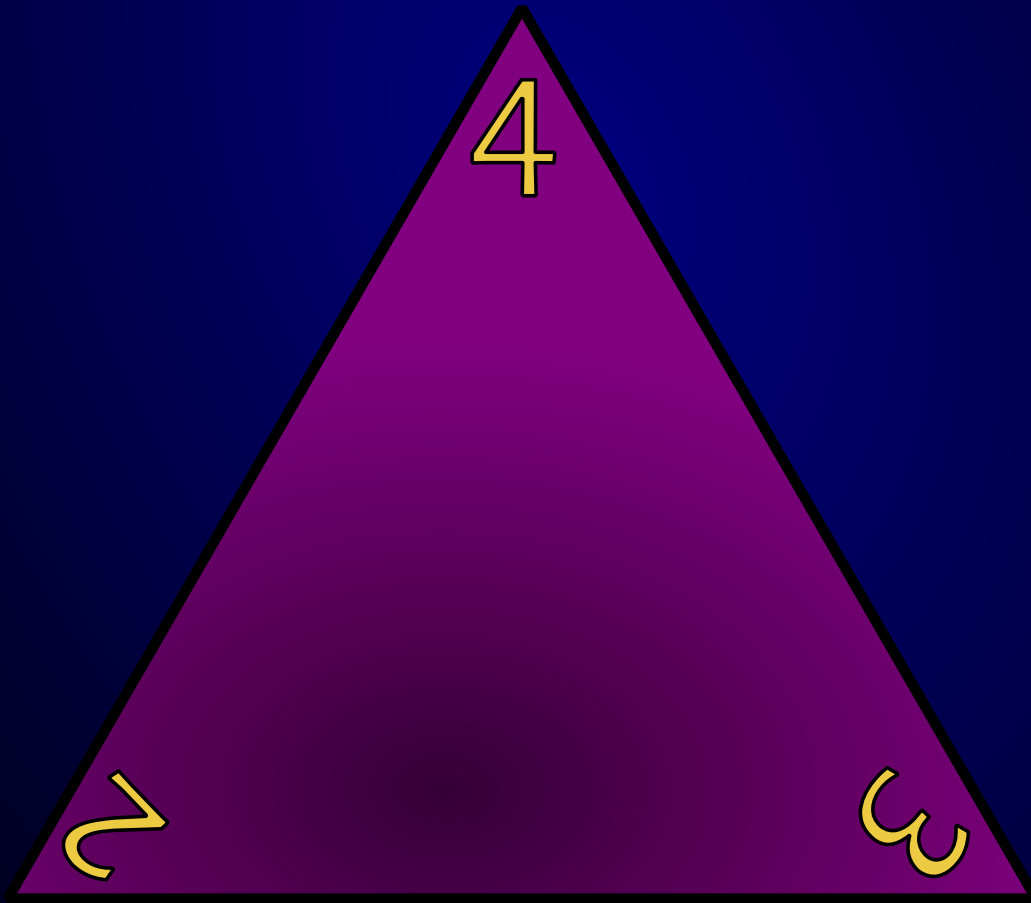


FOURS



Simple, Universal, Fun

homoeoteleuton

games

Ages 10+

What is FOURS?

FOURS stands for “Fast, Open, Universal Roleplaying System”. It is a storytelling roleplaying game, in which players collaborate to create a world and adventures.

In order to play FOURS, you some pencils and paper, as well as a handful of four sided dice. You could also use digital record sheets available separately from this book.

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Playing the Game

FOURS is intended to be played by veteran roleplayers and novices alike. It uses dice rolls to allow players to determine what exactly their characters can and can't do, with one player, the Game Master (or GM), serving as a referee.

FOURS is focused on storytelling and drama; the setting is created collaboratively, and all players build the rules of the universe together; you could adventure in the ruins of a dying world, or in a fantastical realm, or in the far future in a distant place.

When playing FOURS, you will need a GM; this player is responsible for setting up Episodes to play through, as well as creating the supporting cast for the players' adventures.

The setting, each character, and each Episode have “Facts”; each Fact determines something about the character or universe and gives them flavor.

The Roll

All rolls in FOURS revolve around a central four-sided die, plus Facts. When characters want to do something that they might not succeed at, the Game Master will determine the difficulty of the roll.

Once the die is cast, the player will determine their result by adding the result of the die roll to the number of Facts that assist their character, minus the number of Facts that impede their character.

