SIX FREE SENSOR CONTACTS

BY PHILIP REED

During July, in the ***Future: Datastream,*** I finally came up with a usable format for an idea that had been bouncing around in my head for several months: starship sensor contacts. The basic idea was simply to write a series of adventure seeds for use while the players' characters are traveling the stars. I wanted something a little more than just brief paragraph suggestions, though, and knocked around a few ideas before I settled on the format used in these pages.

I hope that you can find a way to use some (or all!) of these sensor contacts in your campaign. As with the other starship-related releases that Ronin Arts has published in the Future series this PDF makes some assumptions about your campaign; the sensor contacts in this series will be most useful in campaigns in which the following statements are true:

■ The campaign is not a "hard" science setting. Campaigns that are more space opera/adventure movie are the intended target for this PDF.

■ Starships are not rare or unusual. Everything that I've written in this PDF assumes that space travel is a standard and common occurrence — individuals either fly their own ships or ride on passenger ships. Starships and space travel are as common for characters as a plane ride is for people of our reality.

■ Space combat is not uncommon. It's just another exciting adventure when the player characters have to engage the enemy while fleeing from some world or other.

■ The campaign is packed with action. If things aren't exploding, how much fun can the game really be?

WHAT'S REQUIRED TO USE THIS PDF?

In order to use ***Future: 6 Free Sensor Contacts*** you will need the ***D20 Modern*** roleplaying game, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and the official future supplement, also published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.. You can find both at your favorite

local game store or online at any number of role-playing game vendors. No other Ronin Arts products are required to use this PDF.

FUTURE: DATASTREAM

As of the time of publication, Ronin Arts' **Future: Datastream** subscription service is running, introducing new material for futuristic campaigns five times each week. For more information on the **Future: Datastream,** including subscription information, please visit the official forums at **www.d20projects.com.**

OPEN GAME CONTENT

All of the text of this PDF is presented as open game content. While this means absolutely noth-

ing to your campaign it does give other publishers permission to use this material as long as they follow the open game license (see the end of this PDF).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Philip Reed has been working professionally in the roleplaying game industry since 1995. In that time he has worked for such companies as West End Games, Privateer Press, and Steve Jackson Games. Today Philip spends his days at home running Ronin Arts, writing and designing new games, and reading whatever books interest him at the time. To learn more about Philip Reed — and Ronin Arts — please visit **www.philipjreed.com/php** and **www.roninarts.com.**

SENSOR CONTACTS

CORPSEPOD (PL 6)

As the player characters' ship drops out of lightspeed (or whatever form of FTL travel is appropriate to your campaign) on the edge of a system their sensors sound contact. An unidentified object below the system's elliptic plane is just beyond their visual range. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (the players learn all of the information up to the highest result of the check):

10: Metallic object. Contact shows no obvious signs of activity.

15: The object is quite small, just slightly larger than a tall human, and sensors indicate that it is hollow with something inside it.

20: The object is a corpsepod, a coffin-like cylinder used for burials at space. This particular corpsepod registers as less than one-year old.

25: The body inside the corpsepod is that of a male human. Other, non-organic objects are also inside the cylinder but the computer can't

quite identify them through the corpsepod's shell.

30: The pod is transmitting a beacon on a frequency that is reserved by the military. A successful Computer Use check (DC 20) decodes the transmission — the cylinder is broadcasting the corpse's name, rank, and serial number (Dima Vasilev, Praporshchik, SN008383278483321a-7).

If the player characters maneuver to overtake the cylinder (it's moving away from them at a tactical speed of 1,000-ft.) they should have no problems capturing the corpsepod with their grappling systems (unless their engines are damaged or their ship is agonizingly slow, in which case all they'll be able to do is watch as the cylinder disappears off of their sensors). Opening the corpsepod reveals the almost-perfectly preserved body of a human male roughly 6' tall with black hair, a uniform, and a sidearm. Scattered throughout the coffin are numerous photos and trinkets — gifts from the dead soldier's friends.

Decoy Drone (PL 6)

Anywhere along a heavily traveled route the player characters' starship sensors detect a nearby object, large, that the computer suggests may be a starship. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (the players learn all of the information up to the highest result of the check):

10: Metallic object. High energy and lifeform readings, definitely an active contact.

15: The object is a light freighter, Marco Polo's Star, that's moving away from the player characters' starship.

20: The object is actually a decoy drone and not a starship. How a single decoy drone came to be moving through this section of space is unknown, though it's very likely that the ship that launched it took advantage of the decoy to make their escape.

