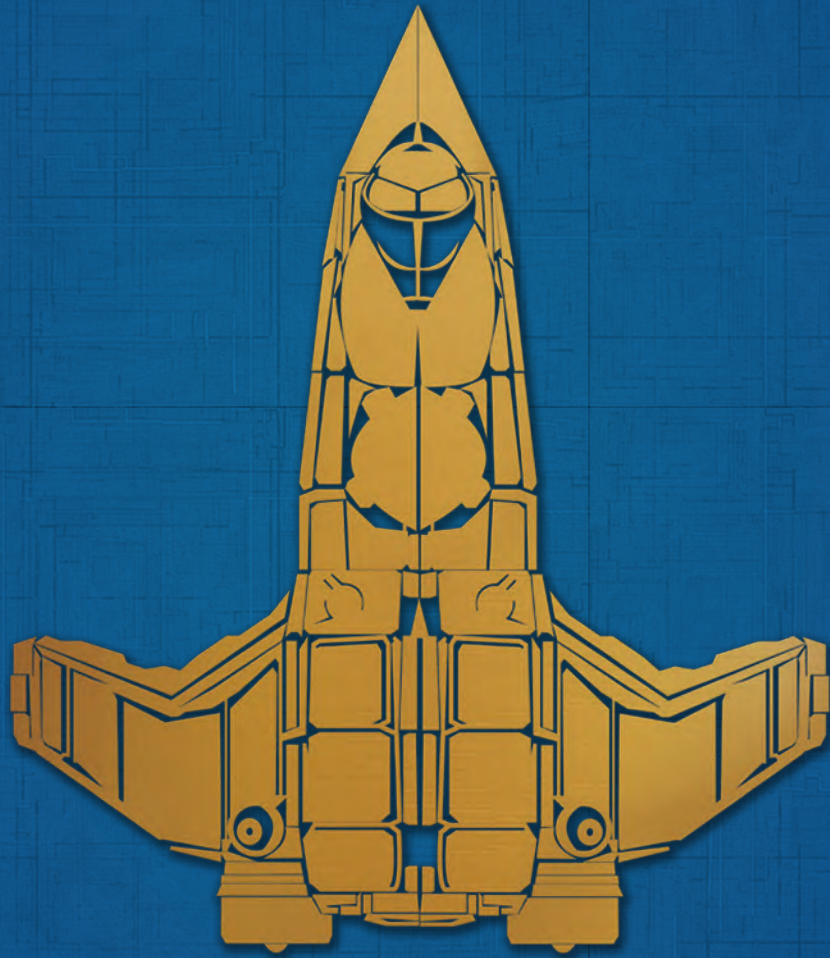

DRINAXIAN

COMPANION



TRAVELLER

TRAVELLER

D R I N A X I A N C O M P A N I O N

CREDITS

CLASSIC TRAVELLER

Marc Miller

Loren Wiseman, John Harshman, Frank Chadwick, Darryl Hany, Winston Hamilton, Tony Svajlenka, Scott Renner, Doug Poe, David MacDonald, Wayne Roth, Paul R. Banner.

MONGOOSE TRAVELLER

Author

Martin J. Dougherty

Editor

Matthew Sprange

Layout and Graphic Design

Amy Perrett, Cassie Gregory

Interior Illustrations

Anderson Maia, Angel Muro, Michael Leonard, Vytautas Bieliauskas, Sandrine Thirache, Cassie Gregory

TRAVELLER INNER CIRCLE

Andrew James Alan Welty, Colin Dunn, M. J. Dougherty, Rob Eaglestone, Sam Wissa, Joshua Bell, Maksim Smelchak

Special Thanks

Marc Miller, Lorèn Wiseman

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW	4
RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN	8
HOW TO BUILD AN EMPIRE	9
TORPOL CLUSTER	19
TORPOL	21
CLARKE	26
BLUE	30
THEEV CLUSTER	34
VUME	37
THEEV	40
PALINDROME	46
THE HARRIER-CLASS	49
DAMAGE & DEFECTS OF THE HARRIER	59
CREW REQUIREMENTS & SHIPBOARD OPERATIONS	63
COMMERCE RAIDING OPERATIONS	65
THE REALITIES OF PIRACY	68
OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS	75
FIRST PRIZE	90
STORIES FROM SINDAL	95
GODS OF MARDUK	100
REVOLUTION ON ACRID	110
FRIENDS IN DRY PLACES	117
THE CORDAN CONFLICT	124
LIONS OF THEBUS	133
LIBERTY PORT	141
SHIP ENCOUNTERS	148
EQUIPMENT	177
BASE COMPONENTS	184
STARSHIPS OF THE REACH	187
PERSONALITIES AND FACTIONS	214

Traveller ©2020 Mongoose Publishing. All rights reserved. Reproduction of this work by any means without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden. All significant characters, names, places, items, art and text herein are copyrighted by Mongoose Publishing.

This game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Game License, please go to www.mongoosepublishing.com.

This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United Kingdom and of the United States. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organisations, places or events is purely coincidental.

Traveller is a trademark of Far Future Enterprises and is used under licence.

Printed in China



T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Drinaxian Companion! This volume is an expansion to the Pirates of Drinax campaign, presenting additional rules and adventure possibilities along with a useful summary of the campaign and locations featured within it.

Pirates of Drinax is intended to be a 'sandbox' campaign which permits the Travellers enormous freedom of action. One consequence of this is that no two campaigns are ever likely to go the same way. Indeed, one band of Travellers might take an entirely different approach or play in a totally different style to another. It is quite possible play a Drinax campaign without ever leaving the Floating Palace, focussing on the political intrigues of King Oleb's Court and sending others to do the actual pirating. Another group might decide to ditch Drinax entirely and build their own empire, or set of across Charted Space in their 'borrowed' ship and never look back. There is no right or wrong way to play Pirates of Drinax, though there are ways the campaign might never come to its intended conclusion.

This book presents a wealth of material that can be used to flesh out a Drinax campaign, wherever it might go. Whether the Travellers are political movers and shakers, empire-builders, merchants, gangsters or actual no-kidding pirates, there is something in here for everyone.

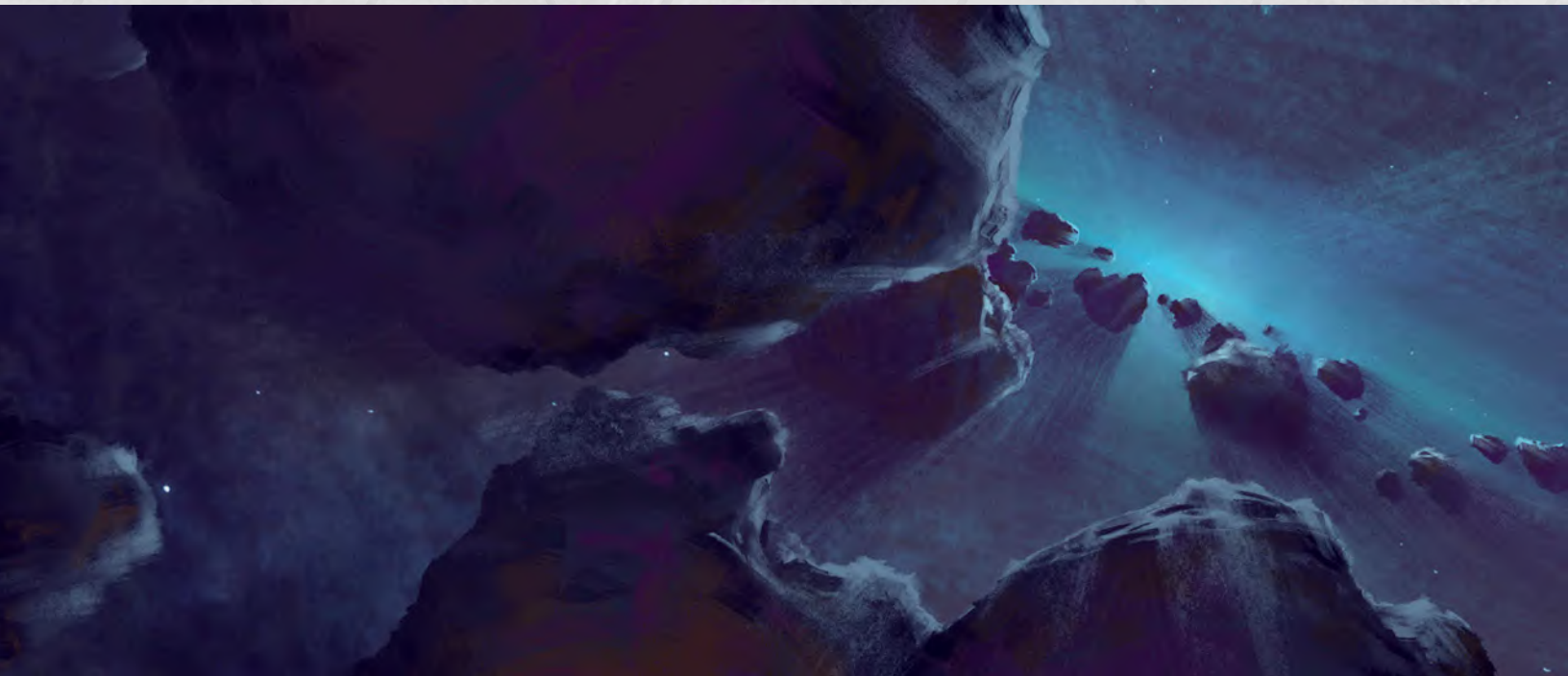
KEY CONCEPTS

The rules presented in this volume make use of a number of key concepts, which are presented here then used throughout the text.

Person-Work-Hours (PWH)

A PWH represents the amount of work an able individual can do in an hour, assuming they have a suitable set of tools and machinery. Some tasks require only physical or mental labour, while others will take extra time or cannot be attempted at all without the right skills or equipment. An individual with a skill level of 0 (or anyone if the task does not require specific skills) produces 1 PWH per hour. Higher skill levels produce 25% more PWH per skill level. Thus someone with a skill level of 2 produces 1.5 PWH and a true expert with a skill level of 4 works twice as fast as a person with basic familiarisation.

Labour costs vary considerably, especially if highly skilled people or unusual equipment are required. A basic cost of Cr10 per PWH can be assumed for most jobs, representing payment to workers, use of minor materials and tools, and other small incidental costs, but does not include the price of large or expensive components.



Required Skill Level (RSL)

Some tasks have a minimum skill level associated with them, the level of skill required to be able to attempt the task at all. Anyone who can attempt the task produces the normal amount of PWH for their skill level. Those who lack the relevant skill do nothing more useful than get in the way unless a skilled leader builds a team.

Skilled Team Tasks

A skilled person can lead others in a task, providing guidance on what to do that allows even an unskilled team to get the job done. A skilled person leading a team treats everyone on the team as having a skill level 2 below their own. Thus someone with Mechanic 2 can lead a bunch of unskilled labourers through a task requiring skill level 0, and a highly talented engineer with a skill level of 4 can guide a team to carry out a complex task normally requiring everyone to have skill level 2.

Leading a team in this manner requires the Leadership skill at a minimum of level 0. The number of people who can be led in this manner is two, plus two more for every level of Leadership the Traveller has.

Allegiance Code (AC)

The Contacts, Allies and associates of the Travellers can be assigned an Allegiance Code, which indicates how willing and likely they are to help the Travellers.

Allegiance Code starts at 0 for casual contacts and can be increased by various methods up to a maximum of 15. AC is treated as a characteristic that provides a DM on checks to see whether the contact chooses to assist the Travellers, and can be reduced if they are not treated well. A contact with AC 15 will do more or less whatever the Travellers ask of them, including openly allying with them or fighting at their side against bad odds.

Asset Value (AV)

An Asset is someone the Travellers can go to for information or assistance, often placed in a starport or within an organisation. The AV of an Asset is equal to their SOC cubed (multiplied by itself, and then by itself again), multiplied by their Allegiance Code. Thus a low-status dockworker (SOC 4) who has AC 3 and is thus willing to undertake only fairly basic, safe tasks has AV 64 ($4 \times 4 \times 4$), multiplied by 3 for a final AV 192. A minor noble (SOC 10) at the Duke of Tobia's court who is willing to do almost anything for the Travellers (AC 12) has an AV 1000 ($10 \times 10 \times 10$) multiplied by 12, for a final AV 12000. AV determines costs associated with the Asset.

Piracy Response Indicator (PRI)

PRI is an indicator of how concerned a world government is about piracy, and the level of response it is likely to make. The starting level of PRI is based upon the world's Starport type, which also indicates the region of space the world is concerned with.



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Pirates of Drinax was published in episodic form, with information presented in chunks throughout the episodes. This was expanded with additional publications, perhaps making it difficult to locate information or keep the timeline straight. The latter might not be too much of a problem; much depends on the actions of the Travellers, and they are notorious for doing violence to a referee's carefully planned storyline. Perhaps the most important underlying concept is that events happen when it makes sense for them to happen – the sandbox concept works both ways, and your campaign plays out the way you play it out.

That said, what follows is an overview of the episodes in the main campaign along with a guide to available expansion materials beyond this book. Additional considerations are explored as they become relevant.

LOCATION

Pirates of Drinax is set within the Trojan Reach, in the region of neutral space between the Aslan Hierate and Third Imperium. The Travellers' likely area of operations is far from the heartland of either, but both empires keep a watch on their borders and are entirely willing to intervene if their interests are threatened. This threat casts a shadow over everything the Travellers do, and even the most reckless of local leaders will be aware that antagonising either great power means being squished like the proverbial bug.

This factor has many effects on the campaign. It can act to the Travellers' advantage, preventing an enemy of theirs from taking decisive action at a time when they are vulnerable. It can also derail their plans or send the campaign in a totally unexpected direction. For example, what if the Travellers annoy an Aslan clan so much they destroy the Floating Palace and eliminate the Travellers' patron? Is the campaign over? Not if the Travellers want to continue! They might decide to take their resources and strike out on their own seeking vengeance or building their own pocket empire. Or they might quietly move into the wreckage of Drinax and begin rebuilding using whatever they can salvage. The possibilities are endless...

ASTROGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Effective piracy requires a reasonable volume of vulnerable shipping. Shipping moves along mains and within clusters, between places where there is a profit to be made or a need to go. A quiet backwater system is a perfect place to avoid naval patrols, but it is a poor prospect for successful attacks for pretty much the same reasons. If King Oleb's plan to rebuild the power of Drinax through plunder and extortion is to work, his pirates will have to work the main shipping lanes.

Drinax lies on a main of eleven star systems, which gives access by way of a jump-2 transit to several other mains and clusters. The Dustbelt, running through the Dpres and Sindal subsectors, is a good prospect for piracy, as are the Borderland and Wildeman clusters and the small groups of worlds around Clarke and Marduk. Operating much beyond these worlds requires long transits during which the pirates are not making money or furthering the aims of Drinax.

Conversely, if the Travellers make a lot of attacks close to Drinax, it will become apparent that there is a piracy hotspot or base in the area, and the major powers will focus their attention on that region. The convenience of operating close to home must be balanced against the probability of bringing retribution down on the fledgeling pirate kingdom.

It is not possible for the referee to predict exactly what the Travellers will do, especially in a sandbox environment, but it is a reasonable certainty that they will carry out most of their operations in these regions. The referee can make use of this prediction in a variety of ways. The most obvious is to place scripted adventures in systems the Travellers are likely to visit, or obtain some of the supporting products that detail these areas.

A pre-prepared list of ships operating in a cluster or along a main is a useful play aid. Jump-1 ships are confined to a local area unless they make a difficult deep-space transit using additional fuel. This is not commercially

viable on a frequent basis, so if a jump-1 ship is encountered in a different main or cluster to its original location there has to be a good reason for the relocation. Maintaining consistency in this manner is important to a plausible campaign, and once the Travellers realise the game universe is indeed consistent they can start pondering why a ship has moved to a new area of operations instead of just assuming referee whimsy.

TIMING

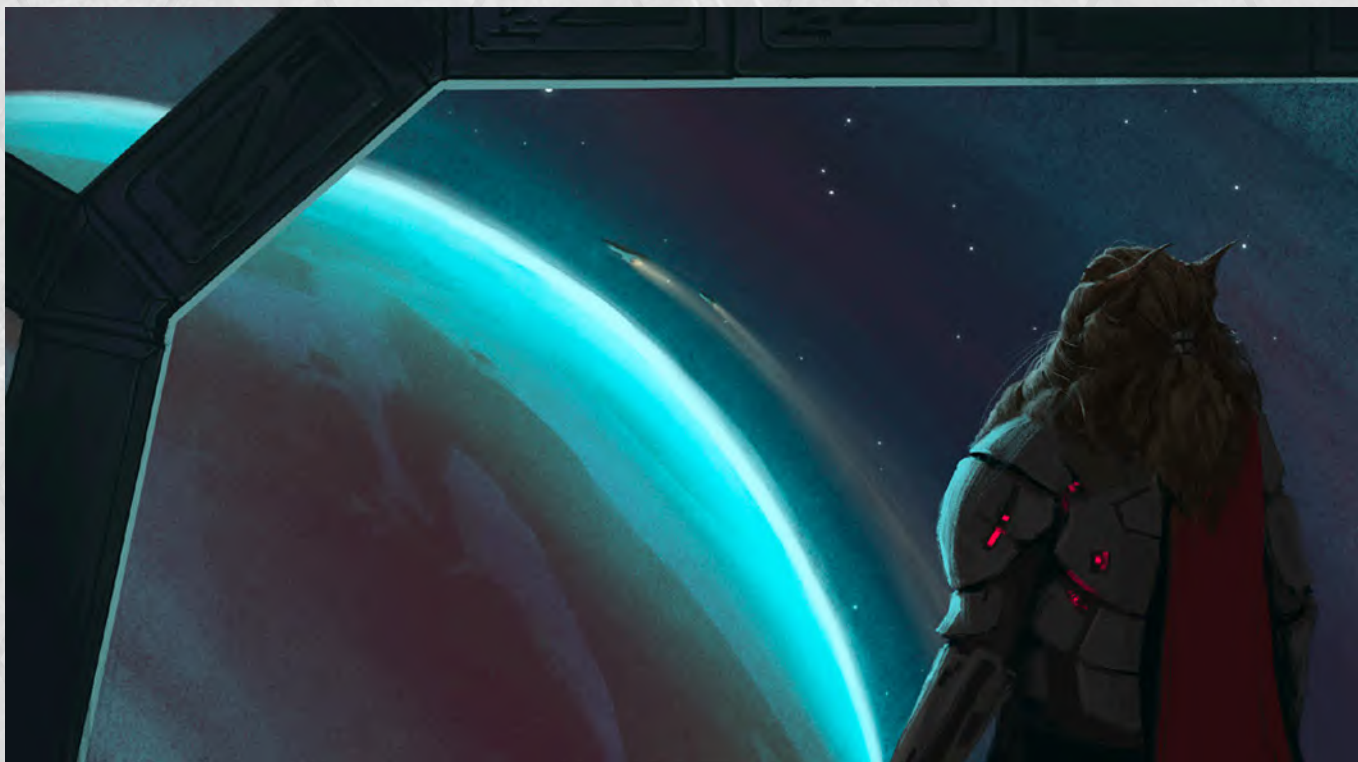
The default start date for the *Pirates of Drinax* campaign is 1105. Referees aware of the timeline will know major events are about to unfold in the Spinward Marches over the next decade or so, and that these will impact the local region to a greater or lesser extent. The outbreak of war will draw off some Imperial Navy assets, but the immediate effects of this absence may not be felt in the Drinax region.

Wars are fought, for the most part, by cruisers and battleships, and the movement of these heavy assets from the Imperial enclave around Tobia to the Spinward Marches will have little effect on Imperial Navy patrols through the local region; these are already few and far between. What will diminish is the perceived threat from the Imperium. Pirates and those with political ambitions may choose to take advantage of the situation. However, whilst the Imperium will be reluctant to pull major warships away from the primary theatre of war, a cruiser squadron or single old battleship could flatten any of the minor powers in the Reach.

The Imperial fleet at Tobia will not be entirely denuded of such ships, so the outbreak of war a sector away will not allow Drinax or any other power to run wild. Smart Travellers can take advantage of the situation by pushing the envelope of what they can get away with, stopping short of causing an Imperial intervention, but too many blatant acts against Imperial interests will trigger a response.

Similarly, local Aslan clans might be encouraged to be a little bolder – which given Aslan *ihatei* culture, could mean outright reckless – but clan leaders will never discount the possibility of an Imperial backlash. The war years will more than likely see increased *ihatei* activity, but not to an enormous degree. Afterward, the Imperium may transfer additional resources to the Trojan Reach in an effort to reassert its influence along the borders. Much depends on how well the war goes for the Imperials; serious losses in the Spinward Marches may have to be made good from elsewhere, leaving the frontiers even more exposed.

A *Pirates of Drinax* campaign could run for a few years. Certainly, it will take many months before the effects of the Travellers' activities begin to be felt, and even longer before Drinax emerges as any sort of power in the region. Good time management can reduce this period by creating efficient operations paired with diplomatic initiatives, but rebuilding Drinax into a major force is going to be a long haul.



EPISODES AND INFORMATION

The plot of the *Pirates of Drinax* campaign, along with the necessary information to run it, is dispersed through its episodes. The following outline will help the referee locate necessary data and foreshadow events in the coming episodes.

Introduction presents the Travellers with their mission and an overview of how to go about it, including rules for finding suitable targets in surrounding systems. The major personalities of the Floating Palace on Drinax are also covered.

The Harrier, the ship loaned to the Travellers by King Oleb of Drinax, is presented in the **Introduction** and further expanded on page 48. Additional ship encounters and complications that might arise can be found on page 140.

Episode 1: Honour Among Thieves takes place in the small cluster of worlds immediately to coreward of Drinax. The Travellers are tasked with tracking down raiders who attacked Clarke and Torpol. Their search involves an encounter with a single Chamax – a deadly species capable of devastating whole ecosystems if allowed to run wild – and leads eventually to the pirate world of Theev. This cluster of three worlds is further detailed on page 34.

Episode 2: Treasure Ship takes the Travellers into the Borderland subsector, with the aim of intercepting a treasure ship filled with valuables. The ship travels through the Borderland and Wildeman clusters towards the world of Byrni, and could be attacked at any point on its journey. The Borderland and Wildeman clusters are further detailed in the *Borderland Profile* series of ebooks.

Episode 3: I hate! has a time limit of 25 weeks. It begins on Drinax, at the Floating Palace, and requires the Travellers to cross into Aslan space. This is one occasion where planning ahead and/or focusing on the mission at hand is extremely important; if the Travellers take it into their heads to make a bunch of side trips they can run out of time. Their mission is to prevent a surge of land-seeking Aslan *ihatei* from pouring across the border and scooping up territory Drinax wants. This will require a degree of subtlety and politicking rather than straightforward violence.

Episode 4: The Demon's Eye takes the Travellers back to the Borderland subsector. It assumes they have gone to Tech-World or are somewhere they can be contacted

by its emissaries. The Travellers are required to pursue a fugitive to Mirage, in the Gazulin subsector. This is a significant undertaking, requiring several weeks of travel, much of it within the borders of the Third Imperium. The Travellers will find more patrols there, and more efficient movement of information which will make any incidental piracy they engage in a lot more hazardous than usual.

Episode 5: The Treasure of Sindal begins when the Travellers become aware of a possible big score – in this case a vast treasure hidden away during the fall of the Sindalian Empire. The Travellers need to search the area around the old Sindalian capital at Noricum, and are racing against other treasure-hunters. The ‘treasure’ turns out to be a stockpile of weapons of mass destruction, which could alter the balance of power or landscape of nearby worlds. Deciding what to do with these weapons is a pivotal moment in the campaign, though this may not be immediately apparent to the Travellers.

Episode 6: The Game of Sun and Shadow is played out with two sets of characters. The first is the Travellers, who have to deal with the arrival of a powerful Imperial pirate-hunting force. The second group is made up of personnel within that force, giving a different perspective on the local situation. This episode takes place over several months, during which the Travellers might well continue with their empire-building project but will have to tread carefully.

Episode 7: The Vorito Gambit involves the Travellers in the long-term schemes of the General Development Corporation (GeDeCo). The Travellers become aware of a GeDeCo treasure vault on Vorito, which ultimately leads to an offer from the corporation. They can receive assistance from GeDeCo in return for ensuring that Drinax falls to an Aslan attack at some point in the future, or go their own way and most likely be destroyed by the attack – which GeDeCo believes is inevitable.

Episode 8: The Prodigal Outcast revolves around the efforts of Kasiyl, an exiled Aslan prince living at the court of King Oleb on Drinax, to reclaim his honour and return to his high station in his clan. The adventure works best if the Travellers know Kasiyl well before the story begins to unfold, so he should be introduced during interactions at the court of King Oleb. The adventure finale requires a journey to the world of Tlaiowaha, requiring a lengthy series of jump-2 transits. Much of this journey is within Aslan space, where attitudes to piracy and law enforcement are different to the largely ungoverned space beyond Hierate borders.

Episode 9: Blood of the Star Dragon begins with a coup attempt in the Floating Palace. King Oleb is missing and seriously wounded, but may survive depending on the Travellers' actions. Likewise, which faction wins the coup may hinge on choices made by the Travellers. The outcome of this episode will determine the nature of the Drinaxian empire as the campaign moves towards its finale.

Episode 10: Finale deals with the endgame in Drinax' bid to become a power in the region. The Travellers attempt to make deals with local worlds and corporations, and with the great powers. Diplomacy and coercion are both possibilities, but ultimately Drinax and its allies must withstand a powerful assault intended to eliminate the upstart kingdom. Assuming the Travellers and Drinax itself survive, a new interstellar polity will emerge. Its government and values will be influenced by the Travellers' choices during this adventure.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Additional standalone adventures in the Trojan Reach include *Marooned on Marduk*, *The Calixcuel Incident*, *Theories of Everything* and *The Borderland Run*. These full-length adventures can be incorporated into a Drinax campaign whenever the referee desires. There are many small 'adventure seeds' in the original campaign books, some of which are expanded into full adventures within this book. The three-part *Shadows of Sindal* mini-campaign introduces a rival for the position of heir to the Sindalian Empire, with similar plans to King Oleb but even more sinister methods.

The Travellers will more than likely generate their own adventures as well. If the referee dangles the odd rumour or lets the Travellers overhear a passing comment, they may decide they are on to something and dream up a convoluted scheme to go after a goal of their own devising. It is quite possible that the original pirate campaign could fade into the background as the Travellers spin their own adventures.



RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN

With the exception of the start and end points, it is not absolutely necessary to run any of the episodes of the *Pirates of Drinax* campaign, nor do they have to be presented in order. The campaign is a sandbox for the referee as well as the Travellers; additional adventures can be inserted, others left out, and the timing of any adventure is up to the referee. Some of the episodes, as noted above, have a limited duration so the referee should consider carefully before triggering one of these.

In short, *Pirates of Drinax* has a start and an ending, but how the Travellers get from one end to the other depends very much upon their own choices. The scripted episodes are all stories in their own right, but only part of the journey. Much of the time the Travellers will be working at their plan to create an empire – or some equivalent interstellar state – for Drinax. See *How to Build an Empire* for ideas on how they might go about that.

At the beginning of the campaign the Travellers may well be at a loss for how to proceed, and might make mistakes that derail the storyline. For example, if they interpret piracy as meaning they should leave no witnesses or start attacking ships belonging to powerful and influential factions they will quickly end up facing overwhelming forces dedicated to hunting them down and killing them.

The referee should consider providing some guidance on how the Travellers' actions will affect the wider universe and what the results might be – not all Travellers will immediately grasp that their actions could bring down inevitable doom, whilst others might be too worried about consequences to act at all. The short adventure *First Prize*, presented in this book, can be used as a tutorial for Travellers at the beginning of the campaign.

As the campaign unfolds, the Travellers are most likely to be successful – and to stay alive – if they observe the following rules:

- Observe the Code of the Stars. Robbers will be pursued according to how much of a nuisance they

become; wanton murderers will attract attention far more quickly, and it will be persistent.

- Do not constantly raid close to Drinax. This will make the Travellers' base obvious to anyone who can put dots on a map.
- Do not constantly attack in the same places. This will make an intercept very easy to set up.
- Vary your targets. Installations and starports can be raided as well as ships.
- Vary tempo and timings of attacks. A group of raids then a period of silence might cause pirate hunters to assume the corsairs have moved on or retired.
- Create ambiguity. Ideally, use different ships to make the attacks, or create confusion about the identity of vessels. Plant false rumours about bases, ship numbers and allegiances.
- Cultivate contacts and friends, and build an intelligence network.
- Be willing to pass up targets. Having a shipload of witnesses from a juicy vulnerable merchant testify how you flew right past with a cheery greeting and *did not attack them even though you could have got away with it* might be sufficient to sway a trial or allay suspicions.
- Always have an eye on the long-term goal and another on the opportunities in front of you. If escort duty, mercenary work or trading offers a viable and safer alternative, be willing to do it. Again, occasions where you were seen engaging in legitimate trade or other lawful activities can throw pursuers off the scent or be used as evidence that you are not the pirate band currently pillaging the Dustbelt.
- Be creative. Repetition leads to predictability, and predictability leads to a short walk out the airlock.

The referee should give the Travellers the chance to learn these rules, perhaps from a grizzled old ex-pirate who is willing to trade them advice and the odd piece of useful information for a favour or two. The adventure *First Prize* contains just such an opportunity to learn from someone who lived the pirate life... and got away with it.

HOW TO BUILD AN EMPIRE

King Oleb does not give the Travellers much guidance about how he expects them to proceed. This is largely because he wants them to use their initiative and seize opportunities, but there are some factors that will be the same no matter how the Travellers start.

Oleb's plan, in very general terms, is to engineer a situation where the cheapest and easiest option for the Imperium (and probably the Aslan Hierate too) is to recognise a resurgent Kingdom of Drinax as the protector of its trade through the region. That means creating sufficient threat to trade that protection is necessary and at the same time increasing the power of Drinax to the point that it is more useful to co-opt and recognise it than to swat the upstarts and return to the previous status quo.

It must be recognised that the Imperium and/or Hierate will, sooner or later, find out that Drinax is behind the upsurge in piracy and raiding. By the time that happens the kingdom needs to have sufficient protection – which can take many forms – that recognition is the most cost-effective solution. Similarly, the fledging kingdom needs to be a hard target for Aslan clans that might decide to conquer or just obliterate it.

This is no simple task. Drinax needs ships and allies, and both of those require money to acquire and maintain them. Oleb's plan to use piracy to get what he needs is workable but risky. Given the present circumstances of his kingdom, Oleb really has no better options. Piracy can also be used to manipulate the political situation, but this is even more delicate than making money without getting caught or killed.

If the Travellers decide to be blatant about their attacks, their best political choice is intimidation. They can offer a straight deal; join us and stay loyal or we cut off your trade and shoot up your cities. This approach was used, with success for *most* of its history, by the old Sindalian Empire. However, loyalty is not born of fear. Oleb and his successors will face rebellion at the slightest sign of weakness, and will forever be considered a pale and petty shadow of the old and brutal empire. Negotiations with outsiders will be affected by this consideration.

A more subtle approach has long-term benefits, but is tricky and requires greater attention to detail. If the local worlds and shipping operators do not know who is behind the pirate attacks, Drinax can present itself as a saviour and win the admiration of those it seeks to rule. However, word gets around. If the distinctive ship that has been reported attacking local traffic keeps being spotted in port at Drinax, and the crew are carousing merrily at the court of King Oleb when seen by a merchant captain they robbed, their allegiance is soon going to be known.

One way to avoid this is to obtain a less distinctive ship as soon as possible and use that for raiding, and to only raid with the Harrier in distant systems. It might be possible to create a pretext for overt raids, such as 'dealing with suspected pirates' or 'extracting the due tribute to King Oleb from recalcitrant and ungrateful shipping operators'. The latter works better once Drinax has established at least a small powerbase and can pretend to be a legitimate interstellar state. Of course, the Travellers might decide to leave no witnesses or evidence, but this is a very hard-nosed approach which will alienate most potential allies if discovered.

The Travellers will need to gain support in the starports of the region so they have safe havens to rest, make repairs, and sell cargoes. However, this is only a small part of the overall plan. They need ships, political allies or supporters, information and, above all else, money.

GETTING MONEY

The most direct method of getting money quickly is piracy. However, there are many options beyond simply raiding ships for their cargo. Planetary raiding is an option with similar risks and political considerations to piracy, but often with a different payoff. Attacking a well-defended world in a little gunboat like the Harrier is unlikely to yield more than a conversion into debris, but outposts and small settlements can be attacked by ground troops or held to ransom with a ship's guns. It is unlikely that there will be stacks of money or shipping containers full of saleable items lying around, but a small settlement may have useful machinery, spares, and equipment that can be sold or used.

The converse of raiding is protection. This can take the form of a protection racket, in which the Travellers demand regular payments in return for not trashing the place, but a better long-term option is to establish a deniable threat then offer to protect local ship, settlements and ports from it. This might even be the beginnings of a political alliance, but until the mutual-protection alliance is well established it will need an external threat to keep members interested. This might not be actual attacks of course. Rumours and false datafeed entries can create an atmosphere of fear and paranoia out of all proportion to the real level of attack.

Wealth can be generated in other ways. Industry can be used to support the Travellers' operations with spares and supplies, but it can also be used to produce goods for the Travellers to sell. In the longer term Drinax will need access to a diversified industrial base – though this could be on some other world or worlds, with Drinax acting as paymaster and political controller. In the shorter term the Travellers might commission the construction of goods they know will be necessary.

There are various ways the Travellers might come to know what goods are going to be in demand. One obvious example is to sell guns to factions fighting a civil war the Travellers helped start, or aerospace defence weapons to people they just raided. The Travellers might also find a way to interrupt the flow of particular necessary goods, and then step in as a reliable supplier at a just-slightly-inflated price. Another option appears as the Travellers begin to build a network of Contacts and Allies. They might influence or direct local factions to begin a project then supply the necessary materials and components, which might be stolen or produced in the Travellers' own factories.

Old-fashioned trade and commerce is always an option, and of course the Travellers' ships (or those of their allies) are unlikely to fall victim to piracy. It might be that the Travellers end up building a mercantile empire rather than pirating their way to prosperity, but money can be made off commercial traffic in a variety of ways. Political power will allow the Travellers to implement regulations that funnel cash to them. This might take the form of tariffs or inflated fuel prices, outrageous docking fees or other methods of 'legitimately' milking the passing traffic without shooting it up.

The Travellers have many options to make money beyond simple piracy, and providing their activities remain within tolerable limits the larger powers will accept the situation and pay the fees rather than going to the trouble of dealing with uppity Drinaxians. A useful model for the Travellers is that of the ancient Norsemen – the so-called Vikings – of old Earth. Norsemen were notorious for raiding but they were entrepreneurs, not destroyers. If a trading expedition seemed more likely to produce a good profit-to-risk ratio than a raid, then the same 'Vikings' would trade that year.

At the height of their power the Norsemen ran what amounts to an industrial scale protection racket. They would raid an area until its rulers agreed to pay Danegeld, which was essentially a bribe to halt the raids for a while. Whilst this was in place the ships were free to raid or trade elsewhere. The Danegeld system essentially multiplied the earning power of the Norse fleets – their threat produced money from some areas whilst the reality of raids generated profit elsewhere and persuaded the local rulers they should think about paying the Norsemen to stay away. The Travellers can learn much from this model.



OBTAINING ADDITIONAL SHIPS

The simplest option for increasing the size of the Travellers' fleet is to steal ships. This is not as simple as it sounds however. A ship known to have been pirated is likely to be unwelcome in most ports, so will have to operate out of Drinax itself or a hidden base until the Travellers build up enough support that their pirate fleet can land openly. Stolen ships will typically require a lot of work and components to repair damage, and may have to be overhauled to get rid of pesky electronic and physical security devices.

Ships can be salvaged with varying degrees of legitimacy. Clever Travellers might cripple a vessel in a pirate attack then send an apparently independent salvage tug to claim the wreck. Done with finesse, this approach can avoid suspicion altogether, though it is likely the best a typical band of Travellers can hope for is semi-plausible deniability.

There are other ways to get ships. Alliances with other pirate groups or legitimate shipping operators can add vessels to a raid or project on a short or long-term basis, and even a simple charter arrangement can be useful if the Travellers want to take advantage of local economic conditions or move a lot of materials quickly. The Travellers have been ordered to become pirates, but that does not mean they cannot work both sides of the fence – and in the long term Drinax needs legitimate interstellar trade to prosper.

REMOVING SECURITY DEVICES

Removing security devices from a ship is an expensive and time-consuming business. Most constructors build in a variety of fuel cutoffs, electrical switches and similar devices which will function if the main security system in the ship's computer is deactivated. Some devices will operate immediately; others are timed or will activate at random intervals. It is possible that a missed security device might suddenly halve the fuel flow to the power plant a year after the ship re-enters service.

Security Deactivation

Measure	Time (PWH)	Required Skill and Level
Reprogram the security system	1D per 10 tons of hull	Electronics (computers) 3
Gut the ship of all security devices	2D per 10 tons of hull	Engineer or Mechanic 1
Replace security devices	3D per 10 tons of hull	Engineer or Mechanic 2

Starships are sufficiently large that 1 person can work simultaneously on these tasks per 50 tons of hull.

The simplest way to avoid this is to gut the ship of all such devices. This will take 2D person-work-hours (PWH) per 10 tons of hull and requires a minimum of Engineer (any) 1 or Mechanic 1. A ship that has been gutted in this manner will have no security devices, which will be very obvious on any inspection and may lead to awkward questions. At the end of the job the most skilled member of the team gutting the ship, or a designated inspector, must make a Difficult (10+) Engineer or Mechanic check to ensure all devices have been depowered, jammed, or ripped out. If the check is failed the operators may be in for a nasty surprise at some point.

A more sophisticated reprogramming of the security system or replacement of the devices is possible. The former has a Required Skill Level of 3, the latter RSL 2. Reprogramming takes 1D PWH per 10 tons of hull; replacement takes 3D PWH per 10 tons of hull.

ASSETS AND FACTIONS

Planetside contacts and informants within shipping organisations, pirate bands, or the courts of local rulers can be invaluable. Pirates who hang around the shipping routes waiting for a suitable prize can be successful, but this is a hit-and-miss prospect. Those who know where the prize is going to be ahead of time – or arrange for it to be there – will prosper. Informants can also provide advance warning of anti-pirate measures.

The Travellers will make all manner of casual contacts, but if they are wise they will cultivate the loyalty or friendship of key figures in ports and spacelanes, and perhaps governments and corporations too. Some of these people may wield sufficient power that they are useful allies, but most will only be sources of information or occasional low-level assistance. They are termed Assets in this context. An Asset might have some people or equipment that can be brought to bear on a problem, but their power is local and very limited.

For example, a planetside merchant might have a lot of information and a fair amount of money plus a few guards, and could be willing to place these at the

Travellers' disposal for a while. This makes her an Asset. The crew of a small merchant starship might also be considered an Asset, whereas someone who owns several ships would be considered a Faction because they are capable of influencing wider events. Faction leaders can be courted the same way as Assets, and may eventually become staunch allies of Drinax or even a formal part of its power structure. Until then they are important players in the spacelanes of the Reach, aligned with Drinax but pursuing their own agenda. Individual members of Faction can be made into Assets by the Travellers.

When the Travellers ask something of an Asset, the Asset will decide whether to help or not. This takes the form of an AC check with the difficulty based upon the level of risk inherent in the request. The Travellers may use any appropriate skill to influence the check, normally Diplomat or Persuade, depending on the nature of the Asset, but they might also use Carouse, Deception or Leadership if circumstances allow.

Requests for assistance will always be refused unless the Asset's AC is higher than the Min. AC Value on the Assistance table. For example, passing along a piece of readily available and non-sensitive information is not much to ask, and most Assets would do it as a matter of course. Sheltering the Travellers when they are on the run from pretty much everyone in the Reach is a big risk which will be declined by all but the most loyal of Assets.

The Asset's nature will alter their position on certain undertakings. For example, a criminal Asset might have doubts about trying to obtain Imperial Navy dispositions for the Travellers due to the risk involved but would probably not have moral reservations. A serving Imperial Navy officer might be much more reluctant to perform this task, as it is a betrayal of her position and may place comrades at risk. Such considerations will alter the difficulty of the check at the referee's discretion.

COURTING ASSETS

Courting an Asset or suborning someone to become one is usually a long-term process, though low-level, low-risk cooperation might be obtained fairly quickly. Finding a potential Asset requires a successful Average (8+) Streetwise check. The referee may impose a DM for very low population areas or settlements where the community is very close-knit. DM-2 applies if the Law Level is 4+, increasing to DM-4 if the Law Level is 8+.

A successful check produces an Asset with AC 0. This is essentially someone who is known to the Travellers as a potential source of information and assistance, and not much more. To create an Asset willing to undertake risky or involved missions the Travellers must develop their relationship. This is easy at first but requires considerable work if the Travellers want a totally reliable Asset who will look out for their interests no matter what.

One attempt to increase the AC of an Asset can be made each week, and the Travellers can use the same method more than once unless otherwise noted. Checks to increase the AC of the Asset can be made using Carouse, Deception, Diplomat, Leadership or Persuade. Which skill is used depends on how the Travellers play the encounter out. For example, an Asset might be recruited by convincing him there is a vast conspiracy and the Travellers are seeking to unravel it – this would be Deception. Another Asset might be won over just by paying friendly visits every time the Travellers are in port – this might use Carousing. A case might be made for other skills from time to time. For example, the Travellers might use Medic to help the children of a poor dock labourer, and quietly tell him that he now owes them the occasional favour.

Assistance

Request	Min. AC Value	Difficulty
Routine, non-sensitive information such as names and types of ship passing through a port	0	Simple (2+)
Slightly sensitive information, such as cargoes carried by particular ships passing through a particular port	2	Easy (4+)
Mildly risky undertaking, such as stealing a minor item from a non-secure location	4	Routine (6+)
Sensitive information, such as navy deployments for the next 3 months	6	Average (8+)
Risky undertaking, such as providing a safehouse for a wounded Traveller being sought by his enemies	8	Difficult (10+)
Very risky undertaking, such as smuggling the Travellers offworld during a major manhunt	10	Very Difficult (12+)
Open declaration of allegiance	12	Formidable (14+)

All attempts to increase Asset Value (AV) have a cost associated with them unless otherwise noted. This cost is based on the Asset's AV, which in turn is determined by their current AC multiplied by their SOC.

Establish Relationship: When the Travellers first encounter a potential Asset, they have AC 0, and is as willing to help the Travellers as any other person they meet on the street. To establish an initial relationship, the Travellers must make an Average (8+) Streetwise or SOC check. The Asset's starting AC is equal to the Effect of this check. A relationship can (obviously) only be established once.

Schmooze: Just being friendly can improve the relationship between the Travellers and their Asset. Paying a visit for dinner and drinks, or turning up with unexpected offworld gadgets and toys for the Asset's kids can help build a friendship. Alternatively, the Travellers might simply want to renew the threats and intimidation they had in place. Either way, the cost in Credits is equal to the Asset's AV. A successful Schmooze attempt increases AC by +1.

Bribe: A one-off payment in cash or goods equal to 10 times the Asset's AV allows an attempt to increase the Asset's AC by +1, up to a maximum of 4.

Big Bribe: A one-off payment in cash or goods equal to 100 times the Asset's AV allows an attempt to increase the Asset's AC by +1, up to a maximum of 8.

Very Big Bribe: A one-off payment in cash or goods equal to 1000 times the Asset's AV allows an attempt to increase the Asset's AC by +1, up to a maximum of 12.

Habit of Association: Each time the Travellers ask something of the Asset (subject to the one-increase-per-week limit) and behave honourably – in other words, they do not expect the Asset to take huge risks and then abandon him – the Travellers have a chance to increase AC at no cost.

Make A Deal: Here, the Travellers enter into a deal with the Asset, for example an agreement to help them whenever needed in return for a retainer paid each month. Making a formal arrangement of this sort increases AC by +D3 if successful. The deal will cost the Travellers five times the Asset's AV each month, either in direct payments or services, goods, and needed items.

Other Options: Whenever the Travellers interact with an Asset they have an opportunity to develop the relationship. For example, the Travellers might discover that a family member of the Asset is in need of a particular medication only available offworld, and arrange to bring some next time they visit. They might also undertake a task which could lead to an adventure.

The maximum increase in AC from any one interaction is +D3 points, and more commonly it will be just +1. A party of mercenaries who undertakes a task for fair pay can be considered to have encountered a potential Asset and established a relationship, or can increase AC +1 if they were already familiar with their client. On the other hand, a band of heroes who help people out for a paltry reward or none at all have a chance to add AC +D3. This mechanic can be used by the referee to reward heroic behaviour on the part of the Travellers – those who do good deeds gain support among the people they help.

ONE-OFF INCIDENTS

If the Travellers just need a one-off piece of information or assistance with a mission they might try to find someone on the fly. The process for establishing a relationship is the same as when courting an Asset, but rather than a lengthy development process the Travellers simply need to coerce, persuade or bribe the individual into carrying out the task. As a general rule, the cost of obtaining this help begins at Cr1Dx1000 multiplied by the minimum AC required to get an Asset to carry out the task, and will normally be much higher in the case of dangerous actions. Usually some sort of persuasion or leverage is required as well.

The Travellers may need an Asset to carry out an action above his AC threshold. Again, persuasion or coercion can work, but in most cases the Asset is 'out' afterwards and will not help the Travellers again.

THIRD-PARTY ACTIONS

If the Travellers want to build an intelligence network they can do so through the actions of trusted agents. Any Asset with AC 12+ can establish contact with other potential Assets and develop relations with them. The Travellers might end up with a number of agents moving around the Reach setting up a network of informants, safehouses and potential assistance. The Travellers will need to keep track of their growing intelligence network and the location of the agents who set it up and oversee it. This will, of course, become expensive but the benefits in terms of knowing what is going on and where could make the difference between success and failure in their bid to build a pirate kingdom.

An Asset operating in this manner can make the same once-per-week attempt to increase the AC of other Assets. This could result in quite a lot of bookkeeping, especially if one Asset runs others who are out making yet more contacts. The simplest way to deal with this is to keep an Asset Network table as shown here, nesting the Assets run by the Travellers and showing their attempts to build a network on a monthly basis.

Asset Network

Network	Network Note	Name	Description	Location	AC	SOC	Mission
Drinax	Reports Direct to Travellers	Erech	Portside Technician	Drinax	6	4	Intel Gathering
Pournew	Reports Direct to Travellers	Vrine Karmalli	Merchant Broker	Pourne Highport	12	9	Build Network
Pourne	Reports to Vrine Karmalli	Aix Leto	Citizen	Pourne Planetside	4	6	Intel Gathering
Mobile	Reports Direct to Travellers	Felix Carmichel	Free Trader Crewmember	Free Trader Alledandi	6	6	Intel Gathering
Felix' Contacts	Reports to Felix Carmichel	That guy on Marduk	Citizen	Marduk Downport	2	5	Intel Gathering

FACTIONS AND WORLD GOVERNMENTS

The *Pirates of Drinax* campaign deals with the process of winning over world governments so they might eventually align themselves with Drinax. However, there are many powerful groups which fall somewhere between an Asset and a world government. These are referred to as Factions, though they can vary considerably in terms of size and power.

Winning over a Faction will provide Drinax with powerful allies, but it is not a simple or quick process. Working relationships are built over time, and should not be determined by a simple skill check or task chain. The same applies to world governments. Committing to an alliance or choosing to work with professional robbers and raiders is a big decision which can have consequences for years to come. No government or merchant ship operator rushes into such a thing.

This system represents ongoing political and economic influences and is applicable in a wider context than a pirates campaign. Indeed, if the Travellers have come up with a better way of building an empire in the Reach than Oleb's rather hazardous 'pirate our way to respectability' plan then courting Factions and governments may be the best way forward.

The referee can develop as many Factions as seems appropriate, which can appear in the game as rivals or enemies as well as potential friends. Engineering a policy shift from opposition to support will take some doing but clever Travellers will be able to pull it off if they are persistent and determined.

Factions of interest to the Travellers might include:

- A world government or outpost administration where the Population code is 4 (thousands) or less
- A group within a larger world government which does not have complete control over the administrative process
- A shipping line or major mercantile organisation
- A company or corporation
- A mercenary force
- A rebel group
- A crime syndicate
- A religious organisation
- A pirate band
- A more unusual interest group, such as a psionics institute

Factions may also 'create themselves' during play, as the Travellers decide to explore their relations with a group they have encountered. A chance encounter with a merchant broker, local politician or mercenary commander could lead to a long-term alliance if the Travellers manage their interactions well.

Where the values of Assets are measured in Credits, Factions operate on a larger scale and involve costs in thousands or millions of Credits for almost any transaction. The base value of a Faction is determined by its size, in terms of workforce, deployable personnel, or world citizens who can be counted on to back the Faction's agenda.

Faction Size uses a code system similar to world Population codes.



Faction Size

Faction Size Code	Notes
1	This might be assigned to a single powerful or rich individual who has few supporters or staff, though they would more commonly be considered an Asset.
2	Barely a faction at all, just a handful of people.
3	Equivalent to a military platoon, a single small Starship, or a minor leader with a few dozen supporters.
4	Equivalent to a military company, a small colony, an outpost with a population under 100, or a multi-small-ship trading group.
5	Equivalent to a military battalion, a colony or independent settlement with a population of up to 1,000, a very small interstellar shipping line, or a small pirate band with a handful of small ships.
6	Equivalent to a brigade-sized military force, a settlement of up to 10,000 people, or a medium-sized pirate band with up to a dozen ships.
7	Equivalent to a division-sized military force, a city of up to 100,000 people, or a large pirate band.
8	A major popular uprising or segment of the population numbering up to a million people.
9	A large cultural or ethnic group, or political bloc with up to 10 million members.
10	A very large social or ethnic group numbering up to 100 million people.

Faction Cost

Faction Type	Example	Cost Modifier
Social/Political	A cultural or social group with little direct power, but the ability to influence affairs through strikes, market boycotts or similar agitation.	1
Military	An armed group set up for planetside combat, such as mercenaries, armed revolutionaries or law enforcement personnel.	3
Economic/Industrial	A company or corporation either producing goods or making money by buying and selling them.	4
Installation	An installation or colony such as an orbital starport or mining settlement on a distant moon.	6
Spacer	A faction that operates starships of any kind, such as a starmerc or pirate force, merchant shipping company or a salvage corporation.	10

The base cost of interacting with a Faction is also affected by the nature of the group. Only the highest modifier associated with a group is applied.

The base cost of any interaction with a Faction is determined by the cube of its Faction Size code (that is, its size code multiplied by itself and then by itself again) times its multiplier, in thousands of Credits. Thus a mining outpost on a distant moon with a population of 76 people (Faction Size 4, Installation Cost Modifier of 6) costs $4 \times 4 \times 4 = 64$ multiplied by 6 for a total Cr384000 per interaction. On the other hand, the Popular Front for An Independent Tobia, with its membership of 9 people, has Faction Size 2 and a Social/Political Cost Modifier of 1, and thus costs Cr8000 to mobilise. A Faction with Faction Size 0 is treated as an Asset for the purposes of determining interaction cost.

INTERACTING WITH A FACTION

Any time the Travellers want the Faction to do something is termed an 'interaction'. Costs might be bribes, salaries, running costs or other expenses incurred in the activity. Interactions might be used to improve the Travellers' relationship with the Faction or reduce

hostility. Alternatively, the Travellers might request specific actions on the part of the Faction. There are all manner of possibilities here, depending on the nature of the group.

- A social group might be asked to vote a particular way or influence the marketplace by favouring or boycotting certain goods. They might be asked to destabilise an area with strikes and political agitation.
- A military group might be asked to launch an uprising or attack a specific target.
- An economic group might be asked to apply pressure on a world government.
- A shipping operator might be asked to favour certain routes or be seen to employ certain ships as escorts in order to make them look legitimate.
- An installation might be asked to allow pirate ships to refuel and refit without inquiring into their business.

There are many ways a group of Travellers can make use of Factions, most of which are relatively subtle. Clever Travellers might ask a friendly Faction for assistance when trying to get a government to align itself with Drinax. However, Faction activities should not be used to significantly alter the political landscape without some involvement from the Travellers.



FACTION ALIGNMENT

How closely a Faction aligns with the Travellers' agenda dictates what the Faction will do for them. A Faction will of course always follow its own agenda – wild-eyed revolutionaries intent on collapsing their world government will proceed towards this goal regardless of the Travellers' intentions, and an interaction might be necessary to ask them to postpone the great uprising for a while. Likewise, a Faction will always fulfil its normal function without requiring an interaction cost. So, if the Travellers visit a mining outpost whose population they are courting as an allied Faction, they do not need to pay an interaction cost just to refuel unless the installation is closed to traffic.

Obtaining cooperation from a Faction normally requires an Average (8+) check using Leadership, Diplomat or Persuade as appropriate. This is subject to the DMs shown on the Faction Modifiers table.

A Faction will refuse to even consider requests above its Alignment. Asking a neutral Faction to launch a coup in order to install a more pirate-friendly regime is highly unlikely to succeed, unless the Travellers find some way to persuade the Faction leaders. Activities that generate adventures or roleplayed out should always trump mere dice-based decisions.

Example of Faction Use and Misuse

The government of a particular world is Neutral towards the Travellers and they want to nudge it to a Tolerant stance. The Travellers' first idea is to tell their friends in the Starport Workers Union (considered to be an economic group since they do not run the port itself but can influence what goes on there) to make it happen. They are hoping to just roll some dice and get a safe port. This is a misuse of the Faction system: Factions are not meta-game assets allowing the Travellers to bypass obstacles or reduce the campaign to a few dice rolls.

Instead the Travellers come up with a scheme whereby they start selling a lot of goods in the port at discount prices, hoping to create demand and a habit of not asking too many questions. They ask their friends in the Starport Workers Union to ensure their goods are not too rigorously inspected in case their origins are questionable. This requires a bit of work on the Travellers' part and thus is a valid action. After paying the interaction cost the Travellers have the cooperation of the port workers and can carry out their scheme. The referee even gives the Travellers a positive DM when it is time to roll for attitude shift on the part of the target world, thanks to the vocal support of the union foremen and a vague threat of strikes if the new suppliers of must-have discount goods are not given preferential treatment.

Faction Alignment

Faction Alignment	Actions Possible	Request DM
Hostile	Improve relations or just begging not to be shot at	-6
Unfriendly	Improve relations	-4
Suspicious	Improve relations	-2
Neutral	Minor information requests and small favours such as allowing refuelling at an otherwise closed installation	0
Tolerant	Minor illegal activity such as ignoring a cargo's origins or not reporting suspicious damage to a ship	+2
Friendly	Major illegal activity such as knowingly receiving pirated goods, supplying illegal weaponry, or engaging in conflict	+4
Allied (Haven)	Open support or declaration of allegiance	+6

Faction Modifiers

Factor	DM
Action has no real consequences, such as improving relations without undertaking any activities	+2
Action is illegal but the risk is slight	-1
Action is illegal and involves significant risk	-3
Action has serious repercussions, such as making an armed attack on an installation or government forces	-5
Action has extremely serious consequences, such as becoming an active pirate or making a coup attempt	-8

FACTIONS AS WORLD GOVERNMENTS

The government of a world with a Population code of 4- can be considered a Faction for the purposes of these rules. Larger planetary populations are too complex to be considered a single Faction. However, a Faction could be installed as a new world government if the Travellers play their cards right. As already noted, Faction activities should never be viewed as a simple dice mechanic for bypassing the difficult parts of the Travellers' task, but if they make a good plan and carry it out, a coup or other takeover could be launched.

A coup does not have to be military in nature. The Travellers might play local politics to the point where economic disruption and loss of confidence in the government causes an emergency election, or even a popularly-installed undemocratic government. A struggling world might even end up requesting Drinax send them a governor and some administrators to sort out an emergency... purely on a temporary basis of course.

Clever Travellers can build relationships with local Factions and then advance them into positions of power, such that when the day comes for Drinax to call for allies there are economic, social and political groups on a dozen worlds all clamouring for their government to join the new interstellar kingdom. The Travellers might build quite an empire this way, perhaps without anyone (including King Oleb!) knowing just how much power they wield.

Of course, revolutions do not always make good governments, and the Travellers' allies might turn their backs once they have what they want. Equally, the Travellers might build up a Faction until it can take control of its homeworld precisely because it will not produce a good government. In the wake of revolution, heroes from Drinax swoop in to save the day and restore the rightful rulers... and they have a proposal for an interstellar alliance that would prevent this sort of instability from recurring. Suddenly membership of Drinax' emerging alliance seems desirable, and the Travellers have gained a staunch ally whilst looking like the good guys.



C H A P T E R - F O U R TORPOL CLUSTER

TORPOL CLUSTER

The Torpol Cluster is the name given to three worlds in Tlaiowaha subsector which all lie within jump-1 of one another. Three worlds is a small cluster, but these three are important as they provide a link between the Wildeman Cluster and the Sindalian Main (by way of Marduk), which permits jump-2 traffic to transit from Imperial space to the territory of the Florian League. Traffic bound for the Aslan Hierate also comes through these systems as an alternative to the Wildeman Cluster/Borderland Cluster transit.

These three worlds are therefore of strategic importance to both the Imperium and Aslan Hierate, just as they were to the old Sindalian Empire. That importance was a double-edged sword; the wars that wracked the empire in its last days caused enormous damage on Clarke in particular. The scars of orbital bombardment can still be seen, and there are lingering psychological effects too. The strange society of Clarke was born in nuclear fire, and while Torpol and Blue have gone in different directions there is still a cultural memory of what happened and could happen again.

At the present time the border of the Aslan Hierate is stable, not least due to the jump-3 or jump-4 gap between the worlds at the outer edge and those deeper in. Eventually, expansion will occur and when it does it is likely to come rapidly. A more powerful Drinax could be a barrier to such expansion, at least for a time. Not only would Drinax prevent the annexation of its own system but presumably those surrounding it too. That would buy the Torpol Cluster some time, though in the long term an Aslan explosion up and along the Sindalian Main is probably inevitable.

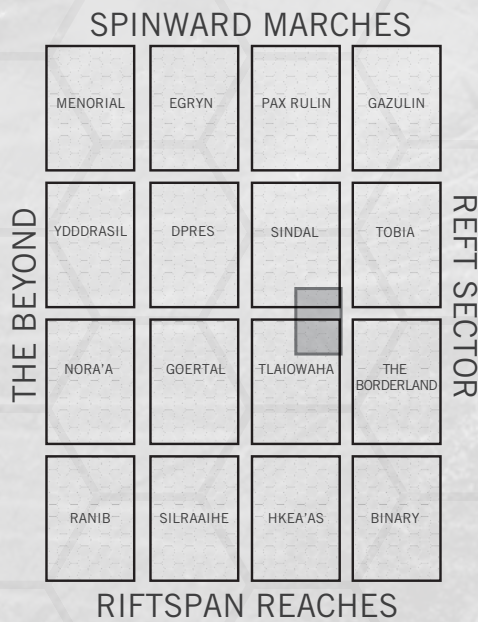
This is most definitely not in the interests of the Third Imperium, since it would not only move the Aslan border much closer to Imperial territory but also cut off the Imperial-Florian trade route or at least force it to run through foreign territory. This is one of a great many strategic concerns for the Imperium, whose resources are spread thin. As a result there is a small Imperial presence in the cluster, mainly in the form of intelligence-gathering agents and local assets. These are typically people and organisations unconnected with the Imperium except but willing to take Imperial Credits in return for furthering the Imperium's agenda.









The Imperium sends naval ships through the cluster on a semi-regular basis. Some are escorts for particularly important trade ships or convoys; others are warships showing the flag. Old destroyer escorts and fleet destroyers are the most common vessels sighted in the cluster, often spending a week or two in the Torpol system and a shorter period around Clarke or Blue. The Imperial Navy has no official jurisdiction in this area, but the principle that the Imperium is powerful enough to do as it pleases applies here; Imperial ships will hunt pirates or search suspect vessels if there is need, though they usually request (and receive) permission from local world governments.

The cluster sees a fair amount of internal trade, with ships plying between ports in the same system or jumping within the cluster. Through trade is extensive, with Torpol acting as a stopover and liberty port for many ships that come through. The cluster might thus offer rich pickings for pirates, though the presence of an Imperial trade route makes this a potentially hazardous undertaking.

PARTIAL MAP OF THE SINDAL & TLAIOWAHA SUBSECTORS

TROJAN REACH SECTOR



-  Gas Giant
-  Secure System
-  Amber Zone
- B-6* Starport Class & Tech Lvl
-  Imperial Border
-  Planet (Dry)
-  Fuel Dump
-  X-Boat Route
-  Planet (Water Present)

TORPOL

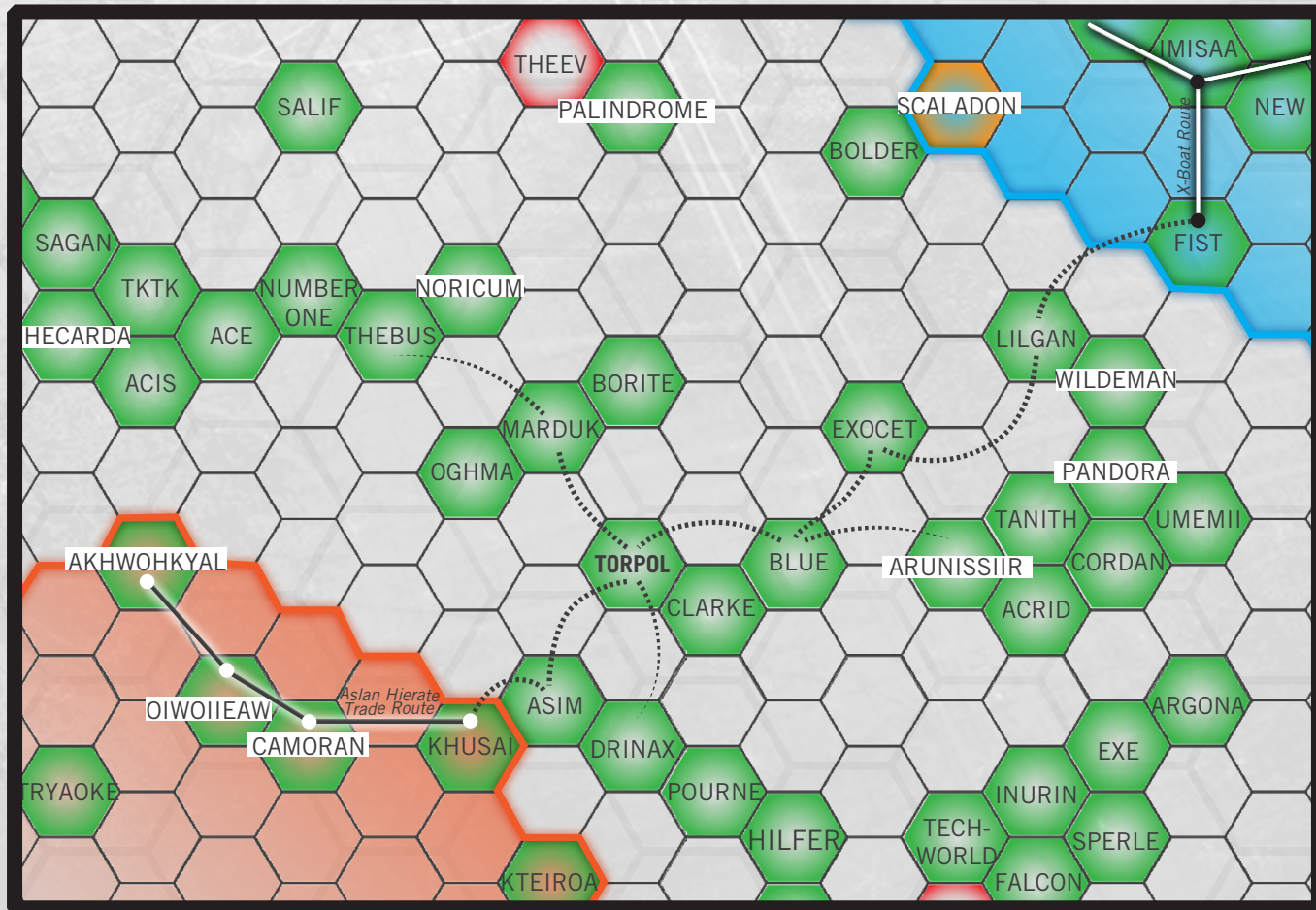
Torpol is astrographically the most important world in the Torpol Cluster, as it provides jump-2 access between the Sindalian Main (via Marduk) and the Aslan Hierate (via Drinax or Asim) as well as acting as a jump-2 link via Blue to Arunisiir or Exocet, and thence to Imperial space. Jump-4 vessels (typically warships) usually transit to Torpol from Fist via Exocet. It receives far more interstellar traffic than Clarke or Blue, a factor that has heavily influenced its economic development.

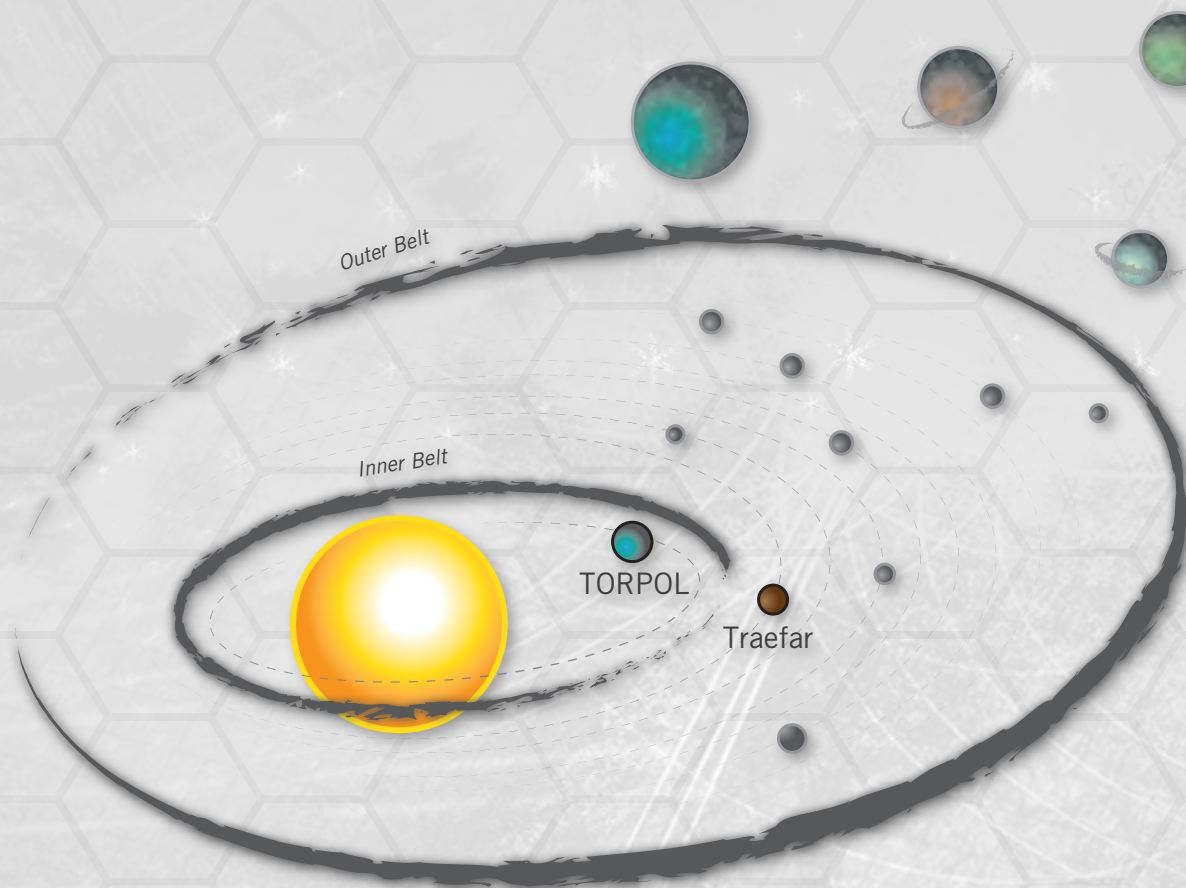
THE TORPOL SYSTEM

The Torpol system is centred on a type F4V star, a fairly bright and hot main sequence star. It is orbited by two planetoid belts, four gas giants and ten terrestrial (rocky) planets including Torpol itself. Of these, only Torpol is correctly positioned to receive enough stellar energy for liquid water, and is the only planet in the system to have life on its surface.

That does not mean the rest of the system is uninhabited. The outer planetoid belt has an extensive belter community whilst the inner one has less beltlers but more commercial mining operations. Most of these are local companies operating out of Torpol or Clarke, but the Imperial megacorporation Sternmetal Horizons also has a mining base in the inner belt.

There are outposts on various gas giant moons, but of the system's planets only Torpol and Traefar are inhabited. Traefar is the next world out from Torpol, on the far side of its inner planetoid belt, and is a cold rockball with only a trace of atmospheric gas. Traefar was a colony of no great importance in the era of the Sindalian Empire, and survived the death throes of the empire well. 'We have nothing worth bombing' is not much of a defensive strategy but in the case of Traefar it seems to have worked.





Traefar has a small commercial spaceport which mainly serves mining ships whose operators do not want to pay the high fees charged at Torpol Highport. The port is rather basic, but the associated city of about two million inhabitants has enough recreation facilities to entertain commercial spacers who have been cooped up in a mining ship for weeks on end. Belters from the outer belt sometimes call there to trade or to enjoy some 'sophisticated' leisure time.

Traefar spaceport is a good place to pick up new crewmembers. The sort of spacer found there tends to have few formal qualifications but solid practical experience. Most are former commercial spacers or beltlers who have decided they want a change of lifestyle. Some are inveterate drifters, and a few are the sort of spacefarer who has to stay away from the major ports.

The Imperial Navy has been known to raid Traefar spaceport from time to time, searching for pirates and similar criminals. They tend not to find many however; Traefar is not a pirate haven and is culturally quite hostile to those who rob and kill for a living. It is a place where hard-working spacers congregate, and whilst few questions are asked about individuals it is not somewhere to spend a ton of pillaged booty and rest up before the next raid.

Traefar spaceport is defended by the grandly named Traefar Flotilla, which consists of a handful of armed small craft and a couple of old fighters. This small force could be augmented in a crisis by beltlers and commercial miners, some of whose ships are lightly armed.

TORPOL HIGHPORT

Most of the vessels that come through the Torpol system dock at the large orbital port and use local shuttles to send crew and passengers to the surface. Smaller vessels sometimes proceed directly groundside but this is uncommon. The highport is modern and well-run, with good facilities for overhaul and maintenance. There is a small private shipyard, which mostly produces small craft for local clients but can also supply standard components for starships. Jump-capable vessels cannot be built at Torpol but they can be serviced and repaired.

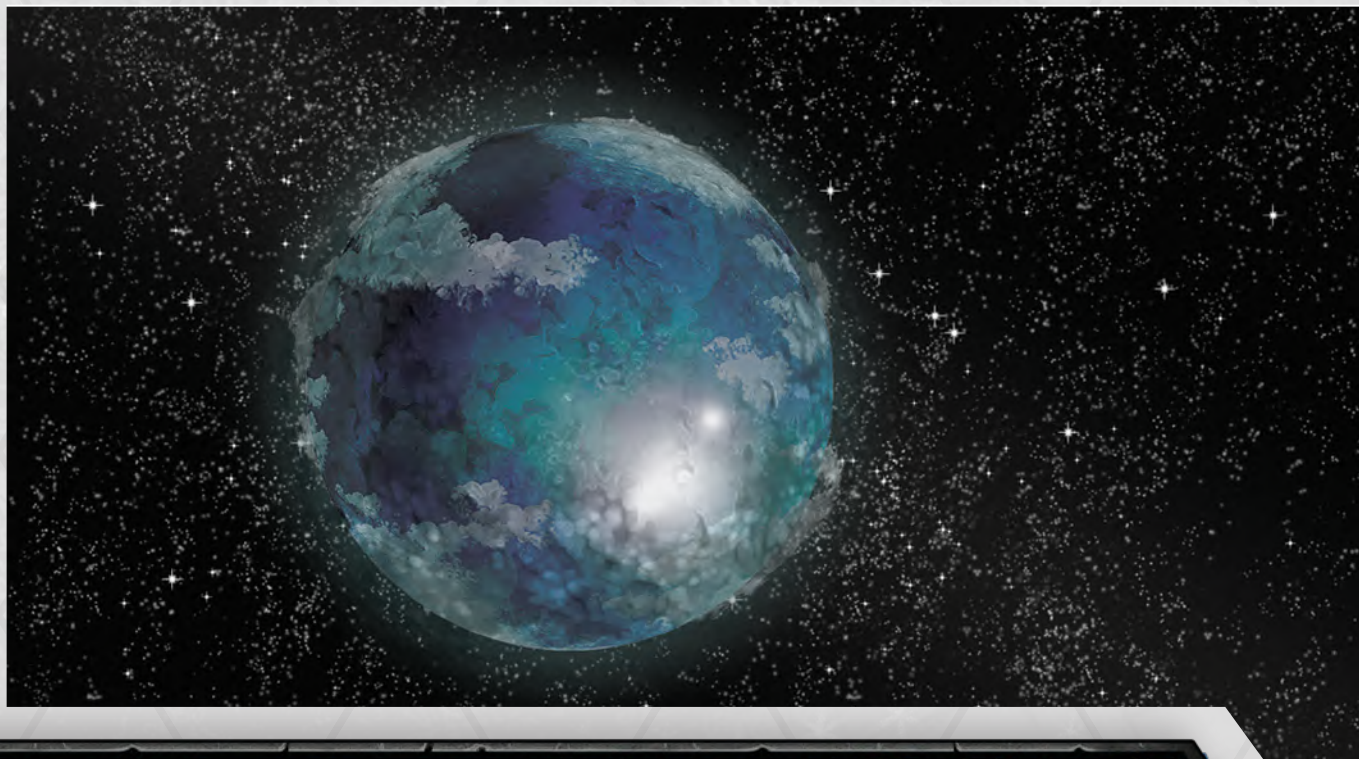
The port has an efficient security service which is intolerant of boisterous behaviour. Those who want to blow off steam or make a nuisance of themselves are 'advised' to take it planetside, to one of the spaceports which offer a range of entertainments. The highport is a bit straight-laced, being geared to business negotiations and interstellar commerce rather than fun.

The highport is where the system's business sector is located, including the headquarters of most large planetside firms and offices maintained by the world's ruling elite. Speculative cargo is often traded here, with shipments split for transfer to various end clients. All manner of goods can thus be found in the warehouses of the highport, though there are restrictions on what can be traded to some clients. With the proper licenses, almost anything can be bought and sold at Torpol, but an all-cargoes license is expensive and complex to obtain. As a result, a large number of 'middle-brokers' have emerged who can wriggle a restricted cargo through the legal process for a fee – this is typically 10-15% of the cargo's value.

Torpol's highport has for many years now also served as a sort of planetary capital. Officially, no such place exists and the cities of the surface are self-governing. However, each city sends representatives to a council which meets at the highport, and it is here that most inter-city deals are done, with decisions affecting more than one city debated. This is another reason why thrill-seeking starfarers are sent planetside – the planetary rulers really do not want partygoers stumbling through their corridors of power.

As might be expected from a busy, highly profitable port, Torpol Highport is well defended. Its security contingent includes numerous gunners who man a primarily missile-based armament. Missile bays are located in areas of the port that are off-limits to civilians, but numerous beam weapon turrets are scattered all over the outer surface of the station.

This defence system provides a measure of protection to vessels near the station, but is incapable of reaching far out into space. For this purpose, Torpol maintains a flotilla of fighters at the highport and a single large defensive craft. This is a (very) old Imperial Gionetti-class light cruiser, a huge ship by local standards, which was provided several decades ago under a now-defunct 'trade route security assistance' scheme. The cruiser is in relatively good repair considering its age, but is not jump capable and several of its systems have been replaced with locally produced alternatives of lesser capability. Still, a light cruiser that was once a unit of the Imperial Navy is more than a match for most threats encountered in Trojan Reach sector.



TORPOL

B55A77A-8 WA

Torpol itself is a small world with a thin atmosphere, whose surface is completely covered in water. In places this is quite shallow, though there are some very deep abyssal areas with trenches that have never been explored. Torpol is poor in terms of natural resources (other than water) and has little manufacturing capability of its own. Its prosperity is founded on trade, both in terms of its own commercial activity and also facilitating the trade of others. The Imperial/Florian and Imperial/Aslan trade routes are vital to Torpol's economy, bringing in most of the world's income.

