

MANDATE ARCHIVE

SCAVENGER FLEETS

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WORLDS WITHOUT END

The space between worlds has been desolate since the Scream. The silver fleets of slowboat freighters and agile warships are no more, and only a powerful and technologically advanced world can heave so much as a pocket cruiser up to the stars. The construction of spike drives and starships requires rare elements that cannot be found in every star system, and many worlds that would otherwise have the science to build such ships lack the vital components. To possess a ship is to possess rare power.

In the immediate aftermath of the Scream the situation was far worse. Many ships were commandeered by the elites of their world, and their flight cost many worlds the few ships they had. Under the sincere or fancied name of “going for help”, they made their stolen ships groan with the weight of their treasures in a mad attempt to find refuge at a neighboring star. It was weeks before it became plain that the disaster that had scourged one world had scourged them all, and these wretched pilgrims found themselves forced to land on whatever frenzied orb was closest or else die a slow death in the cold of empty space. Now and then one of these refugee ships is discovered floating inert around some lifeless star, their fuel exhausted in a system that had no haven for them.

Those ships that were not seized by frightened presidents or plutocrats were mobbed by terrified locals. Even when there was no hope of refuge elsewhere, they hammered on the airlocks and clawed at the ports, maddened with the need to go elsewhere, *anywhere* to escape the ruin around them. Many of these ships were forced to take off simply to escape theft or destruction by the crazed mobs.

Most of these ships were small traders and tramp freighters, ships too small or discreet to be noticed by the planetary government. A few military ships were also among their numbers, those few that hadn't been lost in the last, desperate days when plundering raids were launched against neighboring worlds to steal another few weeks of life from their irreplaceable spare parts. It was a wretched, ragtag cloud of ill-prepared ships that were cast off by most advanced worlds, confused and desperate in the growing darkness.

NATURAL SELECTION

Some of these involuntary exiles rapidly degenerated into pirates and thieves, attacking their fellows to steal their ship for parts and space whatever wretches hadn't died in the fighting. Those that didn't undertake this lone-wolf existence reflexively banded together to defend each other against the marauders. In a few places, pirates joined together in like alliances to prey on these fragile unions, but the kind of men and women who were willing to turn reaver were rarely suited to close cooperation. After the first twelve months, most of the remaining pirates were either dead, shipwrecked, or hunting for ill-defended colony worlds elsewhere.

In most systems where the tenuous alliance of refugee ships had survived their test of fire, the shared suffering and cooperation had formed bonds between their disparate crews. Safety was in numbers. It was in their allies in the fleet and the strength of the trust between them. These new-made compacts were the seeds of those roving ship-clouds that would later become known as the scavenger fleets.

They earned their name early. Frontier starships were rough and ready constructions compared to the psitech-crafted components and pretech sophistication of Core-built warships. Allowances had to be made for local materials and their performance was inevitably worse than the AI-crafted masterpieces of later Terran Mandate shipbuilding. Still, they had the great and overwhelming advantage of being maintainable on frontier tech bases. Exotic psitech components were only necessary in the most advanced warships, and almost all of those had been expended early in interstellar plundering raids. Those ships that remained could survive on the scraps and leavings that the Scream had left behind.

Some of these fleets began by scavenging their own systems. It was a choice born of brutal necessity- the ships needed the parts to remain operational, and negotiations were out of the question. Even if a coherent planetary government remained after the chaos of the Scream, most dirtsiders hated the “cowardly ship-thieves” who had abandoned them to suffer and die on the worlds below. More than this, any exposure of a functioning starship to the vastly superior numbers of the planetary populations would be sure to end with the ship's theft and the brutal execution of its crew.

The fleets took what they needed by force. Remote asteroid mines, moon refineries, scientific observation stations... they ruthlessly and systematically stripped all these outposts of everything they could use. Most fleets offered the surviving crews a chance to join them. Others considered them to be too great a security risk, and sent them out the airlocks. Humanity and forbearance were among the first losses in fleets still dazed by the spectacle of the Mandate's utter collapse.

Any given system only had so much to loot, however, and eventually every fleet needed to move on to unscavenged stars. Scout-ships led the way, and fleets wandered far from their original homes in a never-ending quest for fresh parts and vital supplies. In the early years after the Scream, it wasn't uncommon for two fleets to find themselves in the same system, staring each other down over the carcass of some unplucked Mandate research installation or long-abandoned refueling post. These situations forced the fleets to trade and to compromise, as any fighting would have maimed both sides beyond their power to repair. There was no profit in fighting when the victory would be worth less than the price it took to win it.

As human populations died out on uninhabitable worlds or planets overly reliant on core parts shipments, the scavenger fleets began picking the bones of tomb worlds as well as orbital and system stations. Sometimes the local populations weren't entirely dead. Not all of the fleets had much humanity left, but even the coldest-blooded of the scavengers did what they could to help these wretched remnants survive. Native human workers could produce goods and scavenge parts that the fleets could never fashion or find. By bringing these ragged remnants the treasures of distant worlds, they could buy a king's ransom in vital components for goods that were worthless to the fleet. Here and there attempts were made at dragooning survivor remnants into slave labor, but these efforts almost invariably ended in failure. There were simply too many dirtsidiers and too few "scavvers" to keep order.

Some of the fleets came to rest on these worlds, forming the nucleus of new colonies and rebuilt societies. Most, however, had come to prefer the security of space. Life there was a constant struggle to find or fashion maintenance parts and supplies, but there was no crisis the fleet could not escape, and no scarcity they could not simply avoid. Their numbers and ship-skills were such that not even the greatest of the petty unions of the Silence could hope to threaten them with their planetary navies, and only the fleets of still-functioning alien polities were a serious concern to their leaders.

