It is somewhat darker than the lead it is made from and is about four times as dense, making it very heavy. It is quite pliable and easy to work but doesn’t hold a shape well. It is most often pounded into flat sheets.

The one feature it is best known for is that it is extremely resistant to magic. No known magic can penetrate even the thinnest layer of quoborium. Even a small amount can perturb or disrupt magical effects.

You can find strongboxes made with a quoborium lining, to guard their contents from detection. It is also used to bind



magical items or creatures that might otherwise escape and wreak havoc. It can be found tipping probes and picks in the highest end versions of thief's tools for disarming magical traps and locks.

It is usually made to order and is rarely found in large quantities. When available it is valued at about 1,000 times its weight in gold.



Tinium

True tin is most often a curiosity. It is forged from pure tin and a broad array of other miscellaneous substances. These are not particularly valuable but are rare. The result is a shiny silvery metal which is very reflective. It does not forge well, but it melts at a low temperature and is easily cast.

It is mildly attuned to magic and can sustain low level enchantments. Its main attraction is its mechanical properties. When cast in thin pieces, it is still very flexible. It can be deformed to a large degree yet will snap back to the original shape. It is very resistant to metal fatigue and can be bent and restored indefinitely.

Many curious devices are made of this, often by Dwarves or Gnomes. Springs and coils can power small automatons, or items that need to move or change shape as they operate.

It is reasonably durable and most commonly found as indecipherable

pieces, the original devices that housed it long rusted away. Such scrap can be available for about 2,000 times its weight in gold.

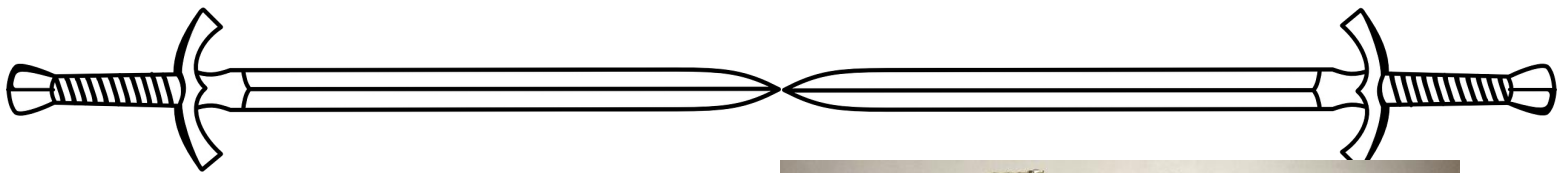


Laen

True glass is made from high grade leaded crystal, ground down and re-cast multiple times, like Damascus steel. With every stretch and fold additional magic is woven into the matrix until it produces a perfect liquid crystal. It must be worked in this form, and shaped or blown much like normal glass. Once it cools, it becomes rock hard and will not melt again. In fact, it becomes highly heat resistant and insulating. A crucible of laen can contain molten lava and yet be held by hand.

It is light grey naturally, but exceptional crafters can improve the clarity and tint it a variety of shades. But it will always remain somewhat smoky. It is most often used for utilitarian things, such as parts for magical forges to make other true metals. It is not particularly attuned to magic, but it can form a base for which other elements can be inlaid that carry a magical enchantment.





As a curiosity, laen can go for about 3,000 times its weight in gold. But pieces that have a clearly defined purpose (for example, rigid laen gloves) can go for much more to the right buyer.

Hydrangium

This extremely dangerous substance is illegal almost everywhere it is known. Also called "true mercury", it is made in large vats by dissolving living exotic animals into a mercury base while dark chants are sung. The resulting pasty metal is a dully silver with a slight iridescence to it. It is not very strong and can crumble with too much pressure.

What makes it specifically dangerous is that, like its source mercury, it can cause insanity. However, it does so just by proximity, rather than direct exposure. Only lead, or a similarly dense substance can prevent this. It is not quick, but it is irreversible, to anything less than deity level magic.

Primitive tribes have been known to make this and use it in rituals, especially those inhabiting deep underground caves. Some will also keep hydrangium tipped arrow heads and blow darts to discourage contact. One of the vilest uses is in its powdered form, inserted into a trap that blows it into the face of the victim. Once inhaled it is impossible to get rid of, and a gibbering descent into madness is inevitable.

The most depraved assassin guilds sometimes have small quantities available for at least 4,000 times the weight of the powder in gold.

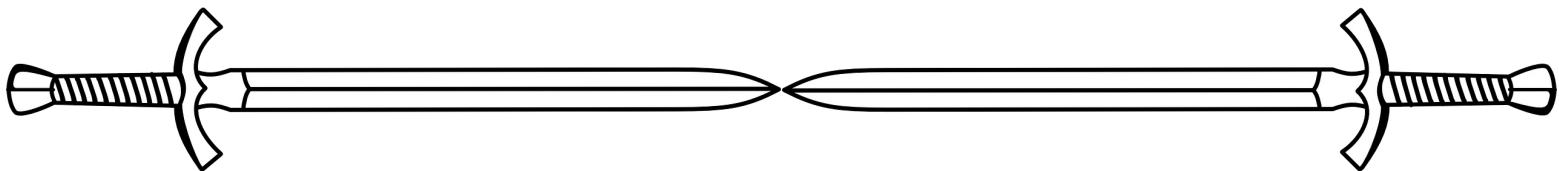


Equipment & Plot Ideas

The most obvious use for these materials is in items made from them. Here is a selection of items that you might add to your game where these materials are available.

Forge Visor (1500 g.p.): This is a curved section of laen, like a slice from a cylinder. It either has a supporting frame or else loopholes worked into the sides. If intact, it also has straps and a harness so that it can be secured to the head, over the face. When worn as such, it enables unobstructed vision (at least of near objects) but total protection from heat. This makes it highly desirable for anyone doing craftwork on heating. This can be forging, smithing, welding or anything where fine work is needed on very hot items. Using the Forge Visor in such circumstances will allow for mundane work to be completed in half the time, or else if the same time is used the work may be performed to a finer level of detail.





Plot hook: The players wish to commission a great work to be completed by a master smith. They have gone through great lengths to acquire the fabulous materials required, sought out the smith on their high mountain, and brought a princely sum for payment. However, the work required is of great detail, and to complete it to the fidelity requested, the smith requires a forge visor. Just so happens he knows where one is...

Crab Claws (200 g.p.): These items look a lot like their namesake. A shiny carapace made of laen with a padded interior that your hand can slip into. They are frequently found in pairs, but even single ones command a high price. They are not flexible and cannot grasp, but the built-in shape is capable of holding up anything that is relatively long and thin. So, they are quite handy for many tasks such as smith work and weapon forging.

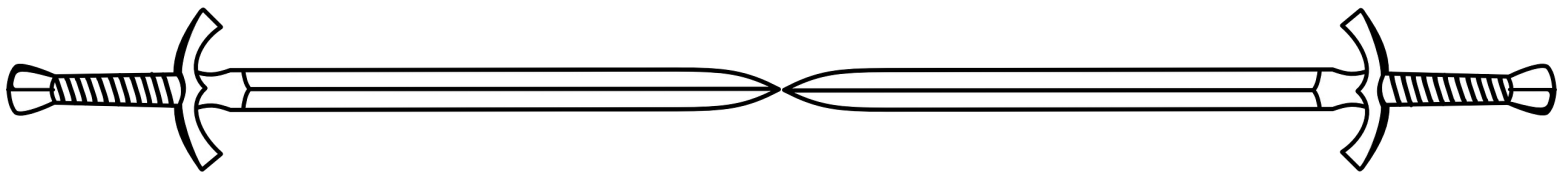
Plot hook: While recuperating from an adventure at a lord's castle, the players are approached by the weaponsmith. They are a good friend of theirs because of their joint love of weaponry and the players have traded repairs and new items with them previously. One of the smith's most prized possessions is his crab claw, which has made much of his work easier to do. Unfortunately, either through a bad bet, a lover's tiff, or a self-inflicted cause of the referee's choosing, the smith no longer has it. The cook has it.

The cook is quite pleased with it and has found many uses in the kitchen for it. They are still miffed at the smith for whatever caused its loss and are unwilling to part with it lightly. It is up to the players to make peace between the two, or to find some other creative way to resolve the situation.

Elite Thief's Tools (250 g.p.): These high-end tools have all the usual items, although of exceptional quality. There are a number of other, extraordinary tools. First there are a number of long, thin, probes. These are made of tinium alloy and are highly flexible. With a little pressure they will bend and slip around corners and cracks. A few have small hooks on the end allowing them to be wormed into mechanisms and used to hold things in place or move them as desired. There are more devices made of short thin lengths of adamantine. Some may be slotted together with a tiny universal join in-between. These are excellent for transmitting direct or rotational force to their target of any magnitude. They are unbendable and unbreakable. Finally, is a long flexible tube with a piston running its length. When pressed several lengths of quoborium filament extend from the end in a fan shape. This can be used to disrupt or nullify certain magical triggers.

In terms of game mechanics, use of these tools does not make picking locks or removing traps of normal difficulty any easier. However, they can negate up to a total of -4 of dice modifiers that a device possesses due to superior or magical workmanship. However, they are also limited by the skill of the user. The amount nullified cannot exceed the Craft skill of the user.





Plot hook: Players are hired as muscle to back up a master thief from the guild on an operation against the local government. They just have to take out the minimal guards on a place that is deemed so secure, that they don't bother with physical guards. The place is, indeed, guarded by hellishly complex locks and traps, but a master thief with master tools can make quick work of it.

Urn of Eternal Rest (100 g.p.): This is a funerary urn, designed to hold the ashes of a deceased creature. It is dull in color, and only has light ornamentation on its surface. It is exceptionally heavy, though, as the primary component of it is quaborium. There are some creatures that do not wish to remain dead, but by placing their ashes in here, and using the accompanying stopper, they can be prevented from escaping their fate. In worlds with resurrection magic, placing the remains of crime lords or freedom fighters in here, will prevent their compatriots from resurrecting them. Such a precaution can also prevent the souls that occupied the body from reincarnating in a new form, thwarting generational saviors or curses.



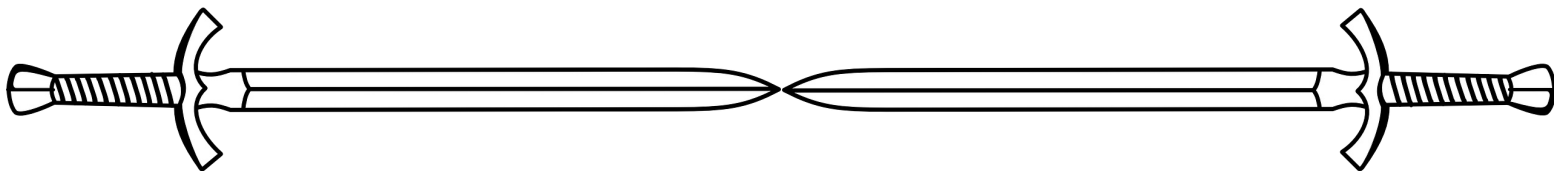
Plot hook: As part of a treasure hoard the players find an uncharacteristically heavy cremation urn. When searched (because, of course, players will) it is found to mostly contain ashes and bone shards. At the

very bottom, however, is a mithril ring. It is certainly magic, and has light etchings on it in a script that those with esoteric knowledge will know to be favored by necromancers. The writing is symbolic, however, and does not spell anything out. The best guess from an identifying scholar or magic is that it aids in protection against level drain.

The ashes in the urn are from a powerful vampire that was vanquished years ago after a particularly evil reign of terror. If they ignore the ashes, they will reconstitute over the next 24 hours and the vampire will be reborn. The ring was its prized possession, which allows it to drain life energy and heal itself not just through its bite, but through any attack, even that of spells or weapons. It will begin to hunt down the party to retrieve it.

Marzipan of Derangement (1000 g.p.): Assassin guilds are known for making available sweets laced with poison for the elimination of undesirables. Marzipan is one of their favorites as the heavy almond flavor masks the cyanide. But for truly special assignments they prepare special pastries made with a paste of ground almonds, honey, and hydrangium. This is very rare as it is hard to get, and extraordinary precautions have to be undertaken to avoid being poisoned while making it. The result is package in intricately enameled boxes (with lead lining) and in the shape of marzipan for traditional reasons.





Plot hook: An extremely audacious (and very well paid) assassin's guild has taken on the ultimate challenge: to kill a god. Their plan is on the high holy day, when the god descends to take, personally, the highest offerings, to substitute the honey cakes for hydrangium laced delicacies. Perhaps the players are recruited to aid in some of the preparation of it, or hear of the plot and are recruited to put a stop to it, or maybe they have to deal with a deranged god wreaking havoc.

Beyond Fantasy

Although this article focuses on the use of such things in a fantasy setting, similar concepts are applicable in other genres.

In modern games, exotic elements might be brought to a world from meteorites or unique, one-of-a-kind circumstances, lead to small quantities of miraculous substances. Or cutting-edge corporations

might have created some miraculous things in their research and development labs.

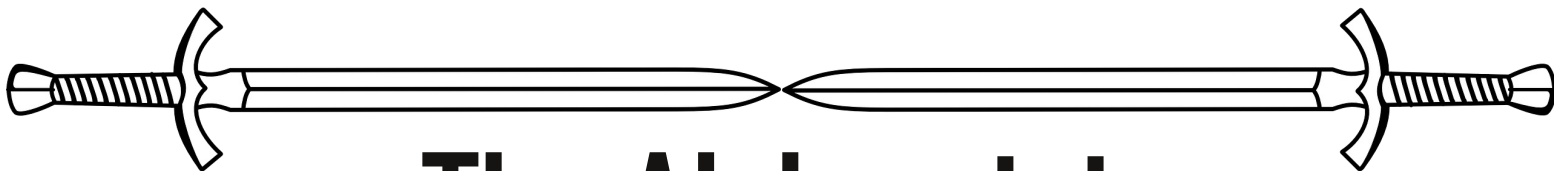
In a near or far future setting there are many other possibilities. Microgravity allows for the creation of alloys of previously immiscible substances (like steel and Styrofoam). Gravitics allows for the hammering and shaping of metal with precise control, allowing for Damascus or Japanese steel folding techniques to be applied to many substances. Advances in nano-technology might allow for creating crystal compounds not normally found in nature by laying down precise atoms in the lattice one at a time.

Whether it is beskar armor, or vibranium spears, decide on the end purpose you desire, and then use some of the ideas above to explain it in your setting.



This fanzine and more can be downloaded from the official Cepheus Journal Website!





The Alchemist

By Paul Drye

In Sword of Cepheus rules, characters who are scholars may specialize in alchemy which is a specific branch of magic oriented towards laboratory procedures and potions rather than on-the-fly spellcasting in the heat of the moment. Its practitioners are interested in acquiring quite unusual treasures termed reagents and rely on a well-outfitted laboratory and the investment of quite a bit of time when producing their products.

Potions

An alchemist's greatest advantage while adventuring is his pharmacopeia—the pre-made potions he brings with him and the miraculous effects they can bring to bear on the problems encountered. For a list of

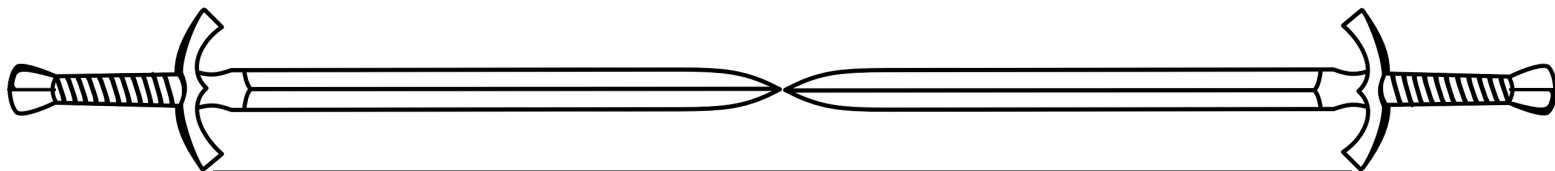
actual effects, refer to the SoC rulebook, p.121.

Creating a Potion

Potions are created with a roll against Alchemy skill. Each type of potion has a difficulty to create it listed in the following table, against which the roll will be made, and a time to make it. Note that the listed times are optional rules, replacing the flat 1 week for all potions (as one-use items) in the SoC rules.

If using the failure rules following this table, the referee should make the skill roll secretly rather than the alchemist's player, so as to leave doubt as to whether or not the creation of a potion is successful.

Potion	Category	Difficulty	Time
Animal Control	Control	Average	1D+3 days
Clairaudience	Perception	Average	1D+3 days
Clairvoyance	Perception	Average	1D+3 days
Climbing	Skill	Routine	1D days
Delusion	Other	Routine	1D days
Diminution	Transformation	Difficult	2D+2 days
Dragon Control	Control	Very Difficult	1D weeks
ESP	Perception	Difficult	2D+1 days
Extra Healing	Transformation	Average	1D+3 days
Fire Resistance	Transformation	Average	1D+2 days
Flying	Skill	Very Difficult	1D weeks
Gaseous Form	Transformation	Formidable	2D weeks
Growth	Transformation	Difficult	2D+2 days
Healing	Transformation	Routine	1D+1 days
Heroism	Skill	Routine	1D+1 days
Human Control	Control	Average	1D+3 days
Inhuman Strength	Skill	Very Difficult	1D weeks
Invisibility	Transformation	Difficult	2D+3 days
Invulnerability	Transformation	Difficult	2D+3 days
Levitation	Skill	Difficult	2D+3 days
Longevity	Transformation	Formidable	1D months



Oil of Sharpness	Other	Difficult	2D+1 days
Oil of Slipperiness	Other	Average	1D+1 days
Love	Control	Routine	1 day
Plant Control	Control	Average	1D+1 days
Poison	Other	Routine	1 day
Polymorph	Transformation	Formidable	2D weeks
Speed	Skill	Difficult	2D+1 days
Super-Heroism	Skill	Average	1D+3 days
Sweet Water	Other	Routine	1 day
Treasure Finding	Perception	Very Difficult	1D weeks
Undead Control	Control	Difficult	2D+1 days
Water Breathing	Skill	Routine	1D+1 days

As well as generally grouping potions by type, the Category of a potion is used to determine what alchemy equipment would be useful in making it—see the section on Alchemical Equipment, below.

