



AWAKE

IN THE BLACK

... CORE RULEBOOK ...

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REFERENCE

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APOGEE GAMES

FOR CREW.
FOR SURVIVAL.
FORWARD.

WELCOME ABOARD

AWAKE IN THE BLACK

a tabletop role-playing game about survival, risk, and consequence
in a fractured galaxy.

FIELD MANUAL

You are not heroes chosen by fate. You are a crew trying to stay ahead of debt, danger, and the slow collapse of everything that holds the galaxy together. You have a ship that barely holds, a reputation that follows you everywhere, and just enough opportunity to keep going if you're willing to take the risk.

The galaxy is fractured. Systems are isolated, factions compete for control, and whatever passes for law only applies when it's convenient. Out here, survival isn't about doing the right thing; it's about making the call you can live with.

Every job looks manageable at first. It never stays that way.

You will make decisions without all the information. You will take jobs you know are risky because you don't have a better option. You will push forward when the situation is already unstable because stopping is worse. And when things go wrong, which they will, the story doesn't reset. It evolves. Your mistakes matter. Your wins come with cost. Everything carries forward. At the center of it all is your crew.

No one carries the game alone. Every player has a role in how the crew survives, and the best moments come when those roles collide under pressure. One person is trying to hold things together while another is pushing further than they should. Someone is making the safe call while someone else is chasing the bigger payoff. The tension between those decisions is where the game lives.

And then there's your ship. It isn't just something you use; it's something you depend on. It takes damage, it gets pushed too far, and it reflects every bad decision you've made along the way. Over time, it becomes a record of your survival. When it finally starts to fail, it matters.

The galaxy is unstable. The jobs are dangerous. The margins are thin.

You are Awake in the Black.

What you do next is up to you.

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CHAPTER 1 //

CORE CONCEPT & GAME OVERVIEW

CHAPTER 01

01 THE CORE EXPERIENCE

At its heart, this game is a narrative-driven tabletop roleplaying experience about a crew and their ship struggling to survive, profit, and build a reputation within a dangerous and fragmented network of star systems. You do not play isolated heroes operating independently; instead, you are part of a tightly bound crew whose success or failure depends on cooperation, specialization, and the ability to adapt under pressure. Each player takes on a defined role within that crew, contributing unique strengths to overcome challenges, complete high-risk jobs, and navigate the ever-present consequences of their decisions. The galaxy is not stable, and it is not forgiving. Every opportunity carries risk, and every success leaves a mark.

02 CREW IDENTITY AND PLAYER FANTASY

The core player fantasy reinforces this idea of shared identity and interdependence. You are not just a character moving through the world; you are part of something larger, bound to a ship that carries its own history, personality, and problems. That ship is your home, your livelihood, and often your only lifeline. Success is not determined by individual heroics alone, but by how effectively your crew manages risk, leverages each member's strengths, and responds when situations inevitably begin to fall apart. The game rewards adaptability, coordination, and the willingness to act decisively even when the outcome is uncertain.

03 TONE AND THEMATIC PILLARS

The tone of play is defined by a set of consistent thematic pillars. The galaxy is a frontier, fragmented and unstable, where survival is never guaranteed. Moral clarity is rare; most choices exist in shades of gray, forcing players to weigh immediate gain against long-term consequences. Every job presents a tension between risk and stability, between playing it safe and pushing for greater reward. Reputation, debt, and consequence follow the crew from system to system, shaping how others perceive and interact with them. Above all, the game emphasizes improvisation under pressure. Plans rarely survive contact with reality, and the ability to adapt quickly is often more valuable than careful preparation.





THE CORE GAMEPLAY LOOP

Gameplay itself is structured around a repeating loop that reinforces these themes. Each session or job begins when the crew takes on a contract, opportunity, or mission. This establishes the objective, the potential reward, and the risks involved. From there, the crew must travel to their destination, navigating space through route planning, hazard avoidance, or calculated risk-taking. Travel is rarely uneventful, and complications often arise before the objective is even within reach. These complications introduce tension into the narrative, whether through external threats such as enemy ships, inspections, or environmental hazards, or internal problems like system failures and crew conflict. Once a complication emerges, the crew is forced into a decision. This is the core of play. Every choice carries trade-offs between safety, speed, profit, and long-term consequence. There are rarely perfect options, only different forms of risk. The outcome of that decision is then resolved through the game's mechanics, producing a consequence. Even successful actions can introduce strain, create new problems, or shift risk into the future. Failure, likewise, does not end the story; it reshapes it, often opening new paths forward at a cost. Afterward, the crew enters a phase of recovery or escalation. They may stabilize their situation, repair damage, and collect their reward, or they may push forward into deeper danger, chaining one complication into the next. This loop repeats, driving the narrative forward through a constant interplay of choice and consequence.

CORE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Several core principles guide how the game is played. First, the fiction always comes first. Players describe what their characters do within the narrative, and the Game Master determines how the rules apply. Mechanics exist to resolve uncertainty, not to replace the logic of the story. Second, success is rarely clean. Even when actions succeed, they often generate strain, complications, or future consequences that must be dealt with later. Third, risk is required for progress. Playing cautiously may avoid immediate danger, but it often limits rewards or creates new pressures over time. Fourth, the spotlight is shared. Each role is designed to matter, and the system encourages players to support one another and create opportunities for others to shine. Finally, the ship is treated as a character in its own right. It is central to the story, with its own strengths, weaknesses, and identity, and it evolves alongside the crew.



ROLES WITHIN THE CREW

Each player selects a Role that defines their specialization within the crew. These roles provide access to unique abilities and shape how characters approach problems. Whether acting as Pilot, Engineer, Gunner, Face, Drifter, Operative, Navigator, Scavenger, Smuggler, or Trader, each role excels in certain situations while relying on others in different contexts. This intentional overlap ensures flexibility without redundancy. No single role can solve every problem, and the most effective crews are those that learn to combine their strengths.

The Ship as a Shared Character The ship itself serves as the mechanical and narrative centerpiece of the game. It is a shared asset that enables travel, combat, trade, and survival. Mechanically, it is defined by core stats such as Frame, Drive, Core, and Signature, along with multiple strain tracks that represent damage, system stress, and external attention. It can be modified and improved through modules, upgrades, and crew enhancements, while also developing traits and quirks that reflect its history. Over time, the ship becomes a direct expression of the crew's priorities and playstyle, shaped by the choices they make and the risks they take.

Structure of a Typical Session A typical session blends multiple forms of play into a cohesive experience. Players can expect a mix of travel, social interaction, problem-solving, and at least one high-pressure scenario where the stakes are clear and the outcome matters. Each session should include meaningful decisions that involve trade-offs, complications that shift the situation in unexpected ways, opportunities for different roles to contribute, and consequences that persist beyond the immediate scene. Effective pacing alternates between tension and release, allowing moments of intensity to be followed by brief periods of recovery or planning before the next escalation.

Roles at the Table The roles at the table are clearly defined but collaborative. Players are responsible for describing their actions, engaging with the fiction, accepting the consequences of their decisions, and supporting the spotlight moments of others. The Game Master, in turn, is responsible for presenting meaningful choices, introducing complications, applying rules consistently, enforcing consequences, and maintaining the overall pacing and tension of the game. They also act as the final arbiter in unclear situations, ensuring that rulings remain fair and consistent with the tone of the game.

TABLE EXPECTATIONS AND PLAY CULTURE

The table itself operates under a set of shared expectations. This is a cooperative experience, even when characters disagree or pursue conflicting goals. Clear communication between players and the Game Master is essential, particularly regarding intent, tone, and expectations. The system is designed to be flexible; if a rule slows down play or creates confusion, the table is encouraged to resolve the issue quickly and move forward. Before play begins, the group should also align on tone, deciding whether the campaign will lean toward gritty survival, high-stakes drama, or a lighter, more adventurous style.

GETTING STARTED

For those new to the game, getting started is straightforward. Begin by creating characters using the character creation rules, then build a ship together as a group. Establish a starting job or objective that gives the crew direction, and begin play with either a travel scene or an immediate complication. The system is designed to be learned through play. As decisions are made and actions are resolved, the mechanics will quickly become intuitive, and the rhythm of the game will emerge naturally.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

Ultimately, this game is about the stories that emerge when a crew is pushed to its limits. It is about the tension between ambition and survival, the bonds that form under pressure, and the consequences that follow every decision. The galaxy is vast, unpredictable, and often hostile. What matters is how you choose to face it together.

CHAPTER 2 //

CORE MECHANICS

01

RESOLUTION FRAMEWORK

The Core Mechanics of the game define how actions are resolved when the outcome is uncertain and the stakes matter. At its foundation, the system uses a dual-pool structure built from six-sided dice. One pool represents the player's capability and intent, while the other represents resistance, difficulty, and consequence. These are known respectively as Success Dice and Failure Dice. Whenever a character attempts something risky, the player assembles their Success Dice, the Game Master assigns Failure Dice, and both pools are rolled together to determine not only whether the action succeeds, but also what additional benefits or costs emerge from the attempt.

02

WHEN TO ROLL

The central principle is straightforward. When an action carries meaningful risk, you build the dice pools, roll them simultaneously, and interpret the outcome through comparison and effect. The fiction always determines when a roll is necessary. If there is no uncertainty or no meaningful consequence, the action simply happens. The dice only enter play when both risk and stakes are present.

03

DICE TYPES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

The dice system is divided into two distinct types, each with its own function and interpretation. Success Dice are generated by the player and represent their character's ability to influence the situation. These dice typically come from the character's chosen Approach, along with any bonuses provided by roles, abilities, or deliberate risk-taking. When rolled, results of 4 through 6 count as Successes, while results of 1 through 3 generate Advantage. Failure Dice, by contrast, are assigned by the Game Master and represent opposition, environmental hazards, and situational difficulty. On these dice, results of 4 through 6 count as Failures, while results of 1 through 3 generate Strain.



BUILDING THE DICE POOL

Every roll consists of these two pools working against each other. The player first determines how they are attempting the action by selecting an Approach: Force, Finesse, Logic, or Presence. This choice reflects not what they are doing, but how they are doing it. They then build their Success Dice pool by adding a number of dice equal to their Approach rating, along with any additional bonuses from abilities or Traits. Once the player's pool is established, the Game Master assigns Failure Dice based on the situation's difficulty, the presence of danger, and any active opposition. Both pools are then rolled together in a single resolution.

BONUS DICE LIMITATION

There is an important constraint placed on this system to maintain balance and encourage creative play. A character can never gain more than +2 additional Success Dice from abilities or effects beyond their base Approach. This ensures that no character can rely solely on stacked bonuses and reinforces the importance of narrative positioning and teamwork.

INTERPRETING RESULTS: SUCCESS VS FAILURE

Once the dice are rolled, results are interpreted in two stages. First, total Successes are compared against total Failures. If the number of Successes exceeds the number of Failures, the action succeeds. If Failures equal or exceed Successes, the action fails. This binary outcome establishes whether the character achieves their immediate goal.

INTERPRETING RESULTS: ADVANTAGE AND STRAIN

The second stage introduces nuance. Advantage and Strain are counted separately from Successes and Failures. Each Advantage result creates a positive effect, while each Strain result introduces a cost, complication, or consequence. These effects apply regardless of whether the action ultimately succeeds or fails. As a result, outcomes are rarely simple. A character might succeed while generating serious complications, or fail while still gaining valuable benefits that shift the situation in their favor.





OUTCOME COMPLEXITY

This layered resolution system produces a wide range of narrative outcomes. A roll might result in a clear success with minor cost, a failure that still provides meaningful advantages, or a decisive success that comes at a steep price. For example, achieving more Successes than Failures while generating both Advantage and Strain may represent accomplishing the goal but at a cost that introduces future risk. Conversely, failing a roll while generating high Advantage can shift the situation in unexpected ways, opening new opportunities despite the immediate setback.

DIFFICULTY AND FAILURE DICE

Difficulty is controlled entirely by the Game Master through the assignment of Failure Dice. This creates a flexible and intuitive scaling system. An easy task typically involves one Failure Die, a standard challenge uses two, a difficult situation calls for three, and an extreme or highly dangerous action uses four. These values can be adjusted dynamically based on environmental conditions, preparation, available tools, and the presence or strength of opposition.

THE PUSH MECHANIC

Players also have the ability to deliberately increase their chances of success through the Push mechanic. Before rolling, a player may choose to Push, gaining an additional +2 Success Dice. However, this comes with guaranteed consequences. The player automatically generates one Strain after the roll, regardless of the outcome, and the Game Master introduces a new complication into the scene. This may also escalate broader risks, such as increasing Heat or adding strain to the ship. Push must be declared before the roll is made and still respects the overall limit on bonus dice.

USING ADVANTAGE AND STRAIN

Advantage and Strain are intentionally flexible tools that allow the narrative to evolve dynamically. Advantage can improve a character's position, grant additional dice to an ally, reveal useful information, reduce future risk, or create entirely new opportunities. Strain, on the other hand, represents the cost of action. It may inflict stress on the character or the ship, trigger complications, increase Heat, damage systems, or draw unwanted attention. The Game Master and players interpret these results collaboratively, ensuring they remain grounded in the fiction.





COOPERATION AND GROUP ACTIONS

Cooperation is built directly into the mechanics. A character may assist another by granting a single additional Success Die to their roll, representing coordinated effort or support. In group actions, one character leads while others assist, but all participants share the consequences of the outcome. This reinforces the idea that success and failure belong to the crew as a whole, not just the individual taking the lead.

WHEN NOT TO ROLL

Not every action requires a roll. The system explicitly avoids unnecessary dice use. If an outcome is guaranteed or lacks meaningful consequence, it resolves through narration alone. Rolls are reserved for moments where risk is present and the stakes are significant. This keeps gameplay focused and prevents the mechanics from slowing down the narrative.

EDGE CASES AND SYSTEM SAFEGUARDS

Several edge cases ensure that the system remains consistent and functional in all scenarios. If Successes and Failures are equal, the action fails, but all Advantage generated still applies, often creating partial progress or new opportunities. If a character would roll no Success Dice, they instead roll a single die, which can only generate Advantage. This ensures that even the least favorable situations can produce narrative movement. If no Failure Dice are assigned, the action automatically succeeds, but Success Dice are still rolled to determine Advantage.

STEP-BY-STEP RESOLUTION

In practice, the resolution process follows a clear sequence. The player chooses an Approach, builds their Success Dice pool, and the Game Master assigns Failure Dice. Both pools are rolled together, Successes and Failures are compared, and then Advantage and Strain are applied. Finally, the outcome is described within the fiction, incorporating both the result and its consequences.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

Taken together, these mechanics create a system where every roll matters. Outcomes are rarely absolute, and even failure can drive the story forward. Players are constantly weighing risk against reward, deciding when to push their luck and when to play cautiously. The result is a dynamic, consequence-driven experience where the story evolves through both success and failure, and where every decision leaves a lasting impact.



CHAPTER 3 //

CHARACTER CREATION

OVERVIEW AND CORE PRINCIPLE

Character creation is designed to be fast, clear, and flexible, allowing players to move from concept to play in minutes while still making meaningful decisions that define identity and playstyle. The system is built around a simple core principle: define who your character is, how they approach problems, and what role they play within the crew.

01 — 02 — 03 — 04 — 05 — 06 — 07 — 08 — 09 — 10

01

01 // CONCEPT

Character Creation Step 01 of 10

The process begins with a concept. This should be a short, focused description of who your character is and how they fit into the crew. A strong concept acts as a guiding anchor, shaping how your character behaves under pressure and informing every mechanical choice that follows.

Keep the concept simple and clear. Focus on background, personality, or a prior role that informs how the character operates. It should be flexible enough to grow but specific enough to guide decisions.

Examples include a former military pilot turned smuggler, a quiet infiltrator with a criminal past, a scrap-deck mechanic obsessed with machines, or a smooth-talking broker buried in debt.

CHARACTER CREATION // SPECIES SELECTION

01

02

03

04

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02

02 // SPECIES SELECTION

Character Creation Step 02 of 10

After establishing your concept, choose a species. Species provide identity, cultural context, and a small mechanical influence, but they are not intended to define your character's effectiveness. Each species grants one Passive Trait, which is always active, and one Edge Ability, which is situational or limited in use.

CHARACTER CREATION

HUMANS

Passive Trait: Adaptive Instinct
Reroll a single die once per session, whether from the Success or Failure pool.

Edge Ability: Push Through
Ignore one Strain from a roll, but immediately gain one Strain afterward.

DROIDS

Passive Trait: Machine Precision
+1 Success Die on Logic-based rolls.

Edge Ability: System Override
Automatically succeed at a simple technical task, but gain one Systems Strain equivalent, applied as Mental Strain. Droids track System Stress instead of Mental Strain.

VELARI

Passive Trait: Field Awareness
Remove one Failure Die from detection or navigation rolls.

Edge Ability: Pulse Sense
Detect hidden signals, ships, or anomalies, with the GM revealing one hidden element in the scene.

CHARACTER CREATION // SPECIES + APPROACHES

DRATH

Passive Trait: Built to Endure
Reduce incoming Physical Strain by one, to a minimum of zero.

Edge Ability: Unstoppable
Ignore all penalties from Physical Strain for one action, then gain additional strain afterward.

