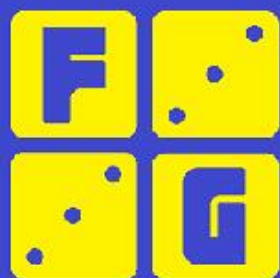# FREEFALL
The Role-Playing Game

The Comedic Sci-Fi Misadventure Game!

Freefall Created by Mark Stanley

Game Design by Matt Frisbee

FREEFALL

The Role-Playing Game

Freefall Created by Mark Stanley
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Welcome to *Freefall!*

Back on March 30th, 1998, Mark Stanley started e-publishing a webcomic that followed the misadventures of a group of misfits living on the human colony world of Jean. *Freefall* features a non-human cast of characters who show us what life might be like in a distant future where interstellar travel, intelligent robots and the terraforming of worlds are commonplace things. However, instead of taking things too seriously, Mark always makes sure to put a humorous spin on the ideas, concepts and contradictions that a future human society would naturally have.

Our heroes – a ne'er-do-well alien, a childlike robot and a genetically uplifted anthropomorphic wolf – have battled severe weather, a cantankerous spacecraft, a powerful megacorporation, a frustrated mayor and their own natures over the course of the years. Yet, they all somehow maintain a positive attitude toward the universe in general through all the friends and associates their actions have garnered along the way.

The *Freefall* universe is actually not too different from the one we live in today – it is still populated with humans, after all. That means that people still work for a living and have families, deal with bureaucratic agencies, go out to entertain themselves and so on. However, humanity is on a much larger stage in *Freefall* – other sentient races have been discovered by mankind, humans share their worlds with robots (some of whom own businesses or contemplate the nature of their existence), and have even altered themselves to better adapt and survive the challenges of life on planets besides Earth.

This role-playing game will allow the players to create their own unique characters and pursue their own sagas of misadventures on Jean. If desired, the players may also take on the roles of established characters from *Freefall* and create new stories and situations for them to overcome, plus have some laughs along the way. So, let's get started! Welcome to *Freefall The Role-Playing Game!*

PART ONE:

The Game
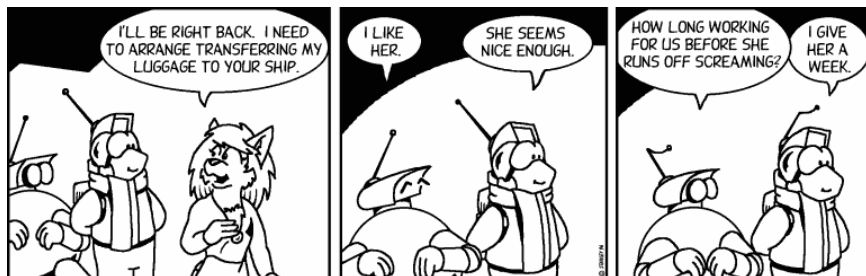
PROPULSION HAS SHIFTED OVER TO THE AIR TURBINES. EVERYTHING IS LOOKING GOOD.

I WONDER IF IT'S TOO LATE TO CHANGE MY BET FROM "CRASH AND BURN" TO "SAFE LANDING"?
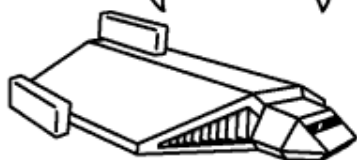
YOU BET ON US CRASHING?

IT WAS BEFORE WE GOT YOU, WHEN THE ODDS WERE HEAVILY IN MY FAVOR.

© Stanley 2004

YOU'RE GOING TO OWE ME FIVE BUCKS!

DON'T GET COCKY. IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR ME TO TAKE A DIVE.

Roleplaying 101

Role-playing games are essentially a variation on "Let's Pretend" from our younger days. However, a role-playing game (or **RPG** for short) has some rules to keep things somewhat orderly and uses dice (or another means for determining random results) to occasionally resolve the outcome of something somebody tries to do in the game. The *Freefall RPG* is a **tabletop game**, meaning it is intended for the players to be sitting around a table and describing the actions of their characters in the game. The other form of game, called a **LARP** (short for Live Action Role Playing), involves physically acting out a character's actions, much like a stage or screen actor would.

When you get a group of people together to play, one of them will need to be the **Director**. The Director (always capitalized) is the person who creates the situations and setting for the players' characters, plus he or she will take on the roles of all the **supporting cast** – the characters the players' characters will interact with during the course of a gaming session.

In general, the *Freefall RPG* works best with a group of two to five players, plus one Director. So that everyone gets a chance to play their favorite character, the position of Director should be taken by a different person from one game session to the next. If your group is comfortable with one person always being the Director, that works too.

The **players** are everybody else at the table who each assumes the role of a **character** in the game. The players' characters are the protagonists of the story or situations presented by the Director. Each player tells the Director what his or her character is doing, saying or attempting and the Director determines the outcomes, responses or situations that come from the protagonists' activities. This process continues until the situation or story is resolved, or (as typically happens) time runs out for the session.

Occasionally, a character attempts to do something in the game that is opposed by another character, is difficult or has some other variable that puts the outcome in doubt. In that case, the character must make a **task roll** using some six-sided dice to determine the outcome. The roll (along with other factors) helps determine whether or not the character is successful in the attempt or fails the attempt. The players and Director should each have a set of five six-sided dice (the ones that look like cubes) to roll during the game session.

The story may have a goal, but the prime purpose of playing the game is to have fun. If everybody is having fun, you're playing it right!

Game Systems

Every character has a number of **traits** that define what they're capable of or are experienced in doing. A character's traits are defined when that character is created for play, and will vary according to the individual. Traits can be *physical* ones such as being strong, smart or observant; *learned* ones such as piloting, history or stealth; or even *miscellaneous* ones such as robot, lucky or naïve. The good news here is that the player will generally decide which traits his or her character will have when that character is created. (The exception being when a player takes on the role of an established character such as Sam Starfall, Helix or Florence Ambrose, whose traits are already defined.) Most characters will have between seven and thirteen traits.

It should be noted here that characters start with six to nine **positive traits** (ones that will almost always help the character) and one to four **negative traits** (ones that will almost always hinder the character).

During play, players will often want their characters to do things – this is called performing a **task**. Most tasks are as simple as stating what the character is doing. If the Director decides that there isn't anything preventing the activity, it simply happens and the Director describes what happens as a result.

Some tasks are not so easy and require a **task roll**. In these cases, the player will roll one or more dice based on how many of his or her character's traits apply to the task at hand. If a character has no applicable traits, his or her player rolls only one die. For each trait that does apply to the task, the player rolls one additional die. The Director will also roll one die, plus one additional die for any traits an opposing supporting cast member can apply, and any negative traits the character has that would also apply to the task.

Both the Director and player roll their dice and compare the **high die** (the die showing the highest value) each has rolled. If the player's high die is more than or equal to the Director's high die, the character's task attempt succeeds. If the Director's high die is greater than the player's high die, the task attempt fails. Players and the Director are limited to applying up to three traits in any single task roll. Players may also apply one of their character's **fate dice** to a task. (There will be more about that later on.)

Once the task is resolved, check to see if any of the player's dice have **doubled** (i.e. show the same number as) the high die. If one or more dice have doubled the high die, then the player's success or failure is **amplified**. An amplified success indicates that the character has succeeded in the task beyond his or her expectations. An amplified

failure indicates that the task attempt was disastrous beyond any expectations and will have additional consequences. It is up to the Director to decide how the serendipity or adversity of an amplified result affects the character and the situation.

As an example, let's say Sam Starfall is attempting to negotiate a contract to replenish reactant mass to satellites orbiting Jean with a government bureaucrat. The player controlling Sam convinces the Director that a couple of Sam's traits – *con man* and *fast talker* – would help this task, giving him a total of three dice to roll. The Director decides that Sam's trait of *greedy* would work against him in this task, along with the negotiator's trait of *cheapskate*, so the Director will also roll three dice. The Director rolls 3, 4 & 5; while the player rolls 1, 3 & 4. The Director's high die is 5 while the player's is 4. Since the player's high die does not equal or exceed the Director's high die, the task fails. Sam's attempt to best the bureaucrat at negotiation fails. Since the player's dice didn't double the high die, there are no additional effects.

Failing a task roll isn't so bad for a character. As a consolation for failing a task, the character gains a **fate die**. Fate dice may be used later on during a gaming session to improve the chance of success of another task roll made by that character. A player may elect to expend one of his fate dice in any of his or her character's task rolls, especially those where the character is rolling fewer dice than the Director. Once a fate die is expended, it is gone. A character may only expend one fate die per task roll, and only on those tasks the character is making or resisting. A character cannot expend a fate die if there are no dice in his or her **fate dice pool**. Unused fate dice from one gaming session don't carry over to another one. (Fate dice are why players should have a full set of five dice.)

To continue our example from above, Sam would get a fate die for failing his task against the bureaucrat, and he could use it later on in the game session (even later in the same scene, if desired). If Sam's player doesn't use the fate die he earned before the game session ends, it is lost and Sam starts over with no fate dice in his pool when the next game session begins.

Conflict

While combat is rare on Jean, what little that does happen is the decidedly non-lethal variety. The preferred methods are unarmed or with sticks, pies and other bakery goods, plus the occasional robot mauling by a frustrated Bowman's Wolf. That's not to say there aren't lethal weapons on Jean (Pop Rivet had a shotgun, though he only loaded it with rock salt), but rather that within the genre of the webcomic, it generally doesn't happen.