Failure

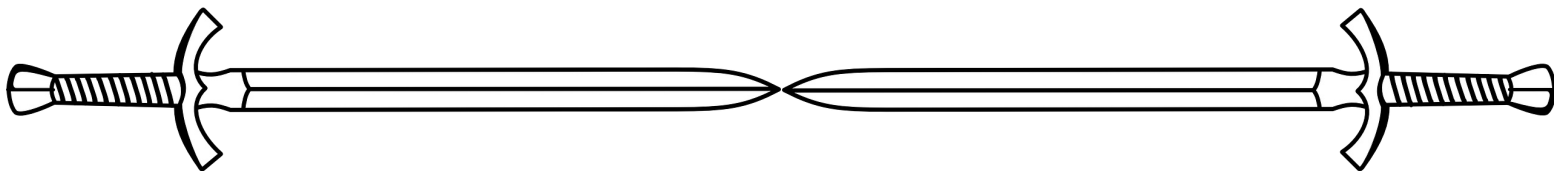
Alchemy is a touchy science, and even a most-skilled alchemist will fail to produce their intended product at times. Should the skill check to create the potion fail, the referee should make a second roll of 2D, modified by the character's Alchemy skill to determine what product is actually about to be decanted into its bottle:



Roll Result

- 2-5 The alchemist has accidentally made a potion of Poison.
- 6-9 The alchemist has produced an obviously botched “potion” which has no effect if drunk. Local bylaws forbid pouring the results down the nearest opening to the sewers following the Egrious Caustic Rats Incident.
- 10+ The alchemist has accidentally made a potion of Delusion, of the appearance of the potion that the alchemist intended to make. Drinking it makes one believe that the effect of that correct potion is now in play...

As well as the skill modifier to this roll, some pieces of alchemical equipment also modify the roll and thus reduce the average severity of the result.

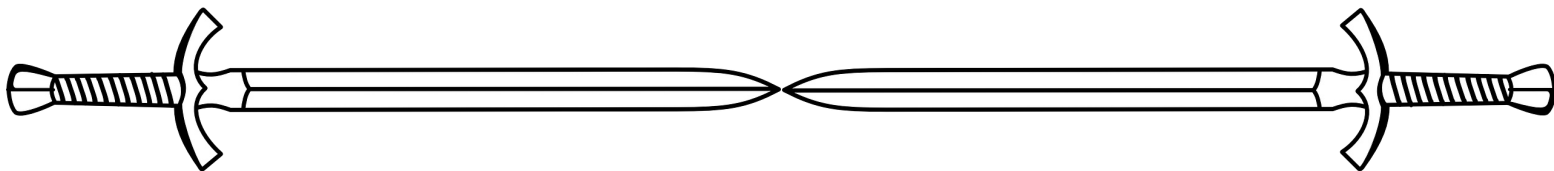


Alchemical Ingredients

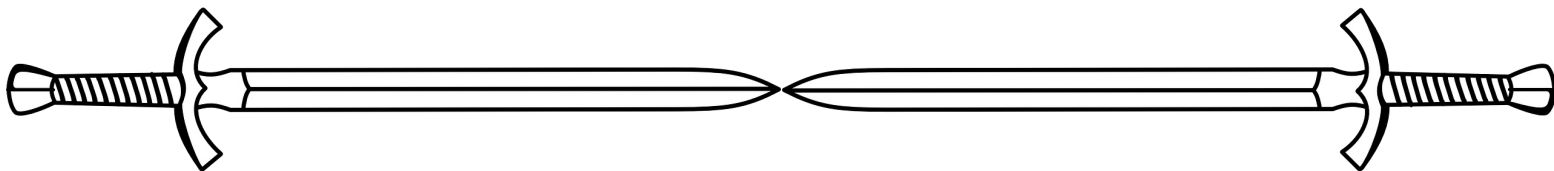
There are many substances that an alchemist might use when creating a potion or powder. Some are relatively common and can be glossed over (water, for example, or lead), but most are unusual and might require an adventure to obtain. To discover what unusual ingredients are

needed for a particular potion, roll d66 for 1 or more ingredients below, or select them based their common use. The number needed can be based on potion difficulty, ranging from 1 to 5 (Routine, Average, Difficult, Very Difficult, or Formidable):

Roll	Reagents	Description
1-1	Alicorn	The horn of a unicorn, or a portion of it powdered. Very powerful against poison and disease.
1-2	Ambergris	A waxy solid found washed up on the shores of the world. Its exact origin is unknown to any person living in the setting. Often used in aphrodisiacs.
1-3	Aqua fortis	An extremely strong acid.
1-4	Aqua regia	Another strong acid, particularly useful to alchemists for its ability to dissolve gold.
1-5	Bezoar	A stone formed within the intestine or stomach of a ruminant such as a cow or deer, these are powdered and often used in potions that work against poison and disease.
1-6	Brimstone	Yellow and usually powdery, the best brimstone for alchemy is formed in large translucent crystals. This form is rare and found only around hot springs. Alchemically it has the inverse properties of mercury, and the two are often paired.
2-1	Butter of antimony	A salt of antimony resembling tiny fragments of glass, often used to cloud clear liquids.
2-2	Calcanthum	Notable for its large, bright blue crystals, calcanthum is often used in potions related to water or air. If heated sufficiently, it will reduce to copper metal.
2-3	Colostrum	The milk of a cow or other mammal that has just given birth. Often used in potions related to health or rejuvenation.
2-4	Copper glance	A stone of made of soft, lustrous crystals like obsidian. Of interest to alchemists as copper is extracted from it with ease.
2-5	Fulminating gold	Made by dissolving gold in aqua regia with sal ammoniac, fulminating gold is a bronze-coloured powder that is remarkable not only for its expense but its explosive properties. These become apparent if it is subjected to even slight movement. Alchemists believe it may have many interesting uses, but it is naturally difficult to explore them.
2-6	Lapis infernalis	Also known as lunar caustic, it is produced when a mixture of gold and silver is dissolved in aqua fortis - the gold stays solid and sinks to the bottom - and then dried. It can then become pure silver by heating. Often used in potions related to change.



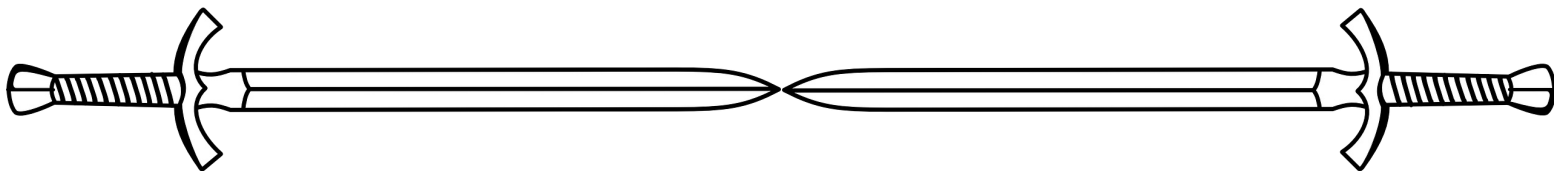
3-1	Lapis solaris	Also known as baryte due to its weight, this is a grey stone with a radiating pattern of wrinkles and furrows when cracked open. It has the most peculiar property, after it has been heated and allowed to cool, of softly glowing greenish-yellow after being exposed to the sun. Only available from one known source at the base of a volcano and highly sought after. Often used in potions relating to repelling evil or revealing the unseen.
3-2	Luna cornea	Also known as horn silver, it is heavy and resembles weathered horn. It is useful to alchemists as it is easily reduced to elemental silver. Related mystically to moon phases, it is often used in potions related to changing shapes or other physical properties.
3-3	Massicot	A hard yellowish substances that encrusts other, worthless rocks, it is of alchemical interest for two reasons: it converts easily to another form, purplish-red in colour named litharge (and vice versa), and it can be heated with luna cornea to produce pure silver.
3-4	Mercury	Also known as quicksilver and hydrargyros, this metallic, silvery liquid is a major alchemical ingredient and a source of fascination to the art's practitioners for its mixture of properties.
3-5	Milk of sulfur	Closely related to brimstone, this substance differs only in the manner of its creation: precipitated from oil of vitriol. As the other substance that notably was not dissolved by the oil is gold, this precipitate is used when the cost of using gold in a preparation would be prohibitive.
3-6	Moonfoam	Also known as aphroselenon, moonfoam is dew which has been charged with a strange energy by the rays of a waning moon. Accordingly difficult to gather in quantity, it is nevertheless useful in the conversion of silver to gold. It is also very poisonous.
4-1	Mummia	Bitumen sourced from its use in mummification before burial, believed to be superior to the same substance directly obtained.
4-2	Natron	A powdery white or light yellow substance mined from only a few dry salt lakebeds where it has formed. Used to preserve the quality of things in situations where they would normally change.
4-3	Nitrum flammans	A bluish-white substance that is usually powdered or in small granules, it is alchemically useful because of its properties related to warmth and coolness. Water drops in temperature when nitrum flammans is dissolved in it, and when heated it increases the temperature of the burning substance, sometimes to the point of explosion. Often used in potions related to fire or ice.
4-4	Oil of terebinth	Smelling strongly of resin and extracted from the wood of the terebinth tree, this yellow oil varies highly in quality. It is often used in potions related to life extension and immortality.
4-5	Oil of vitriol	A strong acid, contrasting with the otherwise similar aqua regia in that it dissolves most anything except for gold.
4-6	Orpiment	A yellow or reddish crumbling stone of interest to alchemists because of the golden streak it makes when rubbed on a surface. Believed to be useful in producing gold in some way.



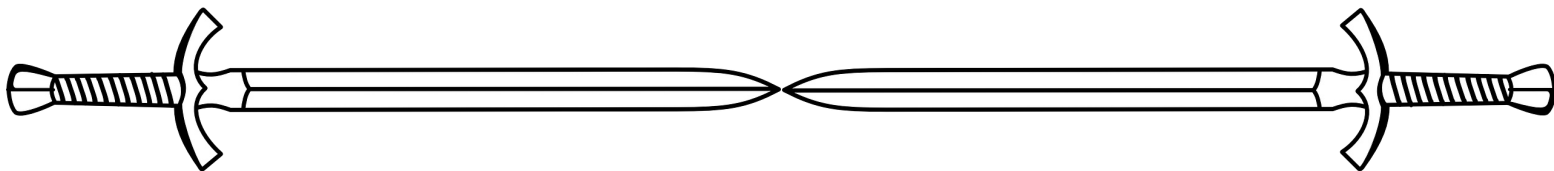
5-1	Phlogiston	An elusive substance that is nevertheless highly sought after because of its unparalleled affinity with heat and warmth. Reputed to be a red, metallic liquid like mercury, few have even seen it, let alone possessed some and experimented with it.
5-2	Plumbago	Glassy, greasy-feeling dark stone, notable for its softness (it marks parchment) and the fact that it burns away to nothing if heated. Often used in potions of invisibility.
5-3	Powder of Algaroth	A coarse, light grey powder. Used in a wide variety of ways, it is most notable as a powerful purgative and emetic, making it tricky to use in potions that must be drunk.
5-4	Purple of Cassius	A substance which turns bright purple when mixed into a solution that contains gold or related compounds, and so used by alchemists to detect its presence.
5-5	Realgar	Also known as sandaracha. Large red crystals superficially resembling ruby but very soft. Highly poisonous.
5-6	Regulus of antimony	A form of antimony metal with crystalline rays of other alloys visible on its surface.
6-1	Sal ammoniac	A rare kind of salt only found in an otherwise unused mine where a coal seam has been on fire for a long period of time. Used in potions that relate to fire and heat.
6-2	Sal petrae	A white powdery solid used to convert aqua fortis to aqua regia.
6-3	Spiritus fumans	A liquid similar in appearance to water, but fuming at room temperature and with a pungent odor like very strong vinegar. Believed to be related to mercury in some fashion, and sometimes used as a substitute.
6-4	Thion hudor	A sulfurous compound, thickly liquid at room temperature and a light yellow in colour. Smells strongly of sulfur.
6-5	Wormwood	Also known as absinthion, wormwood is a bitter-tasting woody substance derived from a shrub. Like many botanical alchemy ingredients its quality varies widely and the best wormwood is rare and expensive. It is often used in protective potions.
6-6	Zaffre	A deep blue pigment, zaffre is unusual for an alchemical ingredient in being a source of revenue rather than expense; painters find it useful in making blue tints and it is used by glassmakers. Due to its colour, alchemists prepare it for their own use when making potions related to the sky, ocean, or air.

Alchemical Equipment

An alchemist is nothing without a bonus to making potions of one category laboratory, and that laboratory is filled with or another. Finding this equipment in a special equipment. Some is the bare disused or abandoned laboratory is a minimum necessary for producing a treasure of great price, while finding a potion—without them on hand, a craftsman who can make an item is an character has no chance of success to adventure itself. create any potion—while others give a



Item	Description	Effect
Alembic	Similar to a retort, but consisting of two sealed vessels connected by a tube rather than one vessel and a cup.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Perception category.
Aludel	Two or more nested containers with open bottoms (except for the bottom-most) and tops. A substance is placed in the bottom container and the whole placed on a fire to allow sublimed material to condense on the walls of the uppermost container.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Control category.
Asbestinon Cloth	Also known as <i>amiantos</i> , this remarkable cloth is impervious to flame. It is a kind of wool made from a stone found only in a few mines to the far northwest.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Transformation category.
Athanor	A furnace designed to produce an even heat.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Control category.
Bellows	A corrugated leather bag with a metal nozzle, used to blow air on flames and make them hotter.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Perception category.
Crucible	A ceramic bowl that can be placed above a flame and substances melted within.	Minimum equipment
Cucurbit	Like a retort, but without the beak-sealed top and bottom with a seam in the middle.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Skill category.
Cupel	Like a crucible, but made of bone ash, used to melt precious metals.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Other category.
Dew Bath	A water bath full of dew, which has alchemical properties beyond those of mere water.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Perception category.
Dung Bath	A container full of animal dung, which uses the natural decomposition of its contents to supply a very low heat over a long period of time to anything placed within it.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Other category.
Glass Rod	A humble piece of equipment, yet fragile and expensive to make. Superior when stirring an experiment, as unlike wood, stone, or metal it will not introduce unwanted substances even at the greatest heats.	Minimum equipment



Lute	A sticky substance used to seal joins between two other pieces of equipment.	Minimum equipment
Mortar & Pestle	A heavy stone bowl with a matching club-shaped instrument used to crush substances into a powder.	Minimum equipment
Philosopher's Egg	An oval glass container with a long vertical neck.	On a potion-creation failure, adds +1 to the result check.
Retort	A glass vessel with a beak which can be subjected to heat, with substances condensing on the sides of the beak to drip into a cup.	Minimum equipment
Sand Bath	A container full of sand which can be heated from below. Vessels containing a substance can be placed in the sand, so as to be subject to even high heat from all directions.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Transformation category.
Show Globe	A glass vessel intended to receive a liquid condensed from another vessel while also allowing the alchemist to see the colour, consistency, and so on of the liquid being produced.	On a potion-creation failure, adds +1 to the result check.
Spirit Lamp	A metal tube stuffed with cotton or linen, used to burn distilled spirits soaked into the fibers as a source of smokeless heat.	Adds +1 to the Alchemy skill check if making a potion of the Other category.
Touchstone	A flat slab of dark slate against which a sample of metal may be streaked. The colour of the streak gives clues as to the quality of the metal.	On a potion-creation failure, adds +1 to the result check.

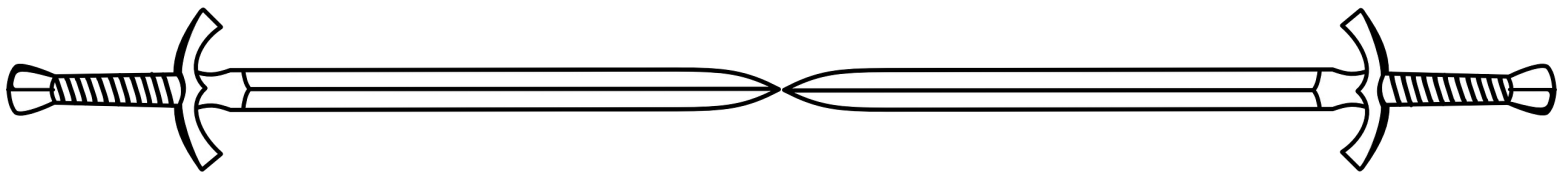
Great Works

Besides their general research and potion creation, alchemists usually have one lifetime-long project to which they always return, which they term their "Great Work". There are a few different goals which can qualify for this, and so players should select from among them for their character:

Discovering the first matter: It is a fundamental belief of natural philosophy that all matter is ultimately composed of one single, almost royal, form of matter. Gold is sometimes looked at as containing the highest fraction of it, or perhaps mercury, or water. This mystery compels the alchemist to distill substances in a variety of

arcane (and expensive) ways, trying to recover the basic substance on which everything else rests.

Making an immortality elixir: A work complicated by the fact that it will undoubtedly require only the rarest and most expensive ingredients, the payoff is nevertheless immense. Any given alchemist will be lucky to produce even one dose of this elixir in their lifetime, and failures are often extremely grim—the gods do not like mortals treading on their prerogatives and delight in ironic punishments.



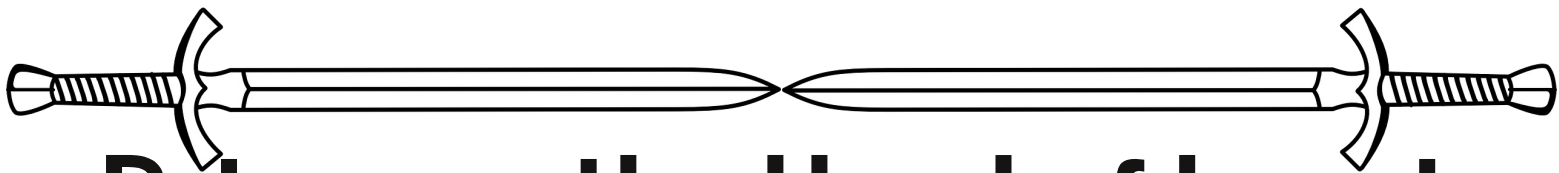
Discovering the Universal Solvent:

Alchemists invariably dissolve new substances in water, alcohol, acid, or other liquids so that they can be distilled, boiled, filtered and other such procedures. They are particularly interested in the fact that all substances dissolve in some liquids but not others. The question then follows of whether or not there is a liquid that will dissolve anything, which they call alkahest. And so, they set themselves the task of finding one. Strictly speaking this is actually two Great Works—discovering the solvent and also finding something that can hold it.

