

blue planet

Original Creation

Jeffrey Barber

Writing and Development

Jeffrey Barber
Greg Benage

Writing

Allan Grohe
John Snead
Jason Werner

Additional Development

Mike Bellman
Charles Cowan
Catten Ely
James Givens
John Harper
John Hay
James Heivilin
Charles Lewis
Harold Martin

Cover Illustration

Brian Schomburg

Cover Coloring

Ben Prenevost

Interior Artwork

Adam Black
Paul Daly
Nik Fiorini
Chris Keefe
Yeng Khang
Scott Schomburg

Graphic Design

Brian Schomburg

Content Editing

Jeffrey Barber
Greg Benage

Copy Editing

Greg Benage
Catten Ely

Layout

Greg Benage

Publisher

Christian T. Petersen

Printing

Bang Printing

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A debt of gratitude is owed the countless playtesters who helped us breathe life into Blue Planet and refine the new rules for v2. Your paper lives and mind's eye adventures have helped to create this new world, and now we hope they will inspire others to follow you into the frontier...

In Tribute

As the first edition of Blue Planet went to press in June of 1997, the world mourned the death of Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau. In his passing, the Earth's oceans lost one of their greatest champions and humanity lost one of its most noble men. Please honor his memory by honoring the oceans.



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2021 W. County Rd. C

Roseville, MN 55113

651.639.1905

www.rpg.net/ffg

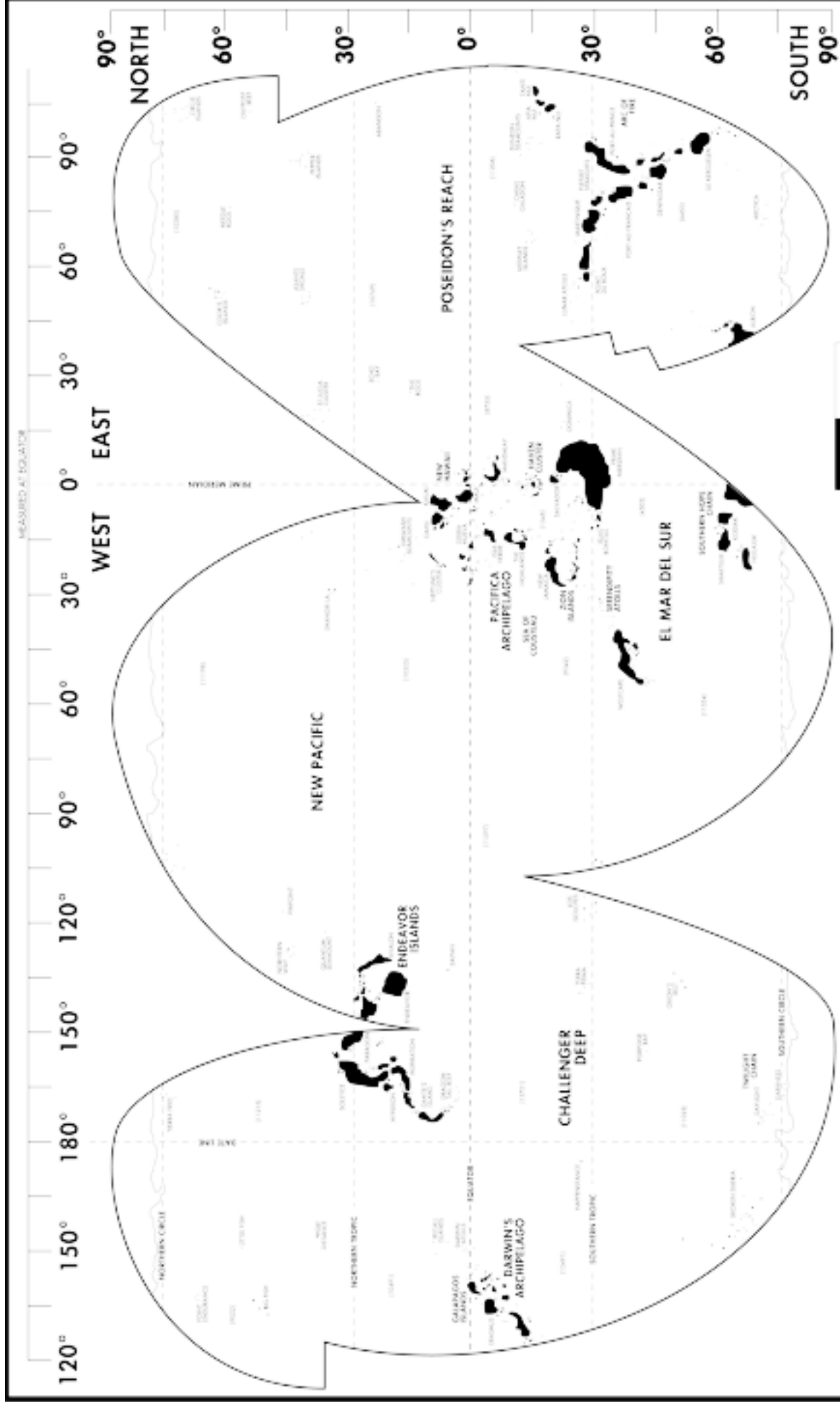
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5000
KILOMETERS
(DEPTH IN METERS)

LAMBDA SERPENTIS II

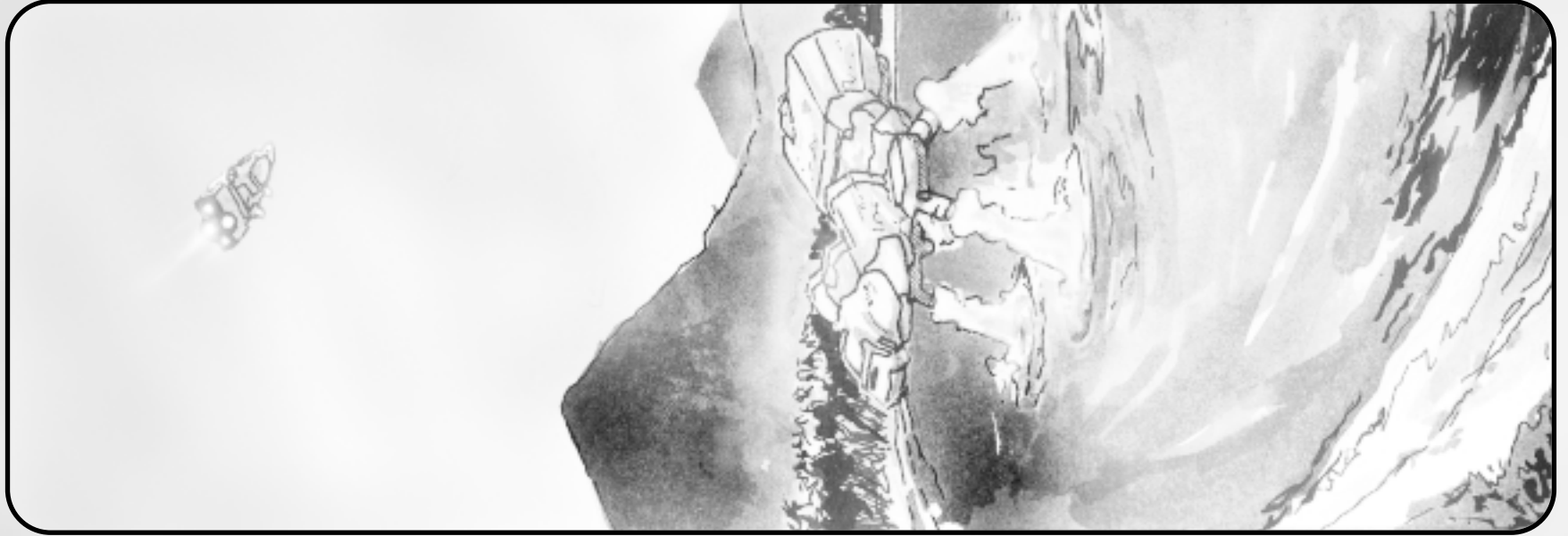
POSEIDON

2199AD

WELCOME TO BLUE PLANET

CHAPTER

01



2199 AD

The year is 2199 and life on Earth is a hopeless struggle with economic chaos and social decay. Incorporated city-states dominate the political landscape and natural resources are virtually exhausted. Civilization has barely survived a 75-year dark age known simply as the Blight. For more than three decades, an engineered virus ravaged the world's agricultural crops while social panic reigned and billions died of starvation. Once-great cities lie in ruin and anarchistic, famine-ravaged Free Zones have claimed whole regions of the globe.

The resulting chaos has only recently been stabilized, due primarily to the heroic efforts of the Global Ecology Organization (GEO). This organization was created by the United Nations in reaction to the Blight and is all that still remains of most of Earth's original world governments. Conceived of desperation and the threat of human extinction, the GEO was viewed as a powerful and benign champion, the protector of human rights and ecological integrity. During the darkest days of the Blight, the GEO was humanity's last hope for salvation.

Forty years after the Blight was finally eradicated, the memory of the GEO's heroism and its champion's mantle are beginning to fade. Many believe this world government is a powerful and dangerous relic, one that has outlived its usefulness and now threatens the ideals of liberty and justice on which it was founded. The United Nations has been reinstated and has emerged as a new challenge to the GEO's political authority throughout Earth and the Colonies. The GEO has become an unpleasant reminder of a horrific past, as humanity's attention turns to a new world and a new future.

In 2078, long before the outbreak of the Blight, astronomers discovered an anomalous body beyond the orbit of Pluto. During the following years, a series of probes revealed the anomaly to be a rift in space, an example of the hypothetical, astronomical construct known as a wormhole. Further exploration eventually demonstrated that this phenomenon was, in fact, a traversable passage to another region of space. Humanity looked to the stars with collective awe when it was discovered that an Earth-like planet waited beyond the wormhole: a planet covered by blue oceans and teeming with life; a pristine world, unexplored and unravaged; a waterworld that would become known as Poseidon.

As part of a long-term plan to ease the heavy burden on the Earth's vanishing resources, the UN member nations began an intensive colony effort, seeding Poseidon with genetically altered human colonists. The Athena Project did much to aid the Earth's failing economies and social morale. Unfortunately, the Blight struck soon after the colony ships were launched but before the planned resupply ships could be built. Desperate for resources to fight the Blight, the UN was forced to abandon the project and the colonists. This was the first in a long series

of harsh decisions the UN would be forced to make in the years that followed.

THE LESEAR EFFECT

It was the third day of the fourth week after the orbiter's splashdown, and Neilson and the crew had finally checked and re-checked the incoming data long enough to pronounce the atmosphere and water safe for the dive team. I was out of my environmental shell and already pulling off my thermalsuit when McLaren came in from sonar to tell us we could all go for a swim. He glared at me; I smiled at him and headed for the topside hatch. The airlock had only cycled half open when I climbed out on deck and into the alien sunlight and air of Poseidon. I could hear Neilson over the intercom, yelling at me to come back and put on a bio-monitor. I turned around, gave the intercom camera my sweetest "screw you" smile (you've probably seen the clip), and jumped over the side.

It's that first moment I'll never forget. I'm no poet, but by God, I'll tell you, sliding into that water felt like coming home. No lie. It was as real as I'm sitting here talking to you. A kind of dreamy, half *deja-vu*. It lasted for maybe five minutes, maybe more, while that crystal blue water worked its way into every pore. I just hung there about two meters under, grinning like an idiot (you've probably seen that clip, too). Strangest thing I've ever felt.

The bioengineers tell me it was some kind of hormone induced euphoria. All the modies get it on their first dive, apparently. But I don't buy that crap. It was more than that. It was the Planet. No, I'm not crazy. It was the Planet. It reached out and took hold of me and held on—as if I'd been gone a long time and had just come back home.

