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Halfway Station presents…

High Colonies

Scenarios for the High Colonies RPG

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High Colonies is a little-known role-playing game originally produced by Waterford Publishing in 1988. Set in 2188, the game posits a future where the Earth has been destroyed by nuclear war, and humanity clings to a precarious existence on a number of space stations scattered throughout the solar system. Player Characters are normally members of the various mercenary units used by the smaller stations to maintain order and provide defence.

I ran a *High Colonies* game for awhile in the early 1990s, which gradually mutated until it merged with my *2300 AD* campaign. I wrote these scenarios for the game, which were published in *Challenge* magazine. They also work well in *Traveller* or *2300 AD*.

So far as I know, the copyright to these articles reverted to me when *Challenge* and its publishers, GDW, ceased trading.

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Beast Man

This adventure is intended as an introduction to hand-to-hand combat in *High Colonies*. However, a little surgery on the Background and Refereeing the Scenario will make the adventure suitable for other SF RPGs. As written, the scenario assumes that the PCs are members of Van Owen's Rangers, a respected mercenary company stationed on Janissary Station in Jupiter orbit.

BACKGROUND
Even PCs need some R&R from time to time, and the group is taking a few days of well-earned leave. In the interests of maintaining security and discipline, Janissary Station has little in the way of amusement for off-duty soldiers. However, Levesque Station in Callisto orbit has recreational facilities catering to the tastes of the large number of ship crews who pass through the Jovian system, including a large red light district where many interesting and generally illegal pleasures are available - at a price. The mercenaries acting as station police turn a blind eye to what goes on in there, partly because they use the facilities themselves and partly because the money from the district (after being laundered) makes up part of their paychecks. Levesque is wary about visitors, though, and the area is isolated from the main bulk of the station.

APPROACH
The PCs are fresh off the shuttle from Janissary Station, wandering through Levesque's red light district and wondering where to spend their money. They are unarmed and wearing only light cloth fatigues.

Suddenly, a grim figure leaps out from a nearby alley, pounces on a passerby, and begins to savage that innocent with fingers and teeth.

MAP DESCRIPTION
The map details the vicinity of the attack.

Alleyway: This is where the maniac springs from, only a few metres from the PCs.

Cafe: This is a French-style pavement cafe, with a bar inside and chairs and tables outside. PCs searching for impromptu weapons may stroll across to the cafe and acquire chairs or bottles from its outdoor facilities.

TYPICAL STREET

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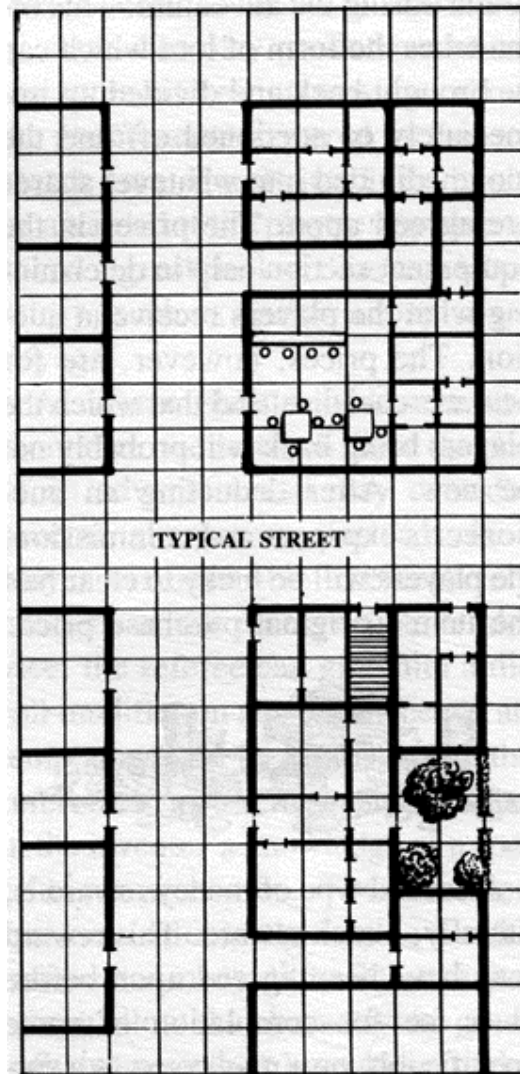
Sleazy Hotel: This is where the maniac was staying before the attack. There are balconies and fire escapes to swing from if your PCs are feeling exuberant during any fight which ensues.

Bar: Additional brawlers enter the fight from here. The bar has a bouncer (see Refereeing the Scenario).

House of Ill Repute: Here, mercenaries and ship crews can indulge themselves in tea, crumpets and polite conversation with skilled professional companions (probably biogens in a district this cheap). The house has a bouncer (see Refereeing the Scenario) and is another source of extra combatants.

Isolation Doors: Like most stations, Levesque is segmented to minimise casualties and damage if its hull is breached. The isolation doors will automatically seal off the area if a sudden pressure drop is detected on either side. They can also be triggered manually by the station's security forces in the event of a riot to limit damage and injury to the red-light district. Once they are triggered in such a case, the traditional next step is to introduce tranquiliser gas into the air supply to calm things down.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO
Most groups of PCs can be counted on to intervene, especially if the innocent victim is young, good-looking, and of the opposite gender. If not, the maniac will assault the PCs a few combat rounds after polishing off the passerby.

The maniac is a crewman from a visiting freighter who has sampled one of the district's more illegal pleasures - a drug and hypnosis combination which allows him to partake vicariously of the life and feelings of a large, ferocious animal. In effect, until the drugs wear off, he is that animal - in this case, a tiger. Afterward, he will remember the experience - a great contrast with his mundane and frustrating daily life. Normally, those indulging in this addiction are securely locked away until the drugs wear off, but this addict managed to escape when a maintenance robot attending to a faulty circuit accidentally opened the door to his room.

The maniac believes the passerby he has just savaged is a deer he has been stalking, and that the PCs are scavengers come to steal his kill.

Opposing Forces: The beast man will attack the PCs (if they don't attack first) as if he were a tiger - biting, clawing and roaring.

One unarmed maniac, however desperate, is no match against a group of PCs. But just as the PCs start to get the upper hand, a group of the maniac's fellow crewmen pass by and intervene to help him out. Adjust numbers so that each PC has a single opponent, and match the PC with the best combat skills against the maniac.