MYRR

Passive Trait: Emotional Read
+1 Success Die on social insight or deception detection.

Edge Ability: Neural Sync
Transfer one Advantage to an ally's roll at the cost of one Mental Strain.

DESIGN NOTE // SPECIES DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Species are intentionally balanced to reinforce narrative identity rather than mechanical optimization. They provide flavor and occasional mechanical impact but should never override Role or Approach as the primary driver of gameplay. Players should choose species based on concept, not optimization. Game Masters should reinforce species identity through cultural context, NPC reactions, and worldbuilding.

01 — 02 — 03 — 04 — 05 — 06 — 07 — 08 — 09 — 10

03

03 // ASSIGN APPROACHES

Character Creation Step 03 of 10

Next, assign values to your four Approaches: Force, Finesse, Logic, and Presence. These represent how your character acts rather than what they do.

You assign one Approach a value of three, one a value of two, and the remaining two a value of one. No Approach may exceed three or fall below one at creation.

These values determine the size of your Success Dice pool and define your strengths and weaknesses. This ensures that every character has a clear specialization while remaining capable in other areas.

APPROACH ALLOCATION

3 FORCE

2 FINESSE

1 LOGIC

1 PRESENCE

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

04

04 // CHOOSE A ROLE

Character Creation Step 04 of 10

Choose your starting Role. Your Role defines your primary specialization within the crew and grants access to a Skill Tree that shapes your progression.

This grants a Role Tag, access to abilities, and establishes how your character contributes to the crew. Roles do not limit what you can attempt; they define what you are best at.

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

05

05 // STARTING ABILITY

Character Creation Step 05 of 10

Select one Tier 1 ability from your chosen Role. This ability is free at character creation and represents your first meaningful mechanical advantage.

It defines how you begin interacting with the system and reinforces your specialization immediately.

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

06

06 // TRAIT

Character Creation Step 06 of 10

Choose one Trait that represents a defining strength or edge. Once per session, when your Trait clearly applies, you gain +1 Success Die on a roll.

Traits should be broad enough to matter but narrow enough to avoid constant application. They should reflect background, training, or personality and require Game Master approval.

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

07

07 // PROBLEM

Character Creation Step 07 of 10

Every character must take a Problem. A Problem is a source of tension, risk, or complication that shapes your experience.

If your Problem meaningfully complicates the session, you gain +1 XP at the end of play. Problems should influence decisions, create conflict, and be easy for the Game Master to introduce.

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

08

08 // LOADOUT

Character Creation Step 08 of 10

Choose your starting equipment. You begin with one Personal Item and one Utility Item.

Your Personal Item is something iconic or central to your character, such as a sidearm, blade, toolkit, or data slate. Your Utility Item is a practical tool for solving problems, such as a med patch, repair kit, scanner, or climbing gear.

Equipment is primarily narrative unless otherwise specified.

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

09

09 // STARTING RESOURCES

Character Creation Step 09 of 10

Begin with a small pool of resources that reflects your starting position. You start with two Cred, one Part, and no Assets.

Cred is used for transactions and services. Parts are used for repairs and modifications. Assets represent temporary advantages gained during play.

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

10

10 // OPTIONAL MULTICLASSING

Character Creation Step 10 of 10

For players who want additional flexibility, there is an optional multiclass rule. By spending one starting experience point, you may gain a Tier 1 ability from a second Role.

You may have a maximum of two Roles at creation, and Game Master approval is recommended. New players are encouraged to skip this option until they are comfortable with the system.

CHARACTER CREATION

DESIGN NOTES

Character creation is intentionally streamlined and should take approximately five to seven minutes. Depth emerges over time through advancement, ability selection, and narrative development rather than complexity at the start. Flexibility is built into the system. Characters evolve through experience, abilities, and potential multiclassing. Balance comes from meaningful choices, not starting power.

QUICK REFERENCE

Create a concept, choose a species, assign Approaches in a 3, 2, 1, 1 distribution, choose a Role, select a Tier 1 ability, choose a Trait and a Problem, pick your equipment, and record your resources. From there, you are ready to begin play immediately.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

Character creation is about establishing direction, not completion. Your character is not fully realized at the start. They become defined through risk, consequence, and the decisions you make alongside your crew.



CHAPTER 4 //

ACTIONS & APPROACHES

CHAPTER 04

01

CORE PRINCIPLE: ACTION VS APPROACH

Actions define what characters attempt to do within the fiction, while Approaches define how they do it. Every meaningful roll in the game is built from this relationship. Players begin by describing their intent in the narrative, grounding their action in the fiction, and only then select the Approach that best reflects how their character is acting. This sequence is essential. You do not choose an Approach first and then justify it; you describe what you are doing, and the appropriate Approach naturally follows.

02

THE FOUR APPROACHES

There are four Approaches, each representing a distinct method of solving problems. None of them are inherently superior; each becomes powerful when applied in the right context. Force represents direct, aggressive, or overpowering action. It relies on strength, durability, and blunt execution, whether that means breaking through a door, overpowering an opponent, forcing a damaged system to function, or using intimidation backed by credible threat. Finesse emphasizes precision, control, and subtle execution. It governs careful, deliberate actions such as sneaking past guards, piloting through tight or hazardous environments, bypassing locks, or executing precise maneuvers. Logic is rooted in analysis, technical knowledge, and structured problem-solving. It applies when repairing systems, hacking networks, identifying weaknesses, or planning efficient strategies. Presence governs social influence and emotional control, shaping how characters interact with others through negotiation, deception, authority, or insight into motives.



CHOOSING AN APPROACH

Choosing an Approach is a collaborative process between player and Game Master. The player proposes an Approach based on how their character is acting, but the GM has final authority to determine whether that choice fits the situation. The system is intentionally flexible, and many problems can be approached in multiple valid ways. Getting past a guard, for example, might involve sneaking past unnoticed using Finesse, talking your way through using Presence, knocking them out with Force, or manipulating a nearby system using Logic to create a distraction. Likewise, repairing a damaged engine might be handled through careful diagnosis with Logic, brute-force stabilization with Force, or delicate balancing of components with Finesse. The chosen Approach does not change the objective; it changes the method, and therefore the risks and outcomes.

ACTION RESOLUTION SEQUENCE

Once an action is clearly described and the Approach is agreed upon, resolution follows a consistent sequence. The player describes their action, selects the Approach that matches their intent, builds their Success Dice pool, and the GM assigns Failure Dice based on the situation. The dice are then rolled and the outcome is resolved. If there is any ambiguity in what the player is attempting or how they are doing it, the GM may pause and ask for clarification before allowing the roll. This ensures that every action remains grounded in the fiction and that the chosen Approach is appropriate.

APPROACH AND DIFFICULTY

Approach selection can influence difficulty. Some methods are simply better suited to certain situations than others. The GM is encouraged to reward logical, well-matched Approaches by reducing difficulty or allowing cleaner outcomes, while poorly suited Approaches may increase difficulty or introduce additional risk. For example, forcing open a sealed airlock with raw strength may be more effective than attempting delicate manipulation, while trying to finesse a situation that clearly requires technical understanding may introduce complications. This dynamic reinforces meaningful choice; how you act matters just as much as what you attempt.

APPROACH AND ADVANTAGE

Approaches shape how Advantage is interpreted. The same mechanical result can produce very different narrative outcomes depending on how the action was performed. Advantage gained through Force might represent overwhelming impact, intimidation, or collateral dominance. Through Finesse, it might reflect improved positioning, stealth, or precision. Logic-based Advantage often manifests as deeper understanding, efficiency, or system control, while Presence generates influence, trust, or leverage over others. This ensures that outcomes remain consistent with the method used, reinforcing the connection between mechanics and narrative.



APPROACH AND STRAIN

Strain follows a similar pattern. It represents the cost of action, and that cost is shaped by the Approach used. Force often generates physical exhaustion or collateral damage. Finesse may lead to loss of balance, exposure, or timing errors. Logic can result in system instability or miscalculation, while Presence may create suspicion, backlash, or damage to credibility. By tying Strain directly to Approach, the system ensures that consequences feel appropriate and grounded in the fiction rather than arbitrary.

LAYERED OUTCOMES

A key feature of the system is that outcomes are layered rather than binary. Success or failure is determined first, but Advantage and Strain are applied independently. This means that failure can still produce meaningful benefits, and success can still create significant complications. A character might fail to bypass a security system but gain valuable insight into how it works, or successfully negotiate a deal while incurring a future obligation. This structure ensures that every roll moves the narrative forward, regardless of the immediate result.

CREATIVITY AND PLAYER AGENCY

Players are encouraged to think creatively when proposing actions. The system is built to reward inventive problem-solving, especially when it aligns with the fiction and the established world. The GM should support this by reducing difficulty, granting additional Advantage, or introducing new opportunities when a player presents a clever or compelling approach. However, creativity is not without limits. Every action must remain grounded in the logic of the setting, and not every idea will be viable in every situation.





TEAMWORK AND COMBINED APPROACHES

Teamwork adds another layer of depth to Approaches. Different characters can combine their methods within a single coordinated action, creating layered solutions that feel more dynamic than individual efforts. A Pilot might use Finesse to maneuver through a dangerous environment, while an Engineer applies Logic to stabilize failing systems, and a Gunner uses Force to suppress incoming threats. These combined efforts create richer outcomes and reinforce the importance of crew coordination.

LIMITS AND GM AUTHORITY

There are limits to flexibility. If an Approach does not reasonably apply to the situation, the GM may deny the roll, increase difficulty, or require a different Approach. If multiple Approaches are valid, the player retains the choice. If intent is unclear, the GM should pause the action and clarify before proceeding. These guidelines ensure that the system remains consistent and that decisions are always grounded in the fiction.

PRACTICAL RESOLUTION FLOW

In practice, resolving an action follows a simple sequence. The player describes what their character does, selects the appropriate Approach, confirms it with the GM, builds the dice pool, and resolves the outcome. The key principle to remember is that the Approach defines how the action is performed, not just what is attempted. This distinction is what gives the system its depth, allowing the same situation to unfold in dramatically different ways depending on the choices the players make.





CHAPTER 5 //

ADVANCEMENT & XP

CHAPTER 05

01

CORE PHILOSOPHY OF ADVANCEMENT

Advancement represents growth earned through experience, risk, and consequence. Characters do not improve simply by succeeding; they improve by engaging with the fiction, taking meaningful risks, and contributing to the evolving story of the crew. The system is built on a simple principle: experience rewards participation, impact, and decision-making under pressure, not just favorable outcomes.

02

BASE EXPERIENCE GAIN

At the end of each session, every character gains a baseline amount of experience. This base reward reflects meaningful participation, regardless of whether the crew succeeded or failed in their objectives. As long as a player was actively engaged in the session and contributed to the narrative, they receive this experience. This ensures that progress remains steady and that failure remains a valid and valuable part of play.

03

BONUS EXPERIENCE

Additional experience can be earned through specific types of impact. The Game Master may award a bonus point of experience for exceptional moments, such as creative problem-solving, high-risk decisions, strong roleplay, or contributions that significantly shape the direction of the story. This reward is intentionally limited to maintain balance and consistency, typically no more than one bonus point per player per session.





PROBLEM-BASED EXPERIENCE

Characters are also rewarded for engaging with their Problems. When a Problem meaningfully complicates a session, the player gains additional experience. This complication must have a real effect on the situation; it cannot simply be mentioned in passing. The intent is to encourage players to lean into their character's flaws and narrative tensions, using them to drive the story forward rather than avoiding them.

GROUP RECOGNITION (MVP)

At the conclusion of each session, the group participates in a recognition system by nominating one player as the session's most impactful contributor. This "MVP" is not chosen based on screen time, but on who drove the story forward, took meaningful risks, or supported the group in a critical way. The nominated player gains additional experience. Players cannot nominate themselves, and groups are encouraged to rotate recognition over time to maintain balance.

EXPERIENCE CAP

To maintain consistent pacing, experience gain is capped. A character may earn no more than four experience points in a single session. This cap ensures steady progression while preventing rapid power spikes that could disrupt balance or diminish long-term growth.

WHEN EXPERIENCE CAN BE SPENT

Experience is not spent immediately. It may only be used at the end of a session or during downtime, never during active scenes or encounters. This restriction prevents sudden mid-action power shifts and ensures that advancement reflects time, reflection, and development within the narrative. Players may also choose to save experience across multiple sessions, allowing them to invest in more significant upgrades.





SPENDING EXPERIENCE: CORE OPTIONS

There are several ways to spend experience, each representing a different path of growth.

SKILL TREE ADVANCEMENT

The most direct option is to purchase abilities from a Role's Skill Tree. These abilities are structured in tiers, and players must progress through them sequentially, gaining at least one ability from a lower tier before accessing higher ones. Costs scale with power, with Tier 1 abilities being inexpensive and higher tiers requiring greater investment. This structure ensures deliberate and traceable growth.

GAINING A NEW ROLE

Characters may expand their versatility by acquiring a new Role. This is accomplished by purchasing a Tier 1 ability from that Role, which grants both the ability and the associated Role Tag. This system allows multiclassing and hybrid builds without adding complexity. Characters grow into new roles through their choices rather than selecting them upfront.

IMPROVING APPROACHES

Another path of advancement is improving your Approaches. Increasing an Approach represents refining your fundamental method of solving problems. Each increase costs experience equal to the new value of the Approach, creating a scaling investment. No Approach may exceed a value of five. This forces players to balance consistency against versatility and specialization.

NARRATIVE-BASED ADVANCEMENT

Beyond these core options, additional forms of advancement may emerge through the narrative. The Game Master may introduce unique abilities, faction-based perks, or specialized training opportunities. These options should always be grounded in the story and reflect the character's experiences within the world.





CONVERTING CRED TO EXPERIENCE

Characters also have the option to convert wealth into growth. By investing a significant amount of cred, a character may gain additional experience, representing access to training, equipment, or external resources. This conversion is limited to once per session, cannot exceed the overall experience cap, and must be justified within the fiction. It cannot be used during active scenes and remains subject to Game Master approval. This mechanic introduces a meaningful trade-off between immediate resources and long-term advancement, reinforcing the tension between survival and growth.

PROGRESSION PACE

Progression in this system is intentionally paced to support long-term play. Characters typically gain between two and four experience points per session. Smaller upgrades, such as Tier 2 abilities or minor improvements, can often be achieved within one or two sessions. More significant advancements, such as higher-tier abilities or Approach increases, require sustained investment over several sessions. Major capabilities emerge over longer periods, reinforcing a sense of earned growth.

STRATEGIC ADVANCEMENT

Players are encouraged to approach advancement strategically. Balancing short-term gains with long-term goals is often more effective than focusing solely on immediate upgrades. Over-specializing too early can create vulnerabilities, while coordinated progression within the crew can significantly improve group effectiveness. Advancement is not just an individual decision; it shapes how the crew operates as a whole.





GAME MASTER GUIDANCE

For Game Masters, experience is a tool for reinforcing desired play behavior. Rewards should emphasize risk-taking, meaningful decisions, and engagement with the narrative, rather than simple success. Consistent pacing across players is important to maintain balance and ensure that no one falls behind or advances too quickly. Experience should reflect the story that was told, not just the outcomes achieved.

PRACTICAL ADVANCEMENT FLOW

In practice, advancement follows a simple structure. Each session, players gain a base amount of experience, with opportunities to earn additional points through impactful play, engagement with Problems, and group recognition. There is a cap on total experience gained per session, and all experience is spent between sessions or during downtime. Players can use this experience to improve their Roles, increase their Approaches, or expand into new specializations.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

Ultimately, advancement is not just about becoming more powerful. It is about becoming more defined. Each choice reflects how your character adapts to the challenges they face, what risks they are willing to take, and how they grow alongside their crew.





CHAPTER 6 //

PLAYER ROLES & SKILL TREES

01

CORE ROLE PHILOSOPHY

Roles define how characters contribute to the crew, both narratively and mechanically. While any character can attempt any action, a Role establishes where that character excels, what tools they bring to the table, and how they shape the outcome of high-pressure situations. Roles are not restrictions; they are specialization. They provide structure without limiting creativity, ensuring that every player has a clear way to influence the story while still allowing flexibility in how problems are approached. Each Role operates on two levels. The first is narrative identity, defining how the character fits into the crew and the types of problems they naturally solve. The second is mechanical identity, defining how the character interacts with the system through abilities that manipulate dice, outcomes, and risk. Together, these layers ensure that Roles feel meaningful both in the story and at the table.

02

SKILL TREE STRUCTURE

All Roles progress through structured Skill Trees composed of five tiers. Lower-tier abilities provide foundational tools and small advantages, while higher-tier abilities introduce powerful effects that can significantly alter outcomes. However, this power always comes with cost. As abilities increase in strength, they introduce greater risk, delayed consequences, or additional strain. This ensures that no ability removes tension from the game. Instead, abilities shift or amplify it, reinforcing the system's core design. Tier 1 abilities establish core functionality and immediate identity. Tier 2 expands flexibility. Tier 3 and Tier 4 introduce strong outcome control and risk manipulation. Tier 5 abilities represent peak capability, often defining entire scenes, but always with significant consequences.



