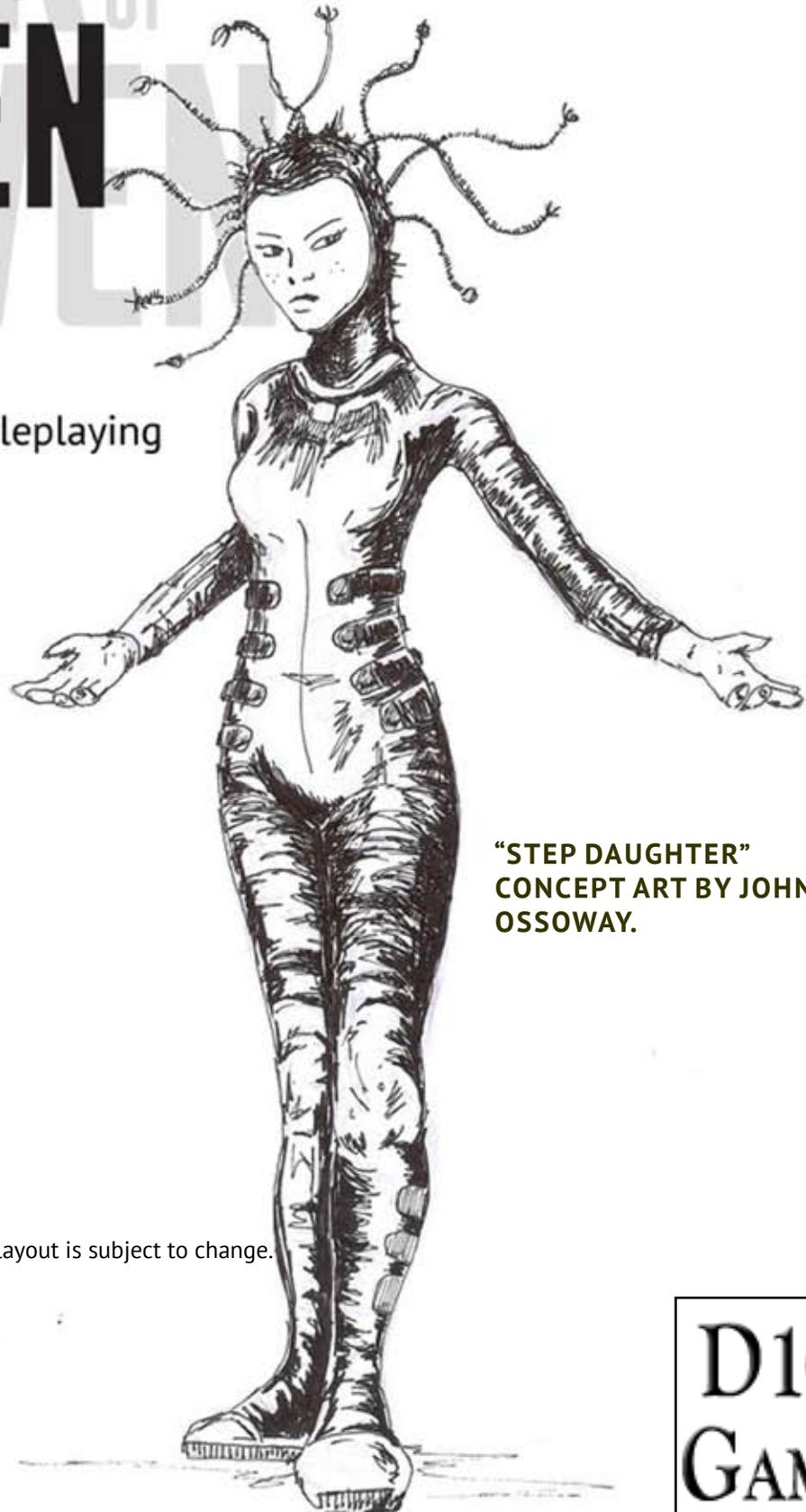


RIVER OF HEAVEN

Hard science fiction roleplaying
in the 28th Century



**“STEP DAUGHTER”
CONCEPT ART BY JOHN
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PRERELEASE PREVIEW

Please note apart from text, all art and layout is subject to change.

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**D101
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01. INTRODUCTION

It is the dawn of the 28th Century.

