

THE --- SHIFT

A campaign setting and adventure for
ADVANCED FIGHTING FANTASY STELLAR ADVENTURES

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Shift, a science fiction action horror setting for the Advanced Fighting Fantasy ‘Stellar Adventures’ roleplaying game.

This campaign setting is a mix of science fiction, magic and horror; a place where scientific progress has torn open the very fabric of space and time and allowed... *things* to exist in our reality. These things cannot live in our dimension for long unless they consume the life energy of living things. Lifeforce, bioenergy, the human soul – whatever you wish to call it, these things need it to live outside their own reality, a reality so foul that even creatures as evil as this wish to escape it...

And the human race? Once the rift in space was torn open they were reduced to ash, and the remnants of a once great star empire is now in tatters, a post-apocalyptic nightmare spread across the stars, where all settled worlds are now burning hell-holes and settlements are mostly dangerous. The remains of the humanity wander the stars trying to find a place to live – or hide – and must simply survive from day to day without their failing starships imploding, their food and water running out, or their essence being eaten.

It’s a tough life out there.

The Shift has elements of survival horror but it is, at it’s heart, a science fiction action setting. Things seem bleak, and they are, but the Heroes in this game are intent on surviving and to do that they’ll have to fight, and fight hard. There’s plenty of room in this game for terror, fear and the exploration of the human soul and what it would take to turn a person from a peaceful citizen into a raving post-apoc survivor; but honestly, when all else fails it’s time to unsling the all-purpose plasmablaster and pump a round into the accelerator chamber.

THE DIRECTOR

THE SETTING

The year was 2689, and things were going extremely well for the human race.

Travel amongst the stars was commonplace; the Jackstone Engine was capable of moving starships at the speed of one light year per day, so suddenly the stars themselves were incredibly close and within weeks dozens of starships were orbiting new stars, cataloguing new planets and creating new settlements. For more than a hundred years new worlds were settled and the human race was flung far and wide.

Mother Earth, once in danger of losing her ecosphere and collapsing, was on the mend as huge leaps in terraforming techniques helped repair the ecologically ravaged world. Atmosphere Formatters, genetically modified plantlife and some genetic alterations to the human body rescued the Earth and helped colonists tame worlds far and wide. The human race was on the rise.

All that could happen was progress.

Then a scientist named Professor Ivan Nicholson, the settled world's most brilliant man, developed something that would not only revolutionise starship engines but change the very nature of the empire that the human race had created.

Ivan Nicholson had developed a way to bend spacetime upon itself, so that a starship could travel from one point in the galaxy to the other instantaneously. The engine would compress space like a consatina, punch a hole through space and time, and then pass through the compressed space to its destination. A vessel could spend six seconds firing up the new drive engines, six seconds passing through compressed space and six seconds powering down. This new fold drive, known as the Shift Drive, would change everything.

And it worked. It worked so well that almost immediately every new starship produced was fitted with the new engine and trade, leisure and exploration increased at such an amazing rate that the Stellar Empire became far too large to be controlled by a single entity. The worlds, now flung far across the galaxy, were given almost complete autonomy and controlled by regional councils. In time, Earth itself became a distant memory, a relic of the human race left behind by progress, and as it had already been stripped of most of its usable resources the entire home Solar System was all but abandoned. Earth itself, now on the mend, was left behind to take care of itself. The only vessels that traveled there now were private yachts, tourist ships and research vessels interested in monitoring Earth's progress.

By the year 2890 there were so many settled worlds that on some planets they didn't even realise the extent of it all.

The human race enjoyed a relaxing, leisurely existence. While there was still a need for specialists and workers, the majority of the menial tasks were done by automatons and artificial intelligences designed and programmed to serve. United in progress and expansion, the human race enjoyed prosperity and leisure never before experienced.

You could say it made them lazy.

The new Shift Drive changed everything but there were always... stories. Some star traders told of strange visions of fire during transit through compressed space, or hearing whispers and incomprehensible voices. There were reports of crewmen having trouble sleeping and not focusing

on their jobs after a few jumps which caused accidents, and there was always the story of the passenger ship Archibald VI on it's final approach to a SatStation over the lush garden world of Proxima Hella. The report was that the pilot suddenly started screaming, that the 'hooks were tearing', and then he flew the starship into the SatStation, killing more than three thousand people.

The settled worlds were vast. There were always strange stories such as this. Many of them, no doubt, were embellished or simply untrue and told to scare the children of spacefarers.

In 2892 Ivan Nicholson, after enjoying an artificially extended life, decided to go out in a blaze of glory. He had always sought longer life, using gene therapy and drugs to keep his body going, but he realised that he would not cheat death. So, to show what his Shift Drive could do and further the boundaries of the human race, he declared that he was going to power up his drive on his personal ship and his destination was the Andromeda galaxy.