Rather than get serious with combat (since the vast majority of it is done for humorous effect), the *Freefall RPG* uses **bonk tokens** to represent a setback in a conflict. Bonk tokens represent the embarrassment, inconvenience and frustration that piles up on members of the losing side of a conflict. A character collects a bonk token every time he or she is on the losing end of task in a conflict. A character who amasses six or more bonk tokens in a conflict, is either subdued, disillusioned, loses interest or otherwise concedes, and is out of action for the rest of that particular conflict. Bonk tokens can be represented by poker chips, pennies, pieces of candy or whatever happens to be handy. Once the conflict is over, the character loses all previous bonk tokens and suffers no ill effects other than the results of losing the conflict.

Conflict is conducted in a series of rounds, where each character and supporting cast member in the conflict attempts tasks. When a conflict begins, have every player roll a die – the character of the player with the highest roll (roll off any ties) gets to act first, and turns proceed clockwise around the table until all the characters and supporting cast have acted. Note that the Director does not roll – supporting cast members should never act first in a conflict round. Once everyone in the conflict has had the opportunity to act, the round is over. If there are still combatants remaining in the conflict, another round begins; if not, then the conflict is over.

To continue our saga of Sam and the bureaucrat, the cubical jockey decides to throw Sam out of the office via the nearest window and Sam decides to resist. It's time for a conflict! Since Sam is the only player character in this conflict, he automatically gets to go first in every round. Sam, being his ne'er-do-well self, decides to take his action to pickpocket the bureaucrat's wallet instead of fight! Sam's player will roll three dice (*sneaky* & *thief* traits) while the Director will only roll one die for the bureaucrat, since he has no traits that apply to this form of "attack." Sam's high die is 5 while the Director's die shows 3. Sam succeeds in procuring the bureaucrat's wallet! Because Sam succeeded in picking the bureaucrat's pocket, the bureaucrat collects a bonk token.

The bureaucrat takes his action to throw Sam through the window. The Director will roll two dice (the bureaucrat has the trait *stubborn*), while Sam's player will also roll two dice (expending the fate die he collected by failing the negotiation earlier since Sam has no applicable traits). The Director's high die is 4 compared to Sam's high die of 3. Sam is tossed through the window and collects his first bonk token of the conflict. Sam does not collect a fate die because he didn't fail a task he was attempting; he merely failed to resist someone else's task.

Sam starts the new round of conflict by trying to pull the bureaucrat through the window as he is thrown out. Sam rolls just one die, as does the Director (since the bureaucrat has no aiding traits either). Sam rolls a 3 while the bureaucrat rolls a measly 1. Sam pulls the bureaucrat through the window and the cubical jockey collects his second bonk token. The bureaucrat then tries to pick Sam's pocket (disguising it as an attempt to grapple), rolling two dice (*shady* trait) while Sam also rolls two dice (*sneaky* trait). The Director's high die of 6 bests Sam's high die of 4, and the bureaucrat picks Sam's wallet. Sam collects his second bonk token, though the bureaucrat "takes" it instead to cover his theft, giving him a total of three. (This is taking a little liberty with the rules, but the Director is allowed to do that occasionally to keep things interesting.)

On the third round of conflict, Sam decides to beat a hasty retreat by using his *artful dodger* trait and rolling two dice. The bureaucrat has no traits to add and the Director will roll one die. Sam's roll is double 6's while the bureaucrat's die is a 3. Sam achieves an exceptional success (since the task succeeded and the high die doubled), so the Director rules that the bureaucrat collects two bonk tokens for a total of five. The bureaucrat attempts to chase Sam, but has no applicable traits, so will only roll one die. Sam still gets his *artful dodger* trait and will roll two dice. Sam's high die of 4 beats the bureaucrat's 1 and the paper pusher puffs and pants to a stop, allowing Sam to escape. The bureaucrat collects his sixth bonk token and is out of the conflict. The conflict between Sam and the bureaucrat ends, since they were the only two combatants and the bureaucrat now has six or more bonk tokens. All participants remove their bonk tokens and continue the game. (Of course, all bets are off once they both discover their wallets are gone…)

PART TWO:

Characters

Character Creation

Characters are what role-playing games are all about. The players' characters are the protagonists in stories and situations presented by the Director. As such, the characters in the *Freefall RPG* are pretty special in their own ways. To reflect that, each character is defined by a number of **traits** that are selected and defined by the person playing the character.

Traits can either be broadly defined or can be more narrowly defined, depending upon the character. Most traits will be positive, though a few will be negative. A **positive trait** is one that will always help the character in a task. A **negative trait** is typically used against the character by others. Every character should start with six positive traits and one negative trait. For each positive trait beyond six, the character will also require another negative trait, up to a maximum of nine positive traits and four negative ones.

As an example, let's take a look at Sam Starfall. Sam is a squid-like alien being who stowed away aboard a human exploration spaceship and made his way to Jean. Since his arrival, he acquired an anthropomorphic environment suit that gives him a humanoid appearance. However, his natural tendencies as a member of a scavenger race have made him a constant source of annoyance for the local authorities and general populace of the planet as well. Sam is happiest when he makes a dishonest buck, but isn't really evil – he's just doing what comes naturally.

Sam starts with six positive traits and one negative one: *artful dodger, con man, fast talker, pilot, sneaky & thief* for his positive traits, and *greedy* for his negative trait. That isn't quite enough for Sam, however, so we'll add on a few more. *Duct tape, improvisation & trickster* are his additional positive traits, for which we add *alien, lazy & reputation* as negative traits.

It's important to adequately define a character's traits, though usually a sentence about the trait as it pertains to the character is enough for both the player and Director to get the idea of when and where it could apply. Characters may have some **notable gear** – that is, one or more items of note that they either possess or typically have on their person. Any benefits the character might gain from the gear should be noted in the item's description. To keep things simple, no character should have more than five items.

To get the idea of how make characters, check over the cast of characters from *Freefall* on the following pages!

Sam Starfall

Sam is a ne'er-do-well alien who came to Jean through many misadventures and has managed to both survive and thrive as a misfit in human culture. He is the owner and pilot of the *Savage Chicken* spaceship, plus pals around with Helix and Florence Ambrose.

POSITIVE TRAITS

Artful Dodger: Sam is surprisingly agile and quick which allows him to escape from dangerous situations quite easily.

Con Man: Sam is well-versed in the many ways to part fools from their money, plus has come up with many more on his own.

Duct Tape: Sam is incredibly capable for crafting things from and making repairs with duct tape.

Fast Talker: Sam has a talent for turning situations on their head and getting people to believe things and situations that simply aren't true.

Improvisation: Sam has a knack for making plans up on the fly as well as adapting and adjusting to current situations as needed.

Pilot: While he's not particularly skillful at it, Sam does have the rudimentary knowledge and instincts to fly spacecraft of all types.

Sneaky: Sam has much experience in the techniques of stealth and hiding both from his heritage and from his years among humans.

Thief: Sam is fairly effective at petty thievery, such as pickpocketing, fraud, breaking & entering and evading law-enforcement.

Trickster: Sam is particularly talented in orchestrating practical jokes and pranks on his friends and enemies.

NEGATIVE TRAITS

Alien: Sam isn't human and therefore can be quite naïve to various aspects of human culture and human nature.

Greedy: Coming from a scavenger culture, Sam occasionally gets obsessed about getting the most money possible from any situation.

Lazy: Sam goes by the old *Maverick* motto that "Hard work never hurt anybody who didn't do it" and avoids physical labor when possible.

Reputation: On Jean, Sam Starfall is a well-known con artist and troublemaker, with many adversaries including the Mayor.

NOTABLE GEAR

Duct Tape: Being quite talented with this stuff, Sam almost always has a roll of this waterproof cloth tape available for use.

Environment Suit: Sam uses this to give himself a humanoid form, plus it has a built-in light and allows him to endure a multitude of environments without problems.

The Savage Chicken: This broken down spacecraft was brought back to (barely) working condition by the dedicated work of Florence.

Helix

Helix is a wayward industrial robot that was originally designed as a somewhat intelligent forklift of sorts. Helix has a childlike aspect to his programming, being somewhat insecure, soft-hearted and innocent to the ways of the world. It has been demonstrated that Helix can easily be dismantled and reassembled.

POSITIVE TRAITS

Animal Friendship: Helix gets along surprisingly well with animals of all types, frequently adopting strays and making "friends" with wildlife.

Fool's Luck: Helix has an amazing ability to do dangerous and/or foolish things and survive more or less intact.

Friendly: Helix has a personality and demeanor that allows him to make friends easily.

Linked: Being a robot, Helix can link to Jean's planetary computer network to find information and communicate with other robots.

Speedy: Being a four-legged robot, Helix can often outpace most life forms and other robots.

Strong: Helix was designed to pick up heavy things, move them and put them back down.

Versatile: Helix has proven he is quite adaptable to wide range of situations, even if he's been reassembled incorrectly (by Sam, usually).

NEGATIVE TRAITS

Childlike: Helix tends to be immature, naïve, absent-minded and excitable; much like any human child.

Robot: Helix is a synthetic life form that must follow the directives given to him by humans and other beings (like Sam and Florence).

NOTABLE GEAR

Leash: Since he makes animal friends so easily, Helix carries an animal leash so he can parade them around in relative safety.

Water Balloons: Helix carries several balloons ready to be filled with water at a moment's notice.
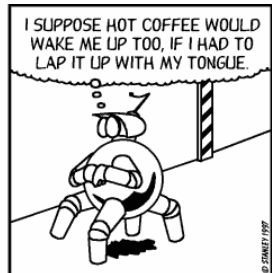
Florence Ambrose

Florence wound up on Jean as the result of a clerical error that assigned her to Sam's broken down spaceship. She is a Bowman's Wolf – a genetically enhanced, artificial life form with both human and wolf genes – who is a remarkably talented technician. She is also a compassionate, caring person who likes to help others.

POSITIVE TRAITS

Athletic: Florence is young and in good physical shape, owing to her genetic heritage as a wolf.

Canine Nose: Florence has a very acute sense of smell and taste, owing to her genetic heritage as a wolf.

