

Flare Star



Flare Star by J. Andrew & William H. Keith Jr.

This folio adventure is designed for characters with a variety of backgrounds serving aboard a Trade Pioneer merchant ship. The referee may draw characters from any source, including existing campaigns; some of the characters should have Vacc Suit skill.

The merchant ship is the Type A2 Far Trader Scotian Huntress. Details of her statistics, performance, and layout can be found in GDW's Supplement 7, *Traders and Gunboats*. Other TRAVELLER books and supplements can be incorporated as desired.

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TRAVELLER™

Science-Fiction Adventure in
the Far Future

Marischal



Adventures

Flare Star

Background: Undeveloped sectors along the edge of the Imperium - sectors like Reaver's Deep - are the hunting grounds for the Trade Pioneers. Scotian Huntress is one of these, a Type A2 Far Trader owned by the mercantile firm of Caledon Ventures. Manned by an experienced trade team, the ship has been probing along the rim of the Great Rift, searching out new markets, resources, and products that might put Caledon ahead of the competition.

Unexplored star systems always promise untold wealth. But the system the traders were exploring now - shrivelled chunks of rock and ice circling twin M5 dwarfs - had shown the other side of the balance sheet. There was nothing of value here.

Until they detected the Other...

The alien craft was unlike any seen before - huge, with enormous heat radiator wings, falling in an eccentric orbit around the red suns. Aboard the Huntress, excitement ran high. New-found races meant whole new worlds of trade opportunity, and a fat bonus from Caledon. In moments, the traders had matched course and speed with the newcomer. But, as they approached, they realized that there was no sign of life from the alien and only the faintest traces of power leakage or heat spill. Their prize was a dead ship.

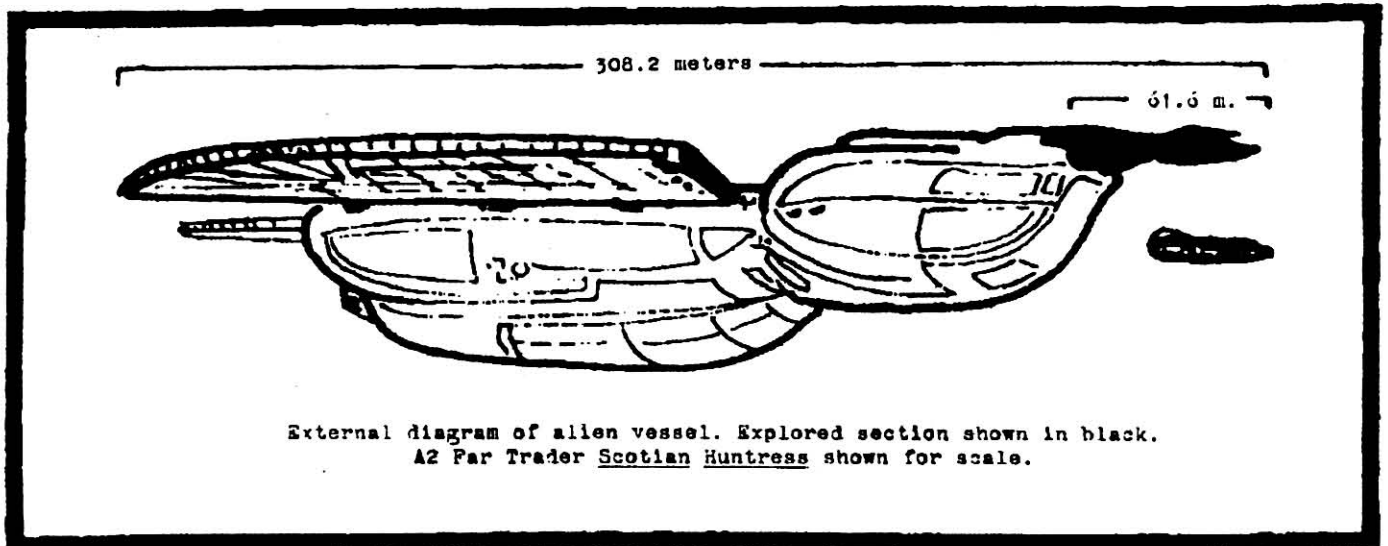
But even a derelict must come from someplace. The Trade Pioneer's contact team suited up to have a closer look. An airlock was visible at the bow. Within might be the clues that would lead them to a new world, new people, and bonanza.

