

MOTHERSHIP®

SCI-FI HORROR RPG



Tuesday
Knights
games

WARDEN'S OPERATION MANUAL

HORRORS

D100	TRANSGRESSION	OMENS	MANIFESTATION	BANISHMENT	SLUMBER
00-04	Making first contact	Dead animals	Alien creature	Righting a wrong	Returns in 100 years
05-09	Studying arcane text	Visions of future victims	Deranged killer	Human sacrifice	Recurring hallucinations
10-14	Boarding a ship	Writing on the wall	Elder evil returned	Vaccine	Victims forever scarred
15-19	Opening a grave	Stigmata	Cult	Only harmed by fire	Slumbers until next Jump
20-24	Mining strange ore	Unexplained suicides	Tainted technology	Nuking from orbit	Retreats into hiding
25-29	Trespassing	Distress signal	Colossal space being	Obscure occult ritual	Feigns death, escapes
30-34	Gross negligence	Stranger appears	Ruthless apex predator	Returning it to its home	Awaits next Transgression
35-39	Tampering with biology	Abnormal birth	Ghost or spirit	Tough, but killable	Recurring nightmares
40-44	Reneging on a deal	Unlucky numbers	Tangled mass of flesh	Giving it what it wants	Possesses closest victim
45-49	Disturbing holy site	Ancient distress beacon	Mutated being	Special weapon	Awakens if Transgression is repeated
50-54	Leaving someone behind	Android having visions	Child	Making a pact with it	Hibernates deep underground
55-59	Study of strange relic	Ancient recorded warning	Biological experiment	Serving it	Whispers from the shadows
60-64	Forgotten atrocity	Researcher's incoherent notes and findings	Sentient environment	Learning its true identity	Evolves into its more powerful form
65-69	Interfacing with forbidden technology	Irrational computer behavior	Gateway or portal	Certain kinds of light	Hidden in the background of screens and images
70-74	Landing on uncharted planet	Significant astrological alignment	Dream	It can't be killed, only avoided	Slumbers in its killer's mind
75-79	Altering its natural habitat	Speaking in tongues	Cybernetic organism	Inter remains in their rightful resting place	Herald of a greater Horror to come
80-84	Breaking a cultural taboo	Mysterious disappearances	Haunted location	Closing portal/gate to another realm	Uploads into nearest computer
85-89	Failing to stop a previous Transgression	Strange weather phenomena	Doppelganger	Requires a certain time/location	Never stay in one place for too long or it finds you
90-94	Ingesting an unknown substance	Ancient calendar foretells of its arrival	Invisible being	Sending it to another dimension	Parental entity comes looking for answers
95-99	Allowing harm to come to an innocent	Gruesomely displayed corpse(s)	Mothership	Trapping it inside a powerful container	Apocalyptic events set in motion

THEMES

D100	DESCRIPTION	D100	DESCRIPTION	D100	DESCRIPTION
00-03	Death, ancient, arise	36-38	Childhood, innocence, time	65-67	Fire, ashes, war
04-09	Underwater, sunken, drowning	39-41	Underground, crime, buried	68-71	Hunger, famine, food
10-12	Politics, government, nationalism	42-43	Fading beauty, age, fame	72-74	Pleasure, touch, passion
13-16	Humanity, love, memory	44-46	Technology, excess, decay	75-77	Artifice, dolls, toys
17-19	Resistance, struggle, suffering	47-49	Abduction, identity, silence	78-81	Meat, slaughter, animal
20-22	Travel, road-weariness, rural	50-52	The City, rain, flood	82-84	Truth, solitude, loneliness
23-25	Darkness, absence, void	53-55	Fear, the afterlife, prophecy	85-87	Wilderness, nature, growth
26-29	Medicine, hospitals, surgery	56-58	Factories, work, oppression	88-91	Capitalism, greed, fortune
30-32	Rust, the Machine, noise	59-61	Belief, god, hell	92-94	Chaos, change, laughter
33-35	Transformation, rebirth, loss	62-64	Cold, sleep, snow	95-99	Abandoned, empty, forgotten

MOTHERSHIP®

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CONTENT WARNING

Mothership® is a horror game for mature audiences. It contains violence, foul language, some sexual content, drug use, and depictions of mental illness, trauma, stress, and panic that may not be suitable for all audiences. Please be advised.

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PREPARE YOUR FIRST SESSION

Preparing to play a game of **Mothership®** with your friends, family, or strangers at your local game store can feel like a daunting task. What do you need to prepare? How do you know when you're finished? And how can you guarantee that all that hard work pays off?

The short answer to all of these questions is to remember that most likely you've been playing games of imagination and pretend since you were a child. You can do this.

The long answer is that you learn more from playing than you do from prepping, so let's get to work.

STEP 1. GET ORGANIZED

Grab a cheap notebook and a pen. On the cover, in big block letters write, **Mothership Campaign Notebook**. Turn to the first page and label it **Index**, then flip to the last page and label it **Roster**. Finally, flip to the second page, write the page number in one corner, and title it **Session 01 Prep**.

STEP 2. INVITE YOUR FRIENDS TO PLAY

Do this before you're ready. Get a hold of 3-4 friends and tell them you want to play a sci-fi horror roleplaying game with them. Find a night where you can spend 3-4 hours playing in person or online. They don't need to know anything about the game. You'll teach them how to play and they can make a character when you get together.

SESSION 1 PREP

UNDERTAKE A DANGEROUS MISSION / VISIT AN OFFWORLD COLONY

SCENARIO: EXTERMINATE AN OTHERWORLDLY THREAT

SETTING: RELIGIOUS COMPOUND (SHIP?)

TRANSGRESSION: INGESTING AN UNKNOWN SUBSTANCE

OMENS: MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES

MANIFESTATION: ALIEN CREATURE

BANISHMENT: GIVING IT WHAT IT WANTS

SLUMBER: EVOLVES INTO ITS MORE POWERFUL FORM

OKAY SO, THERE'S LIKE THIS CULT AND ITS MEMBERS ARE ALL TAKING THIS SORT OF EUCHARIST LIKE THING WHICH IS LIKE SEEDING THEIR GUT BIOME WITH THE CELLS OF THIS ALIEN CREATURE. BASICALLY THEN WHEN ENOUGH OF THE CREATURE HAS TAKEN OVER THEY LIKE WANDER TO "THE CHAPEL" AND JOIN WITH THE OTHER DISAPPEARED MEMBERS AND SORT OF MUTATE INTO THIS HIDEOUS LIVING ALIEN GOD THING.

ITS GROWN POWERFUL THROUGH THE BELIEF OF THE CULT AND ALL THE MEMBERS WHO HAVE JOINED ITS "LIVING BODY." ITS GOT MAYBE LIKE SUPER PSYCHIC POWERS AND ITS FUNCTIONALLY INVINCIBLE (LIKE YOU CAN'T BLOW IT UP ITS GOT PSYCHIC SHIELDING OR WHATEVER). IT WANTS SOMETHING LIKE...

OH IT WANTS THIS "SPECIAL CHILD" OR WHATEVER GENETIC MAKE-UP TO COMPLETE ITS EVOLUTION. WHY THE CULTISTS HAVE BEEN KIDNAPPING THAT PERSON RECENTLY. ONCE IT GETS THAT FINAL PERSON IT'S "GOD SELF" AND THEN IT LIKE TURNS INTO SOMETHING ELSE. IT HEADS OFF TO ITS STAR HOME/HEAVEN. SO IT'S STOPPED BUT THEIR GOD CAN'T BE KILLED.

MAYBE LIKE SOME C-LEVEL HIRES THE CREW TO TRACK DOWN THEIR MISSING CHILD?

2

STEP 3. READ THE RULEBOOK

Read the **Player's Survival Guide**. If you're strapped for time, just skim the **Character Sheet** and the **Cheat Sheet** on the back of the book. The actual rules as written are easy to use and not the most important part of the game. They do, however, provide a solid skeleton for you to flesh out with your own tweaks and house rules.

STEP 4. CHOOSE A STARTING SCENARIO

For your first session, you should throw your players into bad situations... and then make it worse. Economic horror, poor working conditions, a stand-off between powerful factions — all of these provide a tension that's ready to explode by the time you add the Horror.

See Scenarios on pg. 6.

Learn how to teach the game on pg. 23.

Read more about House Rules on pg. 34.

SESSION 1 PREP

SURVIVE:

- **PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA:** THE ALIEN GOD CAN FIRE A PSYCHIC BLAST VIA THE CULT LEADERS. ADDITIONALLY, THE ENTIRE PLACE IS JUST CREEPY WITH A LOT OF PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT BECOMING ONE BODY. THE CARPET SMELLS, THERE'S FAKE WOOD PANELLING AND YOU CAN'T GO ANYWHERE BECAUSE YOU'RE STUCK ON THE SHIP.
- **SOCIAL PRESSURE:** THE CULT DOESN'T WANT INTRUDERS THERE OBVIOUSLY, SO THEY'LL HAVE TO BE UNDERCOVER.
- **VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS:** THERE ARE SOME CULTIST SEMI-PSYCHIC INQUISITOR-TYPE PEOPLE WHO KNOW SOMEONE IN THE NEW GROUP OF RECRUITS IS AN UNDERCOVER AGENT.
- **ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS:** THE RELIGIOUS COMPOUND IS ON A SHIP SO THAT THEY CAN EVADE GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITIES. YOU CAN'T LEAVE AND FRAG GRENADES/LASER CUTTERS COULD BLAST A HOLE IN THE SHIP ETC. PLAYER'S NEED TO FIND A WAY TO ESCAPE.
- **RESOURCE SCARCITY:** THE PLAYERS DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO AN ARSENAL OF WEAPONS BECAUSE THEY'RE COMING IN UNDERCOVER, SO WHATEVER WEAPONS THEY NEED THEY'LL HAVE TO FIND ON BOARD.

SOLVE:

- **DILEMMA:** THERE'S A GROUP OF CULTISTS WHO ARE PLANNING TO ESCAPE AND THE PLAYERS HAVE TO DECIDE TO HELP THEM, AND IF THEY DO IT'LL BLOW THEIR COVER.
- **LOCK & KEY:** THIS SHOULD BE PRETTY EASY, THERE'S DEFINITELY AREAS OF THE SHIP THAT ARE RESTRICTED ACCESS AND THE PLAYERS WILL NEED TO FIND A WAY TO GET IN.

SAVE:

- **BAKER:** TWENTY-SOMETHING HEIR TO A C-LEVEL FORTUNE. HAS FALLEN IN WITH CHARISMATIC RECRUITER WHO IS MILKING THEM FOR FUNDING FOR THE GROUP.
- **THE SPLINTER GROUP:** SIX CULT MEMBERS LED BY HANNA GABRIEL WHO ARE PLOTTING TO ESCAPE. THEIR PLAN IS TO TAKE OVER THE DROPSHIP NEXT TIME THEY NEAR A PLANET. THEY'VE STASHED A SMALL ARSENAL OF WEAPONS AND WILL DIE ESCAPING IF NEEDED.



STEP 7. SOMETHING TO SOLVE

Once you have Survive down, you need to come up with some puzzles or mysteries to test your players' wits. These can be as simple as a locked door or as challenging as a complex web of conspiracy.

[Read about Solve on pg. 12.](#)

STEP 8. SOMEONE TO SAVE

Then, establish some compelling people for your players to talk to, help, or avoid. Done well, this can help **immerse your players in the world**, and give their actions real meaning.

[Read about Save on pg. 16.](#)

STEP 9. MAP IT OUT

Once you have all of the above, it's time to put each of these items down onto a **map** with shorthand notes to make running the game a breeze.

[Learn to draw Maps on pg. 18.](#)

STEP 5. FIND THE HORROR

Start with something that makes your skin crawl and build from there. A good Horror includes a **Transgression** that awakens it, **Omens** of its arrival, its appearance or **Manifestation**, a way for the players to defeat the Horror through some kind of **Banishment**, and finally the effects the Horror has as it **Slumbers**, awaiting its return.

[Read more about the TOMBS cycle on pg. 8.](#)

STEP 6. SOMETHING TO SURVIVE

Once you've found your Horror, the next thing you need to create is a **dilemma** or series of obstacles where your players must choose between **Surviving the nightmare**, **Solving the mystery**, or **Saving the day**. It's easiest to start with Survive, as it'll be forefront on the players' minds.

[Read more about Survive on pg. 10.](#)

STEP 10. FINAL DETAILS

Finally, look through everything you've written to find hidden connections, discard weak ideas, and make sure each class has something interesting to do. Be careful not to over-prepare, because your players will have their own ideas, and you need to leave room for them, too.

[Learn how to tie it all together on pg. 20.](#)

CHOOSE A STARTING SCENARIO

If this is your players' first time playing Mothership, they'll want to sample the best that the game has to offer. For your first scenario you want something that is quick, easy, and classic. Take a look at the scenarios below and pick one that sounds fun.

1. Explore the Unknown

The crew is hired to survey an uncharted planet, or to explore the interior of a strange vessel which has recently appeared at the edge of Rim space. The crew is on their own in unfamiliar territory with no one to call on for help. God speed.

2. Investigate a Strange Rumor

Something is alive in the vents. Colonists are disappearing. Someone is leaving messages on the comms terminal, from two years in the future. Separating fact from fiction was the easy part. The hard part was learning to live with the truth.

3. Salvage a Derelict Ship

Distress signal on repeat. Scans show no signs of life. Escape pods all ejected. Finding a derelict ship can be a chance to strike it rich off scrap and loot, but not every risk has a reward, and every abandoned ship is abandoned for a reason.

4. Exterminate an Otherworldly Threat

No one goes outside anymore. They've been scratching at the walls for days and the Company has made their decision: wipe them out, by any means necessary. Just bring back a sample for testing when you're done — a living one.

5. Visit an Offworld Colony

The Company hasn't heard from the miners on PK-294, and the shareholders are getting restless. Take the next Jumpliner out to the Rim and get production back on track. Offworld colonies for many are a new start, but for others a new end.

6. Undertake a Dangerous Mission

A C-level's child has been "kidnapped" by a fringe religious group. Android liberation activists want to sabotage a corporate synthetic production facility. There's always work for people with no scruples in need of quick credits.

7. Survive a Colossal Disaster

Abandon ship! Radiation leaks and warp anomalies. Make it to the escape pods before the whole station collapses. Unstable environments and dangerous weather. Escaping disaster is never a bad place to start.

8. Respond to a Distress Signal

Help is never nearby out on the Rim, and responding to a distress signal is a spacer's duty. There's only one problem though: you can never tell the legitimate cries for help from the traps laid by wolves in sheep's clothing.

9. Transport Precious Cargo

You needed a job, and your contact came through. They won't tell you what's in the container, only that it needs to be at Outpost-683 in six weeks. Don't open it, don't scan it, and whatever you do, don't listen to anything it says.

10. Make Contact with the Beyond

They found it at the edge of the system, on a frozen and forgotten moon. Eons old, intricate stonework, when our probe arrived it started humming a tune. They've been looking for us for a long, long time. Now they've found us.

6.1 SETTING

For your first game of Mothership, let's **keep things simple**: a nice 2-3 hour session that doesn't overstay its welcome and has your players coming back for more. All we need is **one self-contained location** with lots of potential for trouble, like the ones on the **Setting Table** here. Once you note that in your **Campaign Notebook**, you're ready for the most important ingredient: the Horror!

SETTING

D10	LOCATION	D10	LOCATION
00	Space Station	05	Religious Compound
01	Aboard Your Own Ship	06	Mining Colony
02	Military Outpost	07	Research Facility
03	Prison Complex	08	Underwater Base
04	Derelict Spacecraft	09	Mothership





Now that we have a basic scenario, we need to find the Horror in it. To do this, we use a method called the **TOMBS Cycle**, which stands for **Transgression, Omens, Manifestation, Banishment, and Slumber**. It describes the cycle of Horror from its origin all the way to how it is defeated (and then returns) in five Acts.

Prepping your Horror

Write down the Acts on your **Session 01 Prep** page in your **Campaign Notebook**, then use the guidelines to invent your Horror. You can

use the **Horrors Table** on the inside front cover to generate ideas. **Remember:** the table is only a starting point. You have to breathe life into the entries and interpret the results. Ignore entries you don't like, and combine unrelated concepts to create something unique.

ACT I. TRANSGRESSION

Someone knowingly or unknowingly awakens the Horror from its slumber.

Horrors occur because at some point a line was crossed that wasn't meant to be crossed. The line may be an actual boundary, like stepping foot on an unknown planet or boarding a derelict ship, or it may be a moral boundary, like leaving a crewmember behind or turning your back on an innocent's suffering. Transgressions can be active like deciphering the runes on an ancient relic, or passive like docking at a backwater spaceport. Transgressions aren't just actions your players take in the present, either. They can be something in the past that explains why the Horror exists at all, or an action in the present that your players are trying to stop. Usually, your players only realize that they have Transgressed by the time it's too late and they enter the next Act: **Omens**.

ACT II. OMENS

The Horror heralds its arrival through signs and signals.

Omens can take the form of nightmares and prophetic visions, a loose trail of victims, or rumors and whispers among the colonists. Each serves as an early warning system that alerts the players that something is not right and gives them a chance to get ahead of the Horror. Omens build tension. For long-term looming threats like an Alien Invasion, each might be spaced months apart as scientists and astronomers start going insane or killing themselves. For more impending terror, the Omen may simply be a corpse aboard an abandoned ship with its chest split open.

Finally, Omens act as clues for mysteries to be solved. What are they pointing to? And what do they foretell? Once the Omens have been solved, or time has run out, the Horror appears and the players enter the next Act: **Manifestation**.



ACT III. MANIFESTATION

The Horror reveals its true form to the players. This is a big moment. For the first time, the players get a glimpse of the Horror in all its terrifying glory.

The spirit appears, the serial killer attacks, the disease infects another crewmember, a monster rampages through the lab. The Manifestation makes it real and gives the players a form, body, or face to fight. A Manifestation is often what people remember most, so think hard about your Horror's appearance. Think about its smells, and the sounds it makes when it's creeping up on you. This is also the perfect time to start thinking about its tactics, and how it acts during the game. Remember, a Manifestation is a symptom.

Once Manifested, the players are on the defense. They are being hunted, attempting to survive just long enough to make it to the next Act: **Banishment**.

ACT IV. BANISHMENT

The players race against the clock to fight back and attempt to destroy the Horror. Once Manifested, things ramp up quickly. The Horror is now a real problem that must be dealt with before all hell breaks loose. During this Act, players either defeat or are defeated by the Horror. Banishment can take many forms, the most common being that the players simply kill the Horror. It's not always that simple, though: the Horror may need to be appeased, or freed from its torment. This Act is the perfect time to ramp things up, and really make the Horror the players' problem. Attacks increase, viruses spread, deaths multiply, all while the players learn that the Horror is at their doorstep and cannot be ignored. Whether the players Banish the Horror, run away, or die trying, the Horror enters its final phase: **Slumber**.

ACT V. SLUMBER

The Horror relents... for now. If the players are successful in banishing it, the Horror goes dormant, waiting for the next Transgression to set it off again. If they fail, the Horror completes its plan and moves on to the next phase in its evolution.

Slumber is an important part of the Cycle, because it shows that the Horror is rarely defeated permanently, just kept at bay for another day. It must always be resisted, and defeated anew day after day, week after week. There is always work to do. The long term echoes and consequences of the Horror's existence leave scars for a long time to come. Maybe the beast was defeated, but its bite infected a member of the crew. Or maybe the ancient evil was sealed away in a tomb, only awaiting for some other explorer to stumble into it a hundred years from now and **start the Cycle all over again**.

SOMETHING TO SURVIVE

Now that you have a situation rife with horror, you need obstacles for your players to overcome. We call this **Survive, Solve, or Save** and it's all about creating difficult choices for your players to make. The idea is to put your players in a position where they have the option to Survive the ordeal, Solve the mystery, or Save the day. They can usually only do one of those things, or maybe two if they try really hard.

10.1 SURVIVING THE NIGHTMARE

Survival is the easiest of the three obstacles to come up with, as it's what most games are centered around. What's important here is to vary the kinds of obstacles that threaten your players' characters' survival.

Psychological Trauma

This is largely represented with the Sanity, Fear, and Stress mechanics, but it's a good variable to keep an eye on, as these factors can also kill players.

- Creepy environment
- Darkness
- Loneliness
- Isolation
- Splitting the group up
- Evidence of violence
- Omens

[Read more about Omens on pg. 8.](#)

Social Pressures

The players exist as a part of a small community (the crew), but often exist as a part of a larger community (the entire ship, colony, etc.). Convincing others of a plan or using leadership and command skills is often the difference between living and dying.

- Good planning and risk assessment
- Convincing arguments
- Negotiation and de-escalation
- Favors, allies and enemies

[Read about Social Encounters on pg. 36.](#)

Violent Encounters

The most common of the Survival Obstacles, however an over-reliance on combat and violence slows the game to a halt. Violent encounters are a powerful spice; use them sparingly and brutally and your players will learn to avoid them.

