

# Futures

## Star Corps Crew Manual Section 15-A37: On Mental Dislocation

It's for your own protection. By Marissa Lingen



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

### Subsection 1: Parallel universes

Starting during cadet training, each member of the Star Corps will, on their birthday, order one randomized item from the replicator. Logging what that item turns out to be will help the Corps to narrow down divergence points by comparing birthday logs when a parallel-universe self shows up.

If you are the crew member who discovers that your existing log does not match your memories, please remain calm. Many crew members – possibly even most – survive contact with parallel universes. Although you will hear sensational stories in your cadet training about Captain Sussman's alternate self – the intergalactic spice pirate – that kind of parallel universe is extremely rare. Most contact results in only mild confusion.

If a crewmate displays a difference in the

styling of clothes, hair or body adornment in their off hours, please *first* investigate the possibility that they merely like to look that way and mind your own business. It is only when these signals intrude on work hours that investigation is called for.

*We have modern medicine* in this Star Corps. If a crewmate is losing memory rather than remembering an alternate timeline, seek treatment. If a crewmate is exhibiting symptoms that may apply to mental-health conditions, seek treatment. Many successful Star Corps officers receive treatment for either of these conditions in the course of their career. There are *no reasons* to avoid investigating a parallel-universe incursion.

If your parallel-universe self seems to be planning some kind of invasion, remain calm and refer to *Manual Section 6: War and Manual*

*Section 7: Insurrection*. Please leave as many pieces of evidence of your whereabouts as possible, as this may be necessary for tracing your safe return to duty.

### Subsection 2: Mind control

If you feel that you are being mind controlled, please proceed to the sick bay as soon as possible, so that medical staff may perform a thorough examination.

If you suspect that a crewmate is being mind controlled, please gently initiate temporary lockout procedures. Protect yourself with body armour as soon as possible. Summon assistance. Do not attempt to subdue a mind-controlled crewmate personally.

Bear in mind the well-known Sussman-Langlois incident: our weapons have stun settings with none of the side effects of previous

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generations' supposedly less-lethal uses of force. Stun early. Stun often. Do not risk injuring a mind-controlled crewmate by subduing them by hand.

Repeatedly ask yourself: why do I hold this belief? When did I begin to think so? Even if you are not mind controlled, this exercise will teach humility and perspective.

### Subsection 3: Alien communication, subtype: unwitting

For occasions when the recruit knows that alien communication is occurring, please see Sections 3–5 and the latter half of Section 12.

Rarely, an alien species will use telepathy, pheromonal waves, or some ungodly perversion of quantum mechanics as a sort of distress beacon. These species almost never mean to use this kind of communication as mind control; they are just trying to talk, or more often to scream. Finding out who is screaming in your crewmate's head and why can be crucial to the ongoing survival of nearby ships, planets, stellar features, crewmates, etc.

Some useful questions to ask may be: do you

actually possess the appendage you describe as hurting? Where do you think that appendage is now? Have you ever personally seen the moons of Smixnork 7, or is your current yearning purely hypothetical? Is that object edible to your species? These questions may reorient your crewmate.

Please remember that although Captain Sussman did successfully avoid court martial for his treatment of the Herpestidine who was using Doctor Oliveira as a conduit, several planetesimals might still exist if he had proceeded with more caution in ascertaining the doctor's mental state vis-à-vis external influence. The Star Corps has not ruled out courts martial in similar future circumstances.

### Subsection 4: Time travel

It is strictly against Star Corps regulations to contact a past or future self through use of time travel. No matter what other crises your crew is suffering at this time, it is prohibited to fix them with time travel.

If you encounter a future self, *do not engage*. Stun them and call engineering.

No matter what your future self may tell

you, it is vanishingly unlikely that this was the only method of solving the problems at hand. Invoking the situation with Sussman, Langlois and Oliveira will not assist in your defence should the Advocate Corps be forced to involve themselves, as the odds that all major section regulations on mental dislocation will be needed at once are so vanishingly small that the quantum probability theorists are now investigating the region around the *Starship Emma Goldman* in the hope of understanding how they all happened at once.

This will not be the situation for you. Therefore you should proceed with the understanding that any engagement with future selves will result in courts martial for all instances of the party or parties involved.

Time travel to change the *Star Corps Crew Manual* is also strictly and in no uncertain terms forbidden.

**Marissa Lingen** has published more than 100 short stories in venues such as *Analog*, *Lightspeed* and *Tor.com*.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

**Marissa Lingen reveals the inspiration behind *Star Corps Crew Manual* Section 15-A37: *On Mental Dislocation*.**

Half a lifetime ago, I was getting a security clearance to have my graduate work funded through Lawrence Livermore National Labs. The government agencies who do that sort of thing emphasized that they didn't care what minor things I'd done, they just wanted to be sure that I couldn't be blackmailed for having done them. "So, for example, I failed to turn in other students, whose names I will not tell you, when I knew about their low-key illegal drug use?" I ventured. "Exactly!" they beamed, and my clearance went through. (My own crimes have been pretty minimal all along.) I have thought about this experience off and on when I watch various TV programmes whose plots require people to keep things secret that would be very little trouble if they were disclosed.

What's worse is when this is combined with transporting stigmatized attitudes about mental health from the present or recent past into our imagined futures. I would like to be building a present — to say nothing of a future — where "they'll think I'm crazy" is not a worry anyone has to have. Where it's "they'll help me with the health issue I'm having" instead. Let's hope. More than that — let's work for it.

