

SERENITY ROLE PLAYING GAME

TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

A TALE
OF ORDINARY HEROES
IN THREE ACTS



TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

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HERE'S HOW IT IS

Opportunities to carry a legal cargo to those that live outside of the pampered Core Worlds are few and far between, so the crew all but jumps at the chance to do something legit for a change, but the old adage of be careful what you wish for never seems more appropriate when the deal goes south and the crew also finds that the times they live in are more interesting than even they thought.

GAME MASTER NOTES

This adventure is meant for beginning and experienced crews alike and can be completed in an average of two gaming sessions. *Truth and Consequences* is a three act adventure for a ship and crew to engage in a simple business transaction and the repercussions that can occur while performing even legitimate trade. Act One is in three parts consisting of *Horse Tradin'*, *The Cargo's got the Ruttin' Colic*, and *Alliance Interference*. Act Two is in two parts that leads the characters to *Slappin' Leather* and the *Hangin' Judge*. The finale is also in two parts giving the crew the options of *Bustin' Loose* and *Bound by Law*.

LET'S MAKE A DEAL

Despite all of the amazing progress in technology that graces the `Verse, good old fashioned horses are still a mainstay of transportation on the Rim and Border planets, while still more of an entertainment on the Core Worlds, regardless of where they happen to be, horses are still highly sought commodities. Most horses stay on the planet they were born on, but the need to increase the number of or to balance a herd, or to improve breeding, results in a widespread

requirement for horses to be moved between worlds. Appaloosa stock is still one of the most preferred breeds on the Rim due to their ability to endure the rougher living conditions found on most Rim planets and the transport of these hardy equines is a common sight throughout the `Verse. Another common feature of the `Verse is a business transaction known as speculative trading. The details can be complex, but the gist of the operation is an investor or ship owner purchases a cargo on one planet and takes it to another with the hopes of selling the cargo for a profit on the second planet. Since all planets have some items in surplus and shortages of others, a shrewd businessman can make enormous profits while engaging in these types of transactions. However, since the ability to make a profit is driven by knowing which planet needs what, out of date information can result in arriving after another ship has already flooded the market with the same commodity and that can result in losses as great as the profits that can be made, thus speculative trading is not for the faint hearted. Still, the allure of huge returns on investments keeps the practice alive and thriving.

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Horse Tradin' (Obtaining the Cargo)

"Now ya'll want ta jaw about a right fine animal, that would be th' Appaloosa. Quicksilver fast an' can cut inside anythin' but one of them there Quarter horses. Now the Quarter horse is another fine animal, but the Appaloosa beats 'em six ways to sundown when it comes to bein' more rugged. Thar's a

lot o' horse flesh in the 'Verse, but if you want th' best, a horse ya'll can stake yer life on, ya needs to get yerself an Appaloosa."

– Jefferson Picket, renowned champion horse breeder, Athens

As the adventure begins, the player characters (PCs) are aboard their ship that descends into Persephone's atmosphere. In the ship's cargo bay, five tons of airtights¹ await collection while two passengers, Jacob Hartford and Samuel Carpenter, want to disembark. The 6-day trip from Hera has been an uneventful, not to say boring, one and the PCs can look forward to roaming the Eavesdown docks. After the ship has touched down at the docks, the airlock has been opened and the ramp has come down, the passengers leave. The cargo is collected a short while later.

As the PCs finally pile out too, you, the Game Master (GM), should read the following passage out loud or paraphrase it.

Your boat is dwarfed by the large freighters and container ships that are lined up next to each other, each one advertising passage or selling goods. Since the district known as the Eavesdown docks is clearly poorer than Persephone's gleaming capital that is coldly towering in the distance, all the ships that have docked here look a tad run-down, if not seedy.

In front of you, a hustling and bustling bazaar is filled with people of all races, modes, and languages. Simply put, the place is chaotic; trade, theft, and outright violence all happen amidst the jumble of humanity. You know that you have to be

extremely cautious if don't want to get into trouble or end up dead. In the pandemonium of the Eavesdown docks, only the fittest survive. That's why it was decided that your stay on Persephone shouldn't take long. Your ship has been put down for departure in five hours, so it's time to round up some passengers and load up the cargo hold.

After fuelling up the ship, restocking any supplies that have run low and paying port fees, the Crew still has round about 100 Credits to spend or save for a rainy day.

Episode 1: Transportin' Cargo

The PCs may check the computerized placards in front of the ship's berth to notice that a new request has just popped up: A man by the name of Horace Chan wants to do business with a trustworthy and honest crew. At a good price, an eight-up² is to be transported to Three Hills, a moon on the Rim.

Collecting this information by simply asking around requires an AVERAGE (7) *Willpower* + *Influence* roll. PCs that have FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES may also go and talk to Badger, for example, but contacting persons of the shady, criminal, and underworld variety will claim at least 25% of the Crew's net profits, of course. Hopefully the PCs will contact Chan and arrange a meeting. If not, he turns up at their ship anyway, having heard of their reputation and that they are looking for cargo.

One hour later, an old and rather derelict large hover mule that is towing a large horse trailer is brought to a standstill in front of the PCs'

¹ Canned goods

² A team of eight horses, mules, or oxen

ship. A small man gets out and slowly approaches the PCs. Read:

A weather-beaten man steps up to the ship, he seems to be bowed down with sorrow rather than by age. Apparently he hangs his shaggy head of dark hair, flecked with grey, in shame.

As the man comes to a stop in front of you, you notice the grief-stricken look in his almond eyes.

"Ni hao"¹, he says in a low, sad voice, "My name is Horace Chan. I have been led to believe that you would be willing to assist me in the transport of my team of horses. These fine animals are of pure as well as extremely rare breed and a well-trained team. I can assure you that they will fetch a higher price at your destination than I am asking here. You see, I have already sold the team to a buyer on Three Hills and I have proof of this transaction, but times are such that I do not have the coinage to pay you for the transport in advance. You will be paid upon delivery by Mr. Solomon Buckhalter, my esteemed business associate on Three Hills.

I know this request is *da bian hua*², but I wish to sell the horses to you and in turn, you sell them to the buyer on Three Hills. I looked this sort of thing up on the public access Cortex and the proper name for this sort of transaction is 'speculative trading.'"

Unbeknownst to the PCs, Mr. Chan is a rancher who was run off his land by a gang of

thugs hired by one of Persephone's Tongs. He has to sell what little is left of his property to start a new life on some Rim world. He is, however, an upright and honest man who has met his fate calmly and who would not dream of asking for alms. It is very important to Mr. Chan to maintain face³ because it translates into power as well as influence and affects goodwill. He will confide his troubles to the PCs only as a last resort.

As this deal sounds fishy, the PCs are more than welcome to check the digital contract Mr. Chan has brought along. It is an Average (7) task (*Alertness + Knowledge / Law*) to come to the realization that the contract does indeed specify Solomon Buckhalter as the horses' buyer, that it is legal, valid, and not a forgery. According to the agreement, Buckhalter will pay the sum of 1,000 Credits (125 Credits per horse) after examining them. This is exclusive of shipping costs, of course, which have been estimated at 1,500 Credits, to be paid on delivery.

Mr. Chan's initial offer is that the PCs pay 100 Credits per horse. The PCs can try and beat the old man down by making a HARD (11) *Willpower + Influence* roll. A *Success* means that Chan sadly agrees to 75 Credits per horse. An *Extraordinary Success* beats him down to 50 Credits. Neither a *Failure* nor a *Botch* will raise the price because Mr. Chan is desperate to sell.

³ Face refers to two separate but related concepts in social relations between folks of Asian origins. One is mianzi, and the other is lian. A loss of lian would result in a loss of trust within a social network, while a loss of mianzi would likely result in a loss of authority. To illustrate the difference, gossiping about someone stealing cattle would cause a loss of lian, but not mianzi. Repeatedly interrupting one's superior as he is trying to speak may cause him a loss of mianzi but not lian.

¹ Literally, "hello; how are you?"

² "Big change"

Since it has been agreed that Mr. Buckhalter will send the purchase price directly to Chan's account after having accepted the consignment, Mr. Chan will transfer the PCs' money to them as soon as he has been duly paid. No roll is required to know with dead certainty that Chan does indeed intend to make sure the PCs get their share. If the PCs are completely dead set against the speculative trading plan, Chan will, with extreme sadness, bow to the inevitable and point out again that the PCs will be paid upon delivery on Three Hills. He cannot be argued into raising the PCs' payment because the shipping costs have already been agreed on by contract. Either way, Mr. Chan stands and mournfully watches as the first three horses, heavy sacks of horse fodder, and large bales of straw are loaded onto the ship. A single tear rolls down his face before he returns to the battered hover mule and departs to fetch the remaining five horses. Read:

The eight-up consists of able-bodied, large, and proud horses of an ancient breed from Earth-That-Was that have broad heads, compact bodies with short straight backs, sloping shoulders, strong legs, as well as sparse manes and tails. The fine animals that stand between fourteen and fifteen hands¹ high have colorful spotted coat patterns and striped hooves. Their mottled skin is most visible around their eyes and on their muzzles. The stunningly beautiful animals have

¹ A hand is a unit of length measurement, primarily used to describe the height of horses, ponies, and other equines. It is based on the breadth of a male human hand and thus around four inches long. A horse that is 15 hands high is 60 inches from the ground to the top of the withers.

brown, blue or hazel eyes. Some of them even have eyes of different colors.