Gradually, the fleets became societies unto themselves, self-contained and self-sustaining by the profits of their long journeys. As the easily-plundered salvage of a sector ran out, they began to follow loops through multiple sectors, crossing from star to star to trade with planetbound populations for what they needed, bringing word and passengers from worlds that had been lost for decades, or even centuries. They were a thin and tenuous lifeline for many worlds. Their foreign supplies and raw materials could provide an impoverished planet with the components they needed for bare survival, and many local rulers were willing to pay anything at all for the tools to maintain their people- and their power.

For the past century, the great majority of scavenger fleets have lived in this roaming manner. They are nomads and traders, wanderers among the stars following the paths of their ancestors from world to world. Scout-ships cast off from the main fleet trace perilous routes through the churning energies of drillspace to find new avenues for trade and salvage, and they guard their knowledge jealously from outsiders.

This jealousy is growing sharper. Over the past few decades, more and more worlds are finally reaching the cusp of technological reconstruction necessary to jumpstart their own spike drive construction. Starships are no longer the province of a few preserved-in-amber polities with the complex machinery and rare resources necessary to construct the drives. Systems that had once relied upon the once-a-generation visit of a scavenger fleet to supply them with some vital resource can now go out and seek it in their own hulls- and they are no longer offering such a wealth of local resources in exchange for the small amounts of important wares the fleet is willing to trade.

Some scavenger fleets are seeking to interact with these new powers on the old terms of trade and negotiation. They look for ways to gain mutual advantage from the new influx of ships, and seek the possibilities inherent in newly-awakened trade. Other fleets find the stakes too high to risk losing their local monopolies, and are starting to take more direct actions toward containing newly-established spacefaring. Ships vanish in the dark between worlds and accidents happen in the tunnels of new asteroid mines. Small things at first, deniable things at first, but some fleets are willing to turn their guns on more than pirates if it promises them a captive market.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

The social structure of a scavenger fleet is inevitably shaped by its environment, but within the limits enforced by the cold void the variety of government types, social mores, and aesthetic standards embraced by the fleets vary wildly. One fleet might be a grimly Spartan array of militaristic trader-soldiers cutting their way through space infested by hostile aliens, while another might be a religious enterprise bringing wealth and spiritual truth to the benighted planetary masses. Other fleets have cast off from humanity itself, becoming infected by strange memes or unknowable alien tech. These "Lost Fleets" are a subject of whispers and shadowy lore in the scavver databases, stories of old allies gone silent or hideously strange in the span of a few years. Most of them are never seen again, but some say it is merely because their passage leaves no one left to tell of them.

Still, many scavenger fleets are strongly influenced by military ranks and protocols. In part, this influence comes from the military ships that leavened the initial survivors, and in another degree it comes from the successful patterns of shipboard operations that these naval traditions embody. Whatever form of society develops in a fleet invariably has to deal with several crucial factors.

The need for supply is a fact of life for the fleet. Water, carbon, and some minerals are usually abundant in most systems. Aside from these bare minimums, everything that a fleet needs for survival must be fabricated or scavenged. The sharply limited population of a fleet can only create so much, and hardly any fleet has the ability to create the AIs necessary to oversee drone manufactories. Relatively primitive robotic factory-ships are the best alternative, and every project and every product requires precious attention from a sharply limited pool of fleet crew. Nothing is in easy abundance in a fleet- not space, not time, not the vital necessities of life.

Technical skill is indispensable for a fleet. The ships they fly are centuries old in some cases, and the newer ones lack many of the self-maintenance features that made their Mandate brethren more easily managed. Every crew member must be a reliable and dependable participant in the constant struggle to keep these ships flying. Failure doesn't just mean an emergency landing back at base- it means horrible death for the crew and most of the people they love, because the fleets *have* no reliable base. A scavver schoolgirl knows as much about practical starship maintenance as a professional astrotech, and the honored chief engineer of a fleet is probably the most skillful field astrotech within three sectors.

Unity is a prerequisite for the survival of a fleet. Without the coordinated aid of multiple ships performing specialized manufacture and maintenance work, any single ship is certain to rapidly become an inoperable tomb for its crew. A lone scout is terribly vulnerable to hostile alien warships, pirates, and ruthless planetary navies, while a unified fleet is enough to give any such predator pause. However fierce the disagreements between members of a fleet, they *must* work together and trust each other implicitly if any of them are to survive the rigors of an interstellar existence.

Any social structure that satisfies the triple need for supplies, technical skill, and unity might conceivably crop up in a scavenger fleet. These structures are the product of centuries of adaptation and individual influence, and they rarely change rapidly or without good reason. The cost of a mistake is just too high to risk an untested social theory or tolerate a sharp deviation from local mores. Conflicts that would result in angry separation on a planet's surface would result in mutual destruction were a fleet to behave in the same way.

One of the most common evolutions is based on a quasi-military structure softened over centuries of cultural absorption and modification. The exact terminology and organization can vary wildly, but the following pattern is perhaps more common than most other alternatives.

The basic unit of such a fleet is the ship itself. Each ship is inhabited by one or more families and is responsible for choosing a Bridge- several crewmembers invested with executive authority on the ship. These "Bridge officers" then select a Captain who has life or death control over everyone aboard the ship. The Captain or their appointed representative then represents the ship's interests to the Fleet Command, a circle of Bridge officers chosen from every ship to determine policy for the fleet as a whole. Fleet Command, in turn, selects a single person from among their number to serve as Admiral, with the same rights over the fleet that a Captain might have over their crew.

Each ship is allowed its own customs in selecting Bridge crew. For a small, single-family craft the Bridge crew and Captain may be a single person in the form of the family patriarch or matriarch. For larger ships, the choice may be through selection by the prior Bridge crew, public voting, resource accumulation, or any other method that satisfies the feeling of the crewmembers. While the Fleet Command does not have the right to appoint Captains, it does have the right to refuse to recognize them, in the case they feel that a particular choice is intolerably bad. The ship is then deprived of a voice in the FC but is still obligated to obey fleet orders. Most ships choose a more amenable leader, or else stubbornly maintain their own choices while acquiescing to the dictates of the FC.

