

CUBE 50

1. A cube 50 miles on edge descended rapidly to the surface. The bottom of the cube glowed white-hot with air friction.
2. An interesting thing about real space travel is that space-craft made by many different species, are all almost identical. All space-craft are non-descript with no identifying markings of any kind. They are all smooth surfaced, “black”, and virtually undetectable in space. The reason being one of safety. When the space-craft are all identical, one doesn’t know who the other guy is. Lack of knowledge about who or what is inside a non-descript space-craft prevents a lot of conflicts.
3. The space-craft descending to the surface was a registered “cleanup” or assault cube. The assault cube was a large manufactured construct. It’s non-descript cubic form gave no clue as to what was inside. The exterior of the cube was black, featureless and perfectly symmetrical. It only opened during embarkation, and landing. It was almost undetectable except for the few minutes of disembarkation and landing. It was extremely difficult to tell which direction it was oriented in and where it was headed. There were no emissions of any kind from the cube, and the surface temperature was roughly the same as that of space. The “hull” was approximately 1000 feet reinforced armoured material.
4. Normally assault cubes were part of governmental armed forces. However there were a few independent organizations that actually own them as well. Their existence and use must be registered with and authorized by the government. Sometimes large corporations may hire a cube, with proper clearance from the government, in order to perform some task or other. There are a few different sizes of cubes. The cube 50 miles on edge was considered fairly small.
5. Inside this particular cube was a number of different things. It was a privately constructed and owned cube, used primarily for “cleanup” operations. Internal to the cube was everything essential

to support a small crew of perhaps 10,000 for a number of years. A small city, a refinery, a factory, command centre, and shipping ports were present. The cubes were useful as occasionally there were problems with goods being lost on some asteroid or small planet during transit from one place to another. The cleanup cube's primary purpose was retrieval and cleanup of any "messes" resulting from the kinds of things that can go wrong during spaceflight. For example if a shipment of 100,000 automobiles crashed on a planetoids surface, the government does not want to just leave them lying around there as it's too risky. Nobody knows who will try and take them apart and analyze them if they get found.

6. The cube's crew included approximately 50% armed forces personnel, whose training varied from aircraft pilots, to tank drivers, to navel personnel. About 35% of the crew were professional mercenaries. People who had on their own become highly skilled in one area or another. Most of the mercenaries built all their own equipment. Resulting in some rather unusual looking vehicles and other equipment. The other 15% of the crew were specialists in different areas. Engineers, technicians, and other support personnel. Within the cube everyone was a bipedal hominid type. Most members of the cube were from the same planet. Although most of the mercenaries and some of the hard-to-find specialists were not.
7. The purpose of the mission they were on was to make the planet more habitable for their own kind. Currently, there was no intelligent life on the planet begin descended upon. Just large snakes, reptiles, and other simple proto-life-forms with no real capacity to be intelligent. The kinds of things that arise on a young planet, before evolution has time to set in.
8. Living in the cube was generally regarded as unpleasant; perhaps a bit like living in a large apartment building. Although it did have some "nicer" areas, just to keep people from going nuts. Within the cube sometimes there were odd spaces that people tended to decorate.

9. People sometimes tried to get work on a cube because of the pay scale, although it was difficult to do. One more or less had to earn their keep on a cube. Working on a cube usually meant one made double or more the wages one would make elsewhere. Some people who worked on cubes became fairly wealthy; although most did not. Although the pay was good, expenses could be high sometimes. There is risk with space travel, and depending on the mission, there may be risk associated with that as well. So people got paid more. Quite often the crew was split into “permanent” crew members who spent most of their lives on the cube, and transient members, people who were there for “just one mission”.

10. Cleanup is usually done with remote robotics. Much of the crew controlled or monitored robotics used to do the actual cleanup operations. There was a requirement always that some minimal portion (10%) of the crew be qualified to do direct clean-up however. There was always the chance that the robotics might fail, and hence direct intervention would be required. Given how expensive it is to operate a cube, they liked to guarantee that at least something could be done, even if they had to do things by hand. Nothing like sending a cube a billion miles only to find out the robots don't power up.