

Galactic Echo



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Table of contents

Introduction.....	2
Purpose.....	3
Plot, setting and characters.....	4
The plot.....	4
Timeline: Galaxy in the year 2720.....	5
Timeline: Dirt in the year 2720.....	6
The place.....	6
The characters.....	7
The game master.....	8
Procedures.....	9
Dirt, now.....	9
Skull scenes.....	10
Memory scenes.....	11
Warmup and casting.....	12
Prologue.....	14
The course of the game.....	16
First act.....	16
First interlude.....	16
Second act.....	16
Second interlude.....	16
Third act.....	17
Epilogue.....	17
Characters	
Vignettes	
Timelines	
Cheat Sheet: Scene Types	

Printing in practice: If you prefer the text in columns, the main document (including characters) is printable as landscape, with two pages a sheet. The handouts document only works with one page a sheet, as landscape.

Introduction

Jonas og Miriam live – and thrive – in a harsh future world where civilization has collapsed, but one day their heads fill with memories of life in glamorous Galaxy, with the voices of Jonas and Miriam as glamorous Space/Time agents. A life that can maybe turn into reality, if they are willing to destroy their own world, and themselves.

Galactic Echo is jeepy relationship drama, and it's time travel science fiction. The game raises questions about the value of the lives of rich people and poor people, and explores the constructed and negotiated nature of human memory. With time machines, disintegrators and cyborg scrounger mercenaries.

Expected duration of play: Four hours.

Number of players: Four plus one game master.

Genre: Space opera drama with political subtext, loosely based on the science fiction comic *Valerian and Laureline* (which players need not have read).

Player type: You feel like exploring memories and playing meaningful personal drama – possibly while wearing a space suit.

Game master type: You love the players, and help them and make sure they don't have it too easy.

About the designer: Troels Ken Pedersen believes fiercely in roleplayers as co-creators. The shocking twist is that he's a fan of *Valerian and Laureline*.

Thanks to: Anne Vinkel for sparring, Niels Ladefoged for useful critique, Asbjørn Olsen *and* Danny Wilson for inspiring techniques, Tore Vange for the deteronic frombotzer, Lizzie Stark for help with the english translation, my playtesters Asbjørn Olsen (again), Mads Kirchhoff, Marie Skouenborg and Terese Nielsen. And of course to Pierre Christin and Jean-Claude Mézières for *Valerian and Laureline*.

Purpose

The game has two main subjects: social class and negotiated reality. I'm out to play with them and to help the players explore and play with them. I intend the game as thought-provoking entertainment, with emphasis on both thought and fun.

In the game there are two realities, a rich one and a poor one. In the long run, only one of them can exist. The player characters end up deciding which one gets to live. In a way it's obvious to espouse the equal rights of poor people as human beings but ...isn't it better to be rich and healthy than sick and poor? So whose lives are worth more, if not choosing isn't an option? And why?

By "negotiated reality" I mean that without interpretation the world is mostly just a jumble of sensory impressions. They only become coherent, they only *mean* something, when we piece them together and ascribe value to them. How we piece things together and what we choose to declare important is very much something we learn and something we negotiate with each other (and ourselves) A considerable part of the game consists of memories used to explore and negotiate the worth and meaning of the two realities. It is important to note that "negotiate" doesn't just mean bargaining and intellectual discussions, but also feelings and personal relationships, and very much so. Identity and heartbreak are on the line.

You could also say that a discussion of nature and nurture is implicit in the game. The people in the two timelines are the same, but are shaped by different environments. Actually, I take it as a given that we develop through the interplay of nature and nurture, and I'm not interested in making an issue out of it, but perhaps players will find the topic fascinating. That's OK, as long as it doesn't get out of hand.

Galactic Echo presents conflict on two levels. One is the philosophical/political strife over who has more right to exist, the other is personal, emotional drama between the characters. The first conflict mostly plays out overtly and verbally, while the second finds expression as subtext and physical play. It is what's at stake, so to speak.

Plot, setting and characters

Galactic Echo is grand science fiction where worlds and civilizations clash and fray, and as such, introducing the setting is relevant. It's also a game with a plot. The point isn't to look for it or figure it out; the plot is handed to the players from the start so they can play with it. Below, you can find the plot, then the two timelines that make up the setting, and then an outline of the characters and the dynamics between them. A more detailed description of the timelines is available as a handout, if you feel like getting into years and events. If you want more setting than that, read some *Valerian and Laureline*.

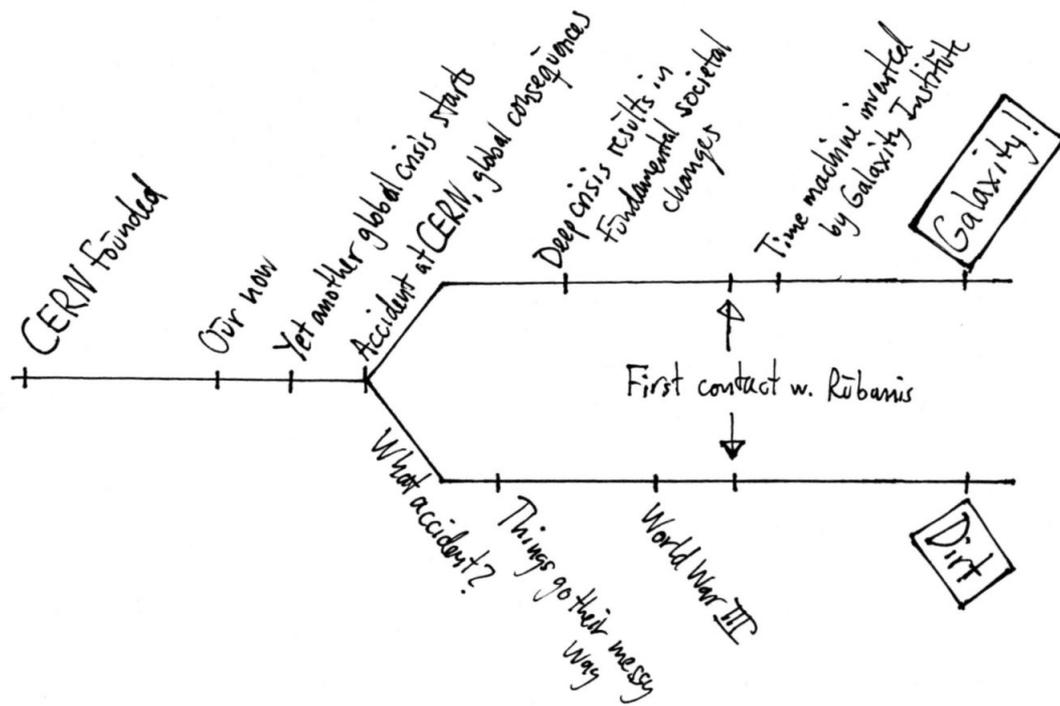
The plot

The Space/Time agents Jonas and Miriam of Galaxy (as the Earth is called in the year 2720) pursue the renegade Xombul in a time jump to the year 2046, in the forbidden period (2040-2110), and they stop Xombul from setting off a disastrous reaction in the KRONOS experiment at the research facility CERN. By doing so they inadvertently delete their own timeline, let's call it **Galaxy**, and instead create a harsh, poor reality, we'll call it **Dirt**.