Additional brawlers can enter the scene from the bar or the house of ill repute. Also, as the situation escalates, fellow mercs may decide to join the fight on behalf of the PCs. Balance out any friendly newcomers by more ship crewmen or members of a rival mercenary company.

Enter the Authorities: Several establishments in the vicinity have bouncers. They will not voluntarily enter the fight. However, they will keep a close eye on the activity. If their buildings or customers are threatened, they will try to stop the brawl or divert it elsewhere while someone inside calls the police.

A clear victor may eventually emerge from the brawl. Otherwise, a squad of mercenary police armed with clubs and riot gear will arrive on the scene, summoned by locals to break up the fight before too much property damage occurs.

Morning After: How the PCs come out of this situation depends very much on what happens during the fight and how it breaks up. Also, the PCs' fate may be affected by

whether the PCs or authorities trace the madman's trail back to his hotel room and discover his addiction. Below are several alternative outcomes:

- The police who break up the fight can be members of a rival mercenary company, who frame the PCs for causing the riot. This will get the PCs in trouble with the local cops and their unit commander. Traditionally, they can only redeem themselves by undertaking a highly dangerous mission.

- The PCs may lose the fight. This earns them numerous cuts and bruises, plus a chewing out from their commander for damaging the unit's prestige.

- The PCs may subdue the madman during the rumble and thus save other passersby from harm. They will get a pat on the back.

If the PCs kill the madman in the process of subduing him, they may well be arrested and charged with manslaughter. After all, he had no murderous intent. They will probably be released after an investigation reveals the circumstances, but will acquire several enemies among the ship crew fraternity - the dead man's friends.

NPCS

To speed up play, assume that NPCs are all one of the generic character types from page 58 of *High Colonies*, with a score of 13 in all characteristics.

Maniac: A generic miner. The maniac will attack with bare hands and teeth, and will not seek to use weapons or armour.

Crewmen: Generic miners or pilots. These will be initially unarmed and unarmoured, but will try to grab clubs or other improvised weapons before entering the fray. If you're feeling nasty, some of them could have knives.

Fellow Mercs: Generic soldiers, also initially unarmed. These, too, will remedy that oversight before joining the fun.

Bouncers: Generic soldiers, unarmoured, armed with clubs and possibly knives.

Mercenary Police: Generic soldiers, equipped with riot helmets and shields, truncheons (treat as clubs), gas grenades and gas masks. To them, this is just an everyday brawl and doesn't justify the use of firearms.

The PCs are members of Van Owen's Rangers' Special Action Detachment, currently assigned to Janissary Station in Jupiter orbit. Their mission is to rescue engineers stranded aboard a flying laboratory before it falls out of the sky. They will no doubt expect plague, terrorists, alien monsters and other complications, but they are actually pitted against equipment failure, local weather and their own paranoia. That doesn't mean the mission is easy - or safe.

MERCENARY LIFE

The High Colonies are chronically short of trained manpower, and there is little surplus food to support soldiers who do nothing but train and maintain equipment. So clients often maximise the return on their security investment by using mercs for other jobs as well.

The smallest and least famous mercenary companies often find their members coerced into working on farms or in factories to fulfill their contracts. The largest are influential enough to spare their troops this ignominious fate. However, they are often called in during natural disasters, where their transport, skills, equipment and discipline can help to save lives and property. Combat engineers are used to construct bases and demolish hazards.

The merc companies encourage this for several reasons. First, it hones skills. Even though combat skills are rarely used on this kind of mission, other skills such as Hard Vac or Pilot are exercised, and those, too, are essential. Second, it keeps the troops occupied during long periods of garrison duty where boredom might otherwise be a major disciplinary problem. Third, it looks to the colonists hiring them as if they are doing something for the money.

MISSION

The PCs are minding their own business in off-duty hours when the intercom system blares into life, urgently summoning them to their unit commander. In the commander's office, they are informed that a refinery maintenance crew in Jupiter's atmosphere has lost control of its balloon and is drifting helplessly toward a storm. Crew members must be rescued in a matter of hours, or they will die. Because of their discipline and expertise, the Rangers have been asked to help.

The PCs' commander (Captain Markov, *High Colonies*, page 94) feels they are the best ones for the job. They need to equip themselves for a trip of several hours in Jupiter's upper atmosphere, and they will be briefed en route. Time is of the essence.

EN ROUTE BRIEFING

The PCs are issued with hard vac suits and a Waverider shuttle as they bid a hasty farewell. They are briefed during the first part of the trip.

They are to rescue a four-man maintenance and calibration crew aboard the balloon laboratory KX-181, an 85-ton laboratory supported by a 200 metre diameter hot hydrogen balloon. Such laboratories investigate Jupiter's atmosphere and weather, and they pilot new gas extraction techniques for use by industry. Normally, they are unmanned, but every so often a crew is sent to repair on-board equipment failures, recalibrate instruments and perform preventative maintenance.

An unexpected storm has wrenched the crew's shuttle from the docking port and is pushing the laboratory off-course, toward a region of great turbulence at the edge of one of Jupiter's bands. Here jetstreams blowing in opposite directions will tear the laboratory to pieces, killing all aboard.

The PCs' objective is to rendezvous with the laboratory, recover the engineering crew and as much of their equipment as possible, and escape alive.

WAVERIDER SHUTTLE

Waveriders are streamlined craft intended for atmospheric flight. They are shaped like an arrowhead bent partly in half down the long axis. Made of stainless steel, they are silvered on the lower, concave surface and blackened on the upper surface.

In game terms, they are dual-function atmospheric spacecraft as described on page 75 of *High Colonies*.

The design dates from the late 20th century, invented by a Professor Nonweiler. The unusual shape traps the shock wave of re-entry inside the ventral cavity, giving the craft its name and making it extremely manoeuvrable at all speeds from Mach 6 down to a few tens of metres per second.
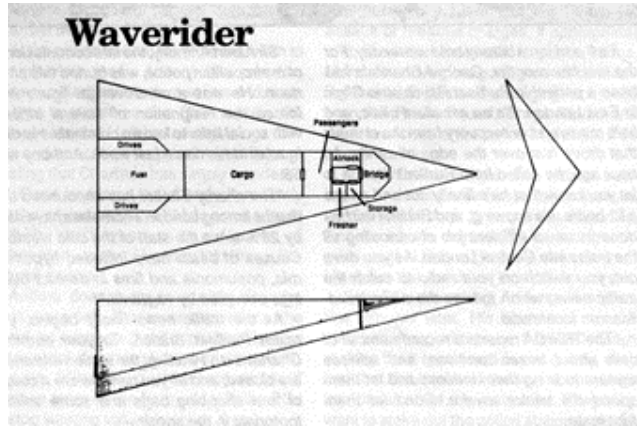
The design also has an immense landing footprint and can reach any point of a planet's surface from almost any entry point. Finally, as the ionised plasma of re-entry is contained under the craft, it can remain in radio contact with orbital stations throughout re-entry, which other designs cannot.