Anyway, I was the first and am proud of it. And now you know why they call that "hormone induced euphoria" the Lesear Effect.

Nathaniel Lesear, *Argos 12* crew member
— from *Tidal Forces*, interviews by Ashri Khenera

In spite of the failure of the resupply effort and the lack of contact with Earth, the colonists on Poseidon survived. As their technology wore out and failed, they learned to rely on pioneer ingenuity and their genetically engineered bodies. Spreading across the planet's surface in small villages and family groups, the colonists adopted a life much like the ancient Polynesians, settling the planet's countless island archipelagos.

One of the many discoveries made by the colonists was that they were not the only sentient lifeforms on Poseidon. Frustratingly alien in their actions and motivation, these aborigines became a source of fear and mystery for the colonists. Encounters often ended in bloodshed, and superstition grew as evidence of strange empathic abilities was discovered. The true origin and motivations of these beings lies in the ancient history of the planet and is a mystery as dark as the planet's deepest waters.

As the GEO slowly salvaged the future of the human race, it looked again to the stars. In 2164, a small science vessel was built and sent through the wormhole in hopes of initiating a second colonial effort. No one had anticipated the survival of the original colonists, and those on Earth were stunned to discover the colony had not only survived, but had grown from the 5,000 original colonists to over 40,000 souls.

The recontact mission met with mixed reactions from the original settlers—many were excited and relieved, others were bitter and retreated into uninhabited regions; the majority were calmly indifferent. Poseidon had become their world, and they had become its natives. Contact was welcome but essentially unimportant. They had made their peace with the planet and had no intention of giving up the lives they had built.

Traffic between Earth and Poseidon was minimal at first and consisted mainly of scientific missions and Incorporate research and development teams. At first they had little impact on the natives or the planet, but as Poseidon began to give up its secrets, that quickly changed. The nature of the wormhole and its connection to Poseidon became a source of endless debate. The intelligence of the aborigines became a compelling mystery, as all efforts at contact or capture ultimately failed. The planet's biological diversity and ecological intricacy defied understanding, and the commonality of DNA remained inexplicable. And, in the planet's exposed crust, Incorporate geologists found a substance that would eventually motivate a colonial frenzy that not only threatened to change the colonists' new way of life, but threatened to plunge humanity into a war of survival with an ancient alien legacy.

Xenosilicates, commonly called Longevity Ore or Long John, were first discovered during an Incorporate mineral survey. Though initially a closely guarded secret, word soon leaked about the fantastic potential of the substance. These minerals could be processed to yield biochemical tools of such awesome power that nothing in the realm of genetics remained beyond the control of gene engineers. Humanity had discovered the key to immortality!

On Earth, a world still foul with the smell of the dead, the human race exploded into a colonial gold rush the likes of which history has never known. Almost overnight, company towns began springing up across the waterworld as the Incorporate states imported research scientists and deep-ocean miners by the thousands. Human desperation sent millions rushing to Poseidon to stake their claims and to feed a market driven by humanity's primal fear of death.

In 2199, Poseidon is a planet of company boomtowns and corporate mining facilities, native settlements and orbiting factories. Life is hard, fast, and amphibious. Frontier law prevails as GEO Marshals try to protect native rights and enforce Incorporate regulations. The aborigines remain a mystery, yet are blamed for increasingly frequent acts of sabotage and carnage. Squadrons of fighter subs guard sea-floor installations, and corporate takeovers often involve marine assault teams. The natives have grown to hate the Incorporate and fear for their new world as environmental extremists incite ecological warfare in defense of the planet. New colonists continue to flood in, hoping for a better life, as ruthless opportunists scavenge what they can. And, lost in the background, scientists preach caution, claiming there is something wrong, something strange going on below the water's surface.

BLUE PLANET V2

Welcome to **Blue Planet v2**, the second edition of the critically acclaimed science fiction roleplaying game. This edition is published in two volumes and includes nearly all the material from the first edition of **Blue Planet** and its first supplement, *Archipelago*. **Blue Planet v2** also offers a completely redesigned game system, as well as characters, places, technology, and background information never before published.

This volume is the **Blue Planet v2** *Player's Guide*. It includes all the rules players need to create and equip their characters, resolve tasks, and roleplay combats and other action sequences. The *Player's Guide* also provides enough background detail to introduce players to this incredibly rich setting, including a comprehensive timeline and historical summary of the **Blue Planet** universe. The *Moderator's Guide* is packed cover-to-cover with additional details, backgrounds, and secrets of the

people, places, and alien lifeforms characters will encounter in the course of their adventures on Poseidon.

WHAT IS BLUE PLANET?

Blue Planet is a science fiction roleplaying game. The setting allows players to participate in an epic human struggle to colonize an alien planet, a waterworld known as Poseidon. Unlike novels and movies, roleplaying games are interactive. Players will not just read about or watch the adventures of someone else's characters. They will create their own characters and have the chance to guide them through exciting adventures set on this challenging and mysterious frontier.

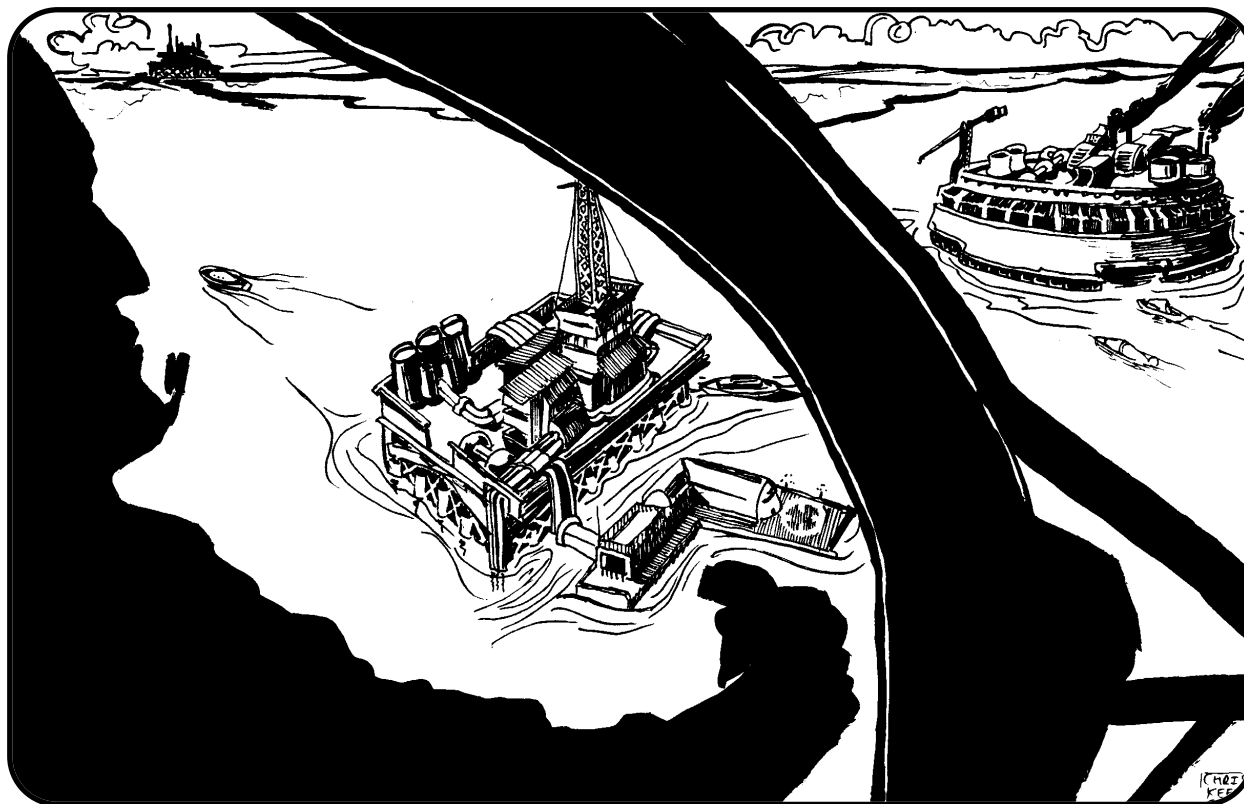
For those players new to the hobby, an introduction to roleplaying is in order. In a roleplaying game, most of the players will create and control unique personas, called player characters. Each player will design his character from the ground up, detailing his physical and mental characteristics, personality, background, and professional aptitudes. Once the characters have been created, the players will verbally act out their characters' adventures, in a way similar to actors in a movie or play.

In **Blue Planet**, the characters players can create and roleplay are limited only by their imaginations. GEO Marshals, heavily modified lawmen, are charged with keeping the peace on an often-violent frontier world. Native insurgents, the aquaformed descendants of the original human colonists on Poseidon, battle insur-

mountable odds to defend their homes and way of life from the encroachment of the newcomers. Incorporate operatives, highly trained and equipped with cutting-edge technology, wage a secret war against both the colonial government and each other. Cold-blooded gangsters in the service of shadowy crime syndicates run guns, drugs, and other contraband for a profit. Professional soldiers—from GEO Peacekeepers to hard-edged mercenaries—earn their livings on the frontlines of the colonial war that is spreading across the waterworld. Deep-ocean miners and prospectors navigate the abyss in search of Long John, the priceless ore that has unlocked the power of human DNA. Frontiersmen and explorers venture into Poseidon's wilderness and confront its savage ecology head-on. And ordinary colonists—pioneers, bush pilots, free traders, and many others—brave alien lifeforms, brutal cyclonic storms, and frontier lawlessness to build a civilization under a new sun.

THE GAME MODERATOR

In **Blue Planet**, one person will serve as the game moderator. The game moderator's job combines elements of both writer and director in a film production, as well as some of the duties associated with a referee in sports competitions. The game moderator will have a guiding hand in creating adventures for the player characters, and in creating and acting out the roles of the non-player characters. The non-player characters populate the imaginary world surrounding the player characters and usually play some part in their continuing adventures.



The game moderator will also be the final judge of what the characters can and can't do within the scope of the game mechanics or rules. Does the Marshal spot the smuggler lurking in the shadows of the waterfront warehouse? Can the hacker defeat the network's security routines and crack the system? Does the three-round burst the Peacekeeper fires from his assault rifle hit the terrorist, and if so, does he live or die?

THE SYNERGY GAME SYSTEM

The rules system used in **Blue Planet** is called the SYNERGY Game System. Synergy is fast and easy to learn while still being robust and fun to play. The Synergy rules are described in detail in Chapters 2–4. This section is simply intended to familiarize players and game moderators with Synergy's basic rules.

THE DICE

Any time a character tries to do something that has an uncertain outcome, dice are rolled to determine the character's success or failure. Synergy uses 10-sided dice (abbreviated D10) for all rolls made in the game. The numbers on a D10 range between 0 and 9. A result of 0 is read as 10, so the dice produce a range of numbers between 1 and 10. Ten-sided dice can be purchased at any hobby games store.

DICE POOLS

When a character tries to perform some task in the game, the player will roll a number of D10s to check for success or failure. The number of dice the player rolls for a task is the dice pool. In general, the greater the character's aptitude for a task, the larger the dice pool will be. Aptitudes represent the character's natural talent and proficiency in fairly broad fields, like Firearms, Tech, and Communication (see page 37). In Synergy, dice pools range between one and three dice.

TARGET NUMBERS

Any task a character tries to perform has a target number. The target number for a task will usually be based on two characteristics. Skills—like Handguns, Computers, and Persuasion—are rated between 1 and 10 and represent a character's relevant training and experience (see page 38). Attributes—like Dexterity, Intellect, and Presence—measure the character's basic mental and physical traits. The human norm for all attributes is zero, so above-average attributes are indicated by a positive number, and below-average attributes by a negative number (see page 28). The relevant attribute is added to the character's skill and so either increases or decreases the target number.