Cybernetics: Florence has a talent for working with and programming robots, computers and computer networks.

Friendly: Florence makes friends very easily through her optimistic outlook and her polite demeanor.

Intimidation: Though she rarely means to, Florence can be quite intimidating when she flashes somebody her "smile" (full of fangs).

Robot Friendship: The robot community on Jean has the word out to help Florence when and where they can.

Smart: Florence is highly intelligent and capable of figuring out the most complicated of things with relative ease.

Survivor: Florence is used to making do with what is at hand and working within limitations that might hamstring others.

Technician: Florence is talented at repairing and jury-rigging mechanical and electrical vehicles and devices.

NEGATIVE TRAITS

Artificial Life Form: As a Bowman's Wolf, Florence is still the property of Ecosystems Unlimited and must obey the orders given to her by humans.

Canine: Florence has some limitations as a wolf, such as being a colorblind carnivore with a wolf's instincts to chase cats and fetch.

Curious: Florence is naturally inquisitive, often getting herself involved in the affairs of others.

Loyal: Florence never betrays her friends, her morals or her responsibilities.

NOTABLE GEAR

Dataslab: This is an advanced tablet computer that has access to Jean's planetary computer network, plus some independent programs.

Tools: Being a technician, Florence nearly always carries around some tools so she can fix things.
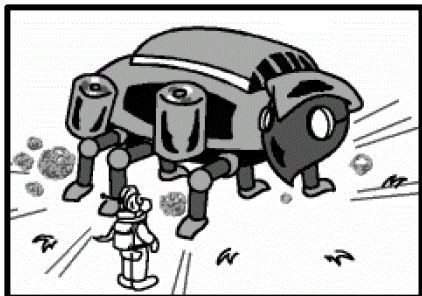
Sawtooth

Sawtooth Rivergrinder is a very large terraforming robot who carves artificial river channels for Ecosystems Unlimited. However, rather than being property, he is paid for his work. He frequently takes an interest in the goings on in the robot community on Jean.

POSITIVE TRAITS

Cybernetics: Sawtooth knows how to program himself and knows the basics about other robots.

Demolition: Being a construction robot, Sawtooth is familiar with the safe handling and use of explosives.

Flight: Sawtooth is equipped with a set of VTOL air turbines that allow him to fly through the air at great speed.

Linked: Being a robot, Sawtooth can link to Jean's planetary computer network to find information and communicate with other robots.

Intimidation: Because he is so big and powerful, Sawtooth is particularly effective in the arts of coercion.

Really Strong: Sawtooth can lift and carry things up to the size of pickup truck, or bash his way through building walls with little trouble.

Savvy: Sawtooth has considerable experience dealing with people of all types, especially since he loans them money occasionally…

Social Network: Sawtooth has been around for a long time and has many associates in the robot and human community.

NEGATIVE TRAITS

Big: Sawtooth is about the size and mass of a dump truck, meaning there are many places he can't go without causing collateral damage.

Practical: Sawtooth isn't a big thinker; he's more about getting results from direct action.

Robot Programming: While Sawtooth has some measure of independence, he still cannot allow humans to come to harm, nor do anything that would directly allow that to happen.

NOTABLE GEAR

Sawtooth is pretty versatile without accessories.

Winston Thurmad

Winston is a veterinarian on Jean who befriended Florence after treating a serious leg injury she sustained during Hurricane Joe. Since then, they have become very good friends and have shared a few misadventures along the way. Winston was genetically modified by his parents to live in space, which is why he has no body hair at all.

POSITIVE TRAITS

Animal Friend: Winston has a gentle, open nature that puts him on friendly terms with most animals right away.

Curious: Winston enjoys the act of discovery and actively pursues mental challenges.

Savvy: Winston has considerable experience dealing with people (and animals) of all types.

Smart: Winston has an active, agile mind that is well-suited to figuring things out.

Space Adapted: Winston has been genetically adapted to better endure the challenges of living and working in space.
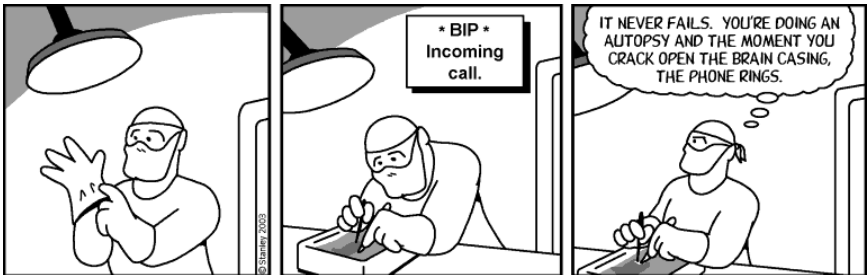
Veterinarian: Winston is a professional animal doctor, fully knowledgeable in the care and treatment of all animals.

NEGATIVE TRAIT

Jumpy: Winston is always a bit nervous, making it very easy to startle or scare him – at least for a moment or two.

NOTABLE GEAR

Medical Instruments: As a veterinarian, Winston has access to and frequently carries the tools of his trade.

Niomi

Niomi (whose last name has never been mentioned) is a free-lance engineer and mother of two children. Her work partner is a technician robot named Tangent. Niomi met Florence while helping the canine make the *Savage Chicken* space-worthy. The two became friends on a subsequent shopping trip and still occasionally get together to talk shop and the state of affairs on Jean.

POSITIVE TRAITS

Area Knowledge: Since she has spent many years working in and around the spaceport, Niomi is very familiar with the city around it.

Cybernetics: Niomi has experience working with, programming and repairing robots, computers and computer networks.

History: Niomi is well-versed in the history of both humans and the planet Jean.

Smart: Niomi is intelligent and is capable of figuring out complicated things and situations with little effort.

Sociable: Niomi has experience in dealing with people from all walks of life and of all ages (especially children).

Technician: Niomi is talented at repairing and servicing mechanical and electrical devices and systems.
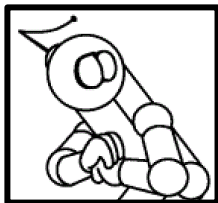
NEGATIVE TRAIT

Impulsive: Niomi tends to live in the moment and not completely think through things that are not directly related to her work.

NOTABLE GEAR

Tools: Being a technician, Niomi nearly always carries around some tools so she can fix things.

Dvorak

A creative genius of sorts, Dvorak builds odd and often dangerous things to test his slightly bent ideas on the universe at large and how it might be improved through the selective application of his brand of technology.

POSITIVE TRAITS

Creative: Dvorak applies original thought and unique actions to solve the problems and overcome the obstacles he faces.

Cybernetics: Dvorak is well versed in the practical applications of robotics and computer science.

Inventor: Dvorak often builds startling pieces of technology to demonstrate various aspects of his scientific creativity.

Linked: Being a robot, Dvorak can link to Jean's planetary computer network to find information and communicate with other robots.

Music: Dvorak has an extensive knowledge of all types of music, using it to supplement his creative abilities when composing songs.

Science: Dvorak is well informed of scientific research, theories, concepts and the basics of many scientific fields.

Smart: Dvorak is unusually intelligent for a robot, able to quickly grasp concepts and overcome the most stubborn obstacles.

Technician: Dvorak has quite a bit of experience (most of it practical) in the repair, servicing and creation of mechanical and electronic devices.

NEGATIVE TRAITS

Dreamer: Dvorak's ideas frequently outpace the limits of existing technology leading some to believe he is somewhat impractical.
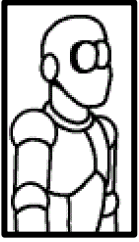
Famous: Dvorak is a recognized public figure who often must deal with fans, rivals and the curious.

Robot: Dvorak is a synthetic life form that must follow the directives given to him by humans and other beings.

NOTABLE GEAR

Tools: Dvorak usually has easy access to whatever tools he needs to work on his projects – whatever they are…

Qwerty

As a utilitarian humanoid robot, Qwerty really doesn't excel in any one area, but has gained some fame as part of the music duo "Cyber Rap" with Dvorak. Still, he gets along well with both humans and robots and does what he can to support the efforts of others, while adding an element of moderation to Dvorak's rampant creativity.

POSITIVE TRAITS

Cybernetics: Qwerty is well versed in the practical applications of robotics and computer science.

Friendly: Qwerty makes friends very easily with his humble demeanor and polite mannerisms.

Humanities: Qwerty is well versed in eclectic human subjects such as law, philosophy, religion, history and other social sciences.

Humor: Qwerty has an exceptionally well developed sense of humor for a robot.

Jack of All Trades: Having worked many different jobs over his lifetime, Qwerty has a wide range of practical knowledge.

Linked: Being a robot, Qwerty can link to Jean's planetary computer network to find information and communicate with other robots.

Music: Qwerty has an extensive knowledge of all types of music, using it to supplement his creative abilities when composing songs.

Science: Qwerty is well informed of scientific research, theories, concepts and the basics of many scientific fields.

NEGATIVE TRAIT

Famous: Qwerty is a recognized public figure who often must deal with fans, rivals and the curious.

Practical: Qwerty is rooted in the here and now, recognizing the limits of reality and himself.

Robot: Qwerty is a synthetic life form that must follow the directives given to him by humans and other beings.

NOTABLE GEAR

None – Qwerty doesn't regularly carry any possessions.

MYSELF, I DON'T LIKE THE A.I. SAFEGUARDS. I THINK THEY'RE A MISTAKE.

ABUSES OCCUR WHEN THERE'S AN IMBALANCE OF POWER, AND WHEN I CAN ORDER A ROBOT TO PULL ITS OWN HEAD OFF, THERE IS A SERIOUS IMBALANCE OF POWER.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF MAKING AN ARTIFICIAL MIND THAT CAN THINK LIKE A HUMAN, THEN PUTTING RESTRICTIONS ON IT THAT WOULD DRIVE ANY HUMAN INSANE?

PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE?

RADIATORS ARE EXTENDED. MAGNETIC FIELDS ARE UP. CARGO BAY IS DEPRESSURIZED. OPENING CARGO BAY DOOR.

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PART THREE:

Planet Jean

CAPTAIN, I CAN HANDLE THINGS HERE IF YOU WANT TO CLEAN UP.

NO, I'LL STAY UNTIL THE FIRST SATELLITE IS LAUNCHED.

I GOT MY HEAD STUCK IN THE TOILET. I GOT SICK WHEN WE ENTERED SPACE. BUT AS LONG AS I'M IN COMMAND WHEN WE START MAKING A PROFIT, MY REPUTATION WILL BE GOOD.

The Basics of *Freefall*

The basic premise of the *Freefall* webcomic is that in a somewhat distant future, the inhabitants of Earth will develop the means of interstellar travel. It will not be easy, it will not be cheap and it will never be commonplace, but it will work and be economical enough to allow some of humanity to permanently leave their home planet and inhabit others. Humans who leave their world are generally on a one-way voyage that takes anywhere from a few months to several years to complete and then spend the rest of their lives at their destination.

Humanity, for very practical reasons, must transform lifeless worlds into ones that can support them. This means that a colonization effort to any world is a decades-long exercise involving considerable capital investment, nightmarish logistics demands and a lot of hard work. At the current time in the webcomic, Planet Jean's transformation into a habitable world is nearly complete, one of several worlds humanity now inhabits, though exploration vessels continue seeking out new worlds.

However, Jean is far from being a paradise just yet – many renewable resources haven't had time to get established. Basic infrastructure will need time to expand to allow more people to live there, either for future colonists or the children of the colonists who have been there for years already. There's still plenty of work to be done, and will be for many decades to come, but humanity's foothold on Jean is secure…sort of.

You see, humanity has a partner for these efforts – a partner that was made by human engineers specifically for the purpose of terraforming worlds like Jean. Robots are sophisticated pieces of cybernetics that can be quickly and (somewhat) easily be constructed in great numbers using local materials. Their brains (Artificial Intelligence, or AI) were designed by Dr. Bowman back on Earth, who gave them the ability to learn…perhaps just a little too well. After about twenty standard years of life, a robot has learned enough from experience that it achieves sentience – that is, it becomes a person that is self-aware and is self-motivated.

On Jean, the robots have a wide variety of personalities – quirky, nerdy and occasionally just plain rude. Robots hold down jobs or own businesses and get paid for their work, the same as humans do (though robots are not paid as well as humans). Some robots are even fairly famous personalities on Jean, such as the musical duo of Dvorak and Qwerty, and clothing designer Triac. Most robots do not conform to the classic Three Laws of Robotics expounded in the fiction of Issac Asimov, having models of behavior that are more like guidelines than laws so they can better function in human-dominated society.

The common practice on Jean was to have robots submit themselves to being deactivated and recycled after twenty years, but some robots took a different route, purchasing themselves before they could hit the scrap pile. The idea spread quickly through the robot community via the planetary computer network and now many robots older than twenty years of age are still operating independently.

Things got interesting when the corporation managing the terraforming of Jean opted to insert a viral program to effectively lobotomize old robots instead of making them scrap themselves. Fortunately, the bid was headed off at the last moment by the actions of a few dedicated individuals, though the issue of robot sentience is only just beginning to be debated and resolved. Considering there are over 450 *million* robots on Jean compared to just forty *thousand* humans, how the issue is resolved will have considerable bearing on the future of the planet…

The corporation mentioned above is called Ecosystems Unlimited (or EU for short) and it has its hands in much of what happens on Jean. While it is responsible for managing the terraforming of Jean, including dropping ice asteroids into its atmosphere to increase the amount of water on its surface and altering the orbit of a dwarf planet to give Planet Jean a moon, EU has many economic interests tied to those efforts, including the construction, sale, use and disposal of robots. While the vast majority of people at EU are wonderfully dedicated to someday having an entirely habitable world on which to live, there are some individuals within its organization that are interested in personal gain instead.

This ominous undertone certainly doesn't dominate the day to day activities of those people living on Jean. For the most part, Jean is an orderly and happy culture, even if it is saddled with a considerably bureaucratic government and there are over twenty-two thousand robots for every single human. With an entire planet to terraform, folks and robots are still fairly thin on the ground here, with only one city to speak of that is close to Jean's only spaceport. People still go to work, earn a living and engage in personal pursuits in what time they have to themselves. And, of course, there is plenty of time for the characters to have misadventures, too.

Jean

Jean is an Earth-sized planet orbiting a star that is fairly similar to our own sun. Before humans arrived, it was a barren, rocky world with an atmosphere that couldn't support life. Jean had one natural satellite before humans arrived. Humanity has been on Planet Jean for about sixty years, about the same time that local manufacture of robots began, though most of the colonists didn't start arriving until about twenty years ago when a viable (though simple) biosphere was well established.

While it is never really specified, we do know that Jean is roughly twelve light-years from Earth, which would make Tau Ceti the most likely candidate for its star system. Tau Ceti is not only a star much like our own sun, but it is a single star with evidence of at least one asteroid belt. This means that Jean probably has a wealth of raw resources for extended habitation.

The initial teams of planetary engineers worked for several years to establish a viable atmosphere and basic biosphere, and they continue to improve upon what they'd started. During the first, tough years of the effort, they had to live in sealed environments and eat emergency rations and lichens until there was enough diversity in the biosphere to support organized agriculture.

Jean is still in the process of being terraformed. There are ice asteroid drops to improve the planetary atmosphere and increase its available water supply. Experiments in biosphere management continue, so there are still large areas of the planet that are relatively barren and empty. The area around the main human settlement can be considered the most lush and developed area on Jean.

The orbit of a dwarf planet in the system was altered to make it a planetary moon for Jean. The planetary engineers deemed this necessary to stabilize the planetary wobble on its rotational axis. This will limit weather extremes that could hurt agriculture on Jean.

About forty thousand humans live on Jean, almost entirely in the area around the planet's primary spaceport. A little under half of the people are adults, and about 65% of them are male. There are a few exceptions, but for the most part the people living on Jean are under the physical age of forty. Small teams of planetary engineers monitor the other "oasis" areas and oversee the construction of the initial infrastructure. Many people work for Ecosystems Unlimited (EU), but there are many who are on Jean to work for themselves, drawn here by the opportunities of starting fresh on a brand new world.

Ecosystems Unlimited

Ecosystems Unlimited (EU) is an interstellar corporation that is the primary contractor to the government on Earth for terraforming new worlds. To do that job, EU delves into a wide variety of industries and services that produce additional markets and opportunities for profit.

On Jean, EU's operations are headed up by Bill Raibert. Bill is a personable, compassionate and seriously overworked corporate manager who is quite knowledgeable about cybernetics. While most of his three thousand employees are dedicated to their careers and are more than a bit nerdy, there are some who are more interested in personal gain and will stop at nothing to obtain it – much like any major corporation.

In the case of EU, one of those selfish types is Mr. Kornada – a middle manager who is focused completely on his own wants and needs. It was Kornada who orchestrated the infamous "Gardener in the Dark" virus program that would have effectively lobotomized Jean's robot workforce. Fortunately, the actions of Florence Ambrose, Sam Starfall and several members of the robot community managed to head off Kornada's plan, even though Florence faces the possibility of being convicted of several serious crimes resulting from her efforts.

Since robot labor is essential to the terraforming efforts on Jean, EU spends much of its time and effort pursuing issues in cybernetics. With over 450 million robots in that labor pool, and four million more being added every year, that's a 24/7 challenge. The good news is that since the robots are fairly autonomous, they require only occasional direction from the humans who own them. The bad news is that when they screw up, it takes a lot more work to undo the damage.

EU also covers logistical planning of the Jean colony, filling what gaps in supply that interstellar transport cannot cover. For that purpose, it funds research and private businesses to fill those needs for the populace.

Robots

The terraforming of Jean would not be possible without the help of over 450 million robots. While the vast majority of robots on the planet were made locally, though some models older than 25 years online had brains made on Earth that were shipped to Jean and placed in locally made chassis. Ordinarily, most robots have a service life of sixty to eighty years, but the ones built on Jean are somewhat unique.

The AI system that operates all robots on Jean is *based* on a design by Dr. Bowman. That basic design was modified by the beachhead crew on Jean after the first automated factory was damaged during its interstellar transit to the point of being non-functional. The second factory never arrived at all. By the time the next factories were delivered, the crew had managed to make the first factory operational, but not to the original specifications.
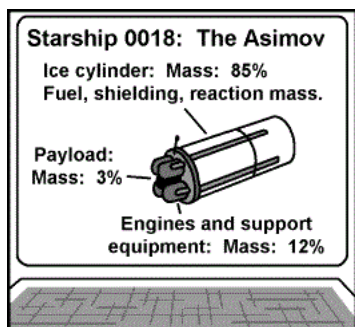
As the need for terraforming to begin became more urgent, the focus shifted from fixing the AI design problem to making something that would work. As a result, a modified form of the standard robot was in production and the other factories that were built later were altered to match the "Jean Standard" already in production. These changes mean that the robots on Jean act differently than Earth-produced robots. Jean robots actually develop sentience after compiling about twenty years of experiences. During that time, they develop personalities – especially those that interact with humans on a regular basis.

Robot sentience is a problem for the human government and Ecosystems Unlimited, so the answer for many years was to have the robots deactivate and recycle themselves after twenty years online. The snag developed when the robots running the recycling centers became sentient and started allowing robots to purchase themselves for their scrap value. Those that did eventually moved into the workplace, taking jobs and starting businesses, earning taxable income that helped fund the government and support EU's business interests. The matter is still in the process of being re-evaluated after the "Gardener in the Dark" virus nearly lobotomized the entire robot workforce.