The GM does not roll dice for their characters if they find that their interests clash with the players'. Rather, if the player attempts actions that influence one of the GM's characters (either to help them or harm them), they may add Facts from that character to hinder or help the players' actions.

If the GM so desires, they may roll actions for their NPC's, in which case the players have an opportunity to use their Facts per the rules in the Character section.

Jen's character, Ori-ten, is attempting to search the deserts for a missing robot. The difficulty is set to 4, but Ori-ten has the Power: Scry Fact, so when Jen rolls she adds 1 to the die's result. She needs to roll 3 or 4 to succeed, and if she rolls a 1 or 2 she fails. The die is rolled for a result of 3, so Ori-ten succeeds in his search.

Facts

Facts are crucial to the game, but there are restrictions on how many Facts can apply to a single roll. Character-contributed Facts must come from different categories (i.e. an Icon and a Three), and only two Facts may be contributed by a single character. No more than three Facts may be contributed by characters to a single roll.

If there are characters on both sides of the roll (some impeding, some assisting), then each group of characters may contribute their Facts, with the limit counting for each side.

Setting-contributed Icons help a roll once, though up to three Rules may impede a roll. Places count as Settings for the purposes of contributing Facts.

Episode-contributed Icons override Episode-contributed rules.

Characters

Characters have five types of facts: Icons, Twos, Threes, Fours, and Vulnerabilities.

A character has two Facts of each type; these are determined in cooperation with the GM; they might be something tangible, such as “Strength”, some archetype, such as “Lucky Scoundrel”, or an iconic piece of gear “hand-crafted plasma sword”.

The process of creating a character is simple; each player's character has two Facts in each category, and as soon as the player and GM agree that the Facts for a character are appropriate, the character may be created.

Example: Jack and his GM Luke are working together to create Jack's character, Hewci. Since they are in an exciting space opera setting, Jack suggests that the character be an alien, gaining the fact “Koowa” to represent his alien species. Luke argues that this Fact is too vague, so Jack and Luke settle on the Fact “Koowa Strength” as one of Hewci's Icons. They continue this procedure for the rest of Hewci's Facts.

Regardless of the Fact, it falls into one of four categories:

Icons: These are the character defining elements that a character is most notable for. They may use their Icons on any roll that the player and GM agree is appropriate.

Twos: Twos are less potent abilities, but still very closely associated with a character. When a character uses a Two, they are forced to enter Cooldown; after the next roll that involves them, they may use Twos, Threes, and Fours again.

Threes: Threes are abilities that tax a character greatly. When a character uses a Three, they are forced to enter Cooldown; unlike a Two they must wait for two more rolls that involve them to pass before they can use Twos, Threes, and Fours again.

Fours: Fours are abilities that a character has barely mastered. When a character uses a Four, they enter a Cooldown and must wait for three more rolls

that involve them to pass before they can use Twos, Threes, or Fours again.

Vulnerabilities: A character also receives two Vulnerabilities. If a character's Vulnerability is used as a Fact on a roll, the result is the opposite of normal. When a Vulnerability comes into play, a character goes off Cooldown (if they were on Cooldown). Unlike other Character-based Facts, they can be used in rolls by other characters and the GM.

Using Facts

When a character would use a Fact, they have two limitations. First, they must logically be involved in the scene. Second, they may only use one Icon and one of their Twos, Threes, or Fours. A character may use as many Vulnerabilities as they like.

Further, the use of Twos, Threes, and Fours is limited by Cooldown.

Cooldown

When a character uses a Two, Three, or Four, place a four-sided die on one of its sides. If the Fact used was a Two, set the die to its 1 position, if it was a Three, set the die to its 2 position, and if it was a Four set the die to its 3 position. Each time the character participates in a roll in which they use a Fact, they move the count on this die down by 1, unless it is 1, in which case they remove the die.

In addition, if a character's Vulnerability comes into play, they immediately remove the die that tracks their Cooldown status.

When the die is removed, the character is no longer on Cooldown, and may use Twos, Threes, and Fours again.

Example: Hewci's “Koowa Rage” vulnerability comes up while Jack is trying to disguise his character as a prisoner. When a Royal Guard insults the proud alien, he causes Hewci to have a -1 penalty on his roll's result, as it is hard to pretend that you are a prisoner if you tear your handcuffs apart!