The ventral cavity is silvered to reflect the savage heat of re-entry, and the upper surface is blackened to radiate away what cannot be reflected. Both surfaces become very hot during atmospheric flight. Trapping the shock wave under the vehicle means that its dorsal surface has very little wind or turbulence; in fact, it is in vacuum at high speed.

When working in atmospheres with some chemical energy present (e.g., those of Earth or Jupiter) Waveriders frequently use external combustion engines. Fuel or oxidiser, as appropriate, is dumped into the ventral cavity and ignited, causing a controlled explosion which generates both lift and thrust.

Waveriders are made by the hundreds in a variety of sizes and are the most frequently encountered dual-purpose atmospheric craft. The deck plans shown are for a fairly typical small Waverider, with a crew of two and room for various combinations of small cargo and passengers up to a maximum of 20-some people. As breaks in the ventral surface are potential structural weaknesses, the cargo bay doors and airlock hatch are on the craft's back.

RENDEZVOUS

The PC with the highest Atmospheric Pilot skill will be assigned to fly the shuttle. If no PC has suitable skills, an NPC pilot with the skills shown on page 58 of *High Colonies* will be provided. To rendezvous with the flying laboratory, several successful skill rolls are needed, using Atmospheric Pilot skill.

The first roll is to fly successfully through the gap in Jupiter's radiation belts at speed. These belts have the intensity of a continuous nuclear explosion and prevent extensive colonisation of the four largest moons. Fortunately, as Jupiter's magnetic axis is offset from its axis of rotation, there is a gap which skilfull pilots can exploit to get into the atmosphere. Failure on this roll indicates that the PCs suffer mild radiation poisoning and

require medical treatment on their return. However, that might just make them seem more heroic.

The second roll is to enter Jupiter's atmosphere successfully. Failure here means the PCs lose time (an hour or so) lining up for another attempt. This has no effect on the scenario, but the PCs should be encourage to think time is running out. Catastrophic failure damages the shuttle, reducing the pilot's effective skill level by 10% for future skill rolls.

The third roll is needed to navigate to the laboratory's predicted position. Failure means the PCs get lost or have to detour to avoid the worst of the storms, and they lose an hour or two looking before they find their destination. The shuttle pilot may roll against Navigation rather than Atmospheric Pilot if he wishes.

A final skill roll is needed to rendezvous with the lab. The shuttle will be unable to dock because of damage caused when the engineers' craft was torn away. Failure on this roll means the shuttle accidentally brushes against the lab, which reduces the pilot's effective skill level by a further 10% for any future skill rolls.
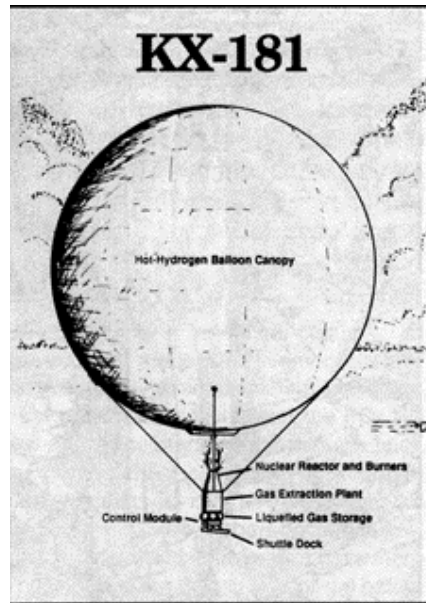
BOARDING THE LAB

Give the PCs some time to come up with a way of getting the engineers out by themselves. If they fail to come up with anything better, have an NPC (either aboard ship or in mission control) suggest that they fly directly under the airlock and send someone out into the relative calm on the Waverider's back. There, he can climb into the lab or jury-rig some way of docking.

Assuming the PCs choose that option, conduct the boarding in combat turns to heighten the tension. During each combat turn, the character flying the shuttle must succeed in an Atmospheric Pilot skill roll to hold it steady. In the unlikely event that this is too easy, reduce the pilot's effective skill level to compensate for fatigue based on the high gravity and turbulence.
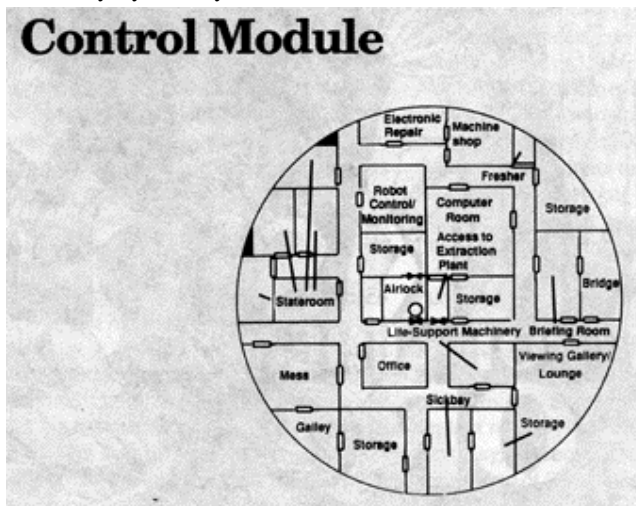
It takes a character one combat turn to get out through the airlock onto the Waverider's back. If the pilot fails the skill roll that turn, the PC on the craft's back must roll against Dexterity x 5% or Hard Vac (his choice) to stay on his feet and in control. A failure means he slips and falls and must make a further roll to regain his feet. A catastrophic failure means the character's safety line has broken, and he falls to his death. (Anyone with any Hard Vac skill at all will think of using a safety line and can be assumed to suggest it to the others.) In the best TV tradition, the referee may wish to sacrifice an NPC brought along for the purpose to illustrate the dangers to the PCs.

Assuming that the PCs stay in control, it will be obvious that they have no chance of repairing the shuttle dock enough to dock normally. The PCs must carry hard vac suits into the airlock, where the engineers can pull them inside and don them. The engineers may then be brought out through the airlock, braving the dangers of the shuttle's back, and taken aboard.