- Bar brawls and hand-to-hand combat
- Chase scenes and evacuations
- Ship-to-ship combat and fleet battles
- Massive battles and sieges
- Tactical gunfights and shootouts

[Read about Violent Encounters on pg. 37.](#)

Environmental Hazards

Space is the most inhospitable environment for human life. Environmental hazards are a good palette cleanser for violence, and they help unlock different parts of your brain when solving problems.

- Dangerous vegetation
- Toxic atmosphere
- Radiation
- Zero-gravity
- Volcanoes
- Underwater locations
- Caves
- Lack of oxygen

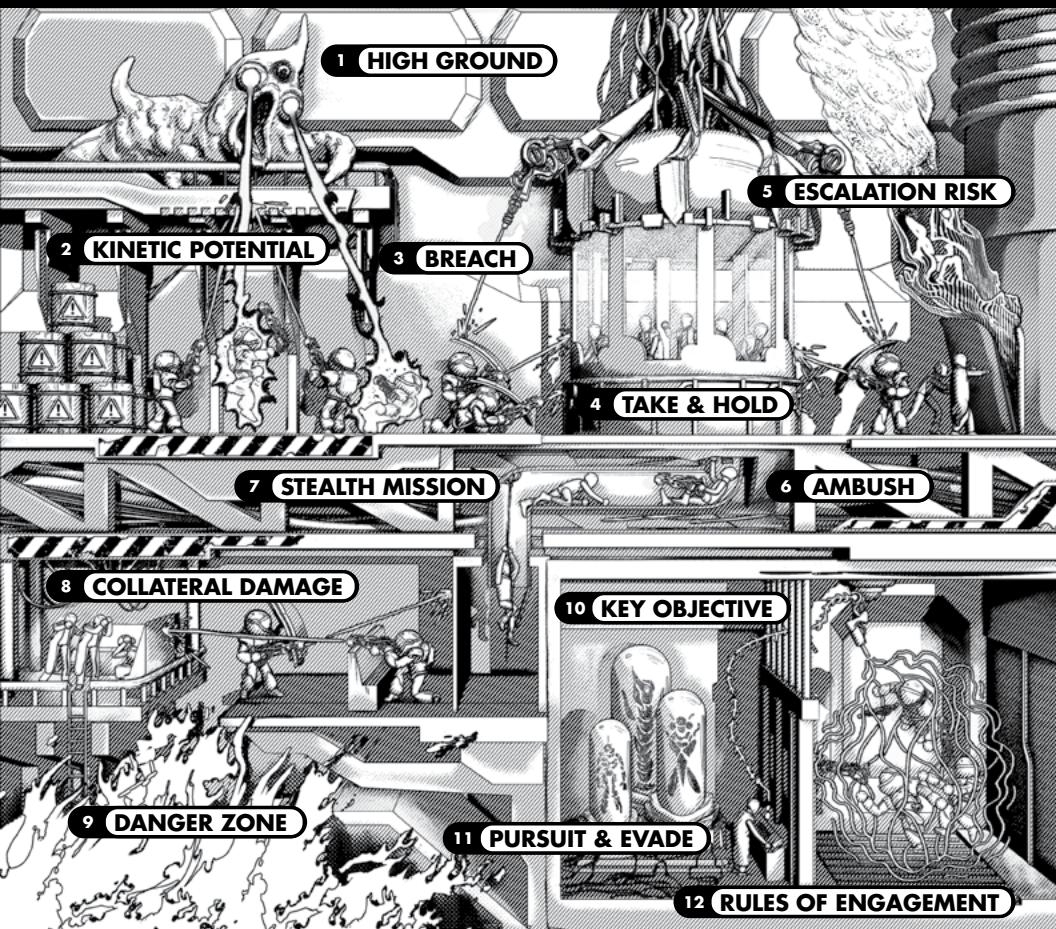
Resource Scarcity

A very common trope in both sci-fi and horror, and key to survival horror narratives. Keeping your players' resources scarce and making them make decisions about what to keep and what to lose can really amp up tension.

- Lack of oxygen, food, ammunition
- Destruction of equipment or weaponry
- Time
- Fuel and warp cores
- Credits and money

[See Campaign Economics on pg. 50.](#)

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS



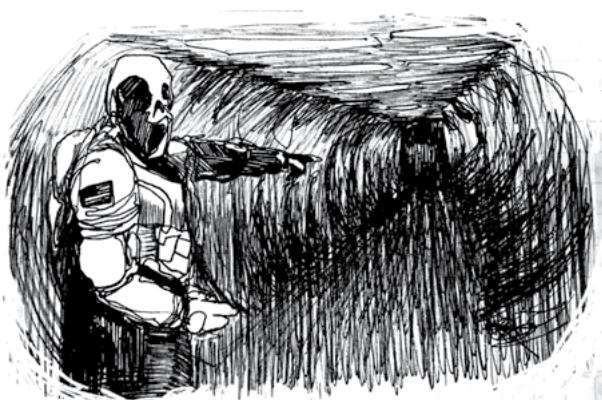
TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
01 HIGH GROUND	One side is located high above the other, and has an advantage in attacking and defending.
02 KINETIC POTENTIAL	Objects in the area have the potential to deal a great amount of damage, radically changing the situation.
03 BREACH	The enemy is deeply entrenched in a highly defensible position which must be defeated first.
04 TAKE & HOLD	One side must capture an objective and defend it until reinforcements arrive.
05 ESCALATION RISK	The longer the encounter takes, the more likely it is to spiral out of control.
06 AMBUSH	If one side is surprised, the encounter ends quickly.
07 STEALTH MISSION	Stealth and silence are required for the situation not to escalate.
08 COLLATERAL DAMAGE	There are non-combatants in the area which must be considered and may be leveraged by enemies.
09 DANGER ZONE	The encounter takes place in a limited area, which if strayed from risks damage or death.
10 KEY OBJECTIVE	The encounter ends as soon as a key objective is reached, captured, or killed.
11 PURSUIT & EVADE	One side is attempting to get to a location and the other party must stop them.
12 RULES OF ENGAGEMENT	One side is required to be non-lethal, radically altering the weapons at the players' disposal.

SOMETHING TO SOLVE

Solving a good mystery, beating a challenging puzzle, or uncovering a long forgotten secret unlocks your players' innate curiosity and feeds their hunger for exploration. Done well, this can fuel entire campaigns as players seek the answers to every burning question, stopping at nothing in their quest to reveal the truth.

To do this, you need to use three tools: **questions**, **puzzles**, and **answers**.



MYSTERIES (QUESTIONS)

PUZZLES (OBSTACLES)

SECRETS (ANSWERS)

12.1 QUESTIONS

Every mystery has a question. “What happened here?” is the most common one, but simple ones like “How do we get there?” or “How can we kill it?” work too.

See the most common
Questions below.

12.2 PUZZLES

Each puzzle is an obstacle, which when defeated reveals a new secret, starting the cycle again. The simpler the mystery, the fewer and more mundane the puzzles.

Build interesting
Puzzles on pg. 13.

12.3 ANSWERS

Your most powerful tool. Secrets represent clues, evidence, and most importantly: answers. Whenever an answer is revealed, a new question gets asked, and a new mystery begins.

Reveal compelling
Answers on pg. 14.

12.4 WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS?

To run a good mystery you need to ask a compelling question. Let's start with the three most basic.

What happened here?

Docking at an abandoned space station. Finding a dead body. Discovering the ruins of an ancient civilization. All of these scenes force you to ask: what happened here? Small mysteries hide their answers in the clues on the scene. Complex mysteries force you to answer several smaller questions before you learn the truth.

Who did it?

Once you know what happened, you might start thinking about who did it, and why. The answer could lead you out of danger, or directly to your death. Sometimes knowing the answer isn't as important as knowing when not to ask the question. But one thing is for certain, whoever did what they did doesn't want to be found. Ever.

Where are they?

Everything from your basic missing persons to mysterious disappearances of entire colonies. Tracking down lost people, places, or things sends you from one end of the galaxy to the other. Even on the small scale, finding a lost keycard or a hidden stowaway is enough adventure for a solid session of gameplay.

CREATING INTERESTING PUZZLES

Once you've asked the right question, you need to place an obstacle in the way of the answer. We call these obstacles **puzzles**, and below is a list of their common building blocks. Most should only be one or two components. The more components you add, the more complicated a puzzle becomes.

Much like how in every violent encounter, death is a real possibility, every puzzle leaves open the chance that the players won't solve it. Don't design puzzles that, if left unsolved, completely halt the game. If the players can't find a way through, they need to find a way around. Choosing which puzzles to solve and which to ignore is an important part of the game.

[Read more about Failure on pg. 33.](#)

13.1 WHAT MAKES A GOOD PUZZLE?

- Forces the players to think about their environment in a new and interesting way.
- Allows for multiple solutions as players often come up with solutions you haven't thought of yet.
- Gives feedback on why a solution didn't work, rather than just "nothing happens."
- If it goes unsolved, the game can still continue forward.
- Hides optional or bonus rewards behind the hardest solutions.
- Offers a clear reward for the puzzle's solution.

PUZZLE COMPONENTS

D100	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
00-04	ALARM	If solved incorrectly sets off an alarm, alerting nearby enemies.
05-09	CONNECT THE DOTS	Connect a series of "dots" using some kind of item (e.g., wires, light, water, blood, etc.).
10-13	CONSTRUCTION	Construct an item using pieces that they are given, or must find or provide.
14-17	DILEMMA	Choose between the lesser of two evils or the greater of two goods.
18-21	EGG CARRY	Safely deliver a delicate or vulnerable item or organism (e.g., the "egg") to a certain location.
22-25	FIND THE CLUE	Search for one or more objects (which then lead to more Questions, Puzzles, or Answers).
26-29	GUARDIAN	Defeat, appease, or otherwise bypass a guardian who denies access to a location or item.
30-34	HAZARDOUS PATH	Route is blocked by danger which must be avoided, circumnavigated, or defeated to continue.
35-38	ILLUSION	Contains an element that appears to be one thing but is actually another.
39-42	LABYRINTH	Forces players to navigate a maze or complicated path.
43-47	LOCK & KEY	Collect an item (the key) and use it on the lock in order to gain access to the lock's contents.
48-51	MISSING PART	Locate a missing item in order for the puzzle to work properly.
52-56	MUNDANE OBSTACLE	A real-world problem (e.g. a broken elevator, a collapsed pylon, etc.).
57-60	OUTSIDE-THE-BOX	No obvious solution, so players must bring outside resources to bear in order to solve it.
61-64	PATTERN RECOGNITION	Requires the players to notice repeated symbols or other repeated information.
65-69	REMOTE SWITCH	Activate a switch in another location to bypass the obstacle in their current location.
70-73	RIDDLE	Requires recitation of a coded phrase or password.
74-78	RISING TIDE	Danger which escalates naturally, forcing the players to solve it quickly or be harmed.
79-82	SACRIFICE	Requires the players to sacrifice something of great value to them in order to solve it.
83-86	SEQUENCE	Complete a certain number of steps in a specific order to solve the puzzle.
87-90	TEAMWORK	Multiple players must do something at the same time in order to solve the puzzle.
91-93	TIMELOCK	Solve the puzzle in a certain amount of time or fail (or otherwise re-start their attempt).
94-96	TRAP	The puzzle punishes players for failed attempts to solve it.
97-99	TRIAL AND ERROR	Players must experiment with several ingredients (e.g., switches, chemicals, etc.) to solve the puzzle.

CREATING COMPELLING ANSWERS

Whenever your players solve a puzzle, they're rewarded with an answer. This could be a piece of **evidence** that opens a new line of inquiry, or a **secret** that changes their perspective on the world around them. Always give them information they can act on immediately. Point them in a direction.

Show the lock before the key.

You want players to hit a blocked path before they find the key for it. This way they know to look for the key. Backtracking to unlock previously blocked paths is hugely fulfilling in an investigation game.

Many names for the same thing.

A neat trick is to call something or someone by two or three different names. Players assume these are separate entities, and fill in their own backstories for them. Later, when they realize that these are all one and the same, they can connect dots they couldn't see before.

Answers lead to new questions.

Every clue points to a **lead**, something else the players should investigate. It needs to be something concrete: a person, place, or thing of interest to the investigation. See the **Leads Table** below for examples.

More clues than you think you need.

When prepping, put plenty of clues in each location, then discover more with your players during play. Mix up the types of evidence and the leads they generate so it doesn't all feel the same.

Reveal facts, not conclusions.

Good answers don't spell things out for the players, but instead leave the information there for the players to put together on their own.

14.1 TYPES OF EVIDENCE

Testimonial Evidence

Anything someone says under questioning or interrogation. Testimonial evidence can be difficult to get if there's no one to question or if the witnesses are unwilling to talk. Additionally, rumors could turn out to be hearsay, and torture almost always just gives the interrogator whatever information they want to hear.

Read about Lying & Deception on pg. 36.1.

Physical Evidence

Any material object relevant to the mystery is classified as physical evidence: blood samples, DNA, organisms (in containment, hopefully), a crashed vessel, an ancient idol, or a murder weapon. Physical evidence is especially common at the location where the event took place, and often requires further study in a lab or expert analysis in order to get any valuable information.

Documentary Evidence

Any kind of written note or digital recording: corporate memos, interdepartmental messages, deck plans, handwritten notes, distress signals, samizdat literature, or religious texts that your players encounter. While documents themselves are often abundant, finding the right one can take days or weeks of painstaking research.

See Running Investigations on pg. 38.

LEADS

EVIDENCE	PERSON	PLACE	THING
DOCUMENTARY	A stack of forms all dealing with "Entity 742," all are heavily redacted and authorized by a <u>Dir. Davis</u> .	A <u>deckplan</u> shows a secret sub-level accessible only via a <u>secure lift</u> .	A <u>corporate memo</u> refers to the disappearance of an experimental weapon called a "dream cannon."
PHYSICAL	The <u>blood</u> , if tested, contains DNA belonging to Amanda Davis, age 6, who died 5 years ago.	A <u>trail of blood</u> leads from the broken observation window towards a wrenched open maintenance shaft.	<u>Discarded</u> near the broken window is a powerful experimental weapon in need of repair.
TESTIMONIAL	When questioned, a corporate researcher says, "Only Director Davis has access to the containment unit."	There's a <u>rumor</u> among the staff that "They're keeping a secret off the books project on sub-level 4."	Under <u>interrogation</u> , a guard confesses that "you need a <u>red keycard</u> to access the containment unit."

PLANNING FOR FAILURE

The basic framework of an investigation is simple: the players look for clues which help them solve the mystery. If they don't find the right clues and make the right deductions fast enough, things get worse. The key to running a gripping investigation is to have a plan for how things escalate if the players fail to solve things in time.

Investigation games fail when the Warden feels like they have to drop hints or keep the players on track. That's not your job. Your job is to ask interesting questions and to create compelling consequences.

Start by outlining three escalating events that could happen if the players don't solve things in time. Then, put each of those events on a timeline. It could be hours, days, months, or years. The point is, with these escalating events, the players are free to make mistakes, miss clues, or follow bad leads without you worrying about them "getting off course."

The secret is: there is no such thing as "off course."

It's all just the game.

SOMEONE TO SAVE

Horror games test who characters are under the worst possible circumstances. Are they survivors, doing whatever it takes to make it out alive? Are they investigators, searching to find the truth? Or are they heroes, putting the lives of others before their own? To find out, you need to create interesting characters with real wants and desires, and then put them in absolute peril. Every scenario needs someone worth saving.

16.1 ALLIES & ENEMIES

Turn to a new spread in your Campaign Notebook and label one page **Allies** and the opposite page **Enemies**. Whenever the characters save someone's life or do them a huge favor, add them to the Allies page. Whenever the characters betray a person or hurt them or their interests, add that person to the Enemies page. Every few sessions, skim these pages to see if they are relevant to your prep. You can attack the characters' Allies, or have them come begging for help with their problems. Old Enemies form new alliances, and undermine the players' goals. It won't be long before both pages are full and the game starts to run itself.

16.2 CREATING USEFUL CHARACTERS

To design a character you're going to focus on three things:

1. What do they think with?

Take a person's most prized possession, or the body part that most represents them, and then use that to define their approach to the world. Do they think with their fists? With their wallet? With their head or their heart? This tiny detail can help you define not only how they make decisions, but also how they act. A character who always thinks with their watch is always checking the time, always running late, always in a hurry, always wants to know when things will get done.

2. What do they want?

Everyone wants something, even if it's just to be left alone. You need to give characters a clear, attainable, material goal. Desires like "they want to be loved" aren't nearly as helpful as "they want to go on a date with Jones this weekend." The second example is much, much better. It's more concrete, and it gives us an idea of what the players can do for the character right now.



SOMEONE TO SAVE

3. How do the players interact with them?

More important than a character's personality, voice, or appearance is what they can (or can't) do for the players. We've simplified this into two categories: helpful/unhelpful and powerful/powerless. Players need to be able to quickly assess whether a person stands in the way of their goals or can help them achieve them. Look at the matrix below for some common examples of people the players might meet.

For your first session we recommend designing three characters: someone unhelpful and powerful (e.g., a gatekeeper), someone helpful but powerless (e.g., the drinking buddy), and someone in it for themselves (e.g., the survivor). These roles won't be static. They should change and respond to circumstance and how players treat them, and are a good starting place for playable social encounters.

POWERFUL

Read more about Social Encounters on pg. 36.

1 GATEKEEPER

They have the power to keep you from what you want. As unhelpful to you as humanly possible.

2 EMPLOYER

Yields some of the greatest power over you of anyone. Neither helpful or unhelpful. Your job is to help them.

3 BENEFATOR

Patrons, sponsors, and contacts who can help you and have the resources to do so. The rarest kind of ally.

4 TRAITOR

Double agents, spies, backstabbers. Could be anyone. The more helpful they are, the worse the betrayal is.

5 SURVIVOR

Only cares about what's best for them and will do whatever it takes. Help them or get out of their way.

6 EXPERT

The cream of the crop. When you need them, they are the best kind of help. Their power is their expertise.

7 COWARD

Panicked civilians, frightened bystanders, or worthless sycophants. Completely useless.

8 VICTIM

Powerless to help you, though not forever. They need you the most, but can you spare the effort?

9 DRINKING BUDDY

Friends in low places. They'd do anything for you. There's just not that much they actually *can* do.

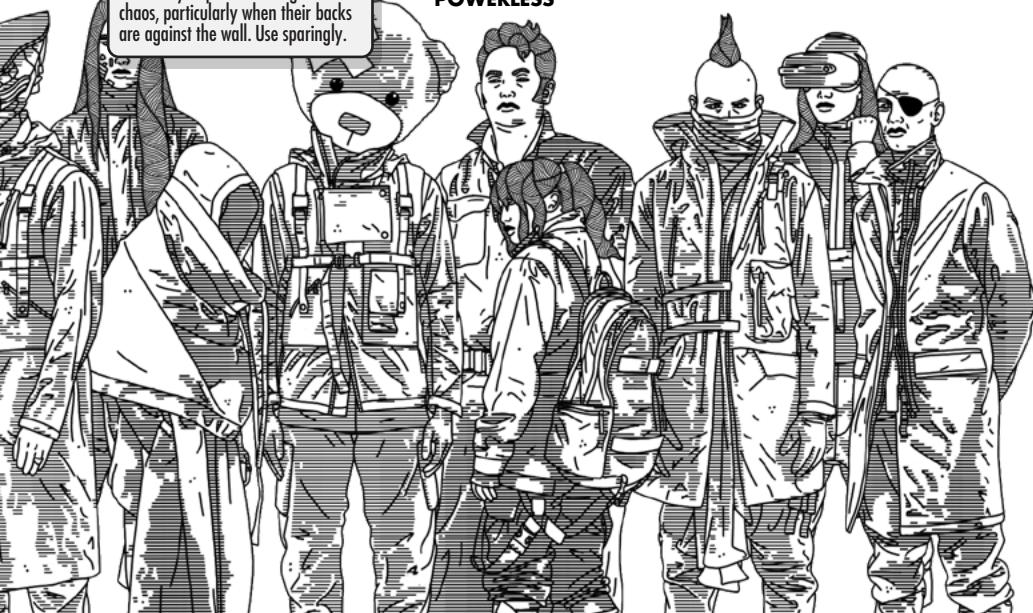
0 WILDCARD

Extremely unpredictable agents of chaos, particularly when their backs are against the wall. Use sparingly.

POWERLESS

UNHELPFUL

HELPFUL



HOW TO DRAW A MAP

Now that you have notes on all the content you want to include in your scenario, it's time to write it all down in a usable way. Let's draw a map.

