

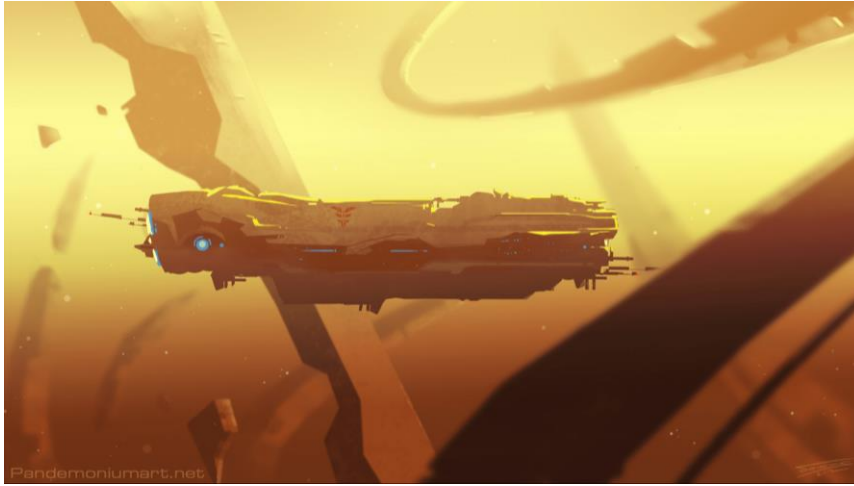
Ten Thousand Light Years from Home



A role-playing and storytelling game set in a mythical future
4 players, play time 4-5 hours
by Morten Havmøller Laursen

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe.
Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion.
I've watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate.
All those moments
will be lost in time,
like tears in rain.

-Roy Batty, *Bladerunner* (1982)



Foreword

Dear game master – dear reader. This scenario started as an attempt at taking the 1999 PC game Homeworld and re-interpret it as a scenario for Fastaval 2018.

Homeworld was a milestone in gaming, with its narrative of a dying people and their discovery that their place of origin, their garden of Eden, was a planet amongst the stars. It is one of the first great aesthetic experiences I recall experiencing. The game's story, its music and imagery has been a baseline for my understanding of other such experiences.

I have drawn strong inspiration from the game's own story and ideas, but at the same time sought to take the story in a natural direction, now that 20 years have passed – in a world after movies like Interstellar and after sci-fi stories with a transhumanist edge, such as Ancillary Justice, have become widespread.

The result of my work and long evenings of doubt is encapsulated in this very scenario you are about to read. It is a scenario about finding your home – a home out there where you feel that you belong, without having ever been there. A life that is better than the hell you've always known. The hope of distant relatives and their caring smiles.

... and how life may shape us on that path.

Thanks to my sparring partner

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Stefan Møller

Wishing you a great game and a great experience,

*Morten Havmøller Laursen
Gladsaxe, januar 2018*

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Introduction

Background

Hidden away in the far reaches of the Galaxy, a hardy human people toil away on the surface of the dying planet **Mashaara**. Through scientific breakthroughs they have learned that they are an alien life form on the planet and that they do not share DNA with other living beings around them. At the start of their space age they locate the wreckage of a six thousand years old star ship on the far side of their third moon. Etched in its hull; an enormous stellar map – with a single star near the heart of the Galaxy marked with a single recognizable word; “Home”.



Procedure

The discovery of a home amongst the stars unites the people of Mashaara and they build a gargantuan colony ship, **the Mothership**, as well as 4 advanced escort ships. Each ship is commandeered by a digital intelligence, an AI (also referred to simply as “the ship” over the course of the game). The players take the roles of the 4 escort ships’ AIs, while you as the game master control the role of the Mothership, a collection of secondary characters, as well as the narrative itself.

At the start of the game, the Mothership and the 4 players’ ships leave Mashaara, but an alien fleet soon eradicates all life on its surface. Through the rest of the game the fleet thus has no focal point apart from itself, as well as the 300,000 travelers safely stored aboard the Mothership. The hunt for the mythical “Home” near the heart of the Galaxy is the only possible conclusion to their journey.

On hypersleep

All travelers in the fleet, military personnel excluded, has been put in a frozen death-like sleep. The condition is also referred to as “cryo-sleep”. The Mothership has 30 cryo-chambers, each holding 10,000 travelers – 300,000 travelers in total.

Theme and style

The over-arching theme in the game is sacrifice for a higher cause, a cause so uniquely important that it is never questioned even when losses are great. We never stop to ask whether the sacrifice is justified – against the backdrop of a firebombed Mashaara, the answer will always be that the sacrifices are worth it ten times over.

The star ships present throughout the scenario are near-divine in their power. They are mythical beings, guardian angels, and their journey will become legend. Parts of the game try to home in on this mythical aspect. Try to lead into it using poetic language and theatrical acting.

As the game master you should **not** present the story as a sort of search for burning revenge. The sacrifice is brought solely because of its necessity. Individual players are free to have an internal narrative of revenge, but as game master and the role of Mothership you must present the story through the lens of forced necessity with an unyielding melancholic bearing.

System and mechanics

Each of the players' ships consist of 4 "modules", each represented by a quarter of a sheet of paper. Every module describes a mannerism or behavior as a hint to the player, as well as a "goal" the player may complete to reinforce the module. As such, the modules nudge the interaction between the players as the game progresses. The rest of the definition of the roles, like background and appearance, is governed by each player.



Throughout the game, events that replace these modules will come up, such that the players' roles and goals constantly shift. New modules will tend toward more aggressive social behavior. When a ship suffers damage, the other ships choose which modules to keep. In this way, players change each other's roles gradually, or rather; they try to keep the things they like about their friends.

Mainly, replacing these modules will be the result of combat, which is carried out using a simple system presented later in this document.

Scenes and editing

The scenario starts and ends with a series of small scenes in which we meet the people of Mashaara and witness how the exodus to the home planet of **Háynos** changes their lives.

Through the main part of the scenario, we take the roles of the star ships in the fleet. Each scene usually starts with the Mothership and her escort arriving from hyperspace. Things then develop, and often there will be a sequence of combat. At the conclusion of the scene, the Mothership and her fleet make the jump to hyperspace again. Between scenes, while in hyperspace, players tally damage and are re-built by the Mothership if needed.

The intent of the game is to be fundamentally exciting and forward-moving but be able to slow down and savor the moment when required. Thus, as the game master, you control the game through dramatic narration and asking players to take action in dangerous situations. The movie Dunkirk is a great example of the kind of excitement this scenario strives for; a kind of trembling suspense and intense mood, that never escalates into rock-n-roll action with roaring laughter. Other intense movies like Titanic, Gravity and Saving Private Ryan can also exemplify the fundamental suspense this scenario aims to achieve.

Implements

In order to run this game, you will need:

- An ordinary set of polyhedral dice, ideally one for each player (that is: 1d20, 1d12, 1d10, 1d8, 1d6, 1d4)
- A normal deck of playing cards (no jokers)
- This document, printed, preferably in color

Goals of the scenario

Ten Thousand Light Years from Home was conceived with a series of intended goals. Just like the purpose of a scene helps in understanding the individual components, I would like to briefly summarize the goals and intent here.

A classical game

Ten Thousand Light Years from Home is, flow-wise, a pretty classical role-playing game. This is in spite of its transhuman roles, social prose reading and a far-future setting unrecognizable to people of the 21st century.

The game master sets scenes and plays side characters, while the players manage their own roles, through which they affect the overall story. The players describe their own actions and intents, and occasionally they will have to roll dice to carry out actions.

The choice of whether a scene or the game as a whole ends in tragedy or success is, in this way, neither the players' nor the game master's "fault", and that is on purpose: Instead of each participant steering through their own narrative wishes, the dice are arbitrary judges. Follow the results where they may lead.

A broad-minded game

Some games are written specifically for a target audience. This is effective and writing for specific player types can yield fantastic experiences!

Ten Thousand Light Years from Home is not that game.

At the heart of the game's intent is the idea that it may be played in different "gears" and with differing intensity, depending on what the individual player or group is comfortable with. Therefore, there are very few mechanics that force players onto the stage; most rules that affect a player are initiated by the player (such as the goals built into their star ship modules).

Play to win

The game assumes players are here to "win" the scenario, by preventing as many losses as they can. Hence the system is not very complicated to avoid undue exploitation of mechanics. The game dynamic hinges on the modules, which all present small goals to the individual player; most of these goals force the players into social conflict with each other. Thus, in order to "win" the scenario, players must seek social conflict.

Describing a foreign world

If this was a fantasy or western scenario, ad-libbing dramatic descriptions would be a breeze. Most players with a little experience can improvise text like "my sword glints sharply as I draw it, and in one move there is the sound of broken bones, while the wall behind is spattered with drops of red"

But we are in outer space now! Hence, both this document and the player material is peppered with examples and descriptions, with the implicit goal of giving everyone involved a sense of the language needed to dramatically narrate the void of space. Please try to take note as you read these, so that you have a solid frame of reference yourself when the game starts.

Reading guide

The scenario is voluminous, as you are probably painfully aware at this moment. Luckily, a large portion of the pages involved do not contain information you need to know in detail at the start of the game. Below, you will find a brief walk-through of the information involved; which parts you should focus on getting to know, and what you can glance over or skip.

Background and setting

The upcoming chapter gives you a brief overview of the history of the Galaxy, which leads up to the start of the game. You do not need to know this extensively, but it does form a conceptual backbone from which you will understand other parts of the game better, and it will allow you to improvise with more confidence at the table.

Overview of the plot

After Background and Setting you will find a single page that contains the whole plot of the game. Many details are of course exempt, but this is the overall frame. Read this thoroughly.

Setup of the game

The chapter Setup of the Game offers a complete description of all the physical components of the game (handouts etc.) and a guide for how to prepare them for play.

Function of the Game Master and Your Role as Game Master

These two chapters deal with the things you do on a moment-to-moment basis throughout the game. They describe important tools for the collective storytelling to succeed and set the proper mood for the game.

Mechanics

Read these pages in detail. Make sure you understand the intent of the mechanics as well as their function.

Game master's material

The section "Game Master's Material" contains a series of pages you will need during the game, such as sheets that detail the individual scenes, as well as major side-characters. Read through the side-character roles and understand in what ways they affect the story; it is difficult to refer to these actively during play.

The scene graphs are intended as both detailed description and useful reference during play. Read through them all so that you have a sense of the details involved, then rely on the scene graph layout during play to recall information you need.

Prose reading

It is not necessary that you know the prose reading in advance. I still recommend skimming all 5 prose readings so that you have a feel for the language and how they fit the story, but it isn't strictly speaking necessary.

It is however very important that you acquaint yourself with the **Ritual of Reading**, which is described in text boxes on the same sheet as Prose Reading 1. You will need to go over this with the players.

On playing cards

In this scenario, playing cards may be referred to as either "closed" or "open".

This of course refers directly whether the card is face-down or face-up, respectively.

Try to use "closed" or "open" when you discuss cards at the table to distance the game from a regular card game.

Background and setting

This chapter is an overview of the history of Mashaara's people and the state of the Galaxy. The goal is not to know this information by heart; it is simply presented here to give you, the game master, a solid starting reference from which you can understand the rest of the game and the plot and improvise within it as you require at the table.

Prehistoric time

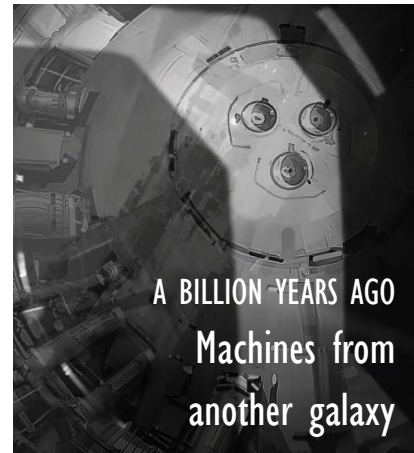
More than a billion years ago, two ancient beings arrived in our Galaxy. They had travelled through the endless black of space for a hundred thousand years and were from another galaxy, the name of which they could barely recall. The one they had left was dead; devoured by millions of years of warring civilizations, each collapsed on top of the other. In the end, barren planets and radiation from the discharge of unbelievable weapons were the only things left.

The first being named itself **The Borer**. From the death of its old galaxy it had learned to seek knowledge and keep the past; for its goal was to stop another one from stripping itself of life.

The second being had learned another lesson; that the wars of self-replicating life would inevitable cause any galaxy to render itself barren. It named itself **The Black Hole Mother**, and its purpose was to survive all life-forms so that she could escape when this Galaxy would inevitably die. To that end, she needed absolute dominance.

The Black Hole Mother created a new consciousness to serve her, shaped from her own thoughts and dark dreams. It named itself **Red Blade from Dark Skies**, and it would become a key power broker in the galaxy for millions of years.

Hundreds of millions of years later, the age of humanity began in the Galaxy. They have forgotten from whence they came. But they have spread far and wide and built many new civilizations, some already extinct, in the ten million years since they blasted into interstellar space.



Mashaara's people as rulers

Some 8,000 years ago the people of Mashaara lived near the heart of the Galaxy, and they were its undisputed rulers. Their power unquestioned, they lorded from the throne of the Galaxy's crown jewel; the planet **Háynos**.

In those days the people were known as **Ashtarai**; “Blood of the Stars”, and they had inhabited Háynos for 30,000 years.

The Ashtarai played relatives and competitors against each other and cemented their own leadership in the Galaxy with blood on their hands. They had help. They were allied with the ancient ship **Red Blade from Dark Skies**, its name now synonymous with destruction, murder and the Ashtarai’s boundless ambition.

After millennia of broken rebellions, a people from the fringes of the Galaxy emerged. They were led by the ship **Kaugur**, with an AI that remembered the time before humanity, and who wished to set them free. Through cunning, Kaugur forged an alliance with Red Blade from Dark Skies – and the Ashtarai began a prolonged but unstoppable fall from their towering throne.



Vicious battles slowly undulated back and forth across all the skies of the Galaxy for nearly a century. Untold worlds, ships and gargantuan space stations were ground into stellar dust, pieces of their wreckage still floating through empty space. Here, they mingle with even older wreckage – some of it older than most stars that now shine in the Galaxy.

In the final phases of the rebellion, Kaugur was secretly attacked and wiped from existence by Red Blade from Dark Skies, who did not agree with the power Kaugur wielded, nor its visions for the Galaxy’s future. This was kept a secret using any and all means.

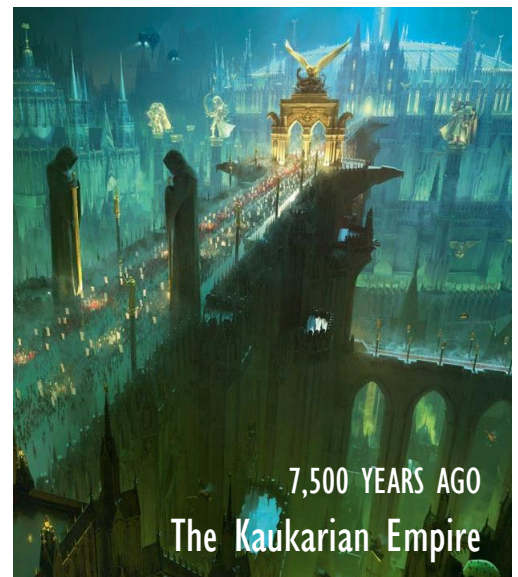
Without Kaugur’s wisdom, the new lords of the Galaxy claimed power and called themselves “Kaukhar” in honor of the lost ship that had led them for so long. The gruesome deed of Red Blade from Dark Skies was never discovered, and the newly christened Kaukhar people allied themselves with the traitorous, ancient ship, who now whispered to them lies and malicious intent.