Actions

The central focus of FOURS is actions. The GM and players take turns with actions; three players each get one action, then the GM gets an action. Each player may only take an action once before the GM gets an action (the exception being if there are two players or only one player!), and players should generally take actions in order.

In addition, players may split their characters into smaller groups to do different things in the context of the story. In this case, each group gets two actions, and then the GM gets one action for each group.

Most actions will require a roll (the difficulty of which is determined by the GM), but on occasion an action that is very simple may be done without a roll.

Example: Greg's character, Jon, is attempting to return to his starship. Luke decides that the action would have been automatic, but instead of finding the hangar empty Jon is greeted by the crime lord Pava, who Jon owes a significant amount of money to. Luke sets the Difficulty of getting past Pava to 3; the corpulent criminal is not particularly interested in Jon right now.

Elimination

Characters can target each other for "Elimination". The base difficulty of Elimination is 4; any Facts applied by the attacker (and their allies in Cooperation), or the defender (and their allies in Cooperation) adjust this difficulty, and then the die is rolled.

Player characters have three Elimination Points; when a character with Elimination Points is "eliminated", they are removed from play for the rest of the Episode. The exact fate of the character is up to the players and GM; many characters do not die, but are instead imprisoned, injured, or forced to deal with some concern outside the scope of their adventures.

At the consensus of a player and a GM, a character may die, but even this is not necessarily final; they may return as a spirit, or have a clone, or otherwise show up again in the storyline.

If a character's Elimination attempt fails, then the target character goes off any Cooldown they may have been on (or gone onto as a result of the Elimination attempt), and may make an Elimination attempt back. If the target's Elimination attempt fails, the original attacker does not go off Cooldown and does not get an Elimination attempt in return. If the players initiate an Elimination attempt, the GM automatically gets the next turn.

A player whose character suffers Elimination may create a new character for the remainder of the Episode, take over one of the GM's characters (with their permission), or simply wait to see what happens and rejoin play at the beginning of the next Episode.

Example: The evil Lor Hadan is attempting to strike down Jen's character, Ori-ten. Ori-ten's attempt to infiltrate Hadan's base has led to Jen racking up two Elimination Points for Ori-ten, and when Lor Hadan manages to get a +4 on his roll against Ori-ten, Jen and Luke collaborate for a moment. They decide that Ori-ten is killed, and Jen prepares a new character for the rest of that Episode and for subsequent Episodes.

Cooperation

Characters, both player-controlled and GM controlled, may find themselves intending to cooperate with each other. When the need for cooperation arises, a character may use one Fact to assist another. If this is a Two, Three, or Four, the character may only assist the other if they are not on Cooldown, and they enter Cooldown once the Fact is used.

Example: Jon and Hewci are in a firefight with the Royal Guards, after Hewci lost his cool. The Guards make an Elimination test against Hewci, and Jon uses his Lucky Scoundrel Fact while Hewci uses his Koowa Strength Fact. This gives the Royal Guards a -2 penalty on their roll.

Competition

Characters who wish to hinder each others' actions may spend up to two Facts to defend themselves. As with the usual rules for Twos, Threes, and Fours, characters can only use these limited abilities if they are

not on Cooldown, although unlike the usual rules using these abilities to defend one's interests does not trigger a new Cooldown. Multiple characters can Cooperate for a Competition, with the usual limit of three Facts being used.

Example: Jon attempts to save Ori-ten from Lon Hadar, using an Action to give Ori-ten an opportunity to escape. Ori-ten and Lon Hadar are old enemies, and Lon Hadar is the main villain, so Luke sets the difficulty at 4. Jon's LD-4 Laser Pulser Fact gives him a +1 to the roll (shooting tends to disrupt peoples' concentration), but Lon Hadar uses his hand-made plasma sword Fact to deflect the laser harmlessly, and his Royal Guard allies use their laser rifle Fact to further add a -1 to Jon's roll, so that the total roll modifier ends up at -1. Worse, Luke decides that Jon's Selfish Vulnerability applies, so his half-hearted effort which was already impossible is even more difficult!

Settings

The setting serves as a powerful tool to shape the flow of play in FOURS. Settings have Icons and Rules; these work similarly to a Character's Facts, but have some minor changes.

First, anyone can apply the effects of an Icon or Rule from a Setting to any appropriate roll, while characters can choose to apply their Icons, Twos, Threes, and Fours, but cannot be compelled to.

