

# The Poseidon Swimming School

An player introduction to Blue Planet\*

Jonas Steverud†

27 december 2009

## What is Blue Planet?

Blue Planet is a Science Fiction Roleplaying Game set in the not so far future (2199 AD to be specific) on another planet, Lambda Serpentis II, commonly known as Poseidon. Contrary to many other space SF games, Blue Planet is a *realistic* Science Fiction game that focus very much on down-to-Poseidon *Roleplaying*. This means that considerable effort has gone into the thought of how the society has transformed due to the technological, environmental and social changes (which are considerable, but you won't find laser beam weapons or anti-gravity vehicles). The emphasis is on *roleplaying* than on Space Opera or gritty Cyberpunk, more Science than Fiction. Blue Planet is probably one of the most well researched roleplaying games ever made.

Poseidon is an Earth-like planet, covered almost entirely by seas; there are millions of small islands and just a few larger island, the largest (Prime Meridan) is the size of Australia (think Polynesia on a planet-wide scale) – hence the name of the game.

Humans colonised the planet about 120 years ago and the second wave of colonists arrived about 20 years ago. Typical campaigns can be cyberpunk inspired, Wild West á la 19:th century, man-against-Nature or research missions. Or anything else. Natural phenomena on Poseidon is mostly hostile, from winds that will capsize the biggest boats in the Storm Belt to the horrible predators known as Greater Whites that consider a small boat a convenient afternoon snack; a soft and tasty content in a crunchy shell. Even the islands can be deathtraps with poisonous plants and microorganisms, all of which are alien to the human immune system. And companies don't like it when nosy adventurers stumble upon their secret research lab, hidden on a far-away island, but on the other hand, there are several other companies that are willing to buy whatever data the aforementioned adventurers has uncovered, or pay for the destruction of it – including the lab.

On a new, pristine world with no nation states in the traditional sense, and hence the law and order of a 19:th century Wild West frontier, there are plenty of opportunities for new entrepreneurs.

---

\*With some feedback from Tom Cusworth

†js@muorji.se

Most important of all is that Blue Planet's emphasis is on the roleplaying, an entire scenario can revolve around the characters struggle to avoid combat or the Native Patrol officer and his visit to the village he was bought up in – do relatives and childhood friends share his view of what is good and proper sources of income? What do they think of the fact that he is on GEO's payroll, a law enforcer?

If you prefer to run into a lobby with guns blazing Matrix style, a classic cyberpunk game might be a better selection. Combat is lethal in the SYNERGY game system.

A description of the history of mankind for the last 200 years can be found in the first chapter of Player's Guide, which is also available on the Web <sup>1</sup>.

## Types of characters

The characters can choose from about ten different species and a large number of professions. There are three types of species; humans, hybrids and cetaceans.

### Humans

Humans comes in three forms:

**Unmodified human** Pure humans, these are not modified in any way, neither pre-birth gene modification, nor gene therapy or implants after birth. The reasons for this can be economical, political or religious.

**Modified human** The modified humans have undergone gene therapy or obtained artificial biological or technological implants after birth.

**Genetic redesign** The genes are the most modified of all humans. Their DNA has undergone dramatic changes before birth and they can be quite extreme in appearance and abilities.

**Aquaforms** There are two specific forms of genetic redesigns. "Squids" and "divers." The former has gills on their backs which gives them the ability to dive for prolonged times and the latter has the ability to hold their breath for about an hour due to similar respiratory physiology as dolphins etc.

**Spacers and Transhuman** There two additional special cases of genetic redesigns, spacers and transhumans. It is not very likely a player character will be spacers. These are highly specialised humans that are designed for living in space. They are not physically able to live for long periods of time in a planet's gravity well.

Transhumans are usually the children of very rich people: They are perfect in every aspect; beautiful, intelligent, very highly resistant to diseases etc.

### Hybrids

Hybrids are a highly-shunned subspecies of humans. They come as a result of experiments to mix human and animal DNA. Two distinct hybrids exist; cat hybrids and silvans. Almost all hybrids on planet Earth have fled or moved to Poseidon.

---

<sup>1</sup>spillklubben.samfunnet.no/Rollespill/blueplanet/filer/bppreview.pdf

## Cetaceans

One of the main differences between the real world and the world of Poseidon is the genlifting of dolphins et al. One of the greatest achievements of the last century was the project to genlift Bottlenose dolphins, Common dolphins, Killer whales (usually called “Orcas”), Beluga whales and Pilot whales. This group of species are commonly called “Cetes” or “fins.” They are now fully sentient and have a rich culture that is in parts completely foreign to humans. It should be mandatory for anyone who wants to play a cetaceans to read the “Ancient Echoes” supplement. It is very hard to play a cetacean and they shall not be played as a human in a new form – in the same sense as elves is not humans with pointy ears.