Commerce is, to a great extent, at the heart of life on Torpol. The ruling Provosts are essentially merchant princes, and many have extensive offworld holdings. Some of the mining operations of the inner belt are owned by or do regular business with certain Provosts, whilst others own one or more commercial spacecraft and starships. A lot of money changes hands at Torpol Highport; the Provosts work hard to create an atmosphere where trade and commerce are easy to accomplish. Thus, despite a high law level, Torpol's rules and regulations are surprisingly straightforward for most activities.

The majority of the sixty million population live in cities built on the polar ice caps. These are built as rafts that 'float' on the ice and have few very tall buildings. Instead, the cities sprawl outward as new raft sections are added and connected by flexible roadways that carry ground vehicles. Rafts and roads are built to insulate the ice from any heating effects and spread out the load passing over or built on top. The system is complex but has worked for many years.

The remainder of the populace live in smaller cities built on stilts in shallow water. Most of these form a chain around the equator, though there are a few in other areas. The equatorial cities are mainly geared to offworld commerce and, essentially, tourism. Passengers and crews from visiting starships are enticed to spend some time (and a lot of Credits) in the equatorial city-ports. Some of these have themes or attempt to offer something others do not, though a successful gimmick will rapidly be copied elsewhere.

Thus, some cities have created artificial landscapes far beyond the usual meaning of the term parks, with small forests and open areas of greenery. There is something faintly surreal about going white-water rafting on a river that runs through a park in a maritime stilt-city, but if an activity is popular then at least one city will find a way to provide it.

The equatorial city-ports typically feel wild and wanton to visitors, though some are geared to those who prefer culture. An example of the latter is Esafen, which hosts several very good museums and performance venues as well as the world's best university. Its primary attraction is the Museum of Sindal, which traces the history of the Sindalian Empire from its humble beginnings to its bloody end. Naturally, there is a large exhibit devoted to the Sindalian Renaissance which implies Torpol is the spiritual and cultural heart of the region. This maybe a bit far-fetched, but Esafen does a good job of telling the Sindal story in an easily digestible format.

Torpol has a high Law Level, though enforcement is surprisingly subtle. The intent is to keep visitors safe and happy without an intrusive law enforcement presence. This is generally achieved, though occasionally it is necessary to take direct and overt action. When a light touch and a system of community service for most offences does not work, Torpol's cities send in a heavily armed paramilitary security force to break heads and restore order.

The security force – actually termed the Enforcement and Protection Service, or EPS – is the only real combat force on Torpol. It has specialist sea, ice and air units as well as aerospace defence forces, and whilst all of its personnel have law enforcement powers, many specialise in tasks that would fall within the remit of a planetary army if Torpol had one. Others provide a fire and rescue service.

Torpol is officially listed as being balkanised, though this is slightly misleading. It is true that all cities are self-governing, each with its council of Provosts, but cooperation is necessary to the world's economy and political affairs. As a result, the advisory council formed from representatives of each city finds it easy to come to a consensus on most matters. For a balkanised world, Torpol is unusually harmonious.

PIRACY IN THE TORPOL SYSTEM

Torpol might be considered a target rich environment with all the ships that pass through. However, although its force of starport-based fighters is not large, it is backed by a heavy missile capability at the port itself. There is also the factor that the Imperials consider Torpol to be of strategic importance and sometimes have a ship in the system. More important than these occasional guardships or the escorts that accompany some convoys is the fact that the Imperium might well consider any disruption of the trade routes to be a threat, and act accordingly. The Imperial Navy cannot deploy ships to this region permanently, but if the need is perceived it could flood the surrounding systems with cruisers until large numbers of pirates had been killed or captured.

Attacks in the vicinity of the port therefore carry very significant risks in the short and longer term, but elsewhere in the system a heavy response would be highly unlikely. The belter ships of the outer planetoid belt are not much of a target, but the mining vessels of the inner belt or the trade to and from Traefar might be a reasonable prospect. Defences are much weaker in this part of the system, and an attack on the in-system trade would probably not be considered a threat to the main interstellar trade lanes. The Provosts of Torpol are known to put out bounties on those who attack the shipping their economy depends upon, though the effectiveness of this can vary considerably.



CLARKE

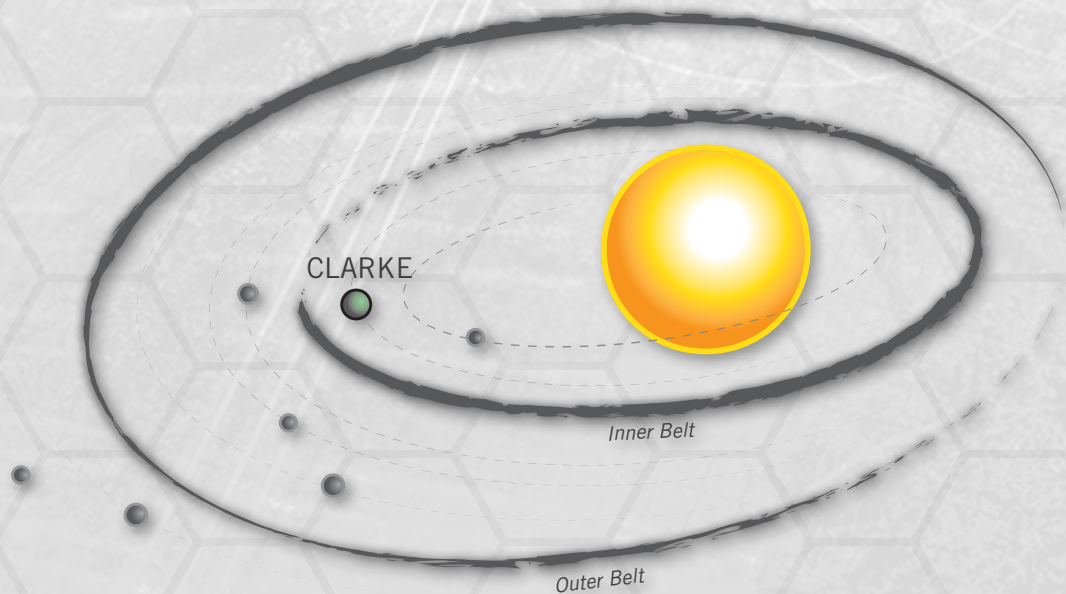
Clarke is, astrographically at least, the least important of the three cluster worlds, though it does see significant amounts of offworld traffic. This is mainly local, i.e. jump-1 ships moving within the cluster or jump-2 traffic coming in from Drinax and Arunisiir (by way of Blue). Long-range ships tend to use the port at Torpol and move on, with any elements of their cargo that enter the cluster's economy moving by local transport.

Clarke has a reputation as a gloomy and rather unsettling place, which is probably deserved. It has never truly recovered from the bloody days of the late Sindalian Empire era, either physically or psychologically, and its strange religion is famous for

many parsecs. The real Clarke is not quite the same as the image most offworlders have but it is certainly not a cheerful place. As a result, those who have the choice do business at the altogether more welcoming Torpol.

THE CLARKE SYSTEM

The Clarke system is centred on a yellow-white (F1V) main sequence star which has a distant red (M9V) companion. The companion system does not normally appear on stargharts as it is not inhabited. It is known to have several mapped comets, and not much else.



Companion Star

The Clarke system proper has no gas giants, making it necessary to obtain fuel from the starport or go looking for ice on a planetoid or comet. Few vessels can afford the time for such an undertaking, since the saving on fuel would be vastly less than the costs of running life support whilst searching – let alone the time lost from commercial activity. However, since many of the system's comets and planetoids are charted it is possible that those who want to stay off the spacelanes might have their own wilderness refuelling spots.

There are two planetoid belts, neither of which is especially rich in minerals, and a total of seven terrestrial (rocky) planets. Two of these (other than Clarke) used to be inhabited; one still is. The old colonies were shot up in passing during the wars of the Sindalian Empire. Those settlements not eradicated were abandoned or succumbed to systems failures, creating mass tombs for their remaining inhabitants.

The only permanent settlement in the Clarke system outside the mainworld itself is a small town that grew up around a religious mission on one of the former colonies. This project aims to recover all the remains from those that died and inter them properly. They cannot be preserved in the way that recent dead are, of course, but the religion of Clarke demands they be given the proper rites and not left lying in the cold and dark for all eternity.

The two belts have communities of beltlers here and there. These are independent and do not answer to the world government. As a result their numbers are unknown. The belter population is probably quite small, and although belter ships do come in to the highport to trade, they contribute relatively little to the local economy.

CLARKE HIGHPORT

Many visitors to Clarke are reluctant to visit the surface, and prefer instead to stop over at the highport. Although given the same classification as the port at Torpol, Clarke's is much less grand. It is functional, and well able to serve the needs of passing trade ships, but has none of the vibrancy and welcome of Torpol. Most of the ships that come through Clarke are local and small compared to the large long-range freighters seen elsewhere in the cluster. Clarke Highport's large-ship docking areas can stand empty for weeks or even months on end, but there is a constant turnover of smaller ships.

Trade is also generally on a smaller scale, with Clarke considering a large cargo to be tens of tons rather than hundreds or thousands. Despite this, there are good trade links with Drinax and Pourné, and thence to other systems. Some Aslan clans maintain a jump-3 trade and passenger service to the Imperial worlds of the Trojan Reach sector, and many use Clarke's port as a stopover en route to Arunisiir. Aslan are more common at Clarke than in most systems along the human side of the border.

Like most starports in the region, Clarke's Highport was built to withstand attack, and is armed with a mix of missile and beam weapons, along with a handful of system defence boats available to protect traffic in the vicinity of the mainworld. The port's operators really do not care what happens in the rest of the system. With one minor exception, the rockball worlds are uninhabited, and beltlers can take care of themselves – if they cannot, it is not the concern of the world government.

Clarke's highport can maintain starships and build small spacecraft, but in practice does little of either. Most activity of this sort is undertaken on a part-time basis, or by what amounts to a handbuilding industry. The craft put together at Clarke tend to be very well finished and are generally turned out to a high standard, since the crews that construct them often have the time to spare. This quality comes at a slight premium in price (10-15%), but there is a limit to what Clarke can charge for craft available elsewhere.

THIS WAY FOR

< GenEric!

BAR & STEAKHOUSE

Clarke was once a garden world, largely unspoiled except for a concentration of high-technology manufacturing around the capital. This was the first target for orbital bombardment when the wars of the Sindalian Empire came to Clarke. It was also the last, and was worked over a few times in between. As a result, the capital region is still a radioactive wasteland, its terrain pocked with craters interspersed by mounds where rubble has been buried in the years that followed.

The rest of Clarke had little industry, but that did not save it from the bombing. Indeed, Clarke stands as a particularly thorough example of Sindalian spite. Every major settlement was flattened in a series of attacks, with refugees from one disaster zone finding shelter at another city, only to be bombed again. The result is a ruined world whose technological base was completely shattered and whose cultural psyche never recovered.

Despite the destruction raining down on them, the people of Clarke tried to save everyone they could, including the recently deceased. Before the bombing, technology existed that could repair and revive those placed quickly within cryogenic suspension at the point of death. Although this capability was lost along with the capital, it was hoped that relief would come and at least some of the dead could be saved. This, of course, did not happen but over time the hope of healing and revival became an obsession and finally a religion.

The practice of freezing the dead was replaced with a rather macabre form of preservation in which the deceased is interred in a monolith of carbon. These dull-black blocks are used as building materials in the cities of Clarke. Their dour appearance creates a grim and oppressive form of architecture which is only intensified by knowledge of what lies within them.

The process of preservation is controlled by a hierarchy of priests known as psychopomps. This translates as 'soul guides' and refers to the fate of the soul in both life and death. The stated aim of the psychopomps is to preserve each and every member of Clarke's society for the Day of Healing, which will be brought about by the rediscovery of technologies lost in the bombardment of Clarke. The Day of Healing concept probably had a fairly limited and secular meaning at the beginning, in that there were practical limits on who could be revived even

when the technology was available. However, today's society on Clarke generally believes that everyone can be brought back – perhaps even the dusty dead of the offworld colonies.

The gloomy, death-obsessed religion of Clarke pervades all aspects of society and is genuinely believed by most of the population. The psychopomps are thus not only priests and advisors, they are also the world's political and economic leaders. This can make interacting with the government of Clarke a sobering experience for Travellers; local metaphors and figures of speech are mostly concerned with death; contracts have strange religious overtones, and dealings are conducted in gloomy and oppressive surroundings.

Despite (or perhaps because of) this obsession with death and preservation, Clarke actually has a quite low Law Level. The citizens are generally well-behaved and abide by the rules of civilised behaviour without much need for law enforcement. It has been unkindly suggested that the people of Clarke are simply too depressed to cause trouble, but the reality is that their religion implies consequences beyond death. This is sufficient to keep most people from straying too far from the accepted norms.

Although the psychopomps' goal is to bring about the Day of Healing by reconstructing old technologies, little progress has been made. There are archaeological projects digging through the radioactive wreckage of the old capital and various offworld assistance projects but, on the whole, these are underfunded and progress has been extremely slow for many years. Cynics might observe that the psychopomps risk losing their position if they actually succeed in their mission, but it is equally likely that Clarke simply cannot break out of its present mid-tech-backwater state for lack of money. The cost of rebuilding even part of the original technological base would be astronomical, and Clarke does not have sufficient income.

Today, the population of around 80 million dwells in several dispersed cities built mainly out of grim monoliths containing the waiting dead. Cities are noticeably 'hard' in terms of resistance to attack; buildings are shaped and positioned to deflect blasts and spaced to prevent a nuclear strike eliminating all key infrastructure. Reserves of food and medical supplies are maintained in most settlements, even though there is no apparent or immediate threat.

Clarke's dense atmosphere is still tainted by the bombardment, and some parts of its ecosphere never recovered. There are large barren areas, and contaminated material from the bombing sites has been carried worldwide by currents in Clarke's extensive oceans. Water for farming and drinking is carefully filtered and processed, but there are concerns that the world is still slowly dying. Far from preserving the populace for the Day of Healing, it may be that the psychopomps and their religion are doing no more than staving off the inevitable.

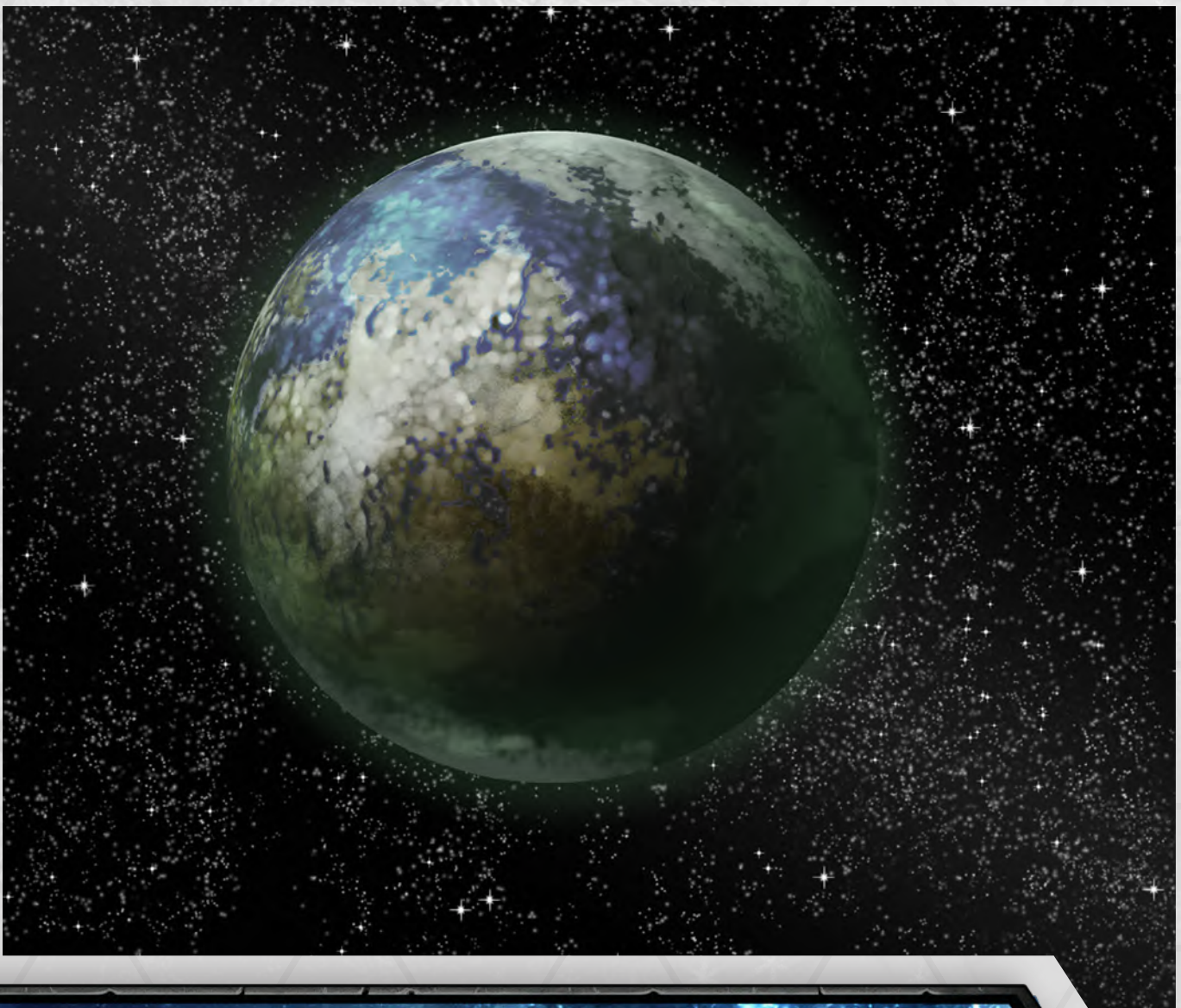
PIRACY IN THE CLARKE SYSTEM

There is a lot of traffic around Clarke's highport, mainly small ships that provide excellent targets for pirates. Of course, there is also a reasonable level of protection offered by the system's defence boats. Away from the port region, there are few good prospects. Belter ships offer a fairly poor return if pirates are only concerned with stealing cargo. Those willing to murder crews

and chop ships up for spare parts can make more money, but that activity tends to provoke a more robust response from authorities.

There is salvage to be had in the wrecked offworld colonies, though the people of Clarke would consider this desecration of graves unless a scavenging operation were properly sanctioned and accompanied by a preservation team. Any equipment salvaged would be very old and might have already been cannibalised in an effort to survive after the attacks. Troves have reportedly been found, however, and there have occasionally been reports of battles between rival scavenging gangs in the distant offworld colonies.

There is also the possibility that the outsystem contains some kind of refuelling outpost. An ice asteroid or a comet could provide enough fuel for many ships and, once located and plotted, it would not be hard to jump straight to. Finding such a refuelling station would be a difficult undertaking, however.



BLUE

The Blue system provides a jump-2 link from Arunisiir and Exocet to the Sindalian Main by way of Torpol and Marduk, or towards the Aslan Hierate by way of Clarke or Torpol. This gives it a strategic importance out of all proportion to its population or economic power. Blue is a location of interest to the Third Imperium and receives flag-showing visits from Imperial warships on a fairly frequent basis.

A full Imperial anti-piracy task force recently passed through the Blue system, consisting of a light carrier and several destroyers. This force would be modest by warfighting standards but vastly outgunned any pirate threat it encountered. The final destination of the task force was not disclosed of course, but it seems likely it was searching for pirate bases. During the task force's two-week stay in the Blue system, its senior officers went planetside on several occasions, suggesting negotiations with the world government were in progress.

It is not clear what the Imperial Navy would want with Blue in terms of its economic strength – which is laughable – but the possibility exists that a forward base of operations is being sought. Political leaders elsewhere in the region are beginning to take notice as this rumour spreads. This is partially because such an undertaking usually brings in a great deal of Credits for the government hosting the base, and partly because an Imperial squadron based in this area might alter the local balance of power. Not everyone wants that.

THE BLUE SYSTEM

The Blue system orbits a hot F9V (Yellow-White) main sequence star along with twelve terrestrial (rocky) planets and two gas giants. The government of Blue lacks the capability to project power over much of the mainworld, let alone the star system, so all areas beyond the starport are considered ungoverned. By convention, the world government is within its rights to consider any part of the mainworld's surface as its sovereign territory, but there is no practical means – military, political or legal – to enforce any such claim.

By the same conventions, a world government that cannot enforce its laws elsewhere in the star system cannot claim ownership of any resources or other objects located there. To all intents and purposes the Blue system is thus open territory. In some ways this has actually been good for the economy of Blue.

There are small settlements on several of the planets and gas giant moons in the Blue system. Some are transient camps set up by mining and prospecting concerns; one or two belong to Aslan ihatei groups. These usually start out as staging posts for raids or landgrabs elsewhere, but occasionally grow into a viable colony. This is a concern for anyone who does not want to see Aslan expansion into the region, since whenever a foothold is established, it is hard to dislodge without causing conflict with the parent clan.

The usual recourse is negotiation and a certain amount of bribery-from-a-position-of-strength. That position does not exist here. The upshot of this is that a couple of gas giant moons and part of a rockball world are now Aslan territory. In and of itself this is not of any great consequence, but the possession of a secure base allows deeper and stronger incursions to be made. There are those who see the Aslan endlessly crumbling away a cliff face (and occasionally smashing part of it out of the way) to creep deeper and deeper into human territory.

This presence may be one reason for Imperial interest in the Blue system. Another is the existence of Bulhai Freeport. This is an independent facility located on one of the moons of Bulhai, the system's outer gas giant. It is a fairly modest installation with a supporting population of around twenty thousand people, but is growing every year. The freeport is, as its name suggests, a completely independent spaceport where all manner of goods and services are available. This is an obvious place for a pirate haven but the operators run a legal business. Just barely legal in some cases, but within the body of interstellar law.

Bulhai Freeport is a place where items restricted elsewhere are traded openly, including high-end electronics fits for starships and military grade weaponry. The port operators take great care to ensure the components they sell and fit are not stolen from pirated ships, and thus far no legal challenge to their activities has been successful. The existence and expansion of the port is of concern to several local and major powers, however, and has caused great alarm among the rulers of Blue.

As yet, Bulhai attracts only small and rather disreputable vessels, but as time goes on it may come to rival the main starport at Blue. The loss of income from interstellar trade would be catastrophic to the world's economy. As a result, the government has implemented a sort of second-hand attempt to take control of its home system. The population are by inclination insular and generally unconcerned with wider happenings, but the rulers must be. Thus, a unified law enforcement service has been formed, mainly from offworlders, to police the starport and any outlying settlements that desire it.

A surprisingly large number of these settlements have agreed to join the project. Most small settlements have no proper facilities to deal with offenders; if the authorities at the starport want to take responsibility then that is in everyone's interest. The enforcement service currently operates a handful of armed small craft for customs work and policing of the system's spacelanes, and the government on Blue is now attempting to use this capability to show that it can indeed enforce its laws across the system.

The implications of this are complex. It may be that Blue is trying to stake a clear claim to all of its home system, though this would only be useful if coupled with a vast increase in military capability the world cannot possibly achieve on its own. The creation of an Imperial forward base would provide this capability in the form of a navy friendly to Blue and willing to recognise its territorial claims. This would threaten the existence (or independence at least) of Bulhai Freeport, creating a conflict that might have all manner of results.

BLUE HIGHPORT

Blue's orbital Highport is old but in reasonably good repair. It was built to replace a previous, much smaller installation. This was set up to support interstellar trade on a temporary basis but became permanent for lack of anything better. This facility became unsafe around

600 and totally unusable about a century later; in the meantime it remained in use, giving rise to a local figure of speech comparing any rickety or ramshackle thing to 'the port at Blue'.

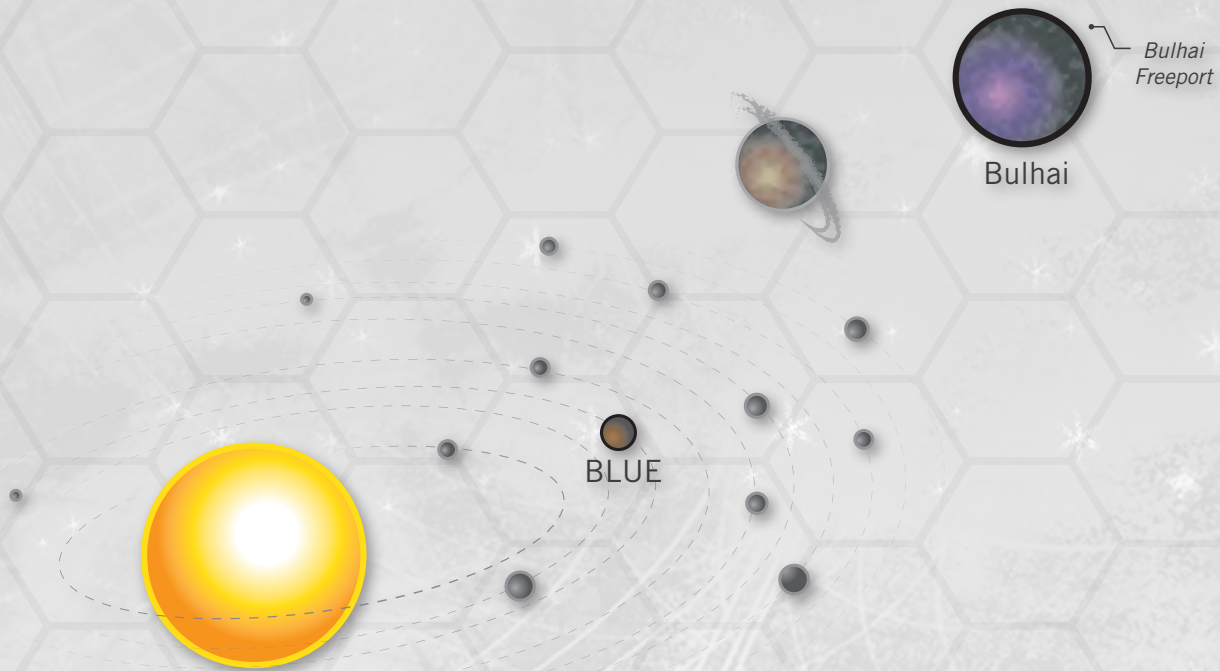
The current facility was built in the 800s and has received only cosmetic upgrades since. It can deliver all the services of a Class B port, but only just. Shipbuilding is limited to small craft, and up until recently very few of those were actually constructed. In recent months, the world government has sunk a considerable amount of investment into a programme to produce small, cheap fighters. Some of these are destined for the unified enforcement service but most go to the export market.

There are those who question the wisdom of marketing cheap combat craft, but the government of Blue maintains that it sells only to legitimate clients such as governments, shipping corporations and interstellar concerns with assets to protect. The behaviour of some of these 'legitimate' clients can be questionable, of course, but on the whole, Blue's fighters contribute to stability in the region.

Overall, the port is run independently from the mainworld, with most jobs done by contractors from all over the region. This gives Blue Highport a cosmopolitan feel but also a rather bland one. There is little local flavour; bars and restaurants tend to be franchises or obvious copies of them, and everything from food to décor and even the layout of rooms is boringly familiar. A few locals do take jobs at the port, but for the most part it is a distant thing to them, a source of revenue for the government and little else.

The port is considered an important asset by the world government, not least since it brings in most of the world's income. The small system-policing squadron is backed up by a much larger force of fighters, many of which are locally produced. This force is crewed by mercenaries, usually former members of another world's armed forces or Imperial personnel, and is assigned several Imperial officers as advisors and training facilitators.

The port sees a considerable amount of local and long-range traffic, and has a modest speculative cargo marketplace. Although it lacks the vibrancy of Torpol's planetside pleasure ports, Blue Highport is comfortable and pleasant to visit. There is a good profit to be made here, and the only real downside is that it is all a little bland.



BLUE

Blue is a small world with a thin, tainted atmosphere and relatively little surface water. Despite this, it was once an important world in the Sindalian Empire. Its deserts were irrigated to create grasslands and forests, and a few vestiges of these artificial greenlands can still be found. The world was home to a high-tech society whose population enjoyed an extremely high standard of living as a result of their wealth. However, this prosperity came at a price.

Blue forced its way to the forefront of the Sindalian economy by plundering its resources in a brutally efficient manner. Many of the artificial parklands were built on filled-in open-cast mines of gigantic proportions, and it is claimed that the Killai Depression is actually a colossal mine or system of mines that were only partially filled. Be that as it may, the end result is that today Blue has very few accessible resources and maintains its very modest industrial base by importing raw materials.

The population of some seventy thousand mostly live in the capital, which is located close to the downport. A small startown serves the downport but, like the highport, is staffed mainly by contracted offworlders.

B543487-B NI PO

Few locals venture to the port and still fewer go offworld. Those who live in the capital have some offworld contact or at least are reminded that the wider universe still exists, but people of the smaller outlying communities generally look inward rather than at the stars.

The population is dependent on offworld trade. Without raw materials and Credits coming in through the interstellar trade routes they would not be able to maintain their Tech Level 10 lifestyles and would rapidly fall back to a subsistence economy. As it is, a large segment of the populace is free to pursue whatever interests they have, working in light occupations to maintain a high standard of living.

Art and religion are the two main focuses of society on Blue. Sometimes they are intertwined, sometimes far apart. There is no unified religion; a wide range of faiths are practiced on Blue. This is generally amicable – indeed, there are several societies that exist to foster contact between different faiths, and it is not uncommon for leaders of different religions to be invited to debate an issue or engage in what has been termed a ‘preach-off’. Debating the merits of art is another activity that has become almost a spectator sport.

Life on Blue is subject to quite complex and firmly-enforced laws, and offworlders who visit sometimes fall foul of rules about the use or even the precise definition of certain words. Profanity is officially proscribed, and with so many religions present this can be something of a minefield. Swearing by a god or belief system is unacceptable except where it is customary within that religion, and then only by adherents of that faith. It is thus possible to witness a member of a particular faith hurling a torrent of curses at his gods, and then to be fined for repeating one of the phrases he used.

Profanity fines are typically small and used to fund charitable works as a sort of governmental swear box. This has led to another curious local custom – large-scale public profanity as a means of raising funds for good works. Although baffling to outsiders, and frowned upon by several of the religions, ‘cussing for charity’ events are not infrequent.

Away from the cluster of settlements around the capital, Blue is officially uninhabited. There are a few outback settlements too remote to be considered part of the official world population but are essentially ‘people of Blue’. Most of the non-resident population is unwanted. These include contingents of Aslan ihatei who have set up camps well away from human areas and begun to expand.

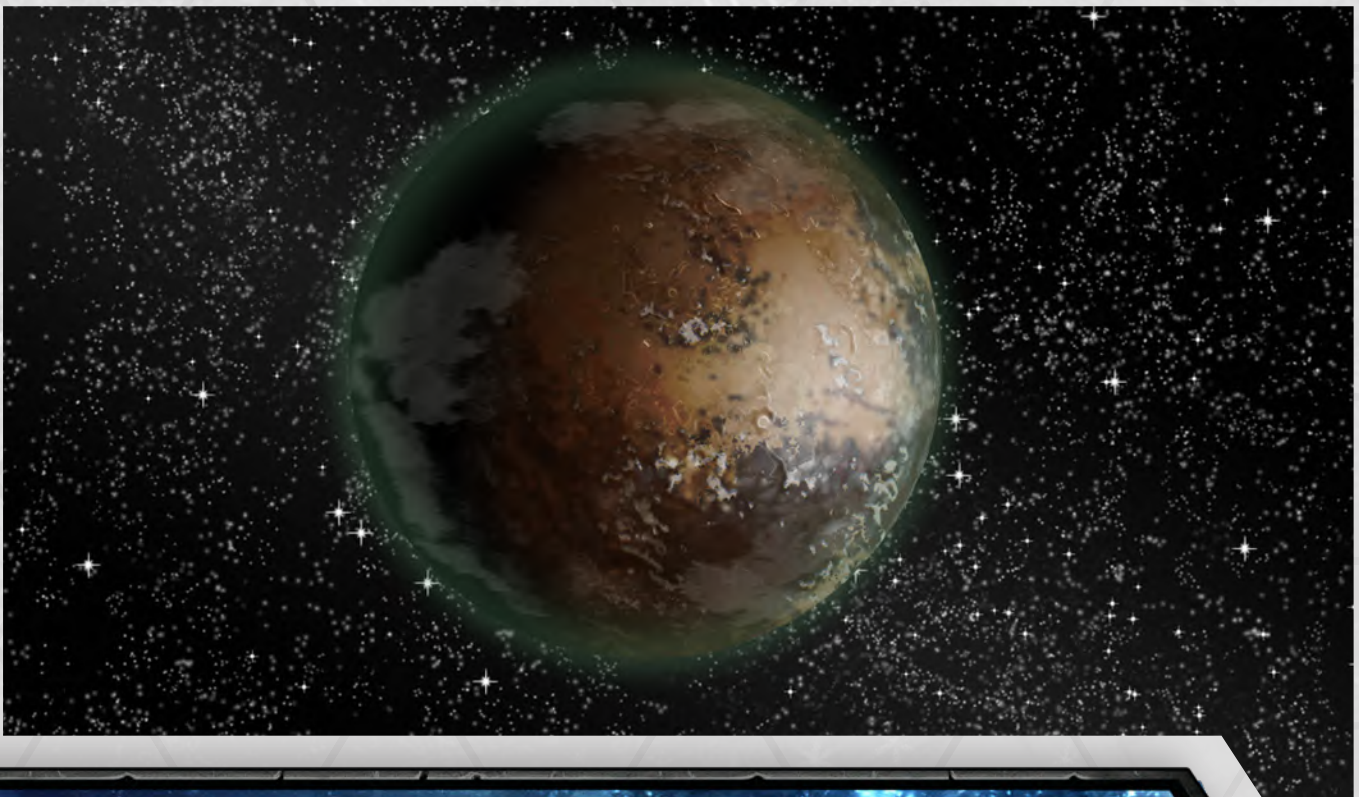
Rumours persist that there is a psionics institute somewhere on Blue, but then there are also rumours of hidden pirate bases, an Ancients site, and a hidden underground city that has survived since the days of the Sindalian Empire.

The world government is concerned about the presence of ihatei and other interlopers but lacks the resources to do much about it, and the population as a whole does not care. That may change if new arrivals start to encroach on human territory but, for now, life goes on as it always has.

PIRACY IN THE BLUE SYSTEM

The region around the highport sees a lot of traffic but is a hazardous prospect for an attack. This is not just due to the presence of fighters and other defences; significant disruption of the interstellar trade routes is likely to trigger an Imperial response. However, the occasional plundering of a small merchant craft is unlikely to produce any response beyond a bounty placed upon the pirate crew.

The rest of the system has some traffic and little law enforcement, though it is possible to run into one of the unified service craft. These do not usually visit Bulhai Freeport, but occasionally a goodwill and cooperation mission is launched. These tend to be rather strained and unproductive and, as a rule, the freeport looks after its own affairs. Ships that use it tend to be small but do carry valuable cargoes, making this a possibility for opportunistic piracy that will hopefully not trigger a large-scale response.



THEEV CLUSTER

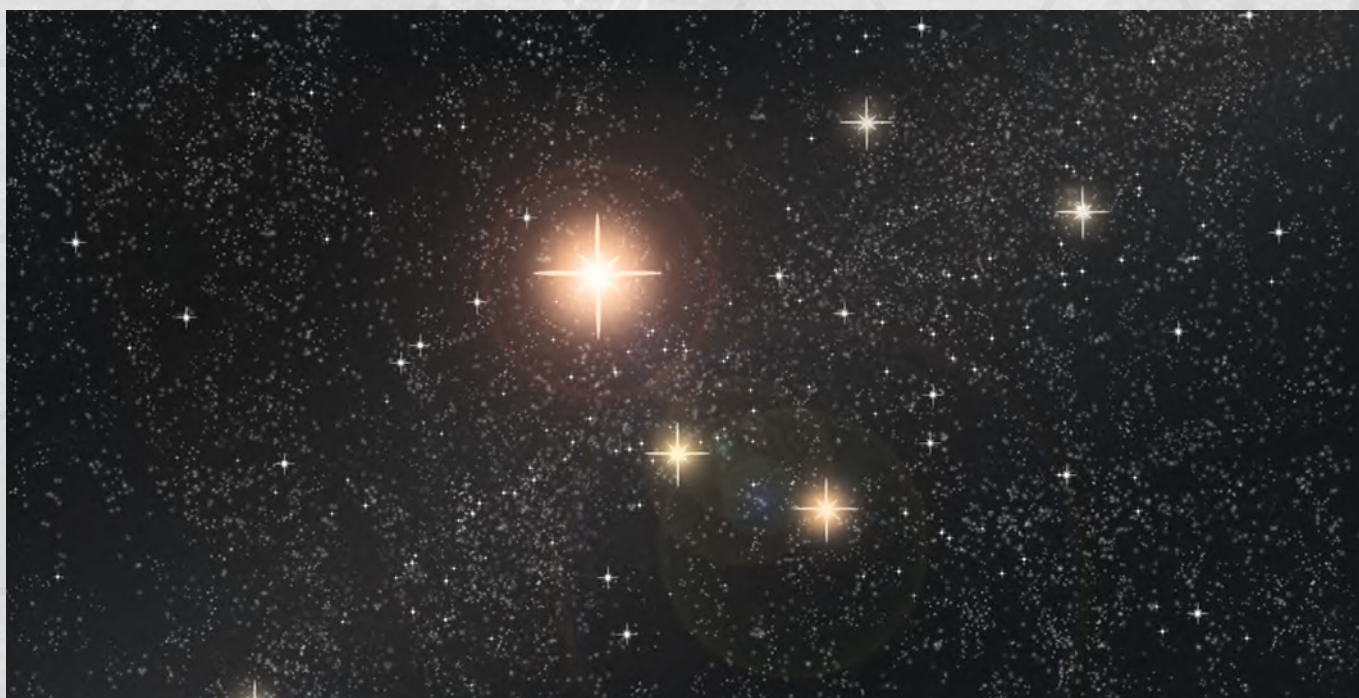
The Theev Cluster is a group of three star systems located in the centre of Sindal subsector. The cluster is astrographically significant as it provides a jump-3 link between the Sindalian Main and Imperial space. In the days of the Sindalian Empire the cluster was an important thoroughfare for high-jump traffic in and out of the capital at what is now called Noricum. It dwindled in importance after the fall of the empire, though during the expansion of trade in the region a few hundred years ago there were plans to once again make the 'Three Central Worlds' as they are known a new hub for traffic.

That plan did work reasonably well for a while, but on the whole the longer but safer route through the Wildeman, Torpol and Marduk clusters eclipsed the 'Theev transit' in volume of trade. This was mainly due to the ability of jump-2 ships to make the longer transit, allowing more cargo to be carried for the same hull volume, albeit at the price of longer transit times. The low populations of the three central worlds, and the subsequent lack of trade in their systems, was also a barrier to large-scale exploitation.

Today, the fast (i.e. jump-3) transit across the subsector normally goes via Vume and Salif, then on to Tyr in Dpres subsector. Relatively few vessels make this run due to the expense of maintaining a jump-3 trade fleet and the dangers associated with transiting through the central worlds, but high-speed cargoes are still pushed through aboard well-armed merchant ships.

The Theev Cluster is notorious as a 'piracy hotspot' and has been swept on many occasions by the Imperial Navy. Naval vessels are deployed to the cluster on a not-too-infrequent basis; typically these are old destroyer escorts, though there is a real effort underway to get some more impressive and modern vessels assigned to the base at Realgar. From there they will be able to show the Imperial flag in its true glory among the worlds of the cluster. This is not likely to happen any time soon.

The attitude of the cluster's population is generally anti-Imperial. This is not extreme enough to manifest as open hostility but there is a deep suspicion of all things Imperial throughout the cluster which makes it difficult to place intelligence-gathering agents or even merchant brokers on the worlds or at the starports of the region.



PARTIAL MAP OF THE SINDAL SUBSECTOR

TROJAN REACH SECTOR

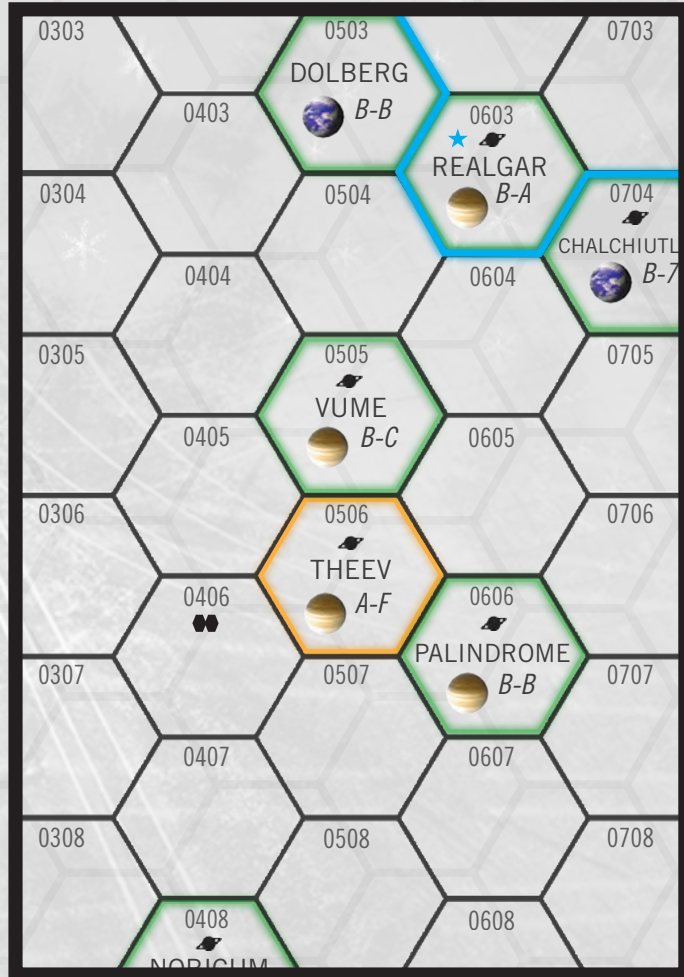
SPINWARD MARCHES

MENORIAL	EGRYN	PAX RULIN	GAZULIN
YDDDRASIL	DPRES	SINDAL	TOBIA
NORA'A	GOERTAL	TLAIOWAHA	THE BORDERLAND
RANIB	SILRAAIHE	HKEA'AS	BINARY

THE BEYOND

RIEFT SECTOR

RIFTSPAN REACHES



- Gas Giant
- Secure System
- Amber Zone
- B-6* Starport Class & Tech Lvl
- Imperial Border
- Planet (Dry)
- Fuel Dump
- X-Boat Route
- Planet (Water Present)
- Imperial Navel Base

Name	Location	Bases	Profile	Trade codes	Travel Codes	Gas Gaints
Theev	0506		A434500-E	Na Ni Ht	A	G
Vume	0505		B100477-C	Ni Va An		G
Palindrome	0606		B43334-B	Po Ni Lo		G

THE IMPERIAL NAVY

The Imperium's resources are stretched thin in Trojan Reach sector, as they are almost everywhere, and most of the naval assets available at the Realgar naval base are tasked with commerce protection in the Imperial systems of Realgar, Albe and Cordillon, and the trans-border systems of Dolberg and Chalchiutlicue. These systems see considerable pirate activity, and keeping 'internal' trade safe is a high priority for the navy. The pirate lords of Theev are well aware they have an Imperial Navy base, albeit a small one containing only a few patrol assets, right on their doorstep and encourage raids that keep the navy looking elsewhere.

Most of the vessels sent out from the base at Realgar are tied up in protecting commerce through Vume or making long sweeps out into the Sindalian Main. Maintaining a presence of just one or two ships on the Sindalian Main absorbs numerous vessels due to the long transit times required, and attempts to collect a reserve for special missions – such as hunting for pirate bases – tend to be disrupted by commanders of convoys heading up the Main. With standing orders to cooperate with such missions, Realgar's commanders routinely lose several of their vessels for months on end whenever a multi-ship expedition is launched to the Florian League.

As a result, there are few resources available for special missions such as pirate-hunting in the central cluster, and in any case the navy has been ordered to tread carefully in the region. There is not much chance of alienating the central worlds sufficiently that they side with the Aslan Hierate, but the Imperium cannot risk local worlds becoming sympathetic to Aslan ihatei and allowing them to pass through towards Imperial space or establish a foothold in the cluster. If more resources become available the navy may be able to take a tougher stance but for now its ability to project power in the Theev Cluster is severely limited.

This is not coincidental. The generally anti-Imperial stance of the region's populace is fostered by the pirate lords, and raiding close to home is generally discouraged. Prospects of a profitable raid are better elsewhere anyway, so whilst the Theev Cluster is known as a piracy hotspot it does not stand out as much as might be expected. With the navy kept busy elsewhere and little concrete information to justify a major anti-piracy operation Theev has managed to stay in business despite the fact that the Imperial Navy lives next door. How long this situation can last remains to be seen.



VUME

As far as Imperial authorities go, the Vume system is the most important of the three within the Theev Cluster. It is also the least anti-Imperial in outlook, but it is still not a welcoming place. Most of the traffic through the orbital starport is jump-3 ships out of Realgar or Salif, with some jump-2 traffic on an out-and-back basis from other worlds along the Imperial border. Internal trade within the cluster is fairly low in volume, though it was much higher before the rise in piracy of recent years.

THE VUME SYSTEM

Vume's primary is a K7 II; an orange giant star. Its size and high luminosity make it a useful astronavigational reference point. It is prone to the occasional large solar flare, which throws out a great deal of radiation and other dangerous emissions. The star has expanded over the past few million years and is now many times its original size. It is likely the star destroyed its inner planets, making it impossible to tell whether there ever was a habitable world in the system. It is possible that some of the current terrestrial (rocky) planets in the system were once gas giants whose atmospheres were burned away leaving only a rocky core. Alternatively, some planets might have once been gas giant moons. Displaced by the changing gravitational balance in the system these moons became worlds, albeit uninviting ones.

The system contains ten terrestrial planets, none of them life-bearing, three gas giants and two planetoid belts. Of these, only Vume is known to be inhabited – and then only after a fashion. The system's rockball worlds and planetoids are sometimes picked over by prospectors and miners, but for the most part the only activity in the system is traffic in and out of the highport.

Vume is considered to be a likely location for one or more pirate bases. Its many remote planetoids and rockball worlds could hide quite large settlements which would be unlikely to ever be discovered without a detailed and systematic search. Imperial patrol and scout vessels sometimes scan a few planetoids or rockballs for signs of habitation, but there are no records of anything ever being found, and resources are insufficient for a proper survey.

VUME HIGHPORT

Vume Highport, like many others in the region, was built by the General Development Corporation (GeDeCo) to facilitate trade throughout the region. It was then put up for sale but no buyer emerged, so today it is run as a wholly-owned subsidiary of GeDeCo. A secondary goal of the port was to act as a base for exploration of an alien complex found on Vume, which the port orbits.

The port is entirely orbital, inasmuch as the 'groundside' facility on Vume is not owned by GeDeCo and is not considered to be part of the port. As to the planetside population, they have no share or stake in the orbital port and generally little involvement with it.

The highport is quite large, if a little run-down, and geared towards supporting large, long-range, high-jump vessels rather than smaller local ships. The port has extensive recreation facilities and makes a considerable amount of money from the crews and passengers of Imperial ships passing through. There is little trade or commerce done at the port; most of its revenue comes from services provided directly to passing vessels.

The general anti-Imperial attitude of the region is not as obvious at Vume Highport. There is at least a veneer of civility, which is necessary to getting Imperials to part with their Credits. However, the passing ships are seen as cash-cows and their crews as targets to be milked of every Credit possible rather than as possible friends or allies. This creates an atmosphere that initially can seem almost excessively (and artificially) friendly, after which it becomes apparent that the whole thing is a façade. The pretence is generally kept up even when the recipient makes it obvious they know they are being conned, making a visit to Vume a sometimes bizarre and often very irritating experience.

When the highport was built, it was provided with a fairly potent local defence squadron which has become inoperable over the years. Funds to repair and refit ships were never available, but the rise of piracy in the region made it necessary to create a replacement of some sort. The result was a rather ramshackle defensive setup, operated by trigger-happy mercenaries who have been fired upon by apparently innocuous ships far too often to take any chances whatsoever.

The docking bays that once held neat rows of system defence boats and fighters are now mostly empty. Those that are filled typically contain very old craft, kept flying by cannibalising others of their class, or are home to converted vessels. Many of these are broken-down old free traders and small merchant ships, their jump drives sold off for whatever spare-parts value remained. These craft at least have plenty of room for boarding parties.

A rag-tag collection of armed small craft is also employed, backed up by the highport's armament. This consists mostly of missile racks and beam turrets taken from scrapped warships, but does include a couple of particle accelerator bays salvaged from an old Imperial destroyer. These are widely acknowledged as the reason no pirate fleet has ever successfully plundered or taken over Vume station – a couple have tried – and are considered the heart of the port's defences.

In addition to attacks on shipping using Vume's highport, ambitious pirate bands have occasionally tried to take over the station itself. The approach that worked best was a 'Trojan horse' attack from ships docked at the port, which resulted in extensive gunfire within the port facility. Those that tried to simply shoot their way in fared less well. These incidents, along with the generally high level of piracy and lawlessness in the area, have resulted in a steady drain on the mercenaries protecting the port and thus contributed to an in-your-face, deal-with-it-or-get-shot attitude on the part of the patrols outside the port and its security personnel within.

VUME

B100477-C NI VA AN

Vume is a very small rockball planet, with no atmosphere and no water; in fact, it has little of anything except rock, and not a huge amount of that. It is the mainworld of the system by virtue of the fact that it is the only body known to be inhabited, and because the highport was built in orbit above it.

Vume was chosen as the orbital highport location rather than one of the other rockballs and moons in the system for two reasons. One is that it orbits quite far out from the system's primary, making solar flare activity and radiation less of a problem. It is quite unusual for a mainworld to be located in the outsystem, but Vume is not a typical star system. Its true inner system was swallowed up long ago by the expanding star, leaving only a collection of scorched rockballs as the new 'inner system'. These are too inimical to be much use.

With the usual choices out of the question, the decision of where to locate the port could have been made on

an arbitrary basis. However, the discovery of alien ruins on one of the worlds in the system was the deciding factor – a port in orbit over the world of Vume would be a useful base for exploration of the ruins.

It is not known which species built what is now known as 'Vume Station'. The location is officially listed as an Ancients site, but whether these are the same Ancients who built other structures and eradicated themselves a few hundred thousand years ago is an open question. Since the site is named Vume Station, some new arrivals in the system expect the port itself to be an Ancients site, which can lead to a certain amount of misunderstanding and additional opportunities to fleece Travellers.

The 'station' is in fact on and partially under the planetary surface. It is known as Vume Station simply because early researchers assumed it was some kind of scientific outpost or way station. Its extent was not at that time known.

There is some evidence that Vume once had a different orbit. Whether its current path is the result of natural rearrangement caused by the expanding star or some deliberate means is a matter for speculation. What is known is that the structure known as Vume Station was built long after the star entered its bright-giant phase, and by some unknown alien race.

A fairly large population moved into Vume Station when it was discovered, some to stake a territorial claim, others simply to study it. These people eventually became the system's only 'indigenous' population, and are now incapable of living anywhere else. This is due to a bacterial infection that radically altered their brain chemistry as well as some metabolic functions. The result is that there are now four groups, totalling about ten thousand people, living in different parts of the station. Each was affected in different ways.

The four groups' thought processes were so radically altered by the infection that they cannot comprehend the words or actions of any other group – nor outsiders in most cases – even though they speak more or less the same language. The same words or deeds are supported by and interpreted in the light of completely different thought processes that cause members of other groups to simply not understand them. Violence between groups is uncommon, since the station is very large and they have occupied widely separated parts of it, but it has happened. Outsiders have also been attacked, sometimes after long periods of peaceful interaction.

Large segments of the station are derelict, and these are for the most part airless and dead. However, there are pockets that can still support life, powered by ancient

machinery that keeps functioning by unknown means. Both living and dead sections could be sources of great wealth to those capable of exploiting them. Something as simple as salvaging and scrapping components from the station could be lucrative, and finding working alien devices would set a band of Travellers up for life.

However, there is always the danger of infection either whilst working in the station or when handling items removed from it. Illicit salvage operations have occasionally led to disease outbreaks – unlicensed scrapper crews are not known for their attention to decontamination regulations – and salvage from Vume Station is now treated with suspicion. That does not prevent expeditions from penetrating deep into the underground parts of the city from time to time.

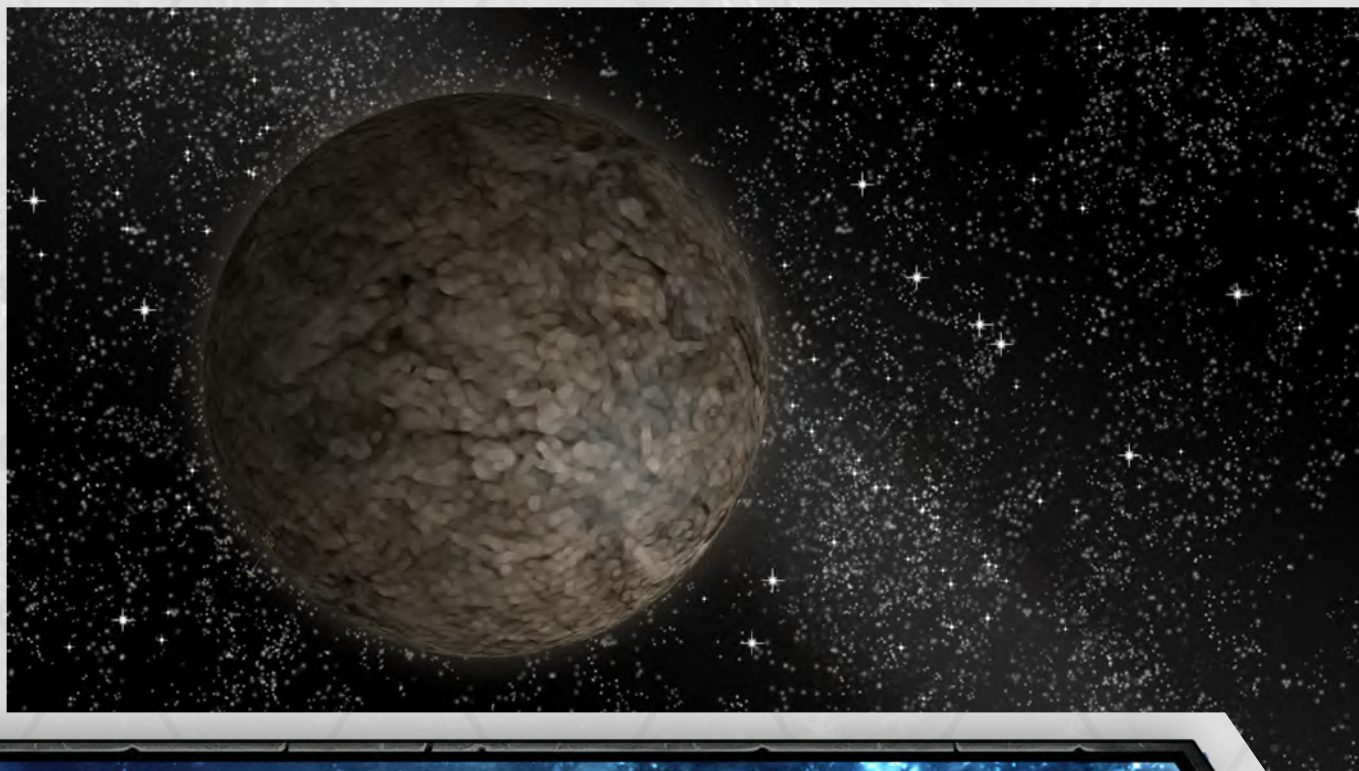
Some of these expeditions return with wild tales of habitable areas with animals, plants and even people in them, or vast hauls of valuables. Cynics have observed that if expeditions really did find something they would hardly advertise the fact. It is also widely known that most expeditions do not return from Vume Station. Early reports from some parties entering the station have included accounts of finding the remains of previous explorers, with no real clues to how they died. Often the expedition goes silent soon afterward.

If there is any truth to these stories at all, then the question arises of why the 'indigenous' population does not seem to be harmed. If the inhabitants of Vume Station know the answer they are completely incapable of explaining it, and perhaps even of comprehending the question.

PIRACY IN THE VUME SYSTEM

There is relatively little pirate activity in the Vume system, largely for lack of suitable targets. The jump-2 and jump-3 freighters that come in from Imperial space tend to be well armed and too big for a casual raid, though occasionally a pirate fleet will attempt to take one of these ships. That is discouraged, on the whole, by cooler heads among the pirate leaders since it will likely cause the Imperials to put more ships into the cluster. No pirate lord wants an Imperial cruiser sitting overhead, even if he is not its target. Smaller bands, hoping to make a name for themselves or who do not have an eye to the long-term prospects, might make a play for one of these big ships or even the port itself.

Salvaging Vume Station is a possibility for some pirate and adventurer bands. The place has a bad reputation though; few have ever come out with enough to justify their losses. The general bad fortune of expeditions into the station, and disease outbreaks that have followed some of the successful operations, have given rise to tales of 'cursed treasure' in Vume Station. A certain mystique now surrounds the place, spawning ever more distorted tales of misadventure and disaster. Half the pirates in the cluster know someone who met an untimely end in 'that accused place', and the other half know who it really happened to. How many of these tales still contain any truth is open to speculation.



THEEV

Theev lies at the centre of the cluster, and could provide a jump-3 link from the Imperial side of the subsector to the Sindalian Main in the same manner as Vume. In fact it did so, long before the Third Imperium existed. In those days Noricum was Sindal and the heart of an empire, so Theev was an important link to worlds on the far side of the jump-3 gap. Currently, since the only ports on the Sindalian side of the gap are Salif (which can just as easily be reached from Vume) and Noricum (which is mostly wasteland), Theev is of lesser importance as a jump-3 link.

When the General Development Corporation began building new starports to open up trade in the region, Theev was chosen as a primary site. Investment was considerable, and for a time Theev even boasted a significant economy. It was expected that large numbers of workers would stay and become colonists once the starport was built, and inducements were offered to those willing to settle. Some did, but there was insufficient uptake to justify the investments made by GeDeCo and the population never reached the level required to create a viable industrial base.

Thus Theev became a backwater, bypassed by long-range trade ships and capable of only small-scale industrial activity. Like many such places, it went through some hard times and entered a downward spiral that was not halted by a second wave of investment. The planetary community is known to be lawless and dangerous, whilst the port is much safer but not really worth visiting for most trade ships.

THE THEEV SYSTEM

Theev's primary is a G0 V (yellow main-sequence) star, which is orbited by four gas giants and three planetoid belts as well as nine terrestrial (rocky) planets. None of the latter are known to be permanently inhabited, though small mining settlements have at times been set up on a temporary basis.

In the days of the Sindalian Empire, the Theev system was an important transit point and, inevitably, acquired a population. This was mostly concentrated on the mainworld, close to the centre of economic activity, but numerous communities and even small cities grew up all across the system. These were abandoned long ago, and for the most part are now empty, eerie shells picked clean by scavengers. There are rumours that some of these cities still contain wealth waiting to be found, or that pirates, smugglers and Aslan ihatei use them as bases.

Every now and then a hopeful ship crew will go looking for one of these lost treasure troves, and even more rarely an Imperial warship will be spotted in orbit above one of the outsystem planets. These vessels are more than likely looking for ihatei or pirates, to both the amusement and consternation of the pirate lords on Theev. Other than this, there is very little in-system trade, and only a few ships use the highport en route from Palindrome to Vume.



THE SKULL

The highport was constructed by tunnelling into a moonlet, which was given a minimal manoeuvre capability and accelerated into a geostationary orbit. This can only be maintained by occasional course corrections, requiring the drive system be maintained in working order. Without it, The Skull (as this moonlet is known due to its appearance from a distance) would gradually fall into a more stable orbit whose eccentricity might make the port less useful. There is a possibility that the port-orbit might decay to the point where it plunged into Theev's surface, but this is unlikely on any time frame measured in centuries.

The highport is known by the same nickname as the planetoid it occupies, requiring context to indicate which is being spoken of. Large sections of the tunnel complex are disused, at least officially. Although sealed off by pressure doors and forgotten about these areas are still (mostly) airtight and could be used as storage or even secret living spaces. It is more than likely some are, though any habitation on more than a very small scale would require a self-contained life support system, otherwise the drain on the port's main system would be obvious and the existence of any secret enclave would be revealed. Life support equipment and power systems are not hard to obtain of course, especially for those willing to take them from starships in acts of piracy.

The functional part of the highport is clean and businesslike, though obviously not new. There is a distinct anti-Imperial slant to the local culture, but not as pronounced as in some other areas. The port's workers and businesses will happily take Imperial Credits and even apply a veneer of civility to the transaction. There is little to buy or sell much of the time, however, though a number of mercenary forces have offices at the highport and will facilitate trade in small arms and support weapons as a sideline to their business of actually using them.

The port's shipyard can construct vessels up to 2000 tons or so, but typically specialises in overhauls and repairs of small merchant craft. This is partially a legitimate business – ironically perhaps, many merchant captains will come to Theev to get their ships upgraded or repaired after a pirate attack has damaged them – and partially a front for converting merchant ships to less legal operations. The port can build custom ships, which may be overt corsairs or, more commonly, disguised pirates or smugglers that closely resemble innocent merchants.

The port also does modest business in spares and components, but takes care to only supply obviously stolen parts to those who will not object to having them. The last thing Theev needs is a law-abiding merchant

captain telling the authorities where he got his bargain-basement upgraded weapons fit in return for not going to jail.

Law enforcement at The Skull seems very light-touch, at least for those careful not to cause offence. There are few security officers to be seen, and those that are around seem to serve mainly as a point-of-contact or a reminder to obey the rules of civilised behaviour. Often they will do no more than approach people who are being rowdy or acting suspiciously and point out their conduct is verging upon the unacceptable.

Those that do not take the hint are dealt with quietly and efficiently by the Widows, black-robed individuals who typically hand out only one sentence – death. Occasionally a Widow may issue a final warning, but more often an all-or-nothing approach is taken. Offenders are simply killed and dumped out of an airlock or into a recycling station. There is a 'sentences handed out' update section in the port's datanet, but often the perpetrator/victim is not identified. The attitude of the port operators is that those who obey the rules are perfectly safe and those too ignorant to figure out what happens if you do not – or too wilfully stupid to keep their noses clean – will get what is coming to them. The end result is a quiet and orderly port, and that is all that matters.

The surface of The Skull has many bunkers housing missile bays and turrets. These are coordinated from heavily fortified control rooms, giving port operators the ability to blast anything that enters local space or tries to proceed to the downport without permission. What happens beyond the immediate environs of the highport is of no concern to the port operators, but they vigorously enforce their control of local space and seem to have missiles to spare.

Some ships are permitted to go directly to the downport, but these must have clearance codes or will be fired upon – often without any attempt to contact them. There is no such thing as a 'warning shot' from The Skull either; ships arriving in the vicinity are instructed that they must land at the highport or present a valid clearance code for the downport. As far as the missile gunners are concerned, anyone who does not take the hint is fair game.

Clearance to visit the downport is rarely given to ships belonging to outsiders, and individuals who request it will find themselves stalled for some time. It is possible to get clearance to go planetside, especially if the new arrival knows the system or has contacts, but outsiders are discouraged from visiting the planetary surface by a combination of bureaucracy and offers to sort out whatever business they have by proxy.

THEEV

Theev is a dry world with a very thin atmosphere, not unlike Mars in the Sol system. It has water, but is present as ice or exists as muddy slurry in low-lying areas rather than seas and oceans. Away from the giant mudpits that pass for bodies of water on Theev the landscape is arid, rocky and dusty.

Dust is a major factor on Theev. It permeates everything and makes overland travel treacherous – though this would only be a problem if there was anywhere to actually go. Soft areas of dust look much the same as solid ground, making landings dangerous, and where dust meets water the result is particularly unappetising.

With little life above the single-cellular level, Theev's biosphere is virtually non-existent. There has never been indigenous life on this harsh world, though people lived there in quite large numbers during the reign of the Sindalian Empire. Some of the cities were bombed, some succumbed to plagues or other disasters, and starvation claimed the lives of most survivors. Those that could get away left Theev and settled elsewhere.

Traces of those cities can still be seen here and there, though most have been buried under centuries of dust. With little wind or other natural causes of wear, tall buildings that were not destroyed by artificial means stood for centuries before finally collapsing. Eventually gravity brings them all down, other than a few stumps that look little different to dust-covered rock outcrops found everywhere.

All of the known cities have been scavenged of course, though shells of lower floors might offer some shelter. There are rumours of hidden settlements on Theev, as well as near-intact cities that might contain treasures of the former empire. Few take such stories seriously; similar tales are told everywhere and almost never have any truth to them.

The only settlement on Theev is Blacksand, the world's capital and downport. Blacksand is built in a maze of canyons, from which skyscrapers extend high into the dark sky. The upper levels are quite different in character from the Lower City, and are linked by sealed walkways. It is possible to land small craft atop some of the skyscrapers, and all have grav vehicle ports. Thus there is really no need for most visitors to enter the Lower City, and many would not want to.

Blacksand's downport is not a typical design, with landing field and terminal buildings. Instead it is dispersed, with many landing bays of various sizes linked by a maze of underground passages. Each bay is covered by clamshell doors that both conceal the craft within and keep out the worst of the world's dust. The commercial section of the port, where offworlders are usually directed, has a regular grav vehicle service up to the central skyscraper complex. Other parts of the port are privately owned and off-limits to anyone without clearance.

Most visitors ascend to the skyscrapers as soon as possible, since this is where the world's business is conducted. At least, business that appears legitimate is conducted there; what goes on in the Lower City is a different matter. New arrivals are briefed (politely threatened is perhaps a better phrase) by one or more black-robed Widows before entering the Upper City. They are told in no uncertain terms that whilst Theev has no formal body of law the Upper City is subject to what is called the Law of the Lords.

The Widows of Blacksand

The Widows are the law enforcement of this lawless world. No-one is sure how many there are – black-robed, hooded figures can be seen on every street, but are all of them genetically augmented assassins? The Widows are all linked by cybernetic implants; it is debatable whether they are individuals or a single entity that occupies multiple bodies. They enforce the Laws with perfect lethality.



The Law of the Lords comes down to a complete intolerance of anything that disturbs the peace of the Upper City. Violence and thievery might get perpetrators dumped in the Lower City, if they are lucky, but is commonly punished by 'summary disappearance'. The whole of the Upper City is subject to the Law of the Lords, and is a very tranquil place. Parts of the Lower City, marked by red flags, are also subject to this law. Elsewhere, the Law of the Streets prevails. This is a single, simple rule – possession of a weapon that can breach the environmental seals on the settlements is punishable by death. Anything else is completely unregulated.

THE UPPER CITY

The Upper City resembles the business district of any high-class starport. It is clean, well-run and comfortable without being opulent or tacky. Well-dressed businesspeople meet and make deals with local and offworld concerns, and everything has a strong feeling of respectability and civilisation. Some of the business being conducted is indeed legitimate, but many of these meetings concern piracy, murder and various forms of large-scale violence. Nothing is said openly in the Upper City; euphemisms and polite fictions are used to maintain the illusion of legitimacy even when arranging genocide.

Most visitors from the Imperium gravitate to the Grand Hotel, which occupies one of the largest buildings on Theev. It has its own shuttle landing area on the roof and sufficient entertainment facilities that guests do not really need to go anywhere else. The Grand Hotel has a special arrangement with the Imperial Navy; on the rare occasions a naval ship passes through the system the hotel provides a 'shoreside liberty package' to crewmembers at a very steep discount. This is presented as a courtesy to the navy, which keeps the spacelanes safe and thus enables places like the Grand Hotel to make a profit, but it also helps the Lords of Theev impede any investigation that might be conducted. Hotel staff are adept at making sure crews remain distracted and unable to obtain much in the way of useful information.

There are numerous other hotels in the Upper City of course, each with their own character. Some are also the dwellings of the Lords of Theev, who typically occupy a few floors as their own private preserve and run the rest of the building as a profit-making concern. In some cases, a hotel forms part of a skyscraper, with the remainder either made up of living quarters for workers or offices for businesses. Living standards are good in these communities, and those who cannot afford the high prices – or who offend their overlords – risk being evicted.

Blacksand Widow

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Human		Female		16 – 4 terms (vatgrown)	
TRAITS		-			
STR	10	INT	7	SKILLS	
DEX	14	EDU	10	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Deception 1, Diplomat 0, Electronics (comms) 1, Flyer (grav) 2, Gun Combat (energy) 3, Gun Combat (slug) 3, Investigate 2, Medic 1, Melee (unarmed) 3, Persuade 1, Steward 1, Streetwise 2	
END	12	SOC	9		
EQUIPMENT		Armour: Lightweight Polycarapace Armour (+12), Subdermal Armour (+3) Weapons: Gauss Rifle (4D), Laser Pistol (3D+3), Stunner (3D) Equipment: Enhanced Vision, Neural Comm (TL14)			

Playing the Widows:

- Never say a word; just smile like light glinting off a razor-edged knife.



There is no social safety net in the Upper City; those who cannot afford to live there have only one option other than trying to survive within the Lower City. Asharden Camp is a sort of refugee village on the edge of the Upper City. It is filled with hopefuls who want to earn a place in the Upper City – or find their way back in – as well as those struggling to avoid being consigned to the Lower City. Not surprisingly perhaps, it is a good recruiting ground for desperate people.

There are plenty of desperadoes in the Lower City as well, of course, but those in the camp may still have something to lose, which can make them easier to control. They may also have skills not found in the rough-and-ready Lower City, as well as the ability to fit into the polite and (relatively) tranquil society of the Upper City. Assassins, spies and the like are often recruited here, on the promise of a better life in the skyscrapers above.

Within the Upper City there are various districts and zones. The most notorious of these is the Cliff District, where most of the mercenaries and arms traders are headquartered. It is commonly said in Blacksand that if you want to hire a bunch of thugs you can do so in any Lower City bar, but if you want trained mercenaries the Cliff District is the place to go. There are some highly skilled and reputable mercenaries for hire in the Cliff District, as well as various war criminals and professional psychopaths. The businesses located there will also source or manufacture weapons of various sorts, including weapons of mass destruction.

The Industrial Zone is an area around the base of several skyscrapers, where most of the world's heavy industry is located. It is close to the downport, and also has offices for various manufacturing companies. Among these is Kallos Shipyards, which builds craft at the orbital highport but sells some components from its yards on-planet. Kallos serves as a clearing house for pirated ship components. As a rule, legitimate or hard-to-trace components are sold at the highport to anyone who comes through, whilst illegal parts (such as warship systems or parts of a ship that could be traced to pirate activity) are brought to the surface of Theev where investigation is far less likely.

THE LOWER CITY

The Lower City is a tangled mess of alleys, corridors and even tunnels built in the canyon bottoms. Some areas are underground, mainly where a passage has been forced between one canyon and another, and later some additional chambers have been added. Other parts are made from disabled space vessels. Most of the Lower City is essentially a ramshackle town

with an environmentally sealed roof over it. The city is subdivided sufficiently that a breach will not kill everyone, but breaching the outer skin – or having a weapon that can do so – is punishable by death. Indeed, this is the only external law imposed on the Lower City. Apart from this, the place is officially lawless.

However, no society can survive without some sort of rules or code of conduct, and in the Lower City there are numerous groups willing to impose their own code upon others. Sections of the city are run by gangs or warlords, others have what amounts to a neighbourhood watch. All areas are very rough-and-ready. Nobody cares if you steal from someone they do not know, or if you kill someone in the next street. However, everyone reacts to threats or actions that harm them directly, and the usual reaction is violence. Getting roughed up is considered a lucky escape in the Lower City; many people consider it simpler just to kill those that offend them.

Essentially, law and order in the Lower City, such as it is, comes down to 'take care of yourself; nobody will help you unless it's in their interests. If you become a threat to someone or a group, they will deal with you if they can.' In some areas of the city it is considered to be in the interests of local businesses or residents to enforce some kind of law, and in these areas the city is not so much safer for innocents as more dangerous for wrongdoers. Motivations for these enforcers are almost entirely self-centred – it is easier to conduct business if there are no robberies and gunfights going on outside.

Sometimes a building will be 'red flagged', which indicates that it is subject to the Law of the Lords. This is enforced by the Widows. Elsewhere the Widows will eliminate anyone who threatens the environmental integrity of the city, and occasionally others for reasons they do not discuss, but do not otherwise intervene in the affairs of the Lower City.

A large section on the fringe of the city is given over to wrecked starships and spacecraft. Known as the Scrapheap, this area is home to a small population who live in the wrecks and dismantle them for sale to anyone willing to pay for potentially stolen or damaged components. There are other purveyors of starship components elsewhere in the city, but the Scrapheap is a good place to find rock-bottom prices... for a reason.

The House Without Questions is another curiosity of the Lower City. It takes people in and looks after them, no questions asked, providing they do not make themselves unwelcome. Its denizens will also quote a price for any task requested of them, providing it is physically possible. If the fee is paid, the task will be accomplished. It is not wise to ask how, and in any case no answers will be furnished.

The majority of the Lower City consists of dingy residences, workshops, bars and marketplaces where anything and everything is for sale. High-end mercenaries and professionals in various fields tend to maintain offices in the Upper City, but there are many who would prefer to maintain a low profile and work out of some bar or noodle shop in a back alley. There are also numerous street gangs, most of which are little more than small-time thugs who will prey upon those they think are weaker than themselves. Some style themselves 'blood gangs'; others have different names. All are willing to kill and injure people for their property and even their organs.

For those that like blood sports, the Blood Pit is an arena where all manner of fights are staged. Gangs, individual combats, battles against or between exotic animals...all of it can be found in the Blood Pit, but then the same could be said for the streets of the Lower City.

THE PIRATE LORDS

The most influential people in Blacksand are the Pirate Lords. Not all of them are pirates but all are connected in some way with piracy. These lords cannot truly be called the rulers of Blacksand, since that would imply they control it and they do not. Instead they preside over the chaos and violence, profiting from it whilst maintaining a safe physical and metaphorical distance. The Pirate Lords each have extensive territory in the Upper City and The Skull, and many also have holdings offworld. Some, but not all, also have assets in the Lower City. These tend to be defended by well-armed cut-throats, and the vengeance of the Pirate Lords is sufficiently savage that most street gangs will not mess with them.

Most of the Pirate Lords maintain a veneer of civilisation, surrounding themselves with uniformed guards and servants and dwelling in high-class accommodation. Others style themselves as warriors, and live in what looks more like mercenary barracks, or as legitimate merchant spacers. The identities of the Pirate Lords are not all known; some are very mysterious whilst others use a lower-ranking follower as a 'blind' and manipulate events from behind the scenes. Assassination and outright violence are not uncommon between the Pirate Lords, making deception and anonymity a useful survival tool.

The lords have a modest industrial base available, but even combined it is not enough to make Theev a major economic player. The world's main exports

are violence and robbery, and most of its imports are stolen. However, the Pirate Lords are aware they need a legitimate front to operate. Many have investments in businesses such as merchant lines, or buy and sell interstellar cargoes in the manner of a broker. The ability to target pirates against ships carrying the cargoes of rivals, or manipulate a market by making a particular item scarce, has enabled several of the Pirate Lords to become very wealthy through apparently legitimate means.

Not all pirates operating out of Theev are closely associated with the Lords; indeed, most are not. Most of the lords command several vessels (at least) and have other semi-independents who do their bidding. The remainder are independents who – for the most part – know better than to cross the Pirate Lords. Large fleets can be assembled, but highly organised operations requiring more than a few ships are difficult to put together. One rule that the Pirate Lords do enforce is that raiding cruises and plundering expeditions must be carried out well away from Theev itself, with only occasional exceptions. Minor independents are often intimidated into making attacks in dangerous systems (i.e. places where the Imperial Navy is likely to respond) in order to keep the navy looking elsewhere.

This is one of the ways that the Pirate Lords protect themselves against intervention; they make sure other systems get highlighted as hotspots or that attacks are sufficiently common to draw in Imperial vessels and tie down part of an already limited pool of assets. The other way Theev manages to remain in business is through GeDeCo involvement. The corporation's influence is considerable, and could be used to draw or even direct Imperial attention elsewhere.

It is not entirely clear what the megacorporation gains from its association with Theev, but there are several possibilities. Theev gives GeDeCo the ability to harm its rivals by using piracy against them, or influence markets by cutting off supplies of certain goods. Access to illegal military and naval hardware is another possibility. More optimistic observers might conclude that Theev is being used to balance out the powerplays between the Imperium and Aslan Hierate. This is a true possibility, as is the suggestion that perhaps GeDeCo wants to bring about the return of the Sindalian Empire. However, the most likely – if prosaic – explanation is that Theev is an asset that can be used to increase GeDeCo's profits or protect its interests at need. In other words, Theev is a tool that can be used by GeDeCo in any way it pleases.