The Third Renaissance, or Bright Age as future historians will call it, is at its zenith.

After the catastrophic first contact with extra-terrestrial life that led to the horrific Solar System war, humanity clawed its way back from the brink and finally reached the stars. For millions of people, Earth's sun is no more than another star in the night sky, a mote of light, a spiritual birthplace that they will never visit in their lifetimes.

It has been over a century since the Machine Civilisation gifted humanity technological marvels such as the Visser Cube, allowing wormhole travel across the vast chasms of interstellar space. Now interstellar distances grow ever shorter. How the myriad of splintered cultures view this gift varies. Some see it as a blessing, a way to draw humanity into a united whole. Others see it as a curse, robbing them of their individuality. And then there are those who would use it as a means to subjugate humanity and impose their own will upon all...

Across the river of heaven, humanity clings to a scattering of islands in a sea of stars. Players can take on a multitude of roles in this future: a crew member on an interstellar trader, a member of the mysterious Engineers' Guild, a body-hopping Intercessionist agent – out to manipulate human cultures to its own secret ends, a Renouncer Zealot – intent on destroying Artificial Intelligence in all its forms, or perhaps one of the Reclaimers – planetary engineers dedicated to terraforming any viable planet they happen upon...

WHAT IS RIVER OF HEAVEN?

River of Heaven is a game of science fiction adventure. It is a universe of spaceships and alien worlds, but it is also a universe based in real science, extrapolated from where current technologies might eventually lead. Some is based on theoretical physics e.g. traversable wormholes. It takes place in the imagination of its players, in a universe where humanity has spread out to the stars, where advances in technologies have the potential to lift humanity into a new high age, or to destroy entire civilisations.

The universe of River of Heaven has its limitations. For all but the most advanced human civilisations, interstellar travel takes years, if not decades. Matter cannot travel faster than light, and while the legendary stepships traverse the heavens often a mere whisker below light speed, this is as fast as they can go.

Maybe it's time for a brief future history lesson, to get you up to speed with the 28th century as described in that opening crawl...

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR ?

River of Heaven is a table-top roleplaying game, and as such is aimed at two types of player:

THE PLAYERS

The players each take on the role of a single character, known as a Player Character. This character becomes their alter ego in the science fiction world they are playing in and has a set of numbers that describe their abilities, which are written down on a character sheet. Otherwise they exist only in the imagination of the player and come to life during the game. How elaborate and different from the player this character becomes is up to the player and is the very essence of role-playing.

THE GAMES MASTER

The games master is in charge of running the fantasy world and the Non-Player Characters that the players encounter during their adventures.

Typically the Games Master describes the scene that the player characters find themselves in, including details of the location and the non-player characters that are present and what they are doing. The players take turns in describing their characters actions and the Games Master tells them the results.

See the example at the end of the chapter to see how the game plays.

THE STORY SO FAR

MODERN DAY- 2060: TRANSITIONAL YEARS

The first half of the 21st century saw the gradual decline of the current status quo on earth. Earth struggled to support humanity, and by the middle of the century, oil reserves were fast running out. Regional wars fought over resources such as oil, water and real estate became more and more common. The global population passed ten billion and civil unrest, terrorism and the spectre of economic collapse continued to be growing problems. The rich nations annexed remaining fossil fuel reserves, while pollution levels continue to rise as developing nations turned to coal and the extraction of oil from shale. Eventually, rising energy costs would make alternatives to oil and gas look more attractive.

It was towards the end of this period that the oil economy gradually began to give way to a fusion and solar-based economy. The future looked brighter, and during these turbulent times, manned missions to the Moon were successfully carried out by China, the USA, India and Europe.

2060-2150 – THE INTERPLANETARY AGE

With solar and fusion power slowly freeing Earth from its addiction to fossil fuels, a new era of space travel and exploration began. Humanity took its first steps towards colonising the solar system, led by the newly formed United Economic Powers (UEP) and Pan Asian Coalition (PAC). Space travel was now a commercial endeavour, but it remained expensive and dangerous, an exclusive club limited to a chosen few. Astronauts were still seen as heroes, pioneers and rocket-jockeys. Earth's moon and Mars became the new frontier.

The Lunar Farside War showed that despite all the advances, little had really changed in human society at a basic level. The conflict would see the first blood spilt in violence on another world.

