

DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY



Adventure for Beginning Characters

Pandemonium attracts not only the downtrodden, desperate for any opportunity to better themselves, but also the powerful, seeking more power in its wreckage. The characters may come from either of these groups, but their main encounters during “Diplomatic Immunity” come from both. While they serve a powerful Hazat noble and interact with Pandemonium’s leading families, they also get to see the lives of some of the planet’s most wretched inhabitants.

Don Marchenko Catilla Arronto Justus, a Hazat count, has just arrived on Pandemonium (perhaps on the same spaceship the characters were on) as a representative of his house. His position is only temporary; however, for his main role is to assess what threat (and opportunities) the newly discovered planet of Iver represents. To this end, he intends to meet with those who have gone to Iver and perhaps sponsor some expeditions of his own.

Unfortunately, more than a few people prefer that he never get the chance to do this. The characters encounter some of these people immediately after Don Marchenko disembarks, and get to meet more and more as the week continues. Someone wants Marchenko dead — perhaps more than one person. Some people merely dislike him, while others wish that he were dead. The players have the fun task of both finding out who the latter are and protecting Marchenko from them.

Do not expect this drama to detail every way to handle what the players want their characters to do. The only thing you can expect from players is that they will not do what you expect them to. “Diplomatic Immunity” details a series of events occurring over a period of days. Characters might persuade Marchenko to do different things, but he is strong-willed and unlikely to change his plans without good reason. As long as the characters work for him, they need to follow his orders.

Riot

Sometimes Pandemonium gets hot. Okay, Pandemonium is usually hot. Fine, have it your way — Pandemonium sweats like it was sitting in the middle of the holy flame itself. The small space liner *Ryko’s Trust* landed during one of these swelteringly hot days, one of many oppressively warm days in a long string of such days. The heat has helped aggravate conditions on this overcrowded planet, and tempers have risen as high as the temperature.

This is especially true in the spaceport, where the various guilds have begun bitterly clashing over issues of territory and employees.

The Muster and the Scravers have butted heads repeatedly, with both groups wanting greater control over the loading and unloading of spaceships. While the Reeves and Charioteers could usually bring such tensions under control, outside forces now prevent that.

Unloading *Ryko’s Trust* just became the center of this dispute, and things do not look good. A small crew of Scraver stevedores shows up and begins unloading the ship, only to have a Muster crew show up, waving papers to prove the ship’s owner hired them in advance. As the ship’s passengers watch, both sides of the argument begin attracting supporters, and tempers flare.

It does not really matter who throws the first punch, only that it does get thrown. Within seconds, the entire docking area erupts in violence, with 100 guild members fighting, running and causing as much havoc as possible. The characters might just want to get themselves into cover. They each have the chance to make one Dexterity check (DC 15) to get to safety behind crates and other cargo. Any who succeed are immediately safe. Any who fail are embroiled in combat. This is a chaotic melee where 100 people run around hitting whoever appears before them; see the Thug stats at the end of the chapter.

Of course, the tumult of the riot is not the only danger. The characters also get a Spot check (DC 15) to see five Muster toughs heading straight for Don Marchenko’s back. If none of them make the check, then the first they know of it is when the Hazat ambassador screams as a club comes down on his skull.

Stopping this attack should not prove especially difficult, but finding out who planned it is. The five thugs believe Don Marchenko is the ship’s owner (he is not) who double-crossed them by first hiring them and then allowing Scravers to do the work. This belief stems from a video conference held nine days ago, in which a figure bearing striking similarities to Don Marchenko did hire the Muster to unload the ship. This was, in fact, the assassin using video compositing to make it appear that Don Marchenko was behind everything. Of course, Don Marchenko was on *Ryko’s Trust*, in the Rampart solar system, at that time, and could not have made any such call. The assassin also set up a high quality squawker near the docking area. When the Muster bearers appeared, she insulted the Scravers viciously, egging the bearers on to violence. The incident embarrasses the Muster severely, but they still have their suspicions.