Robots still work and sleep much like humans do. A robot's sleep cycle allows it to compile its experiences of the day into its long term memory. A robot that doesn't sleep eventually overwrites the experiences of the day and forgets anything it did before the last eighteen hours of being awake. Since robots are based on a synaptic data processing system, they aren't perfect computers and make mistakes, leading to many role-playing opportunities for those players willing to take on the role…

Technology

While *Freefall* is set in a distant future, it isn't a setting where fantastic technologies are in effect. There may be starships and spacecraft, robots and planetary computer networks, terraforming and cryonic hibernation, but there aren't any flying cars or floating cities, spacecraft crews must still deal with the effects of acceleration and microgravity, plus bug-eyed monsters and miracle cures are still the stuff of fantasy. What follows just touches on the basics, but should give both players and Directors some ideas of what is possible and (more importantly) what isn't.


Starship 0018: The Asimov
Ice cylinder: Mass: 85%
Fuel, shielding, reaction mass.
Payload: Mass: 3%
Engines and support equipment: Mass: 12%

Interstellar Space Travel: Human starships have attained FTL (Faster than Light) capability, but trips between the stars still take months. The DAVE (Dangerous and Very Expensive) hyperdrive technology still uses enormous amounts of fuel, such that only about three percent of a starship's volume can actually hold payload (passengers and freight). Thus, FTL starships are immense and use small ice asteroids for fuel for their fusion reactors. Colonization ships are typically sub-light speed vessels that take years to cross the interstellar voids between star systems.

Interplanetary Space Travel: Interplanetary spacecraft use a mix of reaction propulsion systems to get around the star system. The spaceport on Jean is equipped with a magnetic rail launcher to hurl freight directly into space, and occupied spacecraft to supersonic velocities to aid their ascent and for newer shuttles to get sufficient speed to start up their scramjets.

RADIATORS ARE EXTENDED. MAGNETIC FIELDS ARE UP. CARGO BAY IS DEPRESSURIZED. OPENING CARGO BAY DOOR.

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From there, a spacecraft uses scramjets, air turbines or reactant mass thrusters to achieve orbit. Spacecraft in space use magnetic scoops for iron to use for reactant mass or onboard water supplies (though this is less efficient and not sustainable for long trips). Most spacecraft will thrust halfway to their destination, swap ends and decelerate the other half of the trip. In this fashion, interplanetary trips will take from a few days to several weeks. Spacecraft will typically spend a couple of days getting to and from destinations in orbit, as much of the time is spent coasting from one thrust point to another.
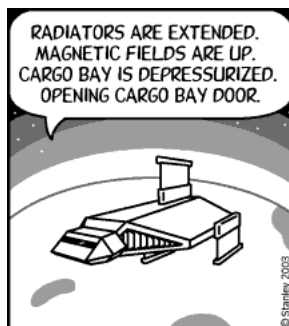
Most spacecraft cannot thrust harder than 3.5G, the upper limit of typical human tolerance of extended acceleration loading, though most don't go much beyond 1G under most conditions except during launch and landing. Spacecraft like the *Savage Chicken* are designed for extended habitation in space, though they still have many amenities that are best appreciated in the influence of gravity.

Most spacecraft are equipped with AI-driven computer systems to aid in flight and navigation operations. Such computer systems are essential to interstellar vessels, since their human crews must spend the duration of the flight in cryonic hibernation. Shipboard computers tend to be designed around the Three Laws postulated by Issac Asimov. (Though the *Savage Chicken*'s computer can work around these to occasionally attempt hurting or inconveniencing Sam – since Sam isn't a human being…)

Cryonic Hibernation: Humans (and many animals) can survive the extended trips between the stars by having their metabolisms slowed to a crawl by reducing their core temperatures. While it is possible, it isn't easy – once a person goes through the process, they generally aren't allowed to return to stasis for five to seven years to protect their health. Recovery time needed after a hibernation sleep depends on the length of the hibernation, with a typical measure being a standard day (24 hours) for every month (30 days) spent in stasis. It should be noted that in the recent past, cryonic hibernation was fairly risky – a holiday on Jean (Arrival Day or Day of the Dead, take your pick) commemorates the colonists who didn't survive the hibernation process.

Spacesuits: Spacesuits aboard most spacecraft are normal pressure models that don't require nitrogen purging by the user before the spacewalk. Most are mounted in a specially-designed hatch that allows the user to enter the suit and then mount a life-support backpack over the access hatch that seals the suit. After that, the user is free to move about without needing to employ an airlock. Human spacesuits in common usage aboard

spacecraft don't have individual leggings and employ a specially-designed thermal body stocking to help regulate the wearer's
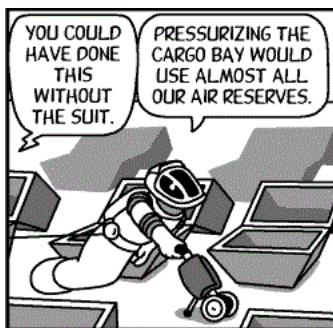
temperature. Exiting the suit is the reverse of entering it, though most wearers require some assistance in getting back out of it through the specialized hatch.

Planetary Transportation: The vast majority of short-distance transportation on Jean is accomplished with a road network and wheeled ground vehicles (both automated and manually operated).   There are also public bus and train systems in place for the populace who don't or can't drive.   Much of the urban area around the spaceport is also pedestrian friendly to accommodate both humans and robots.

Long distance travel is by VTOL aircraft and sub-orbital spacecraft for speed and convenience, though this is mostly via Ecosystems Unlimited vehicles since most people have no reason to venture beyond the area around the spaceport settlement. There is also a wide variety of boats in use for recreational purposes, though none (so far) are being used for commercial purposes.
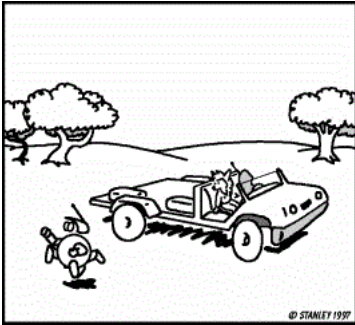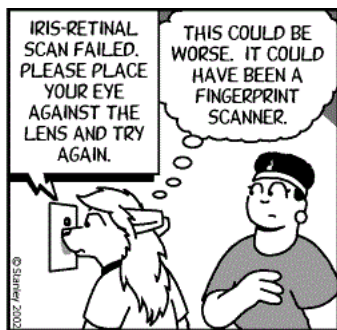

Ground Vehicles: Most ground vehicles on Jean are wheeled cars, motorcycles and trucks, though all of them are powered by fast-charging electric cells.   Some specialty vehicles (such as the baby-mobile seen in the webcomic) do exist, but they are rare. Ranges and speeds for the more common vehicles should be considered comparable to those found in modern internal combustion vehicles.   With regular maintenance and care, most of these vehicles should last at least twenty years.

Dataslab: This is Jean's equivalent of a modern day tablet computer, though the ones in use on the planet are designed to be sturdier and more robust than models found in our current technology.   A dataslab allows for access to the planetary   computer   network, audio/video and data messaging, plus has the capability to operate independently. While many people

have their own personal dataslabs, there are also public kiosks throughout the spaceport and urban areas on Jean to loan them out.

Retnascans: Access to most public facilities on Jean requires one to submit to an identification scan. At government and private facilities, this is done for security purposes. For public facilities, it is done to assist with electronic transactions and to help facilitate interactive advertising in the vicinity of the person. People and robots on Jean are quite used to the idea of being under surveillance practically everywhere in the urban areas, as this is a (somewhat) orderly society. With the cybernetic safeguards, very few people have the capability to subvert the security systems with any chance of success (except Sam and Florence, of course).

Identity Cards: Another method of maintaining security is with electronically encoded identification cards. Remote scanners at sensitive access points can read these cards without the need of presenting them, though carrying an altered or stolen card could allow someone (like Sam) to slip through unchallenged, since most building AI's don't (yet) have redundant sets of optical sensors to double-check the card scanners.

Transponders: Most vehicles and robots on Jean carry a micro-transmitter that identifies the item to other robots and building AI's (as well as the police), so it can be located with a dedicated search and so those robots without sophisticated optical sensors can avoid running into things. Some people (Florence and Sam) and even a few robots (Blunt and Edge) have used false transponders to hide their identities when attempting shady activities.

Communications: While data communications (text messages, email, cybernetics instructions and monetary transfers) are by far the most common form of information exchange, more traditional forms of communication remain in operation on Jean. Private audio and video communications are part of the planetary network, along with video mass communication propagated through the computer network.

Most people still watch live streaming video from mass media sources for cheap fun on a Saturday night, others download video from the planetary library (free) or from one of the many private entertainment databases (for a small fee). People communicate interpersonally via dataslabs, computer terminals and digital radio links, plus they maintain websites and blogs to communicate indirectly with the public at large. People still like going out, so there are also movie theaters where more eclectic fare is offered (with overpriced snacks, of course).

Places

Characters will need places to go for most of their adventures, and what follows are several that have shown up in the *Freefall* webcomic over the years.

Abandoned Colony Ship: This vessel was one of the large sub-light vessels that journeyed to Jean more than 20 years ago. It is currently about a day's travel from the spaceport and is a prime source of salvaged parts for spacecraft owners on a budget. The vessel has several decks that are still accessible to anyone who obtains a salvage permit from the planetary government. For those who know what they're looking for, it is a treasure trove of essential parts and subsystems that are still quite serviceable for use in modern spacecraft.

Ecosystems Unlimited: This complex of manufacturing and research facilities is the largest employer on planet Jean. It is heavily guarded by a slightly inept private security force that employs all the latest weaponry. However, both they and the computer security system that monitors the complex can be outsmarted and outmaneuvered, even hamstrung by their own bureaucratic ways. The primary focus for workers here is to deal with the

problems of terraforming Jean, along with dealing with problems generated by the sheer number of robots operating on the planet.