If the player characters choose to capture the decoy drone — it's moving away from them at a tactical speed of 1,500-ft. — they could choose to either reconfigure the drone to work with their decoy drone launcher (if they have one), or sell it (the drone has a sale value of 23).

Emergency Lifepod (PL 7)

A distant beacon interrupts an otherwise dull trip, the ships' sensors detecting a physical contact within seconds of the beacon's sound coming through over the ship's comm. system. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (the players learn all of the information up to the highest result of the check):

10: Metallic object. Contact shows faint signs of life.

15: The object is a lifepod — also known as an escape pod or lifeboat — 25-ft. long and with minimal engines and maneuverability.

20: Sensors indicate two lifefroms onboard the lifepod. It is difficult to distinguish the exact size or species of the lifeforms.

25: The lifepod has suffered damage and is slowly losing oxygen and fuel. The computer suggests that the lifepod has only enough oxygen inside to sustain two medium-sized lifeforms for thirty more minutes.

30: The lifepod is carrying two human females. Readings indicate that one is injured and unconscious. A second Computer Use check (DC 20), if successful, reveals that the lifepod's comm. system is damaged and locked to transmit the universal call for help. Unfortunately, the lifepod has suffered so much damage that the assistance beacon is faulty and transmitting only a fraction of the full message — which is why the ship didn't automatically flag the lifepod as a ship in distress.

If the player characters elect to rescue the lifepod and its two inhabitants the women **[human female, smart 2,** one with **8 hit points** and the other with **1 hit point]** will be very grateful. Lia and Sancia Napoli are the sole survivors of *Executioner's Delight*, a family-run merchant vessel. If asked the women will tell a tale of the ship's capture at the hand of pirates. Their lifepod computers have the last known coordinates of the *Executioner's Delight* and the women promise that the player characters will be well rewarded if they'll rescue the womens' family.

What the player characters choose to do could or could not lead to further adventure.

Garbled Transmission (PL 7)

The starships communications system suddenly springs to life, emitting a broken transmission in English:

" . . . seventeen more . . . ire is still burnin . . . ward cargo hold. We're forced to seek shel . . . oon of the . . . the system. It's un . . . vive but the . . . seal is still intact."

The message repeats over and over, sometimes less understandable but the above is the most the player characters will be able to understand. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (the players learn all of the information up to the highest result of the check):

10: The transmission is coming from somewhere in the same system that the player characters are currently in.

15: The transmission is coming from the fourth moon of the system's sole gas giant.

20: The computer dates the accent used by the speaker of the transmission as coming from a long-destroyed colony in an outer rim system. Combining that information with technical information on the transmission's wavelength and frequency the computer proposes — with a 75% certainty — that the transmission is approximately 175 years old.

If the players land on the moon (light gravity, thick atmosphere) to investigate they'll find a crash site but no survivors. Anything of value that the ship was carrying has long since been salvaged. Others that have passed through this system before the player characters cleaned the site of almost everything and all that remains is the rusting shell of a Fusion Age starship.

If the GM wants to make the encounter more memorable he could replace the barren crash site with any number of possible encounters, including:

- A single survivor, mad from loneliness and kept alive by experimental drugs the ship was transporting, has turned the crashed ship into his own fortified home. How will this "Robinson Crusoe" of the stars react to the player characters?
- A combat robot the starship was transporting has broken free and is defending the crash site. The robot's programming is faulty and the only way to stop it is to destroy it.
- A group of survivors have multiplied on the moon and there are now at least twenty inhabitants — of all ages — living in and around the crash site.

ILLEGAL MINING OPERATION (PL 7)

While passing near a system that's marked as devoid of life (the computer indicates that the system is a registered stellar preserve) the player characters' starship sounds a contact alert. Somewhere

MINING RIPPERS (PL 7)

In place of three weapons, a starship may be equipped with mining rippers — drills and scoops that eat through a planet or asteroid's surface and extract valuable materials. Mining rippers can extract two tons of material each round though the ship must be moving at only 1 square per round for the device to work — any faster and the mining rippers are torn off and are completely destroyed.

The device instantly feeds the mined materials directly into a designated cargo hold on the ship.

Purchase DC: 30.

Restriction: Licensed (+1).

deep in the system's asteroid belt something is giving off a powerful energy signature. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (the players learn all of the information up to the highest result of the check):

10: The object is massive and moving very, very slowly.

15: The object appears to be a superheavy starship with dozens of ultralight ships swarming around it. The smaller ships are moving back and forth between the asteroids and the larger ship.