Don Marchenko's Plans

Don Marchenko intends to make his moves slowly and surely. His primary responsibility is to ensure that Iver's House Chauki can in no way threaten the Hazat. He intends to discredit any claims it might have to being the original House Chauki, or, failing that, find some way to neutralize it. This can mean violence, getting the Church to excommunicate it, or, if possible, shutting down the jumpgate yet again.

He intends to begin his trip to Pandemonium with the social necessities — visiting Count Enis Sharn, undertaking a pilgrimage to the Cathedral and making the acquaintance of the planet's leading figures. Then he hopes to start tracking down those individuals who have had any contact with Iver. This list includes Enis Sharn's agents, the few Church missionaries who have traveled to Iver, smugglers who have managed to start small trade routes between there and Pandemonium, and the technicians who first reactivated the jump route.

The day after the riot, he intends to visit Count Sharn in the early afternoon to gather information on Iver. Count Sharn will not tell him much, but will direct him toward several Hub merchants who traffic in Iver relics. Don Marchenko hopes to visit them the following day to get the names of smugglers who trade goods out in the badlands.

His unspoken hope is that he can prove that the rulers of Iver usurped the real House Chauki on their planet, thereby giving the Hazat some claim to their world. He would like to visit Iver himself, but knows that in his condition, such a trip would pose innumerable difficulties. Perhaps a team of intrepid explorers could do it for him.

Fanaticism

After a relaxing night at Don Marchenko's Pandemonium villa, Don Marchenko and his new friends prepare to visit Count Enis Sharn. The stable master outfits enough horses for everyone as this is Marchenko's preferred mode of travel. Even characters without the ride skill can travel this way — as long as nothing happens to upset the animals. The first half of the one-hour ride is pleasant enough, but then the characters get Spot checks (DC 13) to hear a commotion from around the corner.

Any characters who make the check have one round to prepare before Friar Mizraim Reuss and his devoted followers turn that corner. These are 50 anti-tech fanatics in the harshest sense, carrying clubs, torches and rocks with which to destroy any technology they may encounter. These vigilantes do not have to target the characters. Don Marchenko carries no obvious tech objects, and they will leave him alone. The characters, on the other hand...

Anyone who has any obvious items (and any aliens) finds himself on the receiving end of a volley of rocks (five per turn, each with a base attack bonus of +1, 1d3 damage). Anyone with obvious cybernetics gets picked out for special attention, and five club-wielding nuts come after her (see the Thug stats at the end of this chapter). These guys should not prove too difficult to disperse, but they should add to the characters' paranoia. The assassins have nothing to do with Friar Mizraim and his followers, but the characters have no way to know this. This red herring should keep them quite worried.

Getting the Players Involved

Gamemasters should have little trouble finding ways to work the characters into this drama. Pandemonium's spaceport is one of the planet's busiest areas, and everyone has reason to be here. All the guilds conduct heavy business on its premises, the noble houses oversee their investments, and priests come out to minister to space crews, bless ships and watch cargo for signs of heretical material — or choose the best for themselves.

If the characters do not have permanent ties to Pandemonium, they might very well arrive on *Ryko's Trust* themselves. Perhaps they work for the ship or Don Marchenko hired them before arriving on the planet. If they have no such ties, then Don Marchenko will seek to hire them if they play any role in fighting off the Muster thugs. He offers housing in a nice villa (a serious luxury on Pandemonium) as well as standard salaries. Even if the characters refuse to accept this position, the assassins have seen them associating with Don Marchenko and may target them as well.

Sniper

When the characters and Don Marchenko finally get to Enis Sharn's manor, the planet's owner will actually greet them himself. He has long hoped to talk to this famed warrior, and will put up with whatever bizarre entourage he brings with him. He also apologizes for the commotion that Don Marchenko has encountered (the spaceport riot, the religious fanatics), but stresses that Pandemonium is going through uncertain times.

After a pleasant afternoon with the Count (during which time enterprising characters can learn much about the planet), the horses get saddled and again the team rides off. It's another hour getting back to the villa through the dusky streets of the Hub. The group is only 15 minutes from home when Marchenko's horse rears as if shot and begins bucking wildly. A sniper, knowing that a noble would have a shield, shot a crossbow dart into his horse. The dart, coated with a painful (though not lethal) poison, has driven the beast into a frenzy. Though Marchenko is a skilled rider, he has little hope of maintaining his seating against this fury. The characters have two rounds to resolve the situation before the beast pitches Marchenko to the ground. While the actual unseating will probably not get through his energy shield (1d6 damage), the resulting trampling from his maddened horse will. This trampling does 2d6 damage every round until characters rein the beast in.