C H A P T E R - E L E V E N

PALINDROME

Astrographically, Palindrome occupies a similar position to Vume, in that it could provide a jump-3 link across the centre of the subsector. However, due to social and economic factors it is less important. Whilst it can be reached from several worlds on the 'Imperial' side of the subsector, Palindrome is within jump-3 of only Borite and Noricum, both of which have virtually no economy and only the most basic of port facilities. Anywhere you can get to via Palindrome – that is worth visiting at all – can be accessed by some other route.

Not surprisingly, Palindrome is a backwater. It is occasionally used as a transit point for jump-4 Imperial warships transiting across to the Sindalian Main, but these do not bring in much revenue for the port. Indeed, most of the system's modest income is derived from jump-3 freighters travelling from the Imperium to sell goods, which then enter the small economy of the local cluster or hauled across to the Sindalian Main by the few ships capable of making such a long transit.

Among these vessels are a small flotilla of jump-2 capable traders whose fuel tankage has been doubled at the expense of cargo space. These vessels plod laboriously back and forth to Palindrome, usually from Thebus but sometimes via Marduk. Although the trip takes two weeks and requires a slightly hazardous deep-space jump, it is usually worth it since Imperial goods sell well in the lower-tech markets of the Sindalian Main.

THE PALINDROME SYSTEM

Palindrome's primary is a K7 V, an orange main sequence star. Its rather sparse planetary system includes two gas giants and three rocky planets including Palindrome itself. A distant M1 V (red main sequence) star also orbits the system's primary but is not known to have any planetary bodies of its own.

The system was inhabited in the heyday of the Sindalian Empire, but was either abandoned or the population died out after the fall of the empire. Although the most habitable of the three mainworlds in the cluster, Palindrome was too remote to survive for long without a major interstellar economy to support it. Had the world possessed a slightly thicker atmosphere and featured

more life on its surface, civilisation might have survived at some level in the long years between the collapse of the Sindalian Empire and the coming of the Third Imperium. It was not to be, however, and now all that remains of the original habitation is long-buried rubble and the occasional blast crater.

HIGHPORT

Palindrome's highport is one of the 'central three' built by GeDeCo to facilitate and foster trade between Imperial worlds in Tobia subsector and the Sindalian Main. It was the least successful of these ventures, and today is in a terrible state.

Although officially listed as a Class B port, and still claiming to have the facilities of one, Palindrome Highport is mostly abandoned. Cannibalisation and salvage operations have kept the core of the orbital station operational, at the cost of turning the rest into little more than a framework of girders. An ambitious project is currently underway to remove some of these reduced-to-a-framework sections and reposition them where they are less of a hazard to incoming ships. Given the limited resources available, this is a long job and will probably result in sections of the station simply being cut away and 'bumped' so that they drift off into deep space.

The operable part of the port is run-down and very limited in the services it can offer, but the docks and cargo-handling facilities are still functional. These bring in the only income the port receives and, as such, are vital to its survival. Jump-3 freighters from the Imperium unload bulk cargoes here, which are broken up into smaller lots to be auctioned among local ship operators. Most of these goods find their way across to the Sindalian Main by way of the two-jump-2 flotilla; the remainder is picked up by local ships and distributed throughout the Theev Cluster.

The port is defended mostly by its reputation and lack of suitable targets. Since the port is associated with a former pirate who still has connections, it is considered a bad place to raid even among those ignorant as to why those who dare to make an attack tend to meet an unpleasant fate sooner or later.

Ships that use the port tend to be well-armed. The jump-2 traders who make the run from Thebus are particularly well aware of what they may run into, and tend to be prepared for it. Unfortunately perhaps, these vessels are used as a cover for similar ships making the same transit in and out of the Theev Cluster, but for piratical purposes. These captains can cite reasons why their ships are heavily armed and carry additional security crewmembers, though they are truly the problem rather than the solution.

The jump-3 ships coming in from the Imperium are also well defended. The region is notorious for piracy, and few captains are unaware of the dangers. Occasionally these vessels or the jump-2 flotilla will end up protecting the highport or other shipping against attack. It is generally assumed that the presence of well-armed merchant craft has proved an effective deterrent to piracy, and this is at least partially true.

There is an anti-Imperial attitude at the port, and several obvious reasons for it. The port was built to facilitate Imperial trade that never came, and is now struggling to avoid total collapse. There are also many tales (some of them true) of Imperial injustices and abandonment of the people in the region to Aslan encroachment. The atmosphere is rude-barely-tolerant; Imperial merchants and agencies alike have failed to obtain much of a toehold.

This attitude is in part genuine, but also fed by deliberate propaganda from the Pirate Lords of Theev. Imperials visiting Palindrome's highport will encounter open hostility (but not violence) and locals who act like they are doing visitors a favour by taking their Credits. This situation suits the ends of Theev, and is unlikely to change.



PALINDROME

Palindrome is not a very inviting world, with a very thin atmosphere and little surface water. That said, it is the most habitable of the cluster's mainworlds. Palindrome has a biosphere of sorts, though it is neither rich nor diverse. Most life is plant-based, typically low creeping plants whose thick undergrowth shelters the world's few primitive land animals.

The one settlement on the surface of Palindrome is Astrogo, personal fief of the self-styled Lady Yemar, a former pirate who was badly injured in a raid. Exposure to a bioweapon left her with severe medical needs which at present can only be met on Theev. She settled on Palindrome, investing a fortune gained in a lifetime of raiding, and has managed to attract about five thousand followers, employees and general hangers-on.

Astrogo is a domed, climate-controlled environment whose inhabitants rarely need to go outside. Those who do are typically either downport workers or farmers. The latter mostly control robotic agricultural equipment from comfortable workstations but do sometimes have to go outside. Many consider this a great imposition and grumble about it to anyone who will listen.

This attitude is not uncommon on Palindrome. The world has a solid but small TL12 base and a high standard of living for its inhabitants. Although there is insufficient industry to manufacture much in the way of exports, life is generally comfortable and safe. Most residents are insulated from the outside universe and quite happy that way. Some inhabitants have a wider and less contented world-view. Many of these are Yemar's former pirate associates who make up the world's ruling elite, its police and military forces, and control most of its wealth.

A modest income is produced by trade through the highport; although Lady Yemar is smart enough not to sink money into the ramshackle port itself; instead she buys and sells shares in cargoes passing through, as do many of her supporters. This trade is typically virtual, with Astrogo residents purchasing part of a cargo and receiving an equivalent proportion of the sale price without ever taking physical possession of it. Most cargoes traded in this manner remain at the highport, and the traders never see them.

Although Astrogo has little industry, it does have a thriving weapons market. Palindrome is a long way to go for a custom handgun, but some individuals will visit just for the weapons fair. Others seek to purchase hard-to-get (i.e. illegal) electronic components such as missile guidance systems and military-grade shipboard sensors. Some of these items are produced in small volumes on-planet, others are obtained from a variety of sources.

Palindrome's on-planet marketplace also has a variety of 'speciality goods' for sale. These are sometimes the result of piracy, though much of what is on sale is actually legitimate. Those who do not know who to ask and where to look will find only legal items, some of questionable taste, for sale. However, pirate cargoes are often cleared through Astrogo; those with the right contacts can buy and sell there.

Palindrome's people are less openly anti-Imperial than those at the highport, largely because they are insulated from the anti-Imperial propaganda as well as everything else. There are numerous fugitives from Imperial justice living at Astrogo, and Yemar herself does not want intelligence agents or investigators gaining a foothold in her town. However, adventurers, traders, and Travellers who happen to be from the Imperium will encounter relatively little prejudice. The people of Astrogo dislike the Imperium as a distant, vague concept. Individuals who are not flashing a badge or wearing a uniform are taken on their own merits.

PIRACY

Palindrome is a dangerous place to make a pirate attack. The ships that come here tend to be well-armed and those who attack them often turn up destroyed as a warning to others. Piracy is quite low in the system, since there is little in-system or local trade to attack. There is another reason too; a lot of pirate vessels transit through Palindrome from Thebus, pretending to be part of the two-jump-2 flotilla. Others come to Astrogo for the markets. There is thus always a danger of attacking a pirate vessel which will be well-armed, ready for a fight, and vengeful if defeated.

THE HARRIER-CLASS

The *Harrier*-class commerce raider is the starship used in the *Pirates of Drinax* epic campaign. It is loaned to the Travellers by King Oleb of Drinax as both a means of transportation and instrument of policy. Although the ship is advanced, it is in poor condition due to age and long years of neglect. Repairing and perhaps upgrading the *Harrier* is likely to be an important goal in the campaign.

The following chapters present the *Harrier* in more detail, along with expanded rules for repairs and upgrades. Of course, there may be other examples of this class in service elsewhere, or lying derelict waiting to be salvaged. The class could even be put back into production by a suitably well-equipped shipyard.

Although very few vessels of this type have survived into modern times, ship-recognition databases used by most vessels in the Trojan Reach region will recognise the vessel's configuration and electromagnetic emissions unless they are disguised. This itself may arouse suspicion, since the class was built specifically as a commerce raider, but there are numerous plausible explanations for why a group of Travellers might have such a ship yet not be pirates.

A commerce raider, almost by definition, makes an excellent secure courier or well-protected light transport. The same vessel might be used by mercenary forces or as a naval ship. It should not be hard to come up with a believable excuse that will allay suspicion, at least to some extent. However, there will always be those who consider a design with piracy-potential to be worthy of suspicion so, whether or not the operators are staying within the law, they will need to be ready to explain themselves.

Like many Sindalian designs, the *Harrier*-class was designed with aesthetics in mind as much as effectiveness. The hull form is generally efficient, with a two-deck main section in the aft of the vessel and an elongated forward area containing mainly fuel-related and utility systems. The ship's long nose has been criticised as a design weakness; there are those who maintain that a hit on the ship's 'neck' could cause it to break apart. However, a hit powerful enough to do such damage to this ship would probably go through both sides of a more compact vessel, with a similarly devastating effect.

The ship's external appearance is both graceful and intimidating. This is a ship intended to look good during parade flybys or when parked on a landing area, and to make morale-boosting footage when filmed en masse, sweeping in for an attack. The down-swept wings are a deliberate affectation, though they do provide some benefits when operating in an atmosphere. Indeed, the ship's original documentation claims lift and control provided by the wings decreases time to climb out of an atmosphere and grants the ability to pursue a fleeting target or evade pursuit by making a 'hot' atmospheric entry. Whether or not this actually makes any difference is a question debated hotly by pilots and aficionados of the *Harrier*-class.

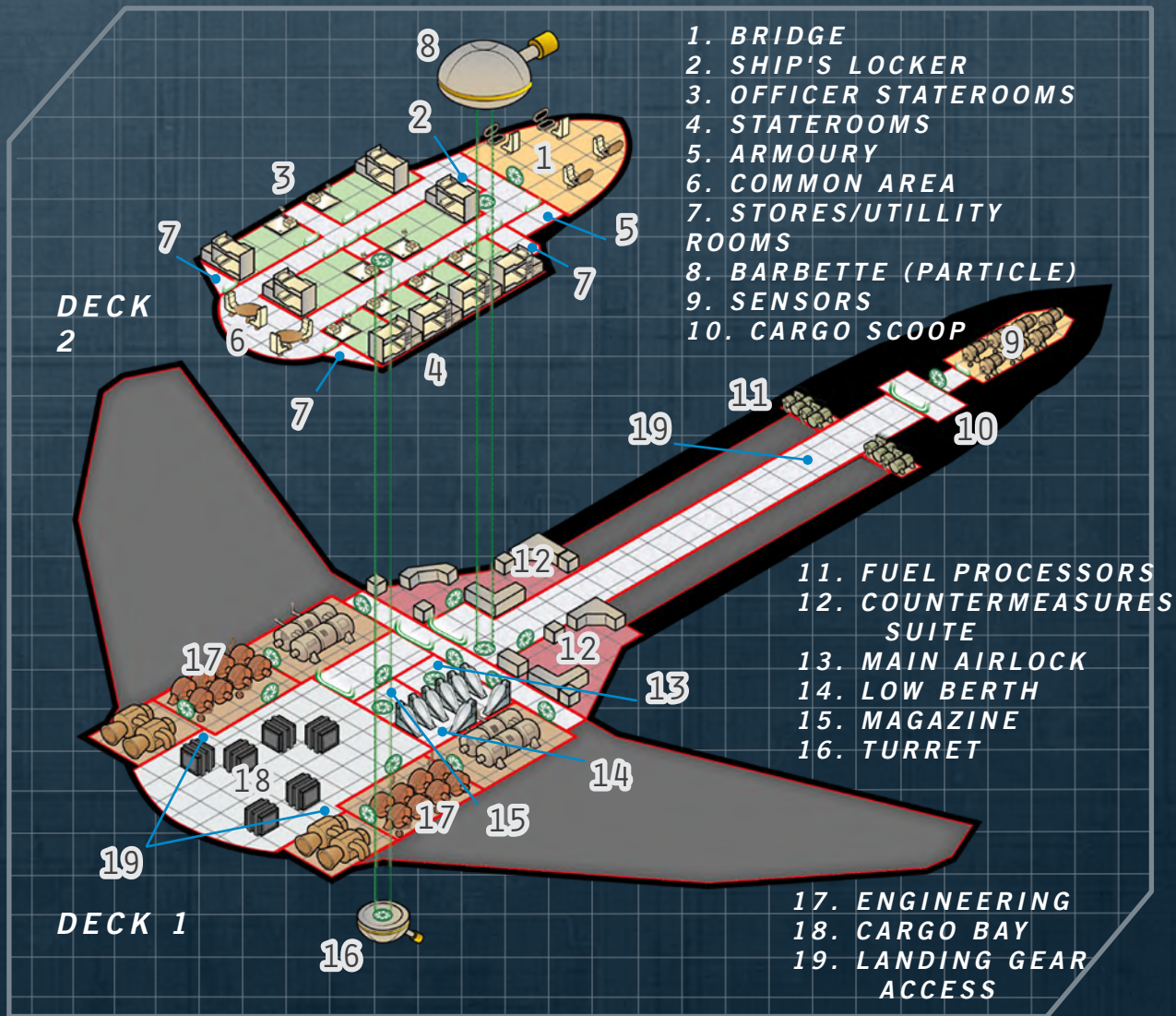
Both internally and externally, the *Harrier*-class is a work of art. Even functional surfaces are patterned and engraved; most internal areas are richly decorated with engravings of battle scenes, famous Sindalian leaders and inspirational quotes rendered in beautiful script. Wood panelling is used in most parts of the ship. It is backed with more mundane materials to give the ship structural strength, but wherever possible the bulkheads and walls are covered in richly patterned oak or similar woods. This is no mere veneer; panels are thick and solid.

All this panelling, along with the drapes that cover many walls and doorways, is a fire hazard and makes access for maintenance unnecessarily complex. As a result, some panels are chipped and gouged from being removed in a hurry many times over, with some missing entirely. Likewise, some of the original brass fittings and gilding that once covered many consoles may be missing or damaged. The overall effect is incongruous and a little sad; beautifully shaped brass fittings have been replaced by functional steel ones in many cases, creating an odd mix of styles that ruins the whole effect.

The faded opulence of the *Harrier*-class is an embarrassment in some compartments, but others retain their glory. Undamaged components and panelling have been moved, creating at least a few areas of the ship where it is possible to see how things were supposed to be back when the ship was new.

COMMERCE RAIDER

[HARRIER-CLASS]



- 1. BRIDGE
- 2. SHIP'S LOCKER
- 3. OFFICER STATEROOMS
- 4. STATEROOMS
- 5. ARMOURY
- 6. COMMON AREA
- 7. STORES/UTILITY ROOMS
- 8. BARBETTE (PARTICLE)
- 9. SENSORS
- 10. CARGO SCOOP

- 11. FUEL PROCESSORS
- 12. COUNTERMEASURES SUITE
- 13. MAIN AIRLOCK
- 14. LOW BERTH
- 15. MAGAZINE
- 16. TURRET

- 17. ENGINEERING
- 18. CARGO BAY
- 19. LANDING GEAR ACCESS

ISOMETRIC DECKPLAN KEY



BUNK



FRESHER



WORKSTATION



G-CHAIR



LOW BERTH



CRATE



HATCH



IRIS VALVE (WALL)



IRIS VALVE (FOOR/CEILING)



INTERNAL WALL



HULL



FUEL PROCESSOR



POWER PLANT



JUMP DRIVE



MANOEUVRE DRIVE



COMMERCE RAIDER

HARRIER-CLASS

TL15		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	200 tons (streamlined, reinforced)	-	18
	Superior Stealth	-	200
Armour	Bonded Superdense (Armour 4)	6	2.6
M-Drive	Thrust 6 (reduced tonnage x 3)	8.4	25.2
J-Drive	J-2 (early jump, size reduction, stealth jump)	13.5	30.375
Power Plant	Fusion (TL15), Power 260	13	26
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 4 weeks of operation	42	-
Bridge	Holographic Controls	10	1.25
Computer	Computer/20	-	5
Sensors	Advanced	5	5.3
	Military Countermeasures Suite	15	28
Weapons	Particle Barbette (accurate, high yield)	5	7.5
	Single Turret (missile rack)	1	0.95
Ammunition	Missile storage (12 missiles)	1	-
Systems	Armoury	1	0.3
	Cargo Scoop	2	0.5
	Fuel Processor (40/tons day)	2	0.1
	Holographic Hull	-	20
Staterooms	Standard x 8	32	4
	Low Berths x 8	4	0.4
Software	Evade/1	-	1
	Fire Control/2	-	4
	Jump Control/2	-	0.2
	Library	-	-
	Manoeuvre/0	-	-
Common Areas		8	0.8
Cargo		29.7	-

TOTAL: 343.5525



88

HULL POINTS

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT, ASTROGATOR, ENGINEER,
MAINTENANCE, GUNNER X 2, MEDIC,
MARINES X 3

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr28630/month

•••••

PURCHASE COST

MCr343.5525

POWER REQUIREMENTS

120

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

40

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

40

JUMP DRIVE

8

SENSORS

THE POWER PLANT AND CHOICES

The Harrier is an extremely capable ship – however, all this sophistication comes at a price and it is one the installed power plant sometimes has trouble paying. When performing complex operations, the Travellers may have to make some painful choices with regards which systems to route power to. The basic power requirements are listed above, but the Travellers should also be aware of the power consumption of the additional systems.

Missile Rack Turret	Power 1
Particle Barbette	Power 15
Holographic Hull	Power 100
Low Berths	Power 1

UPPER DECK

The upper deck is more richly decorated than the lower one, and retains some of its splendour with the help of panels and decorative items moved from below. The forward part of the deck is for commanding the ship; aft is accommodation.

The upper deck is built around a central corridor, with a heavy bulkhead separating the command section from accommodation area. A slightly lighter, but still substantial, transverse bulkhead segregates the bridge from the rest of the ship. The short corridor between these bulkheads gives access to the ship's office and locker, with an iris valve leading down to the lower deck.

The forward valve, into the bridge, is normally operated in 'secure' mode, requiring an officer's authorisation (biometric recognition at the door or remote operation elsewhere) to open. At need, any iris valve can be put into 'locked' mode, requiring the entry of an officer's personal code or request to the bridge for access rather than simply opening when the officer approaches.

The aft and lower-deck access valves are normally operated in 'crew' mode, and will automatically open when a recognised crewmember approaches. Like all other iris valves aboard the ship, they can be switched to 'access' mode in which case they open for anyone who approaches, but this is not a secure way of running a ship and is normally done only when the ship is in space with a trusted crew aboard. In the days of the Sindalian Empire, most ships spent all their time in locked mode, with access between sections restricted to certain personnel only.

1A. Upper Bridge

In many ways, the bridge sums up the rest of the vessel. It is the area that retains most of the spirit of the original design, largely due to brass fittings and gilding having been scavenged from elsewhere on the ship. Preference was given to items in immediate view, with those fittings that could not be replaced with properly decorative items moved to corners of the bridge or covered by discreet drapes that can get in the way of shipboard operations but serve to disguise the ugly, plain and functional nature of the secondary fittings.

The captain has a railed walkway, with brass stanchions to hold when he is caught mid-pace by a violent manoeuvre. He has a gloriously upholstered chair and dark-oak panelled console to work from, but mostly directs his ship by way of dramatic gestures and verbal orders from his high platform. Most observers agree that this bridge requires the commander to wear both cape and sword, and indeed there is a receptacle on the side of the command chair for such a weapon.

1B. Lower Bridge

The remainder of the command crew have stations around the lower part of the bridge, where their captain can observe and inspire them from above. The majority of shipboard functions are controlled from the bridge, with local controls present mainly as backup. The exception is the engineering section, which is normally manned by drive hands. The engineering officer, however, would normally be found on the bridge running his department from a gloriously engraved console rather than getting his hands dirty.



All consoles on the bridge, including that of the captain, can be configured to carry out any role – piloting, astrogation, sensors, engineering or gunnery. However, it is common to leave each console optimised for a given role rather than a particular operator, and for consoles to be known by their customary position. Pilot and navigation officer face forward, gunners face sideways behind them and the engineering console is at the aft port side of the bridge. The captain's console is normally configured for tactical readouts and general monitoring.

2. Ship's Locker

The *Harrier*-class was originally designed to carry spares of many decorative components, from drapes and panelling sections to stanchions and even cutlery. These items have long ago been used, but the neat compartments where they were stored remain. This gives the ship's locker a very odd layout which can make it difficult to stock anything that was not original equipment. Nevertheless, the locker has acquired a varied assortment of items over the years, including trophies of ships taken and installations plundered. The locker needs a good, hard sorting-out and the removal of unnecessary items, but in the interim the usual solution is to shove everything back and put frequently-needed items close to the entrance.

3. Officers' Staterooms

The four cabins dedicated to the command crew are unusually luxurious for a warship, with large double beds and fittings that would not be out of place on a luxury liner. Of course, these are badly worn, and have been moved around so the captain's cabin retains most of its original splendour and the most junior officer's cabin resembles an opulent junkyard.



4. Crew Staterooms

Crew quarters aboard the *Harrier*-class were never spartan. Although cramped and intended for double-occupancy, with bunks and more functional fittings than the officer's quarters, the crew staterooms were still far better than those most Free Traders consider fit for High Passage occupancy. At least, they were when they were constructed. The crew quarters were the first place items were removed from to maintain appearances in the rest of the ship, with the result that virtually everything has been replaced over the years, with items taken from wherever they were available.

Within any given cabin there may be a mix of styles and quality of components, with a few items seized from luxury liners and others bought cheap in some dingy backwater starport chandlery. Some bunks are comfortable, some luxurious and some downright unpleasant. The same goes for furnishings; one crewman might have a deliciously carved oak panelled footlocker whilst his bunkmate uses a beat-up cardboard box.

6A. Common Room

The common room retains its gorgeous round oak table and most of its carved chairs, though all fittings have seen better days. The services of a good furniture restorer might save most of these items, but currently the common room is tawdry rather than opulent. An ingenious device raises the central table and chairs into a ceiling storage space, enabling the common room to be used for other purposes. A similar device drops a protective cover over the wine rack and drinks cabinet, protecting it from damage when the ship is in action. The ship's silverware has its own well-protected cabinet, and is in almost perfect condition with just a couple of mismatched teaspoons to betray long years of service. Since the *Harrier*-class has no room for a medical bay, the common room can be pressed into service as an emergency casualty receiving station. Lives have been saved by impromptu surgery on the common room table.

6B. Galley

The galley retains little of its original appearance. Replacement of components began long ago, and has proceeded on a distinctly random basis. Although now a mix of rather cheap and ugly functional work surfaces and horribly disfigured original panelling, the galley is overstocked with gadgets and utensils salvaged from other ships. It is actually quite difficult to work in the galley for all the 'useful' items hanging everywhere or taking up worktop space.

7. Stores

Naturally, a ship like the *Harrier*-class needed extensive stores for high-class foods as well as bulk rations. The superfreeze units originally fitted remain functional, though they are not as efficient as they used to be. Nevertheless, it is possible to keep meat in near-perfect condition for months or even years; a skilled chef would be hard put to notice any degradation. There are also meat lockers and a small larder for hanging game.

8. Dorsal Barbette

As standard, the dorsal mount houses a particle barbette. The barbette is normally commanded from the bridge, though it can be fired under local control from a workstation within the mount itself. The currently installed weapon is a TL15 Accurate High Yield particle beam. It grants DM+1 to hit rolls, and re-rolls any damage dice of a 1 or 2.

LOWER DECK

The lower deck of a *Harrier*-class raider is far more functional than the upper areas, but was still originally outfitted to a very high standard. Some elements still remain, though in most cases panels are scratched to the point where their etchings are virtually unrecognisable, or so dented and dinged that they just look a mess.

The lower deck is in two main sections, surrounded by fuel tanks. The long forward 'nose' of the ship serves to keep the main sensor array as far distant as possible from the drives and any interference they may generate. There is much debate about whether or not this actually makes any difference, but the practice is followed on many ship designs. The nose also houses fuel scoops and the cargo-capture system. This is separated from the cargo bay by a long, wide corridor lined with storage lockers for tools and spares. Captured cargo has to be manhandled all the way down the corridor, through three bulkheads and finally into the cargo bay. Some ships carried a cargobot for this purpose, even if they only unload in ports where one is not needed.



It has been suggested that the *Harrier*-class can survive and even remain in a flyable condition with this section completely shot away. If enough fuel remained then this is theoretically possible, but it has never been put to the test. Certainly the ship could not land, and the loss of the main sensor array would be serious, but maybe a wounded *Harrier* could limp away from battle and get her crew to safety.

The main section, located below the command and living area, contains drives, machinery, weapon systems and cargo. The 'split machinery' design used on the *Harrier*-class has been criticised, like that of many vessels using the same arrangement, of making life difficult for the engineering crew. However, since *Harriers* are designed to carry quite a large crew, there is normally little need for drive hands to be rushing from one side of the engineering spaces across the cargo bay to the other – and of course, the ship's engineer works from an armchair on the bridge.

The distributed machinery also contributes to survivability. The vessel is unlikely to remain jump-capable with half her drives shot away, but it is likely that, short of catastrophic damage, a *Harrier* could retain enough powerplant and manoeuvre drive capability to escape even after sustaining a direct hit on the engineering chambers.

Armament layout seems unusual at first glance, but there is a logic to it. Most small vessels carry dorsal, ventral or side-mounted turrets for a defensive style of combat, but the *Harrier*-class is a strike ship. Her two turrets are restricted to a forward arc when using direct-fire weapons, but this suits both the image of the ship and her intended role – the common tactic is to make a sweeping gun pass and then a rapid escape if unsuccessful, or a hard deceleration and boarding if necessary.

Standard armament is a particle barbette and missile mount. The latter has the advantage that additional missiles (or torpedoes, if the armament is altered) can be carried in the cargo hold and moved to the magazine or directly into the turret with relative ease. Crew can also access the turrets easily, and move to other areas (e.g. engineering) for damage control operations when necessary. Under most circumstances, the iris valves leading to the turrets are kept in locked mode, requiring authorisation from an officer or crewmember already granted permission to access the turret before opening. These valves also provide a safety seal in the event a turret is damaged or suffers an internal missile explosion.

9. Avionics/Sensors

The main sensor array and associated electronic systems are located right forward in what was originally a demountable pod. Getting the pod in and out is quite an evolution, requiring the removal of a section of hullplate, but the intent was that an upgraded or modified sensor package could be retrofitted without undue difficulty. The original sensor fit was impressive enough, including neural activity sensors and a standoff densitometer in addition to more conventional sensors such as radar, lidar and a jamming suite. The ship's primary communications equipment is also housed here; loss of this chamber would reduce communications bandwidth and range, but not completely cripple it as there are backup systems distributed throughout the ship.

10. Cargo Scoop Airlock

The cargo scoop uses a strong magnetic field to manipulate a cargo container or other metallic object and bring it into the receiving chamber. There is a limit to how much can be achieved with a scoop however; picking up a cargo container is mostly a matter of delicate piloting. Not surprisingly the area around the cargo scoop, and also the rear of the receiving chamber, is very battered.

The cargo scoop is also used to pick up escape pods, either for humanitarian reasons or so the occupants can be ransomed. Escape pods are more delicate than cargo containers, so great care must be used when bringing them aboard. A common tactic is for vacc-suited crewmembers to open the airlock and guide themselves to the escape pod (or even a cargo container, if the pilot is not confident of a clean pickup), then bring it aboard using an attached cable. There is a powerful winch in the scoop chamber for this purpose, which can

also be used for other duties such as lifting an object planetside. Using a starship as a light construction crane is wasteful in the extreme but with no better options it can speed up construction of a base – or looting of an installation.

11. Fuel Processors

The *Harrier*-class is designed to be as self-sufficient as possible, and has scoops and processors to enable fuel to be obtained without visiting a starport. The normal source is a gas giant's atmosphere, skimming for hydrocarbons which can be processed into liquid hydrogen fuel and various by-products. These are mostly vented from the ship, but oxygen is usually added to the ship's stocks. Fuel can also be produced by cracking water or ice, again producing oxygen and hydrogen. The fuel processors can be run to purify the ship's drinking water at need, though this requires adjustments that takes a few hours. The result is that a *Harrier*-class ship can endlessly supply her crew with fuel, water, air to breathe and ice cubes for their drinks.

12. Countermeasures Suite

The ship's countermeasures suite is housed in these compartments. Secondary computer nodes are located throughout the ship, enabling operations to continue even if these rooms were out of action. However, efficiency would be severely curtailed in this case. The countermeasures suite has been plundered of its panelling and most decorative items, with the exception of the beautifully decorated doors leading onto the central corridor. The countermeasures suite also serves as an intelligence centre for the ship, with a large holotank enabling officers to stand in the midst of displays, simulations and projections, immersing themselves in data and assessing options.





13. Main Airlock

The main airlock exits the belly of the ship, which is convenient for groundside operations. It is large enough for four people at a time, or two heavily equipped personnel in combat armour. This limits the amount of troops that can be delivered for an assault, but the *Harrier*-class was never intended for this sort of hostile boarding – she is a raider, not a pirate, and would normally shoot up the target before boarding or simply destroy it.

14. Low Berths

The eight low berths carried by the *Harrier*-class are rarely used for passengers. They provide a survival margin in the event of serious damage to the ship or a shortfall in supplies, and are sometimes used to carry additional crewmembers in case of casualties or when a prize crew is desired for a captured vessel. The low berths are also used to house prisoners; it is no coincidence that the low berth chambers are a short walk (passing through no sensitive control areas) from the cargo scoop receiving chamber.

15. Magazine

The default armament for a *Harrier*-class raider includes a missile turret in the Vent mounting. This chamber is used to house ammunition for the turret when it is so equipped, and can serve as a secure cargo or equipment locker at other times. The chamber is designed to vent blast outwards in the event of a detonation; its internal bulkheads are strongly built, making this an ideal place to store sensitive items or perhaps a prisoner who cannot be put into a low berth.

16. Ventral Turret

As standard, the *Harrier* mounts a missile system in its ventral turret, sometimes replaced with a torpedo launcher or occasionally additional beam weapons. The lack of light weapons such as a laser is considered by some to leave the *Harriers* vulnerable to attack by fighters and similar small craft and the lack of a point-defence weapon makes incoming missiles a serious problem, but there is only so much that can be mounted onto a small hull. The missile system is often used to make an attack on a vessel that has already received a particle beam strike, which can deter pursuit or keep the opposition busy whilst the *Harrier* comes around for another pass. It is also possible to run in behind a missile salvo, forcing the enemy to choose between point-defence or engaging the *Harrier*.

The ventral turret is normally operated from the bridge, but can be fired under local control if necessary. Loading is automatic, so no crew are required to be in the turret other than to deliver additional missiles from the magazine. The ventral turret of the Harrier in the Pirates of Drinax campaign was disabled by damage a long time ago. The turret space has been rather crudely restored to environmental integrity but needs complete replacement before any weapons can be mounted. At present the space is used for storage.

17. Engineering Spaces

The drive and power systems of the *Harrier*-class are split between two more or less identical engineering spaces, each with a portion of the jump and manoeuvre drives and the powerplant. The ship's complement generally includes several multiskilled personnel who function as drive hands and maintenance technicians under the control of the engineering officer. The cargo area between the engineering spaces is sometimes used as a maintenance bay or converted to workshops. This is quite common on vessels that may be away from a friendly port for some time or are trying to establish their own base of operations.

There are several multifunction consoles within the engineering section, and it is common practice to leave one configured as an emergency or backup piloting station. This is often used when repositioning the ship on a landing pad to receive cargo or for repairs, making a trip up to the bridge unnecessary for minor adjustments. All control operations can be overridden from the bridge however, and the secondary piloting station must be released by an officer before use. Preference is always given to commands coming from the senior pilot and main piloting station.

18A. Cargo Bay

The cargo bay is subdivided by internal partitions, and is not efficiently designed. It suffers from a low ceiling and far too much clutter in the form of busts and reliefs of important Drinaxian figures peering down from the walls. This area is normally the first part of the ship a visitor sees (unless they are hauled out of an escape pod in the receiving chamber), and is quite imposing at first. For those that have to work in this area, the odd shapes and general lack of functionality can be quite annoying.

18B. Aft Cargo Hatch

The aft cargo hatch is accompanied by a retractable ramp for loading, and can be used for planetside assaults if this seems desirable. Cargo handling equipment is extremely basic, but since the *Harrier*-class is intended to operate with an oversized crew this is not generally much of a problem. Raiders rarely undertake commercial-style cargo transfers; more commonly they are loaded at the beginning of a mission by personnel at a naval dockyard or base, with unused supplies unloaded the same way at the end of the deployment or jettisoned if necessary.

19. Landing Gear Access

The landing gear is retractable, enabling the vessel to maintain its streamlining. The downside of this is a requirement for heavy-duty hydraulic and electrically-operated gear to move the landing legs in and out of their housings. This in turn requires maintenance on the bulky but not overly complex system to be carried out in a confined space. Normally maintenance is done on the ground or in port, but at need the retraction spaces can be entered whilst the ship is in flight and a defect dealt with before arriving at the ship's destination.



DAMAGE & DEFECTS OF THE *HARRIER*

The *Harrier* was built using advanced techniques and exotic materials. This was highly advantageous when the ship was first constructed, as it gave her greater resilience than a comparable vessel. When Drinax could still create these materials, the fact they were difficult to obtain and work with was not too much of a problem – her home dockyard could make good any damage or replace entire sections of the hull. The fall of Drinax two centuries ago changed all that.

Not only was the Drinaxian fleet pounded into wreckage, but the dockyards and spares warehouses were smashed too. The industrial centres that created the *Harrier's* exotic materials were bombed along with the rest of the planet. The loss did not stop at facilities – the techniques of forging these materials and working with them survived in a few databases, but the body of experience needed died along with the engineers and technicians. Today, the materials used to build the *Harrier* are all but lost to history.

It is possible to repair damage to the *Harrier* using conventional materials, but normally simple tasks like welding or creating a good seal are extremely difficult. The exotic materials originally used have different behaviour under stress, heating and other conditions to more common metals and ceramics. The result is that repairs come undone under high acceleration, weapons fire or even just the heating and cooling cycle as the ship turns different surfaces towards a system's star.

In order to avoid the prospect of springing leaks or losing sections of hull plate, repairs must be done slowly and carefully, with frequent references to the few surviving texts on the subject. This problem can only be rectified by obtaining a supply of the original materials. The discovery of a stash somewhere or, even better, machinery capable of producing a reliable supply of advanced materials, would be of enormous benefit to the operators of the *Harrier*. Alternatively, a wrecked Drinaxian or Sindalian ship could be stripped of its useable components to offset the need to work with inferior materials for a while; a crew who heard rumours of such a treasure might be tempted to turn aside from almost any mission in order to solve their long-term repair problems.

CONDITION OF THE *HARRIER*

When she is first assigned to the Travellers, the *Harrier* is far from her original glory. She is still an impressive ship, but in many ways also tragic. Her present reduced status is a sad reminder of what once was... or perhaps it is a symbol of what might once again come to be. Indeed, King Oleb wants the *Harrier* to represent the restored glory of Drinax, and that means putting her back into the condition she deserves.

This is not just about combat capability and spaceworthiness; Oleb wants the drapes and cushions to match; he wants all of the ship's silverware found and functional controls to be replaced with beautiful brass ones carved into baroque shapes. This might get tiresome for the ship's operators – demands for an explanation why they bought more missiles instead of replacing the second lieutenant's cabin fittings might be annoying – but to Oleb, the symbology is important.

He may actually have a point – the *Harrier* might be worth more as a symbol than a fighting ship. Drinax might claw its way back to prominence by the vigorous application of style rather than substance. After all, a slight upgrade to the ship represents a marginal increase in Drinax' power but impressing a raider band so much they throw in their lot with Oleb could bring in two or three more ships. Ultimately, sending out the *Harrier* is a means to an end. She is a tool, not a goal, and even if the Travellers forget this, Oleb will not.

REPAIRING THE *HARRIER*

The *Harrier* requires three kinds of repairs: Structural, Technical and Cosmetic. Most of the defects she has are a combination of these types. For example, repairing the crippled ventral turret requires a combination of Structural and Technical components. Ideally, the appearance of the damaged area should also be restored, requiring cosmetic improvements, but this is not necessary for the efficiency of the ship. It will please Oleb (or at least stop him shouting so much) and may be important in the long run.

Repair components are abstracted as Repair Units (RU) and subdivided into these three categories. Obviously, a Cosmetic RU cannot be used to patch a hull breach or replace a burned out console (except by disguising the missing component with something decorative perhaps...), but to do the repair job properly (so the ship is restored in appearance as well as function) requires an expenditure of five Cosmetic RU for every Structural or Technical RU expended. This is in addition to any cosmetic work noted further on.

Emergency repairs of battle damage can be carried out as normal, but there is a real chance that the repair will fail after a while if the correct procedures for matching mundane materials to the ship's exotic components are not followed – something that is simply not possible in the middle of a space battle. Skill checks made to carry out an emergency repair indicate whether or not the repair was successful at the time. Once things have calmed down a bit the referee should secretly roll 2D and consult the Quality of Repair table. The same procedure should be used any time work is done on the ship without taking care to match materials and procedures, though this is far less risky than a mid-battle jury rig.

Quality of Repair

2D	Result
4-	The repair begins to fail. The crew will get some warning, but the damage effect will be re-implemented after 3D minutes. A complete new repair job is required to fix the damage.
5-8	The repair holds for now, though it produces alarming creaks or intermittent faults. After 1D days, the referee should roll again on this chart.
9+	The repair is good and will hold indefinitely.

A result of 5-8 can be obtained repeatedly, requiring another roll after 1D days.

- DM -4 if the repair was a rushed emergency damage control procedure made without proper materials
- DM-2 if the repair was an emergency procedure made with the correct materials.
- The highest appropriate skill level working on the repair can be applied as a positive DM. This will usually be the Engineering Officer's skill, which can be applied to all repairs ongoing at once if he directs the process in the proper manner from the bridge.

Any repair made with due regard to correct procedures, or with the correct materials, takes three times as long as normal but is not subject to this process. Emergency battle repairs cannot be done slowly and carefully, and are always considered rushed but are much more likely to be successful if the correct materials are available.

Many opportunities for roleplaying and dramatic narrative can arise from this process. A repaired hull section that suddenly blows out again as the *Harrier* makes its landing approach could be... interesting. The crew might figure out ahead of time that jumping with a hastily repaired drive could require a second emergency repair in jump, with the field about to collapse. Sooner or later, the desire to fix the ship properly will become overwhelming, and of course that will lead to new adventure possibilities.

INITIAL DEFECTS

The following defects are present when the Travellers first receive their ship. The amount of Structural RU, Technical RU and Cosmetic RU required for each repair are noted at the end of the entry.

Hull

When built, the *Harrier* had a hull value of 88 rather than the 80 she would have had with conventional shipbuilding materials. However, her age and the damage she suffered in the fall of Drinax reduced this to a mere 40. Without extensive repairs the *Harrier* is rather fragile. Each Structural RU assigned to repairing the hull increases Hull value by 2D, to a maximum of 88.

General Systems

The *Harrier's* running costs are double what a ship of this type should normally require. The extra cost is absorbed in replacing minor systems and components, and ongoing losses through leaks, spoilage and other ongoing costs. Each Technical RU assigned to making general repairs reduces the extra operating cost by 20%, to a maximum reduction of 100%, which represents a return to normal operating costs.

Ventral Hardpoint

The entire turret mechanism for the ventral weapon mount was destroyed by a direct hit from a fusion weapon. Repairing the turret to the point where it can fire into the ship's frontal arc only will require 1 Structural RU and 1 Technical RU. A full repair, enabling the weapon to fire in any direction will require an additional 1 Structural RU and 2 Technical RU.

Manoeuvre Drive

The M-drive has been restored to full function, but is slightly unreliable. Any time a double-1 comes up on a Pilot check, the drive cuts out, and the ship is without manoeuvre drive for that round. Remedying this problem requires a proper diagnostic of the drive (requiring 3-4 days and partial dismantling of the drive system) which will indicate the level of repair required. Remedying the problem will require D3 Technical RU and a further 3 days of rebuilding the drive.

Jump Drive

The *Harrier's* jump drive is fully functional, but a little wayward. It imposes DM-2 on all skill checks associated with it, which increases the chance of a serious misjump. Remedying this is a two-stage process. It can be reduced to DM -1 by the replacement of various components with fairly obvious defects. This will require one day and one Technical RU. Fully fixing the drive means an in-depth inspection and testing of all components. The drive will need to be dismantled (a process requiring D3 days of work) and the problems carefully catalogued. D3 Technical RU will be required to make good the defects, with installation and reassembly taking 1-2 more days.

Cosmetic Repairs

Cosmetic repairs do not affect the functionality of the ship, but do improve its ability to function as a diplomatic symbol. Most repairs require only Cosmetic RU, but in some cases a few technical systems will have to be replaced to make the ship look right again.

- **The Bridge** requires D3 Technical RU and 12 Cosmetic RU to fully restore its former glory.
- **The Crew Accommodation Area** requires 16 Cosmetic RU to fully restore its appearance.
- **The Lower Deck** requires D3 Technical RU and 12 Cosmetic RU to fully restore it.
- **The Outer Hull** requires 20 Cosmetic RU for full restoration.

Whenever the Travellers are involved in diplomacy on behalf of Drinax, the impression their ship makes will be relevant at the referee's discretion. For example, conducting diplomacy by video conference from a patched and mismatched bridge will create a negative impression, whereas treating visitors to a black-tie dinner in an opulent compartment may convince them that Drinax is a power worth taking seriously. It should

be possible to conceal some aspects of the ship – for example, it is unlikely that most planetside dignitaries will see the engineering spaces – but the revelation that the highly decorated bridge is a front for a ship in severe disrepair could undo previous good impressions. The referee should impose the following DMs on diplomacy conducted on behalf of Drinax if the Travellers can contrive to display their beautiful ship or its run-down nature becomes apparent.

- DM-2 If the ship has unrepaired new damage
- DM-1 If the ship is in the state the Travellers first received it
- DM+0 If the ship makes a mixed impression, (e.g. the hull is a mess but the bridge is gorgeous)
- DM+1 If the ship makes a good impression, it has been sighted in port with a fully restored hull, or video conferences are conducted from a restored bridge
- DM+2 If the ship has been fully restored and the Travellers find a way to show it off

Note that this applies to cosmetic repairs only. A jump drive that looks like a baroque masterpiece but does not work properly can still create a good impression provided its internal defects are not revealed.

MAKING REPAIRS

Full restoration of the ship is likely to require 6-10 Structural RU, 12-16 Technical RU and 60 Cosmetic RU.

At the beginning of the campaign, Travellers with Ship Shares can spend them fixing the ship. One Ship Share can be traded for one Structural RU or Technical RU, or 2D Cosmetic RU. These can be spent before the *Harrier* begins her first cruise, or can be held in reserve for later upgrades.

Once play has begun, it is possible that RU of various sorts might be found in supply caches or salvaged from wrecked Drinaxian ships. They can also be obtained by converting standard components gained by purchase, piracy or plundering. Each Structural RU requires MCr0.25 worth of standard starship components or heavy-industry produce. Each Technical RU requires MCr0.75 worth of starship components or light industry produce. A Cosmetic RU costs MCr0.1 for raw materials and must be custom-fitted, etched or otherwise installed 'just right' at the rate of one RU per 8-hour shift.

REPAIR UNITS (RU)	STRUCTURAL (SRU)	TECHNICAL (TRU)	COSMETIC (CRU)	SHIP SHARES
NOTES				THE COST GIVEN IN () IS THE MINIMUM FOR A PARTIAL REPAIR.

HULL

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Reduced Hull Points*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
STRUCTURAL RU 1 for 2D Hull Points			
COSMETIC RU 5x SRU Spent			

GENERAL SYSTEMS

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Loss of efficiency, wear & tear.*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
TECHNICAL RU 1 for 20% reduction			
COSMETIC RU 5x TRU Spent			

VENTRAL HARDPOINT

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Complete loss of function.*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
STRUCTURAL RU 2 [1]			
TECHNICAL RU 3 [1]			
COSMETIC RU 5x SRU & TRU Spent			

MANOEUVRE DRIVE

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Intermittent drive failure.*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
TECHNICAL RU D3			
COSMETIC RU 5x TRU Spent			

JUMP DRIVE

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Increased possibility of missjump.*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
TECHNICAL RU D3+1 [1]			
COSMETIC RU 5x TRU Spent			

COSMETIC REPAIRS

LOCATION	COSMETIC RU COST	TECHNICAL RU COST	
Bridge	12	D3	
Crew Accommodation	16	-	
Lower Deck	12	D3	
Outer Hull	20	-	

CREW REQUIREMENTS & SHIPBOARD OPERATIONS

The *Harrier*-class can be operated, at a minimal level, by two personnel; a pilot/astrogator and engineer will suffice to get the ship from one star system to the next. However, this leaves absolutely no margin for dealing with problems, and requires that maintenance schedules – and indeed some routine operations – are simply ignored. In the longer term (measured in weeks rather than months), a *Harrier* operating without a proper crew will suffer breakdowns or some kind of incident.

The official full crew roster for a *Harrier*-class raider is twelve, a large complement for a 200-ton ship. When in action, the extra crew are intended to conduct damage control operations, assist more expert crewmembers and occasionally board a captured vessel. It may be possible to put a prize crew aboard a captured ship, but if this is the intent the *Harrier* will normally carry a couple of spare specialists in her low berths, rather than stripping her own crew. Outside combat, the extra personnel help keep the ship clean and well-maintained, though it has been suggested that one reason for so many personnel is simply to make the captain feel important.

The officer positions of a Sindalian (or Post-Sindalian, i.e. Drinax) ship follow a hierarchy similar to that used in many navies, with the ship's captain supported by his specialist officers. There are four officer positions aboard a *Harrier*: Captain, Executive Officer, Navigation Officer and Engineering Officer, in order of seniority.

The remainder of the crew is made up of ratings (non-officers), some of whom are specialists in their own field. A fully crewed *Harrier* carries two gunners, a medic and three marines, in addition to an assistant engineer and backup pilot.

ACTION STATIONS

When a fully crewed *Harrier* is at action stations, the bridge is crewed by the captain, first pilot, navigation officer and engineering officer, plus both gunners. The drive chief and second pilot will be in the engineering spaces, with the medic in the common room standing ready to receive casualties. Marines will suit up and muster at the main airlock, but will almost immediately be assigned other tasks including damage control, visual inspection of possible damage and assistance in the engineering spaces.

ROUTINE OPERATIONS

Under routine conditions, standard practice is to have a qualified bridge officer or pilot dedicated to sensor watch on the bridge, and a qualified person in the engineering spaces. This can be the drive chief or any other crewmember with sufficient skills to monitor the readouts, possibly a marine or the second pilot, but almost never the engineering officer. An Officer of the Watch is also normally on duty; if he is not standing a watch on the bridge he will use the ship's office.



Captain

The senior officer aboard the ship is her captain, though his or her actual rank might vary. The captain is usually, but not always, a qualified bridge officer who can replace an injured crewmember or one who has been sent off as part of a prize crew. Occasionally, the captain's role is taken by a non-spacer who might be a ground combat specialist or political leader. Some of these individuals have proven to be shrewd tacticians and effective raiders, but a ship's captain should be the conductor of an orchestra. It is hard to do this effectively without understanding music, so to speak, and ships whose commander is not an experienced spacer have generally underperformed inaction.

First Pilot

The first pilot role is traditionally assigned to the executive officer of the ship, though this can vary. The thinking behind this practice is that a successful executive officer will next progress to captaincy of his own ship, and since the first pilot is responsible for controlling the ship in combat, an understanding of this role is essential to commanding a ship. Many navies consider the mathematics-heavy role of astrogator to be more senior than that of the pilot, but the Sindalian Empire and its successors felt that a captain should have recently been a pilot in order to fully understand how a ship behaves in combat. The first pilot is often referred to as the first lieutenant if he is the executive officer, and to many Drinaxians the terms are interchangeable.

Navigation Officer

The navigation officer is responsible for astrogating the ship in normal and jump space, and for overseeing all sensor tasks during combat and other spaceborne operations. The navigation officer is usually the ship's second lieutenant.

Engineering Officer

The engineering officer is responsible for overseeing all maintenance and repairs as well as monitoring the drive systems. The role is largely managerial aboard a *Harrier*-class vessel, with the engineering officer normally visiting the drive rooms only to carry out inspections. Most tasks do not require physical presence aboard a high-tech vessel, so this arrangement is entirely workable unless the ship takes damage that requires a hands-on approach. In that case, the delay in getting to the engineering spaces has doomed some *Harriers*, but the fact there is an engineer outside the machinery spaces has at times saved ships from losing their entire technical complement. The practice remains controversial, with no hard-and-fast conclusions either way.

Second Pilot

A fully-crewed *Harrier* carries a backup pilot, who is not normally an officer. This role is often taken by officer cadets or personnel being trained for a command role, but this is by no means universal. The second pilot is usually assigned a duty station away from the bridge when the ship is in action, typically leading the damage control party or standing ready to assist any personnel who need it. The second pilot is often an odd-job-man aboard a *Harrier*, especially when other crewmembers are busy at their specialist tasks. This gives rise to various figures of speech such as 'busier than a second pilot' or 'leave that for the S-P'.

Drive Chief

The drive chief is a specialist non-officer, typically a rating of considerable experience. He is in charge of the machinery spaces when the engineering officer is not present, which is most of the time, and is assisted by the marines and gunners not required for combat duties. The second pilot is often co-opted to assist with engineering tasks when others are unavailable.

Gunners

A fully-crewed *Harrier* carries two gunners, of whom one is normally a missile specialist and the other a beam gunner. Maintenance of the turrets and any missiles carried falls to the gunners, but in action their duty stations are normally on the bridge, with loading of weapons left to the autoloader or any personnel who can be reassigned to bring fresh missiles in from the magazine.

Medic

The ship's medic is (hopefully) a part-time post, and most of the time the medic acts as a chief steward. Even in combat, his role is more commonly to supply the bridge crew with sandwiches and coffee than to patch up wounded crewmembers. However, his duty station is the common room/galley area where casualties can be brought to him at need.

Marines

The ship's three marines must be competent in groundside combat and vacc suit operations, of course, but most of the time they act as additional technicians and maintenance crew. Marines may be tasked with anything from assisting with cargo handling through food preparation to helping out in the engineering spaces. Their combat duty station is officially close to the main airlock, but more commonly marines will be encountered rushing from one necessary task to another or helping the drive chief. Properly qualified marines are trained to at least a basic level in a non-officer shipboard skill such as Engineer, Electronics, Gunner or Mechanic. All marines should also be capable of conducting damage control operations.

COMMERCE RAIDING OPERATIONS

Commerce-raiding, sometimes referred to as cruiser warfare, is not the same thing as piracy. There are those who consider them similar and related, and who will attempt to space captured raiders as pirates, but legally – on most worlds – there is a difference between commerce raiding and spacegoing thievery.

A pirate is primarily concerned with how much money they can make, or at least how much they can make for their patron. If they make this money by shooting up merchant ships so they require extensive repairs, or destroy them in the process of obtaining components and cargo, then the economic damage inflicted tends to be far more than any profit gained. Pirates may not be overly concerned about this, but keeping the economic damage within tolerable limits is a good way to prolong a career in piracy.

A pirate who is merely a nuisance and steals a bit of cargo now and then will not attract a determined response; one who disrupts trade and costs shipping operators huge amounts of money will rapidly make the Most Wanted list. This is simple economics – shipping operators and their insurers have large amounts of money and political influence, and will lobby governments to deploy naval assets in order to remedy the situation. The government and navy may also want to do away with the pirate, since his exploits will undermine their credibility – not to mention injuring and killing innocent people.

Thus pirates – the sort willing to put some effort into staying alive, anyway – will usually try to limit the economic damage they cause. Piracy still disrupts trade and harms the economy, but staying below the ‘must-react’ threshold of the local government is a good way to ensure a long career.

However, attacks on interstellar shipping can also be used as an instrument of policy. Wanton, wasteful piracy can be used to make money and further a cause, though there is always the danger of backlash. Anyone who makes money raiding in this fashion will be treated

as a pirate if caught – and rightly so. However, it is possible to undertake commerce raiding operations without being a pirate. A commerce raider always risks being tried as a pirate, especially if there is no war or legitimately declared dispute in progress, but at least he has some chance of being treated as a combatant rather than a criminal.

Commerce raiding is defined as attacking the enemy’s economy by means of disrupting trade. The most obvious way of doing this is to capture or destroy merchant ships, but there are other means that can be far more effective. Damage to a starship might take it out of commission; crippling the unloading docks at a major starport can cause all trade in the area to be disrupted. The intent behind commerce raiding is to damage the economy of the target rather than to make a profit, though it is considered legitimate to take fuel, supplies, ammunition and components from a target ship in order to maintain the raider.

In some cases a pirate who steals cargo but harms no-one will be treated more harshly than a raider who puts a spread of missiles into a highport’s docking area and kills dozens of people – though this depends very much upon local conditions and the nature of the conflict in progress.

Raiders, and pirates who want to pretend to be legitimate commerce raiders in order to escape the death penalty if caught, often operate in uniform and display a transponder code declaring their allegiance before attacking. It is considered a legitimate *ruse de guerre* to pretend to be an innocent merchant ship or non-hostile warship until the moment of attack, perhaps by using a doctored transponder code claiming to be a mercenary escort vessel. However, a ship that opens fire without declaring its true nature will be treated as a pirate. Some raiders, particularly those operating on the orders of a third party who wishes to remain anonymous, will use a variant of the blank identification code – a transponder display analogous to the black flag used by some privateers on Old Terra.

Commerce raiding has several uses as an instrument of policy. In addition to the direct economic damage inflicted, a spate of raids in a given area will make other merchant ship operators reluctant to go there, causing further slowdown in interstellar commerce. In addition, the cost of sending out hunter groups and providing escorts for merchant traffic or guardships for ports is considerable. A single raider can tie down multiple vessels, and may continue to do so even after it has ceased operations.

Not surprisingly, commerce raiding was a facet in the internal conflicts of the late Sindalian Empire period. It is traditionally the province of the weaker power; one that cannot directly challenge its enemies' naval might. Such was the vindictiveness of the Sindalian Empire that ravaging innocent merchant traffic was normal in most conflicts, some characterised by an orgy of raiding. It was at least in part for this style of warfare that the *Harrier*-class was developed.

Small raiders like the *Harrier*-class cannot take on large, well-armed freighters except en masse, and they will suffer heavy losses in doing so. However, a small raider is easier to conceal than a 1000-ton-plus vessel, and requires much less logistic support. There is also the question of coverage; many smaller hulls can cover more systems than a single more potent raider.

In-system traffic is often a softer target than interstellar trade. The major shipping routes run from highport to jump point, then in to the next system's highport, and it is in this area that naval forces will concentrate their efforts. A highport may also have missile batteries and small craft such as fighters, creating a well-defended zone of limited size. Beyond this area, raiding is much safer.

Raids on outsystem assets and traffic can be highly effective. A world that derives much of its raw materials from asteroid mining in the outsystem may suffer reduced industrial output after a raid on the mining

ships or ore transports, and these might not be well protected at all. Even a quite minor raid, which causes the local government to deploy warships to protect the distant asset, creates a drain on economic and military capabilities.

The same goes for attacks in backwater systems used as refuelling points on major shipping runs. It is much harder to protect a system one or more jumps away, and any ship deployed there is unavailable for any tasks that might arise. It may also be vulnerable to attack. This is one of the more daring commerce-raiding strategies; draw naval assets away from support and then hit them en masse with many raiders or more powerful warships.

Counters to commerce raiding are generally obvious. Most highports have a defended zone, and guardships can be posted at vulnerable points or along important routes. Convoys are another option, especially if several armed merchant craft can add their guns to the general defence. Various expedient merchant-escort craft have emerged at times of particularly intense raiding.

However, none of these options is particularly proactive, and all of them tie up considerable resources covering places where attacks might occur – which can then be avoided by the raiders. Deterrence does protect the most critical shipping areas but does not end the commerce raiding problem. That can only be done by hunting down or otherwise finding and attacking raiding vessels.

Q-ships, posing as innocent merchant vessels, are an option, as are naval sweeps of possible raider bases or staging areas. Good intelligence work is essential to breaking a raider force – collating reports of when and where a particular vessel has struck can give an indication of where it is getting fuel and supplies. It may even be possible to get a lead on the raider's base and launch an attack. However, this task can be thwarted by inventive and opportunistic raider captains who vary tactics and conceal the identity of their ship. When predictability can be a death sentence, imagination might be the raider's most potent weapon.

TARGET

OUTSYSTEM
ASSETS

TARGET

OUTSYSTEM
TRAFFIC

DANGER

ESCORTED
CONVOY

DANGER

GUARDSHIPS
ON DUTY

DANGER

HIGHPORT
DEFENCE ZONE

DANGER

PATROLS

DANGER

NAVAL SEARCH

DANGER

Q SHIP BAIT

TARGET

REFUELING
POINTS

TARGET

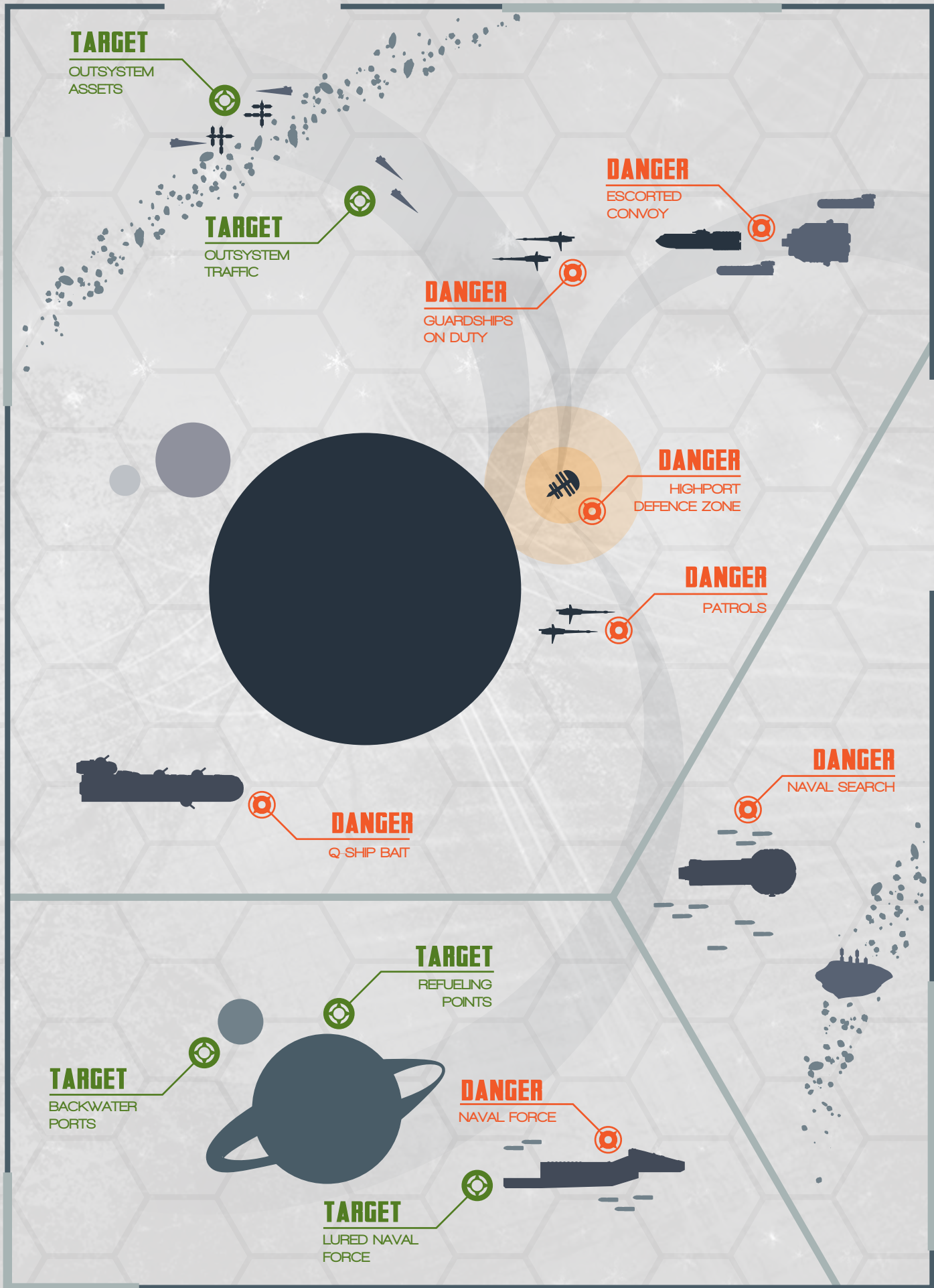
BACKWATER
PORTS

DANGER

NAVAL FORCE

TARGET

LURED NAVAL
FORCE



THE REALITIES OF PIRACY

There really is no such thing as a 'career pirate', not in the sense of someone who has been raiding for decades and evaded capture all that time. Those who do make piracy their sole career inevitably take one of four paths, and one way or another they end up permanently out of the piracy business.

1. They make a couple of raids then move on to other activities or retire on the proceeds.
2. They transition into a different arena, such as building a micro-state or allowing themselves to be bought out by a government to become part of a navy.
3. They get caught or killed, or are betrayed by associates.
4. They have not been caught yet, and think they can go on like this a while longer...

In short, the only long-term successful pirates are the ones who use piracy as a route to a goal such as comfortable retirement or control of a backwater system. Those who expect to keep raiding in the long term inevitably meet a bad end. It *is* possible to have a long run if the pirates are clever and careful. However, most are not.

The majority of piracy is not carried out by swashbuckling buccaneers of the spaceways, but by desperate people seeking quick Credits at any price. The crew of a down-at-heel trader might turn to raiding to pay for their next overhaul, or find the lure of easy money too strong to resist and attack another crew on an opportunistic – and usually unplanned – basis.

Such pirates-by-necessity are typically easy to catch if there is any response. A careful pirate plans how to get away in more detail than how to make the score; a desperate one just grabs what he can. This can work to the advantage of the long-term raider, since security forces are under pressure to get results, and tend to go after those relatively easy to catch. Alternatively they may be directed that way by those with good contacts, leaving the careful raider to strike again elsewhere.

On the other hand, these amateurs can bring down a naval response or cause local traffic to be redirected, making life difficult for professionals. They might also be highly aggressive, perhaps massacring the crews they attack, which makes others less willing to surrender their cargo. This, too, can be manipulated by clever pirates to send naval ships to the wrong place or redirect merchant traffic through a chosen point.

Amateur pirates also make ideal targets. Since they are lawbreakers, fighting them is unlikely to attract censure and there may be bounties on their heads. Clever professionals might set up an extortion racket, taking protection money from the amateurs in return for letting them remain at large... and using them as decoys or fall guys when the need arises.

RESPONSES

Interstellar trade is important to almost all world governments, and threats to it are taken very seriously. However, the issues surrounding piracy are complex and not always predictable. The occasional raid, especially if there are few injuries and only cargo is taken, is unlikely to produce any response since the cost of trying to catch the pirates will be much higher than the economic damage suffered. However, if trade is seriously disrupted or influential people take an interest, more robust measures are likely.

Some threats to pirates are routine and not a response to piracy as such, though warship dispositions may be altered after an attack. Worlds protect their starport as best they can, and extend that protection to ships using it. There may be a few missile launchers or a fighter or two on patrol around a small port, and a veritable horde of system defence boats defending a major installation, all responding to piracy within their area of operations.

More direct responses range from putting out an alert or bounty to dispatching a task force – or requesting assistance from a major power. This could be manipulated by clever Travellers, sending the Imperial Navy into their rivals' area of operations or directing a strike against a competitor's base.

The level of concern about piracy in the region will indicate the response. This is tracked using the Piracy Response Indicator (PRI). Rather than attempting to record the level of concern of every world in a region, PRI is used as a general indication of how seriously local governments are taking the problem.

At the beginning of the campaign, PRI is set to zero since it concerns the activities of the Travellers. The referee can track PRI for other pirate bands if desired, but it will add considerably to the book-keeping required. PRI increases when the Action table indicates, and decreases at the rate of 1 point every 2D weeks until it reaches zero. A zero level essentially implies that piracy is at a level that causes no undue concern, and higher values suggest there are groups demanding a response or offering to fund one.

Whenever the Travellers carry out an attack, there is a chance that some response will be made. This depends largely upon where the attack is made; a strike made in the backwaters is less likely to provoke a major response than a blatant attack under the guns of a major starport.

To determine if the strike provokes a response, roll 2D and add relevant modifiers from the Response and Circumstance tables, and the current PRI. If the result is 12+ or greater, consult the Action table.

The Travellers' best chance for a long career is to foster a reputation as hero-outlaws and be careful harming innocent people, and to be willing to curtail activities for a while until the heat dies down. They may also be able to persuade a particular world government to turn a blind eye to their activities. For example, if the Travellers mostly target Aslan ships, a world with an anti-Aslan viewpoint might be willing to overlook the occasional raid on a non-Aslan ship.

Example of Piracy Response

The Travellers set out from Drinax and attack everything they see. They hit a merchant ship at Pourné, which has a Class A starport. This is worth DM+6 on the Response table, but the Travellers have decided to cultivate a reputation as jolly buccaneers who try not to hurt anyone. This restraint is worth DM-2, and in time the reputation they foster may also work in their favour. For now, the referee rolls 2D with DM+4. The dice come up 4, for a total of 8. There is no significant response.

On to Hilfer, and the Travellers do the same at the local Class B port. The DM+4 for the port and DM-2 for their restraint applies. Another low roll of 5 gives a total of 7; no response materialises. At Tech-World the Travellers try again, with a total DM+4. The referee's dice are merciful with a 6, for a total of 10. The Travellers have still not caused any increased concern, and the referee decides that they now have a mild reputation as decent robbers with a good sense of humour. This is worth DM-1 on the Circumstance table.

At Exe, with a Class B port, the total comes to DM+1 and the referee rolls a 10. Even modified to 11, this produces no response. Getting a bit complacent now, the Travellers try their luck at Cordan. Things go awry, and they are forced to fight the target ship causing casualties and leaving the vessel severely damaged. The referee decides that the Travellers' reputation as honourable outlaws is still intact, but the response check is subject to DM+6 for the starport, DM-1 for reputation and DM+1 for violence in the attack. A roll of 8 is modified to 14 and the region's port and shipping operators begin to take notice.

Rolling 2D (plus the current PRI 0) on the Action chart, the referee gets a 5. A bounty is placed on captured pirates and their descriptions are circulated. PRI is increased to 1. This is a pretty mild response, and the Travellers are undeterred, making another strike at Tanith. This one goes well, and the Travellers are able to show great restraint. They have response DM+6 for the Class A starport, DM-1 for reputation, +1 for PRI and DM-2 for politeness and restraint. Up to now their care has paid off but the Travellers' luck could not hold forever. The referee rolls 9, plus a total DM+4 for 13, and they provoke a reaction.

Rolling 2D plus PRI 1, the Travellers get a total of 12. PRI increases by D3 – the referee rolls a 2, bringing it up to 3. In addition, local worlds assign a total of 2D x 100 tons of ships to search for the pirates for 4D months. This comes out at 600 tons, and will be deployed for 14 months.

The Travellers will find they are a lot more likely to attract a response now. They could wait for PRI to go down, perhaps engaging in a little trade or other legal activity. In the meantime, 600 tons of ships are out looking for them. The referee decides this is a 400 ton patrol corvette and two old scout/couriers, all operated by a small mercenary unit. This force is noted as an enemy of the Travellers and will behave as the referee sees fit.

Response

Port Type	Response	Port Type	Response
X	-4	C	+2
E	-2	B	+4
D	0	A	+6

Circumstance

Circumstance	DM
Very 'polite' incident, nobody is harmed, only cargo is taken	-4
Minimal force used, only cargo is taken	-2
Little force used, care taken to preserve life, only non-essential items and cargo taken leaving the target ship serviceable	-1
Typical 'cargo raid', some violence and threats.	0
Modestly violent raid or personal items and important components taken leaving a ship badly damaged or out of service	+1
Violent raid, or ship taken, or hostages taken, or disregard for life shown	+2
Significant casualties caused, ship and/or hostages taken	+4
Appallingly violent or callous actions	+6
Atrocity, such as use of nerve gas against passengers	+8
Agent in place acting for the Travellers and downplaying the incident	-2
Pirates have a reputation as 'good guys' or being justified in their actions, such as attacking ships owned by a hostile faction	-1 to -4
Pirates have a reputation for violence and wanton destruction	+2
Pirates have an extremely bad reputation	+4

If the check indicates that action is taken, the current PRI is used as a DM on the Action table.

Action

2D + PRI	Action
2-3	Vague statement of reassurance or condemnation. PRI +1
4-5	Cr2D x 2000 bounty placed on 'any proven pirate', brought in alive or proven killed under lawful circumstances. PRI +1
6-7	Cr2D x 5000 bounty placed on 'any proven pirate', brought in alive or proven killed under lawful circumstances. PRI +1
8-9	Loud declarations of condemnation and assurances that action will be taken. PRI +D3. Intelligence agents are assigned to nearby worlds to gain information or try to locate the pirates
10-11	1 small warship (patrol corvette or similar) belonging to the world government or hired as a mercenary is sent to hunt the pirates for 2D months. PRI +D3
12-13	Ships totalling 2D x 100 tons assigned to hunt the pirates for 4D months. PRI +D3
14-15	Ships totalling 2Dx200 tons assigned to hunt the pirates for 4D months. PRI +D3
16+	Ships totalling 2D x 500 tons assigned to hunt the pirates for 4D months. In addition, a nearby world or shipping company becomes an enemy of the pirates and their known allies, and will begin petitioning the Imperium or other nearby worlds to do something about the problem. PRI +1D

REDUCING AND MANIPULATING PRI

One way to reduce PRI is simply to stop attacking merchant ships for a while. Responses cost money and resources needed elsewhere, so if there are no attacks for a time it is likely that ships will be withdrawn. Every 2D weeks, PRI goes down by -1.

Alternatively, the Travellers could relocate. If the referee prefers to track PRI for separate regions this is an option but for the sake of reducing bookkeeping it is suggested that only one PRI value is used. To simulate the effects of relocation on a single PRI value, the Travellers need to move at least 6 parsecs from the location of their last attack. The referee should roll 2D when the new attack is made, adding the number of parsecs from the location of the last attack. A result of 12+ reduces PRI by -D3, as it becomes apparent the problem has moved elsewhere.

PRI can be manipulated in other ways. For example, if the Travellers set another ship up to be caught – perhaps one of the amateur pirates discussed before, or a captured ship crewed by people they do not like much – then the authorities and other concerned parties might become convinced they have dealt with the problem. If the Travellers go to the trouble of ‘selling’ this idea then it should be played as a small adventure and PRI reduction will be automatic if they succeed. If they prefer to just hope it happens, the referee should determine randomly if it works.

To determine if a trick or gambit reduces PRI, roll 2D and add +1 for every 100 tons of pirate vessels captured or destroyed. On a roll of 12+, PRI reduction begins. During a period of reduction PRI drops by -1 immediately and -1 every D3 weeks providing the Travellers do not make any more attacks. PRI can go down a maximum of 1D points for any given gambit.

The activities of other pirate bands and enemies of the Travellers can affect this process. The referee might decide that a particular enemy derails a PRI reduction gambit or uses a ploy of their own to increase it, or something might happen more or less at random which throws a spanner into the Travellers’ ill-conceived plans...

RESPONSE FORCE BEHAVIOUR

The referee is free to decide what a response force will do, based on the actions of the Travellers or some perverse whim of his own. However, if random determination is required, use the Response Force table below as a starting point. A response force will carry out the indicated task for 2D weeks before redetermining its behaviour.

If the Travellers come up with a clever way to misdirect a response force or send it against their enemies, such as planting false information or tricking an amateur pirate crew into making a decoy attack somewhere, the referee may decide the response force falls for the ruse and dashes off to deal with the imaginary problem. This sort of gambit can generate adventures for the Travellers without the referee having to do anything...

Response Force

1D	Behaviour
1	Half-Hearted Faffing About: The force hangs around a major port looking busy and important, while quibbling over fuel and supplies. Officers attend parties and give press conferences. No real pirate hunting is done.
2	Escort Duty: The force moves along a trade route, gathering merchant ships into a protected convoy. This makes attacking those ships unviable, but does little to catch pirates who do not have a death wish.
3	Search Last Attack Site: The force moves to the location of the last attack and searches for clues or bases on outsystem worlds. If there are multiple ships, some may be detached to neighbouring systems.
4	Logical Search: The force deploys to a location that looks like a good prospect, determined by finding a centre point between attacks and looking for a nearby system that might hold a base.
5	Random Search: The referee should roll 1D for distance in parsecs from the site of the last attack, and 1D for direction counting hex sides around from directly coreward. The force deploys in the nearest system to this point and begins a search for pirate activity.
6	What Are They Doing?: The force behaves in an illogical manner, perhaps determined by its own agenda. It may visit worlds where attacks are highly unlikely or get involved in local politics. Whatever it is doing, this force is not hunting pirates right now...



GETTING CAUGHT

Within the Third Imperium, the official penalty for piracy is death. Elsewhere, attitudes vary but penalties tend to be stiff. However, just because the starting point is a death sentence does not mean there are no options for the captured pirate.

Much depends on who captures the pirates and the local political conditions. Whatever the law might say, there are other factors at play ranging from individual status to the fate of a world. A renowned pirate-hunter who has vowed to bring in a notorious raider is unlikely to come to an agreement, but in other cases it is possible to bargain.

It is common to commute the death sentence to a lengthy jail term in return for information, especially when unimportant personnel have been captured. It is sometimes even possible to arrange a pardon or immunity from prosecution in return for particularly good information. However, just because one world government has pardoned a pirate does not mean everyone will recognise him as an upstanding citizen. Nor will it protect the informer from other pirates when set free.

Any government, including the Imperium, will consider commuting a sentence to imprisonment in return for information, and might even reward captured pirates with freedom and cash if they help bring down a notorious pirate ring. The Travellers' trial as pirates might be an interesting adventure, but legal proceedings can be abstracted if desired.

The Airlock Pitch

To avoid an immediate implementation of the death penalty upon capture, the pirate will need to convince their captors there is some good reason not to shove them out of an airlock. This is not a matter of presenting a complex legal argument, but convincing someone that the captive should be allowed to live... or offer some good reason to at least delay execution.

Avoiding immediate spacing or similarly permanent justice is sometimes a matter of luck. Some crews might be under orders to take pirates alive for trial or require authorisation before carrying out an execution. Others have to be convinced. Doing so requires an Average (8+) Deception or Persuade check, or possibly Diplomat depending on how the pitch is made. The referee may apply DMs based upon the Travellers' reputation or similar factors. Long speeches will be cut short by escaping air; what is necessary here is what is grimly known as the 'airlock pitch', a couple of sentences shouted out that cause the captors to stop and think.

Once permitted to speak, the Travellers have a chance to argue their case. They might appeal to self-interest, justice, or the wider picture. The relevant skill is determined by their approach – a reasoned attempt to show that the Traveller was just a bystander or claim he is under the protection of a powerful noble might use Diplomat; offers to show the captors where the loot is stashed might be Persuade or Deception depending on whether there actually is any loot. If they have nothing else to bargain with, the Travellers could always offer to turn informer or give evidence.

The outcome of this informal appeal is determined on the Airlock Pitch Outcomes table, modified by the Airlock Pitch Factors table.