18.1 DRAWING A MAP

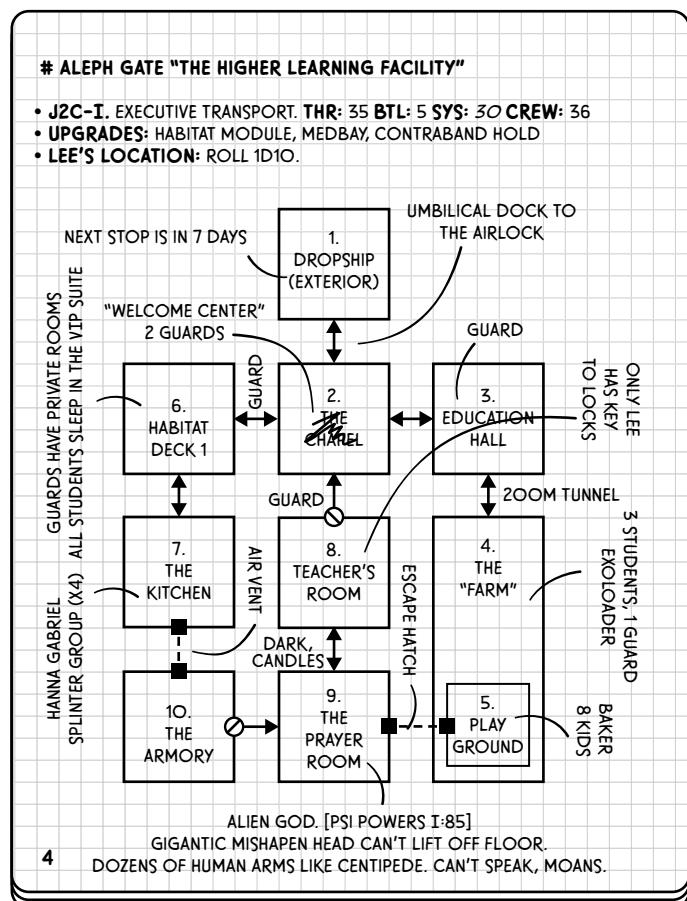
There are lots of beautifully detailed maps out there, but for our purposes we just want a simple flowchart that tells us exactly what's going on and where. Flip to a new page in your **Campaign Notebook**, write down the name of your location, then draw ten boxes and number them 1-10. This is your map.

What goes in the boxes?

Each box represents a location in your scenario. To begin, write your players' starting location in **Box 1**, then write a word or two in each box that describes an **important location**. Try not to overthink it. Right now the only important thing is just getting some ideas down so you have something to work with. The first thing that comes to your mind when thinking about your setting is perfectly fine; you can change these later as you get new ideas. If you need help, look at maps of similar locations. For your first session, pare down your ideas to only the ten most interesting locations.

How big is each box?

Each box can represent as large or small a space as you want. You could make one box an entire space station and another a tiny storage closet. What's important is that this location frames the action that takes place inside it. Choose locations that are important to the scenario.



Connecting the boxes.

The lines connecting the boxes each represent a route from one location to another. They could be a drawn-out walk down a long dark corridor, a cramped crawl along a maintenance shaft, or even an entire jump through hyperspace. Mix up the kinds of routes and how dangerous they are. Some should be hidden or secret, others locked or guarded. The paths can have their own encounters, and if a path is important enough it can have its own box: make it a location in and of itself.

Each path is a choice.

As much as possible, try to frame the decision to go down one road or another as a meaningful choice. The easiest example is the long, safe road versus the dangerous shortcut. The choice between “go left or right” isn’t much of a choice at all. Instead, note down some information about what going down the path might entail. Guards, light, vulnerability to attack, exposure to the elements, all of these are good things to keep a path from just being labelled “hallway.”

HOW TO KEY YOUR MAP

ALEPH GATE HIGHER LEARNING FACILITY

REMODELED EXECUTIVE TRANSPORT. "A GARDEN IN HELL." --LEE

6 GUARDS [C:35 STUN BATON 1D5 DMG I:35 W:1(1O)]

8 CHILDREN, 12 STUDENTS, AND LEE.

1. SHUTTLE PAD: UMBILICAL DOCKING -> AIRLOCK. MINI CONTROL CENTER.

- CREW IS EMBEDDED WITH 8 ULTRA-SMILEY NEW STUDENTS.

2. WELCOME CENTER: LEE "FIRST TEACHER" GIVES WELCOME SPEECH

- 2 GUARDS DISROBE/SHAVE HEADS OF NEW STUDENTS. GIVE BEIGE SCRUBS.
- MANDATORY 24HR SILENCE "CENTER YOURSELVES." (DEHUMANIZATION)

3. EDUCATION HALL: TEACHES ALEPH = ONENESS WITH GOD. WE HAVE TO LEAVE THE FIRST GATE (OUR BODY) TO ASCEND TO OUR HIGHER SELF.

4. THE FARM: CONVERTED CARGO HOLD.

- 3 STUDENTS DO MANUAL LABOR AS PUNISHMENT. 1 GUARD.
- EXOLOADER, FOLDING TABLES, MISSIONARY PAMPHLETS

5. PLAYGROUND: BAKER IS HERE. WORKING WITH 8 CHILDREN.

- BELIEVES IN CHURCH STILL ("LIKE ANY OTHER GROUP, HAS FLAWS")
- WON'T LEAVE IF THEY KNOW THEIR DAD IS INVOLVED.
- WILL LEAVE IF PROOF THAT LEE/ELDERS ARE ABUSING THEIR POWER.

6. DORMS: RUMOR: DISAPPEARING STUDENTS ARE "PASSING THE 1ST GATE"

7. THE KITCHEN: SPLINTER GROUP MEETS HERE. LED BY HANNA GABRIEL.

- PLANS TO ESCAPE. HAS VENT ACCESS TO ARMORY.

8. TEACHER'S ROOM: 2ND HABITAT DECK. LEE'S KEEPS 6 BEDROOMS.

9. THE PRAYER ROOM (VIP SUITE): THE ALIEN GOD.

- CAN'T BE KILLED BUT CAN'T LEAVE.
- PSIONIC BLAST (LONG RANGE): SAN SAVE OR 2D10 DMG + PANIC CHECK.
- PASS THE 1ST GATE (ADJACENT): BODY SAVE OR BE CONSUMED BY FLESH.
- SUMMON GUARD: CAN SUMMON 1 GUARD PSYCHICALLY PER ROUND.

10. THE ARMORY: 20 SMGS, 2 ROCKET LAUNCHERS (4 ROCKETS), 10 FRAGS

MARINES: ARMORY GUARDS, HTH, FINDING WEAPONS, TEAM WITH SPLINTER

ANDROID: INTERFACE WITH ALIEN GOD

SCIENTIST: NEEDS WORK. PSIONIC SAMPLES? GUT BIOME TESTING?

TEAMSTER: HARVESTER MECH. ORGANIZE RESISTANCE WITH SPLINTER
RESISTANCE, STRUGGLE, SUFFERING

THEME: ABANDONED, EMPTY, FORGOTTEN

CONTENT WARNINGS: RELIGIOUS ABUSE, VIOLENCE, MIND CONTROL. 5

Put everything on the map.

Everything you prepped before, your Survive, Solve, Save, your TOMBS acts — find a location for them on the map. If it's not on the map, it's not going to come up in the game.

Formatting your key.

Your key needs to be easy to read very quickly, so write one or two word descriptions and then create a bullet list for all the important interactive elements in a location. Try to write it so that the most important information is at the top. Highlight or color-code dangerous people or items.

Additionally, you can also "nest" items in indented lists, so that you can ignore any indented items until the players first interact with the item at the top of the list. All of this isn't strictly necessary, but over time you develop a shorthand that helps pick out the most important details for you to make running from your key a breeze.

When are you done?

Sooner than you think. Keying your map is about getting down specific details that evoke something powerful in your imagination while you're running the game. It's not meant to be comprehensive, because you won't be reading from it. Once you have your key fleshed out, go back to your map and jot down the most important detail from each location or path. During the game, you work mostly from the map, and reference the key only if you need more information. Over time you learn exactly how much you can improvise, and how much you need to have prepped in advance.

19.1 WRITING A KEY

Once you have your rough map drawn, it's time to make a key.

The key explains the important items in each box on the map.

On the page opposite your map, write the numbers 1-10 down one side, leaving a few lines between each number and a little extra space at the bottom for later. Label each number with the name you gave each box, and start sketching in one to two word ideas for each location.

What goes in the key?

This two-page spread, your map and key, are what you use to run your scenario. You want to keep all the important information on these two pages so that you don't have to spend time flipping through your notes to find important information during the game. Note any people or creatures that are in each room, as well as any relevant Stat Checks or Saves. Interactive elements or events that take place when the players' characters enter are important to write down as well.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

You could absolutely run a game right now with the prep you've already done. All we need are a few details to help polish things up, and we're ready to get the game on the table.

20.1 SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Every Warden has their favorite play style (combat, investigation, social deduction, exploration, etc.) and tends to favor one class over the other. To counter that, it's a good idea to go through all the classes and make sure you've included something for everyone.

Marines are killing machines.

New weapons, orders from command, jury-rigged explosives, stealth missions. You gotta give the marines something to shoot at. Mothership's brutal combat is no excuse for making your marine players look like anything other than natural born killers. Interpret their failed Combat rolls more generously than others'. Get some!!

Androids can go where humans can't.

Depending on your setting, androids may be able to breath in a vacuum or underwater, tolerate radiation or extreme temperatures, interface with machines, and any number of other things most humans can't. One great trick is to pull androids aside and give them private information from the Company, which always adds a little paranoia to the group.

Scientists: the smartest in the room.

Work your players' "science" skills into your prep. You won't always need a *Xenoesotericist*, but if you don't **ever** need one, your scientists will start to feel like their high-priced degrees are useless (tell me about it). Give them tons of samples to study, and a broken down lab to analyze the data.

Teamsters build, repair, pilot, and drive.

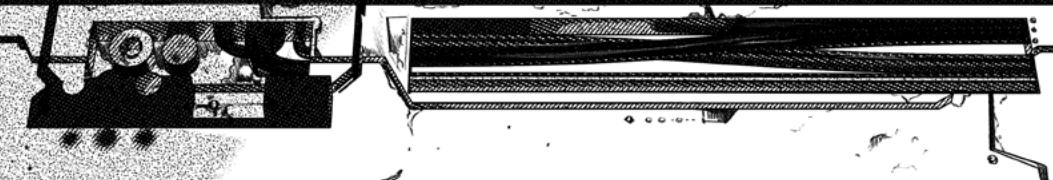
Given enough coffee and overtime, teamsters can accomplish pretty much anything. Drones, mechs, ships and other vehicles make the perfect playthings for your teamsters, as they tend to find a way to bypass mechanical puzzles with jury-rigged solutions.

20.2 THEMES

Leave this until the end, because if you run out of time, this is the easiest thing to cut. Take a look at all the work you've done, and ask yourself: are there any connections? Are there any patterns to the horror you've created and the location you've chosen? How do they pair up with the scenario you've built? Close your eyes and see if any images come to mind. Ask yourself: does all of this feel like it's part of a larger whole? Like it's all connected? It's okay if it isn't. Take a look at the list of themes on the inside front cover of this book and pick one that feels right to you. Then, go back through your notes and rename characters and places, and add evocative descriptions that bring out the theme you've selected. And with that, you're as prepped as you'll ever be! Keep reading to learn how to run your very first session.

20.3 WHEN AM I READY?

When the players show up. You need to run a few games before you learn what kind of prep is most important to you. Generally, this is the stuff that stumps you in the moment, or that's difficult for you to improvise. Over time, some people prep less and less, while others pour hours into making props or updating what every character and faction has done in the time between sessions. Find a way that's fun for you. The tools we've provided here are not strict rules to adhere to, and if you miss something here and there it won't ruin your game. They're here to build your confidence and give you some things to think about that you hadn't considered before.



RUNNING YOUR FIRST SESSION

Congratulations! Your friends are all coming over, or meeting online, and your game is about to start. If you're freaking out, don't worry. Just recall that you've likely played some game of pretend your whole life, and that your friends are here to have a good time. Everyone is on your team.

Before the other players arrive, take a few seconds to get into the right headspace:

- **Don't worry about the rules**, you'll learn.
- Help maintain a **safe playing environment**.
- Think of the game world as a real place, **not as a video game**.
- Use **common sense**.
- Build up to the horror slowly.
- Ask "with what" and "how" often.
- Treat every violent encounter like it could be the last.
- **Try to be an impartial referee**. You're not the players' enemy, or their friend.
- Pay attention and **take good notes**.
- **Roll as little as possible**.
- The first game works best with **simple, clear objectives**. Then, open it up.
- **Get out early** and leave them wanting more.

Then, take a deep breath, print out some character sheets, set out a bowl of chips, and get ready to have some fun!

22.1 CHARACTER CREATION

If they've never played before, hand them a **character sheet** and tell them to ask you if they have any questions. It's helpful if you have an extra set of dice, because people forget them.

What Skills should they pick?

A lot of times, players want to know which Skills are useful. Tell them to treat their Skills like a wishlist of items they'd like to see come up in play. If they're really nervous about survival, they should take a Skill like Firearms. If they're more interested in learning about the world, some of the sciences might be better for them.

What equipment should they buy?

Rolling random Loadouts helps reduce shopping time before a game begins, and also creates a situation where players don't have everything they need at hand and must work together. If you have a player who really wants something specific, either show them the shopping rules in the PSG or just give it to them.

Once they have their characters, remind them that this is a sci-fi horror game. It can be deadly, so they should think critically and work together as much as possible to increase their chance of survival. Then, if there are any new players, teach them the basics of the game.

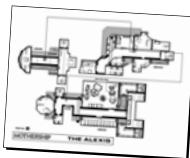
See Teaching the Game on pg. 23.

Warden Supplies Checklist

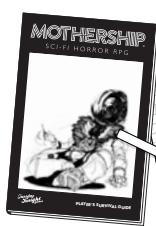
You don't need much to run a game, but if you can, having the following handy will help.



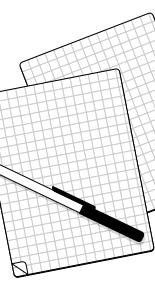
Character & Ship Sheets



Props, Maps, Handouts



The Player's Survival Guide



Pen & Paper



Module



Campaign Notebook



STEP 1. EXPLAIN WHAT A ROLEPLAYING GAME IS

If your players have never played a roleplaying game before, tell them that it's a game of pretend. They each play a character, and you describe what they see and hear, who they meet, and how the world reacts to them. You also act as a judge of what happens when the players attempt to do something. Usually this is as simple as the player saying "I open the door" and you replying "Okay, you open the door and on the other side you see..." But occasionally, when it's unclear what would happen, you or they might roll dice to determine the outcome. Remind the players that other than the technology, everything works just like it does in real life, and people respond to your actions just like they would in real life. This helps new players figure out "what they are allowed to do."

What's different about Mothership?

If your players have played roleplaying games before, here are some differences between Mothership and other games:

- **There are no levels** or experience points.
- Characters improve mechanically by converting Stress into better Saves.
- Characters mostly improve by making allies, acquiring wealth or a ship, installing cybermods, gaining knowledge, and collecting favors within the game world.
- **You don't roll for every little thing.** If you have the right tools, Skill, or class, you don't usually roll unless the stakes are high or there's a lot of uncertainty.
- **There are no social rolls.** Instead, social encounters are handled through roleplaying.
- **Violence is extremely deadly** and should be used as a last resort.
- Healing is expensive, and desperate players finding a way to pay for procedures can drive the game forward.
- **Encounters are not balanced** to your characters' capabilities.
- Your Stats and Saves are not necessarily a measure of your character's personalities. They are a measure of characters' ability to act **under extreme pressure**.

STEP 2. SHOW THEM HOW THE DICE WORK

Start with percentile dice first, since they confuse a lot of people. Remind them that 00-0 means "zero" in Mothership (since in a lot of d100 games it means "100"). This means that the players' Stats and Saves tell them exactly what the percent chance is that they succeed on any given roll.

When do they roll the dice?

Make it clear that they won't roll for every little thing. **What the player wants to do, they usually just do.** Opening doors, talking to people, even violent actions like attacking someone, often won't require a roll.

You typically only roll dice when it is both unclear what would happen and the stakes are high. Tell them they can think of their Stats and Saves as a measure of how good they are when unprepared and under extreme pressure.

Read more about when to roll dice on pg. 32.2.

What's the difference between Stats and Saves?

Stats are used when the player is being proactive, attempting to do something difficult. Saves are used when the player is being reactive, attempting to avoid something bad happening.

STEP 3. TEACH STRESS & PANIC

Finally, tell them that whenever they fail a roll, something bad happens and they'll gain a point of Stress. Stress piles up, and whenever they roll a Critical Failure, they roll the Panic Die. If they roll under their current Stress, they freak out and Panic, and consult the Panic Table, which has a bunch of bad stuff on it.

STEP 4. TELL THEM YOU WILL EXPLAIN THE REST AS IT COMES UP

For now, they have enough information to get started. Let them know that the rules don't cover everything, and that you can tweak anything that doesn't work for the group. Then, it's time to go over the **Safety Instructions**.

See Safety Instructions on pg. 24.

SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS

So, this is me, Sean McCoy, the creator of Mothership® talking directly to you, the Warden, right now. I want to talk to you about safety in gaming for a second. Stick with me, it's important.

This is a horror game, which means we're all deciding to get a little uncomfortable. To give up a little of our agency. We do this because we want to be scared and surprised.

But not too much.

And that's the tricky part. There are still some doors we want to keep closed, some horrors that are just for us. We want to be safe in the unsafe place.

Safety in gaming is about hospitality.

If I were to invite you over to my house for dinner, I would work with your dietary restrictions. In conversation you could be sure that racism, slurs, transphobia, homophobia, bigotry of any kind would be unacceptable at my table. You would know that you would not be shamed or mocked by the other guests for the way you look, the way you dress, the things you believe.

This grace would be extended to you and expected of you.

In short, while under my roof, I would do everything in my power to make sure you were safe.

And we wouldn't always get it right.

Sometimes I wouldn't realize until later that I, or someone else, had said something stupid or insensitive, and for that I'd hopefully apologize and we'd figure out how to not end up in that situation again next time. But we all accept that these things happen because we want to be around other human beings and we don't expect perfection of them.

Playing a horror game is like that. You need to be graceful and understanding and you need to listen to the other players. In addition to all the other social requirements of being a human in a shared space with other humans you need that basic human requirement of kindness.

Hospitality has been with us since we travelled in packs and lived in caves. It's a way to say: under this roof, friend or stranger, you are safe.

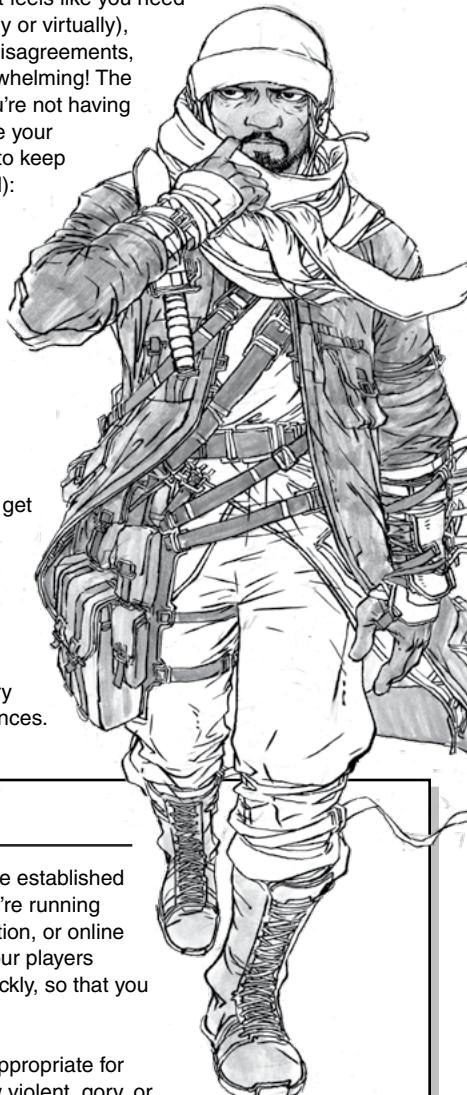
There is nothing more important in gaming than this.

Part of being a good Warden is being a good host. At first it feels like you need to schedule the game, find a space to play (either physically or virtually), coordinate food in addition to running the game, arbitrate disagreements, make rulings, and get everyone out on time. It can be overwhelming! The first thing to remember is that **you are a player also**. If you're not having fun, it's not your job to keep running the game just because your friends like it. After that, there are a few things you can do to keep the game running smoothly for everyone (yourself included):

- **Roll in front of your players.** Show them you have nothing to hide.
- **Delegate coordination** of snacks, scheduling, and location. Gaming is a potluck. Everyone should chip in.
- **Go around the table regularly** to make sure everyone is getting a chance to chime in.
- **Let shy players ride along** with the rest of the players. Don't put them on the spot.
- **Keep some pre-rolled character sheets handy.** New players may not realize how deadly violence can be, so get them back into the action quickly.
- **Admit when you've made a mistake** and correct it. Try not to do it again. Don't get defensive.

Solve disputes as people, not characters.

If you have a player who is rude, disruptive, or annoying to play with, address the behavior with them privately. Don't try and correct them "in character" with game-world consequences. If the behavior is persistent, just stop playing with them.



25.1 RUNNING GAMES FOR STRANGERS

When you run games with your friends, you already have established boundaries, rapport, and a sense of trust. But when you're running games at your friendly local game store, nearby convention, or online with some new friends, you're going in fresh. You and your players need to be able to establish some trust and boundaries quickly, so that you can start playing.

First, establish a rating for your game and whether it's appropriate for children, teenagers, or adults, and be upfront about how violent, gory, or lewd your games tend to be. At the start of your game make it clear that if anyone feels uncomfortable with anything that's happening (from you or from another player) they should say something so that you can address the behavior or content. Additionally, it would be wise to make a list of any content warnings for your game available on request to those who might want a copy. In general, you should avoid all the topics below in public games.