FC representatives play a crucial role in fleet politics, lobbying for their ship's share of bartered resources and negotiating the services and supplies they will be expected to provide to other members of the fleet. Some of these negotiations can be ruthless, but the need for fleet unity usually prevents arrangements from becoming too oppressive. Even the Captains of the most powerful ships in the

THE RARITY OF FLEETS

It's up to you to decide how common scavenger fleets are in your game world. Much like the Imago Dei and the alien races, their prevalence in any particular sector of space depends entirely on the GM's discretion. In some sectors they will be wholly unknown, while in others they might form dueling dynasties of starfaring merchant-lords.

If you feel inclined to add them to an existing campaign, their presence can always be introduced as a new event, a fleet seeking newer pastures... or driven by something from their older stars.

fleet know that any real infighting is certain to leave them crippled and easy prey for pirates or planetary navies.

With a fleet, crewmembers aboard a ship each have a rank- the Captain, of course, stands foremost, while beneath are the Commanders and Lieutenants of the Bridge crew, and then the Chiefs and Spacers of the other rates. Commanders are usually found only aboard very large ships, where the Bridge crew is so numerous as to require a little structure of its own. They oversee the Lieutenants, who on smaller ships are each responsible for a particular department- engines, logistics, life support, and so forth. Chiefs are the senior crewmembers with the skill and experience to excel in a particular department, and they provide both consultation advice for the Lieutenants and leadership for the ordinary Spacer ratings. Children earn their Spacer ratings as soon as they demonstrate adequate technical skill in a department that needs more hands; until then, they have the courtesy title of "Ensign", but have no adult privileges. Most children earn their rate around the time they turn sixteen, though a few of the slower or more untalented ones can remain an Ensign into their early twenties.

Laws aboard a scavenger fleet ship tend to be simple, direct, and pitiless as a vector calculation. Murder, mutiny, assault of a Bridge officer, sabotage of a ship, and treachery against the fleet are all punished by a short trip out of the airlock. Theft, assault on a Chief, rape, and wilful disobedience all earn penalties that range from extended periods of brutally unpleasant ship duty in the lightest case to the severe punishment of being "landed" on the next habitable planet. Some merciful Captains even stop the ship before they throw the miscreant off. Lesser crimes such as brawling among the ranks, dereliction of duty, waste of supplies, insubordination or incompetence earn lengthy spells of punishment duty, demotion, or corporal punishment. Imprisonment is virtually unknown among scavenger fleets, as even criminals must be kept working usefully if they aren't to be executed out of hand.

Minor crimes are identified and punished by the scavver's superior officer as they see fit. Those who protest against the judgment may appeal to a court-martial, where three superior officers weigh the evidence in a reasonably impartial fashion. If found guilty, however, the punishment is always substantially worse, discouraging recourse to a court-martial for anything short of an egregious injustice. These courts also sit in judgment over serious crimes, assuming the Captain doesn't make a summary decision. Aboard small family ships, it's rare for discipline to be imposed by anyone but the Captain.

SHIPBOARD ECONOMIES

Despite their bluntly mercantile ambitions, most ships run as command economies. Aboard small family ships, family ties and discipline ensure that every member pulls their weight and supplies the surplus of goods and services expected by the rest of the fleet. On larger ships with multiple families, “work credits” form an informal economy, whereby a crewman can trade off portions of his free time for services or possessions not otherwise issued by the ship’s quartermaster. The very largest ships with thousands of crew usually have a standard monetary system using fleet credits to buy and sell amongst themselves.

Ownership of possessions takes two forms- personal possessions and “cargo shares”. Scavvers have very little personal space, and the whole earthly belongings of most will fit into a shoulder duffle with room to spare. Custom marks these possessions as belonging to the scavver, to be owned, traded, and used as they see fit. Anything they can’t fit into their allotted storage space, however, is not theirs, and may be reassigned by any superior officer.

Cargo shares are somewhat different, and represent a claim on a particular amount of cargo space aboard the ship. The scavver is expected to fill this space with salable goods if they are able, and both the Captain and the fleet has the right to confiscate any amount of them at any time for the good of the ship or the Fleet as a whole. Most small, family ships hold their cargo shares in common, sharing in the profit or loss of any particular load. Aboard larger ships, senior family members traditionally supply the seed resources for a new trader’s first sale attempt, and more later if necessary- though a consistently bad trader inevitably runs out of backers in time.

Scavvers are encouraged to seek out new trade opportunities and new goods to barter, the better to extract every possible ounce of value out of their mercantile routes. A scavver who takes on a cubic ton of dried raspberries may be perfectly confident of his ability to sell them on at the next world that lacks such delicacies, but the profit is likely to be correspondingly limited, as other scavvers will be thinking the same thing. It’s those who strike out on new trails and discover new profit opportunities that strike the biggest successes.

If the profit won by trading takes up more cargo share than a scavver is allowed, he might barter it for a smaller amount of some more valuable resource. Alternately, he might directly donate the excess to the fleet’s storage hulls, thereby earning significant social status and esteem.... not that the fleet would hesitate a moment in simply taking it if it needed it, but his obvious willingness to support the rest of the fleet earns public respect.

Social advancement takes place both by impressing fellow crewmembers with personal skill and charisma and by acquiring supplies for the fleet. A merchant-captain who strikes a magnificent deal can rocket in fleet esteem over a dutiful but less talented rival. Such status lends more weight to their opinion on the Fleet Command council. The ultimate argument is always that of resource access, and the captain who brings supplies to the fleet can expect to be heeded by his peers.