In **Dirt**, in the year 2720, echoes of the thoughts and memories of the Space/Time agents Miriam and Jonas appear in the heads of Miriam and Jonas, who are trying to rebuild civilization after World War 3 and centuries of barbarism from their base in Serne (CERN of old). The echoes are from a buffer function of the time machine and will only last a short time, days at most.

Galaxy has one chance, though: The KRONOS shaft exists in the **Dirt** timeline, and it's a proto-time machine. With the knowledge of the Space/Time agents, Jonas and Miriam of **Dirt** will be able to make KRONOS self destruct backwards in time, thus recreating Galaxy – but destroying **Dirt**, and themselves. Will the Dirlings do it?

The players are very welcome to play towards all this, even if the characters don't necessarily know everything.



Timeline: Galaxy in the year 2720

Galaxy, Earth reborn after the disaster. Glittering Galaxy, center of the domain of humankind, a great power with growing influence not only over great swathes of the Milky Way, but also outposts in the past and the future. Humanity has mastered the art of jumping in both time and space. In Galaxy, scarcity and want are obsolete. Those driven to action by inner fire serve as administrators, engineers, artists or colonists. The very most talented and daring serve as agents of the Space/Time Service. The rest of humankind spends it's time enjoying the creativity of the artists in stupendous, technologically created dreams.

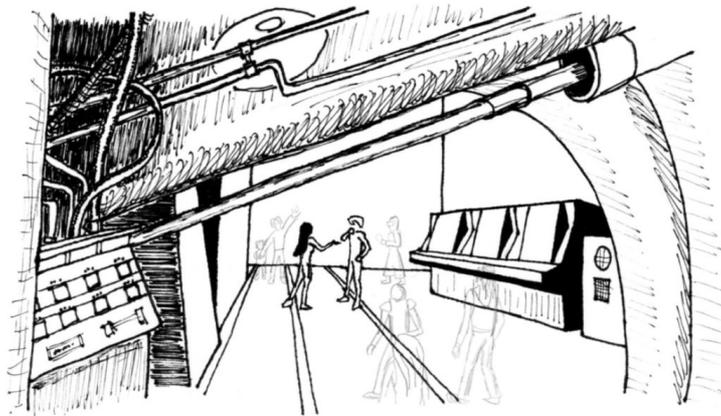
A mysterious disaster in the 21st century forces humanity to fundamentally change society. Later, in the early 25th century, when aliens from the planet Rubanis visit the Earth, the Galaxy Institute combines it's knowledge of the ancient disaster with alien space travel technology to create a working time machine. Galaxy takes control of the Earth and founds a galactic dominion. The KRONOS shaft in CERN does NOT exist in the year 2720.

Timeline: Dirt in the year 2720

Times are tough on Dirt, as the Earth is now known. Forests and deserts have all but swallowed up the cities of the Golden Age, and warlords and robber barons reign. Small communities eke out a living here and there. Some try to hoard the learning of the Golden Age, and even relearn and rebuild, but most just get by as best they can. Once in a while a trading ship from Rubanis stops by to sell glass beads and technological "miracles" to those willing and able to pay a good price in slaves or other resources. It is a time that hardens people, or breaks them.

There are no great disasters, just crisis upon crisis, economic, ecological, political and social, until things go seriously bad with World War 3 around the year 2200. When traders from the planet Rubanis arrive in the early 25. century, the state of things is more terrible than impressive. The KRONOS shaft at CERN exists in the year 2720.

The place



Serne (CERN) in 2720, in the timeline *Dirt*, is the here and now of the game. It is situated between the Alps and the Jura Mountains in a wooded landscape rich with overgrown ruins. On the surface there are some fields and pastures and a few houses, but under the surface several hundred people live in kilometers of corridors, halls and strange technical facilities. Among the strange facilities are an ancient but functional power plant, and also a great shaft, about 30 meters wide and incredibly deep, made up out of high energy machinery, known in the old records as KRONOS. This is the base of Miriam and Jonas, and it is from here that they intend to rebuild civilization.

The characters

The two characters are Jonas and Miriam, larger-than-life heroes and yet fallible human beings. Of course they are based on Valerian and Laureline, but I need Miriam (/Laureline) to be from the 28. century, not the 11. As I also mess a fair bit with the comic series' own Galaxy-has-gone-missing plot, I've let my two heroes be other people than the iconic heroes in order to have my hands free. Each character exists in two versions, one for each timeline, and each version is played by a separate player.

Jonas is a bit of an anti-hero or, so to speak, what happens if you take a stereotypical manly action hero and then DON'T sweep the consequences of that attitude under the carpet. Jonas of Galaxy can get away with almost anything because he serves the great power, and because he has Miriam to clean up after him... with a time machine, if necessary. Now, though, he is confronted with the ultimate consequence of drastic, rash action: the destruction of his world. Jonas of Dirt on the other hand has had his share of adversity and defeat, and is if not broken then at least marked, and conscious of his dependence on Miriam.

Miriam is on the whole a positive, heroic interpretation of stereotypical feminine virtues. She's pragmatic and cleans up after the party, so to speak. Miriam of Galaxy has been lovely assistant and sidekick for "the real hero" Jonas, quite stereotypically, but now she has a chance to make a crucial difference. Miriam of Dirt is definitely the strong partner in her relationship with Jonas, and generally successful in a difficult situation on post-apocalyptic Earth.

They all have this in common: they love their partners but are somewhat unhappy with aspects of their relationships. It just so happens that these aspects are things that the alternate versions of their partners do better. This keeps things unsettled and helps prevent the choice between the timelines from becoming too easy. Play upon it as game master.

The game master

Your most important role as game master is communicating the theme and tools of the game, so the players can create drama themselves. Aside from that, you can play Xombul of Dirt, an important minion of Jonas & Miriam of Dirt, technically skilled but also a sensitive, artistic soul who has no idea what his Galaxy counterpart has been up to. He's a short, balding man who loves and admires Miriam and Jonas and is deeply loyal. Perhaps he gets strange flashes of alien memories if you find it convenient and dramatic to hint at a possible connection to the plot. Through him you can play upon technical stuff relating to KRONOS and the machinery of Serne in character, and also bring in news as you like. You can also play secondary characters as you feel the need, refugee children, the cook or what have you. Also, of course, you keep track of time.

Here's a couple of tips; if you're an old hand you probably don't need them, but perhaps you're a younger hand?

- **Be positive** and enthusiastic about the game and the input of the players. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- **Be brief** in your descriptions. Throw in a few adjectives and leave it to the imaginations of the players to flesh things out.
- **Press your players** through the erosion of the echoes and the problems caused by cyborg scrounger mercenaries. Don't make your challenges take up so much space that they overshadow the most important content of the game, which the challenges are supposed to support and illustrate.
- **Make sure it's not too easy.** If the players are approaching consensus too early, try to divide them by talking up the losing timeline a little. If the Galaxy players lose it, you might ask them if they remember some things about Galaxy that could convince the Dirtlings that Galaxy is worth saving. If the Dirtlings quickly agree to save Galaxy, you might prod them a little by asking if they accept the glossy version of Galaxy so uncritically, without scratching the surface of the idyllic memories.

