STARVATION CHEAP

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by Kevin Crawford

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Ultima Ratio Regum

Wherever humankind has known dissent, it has known war. Wherever there has been a prize to take, a quarrel to settle, or an insult to avenge, there has been war. Despite all the dreams of peacemakers, humanity has never been so clever or so silver-tongued as to banish the specter of war.

Humanity's ascent to the stars has not changed this. For every world wired or warped into an inhuman serenity, half a thousand others still teem with the furious passions of battle. No matter how far humanity fares, they bring with them the fires of their own destruction. This book will help you waft those acrid fumes over your own gaming table.

Starvation Cheap is a sourcebook for planetary warfare and mercenary legions. Within these pages you will find all the tools a GM requires to create a dedicated campaign of ground warfare or far-flung mercenary contracting. For those GMs who don't care to build an entire campaign around a military framework, these same tools can be used to create wars as a background to events on a planet, or battles that cry out for the intervention of heroes. A commander sufficiently desperate for aid might not look too closely at its providers.

War Never Changes describes the background of military activity in the post-Scream universe, detailing the misty past of the Mandate expeditionary forces and their heritor legions among the stars. The influence of lost Terra is still strong on many worlds, and the martial customs of a vanished world still have power in the present day.

No Thin Red Heroes provides details on the typical structure of a modern ground army. Ranks and roles are described, along with the pertinent details of military justice, the chain of command, and the various types of modern arms.

When The Guns Begin To Shoot gives an overview of the basic process for building a military campaign. From fabricating a suitable war to creating the high brass that guide an army to the gritty details of building an evening's battlefield fun, this chapter explains how all the pieces fit together.

The Band Begins To Play details the creation of planetary wars through the use of War Tags, tropes and motivations for the unleashing of terrible conflict. Along with this, you'll establish the crucial Vital Points of the war, those objectives and circumstances that must be overcome to defeat the foe.

Single Men in Barracks reviews the creation of planetary armies. Along with the building of national forces that draw from an entire polity's population base, you'll get the guidelines for fabricating and maintaining mercenary legions. Some campaigns might begin with these legions already in play, while other games might find some wealthy PCs determined to start their own band of heroes for hire.

They Shove Me In the Stalls shows how to use the army you've just made in the war you've already created. Pitch opposing forces against each other in fearsome battle, with a quick and simple system that leaves the focus on player choices and battlefield missions. The war turn is designed to fit neatly at the end of a gaming session, allowing your group to sort out the details of the next session's play in a way that facilitates classic sandbox gaming.

When It Comes To Fighting provides you with the tools to build a worthwhile military mission, one fit to provide an evening's fun for the group. You'll use Mission Tags to brew up objectives for the struggle, and other tools to pepper the battlefield with foes, events, and situations to embroil the PCs in unexpected complications.

Parading In Full Kit rounds out the book with a healthy selection of weaponry and military hardware to equip a fearless PC fireteam. You'll also find a selection of common military vehicles for use in the field, though determined gearheads can also use the rules and hardware from ***Engines of Babylon*** to round out their forces.

The tools in this book are meant to mesh smoothly with the ***Stars Without Number*** game system, but the great majority of them can also be used with other sci-fi games and settings. The War Tags can be used to brew up a planetary conflict almost anywhere in the galaxy, and the Mission Tags describe the kind of problems and objectives that are likely to be found on almost any far-future battlefield. The strategic mass combat system is easily generalized to other games, with the infantry and armor units you build quickly reskinned into the warriors and engines of far different worlds.

However you use this book, the key thing to remember is to take only what you need from it. These pages include everything you need to build an entire military campaign from the ground up, but it may well be that your table doesn't need that kind of wholesale support.

Your PCs might just be common interstellar freebooters caught up in a larger struggle, cursed to navigate some bloody battlefield in order to accomplish their goals. They might be powerful merchant princes who just want to know how much it'll cost them to hire an army to go have a chat with some troublesome planetary dictator. They could even be deserters from some dubious battle, trying to dodge the grim consequences of their unlicensed leave as a war churns the world to mud and ash around them.

Starvation Cheap is here to support whatever choice you make for your own campaign. In the traditional Sine Nomine fashion, everything in this book is meant to be torn apart and wielded as you see fit. So go forth in glory and conquer!

War Never Changes

The History and Present Reality of Warfare

In the beginning, there was iron. Even the very first ships sent out in the earliest years of interstellar exploration carried soldiers among their crew. The first colonists who came to fashion precarious homes on newfound worlds still separated out men and women to bear arms for the common defense. Down through the twilight years of the Mandate itself, the Harmony Bureau troops of Old Terra traded plasma bolts with rag-tag armies of rebels and malcontents. Soldiers have been with humanity since its very first steps as a starfaring species.

The worlds that have risen in the wake of the Scream are no different. There are always uses for a brave soldier, especially in these raw and disordered times, and even the most peaceful of worlds has reason to fear foreign invaders or agitators seeking blood and rebellion. On planets with less unified governments rival nations still settle their quarrels in the ancient ways, whether by arrows, flying lead, or gouts of unearthly energies.

With so many worlds still crippled by the aftermath of the Scream and the long, slow crawl upward from interstellar society's collapse, many planetary nations find that they are unable to equip their soldiers with the more advanced weaponry of their interstellar peers. Border wars and invasions drag on with brutal leisure as their primitive armies clash, and much of what they would capture is often destroyed in the fighting. These worlds seek outside aid from forces willing to bring superior technology to bear.

Where there are credits, there are soldiers ready to fight for them. A small unit of high-tech, highly-trained soldiers can often spell the difference between a grinding war of attrition and swift victory. Space superiority over a primitive world can allow for orbital bombardment, the swift insertion of troops at any point on a planet, and inescapable satellite surveillance. The services of such troops can sometimes be worth more to a planetary government than the rest of their military forces combined.

And of course, where one such legion is hired, a second is needed to counter them. These mercenary bands are found in countless sectors, with sizes ranging from a small handful of operatives to entire mobile armies with attendant fleets of troop ships and space superiority craft. Their trade is plied in struggles for the fate of nations and dirty little wars too ugly for a government to look them square in the eye. The pay is usually enticing enough to keep the legions well-manned, even if not all of them live to enjoy their fee.

A Dawn Streaked With Crimson

With the rise of the Terran Mandate the initial plan of its Directorate was to maintain a reliable garrison of Mandate troops on each human world. This garrison would ensure the cooperation of the locals and the tractability of their government, and be a lasting reminder of the Mandate's power. With the occasional support of the Mandate Navy, it was thought that this plan would ensure a firm grip on the worlds of the rapidly-expanding frontier.

Inspired by ancient Chinese ideas of soldier-farmers and military colonists, the Directorate established the "commandery" model for colony garrisons. Each colony was to have its own integral garrison of trained Mandate troops, soldiers who would also be expected to assist in building the colony and serve in less martial roles. In the case of alien attack, colony rebellion, or hostile incursions from another Mandate member-world, the troops could muster to deal with the danger to lawful order, or in the worst case serve as a temporary bulwark until the Mandate Fleet could be summoned.

The troops chosen for a commandery were a blend of zealous Mandate military officers and less enthusiastic recruits from the Terran member-states. Some joined for the pay, others for the excitement, and not a few simply to get off of their increasingly-stultifying homeworld. They took ship on the massive colony-craft that Earth sent forth, forming one more component of each world's colonization effort.

The commandery model proved quite effective in the early decades of colonization, during the First Wave of colonial expansion. Major colonies were few enough that Old Terra was still able to supply sufficient soldiers, and attacks by raiders, aliens, or hostile neighboring worlds were regularly foiled by commandery troops. The occasional wildcat colony slipped out from under the model, seeking new homes far off the familiar drill routes, but the largest and most important human worlds were almost invariably a safe part of the commandery system.

The head of the garrison, the "Taishou", was nominally subordinate to the colony's chief administrator, both of them chosen carefully by the Directorate for their loyalty. As most of the first colonies were founded for economic reasons, there was usually little friction with the ordinary colonists; so long as the world gave up its treasures, the new residents were largely indifferent to the Mandate's rule over them. This changed, however, as the focus for new colonies increasingly shifted to reasons of nationalism, religious freedom, and political independence. The easy complicity of the garrison with the colonial leaders began to fray as loyalties blurred. As with most institutions, the strongest influence was the nearer one, and loyalty to Terra inevitably weakened.

The fading years of the First Wave saw the commandery model begin to decay as it became increasingly difficult for the Mandate to exert its control over restive offworld populations. Troops intermarried with the locals, becoming ensnared in familial politics and factional disputes. Others found their technical and professional skills so much in demand that their skills as soldiers and enforcers were soon neglected. The further the world was from Old Terra, the harder it was to maintain the bonds of loyalty toward the distant and largely indifferent Directorate, with some worlds going decades between desultory visits by Terran inspectors.

The years of the Second Wave marked a retrenchment in Mandate affairs even as humanity rushed even farther into the galactic wilderness. The Jump Gates provided near-instant communication between the wealthy core worlds, yet their construction and maintenance demanded significant resources. The Mandate Fleet was still invincible when gathered as a whole, but the frontier edges of human colonization had spread so far that the obedience of the rim worlds was more a matter of fiction than fact. The weary lords of the Directorate turned their attention inward, toward the "civilized" core, and left the exiles, fanatics, lunatics, and bumpkins of the frontier largely to their own devices.

The commandery model gradually decayed as the interest of the Mandate dwindled. Soldiers ceased to receive reinforcements from the core worlds, resources became limited to whatever scant shipments the Fleet could bring in, and men and women intermarried with the natives. Within a few generations, most commanderies had fragmented into just one more element in the planet's sociopolitical calculus, many vanishing entirely into a dissipating cloud of intermarriages and factional alliances.

The Scream did little to change this fundamental state of affairs. The Mandate military equipment once assigned to the commanderies had largely been worn into uselessness by the time the Jump Gates collapsed and the core worlds were ravaged by privation. Many long-simmering planetary conflicts were wiped away in the glare of impending disaster, while others were decided with sudden brutality. The commanderies had little to say in the matter, even where some recognizable fragments of them still existed.

The Present Hour of Battle

One relic of the commanderies does still persist across many sectors of human space in the organization of major planetary armies. The traditions and organizational principles of these commanderies often still survive in more or less altered form among the heritor cultures of the modern day. This shared similarity is inevitably colored by a polity's particular culture and habits, but there's just enough familial resemblance among them to make them mutually intelligible to most observers.

And even if the commanderies are no more, the armies still remain. Virtually every planetary polity worth the name maintains at least a few professional soldiers, even in the absence of obvious internal threats. More often, however, these troops are needed to maintain a polity's independence against the inevitable appetites of its neighbors on the same world, or as a tool for gobbling up those same neighbors when their own vigilance flags.

Conventional planetary armies rarely leave their homeworlds, because interplanetary invasions are almost unknown in the modern post-Scream era. The number of ships necessary to move an entire army between worlds is out of the question for most planets, to say nothing of the logistical tail required. Even if the army could be transported the sheer number of hostile natives at the other end would doom invasions of any but the most sparsely-populated worlds. Thousand-to-one odds make up for even the larger technological gaps.

"Expeditionary forces" are much more common, with a nation sending troops to aid an allied polity on another world. Such forces can draw on local logistics and count on at least some friendly natives to aid them, and are rarely expected to form the main body of the allied forces. Help from a high-tech neighboring world can make all the difference when two primitive kingdoms decide to fight it out with spears.

Mercenaries step in where friendly allies are hard to find. Provided the locals have something worth trading, the free legions are willing to go where the armies of other worlds might fear to tread, landing troops and providing space-based reconnaissance for their allies. They are vital equalizers for the smaller polities, the men and women who can be called in when some neighboring nation finds unwelcome allies in a more powerful world. Their cost is often exorbitant, but given the stakes of such struggles most nations find that they have no choice but to pay.

Mercenary legions are particularly popular hires for worlds with local diplomatic designs. There are all manner of poor and backward planetary nations who might be willing to cast their allegiance to a foreign world in exchange for the right inducements. A heavily-armed mercenary legion financed by an outside patron can be one such inducement, serving either to crush an old enemy in battle or assist local rulers in perceiving the wisdom of a new overlord. If the expedition ends in disaster, the whole sad business can be neatly disavowed by their paymasters as an unfortunate overreach by notoriously untrustworthy mercenaries.

Most wars in the post-Scream age lack romance, even beyond the usual filth and horror of warfare. These fights are usually small, savage, dirty conflicts on backward planets between polities that are often indistinguishable in their primitive barbarism. Each war is no more than a prelude to the next spasm of bloodletting, save for those occasions when one side aims for the complete extermination of the losers. In those circumstances, the peace commonly lasts only for a marginally longer period before the victors splinter into new divisions and fresh reasons for murder.

These worlds have something valuable enough to pay for outside help, but they lack the stability and security necessary to blossom into true prosperity. So long as the patchwork of old hates, undying grudges, and carefully-cataloged atrocities rules their political sphere, no one power can gain enough control to bring a prosperous calm to the planet. Sometimes mercenaries were the catalyst for this condition, the wild card that allowed a former upstart to shatter a calm status quo. More often they simply enable the bloodshed at a higher level, allowing true conquests in place of interminable sieges and skirmishes.

A very few mercenary groups aspire to something more than this constant round of brushfire wars and the toppling of petty kingdoms. Some dream of bringing peace back to a broken sector, of constraining the wild dreams of tyrants and conquerors and holding them back long enough for peace to grow strong on a world. Few of these groups last long in their dreams; the grinding need for money to supply their forces and the casual barbarity of their patron powers soon erodes any remaining idealism they may have. But a few hold on to their ambitions, and from them may yet come great or terrible things.

More than one planetary dynasty had its foundations in some fortunate mercenary captain. Some of these noble houses are the fruits of a grateful employer, one willing to give land and social esteem to a useful military force. Significantly fewer were acquired by less diplomatic means when a band of mercenaries chose to rearrange local power structures to a state more to their liking. All too often, the outworlders who so easily overcome native arms find themselves swamped at last by sheer numbers and relentless hate. Those with the sense to strike bargains with local powers do better, though some legions are determined to keep throwing fire at the problem until they run out of soldiers… or out of natives.

Ground Pounders and the Fleet

On almost every advanced world, "in-atmosphere" military forces have much less prestige than the interplanetary or interstellar corps. The romance and excitement of interstellar flight catches the imagination of civilians and enlistees in a way that eighty-kilometer marches under full packs do not. Ground infantry and "wet navy" sailors are considered to be the slow children of the armed forces, the branches for those that lacked the intelligence or ambition for the navy.

This is, of course, to mistake technical expertise for actual utility. While many advanced worlds have terrestrial force specialties every bit as demanding as a spacer's rating, the particular virtues and purposes of the ground forces are very different from those of a space navy. For the ground forces, a war is not won by space superiority, orbital bombardments, or peerless aerial reconnaissance. A war is won when a dirty, exhausted, sleep-deprived rifleman is standing in the enemy capital and everyone who objects too strenuously to that state of affairs has been shot.

This tension between branches runs hottest on those advanced worlds that still have meaningful political divisions. On such planets, a nation needs both an army and a space navy, and both forces end up competing for limited resources. The bad blood it brings can often hinder effective use of both branches of the military, with the space navy promising impossible victories from the air and the ground forces refusing to expend blood and effort to create opportunities for the navy.

Relations are usually fraught between the branches. As far as the usual sentiment of the navy is concerned the army is a pack of sub-human barbarians who can barely be trusted to keep sharpened sticks working and who can be wiped off the surface of a planet any time they venture outside the bubble of a quantum ECM generator. To the grunts in the army, the navy is commonly considered to be a crowd of hopelessly effete console jockeys who could be drowned like kittens by the army typing pool if they ever had the guts to put themselves within a thousand kilometers of a real soldier.

Healthy militaries keep this animosity in check, even when one branch is clearly the more important to a given nation's interests. A certain degree of feuding and bar fights are to be expected, but in serious operations the different branches are expected to support and coordinate with each other.

Less professional organizations can let this animosity spiral out of control. Some decadent worlds have gone so far as to intentionally cripple their planetary bombardment defenses and quantum ECM generator webs. They do this in order to ensure that the space navy staffed by the planetary nobility has the constant ability to snuff out any martial rebellion below. Other unstable planets starve their space fleets, unwilling to invest in such costly tools when terrestrial victory rests so clearly on masses of armed men. Both situations tend to be unstable in the long run, tottering along only until the day that an outside enemy forces the point.

Worlds Without War

In any expanse so wide as former human space, some worlds are bound to be oddities. The exodus of the First Wave had many determined idealists and transhumanism enthusiasts among the wildcat colonists, and the Second Wave had an even wider range of exotic believers. Some few of them were dedicated pacifists to a degree incompatible even with the enforced stasis of Old Terra.

Some of thes pacifists were religious or philosophical idealists. They sought to leave behind the harsh rigor of the Bureau of Harmony on Old Terra and fabricate societies free of the curse of violence. Some of them were convinced that their holy book or enlightened teachings would be sufficient to quell the bestial urges of humanity, if only they had a pristine world to build their paradise upon. It is possible that some of them were correct, but existing evidence is written more in the remaining ruins, slave camps, and barbarous anarchies left on most of their surviving worlds.

Other peacemakers chose to take more drastic steps to ensure a serene society. Chemical regulation, genetic manipulation, panopticon surveillance, or the complete abdication of human control to the will of a properly-vetted AI overlord were all represented in the worlds of the exodus. The tools these worlds used were largely about changing humanity or their environment so that large-scale violence would be a physical impossibility for the locals.

If anything, these undertakings were even less successful than the hermitages of the religious zealots. Too much was left unanticipated by the designers. The chemicals had side effects, or their application gradually became restricted to a serf class. The gengineering gelded passion as well as anger, breeding cold populaces that would not even struggle to reproduce. The surveillance became a tool in the hands of the powerful, and the AIs eventually proved disturbingly capable of altering their own programmed instructions. Chaos and bloodshed were always waiting in the wings, always ready to enter these peaceful kingdoms sooner or later.

Some of these worlds survive still, scattered throughout human space. Some of them are simply so isolated that more rapacious neighbors have never found them. Others have become twisted by their discipline, forsaking direct violence in favor of terrible indirect calamities for their enemies and inexorable misfortunes befalling those who oppose them. Most, however, have simply collapsed into barbarism of one kind or another, constitutionally incapable of resisting the virus of bloodshed once it finally gained a foothold among them.

A few are even in a position to need soldiers in a hurry. They might be desperate enough to try to throw together an army out of hapless natives and some foreign instructors. Others might have the wealth to hire more professional assistance, trading the prosperity of their peaceable kingdoms for the blood and iron of redder help. PCs can sometimes find themselves entangled in either state of affairs.

Alien Fire

Hostile alien forces have always been a threat to worlds on the frontier. Even those polities with no planetary enemies and no significant internal threats had reason to keep at least a small military force at the ready. Until the surrounding sector was thoroughly mapped and explored, there was no way to tell when an angry alien war fleet might come to darken the sky of a fresh colony world.

Those alien races that refused to respond to human diplomacy were answered by the Mandate Fleet. The Terrans were notoriously brutal with alien interlopers, with some fleet admirals glassing entire worlds to ensure that their progeny would no longer threaten human colonies. Others were content to simply smash the alien asteroid mines and shipyards, sealing them onto their worlds with a few self-repairing orbital siege guns to ensure that nothing else came off the surface.

Even the impossible excellence of pretech engineering has its limits, however, and many of these containment perimeters are starting to fail. It has been centuries for some worlds, but the memory of their loss and their rage against the hated humans is doubtless still fresh in alien hearts. There will yet be consequences for this.

Using This Book

Starvation Cheap is a campaign guidebook. It's intended to provide both GMs and players with the tools they need to run campaigns focused around ground military units and mercenary legions, taking them through the fires of bitter warfare and the cynical choosing of mercenary contracts. A GM who walks through the procedures given here should end up with a half-dozen suitable wars to fight, a fully-developed military unit for the PCs to belong to, and a clear set of templates and tools for generating quick adventures on the battlefield and amid the ruins of war.

Like other offerings from Sine Nomine, **Starvation Cheap** is aimed towards a sandbox style of gaming, one where the campaign's direction and goals are set by the players rather than implicit in a particular storyline. At first glance, this might seem to be a difficult trick to pull off for a military campaign. Soldiers are not famous for having their choice of battles, after all, and the rifle-slinging ground pounders that form most PCs don't have a great deal of control over their ultimate goals.

In a **Starvation Cheap** campaign, however, players play more than one character. They have their *squad characters* that are the grunts and special operatives who go forth to face the enemy, and their *brass characters* that make up the command staff of their military. The staff characters weigh their options and possibilities and set the goals for the unit, while the field characters are among those loyal multitude who go forth to achieve the desired end.

No Thin Red Heroes

Military Life and Organization

This section covers the general details a GM needs to depict an army or mercenary legion in play. In these pages, you'll learn the basic structure of a 33rd-century military force, a soldier's duties and obligations, and the kind of units they're likely to serve in.

As a practical matter, a number of concessions to gaming over reality have been made in the following pages. Extremely complex and nuanced realities have been cheerfully simplified for the gaming table, and players with real-life military knowledge will doubtless spot points where a complicated truth has been replaced with a friendlier simplification.

As the GM, you shouldn't feel obligated to get every twitch and detail of military life down pat; not only is this unreasonable, but a modern, well-regimented army isn't suited to conventional adventure in the first place. Some liberties need to be taken for your game's own good.

You're In The Army Now

The PCs in a military campaign are special. For one reason or another, whether it's because they're the most convenient fireteam in the vicinity, because their names just happened to come up first on the list, or because they really *are* the heroic elite operatives of their unit, they can expect to be tasked with pressing missions in the field. They will be alone, operating with minimal support, and with little or no immediate oversight from their superiors.

Comparatively little of the actual session will take place back at the base. Indeed, some sessions might start right in the middle of the battlefield, with the PC fireteam getting an emergency order from their superiors to go deal with a particular objective. Camp life itself with its formations, policing, physical training, and hours of tedious maintenance and paperwork are shuffled off into a corner as flavor, rather than as the focus of your gaming session.

The pages in this section discuss that framing. The basic organization of the army is given, details are laid out on how officers and enlisted are likely to interact, and some idea of the different types of military units the PCs might encounter is provided. The GM can use this information to frame problems and personalities that the players encounter in the course of their missions.

Need to Know

A GM should read and understand everything in this chapter. As the animating spirit of the army in which the PCs serve, the GM needs to be familiar enough with its rules and operations to keep things going in response to typical PC recklessness and insubordination. The GM needs to have enough of a grasp on the army to handle these little deviations and understand the most likely institutional responses to them.

Players have fewer obligations. Players being who they are, most will have little interest in absorbing all the fine details of military life. Most mil-SF enthusiasts aren't in it for the minutiae of barracks life, they're fond of it for the gruesome last stands and heroic charges that flavor the genre. Most players want enough of the details to feel like they're actually playing in a military organization, but not so much that they actually have to do homework to play their character.

As the GM, you should cooperate with this. Don't make your players memorize orders of battle or oblige them to immediately tell the difference between a First Sergeant and a Command Sergeant Major. Be ready and willing to do a little hand-holding for them, providing cues and tips that their PCs would naturally know. If they start to do something that's going to get them or their fireteam in dramatically hot water, you should be ready to warn them of likely consequences. Try to let them get away with only so much reading as they actually want to do. The fun is in the play, after all, and not in close study of a rulebook.

RANKS AND RATES

A military force is an extremely complex hierarchy of superiors and subordinates, the organization shambling forward on the strength of its discipline and traditions. Battlefield situations do not lend themselves to thoughtful consensus-building, and so the vast majority of armies are sharply hierarchical institutions with very clear lines of command.

The model described here is traditional to most Mandate heritor-worlds, and has been honed by the ugly necessities of warfare. Other planets might develop different lines of organization, as might mercenary legions with fewer troops to marshal and less complicated missions to fulfill. On other worlds the army can be so tangled by dead custom or new fads that it becomes largely useless for its intended purpose. These unhelpful traditions and foolish innovations tend to get rectified in a hurry once the shooting starts, assuming their practitioners survive long enough to repent.

Rank in a Mandate-derived army is described in terms of a person's **pay rate**. This rate is a letter code followed by a number: E for enlisted troops, W for warrant officers, and O for officers, with the number ranging from 1 for the most junior and lowest-ranking troops, to 8 or more for extremely high-ranking or senior individuals.

Each rate has an associated title. An "E-1" is a temporary rate given to recruits who haven't even made it out of boot camp, while "E-9" might be the illustrious sergeant major of the army. The same rate may also have more than one rank associated with it. For example, an E-4 could be a specialist, an experienced and proficient enlisted soldier, or it might be a corporal, a non-commissioned officer in charge of a squad or fireteam. The important thing for PCs to remember is that the higher the NPC's rate number, the more likely the person is to be someone they can't afford to upset.

ENLISTED

Enlisted troops are those men and women who do the actual work of the army. They drive the trucks, sort the supply pallets, dig the trenches, clean the barracks, and shoot the enemy. They range from the raw privates given jobs so simple that even a hopeless newbie couldn't possibly screw them up to the exalted and venerable sergeants who accomplish impossible tasks with hopeless material at the inscrutable bidding of their officer superiors. When the rubber hits the road, the enlisted troops are the tread.

EXAMPLE ENLISTED
Goldbricking eternal private, Grizzled sergeant, Gung-ho corporal who's a new fireteam leader, Clueless new guy private, Cynical staff sergeant with a thick blackmail folder on everyone, Reluctant conscript who wants to desert, Lazy private who trades sexual favors to get out of duty, Inseparable frenemy privates from the same squad, That NCO who can get you stuff for a price, Incompetent NCO whose only skill is brown-nosing their superiors, Specialist who offloads all their work on the privates, Enlisted who's semi-secretly an officer's concubine and trades on it, Shellshocked combat vet specialist with a thousand-yard stare, Enthusiastic new guy private who wants to get into combat, Eager corporal who's bucking for promotion to sergeant

WARRANT OFFICERS

Warrant officers are specialist troops trained for work so demanding and so important that a dedicated expert is needed for the job. Some warrant officers are recruited into officer training directly from civilian life for specific technical fields, while others are chosen from veteran NCOs and senior enlisted troops. Some warrant officers are strictly technical experts in matters of aviation, engineering, military intelligence, or medical services, while those drawn from the NCO ranks are sometimes put into the field as mission leaders for special forces groups or other field tasks related to their expertise.

EXAMPLE WARRANT OFFICERS
Scarred and supremely arrogant special forces operative, Maniacal close air support aviator, Vehicle mechanic who insists on "improvements", Medical technician who deals on the side, Intelligence staffer with implacable paranoia, Combat engineer who is much too fond of explosives, Transport aviator who treats cargo better than passengers, Gray-haired engineer who's the only one in the unit who still knows how this thing works, Special forces leader gone to seed at a desk, Medical tech who likes trying experiments, Intelligence staffer who's an internal security officer's pet snitch, Venal logistics officer who's essentially seized control of the unit's quartermaster duties

OFFICERS

The enlisted obey, but the officers need to wisely command. Officers in charge of smaller units such as lieutenants and captains might see regular field activity, but as they climb the ladder of rank their duties often require them to spend all their time behind a desk, planning and coordinating vast undertakings. Some are charged with technical duties and staff support, while others retain combat commands and relish the chance to get up to the front lines. Whatever their role, officers are expected to lead. They give the senior NCOs their orders and direct the expert services of experienced warrant officers.

EXAMPLE OFFICERS
High-born young ninny who means very well or very badly, Cynically wearied executive officer, Razor-sharp martinet in search of an infraction, Hopelessly incompetent political favorite kicked upstairs to this command, Glorious hero relaxing in semi-retirement, Harried leader cracking under the strain, Cool and confident officer who completely misunderstands the danger, Corrupt blackmailer with a harem of subordinates, Ambitious charger seeking glorious engagements, Narrow-minded expert focused solely on their department, Incredible asshole who's great at his job, Political golden boy set up for success, Firm and charismatic officer who's secretly a profound coward

Staff and Line Officers

While all officers are expected to be leaders, the type of leadership required of them varies. The biggest distinction the Mandate military pattern made was between *staff officers* and *line officers*.

Staff officers are those commissioned officers who handle a job so specialized that it requires their full, focused attention. Medical officers are one such example, as are those in intelligence, logistics, and personnel management. While NCOs and enlisted may handle much of the day-to-day work within those departments, the overall leadership and management requires an officer, and staff officers are selected for the work.

A large unit will have numerous staff officers attached to it to handle the myriad departments and duties within the unit. These officers will all report to the unit's commanding officer and act as advisors and interpreters for their department.

Line officers are those chosen to command combat units. Their sole concern is fighting. They manage their staff officers and give them general directions, but their focus is meant to be on their own unit's readiness for combat and leadership while under fire. Line officers always lead units.

It's not uncommon for an officer to swap between roles as their career progresses, but a line officer position is one jealously sought by all who want swift advancement.

COs and XOs

The "CO" of a unit is its commanding officer, the "old man" or "old lady" who appoints the fates of all within their unit. They are expected to be remote, godlike entities who concern themselves solely with grave matters of war. It is a spectacularly unpleasant thing for an enlisted soldier to draw the personal attention of the CO. If they have cause to notice a PC, it is usually because a PC screwed up in their presence. The consequences are invariably dire.

Busy as the CO is with affairs of martial state, much of the day-to-day management is under the hand of the "XO", the executive officer of the unit. This line officer is usually being groomed for a command of their own, serving a period as an XO in order to make sure they understand how a unit really works.

The PCs are much more likely to deal directly with the XO in the course of briefings or unit discipline. While less formidably unapproachable than the old man, the XO is not to be trifled with. He or she has an entire unit to keep running, and they are unlikely to view complications to that task with a kindly eye.

An XO's future career lives and dies on the approval of their commanding officer. Some have been known to bend the rules mightily for useful subordinates in order to ensure that the CO stays happy with their performance.

STANDARD MANDATE MILITARY RANKS

Individual worlds vary widely in their specifics, and some of them have adopted entirely unique hierarchies. Still, most have fallen back to the traditional rank structures of the later Terran Mandate. The roster here describes the most common arrangement of these ranks, which are often translated into the predominant language of a given polity. Included are their usual pay rates, average daily wages, and roles.

Smaller armies may lack the upper ranks entirely, with modest mercenary legions being commanded by colonels or brigadiers. It's generally considered undignified to adopt an exalted rank without a sufficient number of soldiers to justify the title, though this has never stopped the more megalomaniacal planetary generalissimos, caudillos, supreme leaders, reverend mothers, god-kings, and chief executive officers.

OFFICER RANKS	RATE	PAY	ROLE
General	O-10	750	Runs all operations within their geographic area of command
Lt. General	O-9	450	Commands a corps
Major General	O-8	350	Commands a division
Brigadier General	O-7	275	XO to the commander of a division, or runs an unattached brigade
Colonel	O-6	200	Runs a brigade, or runs staff departments at divisional level
Lt. Colonel	O-5	150	Runs a battalion or is executive officer for a brigade
Major	O-4	75	Usually a staff officer for formations of brigade size or larger
Captain	O-3	40	Commands a company and is assisted by a senior NCO
First Lieutenant	O-2	20	Usually 2+ years experience. XO for a captain or commands a platoon
Second Lieutenant	O-1	5	Fresh out of officer training school and in command of a platoon

WARRANT OFFICER RANKS			
Chief Warrant Officer	W-2+	25/rate	As warrant officer, but with a decade or more of specialist experience
Warrant Officer	W-1	25	Technical specialist, aviator, or other highly-trained topic expert

ENLISTED RANKS			
Command Sergeant Major	E-9	50	Senior enlisted advisor to the commander, usually of battalion or larger formations. Responsible for looking after all the enlisted troops
Sergeant Major	E-9	30	Assigned to large formations of battalion+ size, responsible for heavy paperwork and minding the store. 20+ years of experience is normal
First Sergeant	E-8	30	Senior enlisted of a unit of company size. "Top sergeant", "top", or "top kick". Often trusted by the captain with executing important tasks
Master Sergeant	E-8	25	Enlisted assigned to brigade-sized formation as a subject matter expert
Sergeant First Class	E-7	20	Senior enlisted of the platoon, and the first "senior NCO". They've usually got at least fifteen years of service experience
Staff Sergeant	E-6	15	As sergeant, but also ends up running unit logistics and administration
Sergeant	E-5	12	Lead squads. The basic interface between officers and actual results
Corporal	E-4	10	Lead fireteams. Responsible for readiness of team members
Specialist	E-4	8	2+ years as a private first class, usually implying technical expertise Doesn't do formal leadership, but may have informal supervision
Private First Class	E-3	5	The basic enlisted rank for a competent, reasonably experienced soldier
Private Second Class	E-2	3	Fresh out of boot camp with less than a year of experience
Private	E-1	1	A boot camp rank only, unless applied as a punishment to a soldier

Only the main element of a rank is used for ordinary address. A lieutenant general is addressed as "general", for example, and a second lieutenant as "lieutenant". Warrant officers are addressed as "Mister" or "Miss". Ranks from E-5 to E-8 are addressed as "sergeant", though "first sergeant" and "sergeant major" are used as specific titles. A private soldier is always "private". The full rank titles are used as part of formal address, though they may also be in common use in some armies with very strict hierarchies or particular traditions.

MANDATE MILITARY UNITS

Soldiers are grouped together in *units* of varying size. These units are then grouped together in *formations*, two or more units together under the command of a leader. A *command* consists of all the troops under the command of a particular leader.

Thus, the brass might order a particular colonel to move his command to a new location. The colonel's staff then orders his three battalion commanders to get their troops to the desired place by the anticipated time. This order steadily trickles down the chain of command until individual platoons are charging up their trucks and throwing their packs in the back. Inevitably, somebody will fail to get the message.

FORMATION	SIZE	LED BY	COMPRISES
Army	40K – 200K	General	2-5 corps
Corps	20K – 40K	Lt. General	2-5 divisions
Division	10K – 18K	Major General	3 brigades
Brigade	3K – 5K	Colonel	3 battalions
Battalion	500 – 600	Lt. Colonel	3-5 companies
Company	100 – 200	Captain	3-4 platoons
Platoon	16 – 40	Lieutenant	3-4 squads
Squad	4 – 10	Staff Sgt.	2 fireteams
Fireteam	2 – 5	Corporal	Smallest unit

Units are made up of more than combat soldiers. Indeed, in most advanced armies the great majority of troops are support personnel who might never get near the front lines. Instead, they drive the trucks, shuffle the paper, cook the meals, tend the wounded, and otherwise occupy themselves in the countless jobs that need to be done if the soldier at the front is to be able to fight. These personnel make up entire units which are attached to other formations to provide necessary services and skills.

A glance at the table on this page will show that the numbers don't necessarily add up for force compositions, particularly for the larger formations. This is due to the significant number of additional administrative and support personnel that are needed at the higher levels to keep everything running.

Fireteams are the foundation of most modern armies. Each one is composed of a team leader and one to four soldiers, each with their own job. One often has a grenade launcher or other indirect-fire weapon for getting at enemies under cover, while another is usually equipped with a heavy weapon such as a light machine gun. The remaining members of the fireteam generally carry standard rifles and are responsible for supporting the heavy weapons user so they can tear things up without being rudely interrupted by the enemy.

Squads are composed of two fireteams and a staff sergeant squad leader. When a platoon commander needs something done on a battlefield, he'll usually send a squad, as a single fireteam operating alone is too vulnerable to mischance.

Platoons are usually the smallest units charged with particular missions in an engagement. They're made up of three to four squads with a lieutenant for a commanding officer.

Companies are usually the smallest units charged with particular roles on the battlefield. A commander might order a company to blow a bridge or take a hamlet, with the company commander then directing his 3-4 platoons to specific objectives in line with the mission goal. A company is led by a captain with a senior NCO such as a first sergeant employed as their executive officer.

Battalions are the smallest units that are usually left on their own, without being physically associated with a larger formation. Led by a lieutenant colonel, they might be charged with securing a particular town or managing logistics for their section of the front. Mercenary legions are usually at least battalion-sized.

Brigades are often responsible for long-term independent commands. Their colonels are ordered to accomplish a particular job or role and left to do so within the parameters provided by the brass. Most successful mercenary legions are about brigade-sized, as larger units are progressively more difficult to move across interstellar distances.

Divisions are the backbone of armies and the usual unit counted when opposing forces are measured. A division might be given responsibility for a substantial length of a war front. Major generals command divisions, usually with the assistance of a substantial staff.

A *corps* (pronounced like "core") is made up of two to five divisions and the requisite administrative personnel. Commanded by a lieutenant general, a corps usually stands responsible for a major part of a region-wide strategy.

The *army* formation itself is often the largest formation a planetary polity can field. The demands of high-tech warfighting can make it impossible to field more than a very small percentage of a nation's able-bodied adults, and mercenary legions of this size are almost unheard-of. Even so, some exceptionally populous or martial worlds can field even larger formations, such as the *army front* composed of two or more army groups, or gigantic *theaters* of ten million men.

The reality of warfighting inevitably complicates this tidy arrangement. Units can find themselves suddenly tasked with jobs that have nothing to do with their training or equipment. A commander can only ever have a provisional expectation about their duties to come. When the shells start dropping and the brass starts getting confused, even the 101st Typing Company might find itself fixing bayonets and charging the enemy line.

Special Forces Units

It's quite possible that the PCs will end up enlisted into a special unit of some kind, one charged with those objectives too delicate or too sophisticated to be managed by ordinary troops of the line. These units tend to be "free-floating" within an army, directly reporting to special staff divisions responsible for their deployment to particular missions.

In the ordinary way of things, individual troops are allowed to test into an army's special forces, usually by passing a grueling filter program that trims two-thirds or more of the candidates, all of whom had to be excellent material to be even allowed the chance to test. After this filter, extensive further training is given before the soldier is ready for assignment to a special forces team.

Given the nature of PCs and the exigencies of wartime, it's possible that the PCs might get drafted into these special forces after achieving some spectacular feat of arms. The training filter can be handwaved off-screen, assuming the PCs don't start the campaign as members. Most special forces PCs should be around third level in their class to represent the unusual degree of expertise expected of them.

Special forces units are notorious for their indifference to regulations. Among inferior troops, this carelessness would result in mass casualties, but special forces troops are trusted to deal with things in their own way, with the understanding that the only thing that matters is winning. Blatant violation of important regulations in front of outside brass might be punished, but many command officers prefer not to look too closely at how the special forces accomplish their missions.

Regular troops tend to view special forces with a mixture of awe and irritation. Their ability to shrug off minor regulations and use tools and methods disallowed to regular troops causes an unavoidable amount of tension and resentment. Even so, line troops recognize the undeniable excellence of their personnel and the extremely dangerous, demanding missions they're expected to accomplish. This kind of competence demands respect even from the most grudging soldier.

If the PCs belong to the special forces of an army, they might conceivably be sent to any battle. Instead of being attached to a standard force and involved in the battles that engage those troops, the "brass" characters run by the players can dispatch the special forces to any fight that looks interesting.

1d6	Special Forces Team Name Elements		
1	Special	Operations	Unit
2	Detached	Intrusion	Force
3	Focused	Objectives	Section
4	Elite	Personnel	Group
5	Shock	Reaction	Team
6	Sensitive	Projects	Command

Women and Men In Uniform

Historically, the overwhelming majority of soldiers have been male. Numerous factors have produced this result, including points of physical strength, resilience to injury, hygiene issues, reproductive expendability, unit discipline challenges, and ingrained cultural values. Despite this, women have always fought in defense of their persons and homes, and regular units such as the amazons of Dahomey or the female snipers and combat pilots of WWII-era Russia have served with distinction.

Most groups are likely to want to leave the door open to female infantry PCs and similar tip-of-the-spear characters. There's no reason that the GM and the group can't simply wave such PCs into place. Female infantry in such armies or mercenary legions are simply par for the course and exist in whatever number the group requires.

Different worlds may have different arrangements for their armed forces, usually based on a mixture of culture, planetary environment, demographics, and the magnitude of sexual dimorphism in the population. Some might be rigidly reserved for one gender, usually the most culturally expendable, while others may have varying degrees of integration. Most of the time, these details won't be important unless the GM decides to do something unusual with them.

There is a great deal of unusualness possible in the myriad worlds of humanity. Organized conflict is the product of countless factors, among them circumstance, environment, ideology, and biology. Any of these elements can be drastically altered by the influence of alien worlds, eccentric societies, and technological manipulation.

Groups interested in exploring gender roles in combat can do so easily under these circumstances, though as with any touchy issue, it's best to be sure that the group really *does* want to explore the issue. The conflict between members of societies with different ideas about the place of women – or men – in combat can make for drama in the barracks and on the battlefield.

These issues can be further complicated by the effects of pretech gengineering, heavy-gravity worlds, or exotic biochemical influences from an alien world's ecosystem. The usual concerns and arguments of the modern day may not even be relevant to the populations of many far-flung worlds, and entirely different concerns might shape them.

This difference can be particularly useful when the GM wants to introduce an exceptionally alien force. The PCs might find themselves fighting alongside or against military units that just don't operate based on the same values as they do. Whether due to biological differences, cultural strictures, or the influence of their environment, these units can be used to emphasize the fact that the many worlds of humanity differ in ways that are more than skin deep.

The Chain of Command

An army's operation is based on its *chain of command*. This is simply the hierarchical order of the organization, clearly indicating who is to give and take orders from whom. It starts at the top, with the commander in chief, and spreads downward through a web of different officers and organizations until it reaches the lowly private soldier at the bottom.

The chain of command is normally a straight line upward for any given soldier. A soldier may give orders to many subordinates, but they take orders from a single superior. Their superior's superior might have occasion to directly order them to do something, but this will be rare and contingent on necessity.

Snarling the chain of command is normally a *very bad* idea. An officer outside a soldier's unit might outrank them, but he will not be giving them orders unless the situation is dramatically bad and in need of immediate leadership. If an outside officer does take it into his head to command them, the expected behavior is to obey if the orders are reasonable or necessitous, or else make it clear that unusual orders need to be confirmed with one's superior. Flatly refusing to obey a higher-ranking officer outside the chain of command is still insubordination, and it just means that the rebel is going to get disciplined alongside the officer who was reckless enough to step outside his chain of command.

If a soldier's superior is an idiot, the options for complaint are limited. Going over his head to complain to his superior is always going to bring misery, as such behavior violates the chain of command. If the superior really is doing something catastrophically stupid, the brass might pull him out of the unit, but the complainant can expect to catch Hell for having stepped outside the chain. The general assumption is that if the situation is not bad enough for a subordinate to be willing to get crucified to stop it, the situation is not bad enough to merit abandoning the chain.

It is not uncommon for subordinates to dislike their superiors, or even consider them criminally incompetent. Under such circumstances soldiers are expected to salute the rank, if not the person. No matter how cack-handed the officer might be, trying to fix his orders or ignore his authority is almost certain to get more soldiers killed than just carrying them out. Clever confusion costs more than organized stupidity.

What this means for the GM is that the PCs will all be answering to the same superior if they're in the same unit. This superior might delegate some handling to other soldiers, such as assigning some other officer to handle the group's briefings and requests, but there is only one formal superior they need to worry about. The GM should know that superior's details and have a grasp of their personality and goals. These higher officers might honestly hate each other, but the professional ones won't let it interfere with their duties. The less professional ones will try to use the PCs to humiliate or depose their rivals.

Giving and Taking Orders

In most professional armies, orders are given from lawful, specific superiors to their designated subordinates. The PCs won't be given orders by random officers, but by their superiors in their specific chain of command. Different armies will have different degrees of formality about such things, but as a general rule any direct instruction from a superior should be taken as a formal order. More casual "advice" may not be an order, but a soldier ignores it at their peril. Bad things tend to happen to inattentive subordinates.

In most disciplined militaries, a soldier can decline to obey an unlawful order, one contrary to the written regulations. Such an objector can expect immediate arrest with a later trial for insubordination. If the objection is sustained, then the officer might face a similar trial for issuing an unlawful order. It will be ugly, however it shakes out, and everyone involved can expect to have their careers stained.

Lawful orders are not necessarily survivable orders. A superior may well need to order his subordinates to carry out an action that will probably or certainly get them killed. It's not assumed that every mission is a death-or-glory task; a job that turns out to be unexpectedly dangerous or requiring a greater cost in casualties than it's worth might see the subordinates abort the mission or request clarification from their superiors.

Despite this, if that machine gun nest needs to be taken out or that enemy fortification needs to be seized, somebody is going to be ordered to do it, and that somebody probably won't survive the experience. PCs who are ordered into such situations are going to have to show remarkable ingenuity or a finely-honed sense of how to fob off responsibilities if they expect to survive the order.

With this in mind, officers are almost universally trained not to give an order they know won't be obeyed. Every instance of open defiance weakens the officer's authority and sparks potential disobedience among the troops. It's far better to keep silent or give a mitigated order than it is to issue some stern command that is ignored by your subordinates. Once a unit breaks discipline and starts disobeying difficult orders, it's a swift and perilous plunge into complete anarchy. Under the life-and-death pressure of a battlefield, the officer cannot afford to let their subordinates even *imagine* disobeying their clearly-given instructions.

What this means for the GM is that the PCs should be expecting to receive orders from a single superior. They should view overt disobedience to this order as a last-resort choice, even when the order is moronic or suicidal, though more subtle resistance is possible. When the PCs are giving orders to their own subordinates, they should keep in mind the fact that these NPCs may not be willing to give perfect obedience, particularly if the task seems certain to kill them.

Fraternization

Officers, NCOs, and enlisted soldiers do not socially mix in most armies. Each of them is a separate social tribe with their own clubs, hangouts, and cliques. In some cases, this policy is sharply enforced; an officer fraternizing with a private in their own unit would be breaking the rules in almost any army-while in other cases the limits are blurrier. For instance, an officer outside of a unit wouldn't usually be violating formal policy to associate with a private from that unit, since they're outside their chain of command. Even so, it would still raise eyebrows and invite hard stares from their peers, and some armies would simply categorically ban such relationships as being prejudicial to good discipline.

While a certain degree of social tribalism is inevitably involved, the core rationale for this policy has to do with emotional investment. An officer cannot afford to be friends with their subordinates. They may be forced to order these troops to their certain death in order to accomplish the mission, and they cannot hope to think clearly and calmly about the situation if they're sending off dear friends and loved ones to their doom. On a more day-to-day basis, friendship also taints the officer's judgment and persuades them to be laxer with discipline and less demanding with their standards than they'd be towards troops that were at a proper remove. This kind of sloppiness can get good soldiers killed.

This danger is especially pronounced with relationships within a particular chain of command, where the chances of abuse are highest. In armies where these rules against fraternization are not enforced, it's not uncommon for officers to acquire pets and favorites among their subordinates, some of whom earn their place with their skills, and others who earn it with their bodies. This kind of unsavory entanglement creates a second kind of authority within the unit, a hierarchy of favor and approval which competes with the official positions of the unit. No healthy army can afford to have such complications in their military forces, and some will flatly forbid mixed-gender units to limit this risk.