To design the setting, the players (as a group) set a total of two Icons and Rules (one Icon and one Rule, or two of either type). The GM adds one Icon and one Rule of their own, to make the four Permanent Facts of the setting.

The only rule regarding Settings is that only one Icon and one Rule from the Setting can come into play at a time.

Example: Jen likes the idea of there being some mysterious magical entity in the setting, so she introduces the concept of Power. Jack and Greg like this idea, so they make "The Power" one of the Icons of the setting. To counter this, Luke makes "Power Sensitivity Required" a Rule, so that not

everyone can use a Power related ability without building a character around it.

Temporary Setting Facts

In addition to the four Permanent Facts of the setting, the GM has one Temporary Setting Fact and the players have one Temporary Setting Fact. They may change these at any time, but only after taking an Action with one of their characters.

Temporary Setting Facts can be either an Icon or a Rule, and this is determined when the Fact is selected.

Example: Jon is trying to fly away from the Royal Guards in his spaceship, and Luke has just rolled for the Royal Navy's interceptors to make an Elimination roll against him. To make things more interesting, Luke decides that there should be an Asteroids rule, making things more difficult for Jon (and the Royal Guards).

Places

Places are ways that the GM can contribute to the mood and tone of a game. Each Place has a single Fact, which can be either detrimental or beneficial. At the GM's discretion, a player can add a Place to the game as well, making for more interesting environments.

Example: The Netam Bar is a den of thieves and scoundrels. In addition to being Jon's usual haunt, it is a place with a Rough Crowd; great if you're trying to hide from the Royal Guard, but not so great if you have legitimate business to do.

Episodes

FOURS focuses on "Episodes", chapters of play that serve as natural breaking points in the story. Episodes are created by the GM, and have an Icon and Rule of their own.

In addition, each Episode has a "Crisis" that is set by the GM. This is kept secret from the players at the beginning, but the GM's goal is to reveal the Crisis to the players and encourage them to solve it.

Episodes can have an arbitrary length; they may take place across a single session of play, or across multiple games. It may even be the case that multiple Episodes pass in the span of one session of play. The GM has the final say on when an Episode begins and ends.

Transitioning Between Episodes

Whenever an Episode ends and a new one begins, each character may exchange one of their Facts from each category (i.e. one Icon, one Two, one Three, one Four, and one Vulnerability) for another, using the normal rules for character creation.

In addition, after each episode either the Players or the GM may change one of their Permanent Facts of the setting, making certain things more prominent or less influential in the setting.

Any character that was eliminated may return to play at the end of an Episode. This is at their player's discretion (or the GM's discretion for GM controlled characters).

The Game Master

This section is intended for Game Masters, though it doesn't include anything that players can't necessarily see. It handles rules for bringing in elements that are more complicated than normal Characters and Settings.

The Role of the GM

Your role in the game is to keep things flowing. To this end, you are able to use as many characters as you want, including special types of characters such as minor characters and legends, add places, and generally tell a story.

In crafting your story, give each of the player's characters a chance to shine. With the right timing, you can set up important plot events so that each player can have their own achievements throughout the course of an Episode and even longer games.

What the GM is NOT!

The GM is not in competition with the players. You want to guide them through a story, which means sometimes providing risk and danger, as well as real setbacks, to the players' characters, but you do not necessarily want to crush them. There may come times in the story that you are telling (especially if the Setting is predisposed for it) that the players are dealt grievous defeats; the destruction of a planet, the loss of loved ones, or even the death of all the player characters.

Determining Difficulty

One of the jobs of the GM is to determine the difficulty of actions. FOURS uses a very simple four-sided die mechanic, so you don't have a whole lot of resolution to work with. The following list of difficulties should provide guidelines for setting the difficulty for characters' actions.

o (or less): Automatic. If you're requiring a character to roll for a task this simple, they should have some Facts getting in the way to make it more difficult for them to succeed.

1: Foolproof. These tasks should be easily accomplished by the average person. Of course, the old adage applies that "there is always a better fool".

2: Everyday. The average person might encounter difficulty with this, but someone who knows what they're doing will get it done with no issues.

3: Risky. At this point, characters might begin to run into trouble. A trained heroic character might do fine, but having risky actions frequently is a recipe for disaster.