Transforming base metal to gold:

The previous goals are too rarefied for some alchemists, and the more roguish type will seek this entirely practical end instead. There are two schools of thought as to how this feat may be accomplished: either from one metal to another directly, or through the mediation of another substance that must be created, termed the philosopher's stone. The creation of gold is also the Work that most interests royal laypeople, and so alchemists that cannot support themselves and require a patron will also seek it. Riches await, but one's lord may be impatient...





Bring me the Head of Izumi Takahiro

**An adventure for Zaibatsu
for 3 to 6 players. By Norton Glover**

Briefing

The assumption is that the players are street samurai, employees of a particular corporation, and have been called in at 6:00 am for an emergency meeting with their handler.

Izumi Takahiro is somewhat successful middleman in the Tokyo underworld. He made his living trading in information and running the occasional con. He recently came across some confidential sales projections and future projects for the Ghibli-Disney media corporation. Data like this would be worth millions to any competing megacorp. His plan was to sell them to the PC's employer. While negotiations were underway, he was shot in the chest multiple times by an assassin and left for dead. It is assumed Ghibli-Disney tried to kill him.

Fortunately for Izumi, he was fitted with a Cardiopulmonary Backup System - an expensive piece of retrogenic technology that keeps the user's brain alive for 24 hours after a critical injury (see Cepheus Journal #7 for details). If brought to an appropriate medical facility, the brain can be moved to a new vat-grown body, and Izumi can be restored.

Unfortunately for the company, Izumi's body was stolen at the scene of the shooting. The company wants the information Izumi has and has tasked the players to bring Izumi (or just his head) back

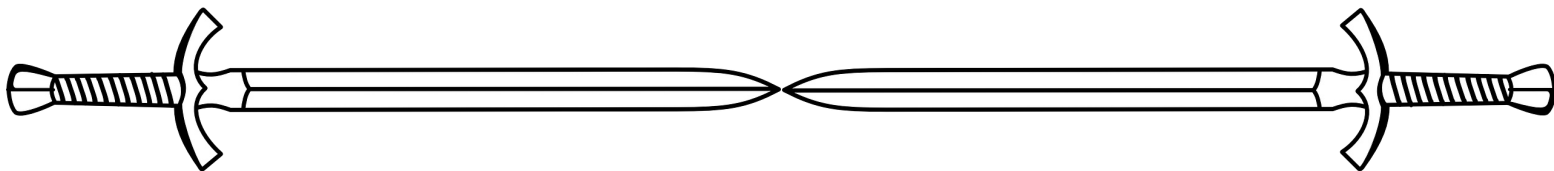
alive. The attack was 6 hours ago, and the players have 18 hours to retrieve Izumi's head before it is non-viable.

What's going on?

The Enemy Company: Ghibli-Disney does have a team after Izumi, but they didn't shoot him. They're looking to take him alive to find out what he knows and how he infiltrated their security (spoiler: he seduced a secretary). They're aware of Reiko's former employment at Perfect Blossom, so they're monitoring that location. They have commissioned a stealth airship that is ready to drop in a retrieval team whenever Reiko shows up with the head.

The Wife: The assassin was a freelancer hired by Mizuki, Izumi's long-suffering wife. She hired the killer, a man named Gavreau, to take her husband out, for both the insurance money, and for his repeated betrayals of her. She didn't know about the brain implant beforehand, so she's still after him.

The Girlfriend: Izumi knew that this deal was dangerous, so he had one of his girlfriends, Ejiri Rieko, a nurse/EMT, on standby in case something happened. She retrieved his body, removed the head, and is in hiding. She intends to bring him to Perfect Bloom, a luxury medical facility, where he can be revived. She has an appointment for 8pm tonight (earliest



she could get). She's spending the day in a capsule hotel at the Shinagawa train station, guarding the head.

Operation Spoiler Warning: In addition, there is another organization after Izumi called the Saurian Society: A violent faction of a fan club for the media property Venus Rangers (produced by Ghibli-Disney). Their source inside Ghibli-Disney informed them of Izumi's theft. They believe the information will spoil an upcoming Venus Rangers movie, and they're willing to kill him to prevent this from happening.

Intelligence Provided by the Company

- The attack was at a public noodle shop at midnight. According to the police, 3 shots were fired from a Stern Universal T75 Gauss sniper rifle. No shooter has been found.
- The T75 is an expensive, rare weapon used only by professionals.
- An image from a traffic drone, showing one of the paramedics at the scene driving off with Izumi's body.
- An image and ID for the paramedic - an EMT named Ejiri Rieko. You have her address.
- Two Tokyo addresses are on file for Izumi, one with his wife, another a small Asakusa apartment in his name.

Finding out information with Investigate or Streetwise rolls.

- The only known underworld figure who regularly uses a T75 is a gaijin (foreigner) named Gavreau, a professional killer.
- Ejiri Rieko is an employee of Safety Systems, a private EMT company where she has worked for 4 months. No criminal record.
- Previously she was an employee of Perfect Blossom, a private, boutique medical facility.

- Neither the ambulance nor Reiko have been found.

Trying to find Reiko

After the ambulance heist, she returned to Izumi's apartment, and removed his head. She put on a crude disguise, and took multiple taxis to Shinagawa station, where she's hiding in a capsule hotel with Izumi's head. She paid cash for everything and would be particularly difficult to trace. If the players do somehow find her at Shingawa, she will not willingly give up the head, but might accept their help in bringing it to Perfect Blossom at 8pm.

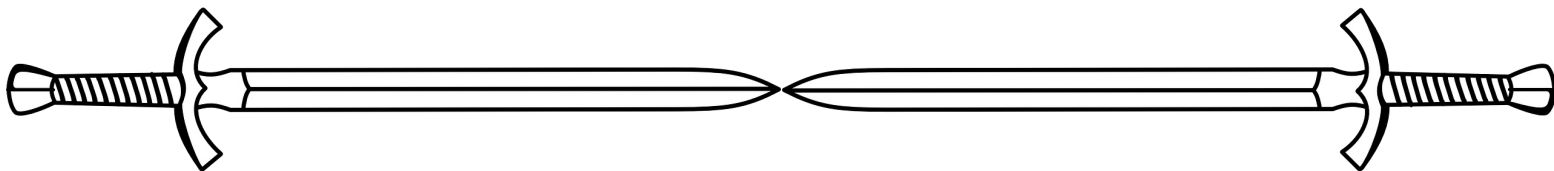
Trying to find Gavreau

With an Average (8+) Streetwise roll players could find out the following details about the assassin Gavreau:

- He doesn't work for any group or person in particular. He is completely freelance.
- It's widely known he's currently on a job and hasn't been seen in any of his usual haunts.
- He's never learned Japanese and communicates entirely through a translation tablet.
- His place of residence is unknown.
- He's been linked to over 20 high-profile assassinations.

Places the players might visit: Izumi's apartment

A small shack filled with cheap and flashy luxury goods. An apartment of a man with a bit of money and very little taste. It's on the roof of a 30-story pre-fab apartment building (Low Security - regular Security roll), surrounded by 10m high spherical aquaculture tanks (owned by a restaurant on the ground floor). Any gunplay on the roof will puncture the tanks, covering the roof in saltwater (DM -1 to any movement-related rolls). Any explosions will breach the tanks, and the



roof will be knee-deep in squiggling shrimp (DM -3 to any movement-related rolls).

- The abandoned ambulance is in an alley behind the building. There are no useful clues inside it.
- The door to the shack is locked (Cheap Lock - Security +2), and the windows are closed and covered.
- The kitchenette floor is covered in blood. Izumi's body lies limply over the sink. His head has been crudely sawed off. A bloodied hacksaw lies in the sink.

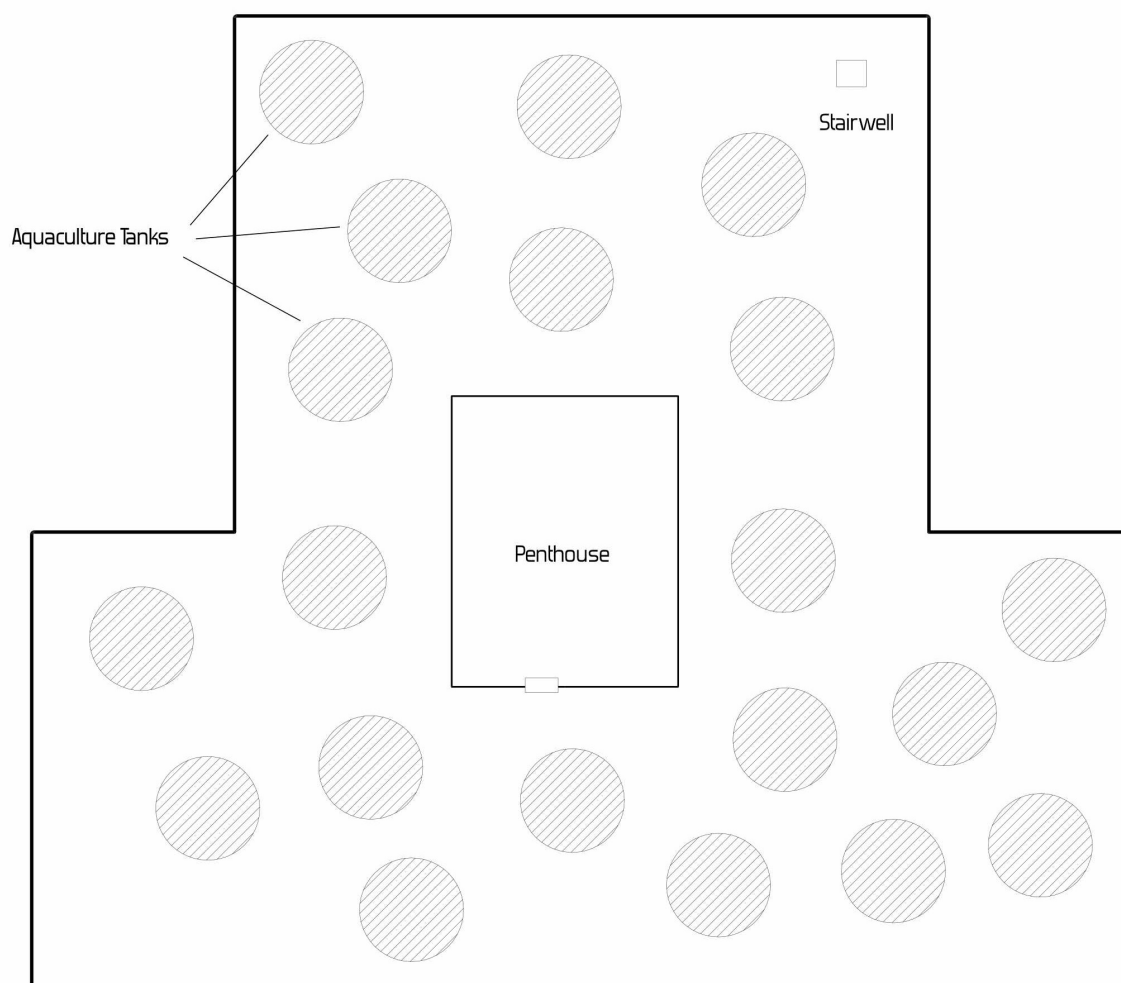
• There's a bloodied carpet and a hand truck. Presumably, Rieko used these to get his body to the roof.

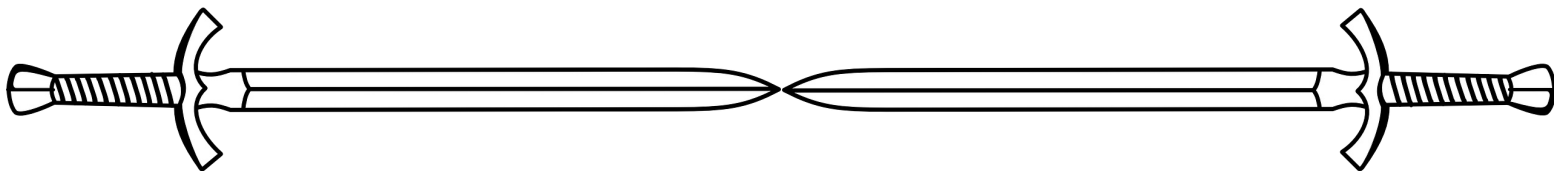
• There's an empty box for a recently purchased Danaher-Samsung CryoCourier 670. It's a portable cooler designed to keep transplant organs safe for transport. It's a silver cylindrical object with a handle, according to the image on the box.

• There's a discarded EMS uniform in the garbage.

Izumi's Apartment

Roof Penthouse





Saurian Ambush

A team of Saurian Society fanatics has been watching Izumi's apartment. They were too late for Reiko's arrival and exit, but they will notice the players. As soon as the players enter the apartment they will ascend to the roof and attack as soon as the players try to leave.

Their goal is to capture the players and find out where Izumi's head is. Assume 2 Saurians for each player. They're not formidable, but they are lunatics. They are mostly armed with cheap fan-made replicas of the fantasy weapons found in the Venus Rangers TV show. One of them, however, is wearing a suicide vest of homemade explosives.

They are all wearing custom dinosaur heads, each one representing one of the characters from the Venus Rangers series. Though they speak Japanese, they will communicate with each other in Saurian, a constructed language that was invented for the show.

The Wife's Apartment

Mizuki will receive the players politely. She will claim her husband is a loyal, hard-working salesman who she misses dearly, and will do anything to recover his body. She will also claim to be unaware of the brain-backup system, and of Izumi's other apartment. An 8+ Investigation roll will reveal that there are no pictures of Izumi anywhere in the apartment. Speaking to the neighbors will reveal the couple fought constantly until about 5 months ago, when he moved out.

As soon as the player's leave, she will call Gavreau to notify him of the player's visit. He will attempt to shadow them, until he can find the head's location. Players would need to make a Formidable (-6) Recon roll to notice Gavreau.

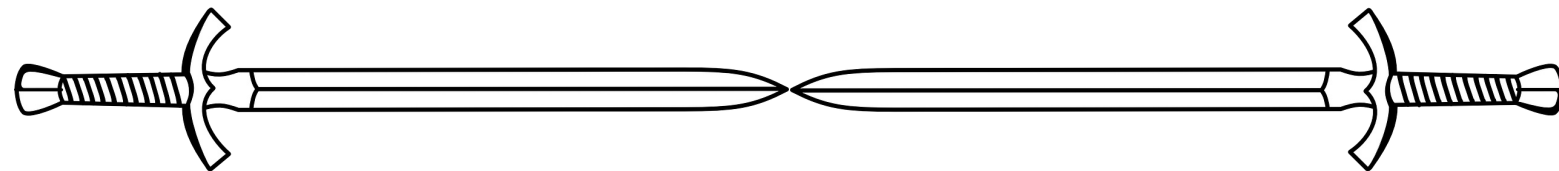
Rieko's Apartment

A tidy apartment that Reiko shares with 3 roommates. The roommates haven't seen Reiko since yesterday. If asked about Izumi,

they explain that Reiko has been dating Izumi for months. They didn't approve of him (he seemed a little sketchy), but Reiko was head over heels for him.

- The roommates didn't know Izumi was married, but they're not surprised.
- She even quit her old job to become a part-time EMT, so she'd have more time to spend with him.
- Her old job was as a technician for Perfect Blossom, a luxury medical resort.
- There are multiple pictures of Izumi and Ejiri together here.

Gavreau is surveilling this apartment from a distance. When he sees the players, he will begin to shadow them, hoping to be led to Izumi's head. He will also contact Mizuki, to inform her of his plans. Players would need to make a Very Difficult (-6) Recon roll to notice Gavreau.