A PC squad is unlikely to contain both officers and enlisted. A PC might be the squad's sergeant or corporal, and while NCOs are expected to keep their social distance from the enlisted a certain amount of socializing is inevitable due to the close working conditions. The kind of cooperation normal to an adventuring party is unlikely to be a problem, though intra-group romances would be a serious breach of discipline in most armies.

What this means for the GM is that the PCs should expect to socialize within their own military class. Due to the special vagaries of a PC unit, the usual rules about fraternization might be quietly ignored for them if the party includes PCs of different ranks, or it may be that the PCs just keep their closer affiliations concealed except when they're on a mission. Romances that cross rank boundaries or open favoritism in a unit should be a clue to the PCs that the unit is not a healthy or well-led group.

The Laws of War

There is precisely one law of war that all combatants are bound to respect, one grim commandment that brings invariable punishment to the army that dares to defy it.

Don't lose.

Every other law of war is provisional, based on culture, situation, and the enemy at hand. Armies that have fought each other over centuries might have had time to develop some tacit agreement about the limits of violence, but a mercenary legion that travels from world to world might have rules that are drastically more permissive or restrictive than those of the forces they fight alongside. Such mercs will usually fight under the terms of their employer's code, but old habits die hard, and enemies might discover a few of them the hard way.

The Purpose of the Laws

The laws of war on a world rarely proceed purely from a spirit of universalist charity. They emerge because they are useful. Putting limits on reprisals and boundaries around the civilians ensures that there is something left worth winning when the war is over, and that forces that choose to surrender can have some reasonable hope of getting home alive. An outmatched enemy who fights to the bloody end costs the victor lives and precious time, so even a ruthless and overwhelming foe has practical reasons to prefer surrender.

The laws of war also provide a refuge for the civilians caught in the war zone. If the ordinary people are relatively safe so long as they offer no resistance, the civilians are likely to keep their heads down and cause only minor problems for the army. If the common folk have no protection at all, then they have no reason for restraint or caution. Excessive violence toward the civilian population also makes it impossible to maintain a productive society in occupied areas, which makes logistics that much more difficult.

These benefits require that all the participants in the conflict share the same understanding of the laws. If one side is limiting their behavior and tempering their violence while the other is gleefully ignoring the code, then the former side is at a clear disadvantage. What is even worse is when one side maintains the code and the other uses that very set of laws to shield their own perfidy or force their enemies into disadvantage. Civilians made to sleep atop fortified bunkers, command centers dug under hospitals, schoolchildren draped over anti-air guns… the more restrictive and careful the code, the more advantage an opponent gains in exploiting it.

This advantage goes to the first mover in this game. Once all the limits of morality and military custom are abandoned, there is no further benefit to perfidy. The opponent will simply bomb the civilians, shell the hospital, or torch the children. As a consequence, when one side breaks the laws of war, it is bitterly predictable that the other will soon meet them at their level.

Rich, powerful, and idealistic powers can afford to base their laws of warfare on morality. Everywhere else in the cosmos, a custom of battle is respected insofar as it is useful to all sides involved in the conflict. Where that situation does not obtain, bloody anarchy is soon to follow.

Enforcing the Laws

Enforcement of the law is a matter of consequences. If one side abandons the code, the other side will also abandon it. Individual massacres, atrocities, and crimes are often glossed over if they do not appear to be part of a clear repudiation of the customs. Note that this does not mean that a victorious army will not gladly try enemy combatants for war crimes, but the army itself will not abandon its observation of the code just because some young fool of a lieutenant shot up a few dozen prisoners. War is too confused and vicious to expect even a willing army to always and perfectly maintain the code. All that is expected is that they clearly try to do so when it is within their power to comply.

PCs may well find themselves in situations where a war crime is the easiest way out of their situation, or they might be given orders by a superior to do something that violates the understood limits of warfare. Conversely, they might also be on the spot when some desperate enemy hurls aside the customs of war to grasp for an immediate advantage.

Military Justice

Players being who they are, sooner or later a PC is going to end up doing things that they ought not to do. Military justice tends to be brisk at best, but sometimes a certain adjustment of its rigors is known to happen during wartime. Even so, both players and GMs should be appraised of the things most likely to get the PCs a firing squad.

A Motley Code

Every army and mercenary legion is going to have its own book of discipline but most of them are going to share a few basic features hammered out of centuries of military pragmatism. Every soldier is going to be expected to understand these rules, so as the GM you should take care not to spring "gotcha" infractions on the players. If they're about to do something that's going to get them in hot water, they should know it before they do it.

Aiding the enemy, deserting the battlefield, and the murder or rape of comrades or allied civilians are usually capital crimes. Some armies with a particular gentleness toward civilians extend their protection towards noncombatants, while more savage ones consider the murder and rape of prisoners and the conquered to be legitimate rewards of battle. Helping the foe or fleeing combat are excellent ways to meet a firing squad in almost any army, however.

Striking an officer is also often a capital crime. Officers need to maintain an air of remote implacability in order to help keep the enlisted calm and instill obedience to their orders. Punching one in the nose spoils this Olympian air, and if the situation is already deteriorating it can be the catalyst for a complete loss of control. If the assault takes place in private or among a few trusted witnesses it might be glossed over.

Lesser sins include fighting, petty theft, disobeying orders, insubordination to a superior, laziness, and being away from your post. If egregious enough, most of these offenses can get a soldier shot; being absent for roll call will buy you punishment duty, while being absent from your guard post on the front line will get you death. Selling stolen rations to the locals might cost you a rank, while selling stolen anti-tank missiles to a shadowy buyer is not normally a survivable mistake.

The rules are often different between enlisted and officers. Enlisted troops are tacitly expected to brawl, drink, steal, slack, and lie every now and then. Making a habit of it is unhealthy, but occasional offenses win punishment duty and some yelling. Minor offenses are unlikely to harm their long-term career prospects as an NCO or an enlisted man.

Officers are held to a much stricter standard. A corporal who steals a case of rations might get busted to private and some time cleaning latrine barrels. An officer who does that can expect his career to come to a screeching halt. Officers are expected to *act* like officers, and fistfights, larceny, and lies are things they're welcome to do as newly-minted civilians.

The Wheels of Justice

The overwhelming majority of military justice is passed out in summary fashion by a soldier's superiors. Somebody shows up with a dirty rifle, the sergeant puts him down for tuber-peeling for the next week. Two privates get in a fistfight, and both of them get to work off their energy on a brisk all-day hike around the parade ground with extra-heavy packs. The soldier's immediate superior sees the offense, assigns the punishment, and life goes on without appeal.

For serious crimes, or if the soldier is fool enough to demand it, a court-martial is assembled. These courts are usually made up of three superior officers. The defendant is normally allowed legal representation. The judges confer briefly and make a judgment which is largely beyond appeal.

Wise soldiers avoid courts-martial. A superior can bust you down a rank, put you on bread and water, run you until you drop and work you until you collapse, but they can't kill you or throw you in prison for years. Courts-martial can and will. While a minor crime is unlikely to get a firing squad, a court-martial that thinks its time is being wasted will cheerfully pass down a doubling or worse of the original punishment. While the courts will redress a serious and obvious injustice, the maintenance of discipline and order is much more important than correcting small or unproven errors.

The purpose of military justice is not justice, it is *order*. Soldiers do not commonly have the rights of civilian members of their society, and if the good of the army requires them to be sacrificed to necessity, they will be sacrificed. Petitioners who look for justice even if the heavens fall will seek it in vain.

ARTILLERY

If you want to make an enemy run, you use infantry. If you want to make them hide, you use armor. If you want to make them paranoid, you use air strikes. And if you want to make them *dead*, you use artillery. The majority of murder on most battlefields is accomplished by the pitiless fall of shells, and even among high-tech armies the advantages of falling fire are too great to abandon in favor of direct energy emissions. While sophisticated magnetic railguns sometimes replace old-fashioned powder and shells, the ancient purpose of the gun serves on even the most modern battlefield.

IN THE FIELD

An artillery unit commonly consists of a battery of about a half-dozen guns, is commanded by a captain or the equivalent, and is treated as a company for organizational purposes. Guns are usually kept together to simplify logistics and communication, though sometimes one or two might be broken off for a special occasion.

Guns are either towed or self-propelled. The former can be quite sophisticated in a TL4 society, using grav units to allow for easy hauling over rough terrain, but even the more primitive towed guns have the advantage of cheapness, toughness, and lighter maintenance demands than self-propelled guns. The latter are much faster to get into position for firing and their speed can be crucial for survival when the enemy is able to launch effective counter-battery fire.

On a modern battlefield, guns survive either through entrenchments or through speed. Towed guns will be bunkered behind protective fortifications whenever possible, often ones that allow them to be rolled out, fired, and then drawn back behind shuttered embrasures before counter-battery fire can land. Self-propelled artillery is more likely to launch a volley and then rapidly decamp.

Even in an "all-electric" army that relies on energy weapons will usually rely on projectile-based artillery. Energy beams tend to fire in a straight line, which is less than convenient when shells are needed 30 kilometers away or a round needs to be planted on the other side of a hill. Because of this addiction to gross matter an artillery unit is voracious in its consumption of ammunition and spare parts, and crises involving logistics might well involve the need to get more shells up to the guns.

PCs who encounter an artillery battery in the field can expect to find caretakers nearby. An artillery unit is effectively helpless against a close assault and doesn't have the weight of numbers that would allow the gunners to repel a serious attack. A battery far enough back from the front might be allowed to go with minimal protection, but if there's any threat of hostile forces in the area, the PCs will find infantry to be posted close enough to respond. Self-propelled artillery will usually run for it in the face of an attack, while towed guns will try to button up inside their fortifications.

RUIN FROM ON HIGH

On the modern ECM-jammed battlefield, dumb shells have the advantage of indifference. With a given charge, no wind, and a specific angle the shell *will* land in the general area desired, regardless of how choked the quantum bands might be with misdirecting signals. The only effective countermeasures are active ones, with counter-projectile lasers and charges to screen the sky from unwelcome visitors. Armies without these tools can only seek cover.

Artillery fire comes in two sulfurous flavors: direct and indirect. Direct fire, unsurprisingly, aims the weapon directly at the target on a flat trajectory. This shooting is relatively short-range by necessity but highly accurate since it can be sighted by the gunners directly. Unfortunately, it also means that the target is in a good position to shoot back, a situation most batteries try to avoid whenever possible. Tanks and aircraft provide the most common direct fire, though a few modern tanks can get enough elevation on their guns to launch shells at a relatively high angle.

Indirect fire is the more comfortable choice, where a gun fires in a high arc to plant the shell behind fortifications and obstructing terrain. Indirect fire is a scourge to its targets, as the plunging of the shells hits relatively weaker overhead protection and can reach past the security of walls and entrenchments. The great majority of artillery fire on a battlefield is indirect fire.

Not least of these is the humble mortar, much beloved by infantry squads. TL4 mortars are much lighter than their TL3 ancestors, and both provide brutal plunging fire on demand to a squad equipped with one. The ability to drop shells from the other side of a concealing ridge is one that has turned the tide of countless small, bitter engagements.

While an indiscriminate pelting of shells has its benefits, it's generally necessary to have a forward observer to make more precise shots. The observer can radio back corrections and hits when a given fortification or mass of troops has been annihilated. A PC mission might revolve around getting close enough to an objective to act as such an observer. These missions can prove exceptionally challenging if the foes have some way of detecting signals, and PC survival can turn into a race between allied guns and enemy searchers.

"Powder guns" based on TL3 propellants can usually reach anywhere from 20 to 30 kilometers with some degree of accuracy. The monstrous energies of TL4 railcannons can launch their lances as much as 500 kilometers, but the extremely high arc of such projectiles tends to give ground-based defenses time to lock them with counter-projectile lasers and detonate them before they can hit. From a game play standpoint, an artillery battery can usually be expected to be able to reach any location on a given battlefield, whether it's fired by powder or electricity.

PCs Under Artillery Fire

From time to time the PCs might come under an artillery bombardment. In the best case, they're under fifteen meters of reinforced materials, and their only danger is the inability to sleep under the constant concussive vibrations of shells falling above. PCs being who they are, their situation is usually much less comfortable.

If the PCs are caught completely in the open by an artillery barrage, they get two Luck saves. If they make both, they're unharmed. If they succeed at only one, they lose half their current hit points, rounded up. If they fail at both, they're mortally wounded and in need of immediate medical attention if they're to live.

If the PCs have inadequate cover but aren't entirely exposed, they can make three Luck saves and take the best two. A foxhole might give this kind of shelter, while a proper trench or the ruins of a sturdy building might allow four Luck saves in which to save a character's neck.

Characters out in the open need to repeat their saves every round that the bombardment continues. Characters under cover need only roll once unless the bombardment is especially prolonged. Any PC desperate enough to leave cover and race across open terrain while under bombardment must make a new set of saves.

Vehicles and Buildings Under Fire

Vehicles make the same saving throws for survival that the PCs might make, using the best Luck save of its crew, or rolling against a save of 15 if unmanned. Finding effective cover for vehicles is extremely difficult, and probably impossible unless hardened hangars or garages have been constructed by the defenders.

Civilian structures are automatically destroyed by an artillery bombardment. If the strike is just a few desultory shells, large structures might only be damaged, but most civilian buildings are completely unable to withstand even one or two shells. Any luckless wretches in the structure at the time it goes down must save versus artillery fire as if caught out in the open by the strike.

Once a building's been reduced to a stable pile of rubble, it makes a much better shelter against fire. Most ruins are at least as good as a foxhole, while particularly sturdy ones might grant four chances to save to those hiding within them.

Military fortifications are much harder, and usually can't be reduced without lengthy bombardments that are beyond the scope of a single PC mission. Some TL4 fortifications might be so well-reinforced that more primitive weapons are unable to damage them at all. Conversely, crude concrete and earth might offer much less protection against railgun strikes.

Tanks and Other Military Vehicles

Tanks, aircraft, armored personnel carriers, gravitic scout sleds, submarines, surface ships, and plain old-fashioned cargo haulers all have their place on the modern battlefield, and many modern armies have entire units that rely on these vehicles. Even relatively primitive polities often strain their resources to acquire and maintain at least a handful of prestige pieces, even if they're too few to make any difference in a real war. Depending on the kind of unit they're fighting alongside, PCs might spend a lot of time dealing with vehicular combat and engines of war.

So Happy Together

Most modern armies fight their tanks and aircraft as part of a force of combined arms, using units of various types together to get the best utility out of all of them. A force made up entirely of aircraft is almost useless for actually holding terrain, while a tank army might break like a wave on the mazey rubble of a ruined city. Conversely, a squad of troops caught out in the open by a tank is likely to end up so much tread grease, to say nothing of the poor bastards spotted by a gunship far above the range of their available weapons. Vehicles work best when in the company of dear, heavily-armed friends.

Aircraft usually operate in squadrons of one or two dozen aircraft dispatched according to the needs of hour. For close air support, it's not uncommon for single aircraft to be sent to aid a squad or take out some exposed tank, while bombing missions or air superiority patrols almost always involve at least four or five planes. While gravflyers and other TL4 planes can have remarkable loitering and range capabilities, even they need someplace to rest their heads and get vital maintenance, so they tend to operate from bases put comfortably far from the front lines.

Tanks normally take the field in platoons of four tanks, each usually manned by a commander to give orders, a driver to keep the tank moving, a gunner to aim the main gun, and sometimes a loader to keep the gun fed. A solitary tank is a dead tank, and one without a screen of friendly infantry to keep off hostiles is not long for this world. They thrive in open country where enemy "crunchies" can't dig in or hide behind rough terrain, but they can also be surprisingly effective in blasting out urban strong points, if they've got enough friendly infantry to keep them screened.

Armored personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles are vital for infantry who mean to keep up with a motorized advance. APCs are built for passenger volume, are sufficiently armored to shrug off small arms and light shrapnel, and might have a small gun to discourage unfriendly attention. IFVs trade off room for passengers in exchange for a bigger gun, often crewed by a dedicated gunner. Unlike APCs, they're meant to provide direct fire support for their associated infantry with a weapon that would be too big for the squad to carry unaided. An IFV equipped with anti-tank weaponry can be a lethal danger to a much heavier tank. With both types of vehicle the infantry normally dismount to fight, though some have firing ports for passenger weaponry.

Cargo haulers can range from advanced grav-based all-terrain movers to wheeled platforms attached to steam engines. Commanders have a deep and abiding love for grav vehicles in this role, as even the low boost altitude of a gravtruck allows it to leave the road and cross terrain that would instantly swallow a fully-loaded wheeled vehicle. Leaving the road is often the safest path in hostile territory, where enemies might have planted improvised explosive devices or picked a good stretch of asphalt to turn into an ambush zone. Cargo haulers might move alone in safe areas, but when danger is about they invariably move in convoys to support each other in case of attack and provide repair and transport in the inevitable case of mechanical failures.

Dedicated seacraft are common on all but the most advanced or grav-industrialized TL4 worlds, provided the local ocean is large enough to justify them. With a relatively calm sea they can move faster over long distances than any ordinary ground vehicle, and they have the interior volume and power supply to carry a huge array of weaponry and active defenses. Even with armed forces that ordinarily rely on energy weapons, ships are commonly equipped with projectile artillery in order to bombard coastal areas far beyond the line of sight allowed to direct energy weapons. Most combat watercraft operate in groups, the better to provide mutual support and cover.

PCs Versus Vehicles

When fighting against enemy vehicles, there will be some cases in which PCs afoot simply have no practical way to destroy the enemy. A gravflyer might be raining doom on them from 5,000 meters up, a battleship's guns might be roaring from twenty kilometers away, or a tank might be bearing down on them when the heaviest weapon the PCs have left is a frag grenade with a rude word scratched on it.

As the GM, you should be ready to clue the players when they're facing a no-win situation. They're professional soldiers, presumably, and should be able to realize that driving their cargo hauler down the road while the TL4 equivalent of a Warthog lines them up is not a recipe for longevity.

A professional response to this situation is to go where the vehicle can't follow. Diving into rubble, retreating into ruins, taking cover in thick forest, or pulling back over muddy ground can all be ways to avoid a new career as a tread decal. Another response is to hide, as agile and motivated humans can be almost impossible for a vehicle-encased observer to locate in rough terrain.

This same stealth is the infantry's best weapon against a hostile vehicle. A properly-equipped infantry squad can de-liver inexorable murder to a tank platoon if they're able to get close enough to use their AT missiles or lance charges. An anti-air equipped grunt can crouch near-invisible on a brushy hillside, lining up a shot against an unsuspecting gravflyer hovering too closely above. Cities are places of particular nightmare for vehicles, as even gravtanks that can skim over low rubble can't clear tall buildings or be certain that every empty window is free from a lurking partisan with a missile.

If you do pit PCs against vehicles, it's recommended that you use the rules for quick vehicle kills. Unless the squad is playing a group of tankers, it's unlikely that they're going to be spending most of their time inside a vehicle, which means that they're most likely to be encountering them as hostile forces on the field. The standard vehicle rules in *Stars Without Number* are built so as to make tanks and other military vehicles a rare incursion into a campaign, and correspondingly difficult for ordinary adventurers to deal with. This calculus changes significantly when every squad is expected to have an AT missile or lance charge in their packs.

Vehicles are also singularly unstealthy. Make sure to give the PCs fair warning of incoming trouble, and allow them the natural reaction time they'd have between spotting an IFV rolling over a distant ridge and the moment that IFV's gunner manages to spot their tiny, scurrying forms.

Logistics

At its core, logistics is planning and executing the movement and support of forces. It's the business of getting the troops where they need to be and giving them the gear and support services they need to keep fighting. Logistical problems form the basis of many challenges that face a military band of PCs, because *nothing* ever runs smoothly in a war zone. Even the basic delivery of rations and bullets becomes a feat of heroic valor when thousands of enthusiastic enemy soldiers are desperately trying to foil your every plan.

This section lists some of the basic principles of logistics. These are provided for your own education as a GM, but more importantly, they're provided as hooks for identifying fresh problems and challenges for the PCs. When one of these principles breaks down, the PCs are going to have a problem. Sometimes it is a small problem, such as the lack of an otherwise useful piece of equipment. Sometimes it is a large problem, such as the absence of hoverboats when the squad's just been ordered to cross a robopiranha-infested river of sulfuric acid.

When you need a logistical challenge for the PCs, just skim down the following eight categories and pick something from the difficulties listed. You can always dress it up with local color, pulling in some feature of the native ecology or local culture to explain why this situation has suddenly become a problem the PCs need to handle quickly.

Integration requires that the logistics support actually coordinate well with the existing command structure and strategic planning. This can be exceptionally difficult when a mercenary legion is working with native ground forces, as the locals are likely to have difficulty coordinating properly with the foreigners for delivery of necessary sustainment. Even within a conventional national army, however, the sheer size, confusion, and stress of warfare can make it a struggle to get the right supplies in the right place at the right time.

Problems: The PCs have a load of vital supplies but only a vague idea of where to deliver them, and time or the enemy is on the march. The PCs are working with a corrupt native officer who won't release supplies without a favor. The PCs are being ordered to carry out a delivery according to operational plans that no longer apply, and only enemy forces are in the area.

Anticipation means that the logistical planners have to be able to foresee the supplies and force deployments that will be necessary. Once a general's ordered his troops to start marching, he doesn't have time to ensure that he's actually packed enough beans for the trip. Sudden changes in the battlefield situation or confusion at headquarters can leave the PCs to abruptly realize that some vital supply isn't going to be forthcoming

Problems: A mercenary legion has totally missed the need for some piece of equipment or medication for successful operations on this planet. The natives don't use a particular type of weapon or vehicle and so don't think to provide vital components to the mercenaries. The brass has grossly overestimated the amount of a particular supply the unit will need, and now the enemy, grasping comrades, or corrupt local officials are coming for it.

Responsiveness is what you need when your anticipation proves insufficient. An army needs to have enough surplus supply and a sufficiently good transport capability to get vital sustainment to a unit until a more lasting supply line can be run. Someone, somewhere is going to screw things up, and somebody's going to have to make a desperate last-minute run to deliver supplies. Often as not, that somebody is a PC.

Problems: A unit is desperately low on ammo, fuel, or some other necessity and the PCs are tapped to run it through enemy-infested terrain. A corrupt officer or local has stolen suddenly-needed supplies and they have to be recovered before it's too late. The emergency supplies exist but have been seized by a sudden enemy thrust that needs to be driven back.

Simplicity is vital to any element of war, but especially in matters of logistics. In war, everything goes wrong *all of the time*. Every additional step of complication to any plan or procedure is one more opportunity for the enemy to wreck it, to say nothing of some exhausted, fear-raddled soldier who's paying more attention to the grinding sensation in his ribcage than the nine-page requisition form he's been handed. Every process has to be as simple as possible to survive the stress of battle.

Problems: An army too long at peace has become so encrusted with paperwork and anti-corruption checks that it requires personal favors to get anything released. Somebody screwed up a requisition form and the gear the PCs need has been delivered someplace dangerous. The PCs are handed an ambiguous form and the only person who knows how to fill it out correctly is somewhere dangerous to reach.

Economy recognizes that there is only so much to go around, and it needs to go where it matters most. Loading one unit with too much means another goes without, so it's crucial to keep a clear, central eye on supplies to eliminate redundancies and ensure the right amounts end up at the right places. Of course, given that every unit has an incentive to want as much as possible, all kinds of deals and unfortunate confusions tend to ensue.

Problems: A rival unit has "persuaded" a quartermaster to issue the PCs' necessary support to their own troops if the PCs can't "persuade" them otherwise. A mistake has grossly under-equipped the PCs' unit with something important. Corrupt native officials are reporting deliveries that they never made, thus leaving HQ to think the unit's fully supplied and refusing to issue more.

Survivability is hard enough for intelligent soldiers on a battlefield; unprotected ration packs haven't got much of a chance. Native looters, thieves in other units, local vermin, torrid heat, fungal blooms, toxic atmospheres, and any one of a host of other causes can end up ruining supplies and degrading equipment. Quartermasters have to keep their stocks from being stolen, rotting away, or going stale, all while pitched combat rages a long artillery shot away.

Problems: A native fungus eats away the plastic components of a PC's equipment. Desperate locals are willing to risk their lives to steal rations. Impending alien weather conditions threaten to ruin a supply dump and the only good cover is currently in enemy hands.

Continuity is a matter of ensuring that supplies that are needed will continue to be delivered, despite the obstructions of the enemy, the natives, and the perversities of fate. Emergency shipments can save a dire situation, but the disaster will only threaten again if steps aren't taken to set up a solid, reliable line of supplies. As simple as it sounds, it is every bit as difficult to arrange these things as anything else is in wartime.

Problems: A vital supply road is being threatened by an enemy concentration. The PCs need to head to an outpost and figure out why supplies supposedly forwarded from it never seem to get to the front. An incompetent officer or corrupt native has let a supply route collapse and someone needs to force a new convoy through now-dangerous terrain.

Improvisation is what happens when one or more of the former principles don't work out. Battlefield expediencies are inevitable during a fight, and even afterwards there are times when a good quartermaster just needs to find supplies, no matter where or how he finds them. If faced with a crushing lack of resources, most unit commanders don't look too hard at the legality of happy innovations.

Problems: The only stock of a vital supply is in the hands of a local grandee of some importance. A tech knows how to fix or mitigate a supply lack, but he needs to be fetched out of a bad situation. Somebody's done a battlefield fix on a problem but it's going to go catastrophically wrong if the PCs can't get a vital part to them in time.

These logistical issues can all be used to brew up a sufficiently calamitous problem for your players. No matter how critical the gear or how easily had it might be in a peacetime situation, the chaos of war guarantees that the only things that will be easy to get are the things they don't really need.

It's also possible for an enemy to suffer these same afflictions. If you need a quick reason why an enemy outpost might be vulnerable or an enemy squad might be bogged down, you can find ample rationale in this same list of troubles. The gods of the supply line are capricious and cruel but they are nothing if not even-handed about generously disbursing their unkindly attentions.

What's In The Box?

So what is it that the PCs need to deliver, or what vital supply are they suddenly missing? The categories below include most of the things that an army regularly requires for its functioning.

Beans, bullets, and batteries make up the holy trinity of supplies. Food, ammunition, and vehicle fuel are absolutely essential to any army, whether they're shooting matchlock rifles and riding neohorses or firing plasma rifles from gravitic troop carriers. An army that runs out of food will become effectively helpless in a few days, too weak to fight effectively. An army without ammunition is reduced to fighting with entrenching tools and rifle butts against emplaced weaponry. And an army without vehicle fuel, whether petroleum or batteries, is unable to move fast enough to effectively engage mobile enemy forces. If the quartermasters deliver anything, they *must* deliver these three types of supply, though if they have to make a choice the troops can fight hungry for a couple of days.

Personal equipment could be specialized gear for a unit about to deal with particular obstacles or terrain, or it might just be a fresh case of plasma rifles for a squad that's had too many weapons smashed by artillery strikes. Lack of this gear can make for horrendous casualties if troops are thrown against obstacles they're not equipped to handle.

Construction materials make the difference between a muddy pit and a defensible outpost. TL4 construction tech can turn dirt and gravel into a fortified camp in a matter of hours, but even gunnysacks for sandbags and tarps for protection from a merciless alien sun can make a vital difference to troops.

Medical supplies are critical for both casualty support and general morale. A soldier who has confidence that he can be treated quickly if hurt will have far more readiness to fight than a man who knows that the company surgeon hasn't got anything more than good wishes and the power of prayer. Some hostile worlds also might require foreign troops to take regular anti-allergen medication just so they can survive the native pollens and molds.

Vehicles need to be delivered too, sometimes on carrier trucks but more often under their own power. Many of them require final tuning and adjustment once they reach their destination, so they might not be in a condition to actually fight should they be ambushed along the way.

Spare parts and repair materials are a constant hunger in the field. Everything is breaking *all the time*, either from brutal environmental demands, soldiers unconcerned with gentle handling, or the inconsiderate imposition of enemy fire. A dozen gravtanks might be useless scrap without a few crates of vital replacement parts.

Psychics

Not every army has access to psychic soldiers, but those that do use them as potent resources. While a lone psychic lacks the raw battlefield power of a tank platoon or an artillery company, their abilities allow them to skirt some of the basic laws of physics that an army is otherwise obliged to obey. Most military forces will go to great lengths to recruit and safeguard these assets.

The Use of Impossibility

Psychics are precision instruments in an army. Certain disciplines in particular can make a trained psychic enormously useful in the field or at headquarters, and these psychics can expect to be employed for very specific purposes. As every psychic has a preferred primary discipline, the categorization of a psychic soldier's service tends to focus on using this primary discipline in the field.

Most military psychics average the game equivalent of third or fourth level in expertise after a few years of field experience. Few have the drive and talent to rise above this already-impressive competence, but those who do can become a precious resources to an entire division or corps.

Biopsions are peerless field medics for their units and a cherished addition to any field hospital. Many psychics with disciplines more suited to headquarters operations are encouraged to master the most basic levels of this discipline so as to provide a quick and copious source of medical repair. While the basic forms of the discipline as taught at most academies are unable to regrow lost limbs or replace large amounts of missing tissue, a biopsion with mastery of *Psychic Succor* can put a hundred less-mangled grunts back on their feet in roughly ten minutes.

Novice biopsions are sometimes kept back at headquarters, but the most widely-useful medical tricks of the discipline are so easy to master that spare psychics are sometimes assigned to squads as a mobile source of field repair. They can be literal life-savers when using their I*nvincible Stand* ability to support the brave soul leading a charge on a fortified position or patching up a downed enemy for later questioning.

Experienced biopsions are sometimes trained as spies, as their ability to shapeshift can overcome ordinary biometric security measures. The most capable are sent forward to the front lines to raise up entire squads of maimed soldiers with the discipline's art of *Psychic Vitality*. The extreme durability of a master biopsion allows them to take on greater risks than such an asset would normally be allowed to face.

Metapsions are difficult for most armies to utilize, as few of them have enough psychics to form the choirs that would get the most use from a metapsion's abilities, or face enemies with enough psychic resources to make their defensive abilities all that useful for a squad. Despite this, metapsions are often drafted as bodyguards and protective escorts for VIPs.

Their ability to detect other psychics and defend against psionic intrusions make them the best anti-psychic defenses most armies can muster.

Novice metapsions are most often employed as bodyguards or psychic cover for a squad on an important mission. Aside from easily becoming very resistant to psychic powers, they can identify enemy psychics and increase the difficulty of using powers to the point that most other hostile novices will be unable to use their abilities freely.

Experienced metapsions are often set as assassins and snipers, trained to execute enemy psychics who have proven too troublesome or elusive for conventional measures. Arch-metapsions can even squelch the "automatic survival" powers of biopsions and precognitives, forcing them to face a final death, and make any use of an enemy psychic's powers prohibitively damaging to them. The best such "nullifiers" often develop secondary disciplines tailored to stealthy murder.

Precognitives are most useful on the battlefield when using their simpler powers, providing their associated squad with a superb early warning against ambushes and booby-traps. It's a deep frustration to most armies that a precog's powers revolve around events that have a personal impact on them. Because of this, it's often necessary to put a precog on the front lines of combat in order to give them the necessary environment for making predictions about a battle or a war.

Novice precogs often serve as point men for squads on important missions. Their unfailing ability to detect ambushes and sense impending traps is a lifesaver on patrol, and the more talented novices can give the slight nudge to random events that can spell the difference between success and failure for a mission. Many squads view them as a kind of walking good-luck charm.

Experienced precogs are almost always in the heat of the action, relying on their metadimensional foresight to avoid death. The most capable are known for undertaking suicide missions, relying on their powers to give them a second chance, or even splitting off secondary manifestations of themselves to perform some act that is certain to result in the manifestation's death. One particularly lethal pair of arch-psions, a teleporter and a precog, were able to disable an entire string of enemy fortifications by teleporting in, splitting off a manifestation of the explosives-laden precog, and then teleporting out as the manifestation detonated their charges. The precog did require extensive trauma counseling afterwards, however, in light of their multiple suicides.

Telekinetics are the psychics most likely to be found on the front lines. The ability to manipulate objects without having to stick an arm out is enormously useful in combat. Of equal utility is the fact that telekinetic powers do not obviously emanate from the psychic. To enemy onlookers, it just seems like that grenade flew itself around a corner to detonate.

Novice telekinetics are utility arms for their squad. Even modestly-talented telekinetics can launch grenades and other explosives around impossible angles, and do so without exposing themselves to fire. Downed comrades can be lifted and pulled back into cover for medical treatment, and allies can be quickly boosted up to roofs and other high vantages.

Experienced telekinetics are human-shaped siege weapons. Their *Telekinetic Ram* abilities are useless against mobile or unrestrained targets, but against building walls, parked vehicles, obstinate doors, or bothersome rubble, they can plow a hole in almost anything given enough time and the mastered ability. They can get in where a tank is too clumsy and use their abilities in areas too cramped or delicate for explosives or artillery.

Telepaths are interrogators *par excellence*. With a sufficiently expert psychic, days or weeks of rigorous questioning can be replaced by a few minutes of probing questions and a deep brain scan. Even those telepaths without those advanced abilities can get a very good idea about the emotions of an interlocutor, and a watchful empath can detect a suicide bomber on sight by the tension they display.

Novice telepaths serve in the field as translators and as spotters of problematic locals. A telepath can give a squad's negotiator a substantial advantage in reading a target's emotional reactions to various questions, even if they can't catch more than the most basic surface impressions.

Experienced telepaths are particularly common in counterintelligence and secure communications. Their ability to form mental hubs of telepathic contact with far-flung agents makes for a communication network that's impossible to intercept or detect without the use of rare, esoteric psitech devices. Despite their inarguable utility, telepaths tend to be the least popular psychics in a unit.

Teleporters dramatically expand the tactical options of a squad. Any location the teleporter can see becomes vulnerable to their sudden appearance, barring the use of very rare and precious psitech shielding. Their ability to instantly translocate to any location they've visited before makes them a pervasive threat to the enemy, because it is impossible to be certain that an enemy teleporter has never been in the area.

Novice teleporters may not be able to carry a friend, but they can carry a grenade, or a lance charge, or some other unfriendly gift to their target. More experienced ones can manage sufficient range with their teleports to blink back behind the lines and return with critical ammunition or equipment. Their powers of quick retreat and advance often have them serving as scouts for their squads.

Experienced teleporters are unmatched infiltrators, some capable of carrying an entire squad with them as they vault past defenses and escape with vital intelligence or prisoners. Their abilities send them into terrible dangers but also help ensure that they and their squad can come out again.

Recruiting Psychics

Some armies are fortunate enough to have their own psionic mentors and training academies, but these are vanishingly rare on any but the richest and most sophisticated worlds. Still a few technologically primitive societies still retain the principles of psionic education, and these native armies can present an ugly surprise to invaders ill-equipped to deal with their gifted warriors.

Most militaries work in coordination with the sector's psychic academies, often with representatives and recruiting agents affiliated with these institutions. It's not uncommon for as many as ten percent of academy graduates to choose a military career, particularly since their pay is excellent and the excitement often appeals to youth.

More experienced psychics might also be approached by an army, particularly those of their native polity. Appeals to patriotism or desperate need might be made, and some psychics can be swayed to help for the sake of idealism and a sense of doing something important. These late recruits can take some time to get accustomed to the military way of doing things, but they're often the only way the military has to enlist truly experienced psychics. The casualty rate for novices is brutal, and not many of them survive to get the decades of practice most psychics need to gain true expertise.

The rarity and utility of a trained psychic is such that many armies are willing to bend their recruitment rules in order to get one. A female telekinetic might find herself pushed onto the front lines in an otherwise all-male squad, and even a member of some despised minority might find themselves "enlisted for the good of the nation".

Pay, Ranks, and Treatment

Psychics are paid an enormous amount compared to ordinary troopers. For any given rank, most armies pay from five to ten times the usual pay rate, and the signing bonus alone is usually measured in the thousands or tens of thousands of credits. Even those regimes that forcibly conscript their psychic graduates will pay them very well, sometimes to the grumblings of other, less gifted recruits.

Psychics do not have any particular advantage in rank, however, and many armies tacitly prevent psychics from ever obtaining positions of command. They are enlisted soldiers or NCOs, not officers. Their special talents are too useful to burden them with an officer's usual obligation of paperwork and politics, and so a psychic can expect to end even a very successful career as a chief warrant officer. A very few psychics are selected for command roles, particularly precognitives, but even these see a great deal of field use.

Some of this aversion to command has to do with military practicality, and other parts have to do with the basic mistrust many psychics endure in the ranks. They have powers utterly alien to other soldiers and can do things that defy the basic

Numbers of Psychics Available

If an army or its sponsoring nation has access to their own psychic academy they can usually find as many as 2 psychic recruits per fifty thousand civilians in their polity, given that one person in ten thousand has psychic potential and perhaps 40% of those can be vigorously persuaded to work for their nation's military. Those that rely on recruiting from outside institutions rarely can convince more than 1 recruit per hundred thousand people that institution serves, divided by however many armies are recruiting from that academy. Native institutions can hold out patriotism as an inducement, whereas recruiting from outside academies is based on less idealistic factors.

Thus, a sprawling psychic academy that is the only source of training for two billion people of a particular sector would be able to supply 20,000 psychics to the various groups that recruit from their graduates. Note that this isn't a yearly graduating total, it's the total number of psychics who are likely to be available for military recruitment at any one time. As recruits are killed off or retire replacements can be acquired, but the total number of active military psychics it provides is unlikely to exceed this number.

laws of physics. Around a telepath no private thought is safe. You can't even have a friendly game of cards with a precog, and a teleporter or shapeshifting biopsion with a streak of practical joker in her can be a nightmare. The more familiar the soldiers are with psychics the less likely this is to be a problem, but some tensions are inevitable.

Because of their value psychics can get away with a lot of things that would see an ordinary soldier jailed, discharged, or occasionally shot. Psychics might suffer petty discipline, punishment duty, and regular screaming rebukes, but serious discipline that would result in their separation from the service is uncommon. For certain psychics, especially teleporters, telekinetics, and precognitives, their odds of dying on the battlefield are good enough that most of their peers don't begrudge them their little perks too much.

In the field, psychics can generally expect summary execution if they're captured. Most armies simply lack the necessary tech and personnel to neutralize a psychic. The best they can do is keep them in a medical coma, which is practical in a controlled situation with medical resources readily at hand but completely unserviceable during combat. Psychics understand that capture means death.

In direct consequence, psychics never wear distinguishing insignia or markings in the field. They always dress and serve just as a normal member of their squad, often serving as a rifleman. When it's possible to conceal the source of a psychic effect, they will do so not only to avoid execution on capture, but also to avoid the inevitable hail of gunfire should they be identified as a psychic by enemy forces. Most enemy forces will focus fire on a psychic even faster than they will on an identified officer.

Nukes and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Every TL4 army has an almost casual access to nuclear weapons. Even a civilian from a TL4 world can likely put together the necessary components for a low-yield nuclear weapon with nothing more than an expert technical education and an asteroid mining supply catalog. Nukes are not hard for high-tech militaries to obtain, nor are lethal bio-weapons, caustic chemicals, or other conventional tools of mass destruction.

Nuclear Weapons

Nukes are, however, extremely hard to *use*, as nuclear inhibition fields, or "nuke snuffer" technology was an early offshoot of spike drive development. It's relatively trivial to generate a field that suppresses nuclear explosions. A single TL4 fusion plant and a small building worth of tech can dampen explosions on an entire continent. Most TL4 polities of any size have multiple redundant snuffers operating at any one time, several of them carefully hidden from sight.

Even TL3 worlds usually make the acquisition of nuke snuffer technology an absolute priority as soon as interstellar trade is re-opened. Black-box technological solutions are common in most sectors, requiring nothing more than occasional simple maintenance to preserve some lostworlder king's peace of mind. The spike drives of starships also provide automatic nuke snuffing in a variable radius, ranging from 4 kilometers for fighters to 40 km for frigates. These snuffer fields are one reason that conventional nuclear weapons are so little used in ship-to-ship combat.

On primitive worlds without the benefit of snuffer technology, a military can use nukes more freely. Perversely, however, very primitive worlds are often less susceptible to nuclear coercion. Their primitive transport and agricultural tech requires the population to spread out much more thinly than on more sophisticated worlds. A nuke dropped on the banners of a native army can be extremely efficient, but it's harder to nuke a hundred partisans lurking in ten thousand square kilometers of jungle.

Some worlds may have a moral horror of using nuclear weapons or other tools of mass destruction, but these qualms are very specific to individual societies. Other polities joyously embrace these weapons as ways to quicken a war's end and decrease casualties. There is no particular universal taboo against these weapons, just a universal recognition that they're not terribly practical against TL4 opponents.

An exception exists for using nukes so freely as to threaten a world's habitability. Most interstellar powers don't care what their neighbors do on their own land, but a military vicious enough to sterilize an entire world is clearly a danger to everyone around them.

The response may not be direct military hostilities but such planet-wreckers can expect to find few public friends among the other planetary rulers of the sector. Privately, such ruthlessness may be thought useful, and some clients have a particular interest in employing mercenaries who don't balk at a little ecocide.

Biological and Chemical Weapons

These weapons are less easily negated than nuclear explosions, but they are also less easily controlled. Biological warfare is notoriously hard to manage well, and few militaries have been able to effectively weaponize pathogens without risking their own troops or civilians. Some polities don't especially care about these dangers, however, or are so desperate that they'll gladly destroy their own people if it takes a hated enemy with them.

Chemical weapons barely bear notice on the interstellar battlefield. Crude war gases are easily overcome by modern sealed armor, and more sophisticated compounds are often more trouble to create and deploy than they're worth. Still, against poorly-equipped partisans or primitive natives, these weapons can be effective tools of terror and death. The collateral damage tends to be high, but such is the price of war.

Some polities have qualms about using biological or chemical weapons, quite beyond the issue of their utility. Mercenary groups rarely use either, as their imprecise and messy deployment often risks collateral damage to local allies, and can strain relations unacceptably. Still, a few legions hire out expressly on their capability to unleash a murderous plague or a killing wind on their client's least favorite people.

> ## When PCs Have Been Nuked
>
> If nukes are used in your campaign, the nature of PCs makes it very possible that they will somehow manage to get caught in a blast radius. In some cases, the outcome will be obvious. If they're within four kilometers of even a pocket nuke's ground zero, they're simply going to die unless they're in some very well-hardened cover. If the heat and shock don't kill them, the lethal radiation poisoning certainly will.
>
> For those outside the zone of immediate death, or those inside in imperfect cover, two Luck saving throws should be rolled. If both are passed, the PC suffers only half their hit points in damage, rounded up. If only one is passed, the PC is mortally wounded or dying of lethal radiation exposure. If neither succeeds, the PC dies instantly. If all the PCs are crouched together in a shared shelter, you might be merciful and let the best pair of saves dictate the result for the whole little group of them.
>
> Special technology or advanced armor might allow the PCs to get much closer to ground zero without risking death. Such tech's availability is at the GM's discretion.

Robots and Drones

Some polities are sufficiently advanced to rely on robots and other automated devices for their militaries. A larger number use bots as auxiliaries and adjuncts to human handlers, tools that can be deployed to stiffen a squad's firepower or defend a fixed position. The tireless, fearless obedience of mechanized soldiers has much to recommend them to their generals, but some limitations are too deep in the metal to make them a perfect replacement for meat.

Military Bots and Drones

The most common military bot is a four-legged weapon platform roughly as tall as a human, one meter wide, and one and a half meters long. These "centaurs", or "cents" are normally mounted with a heavy cutter or other support weapon and used to provide extra firepower for a squad. Light fireteams sometimes replace the human support weapon operator with a centaur, while other fireteams simply add them as another member of the group.

The centaur's advantage is strength and durability. The robot's chassis can support an energy weapon with an enormous amount of power for sustained firing, and the heavy cerasteel armor can shrug off hits that would reduce a human weapon operator to a lump of scorched meat. The size of the centaur is small enough to fit into most human-scale structures, though stairs and narrow doorways can be awkward for the bot's onboard navigation.

A centaur is somewhat limited by its physiology, however. Its four legs end in ruggedized "toes" that can crudely grip and manipulate objects such as doorknobs or container latches, but the control is not fine enough to handle delicate work, even in the unlikely case that the onboard expert system would know what to do with it. Even the relatively rare anti-grav-equipped centaur usually has at least one manipulator for clearing obstacles.

"Walkers" are the second most common bot type, being a humanoid construct of bipedal design meant to interface easily with human equipment and vehicles. Walkers are more fragile than centaurs, but their ability to replace humans for simple and repetitive work makes them valuable behind the lines, and their mechanical indifference to peril gives them value in facing the foe. Walkers can use any human weapon for which their expert system is qualified.

Other military bots exist, with some militaries having a sufficient industrial base to build special-purpose robots for multiple purposes. Most common are roboticized vehicles, equipped with hardware and expert systems to fulfill their tasks with minimal human oversight.

Genuine drones, operated remotely by specialists, are relatively rare on the modern battlefield. Quantum ECM causes significant jamming problems for data-dense transmissions over long distances, and it's largely impossible to control a drone at the ranges which a remote operator would require. Anything out of line-of-sight range is prone to failure. Because of this, most "drones" are no more than simple bots equipped with basic onboard expert systems for recon.

Military Expert Systems

Military bots are equipped with specialized expert systems. These systems aren't nearly as sophisticated as true AI, but they're usually smart enough to let the robot accomplish its intended task with minimal supervision.

A standard-issue military expert system is smart enough to let the bot navigate difficult terrain and building interiors, chase enemies through complex physical environments, and avoid shooting at enemies when stray rounds and likely misses might be expected to endanger allies. It can contextually recognize people shooting at it as enemies and can avoid physical actions that would obviously result in danger to its allies. It will also avoid placing itself in obviously-lethal physical environments and will naturally seek cover or other protection from perceived enemies.

The expert system understands nothing of context, however. Some allied forces chip their uniforms with IFF transponders to force allied identification to their bots, while others find it too dangerous to rely on that kind of hardware recognition. These units simply assign a bot to one or more specific handlers and let the handler direct the bot.

An expert system that is put in a situation it cannot handle must roll a skill check to come up with a rational response, with a difficulty based on the complexity of response required. On a failure, it drops back to its default behavior. For a military bot, this is "Shoot enemies", and potentially lethal for those around it. Many such bots are kept "locked down" by their handlers until it becomes time for actual combat.

Bot Wranglers

The vast majority of military bots are assigned to specific handlers. In a fireteam, one of the riflemen is usually handed the bot's control rig, while groups involving more than one bot usually have a dedicated handler to run them. This handler is responsible for directing the bots according to the instructions of their commander.