The above rolls to stay on one's feet remain in force. Each engineer takes three turns to retrieve - one to exit the lab, one to cross to the shuttle airlock, and one to enter the shuttle. If the PCs are smart, they will rig a safety line between the lab and the shuttle, and get the engineers to clip themselves to it. The safety line gives a 10% bonus to engineers' rolls to stay in control. Other bright ideas on the part of the PCs should likewise be rewarded with an increased change of success.

TAKING A DIVE

If someone falls of the back of the shuttle, there is a chance to recover him. The shuttle must immediately disengage from the lab and dive after the unfortunate, hoping to overtake him and catch him in the cargo bay as he falls. This will require a very difficult Atmospheric Pilot skill roll - reduce the pilot's effective skill to around 30% or whatever you think is reasonable - and only one attempt is allowed. Failure means the falling character smashes into the shuttle hull under 2.5 G of acceleration, or misses the hull and gets crisped in the exhaust from the external combustion engine. Either of these will ruin his whole day, but both are probably better than falling into Jupiter until his suit implodes under the pressure.

If the character is lucky enough to get caught, smashing into the cargo bay at high speed will incapacitate him. He takes no further part in the scenario due to his injuries.

If there is somebody else on the shuttle's back when this happens, he must succeed at both Dexterity and Strength rolls to hang on. The pilot may well have to choose just who he lets fall to their death.

RETURN

To return, the PCs need two successful Atmospheric Pilot rolls. As they are no longer in such a hurry, failures just mean they take longer to get back.

The PCs receive no combat pay or other financial reward, but they become heroes throughout the Jupiter system for a few weeks, and the engineers may feel indebted. Just what advantage the PCs gain from being owed favours depends on their own ingenuity.

Terrorists hold a group of colonists captive aboard a hijacked shuttle. The Rangers' Special Action Detachment is the most likely unit to be assigned this mission if it is available; otherwise, the local garrison commander will make do with whoever he has on hand.

The PCs are stationed on Janissary Station at the time, and the scenario begins as they are summoned to their commanders' officer to be briefed on the situation.

BRIEFING

The commander (probably Captain Markov, *High Colonies*, page 94) announces that an inbound personnel shuttle has been seized by a terrorist group, believed to be the Flaming Sword, a group known to be associated with the Band of Humanity (BH). The terrorists have killed the pilot by ejecting him into space without a spacesuit. The terrorists refuse to negotiate with local traffic control or police forces, and the PCs are being placed on alert to undertake a rescue mission. The PCs will take up positions in the shuttle docking bay and prepare for an assault on the shuttle to rescue the hostages, should that be needed. Maps of the shuttle and the docking bay are on hand, and a second shuttle has been set up in an identical bay for rescuers to practice on prior to the actual assault.

The unit intelligence officer, Lieutenant O'Hara, outlines what is known about the Flaming Sword terrorist group: Janissary Station was originally built as Purity Station for the Brotherhood of Purity, founding members of the Band of Humanity, in 2102. Following the Purge War, the station was handed over to the Outstation League in 2174 as part of the Band's reparations to the League. The League sold the station to a consortium of mercenary companies in 2176. (Some of its original religious statues and decorations have yet to be replaced, and are occasionally used for target practice.) The Band of Humanity still schemes to recover the station.

After the defeat of the Band of Humanity in the Purge War and the loss of their home station, disaffected elements in the Brotherhood of Purity formed the Flaming Sword, a terrorist organisation with goals of striking back at the Outstation League and its allies, and recovering Purity Station for the Brotherhood.

While the Flaming Sword's communiques continue to stress the rhetoric of its cause, the original aims have long since been lost, submerged by an addiction to violence and outrage for its own sake. This explains the group's co-operation with other terrorist organisations, even those run by its sworn enemies. The goal is now simply to terrorise, and members do not really care who or why. It is not known which members of the group are involved, but they are believed to be funded by BH operatives and normally use BH weapons.

The shuttle is carrying a number of pregnant women from the nearby High-G Station. This is an industrial colony in Jupiter orbit, which uses unusually rapid rotation to simulate gravities of 1.5 G and up. Its primary purpose is providing high-G acclimatisation for shuttle crews and other workers who need to venture into Jupiter's atmosphere. The high gravity causes complications in pregnancy and childbirth, so pregnant women are normally transferred to Janissary Station (the nearest normal-gravity station) to reduce the risk to mother and child.

When the hijack took place, the pilot dumped the shuttle's fuel reserve, committing it to dock at Janissary Station with no spare fuel to choose an alternative destination. The terrorists then killed him in a fit of rage.

O'Hara believes the terrorists will drag out the situation as long as possible to embarrass the mercenary companies and gain maximum publicity for their cause. The Rangers are

under pressure to solve this problem fast - who's going to hire them for security work if they can't handle a simple hijack on their own turf?

PLAN

The shuttle will arrive and dock in five hours. The PCs have four and a half hours before they take up positions in the shuttle dock, which they can use to equip themselves and make investigations. Fortunately, like all civilian shuttles, the inbound craft has blind spots - arcs into which neither crew nor passengers can see. These are deliberately included in the design for just such circumstances.

Unless the PCs choose to equip themselves differently, each character on the mission will be armed as follows: Heavy cloth armour, metal vest, full helmet and gas mask, auto pistol with spare magazine, machine pistol with four magazines. One or two sniper rifles will be available for those wishing to use them, as will smoke, tear gas and sonic grenades.

The PCs will be backed up by a large number of ordinary soldiers, medical personnel etc. Their mission is limited to rendering the terrorists ineffective, with minimum casualties among the passengers. Others will follow to deal with everything else.

DOCKING BAY

The map shows the shuttle in the docking bay after it lands. Its position after touchdown is roughly, but not exactly, predictable.

Shuttle in Docking Bay

Mobile Stairs: The mobile stairs are a standard internal station van modified to carry a flight of stairs which reach up to the shuttle's airlock to allow passengers and crew to disembark.

Fuel Bowser: The fuel bowser is a standard internal station van modified to carry fuel hoses and connectors. The fuel is stored elsewhere in the station and pumped into the docking bay by the refuelling machinery. The fuel bowser carries a reel of tough hose connecting it to the refuelling machinery; fuel is pumped into the bay, then down the hose to the bowser and finally into the shuttle.
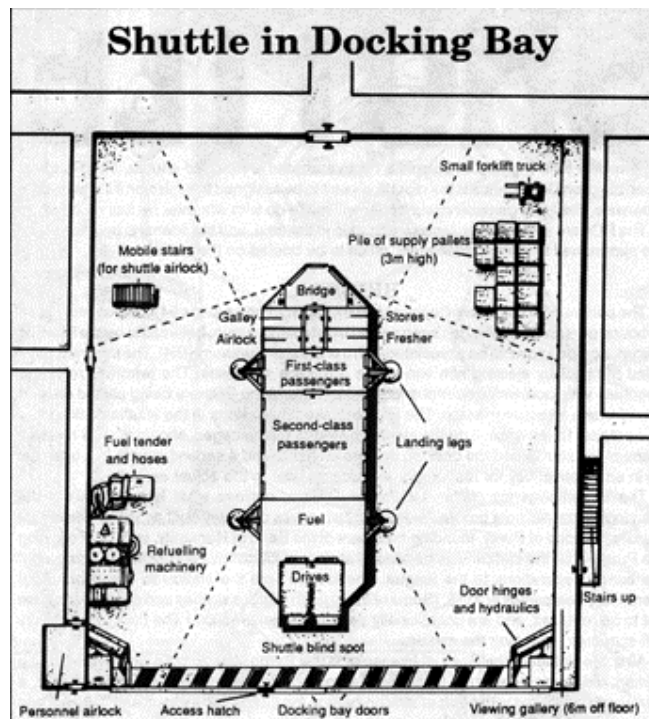
HIGH-G STATION

As High-G Station is presumably where the terrorists boarded the shuttle, the PCs may wish to find out more about it. A few minutes of searching and a successful Computer, History or Politics skill roll will reveal the following additional information:

Name: High-G Station.

Location: Jupiter GSO.

Function: Industry.

Population: 3000/2500.

League: SFL.

Government: Restricted parliamentary.

Attitude: Insular.

High-G's political parties are the local councils of the three main spacer unions. Other parties are forbidden by the constitution, and only union members can vote in elections.

It was originally intended that staff would serve only short tours of duty on High-G, but over the years, some have become permanent inhabitants.

Attempts to get further information from High-G Station will run foul of a pompous petty bureaucrat who refuses to give the PCs any help and who is greatly insulted by the suggestion that High-G's antiterrorist precautions have failed.

REFEREE'S NOTES

The leader of the terrorist group aboard the shuttle is Paula Mouton, a well-educated, middle class young woman. She was originally drawn into the Flaming Sword by her infatuation with one of its male founders, who was later killed in a counter-terrorist operation by Van Owen's Rangers Special Action Detachment. Now a hardened, bitter killer, she sees violence as the only way to get what she wants. She is charming and attractive, and infiltrates potential target areas easily. Isolated from normal praise by her covert and violent life, Mouton puts herself under great and continuous pressure to prove herself; she strives to outdo her male colleagues in ferocity, and often succeeds.

If she feels she is losing control, Mouton will escalate the situation past the point of no return and may become suicidal.

Mouton and her three followers (two male, one female) should be treated as generic soldiers from page 58 of *High Colonies*. Mouton has donned the shuttle's hard vac suit as armour; her followers are unarmoured. Each has a light pistol and two fragmentation grenades, and Mouton also has the shuttle's flare pistol. One of the terrorists is concealing his identity - as far as the other passengers know, he is one of them. Most of the hostages have been tied to their seats, but they have been told that the undercover terrorist has been left free to act as a waiter.

Clearly, the hijackers are outnumbered and outgunned - the challenge is not dealing with them, but doing so without hostages being hurt.

The 15 passengers are almost all women in the early stages of pregnancy. If their skills and characteristics become important, treat them as a mixture of generic Miners and Traders from *High Colonies* page 58. The passengers and co-pilot are not armed or armoured in any way.

NEGOTIATIONS

The PCs will not be taking part in the negotiations, but will be kept informed. Initially, the hijackers will demand the release of other terrorists held prisoner, a broadcast of a propaganda tape on all channels, a large sum of money, refuelling and a new pilot. None of these are forthcoming, and negotiations break down.

During the negotiations, the hijackers state that they have rigged an explosive charge to destroy the shuttle, and they will detonate it if they are attacked or if their demands are not met within 24 hours. (This is actually a bluff, but the PCs have no way of knowing whether there is a bomb aboard.)

After 2d6 hours, the PCs receive the order to assault the shuttle and free the hostages.

RESCUE OPTIONS

The PCs should come up with the assault plan. If they fail to do so, their commander will suggest that the PCs hide inside internal station vans which approach the shuttle under the pretence of delivering food and fuel, then begin the assault when the terrorists open the hatches to receive the food.

If the PCs are having too easy a time, the terrorists may demand that the docking bay be kept open to vacuum. As the shuttle passengers have no vacc suits, this complicates the problem enormously.

Underfloor Access: The PCsmay come up with the idea of crawling through maintenance ducts under the floor so as to emerge beneath the shuttle, where they cannot be seen by the terrorists. This requires several hours of work to cut and camouflage hatchways through the deck allowing them to emerge. The shuttle clears the deck by about five feet when grounded. Only a sadistic referee would have the shuttle land on one of the PCs' concealed hatches.

Frame Charges: The PCs may want to blow holes in the shuttle's walls or roof quickly to gain entrance to its interior. This is best done using frame charges, which cost around 1000 EC each and weigh four to five pounds. They take one combat turn to emplace and can be triggered by remote control, timers or a nearby PC. They are precisely tailored to cut a door- or window-sized hole withough causing injury or other damage. Such charges are readily available because of their usefulness in gaining access to crashed or disabled spacecraft to rescue the occupants.

Gas: The PCs may try to introduce knockout gas into the shuttle to incapacitate the passengers and hijackers. This can be done either by drilling small holes and introducing gas pipes into the passenger compartment or by tampering with the shuttle's air supply. The equipment is readily available, and holes can be drilled quietly, provided that the PCs get close enough to the shuttle. Tampering with the shuttle's air supply is best done under cover of refueling and replenishing the shuttle, but if this is attempted, one of the terrorists will come out to check on whoever is doing the replenishing. That person will need to make a successful Con-Artist roll to avoid being discovered and attacked. If the gas is introduced into the shuttle, each hijacker rolls against Initiative to see if he notices the gas in time to alert the others and take action. Mouton will seal her vacc suit; the others will open the airlock. High concentrations of gas in confined spaces could harm hostages.