Frequently Excluded Topics

Sexual violence, animal cruelty, child harm/abuse, torture, sex, racism, homophobia, sexism, transphobia, addiction, mental illness, and suicide.

HOW THE GAME WORKS

The majority of what you do during a game is **describe the world and people** around the players. The players ask you clarifying questions, which you answer to the best of your ability. Eventually, **the players tell you what they want to do** and you tell them what happens next.

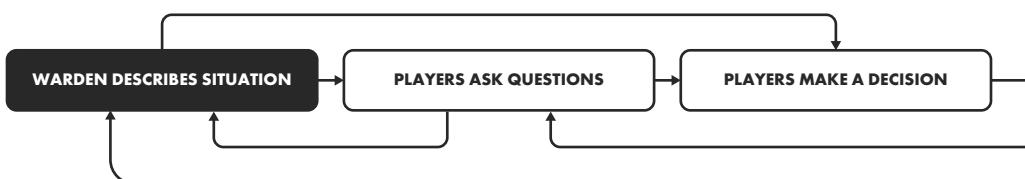
Most of the time **it's obvious to everyone** what happens next. If a player says they open a door, they just open the door and you describe what they see on the other side. Occasionally, it's unclear what would happen, so you decide on a way to determine what happens next. Usually, this means **setting the stakes** of a dice roll, and then rolling the dice to see what happens next. You repeat this for a few hours, and then everyone goes home, excited to play next week (or month).

At the end of the day, **Mothership is a social game**. Let players talk, plan their moves, make schemes, have access to knowledge they shouldn't have. Encourage anything that keeps them invested in the game.

26.1 BEING IMPARTIAL

Remember to be impartial. This means sometimes your players one-shot your big bad encounter, and other times they flub and nearly wipe out what you thought would be an easy encounter. It's not your job to tell a dramatic story, it's your job to create interesting situations and then model the natural consequences of the players' actions as best you can. The story takes care of itself in hindsight.

That being said, this is a game, and the players are playing competent people. What this game tests is how normal people act under extreme pressure and extraordinary circumstances. It's not as interested in testing if they remember basic facts about the world around them. The players are likely only inhabiting this world you've all created once every week or two, for two to three hours. Remind them of things they've forgotten, rather than taking a stance of "well they should've written it down." It makes for a much better game.



STEP 1. DESCRIBE THE SITUATION

This is your main job. Describing the situation honestly and evocatively to the players.

- Zoom in or out as necessary, don't feel like you have to describe every moment.
- Use all five senses. Smell is particularly good for horror.
- If something seems dangerous, say so.
- Feel free to talk in character for NPCs if you want.

[Read more about Describing the Situation on pg. 28.](#)

STEP 2. ANSWER THE PLAYERS' QUESTIONS

Encourage your players to ask as many questions as they need until they feel they understand the situation correctly.

- Sometimes players forget something and need to be reminded. That's fine.
- The point of this is to make sure you're all imagining roughly the same space.
- The more information they have, the better decisions they make.

[Read more about Answering Players' Questions on pg. 29.](#)

STEP 3. WAIT FOR THEM TO MAKE A DECISION

Players decide to act. This can be big ("I want to shoot the Thing on the ceiling") or small ("I want to open the airlock").

- Everything follows the players' decisions.
- If they're taking too long, escalate the situation.
- Tell them if an action seems particularly dangerous, just to confirm they're aware.
- There should always be more than one viable option.

[Read more about Player Agency on pg. 31.](#)

HOW THE GAME WORKS

27.1 TAKING GOOD NOTES

During your session take notes on a few important things to make prep for your next session easier. We call this an AAR for **After Action Report**. As a general rule of thumb, make a small bullet point for:

- Who played and the date.
 - New jobs you offered and how much they pay.
 - Names of new characters you introduced and something to help you remember who they are.
 - Anything you made up or improvised that you need to fill in the details for later.
 - Any questions the players had that you didn't have answers for at the time
 - A quick bullet list of what the players did. Only write a few words per line, just to help remind you later of what happened.
 - What worked? Fun moments. Prep that paid off.
 - What didn't work? Wasted prep, poor rulings.
- Things to improve.

# SESSION O1 AAR	11/02/23
ROSTER	NEW NPC'S
• DAVE	• STEVE
• SUSAN	• CPL. ANGELA VASCO
• JIM	
• PAUL	
WHAT HAPPENED:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WENT TO BANQUO IV LOOKING FOR MISSING DATA • WORKING FOR CORP 3X SALARY + 1X HAZARD PAY • STEVE & ANGELA: TEMPORARY ALLIANCE 	
WHAT WORKED?	WHAT DIDN'T?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COOL ALIEN SUIT • STEVE'S VOICE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLAYERS AREN'T BUYING THE CORP'S PLAN • MONSTER ISN'T SCARY
PREP FOR NEXT TIME:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HOW LONG DOES DAVE'S RESEARCH TAKE? 	
FLESH OUT STEVE AGENDA	



STEP 4. SET THE STAKES OF THE CONFLICT

Clearly tell the players the likely consequences of their decisions. This way they can decide whether they want to risk it or not.

- If the stakes aren't high, you can just skip this.
- It's tempting to leave things up in the air until dice are rolled. Resist this.

Read more about setting the stakes on pg. 30.

STEP 5. WAIT FOR THEM TO COMMIT

Once players know the stakes and what the possible outcomes might be, it's time for them to commit to a course of action.

- It's okay if players decide they don't like their options and change plans.

Read more about Player Agency on pg. 31.

STEP 6. RESOLVE THE ACTION

Once the players have decided on their action, determine the consequences.

- If it's obvious what would happen, it just happens.
- If you're not sure what would happen and the stakes are high, roll for it.
- Stat Checks are for proactive actions. Saves are for defensive reactions.
- If you're not sure what to roll, make up a **house rule**.

Read more about House Rules on pg. 34.

DESCRIBING THE SITUATION

Your first job as a Warden is to describe the world and the people in it to your players. You and the players will almost always be imagining different things, which is great; each person can imagine a world that most appeals to them. You act as a common ground, distinguishing which particular things are important for everyone to imagine the same. To do this, try and:

- **Focus on the important things** and let your players' imaginations fill in the details.
- **Hit all five senses.** Smell in particular is great for disgust. Sounds can help increase dread.
- **You can use sketches, toys, or blocks** to give players an idea of the space around them.
- **Only describe the horror a little at a time.** Never give a complete picture.

A TYPICAL NIGHT OF GAMING



28.1 TIME

One of the great things about roleplaying games is that you can zoom in or out depending on how quickly you want time to move. It's important to know when to move moment to moment, or when to just cut to the next most interesting part.

- **Use moment-to-moment framing** when you want time to move slowly, where every second counts, and when you want to build tension.
- **Briefly recap** all the problems going on before asking the players what they want to do.
- **It's okay to split people up** and juggle between groups. If it helps, just go around the room in turn order.
- **Zoom out and skip forward** when you want to release tension and introduce a more casual atmosphere. Just cut to the next big decision the players need to make.
- **Don't skip over interesting decision points.** "So a few days go by when you hear this static..."
- **Ask players** before skipping ahead. "Okay, so you all finish up shopping and meet back at the dock, right?"

28.2 TENSION

Tension grounds players in the fictional world, and adds weight to their decisions. It is hard to build, however, and a typical night of gaming has a lot of distractions. It's your job to keep things at a simmer, and constantly turn up the heat.

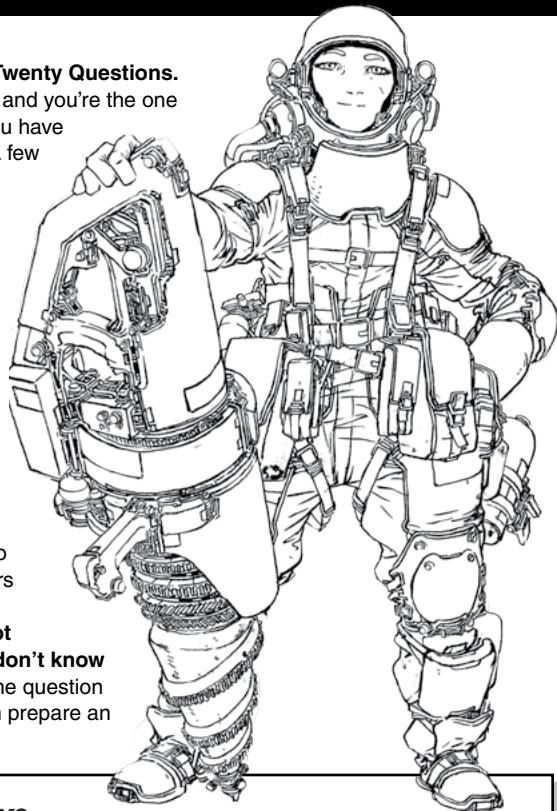
- **Building slowly.** Don't start off with the horror. Set a baseline of normalcy first so players have something to compare the horror to.
- **Focusing on anticipation.** Spend most of your time dealing with the Omens of the horror.
- **Use multiple short encounters with the horror rather than one long one.** Once the horror appears, some tension will be released and you need to build it up again. It's good to have your horrors flee when hurt and set up an ambush rather than have a drawn out fight.
- **Play everything straight.** Let your players be the funny ones.
- **Imagine everything like it's happening in the real world.** Most people aren't heroes or villains. If they act afraid, it'll rub off on your players too.

ANSWERING PLAYERS' QUESTIONS

A roleplaying game is a lot like a game of Twenty Questions.

None of you are really in this imagined place, and you're the one who has read or designed the scenario, so you have access to a lot of answers the players don't. A few things to keep in mind:

- **Players forget things.** If you realize they've forgotten something important just remind them.
- **If you don't know the answer, make it up.** Take a note of what you made up in your session report so you remember it later.
- **If they ask the right question give them the right answer.** Don't try and obfuscate what's really going on in the fictional world.
- **The more information players have, the better decisions they make.** This leads to more fun games and helps keep the players from seeming incompetent.
- **If you don't know the answer and it's not important right now, just tell them you don't know and you'll get back to them.** Then note the question in your After Action Report so that you can prepare an answer for next time.



29.1 WHAT ABOUT TECHNOLOGY?

Something that trips up a lot of Wardens is the fear that they don't know how all the technology works. Keep the following in mind and you should be fine:

- **Keep track of it:** Create a **Technology** page in your Campaign Notebook, and whenever you and your table come up with an official explanation for how something works, write it down. It's now a part of your game's official setting.
- **Focus on outcomes:** You probably don't know how your phone works, but you know what it does. The same is true for the players' characters.
- **Sci-fi technology has the same problems as modern day technology:** Things take time to boot up or load. Software can be out of date or buggy. Things break, often.
- **Off-load explanations onto players who enjoy it:** If you have a player who is really into sci-fi and technology, just let them run with explanations. Players using their real world knowledge to solve problems is a feature, not a bug.
- **Encourage weird science solutions (at a cost):** It's great when a player comes up with an innovative solution to solve a problem by strapping a laser cutter to a warp core for some reason. Allow these as much as possible, and don't worry about balance here. If it seems particularly powerful, have the technology require some kind of consumable power source to continue working (batteries, warp cores, androids, etc.).
- **The characters know more about the world than the players do:** It doesn't matter if you or the players can explain how a piece of tech works as long as it's plausible that the characters would know.

SETTING THE STAKES

When you set the stakes you ask: what is at risk if the player fails? Most of the time the stakes will be low or nothing. Common, mundane actions like opening doors or talking to people usually won't involve clearly outlining what failure looks like.

However, whenever the players come in **conflict** with other people, creatures, or their environment, you should stop and outline what they stand to lose if things go poorly.

What are the plausible outcomes?

Tell the players what you think is likely to happen if they fail. Do you need to outline exactly what happens? No. But giving them a ballpark, particularly when life and death are at stake, is important.

See Death pg. 37.1.

There's more than just success or failure at stake.

Furthermore, actions that automatically succeed can have stakes about whether they succeed without cost. Actions doomed to failure can have stakes about exactly how badly they fail.

See Failure on pg. 33.

Informed decisions lead to better play.

Does outlining possible outcomes ruin the surprise? Not really. Instead, it creates a real gamble where players know the odds and can make an informed decision. They can weigh the risks and act accordingly, which makes the game more fun.

You're all picturing something different.

Remember that you and the players are imagining the game world differently. What seems obvious to you might be completely missed by another player. Setting the stakes before every roll helps alleviate this a bit.

Over time you develop a sense of what your players like, and what risks they want to know and what they want left to mystery, and you can adjust from there. The rhythm is different for every group, and evolves with the campaign.

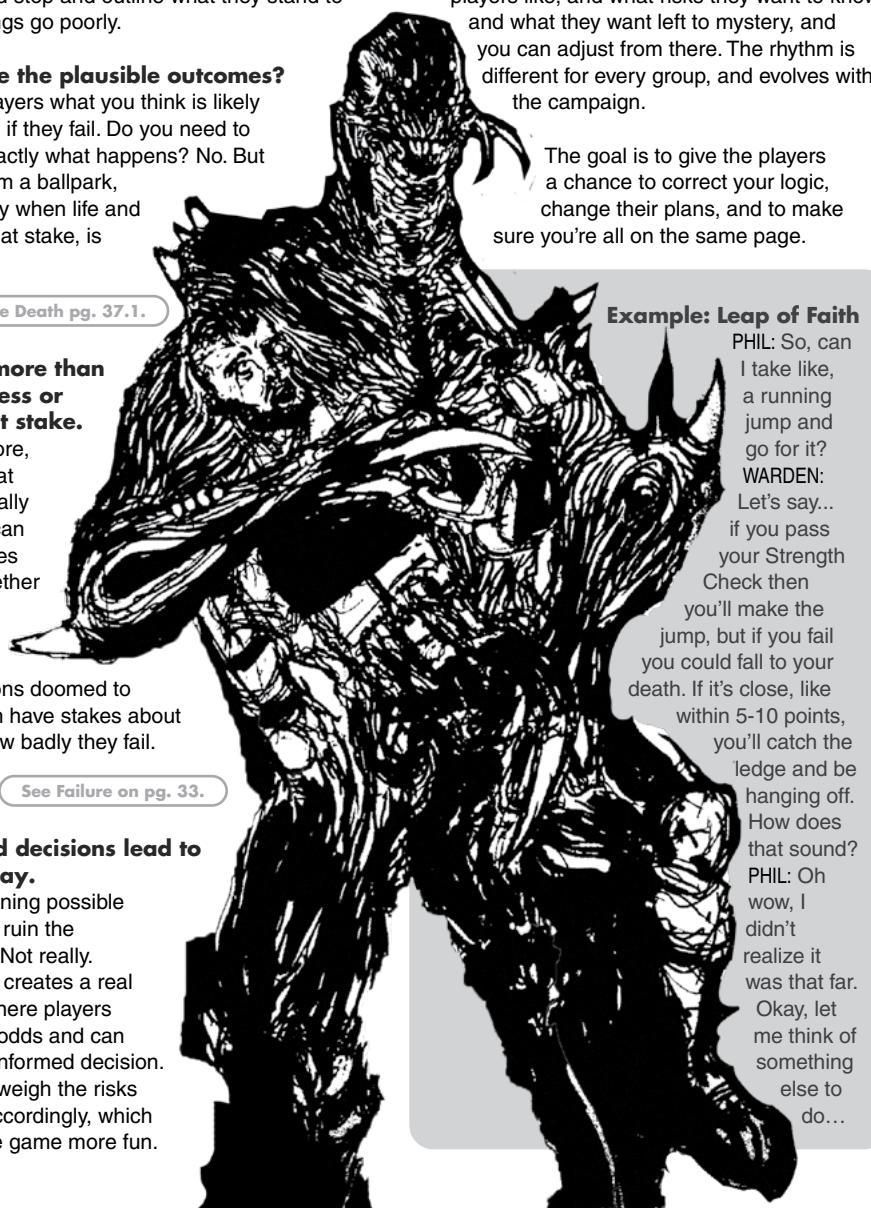
The goal is to give the players a chance to correct your logic, change their plans, and to make sure you're all on the same page.

Example: Leap of Faith

PHIL: So, can I take like, a running jump and go for it?
WARDEN: Let's say... if you pass your Strength Check then

you'll make the jump, but if you fail you could fall to your death. If it's close, like within 5-10 points, you'll catch the ledge and be hanging off. How does that sound?

PHIL: Oh wow, I didn't realize it was that far. Okay, let me think of something else to do...



PLAYER AGENCY & DECISION MAKING



The big thing that makes roleplaying games so fun is that you can attempt to do anything you want. Yes, there are rules and guidelines and procedures, and there are common sense boundaries of what might be possible in the fictional world, but for the most part if you can think of it, you can try it.

We call this ability to change the game in a meaningful way Player Agency.

It means that the players have control over their actions, and those actions have consequences. Player agency is important because it's really fun to play in an imaginary world where what you do matters. It heightens the experience of playing.

A good story only happens in retrospect.

This means when you're designing scenarios, don't write what you think makes a good story "as long as the players do this." Instead, design scenarios with hard problems, escalating threats, and interesting characters to talk to. Then watch what happens when you set the players loose in that environment. When the game is over it'll be easier to appreciate the story you all made.

[Read more about telling a good story on pg. 56.](#)

31.1 PRINCIPLES OF AGENCY

- The players need to have enough information to make meaningful choices.
- Those choices have consequences.
- Those consequences can meaningfully change the game world.
- Some choices may lead to good or bad outcomes for the players, but there is not a "correct choice" that "moves the story forward."
- The Warden should not shield the players from the consequences of their actions by secretly changing die rolls, but instead try their hardest to be an impartial referee.
- If a random roll leads to a consequence so unexpected that the Warden or players now realize they probably shouldn't have called for the roll in the first place, they should undo it, talk about what they did wrong, note any **House Rule** changes in the **Campaign Notebook**, and move on. Nobody's perfect.

[Read more about House Rules on pg. 34.](#)

RESOLVING THE ACTION

Once the stakes have been outlined and the players have made their final decision about what they want to do, it's time to decide what happens. Usually it'll be obvious, but sometimes you need to roll dice to determine what happens next. Here are a few tips on when you should roll dice and when you should just let it happen.

32.1 WHEN NOT TO ROLL DICE

Rolling a lot teaches players that they're limited by what's on their character sheet.

Instead, teach them that their choices, not the numbers, are more important. To help them learn, try to avoid rolling dice in the following situations:

1. When the stakes are low.

If you roll for every little thing, the game starts to drag. The players start to feel like they aren't capable of doing even the most basic tasks. Only break out the dice when the results would be interesting.

2. When it's obvious what would happen.

When a player wants to do something it usually just happens. This is usually because the stakes are low or the results are obvious. If it's clear to you and the player what would happen, you can skip the roll and just move forward.

3. When they have the right tool.

A character's class, skills, equipment, patches, and trinkets are just as good an indicator of expertise as are their Stats and Saves. All of these things together say something about the character.

4. When they have a good plan.

The game is about how the players solve problems in a fictional world, not a contest in who can roll random numbers the best. If the players have figured out the solution, their reward is being able to enact it.

[Read more about Player Agency on pg. 31.](#)



32.2 WHEN TO ROLL DICE

Save rolling dice for those situations where you truly don't know what the outcome might be, and where the results impact the game significantly. It can be easy to roll for every little thing, and sometimes it's nice to relax and let the dice decide. While none of these are hard and fast rules, the more you lean on them the more powerful every dice roll becomes, rather than just another turn in a boardgame.

1. When the stakes are high.

Life or death situations, or when failure leads to a heavy burden, are great times to roll. As long as you have clearly outlined the stakes, high-stakes moments like these have the most potential impact when left to chance.

2. When the outcome is uncertain.

Sometimes, even in a high-stakes situation, it's fairly obvious what would happen, like jumping from a cliff, or shooting an unarmed person point blank. But when it's unclear to everyone at the table what the result of a decision would be, that's another great time to let the dice decide.

3. When they don't have the right tools.

When a character is unskilled or ill-equipped to handle a problem (like a surgeon attempting to remove a bullet with a pocket knife or a novice attempting to pilot a spacecraft) then some amount of instinct, reaction, or intuition is at play. Stats and Saves model this really well, and it's another great time to roll.

4. When the plan is bad.

Going off half-cocked, without a plan, is essentially leaving things to chance. Sometimes characters are acting so frantically and by-the-seat-of-their-pants that only a random roll can save them.

5. When that's what the player prefers.

Some players prefer a play style where they don't have to think about every little thing and want to instead just roll. This is totally fine, though you may want to adjust the difficulty for them.

[Read more about Difficulty Settings on pg. 52.1.](#)

INTERPRETING FAILURE

Most rolls have a 30-40% success rate. This is because Stats and Saves don't represent a character's natural abilities, they represent how resilient and capable they are on the worst day of their lives.

33.1 WHAT DOES FAILURE MEAN?

Whenever players roll the dice, the chances are good that they will fail more often than they will succeed. This means it's important for you not to think of rolling as a binary pass/fail system.