Characters who want to control the horse at any point need to make Handle Animal checks (DC 15). If they want to drive it off, they need to achieve a DC 20. Marchenko would prefer that they brought it under control one way or another and absolutely detests seeing animals harmed. Characters should have to decide between tracking down the sniper (located in a four-story building just off the main road to the villa) and protecting Marchenko and the horse. The sniper has set up his ambush spot well, ensuring rapid access to the roof

from which he hops from building to building until he reaches a dark ladder several blocks away. Once there he clambers to the ground and rushes to join his cronies at a nearby barber shop.

The Physick

The episode shakes Marchenko up badly, and once back at the villa he sends the houseboy for a local physick. While the local physick has served his community for most of his life, cutting hair and amputating limbs, he is not the gentleman who appears in response to Marchenko's summons. The physick and his family are currently bound and gagged in their own house, watched over by several thugs. In his place comes Bitash the sniper, dressed in the physick's robes. He tends Marchenko as best he can, and he may well convince any characters who monitor his work of his legitimacy. If they ask any of the villa's servants about the physick, they all assert to never having seen him before, though he looks like the old physick. If questioned, he says that the local physick was away on a call when the houseboy showed up requiring aid.

Before leaving, he gives Marchenko a drink of a warm herbal tea to help him sleep. He has already prepared the herbs with a slow-acting poison — one that should not take effect until well into the night. Barring character intervention, he takes a one firebird fee and heads back to the barbershop to gather his band and disappear into the Hub.

Don Marchenko goes to sleep within 30 minutes of drinking the tea, and the poison begins working shortly thereafter. By the time he wakes, fiery pain tearing through his belly, he has less than an hour to live. Healing him requires accumulating 30 points on Heal checks (DC 20, each result over the DC is tallied). Each roll takes 10 minutes, so characters can take six rolls over the next hour to save him. If they seek out the local physick, they find him at home with a police guard. If the characters convince the guards to let them talk to the physick (5 firebird bribe), then they immediately notice that this is not the one who worked on Marchenko. The real physick tells of being held captive, though he does not know why or by whom. He will rush to help Marchenko, but will only have thirty minutes (three rolls), and his Heal modifier is 15 (12 ranks + 3 Wis).

Theurgy can help Don Marchenko as well. While Revive will not rid his body of the poison, each successful use allows him to live another 30 minutes and reduces his agonizing pain. Rejuvenation can completely rid Marchenko of the poison (DC 20) and makes him feel better than he has in years.

The Assault

If the characters manage to save Marchenko, then Bitash (the sniper and fake physick) is getting frustrated. He will make one more attempt the next night. He takes his time approaching the villa. He has hired a dozen thugs to charge the front door as a distraction. When the thugs begin mixing it up with the characters, he intends to sneak in the villa and kill Marchenko himself. He hopes to sneak up on Marchenko (who will still be bed bound following his recovery from the poison) and slit his throat with a vibrating dagger, which Bitash has coated with poison just in case.

Normally Marchenko could handle the assassin alone, but barring some miraculous healing, the poison has left him with a Con-

stitution score of 2. Characters who are vigilant for danger from any source besides the thugs can make Spot checks opposed against Bitash's Move Silently to notice him. Of course, if anyone is waiting in Marchenko's bedroom, they automatically see Bitash, who comes through the door (or window, if there is a guard at the door).

This is Bitash's final attempt on Marchenko. If he fails this time, he will try to seek out his patron for further instructions, only to discover that he cannot find her. If he succeeds, then he disappears for a while, staying on the outskirts of the Hub for a year. If he gets caught, he has no intention of being killed (or killing himself), and will trade money (up to 400 firebirds) and information for his freedom.

So Who Did It?