A very common misunderstanding among new players of BP is that the difficulty with Cetes is they cannot move on dry land, but considering that 98 % of the planet is water, who is the one with problems, monkey boy?

The problem is that the mindset of whales are so different from humans, not that they are bound to the sea. Technology has given them several facilities to interact with the “monkeys.” One of the most common used are the drones; remote controlled, flying robots that can contain hand-like manipulators, speakers, microphones, translation software, weapons etc. Cetaceans can all understand human languages (if they have the skills) but they cannot produce the sounds, so without translation software (which is good but far from perfect; forget about translating poetry) they can only “talk” to humans with the sound and sign language known as Interspecies.

## Life on the planet

There are three major types of communities on the planet:

1. Native villages
2. Cities
3. Mining towns

The natives, e.g. the descendants from the first colonists, usually lives in villages similar to the communities of Polynesia on Earth. They live of what the planet gives – fish, crops etc. – and access to technology is common but the equipment is run down, patched up and in desperate need of spare parts. But it works and will do so for another decade at least.

The cities are like cities everywhere: a large mixture of people and fins all trying to make a living. Every city has its charm and individual characteristics, all depending on who runs the town. Some cities are corporate, i.e. the facilities of a company and the surrounding houses of the employees and all kinds of facilities they need in terms of shops and entertainment, other cities are simply towns that have grown big.

One of the few industries that actually makes any profit from transporting the goods to Earth is the mining industry. One of the major breakthroughs for Poseidon was the discovery of “Long John,” a mineral that has had huge impact on the genome research and in the medical field as a whole. There are hundreds, thousands or even more mining fields all over the planet and where miners go, there go everyone that profits from what the miners dig up. Think Klondyke below the seas.

Technology is very advanced, cheap and usually contains batteries for its lifetime. Since Poseidon is so ... moist, all electronics are very well sealed in plastics. There are no beam weapons or anti-gravity vehicles, but apart from that almost all technology that can be found in “any” near-future SF game is available, for a price. The main problem is the availability. It is far too expensive to transport goods from Earth and much of that equipment is not made for the harsh environmental situation found on Poseidon. The manufacturing sector has only had about twenty years to build up an industry, much of what is produced is used by the manufacturer’s companies and employees – a surplus is not yet produced. An equivalent to the Internet is available through the satellite based CommCore.

## Some suggestions during the character creation

A game so well researched and elaborate as Blue Planet deserves some thought from the player, who can be quite confident that the GM has put quite some work into the scenarios and the setting. It is therefore a good idea to give the character concept a little more thought than in many other SF and fantasy games.

When the character is created, a number of “packages” are bought, upbringing, education and professional. Depending on which packages you select for your character, he will have different skills. Survival on Poseidon requires some skills and to survive the adventures another set of skills are required. Before you even decide which concept you would like to play, it is recommended that you have a word with the other players. The suggestions are written from a group perspective and if one person has very high skill levels in one skill, the others might put their points elsewhere. They will be needed!

All of the suggestions below assumes that you have had a lengthy talk with your GM, who has given you some advice about what kind of scenarios you can expect to find.

**Combat heavy** This concept is rather easy to play; the classic fighter. Usually a pretty dull character unless he is engaged in fighting. In Blue Planet, combat is very lethal, i.e. realistic, and unless you want to make a new character every now and then I recommend you tone down the combat skills and avoid most kinds of fighting. Combat skills are nice to use for intimidating purposes, see Social Skills below, so they have a potential use outside the fire fight.

The native life of Poseidon is savage, the predators and even the herbivores are very dangerous, not to mention all the violence the humans can create, and a weapon for self-defence is crucial for the group's survival. You should be able to handle at least one long range weapon (usually some kind of gun) with some competence. The group as a whole need to be able to have enough fire power to stop a solitary enemy of human size in one or two rounds. However it is very much better to try to escape the fire fight than to try to fight it out. Keep in mind that the group needs weapons that are usable underwater as well. There are a lot of oceans on the planet and it is not uncommon to take a dive every now and then.

**Medic** Just as important as fire power, it also needs someone to take care of the wounded. First Aid skills are not enough, at least someone in the group should be a fairly competent medic. Hospitals can be days away even with access to aircraft. The rest should be competent enough to be able to handle a wounded group member until the medic arrives or the casualty can be moved to where the medic is.