A failed roll does not mean "nothing happens." It doesn't even have to mean that a player fails to achieve their goal. It just means that the situation gets worse in some way. **Every roll moves the game forward, whether that's by making the situation better or worse.** Instead of stating "You fail" or "You miss," tell the players how the situation changes as a result of the failure. What new situation are they in now?

The game uses a d100 system because it gives you so much room to interpret. "Barely failed" or "Barely succeeded" can mean something if you let it. This is why it's important to set the stakes of the conflict appropriately, to show that a success can mean "making the most of a bad situation" or "trying not to screw up an easy job." Below are a few ideas for how to interpret failed rolls in a way that keeps the game moving forward.

ACTION SUCCEEDS, BUT COSTS MORE TIME OR RESOURCES

ATTEMPTED ACTION

WARDEN'S RULING

Player fails a Speed (Piloting) Check to outmaneuver an enemy craft.	They're able to pull off the maneuver, but it costs extra fuel.
Player fails a Combat Check to shoot an Adjacent enemy.	They hit the creature, but it costs all their ammo.
Player fails a Speed (Hacking) Check to find the ship's manifest on the computer of a derelict vessel.	They're able to find the manifest, but it takes them twenty minutes or so, which gives nearby enemies time to ambush them.

ACTION SUCCEEDS, BUT CAUSES HARM

Player fails an Intellect (Repair) Check to fix damage to the ship's hull.	They're able to repair the hull, but accidentally get injured in the process, taking 1d10 DMG.
Player fails a Combat Check to shoot an enemy at Close range.	The player gets to roll Damage, but so does the enemy.
A Scientist fails an Intellect (Geology) Check to identify a strange rock formation developing outside a terraforming colony.	After a few minutes they're able to identify the formation, but the frustration and embarrassment cause them to gain an additional Stress.

ACTION SUCCEEDS, BUT LEAVES THE PLAYER AT A TACTICAL DISADVANTAGE

Aboard a junked derelict, a player fails an Intellect (Mechanical Repair) Check to scavenge useful parts.	After an hour of deliberate searching the player finds the part they're searching for, only to look up and realize that they are lost.
On the run from a pack of baying Gaunt Hounds, the player fails a Strength Check to open a stuck airlock.	The player is able to get the airlock open, but they get stuck in the process. They'll be able to get out on their next turn.
While sneaking through a cargo hold, a player fails a Strength Check to jump from scaffolding to a stack of nearby shipping containers.	They catch the edge of the container by their fingertips and let out a loud grunt, which causes the Android Security team to search the area.

ACTION FAILS AND THE SITUATION GETS MUCH WORSE

The player fails a Speed (Field Medicine) Check to stop a patient's bleeding.	The player causes a complication, the patient immediately taking 1d10 Damage and their Bleeding increasing by 1.
The player fails a Combat Check when firing at an enemy in a crowded corridor.	The player's bullets ricochet and everyone in the party must make a Body Save to avoid being hit.
The player fails an Intellect (Jury-Rigging) Check when attempting to rig an improvised explosive device.	The device appears to be working fine, then detonates in 1d5 rounds.

MAKING UP HOUSE RULES

The rules and procedures given in these books are a collection of what we've found most useful when we run games of Mothership at home. But they won't work for all of you all the time. They are not comprehensive or infallible, and they don't guarantee you have a fun or meaningful game. Like tools, you need to know how and when to apply them, and more importantly, when they aren't suiting your needs anymore and something else would get the job done better.

34.1 WHAT IS A HOUSE RULE?

A **house rule**, or ruling, is a new rule you and your players invent. You and your friends are the final game designers of Mothership, and you need to add, remove, and tweak it over time to keep it running. Think of the game as your vehicle, and house rules are a kind of routine maintenance. So pop the hood and let's see what we're working with. We'll start with the three main types of rulings:

Interpretative Rulings

These are so common, we don't even think of them as rulings. An interpretative ruling is when you make a decision or judgement call about what would happen in an imaginary situation given all the details you have at your disposal. See? You've been making rulings this whole time!

- How bad is a failed roll? How good is a success?
- Are there any other times you like to call for Panic Checks?
- How should you **describe** damage? Is it just physical or does it hurt willpower too?
- Did the roll almost succeed/fail? How does that affect your **interpretation**?
- How does all the technology work in your game? Can a medscanner detect the cancer? Can a laser cutter cut through a ship's hull?

[Read more about Technology on pg. 29.1.](#)

Procedural Rulings

Whenever you decide to use one rule over another, like a Save instead of a Stat Check, you're making a procedural ruling. You're deciding what the best procedure would be to decide the situation. Often the decision is not to use a rule at all and just to let things happen!

- Is it **absolutely necessary** to roll for this?
- Should this be a Stat Check or a Save? Does it have Advantage or Disadvantage?
- Is there a better way to handle this? Should it be an opposed roll? Should it only succeed on a Critical Hit?
- Is there a rule from another game that would help resolve this better?
- Should we create a standard procedure to handle this regularly occurring event?

[Read more about when to roll dice on pg. 32.2.](#)

Systemic Rulings

This is what most people think of when they think of **house rules**. You might change the numbers to dial in the right difficulty, or you may add new Skills more appropriate to your setting. If you make enough of these changes you might even create a new "hack" of Mothership!

- Does my setting need any new Skills? What about Stats or Saves?
- Are there any rules we constantly forget? Should we remove them?
- Are there new classes my players would enjoy?
- Is Stress and Panic working or is it too intense for my players?
- Do I want to abstract the economics using debt rules?
- Do I need to adjust the difficulty level up or down?

[Read more about Difficulty Settings on pg. 52.1.](#)

WARDEN: What did you roll?
KNOX: A 53 over 50. Ugh.
WARDEN: That's really close, so let's say you succeed but it was really stressful anyway and you gain one Stress.

WARDEN: It keeps banging on the door, trying to get in.
CLEO: I'm throwing all my weight against it. There's no way I'm letting it in.
WARDEN: Perfect. Let's use an opposed roll for this.

WARDEN: I don't love how the game handles social encounters, so I've added a Social Stat. And I also want to try Cleo's idea of using a Stealth Save for running and hiding.

Most of your rulings will be simple one-offs, but if you make any systemic changes, add them to a page labelled **House Rules** in your **Campaign Notebook** so you can reference them later.

35.1 HOW DO YOU MAKE A RULING?

Anytime you or your players are unsure how to handle something in the game, instead of looking to the rulebook for an answer, just make a ruling. Say “I think in this situation we should...” and then ask your players if that sounds alright to them. Sometimes you discuss it for a bit, but most of the time everyone will be on board and the game continues. Try your best to make each ruling:

- **Consistent.** New rulings should fit with previous rulings rather than be arbitrary. The best rulings are just common sense.
- **Easy to remember.** Everyone should be able to understand your reasoning. Don’t create more rules you have to look up later.
- **Involving.** Ask the other players for input. Don’t turn it into a three hour debate, just go around the room and see what everyone thinks.

When you modify the rules, the game becomes something unique. And whenever someone joins your table and says “Whoa, this isn’t how we play it at home” you’ll know you’re both doing something right. Finally, don’t be afraid to break the game. Anything you change can always be changed back. And the flawed game you play is better than the perfect game that sits on the shelf.

35.2 MAKING MISTAKES

Sometimes you make a bad call and something happens at the table that obviously shouldn’t have. Usually this happens when you think an encounter should be easy and it turns out to be way more difficult than you anticipated. In these moments you might be tempted to change the outcome by hiding or altering a roll. Instead, just pause the game, tell the players that you made a mistake, get everyone’s input on how to fix things, and then move forward and try not to make the same mistake again.

Example: Run and Hide

WARDEN: You round the corner and make it to the locker room. You can hear its claws drag across the floor in the hall. What do you do?
 KNOX: Shit. Uh. I want to hide. What do I roll?
 WARDEN: There actually isn’t a Stealth roll...?
 KNOX: Seriously? Okay so I can’t do it?
 WARDEN: No you absolutely can. Where do you want to hide?
 KNOX: What are my options?
 WARDEN: There’s like a row of lockers and like a pile of boxes in the corner.
 KNOX: Is there a vent anywhere?
 WARDEN: Not that you see. Do you want to look? The sound in the hall is getting louder.
 KNOX: Fuck. Okay, I’ll get in the open locker.
 WARDEN: Cool, what all are you carrying?
 KNOX: I’ve got my pulse rifle and like—
 WARDEN: You’re not going to fit in there with all that stuff. Do you want to drop something?
 KNOX: Aaah! This is the worst! Can’t I just make like a Speed Check or something?
 WARDEN: How about this, you pick a hiding spot and I’ll have the creature make an Instinct Check. If it’s a good hiding spot, like you’re all covered up, that kind of thing, I’ll give you Advantage. Sound fair?
 KNOX: Yeah, I still think it’s bullshit though, my guy has like *Military Training* and I was kinda picturing him as like a stealth operative.
 WARDEN: Okay yeah, hmm. What do the rest of you think? Do we need a Stealth Stat?
 PHIL: Could be cool.
 CLEO: I don’t need one personally, but sure.
 WARDEN: I actually like this part of the game where you’re like frantically describing where you want to hide. I think it’s better than just skipping all of that fun stuff with a roll.
 KNOX: Okay but how do I show my guy is good at hiding?
 WARDEN: Pick good hiding spots.
 KNOX: I’m playing this game to play someone better than me, not just play myself.
 WARDEN: Okay what if we add your *Military Training* bonus to whatever the monster’s rolls. Just to show your guy is good at this.
 KNOX: That works! Is that okay with y’all?
 PHIL: Totally.
 CLEO: Yeah that sounds great!
 WARDEN: Perfect. So... Where are you hiding?

SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

Subtlety and subtext are your worst enemy when it comes to running social encounters. The people your players meet during a session are just as much a part of the game as a jammed airlock, Panic Checks, or the cost of fuel. This means characters have to be **interactive**, and the best way to make them interactive is to “say the quiet part loud.” Don’t hide who they really are.

It’s way better to have an **over-the-top cookie-cutter stock character** with clear wants and needs than it is to have a well-rounded three-dimensional person whose motivations are a complete mystery. Even cagey, deceptive characters should be *obviously* cagey and deceptive. If you expect the players to fish around to “figure out” who someone is and what they want, the game will grind to a halt. Once your players know what someone wants, they can make interesting choices about what to do with that information.

36.1 LYING & DECEPTION

The players will encounter a lot of untrustworthy people in the game. However, guessing whether someone is lying or not just isn’t fun. Instead, **when someone lies to the players, just tell them**. Saying “it seems like this person is lying,” leads to more interesting play as the players attempt to prove their suspicions, find out what the real truth is, and ultimately catch their deceiver red handed.

When the players lie to other people: just let the players get away with it until the consequences catch up with them. If the players come across a particularly suspicious person or come up with a really bad lie, you can just say “there’s no way they would believe that,” or you can have the character make an Instinct Check.

36.2 NEGOTIATION

The game can go to some really fun places if the players don’t try and shoot their way out of every situation. However, players have often learned from other games that the most optimal use of their resources is violence, so you may have to make the first move to show them that their attempts at negotiation will be rewarded. Remember:

- **Most people would rather talk than fight.**
- **A reputation for violence** follows the players.
- **Negotiation requires leverage.** Leverage can be anything from blackmail to solving a problem for the other party. The more leverage the players have, the better deal they can get.
- In life or death situations with intelligent beings, remind players that **negotiation may give them time to find an escape.**
- **Don’t kill surrendered players** or they will never surrender. Instead, take the crew to their captors’ leader, who wants something from the players in exchange for a reward.

36.3 VOICES

Don’t worry about talking in the character’s voice or saying word for word what the character says if it makes you nervous. Instead, just highlight the key points of what they talk about and describe what they sound like. With practice you find your sweet spot.



VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS

The trick to running tense violent encounters is to think of them as disasters happening in real time to real people rather than a tactical mini-game.

Every monster is a boss monster.

Don't treat your horrors like obstacles meant to be overcome. Instead treat them like a force to be reckoned with for a session or more, as the players slowly learn their weaknesses and eventually defeat them (or don't).

Never say "You miss."

Whenever someone attacks, something interesting happens. Failed attacks destroy environmental obstacles, kill innocent bystanders, or leave the attacker in compromising positions.

Every violent encounter is the worst day of someone's life.

In real life, when someone tries to kill you, it's a traumatic event with long term consequences. Most intelligent beings, if they feel they are in danger, try to de-escalate or escape rather than trade blows in a fight to the death.

Smart enemies are deadly enemies.

Don't treat your horrors as just a bundle of numbers. When an enemy takes a Wound, it should change tactics. Smart enemies set traps, retreat, ambush, or target the weak.

Defeat doesn't always mean death.

Rescue missions can only happen if the players aren't slaughtered. Try dragging them back to a lair, locking them up in a brig, or cocooning them in webs and leaving them for dead.

37.1 DEATH

It's really discouraging when you're playing and having fun and then out of nowhere your character dies. A lot of Wardens feel the pressure too: did I telegraph the danger clearly? Was I being unfair? Should I have changed the dice roll so that the player didn't die? A few things to keep in mind:

1. It might happen a lot.

This game tests who you are under the worst possible conditions. If that doesn't sound fun, try altering your **Difficulty Settings**.

See Difficulty Settings on pg. 52.1.

2. Tell players when they might die.

Say to them "If you do this and fail, you could die." Or remind them "This monster is very tough, if you stay and fight it you could die." They get used to it and plan accordingly.

See Setting the Stakes on pg. 30.

3. Make every death count.

Don't just say "okay you died" and leave it there. Tell the player that they are going to die, and ask what they'd like their final action to be. Now they can make their death meaningful. Once they get over that fear of death, they can make more heroic sacrifices..

4. Add their death to the Roster.

When a character dies, add their name, High Score, and what killed them to the **Roster** page at the back of your Campaign notebook. Make a big show of adding the newly departed to the list, so that it feels like a badge of honor, rather than a loss.

Ask "what do you do?"

Frame enemy actions as something that will happen to the players unless they do something to stop it. Failed rolls move the enemy forward and the players back. For a real challenge that speeds up combat significantly, try switching to **Player Facing Rolls** in your **Difficulty Settings**.

See Difficulty Settings on pg. 52.1.

RUNNING INVESTIGATIONS

If you want to run a compelling horror investigation game, you have to let go of the idea that the players **ought to be able to solve it**. To do this, you need to treat Mothership like the ultimate game of Twenty Questions: answer everything your players ask you truthfully and without regard to the outcome.

38.1 SEARCHING FOR CLUES

Never make your players roll to find clues. If they look in the right place, ask the right question, “search the room,” they find whatever information is there. Good investigation games test the players’ abilities, not the numbers on their character sheets.

It’s about what they do.

If you just give away the clues without asking for a roll, what’s the point of the game? The point is **what the players do** with the information they find. That’s where the game is.

Don’t hint, but do remind.

Don’t drop hints to your players to “help them.” The game will be fun whether they solve the mystery or not. However, if your players have already uncovered some piece of evidence and have since forgotten about it, just remind them. You want to play a game where the players do cool stuff instead of a game where nothing happens because someone forgot to take good notes.

Use Skills.

Use the characters’ Skills, background, and class to inform the kind of information you give out. If a scientist and a marine examine the same corpse they should get different information out of it.

Only roll when there isn’t time.

Sometimes it takes time and resources to get information out of a piece of evidence. It’s okay to tell players they need a lab for further analysis, or they need to talk to an expert if they want to learn more. And if they take the time, or use the resources, they should get the answer.

However, if the players are working against a hard deadline, like searching a room before a guard shows up, or working without resources, like if the lab is out of power, then it makes sense to call for a roll. Under normal conditions, the players get the information they need. Otherwise, they roll.

Example: Fiegelman Files

CHLOE: Alright we duck into the office.

WARDEN: The security androids are on the intercom saying you should show yourself.

KNOX: Do they know we’re in here?

WARDEN: No it’s being broadcast everywhere, but you can see their bright eyes pacing the hallways through the frosted glass windows.

PHIL: Who’s office is this anyways?

WARDEN: J. Fiegelman it says on the desk.

KNOX: Holy shit. JF. This is the guy.

PHIL: Fuck. Okay let’s search his desk.

WARDEN: Office supplies, files.

CHLOE: Anything incriminating?

WARDEN: How much time you got?

KNOX: Okay what about the computer.

WARDEN: Password?

PHIL: Password.

WARDEN: Alright you’re in his computer. What are you looking for? You’re hearing boots in the hall.

KNOX: Shit, shit, shit.

CHLOE: Project Emanuelle! Search for Project Emanuelle!

WARDEN: Okay the search is loading. Make a Speed Check.

PHIL: What for?

WARDEN: You hear shuffling in the hall.

CHLOE: Just— Everyone drop to the floor!

PHIL: Done.

KNOX: Me too.

WARDEN: Okay the computer is beeping a bit, you hear a bunch of computer sounds. Where are you all hiding exactly?

CHLOE: I’m under the desk.

KNOX: I’m like up against the window, like crouched.

PHIL: Um, I’m uh, I’m by the door in case I gotta hold it closed.

WARDEN: Okay, Phil you see lights crossing past the windows and then a couple of muted robotic voices talking. Everyone make a Fear Save.

CHLOE: Pass.

PHIL: Fail.

KNOX: Critical Fail. Dang it!

WARDEN: Alright, Phil you gain a Stress, Knox you make a Panic Check.

CHLOE: What’s your Stress?

KNOX: Twelve. Here goes nothing.

Space is all about vast stretches of nothing happening punctuated by terrifying life-or-death decisions. As the players start thinking of their ship as just another building or vessel, you'll need to remind them that the ship's hull is the only thing separating them from certain death.

39.1 SHIPS ARE EXPENSIVE

Every part of space travel from building and repairing ships to refuelling and buying tickets is out of reach for most people. Most players don't need to own a ship to enjoy the game. Instead they should work on a crew, either for the Company, or the Military, or for criminals or as part of a larger organization who handles all the costs associated with space travel. That being said, here's a few ways to handle the economics of space travel in your game:

Don't start them with a ship.

As easy as it sounds. Ticket prices for space travel, while pricey, are at least something that most spacers can afford given a reasonable amount of work. And if not, that's a great time to introduce a shady employer willing to get the crew to their destination, as long as they do a little odd job for them. Getting stranded in backwater ports looking for work is a great way to play.

Just ask them what they want.

Talk to your players and find out what they want to do for the game. If they want to own their own ship, look into making them **Owner Operators**. If picking their own jobs is less important to them, then working for the Military or the Company might be more their speed. Regardless, it's a simple ask to solve a lot of problems down the road.

Skip the paying-the-bills work.

If your players own a ship, that means in reality they own a business. When this happens, it's best to time skip over the months where they're working normal jobs and then zoom in again when something out of the ordinary happens. This is what the Profit Save is for, to abstract out the months of normal work and push the game towards something interesting happening. Don't be afraid to use it.

Read more about Who Pays the Bills? in the Shipbreaker's Toolkit on pg. 40.

39.2 SPACE IS DANGEROUS

Running ship combat is all about staying grounded. Remember:

It's a last resort.

Ship combat is a losing proposition for everyone involved. Ships are astronomical investments for their owners and the tiniest mistakes could mean everyone dies.

It's a social encounter.

No one takes the decision to fight lightly. If ships are fighting then something important is at stake. Clearly define those stakes and keep up the communication with regular hails to let the players know what the enemies want.

Read more about Social Encounters on pg. 36.

Simple decisions have huge impacts.

The game is more interested in whether the players decide to fight or flee than it is on the minutiae of space acrobatics. That's the horror, once the players have made the decision, the result is out of their hands. Impress this upon them.

It's a natural disaster.