In TL4 armies with access to cybernetic tech, the control rig is usually plugged into the operator's neural system. This allows the handler to shift their perceptions to any of the bots under their control as a free action, seeing and hearing what the bot sees or hears and controlling it directly as if it were their own body. A handler is unable to act while "ghosting" a bot this way, though brief glances through bot sensors can be done instantly. General commands to the bots can also be given, along with specific enemy designations, though this takes up the handler's move action for the turn.

Those without wired control rigs must rely on an eyepiece and glove system that is clumsier and slower, though more easily handed off to other teammates registered with the hardware. Any access of a bot's sensors requires the sacrifice of the user's move action for the round, and any specific control of a bot requires one round of focusing on the bot before full control can be exerted. General commands and specific enemy priorities take a full round's effort to issue to the bots.

The rig's control range has its limits. Bots can only be safely controlled within three hundred meters. At longer distances, the quantum ECM of the battlefield has a 50% chance of disrupting the control link at the start of any given turn, causing the bot to obey its last instruction until it comes back into range, completes the task, or is destroyed. In the absence of such ECM, the bot's effective range extends to two kilometers.

Hacking a bot's control link is theoretically possible, but not usually practical under battlefield conditions. If given ten or fifteen minutes to observe a bot and its control link, an Int/Computer check at difficulty 10 with another control rig might be able to hijack the bot for 1d6 rounds before automatic safeguards shut it down.

Military AIs and Bots

Very few planets in the modern day have access to a functional AI. The few surviving intellects are almost all creations of Mandate scientists and cyberpsychologists, and few of the sane ones have much interest in generalship. However, a sufficiently powerful robotics industry wedded to a determined AI can make an overwhelming difference in warfare.

An AI core needs access to vast stores of computing power and support circuitry to take control of a robot army. An AI core with nothing more than an armature to carry it can do no better than an ordinary bot wrangler, but one interfaced with a computing cluster as big as a factory building can control tens or hundreds of thousands of bots.

The power of a safely-braked AI does not lie in superhuman intelligence or unfathomable knowledge, but in the ability to calve their attention and awareness over multiple processes. An army of robots controlled by an AI is each individually as intelligent as the AI itself; the core's control can turn a legion of brainless expert systems into a swarm of fearless, intelligent robotic soldiers. These soldiers are not individuals, but simply the same AI mind focusing on countless single bodies at once. Because they all share the same awareness, their coordination is incredibly precise. Confusion, disorganization, and ignorance are unknown to such a robot army.

AI cryptography is also much stronger than that possible to ordinary handler rigs. An AI can control bots anywhere on the planet provided some sort of communications medium can reach them. Only sealed and radio-shielded zones can force an AI drone back on its default expert system.

While magnificent tools of war, most polities are predictably uneasy about handing an inhuman intellect enough firepower to wipe out the entire ruling class of humanity. The few polities with both the robots and the AI necessary to create such an army can't be expected to do so save under the direst provocation of need. Afterwards, the disarmament of these bots can provide to be an even greater challenge.

Robots and Mass Combat

For purposes of the army and mass combat rules in this book, minor robotic support can be assumed as an ordinary part of TL4 military units. The squad PCs might be issued a centaur if their superiors think it necessary for their mission, or they might have a few walkers sent along for stiffening if the objective recommends it. These robots do not cost extra when building the unit; they're just part of being a TL4 army.

Units built chiefly of robots or substantially stiffened by their numbers can also be constructed, with only enough humans to handle their maintenance and direction. If hiring for a mercenary legion, each robot must be purchased separately along with a TL4 soldier contract, but there is no monthly cost for using a robot in the field; the spares and repair are subsumed by the contract cost. The same applies for roboticized armor, artillery, and air units.

Robot units have the same Strength as ordinary units, as their fearlessness and tirelessness compensate for their comparative stupidity. A robot unit under the control of an AI, however, has all the advantages of intelligence along with the benefits of unyielding steel; their Strength is treated as the next step up in unit size.

Bot and Rig Statistics

Any of the robot armatures listed in the core book for *Stars Without Number* can be included in an army. Below are stats for standard centaur and walker bots.

Centaur: AC 2, HD 2 (10 hit points), Attack Bonus +3, Dmg as heavy cutter (3d6 w/suppress, no practical ammo limit), Save on 14+, Skill Bonus +1, Move 30', Cost 15,000 cr.

Walker: AC 4, HD 1 (5 hit points), Attack Bonus +2, Dmg as weapon (1d10 laser rifle, no burst and no practical ammo limit), Save on 15+, Skill Bonus +1, Move 30', Cost 4,000 cr.

For purposes of AI Tolerance, both have scores of 3.

Cybernetic control rigs require a TL4 planet with a significant cybernetic industry. They cost 20,000 credits when bought privately and inflict 1 permanent System Strain.

Eyepiece-and-glove control rigs also require TL4, but cost only 4,000 credits, count as 1 Encumbrance, and can be used by any user who knows the rig's control codes.

When The Guns Begin To Shoot

Designing A Military Campaign

Creating a sandbox-style military campaign isn't especially complex. It requires a certain kind of preparation and due design, but once you know what parts you need you should be able to assemble one with minimal fuss. Once you have it running, it provides an easy source of adventure seeds and mission outlines for future sessions while giving the players a clear range of choices to engage their PCs.

The pages here provide a basic overview of the process. Individual steps, such as creating wars, building military units, or conducting battles, are detailed in further sections of the book. Once you know how these components are meant to fit together, you can use them in the ways described here or assemble them in a manner specific to your own creativity.

Defining Your Campaign

The first step is to decide whether you want to focus your campaign on a mercenary legion or on a conventional planetary army. The choice will largely depend on which factors you and your players find to be most entertaining in play.

A mercenary legion allows for variety. The PCs can be fighting cruel insurgents on a humid jungle-world one month and the next find themselves dispatched to clear alien invaders from the frozen tombs of an icy exile-world. The PCs will be able to participate in numerous different conflicts in the sector, and can choose to shift the sector's balance of power by virtue of who they aid and who they choose to confront. While they might have contractual obligations to a civilian power, they are ultimate in charge of every aspect of their legion's success– or its gruesome failure.

Mercenary campaigns can be somewhat superficial, however, and it can be taxing for the GM to be creating so many new NPCs and situations. A new planet every session means a new roster of villains and contacts for the PCs to interact with, and that can make for a heavy workload for the GM. The tools in this book help simplify the process and lift some of the load from your shoulders, but it's still a serious amount of work to generate enough conflicts and crises to give a mercenary legion an honest choice of employers.

PCs who belong to a conventional planetary army have an easier time building engagement with a specific world. They're dealing with the same conflict and the same general cast of characters, and repeated sessions help to build up an emotional investment in their enemies and their friends. A single planet can still have a broad range of climates, enemies, and situations, and a persistent campaign on the world can give players a chance to really care about the outcome.

On the downside, planetary armies tend to miss out on some of the conventional tropes of sci-fi. There might be interplanetary expeditions or missions to colony worlds, but there's not the easy and constant variety that's common to a more conventional star-faring gaming. If the players don't really enjoy or engage with the traits of a particular world, they can find themselves fighting for causes they don't care about in service to leadership they find indifferent. Of course, some might say that this is a marvelous piece of verisimilitude, but it can limit a game's potential fun.

As with most important campaign decisions, it's a choice to be made between the GM and the players. If you have a firm preference as the GM, one that's acceptable to your players, you should go with it, as a game that's no fun for the GM is going to be no fun for anyone else sooner or later. If you are less committed to a particular option, you can talk it over with your players and see where they stand.

Note that due to the system of creating PC brass, both mercenaries and planetary armies allow a lot of freedom to the players. They'll be picking the battles they want to fight and the situations they want to engage with, even if their squad PCs are lowly grunts of no command influence whatsoever. Players shouldn't feel obligated to pick a mercenary campaign for the sake of having a sandbox experience.

Fabricating Your Sector

Once you know whether you're going to be running a planetary army or a mercenary legion, it's time to create the sector that will contain these feats of arms. You can use the normal sector creation process given in the *Stars Without Number* rulebook, possibly with the addition of the Society tools available in the core version of the book. You might generate more than one society on the larger worlds to help create new sources of friction.

You shouldn't flesh these worlds out more than is minimally necessary at this point. Get them names, tags, populations, basic physical environments, and maybe societies. Make sure that you have enough worlds suitable for large-scale warfare; a sector full of depopulated hell-worlds isn't likely to make for very vigorous combat, though a few such worlds can add spice and the prospect of really exotic warfare. Don't worry about identifying specific NPCs yet. You'll get to that part when you need to have the details.

You may need to increase your sector size a little to provide a sufficient scope of possibilities. Optionally, you might add more than one habitable planet to a star system, building enmity between them that doesn't require interstellar travel to express. Don't be afraid to reach in and adjust what the random generators proclaim. You're building this sector for a specific purpose, and so you need to make sure there's room for properly enthusiastic bloodshed.

Now consider your worlds and choose one to be the main focus for a planetary army campaign, or a home base for a mercenary legion. Even the most freewheeling band of hired guns needs someplace to keep its stuff, and a mercenary legion's homeworld will act as a home base for its operations. It may turn out that the legion operates out of an orbital habitat or deep-space colony, but this initial planet gives you something to focus on at the start of the process.

For a planetary army, pick a world with a suitable terrain for fighting, preferably one with at least a semi-Earthlike environment and a tech level of at least 3. While fighting on a world of molten iron can be dramatic, extremely alien terrain can be hard to manage in play. It's tough to keep track of all the ramifications of such an environment, and it can foreclose a lot of the objectives that make for easy adventure creation. Of course, even an Earthlike world can have zones of extreme environments due to atmospheric disturbances or native phenomenon, so you might dot down a few of those just to keep things interesting

If you're running a planetary army, try to keep the possibility of non-native PCs in mind. If the world has no interstellar contact then every PC created for the army is likely to be a member of whatever polity is sponsoring it, or possibly a foreign enlistee from an allied nation. If you want to leave room for alien troops or offworlder soldiers, you need to make sure there's at least one way for such strange denizens to find their way to a recruiting office there.

Instigating Your War

Now that you have a sector, you need a bloody conflict. The war creation section of this book helps you put together a suitable struggle, mixing war tags together to create a situation and then using Vital Points to identify the crucial turning points of the campaign. You can feed the facts you've already established about the world into the process to refine and personalize the conflict to your chosen world.

For a mercenary legion, you're going to need multiple wars, but you don't want to put a lot of effort into any one of them just yet. Just start by identifying the conflict, assigning war tags, and writing up a few sentences of explanation about it. Don't worry about determining the mercenary contract details for these wars just yet; you'll be able to set them more intelligently once you've created the mercenary legion and know how many credits they need for each month they're fighting in the field. The PCs might be tempted to send fewer troops than they can strictly afford to improve the profit margin on the contract.

You'll want at least three of these wars to give the PC brass an honest choice of employers for their mercenary unit. You won't actually develop any of them until the legion's leaders decide on who it is they'll be lending their guns, though you might sketch them out lightly in case they're needed later.

For a planetary army, you usually just need one war, but you're going to need to develop this conflict thoroughly. Go through the full creation process for the war, making up a few relevant NPCs, assigning Vital Points, and generating an opposing army to face the players' allies. Truly beleaguered forces might face more than one war at once, forcing them to split their units to deal with multiple aggressors, but that sort of situation is apt to end grimly for such an entangled army.

You should keep the interests of your players in mind when building a war. Some players enjoy a gritty, morally-ambiguous struggle of bad against worse, or simply one of client against target. Others prefer a less grim hiring situation, where the force the PCs belong to can generally act on behalf of demonstrably decent clients and governments. Don't offer up a menu of dirty insurgent wars to a group of aspiring paladins, and don't give a struggle of puppymorphs versus Space Nazis to a group that wants *Apocalypse Now* with laser rifles. Choosing the right war for your players is important, and it's important to get it right from the start.

In the same vein, you should scale the size of the conflict to the size of the PC force. A planet-wide conflagration of blood might be seething on a particular world, but if the PCs belong to a thousand-man mercenary legion, they're going to be hired for service in a particular sub-theater of the conflict rather than as the magic bullet to solve the entire struggle. In a similar fashion, if the PCs are serving with a small nation's military forces, arraying the entire rest of the planet against them is probably inadvisable, unless everyone's up for a campaign of progressive horror and gruesome loss.

CREATING YOUR ARMY

Once you've roughed out the major available wars of your campaign, your next job is to create the military force that the PCs will belong to, whether this is a mercenary legion or a conventional army. The next section of the book has rules for creating these armies and the specific unit that will contain the PCs.

The rules for creating an army are intentionally simple. You won't find mechanics for determining the exact number of plasma rifles they have on hand, or tools that take into account the fine distinctions between variants of the same equipment or vehicle. Instead, the creation process is meant to streamline the eventual adventures and conflicts that these armies will find themselves encountering.

First you'll calculate the general size of the army based on the available population. Then you'll break that army up into units based on the quality of its leadership and the type of forces they might field. For NPC armies, this is as much as you'll need to do.

For the army or mercenary legion the PCs belong to, you'll also need to make up the "brass" characters that will take on the roles of the army's commanding officers. The deliberations of the brass will determine the missions that the squad PCs will be dispatched to handle, adding some sandbox freedom into the straitened military pattern.

If the PCs belong to a mercenary legion, this chapter also details the way to assemble such a force for hire, stacking up mercenary contracts and buying transport ships to carry them to far-flung contracts. PCs who come to wealth later in their career can also use these guidelines to build their own mercenary legions for their quarrels and ambitions.

RUNNING YOUR CAMPAIGN

With all this set out, you're now ready to frame up the first session of play. During this session, the players are going to create their PC brass and squadmates and run through a short mission to help them get into the campaign. At the end of the mission, you'll cut back to the PC brass and let them make some choices about how the next session is going to go.

Mercenary leaders will be given a list of clients and the contracts being offered, and conventional military brass will be presented with the current struggle's Vital Points and available units. Mercenaries will choose their next client and army brass will commit their units and the PCs to the next struggle. Once you know what the players want to pursue next time, you have the stretch of downtime between sessions to generate a suitable mission and sculpt out some related events for the players.

At the start of the next session, drop the PCs into the mission you've prepared. Once it completes, resolve any battles,

assign Vital Point control to the winning sides, and let the PC brass make their plans for the next session. Depending on how bloody the most recent mission was, it might be necessary to roll up a few new PC squadmates as well.

Note that the timing for this might be off slightly for mercenary legions. If you haven't completely developed the war, their choice of conflicts during the first session might need some elaboration before they have all the Vital Points defined and the available enemy forces chosen. In this case, let them pick their war at the end of the first session. At the start of the second mission, drop them into a "hello" engagement as soon as the mercs land, and then only present the full scope of the conflict at the session's end when the mercenary brass choose their next tactical deployments. Of course, the mercs might find that their clients were not entirely forthcoming about the scope of the challenge involved, intentionally or otherwise, and have to deal with the changed parameters.

Continue this pattern for the life of the campaign. The session starts with a mission, continues with a resolution of the other battles, and finishes with the PC brass choosing a new deployment. The struggle will ebb and flow based on the strength of the individual forces and the success of the missions the PCs undertake. Eventually, however, one side is going to win the war.

For a planetary army, this can be a good point to close out the campaign. If the PC side wins then victory is theirs, the enemy is crushed, and the game has a clean ending point. If they lose, the PCs might be forced to flee into the wilderness or become resistance fighters in an occupied land. While this mode of play can be a lot of fun, it's very different from a conventional military campaign, and the players might not be entirely up for it. By the time your campaign reaches this point, however, you should have a good idea of whether or not the group wants to carry on with it.

For a mercenary legion, a war's completion is just an excuse to move on to the next one. Indeed, even an incomplete war can be bid farewell if the client no longer requires their services or is tardy about paying the troops. The legion might choose to aim for bigger and more impressive prizes with their newfound resources, or they might have to retrench and lick their wounds an exceptionally costly battle or three. In either case, the ending of hostilities is a good point at which to evaluate the campaign.

Wars rarely end as planned. Forces that are losing a war tend to get desperate, and political fissures and the selective nonpayment of mercenaries are common reactions to fiscal or military catastrophe. A mercenary legion might find itself suddenly lacking an expected payment, with their paymasters assuring them that it will be arriving swiftly with the next victory… and any failure to fight will be proof of treacherous intent. The PCs might find themselves forced to negotiate a new contract at the end of a railgun barrel, or cut their way through friends turned sudden enemies in order to reach their transport back home.

Quick Commander Generation

There will be times when you need to quickly generate a military commander, either as a superior for the PCs or as an enemy leader in charge of an opposing force. These tables allow for a quick one-roll generation of such an officer.

In most cases the combat statistics of these leaders won't be important. The PCs are unlikely to encounter them in battle unless they're relatively low-ranking enemy officers or the PCs have been charged with a mission deep behind enemy lines. The average NPC officer, even one of substantial rank, is no more than a 2 or 3 hit die opponent.

Some soldiers are more than that, however. If the officer is a veteran operative or a hard-bitten field soldier, they might quality as at least a fifth level warrior, if not more. Statistics can be lifted from the examples given in the core rule book.

d6	THEIR CURRENT CAREER GOAL IS…
1	Avoiding death on the front lines by any means.
2	Win a glorious engagement to gain promotion.
3	Serve their superior officer's best interests.
4	Make up for a recent disaster they're blamed for.
5	Get a blackmailer or problematic officer killed.
6	Stay with this unit and their beloved troops.

d8	IN AN ENGAGEMENT, THEY…
1	Charge head-on, relying on brute force to win.
2	Dig in, always suspecting ambush or tricks.
3	Send out scouts first before springing their plan.
4	Hate to call for help or admit they're in trouble.
5	Instinctively fall back to prepared defensive points.
6	Favor tricks and feints to lure enemies into peril.
7	React semi-randomly, with poor coordination.
8	Are utterly perfidious, scorning the laws of war.

d10	THEIR WORST CURRENT PROBLEM IS…
1	An underling is gunning to discredit them.
2	Their superior officer thinks they're incapable.
3	Their unit is severely understrength or ill-armed.
4	Their troops are green, mutinous, or diseased.
5	They're suffering from psychological trauma.
6	They've totally lost faith in their own leadership.
7	Their allies or comrades detest them.
8	They're convinced of a dangerous falsehood.
9	Their XO is incompetent but untouchable.
10	Their troops recently committed a serious atrocity.

d4	THEY'VE BEEN IN COMMAND FOR…
1	Brand-new, with few ties developed to the unit.
2	A while, with a moderate degree of trust built.
3	A long time, intimately familiar with the force.
4	Too long, frustrated at the stalling of their career.

d12	THEIR PERSONAL HEADQUARTERS IS…
1	Skeletal, with very few guards or aids to help.
2	Dug in, with as much fortification as possible.
3	A commandeered villa taken from a local.
4	Mobile, run out of a set of command vehicles.
5	Far back from the lines, in peaceful surrounds.
6	Disorderly with confusion or incompetence.
7	Right on the front lines, an active fighting position.
8	Concealed close to the front, relying on stealth.
9	In a former enemy position, seized and held.
10	In rubble or ruins, dug in deep.
11	Behind enemy lines after a recent sudden surge.
12	Burning, after a lucky shot by the enemy.

d20	PERSONAL QUIRKS
1	Pathological hatred of lies and liars.
2	Rigid observance of the laws and customs of war.
3	Hates a religion or ethnicity of the PCs.
4	Absolute sycophant to their superiors.
5	Superb trainer who's a fumbling mess in a fight.
6	Noble lineage or close government family ties.
7	Enjoys issuing experimental weapons and gear.
8	Total indifference to the lives of their subordinates.
9	Brutal martinet obsessed with regulations.
10	Always keeps their word, no matter the cost.
11	Loves and wants to protect a particular place.
12	Is a psychic, probably a precognitive or telepath.
13	Lost one or more body parts to combat.
14	Addict to problematic substance or behavior.
15	Corrupt and taking bribes for favors to locals.
16	Is deeply depressed and lacking motivation.
17	Runs a ruthlessly clean and incorrupt command.
18	Hates explaining anything about an operation.
19	Is a tremendously capable personal combatant.
20	Actually a traitor or deep-cover agent.

The Band Begins To Play

Creating Planetary Wars and Conflicts

If you're going to have a military campaign, you're going to need at least one war. For campaigns focused around a single planetary army, you might need only one war at a time, as the PCs are naturally bound to their nation's armed forces and will fight whichever foe arises. For campaigns that revolve around a mercenary legion, however, you're likely going to need several wars in hand to give the players a choice of venues for their daring band of freebooters.

Creating a war involves several steps. First, you pick a setting for the war, establishing the basic sides in the conflict. Next, you roll tags for the war, determining tropes and motivations that might produce an armed conflict. Then you set up Vital Points for all sides in the war, marking out those places or objectives that spell the difference between victory and defeat in the struggle. Finally, you establish the armed forces that are available to either side, noting down the units that will be involved in the war.

This section will walk you through these steps. By the time you're done, you'll have a sufficient number of bloody conflicts in which to embroil your players and a framework that you can later use to develop missions for PC squad members.

Choosing the Foes

The first step in building a war is deciding who is going to be involved in it. Wars in the 33rd century tend to be intramural affairs contained on a single planet. A full-fledged interstellar invasion is prohibitively difficult for most worlds to launch against a technologically-capable neighbor, so the fighting tends to be between local powers or hostile factions found on the same world. Every now and then some ambitious TL4 world will launch a civilizing mission to a more primitive planet, trusting in their advanced technology and superior culture to cow the local barbarians, but this rarely works out as well as the invaders might desire. Others will provide quiet support for rebel factions on an enemy world, carefully cultivating a homegrown uprising that they might later ride to full control.

At most, a war will usually be contained in a single star system. The necessary weight of spike-drive capable cargo transport makes interstellar logistics a nightmare, but in-system warfare can be supported by slowboats and systems craft that are both cheaper and larger than anything that mounts a TL4 spike drive. Now and then a system with multiple habitable worlds might break down into system-wide warfare that touches all the planets involved.

If you're running a campaign focused around a single planetary army, then this stage is fairly simple. The military the PCs are involved with will be one side of the conflict. Just look at their home planet, pick a likely enemy, and use them. If you're feeling particularly cruel you might choose to pit two or more allies against the PC forces. Don't worry about the exact motivation or *casus belli* involved in the conflict just yet. You'll establish a reason for the war in the next step.

If you're running a mercenary campaign, you'll need to do a little more work. Ideally, you want at least three potential wars for your mercenary legion to choose from. While the details of the conflict can be fleshed out by war tags, you might consider a few basic thematic frames for mercenary contracts. Picking one of the styles given here can help you put together a war that touches on the kind of themes and tropes that interest players in a mercenary campaign.

The "safe bets" are those contracts with no obvious moral complications or overwhelming foes. The legion is hired to do a relatively inoffensive job against an opposition that is not a serious threat to the mercenaries or their employer. It may be a support action in a war against an inferior and morally repugnant foe, or it might be a defensive contract against rebels or terrorists with some sufficiently loathsome creed. No war is clean and free of ambiguity, but a contract

like this is unlikely to keep a legion's command officers up at night worrying about unacceptable losses. In the same vein, contracts like these rarely pay very well, and can turn ugly in a hurry if the situation proves other than advertised.

The "dirty jobs" are contracts that aren't necessarily a severe military threat to the legion but ensure that nobody's going to feel proud of themselves after it's over. Wars against local guerrillas and undeclared bush wars with hostile neighbors are notorious for being these kinds of jobs. The civilian loss of life on these contracts tends to be high, and the usual tactics of the local guerrillas actively encourage their enemies to choose between losing men and killing civilians, the better to force the locals into cooperation with the guerrillas. Treachery, perfidy, sabotage, and assassination make these jobs a misery for the legions that take them. Conversely, they also pay very well, as many planetary governments find it much easier to hire mercenaries to do the killing and take the blame for any "inadequate care for civilian life and property".

The "crusades" are glorious wars of liberation and justice against a monstrous force of oppression. Such billing is traditional in almost all warfare, of course, but these wars might actually have some justification for such a description. Most mercenary commanders laugh at the very idea of a noble-minded legion, but there is an undeniable seduction to the idea of lighting a beacon for right and justice with the holy fire of their guns. A few legions even embrace this image, preferring to imagine themselves as paladins for hire rather than red-handed contract killers. Maintaining this self-image often requires taking jobs like this, even though the pay is usually terrible. Virtue is often thought to be its own reward, after all.

The "heavy" contracts are the opposite of crusades. Someone with a truly vile and detestable reputation has need for some heavies and thugs to take care of a problem for their rule. These employers are held in such universal loathing that many legions will refuse to deal with them out of hand, whether out of moral disgust or practical doubts as to terms of payment. After a few instances of the tantrum-driven crucifixions of losing mercenary units or the ritual sacrifice of inadequately-deferential military commanders, such employers have to offer fabulously high rates of pay to induce any legion to take their work. A few legions are desperate, greedy, or amoral enough to take the coin.

The "gambles" ride the thin line between confidence and folly. Some contracts are easy to turn down, as they're such obviously hopeless causes or unreliable deadbeats that no sensible commander would accept them. Others, however, dwell in that tantalizing zone of possibility, where the job looks too risky to accept easily, but offers enough of a payout to tempt a commander's prudent judgment. New and weak mercenary legions often end up taking gambles because they need the resources to build up their strength, and haven't got enough muscle yet to find many contracts easy to execute. Contracts like these can herald potentially prohibitive losses, though, or even worse, a failure to get paid.

If you're building contracts for a mercenary legion, you might pick one safe bet, one crusade, and then another two contracts from the other categories. Players being players, most groups tend to be attracted to the romance of a noble cause, but it's also important that they have a relatively safer choice as an option if they're feeling unsteady.

Don't worry about setting contract pay or the details of the opposition. For now, just define the employer, the target, the rough level of opposition, and the thematic tone of the contract. You'll fill in the details as you develop the war.

Once you've picked the participants in a war, you need a reason. Even if the motivation is sheer bloody-minded malice, a war starts due to one or more causes, and you need to figure those out before you can properly develop the struggle. Some causes may be public and known to all, while others might be private considerations of state. Even wars for seemingly obvious reasons might have deeper motivations than what the public is allowed to know.

Setting Up the Tags

To determine these reasons, start with at least one roll on the war tags table. This is the main cause of the conflict, though you might roll again to find a secondary cause or some complication to the simple narrative. Each war tag provides a list of sample antagonists, victims, complications, things, and places pertinent to the conflict you're creating.

Antagonists are those who have some reason to want to prosecute the war. If the PCs are on the same side as the aggressors, they might encounter these figures when you need an NPC that's emblematic of the struggle, one who might have demands for the military brass or who could be responsible for hiring mercenaries. If they're opposed, then these NPCs might be enemy targets to be nullified or symbols of the ruthless aggression directed against the allies.

Victims are those poor wretches who've gotten the sharp end of the struggle. Some of them are more sympathetic than others, but the PCs can run into them when you need someone to embody the personal cost of the war and show just what has been lost due to the fighting. Most victims have naturally bitter feelings towards the side they perceive as the aggressors, but most of them are also in such dire straits that they can't afford to turn down help wherever it might come from.

Complications shade the simplicity of the tag, adding in twists and nuances that make the matter more complicated. A just war might turn out to be based on less laudable motives, while an apparent war of ruthless aggression could be justified in a certain light. You can use these complications to soften the lines of responsibility and play up the inherent ambiguity of the struggle for those groups that like that sort of thing in their warfare.

Things are objects particularly pertinent to the fighting. They might be extremely important things that could alter the course of the entire war, or they could just be objects that symbolize the struggle and have some potential importance to the NPCs involved. You can use these things as macguffins for your adventures or props for your battlefield missions.

Places are emblematic locations for the kind of struggle the war tag indicates. They can be turned into enemy outposts, used as the sites of precious supply caches, or made the centerpiece of some mission to seize lost ground. If you need a place to embody the particular flavor of the war, just lift something from the list of places.

One roll on the tag table is sufficient to give you a basic *casus belli*, but you can roll more than once to create a more complicated situation. Just take the elements from both tags and blend them together, creating a military-political situation that might have mingled elements of both tropes. If you want to play up side-themes or secondary causes of the war, you can selectively pull in characters and situations from other tags.

With the basic reason for the war in hand, take a moment to sketch out the specific details of the conflict's beginning. You don't need a lengthy description of this, but you should be able to identify the opposing sides, the event or situation that started the war, and at least one major leadership figure on each side who can serve as an inscrutable font of commands for mercenaries and troops. You might scratch down a few ideas for bit-player NPCs and military personnel, but you don't really need them just yet.

With the antagonists identified, the war's basic focus determined, and a face nominated to represent each side, it's now time to handle the nuts and bolts of Vital Points. Defining these points will provide the details you'll need to actually run the mass combat and mission systems for each war.

Choosing Vital Points and Forces

A war is won or lost by control of **Vital Points**. These points can be literal locations on a map, such as a peak with a commanding field of fire on the only usable pass through a mountain range, or they can be more metaphorical points, such as the support of a high-tech enclave of religious enthusiasts who have an advanced factory complex. Each Vital Point initially belongs to a side, and if all of their points are captured or destroyed, the side is no longer capable of prosecuting the war.

The number of Vital Points to choose for a side depends on the size and the importance of the war to that side. A powerful, hegemonic nation that really isn't all that interested in the fight might have only a few Vital Points, representing the limited reverses that they'll tolerate before they decide the war isn't worth the effort. A hard-pressed group of guerrilla rebels might have only a few Vital Points as well, as they're a fragile force that can't take many losses before they're destroyed. Conversely, a small nation fighting desperately for its survival might have significantly more points that have to be reduced before it collapses.

If the war is small, the nation is small, or the nation's interest is small, give it three or four Vital Points. For a major war between significant planetary powers, give it about six to eight, and for giant conflagrations between superpowers, give it twelve to sixteen. From a pacing standpoint, assume that a campaign will get about one session's worth of play for every two Vital Points involved in the war, counting all sides.

Once you know how many Vital Points each side has, you need to characterize them. You can use the table provided here to give yourself ideas about what each Vital Point should be, or you could create your own definition specific to this particular culture and situation. Most Vital Points fall into one of four categories: military, industrial, political, or social.

Military Vital Points are fortresses, commanding terrain locations, important recruiting or training areas, or significant supply depots. Destroying or capturing these points is critical for weakening an enemy army. Possession of some

fortresses or chokepoints might be necessary in order to reach Vital Points behind those lines.

Industrial Vital Points are factory complexes, major industrial cities, important farm belts, caches of pretech equipment, slave labor pools, or some other source of necessary supplies and equipment. Without these points, an army might find itself unable to keep functioning, or the civilian forces behind it might suffer grave privation.

Political Vital Points tend to be more abstract in their significance. They might be an important noble's family seat, a symbolic capital city, or the financial support of the rich gentry class in a region. Capture or destruction of the point would wound the enemy's political legitimacy and control, making it harder for them to coordinate their resources.

Social Vital Points are linchpins of the local civil society. Important cities, holy sites, the moral support of a revered group of locals, or places of deep symbolic legitimacy for rulers all qualify as social points. They may have little use in a military sense or even be active liabilities to protect, but their support is critical to keeping the populace fighting.

At this stage, all you need to do is define each Vital Point and decide whether it is something that can be captured or not. A city can be reasonably captured, or a critical chokepoint held by a new master, but some social groups might not reasonably turn their support to a convenient conqueror, and a pretech factory and its keepers might be too fragile to take intact. If you can't imagine the Vital Point being made to usefully serve a new master, mark it as destroyed if it's lost. Otherwise, opposing forces can capture it, and it must be recovered before the enemy can be truly defeated.

Also, you don't need to worry about assigning these Vital Points to exact map locations. If it's all that critical to give a Vital Point an exact spot on a planetary map, you can do so once the war becomes relevant to the campaign. The strategic mass-combat rules don't rely on maps for the movement of forces, so only bother to site such things if it's satisfying to you.

EXAMPLE VITAL POINT DETAILS

D8	TYPE	D6	THIS POINT...	D6	IS VITAL BECAUSE IT...
1-2	Military	1	Elaborate fortification	1	Commands a strategic transit route
		2	Site with fine natural defenses	2	Would savage any advance past it
		3	Ancient or new-made ruins	3	Has supplies to support an offensive
		4	Newly-erected strongpoint	4	Is a major recruit mustering point
		5	Recently-seized outpost	5	Is an operational base for a major command
		6	Transit chokepoint	6	Is threatening an enemy position
3-4	Industrial	1	Factory complex	1	Produces a critical part or supply
		2	Heavily industrialized town	2	Is developing dangerous new weaponry
		3	Research or training center	3	Provides repair services to the army
		4	Supply depot transit nexus	4	Has a crucial store of military supplies
		5	Community of skilled workers	5	Is only source of a vital component
		6	Mine, cropland, or resource site	6	Is producing morale-critical consumer goods
5-6	Social	1	Major population center	1	It has historical value to morale
		2	Sacred site	2	Is a symbol of regime legitimacy
		3	Traditional seat of rulership	3	Is a major source of recruits
		4	Site of famous former victory	4	Steadies and calms the populace
		5	Group of revered personages	5	Is a symbol of normal life going on
		6	Place of safety and sanctuary	6	Is important to neutral or allied neighbors
7-8	Political	1	Home of major nobility	1	Its owners will turn on the regime if it falls
		2	Town of regime supporters	2	Its owners are providing vital moral support
		3	City of dubious loyalties	3	It commands large sums of money
		4	Capital of region or polity	4	Vital governmental functions happen there
		5	Loyalty of regional gentry	5	Votes or regime officials come from there
		6	Oligarch's business holding	6	Its security was promised to a critical ally

Mustering the Forces

With the war salted with a sufficient number of Vital Points, you're ready for the last step of the process. You need to determine what military forces are involved in the war and scale the conflict to a level that the PC side can meaningfully participate in. Of course, if you're running a classical sandbox game there are doubtless many wars racking the cosmos, but unfathomably vast struggles and tiny border skirmishes just aren't relevant enough to your needs to make them worth the time to detail.

Start by identifying the PC-allied side of the conflict, either the patron polity of the regular-army PC squad or the employer side of a mercenary campaign's conflict. Use the army creation guidelines provided later in the book to create the army for that polity, roughing it out into a certain number of units and their corresponding Strengths.

You can follow the same process to create the army for the opposing side and simply use the enemy demographics as the base for the army. While helps keep things rooted in realistic numbers, it's important to understand what these numbers will mean for the war you play out at the table. Badly mismatched forces might not make for much of a campaign, as the allied side steamrolls the opposition or is crushed despite the best PC heroics.

As a general rule, equally-matched forces will generally result in allied victories unless the PCs make a habit of botching their missions. The extra edge offered by PC success will usually be enough to overcome the enemy forces and inflict more damage on them than the allied side suffers in turn. If the allied force is more than 50% larger than the enemy, it's going to be a walkover for the PCs.

Enemy forces 50% larger than the allied side, however, can make for much closer odds. The allies in that situation are unlikely to have a chance without consistent PC excellence in completing their missions. A botched battle or two can leave the allied forces critically weakened and unable to defend their Vital Points against the enemy onslaught. Any polity on the business end of such a war would have to be very desperate to fight it, and any mercenary legion that can't bring its employer above this ratio is apt to demand extremely high pay.

If you're creating wars for a mercenary campaign, keep the PC legion in mind when determining the strength of each side. An evenly-matched fight might turn into a cakewalk if the PCs bring a strong legion to the field. Instead, scale things so that the employers have an obvious reason to need the substantial outside assistance of a mercenary legion. Even with the legion's added strength, the allied side shouldn't have more than 50% more power than their opponents if the war is to be an interesting conflict.

Also, be careful about creating too many units on either side. A force with more units than its opponent has an advantage, as they're able to deliver more attacks than can be comfortably met, and can keep a more fluid reserve to meet an enemy incursion. A side shouldn't have more than 2 or 3 units more than its opponent unless that disparity is an intentional part of the war.

It might be difficult to explain why two very mismatched foes in size and population could still have an interesting war. In such a case, the larger polity just might not be all that committed to the fight, and is willing to extend only a portion of its armed forces to the cause. If those forces are repulsed and the political Vital Points that sustain the fight are neutralized, the larger nation might shrug and give the war up as a bad bargain. A lack of political will, a corrupt military, a strong sympathetic presences in the enemy population, or other similar explanations can be used to provide a reason for more closely-matched struggles.

Mercenary Contract Costs

To determine how much an employer might be willing to offer a PC mercenary legion for their services, follow these steps.

First, decide how much of the legion the employer might want to hire, whether it's just one unit or the entire legion. They might like to have the whole crew, but for small wars or a poor employer, they might not have the funds.

Next, set the basic monthly contract value to the monthly active duty cost for the units they want to hire. If they can't afford to pay this much then the legion can't afford to fight for them and they're not really a plausible employer. You might dangle a few crusader-type choices in front of them anyway, where the PCs actually pay to fight for a worthy cause.

Now add 25%. This is the normal profit margin a legion will want before they bother to look at the contract, since they'll doubtless need to hire reinforcements and replace lost equipment at the end of the engagement.

Increase or decrease the profit margin by the steps given in the adjacent table. Bad clients will usually need to offer more money than reliable ones, and dangerous contracts need more sweetener than easy garrison duty. Desperate clients will offer the sweetest rates, but deposed regimes rarely pay their bills.

Profit Margin Modifiers	
CIRCUMSTANCE	MODIFIER
The client's enemy is currently winning	+25%
The client has a history of merc abuse	+50%
The client's existence is at stake	+75%
The client is notably impoverished	-25%
The client offers rich plunder	-50%

During the course of the combat, a stable and successful client will pay their monthly bills on time. A client that's losing the fight or one that doesn't overly respect its mercenaries can be tardier about payment.

Each month, roll 1d4. If the number rolled is equal or less than the number of Vital Points the client has lost in the last war turn, the legion's payment is delayed. For capricious or impoverished clients, a roll of 1 always means a delay, and for maniacal god-tyrants and the hopelessly pressed, a roll of 1 or 2 always delays.

The next month, roll again for any delayed payments. If the roll for a payment keeps failing, the mercs may not get their pay until the completion of the war, assuming the client wins.

War Tags

Wars start for a reason, however petty, and these war tags offer some practical possibilities. Most wars require only one reason to justify the fighting, and you can pick one to suit the particular social situation on a planet.

If you want a more complex situation, just pick or roll two or more tags and mix them together. It may be the nation thinks it's fighting for one reason, but the politicians are actually motivated by deeper goals, or it may be that several causes have combined to goad the people to war.

D20	WAR TAG
1	**Border Dispute** between polities
2	**Culture War** against an intolerable way of life
3	**Curtailed Rival** of a worried local hegemon
4	**Ethnic Homeland** craved by a rebel group
5	**Forced Conflict** coerced by an outside power
6	**Forced Migration** demanded by necessity
7	**Hired War** purchased by an outside power's coin
8	**National Vigor** of a polity spoiling for a fight
9	**National Honor** outraged by an insult or crime
10	**Political Distraction** desired by the assailant
11	**Political Restoration** of some usurped rule
12	**Razzia** made by a raiding or plundering power
13	**Religious Expansion** by a militant faith
14	**Religious Schism** within a formerly united creed
15	**Resource Struggle** to gain control of a source
16	**Revanchism** and the recapture of lost lands
17	**Safe Haven** given to rebels or guerrillas
18	**Supremacism** of race or culture
19	**Territorial Conquest** for the glory of the nation
20	**Trade War** turned bloody over economic disputes

Border Dispute

They fight over a line on the map, one side claiming land that the other vows is their own, and both usually having some colorable defense to their claim. Sometimes this struggle is fueled by valuable resource deposits or significant populations in the disputed area, but other times the quarrels can spark over useless rocks in the ocean or a stretch of barren desert. In the latter case, border disputes are often pretexts to cover a less convenient reason for struggle; you might choose to roll again to find the real reason behind the fight.

Antagonists: Bordermarch lord, Troublesome local leader, Once-governor of the disputed land, Refugee clan head

Victims: Fought-over village leader, Historian with unwanted evidence, Dweller too close to the new border, Refugee from losing side

Complications: Someone's falsifying evidence to provoke the strife, The border is based on a landmark that moves, The border's shared with a third party, The local dwellers hate both sides

Things: Evidence of the original border, Cache of insurgent gear, Buried treasure of dead residents, Proof of the real reason for the fighting

Places: Abandoned fortification, Border-straddling town, Local hill refuge, Border watchtower

Culture War

The enemies differ over extremely basic cultural or economic values and worldviews. One or both sides embrace principles that the other finds monstrous or loathsome, and popular pressure forces conflict between the two groups. These values may be entwined in the local religions, but they tend to pervade the entire culture and are held proudly as badges of identity by members of each group. Decency requires that they crush each others' filthy ways.

Antagonists: Guardian of tradition, Zealous young moral crusader, Grim-jawed reformer, Cynically hypocritical leader

Victims: Practitioner of a forbidden custom, Guardian of execrated traditions, Merchant beggared by a change of economic models, Family of a martyr for a belief

Complications: One side has more appealing ideals but more repulsive leadership, Both sides embrace repugnant beliefs, The differences seem utterly trivial to outsiders but have deep symbolic meaning to locals, An initially noble cause has fallen into cynical exploitation

Things: Symbolic artifact of a way of life, Resource vital for maintaining a custom, A coffle of slaves or other persons crucial to the dispute, Propaganda material for one side

Places: Fortified temple or cultural shrine, Mass demonstration for or against a culture, Marketplace or workplace for cultural practice in dispute, Smashed ruins of a great shrine dedicated to a belief

Curtailed Rival

One of the parties involved has always been a secondary power compared to the other, but recent success and expansion is making them a real threat to the stronger polity. Rulers in the latter society have decided that it is best to crush their rivals now, before they get strong enough to be a real threat. Not uncommonly, this decision is only reached long after the point where such quelling is as easy as its authors had hoped. The chastisement may focus simply on destroying those industries or resources which made the smaller group a threat, or it may be a more thorough annexation or extermination of the threatening upstart.

Antagonists: Cynical foreign minister, Ambitious glory-hound general, Avaricious oligarch, Minority leader collaborationist in the target nation

Victims: Bewildered border guard, Concerned spy for the target nation, Family with old ties to target nation, Kidnapped foreign dignitary

Complications: The rival really was planning to sucker-punch their old hegemon, The rival's being set up by a third party, The rival is much stronger than expected, The rival has a major ally ready to act

Things: Evidence of a false-flag attack by one side, Codes for warning of an impending attack, Proof of a major figure's personal interest in a war, Plans for the new tech the invaders want destroyed

Places: Construction or research site for a dramatic new technology, Site of some former triumph by the old hegemon, Vital mine or resource processing facility, Target nation's newly-built industrial center

Ethnic Homeland

One of the parties to the struggle craves an ethnic homeland for their people, one where they can be ruled by their own kind in accordance with their own ways. This homeland may be based strictly on ethnic divisions, or it may instead be focused on minority religions or cultural practices. The majority party is unlikely to acquiesce in the abandonment of its rule, to say nothing of the non-ethnic locals living in the territory. These wars often take the form of long, grinding guerrilla conflicts, though some groups are strong enough to field actual armies, especially with a little help from outside parties.

Antagonists: Ambitious ethnarch dreaming of independence, Hereditary ruler in exile, Zealous racial purist, Determined survivor of past pogroms

Victims: Unlucky local of the wrong ethnicity, Beleaguered peacekeeper, Desperate refugee camp director, Member of a now-dangerous inter-ethnic marriage

Complications: The separatists' reasoning is extremely defensible, They're supported by a neighbor who wants a buffer, Their homeland is extremely valuable terrain, Their desired homeland is shared by another group

Things: Historical evidence for their land rights, Proof of a separatist or government massacre, Vital supplies for refugees, Cache of arms for separatist guerrillas

Places: Site holy to the separatists or other locals, Historical battlefield important to the separatists, A once friendly town now divided by ethnicity, Barrier to keep separatists or other locals out

Forced Conflict

The aggressors in this war don't want to fight it, but some entity beyond their power to resist is insisting that they attack. They might be strong-armed into it by a much more powerful neighbor who wants to see them deal with a troublesome polity, or they might be under the control of powerful offworld concerns, or they may just be forced into it by cultural or religious precepts that they obey without joy. If a way can be found to lift the pressure, the war is likely to end rapidly, but otherwise it may go on to an extent that satisfies no one but a pitiless and distant master.

Antagonists: Machiavellian transnational oligarch, Fanatical religious leader, Scheming hegemonic ruler, Ambitious general with little civilian oversight

Victims: Diplomat stymied by an outside power, Military officer who doesn't want to fight, Journalist digging for the war's real story, Powerful rival of the war's true motivator

Complications: Neither army really wants to commit to battle, The war's instigator is under time pressure to get the bloodshed going before they're deposed, The real target isn't the attacked nation but some person or group in it, The war's instigator is deluded about how easy it will be to win

Things: Proof of the war's real instigator, The macguffin that the instigator really wants seized or destroyed, Supplies left cached by stunned defenders, Control codes lost in the initial confusion

Places: A once-peaceful border town in chaos, A sullen and resentful base full of conscripts, A victory parade of enforced patriotism, An enclave or building of the coercing power

Forced Migration

The attacking party feels forced to do so, as their former nation was driven from their old lands. The entire polity is on the move, compelled to invade a neighbor due to pressure from a more powerful conqueror, an environmental catastrophe in their former lands, or some natural disaster that is rendering their old home uninhabitable. Domed cities on otherwise uninhabitable worlds often suffer this cause of war when the ancient repair mechanisms start to break down.

Antagonists: Desperate leader ready to risk all, Hard-bitten scrap engineer-king, Brutal nomadic warlord, Reluctant ruler who can see no solution but war

Victims: Refugee from overrun territory, Defector who tries to find a different way, Bitter survivor of the initial wave, Grim defender of the existing culture or nation

Complications: The migration's impetus is likely to hit the invaded nation next, A faction of the invaders wants to try peaceful coexistence, Some locals are actually related to the invaders by ethnic or religious bonds, The invasion is on a very strict schedule or else the disaster will overcome it

Things: A weapon against the migration's cause, Supplies desperately needed by the hungry invaders, Proof of local complicity with the invaders or innocence of it, A device to fix the problem causing the invasion

Places: A fortress blocking a vital invasion path, A stronghold of local holdouts, A village uneasily under new rulership, A blasted wasteland ruined by the invasion's compelling reason

Hired War

One side of the war has been hired into attacking the other. This may be a simple case of bribery, with the rulers of one side being paid off by some interested outside power, or it might be a more complicated matter of diplomatic alliances and shared interest in another nation's downfall. The common people may or may not be aware of the real motive behind the fighting, but the rulers usually prefer to keep such sordid details out of the common eye, often crediting some wholly different reason why they simply must launch their attack.

