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LOOTING YOUR LIFE POD'S LOCKER

BY KEN SPENCER

*Petty Officer Second Class Ernesto surveyed the area around the escape pod. At least the terrain looked promising, temperate and lush and not terribly rugged. He hadn't had time to notice much about the three others who climbed into the pod as the **Jamestown** was breaking apart. Specialist Samir was one of the ship's engineers, Edwards had been in the refresher and had jumped into the pod naked and soaking wet, and the last survivor was a passenger. That one was a kar, and Ernesto had no idea what kar ate, drink, or needed as far as life support. "Nothing to do now," he thought, "but check out the equipment locker in the pod and hope for rescue."*

Just what will Ernesto find in that equipment locker? **GURPS Ultra-Tech** details life pods (p. 232), describing their general characteristics: how they operate, the number of people they can hold, their life support and flight characteristics. There is even mention of two lockers holding 200 lbs. of survival and medical equipment; however, the exact contents of those lockers are left unspecified. So, what is in those lockers?

The contents of the lockers will vary depending on the technological level and quality of the life pod, the species that built and stocked the pod, and any special considerations that the pod's designers felt necessary. The lists below separate life pods into three general levels of quality (economy, standard, and luxury), and two special considerations (military and exploration). The base tech level for these pods is TL9, but they are easily upgraded to higher tech levels using the rules from **Ultra-Tech**.

Each campaign will have a different set of alien species that inhabit it, and they each will have specific dietary and life-support needs. The lists below assume a human standard; however, other species build life pods for their own use and stock them with items that they need. When using a life pod designed for an alien species, food and atmospheric compatibility should be the primary concern. Some species may require an exotic atmosphere or varying air pressure, and their life pods' life-support systems will reflect that. Survival rations are concentrated foods that contain the nutrients needed to

support an adult of the species they are designed for. As such, they will not have much in the way of extraneous nutrients and may not be able to keep a different species healthy (assuming they are not toxic to begin with). It should be noted that in the real world, survival rations kept in ship's life boats are generally designed to be palatable but just barely; this is to keep bored or gluttonous sailors from raiding the survival lockers for a snack. There is no reason that this practice would not be carried into space.

ECONOMY LIFE PODS

Economy life pods are meant for the ship owner on a budget. They provide the minimum amount of life support and supplies, with a minimum of cost. Many economy life pods are standard or even luxury pods that have been salvaged and refitted. Buyers who are particularly lucky may even find some of the higher-class fittings still inside. Such pods might be found on free traders, mass cargo haulers, older ships, and (of course) those owned by adventurers. The equipment locker is smaller and not equipped to the same level as the standard life pod. Housed inside are 120 man-days worth of food paste in easy-to-use squeeze tubes. These run the gamut from tasteless to the infamous "tuna surprise." Water is recycled through the pod's life-support system.

Economy pods also contain a basic first aid kit (**Ultra-Tech**, p. 198), a heavy flashlight (**Ultra-Tech**, p. 74), a fire extinguisher (**Ultra-Tech**, p. 87), and a pack of old glow sticks (**Ultra-Tech**, p. 74 – the sticks have a 50% chance of working). Two B cells (**Ultra-Tech**, p. 19) provide power the flashlight, and they can be recharged at a port on the life pod's control console. Unlike the standard model (below) that sports a programmable camouflage skin to enhance visibility, the economy model is painted in a bright orange color and is radar reflective. Included are four light-weight jumpsuits, also of an easy-to-see bright orange. Lucky passengers might find a deck of cards or some dice.

Heroes can alter or improve gear in their pods, but they'll probably have to do so with their own money.

Mostly, those aboard an economy life pod just get to spend time waiting to be rescued staring at their fellow survivors. The economy model is a steal at a mere \$65,000.

STANDARD LIFE PODS

These are the life pods as described in *Ultra-Tech* (p. 232), and are the most common throughout the galaxy. Standard life pods see use in most corporate- or government-run ships, especially those that fall under some form of regulation. Passenger ships also carry standard life pods, though the cheaper the ticket, the cheaper the pods, and the quality of life pod varies depending on the class of passenger (steerage, middle, high) they are intended for.

The equipment locker is well-stocked with an eye toward being prepared for the most likely emergencies. There are 180 meals of survival rations, allowing four people to eat two meals a day for 22 days. Each ration contains the nutrients needed by a normal adult human. Water is provided by tanks inside the pod and supplemented via recycling through the life-support system. A medium radio and four small radios (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 44) allow people to keep in touch with each other and the pod. Vision and lighting are furnished through one heavy and four mini flashlights (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 74), two pairs of binoculars (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 60) with IR and night vision, and a pack of 10 glow sticks (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 74).

For situations where the survivors need to exit the life pod and live outside, a four-man tent (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 76), four envirobags (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 75), two collapsible pack frames, a nesting cook set with cutlery, four filtration canteens (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 75), and 100 yards of 3/16" diameter rope is included. A large medical kit contains a set of surgeon's tools, eight bandage spray cans (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 197), and 10 doses each of Analgine, Antirad, Hyperstim, Morphazine, and Soothe (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 205). Four smaller personal first aid kits (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 198) provide for basic cut and burn care and supplement the medical kit.

In case of a long stay, four fire starters, a basic set of power tools (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 81), and two mini tool kits (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 82) will prove helpful. Four survival knives and four civilian survival suits (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 177) with adjustable footwear round out the basic equipment. Small features such as toiletries, a book reader (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 51), a data player (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 51), and an assortment of entertainment and survival chips are also included. There are double the minimum needed power cells for every device, as well as recharge slots in the life pod's console.

LUXURY LIFE PODS

The Cadillac of life pods, luxury pods have several extra features designed with the discriminating client in mind. All the internal fittings are of the highest quality, as is the equipment in the lockers. Treat all equipment as both rugged and stylish (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 15), as no expense was spared making survivors both comfortable and safe. A luxury life pod will have the same equipment and supplies as the standard model (above), with a few upgrades. Instead of survival rations, there are 360 meal packs, allowing each occupant to eat three meals a day for a month. These taste far better than survival rations, breaking the tradition of making emergency food supplies barely palatable.

Any personal equipment listed under the standard model is always in sets of four – people who can afford the luxury model are ones who needn't share. Replace the binoculars with hyper-spectral imaging goggles (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 61) and the four-man tent with four personal pressure tents (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 76). Add four biomonitor bracelets (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 197) and a hovercart (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 75) to the list of equipment, and upgrade the survival knives to superfine quality (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 163). In order to while away the long hours until rescue, the life pod's computer includes VR games and programs, a virtual tutor (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 56) covering basic survival and medical procedures, and a better selection of chips for the data players and book readers. All this for only \$250,000!

MILITARY LIFE PODS

Military personnel are expected not to just sit around and wait for retrieval, but they're likely to be in less-than-friendly circumstances. Thus military life pods are designed with escape, evasion, and survival in mind. The pod itself has a greater number of programmable camouflage options (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 99), from high visibility to concealable. Equipment comes ruggedized (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 15) and miniaturized if possible. Use the equipment list for the standard life pod (above), but increase quantities of all personal items to four, and double the number of power cells of all sizes (each powered item has a spare cell). The survival suits also have programmable camouflage systems, and all the equipment is in neutral colors. The radios are capable of encrypted communications (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 47). Replace the survival rations with a like number of food paste tubes.

Whereas civilian models do not offer firearms (to avoid the danger of accidental shootings), add four 7mmCL assault carbines (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 136) and 800 rounds of ammunition. Remove the book reader and data player from the list, as it is assumed that military personnel will be too busy to need entertaining distractions. Military life pods are unavailable on the open market, but they're sometimes found on the black market for astronomical prices.

EXPLORATION LIFE PODS

Exploration life pods are intended for use by ships that are operating far from the well-traveled space lanes, and thus may have a longer wait for rescue. The life pod has 360 man-days of life support and power, greatly extending it beyond the usual 90 man-days of the standard pod. Likewise, food and water supplies are larger, providing 360 man-days of food paste (yum!). In all other ways, the equipment locker is stocked to military specs (above), save that the assault carbines are replaced with civilian model 18.5mm shotguns (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 136) and 1,000 rounds of ammunition (200 slugs, 400 double ought, 400 bird shot – *High-Tech*, p. 173). Hope you never need it at the price of \$300,000 to replace it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken Spencer is a freelance writer and former archaeologist who shovel bummed for several years. His work has been published by Chaosium and Alephstar Games, and he has a monthly column, "A Bit of History," on rpg.net.