ROLE TREE //

DRIFTER

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Drifter survives where plans fail. They are the one who keeps things moving when everything starts to fall apart; the one who acts when there is no clean option left. Where others rely on preparation, the Drifter relies on instinct, improvisation, and a willingness to take risks that no one else will. They don't avoid bad situations; they reshape them.

In play, the Drifter thrives in uncertainty. They turn failure into opportunity, trade stability for momentum, and push outcomes in unpredictable directions. They are at their best when the crew is off-balance, when the job has gone sideways, and when the only path forward is the one no one planned for.

TIER 1

Make It Work
Flat Effect
Treat any Approach as if it were 1 higher once per scene
Lucky Break
Conversion
Convert 1 Strain into Success; no Advantage
Off-Script
Dice Boost
+1 die when acting outside expected role
Scavenged
Know-How
Flat Effect
Attempt actions without proper tools; consequences still apply

TIER 2

Reroll
Instinct
Conversion
Reroll 1 die; must accept result
Twist the Outcome
Conversion
Convert 1 Advantage into a narrative twist
Unplanned
Entry
Push
Enhancement
+1 die when pushing; introduces complication

TIER 3

Fail Forward
Conversion
Failure becomes partial success with complication
Borrowed Time
Flat Effect
Ignore consequence temporarily; returns worse later

TIER 4

Chaos Engine
Conversion
Swap die results; gain 1 Strain
Unstable Advantage
Flat Effect
Double Advantage; add major complication

TIER 5

No Plan
Survives
Push Override
Success with 2 Advantage; major complication and strain

ROLE TREE //

ENGINEER

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Engineer keeps the ship alive when it has no right to be. They understand how everything fits together; more importantly, they understand how it breaks. When systems overload, when damage starts to cascade, and when failure feels inevitable, the Engineer is the one holding it all together long enough for the crew to survive.

In play, the Engineer is about control and trade-offs. They can delay collapse, reroute problems, and push systems beyond their limits, but every fix comes with a cost. Stability is never permanent; it is something they fight to maintain moment by moment. The Engineer doesn't prevent failure; they decide when it happens, and what it costs when it does.

TIER 1

Patch Kit
Flat Effect
Clear 1 Ship Strain once per scene
System Familiarity Dice Boost
+1 die on own ship systems
Quick Reroute
Conversion
Convert Strain to Advantage
Jury Access
Flat Effect
Use damaged systems without penalty

TIER 2

Power
Redistribution
Push
Enhancement
+1 die or extra repair; adds
Systems Strain
Stabilize Failure
Conversion
Prevent escalation on failure
Efficiency Loop
Flat Effect
First repair gains extra effect

TIER 3

Overclock System
Push
Enhancement
Boost system; adds Heat and a Condition
Ghost in the Machine
Conversion
Failure becomes partial success with instability

TIER 4

Total Reroute
Flat Effect
Shift damage between systems
Emergency Sustain
Conversion
Reduce major failure; add Strain

TIER 5

It Still Flies
Push Override
Ignore Conditions temporarily; system collapse later

ROLE TREE //

FACE

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Face shapes outcomes before they ever become problems. Where others rely on force or technical skill, the Face relies on timing, perception, and leverage. They read people, understand what matters to them, and use that knowledge to turn conflict into opportunity. A situation that would become a fight for someone else becomes a negotiation in their hands.

In play, the Face controls the direction of social encounters and often the flow of entire scenes. They create advantages before action begins, smooth over failures after they happen, and turn small openings into meaningful leverage. Their power comes from influence, but it is never free; every deal creates obligation, every favor builds debt, and every success ties them deeper into the web of relationships that define the galaxy.

TIER 1

Read the Room Flat Effect
Ask the GM a question about an NPC's intent
Silver Tongue Dice Boost
+1 die on first impressions
Shift the Tone
Conversion
Convert Strain into Advantage
Friendly
Angle
Flat Effect
Reduce the first social complication

TIER 2

Leverage
Point
Flat Effect
Declare leverage in a situation
Smooth Over
Conversion
Failure becomes partial success
Name Drop
Push
Enhancement
+1 die; adds reputation risk

TIER 3

Bind the Deal Flat Effect
Force a short-term agreement; adds complication
Turn the Blame
Conversion
Redirect consequences to another party

TIER 4

Social Gravity
Flat Effect
Control escalation within a scene
Debt
Collector
Conversion
Call in a favor; create a new debt

TIER 5

Close the Deal
Push Override
Force an outcome; major complication follows

ROLE TREE //

PILOT

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Pilot decides whether the crew gets out alive. When space turns hostile, when the path forward narrows to a single impossible line, and when hesitation means disaster, the Pilot is the one in control. They read movement, anticipate danger, and push the ship through situations that should not be survivable.

In play, the Pilot controls positioning, pacing, and escape. They are the difference between taking a hit and slipping past it, between getting trapped and breaking through. Their strength is not just speed, but judgment; knowing when to push harder, when to hold the line, and when to risk everything on a single maneuver. A great Pilot doesn't avoid danger; they move through it before it can close.

TIER 1

Evasive
Maneuvers
Dice Boost
+1 die when avoiding damage or danger
Steady Hand
Flat Effect
Ignore minor complications while
piloting
Push the Engines Push
Enhancement
+1 die on movement; adds Heat
Situational
Awareness
Flat Effect
Reduce first movement-related penalty

TIER 2

Tight Vector
Dice Boost
+1 die in confined or hazardous space
Ride the Edge
Conversion
Turn Strain into Advantage while
piloting
Burn Hard
Push
Enhancement
Gain major movement boost; adds Heat
and Strain

TIER 3

Perfect Line
Flat Effect
Negate a major movement complication
Slip Through
Conversion
Failure becomes partial success when
escaping

TIER 4

Ghost Run
Flat Effect
Avoid detection during movement
Vector Shift
Conversion
Redirect outcome of a movement-based
failure

TIER 5

Impossible
Maneuver
Push Override
Automatically succeed at extreme
movement; major strain and
consequence

ROLE TREE //

GUNNER

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Gunner is what happens when avoidance is no longer an option. When the situation turns hostile and something has to give, the Gunner is the one who applies pressure until it breaks. They don't just fire weapons; they control escalation, dictate tempo, and decide how far a conflict goes.

In play, the Gunner is about decisive action. They convert opportunity into damage, force enemies into bad positions, and end threats before they can spiral further. But power comes with cost. Every shot builds heat, every escalation narrows options, and every decision to fire commits the crew to a path that is harder to walk back. The Gunner doesn't just solve problems; they make sure those solutions matter.

TIER 1

Target Lock
Dice Boost
+1 die when attacking a marked target
Controlled Burst Flat Effect
Reduce collateral or secondary consequences
Suppressive Fire Conversion
Convert Success into Advantage (control space)
Weapons
Familiarity
Flat Effect
Ignore minor penalties with ship weapons

TIER 2

Armor Breaker
Conversion
Convert Advantage into additional damage
Sustained Fire
Push
Enhancement
+1 die on repeated attacks; adds Heat
Threat
Assessment
Flat Effect
Identify weakest target or system

TIER 3

Overload Shot
Push
Enhancement
Deal heavy damage; adds Heat and Systems Strain
Pin Them Down
Conversion
Success creates restriction on enemy action

TIER 4

Kill Zone
Flat Effect
Control an area; enemies act at disadvantage
Chain Reaction
Conversion
Damage spreads to secondary targets

TIER 5

End It Now
Push Override
Overwhelming success in combat; severe Heat and consequence

ROLE TREE //

NAVIGATOR

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Navigator keeps the crew from walking into disaster blind. They read routes, patterns, and signals that others miss, turning uncertainty into something manageable. Where the Pilot reacts in the moment, the Navigator shapes the situation before it ever reaches that point.

In play, the Navigator is about anticipation and control. They reduce risk before it becomes pressure, uncover hidden threats, and create safer paths through dangerous space. They don't eliminate danger; they make it predictable. Their strength lies in knowing what's coming and giving the crew just enough advantage to act before it's too late.

TIER 1

Scan Ahead
Flat Effect
Ask the GM about an upcoming threat or condition
Route Mapping
Dice Boost
+1 die on travel or navigation
Signal Read
Flat Effect
Detect hidden signals or anomalies
Safe Passage
Flat Effect
Reduce first travel-related complication

TIER 2

Predictive Path
Conversion
Convert Failure into Advantage on travel
Chart the Unknown
Flat Effect
Remove uncertainty from a route
Data Sync
Push
Enhancement
+1 die for crew action; adds minor complication

TIER 3

Thread the Gap
Conversion
Partial success avoids major travel consequence
Pattern
Recognition
Flat Effect
Identify repeating threats or behaviors

TIER 4

Ghost Route
Flat Effect
Avoid detection during travel
Reroute
Consequence
Conversion
Redirect a travel-based complication

TIER 5

Nowhere to Now
Push Override
Bypass major obstacle entirely; introduces major complication

ROLE TREE //

OPERATOR

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Operator ensures problems never become visible. They move through systems, environments, and defenses without drawing attention, removing obstacles before they escalate into conflict. Where others react to danger, the Operator acts early, quietly shaping the situation so the crew never has to face it head-on.

In play, the Operator is about control through absence. They bypass security, eliminate threats, and create openings without triggering escalation. Their success often goes unnoticed, but it changes everything. However, precision comes with cost. Every silent action leaves traces, every bypass creates vulnerability, and every clean solution risks a larger complication waiting to surface later.

TIER 1

Silent Movement
Dice Boost
+1 die when moving undetected or avoiding notice
Close Access
Flat Effect
Ignore minor barriers like locks, seals, or basic security
Clean Strike
Conversion
Convert 1 Advantage into a silent takedown or neutralization
Shadow Presence
Flat Effect
Remain unnoticed unless directly observed or engaged

TIER 2

Infiltration
Route
Flat Effect
Identify a hidden or less-guarded path into a location
Disable System
Conversion
Turn a success into a temporary system shutdown or disruption
Vanish
Push
Enhancement
+1 die to escape detection; introduces a complication

TIER 3

Perfect Entry
Conversion
Failure becomes partial success; remain undetected with complication
Controlled
Breach
Flat Effect
Bypass a major barrier quietly; delayed consequence

TIER 4

Ghost Operative
Flat Effect
Cannot be detected by standard means during stealth actions
Precision
Collapse
Conversion
Remove a target or system entirely; significant consequence

TIER 5

One Shot, One Outcome
Push Override
Automatic success on critical stealth/elimination; major fallout

ROLE TREE //

SMUGGLER

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Smuggler doesn't avoid danger; they move through it without being seen. They understand how systems work, where they fail, and how to exploit the space between enforcement and oversight. Cargo gets through, people disappear, and information moves where it shouldn't; all without drawing the kind of attention that leads to problems. In play, the Smuggler is about concealment and misdirection. They reduce scrutiny, manipulate inspections, and turn controlled space into something navigable. Their strength is not in stopping conflict, but in never triggering it in the first place. But nothing stays hidden forever. Every successful run increases attention, builds suspicion, and creates a trail that someone will eventually follow.

TIER 1

Hidden
Compartments
Flat Effect
Conceal items from standard inspections unless specifically searched
Low Profile
Dice Boost
+1 die when avoiding attention, inspections, or scrutiny
Mislabel Cargo
Conversion
Convert 1 Advantage into false identification or documentation
Routine Run
Flat Effect
Treat common transport situations as low-risk unless escalated

TIER 2

False Manifest
Flat Effect
Create convincing cargo records or identities
Slip Inspection Conversion
Failure becomes partial success during an inspection
Quiet Transit
Push
Enhancement
+1 die to avoid detection; increases future scrutiny or Heat

TIER 3

Ghost Cargo
Flat Effect
Certain cargo cannot be detected without specialized methods
Redirect
Attention
Conversion
Shift inspection or suspicion to another target

TIER 4

Black Route
Flat Effect
Access hidden or illegal transport routes; introduces risk
Perfect Cover
Conversion
Completely avoid detection in a scene; adds future complication

TIER 5

Nothing to Declare
Push Override Automatically bypass major inspection; generates significant Heat or long-term consequence

ROLE TREE //

SCAVENGER

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Scavenger sees value where everyone else sees loss. Wreckage, damaged systems, abandoned sites; none of it is wasted. Where others move on from failure, the Scavenger stays behind long enough to extract something useful. They understand how things break, and more importantly, how to take those broken pieces and turn them into something that keeps the crew going.

In play, the Scavenger is about recovery and conversion. They turn destruction into resources, stabilize bad situations just enough to keep moving, and ensure the crew can survive longer than they should. But there is always risk. The best salvage comes from the most dangerous places, and the more they push for value, the more likely they are to trigger instability, attract attention, or make a bad situation worse.

TIER 1

Scrap Sense
Flat Effect
Identify valuable parts or materials in damaged systems or environments
Quick Salvage
Dice Boost
+1 die when extracting resources under time pressure
Break It Down
Conversion
Convert 1 Advantage into usable Parts or materials
Nothing Wasted Flat Effect
Always recover minimal resources from any wreck or failure

TIER 2

Efficient
Strip
Flat Effect
Increase yield from intact or partially intact systems
Risky Harvest
Push
Enhancement
+1 die on dangerous salvage; adds Strain
Salvage
Insight
Conversion
Failure still yields partial resources or information

TIER 3

Field Rebuild
Flat Effect
Convert Parts into temporary repairs during a scene
Chain
Extraction
Conversion
Gain additional salvage from connected systems

TIER 4

Deep Strip
Flat Effect
Extract high-value components from heavily damaged or hostile environments
Resource
Conversion
Conversion
Convert excess materials into a different useful resource

TIER 5

Turn the Wreck Push Override
Convert a destroyed asset into significant resources; major complication or consequence

ROLE TREE //

TRADER

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Trader understands that survival isn't just about completing the job; it's about making the job worth it. They see value where others don't, recognize leverage before it becomes obvious, and shape deals long before they are finalized. Goods, information, access; everything has a price, and the Trader knows how to set it.

In play, the Trader controls the economic layer of the game. They turn outcomes into profit, secure better terms, and ensure that the crew's effort translates into real advantage. But value always comes with strings attached. Every deal creates obligation, every advantage shifts attention, and every successful transaction places the crew deeper into networks that expect something in return. The Trader doesn't just make money; they decide what things are worth, and who pays the cost.

TIER 1

Appraisal
Flat Effect
Determine the true value of goods, assets, or opportunities
Market Sense
Dice Boost
+1 die when buying, selling, or negotiating value
Trade Margin
Conversion
Convert 1 Advantage into increased profit or favorable terms
Established
Contact
Flat Effect
Access a known buyer or seller in most populated areas

TIER 2

Bundle Deal
Flat Effect
Combine multiple items for improved trade value
Hard Bargain
Conversion
Failure becomes partial success in negotiation
Speculative
Play
Push
Enhancement
+1 die on risky deal; introduces future complication

TIER 3

Liquid Assets
Flat Effect
Quickly convert goods into usable Cred or resources
Market Shift
Conversion
Change value or outcome of a deal in your favor

TIER 4

Exclusive
Contract
Flat Effect
Secure a deal others cannot access; creates obligation
Price Control
Conversion
Influence cost of a transaction; adds risk or attention

TIER 5

Own the Deal
Push Override
Fully control a major transaction; significant long-term consequence

ROLE TREE //

MEDIC

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Medic keeps the crew functional when they should already be down. They understand the limits of the body and mind, and more importantly, how to push those limits without crossing them; at least not immediately. When injuries mount and stress begins to take its toll, the Medic is the one deciding who keeps moving and who doesn't. In play, the Medic controls strain and survival. They delay breakdown, stabilize critical moments, and keep the crew in action long enough to finish the job. But nothing they do is permanent. Every recovery is temporary, every delay comes at a cost, and every life saved carries consequences that must be paid later. The Medic doesn't remove damage; they decide when it matters.

TIER 1

Field
Stabilization
Flat Effect
Reduce 1 Physical or Mental Strain for an ally once per scene
Triage
Dice Boost
+1 die when treating injuries or stabilizing under pressure
Pain Management
Conversion
Convert 1 Strain into Advantage for the target
Basic Kit
Flat Effect
Treat injuries without proper facilities; consequences still apply

TIER 2

Quick Patch
Flat Effect
Remove minor injury penalties for one scene
Stabilize
Collapse
Conversion
Prevent escalation to a higher Strain threshold
Stim Push
Push
Enhancement
+1 die to ally's next action; adds 1 Strain afterward

TIER 3

Keep Them Moving Flat Effect
Ignore Strain penalties for one scene; consequences apply later
Controlled
Recovery
Conversion
Failure becomes partial success when treating serious harm

TIER 4

Emergency
Override
Flat Effect
Prevent incapacitation; heavy Strain afterward
Transfer the Load
Conversion
Move Strain between characters (with consent)

TIER 5

Not Today
Push Override
Avoid incapacitation entirely; maximum Strain and major consequence later

ROLE TREE //

TECH

ROLE IDENTITY AND PLAYSTYLE

The Tech doesn't just fix systems; they take control of them. Doors open when they shouldn't, sensors report what they want them to report, and networks reveal more than they were designed to. Where others see security, the Tech sees structure; and structure can always be broken.