The Empire

The Kaukhar people created an open and free republic, but over the course of a few centuries it devolved into an unhealthy rule, where leaders were revered as deities. About 7,500 years ago, The Kaukarian Empire was founded.

Since then much has happened. Over millennia different peoples – pirates from the outer reaches, clans from the Angel Nebulae and rival empires from the Vhanrai-quadrant – have tried to topple the Kaukarian Empire.

The seat of power has been removed from Háynos and brought back, and the Empire has been thrown into century-long conflicts. Through this time, the Kaukarian Empire has re-invented itself multiple times – and each time its hold on power has been stronger and more abusive. The current empire is The Fifth Kaukarian Empire, and bears only superficial likeness to the first; much has changed and not for the better.



Red Blade from Dark Skies continues misleading the Kaukarians and conducts its own agenda, with none to challenge its position of power as a central backbone of the Kaukarian fleet.

Exile to the fringes of the Galaxy

At the founding of the Kaukarian Empire the Ashtarai people was beaten and hated. Red Blade from Dark Skies sought to extinguish them completely, but one last ounce of compassion yet lived in the Kaukarians and instead the Ashtarai were exiled. They were put aboard a decrepit colony ship and its course was set for the fringes of the Galaxy – knowledge of the Ashtarai was outlawed by the Kaukarian Empire.

Removed from history, the Ashtarai aboard the decrepit colony ship sought to keep their history, but over millennia of scarce resources and superstition their history turned first to legend, then myth. Re-told for hundreds of generations aboard a colony ship that had its own memory wiped, with none aboard knowing its true origin.

Even the word "Ashtarai" dissolved, along with the language they spoke; first it became Ashterá, meaning "children from stars". It became Masheráa; "the one who follows Sherá", which itself became **Mashaara**, a name that was eventually given to the colony ship, whose memory had only worsened.

Finally, the colony ship left its travelers on the surface of a dying desert planet. At that time, "Mashaara" meant "that which holds life", and the planet was thus named. By now the word has lost its formal meaning; like the word Ashtarai it has passed out of all knowledge. The planet Mashaara was thus settled by a people without history 6,000 years ago.

Since then, the people of Mashaara has scraped by in their bitter world... until they found the wreckage of an ancient space shuttle on the far side of their third moon, and rediscovered the meaning of the word "Home"; "Háynos".



Linguistics

Through eons, language changes and words change meaning. Through the last thousands of years, some select words have changed like this:

▼ **Háynos** (from: khei, "bedrest, safety"; nos, "us, ours")

▼ **Hámo** ("origin")

▼ **Háijm** ("place of birth")

▼ **Home**

▼ **Ashtarai** (from: ésh, "blood"; hster, "star")

▼ **Ashterá** ("children from stars")

▼ **Masheráa** ("the one who follows Sherá")

▼ **Mashaara** ("that which holds life", name of colony ship and planet)

▼ **Kaugur** (origin unknown, an ancient ship from the far reaches)

▼ **Kaukhar** ("Kaugur's own")

▼ **Kaukarian** ("like the Kaukhar people")

Overview of the plot

Prologue – appr. 30 minutes

Before the players take the roles of star ships they play a small ensemble of human characters. These brief scenes highlight the destinies of the people about to board the Mothership and enter cryosleep.

Act 1 – appr. 1 hour

Through a brief workshop the players breathe life and form into their star ships. The players' ships leave Mashaara temporarily to look for clues in their solar system and test their systems.

At the end of this act, a foreign fleet from the hitherto unknown Kaukarian Empire finds Mashaara and commits genocide on its people. They are led by an enormous ship, called Red Blade from Dark Skies. The Mothership and her fleet flee into the unknown.

Act 2 – appr. 1 hour

The desperate exodus leads the Mothership and her fleet through two dangerous trials:

With Red Blade from Dark Skies at their heels, the fleet tries to avoid incoming fire by taking cover on an exoplanet and use its terrain to avoid deadly barrages.

Just in time to ruin their escape, The Black Hole Mother arrives and tries to wipe out the fleet. But the Mothership charges towards the event horizon of one of the new-born black holes and shunts the fleet into hyperspace a mere 300 meters from oblivion. The player ship Forty Steps towards the Sun is crushed, but the enemy cannot track the fleet's trajectory.

Act 3 – appr. 1½ hour

A new ship is built to replace the lost. The fleet then comes out of hyperspace in an alien solar system to lick its wounds and consider their options. Here they meet a friendly ship called Uzaam, who betrays its peers out of compassion. It nervously relays information to the fleet about the Kaukarian Empire and The Borer.

The fleet finds The Borer; the only being in the Galaxy that stands a hope of defeating Red Blade from Dark Skies and The Black Hole Mother.

Act 4 – appr. 30 minutes

Finally, The Black Hole Mother is confronted and killed according to a plan laid by The Borer.

Red Blade from Dark Skies hatches a gruesome plan to revenge the death of its creator: It charges madly towards the mythical home planet of Háynos in order to destroy it. This leads to a final confrontation in the atmosphere above Háynos, hundred-mile trails of burning plasma surrounding the ships as they barrel towards the surface.

Epilogue – appr. 15 minutes

The surviving travelers aboard the Mothership awake and land on Háynos and are confronted with the consequences of their journey; whole cities are ruined by falling debris and the discharge of weapons in the atmosphere.

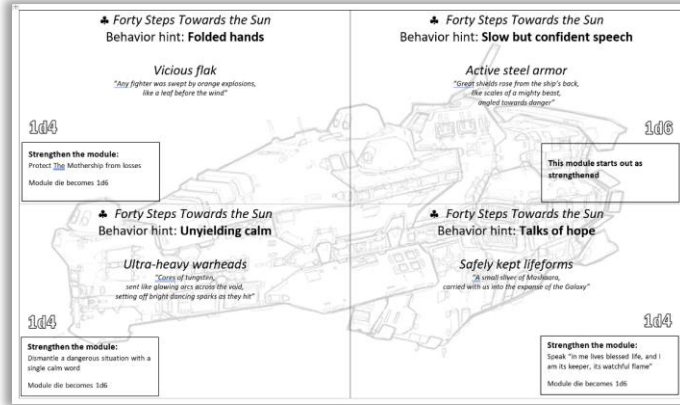
Setup of the game

Here is a brief overview of the sheets and handouts used in the game, as well as how to prepare them for play.

Player handouts

Star ship modules

These pages must be cut into 4 parts, as indicated by the lines, so that each module may be changed individually over the course of the game. When put in front of the player, they must be arranged such that they form the image of a star ship. The 4 starting star ships have card suit symbols at the top, indicating which ship belongs to what player from the casting. The ship modules without card suits represent the modules that may be gained over the course of the game – these have a gradual progression of power, so it is important that they are kept in order.



Human roles and cryo chambers

These sheets must also be cut along the lines.

The human roles are used during the prologue.

Cryo chambers and roles with the text “a traveler” will end up in the card pile **The Travelers**, which is put at the center of the table after the prologue.



Game Master's material

At your seat as the game master, you should also have some papers to be able to refer to them. You will find them later in this document in the section named Game Master's Material.

Side characters

Over the course of the game several side characters appear whom you must step into and act out. The side character texts are intended as detailed explanations; the effect of each role in each scene is written into the scene structure as well.

These side characters have been prepared for the scenario:

- The Mothership
- Support Vessel Agal
- The Colony Ship Mashaara
- Red Blade from Dark Skies
- Uzaam
- The Borer
- The Black Hole Mother



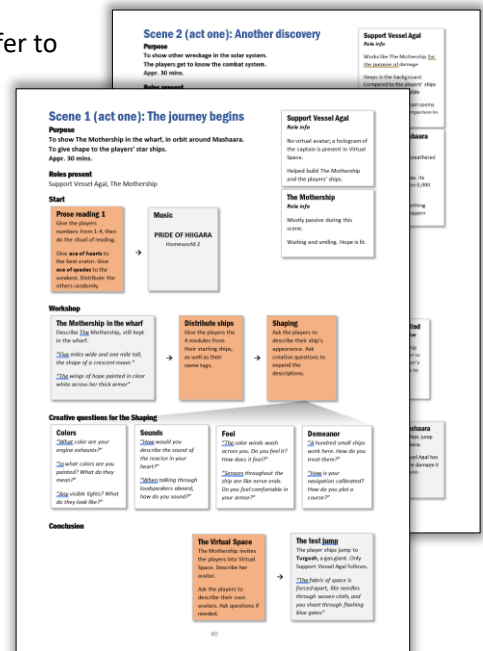
During the game you are free to invent more if you see the need for it.

Scene graphs

Put these in chronological order, so that you may refer to them during play.

The small "cards" showing the individual scene components are color coded:

- **Orange cards** are essential. The game depends on these elements.
- **Light grey cards** are scene elements that structure the game, but the game is not dependent on these taking place as written.
- **White cards** are optional elements, which you can include or leave out as you see fit.



A deck of playing cards

The game uses a deck of playing cards (without jokers) to drive parts of the mechanic.

Sort out aces, queens and kings and keep them separate. They have special roles.



Game Master's tools

On the following pages you will find an overview of some narrative tools the game is built upon, and which you will be using in practice at the table.

The right of narration

We are here to create a story between all of us, and the players should also be allowed power over the fiction

You can always hand the right of narration to the players over the course of a scene. Do this to activate them if they had a bad combat sequence or plain need something to do at the table. The players may also hand the right of narration between themselves.

Cutting without a knife

Do not use the word "cut" or "thank you" in its place

Explicit cutting, such as when the game master uses the word "cut", are easy to work with but can have a jarring effect on the narrative flow. It is not the only way! Here are two explicit techniques to get around the use of the word "cut" and keep the scene's narrative flow and energy intact:

Pushing through the scene

When a scene reaches some natural conclusion, use your power as storyteller; let circumstances change to push players along. In the third scene of the prologue, where a daughter must part with her father, the scene can push through the intensifying protests surrounding them, in turn making soldiers clear the area and forcing the players to conclude their goodbyes before they are separated.

If players debate for too long in the Virtual Space, you can describe how the world surrounding them, in slow motion, starts demanding action; the muzzle of a giant beam cannon starts glowing far away, readying a shot.

If the players are in doubt regarding some choice and you want to move on, let a friendly ship provide information favoring one side or simply let the Mothership make the choice for them!

Recount, reward, lead on

We are at the end of a scene; the players are beginning to move in the right direction or you have to grab them and make them move.

Make it happen by seizing the narrative. Repeat or recount the last thing a player did, and immediately carry on narrating from this point – lead on to the next scene or end with an implicit cut ("you dive into hyperspace").

When you interrupt using this technique, you must recount the players' actions as if they were competent! This is a kind of bait-and-switch maneuver; you reward the player with success, while you take control of the narrative and keep it. Here is an example:

Player 1: "(...) and like that I circle the enemy ships, dodging their fire, my cannons a roaring thunder as-

Game Master: "You circle the enemy ships and evade all fire; warheads burst around you like a raging storm, but you are untouchable. The Mothership grabs your arm in the Virtual Space; 'we are set' she says with a nod, and she escapes to hyperspace with you all in tow"

Time manager in combat

Instead of mechanical "rounds" and "turns", you direct the flow of battle

During conflict and combat, the flow of the game is much like classic tabletop role-playing games, but it is less structured. As the game master you are the central narrator, weaving the players' actions together with the actions of the enemy. There is no cohesive structure of turns or rounds, where each player takes their turn in order (unless you decide you want that). Here is an example of the basic flow to aim for:

Game Master (GM): *"The enemy cannons turn around, and little lights come on near the radar arrays and sensors – they are preparing to open fire. Who reacts?"*

Player 1: "I charge forward immediately, firing my enormous mass accelerator"

GM: *"An arc of red-hot light streaks across the void"
[turns to player 3] "a small group of fighters attempt to flank you, what is your response?"*

P. 3: "I send my own fighters! They will regret this..."

P. 4: "I assist using my flak cannons; fire all!"

GM: *"From your hangar doors, fighter planes screech into space like spears of white steel, covered by the fire from a hundred crackling flak guns; then the mass accelerator strikes the enemy formation. Their cannons open fire battering and scorching your armor."*

P. 1: "Emergency maneuver! I try to draw their fire off the Mothership"

GM: *"You throw yourself into a mad whirling maneuver"
[notices player 2 has not reacted yet] "your friend's emergency maneuver leaves an opening for you to exploit, how do you do it?"*

As you probably noticed, you should let the players' own initiative dictate the flow. As a golden rule; when a player says they take an action, let them do it and assume success unless it breaks the narrative cohesion or is prevented directly by mechanics (more on that later).

Build on top of the players' descriptions and bend the description of one player's action into an active question to another ("your friend's emergency maneuver leaves an opening for you to exploit...")

Try to sense when players feel entitled to being heard. Ask them directly how they act and react towards the enemy's vulnerabilities or attacks, when you want to activate a player.

The Virtual Space

In the abstract Virtual Space all ships have digital avatars, and everyone can cut back and forth between reality and Virtual Space

The ships in the game are high-tech machines with untold raw calculating power, but once they were human. They still need a human experience of consciousness and presence.

The Virtual Space is an abstract layer in the game, a sort of parallel reality, where the ships take on humanoid shapes. This represents their digital consciousnesses for each other to see in a dream-like manner. In the Virtual Space, concepts like distance and laws of physics may be illogical and strange, depending on what the game calls for.

Because the Virtual Space is an abstract representation, abstractions of actions come into play here: When the ships transfer data to each other, such as coordinates in the Galaxy, we can play it out with them showing the coordinates in the Virtual Space; floating holograms and images materialize, letting the characters point at and talk about the information they present to each other in the space of a single thought.

Everyone in the game can cut between real space and Virtual Space as much as they want. Here is an example from the first act, where the Mothership must be freed from the wharf:

Game Master (GM): "The enemy fleet appears beyond the horizontal arc, while blooms of bright burning light, unfathomable bombs, silently spread over the surface of Mashaara."

Player 3: "In the Virtual Space I look towards an impossible point in the distance. I break into a run, as if preparing to throw a spear. Large doors open along my sides, and slim missiles rage towards the enemy position."

GM: "The missiles burn and tear through space, leaving their characteristic white trails, visible from the surface of the burning planet like the arrows of angels arriving too late. The Mothership is still fastened with giant bolts to the wharf in orbit; in Virtual Space she tears against mighty iron chains binding her arms and legs. 'release me!' she implores, as her engines churn with a blue inferno – but the enormous scaffold and bolts are too strong, and she is nailed to the spot. She lifts her chained arms before you 'help me' she pleads again."

Notice how there is almost no need for explicit cutting between real space and Virtual Space; it is clear from context when an action is described in either space. There need not be any logic to the cutting back and forth. Bring abstract representations to life to underscore the events unfolding in a mythical symbolic light, like the chains binding the Mothership.

After some time, the players will learn to narrate within the same framework, as long as you confidently and repeatedly use the Virtual Space in your own narration and description.

Your role as game master

In the game room you play the role of Game Master. Everything you do influences the perception of the game, in the same way that personality traits of characters influence the perception of their inner workings. These are the character traits you should project as Game Master:

When not inhabiting a role...