COMING AND GOING

Most fleets consist of a core and a scout wing. The slow, fragile, or vital ships are always kept together, the better to be defended by the most powerful ships in the fleet. Smaller ships capable of atmospheric landings are relegated to the scout wing, a position both extremely dangerous and highly remunerative. The scouts are forced to endure the dangers of a potentially-outdated spike drill rutter and a destination world that may not welcome them, but they’re also the first to recognize business possibilities on a visited world and to obtain the first call on easy salvage.

The navigational prowess of the scavenger fleets is legendary, but even they are forced to deal with certain risks involved in a drill. Initially, at least two scout ships are dispatched to the next world on their course. These drills are almost always successful, but without fresh metadimensional soundings even the small chance of disaster is too much to impose upon the rest of the fleet. The initial scouts are to make a fresh chart of the course, identify any dangers to the fleet in the destination system, and return with useful data.

This scouting process is undertaken even on familiar ground. Things can change quickly on a planet and disaster can blossom easily in the years between fleet visits. The core is simply too important to risk it to any danger that can be logically foreseen. The scouts always go in first and they always observe things carefully before they return.

Other scouts are sent on longer-range missions, assigned to duties that separate them from the fleet for months or even years. These “far scout” ships identify dangers well in advance of the main fleet and plot out systems that need to be avoided. They also do what they can to minimize or eliminate these threats, relying on a combination of technological expertise, mercantile bribery and brazen daring to clear a path for their kindred. Such duties are quite popular with the younger spacers, offering them a freedom of action rarely known in the regimented fleets. A far scout wing that comes back with valuable information and precious supplies can make an excellent launch point for a career as a Bridge officer, or even the chance to captain their own ship.

Once the core fleet has drilled into a system, they usually remain there for several months at the least, the better to exploit deep-space mineral resources, perform maintenance, and conduct trade at a suitably careful pace. The core fleet always remains at the very edge of the system, ready to drill out quickly in the case of attack, while smaller ships are used to conduct the mining and cargo ferrying necessary in the system.

NEEDFUL THINGS

The priorities of a scavenger fleet can be summed up into a few vital resources that they seek from the worlds they visit.

Foremost and most vital to the fleet are a wide range of raw industrial inputs ranging from alloys to petrochemicals to radioactives. Their machine shops can work miracles with raw materials, but they need those materials in the first place. Asteroid mining and gas giant skimming can give them much, but there remain

many materials that are much easier to acquire from inhabited planets.

Next in importance are biological inputs. New seeds, new livestock, and even new human genetic samples gathered either mechanically or through more old-fashioned means of crossbreeding. The closed loop of organic recycling is imperfect even in the best of fleets, and there remains a constant need for fresh material to stave off the threat of inbreeding, mutation, and opportunistic disease. The “enthusiasm” of unmarried scavver women on shore leave is notorious on worlds familiar with the fleets.

Occasionally the fleets will even enlist adults from the worlds they visit, but this is quite rare- it generally takes a lifetime to socialize into the society of the fleet, and the consequences of a misfit are too disastrous to recruit lightly. Still, mortality or disaster sometimes force a choice of necessity on the fleet.

The final major need is trade goods. Credits are largely worthless to the scavvers, much as they are to any far trader. They need finished goods, local specialties, and useful tools to trade on to the next world they're to visit. Fleets can- and will- take their necessities at gunpoint if necessary, but they almost always prefer to work through honest trade of goods or services. Existence in the deep black is risky enough as it is without making enemies of the dirtsidiers.

THE THUNDER OF THE GUNS

Scavenger fleets shun space engagements. Any serious battle will result in the loss of precious ships, the death of relatives, and the waste of vital resources. Combat is a failure state- the only question is whether the alternative is even worse.

When the fleets do go to war, however, they are almost invariably the most lethal interstellar force in the sector. They comprise dozens of armed spaceships crewed by men and women raised from birth to spacer life, all of whom fight with the knowledge that failure means the death of everyone they've ever loved. The massed fleets of entire alien races have been known to clear a path for a scavenger fleet rather than face its guardians in battle.

Fleets will always prefer to pull away from engagements and take alternate routes that avoid hostile space. Every few generations, some burgeoning interstellar empire gets the idea of trapping a fleet within their own space, blocking any method of retreat in hopes of forcing its surrender and seizing its ships. The standard protocol for such situations in most fleets is to drive for the polity's most important worlds and render them uninhabitable by humanity. Even a fortress-world can rarely stand up to an entire scavenger fleet's attack, and once the orbitals are down the fleet can dispatch suicide-team marines to take out the planet's gravitic braker batteries. With the batteries inoperable, there's nothing to stop an orbital bombardment with some expertly-placed asteroid drops. Such a drop usually results in the complete extermination of all life on that planet.

This mad-dog violence is a rational response for most fleets. They simply do not have the option of surrender. To lose their ships

FLEET COMPOSITION

The average scavenger fleet is larger than the navy of most multistellar polities, and often larger than the entire starship roster of some backward sectors. The exact numbers and composition of the fleet can always be adjusted to suit your campaign's need, but the following are the numbers for a “usual” scavenger fleet.

The flagship of the fleet is usually a *Vanguard*-class cruiser, or a capital ship for those few fleets actually capable of keeping one flying. One additional *Vanguard* is kept active to provide drill guidance in case the first is incapacitated.

Five to six combat cruisers form the backbone of the fleet's fighting wing, while two to three *Creche*-class colony ships house the bulk of its population. Most fleets insist on maintaining at least two *Shango*-class factory ships, and will prefer to keep three or four if resources allow. Three to four freighter-type cruisers haul the cargo that cannot be kept on the *Creches*.

Up to three dozen frigates and other small craft make up the rest of the fleet, with the scout wing composed of at least six *Pathfinders* or their equivalent. These small ships serve as landing craft, workboats, and skirmishers for the fleet.