It was quite a declaration and something extremely dangerous as no vessel had even tried such a thing. The power requirements were so enormous that his ship was fitted with eight of the largest most powerful engines that were available and, alone, he powered the vessel up and began the six second countdown to transition. Holovideod live and transmitted across the settled worlds, Ivan Nicholson entered compressed space.

And he tore the galaxy apart.

At worst, Ivan Nicholson theorised that the Shift Drive, overpowered and sent on the longest journey ever conceived, would simply fail and either explode or enter compressed space and not emerge. But what happened, what he did, would wipe out nearly all human life across all explored space and, even worse, allow entities beyond comprehension to enter our reality.

When Ivan Nicholson's ship, the *Virgil*, entered compressed space the engines tore apart. The energy they released tore into the fabric of space and time and sent shockwaves across reality. So intense was the rupture that it had an unforeseen side effect; it tore into the Shift Drives of every starship fitted with the revolutionary engine as if every engine was somehow linked and the chain reaction ripped through them all. At this time, nearly every vessel across the settled worlds was fitted with the drive.

Every drive in every ship in every star system was ripped apart by the subspace shockwave. Each explosion created more shockwaves and the cascade was unstoppable. A tidal wave of ruptured engines killed billions in a matter of seconds, some explosions so huge that entire worlds were reduced to cinders. In transit, in orbit, in dockyards, on worlds, the vessels erupted with no warning and no mercy. Each explosion measured in the hundreds of megatons and it was complete, total annihilation.

Sadly, this was just the beginning.

The shockwave from Ivan Nicholson's Shift Drive not only tore apart the fabric of space and time, it tore a whole through the fabric of reality and opened a portal to a dimension that is still unexplained, unexplored and unimaginable. Each detonating vessel also opened holes in reality and before anyone could even understand what had happened concerning the millions of detonating starships, the evil poured forth as if they had been waiting for a chance to be released upon our reality.

The evil, or as they came to be known 'The Hellstorm', spewed from the portals from another dimension, a dimension so corrupt and evil that even these insane, chaotic beasts felt the need to

escape from it. Like waves of bile they came, washing over everything and killing with claw, sword, gun and spell. They tore through the survivors of the holocaust and leeches them of the one thing that gave them sustenance; their life force.

The biblical analogies were not lost on the few faithful who had kept their theological beliefs throughout the centuries, even after the old religions were long thought dead. Hell had been opened and the demons, devils and fallen spirits were pouring forth to exact their revenge, take our souls and reign over our creation. Blood and vileness would be their way, and the human race would die.

And they very nearly did. Of the billions and billions of human beings spread across the hundreds of stars they had conquered and tamed, ninety-nine percent of them were killed by the erupting starships and the invading hordes.

Humans had become weak, and they had become complacent, but nothing could have prepared them for the horrors that now spilled from the holes in space and time. Their military was all but destroyed as every navy vessel was fitted with a Shift Drive and every base had a transport ship with a Shift Drive, and every settlement, outpost, colony and station had a ship docked, moored or nearby with a Shift Drive. Nothing and nobody was spared.

The few survivors called the event 'The Shift'. They had to adapt quickly if they were to survive.

And adapt they did.

THE STELLAR EMPIRE AS IT WAS

At its height, when Shift Drive capable ships were making thousands of jumps a day and connecting the hundreds of worlds that the Empire had transformed and settled, the Stellar Empire was a place of relative peace and ongoing progress. Technology had made the lives of every citizen of the Empire easier and with extended lifespans – two hundred years or more for the wealthy – there was time to not only make breakthroughs but to follow up on them, so research was not stalled or interpreted incorrectly by following generations. Once artificial intelligence had been perfected the rate of advancement was increased a thousandfold. Artificial minds could calculate, theorise and create in a fraction of the time it took a human being to do it.

Daily life was simple. A few hours a day working on their chosen profession – although most citizens opted not to work and pursued lives of luxury – and the rest taken up with socialising and indulging in risk-free sports, arts and hobbies. It was said that this age produced some of the most amazing pieces of art that had ever been seen, from paintings, written pieces, games and architecture.

Everything was pristine, white, smooth and clean. It was either voice or motion activated and designed with the pleasing aesthetic in mind. All kinds of design choices covered every kind of product, from the simplest clothes to the largest starships. Whether it was crude and functional or sleek and artistically revolutionary, everything was produced to be visually pleasing first and functional second.

Cities the size of continents dominated the surface of worlds, with gigantic space elevators that stretched to orbit tethered to space stations. Asteroids were hollowed out and turned into habitats where people could live, work and live their lives, self-contained worlds in themselves. Space stations the size of cities could eclipse the sun in orbit of the vast worlds they circled and deep, underground complexes for research and development were dug into moons and planetoids like warrens.