This drama tends to assume that the Kurgan spy Zulaykha Turakina (see the GAMEMASTERING chapter in **Fading Suns: d20**) is the main force behind the assassination attempts. The courtesan has begun assembling a decent ring of informants and operatives through Hazat space, and word of Don Marchenko's quest did not take long to reach her. She feared that the Hazat might end up with another world whose resources could turn against the caliphate, and took steps to neutralize this threat. Zulaykha Turakina flees the planet before characters figure out who was behind everything, and may well reappear to haunt them again later (or hire them — who knows which way loyalties might change?).

However, this is not the only possibility. The Iver Chauki's would want to hinder his mission if they knew about it. Early in Don Marchenko's career, he became involved in a number of serious atrocities on Byzantium Secundus, and those families affected by his actions may want revenge. Psychics upset at Don Marchenko's harsh role in shutting down the dervishes later in his career might also target him for retribution. The opposite side of this is the fact that religious fanatics might see his association with psychic as a high sin and target him as a lesson to others. Additionally, his own servants might want to kill him since the Don has a notorious history of seducing their spouses. Finally, the assassins might not even have a grudge against Don Marchenko. Instead, they may hope killing him serves as an embarrassment to Count Sharn and helps prove to Decados leaders that he cannot control the planet. The gamemaster can take whatever approach most fits his style.

What Next?

If the characters seek out the lady who hired Bitash, they should have very little luck. He has no idea how she found him, but she proved herself well informed, cultivated and wealthy. She did not speak, instead communicating with him via an old, hand-held think machine when they met at Hazred's Tavern (a notorious bar catering to the underworld). Unless the gamemaster wants them to encounter her, she has left the planet — probably to crop up later to bedevil the characters.

Marchenko is not overly concerned. He knows many people want him dead, and stopping one will not end all the threats against him. If the gamemaster likes, Marchenko can offer the characters permanent positions as his entourage, give them jobs gathering information on other worlds, or thank them for their help and send

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them on their way. If they continue working for him, they may have to escort him through the Badlands as he gets involved in politics at the Cathedral, make contacts with the Hub's criminal element (perhaps meeting Graaf himself), or help keep other houses from making deals with Iver.

Don Marchenko

Born into the wealthy Justus branch of the Hazat, Don Marchenko Catilla Arronto Justus proved that a privileged childhood did not exclude one from the sacrifices of war. He commanded house legions while still young, and helped lead the Hazat invasion of Byzantium Secundus early in the Emperor Wars. He helped form the Hazat dervishes, their psychic commandos who proved so effective. When the Emperor Wars ended, the Church brought a great deal of pressure to bear to disband these units, and the task fell to Don Marchenko. More than a few dervishes bitterly objected to being discarded after having risked their lives repeatedly. The objections turned violent, and Don Marchenko found himself forced to battle several of his own former companions. He lost his left arm during their fights, and spends the next year recuperating. He still suffers nightmares from this time and has trouble sleeping.

He has finally decided he is too old to take personal action, and hopes to serve his house as a diplomat. He has helped push the Church to call a Crusade against the Kurgans and now is in charge of Hazat relations with Iver. His traits represent his age — he used to be a lot more physically capable.

Race: Human

Quote: "I do believe we can work things out."

Description: His 5'8" frame stands ramrod straight, and his military bearing screams out at anyone who sees him. His white hair is cut close to his head and his mustache is well trimmed. He wears elegant clothes, but not especially gaudy ones. He does nothing to hide the fact that he has one arm and does not intend to replace it with a cybernetic one.

Age: Late 60s (he has stopped taking rejuvenation drugs but still looks 10 years younger)

Entourage: Don Marchenko has left his old servants behind on Vera Cruz, intending to recruit locals. If the characters do not stay on with him, he will hire others. His villa has five servants: a head butler, a cook, a maid, a stable master and a serving boy. The stable master also takes care of landscaping what little land the villa has.