TASK ROLLS

To attempt a task, the player rolls a number of dice determined by the character's aptitude and takes the lowest result. If this result is equal to or

lower than the target number, the character succeeds. If the result is higher than the target number, the character fails. The difference between the number rolled and the target number represents the character's degree of success or failure, called the action value.

That's it! That's the basic system Synergy uses to resolve any task in the game, whether a character is trying to jump across a chasm, shoot a gun, or out-swim a dolphin. Chapters 2–4 offer more detailed rules that will help players create characters, resolve tasks, and adjudicate combat.

MAKING THE GAME YOUR OWN

Just about every roleplaying game published these days includes a disclaimer, one to the effect that "any rule can be broken," and that in fact the game rules should be viewed as "guidelines and not rules." Many veteran gamers have come to view such a disclaimer as a simple matter of tradition, and one that is neither useful nor necessary.

The fact is, though, this disclaimer is at the heart of what makes roleplaying games unique. Unlike most video games, board games, or card games, there are no winners or losers in a roleplaying game. The only rewards to be had from playing are the stories the players take home with them, the experiences they share with their friends, and the chance to explore a new world built of their own imaginations. The only point is to have fun and to make the game fun for all those who share it.

As such, players and moderators are free to do whatever they want with **Blue Planet**, as long as everyone is having fun. Rather than rulebooks or doctrinal tomes, every book published in this product line should be considered a literary toolbox or set of guidelines. If a moderator finds some aspect of the setting as presented in these books unsatisfactory, he should rewrite it to suit his own vision. If a rule gets in the way of adventure and fun, the gaming group should feel free to revise it or ignore it completely. The game is flexible and robust enough that it can take a lot of revision, expansion, tweaking, fiddling, and independent creative development and still be **Blue Planet**.

As soon as you dive into your first adventure on Poseidon, **Blue Planet** is yours. Do with it what you will...

POSEIDON: A SURVIVAL GUIDE

The makeshift studio has been set up in a run-down warehouse on Haven's waterfront. A young man sits alone atop an industrial drum in front of a tripod-mounted holocamera, scanning the pages of his script from the holographic display of a bodycomp. The door of the warehouse supervisor's office slams as the director walks to the cameraman and slaps him on the back of the head, waking him from a bored slumber.

"Let's do it," the director says, pointing to the production's only actor. The narrator offers his boss a rude gesture and tosses the bodycomp to the cameraman. At a battered plastic desk, the computer technician jacks into a powerful maincomp and its holodisplay flares to life. The tech is responsible for loading and integrating background holos and sound during the recording.

The director gives his crew a five-count, and the holocamera sprays emerald laser-light across the narrator and modest set. The narrator squints into the holographic prompter.

"Welcome to New World Underground's multimedia production, *Poseidon: A Survival Guide*. Dump those lame-assed commercial programs and get ready to learn what it's really like on humanity's newest and bluest playground.

"Chances are, you're running this program back on Earth, the once green dirtball we converted into a landfill over the last couple centuries."

A stunning image of Earth from orbit forms on the holodisplay and fades to a major industrial city. The brown-orange inversion layer hangs over the city like a burial shroud, and a disharmonic industrial rhythm begins driving in the background. The image shifts to a scene from a Free Zone in the North American Midwest. The land is a barren, dusty waste stretching to the horizon, the legacy of the Blight. Scattered across this wasteland, robotic seeders scurry about feeding water, nutrients, and microbes to the hungry sand, struggling to resurrect the soil of what was once fertile farmland.

"First thing you're going to need to do is pack your bags, forward your e-mail, and do the 35 light-year road trip to the Serpents System. Seems like a long haul, huh? Well, it is, but don't sweat it. Someone was nice enough to leave us a turnpike. Yeah, I know the scientists say it might be a 'naturally occurring phenomenon,' but you and I know somebody with some big-ass bulldozers built that wormhole. We don't know who and we don't know why, but it was mighty neighborly of them, because it lets us do the Sol-Serpentis gig in as little as six months instead of a few thousand years. You want to



know how it works, you got the wrong program. But I can tell you it does work, because I made the trip myself a few years back. Real smooth ride...I slept through the whole thing."

An image of the wormhole recorded from an approaching spacecraft replaces the barren wastes of Kansas. The thematic overture from a 20th Century sci-fi classic keys in and builds to a crescendo of thrumming timpani and powerful brass. The massive, utterly dark sphere grows steadily, and the starscape beyond it is slowly eclipsed as the ship draws near. The image fades to black as the wormhole engulfs the horizon.

"That's right, Dave. They're going to dope you and stick you in a freezer for six months to a year so you don't go psychotic and jeopardize the mission. Don't worry, though...they have real smart computers to make sure everything is under control.

"But we're getting ahead of ourselves. You need to know how to hitch a ride before you start worrying about the cooler. So, who the hell are you, anyway? See, Chief, how you get to Poseidon really depends on who you are. You can either make the trip in all the comfort, luxury, and safety that money can buy, or you can do it the way I did—in an obsolete coffin that couldn't keep your turkey frozen until Thanksgiving.

"Ships making the run between Earth and Poseidon fall into one of three categories. First, there are your GEO vessels. This is probably the best way to go, all things

considered. The easiest way to get yourself on a government ship is to work for 'em and get reassigned to the Serpentis System. If you can't swing that, you could apply for a position in a GEO-sponsored colonization effort. You can find the application you need on CommCore at the GEO Office of Colonial Affairs datastore. Your computer can help you find it if you're an idiot. Your chances will be vastly improved if you have something to offer, like scientific, military, medical, or technical training, teaching experience, or a background in deep-sea industry. You'll probably be at least two years toward the bottom of the waiting list for one of these programs...seems a lot of folks are pretty eager to bid Earth their fond farewells these days. Go figure.

"Your next option is to hitch a ride with an Incorporate ship. Again, your best bet here is to have a job and get yourself transferred. This may not be as tough as it sounds, assuming you don't mind waging for the corp a few years once you get here. I hate to break it to you, but it probably won't be a great job. If there were a terrific job for you with the Incorporate, you'd be working for 'em already. You damn sure wouldn't be sucking down a cheap beer and asking me for advice. If you have some skills, you might get lucky and land yourself a job with a deep-sea mining operation. Nothing better than slaving away at 500 meters, digging that priceless ore out of the rock...knowing you can't keep a milligram for yourself. Well, your boss would definitely frown on the idea, at least.

"Of course, even if you don't have any useful skills, you may have some money. Maybe you're a lawyer. Well, every once in a while one of these GEO and Incorporate ships has a spare coffin available, and they'll be happy to rent it to you for half a year or so. This happens pretty frequently, when someone on the passenger manifest dies, or backs out, or whatever. Those lists are public information, so tell your computer to let you know if something becomes available and have your cash ready. It'll cost you about 10,000 scrip.

"Now, I mentioned the GEO and Incorporate ships first, because they're most likely to get you here alive. Well, okay, being dead is a drag, but you may not consider sticking around on Earth the rest of your life a favorable alternative. And, if you happen to be that lawyer I was talking to a minute ago, yeah, things really are that bad for some folks back home.

"Us losers that can't get a GEO or Incorporate ticket but haven't had the common decency to die off yet, we've got some options, too. Before you look anywhere else, try to hook up with a private organization or Independent national government that's running a ship to Poseidon. The odds aren't good, but after the crap you've been through, you're due for some luck. Many private groups,

from religious cults to political organizations, occasionally put together the funds to charter a ship, even if it does look like it took a wrong turn on its way to the salvage yard. Now, you may have to offer a demonstration of your commitment to the cause with anything from a donation, to being Born Again, to an act of political terrorism—but it beats a life of soy burgers and seed-busting on some collective farm in Iowa.

"Okay, like I said: private flights by more-or-less legitimate organizations like the above are few and far between, so you may strike out again. No sweat, you're probably used to it by now. Your last chance is to scrape the bottom of the gravity well and pull out a spot on a ship that wouldn't be licensed if the GEO ever bothered to inspect it. There are ships doing the Earth-Poseidon run that are more than a hundred years old. The one I came over on hauled the first scientific expedition to Jupiter, back before things went down the tubes. Now, the crew of that old heap had no business sailing a rubber ducky in the bathtub, and the ship was in bad enough shape that no museum in Earth orbit would go near it, but I got here, almost in one piece."

The narrator rolls up his sleeve and peels back the flesh on the inside of his right arm. He thumbs open a tiny panel, about a centimeter square, and displays the complex electronics to the holocamera.

"It seems the ship's coolers were about as old and well-maintained as it was. When I got here to Poseidon, my arm was deader than Nebraska farmland. The dental school dropout who claimed to be my medtech just shrugged and said I was lucky it was my arm and not my head. I'd have decked him, but I never could lead with my left.

"I guess I can go ahead and tell you all about the cooler now...if you haven't found a ship at this point, you're probably not going to. Tough luck, pal. You have my sympathies.

"Induced Hypothermic Metabolic Suppression. That's what some Poindexter decided to call it, and I guarandamn-tee you, it'll be one of the least pleasant experiences of your life. Here's how it's gonna go. Once you've booked passage, you'll go through a planet-side training and education program the quality, length, and intensity of which will vary depending on how concerned your carrier is with your health. This is also when they'll start dosing you with god-awful chemicals to burn all the critters off your skin and flush all the bugs out of your system, and this process will continue once they've run you up the 'Hook to the pre-flight facilities in one of the many stations in orbit. They'll give you a bedpan and barf-bucket to handle some of the flushing.

"Speaking of chemicals, let me offer a little word to the wise: kick the recreational pharmaceuticals before you

show up for your orientation program. Again, depending on your carrier, you'll be put through a series of rigorous medical tests, and if you're dosed with something that will cause complications, you'll lose your ticket.

"None of this flushing and such will be any fun, but remember that you won't be near a bathroom for the next six months or so, and you may enjoy it a little more. They'll put a tube in you to handle that kind of thing once you're ready for the cooler. Oh, yeah, to get ready for that tube, you're gonna have to do 48 hours without solid food. That seems to help with the flushing quite a bit, too.

"In the final stages of pre-flight, you're gonna lose every hair on your body and get dunked in a chem bath so caustic it'll bleach your skin. They'll dress you in a hospital gown that even I couldn't look cool in and send you to a quarantine room to wait for your coffin.

"Now, if all of this sounds a little dehumanizing...well, you're not as dumb as you look. And don't think of it as a short stay at a lousy hospital, either. In a hospital, no matter how bad it is, there will be a few people who probably give half-a-lump about you. Otherwise, they'd be making more money in an Incorporate medical center somewhere. No, don't go asking any of the losers pretending to be medtechs to hold your hand. I didn't meet one of 'em who showed me any more kindness or sympathy than they would a wilted cabbage in the produce section. To them, they're processing cargo.

"Your cooler is going to be a canister three meters long, tangled with fiber optics, cooling lines, and electronic gadgetry. Even the older ones are surprisingly comfortable inside. There's a little viewport in the lid so you can watch the medtechs bet on your chances of coming out on the other side at a reasonable temperature. Before they seal you up, though, they'll catheterize you and hook you up with all the IV tubes you'll need. They're also going to glue electrodes all over your body so they can pump current into your muscles...wouldn't want your body turning to mush on the ride over.

"Once they've done all this, they'll seal you up, and the computer will initiate the refrigeration and drug therapy systems. Here's where the panic really starts to work its way deep into your bones. They're pumping sedatives into you now to put you under, but that immeasurable time before you lose consciousness will probably stay with you the rest of your life. It's gotta be a lot like laying on the table in an old lethal injection chamber, except you'll have to deal with some secondary claustrophobia. The condemned know they're gonna die, and I figure there's a kind of comfort in that certainty. You won't know one way or the other in those final seconds before the world goes dark."