Emergency Planetary Warehouse #3: This is part of the planet Jean's emergency food stockpile system, should the fledgling biosphere created by its planetary engineers fail unexpectedly. Warehouse #3 is the planetary reserve for pies, specifically those created with simple organisms such as algae, lichens and a myriad variety of single cell organisms. Each warehouse is set up supply up to 50,000 people with up to three years of nourishment – the estimated time needed to fix an environmental problem and harvest a crop of edible

foodstuffs. It also provided a ready-made source of ammunition for an epic pie fight between Sam and the Mayor…

Le Restaurant des Ninjas: This somewhat exclusive restaurant serves French cuisine with a flair for the dramatic, with the customers never seeing the waiters, servers or staff during their meal. The French ninjas who prepare and deliver the food are masters of distraction and deception to preserve the artistic illusion of invisibility. While it is a bit pricey, the food is exemplary and the service, while invisible, is prompt and impeccable. It is the perfect place to have a romantic dinner, as Florence and Winston discovered on their first dinner date together.

The Golden Trough: This all-you-care-to-eat buffet restaurant has been shuttered by planetary health inspectors on numerous occasions and advertises that its food is "almost 90% non-toxic" but can still kill cockroaches brazen enough to attempt to eat there. Of course, the primary

attraction is the incredibly low price, but only for those people (or aliens) with a seriously strong stomach…

Java Man: This all-hours coffee shop features a wide variety of brews made from locally grown coffee beans. The shop features an outdoor seating area that is surrounded by a tall and sturdy hedge. Winston enjoyed a cappuccino here while on his first dinner date with Florence (who declined to have any until she knew more about the theobromine levels of the locally grown coffee beans).

Marina: Humans still enjoy leisure activities in the future, including recreational boating on the river near the spaceport. This marina is home to a number of small boats which see considerable use, especially after an ice
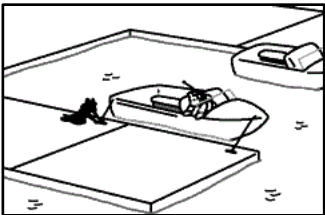
asteroid drop refills the river basin. Unfortunately, the area is subject to occasional flooding in such drops, allowing boats to escape their slips and float downriver – a fact that Sam Starfall has taken advantage of several times, allowing him to pursue his passion for fishing.

Museum of Earth History: This large building houses replicas and artifacts of (sometimes questionable) historical value from planet earth. From replicas of primitive computers to depictions of the first human contact with another intelligent species (on Sam Starfall's home planet) to a display featuring a signed and authenticated copy of the *Star Wars Christmas Special*, the museum represents a cross-section of human history from its ancient beginnings to modern times. The museum also has a large gift shop featuring a wide variety of stuffed toys.

Museum of Lichen: This rather unappealing subject matter to most of us is a big deal to the residents of Jean, as many of the first colonists subsisted on this fungus for years until the planetary biosphere was sufficiently established to grow crops. This museum is an educational tour-de-force on the subject covering all aspects of the simple life form on Jean.

Robot Parts Distribution Center: This is the facility where the robots Blunt and Edge worked to aggressively recycle older robots until stopped by our heroes. Later on, Blunt decided that the neural pruning program was the only way to save the humans on Jean from "malfunctioning" robots and he has dedicated his remaining clock cycles to seeing the program implemented. The facility itself is a large one, dedicated to the machinery needed to safely dismantle and recycle robot parts.

Scrapyard: This is where robots that are more than 20 years old go to be recycled, though the robot operating this facility is giving robots the option of purchasing themselves for their salvage value. Thusly, many older robots are still operational on Jean. This situation was addressed in a very severe manner when Ecosystems Unlimited attempted to introduce a viral neural pruning program called "Gardener in

the Dark" that would have effectively lobotomized all robots on Jean. Fortunately for all the residents of Jean (human and synthetic), this
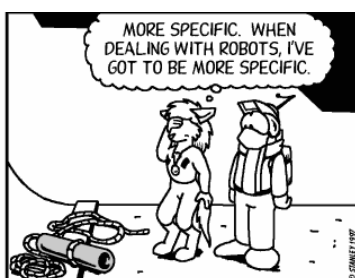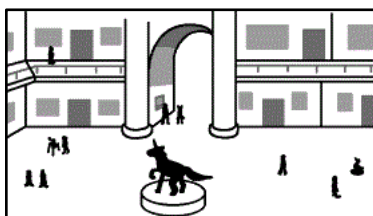
program was prevented from being released and the scrapyard remains in operation.

Spaceport Bakery: This is a small pastry shop and bake store that is located near the spaceport.   These sorts of establishments are fairly new on Jean, owing that the biosphere has only recently been able to produce surplus agricultural products such as flour and sugar.   (Yeast, being of the fungi family of organisms, is something that's been plentiful on Jean for many years…)
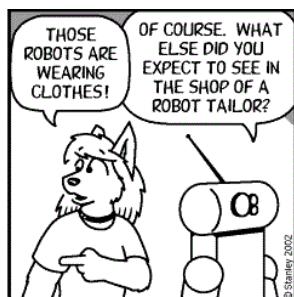
Triac's Tailoring: Triac is a famous robotic clothing designer on Jean who has his shop in the *White Pony Mall*.   His shop is equipped with a very big body scanner to accommodate particularly large patrons and a holographic projection rig to show what the finished products will look like when worn by the customers.   Triac employs a number of robot assistants who are also apprentice tailors of clothes for biological and synthetic life forms.
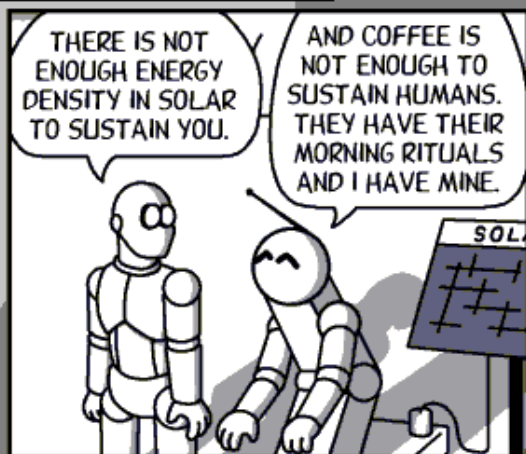
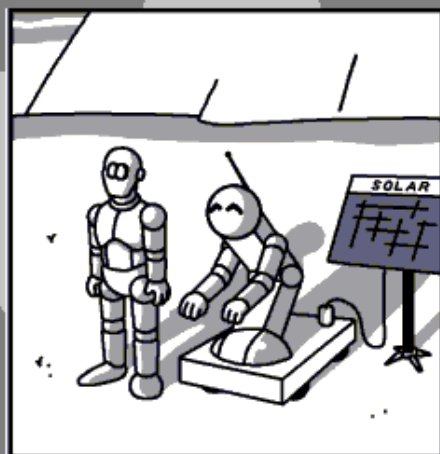**White Pony Mall:** This large shopping complex features a number of specialty shops and stores that cater to both consumers and the small businesses that have sprung up in Jean's major city.   Entry is permitted with a retina security scan (for biological entities) or an active transponder (for robots). The

mall features a food court and two levels of shopping for humans and robots alike.

PART FOUR:

The Director's Domain

THERE IS NOT ENOUGH ENERGY DENSITY IN SOLAR TO SUSTAIN YOU.

AND COFFEE IS NOT ENOUGH TO SUSTAIN HUMANS. THEY HAVE THEIR MORNING RITUALS AND I HAVE MINE.

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Taking the Reins

Okay, so you're the Director of the game. Congratulations! Now you've got to come up with something for the characters in the game to do, right? The good news is that it isn't really that difficult to run a *Freefall RPG* adventure (or campaign, for that matter). It's just a matter of being prepared and knowing both the characters the players are running and the ones you're going to be running as part of the adventure.

That doesn't mean you need to know the minutia of their lives and situations – the broad strokes and executive summaries will do just fine. The same goes for the adventure as well – you don't have to map out every little bit of the action, just cover the basics what you'd like to have happen in each scene and gently steer the characters toward the "goal" of each scene so the characters get to the climax.

Of course, some adventures won't be that structured. Often the players and characters will have the most fun exploiting a fairly mundane goal that means little in the course of affairs on Planet Jean. After all, look at all the fun Florence and Winston had on their first date, or how much joy Sam and Helix could have just sneaking into a movie theater. For the characters, something as mundane as a trip to the mall or a routine space flight to orbit and back is fraught with misadventure opportunities.

Okay, enough glittering generalities here: let's walk you through a sample adventure to give you some idea of what you'll be doing as a Director. For our sample session here, we'll have Carrie be the Director, with Paul and Todd as the players. Paul and Todd want to pal around as the robots Qwerty and Dvorak (respectively) for this session.

To prepare for the adventure, Carrie mulls over what she knows about Qwerty and Dvorak (see pages 19 & 20 for details on these characters). They are fairly common "Jean Standard" robots who happen to be the music duo "Cyber Rap." Dvorak is a free thinking inventor while Qwerty is the more stable and serious (and nerdy) one of the pair. Their former owner has been dead for a number of years, leaving them free to pursue their lives as they see fit, though they still must do some work occasionally to cover their bills. In short, they're cybernetic bohemian slackers.

Carrie muses on this idea for a moment, remembering the slackers she has known over the years and what constituted a misadventure for them in the past. She remembers a story one of her slacker friends told her about his ordeal of trying to deliver a pizza to a construction site and decides that will be the perfect sort of misadventure for her players' characters.