Leading the horses into the makeshift stable that has been hastily built in the ship's cargo bay is an EASY (3) task (*Willpower + Animal Handling*). A *Botch* means that one of the horses kicks the PC that leads it, dealing 9 points of Basic damage. Moreover, the PCs may make a AVERAGE (7) *Alertness + Medical Expertise / Veterinary Medicine* or *Animal Handling / Veterinary* roll to notice that the docile horses appear to be in good health. When the last horse has been led into the ship, Mr. Chan informs the PCs how to contact Solomon Buckhalter once they are near Three Hills and bids them farewell and good fortune.

Episode 2: Takin' on Passengers

Taking on passengers is usually a chance to bring in some easy money, but competition at the Eavesdown docks is fierce. Finding non-player characters (NPCs) who want to go to Three Hills and convincing them to chose the PCs' ship is a HARD (11) feat (*Willpower + Influence*). A *Botch* means that the PCs take on only one passenger: Ruben Laski. A *Failure* indicates that Nicky Tanner is willing to travel with them, too. A *Success* means that Hugh Fletcher will also accompany the PCs, while an *Extraordinary Success* indicates that Jason Rushmore will book a passage to Three Hills as well. It is an AVERAGE (7) mental feat (*Intelligence + Pilot / Astrogation*) to estimate that the journey to Three Hills will take round about a month. It is only reasonable as well as an AVERAGE (7) feat (*Willpower + Influence*) to

convince the passenger to pay 550 Credits each. On a *Botch*, the passenger will only pay 350 Credits, while a *Failure* means that the passenger won't pay more than 450 Credits. An *Extraordinary Success* indicates that the passenger is willing to pay as much as 650 Credits. Note that the situation should be roleplayed. Moreover, the non-player characters will agree to the new price, but the PCs have the choice to refuse the deal.

As is customary, the passengers pay half of the agreed sum up front. The remaining half will be paid upon arrival at Three Hills. Ruben Laski, however, pays the PCs 600 Credits in advance, but insists on privacy and that no questions are asked.

Scene 2: The Cargo's got the Ruttin' Colic! (Protecting the Investment)

The care and feeding of equines is, even after seven millennia of domestication, still equal parts art and science. Despite being a powerful animal, horses are fragile creatures and vulnerable to a whole host of illnesses. One deadly disease that can decimate a herd is equine influenza, a common, highly contagious respiratory infection that can be avoided by a simple vaccination, but, if contracted, can only be treated by an aggressive administration of antibiotics. However, the good news is, all reputable breeders vaccinate their animals for equine influenza.

– The Royal Equestrian Magazine, May 2515 Edition

As soon as everyone is aboard, the pilot can request permission to take off, which, after a short while, is granted.

The journey from Persephone to Three Hills takes a ship that has a Speed Class of 1 twenty-three weeks, two days, and fifteen hours (3,927 hours). Divide by the ship's Speed Class to get the actual travel time (for example, a speed class 6 vessel will take approximately 27 days). Plotting a direct course is a HARD (11) task (*Intelligence + Pilot / Astrogation*). A *Botch* means that the ship is off-course, adding d6 days to the trip. A *Failure* adds d12 hours to the travel time. While a *Success* does not modify travel time, an *Extraordinary Success* subtracts d12 hours from it.

Unless the PCs' ship is FUEL EFFICIENT, they will likely have to make a slight detour to fuel her up again, which adds d4 days to the travel time.

Take the opportunity to encourage the players to engage in roleplaying. Their characters may, for example, get to know the passengers who all have interesting stories to tell. Every player should be asked what his character does to kill the seemingly endless hours.

Players who make the long trip enjoyable for everyone should earn Plot Points. When there's nothing left to say, ask the player to make an *Alertness + Perception* roll. It is an AVERAGE (7) task to notice that the horses have developed a cough in the course of the past week and now also seem to be reluctant to eat or drink.

Examining the horses is a HARD (11) task (*Intelligence + Medical Expertise / Veterinary Medicine or Animal Handling / Veterinary*) and reveals that, apart from the aforementioned dry, harsh-sounding cough and the loss of

appetite, the horses have a clear nasal and eye discharge as well as swollen lymph nodes under the jaw. Moreover, they are lethargic. A *Botch* leads to a misdiagnosis and the animals will be mistreated which will worsen their condition. A *Failure* means that the PCs do not know what is wrong with the horses. Although blood tests and nasal swabs are necessary for definitive diagnosis, a *Success* indicates that the PCs find out that the horses have fallen sick with the horse flu, a viral disease that has a very high infection rate in an unvaccinated horse population that has not been previously exposed to the virus. The incubation time is one to five days. An *Extraordinary Success* means that the PCs not only know that there are two main types of the virus called equine-1 which commonly affects horse heart muscle and equine-2 which is usually more severe, but also rightly assume that the horses have caught the latter.

Although treatment of equine flu usually boils down to rest and husbandry, it is a **HARD Complex Action** (55 vs. *Intelligence + Medical Expertise / Veterinary Medicine* or *Animal Handling / Veterinary*) to assure that the most vulnerable horses do not die. Antibiotics have to be administered because the fever has already lasted for more than four days and because purulent nasal discharge is present. Each roll represents half a day's care. A *Botch* rolled on this Complex Action means that the oldest horse dies of pneumonia, an inflammatory illness of the lung. Rolling a second *Botch* indicates that the youngest horse dies, too. Proceed to Scene 3 as soon as the horses are taken care of.

Scene 3: Alliance Interference (Boarded by the Feds)

It is incumbent on upon the commander on the scene to enforce Alliance law when outside of immediate communications with higher headquarters. Due to limitations of the speed of light communications, individual ship commanders have not had so much autonomy since the days of wind powered sailing vessels on Earth-That-Was. Maintaining the rule of law on the outer reaches of known space is even more important than in the well regulated Core. Each commander must use their own judgment, as guided by regulations, on how and when to best ensure the letter and intent of the laws passed by the Parliament are being obeyed.

– Regulation 46.952.4 para D, Handbook for Commanders FR-22.9 dated 2517, previous editions are obsolete

Roughly two weeks or so later, the PCs and the passengers enter the galley to have dinner together. The day has been as uneventful as the ones that preceded it. As the characters gather around the dining table, their ship is flying on autopilot.

Allow the players to engage in roleplaying. They may, for example, chat away cheerfully, crack jokes, or converse with one of the NPCs. Players whose character engages in this kind of interaction should be awarded a Plot Point or two.

The following is a so-called "cut-away," a scene that the GM describes to the players even though there is no way that their characters would know what is going on. Cut-

always are meant to whet the players' appetites and to entice them. They tell the players just enough to get them interested – and leave them hanging. Read:

In the pitch-black and freezing vastness of space, a freighter was dwarfed by a looming spaceship that was everything the boat was not: enormous, sleek, impressive, awe-inspiring, and almost antiseptically clean.

The Anglo-Sino flag was painted above the gigantic cruiser's name, I.A.V. Magellan.

Standing before the aftward-facing viewport of the cruiser's bridge, a rigid and formal Alliance officer looked out upon the tiny vessel that was slowly gaining on his cruiser. The I.A.V. Magellan's commanding officer, Commander Harken, quietly muttered his discontent. The past two months had been the duller of his entire career. The 63-day trip to the godforsaken Rim world he had never even heard of had turned out to be the most boring and tedious mission he had ever been assigned to. This long way from the Core, the 'Verse's bright centre, nothing ever seemed to happen. Harken knew that it was of paramount importance to remove the traitor who had betrayed everything the Alliance stood for from office, so that the betrayer could finally get his just deserts, but he wished another commander had been ordered to do it.

This, he thought to himself, might be a welcome change and a way to break the monotony at least temporarily. Harken smiled sardonically as he regarded the

small boat with curiosity. It was nothing but a tiny speck, an annoying bug he could squash if he wanted to. He cast a glance at the computerized window within which the teeny caricature of a spaceship was magnified, a rotating, three-dimensional image.

The mandatory registration markings on the bow are hardly visible, he thought, I will remind those hicks who is in charge here.

Suddenly, Harken turned away from the window and said, "Ensign, identify that vessel and check whether we have a flag on it. Order them to release control of their helm as well as to prepare to be docked and boarded."

"Yes Sir, Sir!" the young officer affirmed.

The PCs' dinner is interrupted by a high-pitched beeping. If, contrary to expectations, the pilot chooses to eat on the bridge, the audible proximity alarm is not given. If he prefers solitude, the pilot has to be the bearer of the bad news that the ship will imminently be boarded by the Alliance.

You have to pay close attention to how the PCs react to the situation because you will have to know where everyone is real soon now.

As the PCs enter the bridge, read:

Through the cockpit window you see that the familiar void of the Black is now blotted out by the eerie green glow of an enormous vessel that looks more like a floating city than a spaceship. You know that your ship is dwarfed next to this visible symbol of the Alliance's power, the Tohoku-Class cruiser.

"You are ordered to release control of your helm", a faceless, threatening voice suddenly states over the radio, "Prepare to be docked, boarded and inspected. You are required to produce all valid permits so that the inspecting officer can verify the documentation".

Before any of you have time to react, you notice that several smaller gunships break away from the Alliance ship and you know that before long, those ASREVs will swarm around your ship.