Gaining Entrance: A 3-meter wide panel at the derelict's bow is the only obvious entrance. No controls are visible, but a 5-centimeter square recessed niche will invite investigation. Nothing the adventurers do to this niche will have any effect. Characters who carefully examine the hull around the panel can, on a 2-die throw of their intelligence or less, discover a hidden manual release.

Operating the release will make the panel slide open very slowly. The outer door will close and the inner door opens automatically once the adventurers enter the airlock. The inner door will operate in fits and jerks, freezing open, and a faint blue light on one bulkhead will flicker twice and die. The party will find that nothing they do, and nothing attempted by those still aboard Huntress, will make the airlock operate again. They are trapped, although there seems to be no immediate danger.

Conditions Aboard: There is no gravity or light and, except for the battery that spent its last power working the airlock, there are no operating power systems aboard. There is atmosphere present, but the interior temperature is -150 degrees C.

Of immediate interest will be the bodies floating everywhere, well preserved in the cold and all showing signs of violent death. They are of no species known to the adventurers. Each is 1.1 meters tall, with tubular bodies, two stalked eyes, eight grasping appendages and four heavier legs. None wears clothes; some carry lengths of metal tubing, broken equipment, or other improvised weapons.



Referee's Notes

The Ship: As the adventurers explore the ship, the referee should refer to this section to identify various compartments and describe them to the players.

All corridors are 3 meters wide and 2 high. Doorways are 3 meters wide and only 1 meter high; mechanical releases .5 meter off the deck will open all the doors except two. These exceptions are the frozen inner airlock panel and a door leading aft to what may be engineering spaces; no mechanical releases are present, but 5-centimeter square recessed spaces are visible next to them. Debris floats everywhere - broken equipment, smashed instruments, and vandalized fixtures - and occasionally the party will encounter what seem to be tube-shaped, cartilaginous bones among the alien bodies.

The following areas are keyed to the alien ship deckplans.

1. Airlock.

2. Control Room: Instrument panels are .5 meter tall, covered with switches, plungers, and other controls. Any character with computer skill will soon notice that there is nothing resembling a computer anywhere. "Furniture" seems to be shallow circular depressions, 1.5 meters across, .5 meter deep, lined with some flexible material and sunken into the deck. Considerable damage has been done to the instrument panels, though one, set off by itself and bearing only a violet plunger, appears unharmed. Any character who experiments with this will find that pulling the plunger out will restore gravity (.95 G) and light (extremely harsh, blue-white light from overhead panels) throughout the ship. When gravity is restored, each character must roll two dice against his dexterity to avoid 1D damage.

3. Quarters: Eight rooms, each with a single deck depression. The walls are covered by the remnants of intricately designed hangings of glass beads in shades of green, blue, and violet, interspersed with black. The door to one room (marked A) has been deliberately jammed shut from the outside by a piece of pipe in the release mechanism. Within are 10 alien bodies and a number of disjointed cartilaginous bones.

Including these 10 bodies, 60 alien corpses will be found aboard the ship; the referee should divide this number among the various compartments. Unnumbered compartments are of unknown purpose; the combination of alien design and wanton destruction leaves no clues to what they were for. Nearly every compartment has meter-high panels of silvery metal, many half-covered by alien inscriptions, along the walls. These notations can be wiped off easily.

Artifacts: Among the other junk, the party will notice what look like bracelets of some slick, silvery material, 4 centimeters in diameter and 5 centimeters wide. A 5 cm x 5 cm raised ornamental design on the band will on close inspection prove to be an intricate assembly of metal plates and electronic components. Six will be discovered, one in the cabin that was jammed shut. All will be found among or near scattered bones, and all will be broken to some degree.

The Lifeboat: On the port side forward the party will find a series of mechanically dogged hatches, the last jammed shut from the far side. It may be freed by applying 20 strength points to it, giving access to the ship's lifeboat.