A first-person image recorded from an implanted sensory recorder fades in. The view jerks wildly as "your" eyes flit back and forth, looking down at your naked body bristling with IV tubes, now at the fogging viewport centimeters from your face. Along the left periphery of your vision, biomedical data scrolls through recordings of your elevated heart rate and adrenaline. The sedatives kick in and your eyes close. The view fades as you lose consciousness, but the sleepless internal biomonitor continues to flash unending data across the backs of your retinas.

"You'll wake up in post-flight on *Prosperity Station* feeling like warmed-over manure. Your body will be feeling all those chemicals and engineered viruses they put into you to hold your cells together while you were frozen and thawed. Well, being a centimeter this side of death for as long as a year takes a certain toll on a person. They make sure the lights are dimmed, but when you open your eyes, it'll feel like your head is going to explode. You'll be so weak it'll be hard to sit up. You'll most likely puke all over yourself. Well, not really...it'll be the worst case of the dry heaves you ever had, though.

"After these preliminary unpleasantries, the itching will start. Those electrodes they stuck on you will leave little red welts all over your body, and these welts are going to itch like all hell for about a week after they unplug you. We Poseidoners call it the Spots, and it'll be a convenient signal to us that you just got off the boat and haven't a clue what you're doing. It should remind you of the same.

"You'll spend a few days in recovery facilities, either on *Prosperity Station* or planetside, under the close supervision of the OCA's computers and a few medtechs who don't have time to bother with you. Believe it or not, you'll wish you could sleep. You'll feel so bone-tired that you wouldn't mind going under for another six months. You won't be able to, though—they've got you so pumped full of stimulants that you'll do well to stop shaking long enough to scratch your Spots. Oh, and you'll be on a liquid diet again, even though you'll be hungry enough to think about eating one of the medtechs.

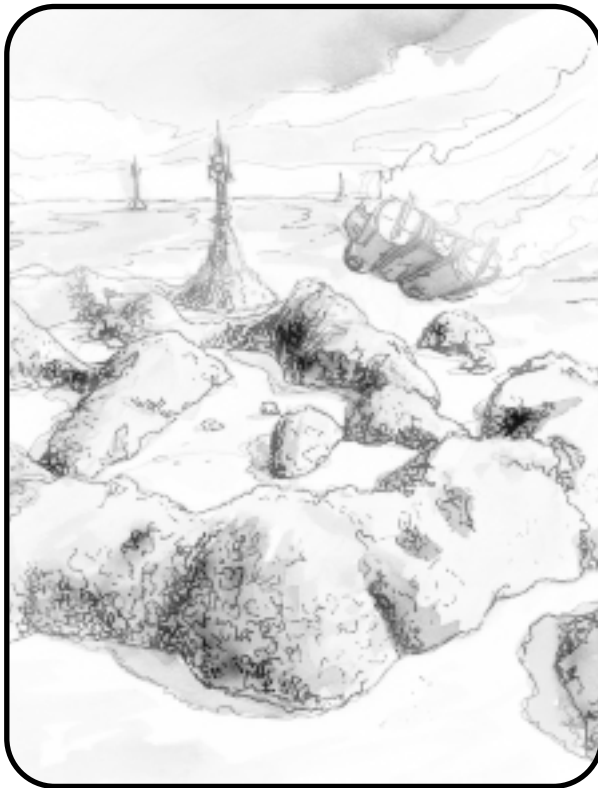
"The days you spend in recovery are likely to be the most unpleasant of the trip. See, what they do to you to get you over here really ought to kill you...hell, it might kill you, and if it doesn't, it'll come damn close. You're going to be a twitching, helpless, gelatinous mess for 48 to 72 hours, at least. All this makes the GEO's task of unloading all the passengers from a ship and shuttling them down to Poseidon all the more difficult. Chronic understaffing and an inevitable contempt for the truly disgusting and pathetic pretty much guarantees that the medtechs at *Prosperity Station* will treat

you with even less respect than those on the other side of the wormhole. They'll laugh in your face when you make a mess in your bed and curse you as they're cleaning it up. Look around, though—would you want their job?

“When they release you from post-flight, you'll be directed to OCA Customs and Immigration. They'll put you through much the same routine you got before leaving Earth orbit, but this time there'll be an edge on it. They'll ask you why you left Earth, why you want to immigrate to Poseidon, what your plans are, why you packed a box of condoms...the whole bit. Don't give them any lip—these guys have the attitude that they're the planet's last line of defense, and they'd be more than happy to make your life miserable.

“Once you're passed through Customs and Immigration, you'll want to find a monitor and find out when you're registered to shuttle down to the planet. *Prosperity Station* is crowded, and they'll try to get rid of you as soon as they can.

“Enjoy the flight. Try to get a window seat. Look out at the blue globe with white swirls hanging in space and think about the fact that you're one of only a few million human beings who have ever seen it. Hell, most of the natives haven't even seen it like this. Poseidon is a new world. There'll be danger and hardship, but if you have a quick mind, a bit of courage, and a strong body, you can start a new life here. This planet is a second chance that most of us probably don't deserve.”



An image of Poseidon from orbit appears on the holodisplay, the planet's two moons visible in the background. The image fades to a high-speed motion shot, the camera racing just over the surface of the ocean toward a small volcanic island, as manic techno-pop rises from the maincomp's speakers. The display goes dark again and shifts to a dimly lit underwater scene, where a team of Incorporate miners, supported by a variety of heavy equipment, are blasting away at the planet's exposed crust.

“Your shuttle will most likely touch down at a spaceport in Haven, Second Try, or Kingston. I'd recommend one of the latter two—Haven is the largest city on Poseidon, and it's easy to get a shuttle there, but it's also overcrowded and damned expensive. You're probably going to need to do some serious shopping, and there's no reason to pay the Haven premium unless you have to.”

The holodisplay clears and is filled with the image of a narrow, dirty city street in a commercial district choked with pedestrians and civilian vehicles. Buildings demonstrating a chaotic variety of architectural styles squeeze the street, and holographic billboards light the scene with an unpleasant multicolored glow. Overhead, jumpcraft move through the city in layered traffic lanes stacked 10 high.

“Stepping off of that shuttle and into one of the major spaceports is likely to be the most bizarre experience in your life. You never really notice it at the time, but mass-culture and the global village have turned much of Earth into an anonymous purgatory of conformity. Everywhere, things are the same. You can travel thousands of kilometers between cities and never feel like you've even left home. You're in for a shock.

“Freedom and individuality rule on Poseidon in a way that hasn't been true of Earth for centuries, except maybe in the Free Zones. In a lot of cases, this is exactly why folks come here. You're going to see, hear, and smell some things that you never even imagined. Clothes, languages, customs, it's all going to seem more than foreign...it's gonna seem alien. And guess what, ace? You're on your own. You're going to feel lost, confused, and more disoriented than you've ever felt in your life. Vendors will be approaching you and trying to sell you stuff you've never even heard of. People so modied-out you can't determine their sex will offer companionship for a price. You'll be haggled, molested, and maybe even mugged your first hour off the shuttle. And don't expect any caring folks who get paid to help you out and make the transition easier. Nobody cares. Like I said, you're on your own. You're gonna be homesick. Don't laugh, wiseguy...wait and see if I'm not right.

“When you leave the spaceport and step onto Poseidon for the first time, you may think you’ve made a terrible mistake.”

A middle-aged man with white hair, a scraggly beard, and a weathered face peers into the camera, his suspicion and irritation clearly translated in the detailed hologram. “What do I think?” he asks in a gravelly voice. “Poseidon stinks, that’s what I think. It’s the first thing you notice when you get off the shuttle and breathe that alien air. They say it’s because the atmosphere is a little different from Earth’s...whatever, it smells...heavy, organic...like a living thing. When I caught my first whiff, I seriously thought about getting back on board and heading home. ‘Course, home doesn’t smell a hell of a lot better these days. Besides, you really do get used to it after a while. After a few days, it stops stinking and starts smelling like freedom.”

“I’ve known James Colby for two years, folks, and he knows what he’s talking about. He’s an independent prospector who’s been operating on Poseidon since before I even came over. That little bit of advice was the most I’ve ever heard him say at one time when he wasn’t stone drunk. Don’t let the trace compounds in Poseidon’s atmosphere fool you, though: with its healthy ozone and lack of pollutants, it’s better suited to sustaining human life than Earth’s. Of course, the Incorporate will remedy that before long.

“Whatever your plans, you’re going to be spending some money your first few days on Poseidon. The colony is still partly autonomous from the GEO, and that autonomy has its price. For one thing, commerce on Poseidon is a nightmare of confusion. For whatever reasons, a standard currency hasn’t yet been instituted. I figure a lot of the natives and a good portion of the newcomers are worried about the GEO hanging the economic chains on them. Unfortunately, the alternative that’s in place right now is even less appealing.

“The only thing vaguely approaching a standard currency on Poseidon is a little commercial disaster called corporate scrip. Those of you from Incorporated city-states back on Earth may already be familiar with it. Scrip is something like common stock, I guess, except it doesn’t represent any equity in the corporation. Instead, it’s a legal tender that’s loosely pegged to the issuing corporation’s quarterly earnings, just like the currencies of some developing nations were pegged to the US dollar in the 20th Century. When the value of the US dollar increased, the value of these pegged currencies would increase, and vice-versa.

“So, corporate scrip works pretty much the same way, but it’s pegged to the corporation’s earnings. For example, when Biogene’s earnings increase relative to GenDiver’s, the value of its corporate scrip increases relative to GenDiver’s. When Biogene’s earnings

decline relative to GenDiver’s, the value of its scrip declines as well. Of course, while the value of Biogene scrip has declined relative to GenDiver scrip, it might have increased relative to Atlas scrip.

“It gets worse. There’s a supply and demand for corporate scrip, just like there’s a supply and demand for any commodity. It was the same for the national currencies back in the 20th Century. The value of the scrip pegged to earnings acts like a kind of baseline, but there’s a hell of a lot of fluctuation beyond this value. Supply and demand: as supply increases, value tends to decrease; as demand increases, value tends to increase. All of this is just to say that there is a market for corporate scrip on Poseidon that contributes as much to the determination of its value as corporate earnings. If a lot of people think Biogene scrip will get stronger relative to the other scrips, a lot of people will want Biogene scrip. The more demand for Biogene scrip there is, the higher its value will rise. That is, the more of another corporation’s scrip you’ll have to give up to acquire a given sum of Biogene scrip, or the more goods you can buy in a local market with a given sum of Biogene scrip.

“Of course, expert traders who are familiar with the market can make a fortune in scrip speculation. All of the Incorporate powerhouses on Poseidon have a team of experts and computers to manage their scrip trading. Fortunately, there are a few scrip analysis programs available on CommCore that will help average Joes like us survive in the corporate scrip market. So where do you go to find corporate scrip? Well, scrip comes in two forms: paper and electronic.

“That’s right, you’re actually going to get a chance to use cold, hard cash. Paper scrip is available at all major financial institutions on Poseidon. The big banks have branches in all of the larger settlements and quite a few small ones. Cash is important, because there are still some holes in the GEO’s global communications network, and there are countless settlements where the natives won’t have anything to do with electronic scrip. And, of course, if you’re interested in privacy in your commercial dealings, paper scrip has the advantage of not having your name written all over it.

“You’ll also want to set up an account with a bank, of course. Electronic scrip is a lot more convenient than cash, and you’ll have access to your account, in most places, through your bodycomp.