As if the situation wasn't already bad enough, you now hear a familiar voice. "Zhou ma¹", Ruben Laski swears, standing in the cockpit doorway." Hold it right there you ruttin' *da sha gua*². I ain't getting' pinched by no Feds, so this is how it's gonna go! Your *xian cai*³ pilot is gonna hard burn us out of here, *shi xia*⁴!"

When the crew informs Laski that the Alliance ship has already taken control of the ship's helm and they couldn't run even if they wanted to, he tries to take a hostage. Preferably, this should be the weakest PC. If there is no chance that Laski could win the opposed rolls or if the PC breaks free later on, he will grab Nicky Tanner. Laski has to get hold of his opponent by making an *Agility + Unarmed Combat / Brawling* roll which may be blocked or dodged. Read:

"You gorram *sha gua*⁵ ain't gonna get me pinched, this is the new plan. Me and this here human body shield are gonna take

us a little walk to your shuttle and take us a little trip, *dong ma*?"

Laski's opponent must succeed at an *Agility + Strength* action against him to break free. As long as Laski has a hold, however, his opponent is an EASY (3) target for all attack actions. Moreover, Laski uses his opponent as a shield which makes him harder to hit. Unless a PC attacks him from behind, the Difficulty to hit Laski is increased by +8. Bear in mind that attacks which miss Laski may hit the hostage instead.

Calming Laski down is an INCREDIBLE Complex Action (115 vs. *Willpower + Influence*) that has to be completed before he reaches his means of escape. Depending on the ship's layout and size, it will take him about 15 turns to reach his goal. You should role-play Laski. The PCs who try to make him see reason should make at least a token effort at roleplaying to use their skills. Each roll represents a time increment of one turn. A *Botch* rolled on this Complex Action increases the Difficulty Threshold to RIDICULOUS (135). A second *Botch* or attacking Laski, however, results in automatic failure.

Attacks made to disarm Laski with a ranged weapon are at -4 Skill steps. It is important to know this because he will shoot if he feels cornered. Remember that his hostage is an EASY (3) target at Point Blank range, that Laski is aiming for the hostage's head, and, if pressed, will make an All-Out Attack. He has nothing to lose, after all. All things considered, he's at +1 Skill step and will deal d12 points of Wound damage. In addition to Basic damage and damage derived from the fact that his attack will likely be extraordinarily successful, that is. To put it bluntly, unless he is taken out

¹ "Damn it!"

² "Silly big melons"

³ "Genius,; talented person"

⁴ "At present, right now"

⁵ "Idiots"

with a well-placed headshot, fighting Laski should be the PCs' last resort.

A shrewd and electronically gifted PC who was not in the cockpit when Laski took a hostage may try to disable the shuttle or the escape pod before the scoundrel reaches it, for instance. Disabling Laski's means of transportation without irreparably damaging it is a HARD Complex Action (55 vs. *Alertness* + *Mechanical Engineering* or *Technical Engineering*) that has to be completed before Laski's arrival. Again, one roll represents one turn's work.

If Laski reaches his destination, he pushes his hostage away. The PCs have one turn to take him down before the airlock closes in front of Laski. If he can, he will take off immediately. Suffice it to say the Alliance cruiser will warn Laski once. Then the ASREVs will open fire on the PCs' shuttle or escape pod which will explode soundlessly and glow to embers. If, however, the PCs make Laski surrender in time, they may decide to either turn him in or to allow Laski to hide away. If he is killed, his body should be presented to the Alliance soldiers, who will confirm that he was a wanted murderer and that they are lucky to be alive.

If this all plays out in truly dramatic fashion, award two or three Plot points to the players. When the matter is settled, the PCs' ship docks with the Alliance cruiser and the PCs gather in the cargo bay to welcome their uninvited guests. Read:

The airlock doors open and a compliment of grey-clad and armed Alliance soldiers streams onto your ship. Their black boots click on the hard cargo bay floor. After they've eyed you suspiciously and

wordlessly signified to you that resistance is not an option, a middle-aged man with dark blond hair enters the cargo bay. Commander Harken gives a signal to his lead man who moves in right away, relieving your captain of the documents he brought along and handing them over to his commanding officer. "Well, well!" says Harken as he studies the documentation, "What do we have here? The way I see it, you are nothing but a bunch of vulgar cattle drovers."

Under no circumstances should the PCs arouse suspicion. Acting the innocent is an AVERAGE (7) feat (*Willpower* + *Discipline* or *Performance*). Provided that the PCs' make the rolls and that their documentation is in order, they will get off lightly. Assuming that no blood was spilled in the cargo bay and that their ship is not BRANDED, that is. If that is the case, however, the PCs might be in for an interesting experience indeed, but that is another story and shall not be told now. Harken will only fine them because the mandatory registration markings on their ship's bow are not visible to the naked eye. The fine amounting to 15 Credits is immediately due and payable. After handing over the receipt, Harken turns around on his heel and leaves the PCs' ship, closely followed by his men.

If they handed over Laski, or his body, he is taken away by the Feds and they are thanked by Harken for doing their duty as citizens, but nothing more, unless you, as a GM, decide that there is a bounty for his capture (this should not apply if he is killed).

Depending on how well they handled the situation, the PCs are now awarded one or two Plot Points.

ACT TWO

Scene 1: Slappin' Leather (The Deal Goes South)

"Iff'n you think you've got the gumption to make a life facin' an armed man, your own life depends on bein' able to read the other feller. How they blink, how they breathe, and a whole passel of other things they do will warn ya if he's plannin' on runnin', fightin', or callin' it quits. You can't master 'the read' then you might as well call yourself a ruttin' corpse now."

– Jo-Jo Taylor, Bonded Bounty Hunter, Paquin

After contacting Solomon Buckhalter who says that he will meet the PCs at Oak Ridge's port in two hours, the PCs' ship finally descends into Three Hills' atmosphere. The horses, however, have not fully recovered from the horse flu. Although the most obvious symptoms have vanished, the horses are still weak and slightly lethargic. The PCs have to decide whether they will tell Solomon Buckhalter the truth and risk not getting full value on the horses or whether they wish to administer stimulants to the animals and hope that the rancher won't notice that the horses are intoxicated.

When the PCs' ship touches down at the local spaceport, read:

Oak Ridge's port is nothing more than a flat space on the ground for ships to land on. There is fuel for sale and a small

control tower to hypothetically prevent collisions between ships in Three Hills' airspace. As far as you can see, there are no other ships, though. There are, however, maintenance sheds for rent.

All remaining passengers pay the remaining half of the agreed-upon price, say their farewells and disembark. Before doing business with Mr. Buckhalter, however, the PCs have to grab any supplies they are low on and pay port fees. These operating costs should amount to 300 Credits, give or take a few bills depending on how long the journey took and how big their ship is. Figuring out how much fuelling the ship up costs, however, is unfortunately a tad more complicated. To do this, divide the ship's Fuel Capacity (in tons) by her Fuel Capacity (in hours). That's how much fuel she burns per hour of flight.

Multiply this dividend by the number of hours it took the Crew to reach Three Hills. That's how many tons of fuel the ship has consumed. On Three Hills, fuel costs almost twice as much as in the Core at 9 Credits per ton. Multiply the tons of fuel that the ship has consumed by 9 to arrive at the sum the PCs have to pay to fuel their ship up.

Example: A Firefly-Class transport's Fuel Capacity is 60 tons (600 hours). She burns 0.1 ton of fuel per hour. Provided that it took the ship a little more than 981 hours to travel from Persephone to Three Hills, she has consumed roughly 98 tons of fuel. At 9 Credits per ton, fuelling the ship up costs 882 Credits. If you don't want to go to all the bother of calculating how much it exactly costs to refuel the PCs' ship, just make them pay 0.9 Credits for each hour the journey has taken. Finally, you can also use the following table which

assumes a travel time of four weeks, four days, and seventeen hours (785 hours).

	400 hours (GAS GUZZLER)	600 hours	800 hours (FUEL EFFICIENT)
Str d4	1,150 Credits	750 Credits	550 Credits
Str d6	2,400 Credits	1,500 Credits	1,200 Credits

Find the ship's Strength in the left-hand column. Then find the number of hours of cruise endurance the ship's fuel yields along the top columns. The result is the number of Credits the PCs have to pay to refuel their ship. Bear in mind that only FUEL EFFICIENT ship could have made the trip without making a detour to be fuelled up again.

Moreover, monthly maintenance is probably due.

Since the PCs have to buy provisions for their return journey in the small town itself, they might just as well have a look around. Read:

Sitting atop a small hill overlooking nothing in particular, the town of Oak Ridge does not seem to be growing fast. The original settlers who were paid to travel rimward from the Core are still more or less among themselves and could not turn Oak Ridge into the boomtown the Parliament had envisioned it to become. Two main streets, *Guo Wang*¹ and *Tou Deng*², run from east to west with small lanes connecting them. There are a few empty lots and buildings within the town boundaries, just waiting for entrepreneurs to step in and utilize them. There is, however, a surprisingly

¹ "King"

² "Main"

well-stocked general store, a modest sized hotel, and a large, two story saloon. The upstairs obviously serve as a brothel, with balconies overlooking the street. Moreover, there is a Christian church and cemetery, a Buddhist temple, as well as a livery and corral. Rim towns like Oak Ridge usually teeter on the brink between lawlessness and civilization. The honest and hardworking settlers who live here, however, seem to have turned the town into a respectable community.