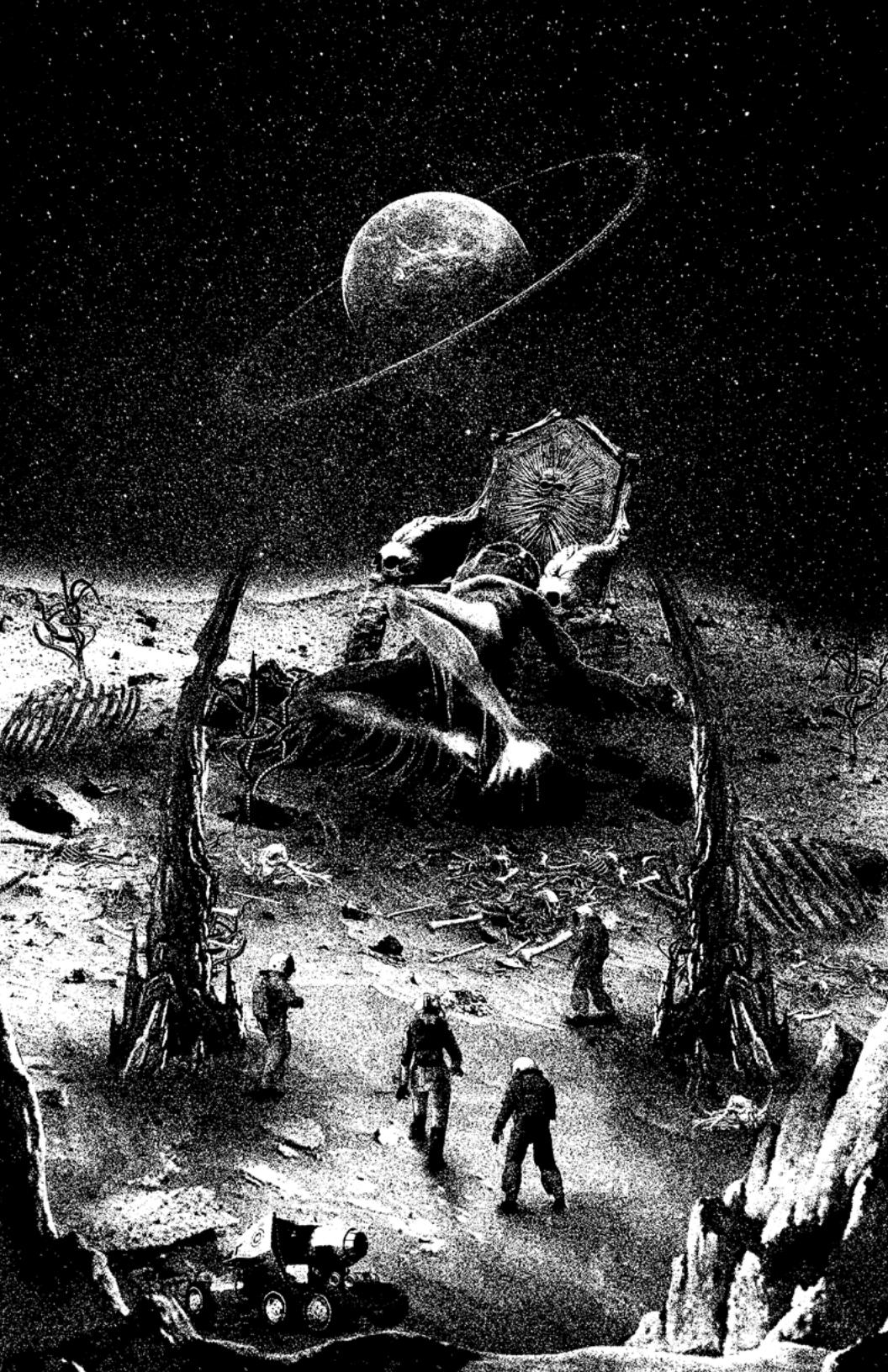
The ideal ship-to-ship combat scenario involves a creature loose on the players' ship, while a patrol craft attacks them for being in a restricted area. The life support is down, the atmosphere is toxic, and a team of marines attempts to board, just when the thing in the vents finally attacks.

Ship rounds are encounters.

In between Ship Rounds let the players try and deal with the fallout by putting out fires, sending hails, negotiating, or making minor repairs before hitting them with another ship round. If the ships are far apart, at the upper end of Firing Range, you can pace the turns thirty minutes or an hour apart (in the game world). If they're on the shorter end of Contact Range, a Ship round after every player round is best. No ship-to-ship combat should last more than 2 or 3 rounds at the absolute maximum. Most should end after one.

Alien ships break the rules.

Treat ships with otherworldly technology as unwinnable fights. Something you can potentially survive, but not beat.



BUILDING YOUR CAMPAIGN

A game of Mothership takes place over one or more **sessions** and is called a **campaign**. Many campaigns are only a single session of a few hours (called a “One Shot”). Most campaigns are 5-7 sessions, and a few long Campaigns can last years of real time, or continue indefinitely.

41.1 WHAT DO I NEED TO PREP?

To get started you need to prepare a few things:

- A starter scenario**, which if you’re reading this, you should’ve prepped and run already!
- A campaign style** tells the players the kind of game you’re interested in running.
- Your campaign frame** shows the players the kinds of jobs they’ll be doing.
- A starting area** to play in.
- A few tools** to help you maintain and grow the campaign over time

Let’s dive in.

41.2 YOUR CAMPAIGN’S STYLE

Your **campaign’s style** describes very broadly how the campaign is structured and the kind of game your players can expect. The table below lists several kinds of styles that can be combined and varied from game to game, or even as time goes on. You can run a campaign with a very sandboxy nature and then switch it up into something different, or you can start a new campaign with different goals. Figure out what your players like and then adjust from there.

41.3 YOUR CAMPAIGN FRAME

Your campaign’s frame tells players roughly who they are, what kind of work they do, and the kinds of things they might do in the game. As the game goes on these things might change, but it sets the right expectations. In a “space truckers” game, for instance, you might not do a lot of political intrigue.

See some example Campaign Frames on pg. 42.

41.4 PITCHING THE GAME

Once you have your campaign’s style and frame worked out, you can pitch your concept to your players. This helps everyone get on the same page about the kind of game you want to play and to see if there’s any interest.

Remember: being a Warden is a lot of work, and you’re a player, too. Make sure the campaign’s style and frame line up with your interests and the kind of work and preparation you want to do. An Anthology game might have you creating new concepts from scratch every week, and you shouldn’t choose a Private Mercenaries frame if you hate running combat. Think about what you like about the game and take it from there.

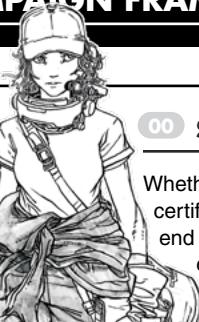
Example: Campaign Pitch

WARDEN: Hey gang, I was thinking about doing like an ensemble style apocalyptic dogs of war campaign where you’re all fighting against an ancient alien threat. Does that sound like fun to y’all?

CAMPAIGN STYLE

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
ANTHOLOGY	Sessions and adventures have little (if any) narrative cohesion. Each adventure stands alone.
APOCALYPSE	Play centers around a massive threat to life in the universe (alien invasion, interstellar war, plague, AI revolt, etc.).
ENSEMBLE	Players routinely control multiple characters and switch between them as play dictates.
EPISODIC	Sessions place a heavy emphasis on downtime and roleplaying, with frequent time skips and slice-of-life encounters.
HEROIC	Players are key figures in a large-scale epic struggle with stakes that affect millions of people if not all of humanity.
NARRATIVE	Players are interested in unravelling a cohesive narrative as part of the background or foreground of play.
OPEN TABLE	Campaign features a large pool of potential players who may drop in or out on a session-by-session basis.
SANDBOX	Players are given a large area of several leads on potential work and can tackle them in any order they wish.
SERIAL	Play takes place from moment to moment, day to day, with infrequent time skips.

CAMPAIN FRAMES



00 SPACE TRUCKERS

Whether it's blockade running, smuggling contraband, or just working as a certified owner-operator, there's never a dull shift hauling cargo from one end of the Rim to the other. Watch out for stowaways and customs patrols, and always pay your union dues.



01 PRIVATE MERCENARIES

Jump and drop. Sweep and clear. Seek and destroy. Whether you call it wetwork or liquidation, you go where the Company sends you. They said if you had a vaccsuit and were willing to travel, you'd always be flush with credits. They weren't wrong.



02 EXPLORERS

You wanted to go where no one had gone before. But what you found out there in the void wasn't something anyone back home would understand. So you had to keep going. You never looked back.

And hopefully someday you will find a place to call your own. A place where no one ever asks you what you saw out in the black.



03 DOGS OF WAR

Humanity was in trouble and you answered the call. You've seen things those people back home wouldn't believe. You've looked into the yawning maw of destruction and seen it grasp at everything you hold dear. Your response? Come and take it.



04 CORPORATE INSPECTORS

Production has shutdown on mining station Ypsilon 14. The Alexis research vessel has disappeared. There's a strike brewing on Prospero's Dream. The entire Rim is on fire and your bosses are concerned with one thing: the bottom line. The C-Levels have questions and it's your job to get answers. Find out, fix it, and sign the NDA. Just watch your back near the picket line.

CAMPAIGN FRAMES



05 OFFWORLD COLONISTS

You volunteered. Planting terraformers in inhospitable environments, researching planetary phenomena, defending themselves against the local flora and fauna. On the Rim, life is what you make of it.

06 CRASHLANDERS

Life was hard, but it was good. You scraped together what money you could to buy a Jumpliner ticket to a new life on an off-world colony. But now the sirens are blaring and you're waking up from cryosleep amongst the chaos of screams. "Abandon ship!" Whether you fix the ship or ride it to the ground, your life will never be the same again.



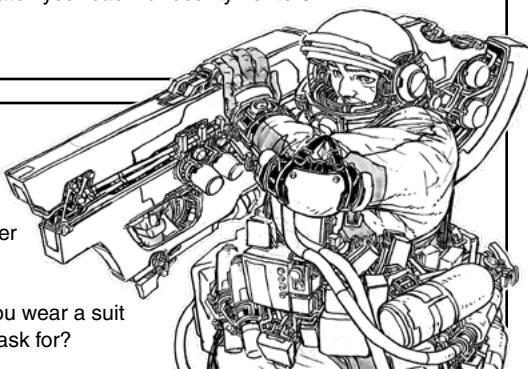
07 HYPERSPACE RAIDERS

It's always been illegal to steal, but only recently did it become illegal to own. In a world where everyone gives, you take, stealing from the rich and giving to whomever you please. Make sure you Jump before the Marshalls close in, and always watch your back for bounty hunters.



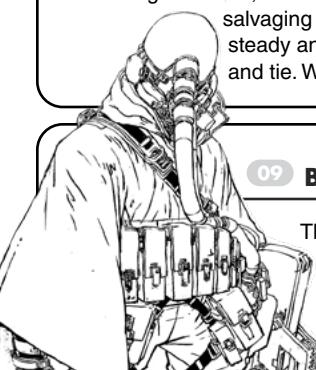
08 MINING & SALVAGE

There aren't many honest ways to make a buck on the Rim, but this is one of them. Whether it's mining asteroids, skimming gas giants, or salvaging derelicts, the pay is steady and they don't make you wear a suit and tie. What more could you ask for?



09 BOUNTY HUNTERS

There is no law on the Rim, just Corporate Policy. Those who break it paint a nice target sign on their back for anyone looking to break out of the 9-5 and into a fistful of credits. Check the bounty boards, bring in your charge, stay alive. The rules are easy. Getting it done is hard.



CREATE A STARTING AREA

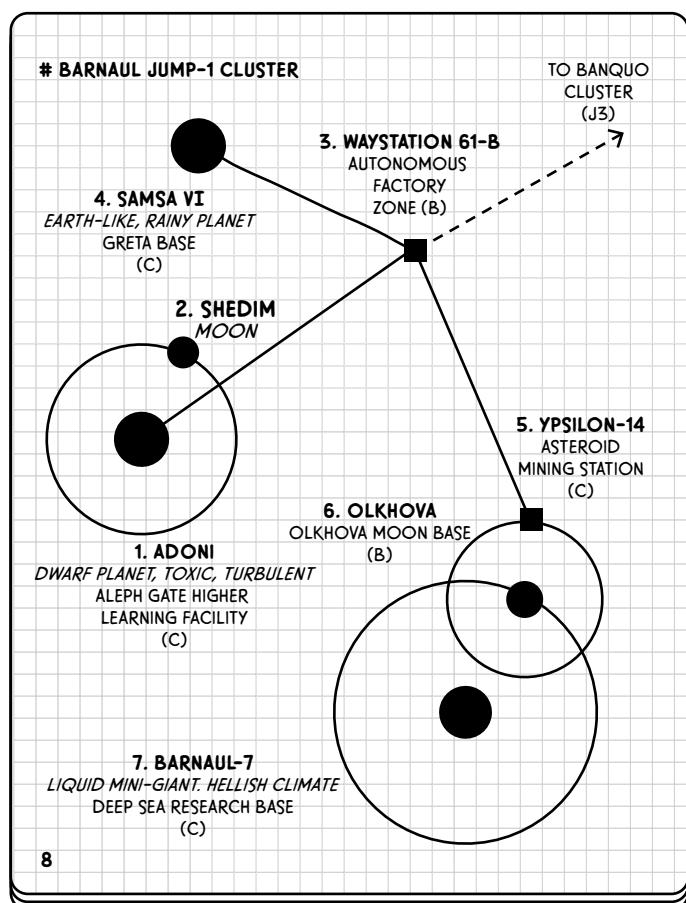
Turn to a new spread in your Campaign Notebook and copy the map on this page, leaving out all of the text. This is your campaign's starting area: a small Jump-1 cluster out in the middle of rimspace.

44.1 WHAT THIS MAP IS

This map shows a handful of star systems, each connected by a Jump-1 hyperspace route. Essentially, it represents the smallest intergalactic neighborhood.

This is not a map of all the planets, moons, stars, and asteroids in each and every system. **It's only a map of the notable ones.** There is much more to space than what is here. This is just what is important right now. An entire system with a dozen planets may have only one settled planet, and the colony it holds may only house a few dozen people.

You can fill in more of the map as it becomes important to your players. But for now, this is a good starting point.



44.2 LEGEND

- Solid straight lines:** These represent **Jump-1 Routes** leading to the different systems inside the cluster. Label each of these lines 'J1.'
- Dotted lines:** This is the Jump Route leading to and from the cluster. Roll 1d5+1 for the Jump Route and label it. The higher the number, the more remote this cluster is.
- Empty circles:** Each of these represents an **orbit**, and are there to show the relationship between two or more **dots**.
- Points:** Use circles for planets, moons, stars and squares for space stations.
- Jump Points:** If a dot is connected to a Jump Route (a straight line), the dot is the closest location to the Jump Point for that system. This means in order to travel to another system you first have to travel to that dot, and then travel to the Jump Point (which usually takes a couple of weeks). From there you travel through hyperspace along the Jump Route until you (hopefully) reach the next Jump Point.

MAPPING YOUR JUMP CLUSTER

BARNAUL JUMP-1 CLUSTER

1. **ADONI (C)**. TERRES. DWARF PLANET. TOXIC ATMO. TURBULENT CLIMATE.

- ALEPH GATE HIGHER LEARNING FACILITY (PG. 4)

2. **SHEDIM (C)**. MOON OF ADONI.

3. **CONTROL 54B (B)**. SEBACO AUTONOMOUS FACTORY ZONE.

- NEAR A MASSIVE JUMP-5 DERELICT HULK
- STATION INFILTRATED BY ALEPH GATE.
- SETTLEMENT HAS NEWFOUND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE
- JUMP-3 TO BANQUO CLUSTER

4. **SAMSA VI**: TERRES. EARTH-SIZED PLANET. T-FORM ATMO. RAINY CLIMATE.

- GRETA BASE (ANOTHER BUG HUNT)

5. **YPSILON-14 (C)**: SEBACO ASTEROID MINING STATION.

- MINERS GOING MISSING. (**HAUNTING OF YPSILON-14**)

6. **OLKHOVA MOON BASE (C)**: COLONIAL SETTLEMENT.

7. **BARNAUL-7 (C)**: LIQUID MINI-GIANT. HELLISH CLIMATE

- DEEP SEA RESEARCH BASE. COMMUNICATIONS CUT OFF.

FACIONS

- **SEBACO MINING CO.**: YPSILON, OLKHOVA, BARNAL, WAYSTATION 61-B
- **TANNHÄUSER HEAVY INDUSTRIES**: SURMA VII
- **ALEPH GATE CHURCH**: ADONI, SHEDIM?
- **INTERSTELLAR ASTEROID MINER'S UNION**: YPSILON, OLKHOVA

9

45.2 JUMP ROUTES

Consider this a map of only the locations your players know about. There may very well be many other systems that are part of this Jump cluster, but the astronavigation data is secret, lost, or in most cases proprietary. After all, only the most powerful corporations and governments would have the resources to explore hyperspace and establish or discover new Jump Routes, and they keep most of that information to themselves. Finding new Jump Routes can be a precursor to a mission or the reward for a job well done. Players might have to pay to get a good route, or else find someone who can guide them. Always be adding to the map, growing it into a large and sprawling atlas of your game's interstellar network.

45.1 KEYING THE MAP

Once you have the map drawn, number each of the dots, and then key the map using the next page (or right on the map if you don't have a lot of information yet). To start with, put the first scenario you played somewhere on the map. You only need the most important details about each location, like its purpose, Port Class, and any major conflicts. For everything else, put a page reference to that location in your key to make it easier to find. Continue filling in the key using the locations and scenarios you prepare, and then use official and third party modules to fill in the gaps. There are tables in the back of this book to help you generate locations, and other tools like the **Derelict Generator** in **Dead Planet** and the **Space Station Generator** in **A Pound of Flesh** can help as well.

You don't have to fill it all in now; in fact, it's better to wait to see what your players are interested in. Good prep is a terrible substitute for good play. So for now, just write a scrap of an idea down for each location, enough to tell your players that there's something there, and then move on. You can always come back and add to it if you feel inspired.

Read more about finding inspiration on pg. 55.1.

HOW TO CREATE FACTIONS

Your players interact with many different organizations, corporations, cults, gangs, and other groups, which we call **factions**. These factions can operate as allies, enemies, and employers, and by developing them and their goals you can create a more immersive game.

46.1 CREATE A FACTION

To create a new faction, turn to a new page in your **Campaign Notebook** and title it with the faction's name, then write a short description of who they are and what they do. Below that, note each faction's:

- VIPs:** List any **important members** of the faction, along with a short description and a page reference if the character is described in detail elsewhere.
- Locations:** List any **notable locations** along with page references to any maps or scenarios you've prepared featuring them.
- Goals:** Make a list of any **compelling goals** the faction is pursuing. You only need to list goals that affect the players if they are completed, rather than the common day-to-day tasks the faction relies on for survival.

You don't need to prepare all of these at the start of your campaign, just keep track of them as they come up in play and the sheet fills in naturally.

46.2 USING FACTIONS

Factions become most useful to you once your players have run into two or three. This naturally creates situations where the players have to choose between competing interests, and adds another layer to the game as players seek to navigate this complex web.

When a faction becomes an **ally** it can offer your players work, safe ports to take Shore Leave, or other resources that players can bring to bear in completing their own goals. **Enemy** factions hunt players down and make life difficult for them at every turn, cutting them off from supplies they need and hindering their efforts to make progress.

Read more about Allies & Enemies on pg. 16.1.

SEBACO MINING LTD

INTERSTELLAR ASTEROID MINING, PLANETARY COLONIZATION MEGACORPORATION.

VIPS:

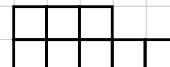
- ANDERS: CREW CONTACT/CORP. LIASON (PG. 12)
- SONYA: TEAM LEADER YPSILON-14

LOCATIONS:

- OLKHOVA MOON BASE (PG. 15)
- YPSILON-14: MINING FACILITY
- BARNAUL-7
- WAYSTATION 61-B

GOALS:

- RESEARCH ON BARNAUL-7?
- TERRAFORM OLKHOVA



10

46.3 FACTION GOALS

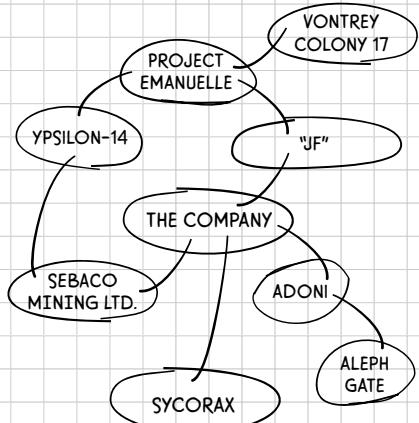
Faction goals can help you get a sense of what's going on in your game's world. Start by assigning each goal a number of boxes, which represent the difficulty of the project. Easy/short goals are only a box or two, while long/challenging goals should be 5-10 boxes.

Roll 1d100 in regular intervals that fit your game's pace (weekly, monthly, yearly). **On evens**, the faction makes forward progress: fill in a box. **On odds**, the faction has hit an obstacle or roadblock and they need help resolving it: mark a box with an X. **On even doubles**, the faction has a break through: mark off two boxes, or fill in a box marked X. **On odd doubles**, the faction has experienced a catastrophic event: erase a filled-in box. **When all the boxes are filled in, the faction achieves their goal.**

Each of these results tells you something about the world. Use this information when you prepare your scenarios. While your players may not know what a faction's goals are, they should always see the ripple effects of the faction's progress.

THE COMPANY

THE COMPANY



The first faction you should design is the Company. In the corporate controlled future of Mothership, this interstellar megacorporation can easily serve as your campaign's:

- **Primary employer or client.** The players have to work for someone, and the Company is one of the few entities with the resources to operate far from the Core. Choosing to work for the Company can mean stable pay, but it can also put you first in line to be discarded when things go sideways.
- **Principal antagonist or rival.** The Company is a prime example of a persistent threat. It keeps coming back, session after session, campaign after campaign. Faceless and inexhaustible. Its resources are so infinite that it could take one or more campaigns to truly uncover all of its schemes and destroy it.
- **Framing device or setting.** The Company you design reveals a lot about what kind of work your players do and what kind of technologies are prominent in your setting. If you're running a short campaign, you might not even need to give the Company a name. Just calling it "The Company" is enough.

47.1 CORPORATE MIND MAP

Open to a new page in your Campaign Notebook, label it **The Company**. In the center of the page write "The Company" and circle it. From here, you draw what's called a "mind map," essentially a series of connections, important people, subsidiaries, secret projects, and anything else that connects to the ever-present megacorporation you've created. Start thinking of the Company this way, as a series of tenuous, sprawling connections. Add to it as time goes on, connecting planets, ports, enemies, and so on. Over time, this amalgamation of loose concepts yields new and interesting results if you let it. Your players will feel the looming sense that the Company truly is everywhere, and that everything is connected.