Male Human Nob10/Psi4; Medium-sized humanoid; Hit Dice 10d8+10 plus 4d6+4; hp 67; Init +2; Spd 30; AC 16 (touch 16, flat-footed 14); Atk +14/+9/+4 melee (1d6+2/15-20, masterwork rapier); SQ House Affiliation (Hazat); AL LN; SV Fort +9 Ref +6 Will +14; Str 15, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 18.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +11, Diplomacy +17 (+21), Handle Animal +14, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (military) +15, Knowledge (nobility) +15, Literacy, Occultcraft +10, Ride +15, Wilderness Lore +14; Assets: Rich (x4), Leadership, Noble Title: Earl (Hazat) (x4), Parry, Riposte.

Special Qualities: House Affiliation (Hazat): +2 to Intimidate those of lower rank.

Psychic Powers: (Wryd 25) Bedlam — War Dance +12, Confuse Others (resist DC 19) +17, Prana Burst (resist DC 20) +20, Nerve Strike (resist DC 15) +7.

Possessions: Dueling shield, masterwork rapier, excellent clothing, wrist squawker, enough money to buy anything else he wants.

Bitash the Sniper

One of Pandemonium's better assassins, Bitash can use guns or poisons equally well. He was hired by a cloaked woman who gave him 500 firebirds, a photograph of Marchenko, and a schedule of his planned activities. He knows nothing beyond that and has no idea how the woman found out about him. Bitash understands the consequences of his actions and knows that Count Enis Sharn will have him killed if he gets turned over to the authorities. He will do everything he can to keep that from happening, cooperating with anyone who captures him to the best of his abilities. He knows very little about who hired him, and does not even realize she has already left the planet.

Quote: "I don't know anything!"

Age: Early 30s

Male Human Knv5; Medium-sized humanoid; Hit Dice 5d8+5; hp 29; Init +3; Spd 30; AC 16 (touch 14, flat-footed 16); Atk +5 melee (1d4+1/19-20, masterwork vibrating dagger) or +7 ranged (1d10/x3, masterwork hvy crossbow w/10x scope); SA Sneak Attack +3d6; SQ Chemical Use, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge; AL NE; SV Fort +2 Ref +7 Will +2; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +8, Climb +9, Disguise +8, Gather Information +8, Hide +11, Jump +9, Listen +12, Move Silently +11, Search +9, Spot +12, Tumble +11; Alertness, Point Blank Shot, Streetwise.

Special Qualities: Uncanny Dodge: keep Dex bonus to AC when flat-footed.

Possessions: Leather armor, standard shield, MW heavy crossbow w/10x scope, MW vibrating dagger, hvy revolver, hand grenade (x3), speed loader (x2), 10 bolts.

Thugs

A number of rather common street thugs appear in this drama, ranging from Muster bearers to religious fanatics to common ruffians. These are not the bravest of individuals, and will usually try to break off a fight if they take four or more points of damage. The following traits can work for all of them.

Race: Human

Quote: "Get 'em"

Description: Local toughs. Poorly dressed and educated.

Male or Female Human Yeo3; Medium-sized humanoid; Hit Dice 3d6+3; hp 15; Init +0, Spd 30; AC 13 (touch 11, flat-footed 13); Atk +2 melee (1d6/x2, clubs); AL N; SV Fort +1 Ref +1 Will +4; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Listen +6, Spot +6; Toughness.

Possessions: Leather armor, club.

Experience

This mission can be broken into the following stages.

Stage	CR	Encounter or Task
1	1	Avoid the riot (Dexterity checks or combat).
2	3	Stop Muster thugs from assaulting Marchenko.
3	1	Find out why the Muster thugs attacked (Diplomacy of Intimidation checks).
4	3	Disperse mob of anti-tech fanatics (Diplomacy or Intimidation checks, or combat).
5	2	Prevent poisoned horse from trampling Marchenko and calm it or drive it off (Handle Animal check or combat). Bonus CR +1 to notice the poison dart and realize a sniper is at work — Spot DC 30.
6	2	Keep Marchenko from dying of poison (Heal checks). Bonus CR +1 if false physick is revealed.
7	5	Foil Bitash's assassination attempt.
8	1	Discover Turakina's role as sponsor of the assassination attempts (Diplomacy, Gather Information and Intimidation checks).
9	3	Earn Marchenko's thanks: mission goal.

Notes:

Credits

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