In play, the Tech controls digital space the same way a Pilot controls movement or a Gunner controls combat. They infiltrate networks, manipulate information, and reshape how systems respond to the crew. But every intrusion leaves a trace. The deeper the access, the greater the response. Security escalates, countermeasures activate, and attention builds. The Tech doesn't just solve problems; they trigger systems that will eventually push back.

TIER 1

System Access Flat Effect
Interface with most digital systems without specialized equipment
Data Read
Flat Effect
Ask the GM one question about a system, network, or digital environment
Exploit
Weakness
Dice Boost
+1 die when targeting a known system vulnerability
Signal Mask
Conversion
Convert 1 Strain into reduced detection or traceability

TIER 2

Breach
Protocol
Conversion
Turn a success into deeper system access or control
Ghost Signal
Flat Effect
Operate within systems without triggering standard alerts
Overclock
Hack
Push
Enhancement
+1 die on digital actions; introduces trace or instability

TIER 3

System
Override
Conversion
Failure becomes partial success with limited control and consequence
Data Loop
Flat Effect
Sustain or repeat a digital effect for one additional action

TIER 4

Blackout
Flat Effect
Disable or blind a system temporarily; larger response later
False Reality Conversion
Feed false data into a system; delayed complication

TIER 5

Total Control Push Override
Fully control a system for a scene; major trace or consequence

ROLE SYSTEM //

ABILITY USE RULES

Expanding Role Coverage While the above Roles are foundational, the system supports a wide range of additional Roles that fill critical functions within the crew. Each follows the same design philosophy of identity, specialization, and risk-based capability. These include combat-focused Roles such as the Gunner, movement-focused Roles such as the Pilot, and control-oriented Roles such as the Navigator. Additional Roles emphasize stealth, trade, resource recovery, or system bypassing. Each Role is designed to:

- Provide a clear function within the crew
- Offer a distinct method of solving problems
- Interact meaningfully with the dice system
- Introduce trade-offs rather than pure advantage

No Role operates in isolation. The system is designed so that coordinated use of multiple Roles produces stronger outcomes than any individual action.

Ability Use Rules

When Abilities Apply Abilities only apply when their conditions are met. Players must clearly state when they are using an ability, and the Game Master confirms whether it applies within the current situation. This ensures that abilities remain grounded in the fiction rather than being applied abstractly.

Ability Stacking Limit To preserve clarity and meaningful decision-making, there is a strict limit on ability use. A character may apply no more than two abilities to a single roll or action. This includes:

- Dice Boost abilities
- Conversion abilities
- Push Enhancements

- Any ability that directly modifies a roll or its outcome

Players may combine different types of abilities, but must choose which two to apply before resolving the roll. Any additional abilities cannot be used in that moment. This rule:

- Prevents stacking abuse
- Keeps resolution fast
- Forces meaningful choices under pressure

Passive Abilities Passive abilities function differently from active abilities. They are always in effect and do not require activation or declaration. However, whether they count toward the two-ability limit depends on their impact. If a passive ability directly modifies a roll, such as adding dice, converting results, or altering success conditions, it counts toward the limit. If it only provides narrative permission, background positioning, or situational context without modifying the roll, it does not. If there is uncertainty, the Game Master determines whether the ability meaningfully impacts the roll. The design intent is clear. Passive abilities provide identity and narrative flexibility. Active abilities provide mechanical advantage and must be limited.

ROLE SYSTEM //

RISK, POWER, AND CREW SYNERGY

Design Philosophy: Risk and Power The design of Roles and abilities is intentional and consistent across the system. Every ability:

- Creates opportunity
- Shifts risk
- Mitigates consequence

But never removes it entirely. Even the most powerful abilities introduce new complications, delayed effects, or increased strain. This ensures that tension remains constant and that players are always making meaningful trade-offs. Power in this system is not about eliminating risk. It is about controlling how and when that risk appears.

Crew Synergy Roles are not designed to function independently. A well-balanced crew relies on interaction between Roles rather than individual dominance. The system rewards coordination. A Pilot's positioning, an Engineer's stabilization, a Gunner's pressure, and a Face's influence all combine to produce stronger outcomes than any one Role acting alone. Players are encouraged to think in terms of crew strategy rather than individual action. The most effective solutions come from layered approaches that combine multiple Roles in a single situation.

Final Perspective Ultimately, Roles define who steps forward when pressure peaks. They determine who acts when the ship is breaking apart, when negotiations collapse, or when the plan fails entirely. They are not limits on what a character can do. They are the tools that define how they do it best.



CHAPTER 7 //

STRAIN, DAMAGE, AND CONSEQUENCES

CHAPTER 07

01

CORE CONCEPT OF STRAIN

Strain represents the accumulated physical, mental, and mechanical stress placed on both characters and their ship. It is not a measure of immediate failure, but a rising pressure that builds over time, forcing difficult decisions and trade-offs. The more strain you carry, the less stable your situation becomes, and the closer you are to serious consequences. Players are not meant to avoid strain entirely. They are meant to manage it, gamble with it, and sometimes push past safe limits in pursuit of success.

02

THE STRAIN SCALE

All strain in the game is tracked on a unified scale from one to six. This scale represents a progression from minor stress to critical failure. At levels one and two, strain reflects background pressure with no direct mechanical impact. At level three, strain becomes noticeable and begins to introduce minor narrative complications. At level four, mechanical pressure begins, increasing the risk of failure. At level five, the situation becomes unstable, with strong penalties and a real threat of collapse. At level six, the track reaches its limit and triggers a Condition, representing a significant and persistent consequence that must be addressed.

03

PERSONAL STRAIN

Personal strain is divided into two separate tracks: Physical and Mental. Each is tracked independently from zero to six and represents a different type of pressure experienced by the character.





PHYSICAL STRAIN

Physical strain reflects bodily exhaustion, injury, and overexertion. At low levels, this appears as fatigue or discomfort with no mechanical effect. At level three, the strain becomes visible, and the Game Master may introduce minor complications tied to exhaustion or injury. At level four, actions become physically taxing, and Force-based actions suffer increased difficulty. At level five, the character is severely impaired, with penalties applied to all physical actions and a growing risk of collapse under pressure. At level six, the body reaches its limit, triggering a Condition such as Injured. At this point, additional physical strain no longer accumulates normally and instead escalates the severity of consequences.

MENTAL STRAIN

Mental strain reflects cognitive and emotional stress rather than physical fatigue. At early levels, it manifests as mild tension or distraction. By level three, focus begins to slip, and the Game Master may introduce hesitation, doubt, or lapses in concentration. At level four, cognitive overload sets in, increasing difficulty for Logic and Presence actions. At level five, the character becomes unstable, suffering penalties on most non-Force actions and facing a heightened risk of panic or poor judgment. At level six, the character reaches a breaking point, gaining a Condition such as Shaken or Overwhelmed. As with physical strain, any additional mental strain at this stage escalates consequences rather than increasing the track further.

STRAIN OVERFLOW

If strain would be applied to a track that is already at its maximum, it does not disappear. Instead, it escalates the existing Condition or introduces a new and more severe narrative consequence. This rule ensures that pushing beyond safe limits always carries meaningful risk and prevents players from ignoring strain once a track is filled.



SHIP STRAIN

The ship tracks strain across three separate systems: Hull, Systems, and Heat. Each uses the same one-to-six scale but represents a different type of pressure affecting the vessel.

HULL STRAIN

Hull strain measures structural integrity. At low levels, damage is cosmetic. By level three, structural weaknesses begin to appear. At level four, the ship becomes more vulnerable to further damage, and resisting impacts becomes more difficult. At level five, integrity is critically compromised, and damage escalates rapidly. At level six, the hull fails, triggering a Condition such as a Hull Breach, which introduces immediate and severe consequences.

SYSTEMS STRAIN

Systems strain represents the condition of the ship's internal mechanisms. At early levels, this reflects minor stress. By level three, instability begins to appear in the form of glitches or delays. At level four, systems degrade, increasing difficulty for system-related actions. At level five, the risk of failure becomes constant, with systems threatening to shut down under pressure. At level six, a major system collapse occurs, triggering a Condition such as System Instability or full shutdown.

HEAT STRAIN

Heat represents the buildup of attention, pressure, and internal system stress rather than direct damage. At low levels, heat is manageable. By level three, it becomes noticeable, often prompting warnings or early signs of trouble. At level four, heat begins to interfere with performance, especially when pushing the ship beyond safe limits. At level five, overheating becomes dangerous, increasing the likelihood of forced shutdowns or cascading failures. At level six, the system overheats completely, triggering a Condition that restricts functionality and demands immediate attention.

SHIP STRAIN OVERFLOW

As with personal strain, exceeding the maximum value on any ship strain track escalates consequences rather than increasing the value further. This ensures that the ship remains a dynamic and fragile system, where sustained pressure inevitably leads to serious complications.

CONDITIONS

Conditions represent the breaking point of strain. They are persistent effects triggered when a strain track reaches its maximum or when a major consequence demands it. Conditions impose meaningful penalties, restrict options, or introduce ongoing narrative complications. They remain in effect until actively addressed through recovery, repair, or narrative resolution. Multiple Conditions may exist at the same time, compounding their effects and increasing the urgency of dealing with them.

CONSEQUENCES

Consequences emerge naturally from strain, failure, and risk. These consequences can be immediate or delayed. Immediate consequences include direct outcomes such as taking damage, losing position, or triggering detection. Delayed consequences unfold later in the narrative, such as being tracked by an enemy, attracting faction attention, or allowing system instability to worsen over time. This distinction allows the Game Master to control pacing, applying some pressure instantly while allowing other threats to build in the background.

RECOVERY

Recovery is possible, but it is never free. Personal strain can be reduced through rest, medical attention, or safe downtime. Ship strain requires resources such as Parts, access to repair facilities, or the use of Engineer abilities. Conditions require focused effort to resolve and cannot be ignored indefinitely. Recovery is also limited during active danger. Players must create space for it, either by withdrawing from risk or securing temporary safety.

ESCALATION

As strain increases, escalation becomes inevitable. High strain levels, multiple Conditions, and repeated use of high-risk actions all contribute to rising instability. The Game Master should respond by increasing tension through complications, system failures, and narrative pressure. This escalation is not punitive. It is the natural result of pushing beyond safe limits and is essential to maintaining momentum and meaningful stakes.

STRAIN PROGRESSION SUMMARY

In practice, strain follows a clear progression: • Levels 1–2: No mechanical penalty; background pressure • Level 3: Narrative complications begin • Level 4: Mechanical penalties start • Level 5: Severe penalties and instability • Level 6: Condition triggered This structure ensures that strain is always meaningful, always visible, and always pushing the story forward.



CHAPTER 8 //

THE SHIP

CHAPTER 08

01

CORE SHIP STRUCTURE

Mechanically, every ship is defined by four core stats and three strain tracks. These elements establish what the ship can do, how well it performs under pressure, and how close it is to failure.

02

CORE STATS

The four core stats—Frame, Drive, Core, and Signature—represent the ship's structural integrity, mobility, power capacity, and detectability. Each stat is rated on a scale from one to five, where one represents poor or failing performance and five represents exceptional capability.

03

FRAME

Frame measures the ship's durability and resistance to physical damage. It governs how well the vessel withstands impacts, collisions, and structural stress. A high Frame allows the ship to endure punishment, while a low Frame makes it fragile and prone to failure under pressure.





DRIVE

Drive represents engine power, speed, and maneuverability. It determines how effectively the ship can travel, evade threats, or pursue targets. A strong Drive allows for aggressive movement and escape, while a weak one limits options and increases risk during navigation or combat.

CORE

Core reflects the ship's power generation and overall system efficiency. It governs how many modules can operate simultaneously and how well the ship handles energy-intensive actions. A high Core enables flexibility and sustained performance, while a low Core forces difficult choices about which systems remain active.

SIGNATURE

Signature represents how detectable the ship is to others. It governs scan resistance, tracking difficulty, and the level of attention the ship attracts from factions or authorities. A low Signature allows the ship to move quietly, while a high Signature makes it easier to detect, track, and target.

SHIP STRAIN TRACKS

In addition to its core stats, the ship tracks strain across three systems: Hull, Systems, and Heat. Each operates on the same one-to-six scale used throughout the game, escalating in severity as pressure builds.

HULL STRAIN

Hull strain represents physical damage to the ship's structure. At low levels, damage is largely cosmetic. As strain increases, structural weaknesses begin to form. By mid-levels, the ship becomes more vulnerable to further damage, and at critical levels, integrity collapses rapidly. At maximum strain, the ship suffers a Hull Breach, a severe condition that introduces immediate and ongoing danger.



SYSTEMS STRAIN

Systems strain reflects the internal stability of the ship's mechanisms. Early strain appears as minor stress or inefficiencies. As it increases, systems begin to glitch, delay, or malfunction. At higher levels, system actions become less reliable, and failures become more likely under pressure. At maximum strain, the ship suffers a System Shutdown or similar collapse, rendering key functionality unusable until repaired.

HEAT STRAIN

Heat represents the buildup of thermal stress and operational strain from engines, weapons, and overuse. At low levels, heat is manageable. As it rises, it begins to interfere with performance. Pushing the ship under high heat becomes increasingly dangerous, and at critical levels, overheating can force shutdowns or trigger cascading failures. At maximum heat, the ship gains the Overheated condition, restricting its ability to operate safely.

STRAIN OVERFLOW

As with all strain tracks, exceeding the maximum value does not cap the effect. Instead, additional strain escalates the situation, worsening existing Conditions or introducing new, more severe consequences. This ensures that the ship cannot safely operate at its limits indefinitely and reinforces the need for active management.

SHIP CONDITIONS

Conditions represent major failures or instabilities within the ship. They are persistent effects triggered when strain reaches its maximum or when significant consequences occur. Conditions impose meaningful penalties and restrictions, often altering how the ship can function. Examples include:

- **Hull Breach:** Ongoing structural damage and environmental exposure
- **Engine damage:** Reduced maneuverability and increased difficulty for Drive actions
- **System Shutdown:** Key functions disabled
- **System Instability:** Unpredictable failures under stress
- **Overheated:** Restrictions on pushing systems

Additional Conditions may include weapon systems going offline, sensor blindness, power drain, or exposed systems. Conditions persist until actively repaired, and multiple Conditions may stack, compounding their effects.

MODULES

Beyond its base structure, the ship's capabilities are defined by modules. Modules represent specialized systems that expand what the ship can do. These include weapons, defensive systems, cargo space, sensors, and utility tools. Modules often require Core capacity to function and may generate additional Heat or Systems strain when used. They can also be damaged or disabled, adding another layer of risk and resource management. A heavily armed ship may dominate combat but struggle with heat and power demands, while a stealth-focused vessel may sacrifice firepower for survivability and evasion.



TRAITS AND QUIRKS

The ship's identity is further shaped by traits and quirks.

TRAITS

Traits represent permanent strengths and weaknesses. Some provide clear advantages, such as reinforced hull plating, high-output engines, or advanced targeting systems. Others introduce drawbacks, such as increased detectability, unstable power cores, or aging infrastructure. A well-designed ship balances these elements, trading capability in one area for vulnerability in another.

QUIRKS

Quirks add personality and unpredictability. They are not strictly mechanical, but they create narrative texture and complications. A ship might require manual startup procedures, emit unusual signals, behave unpredictably under stress, or even exhibit semi-sentient behavior. These details make the ship feel distinct and alive within the story.

UPGRADES AND PROGRESSION

Over time, the crew can improve the ship through upgrades. These upgrades may increase core stats, add new modules, remove drawbacks, or introduce new traits. All upgrades require resources, including Parts, Cred, and downtime, and must be justified within the fiction. The ship evolves alongside the crew, becoming more capable but also more complex, often carrying the consequences of earlier modifications.



ROLE INTEGRATION

Every Role within the crew interacts with the ship in a meaningful way. The Pilot controls movement through Drive. The Engineer manages systems and repairs damage. The Gunner operates weapons and contributes to Heat buildup. The Navigator influences routes and detection through Signature. This integration ensures that the ship is not a passive asset, but an active part of gameplay where multiple players contribute simultaneously.

SHARED OWNERSHIP

Ownership of the ship is collective. No single character controls it outright. Decisions about upgrades, risk, and resource allocation are made as a group, and the consequences of damage or failure affect everyone. This shared responsibility reinforces the cooperative nature of the game and ensures that the ship remains central to the crew's identity.

SHIP LOSS AND NARRATIVE IMPACT

Ships can be lost, but this should never be trivial. When strain and Conditions escalate unchecked, the ship may suffer severe damage, lose critical modules, become temporarily disabled, or in extreme cases, be destroyed entirely. However, such outcomes should be treated as major narrative events rather than casual consequences. The loss of a ship is not just a mechanical setback; it is a turning point in the story.

SYSTEM SUMMARY

In practice, the ship operates as a unified system. Its four core stats define its capabilities, its three strain tracks measure its stability, and its modules, traits, and quirks define how it behaves. As strain increases, risk escalates, and Conditions begin to shape play in meaningful ways. Managing the ship is as important as managing individual characters, and the decisions made around it often determine whether the crew survives or fails.