The PCs have at least an hour to kill before Mr. Buckhalter arrives. They may, for example, ramble through the dusty street of Oak Ridge and get a rough feeling for the town. They should not, however, lose track of time because Mr. Buckhalter arrives on schedule. Read:

Three hover mules drive down the main street, towing large horse trailers and blowing up clouds of dust. Finally, the vehicles are brought to a standstill a few yards away from your ship's ramp. A round and bearded faced man gets off the leading mule and comes closer. The slightly overweight man's clothes are clean and well made. Moreover, Mr. Buckhalter's manners are impeccable. "*Guang lin*³", he says benignly, "Welcome Oak Ridge. I sincerely hope you had a pleasant trip."

While Buckhalter seems to be a likeable fellow, you can't help noticing that some of the six men that accompany him look like ruffians. One of them, a bearded man

³ "You honor us with your presence."

with brown-stained teeth and a jowl of chewing tobacco, wears a pair of tied-down double actions¹ and seems more than willing to use them.

The PCs and Buckhalter exchange pleasantries. The rotund man tells them, for example, that he booked rooms in the Oak Ridge Hotel for them. The rooms are already paid for. Moreover, he invites them to his house for dinner.

After a short while, Mr. Buckhalter wants to come down to business, though. He gives a signal to one of his companions, a tall man dressed in fine clothes, who immediately approaches the horses. Buckhalter tells the PCs that the man is called Frederick Holloway and that he is the local veterinarian. Unless the PCs have already told Mr. Buckhalter that the horses are sick, they may do so now. If they choose not to tell him the truth, read:

Frederick Holloway examines the horses very closely. He looks them in the mouths and palpates their bellies as well as their legs for a long time.

A few minutes later, he steps up to Mr. Buckhalter. Holloways now stands right beside the corpulent man and speaks in his ear.

Even if the PCs have already informed Mr. Buckhalter about the horses' sickness, read:

"Ta me de²!", Buckhalter suddenly exclaims angrily, obviously forgetting his manners, "These horses are sick,

¹ A revolver in which the pulling of the trigger automatically cocks the hammer sufficiently to fire.

² "Damn it"

gorramit! What do ya wang ba dan³ take me for? I ain't no ruttin' fool, I tell ya! They ain't worth a thing... I'm not gonna buy 'em and I'm sure as hell not gonna pay ya fer bringin' them plague ridden varmints here to spread whatever go se⁴ they got. Now, get lost, ya bunch o' fan zui zhe⁵"

"Looks like these sha zi⁶ earned themselves some imminent violence," the man who's strapping iron states loudly and slowly reaches for his guns.

Socially apt characters may try to calm Mr. Buckhalter down who will only cover them with more insults. Before long, the situation gets tense. Ask the players whose characters do not participate in the effort to quieten Mr. Buckhalter down to make an *Alertness* + *Perception* / *Empathy* roll. It is a FORMIDABLE (15) feat to come to the conclusion that the hot-blooded, unnamed man is not about to shoot, but trying to frighten the PCs. A *Failure* or, worse still, a *Botch* means that the characters have to act on the mistaken belief that Mr. Buckhalter's henchman is indeed going to open fire on them, though. Ask for an Initiative roll.

To maintain the façade of imminent danger, you may tell any PC who has a TRUSTWORTHY GUT that things seem to go south quickly and then make a skill roll that seems to be an Initiative roll without taking note of the result. Since Mr. Buckhalter's henchman will not shoot, the PCs have just initiated a gunfight and are the only ones who can act during the first turn of combat. PCs who are

³ "Bastards, sons of bitches"

⁴ "Crap"

⁵ "Criminals, perpetrators"

⁶ "Idiots, fools"

OVERCONFIDENT or, worse still, have a CHIP ON THE SHOULDER should not hesitate to draw their guns and open fire. More cautious PCs may decide to hold their actions until later in the turn, though. Since the hired gun did not intend to initiate the ensuing violence, he is taken by surprise and will not dodge. Because he is aware of the PCs, he can make an unskilled *Agility* roll as his defence number, though.

More likely than not, shots are fired and the henchman probably goes down. Bear in mind that any attack roll that exceeds the henchman's defense number by 7 or more is an extraordinarily successful hit and causes a serious injury. He will suffer an additional d2 Wounds every ten minutes and, in all likelihood, bleed to death before long. It has to be noted that charitable and medically versed PCs may patch the NPC up, of course. However, this will not propitiate Magistrate Killburn.

If the PCs were wise enough not to start firing, the henchman will draw his guns the next turn. Make sure that he is not the first one to act, though. It is very important that he is hit before he had the chance to shoot.

The turn after the first shots have been fired, Buckhalter's ruffians draw their guns, too. The PCs should do their best to keep them from shooting by making *Willpower* + *Influence* rolls, for instance. Buckhalter's men, however, only do what their boss says. When tensions hit peak, read:

"Steady, boys", Buckhalter shouts while looking at all the guns that have been drawn and are now facing in different directions, "There's some misunderstanding, I reckon."

After a short pause, his men grudgingly lower their guns and Buckhalter looks at you expectantly.

"Now it's your turn", he says, "I propose bringing this matter up before the court instead of bringing about more violence and bloodshed. What do you say? There is no reason to doubt that Magistrate Killburn can settle this simple trade matter for us."

If the PCs agree to Buckhalter's proposal, proceed to Scene 2 immediately. If they refuse to cooperate, they will be arrested by local policemen.

Scene 2: The Hangin' Judge (Brought before the Magistrate)

There can be no higher calling or solemn a profession than that of law. The very fabric of our great society depends on the carefully interwoven strands of the Alliance Charter. All our rights and freedoms evolve from that one document and up holding those laws is beyond comparison.

Bringing those who would violate those laws to justice and keeping those innocent of wrong doing free from unjust incarceration requires skilled practitioners to ensure that every member of the Alliance has their day in court and is served by due process. By choosing to pursue a degree in jurisprudence you have taken the first step in joining an unbroken chain of legal professionals that guarantees that being a citizen of the Alliance remains an uplifting experience for everyone.

– University of Osiris, School of Law Brochure

As soon as the PCs have holstered their weapons, read:

Mr. Buckhalter produces a small transmitter and, after dialling, holds the receiver to his right ear.

After a few seconds he says, "Harry, is that you? Splendid! It's me, Sol...Listen, I've gotten into quite a mess here and I need you to get me out of it. Can we meet at Hank's in, say, an hour?"

For a short while, Buckhalter listens to what his interlocutor has to say intently. Then he nods and adds, "All right, we'll be there. See you in an hour, then."

He hangs up and tells you, "Magistrate Harrison Killburn who also acts as a Justice of the Peace around these parts is going to attend to this matter personally. He'll arrive at Hank's Saloon in an hour from now. I strongly advise you not to be late."

The corpulent man turns on his heel, gets in his mule, and signals his men to follow suit. Moments later, all three mules drive off.

The PCs should prepare for what, for all they know, will be a trial. Coming up with profound arguments to make out their case is a HARD (11) mental feat (*Intelligence + Knowledge / Law*). Pleading act of God, for instance, seems to be a good idea. Moreover, even if Mr. Buckhalter is not condemned to buy the horses, he has to pay the PCs for bringing the animals to Three Hills. He may claim damages from Mr. Chan, after all.

Moreover, the PCs may try to find information on Harrison Killburn by asking the townspeople of Oak Ridge what kind of man

the Magistrate is. It is an AVERAGE (7) feat (*Willpower + Influence*) to find out that Killburn was born and educated on Londinium, that he turned Hank's Saloon into a part-time courtroom and began calling himself the "The Law Rimward of Hera"¹ about two years ago. Killburn is a strict, yet fair judge who does not allow hung juries or appeals, and jurors, who are chosen from the best bar customers, are expected to buy a drink during every court recess. Rumor has it that the Alliance is about to fall out with the magistrate because he not only tends to be rather adamant, but also fails to keep proper records. The overly bureaucratic ladies and gentlemen in the faraway Core don't take kindly to that. However, despite Killburn's eccentricities, most people on Three Hills are glad that their magistrate became a Justice of the Peace. In their opinion, he frightened all the ruffians away who had preferred Oak Ridge to remain the lawless frontier town it once was. The PCs enter Billy's Saloon at the right time. Read:

Hank's Saloon is the largest and liveliest business in Oak Ridge. This large, two-storied building is open around the clock. The first floor contains a bar, stage, and several backrooms. It does not surprise you that the barroom floor is hardwood and littered with sawdust. The place may seem loud and rowdy, but apparently all the customers came here looking for a good time rather than to

¹ Earth-That-Was: Phantly Roy Bean (c. 1825 – March 16, 1903) was an eccentric U.S. saloon-keeper and Justice of the Peace who called himself "The Law West of the Pecos". Rumor has it that Roy Bean held court in his saloon along the Rio Grande in a desolate stretch of the Chihuahuan Desert of west Texas.

cause trouble. The stage that is probably rented to traveling performers, from time to time, now serves as a dais for the large and exquisite oaken table that rests upon it.

Magistrate Killburn arrives round about half an hour late. Read:

Harrison Killburn is a tall, bald-headed, bearded, and hard-looking man. His clothes are well made and obviously frightfully expensive.

With powerful, bounding strides and flanked by Sheriff Butch Hartman and Deputies Cole and Wong, Magistrate Killburn makes his way through the unwashed masses that have fallen silent in reverential awe. He briskly walks onto the stage and sits down behind the imposing desk.