The vast, cold space

Space is cold and unyielding. It does not laugh, and it does not gloat

Adopt a calm and straight posture and speak too slow rather than too fast. You may smile at jokes, but never laugh. Neither should you take part in the players' own talk and banter unless you have to. Keep eye contact when you speak and enunciate clearly and with poise. You are the authority.

Poetic narrator

Tell a tale of thundering sounds, tell a tale of blinding light

When a player ends their description of an action, catch that description and make it more vibrant if need be. Try to paint in beautiful colors and dramatic words; missiles screech through the black of space with burning orange trails; cannons thunder, sending showers of small lights, which tear and scorch enemy armor.

Poetic listener

Invite the players to paint beautiful pictures as well

Make sure you invite players to describe and narrate on their own as well. Wrap the question in an invitation to poetry: As a player engages their engine you may ask "how does it look, as the fire rages from your heart, pushing you forward?" – or when a player fires their cannons: "your warheads sail like orange dots through the void towards the Enemy; how and where do they strike?"

Music director

Music frames our common understanding of a scene

The game comes with a series of suggestions for music, written into the scenes. Take your time during play to put these on. The 20 seconds spent doing that will be repaid over the next 20 minutes with the proper framing.



When you inhabit a role...

Grand language

"I am the Mothership, mother of my people! You scorched our skies, danced upon its burnt-out ashes – forever that blood is on your hands."

When you inhabit a role, it can be easy to drift towards everyday language, but try sticking to slow, deliberate speech with a flair for the theatrical. Some roles are more agitated and human, but for instance the Mothership must convey a certain authority and gravitas.

Show the way for the players

You are the yardstick of the players' commitment to acting

Never underestimate the effect that you, the game master, can have on players by acting out your roles with passion and abandon. Often this is like a balloon waiting to be punctured; when the first player has raised their voice, it is a lot easier for the next one. Give them something to look up to; play to the hilt, using every instrument available to your inner actor.



Mechanics

Ten Thousand Light Years from Home makes use of a series of small mechanics that simulate the quest of the players' star ships trying to keep safe their creators.

The Travelers

The central mechanic of the game is The Travelers. On the middle of the table is a pile of small cards, symbolizing the travelers aboard the Mothership. When the Mothership suffers damage you, the game master, will remove one or more cards from this pile and tear them apart; this symbolizes their death. It is the overarching goal of the players to prevent this from happening.

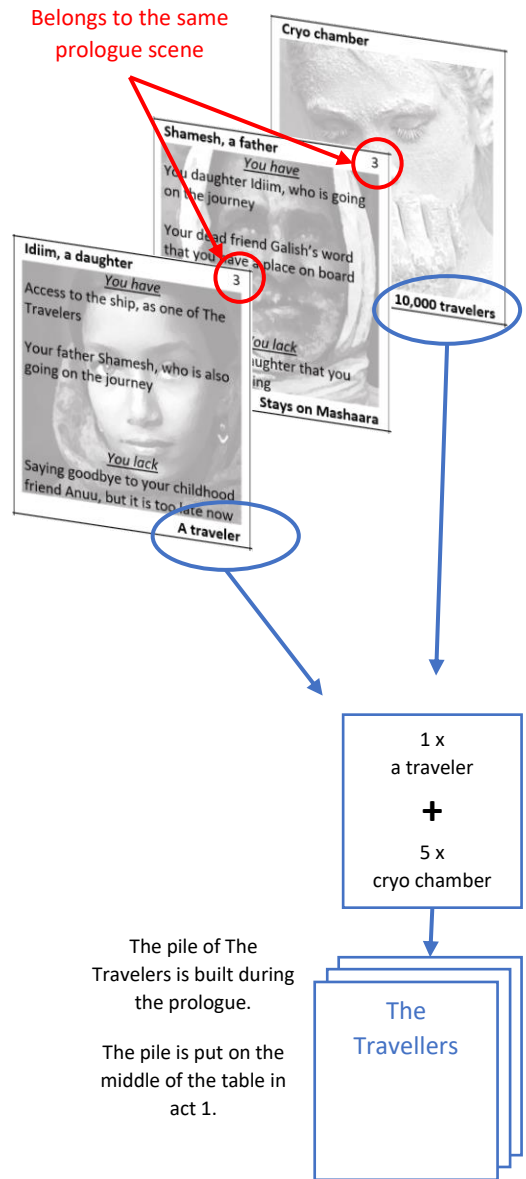
There are 3 types of card relevant to The Travelers: Most of the cards are the same and are named "cryo chamber". Each cryo chamber contains 10,000 travelers in hypersleep. All of these will go into the pile of The Travelers.

The two other types of cards both represent a named character. They are all roles to be played in the prologue of the game. Some of these roles end up among The Travelers.

These cards with roles come with a number in the upper right corner, indicating which scene in the prologue they appear in.

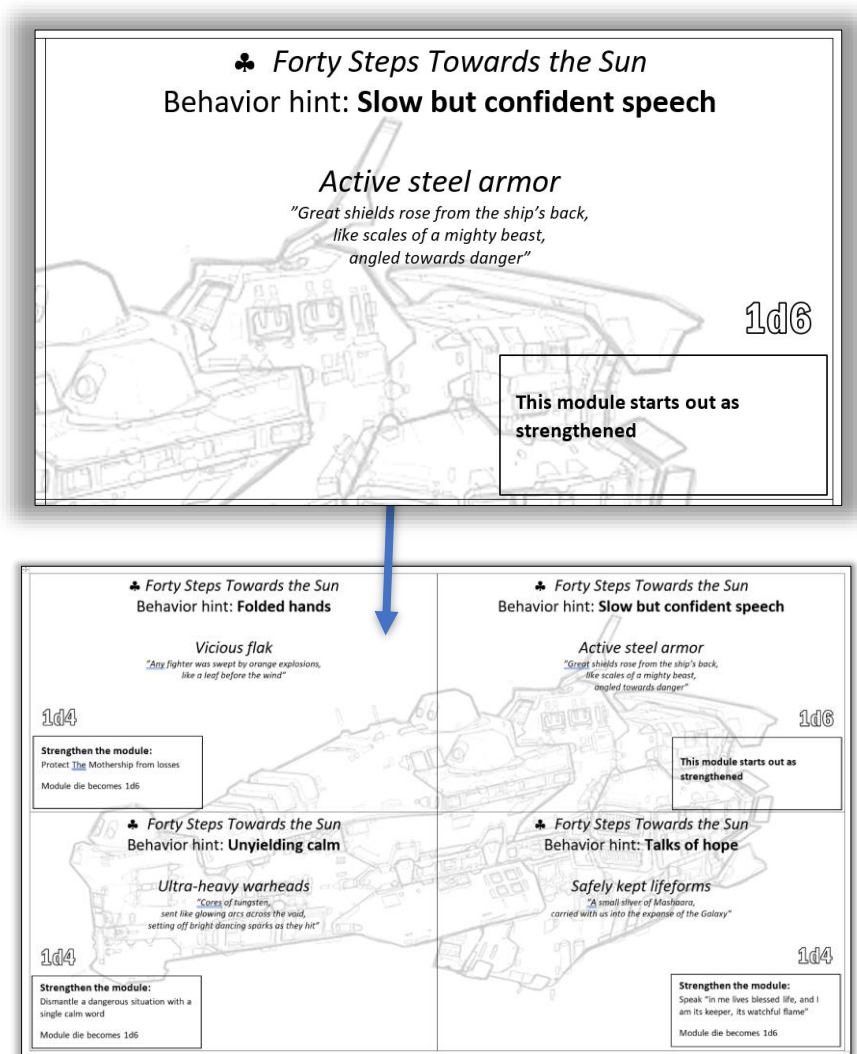
The cryo chambers and roles going on the journey are treated similarly; when the Mothership suffers damage, you remove cards from the pile and tear them whether they are cryo chambers or names roles. Regardless of type, you will tear the same number of cards based on damage suffered.

Building the pile of The Travelers happens during the prologue of the game. After the first prologue scene you will take each role involved and stack 5 cryo chambers on top of each, and put all of this in one stack. Carry on like this throughout the prologue, thus spacing each role going on the journey 5 cryo chambers apart.



Star ship modules

Each player's role and options in the game are loosely defined through the 4 modules that constitute their ship. The modules are somewhat self-explanatory, but here is a brief overview.



Above you will see the modules of one of the starting ships. The Spades-symbol indicates which card suit this ship is connected to, which is important to casting during the prologue.

"Behavior hint" is a suggestion illustrating how this module might shape this player's demeanor and body language. It varies between modules. This is not something the player is required to adhere to; it is, as written, a hint.

The modules each have a technical feature (such as "Active steel plating" above). When a player involves a feature in their narration of a combat move, the player may add a bonus to their roll.

Each module has a text box with the text "Strengthen this module". If the player completes the action described in the box, the module is immediately and permanently strengthened, adding a larger bonus to rolls during combat. Let the players evaluate whether they have completed their own actions – the actions are written purposefully for this.

Combat and conflict

Combat and conflict is primarily driven by you as narrator, but is also supported through a mechanic based on an ordinary deck of cards (without jokers).

You, as the game master, will lay down cards one by one to represent the player's inevitable march to victory. However, at critical points the players must roll dice in order to avoid taking heavy losses as they barrel towards their goal.

Narration of combat and conflict follows the pattern described in "Narrating combat" (page 28). It may be relevant to re-read this chapter on the mechanics after you've read about the narration.

The combat rules do not try to simulate individual damages and the tactical situation – it is abstract, but each card on the table represents an individual combat maneuver in some sense.

The playing cards

Every time a player declares their intent or action in combat, you draw a card and glance at its suit; if it is **not hearts**, put it on the table face-down ("closed"). Do this in front of you towards the players, so that you form a visible line of cards between you and the players.

If the suit is **hearts** you put it down face-up ("open"). The type of the card, plus the number of closed cards, defines the difficulty. The player must beat this difficulty by rolling dice (detailed blow).

All cards with numbers are difficulty 10, while court cards are difficulty 15.

The picture on the right shows a difficulty of 13: A numbered card of difficulty 10, plus 3 closed cards.

Each time you put down a closed card, the player succeeds at their action to the extent that it does not seriously shift the balance of the fight. Think of it like a cinematic sword duel, in which plenty of feints and parries occur until, at a key moment, one of the fighters inflict a heavy wound.

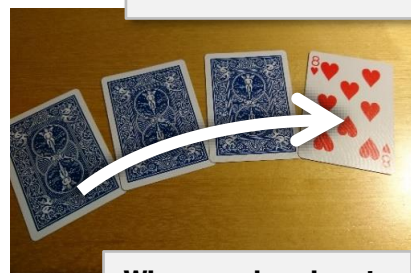
In this way we can narrate combat back and forth, and the mechanic escalates the stakes, until a card of hearts is revealed and with dice we decide whether losses are suffered during a critical moment.

Damage

Both the players' star ships and the Mothership can suffer damage. This is done by putting playing cards down in front of each player or you as the Mothership, typically due to a bad die roll. In contrast to many other systems of combat, we only deal with damage after combat is over – until then the fleet is kept flying through pure strength of will and hope, meaning that **damage does not affect combat**. Damages and their mechanics are detailed later in this text.

Draw cards

For each player action you draw a card and put it closed on the table, unless the suit is hearts...



When you draw hearts

The card is put down openly and the player must beat the difficulty.

Difficulty

The difficulty is 10 for numbered cards, and 15 for the court cards. The number of closed cards is added to this.

Dice rolls

The player wins a dice roll by rolling a 20-sided die and **meet or beat the difficulty**. The 20-sided die is the **base die** of each ship.

If the player involved one or more features from their modules in the narration, the die from the strongest module is added to the roll to beat a difficulty.

If the player has “strengthened” a module, its die type increases. It is perfectly legal to complete the action required to strengthen a module as part of narrating the combat maneuver that provokes the dice roll! It is ultimately on the player to keep track of which modules in their ship is strengthened.

If the player beats the difficulty

Losses are avoided: The playing cards in front of you, including the open one, are added to the players’ combined efforts towards ending the combat.

If the player misses the difficulty

Losses suffered: Draw a **new** set of cards from the pile, the same amount that is in front of you on the table for the current die roll. Distribute these new cards as damage as you see fit. Then add the cards on the table towards the players’ efforts towards ending the combat.

Enemy fire

As the game master you control the enemy fire, deciding where it is most intense. You choose how to do this according to the story’s state and actions taken.

The implicit goal is to reward players for aggressive narration and diverting attention from the Mothership. Therefore: If the players are too complacent or careful, let the enemy target the Mothership and focus their fire on her. Players who talk aggressively to enemies in the Virtual Space, use diversion tactics, or are especially bold and daring are natural targets of the enemy fire. In this way, players avoid damage to the Mothership though aggressive acting and daring actions.

There is no separate mechanic for enemy fire, but use this as a rule of thumb when you distribute damage among players and the Mothership.

Dice in combat

All player ships roll their base die: 1d20.

If the player's narration involves one or more modules, the strongest module adds its die.

If the module is strengthened, or becomes strengthened during the narration leading up to the roll, its die type increases.

Players can never claim bonus dice from more than one module at a time.





Ending combat

In order to end combat the players have to amass a certain amount of playing cards. Cards are only counted towards this if players have rolled to avoid losses from them.

After each die roll, the cards from the current line are added to the players' accumulated cards towards ending a combat phase.

Combat has two phases; in the first phase the player ships are generally occupied with seizing initiative and establishing a zone of control. In the second phase the player ships attempt to win the battle as such (whether this constitutes eliminating the enemy or escaping). Each phase demands a certain number of cards be accumulated by the players, and they are not carried over between phases.

The combat phases are described on the scene graphs. Here is an example of how it looks:

On the two phases of combat

Each phase demands a certain number of cards be accumulated by the players, while they try to avoid losses.

The two phases are solved separately; accumulated cards do not carry over!

COMBAT

Scan area for targets [2],
eliminate weapons platforms [4]

The players must learn the combat system during this fight. Take your time if needed.

Use the deck of cards **without queens and kings**.

The two phases are detailed at the top.

The numbers indicate how many cards must be accumulated to end the combat phase.

When the players end the second phase, the combat is resolved.

Bending the rules

In addition to the core mechanics, other things may happen.

You are encouraged to improvise to your heart's content at the table using dice and cards, overruling numbers on the scene graphs or calling out cards in some way. Below is a list of central "rule additions" that the scenario assumes are in effect. Make sure you know them.

"I'm all-in"

A player can provoke an open card, whatever the suit, if the player wishes to do so.

The player indicates this by declaring "I'm all-in". The player's ship throws itself into the heat of battle, without caring for its own safety or that of the Mothership. This forces you to put down the next card openly, revealing the value, whether it is hearts or not. The closed cards already on the table are still added to the difficulty.

Such a gamble is not without **consequence!** If the player wins the difficulty roll you remove one of the cards from the successes gained – and deal this card as damage instead! Prefer dealing this damage to the Mothership if applicable.

If the players **overuse this rule**, the enemy will learn; you may remove more cards from their successes.

Final gambit

At the start of the game, all players are dealt an ace card of their own suit to distribute roles. Once over the course of the game, the ace can be spent to immediately win a roll that would otherwise fail. The player may declare this use **after** the dice are rolled.

The player's ship immediately loses a module which you pick (prefer module that the player often uses). The player is not dealt a new module before combat concludes and the player ships are re-forged. The ship may still receive damage as normal and lose even more modules when damage is tallied.