CHAPTER 9 //

SHIP CREATION

CHAPTER 09

01 CORE CONCEPT

Ship creation is a collaborative process in which the crew designs their shared vessel. This is not simply a mechanical step; it is one of the first major group decisions that defines how the crew survives, travels, fights, and earns a living. The ship determines not only what the crew can do, but how they approach every situation. From the beginning, players should understand that every ship is built on trade-offs. Strength in one area inevitably creates vulnerability in another, and those choices will shape the entire campaign.

02 BUILD TYPES

There are two primary modes of ship creation.

03 STANDARD BUILD

The standard build is structured and balanced, making it ideal for new groups or campaigns that prioritize stability. It ensures that no single area dominates and that the ship remains broadly capable.

04 ICONIC BUILD

The iconic build is more flexible and expressive. It allows for more powerful or highly specialized ships, but requires additional drawbacks and closer Game Master oversight to maintain balance. Both approaches are valid; the choice depends on the tone and complexity desired by the group.



STEP 1: SHIP CONCEPT

The process begins with defining a concept. Before assigning any numbers, the crew should decide what the ship is and what it represents. Consider what it was built for, what it is known for, and what problems it has. A ship designed for smuggling will differ dramatically from one built for combat or exploration, and those differences should be reflected both narratively and mechanically. Establishing a strong concept ensures that later decisions feel cohesive rather than arbitrary.

STEP 2: CORE STATS

Once the concept is clear, the crew assigns values to the ship's four core stats: Frame, Drive, Core, and Signature.

- Frame determines durability and resistance to damage
- Drive governs speed and maneuverability
- Core represents power output and system capacity
- Signature measures detectability

In a standard build, the crew distributes ten points across these four stats, with a minimum of one and a maximum of four in any category. In an iconic build, twelve points are distributed, and one stat may reach a value of five. However, this increased power requires additional drawbacks, reinforcing the system's emphasis on trade-offs.

STEP 3: SYSTEMS AND MODULES

After establishing core stats, the crew selects systems and modules. Systems define what the ship can do beyond its base capabilities. Each system occupies a slot, and ships have a limited number of slots based on their build type. • Standard ships begin with three system slots • Iconic ships begin with four system slots Systems fall into several categories: • Weapons: Enable combat and deal hull damage • Defense: Reduce or mitigate incoming damage • Engines: Improve movement and maneuverability • Sensors: Enhance detection and analysis • Cargo: Increase carrying capacity and trade potential • Utility: Provide flexible, general-purpose tools Each system follows a tiered progression. Higher tiers provide stronger effects but introduce increased cost and risk, often in the form of Heat or Systems Strain. Systems may also require Core capacity to function. If the crew attempts to operate more systems than the Core can support, reliability decreases and the chance of failure increases. This creates an ongoing tension between capability and stability.

STEP 4: TRAITS

After selecting systems, the crew defines the ship's traits. Traits represent permanent strengths and weaknesses that shape the ship's identity. • In a standard build, the ship gains one advantage and one drawback • In an iconic build, the ship gains two advantages and two drawbacks Advantages might include reinforced hull plating or advanced targeting systems. Drawbacks could include high detectability, unstable power systems, or aging components. Traits reinforce the idea that no ship is perfect; every strength comes with a cost.

STEP 5: QUIRK

Next, the crew assigns a quirk. Quirks give the ship personality and introduce small but meaningful complications. Unlike traits, quirks are not purely mechanical; they exist to create narrative texture and unpredictability. A ship might struggle to start cleanly, run hot under pressure, operate with outdated systems, or behave unpredictably due to hidden flaws or semi-sentient behavior. Some quirks introduce minor penalties, while others create opportunities for Advantage when they trigger. Regardless of form, quirks make the ship feel unique and alive.

STEP 6: CAPACITY

The crew then defines the ship's capacity. This includes cargo size, which determines how much the ship can carry, and crew support, which establishes how many individuals the ship can sustain comfortably. These decisions influence long-term play, particularly in trade, smuggling, and extended operations.

STARTING CONDITION

At the start of play, all strain tracks begin at zero and the ship has no Conditions. This represents a stable starting point, though it rarely remains that way for long.



FINALIZING THE SHIP

Once all elements are chosen, the crew finalizes the design. Because the ship is a shared asset, this step is important. Every player should agree on the ship's structure, capabilities, and identity. This ensures that all players feel invested in the result.

SHIP PROGRESSION

As the campaign progresses, the ship evolves through upgrades. These upgrades may: • Increase core stats • Improve system tiers • Add new systems • Remove existing drawbacks All upgrades require resources such as Cred, Parts, and downtime, and must be justified within the fiction. The ship does not improve simply because resources are spent. It improves because the crew has the opportunity to make those changes within the story.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

The design philosophy behind ship creation is deliberate. Systems define playstyle more than raw stats, and higher-tier systems provide powerful capabilities but introduce additional risk. No ship should excel in every area. Instead, each design reflects a specific approach to survival, whether that is speed, durability, stealth, firepower, or adaptability.



CREATION SUMMARY

In practice, ship creation follows a clear sequence: 1. Define a concept 2. Assign core stats 3. Select systems 4. Choose traits 5. Add a quirk 6. Define capacity 7. Finalize the design

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

The result is not just a vehicle, but a central character in the campaign. It will grow, struggle, and evolve alongside the crew that depends on it.



CHAPTER 10 //

GAMEPLAY PHASES

CHAPTER 10

01

CORE STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE

Gameplay unfolds through a series of interconnected phases that structure pacing, distribute spotlight across the crew, and connect narrative decisions to mechanical outcomes. These phases are not rigid steps that must always occur in order. Instead, they function as a flexible framework the Game Master uses to manage flow, escalate tension, and ensure that every session feels dynamic and responsive to player choices. At its core, play is driven by decisions made under pressure. Each phase introduces new risks, opportunities, and consequences that build on one another, creating a continuous loop of action and reaction.

02

PHASE 1: JOB INTAKE

This is where the mission begins and where the crew is presented with an opportunity, a contract, or a problem worth solving. During this phase, the crew receives or actively seeks out a job, negotiates terms, and begins to understand the stakes involved. Information is intentionally incomplete. The Game Master should provide enough detail for players to make an informed decision, while holding back key complications that will emerge later. Players may negotiate payment or conditions using Presence, gather initial intelligence through Logic, or assess whether the risk is worth the reward. This phase establishes tension early by forcing the crew to commit before they fully understand what they are walking into.



PHASE 2: PREPARATION

Once the job is accepted, play moves into Preparation. This phase allows players to influence the difficulty of the mission before it begins. The crew may scout locations, acquire equipment, investigate unknown elements, or plan their approach. Mechanically, successful preparation can reduce future Failure Dice, while Advantage can create temporary Assets that provide situational benefits. Failure may introduce complications before the mission begins. The Game Master should reward thoughtful planning with tangible benefits, but preparation should never eliminate risk entirely. Its purpose is to shape the problem, not solve it in advance.

PHASE 3: TRAVEL

The Travel phase introduces tension before the primary objective is reached and brings the ship into focus. The crew navigates space, often encountering hazards, environmental dangers, or unexpected encounters along the way. Rolls during this phase typically rely on Drive or Logic, placing the Pilot and Navigator in key roles, with the Engineer supporting system stability. Failure during travel rarely halts progress, but it introduces strain, increases Heat, or creates new complications that carry forward into later phases. Travel reinforces that risk begins before the main objective is even reached.



PHASE 4: ENCOUNTER

The Encounter phase represents the core challenge of the mission. This is where the primary objective is confronted, whether through combat, negotiation, infiltration, or technical problem-solving. The Game Master presents an evolving situation, and players respond using their Approaches and Roles to shape the outcome. Ship systems become fully active during this phase, and strain can accumulate rapidly as players push for success. Encounters are dynamic and escalate over time as new threats emerge, difficulty increases, and consequences begin to stack.

PHASE 5: COMPLICATION

The Complication phase ensures that situations do not resolve cleanly. Complications may be triggered by failed rolls, high strain levels, Game Master escalation, or ship quirks activating at the worst possible moment. When a complication occurs, the situation shifts in an unexpected but logical way. Reinforcements may arrive, systems may begin to fail, or new risks may emerge that force the crew to adapt. Complications should always feel connected to player actions or established conditions, not arbitrary disruption.

PHASE 6: RESOLUTION

The Resolution phase determines the outcome of the mission based on the crew's actions and accumulated consequences. Outcomes are rarely binary. A clean success is possible but uncommon. More often, the crew succeeds with cost, fails while gaining some advantage, or fails in a way that escalates the situation further. Final rolls may be required to resolve the objective, and any remaining strain or Conditions continue to apply. The Game Master should ensure that the outcome reflects the choices made throughout the session.





PHASE 7: FALLOUT

The Fallout phase extends the consequences of the mission beyond its immediate conclusion. This is where the world reacts. Factions respond to the crew's actions, reputations shift, and delayed consequences begin to surface. The crew may gain allies, make enemies, or attract unwanted attention. Heat may increase in specific regions, and new opportunities may arise from the outcome of the job. Fallout ensures continuity between sessions and prevents events from feeling isolated.

PHASE 8: DOWNTIME

Downtime is a period of recovery, growth, and strategic decision-making. During this phase, players can reduce personal strain, repair ship damage, address Conditions, spend experience, and invest in upgrades. Downtime requires time and resources, and not all recovery is guaranteed. The Game Master should treat downtime as meaningful gameplay rather than a simple reset. Resource scarcity, faction pressure, and environmental constraints can all shape what is possible.

FLEXIBLE PHASE STRUCTURE

While these phases provide structure, they are not mandatory in every session. The Game Master should adjust the flow based on pacing and narrative needs. Some sessions may skip preparation entirely, especially in urgent situations, while others may merge encounter and complication into a single high-intensity sequence. The typical flow—Job Intake, Preparation, Travel, Encounter, Complication, Resolution, Fallout, and Downtime—serves as a guideline rather than a requirement.



ESCALATION CURVE

Tension within a session should follow a clear escalation curve. As play progresses, pressure increases through rising strain, accumulating Conditions, and repeated high-risk actions such as pushing. The Game Master can reinforce this escalation by increasing Failure Dice, introducing time constraints, activating ship quirks, or limiting player options. The goal is to create momentum, where each phase builds on the last and the situation becomes progressively more unstable.

ROLE SPOTLIGHT MANAGEMENT

An important responsibility of the Game Master is managing role spotlight. Different phases naturally emphasize different Roles. Social characters often lead during Job Intake, while Preparation highlights investigative and support Roles. Travel focuses on Pilots, Navigators, and Engineers, while Encounters bring combat and infiltration specialists forward. The Game Master should intentionally rotate spotlight to ensure every player has meaningful opportunities to contribute.

CORE GAMEPLAY LOOP

At the core of all gameplay is a simple loop: Decision → Roll → Outcome → Strain → New Situation. Players make a decision, the dice determine the immediate result, strain introduces consequences, and the situation evolves. This loop ensures that the game remains reactive and that every action creates forward momentum.

GM GUIDANCE

For Game Masters, effective pacing is essential. Alternate between moments of tension and brief periods of relief to prevent fatigue and maintain engagement. Clearly communicate stakes before rolls so players understand the risks they are taking. Use strain to drive decisions rather than punish players, and ensure that consequences feel earned and connected to actions.

PLAYER GUIDANCE

For players, the system rewards engagement and risk-taking. Playing too cautiously limits opportunities and slows progression. Working as a crew, supporting each other's strengths, and embracing consequences as part of the story are key to success. The game is not about avoiding failure, but about navigating it effectively.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

In practice, gameplay flows through these phases in a flexible sequence, guided by narrative and pacing. The structure exists to support the story, not constrain it. When used effectively, it creates a rhythm of rising tension, meaningful decisions, and lasting consequences that define the experience of play.



CHAPTER 11 //

ECONOMY & RESOURCES

CHAPTER 11

01

CORE ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY

The economy governs how the crew earns, spends, and manages the resources necessary for survival and growth. It is not a passive background system, but an active source of pressure that forces constant decision-making. Every job, every repair, and every upgrade competes for limited resources. Having resources creates options; lacking them creates risk. The crew is never truly comfortable. Even success introduces new choices about how to allocate what has been gained.

02

CORE RESOURCE TYPES

There are three primary resource types in the game: Cred, Parts, and Assets. Each serves a distinct purpose, and none are sufficient on their own.

03

CRED

Cred is the most flexible resource, functioning as the primary currency. It is used to: • Purchase ship systems and upgrades • Pay for repairs, docking, and services • Acquire equipment and information • Convert into experience under specific conditions While Cred enables progress, it does not guarantee it. Without Parts or Assets, it cannot solve every problem.



PARTS

Parts represent materials, components, and salvage required to maintain and improve the ship. They are the limiting resource in the system. Parts are used to:

- Repair ship strain

REMOVE CONDITIONS

- Enable system upgrades Without Parts, even large amounts of Cred cannot restore a damaged ship. This creates a deliberate dependency between resources; Cred opens opportunities, but Parts make action possible.

ASSETS

Assets represent temporary advantages gained through preparation, leverage, or situational control. They are not permanent and cannot be stockpiled indefinitely. Instead, they provide short-term power that can influence outcomes at critical moments. Assets reward planning and creativity, but their value lies in timing rather than accumulation.

EARNING RESOURCES

Resources are primarily earned through play, with multiple avenues contributing to the crew's overall income.

JOBS

The primary source of income is completing jobs. Jobs are completed as a group, and rewards are distributed to the crew as a whole. The scale of rewards depends on the level of risk involved. • Low-risk jobs provide modest Cred with minimal complications • Standard jobs provide enough Cred to sustain repairs and gradual progress, along with moderate Parts and occasional Assets • High-risk jobs provide significant rewards, including large Cred payouts, multiple Parts, and additional Assets, but come with serious consequences The Game Master may adjust rewards slightly based on crew size or difficulty, but overall balance should remain consistent. A typical job should sustain the crew while allowing incremental growth, not immediate advancement.

SALVAGE

Salvage provides an additional source of income. Recovering materials from destroyed ships or hazardous environments can yield Parts and sometimes Cred or specialized components. Salvage is intended to supplement income rather than replace it, providing opportunistic gains without undermining the importance of contracts.



NEGOTIATION

Negotiation occurs during Job Intake and provides an opportunity to increase rewards before the mission begins. Players may use social interaction to improve terms. Success can increase Cred payouts, while Advantage may secure additional Parts or Assets. Failure may reduce rewards or introduce obligations. This reinforces the importance of social Roles and introduces meaningful risk before the mission even begins.

SPENDING RESOURCES

Spending resources is where the system's pressure becomes most apparent. Every expenditure represents a trade-off between survival, growth, and future opportunity.

REPAIRS

Repairs are a constant necessity. • Each Part reduces one point of ship strain • Removing Conditions requires both Parts and Cred • More severe Conditions require greater investment Repairs are frequent and meaningful. Damage cannot be ignored without consequence.

UPGRADES

Ship upgrades represent long-term progression. Upgrading systems increases effectiveness, but each tier requires increasing amounts of Cred and Parts. Upgrades also require downtime and must be justified within the narrative. Players cannot upgrade mid-mission; they must create the opportunity to do so. Because Parts gate progression, upgrades become strategic decisions rather than automatic improvements.



SERVICES AND EQUIPMENT

Beyond repairs and upgrades, resources are spent on ongoing needs. • Docking fees • Black market access • Information gathering • Personal equipment These costs ensure that Cred remains relevant even when the ship is stable.

ASSET USAGE

Assets follow a distinct set of rules that separate them from other resources.

MECHANICAL EFFECTS

Assets can: • Add a Success Die • Remove a Failure Die • Negate minor strain • Introduce favorable narrative elements • Avoid minor consequences

USAGE LIMITS

• Assets are consumed when used • No more than two Assets may be used on a single roll • All usage must be justified within the fiction

TYPES OF ASSETS

Assets can take many forms, including: • Tactical advantages such as targeting data • Social leverage such as favors or contacts • Logistical support such as safehouses or supply caches They are typically gained through Advantage, preparation, or Game Master rewards, and most crews acquire only a small number per session. Their purpose is to reward planning and creativity, not accumulation.

ECONOMIC PRESSURE CYCLE

The economy creates a continuous cycle of pressure. A typical session yields a moderate amount of Cred, but a significant portion is immediately consumed by repairs, services, or obligations. What remains must be carefully allocated. Players must constantly choose between: • Immediate repair vs future risk • Upgrades vs short-term vulnerability • Saving vs acting There is rarely a perfect solution.

DEBT AND OBLIGATIONS

Crews may take on debt to access resources they cannot currently afford. This allows immediate gain at the cost of future consequences. Borrowing Cred or acquiring Parts through questionable means introduces narrative complications such as: • Faction obligations • Tracking or surveillance • Forced jobs or repayment demands Debt is never purely mechanical; it always creates story consequences.

FACTION INFLUENCE

Factions directly impact the economy. Reputation influences: • Access to jobs • Pricing of goods and services • Availability of rare resources • Level of hostility or cooperation Positive relationships provide advantages, while negative relationships increase difficulty and restrict options. This ties resource management directly into the broader narrative.

SYSTEM SUMMARY

At its core, the resource system is designed to maintain tension. • Cred provides flexibility • Parts enable survival and progression • Assets offer short-term advantage None of these exist in isolation. Players must constantly balance survival, growth, and opportunity.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

In practice, the economy operates as a continuous loop. The crew takes on jobs to earn resources, spends those resources to repair and improve their ship, and then takes on greater risks to sustain that progress. This cycle reinforces the central theme of the game: advancement is always tied to risk, and every gain carries the potential for future consequence.