"Be seated, please!" he finally says in a deep, loud, and awe-inspiring voice.

Both Buckhalter and the PCs describe the deadlock situation and bring their arguments forward. While the PCs want to get paid, Buckhalter is still of the considered opinion that the PCs are not entitled to payment of any kind. You may ask for *Willpower* + *Influence* or *Intelligence* + *Knowledge* / *Law* rolls to spice things up a little, but Killburn has a firm and steady hand on the tiller, really. However, make sure that Buckhalter mentions that one of his men was shot. Moreover, encourage the players to role-play their characters. Award them Plot Points if they make out their case in an exemplary manner. When both sides are heard, Killburn instructs the jury to retire to the jury room to consider

what has been said, appoint a foreperson, and then to return to the court with a verdict. Fifteen minutes later, they return and Killburn asks the spokesman whether the jury has reached a verdict. The man tells the Magistrate that the jury finds that the defendant party is entitled to be paid for the services they provided. They do, however, find that the horses' sickness has reduced their value. Solomon Buckhalter is to pay 1,500 Credits for the services the PCs rendered. Moreover, Killburn rules that each horse is no longer worth 125, but 100 Credits. That, however, does not directly affect the PCs who may now sigh with relief because this is at least a partial victory. Killburn, however, is not finished yet. He says that he is not willing to put up with someone who fires a lethal weapon in his town. He looks at the PC who shot at Buckhalter's man. Read:

"You, sir, are trouble", Killburn says as he looks you straight in the eye, "I will not tolerate trouble on this world, especially not from vagabond spacers. We don't cotton to firing a lethal weapon with intent to kill around these parts; it's a hanging matter. Therefore, you are to be taken immediately into custody of the sheriff."

After a short, theatrical pause, he adds, "I condemn you to be hanged at high noon tomorrow as a lesson to others that are thinking about visiting Three Hills with a bad case of itchy trigger finger. This case is closed."

He strikes his gavel, the small ceremonial mallet, on the sound block as if to punctuate his surprising ruling and stands up to leave.

Although it is an AVERAGE (7) mental feat (*Intelligence + Knowledge / Law*) to know that capital punishment has been abolished by the Alliance, Killburn does not listen to any form of appeal and leaves the saloon right away, while the local lawmen take the condemned PC into custody. Proceed to Scene 3.

ACT THREE

Scene 1: Bustin' Loose!

(Saved from Gallows)

Unless the PCs choose to literally leave their arrested friend hanging, they should come up with a plan to rescue him. There are three ways to do this: The PC can break their friend out of the local prison (see *Jail Break*, below), free him while he is being escorted to the gallows tree (see *Dead Man Walkin'*), or rescue him in the last possible moments when the rope is being tied around his neck (see *Hang 'Em High*). The PCs will find that it is an IMPOSSIBLE (31) feat to get the townspeople to help them (*Willpower + Influence*). After all, Magistrate Killburn, however eccentric he may be, did turn Oak Ridge into a respectable community.

Option 1: Jail Break

Oak Ridge's jail sits not too far from the saloon. Read:

Oak Ridge's jailhouse is right across the street from Hank's Saloon and is a squat, solid building that was built of the local brownstone. The first floor contains holding cells as well as Sheriff Hartman's office. Digital wanted posters are tacked

on the wall behind his desk. The second floor contains sleeping quarters for the lawman on duty. Sheriff Hartman and his five deputies, Cole, Wong, Brantley, Ortega, and Leung, rotate duty shifts. The sheriff and two of his deputies stand duty during the day. At night, however, only two deputies are on duty: one of them acts as a warden as well as a roaming guard while the other rests upstairs.

Preliminarily, it has to be said that if a PC tries to break something with sudden force rather than dealing damage, he must make a Burst of Strength (*Strength + Strength*) roll against the object's Break Difficulty to see whether he succeeds. Prying tools, such as crowbars, grant a +1 step Attribute bonus to *Strength* when used to force open a locked door, for example. Battering rams even grant a +2 step Attribute bonus. If an object's Wounds are equal to or higher than half its Life Points, the Difficulty to break it decreases by one category. Hover mules, shuttles, or spaceships are much more powerful than the PCs, obviously. Vehicles or spacecraft, however, cannot be misused to break the arrested PC out of jail because they are far too conspicuous and noisy. It is IMPOSSIBLE (31) to approach the jailhouse in a vehicle or spacecraft without being noticed (vehicle's *Agility + pilot's Planetary Vehicles* or *Pilot*). If the PC somehow manage to arrive without having been noticed, all Burst of Strength rolls made by the vehicle or spacecraft succeed automatically. The jailhouse's entrance (Armor 4W; Life Points 7; HEROIC (19) Break Difficulty) is rarely locked because the lawmen must be able to respond to trouble quickly. Any windows allowing views to the jail's

interior, however, are blocked by metal bars (Armor 10W; Life Points 21; RIDICULOUS (27) Break Difficulty). Even if the condemned PC, who is being held in the right holding cell, somehow removes the bars as well as the pane, he must make a FORMIDABLE (15) *Agility + Athletics / Contortion* roll to squeeze through the narrow opening. Opening a cell door without the proper key requires a lock-pick set as well as a HARD Complex Action (55 vs. *Alertness + Covert / Open Locks*). Each roll represents one turn's work. Alternatively, the lock can be forced open (Armor 10W; Life Points 9; INCREDIBLE (23) Break Difficulty). It is IMPOSSIBLE (31) to break the jailhouse's walls (Armor 9W; Life Points 42). Any character who tries to use an explosive to blow a hole through the wall must make an *Intelligence + Technical Engineering or Heavy Weapons / Demolitions* roll. A *Botch* means that the explosive goes off prematurely. Using an explosive to damage the wall is an AVERAGE (7) task.

Wiring together several sticks of dynamite or throwing a grenade or two is not a good idea because excess damage will be applied as Wound damage to objects and characters on the other side of the wall which will likely wound or even kill the arrested PC. That's why it is better to evaluate the wall's structural integrity and tamp¹ an explosive like a ChemPlast charge. Evaluating a structure is a HARD (11) task (use *Alertness* instead of *Intelligence*). Depending on the degree of success, the damage done by the charge is modified. On a *Botch*, the charge deals 3d12 / 2 points of Wound damage. A *Failure* means

¹ Some explosives such as ChemPlast charges can be shaped to fit the surface of the target, maximizing the explosive force.

that it deals 3d12 W. A *Success* indicates that it deals 3d12 x 2 W, while an *Extraordinary Success* means that the ChemPlast charge deals 3d12 x 4 points of Wound damage. Moreover, excess damage will be halved (rounded down) and suffered by the arrested PC who may use the cell's cot as Cover (AR 3W) as Basic damage.

Tamping an explosive is an AVERAGE Complex Action (35) with a time increment of 1 minute. If tamped, the explosive has only half its normal distance increment, but does double damage.

Example: A PC successfully evaluates the wall's structural integrity and a ChemPlast charge. This halves the charge's distance increment, but does double damage.

Therefore, damage multiplier is 2 (evaluating the structure) x 2 (tamping the charge), or x4. The charge deals 3d12 x 4 points of damage to the wall. Since the dice yield a result of 20, damage to the wall is 80 points - a clean blow-through. Excess damage is halved and applied as Basic damage to the arrested PC who has taken cover behind the cot. He suffers 7 points of Stun and 4 points of Wound damage. He's injured, but not blown to bits.

If the PCs prefer a more covert approach, they can wait until the deputies who are on night duty have become tired. The PCs can speed up the process by seeing to it that the deputies unknowingly take a soporific. The PCs may, for example, spike the drinks the deputies will down before clocking in or drug the meals they will eat during their shift. Doing this unnoticed is a HARD (11) task (*Agility + Covert / Stealth*). However, even if they are drugged, the zealous deputies will not fall asleep unless it is their turn to do so. Sneaking into the jailhouse requires an

Alertness + Covert / Stealth roll every turn the PCs are moving about inside the building. It is a FORMIDABLE (15) task to sneak about if the deputy on duty is wide-awake. If he is drowsy, however, it is an AVERAGE (7) feat. Bear in mind that picking the cell door's lock is a Complex Action. Removing the key ring from the keyboard behind the sheriff's desk without alerting the sleepy deputy who snoozes behind it is a HARD (11) task. Once the cell door is open, all the Crewmembers who are inside the jailhouse have to sneak out of it.