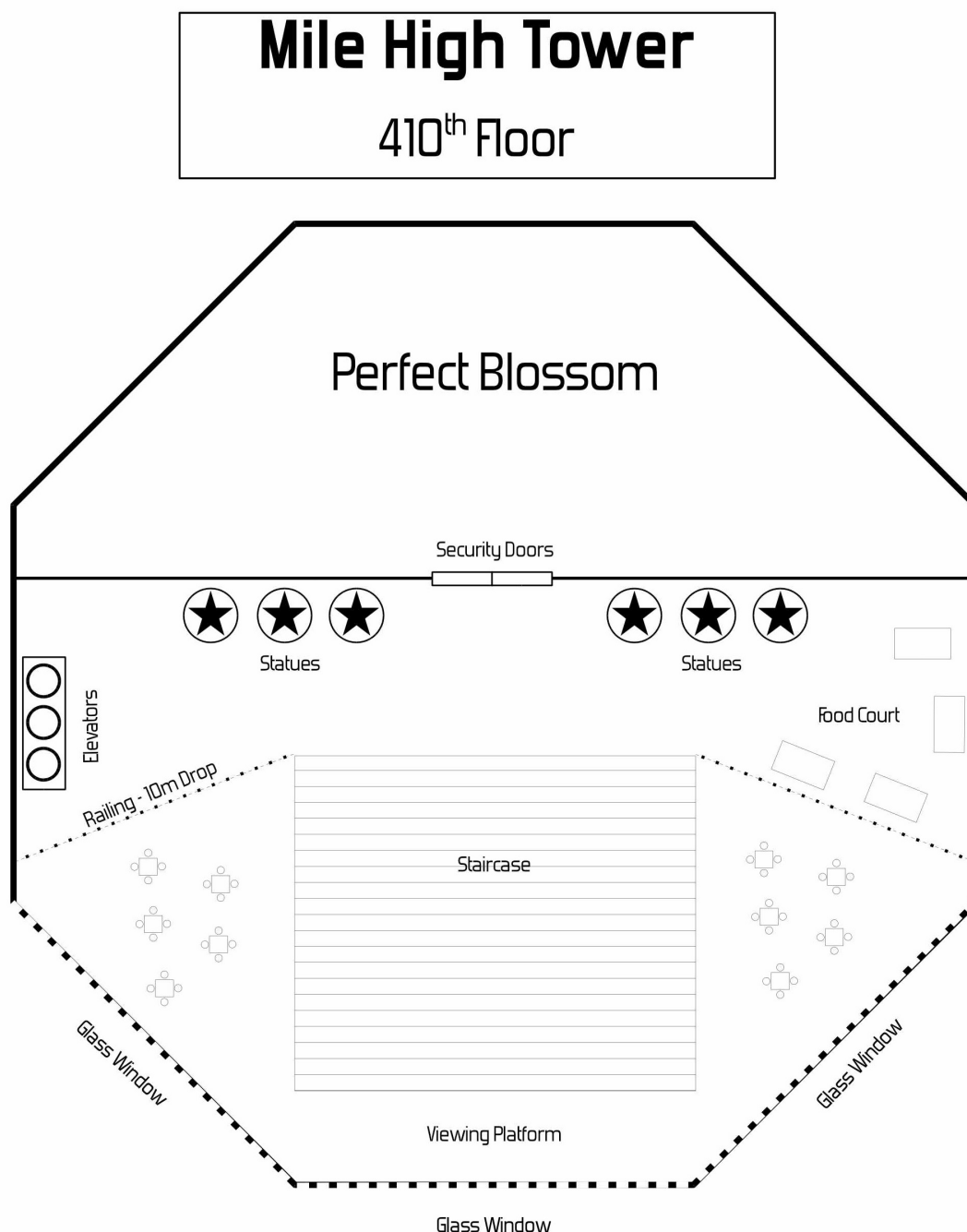
Perfect Blossom

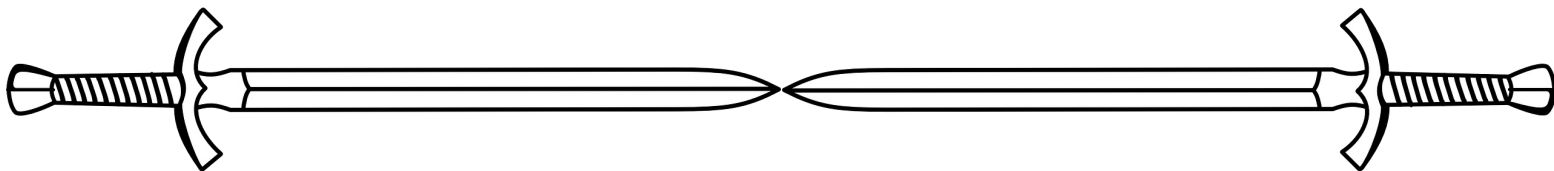
A boutique medical facility. They provide mostly cosmetic surgeries for wealthy patrons. Located on the 410th floor of the Mile-High tower in Tokyo Bay. They're very private and will not provide any details on their client list or employees. If hacked, their system can reveal the following:

There is one brain retrieval procedure scheduled for today at 8pm. It was paid for in cash, with no name listed.

Mile-High Tower

An 1800 km high tower on an artificial hexagon-shaped island in the center of Tokyo Bay. Filled with luxury stores, hotels, and apartments.





Rieko's Arrival

Ejiri will arrive at the base of the tower by taxi at 7:30 pm. There's a big festival going on, and the plaza around the base of the tower is crowded with tourists and cops. Spotting Reiko in this crowd would require a Very Difficult (-4) Recon roll. She'll enter the building and take the first elevator to 410.

The 410th Floor

When the elevator arrives on the 410th floor it opens up on a wide open-air plaza with a dramatic view of the city. The entrance to Perfect Blossom is intermediately to the left, an ornate faux-greek structure with large clear plexisteel security doors. There are 6m tall stone greek statues lined up in front of the clinic, each representing an idealized physical form. To the right, a wide white staircase descends 10 m to a viewing platform. The viewing platform is protected by large glass windows overlooking Tokyo Bay.

Showdown on the 410th floor.

This scene assumes the players are waiting for, following, or accompanying Reiko to the 410th floor. Once Reiko arrives, the following events will take place:

Ghibli-Disney: As soon as she exits the elevator, software jockeys aboard the airship will disable security cameras on 410 and shut down the elevators. A sonic weapon will be deployed to shatter the glass protecting the viewing platform, and a 4-man retrieval team will rappel down from the airship. Two will land on the upper platform, two on the lower viewing platform. They'll do whatever they need to do to retrieve the head. The doors to Perfect Blossom will be immediately locked from the inside.

At this point, havoc will break out. Civilians will panic and run for cover. Many will try

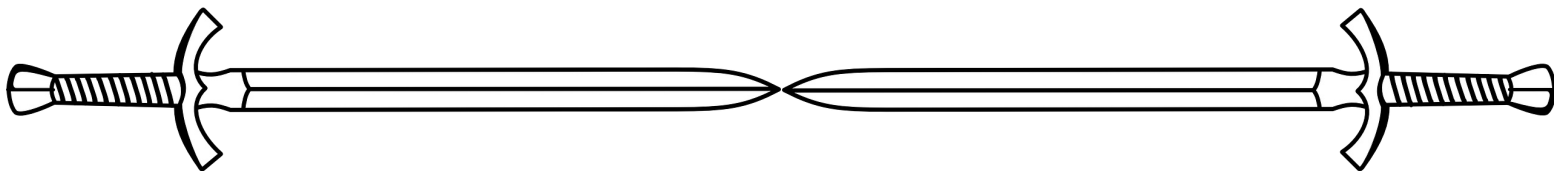
to rush the non-functional elevators or try to force open the locked Perfect Blossom doors. Trying to hit someone through a crowd is at a DM of -2. Gusts of wind will blow in through the shattered window, kicking up paper plates, tourist brochures, and newspapers, also obscuring lines of sight.

Reiko: Panicking at the first explosion or gunshot, Reiko will drop the CryoCourier containing the head. It will slowly begin to roll down the long staircase to the viewing platform. If no one picks it up in 6 rounds, it will roll off the viewing platform and plummet 1700m to the plaza below. The CryoCourier (and Izumi's head) will shatter on the pavement.

Gavreau: If Gavreau is on the player's trail, he'll arrive just as they do. Over his objections, Mizuki has demanded to come with him. Gavreau will take cover behind one of the statues and provide cover fire for Mizuki. If she's killed, he'll make his exit.

Mizuki: Mizuki has decided she wants to take care of Izumi herself. She insisted on coming along with Gavreau, and even has his gauss rifle. She doesn't really know how to use it, but she'll keep shooting at Izumi's head and anyone who gets in her way. (DM -3 for untrained shooting, DM -2 for shooting at a rolling CryoCourier, DM -5 total). With each shot, she'll loudly relate one of the many wrongs Izumi's done to her.

In about ten minutes, building security will regain control of the elevators, and show up in force. The players have that long to get Izumi's head for themselves and make their escape.



Debriefing & Aftermath

Use the following promotion points in addition to the normal ones for this mission:

Retrieving the head intact +2

**Preventing Ghibli-Disney
from getting the head** +1

If the players get the head, they can either use Perfect Blossom to revive Izumi, or just give the head to their employers before midnight.

If Gavreau survives, he'll have no hard feelings. It's just business.

If Mizuki survives, and Izumi does as well, she'll continue her campaign of vengeance. It's not just business.

If Izumi dies, Reiko will be heartbroken.

If Izumi lives and is revived, he'll collect his reward, and immediately break up with Reiko. She will be heartbroken.

If the players tangle with the Saurian Society, and leave any of them alive, the Saurians will seek revenge. The players will be declared as Enemies of the Fandom, and continually harassed by otaku nerds across the globe.

NPCs

Saurian Society 897675

Bujutsu-1, Demolitions-1

Cheap Blades (1d6+4) damage, Suicide Vest (treat as Fragmentation grenade) (5D6/3D6/1D6)

Otaku fanatics. Willing to die for their ridiculous cause.

Gavreau ABA954

Gun Combat 3, Bujutsu 2, Take Aim 3, Security 2, Recon 3, Streetwise 2, Urban Survival 2, Ground Vehicle 1

Subdermal Armor (Armor 4), Ballistic Vest (Armor 5). Total Armor 9 points

ASA Taurus Auto (2d6) ROF 1/4/10, ASA Hoplite Combat Shotgun (4d6) ROF 1/4 - w. laser sight (+1 for aiming)

Retrogenics: Ambidextrous, High Pain Threshold, Macrovision, Parabolic Hearing

A native of Quebec, Gavreau has become the top gaijin assassin in Tokyo, despite the fact he speaks no Japanese. He communicates with a translation tablet, originally designed for children. The tablet is old, and running on pirated software, so his gruff statements in Quebecois French are translated into barely passable Japanese in a squeaky, anime-girl voice.

Once Gavreau is aware of the players, he will follow them until they lead him to Reiko.

Mizuki 587BAA

Bribery 1, Carousing 1, Leader 1, Streetwise 2

Concealable Vest (Armor 4)

T75 Gauss Rifle (5d6) Mizuki has no Gun Combat skill, so DM-3 to hit

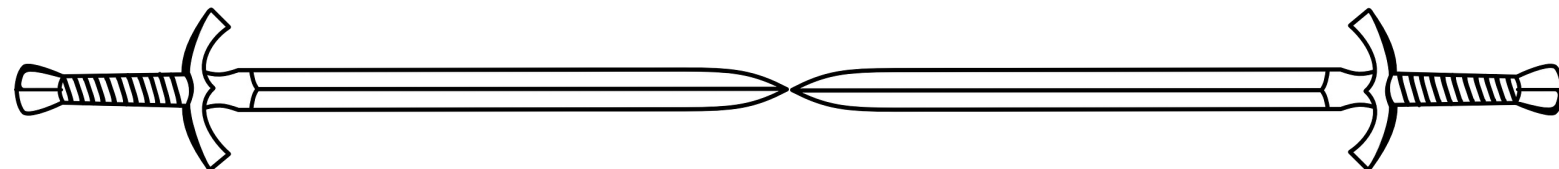
Izumi's estranged wife. She has long list of grievances (all quite valid) with Izumi and is determined to see him dead.

Ejiri Rieko 6759A8

Medical 2, Ground Vehicle 2, Gun Combat 0

Stun Gun (END Roll or unconscious for 1d6 minutes)

A skilled, but naive young woman. Ejiri is deeply in love with Izumi and would do anything to keep him safe.



Ghibli-Disney Retrieval Team 9AA887

Gun Combat 2, Bujutsu 2, Security 1, Take Aim 1, Recon 1

Rigid Armor (Armor 9), gas masks, secure comms

Maverick M24A3 Carbine (3D+1), Combat Knife (2d6+1), smoke grenade

Dedicated and professional.

Other Details Venus Rangers

An internationally successful multi-media property, currently owned by Ghibli-Disney

Media

Beginning as a joint Japanese-Australian produced sci-fi anime series, it was successful enough to spawn a small media empire. The long, arcane plot concerned a group of humans and dinosaur people ("Saurians") living on a terraformed Venus. The original series ran for years and spawned multiple VR games, stims, and movies.

It developed a global fanbase, many of whom formed fan clubs. A small minority of the fanbase became militant, reacting to critics, or to changes in the show, with sporadic terrorist attacks.

Stern Universal T75 Gauss Sniper Rifle

Cost (¥)	Wgt (Kg)	ROF	Effective Range	Dmg	Length (cm)	Rds
50,000	8	1	100m	5d6	80	8

An advanced sniper rifle, designed to fire quietly (not silently) with no muzzle flash. Instead of using chemical bullets, it uses a strong magnetic field to propel a solid metal projectile. The weapon never saw wide acceptance in military units, as it is quite fragile, and often fails in dusty or muddy environments. Also, the internal battery packs in the magazine are quite heavy, making it an unwieldy weapon. It still has a following among exotic firearm enthusiasts

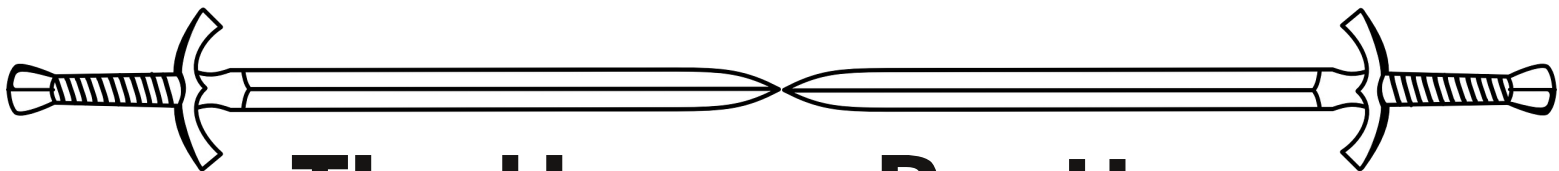
Mizuki's Complaints about Izumi

- My wedding ring turned out to have been stolen from a corpse!
- He framed my sister for cyber-crimes!
- He turned my book club into a front for a prostitution ring!
- He used my mother's coffin to smuggle drugs!
- He sold my schnauzer to a Yakuza dogfighting club!

Gavreau's Bad Translations

What Gavreau says in French	What his translator will say in Japanese
I'm going to kill you	Bad touch you I will!
Stay out of my way, or you'll get hurt	Minding your step - Ouchy!
Where's the head?	Nice skull for I be searching
Who are you working for?	Money Daddy? Have one?





The Human Destiny

A Space Opera Setting for Cepheus Engine

By Jon F. Zeigler

Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, most of my creative effort was spent on freelance work for the tabletop game industry. My major projects at the time included *Transhuman Space*, *Traveller*, and other books for Steve Jackson Games.

Since then, I've mostly turned to my own original work. These days I publish original fiction under the pen name of "John Alleyn." I've also been working on new game projects that I eventually plan to publish under my own imprint. The two halves of my creative life overlap, as I develop settings for my original fiction that may eventually be published as game material.

One setting that I'm developing has the working title of *The Human Destiny*. The first elements of this universe date back to the fourth edition of *GURPS Space*, as one of three planned setting capsules that eventually were dropped for lack of room. I've worked with it ever since, as an extended meditation on the kind of future human beings might realistically expect on the interstellar stage. I've written and published several pieces of fiction in this universe, with more to come. I'm also in the very early stages of developing at least two tabletop sourcebooks, for people who might be interested in using the setting for their own games.

Premise

The default present for the *Human Destiny* setting is in the late 23rd century. This is a little over two hundred years after Earth

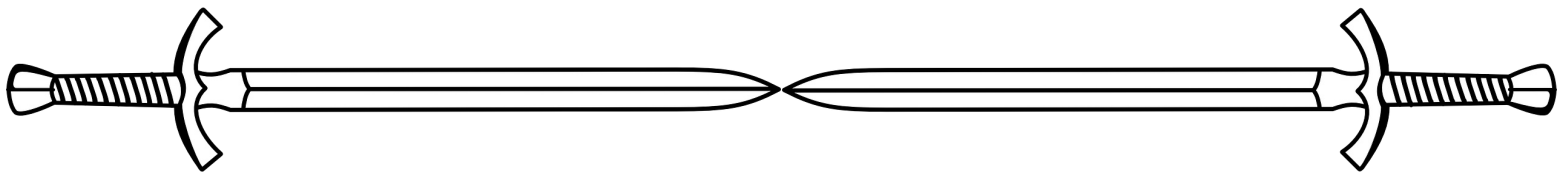
and humanity were "annexed" (that is, conquered) by a vast interstellar empire, the Khedai Hegemony.

In the setting's back story – our own near future – Earth was in very bad shape. Global depression, ecological collapse, runaway climate change, and half a dozen regional wars threw the world into chaos. Civilization seemed to be on the brink of failure, and many wondered whether the human species itself would survive.

It's at that point that the khedai made their presence known. The khedai are a reclusive people, rarely seen by their subordinates, who rule the Hegemony through a network of client species. They have been civilized, starfaring creatures for millions of years, and today the Hegemony governs tens of thousands of worlds across the Orion Arm of the galaxy.

As soon as the khedai became aware of our existence, they set plans in motion to intervene. The invasion of Earth began in September 2044, and it was over in less than six months. The khedai called it the Fifth Rimward Intervention, and they considered it a minor skirmish on the frontiers of their empire. Humans called it simply the Conquest.

The khedai are imperialists by any reasonable definition, but as overlords they seem surprisingly benevolent. The resources of Earth and the solar system have not been plundered. In fact, the



Hegemony has rebuilt many shattered ecosystems, restoring much of Earth's natural beauty and health. Humans have not been enslaved. In fact, most humans enjoy greater freedom and a higher standard of living than their ancestors did before the Conquest, without having to work for any of it. The Hegemony enforces a system of laws that most humans find reasonable, and they do so with majestic impartiality.

The khedai have always claimed that they came to Earth only to save humanity from its self-destructive nature. They claim to mean us no harm, and they express a wish to see us someday become mature citizens of the galaxy.

Even so, many humans have always resented the Conquest. They feel the human species has been forced to give up freedom and ambition in exchange for a false security – the life of animals on exhibit in a zoo. Dissent and passive resistance continue to the present day.

In recent years, however, there have been signs of slow change in the Hegemony's policy. Humans have been granted greater self-government in the cities of Earth. Millions of us have been encouraged to move to the colonies on Luna, on Mars, and elsewhere. A few humans have been selected to serve aboard Hegemony starships, as crewmen and even as officers.

Human Destiny characters are among those exceptional humans. They stand out in a crowd, with dreams and aspirations that can't be denied. Whether it's a quest for a meaningful life on Earth, a career of hard work in the colonies, or a vision of exploring the stars, they are ready to step up to the challenge.

The galaxy doesn't belong to humans, but that doesn't mean we can't earn a place in it.