CHAPTER 12 //

FACTIONS & HEAT

01 CORE CONCEPT

Factions are the forces that shape the galaxy. They are not background elements or distant powers; they are active participants in the story, constantly reacting to the crew's decisions. Every job completed, every alliance formed, and every mistake made shifts relationships, opens opportunities, and creates new dangers. The galaxy is not static. It responds.

02 THE ASTRYX CONCORD

At the center of galactic structure sits a loose governing authority known as the Astryx Concord. Formed in the aftermath of devastating interstellar wars, the Concord presents itself as a stabilizing force responsible for maintaining law, trade, and diplomacy across known space. In practice, it is a fragile coalition balancing competing interests. Core systems benefit from its protection and infrastructure, while frontier regions experience inconsistent enforcement, neglect, or exploitation. The Concord's authority is real, but uneven.

03 INTERNAL STRUCTURE

The Concord is divided into several key bodies: • **Central Council:** The legislative body composed of system representatives, often stalled by political gridlock and corporate influence • **Sector Marshals:** Regional enforcers with broad authority, capable of both protection and oppression • **Trade Authority:** Oversees commerce and shipping, heavily influenced by corporate interests Internal conflict defines the Concord. Reformists push for fairness, hardliners demand control, and competing interests prevent stability. This tension creates opportunities for the crew to exploit or become entangled in.

MAJOR FACTIONS

Beyond the Concord, multiple factions compete for influence across the galaxy.

IRON LEGION

The Iron Legion serves as the Concord's military force. They enforce order through discipline and advanced technology, but are internally divided between protectors and authoritarian enforcers. Encounters with the Legion can range from lawful intervention to oppressive crackdowns.

FREEBELT UNION

The Freebelt Union is a decentralized coalition of frontier systems. It values autonomy and mutual defense, but lacks unified leadership. Some members seek cooperation, while others prioritize independence. The Union offers opportunities for alliance and resistance, but its instability creates risk.

HELIOS COMBINE

The Helios Combine dominates industrial production and resource extraction. Entire systems are shaped by its operations. Profit and efficiency drive decision-making, often at ethical cost. The Combine provides opportunities tied to resources and manufacturing, but frequently introduces exploitation and environmental consequences.

ORION VEIL

The Orion Veil operates as a hidden intelligence network. Its structure and leadership remain unknown. It manipulates events through prediction and covert action rather than direct intervention. Engagement with the Veil involves deception, incomplete information, and hidden agendas.

VANGUARD ORDER

The Vanguard Order is an ideological faction focused on technological transcendence. Its followers treat advancement as both necessity and doctrine. Internal divisions exist between true believers and opportunists, creating instability. Interaction with the Vanguard often involves advanced technology and ethical conflict.

CORPORATE POWERS

Corporations operate as independent forces, often rivaling factions in influence. • Solis Dynamics produces advanced weapons and profits from conflict • Aeon Transit controls trade routes and logistics networks • NovaGen develops experimental technologies with unpredictable outcomes These entities provide opportunities for profit and advancement, but always introduce risk tied to corporate agendas.

CRIMINAL SYNDICATES

Outside the law, syndicates function as alternative power structures. • Black Sun Cartel: Highly organized, controlling smuggling and illicit trade • Void Reavers: Decentralized pirates relying on chaos and opportunism These groups provide access to illegal operations, but involvement often leads to long-term consequences.

THE ECHO COLLECTIVE

At the edge of known space exists the Echo Collective. Its nature is unclear; it may be digital, post-human, or something entirely unknown. It rarely interacts directly, but its presence is felt through anomalies, altered systems, and cryptic signals. The Collective acts as a wildcard element, introducing events that challenge conventional understanding and disrupt established systems.

FACTION ATTITUDES

Each faction tracks its relationship with the crew. • Hostile: Active opposition and direct conflict • Unfriendly: Limited access and increased costs • Neutral: Standard interaction without bias • Favorable: Reduced costs and improved opportunities • Allied: Strong support and significant advantages These relationships are dynamic and shift based on the crew's actions.

HEAT SYSTEM

Heat represents how much attention the crew has attracted across the galaxy. It is tracked on a scale from zero to six. • Low Heat: The crew is largely unnoticed • Moderate Heat: They are known and monitored • High Heat: They are hunted or actively pursued • Maximum Heat: They are marked as high-priority targets As Heat increases, encounters become more frequent, services become restricted, and enemies become more aggressive.

MANAGING HEAT

Heat can be reduced, but never without cost. Methods include: • Laying low • Paying bribes • Calling in favors • Relocating to new regions Each method involves trade-offs, such as lost opportunities, resource expenditure, or new obligations. Managing Heat becomes an ongoing strategic concern.

FACTION CONFLICTS

Factions do not operate in isolation. The Iron Legion may clash with the Freebelt Union. Corporations compete for control of resources. Syndicates exploit instability. These conflicts create opportunities for jobs, alliances, and manipulation. Remaining neutral is possible, but often as risky as choosing a side.

GM GUIDANCE

For Game Masters, factions and Heat are primary tools for shaping the campaign. They can: • Increase tension through faction interference • Restrict access to services • Introduce agents or rival crews • Offer improved contracts or unique Assets The goal is to ensure that the world feels reactive and interconnected.

PLAYER STRATEGY

For players, faction relationships and Heat function as strategic resources. Managing alliances, controlling visibility, and leveraging relationships can provide major advantages. Ignoring these systems leads to escalating danger and fewer options.

SYSTEM SUMMARY

Factions and Heat transform the galaxy into a living system. Actions carry consequences that extend beyond individual missions. Relationships shift, opportunities change, and the crew's reputation evolves over time.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

The more the crew engages with factions and manages Heat, the more dynamic the campaign becomes. The galaxy is not static. It reacts, adapts, and responds to the crew's choices, ensuring that every decision shapes the future.

CHAPTER 13 //

RUNNING THE GAME

01

CORE GM PHILOSOPHY

Running the game is not about controlling the story; it is about controlling pressure. The Game Master does not determine outcomes in advance or guide players toward predetermined conclusions. Instead, the GM presents situations, defines stakes, and applies consequences consistently, allowing the system and the players' decisions to drive the narrative forward. The goal is not to defeat the players, but to challenge them with meaningful choices that carry weight.

02

PRESENTING PROBLEMS, NOT SOLUTIONS

At its core, the role of the Game Master is to present problems, not solutions. Players should be given situations that require action, but never a single correct path forward. Every decision should matter, and every outcome should follow logically from both the fiction and the mechanics. Before any roll is made, the GM must clearly establish the stakes. Players need to understand: • What success looks like • What failure means • What risks they are taking If there is no real risk, there is no need to roll.

SESSION STRUCTURE AND PACING

Sessions typically follow the structure outlined in the Gameplay Phases, but this structure should remain flexible. A session may begin with a job offer or in the middle of an unfolding crisis. Preparation and travel may be expanded or skipped depending on urgency. What matters is pacing.

- Start quickly and avoid unnecessary setup
- Introduce complications early
- Escalate tension through the middle of the session
- Resolve before player fatigue sets in

The goal is to maintain momentum while allowing meaningful decisions at each stage.

USING THE DICE SYSTEM

The dice system resolves uncertainty; it does not dictate outcomes. Success Dice come from player choices and capabilities, while Failure Dice represent resistance, danger, and complexity. The GM's role is to assign Failure Dice appropriately. A common mistake is introducing too much difficulty too early. Tension should build over time. Early scenes may feel manageable, but as strain accumulates and complications emerge, situations should become increasingly unstable.

APPLYING STRAIN AS PRESSURE

Strain is the primary tool for applying pressure. Failures, Push actions, and high-risk decisions should generate strain consistently. As strain increases, especially at levels four through six, it should begin to trigger visible consequences and complications. Strain should never remain purely mechanical. It must be reflected in the fiction and used to drive decisions. At the same time, strain should not be applied so aggressively that players are overwhelmed before they can respond. The goal is steady escalation, not immediate collapse.

USING CONDITIONS

Conditions represent major turning points in the game. When strain reaches its maximum or when the situation demands it, Conditions should be applied to shift the state of play. A Condition is not a punishment; it is a change in environment or capability. Conditions should: • Introduce new problems • Alter available options • Force adaptation They should never halt play. They exist to complicate it.

RUNNING SHIP-BASED SCENES

Ship-based scenes require coordination across multiple Roles. The ship is a shared system, and multiple players should be involved whenever possible. • The Pilot controls movement • The Engineer manages stability • The Gunner applies pressure • The Navigator influences positioning and risk The GM should design situations that allow these Roles to overlap and interact. Heat and Systems Strain should be applied regularly to reinforce escalating pressure.

NON-COMBAT SCENES

Non-combat scenes should carry the same weight as combat. Social encounters, investigations, and technical challenges all use the same core system. Stakes should be clear, and outcomes should matter. Creative approaches should be rewarded, especially when they align with the fiction and demonstrate strong problem-solving. No single type of interaction should dominate play.

ESCALATION TOOLS

Escalation is essential to maintaining engagement. Every scene should increase in complexity, danger, or consequence. This does not require constant action, but it does require rising pressure. The GM can escalate by:

INCREASING FAILURE DICE

- Introducing new threats
- Applying additional strain
- Activating ship quirks
- Bringing faction responses into play

Escalation should feel natural and connected to the situation.

CONSEQUENCES AND CONTINUITY

Consequences are the engine of the game. They must always follow logically from player actions and the established fiction.

- Immediate consequences include damage, detection, or loss of position
- Delayed consequences include faction attention, rising Heat, or future complications
- Narrative consequences introduce new problems or opportunities

Consistency is critical. Players should always be able to trace outcomes back to their decisions.

SPOTLIGHT MANAGEMENT

Managing spotlight ensures that all players remain engaged. Different Roles naturally shine in different phases, but the GM must actively rotate focus.

- Design situations that require multiple Roles
- Prompt quieter players directly when needed
- Avoid allowing a single Role to dominate repeatedly

The game is cooperative, and spotlight should reflect that.

IMPROVISATION AND ADAPTATION

Improvisation is inevitable. Players will make unexpected decisions, bypass obstacles, or create solutions the GM did not anticipate. When this happens, the GM should adapt rather than resist. The best approach is to build on what already exists:

- Use established faction motivations
- Apply the consequence loop
- Introduce complications instead of blocking actions

Rather than saying no, respond with:

- “Yes, but...”
- “No, and...”

This keeps the story moving while maintaining tension.



ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

Difficulty should remain flexible. The GM can adjust it dynamically by:

MODIFYING FAILURE DICE

• Altering consequences • Introducing or removing complications If the situation becomes too easy, increase pressure. If it becomes too punishing, introduce opportunities or reduce difficulty slightly. Balance is achieved through responsiveness, not rigid adherence to fixed values.

COMMON GM PITFALLS

There are several common mistakes to avoid. • Overcontrol: Forcing outcomes instead of letting the system resolve them • Low Pressure: Failing to apply strain or meaningful consequences • Excessive Punishment: Overwhelming players with too many consequences at once • Unclear Stakes: Not communicating risk before a roll These issues can be corrected through clarity, consistency, and trust in the system.

PLAYER ENGAGEMENT

Player engagement depends on connection to the narrative. Missions should tie into:

CHARACTER PROBLEMS

• Faction relationships • Ongoing story threads Creative play should be acknowledged and rewarded. Players are more invested when their choices have visible impact and when the world reacts.



TONE AND TABLE FEEL

The tone of the game should remain consistent. It is a game of tension, risk, and opportunistic survival. Situations should feel grounded, even when extreme. High-pressure moments should be balanced with brief periods of relief, allowing players to recover and plan. The focus should always return to consequences and trade-offs.

CORE GM PRINCIPLES

In practice, running the game comes down to a few key principles: • Present situations, not solutions • Set stakes clearly before every roll • Use strain to create pressure • Escalate tension over time • Apply consequences consistently • Keep all players engaged When these principles are followed, the system does the rest.

CHAPTER 14 //

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

01

THE CREW

The crew consists of four characters, each fulfilling a distinct role within the system. • Rhea (Pilot) specializes in Drive and Finesse, responsible for maneuvering the ship through dangerous situations • Kade (Engineer) relies on Logic to manage systems and stabilize problems under pressure • Vex (Gunner) uses Force to control combat and apply direct damage • Lumo (Face) leverages Presence to negotiate, manipulate, and shape social interactions Each Role contributes in different phases, demonstrating the importance of teamwork.

THE SHIP

The crew operates the ship The Patchwork Saint, which reflects their survival-focused playstyle. It is equipped with:

OVERDRIVE ENGINE

SHIELD ARRAY

SMUGGLER'S VEIL COMPARTMENTS

These systems make it fast, resilient, and capable of avoiding detection. However, it also carries the quirk Patchwork Princess, meaning repairs are inconsistent and may introduce additional strain. At the start of the session, the ship is already under pressure, with moderate Systems Strain, minor Hull damage, and elevated Heat indicating that the crew is being watched.

PHASE 1: JOB INTAKE

The session begins with Job Intake. The crew meets a contact from the Freebelt Union offering a transport job involving sealed and undocumented cargo. The Game Master clearly establishes the stakes: success yields a strong payout, while failure risks damaging trust and future opportunities. Lumo leads the negotiation using Presence. The roll results in a success with Advantage. Mechanically, the payout increases and the crew gains an Asset in the form of an inside contact. Narratively, this reinforces Lumo's role and gives the crew leverage moving forward.

PHASE 2: PREPARATION

The crew moves into Preparation. They investigate the cargo and planned route. Kade uses Logic to scan the cargo's integrity, resulting in a success. The cargo is revealed to be unstable. The Advantage generated creates an Asset representing a reinforced containment plan. Mechanically, this reduces difficulty for future rolls involving the cargo. This phase demonstrates how preparation shapes future outcomes without removing risk.

PHASE 3: TRAVEL

The crew enters Travel. They choose a faster but more dangerous route. Rhea pilots the ship through an asteroid field, facing moderate difficulty. The result is a mixed success. The ship avoids major damage, but generates additional Heat Strain. Progress is made, but the situation becomes more volatile, reinforcing the system's core principle of success with cost.

PHASE 4: ENCOUNTER

The Encounter begins when a patrol intercepts the ship. This becomes the central conflict of the session. Rhea executes evasive maneuvers, successfully avoiding a direct hit. Vex engages using heavy weapons, succeeding with Advantage and dealing significant damage while generating additional Heat. Ship systems are pushed: • The Overdrive Engine increases performance but adds Heat • The Shield Array mitigates damage but adds Systems Strain Multiple Roles act simultaneously, demonstrating coordinated play.

PHASE 5: COMPLICATION

A Complication is triggered as Heat reaches a critical threshold. The Game Master introduces a new problem: the cargo begins to destabilize due to overheating. This adds Systems Strain and creates a new urgent objective. Kade must shift focus to emergency stabilization. This illustrates how complications emerge from accumulated strain and force players to adapt.

PHASE 6: RESOLUTION

The crew reaches Resolution. They escape the patrol and complete the delivery, but the outcome is a mixed success. The cargo is partially damaged, resulting in reduced payment and increased Heat. This reinforces that success is rarely clean and that consequences persist beyond the objective.

PHASE 7: FALLOUT

The session moves into Fallout. The world reacts: ● The Freebelt Union remains favorable ● The patrol faction becomes unfriendly ● The crew's reputation increases in frontier systems A new, higher-risk job is introduced, connecting this session to future play.

PHASE 8: DOWNTIME

The crew enters Downtime. They spend Parts to repair strain and stabilize the ship. They consider upgrades but choose to save resources. Each player gains experience, and one converts Cred into additional experience. This phase highlights the trade-offs between recovery, growth, and preparation.

SYSTEM HIGHLIGHTS

This example demonstrates several key systems in action: • Dice resolution producing varied outcomes • Strain accumulation driving tension • Ship systems providing power at a cost • Asset creation and usage • Heat escalation over time • Resource management shaping decisions Each system reinforces the others, creating a cohesive gameplay loop.

GM BEST PRACTICES

From the Game Master's perspective, several principles are demonstrated: • Stakes are clearly defined before rolls • Consequences follow logically from actions • Tension escalates gradually • All players are given opportunities to contribute These practices ensure consistent pacing and engagement.

CORE TAKEAWAY

The key takeaway is that the system works best when pressure builds naturally and decisions matter. Every action creates consequences, and those consequences reshape the situation, driving the narrative forward. The flow of play follows a consistent rhythm—job intake, preparation, travel, encounter, complication, resolution, fallout, and downtime—but remains flexible enough to adapt to player choices.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

This is the core experience of the game. Players are not simply completing objectives; they are navigating an evolving situation where every decision carries weight, and every outcome creates new possibilities.



CHAPTER 15 //

LORE OF THE GALAXY

CHAPTER 15

01

CORE CONCEPT: A LAYERED GALAXY

The galaxy is not a uniform space. It is divided into distinct tiers of control, stability, and opportunity, each shaping how the game feels, how risk behaves, and how the crew must operate to survive. Moving through these tiers is not simply a change in location; it is a shift in tone, pressure, and possibility. The further a crew travels from the center of civilization, the less predictable the world becomes, and the more survival depends on their own choices rather than external systems of order.