Option 2: Dead Man Walkin'

The arrested PC will be strung up on the following day at high noon. It is an AVERAGE (7) task (*Willpower + Influence*) to find out that an old oak standing in the gulch that Oak Ridge overlooks will serve as the gallows tree. Moreover, it is a HARD Complex Action (55 vs. *Willpower + Influence*) to find out which route will be taken by Sheriff Hartman, two of his deputies, and the arrested PC. Each roll represents a time increment of half and hour. A *Botch* rolled on this Complex Action indicates that the investigating PC has raised suspicion and must make a HARD (11) *Willpower + Influence* roll to avert it. *Failing* this check or rolling a second *Botch* on the Complex Action means that Sheriff Hartman and the townspeople will be forewarned. The Difficulties of all rolls made to go unnoticed will increase by one category. If they are successful, however, the PCs also find out that a crowd of spectators will likely gather along Tou Deng Street. It is an IMPOSSIBLE (31) feat (*Alertness + Covert / Stealth*) to free the arrested PC without being noticed. The PCs have to lie in ambush outside

of the town and wait for the sheriff, the deputies, and a small crowd of twenty spectators to pass them by. It is an AVERAGE (7) task (*Alertness + Knowledge / Tactics*) find an appropriate hiding-place and a HARD (11) task (*Agility + Covert / Stealth*) to hide away in it. As soon as the arrested PC and his mounted escort party have walked past the hidden PCs, they may jump out of concealment and force Sheriff Hartman to release the arrested PC at gunpoint. The PCs find that it is an AVERAGE (7) feat (*Willpower + Influence* or *Discipline / Intimidation*) to make the lawmen do their bidding. *Failing* to intimidate the lawmen instigates a gunfight. As soon as the arrested PC is released from his handcuffs (Armor 8W; Life Points 5; INCREDIBLE (23) Break Difficulty; EASY (15) to pick), the PCs must make a strategic withdrawal.

Option 3: Hang 'Em High

After having found out where the arrested PC will be strung up (see *Dead Man Walkin'*, above), they can have a close look at the place. Read:

Xuan¹ Valley is a large, box canyon located in the hills that surround Oak Ridge. The canyon's steep sides are bare, while the rest of the valley is thickly wooded, with a few open hills and meadows. Small creeks and streams are scattered throughout the valley, the largest being Eden Creek near Oak Ridge. Inside the canyon and surrounded by erratic boulders as well as scrubs, a dead

¹ "Black; mysterious"

oak, known as *Lao Tou Er*¹, stands alone, but not forgotten. For years, Lao Tou Er has served as the gallows tree for those who have been unfortunate enough to arouse Magistrate Killburn's anger.

It is an AVERAGE (7) task (Agility + Covert / Stealth) to hide near the oak. As soon Sheriff Hartman, his deputies, and a small crowd of ten spectators have arrived without noticing the hidden PCs, they may jump out of concealment and force Sheriff Hartman to release the arrested PC at gunpoint. The PCs find that it is an AVERAGE (7) feat (*Willpower + Influence or Discipline / Intimidation*) to make the mounted lawmen do their bidding. *Failing* to intimidate the lawmen instigates a gunfight.

It is not wise to shoot the rope (AR 0; Life Points 2; FORMIDABLE (15) Break Difficulty) after it has been tied around the condemned PC's neck and shortly before the horse the PC sits on is led away because the attack roll will be at -4 Skill step. If the shot misses, the condemned PC drops down, immediately suffers d12 points of Wound damage, and may die from a broken neck. If left dangling, the PC will slowly strangle, starting to suffocate right away. The Resistance rolls (*Vitality + Vitality*) he has to make every other turn start out EASY (3), but increase by one category with each roll made. Once the PC fails, he suffers d2 points of Stun damage every other turn. When he runs out of Stun, additional damage is taken as both Shock Points and Wounds.

As soon as the arrested PC is released from his handcuffs (Armor 8W; Life Points 5; INCREDIBLE (23) Break Difficulty; EASY (15)

to pick), the PCs must make a strategic withdrawal.

Depending on how well the PCs handled the situation, they should be awarded two to four Plot Points. Proceed to Scene 2.

Scene 2: Bound by Law (Landlocked and Stranded)

"The Feds don't take lightly to escapees, even if you ain't done what they had you in lock up for. So, iff'n you're thinkin' about makin' a run for it, you make damn sure that's really what you want, 'cause you bust outta the tank, they'll tag you as a fuegie double quick and you best be good at disappearin' as they'll never stop lookin' fer ya. And the Feds ain't even the worst part of bein' on the lam, you get tagged a' runner and you is open season to every two-bit bounty hunter in the 'Verse. Thing about the Feds is, you can usually figure out how they think and how to avoid 'em, but most of them hunters don't follow no code but their own an' that can get ya killed while ya'lls still sussin' that there code out."

– Frankie 'Twice Pipe' Whitaker, information broker, Persephone

The PCs reach Oak Ridge's port unscathed. They board their ship and prepare for take-off. When the pilot enters the cockpit and sits down in his chair, read:

All of a sudden, ear-piercing warning signals shrill and all your screens flash: LAND-LOCK. You hit switches all over, hoping that this is some mistake, but it is not. Apparently, a signal that disabled your ship's engines and keeps her docked or on the ground has been sent.

¹ "Old man" (often impolite)

Overriding a land-lock ain't child's play, you can't help thinking, we're humped, gorramit!

Overriding a land-lock is not only highly illegal, but also a FORMIDABLE (75) Complex Action. Technically gifted PCs may try to override the signal manually, making *Intelligence + Technical Engineering* rolls. Each check represents one minute's work. Mechanically versed PCs, on the other hand, may try to remove the circuitry that is responsible for this unfortunate incident. These PCs must make *Alertness + Mechanical Engineering* rolls with a time increment of five minutes.

While the PCs are just doing their best to take off, they hear a distant sound. Read:

A menacing, distant growl is constantly growing louder and louder. Suddenly, you realize that it's the sound of nearing reaction thrusters. Apparently, a considerable number of ships are approaching Oak Ridge's port at high speed. A tantalizing sense of foreboding rises in your stomachs. Before long, your suspicions are validated as a more than unwelcome sight, which makes your blood run cold, meets your eyes: Two flights of four Alliance gunship roar past overhead. The ASREVs decelerate and enter a standard holding pattern as if to monitor Oak Ridge's port. Mere seconds later, further ships appear on the horizon. Numerous Alliance shuttles and dropships quickly come closer to finally touch down on the bare landing field. Ramps open and personnel, as well as armoured skiffs, disembark.

While most of the vehicles set out for Oak Ridge, the Alliance soldiers and Federal Marshals stay behind as if to create a secure perimeter. You are rather taken back when you finally realize that, after assuring that she is unarmed and therefore not a threat, no one deigns to look at your ship.

Despite the obvious, PCs who have a TRUSTWORTHY GUT might get the feeling that things may not be as bad as they seem. All PCs should reflect about the situation before storming out of their ship, guns blazing, though. Unless their players remember what has been said about Magistrate Killburn before, the PCs find it is an AVERAGE (7) mental feat (*Intelligence + Willpower*) to recall that Killburn has fallen out with the Alliance because he fails to keep proper records. Since the death penalty has been abolished for a long time, abuse of office or, worse still, murder are likely to be a much more serious charges he will obviously face before long. To put it briefly, the Alliance has evidently not sent these ships to arrest the PCs, but to depose Killburn which affords the PCs a unique opportunity: If the Alliance hasn't ordered the land-lock, Killburn has. Since Killburn does not keep records, the Alliance probably does not know why the PCs' ship's engines have been disabled. Because Killburn is in the Alliance's bad book, it is safe to assume that the Alliance soldiers will raise the land-lock Killburn ordered if the PCs ask politely and can come up with a believable explanation why their ship has been land-locked and why they pose no threat whatsoever. At least, it is worth a shot. The PCs have nothing to lose, after all.

It is a HARD (11) task (*Willpower + Influence*) to convince one of the high-ranking Alliance officers that there's been some misunderstanding and that there is no need to keep the PCs' ship from lifting off. The players should make at least a token effort at roleplaying to use their skills. If the PCs successfully fool an officer into believing that they are just an innocent victim of Killburn's megalomania, the land-lock will be disabled within minutes and they are commanded to leave right away.

If, however, the PCs fail to draw this conclusion, three armed and armoured Federal Marshals will approach their ship and demand to be let in and talk to the captain. The Feds order the PCs to lift off immediately. If they are told that the ship has been land-locked, the Feds demand a further explanation. Unless the captain is a STRAIGHT SHOOTER, he should be able to piece everything together now.

If the players don't even take the broadest hint, they may have to fight their way out. Contrary to expectations, the Alliance is not their enemy, though.

Magistrate Killburn does not intend to resign without putting up a fight. He has rallied a posse of unhesitant supporters around himself and has barricaded himself inside his estate near Oak Ridge. The Federal Marshals have to storm Killburn's stronghold. Since Sheriff Hartman and his deputies are among Killburn's followers, the PCs may take the opportunity to sneak in the jailhouse, break into the sheriff's Cortex terminal, and release the land-lock. They find that it is an AVERAGE (7) feat (*Alertness + Covert / Stealth*) to steal into the sheriff's office and a FORMIDABLE (15) task (*Intelligence + Technical Engineering /*

Hacking) to break the security system and to remove the land-lock.

Finally, the PCs' ship lifts off and heads off to the black.

Before telling the players that Horace Chan will indeed repay his debt in full and awarding five to six Advancement Points to each player for a job well done, read:

EPILOGUE

In the pitch-black and freezing vastness of space, an enormous, awe-inspiring, and almost antiseptically clean spaceship was dwarfed by the moon it weightlessly levitated over. The Anglo-Sino flag was painted above the gigantic cruiser's name, I.A.V. Magellan. Standing before the huge viewport of the cruiser's bridge, a rigid and formal Alliance officer looked out upon Three Hills and quietly muttered his contempt. The traitor who had betrayed everything the Alliance stood for had been successfully deposed and would stand trial for high treason soon, as would those who stood with him. Commander Harken smiled sardonically as he took a peek at a small boat that was flying past. It was nothing but a tiny speck, an annoying bug he could squash if he wanted to.