Everything about the Stellar Empire was about personal pleasure, progress and the expansion of knowledge, art and experience.

THE STELLAR EMPIRE NOW

Now, mere months after The Shift, the remnants of the human race are trying to simply survive on the very few ships, relics of the age before the the Shift Drive, that are left.

Everything is different, now. The settled worlds are nothing more than burned planets with no ecosphere, or the domains of the Hellstorm, entire globes covered in fire and desolation, the Atmosphere Formatters still working and unknowingly extending the lives of these ruined homes. The once great cities are shells

THE HELLSTORM

It's a rather archaic name that the invading hordes have been given but it is more than suitable. No human being has seen beyond the portals that they have come through, but all that can be seen and heard is fire and screaming.

Every exploding Shift Drive created a portal, the larger the vessel the larger the hole that was torn into the fabric of reality. Most of these portals slowly closed, the larger ones are still collapsing and the portals of the largest starships are still open and show no signs of sealing. Nobody knows how large or what state the portal that Ivan Nicholson's oversized engines created, but it tore apart the entire Proxima Centauri star system.

The closest thing that the Hellstorm can be compared to is the devils and demons of old, the horned beasts and twisted beings that haunted the dreams of the wicked and terrified the souls of the faithful. Using brute force, technology and what can be only described as magic, these creatures devastated everything.

WHAT THEY DO

The Hellstorm seem to have just one purpose; to recreate whatever hellish nightmare they have escaped from here in our reality. However, living in our domain is proving difficult for them.

It is not known what these creatures sustain themselves on in their own reality but here, over time, they begin to wither away until they fall into a torpor state. There is no form of food or liquid that sustains them and the only way they can replenish themselves is by draining any living thing of its lifeforce and absorbing it themselves.

This lifeforce is known by many different names; essence, spirit, bioenergy, the soul. This energy field is what the Hellstorm crave to keep themselves alive.

Only the creatures that have come from the other side of the rift requires this constant sustenance; the Demon, the Devil and the Fiend. They must drain at least one animal or human a day to live, more if they wish, and this is done by a simple touch. Powerful runes carved into the flesh of their arms glow fiery red when they touch their victim, and they lose 2 STAMINA points per round until they are fully drained

Once a creature is drained of its lifeforce, and depending on how much lifeforce is taken, it becomes one of four things; a Beast, a Zombie, an Undead or a Turned.

If a Hellstorm drains all STAMINA points they perish and become a Zombie. If it is an animal they have drained, it becomes a Beast.

If the victim is left with at least 4 STAMINA points they become an Undead.

If they are left with 6 STAMINA points they have the option to become a Turned.

If a victim is pulled away from the Hellstorm they can avoid becoming any one of these things, but they will never regain the lost STAMINA and the Initial STAMINA score remains at the score it was at when they were pulled away from being drained.

If a Hellstorm does not drain anything, they fall into a torpor which makes them vulnerable. Therefore, they try surround themselves with Zombies and Undead to keep away possible threats, either from humans or other Hellstorm, and the Turned bring them fresh victims.

WHAT THEY ARE

The Hellstorm come in various shapes and sizes, twisted creatures like warped monsters created from animals we knew on old Earth, but with intelligence and an insatiable need for violence and cruelty. However, there are three definite monsters that stand out from the rest.

The Demon is the largest of them all and the first to burst through the rifts with their kind screaming in their wake. It is a huge creature, at least six metres tall, and it has the shape of a muscular human and can be male or female, and the head of what appears to be a skinless goat. The body is covered in whatever the creature is able to get hold of; sometimes, cloth or furs, sometimes hammered metal, sometimes the skin of the fallen.

DEMON - SKILL 11 STAMINA 12 -

The Devil

DEVIL - SKILL 9 STAMINA 10

The Fiend

FIEND - SKILL 7 STAMINA 8

The effect these three creatures have on living things is nothing but corruption.

Beasts

BEATS – SKILL 5 STAMINA 6

Zombies

ZOMBIE – SKILL 3 STAMINA 2

The Undead

UNDEAD – SKILL 4 STAMINA 4

The Turned

TURNED – SKILL 6 STAMINA 6

These ships are small, no larger than 30 or 40 metres, and were discovered in old shipyards, personal collections and even museums.

SPEED - Fast

COMBAT - +1

ARMOUR - Light

WEAPONS - None

MODULES – 2 x Cargo Hold, Enhanced Jackstone Drive

HULL – 12

The enhanced Jackstone Drive means that it never requires recharging or fueling, it is a self-sustaining engine that has decades of use left in it.