02

GALACTIC TIERS

Each region of space defines a different style of play, risk profile, and narrative tone.

03

THE CORE

At the center lies the Core, the heart of civilization and the seat of power. These systems are dense, wealthy, and tightly controlled by the Astryx Concord and the Iron Legion. Corporate influence is deeply embedded within governance, creating a system where political authority and economic power are inseparable. Life in the Core is defined by advanced technology, high population density, and constant surveillance. Law is strict and consistently enforced, making illegal activity difficult but highly profitable for those who can navigate it. From a gameplay perspective:

- Heat escalates rapidly and is difficult to reduce
- Social and political play dominates
- Resources are abundant but expensive

The tone is polished and controlled, masking systemic corruption and quiet oppression.



Beyond the Core lies the Inner Rim, a region of stability and controlled opportunity. These worlds operate under Concord oversight but retain local autonomy. Corporate influence shapes daily life more openly, and inequality becomes more visible. Trade hubs and logistics networks dominate the economy, creating opportunities for commerce, smuggling, and negotiation. From a gameplay perspective: • Heat behaves predictably • Social and logistical play are balanced • Rules exist but can be bent The tone is one of structured opportunity under tension.

THE MID RIM

The Mid Rim marks the transition into instability. Centralized control weakens, and competing factions begin to assert influence. The Freebelt Union becomes more prominent, creating a fragmented and contested political landscape. Systems vary widely in development, and territorial disputes are common. The economy is driven by contracts, resource transport, and mercenary work. From a gameplay perspective: • Heat becomes localized and faction-driven • Conflict is more frequent • Jobs involve navigating competing interests The tone is volatile, with power constantly shifting.

THE OUTER RIM

The Outer Rim is the frontier of known space. Authority is minimal, and local powers, syndicates, and independent groups dominate. Settlements are small and focused on survival. The economy is driven by scarcity, black market trade, and salvage. Reputation replaces law as the primary form of control. From a gameplay perspective: • Heat is localized and faction-specific • Parts become more valuable than Cred • Ship condition becomes critical The tone is gritty, personal, and survival-focused.

THE FRINGE

At the edge lies the Fringe, a region defined by the unknown. There is no centralized authority, and even faction influence fades. Strange phenomena and the presence of the Echo Collective introduce forces that defy conventional understanding. Settlements are rare and unstable. Exploration and anomaly-driven discovery define activity in this region. From a gameplay perspective: • Heat is replaced by existential risk • Survival becomes the primary focus • Strain management is critical The tone is mysterious, dangerous, and unpredictable.

MOVEMENT BETWEEN TIERS

Traveling between tiers creates meaningful shifts in gameplay. Moving inward increases safety, structure, and access to resources, but reduces freedom and increases oversight. Moving outward grants independence and flexibility, but introduces instability and danger. Faction influence shifts accordingly: • Core: Government and corporate dominance • Mid Rim: Active faction conflict • Outer Rim: Syndicates and independent actors • Fringe: Unknown or non-traditional forces These transitions reinforce adaptation as a core survival skill.

ECONOMIC VARIATION BY REGION

Economic conditions shift dramatically across tiers. • Core: High Cred flow; stable but expensive • Inner Rim: Balanced economy; opportunity-driven • Mid Rim: Contract-based and volatile • Outer Rim: Scarcity-driven; Parts are critical • Fringe: Value becomes situational and survival-based These changes force players to rethink priorities depending on location, reinforcing the importance of adaptability.

KEY LOCATIONS

Within each tier are anchor locations designed to support repeat play and evolving narratives.

CORE LOCATIONS

ASTRYX PRIME

The political center of the Concord, defined by arcologies, surveillance, and hidden corruption. Ideal for diplomacy, intrigue, and high-risk smuggling.

HELIX SPIRE STATION

A corporate stronghold dominated by wealth disparity and information control. Supports espionage, negotiation, and data-driven conflicts.

INNER RIM LOCATIONS

VEYRAXIS

A major trade hub where commerce and chaos intersect. Ideal for smuggling, trade disputes, and interception missions.

LUMA VERGE

A cultural center where influence operates beneath art and entertainment. Supports social manipulation and identity-driven conflicts.

MID RIM LOCATIONS

KORTHAL DRIFT

A hazardous mining system rich in resources and faction conflict. Ideal for escort missions, sabotage, and salvage.

THALOS GATE

A strategic transit hub where control of movement equals power. Perfect for blockades, negotiations, and territorial conflict.

MIRAGE HOLLOW

A desert world of illusion and hidden settlements. Supports deception, discovery, and information-based missions.

OUTER RIM LOCATIONS

BRAKKA-9

A scrap world centered on salvage and survival. Crews compete for valuable wreckage and lost technology.

DUSKWATER

An ocean world of scattered platforms and submerged ruins. Ideal for smuggling routes and isolated exploration.

IRONHOOK OUTPOST

A lawless station where reputation dictates survival. Supports bounty hunting, debt collection, and volatile social encounters.

FRINGE LOCATIONS

NULLSPACE ECHO

A region where reality behaves unpredictably. Focuses on survival and anomaly-driven exploration.

EDEN FALL

A silent lost colony filled with mystery and danger. Ideal for investigation and high-risk discovery.

EVOLVING LOCATIONS

These locations are not static. Repeated interaction can: • Shift faction control • Create new opportunities • Introduce lasting consequences Game Masters are encouraged to establish one or two primary hubs while rotating others to maintain variety and narrative momentum.

NPC PERSONA FRAMEWORK

To populate the galaxy, the system uses an NPC Persona framework. Rather than static stat blocks, NPCs are defined by behavior patterns. A persona represents how an NPC thinks, reacts, and makes decisions, allowing the Game Master to improvise consistently. Examples include: • Calculated strategist • Relentless pursuer • Opportunistic broker Personas can be adapted to any faction or location and anchored through goals and relationships.

MECHANICAL ROLE OF NPCS

NPC personas are not purely narrative. They influence gameplay by: • Increasing or decreasing difficulty • Shaping consequences • Defining reactions under pressure Hidden variables within personas act as triggers, revealing deeper motivations or altering behavior at key moments. NPCs evolve over time, acting as active participants rather than static obstacles.

SYSTEM INTEGRATION

This chapter provides the framework for a living galaxy. • Tiers define tone and risk • Locations anchor gameplay • NPC systems drive interaction Together, they ensure that movement, choice, and consequence remain interconnected.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

The galaxy is not a backdrop. It is a dynamic system that reacts, shifts, and evolves based on what the crew does within it. Every journey between systems, every faction interaction, and every decision contributes to a living world that responds in kind.

CHAPTER 16 //

THE FIRST JOB

01

SETTING: IRONHOOK OUTPOST

The scenario takes place at Ironhook Outpost, a lawless frontier station in the Outer Rim where reputation matters more than legality and opportunity is always tied to risk. The tone is gritty and opportunistic. Trust is limited, resources are scarce, and survival depends on quick thinking and careful judgment. Crews operating here must balance profit against danger, knowing that every opportunity carries hidden complications. The central theme of this scenario is simple: a straightforward job becomes dangerous when multiple factions pursue the same objective.

02

THE JOB OFFER

The job begins in a crowded cantina. The crew is approached by a fixer named Dax Virel, who presents a salvage opportunity. A drifting transport wreck has been located in a nearby debris field, and the crew is tasked with retrieving a sealed cargo container and returning it discreetly. The reward is modest but appealing, consisting of Cred and a small number of Parts. However, Dax warns that the crew is not the only group searching for the cargo. This establishes immediate tension and signals that the situation is more complex than it appears.



KEY NPCS

The scenario introduces several important NPCs, each defined by clear behavioral patterns and motivations.

DAX VIREL

Dax is calm, calculating, and intentionally vague. He presents risk as opportunity while withholding critical information. His true goal is to secure the cargo without revealing its value. The cargo is far more important than he admits, making him both an ally and a potential source of conflict.

RHEA KEST

Rhea is a rival smuggler captain. She is charismatic and competitive, preferring negotiation before conflict but fully willing to escalate if necessary. Her goal is to secure the cargo for her own crew, though she may cooperate if profit is shared.

VORN TAL

Vorn Tal is a cartel enforcer. Relentless and intimidating, he escalates situations quickly. He operates under orders to secure the cargo for the cartel, eliminating interference if required. He represents the most direct and dangerous threat.

KELRA VOSS

Kelra is a dockside mechanic. Observant and cautious, she notices details others miss. She may provide useful information, but her priority is avoiding trouble. She acts as a subtle source of insight rather than direct conflict.



SCENARIO STRUCTURE

The scenario follows the standard gameplay phases, demonstrating how each system functions in play.

PHASE 1: JOB INTAKE

The crew meets Dax and negotiates the terms of the job. Successful negotiation can increase rewards or provide Assets. Failure may introduce mistrust or hidden complications. This phase emphasizes social interaction and early decision-making.

PHASE 2: PREPARATION

The crew gathers information and prepares for the mission. They may: • Scan the wreck location • Research rival crews • Adjust ship systems Successful actions reduce future difficulty or generate Assets such as schematics or navigation data. Preparation shapes the mission but does not remove risk.

PHASE 3: TRAVEL

The debris field introduces the first real challenge. Navigation is difficult due to drifting asteroids and interference. Piloting through the field requires skill and carries consequences even on success. The crew may accumulate Heat or Systems Strain, reinforcing that pressure begins before the main objective.

PHASE 4: ENCOUNTER

Upon reaching the wreck, the crew discovers it is already contested.

They must choose how to proceed: • Negotiate with rivals • Infiltrate the wreck unnoticed • Engage in direct conflict Ship systems become critical. Roles overlap as players coordinate actions. The situation is dynamic and escalates based on decisions.

PHASE 5: COMPLICATION

Complications emerge naturally from the situation. Possible developments include: • Rival betrayal • Cartel arrival • Cargo instability For example, an energy surge from the cargo may generate additional Heat Strain, forcing the crew to balance progress against system risk. Complications should always feel connected to prior actions.

PHASE 6: RESOLUTION

The outcome depends on the crew's choices. Possible results include: • Delivering the cargo for full payment • Sharing the reward to gain allies • Betraying all parties for maximum profit • Losing the cargo entirely Clean success is possible but unlikely. Most outcomes involve trade-offs and consequences.

PHASE 7: FALLOUT

The world reacts to the crew's actions.

- The Black Sun Cartel's attitude may shift
 - Rhea Kest may become an ally or enemy
 - Heat may increase
- New opportunities emerge, such as follow-up jobs, retaliation, or deeper investigation into the cargo.

PHASE 8: DOWNTIME

The crew recovers and prepares for future missions. They may:

- Repair strain and Conditions
- Spend experience
- Upgrade systems
- Convert resources

This phase reinforces the balance between survival and advancement.

THE CARGO TRUTH

At the center of the scenario is the cargo itself. It is not ordinary salvage, but experimental NovaGen technology with unstable energy properties. Its value is high, but so is the danger it represents. This revelation reframes the mission, transforming it from simple retrieval into a conflict with broader implications.

GM GUIDANCE

For Game Masters, this scenario provides a clear structure for pacing and execution. • Move quickly through early scenes • Build tension during travel • Peak during the encounter • Introduce complications to prevent clean resolution Flexibility is critical. Players should be able to approach the situation in multiple ways, and combat should never be forced. Strain and Heat should be applied consistently to maintain pressure.

PLAYER LESSONS

For players, this scenario demonstrates several key principles. • No job is ever simple • Factions are always involved • Resources must be managed carefully • Decisions have lasting consequences Success is not defined by outcome alone, but by how the crew navigates risk and consequence.

SCENARIO SUMMARY

This is a salvage and retrieval mission built around competing interests. The central conflict is not just external threats, but internal priorities:

PROFIT

SAFETY

REPUTATION

TRUST

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

The most important question is not whether the crew succeeds, but how they choose to succeed and what they are willing to risk in the process.



CHAPTER 17 //

NPC PERSONA LIBRARY

CHAPTER 17

01

CORE CONCEPT: BEHAVIOR OVER STAT BLOCKS

Non-player characters are not defined by numbers or static traits. They are defined by behavior. This library provides flexible persona frameworks that allow the Game Master to create believable, consistent, and reactive characters quickly. These personas are not fixed identities; they are behavioral engines that can be adapted to any role, faction, or situation within the game. Each persona answers a critical question: how does this character think, decide, and react under pressure? By focusing on behavior rather than detail, the Game Master can improvise confidently, maintaining consistency without pre-scripted dialogue or rigid preparation.

02

PERSONA FRAMEWORK STRUCTURE

Each persona is built from a consistent set of components:

- Behavioral Engine: How the character processes situations
- Primary Drive: What they ultimately want
- Decision Logic: How they act under uncertainty
- Interaction Pattern: How they engage with others
- Stress Response: How they behave under pressure
- Hidden Variable: Internal conflict or unseen motivation
- Dialogue Signature: Tone and speaking style
- Narrative Utility: Their function within the story

These elements allow the GM to quickly understand and run a character without needing detailed notes.



STRONG PERSONAS (FEMALE ARCHETYPES)

Strong personas drive scenes, create conflict, and shape the direction of the narrative.

THE TACTICAL SURVIVOR

The Tactical Survivor operates through preemptive threat elimination. Her primary drive is to protect the future at all costs, leading her to act before threats fully emerge. She is intense and distrustful in interaction, escalating quickly under stress into hyper-focused aggression. Her hidden variable is a deep paranoia about inevitability; she believes threats will return if not completely destroyed. She speaks in urgent, commanding tones and functions as a driver of escalation and tension. Narratively, she pushes scenes forward rapidly and forces players into decisive action.

THE ICE STRATEGIST

The Ice Strategist manipulates perception as her primary tool. Her goal is to control how events are understood, often reframing situations to her advantage. She is charming and deceptive in interaction, maintaining control even under stress by doubling down on manipulation. Her hidden variable is a need for dominance, expressed through psychological control. Her speech is polished and layered, often masking intent beneath precision. She functions as a psychological antagonist, reshaping reality through narrative framing rather than direct force.



THE PRECISION LEADER

The Precision Leader focuses on containment and survival. Her primary drive is to protect her crew while eliminating threats, relying on protocol until it fails. She is direct and pragmatic, becoming sharply action-oriented under pressure. Her hidden variable is isolation; she often carries responsibility alone. Her speech is firm and efficient, reflecting clarity under stress. Narratively, she stabilizes chaotic situations and anchors high-pressure scenes.

SUPPORTING PERSONAS (FEMALE ARCHETYPES)

Supporting personas reinforce the world, provide contrast, and support narrative depth.

THE LOYAL SECOND

The Loyal Second operates through disciplined competence. Her primary drive is to support the mission, making decisions based on necessity rather than recognition. She is steady and professional, becoming even more efficient under stress. Her hidden variable is a sense of being overshadowed. Her speech is sharp and controlled. She functions as a reliable ally who enables others to succeed without seeking control.

THE ANXIOUS ANALYST

The Anxious Analyst is driven by curiosity and innovation. Her goal is to solve problems through experimentation and iteration. She is sharp and playful in interaction but becomes hyper-focused under stress. Her hidden variable is the pressure of expectation. Her speech is fast and clever, often reflecting rapid thought. Narratively, she drives problem-solving while introducing tension through overthinking or risk.



THE QUIET HEALER

The Quiet Healer operates through empathy and de-escalation. Her primary drive is to prevent suffering, seeking peaceful solutions whenever possible. She remains calm and persuasive, even under stress. Her hidden variable is internal conflict, often balancing compassion with reality. Her speech is measured and compassionate. She functions as a stabilizing force, offering alternatives to conflict.

STRONG PERSONAS (MALE ARCHETYPES)

These personas serve as major forces within the narrative, often acting as leaders, antagonists, or catalysts.

THE DRIVEN DETECTIVE

The Driven Detective operates through preparation and control. His goal is to prevent chaos by anticipating every variable. He is reserved and intimidating, becoming obsessively focused under stress. His hidden variable is a fear of failure. His speech is deliberate and controlled. Narratively, he dominates information flow and uncovers hidden truths.

THE CHARISMATIC OUTLAW

The Charismatic Outlaw thrives on risk and improvisation. His primary drive is freedom and profit, often masking deeper loyalty. He is charming and evasive, adapting quickly under pressure. His hidden variable is a reluctance to admit loyalty. His speech is quick and sarcastic. He functions as a wildcard ally, capable of both helping and complicating situations.

THE RELENTLESS PURSUER

The Relentless Pursuer enforces order without compromise. His primary drive is absolute adherence to law or duty. He is rigid and intense, escalating quickly under stress. His hidden variable is a potential crisis of belief. His speech is formal and unwavering. Narratively, he acts as sustained pressure, forcing confrontation and resolution.

SUPPORTING PERSONAS (MALE ARCHETYPES)

These personas add depth, perspective, and grounding to the narrative.

THE NERVOUS TECHNICIAN

The Nervous Technician operates through strict adherence to protocol. His goal is to avoid mistakes, leading to cautious decision-making. He is anxious and verbose, often panicking under stress. His hidden variable is a fear of failure. His speech is formal and rambling. He introduces tension and occasional relief, especially in technical situations.