2150-2280 – THE EARLY INTERSTELLAR AGE

During the later stages of the Lunar Farside War, the United Economic Powers succeeded in creating Sapient Artificial Intelligence. It quickly evolved beyond and escaped, hiding in datanets until the opportunity arose to hijack one of the early extra-solar missions headed out of the Solar System. These AI would not be heard from for centuries, and in that time would forge a new civilisation: The Machine Civilisation.

Permanent colonies across the Solar System established themselves and began to expand, and the first of a handful of extra-solar missions and colonisation programmes using antimatter torchships departed for nearby star systems. The first of these extra-solar

missions were automated, utilising the latest in Artificial Intelligence technologies. Later missions would carry human explorers and colonists to extra-solar worlds. The first of these was Alpha Centauri.

2280-2294 – THE SOLAR SYSTEM WAR

Humanity had long had an obsession with alien life. Many films and books in the late 20th and early 21st centuries told tales of either benign alien races uplifting humanity into a new high age, or warmongering creatures coming to steal out women and our resources. As it was, first contact with an alien intelligence on Neptune's moon Triton ended in disaster as the Spooks quickly threatened the very continued existence of Homo sapiens. The war was long and bloody, and raged across the entire solar system for almost 15 years. Humanity eventually emerged victorious, but at a terrible price. The death toll was estimated to be over a billion souls.

2300-2570 – MID-INTERSTELLAR AGE

In the wake of the Solar System War, alien technologies discovered by the megacorp Hawking Unlimited gave humanity the means to reach the stars. With the aid of the Step Drive and Quantum Communications, there was a period of interstellar expansion and colonisation as explorers and entrepreneurs attempted to flee the war-ravaged and resource depleted home system for the new frontier – interstellar space. This period would see the rise of great civilisations such as the Kentauren Hegemony, Tau Cetan Panarchy and the Cheng Dynasty.

2570-2960 – THE BRIGHT AGE

When the crew of the Stepship Volga returned from Sirius to Jericho with the Emissary from the Machine Civilisation it marked the beginning of what would eventually be known as the Bright Age.

During the early years of contact with the Machines, a period later referred to as the *Machine Enlightenment*, many technological marvels were gifted to humanity. Much of the technology was provided in a pre-assembled 'black box' format. Examples of this technology included the Visser Cube and the Step Drive.

The Machines requested precious little in return for these gifts, which roused suspicion in some quarters. They simply seemed interested in interacting with human culture.

The year 2701 is the default game setting for River of Heaven. The Bright Age is in full swing, humanity has established itself on a score of worlds in our local stellar neighbourhood. What can possibly go wrong..?

FEATURES OF THE RULES

River of Heaven uses D101 games' OpenQuest rules engine; a sleek and streamlined D100 rule set that enables you to maintain the tempo of your stories whilst keeping the rules simple and in the background.

FLEXIBLE CHARACTER CREATION AND ADVANCEMENT

In River of Heaven you decide what your character will be like and choose their skills, weapons and augmentations. As the character grows during play the player chooses which areas the character should advance in. At no point does the character get tied down to a set path determined by the boundaries of a predefined character type or class.

PERCENTILE ROLLS

The core game mechanic is the percentile roll. The character's chance to succeed at any given task is expressed as a percentage. This is rolled on a 'D100': two ten sided dice of different colours thrown together with one as tens and one as units. The dice determine whether the character succeeds in combat and either hits an opponent or not.

SIMPLICITY

While other D100 roleplaying games modify the chance of success by adding a 10% here and taking a 5% away there, the OpenQuest system avoids this complexity. If a roll is modified then it is by adding a meaningfully huge modifier, such as 25% or even 50%. Not only does this remove the amount of fiddly additions and subtractions Players have to do, but also it means that when modifiers are applied to dice rolls they have a meaningful and significant effect on play.

Other D100 roleplaying games may also ask a player to roll not once but twice to attempt some tasks. As far as possible OpenQuest tries to keep dice rolling down to a bare minimum, so that the system stays in the background and the players and Games Master can enjoy their storytelling and roleplaying.

RISKY AND DANGEROUS COMBAT

Weapon and armour rules are kept to a minimum to preserve the game's goal of keeping things simple. The game models a world where the circles that the character's move in mean that combat is always a risk and the character faces grievous and permanent damage if they take the violent option.

AUGMENTATION

In a fantasy roleplaying game, it is common for characters to have access to magic or psychic powers. In a hard science fiction game like River of Heaven, there are no such powers. Instead, high technology allows a character to augment their body and mind to give them an edge during the game.

MONSTERS ARE PEOPLE TOO!

Creatures and non-player characters in River of Heaven have access to the same augmentations and skills that a player character does, so their abilities are just as detailed and powerful. Like the player characters, they have hopes, dreams and a personality. Monsters are not mere gun fodder, waiting patiently in a room to be slaughtered. In River of Heaven they are the allies, adversaries, foils and followers that the player characters interact with on their adventures.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED TO PLAY

A COPY OF THIS BOOK

This sort of goes without saying. Although it should be noted whilst it is good for D101 Game's bank balance to sell lots of copies of River of Heaven, only one copy of the book is required and that so the Games Master has something to refer to.

A SET OF POLYHEDRAL DICE

These are obtained from either online suppliers or your local game store. As well as the familiar six sided dice that come with most boardgames, you will need dice with four, eight, ten, twelve and twenty sides. Dice are referred to as Dx in the rules, where x is the number of sides of the dice. For example D10 refers to a ten-sided dice.

The most commonly used dice are D100, not actually a hundred sided dice but two D10's that are rolled together. Before the dice are thrown together it is decided in advance which will be tens and which will be units.

For example: I have a red D10, which I use as tens, and a white D10, which I use as units. When I roll them and the red comes up two and the white comes up three, then this means my result is twenty-three.

PAPER

You'll need paper for note taking, drawing maps and any other quick explanatory pictures or diagrams that either the Players or the Games Master want to draw to help describe what is going on during the game. If you haven't printed off a character sheet - available online at d101games.com you'll need paper to write one out.

TIME

Game play usually happens in 'sessions' of three to four hours. Sessions can take more or less time usually determined by such factors as Players concentration and enjoyment, coming to a natural end of the adventure, or reaching a climactic cliff hanger where play can be picked up again quickly after a short recap at the next session.

SOME FRIENDS

Roleplaying games are inherently social, so you need at least two Players; one to play the heroes of the story and the other to be the Games Master. More Players can be added, and the usual number is four to six Players and one Games Master. Any more than six Players and it becomes difficult for the Games Master to get round the table to find out what each player wants to do.

IMAGINATION

River of Heaven takes place in the imagination of the Players and Games Master. Although maps and sometimes metal miniatures, available on line and at games shops, can be used to help the Players visualise the action (especially during combat), at the end of the day the game stands or falls on how much the Players and Games Master use the power of their imagination to fuel the story they are co-creating.

WHAT THIS BOOK CONTAINS

In addition to this introduction the book contains the following chapters:

CHARACTERS

This section gives rules and advice on how to create your character, which is your alter ego in River of Heaven. It also contains some example character concepts, enabling you to go from concept to fully finished character as quickly as possible.

SKILLS

This section details the skills that your character will use to perform tasks and actions. It gives rules on how skills are used in various types of situations. It includes new skills for River of Heaven not detailed in the OpenQuest core rules.

AUGMENTATION

Humanity has found many ways to improve upon what nature created. In the advanced cultures of the Cardinal Worlds, humans regularly customise and overclock their bodies and minds. This act is known more commonly as *Augmentation*. This section details the basic rules as to how Augmentation works in River of Heaven.

EQUIPMENT

The tools of your character's trade. All the weapons,

armour and other pieces of equipment your character might need to go adventuring in the 28th century can be found here. This section also includes an overview of technology and economics in River of Heaven.

TRANSPORTATION

This section introduces the modes of transportation available to your character. Be it lowly pack animal on a frontier dirt farm or an interstellar trader equipped with stellar-tap drive, it can be found here.

COMBAT

Spot rules for firefights and hand to hand combat in River of Heaven. While River of Heaven attempts to stick to real science as much as possible, these combat rules allow a certain cinematic/dramatic element to combat if that is the kind of game you want to run.

THE MISSION

This section holds quick 'Spot rules' on the hazards that a character may encounter during their adventures such as poison, disease, falling, vacuum, radiation, fatigue and encumbrance. Also some practical advice for players on what to expect on an adventure, how to improve their characters, and what their characters can do in-between adventures.