All ships have spike drive-4 engines. Ships that cannot be retrofitted with such engines will be scrapped for parts.

is to lose their entire society, to abandon the very thing that has kept them alive for almost six hundred years. The survival of the fleet is the first, last, and only concern of Fleet Command, and they do not especially care how many dirtsidiers they have to kill to save their people. It is true that some fleets have more tender sentiments and more forgiving ways, but over the past six centuries the brutal necessities of interstellar space have culled almost all such soft-hearted flotillas from the sky.

During actual engagements, the highest priority of the core fleet is to protect its vital infrastructure- the factory-craft, storage freighters, and colony ships. These ships immediately attempt to disengage from any fight, falling back on precalculated escape courses. Enemies without a substantial speed advantage are forced to fall into optimal intercept vectors to have any chance of catching up with them, which makes them all the more vulnerable to the guns of the fleet escorts. Varying their intercept vector complicates the targeting, but makes it all the harder to catch up with the civilian ships. In extremis, a fleet's entire escort division will sacrifice itself to buy an escape for the civilians. A fleet can survive with its people intact, but the loss of its factory-craft and colony ships means certain destruction.

For scout wings and other detached elements, the priority remains escape, but with substantially more interest in bloodying the foe. Such wings have no special desire to eradicate their enemies, but only to make it too expensive to continue their hostilities. Any enemy capable of spaceflight is also capable of providing valuable parts and resources, and they might be persuaded to conduct business in more civilized fashion. Such grudging partners are far more valuable as traders than as floating scrap.

FLEET IDEA TABLES

FLEET ORIGINS	
1d12	Major Initial Component of the Fleet
1	Merchants caught mid-space by the Scream
2	Religious zealots on their way to a holy world
3	Pirates safely in space at the time of the Scream
4	Government officials in requisitioned ships
5	Naval remnants from a local world's former fleet
6	Wealthy elites and their favored courtiers
7	Scientists conducting deep-space investigations
8	Ship repair depot with numerous half-usable hulls
9	Outcasts exiled into orbital habitat by a local world
10	Mandate security personnel patrolling the sector
11	Random survivors and confused remnants
12	Alien fleet that rescued humans

WHAT THE FLEET WANTS	
1d12	The Thing They Need Most
1	<i>Data.</i> They're looking for a long-lost fleet cache.
2	<i>Food.</i> The hydro production recently crashed.
3	<i>Genetic samples.</i> Inbreeding threatens them.
4	<i>Medicine.</i> A plague threatens to destroy them.
5	<i>Parts.</i> They need ship parts they can't manufacture.
6	<i>Prisoners.</i> They need to rescue imprisoned crew.
7	<i>Rare Ore.</i> It's (almost) unknown in this sector.
8	<i>Refuge.</i> The fleet is being pursued by something.
9	<i>Revenge.</i> Some local world wronged them badly.
10	<i>Rule.</i> They seek to dominate a local polity.
11	<i>Skills.</i> They need a certain master specialist.
12	<i>Slaves.</i> They need certain locals for some reason.

WHAT THE FLEET OFFERS	
1d12	Their Most Enticing Commodity
1	<i>Astrotech.</i> Ship fittings unknown elsewhere.
2	<i>Drugs.</i> Either delightful or powerfully medicinal.
3	<i>Maltech.</i> Forbidden biotech or worse.
4	<i>Muscle.</i> Pick a target, and they'll shoot it.
5	<i>Pretech.</i> Salvage from long-lost worlds and caches.
6	<i>Psitech.</i> Rare, esoteric, and probably dangerous.
7	<i>Rescue.</i> Save a crippled orbital or damaged colony.
8	<i>Ships.</i> Spare craft of superb quality are offered for sale.
9	<i>Skills.</i> Talents and expertise in service to buyers.
10	<i>Slaves.</i> Victims stolen to order from local worlds.
11	<i>Training.</i> Possibly even a psychic mentor.
12	<i>Transport.</i> Passage to uncharted worlds.

FLEET TRAITS	
1d20	Fleet Cultural Trait
1	<i>Alien.</i> They follow the ways of an alien race.
2	<i>Altruistic.</i> They are actively helpful to outsiders.
3	<i>Amoral.</i> They have few or no inviolable beliefs.
4	<i>Elitist.</i> They simply know they're better than you.
5	<i>Enigmatic.</i> They tell others nothing of their ways.
6	<i>Hedonistic.</i> They savor strange, extreme pleasures.
7	<i>Honorable.</i> Their word means everything to them.
8	<i>Imperial.</i> They like to suborn planetary governments.
9	<i>Mercenary.</i> They'll do anything for the right price.
10	<i>Missionary.</i> They spread their beliefs zealously.
11	<i>Monopolist.</i> They control an important commodity.
12	<i>Pious.</i> They are pious believers in a local faith.
13	<i>Questing.</i> They're seeking something important.
14	<i>Recruiter.</i> They often enlist outsiders as members.
15	<i>Scheming.</i> They have a plan for everything.
16	<i>Suppressive.</i> They actively seek to halt spacefaring.
17	<i>Treacherous.</i> No bargain is too important to break.
18	<i>Vengeful.</i> They want revenge against an old foe.
19	<i>Violent.</i> They have an unusual affection for force.
20	<i>Xenophobic.</i> They shun unnecessary contact.

RECENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS	
1d20	The Greatest Current Problem or Event
1	Separatists stole a ship with scavver nav data.
2	Pirates took a scout crew prisoner.
3	A local power robbed a scavver merchant.
4	A plague is spreading through a colony ship.
5	The ship's gene banks have been corrupted.
6	Sectarians have sabotaged a colony ship's drives.
7	Factional strife threatens to bring civil war.
8	A new religion threatens the fleet's stability.
9	Someone they harmed can now take revenge.
10	A powerful polity has turned against the fleet.
11	Expendable spacers are needed to salvage a wreck.
12	Aliens seek to destroy the fleet.
13	A factory ship needs a vanishingly rare pretech part.
14	A feral psychic has taken over the fleet.
15	A powerful faction advocates the fleet turn pirate.
16	The admiral is senile, but none can agree on a new one.
17	The fleet found a powerful alien ship that kills crew.
18	The fleet offers a thing that threatens local powers.
19	The fleet seeks to scout an uncharted sector.
20	The fleet is made temporarily helpless by something.

