

TERRA NOVA

Sample file

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
The Contract	4
The Twist	4
The Backstory	4
The Investigation	5
Complications	5
The Choice	5
PLAYING GUMSHOE WITH VARIABLE SUSPECTS	6
The Suspect Roles	6
How It Works in Play	6
Troubleshooting	7
Adapting the Scenario for Subplots	7
The Suspects	8
SCENES	9
Contract Briefing	9
A Bumpy Approach	10
Navigating the Terra Nova	11
Attack of the Drones	18
Death Fields Galore	20
Avoid the Void	20
This Ain't a Rescue,	21
It's an Arms Race	21
The Violent Solution	24
Denouement	25
APPENDIX A: SUSPECT WRITE-UPS	26
Cody Mason, Systems Engineer	26
Aime Antla, Washed-Up Entertainer	27
Theodora Simon, Vas Mal Physician	29
Cheshire-U, Cybe Coder	30
Enha Riverwend, Balla Diplomat	32

Sample file



INTRODUCTION

Terra Nova is a scenario for a Laser crew of 3 to 5 people, set on what remains of an old Combine-era luxury liner that's now adrift in space due to sabotage. It relies mainly on the use of Technical and Interpersonal abilities. There are at least three significant action sequences which all take place groundside; ship-to-ship action isn't as central to this scenario as some others.

THE CONTRACT

The Lasers are to travel to the *Terra Nova*'s last known position, ascertain its status, investigate the cause of the disaster, and provide a full report to the company. They also want any survivors evacuated if possible. The contract is a private one, served by Tiara Cruise Lines, the owner of the vessel. No salvage rights are given.

THE TWIST

The vessel is not all that it appears to be. It's secretly housing a doomsday weapon of immense power; designed to shred space-time and render a whole region of space uninhabitable. One of the surviving crewmembers is actually a saboteur who wishes to kill the rescue party and use their ship to tow the technology away. The culprit could be any of the survivors; see *Playing GUMSHOE with Variable Suspects* on page 6 for more details.

THE BACKSTORY

As a measure of desperation in the darkest parts of the Mohilar War, the Combine government created a terrible weapon of mass destruction: a quantum singularity generator that would destroy everything within the reach of a star system. They planted it on a luxury liner, the *Terra Nova*, with the consent of Tiara Cruise Lines, flying under heavy escort in a show of open defiance. They hoped that the Mohilar would consider it an irresistible target and attack it with one of their primary fleets.

The War ended before that attack came. Tiara could not disassemble the weapon without also disabling the vessel, and it was in dire financial straits, spending all its operating capital simply on maintaining what remained of its fleet. In addition, the memory-damping effect of the War created a new problem: even the scientists who'd worked on the device could barely remember what they'd done, let alone how to safely dismantle it. So they merely left it there, a dark secret buried in the *Nova*'s engine core.

One of the guests has discovered the truth of the *Terra Nova* and wishes to steal the weapon. Which character ends up as the culprit also determines the motive for the theft; see the individual write-ups for details starting on page 26. The plan is to stage a catastrophic accident, kill the inevitable rescue party, and take their vessel with the doomsday weapon in tow.

The culprit brought a specially constructed nanovirus on board to infiltrate the ship's computer system - once inside, it allowed access to the navigational data, allowing the culprit to plant false star charts. Then it infiltrated the security system, putting the ship's entire compliment of security drones under the saboteur's control. Finally, it created nanomolecular stress points at strategic locations in the *Terra Nova*'s hull.

ASHEN STARS



The culprit also poisoned the one person who might catch the sabotage in time to stop it - the ship's hailer, a human named Nolan Seif - by tainting his pre-shift meal.

Everything went exactly as planned. The pilot used the false data and slammed the Terra Nova right into a dense meson shrapnel cloud. The ship was thrown out of warp, and the sabotage to the hull ensured that a vast majority of the crew and passengers were killed when the hull breached just so.

The only hitch was that the weapon partially activated in the disaster. Now, parts of the vessel have turned into a death trap, suffused with small rips in space-time that consume anything in their path.

The secret of the Terra Nova is laid bare, and the rescue party is on its way. All the culprit has to do is survive them.

