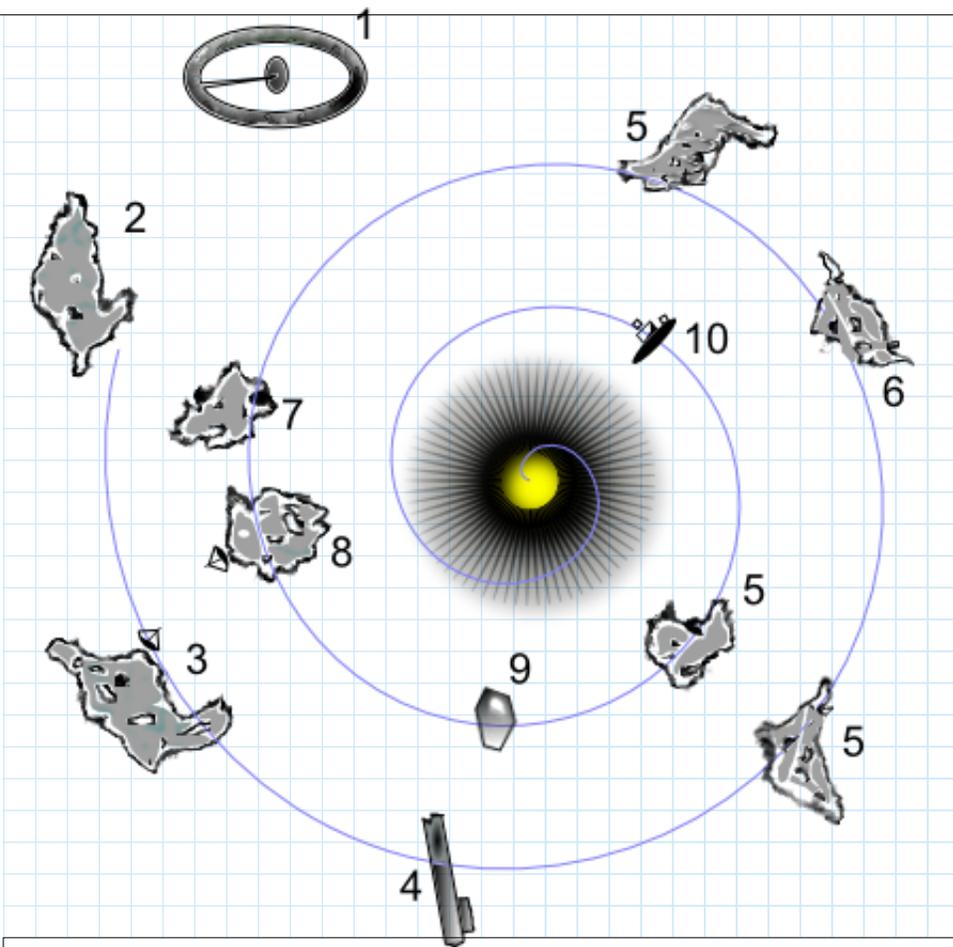


# A Tempest in a Teaspoon

By Todd Mitchell



**You** have been approached by an agent representing a former employee of the defunct OmniTech corporation to retrieve the sensor data from a monitor device deep in the gravity well of a pint sized, but massive Neutron Star. Will you hire a Tug or pilot yourself? Hopefully your pilot is up to the task because if you don't follow the proper route to the monitor, gravity shear will tear your ship apart. And did we mention it's in an asteroid field?

**Mining Tugs:** These small ships have powerful engines and thick radiation shielding. They are slow, with powerful engines and have decent sensor capability. Miners are a cagy bunch and their tugs are often jury rigged with weapon mounts or electronic countermeasures.

**Asteroids and X-Rays:** Shifts in the surface gravity of the neutron star cause the orbits of smaller asteroids to be unstable. The closer to the star, the more this occurs. It also emits bursts of X-Rays which disrupt systems. Roll 1d6 more frequently as the players progress down the gravity well:

- 1: Impact! Ship damage or Hull Breach.
- 2: A Near miss! Proximity alarms will go off.
- 3-5: All Clear.
- 6: X-Ray burst – sensors out for the next few turns.

**Gravitational Shear:** The blue spiral represents the optimal path through the warped space of the star's gravitational field past the orbital debris and larger asteroids. Ships travelling off the optimal path will be subject to turbulence, increased danger from asteroids and finally hull breaching shear forces.

- 1. OT station:** This station was originally an OmniTech science outpost built to study the star, but was mostly abandoned when the corporation went bankrupt. It was bought by a struggling mining consortium. While fairly modern, it is starting to show signs of neglect and much of the station is mothballed. The stores and hotels can boast of only the barest necessities available to customers and a minimal staff is available to assist travelers. The two exceptions to this are *War Daddies* – a happening night club and gambling pit, and *Sam Ford's Salvage and Loan*, both of which cater to the local miners. Sam Ford owns and runs both these establishments; Ford does not want the monitor data retrieved in case it brings more attention to the system as he is also involved in illegal activities. He is a shrewd and direct man who will secure his business. There are over 600 people living and working on the station.
- 2. Mining Asteroid:** Life in the asteroids is tedious and hard, however the miners are good natured. There are about 1500 miners working the asteroids with this as their primary refining facility. Some have turned to salvage or prospecting although most will not go deeper down into the gravity well.
- 3. Listening post:** This is a small, hard to detect listening post manned by two of Sam Ford's crew. They will send word to the Drug Lab at #8 if they detect any ship traffic going deeper into the gravity well. They have decent sensing equipment and can only be surprised by silent running or cloaked ships. If they are boarded before they send their message, they will bluff, then fight and try to escape and send it. If they are boarded after sending their message they will have cleaned their tracks and prepared to pose as harmless prospectors who will surrender at the first sign of force or hostility. They have energy pistols and decent skill at hand to hand combat.
- 4. Wreck of the Pequod:** This is an old and stately ship that has certainly seen hard use. The hull is melted and scored in places as well as pummeled by asteroids. The entire front section of the ship has been torn away and the Bridge is entirely missing. Needless to say there is no life-support and the ship is open to the vacuum, it is abandoned and has been drifting for 100 years or more. The wreck has been picked over for all valuable components. A thorough search will reveal a number of curious personal artifacts (data fans, books...) will reveal the name of the ship and that it was hunting a 'space creature' in the asteroids. A very successful search will reveal details such as the space creature was very crafty and highly resistant to energy attacks.
- 5. Asteroids:** Unremarkable rocks big enough to land on. Feel free to have them reflect back false signals or be composed of useful elements.
- 6. Interesting Rock:** This 'roid is made of different materials than other bodies in the system. Study will reveal it is a body from outside the system.
- 7. The Kraken:** In the bowels of this asteroid lives the "Kraken", a ship-sized tentacled space creature looking much like a cephalopod. This creature feeds off of mineral deposits in the asteroids and does not mind supplementing its diet with the occasional space tug. The creature moves using a very efficient ion propulsion and can equal the speed of a fast cruiser type ship for short distances. It is primarily a lurker, and is well camouflaged both visually and to sensor equipment (except when moving.) Its primary method of feeding is to capture a small asteroid (or ship) and feed off of the metals by excreting powerful digestive acids from its tentacles. It uses long wave radiation and gravity detection to sense direction and locate objects. Having evolved in space, the creature is highly impervious to energy attacks but not as resistant to physical damage. If it is wounded it will flee and hide. It is ill tempered and cunning, if it is provoked.
- 8. The Lab:** This asteroid hosts the secret drug lab and the source of the Ford family empire. This lab uses the high energy and low gravity conditions to make illegal drugs and bio-weapons for sale on the black market. The lab facility will have 8-10 scientists working and 25-30 maintenance/defense staff armed with hand weapons and/or energy weapons on duty at any time. 4 armed mining tugs are docked here, 2 of them will be manned and hiding near #7 if a warning has been sent from the listening post or the station. The lab staff will stir up the Kraken if they are suitably forewarned or if the players have previously aroused the suspicion of Mr. Ford. As a final line of defense, the lab has a missile battery with enough firepower to seriously damage a ship.
- 9. Blanket of doom:** Sensors will pick up this very large (2km sq) flat object from far out. It is a portion of an old light sail. **Careful study** will show that it is slightly curved and is spinning, and that there is a 75% chance that it will eventually come to focus the radiation of the star into the path of the ship. If this is not avoided, the ship will be hit by a very large energy burst and there is a good chance that sensors or computer systems will be damaged.
- 10. The Monitor:** At this point in the gravity well things are getting dodgy and gravity shear is very high. Even if they have not been followed, exploring the monitor and retrieving the data will require piloting skill and/or EVA in a dangerous environment, and frequent checks for encountering asteroids and x-ray bursts. If the players get the data they still have to crawl back out of the gravity well, back to the station and past Sam Ford!