Antagonists: Soulless mercenary captain, Ruthless oligarch warmonger, Bitter exile financing the war, Sinister diplomat arranging the fighting

Victims: Abandoned mercenary, Shocked businessman with interests in both nations, Betrayed diplomat who thought war wouldn't come, Member of the group the warmongers are really trying to hurt

Complications: The warmongers are sending "volunteers" to the fight, The defenders don't dare openly accuse the warmongers of inciting the war, The attackers are suffering more than the defenders due to the war, The warmongers intend to take over both weakened countries at the end

Things: New shipment of weapons from the warmongers, Critical payment in precious substances, Proof of the warmongers' interests in the fight, Military hardware undeniably from the warmongers

Places: Suddenly-expanded training camp of the invaders, Social club catering to the inciter's troops, Factory repurposed badly to make military goods, Sullen and joyless "patriotic demonstration"

National Honor

The filthy foe has done something unforgivable to offend the decent sensibilities of the attacking nation. Brutal mistreatment of diplomats, savagery against innocent tourists, intentional insult of religious figures, or some other act has grievously wounded the hearts of the aggressor's people. Sometimes the local elites may not actually want a war at all, but must do something to satisfy the popular fury lest they be deposed or worse. At other times the crime is purely manufactured by the attacking nation, the better to stir up righteous wrath in the hearts of their countrymen.

Antagonists:	Enraged victim of the offending insult, Grimly honor-bound ruler, Cynical schemer playing on local passions, Exile seeking to use the insult to avenge their banishment
Victims:	Insufficiently enthusiastic local, Supposed collaborator, Foreign artist, Diplomat in fear for their life
Complications:	The insult was a frame job by an outside enemy, The insult was all a terrible misunderstanding, The insult was intentional to provoke a war on the defender's schedule, The insult was wholly justified
Things:	Proof the insult was falsified by someone, The one thing the defenders can give to assuage the offense, Something precious to be sacrificed to honor's demands, The remains of the victims of the insult
Places:	Cultural shrine to the glorious dead, Site of a historical victory, Supposed site of the dire insult, Village burnt out by enraged invaders

National Vigor

A nation grows strong, too strong for its current place in the world. It chafes under old restrictions and pushes itself against the limits its old superiors have placed on it. Those agreements that were grudgingly tolerated in days of weakness now seem to be unendurable insults to their national sovereignty, and it is vital that they be thrown down. Such rumbustious new powers are often quick to turn on weaker neighbors, demonstrating their newfound importance in the wreckage of countries that were once thought their equals in weakness. At times such a nation might go too far, imagining itself great enough to challenge a planetary superpower that it thinks has grown senile or decadent in its old age.

Antagonists:	Brash young king, Zealous general, Market-seeking colonialist, Dictator looking for fresh glory
Victims:	Luckless conscript soldier, Trapped enemy citizen, War-taxed merchant, Parent of dead draftees
Complications:	The nation really has been unfairly oppressed in the near past, The nation has a new weapon or pretech relic that they think will give victory, The nation is critically deluded about its chances, The eager vigor is all in one section or subgroup of the population
Things:	Rare parts for the country's new industries, Symbolic relic of old oppression, Supplies needed by locals driven to desperation by war taxes, Military hardware seized from the unsuspecting target
Places:	Newly-constructed industrial site, Mass demonstration to support the war, Conscription and training center, Newly-captured town of sullen locals

Political Distraction

Some political scandal or popular uprising threatens the security of a nation's elite, and so they find it helpful to distract the public with a convenient little war. Such fights are almost always picked with a clearly inferior foe, the better to ensure that the ensuing struggle will be a victorious feather in their collective cap. Unfortunately for the attackers, the same problems and conflicts that forced the distraction in the first place often bleed into the conduct of the war, making a sure thing less certain by far.

Antagonists:	Failing dictator needing an enemy, Unpopular elected president, Ruler struggling to hold together a fractious nation, Warlord in need of plunder for their lieutenants
Victims:	Political enemy of the ruler, Unhelpfully honest journalist, Blindsided political supporter suddenly thrust into war, Member of the opposition party drafted into a suicide squad
Complications:	The people eagerly support but will turn violently on the ruler at the first real setback, The leader actually is a friend of the new enemy but was forced into the war by a desperate opposition, The attacking nation is just not taking the war seriously, Both sides welcome the distraction
Things:	Blackmail material on the ruler, Army supplies stolen by political enemies, Plunder used to bribe political rivals, Material embezzled by an incompetent party-supporter general
Places:	Elaborate showpiece monument, Luxurious town for allied politicians and their families, News station pumping out war propaganda, Secret getaway where inner-circle politicians cut deals

Political Restoration

The aggressors once ruled their current enemy, either holding them directly as a province or keeping them firmly Finlandized within their sphere of influence. At some time in the past, their foe broke away, however, and now it's time to bring them back within the sphere of civilization. Significant minorities of the former ruler's population often remain within the victim, which often provides an easy excuse for "protective intervention".

Antagonists: Ruler drunk on history, Oligarch with long-lost claims on property, Leader confident of a warm welcome from the people, "Oppressed minority" agitator from the defending country

Victims: Ill-treated local from invader's ethnicity, Pro-peace political rival of the leader, Local now treated as a "rebel citizen" by occupying forces, Local caught in crossfire between partisans and regulars

Complications: The remnant population in the invaded country is eagerly cooperating with the invaders, The remnant are only being accused of cooperating, The invaded country is actually miserably governed, The invaders are hindering themselves with fastidious rules of engagement and propaganda efforts

Things: Mobile anti-air missile truck for "volunteers", Supplies for "traitorous" minority being starved, Cultural treasure of the invaders kept by the breakaway nation, List of secret enemy sympathizers

Places: Former seat of rule during the last dominion, Ruins of a monument to the former rulers, Border town once sharply divided between nations, Old battlefield that has become a current battlefield

Razzia

One side is making a frankly rapacious raid on the other, determined to seize as much material wealth as possible. Some cultures may use such wars as their primary sources of sources of slaves and other finished goods, while others view them as convenient pressure releases for excess numbers of impoverished warriors or restless young men. Territorial claims aren't usually made during razzias, and the more far-sighted plunderers may intentionally avoid starving out their prey or brutalizing them beyond their ability to regrow a sufficient harvest for next time.

Antagonists: Rapacious warlord, Oligarch owed money by the enemy, Leader desperate for resources to patch up a failed economic plan, General contemptuous of their weakling neighbor

Victims: Plundered farmer, City-dweller driven into the country, Local enslaved to help carry loot, Villager who is the sole survivor of an attempted resistance

Complications: The defender is used to these raids and feels hopelessly unable to resist, The razzia is exceptionally vicious and seeks complete genocide, The razzia is to collect legitimate debts the hard way, The invaders don't just want these goods they desperately need them

Things: Cultural treasure plundered by raiders, Hostages dragged along, A cache of goods hidden from the enemy, A priceless treasure the invaders seek

Places: Burnt-over crop field, Road choked with refugees, Smashed and looted factory, Burning city

Religious Expansion

A burning faith must be carried on the edge of the sword, and at least one of the parties involved is just the army to carry it. An explosive new religion or radical religious reformation has provoked a group into conquest and proselytization. The infidel natives must be crushed and brought to the True Way, whatever that may be, for the greater glory of God. Incidentally, it also usually works out for the greater glory of the conquering nation, but such points rarely inspire great introspection.

Antagonists: Purifying reformer-by-force, Cynical imperialist ruler, Wild-eyed prophet of future glory, Determined peacemaker by enforced conformity

Victims: Priest of a rival faith, Heretical anti-war cleric of the invading faith, Local who gave the wrong answers to a religious question, Civilian who failed to show adequate piety

Complications: The "religion" is an atheistic philosophy or ideology, The religion is backed up with a conformity-inducing technology, The neighboring nations have active cells of collaborating believers, The neighboring nations fear and hate all members of the faith whether they're violent or not

Things: Problematic original sacred text, Relic of a martyred saint, Precious treasure donated to the faith, Pretech relic used to further the religion's goals

Places: The ruined shell of a native church, A newly-built shrine to the invading faith, Factory now under ecclesiastical management, Re-education camp dedicated to proselytizing the conquered populace

Religious Schism

The two sides share faiths so similar than an outsider may have a hard time distinguishing between them. The locals don't suffer this confusion; the differences are so crucial and so important that they must be settled in blood. One side may have been founded by a group of heretics or the fissure may have formed naturally as the faith evolved differently across different regions of the world.

Antagonists: Minority religious leader with the majority army, Rejected heir to a clerical dynasty, Leader of a populous but oppressed sect, Diplomat inciting the war on behalf of his employer's interests

Victims: Moderate cleric of either side, Believer in an unrelated faith, Scholar caught in the crossfire, Keeper of a shrine of the wrong faith

Complications: The schism is a thinly-disguised excuse for a different and baser disagreement, The enemies much prefer to convert rather than kill heretics, A revered holy figure could resolve the dispute but for some reason will not do so, Both sects have a history of bloody violence against each other

Things: Relic prized by both sects, Contraband goods forbidden by a sect, Sanctified pretech weapons, Sure evidence of the impiety of an important official

Places: Mass grave of heretics, Ruined church, Desecrated graveyard, Burnt-out city of the wrong faith

Resource Struggle

Something crucial to industrial success or even bare survival is at stake in the war. Mineral deposits, agricultural land, habitable terrain, or alien artifacts might be at the core of the struggle, with both sides seeking to obtain or maintain control of the resource. Some of these struggles are old wars over often-exchanged territory, while others are suddenly sparked when offworlders find some newly-discovered treasure for the locals to quarrel over.

Antagonists: Influential mining tycoon, Offworlder prospector, Former owner of the territory, Rapacious dictator

Victims: Resource extraction worker driven from the site, Ignored environmentalist, Resource technician now targeted by the invaders, New process developer who accidentally sparked the war

Complications: The invaders need the resources for some grand scheme, The resources are worthless locally but precious to outworlders, The resources are culturally precious to one side and mere economic loot to the other, The resources are wasting rapidly and will be gone soon

Things: A massive lode of the resource, Tech needed to extract the resource, A map to a cache of the resource, A stockpile of the resource stolen by invaders or embezzled by locals

Places: Used-up resource extraction site, Burnt-out resource processing facility, Industry building reliant on the resource, Work camp with "volunteer" extraction workers

REVANCHISM

The aggressors lost something and now they want to take it back. Land is the traditional cause, with the assailants convinced that the territory is theirs by right and must be taken at all costs. Population clusters can also provoke hostilities, with a "motherland" seeking to reclaim jurisdiction over large minority groups in foreign territories. The cause of the war may come from recent claims, or it may be an inherited struggle begun centuries ago.

Antagonists: Bitter leader of now-minority group in the lost territory, Religious leader with old scores to settle, A dictator seeking distraction in old wounds, Ruler incited by newly-obtained tech or power

Victims: Minority now viewed as traitorous collaborators, Refugee from disputed territory, Local dragooned into an army because of their ancestry, Hapless businessman with holdings on the disputed land

Complications: The land is just an excuse for conquest, The land is worthless but possession is a point of honor, The land is ridiculously well-fortified because of old wars, Neither side really wants the land they just don't want the other side to have it for strategic reasons

Things: Evidence proving the land was abandoned, Proof of an atrocity against a minority group, Plans of a vital border fortification in the disputed area, Lists of local collaborators with the enemy

Places: A war-battered fortress of former ages, A town built in the style of its former rulers, A monument to the glorious liberation of the land, A grand temple on sacred land once occupied by the old ruler's faith

SAFE HAVEN

The defending polity is a safe haven for something intolerable to the attackers. They may be acting as patrons of an exiled royal pretender, supporters of cross-border terrorists or raiders, or a stronghold of some bitterly-hated ethnicity or organization. The attackers are determined to force the destruction of the peril or the collapse of its patron nation.

Antagonists: Noble threatened by exiled pretender, Border governor scourged by guerrillas, Genocide-obsessed tyrant, Paranoid monarch seeing plotters over the border

Victims: Natives forced to work with the guerrillas, Refugees from "contained areas", Aid worker mistaken for a terrorist, Citizen of a guerrilla-controlled border town

Complications: The troublesome group really is unaffiliated with the defenders and acting against their will, The common people hate the troublemakers, The troublemakers have critical blackmail or leverage on the defending nation's rulers, The troublesome group secretly wanted to provoke this war for their own ends

Things: Cache of hidden guerrilla supplies, List of supporters, Symbol of rule stolen by a pretender, Medical supplies needed by wounded refugees or guerrillas

Places: Hidden base of operations, Village terrified of both soldiers and guerrillas, Burnt-out home of "known collaborators", Mass grave of those on the wrong side

SUPREMACISM

One or both sides are convinced that they are deserving of domination by natural right. Their purity of blood, genetic virtue, divine blessing, rational civilization, or impeccable aesthetic entitles them to glorious conquest. This may be the latest outbreak of an age-old antagonism, or it might be the product of a more recent revival of supremacist thought. On some worlds, the victims might tacitly agree that their attackers really are superior, and merely differ on the degree of license that permits.

Antagonists: Self-ordained ubermensch monarch, Genetically-augmented ruler, Cynical peddler of empire, Nation-building idealist

Victims: Official with secret "bad blood", Refugee from destroyed community, Local ruler forced to cooperate by threats to their people, Secret resister of the ideology

Complications: Supremacist forces commit an atrocity even they can't openly admit, Neighboring nations largely agree with one of the sides involved, The attacked group has a deeply repugnant society, The invaders really do have gengineered or alien augmentation beyond human norms

Things: Gene therapy stim that augments the user, Cultural relic that is inspirational to a side, Evidence of an atrocity, Plans for "controlling" the "inferior population"

Places: Town with its population replaced by the invaders, Concentration or re-education camp, Mass rally for "civilization", Fortified outpost for controlling the locals

Territorial Conquest

The land in question may or may not have any economic or cultural value, but the attacker wants it and the defender has it. A young empire might bridle at its narrow borders, or an older one might wish to lay claim on lands now occupied by "barbarians" or "failed states". Even random rocky flyspecks in the sea might be the cause of bloody violence in order to maintain national honor or defend against encroaching interests.

Antagonists: Young monarch hungry for glory, Oligarch planning a use for the land, Border general who wants an war for promotion, Diplomat who barters the land away without asking its current owner

Victims: Hapless locals in the combat zone, Mineral surveyor caught in the field, Refugees driven out of "encroaching settlements", Deposed local ruler

Complications: The land grab is worrying the other nations in the area, The locals are a dangerous military force in their own right, The territory is valuable but only one side knows the truth about it, The territory was worthless not long ago but has become valuable due to mineral strikes or new industry there

Things: Secret mineral strike, Treasures of the land's original occupants, Battered survey pod proving original ownership, Lethal device that could render much of the land uninhabitable

Places: Newly-discovered pretech ruins, Recently-built factory, Wildcat military base built up suddenly, Graveyard or other site of emotional importance to one of the sides

Trade War

At least one side of the struggle is not playing fairly at trade as far as the other is concerned, and the matter is to be resolved by war. The defender may be refusing to allow the attacker's merchants to trade in their markets, or may be applying punitive tariffs at the border, or may be choosing to conduct vital trade with a bitter enemy of the attacker. Most such wars only go on until the defender chooses to change their policy, and are most often conducted when the targets are too weak to put up serious resistance to such violent pressures.

Antagonists: Scheming merchant-prince, Grasping diplomat, Protectionist union leader, Offworlder far trader

Victims: Suddenly-beggared merchant, Collapsed local manufacturer, Worker thrown out of work, Refugee from the industrial zones under attack

Complications: The invaders are angry at too-cheap goods being sold to other nations, The invaders want to sell something reprehensible to the defenders, The invaders really just want to seize the defender's industry for slave labor use, The invaders want revenge for some sale that went very wrong

Things: The cheaper or better goods that started the fight, Cache of sinister contraband goods, List of smugglers conducting illicit trade, Secret tech that allows vastly superior manufactures

Places: Massive cargo ship now stuck in port, Factory with a few underemployed workers, Store filled with cheap goods, Slave-labor work camp

Quick Civilian Generation

Every war has its walking casualties and luckless bystanders, and GMs often need to generate a few of these people to help round out a battlefield encounter or provide some extra flavor for a session set behind the front lines.

The NPCs described by this one-roll table are the survivors, the hard-bitten men and women who've found some practical use for their capacities this close to a war zone. Some of them might be found right on the battlefield, albeit usually out of the misfortunes of war rather than any intent to be that close to the fighting.

Many entries refer to an area's rulers. This usually refers to the military force that has dominance over an area, as whatever the civilian government might be, it tends to rapidly make way for the dictates of men with rifles.

d6 — Their family is...

d6	Their family is...
1	Dead, victims of the fighting.
2	Split, divided in loyalties between the sides.
3	Scattered, their current conditions unknown.
4	Hiding or otherwise laying low from soldiers.
5	Fighting as guerillas, saboteurs, or soldiers.
6	Perfectly safe and secure where they are.

d8	Toward the local rulers, they feel...
1	Cold indifference, one master as good as another
2	Hatred, blaming them for some evil they endured
3	Avarice, looking to rob them for personal profit
4	Desperation, seeking to get vital aid from them
5	Loyalty, sharing their cause and serving with faith
6	Collaboration, thinking it best for now at least
7	Affiliation, feeling doomed if the rulers fall or flee
8	Treachery, feigning loyalty for profit or hate

d10	Their worst current problem is...
1	The rulers are demanding too much from them
2	Bitterly resentful neighbors or jealous rival
3	They secretly committed a grave crime recently
4	A local military official wants them dead or worse
5	They're in desperate need of money or supplies
6	A loved one is in great danger or is very sick
7	Someone expects some goods they can't provide
8	They're cut off from their resources by events
9	They desperately need to get out of here quickly
10	Loved ones have gotten separated by fighting

d4	Their age is...
1	Too young to be alone in this situation.
2	Of military age, perhaps dodging conscription.
3	Middle-aged, though still young enough to fight.
4	Too old to be of much use on the battlefield.

d12	Their best resource right now is...
1	They know a trade very useful in this situation
2	They have money, saved or stolen or earned
3	They have relatives or friends among the rulers
4	Extreme beauty and personal charm
5	Surprising aptitude for violence and threats
6	A number of heavily-armed friends oblige them
7	They have a secret way in to important places
8	They have blackmail on local officials
9	They have extensive criminal contacts
10	They're a spy supported by a rival force
11	They can acquire materials the rulers need badly
12	They can run trade past enemy lines

d20	Personal Quirks
1	Has a visible war wound that healed badly
2	Always cadging cigarettes or small trifles
3	Perpetually disheveled or unkempt
4	Always exhausted; has nightmares or insomnia
5	Flinches at every loud noise
6	Constantly trying to trade small goods
7	Missing a limb or has a notable scar
8	Feigns lack of language around disliked figures
9	Wears scavenged bits of castoff uniforms
10	Lives underground or has meetings there
11	Grimly carries on as if the war wasn't there
12	Devoted to a small pet animal they found
13	Addicted to a thing that blocks out the war
14	Insists on living in a now-dangerous home
15	Has a notably contagious venereal disease
16	Always seen with a young relative
17	Affects a totally mercenary demeanor, true or not
18	Always moving, hates to meet twice in one place
19	Only deals with those referred by trusted friends
20	Lies shamelessly for the smallest advantage

An Example of War Creation

The GM is dicing up conflicts for the Proteus Sector, and has lighted on Fanshaw as an appealing prospect for bloodshed. The planet is ruled by a gengineered noble caste which is served by a much larger class of unaugmented humans known as the "gentry", and a genetically-disadvantaged working caste known as the "commoners", or "proles".

The obvious tension between the gengineered Ascendant and the unaugmented gentry is reason enough for a war, but the GM decides to roll to figure out what eventually sets it off. It appears that it's a Culture War. It seems that the gentry aren't simply dissatisfied with the division of the planet's spoils, they genuinely oppose the brutal eugenic supremacism of the Ascendants, self-interested as they may be.

The GM quickly sketches out some figures for the fight. For the Antagonist, they paint up Lady Sophia Arundel, of the ruling House Arundel, a gengineered Joybringer-line Ascendant with inhuman charm and a complete absence of morality. She's recently undertaken a monstrous plan involving hapless commoners, though the GM doesn't decide just what that plan might be yet. For a Victim, the GM draws up Thomas Bright, a simple commoner engineered for low intelligence and minimized aggression, albeit with an unusual talent for painting. The GM will insert him when they need an example of the kind of people who are being hurt both by the war and by their existing state in society.

For Complications, the GM decides that the rebels are being supported by another polity in the sector, the Malkite Synod, and also by a splinter group of Ascendants who have rejected the supremacism of their kindred. This support isn't enough to tip the balance by itself, but it gives the rebels a fighting chance and provides the PCs with some unusual NPCs to encounter on their missions.

For Places, the GM creates a Victorian church, albeit with the iconography a mixture of Anglicanism and open worship of their idealized Ascendant nobility. For Things, the GM picks a large supply of control chemicals that certain commoners were gengineered into needing for reproduction. The commoners obviously want these chemicals, but their gentry leaders have reservations about allowing these genetically-damaged men and women to reproduce freely.

With those details in hand for later mission use, the GM now needs to set up Vital Points for both the rebels and loyalists. The GM decides that this is going to be a planetary uprising, with the entire globe consumed by the war. To keep things manageable, though, the struggle of interest will just be in one region of the planet, in the province of York. All told, each side will need eight Vital Points, and the GM expects the ensuing battle to eat up about eight sessions of play before a winner is clear.

The GM uses the table earlier in the chapter and their own sense of importance to pick out eight Vital Points for the loyalists: the provincial capital of York, the Greenwich armory, the Aberswythe mountain pass, the sprawling prole-city of Coventry, the confidence of the wavering rebel-sympathetic Earl of Bridgeton and his vast mining operations, the best port on the Mare Pacis at Kilmannock, the religious support of the Archbishop of Durham, and the tamed quiescence of the "bad commoners" imprisoned in the Dunwich work-pits.

Some of these choices are drawn from maps and decisions the GM has already made about Fanshaw, while others are simply conjured from thin air. At this stage the GM rarely has complete information about any world, and simply generating facts by fiat is often the most efficient way to flesh things out.

The GM then glances down this list of Vital Points and marks out those that could conceivably be captured and not simply destroyed. Among these, they decide that the city of York and the Aberswythe pass are clearly not going to be destroyed simply by being captured, and the Yorkers aren't so committed to the nobility that they won't cooperate with rebel rulers. The Earl of Bridgeton is also willing to flip, if he thinks it will save his skin, and the port at Kilmannock should also be largely intact if taken in a fight. The slaves at Dunwich will be no use, however; some might be willing to work for new masters, but most simply want their freedom. The Greenwich armory is certain to be destroyed by the loyalists before it's allowed to be captured, and the Archbishop of Durham is far too loyal to the nobility to ever turn his cassock.

The GM then turns their attention to the rebels, who also need eight Vital Points. Their critical factors are less about terrain and more about resources and moral support. Their points are the support of the commoners of the Severn river valley, the large arms caches hidden in the caves of Ben Bulben, the farming towns of the New Essex region, the vast but primitive factory complexes of Smithwick, the rail nexus at Gatwich, the ancient provincial capital at Aldershot, the Upton Abbey manor of the first Ascendant noble killed in the uprising, and the vast old Red Tower fortress that shelters a major braker gun installation.

It takes but a moment to decide that each of these Vital Points will be destroyed if the loyalists seize them. The weapons are useless to the more advanced loyalist units and the moral and logistical support provided by the other points won't be tendered to the hated nobility. Commoners unlucky enough to have backed the rebels can expect mass executions and starvation, and the brutal Ascendant forces will peel the land where they go. The rebels may be forced to strategically sacrifice some of their Vital Points during the war, but such actions will inevitably mean enormous loss of life among their supporters there.

With that, the GM now has the framework of the war on Fanshaw. If this is just one war possibility among several in the campaign, this much information might be enough for now. If not, the army lists can now be created for the fight.

SINGLE MEN IN BARRACKS

BUILDING ARMIES AND MERCENARY LEGIONS

In this section, you'll learn how to forge a proper army for your campaign, whether as a mercenary legion captained by the PCs, a planetary army under the control of faceless bureaucrats, or some nebulous alien horde bent on ineffable destruction. Players can take the role of the army brass responsible for prosecuting the objectives of a war or they can play the luckless grunts at the bottom, the ones dashing across muddy fields and receiving the excitement of regular artillery barrages.

These rules are designed to produce the armies you actually need to worry about, from a GM perspective. You shouldn't bother to go through this process with every armed force in your sector, just the ones that engage with your schemes. Other military forces can be left comfortably vague until the winds of war bluster in their direction.

COUNTING HEADS

Start by deciding how many soldiers are actually in this army. For a planetary army with a history of warfare but no especially pressing military need, assume 1% of the civilian population is in the armed forces. For a polity currently at war or expecting to be at war, assume 5% of the population is enlisted. Note that this percentage is as much as most polities can manage for any significant length of time. Any further enlistment is going to start eroding the economic base of a human society, and will only be undertaken at extreme need. If it does come to that and the entire civilization has been dragooned into war, you might expect 10% of the population to be effective fighters. Beyond that, there just aren't enough able hands to work the basic levers of industry and support the military needs.

These numbers assume human civilizations at least vaguely similar to those of terrestrial history. Exceptionally strange, technologically gifted, or transhuman entities might have different limits on available manpower. A society with large amounts of robotic tech to hand might be able to send far more of its population onto the front lines, or else send the robots in their place. Even a primitive society might be able to send out more if they have a culture-wide dedication to warfare and rich agricultural land that supports them with little constructive effort.

Mercenary legions draw from a much smaller pool. If you're creating a legion from scratch, assume that they have only one percent of the numbers above. Thus, a ten-million strong planetary population not currently at war would support a conventional army of 100,000 troops and a mercenary legion of 1,000 soldiers of fortune. On most advanced worlds, there simply isn't a large pool of interest in becoming a mercenary soldier, and even where there is, the legions are picking from the same population pool as the conventional military.

This can be very different on other worlds, however. On poor or warlike planets, the prospect of going up to the stars to fight alongside light-wielding offworlders might be ecstatically exciting to the native warriors, or provide a hope for the daily bread that can't be found where they are now. Among these populations a mercenary legion might find as many eager recruits as a conventional army would.

Even so, most mercenary legions skim off the absolute cream of their candidate pools. With the cost and labor required to move a soldier from world to world, it's folly to take any but the very best. The more elite the legion is, the greater the price it can command for its assistance, and so it's much more economical to run a small legion of crack troops than try to fly a conscript army between stars.

Most legions are no smaller than a battalion of 500 soldiers, while even the largest are very rarely more than a brigade of five thousand. Numbers larger than that can be prohibitively difficult to move interstellar distances, especially when vehicles and gear need to be moved as well. Even so, the few legions with sufficient lift to move a division or more can become arbiters of an entire sector's military destiny.

Defining Units

Now that you know how many soldiers are in the army, it's time to break it up into one or more **units**, a term meaning more than just a general military unit. Units are the building blocks of planetary warfare; the more effective units an army can maintain, the more flexible their plans can be and the more readily they can respond to enemy actions. Primitive or poorly-led armies have few units, as they are unable to coordinate multiple forces effectively. More sophisticated armies can split their forces up into smaller units without losing control.

Add up the army's most common Tech Level, plus its commander's Tactics skill, plus the total of the commander's Wisdom, Intelligence, and Charisma modifiers. The resulting number is the total number of units that the army can support. Poorly-trained or undisciplined forces halve this number, rounding up. War-augmented or martially-fanatical cultures can increase this number, possibly by as much as half.

For example, New Sarum, a primitive nation of TL1 and 10,000,000 people, commonly supports an army of 100,000 swordsmen, archers, and dragon-riders. Its army is led directly by King Uther, a man prone to occasional fits of folly (Wisdom 5), but intelligent (Intelligence 14) and enormously charismatic (Charisma 18). He is a skilled and seasoned tactician (Tactics-2 skill), but a still better leader (Leadership-3 skill). The total number of Units that New Sarum can maintain are 1 (its Tech Level) plus 2 (its commander's Tactics skill) plus 2 (the sum of Uther's Wisdom, Intelligence, and Charisma modifiers). If New Sarum were particularly barbaric or backward, this number would be cut down by half to 3, and if they were incredibly martial and well-disciplined, it might be increased by half to 8.

Once you know how many units the army can support, simply divide it into that many units, assigning them according to the unit size table provided here. The smallest unit size is that of a battalion; anything smaller than that is too minute to suffice as an independent command. You don't need to split the army up evenly if you do not wish to do so, and you may have leftover troops at the end that are part of no unit. You can ignore them, and assume that they're just shuffled in and out of units as necessity requires.

To return to New Sarum, King Uther could just divide his army into five corps of 20,000 men apiece. Instead, however, he splits the force into one army of 40,000 men and four divisions of 15,000 troops, as he fears the ambition of the great lords that lead the other units. Thus, he has one heavy-hitting unit with a Strength of 8 and four lesser units with a Strength of 2.

Extremely well-commanded armies might not have enough troops to pad out all the possible units they can support. In this case, any unassigned unit points can be divided up and added to the Strength of one or more units, to represent the surfeit of leadership available to them.

Detailing the Units

With your units established, now it's time to define each one a little more carefully. Start with its commanding officer. The table indicates the usual rank that leads a given unit. Give each unit a leader and write down one sentence about their appearance or carriage, and one sentence about how they tend to use their troops. You don't need to detail the leader very much, but you should at least have a name to attach to them. In New Sarum's case, the army unit's leader is clearly King Uther himself, while the four lesser units are led by the greatest earls of the realm.

Next, decide whether the unit is infantry, armored, air, sea, or artillery. Extremely large units might include components of all these things, but you should choose their most predominant character. The choice you make here will affect how you describe battles involving the unit, and also what special abilities will be granted to PC squad members who fight in battles alongside the unit.

For New Sarum, the army is clearly infantry, as are two of the divisions. One of the divisions, however, includes a strong force of wyrm-riders mounted on siege dragons, being tank-like enough to qualify as an armored unit. The other division supports the winged dragon-riders of New Sarum, and is treated as an air unit.

Now, throw a handful of dice on the quick-roll table on page 56 to add a little individual flavor to the unit. These rolls don't necessarily have a mechanical effect on the unit, unless you decide they do, but they do help you characterize it and its particular quirks.

Finally, give each unit a name. The simplest method is to just assign a number to a unit type and size. Thus, the dragon-riders might be dubbed "The 101st Air Division", while the army might be "The 1st Foot Army". Worlds with more extravagant and poetic traditions might instead dub them "The Legion of the Burning Skies" and "The Conquering Sons of the King".

Handling the Paperwork

As the last step in creating your army, make up an info card for each of the units. A 3x5 works fine for this, or even a Post-it note. On each card, write down the Unit's name at the top, followed by its size as a battalion, brigade, division or so forth, its number of troops, its type, and its Strength. Note down the unit's leader and the sentences you chose to describe them. Follow it with the unit's Strength, taken from the unit table here.

Lastly, scribble down a Condition track. A new unit starts as Fresh, and becomes Ready, Bloodied, and then Crippled. Units damaged below Crippled are so badly broken that they fall down to the next smallest unit type, becoming a Fresh example of them. Thus, if the 1st Foot Army takes four steps of damage, it'll be so badly shredded that it will effectively become the 1st Foot Corps, with a Strength of 4

Unit	Size	Led By	Strength
Theater	2M-10M	General	16
Army Front	400K-2M	General	12
Army	40K – 200K	General	8
Corps	20K – 40K	Lt. General	4
Division	10K – 18K	Major General	2
Brigade	3K – 5K	Colonel	1
Battalion	500 – 600	Lt. Colonel	0

instead of 8. If they took six steps in some bloody rout, they'd instead become a Bloodied Corps. Damage that drives the unit below battalion size effectively destroys it. Restoring unit damage is very difficult without a period of peaceful rest and recruitment.

If you have any unused units that weren't assigned, you can divide them up, adding them to the Strength of one or more of your units. If you raise more units during the course of the war, this number may decrease as the excess leaders are taken from these units and put in charge of the new unit.

These excess points are particularly common with high-tech mercenary legions, who tend to have extremely professional leadership, high-tech gear, and relatively small numbers. Their units are comparatively tiny, but can have a disproportionate effect on the battlefield. Their small size makes them relatively fragile, however, and they're not well-suited for prosecuting large wars with numerous Vital Points.

Recording Unit Support Abilities

Aside from the military advantages of having combined arms, units grant special *support abilities* to PC squads operating in their theater of battle. If there's an artillery unit on the battlefield, then the PCs can call in an artillery strike. If an infantry unit is fighting nearby, the PCs can radio in for support in the form of a group of ground troops. The amount of support a squad can call in is limited, however, and must be deployed wisely by the team.

The opposite page lists the special benefits granted by the different types of units. Other abilities might be created by the GM if specialist units are nearby and willing to aid; a platoon of elite cybernetic recon scouts might be willing to do a quick reconnaissance of a section of the battlefield, for example, alerting the PCs to any objectives or dangers there.

The relevant special abilities should be printed out or copied out on 3x5 cards and handed to the players, both to remind them that the special abilities are available and to provide a quick recap of the rules during play.

There may be some times when support is unavailable, even though the allies are to hand. By the same token, burning the right favors can sometimes summon aid from a vast distance, or call down shells from hundreds of klicks away.

Unit Support Abilities

PCs can call on a unit for support once per mission for every 4 points of Strength it has, rounded up. Thus, a tank army with a Strength of 8 allows the Armor Support action to be invoked twice during a mission. Units with available organic assets can be invoked for any of their associated supports, but all uses count toward the maximum. For example, a tank army with organic infantry assets could be radioed for either Armor Support or Infantry Support, but only twice in total.

Infantry Support

1d6 squads of ten soldiers are available and in the area, or more if the GM so decides. They can crush an equal or lesser number of enemies, or pin down 2 to 3 times as many enemies. They have standard squad gear. Against more than three times their number in enemies they can only cover a retreat or cause a distraction.

They take 1d6 x 4 minutes to arrive. Once arrived, they hold their position unless such defense seems impractical, in which case they stick around long enough to do one favor for the group.

Air Support

An air strike is slower than artillery, but more lethal against enemies under soft cover and capable of avoiding damage to friendly forces most of the time, provided they're not in melee combat with the enemy. It arrives in 1d6 x 2 minutes.

A single group of enemies or vehicles in the open or under light cover are automatically destroyed or disabled, provided all the foes are within a two hundred meter radius. Against foes under hard cover, roll percentile dice to find out what percentage are crippled or killed.

If the enemies have man-portable AA defenses, the air unit has a 1 in 6 chance of being shot down before it can destroy the foe. If the area is covered under an ordinary grade of emplaced AA, there's a 2 in 6 chance of being shot down, ranging up to 5 in 6 chance for specific heavy AA fortifications.

Orbital Strike

An orbital strike is usually impossible on a modern battlefield thanks to braker guns and shore defense emplacements. Still, if the PCs are fighting primitives or those with disabled shore defenses and have an ally in orbit with the right hardware, they can call in a barrage from orbit.

The PCs designate an area no less than 200 meters wide and no more than two kilometers wide that they can see. Everything in that area is annihilated 1d6 minutes later, barring fortifications built to resist orbital bombardments.

Artillery Support

The PCs call in a strike from an allied artillery battery. The strike arrives in 1d6 minutes and is indiscriminate. The area affected can be a radius as small as fifty meters in diameter or as large as three hundred meters. If the friendly artillery unit is at least division-sized, the PCs may be authorized to call in a grand barrage that can hit everything in a small town. Such permission is usually related to a mission goal.

Roll percentile dice; that percentage of the targets are dead or disabled, and an equal number are stunned and unable to make offensive actions for ten minutes. Civilian structures and barriers are wrecked, while military ones have a 2 in 6 chance of being ruined. Affected enemies under heavy cover are stunned for ten minutes rather than being killed, and those bunkered down in fortifications cannot be affected at all.

Being too close to the strike is inadvisable; anyone out of cover who's within one hundred meters of the edge of the strike needs to make three Luck saving throws, losing one-third of their current hit points for every save failed.

Armor Support

1d6 tanks and their protective infantry screens are in the area, and will arrive in 1d6 x 4 minutes. They can destroy or perforate non-fortified buildings and emplacements and drive back or kill as many as twenty modern enemies or one hundred primitive foes per tank. After they complete whatever immediate task the PCs need accomplished, they'll be called away to another part of the battlefield.

There's a 1 in 6 chance that enemies with modern weapons can destroy or disable a given tank it before it can destroy its foes, however. Against enemies with specific anti-tank weapons, this rises to 2 in 6. Against foes with equivalent tanks of their own, pair each defender up with an attacker and roll 1d6; on a 1-3, the allied tank is destroyed, and on a 4-6, the enemy tank is destroyed.

Sea Support

Warships are equipped with heavy guns and the crew to use them, along with shore raiding parties that can be dispatched by swift grav landers to aid allies along the coast.

The PCs may invoke this ally as either Infantry Support, calling in marine raiders, or as Artillery Support, calling for fire from their guns. In both cases, however, they must be within fifty kilometers of the coast in order for the sea support to reach them.

Unit Details

These tables provide some extra flavor for fleshing out an individual unit. You can choose or roll from the tables to get some extra creative grist, or just use them as inspiration for your own choices. These details don't need to have a practical effect on the unit's statistics, though you might choose to apply small bonuses or penalties relevant to them.

D4 — Its current situation is...

1	Confused. Too many new recruits or changes
2	Steady. It's comfortable with its role and routine
3	Decaying. The leadership is somehow flawed
4	Improving. Its leadership is advancing its quality

D12 — Its bitterest past shame was...

1	Succumbing to the blandishments of a usurper
2	Obedience to a now-despised heresy or faith
3	Cowardly flight in a desperately important battle
4	Mutiny against its commander for some reason
5	Savage plundering of a weaker ally's land
6	Refusal to come to the aid of a desperate ally
7	Conspiring to overthrow the lawful ruler
8	Miserable incompetence in the face of the foe
9	They proved useless in a moment of dire need
10	They allowed a rival unit to perish without help
11	A great fortress was taken by their carelessness
12	They went the wrong way at the worst time

D6 — The army commander thinks the unit is...

1	Capable of anything, whether or not it really is
2	A firm and reliable unit for its commander
3	A good-enough unit, if not especially great
4	Somewhat questionable, not for hard jobs
5	Untrustworthy and prone to error or retreat
6	A waste of supplies and a disgrace to the army

D8 — It's exceptionally proud of its...

1	Excellent drill and speed of maneuver
2	Toughness in the face of prolonged combat
3	Inventiveness and flexibility in strange surrounds
4	Long tradition of superb leadership
5	Elite connections with local rulers and their blood
6	Advanced technology or cutting-edge gear
7	Ferocity and overwhelming vigor in a charge
8	Loyalty even in the face of certain disaster

D10 — Its greatest past glory was...

1	A glorious last stand where almost all perished
2	Defense of the ruler in the face of dire odds
3	Overcoming a superior foe with wits and valor
4	Seizing an enemy stronghold thought invincible
5	Rising to drive out enemy occupiers of their land
6	Defense of a sacred person or place against foes
7	Making an impossible march to relieve an ally
8	Withstanding a siege despite horrific privations
9	Defying a usurper despite his superior forces
10	Aiding an ally even in the face of near-total ruin

D20 — A current problem facing it is...

1	Several officers are incompetent but untouchable
2	It's being starved for necessary supplies
3	It's been in garrison so long it's gone soft
4	The locals are furious about its bad discipline
5	The commander is distracted by something
6	Another unit feels it's been bitterly wronged by it
7	Its equipment is being kept in poor repair
8	It's been spread out too far geographically
9	It's got ethnic or religious factions forming in it
10	It's suffered a depressing string of bad luck
11	The ruler feels insulted by it for some reason
12	It's been accused of atrocities, true or otherwise
13	It's been ordered to fill a role that it's bad at
14	The troops are overconfident of their skills
15	Excessive bribery and corruption in the ranks
16	The troops feel little love for their cause or leader
17	The troops bitterly resent a recent use of them
18	Civilian leaders are using them as props and toys
19	Its gear and tactics are badly outdated
20	None. Everything is miraculously functional.

An Example of Army Creation

During the Fanshaw Rebellion in Proteus Sector, gentry forces were mustered against the war-proles and loyalist forces of the Ascendant nobility. The nobility had the advantage of superior technology individually excellent soldiery, and a leadership of literally superhuman capabilities, while the gentry rebels relied on massed forces. Ascendant forces had an effective TL4, with some superior pretech for their elites. The gentry rebels could not reliably muster more than TL2 equipment for the bulk of their forces.

During the York Campaign, loyalist forces were led by Theodore Arundel, Duke of York. As a Joybringer, Arundel was possessed of inhuman charisma and a superlative situational awareness, though he was relatively undistinguished intellectually. His Charisma modifier was +3, Wisdom was +2, and Intelligence was +0. He's a brilliant natural leader (Leadership-3 skill), but utterly oblivious to the most rudimentary military concerns (no Tactics skill at all, for a -1 penalty). The loyalist forces in York were thus able to organize their available troops into 8 units: +4 for their tech level, +3 for Charisma, +2 for Wisdom, and -1 for Arundel's entirely non-existent Tactics skill

Against him, the gentry rebels in York were commanded by General Sebastian Grosvenor. Grosvenor was an intelligent, prudent, and charismatic man, albeit in no way the mental equal of his gengineered opponent. (+3 total modifiers) He was, however, a masterful leader and military commander (both Leadership and Tactics skills at 3). The gentry forces were thus also able to divide their available troops into 8 units: +2 for TL, +3 for attributes, and +3 for skills. Thanks to years of careful preparation, the rebel forces do not suffer the usual penalty for disorganized forces, which would cut their allowed units by half.

The population allied with the nobility amounted to 10 million people, albeit "allied" is perhaps a generous term for abject subjugation. Five percent of 10 million is 500,000, but Arundel is desperate and the nobility are throwing everything they have into the fight. The available troops are doubled, for an even million minions to fight for their Ascendant masters.

Against this, the teeming rebels can muster 90 million sympathizers and allies. Their cause is equally desperate, but the GM decides that they lack the existing control systems to maximize their recruiting. Five percent of their allies amounts to a military manpower pool of 4.5 million troops.

Arundel divides his forces into the maximum eight units, making eight armies out of them, each of 40,000 troops. This rides the line a little, as they might be considered merely heavy divisions, but the GM decides that the generally superior qualities of the war-proles and Ascendant officers give them an edge. Each unit thus has a Strength of 8.

Arundel makes four of them infantry armies, then one armored, one artillery, one sea, and one air army. These choices just affect the special benefits PC squads can gain when the units are in play on their side of the battle. Of course, most players would not be enthusiastic allies of the likes of Arundel unless paid with great munificence.

Arundel keeps the naming conventions simple, dubbing each army a "Clade", thus providing the first through forth Ground Clades, then the Sea Clade, Air Clade, Armored Clade, and Artillery Clade. The GM makes up a 3x5 index card for each one, recording their size of 40,000 troops, their Strength of 8, their unit type, and their current condition of Fresh.

Grosvenor has a titanic legion of recruits to command, and decides to break up the 4,500,000 eager soldiers into eight equal army fronts, each with a Strength of 12. While the individual Ascendant forces are superior, the sheer numbers of rebel gentry and their commoner sympathizers give the rebels a fighting chance of victory.

All of Grosvenor's units are given the infantry type, except for one artillery front. They have a smattering of captured armor and air assets, and their allied city-states are trying to retool for military production, but they just don't reasonably have enough military resources to fit out entire armies with meaningful organic air or armored assets. Simple gunpowder artillery is within their available immediate tech base.

Grosvenor names the fronts after city-states that are supporting the rebellion: the Ludgate, Harshaw, Smithton, Cardiff, Rutland, Lancaster, and Smithwick Fronts are all infantry units, while the Woolwich Front concentrates the rebel's available artillery assets.

When these two armies clash, the rebels will have the initial edge, though the superior technology of the loyalist forces will even the field substantially. If the massive numbers of rebel troops are able to crush the loyalist armies before they're bled white by the inevitable casualties, the rebels are likely to win. If Arundel can pare the rebel forces down to a more manageable size, however, his superior technology will put Grosvenor's leadership abilities to the test.

The loss of life, of course, will be enormous.

CREATING THE BRASS AND THE SQUAD

For most armies, these details are all you're going to need. Enemy forces might have particular commanders or allies of interest, but such NPCs can be developed only when the situation requires it. If you're creating the legion or planetary army that the PCs are to be fighting for, however, your group is going to need to sort out a few more things before play. In particular, they're going to need to create their command characters and their field squad.

THE BRASS AND THEIR FAVORS

The life of high military officials is one of paperwork, politics, meetings, and excessive amounts of coffee. While doubtless necessary, it's not the sort of play that most players are interested in having when they think of a mil-SF campaign. Play is more likely to revolve around front-line combat soldiers and the daring deeds of commandos and field grunts.

These same grunts have very little say in the objectives of their superiors, however, and it can be difficult to add much sandbox freedom into their missions. To compensate for this, players also create a set of **brass**, PCs that exist for the purposes of those brief meetings at the end of a session that will determine the military force's next action.

The brass has several roles, each one giving a special bonus to the squad PC their player plays. This "client" can invoke their perk at any time during the mission, but if they are killed or incapacitated the perk is lost for that session, even if their player then brings in a fresh squad member.

There are five different roles for brass, which players should divide up as they see fit. If there are too few players for each role to be filled, add together the Quartermaster and Senior NCO roles or the Intelligence Officer and Politician roles. If there are more than five players involved, add extra Senior NCO representatives to the mix. You might choose to create entirely new roles if you wish, the better to example the particular ethos of a military force or the quirks of a mercenary legion's methods of operation.

The General, the supreme leader of the military forces. Once per session, their client can predict what a group of enemies within sight of the squad are going to do. Unless the prediction is entirely implausible even for the chaos of wartime, the enemies will end up doing largely what is predicted. This enemy activity isn't sure to continue for more than a few minutes.

The Quartermaster, the avatar of logistical might. Once per session, their client instantly finds, produces, or is provided something that might plausibly be issued to the squad that is small enough to reasonably have on their person. This doesn't include vehicles, pretech, or other exotic implements, but it could include a man-portable weapon and a reasonable sum of ammo, 1d6 doses of some military stim, 1d6 grenades, a particular tool, or anything else in that line. Encumbrance rules then apply if the item is retained.

The Intelligence Officer, who knows all. Once per session, their client can ask the GM a question about the mission or enemy activities. Provided that the information wouldn't solve or trivialize an objective by itself, the GM will provide a sentence or two in answer to reflect their intel briefings.

The Senior NCO, all grizzled competence and swift action. Once per session, their client can reroll a failed skill check or attack roll related to their military role or specialization. This reroll cannot be stacked with an Expert's class ability.

The Politician, the military's connection to their civilian employers. Once per session, their client finds that a particular native, civilian, or government official is a friend to the allies and willing to help the squad to the limits of their courage and inducement. Even the craven and grasping will cooperate in ways that don't directly threaten them or their families.

