

CHAPTER 8: STARSHIPS

The First Mate of the Steppenwolf noticed a new contact on the sensors. Looking more closely, he realized there were multiple bogies on an intercept course. "We've got company," he told the Captain sitting beside him in the cramped bridge. "Pirates!" the Captain growled under his breath. He ordered the First Mate to take evasive action. The Steppenwolf lurched to one side as its thrusters burned at full capacity. The contacts drew closer until their reddish hulls could be seen from the bridge window. A yellow ribbon of light surged across the ship's bow. "They're firing!" the First Mate said. The Captain opened a channel on the communicator: "Mayday, mayday!" he said. "We're under attack!" The intercom overhead rattled with static unsympathetically. There was no one out there except the pirates and the vacuum of space.

In the eyes of many, the purpose of the Imperium is to maintain the steady flow of commerce between star systems. Both sides of this equation require ships: the armada of freighters hauling tons of goods, and the fleets of naval warships tasked to protect them. Perhaps just as numerous are those who prey on this commerce: the pirate clans and the freelancing freebooters. Whatever the case, the space between the stars of the Imperium is full of vessels plying the trade routes between planets.

SPACE TRAVEL

Although characters could spend their entire careers on a single planet, the Imperium has hundreds of worlds to explore. But traveling between star systems, or even between planets within a single system, requires a starship and that can present a challenge of its own.



Travel Options

Without a ship of their own, characters will need other ways to get from one planet to another. Several methods exist, including buying passage, working for passage, and stowing away.

Buying Passage: The most common way of travel is by purchasing a ticket on one of the

many shuttles and cruise ships that jump between star systems (and planets within a system). The frequency of these flights will vary depending on destination, but flights on main worlds along trade routes will usually leave at least once a day (or several times a day for interplanetary trips). However, for worlds and systems off the beaten path, flights will be more seldom: perhaps once a week or less.

Ticket prices average around 10 Cr per AU within a system and 100 Cr per light year between systems. If characters choose to travel in style, luxurious accommodations will cost 25-50% more per ticket. Steerage and other less desirable accommodations will cost 25-50% less.

Working for Passage: Although much less common, this form of travel involves working on the ship in lieu of paying for a ticket. Of course, the character must find a ship that's going where he wants to go and that's willing to hire him for that period of time. The character will, at the very least, need skills that the ship's crew would need as well.

Stowing Away: This is the most risky way to travel, and it's nearly impossible for a group of more than two or three characters. The character basically finds a way to get on board a ship and then must hide or pose as a paying passenger for the duration of the trip. If discovered, stowaways are treated differently depending on the situation: the crew may simply turn the character(s) over to the authorities at the next stop. However, for rougher crews, they may strand the stowaways somewhere inconvenient or, in rare cases, flush them out an airlock.

A Ship of Your Own

For various reasons, characters may decide to get a ship of their own. Before embarking on the



exciting new life of ship ownership, they must figure out how to pay for it.

Buying New: With enough money, characters can buy a brand new starship right off the lot. In most cases, however, characters will need to take out a bank loan and pay it off for many years to come. Fortunately, the Imperium government subsidizes starship loans to help encourage trade. This means that characters can usually get a loan for a mere 3% interest rate over 30 years. For a 20 MCr ship, this translates into a monthly payment of 106,000 Cr per month (50,000 Cr for interest and 56,000 Cr for the principal). Of course, the more money the characters put down at the time of purchase, the less the monthly payment (namely, the principal) will be.

Obviously, over a 100 grand a month is a lot of money and characters may find it difficult to keep up with their payments. If, for some reason, characters don't make their monthly payments for three months or more in a row, the bank will attempt to repossess the ship. They usually hire a third party (so called "repo men") to do the dirty work.

Buying Used: Buying a previously owned ship is often the most financially viable option for characters who don't have a lot of cash. Used ships will cost around 50% of the new price. Due to wear and tear, however, a used ship will may have one or more components that need to be fixed, thus driving up the total cost of the purchase. For every week after buying the ship, there's a 10% chance that a random component will break down and need to be repaired. If that happens, roll on the table below to see what repairs need to be made.