“Hopefully, you transferred the majority of your funds to Poseidon ahead of you. If that’s the case, just go to your bank’s local office and request that they convert your funds to scrip. If you haven’t downloaded a scrip analysis program, you can access a bank terminal for a nominal fee. Exchange rates between Earth’s surviving currencies and the various scrips are way too frigging

complicated for us to explain here. However, assuming you've accessed a good analysis program, the purchasing power of your net worth shouldn't suffer much. If you had enough cash to buy a nice jumpcraft back on Earth, you'll probably have enough scrip to buy one on Poseidon...well, so it might be a little older and not so nice. Quit whining.

"Okay, so explaining corporate scrip is one thing; when you actually try to buy something with it, things can get real confusing, real fast. How much Biogene scrip does it take to buy a fish burger in Cliffside? How, the hell should I know? Well, seriously, this currency system pretty much rules out slapping an absolute value on a commodity. It'll be around five scrip. You'll always get good value for a corporation's scrip in one of its company towns...Cliffside is a Biogene company town, so the demand for Biogene scrip will always be pretty high there. If you're trying to buy the burger with GenDiver scrip, and GenDiver is weak against Biogene, you could pay ten scrip or more for that burger. You get the idea. Or maybe you don't, but I'm tired of trying to explain it.

"For obvious reasons, commerce on Poseidon tries to find as many ways as possible to avoid corporate scrip. In many native villages, for example, the barter system dominates trade. If you ask me, though, native barter is as arcane a practice as corporate scrip.

"The most popular substitute currency on Poseidon is Long John. Long John, in either pure or refined form, serves as an informal common currency in most of Poseidon's settlements. Long John is accepted by Poseidoners, even when scrip isn't, because it has tended to be hyper-inflationary—that is, its value on both Earth and Poseidon continues to increase daily. Okay, so maybe a stable currency would be nice, but if you're going to have fluctuation, it might as well move in the right direction. Long John makes a good substitute because it eliminates much of the risk and uncertainty of corporate scrip—if you're holding Long John, it's pretty likely that its value will increase over the near-term, and very unlikely that it'll decrease. Currently, one gram of Long John is worth about 1,000 scrip, standard. The one-milligram wafer is the most common unit of exchange for modest purchases.

"Even in the major cities, the retail industry hasn't quite caught up to the booming commercial expansion that's taking place on Poseidon. The Incorporate have mainly focused on industrial enterprises, especially mining, and most business-minded folks didn't come to Poseidon to run a grocery store or restaurant. There are grocery stores and restaurants on Poseidon, of course, but they're typically small-time mom-and-pop enterprises, rather than corporate-owned chains and conglomerate franchises. For the most part, the retail industry is dominated by retired government and military folks, failed

miners and prospectors, 'civilized' natives, or the descendants of the above.

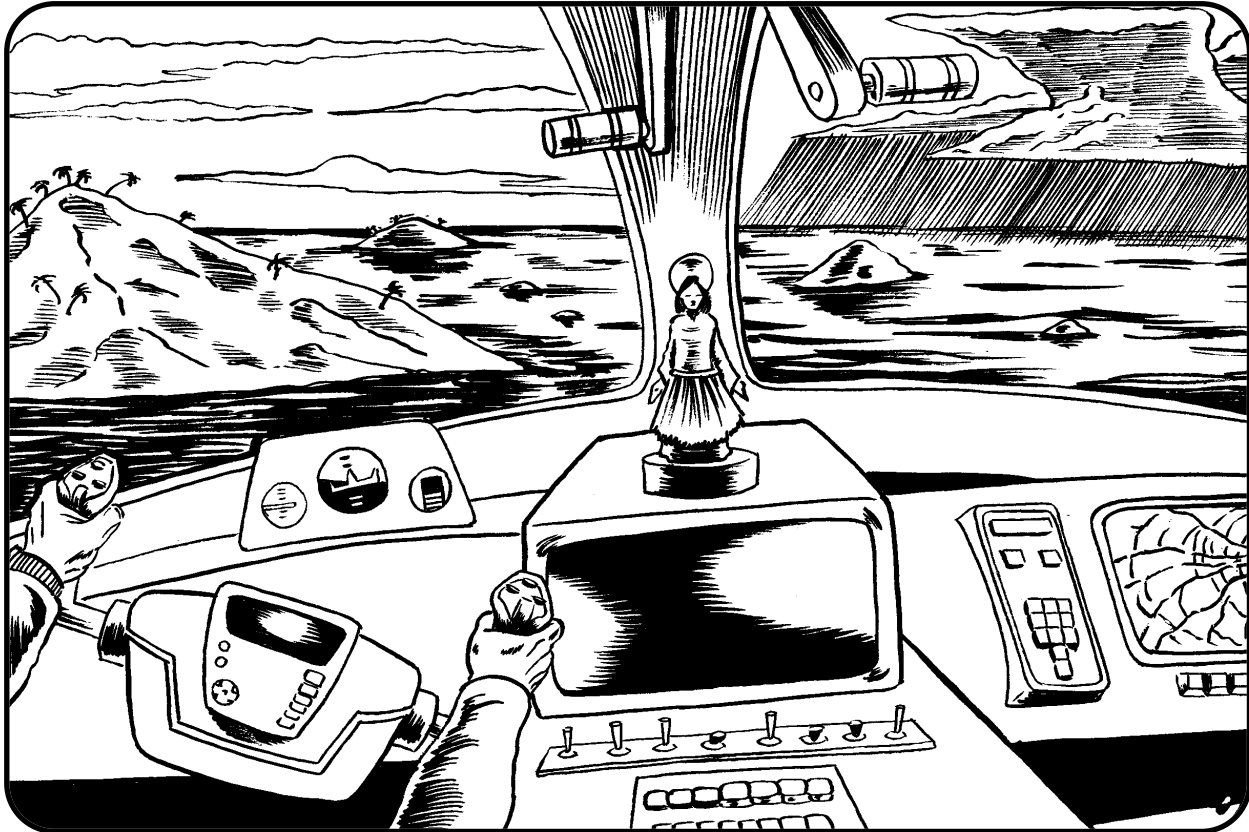
"The limited resources of these entrepreneurs leads to market specialization and the classic decentralized economy. Even in larger settlements like Haven where you can find a Hypermart or two, there are independently owned and operated fish markets, produce markets, street vendors, medical clinics, machine shops, and so forth. If you want to do the pioneer thing and build your own house, you'll buy your tools and nails at a hardware store and your materials from a lumberyard...even if you're not really getting wood. In some very small and isolated settlements, you'll see a bit more centralization out of necessity. These towns and hamlets might have a single trading post where just about anything can be bought, sold, or bartered."

An image of a bustling open-air market in a small but prosperous community lights up the holodisplay. Traders and vendors offer their wares to shoppers who have traveled from countless outlying settlements to visit the market. The air is thick with the smoke from open cook-fires, and scrip changes hands amidst the haggling and gossip.

"Of course, the consumer goods manufacturing industry is as decentralized and underdeveloped as retail service. The clothes you buy will often come from a favorite tailor, rather than a major clothing manufacturer. If you're in a small town in the middle of nowhere, second-hand clothes from the local trading post might be the best you can do. I've done this not a few times. One jacket even sported the bullet hole that explained its return to the retail market.

"What about things like vehicles, machinery, and computers? Well, it's been slow coming, but heavy manufacturing of durable goods has begun to accelerate over the last several years. It's a simple matter of expense: shipping anything through the wormhole is ungodly expensive, and the Incorporate like to avoid ungodly expensive. As a result, several major manufacturing corporations have operations running on Poseidon, though the scale of most is still small compared to Earth. These manufacturing operations are clustered around the major cities and company towns, and this is always the best place to make major purchases, whether it's a vehicle, a bodycomp, a firearm, or a hard suit you're shopping for.

"Again, retail service for this stuff is a little backward. For example, there are a few factory jumpcraft dealerships in the major cities, but the corporations will give just about anyone a license to distribute and retail these goods, so you're likely to find a lot of independent tech dealers in other locations. Like anything else, these guys vary widely in honesty and reliability. Just remember the guiding principle of commerce on Poseidon: C.O.D.



The dealer doesn't see your cash until you see your jumpcraft. Anyone who tries to do it another way is trying to rip you off. Count on it.

"Of course, there's going to be a waiting list for most durable goods, but you're gonna get used to that kind of thing around here. You can usually speed things up by working with an independent dealer and slipping him some extra cash to move you to the top of the list. This will usually cost you a 20% premium or more, but a lot of times, it's worth it not to have to wait.

"Unless you plan to live your life in one of the big cities, and you probably wouldn't bother making the trip to Poseidon if that was your goal, the first thing you'll want to arrange is transportation. Yeah, you want to do this even before you book yourself a room at a local hotel or boarding house. Reliable transportation is one of the most important things in the life of a colonist on Poseidon. Ninety-seven percent of this planet is covered by water. You've got ocean and little islands. Between all of those little islands is a lot of ocean. If you get separated from your ride, you could literally be stranded on a deserted island for the rest of your life. Or worse, stuck in a tin can on the ocean floor with your oxygen supply running low.

"Colonists and natives alike are real serious about their transportation, whether it's a beat-up '82 SeaStrider or a catamaran with patchwork sails. Vehicles on Poseidon

are usually well protected by sophisticated security systems and closely watched by suspicious owners. Vehicle theft is punished pretty harshly on the colony. Most colonists are likely to shoot any thief caught taking so much as a headlight off their vehicle. Still, the black market trade in vehicles and spare parts is so lucrative that there are always freelance and organized criminals who are willing to run the risk."

A crime scene in a small settlement materializes on the holodisplay. Two Patrol jumpcraft have landed near a beat-up SeaStrider and a light transport hover. An outraged, but defensive, motorist speaks with the four Patrol officers circled around a sheet-covered body.

"Yeah, officer, I came out of the bar and saw him load-in' my hopper onto a cargo-hauler! I didn't even think about it...I just put a bullet in him and started unhooking my rig. Would you wanna be stuck in Wetland for the rest of your life? No offense, if you are stuck here. I was only a month behind...how was I supposed to know that rat-bastard I bought the piece of junk from would send a repo man after me?"

"The recovery of lost or abandoned vehicles is protected under the treasure statutes of the GEO property code. For those of adventurous spirit, this can be one of the most profitable, legitimate enterprises on Poseidon. I'd think about taking it up if I weren't a famous actor with a cult following numbering well into the 10s. Many salvage teams follow in the wakes of cyclonic storms or

dive to undersea mining facilities that have suffered a major accident or catastrophe. These teams usually race the Emergency Response Teams, who are authorized to claim salvage rights for the GEO. Now, the relevant statutes dictate that the owner of any salvage will have first rights to the equipment at a fixed percentage of its recorded value. Of course, the value of salvaged technology in both legitimate and illegitimate markets greatly exceeds this standard commission. You and I both know which markets see the most traffic.

“Just as important as your vehicle is the fuel that keeps it running. Most of the larger settlements on Poseidon offer both commercial and government stations where you can get your tanks topped off. The cost of hydrogen at these facilities averages half-a-scrip per liter. Even the smallest of settlements will often have a solar unit that can crack hydrogen, and the locals are usually willing to negotiate a fill-up. I’ve found that a stranger in an outlying settlement can expect to pay as much as two scrip per liter. In many of these settlements, of course, barter goods or Long John will greatly facilitate the negotiations.

“Finally, your rig will eventually break down, and you’re going to need to know how to get it fixed. The already mentioned salvage teams point to the scarcity of spare parts on Poseidon. Fortunately, independent mechanics and machinists are the blacksmiths of this frontier colony, and you should be able to find some kind of repair services in all but the smallest settlements. Most small-time mechanics and machinists won’t have the facilities to replicate advanced, high-tech components, especially electronic systems. You’ll probably need to go to a salvage auction or the black market for this stuff, as a local shop usually won’t have access to a reliable supply. If you don’t want to deal with the auctions or the black market, you’ll want to stock an ample supply of parts from your local manufacturer, well in advance of any trouble. Remember, there can be some serious delays with this kind of stuff, and having a vehicle that won’t run is no better than having it stolen.