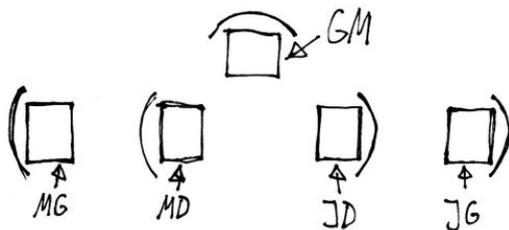
Procedures

The game has three layers, on which the two dramas (philosophical/verbal and emotional/physical) play out. Each layer has some simple, specific rules to make it clear at all times where the game is. There is the here-and-now layer *Dirt, now*, which is Serne in the year 2720, there are "skull scenes" where two versions of a character talk to each other inside the head of one of the Dirlings, and there is the memory layer, where someone is unpacking a memory for their alternate version. When the main part of the game is underway, the players can more or less freely move between the layers, and the game master can tweak, suggest or intervene to keep things tense and moving forward. There's a handout that sums up the rules for the three layers.

Action is never to be shown directly. This rule goes for both sex and violence, in all of the game. We always see what happens just before, or just after.

Dirt, now

Take your places thusly:

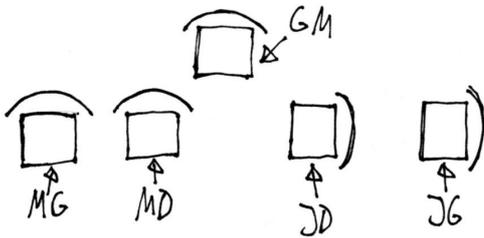


Here the Dirlings have a physical body and presence, while the Galaxics are voices in the heads of the Dirt characters. The Galaxics cannot force the Dirlings to do anything. Physically, the Galaxy players sit behind the Dirt players and whisper in their ears.

The Dirt players play verbally and with gestures, sitting on their chairs facing one another. The game master sits beside the Dirt players and sets scenes and plays secondary characters. The game master can force time forward by cutting forward. It is possible for Dirt characters to lend their bodies to their galactic counterparts, in which case they trade places until the Dirt player touches the shoulder of the Galaxy player – the Dirlings can always take back control. Galaxy players start skull scenes by touching the Dirt players' shoulders, Dirt players start skull scenes by turning their chairs 90 degrees.

Skull scenes

Take your places thusly:



Here, Miriam has a skull scene

Skull scenes take place inside a character's consciousness, shared by the Dirtling and the echo from Galaxy. Here they ignore the world around them and focus their attention on each other. The first time a character has a skull scene, the scenery is constructed by the two together, coming up with something fitting. It should be a

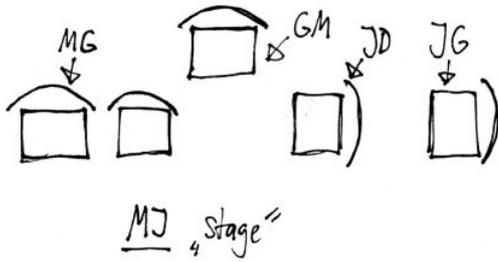
little weird and symbolic. During the game, the game master will ramp up the pressure by describing how the scenery that the players defined is worn down. Cracks, overturned objects, spreading emptiness. This represents the impending doom of the echoes. Dirt players can return to *Dirt, now* by turning their chairs back towards their Dirtling partner. Both Dirt and Galaxy players can start memory scenes by standing up or by challenging their counterparts to do so.

Special skull rule:

Once in the game, the two Galaxy characters can play a skull scene with each other through phasing, courtesy of telepathy-inducing surgery they once had. This is difficult and destabilizing, and cannot be repeated. In practice? Let them stand together holding hands on the "stage."

Memory scenes

Take your places thusly:



Here, Miriam/Dirt remembers

Memory scenes are storytelling scenes, narrated not enacted, that present the memories of a character, quite subjectively and in support of the character's agenda and point of view. The player whose character is remembering stands up on the floor in front of the chairs as if it were a stage, and tells the memory. The other inhabitant of the skull stays in

their chair, and is the obvious audience. The other players listen in, too, even if their characters don't. Remember briefly and to the point, not with lengthy explanations. After the end of the memory, play returns to the skull from whence it came, unless the game master chooses to cut directly to *Dirt, now* in order to drive the game forward. There are two special rules in memory scenes.

1. rule of memory:

If the rememberer recalls a situation that involved physical contact or intimacy with their own partner (remember, no sex in sight), their partner must come to them on stage and stand in contact in some fitting way, while the rememberer tells on. The rememberer can dwell on the situation a little more, without getting long-winded. Silent partners don't experience the memories, but represent themselves in them.

Example: Jonas/Dirt remembers how Miriam/Dirt tended to his wounds. Miriam/Dirt steps up next to Jonas/Dirt and holds him tenderly, while he tells Jonas/Galaxy more about his memory.

2. rule of memory:

If the non-rememberer feels that the scene is too lacking in credibility or otherwise wants to challenge the rememberer, the non-rememberer can ask a couple of critical questions and ask the rememberer to tell the same memory one more time. The rememberer doesn't have to completely fold to the criticism, but the second take should focus on grey areas and doubt, rather than paint with the clear colours of the first take.

Warmup and casting

The warmup phase serves three purposes, getting the players warmed up (obviously), introducing the setting and giving you as game master information from which to cast. This is a game where it is far from irrelevant who plays who, so keep a sharp eye on the players from the moment you set foot in the room.

- 1. Genre/expectations conversation.** Once you've said hello and made yourselves comfortable, it's time to coordinate expectations. Start by explaining that *Galactic Echo* combines Space Opera aesthetics with gritty post-apocalypse and time travel drama with psychological relationship drama. Then ask them what expectations and ideas they're bringing to the game. Do break up the conversation a bit with your input, to make it a true conversation rather than simply taking turns around the table, but also make sure everyone gets to say something, if necessary. During this conversation you should look for a player who has social authority in this particular context. It doesn't have to be the loudest or most eager speaker, just one whose words are accorded weight by the others. Take a note of this player (irrespective of gender) as Miriam/Galaxy, the character who is most important in driving the conflict, and a character who could fail horribly in the hands of a player less able to advance their agenda. Don't start assigning characters until you can assign them all at once, though.
- 2. Introducing the two timelines.** Now that we have the style converged, it's time for the actual setting. Read out or speak over the introductions to the two timelines and the situations in the year 2720, and tell them that they can read the dirty details and years in the timeline handout during a break, if they like.
- 3. Association exercise.** Ask the players to form a circle standing on the floor, with you. The exercise is, you say a word, and then the player to your left says the first word or two that come to mind without thinking, and so on four or five times around the circle. The point of the exercise is to react to each other freely and with good flow, not to say "the right thing." Start off the

exercise with the word wealth. During this exercise you must spot at player who answers promptly and without fear of being weird or inappropriate, and who isn't already picked for Miriam/Galaxy. This player (again, regardless of gender) should be Miriam/Dirt when the time comes to cast.

4. **SPACE!** Now it's time for an energy raiser. Every player (including you) takes a turn saying *space!* in some particular way, and then the others must mirror the pronunciation. It might be a whisper, a shout, in a deep and dramatic voice or whatever strikes your fancy.

5. **The Deteronic Frombotzer.** Relationship drama exercise, and time to cast the last two players as one Jonas or another. Declare one of the Miriams to be Miriam and one of the Jonases to be Jonas. Place them in front of each other on the floor and ask them to hold hands to begin with. But there's a problem that they need to talk about: The deteronic frombotzer is missing. Keep switching out players as the discussion progresses by physically pulling out one and pushing in one of the others in their place, but keep Miriams as Miriams and Jonases as Jonases. Escalate the seriousness of the problem along the way by saying that the frombotzer is important, that they've paid dearly for it, by asking whose fault it is that it's missing, by saying that the nuke will explode if they can't find the frombotzer. (And like you, I have no idea what it is.) Keep going until you've seen both Jonases with both Miriams once or twice and have an idea of their chemistry as pairs. Keep an eye on the body language.

6. **Casting.** Hand the Miriams to the players that you noted earlier and hand the Jonases to the player with good chemistry with the Miriams that they are to partner up with. If you're in doubt, the chemistry between Miriam/Dirt and Jonas/Dirt is the most important, as they will play the most directly opposite each other. If you're still in doubt, give Jonas/Galaxy to the player you think will be most inclined to play him unironically as a fundamentally good person. Give the players time to read their characters thoroughly.

Prologue

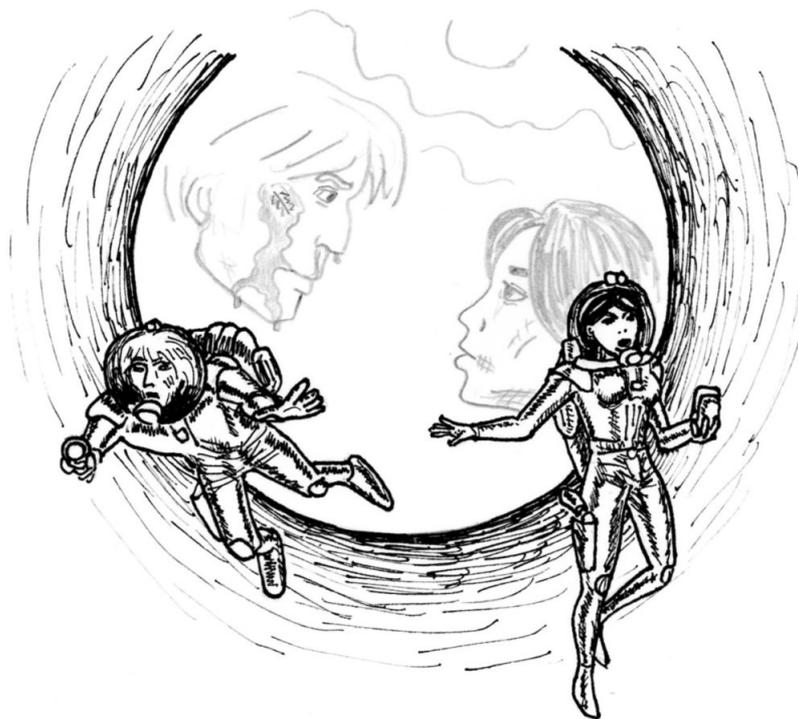
This is when you start playing the game for real, while getting to know the rules and the setup at the same time.

- 1. The plot.** Tell them the plot, and also tell them that it's public and they are allowed to play towards things they know as players but not necessarily as characters. They are partners in driving the plot. Let them ask questions so everyone is on board with the plot.
- 2. Vignettes from the timelines.** Here the players put some meat on the bones of the setting, get started with the storytelling part of the game and make up things to play with for themselves and each other. Also, they start doing memory scenes. Start out telling a concrete, fairly brief anecdote from Dirt based on the vignette *An overgrown and sanded-up world*. The vignettes are anecdote seed handouts. Build the anecdote over the template **where** it is, **who** is there, **what** is going on. Then ask the two Galaxy players to take the vignettes *Glittering Galaxy* and *Shingonż spies*, and the two Dirt players to take *Serne/CERN* and *Traders from Rubanis*. Now ask everyone to tell a vignette from their character's point of view, and let them play around with the form a little. Prod any really long-winded descriptions gently and ask them to keep it short but sweet.
- 3. Layers and rules.** Set up the chairs for the game. Explain the three layers and how to shift between them. The shifts are important!
- 4. Xombul and the catastrophe.** As game master, stand up on stage and tell as anecdote how the Space/Time agents are given emergency orders to pursue Xombul, the chief of the Dream Service, who has stolen a time capsule and jumped to CERN in the year 2046, in the forbidden period. Here they stop him, heroically, as he is about to set off an uncontrolled reaction in the KRONOS shaft. And then the world fades out around them, as their existence is obliterated.

5. **An ordinary day in Serne.** Say that now, play starts, in the *Dirt, now* layer. Ask Jonas and Miriam/Galaxy to hold the whispering until you signal them. Get Miriam and Jonas/Dirt started playing, and then introduce Xombul/Dirt by having him enter with some practical message (and do tell that in this timeline, he's their faithful, technically skilled minion). Then signal the Galaxy players to start. Cut when they've explored the situation a little, long before anyone gets bored.

6. **Skull scenes.** If people don't frame skull scenes on their own, frame them now, perhaps in the dreams of the Dirlings? They should make up what it looks like, where they're talking to each other in their shared consciousness. Strange and symbolic is fine, but ask for a do-over if the result strikes you as ridiculous. Again, cut before it gets boring – you have two skull scenes to do.

As seasoned and knowledgeable time travellers, the Space/Time agents can figure out that they are buffer echoes with limited lifespan, and they are not obliged to be confused about this (though it's OK to not like the situation). Tell them this. And now, you are totally ready to start the main part of the game, so perhaps it's a good time for a brief break.



The course of the game

You'll play your way through three acts and two interludes before the brief epilogue. The game is mostly broken up to insert more vignettes that give the players additional material to work with in the memories. During the acts, the players play freely on all three layers as they please. You as game master control when the acts end.

First act

Let the players loose in the three layers. In the first act, the characters will get to know each other for real, and will start to consider the possible outcomes. When the act is about to end, Xombul/Dirt enters with a rumour that there's a column of refugees in the area, possibly on the run from a gang of cyborg scrounger mercenaries.

First interlude

After the first act, ask one player from each timeline to tell a vignette based on what you hand out. Hand out *Cyborg scrounger mercenaries* to the Dirt players and *The black warriors of Kraan* to the Galaxy players.

Second act

Again, the players play as they like in the layers. Start putting pressure on the players through the erosion of the echoes. At some point a group of about fifty confused refugees does arrive as rumoured, along with some confused livestock. This gives Miriam and especially Jonas an opportunity to look and sound cool and visionary.

Second interlude

In this second interlude, hand vignettes to the two players who didn't tell vignettes in the first interlude. Give *The planet Rubanis* to the Galaxy player and *Refugees from the City of Clockmakers* to the Dirt player.

Third act

Now, it's decision time. The act ends when they've made a decision, or clearly won't reach a decision despite the pressure. In this act Serne itself is threatened by mercenaries. People are afraid and it's very serious, but luckily Jonas and Miriam are here. Remember the rule of not showing action in play. If they use the KRONOS shaft to recreate Galaxy, it takes enough time to set it up that the characters who are about to disappear have a chance to reflect on their fate. Xombul/Dirt can help with the technical stuff, and through him you can control the timing in game, and also say cool-sounding technical science fiction words like *terawatt years*, *indeterminal flux*, *deviations of over 42 on the Schrödinger scale*, or what have you.

Epilogue

If Galaxy has not been recreated, the echoes describe Galaxy one last time before they disappear. The Galaxy players physically get up and stand away from chairs and "stage." The Dirtlings briefly describe how they get on with their lives.

If Galaxy has been recreated, the Galaxy players move to the middle chairs and play out a day in Galaxy. Let them play for a minute or two. Then they sense strange echoes from another reality in their heads, in the form of the other players. The Dirt players briefly talk of Dirt while they fade away, and then they get up and stand away from chairs and "stage."

Fin

Jonas, Dirt

In Serne, between the mountains and the forests, Jonas and his beloved Miriam have gathered talented people and lead a secret base of rebuilders preparing to challenge the power of the warlords and gather the isolated villages into a new civilization. On the surface, the woods have almost swallowed up the old buildings, but below the remains of the mightiest works of the ancients – vast facilities built to explore the deepest mysteries of the universe – remain intact.



Jonas is the charismatic leader who can get even the exhausted and fearful to stand up straight and look to the stars, because he *believes*. Like Miriam, he has a talent for calling ancient tech back to life, and he has risked his life in the fight against the warlords many a time. He's also completely dependent on Miriam; without her cool head he would risk and lose it all in rash action driven by his restlessness. Jonas is lucky to have her to back him up, to stop him from throwing himself in front of

a horde of cyborg scrounger mercenaries on battle boars headed for the village; to help him bury the dead and comfort the living; to help him make a plan to stop the swine from wiping out the *next* village. Actually she's gotten him out of trouble a number of times, which only makes it even more important for him to prove the he really IS a proper hero.

Jonas is proud of his courage and skill, and of all that he and Miriam have built together and plan to accomplish. He loves her with a frightening passion, and is a bit ashamed that she can make him feel two feet tall with a sigh or by joking with serious matters, as is her habit. Not that she nags or manipulates him, or at least not much or often, as she is neither petty nor cruel, and he's sure she tells the truth when she says that she loves him. But it would be nice if he felt that she needed him as much as he needs her. Where he believes, she often questions, and it makes him a little uneasy. If only he had the answers.

- Dirt:** Poor, dangerous world. Both actions and chance have far-reaching consequences. Harsh, but with hope of progress.
- Jonas:** Physically brave, charismatic, impulsive. Defends the ideals of his time. Pretty badass.
- Miriam:** Calculating, charming, thoughtful. Critical of the ideals of her time. Unceremonious. Pretty badass.
- Together:** He looks like the leader. She is the leader. He tries to prove his worth. She handles the consequences.
- *Do*** Play Jonas as a competent and basically likable person that Miriam can love without feeling like a fool because of it.
- *Don't*** Do NOT play Jonas as a confused whiner.

Miriam, Dirt

In Serne, between the mountains and the forests, Jonas and his beloved Miriam have gathered talented people and lead a secret base of rebuilders preparing to challenge the power of the warlords and gather the isolated villages into a new civilization. On the surface, the woods have almost swallowed up the old buildings, but below the remains of the mightiest works of the ancients – vast facilities built to explore the deepest mysteries of the universe – remain intact.



Miriam is a talented strategist and, like Jonas, a gifted techie with some understanding of the old machines and the Golden Age that produced them. But more than anything she is a visionary; a great fire burns in her belly. Deep in her bones she *knows* that something is wrong, and it needs fixing. And she'll get it done. Of course something is wrong with the present, but the Golden Age is not the whole of the answer. The present is the result of the failures of the Golden Age, political, economic,

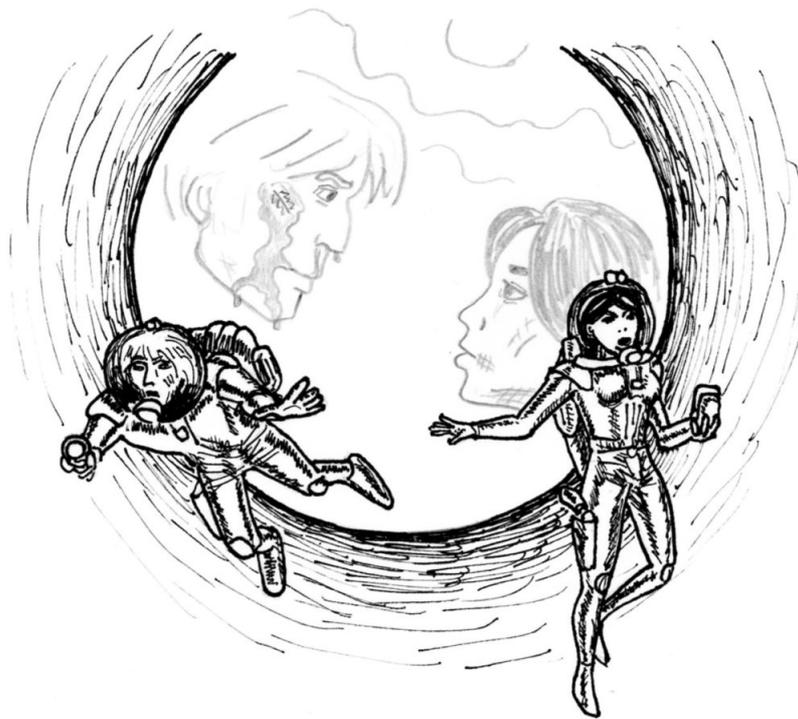
ecological and moral. It's time to build a society willing and able to take responsibility for itself and the world. Jonas *believes* in the cause and his charisma and heroism draw people together. It confuses him when she questions the past, the way forward and themselves. And also when she jokes around with serious matters, as she sometimes does.

Jonas is lucky to have her to back him up, to stop him from throwing himself in front of a horde of cyborg scrounger mercenaries on battle boars, headed for the village; to take care that the dead are buried and the living comforted; to come up with a plan to stop the soldiers of fortune from wiping out the *next* village. It gives her a certain satisfaction to be the one holding things together and to see him learning from his bruises and experiences, but it pains her to see his hope and pride being worn down by adversity and dependency. There was something strangely attractive about his arrogant belief in his own immortality when he was very young. She loves him the very most in the rare moments when he's quite foolishly carefree, though she can't resist teasing him with it a little.

- Dirt:** Poor, dangerous world. Both actions and chance have far-reaching consequences. Harsh, but with hope of progress.
- Miriam:** Calculating, charming, thoughtful. Critical of the ideals of her time. Unceremonious. Pretty badass.
- Jonas:** Physically brave, charismatic, impulsive. Defends the ideals of his time. Pretty badass.
- Together:** She's the leader. He looks like the leader. She sees what's necessary. He does it. And then she makes sure that life goes on.
- *Do*** Play Miriam as a competent and basically likable person that Jonas can love without feeling like a fool because of it.
- *Don't*** Do NOT play Miriam as a tyrannical know-it-all.

Jonas, Galaxy

Jonas and Miriam are the best of the best – agents of the Space/Time Service that safeguards the progress and prosperity of Galaxy. As partners, they advance Galaxy's cause by serving as diplomats and spies to alien species and civilizations. Should a mission go seriously wrong, they can fall back on Galaxy's secret weapon: A jump in time, another try. Sure, paradoxes and dangerous secrets and so on can be problems; it's not so easy that you can always just try again, but it's very nice to have that option up their sleeves. And should things fall out less than amazingly, space is vast and so is time, when you serve glorious Galaxy!



Jonas looks like a hero. He sounds like a hero. He IS a hero. When he's with his beloved and partner Miriam there's almost nothing he can't accomplish. Partly because he's fast, brave and smart (and she's not too shabby either!), partly because she inspires him to do his very best and more. And should things go sour anyway, Miriam is really good at seeing how they can fix it so it ends OK. Who dares wins and all that, and with Miriam and Galaxy backing him up, there's very little that Jonas doesn't dare.

Quite aside from being beautiful, talented and pretty funny, Miriam has yet another excellent quality: She can make Jonas think. She has opened his eyes to the fact that the common people living far from the joy and beauty of Galaxy matter too. He himself believes fiercely in the glittering civilization of Galaxy, but sometimes it's still a good thing that she questions whether what they do, what the bureaucrats want them to do, is really for the best. For what is courage without fear? Belief without doubt? A hero without an audience? Without her he's not sure he'd be a real hero. She is a bit in his shadow, though. It's as if she sometimes is a little passive, as if she's waiting for something, some challenge great or terrible enough to bring her fantastic potential to its full bloom. Jonas longs to see that, even if the thought is also a bit frightening.

Galaxy: Rich, safe world. Through dream games and time jumps, it's often possible to disconnect actions from consequences.

Jonas: Physically brave, charismatic, impulsive. Defends the ideals of his time. Pretty badass.

Miriam: Calculating, charming, thoughtful. Critical of the ideals of her time. Unceremonious. Pretty badass.

Together: He's the leader. She's advisor and assistant. Together they are as good as invincible, and have a lot of fun.

Do Play Jonas as a competent and basically likable person that Miriam can love without feeling like a fool because of it.

Don't Do NOT play Jonas as a narcissistic fool.

***Special Rule:
Phase with Miriam***

Courtesy of telepathy-inducing surgery, once in the game the Galaxy characters can enter phase, that is to say play a skull scene with each other. This is difficult and destabilizing, and the buffer echoes can only survive it once.

Miriam, Galaxy

Jonas and Miriam are the best of the best – agents of the Space/Time Service that safeguards the progress and prosperity of Galaxy. As partners, they advance Galaxy's cause by serving as diplomats and spies to alien species and civilizations. Should a mission go seriously wrong, they can fall back on Galaxy's secret weapon: A jump in time, another try. Paradoxes and the need for secrecy mean that time jumps are not to be used at whim, but for a mind like Miriam's it is nonetheless an amazing safety net that she has used several times to her and Jonas' advantage.



Jonas is the great, charismatic man of action. Miriam is advisor and backup, the somewhat lighter hand. Together they make a strong team, both as agents and as partners. Miriam loves the fantastic adventures, that it's real, with real outcomes on the line, and she loves Jonas for being amazing and making amazing things happen. Sometimes though, she's not too keen on the way that Galaxy draws all resources to itself from both neighbours and colonies, and subsumes all other agendas under its own. Sure, compared with pretty much any other power, in any other known time, Galaxy is a gentle and benevolent power, and thanks to the Space/Time Service there's rarely need for brute, overt coercion. But power corrupts, and so does the powerlessness of those influenced, in a way.

Jonas can see fragments of the problem when Miriam is pointing them out, but due to his fervent belief in Galaxy he can't and won't see the pattern. Miriam can see the pattern, but she can't see anything she can do to change it. She loves Jonas, but sometimes his carefree perspective (and lack of perspective) can completely electrify her with frustration. How would he grow if he were forced to live with the consequences of his actions? And how would she herself grow? That isn't on the agenda in the service of Galaxy, and in all fairness it's a little spoiled to dream of more if you have everything, as Miriam does.

Galaxy: Rich, safe world. Through dream games and time jumps, it's often possible to disconnect actions from consequences.

Miriam: Calculating, charming, thoughtful. Critical of the ideals of her time. Unceremonious. Pretty badass.

Jonas: Physically brave, charismatic, impulsive. Defends the ideals of his time. Pretty badass.

Together: He's the obvious hero. She's analyst and cleaner. Together they are as good as invincible, and have a lot of fun.

Do Play Miriam as a competent and basically likable person that Jonas can love without feeling like a fool because of it.

Don't Do NOT play Miriam as a frustrated Bond Babe.

***Special Rule:
Phase with Jonas***

Courtesy of telepathy-inducing surgery, once in the game the Galaxy characters can enter phase, that is to say play a skull scene with each other. This is difficult and destabilizing, and the buffer echoes can only survive it once.

Vignettes from two timelines

The players will tell anecdotes and create descriptions around these seeds. The first five are for use in the prologue, the next two for the first interlude and the last two for the second interlude.

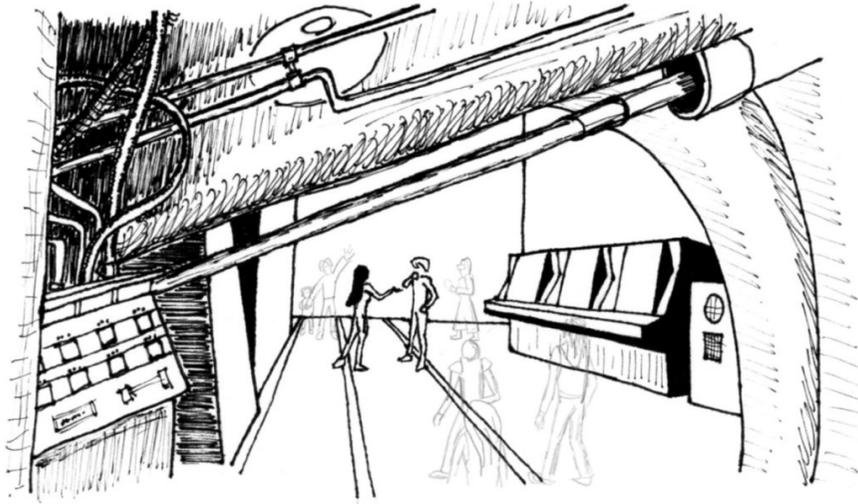
If anyone is confused by the illustrations: The parts done with pencil are bits of the other timeline in the background. Generally, straight lines say Galaxy in the background while smoky/steamy lines say Dirt in the background.

Memories of Dirt: An overgrown and sanded-up world



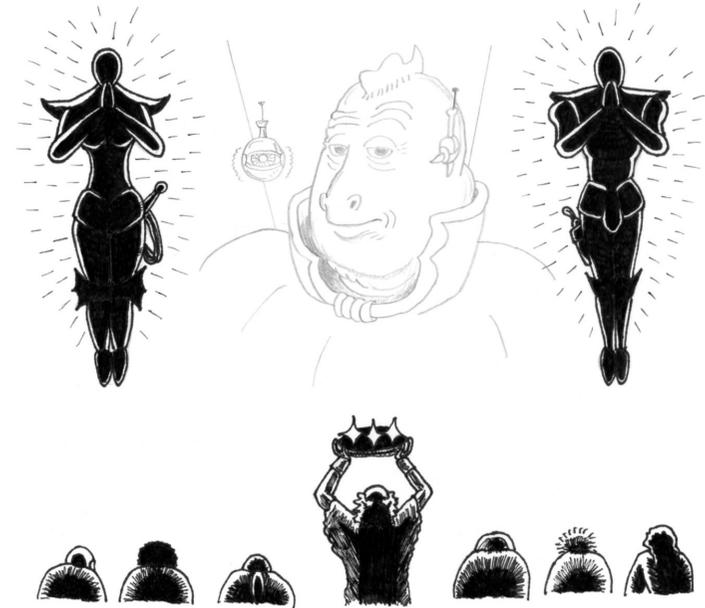
An overgrown and sanded-up world. Imagine Western Europe as one giant forest. And the Mediterranean as desert all the way round.

Memories of Dirt: Serne/CERN



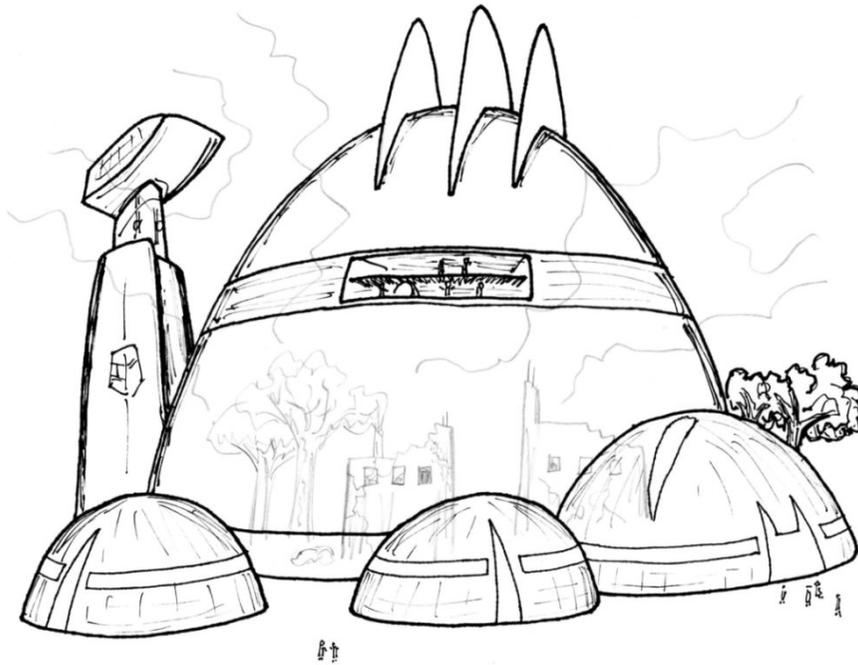
Now it's named Serne. Many centuries ago, in the Golden Age, it was CERN. The place which right now is the center of Jonas' and Miriam's attempt to build a human civilization. *Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire*, a place to explore the secrets of the universe, and use them to do great good. Or terrible harm.

Memories of Dirt: Traders from Rubanis



Traders from Rubanis. Seen from one angle, they are opportunistic petty traders from the planet Rubanis bringing glass beads, firewater and awful guns to the natives of Dirt. Seen from another angle, they are space gods bringing blessings to those of the poor, debased mortals who are willing to bring sacrifices.

Memories of Galaxy: Glittering Galaxy



Galaxy. Planetsized city and grand nature at one and the same time, maintained with the wealth of hundreds of solar systems. Run by bureaucrats and artists, served by engineers and Space/Time agents. Inhabited by billions of carefree hedonists.

Memories of Galaxy: Shingouz spies



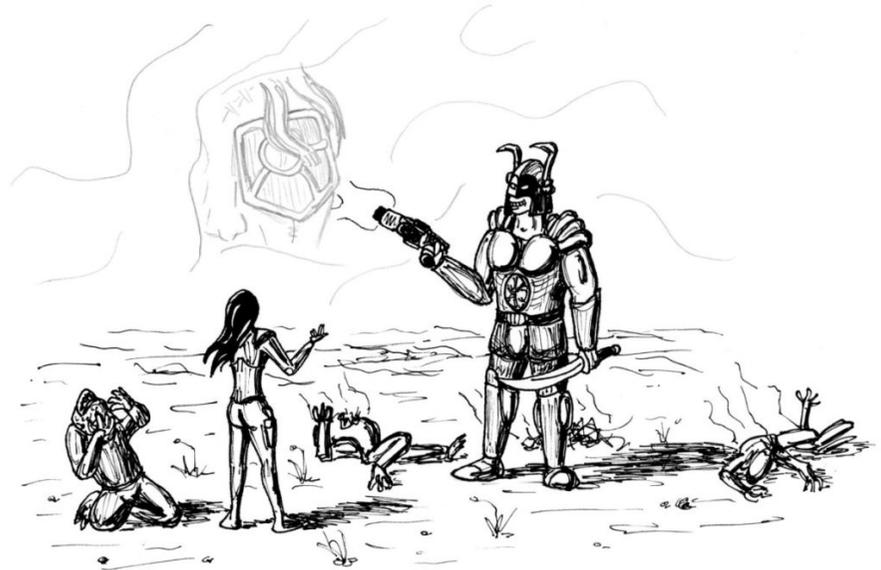
Shingouz spies. Seen from one angle, insufferable, sneaky little busybodies always poking their long noses where they don't belong, in order to sell to the highest bidder. Seen from another angle... OK, but they're ALSO really good at it, and if you cultivate something like a mutually beneficial friendship with them, they can be incredibly useful.

Memories of Dirt: Cyborg scrounger mercenaries



Cyborg scrounger mercenaries. If you pretend that you're half robot, half monster, you don't have to feel weak and inconvenient emotions. The mercenaries are that kind of people. The warlords find them useful, since they can be bought with spare parts.

Memories of Galaxy: The black warriors of Kraan



The black warriors of Kraan. Space fascists. Galaxy and the Space/Time Service have their work cut out containing in anything like a peaceful manner. Singly or in small groups, they are charming people, and they do impressive uniforms and parades. Measured by the consequences of their policies, a little less charming...

Memories of Dirt: Refugees from the City of Clockmakers



Many come to Jonas and Miriam for help, especially people who share their ambitions to some degree. Here's an example; a group of **refugees from the City of Clockmakers**, north of the mountains, in the great forests. They have sought out Serne to find refuge from the plundering warlords, and to offer their assistance.

Memories of Galaxy: The planet Rubanis



Rubanis. The planet of merchants and spies. And of flying taxis. Everything is seemingly in chaos, and yet it works, after a fashion.

Timeline: Galaxy, 2720

Galaxy, Earth reborn after the disaster. Glittering Galaxy, center of the domain of humankind, a great power with growing influence not only over great swathes of the Milky Way, but also outposts in the past and the future. Humanity has mastered the art of jumping in both time and space. In Galaxy, scarcity and want are obsolete. Those driven to action by inner fire serve as administrators, engineers, artists or colonists. The very most talented and daring serve as agents of the Space/Time Service. The rest of humankind spends it's time enjoying the creativity of the artists in stupendous, technologically created dreams.

A mysterious disaster in the 21st century forces humanity to fundamentally change society. Later, in the early 25th century, when aliens from the planet Rubanis visit the Earth, the Galaxy Institute combines it's knowledge of the ancient disaster with alien space travel technology to create a working time machine. Galaxy takes control of the Earth and founds a galactic dominion. The KRONOS shaft in CERN does NOT exist in the year 2720.

In common:

CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire) is founded near Geneve in the year **1954**.

In **2036-2039**, KRONOS is built as part of CERN to carry out advanced experiments in spatiotemporal physics.

Ca. 2040: Serious global economic and political crisis sets in.

Galaxy:

The years **2040-2110** contain a terrible catastrophe of an unclear nature, which casts humanity into a crisis lasting centuries. Humanity's view of reality is shaken to its core. When time travel is later invented by Galaxy,

time jumps to this period is strictly prohibited for reasons which remain a well-kept secret.

Ca. 2110-2400 is a dark age characterized by population decline and the disintegration of traditional capitalist growth economy. Humanity slowly rebuilds technical civilization.

2405: First contact, with the enthusiastically mercantile civilization of the planet Rubanis.

2437: Scientists at the Galaxy Institute create the first experimental time machine by combining dearly bought Rubanis technology with the results of ancient experiments at CERN and knowledge of the 21st century catastrophe, dredged from the remains of the dark time. The Rubanese can travel faster than light, but NOT jump through time.

2469: Galaxy secretly creates the first fully functional time machine.

2482: Galaxy takes over responsibility for the administration of the planet Earth from various local authorities.

Ca. 2550 and on: Interstellar colonization begins.

Ca. 2600: Material want is a thing of the past on Galaxy, as the Earth is now known.

2720: "Now" for the Space/Time agents Jonas and Miriam.

3220: The latest year that Space/Time agents in the year 2720 are cleared to know of conditions in. Galaxy is a true galactic empire with vast branches spreading out through time and space. Dozens of intelligent alien lifeforms are subject to the authority of Galaxy.

Timeline: Dirt, 2720

Times are tough on Dirt, as the Earth is now known. Forests and deserts have all but swallowed up the cities of the Golden Age, and warlords and robber barons reign. Small communities eke out a living here and there. Some try to hoard the learning of the Golden Age, and even relearn and rebuild, but most just get by as best they can. Once in a while a trading ship from Rubanis stops by to sell glass beads and technological "miracles" to those willing and able to pay a good price in slaves or other resources. It is a time that hardens people, or breaks them.

There are no great disasters, just crisis upon crisis, economic, ecological, political and social, until things go seriously bad with World War 3 around the year 2200. When traders from the planet Rubanis arrive in the early 25th century, the state of things is more terrible than impressive. The KRONOS shaft at CERN exists in the year 2720.

In common:

CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire) is founded near Geneva in the year **1954**.

In **2036-2039**, KRONOS is built as part of CERN to carry out advanced experiments in spatiotemporal physics.

Ca. 2040: Serious global economic and political crisis sets in.

Dirt:

Ca. 2060: The crisis is declared past, but the economy never really recovers fully.

Ca. 2050-2300: More and more serious consequences of climate changes put ever more pressure on economic and political stability. The political system is unable to coordinate effective global action.

Ca. 2120-2150: Democracy goes out of fashion in favour of authoritarian and/or technocratic solutions. Due to bad economy, technical progress slows to a crawl.

2198-ca. 2205: World War Three. Some nuclear weapons are used and a number of artificial epidemics are released (biological as well as electronic), but the conflict is an all-encompassing mess, not Armageddon. The remaining great powers fall apart. Serious population decline sets in, which continues in a milder form over the following decades and centuries.

2273-2289 "The Emperor Ozymandias of Eurasia" attempts to unify the Earth under his banner. It goes well for a while, but eventually fails due to the Emperor's madness.

Ca. 2340-2390: The Second North American Union unifies North America for a while, and inspires the Second European Union 2370-2390. It ends in devastating epidemics, possibly caused by World War Three biological weapons.

Ar 2405: First contact, with the enthusiastically mercantile civilization of the planet Rubanis. Over the following centuries occasional trader spaceships visit Earth on private initiative, as well as a few safari tourists from alien civilizations. There's no organized trade or colonization, as Earth (or Dirt, as it is now called) is far from the main galactic trade routes, and isn't seen as worth the bother.

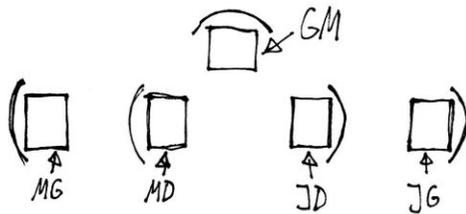
Ca. 2430-2470: The Green Dynasty tries to reunite China. It is destroyed by civil war set off by years of famine, and possibly under the influence of a Rubanese weapons dealer pitting the factions against each other in the name of profit.

Ca. 2500-2600: Without industrial civilization to disturb things, the climate slowly starts stabilizing in a new equilibrium.

Ca. 2720: In the Western Alps in Europe, Jonas and Miriam make an attempt to put together human civilization, based in Serne, the old CERN.

Cheat sheet: Scene types

Dirt, now

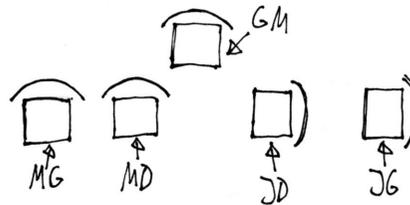


Take your places thusly

Here the Dirltlings have a physical body and presence, while the Galaxics are voices in the heads of the Dirt characters. The Galaxiscs can't force the Dirltlings to do anything.

- The Dirt players play normally opposite each other. The Galaxy players sit physically behind the Dirt players and whisper in their ears. The GM sits beside the Dirt players and sets scenes and plays NPCs as relevant.
- It's possible for Dirltlings to lend their bodies to the Galaxics; in that case the players trade places until the Dirt player touches the Galaxy player's shoulder.
- The GM can force time forward.
- Galaxy players can start a skull scene by touching their Dirt player's shoulder.
- Dirt players can start skull scenes by turning their chairs 90 degrees.

Skull scenes

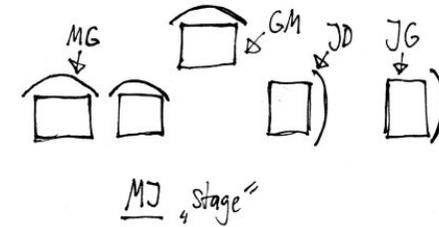


Here, Miriam has a skull scene

In the shared consciousness between a Dirltling and a Galactic echo, when they focus on each other and ignore the world around them.

- The first time a pair play a skull scene together they establish the setting, preferably a little weird and symbolic.
- The players sit beside each other, side by side.
- If they're done talking or it gets boring, play moves to *Dirt, now*.
- Players can frame a memory scene or challenge their other-timeline version to do so.
- Once in the game, the Galaxy characters can play a skull scene with each other through *phasing*, courtesy of telepathy-inducing surgery they once had. This is difficult and destabilizing, and cannot be repeated. Hold hands "on stage".

Memory scenes



Here, Miriam/Dirt remembers

Here, a character remembers based on a skull scene, and the other inhabitant of said skull is the in-game audience.

- The rememberer stands on the "stage" and tells it, quite subjectively of their own agenda.
- Where, who, what's going on?
- Keep memory scenes short and sweet.
- If players tell of intimacy/physical contact with their beloved, the beloved stands up and takes a fitting position in contact with them, but doesn't talk. Slow down play.
- After the memory is done, cut back to the skull or directly to *Dirt, now*.
- The other inhabitant of the skull can ask critical questions of the memory; in that case tell the memory again, this time focusing on doubt and gray areas.