Serious escalations

The battles in the game have suggestions for escalations. As a starting point, these do not have an impact apart from dramatic framing.

If you want to put pressure on the players (and they should feel the pressure!) you can let any escalation deal damage directly, increase the difficulty of the next roll or increase the number of cards needed to end combat. You do not have to do this with each escalation – do it when you think the game calls for it.



Optional additional rules

The rules below add more complexity to the game but also add a better dynamic if you can manage them. Use them if you feel like you have a good overview and can spare the time and effort to teach the group how to follow them.

Spending modules

This rule forces the players to vary their descriptions more, as modules are “spent” when involved in a combat maneuver. This forces the players to involve more of their modules when narrating combat, as they bounce between unspent ones.

When a player describes a combat maneuver, and a module is involved, the player must clearly mark that module as “spent”. The player does this by turning it 90 degrees (like “tapping” a card in a card game).

When the next dice roll is made, all spent modules become ready again (“untapped”) – **except** the module used for the roll, which remains spent until the next roll of dice.

All modules of course become unspent between combat sequences.

Ships supporting each other

This rule introduces a way for the ships to help each other when rolling dice. It lets the players feel more like a tight-knit band who help each other when under pressure, but it requires difficulty to be adjusted because more dice are involved.

Increase the difficulty of combat dice rolls by 5; a number card counts as 15, a court card counts as 20. The cards’ values for the purpose of damage and losses remain unchanged.

When a player (let’s call this the “main player”) must roll dice as usual, another player can support the roll using one of their modules (even if it is spent/tapped!). The supporting player describes their help and rolls their module die, which is added to the main player’s result.

If you are also using the rule “spending modules”, remember that a module used for rolling remains spent after the roll. That is; both modules, the main player’s and the supporting player’s alike, count as spent when the next round starts.

Rolling all together

A couple of times throughout the the scenario, a so-called “count-down” takes place, in which you will take 8 cards on your hand and the group narrates a combat sequence culminating in the 8th card being put on the table as an open card, against which a player must roll. In order to increase the group cohesion, you may want to carry out this particular roll in a special way: Let all players roll, one of ther the other, against the same difficulty. If 2 or more players succeed, the whole group succeeds. Otherwise, the whole group fails.

Since everyone in this sequence is helping each other out, this particular roll should not be combined with “ships supporting each other”.

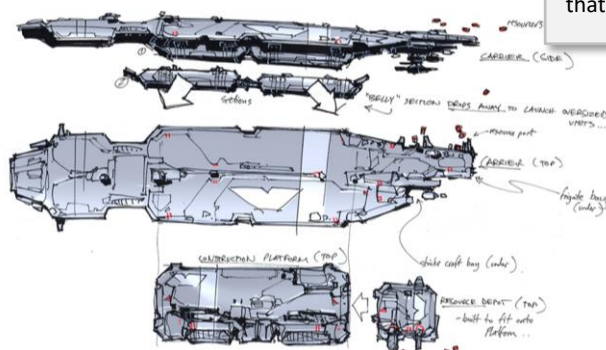
Losses and damage

Damage is treated a little differently from classic systems; the players' ships and the Mothership can receive (potentially) endless damage and still hold together. It is only at the end of a battle that we find out what how serious the damage truly is; until then the ships are held aloft through their power of will and the magic of the plot.

Damage is indicated using playing cards, put beside the players or you as the Mothership. Closed cards are kept closed, open cards are kept open.

After combat all cards are opened. The difficulty of the top card is added to the amount of cards, excepting the top card itself. Just like in battle, numbered cards are difficulty 10, while court cards are difficulty 15. The player must meet or beat this difficulty on the roll of a 20-sided die. Modules cannot be used to influence this roll.

The Mothership suffers one loss for every numbered card – and suffers 5 losses for every court card. For every loss, you remove one card from the pile of The Travelers and tear it apart. You should do this slowly and theatrically. If you can manage, count the number of dead and read the names of now-dead characters aloud, as they are embraced by the cold vastness of empty space.



Damage after combat: Players

The closed cards are opened. The card with the highest value is added to the number of cards (excl. the highest-value card).

Like in battle, number cards are difficulty 10, court cards are difficulty 15.

The player rolls 1d20 to meet or beat this difficulty. If the roll fails, the ship break: Carry out the ritual of re-forging.

Damage after combat: The Mothership

Open the cards. Number cards deal 1 loss, court cards deal 5 losses.

For every loss, the Mothership loses one of The Travelers. Tear the cards that are lost apart.

The ritual of re-forging

A player ship has broken and must be re-forged. Follow these steps:

1. In silence, the player puts their modules at the center of the table
2. Each of the other players choose one module to save, until one module is left to be destroyed
3. You destroy the left-over module
4. The Mothership re-forges the ship; replace all missing modules with modules from your stack
5. Let the player describe the look of their ship after the change

If the player ship has less than 4 modules (such as after using "Final Gambit"), one module must still be left on the table. The fastest get to choose.

Ships with less than 4 modules

Sometimes ships will have less than 4 modules during this ritual.

When that happens, the fastest choosers decide; **one module must always be left on the table** for you to destroy.

Narrating combat

It is one thing how the mechanics of combat work at their core. It is another thing how these mechanics influence narration in practice.

Rhythm

The cards you put on the table decide the rhythm of the narration. Think of each card as the hammer at a court; when a player has described an action and you put down a card, whether open or closed, that action is committed to. The decision is sealed.

You should also think of it as explicit beats of storytelling; drive the combat forward in sprints, *bam-bam-bam!*, interrupted by more poetic visual descriptions at roughly every third “beat”. But don’t force it; this depends on intuition, affected by the overall game flow and whether you or others have good ideas for picturesque descriptions of the actions unfolding.

An example:

Game Master (GM): *“(...) You fly through the narrow valley, enemy missiles right behind you.”*

Player 1: “I wait until they are danger close; then I engage full engine power and envelop them in my engine wash”

GM: *[puts down closed card] “You succeed; you are safe for now. But another salvo of missiles flies towards the Mothership.”*

Player 2: “I destroy them, pot-shots from my miniaturized beam weapons”

GM: *[puts down closed card] “Most disintegrate, but a few make it through still heading for the Mothership. Anyone else?”*

Player 3: “Yes! I put myself between the Mothership and the incoming missiles! Front armor up, bristling with electric charge”

GM: *[puts down closed card] “They bloom into orange explosions, sending shockwaves down the length of your hull. Thundering fire embraces you, and an ear-splitting noise tears through your insides.” [turns to player 1 again] “How does this look from your perspective?”*

Player 1: “As your ship is engulfed in flame and fire, my avatar nervously eyes yours in Virtual Space. I see it standing firm. My own eyes narrow, and I re-focus on the enemy”

GM: *“You deny the enemy’s fire once again, but this cannot go on forever. You must seek cover.”*

Player 4: “Mother, fly towards the planet! Use the large mountains and rock formations!”

GM: *[puts down closed card] “The Mothership’s engines vector their thrust, the engine wash shocking and shaking those behind her as she barrels towards the surface.”*

Open cards and escalation

Open cards may be put down at a time that does not naturally lend itself to a decisive moment in battle. An example would be a player taking defensive action, or even just a “regular” attack with little narrative heft.

When you put down an open card it is an **invitation to escalation**. The player may add more actions, descriptions and gravitas to their previous actions.

Player 2: "I put myself right behind the Mothership, match her speed, and keep at her side"

Game Master (GM): [puts down open card!] "Projectiles fly all around you. The enemy aims at a mountain top to ruin your cover; the Mothership will be dead in the water if they make this."

Player 4: "Never! I send everything I have, every missile every rocket, in huge vicious swarms!"

GM: "Let the dice decide what happens now..."

Even if the player had declared an offensive action, remember more can be added. As the game master you can invite to escalation through asking questions or ask the other players add their descriptions of events unfolding. Lay it on thick; *the battle may shift!*

Never a “clean miss”

The actions carried out by the players are never ineffective. Their weapons may strike and deal damage to the enemy whether we are putting down open cards or not. The question is whether this is a decisive shot!

Narrate what makes sense given the enemy composition in the scene. If the enemy has plenty of ships, some may be destroyed, or you can make up smaller vessels (fighters, corvettes) for the purpose of blowing them up for spectacle! The enemy is never unscathed when the Mothership and her fleet commit.

Damaging the Mothership

It falls natural to the players to protect the Mothership, if you tell of enemy weapons trained on her. Therefore: When dealing damage to the Mothership, you must describe the **impact** – not the shot. An example:

"A stray warhead hammers into the back of the Mothership. What looks like seismic waves spread across her hull."

(The players cannot prevent this; the attack has already struck)

"Five cannons open fire at the Mothership-"

(The players will – almost always – interrupt you at this point to put themselves between the Mothership and the incoming fire)

It is completely fine – even strongly encouraged – to let the players interrupt enemy fire like this during normal combat narration. But when damages are dealt, and you describe their impact, **the attacks hit immediately.**

Game Master's Material

The Mothership

Background

The Mothership is hope itself made manifest for the entire people of Mashaara.

It is more than five miles wide and almost one mile tall, to the extent that width and height means anything in zero gravity, where the Mothership was born.

At the start of the game, the Mothership is still fastened to the enormous wharf where she has taken shape for almost a hundred years.

Like her escort, her “brain” is an AI made from a human’s. The Mothership does not know who she was before, and she is not bothered by it; her only cause for existence is to lead the people of Mashaara safely through the Galaxy to Háynos, the home amongst the stars.

She is highly intelligent, but not emotionally distant. The loss of Mashaara in the first act is a pain that almost drives her mad, and she carries a melancholy and sadness with her for the rest of the game. It is not a paralyzing sadness, but it affects her words and actions with a certain noble gravitas.

Functions in the game

The Mothership is the central nerve of the players’ fleet; where she goes, they must follow and protect her as best they can.

When you want the players to make a decision in the game, you can talk through the Mothership and make a decision the players will have to respect and follow.

The Mothership can also be used to cut the scene; when she makes the jump to hyperspace the fleet must naturally follow.

Virtual avatar

A tall, powerful woman clad in a grey plastic suit reminiscent of the suits worn by the travelers in cryo sleep. From her head rises a crown of wires and cables, leading up and away in an unimaginable direction.



Behavior hints

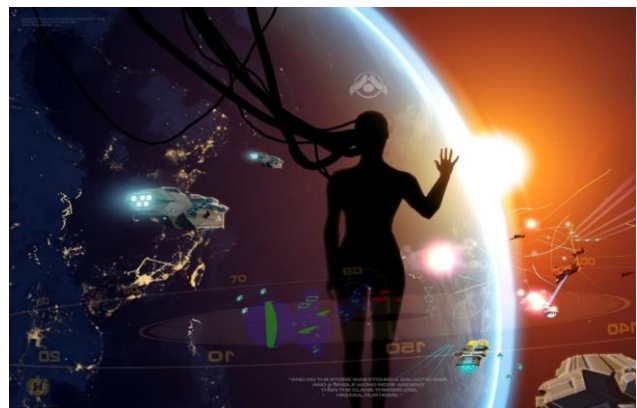
Poised and authoritative

Perhaps standing, towering over the table when things escalate

Intense gaze

More sorrow than anger

Powerful emotions, but never paralyzed by them



Support Vessel Agal

Background

Built more than a hundred years ago, before the Mothership started taking shape in the great wharf. Its original function was to gather asteroids and weld great scaffolds that now make up the parts of the Mothership's wharf.



Support Vessel Agal's hull has stood the test of time with honors and is still fully operational. The technology is aging but the spirit is strong. It is the largest and most capable ship based on pre-Mothership technology.

A year ago it was retrofitted with a hyperspace core, the only ship to have one apart from the Mothership and her four escort ships. The intent is to bring Support Vessel Agal along on the journey, capable of carrying out repairs on the Mothership, and to have a backup ship based on extremely dependable technology.

Functions in the game

Support Vessel Agal joins the players in lieu of the Mothership for Scene 2, where the Mothership is not present.

If Support Vessel Agal successfully returns for Scene 3, it is the first major sacrifice as it takes a shot that would otherwise have impacted the Mothership.

Virtual avatar

Support Vessel Agal has no virtual avatar. It is a ship from before Mashaara's people mastered the technology that permitted them to transfer consciousness to computers.

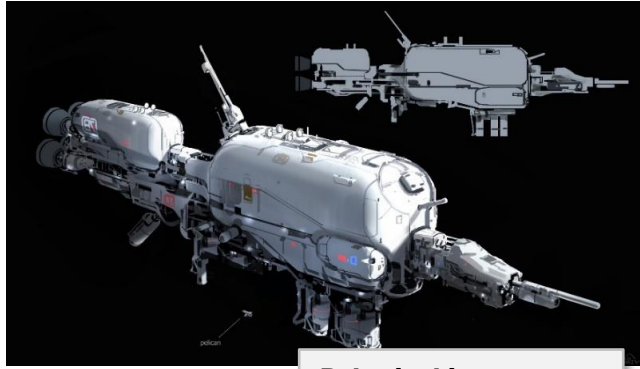
Instead of a virtual avatar, the captain of the ship appears as a hologram in Virtual Space. The captain is painfully slow from the perspective of the ship AI's, as their powerful neural wiring allows them to process thought at a much higher speed than humans.

The Colony Ship Mashaara

Background

A colony ship from ancient times, left in orbit around a moon of the gas giant

Turgosh in the planet Mashaara's solar system.



It is an old colony- and hangar ship, with empty docking bays where smaller vessels have undocked from. The derelict space ship found by Mashaara's people on their third moon originates from here.

The colonists landing on the planet Mashaara named it after this ship – in the 6,000 years since, the pronunciation has not changed much.

Functions in the game

The players' ships find the Colony Ship Mashaara in Scene 2.

As it is awoken, it is brutally forced by its programming to signal the Kaukarian Empire and Red Blade from Dark Skies. The players' ships easily detect the powerful pulse but cannot decipher its meaning. The Colony Ship Mashaara itself is not fully aware of its contents either, except that it is malignant, and that it has now brought great pain upon the people it once protected.

The Colony Ship Mashaara still keeps 122 human beings in cry sleep from the original journey, who can still be awoken (however they do not have many answers; they knew only life aboard the colony ship). Awaking them requires transferring them to the Mothership.

Virtual avatar

The shape of a confused elderly man, with skin like of copper made and weathered by unimaginable storms for thousands of years. As the Colony Ship Mashaara fully wakes, its skin grows more whole and detailed, but never becomes fully detailed. It is swept in clothing that would once have been formal but is not torn and in tatters.

The avatar is blind. 6,000 years without repair has left its marks; the sensors aboard the ship are almost completely ruined.



Behavior hints

Panicky body language

Blind; eyes half-closed and fumbling

More calm as time passes

Senses that it has called great destruction upon Mashaara

Red Blade from Dark Skies

Background

Though the hull is only a few hundred years old, and the armor even more recent, the AI core has been transferred from ship to ship for millions of years.

Every time the AI core has cannibalized the AI originally aboard, and with violence taken its memories. A cavalcade of old AI's without memory, and only the most basic language, carries on living in Red Blade of Dark Skies. They are reduced to gibbering shadows of their former selves, whom Red Blade from Dark Skies can control or ignore at its whim.

The AI core was created by The Black Hole Mother, an even older being. Red Blade from Dark Skies has done everything it can to keep the Black Hole Mother a secret to the galaxy.

Functions in the game

Red Blade from Dark Skies is the most important recurring antagonist in the game.

