

Hyperspace Drone



In the slightly less than two thousand years* that the current spacefaring species have been exploring this section of the galaxy, the practical limit to their voyaging has not been the speed or even the endurance of their vessels. It has been the difficulty of long-distance communication. Who knows how many wonders and horrors have been witnessed only by the crew of a single starship that was subsequently lost without ever being able to report what they had seen? But having such vessels return to their origin whenever something of note has been discovered is also infeasible, and they would still run the risk of being destroyed on that unplanned return journey.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to transmit information through hyperspace, any more than directed energy weapons can be used there. Outside of the warp field that surrounds a hyperspace-faring vessel, projected energy disperses to incoherence almost immediately; signals are lost, weapons discharge is wasted. It has been theorized, based on dubious evidence, that the "highest" known regions of hyperspace might allow signals to be transmitted, but all known attempts to access such "bands" have been horrible disasters. Alternative methods have thus long been sought.

For a long time in **the Senatorial Imperium**, those mystics who possessed telepathic abilities that facilitated instantaneous communication over interstellar distances provided that communication for the benefit of the Senate and other parties with whom they cooperated. However, there were never enough mystics of that capability to permit as much communication as was needed, and many of them (quite rightly) objected to devoting all their time to this

activity. Artificially created telepaths were also employed to this purpose, but quite apart from the ethical considerations involved in their geneforming, the sort of mental organism designed for such telepathic prowess was unlikely to endure being used only for communication.

Hyperspace vessels that acted as couriers were employed for a while, but the demand for more and more rapid communication (and thus faster and lighter ships) ran into practical limitations. A starship designed for humanoid occupancy could not be built smaller than a certain size; any smaller than the size of a typical space fighter would result in the hyperdrive irradiating the pilot. This naturally led to robot-piloted courier starships for a short interval (a bit less than 1.5 years*) before the notion of combining the pilot and the starship led to the creation of the first hyperspace drone, a robot *brain*-piloted vessel that was the fastest documented ship in known space. Subsequent vessels of this class have hewed closely to the original design, with only minute increases in speed and endurance over the centuries since its debut.

The drone fleet remained in service until it was dismantled with the end of all robotic labor within the Imperium. The years since have seen a restoration of biologically-piloted hyperspace courier traffic, dubbed the Imperial Mail and firmly under the control of **the Crimson King**, who thus enjoys a near-monopoly on interstellar communication within his domain. Drone couriers remain in use in **the Technate**, though since the emancipation the vessels have generally been piloted by extremely sophisticated expert systems instead of true artificial intelligences. (However, there are still robots who accept employment as drone pilots, accumulating their pay until they can purchase a different frame that allows them to retire.) A smaller fleet of drones, based on Chirab, provides less frequent communications between many systems of the Unclaimed Regions.

Drones are not usually well-armored enough to survive re-entry on most inhabitable planets, and so either dock at orbital facilities to resupply and transmit their "cargo" or, more rarely, take up orbital positions that allow them to transmit to planetary communications facilities below. This relative structural weakness, and their lack of heavy weapons, also means that they will avoid battle as much as possible. There are exceptions, though, and a handful of drones in Technate service have earned *multiple* battle stars.

Hyperspace Drone -- PL 7/MR 12

Abilities:

STR 5 | STA -- | AGL 4 | DEX 3 | FGT 2 | INT 1 | AWE 3 | PRE -2

Powers:

Armored Structure: Immunity 50 (Fortitude, mental effects); Protection 8, Impervious 6 - 64 points

Comms: Radio Communication 4 (planetary), Rapid 3, Subtle - 20 points

Hyperflight: Flight 14 (30,000 MPH), Limited to space or hyperspace; Enhanced Flight 4 (500,000 MPH), Limited to hyperspace; Movement 2 (space travel 2 [extra mass 5]) - 26 points

Manipulators: Feature 1 (tools for self-maintenance and repair) - 1 point

Sensors: Senses 8 (hyper-extended accurate radio, direction sense, distance sense, time sense) - 8 points

Weapon Systems: Ranged Damage 8 - 16 points

Advantages:

Eidetic Memory, Improved Defense, Improved Initiative, Move-by Attack.

Skills:

Expertise: Galactic 8 (+9), Perception 5 (+8), Ranged Combat: Weapon Systems 3 (+6), Technology 6 (+7).

Offense:

Initiative +8

Unarmed +2 (Close Damage 5)

Weapon Systems +6 (Ranged Damage 8)

Defense:

Dodge 6, Parry 5, Fortitude Immune, Toughness 8, Will 5

Totals:

Abilities 22 + Powers 135 + Advantages 4 + Skills 11 + Defenses 7 = 171 points

Offensive PL: 7

Defensive PL: 7

Resistance PL: 5

Skill PL: 4

Complications:

Delivery--Motivation. No Ground Movement. Non-Verbal (communicates only through radio, and only pre-recorded messages.) **Weak Manipulators** (Strength 1 for most manipulation tasks.)

Note: The above represents a drone "piloted" by an expert system; one operated by an artificial intelligence will have a higher PRE and Will at minimum, probably better skills, and may or may not be Non-Verbal. They might also have more complicated Motivations.