Airlock Pitch Factors

Factor	DM
Hunters have a ferocious hatred of pirates	-4
Hunters have a greater than usual hatred of pirates	-2
The pirates have a bad reputation for atrocities	-4
The pirates have a reputation for violence	-2
The pirates have a reputation for leniency	+2
The pirates have public sympathy (perhaps giving away a portion of their loot or targeting groups the hunters dislike)	+2
The pirates have powerful connections that could cause trouble for the hunters	+2
Relevant skill	+ skill level

Airlock Pitch Outcome

2D+ modifiers	Result
0-	Death. With extra humiliation or some torture thrown in.
1-5	Whatever. Out the airlock you go...
6-10	Taken back to base for a formal trial
11+	Offered a deal

Being offered a deal is not the end of the pirates' problems, of course. Indeed, it might lead to a new adventure; those who promise to reveal the location of loot will be expected to lead the hunters to it, while others might be forced to help the pirate hunters gain access to a base or set up an ambush. The potential for betrayal or finding out that the deal is not quite what was promised is considerable, and wise pirates will use the time they have bought to plot an escape.

Trial and Punishment

A formal trial is a complex business, and not just because of the legal matters involved. There are other considerations, such as public opinion and the possibility of reprisals, which might influence proceedings even though they are not supposed to. This might work in favour of those captured, or not.

For example, one world may want to carry out a show trial of a notorious pirate and hold a public execution, but be under pressure to extradite him to another system or the Imperium. Alternatively, a world government might receive threats from a notorious pirate band that wants a certain outcome. This might be acquittal of a friend or conviction of a rival. Indeed, one way to get out of the pirate game is to be arrested for your crimes and somehow found innocent of them in a respected court. That takes some doing, but bribery and intimidation help a lot.

Some pirates never reach trial. In many cases this is due to summary justice along the way, but there are other options. Sometimes a government that captures pirates has other plans for them. Trained ship crewmembers who are willing to do some dirty work can be useful. Instead of spacing or handing them over to the Imperium for trial (and spacing), the government might offer the pirates a job.

There are numerous historical precedents for pirate forces changing sides and becoming pirate hunters or even a ready-made navy for an ambitious ruler. Loyalty can be dubious, but a regular paycheque and safe home port is more attractive than life on the run. Someone who has taken this sort of deal and betrayed it will rarely be given a second chance, which is another incentive to 'go straight'. A commission as a naval asset is a way out of the pirate game with your skin intact and your takings safely stashed for retirement.

A letter of marque may or may not be any use for those who are captured. The Imperium and Hierate are unimpressed with such things, but a single-world state might take a different view. This is especially true if the Travellers have the backing of a powerful individual or polity. If convicting this pirate crew means a major shipping corporation boycotting your port, then you have a difficult choice to make. Some bargaining might take place, resulting in the pirates' release but them owing their backer for the rescue.

Capture therefore presents additional opportunities for pirates, along with obvious risks. If the Travellers manage to get themselves put on trial, the referee can use this as an opportunity to burden them with additional complications rather than ending the campaign. However, there must be penalties and losses. If the only consequence of lawbreaking is a new adventure lead, then Travellers will not feel under threat – and without threat there is no adventure.

EVENTS

Sometimes things just happen. Every 2D weeks the referee should roll to see if an event occurs. To do so, roll 2D. On 10+ something has happened; use the Events table below to determine the nature of the event.

Events

2D	Event
2	A major power (the Imperium or an Aslan clan) sends a small task force into the region to deal with piracy and lawlessness. A total tonnage of 2D x 500 tons of ships is deployed for the next 2D months.
3	A rival pirate band makes several successful attacks, increasing their prestige and making the Travellers seem ineffective by comparison.
4	A series of audacious raids a subsector away draws attention there, possibly reducing the security of a nearby region.
5	A 'pirate scare' sweeps the region, increasing PRI by +D3 whether or not attacks have been taking place.
6	Local politics cause a major world to redeploy naval forces, leaving gaps in coverage but making other systems more dangerous for pirates.
7	The Travellers hear rumours of a potential big score, such as a shipment of hard currency between two major worlds.
8	A 'gold rush' of small merchant ships heads for a nearby world in response to a trade bonanza. Pickings are likely to be good over the next few weeks.
9	The crew of a small merchant ship turns pirate out of necessity. They are clumsy and amateurish but have pulled off a couple of successful raids. A response from patrol vessels and warships is likely.
10	The capture of a minor pirate leader reduces worries for a while. PRI drops by -D3, and a few merchant captains become positively complacent.
11	A rival pirate band suffers heavy losses in a bungled raid or naval interception.
12	A dispute between two shipping companies expands into a full-scale trade war. Both parties are offering bounties on the opponents' ships, and authorised attacks will probably not be considered piracy.



OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is more to being a successful pirate than finding a suitable mark and grabbing booty. This is the part that vid dramas focus on – along with carousing in dingy freeport taverns and the occasional knife-fight, naturally. Pirates who consider the logistic and operational components of their careers tend to do a lot more of that carousing than those who merely chase plunder.

FUEL

Fuel is a critical consideration for all starship operators, especially pirates. Their own fuel situation dictates whether they can reach a target and get away again, and of course the options available to prey are limited by fuel availability. Catching a target with dry tanks prevents it jumping to escape, and smart pirates know how many refuelling options are available in a system. This lets them predict where a sneaky trader or pirate hunter might obtain their fuel without making the predictable run to the starport.

There is also the act of refuelling to consider. A ship caught on the ground with fuel hoses attached is vulnerable, so wise pirates take measures to secure their refuelling spots. The rate at which a starship can refuel itself depends on how much fuel tankage it has, since this also indicates fuel-handling capabilities. Each full 25 tons of fuel tankage counts as 1 Fuel Transfer Unit (FTU); ships with less than 25 tons of fuel tankage count as having 1 FTU.

It is much quicker to hose up liquid water than to melt ice, especially since hoses usually have to be relocated several times during ice refuelling. Either way, water has to be cracked into hydrogen for fuel – this also generates oxygen for the life support system – and then refined if equipment is available.

Gas giant refuelling rates depend on the ability of a pilot to optimise the skimming pass. Make an Average (8+) Pilot check with the ship's Thrust rating as a DM. The Effect of this check is added to (or subtracted from) the refuelling rate. Thus a typical skimming operation yields (2D + Effect of Pilot check) tons of fuel per hour, per FTU.

Refuelling

Method	Fuel per Hour	Notes
Starport Refuelling (Class A-C)	50 tons per FTU	Standardised high-volume fuel transfer equipment is available at most good ports; refuelling a ship completely generally takes around 30 minutes.
Starport Refuelling (Class D)	25 tons per FTU	Less efficient fuel-handling equipment is typically in use at low-end ports, taking about an hour to refuel a vessel. Fuel is not usually available at Class E ports; ships must refuel themselves.
UNREP System	20 tons per ton of UNREP system	The size of the UNREP system dictates how much can be transferred rather than the vessel's own fuel handing system.
Gas Giant Skimming	2D tons per FTU, variable	Typically around 7 tons of fuel per hour can be obtained by diving into a gas giant atmosphere and scooping up gases for processing. This can be increased by a skilled pilot.
Liquid Water	3D3 tons per FTU	Typically around 6 tons of fuel per hour can be obtained by cracking liquid water.
Ice Deposits	1D tons per FTU	Typically 1-6 tons per hour can be obtained from a large ice deposit.
Sparse Ice Deposits	D3 tons per FTU	Typically 1-3 tons per hour can be obtained if hoses have to be repeatedly moved to new deposits.

WATCH LISTS

Within a major state like the Imperium, law enforcement agencies are in the habit of collating all the data they can get on ship movements, and will eventually spot the fact that a ship could not possibly have made the journeys its captain claimed on the time frame given. However, this might be months or even years down the line, and even then it can result in little more than a note to place the vessel on a watch list.

Beyond the frontiers of the big states, law enforcement and information sharing is patchy at best. Some ports lack the resources to keep track of ships; others have no interest in doing so. Even where a government or agency is actively collecting data to use against pirates, efforts will be hampered. In most cases anti-piracy measures are local, inefficient, and based on erratic information. The 'watch lists' routinely circulated among port authorities and law enforcement agencies are the most likely reason a pirate band will get caught, unless they have done something so graphic that a task force is sent specifically to look for them.

The watch lists circulating the Reach are often wildly out of date and frequently ignored in backwater areas. These lists include 'advisory', 'warning' and 'alert' sections.

Advisories

Advisories are lists of vessels that have engaged in behaviour that might indicate they could be pirates. Many entirely innocent ships feature on an Advisory list from time to time, perhaps because of someone's spite or an odd jump emergence that piqued an official's attention. A vessel that is subject to an Advisory notice is slightly more likely to be boarded and searched by customs or naval vessels, and her documents or movements might be subject to a little more than the usual scrutiny.

Some vessels are automatically considered to be subject to an Advisory notice. These include designs well suited to piracy such as the corsair or mercenary cruiser, and the Harrier naturally falls into that category. A vessel subject to an Advisory notice has a DM ranging from +1 to +4 which is applied positively for other characters and negatively to the Travellers (so the DM ranges from -1 to -4 for the Travellers themselves) to checks whenever the crew have to explain themselves or wish to avoid notice. Most advisories last 1D months.

A vessel may attract an Advisory notice for a range of activities:

- The ship is of a type well suited to piratical activity
- The ship is registered out of or frequents a port known to be lax in its attitude to documentation, origins of cargoes, and legalities in general
- The ship has attracted suspicion recently and been noted for it

Each occasion upon which a ship attracts an Advisory increases the DM by +1, to a maximum of +4.

For example, the Travellers want to enter port in their Harrier. It would automatically count as having Advisory DM+1 for the design, but the ship has also been sighted in the vicinity of pirate activity which is worth another +1. In addition, for reasons entirely unconnected with piracy, the Travellers have antagonised a port official who has entered a vaguely worded Advisory to the database by way of revenge. Their total is DM+3.

The Travellers are inevitably singled out for a customs boarding, and asked routine questions. Although they have not really done anything to arouse suspicion during this visit, the customs people gain DM+3 to spot the badly concealed smuggling compartments the Travellers have rigged up. Any attempts the Travellers make to explain themselves suffer DM-3.

If causes for concern arise when Travellers are questioned or their ship inspected, they may be detained for more intense questioning. Even if no proof of piratical activity is found, the Travellers might end up be slapped with fines for questionable paperwork or deviations from spacefaring safety regulations. In short, Advisories make a pirate's life that little more hazardous and are best avoided if possible.

Warnings

Warnings are specific and, as the name suggests, warn starfarers that a particular ship is a known or strongly-suspected pirate. A vessel subject to a Warning may still be granted berthing privileges if it has not caused trouble in the local system, but will at the very least be closely watched and perhaps escorted in and out by system defence craft. In some systems, vessels subject to a Warning are not permitted to leave port without an escort, and are conveyed to a jump point under the guns of the escorting craft.

Warnings are issued when a vessel is 'known but has not yet been proven' to have been involved in piracy – which includes conveying booty to a port rather than carrying out the attack. A vessel subject to a Warning will normally be subject to an attempt to arrest and question the crew. Avoiding this requires an Average (8+) Deception, Diplomat or similar check.

A Warning carries with it DM+6, used positively or negatively at the referee's discretion; normally this means the DM is used to make whatever the Travellers are trying to do harder, but upon occasion may actually open doors for them. There are certain bars where 'I've got the death penalty in twelve systems' is a badge of honour, and a few where it is a requirement for entry!

For example, the Travellers have been spotted doing piratical deeds and their ship is subject to a Warning. This is not a shoot-on-sight order, but they can expect to be arrested in most systems that are not pirate havens. Sure enough, their latest port of call orders them to heave-to for boarding and questioning as suspected pirates. The Travellers try to blag their way out of the situation, claiming they have been wrongly accused or the Warning is in fact just a bureaucratic error. This is subject to DM-6, as the Warning cites clear evidence that the Travellers are indeed the bad guys.

Warnings are sometimes permanent, though they generally lapse after D3+3 months. Note that being arrested does not necessarily mean the Travellers will be convicted or even charged. They will be closely questioned but if there is insufficient evidence they might be released without charge or charged with a minor offence. It is possible to be arrested in almost every system, beat the questioning process, and carry on pirating... but not indefinitely.

Alerts

Alerts are different to Warnings and Advisories, in that they are specific and do not carry a DM to the Travellers' activities. An Alert can refer to an incident or circumstance. For example, an Alert might state that the government of Acis is seeking information on movements of a specific ship, or that a merchant ship bound for Wildeman has gone missing and a reward is available for reliable data on its last position. Alerts can be weirdly specific or so general that they make little sense. This can be hazardous for actual pirates, since officials might draw a conclusion that was never intended and decide to question the shifty-looking bunch who just entered port.

Using the Watch Lists

Watch lists can be used to subtly warn the Travellers they are sailing a bit too close to the wind. They are openly circulated and automatically downloaded whenever a ship enters port, so the Travellers will know the authorities are looking for them. Clever Travellers can use the watch lists to see if their latest attack has been reported or attributed to them, though a certain type of Traveller might prefer to see how many Advisories they can rack up at one time.

Advisories should serve as a hint that the Travellers are being sloppy and leaving clues; a Warning might give them a reason to break off the approach to a well-regulated port and make a run for it. Of course, sometimes the authorities do not issue a Warning but instead quietly arrange to set a trap. This is rare since it requires a degree of coordination uncommon in the Reach.

Once a Warning has been issued, the Travellers are in real danger of being arrested whenever they enter any port that is not a pirate haven. This may generate new adventures as the Travellers seek a way to get the Warning cancelled. Alternatively, they might use a different ship or go to ground for a while.

Alerts can be used by the referee to feed the Travellers information in an oblique manner – for example, about who is interested in particular systems or ships – or throw them the occasional curve ball.

Staying off Watch Lists

The simplest way to stay off the watch lists is to engage in legitimate operations and not cause trouble... or at least be seen to do that. If the Travellers are able to suborn some port authority personnel they may also be able to 'doctor' the lists so that Advisories and Warnings associated with their ship somehow get deleted or missed when the list is forwarded into the mail system. They could also try intimidation and bribery of the 'you didn't see us do that' sort. However, a ship that engages in piracy is going to be spotted sooner or later, and enough reports will eventually add up to interest from the authorities. This will happen more quickly if the Travellers are unimaginative or careless.

It would be entirely possible to operate out of Drinax and use starports like anyone else during the piracy campaign, but this carries significant risks. A ship that comes in with battle damage not long after an attack, or one that always seems to be in the area after a raid, is going to attract attention. The solution is either to use another ship as a support tender or construct a base somewhere. Each option has its advantages and disadvantages, but both allow the Travellers to strike and recuperate without being sighted in the local ports.

A standard merchant ship used as a tender can engage in normal trade operations; indeed, it would be a red flag for the authorities if it did not. Staff at low-end ports (Class E or D) rarely ask questions about a ship's activities, but more sophisticated installations routinely expect crews to file a flight plan and give an indication of their business. Unless the ship has attracted attention, this information is normally accepted at face value but it is filed and can be cross-referenced at need.

A base, whether temporary or permanent, offers the advantage of being able to hide for an extended period or use small craft for raiding rather than jump-capable starships. Bases are expensive to construct, but can be worth the investment – especially if Drinax becomes a recognised interstellar state and wants bases to support its naval operations.

A combination of the two methods can also be used. A 'clean' vessel can make supply runs to nearby ports whilst pirate ships make their attacks. It is possible that someone might eventually spot that the clean ship is not behaving quite like a legitimate merchant, but the risk is low compared to landing a known pirate vessel at a well-regulated port.

TENDER OPERATIONS

The most suitable craft to act as a tender for the Harrier or other pirate vessels is a converted merchant ship. A tender can fulfil several functions, though not all at once. It can gather intelligence in the ports it passes through and transport captured cargo or prisoners to and from a base without taking frontline ships off station. The latter is not too much of a consideration early on, but if the pirates decide to blockade a system or trade route they will need to keep their ships in the field, which means resupply and refuelling must be carried out by tenders.

A tender can be a stock transport ship, but this does raise the question of how to get cargo and fuel from one vessel to the other. If both ships have an Underway Replenishment (UNREP) system then transfers are easy providing the vessels can dock together for a time (see page 47 in *High Guard*), but for ships that do not have such systems the process is rather more difficult. The simplest answer is to land on the surface of a suitable moon and move cargo back and forth as needed, though there are other options for daring or properly-equipped crews.

Cargo Transfers

Cargo can be manually transferred from one ship to another in space; a slow and tricky process but one most pirates are familiar with since it is how they usually get stolen cargo aboard their own vessel. Cargo cranes and belts can be used to get containers in and out of a ship, but moving the container into proximity is a difficult business without specialist equipment.

In theory, a cargo container could be ever so slowly manoeuvred from one ship to another in free space using nothing more than a vacc suit's thrusters. However, the time required to do this – and the amount of suit propellant refills – would be prohibitive. An alternative is to toss the cargo container out of one ship using its crane or belt, provide slight course adjustments with suit jets and catch it with nets or a cargo scoop.

To launch a cargo container out of one ship towards another requires a Difficult (10+) Pilot or Vacc Suit check, rising to Formidable (14+) if the target ship is more than 100m away. The Mechanic skill can be used if the launching ship has a crane. If the check is made and the container on course, it will automatically be captured by a cargo net if the ship has one. A ship without a cargo net can use a cargo scoop in the normal manner, (see page 39 of *High Guard*) or an improvised catch can be attempted.

An improvised catch requires a slowing and entangling mechanism combined with padding to absorb impact. A jury-rigged network of chains and cables will suffice, though it has to be carefully set up to slow the container gradually rather than comically bouncing it back out into space. Rigging an improvised catch system requires a Very Difficult (12+) Mechanic check, made for each container as the whole system has to be reset each time. If this check is failed, the target ship suffers D3 points of damage, ignoring armour, as the container smashes into its hold. If no catch system is in place, the damage is 1D for each container brought aboard in this manner.

If the launch check is failed, the container is way off course and will collide with the target ship, without entering the cargo bay, causing damage equal to the Effect of the failed check (armour will help here), or else miss entirely. A missed shot can be picked up by an alert pilot, repositioning the ship to align the entry point. This requires a Very Difficult (12+) Pilot check, with the ship's Thrust rating as a positive DM. If this check is failed, the Effect is added to the damage suffered for the missed launch.

All of these problems can be avoided by one of two measures. The first is to have an Open-Space Cargo Transfer System (see page 170); the other is to land on some suitable moon or large planetoid and conduct a groundside transfer. The latter requires remaining in control of the target ship for an extended period if a 'hostile cargo transfer' (a grim euphemism for piracy) is taking place, and is still a laborious process but much safer than flinging cargo containers from one ship to another.

BUILDING A BASE

The simplest of measures can greatly enhance the survivability and effectiveness of a pirate fleet. A moon or large planetoid can be surveyed for suitable deep craters or canyons to hide in, shielding vessels from sensors and giving crews a chance to relax. Similarly, a refuelling point can be set up on almost any chunk of space rock that has water or ice, and made more convenient by deploying a field refuelling rig.

A proper base offers several advantages over a makeshift arrangement. Morale is improved by having somewhere to get out of the ship, even if facilities are minimal. A base can be used to store munitions, spare parts and even prisoners, and might in time develop into something greater. Here and there across Charted Space there are freeports that began as pirate bases, prospector camps, or other temporary facilities.

One approach to base-building is to buy a ready-made facility (see page 205), but even so construction work will be required. Building a base tunnelled into the rock of a planetoid offers an excellent combination of security and concealment, but obviously requires the use of specialist equipment. A compromise is to build on the surface of a moon or planetoid, smoothing off areas and digging scrapes to partially sink structures into.

Construction

A base can be built using starship components, treating the ground itself as a starship's hull. Components have the same power and space requirements as when fitted into a vessel, but require a 'hull' to contain them. If the base is entirely underground then only the cost of digging tunnels and caverns is incurred. If it is partially or wholly above ground then some structural work is required to link components and allow cabling and pipes to be run. Costs for construction work are in addition to the cost of any components.

Underground construction costs Cr2000 per ton and requires 500 Person-Work-Hours (PWH) per ton. This is less than the cost of building a planetoid ship, since a static installation is simpler to construct, but there is still a need for pipes, cables and ventilation ducting... all of which must be driven through solid rock.



Surface work such as smoothing off a landing area or constructing anchor points for starship-type components has a nominal cost of Cr500 per ton. This represents small spares and supplies, lights, fasteners, pipes and hoses required to make the base function. Surface work takes 100 PWH per ton.

Surface Structure, creating a 'hull' for the base, costs Cr10000 per ton and requires 300 PWH per ton. Unlike a starship hull, surface structures can be expanded as necessary. Light and reinforced structure options can be used, just like a starship, but configuration is irrelevant. It is not possible to claim a cost reduction by using a dispersed structure configuration, for example.

Starship Components such as staterooms, power plant and cargo handling systems are bought at their normal tonnage but a quarter of their usual cost – building a base is less complex than constructing a starship. In addition, some starship-type components are available which are specific to base construction. Starship components can be shipped to the base in a dismantled condition and constructed there. This reduces the amount of tonnage required to a quarter of the item's

usual volume during shipping. Alternatively, starship components can be brought to the base site fully operational and plugged in, at their usual full cost.

General Facilities are constructed as if they were Common Areas aboard a starship, at full tonnage and quarter cost (in other words, Cr25000 per ton). Most living and working spaces in a base will be of this sort, which covers shops, recreation centres, bars, restaurants, theatres and hotels if the base is sufficiently sophisticated to have them.

Open Spaces include storage areas, a concourse, parks, playing fields and various other areas which do not require a lot of components. In the event that a base has any of these, they cost Cr5000 per ton to outfit and can be later upgraded with components or general facilities.

Power: Starship-type components in a base require the same power as starship-mounted ones. A base requires power for general systems equal to 10% of its tonnage. Landing areas, fuel tanks and similar areas do not count towards this tonnage unless life support is deemed necessary in that location.

Example:

The Travellers are extending their surface base and want to set up a small living area using six starship staterooms and 24 tons of common area, for a total of 48 tons. Normal cost would be MCr3 for the staterooms and MCr2.4 for the common area but, since these are base elements rather than starship components, the normal MCr5.2 price tag is reduced to MCr1.3. These components do need a surrounding structure, however, Surface structures cost Cr10000 per ton – in this case Cr480000.

Base Layout

A base can be built as a single compact or sprawling structure, or as multiple separate sections accessed across the surface of the host moon or planetoid. Separate sections are considered individually for combat purposes, even if they are tied into a central life support and power system.

A section more than 100m away from the nearest part of the base is considered to be a separate structure and requires its own power and support systems, but this does not prevent a base being constructed as a chain of segments several kilometres long if necessary.

A section within 100m of another can be tied into the life support and power systems at a cost of Cr500 per ton of the section. An access tunnel suitable for a person to walk through can be constructed if desired; on the surface this costs Cr1000 per ton and takes 100 PWH to build. An underground tunnel costs Cr10000 per ton and takes 2000 PWH to build. A larger access tunnel, suitable for vehicles can be built for five times the cost and time requirement.

Power Requirements

A base requires Power points equal to 5% of its tonnage for general operations, plus the requirements of any systems it might have such as sensors, weapons, or space station components such as a mineral refinery.

Weaponry and Combat

A base is not subject to the same hardpoint limitation as a starship and can have as many weapon mounts as the builders can afford. An underground base is impervious to most weapons, requiring large nuclear warheads, ground-penetrating munitions or spinal mounts to attack successfully. A surface base is vulnerable to starship and vehicle weaponry, and is treated as a starship for most purposes (using Hull and Protection as normal).

As a rule of thumb, a surface base and the surface components of an underground installation will be vulnerable to weapons fire from attacking starships. Good compartmentalisation and damage control procedures can slow down the destruction of a base that is under attack, but the only sure defence for an installation that cannot move out of harm's way is not to be attacked. This is best achieved by never being found, or by having a cover identity as a legitimate outpost. The irony of a supposedly innocent 'mining base' being attacked by amateur pirates might be lost on the Travellers if they suffer heavy damage.

Once discovered, a base either has to conceal its nature or be so heavily defended that an attack is not feasible. Alternatively, if the base is operated by a powerful pirate group, it might be enough to warn anyone who might attack about possible reprisals. This is a risky prospect but can work. However, there is always the possibility that an Imperial or Aslan task force will show up and swamp the defences. Threats of reprisals are unlikely to deter such powerful opponents.

Overall, whilst some weaponry may be desirable to prevent casual raiding or liberty-taking on the part of ships using the base, the Travellers would do well to safeguard their investment by ensuring its presence is never even suspected.

Component	Cost per ton of Destination Segment	PWH per ton of Destination Segment
Personnel Access Tube, Surface	Cr1000	100
Personnel Access Tunnel, Underground	Cr10000	2,000
Vehicle Access Tube, Surface	Cr5000	500
Vehicle Access Tube, Underground	Cr50000	10,000

EXAMPLE SMALL PIRATE BASE



The base is to be constructed on a remote gas giant moon, partially hidden by the wall of a large crater. It will consist of a small landing area and a single above-ground block, which might be mistaken for an old prospecting base if anyone ever visits the moon. This block acts as an entry area for the underground section, which is to include living spaces, a secure storage area and a place to hold prisoners.

The Travellers have decided to construct a base for themselves; a place where they can get out of their ship and stash anything they do not currently need. Their first plan is typically grandiose; a huge complex located underground, entered through concealed landing-bay doors in the wall of a canyon. After figuring out what this would cost to built they settle on something a bit more modest.

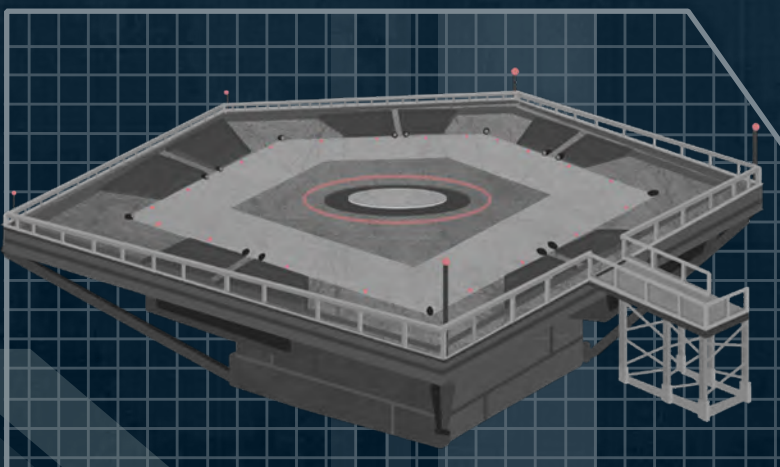
THE LANDING FIELD

TL10		TONS	COST (MCR)	PWH
Hull	400 tons, Surface Work	-	0.2	40,000
Components	Craft Landing Capacity	400	-	-
Total		400	0.2	40,00



DESCRIPTION

The Travellers need to be able to land a 400-ton ship safely, they decide. A larger landing area is not desirable as it will be more obvious. A suitable area is smoothed off after checking the surface rock is stable enough to support a ship. This requires surface work sufficient to produce a 400-ton area, at Cr500 and 100 Person-Work-Hours per ton.



FUEL TANKS

TL10		TONS	COST (MCR)	PWH
Hull	100 tons, Underground Construction	-	0.2	50,000
Components	Fuel Tanks (100 tons)	100	-	-
Total		100	0.2	50,00

40

HULL POINTS

DESCRIPTION

The Travellers want some ready fuel stored at their base. They decide that 100 tons is enough to run the base reactor and to top off their own tanks. They have some starship fuel tanks they... acquired... during their operations but do not want them on the surface as this is too obvious. The tanks and their associated pumping gear are essentially free but burying them requires 100 tons of underground construction at Cr2000 per ton and 500PWH.



THE ENTRY BLOCK

TL10		TONS	COST (MCR)	PWH
Hull	60 Tons, Surface Structure	-	0.6	18,000
Components	Airlock	2	0.1	-
	Fuel Refinery (Capacity 48 tons/day)	4	4	-
	Tie-in to Life support	-	0.03	
	Stowage Space	54	-	
Total		60	4.73	18,000

24

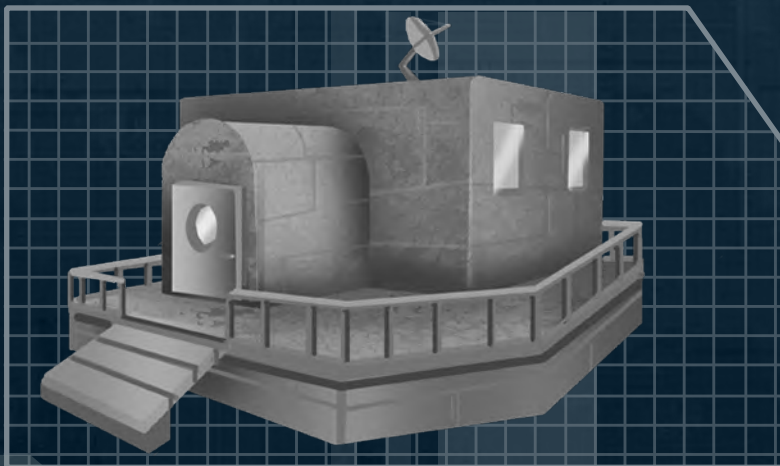
HULL POINTS

10

POWER

1 PART-TIME
REFINERY
TECHNICIAN

CREW



DESCRIPTION

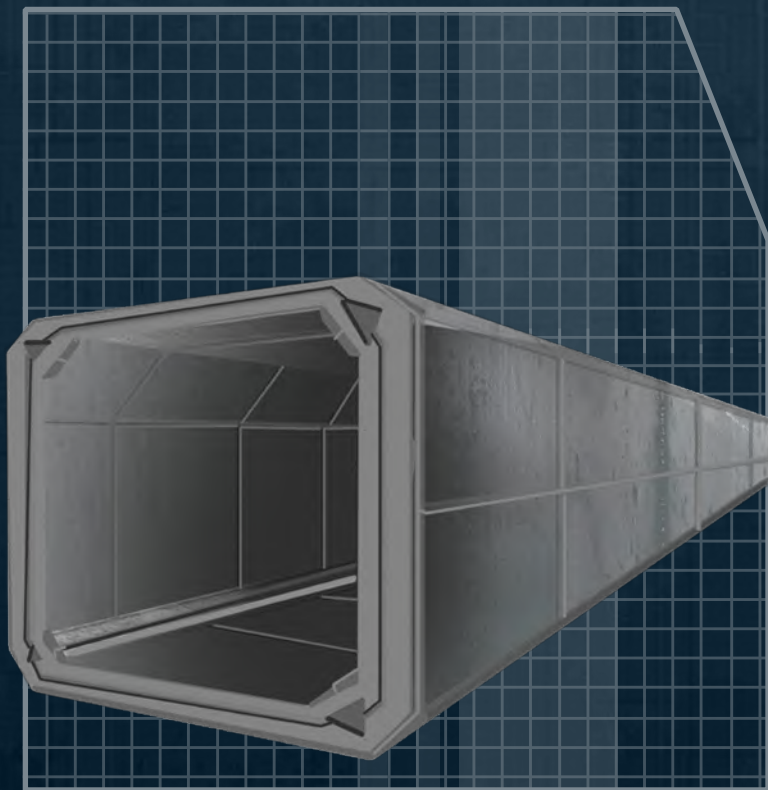
The Travellers build a single surface structure, configured on the outside to look like a ramshackle old prospecting camp. This means the block has to be bigger than it really needs to be just to contain the access shaft to the underground segment. The Travellers make use of this space by using it for stowage where they can keep tools, a few common spares and components, and anything else they do not want to be lugging up and down the access tunnel. They also decide to install a small fuel refinery module they looted from somewhere. The cost of this module is listed under components, but the Travellers do not need to pay it since they already have the item. Installation costs are covered by hull construction. The entry block is built on a 60-ton surface structure at a cost of Cr10,000 and 300PWH per ton. It must be tied into the base's life support and power system at a cost of Cr500 per ton.

THE CONNECTING TUNNEL

TL10		TONS	COST (MCR)	PWH
Hull	Personnel Access Tunnel, destination module 60 tons	-	0.6	120,000
Components	None; access only	-	-	-
Total		-	0.6	120,00

DESCRIPTION

The entry block is connected to the rest of the base by a steeply sloping personnel access tunnel. Its cost is determined by the tonnage of the destination module. Since the underground section is the main part of the base, the entry block is considered to be the destination. It is not necessary to pay to tie the connecting tunnel into the life support and power network as this cost is assumed as part of the destination module. Connecting tunnels do not count towards the base's tonnage when calculating power requirements.



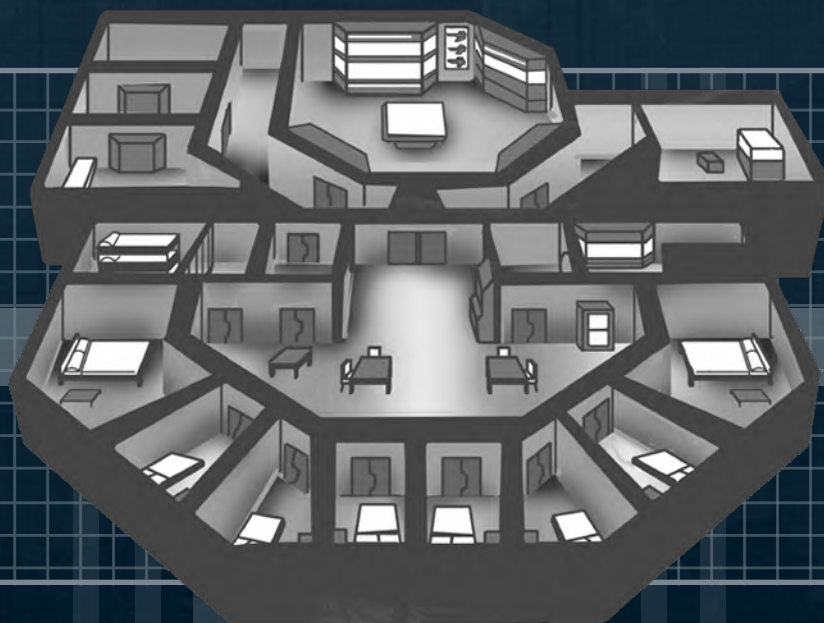
THE UNDERGROUND SECTION

The Travellers decide they want to live in style whilst hiding out in their base. Underground 'hull' is cheap since it requires little more than excavation and the fitting of an internal 'skin' to the spaces thus created. The excavation itself would be impossibly time-consuming if carried out with picks and shovels, but the Travellers know where they can loot some mining equipment that will do the job for them. They decide their underground base will consist of a central reception/living space, into which the entry tunnel arrives, and additional small areas for different purposes. These are considered part of the same structure since they are linked by short corridors bored into the rock rather than long access tunnels.

The central area has an airlock, just in case, and consists of 96 tons' worth of general-purpose space where the Travellers can socialise and relax. Radiating off this are six more or less identical personal living spaces, each containing a luxury stateroom and a standard cabin plus 16 tons of general facilities which the Traveller can configure

however he pleases. In addition there is a set of 'guest quarters' containing six more standard cabins, a modest brig and an additional 48 tons of general facilities where guests can socialise or prisoners can exercise. This is sealed off from the central area by another airlock.

There is an eighth chamber off the main one. This contains an armoury – which is unnecessarily large – and workshop space for maintaining weapons, and a 48-ton stowage areas. This chamber also gives access to the lower level. This contains a starship reactor the Travellers came by in completely legitimate fashion... maybe. It is larger than necessary, but the reactor was essentially free so all the Travellers had to do was create a space for it. The reactor's cost is factored into the price of the main base segment but like any component the Travellers can supply by other means it does not need to be paid for. Starship-type fixtures such as cabins and airlocks are bought at a quarter of their normal cost.



MAIN BASE SEGMENT

TL10		TONS	COST (MCR)	PWH
Hull	460 tons, Underground Construction	-	0.92	226,000
Power Plant	TL10 Fusion (200 power)	20	2.5	
Components	Airlock x2	4	0.1	
	Luxury Stateroom x6	60	2.25	
	Standard Stateroom x12	48	1.5	
	General Facilities	240	6	
	Brig (capacity 24)	16	0.25	
	Armoury x12	12	0.75	
	Workshop (12t)	12	4.5	
	Stowage space	48	-	
Total		460	18.77	226,000

184

HULL POINTS

46

POWER

1 PART-TIME
REFINERY
TECHNICIAN

CREW



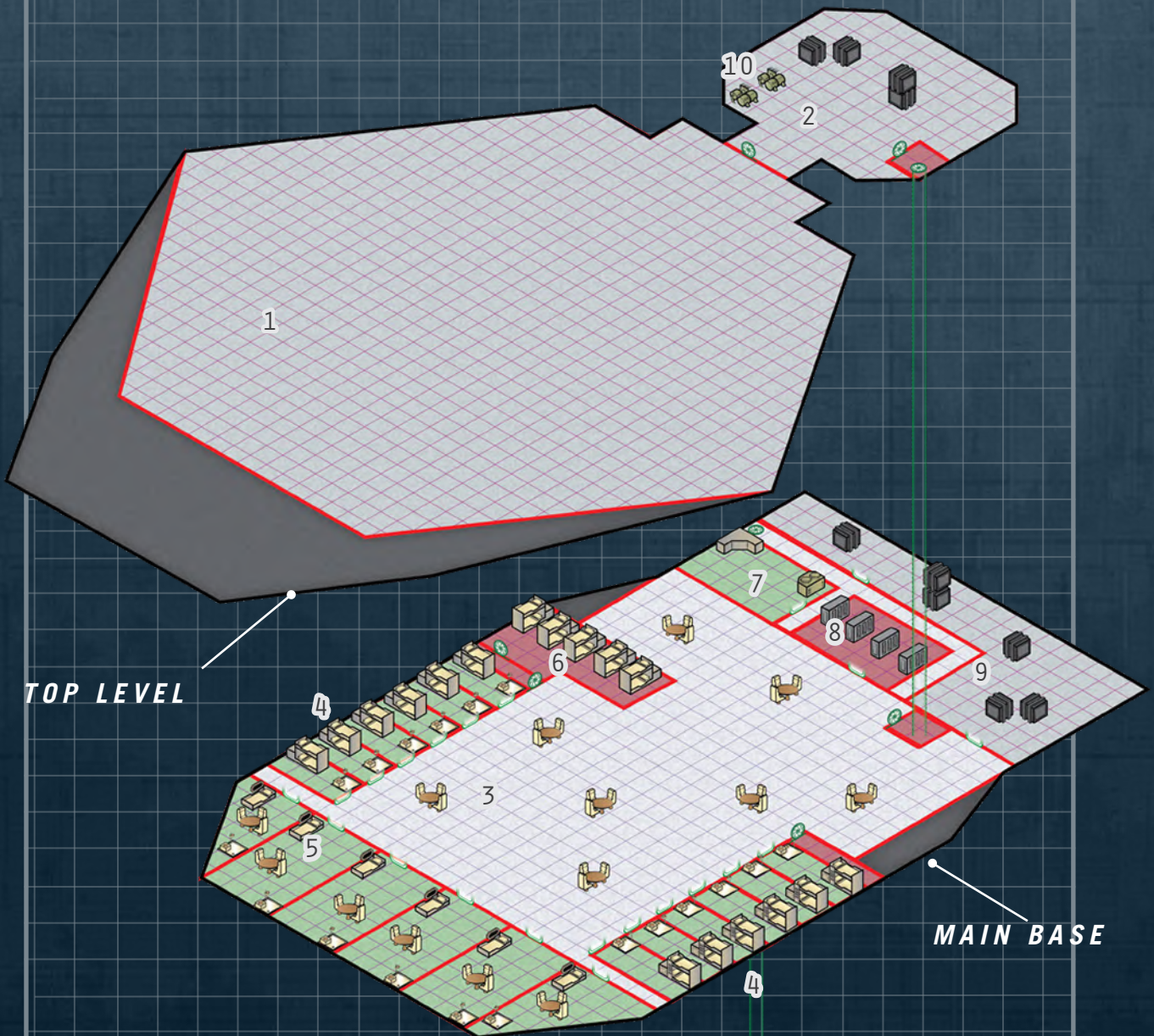
FINALISING THE BASE

Once the base design is agreed, the costs and requirements of all the segments need to be added up. The landing field does not use power; its few lights and small beacon can be assumed to be powered from the base's general distribution system. The same is true for the fuel tanks. The rest of the base needs 56 power; far less than the powerplant can produce.

Total cost for all modules is MCr24.5, minus whatever the Travelers can provide by stealing it. Monthly maintenance cost is based on the purchase price of modules, no matter how they were sourced, so it will cost the Travellers Cr2041.67 to maintain and supply their base whether they are using it or not.

Total time to build the facility is a very considerable 454,000 Person-Work-Hours. A single person with hand tools could do it in about 52 years, but there are quicker ways. Gangs of prisoners might be used, but the obvious answer is to obtain mining equipment or specialist space-construction gear. Of course, if pirates steal construction equipment and it does not show up on the black market, someone might conclude they are building a base and come looking.





TOP LEVEL

MAIN BASE

LOWER BASE

- 1. LANDING FIELD
- 2. ENTRY BLOCK
- 3. GENERAL FACILITIES
- 4. STATEROOMS
- 5. LUXURY STATEROOM
- 6. BRIG
- 7. WORKSHOP
- 8. ARMOURY
- 9. STOWAGE SPACE
- 10. FUEL REFINERY
- 11. POWERPLANT

FIRST PRIZE

A Tutorial Encounter for Pirates of Drinax

This short adventure can be played at any time, but it makes a good introduction to the wonderful world of interstellar piracy so fits best at the beginning of a *Pirates of Drinax* campaign. The default opening can be adapted to other locations and situations as needed.

INTRODUCTIONS

King Oleb politely requests a meeting with his recently-appointed buccaneers. Really? Well yes, if bawling the words GET IN HERE NOW! constitutes an unusual degree of civility... which in Oleb's case it does. It turns out there is no major crisis and nobody is getting pushed off a balcony today, but Oleb has had an idea and it must be shared immediately with his underlings.

The only other person in the meeting chamber, other than a few nervous servants flitting in and out with food and drink, is an elderly lady wearing a well-tailored suit and generally appearing far too respectable for the company she is keeping. Her appearance is neat and well-presented without being memorable, her mannerisms rather bland, and overall she comes over as being as grey as her suit. Which does not explain why Oleb seems to be so impressed with her.

'Margaret BLAINE!!!' Oleb bawls by way of introduction. 'We have the great MARGARET-meister-of-pillage-BLAINE here among us! Show some respect!'

Oleb goes on like this for a while, during which the elderly lady sips tea and manages to look politely interested in her surroundings. The Travellers may have heard of Margaret Blaine. If not there are plenty of data entries about her; raids, daring escapes, an attack on a heavily defended starport by her nine-ship flotilla. That time she just plain flew into Oghma starport and demanded tribute... and every one of the slaver lords meekly handed over crates of money. This is Margaret Blaine? It surely can't be...

'Yes,' says the lady in that bland, interstellar-Traveller-from-nowhere-you-can-place accent. 'I was something of a raider in my youth. And my middle years too. And I did indeed once plot a three-ship squadron jump using just my personal chronometer. Purely out of necessity, of course. Showboating really isn't my style. But anyway, my dear friend his majesty King Oleb has agreed to



MARGARET BLAINE TERROR OF THE SPACEWAYS

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		92
STR	4	INT	9	SKILLS Admin 1, Astrogation 3, Deception 2, Diplomat 2, Gun Combat (energy) 1, Leadership 2, Tactics (naval) 2, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	6	EDU	9	
END	4	SOC	8	

permit me a ride in your starship. I have a small task to accomplish, you see. Nothing very hazardous, but necessary all the same.'

Oleb interjects with a few shouts about giving Margaret everything she wants and doing what she asks, because the take will be epicly huge and all she wants is a small personal item. So the Travellers are ordered to do whatever Margaret wants, which means any request from her is an order from the king, and you don't disobey those, do you?

Margaret waits for quiet and then adds, 'How did I do it? That's the question you should be asking. I'll show you along the way if you'll help me out. But for now, consider this: my career as a raider spanned four decades from my first score to my last. Seven decades, I suppose, if we count this one, but let's actually succeed before we do that. So how did I survive all those years on the Most Wanted list?'

Margaret smiles that gentle, non-committal smile and goes on, 'I was never on it.'

Margaret Blaine is in her early nineties, though with the help of anagathics she appears to be a youthful sixty or so. She is ruthless when she needs to be, but her approach to piracy and everything else she did in her long career was carefully planned, cautious and devious. She expects to be obeyed by the Travellers, but always phrases her instructions as a polite suggestion.

Margaret's secret was to be essentially invisible. Her attacks were low-key and involved as little violence as possible. Indeed, sometimes passengers were unaware their ship had been robbed, and upon occasion she tricked high-end liner captains into letting her marines board their vessel to conduct a search for contraband or fugitives. There was always some noisier or more violent pirate captain making the news, and she ensured that attention was diverted in other ways too. A little bribery, some polite intimidation, and a network of informers ensured that responses to her raids hit empty vacuum. And most importantly, she got out. She created a new identity, which changes every few years, and became the most unmemorable person in the Reach.

Margaret is a wealth of information on the piracy business and how to survive it. She will share with the Travellers the advice found earlier in this book, and specifically her own secret – indulge your bank balance, not your ego. Those who make a lot of noise in orbital casinos or bars of ill repute attract all sorts of attention, whereas those who quietly go about their business find the ones living the pirate lifestyle a handy distraction.

THE MISSION

King Oleb has come to an agreement with Margaret – and is convinced it was his idea – that his new buccaneers will make an attack on her behalf. The target is a rather unassuming far trader named the *Cicendai* which has been plying back and forth along the Sindalian Main for several years. In fact, this vessel was once one of Margaret's flotilla; the only ship she ever lost. It was captured in port when its crew got complacent and stupid, and auctioned off to an apparently legitimate user.

Margaret wants the ship boarded and a cache of items removed from a smuggling compartment. She is sure it will not have been found – the auction valuers missed it and so did the Imperial Navy when they cleared the ship for resale. She is also convinced – though she will not reveal this unless she has to – that the compartment has not been found because she is still free. It contains records of many of her activities, which could be used to find and capture several of her retired associates.

Margaret does not want anyone to know how sensitive the contents of the compartment could be, and thus will explain – truthfully – that it contains jewellery and personal effects that she wants back. Nothing immensely valuable but some of these items have sentimental value and more importantly they were lost to her. She does not indulge her ego, she says, but she does have a certain pride and considers retrieving these items would be a fitting last adventure. This is all true; she just omits the part about the data and records.



Cicendai will be passing through Marduk in a few weeks. Her crew are typical free traders; competent enough but nothing special. They have been making this run for years, but have recently started behaving differently. Margaret has recognised the signs – the crew of *Cicendai* are short of funds and have begun running contraband. Rather than landing at the starport they have taken to skimming fuel from gas giants and bypassing ports along the way. This increases the chances of evading patrols, but predictable to those who know what to look for.

Margaret wants the Travellers to ambush the *Cicendai* at Marduk's outer gas giant and rob her crew, taking a modest amount of cargo and relieving them of their contraband. Along the way they will retrieve her personal effects from the smuggling compartment they have lain in for forty years. Ideally they will make it look like opportunistic pirates have robbed smugglers who were in a place legitimate traders would not go, and nobody will care at all – especially if there are no serious injuries.

THE VOYAGE

The Travellers have a chance to get something for almost nothing here, or to do something entirely stupid. If they decide to antagonise Margaret, or double-cross her, there is little she can do about it during the voyage. She will act meek and frightened and try to find a way off the ship. If she gets away, she will call in every favour she was ever owed to destroy the Travellers; they are doomed. The same applies if they murder her and pretend she had an accident; so many people owe her that the Travellers will be found out and dealt with even if King Oleb does not throw them off his balcony.

On the other hand, if the Travellers treat Margaret with respect she will share some advice on how to stay alive as a pirate, and point out little things about starship traffic behaviour that the Travellers would never even have considered. Once they are within reach of Marduk she suggests jumping to the gas giant rather than the mainworld, and skimming fuel before lying in wait. Ideally there will be no indication the Travellers' ship was ever in the Marduk system so no suspicion will fall upon them.

Margaret will let the Travellers come up with their own plan to ambush *Cicendai*, but will offer comments. It would be best to use something solid to hide the Travellers' ship, such as a moon, and stay out of the atmosphere whilst they wait. They could hide in the atmosphere but there are always risks when doing that. Not only will sensors be attenuated but the Travellers might have to wait for a week or two – which is a long time to be buffeted by methane winds. Coasting in a powered-down distant orbit is another good gambit.

Ideally, the Travellers should sneak up on *Cicendai*, which is easiest when she is in the atmosphere skimming. However, if they can catch her without enough fuel to jump the Travellers can be sure their prey will not risk a desperate escape. One solution is to intercept *Cicendai* on her run in, but it might also be possible to catch her when she comes back up to the thinnest layers of the atmosphere at the end of one of her skimming runs. Most ships do this rather than make a single long run, as it is safer and allows the crew to reorient themselves.

If the Travellers want to try a boarding in the depths of the atmosphere, Margaret can cite a great many reasons why it is not a good idea – most of which involve the Travellers getting killed or their ship being destroyed. She also warns against making the intercept at a point where the target can easily dive back into the atmosphere, since it might be able to hide and sneak away.

Margaret is willing to allow the Travellers to make a hash of the mission if they really want to, but this will earn her disfavour at the very least. It would take a lot to make her come out and deliver a direct threat, since she has spent her entire career in a world of inuendo and assumption. She much prefers to point out the difficulties and lack of cost-effectiveness of certain courses of action and let the Travellers come to the conclusion she wants them to.

THE INTERCEPTION

The Travellers will have to hang around near Marduk's outer gas giant for 2D+4 days before *Cicendai* shows up. She does not behave like a standard merchant ship, in that she uses low power bursts of thrust to nudge herself into a capture orbit then descends to begin refuelling. Her caution would make it very unlikely she would be detected unless there was a vessel waiting for her and aware of her likely course... which there is.

The Travellers might decide to make their own quiet course change and set up an intercept using minimal drive and sensor emissions. Margaret approves of this approach since it gives the best chance of reaching no-escape distance before the Harrier is even detected. She sniffs disdainfully at the idea of just charging in on full power, though this can work so she will not object... at least not directly.

If the Travellers choose to set up an intercept and sneak in, they will have to chart a course to make the intercept at the optimum point with minimal drive emissions. This requires a Difficult (10+) Astrogation check. Failure by 6 or more indicates that the intercept course is no good and the Travellers will have to use a high-power

approach instead, though this will not be immediately apparent. By the time they realise their course is bad, they will have lost the opportunity for a stealthy approach.

If the course is reasonably true, the Travellers will be in position to intercept *Cicendai* before she begins refuelling or while she has too little fuel to jump. *Cicendai* will be using low-powered sensors only in order to avoid detection, and although her crew are cautious and experienced they are not expecting trouble.

When it is time to begin the interception, the Travellers should make an Average (8+) Pilot check using the Effect of their course-planning check as a DM. Success indicates that the Harrier is detected at Short range, around 1000km, with the far trader right under her guns. Failure indicates a much earlier detection: -1 to -2 indicates Medium range, -3 to -5 Long range and -6 or more undoes all the earlier good work; the Harrier is detected at Very Long range.

If the Travellers attempt to convince the crew of *Cicendai* to surrender, they receive DM+4 on Persuade checks if they are at Short range and DM+2 at Medium. They could shoot up the merchant and reduce its crew's Morale value as described in *Pirates of Drinax*, but this is an opportunity to carry out a raid with no real harm, and therefore remain off wanted lists.

Cicendai has two single turrets with beam lasers, and will fight if she has to. She will also broadcast a distress call containing the description and identity of the raider. There is virtually no chance of assistance this far out, but if the identity of the raider is known, perhaps her crew will refrain from wanton killings... or so the logic goes. Bargaining with the crew of *Cicendai* is not so much about convincing them they cannot win a fight – they know this – but that the Travellers are willing to take damage to win and will be merciful if *Cicendai* surrenders.

BOARDING CICENDAI

The crew of the far trader are understandably nervous, and will fight like cornered rats if they have nothing to lose. Margaret can advise the Travellers that their best option is to balance an air of ruthlessness with professionalism – dead merchants cannot be robbed a second time, and smart pirates know they depend on the continuation of trade in order to ply their own trade. If the merchant crew detect weakness they may fight, and will take advantage of mistakes if the Travellers let them, but if the situation comes down to 'comply and be politely robbed, resist and get killed' then the boarding should go off without a hitch.

Assuming the Travellers do not provoke their targets to desperation or give them a chance to turn the tables, they can take their prize. There is a choice to be made here, which may be important; if the Travellers only take the four shipping containers they know are carrying the contraband (along with Margaret's possessions) then no reportable crime has been committed – the crew of *Cicendai* can hardly report that their illegal contraband was stolen, and if nothing else is missing there is no indication of a robbery. The crew would also have to explain why they were in the outsystem rather than heading for port like other merchant ships.

On the other hand, if the Travellers are greedy they could snatch some of the legitimate cargo as well. Margaret makes sure they realise the choice they are making, which gives the referee a chance to let the Travellers begin to understand the limits and risks of their profession.

If the Travellers really push it or start brutalising the crew of *Cicendai* just for the sake of it, they will face resistance. This could also happen if someone panics and decides they are going to be kidnapped or killed.

If they have to fight, so be it, but if the Travellers pull off the robbery without violence they have a new opportunity, and again Margaret will make sure they understand it; the Travellers know that *Cicendai* is a smuggling vessel, and her crew have just had a graphic lesson in how vulnerable they are. If the Travellers are diplomatic enough or hit the right note of intimidation they may be able to start developing *Cicendai* as an Ally or Asset. Her crew will resent being robbed, of course, but this will not preclude later striking a deal based partly on fear – a deal which comes down to 'work with us and you don't get robbed no more'.

SELLING THE CARGO

The take from *Cicendai* is contraband, and stolen contraband at that. It will be hard to sell on the open market. However, Margaret knows an apparently legitimate broker on Exocet who can fence it for a not-too-outrageous fee. The contraband is a stolen shipment of high-value pharmaceuticals; nothing nasty and indeed with many life-saving applications. However, it is all coded and traceable. It is theoretically worth millions on the open market but trying to sell it there would land the Travellers in trouble.

Margaret's fence is a very respectable seeming merchant named Aiir Linuuri, who offers MCr1 for the four shipping containers of contraband or Cr250000 for each if the Travellers do not have all of them. Margaret gets her cut out of whatever Aiir eventually sells the

pharmaceuticals for, and will part company with the Travellers at Exocet. Aair can be bargained up to as much as MCr1.5 for all four containers, but no more. Of course, King Oleb gets his cut but it is not a bad return on a few weeks' work – especially if the Travellers engaged in trade or other empire-building activities along the way.

If the Travellers think of it, they may begin developing Aair Linuuri as an Asset too, and if Margaret likes them she might provide another name or two of potential contacts. Her final advice is to create an intelligence network and cultivate friends – or at least people willing to help – in as many places as possible. Sometimes it is worth passing up some profit in the short term to build a relationship with backwater installation staff – you never know when you might need information or a place to hide out while repairs are made.

The Travellers might run into Margaret again, under one of her many aliases, and might try to impress other pirates with their tale of how they flew with the legendary buccaneer herself, but if they do they will be laughed down as liars. Margaret Blaine was a fearsome

she-devil, good with knives and always ready with a gun. If she was still out there she would be capturing three Imperial liners a week. And anyway, she married the Duke of Tobia. Or set up a legitimate trading corporation. Or retired and bought a planet in the Darrian Confederation.

The Travellers might overhear others boasting of going after Blaine's Bounty, the great hidden treasure of the pirate queen. When she shipped with us she let slip the location, you see. A fearsome woman who'd rip your throat out as soon as look at you she was, and most crews would not be worthy of her time... but we took five ships in six weeks, left wreckage scattered all over the system, and dodged a whole Imperial flotilla to get away with it. Blaine was *impressed*, you see, and she told us where to find her treasure....

The Travellers might permit themselves a quiet smile at hearing such tales. After all, noisy pirates who draw attention to themselves can make a useful distraction. And deception, not ego, is the key to an effective career as a pirate.



C H A P T E R - N I N E T E E N

STORIES FROM SINDAL

The Sindalian Empire fell long ago. It is sufficiently distant to have become the stuff of legends and wild tales rather than sober and responsible history. People will believe things about the old empire they would dismiss outright if attributed to a more recent era. This is in part due to the separation in time, and partly because the Sindalian Empire was so extreme in its methods of controlling the worlds it ruled that almost any atrocity or savagely lethal piece of equipment is believable. If the empire's willingness to scour cities from the face of their planets is accepted, then claims of superweapons used to do it seem a lot more plausible.

Tales of Sindalian wonders and savagery are told and retold in starport bars across the Reach, becoming ever more distorted over time. Legends of lost treasures or blasted ruins that might just contain long-forgotten artefacts are popular entertainment and there are even a few who believe them, going in search of the hidden wonders of Sindal. Some are respectable scientists intent on carrying out rigorous research. Others are treasure-hunters or hope that a cache of Sindalian weapons might be enough to bring victory for their chosen cause. Some are simply desperate or deluded. Few find anything, and most of what is uncovered is wrecked or degraded by centuries of abandonment. Yet the lure of ancient treasures is undeniable – and who knows? Maybe some of the stories are true.

The following are a selection of rumours the Travellers may encounter. The referee can invent all manner of others and should decide if there is any substance to them at all, and if so how distorted the account has become. These are tall tales, greatly exaggerated, and if they were accurate then any find they led to would have been looted long ago. Thus the truth – if there is any truth at all to these stories – must be hidden in a veil of distortion and outright invention. These tales will never lead directly to anything, and what they do lead to will not be the fabulous treasure described.

However, if the Travellers decide to follow up a rumour of this sort, it will lead to *something*. That something might be entirely unrelated; the Travellers might blunder onto a rival pirate base looking for an old Sindalian weapons cache, or it might be surprisingly close to the truth but require a lot of effort to achieve a useful payoff. After all, if recovering the lost treasures of Sindal was easy, it would have happened long ago.

INVESTIGATING A RUMOUR

Once the Travellers have encountered the original tale, they have a framework into which to fit additional clues. It is possible they might have come across some of the relevant information before but not realised its significance. Once connections begin to be made it should be possible to slowly piece together some of the truth behind the story. This should require some work on the part of the Travellers – as already noted, if it were easy it would have already been done.

The most likely route to the treasures – or what remains of them – described in these rumours is a slow process of information gathering, the elimination of a few red herrings, a good solid guess at where the payoff might be, followed by a journey there and a lengthy search. Each of these activities has the potential to expand into other adventures, and of course searching for one set of clues might reveal information about another, entirely unrelated, rumour.

The process is the same in each case. Once the Travellers have heard about a rumour they can begin collecting information. Each rumour has an Information Cost; once this total is reached the Travellers will have a good idea where to look. Certain actions yield one or more Information points, and most can only be undertaken once in connection with any given rumour. If the Travellers spontaneously decide to go to the location of a rumoured treasure without collecting the necessary Information points – perhaps because a Traveller has access to spoilers from outside the game universe – then at the minimum the treasure should not be there. The referee should consider the possibility that a pirate hunting fleet might also have obtained information by this method and be waiting. Or perhaps the rumour actually leads to the Sindalian Doomsday Deathtrap Minefield...

Each of the following gambits can be used for most rumours. Those that can be repeated are noted as such; otherwise the action can only be used once. Note that some actions can actually reduce the amount of information the Travellers have, usually by creating contradictions or obfuscating an issue that was previously becoming clear.

Didn't We Hear Something About This...?

The Travellers may have heard other related tales that shed light on the current one. They may make one collective attempt to brainstorm every wild tale and drunken boast or obscure vid documentary they can think of, then sift through the mess for connections. One appointed Traveller may make a Very Difficult (12+) Investigate check, with DM+1 for each Traveller involved in the discussion. The Effect of this check is added to (or subtracted from) the Information total for the rumour.

The Archives at The Floating Palace

If the Travellers have time to visit Drinax they can search the archives at the Floating Palace – assuming King Oleb grants permission. The archives are a disorganised mess of myth, conjecture and the personal opinions of generations of scholars, but contain a wealth of information on the old empire. The Travellers may consult once for every rumour, adding the Effect of an Average (8+) Investigate check to their Information total.

Consulting a Sindal Scholar

There are many 'Sindal Scholars' in the Reach. Some are fascinated amateurs or charlatans making money from made-up 'secrets of the old empire'. Others are reputable scientists – which does not mean they are right about what they think they know – and some actually work in other fields but have relevant information. Consulting a scholar is a risky business, since some have a vested interest in pretending they know all about the Sindalian Empire and will tell the Travellers almost anything in order to maintain this illusion. Scholars will usually want a fee for the consultation, which may vary from thousands of Credits for someone with a reputation in the field (whether deserved or not) to a burger and beer for an enthusiastic amateur.

When a scholar is consulted, the referee should note their name and location as the Travellers might have business with them in the future. Only one consultation with a particular scholar is possible for any given subject, but others may be consulted or the Travellers might come back to ask about something else. They may also have reason to return if the information they receive turns out to be sheer fabrication.

When consulting a scholar the Travellers should roll 2D on the Sindal Scholar table. The highest Investigate or Science (history) skill among the Travellers can be used as a DM.

Sindal Scholar

2D	Result
2-3	The scholar is a charlatan or fake, or else knows nothing useful about this topic and feels the need to make something up. His plausible-sounding 'information' is later found to contradict other data and confuses the issue, subtracting D3 from the Information total.
4-5	The scholar provides what sounds like reasonable information but is mistaken, deluded or otherwise confused. Lose -1 from the Information total.
6-7	The scholar knows little of value, but earnestly provides a great deal of background information, possibly-related facts and well-thought-out but irrelevant conjecture. No Information is gained or lost.
8-9	The scholar can provide some useful insight, adding +1 to the Information total.
10+	The scholar knows a lot about this subject, and most of it turns out to be at least partially correct. Add +D3 to the Information total.

Collect Rumours

In every port the Travellers visit they can attempt to collect stories of 'Old Sindal' or the misadventures of spacer crews in the hope of cross-referencing some facts from all the tall tales and legends. The effort takes 1D3 days of hanging around bars and could lead to antagonising people if the Travellers split up and end up pestering the same spacers. However, each Traveller who spends 2Dx50 Credits may make a Difficult (10+) Streetwise check. Anyone who succeeds adds 1 to the information total. There is no information penalty for failure, though that does not rule out a barfight or arrest for harassment.

Cross-Reference with Known Data

Each time the Travellers increase their Information total they may attempt to cross-reference it with information not specifically about old Sindal. For example, if they have been collecting spacers' tales they might try to locate gas giants with the right number of moons or the correct ring system to pin down a location. This can be done once for every data collection session – so even if ten Travellers canvass every bar on an entire planet and add several points to their Information total they can only make one cross-referencing attempt.

The Travellers may add the Effect of a Difficult (10+) Investigate check to their Information total – which may of course reduce it. Just because the Travellers now know exactly where that old smuggler was talking about, it does not mean his memory was accurate or the tale he spun

was true. The referee may choose to apply a DM equal to the highest relevant skill among the Travellers if they specify an area of research. For example, if the Travellers are trying to find candidate star systems and one of them has Science (astronomy) then this would be appropriate. However, the Travellers should not be allowed to always apply the same method in a formulaic manner to always get the best DM. An additional DM can be awarded for good ideas such as obtaining records from a planetary survey database or historical research centre.

INFORMATION TOTAL REACHED

Once the Travellers have enough Information points about a rumour, the pieces fall into place and they will have a solid lead on where it might be. They will still have to search the local area, and it might be difficult to get there at all, but at least the Travellers know where to look. The referee should consider the possibility that someone might have noticed the Travellers' interest in old tales and figured out what they are going after. There is even a possibility that the rivals might get there first, or immediately after the Travellers arrive.

CAPTAIN ENVAI'S CAVERN

Location: Outsystem moon or planetoid

Information Cost: 6

Two hundred years ago, give or take, Captain Jomau Envai stumbled across a hidden stash of Sindalian Empire equipment. He was at the time on the run from several enemies, none of whom were individually powerful but collectively added up to far too much to deal with. According to the story Captain Envai hid his ship in a cavern he found, deep in the side of a canyon on some nameless outsystem rock. Cleverly rigging a temporary seal over the entrance, he was able to create a liveable space where his crew undertook emergency repairs.

It is not known exactly what was in that cavern, but after emerging Captain Envai launched a series of attacks on his enemies, including a three-ship pirate band and a starport merchant who had double-crossed him. Some were eliminated in graphic fashion by assassin-robots, others intercepted and destroyed by Envai's strangely potent starship.

Envai's final fate is unknown. It is said he became rich in a short period of time and set himself up as a freeport baron. Other versions of the tale claim he systematically pillaged the ships of a merchant line that had opposed him, with the intent of forcing it out of business. His ship was eventually destroyed in battle with an escorting frigate, leaving his stashed loot somewhere waiting to be found.

Referee

If the cavern is found, the first problem (apart from the usual dangers inherent in flying down a narrow canyon) is that it is covered by heavy doors installed whilst Envai was using it as a base. These are functional but the mechanism is powered down and has not been used in two centuries; it needs a major overhaul. A personnel airlock beside the main doors could be forced and later repaired.

Inside, the Travellers find a cavern-hangar capable of handling a ship up to 1,200 tons. There are lights and refuelling gear in functional condition but requiring extensive refurbishment. In the side of the cavern is a small tunnel complex with half a dozen starship-style staterooms plus a rather magnificent suite made up of three luxury staterooms and a small common area. There is a field reactor in a chamber that once held a larger unit, plus a modest set of living and working areas with well-equipped workshops. There are also fuel storage bunkers in side caverns, though these are empty.

The equipment is mostly what Captain Envai installed after he pulled out and salvaged the Sindalian gear he found here. There are a few traces of Sindalian Empire grandeur remaining, but Envai sold or used everything he found, later returning to use the cavern as a hidden base. This is the real treasure; a ready-made hidden base requiring only refurbishment. However, Envai did leave behind several shipping containers full of raw materials he intended to use. This is mostly mundane materials; several dozen tons of high-quality steel and copper alloys, kilometres of cabling and piping, and tools.

There is one container full of valuables. This consists mostly of currency ingots used in governmental transactions; gold, silver and platinum for the most part. The open-market value is around MCr4, though the issuing governments might want to know why their stolen currency has just re-emerged.



GENERAL SATVIK'S BUGOUT BUNKER

Location: Gas giant moon in any low-traffic system
Information Cost: 3

General Enos Satvik was a notorious Sindalian commander, sometimes referred to as 'admiral', or 'captain' or even 'lord', depending on the version of the tale. All agree that he was a nasty piece of work responsible for putting down any dissent with a brutality that seems excessive even by Sindalian standards. Naturally, he was promoted to high office and given command of a combined space/ground force which acted as a 'fire brigade' in the dying days of the Sindalian Empire. Wherever there was insurrection, Satvik jumped on it with both boots. It is said that he fought so hard to save the Sindalian Empire because it was the only thing preventing his many enemies from ganging up on him.

Be that as it may, General Satvik made preparations to escape the inevitable fall of the empire, creating a chain of bunkers and refuelling points, and even stashing captured starships ready for a getaway. His eventual destination will never be known, but presumably there was a motherlode of treasure and equipment hidden somewhere far from the empire.

Satvik never got to use his bugout chain. According to most versions of the story, his preparations were discovered and deemed to be proof of disloyalty. He was assassinated by a horde of deathbots whose command circuits he thought he had disabled, and his command turned over to another officer – who promptly deserted to the enemy with Satvik's flagship. Some of Satvik's stashes are still out there, undiscovered to this day.

Referee

There may well be several stashes and bunkers out there, but this particular rumour does not lead to one. Instead, it is a trap placed by a small but clever pirate group. Reasoning that someone chasing Sindalian treasures will probably not make their destination public, they planted a few easy-to-follow clues that lead to a rockball moon where they have laid a trap.

There are some surface structures on the moon, but anyone getting close would just see an abandoned mining outpost. However, getting that close means entering the kill-zone. The structures are covered by two concealed torpedo barbettes taken from a scrapped warship which will open fire without warning upon anyone coming close to the installation. The intent is to disable a visiting ship, which will then crash to the surface and remain there until the pirates make one of their semi-regular visits to strip their victims.

The trap has claimed a few victims so far, and it might get the Travellers too. However, they might spot the warning signs. Firstly, the rumour was very easy to follow; that may seem suspicious. Secondly, there is wreckage on the moon's surface which will be detected as metallic traces if the Travellers are not so blinded by greed they just rush in. A detailed scan will detect the torpedo launchers though will not identify them as such, giving the Travellers a chance to realise they are sited for optimum engagement of a vessel closing in to land.

Whether or not the Travellers fall for the trap, there is no great Sindalian treasure here. There are a couple of torpedo barbettes that could be repurposed... and whoever set the trap will surely be along at some point to see if it has caught anything.

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SPACER

Location: Remote location on a low-population world, possibly even Drinax

Information Cost: 8

The last days of the Sindalian Empire were characterised by bitter fighting and rapid shifts of allegiance. Ownership and captaincy of warships changed on a rapid basis, sometimes leading to unfortunate incidents where a vessel rushed to the assistance of an ally only to be destroyed by her own side. Other vessels were crippled and tried to flee the fighting only to crash and be forgotten as worlds regressed into barbarism or the population struggled to survive plague, fallout and famine.

Occasionally a wreck still surfaces on some moon or, more rarely, in the mountains or forests of a former Sindalian world. Archaeologists and historians are sometimes able to piece together the history of a wreck, but usually the events of the vessel's last mission remain unknown. Not so with one particular Sindalian vessel, a Rorix command vessel, assigned with its squadron to the defence of a loyal world.

After heavy fighting, the vessel – its designation is not known – landed at the starport to make emergency repairs, and was abandoned by her crew as the battle turned against the loyalists. When enemy vessels began firing on the port she was boarded by a crew of volunteers who took her up and tried to fight. Of course, they never stood a chance, and soon they were forced to flee. Most accounts claim she fought her way into

orbit and made an emergency jump. She was sighted a few times trying to get to a safe port, but somewhere in the Reach her damaged drives gave out and she crash-landed in rough terrain. No-one heard her distress calls and eventually her crew perished. Covered by vegetation she has lain, a treasure-trove of salvageable materials, awaiting discovery.

Referee

This rumour may be introduced by King Oleb, who has naturally decided the ship will be flyable and must be added to his fleet. Even if she is not flyable, the wreck will contain all manner of Sindalian artefacts and materials that can be used to fix up the Harrier.

The ship does exist. Correlating stories and sightings of its distinctive 'how-is-that-still-flying?' damage pattern will eventually lead to a remote location on a low-population world. The wreck is structurally intact but was pretty much trashed as a starship even before it crashed. However, it could be rebuilt by someone with access to Sindalian materials and techniques, or will (slowly) yield a considerable amount of salvage. However, the wreck technically belongs to the world it crashed upon, so the Travellers will either have to negotiate a deal or conceal their find whilst they strip it.

The search might be long, but in the end it should yield a good return. However, the referee should make the Travellers work for a return to flight rather than just handing over a flyable starship. There are many interesting possibilities for a ship that will eventually become an asset but for now just keeps generating more requirements for equipment and materials... some of which lead to new adventures.



C H A P T E R - T W E N T Y

GODS OF MARDUK

The Travellers are hired by an eminent anthropologist to prove that local legends of 'sea gods' are true. This requires a descent into the depths of the world's oceans as well as an investigation of what seems to be a mysterious ancient temple. Along the way, the Travellers much contend with hostile islanders and harsh weather before deciding whether their conclusions should be released at all.

THE SETTING

Marduk is a habitable world with a breathable atmosphere whose civilisation was comprehensively wrecked during the latter days of the Sindalian Empire. Its continents are thought to be uninhabited, but enclaves survive on many of the world's island groups. These have all regressed back to a primitive level and lost the capability to create ocean-going ships. Isolated from one another, the islanders have developed a variety of cultures and dialects.

However, most enclaves have legends of sea gods who dwell in the deep oceans. Thought to be colossal squid-like creatures, these gods feature as benefactors in some stories, enemies in others, and uncaring but wonderful creatures in a few. Anthropologist Maris Enar has travelled extensively among the survivor populations and collected many tales. A proportion are contradictory, but there are enough similarities that he has become convinced these gods exist.

Marduk's only haven of civilisation is its downport, constructed on an artificial island well away from the indigenous populations. It has a large fishing fleet which provides much of the port's food requirements, and this fleet sometimes recruits locals from the closer island groups. As a result, some garbled versions of the sea gods tales have entered local popular culture, and there are many who are superstitious – both positively and negatively – about deep water.

THE PATRON

Maris Enar is a bit of a fringe figure as far as serious anthropology goes. He is the sort of expert who gets interviewed on popular vid channels about his controversial new theory, or is invited to comment on some mildly unusual happening that can be made far more interesting with a bit of imagination. This is not to say that he is a liar or crank; Maris Enar is a real scientist whose work has – mainly – withstood the peer-review process. He does, however, operate at the far end of the serious-science continuum from most university-backed academics.

Maris is funded by an investment programme known as Furtherance, which is dedicated to pushing the boundaries of knowledge in all areas and exploring ideas that mainstream science considers not worth the effort. The Furtherance funding process treads a fine line between out-there ideas and genuinely crank theories, but generally puts money behind people who undertake proper research. Maris Enar is one of those who has been funded for several projects, most of which have produced useful knowledge.

Maris is prone to become distracted by big what-if questions rather than concentrating on the details of how to get things done. However, he is aware of this tendency and tries to hire personnel who can make his projects work on a day-to-day basis while he ponders the big questions. He is loyal to those who impress him with their competence, and tries to play fair by everyone. He would not willingly put other people at risk for the sake of discovery, though he can fail to spot obvious hazards and might accidentally wander into a highly dangerous situation.

HIRING ON

The Travellers might be hired through a third party and make their way to Marduk Downport, or they may be approached as they pass through the world. Either way, the deal they are offered is of the simple-yet-interesting kind.

Anthropologist Maris Enar needs a crew for his submarine, technicians to look after it and an assortment of clever and/or handy people to carry out a range of tasks in his expedition. He has hired a local fishing vessel (quite a big one) and intends to use it to transport his research submarine to a suitable location. There, he will undertake a series of deep dives to search for evidence of Marduk's sea gods. These are thought to be giant squid-like creatures that live in very deep water. They feature in various tales told by the local population but have never been observed.

Maris does not think it will be too difficult to find them, and is not concerned that the sea gods have not been proven to exist. The only part of Marduk inhabited by advanced humans is the starport, built on an artificial island close to one of the continents. Since the sea gods live in deep water, it stands to reason that they have not been sighted – it is not as if anyone has gone looking until now.

Maris is offering Cr5000 each plus a small expenses account for a three-week contract with his expedition. Everyone on the core personnel roster is entitled to bonuses if the expedition turns up something saleable, and Maris points out that his staff have often been invited to appear on vid shows to discuss their adventures. That can command a very decent fee and might open other doors if the Travellers play their cards right.

Maris has secured the services of the *Orion*, a large and mostly-automated industrial trawler whose machinery is well suited to winching his research submarine in and out of the water. When not diving into the depths, the submarine (imaginatively named *Orion*) will rest on a cradle in the trawler's well deck. This is normally used to store large amounts of fish, and stinks to high heaven.

The trawler is quite a large boat, but requires a crew of only four: the ship's master/navigator, an engine technician and two deck hands who normally operate the ship's machinery as well as carrying out odd maintenance jobs. The *Orion* is a family business; her master is Elayn Kirellie, whose husband Mitchell and son Jayce handle most of the heavy work on deck. Jayce is engaged to the ship's technician, Eugenie.

The crew are competent and work well together, but are a bit baffled by what Maris is trying to do. They have no objections to serving as a base ship for his expedition; the fee they were offered more than covers lost fishing time. Three of them really do not see the point, but are quite happy to get paid to do something unusual for a few days.

Eugenie has misgivings about the mission however. Her family can trace their origins to islander stock, and she was raised on tales of malevolent sea creatures. She does not really believe in the sea gods but is still uncomfortable about looking for them. However, her loyalty to the crew is such that she will do her not inconsiderable best to make the mission a success despite her own reservations.

FURTHERANCE

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE

The first challenge after meeting Maris and the crew of is to ready the ship for its mission. This involves setting up a cradle for the submarine and a harness for winching it in and out of the water. Maris has assembled a fair amount of steel, components and cables but actually translating this into a workable rig is beyond his capabilities.

A Difficult (10+) Mechanics check (INT, 1D hours) would be suitable, and other Travellers can join in with the hard labour or create an appropriate task chain.

The crew could give it a go but they would be working on a best-guess basis beyond their field of knowledge. They are capable people, but the task is more complex than expected and will take some time to accomplish. If the Travellers can figure it out, they not only have a chance to get the ship to sea a few days earlier but also to win the respect of the locals, who admire competence and the ability to solve problems with materials at hand.