THE INVESTIGATION

The crew starts with the *Contract Briefing* (page 9). They attempt to navigate the meson shrapnel cloud surrounding the ship in *A Bumpy Approach* (page 10). They explore the wreckage in *Navigating the Terra Nova* (page 11), where they begin to learn just how wrong things on the ship are - the strange nature of the ship's engine core, the hailer's murder, and the depths of the computer sabotage.

Their suspicions of wrongdoing are further confirmed when things try to kill them. Reprogrammed security drones come after them in *Attack of the Drones* (page 18), revealing the nanobots as the chief mechanism used to create all the havoc on board.

During their exploration of the ship, they'll also meet the five survivors. Eventually, interactions with them lead to a suspicion that one of more of them is the saboteur - see the *Playing GUMSHOE with Variable Suspects* (page 6) to see how this goes down.

As soon as they discover which of the survivors is the culprit, it comes down to a confrontation to see if they can stop the saboteur from stealing their ship and escaping with the doomsday weapon in *This Ain't a Rescue, It's an Arms Race* (page 21).

COMPLICATIONS

As previously mentioned, the doomsday weapon has partly activated. PCs run into the lethal space-time shredder in *Death Fields Galore* (page 20).

If the security drones don't get to the PCs, the nanobots have another plan up their not-actually sleeves - dropping the containment field protecting the hull breaches and trying to suck the PCs out into space! See *Avoid the Void* (page 20).

THE CHOICE

Depending on how things roll out in the concluding scene, the culprit might attempt to engage the PCs in a side deal to let them profit from allowing the culprit to get away with the doomsday weapon.

If they decide to take down the culprit, the weapon is theirs to do with as they please. The obviously moral thing to do is destroy it, but there's a lot of potential profit to be had from selling it, not to mention power to be had by keeping it.



PLAYING GUMSHOE WITH VARIABLE SUSPECTS

This scenario also introduces a new idea for how to handle the culprit in your GUMSHOE games. Even though this is an *Ashen Stars* module, you could do this with any of the games in the system.

In most GUMSHOE cases, you define the culprit and his or her (or its, in the case of this game) motives as part of the preliminary work of crafting the case, usually when you make up the Twist. In *Terra Nova*, any one of the NPCs in the scenario could be the culprit - you decide which one of them it's going to be when you play it through by gauging the reactions of the Laser crew.

THE SUSPECT ROLES

Each of the NPCs comes with a writeup that defines the three major roles they play in *Terra Nova*: the innocent, the red herring, and the culprit.

The innocent is the default state of any character when the PCs first meet them. The notes include a general personality sketch, as well as all the non-incriminating clues they have to offer the PCs when encountered.

The red herring is a character who arouses suspicion, but is not the actual culprit. Usually, the red herrings in modern procedurals are interesting characters in their own right, hiding a secret, engaging in scandal, or attempting some other crime that is not relevant to the case currently under investigation. The notes include a floating clue that you plant in order to direct suspicion to that character, as well as companion clues which eventually absolve him or her of guilt.

The culprit is, of course, the one responsible for the sabotage of the *Terra Nova* and the deaths of a majority of her passengers and crew. The smoking gun

that identifies the culprit is a nanovirus infection that allows him or her to remotely control what remains of the ship's operational systems. Each suspect has a different means by which the PCs discover their control of the nanobots. The notes also include information on motives, similar to the red herring, to show how that NPC developed the will and drive to commit such a heinous act.

HOW IT WORKS IN PLAY

The PCs run into the NPCs at certain points during the section called *Navigating the Terra Nova*, on page 11. It's their mission to find survivors, and some of the existing clues point toward the NPCs, so the players might decide to go looking for one of them. This automatically succeeds; don't hesitate to bring them in as soon as possible.

If the crewmembers don't go looking, have them run into one the NPCs by coincidence every other location or so that they check.

Start by playing each NPC according to the notes given for them in the innocent role and gauge how the crew reacts to them. Each of them has a strong personality, which hopefully brings out some sort of favorable or unfavorable reaction from the crew members. At some point, the players might even start making direct accusations.

As soon you have a clear idea of where the group stands with the suspects, you can "lock" the NPCs into the roles they're going to have for the rest of the scenario and start adding the special clues.

How are you supposed to know which role to assign each NPC? Follow these guidelines: