At the end of humanity's darkest century, a curious symbiosis between man and machine emerged. This eventually enabled humans to leave their natural bodies and to free their minds from obsolete constraints. With their brains sustained by artificial means, space travel also became feasible. Other civilizations were encountered, and peaceful intragalactic trade soon established.

Now, the growing civilizations create a huge demand for resources which can only be satisfied by the ever-expanding frontier. Competition is brutal and anything goes in this galactic gold rush. You will now join it on a venture to an untapped planet. Prepare to assume...

cortex
C O M M A N D



You'll be spending the next ten years on an entirely undeveloped planet. Age, gender and starting location don't matter here. You are who you make yourself, and the land is blank save for what you build upon it. Well, that and what your competitors build. Three other commanders contest your claim, and each wants to keep this world's resources for him/her/it/them-self. All of you are ready to fight, kill and die (by proxy) for the sheer profit to be had here. You can't leave the planet (orbit is fine) while the jump is in progress. You can start in the body you had for your last jump, or as a brain-in-a-jar mounted in a humanoid robot.

Good luck.

Business Model

Pick one. Your choice will determine how you acquire troops and supplies during your stay.

FreeTrade License (300)

The FreeTrade corporation has an incredibly strong hold on every market; they decide who gets to do business and where. You are a card-carrying affiliate, so they will sell you weapons, equipment, transportation and Backup Brains for what they assure you is a very reasonable fee. They'll also sell you Culled Clones at a discount, which make for decent remote-control meat-puppets but aren't capable of much else. When the time comes to move on, be sure to ask about their pan-dimensional delivery services (they will continue to do business with you even if you move on)!

Monopoly Breaker (200)

You've stolen a number of cloning tanks and transplantation stations from the local TradeStar, and have them up and running... more or less. You can make all the Culled Clones you want, but making healthy, aesthetically pleasing bodies or Backup Brains will take some practice. Or, perhaps, skills gained from a previous jump? In any case, FreeTrade is less than thrilled with your meddling. Take the Official Sanctions drawback without gaining any points. It doesn't count toward your drawback limits. After the jump, these facilities are automatically installed in your Warehouse.

Thrill-seeker (Free)

Brains in jars? Meatpuppets? Ick. There are four commanders on-world, but you aren't one of them. You're just here to smash things, and take other things. The Ronin find this hilarious, so they'll provide contacts for mercenaries and sell you supplies for as long as you continue to make the commanders look like chumps.

Perks

Micromanager (100)

You can effectively direct whole groups of unbrained clones at once, or maneuver individuals with impeccable precision. You might even be able to pass them off as real people- what a great party trick! You also gain a modicum of talent in persuading actual sapients.

One-Brain-Army (100)

You have a great deal of skill at arms, and can fight effectively in any body you end up in. Hiding behind meatpuppets is for chumps.

Architect (100)

Your defensive emplacements are second to none. Once you are set up, you can devote all your time to mining… at least until your competitors realize just how rich you are getting.

Joint Venture (300, Requires Micromanager)

One of your companions joins you as a co-commander. Control of all assets is shared between you, increasing your forces' ability to multi-task and collaborate. Your co-commander gets 400 points to spend on Perks and Tech Contracts from this Jump (no discounts, Joint Venture is off-limits), but you two will have to share the standard amount of start-up capital.

BrainMech (300, Requires One-Brain-Army)

Instead of a meaty body or a BrainWalker, you've housed your brain in a mechanized war machine. You have a great deal of armor and hardpoints for mounting weapons, but are incapable of fine manipulation. FreeTrade doesn't sell these; if you don't take it now, you'll need to rig one up yourself if you want one later.

Set Them Up (300, Requires Architect)

Whether it's with mining tools or airstrikes, you know where to hit buildings to bring them down or crack them open. Build your competitors some back doors for their compounds, then put bullets between their lobes when they least expect it.

Stargazer (50)

You begin your enterprise accompanied by an Anti-Air Drone, which will shut down any and all hot-drop attempts made against you. This particular drone has unlimited ammunition, but can be damaged normally and will not leave your side.

On Call (200)

You personally own a dropship, which means you'll save a small fortune on shipping. It also comes equipped with a tractor beam, so you can easily steal assets from your competitors and then sell them to FreeTrade. Questions may be asked, but they don't really expect you to answer.

Portfolio (300)

You can maintain two simultaneous Tech Contracts without any surcharges or political backlash. This'll give you some excellent flexibility, though you may have some issues with mistaken identity and friendly fire!

Backup Plan (600)

All commanders make use of Backup Brains to ensure trivialities like death don't put them out of business. As a Jumper, your nature makes taking advantage of this… problematic. With this perk, however, you can cheat the system and make use of a single Backup per Jump without breaking your Chain. You still need to provide all the standard tools involved in the procedure.

To make use of Backups, an allied Transplantation Station must be in operation upon death, within a range that will not cause signal degradation. The process may also fail if the death is quick and thorough enough that the personality data doesn't make it out before the implanted transmitter is wrecked.

Crustacean's Call (50)

You have all the crabs. Whenever you think about crabs, a lone, amphibious, housecat-sized alien crab poofs into existence somewhere within arm's reach. Said crab is rather territorial and *not* under your control.

If you eat 256 crabs of the same species in a single day, you gain the ability to call that type of crab in the same manner.

Mine, Mine, Mine! (Free)

You find digging for precious metals unaccountably soothing, and along the way you discover you have a knack for it. Digging restores your sanity and willpower, but above and beyond that your mining hauls are inexplicably 25% greater on average. These bonuses only apply when you are directly mining; having meatpuppets or automatons do it doesn't count.



Tech Contracts

Pick one, or two if you took Portfolio. Techs determine what units you can buy/build/grow, and provide a personal skill.

Coalition (300, Discount FreeTrade License or Joint Venture)

A militarized organization, the Coalition produce a large array of units and weaponry to choose from. They are versatile and powerful, making them a strong ally or a dangerous foe. You gain skill in maintenance and general care for weapons, vehicles and military equipment. You might not be able to build them, but you can keep them in working condition indefinitely.

Dummy (200, Discount FreeTrade License)

These robots were originally designed as test subjects for weapons, vehicle safety measures, and other lethal experiments. Their arsenal consists mostly of re-purposed construction tools, but some experimental energy weapons are also present. You become skilled in kitbashing and jury-rigging; when you don't have the right tools for the job, any tools will do.

Ronin (200, Discount FreeTrade License, Free Thrill-seeker)

Rag-tag parties of bandits who prey on weak and unsuspecting explorers. Their soldiers are unarmored and weapons primitive (20th century antiques!), but they manage to get the job done. You can pick up any weapon and use it passably, but you need to put as much effort in as anyone else if you seek mastery.

Browncoats (300, Discount FreeTrade License or Set Them Up)

A strong mercenary group who are fearsome when confronted up-close. What they lack in range is made up for in durability, allowing them to close distances while soaking bullets. You gain skill with fire- flamethrowers just feel right in your hands and you never make mistakes while executing controlled burns. You could also turn this knowledge to putting fires out.

Imperiatus (300, Discount FreeTrade License or One-Brain-Army)

The Imperatus rely on pure brute force and the reliability of their sturdy and easy to produce armored units. They use simple low rate of fire guns and cannons which tirelessly deals out good damage. You gain an intuitive knowledge of both ballistics and recoil.

Techion (400, Discount FreeTrade License)

The Techion were formed by a small group of elite corporations focusing on high-tech research and manufacture. They are sometimes employed and trusted by the TradeStars to do guard and escort duty. Your capacity for research and learning increases.

Freelancer (Free)

You don't have a contract. This can be either a blessing or a curse; your lack of affiliation means you can buy from any of the FreeTrade License discounted techs, but it also excludes you from the insider rates a contracted commander gets. You can combine this with Portfolio to have a contract with one Tech and a shaky agreement with the rest if you so desire. In short order, you become quite skilled at haggling.

Founder (600, Discount Monopoly Breaker)

Start your own Tech! You have the genetic information and fabrication plans to build units and equipment derived from one of your previous jumps. This choice is permanent once made, and you can't take it twice even if you have Portfolio. Jumps which make use of exotic materials, magic, spirituality or have a higher technology level than Cortex Command will present difficulties in replication. But you're a Jumper, aren't you? Surely you can figure something out.

Drawbacks

You can gain up to 600 points from drawbacks.

Ain't Got No Body (+100)

You don't have a body; you're a brain in a jar bolted to the ceiling of your starting bunker. Drops containing spare bodies seem to attract more attention from your competitors too...

Official Sanctions (+200)

You've done something to piss off FreeTrade. They will arbitrarily cut off (or double the price for) your access to certain goods and services, and change the restrictions minute-to-minute. They want to keep taking your money, but they also want to see you suffer.

Kick Me (+300)

Nominally, your competitors are also in competition with each other. Practically, they are allied to see you die. Non-Zombie foes will put aside their petty differences to shoot you and yours whenever a free-for-all would otherwise break out.

What a Dummy (+100)

You are a construction or training A.I. who has gained self-awareness. You must take the Dummy Tech Contract, and Free Trade operators will be spectacularly condescending throughout each and every one of your transactions. Bastards.

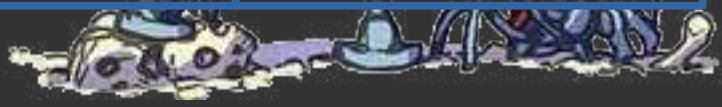


Look, sir! Free Crabs! (+200)

There has to be something in the water here. All your competitors engage in bizarre tactics which should be prohibitively expensive or strategically untenable. But somehow, they make it work. After the third time a crate full of giant crabs crushes one of your impeccably crafted bunkers, you'll begin to wonder just who is the fool in this scenario. Your attempts to duplicate their successes will end in tears.

Remnants of Mu-ilaak (+300)

This planet is positively lousy with Alien Cyborg Zombies. You and your competitors are besieged on all sides, but you can't just up and leave; you spent every last penny you had to make it here. If you leave without making it big, your brain'll definitely end up in a bin somewhere. So buckle down, and aim for the head; if you don't, it'll just crawl away and snatch another body. Spooky.



Ten years later, you've accumulated enough wealth for a long period of retirement (which, by this setting's life-extended standards, is pretty impressive) or perhaps the starting capital for a larger operation. You are no longer restricted to the planet, and all drawbacks are revoked. You have but one choice left to make…

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