

**ARTIFACT RETRIEVAL CORPS**  
**Orientation Handbook v1.0**

## 1.1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Welcome to the Corps, Kid.

I'd tell you this was the greatest job you'd ever have, but that would be a lie.

The Artifact Retrieval Corps is hard work on strange worlds, often populated by disgruntled species who think you're there to steal their gods.

The good news is that you are helping the worlds of the Intersellar Congress. Each artifact you help recover brings us one step closer to unlocking the secrets of the ancients. And one step closer to protecting ourselves from those fraggin Asheys. Asheys you ask? That what we old-timers call them sentients that been blowing things up across the galaxy. We call em Asheys cause thats all that they leave behind when they strike. But more on them later. Sometime before you leave basic training you will get a full briefing on what we know about them, which ain't much, as well as the other major knwn species in the galaxy.

## 1.2 Personal Data

Believe me when I tell you that I don't much care who you are or where you came from. I talk to dozens like you every cycle. But the Corps does care who you are, so your first job is to fill out that sheet in the back of your packet.<sup>2</sup>

Yeah, that one there, it asks for a physical description, your history, personality, and another notes you think you should share. Now, as I said, I don't care if you do or you don't but it will make the rest of the orientation process a lot easier, and either way, your commanding officer will probably make you fill it out before he lets you do shore duty any way. You're also going to want to note your age on the front of that sheet.

Did I mention this was going to be transcribed? Well, it is, so it occasion it seems like I'm talking to someone else, that's why. Deal with it.

Anyway, if I had to guess why you are here, and I don't, I would

<sup>1</sup>Transcribed from Training Session led by Sergeant-Major Nathan Wold.

<sup>2</sup>Start by filling out the top of the left-hand column of your character sheet – name, age, player. Set your rank to 1, unless you wish to be an experienced member of the A.R.C. Then fill out the left-hand column of the back of your character sheet. This will give you and your play group a sense of who you are. If you need more of a sense of the world before you can make these decisions, flip to section <XX>.

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| NAME:   |             |
| AGE:    | RANK: ○○○○○ |
| PLAYER: |             |

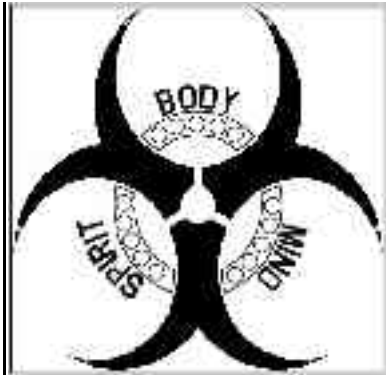
|             |
|-------------|
| DESCRIPTION |
|             |
|             |
| HISTORY     |
|             |
|             |
|             |
| PERSONALITY |
|             |
|             |
|             |
| NOTES       |
|             |
|             |
|             |



Spirit.<sup>5</sup> It is from these that we are able to calibrate your personal reader. These also give a good sense of just what you are going to be able pull off in the field.

Body and Mind are pretty self-explanatory. After encountering a vast number of beings over the years, the Interstellar Congress has a pretty grip of what sentients are capable of and have set a five-point scale to describe them. The higher your rating, the better you compare to the rest of the sentients in the galaxy.

Spirit is a little more nebulous. I mean, it works the same way, with the Interstellar Congress' scale and all, but I've got a lot harder time wrapping my mind around what it is. Body is physical stuff. Mind is mental stuff. Spirit, well, I guess that's pretty much everything else. If you want a better description, go find a Murpei.



## 1.4 Your Status Meter

The first piece of gear you got when you got here is the most important piece of tech you will ever get from the Corps. It's your status meter and it tells us and you how you're doing.<sup>6</sup>

The basic tech is pretty low-brow. It's based on old Earth LEDs. That's why it lights up in those near little circles. Turns out LED-tech is pretty resistance to pretty much anything we've encountered out there. Go figure. Even the Earthers had all but given up on it a couple of centuries ago.