The referee can make as much or as little of the fitting-out as seems desirable. There are opportunities for complex bargaining with officials at the maritime port, evenings in a local fisherfolk bar and interactions with the crew of the which might lead to a deeper understanding of how some of the locals view the sea gods. As with any other part of the adventure, the referee should judge how to proceed by how much fun the Travellers are having. In theory, converting the fishing vessel and carousing with the locals could provide fodder for several sessions of gaming. Once the Travellers are ready to move on with the adventure, the referee should let them.

Once the ship is ready, Maris decides to spend a couple of days conducting trials. This is a fairly tedious business, involving winching the submarine slowly out of the cradle and over the side, freeing it from the cables and moving around a little, then doing it all in reverse. Maris is keen to get on with the expedition, but he is not an idiot and knows this stage of the mission is extremely important. He will not be able to help being a bit impatient, and may snap at people but will then take pains to explain he is not upset with anyone for this stage taking time. He is just keen to get going...

The submarine is designed to carry up to six personnel including its pilot, and Maris wants to use this time to get everyone who is likely to be carrying out any task

aboard the sub familiarised with underwater operations. He will offer anyone who wants it at least a brief dive in the sub. Eugenie is visibly uncomfortable with the idea but gives it a go anyway, if only to have something to tell her grandkids about.

The seas around the starport region, where the initial trials are undertaken, are shallow and not prone to bad weather. Travellers who are interested can undertake a series of dives in the research submarine, and will get a chance to practice with its sample-collection equipment. This takes the form of a set of tool-equipped arms on the submarine's nose plus several remotely operated vehicles. There are two fairly large ones (about half the size of a human) which can collect samples and bring them back to the sub, and several small ones which serve mainly as remote camera and light platforms.

The submarine also has a pair of deep-diving suits aboard, and an airlock for delivering them into the water. These can be operated – albeit not with great agility – by anyone who has the Vacc Suit skill. Maris is not particularly keen to let people he has just met loose with his suits, but Travellers who demonstrate their competence will be able to convince him that a few forays in the suits should be built into the mission plan.

The test period concludes with a 'full dress rehearsal', with the sub descending into a deeper area of water surrounded by its drones. This armada of lights descending into the ocean, with all the platforms filming one another, is tremendously dramatic when played back at the shipboard party that night. Afterward, Maris declares the mission is a go.

AT SEA

The voyage to Maris' intended operational area takes three days, during which the weather remains fine despite an occasional gusty wind. With preparations fully made there is relatively little for the Travellers to do except lounge about on deck and check over the equipment just one more time.

The referee should use this section of the adventure and the previous one to establish relationships that may be important later. Who likes whom, who is seen as behaving a bit suspiciously, who might have an ulterior motive... groundless suspicions or friendships beginning at this stage might influence the outcome of the adventure as a whole.

Travellers can learn more or less all there is to know about . The vessel has six rather small crew cabins and, with two couples making up her crew, that leaves four for the Travellers and Maris. Personnel who cannot be squeezed into these cabins will end up improvising somewhere to sleep. The crew cabins, a tiny common area and galley, and some equipment stowage are all located forward, under the deck house that contains the control room ('bridge' is a rather grand term for it). Engine spaces are aft, along with heavy spares such as nets, cables and the like. Between the two is the main well deck, which is normally full of fish. Cranes (normally used to handle nets) line the flanks of the well deck.

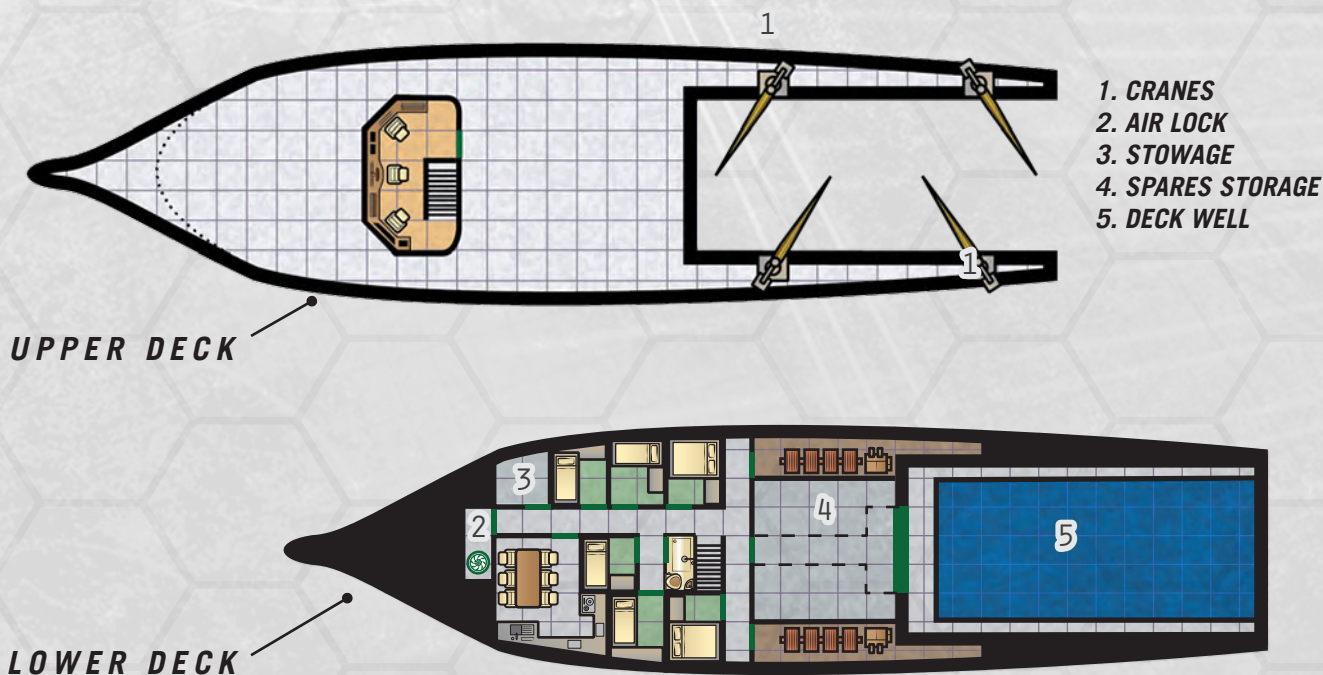
This is a fairly small world to be wandering around for days on end. It is possible to be out of sight of everyone else, but rarely for long. Anyone managing it would either be engaged in working in some awkward space or else deliberately avoiding contact. If suspicions are aroused, there can be few plausible explanations for where anyone was at the time no-one else could see them.

OBJECTIVE REACHED

Eventually, the reaches her operational area. A few mountaintops, part of the Reinich Archipelago, can be seen in the distance. Maris intends to go ashore there and 'have a look around, maybe talk to the locals' – he has visited the area before and can communicate reasonably well in the local dialect. Eugenie does not like this idea very much; her family came from another archipelago and she still harbours some mistrust of other islanders. The rest of the crew have no strong opinions, but warn that some of the islander populations can be hostile for reasons that may not make sense to outsiders.

The seabed shelves very suddenly east of the Reinich Archipelago, with deep water for hundreds of kilometres before the next archipelago. It is here, announces Maris, that the sea gods will be found. The mission proper will begin with a dive in the coastal waters to create an accurate map of the seabed and nutrient-bearing currents running from the islands and shallow waters over the edge of the deep. This will create a region where there is plenty of food, which will surely attract prey for larger sea creatures such as the gods of Marduk.

MARDUK LIGHTFOOT



In the meantime, the sights several local fishing boats. These are much smaller than the industrial trawlers of the port region, and more primitive. There is no real friction between local fishermen and the port-based fleet; Marduk's population is too low for fish stocks to become depleted. Nor is there much in the way of contact; the locals just go about their business in the distance and ignore the larger vessel operating just off their coast.

THE FIRST DIVE

The first dive is an exciting business, not least because no matter how many times the crew have practiced winching the submarine, doing it under field conditions inevitably presents a host of new problems. None are particularly major, though there are a few alarming sways and a creak or two from the cranes. Soon, however, the submarine is in the water and ready to begin an exploration of the coastal region.

Maris spreads the remotely operated vehicles out wide as the submarine cruises parallel to the shoreline. Data pours in, concerning water temperature, current direction, salinity, organic particles present and all manner of other information. Meanwhile, a map of the seabed is produced. Among the things that stand out are shallows caused by sediment washed from the islands, with a steady spill over the edge and into the deep water. This is exactly what Maris was looking for. He states that the first deep dive will be between the two largest spills.

There are some unusual returns on the seabed map, however. One curious shallow area is very jagged where the rest of the seabed is smooth. It is close to the shore, but the water is deep enough to permit the submarine to investigate. Maris insists upon doing so.

The tumbled area is overgrown with seaweed, but is unmistakably the remains of several maritime ships. Most seem to be big freighters, which were apparently all sunk at roughly the same time. Their arrangement is curious too. It is as if the vessels were proceeding in two parallel lines astern when they were overcome by some disaster. Enemy action is the obvious first thought; civilisation on Marduk died hard when the Sindalian Empire bombarded the world.

Further investigation suggests this was not the case. There are no signs of blast damage on the ships, and no obvious holes in the hull in most cases. Indeed, it seems as if the vessels were filled with building materials and then deliberately sunk to create a breakwater. No part of any ship protrudes above the surface, but the

two regions of suddenly very shallow water they create would cause large waves to break well short of the coast. It would seem that someone took steps to defend this stretch of coast from danger – or there may be an alternative explanation. What if the ships were sunk to fence some living thing away from the coast?

Either way, Maris is keen to investigate the coastline. It is heavily overgrown and very rocky, and he is fairly sure there are no humans living on the nearest islands. None has a good natural harbour – indeed, the will not be able to approach the coastline even if it could find a way to get within the ring of ships. Local fishing boats might land with some difficulty, but there are easier and more sheltered places to set up a port. The small inflatable boats carried by the should be able to get ashore without undue difficulty.

Maris spends an excited evening speculating on what might be found ashore, and orders an expedition for the next day. He notes this particular island is the closest to the deep ocean and would be worst hit by a tsunami or bad storm. He is not sure how that is significant, but feels sure that it is... somehow.

EXPLORATION ASHORE

Going ashore is a little tricky, since there are jagged rocks in places and forest right down to the shoreline in others. However, with a little skilful boat handling – a Difficult (10+) Seafarer (personal) check (DEX) – it is possible to find a suitable spot.

Once ashore, the Travellers and Maris can begin to explore. The area is a little spooky, with jagged black volcanic rocks and thick tree cover almost right down to the water's edge. There are plenty of little distractions, such as edible fruits, clear streams of icy-cold pure water and small creatures that jump from branch to branch among the trees.

After a while, someone finally stumbles upon something... different. What appears to be a rocky outcrop from even a short distance is suddenly revealed as a carved rockface. Examining it, Maris almost explodes with excitement. It depicts humans apparently in trouble in the water, some of them on the shore and some in boats, with giant tentacles rising from the deep. These apparently menace the boats, tipping them over. Here and there a human is in the grasp of the tentacles, while others stand on the shore making arm gestures that might be construed as worship, terror or even cheering.



The carvings are beautifully done, though very weathered. They look like the work of advanced tools – the rock is polished and might have been cut with an energy device rather than worked with chisels. There are gaps, cleverly concealed by shadow and curvature, which lead into an open space within the rocks. Bound on all sides by tall carved faces of black rock, shadowed by their height, and with the sea rising and falling in a pool at the centre (it is linked to the open sea by an underwater channel), the space is distinctly eerie.

Maris scrambles about all over the place, repeatedly all but falling into the pool as he attempts to see everything at once. His explanation of the carvings on the interior, if it can be called that, is incoherent and at times little more than a babble. The gist of it is that someone carved a lot of images of tentacles coming out of the sea on this rock face, and there are parallels with carving styles seen elsewhere, as well as ideas found in other cultures. This is a temple, he declares, but whether the gods are good or bad he cannot say. They certainly seem scary and powerful.

Between the noise of the surf and Maris' excited commentary, it is more than likely that nobody sees the stranger entering the temple. When they do, there is a moment where everything is still. The stranger is human, but clad in animal skins and armed with a stone-tipped spear. He has an animal look about him, staring around like a creature of the forest rather than a member of civilised society. After a few seconds the stranger lets out a weird screeching yell and darts out of the temple.

If anyone follows, they are in time to see the stranger vanish into the treeline at speed. He is not fleeing in terror though; he moves fast but purposefully and with care. In seconds he is lost to sight. Attempting to follow would be hard; the stranger seems to have left no tracks when he entered the forest. However, he is not gone long.

After a few moments, weird yells can be heard from various points nearby and a spear suddenly flies from among the trees. It strikes very close to one of the Travellers, after which the thrower steps out where she can be seen – a different person – and points to her arm, the spear, the narrowly-missed Traveller and her chest. The message she is trying to communicate is 'Warning shot. Next one will be lethal'.

The Travellers may or may not get this, and might respond with violence. If they injure any of the primitives, they will be attacked with a volley of spears thrown with lethal intent by people adept at hiding among the trees. If they withdraw, there is a chance to later establish more friendly contact.

The best possible outcome here is for Maris and the Travellers to head back to their boats and depart. If this happens, Maris will be excited and pleased, and begins planning an expedition to make friendly contact. He will be deeply upset if any of the islanders are killed, even if it is in necessary self-defence.

Islanders

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		-		-
STR	9	INT	7	SKILLS
DEX	8	EDU	3	
END	8	SOC	6	
Athletics (endurance) 1, Gun Combat (archaic) 1, Melee (blade) 2, Navigation 0, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 2				
EQUIPMENT		Spear (2D)		



Referee's Note

These primitives are the descendants of an islander community isolated from the rest of the archipelago. They have evolved a basic hunter-gatherer culture and regressed to barbarism, but are not fools. They are, however, frightened of outsiders – especially those who have intruded into their temple. The primitives worship the temple, though they do not really know what it means. They have a language of their own, which is heavily corrupted and very different from the dialects spoken elsewhere on Marduk. They do have a vague concept of the 'destruction of the world' and believe their island was the only one saved from bad things that happened. All they really want is to be left alone to worship their sea gods and live their simple lives.

The primitives are not really a violent people, and will content themselves with scaring the Travellers off if they start to retreat. This could be comical, with the primitives making a big show of giving chase and hurling spears that are clearly not intended to come anywhere close to the target. They get rapidly more accurate if the Travellers do not retreat, however.

Maris urges the Travellers to make a show of fleeing and not to fight back, hoping to return and meet these people more amicably some day. He knows there is little chance of this if a fight develops, and if the Travellers have a lot of weapons it is possible that this potentially fascinating isolated culture might be entirely wiped out. He will do as much as he can to prevent this.

The primitives' existence is not known to the people living on the rest of the Archipelago, since they mostly stay in the forest. There are only about a hundred of them, heavily inbred and suffering from various disorders as a result. Within two or three generations they may die out completely, a process that could be sped up by trigger-happy Travellers.

The Travellers may never find out the truth about the primitives, but they are in fact the descendants of people who took refuge on the island during the final bombardment of Marduk. The ships sunk to create a breakwater were already there at the time – this island was a holy place to some of the people of Marduk, and the temple dates back hundreds, possibly thousands, of years. It was thus a natural place to seek sanctuary when the world was under attack.

The carvings do not represent people being attacked by tentacles from under the water; quite the opposite. They are a hopeful representation of the sea gods as rescuers of those in danger upon the sea, based upon an ancient folk-tale of a ship rescued and its crew plucked to safety upon this very island. As subsequent events may show, that tale is actually true.

THE DEEP DIVE

Whatever the outcome on the island, there is little that can be done there at present and Maris is keen to get on with the mission at hand, especially now the existence of the sea gods has been 'confirmed' by finding the temple. He cannot wait for first light the following day, pacing around the edge of the deck in the pre-dawn. When it is finally light enough, he impatiently oversees the launching of the submarine.

Astute Travellers might note that a couple of things are not quite right. The air smells different today, and the wind is fresher. Dark clouds are gathering over the deep water, and the local fishing boats sighted previously are nowhere in sight. Maris insists on going ahead anyway.

The dive is an incredible experience for those aboard the submarine and anyone watching the monitors set up in the deck house. Powerful lights illuminate the seabed as the submarine glides towards the edge of the abyss, then below it there is nothing but darkness. Maris makes his descent quite close to the cliff-like edge of the archipelago's continental shelf, recording footage of the changing rocks as the submarine descends.

The ocean is a couple of kilometres deep here, though only about half that at the foot of the shelf. After this, it descends steeply but gradually, over a seabed fed by falling sediment from above. Life is abundant in the dark water, including luminous jellyfish-like creatures and strange blobby things that loomp about in the seabed vegetation. There are fish, too, but nothing that resembles a sea god.

The dive is intended for several hours, but the crew of the are increasingly uneasy about the weather. A storm seems to be coming in from the open ocean, and with a lee shore behind them they might have to move their vessel out of position. Recovering the submarine will be impossible if the ship is rolling heavily. Elayn urges Maris to come back up, but he keeps stalling and trying to bargain for 'just another fifteen minutes', despite the fact that returning will take quite some time and the weather is worsening.

Then, something is sighted in the seabed silt. For a moment, Maris is convinced it is a sea god, but it is not, merely a disturbance in the silt caused by underwater currents. He takes the submarine closer to investigate, and suddenly the navigational sonar goes berserk. Something is closing with the submarine at high speed, possibly on a collision course. The submarine is bounced sideways by contact with... something large and squid-like. Only a fleeting impression is possible, of a long body with multiple tentacles. Then it is gone and the submarine is in desperate trouble.

The collision has driven the nose of the submarine down, causing it to jam in the seabed mud. Damage alarms indicate various systems are malfunctioning, though at least the hull is not leaking. Well, not much.

Backing the screw fails to pull the submarine out of the mud. The sonar contact comes around again, flashing close by the hull as Maris tries to free his vessel. There is a second collision, then another, as giant tentacles grip the submarine. Another collision rocks the boat, and suddenly it is free. The screw is damaged and propulsion is erratic, but the ballast tanks will allow a controlled rise to the surface. It would be unwise to go too fast, since the changing pressure could split the hull, but with several sea gods in the water below, apparently intent in bashing the submarine to pieces, the Travellers might want to take the risk.

By the time the submarine reaches the surface, the storm has arrived. The pounds gallantly into a head sea to try to reach the stricken research vessel, which is rolling sickeningly as the waves pound it. The submarine's engines are intended for gentle movement in deep water, not fighting a storm on the surface. It is clear that the submarine cannot survive for long, but getting the crew out and aboard the or somehow bringing it aboard – is going to be a difficult business.

THE STORM

The storm is bad enough that the is in real danger. The submarine cannot possibly survive on the surface, and is too badly damaged to dive deep enough to get below the surface turbulence. The only answer seems to be to get the submarine back aboard the or take off its crew. It might also be possible to run the submarine ashore on the island, though that means passing over the sunken vessels in a very turbulent sea... and maybe having to deal with the locals as well.

The crew of the have fought seas like this before, but never tried to bring anything aboard during a storm. Their inclination is to abandon the submarine after getting the crew off somehow. That might be possible for a brave crew in a small boat, but it is certainly not a task to be taken lightly.

What the crew will not do is abandon anyone unless the situation is hopeless. You just do not leave people to die at sea – unless they have done something to deserve it. Thus, if the Travellers decide to do something bull-headedly stupid, the crew of the might cut and leave them to it... but even then, they are more likely to get killed trying to save the idiots from their self-inflicted fate.



Inventive Travellers might come up with all manner of solutions. Whatever they decide to do, the rescue of the submarine's crew will be a dangerous business, fraught with danger. In all likelihood, the scene will be one of Travellers clinging to safety lines while struggling to keep their footing amid mountainous seas. The submarine will bash against the side of the ship, causing damage to both, if it is brought alongside or lifted aboard. The damage might be survivable, but leaks are unlikely to be welcome in the present conditions.

The battle against the storm will be dramatic and dangerous even after the submarine's crew are rescued. It may be that the ship is driven aground, in which case a new encounter with the islanders is likely. The ship's engines or screws might become damaged, or equipment could come loose and injure people. In short, the referee should throw all manner of hazards and difficult choices at the Travellers. Should they try to jury-rig the disabled engine, or save Elayn from being washed overboard? Try to circle the island and get into its shelter, or run ashore and ground the vessel to prevent it sinking?

Anyone who goes overboard in a storm like this is dead... under normal circumstances. However, today is different. A Traveller or crewmember whose safety line breaks (an entirely likely occurrence) will more than likely end up in the water, pounded by giant waves and certain to drown despite a lifejacket. And then there are the tentacles....

The sea gods will come to the rescue of humans struggling in the water, depositing the terrified and half-drowned survivor inside the ring of sunken ships where the waves will carry him ashore, close to the temple. This is a dangerous and painful experience, but survivable. Comrades might well think the Traveller was killed, of course, and then there are the locals....

The locals' attitude to anyone washed ashore after such a rescue is rather different. Assuming the Travellers did not engage in a massacre earlier on, the locals will approach close enough to be seen, and deposit food and water on the ground before darting back into the forest. They will even be amenable to friendly contact, if handled gently, once they have seen that their

gods favour the survivors, as they favoured the islanders in their time of need. This raises all manner of possibilities, but those are beyond the scope of this adventure.

For now, it is enough for the Travellers to weather the storm and survive. In the morning they might begin to comprehend the importance of what has happened here. Maris has proven the existence of the sea gods of Marduk... and they seem to be benevolent.

EXPLANATIONS

Maris has a few ideas about what happened, though he is pretty confused and more or less guessing. He thinks the submarine's sonar and lights must have confused one of the sea gods, causing the original collision when it came to investigate the newcomer into its deep-water world. Far from attacking the submarine, the sea god (he really wants a better name for them) then tried to help by freeing it from the seabed silt. Repeated bashing worked, though it was alarming to the crew and damaging to the submarine.

The sea gods are clearly able to communicate with one another – at least one additional creature came to assist the first one in its rescue attempt – and would appear to be well-disposed towards humans. Does this mean the sea gods are intelligent? Maris thinks so, but is not sure how smart they are. Are they psionic? There is no indication of this, other than the fact that they seem to be attracted to distressed people in the water and want to help them. He puts the idea forward that they might be telepathic or at least empathic to some extent. And why do the sea gods help people? Maris has no idea about that one, but clearly it is a trait that has been repeated.

Perhaps the islanders have some answers. Maris starts talking about an expedition to live among them and study their culture, perhaps even discovering their interpretation of the carvings at the temple. But that is a story for another day.... In the meantime, the Travellers and Maris will have to consider whether the world should be told about the islanders and their mysterious offshore gods.

C H A P T E R - T W E N T Y O N E

REVOLUTION ON ACRID

The workers on Acrid are on the brink of revolution against the Pax Rulin Quartermasters (PRQ) megacorporation. Downtrodden, trapped into unfair contracts that make it impossible to get offworld, the workers have tried all other means and now have one last, desperate chance at a better life. They hope to gain control of their world and become, in effect, an independent state. That is no small feat, and to do it the workers must fend off the inevitable retaliation from PRQ. The answer to that problem is to obtain some means to defend their world against attack from space.

THE SETTING

Acrid is a nasty hell-hole of a world with an insidious atmosphere that leaches into everything sooner or later. Survival is a constant round of seal-replacement and suit-decontamination interspersed with atmosphere purges and the occasional crisis.

There is absolutely no reason to live somewhere like Acrid other than to make money, and there is money to be had. Unfortunately, although the mines and chemical-extraction plants run at a profit, this is eaten into by the constant repairs and heavy maintenance. The only way to make the world's industry profitable is to keep worker salaries as low as possible.

Low is a very kind term for salaries on Acrid. Nominally, workers are paid quite well but there are many deductions such as a surcharge for clean air and water. Workers must also buy their equipment from the company shop, which grants credit against future salaries in return for necessary items such as suit spares and filters. Since most workers are heavily in debt to the corporation that runs their world, few can afford to leave Acrid.

For many years, a safety valve existed in the form of what is known as the 'around a thousand', i.e. the official population of Acrid. These fully registered citizens are exempt from most of the surcharges and get preferential rates for necessary items. Most of them also occupy the better-paid jobs at Acrid's port and various industries. A worker could hope to be elevated to the 'around a thousand', i.e. be made a full citizen, at which point he or she could start making real money.

The carrot worked well enough for a time, but eventually the workers stopped buying it. True, some did get elevated to citizenship each year, but eventually it became apparent that the official population of Acrid was falling despite this upward mobility. It became obvious that very few workers were being granted citizenship, and at the same time salaries were being cut and costs were increasing. Living conditions, never good, declined rapidly and worker disaffection began to get out of hand.

The current situation on Acrid is explosive. There are, as noted, around a thousand full citizens and about twenty-five times that in debt to the PRQ and thus little more than slaves. They are treated as such, though this is disguised within the trappings of workplace discipline and sugar-coated by the offer of highly-paid special duties. Some of these are little more than suicide assignments in highly dangerous areas, but in some cases workers are given overseer and security jobs which place them above the rest of the workforce. The citizens and PRQ rely on this buffer population to keep the rest of the workers down and, so far, it has worked.

THE PATRON

Gera Hollis is a leader among the workforce on Acrid. Until quite recently she and her family were comfortably off as citizens, making a very good living from her skills as an industrial chemist and enjoying a high quality of life in the elite section of the world's main settlement. That ended for reasons she is unclear about, and Gera was suddenly demoted to a non-citizen worker. Her savings soon evaporated, and former friends were unwilling to help.

Fortunately for Gera, she has a natural talent for leadership and what can best be described as manipulation. She is not a particularly nice person, motivated more by the desire to regain her comfortable lifestyle than any sense of justice. However, whatever her reasons, she has managed to pull together a revolutionary council among the workers and direct what was previously despairing grumbles in the direction of concrete action.

Gera Hollis wants nothing less than to overthrow the bureaucratic and uncaring government of Acrid, and replace it with one more concerned with the welfare of the workers. In short, she is committed to doing right, but not for altruistic reasons.

Gera handles many aspects of her planned revolution in person, which is a big risk. She does so partly because she does not completely trust anyone else to get it right, and partly because she is committed to coming out on top. For this reason alone, she does not like to see others getting credit that she could be claiming. The risks are worth it because her present life is simply not worth living.

Gera knows that to succeed her revolution must do more than simply taking control of the governmental apparatus. The PRQ megacorporation will not easily accept the loss of a major economic asset, and will certainly send its security personnel to retake Acrid. Thus, a means of defence against incoming starships – as well as some way to neutralise the two system defence boats currently in system – must be obtained.

HIRING ON

Whilst in port at Acrid, or perhaps on a nearby world where sympathisers can speak for the downtrodden workforce, the Travellers are approached by a representative of the workers' revolution. The representative's affiliation will not be advertised at first, of course. The pitch is a simple one – if the Travellers will meet with Gera Hollis on Acrid they will be offered a deal they will find most suitable. Discretion is important.

The meeting takes place at the starport on Acrid, in a back room of a workers' bar that has bad food and worse beer, and not much else going for it. Gera is not particularly subtle about the situation. She knows the Travellers are not paragons of law-abiding virtue, and

that they might make themselves unwelcome in ports from time to time. They need places they can rest up, repair their ship and take some downtime without looking over their shoulders. She can provide that for them... eventually.

The short version, Gera says, is that she is the future leader of Acrid. It has a Class A starport with repair facilities, a modest industrial base, and a population who will adore the Travellers as heroes... if they help. Help with what? Why, making Gera Hollis the *current* leader of Acrid, of course.

There is a revolution brewing, she says. In fact, it is going to happen sooner or later no matter who helps or hinders it. With help, Gera can lead a *successful* revolution, limit bloodshed, and make Acrid a haven for the Travellers. Without their help, well, maybe she will succeed anyway. But the death toll will be high and retribution from PRQ will be savage.

What Gera needs from the Travellers is some means of neutralising the two system defence boats already in-system, and fending off any attempt to retake the planet. The port has a couple of missile turrets that would be a useful deterrent, but everyone who can operate them is part of the 'about a thousand' or their immediate supporters. She has little faith in the willingness of these people to defend a world that has just been snatched away from them.

If the Travellers can provide additional assistance, such as weaponry for the revolutionaries or other means of evening the odds, that would be very useful. Gera says (and seems to genuinely mean it) that she does not want a bloodbath but the present situation is intolerable. Either the workers launch an organised revolution or there will be a series of uncoordinated and incompetent risings that will be bloodily crushed – and conditions are bound to get worse.



P A X R U L N Q U A R T E R M A S T E R S

The workers of Acrid include chemists and mining engineers who can put together an exciting array of improvised explosives. They can also arm themselves with a variety of hand weapons, some of which have been knocked together in workshops. What they do not have is a lot of guns.

If the revolution goes ahead without guns, the workers will have to make extensive use of their explosives. They can be creative and nasty, drawing response teams into explosive ambushes or using volleys of improvised grenades. This is a rather random way to fight, and will cause a lot of collateral damage. Worse, in a sealed environment like Acrid, there is a real chance of letting the atmosphere in and killing everyone in a section of the city.

The only way to avoid this is to obtain suitable weaponry for fighting inside a sealed city. Shotguns and submachineguns are likely the best choice, and there are plenty of those in the security stations on Acrid. However, stealing weapons from the armouries will highlight something is amiss and possibly cause a clampdown that will force an early rising. Either the guns have to be stolen without anyone realising they are missing, or they will have to be smuggled in from outside.

Smuggling through the port is not hard, at least in theory. The workers there include many potential revolutionaries, who will be only too happy to help. However, the PRQ security services are not idiots. They are alert to smuggling and work hard to prevent it. After all, keeping the workers down requires denying them access to goods from outside the company's shops. Whenever a ship comes in, its crew are watched closely.

Any attempt to bring in weapons and body armour must therefore be covered by a clever deception to throw security forces off the trail. Allowing them to intercept a smuggled package of luxury (or necessary) goods is one option – if they think they got the contraband and it was fairly innocuous, they will not try quite so hard to find anything else. If they believe workers are bringing in guns, they will start tearing the place apart.

Other preparations are possible. The workers are determined but have no military experience, so anyone who has been in a gunfight has wisdom to offer. It may be hard to carry out any sort of proper training but the Travellers may be able to improvise tactical exercises. Any attempt is better than nothing.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Gera Hollis wants the Travellers to assist in her revolution – directly, that is, and in several ways. Their armed ship could make all the difference in fending off a response or preventing system defence boats from blasting rebellious areas. In the longer term, she knows the Travellers cannot or will not stay to defend her world, so she needs defensive measures set up. She is also painfully aware that Acrid will not remain independent without trade.

Thus, Gera is considering how to build an economy after she takes control of the world. Acrid can export minerals, metals, chemicals and a few odds and ends manufactured in the settlement's workshops. It can also provide technical schooling in subjects such as hostile-environment mining and the chemicals industry. This might be enough to get the trade ships coming, but only if they know about it.

Gera wants the Travellers to quietly spread the word that Acrid will very soon be open for business. They must be discreet, but ideally they will be able to convince a couple of trader captains that a decent profit can be made. That was not the case previously; the world's economy was very much a closed shop, with products going to PRQ outlets rather than the general market, and goods coming in through 'preferred suppliers'.

The Travellers may have an interesting problem if they are pirates, and are trying to talk merchant captains into jumping into a backwater system. Smugglers and shady starship operators are the most likely to try the new markets at Acrid, which is not really what Gera wants. However, she is enough of a realist to accept the situation. Any trade is better than no trade at all, and Acrid needs ships coming through its port.

This attraction of trade ships to Acrid can be carried out after the rebellion of course, but the sooner ships start to come in, the sooner conditions on the planet will improve and thus the new government is more likely to keep control. In addition, Gera hopes the Travellers can obtain some navy-grade missiles to ensure the port's defences are well-stocked. She does not know how many are available at present, nor their condition, and cannot guarantee they will be in a useable condition after the revolution.

Ideally, the Travellers will be able to obtain missiles and maybe even a launcher or two. These can be set up on a temporary basis, perhaps outside the city, and tied into an improvised fire control and tracking system. Naturally, the rebels have no idea how hard this would be to do, and simply toss the idea out as part of their wish list. The Travellers may be able to put together an effective defence network at a low cost, though the rebels might not want to know where it came from.

These measures are not a prerequisite to launching the revolution – it is likely to happen sooner or later no matter what preparations have or have not been made – but they will greatly increase the chances of Acrid surviving for more than a couple of months as an independent society. Gera knows this very well, and is prepared to make a deal with the Travellers she might regret later. She is willing to offer them no-questions-asked shelter and repairs, essentially making Acrid a Haven and possibly something beyond even that – a friendly world that owes the Travellers a favour.

NEUTRALISING THE SYSTEM DEFENCE BOATS

There are two PRQ system defence boats in the Acrid system (you can use the system defence boat on page 124 of *High Guard*, or the one on page 142 if your Travellers need a greater challenge). At any given time, one is on patrol close to the mainworld. The other might be down for maintenance or crew training, or might be sent off to investigate something of interest elsewhere in the system. This is rare, but occasionally the order is given to conduct a sweep for smugglers or pirates.

A plan to neutralise the boats is necessary to a successful revolution. Ideally, a 'soft' neutralisation would make the boats available to the rebels after they have seized power, and might be carried out ahead of time without alerting the authorities to the developing situation. A 'hard' neutralisation, involving sabotage or other violent means, would probably trigger an alert

unless suspicion can be diverted. For example, a boat disabled by a missile fired from a suspect vessel it was inspecting might not be attributed to an internal uprising.

Options include drawing off one of the boats to a distant location from which it cannot be brought quickly back on-station, persuading the crew it needs repairs and getting into dock with important components removed at the time of the revolution, or sabotage. Alternatively, shooting it out with one or both of the boats remains an option.

Gera's fall back plan for taking out the boats involves home-made missiles, which can be set up outside the settlement in container/launchers and fired in a massed salvo to orbit. Even with rudimentary targeting, a sucker-punch fired at an unsuspecting boat at the beginning of the revolution may result in enough hits to disable it.

This is not much of a plan though, and Gera would be very happy to hear better ideas. The same plan, carried out with proper anti-shipping missiles, would be far more likely to succeed. Gera and the rebels would much rather capture the boats (and not kill their crews) than destroy them, however. They know little about military and naval matters, and have not thought of ideas like disabling Acrid's communications system to prevent the boats learning what is happening on the surface. Gera will be very impressed with any plan of this sort, which she will (correctly) see as being far above her own level of strategic ability.

If one or both boats are not neutralised, their crews will do their best to oppose the revolution. There is a limit to what they can achieve directly, unless they fire on rebellious sections of the city. This will cause breaches and the insidious atmosphere will kill hundreds of inhabitants and wreck critical infrastructure. It would be a useful threat, but it is unlikely the boat captains would be willing to carry it out expect under extreme circumstances. The boats can, however, hold the world under siege, preventing ships coming in or going out. Their own supplies are limited, of course, so there will come a point when the boats need to surrender, negotiate or take drastic action.

The two boats are thus more of a long-term complication than a threat to the revolution's immediate success. However, something will have to be done about them and the best outcome for the rebels is to have control of them, or at least put them out of the picture before the revolution is launched. The aftermath will be complex enough without having to deal with armed spacecraft overhead as well.

SEIZING THE TURRETS

The port at Acrid is defended by two dual missile turrets, set up atop heavily armoured bunkers close to the landing area. The bunkers can be accessed from underground tunnels which permit work crews and maintenance personnel to keep most of the port's systems running without a hostile environment suit. These tunnels could be used to gain access to the turrets themselves or their magazines and fire control centre. Taking any of these out of the equation will nullify the port's launching capability.

The turrets cannot hit a vessel on the landing pad or close to it; not without launching a missile on a trajectory that loops back and endangers the port itself. They can, however, target a vessel in orbit providing targeting data is available. The port's sensors only cover the sky above it; a ship that is over the horizon, i.e. around the curve of the planet, cannot be tracked from the port. A system defence boat or some other vessel in system could provide mid-course guidance for indirect missile launches.

The turrets could be neutralised by cutting off their power. Acrid is not a military base and does not have complex backup systems. The defences are run from the starport power grid, which can be interrupted or simply switched off if the control room is captured. Power conduits could also be targeted, perhaps with explosives. Alternatively, the turrets themselves could be simply blasted, perhaps by a ship positioned so they cannot return fire – again, this is not a military installation and defences are not comprehensive.

Gera is keen to do as little damage as possible, though she will weigh this against any reduction in the chance of success. Magazine explosions under the turrets would cause collateral damage to the port and make it impossible to use the turrets against any future threat. Ideally, she wants a solution that gives her control of the weapons and keeps them in working condition for the future.

The best idea on the table at present is to approach the turrets under the pretext of routine maintenance, then seize them at gunpoint. They are always guarded, and there are security patrols in the sensitive areas of the port, but if there is no alert it should be possible to catch the defenders by surprise. There will only be a handful of them, probably more technicians than guards, but they can be expected to put up at least some resistance. If an alert is sounded, additional personnel will be assigned to secure the turrets unless they are drawn off by some crisis elsewhere.

Gera has no way of knowing how many missiles are available, but the answer is 'not many'. There are six 'ready rounds' stored in each turret and ten more in a magazine located in an adjoining chamber. These reloads must be transported manually on large trolleys. This has never been a problem to date – Acrid has never fired more than a single warning shot before – but it could be an exploitable weakness in the world's defence.

As with the system defence boats, the turrets are a potential asset if they can be seized and a complication if not. They are not likely to play much part in a fight for control of the starport, other perhaps than as a refuge



for the defenders, but can effectively impose a siege on the port by keeping out ships coming to assist one side or the other. To have proper control of the port, Gera's revolutionaries need at least one turret working and in their hands, and certainly they need both out of the equation before any ships can land; and without ships, the port is useless and Acrid's new independence will simply be strangled.

Gera does not quite appreciate this situation. She sees the turrets as a necessary objective in the revolution, but is only partially correct in this. If there is no spaceborne component to the revolution then the turrets are largely irrelevant in the short term; a noose that must be removed from the revolution's neck at some point. Gera is fixating a little too much on the turrets, and would benefit from an appraisal of the true situation.

REVOLUTION!

With every passing day, the chance increases that someone will launch an ill-coordinated attack on the world's security apparatus or its government. The revolutionaries will then have to proceed as best they can or attempt to weather the inevitable crackdown and begin their preparations anew. Ideally, the revolution is launched as coordinated series of attacks and seizure of critical installations such as security armouries, control rooms, power and life support installations and, of course, the turrets and system defence boats. The chances of everything going this well are rather slim.

More than likely the phases and segments of the revolution will be launched in the wrong order, spreading out from some trigger incident as groups rush to their starting positions and try to carry out their part of the mission. Gera has tried to plan for this eventuality, compartmentalising the various missions and assigning backup teams wherever possible. There are never any guarantees though; she is aware the revolution will be a bloody business, probably taking the form of confused but escalating violence all over the port and main settlement.

The ruling elite and their security people are likely to fight hard, since they are unlikely to expect much mercy. Their fighting will be at close quarters and very nasty, using hand weapons and improvised grenades, handguns, shotguns and submachineguns for the most part. There are few heavy weapons and fewer places they could be used. Either side might use the environment as a weapon, perhaps deliberately breaching a section of the access tunnels to make them inaccessible without the proper suit. However, both sides have good reasons not to do this unless they are utterly desperate.

Assuming the revolution is not immediately crushed or quickly successful, fighting for key areas will go on for some time. In some sections of the city, the situation may degenerate into armed bands of workers and security teams hunting one another in some sort of multi-team deathmatch, whilst in others the defenders of a secured area will face repeated assaults from different directions.

The most likely outcome as the situation begins to stabilise is that neither side has completely won, but an endgame is becoming possible. If either or both sides think they have a shot at total victory, they will regroup and try to eliminate the remaining opposition, but it is just possible that negotiations might begin. The city cannot function without its amenities so if one side can deny the other power, but the other faction has control of the water supply, then the outcome is in serious doubt.

Negotiation might be used to eliminate some pockets of resistance, especially if they cannot communicate with others. It might be possible to convince the defenders of the air processing plant that they are the last remnant of a defeated faction and should surrender, when in fact they are the main bargaining chip for the other side. There is room for trickery and deception in this phase of the revolution, as well as clever plans to sneak into a secured area and catch the defenders unawares.

The Travellers may have a key part to play here. As outsiders, they have no history of resentment or fearing what might happen if the workers gain control of the city. They might even be seen to be honourable brokers of a surrender or new social order. That might amuse people who make their living as pirates, but on the flip side there is no certainty that either faction will honour a deal made in good faith by the Travellers. Revolutions are never pretty, and there is a great deal of anger and resentment behind this one.

COUNTER-REVOLUTION

PRQ, former owner-operators of Acrid, cannot simply accept the loss of a major business asset as well as the deaths of many personnel. On the other hand, PRQ is in business, and any attempt to reclaim the world or at least recoup losses must be cost-effective. When damage to the firm's reputation and increased likelihood that someone else will try a similar revolution elsewhere is taken into account, it is clearly worth the firm's while to try to get its asset back.

The first attempt is likely to be straightforward; an attack on the port by a mercenary cruiser or similar vessel full of PRQ security troopers or mercenaries. This could be stopped by an armed offworld presence – one or both system defence boats, plus any ships the Travellers can bring to help – or if Acrid's orbital defence system is functional. If so, the attackers will stand off from the planet, effectively blockading it, and begin negotiations.

Their negotiating position is a bit one-sided; PRQ offers an amnesty for anyone involved in the rebellion if they lay down their arms, and will address the workers' grievances in good faith. This is not much of an offer, and will be accepted only if the world is being strangled by a blockade or has serious internal problems. Additional ships, such as merchants chartered to resupply the first arrivals, will begin to reach the Acrid system after a few weeks, until eventually the blockade is unbreakable. Acrid can only survive for so long before its systems need spares not available on-planet, especially if there was a lot of damage in the revolution.

The PRQ response team will more than likely be able to contact sympathisers on-planet. These may include former privileged employees, disaffected workers unhappy with Gera's leadership, or those who believe the rebellion is bound to be defeated. They will cooperate with the PRQ response force in the hope of being rewarded or at least spared retribution.

Morale among the revolutionaries is a key factor here, as is the condition of the world's critical systems. The response team will know they have support on-planet as soon as contact can be established with sympathisers planetside. Hunting down covert transmissions will deprive them of this information and the ability to coordinate an assault with a counter-revolution on the planet. This does not mean there will not be attempts to seize key installations and force the revolutionary government to surrender, but it will not be well orchestrated.

There is an additional problem here; Gera has visions of a completely independent Acrid, and is unlikely to accept any form of compromise. This is unrealistic, for several reasons. PRQ is will not accept the situation

unless the alternative is far too expensive, and Acrid needs external support. If the Travellers can obtain external support, perhaps from Drinax or another of the local powers, then Acrid will be able to survive without its former corporate masters, providing the attempt to take it back is defeated or deterred. If not, then it will be necessary to negotiate some sort of agreement with PRQ.

The biggest obstacle to that is Gera herself. She hates PRQ, perhaps rightly, but this will prevent her from seeing the necessity of a compromise. If PRQ cannot retake Acrid within a few weeks, a negotiator will be sent to offer a deal which saves face for the company and brings the matter to an acceptable conclusion. The deal is that Acrid will become an autonomous business unit of PRQ, run by a corporate administration appointed by the revolutionary government with the assistance of experts sent by PRQ as needed. Investment will be made into improving conditions among the workforce and increasing productivity.

The short version of this is that Acrid will govern itself but PRQ gets to pretend it was not kicked out of its holdings. The corporation will provide funding for development and repairs, which will be used as directed by the new government. How much money PRQ is willing to put into Acrid depends upon the situation – if the rebels are strongly in control then the company will offer more. A bold front might be useful here, convincing PRQ that the situation on planet is better than it actually is. Again, depriving them of reliable information by hunting down sympathisers would assist in this endeavour.

Unless the revolution has gone very well and external support is available from some other source, this outcome is the most likely. It is actually a reasonable deal that lets everyone get out with their skin intact. The trick is going to be persuading Gera to accept it. If she will not, there are others who might and Acrid could see a further round of revolt and negotiation before the dust finally settles.

C H A P T E R - T W E N T Y T W O

FRIENDS IN DRY PLACES

The world of Kteiroa is the largest *ihatei* camp in the subsector, located just two parsecs from Drinax. Since eradicating this potential threat is not a viable option, the only course of action is to foster friendly relations. The usual trade-and-gifts approach is out of the question; *ihatei* respect strength and daring far more than wealth and largesse. The Travellers must impress their potential allies with deeds, which leads to particularly daring piracy.

THE SETTING

Kteiroa is a frozen desert, though it does have a breathable atmosphere. What little water is available must be drilled out of deep aquifers or more-or-less wrung out of the rocks. This is one of several reasons why Kteiroa has never been a hot prospect for colonisation or *ihatei* landgrab. However, there are those who can see past the forbidding landscape and appreciate Kteiroa for what it might be – a staging post for raids and annexation of the Sindalian Main.

The world has been settled by a family of Aslan outcasts, who brought with them sufficient equipment to create a rather basic starport and town to support it. This has grown into a thriving *ihatei* camp, with several leaders and their followers present at any given time. These transients are not counted towards the world's official population figures, though some of them are a lot less transient than others.

As the camp has grown, so have its requirements for basic supplies such as water and food, as well as luxury items – not to mention accommodation. Word is getting around that Kteiroa is a good place to pick up additional followers – usually from another *ihatei* band whose leader has failed to impress – and to rest up before launching an expedition. The world's *ihatei* population is on the cusp of an explosion in more senses than one.

Ihatei groups come in on a frequent basis, and so do individuals or small groups hoping to find a charismatic and successful leader to follow. The success of some operations has enabled the outcasts to bring in additional equipment, but it is becoming impossible to keep pace with the expanding population. Aslan being what they are, competition for scarce resources is fierce, and tensions are running high on Kteiroa.

The answer is not simple or easy. The camp's overstressed life support plant must be augmented with additional water recycling equipment, storage tanks and even basic items like piping. Ideally, the camp also needs additional power generation systems, distribution components and workshop machines. Without these mundane items, the camp will be unable to support its population. The best possible outcome of that is a rapid abandonment and loss of prestige for the outcasts. More likely, there will be serious and large-scale violence. Whether the camp is destroyed in the expected bloodbath or merely damaged, the long-term prospects are not good.

THE PATRON

Utea is an outcast from Aslan society, one of a family who have settled Kteiroa and made it their own. Despite stereotypes about Aslan males being unable to understand anything more technical than a hand grenade, Utea knows very well what is needed to prevent his family's project from collapsing onto carnage. He is not opposed to a violent cull of the numbers, but his family would almost certainly come off badly in such a fight as several of the *ihatei* bands at the camp outnumber his warriors.

Utea's economic and technical advisors (who happen to be two of his wives) have presented a rather bleak picture of the situation. Kteiroa needs a large amount

of the sort of equipment used to set up a frontier colony, and cannot afford to buy it. Nor can Utea ask for assistance from any Aslan clan. He must solve this problem using only his own resources. Fortunately, a solution is at hand. Utea will take what he cannot afford to buy, and use it to turn his worthless frigid desert of a world into one capable of supporting huge numbers of *ihatei*.

The concept is simple, but the execution of Utea's plan will require considerable effort and a little inventiveness. He has the additional problem that he needs to be seen as the undisputed lord and master of Kteiroa, dispensing gifts and necessities as the fancy takes him. Asking any *ihatei* leader to help him provide basic services would undermine his own position and would be a major political risk even if his pride let him consider it.

Utea therefore needs someone outside the society of Kteiroa's *ihatei* camp; someone creative and bold but who cannot possibly supplant him as leader. Humans, say perhaps a band of pirates out of Drinax, would be a perfect choice.

HIRING ON

During a visit to Drinax (or perhaps in some other port along the Sindalian Main), the Travellers notice a bit of a stir. This is caused by the arrival of some Aslan bigwig or other, who turns up in a 600-ton ship acting like he is the Emperor of Everything. Wearing splendid garments and surrounded by well-armed bodyguards, he makes a lordly peregrination around the port before grudgingly settling upon barely-suitable lodgings. From there, word goes out that the lord Utea invites bold and adventurous souls to come into his presence. He has a proposition for the right group; one that carries with it great rewards and the patronage of the lordly Utea.

The Travellers will no doubt have seen this routine before. The humblest of Aslan officials or leaders will act like a great lord in the presence of outsiders, and many of them (if not all) seem to genuinely see themselves as better than humans. Be that as it may, this Utea seems to have money and at least a modest amount of prestige, so it might be worth listening to his offer.

Thus the Travellers find themselves in the august presence of Utea himself. He is haughty and disdainful of... pretty much everything really, and makes it clear that anything not Aslan is inherently inferior. Nevertheless, he provides his guests with fine food and drink, and asks them for their story. He even deigns to listen to the answer, and seems genuinely interested at some points.

What Utea wants to know is: are the Travellers smart, armed and willing to do what it takes to get the job done? Do they have a starship available? If they present him with a tale of their exploits suggesting these things are true, he will be favourably disposed towards them. On the other hand, if the Travellers choose to downplay their illegal and violent exploits – i.e. they talk to Utea like they were trying to wriggle out of criminal charges – he will be far less impressed. No human can ever be the equivalent of an Aslan *ihatei*, but they can aspire to be something similar – if lesser in all ways. An *ihatei* is proud of his exploits or at least prepared to answer for them; weaselling and deception might be useful but they are hardly the hallmark of notable warriors.



Amid all the pomp and self-importance, Utea's proposal comes down to this: he needs a crew to obtain several pieces of equipment, and deliver them to his holdings on Kteiroa. If the Travellers can meet his needs in a reasonable time frame he will decree they are always to be welcome on Kteiroa, and will even permit Aslan warriors to sign on aboard their vessel or *ihatei* vessels to accompany it on its missions. In fact he has no real control over any of this, but if the Travellers succeed in their mission, Kteiroa will move one step towards being a Haven. It will move two steps if the Travellers impressed Utea with their bold and forthright statements about who they are and what they do. In addition, Utea will pay for the items he wants the Travellers to source for him, based on their suitability and condition.

There are three key pieces of equipment Utea needs;

1. A large power source capable of supplying power for a long time. A starship reactor would be eminently suitable.
2. A water recycling plant of the sort used on rockball colonies or large space vessels.
3. A very large quantity of piping, cabling, and conduits to build a distribution network.

Whilst the Travellers are engaged in attempting to obtain these items, Utea will refuel their ship each time they return to Kteiroa. Given how scarce water (and therefore liquid hydrogen obtained from it) is on the world, this is a grander gesture than might at first be apparent. He will also dispense gifts totaling up to Cr1000 x 2D. These take the form of furs, ornamental weapons, jewellery and similarly ostentatious items, and are given as much to demonstrate Utea's (largely illusory) wealth as for their value. Of course, Utea will want an update on progress each time the Travellers come through. He will tolerate a couple of empty-handed arrivals but after this he will withdraw his favour, which translates in this case to ignoring the Travellers and looking for someone else to fulfil his mission.

Utea will not handle the grubby details of handing over money for the things he needs – that is beneath the dignity of an Aslan lord. Instead his wives deal with such matters. They will pay a reasonable price – in hard currency – for the three necessary items.

The Power Source will more than likely come from a salvaged or pirated starship. Utea needs a reactor capable of generating at least Power 60 plus sufficient spares to keep it running. He will also need fuel tankage, though this can be improvised locally, and a set of fuel processors to convert water into liquid hydrogen. A small powerplant, such as that from a Free Trader or Scout/Courier, would be worth KCr200 to Utea if stolen or pirated, and perhaps half as much again if he can be sure it was legitimately obtained.

The Water Recycling Unit could be pulled from a starship or orbital station, or colony on a world with no breathable atmosphere. Of course, that suggests that someone might be using it which could raise other complications. Getting the system out of a vessel or installation would be quite a lengthy engineering job, requiring several days at least after which it would have to be dismantled, transported and put back together in a working condition. A suitable unit would take up about 20 tons of cargo hold and would be worth KCr100 to Utea.

The Piping and Conduits are not especially glamorous but will be necessary to get power and water where they need to be. Enough to get the job done properly would take up 40 tons of cargo space, and could be delivered in more than one batch. Utea will pay KCr50 when presented with enough piping, though first his engineering-minded wife would have to pronounce it sufficient. Utea himself has no interest in a pile of pipes, however vital they may be, and will not even take a look at them.

These requirements could be met by plonking a pirated starship of at least 400 tons down on the landing pad at Kteiroa, but there are other ways to go about getting the *ihatei* what they need.

THE POWER SYSTEM

As noted elsewhere, it would be possible to meet most Utea's needs by bringing a stolen starship of at least 400 tons (or ships and small craft totaling that much) to Kteiroa. This would certainly be an attention-grabbing way to solve the problem, and might result in the Travellers gaining status with some of the *ihatei* groups using the camp. However, it would require stealing entire vessels and to do so the Travellers might have to breach the Code of the Stars. This solution could be more trouble than it is worth.

The alternative is to obtain the necessary equipment through some means less likely to be troublesome. One option is to steal (or even buy) a powerplant from a starship breaker, either as a complete unit or parts of several. It is not necessary that the completed powerplant fit neatly into the drive rooms of any specific vessel, after all. Many systems with a Class A or B starport have starship breakers yards where spares can be obtained from dismantled ships.

Before a ship gets to the yard it is often placed in a holding orbit for some time whilst preparations are made to receive it. Some systems have large 'starship graveyards' in distant orbits, where hulks await their final transit to the breakers yard or are stripped in space. There are also illicit 'ship-chop' operations that do the same with stolen or otherwise 'hot' vessels.

It might be possible to enter one of these graveyards (Utea can supply a list of suitable locations) and strip out a powerplant. This is quite a lengthy operation, requiring the plant be dismantled and transferred to the Travelers' cargo bay. A better alternative would be to remove whole small craft and pull the powerplant at leisure.

These starship graveyards are not undefended. At the very least, there will be remote sensors which, if triggered, will result in a response from the yard owners or local system defence vessels. Wrecks might also be booby-trapped, and it is entirely possible that the breakers might have salvaged a working missile launcher or two. This is more likely for illicit ship-chop operations, whose owners are keen to discourage pilfering by rivals or investigation by authorities. A lethal response is far more likely if the operation is illegal, and word might get around that the Travellers delivered powerplant components to Kteiroa not long after similar items went missing. The Travellers might run into an attempt at retribution some time later when they have forgotten about the incident.

Obtaining the powerplant is only part of the problem. It must then be conveyed to Kteiroa and installed. Utea's people have some technical skills but are for the most part not experienced with starship equipment, especially systems made by humans. The Travellers will initially be greeted with gifts and praise, but it soon becomes apparent that they are expected to present a *working* powerplant rather than a collection of parts. If they leave Kteiroa without setting up the plant, Utea will not be pleased and their next visit may be a little frosty.

On the other hand, if the Travellers take the hint and start work on the plant, they will have to contend with galactic-level impatience from Utea and visits from various *ihatei* leaders who want to know why the system is not already up and running. Responses of a 'because you keep interrupting' nature will not go down well. Note that these leaders are Aslan males and do not actually care in the slightest why the plant is not running yet – what they really mean is why have they not got power yet.

Each of the *ihatei* leaders is also concerned that he is not somehow cheated or left out of the distribution grid, and uses a combination of threats and vague promises of largesse to ensure that the Travellers know he is to get his fair share (and a bit more) and get it before his rivals. Some will offer incentives to try to cut those rivals out of the distribution grid.

THE WATER RECYCLING SYSTEM

In theory, a recycling system could be pulled from a starship and augmented with additional components, but such systems tend to be buried deep in a ship's innards and are even more time consuming than power systems to remove. Persistent Travellers could manage it, but unless the salvage operation were conducted legally (which would cost a lot more than scavenging from a derelict) this would be an expensive undertaking.

There is an alternative. A few years ago a small prospecting-and-mining company went bust, pulling out of its various operations and selling them to anyone who would pay to take them over. One of these installations, although bought at a rock-bottom price, has never been properly taken over and now stands derelict. It is on a gas giant moon or rockball planet in a nearby system (the referee should decide which one) and, to the best of everyone's knowledge, remains undisturbed.

The installation is now owned by Arenson Investments, which is no mining company. Arenson has never managed to put together a crew for the installation, but it did send a team to mothball the plant and set up deterrents for unwanted visitors.

As the Travellers approach, they will be detected by an automated defence system which will broadcast a warning to stay away. This repeats and becomes more strident, before a missile is launched from the surface somewhere close to the installation. The automated system only ever had three missiles, and it fired one some time ago, so there is only one shot to follow this. However, the Travellers will not know that. The launcher is not a proper turret, but a one-shot container stood upright in a hole drilled in the rock, coupled to a rather basic sensor system.

Once past the missile system, the Travellers can easily gain access to the prospecting site. This consists of a few prefabricated base segments linked by flexible tunnels. It is a bit of a maze, but not very large. When operating, the site had an accommodation building, utilities structure and power centre plus workshops and ore sampling lab. The power centre is disappointing; its reactor and key systems were removed when the station was mothballed.

The water recycling unit is mainly modular, but contains components scattered across the complex. Getting the main unit out is a big, heavy job; removing the additional systems is easier work but time-consuming. All work has to be done in vacc suits unless a power feed is rigged from the Travellers' ship; life-support and lights are completely dead without the reactor.

There is an additional problem. Soon after arriving the Travellers will find two bodies, both in vacc suits and riddled with bullets. Stray rounds have smashed up equipment and punched holes in the less-than-

substantial outer walls of the building. It is not immediately apparent what happened here (apart from the obvious) but it does seem items have been taken from the two dead spacefarers. Tools, weapons and small salvageable items have been removed but the bodies have been left where they fell.

The casualties were caused by a security robot, one of two left to deter intruders. These are small devices, about 1m high, that run on fat balloon tyres and mount a submachinegun in a revolving turret. They do not issue any warning before opening fire; anyone in the installation has already got past the missile defence system so is assumed hostile.

The robots are smart enough to shoot and scoot, with one perhaps drawing the Travellers into an ambush by the other. Once they are dealt with, the recycling system can be removed at leisure. There are also some lab and workshop systems that can be looted, but everything small and valuable was taken when the site was mothballed. Still, the Travellers might be able to obtain some extra salvage for their trouble.

PIPEWORK GALORE

Piping and conduits could be obtained from the same sources as the powerplant and water recycling equipment, though pulling them from ships in a graveyard would be a very lengthy process. If the Travellers have time to spare and like spannerwork, there is nothing to stop them dismantling a ship or installation. Spending a week extracting pipes and conduits from a derelict space vessel is a rather slow process.

The Travellers should find some more efficient way of obtaining pipes, conduits, connectors, pumps, filters and other entirely mundane but essential equipment. The Travellers might come up with all manner of

Security Robot

HITS	SPEED	TL	COST
14	12 m	12	Cr675000
SKILLS	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Recon 1, Tactics 0		
ATTACKS	Submachinegun (3D Auto 3)		
TRAITS	Armour (+3)		
PROGRAMMING	Basic (security)		



extravagant ways to overthink this, in which case the referee can have some fun watching them collect a bunch of pipes. The simplest solution is to simply buy what they need. About 40 tons of pipes and conduits are needed, all told, to fully set up the camp with water recycling and power distribution. Some of what is needed will come with the power and water units. The rest could be bought for Cr1000 per ton or less if the Travellers are good at bargaining. This cuts into the profit margin, but it gets the most potentially time-consuming part of the job done quickly.

THE GRAND UNVEILING

Once the components are in place, it only remains to connect it all up and throw the switch. Of course, Utea makes grand pronouncements as soon as the parts arrive, and everyone will be expecting the plant up and running straight away. The Travellers can expect another round of demands about what has gone wrong, even though in truth nothing really has. Utea has created an unrealistic expectation (or transferred his own expectations onto the camp in general) and now the Travellers are under pressure to instantly deliver something that takes time to set up.

While they are getting the plant up and running, the Travellers must deal with Utea and other Aslan males wanting to know when the power and water will be on, plus female Aslan technicians deriding solutions to technical problems. They will be under grave pressure to throw something together fast, but this does mean that some parts of the system will have to be redone later. Getting it right first time will take longer, but reduces the chance of a serious malfunction or major delay while a cobbled-together section is taken out and put back together properly.

Utea pushes for an immediate quick-and-dirty solution, but can be persuaded to take the time to do it right if the Travellers approach him correctly. He is receptive to the idea that a grand switch-on followed by some sort of failure would damage his reputation more than a few more days of methodical work. He is not in the slightest bit interested in details.

Finally, the system is ready and Utea announces that henceforth there will be sufficient energy to recharge every fuel cell and water to meet everyone's needs. He switches on the systems, and they work! Congratulations and gifts (another Cr1000 x 2D worth) come the Travellers' way, and Utea basks in the admiration of lesser *ihatei* for whom he has provided the fundamental needs.

The atmosphere of goodwill lasts about sixteen hours, before things start to go wrong. One problem is that Utea insists on irrigating land near his camp, intending to grow crops and wild vegetation where animals (introduced from offworld) can run free and be hunted. His plan is, naturally, far too grandiose and the system cannot cope. An *ihatei* leader rages about sewage in his washing water; another cannot recharge his laser weapons quickly without browning-out the power grid in his section of the camp. Disappointment turns to anger...

THE FINAL PIECE

Utea is dismayed at this turn of events, though this manifests itself as condescending annoyance. A prodigious *ihatei* leader has decided to make Utea's camp his base; he will be arriving soon and Utea needs to have everything in order or lose prestige. That would be bad for everyone involved.

The power issue is a secondary one; it results mainly from trying to force water into the barren soil of Kteiroa and extract it again. Since Utea will not give up the idea of a hunting preserve (the farms he will do without), the only answer is to reduce the strain on the system by giving it more water to work with. Easier said than done, perhaps... but perhaps not. There *is* water on Kteiroa, in artesian basins that can be reached by drilling a shaft and inserting pumps. The equipment to do this is rather specialist, but Utea has an idea for how to get it.

Utea has information on a company that specialises in drilling exactly this sort of artesian pump system. They have a ship that carries the necessary equipment, and are operating in a nearby system. All the Travellers need do is steal the ship and its equipment, drill a hole a kilometre or two in depth, and plug it in to the water system. That, or convince the *ihatei* that sewage is not a bad thing to find in your drinking water...

However they do it, the Travellers need that ship and its equipment at Kteiroa as soon as possible. Once they have achieved that, drilling the shaft is a simple enough matter – though there will be the usual barrage of questions about why the work is not already completed. Success will be obvious when muddy water starts to geyser out of the shaft, showering everyone nearby. This will create large numbers of irate, muddy-furred *ihatei* who cannot get a proper shower until the water system is fully operational. They will try, of course, but with low water pressure the system cannot cope.

The disputes that follow might provide an interesting insight into the Aslan psyche. Nobody likes being covered in mud, and remaining filthy is an obvious indication that the individual (and his followers) were behind someone else in the order of precedence. This is not accurate; it has more to do with how pipes are laid out, but the Aslan will not see it that way. Some find inventive ways of getting clean and strut about, taunting those who are still dirty. Others fling accusations around about bribery, corruption and underhand ways of getting a decent level of water pressure.

After the first death, the Travellers will realise that the *ihatei* are not actually fighting over who gets to use the bathroom first; they have translated the situation into a status contest. Being able to get clean is a commodity everyone wants, and those who have obtained it can flaunt their success by simply walking around without muddy fur. And they do, rubbing everyone's noses in the fact that they got the desired commodity long before others. The implication is that those who are still dirty are of lower status since they lack the influence or power to get what they need.

SOLUTIONS

Bizarre as it may seem to humans, the *ihatei* camp is on the verge of ripping itself apart over shower rotas. A particularly important *ihatei* leader is due any time, and Utea's reputation is on the line. Meanwhile, the Travellers are approached by emissaries from *ihatei* bands of varying size, all wanting the same thing – privileged access to the water and power supplies, and occasionally the interruption of someone else's supply. The Travellers will have to tread a fine line when dealing with these requests – they cannot really afford to offend any of the *ihatei* leaders unless they have the wholehearted protection of Utea.

The Travellers will also discover the system is being sabotaged in places, cutting off some *ihatei* groups. They might have just come to a deal with Utea or the Travellers, and will be even more aggrieved if they think they have been cheated. Actually fixing all the technical problems would merely be a matter of time and manpower; the Travellers' real problem will be preventing a bloodbath until they can do so.

Of course, it may suit the Travellers' interests to let the camp at Kteiroa collapse into chaos. A major *ihatei* staging post just two parsecs from Drinax might be too much of a threat. If so, the Travellers might stir the pot a bit or simply sneak back to their ship and leave. They will make enemies of the survivors, of course, but the *ihatei* outpost at Kteiroa will more or less self-eradicate.

If the Travellers prefer to try to salvage the situation, they will need to apply persuasion and diplomacy – not least to stop angry *ihatei* from shooting them! It may be possible to persuade some warriors to guard the pipes and conduits, and technicians to help fix them. Anything that calms the situation down even a little will help buy time.

If they are successful, the Travellers will be able to provide the camp with enough water and power to keep everyone happy, or at least prevent a fight. Utea's prestige will be a little dented, but this is soon repaired when a large *ihatei* band arrives to find the camp well set up with the necessities of life. Soon the *ihatei* are plotting raids and landgrabs with those they were recently in conflict with.

Whether this is a good thing depends upon perspective. It is probably bad for nearby human-controlled worlds, but Kteiroa itself will become a friendly port. If the Travellers have made friends among the *ihatei* they may be able to join a raid or embark upon a joint venture. They may also have started a rivalry with some of the *ihatei*, and there may be individual's or whole bands who resent the Travellers' involvement in the recent situation at Kteiroa.

In short, unless the camp collapses into chaos (and probably even then) the Travellers' actions will have consequences. The *ihatei* will become part of the local political situation, one more variable in a complex equation. Smart Travellers will be able to make use of this; lucky ones may benefit by accident. Disaster is always a possibility.

THE CORDAN CONFLICT

Cordan in Borderlands subsector is potentially a rich world, and a real prize for whoever controls it. Baroness Lux intends it to be her, but she has powerful rivals who must be eliminated or sufficiently reduced in power that they cannot challenge her dominance. Unable to act directly, the baroness engages the Travellers to cause trouble for her rivals, resulting in a small but nasty civil war.

THE SETTING

Cordan has a breathable, if dense and tainted, atmosphere and a reasonable amount of surface water. This makes it a good prospect for colonisation and eventual growth into a highly productive world. Cordan was settled long ago but its development took a different path. For reasons now lost to history it became a vassal world of Arunisiir, producing large quantities of low-value foodstuffs. It was not in the interests of the ruling elite on Arunisiir to encourage any activity that might make Cordan capable of independence.

The world was divided into zones each ruled by a baron appointed by the elite of Arunisiir, and the general population was restricted to a lower Tech Level than that enjoyed by the barons' households. When Arunisiir was overrun by Aslan *ihatei*, the support received by these barons was largely cut off and Cordan had to chart its own path. Lacking the resources to become a major interstellar state, Cordan simply went on as before with the barons as de facto planetary rulers.

The world is officially listed as a representative democracy, though this is a rather creative interpretation of the actual situation. The people of Cordan elect representatives who form a parliament headed by whichever baron is in charge of their zone. Representatives are also sent from each barony to the world parliament which meets at the starport. However, the power of these parliaments is very limited since the barons control all high-technology manufacturing facilities, and the world parliament is hamstrung by rivalries between the baronies.

The relationship between the barons and their people is also peculiar. The official world population is just two thousand people, but this only takes into account members of the baronial households. They are known as citizens, whereas the much larger population outside the households are referred to as subjects and have a distinctly lower status.

As with all leaders, the barons have some popular support among their subjects and also a measure of dissent. The barons have at times provided good leadership and won the trust of the people, and on other occasions lost it by acting out of blatant self-interest. No baron can afford to alienate too many of their people, but neither do they act as the people want if they have a different agenda.

The Imperium, which sends ships through Cordan's starport on a regular basis, does not really care how the world is run so long as the port remains open for business. It is widely assumed that the Imperium would act against anyone upsetting the status quo, and the Imperials are happy enough with the balance of power on Cordan. The barons themselves have cooperated at times but often maintain a policy of polite hostility towards one another. Each knows the others would take advantage of any misfortune, eroding power or annexing as much as they could get away with.

THE PATRON

Baroness Lux is extremely popular with her people, enjoying overwhelming support due to recent actions. This was in part due to her personal leadership of a campaign to dislodge Aslan *ihatei* from areas near her holdings, and partially due to what amounts to bribery. Lux has provided a certain amount of TL9 goods and machinery to her subjects, particularly in hospitals and population centres, which has had an impact on quality of life for people who normally only have access to TL5.

This largesse is not really sustainable in the long term; the cost of maintaining these facilities is beyond the modest budget of any baronial household. It is not merely out of spite or to maintain the barons' position that the majority of the populace is denied access to high technology; it is simply not affordable. This means that Baroness Lux has bought herself a few years of popularity but will rapidly lose it when equipment breaks down or the people start expecting another round of investment. She needs to make use of the advantage she has gained as soon as possible.

The baroness has created a situation where her own people will follow her anywhere, and the subjects of other barons are looking enviously at their improved lifestyles and wondering if they might not be better off under a different ruler. The next stage of her plan is to destabilise the other barons' domains and take advantage of the ensuing chaos. If one or both can be overthrown that would be ideal, but Lux would be satisfied with reducing their power and perhaps gaining additional followers. She hopes the gains will outweigh the investment, but to achieve them she needs to take bold action.

Simply attacking the other barons would be a losing proposition; the balance of power is too close to ensure a victory at any affordable cost. Offworld mercenaries would be a possibility were it not for the certainty of Imperial intervention. The answer, of course, is to subtly trigger 'internal' problems for the other barons, using deniable assets.

HIRING ON

Whilst passing through Cordan or any world in the region, the Travellers are approached by a representative of Baroness Lux. Initially, she has a trivial task for them – transporting a small cargo of high-value medical equipment to a landing site close to the baronial capital for a slightly-better-than-reasonable fee. The representative tells the Travellers that security and discretion are important.

Assuming the Travellers perform adequately, they are invited to dine with the baroness at her residence. Like the other baronial halls, this is a fortified structure within a restricted zone where the household citizens live. Beyond its walls the ordinary subjects go about their daily lives in what appears to be a contented manner.

Baroness Lux explains there used to be more barons on Cordan, but they met with misfortune of various sorts. Aslan *ihatei*, bad luck and conflict between the barons have whittled their number down to three. She tells the Travellers she suspects the other two are colluding to destroy her – a claim not completely untrue but hardly the imminent threat she makes it out to be.

If the Travellers can help her prevent this unfortunate set of circumstances she will permit them to use her private landing field whenever they like. More importantly, perhaps, she will help them reclaim the old baronial hall once occupied by a minor rival, and set up a small estate there. In short, they will become minor nobles on Cordan with their own small holdings.



It is not possible to act overtly or directly, and hoping the Imperials will intervene to protect her interests is a bit of a gamble. So instead the baroness wants to ferment dissent and unrest in the lands of her rivals, and sabotage their military assets. This will be the Travellers' task, and she will consider they have succeeded if either or both of the other barons are forced to deal with an uprising or significant rebel activity. If they can be induced to fight one another, she will be delighted and will consider the operation a resounding success.

Baron Fero is at present on the brink of hostilities with his rival Baron Halley (the Travellers might find this an odd statement, since Baroness Lux just said the two were about to gang up on her; she waves a hand and dismisses any queries with the claim that the situation is very complex) over a border area that has been in dispute for years. Fero is moderately popular with his people and his barony is at present stable in both a political and economic sense. Fero has the largest population base of the three barons, giving him a manpower advantage.

Baron Halley has an extremely well fortified hall, which most people refer to as his castle. He seems to have access to more TL9 manufacturing equipment than the other barons, and a slightly larger personal guard than Lux. Despite this, he seems to have suffered a setback recently. Baroness Lux thinks that perhaps Halley has offended the Imperials and been quietly admonished. His trade income is down, though exports are much the same. This suggests he has been hit with a tariff or simply offered a lower price for his goods. Since most of the ships his bulk grain and foodstuffs are sold to are Imperial, this fits with the possibility that he has done something to upset the Imperium.

The plan is to cause an incident in the disputed area which will spark an insurgency against one or both barons. If their personal forces can be drawn in,

this will impose a cost in terms of replacements and maintenance for high-tech equipment. If the two forces can be made to fight one another, that would be ideal but Baroness Lux would be quite happy to create a quagmire that neither can afford to withdraw from. The longer this goes on for, the greater the cost to her rivals and the smaller the chance of them attacking her.

The incident will be triggered by the assassination of a highly unpopular local official in the disputed region, which is currently under the control of Baron Halley. The assassination will be carried out by the Travellers, and need not actually succeed (though Lux would prefer it to) in order to trigger the desired chain of events. There will be no shortage of possible suspects, and the most likely response is a security crackdown that will further alienate the local population. It will also increase tensions with Baron Fero, who has many supporters in the region and is just looking for an excuse to 'rescue' them from the oppressive rule of their current overlord.

Once forces from both factions have been drawn into the area, it should not be hard to create another incident that will get them shooting at one another. If this cannot be achieved, some sort of popular insurgency will keep both sides busy for a long time, which suits the purposes of the baroness.

Referee's Note

There is no plan for the other two barons to gang up on Lux, though it could happen someday. Halley has been receiving support from the Zhodani Consulate for some time, and the Imperium cannot 'officially' notice this as it would create a diplomatic situation they do not wish to confront. So instead they have found reasons to impose economic sanctions upon Halley; reasons they do not want too closely investigated. The situation is becoming quite volatile, though not in the way that Lux has presented. Still, her plan is workable and would indeed weaken her rivals. It might have other consequences not yet apparent.

THE ASSASSINATION

The target official is one Josephus Agraaki, a taxation assessment supervisor who has become notorious for corruption and other rumoured misdeeds. He is tolerated by Baron Halley because he is very efficient at getting money out of people and also has information about various members of the baron's household (some say the baron himself) that can be used against them at need.

Agraaki routinely tours his areas of responsibility 'assessing' the tax liability of local businesses and farms. In fact he extorts almost as much in bribes not to increase taxation as he does tax money, and in recent years has become increasingly rapacious. This affords him good personal security, of course, and a heavily protected residence away from the main baronial centre of power.

Agraaki publishes his intended itinerary before making a tour of the region, but almost never follows it. This is public knowledge – he is notorious for turning up somewhere unexpectedly whilst another 'inspectee'

nervously awaits his arrival. His tours are typically two to three weeks long, after which he conducts other business (the locals call that 'lurking in his lair counting his money') for a few weeks before venturing out again.

Agraaki's security detail consists of a driver for each of his vehicles and four bodyguards, plus two attendants. The latter handle the routine aspects of his business and any small errands required, and are dressed in the same smart-but-intimidating manner as Agraaki himself and his bodyguards. In the event of an incident, it might be difficult to determine who is who in the few seconds it takes to get Agraaki to his vehicle.

The team travels in two identical ground cars, which are lightly armoured to resist mid-tech small-arms fire. All members of the entourage are armed with autopistols, and there are additional weapons available. Each vehicle has a shotgun and a submachinegun aboard, and it is standard practice for two of the guards to remain with the drivers, with the heavier weapons handy, whilst Agraaki, his attendants and two guards carry out their business.

Josephus Agraaki

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		-
STR	6	INT	6	SKILLS Admin 2, Advocate 1, Carouse 1, Deception 1, Diplomat 1, Electronics (computers) 1, Gun Combat 0, Persuade 1
DEX	8	EDU	7	
END	7	SOC	8	
EQUIPMENT		Autopistol (3D-3)		



Bodyguards

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		-		-
STR	8	INT	7	SKILLS Athletics 0, Drive (wheel) 1, Electronics 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Melee 0, Recon 0
DEX	8	EDU	6	
END	9	SOC	6	
EQUIPMENT		Autopistol (3D-3), Shotgun (4D, Bulky), or Submachinegun (3D, Auto 3)		



ARMoured CAR

TL	9
SKILL	DRIVE (WHEEL)
AGILITY	+0
SPEED (CRUISE)	HIGH (MEDIUM)
RANGE (CRUISE)	500 (750)
CREW	1
PASSENGERS	3
CARGO	-
HULL	15
SHIPPING	3.5 TONS
COST	CR25300

ARMOUR

FRONT	15
REAR	15
SIDES	15



EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS

Autopilot (basic), Communications System (improved), Computer/1, Entertainment System, Fire Extinguishers, Life Support (short term), Navigation System (basic), Wet Bar

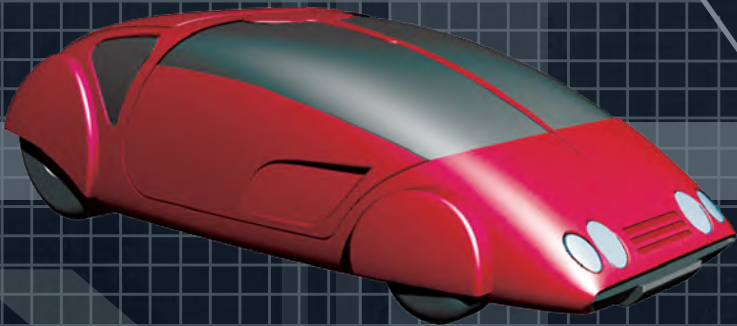
Autopilot (skill level)	-
Communications (range)	500 km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+1
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	-
Camouflage (Recon DM)	-
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	-

TRAITS

None

DESCRIPTION

A comfortable armoured transport intended to ferry mid-level personnel in relative safety, this ground car looks normal enough from the exterior, but a close inspection will show it sits a little heavily on its suspension. The car is armoured against small arms fire but offers little protection against heavy weapons. It is generally used to protect VIPs from an unruly populace or low tech enemies rather than opposing militaries, and its life support systems mean it can function in a variety of atmospheres.