47.2 CORPORATE POWER

When running the Company it's helpful to assume it has functionally unlimited resources. Assume it's above the law. Assume its agents are able to get to anyone. Assume there is a permanent record filed away somewhere with blackmail on every member of the crew. Assume anything the crewmembers own is actually just leased through the Company. Assume the Company always has another crew, just as disposable, just as desperate, to clean things up if your players can't get the job done. Assume illegal research procedures, flagrant regulatory violations, price fixing, collusion, corporate espionage, colonial extortion, bribery, negligence, and embezzlement. Assume invasive biometric tracking, disinformation campaigns, industrial sabotage, proxy wars, human and animal experimentation, rampant pollution, and environmental collapse. Assume abandoned space stations, colonies, cities, and worlds. Assume their products cause cancer. Assume they covertly fund terrorist groups. Assume ties to organized crime. Assume they're overextended in debt and on the brink of collapse which will trigger an interstellar economic meltdown. Assume they've done all of this before. Assume they will never stop.

HOW MUCH SHOULD A JOB PAY?

To calculate how much job pays you should consider three components: **Salary**, **Hazard Pay**, and **Expenses**.

48.1 SALARY

Whether you call it salary, scale, or standard rates, a monthly salary based on skills vastly simplifies job pay. Start players with:

- 500cr/month for every **Trained Skill**.
- 1,000cr/month for every **Expert Skill**.
- 2,000cr/month for every **Master Skill**.

Start every job off with a month's worth of salary. Salary should include travel time: if you'll be travelling for six months in space, that's six month's salary.

48.2 HAZARD PAY

Hazard Pay is a multiplier of the character's salary based on how difficult and deadly the employers believes the job will be. Typically the scale is between x1 (for a normal job without the expectation and danger) and x5 (for a near suicidal mission with a low chance of success). Start most jobs with a Hazard Pay of 2-3x salary.

48.3 EXPENSES

Finally, the employer may opt to cover some of the job's expenses, including, but not limited to:

- **Jump Pay:** A flat 1,000cr bonus for each Jump made through hyperspace.
- **Equipment:** Occasionally employers may provide specialized equipment or cover the cost of equipment the crew needs to get the job done.
- **Travel:** Employers sometimes cover ticket vouchers, fuel or warp core costs to get the crew to and from the job site.
- **Contractors:** Rarely, the contractor will pay (or provide) contractors to assist the crew.

Remember, this is a good baseline. But don't be afraid to give players too much (or too little) credits. The game is deadly enough as it is, and it won't break if the players get an extra cybermod or two here or there. Additionally, a bad payday every once in awhile can spur them into action too.

Example: Adding it all up

WARDEN: Alright, so the Company is willing to cover three month's Salary at x2 Hazard Pay. So essentially, that's six month's Salary. They'll cover travel, you'll be on their ship, and they'll provide vaccsuits and SMGs for everyone. You'll also have a marine escort.

CLEO: What about Jump Pay?

WARDEN: I forgot, that's right. They'll pay for two Jumps, one there, one back. So 2kcr extra for each of you.

48.4 NEGOTIATING BETTER RATES

The players are always free to negotiate for better rates, as are the clients. A good rule of thumb is to increase or decrease pay by 10% for each of the factors below:

- Crew's reliable/unreliable reputation.
- Crew's previous good/bad work for the client.
- Client is desperate/has other options.
- Work is urgent/routine.
- Work is dangerous/risk-free (theoretically).

Push much harder and the client often walks away.

48.5 WORK FOR TRADE

Oftentimes the crew will find work that can't pay their salaries and all the perks. Instead someone will want them to work out some kind of barter agreement.

- **Goods:** Cybermods, weapons, medicine, drugs, or even an old ship. Trad
- **Favors:** A favor from a powerful person is worth more than a few months salary. But even someone without a lot of influence can be helpful as a lifelong ally.
- **Room and board:** If the crew doesn't have a ship or a place to live, offering them somewhere to stay or a cheap way to get to their destination is often enough to get them to put in a little work.
- **Information:** Whether it's astronav data or rumors of where to find someone, information is always valuable.

THE JOB BOARD

If you're running a Sandbox style campaign it's helpful to create a **Job Board** for your players.

49.1 MAKE A JOB BOARD

Keeping an updated Job Board is an easy way to make sure your players always have new work to do. For now, let's create one with 1d5 jobs on it.

1. First, open to a new spread in your Campaign Notebook and title it **Job Board**.
2. On the next line down you're going to create a small table with the headers: **Job**, **Pay**, **Client**, and **Location**.
3. **Choose or roll for jobs on the Contract Work Table.** We've provided several examples here of the different kinds of work, but the important thing is just to provide some variety.
4. **Note how much each job pays.**
5. Using the factions you previously created, **assign a faction as the client** for each of the jobs, and a specific contact at that faction if it's relevant.
6. **Note the location where the players can meet with the client to start the job.** This can be anywhere in your cluster, so feel free to pick any of the locations you created earlier.

Over time, prune some of the entries and add new ones, to keep things evolving and to help create a sense of urgency. Start with adding one new job and removing one old job per year of in-game time, and see how that goes.

49.2 YOU DON'T NEED THIS

Not every campaign needs to be an open-world sandbox game in order for it to be a lot of fun. Most long term campaigns don't even need this. Keep your campaign style in mind when you're thinking about work and pay. If your characters are just working for the Company, most likely they have everything provided for them and they can just get a small token salary to blow on Shore Leave and some new equipment every once in awhile.

Don't get bogged down in the economics if it's going to get in the way of the game.

JOB BOARD

JOB	PAY	CLIENT	LOCATION
ASTEROID MINING	GRUNT WORK	SEBACO MINING	BANQUO IV
CARGO FREIGHT	GRUNT WORK	SEBACO MINING	WAYSTATION 62B
LIQUIDATION	PAYDAY	OCRM	WAYSTATION 62B
ASSET RECOVERY	WORK TRADE	TEAMSTERS	PROSPERO'S DREAM

CONTRACT WORK

D10 DEPARTMENT

PRODUCTION & MANUFACTURE

00-01 Asteroid mining, derelict salvage and scrap, strikebreaking, terraformer installation, and android troubleshooting.

SHIPPING & HANDLING

02-03 Cargo freight, VIP escort, scrap hauling, prisoner transport, sensitive materials handling, passenger transport, and contraband smuggling.

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

04-05 Sample & specimen collection, planetary survey, field testing, sabotage, containment breach, archaeological dig, and corporate espionage.

RISK MANAGEMENT

06-07 Sweep and clear, liquidation, asset protection, quarantine enforcement, bounty hunting, distress signal response, and system patrol.

HUMAN RESOURCES

08 Missing persons, suspicious death, communication breakdown, troubleshooting, AI negotiation, and settlement evacuation.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

09 Asset recovery, salvage retention, personnel recruitment, first contact protocol, repossession, and piracy.

Money in Mothership is all about limiting players' options. It's another resource like Health and Stress that players need to manage, though on a longer time scale. Should they buy equipment they need or hire private contractors? Should they take Shore Leave or seek medical care? Navigating these trade-offs can be a fun and engaging part of the game, but not for every table. Here are the important things to keep in mind about the in-game economics of Mothership:

- **The shorter the campaign,** the less important the economics are. The longer a campaign goes on, the more these tools help.
- **Favors and information are more interesting rewards than credits,** and lead to better play.
- Counting every credit spent works really well for tense games, where players are always one job away from losing everything.
- If your players don't enjoy counting every credit, you can focus only on notable expenses, using the **Net Worth Table** below as a guide.
- **This is a horror game, not a small business simulator.** The economics are in service to creating stressful situations, not in building perpetual motion profit machines.
- **Upward mobility is statistically impossible.** The vast majority of wealth is in the hands of a small number of generationally wealthy companies and families who use their vast resources and influence to limit the ability of anyone else to accrue wealth or power.

NET WORTH

NET WORTH	NOTABLE EXPENSES
Nothing	Everything.
Hundreds	Basic living expenses. Food, shelter.
Thousands	Weapons, equipment, Shore Leave, rent, space travel fare.
Hundreds of thousands	Cybermods, private contractors, skill training, land vehicles.
Millions	Ship repairs, fuel, and maintenance.
Tens of millions	Mechs, small spacecraft, small businesses.
Hundreds of millions	Ships, asteroids, small fleets.
Billions	Companies, research and development, moons, private armies.
Trillions	War, colonization, planets, space stations.

50.1 DEBT

While debt can refer to anything from a bar tab to a mortgage in real life, in Mothership we use debt to mean **owing violent people a non-trivial amount of money**. Because of this, players should **increase their Minimum Stress by 1 for every significant debtor they owe.**

Players operate on the fringe of society and only have access to deeply predatory lenders. Things like a 200mcr ship mortgage, even if the players could somehow afford the downpayment, are typically reserved for large organizations with robust financial resources and generational credit histories. Players have to find another way.

Finally, debt is a great way to abstract payment. You can introduce, for instance, a benefactor who can wipe the players' debts clean if they undertake some particularly shady work for them.

Securing a loan

When getting a loan from a lender, you need to establish three things: a **downpayment**, the **interest**, and the **term**.

- Players must pay a downpayment of 10-50% of the amount borrowed up front, or the equivalent value in some kind of collateral.
- The lender is going to add an exorbitant amount of **interest**, typically equal to the amount borrowed. This means that whatever amount the player borrows, they ultimately need to pay back twice as much (or more!) by the end.
- The **term** of the loan will be over a number of months (or weeks for incredibly shady dealers), usually 2d10. Players need to make a payment once per month (or once per week) of 10% of the total amount owed (the original amount borrowed plus interest), or else suffer the consequences.

Consequences for non-payment

Failure to pay the minimum due each period incurs significant consequences, including but not limited to: aggressive visits from violent debt collectors, targeted malware, threats to allies, blacklisting, repossession, credstick freezes, kidnap and ransom, forced relocation to debtor colonies, or finally a bounty for the debtor's life.

51.1 SAVING MONEY

If your game takes place mostly on a day-to-day basis with some light time skips (a month here or there for travel, etc.), it makes sense that players earn a salary like normal and can save up whatever they don't spend.

However, if your game starts to skip large chunks of time, players may start to ask about whether they can save all their salary from that skipped time. Short answer: no, it's really hard to save money. However, if a player really wants to try and save up, **a good rule of thumb is that they can save one month's salary per year.**

Example: Saving Up

WARDEN: Okay, so you all go back to your normal jobs and like a few years go by.

SALLY: How many? I want to save all my money if possible.

WARDEN: Let's say... 3 years go by. You can put aside about 3 months of salary.

SALLY: What if I'm really going full bunker mode. Couponing, ramen-only diet, working three jobs, what then?

WARDEN: How about this: you can save an extra 1d5 months of salary—

SALLY: Deal!

WARDEN: —But you have to raise your Minimum Stress by the same amount.

SALLY: Oooh, less deal.

WARDEN: Your call.

PAUL: I mean, what's the worst that could happen?



51.2 WHAT IF THEY GET RICH?

Don't be worried if your players strike a big payday. Money solves a lot of problems, but it also creates new ones. If your players start raking in major credits, keep these things in mind:

1. Big money attracts big predators.

Suddenly gaining a huge windfall paints a target on the players' backs. Piracy becomes a bigger issue. Corrupt customs inspectors constantly badger players for bribes. Enemies choose this moment to form alliances and move against you.

2. Allies need help.

Once the players amass wealth, desperate allies hit up players in need of emergency funding. Family members and friends become targets for kidnap and ransom. Failure to help could cost the player the relationship, or worse, their ally's life.

3. Old money hates new money.

Being rich is an exclusive club that doesn't accept new members easily. Players who suddenly find themselves with a large influx of credits aren't likely to be welcomed into high society, and will find themselves met with more skeptics and scam artists than before.

4. It's okay to retire. For now.

Players who strike it megarich should feel free to join the ranks of the uber-wealthy and retire in style. When this happens, the player takes their character out of rotation until they're needed. Until then, their character can operate as an ally of the active crew (either controlled by the player or if they're comfortable with it, as an NPC). And someday, when times are at their worst, they may be called back into play for one last job...

RETIREMENT COSTS

COST LIFESTYLE

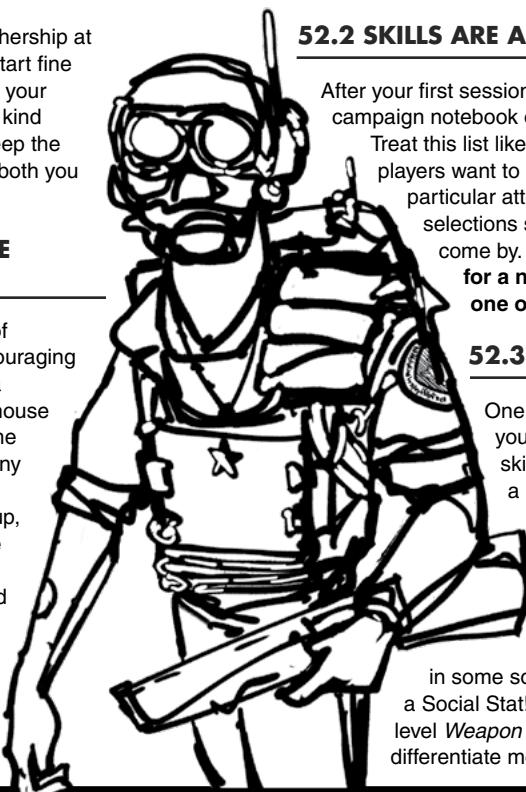
1mcr	Fixed income. Cramped homeworld. Part time job.
10mcr	Second home. Core world. S-Class vacations. Space travel.
100mcr	Social elite. Multiple homes. Life of luxury. Private island.
1bcr	Shareholder. Megayacht. Board seat. Private asteroid.
10bcr	C-level ancestral home. Space station. Personal army.
100bcr	Noble title. Company owner. Private planet. Personal fleet.

CUSTOMIZING YOUR CAMPAIGN

Once you've played Mothership at least once, you should start fine tuning things to better fit your players' play styles. This kind of maintenance helps keep the campaign improving for both you and them.

52.1 ALTERING THE DIFFICULTY

Finding the sweet spot of challenging but not discouraging can be tough. Below is a starting list of common house rules which can adjust the difficulty up or down. If any of these sound like they would work for your group, add them to your **House Rules** page in your Campaign Notebook and try them out. As your players get better at the game and you all get more comfortable, continually revise these house rules.



52.2 SKILLS ARE A WISHLIST

After your first session, make a note in your campaign notebook of your players' skills.

Treat this list like a wishlist of what your players want to see in the game. Pay particular attention to Master Skill selections since these are hard to come by. Whenever you prep for a new session try to hit one or two of these skills.

52.3 NEW SKILLS

One way to customize your game is to alter the skill list. If you're running a game about political intrigue on a desert planet it might make sense to add skills for different factions' customs (similar to *Rimwise*) or to add in some social skills (or even a Social Stat!). Adding in Master level *Weapon Specialties* can help differentiate more tactical play styles.

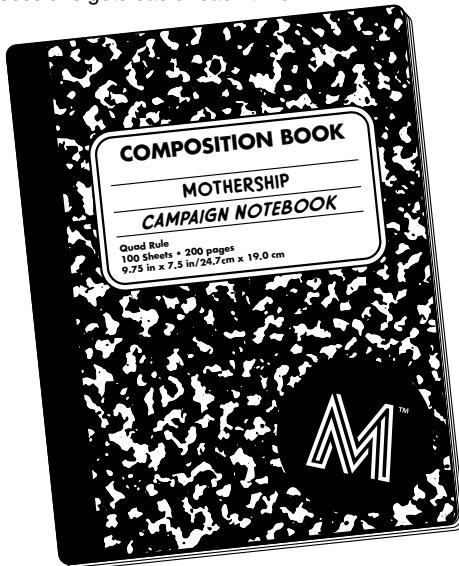
DIFFICULTY SETTINGS

HOUSE RULE	DESCRIPTION
ABLATIVE WOUNDS	Players gain 1 Wound, which when lost does not force a roll on the Wound table. Regained with 30m of rest.
ARMOR DEGRADATION	Armor Points are reduced by 1 whenever excess Damage is dealt. The armor is destroyed at 0 AP.
CRITICAL STRESS RELIEF	Whenever a player rolls a Critical Success they reduce their Stress by 1.
EXHAUSTABLE SKILLS	You may automatically succeed a Skill Check using each of your Skills once per session.
FRAGILITY	All players get 1 Wound except for androids who have 5.
HIGH SCORE BREAKER	If a player's character beats the player's High Score, they gain 20 points to divide between their Stats and Saves.
IMPENETRABLE WOUNDS	Damage does not carry over after receiving a Wound.
IMPROVED ADVANCEMENT	Stats and Saves can both improve from Shore Leave.
LETHALITY	Ignore Health, just use Wounds. All Weapons deal 1 or more Wounds.
LIGHT AMMO TRACKING	Players only track ammo when it seems relevant narratively. Then assume the players have 1d5 shots remaining.
ONE TIME ADVANCEMENT	After a character survives their first session they may add 10 to any 1 Stat or Save.
OPT-IN STRESS	Players volunteer to gain Stress and make Panic Checks when they feel it's appropriate.
PLAYER FACING ROLLS	Players make all rolls. In violent encounters, a failure to hit could mean the player character is hit instead.
RAPID SKILL LEARNING	Players can learn a Trained Skill in 3 sessions, an Expert Skill in 5 sessions, and a Master Skill in 10 sessions.
RESOLVE	Every session a player survives they gain 1 Resolve, which can be spent as a free reroll on any roll they make.
SIMPLE SKILLS	Ignore Skill bonuses, all Skills simply grant Advantage instead.

MAINTAINING YOUR CAMPAIGN

53.1 YOUR CAMPAIGN NOTEBOOK

Your **Campaign Notebook** is your closest ally, research assistant, oracle, and guide to running the game. The more you add to it, linking your characters, factions, and scenarios with page references, the more you can see the hidden connections between your notes. Prepping new sessions gets easier each time.



53.2 USING PUBLISHED MODULES

Published adventure modules can help relieve a lot of your prep, but they still need a little bit of work to really shine in an ongoing campaign.

- **Put the module's locations on your map** and mention them to your players in passing. When they finally go to them they feel like they've known about the place for awhile.
- **Rename the module's factions** with ones you're already using in your game to create a more cohesive universe.
- If the module contains random tables for new content or encounters, **roll up a handful** as part of your prep rather than at the table.
- **It's okay if your players skip large parts** of the module. The modules are packed with content so you don't have to prep as much. They're not hoops your players have to jump through to "experience the whole story."

53.3 STICK TO THE FRINGE

In Mothership, space is more like a lonely desert highway than a bustling city street. Tiny stations with populations in the dozens who rely on annual shipments or quarterly patrols dot the vast emptiness. If the players want to survive, they can't wait for reinforcements to arrive. They are the only help anyone around here is likely to get.

53.4 CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

The more you play, the more your players improve. Through Shore Leave they can increase their characters' Saves, and over time, if they survive, they can learn new Skills. Beyond that, players should focus on improving their characters' status in the game world by:

- **Acquiring wealth.**
- Salvaging and upgrading a **junked ship**.
- Gaining favors from powerful **allies**.
- Installing mind-bending **slickware** or body enhancing **cyberware**.
- **Sabotaging corrupt institutions.**
- Founding and building a **colony** or **port**.
- **Mutating.**
- Developing **psionic powers**.
- **Becoming a living conduit** for an unfathomable ancient entity.

53.5 KEEPING TRACK OF TIME

Skill Training, Ship Repairs, Shore Leave, monthly salaries all take time. It can feel overwhelming to track. You won't need to track most of that in short campaigns but for longer campaign, create a **calendar** in your **Campaign Notebook** to keep track of everything that happens.

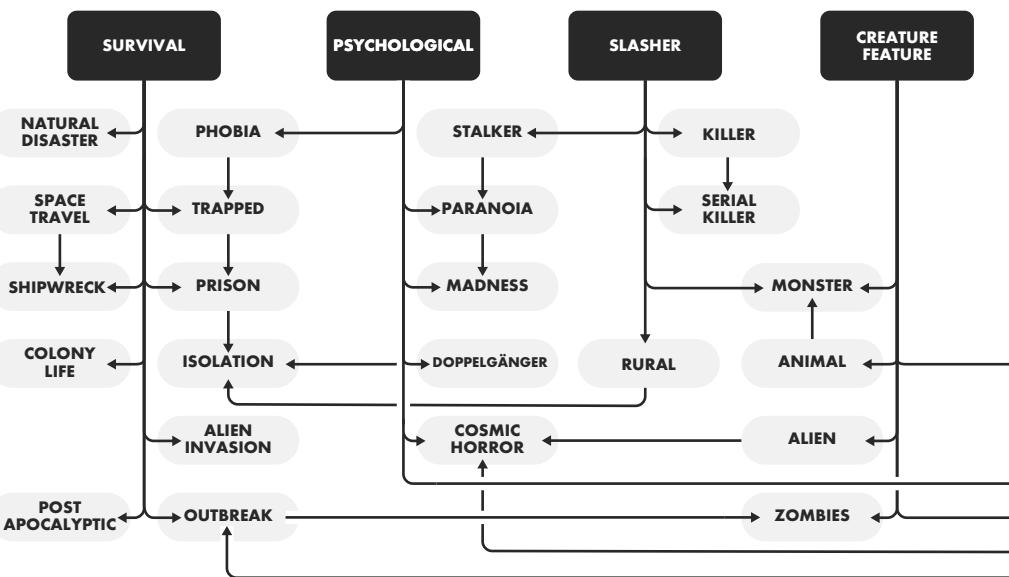
Skipping Time

Too much horror drags the game down. Instead, skip 1d10 months between scenarios. Players can go back to their normal lives, train their Skills, take Shore Leave, work their day jobs, or play through a dangerous, but not horrific, scenario.