**Survival knowledge** Just as it is horrible to die from a gun shot wound, or an untreated scratch which gets an infection, likewise is it horrible to die from any of the many diseases and parasites that are present on the planet. One or two members of the group need to have extensive knowledge of how to survive on Poseidon. It might be anything from how to see if the red-spotted green fungus on the camp site is dangerous or not; to spotting the signs of a predator in the vicinity to the tell tale signs of an oncoming storm or how to build a shelter. The environment can kill on Poseidon and the characters will soon join their ancestors unless they know how to handle the situation.

**Social skills** All kinds of social skills are highly valued on Poseidon, to make friends and to get information from a Long John prospector (the modern era's gold digger) is a common task. All kinds of investigative skills are useful—forensics is more useful than many think. If you are going to avoid fighting the antagonist head on you better have some means of getting information about him so you know when, where and how to hit. If he is involved in some criminal activity, it might be better to hand over the evidence to the authorities, they most definitely have more resources than the group (but the GM might spoil the fun since he wants the characters to take on the antagonist and decides he has bribed connections among the GEO Patrol, or slips away when they try to arrest him).

**Aquatic skills** The planet consists of mostly water and a character that cannot swim will sooner or later drown. The knowledge of scuba diving is also a very good skill to invest in. Everyone in the group does not need to be experts in it, but all should at least be able to handle scuba gear and know the basic safety of a dive. Otherwise they are in for some nasty surprises. Count on all antagonists the characters encounter has the ability to “run away” by dive into the ocean.

**Computer usage** The classic Decker concept from Shadowrun or the hacker from most Cyberpunk novels and games are not very common on Poseidon. The computer network, CommCore, gives many options for the players to find information—it is quite common to keep ones (even secret) notes on ones bodycomp or the future equivalent of the USB stick; dataspikes—but it is not as common that the characters need to hack their way through black ice. The corps are bright enough to not hook their surveillance cameras to the public CommCore.

The main usage of the computers is to find public information—more like a librarian; knowing where to find something more than trying to keep the ice from trying to fry their brain. Computer usage and related skills—like remote drone operation—is very helpful and should be available within the group. But to build an entire Decker concept is simply not reasonable.

If the characters really, really need to hack into a corporation or decrypt a dataspikes, there are people who do such services and who are never curious and ask questions. There is no such thing as a free lunch, so the service will probably cost the players dearly, but it is a much better investment to place those points on skills that will make it possible for the characters to retrieve the dataspikes in the first place.

## Personality Questionnaire

Since the roleplaying within the group is such a central part of the game, this is a selection of questions that can be used to better elaborate the personality and background of the character.

1. The character is shipwrecked on an isolated island and succeeds to secure sufficient supplies to survive “for a while.” What does the character do when he is not foraging for food or improving the shelter?
2. In the situation above, what is the characters most feared nightmare?
3. Describe the island the character is shipwrecked on.
4. The character is on a secret mission and a storm has damaged his hydrofoil severely and he needs to land on an island to make repairs. After some scouting he sees that the island is inhabited and decides to ask the natives for some much needed help. What does the character tell the natives about who he is and where he is heading? What cover story does he uses, if any?
5. What characteristics does the ideal vehicle have?
6. The character has after several very dangerous adventures and missions earned a substantial amount of money (i.e. several hundred thousand dollars, maybe even millions, or equivalent, i.e. the cost of things is of very little concern). What does the character do with the money? (E.g. puts it in a retirement fund or spends it on equipment so the character survives until retirement.)
7. How well does the character interact with cetaceans, hybrids and the other human forms? How much experience does he have of interacting with the other sentient species?
8. Has the character ever been into space (the hypersleep during transfer between Earth and Poseidon does not count)?
9. Who taught the character about survival on Poseidon? When was it?