Leasing: Ships can be leased per day for 0.0001 times the cost of the ship, plus a refundable deposit equaling 10-20% of the ship's cost. For example, a 20 MCr starship would cost 2000 Cr per day to rent, plus a deposit of 2-4 MCr (that's returned when the ship is returned). However, characters are also liable for any damages that might occur to the ship during the lease period.

Corporate-Owned: If characters work for a company with its own ship (such as a delivery

service), they can use that. Of course, since they are working for a company, characters will be restricted to planets related to company business. Also, if characters get fired, they will obviously lose the right to use the ship at all.

Steal It: The tried and true method for pirates and other criminals is to simply steal the ship. Depending on how characters do this, they will likely run into trouble with the law. If characters want to use starports or land anywhere that law enforcement is present, they will at the very least need forged documents to show their ownership. Of course, the original owner of the ship may come looking for it as well, which could lead to additional troubles.

Getting Around

Characters can travel through space using one or more of the following ways:

Thrusters: A ship's thrusters facilitate regular maneuvering at velocities far below the speed of light, but still fast by planetary standards (Mach 1 or more). Although the other two types of movement are optional, thrusters are required for all starships. Without them, a ship has no way to move from one point to another.

STL Drive: For interplanetary travel (around a star system), a Slower Than Light (STL) drive is usually required. Although called slower than light, a STL drive actually propels a ship at speeds just under the speed of light. Otherwise, using only thrusters, trips between planets would take a very long time. While thrusters have speeds of over Mach 1, a STL drive can achieve velocities of one or more AUs (Astronomical Units, or 150 million kilometers) per hour.

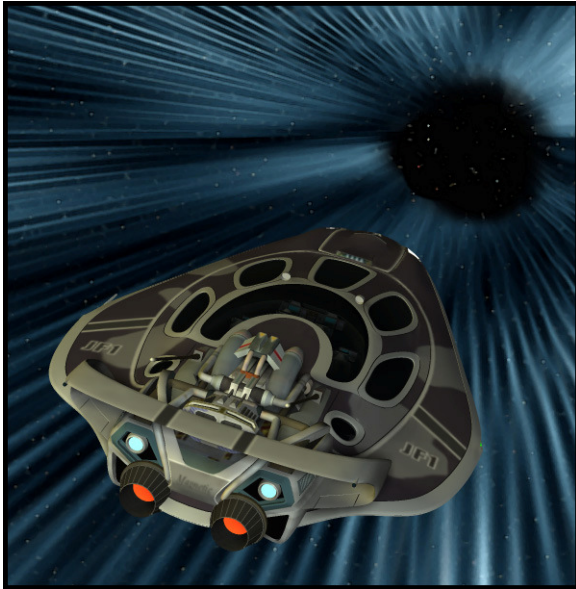
FTL Drive: Unlike STL drives, a Faster Than Light (FTL) drive propels a ship much faster than the speed of light. It does this by shifting the ship outside of regular space into so-called hyperspace (see below). Each FTL drive has a max speed measured in light years per 24-hour day (ly/day).

Each FTL includes a built-in STL drive, thus allowing for interplanetary travel within a star system. For that reason, each FTL will also have a STL speed displayed.



Jump Space

To travel at FTL (which is against the laws of physics), a ship must leave normal space (or N-space) and enter what's commonly called hyperspace or jumpspace (J-space). While in J-space, a ship is entirely cut off from everything else. The crew cannot communicate outside the ship and no one from the outside can communicate with them.



Once a jump is engaged, the jump drive itself has done its job and shuts down. In other words, whatever happens to the drive (malfunction, sabotage, etc.) is irrelevant once the jump occurs. If the drive is damaged while the ship is en route, it will have no effect on the ship's speed (which is set at the beginning of the jump).

Jump Requirements

To make a FTL jump, the ship must be a minimum distance from massive objects like planets, moons, or stars. Otherwise, the gravity well of that object will interfere with the ship's jump trajectory.

To find the minimum jump distance (in kilometers), multiply the object's diameter by 10. For example, if a planet's diameter is 5,000 km, the ship would need to be 50,000 km away before it could safely engage its FTL drive.