In addition to tracking your vitals, the Status Meter also tracks your ready ammo and your progress on the current mission. More on both of these later.

|           |                         |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| HEALTH    | ○○○○○<br>○○○○○          |
| ENDURANCE | ○○○○○<br>○○○○○          |
| POWER     | ○○○○○<br>○○○○○          |
| AMMO      | ○○○○○<br>○○○○○<br>○○○○○ |
| PROGRESS  | ○○○○○<br>○○○○○          |

## 1.5 The Rest of Your Gear

In addition to your Status Meter, you will be assigned weapons and ammo, armor, local currency for wherever you're headed, and a Rations Condensor.

Next to your Status Meter, your Rations Condensor is your other

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- 5 Fill in your Body, Mind, and Spirit now. Don't worry too much about the specifics. 1 is about as low as a sentient gets without being completely incapable of action in that area. 2 is base stock human standard. 3 is the median for sentients encountered by the Interstellar Congress. 5 is top of the line – as good as it gets.
- 6 Health, Endurance and Power are all computed from Body, Mind, and Spirit. Health is equal to your Body and the highest of your Mind and Spirit. Endurance is equal to your Mind plus the highest of your Body and Spirit. Power is equal to your Spirit plus the highest of your Body and Mind.



## **2.0 Artifact Retrieval Corps Timeline**

(CTY = Common Terran Year)

CTY 2014 – Uque-Klik diplomat assassinated by Naa'gan rebels. In an already tense political climate due to an unspoken arms race between various species and economic imperialism, this was the last spark before multi-species declarations of war.

CTY 2015 - Murpei battleship crash-landed in North America territories. Survivors initiate First Contact with Earth. Terran scientists begin immediately translating the technology into Earth-equivalents.

CTY 2018 – The first Terran battleships leave the Lunar shipyards. Later that year, the First Great Cease Fire is signed.

CTY 2019 – Terran President Franklin is instrumental in Earth joining the Interstellar Congress as a full member.

CTY 2037 – After nearly two decades of guerrilla warfare, the First Great Cease Fire is formally broken.

CTY 2039 – The first Second Stage Humans are recognized on Earth.

CTY 2041 – Earth is the last member of the Interstellar Congress to re-enter the Galactic War.

CTY 2043 – The inclusion of Second Stage Humans into the war-effort turn the tide for Earth and her allies.

CTY 2045 – The Second Great Cease Fire brings a second uneasy, but much lauded peace to the galaxy.

CTY 2061 – The Second Stage Uprising begins on Earth. The Uprising lasts for four years at which time the Second Stage Pact is signed, guaranteeing Second Stage Humans full citizenship and sovereignty in exchange for each Second Stager serving five years of military service.

CTY 2071 – Discovery of Ancient's artifacts on various Congress worlds leads to the formation of the Artifact Recovery Corps.

CTY 2086 – A revision to Terran charter allows Second Stage Humans to serve their five year terms with the Artifact Recovery Corps, along with other officially sanctioned service organizations.

CTY 2101 – Unclaimed terrorist activities on several Congress worlds causes a new arms race and a renewed focus on artifact recovery as a source of new technologies to use against the unseen threat.

CTY 2106 – Standard starting date for ARC campaigns.

### **3.0 Basic Conflict Mechanic**

When a conflict is declared, you should decide if you are going to take a mental (governed by the Mind attribute), physical (governed by the Body attribute), or spiritual (governed by the Spirit attribute) approach to it.

Then determine which of your traits are applicable. Consider anything listed in the first two columns of the front of your character sheet, as well as any appropriate weapons or armor if the conflict is a combat.<sup>8</sup>

You may use one trait (get one die) for each pip in the governing attribute for free. Each additional trait (die) you choose to use will cost you an Endurance pip. In addition, each Power trait you choose to use will cost you one power pip.

The conflict will have it's own pool of dice. Roll your pool against the pool of the conflict. Then take turns, starting with the pool with the highest value showing, comparing dice.

A side may remove dice in one of two ways.

- 1) Finesse. Match the sum of the values showing on any number of your dice against the value of any one opposition die exactly. Remove your dice and the opposition die.
- 2) Power. Choose one die, remove one or more opposition dice whose total is strictly less than the value shown on your die. Remove your die and the opposition die. If you remove more than one opposition die, spend one Endurance pip per extra die removed.