Surveillance: The PCs may try to bug the shuttle with microphones, low-powered lasers bouncing off the windows, TV cameras or whatever. As long as they can get into position to place the equipment, they should succeed. They will learn that there appear to be three hijackers and one passenger (acting as a waiter) and that the copilot and the other passengers are tied to their seats. If the PCs see Mouton, they learn that she is wearing a vacc suit. One hijacker is always on the bridge, the others don't stay long in any one place.

Mobile Stairs: The PCs may approach the shuttle hiding in the mobile stairs, under the pretext of delivering food or other supplies, then charge up the stairs and burst into the shuttle when the hijackers open the airlock. The hijackers will only open the outer door of the airlock, demanding that the supplies be placed in it. They then close the outer door, open the inner one and retrieve the supplies. Smarter PCs will spot this possibility and just use the stairs to get into one of the shuttle's blind spots.

Fuel Bowser: This is a variant of the mobile stairs option. The PCs hide in the fuel bowser as it approaches the shuttle, then steal into the shuttle's blind spots under cover of refueling.

Maintenance Hatch: The PCs can easily get into the shuttle's rear blind spot by spacewalking from the docking bay's personnel airlock and entering the bay proper through the access hatch in the bay doors. This requires a portable, temporary airlock to be emplaced around the access hatch to prevent loss of pressure in the bay. The equipment is readily available and can be emplaced in minutes.

Snipers: A perennial favourite is to put snipers in the viewing gallery or behind the supply pallets to fire on the hijackers through the shuttle windows as the assault begins. These fire at half their usual skill levels because of the obstructions and the need to avoid hitting passengers.

ASSAULT

When the assault begins, the terrorists are automatically surprised on the first turn. Starting on the second turn, Mouton will turn her flare pistol on the hostages and begin shooting them indiscriminately. One other hijacker will engage the PCs with his light pistol and grenades; the third will drop her weapons and try to hide among the passengers.

The last hijacker - the "waiter" - is caught by surprise, asleep on one of the passenger seats. It will take him three turns to wake up enough to do anything.

When Mouton and the two other terrorists are dealt with, each character should roll 1d100. If the result is less than his Initiative, the character will notice that one of the seated men (the last hijacker) is not tied to his seat like the others. This terrorist will wait for the PCs to get close, then try to arm a grenade with the intent of killing as many as possible of the hostages and troops. The other passengers still think he is one of them and may try to protect him from the rescuers.

If the player characters capture any of the hijackers, they will be imprisoned. Several months later, another group of terrorists will seize more hostages. One of their demands will be the release of the first group. The details of this second rescue are left for the referee.

Soldier Ants

The PCs are part of a small unit of Van Owen's Rangers, assigned to security duty on a small station of the referee's choice in the asteroid belt. The detachment is small enough for one of the PCs to be in charge, probably no more than a couple of dozen troops.

The station head summons the PCs and informs them that a shuttle, expected in from a neighbouring colony, has failed to arrive on schedule. However, a cloud of debris with the orbital parameters expected of the shuttle is approaching at speed. He wants the PCs to locate the shuttle (or what's left of it), identify the cause for the delay and take appropriate action at their discretion. He will loan them a small shuttle for the duration of the mission; the PCs must provide other equipment themselves. This operation is within the bounds of the PCs' contract with the station head, so no additional reward will be forthcoming. However, the PC commanding the unit can twist regulations to classify this as combat duty, so that hazardous duty rates (*High Colonies*, page 94) are paid for the current month.

APPROACH

The PC with the highest Pilot skill level will be assigned as shuttle pilot (if none have the right skills, allocate the group a generic NPC pilot with the skills listed in *High Colonies*, page 58). The PCs may fly straight out to investigate the debris (the trip takes one day each way), or they may use remote sensing to scan it from the station. In either case, a successful Astronomy or Astrogation roll from any PC means he can work out roughly where the shuttle broke up from the dispersion of the fragments. A further Astronomy roll will identify which asteroid (there is only one meeting the requirements) was close enough at that time for a spacecraft to fly from it to intercept the shuttle and return on a standard fuel load - there are no known objects close enough to have accidentally destroyed the ship. If the PCs fly out to investigate the debris, or if they make a final Astronomy roll, they notice signs of battle damage on the debris.

If the PCs fail to think of these points, or fail their rolls, NPCs on the asteroid will supply them with this data the following day.

When he learns of these facts, the station head orders the PCs to investigate the asteroid in their borrowed shuttle; this trip will take two to three days each way. If they think they can deal with whoever is responsible, the PCs have authority to engage; otherwise, they should conceal their presence and report back. (If the party doesn't think it can take on the base after having scouted it, allocate more NPCs to the group on its return and have the station head send them out again.)

RETRIEVAL

The PCs will return to base using the shuttle.

MAP DESCRIPTION

The asteroid the PCs investigate is an abandoned mine, with minimal accommodations for several dozen miners. The PCs should be able to discover this much by browsing through old records (or making a History roll).

It has been taken over by a band of renegade Ram-Soldiers (*High Colonies*, page 83) who are using it as a base. They have destroyed the missing shuttle and carried off its cargo and passengers. The renegades have no passive sensors other that a telescope (used to find suitable victims for piracy), and they dare not use their shuttle's radar to scan for intruders as it would give them away. The referee should allow the PCs to approach the asteroid undetected. The map shows a small part of a large asteroid, which is rotating slowly to