Once the roles are chosen, the player should define the brass' details. A few moments should provide some particulars of their appearance and quirks, perhaps with some idea of how they rose to their current illustrious position. Their ranks will reflect their importance to the force. Most will be generals of some standing, senior civilian officials, or the senior NCOs of the army. Few of them will be under forty unless they're a military wunderkind with superb political instincts.

Aside from their appearances, the players should also take a moment to think about their general motivations and values. These military officers will be deciding the course of the wars they fight or the mercenary contracts they accept. They should have reasons for accepting or rejecting the possibilities placed before them, since these choices will shape the kind of missions and adventures that the squad PCs experience.

Defining goals can be difficult for the group until they've had more time to soak in the campaign setting and figure out the kind of adventures they want to have. The table here offers some basic, generic motivations as suggestions, but these may well change with the tide of events, and should be personalized to the campaign's situation.

1d8   THE MOTIVES OF THE MIGHTY

1	Preserve the precious lives of our troops.
2	The army is weak; seek out men and money.
3	Avenge ourselves against an old, hated foe.
4	Defend our civilians at all costs.
5	The PCs' unit needs to see much more action.
6	Play it safe; avoid likely hard-fought battles.
7	Forget people; target enemy land and industry.
8	You're a traitor who seeks the army's destruction.

Playing the Brass

Most conferences of the high command will be wrapped up in a brief meeting at the end of a mission and the start of a new war turn. Some groups might want to play this meeting out in detail, with the PCs debating over the best course of action in-character and mindful of their PC's motivations. Others would prefer to just gloss it lightly with a short discussion of their options. Both ways of handling it are perfectly valid.

The brass is almost never in a position where their character attributes and skills matter. The general might have their stats determined for purposes of building an army, but figures of this importance just don't get near a battlefield under ordinary circumstances. If it somehow does become important, the PCs should probably be around 7th level in a class that matches their role, with skills appropriate to their function.

If a member of the brass does somehow manage to get killed, a fresh face will soon be enlisted into their role. Such a replacement can be expected to happen before the next turn.

The Squad

The **field squad** is made up of the PCs the players are going to actually *play*. These luckless men and women are going to be thrown at the sharp end of the fight, tasked with desperate missions and forlorn hopes for the good of their unit and the benefit of the service. A lot of them are going to die.

Every player should roll up a military PC in the usual fashion as given in the **Stars Without Number** core rule book. All PCs gain the skill Profession/Soldier-0 for free and level-0 Combat skill proficiency in the most common weapon type of their forces. For most modern armies, this is going to be the Combat/Energy skill. These free skills "stack" with existing ones gained from backgrounds or class training.

PCs do not necessarily need to take the Warrior class or take specific martial backgrounds or training packages. They're 1st level characters, probably relatively fresh into the service, and it's quite reasonable that they should still have much of their former life clinging to them. Even an otherwise highly selective mercenary legion might find itself scraping the bottom of the roster every so often.

If the PC has a military background, they enter play as an E-3, a private first class. If they're fresh out of boot camp, they're still an E-2, a private second class. The PC with a military background and the highest Charisma is an E-4 corporal, in charge of the PC fireteam. If no PC has a background appropriate for being promoted to E-4, roll randomly to see who gets the stripes bestowed on them by an impatient officer.

Squad PCs should get used to their ranks. They might rise a few ratings over the course of a campaign, with exceptionally smooth and capable sorts perhaps even being recruited as a mustang lieutenant, but for the most part they are grunts, and grunts they will remain. If they prove astonishingly ca-

pable and heroic, they might get swift promotion to special commando status or special forces troops, but even then, this glory is represented in their function, not their rate.

While the fireteam's corporal is supposed to be in charge of the squad, PCs are PCs, and any cooperation is likely to be won by reason rather than appeals to authority. Players who have no interest in the job should be allowed to hand it off to someone else who has more appetite for herding cats.

Most PC groups will be about the right size for a fireteam: four people, consisting of the corporal, a riflemen, a grenadier for pitching explosives at troublesome people, and a heavy weapon specialist who totes the light machine gun or heavy cutter that is the backbone of the team's firepower. Players should divide up these roles as they wish, assuming their military force follows the fireteam model.

If there are too few PCs for a full fireteam, just chalk it up to a special team organization. If there are too many PCs, let the excess pick their own roles. All the PCs should belong to the same fireteam in order to simplify play. While you could insert NPCs to fill out a small group, it can be all too easy to let those luckless extras "redshirt" their way to glory.

Squad PCs don't have to love each other. They don't even have to especially *like* each other. Regardless of this, they should have enough cohesion and group loyalty to look out for each other and demonstrate a basic degree of co-operativeness. A battlefield is no place for dissension and quarreling. With danger all around them, the PCs need to be able to work together if they're to survive the mission, let alone accomplish it successfully.

Replacing Lost PCs

Field squad PCs are going to die. The brave, the cowardly, the wise, and the foolish all fall with equal finality beneath the guns of the enemy. The fortunate might win their way to deathless glory, but the GM needs to be able and willing to sub in new PCs on short notice.

Ideally, all players should make up a spare PC at the start of the campaign. When their original soldier falls in dubious battle, the replacement can be found as a straggler from a nearby unit, a prisoner rescued from the enemy, reinforcements dispatched by headquarters, or some other quick and simple way to get the player back into the action. The GM should be willing to stretch plausibility a bit in order to make this happen. If dying costs a player a major chunk of an evening's play, a lot of players are likely to spend a lot of time just sitting around, depending on the lethality of the team's missions.

The GM should decide at the beginning of the campaign whether new PCs should come in at 1st level or at the level of the PC they're replacing. Either choice is viable, as an underleveled PC is apt to advance very rapidly when receiving the XP awards that their more experienced comrades get.

CREATING A MERCENARY LEGION

Building a planetary army is simple, as a great deal can be abstracted. The extraction of taxes, the apportionment of defense budgets, and the gentle coercion of the state can all be handwaved in tallying up the appropriate numbers of troops and dividing them up into units. Things are different for a mercenary legion, particularly if it's one being run by the players.

This section gives a set of procedures for creating and running a mercenary legion. The individual numbers may shift a little depending on the details of your own campaign world, but the overall method should give you what you need to set contract payments and let your players build up their humble band of sellswords into fearsome vendors of wholesale death.

HIRING TROOPS

The first thing a mercenary legion needs is mercenaries. The more sophisticated the hardware and support that these mercenaries require, the more it's going to cost to enlist them. A lostworlder barbarian with a combat rifle on one shoulder and a bag of oats on the other costs far less to keep in the field than a grav repair tech who expects medical treatment more sophisticated than cautery and earnest prayer. Thus, the table in this section provides two costs for a soldier: the one-time contract cost and the monthly field cost.

The number of "contracts" a legion has bought reflects their maximum head count. The contract costs include not only the hiring bonus for a new trooper, but the cost of housing, feeding, training, and amusing them while they're on peacetime duty at a legion base. Some of the money is spent building barracks, other parts of it buy food and other consumables, and some of it goes to the usual running costs of keeping the legion in trim. These regular costs are all abstracted into the contract fee to simplify the bookkeeping. When the legion wants to add troops, they just buy more contracts on a world where plausible recruits can be found.

Contract costs differ depending on the tech level of the troops involved. Troops from primitive worlds of TL2 and below are accustomed to a degree of casual privation and hardship that would be distracting to a TL3 soldier and nigh-intolerable to a denizen of a TL4 world. While soldiers can fight in truly horrific conditions, mercenaries don't sign up to live like savages in their own camps. The extensive hardware and complex training a high-tech soldier requires for full functionality also costs more money than a crate of mass-produced javelins and a field to throw them in. Thus, a contract has a tech level associated with it, and can only support a soldier of that tech level or less.

Contracts cover a standard loadout of equipment appropriate to the soldier's tech level. The details of equipment can be altered by the captain without worrying about recalculating the cost, though truly dramatic changes in equipage might add an extra fee to the contract. TL3 and TL4 infantry con-tracts include light military vehicles sufficient to motorize or grav-equip the unit. While poor vehicles to fight from, they can move the unit over relatively flat terrain, for TL3 trucks, or almost any terrain, for TL4 grav vehicles. Contracts of TL0-TL2 troops include nothing more than a sturdy pair of boots.

Contracts can be sold, representing the offloading of surplus military gear, trucks, and excess housing. Selling a contract only returns a quarter of its purchase price, however.

If a contracted soldiers dies or retires, much of the infrastructure and hardware they used still remains. A replacement can be hired for a cost equal to one month of field duty for a soldier of their tech level, the price representing the hiring bonus due a new soldier. Such replacement assumes that the world actually can provide such interested recruits.

The field cost is the price of keeping the soldier in the field for a month of active duty. The legion pays the field cost every month the soldier is fighting, starting from when they board their troop transport and ending when they're brought home or released from duty. It covers extra combat pay, ammunition, wear and tear on the equipment, and the countless other small costs of war. If the field cost isn't paid for a month, the soldier might not fight at the GM's discretion, or might not have the support to do so even if they want to. After two months of no pay, the soldier is useless and may desert, save those in units of exceptional zeal or desperate circumstances. For some armies and mercenary legions, loot obtained in combat is considered perfectly valid pay.

BUYING HARDWARE

Aside from troops, a mercenary legion sometimes finds itself in need of vehicles, artillery, and other relatively big-ticket items. Some might be needed for dedicated armor or air units, while others might be wanted to give organic capabilities to an existing unit. Just as with troops, every tank, flyer, or ship has a contract cost and a monthly field duty cost.

The contract cost for hardware includes not only the basic garage space and spare parts for a vehicle or artillery piece, it also includes extensive repair facilities and the large staff of troops necessary to keep this hardware operating under wartime conditions. The portable elements of this investment are assumed to travel with the hardware when it's sent out on a contract, and indeed, most of these vehicles and guns would rapidly degrade into useless scrap without the constant ministrations of their high-tech votaries

The basic contract handles the maintenance for a vehicle or gun of that type and tech level and the employment of its necessary crew. The actual cost of the hardware must be added to it. Thus, if the captain wants to buy fifty surplus TL3 tanks from a planet that's undergoing military modernization, they need to buy fifty TL3 tank contracts and then pay for the tanks as well.

As with personnel contracts, hardware contracts can be sold for one-quarter of their purchase price, representing the scrap and tool value of their support materials. Also as with personnel, vehicles and guns destroyed in action can be replaced without having to buy a fresh contract; an extra month's field cost can be paid to cover the replacement of any lost components, along with the price of the new tank, flyer, or gun to replace the old.

Catching a Ride

Most modern mercenary legions have some means of crossing the starry gulfs to bring their soldiers to bear on an employer's behalf. Those legions not bound to a single planet's affairs will need at least one transport starship, usually at least a cargo freighter of a cruiser-class hull or larger. A few are lucky enough to have dedicated troop transports, but more simply make do with a cargo freighter modified for maximum passenger capacity.

The cost of a starship contract covers its crew, berthing, supplies, and ordinary yearly maintenance. The monthly field duty costs are applied when the ship is actually in use as part of a contract. PCs can still use the ship for ordinary transport and adventuring without incurring these extra costs, but if it's put to use as part of a military action, the field costs start to accrue.

These costs assume that the ship is essentially civilian in nature. It might have a substantial amount of weaponry, but it's built on a civilian hull model such as a cargo freighter or free merchant. True warships are usually prohibitively difficult to get permitted by a planetary government unless the locals are too low-tech to stop the legion or too powerful to care if someone's running around with a few heavy cruisers.

Worlds with "flexible" governments might be persuaded to allow a legion to keep and utilize military warships, either as part of a few missions run as a favor to the government or a sufficiently large gratuity to important officials. If the legion has to bribe a loophole in the laws, the contract and field duty costs can be expected to double for the ship.

As with other vehicles, the contract just equips the legion with the necessary infrastructure and crew to use the ship. The starship itself must be purchased separately. If it is destroyed in action, it is not necessary to buy a new contract. A new ship can be purchased to replace it, along with one month's field duty cost to represent the replacement of lost components and active-duty crew.

The exact location of a starship's support and shipyard facilities is usually assumed to be the legion's home planet. When necessary, satellite facilities can be thrown up on worlds where the legion is currently employed. While not as good as the shipyards of home, these temporary facilities are usually sufficient to keep the ship repaired, refueled, and supplied out of whatever location the legion currently finds itself occupying.

Forming Units

Once an adequate number of contract soldiers are hired and a sufficient supply of hardware lined up, the legion's captain can form them into units. The usual unit sizes as given in earlier sections are used here. Thus, to make up an infantry battalion, the captain needs at least 500 troops.

Making up units of other types, such as armor, air, or artillery units requires a sufficient number of vehicles or guns, but no specific personnel contracts. All the necessary crew and gunners are included in the hardware contracts. The table in this section shows how many such tanks, flyers, or guns are needed to make a unit of a particular size.

Mercenary captains who want to give a unit as much muscle as possible can add in "organic" armor, air, or artillery capability. These sub-units don't change the basic type of a unit, but do allow it to offer support to PC squads in the field as if it were a unit of that type. Thus, an infantry battalion with organic artillery assets would allow a PC squad to play both the "Infantry support" and "Artillery barrage" special abilities on their missions. Each additional asset type added to a unit increases its Strength by 1 point, reflecting the additional tactical flexibility of the unit and the wider range of options allowed to its commander. The number of vehicles or guns necessary to add organic capability will vary depending on the size of the base unit, as given later in the section.

Units that are exceptionally well-equipped or well-trained can add 1 or 2 points to their Strength. Most mercenary units led by competent leadership and drawing from a sufficiently selective pool of recruits qualify for the +1 bonus. If the troops are exceptionally-well equipped with abundant high-tech gear and the additional contract costs to match, the +2 bonus can be claimed, as it might also if the legion's recruits are from an extremely soldierly world. It's the GM's discretion as to whether the bonus applies, and whether it might be lost if the legion takes too much damage or is forced to accept inferior replacement recruits.

A mercenary legion can't have more total units than its leader's statistics would permit. Trying to break the command into too many small independent units would render them largely ineffective without the firm guidance of a single effective commander. If the legion's leader isn't a PC, assume that a competent and experienced mercenary captain would have a +1 Intelligence bonus, a +1 Charisma bonus, Tactics-2 skill and Leadership-2 skill. If a legion has fewer units than their maximum, the excess command points can be divided up among their units as bonus Strength.

Once you've made up a mercenary unit, take a moment to record its costs. Note down its number of contracts, the monthly cost of putting it into the field, and any casualties that it may have incurred in service. You'll want to have these details close to hand when it comes time to decide how much of the legion to send in answer to a particular contract. Not every job is big enough to pay for an entire legion's firepower.

Taking Casualties

Mercenary legions lose men and machines in the ordinary course of war. A particularly bloody victory can sometimes be worse than a bloodless retreat, as the cost of restoring lost hardware and replacing dead soldiers can be prohibitive.

Mercenary units can take the "rest and repair" war turn action just as any other military unit. Their commanders don't need to spend extra money to do so. The repairs and refitting done during this time are assumed to be field-expedient repairs and the drafting of support staff for combat duty, not long-term fixes to combat damage. It's after the war is over that the real bill comes due. After the fighting is finished, the legion's captain needs to pay for the unit's losses or reform it as a unit that can be supported by the remaining numbers.

When a mercenary unit takes steps of damage, it loses soldiers and vehicles. For every step of damage a mercenary unit takes, assume that it loses 5% of its personnel, vehicles, and artillery. For fractional losses of guns or vehicles, roll over the percentage loss to keep it. Others assets may be wounded or damaged, but the available medics and techs can get them back into the field given enough time for rest and repair. Everything else has to be re-bought by the legion.

Thus, if a battalion takes 2 steps of damage in the field, it might be able to rest and refit enough to repair the losses during the war. Once the fighting's over, however, the legion's captain will need to replace 10% of their troops, along with 10% of any organic armor, air, or artillery assets that might be attached to the unit. If the captain can't at least bring the unit up to a minimum battalion strength of 500 troops, it will cease to be an effective unit. If it's the only unit the legion has, the legion itself might end up dissolving. If an organic asset can't be brought up to minimum strength, then the unit loses its benefits until such time as it can be properly repaired.

As can be seen, creating a target-rich environment in the field can get costly. A division of 30,000 troops that takes two steps of damage will need to recruit 3,000 new soldiers to make up the losses, while a battalion of 500 that takes two steps of damage needs hire only 50. Ideally, the massive weight of fire that the division provides will crush the enemy before it has any chance to do harm.

Pay and Plundering

Troops are assumed to be paid monthly by the legion. Those who run short of cash or who wish to make the enemy bear the brunt of the war can collect their pay on the field. Some employers will forbid the practice of looting, particularly if the value of the disputed terrain lies in its industry or developed infrastructure. In other cases, employers will not only permit it, but encourage it, the better to crush the enemy's spirit.

Troops that are kept under strict discipline do not loot. They may requisition foodstuffs and items useful to the military, but they usually at least pretend to pay and are no more dangerous to the civilians than is inevitable when large numbers of heavily-armed soldiers are fighting nearby. Full field duty wages must be paid to the soldiers.

Troops can instead be permitted "traditional" looting privileges, where everything valuable is plundered and anyone who resists is shot. The bare necessities of life are not usually disturbed, but everyone in the area will be going hungry for a long time to come. Some amount of rape, murder, and wanton destruction is inevitable while plundering, but the officers keep the worst of it in check. Depending on the number of locals in the surrounding area, this might produce enough wealth to keep a legion happy for quite some time. This indiscipline comes at a cost, however, and troops that are being paid by loot suffer a -1 Strength penalty due to their disorganization.

Ten civilians of a given tech level will provide enough loot to satisfy one soldier of the same tech level for one month. Thus, if the unit is a battalion of 500 TL4 troops, they'd need 5,000 TL4 civilians to loot to keep them "paid" for one month. For mercenary armor or air units that don't have an infantry head count, treat them as if they were an infantry unit of the same unit size at the low end of its size range.

Victims of greater tech level provide better loot, and those of inferior tech have less valuable possessions. For each tech level higher the civilians are than their plunderers, double the amount of loot they extract. For each tech level lower, halve the amount. Thus, that same 500-man battalion could squeeze a month's pay out of 2,500 TL5 civilians, but would require 10,000 TL3 victims, 20,000 TL2, victims, and 80,000 TL1 victims in order to provide enough baubles and trifles to keep them happy for a month.

Troops can also be permitted unrestricted looting, if their captain is sufficiently brutal. Soldiers under these rules *have* no rules; they take anything and everything, use the wretched citizens for the most hideous ends, and may go so far as to make a sport of atrocities. Such savage peeling doubles the amount of loot that can be extracted from a given number of locals, but can give the legion a very bad name with those who prefer less barbaric hirelings. Some soldiers may come from cultures where such behavior is normal, but others might not be able to take such brutal measures against civilians without serious long-term mental consequences.

The chaos and laxness caused by this plundering also apply a -2 Strength penalty to the unit so long as it is paid this way. Exceptionally barbaric forces might even gain new recruits drawn to the prospect of such plunder, and could possibly repair lost damage steps or even increase in unit size so long as the loot keeps coming. The quality of such soldiers is unlikely to be of the best.

The number of civilians available for looting will depend on the GM's judgment and the population of the area occupied by the mercenary unit. Once plundered, the locals will be useless for further exactions until the war ends.

Contract and Field Duty Costs

Hire	Contract	Field Duty
Soldier, TL0-2	1,000 cr	100 cr
Soldier, TL3	2,000 cr	200 cr
Soldier, TL4	4,000 cr	400 cr
Aircraft, TL3	40,000 cr	4,000 cr
Aircraft, TL4	300,000 cr	30,000 cr
Artillery, TL3	10,000 cr	1,000 cr
Artillery, TL4	40,000 cr	4,000 cr
Tank, TL3	15,000 cr	1,500 cr
Tank, TL4	60,000 cr	6,000 cr
Starship, Shuttle	100,000 cr	10,000 cr
Starship, Frigate	1,000,000 cr	40,000 cr
Starship, Cruiser	10,000,000 cr	160,000 cr
Starship, Capital	100,000,000 cr	1,000,000 cr

Field duty costs are for a month of active combat service. Contract costs are paid only once. Infantry are hired by a contract, but other hires require the separate purchase of the tank, flyer, artillery, or starship to be serviced.

Contracts Needed for a Unit

Unit	Tanks	Planes	Guns
Theater	8,000	2,000	2,000
Army Front	2,000	800	800
Army	1,000	400	400
Corps	500	200	200
Division	250	80	80
Brigade	100	36	36
Battalion	50	18	18

These numbers reflect the number of vehicles or guns required for a full unit of armor, air, or artillery. To give a unit an organic support element of that type, only one-tenth of their numbers are needed, rounded up. Thus, to give an infantry division organic armor, 25 tanks are needed.

Transport Ship Cargo Space Required

Unit Type	Tonnage
Soldier, TL0-TL2	0.1
Soldier, TL3+, including organic vehicles	0.5
Artillery Gun, Towed	5
Artillery Gun, Self-Propelled	25
Tank	50
Aircraft	50

An Example of Building a Mercenary Legion

After an extensive career of stellar freebooting, a band of adventurers have found themselves bitterly opposed to a tyrannical planetary dictator with the blood of more than a few of their friends on his hands. After considering their options, the group decides to found a mercenary company with the eventual purpose of invading this planet and overthrowing the vile dictator.

The first step is to decide who is to lead the legion. Working together closely as a team, the PCs can bring attribute bonuses of +1 to Wisdom, Intelligence, and Charisma, their best Tactics skill of 1, and their best Leadership skill of 2. The most martial PC is nominated as the legion's colonel, while the other PCs adopt the roles they're best-suited to play.

Since they're making their own legion, the PCs each divide up the special roles of the high brass. The colonel takes the role of General, and the other special jobs are parceled out among the other PCs. If they create separate squad PC characters to play out battles, the benefits of these roles are granted to their respective PCs. If they take a personal hand in affairs, they can use the benefits for their existing heroes.

Now they need to hire their troops. Their tech level of 4 is added to their attribute bonus and the worst of their Tactics or Leadership skills, for a maximum of 8 total units that can be effectively controlled at once. There's no way they can afford so many troops to begin with, so they decide to focus on a single battalion.

According to the table, a battalion has 500-600 troops. They decide to hire on the high side to cover some inevitable casualties. Fortunately, they've befriended the government of a high-population planet in the sector, and it permits them to recruit its locals for offworld service. Six hundred TL4 soldier contracts come to a very healthy cost of 2.4 million credits. Still, once they pay the one-time contract cost, they don't need to worry further about the soldiers' ordinary upkeep, and replacing dead troops will require only a suitable recruit pool and the cost of one month's active duty to hire them.

The battalion is a perfectly good grav-motorized infantry battalion now, and can grant the "Infantry Support" special benefit to a squad on a mission in its vicinity. While useful, the PCs want to increase the battalion's utility by adding an organic artillery component to the unit.

As a battalion, it needs 2 guns to qualify for an organic asset. As a TL4 unit, it's not really practical to buy antiquated TL3 guns for it, as they wouldn't be compatible with its logistics. The PCs have to buy 2 TL4 artillery contracts for 80,000 credits. But this isn't enough; they also have to buy the actual guns. Flipping to the equipment section of the book, they decide to go whole-hog and buy two fast-moving TL4 self-propelled guns for 190,000 credits. If they lose these guns, they won't have to buy a new contract, but they will have to buy a replacement artillery piece.

Their infantry battalion now has an organic artillery component and can grant the "Artillery Support" special benefit to associated squads. While costly, the ability to hurl fire on the heads of their enemies is too important a benefit for the PCs to risk relying on their local allies to provide it.

The group briefly considers adding an armored or an air element to their battalion, but they decide to put it aside for now. There's one more major component their legion needs if it's to be an effective fighting force, and that's a way to actually get to the fight. They need to buy a troop transport.

Ideally, an actual troop transport ship like the ones described in the *Skyward Steel* sourcebook would be available for sale. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. For most legions, the next best thing is a bulk freighter refitted for military transport.

They begin with a basic bulk freighter hull and add four "Extended Life Support" fittings, increasing its maximum crew to 640 at a cost of 12 Mass and 12 Power points, plus 500,000 credits. Another two applications of "Extended Stores" keeps the ship habitable for 8 weeks at a cost of 125,000 credits and 6 Mass points. For getting down to the planet's surface, the PCs debate between a cargo lighter and a drop pod; the ability to clear an unfriendly landing zone finally tips them toward a drop pod for 300,000 credits and 2 Mass points. There's still room left, so they put it into 1,000 tons of cargo space for the gear and guns, and settle for a basic transport at a cost of 5.925 million credits.

While they have the ship now, they don't have the infrastructure, crew, and shipyard facilities to keep it in good trim. To do that, they need to purchase a cruiser-class ship contract for a substantial 10 million credits to cover all the necessary staff, facilities, and operational costs involved.

The mercenary legion they've created is now complete with a single unit, a TL4 infantry battalion with organic artillery assets. The battalion has a base Strength of 0 for its size, plus 1 for having an additional organic asset, and plus 1 more for being an elite group of carefully-selected recruits. To this, the group adds its unused leadership potential; the legion could lead up to 8 units but only has 1, so the unused points are added to the battalion's Strength, giving it a final Strength of 9. As befits the personal guard of a group of heroic stellar freebooters, this small battalion has a tremendous amount of punch behind it. Still, it has a very limited ability to handle combat damage; if it loses four steps of damage during a war, it will collapse as an effective fighting force.

This excellence comes at a high price. The basic cost for assembling the legion is 18,595,000 credits. For each month the entire legion is in action, it will cost a further 408,000 credits, so any contracts the PCs take will have to pay at least that much per month. Many polities will find that a bargain, however, if it gives them a handful of deniable offworlders who hit like the wrath of a hundred thousand men.

Soldiers and Common Gear

These statistics are provided for ordinary soldiers of each common tech level, along with their typical gear. If their commander wants a drastically different loadout, the additional cost of any new equipment should be added to their contract cost, with very heavy equipage adding some percentage to their monthly field costs as well.

Tribal Warrior, TL0

HD	AC	+Hit	Dmg	Morale	Skill
1	8#	+1	1d6	7	+1

Gear: Shield, Spear

Peasant Levy, TL1

HD	AC	+Hit	Dmg	Morale	Skill
1	7#	+1	2d6	8	+1

Gear: Leather Jack, Pike or Halberd

Conscript Soldier, TL2

HD	AC	+Hit	Dmg	Morale	Skill
1	9	+1	1d10+2	8	+1

Gear: Colorful Uniform, Rifle

Enlisted Soldier, TL3

HD	AC	+Hit	Dmg	Morale	Skill
1	5	+1	1d12	8	+1

Gear: Woven Body Armor, Combat Rifle*

Postech Soldier, TL4

HD	AC	+Hit	Dmg	Morale	Skill
1	4	+2	1d10	8	+1

Gear: Combat Field Uniform, Laser Rifle*

Pretech Soldier, TL5

HD	AC	+Hit	Dmg	Morale	Skill
1	0 ^	+2	2d8	9	+1

Gear: Field Emitter Panoply, Shear Rifle*

Armor classes marked with a # apply only to primitive weapons; the shields and thick leather jacks of primitive worlds are useless against TL3 guns or TL4 monoblades. Those marked with a ^ are immune to man-portable weapons of TL3 or lower. Weapons marked with a * can be fired in burst mode, granting +2 hit and damage for 3 rounds of ammo.

For random NPCs on the battlefield, assume that those using energy weapons have 1d10 remaining power cells, while those using bullets have 1d6 magazines left.

Fireteam-Specific Roles and Gear

The average fireteam consists of four soldiers: two riflemen, someone with a support weapon, and someone with a supply of grenades or a specialized grenade launcher. The two riflemen keep the support weapon operator covered while the big gun does most of the damage, with the grenadier providing indirect fire against targets who are under cover.

Primitive armies using TL0-TL2 tech usually can't afford this kind of small-group orientation, as it requires too much in the way of quick communication to carry out successfully. Troops in these armies are most likely to be issued a standard set of equipment and sent forward in large, officer-led masses.

For TL3 fireteams, the riflemen will be carrying combat rifles, the support weapon operator will be using a light machine gun as described in this book's equipment chapter, and the grenadier will be slinging at least a dozen grenades and probably using a dedicated grenade launcher. Someone will be carrying an AT missile if there's any chance of running into enemy armor or heavy vehicles. Their standard armor is woven body armor, though poor or low-end TL3 troops will have nothing more than a khaki uniform.

For TL4 fireteams, the riflemen will usually be carrying laser rifles, though some wealthy armies might spring for cutter rifles. The support weapon will be a heavy cutter in most cases, while the grenadier will usually be using a dedicated grenade launcher attached to the underbarrel mount on their laser rifle. AT missiles are still carried by most armies, while others have paid to upgrade to burster beams. The standard armor is a combat field uniform, though poor polities might have to fall back to antiquated woven body armor.

Other equipment will vary depending on the mission and the wealth of the army involved, but soldiers of a prosperous nation can expect to be weighted down with a tremendous amount of gear. Most soldiers will pack on equipment to the limits of their encumbrance allowance, bundling and packing items carefully to maximize the amount carried.

Common TL4 equipment for one soldier includes four bundled packs of 6 Type A energy cells, plus two more readied and one more in the laser rifle. A lazarus patch is readied in a thigh pocket. Each helmet usually has a mount for a military compad. In their pack, they carry rations, water, and a mess kit. The rest of the pack is ammo and mission gear.

The fireteam's designated medic will carry a medkit and another three lazarus patches. A grenadier will fill their pack with extra grenades. One of the riflemen will be tasked with carrying and operating the team's military comm set, while the other will usually carry any AT missiles or burster beam the team has available. Beyond the raw essentials of armor, weapons, ammo, and water, the rest of a team's loadout can vary widely with the mission and personal preference.

They Shove Me In the Stalls

Mass Combat and the War Turn

While it's possible to script a war to omit all the vagaries of chance, a traditional sandbox campaign encourages a less deterministic view of mass combat. This chapter covers the rules for running a planetary war, assuming you've set one up with the methods covered earlier in the book. These rules can be abstracted to numerous different terrains and situations, and should be read as general procedures and guidelines rather than a rigid, traditional war game.

The Purpose of the System

The mass combat system provided here is intended to be a basic, general system for fueling the progress of a military campaign. It's not meant to provide complex decisions for the players or especially reward cunning strategic play. This is an intentional simplicity due to certain problems that tend to come up regularly in a military-oriented campaign.

The most significant problem is that any given group of players is going to have notably different degrees of skill and interest in playing a war game. If the mass combat system you use particularly rewards system mastery, the GM is going to have to work to master that system if they're not going to be overwhelmed by players who do study up on the rules. This makes an already-demanding job harder, as the GM has to be good at playing the war game if they're to present an adequate challenge to the players. Perhaps even worse, the GM might be *too good* at the game, overwhelming players who just don't have the knack or the interest in focusing on strategic-level war games.

The goal, then, is to keep it simple. If your group craves more complications you can add them in, perhaps granting special perks for different unit types or imposing certain limits on what units can attack or defend a particular Vital Point. You might even choose to use a different war game entirely, playing out the campaign and tweaking individual battles based on the outcome of missions. The key is to accommodate your group and do what works best for them.

Basic Terminology

An army is made up of **units**. The smallest consequential army has a single unit, while a vast planetary army might have several dozen such forces. Units have a size, usually from a battalion of five hundred soldiers up to a full army of 200,000 troops. An army may have more troops and formations than are actually represented by these units, but these are the forces that matter, the ones that can be assigned to deal with Vital Points and enemy actions. The PCs always belong to a particular unit, though they might be detached for service on other battlefields.

Units have a **Strength**. This is based on unit size. A battalion has a Strength of zero, a brigade has a Strength of 1, a division has a Strength of 2, a corps has a Strength of 4, and an army has a strength of 8. Units smaller than a battalion are usually too minor to take into account.

Units have a **Condition**. A unit with a full roster and ready gear is Fresh. If it takes a step of damage, it becomes Ready, then Bloodied, and then Crippled. One more step of damage will break it, killing off so many personnel that it is effectively reduced to the next lower size of unit, with armies becoming corps, corps becoming divisions, and so forth. Battalions that are broken cease to exist as useful independent commands.

Units have a **Type**, whether infantry, armored, sea, air, or artillery. A unit might be rigidly composed of this type, such as a traditional artillery battalion or tank division, or it might consist of plenty of infantry grunts leavened by enough of this hardware to give it an organic capability. A force's type gives a PC squad certain special abilities to call on while in the field, provided the unit is involved in the battle.

Battles are fought between an attacking force and a defending force, each made up of one or more units. Both sides add up the total Strength of their units, their Tech Level, and the result of a 2d6 roll. The higher score wins. The margin

of victory is then compared to the table in this section, and a certain number of steps of damage are applied to one or both sides. The outcome of PC squad missions can affect this outcome, shifting the table's results by a row or two.

The War Turn

The *war turn* is when old battles are resolved and new battles are arranged. The war turn usually takes place at the end of a gaming session, once the PC squad's mission has been resolved as a success or ignoble failure. It's possible to run several consecutive war turns if the PCs aren't going to be involved in the fray for a while.

The first thing that is done is the resolving of battles from the prior war turn. Any bonuses or penalties granted by PC missions are applied to the resolution of their respective battles and the engaged units fight it out to a resolution.

Next, each side is allowed to activate their units. Actions are determined simultaneously for all the sides, each one recording the actions for each of their units and then revealing them all at once. Since the PC-allied forces are under the command of the players, they're likely to need some time to discuss their choices. To prevent unconscious bias, it can be best for the GM to make choices for the other sides first, and then let the players debate openly over their choices.

Each unit may be assigned to take one action: attack an enemy Vital Point, rest and recover, or stand in reserve.

Units that attack an enemy Vital Point are moved to that point at the war turn's end. If the defender has decided to keep any units in reserve, these reserve or unused units may then be moved to meet the attack. The outcome is not determined yet, however – that will be sorted out at the start of the next war turn. Attacks are revealed and defenders chosen at the end of the war turn, but they are not actually *resolved* until the start of the next turn. This gives the PCs time to intervene in the form of a mission related to the battle.

Units that rest and recover are removed from their current Vital Point if they happen to occupy one, and may roll 1d6. On a 3+, they regain one lost level of readiness, up to Fresh. Units that rest and recover may not attack, nor may they defend against an attack.

Units that are in reserve are removed from any Vital Point they may be occupying. They may be used to defend against the attacks revealed at the end of the turn

At the close of the turn, after everyone has made their dispositions, the choices are revealed and any units in reserve are then allocated among the attacks. The actual outcome of the battles is not determined until the start of the next war turn. If the PC's unit isn't actually involved in any fighting, then a session of play oriented around base activities or challenges in the countryside might be run, or else another war turn might be run immediately after the first until the PC

Battle Results	
Margin	**Result**
Tied Rolls	Both sides take 1d6 steps of damage from the engagement
Win by 1-2	The Winner takes 1d4 steps of damage The Loser takes 1d6 steps of damage
Win by 3-5	The Winner takes 1d2 steps of damage The Loser takes 1d6 steps of damage
Win by 6-9	The Winner takes 1 step of damage The Loser takes 1d8 steps of damage
Win by 10+	The Winner takes no damage The Loser takes 1d10 steps of damage

unit finally does get shoved into battle. The PCs might even be dispatched to help another unit in the field, or asked to aid in the retreat from some undefended Vital Point that's being overwhelmed by an enemy attack.

Attacking a Vital Point

To attack a Vital Point, the attacker needs at least one unit which hasn't already been assigned to R&R or to their reserves. A single unit can only attack one Vital Point each war turn, barring the GM's estimation of special circumstances.

At the end of the war turn, the defender may resist the attack by placing one or more units that they have in reserve. It's normally assumed that they're able to move the troops into position to defend, or that they were already there to begin with. Units in reserve can defend against only one attack per war turn.

At this point, the battle is suspended until the start of the next war turn, in order to give the PCs a chance to intervene in the form of a mission. The success or failure of this mission will affect the dice that are eventually thrown for the battle.

Once it's time to dice out the resolution, each side rolls 2d6 and adds the total Strength of any units involved and the Tech Level of each side. If the Vital Point is undefended, it rolls 1d6 in most cases, or 2d6 if it's a military strongpoint or exceptionally hard location to capture. Points defended by the PCs always roll 2d6, even if the valiant heroes are a mere detached squad acting without support.

The result is then compared against the table, with the margin of victory determining how much damage the winner and loser take. If the PCs conducted a mission during the battle, however, the result is skewed by their success or failure. If the PCs accomplished all their objectives, the result is shifted 2 steps in favor of their allies. If the PCs accomplished their primary objective, the result is 1 step more favorable. If the PCs failed *all* of the objectives, however, the result is shifted 1 step *worse* due to their lack of success.

Once the result is found, each side rolls the listed damage. These steps of damage may be divided up among units

involved in the battle as their commanders deem best. If a unit's condition falls below Crippled, it shrinks to the next smallest unit size, becomes Fresh, and any overflow damage continues to be applied from there. A unit smashed below Battalion size by damage is too mangled to be any use as an independent element, and is removed from the war. If the PCs belonged to that unit, they will be transferred to one of the remaining functional formations.

If all defending units have been destroyed by the end of the battle, or if no defender was present to begin with, the Vital Point is either captured or destroyed depending on its nature. Whether or not it was something that the assailants could reasonably capture is something that was determined during the creation of the war. Seizing undefended Vital Points is automatic for a unit, but there's a chance they might suffer some scuffs in the process if the defender rolled well on their lone die and an underweight attacking force rolled poorly on theirs.

Resting and Recovering

Units can be pulled from the fight to rest and refit behind the lines. Units recovering in this way cannot be used to defend Vital Points. They're too scattered and too occupied with repairs to pull together into a meaningful fighting force, even if they happen to be located where the enemy is launching an attack. In such a case they're assumed to pull back to some safer location once the battle seems imminent.

At the end of the war turn, Units that are resting and refitting can roll 1d6. On a 3 or more, they recover one step of damage, up to a maximum of Fresh. Units that have been battered down to a smaller effective size by battle damage cannot normally regain their lost size in the available timeframe of a war. If new sources of recruits or supplies can be found, perhaps with the aid of a PC mission, this limit might be sidestepped.

Standing Units In Reserve

Units can be pulled from the line but kept close enough to the fighting to respond to any enemy incursions. Units in reserve can't effectively repair combat damage, but they're assumed to be fast enough to get to any Vital Point in time to make a difference.

PC missions might serve to cut transport links and hinder an enemy unit, however, and other environmental complications might keep a unit from providing useful help. A force with the Sea type might not be able to give much meaningful help to a landlocked Vital Point, though the range of modern railgun artillery can cross large portions of a continent. It's up to the GM to decide whether or not to complicate matters.

Once a unit has been deployed to defend against an attack, it can't be pulled to meet a second invasion elsewhere until the next war turn, barring GM decisions or some special circumstance.

War Turn Summary

1) Resolve any attacks initiated during the prior war turn. If the defenders have any units in reserve, they may move them to meet the attackers. Attacking units can strike only one Vital Point each turn, and defenders can defend only one Vital Point each turn.

2) To resolve an attack, each side rolls 2d6 and adds the Strength of their units present there. If the Vital Point is undefended, it rolls a bare 1d6, or 2d6 if it's a military strongpoint. The side with the higher total wins, and compares their margin of victory to the table in this section.

3) If the PCs were involved in the battle as part of their recent mission, shift the results on the table. If the PCs succeeded in their main objective, improve the results by one step. If they succeeded in all their objectives, improve the results by two steps. If they failed at all their objectives, worsen the results by one step.

4) Both attackers and defenders assign the damage steps they suffer to the units of their choice. If no defending units are left at the Vital Point, it is captured or destroyed.

5) Players now take up the roles of allied leaders, disposing their forces for the next war turn. Assign units either to attack specific enemy Vital Points, to stand in reserve for defense, or to rest and recover from battle damage. The GM secretly decides the enemy choices first, so as to prevent a biased response to the player dispositions.

6) Attackers are revealed by all sides. Defending units in reserve may be positioned to meet the attacks. The actual outcomes are not determined yet, however. They are rolled at the start of the next turn, after PCs have had a chance to affect the results with their mission efforts.

The Power of Heroism

If you're running a particularly heroic campaign where the deeds of a handful of intrepid soldiers can reliably change the course of tremendous battles, you might allow a heroic defense of an otherwise undefended Vital Point by the PC squad. The PCs will be detached from their unit to help escort civilians or retreating troops from the area, blow up abandoned supply caches, or otherwise carry out a mission that makes the enemy conquest as dear as possible.

These missions are run as normal, but always allow the defending Vital Point to roll 2d6 for its defense, even if it's not a military strongpoint. Furthermore, if the PCs succeed in their primary objective, a roll of 10+ means that the Vital Point miraculously holds against the enemy assault and is not captured or destroyed. Successful secondary objectives each add +1 to the roll.

An Example War Turn

With the PCs having enlisted bravely into the Smithwick Front of the rebel army, it's come time to run the first war turn. The players don their hats as the various members of the rebel high command and consider the situation at hand.

As it is the very first war turn, there are no old battles to resolve. The loyalists act first, so the GM's choices are untainted by knowledge of the players' actions. Thus, the GM adopts the pitiless considerations of the Duke of York. He is no tactician, and knows only that an infuriatingly large number of peasants are in arms. He orders one unit to each of the rebel Vital Points, telling them to cleanse them with blood.

The allied side then acts, with eight army fronts to assign. The players briefly consider keeping the entire army in reserve so as to respond to any attacks, but that's hardly a way to win a war. Instead, they decide to gamble a little, and pour in three infantry fronts and their sole artillery front into an attack on the Dunwich work pits. Victory here will help convince the commoners that the gentry are on their side, and not merely a change of masters. The remaining four army fronts are left in reserve to respond to attacks, among them the Smithwick Front.

Then the Duke's brutal move is revealed. The rebels have four army fronts in reserve, which means they're going to have to leave four of their Vital Points unprotected. It's a cruel choice for the high command, but eventually they resign themselves to abandoning the Upton Abbey manor, the arms caches, the rail nexus, and the factory complexes of Smithwick. This will be a cruel blow against the rebel logistics, but it will give them a chance to save as much human life as possible. The brass decide to put in one army front to defend each of the remaining Vital Points, with the Smithwick Front sent to defend the orbital braker gun emplacements at the Red Tower.

The war turn is now over and the gaming session closes for the night. In the downtime between sessions, the GM uses the tools in this book to cook up a mission for the PCs involving their defense of the Red Tower. When the group meets again, the PCs play out their heroic efforts. They manage to achieve their primary objective, albeit with half the squad dying in the process. Their secondary objectives are unfulfilled.

The second war turn now commences, and it starts by resolving the battles. The fight at Dunwich is handled first, because it's a foregone conclusion. The rebels roll 2d6 and add their total Strength of 48 and Tech Level of 2, against the undefended Dunwich's roll of 1d6 plus the loyalist Tech Level of 4. Comparing it to the results table, it's obvious that the rebel fronts take no meaningful damage, and Dunwich is destroyed as a loyalist Victory Point.

Now comes the grimmer news. The GM decides that the arms caches at Ben Bulben qualify as a military Victory Point, so they roll 2d6 + Tech Level 2 against the invading army's 2d6 + Strength 8 + Tech Level 4. The rebels roll 7, for a total of 9, against the loyalist roll of 7, for a total of 19. The arms cache is destroyed without a scratch on the invading Clade.

The rail nexus rolls a 1 for its defense, and is smashed with equal ease. The defenders of Upton Abbey roll a 6, however, while the attacking forces roll only a 3. Even with the modifiers, that's only a 7-point margin, which means that the attacking force suffers 1 step of damage, going from Fresh to Readied. Again, at the factory complexes of Smithwick, the loyalists only win by 9 points, which means that Unit also suffers 1 step of damage. In the end, however, four of the rebels' Vital Points have been extinguished in a single turn.

The remaining ones are defended ferociously. At Aldershot, the rebels roll a 10, adding their army front Strength of 12 and their Tech Level of 2 for a total of 24. The attacking loyalists roll a 6, adding their Tech Level of 4 and Strength of 8 for a total of 18. This six-point difference inflicts 1 step of harm against the rebel army front, but 1d8 steps against the loyalist army. It rolls 4 steps of damage, and is smashed down to a Fresh Corps, now at Strength 4.

In the fields of New Essex the tables are turned, with the rebels rolling a 6 and the loyalists rolling a 10, for respective totals of 20 and 22. The loyalists win, but still suffer 1d4 steps of damage, while the rebels take 1d6. They roll a 2 and a 3 respectively, which is enough to reduce the loyalist Clade to Bloodied and the rebel army front to Crippled. Because the loyalists failed to destroy all opposition, New Essex remains securely in rebel hands.

The simple folk of the Severn valley cower in their homes as the guns thunder around them, each side rolling a 7 for totals of 21 and 19 respectively. Now it's the rebels who take 1d4 steps of damage and the loyalists who suffer 1d6. The chances of war are cruel to the rebels, however, and they take 4 steps of damage, knocking their army front down to a Fresh Army with a Strength of 8. The loyalist commander is in luck, and takes only 1 step of damage.

For the final battle at the Red Tower, the rebels roll a 9 against a loyalist commander who manages only a 5. That's a 6 point margin of victory, shifted up a further level by the victorious PC mission. That margin of victory is enough that the Smithwick Front is unscathed, while the enemy army that faced them is smashed for 1d10 levels of damage. The luckless commander rolls a 9, and his mighty legion is chewed down to a Readied Division, with a Strength of 2.

Now the war turn continues with the Duke of York pondering his actions. He's inflicted terrible wounds on the rebels, but he's paid dearly to do it. The rebels have lost half their Vital Points, but they have enough units left of sufficient strength to choke the loyalists to death if they can bring their full force to bear. Shall he continue to press the rebels with two units sent against each of their remaining Vital Points? Or should he hold some in reserve? Only time and play will tell….

When It Comes To Fighting

Creating Missions and Adventures

The backbone of a military campaign lies in the missions that the PCs undertake. Some might be conducted under a hail of enemy artillery in the midst of an active battlefield, while others might be more subtle undertakings involving diplomacy with the locals and the careful manipulation of native leadership. Whatever their specific details, missions make up the bulk of the play you and your group will have.

There is a certain intrinsic tension between a conventional military campaign and the goals of a sandbox setting. **Stars Without Number** is built to support a sandbox style of play in which the PCs are constantly formulating their own goals and taking the steps they think best toward accomplishing them. They have no masters beyond their immediate employer, and even in that case there are usually limited repercussions to bowing out of an engagement. They might not be *pleasant* repercussions, but only the most ruthless or embittered patron is likely to retaliate in ways the PCs aren't ready to handle.