THE END

Folks and Rascals

Ruben Laski

Agi d8, Str d8, Vit d10, Ale d8, Int d6, Wil d8;

Life Points 18; Initiative d8 + d8

Traits: Fightin' Type (Major Asset), Sharp Sense: Hearing (Minor Asset), Branded (Major Complication), Chip on the Shoulder (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6, Covert d6 / Disable Devices d8 / Streetwise d8, Discipline d6 / Intimidation d8, Guns d6 / Pistols d10 / Shotguns d8, Melee Weapon Combat d6 / Knives d10, Perception d6, Perform d4, Pilot d4, Unarmed Combat d6 / Brawling d8.

Description: Ruben is a muscular, broad shouldered man in his late twenties, standing a little less than six feet tall, with dark hair and brown eyes. No matter when you see him, he always appears to have a few days worth of stubble. Ruben is a wanted man, for many crimes across a number of worlds. He mostly started out with breaking and entering and armed robbery, but this eventually progressed to murder. Since then he has killed a dozen or so folks, including three bounty hunters and two lawmen. Due to nature of his crimes and the high bounty on his head, Ruben has finally decided it'd be best to lay low for a while on some out-of-the-way moon, so when he heard of a ship heading out to Three Hills, it was just what he needed. In general, Ruben will keep to himself and try not to spend too much time in the company of the crew or the other passengers, just in case they happen to recognise him or start asking too many questions. No matter how friendly the crew or passengers, he'll always have a cold edge and never leaves his room without a knife and derringer hidden upon his person.

Weapons: Derringer (DMG d4W, RNG 30, ROF 1, MAG 2), Combat Knife (DMG d4W).

Nicky Tanner

Agi d8, Str d4, Vit d6, Ale d8, Int d6, Wil d10;

Life Points 16; Initiative d8 + d8

Traits: Allure (Minor Asset), Healthy as a Horse (Minor Asset), Sweet and Cheerful (Minor Asset), Amorous (Minor Complication), Comfort Object (Minor Complication), Memorable (Minor Complication).

Skills: Artistry d4, Athletics d6 / Gymnastics d8, Covert d4, Discipline d4, Guns d4, Influence d6 / Persuasion d8/ Seduction d10, Knowledge d4, Perception d6 / Empathy d8, Performance d6 / Dance d8, Unarmed Combat d6.

Description: Nicky, or Nix as she likes to be called, is an attractive young woman in her early twenties, with long blond hair, bright blue eyes, a sensual smile and curves in all the right places. She is sweet, cheerful, fun, sexy, easy to talk to and very likeable. All these qualities are very useful in her chosen profession, as Nicky is a call girl, or as many Rim folk might say, a five credit whore, but it is important to note that she is a whore, not a companion. It's not that Nicky would not have made a good companion; it's just that she didn't come from a moneyed family or even meet a companion until quite recently. Nicky grew up on Santo and even worked for one of the better brothels there for a number of years, before saving enough money to live her dream of travelling the 'Verse, like she'd heard tell that companions often did and ever since she has used her charms to pay her way, one way or another. Wherever she goes, she takes her rather battered teddy bear 'Freddie' with her, to remind her of home, her family and her first love, who gave her the bear. She is not ashamed of what she does and is open and honest about her profession and quite happy to talk about it, though never mentioning any clients by name. It is obvious that she enjoys her job and Nicky will happily ply her trade with any passengers and crew who seem interested in her services; it should also be noted she is happy to service either sex. She is even willing to pay the balance of her fare in services rendered, something she has done more than once in her travels. Nicky is travelling to Three Hills as she has heard that there could be some good opportunities out there and it is a place she hasn't been, so she is looking forward to the trip.

Notes: Nicky should be easily likeable and though she is a sexual creature, she is naturally charming and fun even without any professional services. She makes for the ideal hostage, as in the role play time during the trip; it shouldn't be hard for most of the crew to come to enjoy her company, one way or another. That way, they feel more compelled to save her when Ruben holds a knife to her throat and threatens to kill her.

Hugh Fletcher

Agi d8, Str d6, Vit d8, Ale d8, Int d6, Wil d6;

Life Points 14; Initiative d8 + d8

Traits: Farm Hand (Minor Asset), Talented: Animal Handling (Minor Asset), Loyal (Minor Complication), Smells Like a Farm (Minor Complication).

Skills: Animal Handling d6 / Riding d10, Athletics d6, Craft d4, Discipline d4, Guns d6 / Pistols d8, Knowledge d4, Melee Weapons d4, Perception d6 / Sight d8, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6 / Brawling d8.

Description: Hugh is an experienced ranch hand who travels from place to place, as work demands, usually working for a season or two before moving on. He is physically fit from all his outdoor work, looks to be in his thirties, but is so weatherworn it'd be hard to say for sure. Hugh dresses like a typical rancher, complete with hat and side iron and is very much a good old country boy. His reasons for travelling to Three Hills are fairly simple, to get work on one of the ranches for a season or two before moving on.

Having Hugh on board could be quite helpful to the crew, as he knows a thing or two about horses and should they fail to spot that they are getting sick, he'll let them know and even suggest some possible causes, which may or may not turn out to be correct.

For a reduction in his fare, he'll even offer to look after the horses and treat them right until they reach their destination, making sure that none of them die.

Jason Rushmore

Agi d6, Str d6, Vit d6, Ale d8, Int d6, Wil d10;

Life Points 16; Initiative d6 + d8

Traits: Math Whiz (Minor Asset), Talented: Gambling (Minor Asset), Deadly Enemy (Minor Complication), Hooked: Tobacco (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6, Covert d4, Discipline d6 / Concentration d8, Guns d6, Influence d6 / Persuasion d8, Knowledge d6, Perception d6 / Gambling d10, Performance d6, Planetary Vehicles d4, Unarmed Combat d4.

Description: Jason is in his early thirties, handsome and charming, with dark hair and captivating green eyes. He is well mannered, well spoken and always smartly dressed, with a shiny pearl handled shooting iron at his side. From an early age, Jason was good with figures and calculating the odds, which in turn developed into a particular talent for gambling and he is doing fairly well for himself, so much so that high stakes gambling has become his profession. Not everything has gone smooth though and a rival gambler has taken a distinct dislike to Jason after being beaten by him when a lot of credits were at stake. Since then, Jason's rival has been tracking him down for a chance of revenge.

Jason is travelling to Three Hills for a poker game being hosted by one of the wealthier ranch owners, but will happily play a few 'friendly' games with the crew to pass the time.

Solomon Buckhalter

Agi d6, Str d6, Vit d8, Ale d8, Int d10, Wil d10;

Life Points 18; Initiative d6 + d8

Traits: Friends in High Places (Minor Asset), Steady Calm (Minor Asset), Non-Fightin' Type (Minor Complication), Portly (Minor Complication).

Skills: Animal Handling d6, Artistry d6, Covert d6, Guns d4, Influence d6 / Barter d8 / Bureaucracy d8 / Intimidation d8, Knowledge d6 / Law d8, Perception d6 / Empathy d8 / Intuition d8, Performance d4, Planetary Vehicles d6, Unarmed Combat d6.

Description: Solomon is one of Three Hill's top ranchers, with a lot of land, a lot of animals and a fair amount of wealth. He is one of the top dogs in these parts and it sure does help being good friends with the local magistrate.

He is a slightly overweight man in his forties with a round, bearded face with big brown eyes.

He is always impeccably dressed and mannered, a testament to good schooling and an upstanding mother. Despite being a shrewd businessman, Solomon is mostly fair in his dealings, but really hates being lied to or receiving cargo that isn't up to scratch, yet all the same, he mostly keeps a level head during a deal and it takes a lot to shake him up.

Given that Solomon is not much a man of violence, he hires other people to do the intimidating and muscling for him and will nearly always have a few hired guns travelling with him.

Hired Guns

Agi d8, Str d8, Vit d6, Ale d8, Int d6, Wil d6;

Life Points 12; Initiative d8 + d8

Traits: Intimidatin' Manner (Minor Asset), Overconfident (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6, Discipline d6 (Intimidation d10), Guns d6 (Pistols d8/ Rifles d8/ Shotguns d8), Melee Weapon Combat d6, Perception d6, Unarmed Combat d6 (Brawling d8).

Description: Your fairly basic hired gun, the kinda guy who'll do most anything for money. These guys have a few good skills to carry out their job and they can be all manner of intimidating to regular folk, but not all that tough if it comes to a shootout with anyone who truly knows how to handle a gun.

Weapons: Pistol (DMG d6W, RNG 100, ROF 3, MAG 8).

Harrison Killburn

Agi d6, Str d4, Vit d8, Ale d6, Int d8, Wil d10;

Life Points 18; Initiative d6 + d6

Traits: Friends in High Places (Minor Asset), Wears a Badge (Minor Asset), Overconfident (Minor Complication), Loyal: Alliance (Minor Complication).

Skills: Artistry d4, Athletics d6, Discipline d6, Guns d4, Influence d6 / Bureaucracy d8 / Leadership d8 / Persuasion d8 / Politics d10, Knowledge d6 / Law d8, Perception d6 / Intuition d8, Performance d6, Unarmed Combat d4.