Once the craft is at a safe distance, the navigator must calculate the proper route to the intended destination. This calculation takes 15 minutes minus 1 minute per rank of Starship Navigation skill. For example, if the character had a rank of 6 in Starship Navigation, the time to complete the jump calculation would be 9 minutes. Note, however, the calculation will always take a minimum of 1 minute to complete.

Once the ship is at a safe distance and the calculation has been made, the character must make a Starship Navigation skill roll. If the roll is successful, the ship is able to make the jump without complications. However, if the character fails to make the roll, a misjump has occurred.

Misjumps

If the character fails his starship navigation roll, the ship goes into hyperspace and ends up somewhere unintended. When a misjump happens, roll 1d6 or 1d8 (for maps with hexes or squares respectively) to see which direction the ship travels. Then roll 1d6 for the number of days the ship remains in J-space (triple if a critical failure). The ship will travel at its maximum speed for that period of time. Note, however, the amount of fuel used in the jump will equal whatever it would have been originally. In other words, if the ship had used 50 tons of fuel originally, it would still use that much no matter how far the misjump takes the ship.

Interplanetary Travel

Travel using a Slower Than Light (STL) drive is far less complicated than FTL jumps, since the ship remains in normal space. Also, unlike FTL jumps, the ship only needs to be outside a planet's atmosphere before the STL drive can be engaged. Nevertheless, a character must still make a Starship Navigation skill roll due to the long distances traveled. If the roll fails, there is not a misjump, but the trip will take twice as long due to the poorly navigated route. If the roll results in a critical failure, the trip will take five times as long.

While at STL speeds, the ship can still communicate normally since it remains in N-space. However, if anything happens to the STL drive



while being used, the ship's speed will likely suffer.

SHIP CONSTRUCTION

This section will describe the process of designing starships. Each ship will have one or more of the following:

Hull: This is the starting point for each ship. It determines how many slots the starship can have, along with other values like radar signature.

Power Plant: This component determines the maximum number of energy points (EPs) that can power the ship's components.

Thrusters: This component is used to propel the ship at normal speeds (see FTL and STL Drives below).

FTL Drive: This is the Faster Than Light drive that allows the ship to travel between star systems. Not all ships will have a FTL drive.

STL Drive: This type of drive (Slower Than Light) allows ships to travel close to the speed of light. It's used for traveling between planets within a star system. Note, all FTL have an STL capability.

Fuel Tanks: FTL and STL drives require hydrogen fuel to operate. This is stored in one or more fuel tanks.

Computer: This is the ship's CPU. It is required for certain components, including the FTL/STL drives.

Software: These are programs that can be run on the ship's computer.

Weapons: These are either fixed (fire in one direction only) or turrets (can fire in any direction).

Missiles: These weapons come in two types: radar guided or infrared (IR).

Shields: These are defensive components that can absorb damage during combat.

Armor: Like shields, armor absorbs damage inflicted by enemies.

Radar: This is used to detect other ships and guide missiles. It uses two modes: active and passive.

Counter Measures: These are used to foil enemy missiles.

Stealth: This is used to reduce the radar effectiveness of other ships.

Communications: This is used to communicate with other ships, stations, and planets.

Other components are also available, including fuel scoops, cargo holds, and hangar bays (among others).

Hulls

Like the chassis of the robot chapter, a starship's hull serves as the foundation for all the components that will be added to the ship. By selecting a hull, you determine how many slots the ship will have (and their sizes), which in turn determines how many components the ship can equip.

Size

Unlike with creatures or robots, the starship designer has a greater selection to choose from: each regular size (i.e.: tiny, very small, small, etc.) is divided by up to four different hull tonnages. For example, the Small group has four different hulls: 1000, 2500, 5000, and 7500 tons. Each hull has its own stats, but all four are considered "Small."

Hit Points

Since starships don't have experience levels, they don't get hit dice. Instead, each hull tonnage gets a set number of hit points.

Slots

Slots are treated the same as they were in the robots chapter except that one additional size (Very Large) has been included.