EXAMPLE FLEETS

THE NEW MANDATE FLEET

The heirs to a rag-tag assembly of planetary governors and escaped military officers, the New Mandate Fleet is firmly convinced of its authority as the duly-authorized successor government to the Terran Mandate. Over the centuries of the Silence, this belief has become an article of faith among the people of the fleet, and they have absolutely no compunction about levying “taxes” in whatever amount and form they think appropriate. As a consequence, they have a heavier weight of combat ships than is usual for a scavenger fleet, and a greater willingness to use them.

Conversely, they also have a more active sense of *noblesse oblige* than other fleets, and have been known to act in wholly altruistic fashion to save some beleaguered world from disaster. While the survival and prosperity of the fleet remains the final rule, their “patrol ships” have culled more than their share of pirates. Some of the weaker worlds on their route have openly recognized the fleet as their legitimate rulers, with landbound scavengers dispatched to govern in the name of the fleet. Most such governors have the sense to let the locals run their affairs after the first disaster or two, but some scavengers persistently fail to understand that dirtside life is drastically different from that of the fleet.

THE CHILDREN OF JOY

Formed in a region of space with unusually rich local resources, the Children of Joy had substantial difficulty in the usual tech-trade that supports most fleets. The worlds they visited had limited need for their wares, and were strong enough to repulse more forcible exchanges, so the Children were forced to find different products to appeal to their buyers.

Thanks to a cadre of expert biotechnicians and an esoteric cult of aesthetics that had survived the Scream, that product became the Children themselves. Sculpted to remarkable physical beauty, cultivated in the graces of half a hundred worlds, their music, art, and physical attentions entranced the elites of their region of space. Their visits are marked by performances and sales of art from foreign worlds, and the selective sale of certain volunteer Children themselves. Such sacrifices are considered noble offerings for the good of the fleet, and the family members of such votaries gain substantial status in the community.

Rumors persist, however, that the Children have a longer game in mind- that the “slaves” sold into the foreign worlds are actually mere advance agents of some great plan to overthrow these worlds from within by suborning its leadership. Most knowledgeable sorts scoff at this talk, but there have been occasional ugly incidents where locals have “taken steps to free our world from offworlder plots”.

THE HOWLERS OF THE DARK

One of the wretched Lost Fleets, the Howlers are a nightmarish group of degenerates that stalk the spacelanes of their chosen sectors. The brutal privation of their first few decades marked the start of a downward spiral that has left them more beasts than humans. The embers of compassion in some are quickly extinguished by a society that celebrates all the worst and most vicious impulses of humanity as signs of survival and strength.

There is hardly a human degeneracy which is not joyously embraced by the Howlers- cannibalism, mass murder, rapine, depraved practices of every description and some acts otherwise unique to alien species are all considered normal by the Howlers. The society would doubtless have collapsed centuries ago if the members had anywhere else to go; as it is, they recognize that there is no possible haven for them among the “lesser races”. As it is, the Howlers are significantly weaker than most scavenger fleets, as their constant infighting takes its toll on its ships.

Their naked delight in brutality and conquest is taken out on the weaker planets of their sectors, with the fleet taking refuge in uninhabited systems far off the normal trade routes. The occasional outlying depot is established to hold prisoners and plunder until the main fleet can collect the goods, and sometimes sector natives can strike these bases before their enemies can spirit away their loot.

THE EXILE FLEET

Formed originally around a core of four Mandate colony ships that had yet to reach their destination when the Scream hit, the Exile Fleet has since become a flying repository for every reprobate, scoundrel, outcast, and wanderer in a dozen sectors. They are much more willing to take in outsiders than most fleets, though also more ready to let them hang for their mistakes.

Unlike most fleets, the Exile Fleet offers “provisional” membership to any ship that cares to join the fleet and pay a fee of roughly one hundred tons of useful supplies. Provisional members have no voice in the fleet council and must obey fleet commands as rigorously as any of the “full” members, but they can break away from the fleet at any time without reproach- albeit without a refund, either. Foreign ships often join the fleet simply in order to reach a distant destination safely. Those pursued by local authorities are likely to be unceremoniously jettisoned from the fleet, however, as soon as their wanted status is discovered. The Exiles have no interest in buying trouble with the locals.

This loose structure to the fleet leaves small groups of ships regularly splitting off and joining the core as the situation recommends. Scout wings are regularly dispatched to different points along the route, both to scout for dangers, and to take care of business that the provisional members might be loathe to leave undone. While such interference with local affairs is against fleet rules, it doesn't stop many such scout captains from running a brisk business in private work.

SHIPS OF THE SCAVENGER FLEETS

NEW SCAVENGER FLEET HULLS										
Hull	Cost	Speed	Armor	HP	Crew Min/Max	AC	Power	Free Mass	Hardpoints	Class
Far Scout	17m	5	5	40	3/12	4	15	20	3	Frigate
Colony Ship	12m	3	10	60	50/5000	6	25	50	0	Cruiser
Factory Ship	12m	3	10	60	30/160	4	15	25	0	Cruiser

Scavver ships are not normally for sale. A fleet can sometimes be persuaded to part with a craft in exchange for some great favor or extravagant payment in valuable goods, but most fleets need every ship they can get. The prices given in the listings reflect the cost of building such ships using planetary tech, without scavver aid. They also assume that the blueprints are found in some cache or traded by a fleet, as the price would be prohibitive otherwise.