“There’s no centralized public transportation system on Poseidon, though the GEO claims to be working on it. Like every other area of the retail market, commercial transportation is dominated by small, private concerns. Several small-time carriers offer regular commercial service between the major towns and cities. These carriers usually charge around a scrip per 10 kilometers for the scheduled flights. If you need to make a trip to an isolated settlement, you’ll want to find an independent bush pilot who will charter a private jumpcraft or VTOL flight to just about anywhere on Poseidon. A private charter will typically run you five to 10 scrip per 10 kilometers, depending upon distance and travel hazards. Charters to the Storm Belt are notoriously expensive, but often quite exciting. If you want to spend less money

and aren’t in a hurry, you can charter an independently owned and operated hydrofoil in just about any settlement on Poseidon.”

The holodisplay shows a young, athletic man in aviator’s glasses and a flight suit reclining in the cockpit of an aging civilian VTOL. “Like damn-near everybody else, I came to Poseidon thinking I’d make a fortune prospecting for Long John. Only problem is, I don’t know much about prospecting, or diving either, for that matter. I was a pilot in the GEO Aerospace Command back on Earth. So, a couple years ago, I sold my hard-suit and mining gear, bought this broken-down Raven, and started running charters, mail, and cargo back and forth to settlements in the Storm Belt. There’s nothing like the thrill of pulling eight Gs to climb topside of a microburst. It pays well, too.”

“The GEO maintains an extensive communications network on the colony world. Satellite access is surprisingly good, and you should find that the availability of advanced communications is much the same on Poseidon as it is on Earth. It’s certainly more important—on Earth, communications technology was a convenience for most people and one that was taken for granted. On Poseidon, it can save your life. You probably brought a bodycomp or two with you, and you’ll want to register for a CommCore account, ASAP. The account will cost you about 50 scrip a month.

“The GEO also sponsors public access to its Global Positioning Satellite network, and you’ll want to register for GPS service immediately. It’s real easy to get lost on Poseidon, and most newcomers are almost obsessive about GPS. You can pick up a reliable receiver for around 100 scrip at any electronics store in the cities. Most modern computers can receive GPS signals, too. Monthly service will run you about 20 scrip.

“Okay, you’ve got some scrip in your pocket, and you’ve set yourself up with transportation. You’ve done a little shopping. Now get the hell out of the city and take a few days to experience your new home!

“I’m serious. When you step out of that spaceport, you’ll be feeling a sort of awe and wonder. You won’t be able to stop thinking about where you are: a new world, a new frontier, so far from Earth that you can’t really get your head around it. A world without oak trees, or roses, or cockroaches, or pigeons. A world without humans, until a hundred years ago. Poseidon is a world that has yet to be smothered in concrete and steel, a place where you can breathe air that isn’t toxic or choked with the smell of billions of people.

“After you’ve dealt with the banks, and the shopping, and all the rest, though, it’ll start to feel as if you’ve just traveled to a somewhat backward country or Free Zone on Earth. You need to get that feeling back, see

Poseidon as it should be seen. Take a hydrofoil or, better yet, a sailboat—you can't experience anything but noise and nausea in a jumpcraft or VTOL.

"Don't leave just yet, though. You're gonna want to make sure you're ready for Poseidon. The best thing you can do is hire a local guide. A native is best, but they tend to be few and far between in the cities. A skilled veteran colonist will do, and she'll greatly improve your chances of returning from your sightseeing tour. Do a little asking around, and you should be able to find somebody qualified. If you're in Kingston, look for Pathfinder on the waterfront. She's not a native, but she is a genlifted Fin who's real friendly with 'em. Pathfinder's about as comfortable with this planet as you can be without being born here.

"You don't think you need a guide? Well, that's because you're a clueless newcomer, ace. Hell, you're not even a newcomer yet...you're still back on Earth, glued to your holotank, thinking about coming to Poseidon. This ain't Earth. There are so many ways this planet can kill you they won't be catalogued for years. You're going through a hell of an ordeal to get here, you owe it to yourself to not get dead on your first weekend.

"It really doesn't matter where you go. Just pick a direction and head for that blue horizon. If you're really adventurous, turn off your GPS system. Head down to an isolated beach—there are a billion or so to choose from. Turn off the engine and listen. Look out at the sea. You'll expect to hear seagulls, I guarantee it. Something about our modern human minds just associate seagulls with the beach. You won't hear any seagulls, though, because there aren't any seagulls on Poseidon. Wrong world, man.

"Take off across the ocean. If you're lucky, you'll see a caneopose migration. Most folks call them sunbursts, and you'll quickly see why. Sunbursts are silver-skinned marine mammals, a bit like dolphins or seals, I guess. They have this strange buddy system going with these birds that constantly migrate from archipelago to archipelago. The birds seem to dig the sunbursts' reflective skin, and Poseidon only knows why the sunbursts like the birds. They say the caneopose population in Poseidon's equatorial waters is huge. They organize into groups of thousands, followed by those birds. A large migration will stretch for kilometers, the sunbursts breaching and blowing spray at the sky as they swim from island to island.

"If Pathfinder's your guide, maybe she'll sing with 'em and record it for you. She's got an implant that tapes the sound-pictures she experiences, digitizes them, and converts them for viewing on a standard holoviewer. It's unreal. Those sunbursts sound to you and me like fingernails dragging on a chalkboard (look it up if you have to). Once you see those images, though, you'll know

why the genlifted think of them as more gifted than Mozart, Beethoven, or even Elvis."

An aerial shot on a clear day fades in on the holidisplay. Below, a huge caneopose migration stretches from horizon to horizon. Poseidon's sun is reflected blindingly by the magnificent silver creatures and refracted a billion times in the spray above them. The migration looks like a brilliant band of light winding slowly across the ocean.

"Of course, the sunbursts are being butchered by the millions. It seems their hides are highly prized back on Earth. Even though it can be synthesized cheaply and easily, I guess the genuine article is priceless in a synthetic world. You owe it to yourself to see the sunbursts before they're gone. If you have any thoughts about bagging a few for yourself, think twice. The natives, especially dolphins, are likely to speargun any sunburst hunter they find, and there are damn scary bounty-hunters out there called Wardens who do nothing but track down suspects wanted for ecological crimes. There have even been rumors of aborigine attacks on poacher ships. You don't want trouble from any of 'em."

The migration scene is replaced by the image of a beach littered with the skinned and rotting carcasses of dozens of sunbursts. The grisly scene fades to a gorgeous female Incorporate flaunting a sunburst-skin jacket at a posh cocktail party on Earth.

"Maybe you'll even stumble across a traditional native village on your little tour. Now, some folks will tell you that the natives live like primitive savages. It ain't true. They can get a bit savage if you do something to piss them off, mind you, but they're more free and more at peace with themselves and this world than you or I will ever be. They don't have the tech we do, because they were forced to live without it and found out they kinda like it that way. The folks who call native Poseidoners savages behind their backs are usually the ones who are most scared of 'em. Spend some time with them, if they'll have you, and you'll see—the natives aren't primitive humans...they aren't really humans at all."

Laser-light flares, and an image of a quiet beach on a moonlit night appears above the computer's holoprojector. Six native divers—three aquaforms and three dolphins—perform a ritual aquatic dance in the surf around a circle of softly glowing candles floating in hand-woven baskets. The dancers are accompanied by the slow, rhythmic cadence of a single drum and the haunting melody of a reed pipe. At a distance, phosphorescent tracers glide through the waves, betraying the presence of unknown, silent spectators.



“The natives can be trouble, though. Most of them aren’t too pleased with the results of Recontact, and many are willing to express that displeasure with violence against those perceived as a threat to their planet. For the more sensible ones, that just includes the Incorporate, poachers, and others who are busy trashing the place. For others, it includes anyone without gills and a First Generation ancestor. In this latter category, the tribes of the Sierra Nueva Cluster are probably the worst. Their territory encompasses countless little islands that lie between Santa Elena, the GenDiver company town, and the major settlements of New Hawaii.

“These natives are led by a transient orca and seem to have developed a quaint little warrior culture. They keep themselves busy working over any Incorporate traffic that comes their way. Both GenDiver and the GEO have sent military forces to the Sierra Nueva to ‘pacify’ the natives, and they’ve both had a lot of openings for new recruits as a result. Many of the native villages are underwater, and when they retreat below the surface, no one’s going to go in and root them out.

“If for some reason you’re headed their way, turn around and go back. If you can’t do that, you’d better either be flying or prepared to fight. The warpods of the Sierra Nueva must have some tech of their own, because they can stop a ship dead in the water. They’re fond of treating their spears, and even their fingernails, with the venom of some god-forsaken fish, and if they poke you

with one, you’re not likely to have enough time to kiss your ass goodbye. Most of them have guns, too. I guess killing newcomers like you and me is an important enough job to warrant a little helpful technology, from time to time.

“The tribes of the Sierra Nueva aren’t the only band of hostile natives, either. When they were abandoned, the First Generation scattered all over Poseidon, and I expect there are some unfriendly sorts out there in the big blue that we’ve never even heard of. They might just figure that sending some unwary travelers floating back to Haven with holes in them will keep the tourists out of their water for a while.

“Now, after all this, you may be a little scared of our distant cousins. There’s nothing wrong with that, because the fear will keep you on your toes. But, when folks start being afraid of something, they usually start hating whatever it is they’re afraid of. There’s a lot of that on Poseidon, and it goes both ways. Native or newcomer, it doesn’t much matter—the fear and hate get hot, and not long after, the shooting starts. Thing is, even the violent natives are pretty easy to get along with. Stay out of their way, and you have nothing to fear—they’re not going to come looking for you, unless you really screwed up.

“You’ve done some sightseeing and hopefully avoided any undiplomatic contact with the natives. Assuming

you're not some clueless tourist with unlimited funds or an Incorporate wager with a company-scheduled future, at some point it's going to be time to begin the search for gainful employment.

"There's a world of opportunity waiting for you on Poseidon. Sound like a bad PR cliché? It isn't. This planet is wide open, and there's ample opportunity for the clued-in and daring to get ahead. If you've got a nest-egg and don't mind doing the store clerk thing, you can open a retail shop in most any settlement and be guaranteed to make a nice living. If that sounds a bit too tame, don't worry—on Poseidon, the more danger in your job description, the fatter the paycheck.

"For the ultimate in risk and danger, you can forget the rest and cut straight to Long John prospecting. If you know your geology and have some skills in deep-sea mining, you're good to go. If you're as clueless as most of the wannabe prospectors who wash up on the beach in their brand-new hardsuits, you'd better apprentice yourself to someone who knows what he's doing. Forget the CommCore correspondence programs—apprenticeship is the way to go. If you could learn to be a prospector by watching an interactive holo, there wouldn't be so many deceased rookies on the books. With a bit of luck, you'll be able to find a competent mentor to teach you the ropes in any mining town on the planet. You may have to buy him some new gear or fix up his sub, but he'll have you in the water and practicing your new trade in no time. He'll also be able to show you how to avoid getting dead.

"If prospecting's not your gig, you can join up with a salvage team and make a small fortune on lost tech—on the legitimate or not-so-legitimate markets. You could open a trading post or maybe even take your goods to sea, trading between several small settlements. If you're really adventurous, you could even do some trading with the more isolated native settlements. It's not unheard of. If you're a professional, like a doctor or lawyer or massage therapist, you can hang your shingle in a mining town. It'll be wild living, but you'll get plenty of business. If you're a scientist-type, you could sign up with the GEO, the Incorporate, the universities and research foundations. Or you could strike out on your own and try to make a name for yourself with some monumental discovery. If you're in the military or law enforcement fields, there are ample opportunities with the GEO, Incorporate, and Independent governments.