Military PCs don't have that luxury of self-determination. Almost by definition, they're men and women who obey their superiors and accomplish the tasks put before them. If they have any personal discretion at all, it's simply to decide the best way in which to do what they've been told to do. For an ordinary PC grunt in the mud of an alien hell-world, the choice to simply up and leave is one that is likely to mark their end as a playable character.

For some campaigns, this would not be a problem. If the group has a particular story arc to explore and everyone is interested in playing it out, then playing the roles of low-ranking military personnel might be no imposition at all. The GM will ensure that they get sent where the story needs them to go, and once there they'll play out their choices and responses within the context of their position. The pleasure of the play will be in the complex story, interesting set-piece situations, and progressive development of their characters in response to the story line.

For players who want a sandbox experience while still playing military personnel of a rank low enough to actually do something in the field, however, a story arc model is not a solution. They want to have as much freedom as possible within the campaign's framework to choose their own goals and determine the destiny of their own ambitions. The mission structure provided in this chapter is a way to give that to the players while maintaining the feel and context of a classic military-centric campaign.

The Brass and the Muck

The players have each created a high military official as part of the process of creating the army to which the PCs belong. At the end of each play session, once a mission has been accomplished and a battle resolved, the players take the roles of these high-ranking commanders and choose the next engagement for the PC unit.

Some groups will play these conferences out "in character", with their individual officers having their own quirks, dislikes, and goals. Other groups might be much more stylized about their choices, simply examining the strategic situation for potential interesting conflicts for their lower-ranking PCs to engage. Either way is perfectly acceptable, but it's important that the players take control of the military campaign and direct their PCs where the action is most interesting to them.

In some cases, this will be where the danger is greatest to their cause. The help of a successful PC mission can utterly change the tide of the greater battle. There's no guarantee of victory when the PCs manage to accomplish their objectives, but it does heavily weight the engagement in favor of the allies. In these cases, the PCs are part of a desperate fire crew, thrown into the worst situations and most critical battles in order to snatch victory from the talons of doom. Many of them may die in the process, but there's always a friendly new guy to shove into the stalls.

In other cases, the players might have different motivations for their deployment. They might decide to send their troops to help friendly NPCs or relieve pressure on an old ally's home province or beloved village. They might pursue a hated enemy and seek to crush them for some unavenged atrocity. These kind of personal motivations tend to crop up most often in planetary army campaigns, when players have the time to develop personal feelings toward their allies and their foes.

For some turns, the PC unit might have no active assignment. It might be charged with rest and recovery, or pulled back from the front as a reserve unit. This should be a valid choice for the players, but it doesn't stop a GM from generating something to engage them during the next session. You could generate a conventional mission to cover some sudden local problem, or you could build a more contemplative session dealing with internal problems or intra-unit favors.

Choosing Mission Tags

Once you know what Vital Point will command attention from the players, it's time to start building up a mission. The first step is choosing one or more **mission tags**. These tags serve as a short summary of the basic problem of the session. On a battlefield, this situation or complication is going to be the most pressing issue for the PCs.

Each mission tag includes a list of twelve potential objectives and six complications. The objectives are designed to fall in six general categories: killing an enemy, destroying a position, capturing a location, bringing something important to an ally, retrieving something significant from an enemy, or scouting out information needed by the unit. The complications are twists to the situation that are likely to make life harder for the PCs as they attempt to complete their objectives.

You should choose one primary objective and one or two secondary objectives. You might choose to take the primary one from the first mission tag you roll, while selecting a secondary one from a second tag to add a little variety to the battlefield. It's not necessary to fully flesh out the objectives at this point. You just need to have two or more things that the PCs are expected to accomplish on the field.

Then apply a complication, one which the PCs may or may not be aware of at the start of the mission. It's a classic genre trope for luckless soldiers to battle to the very brink of victory, only to find that the situation is not exactly as advertised. Particularly cold-blooded GMs might accept the dice ordaining an out-and-out screwjob for the players, while others might be too tender to let victory spell disaster for the players. Either choice is a valid one, depending on the group.

Try to ensure that objectives are reasonable for the group. Sending a quartet of low-level PCs to go take out an entire enemy base is unlikely to work well unless they're amply equipped with artillery support or infantry reinforcements they need only direct. The mission tags section has further discussion of some of the more common objective types.

MISSION CREATION SUMMARY

These steps summarize the process of creating a battlefield mission for your PC squad.

Let the brass choose the battle. At the end of a game session the PCs should take up the roles of their more exalted PC officers and sort out the PC unit's next assignment. If the PC unit is being kept in reserve, the PCs themselves might be detached for service with another unit or end up with a mission involving local relations or unit politics rather than a battlefield objective.

Choose one or more mission tags. Once you know where the PC unit is going to be, roll or choose one or more mission tags to find out the basic problem that the allied forces there are going to have to manage.

Choose major and minor objectives. From the mission tag list, choose one major objective and at least one minor objective. You might pull minor objectives from other tag lists. Add complications from the tag as needed to mix up an otherwise straightforward problem.

Make or find the mission map. Now you need to sketch out the map of the mission area. You can either put together a crude diagram with rough distances noted or download a map of some matching terrain from the net. Pristine cartographic perfection isn't needed, just a basic idea of where the PCs start, where the objectives are, and what kind of terrain or complications lie between them.

Detail objectives and challenges. Add some complications to the map from the resources that follow the mission tag list. If an objective seems relatively simple on its face, like transporting a load of supplies to allies, then use these complications to make it a challenge worth facing. Write down combat statistics for likely foes and sketch out rough maps of any particular fortifications or infiltration sites that you expect to need for the mission. You might scribble down a few NPC names in case you need to add a local.

Dress the final details. Make a copy of the map for the players, marking out known points of interest and the objective locations, assuming they know them. Check to see what special resources the squad has to call on, either from the special advantages PC brass give their squad clients or the extra support provided by the units in the area. Note these abilities down on cards and give them to the players to help track their use. Decide how replacement PCs will be added to a depleted squad, and decide what the outcome will be if they botch their objectives or need to flee the mission.

With that accomplished, you now have a suitably dramatic battlefield mission to occupy your PCs. Try to keep matters simple enough to accomplish in a single session's play, unless there's a particular need to stretch things out.

Making the Map

Once you have a general grasp of the objectives associated with this mission, you're ready to start mapping out the area. There are two general ways of doing this, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. The choice for you will depend on the amount of time and effort you have to spare and the degree of precision your players enjoy in their maps.

The first way is to create a very simple relational map. Begin with a blank sheet of paper. On one side of the paper, mark the insertion point for the PCs, the place from which they'll be starting the mission. Some missions and some PC groups might have more latitude in their initial position, but you'll need a point for planning purposes at least.

Next, draw at least three loose blobs of rough terrain appropriate to the setting. The tables in this chapter offer some suggestions for features, but anything that fits the planet and the local surrounds will work. Thick forest, a steep cliff, a river too deep to easily ford, deep swamps, powder sand, high hills, or anything else that might complicate a PC squad's progress will work. For most maps, let the rough terrain take up at least half the paper. Some maps might be entirely rough terrain, with relatively small patches of easier going.

Now place the objectives. Some objectives will be relatively obvious; if the PCs are charged with seizing a gun emplacement that's commanding a chokepoint, then you put the emplacement next to a narrow path through rough terrain. Other objectives are vague, such as finding a VIP who's been lost somewhere in a trackless jungle. Put the objectives where they seem reasonable to you, but at least one of the objectives should be at least half the map's width away from the others. If you clump them all together the inevitable chaos and disruption of taking one can end up alerting the others beyond any hope of success.

A map that consists of nothing but objectives and empty terrain leaves something to be desired for excitement, however. Use the resources in this section to roll up a half-dozen points of interest on the map, placing them accordingly. These people, places, and things probably have nothing to do with the missions, but they provide additional elements to engage the PCs during play.

Finally, for a simple map, make a few notes on travel times between the various points. You might keep a ruler to hand at the table and calculate a certain number of minutes to cross a centimeter of distance, with double or triple time for rough terrain. If there is no pressing time pressure to the objective, you might just make the vaguest decisions about general distance, as the speed of travel is unlikely to be all that important during play.

The second way to create a map is similar to the first in all steps except the start. Instead, you download a terrain map off the internet, choosing some random area that has the right general topography. Google Maps is one potential source, as are government surveys. American surveys are particularly useful in this regard, as there are large stretches of rough, unpopulated terrain that are still well-mapped. With the map in hand, you then go ahead and plant objectives,

While this method creates extremely realistic maps, it is at a disadvantage when rendering truly alien terrain and requires that the GM find some patch of Earth that matches the needs of their mission outline. Its very accuracy can also prove somewhat hindering in play, as players feel obligated to deal with the numerous small obstacles and terrain quirks between them and their target. For some groups, the logistics of dealing with the map can end up distracting from the less sharply-defined elements of the mission. Still, others find the extra verisimilitude to be worth it.

Objectives and Challenges

With the map set and the objectives placed, now it's time to detail them individually, along with any other fine detailing that the local points of interest might require. In most cases, it will be fairly obvious what sort of preparation an objective requires. If the PCs are charged with wiping out a unit of enemy troops, you're going to need statistics for those troops. If they're supposed to seize a forward outpost of the foe, you're going to need a crude diagram of the outpost and details on its defenses. A brief consideration of the problem should be all you need to tip you off on what you should be writing down.

There are times when the objective by itself just isn't very interesting. If the PCs need to drive a supply truck to a remote base, that's a clear objective, but there's no obvious reason why it should be an interesting problem to deal with. In those cases, you'll want to use the challenge tables in this section to complicate the situation, adding problems and difficulties along the way for the PCs to overcome. You can also add additional challenges to more conventional problems, to layer more misery on the situation.

You'll also need to flesh out the points of interest on the map, supplying names to NPCs and places and detailing them out to the extent that seems necessary. Save your work with these points; you can always reskin and recycle them later for other missions if the PCs don't use up the content on the first pass through. Even pure-hearted sandbox GMs shouldn't feel any hesitation to recycle unused content this way. You're not creating a continental siege engine that the PCs will be destined to face regardless of their choices, you're just ensuring that you *have* a continental siege engine detailed for the next time that the sandbox would logically need one.

Also remember that the PCs are likely to have the tools to deal summarily with certain kinds of complications. If they've got a squadron of close-support gravflyers available, they're not going to slow down much in taking out some lightly-entrenched enemy forces. Let the PCs use their hardware. It's not much fun being the heavily-armed representative of a standing military force if you never get to call in an artillery strike on someone who upsets you.

Final Dressing

The last stage is just dressing the mission up with a last few points that might prove relevant in play. First, make a player copy of the map with known intel marked on it. In some cases the objective location will be obvious from the start of the mission, while in others the PCs might have to hunt it out themselves. While most advanced planets will have high-quality terrain maps available via satellite records, most battlefields rapidly knock down any eyes in the sky. Without unchallenged space superiority, the PCs may have nothing but stale intel and whatever they can see with a good pair of binoculars and whatever a line-of-sight spy drone can spot before it's swatted down by the enemy.

Then check to confirm what special resources the PCs might have due to the units assigned to the battle or the special perks of the brass. It's often most convenient to write these down on 3x5 cards and hand them to the player responsible for calling them in. While brass perks are lost for the mission if the PC they're assigned to perishes, unit abilities such as artillery strikes or infantry reinforcements can be called in so long as one squad member is still left to work the radio.

And with that in mind, decide how replacement PCs will be added in, should some of the initial squad be lost. Convenient infantry squad survivors can always turn up to join a decimated party, as can forward observers who are pulling back, or fragments of a prior squad assigned to the same mission. With the potentially high mortality rating of a military campaign, it's especially important to players with downed PCs back into the game as quickly as possible. You should take care to allow some plausible way to get fresh bodies into the squad mid-mission.

Lastly, think about the failure states for the mission. Some missions will be failed if they aren't completed within a certain number of hours. Others will be called off if the PCs suffer too many casualties, such as the entire loss of the squad. Some might fail if a certain special condition obtains, such as the death of a VIP or the loss of a supply shipment. Make sure the PCs know about any obvious failure states at the start of the mission.

Once you have this material in hand, you're ready to run the mission. Unless you determinedly railroad the squad through the full selection of events and encounters you've prepared on the battlefield, though, you're very likely to end the session with at least some of these unexplored. A squad might well avoid much of the material you've prepped on their way to their objectives.

This isn't a waste. If you have an encounter or situation that never came up in play, just clip it out, wipe off its identifying marks, and save it for another occasion. You might plant it in another mission with names and details changed to match, or you might bring it out in the middle of a future session when you need that kind of content in a hurry. Sooner or later the wise GM uses every part of their preparation work.

Mission Tags and Situations

There are some common mission situations that a GM can expect to encounter regularly in a military campaign. Throwing the PCs at them in a naive fashion can end poorly for all involved, so here are a few tips on managing these ubiquitous challenges.

One thing you should keep in mind for all these situations is that the PCs are ostensibly professional military personnel. They aren't going to make trivial, stupid mistakes, however unfortunate their larger decisions might be. You generally shouldn't punish the PCs for not rigorously executing room-clearing protocols or fire-and-maneuver techniques, nor ding them for failing to remember operational trivia. Let their mistakes be due to consciously-made choices rather than environmental gotchas. You should be ready to "fill in the blanks" when something should be obvious to the player characters, and provide appropriate clues and prompts for players who might not be seasoned mil-SF enthusiasts.

Fighting A Larger Unit

The PCs are often put in the position of disrupting or destroying an enemy unit, one that might involve a great many more NPCs than there are PC soldiers to deal with them. While high-level PCs might be able to gun down far more than their ordinary weight in enemies, that kind of meat-grinder attrition is both tedious and liable to end in dead PCs eventually.

Instead, make sure that the PCs have access to a sufficient supply of artillery strikes, infantry reinforcements, air support, or other outside assistance to make the job feasible. Their task might simply be to get close enough to the enemy to call in an effective strike, with an actual firefight with the enemy being a failure state for the PCs. It's possible they have to close with the enemy and monitor them long enough for a friendly force to move in and attack, doing so without being spotted by the enemy.

Optionally, the PCs might need to kill specific targets in the enemy unit in order to disrupt them long enough for allies to respond. Officers are regular targets for this sort of thing, as are comm technicians or mission-critical personnel. The PCs might have to observe the unit long enough to identify the leadership before they can hope to take them out, and to do so cleanly enough to have some chance of escaping the ensuing response.

Remember also that destroying a unit doesn't normally require individual execution of every soldier involved. Heavy casualties or mass confusion can render a unit perfectly useless on the battlefield, at least for long enough to satisfy the tactical needs of the brass. If the PCs manage to drop an artillery strike on the canvas tents of an enemy platoon, it's not going to matter much if half the targets are still theoretically capable of firing a rifle; they're going to be far more distracted by their deafness, internal injuries, and dying comrades to be much of a threat.

d00	Mission Tag
1–4	Air Inferiority
5–8	Angry Biosphere
9–12	Atrocious Casualties
13–16	Civilian Shields
17–20	Clock Race
21–24	Comm Jamming
25–28	Completely Lost
29–32	Confused Leadership
33–36	Elite Opposition
37–40	Enemy Spies
41–44	Equipment Failure
45–48	Hidden Sabotage
49–52	Hopeless Confusion
53–56	Low Supplies
57–60	Miserable Weather
61–64	Mutinous Troops
65–68	NBC Attack
69–72	Sudden Betrayal
73–76	Surprise Fortifications
77–80	Surrounded Allies
81–84	Transport Failure
85–88	Treacherous Terrain
89–92	Untimely Looting
93–96	Vital Extraction
97–00	Vulnerable ECM

Taking or Destroying a Structure

Fortified structures or armed camps are usually impossible for the PCs to capture "fairly." An attempt to seize a place by direct assault is usually an invitation to swift death, so you should be sure that the PCs have access to artillery strikes or demolitions charges capable of blowing holes in the location's defenses or wiping out its defensive perimeter. It may also be that the PCs only have to knock a hole in the site's defenses so that other units can rush in.

Maps are particularly important for missions like these, as it's very likely that the PCs are going to end up fighting inside a building. You can plunder the maps of almost any modern structure for this purpose, as even the most unlikely buildings can end up commandeered by the necessities of war. The PCs might even have maps of the site taken from pre-war databases, assuming the enemies haven't made any special interior renovations that the PCs can only discover through harsh experience.

Stealth and Infiltration

The PCs are often going to need to get close to people who want to kill them, and do so in an unobtrusive way. If everyone in the squad rolls a Stealth skill check, odds are that at least one of them is going to roll terribly, and if one PC gets noticed, it's likely all of them will be noticed. As such, you might want to handle military infiltrations a little differently, as the PCs can be assumed to have experience in cooperating as a group.

In this case, just set a squad skill check difficulty based on the general vigilance of the enemy perimeter, using the guidelines in the *Stars Without Number* core book. Most reasonably-watchful sites will be a difficulty 9, while very well-entrenched ones will be 11, and high-tech sites with worried guards will be 13. Then use the squad skill check rules here to determine the success of the effort.

If the point man succeeds, the PCs get into the location, sneaking in at-will until they hit substantially different defenses or a notably different area inside the location. If the point man fails, then the PCs will alert the enemies when they're halfway through the defenses. If the foes are disorganized or have weak defenses, the PCs might be able to lose them inside the site itself. Otherwise, they'll need to pull out and evade the likely pursuit.

Regardless of the system you use, make sure the players have something to work with in the way of cover or concealment. A featureless desert plain can defy the most inventive players, so make sure to have at least a rough sketch map available indicating the objects the PCs can hide behind or skulk around. If you don't have such a map available, extemporize with a few plausible features that might be in the area.

Hot Pursuit

Sometimes the PCs are going to end up chasing someone or being chased by hostile forces. If this chase takes place on vehicles, the usual vehicle rules from *Stars Without Number* can be used. If the pursuit is on foot, you can simply use the squad skill check system to generate a result.

Set a difficulty based on the quality of pursuit or the swiftness of the target. Note that large groups of enemies have a much harder time catching up with smaller groups, as they can move no faster than their slowest member. Now let the character with the best Athletics make a squad skill check roll, or the best Stealth skill if trying to evade pursuers by cunning rather than raw speed.

If the point man succeeds, the PCs either catch up to the target or evade their pursuers. If they fail, then either the target gets away or some dangerous portion of the pursuers get close enough to attack the PCs. If they can break loose from the engagement, they can make another attempt to flee, perhaps at a higher difficulty as the enemies are closer behind them now.

Tracking Down a Target

Once again, a squad skill check can be used when the PCs are attempting to find a target somewhere in a maze of local vegetation or jagged mountain ridges. Friendly targets who want to be found by the PCs will be relatively easy to locate, while hostile infiltrators will use all their cunning to evade the allied forces.

For these squad skill checks, Survival is usually the relevant skill, though Perception might work as well. Depending on the fidelity of the area map being used, the players might make good suggestions about places to search or ways to locate the target in order to gain the assistance bonus on the squad skill check. You should be ready to abstract these searches somewhat, as making the players interrogate every hollow and blind canyon on the map is the topographical equivalent of making a group of adventurers specifically list every part of a dungeon room they're rifling through.

If the PCs fail, let them walk into one of the challenges associated with the objective, or into an unhelpful point of interest on the map. Assuming they can extricate themselves from the situation, they can make another attempt at finding the target, assuming their mission has the luxury of time for it.

In urban areas or around local settlements, the best tracking techniques might consist of a few well-placed questions for the locals. Most peasants have a near-genetic aversion to involving themselves in the affairs of soldiers, so it might take some especially persuasive conversation or material inducement to get them to talk. Other locals may only be willing to inform on military activity in exchange for the kind of favors that only soldiers can provide.

Mission Tag List

Air Inferiority

Enemy forces have control of the skies over the battlefield. The allies might have some degree of aerial cover, but what exists is patchy at best. The PCs are unlikely to be able to call in any air support and may be subject to strafing or bombing from unopposed enemy gravfliers, helicopters, or fixed-wing planes.

Unless the PCs have some sort of effective anti-air weaponry, such attacks are more hazards to be evaded than foes to be overcome in combat. Rocket launchers can be effective weapons against hovering helicopters or slow-moving fliers, but high-altitude aircraft can be effective untouchable.

Prudent PCs will stay close to cover on these battlefields, relying on foliage, buildings, rubble, and the terrain to stay out of sight. Most aircraft are equipped with weapons that can easily punch through any feasible source of cover, so survival relies on not being seen. Most aircraft have only a limited amount of time or ammunition for any one battlefield, so if the PCs can stay out of the enemy's sights long enough, the aircraft is likely to be withdrawn.

Vehicle-using squads are at particular risk from hostile air. Hiding a vehicle is often impractical, and even the thickest tank armor is little defense against a missile from above.

d12 Objectives

d12	Objectives
1	Kill forward air control staff
2	Kill enemy pilots resting near the front
3	Destroy aircraft still on the runways
4	Destroy enemy anti-air emplacement
5	Seize a hill commanding an airstrip
6	Take an ideal site for friendly anti-air
7	Bring vital parts for friendly aircraft
8	Bring ammunition or parts to an anti-air site
9	Retrieve critical spare parts from an enemy cache
10	Retrieve a downed enemy pilot
11	Find a hidden airfield
12	Steal enemy operations plan and force intel

d6 Complications

d6	Complications
1	Enemy drones are constantly watching from above
2	Friendly forces are getting attacked from the air
3	Enemies are getting air-shuttled behind the lines
4	Friendly vehicles are getting blasted by air attacks
5	Enemy troops have good close air support
6	Friendly AA has been crippled or compromised

Angry Biosphere

The native biosphere is dangerous under the best circumstances, but the fighting here has stirred up the native life forms into a grave peril to everyone on the battlefield. Beasts that are avoidable dangers in a calmer season now rampage among allied and enemy troops alike.

On some planets, this might be the ordinary state of affairs. The natives might know of ways to avoid these natural perils, or they might have the common sense to stay away from zones infested by the most dangerous life forms. Outsiders may not be so well-educated.

Biosphere perils range up and down the scale. Hulking alien predators might be attacking armored vehicles while microscopic molds gnaw away the skin of wretched troopers. Vast carpets of biting alien vermin can be turned back only by flame moats or clouds of pesticide. Angry fliers swoop down to savage wounded men, and tiny vermin contaminate water supplies with their parasitic eggs. A truly hostile world is a study in misery to any soldier caught on it.

The best solution for dealing with these threats is to be somewhere else. If that can't be accomplished, the PCs may need to find someone with the expertise to deal with the situation, or salvage gear vital to their continuing safety and sanity.

d12 Objectives

d12	Objectives
1	Kill a rampaging alien hulk
2	Kill a murderous stalking assassin-animal
3	Destroy a hive of alien life forms
4	Destroy enemy defenses against a predator
5	Seize the only safe ground against dire vermin
6	Seize a burnt-over patch cleared of local life
7	Deliver critical anti-allergen medications
8	Deliver defensive anti-predator tech
9	Recover an ally in a dangerous hunting range
10	Recover equipment stolen by an animal
11	Investigate beast-swamped enemy ruin
12	Find a path through lethal flora

d6 Complications

d6	Complications
1	The wildlife explodes or is more dangerous on death
2	The wildlife is dangerously intelligent
3	The enemies have partial control over the biosphere
4	A massive swarm's impending arrival forces haste
5	A dangerous creature is critical to local survival
6	A lifeform makes an addictive hallucinogenic drug

ATROCIOUS CASUALTIES

War is bloody in every season, but something exceptionally murderous is involved in this battle. Usually, the leadership of one of the sides has made a grievous mistake in their tactics. They've somehow allowed a large number of troops to be left open to enemy action, without shelter and exposed to brutal fire. Casualties are skyrocketing, though the bloodied side might still win through sheer determination. This might particularly be the case if PCs are there to lend their aid.

If the allies are the victims of this error, the PCs might be needed to stymie the enemy attack or lead the bloodied troops out of the kill zone. If the enemy suffers from their mistakes, it might be up to the PCs to exploit their errors or enable the attack that takes advantage of them. Either way, the PCs are closely involved with the consequences, and should have plenty of opportunity to see the grim results.

For additional engagement, you can ensure that NPCs known and liked by the players are somehow threatened by the situation. Simply accomplishing their mission may not be enough to save these allies; the PCs might have to go above and beyond their remit to relieve their friends. In either case, you should avoid predetermining the outcome, good or bad. PC actions can only ever tilt the board toward particular likelihoods, as war is too exquisitely capricious to be perfectly obedient to human intent.

d12 OBJECTIVES

1	Kill enemies perfectly lined up for slaughter
2	Kill an enemy officer responsible for brutal atrocity
3	Destroy an emplaced gun that's slaughtering allies
4	Destroy a fortification that's blocking advance
5	Hold a bottleneck to hold back the foe
6	Maintain a fortification against enemy attack
7	Bring medical supplies to a hospital
8	Bring ammunition to a desperate ally unit
9	Retrieve survivor who witnessed something
10	Recover proof of a military atrocity
11	Find a way out of a lethal ambush zone
12	Find survivors from a smashed unit

d6 COMPLICATIONS

1	The slaughter was accomplished through perfidy
2	Locals got caught up and killed in the fighting
3	The corpses are so thick they hinder the mission
4	The severity was due to loss of medical services
5	The deaths were due to natural disasters or local life forms
6	Looters are thick on the dead

CIVILIAN SHIELDS

The enemy is using human shields to protect important sites. These luckless wretches are usually neutral civilians rounded up from the surrounding area and forced to remain in place atop some military depot or command center. Any attack on the site is certain to create gruesome casualties, as any enemy cold enough to take this step is perfectly capable of adding to the civilian body count as needed. Among some cultures, this behavior might be considered a perfectly ordinary tactic to add extra suffering to an enemy's calculus.

In some cases, however, this situation isn't the result of human ruthlessness. The civilians might simply be trapped where they are due to the fighting that surrounds them, and they might not be able to get clear for fear of being shot down. Others are too determined to protect their property and refuse to leave, even when the enemy sets up a command post on the floor below them. In a few cases, the civilians might actually be zealous allies of the enemy forces, willing to face death in order to discourage the allied forces from attacking.

Tactics like these tend to work very well until they stop working at all. Eventually, all but the most tender-hearted militaries stop caring about the fate of these civilians, and launch attacks regardless of who might be in the danger zone. Once a war reaches this stage this tactic is usually abandoned unless the users are confident that the propaganda value is worth the burden of guarding and feeding their shields.

d12 OBJECTIVES

1	Kill troops holding civilians in place
2	Execute a civilian who betrayed the shields
3	Pierce barrier trapping the shields in place
4	Destroy the target without harming the shields
5	Reclaim building with shields in it
6	Seize transit line being used to move shields
7	Rescue important civilian shield
8	Capture target who knows shield locations
9	Find where the shields are being kept
10	Locate the real hidden target
11	Scout out the hidden location of the weapon
12	Find plans indicating where and how it will be used

d6 COMPLICATIONS

1	The civilians are enthusiastic allies of the foe
2	The civilians are clueless foreign nationals
3	The brass doesn't really care about civilian lives
4	Someone really wants the civilians to die
5	An allied spy is among the civilians
6	Someone the PCs like is among the civilians

Clock Race

The allies are caught in a situation that's about to become much worse for them unless they can resolve it quickly. It might involve seizing a bridge or transit point before enemy forces can rush in, or reducing a fortification before it can be successfully reinforced, moving a vulnerable convoy across open terrain before hostiles can intercept it, or some other feat of military alacrity. Usually the allies will be aware of the time pressure from the start, or else the calamity's descent can seem somewhat arbitrary. Of course, there's nothing stopping the GM from making the discovery of the time pressure part of the PC objectives.

More immediate clock races can be used for less all-encompassing goals. It may be that a secondary objective requires a quick response if it's not to collapse, or multiple time-sensitive situations may force the PCs to prioritize their efforts on the most critical points. Friends and allies might be involved in the situations, leaving the squad with a series of uncomfortable choices to make. Even if they choose to compromise the main mission, a friend's survival is not certain.

Failure to accomplish the time-sensitive goal doesn't necessarily mean that the situation is lost, but it does mean that things are going to be much worse for the allies than they might otherwise have been. PCs might get a chance to taste those unfortunate consequences in further engagements on this battlefield.

d12 Objectives

d12	Objectives
1	Kill an escaped spy before he gets back to the foe
2	Kill an engineering team before they can fix a thing
3	Destroy a missile emplacement before it can launch
4	Destroy a bridge before something can cross it
5	Seize a hamlet before the enemy can
6	Control a transit point before the enemy crosses
7	Deliver a dying VIP to a hospital before they perish
8	Deliver repair parts before something explodes
9	Recover medical supplies before they spoil
10	Bring back a wounded VIP before they die
11	Find a saboteur team before they blow something
12	Find a hole in enemy defenses before they get away

d6 Complications

d6	Complications
1	Only the PCs are aware of the time pressure
2	An officer's career profits if PCs fail to make it in time
3	The PCs think they have more time than they do
4	A progressive bad thing is getting worse with time
5	A rich prize awaits exceptionally fast execution
6	The time pressure is actually nonexistent
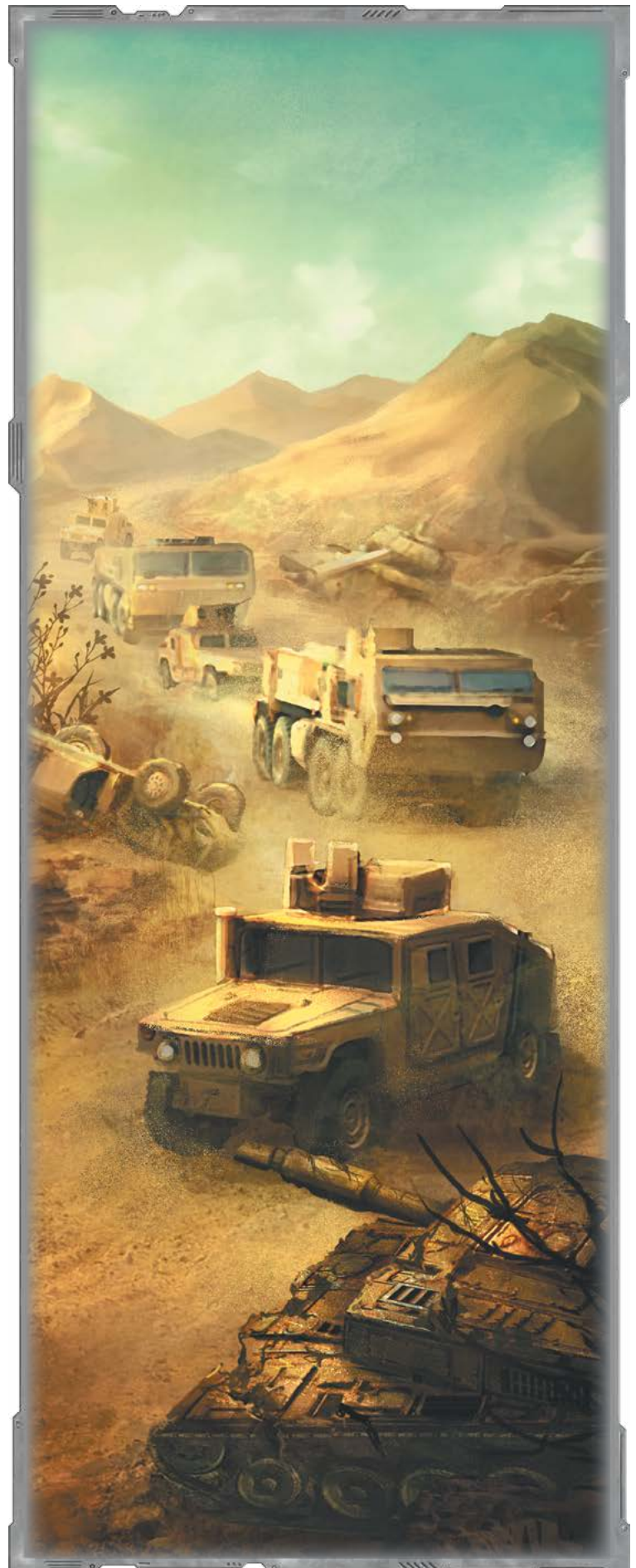
Comm Jamming

Conventional communications technology has been jammed on the battlefield. The PCs are forced to communicate with short-range tightbeam lasers, signal flares, wired landline phone connections, or loud yelling. Worse, it's very likely that the PCs have been charged with a somewhat ambiguous mission, forcing them to rely upon their own judgment rather than getting clear directives from the field command. It can be difficult or impossible to call for support in the field or coordinate large-scale assaults without working comms.

The usual tech for blocking communications involves radio frequency saturation, with the most effective generators being indiscriminate in their jamming. More sophisticated TL5 jamming gear might somehow disrupt even psychic or laser communications over long distances. Prepared hostiles have usually taken the time to put in wired comm channels, tightbeam networks, or other modes of communication so as to be better-prepared to deal with the radio silence, with the allies forced to improvise as best they can.

Of course, if the PCs can think of a way around this obstacle, they should be given the benefit of their cunning. An expert telepath can form a hub for mental links with the brass, while TL5 communicators or esoteric devices might ignore radio communications entirely. The enemy might be relying overmuch on their assumptions of comm superiority, and ill-equipped to handle opposition that's not so disorganized.

d12 Objectives

d12	
1	Kill the comm system saboteur who's jamming it
2	Repulse the enemy jamming team
3	Destroy the enemy EW emitter
4	Destroy the mobile jamming vehicle
5	Seize a vital civilian broadcasting station
6	Take a comm center the enemy has seized
7	Deliver newly-encrypted comm units
8	Bring spare parts to repair a comm hub
9	Recover a working enemy comm jammer
10	Retrieve code books before the enemy gets them
11	Find the source of the comm jamming
12	Find the last tech able to fix the problem

d6 Complications

d6	
1	The line's open, but the enemy's hearing everything
2	The comms fail at the very worst possible moment
3	The PCs have very time-sensitive info to deliver
4	The enemy is spoofing fake comm messages
5	The comms are half-open and garbled badly
6	The PCs can only send a few comms before failure

Completely Lost

The PCs or some other allied unit is extravagantly lost. Conventional inertial guidance or satellite GPS is down or damaged, and the PCs have only a notional idea of where they are or where they need to be. It may be that the PCs have an absolutely exact idea of their location, but a garbled understanding of where their mission objective is supposed to be. It's also possible that they know where they are and where they need to be, but some pig-headed officer is absolutely certain of some contrary state of affairs and won't let them proceed to their destination.

Despite the best efforts of TL4 navigation systems, it's almost inevitable that any large body of troops is going to have at least some of its number badly lost at any given time. The PCs might be charged with rescuing these innocents, locating them among the furor of an active battlefield in order to guide them back to their formation. This can become an exceptionally delicate task when some VIP is among the lost, or the brass needs to produce the missing troops quickly.

Other times, the confusion is induced with a little help from the enemy. Magnetic compasses can be spoofed by certain forms of tech, and even more advanced inertial locators or GPS signals can be skewed by esoteric science. The PCs might have every reason to trust their technology, only to discover a half-hour later that their surroundings bear no resemblance to the map they have of the area.

d12 Objectives

d12	
1	Kill the enemy squad that's chasing them
2	Kill the traitor who misled them and fled
3	Destroy the map-jamming enemy emitter
4	Destroy an enemy structure that's off the map
5	Claim a known landmark from enemy forces
6	Seize a pass that leads to their unit's location
7	Bring vital supplies to a lost unit
8	Bring directions to mislaid allied forces
9	Obtain a functioning or relevant map
10	Find a guide who can lead them out
11	Find a way back to known terrain
12	Find a way through a baffling landscape

d6 Complications

d6	
1	Local flora emit confusing pollens
2	Local geo-weather system baffles tech
3	The PCs are certain of their place, but wrong
4	The brass is certain of their orders, but wrong
5	Their mission goal is off the maps
6	They need to meet up with another lost unit

Confused Leadership

In a war zone, nothing is simple, least of all the directing of troops. The allied leadership in this area has become badly confused, misinterpreting their tactical goals or disregarding the true state of affairs on the battlefield. Some officers might be aware of their confusion, groping desperately at some way out of their benighted bafflement, while others forge forward with steely resolve and an unshakable conviction in their own erroneous impressions.

The usual result of this confusion stems from orders that made sense at the time, but which have been rendered obsolete by battlefield realities. For example, the officer might have been tasked with reducing an enemy fortification that has recently been abandoned by the enemy in favor of a different site with a commanding position over the first. Carrying out the order would be a pointless waste of men, but the officer may not be aware of the changed state of affairs, or might not dare subvert the instructions of particularly tyrannical superiors.

The PCs might be tasked with resolving this confusion by getting more information, or they might be part of the luckless legion sent forth to carry out the wrong orders. This confusion is rarely obvious at the start of the operation, but it soon becomes clear that the situation out there is even more unpleasantly divergent from the briefing than is usual for a military operation.

d12 Objectives

d12	
1	Kill an enemy leader, but directions are wrong
2	Kill a spy, but it's obvious they're not one
3	Destroy a structure that's actually innocuous
4	Destroy a structure that allies will later need
5	Take the wrong building from bewildered locals
6	Seize and hold a position without supporting allies
7	Bring vital supplies to the wrong unit
8	Bring vital supplies to what turns out to be the foe
9	Retrieve plans or objects that aren't actually there
10	Rescue a prisoner who doesn't want rescuing
11	Find a nonexistent allied unit in a dangerous area
12	Find a minor enemy unit that's really a major one

d6 Complications

d6	
1	The leadership is obstinately sure it's right
2	The brass has been misled by a traitor
3	The leader's comms are being corrupted
4	The confusion accidentally reveals a dire truth
5	It's actually a false lead to smoke out a leaker
6	The confusion is obvious to PCs, but not to brass

Elite Opposition

The enemy has brought out their best for this special occasion. Some sort of elite unit or specialized group of soldiers has been deployed to the battlefield, and they're causing grave problems for the allies. Usually these hostiles are infantry or armored troops, as such units are easiest for the PCs to engage, though a problem might also revolve around aerial forces that have tech or vehicles that the allies can't readily handle. Most elites have a very distinctive appearance or style of operation, excelling in a particular role on the battlefield. This role can sometimes be a hint as to what the enemy's overall plan might be.

The PCs are rarely in a position where they have to directly obliterate these elite forces. Aside from the difference in numbers, it's quite possible that these elites might be superior soldiers to low-level PCs. Instead, they usually need to accomplish some objective that hinders the enemy or puts them in a situation where existing allied forces can crush them. Direct confrontation is usually the unhealthiest option.

While potent tools, elite forces are almost always limited in number. The PCs might be able to take advantage of superior numbers of allied troops, or force distracting engagements that compel the elites to spread their forces too thinly to withstand a serious assault. Conversely, a hard hit on a tight cluster of the enemy might wipe out enough of them to cripple their forces here, if the PCs can lure them in for it.

d12 Objectives

d12	
1	Kill a famous and dreaded enemy officer
2	Wipe out an enemy unit that's slaughtered allies
3	Destroy the vehicles or tech the enemy relies on
4	Destroy a vital support base for the elite foe
5	Seize the gear or support the elites need to function
6	Pin the elites by taking a bottleneck before them
7	Bring specific counter-tech to an allied unit
8	Bring vital forewarning to a targeted allied unit
9	Capture an elite officer for intel purposes
10	Retrieve something vital before the elites seize it
11	Scout the elite landing area just before they arrive
12	Locate elusive elites before they can ambush allies

d6 Complications

d6	
1	The elites used to be allies or business associates
2	Local allies are terrified of the elites
3	The PCs can't hope to take them on directly
4	The PCs are being used as speedbumps by brass
5	The elites have tech the PCs aren't able to handle
6	Wiping the elites out would infuriate a third party
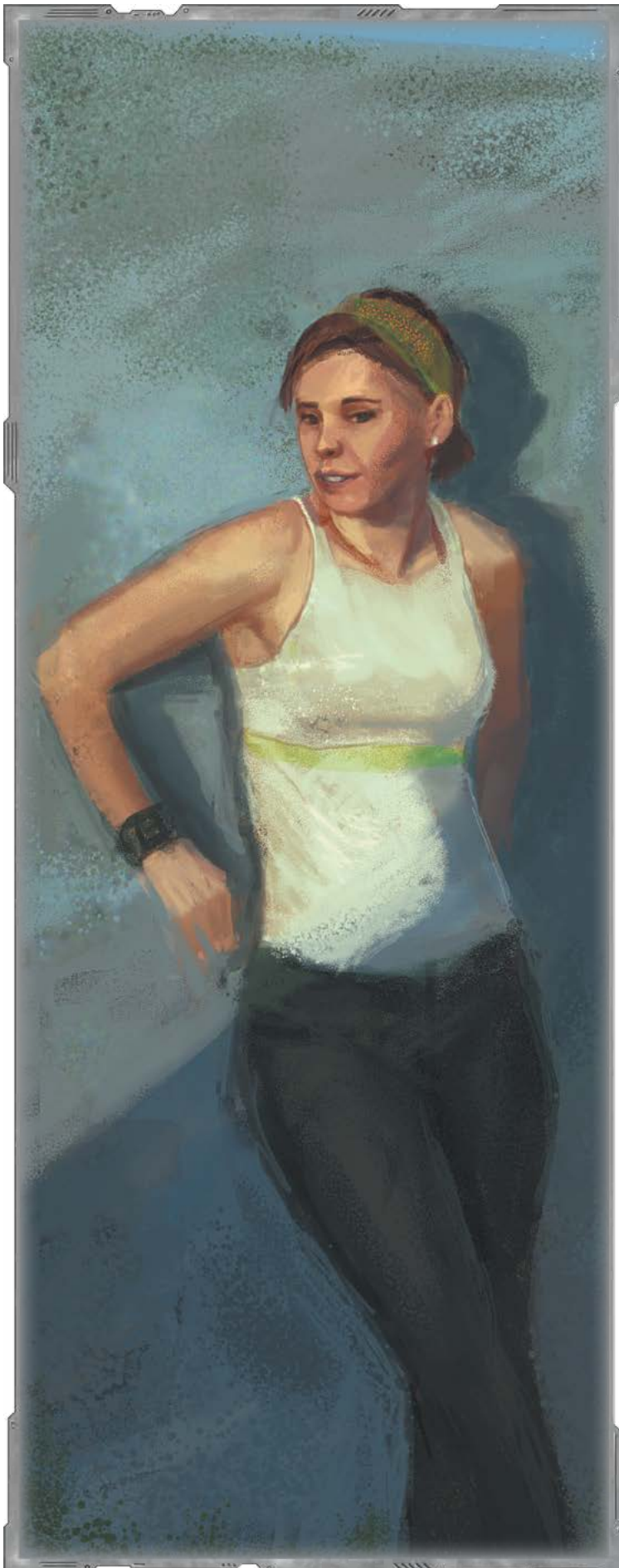
Enemy Spies

Espionage is universal in warfare, and the allies have a problem with it on this battlefield. Long-hidden spies might be emerging from deep cover to commit sabotage or convey intelligence on the latest military plans. For engagements that have less dramatic importance to the enemy, the unit's counterintelligence resources might have finally fixed their finger on an agent who must be captured before they can escape back to their friends.

Other spies are organic to the conflict, just native men and women who have reason to bitterly hate the allies. They may not have the courage or ability to take up arms directly against the allied forces, but a watchful eye and a listening ear can absorb a great deal of useful information. These native partisans can also form links with other like-minded locals, with the fabrication of entire resistance networks happening without any hint to the forces being watched.

Once the enemy forces get close enough, these naive native spy rings might decide that now is their chance to make a difference, and seek to make battlefield contact with the enemy and pass along their intel. Lacking much in the way of tradecraft, these rings are often exposed quickly once they start to actually do something, but that can be too late to save a unit's secrets from eager enemy eyes.

d12 Objectives

1	Kill a spy masquerading as an allied officer
2	Kill an infiltration team behind friendly lines
3	Destroy a comm node used to pass info
4	Destroy a safehouse used by enemy agents
5	Secure a site against enemy infiltration
6	Recover an outpost lost by a spy's treachery
7	Bring a captured spy somewhere for interrogation
8	Bring intel to identify a spy to a forward base
9	Capture a spy whose cover's been blown
10	Recover data stolen and lost by a spy
11	Find the secret camp that recon teams are using
12	Locate the spy amid a crowd of neutrals

d6 Complications

1	The spy is sympathetic in cause or motivation
2	The spy offers something tempting to the PCs
3	The spy is innocent and is framed by the real spy
4	The "spy" just knows too much and brass wants them silenced for political reasons
5	The PCs can't seem responsible for the spy's death
6	The spy's a double agent; the PCs must make their pursuit look convincing to the enemy

Equipment Failure

There is no better way to ensure equipment failure on the battlefield than that it should be something absolutely crucial for the mission. The more important the gear, the more likely it is that the demons of techno-perversity will cause it to fail in use. With unusually complex equipment, it might be effectively impossible to repair it in the field, forcing some luckless squad to cart it to the rear for maintenance or bring up replacement tech from the depot.

This gear is usually critical for the unit's survival or the success of their mission. On planets with hostile atmospheres or dangerous ecosystems, it might be the tech that allows the soldiers to actually survive extended exposure to the world. For particular missions, it might be the explosives, or a crew-served weapon, or a vehicle, or a comm server, or some other implement vital to their goal.

Replacing this gear usually requires either the hazardous transit of a live battlefield or the judicious acquisition of replacements from the enemy. Even with the problem can be repaired, the process should require spare parts or scrap gathered at substantial risk. There's little excitement or interest in a simple skill check, though exceptionally talented field repair techs might substantially decrease the list of necessary parts to gather.

d12 Objectives

1. Kill the saboteur who caused the gear failure
2. Kill the enemy forces that are blocking repair efforts
3. Destroy the jammer that's neutralizing the gear
4. Destroy the enemy threat that's exploiting the failure
5. Seize a position where they won't need the gear
6. Hold a bottleneck long enough to fix the gear
7. Bring replacement tech to a forward position
8. Bring a field-expedient makeshift where it's needed despite enemy interference
9. Retrieve a cache of functioning equipment
10. Recover spare parts from an enemy supply depot
11. Find the lost allies that might have functioning tech
12. Find a smashed enemy unit that can be scavenged

d6 Complications

1. The tech can be made to work, but only briefly
2. The tech is vital for surviving the local environs
3. A third party offers replacement tech at a high price in favors
4. The tech works, but using it would bring calamity
5. The tech fails at the worst possible moment
6. The tech is worthless, but the brass says to use it

Hidden Sabotage

Equipment often simply fails under the stresses of combat, but in this case, equipment has been intentionally sabotaged. It may be the work of a cunning enemy spy, or the bitter consequence of infuriated natives, or it could just be the unfortunate outcome of lowest-bidder manufacturing and a vendor who never expected such shoddy work to be discovered by the buyer.

Sometimes the chief objective of the PCs will be stopping further sabotage. In this case, the challenge might be identifying the secret saboteur while in the middle of a combat zone, deprived of the usual leisure of investigation. If the saboteur is an outsider, the challenge might lie in catching them as they attempt to interfere with the next critical piece of equipment. The PCs may choose to get proactive, and set out into the wilds to track down the saboteur before they have a chance to strike again.