Rotate around the table, until one side has no dice remaining.

The side with dice remaining wins. If the last move removed all dice from the table, the side who initiated the last move wins. In most conflicts, the winning side gets what they want. In addition, each player with dice remaining discards one die and sets the rest aside to re-roll for free as part of their next conflict.

If the conflict was a combat, the losing side loses one Health pip per die remaining for the winning side, unless the winning side decides to "pull their punch".

### **3.1 Disadvantages**

Even if applicable, a player need never apply a disadvantage to a conflict. However, if they choose to, there are two effects.

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<sup>8</sup> Combat will be dealt with specifically in a separate section.

- 1) The conflict gets an additional die for the conflict based on the size of the disadvantage.
- 2) The player gets a number of extra pips equal to the size of the disadvantage.

Disadvantages NEVER not count against the number of traits a player may use for “free”.

### 3.2 Combat

Combat is a special type of conflict that can use weapons and armor and will often lead to a loss of health pips on one side or the other.

In combat, often one or more weapons will be appropriate. In general, a player may only use one weapon unless they have another trait that allows multiple weapons to be used at once.

When using a weapon, the skill die does count against the number of dice a character can use for free, but the damage does not. By using a weapon, you get the extra damage die automatically.

If the weapon is a ranged weapon, one ammo pip is spent EACH TIME the character compares and removes dice. If the character is using multiple ranged weapons, then one ammo pip PER WEAPON is spent each time the character compares and removes dice.

Armor also does not count against the number of dice a character can use for free. Two special rules apply to the armor trait.

- 1) Armor is ablative. Instead of taking health pips in damage, a character wearing armor removes pips of armor first. This DOES reduce the effectiveness (the size of the armor die) of the armor for the next combat.
- 2) Armor with a rating of 5 pips or more only provides a d12 in combat. If it is reduced below 5 pips (from damage), the armor provides dice like any other trait.

By default, the loser of a combat loses one health pip per die remaining in the winner's pool. However, the winner of a combat may choose to “pull his punch”. Mechanically, the winner removes one or more dice of damage and may set them aside to use in their next conflict as if it were a non-combat conflict.

### 3.3 What Size Dice Do I Roll?

The size of the die you roll for a particular trait is based on the number of pips assigned to that trait.

- 1 pip = d4
- 2 pips = d6
- 3 pips = d8
- 4 pips = d10
- 5 pips = d12



**Second Stage Human** – Second Stage Humans represent the next stage in Human evolution and as such may have powers. Their evolutionary advantages are not yet stable, so they vary widely. The Second Stage Human background trait allows the purchase of powers.

**Base Line Human** – Just plain folks. Baseline humans make up the bulk of the Terran population. The universe seems to like humans and as a result, the Human background trait maybe applied to any situation – they are just that lucky.

**Replicated Intelligence** – Most robots are dumb, good for a small range of tasks. Replicated Intelligences carry the mental and spiritual essence of a formerly living Sentient and can perform any task within the capability of their new body. R.I.'s have all the legal rights of their original status, but have limited rights to obtaining additional wealth or status. It is illegal to replicate the intelligence of a still-living sentient (though it can be recorded). It is also illegal to have more than one replicate of a given sentient active at any given time. The Replicated Intelligence background trait may be applied whenever a non-living body would be an advantage.

Replicated Intelligences cannot use Food and Water to recover Health Endurance or Power. They can use Power to recover Endurance and must use Wealth to recover Health, but only between missions. This background trait may be used like armor (but is not ablative).

Other possible racial backgrounds include other alien species and cross-bred species.

#### **4.2.1.2 Other Backgrounds**

Other backgrounds capture other aspects of a character's early life. Some examples are provided, but as with all traits, the play group is encouraged to make up additional traits during play.

**Academic** – You were either raised by professional academics, or by parents who highly valued education. You may apply this trait at any point when book-learning would be an advantage.

**Military** – One or both of your parents were in the military during the last great war, and more than likely you were raised on a military station or battleship. You may apply this trait when dealing with military personal or equipment.