simulate gravity. A Pilot roll is required to approach and dock safely. The docking bay, observatory and personnel airlock are in 0G.
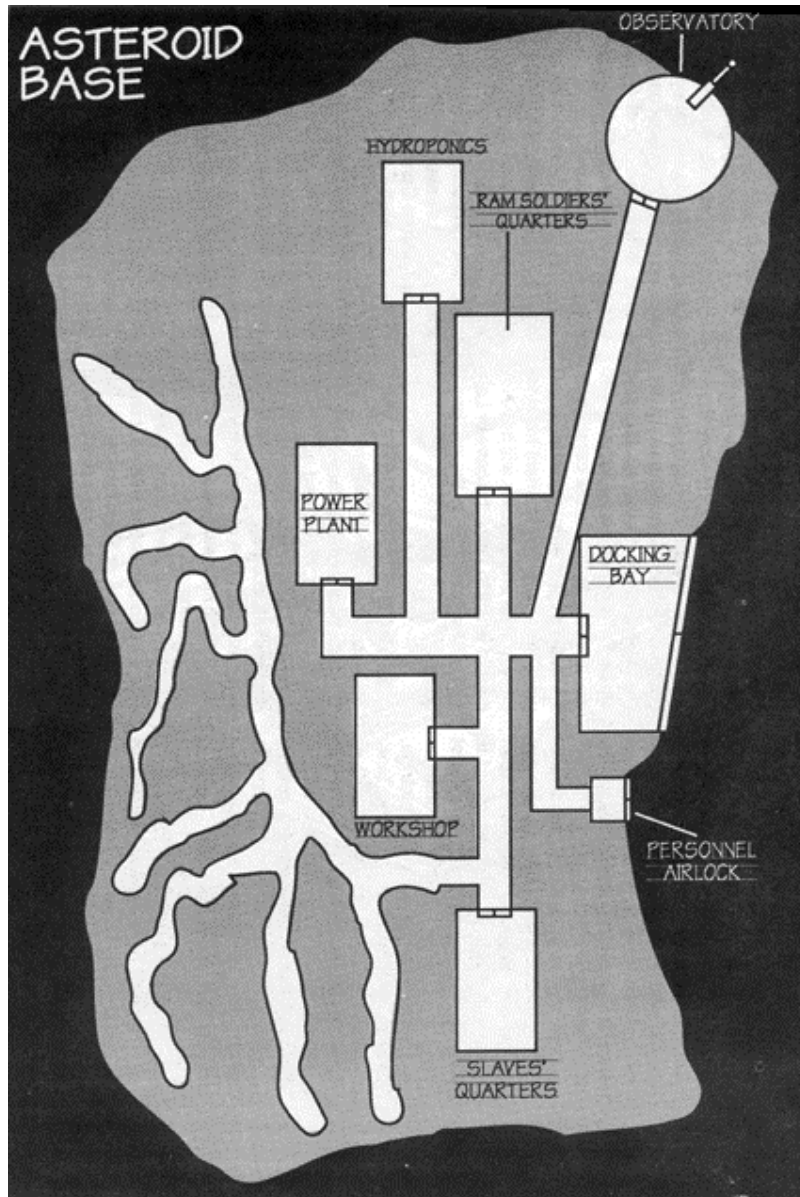
Docking Bay: This contains a small shuttle, guarded by one Ram-Soldier whose duty is to raise the alarm via communicator if intruders enter, then delay them as long as possible. The bay doors cannot be opened from the outside short of using explosives. This will depressurise the area (the airlock will close automatically to prevent loss of air elsewhere in the station), kill the guard and alert all the other Ram-Soldiers.

Observatory: The renegades' telescope is here, currently unmanned as it has broken down. Scattered about are shipping routes and schedules plundered from their earlier kills, used to find future victims. This area has the only window on the asteroid. Airtight doors automatically close to seal off this area if the window is breached. Inside are a slave technician trying to repair the telescope and a Ram-Soldier guard.

Personnel Airlock: The PCs' probable point of entry, this is guarded by one Ram-Soldier just inside the inner door, also under orders to raise the alarm and delay intruders. Initially the airlock itself is depressurised, with both doors closed. Have each character make a Stealth roll if they enter this way; success indicates that they get into the airlock and

pressurise it without alerting the guard. The guard notices the intruders at the first failed Stealth roll or when the inner door is opened.

Connecting Passage: This sloping corridor connects the 0G areas of the mine, on the asteroid's spin axis, with the inhabited areas under spin farther out. It is badly lit, cold, damp from condensation and generally spooky. The apparent gravity gradually increases to Earth normal as the PCs reach the bottom end.

Ram-Soldiers' Quarters: These are spartan and resemble nothing so much as an army barracks. Adult (i.e., ages 3-8) Ram-Soldiers equal in number to the PCs and their allies are present, and one child (under 2 years old) per four adults. The Ram-Soldiers will fight fanatically to protect their children; several older children will join the fighting.

Slaves' Quarters: These have even fewer facilities than the Ram-Soldiers' quarters and contain as many slaves as there are party members. These slaves are exhausted, chained to their beds, of little use to the PCs.

Workshop: Here are a handful of slaves, guarded by one Ram-Soldier, at work repairing and maintaining various weapons and devices.

Hydroponics: This area contains a hydroponic farm large enough to feed the base's inhabitants, being worked by a half-dozen slaves under guard by an armed Ram-Soldier.

Abandoned Mine Tunnels: These are empty. PCs who don't question slaves about the layout can get lost and be ambushed by Ram-Soldiers, who know the tunnels intimately. The PCs get lost almost at once. Thereafter, roll 1d6 every few minutes. On a 1, the PCs find their way out. If there is any reason for the inhabitants to suspect their presence, on a 5-6 the party is ambushed by an equal number of Ram-Soldiers.

Power Plant: This generates barely enough power to keep the base liveable. The plant is decrepit and worn, and requires constant attention from the two slaves present.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

Ram-Soldiers are biogens (genetic constructs), created by the Band of Humanity to fight in the Purge War many years ago, and long thought extinct. Unlike normal biogens, they are able to reproduce. But like other constructs, they have a very short lifespan - around eight years - and are totally focussed on their programmed tasks - in this case, warfare. Thus, Ram-Soldiers cannot exist in isolation. Like soldier ants, they are overspecialised warriors who must depend on others for support. This band has survived for several of their generations by piracy and slavery; all noncombat tasks are performed by slaves.

The Ram-Soldiers are expecting trouble - they're programmed to - and have alert guards posted. Ram-Soldiers should be played as ruthless and competent. Should they beat the PCs - and the PCs should always think they can - any surviving characters will be enslaved and may be rescued later by a follow-up party from Rangers' HQ.

Slaves range from rebellious to broken, but are all unarmed and want to sit out the fight. The referee can use them to balance the scenario by having them seize the chance to revenge themselves on their captors - strangling them with chains, attacking with improvised clubs from behind, etc. Any slave freed by the PCs can describe the base layout to them. Captured Ram-Soldiers will never talk (they're programmed not to).