"Of course, if the law never concerned you much and you know how to dodge GEO Marshals and surveillance satellites, you could run guns or drugs or even raid commercial shipping. It'll probably be a short career, but you won't get bored. If you're a social malcontent like me, you might want to pursue a career in freelance anarchy or ecoterrorism. The pay is lousy, but it offers unparalleled job satisfaction. I suppose, if you don't

mind being lower than the scum a bottom-feeder won't touch, you could try your hand as a sunburst poacher. Say hello to the Wardens for me.

"While we're on the subject of illegal activities, the Poseidon frontier may be wild and woolly, but it ain't entirely lawless, at least in most places. The GEO Marshals are the Law-with-a-capital-L on Poseidon. I guess our benevolent government lost its patience with the traditional criminal justice system and decided to get back to basics on the colony world. Judge, Jury, and Executioner—that's exactly what the silver badge is pinned to. The Marshals are wired, modified, and deadly serious. You really gotta love 'em. It's probably a real good thing there's only a couple dozen of them on the planet. Of course, they're supported by a bunch of edgy Patrol officers, all looking to get that badge themselves. In isolated native settlements, you're more likely to run into the Native Patrol, a bunch of locals with badges and backup, and an inbred dislike for ornery newcomers. When the law comes for you, the best thing to do is cut and run. If you fight them, the best you can hope for is momentary freedom while you wait for an obsessed Marshal to hunt you down.

"If you think of yourself as a goodly, law-abiding citizen, you may be more interested in how you can find the law if something illegit is going down. Assuming you're somewhere not too far removed from civilization, you can access the GEO-Justice/Emergency site on CommCore. It works just like it did on Earth—you make your report, and the system prioritizes and transmits it. If you're out on the fringes and don't have access to either CommCore or a local Patrol office...well, you probably have no business trying to call in the law. You're likely to have local vigilante groups that may, or may not, be preferable to the criminals, and the Native Patrol may be around. You can also try to get your message back to civilization by word of mouth. If you can't do it yourself, give it to the mail carrier when he flies in, or maybe a traveling trader. You won't get any kind of quick response, but if the crime is serious enough, justice will have her day when the Marshal comes to town."

The holoprojector sprays an image into the air, a close-up shot of a GEO Marshal entering a run-down bar in a mining town. The man scans the room and grips the handle of the Peacemaker holstered at his side. The camera zooms to the silver badge pinned to black fatigues over the Marshal's heart. The man turns toward the camera. A gloved hand reaches out, and the image fades to black.

"Despite the Marshals, the GEO's political grip on the colony world is far from exclusive and some would say it's as limp as the kelp you'll be having for breakfast every morning. Several major factions have a growing presence on

Poseidon, and each is driven by a vision of the colony's future that is incompatible with the rest.

"First, you've got the Incorporate, hybrid multinational corporations and traditional nation-states born during the social chaos of the Blight Years. It's easy enough to paint the Incorporate with broad strokes, labeling them impersonal juggernauts bent on capitalistic domination through greed, exploitation, and when necessary, outright violence. One man's stereotype is another man's useful rule of thumb, but I'm told there are exceptions.

"Really, the Incorporate states are like any other government—they each have their own histories, goals, and motivations, and no two are exactly alike. Hydrospan is a massive collective founded and managed by cetaceans, industry leaders in environmental engineering and marine research and exploration. They've developed close ties with the GEO and give every Hydrospan citizen-employee a stake in the enterprise's success. On the other hand, you've got GenDiver, a state ruled by power-drunk cowboys who would mug their own grandmothers for a half-percent of market share. You've heard about the Stone Bridge Massacre and Sierra Nueva War? That's the thugs at GenDiver staking their claim to what the Incorporate bean-counters consider prime Long John fields. Too bad a few thousand natives have been living there for the last hundred years.

The holodisplay flashes again as the tech loads bootleg footage from the Sierra Nueva War into the maincomp. A GenDiver Security combat team stalks relentlessly through a cluster of burning native dwellings, firing controlled bursts from their assault weapons at unseen victims. Three VTOL strike-fighters scream overhead followed moments later by a deafening barrage of explosions. Smoke obscures the combat team and the image fades out.

"Hydrospan and GenDiver, Atlas and Hanover, Dundalk and the NIS—for every responsible and progressive Incorporate state you can name another that still does business like it's the darkest days of the Blight and the world is coming to an end. One thing is sure, though: the Incorporate states dominate the economies of Earth and the Colonies and drive the colonization of Poseidon. It's real simple—if not for the Incorporate, none of us would be here. In one of history's greatest ironies, even the natives are indebted to GenDiver for the genetic adaptations that allowed them to survive their Abandonment.

Dundalk built the ship that established Recontact with the Poseidon colony. Atlas discovered the extraordinary potential of Long John. The Incorporate account for most of the economic and scientific activity on the colony world. Without the Incorporate states' role in the development of the colony, it would be at most a small government research outpost. Of course, some would say that's a good thing.

"Others, though, believe the Incorporate are the fore-runners of a new form of social and political organization. They argue that the old nation-states and political-military alliances are obsolete and that new social groups must evolve to take their place. They claim the Incorporate city-states, organized around a shared economic enterprise, are an early prototype of such a new-world social group. Personally, I'm not so sure—they look to me a lot like the mercantile city-states of Italy in the 13th Century, complete with their own hired armies. The more things stay the same, the more the right-wing blowhards will tell you they've changed. I'm all for the gradual extinction of nation-states and the emergence of new, dynamic forms of social and political organization—I'm just not ready to embrace the corporatist vision and take my place on the assembly line.

"As the level of Incorporate economic and industrial activity on the planet has increased, so too has the native resistance to it. This is the aspect of life on Poseidon that is most romanticized and least understood in the media. After all, no self-respecting journalist will let the truth get in the way of a good story. The natives' conflicts with the Incorporate states are as varied as the Incorporate themselves. In the Sierra Nueva, you've got two aggressive, almost xenophobic groups—GenDiver and the orca Bataku's insurgents—going head-to-head in a bloody turf war that covers a good-size chunk of the Northwest Territories. Nobody asked me, but I figure this little war stopped being about land rights a long time ago. Somewhere along the line, it became a cultural war of attrition in which the objective of both sides is to simply hurt the other badly enough that they'll go away. In Westcape, Hanover is making a straightforward land-grab at the natives' expense. This escalating conflict isn't about political ideology or economics; it's all about territory. Hanover believes it has to expand its colonial holdings to protect its future as a sovereign state, and the natives of Westcape are simply trying to protect their homes.

"The GEO, as usual, is doing just enough to get in the way and not enough to actually improve the situation. Fort Solitude, a Peacekeeper base in the Sierra Nueva, has suffered thousands of casualties but has yet to accomplish so much as a temporary cease-fire. The primary GEO Armed Forces base at Fort Pacifica has more than doubled in size in the last year, and a string of military outposts have begun popping up all along the southern coast of Westcape. Problem is, the GEO leadership in Geneva back on Earth refuses to take sides. This policy indecision leaves the grunts on the front lines with two cheeks to the wind and they've done nothing but escalate the conflict and violence as a result.

"Of course, not everyone believes the GEO should have a policy on these issues. In fact, a lot of folks don't think the GEO should exist at all, let alone exert any claims to governance of the colony world. Unless you're from

Luna, or Mars Colony, or the Belt, you're probably pretty familiar with the GEO's history and current political status. The reality is that, like the Incorporate states, the GEO wouldn't exist today if it weren't for the social and political chaos the Blight left in its wake. The GEO was created for the sole purpose of defeating the Blight, and it was pretty damned effective in completing that task. It's just that a lot of folks figure it outlived its usefulness about half a century ago. With the threat of the Blight safely behind us and a new frontier opening up in another star system, an oligarchic world government controlling the most powerful military machine ever assembled by human beings is going to be in for its share of public criticism.

"There is no shortage of vocal opposition to the GEO. On Poseidon, the loudest comes from the Incorporate, various native groups, and most recently, the newcomer colonists themselves. The Incorporate political resistance to the GEO is led by a powerful few, notably GenDiver, Biogene, Hanover, and the Nippon Industrial State. These hostile states run espionage and intelligence operations against the GEO, refuse to recognize it as a legitimate authority, and deny its personnel access to Incorporate company towns and facilities. GenDiver officials will not even call the GEO by its proper name, referring to it instead as the "Geneva Regime." Other Incorporate states like Atlas Materials, Hydrospace, and Lavender Organics are close political and economic partners with the GEO. While they often disagree on specific issues and policies, they lend quiet support while remaining officially neutral in the propaganda wars between the GEO and its Incorporate enemies.

"There's been native resistance to the GEO and its presence on Poseidon ever since the *Adm. Robert Perry* showed up in orbit in 2165. Plain and simple, many natives just didn't want any contact with Earth, and their attitudes didn't warm up any when they realized the GEO was a world government that planned to claim all of Poseidon as its colony. Most of these natives hadn't dealt with much in the way of government beyond a council of elders for 50 years, so you can understand their reluctance to welcome Big Brother with open arms. Native attitudes toward the GEO have steadily worsened over the ensuing years. The GEO's refusal to recognize native land claims and its inability or unwillingness to protect them from Incorporate aggression have led many natives to lump the GEO in with the Incorporate, poachers, gangsters, tourists, and other undesirable elements Recontact has brought to their world. Activists speak out publicly against the GEO in the Haven Council, the city of Kingston has refused to recognize GEO authority, and insurgent groups like Blue Water Circle have targeted GEO personnel almost as often as Incorporate.

"Even newcomer groups—some of them part of GEO-sponsored colonization efforts—have started protesting

GEO policies on the waterworld. Most of these are simply opposed to the GEO taxes that tap their bank accounts and the regulations that restrict their autonomy, but it's a growing problem for the GEO in the arena of public opinion. When its own citizens start challenging its authority, it raises serious questions about its continued legitimacy as a government. We newcomers have also brought our share of political extremism to Poseidon, and there are a few groups on the planet whose opposition to the GEO is violent. The most famous of these is Zero Nation, an ecoterrorist organization whose history dates back almost two centuries. While there are some who might suggest the *GEO* is just an ecoterrorist organization, it is definitely not friendly with Zero Nation. Opposed to any human colonization, development, or exploitation of Poseidon, Zero Nation cells routinely target GEO personnel and facilities with terrorist acts intended to publicize its agenda.

"While there's plenty of political turmoil on Poseidon, the real battleground is the GEO General Assembly in Geneva. Each of the GEO member-states, the Independent nations like China, India, and the United States, and the major Incorporate states are represented in the General Assembly. This institution is a political jungle of shifting factions, temporary alliances, and divided loyalties, and the most ironic part is, it doesn't even have any real power. Like I said before, the GEO is an oligarchy—the Executive Council wields all the real power, makes all the laws, and executes all the policies. All the General Assembly can do is reject legisla-



tion drafted by the Executive Council if it manages to come up with a two-thirds majority, something it almost never does. Still, the General Assembly has the attention of the media, and it's used by all interested factions as a sounding board to air their grievances, propaganda, and official lies. This posturing is picked up by the major media conglomerates and distributed through CommCore to the six billion citizens of Earth and the Colonies, so the Assembly remains a spawning ground for public opinion.