8,000 years ago, when Kaugur rebelled against the Ashtarai, Red Blade from Dark Skies sought to completely wipe out that people. However, a deal was struck: The Ashtarai people was exiled on the Colony Ship Mashaara, and they were never again allowed to fly their own ships.

It is Red Blade from Dark Skies who programmed the Colony Ship Mashaara to send its transmission to the Empire (and itself).

Virtual avatar

A pallid grey mask, striding at the top of a neck of writhing cables and wires, moving along like a giant unnatural octopus. Behind its eyes and mouth sparks uncontrolled red bursts of energy that intensifies if it is angered. The cables and wires writhe and try to touch other avatars around it, as a sort of unwelcome and disgusting caressing, contrasting the angry words in its speech.

Red Blade from Dark Skies' avatar is surrounded by fleeting whispers and silhouettes, sometimes manifesting as contorted shapes; grotesque parodies of the human body.

When these ghost-like silhouettes from AI's of old cannibalized ships manifest, Red Blade from Dark Skies has only contempt and spite to show.

The Mothership is terrified of Red Blade from Dark Skies. The two ships do not appear at the same time in the Virtual Space.



Behavior hints

Bent forward aggressively

Arms wide

You may walk around the table and gently touch the players

Tries to drive a wedge between the players if it senses conflict



Uzaam

The Galaxy is an enormous place with untold numbers of different human civilizations. Uzaam is a ship from one of these human civilizations, who can trace its heritage to a cluster in the Angel Nebulae.

Because the civilizations of the Angel Nebulae are relatively isolated, Uzaam possesses information outlawed in the Kaukarian Empire. Uzaam knows this, and it is careful discussing such matters.



Functions in the game

Uzaam is the first friendly contact the fleet has with the galactic civilizations at large.

Uzaam has heard and decrypted the pulse from the Colony Ship Mashaara in Scene 2. Since then, it has secretly sought to contact the Mothership and her fleet.

Uzaam knows the coordinates of The Borer and has an inkling of its existence. It also knows The Black Hole Mother created and helps Red Blade from Dark Skies, and that The Borer is the key to defeating her.

Virtual avatar

The humans of the Angel Nebulae have lived in space for eons, and Uzaam's avatar is reminiscent of their form; the male avatar soars slowly through the air with long, slender arms that look like they grab handholds to move him around.



The Borer

Background

A billion years ago, The Borer arrived in the Galaxy, along with The Black Hole Mother.

Since then The Borer has spent millions upon millions of years boring and digging through planets across the galaxy, to find traces of older civilizations.

It now inhabits a large cluster of systems on the far side of the Galaxy's center from Mashaara. It is a sector known as **The Black Mists** because The Borer has torn at planets and asteroids for many millions of years and over time these actions have filled the entire sector with dust and gravel that blocks light.

Functions in the game

The Borer tells the players of The Black Hole Mother: A being convinced she must ultimately control and potentially eradicate all self-replicating life, which would otherwise grow too strong and jeopardize her survival.

The Borer gives the players the option of confronting both The Black Hole Mother and Red Blade from Dark Skies.

To slay The Black Hole Mother, The Borer needs to have the players open a derelict hyperspace portal that lies dormant near The Black Hole Mother's den. Through this portal, The Borer will be able to throw a hundred-mile-wide rock fragment dug from the planet it is currently working on. Even The Black Hole Mother will be crushed by such a force.

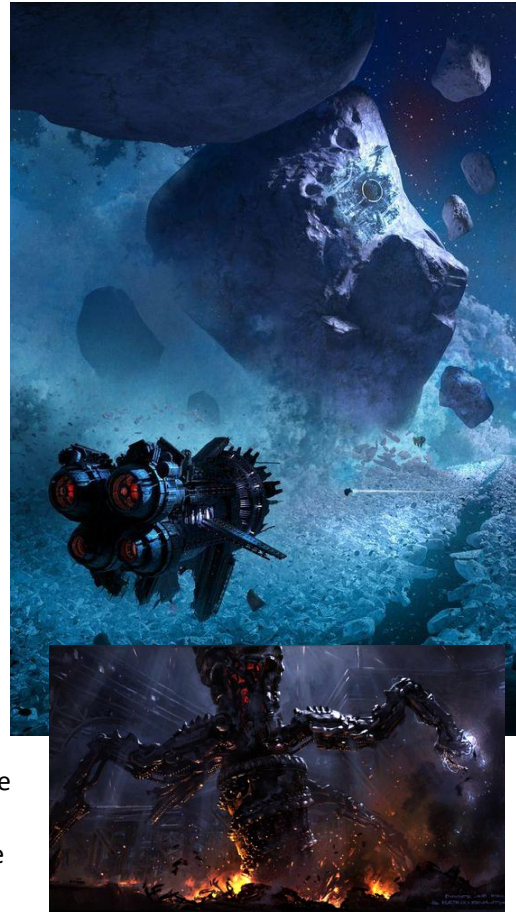
The Borer has no interest in confronting The Black Hole Mother here and now; it has millions and millions of years to do so. On the other hand, it will not turn down the opportunity to help the players do it.

Virtual avatar

The Borer has no virtual avatar.

It is a machine more than a star ship, reminiscent of a tunnel boring machine, and The Borer's gargantuan cutting shield which is a hundred miles wide makes for a strange alien face. 18 hydraulic arms, also a hundred miles long each, end in enormous shovels and drilling bits. 12-mile-wide red sensors are set in a circle in the cutting shield as eyes.

The Borer may freely fly through space but prefers landing on planets and other heavenly bodies.



The Black Hole Mother

The original creator of Red Blade from Dark Skies, she lives in the graveyard of Háynos among the wreckage there. She has been in this Galaxy longer than anyone except The Borer.



She hails from another galaxy where she took an important lesson to heart; biological life replicates fast, but she and her sisters could only create a single new ship in a thousand years. Eventually biological life would crush her if not contained. Her sisters perished when they failed to heed this truth.

She must safeguard her own life against the uncontrolled self-replication of biological organisms. Biological life is a virus to her, best condemned to total extinction to prevent it from bouncing back.

The opportunity of slaying an entire people does not come around every millennium.

Functions in the game

The Black Hole Mother is the players' – and especially the Mothership's – existential nemesis. Ultimately, she is responsible for the genocide on Mashaara and given the chance she would have Red Blade from Dark Skies do it every day for eternity, if it was possible.

With the help of The Borer the players kill her in Scene 8. Depending on how it goes, she may inflict grievous wounds on The Mothership before she perishes.

Virtual avatar

A woman with odd growths, smeared in thick oily grease that drips off her small frame.

Does not speak much. She prefers her own old words, a hundred times older than the first ape uttering the first word:

"You are mine now" - "Chiiraaj"

"Fear me" – "B'hur ajama"

"I am The Black Hole Mother!" – "Eraja Uul-Amana!"



The Mothership dares to confront The Black Hole Mother in Virtual Space. They fight a duel of wills, side by side with the players' ships carrying out the battle.

Cheat sheet for game master

Game Master's tools

The right of narration – hand the right of narration to players when you can.

Cutting without a knife – Push through the scene and its participants.
To cut now: Recount, reward, lead on.

Time manager in combat – there are no rounds. Steer the narration towards players that need activation and what seems interesting.

The Virtual Space – cross-cut often between real space and Virtual Space; follow good ideas and dramatic symbolism.

Putting down cards in combat

Put down a card for every player action until the card suit is hearts.

Difficulties for dice rolls

The card's difficulty is 10 if numbered, 15 if court card. This value is added to the number of closed cards.

A player must **meet or beat** the difficulty. The player rolls 1d20 plus **one** die from a module involved in the player's action description.

Narrating combat

Open cards are an invitation to escalate – when turning an open card, you invite the active player to escalate the narrative to possibly turn the battle.

Never a "clean miss" – when putting down closed cards, actions are still successful, just not decisively so

Damaging the Mothership – when The Mothership takes damage, you must start your description as the attack strikes her, to prevent players from interrupting.

Bending the rules

"I'm all-in" – a player may gamble in combat. This forces you to put down the next card in the sequence as an open card and the player rolls dice as normal. If the player wins the dice roll, remove one card from the won pile of cards and deal it as damage (prefer The Mothership).

Final gambit – a player may play the ace they received at the start of the game to cancel a failed roll and instead succeed. You remove one module from that player's ship immediately.

Serious escalations – when dramatically escalating a fight (through the options contained in the scene descriptions or improvised) you can interpret that to immediately deal damage raise the number of cards required to finish a combat phase.

The ritual of re-forging

The ritual demands silence throughout.

- (1) the broken ship's modules are put in the center of the table
- (2) the other players choose one module each, until one remains.
- (3) tear up the last module. (4) replace missing modules with new ones
- (5) let the player describe the look of the ship after being re-forged

Scene 0: Prologue

Purpose

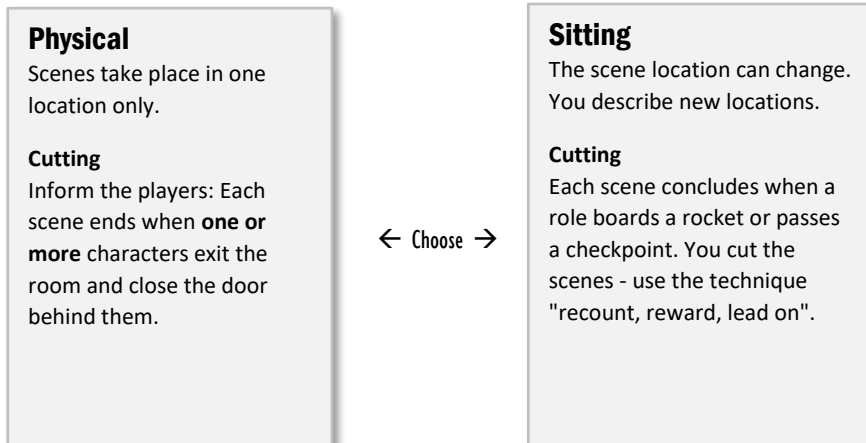
Three brief scenes afford us a look into the life of Mashaara's people before departure; appr. 30-40 mins.

Try to bring up Mashaara's barren nature and the people's opinions of the journey; some warn of hubris, others are ecstatic.

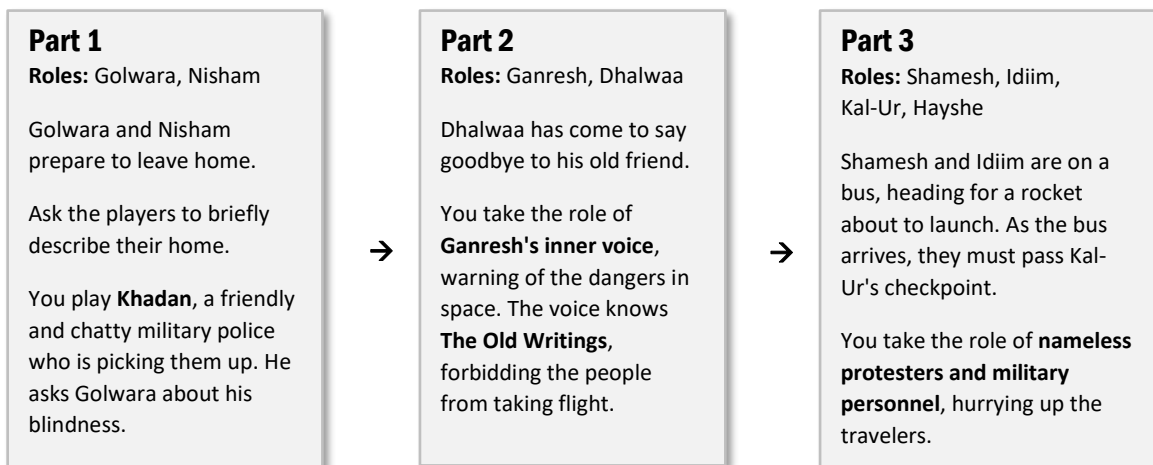
This is warm-up; incite **conflict and pressure** in scenes 2 and 3 to get people going.

Options

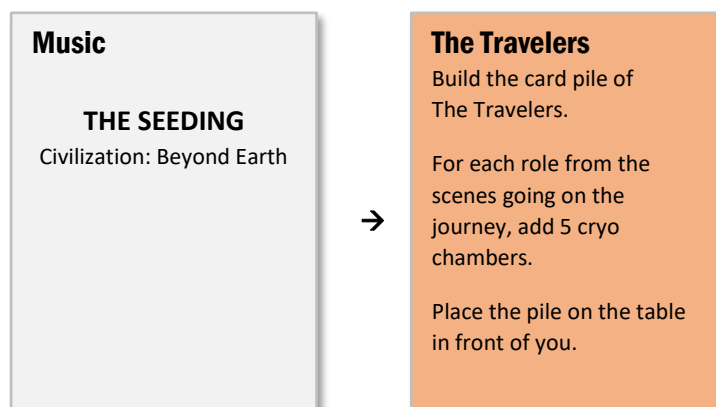
Ask whether the players are comfortable with physical play. If yes, you can carry out the prologue scenes in semi-larp fashion.



Scenes



Conclusion



Scene 1 (act one): The journey begins

Purpose

To show The Mothership in the wharf, in orbit around Mashaara.

To give shape to the players' star ships.

Appr. 30 mins.

Roles present

Support Vessel Agal, The Mothership

Start

Prose reading 1

Give the players numbers from 1-4, then do the ritual of reading.

Give **ace of hearts** to the best orator. Give **ace of spades** to the weakest. Distribute the others randomly.



Music

PRIDE OF HIIGARA
Homeworld 2

Support Vessel Agal

Role info

No virtual avatar; a hologram of the captain is present in Virtual Space.

Helped build The Mothership and the players' ships.

The Mothership

Role info

Mostly passive during this scene.

Waiting and smiling. Hope is lit.

Workshop

The Mothership in the wharf

Describe The Mothership, still kept in the wharf.

"Five miles wide and one mile tall, the shape of a crescent moon."

"The wings of hope painted in clear white across her thick armor"



Distribute ships

Give the players the 4 modules from their starting ships, as well as their name tags.



Shaping

Ask the players to describe their ship's appearance. Ask creative questions to expand the descriptions.

Creative questions for the Shaping

Colors

"What color are your engine exhausts?"

"In what colors are you painted? What do they mean?"

"Any visible lights? What do they look like?"

Sounds

"How would you describe the sound of the reactor in your heart?"

"When talking through loudspeakers aboard, how do you sound?"

Feel

"The solar winds wash across you. Do you feel it? How does it feel?"

"Sensors throughout the ship are like nerve ends. Do you feel comfortable in your armor?"

Demeanor

"A hundred small ships work here. How do you treat them?"

"How is your navigation calibrated? How do you plot a course?"

Conclusion

The Virtual Space

The Mothership invites the players into Virtual Space. Describe her avatar.

Ask the players to describe their own avatars. Ask questions if needed.



The test jump

The player ships jump to **Turgosh**, a gas giant. Only Support Vessel Agal follows.

"The fabric of space is forced apart, like needles through woven cloth, and you shoot through flashing blue gates"

Scene 2 (act one): Another discovery

Purpose

To show other wreckage in the solar system.
The players get to know the combat system.
Appr. 30 mins.

Roles present

Support Vessel Agal, Colony Ship Mashaara. **No Mothership.**

Start

Music

TANIS BASE
Homeworld 2



Gas giant

Briefly describe the gas giant **Turgosh** the players now orbit.