**Orphaned** – Both of your parents died when you were young and there was no one else willing or able to raise you. Growing up on the streets means you may apply this trait when dealing with street level crime.









## 5.0 Running the Game

There are a couple of factors to determine before running A.R.C. First, do you plan to run a one-shot (or short-term game) or a longer campaign? Second, will your game be GM-less or GM-lead.

If you plan on running a short-term story, all player characters will share a goal (possibly one of two, if GM-less, see below) and a progress track. Each conflict that ends in success for the PCs will add one pip to their progress track. Goals will nearly always be the recovery of a specific artifact or an artifact from a specific location (imagine the interstellar equivalent of finding Atlantis or Shangri La).

If on the other hand, you plan on running a longer campaign, each player character is encouraged to have their own goal and progress track. Further, progress along their track will be frequent, perhaps one pip a session, if that PC made meaningful progress toward their goal during the session.

If the game is GM-less, players will take turns posing challenges to their fellows. In a one-shot or short-term game, players are encouraged to break into two artifact hunting teams. Then players will pose conflicts to the 'opposing' team. In a longer campaign, the choice of target of conflict can be more free-form. Players should keep in mind the goals of their fellows and pose conflicts that not only fit with the target's current situation, but also have the potential to move them toward their goal.

In a GM-lead game, one person (the GM) will have responsibility for planning the general path of the expedition (in a short term game) or shaping the flavor of the campaign in a longer game.

The following section has guidelines for creating conflicts in a GM-less game. The guidelines may also be used either wholesale, or for inspiration, in a GM-lead game.

### 5.1 Conflict Generation

Before a session, the play group should create a Conflict Scaling table. In essence, the table consists of a series of rows where in each player enters their highest pip rating in each category (including attributes, weapons, and armor).

Then, identify the second highest rating in each column (or category) and record these as the Conflict Baseline Values. There is no need for Health, Endurance, Power or Ammo. Non-character combat opponents always yield, conflicts never roll extra dice, or run out of power or ammo. (Naturally, this does not

#### **An Example:**

*Arthur, Anna, and George sit down to play a session of A.R.C. Gilbert has agreed to run the game, but will be relying on the conflict charts. They have all played before and have their characters ready. They decide in advance that this will be a one-shot game.*

*Arthur is running a second-stage human who worked in retail before enlisted for his allotted time. His highest background is Second Stage at a 5, his best profession is Sales at a 4, his best hobby is logic puzzles at a 5, his best power is regeneration at a 3, he has taken near-sighted as a disadvantage at a 2, quick-witted as an advantage at a 3, and is trained with needle guns at a skill of 5 and damage 3. His body is 2, his spirit 1, and his mind 5. He does not wear armor.*

*Anna is an R.I. Her best trait ratings are Background 1, Profession 5, Hobbies 1, no powers, Disadvantage 3, Advantage 4, Weapon Skill 3, Weapon Damage 5, and Armor 5. Body 4, Mind 4, Spirit 5.*

*Similarly, George is a Naa'gan with the following best traits: Background 3, Profession 5, Hobbies 2, no powers, Disadvantage 3, Advantage 5, Weapon Skill 4, Weapon Damage 2, and Armor 6. Body 4, Mind 3, Spirit 3.*

*Taking the second best rating in each category gives the following Conflict Baseline Values:*

*Background: 3  
Profession: 5 (two 5's and 4 mean that 5 is the second highest even though it's tied)  
Hobbies: 2  
Powers: None  
Disadvantages: 3  
Advantages: 4  
Weapon Skill: 4  
Weapon Damage: 3  
Armor: 5  
Body: 4  
Mind: 4  
Spirit: 3*

*These traits will be the basis for any conflicts the trio encounter along the way.*

mean they won't come back for vengeance at another point; only that they will back down for at least the duration of this scene.)