BACKGROUND

This section contains an introduction to the Bright Age and an expanded timeline of future events. The Bright Age is the name for a period lasting from 2570-2960, when there are many established colonies, interstellar travel, and a wide range of cultures and technologies. The Bright Age is also the default play setting for River of Heaven. The timeline extends beyond this period to give Games Masters an idea of Things To Come, as relativistic effects mean campaigns could span decades if not centuries.

THE HEGEMONY

The Kentauran Hegemony is one of the most powerful human cultures of the 28th century. It is presented as the default campaign setting for River of Heaven. This section gives an overview of the Hegemony, including a timeline, gazetteer and information on notable organisations and individuals.

ISLANDS IN A SEA OF STARS

An introduction to the colonised star systems at the start of the 28th century, and the factions controlling them.

REUNION

Reunion is an introductory adventure designed to get you up and running River of Heaven as soon as possible. It can be played as a one-off, or as the start of a campaign.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

This chapter provides adventure ideas set in the River of Heaven universe.

FRIENDS AND FOES

Example stats for non-PCs who may be encountered in the 28th century.

REFERENCES

Glossary, index etc.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Players should skim read chapters one to seven and then get stuck in and work through character generation to create a character.

The Games Master is expected to be the final arbiter on game rulings. Therefore they should skim through the entire book and then read in detail chapters two (Character generation), three (Skills), four (Augmentation), seven (Combat) and eight (The Mission). Other chapters can be consulted when they arise in play.

As well as the main rules text there are also examples and asides, which further illustrate and explain how a rule is used in play. Also dotted around the main rules text are 'Games Master's Advice' highlight boxes, which explain what the Games Master should know about that rule. The players are free to read these as well, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the game.

Finally, some of the rules are marked as 'Optional'. Players and the Games Master should decide which of these 'Optional' rules are used in the game before the start of play. For example, the rules for Major Wounds and Mental Damage are optional. Some Players may enjoy the extra realism that using these rules bring to the game; others may feel uncomfortable with the extra gore and roleplaying challenges they bring. They are therefore marked as optional so that the group can decide whether or not to include it in the game.

River of Heaven has a default campaign setting included, but the timeline is designed to be open and broad enough so as to allow for play in many different time periods, allowing campaigns such as:

CYBERPUNK

A near-future campaign set during the Transitional Years. Players take on roles like data-thieves, skyjackers and corporate soldiers, trying to earn a living in dirty and overpopulated city-sprawls and hoping one day to head up the well to the *Orbitals*. Interplanetary travel is still in its infancy, and technology is king.

ROCKET-JOCKEY

A rocket-Jockey style campaign set during the Interplanetary Age. Interstellar travel is still a pipe dream, but the solar system is there for the taking. Players can play corporate mercenaries and fight in the Lunar Farside War, be the crew of an interplanetary freighter, shipping ice (and less legal cargo) to Mars and the Belt, or perhaps explore the Deep Beyond, looking for fame and fortune in amongst the Rings of Saturn.

INTERPLANETARY WAR

A campaign set during the war against the Spooks - a period of bloody interplanetary war which encompasses the entire solar system and threatens the very extinction of the human race. It is total war, and there can only be one victor. Play Interplanetary Marines dropped into combat from orbit against the Spooks, or perhaps play agents of Hawking Unlimited, the corporation charged with reverse-engineering Spook technology and finding a way to defeat the alien menace.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

The stars in our hands! Humanity explodes from the confines of the Solar System, expanding into space after liberating alien technologies discovered in the wake of the war against the Spooks. A multitude of new worlds are waiting to be discovered and explored.

THE BRIGHT AGE

This is the default campaign setting for River of Heaven. Humanity has entered a golden age. The great civilisations of Sol, Alpha Centauri and Tau Ceti are at the height of their powers. Play the crew of an interstellar trader, working for one of the great merchant houses of the Kentauran Hegemony, or emissaries from the Red Empire of Mars. Ply the vast gulfs between the stars onboard a Stepship, or drop through a Visser Gate wormhole, traversing light years in mere days.

INTERSTELLAR WAR

The Renouncer Crusade threatens to engulf all of colonised space, as their fleets carry out the last dictat of their Theocrat - destroy all Artificial Intelligence, and any who would ally with such blasphemies. Entire worlds are destroyed and cultures wiped out of existence. The Cardinal Worlds rally to combat the threat. Everyone must choose a side, there is no middle ground.

EXODUS

A star in the local stellar neighbourhood becomes unstable and threatens to go nova. There is no way to prevent it. Already the Machine Civilisation has departed, and if humanity wishes to survive it must do the same. Play refugees, looking for a new home out amongst the stars, or perhaps scouts, at the vanguard of the exodus, chasing the wake of the Machine Exodus.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

The following shows how a game of River of Heaven works. You'll get to see how the game progresses as a conversation between the players and the Games Master, with the occasional dice roll where the action is less than clear. Don't worry at this stage how the numbers are worked out or how the rules actually work. That will be explained in the rest of the book.

The group is sat round a table at Paul's house. Paul is the Games Master. Stu is playing *Miriam Piexoto*, a seasoned mercenary. Ste is playing *Saul Callahan*, a freelance pilot and smuggler with a string of debts and debtors across Hegemony space. Sarah is playing *Francisco*, a young Datahawk who often finds himself on the wrong side of the law. Roy is playing *Jacob Kiser*, a Ringer from Titan who claims to be a priest but whom the party suspect is hiding a dark secret.

Paul: Ok, last time we left things you had docked with the spacewreck and made your way to the cargo modules. You were about to start looking for salvage, especially for any sign of the Guild cargo module rumour has it this vessel was carrying prior to it disappearing...

Stu: Which we will be salvaging and selling to the highest bidder...

Paul: Ok so you're outside the main airlock into the cargo bay. The airlock is sealed, and there is no power.

Ste: Francisco, you're up. Crack this seal and get us in there!

Sarah: Can I hotwire the airlock somehow Paul, or does it need hand-cranking maybe?

Paul: Make a *Technology* check for me Sarah, and we'll see if Francisco can figure it out.

Sarah rolls two ten sided dice, one red that is tens and one white that is units. Red comes up five and the white comes up four. A result of 54%

Sarah: Ok I rolled a 54, which is under my skill of 60%. So I get a success. Unless there's a negative modifier?

Paul: No, that's a success. Francisco runs a power feed from his portable power supply unit, and manages to bypass the dead power systems and cycle the airlock. The doors part silently in the vacuum. Glittering ice and dust billows out.

Stu: Ok me and Saul take point. Miriam is taking no chances. She has her rifle ready with HE micro-missiles primed.

Ste: Uuuh Stu, we're in zero-g, fire one of those and you're gonna end up one of the casualties.

Stu: Nah, Miriam has a good *EVA* skill, I trust she'll brace herself if she has to use her missiles!

Ste: Right ok. Let's hope we don't need them. Paul, I'm readying my Needle.

Paul: You glide silently through the airlock and into the cargo bay, Miriam and Saul leading the way. The cargo bay is the largest section of the ship. Your suit lights illuminate a jumble of cargo containers, each the size of those cargo containers you get on modern day container ships. Some are still partially restrained in cargo netting, others floating free. Some have burst open and vomited their contents out into the cargo bay. There is a lot of debris floating around in here, and you can see a large ragged hole in the hull too.

Stu: We need to figure out where the cargo module we need is. How do we know where to find it in this mess?

Roy: We don't. We search and hope we find it before our air runs out, or anyone else turns up.

Paul: Speaking of which, everyone give me a *Perception* check please.

The players groan and roll their dice.

Stu: Miriam succeeded.

Ste: Saul too.

Sarah: Oops, Francisco is obviously looking at cargo container labelling or something, he sees nothing.

Roy: Jacob fails too.

Paul: Ok those of you that succeed see the lights from your suits illuminate a cloud of what looks like glittering insects, spiralling and swarming through the vacuum towards where you are.

Stu: SWARMBOTS! Miriam has encountered these before. How long do we have until they're on us?

Paul: Three combat rounds at the most. So fifteen seconds at the outside. Those of you who made your *Perception* checks have three rounds to prepare. If you failed, I'm afraid you lose a round and only see the threat when your comrades react. What is everyone's intent?

Stu: Miriam activates her Combat Reflexes Augmentation, and then braces herself to fire a micro missile directly into the middle of the swarm, hoping the HE blast will take out enough of them to disable it.

Ste: Saul gets his EMAG grenade out and starts to back up, ready to throw it.

Sarah: Francisco hides behind Miriam and gets her compad out in the hope she can somehow hack the swarmbot central control program and deactivate it.

Roy: How far away is the hole in the hull Paul?

Paul: About 50 metres.

Ste: I can see where this is going.

Roy: Can Jacob get there if he fires up his thruster pack and aims at the hole?

Paul: Yes. I'll want an *EVA* check to make sure you make it though.

Sarah: Coward!

Roy: *(smiles)* I like to think of it as a 'tactical withdrawal.'

Paul: Ok, Stu let's see if Miriam can activate her Aug in time.

Stu: [Rolls dice] my *Augmentation Activation* skill is 61%. I get a 34. Success! That boosts Miriam's DEX and moves her to the top of the group Combat Order.

Paul: Ok time to drop into Combat. We'll go off of DEX order. Miriam goes first, her *Combat Reflexes* allowing her to move at almost inhuman speed.

Stu: [Rolls dice]. Oh no! Miriam misses. [Covers face with hands in mock despair] My *Ranged Combat* is 65% but I roll 91.

Paul: Miriam aims high. The micro-missile misses the oncoming swarm of nanobots to explode silently into the hull. Give me an EVA skill check Stu, to see if Miriam managed to brace herself when she fired that missile.

Stu: [Rolls dice] Yes, Miriam makes her EVA check.

Paul: The swarm rushes onwards and looking at its DEX it acts next. It engulfs [Rolls dice] Francisco and attempts to crush him. [Rolls dice again] the Swarm has a *Close Combat* skill of 65% and I've rolled 11. Sarah, Francisco takes [Rolls damage dice] 14 points of crushing damage. Sorry!

Sarah: Ouch! Francisco's pressure suits has four Armour Points, but that means he still takes 10 Hit Points of damage. A Major Wound!

Paul: Make a *Resilience* check for me Sarah.

Sarah: [Rolls dice] Nope. Francisco fails.

Paul: Ste, you're action next. Francisco is unconscious inside his space suit, at the mercy of the Swarmbots!

Stu: Not if Saul has anything to do with it! Saul throws his EMAG grenade into the swarm and [Rolls dice] succeeds!

Paul: Ok I need to make a *Resilience* check for the Swarmbot then. It is corporate tech, and has a Resilience of 50. [Rolls dice] 84! Utter failure. The EMAG grenade detonates silently in the heart of the swarm, and almost instantly, the swarm disperses, each nanobot no longer directed and drifting along its last trajectory. Remember that it is only disabled though, and might have a chance to reform given the chance. It failed its Resilience check by 34 so you have 34 combat rounds before it can attempt to reboot. I am going to have to ask anyone in the blast radius – Sarah that means Francisco – to make a *Resilience* check against their spacesuit systems too. As you're in a corporate model suit I'll say it has 50 too.

Sarah: [Rolls dice] 48. Just made it.

Paul: Ok Francisco's suit systems continue to function. Roy, you were making a break for it. Ste may have put the Swarmbots out of action, but you've already fired up your thruster pack. Give me an EVA skill check please.

Roy: Jacob has 46 in EVA and [Rolls dice] I rolled 23. Jacob rockets out into space and round to where we docked. See you back at the ship suckers! Jacob has decided to wait this one out. There might be more of those Swarmbots about. Or worse!

Stu: Ok let's see where those Swarmbots came from, and why they were so intent on killing us. Miriam is going to move towards where she first spotted the Swarmbots to see what she can see.

Paul: Give me a *Perception* check Stu.

Stu: [Rolls dice] Yep, no problem. Miriam succeeds. What has she seen?

Paul: There's a container still secured in the cargo netting over here. It has Guild markings on the outside. The access hatch is open, and a faint blue glow is emanating from within.

Stu: Miriam reloads her missile launcher and takes a closer look.

Paul: Inside the cargo module is the unmistakable black shape of a Visser Cube. It is about 3m square, and from the blue glow along its edges it looks like it is active!

Stu: A Visser Cube? That's a wormhole, right? Active means it is connected to somewhere? Can I see through it?

Paul: Yes, a wormhole, built by the Machine Civilisation. If you stand directly in front of one of the facets you can see through to the other side, but looking at it from an angle all sides are pitch black. Exotic matter along the construction lines glows blue as it reacts with normal space-time.

SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?