NPCS

Ram-Soldiers: Most of these are very similar, although older ones tend to have higher skill levels. They are equipped with a wide variety of weapons and armour, either left over from the Purge War or captured since. The referee should choose whatever combinations he finds interesting, bearing in mind that the PCs will probably wind up owning most of it. Use generic Weapons Specialist statistics from *High Colonies*, page

58, for adult Ram-Soldiers, but for the older children, reduce the skill levels to those of a normal soldier to reflect their lack of experience.

Slaves: Use a mixture of generic characters from *High Colonies*, page 58, with average attributes. Very few will take an active part in the struggle, and those who do will die swiftly, so their precise statistics are not important.

ALTERNATIVES AND VARIANTS
The referee may choose to have one of the slaves be dedicated to civilising the Ram-Soldiers. He has been with the band for generations and is revered as a teacher although still a slave. This person will view the Ram-Soldiers as his children, and will try to avoid bloodshed, pointing out that the biogens have only done what they had to do to survive. If the PCs then want to work out a deal with the Ram-Soldiers, good luck to them.

Kleptomania

The PCs are part of a detachment of Van Owen's Rangers currently on Efrit Station. They may be on garrison duty there, or may be taking a few days of R&R after escorting cargo or passengers from another station. The referee may make any necessary changes to suit his PCs' situation if they are not members of the Rangers.

MISSION BRIEFING

While off-duty on Efrit Station (*High Colonies*, page 26) the PCs are approached by a wealthy trader, James Alden, who has a commission of some delicacy that he wishes them to undertake for him.

Alden explains that his wife, Claire, suffers from compulsive shoplifting. Since the penalty for petty theft on Efrit Station is the loss of a hand, this could be unfortunate. Business calls him away from the station for a few days, and during this time he would like the party to follow his wife around and cover up her shoplifting. He has found that the most effective way of doing this is by bribing the offended shopkeepers and any local police who become involved.

He will, of course, repay the PCs for any expenses incurred during the commission. In addition, he will pay each party member EC 500 - not a bad wage for a few days of idling around town.

MAP

The referee should prepare a map of a shopping mall for the scenario. It's also feasible to run the scenario without a map, by simply describing a shopping area you know well as you go along.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

Since the PCs, the merchant and his wife are all expatriates, it is natural for them to meet at some suitable cafe (alcohol is forbidden on Efrit Station, so there are no bars) or government building. Once they have been introduced, it is equally natural for the PCs - as fellow ex-pats - to offer to escort Claire during her husband's absence, thus allaying her suspicions.

Being off-duty as they are, the player characters are theoretically unarmed and clad only in light cloth fatigues. However, heavy cloth or leather can be worn without attracting attention, and knives or light pistols can be easily concealed. Clubs and other improvised melee weapons abound in the mall - butcher's cleavers, for instance.

Alden will be absent for four days. During his absence, Claire will go shopping daily for several hours, buying fresh fruit and vegetables, imported delicacies, souvenirs and so on. Two or three times each day, she will attempt to steal something. Claire is not good at petty theft, and her attempts will invariably be noticed. Usually, Alden's plan of bribery will work, although the first few encounters should be rolepayed in detail - enjoy yourself insulting the PCs and haggling for the cash. Each bribe will be 1d6 x EC 50; modify the die roll by -1 if the PCs make a successful roll against an appropriate skill such as Con-Artist and -2 for a special success. If the police become involved, there are at least two of them, and each must be bribed.

Each day, the referee should implement one of the following special encounters during a shopping expedition.

Honourable Merchant: The PCs discover a shopkeeper who cannot be bribed to remain quiet, but insists on calling in the authorities. The merchant (a generic trader) is ignorant

of off-station customs, so if the PCs come up with a good excuse and a successful Con-Artist roll, he can be mollified; otherwise, nothing short of a knife in the ribs will shut him up. If he does turn Claire in, the PCs will be arrested as accomplices and sentenced to the same fate. A quick jailbreak is in order at this point, before all concerned lose a hand. Murdering a merchant for reporting a theft is, of course, a serious offence - a full-scale investigation will be launched immediately, and the PCs can expect swift and harsh justice if they are caught.

Mistaken Identity: Local police have heard rumours that Claire will be kidnapped and/or murdered by persons unknown, and officers are discreetly following her. Knowing that the PCs are off-station mercenaries, they have decided that the PCs are the ones who will conduct the attack, and the police will try to arrest them. The PCs must talk their way out, as assaulting the law enforcers is a one-way ticket to 20 years on a penal station. If the party selects the latter option, the police are generic soldiers from page 58 *of High Colonies*, equipped with metal vests over light cloth, acrylic helmets, short range communicators and assault rifles.

Terrorists: Local fanatics have decided to slaughter Claire and any other foreigners they can find in the mall that day, to draw attention to their cause and embarrass the local government. The PCs must subdue these ruffians with minimal loss of innocent life and property. The terrorists are generic soldiers, in light cloth and armed with a variety of pistols and melee weapons. The station's security forces have been bribed by the terrorists and are conspicuous by their absence. Dealing with their attackers could be worth a month's hazardous duty pay and a commendation for the PCs.

Kidnappers: Unscrupulous rivals of Alden attempt to kidnap Claire, in the mistaken belief that this will distract him during the current negotiations. Four thugs are involved, armed with gas grenades, knives and flechette pistols; they also have gas masks and heavy cloth armour. Should the kidnappers succeed, the Rangers will order the PCs to track them down and rescue Claire to restore the honour of the regiment.

NPCS
James Alden: The merchant is a generic trader from page 58 of *High Colonies*. He married Claire for the extra capital and influence she provided him, and he cares for her only as a symbol of his status and wealth.

Claire Alden: The merchant's wife is a bored and lonely woman who resents her husband's frequent absences and has taken to petty theft to attract his attention. She may attempt to begin an affair with a suitably handsome and dashing PC. Treat her as a generic trader from page 58 of *High Colonies*. Her family is well-off, with a moderate amount of influence in the Outstation League.

ALTERNATIVES AND VARIANTS
For a really confused and complex combat, implement all four suggested encounters in quick succession in the above order, starting one while the PCs are still dealing with another.

Fast Combat Rules: The combat system for *High Colonies* is relatively complex, and it may be worth simplifying if you want to speed up the fights and get on with the role-playing. To do this, ignore hit location rolls and deduct damage straight from total IPs. Use the minimum values for armour rather than rolling armour dice. If characters are wearing different types of armour on different hit locations, assume all hits strike the chest, which is the most likely target zone. Armoured characters often have enough layered armour that the average dice rolls are below the total minimums, so this will not distort matters too much.