Roll dice on each of the following tables to get a sense of the nature of the conflict:

### Governing Attribute (d6)

| Value Rolled | Attribute   |
|--------------|---|
| 1-2          | Body – A physical conflict of some sort; possibly a trap, physical combat, or a physical obstacle |
| 3-4          | Mind – A mental conflict of some sort; most likely a puzzle                                       |
| 5-6          | Spirit – A spiritual conflict of some sort; possibly psychic combat or a spiritual dilemma.       |

The Governing Attribute determines the number of dice used in the conflict (based on the Conflict Baseline Values) and the general type of Conflict.

### Type of Conflict(d8)

| Value Rolled | Attribute   |
|--------------|---|
| 1            | Combat – Weapons and armor of the appropriate time may be used  |
| 2-3          | Combat if a Body Conflict, otherwise Damaging Non-Combat – Weapons may be used in combat. Armor may be used regardless. Damaging non-combat is a trap or dilemma that will lead to the character(s) involved losing health if they lose the conflict. |
| 4-5          | Damaging Non-Combat   |
| 6-8          | Simple Conflict – No weapons or armor may be used, no damage can result from failure.   |

### Magnitude of Conflict(d6)

| Value Rolled | Attribute  |
|--------------|--|
| 1-3          | Low – Choose the smallest N applicable dice (where N is the number of pips in the governing attribute)   |
| 4-5          | Median – Choose the middle N applicable dice (when in doubt, discard the highest die first and then the lowest until the proper number of dice is reached) |
| 6            | High – Choose the highest N dice.  |

When N is 5, there will be little difference between Low and High. The categories that dice come from should help shape the specifics of the conflict.

### Inclusion of Cache(d4)

| Value Rolled | Attribute   |
|--------------|---|
| 1-3          | No Cache  |
| 4            | Cache is found at end of conflict, if players win the conflict. |

Caches are used for restocking supplies. See below.

### An Example, continued:

The players encounter their first conflict, and Gilbert rolls to determine its nature.

Governing Attribute – rolled a 2. It will be some sort of physical conflict. As a result it will use 4 dice (based on the Baseline Conflict Value for Body).

Type of Conflict – rolled a 3. Since it is a physical conflict, it is going to be combat of some sort.

Magnitude of Conflict – rolled a 6, this will be a high magnitude combat, using the best four traits listed on the Baseline Conflict Values: Profession (5), Armor (5), Advantages (4), and Weapon Skill (4).

Clearly, Gilbert decides, the PCs have offended someone powerful and well-trained assassins have been sent after them. Given the lack of Weapon Damage, this suggests low-damage high-skill weapons. He does not need to fill in the details, but decides that these are the local equivalent of Ninja (d12 Professions), with hightech low weight armor (d12 Armor), a special knack with stealth (d10 Advantage) and throwing stars (d10 Weapon Skill).

Rolling for the inclusion of a cache, Gilbert gets a 4, indicating that the local equivalent of ninja carry all their supplies with them. Clearly imported from outside the local area.

Since the game has just started, the Ninja do not get any progress dice from the players. A good thing given the pool of dice they are starting with....

Based on the results of the rolls, the current situation, and the goals of the players, describe the conflict. Then,

- (1) Add appropriate Disadvantage dice to both sides. Players choose to activate their disadvantages. Conflicts must activate them in face of APPROPRIATE description by players often as based on flavor.
- (2) Add Progress Dice to the conflict pool for EACH PLAYER CHARACTER opposing the conflict. Note there is a difference between each player leaping a gorge (rolled as several solo conflicts - but worth at most one progress pip in a one-shot game) and the players working together to build a bridge across the gorge (rolled as a single conflict, but with multiple sets of progress dice added to the pool).

Finally, resolve the conflict as described in the earlier section.

### **5.1.1 What if my character doesn't have any appropriate traits?**

This is a valid question and where your extra pips come in. In population fiction, media, and television, characters often conveniently come up with previously unrevealed backgrounds, training, or powers that are JUST THE THING for their current dilemma. A.R.C. awards extra pips to be used to simulate this sort of situation. If you find yourself facing a conflict with no dice, or in your opinion not enough or not large enough dice, you may reveal to your fellow players that you had a trait that would be perfect for the situation. If they think your explanation is sufficiently plausible, cool enough, or are generally feeling amiable, then you merely have to pay the number of pips you wish to assign to the trait and then may use it as if you always had it.