Far Scout: These eclectic frigate-sized craft are the product of centuries of scavver experience and inventiveness. Practically every piece of a far scout is hand-made by a master astrotech and integrated into a design unique to the fleet that built it. The performance and durability of these ships is proverbial, though they can be a challenge to maintain for less proficient crews.

All far scouts are built with integral fuel scoops, a fuel bunker sufficient for two additional drills, and an integrated scavver navigation suite. Keeping such a high-strung ship operational is a challenge for ordinary crewmen, however, and optimal performance requires that the crew include members with the skills of Vehicle/Space-2, Navigation-2, Tech/Astrotech-2, and Culture/Spacer-2. For each lacking skill, apply a -1 penalty to all skill or attack rolls made by the ship.

Colony Ship: These cruiser-class ships are either repurposed Mandate-era colony ships or more modern craft patched together

out of freighters and heavy cargo ships. They most often house the major population of a scavenger fleet, and their populations are vital for the continuing genetic viability of a fleet. The distributed power systems and integral hydroponic facilities make them tough, spaceworthy craft capable of taking a heavy beating, but that same distribution makes it almost impossible to mount weaponry on such hulls. All colony ships automatically have the Hydroponic Production fitting, allowing indefinite food and air supplies provided normal maintenance is performed.

Factory Ship: A factory ship abandons even the minimal armament and cruiser-class armor of a military logistics ship in favor of greater speed and ease of maintenance. A scavenger fleet without a factory ship is living in borrowed time- sooner or later they're going to run out of vital parts far from a viable supplier. Protecting the factory ships is second in importance only to the colony ships.

Factory ships are effectively mobile shipyards. Assuming the raw materials and rare ores are available, they are capable of building shuttle-class system ships in a matter of weeks, shuttle-hull starships in months, and frigate-class starships within a year. This schedule assumes the usual amount of travel for a scavenger fleet. If the ship is entirely stationary, this construction time is cut down to one-third. Factory ships can also repair up to 10 hit points worth of ship damage per day with no skill roll required, assuming repair materials are available.

NEW STARSHIP FITTINGS					
Fittings	Cost	Power	Free Mass	Min. Class	Function
Destructive Maneuver Tuning	50k*	2#	1	Frigate	Double ship's Speed briefly before melting the jets
Fleet Drill Network	5m	5	1	Frigate	The fleet shares this ship's drill roll
Gravitic Phase Generator	1m*	3#	1#	Frigate	Drill into or out of deep gravity wells
Scavver Navigation Suite	5m	5	1	Frigate	Greatly improve familiar drill reliability
Tech Security Failsafe	50k	1	0	Fighter	Melt the ship's tech before it falls into other hands
# Multiply requirements by 2 for frigates, 3 for cruisers, and 4 for capital ships					
* Multiply cost by 10 for frigates, 25 for cruisers, and 100 for capital ships					

As with their ships, the scavvers do not trade their tech. They particularly do not trade the databanks used by their navigation suites, or the intricate equipment necessary to make use of the readings. From time to time a renegade scavver might be found willing to impart the knowledge, but these men and women are usually half-crazed. More often, this tech is found in ships left behind by Lost Fleets and can be tainted by the same creeping horror that devoured those wretches.

Scavver Navigation Suite: The scavenger fleets produce some of the finest navigators in all of human space. Their constant interstellar drills require the repeated, flawless performance of intricate navigational computations, and this unrelenting practice and their centuries-old accumulation of metadimensional soundings leads to skill that quite possibly exceeds even the finest navigators of the ancient Mandate. The scavver navigation suite is a collection of this data and the tools necessary to make use of it, and requires a navigator with at least level-3 expertise to be useful.

Along regularly-plotted spike drill routes the navigation suite allows for flawless drills. These regularly-plotted routes usually mark the fleet's typical path through a given sector, and adding new legs to the route requires the metadimensional soundings from dozens of drills over the course of years. A regularly-plotted course can be drilled unerringly even decades after the last attempt, as the suite can calculate the new energy currents that have arisen since the last soundings.

When making other drills within a known sector, or making regularly-plotted drills that have increased difficulty due to course trimming or other modifiers, the navigation suite is somewhat less effective. It allows for an additional skill check for the drill, along with any use of the Expert special ability, and eliminates any penalty for using old or unknown drill routes.

In a completely unknown sector it functions only as well as an ordinary advanced nav computer, adding +2 to all Navigation checks. Mapping the sector sufficiently to make it known is a work of years of repeated metadimensional soundings and drill scouting, or else requires the discovery of another scavenger fleet's records of the sector.

Destructive Maneuver Tuning: By means of expert propulsion techs and disciplined overtaking of the maneuver jets, a ship equipped with destructive maneuver tuning can briefly increase its speed by a vast margin. When the tuning is engaged, the ship's Speed immediately doubles. This speed boost lasts for 3 rounds, after which the pilot must make a Vehicle/Space check at difficulty 10 to maintain it for each following round. When the boost ends, the ship's Speed drops to zero, leaving it sluggish as a freighter until it has the week's time necessary to repair and recalibrate the maneuver jets.

Gravitic Phase Generator: This enormously sophisticated piece of scavenger tech can only be mounted on frigate or cruiser-class ships, as smaller craft cannot supply the requisite power, and capital ships are too massive to affect. By means of a brief pulse of energy, the ship creates the necessary gravitic environment to allow for a spike drill, even deep within a star's gravity well. The plane generator cannot be used when landed or within near proximity to a body with at least .1 G gravity, but a ship in orbit can instantly drill out

without fighting its way to the edge of the system. Moreover, this plane can be generated in the target system as well, allowing for a drill to land a ship immediately in orbit around a world.

The surge of power required to generate the phase is enormous, and all ship weapons are inoperable for five minutes before and after the phase is generated. The nonstandard parameters of the drill also make conventional nav assists useless- advanced nav computers and scavenger navigation suites give no help to such a drill.