"In the years to come, I'm betting the GEO's biggest challenge will come from the United Nations. The GEO was originally a UN agency formed during the early years of the Blight, and the UN effectively abdicated its position of world leadership to the GEO when human civilization was teetering on the brink of extinction. The original GEO Charter called for the UN to be reinstated and the GEO abolished once the Blight was defeated. Backed by the Independent nations and several Incorporate states, the UN was reestablished in 2156 against strong opposition from the GEO Executive Council. For the GEO to be officially abolished, though, the UN requires a resolution to be passed by a two-thirds majority of its original, pre-Blight member-nations. Problem is, more than a third of those governments no longer exist as sovereign nations. In the aftermath of the Blight, they've become Incorporated city-states, Federal Districts of the GEO, or lost completely to Earth's lawless Free Zones.

"Of course, it irritates a lot of powerful people to no end that the GEO can continue to exist on what amounts to a technicality, but no one has figured out exactly what to do about it short of a full-scale war. And no one has the military muscle to challenge the GEO Armed Forces on its own turf unless the situation changes dramatically. That's why some of us figure a colonial civil war is on the horizon, one that will decide the future not only of the waterworld, but of Earth and her other colonies as well. No one can challenge the GEO on Earth, but despite the recent military buildups, its position on Poseidon remains far more tenuous.

An image of an isolated GEO Peacemaker outpost appears in the holodisplay. A large, angry crowd shouts protest slogans outside the cyclone fencing and an assault hopper is burning in the background. Soldiers and support crew battle the fire while MPs in riot gear move in formation toward the crowd of activists.

"If all Poseidon had to offer were dangerous jobs with long hours and short pay, hostile natives, and dirty politics, you might just as well go to New York. You can have your share of fun on this frontier colony world, though. The entertainment options on Poseidon are as varied as the genetic code of its colonists. What follows are some of

the more popular pursuits, depending on geography and demographics.

"The big cities all have several holoplexes where you can catch the 'latest' major holo productions from Earth. They'll be a year old or more, but you won't know the difference. A ticket will run you maybe five to 10 scrip.

"You can find virtual arcades as advanced, and popular, as those in the cities of Earth. You'll know you're on the frontier when you experience some of the bootleg 'alternative' programs offered by less reputable arcades—the Justice Commission's vice goons would be crawling all over these places in some of Earth's cities. An hour in the Tank will cost you about 50 scrip.

"Smaller, isolated settlements that lack access to these entertainment luxuries often turn to traveling theater companies. There are less than half a dozen currently touring on Poseidon, and most of them are quite amateur, but the New Orleans Burlesque Company offers both sophisticated dramatic satire and outrageously ribald dancing and striptease. It's definitely worth checking out, and the Company will probably make the big-time and head back to Earth before long. Give Lola a kiss for me, she's a hell of a guy.



“Recreational drugs of all kinds, some legal, some not, are freely available in Poseidon’s cities. Most are synthetic, and the most popular tend to be endorphin or narcotic-analogs. A notable exception is pharium, a powerful narcotic harvested from indigenous flora by the natives.

“Many native traditionalists use pharium in their community rituals and ceremonies, and this practice doesn’t seem to cause them any harm. Newcomers find that it’s highly addictive, and pharium dens scattered across the planet are usually filled to capacity with the dregs who have lost all care for anything but the drug. You do pharium the old-fashioned way: burn it in a pipe and inhale. Pharium sells for around 100 scrip a gram in the cities, a bit less in the smaller settlements. Some of the classier dens sell hand-blown glass pipes of native craftsmanship that are nice knickknacks, even if you’re not a pharium user. The Justice Commission makes an occasional noise about cracking-down on the pharium trade, but they’re usually more concerned with the harvesters and smugglers than the local peddlers and dens.

“Prostitution—male, female, and other—is rampant, from the largest city to the smallest town. In fact, there are probably more prostitutes in the latter, where there isn’t any competition from the virtual arcades. Brothels are the most common vendor of professional companionship, though hotel and nightclub call-girls also do a thriving business. Most professional prostitutes offer their customers bodycomp access to legitimate health records, though this custom suffers in the smaller settlements and mining towns. Price varies by location and ‘market value,’ but 20 to 500 scrip, or more, is a good rule-of-thumb. The GEO hasn’t much concerned itself with the indigenous sex trade to this point, but they are getting serious about the ‘flesh merchants’ who prey upon the poor and disadvantaged of Earth, importing them to Poseidon as ‘entertainers.’

“Bars and nightclubs are as popular as they ever were, from the posh hang-outs of Haven, to the dirty, cramped boom-town saloons. Gambling is big on Poseidon, and drinking establishments are a common forum for this pastime. Traditional card games like poker, bridge, and gin rummy are the most popular, followed closely by craps and other dice games. Kingston is currently Poseidon’s only true gambling town, and the waterfront casinos there offer many games of chance, including blackjack, bacarat, roulette, and old-fashioned slots.

“Travel costs have obviously prevented Earth’s professional sports leagues from taking root on Poseidon, but we have some nice alternatives. The dominant spectator sports on the planet are hydroshot and the annual Storm Belt 10,000.

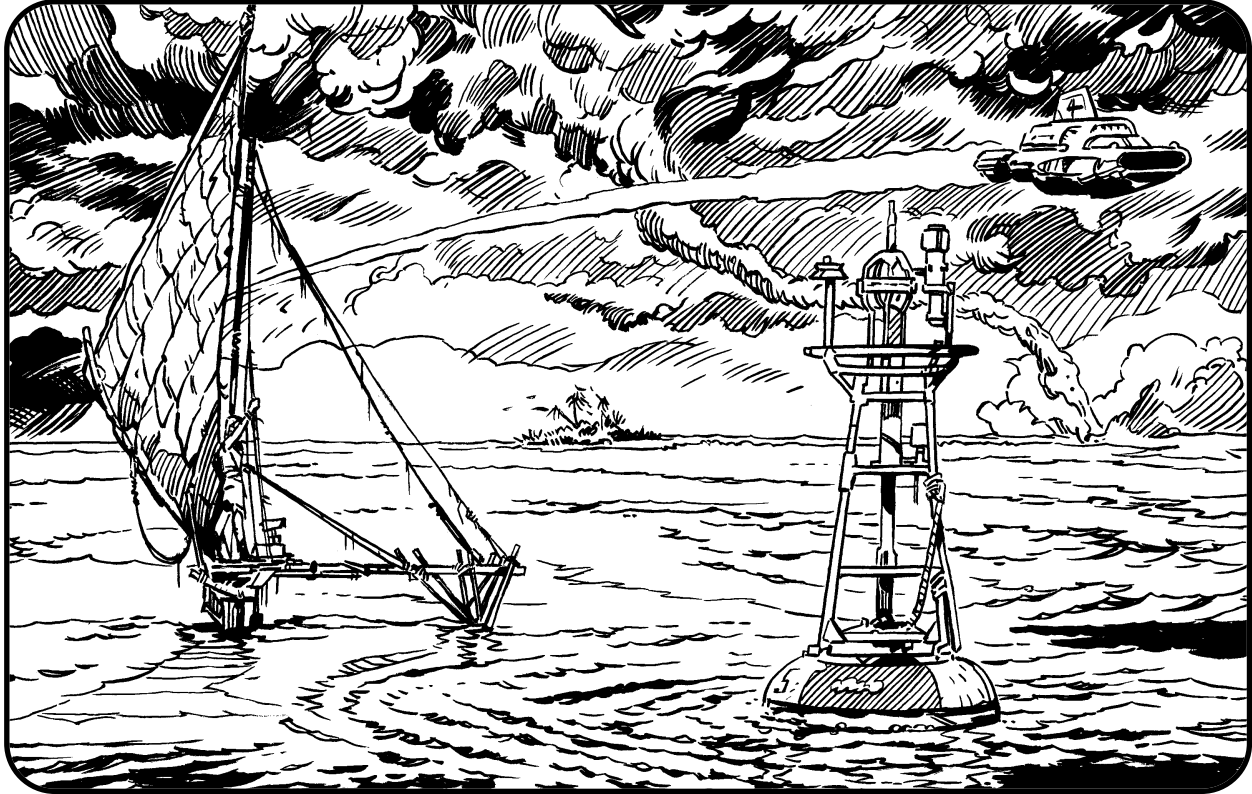
“You’ve probably heard of hydroshot, as it seems to have grabbed the imaginations of the media and sports

fans back on Earth. Hydroshot is a competitive team sport played between three six-person teams on a triangular, aquatic field. Players use a tubular ‘launcher’ to shoot the spherical puck, called a squirt, to teammates, eventually trying to score on one of the other teams’ goal. A goal scored against a team earns that team a point, and the team with the lowest score at the end of the game wins. While one team has possession of the squirt, the other two are trying to get it away from them before they can score. The game moves very fast, and it’s difficult to determine at any point which goal the offense will try to score against. This makes for some interesting defensive strategy: while a team doesn’t want the offense to score on their goal, they do want the offense to score against the other defensive team.

“There’s not a sport on Earth as action-packed and fast-paced. The rules on physical contact are more lenient than rugby or ice hockey, so it’s a rough game that often degenerates into some very entertaining three-way brawls. There are 24 professional hydroshot teams on Poseidon, including six dolphin teams. The human athletes are almost exclusively full aquaforms and still can’t compete with the dolphins. They’ve formed two separate leagues due to the dominance of the cetacean teams over the human competition. There are hydroshot facilities in most of the major settlements, and even if you’re not a sports fan, you should check out a game at the floating stadium in Haven. It’s a beautiful complex and a hell of an experience. A good seat for a regular-season game will run you 50 scrip.

“The other big sporting attraction on Poseidon is the Storm Belt 10,000. This is an annual endurance hydrofoil race (you guessed it, 10,000 kilometers) that runs from Haven to Wetland, straight through the Storm Belt at the height of the storm season. Participating hydrofoils aren’t supposed to be armed, but otherwise, this is a race with no rules. Dozens of craft are knocked out of the race each year by their competitors before a storm or greater white even has a crack at ‘em. The entry fee is 1,000 scrip, and with an average of 100 competitors, the purse is typically pretty fat. The winner usually ends up having to spend most of it on a new boat.

“The music scene on Poseidon is as varied and robust as most any city on Earth. The most original movement, of course, is the dolphin image-sound. This ‘music’ is made with production-quality recorders and digitizers based on the same principle as Pathfinder’s implant that I told you about. You can either view the recordings in holographic format or plug it into a neural jack to experience it something like the dolphin does. And don’t let the media fool you—I’ve jacked image-sound and it hasn’t made me crazy. A number of really excellent orchestras and pop-groups perform concerts on CommCore, and it’s a hell of a way to spend an evening. Jacking it live is always way better than any recording.



“The native tribal sound is also real popular right now, but if you ask me, it sucks. The stuff you find in the clubs and music stores is sell-out crap. It may seem pretty cool if you’ve never heard the real thing—that’s why the media corps export it to Earth. Around here, no one listens to it except tourists. There are some cool groups in Kingston, though, whose traditional reggae is influenced by native tribal. Influence is one thing, mimicry something else entirely. Check out Crest if you get a chance—they’re doing some rockin’ stuff, and they play the Kingston waterfront clubs most every night.

“Well. Now that you’ve waded through this pile of download, it’s time for you to come and experience Poseidon for yourself. You have a chance to see this planet at its best, before the government, the

Incorporate, and mass-culture turn it into an Earth suburb. For now, Poseidon is teetering on the edge of history, and civilization is still a struggling island in a sea of wilderness. The page will turn, and the frontier will be tamed. Progress marches on. Try to live a little before it runs you down.”

A final image emerges from the holoprojector. An endless blue seascape at sunset stretches from horizon to horizon, a lonely catamaran drifting lazily in the foreground. The camera zooms out as three VTOLs scream into view, bank, and disappear into the clouds.