Genre and Tropes

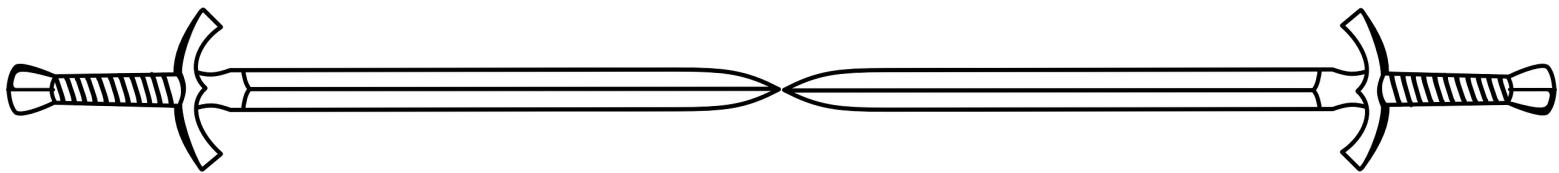
The Human Destiny is a reconstructed space-opera setting, dominated by futuristic technology, gleaming cities, colonies on other worlds, interstellar travel, and intelligent aliens. It's inspired by science-fictional universes such as those found in David Brin's "Uplift" novels, the Mass Effect video game, or the various Star Trek TV shows. Even so, it's not primarily about scientific minutiae or the wonders of ultra-tech gear. It's about people, solving problems and wrestling with human nature on a much larger stage.

The focus is on four tropes: a post-scarcity society, colonialism, exploration, and a cosmic perspective.

Post-Scarcity Society: Humans now live comfortable lives without having to strive for them. In fact, we don't need to work at all, and most of us don't. Violent conflict and most forms of crime are things of the past. Our struggles and conflicts now fall higher on the ladder of needs: quests for belonging, love, prestige, self-respect, or reaching our full potential as sentient beings.

Colonialism: We humans aren't in charge of the galaxy. In fact, we're a tiny minority group, subjects of an interstellar empire ruled by aliens. We're forced to live with the fact that someone else has veto power over all our aspirations.

Meanwhile, under the Hegemony's watchful gaze, we're starting to settle new worlds of our own and establish new human societies away from Earth. What



obligations do we have to the new worlds we settle? What happens when those new societies no longer feel connected to the home world?

Exploration: The galaxy is bright and full of wonders. It is also full of ancient mysteries to be found and unraveled. Even the Hegemony itself is vast and enigmatic, full of exotic cultures we might talk to and learn from. We humans are just beginning to go out and see all of that, and there is no limit to what we might discover.

Cosmic Perspective: We humans are no longer confined to a single world and a few thousand years of recorded history. Now we're part of a society that touches countless stars and has millions of years of history behind it. The stage is so large that most of us have a hard time grasping it.

Plans

I've been writing and releasing fiction in this setting for a couple of years now, with new stories coming out every few months. I'm also working on material that began as a "setting bible," and will eventually be published as a small set of game sourcebooks under the Cepheus Engine label.

Packaging this setting as a Cepheus Engine game presents certain challenges. In some ways, it doesn't resemble the classic science-fiction game that Cepheus emulates at all closely. For example, characters are more likely to value reputation and personal goals, rather than marginal sums of money. Violence is quite rare, so stories aren't likely to involve a lot of armed confrontations. The technological base is consistent throughout the Hegemony, so there won't be the usual need to catalog gear and weapons for a variety of "tech levels."

Individuals will almost never own or operate their own starships. Space travel is uncommon and rather slow, so characters won't be visiting a series of new worlds on a timescale of only weeks.

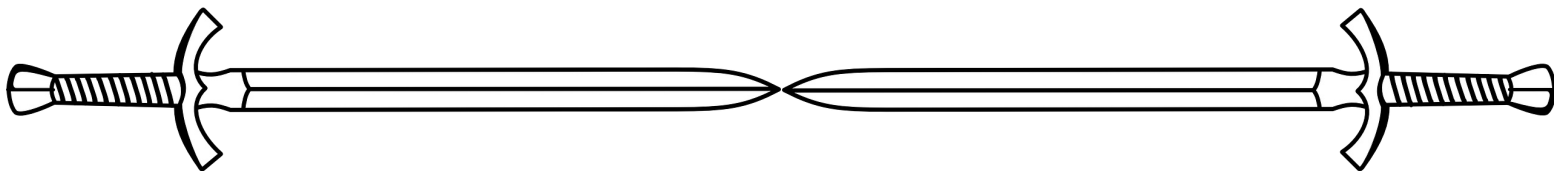
As a result, I expect this instance of the Cepheus Engine will de-emphasize some of the rules systems common to the genre. In exchange, it will need some new systems: rules for nonviolent social conflicts, political and memetic campaigns, scientific and engineering challenges, producing works of art, slice-of-life play, and so on.

For the moment, I think there will be at least three books in the series:

- *Architect of Worlds* – a non-fiction sourcebook for the design of more or less "realistic" star systems and worlds for interstellar fiction. Not explicitly a Human Destiny book, but fully compatible.
- *Human Destiny Player's Guide* – the core setting description or "bible," character generation rules, equipment catalog, common vehicles and ships, rule systems that vary from or aren't found in the Cepheus Engine core.
- *Atlas of the Human Protectorate* – maps and location descriptions for Earth, the Sol system colonies, and the interstellar neighborhood, along with campaign and adventure seeds.

Depending on how well these items attract an audience, I may develop more books to follow.

For now, I can't predict how long it will take before any of these items approaches a publishable state. I'm a one-man development shop, and I have

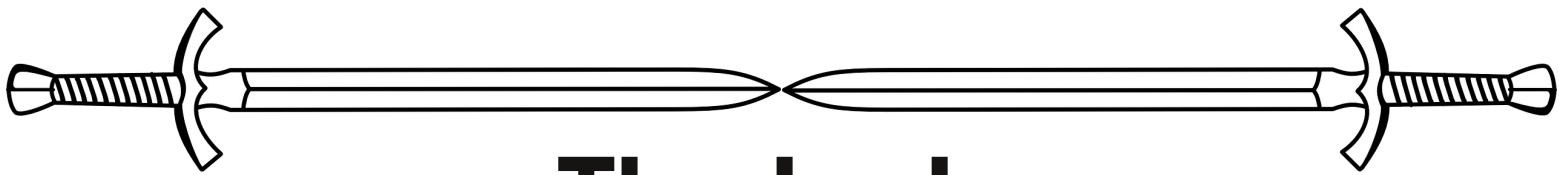


other projects under way as well. Architect of Worlds is the most likely to be finished and released in 2022, but the other books certainly won't appear until 2023 or later. Publication will most likely be via PDF and print-on-demand through DriveThruRPG.com or a similar site.

On the other hand, anyone interested in this project is invited to follow my writer's blog (<https://wordpress.sharrukinspalace.com>).

My patrons (<https://www.patreon.com/Sharrukin>) also get occasional updates for all this material. For example, they have received several interim drafts of Architect of Worlds, as well as an early draft of the Player's Guide with Cepheus-derived character generation rules.





The Junk

By Joseph Jaquinta

The economic development office of the galactic empire has a mandate to bring the great commercial success of the empire into all emerging regions. A great deal of trade has to happen to connect new regions into the economic core, and many incentives have to be given in order to jump start this with new commercial districts. To meet these needs, the office commissioned the design of the optimal trading vessel: the Junco, commonly referred to as The Junk.

The design was commissioned to be as cheap as possible in order to facilitate government production, trade subsidies and to be sensitive to extremely low margins. These together allow for the Junk to be profitable over a wide variety of routes.

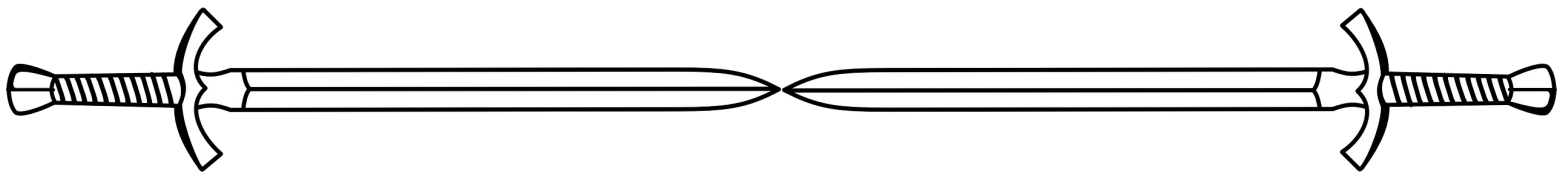
The Junk is extremely popular with many development offices. As the requirements are very basic, they can be built in almost any starport, usually with locally sourced supplies, often qualifying them for most favorable rates and subsidies due to the stimulus to the local economy. Analysis shows that, credit for credit, subsidizing the production, use and distribution of Junks achieves government aims better than any other class of vessel.

A typical government initiative (either local or Imperial) will fund the commissioning of a

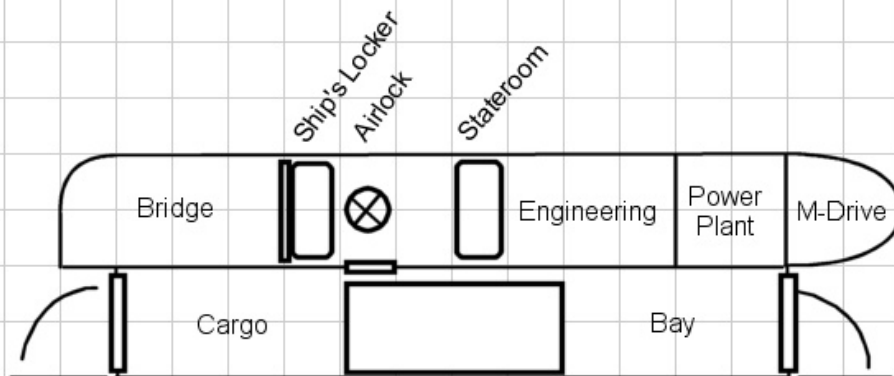
set number of Junks from one or more starports. A call for tender will go out to captains to apply to run a Junk, with their choice of crew. Contracts will normally be given for a set period of time (one to two years) with a fixed route, or else will be given for a set number of runs between a core destination and one deep in the outback. A modest payment is offered, but, more frequently, no pay is given until the end of the contract, and, at that time, the title of the ship is handed over to the captain with no further restrictions. This makes it an extremely popular way for traders to get started in the industry.

TL9 Junk

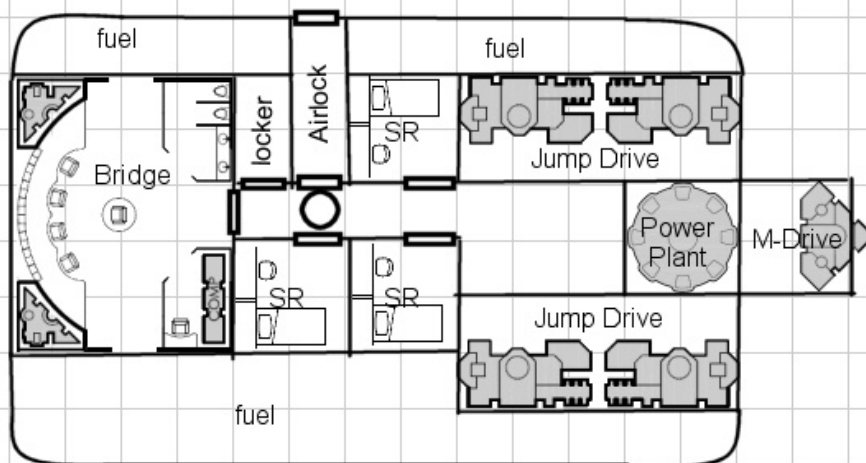
Using a 100-ton hull (2 Hull, 2 Structure), the Junk is a government sponsored trade and haulage ship. It mounts jump drive A, maneuver drive A, and power plant A, giving a performance of Jump-1 and 1-G acceleration. Fuel tankage of 14 tons supports the power plant for 4 weeks and 1 jump-1. Adjacent to the bridge is a computer Model 1. The ship is equipped with Standard sensors (-4) There are 3 staterooms. Cargo capacity is 48 tons. The hull is distributed configuration. The ship requires a crew of 3: one pilot, one navigator, one engineer. The ship costs MCr23.247 (including discounts and fees, but not including other government subsidies) and takes 36 weeks to build.



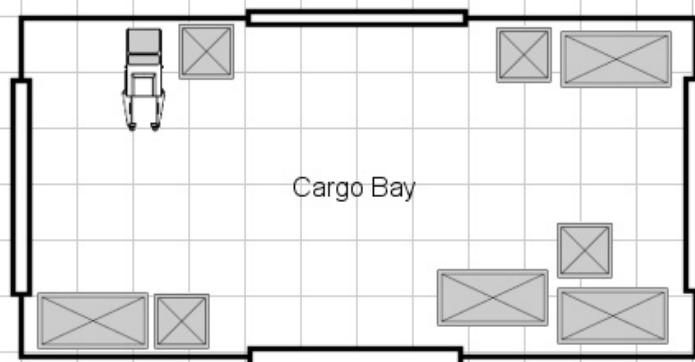
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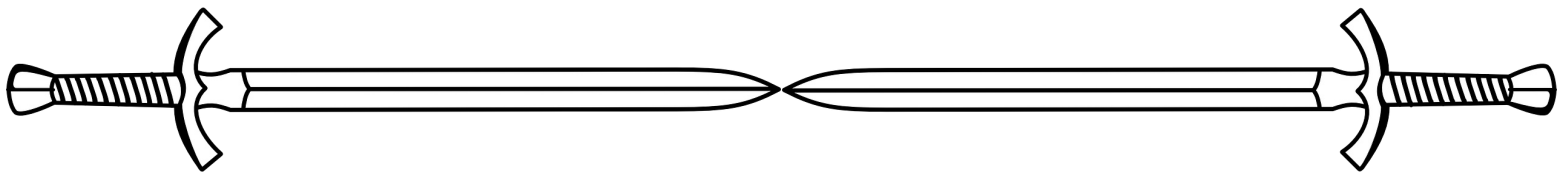
Upper Deck



Lower Deck



(Graphical elements from *Starship Geomorphs*, by Robert Pearce, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.)



What They Don't Tell You

On paper, the Junk is everything it presents itself as. All that economy comes at a price. Amongst experienced space farers the Junk is known to be unreliable, cranky, prone to breakages and subject to unexpected mishaps. Plenty of industry journals feature comics of a proud, but naive, pilot shanking the hand of a government official as they have the title to their Junk passed over, while in the background the vessel disintegrates into a pile of parts. There is wide speculation that the short terms of contracts for Junks are because that is their genuine expected lifespan. Anything beyond that is begging for disaster.

Warnings aside, it is still a popular option for starting captains. Many take the government route and contract for a time to earn one. But they can also be found being sold off cheaply by someone who has just earned one and would rather have some ready cash. They are often available for purchase, used, in wildly varying conditions for wildly varying prices. (Some people will even pay you to take ownership of their Junk, often with mandatory trade contracts attached.)

Buyers should beware; it is universally accepted that there will be something wrong with it. It is just a question of how many things are wrong with it. Fortunately, although it tends to go wrong frequently, it seldom goes wrong fatally. They are certainly known for falling to pieces in a firefight, but they do not often fall to pieces in normal operations. (Although pieces are known to fall off of them.)

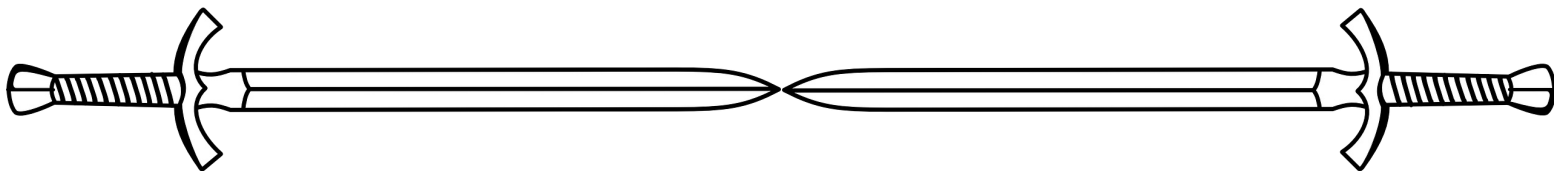
On the plus side, because they are locally sourced, go wrong frequently, and often end up being sold for scrap, finding spare

parts is seldom hard. Because they are of standard design, most spare parts are interchangeable. The general attitude amongst engineers is "forewarned is forearmed". Most competent engineers will stock up on spares of things that most often go wrong. In the worst case, because they are so common, if a breakdown occurs and a part is not on board, there will be some Junk in system that probably has a spare. Half the time they will charge an exorbitant rate for it because of their own bitter experience. Half the time they will give a heavily discounted rate, out of sympathy and shared pain.

Aftermarket Additions

Because of all the shortcomings for long term operations with Junks, anything that is not running under a current subsidy is often modified. Some modifications are slight, like better filtration on the life support so it doesn't stink as much. Others are much more involved. The Junk does have a good quantity of cargo space. And that is space that can be used to install extra systems. This will reduce its profit margin, but if an added system is needed for the ship to be profitable, it can be a fair trade.

Upgraded Systems. There are several companies who make drop-in replacements for major systems. The standard components of the ship: Maneuver Drive, Jump Drive, and Power Plant, can all be upgraded for just a bit more than their normal list prices. This will greatly reduce the number of breakages in those systems. Sadly, there is no trade-in value for the dismantled systems. Scrap value is just about all you will get.



Weapon Systems. Although it is possible to retrofit a Junk with a single starship level turret, they are still terrible in a fight. This is more often done out of bravado or as a poison pill. But, since the vessels are so cheap, it isn't unheard of to use them in a quasi-disposable way to surprise an enemy, or in extremis when no other options are possible.

Defensive Systems. Since Junks are known to go to pieces even when just targeted by a weapon system, they are easy prey to pirates seeking to intimidate into paying some protection money. Although armor plating is of questionable value, point defense weapons are an option. They won't significantly damage an attacking ship, but they will make life difficult for boarding parties. Similarly, an aggressive internal system can make anyone regret boarding one.

Extra Fuel Tankage. This is a popular option, with collapsible bladders being the most favored. That allows two successive jump-1s to be taken to get from one trade loop to another, and then back to normal jump-1 running. For captains who were enticed by a long trade run into the outback and are looking to do it again for their own profit, this can open many more possibilities.

Stealth Compartments. Because these ships are so heavily modified, any inspector expects to find changes to the base design. It is easy to construct something that looks like one modification but is, in fact, a façade hiding a scan shielded compartment for other commodities. Given the difficult margins on this vessel, running contraband is very tempting.