"Storms of world-shattering power churn below you in absolute silence."

Support Vessel Agal

Role info

Works like The Mothership for the purpose of damage

Keeps in the background. Compared to the players' ships it is slow and vulnerable

The captain's hologram seems infinitely slow by comparison to the player ships' AI

Colony Ship Mashaara

Role info

Virtual avatar like a weathered copper statue

Blind; half-closed eyes. Its sensors are dead after 6,000 years

Panicky; senses something terrible is about to happen

Development

The Colony Ship

The player ships locate the Colony Ship Mashaara in orbit around a moon.

When they investigate, it awakens for the first time in 6,000 years.



The signal

The Colony Ship Mashaara sends a powerful transmission, forced by its programming. A hundred light years away it is picked up by the Empire.

The players easily sense the pulse but cannot decipher its contents.

Combat

Ancient traps

A derelict network of weapons platforms come online in orbit around Turgosh.



COMBAT

Scan the area for targets [3], eliminate weapons platforms [4]

The players must learn the combat system during this fight. Take your time if needed.

Use the deck of cards **without queens and kings.**

Describe to the blind

combat, contemplative

As the blind Colony Ship Mashaara, ask a player to describe another player's actions. Ask questions to bring images to life.

Conclusion

System calibration

Support Vessel Agal assist the ships with repairs and calibration.

Each player can choose to **jettison a module** of their choice from their ship.



Ritual of re-forging

Damage is tallied. Ships that jettisoned a module may lose more modules due to damage!



Back to Mashaara

The players' ships jump back to Mashaara.

If Support Vessel Agal has suffered severe damage it must be left here.

Scene 3 (act one): The heavens aflame

Purpose

To show the planet Mashaara burnt to ashes.

Red Blade from Dark Skies introduced.

Appr. 30 mins.

Roles present

The Mothership, Red Blade from Dark Skies, (possibly Support Vessel Agal)

Start

Prose reading 2

Do not set the scene prior to the prose reading; let the text reveal what has happened.



Music

THE LAMB
John Tavener

The Mothership

Role info

Begs to be released from the now-dead wharf

Her goal is to escape with as many cryo chambers intact as possible

Red Blade from Dark Skies

Role info

Finally the people of Mashaara violated the 8,000-year-old pact that prevented you from taking their lives. Finally their life is forfeit!

The helpless Mothership

The dead wharf

The Mothership is still fastened with heavy bolts to the wharf, the crew of which is dead.

"Set me free!" pleads The Mothership in Virtual Space, her arms weighed down by heavy chains.



Red Blade's arrival

Red Blade from Dark Skies appears from the far side of Mashaara, closing at an alarming speed.



COMBAT

cover fire for The Mothership [4], shoot out the bolts fastening her to the wharf [6]

The Mothership will not survive an up-close battle with Red Blade from Dark Skies!

Use the deck of cards **with queens**.

Events during combat

Agal's end

Combat, loss

Let Support Vessel Agal take a shot for The Mothership.

*"Are hopes lie with you now! Now and fore- *KRRZZT*"*

Rescue op

Combat, escalation

Other ships from Mashaara try to desperately run for The Mothership. They will never make it without protection.

The Mothership engages engines

Combat, contemplative

Still fastened to the wharf, her engine wash tears scaffolding and creates northern lights in Mashaara's atmosphere below.

The wharf breaks

Combat, escalation

The bolts fastening The Mothership to the wharf act like crowbars, slowly tearing open her hull.

Conclusion

The flight begins

The Mothership flees with the players. All seems lost.



Ritual of re-forging

Damaged ships are rebuilt in hyperspace by The Mothership.

"None of us will ever be the same again, but none will be left alone! Never!"

Scene 4 (act two): The exoplanet

Purpose

Illustrating the desperation of the flight, in the colds void between stars.

Appr. 30 mins.

Roles present

The Mothership, Red Blade from Dark Skies

Start

Music

INTO THE DUST
Homeworld 2



Desolation

We are in the empty void between the stars.

Thousands of miles away, The Mothership detects a dead exoplanet.

On exoplanets

Information

The balance of gravity in a solar system can sometimes throw planets into interstellar space, where they become frozen exoplanets. Below its frozen shell, the core may still be hot with magma, but no life will survive on the surface.

The Mothership

Role info

Shaken to her core, but finds strength and purpose in her sorrow.

Afraid of Red Blade from Dark Skies. Not present in Virtual Space at the same time.

The exoplanet

The hunt follows

Red Blade from Dark Skies arrives, with a small support fleet. It has tracked The Mothership's jump.

The Mothership dashes towards the exoplanet for cover.



COMBAT

take cover in the valleys of the exoplanet [2], escape enemy fire until hyper-cores are re-charged [8]

Use the deck of cards **with queens and kings**.

At the end of combat, The Black Hole Mother arrives; **the players do not escape** into hyperspace!

Red Blade from Dark Skies

Role info

Hunts players' ships, tooth and claw.

Hopes to dispose of them before the arrival of The Black Hole Mother.

Events during combat

Forgotten ruins

Combat, contemplative

There are empty ruins left on the exoplanet.

Ask a player to describe the dead remains.

Malevolent probes

Combat, escalation

Red Blade from Dark Skies fires probes at a player ship, that drill through its armor and inject hostile data streams.

Volcanic eruption

Combat, escalation

The impact of powerful weaponry on the surface triggers an enormous volcanic eruption!

Magnetized surface

Combat, escalation

The exoplanet's rocks are strongly magnetized, making it difficult to maneuver.

Conclusion

Straight to Scene 5!

The hyper-cores fluctuate, and the gates collapse before the fleet can escape!

>>>

Scene 5 (act two): The Black Hole Mother

Purpose

To introduce The Black Hole Mother.

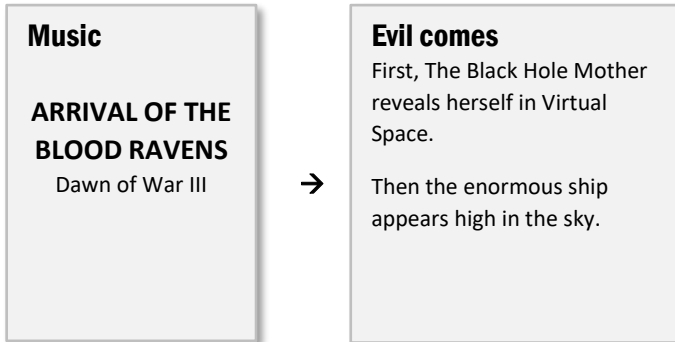
To escalate the stakes to the extreme and inflict losses.

Appr. 15 mins.

Roles present

The Mothership, The Black Hole Mother,
(Red Blade from Dark Skies in the background)

Start



The Mothership
Role info

Terrified of The Black Hole Mother.

Like a cornered lioness, she stands and takes action.

The Black Hole Mother
Role info

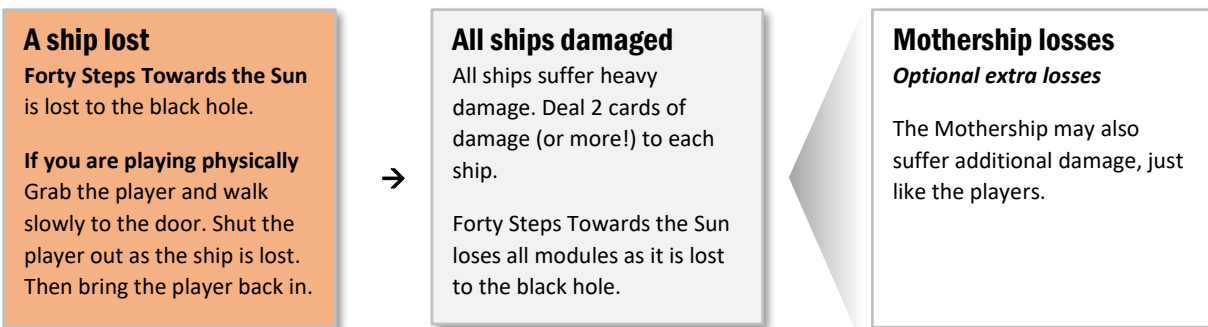
Virtual avatar is a small woman covered in black tar-like oil that drips from her.

Disquieting gaze, satanically smiling.

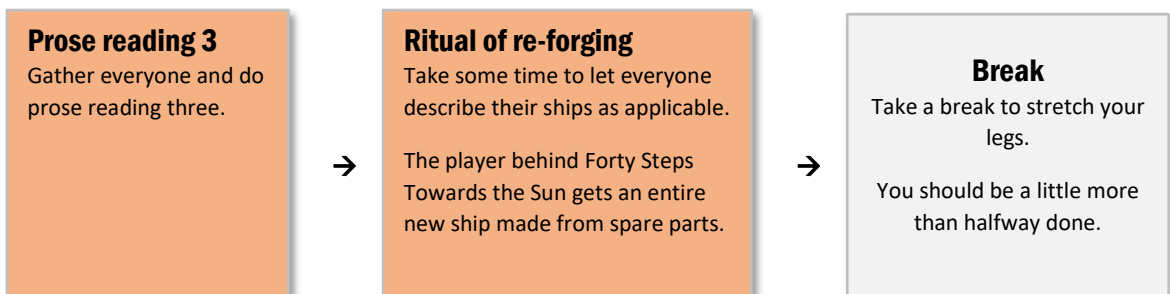
The black hole



Grievous wounds



Conclusion



Scene 6 (act three): A kind soul

Purpose

To show the scale of the galactic wreckage.

To give the fleet a helping hand and lead them to The Borer.

Appr. 15 mins.

Roles present

The Mothership, Uzaam

Start

In the blind

The Mothership and her fleet whirl uncontrollably through hyperspace.

An anomaly appears in the quantum wave function; The Mothership homes in on this like a beacon.



The clockwork system

The fleet arrives in a solar system with more than 200 planets. Their interlocking orbits are too precise for random chance. It is **extremely difficult to navigate** in this place.

From the surfaces of the planets, engine arrays rise high above their atmospheres, unused for millions of years.

The Mothership

Role info

Struck with grief, though never paralyzed.

Warns that she cannot keep the cryo chambers going for more than a year or so.

Uzaam

Role info

From the Angel Nebulae, possessing outlawed knowledge

Recognizes the fleet's technology and betrays the Empire

"There are some monuments to history one's name should never appear on..."

Development

Foreign scanners

Steel grey ships with odd angular shapes start scanning the players' small fleet, ordering them in a thousand languages to stop.



Uzaam's help

One of the foreign ships breaks off as the fleet is identified.

Named Uzaam, it helps The Mothership and the players narrowly avoid confrontation by navigating the complex solar system.

Combat evaded!



"You will be forever hunted"

Uzaam tells the fleet that everyone in the Galaxy fears Red Blade from Dark Skies, and it supports the Empire reigning on Háynos.

As long as that ship lives, the people of Mashaara will be marked for death.

Conclusion

The coordinates

Uzaam shares with the fleet the coordinates for The Borer, in The Black Mists.

"The Borer is the only being who does not fear The Black Hole Mother."



Prose reading 4

Scene 7 (act three): The Borer

Purpose

To give the fleet the option of helping Uzaam or not.
 To reveal the plan for killing The Black Hole Mother.
 Appr. 30 mins.

Roles present

The Mothership, Uzaam, Red Blade from Dark Skies, The Borer

Start

The dark system

The solar system is filled with dust. Everything churns around the fleet; asteroids, gravel, dwarf planets, almost like a soup.

The star at the center is a blue dwarf, barely visible.



Tight fit

The Mothership has problems navigating in this mess.

Combat will result in heavy losses.

The Mothership

Role info

Stays with the players' ships whatever comes.

Uzaam

Role info

Captured by Red Blade from Dark Skies.

Its advanced sensors easily detect The Mothership.

Its virtual avatar is fully present.

Red Blade from Dark Skies

Role info

Its sensors do not work here.

Virtual avatar is shadow-like, it cannot detect the presence of the players on its own.

The Borer

Role info

A hundred-mile-wide cutting shield set with 12 red eyes. 18 hydraulic arms with shovels and drills.

Deep, slow voice.

Development

Uzaam captured by Red Blade

Red Blade from Dark Skies is threatening Uzaam with painful death, unless it can find The Mothership and her fleet.

The fleet can avoid combat if they let Uzaam die.



COMBAT?

opening salvo [2],
 force Red Blade to withdraw [6]

Use the deck of cards with queens and kings.

Events during combat

Fragments

Combat, escalation

Giant asteroids and dwarf planets appear out of nowhere, hurtling towards the fleet.

Evasive action!

The Mothership impaled

Combat, losses

An asteroid strikes The Mothership.

The Mothership suffers 3 or more losses.

The Borer assists

Combat, finisher!

The Borer decides to intervene.

Red Blade from Dark Skies is forced to immediately flee.

Conclusion

Ritual of re-forging?

Go through the ritual if the fleet had a battle.



The Borer revealed

The Borer contacts The Mothership



The Borer's plan

Near Háynos is an old spaceship graveyard. Here, The Black Hole Mother dwells.

In the graveyard is a giant hyperspace portal device. If the players can activate it, The Borer promises to finish The Black Hole Mother.

Scene 8 (act three): The graveyard

Purpose

To finish off The Black Hole Mother.

Red Blade from Dark Skies will take revenge on Háynos in the coming scene.

Appr. 30 mins.

Roles present

The Mothership, The Black Hole Mother, Red Blade from Dark Skies

Start

Music

BATTLE FOR SAJUUK (REMIX)

Homeworld 2

The Mothership

Role info

She confronts The Black Hole Mother in Virtual Space. A battle of will.

The Black Hole Mother

Role info

Her virtual avatar approaches the players.

May shout in her ancient language:

"Chiiraj!" – you are mine now

"Eraja Uul-Amana!" – I am the The Black Hole Mother

Cat and mouse

Through ancient wreckage

The Black Hole Mother pursues the fleet through enormous wreckage. She has ruled this place forever.

She has set traps, and she crushes surrounding wreckage with her black holes.



COMBAT

avoid the black holes and hurling wreckage [4], fly to the hyperspace portal and activate it [6]

Use the deck of cards **with queens and kings**.

Confrontation!

Countdown: The portal opens

Draw 8 cards to your hand.

Count down for every player action.

You deal the cards as damage.



The Borer's move

When the countdown is done, the portal opens.

Through it, with immense speed, comes a hundred-mile large rock and magma, cut by The Borer from a planet's heart.

The Black Hole Mother is crushed in the ensuing inferno.

Great losses

Optional extra losses

If needed an applicable, The Mothership may be caught in the chaos.

The Mothership takes 5 or more losses.

Conclusion

Ritual of re-forging

Damaged ships are rebuilt by The Mothership.

Player ships may choose to jettison a module and replace it with a new one. Use the most powerful spare parts.



Red Blade promises revenge

Red Blade from Dark Skies arrives and sees the wreckage of The Black Hole Mother.

It swears **gruesome revenge** on the mythical home planet of Háynos.

"I tore down one of your homes already – I can destroy another!"

Scene 9 (act four): The home planet Háynos

Purpose

To save Háynos from Red Blade from Dark Skies' revenge.

Creating grand imagery of the final struggle.

Appr. 30 mins.

Roles present

The Mothership, Red Blade from Dark Skies

The Mothership

Role info

She is about to lose Háynos. No sacrifice is too great.

Red Blade from Dark Skies

Role info

The players killed its creator, revenge is the only way!

Its disgusting virtual avatar lashes about, shouting and cursing the player ships.

Start

Music

Shenzou

Steven Price
Gravity Soundtrack



In the atmosphere!

The fleet arrives from hyperspace, directly into the atmosphere above Háynos on the night side.

Mile-long trails of burning plasma envelops them.



Confusion

The Kaukarian Empire intervenes; it's all chaos, everyone fires at everyone else.

"You are a traitor to the empire, no better than these filthy nomads!"

The final stretch

The weapons complex

Red Blade from Dark Skies does not have planet-killing bombs.

It rushes down through the atmosphere towards a weapons complex on the surface. Blowing this up will spell doom to the planet.



Dawn

The sun appears over the horizon of Háynos, as all the ships thunder through the atmosphere in pursuit of Red Blade from Dark Skies.



Countdown: Towards the surface

Draw 8 cards to your hand. Each represents a **thousand miles**.

Count down for each player action, as Red Blade from Dark Skies approaches its goal.

One player rolls against the final card, which is open. The rules for difficulty follow normal combat rules (10 or 15 + the number of closed cards).

Conclusion

The Mothership's sacrifice

The Mothership rams the severely damaged Red Blade from Dark Skies, to push it off its course. **Let the players describe.**

The die roll after the countdown was a...

Success

All of The Travelers are ejected from the Mothership in small landing pods.

Failure

Only 10,000 people and the last character in The Travelers survive and are ejected.



Straight to the epilogue

No break!

>>>

Scene 10: Epilogue

Purpose

To show the players' ships and the planet Háynos from a human perspective.

Twisting the story at the end; who supplants who?

Appr. 15 mins.

The humans

Music (continued)

Shenzou

Steven Price
Gravity Soundtrack



To the rescue pods!

Distribute remaining role from The Travelers among the players. They may adopt other roles if needed.

Set the scene

Alarms are blaring. The roles attempt to reach the rescue pods.

You play **The Mothership's crew**, shouting and preparing rescue pods.



"Farewell, angels of heaven"

From **windows in The Mothership's hull**, the human roles see their star ships guarding The Mothership.

"Which ship do you see, burning in the atmosphere outside?" [Turn to that ship's player] "What is that ship doing right at this moment?"

The characters reach the rescue pods and are hurled towards the surface.

On Háynos

Music

none...



Desolation

The battle in the atmosphere above has left many dead on the surface.

The characters arrive in a city. Describe the destruction.

Hand **Ythep** (to the right) to a player. Set the scene; a ruined street.

Cut: Go to the middle between the players, ask them to start prose reading 5.

(fold this sheet so that only the role can be seen)
^ for a player ^

Ythep

Role from the Empire

You had

Everything you needed for a good life

Your sister and her son, Na-Jal, recently returned from the University

You need

A reasons why your world suddenly was broken

Conclusion

Prose reading 5

This prose reading finishes the game.

Player Handouts

<p>Golwara, a young blind man 1</p> <p><u>You have</u> A place among The Travelers</p> <p>You girlfriend Nisham, who helps you find your way around.</p>  <p><u>You lack</u> Your vision, lost due to a prolonged famine</p> <p>A traveler</p>	<p>Nisham, a famous biologist 1</p> <p><u>You have</u> Hopes of a better future without famine and storms</p> <p>Your blind boyfriend Golwara, whom you guide around using your hands, and who is going with you</p>  <p><u>You lack</u> To pack the last few things before the journey begins</p> <p>A traveler</p>	<p>Ganresh, a demented man 2</p> <p><u>You have</u> Suffered from dementia for years, you sometimes realize this</p> <p>Always believed in The Old Writings, forbidding humans from taking flight</p> <p>An isolated but calm life</p>  <p><u>You lack</u> Your memory. You do not immediately recognize Dhalwaa</p> <p>Stays on Mashaara</p>	<p>Dhalwaa, an old man 2</p> <p><u>You have</u> A place among The Travelers, as an Elder.</p> <p>A terrible feeling of guilt, taking a place that could have been someone else's.</p>  <p><u>You lack</u> Hearing a goodbye from your friend through 40 years, Ganresh</p> <p>A traveler</p>
<p>Shamesh, a father 3</p> <p><u>You have</u> You daughter Idiim, who is going on the journey</p> <p>Your dead friend Galish's word that you have a place on board</p>  <p><u>You lack</u> Telling your daughter that you may not be going</p> <p>Stays on Mashaara</p>	<p>Idiim, a daughter 3</p> <p><u>You have</u> Access to the ship, as one of The Travelers</p> <p>Your father Shamesh, who is also going on the journey</p>  <p><u>You lack</u> Saying goodbye to your childhood friend Anuu, but it is too late now</p> <p>A traveler</p>	<p>Kal-Ur, an officer 3</p> <p><u>You have</u> Command of Hayshe and the other soldiers</p> <p>The list of Travelers, with Idiim on it</p> <p>A place among The Travelers that you reluctantly accepted</p>  <p><u>You lack</u> Shamesh on your list, he will have to leave</p> <p>A traveler</p>	<p>Hayshe, a soldier 3</p> <p><u>You have</u> A duty to Kal-Ur, your superior officer</p> <p>Permission to use force</p> <p>Secretly a place among The Travelers</p>  <p><u>You lack</u> A feeling of control. Everything is chaos</p> <p>A traveler</p>
<p>Cryo chamber</p>  <p>10,000 travelers</p>	<p>Cryo chamber</p>  <p>10,000 travelers</p>	<p>Cryo chamber</p>  <p>10,000 travelers</p>	<p>Cryo chamber</p>  <p>10,000 travelers</p>
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Prose reading 1

(game master)

A hundred years' dreaming of a home amongst the stars
Written in towering letters
along miles of steel and will
A giant ship. A Mothership.
The size of cities, she was held, ready, in her wharf
Engines quietly waiting.

(player 1)

To the naked eye a pale blue moon, racing cross the dark night sky
It would save us from this dying desert planet.
Three
generations
of toiling labor.
The invaluable cargo of the Mothership:
three hundred thousand travelers
in the unyielding grip of hypersleep,
as if in silent prayer.

(player 2)

We were their servants, us four, us brave
no longer human.
Our bodies forged in steel in the endless expanse above.
Our old life forever forgotten.
Now, the fire of the stars thundered in our chests,
instead of fragile hearts.

(player 3)

And our engines raged.
Blue plasma, thrown like sand in a storm
met the atmosphere and burnt up;
turquoise. Purple. Green.
The hull flexed in deep sighs,
spread like the breath of life.
"We are away."

(player 4)

The unknowable workings of the hyper-cores,
forgotten for millennia,
trembled loudly and forced open the gates of heaven.
The fabric of space torn apart,
a bright blue gate shone with radiation.

Section 1 through 8 – online!

Section 9 through 12 – online!

Lock all systems.

**Give us wisdom, give us strength,
as we brave the darkness now!**

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Theatrical performance

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Rise up

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Prose reading 2



A hundred years' dream of a home amongst the stars.
At last a path to the cradle of legends.
The Mothership would carry us ten thousand light years,
and we would see the morning sun,
from the hills of our ancients, somewhere in the void.
Where once we lived.
Where we could live again.



This journey would demand sacrifice
this we knew from the start.
During construction; twenty thousand dead.
A fleet to live forever in legend,
to keep all our hopes and dreams.
But hope had betrayed us,
and betrayed our entire world.



We returned.
With nothing to return to.
An alien fleet, their ships an angry yellow,
sharp spikes
antennae from their backs
like desert beasts.
Their work already done.
Firestorm.
Ash.
Whirling infernos,
red,
orange.
Dancing below us,
in the charred remains of our world,
a hollow silence.



But the anguished cries of pain from the Mothership
echoed.
The sound like knives cutting bone.
It watched the fires helplessly,
fastened to the now-dead wharf,
the last children of Mashaara wrapped inside her armor.
Our systems sparked to life.
Reactors raged and burned and roared!
Fly like angels into darkness.
When everything is burning...
Everything. Burning.

Prose reading 3



A hundred years' nightmare of a home in the cold of space.
All we had was ash,
loss of friends,
echoing screams.
Ahead a lonesome silent journey.
Sorrowful, like a grave.
The grave of our hopes and our entire people.



The black hole dominated the sky, the universe bent around
an insatiable hunger tore at us.
The steel of the Mothership flexed and bent
sighing like a song of grieving.
Unfathomable energies crashed against our armor,
white-hot gasses whirled in chaos,
the armor charred,
shaken,
shattered.



The hyper-cores came alight,
humming an unyielding tone.
And from the edge of the black hole,
soon broken by the curvature of space itself,
we shot through bright blue gates,
towards uncertainty.
Our enemy lost from sight.
Here, they dared not follow.

Without home!
Without fear!

***Repeat until the dead
ship stops you***

A ship has perished in the black
hole. Only that player can stop
your chanting.

Prose reading 4



For six thousand years we were left in the dark,
blind as well as deaf,
fumbling,
isolated in a far corner of this bright and brilliant Galaxy.
The stars in the night sky,
faint and silent,
had been the only look were afforded, of a world we once possessed.



A strange world had revealed itself to us.
Our history was spread across the shining arms of the Galaxy.
A strange, distorted echo,
of a time before time.
Older than any memory.
The price we paid was our world:
the people lost.
a place in the Galaxy found.



A place under the foot of a mighty, cold Empire.
Cowering we were,
trembling and with scorched skin.
Here, at the precipice,
we met an open hand,
stretched out.
A balm to our wounds.
The goal, the mythical home,
again seemed shining
in the distance near the heart of the Galaxy



The sleeping travelers, the lucky few, for whom light might still be lit;
we took them in our armored hands.

For them
we were the angels of heaven
For them
we strengthened ourselves
For them
this journey was not over
For those
WITHOUT HOME!
For those
WITHOUT FEAR!

Prose reading 5



A thousand years' dreaming of our true home.
In the shining center of the Galaxy,
its beating heart.
Glowing with orange colors,
like an eternal morning sun in the sky.



We arose from the burnt-out ashes.
Our bodies burnt and exhausted.
A people,
now home,
after suffering ten thousand years of punishment.
Teetering, we stood fast.



The travelers of The Mothership,
asleep through painful years,
unknowing,
now awoken.
These souls of both immeasurable luck,
yet struck with terrible grief,
embarked onto a lush world without equal.
Gone were the sands of the desert,
swept away by great rivers.



In slow waves the word spread;
“the Empire has fallen!”
A beaten rule,
a beaten people,
at our scarred, bleeding feet.
Perhaps, in their fragility,
an older, universal,
common origin.
But without power,
they might as well be,
ten thousand light years from home.

No repetition

The last prose reading has no repetition – with the last words of the last verse, the game ends.

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and we would see the morning sun,
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Where once we lived.
Where we could live again.



This journey would demand sacrifice
this we knew from the start.
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A place under the foot of a mighty, cold Empire.
Cowering we were,
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Here, at the precipice,
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stretched out.
A balm to our wounds.
The goal, the mythical home,
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Prose reading 5



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We arose from the burnt-out ashes.
Our bodies burnt and exhausted.
A people,
now home,
after suffering ten thousand years of punishment.
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The travelers of The Mothership,
asleep through painful years,
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These souls of both immeasurable luck,
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embarked onto a lush world without equal.
Gone were the sands of the desert,
swept away by great rivers.



In slow waves the word spread;
"the Empire has fallen!"
A beaten rule,
a beaten people,
at our scarred, bleeding feet.
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an older, universal,
common origin.
But without power,
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At last a path to the cradle of legends.
The Mothership would carry us ten thousand light years,
and we would see the morning sun,
from the hills of our ancients, somewhere in the void.
Where once we lived.
Where we could live again.



This journey would demand sacrifice
this we knew from the start.
During construction; twenty thousand dead.
A fleet to live forever in legend,
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We returned.
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Prose reading 3



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The hyper-cores came alight,
humming an unyielding tone.
And from the edge of the black hole,
soon broken by the curvature of space itself,
we shot through bright blue gates,
towards uncertainty.
Our enemy lost from sight.
Here, they dared not follow.

Without home!
Without fear!

***Repeat until the dead
ship stops you***

A ship has perished in the black hole. Only that player can stop your chanting.

Prose reading 4



For six thousand years we were left in the dark,
blind as well as deaf,
fumbling,
isolated in a far corner of this bright and brilliant Galaxy.
The stars in the night sky,
faint and silent,
had been the only look were afforded, of a world we once possessed.



A strange world had revealed itself to us.
Our history was spread across the shining arms of the Galaxy.
A strange, distorted echo,
of a time before time.
Older than any memory.
The price we paid was our world:
the people lost.
a place in the Galaxy found.



A place under the foot of a mighty, cold Empire.
Cowering we were,
trembling and with scorched skin.
Here, at the precipice,
we met an open hand,
stretched out.
A balm to our wounds.
The goal, the mythical home,
again seemed shining
in the distance near the heart of the Galaxy



The sleeping travelers, the lucky few, for whom light might still be lit;
we took them in our armored hands.

For them
we were the angels of heaven
For them
we strengthened ourselves
For them
this journey was not over
For those
WITHOUT HOME!
For those
WITHOUT FEAR!

Prose reading 5



A thousand years' dreaming of our true home.
In the shining center of the Galaxy,
its beating heart.
Glowing with orange colors,
like an eternal morning sun in the sky.



We arose from the burnt-out ashes.
Our bodies burnt and exhausted.
A people,
now home,
after suffering ten thousand years of punishment.
Teetering, we stood fast.



The travelers of The Mothership,
asleep through painful years,
unknowing,
now awoken.
These souls of both immeasurable luck,
yet struck with terrible grief,
embarked onto a lush world without equal.
Gone were the sands of the desert,
swept away by great rivers.



In slow waves the word spread;
"the Empire has fallen!"
A beaten rule,
a beaten people,
at our scarred, bleeding feet.
Perhaps, in their fragility,
an older, universal,
common origin.
But without power,
they might as well be,
ten thousand light years from home.

No repetition

The last prose reading has no repetition – with the last words of the last verse, the game ends.

Prose reading 1

(game master)

A hundred years' dreaming of a home amongst the stars
Written in towering letters
along miles of steel and will
A giant ship. A Mothership.
The size of cities, she was held, ready, in her wharf
Engines quietly waiting.

(player 1)

To the naked eye a pale blue moon, racing cross the dark night sky
It would save us from this dying desert planet.
Three
generations
of toiling labor.
The invaluable cargo of the Mothership:
three hundred thousand travelers
in the unyielding grip of hypersleep,
as if in silent prayer.

(player 2)

We were their servants, us four, us brave
no longer human.
Our bodies forged in steel in the endless expanse above.
Our old life forever forgotten.
Now, the fire of the stars thundered in our chests,
instead of fragile hearts.

(player 3)

And our engines raged.
Blue plasma, thrown like sand in a storm
met the atmosphere and burnt up;
turquoise. Purple. Green.
The hull flexed in deep sighs,
spread like the breath of life.
"We are away."

(player 4)

The unknowable workings of the hyper-cores,
forgotten for millennia,
trembled loudly and forced open the gates of heaven.
The fabric of space torn apart,
a bright blue gate shone with radiation.

Section 1 through 8 – online!

Section 9 through 12 – online!

Lock all systems.

**Give us wisdom, give us strength,
as we brave the darkness now!**

The Ritual of Reading

Speak slowly

Dramatic reading works better with slow pronunciation; much slower than you probably think. Take your time. No one is rushing you.

Read thoroughly

Read the text twice before you all start reciting it. Once in your head, ten once while moving your lips to match the words.

Find the rhythm

The broken prose lines are not pure artistry; it is a guide to help you find a good, dramatic rhythm. Try to lean into it.

Theatrical performance

Channel your inner actor: Raise your voice or quiet down when the text seems to call for it.

Rise up

Reading aloud works best when standing. Rise as a group when you start the actual reading.

3 Repetitions

After the final reader finishes the text in bold, **all** participants repeat these lines 3 times. Only then is the ritual of reading done.

Prose reading 2



A hundred years' dream of a home amongst the stars.
At last a path to the cradle of legends.
The Mothership would carry us ten thousand light years,
and we would see the morning sun,
from the hills of our ancients, somewhere in the void.
Where once we lived.
Where we could live again.



This journey would demand sacrifice
this we knew from the start.
During construction; twenty thousand dead.
A fleet to live forever in legend,
to keep all our hopes and dreams.
But hope had betrayed us,
and betrayed our entire world.



We returned.
With nothing to return to.
An alien fleet, their ships an angry yellow,
sharp spikes
antennae from their backs
like desert beasts.
Their work already done.
Firestorm.
Ash.
Whirling infernos,
red,
orange.
Dancing below us,
in the charred remains of our world,
a hollow silence.



But the anguished cries of pain from the Mothership
echoed.
The sound like knives cutting bone.
It watched the fires helplessly,
fastened to the now-dead wharf,
the last children of Mashaara wrapped inside her armor.
Our systems sparked to life.
Reactors raged and burned and roared!
Fly like angels into darkness.
When everything is burning...
Everything. Burning.

Prose reading 3



A hundred years' nightmare of a home in the cold of space.
All we had was ash,
loss of friends,
echoing screams.
Ahead a lonesome silent journey.
Sorrowful, like a grave.
The grave of our hopes and our entire people.



The black hole dominated the sky, the universe bent around
an insatiable hunger tore at us.
The steel of the Mothership flexed and bent
sighing like a song of grieving.
Unfathomable energies crashed against our armor,
white-hot gasses whirled in chaos,
the armor charred,
shaken,
shattered.



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humming an unyielding tone.
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♣ *Forty Steps Towards the Sun*

Behavior hint: **Folded hands**

Vicious flak

*"Any fighter was swept by orange explosions,
like a leaf before the battering winds"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Protect The Mothership from losses

Module die becomes 1d6

♣ *Forty Steps Towards the Sun*

Behavior hint: **Slow but confident speech**

Active steel armor

*"Great shields rose from the ship's back,
like scales of a mighty beast,
angled towards danger"*

1d6

This module starts out as strengthened

♣ *Forty Steps Towards the Sun*

Behavior hint: **Unyielding calm**

Ultra-heavy warheads

*"Cores of tungsten,
sent like glowing arcs across the void,
setting off bright dancing sparks as they hit"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Dismantle a dangerous situation with a single calm word

Module die becomes 1d6

♣ *Forty Steps Towards the Sun*

Behavior hint: **Talks of hope**

Safely kept lifeforms

*"A small sliver of Mashaara,
carried with us into the expanse of the Galaxy"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Speak "in me lives blessed life, and I am its keeper, its watchful flame"

Module die becomes 1d6

♥ *Last Song of Desert Winds*
Behavior hint: **One hand on the table**

Tactical neural processor

*"Whether they came slow or fast,
from up or down,
we had already seen it a thousand times"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Work out a plan in a combat situation
and have another follow you

Module die becomes 1d6

♥ *Last Song of Desert Winds*
Behavior hint: **Loud speech**

Field hospital

*"Brave souls, fighting , giving all,
they found respite and healing"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Assist a sheep in need

Module die becomes 1d6

♥ *Last Song of Desert Winds*
Behavior hint: **Looks into others' eyes**

Enormous mass accelerator

*"It was only a single cannon, a single shot,
it hammered us backwards like a howling wind,
and split the enemy in twain"*

1d6

**This module starts out as
strengthened**

♥ *Last Song of Desert Winds*
Behavior hint: **Calm, friendly face**

Hardened structure

*"Armor broken, alarms blaring,
the ship held,
as if held by iron chains"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Speak "you may try to stop me, but you cannot
make a storm yield to a sword!"

Module die becomes 1d6

◆ *A Dance Among Stars*
Behavior hint: **Loose body language**

Flexible couplings

*"Mighty rails moved the modules along the hull,
twenty beats of the heart and all was changed"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Join another's plan without hesitation

Module die becomes 1d6

◆ *A Dance Among Stars*
Behavior hint: **Compliments others**

Active defenses

*"They named it 'the flaming shield',
enemy warheads sundered by roaring cannons,
fire fought with fire"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Cover another ship as it makes a maneuver

Module die becomes 1d6

◆ *A Dance Among Stars*
Behavior hint: **Wide smile**

Diplomatic envoy

*"We came from nothing,
and proved our worth in spite of it"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Speak "I believe in the good of all. The same good that brought us here, the hope that keeps us fighting."

Module die becomes 1d6

◆ *A Dance Among Stars*
Behavior hint: **Bares its teeth under pressure**

Super-critical main engines

*"It almost tore the ship asunder,
a plume of furious anger blasted us forward"*

1d6

This module starts out as strengthened

♠ *By Desert Bound; From Heaven Wrought*
Behavior hint: **Emphasizes speech with gestures**

Thundering cannons

*"With every shot there was a thundering shock throughout,
like a hundred mighty hammers striking"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Move aggressively and immediately against a threat

Module die becomes 1d6

♠ *By Desert Bound; From Heaven Wrought*
Behavior hint: **Straight back**

Heavy element gyro-stabilizer

*"Fifteen thousand revolutions a minute,
it stabilized the ship,
every shot every move – a certainty"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Speak "we keep to our course – against all threats, despite fire and pain!"

Module die becomes 1d6

♠ *By Desert Bound; From Heaven Wrought*
Behavior hint: **Nods politely, even when disagreeing**

Crystalline front armor

*"The cannonades burst in waves against the bow,
but we were as unstoppable as a white-steel spear"*

1d6

This module starts out as strengthened

♠ *By Desert Bound; From Heaven Wrought*
Behavior hint: **Colorful language**

White-hot maneuvering thrusters

*"We were secured in strong harnesses,
for the ship threw itself into a mad dance"*

1d4

Strengthen the module:

Laugh as you execute a daring maneuver at break-neck speed

Module die becomes 1d6

Arms crossed

Arc energy shield

*"Like a halo, a bright and flashing shield,
warheads and fighters crashed against it and burst into flame"*

1d6

Strengthen the module:

Defend another ship in conversation, and leave the opponent speechless

Module die becomes 1d8

Curses the enemy

Miniaturized beam weapons

*"Their fighters met their end in hissing bright lights,
small unsuspecting gun ports
bursting with the power of stars"*

1d6

Strengthen the module:

Speak of the enemy in such vicious terms as to take your friends aback

Module die becomes 1d8

Inclined head

Cloaking iron chaff

*"Swept in clouds of particles,
the enemy radars only sensed a vague specter,
a vengeful ghost"*

1d6

Strengthen the module:

Surrender a talking point in frustration and refuse to talk any more of it

Module die becomes 1d8

Grinds its teeth when angry

Soldiers hundredfold enhanced

*"With nothing left they surrendered their bodies,
welded them into copper and steel,
'without home, without fear' they shouted and charged"*

1d6

Strengthen the module:

Have the other ships chant "without home, without fear" with you.

Module die becomes 1d8

Points firmly at whom it talks to

Swarm missiles

"Rows upon rows of missiles peeked from open hatches, they launched with an infernal noise, a huge unstoppable rage"

1d6

Strengthen the module:

Speak "we are swept in darkness, and our skies are ashen-grey"

Module die becomes 1d8

Snarling voice

Outlawed war drones

"We had forbidden them, for they made wars easy and thoughtless, but now their angry screeching noise gave hope instead"

1d8

Strengthen the module:

Describe how you damage a friend or The Mothership by accident

Module die becomes 1d10

Blinking eyes

Wrought from The Mothership

"She gave a part of herself, our Mother, and built it into us"

1d8

Strengthen the module:

Take offense on the Mothership's behalf and become angry

Module die becomes 1d10

Talk down to others

Broad-spectrum jammer

"We saw them drift helplessly apart, their radios dead, now they knew the lack of home."

1d6

Strengthen the module:

Say something that makes another ship criticize you firmly

Module die becomes 1d8

Two clenched fists on the table

Battering ram

*"The enemy ship broke along the center line,
like a twig under the hoof of a mighty beast"*

1d8

Strengthen the module:

Slam your fists into the table to make a point

Module die becomes 1d10

Angry words without feeling angry

Improvised power couplings

*"Overheated, sparkling with energy and warmth,
but we bridled the sudden bursts,
and the enemy would learn to fear them"*

1d8

Strengthen the module:

Convince someone else to go against their feelings

Module die becomes 1d10

Gives others a cruel look

Eye of the Star

*"The beam cannon went from bow to stern,
humming, trembling with a nervous energy"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

Escalate a discussion by standing up and tower over your opponent with your cruel gaze

Module die becomes 1d12

Lean over the table

Air space superiority

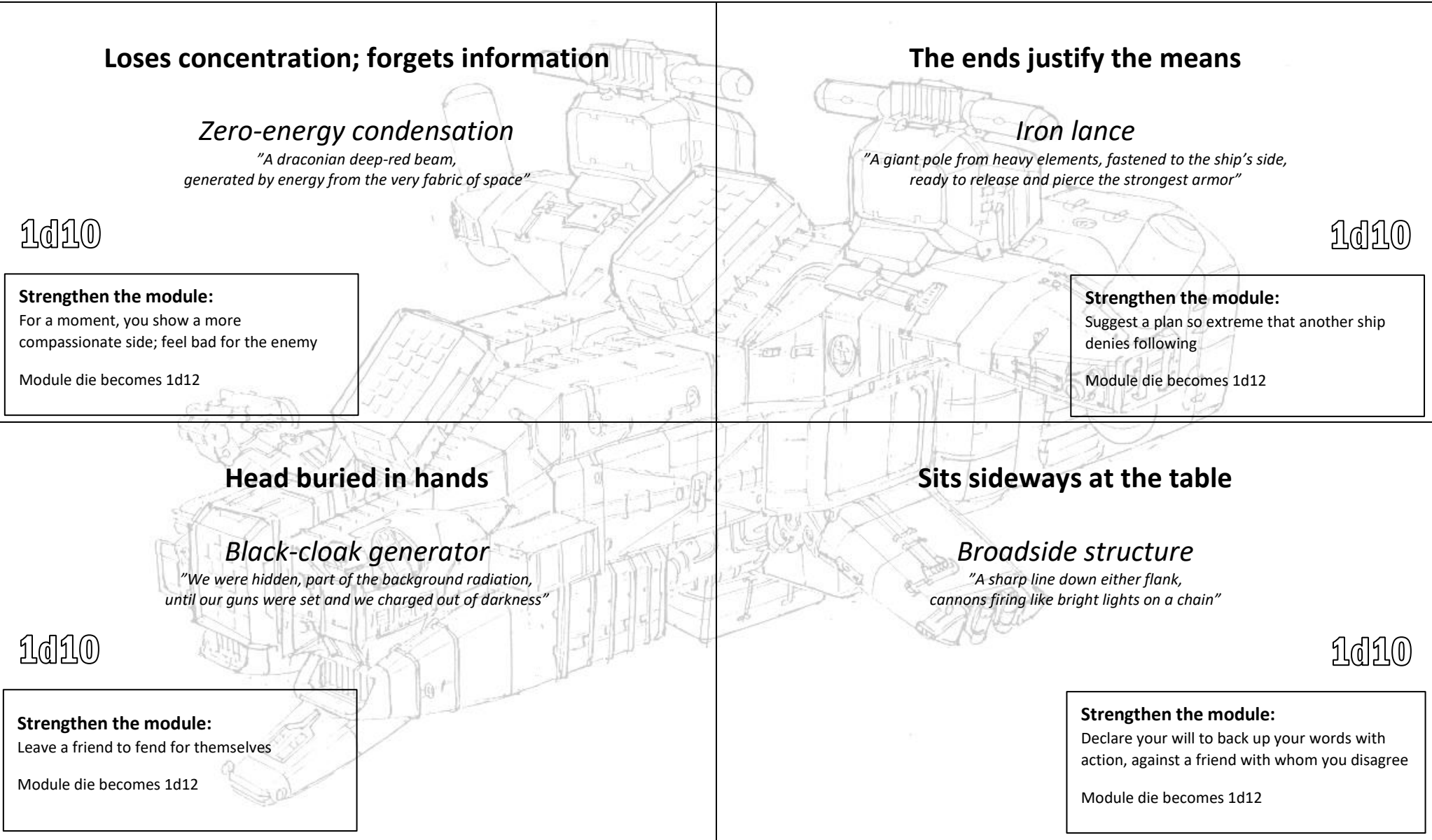
*"The hangar doors opened,
fighters hurled themselves into black space,
lances with terrible power"*

1d8

Strengthen the module:

Seize the initiative in a situation, surprising and upsetting your friends

Module die becomes 1d10



Loses concentration; forgets information

Zero-energy condensation

*"A draconian deep-red beam,
generated by energy from the very fabric of space"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

For a moment, you show a more
compassionate side; feel bad for the enemy

Module die becomes 1d12

The ends justify the means

Iron lance

*"A giant pole from heavy elements, fastened to the ship's side,
ready to release and pierce the strongest armor"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

Suggest a plan so extreme that another ship
denies following

Module die becomes 1d12

Head buried in hands

Black-cloak generator

*"We were hidden, part of the background radiation,
until our guns were set and we charged out of darkness"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

Leave a friend to fend for themselves

Module die becomes 1d12

Sits sideways at the table

Broadside structure

*"A sharp line down either flank,
cannons firing like bright lights on a chain"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

Declare your will to back up your words with
action, against a friend with whom you disagree

Module die becomes 1d12

Hands clenched tight; white knuckles

Gamma burst

*"You never saw the beam itself,
but for twenty microseconds,
everything was like a hell full of raging light"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

Do something sadistic to an enemy ship,
making the others ask you to stop

Module die becomes 2d8

Panicky breath

Oversize power core

*"Often we had to open the vents,
leak blue-white plasma into space
as uncontrollable eruptions"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

Start rambling madly, prompting another to
calm you down

Module die becomes 2d8

Shouts its hate at the enemy

Nuclear salvo-cannons

*"Warhead upon warhead,
blooming in orange colors,
the radiation washing over us"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

Abandon a defensive position at a critical point,
to go on the offensive instead

Module die becomes 2d8

Quiet cries of pain

Scarred spare parts

*"An absurd mess from lost ships,
burnt, torn, crushed,
welded together into steel-grey nightmare"*

1d10

Strengthen the module:

Start an angry tirade against a friend or an
enemy. Shout!

Module die becomes 2d8

Forty Steps Towards the Sun

fold here

Options in combat

"I'm all-in"

Force an open card and roll dice **now**. Success is smaller, and you

suffer small losses.

Final gambit

Play the ace card you were given at the start of the game to cancel a failed roll and convert it into a success. Game master removes one module from your ship immediately.

Names

The planet Mashara

the desert planet you come from

Last Song of Desert Winds

A Dance Among the Stars

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