Conversely, the objective might instead be the repair or replacement of the damaged gear. The only spares might be at a site surrounded by enemy forces, or the only expert able to fix it might be in need of their own reinforcements.

d12 Objectives

1. Survive the ambush triggered by the sabotage
2. Kill the saboteur before they can strike again
3. Destroy a subverted gun emplacement
4. Destroy a remotely-suborned vehicle or structure
5. Hold a vital structure so it can't also be sabotaged
6. Hold a structure that's been compromised
7. Bring repair parts forward where they're needed
8. Bring subverted tech where it can be examined
9. Retrieve the saboteur's remote-control device
10. Recover a piece of tech before it blows up its users
11. Find the sabotaged objects before they're triggered
12. Find the saboteur and capture them for questioning

d6 Complications

1. The "sabotage" is just shoddy work from a corrupt vendor
2. The sabotage is disguised as an improvement meant to fail in a crisis
3. The sabotage leaves allies vulnerable to a pre-planned attack
4. The wrong thing was sabotaged by the foe, thus confusing all involved
5. An ally has been framed for causing the sabotage
6. The sabotaged gear is vital and sort of works, until it doesn't

Hopeless Confusion

Everything is naturally confused during a battle, but this one involves a greater-than-normal degree of profound bafflement. Something has happened or is happening to completely confuse the true state of affairs in the combat zone, and the brass are issuing orders that address no perceptible reality. Units in the field may have a better grasp on the situation, but their perspective is inevitably limited.

This confusion does not necessarily stem from incompetence. Enemy action to deceive their foes can be unpleasantly effective, with troops ordered to capture false strongholds or ordered into commanding positions that are actually snares for an ambush. Even highly competent and skillful commanders can find their best plans baffled when the objectives they thought were there turn out to be mirages. Other confusion results from sheer battlefield chaos. The position of a unit can change drastically in minutes, turning a supporting artillery barrage into a direct hit on friendly troops, and a friendly unit that pulls back from an engagement can leave its hurried reinforcements accidentally charging into the enemy.

d12 Objectives

1	Kill an enemy infiltrator team in false uniforms
2	Kill an infiltrator who's faking comm transmissions
3	Destroy the right vehicle convoy despite false marks
4	Destroy an emplacement mis-marked as an ally
5	Seize the correct fortification despite garbled orders
6	Recover a bottleneck held by allies convinced the PCs are hostile forces
7	Bring a counter-order to someone before they do something idiotic
8	Bring vital intel to a baffled central command
9	Recover a pilot or cargo downed by friendly fire
10	Retrieve lost encrypted orders for leadership
11	Scout a unit to tell whether or not it's friendly
12	Scout a section of terrain that doesn't match maps

d6 Complications

1	Seemingly garbled or nonsensical orders are actually literally correct
2	A hostile force is adding orders to the comms
3	The situation is clear, but the commander can't bring himself to admit it
4	Leadership is divided and contradictory orders are being given by multiple officers
5	A rival commander profits by ensuring the unit stays confused and fumbling
6	Everything seems perfectly understood by the PCs until a catastrophic revelation

Low Supplies

In a combat zone, the only thing the squad has in plenty is enemies. Whether through enemy action, local depredations, logistical fumbling, or simple inability to provide, the allies are severely lacking in something critical for the overall mission. The PCs are likely to find themselves deprived of some staple, or else tasked with doing something to alleviate such.

For most TL4 armies, power cells are the most critical supply. While these can be charged quickly in the field with juice trucks or similar tech, a sufficient number of mistakes or lucky enemy hits can critically impair the unit's ability to fight. The PCs might be charged with securing some still-functional power source so the unit can recharge its weapons and vehicles, or ordered to escort in a new power convoy.

Other supplies might be more specific to the mission. A mission to seize a heavily-fortified emplacement might find itself hamstrung by a lack of explosives and grenades for clearing it, or a company sent into a beast-infested marsh might lack the medical supplies necessary to prevent lethal fungal infestations. Under such circumstances the PCs might be forced to improvise a solution.

d12 Objectives

1	Kill a thief or plundering local who stole supplies
2	Kill an enemy force that's threatening supply lines
3	Destroy an enemy emplacement, but do it without the usually-necessary munitions
4	Destroy an enemy supply dump so the enemy can't just wait to starve the allies out
5	Seize a supply dump long enough to loot vital gear
6	Take a chokepoint that's blocking allied resupply
7	Bring a supply of hopefully-functional substitute supplies to a front-line outpost
8	Escort a supply convoy through perilous terrain
9	Retrieve cargo from a lost vehicle or outpost
10	Recover the authorization codes to request aid
11	Scout out a source of replacement supplies
12	Scout out an enemy supply line for an ambush

d6 Complications

1	There are plenty of supplies but the brass won't release them
2	Only half the supplies needed are available to PCs
3	The supplies are being sold by a corrupt quartermaster or venal local supplier
4	The supplies are needed by sympathetic natives
5	The supplies are trash sold by deceitful merchants
6	The supplies are unreliable due to enemy sabotage

Miserable Weather

Bad weather has been the curse of armies since time immemorial. On some planets, "bad weather" reaches a degree of severity unknown on Old Terra, with continent-wide storms, acidic rain, massive electrical discharges, or still stranger violence from the skies. The natives have usually had time to learn how to cope with these events, but foreigners or unprotected armies are apt to have a much harder time of things.

A unit facing calamitous weather usually has at least a little meteorological forewarning of the danger, even if only by an hour or two. In this time they may need to fight their way to shelter, pull out from an exposed position, or accomplish some feat of arms before the conditions make it impossible to fight. The weather in this case acts as deadline for some other objective that must be completed in time.

In other cases, a unit might be called on to take advantage of the weather. While mired earth or howling winds might be impassable for ordinary vehicles and large bodies of troops, small units of determined infiltrators can use the weather as cover for their own mission. PCs may well be asked to venture into the very teeth of some thunderous blow, the better to hide beneath rain and darkness for an infiltration.

d12 Objectives

1. Kill an enemy unit pinned down by the bad weather
2. Kill an infiltrator moving in under weather cover
3. Destroy a vital shelter needed by the enemy
4. Destroy a dam or other structure to unleash disaster
5. Seize a rare place of shelter against the weather
6. Capture the only pass or route still open
7. Bring replacements for tech ruined by the weather
8. Bring emergency tech for dealing with the weather
9. Recover a vehicle or VIP who's lost in the weather
10. Retrieve a native who knows how to deal with this
11. Find a unit that's gotten mislaid in the weather
12. Scout for an enemy unit that's about to attack under the weather's cover

d6 Complications

1. The weather isn't just bad, it's lethally murderous to the unprotected
2. The weather's goading the dangerous local fauna
3. The weather's destroying vital supplies or vehicles
4. Only native structures can hold up under this
5. The brass is dismissive of the weather when issuing its orders, and fails to understand its danger
6. The weather is somehow provoked or worsened by some weapon one of the sides is using

Mutinous Troops

The troops are revolting, or at least some of them are. A unit has either turned to the enemy or is simply refusing to obey orders. The seeds of a mutiny are usually planted long before the actual event, and it's very likely that the brass has had some sort of problem with these soldiers before. Of course, in some cases the fault rests far more heavily on the commanders than their troops.

Some mutinies are relatively soft in character, with the soldiers simply sitting tight, defending their position, and refusing to advance. They may have lost so many comrades and taken so much punishment that they simply can't bear to endure it any longer, or they may be utterly without confidence in the leadership of their superiors. The brass might not even want to admit that these units have mutinied, as such evidence might encourage other disgruntled units to rebel.

Other mutinies are violent, with loyal officers shot, recalcitrant troops driven out or executed, and the whole remaining unit bound together in shared ties of treachery. Units that so utterly abandon their cause have usually been mistreated for long periods, or else infiltrated by agents of the enemy and beguiled into revolt. A few, however, can be tempted to go rogue by the prospect of great riches or the appearance of certain crushing defeat for their side. These renegades are dangerous to everyone around them, native and ally alike.

d12 Objectives

1. Kill the leader of the mutinous unit
2. Kill a unit that's mutinied at the worst possible place
3. Destroy an outpost that's now blocking the allies
4. Destroy supplies to force mutineers to surrender
5. Seize an outpost that's currently being held by them
6. Take a chokepoint and prevent a mutinous retreat
7. Bring a negotiator alive and intact to the mutineers
8. Bring an escaped witness to the mutiny to the brass
9. Recover a treasure the troops mutinied to keep
10. Retrieve evidence of a crime that provoked this
11. Find the enemy provocateur that enabled the mutiny
12. Find a VIP who went rogue with the mutineers

d6 Complications

1. The PCs are suspected of ties with the mutineers
2. The mutineers had an understandable reason
3. The mutineers were tricked into it and now repent
4. The "mutineers" are actually obeying secret orders
5. The brass confused loyalists with the real mutineers
6. The mutineers are desperately needed alive for some reason

NBC Attack

The enemy is using nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons against the allied forces. High-tech armies may have countermeasures but more primitive allies will suffer dearly.

While actual nuclear explosions are impossible within the zone of a TL4 snuffer field, radioactive dusting is still quite lethal. Biological weapons might be home-brewed tech or something unearthed from an ancient Mandate armory, or they could just be a native disease that the locals know how to deal with and the foreigners don't. Even very tech-primitive societies might know how to turn a particular plague or dangerous local creature into a weapon against their enemies. Chemical weapons most often take the form of war gases, corrosive or poisonous clouds to kill entrenched enemies. More sophisticated chemical weapons may rely on nanites or exotic compounds to produce stranger or more subtle effects.

Some worlds have grave reservations about using these weapons, largely because they are so difficult to control. Even the most amoral tyrant might be reluctant to unleash a plague that could consume him as well as his enemies, and poisonous weapons have a habit of scourging the wielder as much as the target. Even so, a desperate polity might be willing to unleash these weapons as a last hope or in a suicidal determination to take their enemies with them.

d12 Objectives

1	Kill the unit releasing the attack
2	Kill the technical crew the enemy needs
3	Destroy enemy shelter from their own weapon
4	Destroy emplacement that is to release the weapon
5	Seize a shelter from the weapon's effects
6	Seize a bottleneck to pin the enemy in the kill zone
7	Bring antidotes or ameliorative tech to the front line
8	Bring a VIP alive out of a heavily-hit zone
9	Capture an enemy tech for intel about the weapon
10	Retrieve the weapon from the enemy and use it against them
11	Scout out the hidden location of the weapon
12	Find plans indicating where and how it will be used

d6 Complications

1	The weapon use is being blamed on the allies
2	Numerous civilians have been caught by it
3	The enemy doesn't really understand what it will do
4	The weapon was released accidentally or at the wrong place on the battlefield
5	The weapon has unexpected side effects
6	The weapon is extremely visible and can be avoided

Sudden Betrayal

Some portion of the allied forces have suddenly turned their coats. Their leadership might always have been in secret alliance with the enemy, or the change may be the result of some recent dispute or the apparent futility of the cause. While an unfortunate event for any military, these particular traitors have gone rogue at an exceptionally bad time.

Sometimes the PCs are the first allies to realize that their former comrades have betrayed the cause. They might be forced to make split-second decisions on a response without the leisure to consult with their commander. At other times, the treachery will be obvious from the start of the mission, and the PC squad's job will be to salvage what they can of the situation and contain the damage the traitors might do.

The best traitors are ones the PCs already know. A faceless platoon of NPCs is just an obstacle to be overcome, whereas a set of former comrades known to the players can provoke a more pronounced engagement with the situation. The PCs might want to find out why the unit turned on the allies, or they might have old rivalries that can now be settled in more direct ways.

Particularly cruel traitors might work to trick or coerce the PCs into serving their nefarious purposes. The GM should be careful not to make this inevitable. The players will feel more involvement in events if they come of their own choices.

d12 Objectives

1	Kill the leader of the traitorous unit
2	Smash the traitor unit before they reinforce the foe
3	Destroy a traitor gun before it can wipe out loyalists
4	Destroy a bridge or motor pool before they pass
5	Help allied troops recover a turned forward outpost
6	Defend an undermanned vital point from the traitors
7	Bring proof of the unit's treachery to the brass
8	Bring reinforcements to loyalists among them
9	Retrieve sensitive encryption gear from the traitors
10	Recover the thing they were supposed to guard
11	Find the enemy agent serving as a liaison for them
12	Find the traitor unit before they can ambush allies

d6 Complications

1	The traitors would be politically awkward to kill
2	The unit has numerous loyalists fighting still
3	Nearby allied units can't bear to attack the traitors
4	The traitors have defected to an outside third party
5	The traitors don't really want to do this, but must
6	The "traitors" are being set up by treacherous brass

Surprise Fortification

Nobody was expecting to find this sort of entrenchment on the battlefield. Some sort of fortification or well-defended structure is complicating the plans of the allies, and the PCs are at the tip of the spear when it comes time to deal with it. The fortification might be some forgotten structure recently rehabilitated by the enemy, or it might be some seemingly mundane building that actually serves as a very effective strongpoint. Buildings long in disrepair or never intended for military use might have ingresses that the current owners never realized were there.

The fortification might even be a formerly friendly outpost that has changed sides due to coercion or mercenary advantage. The PCs might not realize this change of allegiance until they're met by a spray of laser fire just as they're returning from some other mission. Such ambushes should be used judiciously, as it's all too easy to wipe out a squad entirely with such surprise attacks.

Dealing with these little surprises usually requires some kind of infiltration, even if only to open the doors and shut down the defenses for the PC squad's comrades. Quiet infiltrations might involve sneaking in some unobserved weak point, while louder ones tend to involve large amounts of explosives, heavy weapons fire, and incendiaries. A really enthusiastic breach might not leave much of the fortification still standing for the besiegers to take.

d12 Objectives

d12	
1	Kill an enemy leader deep within the fortification
2	Kill a small enemy unit that's very well-entrenched
3	Destroy a key element of the fortification
4	Destroy a supply convoy or reinforcements for it
5	Seize a commanding height or location near it
6	Take enough of the structure to form a foothold
7	Bring siege equipment or vehicles for the attackers
8	Bring vital supplies past the fortification
9	Retrieve a prisoner from inside the fortification
10	Steal some vital object that weakens the fort
11	Scout out the layout and defenses of the fortification
12	Scout out a secret entrance into the fort

d6 Complications

d6	
1	There's no time for a siege or a careful assault
2	The fort is just a false front, its defenses paper-thin
3	The fort isn't completely under enemy control
4	The fort's air cover is fragile and can be disrupted
5	The fort is in an area riddled with tunnels
6	A prior failed assault has damaged part of the fort

Surrounded Allies

A group of allies has been surrounded by enemy forces, and is in dire need of relief. The group might be large enough to demand attention from the brass, or it might contain some VIP or friend of the PCs. The squad needs to get to the surrounded allies, break through the enemies that encircle them, and either open a path for their retreat or reinforce them with the gear they need to drive back the hostile forces.

The allies might not be surrounded in a conventional sense. It may be that they're on some slender spit of land surrounded by lakes of the native sulphuric acid, with the enemies controlling the only route off the peninsula. It could be that the allies could theoretically withdraw from their position, but whatever they're holding or defending is important enough that they should fight to the last soldier. The allies might not even realize that they're surrounded, about to be crushed by an overwhelming enemy ambush unless the PCs get to them in time to warn them of their impending doom.

Whenever possible, make the allies a group that the players have encountered before, or at least salt them with a few recognizable faces. Rescuing a generic band of NPCs isn't nearly as satisfying as hauling some arrogant rival's chestnuts out of the fire, or swooping in to rescue a faithful friend. Of course, if the PCs fail in their mission, the consequences may well be unfortunate for their associate. Even if they survive, they may not be unscarred.

d12 Objectives

d12	
1	Kill the main unit pinning down the allied forces
2	Fight open a temporary corridor for a retreat
3	Destroy a gun emplacement that's pinning them
4	Destroy a barrier that's blocking a line of withdrawal
5	Seize high ground and cover an allied retreat
6	Take an enemy outpost that's stopping a withdrawal
7	Break through with supplies for the allied forces
8	Bring them a vehicle capable of breaking the pin
9	Escort a VIP out of the encircled zone
10	Recover a VIP captured during the encirclement
11	Find a relief force and guide it back to help
12	Scout the enemy force's positions and strengths

d6 Complications

d6	
1	The allies need to hold tight and draw enemy fire
2	Someone the brass wants dead is in the unit
3	The allied unit is fairly useless or incompetent
4	The enemy is using the unit as bait for an ambush
5	The unit's CO is deluded and thinks they're winning
6	The unit needs to move quickly or be smashed

Transport Failure

Armies live by their supply lines. The most primitive forces can survive by constant motion, peeling the land as they go, but larger or more sophisticated armies must have formal lines of support. Logistical troubles can hamstring an army, leaving the most fearsome force unable to advance and withering where it stands. Other forms of transportation might be needed for crossing hazardous terrain or deep water, or to get troops to the front in time to make a difference.

Whatever the purpose, something has blocked the necessary transport. Vehicles might have been sabotaged, bridges could be mined, or tracks could be loaded with IEDs. The PCs have to deal with the consequences of this failure, hopefully opening up a new route for the allies to move their supplies forward.

The PC objectives might involve finding a new route for the transport to take, or forcibly clearing a path through the new obstacles. In some cases, the obstacles might be something that can't simply be blown up; angry natives might be calling a strike or blocking the road, and a summary massacre could be politically disastrous to the allies. Some such protesters might well be in the pay of the enemy.

d12 Objectives

1	Kill the saboteur who's interfering with the transit line
2	Kill the entrenched unit that's blocking the line
3	Destroy the gun emplacement that's blasting them
4	Destroy the barricade that's blocking the path
5	Take and hold the only clear route to the destination
6	Seize a repair depot from the enemy and hold it long enough to salvage vital parts
7	Bring spare parts to a stranded vehicle
8	Drive a vehicle through dangerous terrain
9	Retrieve a downed vehicle from hostile terrain with a salvage truck
10	Recover something valuable lost in a wreck
11	Find a new, safer route to the destination
12	Find a lost vehicle or convoy before the enemy does

d6 Complications

1	The vehicles are badly unsuited to the terrain
2	The delay is due to native enmity or avarice
3	The failure will result in a cascading disaster if transport lines aren't quickly opened.
4	The convoy the PCs are escorting is just a distraction to cover something more vital
5	Security requires that disabled vehicles be wrecked
6	The enemy is letting some through to bait the rest

Treacherous Terrain

Every planet has its rough terrain, but this stretch of land is actively murderous to those unlucky enough to be fighting across it. It might be a soup of caustic quicksand, a badland swept by regular exhalations of sulfurous gases, a radioactive hellscape, or some less clement stretch of terrain.

Getting through this mess is a major challenge to most armies, and they may be forced to rely on native guides or extremely expendable scout units to find a path for larger groups. In other places, the safe ways change so often that only blind luck or an intimate knowledge of the subtle ways of the place can see a unit through safely.

Some terrain is only terrible to those without the right equipment to deal with it. A field of virulently infectious plague-flowers might be of no concern to troops equipped with breathing masks and anti-fungal tablets, but the loss of this gear or some inadequacy in issuing it might be catastrophic to the unit. PCs could be called upon to get the necessary hardware at all costs, even if that requires liberating an enemy supply dump in order to obtain it.

Some terrain dangers are only obvious in retrospect, such as a defensive radiation burst released by a hidden pretech military facility's long-dormant defenses. An army might not realize that it's sunk into someplace terrible until the first casualty reports start coming in.

d12	Objectives
1	Kill an enemy unit specialized in this terrain's quirks
2	Kill an enemy scouting unit before it can find a route
3	Destroy a vital bridge or close a pass explosively
4	Destroy a key fortification holding a chokepoint
5	Capture an important transit path across the terrain
6	Seize a bridge, pass, dike, or other strategic site
7	Bring a native guide to a pinned unit
8	Bring vital gear for the terrain to a unit in need
9	Retrieve something from a unit lost in the terrain
10	Recover a VIP whose escorts fell prey to the terrain
11	Scout a viable path through the terrain
12	Locate a hidden enemy base amid the terrain

d6	Complications
1	The terrain got treacherous suddenly
2	The natives know exactly how to deal with it
3	Old structures here were built to deal with the terrain
4	The terrain is outrageously defensible
5	The terrain scrambles comms somehow
6	Native riding animals cope well with the terrain

Untimely Looting

Somewhere along the line, either allies, enemies, or hapless locals caught in the middle started plundering before the fight was actually over. If allies have fallen prey to the goad of greed the battle risks a grave reverse as the enemy pushes against the disorganized troops. If the enemy has fallen on some tender morsel, it gives the allies a chance to hit them while they're distracted, and if it's the locals who've seized the main chance, then they may well have taken something that the allies can't afford to have looted.

Disciplined troops might scoop up a trophy or two on their way through a battle, but serious outbreaks of looting are usually the consequence of indiscipline or grave want. Starved soldiers might stop to plunder a farming community and stuff their empty bellies, while a barbarian mercenary unit might consider the plunder of a rich town to be part of their natural pay. Locals caught on a battlefield are usually just desperately in need of the raw staples of survival, or so blind with rage that they'll do anything to hurt someone, *anyone*, who might have had a hand in their suffering.

In some cases, the untimely looting might happen after a fight, and the challenge one of defusing it without bloodshed.

d12	Objectives
1	Kill a band of civilian looters who are taking supplies
2	Kill an enemy detachment that's busy looting
3	Destroy a valuable stockpile before it's looted
4	Destroy an outpost while its troops are plundering
5	Capture a resource site before looters can take it
6	Seize and hold a pile of loot gathered by the enemy
7	Bring an accidentally-looted object to the brass
8	Bring a captured looter to the allies for questioning
9	Retrieve critical supplies stolen by looters
10	Collect important plunder stolen by allied looters
11	Find a vital object before incoming looters do
12	Find a looter who's vanished with a vital object

d6	Complications
1	The loot gives the plunderers more firepower than the PC party
2	Expected support is unavailable due to the chaos of the plundering
3	The looters desperately need the loot to survive
4	The looters have no idea what they really stole
5	The looters are important officers or allied native officials and can't be readily executed
6	The looters have stolen something horrendously dangerous to everyone around them

Vital Extraction

Someone needs to be removed from the battlefield in a largely-intact condition. This may be an allied VIP who's wandered into the wrong sector, or it might be an enemy official who's important enough to justify a live capture. Whether friend or foe, the PCs need to get them back to an extraction point without too much damage done.

The trickiest part of VIP extraction is often getting the target out while keeping them in one piece. Allied targets can at least be expected to cooperate with their escort, albeit this is not a given, as some high-ranking or important extraction targets labor under the unfortunate impression that they are in command of the mission.

Enemy targets are less confused on this count, and must often be bound or intimidated into cooperation, or even rendered unconscious with drugs. The burden of hauling around an unconscious lieutenant-general through enemy lines can prove taxing to a squad, particularly when the brass considers the prisoner's life to be much more valuable than that of any of the squad members.

Some targets can be reluctant to come away from their position, even if they are allies of the PCs. Sometimes favors or inducements must be made to convince them of the need.

d12 Objectives

1	Kill a group that's taken a VIP prisoner
2	Kill the escort of an important enemy officer
3	Destroy an outpost where a VIP is being held
4	Destroy a bridge before a prisoner is moved over it
5	Capture a prison where valuable people are held
6	Secure an extraction route currently held by the foe
7	Bring a well-hidden local VIP to the allies
8	Bring vital extraction gear to a trapped VIP
9	Retrieve an escaped prisoner before they get away
10	Retrieve a VIP who thinks the allies are foes
11	Locate and extract a VIP before the enemy does
12	Find an escape route for a trapped VIP

d6 Complications

1	The "allied" VIP is really a secret turncoat
2	The enemy VIP is a dangerous psychic
3	An allied faction wants the VIP permanently silent
4	The VIP is being used as bait by the enemy
5	The VIP is infectious, violent, constantly transmitting to the enemy, or somehow dangerous to be around
6	The VIP turns out to be very much not as described or their identification is changed mid-mission

Vulnerable ECM

Either the allies or the enemy are facing a serious threat to their quantum ECM generation on the battlefield. Without this protective cloud of quantum-level jamming, an opposing force can unleash the untempered violence of hyper-accurate missile strikes and guided munitions. Modern TL4 guidance tech makes it trivially simple to lob missiles from half a continent away to loiter over a battlefield and dart down to eliminate vehicles, troop clusters, and communications nodes. Without quantum ECM, an army can expect horrific losses to any decently-equipped TL4 foe.

Most ECM on the battlefield is generated by dedicated vehicles. Usually there are enough of these "static wagons" to cover for any losses, but bad luck can thin them dangerously. Stationary generators create even wider clouds of ECM, but once identified they become hot targets for dumb munitions and ground assaults.

While the ECM can be generated in a perfectly circular area, most operators have the sense to distort the outline, giving only a general area in which to search for the generator. Intensity modulation helps mask the source from easy detection by ordinary instruments, but a dedicated scout team can often pick up enough data to give a rough zone to search.

d12 Objectives

1	Kill a sabotage team before they take out the ECM
2	Kill a repair group before they can fix thin ECM
3	Destroy a highly-mobile ECM generator vehicle
4	Destroy a well-concealed stationary generator
5	Capture an enemy site and turn it off on schedule
6	Seize an enemy supply depot of vital ECM parts
7	Bring a repair tech out to a downed static wagon
8	Bring a static wagon out to a vital location
9	Recover an enemy wagon for allied use
10	Retrieve a stock of guided missiles for use soon
11	Find a hidden ECM site amid civilian buildings
12	Locate a concealed ECM truck behind enemy lines

d6 Complications

1	Enemy ECM can only be downed very briefly
2	A backup generator is off and very hard to find
3	The allies are low on guided munitions that can take advantage of clear skies.
4	The squad doesn't have adequate sensor tech and must rely on human intelligence to find the ECM
5	The ECM must be repaired or destroyed by a deadline if a guided attack is to succeed or be repulsed
6	The generator is not where it is supposed to be

Combat Complications

So you've got a group of enemies the PCs need to deal with. For some foes, it might just be a matter of hosing them down with the heavy cutter or pitching a few grenades at their campfire. The PCs are mil-SF characters and there should be times when they simply blast the Hell out of their enemies with few special elaborations.

At other times, however, some further complication is in order. If the PCs have been tasked with wiping out a particular enemy grouping, it might not be as simple as calling in an artillery strike on the target after they've been found. These complications can be used to entangle the squad in situations that aren't always as amenable to large explosions.

D20	Combat Complications
1	Foe is very close to a group of locals or prisoners
2	They've dug in very well or found usable cover
3	The brass misidentified them; they're not as billed
4	They have anti-artillery missiles or lasers
5	There's at least one tank or other heavy vehicle
6	There's far more of them than was expected
7	They're all spread out and hard to hit at once
8	They've got an important local or allied prisoner
9	They have copious amounts of firepower
10	They're elites or other hyper-competent types
11	Expected arty or air support is suddenly delayed
12	The enemy is about to strike a vulnerable ally
13	The enemy is about to seize something precious
14	The enemy is near something fragile and vital
15	The enemy is in confused combat with allies
16	They've got unexpected pretech equipment
17	They've got their own arty or air support
18	The locals are helping them from fear or love
19	They've seized a resource that mustn't be ruined
20	An arty or air strike on them is botched somehow

Stealth Features

It's simple enough to say "I sneak up on the enemy", but such direct declarations leave a lot to the GM's imagination. When setting up a situation that involves stealth or infiltration, it can often be helpful to establish a few features on the field that actually lend themselves to sneaking.

The table here gives a list of possible avenues of approach to enemy outposts or war-zone strongholds. You might call these out explicitly to PCs as they scout the area, but it's generally best to let them discern the possibilities in the course of their investigations.

Few of these features will offer guaranteed stealth to a squad. Still, if the PCs are clever and capitalize on their opportunities it might be very difficult for the enemy to repulse them until well after they've done the mischief they came to do.

D20	Stealth Features
1	A thick matting of native underbrush
2	Semi-collapsed sewage or water tunnels
3	A minefield that nobody's watching properly
4	A damaged wall with a usable gap
5	Wired fencing with vulnerable power or comms
6	Rubble mounds from a recent bombardment
7	Heavy mist, smoke, or other atmospheric cover
8	An abandoned, undiscovered siege tunnel
9	Groups of burnt-out vehicle hulks
10	Large craters caused by a bombardment
11	Buildings or hilltops overlooking a site blind spot
12	Native animal burrows that humans can travel
13	Crumbling maintenance passageways beneath
14	Abandoned but poorly-sealed section of the site
15	Vulnerably-solitary watch tower or guard post
16	Navigable cliff beneath ill-watched wall
17	Large native plants too close to the perimeter
18	A ramp of wrecks or rubble along a wall
19	A maze of side-streets too close to the wall
20	Overhead walkways close to an unwatched area

Social Complications

Sometimes getting a job done is as simple as filling out some paperwork and drawing supplies from a bored quartermaster. At other times, it involves painstaking negotiation with the three-eyed alien war chief of a race of bipedal land shrimp. Whenever human beings or analogous minds are involved, it's inevitable that social complications will arise.

You shouldn't need to roll on this table for every NPC you plan to use in a mission, but if the objective revolves around dealing with someone then you can use it to provide the basic problem that the PCs will need to solve.

Most of the complications assume that their interlocutor is supposed to provide some sort of assistance or aid to the PCs as part of their mission. If this isn't the case, simply assume that the implied mission is whatever personal goal is most reasonable for the NPC in question.

d20	Social Complications
1	The allies did something to piss them off mightily
2	They consider PCs to be profound social inferiors
3	The allies promised some difficult favor to them
4	They only say what the PCs seem to want to hear
5	They're determined to con the PCs out of a thing
6	They're totally deluded about the PCs' capabilities
7	They're totally deluded about the overall situation
8	They won't do a thing without being paid for it
9	They plan to sell the PCs out to the enemy
10	They're distractingly sympathetic and in trouble
11	The enemy has some fearsome hold over them
12	They retrievably bungled their intended utility
13	They need a favor before they can do their job
14	They're dead, replaced by one semi-competent
15	The PCs screwed them before, if by accident
16	They intend to help in a very unhelpful way
17	They have a splendid and very impractical plan
18	They mean to provide far, far *too much* support
19	They've misunderstood, but don't make it obvious
20	They've been replaced by an enemy agent

Environmental Complications

Even the most friendly alien world is still an alien world, one formed in ways that were never intended to support human life. The luckless ground-pounders of a human army are often forced to face snares and hostile environments that would be unknown on homely Earth.

When the PCs need to travel long distances, these environment complications can be used to burden their movement or add to the obstacles involved. Some of them are natural byproducts of the planet's environment, while others are the difficulties that arise from trying to move around in a war zone.

d20	Environmental Complications
1	Tremendously powerful storms or winds
2	A burning wreck blocks the road or path
3	A broken dam has flooded or is flooding an area
4	Native pollen provokes allergies or mild visions
5	A tangle of native plants that are toxic to touch
6	Large native predator attacks to defend its turf
7	Mud swallows non-grav vehicles or slows walkers
8	A bridge or stairway has been blown out
9	Explosions made a tangled abatis of fallen trees
10	Something sets off a mudslide nearby
11	A vast swarm of small native predators attacks
12	A native plant explodes or ignites on disturbance
13	Vicious native scavengers teem on a battlefield
14	Storms are skewing artillery and grounding air
15	Stellar activity is jamming all radio signals
16	A debilitating local disease has broken out
17	Combat has badly weakened fragile cliff edges
18	Torrential rains are flooding and blinding the area
19	Flash frost or heat is damaging gear and men
20	Explosions kick up dangerous earth vapors

Map Features

A battlefield map can be livened up by adding additional features and complications to the area. People and events often involve troops, whether allies or enemies, while urban area features can be planted anywhere there's a significant population. Environmental features can be thrown in to liven up an otherwise straightforward transport job or a squad's latest scouting mission.

d20	People And Events
1	Refugees fleeing with all their worldly goods
2	Troops are abusing a local family for amusement
3	A local partisan is being hanged by troops
4	Badly-injured troops are in need of medical aid
5	Locals here are somehow untouched by the war
6	Desperate locals offer anything for vital supplies
7	A sympathetic local is critically injured
8	Scavengers are attacking troops or vice-versa
9	Locals are trying to fix a broken-down vehicle
10	Locals are hiding in a bombed-out ruin
11	Locals are stealing from an ill-guarded cache
12	Scavengers are cutting up wounded left behind
13	A burning vehicle is surrounded by the dead
14	Locals try desperately to fix a vital local utility
15	Troops are drunk or drugged on stolen goods
16	A ruined building is full of civilian corpses
17	Harried local medics are treating refugees
18	Troops are burning out a "nest of guerrillas"
19	Troops are forcing out locals to make an outpost
20	Troops have surrounded a foe that's already gone

d20	Urban Area Features
1	Magnificent public building blasted to rubble
2	Wildly-spewing water main
3	Fallen power cables hissing and spitting
4	Street's fallen away into a maintenance tunnel
5	Sniper nest in a nearby building
6	Soldiers fighting in the sewer tunnels
7	Terrified locals hiding in a basement
8	Fire raging out of control in a neighborhood
9	Huge building will collapse at the first bang
10	Brutalist-style building turned into a bunker
11	River choked with bodies and scavenger beasts
12	Crazed local wandering the streets and wailing
13	Building blown out by artillery or tank rounds
14	Oil spill laid as a trap to be ignited by a laser
15	Steel beams and rubble as a tank obstacle
16	Makeshift hospital full of badly-injured people
17	Hidden cache of supplies laid in by a local
18	Demonstratively executed looters or partisans
19	Fallen building blocking the way
20	A maze of rubble between the PCs and the goal

Environmental Features by Terrain Type

d12	Dry	Forested	Hill and Mountain	Swampy
1	Soft sand that bogs down	Wall of green vines	Rockslide zone	Broad, boggy river
2	Dry bed that flash-floods	Infectious mold colony	Narrow cliffside trail	Quicksand under puddles
3	Complete water lack	Nest of angry beasts	Ambush chokepoint	Floating swamp islands
4	Dune-dwelling predator	A dead tree falls easily	Perfect observation point	Mud-buried predator
5	Shifting sand landmarks	Dangerous plant life	Well-used cave complex	Pockets of foul gases
6	Unstable sand surface	Battle-caused forest fire	Fast-climbing predator	Grasping swamp weeds
7	Spring-made quicksand	Local alpha predator	Sheer stone cliff face	Water full of biting fish
8	Scouring sandstorm wind	Hallucinogenic pollen	Occupied road tunnel	Clouds of insect parasites
9	Voracious sand parasite	Diseased parasite life	Icy quick-flowing stream	Dangerous plant life
10	Subtly toxic water supply	Iron-hard tree stand	Creaking old bridge	Water route's the only way
11	Maze of dry canyons	Clinging brush field	Impassible crevasse	Hidden river predator
12	Abandoned village site	Hidden refugee camp	Cold-preserved corpses	Concealed swamp huts

BATTLEFIELD ENCOUNTERS

A war zone is rarely static. Things are happening on the battlefield, and it can be convenient to have a few of them sprawl across a mission's objective. The tables here provide reasons for a time pressure on an objective, random battle wreckage to insert into a situation, and a generator for activities that might be going on at a particular location.

d20	HASTE IS NEEDED BECAUSE...
1	Overwhelming enemy force incoming
2	The objective can't hold out much longer
3	The PC squad is scheduled for evac soon
4	Floods, fires, or artillery barrages are closing in
5	Locals will attack or sell the objective out soon
6	The objective is hurt or damaged and needs aid
7	The allies are going to carpet-bomb it soon
8	Enemy patrols are closing in
9	Its rear guard will soon be overwhelmed
10	The enemy it pinned and soon will capture it
11	Enemy forces are rigging it for demolition
12	It's running out of vital fuel or some other supply
13	It's being harried by enemy air forces
14	It's useless to the allies if not reached soon
15	A rival squad is also tasked with the mission
16	It's about to do something stupid and self-ruinous
17	Blind, meaningless bad luck is about to strike it
18	Someone else will fail reaching it and trigger ruin
19	An industrial catastrophe is edging closer to it
20	It's about to be pillaged by desperate locals

d20	THE WRECKAGE OF BATTLE
1	Massive artillery craters
2	Burnt-out rural house or business
3	A mostly-functional vehicle with dead crew
4	Blasted garden with alien flora or frenzied fauna
5	A dead family and their rifled possessions
6	A scorched vehicle barrier
7	Burning crop field or forest fire
8	Smashed industrial tanker spewing toxins
9	Toppled monument or artistic work
10	Piled mounds of civilian dead
11	Explosive device crater in the road or path
12	Corpse-filled ruin of a building used as a refuge
13	Line of vehicles destroyed by an air strike
14	Cloud of toxic fumes from wrecked storage silo
15	Sparking and hissing power node
16	Ambushed and stripped soldier corpses
17	Crashed vehicle only partly looted
18	Building carved half-open by a tank round
19	River of raw sewage from blown pipes
20	Dead prisoner, hands bound behind them

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

d12	THIS GROUP...	...IS DOING THIS...	...AROUND THIS PLACE
1	Clutch of desperate deserters	Scavenging for food	Ruined church or temple
2	Looters broken off from their unit	Tormenting someone in revenge	Blown-out hospital
3	Refugees driven from their homes	Trying to fix something important	Cave or clearing in the countryside
4	A family fleeing peril	Hiding in terror	A ruined mansion or palace
5	Hopelessly lost allied soldiers	Scrapping something valuable	Cratered farm fields
6	Civilian looters working the area	Abusing someone for sport	Debris-strewn road
7	Soldiers ordered to this position	Concealing a crime or atrocity	Dangerous damaged industry
8	Recon group ordered to scout	Trying to reach a place of safety	Shattered government office
9	Civilian wounded left behind	Hiding a valuable cache of goods	Broken-open prison
10	Force-conscripted civilian workers	Torturing someone for information	Arena or stadium
11	Soldiers advancing violently	Trying to ambush an enemy	Media broadcasting station
12	Soldiers hanging back for ill-doings	Tending to the wounded or weak	Bank or vault

Mission Rewards

The mission is a success, the survivors have escaped the battlefield, and it's time to share out the rewards of victory. At least, assuming that victory *has* rewards. Unlike many conventional adventures, a military mission is not normally run for reasons of mere lucre or done to further personal interests. There are no piles of alien artifacts to carry off or fat payments from grateful employers.

Particularly hard-minded GMs might offer no better reward for mission success than simple survival. The ultimate victory of the PC allies might be the greatest reward in the offing, with survival of individual PCs a pleasant bonus. While such an outcome has much for it in the way of realism, most players are interested in a more concrete measurement of their success.

Rewarding Rank

Contrary to what might be imagined, promotions tend to be lousy rewards in a military campaign. Being out in the field is an enlisted soldier's game, and while valiant lieutenants lead the way and inspirational generals tour the front, the great majority of PC-scale missions are the sort suitable for a single fireteam or squad. It's all too easy to promote a PC above the level of actual interaction with field missions. Whatever the rank, it's best to keep the entire party together in the same fireteam or squad, so kicking a PC upstairs is rarely a good idea.

Promotions within the relatively narrow band of NCOs and enlisted is usually workable. A sergeant can plausibly lead a fireteam, so all the ranks beneath that can be handed out to PCs as rewards for success. A fireteam composed entirely of sergeants is unlikely in most present armies, but the far future might be more flexible on that point.

Promotions are usually the product of years of dedicated service in peacetime, but during war they come along a lot more briskly for survivors with proven capability. PCs who distinguish themselves exceptionally in a mission might earn a rank bump, though if you intend to use promotions regularly as rewards you should likely reserve it for just one PC per mission, preferencing those who give the best after-action report of provable heroism to their superiors.

Rewarding Money

In most modern armies, monetary awards are rare. The troops might manage to "collect" a few souvenirs from the battlefield, or trade certain found goods to a quartermaster for other goods conveniently lost, but disciplined armies tend to turn a dim eye on freelance salvage expeditions in a war zone.

This is not the case for all armies. Some militaries consider loot to be a perquisite of service, though traditional plunderers also tend to require a communal gathering of the loot for fair disbursal by their leaders. Individual initiative can be fatal under such circumstances, but far from rest of the army all manner of things can go astray in PC pockets. Even when things are done in an orderly fashion, a successful battle might pay out generously to the troops involved.

Most monetary awards should rise organically from play rather than being placed as specific remuneration. If the PCs loot something precious and can find someone to quietly sell it to, then that's a reward for their ingenuity and cheerful avarice rather than a natural reward of the mission. Comrades with special requests for the PCs might also pay in credits, though more often the currency is the less precise but often more useful medium of favors.

Rewarding Favors

Debt is the main reward of successful service. PCs who save a lost squad, relieve a besieged force, spare an officer from humiliation or retrieve vital parts for an artillery battery won't notice anything more in their paychecks, but they will have someone feeling a useful sense of indebtedness. This quiet currency of favors, backscratching, and friends is often a way to accomplish results that would be impossible under strict observance of the regulations.

When you give out favors to a squad, take a moment to specify the person who owes the favor and a few sentences about what kind of help they might be able to offer the team. Some friends might be able to send support in a hurry, launching an air strike or providing artillery support even when no such units aren't technically involved in a battle. Others can provide privileged information to help carry out a mission, or get the squad forgiveness for unfortunate actions performed in the heat of necessity. Every friend used as a reward should come with clearly-labeled utility.

Once you've noted this out on a 3x5 card, hand the card to the PCs to help keep them in mind of their resources. When they call on the friend, make a note of it on the card. Minor favors might not discharge the full debt, while major impositions might flip the direction of the debt. You can use these friends as convenient hooks for quiet secondary objectives that might be of more importance to them than the army as a whole.

Rewarding Experience Points

As the classic reward of a successful adventurer, you might choose to assign a fixed XP reward for each mission. Give out half that sum if the PCs succeed in the primary objective, and split the remaining half of the XP among the secondary objectives. The total possible amount should reflect the speed of advance you want for your campaign. At low levels, a mission might be worth half or more of a level's XP, while more battle-hardened soldiers might need several complete victories to gain a level.

An Example of Mission Creation

In the next step of the war on Fanshaw, the PC brass sit down after the tremendous battle at the Red Tower to decide the next objective for the rebels. Still stinging from the last turn's bloodshed, they decide that it's time to hammer the duke where it hurts, and take the capital city of York.

Desperate as the gengineered noble must be, they also decide to hold back six of their units in their defensive reserve, committing their artillery unit and the victorious Smithwick Front to the assault. The artillery will break up Ascendant forces outside the city, while the Smithwicks will handle the dirty business of rooting them out of the ancient city's winding streets. The squad PCs, of course, will be with their brethren in the front.

The GM now knows the general parameters of the next session's mission. There's an enormous wealth of things that could go wrong in assaulting the capital city of an amoral genetically-engineered nobleman, so they decide to randomly roll on the mission tags table. The dice come up 12, indicating that the problem here will be "Atrocious Casualties".

The duke is going to make a slaughterhouse of his capital. Commoners will be used as living walls, driven into the streets to obstruct rebel forces and used as human shields to defend loyalist positions. The Duke will be drawing in forces from other parts of the duchy to ensure that local feeling doesn't soften his soldiers' hearts, and his pet war-proles have long since had any such mercy engineered out of them.

The primary objective is rolled from the tag's table and comes up "Find the survivors of a smashed unit." The vanguard of the allied assault was broken when the loyalists turned their guns on their own buildings to topple them, drive the locals into the streets, and ignite numerous fires. The GM decides that one of the members of the broken vanguard was an NPC the PCs dealt with during their last mission, the better to pique their interest in rescuing them.

The GM also decides on two secondary objectives. The first one is rolled off the "Atrocious Casualties" tag, and involves killing an enemy officer responsible for an atrocity. The GM decides that the vanished squad reported the identity and general location of Josiah Bleeker, a loyalist artillery captain responsible for firing incendiary rounds into a slum neighborhood. The brass would appreciate it if the PCs could kill him as a token of rebel concern for the Yorkers.

The GM rolls on a different tag for the other secondary objective, choosing "Civilian Shields" and finding that an important local needs to be rescued. The GM decides that the mayor of York, Thomas Wyse, is currently being held with his family in the mayoral palace. The guard is relatively light, and it would be a coup to save the man, and his family if possible.

To add in a complication to these objectives, the GM rolls on the provided table and finds "Looters are thick on the dead".

York was ever a poor city for those not blessed by the nobility, and its numerous street gangs have taken advantage of the chaos to loot and plunder indiscriminately. They have little stomach for fighting real soldiers, but they'll block the streets and cause further chaos during the mission.

Next, the GM needs a map. For simplicity's sake, they print off two copies of a map of modern-day York in England, focusing on the center of the city. On the player's map, they mark out the insertion point of the PCs at the edge of the map and then the general vicinities of their three objectives, as closely as available intelligence would allow. A few obvious barricades and blockages are also penciled in. On the GM's map, the true positions of the objectives are noted along with those barriers and obstacles that aren't obvious to the invading Smithwick Front.

To spice up the map, the GM now rolls a few entries off the "people and events" and "urban area features" tables on the page opposite this one. They plant these events and details along the more likely paths to the objectives, with a few off the beaten paths. The PCs might well dodge them if they take an unexpected route; there are few cases in which these events should just be automatically pushed on the players as inescapable destinies.

These objectives and complications need details. The GM takes a moment to pull a mansion map off the net to represent the mayor's palace, and scratches down a few details about the man and his family. Generic statistics are recorded for loyalist troops and the fearsome war-proles. Josiah Bleeker's artillery command post is sketched and a note made of the dozen soldiers he has to assist him in calling fire. The tattered remnants of the broken squad that is the primary objective are also recorded, with a note that the NPC the players know will be killed in the fighting if they are not found within four hours of the mission's start. A few looter packs are described, ones inclined to break and run at their first casualties.

As a final touch, the GM now records the special abilities that the PC brass grant their clients. Each one is recorded on a 3x5 note card and will be handed to the appropriate player at the start of the game. The GM also records the special support actions that the Smithwick Front and the allied artillery unit allow the player squad. The infantry support action and the artillery strike action both get their own cards for reference by the players during play. The GM decides that any downed PCs can be quickly replaced by other troops lost in the chaos of the city's assault, but that fast extraction from the city is almost impossible. If the PCs want to abort the mission or extract the fractured squad's remnants, they're going to have to march out on their own two feet.

And with that, the GM has a mission ready for the next session's play. Whatever parts the PCs don't experience can simply be trimmed, reskinned, and used at a later date.

Parading In Full Kit

New Equipment and Weapons For the Military

One of the special pleasures of belonging to a formal military organization is the copious availability of heavy weaponry. Hardware that a more conventional PC team might never hope to access is available for little more than a signature and the vague assurance that it will be pointed at the enemy. In the same spirit, tanks, armored fighting vehicles, and the occasional self-propelled artillery piece are all plausible resources for a determined team of PC soldiers.