On the other hand, if your fellow players call foul for some reason, then you can still get the trait, you must merely pay more for it. As a general rule, you must pay two extra pips for each pip in the new trait if your fellows disagree with your explanation. As an optional rule, the cost multiplier goes up by one for EACH other player who is opposed to you picking up the trait. (For example, if you are playing with three other players and suddenly reveal that you trained with Naa'gans during college and all three disagree, you can still get 3 pips of Naa'gan combat training, but must pay  $3 \times 4 = \text{TWELVE}$  extra pips for it. 3 for the pips time 4 = 1 + 3 players who disagree with your explanation.)



## **6.0 Setting**

Artifact Retrieval Corps is designed to be heavily customized during play. Feel free to ignore any of the setting information presented this far in the book and certainly any that follows. It is provided to give you a jumpstart when designing your A.R.C. Universe.

### **6.1 Who are the Murpei?**

One of the big game secrets in the setting as written are the Murpei. Who or what are they? Below we present some options. Any or all (or none) of the following may be true.

Regardless of the truth, no one besides the Murpei themselves are allowed on, or even to scan, the Murpei homeworld.

#### **6.1.1 Strange Plant Women**

The Murpei are not animal-based lifeforms at all, but instead are sentient, mobile plants. In this option, they don't actually get food from their R.C., just water and nutrients. The reason they only show up as female is because that's what they look like.

#### **6.1.2 Secret Amazon Conquerers**

Some say the Murpei are much like the Earth myth of Amazons. They are a planet of Warrior Women. The few Murpei who interact with the outside universe are specially trained ambassadors – and spies.

#### **6.1.3 The Ancient Ones**

The Murpei are actually the Ancient Ones, the creators of the Artifacts that are the main focus of the Artifact Retrieval Corps. Time has separated from them the locations of all of the artifacts and the means to manufacture them, but the Murpei recall hiding them against a time when they would be needed.

### **6.2 Replicated Intelligences**

Replicated intelligences are a fairly new addition to the setting. There are still a large number of legal and status issues around them. However, they have sufficient rights to serve in the Artifact Retrieval Corps, which is one of the few authorized methods for them to obtain funds.

## **6.3 Second Stage Humans**

Second stage humans first appeared approximately 60 years ago. When they first appeared, their assistance with the war effort led to their being hailed as heroes. However, during peace time and as their numbers increased, they were treated with increasing distrust.

Approximately 40 years ago, a charismatic second stage human led an uprising against the increasing social pressures opposing second stagers. Several years of conflict followed, but in the end, second stagers were granted extended rights in exchange for mandatory military service.

Twenty years ago, the Second Stage Charter was altered to expand the types of mandatory service Second Stagers could do to fulfill their legal responsibilities. As a result, a large number of Second Stagers have signed up for the A.R.C.

## **6.4 The Asheys**

The bad guys of the setting are the Asheys. They are mysterious aliens who appear to have minor shape-shifting abilities and the ability to blow themselves and their ships up at will. Their shape-shifting abilities are sufficient to appear similar to the natives of a given location, but not like a specific native.

So far, their activities have been limited to terrorist-style attacks, blowing themselves up in crowded areas, to destroy notable structures, and the like. No communication from a central Ashey command has provided the Interstellar Congress with any explanation for the attacks.

Player characters are unlikely to encounter the Asheys on retrieval missions. And, if Asheys are encountered, the aliens are likely to blow themselves up rather than engage the PCs. As a result, stats are not provided for the Asheys. Treat avoiding an Ashey explosion as a physical damaging non-combat conflict.

## 7.0 Running a Campaign

When running a campaign, each player character should have their own goal toward which they are making progress. This will be in addition to any missions they are sent on by the A.R. Corps. Goals need not be the retrieval of physical objects, but can be the discovery of secrets, earning the respect of one's parents, or other less tangible goals.