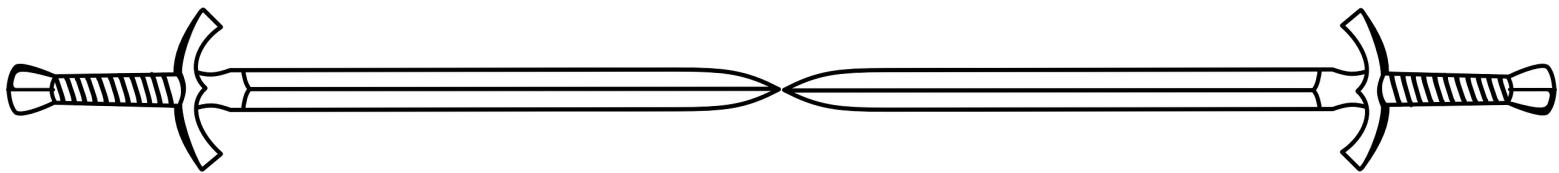
Extra Cargo. The Junk is optimized to carry as much as it possibly can. But some models will scrap the Jump Drives, reduce their operations to in-system only, and bolt on additional cargo compartments. (Not all that unusual after a Jump Drive failure that is too expensive to fix.) Where regulations are lax, some of these may even bolt on more than the maneuver driven can handle at 1G, reducing performance down to .5 or .25G.

Plot Hooks

There are many opportunities to use Junks in your campaign.

Congratulations On Your New Ship. Many campaigns start with requiring one of the players to own a ship. A Junk is ideal in many ways. They are cheap enough, and with a low enough resale value, that the referee can just give one to them outright, without being unbalanced. They go wrong often enough, so that if the referee wishes the players to remain in a system for a while, it can just go wrong. And they are customizable enough that the players can use their creativity to grow the ship into what they need as they progress.

Working Passage. The only available working passage between two points for the players might be on a Junk. This gives ample opportunity for the referee to insert any intermediary adventure based on the Junk failing in some opportune way.

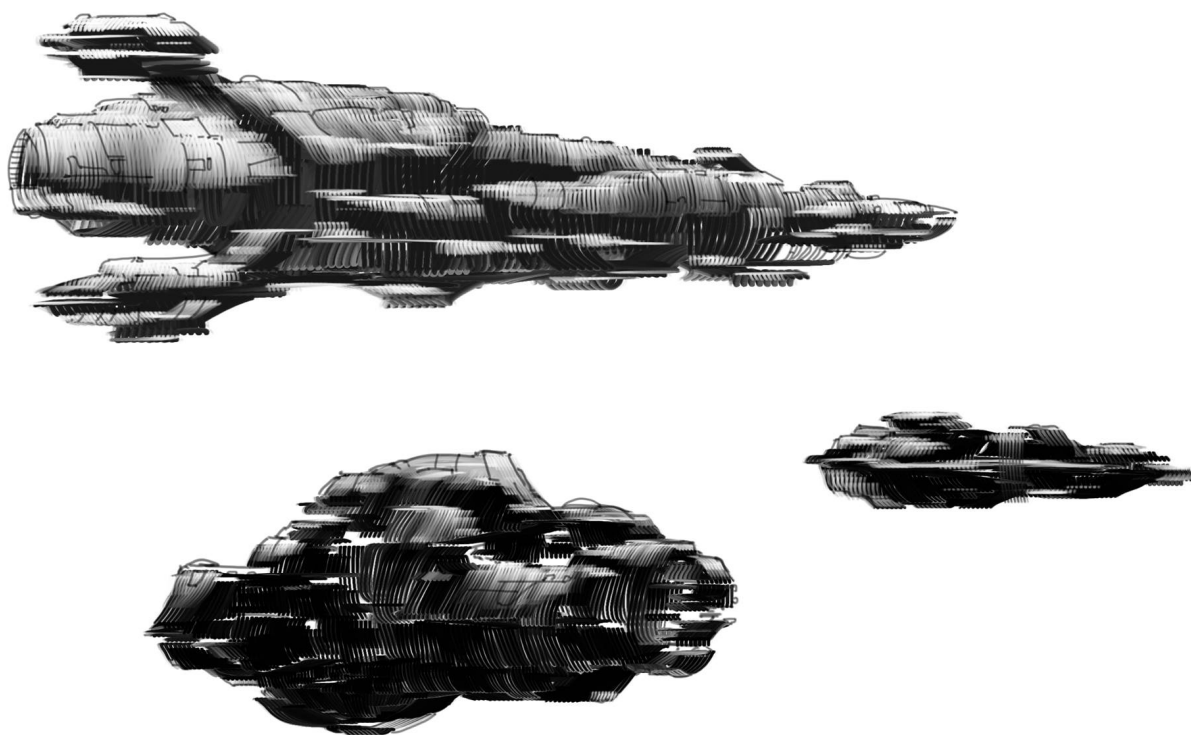


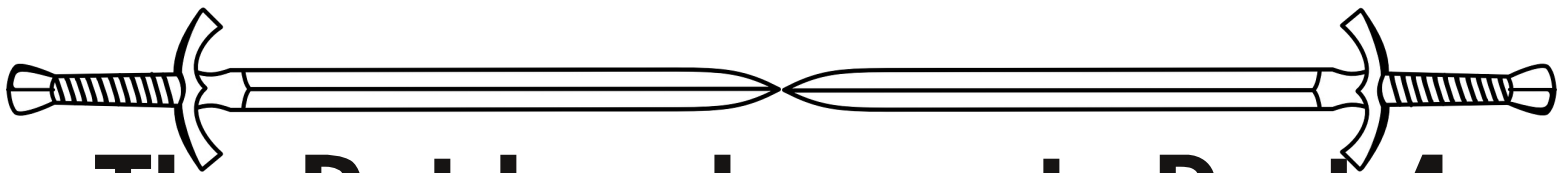
Under the Hood. In some suitably dramatic situation, the players may find that their Junk underperforms when they need it, due to a failure in a aftermarket addition. Upon examination they find that the addition doesn't work as advertised because it is really a holdout compartment. Inside this long-lost stash they find the plot hook for their next adventure.

Shell Game. After a nice paycheck, the players come across a captain, down on their luck. After many drinks, they agree to sell the players a Junk for enough money to pay off gambling debts and the disgruntled crew. The ship turns out not to

be a total lemon, until they get right beyond the space ports jurisdiction. Then it mysteriously fails. Like someone threw a kill switch. They are hailed a bit later by the same captain, who offers to take them back to port in return for the title to the ship.

Breakdown. The player's ship breaks down in an out of the way system. They do not have the spare they need, nor can it be made locally. However, someone will respond to their request saying they know of a location of a crashed Junk. This could be on an asteroid, the bottom of a lake, or a deep crater. Anywhere the referee would like to hook the adventurers to.





The Raiders Lament - Part 4

By Jo Jaquinta

Chapter 5

Kwok and Heleni wiped down the galley at the start of their shift as Juanita finished off her rations at the end of hers. "I love the man to death, but I wish I understood why The Chief decided to insist on a complete 3rd degree inspection of the star drive as a priority. We just came out of drydock and we're just going in some big loop around this star."

"I guess it makes more sense than taking it apart while in trans-space" said Kwok.

"Well, it's like the maneuver drive. While it's running and being stressed, we can monitor and check it out. It would almost be easier to do it while in transition."

Kwok shrugged. "I don't think we're going back to station" said Heleni. Juanita looked at her quizzically. "If The Chief wanted a full inspection of the drive before we used it, and wants it all done during the first half of this little shakedown loop, it might be because we intend to use it before we're done."

"Maybe," said Juanita. "But he can also just be a plain bastard for maintenance."

"Also consider this loop. If we just wanted a lazy spin around the star, it would make more sense to dive deep, let it sling us around and back. Less fuel used, more stress on different systems, all around more sensible. Instead we're powering our way along the normal orbit of L'Union prime at faster than orbital velocity. Looks pretty on a plot, but it doesn't make physics sense."

Juanita nodded. "So, what do you think we're up to?" asked Kwok.

"I think we're headed for the L3 point."

"Which one is that?" asked Kwok. "I never remember the numbers."

"It's the point of gravatic equilibrium exactly opposite the planet in orbit around the star. Once there you can stay there indefinitely with minimal station keeping. Not a bad spot for a rendezvous."

"And, being the opposite side of the star" added Juanita, "it's nicely shielded from station view. You may be on to something." She got up and pushed away from the table. "We'll be coming up on it soon. If anything exciting happens, let me know. I'm off shift and have an appointment with my bunk."

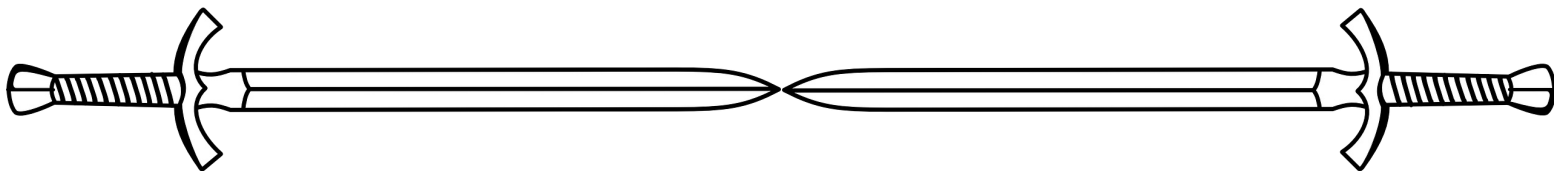
Kwok grinned and gave Heleni the thumbs up. "Nice one. Maybe we'll see action yet."

"They've worked it out", said Elise to Seldon on the bridge, shutting down the galley intercom.

"Did you expect any less?" he asked.

"I suppose not", she admitted. "They're pretty sharp."

Heleni and Kwok entered the bridge.



Heleni took her station at Navigation and Kwok reconfigured the fourth station to tactical. They checked in, picked up their roster and got to work.

"Coming up on solar occlusion of station in fifteen, Captain" reported Heleni.

Seldon smiled wryly, "Noted."

"Sensors not reporting any activity ahead on our course" added Kwok.

"Out here? Why would there be any?" asked Elise innocently.

Kwok and Heleni exchanged glances. He grinned and gave her another thumbs-up.

Thirty seconds after the occlusion mark Seldon said "Navigation. Please give me guide wires for approach and zero velocity to the L3 point."

"On your board," said Heleni, almost immediately.

"How efficient," noted Seldon. "Tactical, no active scan. Please keep it to passive."

"Pip, pip," said Kwok after a pause.

"If an active scan wave reflects off of something," explained Elise, "it will keep propagating across the system. Others could receive it."

"We're not Naval enough to warrant tight beam scanners" said Seldon. "Maybe next refit."

"Passive scan is quiet" said Kwok. "No significant energy readings. Not even space junk."

"It's not a stable point", said Heleni. "Anything without engines will eventually drift off. Kind of lonely."

"Give it time", said Elise.

* * *

"L3 orbit achieved", said Seldon. "Time to see if anyone is home."

"Yes, sir", said Elise. She turned the radio to the lowest gain and typed in a series of numbers. Corresponding call tones sounded over the bridge speakers. After a minute another set of tones came back.

"I've got a direction", said Kwok. "No reading yet."

"Look for occluding stars", said Heleni.

"What?"

"A shadow against the stars. If it's there, it's between us and the stars. There will be some missing."

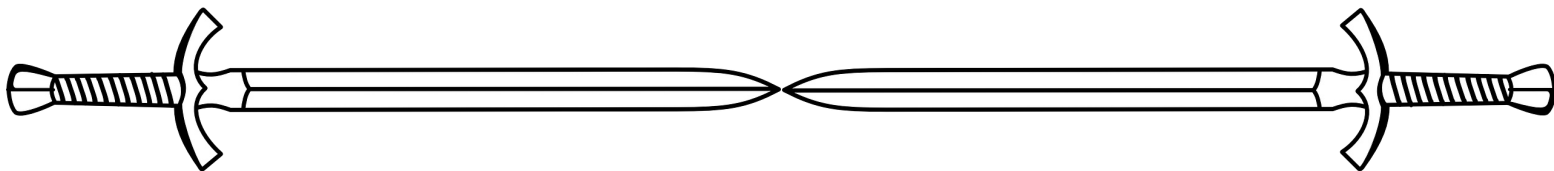
"The code checks out", said Elise.

"We're go then. Put me on," he addressed the keyboard microphone. "This is Captain Seldon of the Raider's Lament. We're here to pick up a delivery. Shall we do this on your deck or on ours?"

There was a pause. "I think I have a track", said Kwok. "Not enough to establish a course."

"They're probably in a halo orbit around the point", said Heleni.

"Reply coming in, sir" said Elise. "Text only."



"Shame", said Seldon. "I guess you won't be able to use your voice stress analysis or ident matching."

Elise ignored him and read the message aloud. "Thank you, Captain Seldon, for this appointment. We can make our docking port available to your subordinate craft for discussion and transfer."

"I've got them now," said Kwok. "They turned their running lights on."

"Very well", said Seldon. "Please ask Vikhagen to get the dory ready." He paused, considering. "Elise, you know I hate discussing private business in public. Yet I so value the advice of my crew. What do you have for me here?"

"Well, sir, we can start off with the collars. They are unobtrusive and will allow us to receive data from each other without being overheard by people or machines, if scrambled enough. I have wearable sensors that will give us basic biometric info and language translation if necessary."

"But can we talk?"

"That's a little trickier. I do have a partial solution that I've had some success with." She attached some small electronics connected to wires to her clavicles. "The key is sub-vocalization. You speak under your breath. No one can hear you, but these low-profile microphones will pick up the vibrations. The problem is that it's not very clear. So first we filter it using voice datagrams I've built up for each of us. This does a most frequently used algorithm to create a best fit match. Additionally, the collar tracks your speech center brain activity and provides subject domain input."

"So, you are saying that it can read our mind and broadcast our thoughts?" asked Seldon.

"In a manner of speaking," said Elise's voice over the ship's speakers. Her lips did not move though.

"Compelling." He rose. "Elise: you will accompany me to the negotiations. No projectile sidearms though. Not even nonfunctional ones. We don't want them to think we're going to blow holes in their ship. But bring your best blade."

"Chief, are you getting this?"

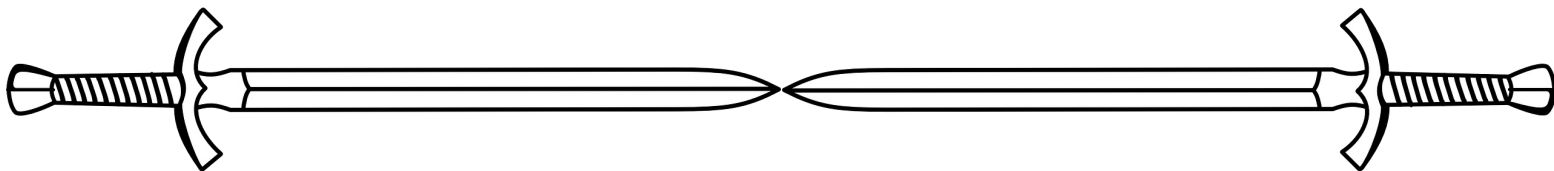
"I've been following from down here," came his filtered reply.

"I want you on the bridge for this. We're not expecting trouble, but I want to be prepared for it. Everyone, refresh yourself with today's call codes for alerting trouble or coercion. Questions?" There were nods all around. "Good. We'll launch in ten."

* * *

The Sweeping Generalization separated from the Raider's Lament with barely a whisper. Vikhagen hovered over the controls like they were fragile glasswork. The engines could barely be heard as she set them up on their trajectory. "Idle speed, sir, all the way."

"Thank you, Pilot" said Seldon from the passenger seat. He wore his dark blue uniform, blazoned with the badge of the Raider's Lament. On first glance, its piratical skull and crossed bones was incongruous against what appeared to be a naval uniform. But on closer examination the skull was impaled on a



sword and red tears ran from the empty eye sockets. On second glance it was apparent that the uniform, as well, was naval in style and cut, but not an actual naval uniform.

"Shadow is confirming the running lights configuration. They look to be a government surplus freighter" said Elise. She too wore a similar uniform. But to it she added a peaked cap, epaulets, gold buttons, and six silver buckles on the boots. Both wore sabers in scabbards on their sides.

"Well there is no question about us outgunning them", said Vikhagen. "There's a reason they call them 'Junks'. They're just mass-produced boxes with barely enough power to move and transition, let alone mount any decent weapons."

"Unless, of course, it's been refitted" noted Seldon.

"I'm not getting any significant power readings", said Elise.

"But you aren't from us, either, are you?" said Seldon, raising his eyebrow.

But as they drew within visual range nothing was seen to contradict the appearance of a bare bones trading junk. "All I see is a double mount missile turret," said Vikhagen. "Should I overfly them to get a better look?"

"No. That would be rude", said Seldon. "I think we have enough to go on for now without making them nervous."

"Aye, aye, sir", she said and brought them about. The standard design had a docking port on the starboard flank of the vessel and the dory had a compatible one in its

aft section, between the engine pods. Contrary to her usual flair Vikhagen made the maneuver in deliberate steps, coming to a full rest between each pivot. When the final port mated there was barely an indication other than the airlock light illuminating.

"Bravo", said Elise.

Vikhagen beamed her a broad grin. "There's more than one way to show off."

* * *

Seldon and Elise stood in the aft airlock of the dory waiting for the green light from the other side.

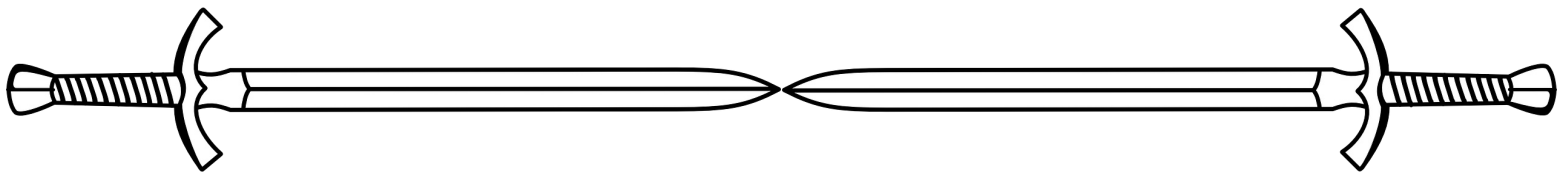
"Check, check" said Elise, through her clavicle mic.