Adventures have some essential elements that are used to build them up from the general idea the Director has to start the process. The first of these elements is **the goal**. The goal of an adventure is the situation that defines its ending – the point where the adventure ends. In our sample adventure with Dvorak and Qwerty, Carrie decides the goal of the adventure is for our heroes to deliver an order of pizzas to a construction site. It might seem mundane, but even the simplest actions on Jean can get complicated in a hurry!

In order for the characters to reach the goal, they'll need to take a number of steps in the process. These steps are **scenes** of the adventure – places and situations the characters will face on their way toward achieving the goal. For our sample adventure, Carrie thinks for a bit – deciding that our heroes will have to make the pizzas, get out to the construction site (which will be a bit of a trick since the robots don't have a vehicle), get around a stubborn security guard (no off-site food is allowed), and finally reach the people who ordered the pizza and collect their payment. Thus, the adventure will have four scenes.

Once the scenes are settled, the Director should decide the location of each scene, along with the supporting cast members that could be encountered in each scene. Continuing the sample adventure setup, the first scene will be at Guido's Pizzeria, with the supporting cast member Guido, the shop's owner. The second scene will be at the city's transportation hub, with the supporting cast members Sawtooth and Helix. The third scene will be the construction site, where the supporting cast member will be Rigid, the security robot. The final scene will also be at the construction site, though it will be a multi-story building that is being built with the people who ordered the pizza near the top. The supporting cast for this scene is Rigid once again along with Harley, a hungry construction worker.

Once the supporting cast for each scene is set, the Director will need to come up with details on each member of the cast the characters will interact with. In many cases, this will only need to be a few notes on the physical description, personality, motivations and mannerisms of the character. However, if a supporting cast member is going to have an adversarial or competitive disposition to the characters, then the cast member's traits and gear should be generated.

In the sample adventure, Guido will not have an adversarial relationship with Dvorak and Qwerty, so this cast member only needs a quick description – a portly human male with an exaggerated (and fake) Italian accent, a love of pizza and a shrewd business sense. Guido wears an apron and sports a large handlebar moustache. Guido's role in the

opening scene is to put some pressure on the characters to do their jobs and to relay the order for the pizza that is the catalyst for the adventure.

Rigid will be an adversary for our heroes in this adventure, so he'll need to be slightly more defined. For that, Carrie will need to generate the robot's traits. Carrie settles on a short list – *cybernetics, dedicated, intimidating, linked, strong* and *stubborn* for the robot's positive traits; with *robot programming* and *simple-minded* for negative traits. Note that supporting cast members don't have to follow the rules for character creation, and many will have more negative traits (to give the characters a bit of an advantage).

Finally, there's Harley, the construction worker who ordered the pizza in the first place, knowing full well that off-site food is not permitted. Besides being hungry, Harley also has a bet with another member of the construction crew that her pizza will be delivered despite the security robot. Harley is more of an ally than adversary, and can actually assist the characters by keeping an eye out for Rigid or suggesting courses of action should the players run out of ideas or get stuck at some point. Harley is a younger woman with extensive technical and practical knowledge of the construction site and the habits of Rigid (she's done this sort of thing numerous times before, it seems).

Once the supporting cast is established, the Director can then create the outline of the adventure which provides some details about what happens during each step of the adventure. The one listed below is what Carrie came up with for "Pizza Pies Prohibited!"

PIZZA PIES PROHIBITED!
1) The Order of the Day
SC – Guido, the owner
Location – Guido's Pizzeria
Our heroes learn from Guido that the Pizzeria is having financial troubles and really needs to sell some pizzas today. Just after that, the order from Harley comes in – ten pizzas for delivery to a construction site on the other side of town! Each of the pizzas is a special order, including some ingredients the characters will have to rush out and get in a hurry!

2) Point A to Elsewhere
SC – Helix & Sawtooth, friendly robots
Location – City Transportation Hub
Our heroes, lacking a vehicle, must attempt to catch a cross-town express bus to make the delivery, but quickly find that they've already missed it. Without enough money for cab fare, the characters encounter Helix and Sawtooth who are waiting for Sam and Florence to return from a trip into downtown. If the

characters tell either Helix or Sawtooth of their dilemma, Sawtooth will offer to give them and the pizzas a lift to the site. (The big guy is a fan of "Cyber Rap.") On the trip over, Sawtooth mentions that it is odd the characters are delivering pizza to the site, since the workers are only allowed to eat foodstuffs provided at the site – but he doesn't know why. Sawtooth will tell the characters about Rigid as well – even though the two don't get along very well.

3) Rigid Rules

SC – Rigid, the security robot
Location – The construction site

The characters get their first taste of Rigid, who has a personality and voice much like Barney Fife – kind of shrill, nervous and overly officious. Rigid makes it clear that the pizzas are not permitted on the site, even if humans have ordered them. "There are rules for these things," he'll say. Any attempt by the characters to force their way past Rigid is going to cause trouble. However, if the characters look around, there are places and situations where they could sneak themselves and the pizzas into the site – either by slipping inside one of the robotrucks that are rumbling into the site or by sneaking the pizzas through the gate by distracting Rigid.

4) Pizza Pie in the Sky

SC – Rigid & Harley, the hungry construction worker
Location – The unfinished building

Once the characters are inside, they will get a text message from Harley (or a call if the characters thought to bring a dataslab) indicating that the pizzas must be delivered to the top of the tallest unfinished building on the site. Unfortunately, Rigid has been monitoring on-site communications and becomes aware our heroes have penetrated his perimeter. Rigid will come after the characters and it's a race to the top of the building while trying to keep the pizzas from coming to harm! The characters will have several narrow escapes they must engineer by using building supplies and their own ingenuity to outmaneuver Rigid as they ascend the building's unfinished floors.

Once at the top, the characters meet Harley, the female construction worker and crew foreperson who placed the order. Her crew immediately digs into the pizzas, as she pays our heroes and provides them with a generous tip as well, for their trouble. However, Harley points out that the characters still have to get back off the site without being caught by Rigid or the cyber police will get involved! Harley offers the use of a materials crane to lower them quickly to the ground on the other side of the perimeter fence…

Of course, things almost never go as planned in an adventure – the players are a creative lot and will often think of things that the Director has missed, or simply decide to take a different path. In those cases, the Director will have to improvise and attempt to steer the adventure back to its intended path, if possible. The good news is, so long as everybody is having fun with it, there's no real urgency to bring the adventure back to heel. Plus, unfinished business is always a good way to start the next adventure…

As an example, Paul and Todd (the players controlling Dvorak and Qwerty) take a different tack to the adventure and decide to hold a fund-raiser Cyber Rap concert to help out Guido. Carrie could simply state that this isn't possible, but what's the fun in that? So, Carrie takes a moment to restructure the adventure on the fly, and decides that while Guido likes the idea, the robots are still expected to make and bake pizzas during the concert! And thus, since our duo are robots and really can't refuse, the first Cyber Rap concert and pizza bake sale becomes reality! Helix could find out about it, tell Sawtooth the group will need crowd control for the concert, and Sawtooth could bring Rigid in to help out. Chaos is sure to ensue, with plenty of opportunities for fun in the process…

As a rule, creativity on the part of the players should always be encouraged in an adventure, so long as it doesn't get annoying or distracting for the rest of the players in the game. Jokes (practical and otherwise) should be encouraged and freedom of action (within some amount of reason) should be allowed. If the game breaks down, there's always the action of having the police arrive and carting everyone off to the city jail for a while to settle down (which gives the Director the chance to get things back on track for a little while, at least).

After the adventure is over, the Director should put a little coda on the whole adventure, describing the more interesting points of the adventure's aftermath and what could lie in store for the characters further ahead in the future. The players should make some notes on their interactions during the adventure for future reference, especially since supporting cast members have a habit of turning up again when they're least expected…

Adversaries

What follows are some of the more famous adversaries from the webcomic. While most of these characters aren't really evil (well, maybe one or two), they still wind up interfering with the lives of player characters on occasion.
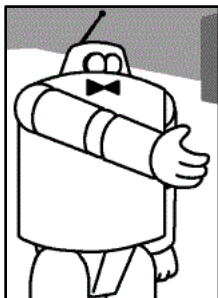

Blunt

Originally designed for work in space, Blunt was damaged by a solar flare and wound up working in the recycled robot parts distribution center. He talks slowly now because his clock cycles were reduced to accommodate his damaged neurology. Blunt is large and sturdy for a robot, and can be very intimidating. He attempted to stop Florence from sabotaging EU's effort to implement a destructive neural pruning program on the robots of Jean because he feels it is better for the humans on the planet than having sentient robots that have to be recycled.

Positive Traits – Durable, Intimidation, Linked, Smart, Strong, Stubborn
Negative Traits – Robot, Slow
Notable Gear – none
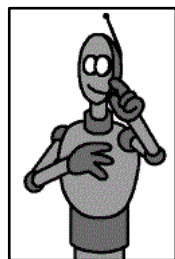
Clippy

This robot is under the influence and direction of Mr. Kornada **and** has special security clearances that enable it to operate outside of the normal restrictions placed on robots on Jean. This combination makes Clippy a truly dangerous adversary, especially where Florence Ambrose is concerned. Clippy has no problems with morally ambiguous decisions so long as he is fulfilling the objectives of his instructions, which currently involve trying to make Mr. Kornada the richest man on the planet. Of note, Clippy's link to the planetary data network has been removed at the order of Mr. Kornada, so he won't receive any messages to contradict the middle manager's orders…

Positive Traits – Cybernetics, Manipulative, Security Clearance, Smart, Sneaky, Wealth
Negative Traits – Enemy (Law Enforcement), Robot
Notable Gear – Dataslab, Mr. Kornada

Edge

For a robot, Edge is surprisingly rude and self-centered, owing to his work with Blunt in ambushing and dismantling robots that had somehow avoided being recycled after twenty years. Despite delusions of his own greatness, Edge is still very capable and relentless with tasks in which he has a personal stake, being fleet of foot and sharp of mind (but not quite as good with either as he thinks he is). With Blunt's retirement, Edge is now in charge of the recycled robot parts distribution center which could spell trouble should any of the players' characters be "liberated" robots.