Fleet Drill Network: This elaborate communications core allows a lead ship to effectively synchronize its drill calculations with an entire fleet, allowing a large group of ships to take advantage of the superior skill or equipment of a pathfinder ship. A single drill network can support up to fifty smaller ships on a drill, though each ship that is to take advantage of the network must have a navigator aboard with at least level-2 skill to handle the integration process. The mesh requires one hour per ship involved in the drill divided by the skill level of the lead navigator. Thus, a fleet of twenty-four ships and a navigator with skill level-3 requires eight hours to synchronize the fleet. Once locked, the entire fleet can drill out using the skill check result of the lead navigator.

Tech Security Failsafe: Almost all scavenger scout ships are equipped with a failsafe in order to prevent the capture and reverse-engineering of their technology. When triggered by the captain or chief engineer, all data and delicate electronics aboard the ship are fused into melted scrap. Some of the most critical systems- such as the databanks associated with a scavenger navigation suite- are keyed to self-erase at any attempt to copy them or to access them without appropriate authorization and DNA coding. Defeating these measures requires a Computer or Tech/Astronautics skill check at difficulty 12. Only the top security engineers of a fleet have the keycodes necessary to disable a failsafe. Still, sufficiently brilliant hackers or the perverse chances of battle have sometimes resulted in failsafes going inert on still-functional systems. Major fleet ships are almost never equipped with failsafes due to the danger of accidental triggering during combat or disasters. When silence is necessary from such ships, the usual answer is an intentional overloading of the ship's fusion core.

EXAMPLE SCAVENGER FLEET SHIPS

PATHFINDER-CLASS FAR SCOUT		Power: 15/3 free	Mass: 20/0 free
Cost: 18.69 million	Hit Points: 40	Crew: 3/12	Speed: 5
Weaponry Plasma Beam (+5 to hit/3d6+1 dmg, AP 10)	Armor: 5	AC: 4	
Defenses Hardened Polyceramic Overlay			
Fittings Spike Drive-4, Armory, Atmospheric Configuration, 20 tons of cargo space, Extended Stores *3 (10 weeks total), Ship's Locker, Scavver Navigation Suite, Survey Sensor Array, Tech Security Failsafe			

While relatively lightly armed and armored, the Pathfinder is a favored model of scavenger fleet scout thanks to its remarkably efficient maneuver jets and miniaturized engineering components. While a frigate-class hull is too small to make truly self-sufficient, the extended stores and ample fuel bunkers of the Pathfinder allow it to remain away from the fleet for months at a time, scouting dangerous systems and identifying profitable trade opportunities for the core fleet.

CRECHE-CLASS COLONY SHIP		Power: 25/4 free	Mass: 50/0 free
Cost: 17.04 million	Hit Points: 60	Crew: 50/5000	Speed: 3
Weaponry None	Armor: 10	AC: 6	
Defenses Grav Eddy Displacer, Hardened Polyceramic Overlay			
Fittings Spike Drive-4, Armory, Cargo Lighter *2, 4,000 tons of cargo space, Destructive Maneuver Tuning, Fuel Bunker *2, Fuel Scoops, Hydroponic Production, Lifeboats, Ship's Locker, Workshops			

Few fleets have more than two or three Creches, but they form the heart of the fleet's population. The great majority of a fleet's populace subsists in these incredibly cramped colony ships, their whole lives spent within a few meters of their compatriots. Most Creches develop elaborate social codes and etiquette forms to minimize internal friction and allow a simulacrum of privacy. Even the quarters of the ship's captain are rarely more than five meters square.

SHANGO-CLASS FACTORY SHIP		Power: 15/4 free	Mass: 25/0 free
Cost: 13.63 million	Hit Points: 60	Crew: 30/160	Speed: 3
Weaponry None	Armor: 10	AC: 4	
Defenses None			
Fittings Spike Drive-4, Armory, 600 tons of cargo space, Cargo Lighter, Fuel Bunker *2, Fuel Scoops, Hydroponic Production, Ship's Locker			

Whatever the fleet needs, the Shango can build- provided it has the necessary raw materials for the work. The Shango's workshops and astronautic armatures can replace fleet losses and repair damaged ships more efficiently than most orbital shipyards. Their crews are justifiably proud of their expertise, and even the lowliest deck ape aboard a Shango has skills superior to that of most dirtside engineers. Construction work requires space, and the large bays left empty between jobs are jealously prized by privacy-starved scavvers.

VANGUARD-CLASS DRILL CRUISER		Power: 50/7 free	Mass: 30/0 free
Cost: 26 million	Hit Points: 60	Crew: 50/200	Speed: 1
Weaponry Gravcannon (+6 to hit/4d6+1 dmg, AP 20), Smart Cloud (+6 to hit/3d10+1 dmg, Cloud, Clumsy)	Armor: 15	AC: 6	
Defenses Hardened Polyceramic Overlay			
Fittings Spike Drive-4, Armory, Cargo Lighter, Fleet Drill Network, Fuel Bunker *2, Fuel Scoops, Scavver Navigation Suite, Ship's Locker			

Almost all fleets have at least one Vanguard or equivalent class available to lead the fleet through the maelstrom of drillspace. While a fleet can initiate individual drills in a dire emergency, the risk of the translation makes a Vanguard's advanced navigational tech a vital failsafe for the fleet. While the ship is not intended to be a primary warship for the fleet, it still has enough teeth to defend its flock from the usual frigate rabble of pirates and privateers.

SCAVENGER FLEET CREWS

The spacers of the scavenger fleets are all superbly-skilled crew. For any relevant skill roll, frigates and escort ships can be assumed to have level-2 skill and a +1 attribute bonus. For colony ships, factory ships, and other vital craft, the skills are level-3 and sometimes boast a +2 attribute bonus. Attack bonuses in both cases are a minimum of +3, up to +8 for fleet flagships.

OTHER DUST



ROLEPLAYING AFTER THE END

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