10. Describe a scene where the teacher instructs the character.
11. How did the character finance his training?
12. The character is walking a late night toward the current “home” after some drinking in a pub in Haven. While walking home, the character takes a short-cut in a alley and is approached by a couple of thugs who want the character’s money. How does the thugs look like? Will the character give them the money? What does the character say? Does the character feel himself threatened?
13. Will the character tell the local police about the robbery?
14. The character walk down a street in one of the less well-to-do regions in Haven and just two meters ahead of him, a man comes running out of a door and starts running away. How does the character react? Does the reaction change when he hears someone from the inside scream “stop the thief”? How does the character respond to the request for action? Will the character check how the shop owner is or will he dart after the thief?
15. What features shall the shop owner have to make the character help her? What features to make the character ignore any requests for help?
16. What would make the character decide to hunt down an individual whatever it takes?
17. The character is in the area of a very old, but not very close, friend who the character has not met in several years, will the character pay a visit? Why not?
18. The character finds his friend recently murdered and is the first on the scene. How does the character react? Describe the scene when the character first sees his friend’s corpse. Who is most likely to have killed his friend?
19. The character has found the murderer, either by coincidence or after a long and dangerous manhunt. How will the character punish the murderer? What is the first thing the character says to the murderer?
20. Which Hydroshot team is the character’s favorite?
21. What is the character’s view of the Whale Song?
22. The character finds himself in a position to buy a perfect garment of Sunburst hides for a very low amount of money (“special price for you my friend”), what is the character’s reaction?
23. Does the reaction change when the character realises that the seller is a poacher? Or was he aware of it from the start?
24. A native villager approaches the character in Haven requesting his help with averting a number of poachers/bandits (i.e. the same setup as Kurosawa’s *The Seven Samurai*). What does the villager offer the character to make him join? What is the character’s motive to join, the money or a “higher” cause? Why doesn’t he suggest that they take the GEO Marshal’s help instead, because this is most obvious a crime, isn’t it?
25. One day does a cetacean, which the character has befriended, but not very closely, ask the character if he would like to watch/hear the Whale Song concert that the local church will hold in two days time. What does the character answer?
26. Does he think it is a friendly invitation, or does he think there is a hidden agenda behind it?
27. Does the answer depend on the friendship with the cetacean or doesn’t that have anything to do with it?

28. One of the larger companies has some problems with a native village in an area where they want to establish a new research station and the characters are hired to deal with the situation. What kind of mission will the character turn down?
29. In case the characters has been fooled and tricked into believe the natives are a bunch of backward green nuts and then realises that the company is the “bad guys,” how will the character react? Would it change anything if the characters had suspected it from the beginning but took the mission anyway?
30. The characters is on a high risk mission where they have to infiltrate a group of corporate scientists, and then the character discovers that one of his trusted friends is a informer for the other company. How will the character react? Will it make any difference if he discovers it himself or is told about it? Will he trust the source? Which sources will he trust and which won't he trust?
31. Could it be the character that is the informer and traitor? If so, what would be the price for his disloyalty? What difference would it make if the others where old time friends whom he had worked with for a very long time or a newly formed group?
32. What does the character think about Sunburst poaching, pollution, the mining industries' environmental impact, etc.?
33. The character sits in a bar or something similar in a native village when he is approached by a person that starts to talk to him about the environment and obvious tries to check out what the character thinks about pollution etc. What does the character say?
34. The inquiring person then goes on by talking about ways of preventing damages, the method he advocates is preemptive violence. How does the character react? What is his reaction of the person tries to hire him for such a mission?
35. How far would he go to stop pollution and other environmental damages? Violence? Resign from his job in protest? Talk to his boss at the “next convenient” moment? Would that moment ever come?
36. What would the most extreme measure be to stop environmental damage?
37. What would justify this extreme measure?
38. How big – or small – does the damage has to be to catch the character's attention? I.e. what kind of pollution etc. doesn't the character care about? Why?
39. If the character had the option of going to the university on Poseidon or on Earth of his choice, which field of knowledge would he take on? What courses would he attend?
40. If he needs to finance the courses himself, i.e. they aren't prepaid as assumed in the former question, what kind of extra job would he take on?
41. The character is hanging out in a bar, getting a slight buzz from a intoxicant of his choice and sees an attractive individual of the gender, species and appearance of his preference. Would he approach the individual? How? What would the pick-up line be? Is he only in for a drink and some dancing or is the prospect of getting into bed the goal? Describe the individual.
42. What characteristics should the individual have to make the character interested in a long term relationship? Marriage?
43. How would the character react if he realises after a while that the individual already has a partner?

44. How would the character react if aforementioned partner suddenly appears? If the partner appears enraged? If the partner is friendly and sits down to chat? If the partner takes interest in the character? Does it matter if the first individual is still present?
45. Which kind of self-improvement course would the character attend?
46. If the character became a sales man (for a short or prolonged period of time), what kind of goods and what kind of customers would he seek out?
47. What would his favorite opening line/sales pitch be? What is the main advantage of this particular product he sells?
48. How would you like to see your character grow as a person?
49. How would you like your character to grow in terms of knowledge? Which skills would you like him train in? Does the character know this himself yet?
50. Which side of the character's personality do you think should be elaborated during the game? E.g. his view of the environment, his relationship with individuals of a certain origin (species, social and cultural background, ...), his relationship with his childhood friends and enemies, his anger management.
51. The character has spend some prolonged time out in the wild, both on islands and in boats and has not seen civilisation for quite some time. When he finally arrives in a larger settlement, something that can be considered a city of sort and which can be considered to be a civilised place. Which kinds of places (barber, shops, bars, hotels, brothels, weapon stores, ...) does he visit and in which order?