Description: Like any other Magistrate, Harrison Killburn was appointed by the Alliance to govern an entire moon. In almost every aspect, the Magistrate's word is law and they are responsible for the appointment of local sheriffs, as well as often taking the role of judge in the local courthouse, should there be one. Despite all the power and free reign to govern their district or world, a Magistrate is ultimately governed and audited by the Alliance, so they are expected to be loyal, honest and only enforce official laws. This is not always the case though, as some Magistrates like Harrison Killburn become more than just governors and more akin to local dictators. Killburn greedily amassed wealth and land and enforces his own form of justice on the local population. He rules over Three Hills with an iron fist. He takes the carrot-and-stick approach. If those who are under his control do his bidding, he is known to be generous.

Sheriff William Hartman

Agi d8, Str d8, Vit d10, Ale d8, Int d6, Wil d8;

Life Points 18; Initiative d8 + d8

Traits: Wears a Badge (Minor Asset), Loyal (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6 / Dodge d8 / Riding d10, Discipline d6, Guns d6 / Pistol d10 / Rifle d8, Influence d6, Knowledge d4, Melee Weapon Combat d6, Perception d6 / Tracking d10, Survival d4, Unarmed Combat d6 / Brawling d8.

Description: Sheriff William Hartman is a well built man in his early forties, with salt and pepper hair and beard. He has spent all his life in Three Hills and was glad of Magistrate Killburn's arrival and his desire to make it a law abiding and orderly place to live. He is proud of what has been achieved and is a loyal supporter of the magistrate, ready to carry out any sentence passed down; always happy they are just and right.

Sheriff Hartman is an experienced man, an able horseman and capable tracker, not to mention a fine shot with his trusty sidearm. He is popular with the townsfolk and has survived a few gun fights with the occasional criminal that has tried to escape justice, mostly due to his hulking frame and great constitution.

A man not to be messed with, but one who could be convinced to hold off if the lives of innocent folk or his men were at risk...just make sure you leave town real quick afterwards.

Weapons: Pistol (DMG d6W, RNG 100, ROF 3, MAG 8), Rifle (DMG d8W, RNG 225, ROF 3, MAG 30).

Deputies Cole, Wong, Brantley, Ortega, and Leung

Agi d8, Str d6, Vit d8, Ale d8, Int d6, Wil d6;

Life Points 14; Initiative d8 + d8

Traits: Wears a Badge (Minor Asset), Loyal (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6 / Riding d8, Discipline d6, Guns d6 / Pistol d8/ Rifle 8, Knowledge d4, Melee Weapon Combat d6 / Clubs d8, Perception d6, Unarmed Combat d6.

Description: These guys are the folk that have shown an interest in keeping the peace, demonstrated an ability to carry out the task and have been deputised by the local sheriff or magistrate. In some cases these guys end up being little more than thugs with a badge, in other cases they truly believe in their work and upholding the law.

Most deputies own and carry a sidearm and normally have access to rifles from the sheriff's office or jail house, which is often the same building.

Weapons: Pistol (DMG d6W, RNG 100, ROF 3, MAG 8).

Federal Marshals

Agi d8, Str d8, Vit d8, Ale d6, Int d6, Wil d6;

Life Points 14; Initiative d8+d6.

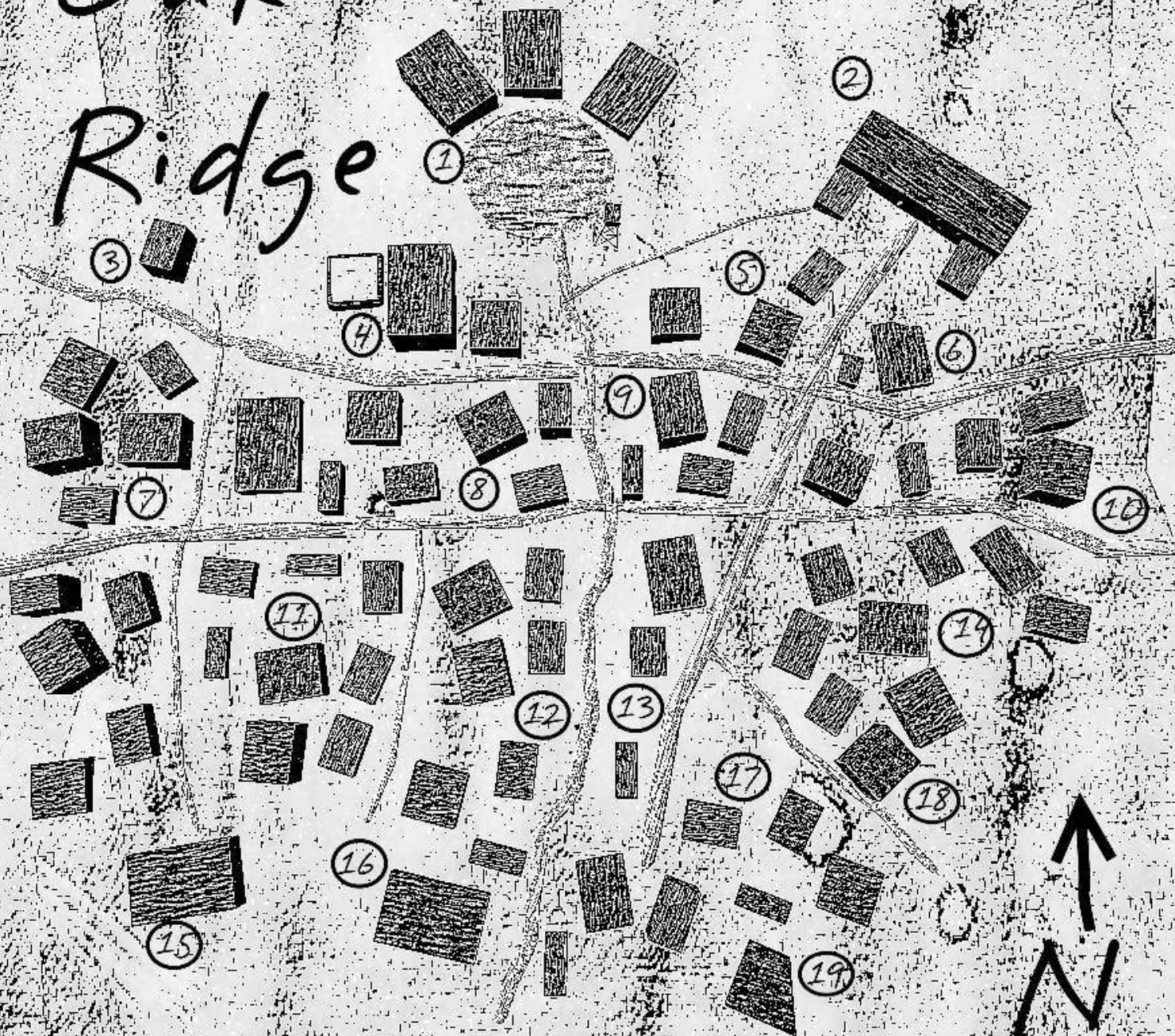
Traits: Wears a Badge (Major Asset), Loyal (Minor Complication), Overconfident (Minor Complication).

Skills: Athletics d6 / Dodge d8, Covert d6 / Stealth d8 / Surveillance d8, Discipline d6 / Interrogation d8, Guns d6 / Pistol d10 / Rifle d8, Influence d4, Knowledge d4, Medical Expertise d2, Melee Weapon Combat d6, Perception d6, Technical Engineering d2, Unarmed Combat d6.

Description: Federal Marshals are law enforcement officers whose bearings are *very* military. They live in a totally disciplined world where obedience is paramount and the will of the Parliament is mainly unquestioned. They deal with crimes that are outside the jurisdiction of local law enforcement. The primary mission of the Federal Marshals Service, however, is to protect and defend the 'Verse against terrorist threats, to uphold and enforce the criminal laws, and to provide leadership and criminal justice services to local law enforcement agencies.

Gear: Sonic Rifle (DMG d8S, RNG 15, ROF 2, MAG 50); Pistol (DMG d6W, RNG 100, ROF 3, MAG 08); 2 Grenades, Flashbang (DMG 2d6B); Plate Vest (AR 4W, -1 Agi); Squad Helmet (AR 4W, -2 Ale).

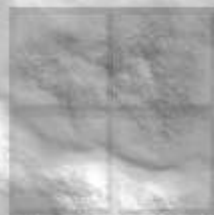
Oak Ridge



Oak Ridge Key

- 1: Landing Field
- 2: Hank's Saloon
- 3: St. James Hotel
- 4: Sterling Livery and Corral
- 5: General Store
- 6: Sheriff's Office and Jail
- 7: Oak Ridge Herald
- 8: Tucker's Blacksmithing
- 9: Mrs. Chen's Tea House and Restaurant
- 10: Buddhist Temple
- 11: Oak Ridge Church
- 12: Hanson's Laundry
- 13: Doc McGregor's
- 14: Lotus Bloom Restaurant
- 15: Bramble's Slaughterhouse
- 16: Jackson's Hall and Bank
- 17: Howlin' Hole Saloon
- 18: Oak Ridge Schoolhouse
- 19: Tanning's Barn

Bustin' Loose: Sheriff's Office and Jail



10 ft

1. Main Entrance
2. Reception/Booking
3. Sheriff's Office
4. Deputies' Office
5. Gun Cabinet
6. Kitchen
7. Drunk Tank
8. Holding Cells
9. Resident Cells
10. Solitary Confinement
11. Showers
12. Equipment Room
13. Storage
14. Restroom
15. Staircase up