4: Hard. Most characters, even characters with a Fact or two on their side, will still fail to complete this action a fair amount of the time. This is the point at which a character off Cooldown who has perfect Facts for the job will begin to have difficulties with the test.

5: Expert. Only heroes or experts in the field need apply. A character by themselves has a 50/50 shot if they're off Cooldown and can apply two Facts, though their odds increase if the Setting lends itself to the task or they can have Cooperation.

6: Heroic. Most people can't even hope to get this done. A character needs at least two Facts on their side to even hope to succeed.

7+: Epic. A character who succeeds against Epic destiny has defied fate; even with the help of another hero and with perfect training they rely on perfect circumstances to complete an epic task.

Characters

Game Master controlled characters may have some special quirks that keep them from being fully compatible with regular characters. The two special forms of Game Master characters are Minor Characters and Legends. At the GM's discretion, players may follow the rules for these types of characters, but doing so is not recommended for most cases due to balance concerns.

Minor Characters

Minor Characters have only a single Icon and a single Vulnerability. They may be eliminated with a single Elimination roll. As a GM, you should use minor

characters to provide setting flavor and potential dangers to the players without requiring you to go through the full character creation process.

One use for Minor Characters is to give yourself a way to interact with the players.

Minor Characters also make a good basis for common enemies, like monsters or enemies.

Example: The Royal Guard has only one Icon, their Laser Rifle, and one Vulnerability, their Weak Will. They are easy to Eliminate using the right techniques, but they can pose a threat to players.

Legends

Legends have three Facts from each category, and they cannot be eliminated. Instead, whenever an Elimination roll succeeds against them, they gain a Cooldown die, set to 4. This die is removed using the normal rules, either counting down over time or being removed with the use of a vulnerability.

Legends are characters that are great threats to most characters in the universe, and should be tightly controlled; a player may have a character become a Legend, but doing so should be rare and a reward for a character that has contributed greatly across multiple Episodes.

Legends make great villains, because they are impossible to kill and will be stronger than the average character.

Designing Episodes

Designing Episodes is one of the hardest parts of running a game of FOURS. As a GM, you are telling a story to your players, but you want to incorporate as many elements of their characters as possible. Ask each of your players what they envision their character's motives and background as being, and use that as a spring pad to epic events.

Learning from the Masters

One of the easy ways to make adventures is to look at common structures of stories across genres and build a general framework before you even get going. Joseph Campbell's Heroic Journey is a common formula that can be used to create engaging adventures, and which serves as a great way to get characters who might not be adventurers into the fold.

Step 1: The Ordinary World

At this point, characters are doing whatever they were doing before the Episode begins. As a practical suggestion, you might opt to have each of the characters be separated at this step, working individually from each other to come to a common point. The primary purpose of this step is to give players an introduction to the Setting and give them a few Places and Minor Characters to get accustomed to.

Example: Harmony is working as a mercenary at Thales Outpost while Nick and Marcus are working as miners on Halidon-7.

Step 2: The Call to Adventure

At this point, as a GM you begin introducing the Crisis of the episode; it may be dramatic or simple, but the protagonist characters will receive some external impetus leading them toward adventure.

Example: Harmony, Nick, and Marcus are drawn out of their comfort zone by a meteor impact that shatters the moon of Halidon-7. Nick and Marcus arrive at Thales Outpost as Harmony's unit is prepared for rescue operations.

Step 3: The Refusal

The Refusal is a critical step that may or may not occur when playing FOURS. If players choose to stay away from the main adventure, either because they are attached to the Places and Minor Characters, then it may be necessary to push them forward.

Example: The inhabitants of Thales Outpost are left confused when power goes out, only to discover that the station has run out of fuel. Harmony, Nick, and Marcus are

sent out on a scouting expedition, hoping to find some of the Hydrogen-2 fuel that the space station needs to restart its fusion reactors.

Step 4: Meeting the Mentor

Meeting the Mentor is a great opportunity for you to give the players some more exposition. The Mentor should touch on the characters' Facts, perhaps even offering to swap out one Fact for another for characters who want to change.

Example: Harmony, Nick, and Marcus fail to find the Hydrogen-2 fuel, but they do find an ancient alien embedded in the meteor that struck Halidon-7. They awaken it, and it gives them a psychic image of an alien invasion fleet, as well as a warning that the mothership must be destroyed.

Step 5: Crossing the Threshold

Crossing the Threshold is the point at which the characters go from being ordinary to officially being heroes. They are fully dropped into the adventure, and this is a great stage to introduce new places and minor characters.