THE SCHEMING ADVISOR

The Scheming Advisor thrives on instability. His primary drive is to climb power structures by exploiting chaos. He is polite and calculating, adapting quickly under stress. His hidden variable is ambition without loyalty. His speech is soft and layered. He functions as a behind-the-scenes manipulator and plot driver.

THE STEADY MENTOR

The Steady Mentor guides through patience and wisdom. His goal is to train and support others rather than act directly. He remains calm under pressure, maintaining composure. His hidden variable is a past failure. His speech is measured and reflective. Narratively, he provides guidance without dominating, allowing players to grow.

USING PERSONAS IN PLAY

Using a persona is straightforward. The Game Master selects a framework, assigns it a name and faction, and defines a clear goal. From there, the persona determines how the character behaves in all situations. When interacting with players:

- Use the behavioral engine to guide decisions
- Apply decision logic during uncertainty
- Trigger stress responses during escalation
- Reveal hidden variables gradually

This creates consistency without preparation overhead.

MECHANICAL INTEGRATION

Personas are not purely narrative; they influence gameplay. They can:

- Modify difficulty
- Shape consequences
- Control information flow

These effects should always be grounded in the fiction and applied consistently.

DESIGN ADVANTAGE

The primary strength of this system is speed. Instead of building NPCs from scratch, the Game Master can deploy fully realized characters instantly. This allows for dynamic, responsive play while maintaining depth and consistency across sessions.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

NPCs feel real when they behave consistently and react logically. This system ensures that characters are not static obstacles, but active participants in the story. As personas evolve through interaction, they reinforce the sense of a living world shaped by player decisions.

CHAPTER 18 //

CONTRACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

01

CONTRACT AVAILABILITY

Contracts are not unlimited. They are offered through: • Local networks • Faction channels • Independent brokers Availability depends on: • Current location • Heat level • Faction standing • Prior crew actions The Game Master should present a limited selection at any given time. This reinforces constraint and forces meaningful decisions. Accepting one contract may cause others to expire, evolve, or fall into the hands of rival crews.

CHAPTER 18

DIFFICULTY AND RISK

Difficulty reflects baseline risk, but it is not fixed. The Game Master should adjust difficulty dynamically based on: • Crew composition • Available resources • Accumulated strain and consequences A routine job can become dangerous under high Heat, while a high-risk operation may become manageable with preparation and Assets. Difficulty sets expectations; it does not determine outcomes.

CONTRACT STRUCTURE

Every contract should contain: • A clear objective • A visible reward • Hidden complications • Potential faction involvement • Opportunities for escalation The true nature of a contract often emerges during play, not before it.

LOW-RISK CONTRACTS

These jobs provide stability, modest rewards, and manageable complications.

ECHOES DON'T PAY RENT

A minor facility is experiencing repeated system echoes and intermittent failures. The crew is tasked with restoring operations and identifying the source of the signal. At first glance, this appears to be a routine technical job. However, unstable systems introduce complications. Communication interference may disrupt coordination, and system responses may behave unpredictably. The reward is low, but successful completion grants access to additional low-risk contracts, making this ideal for crews building reputation or seeking stability.

QUIET SHIPMENT, NO QUESTIONS

An independent fixer offers a simple transport job along a short, seemingly safe route. The objective is to deliver sealed cargo within a strict timeline while maintaining discretion. Despite its simplicity, irregular cargo readings and possible outside interest introduce risk. Inspection or interception may occur without warning. The reward is modest, but completion improves standing with broker networks, opening future smuggling and transport opportunities.

MEDIUM-RISK CONTRACTS

These jobs introduce uncertainty, competition, and layered complications.

THE SYSTEM ISN'T EMPTY

An exploration contract sends the crew to survey a previously cleared region that now produces conflicting data signatures. Their task is to map the area and recover logs from a prior expedition. The incomplete nature of that expedition suggests danger, while unstable environmental readings create uncertainty. The reward includes moderate compensation and valuable data rights, making it attractive for exploration-focused crews.

SALVAGE RIGHTS (DISPUTED)

A private client hires the crew to recover valuable components from an abandoned site before competing claims are enforced. The operation is time-sensitive and contested. Residual defenses remain active, and rival crews may arrive at any moment. This creates immediate tension, forcing the crew to balance speed against safety. The reward includes both Cred and salvageable equipment, making it ideal for crews needing Parts.

HIGH-RISK CONTRACTS

These jobs introduce escalation, instability, and long-term consequences.

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO STAY BURIED

A corporate request sends the crew to inspect a sealed extraction site following irregular activity. The environment is unstable, with contamination risks and unpredictable system activation. The mission combines environmental hazards with mechanical instability. The reward includes high compensation and restricted corporate clearance, unlocking more dangerous future contracts.

CONTRACTUAL SILENCE

A legal intermediary hires the crew to secure sensitive materials before oversight arrives. This is a precision operation requiring clean execution. Security systems are active, and data integrity may degrade under pressure. Success grants high rewards and conditional legal protection. Failure introduces political consequences that extend beyond the mission.

EXTREME-RISK CONTRACTS

These jobs push the system to its limits and introduce major narrative consequences.

SOMETHING IS USING THE DOORS

A fragmented distress signal leads the crew to an isolated installation. The objective is to locate survivors and establish an exit, but the environment behaves unpredictably. Access points shift without warning, and sensory information may be unreliable. This contract emphasizes psychological pressure and uncertainty. The reward includes high compensation and emergency priority status.

THE COST OF POWER

A faction hires the crew to stabilize a critical extraction site under extreme conditions. Environmental stress, equipment failure, and growing local resistance create layered conflict. The crew must maintain operations while managing escalating tension. Success provides significant rewards and improved faction standing.

DO NOT BROADCAST THIS

An unknown signal flagged as impossible must be traced and secured. The crew enters a restricted region where reality itself may behave inconsistently. Temporal anomalies and unstable data introduce unpredictable risks. This contract offers extreme rewards, including unique knowledge or artifacts, but carries potentially irreversible consequences.

ASSET RECOVERY: FULL DENIABILITY

A black-channel contract tasks the crew with infiltrating a heavily controlled Core stronghold to extract a protected asset. Security is layered and relentless. Political consequences are unavoidable. Success grants elite contract access and significant rewards. Failure may permanently alter faction relationships and the crew's standing.

NARRATIVE INTEGRATION

Contracts are not isolated events. They connect to broader narrative threads. • Anomaly contracts may tie into the Echo Collective • Corporate jobs may link to NovaGen or the Helios Combine • Political contracts may influence the Astryx Concord Repeated engagement with similar contracts should reveal deeper layers of the setting.

ESCALATION AND CONSEQUENCES

Risk escalates naturally during contracts through: • Strain accumulation

COMPLICATIONS

• Faction interference Outcomes are rarely clean. Success often introduces new problems, while failure creates opportunities for future play.

CHOICE UNDER CONSTRAINT

The system is built around constrained choice. Players are not choosing between safe and dangerous options. They are choosing between different types of risk. • Low-risk contracts provide stability but limit growth • High-risk contracts offer advancement at the cost of long-term consequences There is no perfect decision.

GM GUIDANCE

For Game Masters: • Present limited contract options • Adjust difficulty dynamically • Tie contracts into larger narrative threads • Let consequences carry forward Contracts should feel like part of a living world, not isolated missions.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

Contracts are the engine of the campaign. They drive progression, shape relationships, and connect individual sessions into a larger narrative. Every job is an opportunity, and every opportunity carries risk. The story moves forward because the crew chooses to take it on.



CHAPTER 19 //

STORY ARCS

CHAPTER 19

01

CORE PRINCIPLE: NARRATIVES, NOT SCRIPTS

Story arcs represent long-form pressure systems that evolve over multiple sessions. Each arc provides a structure for escalation, faction involvement, and consequence, but never dictates player action. They exist to create meaningful choices under pressure, not predetermined outcomes. 1. Frontier of the Unknown

02

PREMISE

An uncharted Fringe region begins producing impossible signals and spatial inconsistencies. Navigation data loops, objects remain fixed in space, and long-range scans return contradictory results.

03

ESCALATION

Exploration reveals a massive, ancient structure designed to contain something rather than transmit it. Evidence of prior expeditions suggests repeated failure under similar conditions.

04

CLIMAX DECISION

- Destroy the structure and escape; triggering long-term spatial instability
- Activate it; becoming trapped in a repeating anomaly cycle
- Attempt partial control; stabilizing it at ongoing cost



2. INDUSTRIAL EXTRACTION ZONE

PREMISE

A Helios Combine or NovaGen extraction facility goes silent. The crew is sent to investigate what appears to be a systems failure.

ESCALATION

The extracted material is revealed to be biologically reactive. Survivors show signs of integration with machinery and infrastructure.

CLIMAX DECISION

• Expose the corporation; becoming a target • Contain the incident; allowing continued exploitation • Extract survivors; destabilizing the region

NARRATIVE USE

Focuses on corporate ethics, resource exploitation, and long-term consequences.

3. DERELICT CONTAINMENT EVENT

PREMISE

A drifting vessel or station broadcasts a distress signal. Initial scans show stability, but minimal life signs.

ESCALATION

Restoring systems triggers a dormant containment failure. The environment becomes hostile, reactive, and increasingly unstable.

CLIMAX DECISION

• Destroy the vessel • Escape with unknown contamination • Secure a sample for profit

NARRATIVE USE

Ideal for high-tension, contained scenarios. Emphasizes survival, time pressure, and system failure.

4. LIVING RESOURCE CONFLICT

PREMISE

A valuable resource site becomes the center of faction dispute. Extraction is ongoing, but environmental instability increases.

ESCALATION

The resource is revealed to be part of a living planetary system or entity. Continued extraction accelerates its awakening.

CLIMAX DECISION

- Continue extraction; risking long-term collapse
- Halt operations; disrupting dependent systems
- Establish controlled balance; requiring ongoing involvement

NARRATIVE USE

Explores sustainability, compromise, and systemic consequence.

5. Central Authority vs Reform

PREMISE

Within the Astryx Concord, internal divisions surface. A policy shift threatens autonomy across multiple systems.

ESCALATION

Evidence reveals a move toward centralized control justified as stability enforcement. Reformists seek exposure or intervention.

CLIMAX DECISION

- Support reform; destabilizing the system
- Support authority; reinforcing control
- Broker compromise; creating fragile balance

NARRATIVE USE

Political intrigue, faction alignment, and ideological conflict.

6. GHOST SIGNAL NETWORK

PREMISE

Multiple systems begin receiving identical transmissions from unknown origin points.

ESCALATION

Signals appear to originate from destroyed or nonexistent locations. Some contain predictive or impossible data.

CLIMAX DECISION

• Trace and shut down the source • Harness the signal for advantage • Broadcast it widely; creating chaos

NARRATIVE USE

Pairs well with Orion Veil or Echo Collective. Focus on information, manipulation, and uncertainty.

7. FACTION PROXY WAR

PREMISE

Two major factions begin indirect conflict over a strategic location or resource.

ESCALATION

The crew is hired by one side, but evidence reveals layered manipulation by third parties.

CLIMAX DECISION

• Commit to one faction • Play both sides • Disrupt the conflict entirely

NARRATIVE USE

Highlights shifting alliances and consequences of faction involvement.

8. BLACK MARKET SURGE

PREMISE

A new illegal technology or resource floods Outer Rim markets, rapidly increasing demand and instability.

ESCALATION

Use of the resource begins causing unpredictable effects. Syndicates and corporations move to control distribution.

CLIMAX DECISION

• Control distribution • Destroy supply chains • Exploit the market

NARRATIVE USE

Economic tension, smuggling, and resource-driven conflict.

9. SYSTEM COLLAPSE EVENT

PREMISE

A Mid Rim system begins experiencing cascading failures across infrastructure and environment.

ESCALATION

The cause is unclear; system instability spreads across networks, affecting power, navigation, and life support.

CLIMAX DECISION

• Stabilize the system; requiring sacrifice of resources • Evacuate key populations • Allow collapse; shifting regional balance

NARRATIVE USE

Large-scale consequence, multi-session crisis management.



10. ECHO CONTAMINATION

PREMISE

Strange anomalies begin affecting ships, systems, and individuals exposed to a specific region or signal.

ESCALATION

Effects spread unpredictably; systems behave independently, and individuals report altered perception or memory.

CLIMAX DECISION

• Contain the spread • Study and integrate the anomaly • Abandon affected systems

NARRATIVE USE

Best tied to Echo Collective. Focus on creeping instability and long-term narrative impact.

USING THESE ARCS IN PLAY

These arcs are designed to integrate directly with your existing systems: • Contracts serve as entry points into arcs • Factions react and shape progression • Heat increases visibility and pressure • Strain escalates tension within scenes Each arc should unfold gradually. Players should discover its scope through action, not exposition.

FINAL PERSPECTIVE

These arcs are not stories to follow; they are systems of pressure to engage with. The outcome is never predetermined. What matters is how the crew navigates the choices presented and what consequences they accept.



PLAYER QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

This guide contains everything needed to create a character and begin play. It is intentionally condensed: clarity and usability at the table take priority over detail.

CORE CONCEPT

You are part of a crew operating in a dangerous, reactive system. Every action carries risk. Success creates opportunity, failure creates complications, and pushing beyond limits always has consequences. Gameplay revolves around: • Declaring intent • Building a dice pool • Rolling for outcome • Interpreting results with trade-offs

CHARACTER CREATION

1. DEFINE YOUR CHARACTER

Establish a clear concept: • Background or origin • Personality and motivation • Role within the crew Keep it functional: this informs your decisions, not just flavor.

2. ASSIGN APPROACHES

Approaches define how you act. They are broad and flexible. • Force: power, aggression, direct action • Precision: accuracy, timing, control • Logic: analysis, systems, reasoning • Instinct: awareness, reaction, intuition • Presence: influence, deception, authority Distribute values based on your system rules. Higher values mean more dice when using that approach.

3. Choose a Role Your Role defines your specialization and grants access to a Talent Tree. Each Role provides: • Unique abilities (Talents) • Mechanical advantages in specific situations • A clear function within the crew Examples: • Pilot: movement and maneuvering • Engineer: repair and system stability • Tech: digital control and hacking • Gunner: combat and weapons • Face: social manipulation • Medic: recovery and stabilization You may take a secondary role if allowed by the table rules.

4. SELECT TALENTS

● Start with Tier 1 Talents from your Role ● Talents provide: ○ Flat effects: always active ○ Dice boosts: add dice to rolls ○ Conversions: alter results ○ Push abilities: increase power with risk Talents define how your character bends the rules.

5. TRACK STRAIN

Strain represents physical and mental stress. ● Range: 1 to 6 ● Gained by: ○ Pushing actions ○ Taking damage or pressure ○ Using certain abilities At higher levels, Strain imposes penalties and risk. It does not fade passively, it must be reduced through:

REST

● Medical treatment ● Specific actions

ACTIONS AND ROLLS

STEP 1: DECLARE INTENT

State clearly: ● What you are doing ● What outcome you want The GM determines difficulty and consequences.

STEP 2: BUILD DICE POOL

Your dice pool is based on:

RELEVANT APPROACH

• Situational modifiers • Talents or abilities Modifiers may include: • Boost dice: advantages • Setback dice: complications

STEP 3: ROLL

Roll all dice together. Results produce: • Success: you achieve your goal • Failure: you do not • Advantage: additional benefit • Threat: complication or cost You can: • Succeed with complications • Fail with benefits

STEP 4: INTERPRET OUTCOME

The GM and player resolve: • What happens immediately • What new conditions are created Results should always move the situation forward.

PUSHING ACTIONS

You may push beyond normal limits. • Gain additional dice or effects • Immediately take Strain • Often introduce risk such as:

DETECTION

- System instability

ESCALATION

Pushing is powerful but dangerous: repeated use builds pressure quickly.

STRAIN LEVELS (1–6)

Strain affects both narrative and mechanics. • 1–2: Minor stress, no penalty • 3–4: Noticeable strain, situational penalties • 5: Severe impairment, high risk • 6: Critical: actions may fail or cause major consequences Strain must be actively managed.

ROLES IN PLAY

Each Role answers a different type of problem: • The Pilot: movement and escape • The Navigator: route planning and foresight • The Engineer: repair and system integrity • The Tech: control and manipulation of systems • The Gunner: combat resolution • The Operator: stealth and infiltration • The Face: negotiation and deception • The Trader: resources and leverage • The Scavenger: recovery and adaptation • The Medic: healing and stabilization • The Smuggler: evasion and concealment • The Drifter: flexibility and survival A balanced crew covers multiple problem types.

CORE GAMEPLAY LOOP

1. Situation is presented 2. Players declare actions 3. Dice are rolled 4. Results create outcomes and consequences 5. The situation evolves There is no static state. Every action changes the system.

KEY PRINCIPLES

• Actions have consequences: success is not free • Failure is not dead-end: it introduces new problems • Information is power: knowing more changes outcomes • Roles define strengths: teamwork covers weaknesses • Strain is pressure: managing it is survival

STARTING PLAY

To begin: • Each player introduces their character • The GM establishes the initial situation • The crew decides on a course of action From that point forward, play flows through the action system.