Power is off within the boat. A violet plunger like the one in the control room is in the "on" position, but the boat's batteries have long since been drained. There is no way to restore light or gravity, or to cast off from the larger vessel.

Two bodies are aboard, much different from those found on the large ship. These are about 1.5 meters across, furry, and disc-shaped, with 12 appendages of various sizes arranged around a fleshy hub. There are no legs on the ventral surface; the creature may glide or undulate along the ground.

Each wears on one arm a bracelet identical to the broken ones outside. Strangely fashioned hand lasers float nearby; both aliens have burn wounds, and one appears to have shot itself.

The Adventure: Shortly after the party boards the derelict, crew members aboard Huntress will detect a massive cloud of hydrogen gas - part of the fire-fall between the two stars - falling toward the nearer sun. Computer predictions estimate that the cloud's impact on the photosphere will trigger a flare within 30 minutes.

Many red dwarfs are flare stars, subject to periodic upheavals that can increase their luminosity by a factor of 100 and flood nearby space with particulate radiation. The two ships are only 13 million kilometers from the double sun, close enough that each is just as bright as, and four times larger than, the sun seen from earth. The immediate increase in brightness will present no danger to characters within the ships. Personnel caught outside will be subject to 1D hits every 10 minutes, unless they are in the shadow of one of the ships.

Four hours after the light of the flare reaches the ship, particulate radiation will arrive. Screens aboard the Huntress will protect those aboard her, but the alien ship has no such protection. Adventurers aboard the derelict will suffer 2D hits every 10 minutes until they return to Huntress. Radio communication will be impossible, though the characters can talk by touching helmets. The flare will last for 20 hours.

The adventurers are trapped aboard the derelict with only a short time to make a thorough and rapid exploration of the alien vessel, discover a way out, and get back to the safety of Huntress. Along the way, they may gather clues concerning the identity and origin of the derelict's crew.

The Puzzles: A number of puzzles are presented to the adventurers. Most important, they must discover that the intact bracelets within the lifeboat will fit into and operate the 5-cm square niche by the airlock. If the ship's power is on, the airlock will function smoothly and the party can escape. (The mechanism of the rear hatch appears to be broken. No amount of tinkering will open it.)

A number of conclusions can be drawn once exploration of the derelict is complete. The players should be encouraged to develop their own conclusions from the clues they discover. These include:

1. Two kinds of lifeforms were aboard the ship, which was designed for the disc-shaped beings. The ship probably carried a crew of eight.
2. No computers were found on board. The alien notations on the silvery boards may represent manual calculations. If this is true, an enormous potential market may be available once this race is discovered and contacted.
3. The ship, based on external inspection, is not jump capable. It has a sublight grav drive of primitive design.
4. The harsh, ultraviolet-loaded lights of the alien's lighting panels suggest a home star of around spectral class A0. Querying the Huntress's navigational computer will reveal a A0 star two parsecs deeper into the Great Rift. Since such stars rarely have planets, it has never been visited. Caledon will pay a bonus of 250,000 CR for this information.

Referee's Information: The following material is for the referee only. It will form the basis for future adventures in this campaign.

Though A0 stars rarely have planets, there are always exceptions, and the disc-shaped aliens come from a Tech 9 civilization on one of these. Clues aboard the derelict suggest that they see blue and ultraviolet light. Their ship passed the twin stars too close at the wrong time and a flare similar to the one that threatened the adventurers disabled their heat radiators and crippled their ship.

The starship builders are extremely long-lived. Later studies will show that the ship (designed to carry 100,000 tons of fuel, with a 100:1 fuel/mass ratio) was capable of reaching .02 light. At that speed, the trip from the nearby A0 star took 325 years.

Computers were unknown among the starship builders. They rely instead on individuals with "lightning calculator" talent - somewhat more common among them than in humans - as organic computers. There will be a planet-sized market for electronic computers if the home planet can be discovered.

The presence of TWO alien species aboard the alien craft is the key to an important secret, one which will unfold in the "Storm," "Periastron," and "The Newcomers" folio adventures for this campaign.