Example: Our heroes return to Thales Outpost to get a new ship capable of heading to the outskirts of the solar system and confronting the alien menace. While there, they meet an enigmatic ex-pirate, Ricard, who offers to join them for a fee.

Step 6: Tests, Allies, Enemies

This stage involves the heroes first meeting the true origins of the Crisis, as well as dealing with the consequences. This is a great time to introduce both Minor Characters, ordinary Characters, and Legends, although it might be wise to keep players away from direct contact with the Legends at this point.

Example: The crew heads out on their ship, the Ares VI, to scout the alien threat. The ship breaks down as they leave Halidon-7, and they are forced to repair it before they run out of breathable air. In addition, they have an encounter with Ricard's old crew, who are convinced to leave them alone.

Step 7: The Approach

The Approach is a final time of preparations for The Ordeal. It is a great time for a second encounter with the mentor character, or for a character to encounter a new ally and take advantage of it.

The Crisis is going to be looming in this section of the journey, and heroes are going to need the time of respite. This is a great place to put some simple tasks in to reset heroes' Cooldown, if they have any.

Example: As they head to the outskirts of the solar system, the crew meets with members of the enigmatic J'itaan, a nomadic group of spacers. The J'itaan have insight to the alien menace, and agree to help the crew if they need it.

Step 8: The Ordeal

The Ordeal is the greatest test that the heroes will face. It can be internal and psychological or external and physical or social, but it almost always includes some form of "death".

One of the things that you might want to do during the Ordeal is to focus on Elimination actions; players should come into direct confrontation with a Legend and be forced to fight for their lives.

Example: The crew lands on the alien mothership, but they incorrectly believe that they have gone unnoticed. As they proceed further inward, they face an ambush from alien soldiers. The J'itaan strike, giving time for the heroes to destroy the ship's power core, triggering a cascade reaction. Ricard, however, is injured badly when the alien Lord Mixxix strikes him down with an energy claw.

Step 9: The Reward

Now that the enemy is defeated, the heroes have their opportunity for glory. The reward can be physical; magic items, money, or super-technology, or come in the form of learning, insight, or friendships. Often the focus of the Reward is moving the heroes back toward the ordinary lives they enjoyed prior to the Crisis.

Example: Harmony receives a pardon for the charge of desertion she faced for running off to fight the alien menace, while Marcus and Nick receive a massive financial

reward. Ricard, still barely clinging to life, achieves fame as the hero of the solar system.

Step 10: The Road Back

At this point, the Crisis is over, but the heroes still have some task to attempt and some challenge to overcome before they can fully return to their normal lives.

At this point, much of the danger is past, but heroes are still hounded by something from their adventures that keeps them from finding peace.

Example: While on its way back to Halidon-7, the Ares VI is attacked by one of the alien starfighters. Harmony manages to man the guns and fight it off; without the mothership to guide its actions it is disjointed, driven only by a desire for vengeance.

Step 11: The Resurrection

The damage from the Ordeal is undone as the heroes confront the changes and outcomes of their adventures. The heroes' actions can shape the fate of world events, and failure or greed can lead to dire consequences.

Example: With the Ares VI back on Thales Outpost, Ricard is rushed to the infirmary for treatment. As he recovers, slowly but surely, he is forced to choose between his past as a pirate and a new life as a hero for the whole system. After a confrontation with his old band, who intend to take over Thales and impose Ricard as a dictator, he sides with the system as a whole, fighting off his old friends in the name of justice.

Step 12: The (Triumphant) Return

Once the heroes have fully vanquished the Crisis and dealt with the aftermath of their actions, they have the opportunity to return to their ordinary life. Their Reward from earlier in the Hero's Journey may help with this, but they have a final chance to make a difference, reaping the rewards not just financially but also by becoming better people than they were before.

Example: Harmony leaves her post as a mercenary to become an emissary with the J'itaan, bringing them back

into the fold of the system's inhabitants. Ricard runs for office, and is elected as Prime Minister of the system. Under his leadership, the system enters a golden age of peace, prosperity, and productivity. Nick and Marcus use the rewards they received from the J'itaan and the people of Thales Outpost to start their own mining company, joining with the J'itaan and venturing further out from the center of their solar system to gather and refine advanced materials that improve the quality of life for everyone.