This chapter provides examples of some of the more common hardware that PCs might call upon during the course of their duties – or less pleasantly, hardware that they might find directed at them by the enemy. Most of these tools are available to standard TL4 armies with access to an ordinary level of technical expertise, though examples of more primitive equipment is provided for outfitting those lostworlder troops that haven't the luxury of energy weapons and gravtanks.

Equipping PCs

As the GM, you should decide on a basic set of equipment for the PCs in the fireteam. For most armies, this ordinary loadout should be drawn from the guidelines given on page 66, with gear appropriate to the PC's role in the team.

Barring loss of this gear and unusual problems in replacing it, the PCs will always have access to at least this much personal equipment. Vehicles and other major pieces of gear are unlikely to be issued as personal kit, though specialist drivers and pilots may have their assigned craft.

Requisitioning Other Equipment

Prices are provided for other hardware on the assumption that it can be purchased legally for the soldier's own use. While this is one way to ensure that a PC has the tools they need, the usual way to get hands on special gear is to have it issued by or requisitioned from the unit's quartermaster.

Sometimes this is a perfectly straightforward process. The PCs sign for the gear, the quartermaster hands it over, and it's theirs to keep and maintain as long as the mission requires it. If it's damaged or lost the quartermaster is unlikely to be amused, but if some defensible explanation for the loss is provided it's unlikely to result in docked pay or punishment duty.

Sale or trade of military goods is viewed much less kindly. A team leader might be able to get away with it if the action was strictly necessary for the success of the mission, but most PCs can expect painful consequences, with punishments ranging from fines and demotion to summary execution depending on just what gear was sold.

Distressingly often, however, it's just not that easy to get gear that the team needs for their mission. Obviously vital equipment will probably be provided, as the PCs can't be expected to blow up an enemy AA emplacement without actual explosives, but even this is not completely certain. Asking for frills and luxuries like extra grenades or a spare centaur bot can be an exercise in futility if supplies are scarce or the quartermaster is feeling ill-disposed. If the GM decides that a particular piece of hardware is especially hard to get, they can roll on the table below for reasons why. The PCs may have a brief window of time before the mission starts in which they might be able to fix the situation.

D6	What's the Hangup?
1	Last one; an officer wants it for a stupid reason
2	It's broken. 25% chance of failure. Fix it, maybe?
3	The quartermaster wants a bribe or favor to give it
4	The PCs need to get it from a squad in the field
5	Last one was lost at a location in the mission area
6	Seems fine, but breaks the second time it's used

ARTILLERY

While the cost of artillery guns can generally be glossed over for planetary armies, occasionally a mercenary legion elects to add a little more firepower to their units. Some might just want a few guns to add an organic artillery capability to their units, while others might want to form entire commands focused around explosive death from afar.

TL3 guns are cheap and effective under most circumstances. They have a range of about 40 kilometers and fire dumb shells that are impervious to quantum ECM. While the gunners can carry enough ammunition for a single artillery barrage, lengthy combat requires a secure supply line if the guns aren't to be useless after the first few minutes of combat.

TL4 guns usually rely on magnetically-accelerated unguided munitions. While the maximum range on a TL4 gun is in the hundreds of kilometers, the high arc of these projectiles gives ground-based anti-artillery lasers time to slag the projectiles. Against such hardened targets the guns have to be within approximately 40 kilometers to land the shells before the lasers have time to lock on to them. As with their more primitive brethren, these guns need a steady supply of ammo.

ARTILLERY	COST
Towed Gun, TL3	20,000
Towed Gun, TL4	40,000
Self-Propelled Gun, TL3	35,000
Self-Propelled Gun, TL4	85,000

Towed guns can be hauled by anything larger than a motorbike, with some light enough to be pulled by draft animals. Self-propelled guns provide their own motive power, but are relatively fragile; TL3 self-propelled guns are treated as groundtrucks and TL4 guns use the stats for gravtrucks, both of which are provided later in this section.

Damage dice aren't applicable to these guns. Those in the target area of a gun's barrage take damage as given for an artillery strike. If a PC or vehicle somehow manages to get directly in front of one of these weapons when it is fired, a truly spectacular death is inevitable. Most of these guns are unable to hit targets closer than a few kilometers away, though a few can be lowered for direct fire against foes.

STARSHIP FITTINGS

These fittings are examples of some of the more common orbital weapons used against low-tech worlds without the protection of braker guns or orbital defenses.

SPITBALL TUBES

A cheap, simple matrix of launch tubes for "dumb" titanium rods, Spitball tubes are often attached to mercenary surveillance frigates or other small craft. Even the occasional shuttle is sometimes crammed with the necessary hardware and a supply of rods. They are useless against planets with functional braker gun defenses, so they rarely see use except against "primitive" worlds without such protection.

A bombardment volley will be centered 1d6-1 kilometers away from the desired target point. Roll a 1d12 and count it as a clock face to determine the direction of the drift. Areas hit are affected as if by orbital strike as noted on page 55. If used as part of a mass combat battle, each Spitball tube matrix used in support of a side automatically inflicts 1d6 steps of damage on the enemy forces, applied before the battle's results are rolled.

IRON RAIN ARRAY

A more sophisticated version of the Spitball system, the Iron Rain is designed to provide orbital surgical strike capability against primitive targets unable to mount effective quantum ECM defenses. It can also prove devastatingly effective against more advanced forces that have lost their ECM umbrella through the vagaries of battle or commando actions. The munitions are powered and guided, allowing them to reach through conventional braker gun defenses.

The Iron Rain invariably hits its exact target and can specify individual targets as small as a groundcar. Individuals caught in the blast radius without cover take 4d6 damage, with a Luck saving throw for half. The array has integral scanning equipment sufficient to keep a bird's-eye view of any surface area beneath the ship, though only one area can be observed at once.

An Iron Rain array can be used for a blanket bombardment of an area, much like a Spitball system. The effects are largely identical, albeit its use in mass combat inflicts 2d8 steps of damage to enemies unprotected by quantum ECM.

FITTING	COST	POWER	MASS	CLASS	TL	HRDPT	EFFECT
Iron Rain Array	2m	2	1	Frigate	4	1	*Guided orbital missile strikes*
Spitball Tubes	75k	0	1	Shuttle	3	1	*Launches blind "Rods from God"*

Spitball rods are trivially cheap, provided the ship has access to a resupply station. Iron Rain missiles cost 100,000 credits for a full barrage, though individuals can be sniped at will. Both require 1 Mass per barrage for ammo storage. Ships of a larger class than the minimum multiply the barrages stored by 10 for each class larger.

Small Arms and Man-Portable Weaponry

While not all of these weapons are available to every squad, the GM may decide that their unit quartermaster has some of this hardware available for requisition. Other weapons might be found on enemies in the field, or in the case of land mines, discovered the hard way while on a mission.

Anti-Tank Missile

These man-portable gunnery weapons come in a dizzying array of models and flavors, all dedicated to blowing up tanks and similar heavy obstacles. Anti-tank missiles always use the anti-vehicle weapon optional rules, even if they aren't otherwise used in a game. TL3 missiles count as anti-vehicle against TL3 tanks and armored cars, while TL4 missiles are more destructive, and count as anti-vehicle weapons against more sophisticated TL4 armors.

Anti-tank missiles are direct fire weapons, and require the operator to get a direct line of sight to the target. Their bulk and single-shot nature make them burdensome to a fireteam, but if their commanders have any anticipation of encountering armor in the field a fireteam can expect them to be issued.

Burster Beam

The solution of choice for the more advanced TL4 worlds that want an effective anti-tank weapon, a burster beam is a man-portable energy weapon that fires a concussive bolt of disintegrating force at a target. The heavy shoulder-mounted projector is a voracious energy hog and requires the equivalent of a Type B energy cell for each bolt fired.

A hit from a burster beam is equivalent to a hit from a TL4 anti-tank missile, and requires the same automatic use of the anti-vehicle weapons rule. While a devastating weapon against vehicles and obstacles, a burster beam has a very slight lag between visible targeting activation and pulse emission. This is enough time for most intelligent creatures to dive out of the beam's path, making it an ineffective weapon against mobile human-sized targets.

Cutter Rifle

While far more expensive than a standard-issue laser rifle, some TL4 armies prefer a weapon of greater penetrating power and fewer incendiary side-effects. Some fall back on the proven punch of mag rifles, but the enormous additional cost in physical ammunition transport is a serious drawback. The cutter rifle is a compromise solution, a simpler and less elegant version of the pretech shear rifles that most modern worlds are unable to manufacture. These rifles are noisy and have a shorter range than a laser rifle, but they ignore atmospheric particulates and have excellent penetration.

Grenade Launcher

Most commonly found in the form of an underbarrel attachment that fixes to most standard military rifles, the grenade launcher adds 1 point of encumbrance to the weapon. The grenades it launches have the same general effects as their hand-thrown counterparts; 2d6 damage to all targets within 5 meters, with a Luck save for half, and every point of AC below 6 reducing the inflicted damage by 1 point.

Small Arms and Man-Portable Weaponry							
Weapon	Dmg	Range	Cost	Magazine	Attrib.	Combat Skill	TL
Anti-Tank Missile	3d8 / 3d12	1k / 4k	1,000	Single-use	Int/Wis	Gunnery	3 / 4
Burster Beam	3d12	500 / 1k	10,000	1	Dex	Gunnery	4
Cutter Rifle	1d12*	200 / 400	600	15	Dex	Energy	4
Cutter, Heavy	3d6#	400 / 1.5k	8,000	10	Dex	Energy or Gunnery	4
Grenade Launcher	Special	150 / 350	300	1 / 3	Dex	Projectile or Gunnery	3 / 4
Lance Charge	3d12	N/A	250	Single-use	N/A	N/A	4
Land Mine, TL3	1d8	N/A	10	Single-use	N/A	N/A	3
Land Mine, TL4	2d6	N/A	25	Single-use	N/A	N/A	4
Land Mine, TL5	3d6	N/A	N/A	Single-use	N/A	N/A	5
Light Machine Gun	2d8#	500 / 2k	3,000	10	Dex	Projectile or Gunnery	3
Milspec Laser Rifle	1d10*	300 / 500	350	20	Dex	Energy	4
Mortar	3d6	1k / 2k	2k / 4k	1	Int/Wis	Gunnery	2 / 4
Neutron Pump	Special	20 cone	15,000	Special	N/A	N/A	4

* indicates that the weapon can be fired in burst mode, using three rounds of ammo and granting +2 hit and damage.
\# indicates that the weapon can be fired to suppress as described in the SWN core book on page 39
Gunnery weapons are exceptionally bulky and heavy, and count as three encumbrance items, if not more.

Grenade launchers are used to provide indirect fire for a fireteam, launching explosives through windows or against cover while remaining at a safe distance. TL3 models fire against AC 5 to hit a particular area, with a miss landing the grenade 1d20 meters away in a random direction. TL4 models take advantage of laser sighting and programmed fuses, firing against AC 9 at all ranges.

Heavy Cutter

These bulky energy weapons are simpler, less sophisticated versions of the advanced pretech shear rifles once common to Mandate ground forces. Their shrill whine and the luminous streaks of distorted space that mark the path of their beam set them apart from the quieter technology of Old Terra, but they require no components that are beyond the power of a reasonably advanced TL4 world to manufacture.

Heavy cutters replace the traditional light machine guns of TL3 powder-based armies, providing a fireteam with a support weapon that can fire through obstacles that would defeat a standard laser rifle or plasma projector. The stabbing bolts of a heavy cutter can punch through ordinary walls and light rubble with minimal hindrance, and even civilian vehicles can be quickly disabled by the gun.

A sufficiently well-trained operator can use the weapon as a cutting tool, slicing up to a ten-meter gash in an ordinary structure at the cost of a full Type B cell. This same energy expense can cut a 3 x 2 meter hole in most civilian walls.

Lance Charge

The details of these demolition charges vary from world to world. Some rely on plasma jets, while others use more esoteric shear fields not unlike those used in heavy cutters, while a few still involve a mixture of explosive chemicals. Each lance charge is roughly the size of a dinner plate with one adhesive side and a grip on the other.

The charge is pressed against a surface, the detonation set for any time at least six seconds from now, and the grip trigger is pulled. No hit roll is necessary if the PC is close enough to touch the vehicle. The charge's countdown then begins, and any attempt to remove the lance charge must succeed in a Int skill check against difficulty 9, using the better of the remover's Combat/Gunnery or Tech/Postech skills. Failure causes immediate detonation.

When the charge detonates, it blasts apart virtually everything in a cone ten meters long and five meters wide at the farthest end. It is treated as an anti-vehicle weapon against any class of vehicle the PCs are liable to encounter for purposes of the optional vehicle instant kill rules, and even if the target survives that, it does damage as a gunnery weapon. The explosive cone is tightly focused and can be used even in small areas with wartime-adequate levels of safety, though the charge's damage is suffered by anyone standing directly behind it when it goes off.

Charges issued to demolitions teams or special forces usually come with radio-detonator circuitry that allows them to be remotely detonated with a standard military compad coded with their encryption keys. The range of this signal varies with the intensity of enemy jamming in the area, but is usually anywhere from 50 to 1,000 meters.

Land Mine

Most militaries make extensive use of land mines, whether the primitive TL3 devices of plastic and solid explosives to the TL4 discs with antigrav technology and IFF circuitry or even the salvaged TL5 mines of the ancient Mandate with their eerie embedded intelligences. They provide crucial defensive cover and area denial for armies that may not have enough warm bodies to defend every trail and flank within the theater.

Detecting a mine requires either sophisticated sensors or painstakingly slow inspection. A group can make its way safely through a minefield by spending three minutes searching per meter traveled. Groups that rely on luck must all make Luck saving throws every ten meters they travel. Anyone who fails a check detonates a mine, though most mines are sufficiently focused that only the victim is injured. A precognitive psychic with the *Omen* psychic ability mastered can lead a group faultlessly through a minefield.

Removing mines is an excruciatingly slow process that is usually impractical under mission conditions. An artillery strike on an area will disable from 50% to 100% of the mines, however. If a PC fails a Luck saving throw while passing through such a burnt-over area, roll this percentage; if under, the mine was destroyed by the pelting of the shells.

TL3 mines are cheap and simple. When a sufficiently heavy pressure falls on them, they explode. Small "toe-popper" mines are meant to disable and maim a victim rather than kill them, the better to tie up enemy forces in tending the wounded. A victim reduced to 0 hit points by a toe-popper can make a Luck save to survive with 1 hit point, though they'll be permanently crippled without recourse to TL4 regeneration or cybernetics tech. The heavier anti-vehicle mines can't be set off by ordinary footfalls, but count as gunnery weapons for purposes of damaging vehicles and use the optional vehicle instant kill rules against any civilian vehicles or military vehicles of TL3 or less.

TL4 mines are more sophisticated. Their anti-personnel mines affect not only the luckless figure to detonate them, but allies within 2 meters as well, while their anti-vehicle models use the optional vehicle kill rules even for military vehicles of TL4 or less. TL4 mines can also trigger a gravitic boost to "jump" and explode against the underside of boosted gravitic vehicles. Most are equipped with sensitive IFF sensors that can recognize allied vehicles and personnel, allowing friendlies to cross provided they have an up-to-date passcode. Those who lack these codes tend to discover that fact the hard way.

TL5 mines provoke a certain queasiness in the few users who've come across stashes of these sinister discs. Mandate-era TL5 mines are equipped with a hive-based expert intelligence. Aside from having all the qualities of a TL4 mine, the code is smart enough to let an enemy force get deep into the minefield before it detonates, or allow friendly troops to pass through it while holding back pursuing foes. Unfortunately, the exact control codes for the intelligence are rarely available, and so the general is forced to teach the mines cruder, simpler rules of recognition.

Some of these mines fail to take the instruction, and become actively and malevolently hostile toward anyone they detect. They have a cruel disposition, like a cat playing with a mouse, and can silently burrow toward victims under their own power. Rogue mines do not respond to deactivation commands and must be destroyed.

Light Machine Gun

A regular tool for TL3 armies, most fireteams can expect to have one soldier assigned one of these weapons. They act as the teeth of the team with their suppressive fire and their easy penetration of anything short of reinforced walls. They can be fired either with Combat/Projectile or Gunnery skill. They are voracious with ammunition, however, and it's common for other members of the team to carry extra cans of ammo for the weapon. Each of these cans counts as one item of encumbrance and holds three full belts of ammo.

Milspec Laser Rifle

The standard sidearm of most all-electric armies, the trusty laser rifle is known on countless TL4 worlds. It has much less penetrating power than a conventional projectile weapon, and heavy atmospheric smoke and dust can scatter its beam for a -4 hit penalty. The heat of the beam also has an unfortunate tendency to set fires in flammable surroundings.

Against these disadvantages, the laser rifle has the enormous benefit of eliminating the need for physical ammunition. A juicebox or a pouch full of Type A energy cells are all that are required for extended operations, and these cells can be recharged back at the base with no further logistical tail required. The ability to shoot constantly with little risk of running out of ammunition has led many a soldier to forgive it its shortcomings. Most models are also equipped with integral low-light sights which allow comfortable operation at night, provided the wielder has the leisure to use them.

The exact details of a given rifle model's operation will vary between worlds. Some are relatively noisy, the focal units making brief shrieking noises with each ignition of the beam. Others are perfectly silent in operation. Some leave a visual trail for the laser beam, a short path of brightly-ionized atmosphere, while others simply leave scorched holes in the target with their beams visible only on infrared sensors and other special optics. Soldiers naturally prize the silent and subtle versions of these guns, but their home worlds are not always able to produce them to such a pitch of excellence.

Mortar

The old ways are the best ways at times, especially when a world lacks the technology for more sophisticated indirect-fire weapons. Ordinary tube mortars can be fabricated by any TL2 world with an adequate gunpowder analog available. They require a two-man team and 1d6+2 rounds for setup, minus the gunner's Combat/Gunnery skill, though a single gunner can set up the device in twice the time.

The various components of the mortar count as ten encumbrance items, and each mortar round is its own item of encumbrance. Mortar rounds cost 50 credits apiece if bought legally, with black market prices easily ten times as high. More advanced TL4 mortars are only half this bulk.

Mortars are imprecise weapons. Hitting an exact location within range requires a hit against AC 0. On a miss, the round goes 1d10 x 10 meters off-target in a random direction. Each round firing at the same target point grants a cumulative +1 to hit provided the team can spot the misses and adjust accordingly. Mortar rounds inflict explosive damage on everyone within 25 meters of the hit unless they're under suitable cover. Victims can make a Luck saving throw to take only half damage. Mortars can be fired only once every three rounds.

Neutron Pump

Both an antipersonnel weapon and a tool of area denial, a neutron pump uses several esoteric processes to create a stream of high-energy neutrons without relying on the nuclear reactions that a conventional nuke snuffer would inhibit. These neutrons are then used to poison and kill entrenched enemies or render areas of ground lethal to intruders. Targets wearing radiation-resistant armor such as powered armor, force field-based pretech defenses, or even a high-quality vacc suit are largely immune to neutron pumps.

When a wielder fires the man-portable version of the weapon, every living creature is affected within a twenty-meter cone one meter wide at the muzzle and twenty meters wide at its base. Victims must immediately make two Luck saving throws. If both succeed, the victim loses a quarter of their current hit points, rounded up, over the next 1d6 minutes. If only one succeeds, they lose three-quarters of their current hit points over the next 1d6 minutes and will die within an hour unless treated by a TL4 medkit or anti-radiation drugs. If both Luck saves fail, the victim dies in 1d6 minutes without such medical treatment. Repeated hits from a neutron pump require additional saves, but only the worst outcome is used. TL4 anti-radiation meds can prevent both damage and death, and military medkits almost invariably include these stims.

The cone will penetrate ordinary building walls and civilian structures, along with vehicles not specifically hardened against radiation. Only a foot of earth, an inch of lead or other dense metal, or specialized anti-radiation shielding will block the pump's beam. Partisans fighting against forces that use neutron pumps soon learn to create earthworks inside buildings or crouch behind sandbags.

A heavy neutron pump is a vehicle-mounted weapon, and has a range of two hundred meters, with a cone width of fifty meters at the farthest point. A single blast from the air can scorch a substantial portion of an entire hostile village, but it's almost as often used to create zones of lethal, lasting radiation by scorching buildings and terrain in an area until they become dangerously radioactive. These zones remain "hot" for up to a week after such scorching. Any unprotected creature that enters the zone must save as if struck by the pump for every round they spend in the area.

The emissions of a neutron pump and the radiation of a "burnt over" zone are invisible to the unaided eye, but victims suffer almost-immediate surface burns, internal bleeding and nausea, making the nature of the attack obvious to those with NBC training. Headaches are a certain sign of a fatal dosage unless radiation meds are applied in time.

Portable neutron pumps involve bulky, rifle-like emitters connected to backpack generators. The power drain is substantial, and many users rely on juicebox power arrangements to keep the weapon fed. Vehicle-mounted heavy pumps use Type B power cells. When not employed against individual entrenched targets, a single Type B cell provides enough power to irradiate an area one kilometer long and two hundred meters wide over the course of half an hour, sufficient to render it virtually impassable for those without radiation-resistant vehicles or vacc suits.

Personal Equipment

Ideally, equipment that a squad needed to execute its mission would be readily available from the unit quartermaster in quantities ample to fulfill the task at hand. It would be available quickly, with minimal paperwork, and in excellent condition for use.

This is never the case when it actually matters. PCs aren't the only ones who want special equipment and it's almost a certainty that they are neither the most important nor the most favored people who are trying to get it. The availability of any of the equipment listed here or other hardware the PCs may wish to requisition is strictly up to the GM. Even when this equipment is theoretically available, getting it might require special favors for the quartermaster, the blessing of a superior officer, or the creative interpretation of military regulations. The prices listed are for those occasions when the PCs want to buy gear out of their own pockets, assuming the equipment is legally available for sale.

Cobalt Salts

While rarely actual cobalt-60, these gritty powders are made from a variety of highly radioactive substances. A single canister can be dusted over an area fifty meters in radius to render it uninhabitable for a varying amount of time. Those who enter the salted area without the appropriate protection must make a Physical Effect save every minute or else lose one point of Constitution, as per the radiation rules in *Stars Without Number*.

Cobalt salts come in both "short" and "long" isotopes, the former tainting an area for a month, and the latter for as long as a century. Some particularly ruthless forces have been known to dump the salts wholesale over entire communities or areas. A particularly determined genocidaire with access to low orbit could render most planets uninhabitable by a sufficient deployment of cobalt salts into the upper atmosphere, but it would require enormous amounts of the substance to be effective and such an attempt could be nullified by most TL4 civil defense infrastructures, assuming they're still intact.

Comm Set

While every soldier in an army can be expected to have a military-issue compad, these short-range communicators are poorly suited to battlefield conditions. They're susceptible to jamming and their encryption is necessarily limited. For serious long-range communication a dedicated comm set is issued to each fireteam, with one of the riflemen usually tasked with "manning the radio".

These radio comm sets have a range of up to 500 kilometers under ideal circumstances, though battlefield ECM can cut this drastically. They can web together friendly compads into a local network, sharing information on encrypted channels. More primitive TL3 radios have a similar range, but are twice as bulky and have encryption easily broken by TL4 tech.

Personal Equipment		
Equipment	Cost	Enc
Cobalt Salts	500 / can	2
Comm Set	2,000	1
Dimmer Field	20,000	N/A
Floater Ruck	2,000	2
Haze Field	4,000	1
Juicebox	300	2
Shush Chems	100	0
Squiggle Spotter	1,000	1
Spy Eye	2,000	2
Stagger Paste	200	1
Umbrella Stand	20,000	N/A
Unstable Field Generator	5,000	1
Zip Stim	5	0

Dimmer Field

A "dimmer field" is a vehicle-mounted variant of a conventional nuke snuffer designed to eliminate radioactivity within its area of effect. While a complex and somewhat finicky device, it's capable of purifying air, water, and ground material with no more than a few seconds of exposure. While the effects aren't rapid enough to prevent the immediate damage caused by weapons such as a neutron pump, and don't serve to reverse the physical damage caused by radiation, it can clean an area contaminated by cobalt salts or other lasting radioactive residue.

A standard dimmer field mounted on a gravtruck can cleanse radioactivity within a hundred-meter radius when active, consuming one Type B power cell for each hour of operation. Permanent structures built as part of a planet's civil defense infrastructure can purify areas within hundreds of kilometers, filtering out the damage of high-atmosphere radioactives as well.

Floater Ruck

This small platform can be reconfigured with sliding cloth panels and a polyceramic support frame to be up to a maximum of 2.5 meters in length and one meter in width. A single Type A energy cell allows it to float silently up to two meters above the ground for 24 hours. It can support up to 250 kilos of cargo while floating along at the maximum speed of a running human. Floater rucks are usually "tethered" to one member of a squad, automatically following them at a distance of some meters, though they can be programmed for remote operation with any standard military compad. The rucks have a maximum range of 300 meters from their controller.

These rucks are prized by fireteams for their ability to carry heavy burdens of ammunition and supplies, but they're also extremely easy to spot when they're floating a meter and a half off the ground. Recon groups avoid using them for reasons of stealth, but some squads will carry a deactivated, compacted ruck just in case a critically-wounded comrade needs to be extracted over rough terrain. They can also serve as makeshift watercraft or swamp boats, floating over calm waters while carrying one soldier at a time. Floater rucks have an effective Armor Class of 9, and 8 points of damage are sufficient to render them inoperable.

Haze Field

Truly flawless holographic images push the limits of ordinary TL4 technology, particularly in an uncontrolled environment. Even so, a haze field can produce a relatively effective camouflage screen over a small group, breaking up their outlines and interpolating them with fragments of the surrounding environment.

When used in stationary mode, the haze field can operate for up to ten hours on a single type A power cell. It forms a dome up to six meters in diameter, sufficient to shelter an entire fireteam if they're friendly. The camo is obvious to observers within ten meters, but further away it becomes very convincing, and can only be detected on a Wis/Perception check at difficulty 7, +1 for every ten meters of distance.

When the haze field is carried, the rapid recalculation and beam adjustment necessary to maintain the hologram drains the power cell much more quickly, each minute of use draining an hour's worth of energy. The haze field is largely ineffective when used indoors or in other manufactured environments, as the fragmented outlines it creates are jarring in an artificial setting.

Juicebox

A "juicebox" is the generic name for one of several varieties of oversized battery pack worn as part of a soldier's harness. An armored conduit cable locks into a standard power cell slot, providing a steady power feed far beyond the capacity of an ordinary Type A cell. A fully-charged juicebox is equal to thirty Type A cells or four Type B cells, and takes six hours to recharge off ship's power or a functioning local power grid. Plugging a juicebox into a weapon takes one action.

While juiceboxes are extremely popular with laser armies, they have one major drawback; the armored cabling has an unpleasant tendency to catch on obstacles. Veterans soon learn to strap the cabling as closely as possible to their body in order to limit the risk of getting hung up, but the battlefield is perversely ingenious in finding ways to catch the cable. Whenever a juicebox user rolls a 2 or 3 on a skill check involving physical movement, the cable hooks on something. At the GM's discretion, either the cable yanks out of the weapon, the weapon is torn from the user's hands, or the cable is actually damaged and rendered useless until repaired.

A few high-tech juicebox models integrate with advanced military harness to provide induction-feed power to items slotted with cell-shaped receptor clips. While cordless, this system is even more prone to disruption due to dirty suit contacts or damage to the sophisticated circuitry. When fighting in exceptionally grimy environments, there's a 1 in 6 chance at the start of every battle that the contacts are bad and require an action to clean before they can draw power. A very few TL5 models of juicebox are immune to this finicky behavior and transmit power perfectly. Persistent rumors speak of some of these boxes as providing effectively unlimited power to the soldier lucky enough to have one.

Shush Chems

This cocktail of sedative drugs is issued in ampule form to medical personnel for field use, and to special forces teams that might need to take prisoners or subdue captured psychics. The drugs require one round to correctly inject, and the subject must either be subdued or willing. Within one round of injection the subject will fall into a dreamless coma. Only victims with blood filtration cybernetics or similar unusual anti-toxin measures have any chance of resisting the effect.

The coma lasts for 24 hours unless the victim is brought back by an ordinary dose of stimulants from any modern medkit. The drug is extremely powerful, and correspondingly dangerous. If the drug is applied by someone without at least Tech/Medical-0 skill, there is a 10% chance the victim will simply die 1d6 hours after the drug is administered if not woken earlier. A dose of Shush can be applied only once a day to a victim, as heart failure is otherwise inevitable. Shush chems function only on humans.

Squiggle Spotter

This spool of fiber-optic cable has a small control screen at one end and a thumb-sized crawler bot at the other. The operator can cause the crawler to prowl forward, dragging the cable behind it to provide a discreet eye and ear into enclosed spaces, around corners, or over the crest of a hill. The cable has a maximum length of 200 meters. The bot has a movement rate of 20 meters a minute and can carry the cable up most porous surfaces or rough walls. The cable is almost invisible while under brush and undergrowth, but is only difficulty 8 to spot in clearer terrain at a distance and automatically noticed if uncovered nearby.

Spy Eye

As a man-portable recon drone, a spy eye can provide invaluable intelligence for a squad. Most TL4 varieties of drone are translucent discs slightly wider than a man's palm, operating silently through airflow-boosted gravitics. A single Type A power cell will keep a spy eye operating for up to an hour, with a maximum round-trip range of twenty kilometers in a moderate breeze and a maximum operational ceiling of one kilometer. The control unit for the spy eye allows for either direct piloting or the programming of a particular route.

The spy eye can pick out details well enough to identify individuals when operating at that height, and is largely invisible to anything short of TL4 detection devices. Information is relayed via tightbeam comm laser when the eye is within line-of-sight of its controller. When LOS is broken by terrain or particulate clouds, the eye can communicate by encrypted radio transmissions, though this makes it almost certain to be discovered by TL4 sensors and possible for even TL3 detection to sniff its presence.

The spy eye is quite maneuverable in the absence of a high wind, but quantum ECM scrambles its automatic navigation. The eye can only be flown under direct control when in the presence of an active quantum ECM field, requiring that it remain within line of sight of the operator.

Stagger Paste

This thick slurry of bioactive compounds, memory splints, and tissue plastics is designed for emergency field application to a badly injured comrade. So long as the subject has been stabilized, the paste will seal major wounds and temporarily reinforce damaged muscular and skeletal components. The subject will awaken within one round and be capable of moving at a steady walk, though they are unable to carry any more encumbrance than their readied items.

Units in the field often use stagger paste on stable but severely injured comrades to allow them to self-extract to the rear without the need of sending stretcher-bearers with them. While more hazardous than sending them under escort, a small unit might just lack the spare hands to help them.

The paste's use comes at cost, however. Its effects last only eight hours, and use of the paste inflicts 1 point of system strain. After each round of combat or other vigorous activity the user must save versus Physical Effort or pass out for 1d6 minutes. The paste renders them mobile, but does not actually heal any hit points and any further damage to them will leave them mortally wounded once more. Stagger paste cannot be used twice on the same subject until they have fully healed from their injuries.

Umbrella Stand

An "umbrella stand" is a mushroom-shaped laser emitter slightly taller than a man and fueled by a stationary generator, or for six hours with a Type B energy cell. The stand automatically scans for incoming artillery or mortar rounds and lases the projectile into slag before it can land. While the stand can only handle so much incoming fire, it is invaluable for protecting a position that lacks well-dug bunkers.

A single umbrella stand is sufficient to neutralize an artillery strike or projectile-based air strike within two kilometers of the stand. If the PCs have multiple strikes at their command, they can call them in simultaneously to overwhelm the stand's defensive capabilities. Mortar shells are generally useless in the vicinity of an umbrella stand.

Unfortunately, it is necessary that the stand be placed at the highest point of a position if its lasers are to have a clear field of fire. While its generator tubing can be sheltered, the dome of the stand must be unobstructed, making it vulnerable to close-range enemy fire or direct-fire energy weapons. Most squads attempting to take such a position will try to destroy the umbrella stand first and then pull back to allow friendly artillery to hit the now-undefended location.

An umbrella stand has an effective AC of 5 and requires 10 points of damage to disable. It is too bulky to be man-portable without special lifting gear, and requires at least ten minutes of alignment and setup before it can protect an area. The terrain is also consequential, as the stand can't fire through physical obstacles.

Unstable Field Generator

While these energy field generators are delicate and fussy pieces of hardware, combat troops cherish them for the abundance of firepower they add to a grenadier. The field generator is normally worn as a belt-mounted pack with a type A power cell receptacle and a large pull-ring kept under a safety cap.

When the cap is lifted, the ring can be pulled off of the generator. The short length of composite attached to it is charged with an unstable energy field with the perceived weight and contours of a hand grenade. The field may be thrown as a normal frag grenade, and will explode three seconds after it manifests. The field emits a bright white light while active and a loud hissing noise, making it difficult to use discreetly. It is not possible to delay the field's explosion.

An unstable field generator has a supply of 50 charge tags. A type A power cell can turn 10 of them into grenades before a fresh cell is required. The field generator is unusually delicate for a piece of military equipment, and will be destroyed if the wearer takes damage from an explosion or similar trauma.

Zip Stim

Enemy forces don't keep to a 9-to-5 schedule, and sometimes a soldier needs to keep fighting long after exhaustion has set in. "Zip stims" are the catchall name used to cover the wide variety of industrial-strength stimulants that are in common circulation among many advanced armed forces. Even more primitive militaries might use something of the same kind if they have access to some particularly potent native flora or fauna to process.

Most zip stims are powerful, raw, and have unpleasant side effects. A single dose is enough to keep a soldier fighting at peak wakefulness for 48 hours. A second dose can be used at that time to prolong their wakefulness, but they become easily-distracted and start to lose focus, automatically losing initiative in combat and taking a -1 penalty on all skill rolls. If a third dose is used without sufficient time to sleep, the user must save vs. Physical Effect or collapse within 1d6 hours.

MILITARY VEHICLES

The modern battlefield is a heavily-mechanized place, and it's very likely that the PCs are going to run into vehicles both friendly an hostile. The table below is adapted from *Engines of Babylon*, a supplement for *Stars Without Number* that includes rules for building vehicles and customizing them for your own purposes. While the statistics given here are more bare-bones, they should be sufficient for the task at hand.

Vehicle costs assume a basic, unarmed version of the craft, with additional guns or special features adding to the vehicle's cost. The Speed score reflects not only a vehicle's raw speed, but also its maneuverability and agility. Speed scores are added to any Vehicle skill rolls the driver makes.

Armor ratings subtract the listed number of points from any small arms damage the vehicle suffers. Weapons that require Combat/Gunnery skill to fire or other anti-vehicle implements ignore this score. Tanks and similar heavily-armored ground vehicles ignore non-Gunnery small arms fire entirely.

Crew totals include the maximum number of passengers for an unmodified vehicle of that type All of the vehicles listed below require only one driver, though additional guns and tasks might require additional hands; tanks normally require a driver, a gunner, and a commander, for example, with the gunner operating the main gun and the commander handling the anti-personnel weaponry as needed.

Kilometers/hour scores allow you to estimate the likelihood of the vehicle getting to a particular locale in time to make a difference, while the tech level required to build the vehicle is fairly self-explanatory. The hardpoint total indicates how many weapons can be mounted on the vehicle without straining its structure or power supply.

Individual planets might build better or worse versions of these base vehicles, depending on their local tech base and the quality of their industry. Vehicles run off in mass lots are also apt to be cheaper than those listed here.

VEHICLE WEAPONRY AND COMBAT

Vehicles armed with weapons are assumed to have enough ammunition to carry them through whatever ordinary engagements they might encounter. Energy weapons are particularly efficient, allowing regular use of the guns without significantly depleting the vehicle's power cell. Even in that case, it's simple enough to swap in a fresh type B power cell while in operation, ensuring that "all-electric" vehicles will not normally run out of fuel or firepower.

Vehicles reliant on physical munitions have much less endurance. A close air support plane will normally deplete its munitions with a single air strike, though that's time enough to resolve whatever immediate situation called for the attack. As the GM, you might decide that such vehicles run dry of ammunition after their first significant engagement. Ground vehicles can often carry more ammo more conveniently, and so might last two engagements before needing to resupply.

Hitting a stationary vehicle is automatic if it's within 10 meters. If the attacker is under no special pressure and has time to line up the shot, the hit is automatic on anything but a natural 1 on the hit roll. Hitting a vehicle in motion is more difficult, but can be done with a successful hit roll against AC 10 minutes the vehicle's Speed. If the attacker is also in a moving vehicle, subtract the attacker's Speed from their roll as well.

Despite the best efforts of 33rd century military engineers, it is still hard to see things when inside a vehicle. It is *especially* hard to see things when inside a heavily-armored vehicle such as a tank. A "buttoned-up" tank with its hatch closed and its commander down can see very little but what's in front of it and what might be in the view of its surface sensors, assuming those sensors have survived any recent combat. Vehicle-bound enemies will not normally detect a small group of infantry if there's anything to hide behind, unless the vehicle is equipped with sophisticated scanning equipment or is unbuttoned to allow for visual observation.

Vehicle	Cost	Speed	Armor	HP	Crew	KM/H	TL	HrdP
Groundtruck, TL3	10,000	0	6	35	10	90	3	2
Groundtruck, TL4	25,000	0	6	40	10	90	4	2
Gravtruck	30,000	1	4	30	10	70	4	2
Helicopter, TL3	25,000	3	6	20	6	250	3	2
Helicopter, TL4	30,000	4	6	25	6	300	4	2
Atmoflyer, TL3	30,000	4	8	25	6	1,200	3	2
Atmoflyer, TL4	40,000	4	8	30	6	2,000	4	2
Gravflyer	40,000	5	8	25	6	1,500	4	2
Tank, TL3	50,000	0	*	40	3	100	3	4
Tank, TL4	125,000	1	*	60	3	120	4	4
Gravtank	200,000	2	*	50	3	120	4	4

* this vehicle is generally impervious to any weapon that doesn't require Combat/Gunnery to fire
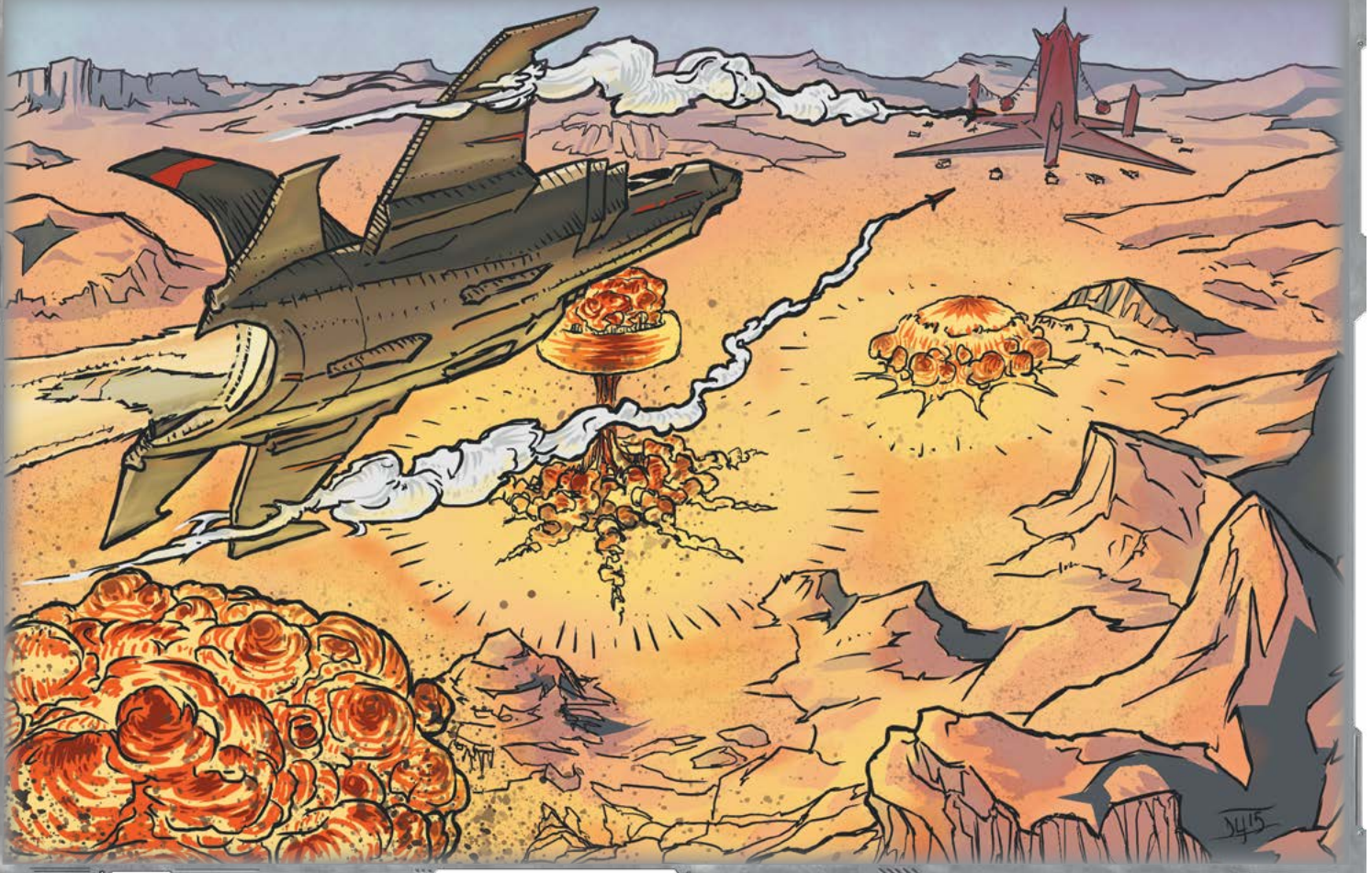
Air Insertion Gravflyer

PC squads might be lucky enough to catch a ride on one of these transport gravflyers if they're being inserted into a dangerous mission area or extracted from a landing zone behind enemy lines. This model is equipped with advanced stealth technology capable of defeating most TL4 sensors, and can fly and hover almost soundlessly. While it has an impressive amount of room for passengers and cargo space, it's a relatively fragile flyer, and its anti-personnel laser is used only in extremis to clear a zone for pickup or insertion.

Air Insertion Gravflyer			340,000 cr
Speed	5	**Km/H Travel**	1,500
Armor	8		
Hit Points	25		
Crew	18	**Hardpoints**	2
Base Frame	Gravflyer		
Fittings	*Anti-Personnel Laser:* 3d6#, 500/1k range		

Armed Technical

Wherever there are cars, soldiers will put guns on them. The armed technical is a venerable mainstay of dirty backwater wars and vicious civil uprisings. Most of them are built off of conventional civilian trucks with little or no modification beyond the adjustments necessary to mount a weapon.

This version of the technical is widespread on TL3 worlds, popular for its ease of acquisition and repair. The cargo space is usually given over to ferrying extra combatants, though these unofficial passengers are rarely able to hit anything unless the technical is at a dead stop. Very few of them can expect to survive if the technical crashes or is forced into dramatic maneuvering.

Armed Technical			15,000 cr
Speed	0	**Km/H Travel**	90
Armor	6		
Hit Points	30		
Crew	5	**Hardpoints**	2
Base Frame	Groundcar, TL3		
Fittings	*Heavy Machine Gun:* 3d6#, 500/2k range		
	1,500 kg cargo space		

CLOSE AIR SUPPORT PLANE

While gravflyers are more maneuverable and have an easier time hovering in place over a battlefield, traditional atmospheric flyers have the advantage of speed and cargo capacity. The Hydra missile array on this model allows for close air support for an extended period before the plane has to return to base to rearm. The anti-personnel laser is usually a door-mounted weapon used only to clear a landing zone or support troops after all the Hydra rounds are spent.

CLOSE AIR SUPPORT PLANE			80,000 CR
Speed	4	**Km/H Travel**	2,000
Armor	8		
Hit Points	30		
Crew	6	**Hardpoints**	2
Base Frame	Atmoflyer, TL4		
Fittings	*Anti-Personnel Laser:* 3d6#, 500/1k range		
	Hydra Array: 3d6#, 2k/4k range		

PRIMITIVE MAIN BATTLE TANK

Slow, fragile, and clumsy compared to a modern gravtank, these primitive tracked wagons have the splendid advantage of cheapness. Even those worlds with the industrial base to support more advanced combat vehicles sometimes fall back on the fast construction and cheap materials of this basic chariot of war. These economies can backfire, however, as the physical ammunition demands of the vehicle can tax already-strained supply lines, and its lack of grav propulsion leaves it vulnerable to tank traps and rough terrain.

PRIMITIVE MAIN BATTLE TANK			80,000 CR
Speed	0	**Km/H Travel**	100
Armor	*		
Hit Points	40		
Crew	3	**Hardpoints**	4
Base Frame	Tank, TL3		
Fittings	*Rifled Tank Gun:* 4d12, 2k / 4k range		
	Heavy Machine Gun: 3d6#, 500/2k range		

POSTECH MAIN BATTLE TANK

Typical of the armored divisions of developed TL4 worlds, this main battle tank is designed to be an "all-electric" solution for overtaxed supply lines. So long as a steady supply of maintenance and repair parts can be managed by the quartermasters, all that this tank needs for operation is a power supply and a crew to drive it.

Most tank crews are divided up into a driver, a main gunner, and a tank commander who operates the AP laser as needed. Most modern tanks are equipped with internal holopanels that give a 360-degree view of their surroundings to all members of the crew. When this inevitably fails in combat, the tank commander's physical viewports are used.

POSTECH MAIN BATTLE TANK			340,000 CR
Speed	2	**Km/H Travel**	120
Armor	* (6 vs. Gun)		
Hit Points	70		
Crew	3	**Hardpoints**	6
Base Frame	Gravtank		
Fittings	*Vortex Cannon:* 5d12, 1k/2k range		
	Anti-Personnel Laser: 3d6#, 500/1k range		

TROOP CARRIER

Designed for use in tandem with conventional gravtanks, the troop carrier shares the same basic hull, but trades the offensive punch of tank for a much larger passenger complement and augmented gravitic propulsion. Most carriers are crewed by a driver, a gunner for the AP laser, and occasionally a comms officer help coordinate with the rest of the unit. The remaining space is taken up by two or three fireteams, with unused passenger space given over to additional ammunition or supplies specific to the carrier's mission.

These vehicles are exceptionally effective against the defenses of more primitive worlds, as their gravitic drives allow them to ignore conventional tank traps and impassible terrain.

TROOP CARRIER			280,000 CR
Speed	3	**Km/H Travel**	150
Armor	* (3 vs. Gun)		
Hit Points	50		
Crew	15	**Hardpoints**	4
Base Frame	Gravtank		
Fittings	*Anti-Personnel Laser:* 3d6#, 500/1k range		

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