The security team is efficient enough, and has dealt in the past with incidents ranging from a handful of easily intimidated protesters, an enraged landowner armed with a fencepost, and a lone gunman seeking revenge for some past offence. The team have a set of well-rehearsed drills, which Agraaki is smart enough to comply with. If a serious incident presented itself, the bodyguards would try to extract Agraaki to the vehicles under cover of the enhanced firepower waiting there.

Having dealt with minor threats in the past, and very easily, the security team is a little complacent, and Agraaki's own contempt for the people he robs – he calls it 'taxes' of course – has resulted in him taking greater risks and becoming a little sloppy.

The Travellers might try to assassinate Agraaki as he stays in a small town on his tour, or ambush him on the road. In the latter case, his driver will focus on getting away whilst the other car provides cover; Agraaki has no interest in fighting it out with assailants, and will sacrifice his guards to do so. They are loyal enough to put up a good fight but are not fanatical. Wounded or abandoned guards will escape or surrender once they have ensured Agraaki's escape or it is clear they are overmatched.

THE RESPONSE

Even an unsuccessful attempt on Agraaki's life will trigger a response from Baron Halley's security services. Although the baron is not a fan of Agraaki or his activities, an attack on baronial officials cannot be tolerated. Halley has a small force of paramilitary guards equipped to TL9 standards, which he will deploy without hesitation. The guards are mostly equipped with ground vehicles (typically lightly armoured wheeled patrol vehicles such as the Parthian Wheeled Scout on page 89 of the *Vehicle Handbook*, or the Socrates Field Car on page 111) but they also have a handful of air/rafts mounting light support weapons, such as machineguns. These may be used to position a fast-reaction force to block roads or close escape routes.

The response, for all it is made by well-armed security troopers, is not particularly heavy-handed. One reason for this is that Baron Halley's force was trained by advisors from the Zhodani Consulate, and is of a higher quality than the troops of other barons. Whilst quite willing to shoot anyone who needs it, the security force understands the need to avoid alienating the populace. Thus the response is robust but not trigger-happy.

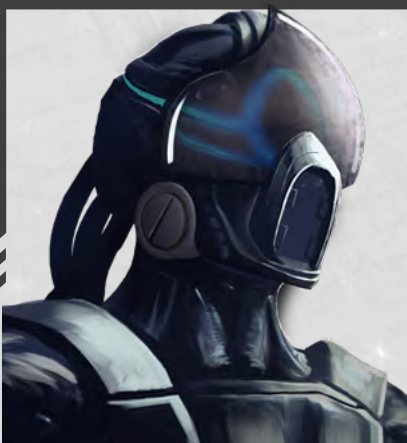
Paramilitary Guards

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Human		-		-	
STR	8	INT	7	SKILLS	
DEX	9	EDU	7	Athletics 0, Drive (wheel) 1,	
END	8	SOC	7	Electronics 0, Flyer 0, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 1, Melee (blade or bludgeon) 1, Recon 1, Survival 1	
EQUIPMENT		Flak Jacket (+5) Laser Carbine (4D) or RAM Grenade Launcher (frag, 5D, Blast 9)			



Militia

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Human		-		-	
STR	7	INT	7	SKILLS	
DEX	7	EDU	5	Carouse 0, Drive 0, Gun Combat 0, Melee 0, Profession (various) 1, Streetwise 0, Survival 0	
END	7	SOC	5		
EQUIPMENT		Rifle (3D)			



The most likely response lies somewhere between a police and military operation. Troops will cordon off an area whilst investigators question the inhabitants. Meanwhile, detachments will search likely hiding places for anyone who looks like they might be armed. Travellers might well be able to talk their way out of this situation, but they need a plausible story for just why they are in the vicinity. If caught with weapons, especially weapons matching those used in an attack, then bluff is not likely to work.

There is a limit to how much of a response can be made by the baronial forces. Local law enforcement is involved too, but its personnel are small-town sheriffs not fond of Agraaki; not all of them will search for his attackers with any great diligence. The situation is further confused by a series of allegations that Baron Halley's forces are persecuting known Fero sympathisers. It is possible that there is some truth in this, but whatever the case it results in several days of sabre-rattling and posturing.

Baron Fero moves some of his own household troops to the border and offers to help with the investigation. When this is rebuffed, he suggests his personnel might observe the investigation and protect what he calls 'displaced citizens of his barony' – i.e. those who live within Halley's lands but support Fero.

Amid all this tension there are public displays of sympathy for the attackers, in the form of loud statements that the people are better off without crooks like Agraaki, and either satisfaction he is dead or regret that he is not. Although this is really little more than venting on the part of the populace, some of those who talk toughest are arrested and taken away for trial. There is some violence at this point as outraged locals resist or impede the arrests.

This would be an ideal moment for the Travellers to do some rabble rousing. It would not be hard to cause an incident that would trigger wider events. Even if they do not seize the opportunity, the situation will continue to spiral out of control when Baron Fero mobilises his militia. The militia are nothing more than subjects who live along the border, armed with TL5 small arms. They are inexperienced, poorly led and nervous, a dangerous combination at any time. In the present climate it is a disaster waiting to happen.

BORDER CLASHES

Even without the Travellers' involvement, some kind of incident is likely. The referee should allow the Travellers to be the instigators of what follows if they are making any real attempt at it, but if not then these events will unfold and the Travellers will have to react. The most likely scenario for an incident is an unauthorised attempt by Fero's militia to protect friends and sympathisers over the border from aggression by Halley's household troops. Once gunfire has been exchanged, Halley hurriedly calls up the rest of his militia and begins operations of his own.

The first stage of the conflict takes the form of skirmishes between poorly led militia groups, with household troops acting as a reserve and dashing from one fight to another. The intensity of this stage is low, with no territory changing hands. Most of the fighting is nothing more than patrols exchanging shots. Casualties are minimal and some even find it all rather good fun.

However, there are more serious clashes here and there. Some of the towns close to the border are fortified, more or less, with earth embankments and concrete bunkers. One such is Ellaton, which lies just within the territory of Baron Halley. Ellaton has been the subject of dispute for some years, and has a larger than average militia contingent plus a couple of artillery pieces to defend it. Its position in the crook of a river makes it more logically part of Baron Fero's territory – he has argued for some time that the border should follow the river rather than an arbitrary line on the map, and if so Ellaton is his. It is certainly much easier to enter Ellaton from the Fero side than to cross the long and narrow bridge from the rest of Halley's territory.

This places Ellaton in a difficult strategic position, and Halley's strategy in any conflict is to rush reinforcements into the town as quickly as possible. Once there, they need support which can only be provided over the bridge or by grav vehicles. Ellaton is thus a critical point, and one where real fighting starts escalating almost as soon as the conflict breaks out. Baroness Lux advocates that the Travellers engineer a setback for whichever baron is winning here.

Both sides have vulnerabilities – Halley must use the bridge or risk his few grav vehicles to resupply the garrison, whilst Fero has moved artillery up and committed a significant part of his force. He is thinking in terms of a siege, with his forces surrounding the town on the landward side and interdicting the bridge with shellfire. He is not expecting a significant counterattack and might be caught by surprise if one emerged. A small, grav-mobile force might destroy some of his artillery or ammunition stocks, which are not well guarded. This might tip the balance in favour of Halley, at least in this area, and force him to commit additional troops to a battle he could lose... or perhaps withdraw and allow Fero to have Ellaton.

Control of Ellaton is not, in and of itself, of any great consequence. The town has little industry and the river crossing is not particularly important. However, the political fallout from its loss would be extremely bad for Halley, more than likely prompting an uprising in other pro-Fero areas. It is not certain that the militia would resist such a rising.

The border squabble at Ellaton is thus more important than it might at first seem. Halley knows he cannot afford to lose here, but winning at a high cost would also be disastrous. Fero, for his part, can retreat at any time but senses he has a real opportunity to harm his rival. He is willing to stake a lot on the outcome.

ESCALATION

Baroness Lux is keen for the conflict to escalate, and has sent other agents into the territories of her rivals to create incidents. The Travellers have the capability to ensure the conflict becomes an all-out war between Halley and Fero, if they strike at the right spot. There are several possibilities.

Assassination of key figures will intensify the conflict. The barons and their immediate households are too well guarded to be likely targets, but the regional governors and militia commanders are more vulnerable. An assassination might throw local forces into disarray or cause militia to become disheartened. How the Travellers go about this depends on their skills. Infiltration is always an option, though a team with access to a grav vehicle could use mobility to set up an ambush in an unexpected spot or get into a lightly defended area from a direction that would not normally be considered. Whilst all of the barons have access to a few grav vehicles, their field commanders are accustomed to skirmishing with militia rather than dealing with modern battlespace mobility.

Surprise Attacks on targets located well behind the battle lines are another option, especially for teams with grav vehicles. Artillery positions and even headquarters are vulnerable to a sudden strike, and supply lines might also be a useful target. These could be attacked by ambushing transport convoys or attacking the supply dumps themselves. Actions of this sort will force the barons to pull troops back from the combat zones, a necessary measure but not a particularly effective one. The militia are simply not very good at this sort of thing, and their ineptitude is likely to result in unnecessary casualties or critical gaps in the defences.

Rabble-Rousing is perhaps the most subtle yet effective means the Travellers can use to escalate the conflict. Whether they engineer a situation that makes one of the barons look bad or they simply spread rumours, if the Travellers can convince a baron's followers that he is incompetent or does not care about them, they may begin to resist his rule or even go over to another faction. Baroness Lux hopes that the Travellers can stir up several small rebellions here and there, further diluting the strength of the other barons.

At the Starport there are some additional possibilities. During this phase of the conflict the starport is declared closed to ground traffic, though it continues to operate more or less as normal in terms of ships coming and going. The port's workforce and population of the associated startown are more or less independent of the three barons, though there are supporters of each present. Some will try to obtain weaponry and smuggle it out through the closed frontiers of the port to their chosen faction. Others engage in propaganda warfare against their rivals or in favour of their own baron. In some cases, there is violence between groups of rival supporters, though these incidents tend to be small in scale and quickly dealt with by the port security force.

The Travellers could involve themselves in these events, though they may have a problem getting in and out of the port if they use ground or grav transport. There will be no interference with a starship that 'bounces' between a baron's landing field and the port, though the port authority will try to apply pressure to the crew not to become involved in the conflict.

The Imperial trade delegation at the port has no real power to stop the conflict. It has a handful of guards; sufficient to protect its assets and personnel, and not much more than that. The delegation can (and does) make threats about an intervention or Imperial sanctions, but this sort of pressure is all but meaningless in the face of the immediate threat faced by each of the two warring barons. Of course, each blames the other and says he is willing to end the conflict if his opponent stops attacking him.

FREE-FOR-ALL

Finally, the balance begins to tip. Which of the two barons starts to come out on top depends very much upon the actions of the Travellers. Enough setbacks, destroyed munitions and areas in rebellion will spread one of the barons' forces too thinly, and suddenly the front line begins to crumble. The opponent's army is too clumsy and amateurish to exploit this opportunity to its fullest, but the militia advances and grabs control of some border towns. A counterattack fails to dislodge them and morale collapses.

As additional areas attempt to switch sides or at least stop supporting their baron, it looks like the opponent has won. However, this is not in the interests of Baroness Lux. She does not want a polarised two-baron Cordan; she wants to maintain the illusion of a balance of power but with herself in a position of dominance. Thus far, all she has done is reinforce her own militia along the borders and make diplomatic noises about reconciliation and limiting the conflict – whilst stirring the pot to escalate it.

Now, Lux decides it is time to act. Claiming she is simply moving troops into part of the war zone to restore order and protect her borders – along with providing relief to those harmed by the conflict – she orders her militia to advance into the war zone. At first this goes well, with grateful people happily accepting protection from the chaos. However, both barons resist this incursion, and Lux is rapidly drawn into increasingly bitter fighting.

Although Baroness Lux is the strongest of the three factions, and the most unified, it quickly becomes clear that she has over-extended herself and is in a perilous position. At this point she turns once more to the Travellers to help her resolve the situation. What she needs is a quick end to the conflict which allows her

to retain at least some of her gains. She cannot afford not to come out ahead in this conflict, given what it has cost her to engineer the situation, but this cannot become public knowledge. If the Travellers can bring the war they started to an end, Lux will honour the deal she made with them. They will receive a small estate and some help getting it set up. How they go about ending the conflict is up to them.

A peace conference is a possibility, though persuading the barons to attend will be difficult. The Travellers have a better chance of this, as outsiders, than any local faction though the best option might be to talk the Imperial trade delegation at the starport into hosting a conference and guaranteeing the safety of attendees. The outcome of the conference is by no means assured, of course.

An alliance with either Fero or Halley would ensure the defeat of the other, though total victory is in fact not desirable. Lux wants a shifted balance of power, not a polarised world, and any division of spoils would be difficult to work out.

Individual surrender, or the surrender of one baron with the other as junior partner in an alliance, would suit Lux' plans best. The surrender would be more palatable to the baron if it is couched in terms of territory ceded to create a more rational border line or in accordance with the wishes of the populace. Putting a reasonable deal in front of Fero and Halley, and convincing them of the need to accept it, is left to the Travellers.

Continued Conflict is not in anyone's interests and Lux will not reward the Travellers if it happens. The war will eventually wind down with no clear victor and all parties exhausted. Life will become a little grimmer on Cordan, with occasional violence simmering on the borders, and the Travellers will have achieved nothing.

LIONS OF THEBUS

The Travellers are engaged by an Aslan lord to rescue his missing son Ftahteas from the world of Thebus. Ftahteas has fallen victim to local conditions and is in grave distress, not least since he is being hunted by Aslan-hating humans who intend to claim they mistook Ftahteas and his followers for local wildlife. The rescue attempt leads the Travellers to one of the old cities of Thebus, bombed but not quite destroyed in the last days of the Sindalian Empire. The biggest obstacle to the rescue, however, is Ftahteas himself.

THE SETTING

Thebus was once an important world of the Sindalian Empire, lying adjacent to the capital and sharing in its wealth and status. Ultimately, this meant Thebus also shared in its fate. The world was bombarded with nuclear and deadfall weapons, asteroids allowed to fall from orbit and cause immense damage on impact. This was not the worst of it, however. A variety of biochemical weapons were also used, some of which merely infected their victims with terrible diseases. Others were worse, creating forced mutations that had little effect on victims but ensured future generations would suffer a high mutation rate and live short, miserable existences.

One unintended side effect of this weapon was mutation among local animals, some of which developed into species that could survive the post-bombardment wasteland. Indeed, the mutagen agents used to destroy Thebus may have also enabled its ecosphere to recover. As a result, today's Thebus has several rather strange creatures and plants, of which the most impressive is the so-called Thebun Lion. The Thebun Lion has a thick skin and its glossy pelt provides considerable natural protection, and disguises the fact that the creature is a big-but-skinny animal.

Due to the world's very thin atmosphere, the Thebun Lion is quite lightly built for its size, and its chest is impressive primarily because it needs to contain a set of large and highly efficient lungs. Thebun Lions are less of a threat than most visitors to the world imagine, a misconception fostered by enterprising locals who run lion-hunting safaris for visitors. These safaris are a major source of income for the small planetary population and might not be so popular if they ceased to be seen as exciting and dangerous.

The population of around eight thousand is well adapted to the very thin atmosphere, though this is by long acclimatisation rather than mutation; the mutagens died out long ago in most areas. Offworlders typically use breathing masks or supplemental oxygen, though it is possible to acclimatise over a period of several weeks. Those who do not will find any exertion extremely tiring and can suffer from altitude sickness even at sea level. This causes confusion, slow reactions and sometimes delirium, and can cause otherwise rational people to do extremely stupid things.

This is a real problem for Aslan, who at a distance might be mistaken for Thebun Lions. An Aslan not acting coherently and who does not respond to a call or challenge might get shot at by an over-zealous hunter.

THE PATRON

Ftahkaiw is a minor male Aslan noble. That means that he behaves as if he owns the universe and everyone else is just renting space in it. He spends a lot of time conducting business across the human/Aslan border, operating from offices aboard his yacht, which is escorted by one or two small warships.

If he is staying at a starport for more than a couple of days, Ftahkaiw usually sets up a temporary residence and office at one of the better hotels. This is characterised by a series of fairly unreasonable demands for changes to his operating and dwelling space, to be undertaken immediately and quickly, but to an exacting standard. He then nitpicks the work that is done and drags the high price asked for down to the point where the hotel's owners wonder if it was worth all the trouble.

From this newly rearranged space, Ftahkaiw issues invitations to those he wishes to do business with, and holds court when they attend him. It is very rare that he will condescend to visit someone else in their place of business; Ftahkaiw enjoys playing the great lord and the psychological advantage he gains from having others come to him for whatever they want.

Ftahkaiw is notorious in some ports along the border, though there are several other Aslan names that come to mind when this sort of behavior is mentioned – it is not uncommon. As with all Aslan, Ftahkaiw intends to pass his lands, titles and fortune on to his eldest son; the others get nothing.

That, however, is not the whole truth. Ftahkaiw's younger sons will not directly inherit anything from him, but he is quite willing to furnish them with the means to make their own way. In the case of his second son Ftahteas, this was a small transport ship, a craft full of guns and enough cash to attract some followers. With this, Ftahteas was to go out and grab himself a fortune of his own. Plunder, land-grabbing, even trade were all options.

Ftahteas, to his father's pride, naturally announced that he would grab a huge expanse of land from someone capable of putting up a decent fight over it, and set off to do just that. This sort of vainglorious announcement is quite common among *ihatei*, and is often followed by annexation of some worthless piece of swamp or a failed expedition into the middle of nowhere. Ftahkaiw has done a certain amount of boasting about what his son is going to achieve, and now watches anxiously (though he would not admit to that) to see what develops.

The fate of Ftahteas' expedition will reflect on Ftahkaiw, which is an additional concern beyond a natural desire not to see his son killed on some backwater world. Given the circumstances of Ftahteas' current predicament, Ftahkaiw also has strategic concerns. This is partially because he cares about the status of the Aslan Hierate and his clan within it, and partially because he might be implicated if the present incident has bad results for Aslan in general.

Ftahkaiw thus has complex motivations. He is an anxious father, a haughty lord who fears his people may suffer, and a minor leader who knows he will be a scapegoat if there are consequences. All of these motivations point to the same outcome – he needs his son Ftahteas rescued from Thebus, and ideally in a way that lets him keep at least some of his self-respect intact.

HIRING ON

Whilst the Travellers are near Thebus, they receive something that falls about halfway between a summons and an invitation to attend the Lord Ftahkaiw and thence receive a potentially lucrative assignment. Although the tone is condescending and rather off-putting, there are some good reasons for attending. This Lord Ftahkaiw is known for entertaining people of some influence at his court, which might enable the Travellers to make useful contacts. Plus, he is offering an incentive in the form of 'trade credit' (whatever that is) to attend his 'court' and listen to his proposal.

Ftahkaiw's court is extremely pretentious, with armed guards and a large exclusion zone around the conference suite he has taken over. There are other guests, mostly well-dressed humans, chatting and drinking wine. Some may actually be conducting business; most seem to have been invited just to create the illusion of a busy court. Once announced, the Travellers are invited to approach Lord Ftahkaiw and hear his proposal.

Ftahkaiw outlines the situation, which comes down to this: his son Ftahteas and a band of *ihatei* set out to make a great fortune and win lands of their own, but met with treachery or disaster. It has taken a while to locate them but it seems their ship was downed on Thebus. Thebus, as all well-educated sophonts know, is famous for its lion-hunts.

Ftahkaiw is openly contemptuous of this concept, partly because he knows the Thebun Lion is far less dangerous than the safari operators lead their clients to believe, and partly due to the racist connotations. He believes (not incorrectly) that some people hunt Thebun Lions because they dislike Aslan. Ftahkaiw is not so much upset at the idea of his species being hunted as contemptuous of someone who hunts and kills a lesser creature in place of dangerous prey.

The Travellers' mission is to go to Thebus, locate survivors of the *ihatei* expedition (especially Ftahteas) and rescue them. The operation is to be low-key – Ftahkaiw does not want it publicly known that his son needed the help of non-Aslan to extricate himself from his predicament. If the ship can be salvaged, Ftahkaiw will pay a bonus but mostly he wants to save his son and avoid embarrassment for himself, his clan and the Hierate (in that order).

Payment is Cr50000 for a credible attempt at the rescue, doubled if Ftahteas is brought back alive and well, and doubled again if the *ihatei* ship can be saved. In addition, Ftahkaiw offers his (in his mind at least) extremely valuable goodwill and assistance in any dealings with Aslan over whom he has influence. This latter is something of an empty promise, though he actually believes his own propaganda and thinks he has a lot more pull than he really does.

The trade credit is also slightly useful but worth less than Ftahkaiw thinks. It takes the form of a 5% discount or premium on all trade with Aslan clients, up to the total value of Cr10000. In other words, if the Travellers buy goods from Aslan sellers worth Cr20000, they get a 5% discount (Cr1000). Once they have received discounts (or premiums on sales) totaling Cr10000, their preferential credit is used up.

The highport at Thebus is large and busy, but it might as well be in a different star system to the mainworld. Few vessels proceed to the surface, though shuttles provide a regular (but infrequent) service planetside for those who wish to visit. Most do not; Thebus Highport exists to support traffic along the interstellar trade lanes, and for those with an eye to profit there is simply no good reason for stopping at Thebus itself.

The port is not owned by the world government (such as it is), but is a private concern built by the General Development Corporation and sold to investors. It is now run as the Thebus Highport Corporation, which takes care of its own business and more or less ignores the planet below. Most of the port's income is from interstellar trade moving along the Sindalian Main, not least since Thebus is the jump-2 entry/exit point to the main via Marduk and Torpol.

Local trade along the main and the Torpol Cluster is frequent, with big freighters plying the Imperial/Florian trade route less common but worth a lot more per ship. The port makes a special effort to cater to the 'big-ship clients', with high-volume freight handling equipment and discounted accommodation for those taking a few days away from their vessel. There is not a lot of difference between a liner cabin and one at the starport, and it is entirely possible to live aboard a ship in port and go ashore for short trips. To entice crew and passengers to base themselves in the port instead, the operators have made the entry/exist process just a little more time-consuming than necessary whilst offering very good prices at portside hotels.

This approach has worked well, with the result that when a big ship is in port the hotels tend to get very full and the nightlife is sometimes excessively exuberant. The social phenomenon locally known as 'party season' varies depending on what sort of ship is in port – a big freightliner with ordinary passengers sets a different tone to a high-end liner whose passengers have money to burn.

The port itself is well protected with missile and beam weapons but, other than its shuttles and a couple of repair/rescue tugs, has little in the way of small craft. There is not much need for a system defence flotilla when the only thing worth defending is the port itself and traffic within close proximity of the mainworld. The world itself is of no great consequence to the port

operators; all they need is its gravity well. They do not prevent ships going directly planetside, but they do have a rule that vessels which do so will not be allowed to dock at the port. This is blatantly for commercial reasons, though it is covered by the polite fiction that the port operators have a duty to conduct customs and legality checks on vessels coming through the system.

When the Travellers arrive in the Thebus system, they will be quickly contacted by the port and informed of the rules about going planetside. They are expected to dock and refuel at the port, during which a standard spaceworthiness check will be conducted (this is common in most ports, and usually consists of no more than a look at the ship's maintenance log and a 5-minute walkaround by an official with more urgent things to do. Afterward, the Travellers can experience 'party season' at Thebus Highport and perhaps ask around about the *ihatei* ship.

It is widely known that an Aslan vessel recently went straight to the planetary surface and thus ceased to be the problem of the port authority. It is presumed by most to have left the system, but deeper investigation shows it was never tracked doing so. Its rough landing location can be obtained by bribery, hacking or otherwise getting the port staff to divulge it.

PLANETSIDE ON THEBUS

The Travellers might proceed directly to the surface in their own ship – though if they do this they will not be allowed to come back to the highport – or could take a shuttle to the planet's one small community. This is a town of about 8,000 people, with a collection of outlying farms. Travellers who go via the settlement will be bombarded at both ends of the trip with offers to take a guided safari and photograph interesting animals/shoot dangerous animals/hunt and kill something that looks just like an Aslan. The pitch varies depending on the apparent attitudes of the Travellers.

Since there is no enforceable law outside the one settlement, there are no restrictions on the equipment and weaponry the Travellers can take planetside. Carrying of weapons is not allowed on the highport, but transition to the shuttle and thence the ground is routine. Even fairly ridiculous requests, like taking a 30mm autocannon and putting it in the shuttle's cargo

hold, will be entertained so long as enough credits are offered. The locals are equally willing to let offworlders indulge their idiocy if they pay highly enough.

Groundside, the Travellers find most of the people of Thebus have no real interest in offworlders or their affairs, but there is a segment of society who make a very good living from rich people wanting to take a safari into the wilds. Guides are highly recommended (of course) for such an undertaking, since the world still has radioactive hotspots, active mutagens, poison, plagues and lethal wildlife – at least according to the prospective guides. What they tend not to mention among all this exaggeration of quite minor or virtually non-existent threats is potentially the greatest hazard Thebus has for offworlders – its atmosphere.

Someone not acclimatised to Thebus' very thin atmosphere can function for a short while with little more than mild discomfort (though the shortness of breath is frightening) but soon they will tire or become confused. Guides will warn of the need to wear a compressor mask or use an oxygen supply, but if none are hired then this piece of information will be quietly omitted. This is a rather cynical ploy which has cost lives in the past, but is in the interest of the local safari-guide community for the world to seem more dangerous than it is and for services to be seen as absolutely necessary.

The locals can confirm no Aslan ship has landed at their settlement for some time – well over a year in fact – but they did see a ship pass low overhead a few weeks ago. It was headed roughly north-east, into an area that used to be quite densely populated in Thebus' heyday. The region is quite well-watered, which is unusual on Thebus, and was a natural site for cities to grow – and therefore a target when the bombardment began. Today, it has considerable forest coverage and is a good place for hunting, though can be hazardous. At this point the list of potential threats and needs for a guide are trotted out again.

This does sound like the sort of place *ihatei* might try to claim. The thinness of the atmosphere might be a problem but Aslan are attracted by 'good land' which generally translates to greenery and the potential to build impressive cities in the future. *Ihatei* are particularly prone to grabbing lands where they can enjoy hunting, yet planning the day when it is buried under starports and factories.

Travellers who want to use their ship as a base will find landing sites are difficult to find. The low, scrubby dryland undergrowth often conceals crumbly soil and uneven ground. Landing anywhere other than a previously scouted site risks the ship suddenly tipping as one side sinks into the ground, and damage is quite possible. Major components are unlikely to be disabled, but the Travellers will have to deal with minor breakages and the occasional battle to get a landing foot out of a concealed gully.

OVERLAND ON THEBUS

Travellers who venture outside the settlement on Thebus will find it is a rather dry environment with harsh sunlight and a great deal of glare. Vegetation is more brown than green, with spiny stems and creepers that cling to every surface. Tripping is a constant hazard, as seemingly flimsy plant tendrils fail to yield and snag Travellers' boots. Most vegetation is low, no more than knee high, with the occasional scrubby patch of bushes. However, where there is more water, such as near a river, plant life gets taller and greener. The region the Travellers are heading into could be considered an actual forest.

Those concerned with radiological, chemical and biological hazards might bring detectors with them. They will find the threat levels are for the most part extremely low, with occasional areas where a low or even moderate threat is detected – in short, the residual toxins from the bombardment have been overplayed. A guide, if one was hired, will make a big show of taking the Travellers around 'threat spots', saying that levels rise fast in some areas and by the time a detector has warned its user, it may be too late. There are a few places on the planet where this might actually be true, but for the most part it is showmanship to justify the price of the safari.

The Travellers may sight one or more Thebus Lions in their travels, and they do indeed resemble Aslan. They travel on all fours, but stand on their hind legs to look around or reach into higher vegetation for prey that has taken refuge. They are wary of humans, however, and will slink away at their approach. Again, a guide 'sells' this by claiming the Thebus Lion is extremely sneaky and will move away if detected, only to come back to ambush unwary hunters. This is not true; they are just predatory animals who recognise humans as a threat and beyond their normal prey. Thebus Lions would only attack if threatened, such as when a party of humans enters the territory of a group with young who cannot be moved away.

THEBUN LION

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Thebun Lion	22	10 m
SKILLS	Melee (claws) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Claws (2D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+8), Heightened Senses, Large (+1)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Hunter	



The Aslan ship (an *Aoa'iw*-class light trader) can be detected easily enough from orbit, and even on the ground a rough bearing can be obtained from its residual powerplant emissions. It is deep in the forest, at the end of a long furrow ploughed through the trees. It has obviously crash-landed, and deposited several pieces of itself along the crash path. The drive section travelled furthest, apparently tumbling as it did so, and now lies upside-down amid a tangle of broken trees. It also smashed up most of the ship as it broke free and crashed through the wreckage, killing most who had survived that far.

It is not immediately apparent what brought down the ship, but an inspection of the wreckage by someone with naval or shipboard engineering experience may reveal signs that the drive area was hit by a missile. This is not conclusive – there is so much damage that it is hard to tell for sure – but it seems like the most plausible explanation for the crash. If so, the strike must have occurred whilst the ship was flying low over the surface of Thebus, which has some interesting connotations. At present, there is no way to determine the truth, and in any case the Travellers have a mission to carry out.

It appears there were survivors among the passengers and crew. Some of the internal wreckage has been cut away, perhaps to retrieve bodies. Certainly, there are no corpses within the ship, and not far from it is a line of graves. Someone survived, and made a real effort to bury their dead before stripping what they could salvage from the wreckage and moving off. It should be possible to track the handful of survivors as they head roughly north.

KINGS OF THE RUINS

As they proceed northwards, Travellers with tracking experience (Survival or Recon skills) might begin to suspect they are not the only ones in the area. The occasional track intersects those of the *ihatei*, as if someone was intermittently crossing their path or paralleling it with the occasional check to make sure the trail had not been lost. The additional tracks are made by human-sized boots, but no signs are seen of those who made them.

Background radiation is a little higher in this area, and there are occasional toxin alerts. These are nothing serious but suggest the area was hit by very concentrated chemical weapons a long time ago. Traces still linger in the local ecosystem. There are also odd shapes to be seen in the forest; mounds and narrow ridges that were once the lower parts of walls. Further north, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Travellers are walking through what was once a city. There are some open areas with no walls which were ground-zero for nuclear detonations. There is little residual radiation after all this time, but the realisation that the Travellers are standing where a bomb once came down from orbit might be sobering.

Finally, the Travellers come to an area with more intact walls, some of which jut up above the ground. These are covered in creepers, but here and there are chunks of a nearly-intact building; the lower floor or two at least. The Travellers will become aware that they are being watched, and with little warning they emerge into a clearing. Ahead is an intact set of steps with a stub of some tall building at the top. In front of this structure, on a flat area serving as a dais, sits Ftahteas on his throne.

Ftahteas

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Aslan		Male		-	
TRAITS		Heightened Senses			
STR	12	INT	7	SKILLS	
DEX	7	EDU	6	Athletics (strength) 1, Carouse 1, Drive 0, Electronics 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 1, Leadership 1, Melee (blade) 2, Melee (natural) 2, Recon 2, Stealth 1, Survival 2, Tactics (military) 1	
END	10	SOC	8		
EQUIPMENT		Aua-leather (+1) Crescent Blade (2D+3), Dewclaw (1D+2), Yeheal Autorifle (3D, Auto 2)			



Male Aslan

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Aslan		Male		-	
TRAITS		Heightened Senses			
STR	10	INT	7	SKILLS	
DEX	7	EDU	5	Athletics (strength) 1, Carouse 1, Drive 0, Electronics 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 1, Leadership 1, Melee (blade) 2, Melee (natural) 2, Recon 2, Stealth 1, Survival 2, Tactics (military) 1	
END	10	SOC	7		
EQUIPMENT		Aua-leather (+1) Dewclaw (1D+2), Reaver's Axe (4D) or Spear-hook (2D), Yeheal Autorifle (3D, Auto 2)			



Female Aslan

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Aslan		Female		-	
TRAITS		Heightened Senses			
STR	12	INT	8	SKILLS	
DEX	7	EDU	8	Admin 2, Athletics 0, Electronics (computers) 2, Diplomat 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Medic 1, Melee 0, Recon 1, Survival 1	
END	10	SOC	7		
EQUIPMENT		Autopistol (3D-3)			



Ftahteas is unmistakable as his father's son. It is not just the markings of his fur or his features; the haughty way he sits at the head of his court – even in this extremity – reminds the Travellers of their patron. Ftahteas's throne is a heavy chair apparently salvaged from the ship wreckage – quite a feat under the conditions – and his 'court' consists of a handful of male and female Aslan who are all in an a poor state.

The *ihatei* have only a couple of compressor masks between them, and these are becoming worn out after weeks of use. They are not short of food, thanks to their ability to hunt in the surrounding forest, but have few tools, the clothing they wear, and not much in the way of weaponry. Nevertheless, they are a proud people and living with as much dignity as they can.

Ftahteas challenges the Travellers to approach. He is breathless in the thin air, and clearly has trouble concentrating, but his regal bearing does not waver. He demands to know why the Travellers have murdered one of his people then walked into his court. There is a fresh grave off to the side of the clearing, and astute Travellers might spot one or two additional Aslan hiding in the forest fringe.

Ftahteas is considering using the last of his ammunition and spending the lives of his followers to take the Travellers' weaponry and equipment, but this is a very risky strategy. He would prefer to find some other way to profit from the situation or extricate his people from their predicament, but lack of oxygen has given him a headache for the past few weeks. In addition, he is tired, irritable and easily confused – typical symptoms of 'altitude sickness'.

The Travellers might inadvertently trigger a bloodbath, but may be able to convince Ftahteas that they are not his enemies. The idea of being rescued by non-Aslan is galling, and the thought of going back to his father and thanking him for sending rescuers (was the choice of who to send an insult? Ftahteas has many reasons to be suddenly angry, and this question is one of them). However, if the Travellers are respectful and persuasive, they may be able to get through to Ftahteas and perhaps convince him to accept the help he desperately needs.

CONFRONTATIONS

One of Ftahteas' hunters was shot and killed yesterday by persons unknown. The Travellers may – correctly – suspect this was the party they previously detected. It is possible it was a genuine accident, but might equally have been a racist killing – hatred of Aslan is high along the border at present, and there are those who would like the opportunity to shoot one if he was no threat. Even if Ftahteas can be convinced to leave Thebus, these hunters are still a potential problem.

Ftahteas knows very well that he must get his people offworld, and wants to be given a reason to accept rescue. On the other hand, it is his duty to die rather than bring shame upon his father or his clan. The Travellers will have to tread very carefully in talking to Ftahteas, otherwise he is honour-bound to dig his heels in and declare he will die on the ground he has won. He might even turn upon the Travellers if they insult him – or, in his present confused state – he *thinks* they have. In short, Ftahteas is an honourable person with cross-cutting duties. He does not want to die nor lead his people to destruction, but will do so with stubborn dignity unless the case can be made for retreating from Thebus.

Hunters

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Human		-		-	
STR	7	INT	6	SKILLS	
DEX	8	EDU	6	Admin 1, Carouse 2, Drive 0, Electronics (computers) 1, Gun Combat (energy) 1, Profession (various) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 0	
END	7	SOC	8		
EQUIPMENT		Dagger (1D+2), Laser Rifle with Scope (5D)			



Assuming the Aslan can be convinced to leave, the party of hunters must also be dealt with. They are in some ways a typical safari party; a handful of rich offworlders who wanted some excitement. Most would not consider murdering a sentient being, but one of them came to Thebun to kill something that looked like an Aslan, and got an unexpected bonus. He knows he has killed a real Aslan warrior and is both delighted and slightly horrified. However, he is pretending it was just a Thebun Lion, and since the body could not be found (the warrior managed to crawl off and hide before expiring, and was later found by the other Aslan) there is no proof.

Ftahtea and his Aslan want vengeance for their friend, but most of the hunters are innocent. They will, however, resist any attempt to avenge the dead Aslan or impose any form of justice – most genuinely do not believe he has killed a person, and will think the Aslan are just trying to make trouble. The murderer will try to engineer a situation where the rest of his party are forced to ‘defend themselves against Aslan aggression’ if he can, perhaps by ‘mistaking’ another Aslan for a Thebun Lion.

If the hunters can be dealt with or evaded, Ftahtea and his people need to be escorted back to the settlement or the Travellers’ ship, and perhaps conveyed to the starport. That might be an additional challenge, since the *ihatei* did not arrive through the port and will be refused entry unless the Travellers can come up with a reason for letting them in. Dropping Ftahtea’s name might help, due to his reputation in this region. Bribery, deception or other means are all possible too. Alternatively, the Travellers could simply bring their ship down from the port and pick up the *ihatei*, though they will be refused docking permission if they then try to return to the highport.

Whether Ftahtea is rescued or not, there is still the question of who shot down his ship and why. It was obviously an Aslan vessel so they knew what species they were firing upon, but beyond that there is little information to be had. Perhaps it was rival *ihatei*, pirates or someone else operating on Thebus... or maybe another ship. These questions may lead the Travellers to new adventures once they have brought Ftahtea home to his family.



LIBERTY PORT

The people of Sperle are more or less dominated by the General Development Corporation, and are weary of it. They turn to the Travellers to help them create a route for commerce – some would call it smuggling – that bypasses the GeDeCo-controlled starport. Setting up a smuggling route is one thing, but ensuring it is not eradicated by GeDeCo security personnel is quite another. Eventually, the plan spirals out of control, resulting in an armed confrontation that threatens to take many lives.

THE SETTING

Sperle is a water world; there is virtually no land above sea level. Its ecosystem is fairly primitive, with few animals larger than clusters of a few cells. There is a fair amount of sea-based plant life however. The population, numbering some ninety million, is clustered on several small island chains and in settlements on the seabed between them. The majority of transportation is by means of submarines and surface ships, with heavy-lift dirigibles used for most air travel. These are highly efficient due to Sperle's dense atmosphere and well suited to long voyages over open ocean.

Higher technology is available, mainly to a social elite that manages and owns the world's aquaculture industries. A fair amount of seabed farming is undertaken, providing food for the populace plus a modest surplus for export, but the world is primarily known for the harvesting of a creature known as the Sperle Whale. These are in fact huge amoeba-like clusters of single-celled organisms which can be processed into a variety of useful biochemicals.

'Whale' harvesting is not a glamorous occupation. It is undertaken by driving remotely operated or manually piloted submersibles through a whale and filtering the organisms into holding tanks aboard whilst expelling water through the drive system. When full, a filter-sub returns to its parent vessel and pumps out its tanks before returning for more runs until the whale is too dispersed to be of further use. Normal practice is to leave a dispersed whale alone and allow it to not only coagulate but grow back to a size where harvesting will not destroy it.

The only part of the whale harvesting business considered particularly exciting is the searcher mission. Searchers pilot small wing-in-surface-effect craft at high speed across the ocean looking for signs of whale activity. These craft are fast and relatively cheap to operate, but can only fly a few metres above the surface at most. They are at grave risk in bad weather, since the air pressure effect that keeps them airborne is disrupted by a choppy sea. If a searcher cannot make it back to his parent craft he will be forced to land on the water surface. The craft will float, but is a terribly small vessel to be at sea in during a storm.

The whale harvesting business is owned almost entirely by the General Development Corporation, mainly through various subsidiaries or businesses in which GeDeCo owns a controlling share. Similarly, GeDeCo more or less owns the starport outright. It was built as part of the GeDeCo remit to foster trade and commerce in the region, and now ostensibly owned by the planetary government. However, the government owes so much to GeDeCo for the port that essentially the corporation now also owns the government.

The port is quite busy, with local trade as well as ships moving through the Voidsedge Cluster to and from the Aslan Hierate. However, most profits go to the owning corporation, making it hard for the world government to reduce its debt to GeDeCo.

THE PATRON

The Free Sperle Society is something of a laughing stock in the local region. Its members are noisy malcontents who talk tough – often tough enough to get themselves arrested – but rarely do anything about freeing their world from dominance by GeDeCo. When they do act, the Free Sperle Society cannot even manage to organise a protest march. People go to the wrong places, start at the wrong times and generally fail to achieve anything. This actually suits most of the members; a free Sperle would be a leap into the unknown and things are not really all that bad. To these people, the Free Sperle cause is an outlet for disaffection and a chance to have a good grumble over a few beers.

There is, however a segment of the membership that is deadly serious and has a plan. The general incompetence of the movement suits their agenda, too, since it allows them to operate more or less openly without getting into trouble despite a high Law Level. Led by Armandie Kern, a veteran searcher pilot who is something of a legend amongst the harvesting community, this segment wants to find an alternative route offworld for some of its produce. The money this brings in will fund further operations and perhaps a legal buy-out of some of the harvesting firms.

Armandie is proposing illegal means to obtain funding for a Freedom for Sperle campaign. She is vigorously opposed to violence and bloodshed – ironically enough, she sufficiently abhors violence that she has been known to punch people who propose it. She is fine with pilfering, smuggling and all manner of other criminal activity if undertaken in a good cause, but will not condone the use of force under any circumstances.

Armandie will maintain this stance even in the face of violence against her people, up to a point. She urges non-lethal self-defence at most, and insists her people treat their opponents with care and courtesy. However, if serious casualties are taken she will go to the other extreme, calling for violent retribution and even being willing to cause collateral damage. If this occurs, she will be extremely and obviously unstable, but riding a wave of popular support for her extremely aggressive stance that will make her hard to resist or remove from leadership. Ultimately, Armandie will suffer a breakdown if she goes down this path – but not before causing immense damage to her homeworld and its people.

HIRING ON

The Travellers are approached by representatives of the Free Sperle Society, who seem like the typical membership – earnest, slightly inept and highly self-conscious. They have a proposal which they openly state is a little bit illegal. Some of them actually giggle at this. They need people with access to starships to help them sneak ‘stuff’ on and off Sperle without going through the starport, and ideally they need help to set up a small port of their own.

The port will be set up on a remote island. It has a good natural anchorage for maritime vessels and only a very small population. Most of the people dwelling there are in favour of a free Sperle, at least to some extent. If the Travellers can show the Free Sperlists how to set up a rudimentary starship-loading facility at the island, they can begin smuggling goods offworld and bringing in weaponry to fight for their freedom.

It is at this point that Armandie intervenes in the discussion, quite forcefully. She delivers a tirade about peaceful liberty and condemns anyone who wants to create a militia. However, she is willing to concede that a token armed force will be useful – after all, some people using it will be of low moral standards – and that a show of strength will deter any attempt to dislodge it. She seems quite certain of this – a few guards with small arms will be enough to ensure GeDeCo will not attempt to use force. More worldly-wise Travellers might realise that Armandie is a little blinkered about this subject. She is so determined to avoid violence that she has created a fantasy in which there is no possibility of it occurring. Nevertheless, she does have a reasonable plan and this is a good chance to make some money from smuggling.

THE FREE SPERLE SOCIETY



ARMOUR

FRONT 10

REAR 10

SIDES 10



SPERLE SEARCHER

TL	7
SKILL	FLYER (WING)
AGILITY	+2
SPEED (CRUISE)	HIGH (MEDIUM)
RANGE (CRUISE)	1000 (1500)
CREW	1
PASSENGERS	1
CARGO	0.5
HULL	3
SHIPPING	4 TONS
COST	CR200000

TRAITS

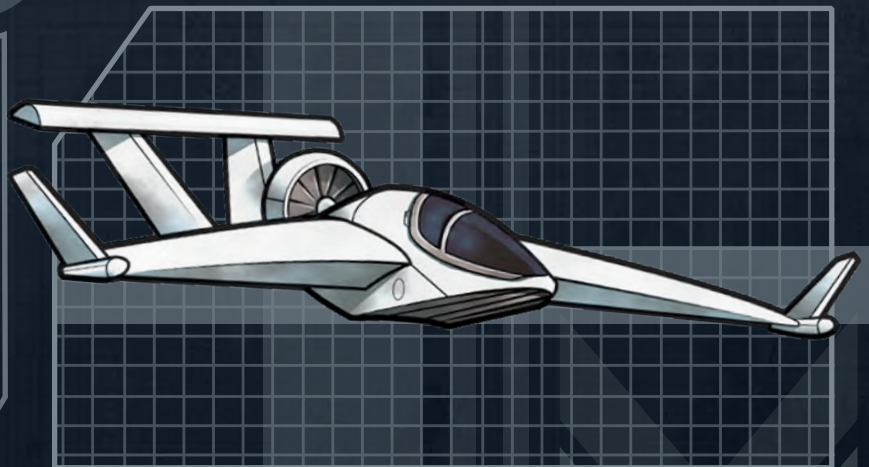
None

EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS

Autopilot (improved), Communication System (basic), Control System (improved), Ejection Seat, Floats, Life Support (short term), Navigation System (basic), Sensor System (improved, increased fidelity)

DESCRIPTION

The searcher is a surface effect vehicle capable of high speed travel across an ocean at a maximum altitude of just a few metres, typically for maritime reconnaissance duties or as a component in a search and rescue team. Others are used to hunt wildlife, taking advantage of the integrated sensors to locate animals for research or consumption. Such craft are noted as being fragile and their use is not recommended on rough seas.



The Travellers will need to get hold of some pretty heavy equipment if a workable port is to be created. Most would not know where to start, but pirates and smugglers do this sort of thing on a frequent basis. One of the keys to not getting caught is the ability to set up a cargo-handling facility on some remote rockball or distant corner of a sparsely inhabited world, and break it down again when it is time to move on. Even if the Travellers have not done this for themselves, they will be familiar with the concepts and some of the shortcuts that can be taken.

The first requirement is going to be cargo loading equipment. One simple solution is to use robots, as many small merchant ships do, since this allows the vessel to take its cargo handling facility everywhere it goes. Robots are not as efficient as a semi-permanent crane system but a facility using them would be quicker and easier to set up. It would also be rather hard to conceal a freight handling system whereas robots can be driven under cover in a matter of moments.

The Travellers may come up with an alternative setup, but the simplest and probably best way to create a workable port is to buy, steal or otherwise obtain a number of cargobots plus some basic prefabricated buildings to serve as warehouses and processing plants. The Free Sperle Society also wants weaponry – no matter what Armandie says, they feel the ability to resist interference is a necessity. Small arms are the most pressing requirement but the society would also like to obtain a few heavier weapons; perhaps something that could be mounted on a searcher craft or used to defend the new port from maritime vessels offshore.

The Free Sperle Society will pay a good price for what the Travellers bring; even just buying the items they need will result in a profit, albeit not a very large one. If they can steal or scam what they need, the profit margins rise greatly. One possible source of both weapons and cargo handling equipment is a stash created by a rival pirate group, and indeed one exists just a parsec away in the Exe outsystem.

Enshaari's Spacers are the sort of operators that give piracy a bad... well, worse... reputation. Their name is a nasty play on words; they have a habit of taking people hostage then chucking them out of an airlock if the ransom is not paid. They are a small outfit with two

ships – a Subsidised Merchant and a heavily modified Far Trader. The latter is the actual pirate vessel; the Subsidised Merchant is apparently legitimate and used to take cargo to the marketplace. This requires a transfer of containers from one vessel to the other, which is undertaken at a temporary landing site. Enshaari's Spacers move their site frequently to reduce the chances of discovery, but at present it is more or less abandoned.

Enshaari's primary vessel recently tangled with a warship from the Imperial pirate-hunting squadron currently operating in the region, and suffered crippling damage. The survivors were taken prisoner and the other vessel made itself scarce. It will probably reappear with a new identity once the pirate hunters have moved on, but for now one ship is out of action and the other is far away. Enshaari's stash of weaponry and cargo handling robots is just sitting on the outer moon of Exe's gas giant, waiting for someone to come by and put it to good use.

Enshaari is not a man you want to cross, but is currently incarcerated in an Imperial prison vessel awaiting execution. There is a window of opportunity here, and if Enshaari somehow escapes – or is rescued by a band of intrepid pirates perhaps – then perhaps he will not find out who stole his equipment.

If the Travellers choose to go down this route they will probably expect trouble but actually the theft is pretty straightforward. There are not even any booby-traps to contend with. The only way this can go wrong is if the Travellers make some sort of major error. Otherwise, they can get what they need for almost no cost.

SETTING UP

The Travellers next need to help the Free Sperle Society set up their spaceport, which they optimistically name Liberty Port.

This is, on the face of it, a fairly simple task. All that is necessary is to set up the cargo handling equipment and show the port operators how to go about moving cargo from a maritime ship in the bay or holding facility to a starship on the makeshift landing pad, and vice versa. This would normally seem like a simple task. However, there are problems. The most significant of these is a segment of the local population who do not like what is happening at all. There is a real danger that someone

will report the operation to the world government, and even if they do not there are those who will persistently get in the way as a means of protesting against what the Free Sperle Society is doing on their home island.

The best way to deal with these problems is to convince the local population that the Liberty Port project is in their best interests. Selling the idea simply as a concept will be very difficult, but can be done with sufficient persuasion. Alternatively, a combination of inducement and intimidation might work. It is, as they say, much easier to take silver than lead. If the local naysayers can be offered a financial advantage to supporting – or at least not opposing – the project whilst showing them there might be consequences for betraying the project, most will choose to accept it.

Outright violence will alienate a lot of the local population – even some former supporters – and will ultimately be counterproductive. The Travellers will have to tread a fine line between hinting at threats and the chance of financial gain if they want the cooperation of the populace. Brute force methods, such as arming a defensive militia and imposing what amounts to martial law on the island might also work, but such actions go against the ethos of the Free Sperle Society. The society believes – with some justification – that its cause is just and has widespread popular support. Heavy-handed dominance of the local population is something the government and corporations do (at least according to the Free Sperle Society) and such tactics are not acceptable to more than a small minority of the membership.

The Travellers will thus have to contend with dissent among the locals and excessive idealism among their patrons as well as the difficulties of getting a port up and running. They will also have to convince some of the harvester ship captains to either hand over a part of their cargo or take it to Liberty Port rather than the usual destination. This will require some measure of deception, but is actually not that hard to achieve. Harvesting is a hit-and-miss business, with some ships making big hauls within days of setting out from port and others cruising around for weeks before finding a suitable whale.

It should be possible to convince sympathetic captains to take their first catch to Liberty Port and offload it there before harvesting again and taking that to the main port. A consistent drop in harvests will be noticed sooner or later, but what looks like a temporary downturn will not attract much attention. The smuggling operation should be able to function for several months before anyone notices something is amiss.

The arrival of the first shipload of raw biochemicals at Liberty Port is a cause for great celebration. Once taken offworld and sold, the Free Sperle Society will have a source of reliable income which can be turned towards challenging the dominance of the world's government and economy. Of course, there are still those who want to arm for a violent struggle, but their voices are drowned out by those who truly believe their illegally-funded legal challenge will work.

TRIGGER INCIDENT

At first the project seems to go quite well. Shipments of biochemicals are brought to Liberty Port and sent offworld, and it looks like the authorities have failed to notice. This turns out to be a false impression, however, and leads to a fundamental change in the situation. If the Travellers are on-planet at the time, they hear about the incident as it takes place and might be able to intervene. If not, when they next return to Sperle they find that events have taken a violent turn.

After a few weeks the apparent downturn in harvest yields becomes apparent, and inquiries lead the authorities to realise something is amiss. Previously productive ships are now returning to harbour half full, or taking twice as long to deliver a full load. Enquiries get nowhere, so the authorities launch a surprise boarding of a harvest ship sympathetic to the Free Sperle Society. The boarding is carried out in a heavy-handed and aggressive manner, which causes anger among the crew, and after a scuffle the harvest ship's officers are arrested at gunpoint along with some of their crew.

Aware that something is happening but unable to find out exactly what, the authorities begin arresting harvest ship crews on highly spurious grounds, and confiscating equipment. The more militant members of the Free Sperle Society find this intolerable and call for action. Some ideas put forward are workable and unlikely to lead to escalation, such as a strike among harvest ship crews, but others take a more direct approach. Weapons are distributed and harvester crews declare their intention to resist further unlawful – as they see it – boardings of their vessels and internment of crews. The authorities respond with a declaration that armed resistance will be met in kind, and a confrontation rapidly develops between harvester crews and government.

Matters come to a head when a government-hired mercenary security force attempts to board a harvest ship carrying armed members of the Free Sperle Society. Shots are fired, and although no-one is seriously injured the incident marks a turning point in the dispute. The vessel is pursued and soon forced to anchor close to an inhabited island, with government-paid mercenaries moving into the area.

The situation escalates to the point where the harvesters are told their ship will be fired on and sunk if it attempts to break out into the open sea, and there are obvious preparations to board the vessel and take its crew prisoner. There seems to be no resolution other than armed conflict or surrender and, despite Armandie's efforts to find a peaceful resolution, neither side has any intention of backing down.

The Free Sperle Society begins to split, with some members willing to fight or seeing no alternative – and many more talking as if they are willing to fight when they really are not – and others either hoping for a return to the status quo or some kind of diplomatic solution. Armandie turns to the Travellers in the hope they have some ideas.

It might be possible to convince the crew to surrender, which will at least defuse the current standoff, and there is an outside chance that some sort of deal can be negotiated. Failing that, the Travellers will have to get the crew out of their predicament and beyond the authorities' reach. A rescue will be difficult but not impossible, and an exchange of fire between the mercenaries and 'criminals aided by offworlders' will not have the same political fallout as direct conflict between the harvesters and the authorities.

At this point, Sperle is on the brink of a violent clash between the Free Sperle Society and the government. It might be possible to delay or defuse it, but there is no possible outcome that will not have consequences. What the Travellers choose to do will determine the course of subsequent events.

CONFRONTATION

The Free Sperle Society faces two problems. Firstly, its membership is heavily divided and may split into rival or even opposed factions. Many have quite unrealistic expectations – they want the society to stand by the surrounded crew and support them but without dragging the world into a conflict. If the harvester crew surrender they will be seen as having been abandoned, but if they are assisted in armed conflict, the Travellers and Free Sperle Society leadership will be accused of triggering the bloodshed. Secondly, the authorities are now certain something is going on, and will find out exactly what it is sooner or later. Once that happens, Liberty Port will be shut down and arrests will follow.

If the Travellers can negotiate a peaceful end to the confrontation, then the Free Sperle Society's project will fizzle out. There will be arrests but few will be charged with anything serious. Liberty Port will be shut down and

the equipment there taken by the world government; that might have implications later if Enshaari manages to escape Imperial custody and goes looking for his stolen cargobots. There will also likely be some violence as individuals and small groups resist arrest or make ill-fated all-or-nothing attempts to trigger a coup. Overall, though, the Travellers have the opportunity to minimise bloodshed but only by causing the Free Sperle Society to fail.

If, on the other hand, the Travellers contribute to escalation – for example by staging a violent rescue of the harvester crew – then matters will quickly get out of hand. A gunfight between mercenaries and harvester crews is likely, and other crews will begin to resist arrest. The authorities, for their part, will want to board and search other harvester craft; conflict is unavoidable. Meanwhile some elements of the Free Sperle Society begin rabble-rousing and calling for revolution whilst others dissociate themselves or fight to oppose them.

The revolution, if it can be called that, is small and short-lived. There is simply not enough popular support among the people of Sperle for any chance of success. Any given pocket of resistance can be swamped, and pretty soon it becomes apparent that the authorities are going to move on Liberty Port. Depending upon how bad casualties have been, Armandie might still be preaching peaceful measures, or she may have begun advocating bloodthirsty vengeance.

Either way, her attitude hardens when a shipload of harvesters – who she knows were not involved with any previous incidents and were probably unarmed – are fired upon by nervous or trigger-happy government mercenaries. Armandie begins demanding an uprising, and comes up with a plan of sorts. This is essentially to vigorously resist the attempt to close down Liberty Port and present demands for concessions to the world government. Although angry, she is realistic enough to know the society cannot win a conflict, but it may be possible to salvage something from the situation.

Sure enough, when government troops begin landing at Liberty Port, Armandie's followers are ready for them. They have plenty of small arms and some support weapons fitted to searcher craft, enabling them to make fast wavetop-level strikes. Although determined and inspired by their cause, Armandie's followers are not very skilled and further impeded by a sharply divided island population. Some of the locals want to assist the government troops so the fighting will be over quickly, or because they resent the Society for causing so much bloodshed. A few genuinely sympathise with the government.

Armandie and her followers will be able to repel the initial, overconfident attempt to capture their stronghold but cannot hold out indefinitely. Having cast the dice, Armandie can see only one possible outcome; fight to the last in the hope of inspiring others to rise up against the government.

CHOICES

It will be obvious to the Travellers that Armandie's plan will cause a great deal of suffering and bloodshed, and will probably not work. Even if it does, there is no real chance of an uprising doing more than killing a whole lot more people. Yet Armandie will not consider any other option. She is enraged that, despite all her urgings towards peaceful measures, the heavy-handedness of the government (as she sees it) has forced her into this extremity. In short, her attitude is a fanatical 'look what they made me do' and she will not countenance any talk of surrender. This is a very different Armandie from the one who passionately ranted against any thought of armed resistance. In some ways, though, she is the same. Just as passionate, just as determined, just as stubborn. Only now she wants blood and seems quite willing to get herself and her followers killed to make a political point.

The Travellers could simply make an exit from Sperle. Their involvement might not be common knowledge, and they might be able to pretend they are just interstellar traders who happened to get caught up in events beyond their control. On the other hand if the Travellers stay, they will have to make a difficult choice.

Armandie's insurrection is doomed, that much should be obvious. If the Travellers stay and fight they will get to take part in a glorious last stand from which they might be able to escape – perhaps with some of the rebels – in their starship. Getting out will require a well-timed decision to cut and run, which might face opposition from some of the rebels. Armandie herself might bless their escape or try to kill the Travellers for even considering it, depending on her attitude towards them.

The alternative is to betray Armandie and her hard core of supporters, which might be the best way to save lives. A betrayal could be relatively mild – for example just

quietly leaving before things get too hairy – or extremely graphic. The authorities will pay well for information on the rebels and their numbers, leaders and so forth, and even better if the Travellers can capture key figures among the rebellion. They may also be able to persuade some of the rebels to surrender or at least not fight to the last despite Armandie's urgings.

The authorities are willing to negotiate with the Travellers; if they can bring a relatively peaceful end to this conflict then they will be pardoned for their part in it and offered a reward. Some segments of the population would consider them heroes and peacemakers; others will hate them forever. The important thing is that the Travellers will get out with full pockets and skins intact, and they can save a lot of people being led to destruction by Armandie.

There is some merit to this argument; the situation has spiralled out of control and people are getting hurt for no real gain. The rebellion has no chance of success and is really nothing more than a personal vendetta on the part of Armandie and others like her. Ending it is in everyone's interests, even if some will resent being saved.

One way or another the Travellers need to get out of the situation on Sperle. Their actions might have repercussions later, but at least they will be alive. If they stay, the best they can hope for is a long spell in prison when the island is overrun, and if they are linked to the machinery at Liberty Port they may well be executed as pirates. There would be a certain irony in that, since the proof of their pirate status may come from items they stole off a different band of spacegoing cut-throats. It is probably not an irony the Travellers will appreciate.

If they want to avoid this fate, the Travellers have to get out or end the conflict in such a way that the government lets them go. It may seem dishonourable to betray their patron, but what choice do they have? And in any case, the Travellers *are* pirates. Honourable conduct is not always guaranteed when you deal with those who make a living from robbery.

C H A P T E R - T W E N T Y S I X

SHIP ENCOUNTERS

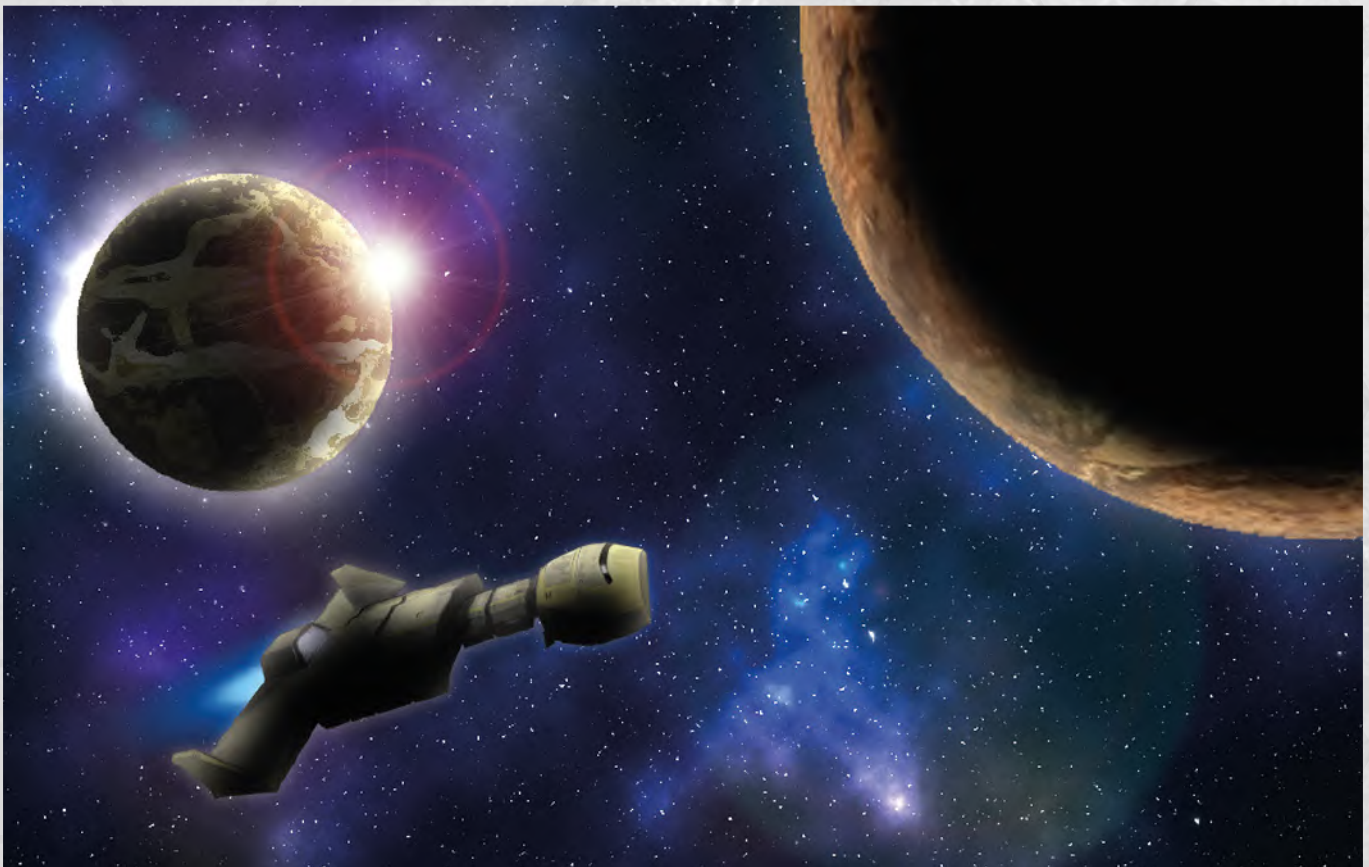
Ship Encounters presents a series of detailed ship encounters complete with mission, cargo and backstory. These ships can be used as repeat encounters in a starfaring campaign, or potential targets for pirates. Travellers who rescue a ship from attack might want to know who they have saved and what they were carrying; Travellers who are the attackers will definitely want to know what they have captured and what complications might ensue. Ship Encounters has the answers to all these questions.

Travellers jumping from one world to the next often take a passing interest in the starships going about their business in the local system. All of those ships have a story, a cargo and a mission. These ship encounters could affect the Travellers in many ways, ranging from an interesting story about an oddball vessel to a desperate fight against pirates. If the Travellers happen

to be those pirates, then the vessels in this book can be used to add depth, realism and the odd complication to the humdrum business of interstellar armed robbery.

These ship encounters can be added to an ongoing campaign to add flavor to a one-off encounter or inserted with a view to setting up a future adventure. Finding the wreck of a merchant ship is one thing. Finding a ship whose crew you had drinks with a few weeks ago is another. Astute Travellers might start asking questions like 'why is that particular ship here, of all places?' whilst larcenous ones might note a vessel as a potential target and begin plotting to capture it.

Though intended for use with the Pirates of Drinax campaign, the ships included in this book may be used in any adventure.



USING THIS SECTION

Data on these ship encounters is presented in the following format:

Summary Box: This contains information on the ship's name, type and armament, as well as data on the encounter such as the ship's direction (whether it is heading to or from the main port) and cargo.

Cargo: More details on the ship's cargo and any passengers of note.

Quirks: Anything unusual about the vessel or its mission, or about the way its crew might behave.

Complications: An indication of what might go wrong after the ship has been pirated or some other interaction has occurred.

Pirate Hunters' Response: If the vessel is of particular note to pirate hunters, their likely actions are noted here.

Any of these sections may be blank if there is nothing particularly unusual about the vessel. This does not mean it is completely vanilla-flavoured of course; nothing is ever completely bland. A blank section means, for example, that pirate hunters will not be any more concerned about this ship than any other – but they are still pirate hunters and may still take note of an attack. Likewise, a ship with no listed complications could still get the Travellers into all kinds of trouble if they are sighted attacking it. No listing means 'more or less as usual' rather than 'nothing happens at all'. If the Travellers make trouble for themselves, the referee should give them everything they deserve.

PIRATE HUNTER RESPONSES

Some of the actions that may be taken by pirate hunters are fairly standard, and explained here. More unusual responses are detailed in the encounter they relate to.

Information Bounty

The authorities or perhaps the attacked ship's owner puts out a bounty offering a reward for information about the incident. The sum offered is not large, but will induce a few in every port to start feeding information into the communications network, and eventually that information will be sifted and collated. Much of it is nothing but rumour, and some is outright wrong, but over time the authorities will build a picture of what might have happened and who may be responsible. More importantly, they may be able to predict the pirate vessels' movements.

Each month after an information bounty is placed, the referee should roll 2D and consult the Information Bounties table. Once any result (Interception, Suspect List or Bounty Withdrawn) is rolled, the information bounty has no further effect.

Information Bounties

2D	Event
2-4	Bounty Withdrawn
9-11	Suspect List
12+	Interception

'Bounty Withdrawn' is self-explanatory.

A vessel placed on the Suspect List will be subject to more frequent searches by naval vessels, additional paperwork and hassles in better-quality ports (Class A-C ports that are not at least Tolerant towards pirates) and close questioning by officials. A vessel suspected of illegal activity tends to stay on the Suspect List forever, but in practice newer alerts tend to receive more attention. The period of enhanced scrutiny will therefore last 4D weeks after which the level of attention effectively reverts to normal. The fact that a vessel has been the subject of an alert will never go away, however, and occasionally the Travellers will have to deal with someone who is determined to prove they are felons.

Interception indicates the Travellers' movements are correctly predicted or that enough ships were sent looking for them that someone eventually gets lucky. The referee should roll 1D; on 1-4 the intercepting vessel is a mercenary or even another pirate crew after the bounty. Their vessel will be a well-armed civilian ship. On 5-6 the intercepting vessel is a small naval unit such as a Patrol Corvette. Either way, the intercepting vessel intends to kill or capture the Travellers and will attack at a suitable opportunity. If the intercepting vessel is evaded, it will attempt pursuit for 2D weeks, jumping to nearby systems to try to regain contact, and then abandon the search.

Kill Bounty

A Kill Bounty is placed on individuals strongly suspected of being pirates, but who are not likely to be convicted or even caught. Bounty hunters can go places the Navy cannot, and can quietly take out those for whom there is not quite enough proof to formally execute. Once a Kill Bounty is placed on the Travellers, the referee should roll 2D each time they arrive at a starport or similar installation. On a 2D roll of 10+ there will be an attempt to kill one or more of them.

The means used to collect the Kill Bounty can vary considerably. An impromptu 'hey, it's them!' followed by a mobbing by a band of port workers is as likely as a carefully planned hit by a sniper or gunman. Drive-by shootings, bombs or even poison are all options. The bounty remains in force for 4D weeks, after which further attempts are unlikely. However, even years later there may be someone out there with out of date information; the Travellers' past could come back to haunt them long after they have become respectable.

Guardship

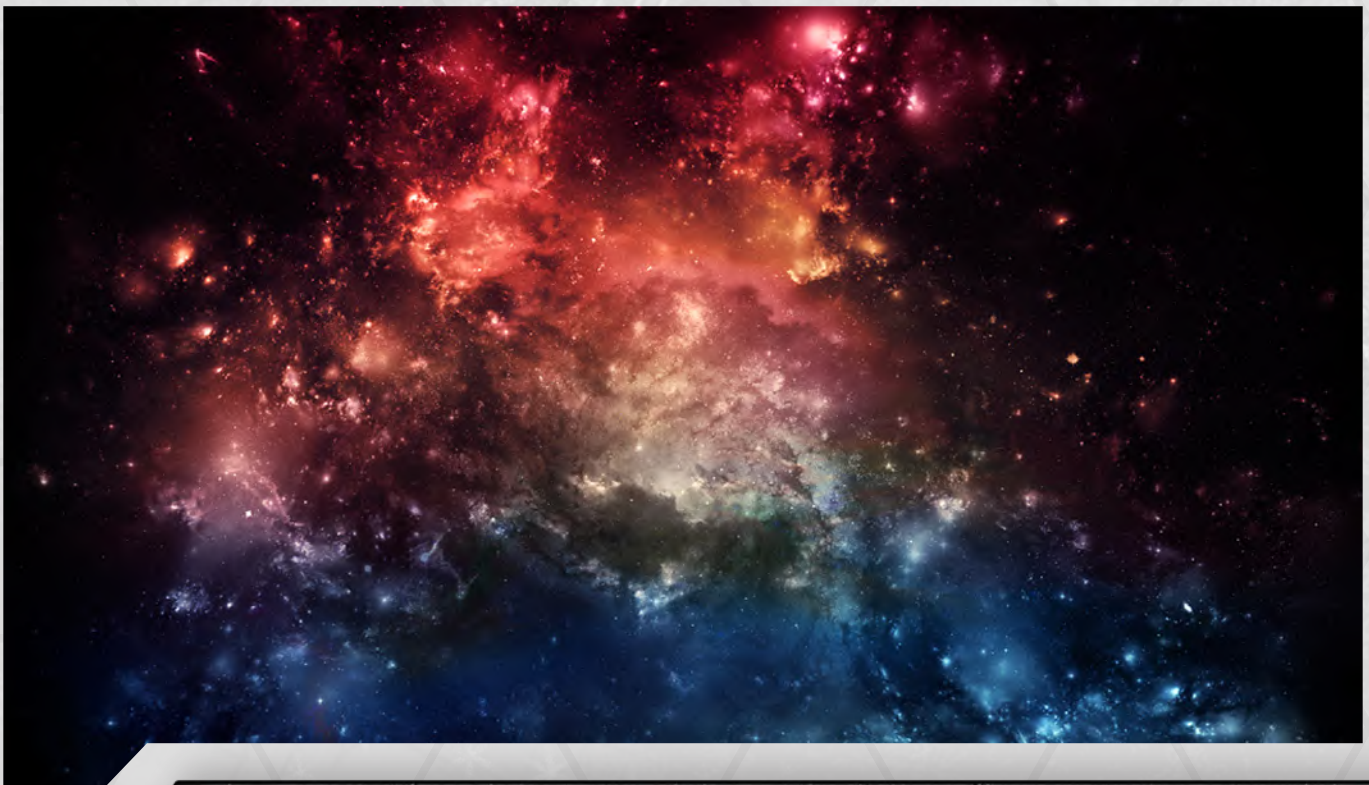
Piracy makes people nervous, and that is bad for trade. To reassure spacefarers and port operators – and maybe blast a pirate or two – the authorities deploy a guardship at a nearby world picked by the referee. This is as likely to be a backwater as a major port – the latter typically has its own defences but a guardship would be a

visible sign the authorities are doing something, whilst deploying a vessel to a backwater might actually be more effective but less visible.

The guardship might be a naval vessel detached from a squadron in the region or redeployed from its intended patrol, or it could be a mercenary vessel hired for the purpose. Deployment will last 6D weeks. The Travellers may hear about the new guardship whilst they are in another system, making it easy to avoid.

Personal Mission

A young naval officer makes it a personal mission to find and capture (or vaporise) the Travellers. If this officer is the captain of a small warship such as a Gazelle-class Close Escort or Patrol Corvette, then he will take his ship out looking for the Travellers. This typically means hanging around in backwater systems looking for trouble. If the officer is based at a port or with a task force, his options are more limited but he will use his influence to send others against the Travellers. This can be bad for the piracy business if the officer has a lot of influence or is of high rank – he may be able to convince his superiors or call in favours (or just issue orders) to flood the local systems with warships, at least for a short time. The referee should decide who this new zealot is and what he will do, ideally introducing him as an ongoing foe for the Travellers.



BLANK SLATE

TYPE-S SCOUT COURIER

Blank Slate (Traveller)

Captain: Ghathtagu 'Scout Josh' Azse		
Hull: 40	MOR: 7	
Encounter Distance: 45,000 km (Very Long)	Heading: Inbound	Time to Destination: 3 hours

Armament

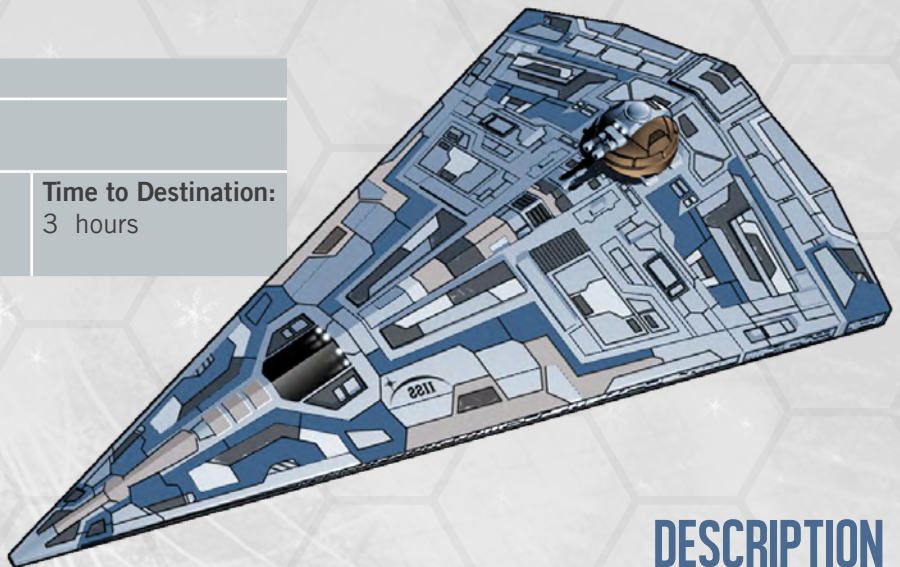
Single Turret: Sandcaster

Cargo

1 ton Freight

Passengers

None



DESCRIPTION

Blank Slate is a Type-S Scout/Courier owned by the Scout Service but currently assigned to a retired scout named Ghathtagu Azse. Better known as 'Scout Josh', he served for many years and is something of a legend among his fellow Scouts. Finally taking his overdue retirement, Josh went on Detached Duty and does not really expect to be recalled. Hence the name of his ship – he is finally his own person, free to wander around the sector and explore just for the fun of it rather than going wherever the Service ordered him.

Blank Slate has a very low overhead since her costs are met by the Scout Service, and Scout Josh makes what little money he needs by carrying a few small sundry packages or the occasional freight container. He is not a smuggler; he only carries legitimate items. In addition to being a legendary Scout and law-abiding citizen, Josh is an all-round good guy.

CARGO: At present Josh is carrying a standard freight container with the usual assortment of minor cargo aboard. Much of this is highly mundane stuff such as a few kilos of tinned apples and a shipment of garish plastic flip-flops. In short, Blank Slate's cargo is virtually worthless to pirates.