"Reading," said Seldon in return, lips barely moving. "Copy Chief?"

"Loud and fuzzy" he said from the Lament. "But understandable. We've got your backs."

The light turned green and Seldon nodded to Elise. She cycled the door open, paused, and stepped through. Her face all serious, she took in the scene at a glance.

The belly of the junk was one large cargo hold stretching the full width of the ship and breaking up fore and aft into smaller compartments between structural girders. A number of regulation cargo containers were bolted to the deck along the edges with nets for loose goods stowed along the ceiling. The center was empty and there waited a small party.



A tall man in his 40s stood ahead of the rest. He wore a rich fur vest which made him look broader than he was. The sheen from the fabric from the rest of his clothes and the gold rings on his fingers marked him out as the likely Captain. A man and a woman flanked him in guard position; not near enough to threaten, but close enough to intervene. They had fair hair and skin, wearing simple blue wool ship suits, and looked like they were related. Their hands rested easily on utilitarian looking hilts of straight swords. Behind and to one side was a young woman of similar stature, with a barely restrained sullen look. Her clothes were well tailored, but of simple weave. She wore a dirk and stood protectively next to a quarter canister case.

Seeing no immediate threat, Elise stood to one side and Seldon came through the lock. He beamed a smile at them and strode to the center of the cargo deck. Elise fell in behind him. "Captain Seldon of the Raider's Lament. At your service." He paid no mind to the two guards. "Allow me to introduce my Warrant Officer, Elise Sedwell." He held out his hand in greeting.

The other Captain seemed to come to a decision, smiled back, stepped forward and grasped his hand with both hands. "Captain Kosti. Welcome to my ship."

"He's looking you in the eyes," said the Chief over the monitor. "That's a good sign."

"Thank you for taking the trip out here for the rendezvous. I hope it wasn't too far out of your way," he continued.

"No distance is too far out of the way for good business" replied Seldon easily. "My

ship has just completed a refit and it was a good excuse for a shakedown cruise."

"Nothing too serious, I hope", Kosti said with concern.

"Our job is to deliver cargo where it needs to go. Sometimes there are those who would see it otherwise. We could have surrendered our cargo, but chose not to. Eighteen months in drydock was a higher price than we received for that cargo, but I'd rather have a reputation for getting the job done than for turning tail to every threat."

Kosti nodded, once. There was a pause that acknowledged that the pleasantries were over. He turned to his side and indicated the quarter canister and the young woman. "The cargo. The destination: Valio Eskola."

"Not in the atlas," reported the Chief.

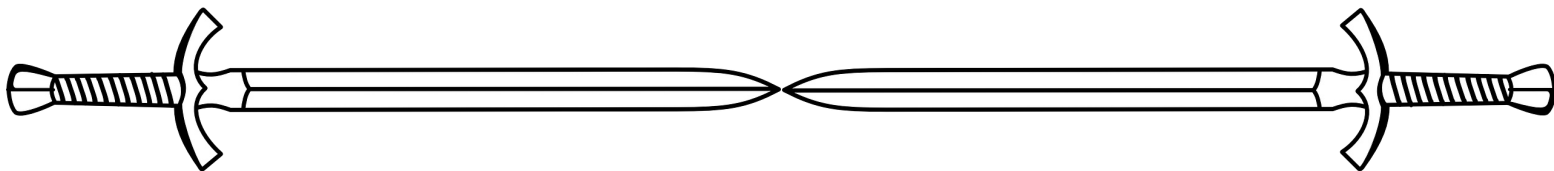
"I'm unfamiliar with that port", said Elise. "Which system is it in?"

"It is not a port", said Kosti, "it is a person. You should be able to find him on Port Newark."

"Two transitions from here", said Elise. She nodded to Kosti.

"I know it isn't far, but Ritva is eager to be reunited with her Uncle." The young woman nodded, once.

"Ah", said Seldon. "My best wishes on your reunification. But I think I should clarify; we are a cargo vessel. We are more than happy to take your consignment," he indicated the canister, "and deliver it to the gentleman in question. But I'm afraid we do not traffic in



people. There are strict laws, you know, against anything that might be construed as slave trade."

"I have them here sir. If you need me to quote," added Elise in undertone.

"Ritva is no slave! She just wants to be reunited with her family. There has been a tragic separation and she has only just gained the information of his whereabouts."

Seldon paused, appearing to consider. "We've taken passengers before", said the Chief.

"Regretted it too" said Seldon behind his hand.

"I advise against it" conferred Elise. "The law is on our side. We can get out of the preliminary contract and maybe even charge a nuisance fee."

"We're here to do business, Elise", said Seldon. "Let's find some business we can do."

"I'm very sensitive to your plight", said Seldon directly to Ritva. "But I'm afraid taking on a person as part of a consignment is quite out of the question." Kosti started to say something. "At any price," finished Seldon, firmly. "But, since my crew will attest that I have a weakness for damsels in distress," Ritva seemed to bridle at that description, "I'm open to offer passage to the Lady Ritva, subject to established terms and conditions, aboard the Raider's Lament until we complete delivery of the consignment."

Kosti considered. "If we're going to take her anyway, why not just take her?" asked the Chief.

"Established terms and conditions do not oblige us to secure her safety should she be engaged in illegal activities. We can terminate that contract if she becomes a problem or transfer her to another vessel if our itinerary changes. We're indemnified from a lot more than the standard contract for secure packet delivery", said Elise.

Seldon smiled. "Precisely."

"Please," said Kosti. "May we confer?" Seldon nodded and moved back towards the dory with Elise.

"Will they go for it?" asked Elise.

"Yes", said Seldon. "He's already gone for it. He just has to persuade her. Whoever she is, I think they'll be happy to get her off their deck."

"And onto ours?"

Kosti called them back. "As we stated in our request, we wish no illegal trade. We accept your emendations."

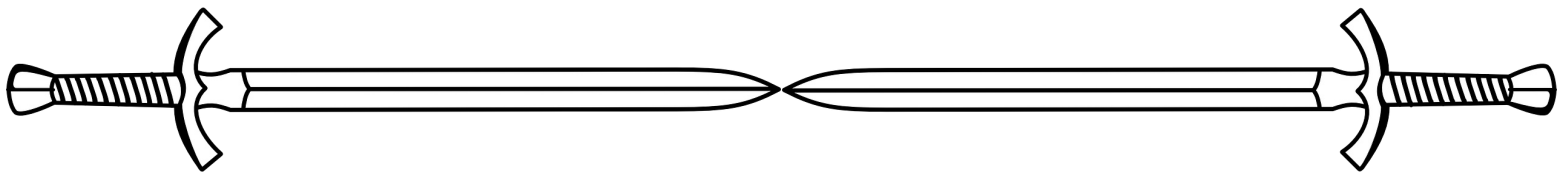
"Excellent", said Seldon. "Elise has the contract ready." She produced a datapad. Seldon signed it and handed it to Kosti. He read it thoroughly from top to bottom, thought for a minute and then signed it.

"May I have a hard copy?" he asked.

Elise blinked for a moment. "Of course." She tapped the datapad and a sheaf of paper curled out from the side.

"Thank you."

"Our ship welcomes you", said Seldon to Ritva. "We can take the consignment



over in our dory and any personal effects you might have."

The two crewmen pulled out a hand truck and loaded the canister onto it. Ritva picked up a duffel bag that had been behind the canister. She and Kosti shared a double handshake but exchanged no words.

"This way then" said Elise.

Chapter 6

Heleni tightened the strap on the duffel of clothes and smoothed the seal shut. Elise was just finishing placing some odds and ends into a utility box. "That looks to be about it", said Heleni.

Elise looked up briefly. "There's a filter on the light. Can you get that while I finish this?"

Heleni stood on the other filled utility box and began to unfasten the panel. "It's nice of you to give up your cabin for the passenger. I thought I'd be the one slinging a hammock in the cargo bay, being junior-most. You're an officer."

"It's not a military ship", said Elise. "It doesn't work the same. You're paid crew. You have your rights. I'm a part-owner. I won't sue myself for less than union regulation quarters."

"But, still. We all understand the situation." Heleni brought the filter down and Elise put it into the utility box and sealed it.

"As you see, I don't have much stuff. And I don't mind Spartan living conditions." They lifted the two boxes onto a hand truck. Elise knocked on the walls and smiled at Heleni. "Besides, this is the most secure room on the ship. From the inside or the outside."

She pointed up where the filter had been removed. "Data projection. Data monitoring. If our friend becomes a problem, it can be contained."

"Ah", said Heleni, slinging the duffel as Elise pulled the crates. "You've done this before then."

"SOP", said Elise. "But not one you'll find in the written manual."

* * *

"So, what's she like?" asked Kwok in the galley. Vikhagen was setting up two trays and steaming some buns. She wore an official crew blazer.

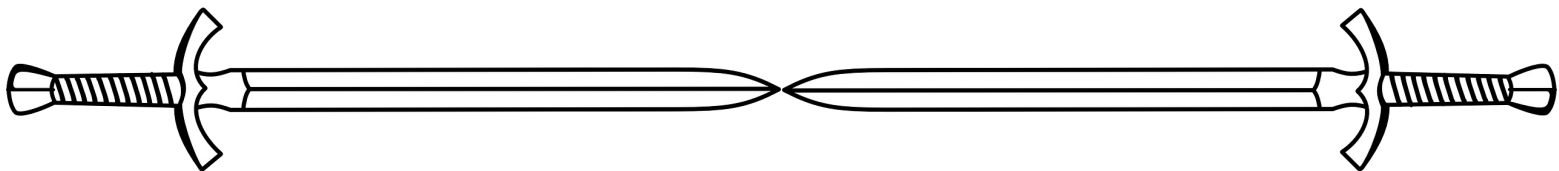
"The passenger? Not your type. Way too young." She looked through another compartment. "Do you know anything about wine?"

"I'm a beer drinker. And how do you know? I like them young."

Vikhagen laughed. "I think she's illegal young. At least for most parts of the galaxy." She read from a number of boxes she was preparing and typed them onto a keyboard.

"So, we've got a kid and a mysterious box. In need of our expensive protection. What's her story?"

"Hmm. A Wellington red," she read from the screen. "Love this wine matching software Elise found. Takes all the guesswork out of serving." She checked a few labels and pulled out a bottle. "She's not real talkative. Hasn't said two words the whole time I've been there. The Captain's just talking, telling tales." She popped the top on the bottle.



"Hey," said Kwok. "Give me a swig!"

"Not a chance", said Vikhagen. "Screen says it's got to sit for a bit. This is for the Captain's table. Besides, you said you were a beer drinker. This would be wasted on you." She pulled out the steaming buns and arranged them on the plate. "Gotta run while it's hot!"

"Pip, pip," called Kwok after her.

* * *

Juanita and the Chief took turns at the sink washing oils from their hands with solvents. The Chief dried his, and Juanita turned off the spigots with her elbows while she waited for her turn. "Are you sure you want to double jump us on the first time?"

He passed her the towel. "You know how Seldon is about passengers."

"Yeah. He can't stand them."

"We've got full fuel and Port Newark is a pretty main port. I think he'll prioritize getting the mission done quickly over coming into port with empty tanks." She secured the towel and they both sat down at the workbench. "The trans-space drives are the same as they always were. They didn't take damage and our overhaul hasn't turned anything up. The whole point of good maintenance is so that you have the leeway to do things like this."

"Hey, less time between today and payday is good for me. No complaints here."

* * *

"I'm not sure the Wellington was the perfect choice for this. But our wine cellar isn't the

most expansive. I apologize", said Seldon across the table to Ritva. "It's not a bad bottle for what it is. The vineyards aren't far from where I grew up. They were once owned by a branch of my family, in fact. Not for a long time now, though."

He finished his main course and smiled across at her. She sat stoically, sipping the last of her wine. Vikhagen quietly entered, quickly cleared the table, laid out two cups of flavored ice, and silver spoons. She popped the top of a small bottle of golden liquid, settled it into an ice carafe, and set out two chilled glasses. Seldon picked out the cocktail stick decorating the ice desert; it had an iceberg silhouette on the top. "Why thank you, Vikhagen."

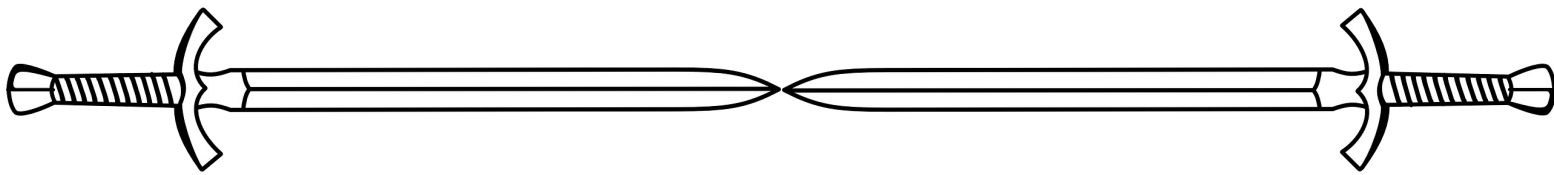
"Yes sir," she said in a forced voice, fleeing before she lost her straight face.

"Now this wine perfectly suits this desert." He poured glasses. "It's synthesized, but it's a classic formula. In order to compete with the sweetness you need something heavy. And if it's heavy then there is no point in anything too subtle. Is it to your taste?"

"Yes" she said after sipping her glass.

They ate in silence for a while. "That's a very interesting gem in the ring on the chain around your neck. I'm not quite sure I recognize it. May I?" With seeming reluctance, she lifted the chain from her neck and passed it to him. The heavy gold was etched in a simple geometric pattern. Set into it was a gem of a transparent purple hue. "Exceptional clarity. A fine cut. Purple corundum? Most odd. Do you know where it came from?" He handed it back.





"It's a family heirloom."

* * *

Seldon poured Elise the last from the bottle of wine. He offered it to the Chief but he held up a beer tube he had brought. "Waste not, want not."

"So how is our precious non-cargo?" asked the Chief, cracking his tube open.

"Very reticent," said Seldon. "Hardly said anything the whole evening."

"I've had dates like that", said the Chief.

"Are you sure it isn't because they couldn't get a word in edgewise?" poked Elise. The Chief guffawed. "We moved her personal effects to the cabin. The canister is locked down in the hold. Can't say much about them. The effects scanned as plain clothes and the canister was shielded."

"Not surprising, I guess", said the Chief. "No point to go through all this secrecy and not

hide things." He took a few bites from the plate of ice he brought up from the galley. "The engines are prepped. We can do a double jump if you want, Sir."

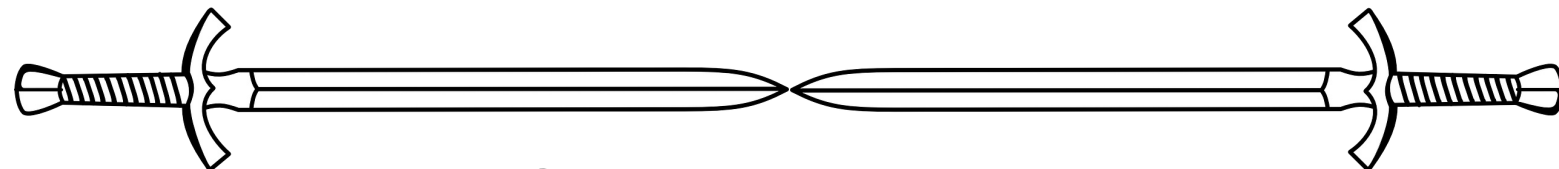
"Excellent" said Seldon, raising his glass to the Chief. "That is precisely what I would like to do. We don't have a good guess about this cargo or this passenger. The sooner they are off our hands, the better."

"We're out of occlusion with the sun," said Elise. "I can send word to the station to cancel our docking reservation and to let the dockyard take their final payment from escrow."

Seldon looked to the Chief. "No issue here. We got what we paid for."

"Very well" said Seldon. "Please arrange it so they get their money, with my apologies. Start the countdown for transition in two hours." They both nodded and left.





World Generation in the Hostile Setting

By P-O Bergstedt

The Hostile Setting from Zozer Games uses its own modified rules for generating the main world of a system. In the Hostile Setting, the nations of Earth have started to colonize space out to about 20 parsecs (and explored interesting worlds even further away from Earth). Corporations are getting rich, mining, and exploring the new worlds. The setting is inspired by the Alien movies and that is visible in books' aesthetic.

In a setting like this, the original Cepheus Engine world generation rules cannot generate a believable subsector. The rules had to be changed, and Zozer Games did so in a simple and logical way that made me very happy; it made me so happy so that I made a web-based subsector generator (details at the end of this article). Some of the important changes are discussed below.

Starport

Starport is based on population and a D3, and this makes sense in this setting. Starport B is the best possible.

Size

Super-Earths, up to size 16, can be generated. Since we have found so many exo-planets that are Super-Earths, this is a very nice addition.

Atmosphere

The atmosphere is dependent on the size of the planet, but in a better way than in the original CE rules. In the Hostile version, small planets with dense atmosphere are less likely, and all worlds smaller than size two will not have any atmosphere. So, there is no need to explain any atmosphere with precursor aliens anymore.

Population

Population is $2D - 5$ minus (or plus) some modifiers. The maximum population possible is 8. This fits well in the setting.

Tech Level

Tech level for all planets is 12. The corporations use the best technology available for their industries. This makes perfect sense in this setting.

The Hostile Subsector Generator

I built a web-based Subsector Generator using the Hostile rules, which can be found at the [Cepheus Journal website](#). There are some different parameters you can try, like the stellar density and the settlement type. The Zozer rules use the OuterRim settlement type. I also allow the tech level for some poor worlds to be 11, since I think that some smaller corporations or entrepreneurs may use surplus equipment. There is also a Hostile Subsector editor you can use if you want to change something about the generated subsector.