Slice of Life Sessions

Session where players visit friends, shop, pursue relationships, see the sights and enjoy themselves helps re-establish a baseline of normalcy so that you can build tension again.

MIXING IT UP



Everyone has their own favorite horror story. But if you're not careful, you can get stuck telling the same story over and over, which gets predictable and boring.

54.1 HORROR SUBGENRES

Above is a diagram of **common horror-subgenres** and how they bleed into each other. You can keep track of which ones you use in your **Campaign Notebook** or just make a tick mark next to each one on this page. See if you can go your whole campaign without repeating a subgenre. Or start each new campaign from a different one and then follow the lines where they lead.

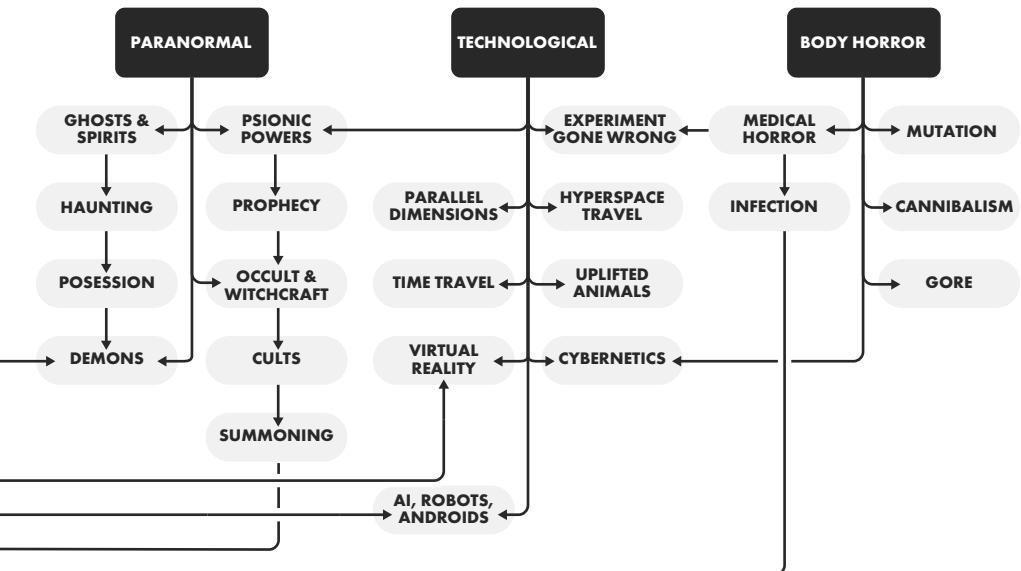
For example, you could start with a **medical horror** scenario about **an experiment gone wrong**, something dealing with **psionic powers** which manifest a **prophecy**. From there you can easily tap into the **occult and witchcraft**, maybe a **cult** forms around the psions... The important thing is to expand your idea of what horror can be so that you don't get stuck playing one kind of game over and over.

54.2 WHAT IF THEY RUN AWAY?

Usually, players instinctually run away at the first sign of trouble. It's super common. They're getting caught up in the horror (which is great) and reacting naturally (which is also great). Don't shut them down. Instead, just talk to them and encourage them to think through their options:

- If you're playing a **one shot**, be honest and say "this is what I have prepared tonight. There's definitely a way to beat this scenario, so regroup, get your bearings, and try again."
- If you're playing a **longer game**, just let them run away! The ability to gauge risk and then bail out is an important one if they plan to survive long term. Let them retreat, but then let the natural consequences follow: the horror takes more innocent lives and grows stronger. They can only run for so long before their cowardice catches up with them.

RECOMMENDED MEDIA



55.1 FINDING INSPIRATION

Read widely from a lot of different media, steal liberally from current events, fiction, and other games, and make note of everything you find in your **Campaign Notebook**. Keep a page of **Random Ideas** and give one line to each cool thing you come across. You'll have more ideas than you know what to do with.

55.2 IS IT SCARY ENOUGH?

Actually scaring your players, like they might get scared watching a horror film or playing a video game is an incredibly rare thing. It is not a measure of a successful game night. Most of the time, your players simply want to have fun in a horror **setting**. This means they want to play characters who feel afraid, while they the players just sit back eating chips and rolling dice. Sometimes you have players who love to be scared and get really into it. If that's the case, enjoy it! But don't feel bad if it doesn't happen every week. Instead focus on keeping the tension escalating.

[Read more about Tension on pg. 28.2.](#)

55.3 RECOMMENDED MEDIA

- **The Long Rain** (1950), Ray Bradbury
- **The Stars My Destination** (1956), Alfred Bester
- **The Word for World is Forest** (1972), Ursula K. LeGuin
- **The Forever War** (1974), Joe Haldemann
- **Alien** (1979), Ridley Scott
- **Stalker** (1979), Andrei Tarkovsky
- **The Thing** (1982), John Carpenter
- **Blame!** (1997), Tsutomu Nihei
- **Event Horizon** (1997), Paul W.S. Anderson
- **Starship Troopers** (1997), Paul Verhoeven
- **Planete** (1999), Makoto Yukimura
- **Pitch Black** (2000), David Twohy
- **Diamond Dogs** (2001), Alastair Reynolds
- **IBM and the Holocaust** (2001), Edwin Black
- **Blindsight** (2006), Peter Watts
- **Sunshine** (2007), Danny Boyle
- **My Work is Not Yet Done** (2009), Thomas Ligotti
- **The Luminous Dead** (2010), Caitlin Starling
- **Binti** (2015), Nnedi Okorafor
- **Furnace** (2016), Livia Llewellyn
- **A Collapse of Horses** (2016), Brian Evenson
- **Haunted Cities** (2016), Kitty Horrorshow
- **HyperNormalisation** (2016), Adam Curtis
- **The Hyacinth Disaster** (2017), David Carlson
- **All Systems Red** (2017), Martha Wells
- **Live at the Death Factory** (2021), Astrid Anne Rose & Sean McTiernan

TELLING A GOOD STORY

Most books, movies, television, and videogames tell pre-written narratives that you passively consume. You might make a few choices along the way and end up with a different ending (like in video games), but ultimately the entire story (and its various endings) have been scripted before you arrive. **Roleplaying games tell stories very differently.**

The game is about what the players do.

Instead of plotting events for your players to play through, create compelling situations your players can react to. This centers the game around them and their play, rather than you and your story.

Create a page for **Threats** in your **Campaign Notebook**. Start with a list of three major **Threats** that are in the process of happening. For each, detail three escalating events that happen if the players don't do anything. Then, put those events on a calendar. Check your Threats page when you're prepping your session to see if anything has changed, then work the new event into your scenario.

Always track the consequences.

Whenever the players fail to save the day, make an enemy, or generally do something disruptive, make a note of it on a **Fallout** page in your **Campaign Notebook**.

Between sessions, think about who the players' actions have affected. See if they've made any new **allies or enemies**, angered any **factions**, or whether they've just generated a new **Threat**. The more the game reacts to the players' actions, the more seriously they take their actions.

Story only happens in retrospect.

Most of what the players remember as the “story” of the game will be intense moments and encounters that went sideways. They almost never remember the plot.

Questions are better than answers.

If you frame your game around interesting questions, you'll have fun no matter what. If you frame your game around interesting answers, then the game only works if the players find those answers.

Try starting your campaign off with **three big questions** (e.g., Who built the Jump gates on Kopacka-B?, What is Project Emanuelle?, What happened to Colony-99?) and build your scenarios around those. Don't put the answers off “until the end,” just let the players get to the answers as quickly or slowly as they choose to.

Use your best ideas first.

Don't save them for later “when you've built up to it,” you'll run out of steam by then. Throw your players into the coolest, most amazing stuff you can think of. You can think of better ideas later. **The Lore Table** is great for that.

LORE	
D100	DESCRIPTION
00	The Maru Banking Colonies
01-04	False Europa
05-08	The Ecosystem
09-12	The MIDAS-12 Massacre
13-16	The Shadow Algorithm
17-20	Universal Remote
21-24	The Conway Machine
25-28	The Book of Sar
29-32	MOGUL: Maximum Prison Planet
33-36	The Orlov Incident
37-40	Fred, the Disappearing Man
41-44	The Creeping Fog
45-48	Mindpillers
49-52	The Precursors
53-56	Zygotean Mercenaries
57-60	The Teaman Murders
61-64	The Whispering Plague
65-68	Sea of Tranquility Conspiracy
69-72	UCSCV <i>Mournbringer</i> Flight 364
73-76	The Bracewell Autonomous Zone
77-80	<i>Spasi, Otets, Syna</i>
81-83	Cosmetic Vampire Hoax
84	IMG 2238
85	The Magnetic Typhoon
86	The Battle for Columbia Gate
87	The Spitz-Okorø Theorum
88	The Uplifted Possums
89	The Silent Century
90	Naktari War Syndrome
91	The Autumnal City at Bellona
92	Origin Point Zero
93	The Mountebank Game
94	The Helium Uprising
95	The Dearborn Corpse
96	Wombship
97	The Hymn of Saeeda Dawn
98	Divinity Strain
99	Rey Burtnolds is Alive and Well and Living on Casimir

ENDING YOUR CAMPAIGN

Whether you're running a one-shot or a multi-year ensemble open table game, sooner or later every campaign ends. Knowing how and when to end your campaign can give your players closure and a sense of accomplishment, rather than a sense that things just petered out.

Run shorter campaigns & sequels.

A campaign doesn't have to be a years long endeavor. Instead, set a clear goal up front. Ask a question and end the campaign when your players have the answer. Then, ask the players whose characters survived, and what they plan to do next. Give them a chance to narrate their characters riding into the sunset, before you bring things to a close.

Now that the campaign is finished, you have a great opportunity to run a **sequel campaign**. Skip some time, find out who is interested in playing again, and set up a new question for a new campaign with some of the same characters and a few new ones. By running shorter campaigns with sequels, you don't over commit your players to an indefinitely long campaign that lasts "as long as they're having fun." Instead, they can commit to a six or seven session campaign, see it through, and then sign up for another if they enjoyed it.

Omega Sessions

Most campaigns end due to events outside the game. Things like scheduling, burnout, and lack of interest are the most common complaints. When you start to see the common symptoms (players are missing more sessions, people can't remember what happened last time, longer breaks between games), it might be time to schedule an **Omega Session**.

In an Omega Session, you just cut right to the end. Whatever the biggest conflict, the greatest reveal, whatever it is that all of this has been heading towards, just skip time and drop your players in for one last session that brings the house down. This way everyone gets to find out who lives and who dies, what the mystery was all about, and everyone goes home with an ending.



57.1 A NOTE FROM SEAN & ALAN

Thank you so much for reading this book. We hope it helps you have more fun when you play with your friends. We wrote this book to show how easy it is to run roleplaying games and we hope we've accomplished that.

At the end of the day, people are more important than games and no amount of technique, advice, rules, or systems can overcome the simple fact that in order to play you need to be generous and kind. This is especially true in horror games.

And that's it! That's all you need to know to get started. Remember, the game isn't in this book, it's on the table. So put this book down, grab your friends, and get playing. We will too.

PLANETS & FACTIONS

PLANETS				
D10	SURFACE	SIZE/GRAVITY	ATMOSPHERE	CLIMATE
00	Liquid	Giant (Crushing Gravity)	Corrosive	Hellish
01	Liquid	Giant (Crushing Gravity)	Corrosive	Hot
02	Liquid	Mini-Giant (Heavy Gravity)	Toxic	Hot
03	Terrestrial	Mini-Giant (Heavy Gravity)	Toxic	Balmy
04	Terrestrial	Mini-Giant (Heavy Gravity)	Thin	Temperate
05	Terrestrial	Earth-Sized Planet (Normal Gravity)	Thin	Heavenly
06	Terrestrial	Earth-Sized Planet (Normal Gravity)	Terraformed	Rainy
07	Terrestrial	Dwarf Planet (Light Gravity)	Terraformed	Turbulent
08	Gas	Dwarf Planet (Light Gravity)	Terraformed	Cold
09	Gas	Dwarf Planet (Light Gravity)	Pristine	Freezing

FACTIONS	
D100	FACTION
00	The Seraphim Institute
01-09	The Outer Rim Colonial Marshalls (OCRM)
10-19	SEBACO Mining Ltd.
20-26	The Teamsters Union
27-31	The Alliance of Hyperspace Jump Couriers
32-35	The Evangelical Solarian Church (AKA The Solarians)
36-40	Los Niños Basura
41-44	The Computer Coders Collective (AKA T-Triple-C)
45-48	PROJECT RICHTER
49-52	BAS-Lehman Ges.m.b.H
53-56	Loss Prevention
57-60	The Synthetic Liberation Front
61-64	Parker-Vance Holding Company
65-68	The Interstellar Postal Inspection Service
69-72	The Komarov Squad
73-76	The Interstellar Asteroid Miners Association
77-80	The Jump-9 Club
81-84	Second Samael Church
85-89	The Zero-G Laborers Coalition (AKA Zed-GLC)
90	REDKNIFE Psyops Unit
91	The Astronavigators Guild
92	The Organization
93	Revolutionary Forces of Luna
94	The Interplanetary Sex Workers Union
95	The Space Monkey Mafia
96	House Sivarajan
97	Uplifted Dolphin Pod 67
98	Aleph Gate
99	FRIEND

SETTLEMENT LOCALE	
D100	GEOLOGICAL FEATURE
00-04	CATENA (crater chain)
05-08	CHAOS (broken terrain)
09-12	COLLIS (small hill)
13-16	CRATER (impact valley)
17-20	DORSUM (ridge)
21-24	ERUPTIVE CENTER (volcano)
25-28	FOSSA (trough)
29-32	LABES (landslide)
33-35	LABYRINTHUS (complex of intersecting valleys/ridges)
36-39	LACUS ("lake" or small plain)
40-43	LANDING SITE
44-47	MARE ("sea" on a moon)
48-51	MENSA (mesa)
52-56	MONS (mountain)
57-60	MONTES (mountain range)
61-65	PATERA (irregular crater)
66-69	PLANITIA (low plain)
70-73	PLANUM (high plain/plateau)
74-77	RUPES (cliff/scarp)
78-81	RIMA (fissure)
82-85	SAXUM (boulder)
86-89	TERRA (extensive land mass)
90-94	THOLUS (small mountain)
95-99	UNDAE (field of dunes)

POPULATION	
D10	NUMBER OF PEOPLE
00	A single person.
01-02	A small handful of people.
03-04	A few dozen people.
05-06	Roughly a hundred people.
07	A few hundred people.
08	Roughly a thousand people.
09	Overpopulated.

PORT CLASS	
D10	PORT CLASS
00	X-Class Port
01-05	C-Class Port
06-07	B-Class Port
08	A-Class Port
09	S-Class Port

CONTROL FACTION	
D10	FACTION
00	Religious Group
01-05	Corporation
06-07	Government
08	Union
09	Criminal Organization

SETTLEMENTS

SETTLEMENTS			
D100	TYPE	CONDITIONS	WEIRD
00	Forced Relocation Slum	Under quarantine.	Failed utopia.
01-09	Terraformer Colony	Overworked, tired. Low morale.	Unsolved string of gruesome murders.
10-19	Mining Colony	Business as usual.	Home to powerful criminal syndicate.
20-26	Colonial Settlement	Workers on strike.	Local customs are strange, wary of outsiders.
27-32	Marine Garrison	Hazardous working conditions.	Deserted.
33-35	Research Facility	Security forces in control.	Underground corporate re-education camp.
36-38	Corporate Operations Center	Gross managerial misconduct.	Settlement has newfound religious significance.
39-41	Manufacturing Complex	Frequent storms.	Company covertly dosing the water.
42-44	Deep Sea Research Base	Productivity low.	Live hostage situation.
45-47	Heavy Industry Complex	Corporate strikebreakers called in.	Local environment is a radioactive wasteland.
48-50	Shipping & Logistics Center	Hostile wildlife.	Rapidly growing doomsday cult.
51-53	Ore Refinery	Military blockade.	Controlled by separatist militia.
54-56	Forward Military Base	Lush overgrown wilderness.	Collapse of local social order.
57-59	Rural Backworld Installation	In desperate need of aid.	Refugee crisis.
60-62	Corporate Resupply Depot	Weather frighteningly unstable.	Extinction event.
63-65	Monitoring Outpost	Food shortage.	Settlement has descended into anarchy.
66-68	Off-World Training Installation	Colonists talking of joining a Union.	Colonists report being replaced by imposters.
69-71	Polar Research Station	Awaiting orders from corporate.	Secret military operation recently arrived.
72-74	Restricted Testing Facility	Local Union elections.	Deadly viral outbreak.
75-77	Maximum Security Prison Complex	Contract negotiation breakdown.	Environmental collapse imminent.
78-80	Stakeholder Camp	Low on supplies.	Recent breakthrough discovery.
81-83	Farming Colony	Massive crop failure.	Settlement houses decadent corporate nobility.
84-86	Prison, formerly a... (roll again)	Communications cut-off.	Colonists slowly disappearing.
87-89	Autonomous Factory Zone	Company holiday celebrations.	Strange black monolith unearthed.
90-91	Independent Frontier Settlement	Under constant threat of terrorist attacks.	A.I. meddling.
92	Covert Pirate Base	Local government crumbling.	Colonists believe settlement haunted.
93	Classified Corporate Installation	Rumors of layoffs.	Android uprising imminent.
94	Desolate Scrapworld	Overpopulation issue.	Gigantic unidentifiable fossilized remains.
95	Major Colonial Settlement	Settlement being shut down by corporate.	Reports of interference by "Celestials."
96	Religious Compound	Petty bickering escalating out of control.	Wreckage of spacecraft of unknown origin.
97	Anti-corporate Rebel Base	Population entirely synthetic.	Ruins of precursor star-faring civilization found.
98	Undisclosed Black Site	Co-opted by military as temporary base.	Ancient gateway recently uncovered.
99	Private C-Suite Game Preserve	Mutiny brewing.	First Contact event.

TERMS OF USE

Congratulations on becoming a proud owner of the **Mothership® Warden's Operations Manual™**. In purchasing this product, you agree to run Mothership® for your designated friends and family in accordance with the following rules and regulations:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| <u>pg. 34</u> | 1. There is no official way to play. Only what you and your players come up with at the table while you're playing. |
| <u>pg. 23</u> | 2. The rules are easy: roll under your Stat (plus a relevant Skill if they have one). If you roll under you succeed, if you roll equal or over you fail and gain Stress. Rolling doubles counts as a Critical Success or Failure. Everything else is up for grabs. |
| <u>pg. 37</u> | 3. Treat every monster like it's a boss monster. |
| <u>pg. 10</u> | 4. Survive, solve, or save. Pick two. |
| <u>pg. 32</u> | 5. Think of every encounter as a completely unique problem to be solved and encourage your players not to look at their character sheet for answers. |
| <u>pg. 32</u> | 6. When in doubt just give your players the odds, listen to their arguments for why they think they have a better (or worse) chance of success than you described, make adjustments as needed, then roll. |
| <u>pg. 30</u> | 7. Let your players know what is at stake when they act and give them a clear idea of what the consequences of their actions might be. |
| <u>pg. 24</u> | 8. Prioritize the safety and fun of your players over everything else. The story, rules, challenge, balance, it all takes a back seat to making sure everyone is comfortable and enjoying themselves. |
| <u>pg 55</u> | 9. Don't worry about scaring anyone, just relax and have fun with your friends. You can do this. You've been doing this your whole life. |
| <u>pg. 32</u> | 10. Only roll when absolutely necessary. |

In signing below I, _____, agree to act as Warden in games of Mothership® in accordance with the terms and principles outlined above to the best of my ability.

Signature
Warden

Sean McCoy
Co-Founder
Tuesday Knight Games, LLC

Date

Date

By opening this product, you agree to the intergalactic terms and conditions stated herein. User assumes all responsibility for any psychic trauma, inter-dimensional rifts, paradoxical time loops, or extraterrestrial invasions occurring as a result of using this product. In the unlikely event of a break in the fabric of spacetime, Tuesday Knight Games, LLC is not obligated to provide paradox resolution services. Product may not be compatible with all future realities, parallel universes, or versions of the multiverse. This product is void where prohibited by law, or where laws of physics do not apply. Game components may or may not exist in all dimensions at all times.