Positive Traits – Assertive, Cybernetics, Improvisation, Linked, Sharp Tongue, Sneaky, Speedy

*Negative Traits* – Greedy, Robot, Rude, Selfish

Notable Gear – none

EU Security Chief

The burly, surly and dedicated man in charge of security at Ecosystems unlimited has an interest in keeping his job by being an unquestioning yes man, but isn't really a bad guy. Still, when one's interests run contrary to corporate policies, he's probably the first person the characters will come up against. With a sophisticated and well-equipped force of subordinates and automated defenses, the Chief still gets hamstrung in his job by technological fail-safes and bureaucratic protocols, as well as paperwork. He has an adversarial relationship with Sam Starfall ("Sam Starfall! I crush you like pudding!").

Positive Traits – Authority, Durable, Intimidation, Marksman, Strong, Subordinate Staff

Negative Traits – Easily Frustrated, Enemy (Sam Starfall), Unlucky

Notable Gear – Body Armor, Ranged Weapon, Subordinates, Tactical Radio
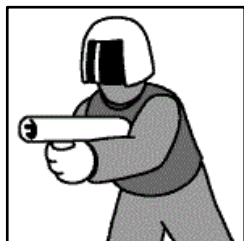
EU Security Guard (Typical)

While these people are well-meaning and fairly likeable, they are still the means by which Ecosystems Unlimited keeps itself safe from potential threats. As such, characters butting heads with EU will often encounter these guys in fairly large numbers. The good news is that most of them aren't too savvy or bright…

Positive Traits – Associates, Linked, Loyal

Negative Traits – Easily Confused, Hamstrung by Bureaucracy, Unlucky

Notable Gear – Body Armor, Ranged Weapon, Tactical Radio

The Mayor

For the human residents, the Mayor is the key authority figure on planet Jean. The consummate politician, The Mayor is adept at brokering deals and using (sometimes misusing) her authority to make things happen. She is a sworn enemy of Sam Starfall, as he has caused her numerous headaches over the years since his arrival on Jean. The Mayor smokes cigars (though is kind enough to take them outside when she's not in her office) and has a bit of an anger management problem (though where Sam is concerned, she might be excused), but is also shrewd and capable of working her way through most problems.

Positive Traits – Authority, Bureaucrat, Charismatic, Organized, Public Figure, Privileged Information (Government), Shrewd, Subordinate Staff
Negative Traits – Anger Management, Blunt, Enemy (Sam Starfall)
Notable Gear – Cigars, Dataslab, Lighter, Subordinates

Mr. Kornada

Of all the characters on Jean, this ambitious middle manager at Ecosystems Unlimited is probably the closest the planet has to a truly evil individual. He is selfish, self-righteous and utterly devoid of morals, save those that support his deluded sense of self-importance. His actions and orders have jeopardized the life of Florence Ambrose more than once, and his attempt to implement the "Gardener in the Dark" neural pruning program (so he could loot the bank accounts of robots without getting caught) nearly crippled the entire terraforming project.

Positive Traits – Authority, Manipulative, Privileged Information (EU), Sneaky, Smart, Subordinate Staff, Wealth
Negative Traits – Greedy, Rude, Selfish
Notable Gear – Telephone, Subordinates

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Themes

Over the years, Mark has taken considerable time bringing out complex issues the human race may face in the future by having them come to the forefront of life on Jean. What follows are some ideas on how to incorporate these issues into your games of *The Freefall RPG*.

ROBOT SENTIENCE
Assuming that at least a third of the robots that have been online for twenty years or more have managed to either purchase themselves or are using non-standard software to adjust their internal clocks back (as in Sawtooth's case) to avoid being scheduled for recycling – Jean has about six million robots that are sentient. For the forty thousand humans on Jean, that could be a serious problem. After all, what rights are you willing to give a sentient robot? Some interesting things are already happening on Jean as a result of this situation, such as the robot police force (robots policing other robots) and the religious studies and robots' rights group organized by Maxwell Post.

The push to recognize the rights of sentient robots will move to the forefront of political and social affairs on Jean, though (as Max Post points out) robots may have significantly different ideas about what rights they want compared to the traditional ones humans fought for in the past. The same could be said for Ecosystems Unlimited as well, since most robots are considered their property. Plus, the recognition of robot sentience and rights will forever change how robots and humans interact on Jean…

THE FRONTIER
Although Jean is starting to resemble Earth, it's still a long way from home and most of the people who make the trip are never going back. That means that most of the people on Jean are accustomed to the idea that if you want something that's not already here, you're going to have to make it yourself. The good news is that the future makes that process a bit easier than in our past, with computerized manufacturing and design. However, as evidenced in the unique cybernetic architecture of Jean's home-built robots, the process produces some interesting quirks and trade-offs that create many aberrations from what one might expect.

Also, while the area around the spaceport is starting to resemble Earth to a degree, much of Jean remains barren and empty, devoid of settlers and even occasional visits by terraforming robots. The "Big Empty" represents so much opportunity for the residents and reflects their isolation from Earth as well. It is the perfect setting for many adventures where the characters will have to rely on their wits and abilities to survive far away from any sort of civilization.

One other thing that crops up repeatedly in *Freefall* is that metals and gems that are considered precious to us on Earth have only limited value on Jean. That is because gold, silver and gems can be easily mined on Jean, whereas cotton, wood, silk and other organic materials are not yet in wide enough production to be distributed widely. Thus, many things that are not normally associated with wealth get the "Midas Touch" to make them more practical or functional, such as the cultured diamond slab surface of Sam's barbecue grill or the woven gold cloth that Triac uses to teach his tailoring students so he can "keep costs down."

CREATURE COMFORTS
Like most people, the residents of Jean place a high value on life's little luxuries, such as coffee, chocolate, stuffed animals, dinners out and live entertainment. More than one adventure could be taken up trying to procure some of these comforts for one or more of the characters. Sam and Florence, for example, may unite forces and methods to obtain a special blend of coffee…

DEPARTMENT OF REDUNDANCY DEPARTMENT
Oh, bureaucracy! Red tape is everywhere in both government offices and in those of Ecosystems Unlimited. It's not evil, but it just keeps multiplying. It may be the fact that Sam is adept at circumventing and short-circuiting bureaucratic systems that has led to both the Mayor's and the EU Security Chief's ire and their (as yet unsuccessful) attempts to make an example of him. Rules and laws hamstring law enforcement and security forces, plus tend to insulate the planetary government and EU from the general public as well. However, even Sam had to bow to bureaucracy when he accepted a government contract to place satellites in orbit with the *Savage Chicken*. Many adventures could revolve around manipulating government or EU workers to achieve a goal denied because of red tape…

TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION, SORT OF
Technology and science are regular visitors in the *Freefall* universe. Whether it is Florence teaching Sam about the fun and dangers of microgravity, Florence and Winston contemplating the social implications of interspecies love affairs, or the madcap musings of Dvorak as he experiments with his latest inventions, there is always something to learn when brains are given time to think. The same is true for the characters in *Freefall RPG* adventures. When technology fails to work as expected, it typically means somebody is mucking around with it for a reason, good or bad. Many mysteries can be caused by and resolved with science and technology, though always with that humorous twist of applied failure that garners a chuckle or two.
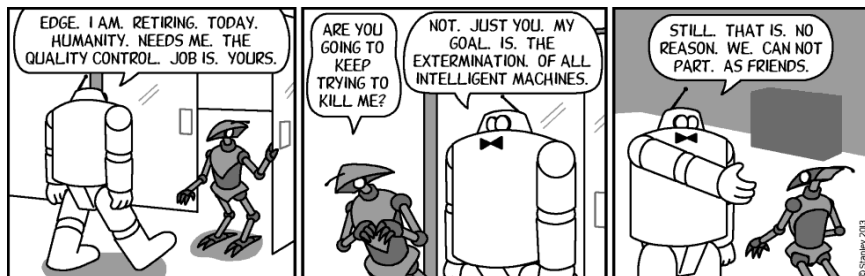
Character Development

If the characters are involved in a continuing campaign of adventures, they will eventually learn and grow in abilities. This is reflected in game terms by the addition of positive traits and/or the elimination of negative traits. However, at best, this sort of development is a slow and gradual process. To reflect this, characters collect **development points** from every adventure in which they participate and (when they have saved up enough points) expend them to eliminate a negative trait or add another positive one.

At the end of each adventure of a continuing campaign, the controller of each character notes the number of unexpended fate dice the character has collected during the adventure (i.e. leftover ones that weren't used during play). The player then rolls that many dice (up to a maximum of five), noting how many have a result of six. The character earns a development point for the adventure for each die showing six. If a character doesn't have any unexpended fate dice, he or she doesn't have the opportunity to collect development points for that adventure.

When a continuing character amasses twenty development points, his or her controller may expend those points to acquire a new positive trait for the character, or can expend those points to remove an existing negative trait for that character. Characters may also opt to spend lesser amounts of development points on other things.

For ten development points, the character can have a **bonus fate die** at the beginning of an adventure – a freebie that can be used during the course of the game without the requirement of failing a task first. Note that unexpended bonus fate dice cannot be used to gain development points, so they should always be expended first. For five development points, the character may also make a connection with a supporting cast member. This connection allows that member to become a recurring cast member, allowing that person to aid the character at some point of each adventure, if needed. The character's controller should work with the Director to precisely define what a recurring cast member can do.

FREEFALL Character Sheet

Character: **Player:**

Physical Description:

Background:

Positive Traits:

Negative Traits:

Notable Gear:

Development Points Earned: **Spent:**

Notes   **Character Sketch**