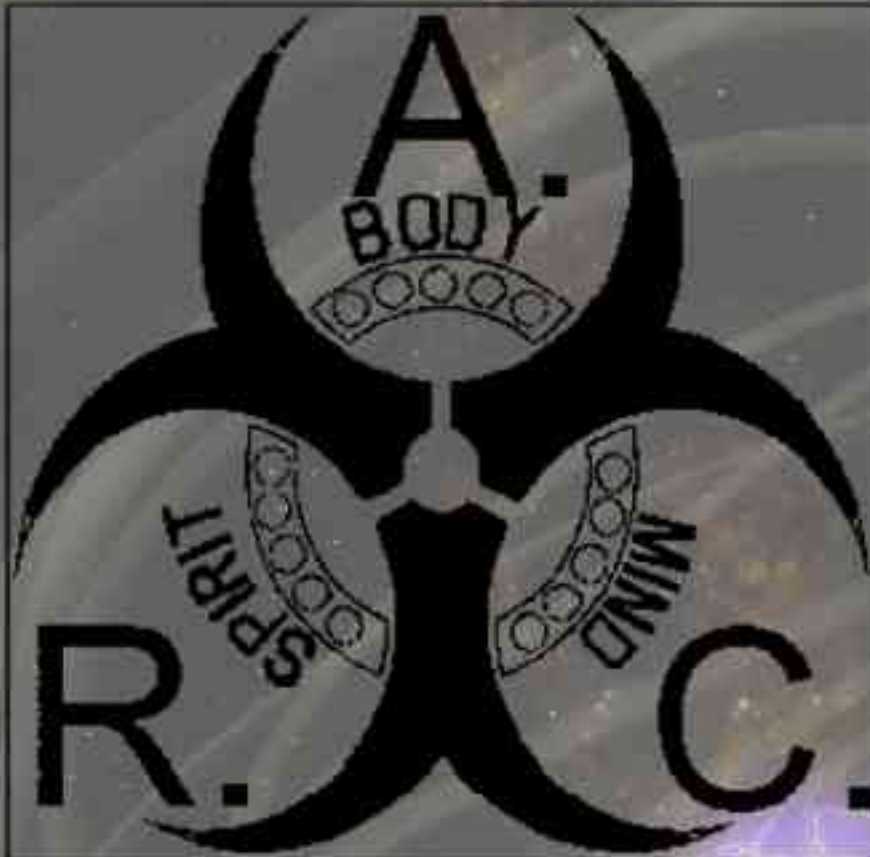
Play will include not only interactions with each other (and NPCs) during missions, but also between mission and off-mission interactions. In a one-shot, a visit to one's homeworld to see family and friends is unlikely, but in a campaign this is not only plausible but encouraged.

At the end of each successful mission, player characters may roll a challenge against their current rank to see if they are promoted to the next rank. Such a promotion does not cost any extra pips to implement. In the challenge, players roll dice based on their current progress track (up to 2d12) against their current rank, plus the dice based on the number of pips not currently filled in on their progress track. If successful, they gain the promotion and may take any extra pips as if it were a normal challenge. If they fail, there is no penalty. Characters who are promoted to 6 pips via this method become admirals and are retired from active missions. They may still remain active in the campaign, facing non-mission challenges.

Due to interstellar travel time, player characters age one year at the completion of each mission, successful or not. Each time you reach an age that is a multiple of ten, your character will roll a challenge pitting your full health against your age. Your effective age in pips is your age divided by 10. If your Health succeeds, there is no effect. If your age succeeds, the mission coordinators label you too infirm for field work and you assigned a desk job. You may still remain active in the campaign, facing non-mission challenges.







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## **8.0 Creator's Postlogue**

Artifact Retrieval Corps was created for the Reversed Engineering Game Competition by David 'Blue' Wendt, Ph.D. based on the original character sheet by Mike Wormley.

If you play this game and like it, I would love to hear from you. My e-mail address is: [blue@wendtonline.net](mailto:blue@wendtonline.net)

You may share this game with others, but this is my work, so you cannot sell it without talking to me (and Mike who created the character sheet) first.

The cover art (actually the last page in the PDF before this postlogue) is based on a public domain image obtained from Wikipedia Commons.