20: Sensors indicate that the superheavy ship is a star freighter (use the superheavy star freighter design in the future SRD) and the ultralight ships are fast freighters (also from the future SRD). There are a total of 33 fast freighters.

25: The fast freighters have been modified with mining rippers (see box) and are strip-mining the asteroids in the belt and then transporting the raw materials to the star freighter. Galactic law prohibits mining operations in this system — it's a stellar preserve — so the player characters will likely be shocked by the mining operation.

30: Concealed by the activity around the star freighter, the sensors pick up two squads of assault fighters (use the PL 7 assault fighter

in the future SRD) moving in on the player characters' ships, all twelve fighters moving at their top tactical speed.

Unless the players' characters have an awesome starship they're out-gunned. The smart thing to do is to run as soon as they detect the incoming fighters — if the initial Computer Use check isn't high enough to detect the fighters at first the assault fighters will close to 10,000 feet at which point regular combat rounds can start — is to turn and run for it. If the fighters are detected immediately the players may choose to try and communicate with the fighters, perhaps going so far as to attempt to make a deal.

How the illegal mining outfit responds to any offers of partnership — or any threats — is completely the GM's call. Some possibilities include:

- False acceptance. Within a few hours of "friendly" negotiations the fighters strike suddenly, attempting to destroy the players' ship and characters before they can leave the system.
- Open conflict. The leader of the mining operations laughs at the players and demands that they hand over their ship or face his fighters. If the players agree then they'll be cast adrift in a broken shuttle. Arguments between the characters could lead to an interesting finale to a campaign as each character works to ensure his own survival.

POSSIBLE CARGOS

If you need ideas for just what sort of cargo could be found floating in space, the following should get your engine started. If you need even more ideas you can try *Future: 13 Starship Cargos* or the *Future: Datastream*.

10 CHE (CONVENTIONAL HIGH-EXPLOSIVE) MISSILES (PL 7)

This thick, armored case is constructed of vanadium. Divided into ten 2-foot by 5-foot by 5 foot compartments, each locked, the case takes up a 10-foot by 10-foot by 5-foot area. Inside each separate compartment is a single CHA missile for use by Fusion Age starships. Breaking into each compartment requires a separate Disable Device check (DC 40) for each electronic lock.

If the case is breached (hit points reduced to 0) there is a 40% chance that the missiles will go off (+20% if the damage is caused by fire). If the missiles are accidentally detonated the case is completely destroyed and all characters and creatures within 25 feet of the case suffer 6d6 points of fire damage (a successful DC 15 Reflex save reduces the damage to 3d6)..

Case Hardness/Hit Points: 10/110.

Cargo Space Requirements: 10-feet square, 5-feet tall, 1,800 lb.

Cargo Value/Purchase DC: 32 (as separate components the case has a purchase DC of 23 and the missiles have a purchase DC of 23 each).

Restriction: Military (+3).

CASE OF AUTODYN HOVERTRUCK PARTS (PL 7)

This 10-foot square metal case features one heavy, electronically locked door on one side. Opening the case requires the proper access code (or successful DC 30 Disable Device check).

Inside the case are spare parts for the autodyne hovertruck, including new power couplings, rotator chips, and direct-to-drive linkages.

Case Hardness/Hit Points: 8/80.

Cargo Space Requirements: 10-foot square, 1,900 lb.

Cargo Value/Purchase DC: 25 (as separate components the case has a purchase DC of 23 and the parts have a purchase 23).

Restriction: Military (+3).

■ Loose partnership. The miners look to the player characters as a potential distributor for some of the mined materials. The more they can spread out sale of the materials the less likely it is that the leader and his followers will be identified as the source of the materials.

JETTISONED CARGO (PL 7)

Along any heavily traveled merchant lane the player characters come across a distant contact. The computer appears confused as it sounds multiple contact alerts and then revises its finding to display only one contact. A single Computer Use check reveals the following (the players learn all of the information up to the highest result of the check):

10: Multiple metallic contacts. Revision: one metallic contact. Revision: multiple metallic contacts. Revision: one . . .

15: Several small metallic objects roughly 20,000-ft. from the player characters' starship. The system is having serious difficulties with reading this contact.

20: The contacts appear to be shipping containers of various makes and sizes. The GM should set an exact number containers (or randomly generate the number of cargo containers by rolling 1d4+1). The contents of each container are up to the GM (see box for examples).

25: The system has managed to isolate each shipping container. A successful Computer Use check (DC 15) made for each individual container reveals the contents.

As long as the player characters' starship has the cargo space, the group may very well have stumbled upon a goldmine of valuables.

OPEN GAME LICENSE