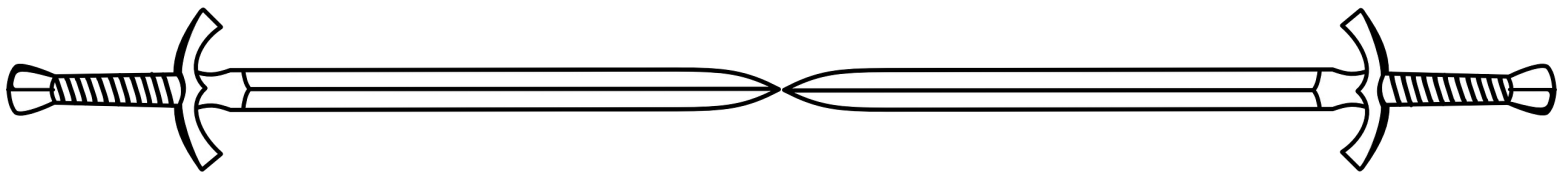
Antown Nova

Vantine

Zimenkaa



Jerray Zone



Using AI for your Cepheus Engine Setting

By P-O Bergstedt

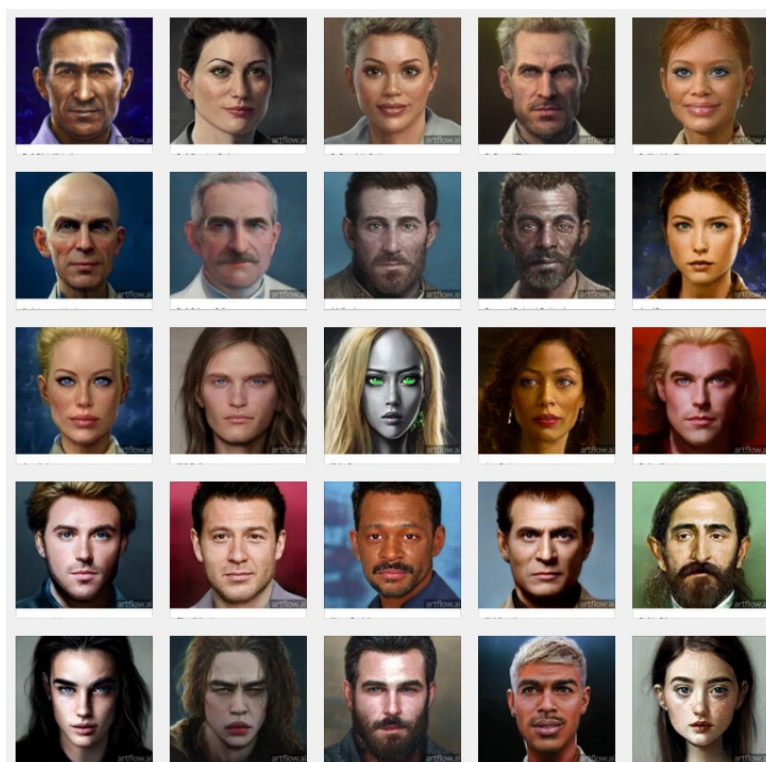
Using AI for your Cepheus Engine setting

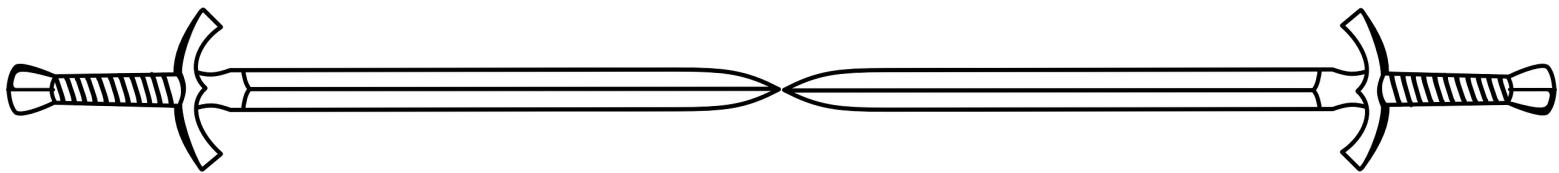
AI can be a great help for Referees/GMs that are planning their campaign. If an image of a landscape or an NPC is needed it can be quickly generated. There are several apps or webpages that can be used. (For the more advanced user, there are also programs that can be downloaded. This often requires the user to have a good graphics card and have the skill Computer-3. This article will only discuss simple tools.)

A few of these tools can be found in the list of [generators at the Zhodani Base](#). Most of the generators found there are not AI tools (but still useful).

NPCs

A nice thing about using images for NPCs is that the Players may think that they are more important than they really are. ("The ref made an image of this NPC. Then this NPC must be important.") A well-known image generator is [This Person Does Not Exist](#). But it is impossible to control the output. Another useful generator is Artflow. Artflow is a lot easier to control. You just write what you want the person to look like, or you could try just writing a name and see what the AI dreams up. This is fun to play with. I recently updated the Adventures of the Starship Notorious with 57 character images of which 47 are NPCs.



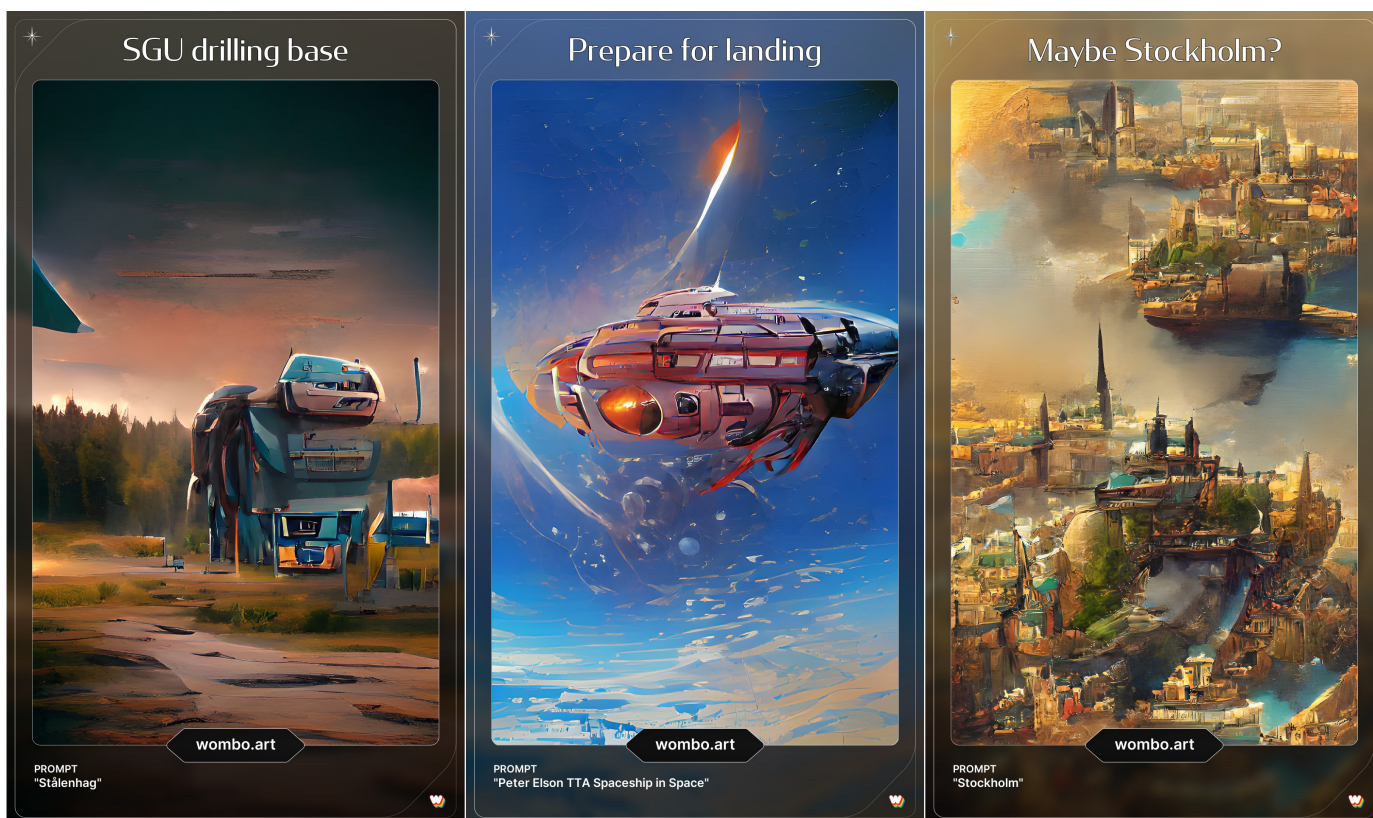


Spaceships and Landscapes

The Wombo Dream app is a fun app that can make spaceships and landscapes. It is easy to use, you just write what you want it to make. You can also add different styles and add an image of your own as a guide. It can make a lot of other things as well, but it is not very good at making characters. Most characters look like an Ood from Doctor Who. It was only when I asked the app to make an Ood that I was

happy with the character it made. For Christmas it also made a nice Krampus.

Another app that is easy to use and that has been used for the cover of this issue is Starryai. Using Starryai takes a little longer, but the results are better. However, there are restrictions on how many times you can use it each day for free. (You can find those mobile apps where mobile apps are found.)



Make an image look like artwork

There are lots of websites with filters that can make a photo look like artwork. Some of these use AI. For my Cepheus Störtebeker setting I used an image of a cog and used a website called [TensorFire](#).

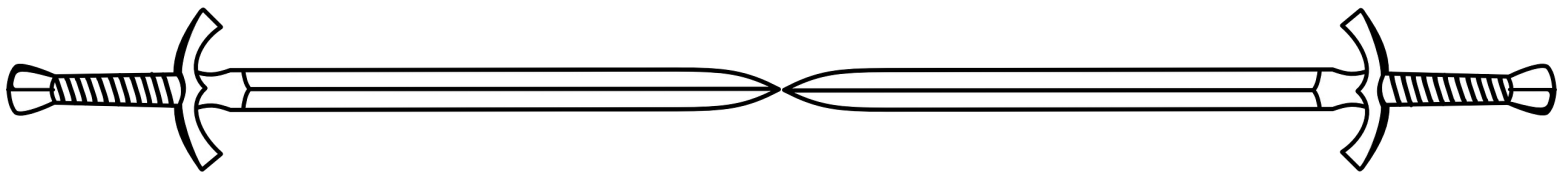
Names and words

There are many generators for words and names. Some use AI. You should try a generator that uses Markov chains. Markov chains have been used for the names in the Subsector Generators that

you can find at the Cepheus Journal website. You can try Markov chains at the [Markov Namegen website](#).

Adventures

AI doesn't seem to be good creative writers of adventures yet. But with a tool like [InferKit](#) you could have some fun and get some ideas to help you with your writing. The adventure [Rue Nee Curios](#) was written by Timothy Collinson using some ideas that this AI had generated.



The Future

The future looks bright. AI can help Referees/GMs and publishers to generate their own adventures. Our computers get better all the time. I am looking forward to what AI can do for the RPGs in a few years.





The Edge of Darkness

By Brett Kruger

A teaser setting.

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." T. S. Eliot

Mankind has always had a thirst for the unknown. From the early days of exploration of the pale blue dot that was mankind's home world, to their expansion across the solar system, there was the ever-present desire to know more of what is beyond the horizon. Still, mankind was limited to the speed of their ion drives. Robotic probes were sent out to nearby stars, their journeys taking decades to reach their targets. Humans continued to fight over the riches of the worlds in their system while waiting for news of new worlds.

All that changed for humanity once viable fusion power plants could be engineered. Within a few decades the power sources were small enough to power starships, and the next great human breakthrough came. The theoretical Alcubierre warp drive became possible. Instead of decades to cross the void the first warp ship completed the parsec to our nearest star in just over two weeks. Suddenly the race was on as factions, corporations and governments all vied to claim the stars. Once again exploration ships were built and sent out. And they found nothing. The worlds orbiting the nearby stars were barren and hostile to mankind. Still, bases and colonies were established and once again mankind set about bringing resources back to their homes. However, the greatest discovery was yet to come.

In 2357 CE an ice hauler working the rings of Saturn discovered something sitting just above the atmospheric plane of the gas giant. Scanners show a large metallic ring floating in low orbit above Saturn. Robotic probes were sent to investigate the ring and try and retrieve it, but all attempts failed. Finally, scientists were sent down to investigate the ring. They discovered it had a huge energy potential that seems to tap Saturn itself.

A week after the scientists began their investigations of the ring, the 'Event' happened. At first the area inside the ring appeared to warp, like ripples across a pond, before a vortex formed into a shimmering whirlpool. The scientists monitoring the ring realised the ring had formed a quantum wormhole, a gateway to no-one knew where. The United Earth Government built and equipped a probe to send into the wormhole. The probe was designed to try and survive the wormhole crossing, capture data on the other side and attempt a return.

The probe was sent into the quantum ring, as the scientists like to call it now, and they waited. Three days passed and, right on time, the probe exited out of the ring. The data showed a system, not completely unlike the Sol system, at the other end of the wormhole. Of even greater significance to the scientists, and the government, was that the data showed an earth-like world in the other system, the first ever found outside the Sol system.

Plans were made and scientific teams were sent through the ring to the other world, and on the other side more systems were discovered that were earth-like. The government tried to keep the ring and the other systems a secret, tried to control the migration to the other worlds, but it was all in vain.

The next great wave of human exploration had begun, and there was no putting the genie back in the bottle. And Hell was waiting...





What's New

By Brett Kruger

The following products were released during the months of December through March. All in all, it was a big couple of months for releases. The top four publishers in this list released thirty four titles alone.

Michael Brown

Hazard: Limnic Eruption!
The Vitrified Village
Hazard: Storm!
Breathless
Primary Attribute
Starfall
Perils of the Innocent
Hazard: Matterslip!
Hazard: Tsunami!
Jane's Deception
The Concrete Maelstrom
Hazard: Tornado!
The Babylon Compulsion
Shots in the Dark
Inbound
The Ghosts of Torin
A Gift Brought More Precious

Zozer Games

HOSTILE Mega [BUNDLE]
Salvatoris
Warlords of Atlantis
HOSTILE Bughunters [BUNDLE]
HOSTILE Double Shift [BUNDLE]
Hostile Referee's Screen
Hostile Rules

Old School Role Playing

Extraction
A Risky Proposition
A Delicate Matter
Justice Denied
Rapture
Expedition to the Crystal Caverns

Independence Games

Trade Empire-class Commercial

Transport

Diverse Roles Third Edition
Anderson and Felix Guide to Naval

Architecture Third Edition

Clement Sector Third Edition

Ordo Arcanorum

Opus Magi: Psions
Opus Magi: the Catacombs of Paris

Stellagama Publishing

Quantum Starfarer
The Sword of Cepheus Reference

Wild Bee Publishing

Andromeda Dragons Character

Sheet

Andromeda Dragons

Okumarts Games

Extrastellar Set Eighteen: Alien
Mercenaries

Extrastellar Set Seventeen: Space
Mercenaries

Monachus Press

Boomslang armed transport
Kavouras Colonial freighter

CyborgPrime Publishing

Starship Deck Plans For VTT:
Newton-Class Lab Ship
Starship Deck Plans For VTT:
Sultana-Class Far Trader

Parts Per Million

Deep Temple - A 5e Compatible
Adventure

Chaosium

Bibliophobia A Rules Light Solo
Roleplaying supplement

Moon Toad Publishing

Quick Ship File: Quixote Type ST
Class Scout

Surreal Estate Games

Ship Dossier: Inanna Class Armed
Transport

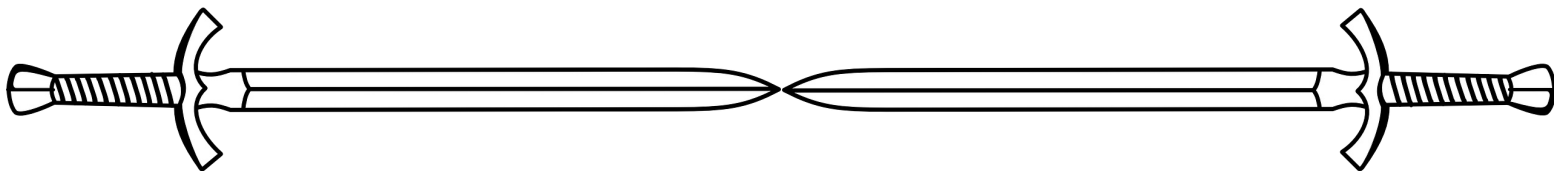
Felbrigg Herriot

Jihad

Mongoose

100 Hooks and Rumours to Hear in
or about Deneb





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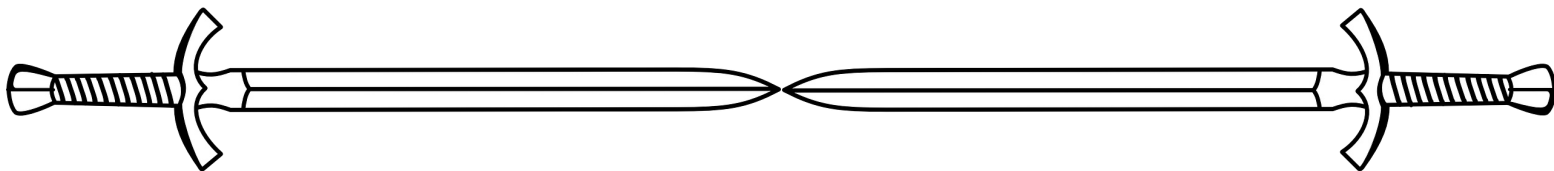
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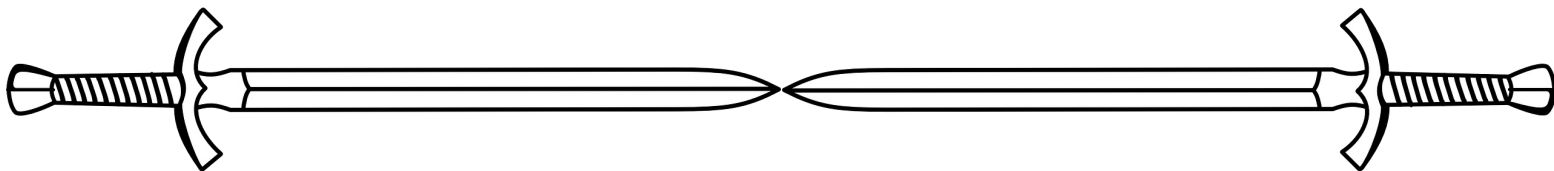
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