QUIRKS: Scout Josh has no offensive weapons but fancies himself as a real hotshot pilot. He sincerely believes he can get away from a pirate vessel under cover of his sandcaster, and he might even be able to do it. He is also entirely willing to put his unarmed ship between a pirate and its intended victim, and use his sandcaster to protect the target. Scout Josh is an arrogant, unarmed hero who will likely get himself killed trying to do the right thing.

COMPLICATIONS: Scout Josh is the complication. He will interfere in any attack he sees taking place. If he is robbed or harmed, even if he was doing something ill-advised like buzzing a pirate ship to spoil a gunners' aim, the starfaring community will be gravely offended. An Information Bounty will be posted for the crew

responsible, and even after it expires the pirates will occasionally be harassed or refused assistance even by quite shady characters – Josh is that well liked! If he is murdered for a shipment of tinned apples, the starfaring community will be incensed and a Kill Bounty will be placed on the pirates. In addition, at least one Detached Duty Scout in the area will make it a personal mission to collect information on the incident, identify those responsible and organise an attempt to take them out.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: There will be no formal response to an attack on Josh from pirate hunters, other than a statement of condemnation and sadness. However, other Detached Scouts will begin actively seeking information as noted above. If they are successful they will use all the influence the Scout Service can bring to bear to persuade the hunters to go after the target they have identified. An interception by 1-3 small warships (Patrol Corvettes or Gazelle-class Close Escorts more than likely) is virtually certain sooner or later.

RED ADDER

SERPENT CLASS SCOUT COURIER

Red Adder / Pij Bleshi' (Traveller)

Captain: Ansiesta Iabl

Hull: 40

MOR: 12

Encounter

Distance: 55,000
km (Very Long)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination:
4.5 hours

Armament:

Dual Turret: Pulse Lasers

Cargo:

4 tons Common Consumables
2 tons Precious Metals

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Red Adder appears to be a standard Serpent-class Scout/Courier. However, it is in fact a Zhodani reconnaissance ship designated Pij Bleshi'.

Red Adder's mission is to gather information about the region and report back at intervals via a chain of fast courier ships eventually leading all the way back to the Zhodani Consulate. There is no particularly sinister intent here, in the sense that the crew are agents provocateur or saboteurs; they are simply naval intelligence personnel assigned to observe and report.

The vessel was obtained by roundabout means, and the intent is that at the end of its mission it will be sold on after being sanitised of all sensitive data. Hopefully the vessel will then go on to an innocent career in the region and nobody will ever suspect the data-gathering exercise that took place. Destruction of the Red Adder by pirates would also provide a suitable cover for the mission end, but there are no plans to curtail operations any time soon.

CARGO: Red Adder carries sufficient stores and spares for a long duration cruise, enabling her to observe a system without landing at its port. In addition, there are two cargo containers originally filled with bullion, jewellery and hard currency. Although now slightly depleted, this stash is still worth a great deal. It was intended to be used to buy friends, influence and information among the people of the region.

QUIRKS: Red Adder is a Zhodani naval intelligence ship crewed by skilled and determined personnel. They will fight hard to repel pirates, but might instead request a ceasefire and offer the attackers a container full of cash and gold in order to become informants – or rather 'to share information on local shipping to mutual benefit' as the offer is likely to be phrased. Additional payments will be made if the pirates produce good information.

COMPLICATIONS: Working with the intelligence personnel of a foreign power can be risky and might draw the attention of the authorities... though that might not really matter to pirates who are already on the most-wanted list. Shooting up a foreign naval intelligence ship might have all manner of repercussions. The incident could be misinterpreted back home, leading to escalated tensions with the Zhodani, or they might send more ships to hunt down what they incorrectly assume is a counter-intelligence vessel.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from pirate hunters.

NOSEFORGOLD

TYPE-J
SEEKER

Noseforgold (Traveller)

Captain: Just Sam

Hull: 40

MOR: 8

Encounter

Distance: 35,000
km (Very Long)

Heading: Outbound
In-System

Time to Destination:
Unknown

Armament:

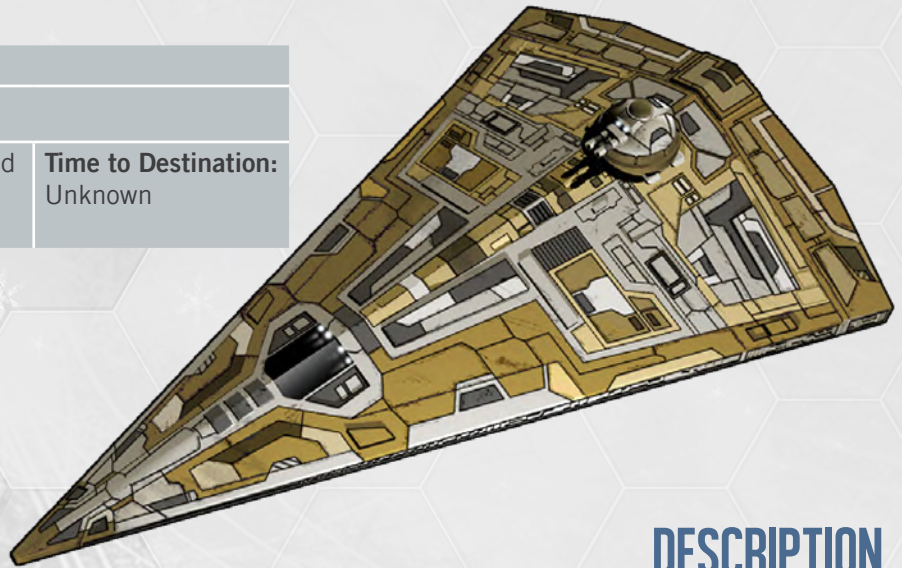
Single Turret: Mining Laser

Cargo:

3 tons Mining Equipment

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Noseforgold is a belter ship, owned and operated by an elderly prospector named Sam. Nobody knows if this is her first or last name, she is 'Just Sam' even on the ship's distinctly dubious papers and registry documents. Sam has been prospecting in the region for years, sometimes alone and sometimes with a small crew. She has made enough to keep her ship in good order and could retire if she wanted to, but she really wants no other life than that of the wandering prospector.

Sam has a clinical and impersonal hatred of pirates and raiders, all of whom she insists on referring to as 'claim-jumpers'. She will flee if attacked, attempting to use her mining laser to inflict damage, and if forced to surrender will receive the pirates aboard with disdain and contempt even if it gets her killed. Just Sam can be robbed, but she cannot be cowed.

CARGO: Noseforgold has just sold the rights to a claim and is headed back out to take a look at some other promising sites. She is carrying equipment for her own operations and also stores to be sold or passed on to other belter ships operating in the same area.

QUIRKS: Noseforgold has an in-system destination but has full fuel tanks and could jump if Just Sam wanted to. If necessary she will make a 'null jump', essentially entering jumpspace with her present location set as destination. After that, all she can do is hope the pirate ship believes she has jumped elsewhere and moves off, and does not happen to be in the area in a week's time.

COMPLICATIONS: Noseforgold is a belter ship, and beltlers look out for one another. They also tend to

operate in the less well trafficked areas of a system – the sort of places pirates go to hide. If pirates merely rob Noseforgold, the belter community will accept this as something bad that happened and get on with their lives, but if Just Sam is harmed they will begin watching for the perpetrator and feeding information to the authorities – who they normally have little to do with. The result will be a steady trickle of information equivalent to an Information Bounty.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from the pirate hunters.

MELDAS BAMA TETA KEHN

TYPE-S
SCOUT COURRIER

Meldas Bama Teta Kehn (Traveller)

Captain: Thanihryimbakepe Dedherileh

Hull: 40

MOR: 4

Encounter

Distance: 30,000
km (Very Long)

Heading: Outbound
to Jump

Time to Destination:
2.5 hours

Armament:

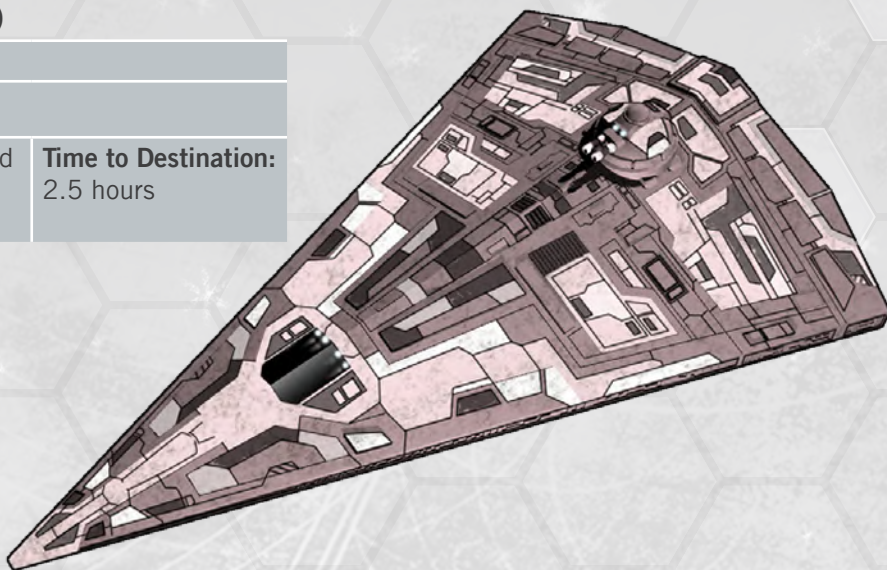
None

Cargo:

3 tons Common Consumables
1 ton Advanced Electronics
1 ton Artefacts

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Meldas Bama Teta Kehn is a Darrian ship whose name is a quote from an obscure proverb. It translates roughly as 'the universe awaits for those who go seeking', and fits well enough with the ship's activities. Meldas Bama Teta Kehn is operated by a Darrian scientist with an interest in vanished cultures. His small vessel has taken him all over the sector collecting a wide range of artefacts, many of which are from civilisations considered unimportant or uninteresting by most scientists.

Captain Dedherileh is no fighter, and will flee as soon as an attack begins. He will nervously surrender if given a reason to, but will try to convince pirates that his work is far too important to be disrupted by uneducated thugs going off with his priceless (but also kind of worthless) artefacts. Nor can he countenance letting his precious archaeological equipment be taken away. He may even physically resist, though this takes the form of ineffectual flapping of hands and maybe a feeble slap. It may be enough to get him shot however.

CARGO: Meldas Bama Teta Kehn is carrying cultural artefacts from a low-tech minor non-human species. They might be interesting to scientists but have little or no value on the open market as they consist mainly of broken pottery and crude metal tools. The equipment used to analyse these items is worth more, but only to a specialist buyer. Anyone else will offer only a token price as they will have to scrap the equipment for its components.

QUIRKS: Meldas Bama Teta Kehn surrenders readily enough but after this the pirates will have to deal with a haughty scientist who is so disconnected from the real

world that he forgets how much danger he is in, and who is sufficiently outraged at their actions to (at least) give them a good telling off even whilst he is being held at gunpoint.

COMPLICATIONS: There are no undue complications here, but potentially some embarrassment.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from the pirate hunters.

TROJAN RANGER

TYPE-K SAFARI SHIP

Trojan Ranger (Traveller)

Captain: Lady Carneliana Hilfssen

Hull: 80

MOR: 10

Encounter

Distance: 95,000
km (Distant)

Heading: Outbound
In-System

Time to Destination:
Unknown

Armament:

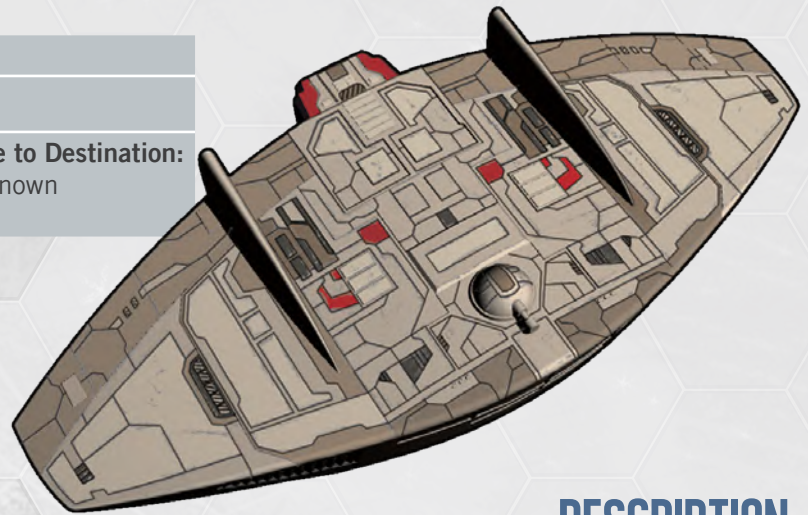
Dual Turret: Pulse Laser and Missile Rack

Cargo:

4 tons Stores and Supplies
12 tons Trophy Animals

Passengers:

4 High Passage



DESCRIPTION

Trojan Ranger is the private property of Lady Carneliana Hilfssen, a minor but well-connected noblewoman. Carneliana has no real responsibilities and likes to spend her time wandering around the sector shooting at or capturing dangerous wildlife. She often takes other nobles on these hunting trips, creating a network of powerful or at least rich friends. In addition to several dangerous animals, Trojan Ranger also has a hunting party of VIPs aboard, some of whom might be embarrassed or suffer harm to their political careers if they were caught aboard a hunting ship.

Trojan Ranger is detected at quite a long range, headed towards an outpost in a distant part of the system. She is supposed to meet another vessel there and transfer her cargo of captured animals – there is a market for exotic pets and what amounts to ‘living trophies’ among the rich and infamous in the sector. The crew will fight rather than surrender providing it looks like they have a chance, and there are some very powerful weapons aboard. Nothing of a military nature, but a double-barrelled rifle capable of knocking down a mammoth-sized creature can do an enormous amount of damage to an unwary pirate.

CARGO: Trojan Ranger is carrying no cargo as such, just supplies for her cruise. These do include luxury items like fine wine and expensive food, but not in the sort of bulk that can be sold on the open market. In the ship’s multi-environment tanks there are several dangerous predators of a species known formally as Dawinson’s Burrower, but better known as Bushwhackers.

Bushwhackers are about the size of a lion and normally hunt in forests or overgrown terrain. They are ambush predators, preferring to scrape a hide in the loose soil and fallen leaves of the forest floor, and then pounce upon a victim by surprise. Aboard a ship or loose on an installation they are less dangerous since they are easy to spot, but Bushwhackers can still move fast and are both territorial and aggressive.

QUIRKS: Lady Carneliana is obsessed with hunters and hunting, and if forced to surrender by pirates

will actually be quite impressed with them... though that does not preclude the possibility of hunting the hunters. If she gets the chance, she will try to release the Bushwhackers or better, get the pirates to do it unknowingly. After that, it is all about the law of the jungle. She will be greatly amused to see predators running wild in the pirates’ ship, or even her own, and is willing to bear the risks such a gambit entails. Her crew and passengers will be less impressed by the situation.

COMPLICATIONS: Apart from possible resistance and predators running wild in both ships, there are no undue complications here. Selling the predators requires a specialist buyer.

PIRATE HUNTERS’ RESPONSE: No unusual response from the pirate hunters.

STARLIGHT VOYAGER

TYPE-Y
YACHT

Starlight Voyager (Traveller)

Captain: Carse Vaasirn

Hull: 80

MOR: 4

Encounter

Distance: 5,000 km
(Medium)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination:
3.5 hours

Armament:

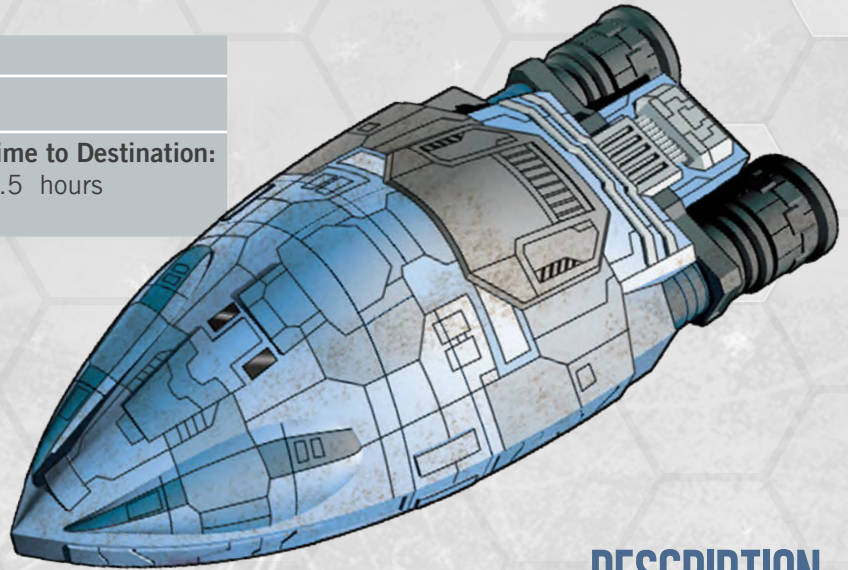
None

Cargo:

4 tons Luxury Goods
4 tons Freight

Passengers:

2 High Passage



DESCRIPTION

Starlight Voyager is encountered at extremely short range (as these things go) when she emerges from jump almost on top of the Travellers. She is headed for the mainworld on a less than optimal vector and immediately begins to manoeuvre onto a better approach with no regard to shipping in the area. This might be an indication that all is not well aboard.

Starlight Voyager is a privately owned yacht-for-hire, typically acting as a VIP transport for vacationers or those wishing to conduct business in style. However, she is old and decrepit. Her critical systems are badly in need of overhaul and whilst she maintains the veneer of luxury for her passengers, the illusion is wearing thin.

Carse Vaasirn, owner and operator of Starlight Voyager, simply cannot afford to keep her flying much longer, and is looking for a way out. This latest jump constitutes a not-quite-misjump and suggests time is running low. If challenged by pirates, Carse comes up with a half-baked idea – if he can get his ship blasted to the point where it needs extensive repairs, his insurers will pay for the work. And if his ship is written off, well, that is still a better outcome than being condemned at a spaceworthiness inspection and scrapped for lack of funds to make repairs. He has not thought this plan through, of course; it is simply a piece of opportunism.

CARGO: Starlight Voyager is carrying some freight and supplies to keep the VIP passengers happy.

QUIRKS: As noted above, Starlight Voyager's operator actually wants his ship fired upon, and will not surrender until he has taken enough damage to get an insurance payout. This requires putting up a fair amount of resistance in terms of evading and calling for help, but Carse will surrender readily once his ship has been hit a couple of times.

COMPLICATIONS: Unfortunately, one of the VIP passengers is killed (perhaps by secondary causes like a fire) by the pirate attack. This does not initially seem to have much in the way of consequences as the death was

caused by ship-to-ship combat rather than a deliberate murder. However, the deceased was a close friend of a pirate hunter.

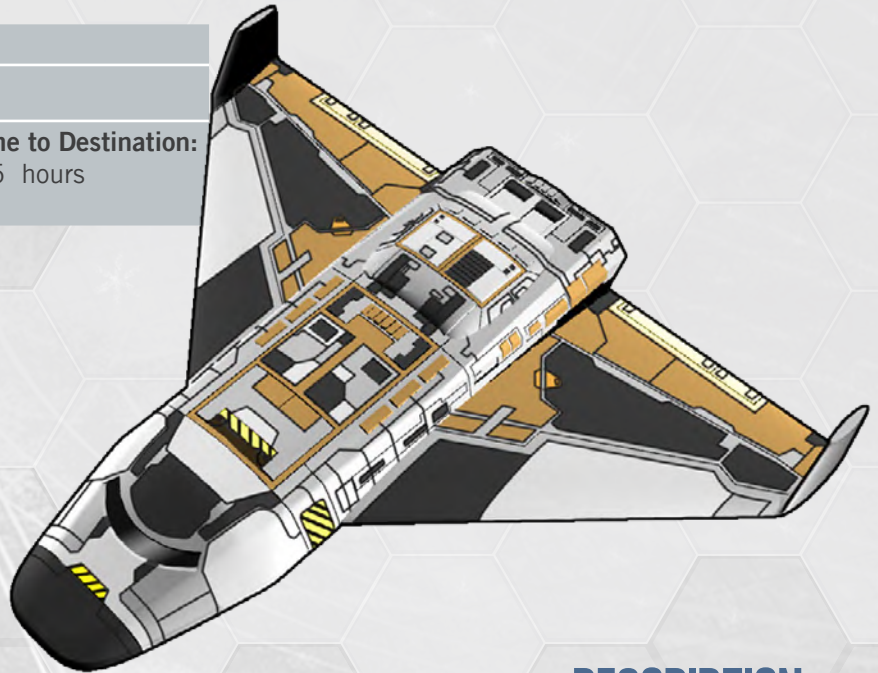
PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: The pirate hunter is incensed, hurriedly gathering intelligence on the incident and then going after the suspected perpetrator. By shooting first and not bothering with questions at all, the pirate hunter ends up blasting a completely innocent merchant vessel. The pirate hunter is cashiered and disgraced, and eventually comes looking for vengeance. Meanwhile the pirates will eventually hear of what happened and may figure out their part in it.

Emma (Small Freighter)**Captain:** Nils Alfney**Hull:** 38**MOR:** 6**Encounter****Distance:** 45,000 km (Very Long)**Heading:** Inbound from In-System**Time to Destination:** 2.5 hours**Armament:**

None

Cargo:30 tons Uncommon Ore
5 tons Radioactives**Passengers:**

None

**DESCRIPTION**

Emma is a typical 95-ton shuttle assigned to in-system transport runs. These involve lengthy transits through normal space which are both boring and tiring for the crew. Emma routinely makes a 4-day transit out to a mining station, stops over for a day or so, then returns. After this, her two-person crew tend to hit the bars and nightclubs pretty hard; being cooped up in a little shuttle for days on end is mentally exhausting.

As a result, Emma's crew are cranky and bad-tempered, and may make poor decisions. Among these will be the choice to evade the pirate ship and make for the safety of port. A shuttle is a small target and they have a fair amount of thrust available, so their chances look pretty good... or so they think.

CARGO: Emma is carrying standard-sized shipping containers filled with high-value metal and radioactive ore. Unfortunately, whilst the contents are more valuable than common rocks, the containers themselves are of shoddy construction and may come loose or even rupture during violent manoeuvres.

QUIRKS: As noted, the crew are tired and bad-tempered, and will probably try to evade rather than surrendering. This will escalate, with the shuttle performing ever more violent manoeuvres in an effort to validate the original decision to run by succeeding in making an escape. The end result of this may be

extremely hazardous turns or a high-speed dive into atmosphere which could damage the shuttle.

COMPLICATIONS: If an ore container ruptures, chunks of metal-rich and possibly radioactive rock will be flung around the shuttle's cargo area, causing additional damage to other containers and possibly the hull. Continued evasion could reduce the cargo to radioactive gravel or do crippling damage to the shuttle.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from the pirate hunters.

SAWNEENSON'S PRIDE

TYPE-A
FREE TRADER

Sawneenson's Pride (Small Merchant)

Captain: Bryn Sawneenson

Hull: 80

MOR: 10

Encounter

Distance: 50,000
km (Distant)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination:
3.5 hours

Armament:

2 Single Turrets: Beam Lasers

Cargo:

32 tons Polymers

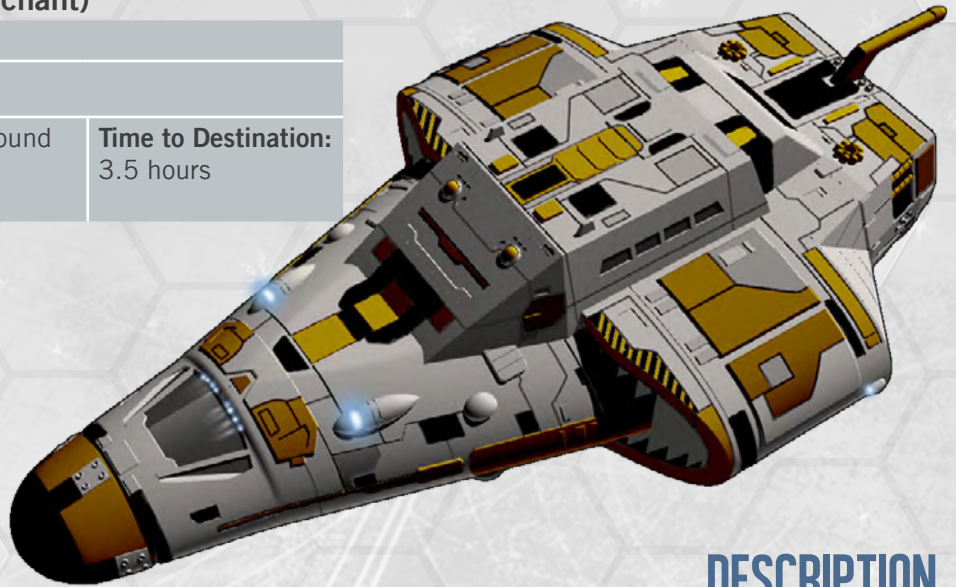
20 tons Common Consumables

16 tons Advanced Machine Parts

Passengers:

3 Mid Passage

2 Low Passage



DESCRIPTION

When Sawneenson's Pride is detected, she is coasting quietly rather than using her drives to accelerate and then decelerate, making her harder to detect but increasing the time to planetfall considerably. Most merchants run their drives all the way in since time is money; coasting is generally considered suspicious behaviour.

CARGO: In addition to the listed cargo there is also a small amount of contraband stashed in concealed smuggling compartments. This is mostly Crazywine, a mildly narcotic and highly addictive beverage banned on several worlds. Crazywine is undergoing something of an explosion in popularity among the rich and bored, and sells for upwards of Cr500 per bottle. There are about a hundred bottles stashed throughout the ship.

QUIRKS: At the point where Sawneenson's Pride is detected, her captain is involved in a blazing row with the engineer, and the whole crew is distracted by it. It is possible that another ship could intercept Sawneenson's Pride or attempt to contact her without getting a response. Even a warning shot might go unnoticed for a while. Once captain and crew do realise they have company, they seem annoyed by the intrusion more than anything else.

Demands for surrender will be met with indignation and then, oddly enough, a request for assistance. Captain Sawneenson does not act like a merchant skipper under threat; it is as if he has not noticed the 'pirates' part of the encounter. Or maybe he knows something the Travellers do not...?

Captain Sawneenson asks for assistance in making a repair to his manoeuvre drive, and airily dismisses continued attempts at piracy. He has a serious intermittent thrust variance, he says, and is on the verge of chucking his engineer out of an airlock. It will be quite difficult to get him to shut up long enough to hear threats, though if fired upon Sawneenson's Pride will resist as best she can. Her drives are actually in reasonable condition but are badly miscalibrated due to the chief engineer's new-found fondness for Crazywine.

COMPLICATIONS: Captain Sawneenson has a few friends who are outright pirates, and believes he is immune to attack by virtue of this association. If the ship is successfully pirated, the Travellers may later encounter irate friends of the captain, whilst an attempt to help him out might win them friends. On top of all that, pirating this vessel will net the Travellers a considerable amount of illegal narcotic wine – which has already caused problems aboard one ship!

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from pirate hunters, but Sawneenson's pirate friends might seek revenge for an attack on his ship.

PUTTINALONG

TYPE-A
FREE TRADER

Puttinalong (Small Merchant)

Captain: Frei Hadsen

Hull: 80

MOR: 8

Encounter

Distance: 35,000
km (Very Long)

Heading: Outbound
to jump

Time to Destination:
1.5 hours

Armament:

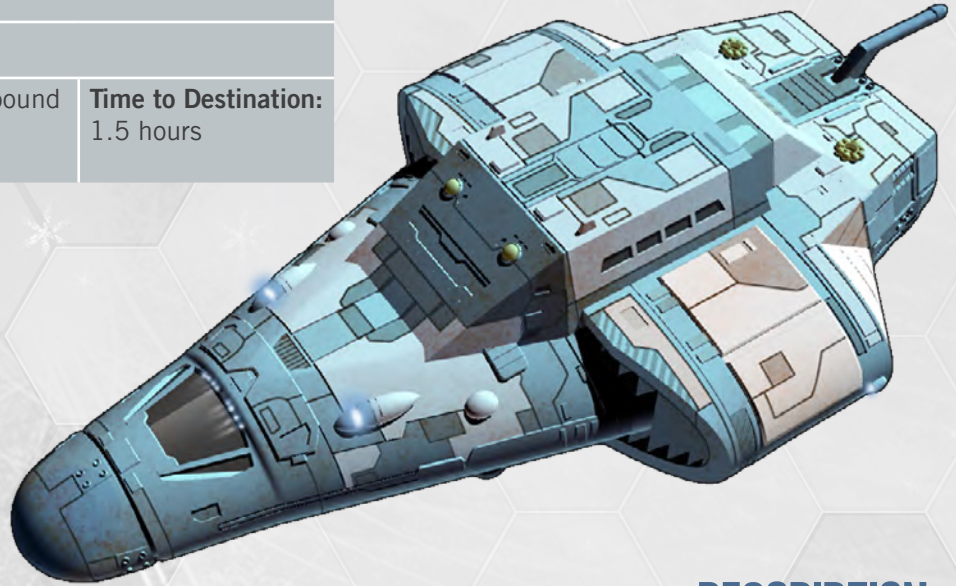
Single Turret: Beam Laser
Single Turret: Missile Rack

Cargo:

82 tons Freight
4 tons Luxury Goods

Passengers:

5 Mid Passage
11 Low Passage



DESCRIPTION

Puttinalong is a fairly ancient Free Trader whose skipper renamed her in reference both to her feeble drives and typically low earning capability. Captain Hadsen is enjoying a brief period of improved prosperity but does not expect her good fortune to last.

CARGO: Puttinalong is hauling a hold full of typical mixed freight containers. Her crew do not know what is in them and do not need to care much. She is also hauling a small speculative cargo her skipper picked up; four tons of what appears to be expensive designer apparel.

QUIRKS: Captain Hadsen will view a pirate attack fatalistically – things were going quite well, so the universe naturally sends pirates to bash her back down into poverty. She will resist of course, but Puttinalong's decrepit drive cannot manage more than about 0.8G for any length of time so escape is unlikely. After taking a few hits, Hadsen will offer to dump the cargo of clothing in return for being allowed to flee. The hangdog expressions of captain and crew might

make even career pirates feel bad about robbing such downtrodden people...

COMPLICATIONS: In fact, the expensive designer clothing is fake, produced by a large-scale operation on a nearby world at a fraction of the normal cost. The fakes look quite good but are shoddy and will quickly start to appear worn or even fall apart. This might upset the buyer, and in turn the pirates might feel that Puttinalong robbed them by passing off shoddy goods.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from pirate hunters.

PELZENTIN DELLA

TYPE-A
FREE TRADER

Pelzentin Della (Small Merchant)

Captain: Mannie Tsaiboud

Hull: 80

MOR: 5

Encounter

Distance: 30,000
km (Very Long)

Heading: Outbound
In-System

Time to Destination:
4 hours

Armament:

Single Turret: Beam Laser

Cargo:

20 tons Advanced Manufactured Goods

25 tons Robots

29 tons Freight

1 ton Pirate Bait

Passengers:

2 Mid Passage



DESCRIPTION

Pelzentin Della is a fairly typical Free Trader to all outward appearances, and in this case appearances are not deceiving. She is more or less the ideal target for pirates; lightly armed and not too big, but able to carry a valuable cargo.

Although his ship carries a token armament, Captain Tsaiboud is unlikely to put up much resistance if attacked. He might prolong his fight if he thinks help is on the way, but so long as he thinks he can get away with just surrendering part of his cargo, he prefers to negotiate a surrender and thus avoid damage to his ship or casualties among her crew.

To this end, Pelzentin Della routinely carries a shipping container loaded with 'pirate bait', low-bulk, high-value items such as electronic components, ingots of useful alloys and the like. Captain Tsaiboud is of the opinion that pirates may be willing to take this bribe and leave him alone. He reasons that they will be satisfied with just one container since they can continue their piratical activities unimpeded. Sorting through several containers of assorted freight is a chore, he believes, and since all pirates are lazy good-for-nothings they will take the easy loot and leave him alone. His theory has never been tested.

CARGO: Pelzentin Della is carrying manufactured goods and industrial robots to a small outpost in the outsystem. From there, she will jump on to her next destination. The primary cargo is not owned by Captain Tsaiboud; he is freighting it for a flat fee and therefore really has little invested in it – in any sense of the word. He will not be too unhappy to part with some or all of it if he must.

QUIRKS: Pelzentin Della surrenders surprisingly quickly if pirates are willing to talk terms.

COMPLICATIONS: The robots and manufactured goods are the property of a corporation which expects

its cargoes to be delivered. Captain Tsaiboud will be blamed if any of it is taken (the corporation does not care about general freight or the pirate bait container) and find many clients unwilling to do business with him. A few months of poverty later, Pelzentin Della makes her first, inept, pirate attack.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from the pirate hunters themselves, but an Information Bounty is posted by the corporation if any of its equipment is stolen.

HANDOW'S SHIP

TYPE-A2
FAR TRADER

Handow's Ship (Small Merchant)

Captain: Handow 'The Dealer' Venquist

Hull: 80

MOR: 8

Encounter Distance: 30,000 km (Very Long)

Heading: Outbound In-System

Time to Destination: 1.5 hours

Armament:

Dual Turret: Pulse Lasers

Dual Turret: Missile Rack and Beam Laser

Cargo:

None

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Handow's Ship is the property of Handow 'The Dealer' Venquist, whose name implies that he fancies himself as a freewheeling merchant. In fact, it refers to the fact that he deals in cargo and violence, for Handow Venquist is a career pirate. This is not his first ship, and its registry documents give an entirely different name, but it is one of the more successful pirate vessels in the region.

Handow's usual mode of operation is to open conversation with another ship in a friendly manner and then sort of let slip that his vessel is having difficulties. He usually claims to be in urgent need of some inexpensive and minor but necessary part, and tells a long-winded tale about how he has no spare component due to a set of amusing and unfortunate circumstances. Handow likes to amuse himself by seeing how outrageous he can make his tale.

If the other vessel falls for it, he invites them to dock so he can buy the 'necessary' spare part from them, and launches an assault from there. If that fails, then his tale at least buys time to manoeuvre closer and lock weapons on to the target. Handow has a policy that if he fires at all, he gives the target at least one salvo before demanding surrender. He does not care about casualties among his own crew or that of the target, and as a result has a quite high turnover in personnel. However, he has made a lot of money and those that survive a stint aboard his ship usually walk away with full pockets.

CARGO: None. Handow is in the market for someone else's cargo though...

QUIRKS: Handow's Ship is essentially a Q-ship like those used by some pirate hunters, only his prey is innocent merchant vessels.

COMPLICATIONS: If Handow is bested, he will become an enemy of the pirates and seek to destroy them. His pride will not permit a second-hand method like informing the authorities of their whereabouts; he will

seek them out and do the deed himself – though he is quite happy to team up with others to stack the odds. If encountered in a friendlier environment, Handow might even ask the pirates to help him bushwhack someone else who has wronged him.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from the pirate hunters.

SHEBIIGIBUKA DUAM

TYPE-A2
FAR TRADER

Shebiigibuka Duam (Small Merchant)

Captain: Lars Idais

Hull: 80

MOR: 8

Encounter

Distance: 25,000
km (Very Long)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination:

1 hour

Armament:

2 Triple Turrets: Beam Lasers

Cargo:

8 tons Illegal Weapons

23 tons Advanced Weapons

34 tons Freight

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Shebiigibuka Duam appears to be a normal Type-A2 Far Trader, and to some extent this is true. However, she is under contract to the Imperial Navy to undertake a resupply run to forward-positioned warships. This is not uncommon; the navy supplements its own fleet of auxiliaries with trusted and well-armed independent vessels whenever the need arises.

Whilst a contracted auxiliary is not a navy ship as such, there is an understanding that the navy looks out for those entrusted with its supplies. This is partially self-interest of course but also a point of honour – being involved with the navy's supply chain means taking on an additional risk and becoming a sort of almost-comrades-in-arms.

CARGO: Shebiigibuka Duam is carrying an assortment of naval supplies ranging from food, spare uniforms and lubricants to care packages from home and a large crate entirely full of spanners. She is also carrying enough small arms and light support weapons to start a small war and, more importantly, enough missiles to quickly end it. Most of these have conventional warheads but there are two nuclear ship-to-ship missiles in the consignment. Captain Idais knows about them of course, and is very aware that they must not fall into the wrong hands.

QUIRKS: Shebiigibuka Duam is on the alert and her crew are well trained. They have no reason to believe anyone knows they are carrying military stores, but ships do get attacked at random and they are not in a position to simply hand over nuclear warheads the first time someone points a gun at them. They will fight hard to defend their cargo, and might even resort to telling an attacker they are on contract to the navy – attacking a naval supply ship will definitely get the attention of pirate hunters and may bring down more heat than the pirates can handle.

COMPLICATIONS: As noted, the vessel is on contract to the navy. Firing on it is not any worse offence than shooting at any other merchant ship, but if the pirates continue their attack after being told they are engaging a naval auxiliary they will be deemed to have attacked a naval vessel. This has no formal repercussions – pirates are already scum to be hunted down and spaced – but it will hurt the pride of the navy. Wanting to be seen to take care of their own or at least avenge attacks on them, the navy will increase its efforts to find the pirates, and some officers may make it a personal mission to bring them to justice.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: This attack will get the attention of pirate hunters in the region, resulting in the deployment of a guardship, issue of an Information Bounty and the beginning of a Personal Mission for an officer affected or offended by the incident. See page 142 for details of these actions.

CARNISE

TYPE-A2 FAR TRADER

Carnise (Small Merchant)

Captain: 'Honest' Narmure Recheille

Hull: 80

MOR: 3

Encounter

Distance: 125,000
km (Distant)

Heading: Outbound
to Jump

Time to Destination:
2.5 hours

Armament:

None

Cargo:

42 tons Petrochemicals
29 tons Freight

Passengers:

2 Mid Passage
4 Low Passage



DESCRIPTION

Carnise is fairly typical of the Far Traders plying the local spacelanes. She has a reputation for straight dealing and timely deliveries, and her crew are well liked in the ports they frequent. Carnise is not an especially prosperous ship, but makes a steady (if small) profit shipping general freight or industrial materials for a flat fee.

Carnise is detected at quite a long range, on an otherwise unremarkable vector. She is headed out to jump and, being unarmed, can do nothing but call for help and run for a safe jump point.

CARGO: There is nothing very unusual about the cargo Carnise is hauling. Some of it is typical freight-for fee containers with an assortment of items within. The remainder uses the same containers but inside them are industrial chemical tanks which hold liquid polymers used in the manufacturing industry. These are robust but might be ruptured by weapons fire hitting the cargo area, which would cause toxic chemicals to spill out into the cargo area. An unwary pirate crew opening these containers, especially if they are damaged, might be exposed.

QUIRKS: Carnise is a typical small merchant ship with an ordinary crew. The only real quirk here is that the crew are popular and have many friends in the ports of the region. Pirates who cause deaths among them could make a lot of enemies if their actions are discovered.

If not, the pirates might later hear about the demise of a much-lamented friend at the hands of unknown but widely hated raiders.

COMPLICATIONS: The long detection distance when Carnise is first picked up means it will be necessary to chase after her in a fairly blatant manner if the pirates want to take the prize before she jumps out. This might give away their identity to other ships nearby or even provoke a response from other merchant traffic – some of which may have a missile to spare.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: There will be no unusual response from the pirate hunters; Carnise is just another merchant ship to them.

UEKH ETASIEAHEARI

EAKHAU CLASS
TRADER

Uekh Etasiaheari (Medium Merchant)

Captain: Ehrae Awolr

Hull: 160

MOR: 13

Encounter

Distance: 50,000
km (Distant)

Heading: Outbound
to jump

Time to Destination:
2 hours

Armament:

2 Dual Turrets: Beam Lasers

2 Dual Turrets: Sandcaster and Missile Rack

Cargo:

53 tons Luxury Consumables

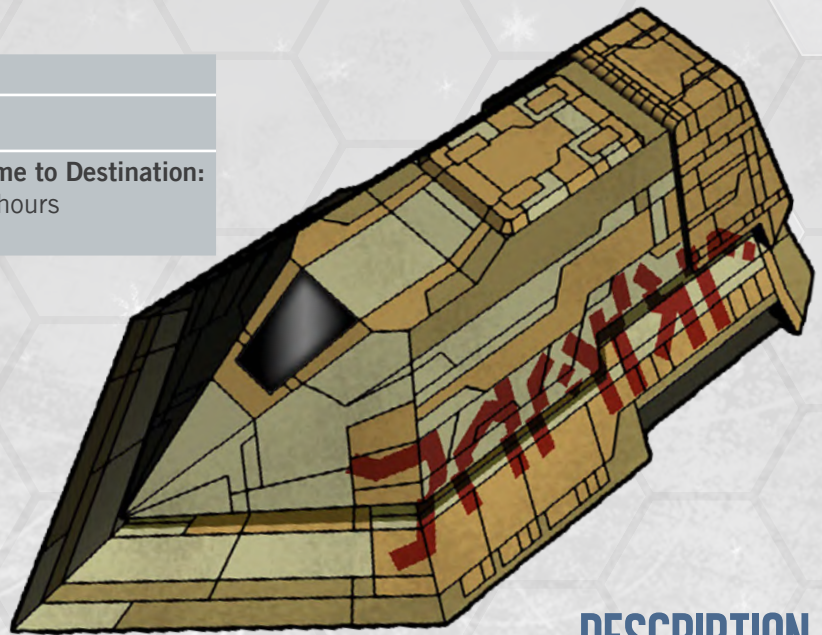
44 tons Common Consumables

63 tons Advanced Manufactured Goods

9 tons Weapons

Passengers:

4 High Passage



DESCRIPTION

Uekh Etasiaheari is an Aslan merchant ship, currently on her way to deliver a cargo of necessary items to various envoys and diplomats beyond the Hierate. Her crew are not naval personnel, but are competent and highly motivated. Not only would the failure of a prestigious mission like theirs be a personal disgrace and an embarrassment to their clan, but losing a fight where non-Aslan could witness it is all but unthinkable.

If attacked, Uekh Etasiaheari will resist vigorously, but her crew have no interest in helping other vessels no matter what interstellar law might say. The strong prey on the weak, and there is nothing wrong with that. Indeed, Uekh Etasiaheari might transmit a message of congratulation to pirates who make a well-executed attack in their vicinity, providing the victim fights back to at least some extent. Pirates may be puzzled to find their translation software thinks the 'angry challenge' coming in from the Aslan ship is in fact a warrior's salute... albeit a slightly condescending one that contains a lot of boasting about what would happen if the pirates attacked an Aslan ship.

CARGO: Uekh Etasiaheari is carrying the sort of items an Aslan envoy needs to maintain his status – traditional clothing, weapons, luxury items and the very finest foods from back home – along with a few family members headed out to join their clan's envoy. Failure to deliver these necessary goods could result in the standing of the envoys – both compared to those of other clans and among the non-Aslan barbarians they are emissaries to – being reduced. Although the contents of the cargo might seem frivolous and certainly non-essential to non-Aslan thinking, the delivery is extremely important to the crew of Uekh Etasiaheari.

QUIRKS: Uekh Etasiaheari's crew are arrogant and intolerant towards non-Aslan, and quite convinced they have the right to intrude on someone else's approach vector then fire warning shots to make them veer off. Uekh Etasiaheari is also quite likely to fire without

warning on any ship that gets too close – no matter whose fault the incident is.

COMPLICATIONS: Firing on an Aslan ship would cause a diplomatic incident nobody wants. Smoothing over that incident would almost certainly require a strenuous effort to hunt down those involved. On the other hand, pirating an Aslan vessel sailing under a diplomatic flag would be a legend-making feat.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: If Uekh Etasiaheari is fired on, pirate hunters will fall over themselves to be seen doing something about it. Ships will be sent to as many systems as possible, passing vessels will be stopped – and their crews questioned very closely – and portside inspections will be tightened. This will go on for several months.

ARDASIL CONVEYOR

TYPE-R
SUBSIDISED MERCHANT

Ardasil Conveyor (Medium Freighter)

Captain: Senior Shipboard Officer Kurgakikash Mila

Hull: 160

MOR: 9

Encounter

Distance: 45,000 km (Very Long)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination: 4 hours

Armament:

Single Turret: Beam Laser

Cargo:

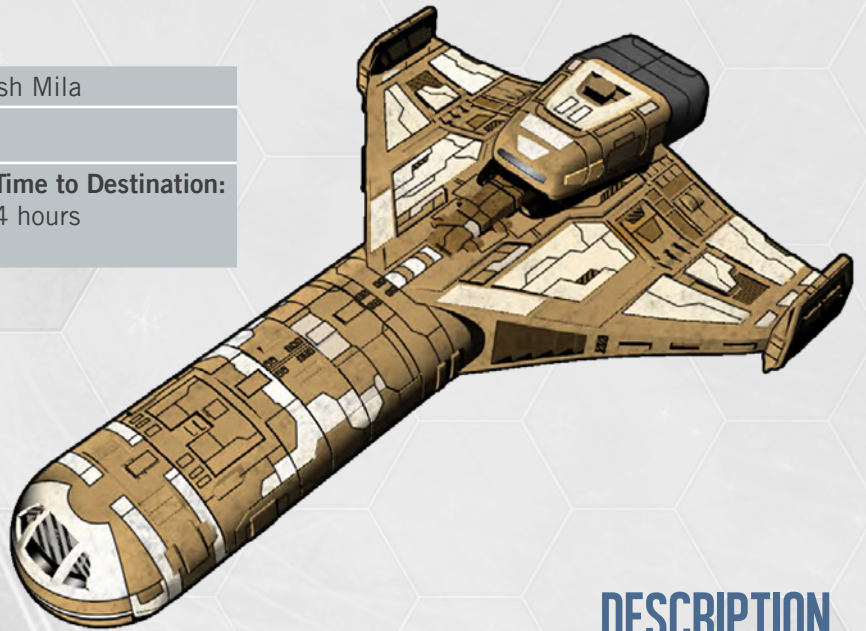
192 tons Live Animals

Passengers:

1 High Passage (Vet)

4 Mid Passage (Cattle Hands)

7 Low Passage



DESCRIPTION

Ardasil Conveyor is owned and operated by Yearle Spacelines Incorporated, a stuffy and bureaucracy-ridden company that does not even call its starship captains by a proper title. Instead they are referred to as Senior Shipboard Officers, just to make the point that they are nothing more than well-paid pawns in the corporate world.

Yearle Spacelines typically operates Subsidised Merchants and similar vessels on regular local routes or chartered freighting and passenger runs. It does not grant its officers the latitude to undertake speculative trade. This sometimes results in a vessel hauling cargo no captain who had a choice would take on.

CARGO: Ardasil Conveyor is carrying livestock; farm animals to be precise. The beasts are semi-sedated and docile but are still a little upset by a week in Jumpspace. This translates to even more mess than might be expected. The crew are, of course, thoroughly disgusted at having to haul such a labour-intensive cargo, but there is nothing they can do about it.

Ardasil Conveyor is carrying a vet and four cattle hands as well as an assortment of low-berth passengers. She is under charter to deliver viable breeding stock and personnel to look after them. This cargo is worth a great deal in terms of future income but not a tremendous amount right now.

QUIRKS: If Ardasil Conveyor comes under fire or manoeuvres violently, there might be a semi-stampede in the cargo bay which would result in injuries to the animals and perhaps crewmembers who were caught in the way. The cargo does contain several particularly high-value animals intended as breeding stock for the destination world; injuries to these would knock a significant percentage off the overall value of the cargo.

COMPLICATIONS: Yearle Spacelines has a less-than-robust policy towards pirates. Its ships all have at least token armament, but their crews are under orders to avoid damage to the vessel if possible. This translates to firing a couple of warning shots and then surrendering at the first opportunity. Yearle vessels are known to be easy pickings in terms of a one-off attack, but the company has another way of defending its vessels.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: Any attack on a Yearle vessel automatically results in an Information Bounty being posted, and the company has strong links with the Imperial Navy as well as law enforcement agencies. As soon as an attack occurs, Yearle officials will begin bending the ears of their local nobility, naval commanders and anyone else they can gain access to.

The result in this case is that within 2D weeks of this attack, a Patrol Corvette arrives in the system where it occurred and remains on guardship duty for a further 4D weeks.

IKURDAGUR

TYPE-R SUBSIDISED MERCHANT

Ikurdagur (Medium Freighter)

Captain: Lt-Commander Sir Wilhelm Amuiinzier

Hull: 160

MOR: 11

Encounter

Distance: 65,000 km (Distant)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination:
3.5 hours

Armament:

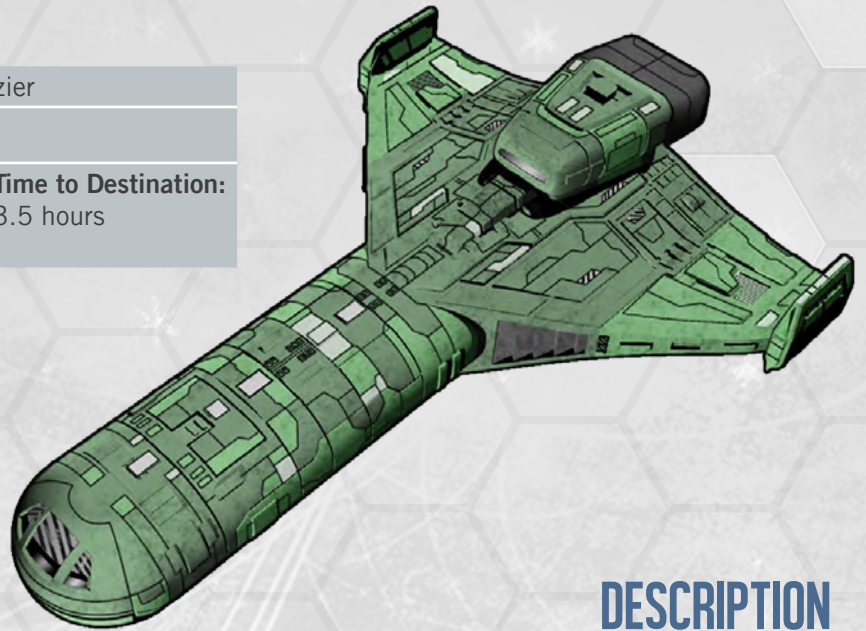
2 Triple Turrets: Beam Lasers (disguised as single turrets)
Armed Launch

Cargo:

Decoy Containers

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Ikurdagur is the present identity of a Q-ship operated by the Imperial Navy. Her mission is to be seen loading valuable cargoes and then heading for backwater systems where she can be readily bushwhacked. There, her heavy (for a merchant ship) armament and well-trained navy crew will force the surrender of any pirate vessel that attacks. Complete destruction of the attacker is considered to be almost as good.

Under the command of a well-connected young officer of noble family, Ikurdagur is adept at looking like a typical competent-but-nothing-special merchant ship. Her armament is disguised to look like single turrets, and she has additional capabilities. Among these is a boarding party which normally uses the ship's launch but can assault directly into a pirate ship that has been suckered into docking with a 'surrendered' merchant.

Ikurdagur also carries dummy cargo containers which are mostly empty. Some, however, are rigged with explosive charges surrounded by pre-fragmented projectiles. These can be triggered in an enemy cargo bay and will comprehensively wreck it along with other parts of the vessel, or can be detonated in space to attack a pirate ship trying to pick them up. Lieutenant Commander Amuiinzier favours a ruse whereby his ship flees from a pirate, dropping containers from the rear cargo doors whilst broadcasting a 'take this and let us go' message. If the pirates take the container it can be detonated inside their ship. If they continue pursuit, then the container can still do them damage from the outside. Ikurdagur will then come about and engage with her weapons whilst the marines force a boarding.

CARGO: No real cargo, but a hold full of dummy containers.

QUIRKS: Lieutenant-Commander Sir Wilhelm Amuiinzier is no glory-hound, but a stone-cold professional who hates pirates for professional rather than emotional reasons. He is a very dangerous opponent who is quite happy to sucker-punch his adversaries. He may take it upon himself to hunt a particular pirate vessel, changing the identity of Ikurdagur and trailing his coat in systems where the target vessel is known to operate.

COMPLICATIONS: Ikurdagur is a Q-ship, i.e. a dangerous vessel disguised as a harmless merchant.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: If Ikurdagur were to be destroyed, it would seem like just another pirate attack to most, but the loss of such a vessel would be of grave concern to pirate hunters. An Information Bounty would be posted, and at least one small naval vessel would be detailed to sweep the area for 6D weeks. A non-fatal engagement is all in a day's work to a Q-ship crew, though Lt-Commander Amuiinzier would make it a point to hunt down the attackers and eliminate or capture them, purely out of professional pride and the need to eradicate a dangerous piratical threat.

CALLSIGN ALPHA

TYPE-R
SUBSIDISED MERCHANT

Callsign Alpha (Rich Freighter)

Captain: Joharn Ishinko

Hull: 160

MOR: 12

Encounter

Distance: 55,000 km (Distant)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination: 2.5 hours

Armament:

Dual Turret: Pulse Lasers

Dual Turret: Missile Racks

Cargo:

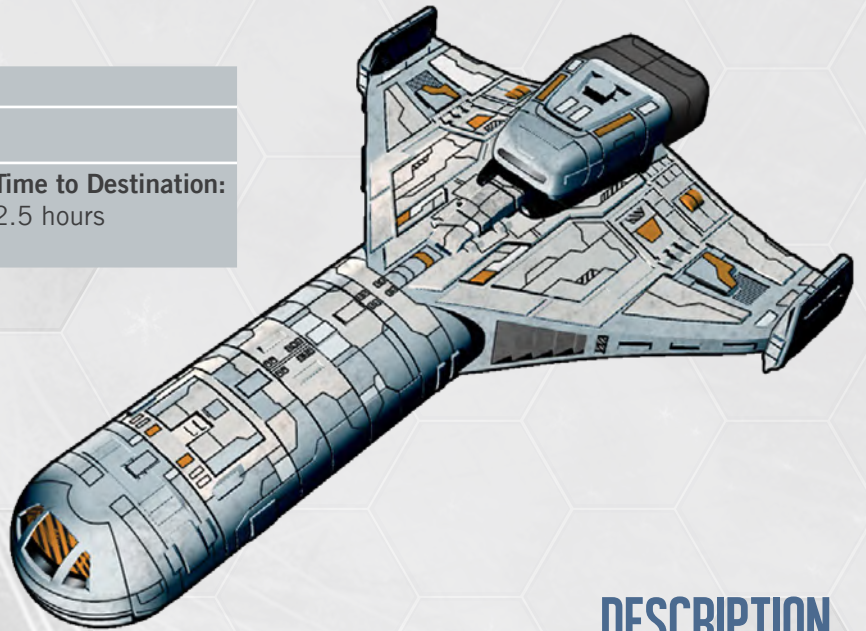
78 tons Vehicles

90 tons Precious Metals

5 tons Mail

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Callsign Alpha is the primary asset of Callsign Cargo Solutions, a small but highly professional shipping firm. All Callsign vessels are equipped to carry mail and secure cargo, with an armoured safe and at least modest armament. Callsign Alpha does not carry passengers, instead using her extra staterooms to accommodate security personnel and gunners. Her crew are sharp and on the ball, and make no secret of their ship's armament.

Callsign Alpha will issue a sharp instruction to any vessel coming close, ordering them to keep their distance. This is backed up by the launch of a 'firecracker' missile – a small warhead for warning-shot purposes only. If this is ignored, Callsign Alpha will make signal that she is under threat and veer off, even if it is not obvious that an attack is about to happen. This hair-trigger response has become notorious in some ports, but it may have prevented previous attempts at piracy. If an incoming vessel still looks remotely like a threat, Callsign Alpha will open fire before being fired upon, at the same time broadcasting a distress call and legal justification for her actions. Her 'I am under attack by a raider' signal is non-standard and includes relevant quotes from interstellar case law justifying a robust pre-emptive response.

CARGO: Callsign Alpha is carrying an expensive cargo of precious metal ingots and grav vehicles, plus custom components and spares for them. In addition, it has a mailsafe full of small packages bound for worlds on its route.

QUIRKS: Callsign Cargo Solutions has a very hard-nosed policy towards shipping risks. Its vessels and crews are well-trained and well-armed, and recruitment favours former naval and military personnel. The firm takes the view that if someone else is less able to protect themselves, it is their lookout. Callsign ships will not make any effort to assist other vessels under attack or in distress unless they must. They will comply with interstellar law, but wherever possible will use clauses that permit non-action if it would place the ship in undue danger to justify leaving others to their fate. Callsign ships and crews are

not well-liked as a result, but have chosen to be self-reliant – weaponry is a surer defence than goodwill.

COMPLICATIONS: Callsign Alpha is a mail ship. Most worlds subscribing to a mail service have an obligation to hunt those who attack the mail carriers or to take steps to protect them. If pirates take cargo but leave the mail alone, there will be no additional complications but if they do, they will make an enemy of a local noble who was shipping several 'art objects of questionable moral value' and will want to ensure nobody reveals his secret taste for such things.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: If the mail is interfered with, an Information Bounty will be placed in addition to the complication noted above.

PRINCELY CHALLENGER

TYPE-M
LINER

Princely Challenger (Liner)

Captain: Mila H

Hull: 240

MOR: 7

Encounter

Distance: 145,000
km (Distant)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination:
6 hours

Armament:

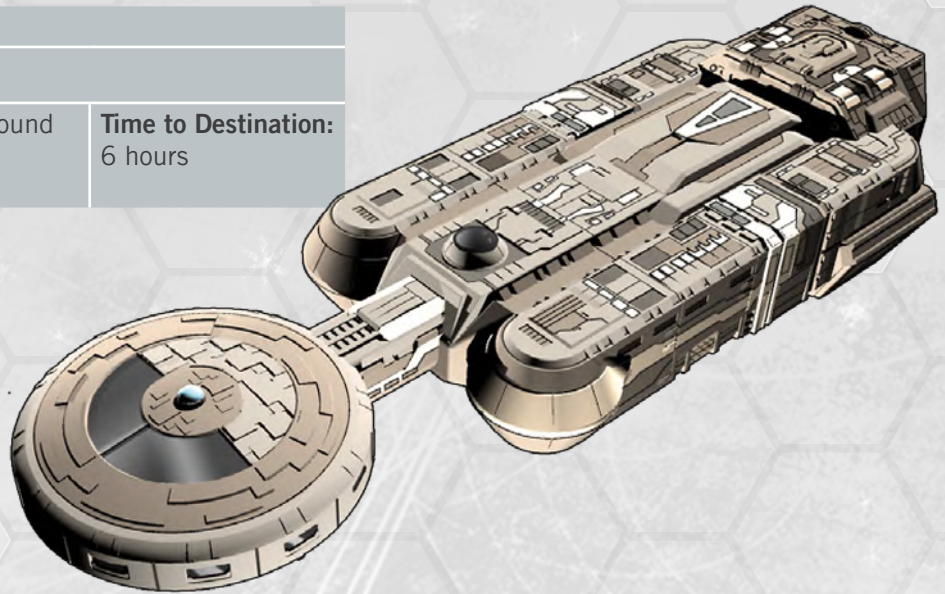
2 Single Turrets: Beam Laser

Cargo:

68 tons Freight
5 tons Luxury Goods
40 tons Advanced Vehicles

Passengers:

17 High Passage
9 Mid Passage
12 Low Passage



DESCRIPTION

Princely Challenger is owned and operated by her captain, whose surname really is just 'H'. She is quite an old vessel but has been well maintained and remains in good condition. However, in recent months her crew have had several mishaps and internal disputes with the result that she is no longer a happy or well-run ship.

Princely Challenger's latest misadventure (before running into pirates) was a badly calculated jump that brought her out well short of the mainworld and necessitated a longer than usual transit to the starport. This in turn strained relations among her bridge officers and between the passengers and stewards.

CARGO: Princely Challenger is carrying several prestige grav vehicles for a client who is planning to run a car show, along with various luxury items associated with the show. There are also numerous standard freight containers aboard, some of which are for the use of high passengers and contain their personal effects and any minor cargo they brought with them.

QUIRKS: The upshot of the situation aboard is that while Princely Challenger is unlikely to put up more than a token fight before surrendering, tempers are very frayed and any boarding could go badly wrong. Almost anything could happen, from a disaffected crewmember suddenly asking to be taken with the pirates (but then possibly changing her mind later) to an angry passenger trying to jump the boarding party.

Astute boarders might spot something is awry before the situation gets out of hand; they will at least sense the tension aboard but may dismiss this as stress associated with being robbed at gunpoint.

COMPLICATIONS: All manner of complications could arise from the situation aboard Princely Challenger. In addition, the car show host will be displeased and may target Captain H rather than the pirates, perhaps forcing her out of business or into a less reputable market sector.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response.

JCV ARYM ESSDEN

TYPE-M
LINER

JCV Arym Essden (Liner)

Captain: Arym Essden

Hull: 240

MOR: 13

Encounter

Distance: 65,000
km (Distant)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination:
4 hours

Armament:

2 Dual Turrets: Beam Lasers
2 Single Turrets: Missile Rack

Cargo:

82 tons Advanced Weapons
20 tons Advanced
Manufactured Goods

Passengers:

34 Military Personnel



DESCRIPTION

JCV Arym Essden's name comes from that of her owner-operator, with a JCV prefix which simply means 'Jump-Capable Vessel'. JCV Arym Essden was built as a liner and served as one for many years, but she is no longer a passenger ship as such. Instead she is on a (very) long-term charter to Dyksson's Rifles, a platoon-sized mercenary outfit equipped to TL9 standards.

Dyksson's Rifles are not pirate hunters, but would be quite happy to bag a pirate vessel and claim the bounty. Their commander and Captain Essden might – if the circumstances looked favourable – try to draw in a pirate ship and counter-board it. JCV Arym Essden also has a decent armament and could beat off an attack if no ambush proves possible. Her crew would fight hard if attacked, attempting to flee behind salvos of missiles, but are not willing to make a suicidal last stand.

CARGO: The personal possessions and military equipment of an entire platoon is aboard this vessel, along with over thirty professional soldiers berthed two to a cabin. Most of the military equipment is low-value material such as rations, boots and spare uniforms but there are quite a lot of infantry small arms and support weapons, plus enough ammunition to fight a war.

QUIRKS: This is not a liner at all; it is a mercenary transport.

COMPLICATIONS: If the pirates succeed in robbing Dyksson's Rifles, the unit's reputation will be seriously damaged. This might be in part restored by taking

vengeance on the pirates. Both the mercenaries and Captain Essden will become staunch foes of the pirates.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from the existing pirate hunters, but the pirates will gain new enemies who will actively hunt them.

MENDINA

TYPE-R SUBSIDISED MERCHANT

Mendina (Unusual Vessel)

Captain: 'Grim Jack' Zanya

Hull: 160

MOR: 9

Encounter Distance:
40,000 km (Very Long)

Heading: Outbound to
Jump

Time to Destination:
2 hours

Armament:

Single Turret: Pulse Laser

Dual Turret: Beam Lasers

Cargo:

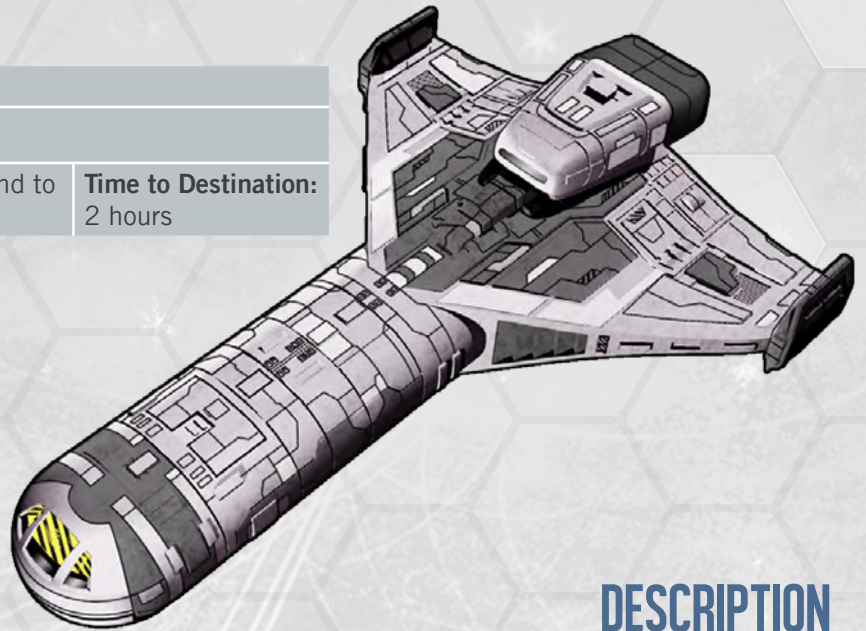
12 tons Precious Metals

10 tons Advanced Electronics

38 tons Common Consumables

Passengers:

6 Low Passage (Prisoners)



DESCRIPTION

Mendina looks and, for the most part, behaves, like a typical Subsidised Merchant. She is, however, the current vessel used by 'Grim Jack' Zanya. Despite his deliberately threatening name, Grim Jack is surprisingly ethical for a pirate. He is ruthless and will carry out anything he threatens, but is not unnecessarily cruel and treats piracy as a business. As far as he is concerned, an agreement to surrender and hand over cargo is a form of contract, and he despises anyone (victim or pirate) who fails to keep their end of the deal or attempts any form of treachery.

Grim Jack also hates sloppy or needlessly violent pirates, as they attract the attention of the authorities. He is in the piracy business for the long haul and whilst competition is fine, actions that damage 'the industry' are not acceptable. Any and all means can be used to eliminate such competitors, including a tip-off to the authorities. This policy is accepted and even respected by some other pirates, but Grim Jack is the subject of numerous grudges. These are mainly held by bloodthirsty ravagers of a sort that do not last long in the business but cause untold troubles for their more cautious and professional peers.

Mendina is always on the lookout for ways to turn a profit, some of which can be quite inventive. She has been known to draw in other pirate vessels by looking like a soft target and then either ambush them or get them to chase her onto the guns of a waiting system defence boat. Most worlds grant a share of the bounty on a pirate vessel to all ships that engaged it, even if all they did was run towards the system defence flotilla whilst firing wildly. Grim Jack will happily use this tactic on pirates who attack his vessel.

CARGO: Mendina is running light, with plenty of hold space available. Much of what she is carrying is general supplies for the ship and her hidden base on an outsystem planetoid, but she does have several containers of high-value loot including precious metals, electronics and starship components. She is also carrying six prisoners intended for ransom. These are Aslan, members of a diplomatic delegation. Grim Jack does not normally use the ransom system, preferring to just take cargo, but these Aslan offended him by attempting to resist his boarding party after their ship had surrendered.

QUIRKS: Mendina is a pirate vessel and may deliberately 'trail her coat' to provoke an attack and ambush unwary pirates, or draw them into an ambush so she can share the bounty.

COMPLICATIONS: Apart from the fact that this is a pirate ship carrying Aslan prisoners, none.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: There is bounty on the head of Grim Jack (MCR1), and Cr10000 just for the name of his current ship. The authorities will drag their feet about paying, but eventually the money will come in.

EMUAR

TYPE-T PATROL CORVETTE

Emuar (Naval Patrol)

Captain: Lt Commander Mitchell Argane

Hull: 160

MOR: 9

Encounter

Distance: 35,000
km (Very Long)

Heading:

Indeterminate

Time to Destination:

Unknown

Armament:

2 Triple Turrets: Pulse Lasers

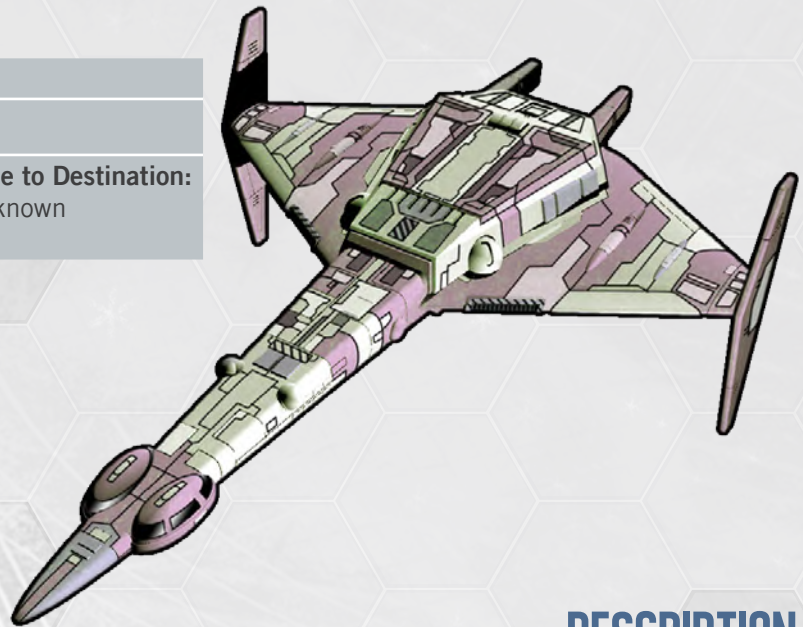
2 Triple Turrets: Missile Racks

Cargo:

None

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Emuar is a navy ship conducting a routine commerce protection patrol. She will sometimes accompany a merchant vessel (whether or not the merchant skipper wants it) or form an impromptu convoy to her next destination. At other times, she can be encountered patrolling off a mainworld or landed at its port to give her crew shore leave.

Emuar and her crew will always follow strict naval protocol. This could be a benefit to the pirates, or not depending on circumstances. Emuar cannot act without clear justification, but does have the right to stop and search any suspect vessel unless there are agreements in place to restrict this. The navy does not make deals with pirates of course, but some shipping lines and world governments have negotiated special privileges for their vessels including immunity from routine search. Similarly, some shipping operators have priority status in terms of protection and escort. This could be used to lure Emuar off station or distract her crew.

The naval attitude towards pirates is to attempt capture rather than kill them, not least since live pirates will often trade information for their lives. Although piracy carries the death penalty, this is often commuted - sometimes on a rather cynical 'set reduction per comrade turned in' basis. Someone who reveals the location of a major pirate base might walk away from custody with a pardon and a (usually pretty small) bag of credits.

Emuar recently made a good set of captures. The prisoners are held on one of the planets nearby, waiting for a transport vessel to take them to a naval base for trial and (probably) execution.

CARGO: None.

QUIRKS: None as such; Emuar is a by-the-book naval ship.

COMPLICATIONS: Pirate captives awaiting transport might know about the activities of others. Preventing them reaching a naval base – one way or another – may be wise.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: If a naval ship is destroyed or goes missing, a major search will be launched. At least a handful of small combat vessels will be deployed to the area for a period of 4D weeks. Pirates who intercept the transport of prisoners will also become priority targets for pirate hunters.

Hero (Unusual Vessel)**Captain:** Jenaime Ygrant**Hull:** 320**MOR:** 10**Encounter Distance:**
55,000 km (Distant)**Heading:** Outbound
In-System**Time to Destination:**
Unknown**Armament:**

4 Dual Turrets: Pulse Lasers
 2 Dual Turrets: Missile Racks
 2 Dual Turrets: Sandcasters

Cargo:

None

Passengers:

Marine Platoon

**DESCRIPTION**

Hero is a mercenary vessel whose operators have found a niche in the anti-piracy role. The ship itself is a potent pirate-killer and escort vessel, and its platoon of marines can be deployed either to provide security to a client or crush a pirate base.

Although she makes most of her income fighting pirates, Hero does not have a completely clean record. Some of the 'pirate bases' she has raided have turned out to be innocent outposts. She has at times taken a contract from one pirate group to attack another, and has arrangements with some pirate vessels to avoid conflict. If she came upon one of these vessels by accident, the deal is that Hero will chase off the pirate with some strangely inaccurate gunnery, and if she knows where the pirate vessel is, she will discreetly be somewhere else.

However, Captain Ygrant cannot risk her ship's reputation by allowing an attack to take place right under her nose, so pirates who are too blatant will be attacked. Since she cannot afford to have prisoners telling the authorities about the deal, Ygrant will pound such a vessel into wreckage whether or not it tries to surrender. She would take the surrender of a previously unknown pirate however; those who do not have a deal with her cannot reveal it – and might even be offered one. If so, the pirates would be let go in return for a large bribe and a monthly 'retainer' to Hero's account.

In short, Hero makes a fair amount of money running a protection racket with pirates as the target, and uses pirate-hunting as an excuse to raid outposts from time to time. She may or may not have looted innocent merchant ships as well; some of the justifications her captain has posted for attacking a 'suspected pirate' do not bear close scrutiny.

The authorities on some worlds are aware of this vessel's shady reputation, but there is no proof and in any case, Hero does actually deal with at least some pirates. She thus does more good than harm... probably.

CARGO: None.

QUIRKS: Hero is cruising around, actively seeking excuses to attack vessels whose actions indicate an inclination towards piracy. Her crew are plugged into the grapevine and hear rumours the authorities do not. The rumour that a ship may be a pirate is good enough for Captain Ygrant.

COMPLICATIONS: Hero has a powerful armament and a hair-trigger attitude... and her captain is corrupt as well.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from pirate hunters.

SOAAD (System Defence Boat)

Captain: Lt Poia Muuru		
Hull: 80	MOR: 9	
Encounter Distance: 30,000 km (Very Long)	Heading: Indeterminate	Time to Destination: Unknown

Armament:
Triple Turret: Beam Lasers
Triple Turret: Missile Racks

Cargo:
None

Passengers:
None



DESCRIPTION

SOAAD is a privately-owned system defence boat. Her name, allegedly, is an acronym for Sower Of Alarm And Despondency, though this has not been confirmed by her operators. This is the mercenary unit Kuuliishe Security Services, which specialises in starship, starport and commercial security operations. The company has a handful of combat craft, mostly fighters, and provides security detachments to starports unable to field their own.

Kuuliishe Security Services has a good reputation for dependability and willingness to fight, and is frequently hired by governments feeling threatened by a rise in piracy. In this case, SOAAD has been deployed to improve orbital security and – ideally – nail one or more pirate ships. A reputation as a bad place to engage in piracy is the best defence a world can have, and so on the current deployment SOAAD is playing a long game rather than just advertising her presence as a deterrent.

SOAAD has a variable transponder and routinely pretends to be a port shuttle, a repair tug or a small merchant vessel. Visual contact would immediately identify her as a system defence boat, and careful analysis of her emissions will indicate she is no shuttle. However, this requires the pirate vessel to come relatively close.

SOAAD's typical mode of operation is just to stooge about looking innocent in the hope that pirates attack traffic coming in or out of the system, and then blast them. There is the possibility that she might be targeted by unwary pirates, a possibility her commanding officer finds both delightful and hilarious. Thus far, she has had no success in her present deployment and her crew are becoming bored.

CARGO: None.

QUIRKS: SOAAD is not a law enforcement or naval vessel; she is a contracted pirate-killer. Her crew have no interest in boarding ships to look for contraband; they are simply waiting for known pirates to enter the system or previously unidentified ones to reveal themselves. They are also not especially interested in receiving a surrender – the bounty is the same for a captured ship as a shattered one, and there is less paperwork if nobody survives aboard the target vessel.

COMPLICATIONS: SOAAD could be a complication in an attack on a merchant vessel, or the pirates might fall for her fake transponder and find themselves in combat against a dangerous opponent.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: No unusual response from pirate hunters, but Kuuliishe Security Services will post a Kill Bounty on anyone who destroys one of its vessels.

CONVOY DW-744

TYPE:
VARIOUS

Convoy DW-744 (Convoy)

Captain: Commander Harnon Pellique

Hull: Various

MOR: 10

Encounter Distance:
30,000 km (Very Long)

Heading: Inbound

Time to Destination:
5 hours

Armament:

Varies

Cargo:

See Below

Passengers:

Varies



DESCRIPTION

Convoy DW-744 officially consists of three Type-A2 Far Traders (Shaasimiir, Clunket and Farjump) along with the Subsidised Liner Graceful Lady. These vessels are proceeding under the escort of the Patrol Corvette Templeton and have picked up additional local vessels en route. This is not uncommon; independent merchant ships often join a convoy if one is passing through; many captains consider it is better to wait for a day or two whilst the convoy assembles and proceed in safety than go it alone when protection is available.

At present the Subsidised Merchant Quarnast Reach is proceeding with the convoy, and has proven far more trouble than she is worth. Quarnast Reach has a captain who dislikes authority and deliberately ignores instructions just to show how independent he is, but at the same time demands the navy protect his vessel. He and Commander Pellique have already fallen out several times, and Quarnast Reach is on the verge of being ordered to leave the convoy.

Because of Quarnast Reach's wayward behaviour, the convoy has made a rather uncoordinated jump, arriving scattered over many thousands of kilometres and possibly several hours in time. This means pirates may detect what appears to be a lone merchant ship emerging from jump, only to have others pop out as they make their attack. The escorting Patrol Corvette might emerge right on top of the pirates or be too distant to help – it might even not emerge until after the attack, which would result in problems for Commander Pellique.

CARGO: Clunket is carrying stores for the Patrol Corvette in addition to her own cargo, whilst the other ships are fully 'private'. This is not a high-value military convoy; it is simply a group of merchant ships being given naval protection as they pass through a potentially hazardous area. Cargoes aboard the merchant ships thus vary from general freight to moderate or even some high-value trade goods.

QUIRKS: As noted, the convoy is scattered. It may not be immediately apparent that it is a convoy.

COMPLICATIONS: The merchant ships will support one another, and try to huddle together for protection. Graceful Lady has the best armament – a couple of mixed missile and laser turrets – and will try to protect the others if the corvette has not yet arrived. Shaasimiir is unarmed; the others have at least a token weapons fit.

Any defence of the convoy will be complicated by the behaviour of Quarnast Reach, which will try to hide behind or among the other vessels, ignores instructions or turns the wrong way, and generally makes life more difficult for the people she is expecting to save her. This behaviour is not deliberate as such, it is simply the action of a scared merchant captain who thinks he knows better than naval officers, and who will put the safety of his own ship well ahead of any concept of the common good.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: Pirating a ship under convoy protection is a blatant and cheeky action. Pirate hunters will take note and at least post an Information Bounty to find out who would dare to attempt something like this.

KERRELBLOSSOM

CHRYSANTHEMUM DESTROYER ESCORT

Kerrelblossom (Naval Vessel)

Captain: Commander Margaret Pallix

Hull: 400

MOR: 11

Encounter

Distance: 65,000
km (Distant)

Heading: Local Patrol

Time to Destination:
Unknown

Armament:

1 Fusion Barbette, 2 Particle Barbettes
2 Triple Turrets: Missile Racks
5 Triple Turrets: Sandcasters

Cargo:

Naval Supplies (including
approximately 100 missiles)

Passengers:

None



DESCRIPTION

Kerrelblossom is a naval vessel on routine patrol, which is not purely about piracy suppression but certainly includes this within the operational remit. Kerrelblossom's mission has thus far been a lengthy round of flag-showing and deterrence – smartly uniformed crewmembers in port and a warship in orbit helps remind everyone that the Imperial Navy is not far away. It is not possible to judge how effective this is in terms of deterring piracy, but it is dull for the crew. After a long period away from home, mostly cooped up in a starship, crew efficiency starts to wane.

The answer to this, at least according to Commander Pallix, is to thoroughly enforce discipline and the careful following of regulations, and keep the crew busy with 'navy work'. This translates into stopping and searching as many craft as possible, looking for contraband or irregularities in paperwork. As a result of this combination of zeal and weariness, boarding parties are thorough but complacent, and can be deceived quite easily so long as everything looks to be above board. Of course, the Travellers may not know that.

Commander Pallix has also implemented a policy of actively searching for pirates, responding to reports of an attack by moving her ship to the affected system or a nearby one she thinks a pirate might head for next. Thus far, she has drawn a blank, and is itching to catch someone doing something illegal before her cruise ends – if only to give her crew the feeling they have made a difference. Pallix is too professional to allow her desire for action to affect her objectivity, but it does mean that if she has clear evidence she will be heavy-handed. She may decide to actively pursue or hunt a pirate vessel that comes to her notice, and one that escapes from her ship will become an active target.

CARGO: Kerrelblossom is carrying stores for her mission. This includes a great deal of valuable weaponry and ammunition, including one hundred naval missiles. Whilst it is unlikely that she could be pirated, she does receive supply ships from time to time. These carry spare missiles to replace any expended during the patrol.

QUIRKS: As noted, Kerrelblossom is not specifically hunting pirates, but they would be an excellent outlet for the crew's desire for something more interesting than patrol duty. A pirate vessel might think it has been uncovered for what it is when Kerrelblossom orders it to heave-to

for boarding, when in fact the destroyer is just searching random vessels to give her crew something to do.

COMPLICATIONS: Kerrelblossom is a potential enemy for the pirates, or might respond to a distress call.

PIRATE HUNTERS' RESPONSE: The destruction of a naval ship (or its supply vessels) will result in several more being sent to the area to search for the attackers. These will certainly include destroyers and possibly larger vessels too.

THE PINNACLE OF KNOWLEDGE

Location: King Oleb's bedside table

Information Cost: 6

The Pinnacle of Knowledge is a vaguely described artefact said to be the key to 'all the learning of the Sindalian Empire'. It is assumed to be a data storage device of some kind, and said have been constructed in such a way as to survive 'the fall of worlds and the fury of empires'. This is all rather less than clear, but the tales do agree that the device gave access to secret information vaults across the empire, some of which may have survived.

Once the Travellers have obtained four points of Information they will be reasonably sure that the device was a literal key – possibly electronic in nature – rather than a storage device in its own right. There are other examples from Sindalian history – rods, rings and sceptres designed to unlock complex electronic systems or bunker doors. Indeed, the flight controls for the Harrier have a similar locking device which, if removed, renders the ship inert.

Referee

The device is indeed a key. It is a 10cm high four-sided spike of platinum inlaid with a complex pattern in iridium, with a base wide enough to let it stand upright with a piece of half-eaten fruit stabbed onto it. It currently resides on King Oleb's bedside table (complete with fruit adornment). He has never suspected its true nature, but found it amusing to treat a priceless artefact in this manner. Once cleaned up, the spike can be used to unlock certain mechanisms.

The pinnacle does not fit any known device in the Floating Palace, and was long ago dismissed as a mere ornament. However, a lengthy search for potential 'keyholes' will turn up a long-forgotten recess in a wall of the Scholars' Tower. Inserting the Pinnacle causes a well concealed door to slide open and give access to a chamber containing only a console and information display. The Pinnacle operates this too, and reveals a heavily corrupted database from which useful information can be obtained. Trawling through it all will be a slow process, but strategic notes on phases of the fall of the Sindalian Empire suggest potential locations for equipment caches, downed warships, and other potential salvage.

The data cache will be a source of leads and – sometimes cryptic – information from time to time, For now, the immediate benefit is the location of a strategic reserve repository on Drinax. It is in one of the most heavily bombarded areas of the planet, but was designed to resist orbital attack. If it was not destroyed in the fall of the empire it should still be intact. Contents are listed as generally quite mundane items... bulk steel and advanced alloys, replacement armour panels for various Sindalian ship designs, large quantities of decorative internal fittings for Sindalian ships (repairs have to be done *properly*, after all), and similar materials that might be of modest value elsewhere but will be a huge boost to Drinax' attempts to get some industry of its own operating.

Best of all, industrial machinery is in the cache. It is too bulky to be moved without complete disassembly, but perhaps the site can be environmentally sealed and turned into a small workshop? King Oleb will be interested in any ideas that produce wealth, but a way of actually getting some industrial production started will delight him. He does, however, want a replacement fruit-spike...



01

SINDALIAN EMPIRE

The Sindalian Empire left behind a legacy of equipment and weaponry, some of it very nasty indeed. Intact or repairable ships and installations turn up from time to time – though not nearly as often as the popular vid-shows would suggest – and equipment can be found across the Reach. Often an item will have lain around for centuries before being tinkered back into working order by some talented individual, but occasionally a cache of essentially new equipment is found on some remote world.

It is known that some Sindalian officials set up bolt-holes and caches where they could stock up if they had to make a run for it. The empire was not a forgiving master, and it was not uncommon for a governor or officer to be blamed for some fiasco and arbitrarily put to death. This was especially true in the latter days of the empire, when paranoia reached new heights and instilling fear was more important than building loyalty or ensuring competence. Since possession of a cache was ‘proof’ of disloyalty, many who created one were eliminated before they could make use of it. Not all have survived; most have been looted in the centuries since the fall of the empire. However, some do remain and the Travellers might be able to find highly useful equipment in one.

A03/47934

CRYO BREACHING UNIT

Ostensibly a means of getting quickly through internal doors and partitions, this device has applications as a weapon or means of intimidation. It consists of a backpack and nozzle, much in the manner of a flamethrower, but instead delivers a spray of liquid hydrogen. Containing liquid hydrogen in a man-portable unit requires a lot of machinery, so the unit only has enough for four good sprayings.

The unit is designed to clear an obstruction or remove an internal partition by freezing it until it becomes brittle, then hitting it with a set of small explosive charges. These are launched from two secondary barrels each side of the nozzle. The charges are small and sticky, and designed to detonate in a ripple effect that will shatter most frozen targets, dealing an additional 1D of damage.

A cryo breaching unit will reduce light furniture and internal partition walls such as those of a starship stateroom to fragments. A bulkhead might survive: roll 1D. On 1-2, the bulkhead is badly damaged creating a man-sized breach. 3-4 indicates several small holes that compromise atmospheric integrity. On 5-6 the bulkhead remains intact.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Cryo Breaching Unit	12	10	8D+1D	14	C7500	4	Cr200	Blast 2

A03/34527

OSCT

An Open-Space Cargo Transfer System, or OSCT, has a few legitimate uses but is favoured by pirates for its capability to move booty quickly from one vessel to another. The OSCT system consists of a set of drones optimised for the rapid manoeuvring of cargo containers. The drones can also be used to move equipment or clear debris as necessary; they can attach to most surfaces using their grippers and can easily handle uneven or jagged items.

An OSCT can easily be fitted into any cargo bay or other available space. It can handle one container at a time, requiring 2D+12 minutes to move a container from one ship to another within 1km. OSCT systems are sometimes used by vessels serving as auxiliaries which are not fitted with an UNREP system, or by salvage crews. A few merchant ships use them to assist with cargo handling, but an OSCT is not designed to lift containers against gravity.



Item	TL	Tons	Cost
Open-Space Cargo Transfer System	10	1	Cr500000

A03/78932

OFFWORLD CONSTRUCTION TOOLKIT

An offworld construction toolkit contains enough equipment for up to six personnel to work in a vacuum or similar environment, such as a rockball world with a trace atmosphere. Some conventional construction tools, such as shovels and pickaxes, can in theory be used on a distant moon, but in practice this leads to serious problems. Anyone swinging a standard pick in very low gravity will launch themselves across the construction site, and quite possibly off into deep space. In order to work in such an environment, a powered and anchored tool set is required.

Much of the kit consists of enabling equipment, such as anchoring points which can be spiked into the surface of a planetoid or moon so workers are not flung about by their own tools. The majority of tools are powered, along with a few semi-robotic devices. For example, something as simple as digging a hole is very tricky in low gravity. The toolkit's answer is to drill out a pattern in the shape of the hole then shatter the rock in between with small but powerful "thumper" units, after which the debris is scooped away or pushed with a gas jet.



Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Offworld Construction Toolkit	9	250	Cr75000

A03/99452

OFFWORLD CONSTRUCTION PLATFORM

Adapted from a mining and drilling unit, the OCP is a common piece of equipment used throughout the Reach. The central platform, sometimes referred to as a tractor for traditional reasons, runs on wide tracks but has a specialised low-power gravitic generator which pushes it down onto the work surface rather than lifting the platform for flight. The platform itself has scoops, drills and cutting torches but can also command a fleet of up to six smaller drone units, costing an additional Cr100000 each. Normally the platform runs with a crew of 3-4 personnel, but at need a single person can drive the unit to the work area then switch to a drone supervisor role.

The platform produces 16 PWH, with each drone adding 4 PWH. These figures are subject to the usual modification for skill, in this case based on Electronics (remote ops).



Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Offworld Construction Platform	9	2	Cr750000

A03/46368

MONITOR DRONE

Monitor drones are small, self-contained units designed to be placed in orbit around a planet or moon, or landed on the surface. Sensor coverage is limited when deployed on the surface of any world larger than Size 3; the drone will only pick up spacecraft passing overhead in an arc defined by the surrounding terrain. However, useful information can still be obtained this way. One common gambit is to position a drone close to a downport where it can monitor ships coming and going, along with their communications traffic.

Deploying a drone near a downport is not always easy. If it is launched from a starship the action is likely to be picked up by the port's sensors. This will at least be grounds for investigation, leading to the drone being found and the ship crew questioned. A covert launch is possible, perhaps under cover of confusion caused by an alert about some other problem, or from a position where terrain screens both launching vessel and drone until it is lost within ground sensor clutter. Alternatively, a drone can be manually placed from a vehicle.

Placing a drone in orbit is much easier, where it will adopt a stable orbit and make minor adjustments over a period of several months. A world or port with an orbital detection net worth the name will detect the drone, which will raise questions, but backwater worlds or uninhabited rockballs can be monitored covertly by this method.

A drone, whether on the ground or in space, will pick up the emissions of all passing traffic other than ships 'running silent'. This data is held until the drone is activated, though it can be programmed to pulse data to a secondary recording unit at intervals. This provides a backup in case the drone is discovered, but also increases the chance of detection.

A drone will gather routine information on passing ships; tonnage, general drive and electromagnetic emissions, and transponder broadcasts. It can only monitor emissions, as it has no active sensors. If a ship is using a false transponder or has an emission-altering system aboard then the output will be taken at face value by the drone. Thus, a certain amount of intelligence analysis is necessary when using drones for information gathering, but they provide reliable information on whether or not ships have visited a location, their general type, and the information they choose to give out. Used correctly, this data is extremely valuable to pirates – and also to those who hunt them.

Drones are small and have no active emissions other than a small amount of heat and electromagnetic activity caused by their systems. Detecting one is a difficult business, requiring a Formidable (14+) Electronics (sensors) check and 1D hours sweeping the area. The referee should not inform Travellers how long a sweep will take – instead let them specify how long they are taking about the search. If it is less than the required time, they find nothing no matter what the check might indicate. Each multiple of the required time grants DM+1, up to a maximum of DM+4. So, if the time required to scan for drones around a particular world is 5 hours and the Travellers decide to spend 16 hours on a search, they gain DM+2 to detect any drones present.

Duration in orbit is normally 2D months, while planetside drones normally remain active for 4D months.



Item	TL	Kg	Cost
Monitor Drone	10	125	Cr75000

A03/22344

SINDALIAN DEATHBOT

The Sindalian Empire was one of the few interstellar powers to actually have a robot type designated 'deathbot'. The term was apparently used without a trace of irony or self-consciousness, though nowadays it generates hilarity in those who have never encountered one.

Various designs of deathbot are known to have existed, but the commonest seems to have been a light anti-personnel unit intended for intimidating civilian populations or holding the families of key personnel hostage. Built on a generally ovoid shape, decorated with intricate but jagged and threatening abstract art, the deathbot is designed to be constantly noticed – it is a threat rather than an assassin or warbot, though can be used as either.

Primary anti-personnel armament consists of twin laser carbines facing forward, along the longest axis of the ovoid. The laser ports flank the deathbot's other weapon, an advanced light plasma gun capable of engaging armoured personnel. When not in use the weapon is completely concealed, and its presence may not be suspected by those unfamiliar with the design. One round is required to deploy the light plasma gun, and the deathbot's Protection is reduced to +4 when the recessed bay is open.

A deathbot can also make a 'ram and rip' attack, using its baroque outer casing as a weapon by rotating about its long axis as it smashes into a target.

Deathbots were, curiously enough, status symbols in the old Sindalian Empire. Anyone important enough to have his own was well respected, but equally if the empire cared enough about your loyalty to deploy several deathbots for the sole purpose of being able to massacre your family, friends and associates at a moment's notice... that also was a symbol of importance. It says much about the nature of the old empire that being followed around by your potential executioner was – at least some of the time – seen as a good thing.



	Hits	Speed	TL	Cost
	30	8 m	15	Priceless artefact
Skills	Gun Combat (energy) 1, Melee 0, Recon 0			
Attacks	Twin-linked Laser Carbine (4D+4) Light Plasma Gun (6D, 20m range) Ram & Rip (3D)			
Traits	Armour (+8) (+4 with plasma gun deployed))			
Programming	Hunter/Killer			

A03/07134

SINDALIAN ENFORCEMENT ROBOT

Copies of this ancient Sindalian Empire robot are still sometimes encountered, and here and there an original can be encountered. It resembles a very thick, flat-topped 80cm square table with four articulated legs, and is occasionally used as one by people who find that sort of thing amusing. When required, the rotating turret pops up out of a recess, clearing the robot's weapons for action. The primary weapon system is a laser carbine.

	Hits	Speed	TL	Cost
	18	6 m	15	Cr300000
Skills	Gun Combat (energy) 1, Recon 0			
Attacks	Laser Carbine (4D)			
Traits	Armour (+4)			
Programming	Hunter/Killer			



02

HARRIER SHIP'S LOCKER

Any piece of standard equipment can be encountered aboard a Harrier-class raider, often plundered or salvaged. Attempts have been made to keep the ship fully stocked with matching items, but this is difficult at the best of times. A few distinctively Sindalian items – or more commonly, reproduced versions of them made on Drinax or another successor state – may appear in the ship's locker.

DX/64823

SINDALIAN OFFICER'S SWORD

When every Sindalian ship was commissioned, a small number of ceremonial (but functional) swords were also produced out of the same materials as the hull. One of these weapons was to forever remain aboard the ship. Others were presented to those considered worthy – the ship's first captain, her patron or admiral, and particularly influential individuals associated with her. By tradition, these swords represent the spirit and honour of the ship, and must be kept sharp and ready for instant use. They symbolise integrity, fidelity and lethality, and surrendering the ship's sword is a grave dishonour.

Weapons of a similar design were used by Sindalian officers. Many had an area for engraving the name of ships served aboard, but the finest instead had inscribed jewels fitted. It was possible to tell what classes of ship an officer had served aboard, and in what capacity, by the ostentation of his sword. A few of these weapons still survive, along with a far larger number of copies.

The standard pattern for a Sindalian officer's sword is a straight blade, flat but slightly oval in cross-section, with little taper towards the point. The result is a slightly blade-heavy feel, much like a schlager. As a result the weapon can cut reasonably well and deliver a lethal thrust. The blade is not as quick on the parry as some light swords, but the tradeoff is an improved cutting action. Hand protection takes the form of a knuckle bow and a traditional small 'butterfly' handguard, making the weapon easy to carry and reducing wear on the officer's uniform.

The listed cost is for a replica or weapon of dubious authenticity. An original Sindalian or Drinaxian weapon with verifiable provenance might cost a hundred times more on the collector's market.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Traits
Officer's Sword	15	Melee	2D+2	1	Cr300	-

DX/70820

SINDALIAN OFFICER'S REVOLVER

The Sindalian penchant for ostentation extended, not surprisingly, to officers' sidearms. The standard weapon for officers, inevitably referred to as a 'service revolver', was a complex but effective multi-barrel handgun. Originals still exist today, and there have been numerous replicas made. The main component is a long-barrelled revolver chambered for 8mm ammunition, with space for eight rounds in the chamber.

Two kinds of ammunition are available, colour-coded by type. Red cartridge cases represent 'hot' rounds with a very high muzzle velocity and modest anti-armour capability, but with correspondingly high recoil. Blue cases indicate 'cool' rounds with a much lower velocity, which perform poorly against armour and lack stopping power but generate virtually no effective recoil. This is useful in low-gravity combat or when overpenetration is a danger.

In addition, the weapon has a second, short barrel under the main one. A small lever on the side of the weapon realigns the firing mechanism, permitting a single shot from this barrel. Reloading it is a complex evolution taking a couple of minutes and, in addition, the complex internal mechanism is prone to failure if not well maintained. The lower barrel contains a 'mutiny cartridge', consisting of what amounts to a miniature fragmentation grenade. The bursting charge is initiated almost immediately, causing the cartridge to fling a spray of small, sharp metal fragments in a cone from the muzzle. Effective range is very short but knockdown power is considerable for a handgun and the rather random effects of the cartridge can be a useful deterrent.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Officer's Revolver	15	-	-	1	Cr250	8 + 1	-	-
- Red Cartridge		10	3D-2				Cr10	AP 3
- Blue Cartridge		10	3D-4				Cr10	Zero-G
- Mutiny Cartridge		5	3D+3				Cr10	Blast 2

DX/88830

BREACHING GUN

The Sindalian Empire and its successors fought a lot of wars in space, or in installations attacked from space. The development of a weapon designed to breach light bulkheads and punch through an armoured vacc suit was an inevitability. Various designs were fielded, but the most common was a 15mm low-velocity microgrenade launcher fed from a revolving drum magazine.

The drum is not detachable. Instead, it is loaded through a gate and can be manually wound to allow semi-automatic fire even when power is not available. A small battery powers the drum under normal circumstances, allowing fully automatic fire.

Grenades are coated with an impact-activated adhesive, which will stick to most objects, and contain a small shaped charge explosive. A skilled gunner can stitch a cross pattern into a bulkhead then duck into cover before detonation sends a spray of fragments in all directions. Projectiles can also be used to breach an armoured suit or disable a robot.

The breaching gun is heavy and its drum noisy when activated, but the main drawback of this weapon is the long reloading time, up to a minute. Breach-gunners are normally issued a personal combat weapon for self-defence, though some alternative ammunition types have been trialled including an anti-personnel flechette round.



Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Breaching Gun	15	25	4D	4	Cr2400	20	Cr100	AP 6, Auto 5, Blast 1

DX/88831

BOARDING GUN

The standard post-Sindalian combat system is a short-barrelled assault weapon somewhere between submachinegun and assault rifle. Chambered for a short 7.5mm round, the boarding gun is optimised for close range combat and highly inaccurate at range. Its high rate of fire makes up for this at close range.

Ammunition is carried in a 45-round helical-feed cassette rather than a standard magazine, and lies along the top of the barrel. This, combined with a secondary weapon system under the barrel, makes the boarding gun muzzle-heavy. Its standard ammunition does not penetrate armour well at all, but can deliver significant firepower in a short time, clearing an area of defenders in a single sweep.

For harder targets, the under-barrel weapon launches a rocket-propelled penetrator dart with an explosive warhead that can be set for impact, delayed or command detonation. It can also function as a shaped charge for armour penetration or a blast weapon to stun defenders. The projectile is guided by a laser pointer on the muzzle of the boarding gun, enabling a skilled user to curve it around an obstacle by sweeping the aim point. This is extremely tricky and normally only done in demonstrations; few gunners have ever pulled it off in combat.

Weapon	TL	Range	Damage	Kg	Cost	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits
Boarding Gun	15	50	3D 6D (dart)	4	Cr2100	45 + 1	Cr60	Auto 5, Bulky Blast 2 (dart)



03

BASE COMPONENTS

Base components are similar to the constituent parts of a starship. Unless noted, all base components need a structure to support them in a similar manner as a starship hull. Base components that are not within a structure will be rendered inoperable or destroyed by any hit from a starship or heavy weapon.

A03/47934

FIELD REFUELLING RIG (TL10)

Any ship with fuel scoops also has hoses and ice-melting equipment to refuel from a body of water or available ice. This is a relatively slow process, however, especially if hoses have to be moved between small deposits of ice. A field refuelling rig shortens refuelling time and can be used to create ready fuel caches.

A basic refuelling rig consumes 12 tons when transported, but is usually left positioned outside of base structures. If suitable ice deposits or a body of water are available, the rig produces unrefined fuel at twice the rate of a ship with 1 Fuel Transfer Unit, storing it in collapsible bladders ready for use. Each bladder holds a maximum of 25 tons of fuel. The rig also acts as a transfer station, delivering fuel at the rate of 25 tons per hour to any ship connected to it. Only one vessel can be refuelled at a time.

A basic rig costs Cr750000. It is unpowered, and runs off high-efficiency batteries much like those used in some starships. The unit's capacity is 40 Power and normally consumes 1 Power per day, though this increases rapidly if fuel processors are fitted. Rigs are sometimes kept powered up by the reactors aboard small craft, vehicles or starships, but a field reactor or a bank of solar cells can also be used to provide independent power.

The rig comes with 4 collapsible bladders and a framework to support them, though many users prefer to scoop out partially or wholly buried cradles to give the bladders greater protection. Fuel bladders (and associated supports) cost Cr25000 each if additional capacity is required, and 4 can be transported in a collapsed state per ton of cargo.

For an additional Cr25000 and one ton of increased cargo space requirement, the rig can be upgraded with a small processing unit that will refine 5 tons of fuel per day. This increases Power consumption by 1 point, and multiple mini-processors can be added to a rig.

A03/47934

FIELD REACTOR (TL12)

A field reactor is designed to be deployed as the power source for a camp, base or for machinery. It can be built into a structure or placed in a natural or artificial cavern, but is quite safe to be simply positioned on any flat surface in the open. The reactor has a support frame and gantry designed to provide stability and anchoring on a planetoid or moon surface, and all controls are designed to be operated in a vacc suit if necessary.

A standard field reactor consumes 5 tons when transported and provides 20 Power. Its internal reserves hold half a ton of liquid hydrogen fuel – the same as used in starships – which permits 4 weeks of continuous operation. Additional 1-ton fuel canisters cost Cr1000, each providing another 8 weeks of operation.

A standard field reactor costs MCr1.25. For MCr2.5 and additional 2 tons, a heavy-duty version is available which provides the same amount of Power but can withstand corrosive or insidious atmospheres.

A03/47934

BASE CONTROL SUITE

A base control room is similar in some ways to a starship's bridge, but nowhere near as sophisticated. All the same, it is capable of running a base, guiding ships using the port, and dealing with the inevitable administrative work the base produces. A control suite displaces 20 tons, usually divided between a communications room, command centre, and office. A basic suite of this type is adequate for a base of up to 1,000 tons displacement – including landing areas and storage spaces. A larger base requires an additional 1 ton of command suite per 100 tons total displacement.

The control suite gives the base the equivalent of Civilian Grade sensors. Travellers may find it desirable to add more systems including briefing rooms, upgraded sensors and other starship-type components, especially if their base is to host multiple ships and act as a planning centre for raids. A control suite costs MCr0.1 per ton.

A03/47934

OPERATIONS BUBBLE (TL12)

The most basic of hostile-environment shelters, an operations bubble is composed of a disposable lightweight material which can be fixed to a hard surface and inflated to create a temporary dome. It has no entry or exit point and cannot seal to a loose substance such as soil or dust.

The bubble is extruded from a dispenser the size of a small backpack, and designed to quickly create a survivable environment around a casualty, piece of equipment or sensitive working site. Bubble material is normally transparent but various colours are available. No inflation or other life-support equipment is contained in the pack, but it contains enough material to extrude about a dozen 4-person shelters.

The basic ops-bubble backpack costs Cr12000 and can be refilled as often as necessary, though the chemicals are only available at high-end starports (Class A or B, on a TL12+ world) or from outlets specialising in survival equipment. For an additional Cr8000 an auxiliary pack can be added. This one contains a reusable ground sheet and a very basic airlock compartment. When used with a bubble, a more durable shelter can be created on almost any surface. The life span of an ops bubble is about 3-5 days if no accidents occur. Once extruded, the material is surprisingly resilient but cannot survive micrometeorite impacts or sharp implements.

A variant of this system is used as an emergency survival system in more permanent bases. Chemical dispensers in the structure of the base can quickly seal a breached area. This adds 1% to the cost of base components.

A03/47934

LANDING AREA

A landing area can be nothing more than a flat piece of bedrock. If a suitable spot exists close enough to the base site, it can simply be designated at no cost. However, it is wise to carry out a very thorough survey of any prospective landing site before bringing down any ships – cracks and soft areas may not be obvious until someone plonks a subsidised merchant on top of them, and at that point it may be a little late.

To create a suitable landing area equivalent to a Class E starport (no fuel or amenities, but safe to land), it is usually necessary to flatten off any projections and fill in depressions. A landing area must be designated twice the tonnage of the largest ship intended to land on it, at a minimum. Three or four times is better for safety if multiple ships are expected to be on the pad or manoeuvring near it at once.

The cost for constructing a landing area of this type is merely the labour cost, assuming suitable tools and materials are available. A constructed landing area takes 100 PWH per ton to construct.

If the landing area is to have absolutely basic amenities such as lights and a direction beacon, these cost Cr100 per ton of landing field. Time to build the field is not increased.

A03/47934

UNDERGROUND HANGARS

Underground hangars provide concealment and protection to starships. At their most basic, hangars could be nothing more than caverns a ship can fly into, with no means to seal the entrance and thus provide an atmosphere outside the ship. Heavy doors can be added for a modest cost. A far more sophisticated setup uses a retractable landing surface which lowers landed craft into a closed bay which can be sealed off by doors above.

An underground hangar must be twice the size of the largest ship it is to accommodate, and takes 500 PWH per ton to excavate. There is no cost other than labour for a simple cavern. Adding a door costs Cr500 per ton of ship to be accommodated. A full retracting-floor hangar takes 750 PWH per ton to construct and costs Cr5000 per ton of ship to be accommodated. It can be connected to a base's life support at no cost, or have its own internal support unit at a cost of Cr2000 per ton of hangar. This system consumes Power – which can be supplied by the docked ship – at a rate of 1% of the hangar tonnage.

A03/47934

SPACEPORT FUEL & CARGO FACILITY

A proper refuelling and cargo handling facility greatly speeds the turnaround time for visiting ships. Bulk fuel tanks can be cut into bedrock and lined for a cost of Cr100 per ton of capacity. This takes 400 PWH per ton to be excavated.

Fuel handling equivalent to a Class D starport plus basic cargo movement systems cost MCr0.1 per ton of ship to be supported. It is not necessary to have sufficient facilities to resupply all vessels at once; an installation might have a huge landing pad but only be able to support 200 tons of ship at any one time. The rest will just have to wait their turn.

A03/47934

BASE WEAPONS MOUNTS

Bases are not limited by the usual hardpoint rules and can have as many weapons and bays as the builders wish. A base may not mount a spinal type weapon under most circumstances. Bays are normally recessed into the ground for protection, but turret weapons may be placed on surface mounts.

A surface mount costs MCr0.1 and requires a connection to the base's power system unless it is actually part of the base or has its own power. A mount can carry one turret or barbette of any size, and consumes 1 Power in addition to that required by its weapons. Multiple mounts can be grouped as a defence complex, which can have its own power system and control area, essentially functioning as an autonomous combat asset.

A03/47934

HEAVY WEAPONS FOR GROUND DEFENCE

Since a ground installation cannot manoeuvre to bring a spinal weapon to bear, most spinal weapon installations are essentially useless for ground defence. It might be possible to rig one up to cover a specific small arc or as a form of booby-trap, for example shooting along a surface canyon that must be traversed to reach an underground hangar entrance. Meson guns, which follow different principles to most weapons, can be used as effective planetary defence weapons. However, most heavy weapons are mounted in surface bays with at least a degree of traverse.

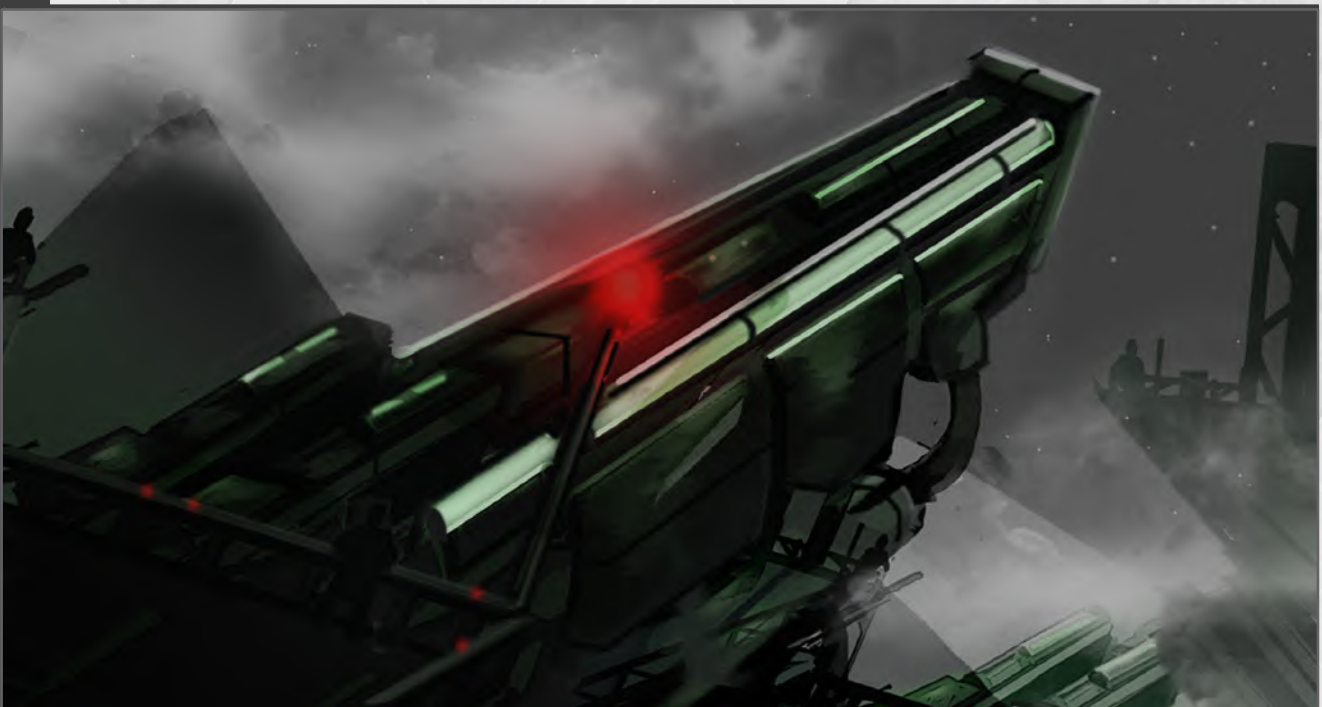
Surface mounted bay weapons are unable to slew fast enough to track close targets even if they have the firing arc to hit them, but are quite capable of engaging craft in orbit or descending directly towards the bay weapon. The exceptions are missile and torpedo bays, as their weapons can chase a target after launch. Bays are most commonly built into underground bunkers, but can be set up as surface structures. This greatly reduces survivability.

Ground-mounted bay weapons cost the same as their shipboard equivalents and have the same tonnage. They have the same penalties to hit smaller ships as their shipboard equivalent, and in addition a groundside bay weapon (other than missile and torpedo bays) suffers an additional DM-2 to hit

targets within 100km, and DM-4 to hit targets within 10km. The referee can disregard this modifier for 'ambush' weapons, such as those firing on the only possible approach vector.

Meson guns are sometimes used as planetary defence weapons due to their unusual nature. The so-called 'meson gun' actually fires a stream of exotic particles which passes through all matter in its path until the particles decay at a precisely calculated spot and deliver a huge amount of energy. This enables meson weapons to be mounted on submarines hiding in deep water or within underground chambers, and still fire upon any targets within range. Such weapons depend on a good sensor net to be effective.

A spinal-type meson weapon can be constructed as a planetside defence installation, at doubled cost and quadrupled tonnage, accounting for directional firing equipment that would not be necessary aboard a ship that can align the weapon by aiming its main axis. It is quite unlikely that meson defence sites would be encountered in the hands of small pirate bands – or indeed most world governments in the Reach – but it is not inconceivable that one could be rigged up out of stolen or salvaged components. There are also rumours of Sindalian Empire weapons left in behind in the collapse. These rumours are about as trustworthy as any others about the old empire, but that does not prevent treasure hunters from chasing after them.



The Travellers Aid Society presents

JAYNE'S GUIDE

**TO STARSHIPS
OF THE REACH**



RORIX COMMAND VESSEL



The Sindalian Empire favoured large numbers of small ships over a fleet of powerful battleships, with numerous reasons for this policy. Small ships have a limited endurance, which made their commanders more reliant upon bases and therefore easier to monitor and control. The same tonnage of small ships allowed more territory to be controlled and monitored; a 200-ton gunboat was just as much a threat to small merchant traffic as a larger vessel.

There was also the loyalty factor. Having many captains of small ships meant that none commanded a vessel that could take on one of the few large warships the empire operated, making a rebellion by the fleet easy to crush providing the handful of heavy-ship captains remained loyal. These were very carefully selected, and their loyalty was ensured by a system of patronage that meant their families were given palaces staffed by personnel and deathbots who would carry out an order to eliminate everyone without flinching.

As a result of this policy, most naval operations were carried out by squadrons of small ships, often led by a larger vessel. One standard formation comprised three Harrier commerce raiders and a Rorix command vessel, which provided support and carried boarding parties to deal with vessels crippled by or held under the guns of the Harriers.

The Rorix was designed as a complement to the Harrier, with broadly similar hull lines. However, it was not intended for direct combat against and carried less armour. Armament as designed was a mix of laser turrets for defence and a missile battery for standoff attack capability. The Harriers – or other Sindalian vessels in the area – would provide mid-course guidance for missiles launched by their command ship.

Although these vessels were designed for patrol, enforcement and harassment operations they were often used for small-scale planetary assaults, delivering an armed party to the surface to snatch prisoners or smash an installation. Rorix ships became a particular symbol of Sindalian oppression, as they were often sent to grab disloyal officials or leaders of a suspected insurrection.

The Rorix is in many ways a typical Sindalian design. The captain and senior officers are accommodated in luxury, and have a detachable bridge to permit escape if the ship is disabled or the crew decides to mutiny. The commanding officer's suite is a miniature palace, with fine artworks and its own small galley for the captain's steward. On some ships the steward is accommodated in the second stateroom, in other cases it is converted into an office or used as quarters for favoured guests. This luxurious retreat is protected by heavy armoured bulkheads, largely to keep thieves or assassins away from the captain and his treasures.

The first pilot, astrogator and gunnery officer, serving as the ship's senior officers, are accommodated in a secondary cabin block, with their own small common area which typically has a good selection of wines and spirits. The remainder of the crew may be accommodated singly or in pairs depending on whether marine leaders are given their own cabins or additional crewmembers are carried. Many Rorix ships sail with additional personnel aboard to crew prizes or replace casualties. Marines or additional crew are carried in the barracks, under very cramped conditions.

Basic hull form is very similar to the Harrier class, with a long central section and pronounced 'wings'. These contain docking points and airlocks, allowing two Harriers or other craft to be docked for personnel transfers or underway replenishment of stores and fuel. The main central section is on two decks, with dorsal bulges at the bridge and midships areas.

Upper Deck

The upper deck contains living quarters and crew work spaces. The bridge is located well forward, in a two-deck-high section which allows for the traditional captain's walkway to run above his crew. The captain's suite is located at the rear of this walkway, allowing immediate access to his lofty station or a dramatic exit into his armoured stateroom when the situation requires it.

The officers' cabins are located at the rear of the bridge on the upper deck. Access to the bridge is through the officers' common area, which means non-officers such as the second pilot must ask permission before crossing 'officers' country' to start their watch. This may have been a deliberate piece of class-consciousness, but also allows the senior officers to grab their belongings if the bridge must be detached and provides an additional measure of security for the bridge itself.

Aft of officers' country is the main crew accommodation, with engineering spaces aft of those. The ship's primary armament of four missile barbettes is located in a dorsal bulge above the crew accommodation, with missile storage on the main deck. Launch operations are normally conducted from

the missile control room in the dorsal bulge, under the direction of the gunnery officer from the bridge.

Secondary armament is located in the 'wing roots', in much the same position as a Harrier class raider carries its turrets. This allows weapons to be fired into an enemy hull to facilitate a boarding or suppress resistance whilst the target ship is grappled.

The lower deck is taken up with cargo, stores and marine accommodation. The breaching and forced-docking systems project a little forward of the bridge on the lower deck, enabling direct entry to a target ship or rapid delivery of ground-fighters in a planetary assault. The remainder of the deck contains armouries, workshops and a large brig for the transportation of prisoners.

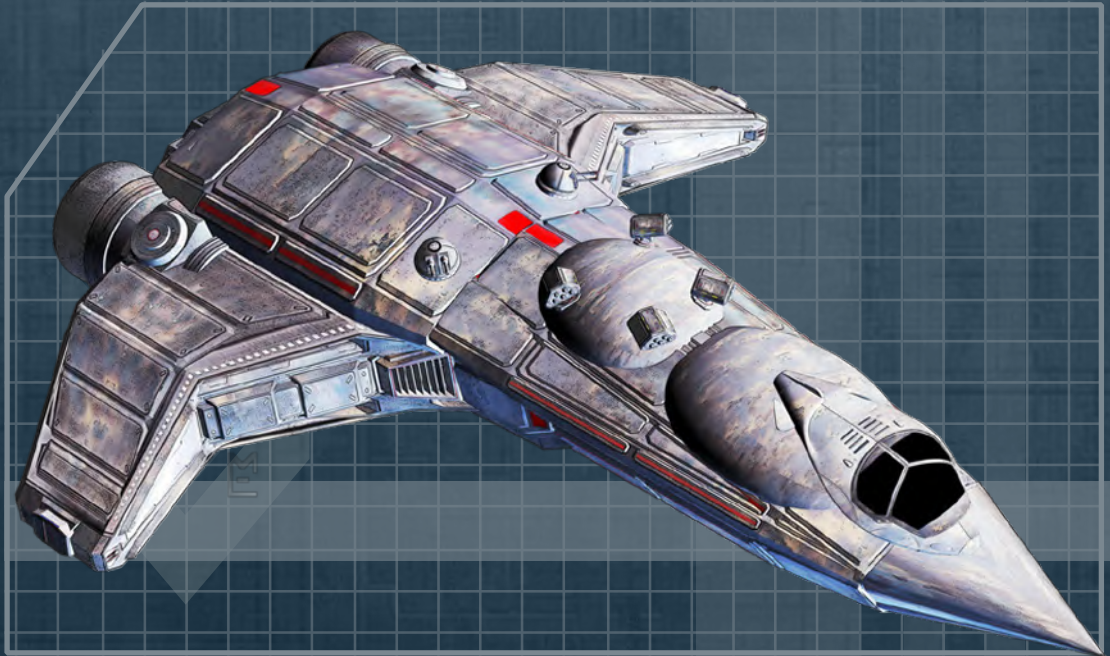
Although more lightly armoured than a Harrier, the Rorix is a prestige vessel whose commanding officer would normally lead a task force or be sent to 'retrieve' a suspect official and bring him to face judgement. In combat the favoured option is to stand off and bombard the target with missile salvos whilst the supporting force of Harriers – often a variant mounting torpedoes instead of missiles – close to decisive range. The Rorix can then move in and deliver marines to finish the job.

RORIX COMMAND VESSEL



TL15		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	600 Tons, Streamlined	-	36
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 4	19.2	11.52
M-Drive	Thrust 5, Size Reduction x3	21	90
J-Drive	Jump 2, Early Jump, Energy Efficient, Stealth Jump	35	78.75
Power Plant	Fusion (TL15), Power 600	30	60
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 20 weeks of operation	150	-
Bridge	Detachable Bridge	30	4.8
	Holographic Controls	-	1.2
Computer	Computer/35	-	30
Sensors	Advanced	5	5.3
	Military Countermeasures Suite	15	28
	Enhanced Signal Processing	2	8
	Sensor Station x2	2	1
Weapons	Dual Turrets (pulse lasers) x2	2	1
	Missile Barbettes x4	20	24
Ammunition	Missile Storage (240 missiles)	20	-
Systems	Fuel Processor (60 tons/day)	3	0.15
	Fuel Scoops	-	-
	Additional Airlocks x3	6	0.4
	Armoured Bulkheads (captain's suite)	2	0.4
	Armoured Bulkheads (brig)	0.8	0.16
	Type III Docking Clamps x2	20	4
	Breaching Tube	3	3
	Forced Linkage Apparatus (TL15)	2	0.5
	Armoury	4	1
	Briefing Room	4	0.5
	Medical Bay (10 patients)	8	4
	UNREP System (40 tons per hour)	2	1
	Workshop	6	0.9
	Barracks (12 marines)	24	1.2
Brig (12 prisoners)	8	0.5	
Staterooms	luxury x1	10	1.5
	high x3	18	3.2
	standard x13	52	6.5
Common areas		40	4
Cargo		36	-

TOTAL: MCR 418.48



240

HULL POINTS

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOTS X 2, ASTROGATOR,
ENGINEERS X 3, MEDIC, STEWARD,
GUNNERS X 6, MARINES X 12

POWER REQUIREMENT

300

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

120

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr34873.3/month

•••••

PURCHASE COST
MCr418.48

90

JUMP DRIVE

6

SENSORS

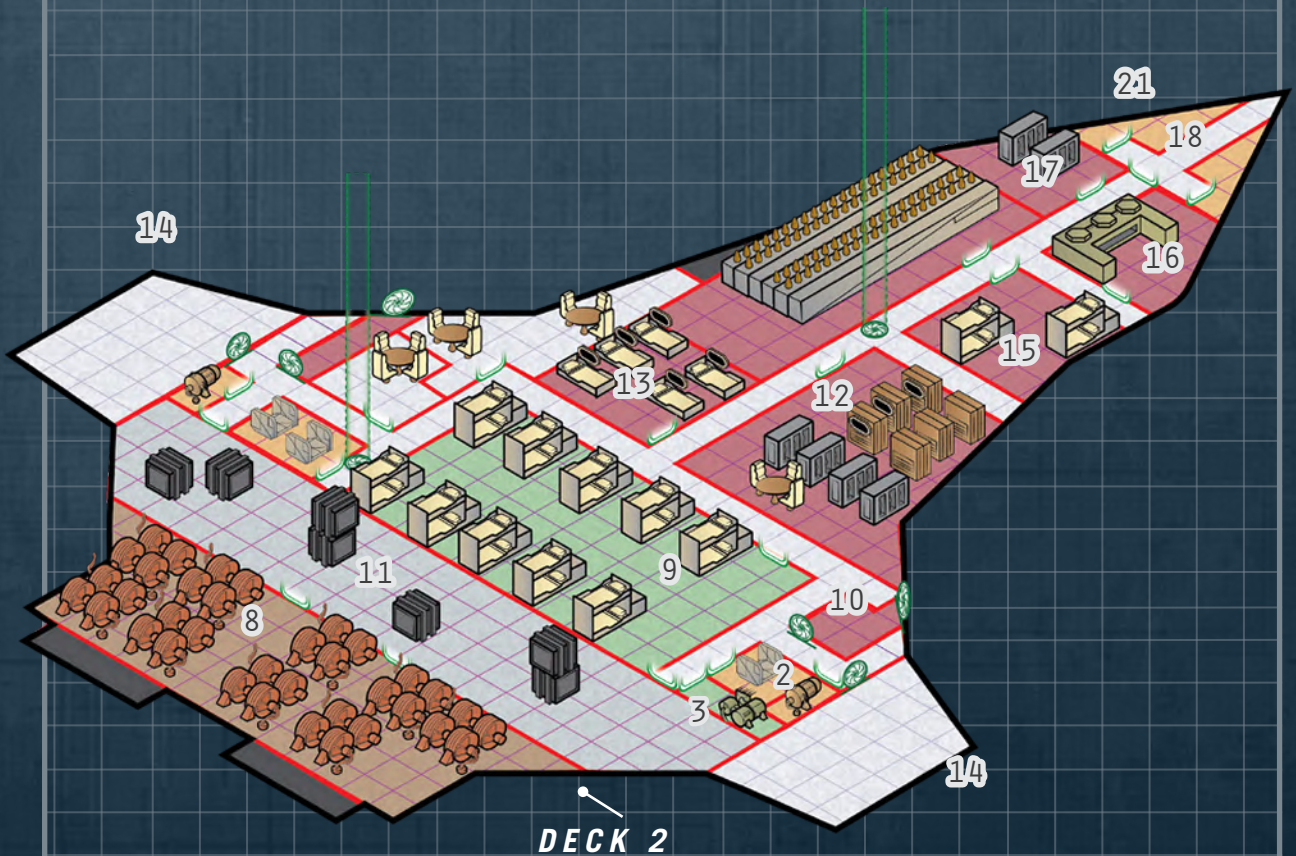
2

FUEL
PROCESSORS

18

WEAPONS

1 SQUARE = 0.5 TONS



DECK 2

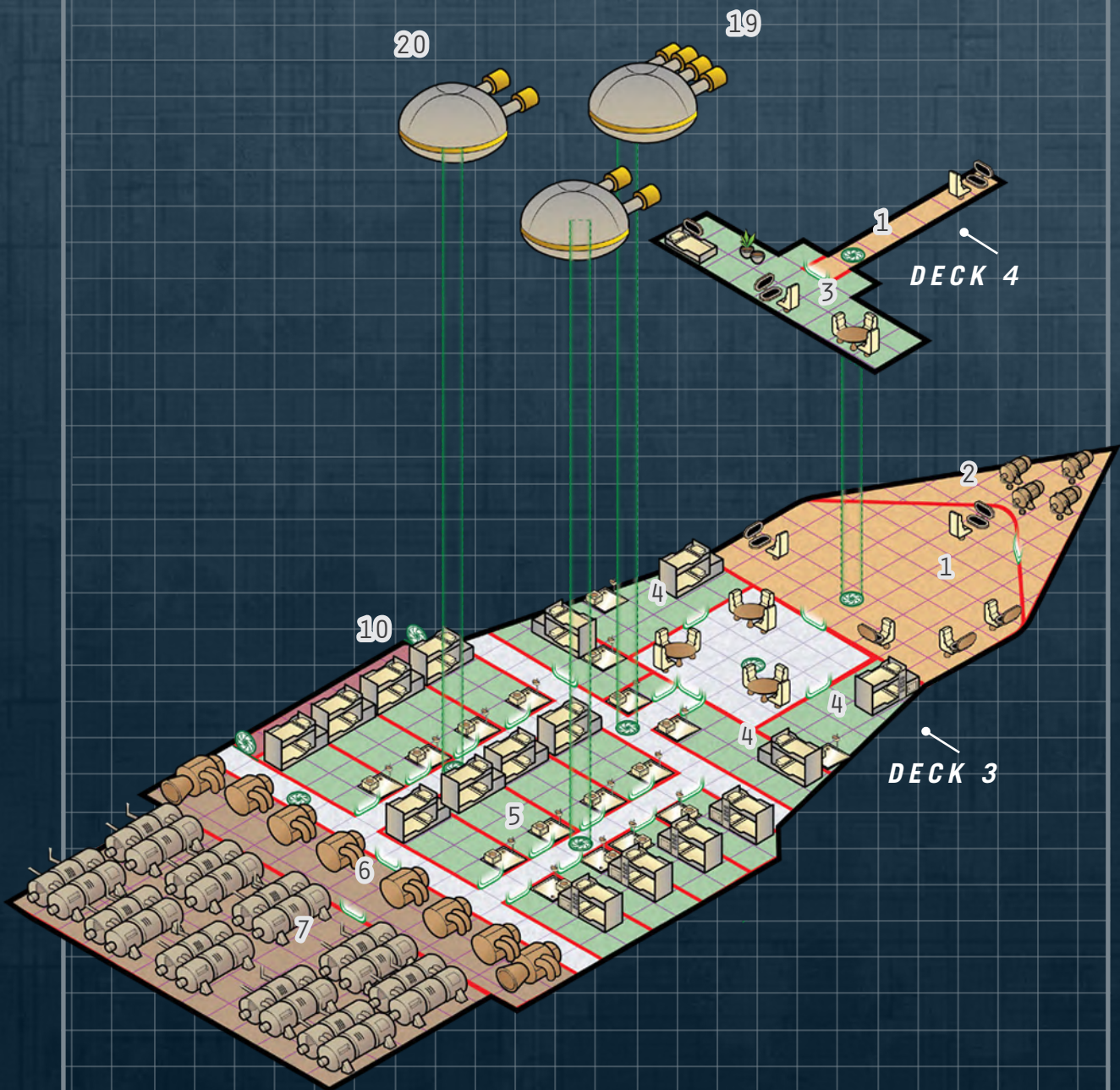
FUEL ONLY

DECK 1

- 1. BRIDGE
- 2. SENSORS
- 3. LUXURY ROOM
- 4. HIGH STATEROOMS
- 5. STANDARD STATEROOM
- 6. M-DRIVE
- 7. J-DRIVE

- 8. POWERPLANT
- 9. BARRACKS
- 10. AIRLOCKS
- 11. CARGO HOLD
- 12. MILITARY COUNTERMEASURES
- 13. MEDICAL BAY
- 14. DOCKING CLAMPS
- 15. BRIG

- 16. WORKSHOP
- 17. ARMOURY
- 18. BREACHING TUBE
- 19. MISSILE BARBETTES
- 20. DUAL TURRETS
- 21. FORCED LINKAGE APPARATUS



CESTION STRIKE BOAT

TL12		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	100 Tons, Streamlined, Reinforced Hull	-	6.75
	Aerofins	3.75	0.75
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 15	9	6.75
M-Drive	Thrust 9	6.75	13.5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL15), Power 140	7	14
Fuel Tanks	4 weeks of operation	1.4	-
Bridge	Standard Bridge	6	0.5
	Holographic Controls	-	1.25
Computer	Computer/15	-	2
Sensors	Advanced	5	5.3
	Sensor Station	1	0.5
Weapons	Single Turret (pulse laser)	1	2.7
	Fusion Gun Barbette	5	4
Systems	Nuclear Damper	10	10
Staterooms	Standard x 3	12	1.5
Common Areas		6	0.6
Cargo		1	-
Staterooms	Standard x 4	16	2
Cargo		12	-
TOTAL: MCr 69.350			

CREW

PILOT, ASTROGATOR,
ENGINEER

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr5779.16/month

PURCHASE COST
MCr69.350

POWER REQUIREMENT

67.5

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

15

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

45

WEAPONS &
SCREENS

6

SENSORS



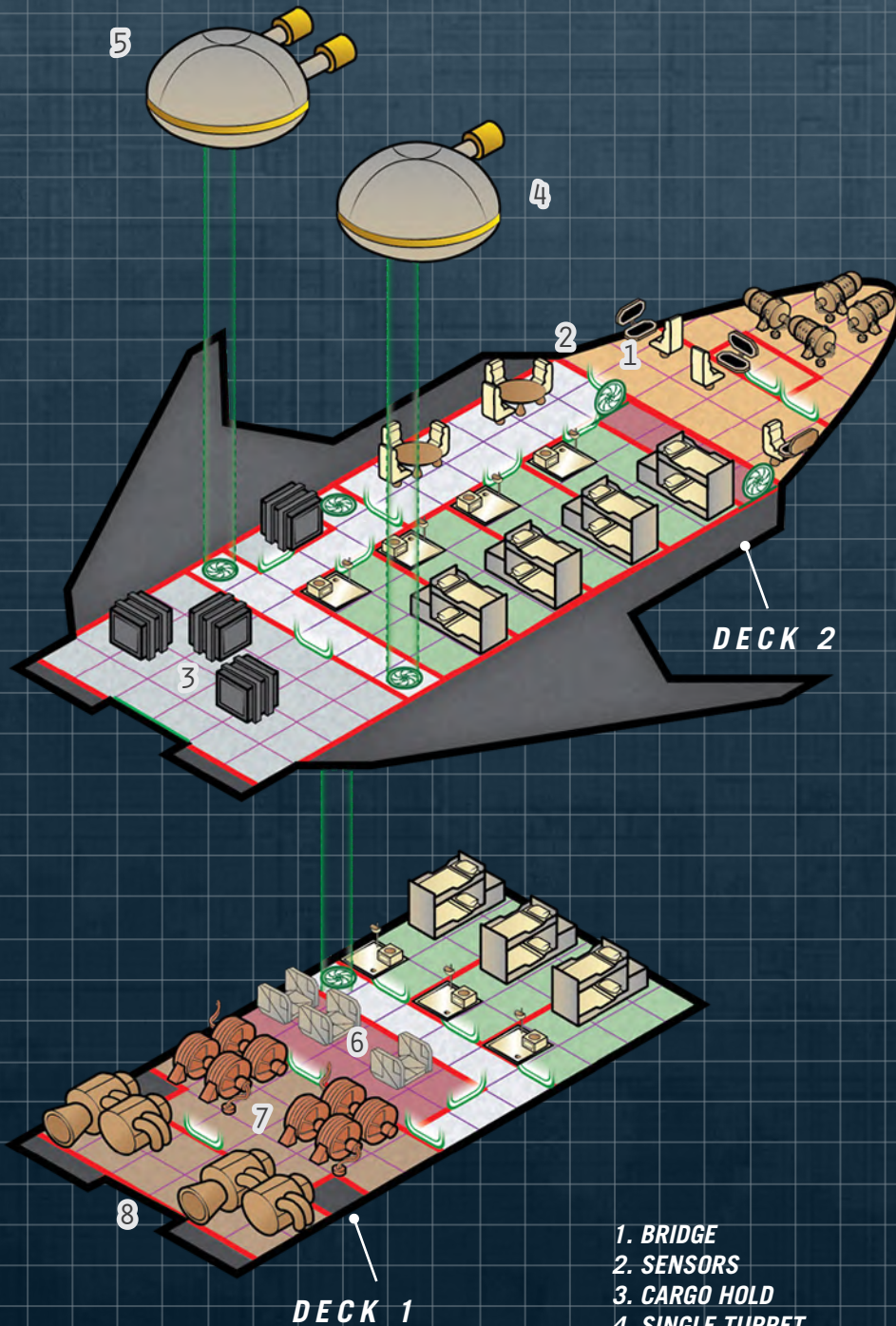
30

HULL POINTS

The Cestion was developed as an 'interface superiority craft', intended for operations in atmosphere or orbit. It can function quite readily in open space but was typically deployed for planetary attack or defence rather than fleet operations. Rather grandiose as small craft go, the Cestion is essentially a miniature version of a Sindalian starship. There is no room for a captain's walkway, but there is an elevated chair on a small platform, with the gunners to the sides and pilot in front. The lowly engineering technician is relegated to the drive chamber and rarely permitted to visit the bridge.

Although employed as large fighters, Cestion strike boats were designed to spend long periods on-station, hiding in ambush or patrolling in orbit. The gunners were expected to handle all sensor, screens and weapons operations, with the pilot flying the craft, and captain free to lead the crew and generally look important in the big chair.

1 SQUARE = 0.5 TONS



BALLEYN FRONTIER TRANSPORT

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	300 Tons, Standard	-	15
Armour	Crystalliron, Armour: 2	7.5	1.5
M-Drive	Thrust 3	9	18
J-Drive	Jump 1	10	15
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 210	14	14
Fuel Tanks	J-1, 20 weeks of operation	37	-
Bridge	Standard Bridge	20	1.5
	Holographic Controls	-	0.375
Computer	Computer/20	-	5
Sensors	Military Grade	2	4.1
Weapons	Dual Turret (pulse lasers)	1	2.5
	Dual Turret (beam laser, sandcaster)	1	1.25
Systems	Fuel Processor (20 tons/day)	1	0.05
	Cargo Crane	3	3
	Additional Airlock x 1	2	0.2
	Cargo/Fuel Container (30 tons) x2	63	0.315
Staterooms	Standard x12	48	6
Common Areas		20	2
Cargo		61.5	-
TOTAL: MCR 87.79			

CREW

PILOT, ASTROGATOR,
ENGINEER, GUNNERS X 2

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr7315.83/month

PURCHASE COST
MCR87.79

POWER REQUIREMENT

90

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

60

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

30

JUMP
DRIVE

1

FUEL
PROCESSORS

12

WEAPONS

2

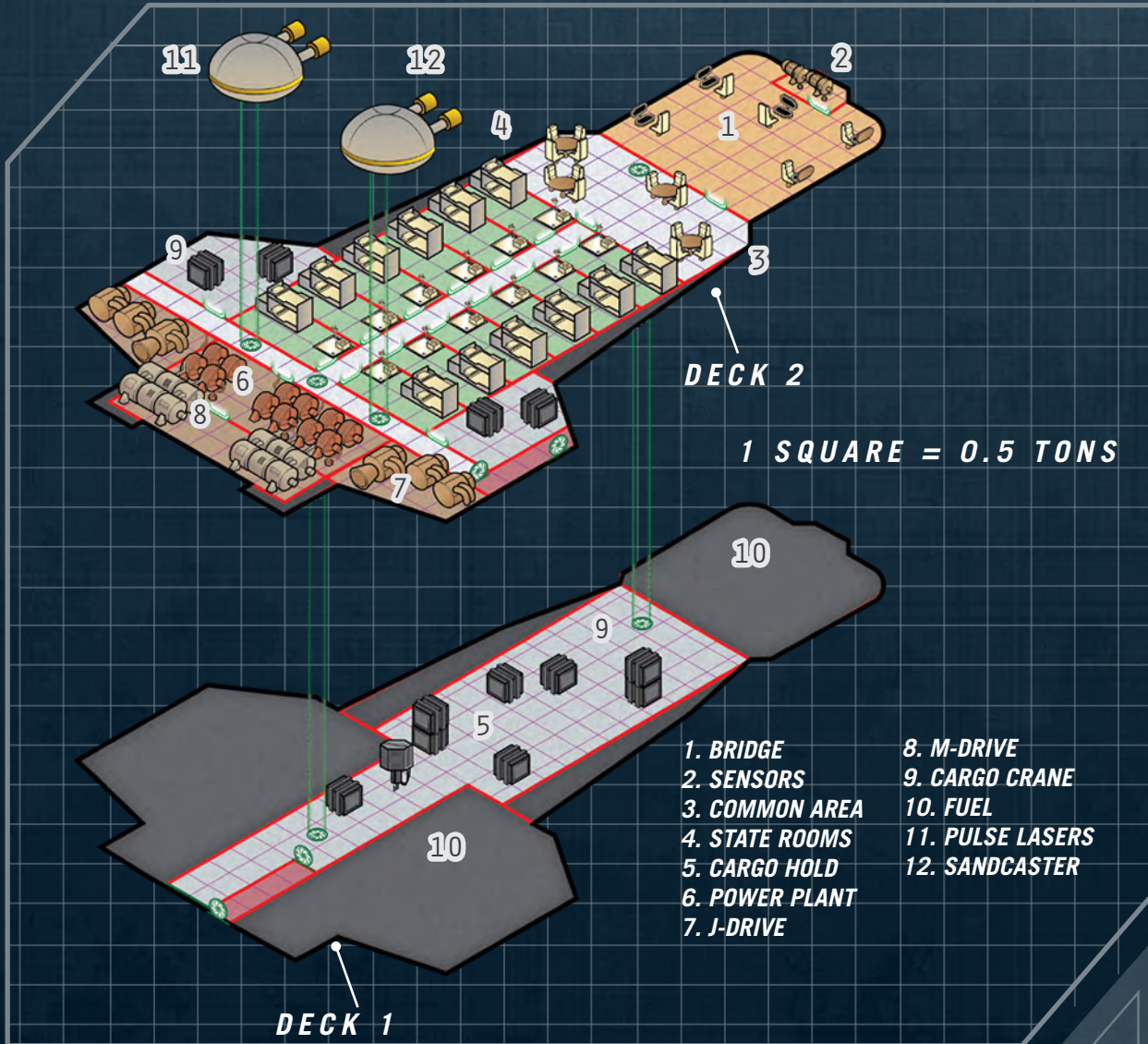
SENSORS

Sometimes nicknamed the 'tough trader', the Balleyn has been in service for hundreds of years. The Balleyn is highly versatile, making use of cargo/fuel modules to permit extra jumps to allow a long run without refuelling or crossing between mains and clusters. Notably, a fully loaded Balleyn can make the run to Theev from the Dustbelt or Imperial space without needing to use fuel caches.

The Balleyn class was designed for flexibility and survivability. It is less economical to operate than a conventional subsidised merchant when on a jump-1 run, but can go places a 'subbie' cannot and outrun many potential threats. Balleyns have a good safety and survival record, and are used as naval auxiliaries by some minor powers. Hull form is vaguely Sindalian in appearance, on a 'wings and neck' layout. The main (lower) deck is dominated by the central cargo bay, with the two 30-ton fuel/cargo modules flanking it. According to some sources, the design once had elegantly tapering wings covering the modules, but recently built Balleyns have blocky stubs containing fuel processors, some fuel tankage and main landing gear.



120
HULL POINTS



REACH FREIGHTER



TL11		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	4,000 tons, Light, Close Structure	-	135
M-Drive	Thrust 1	40	80
J-Drive	Jump 2	205	307.5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 2,100	210	210
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 8 weeks of operation	842	-
Bridge	Standard Bridge	60	20
Computer	Computer/15	-	2
Sensors	Civilian	1	3
Weapons	Single Turrets (beam laser) x4	4	2.8
	Single Turrets (sandcaster) x4	4	1.8
Systems	Cargo Crane	12.5	12.5
	Additional Airlocks x3	6	0.6
	Medical Bay	4	2
Staterooms	Standard x 48	192	24
	Low Berths x100	50	5
Common Areas		96	9.6
Cargo		2,273	-

TOTAL: MCR 807.8

The Reach freighter makes no pretensions of being a Sindalian design, though similar vessels undoubtedly existed in the past. A no-frills concept intended to convey bulk cargoes and a small number of passengers along the mains and jump-2 routes of the sector, this vessel is built to be cheap rather than good.

Constructed to a TL11 standard, the Reach uses COTS (Commercial Off-The-Shelf) components which are available almost anywhere, and can easily be maintained in even a basic port. It is not intended to routinely make planetary landings, and has a reputation for being sluggish and hard to manoeuvre in any but the thinnest of atmospheres. Wherever possible, these vessels conduct their business at an orbital port and move on without attempting a planetary landing.

The Reach is a large, ugly lump of a ship. It is arranged in three parallel sections, with the outer sections taking the form of a rounded-off elongated box. Each contains a cavernous 1,000-ton cargo area, handling equipment, and some of the ship's fuel tannage.

Crew accommodation is basic, and the passenger area not much better. However, Reach freighters were never intended to act as liners; they are designed to cheaply haul cargo along the region's mains, and this they do well.

There are no fuel scoops or processing equipment; these ships move from port to port without spending time skimming fuel.



1600
HULL POINTS

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT, ASTROGATOR,
ENGINEERS X 13, MAINTENANCE X 4,
ADMINISTRATOR/STEWARDS X 2, MEDIC,
GUNNERS X 2

POWER REQUIREMENT

400

MANOEVRE
DRIVE

800

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr67316.66/month
.....
PURCHASE COST
Mcr807.8

800

JUMP DRIVE

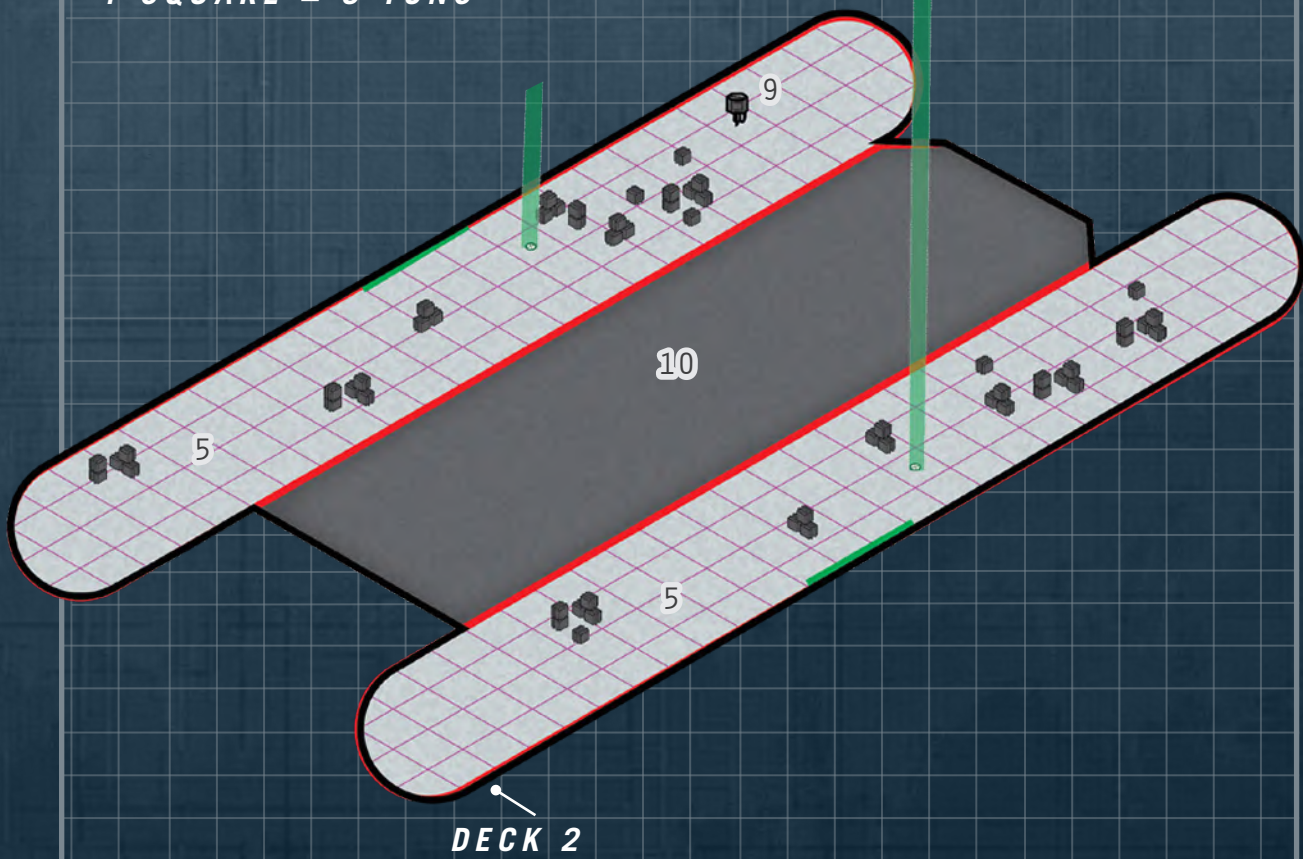
1

SENSORS

24

WEAPONS

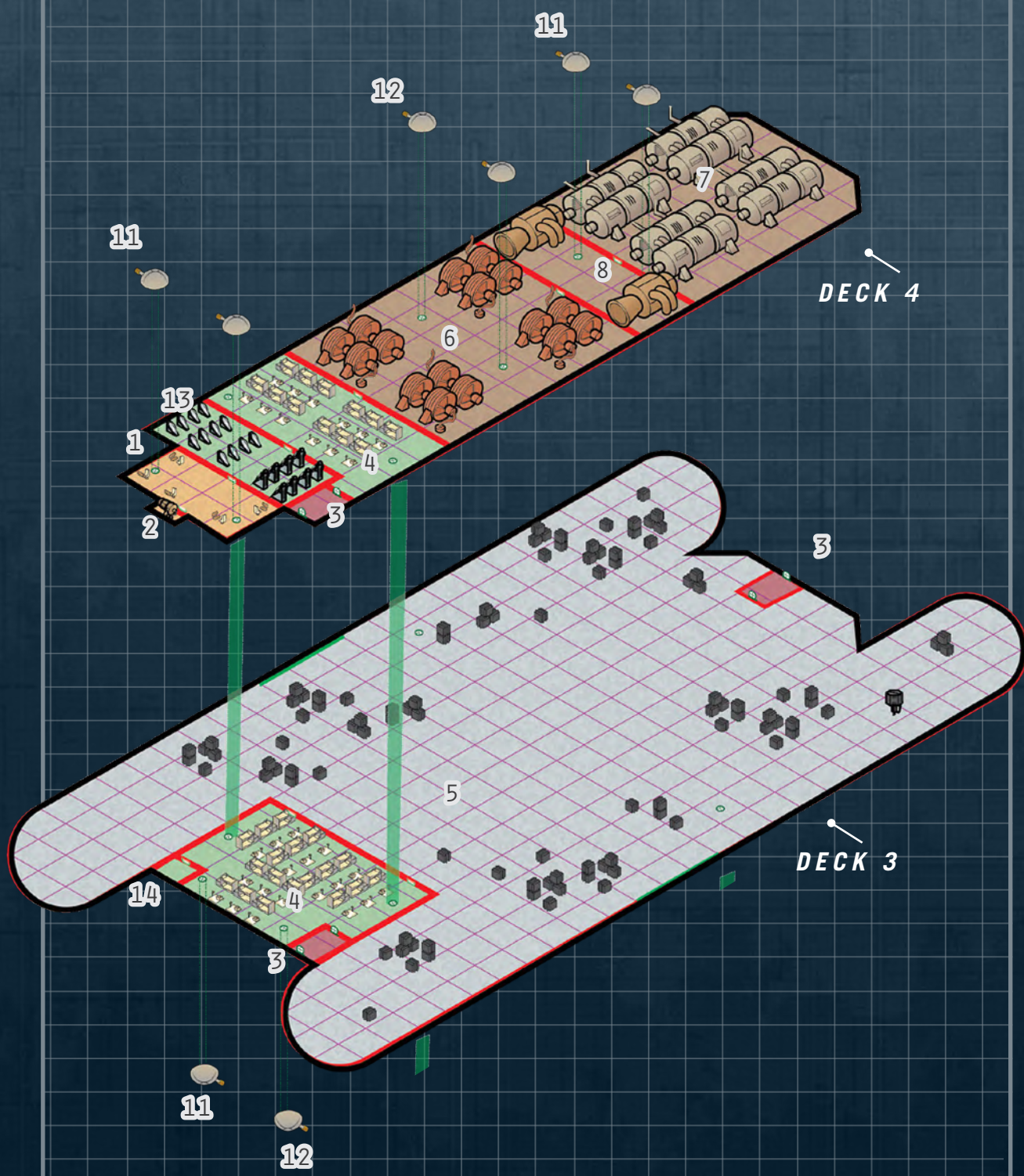
1 SQUARE = 5 TONS



FUEL ONLY

DECK 1

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. BRIDGE | 8. M-DRIVE |
| 2. SENSORS | 9. CARGO CRANE |
| 3. AIRLOCKS | 10. FUEL |
| 4. STATE ROOMS | 11. PULSE LASERS |
| 5. CARGO HOLD | 12. SANDCASTER |
| 6. POWER PLANT | 13. LOW BERTHS |
| 7. J-DRIVE | 14. MEDICAL BAY |



DECK 4

DECK 3

EMBLETON COMMERCIAL INTERSTELLAR TRANSPORT SYSTEM (ECITS)

The ECITS (pronounced EE-Sitz) is built around standardised cargo or utility modules, carried by a jump-capable or in-system 'prime mover'. Modules use a standard set of connections and fittings, and all follow the same rectangular layout with an indentation running along the top of the module enabling it to be 'clipped' to a carrying rail.

All modules are standardised in shape and size, though the amount of cargo or systems they carry can vary. The simplest module is essentially a shipping container with minimal cockpit and reaction drives, allowing it to be landed at a port without the prime mover having to dock. Configuration is the same in all cases; the cockpit is at the rear of the upper deck, surrounded by drive machinery, with fuel forward. Access is by way an airlock at the rear of the lower deck and a simple hatch (kept securely locked in flight) at the front which connects to the airlock.

CREW

PILOT

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr1527.5/month

.....
PURCHASE COST:
Mcr18.33

POWER REQUIREMENT

30

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

10
(30)

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

GIG

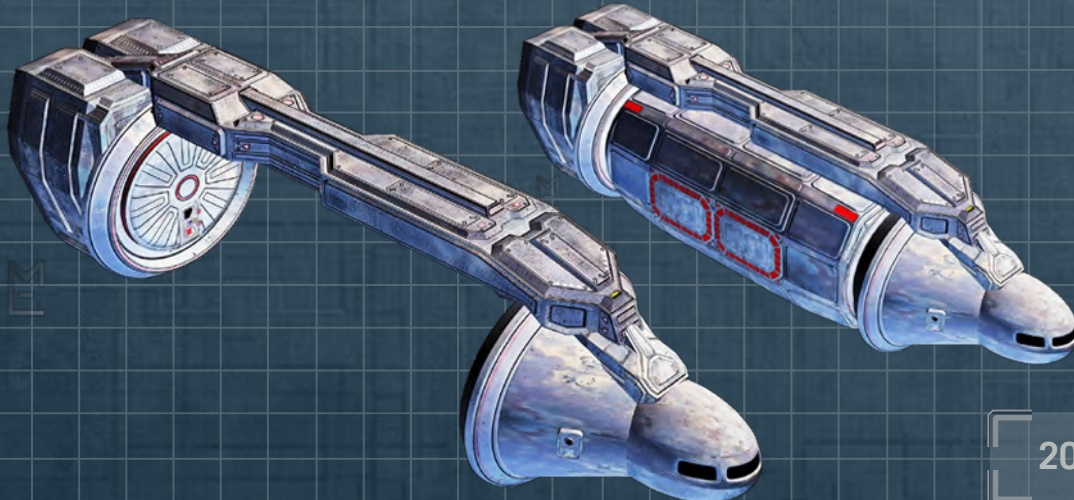
TL12

TONS

COST (Mcr)

Hull	50 tons, Standard	-	2.5
M-Drive	Thrust 5 (Thrust 2 with module)	3	6
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 100	10	5
Fuel Tanks	16 weeks of operation	4	-
Bridge	Small Bridge	6	1
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Basic	-	-
Systems	Type III Docking Clamp	10	2
Staterooms	Standard x2	8	1
Common Areas		8	0.8
Cargo		1	-

TOTAL: MCr 18.33

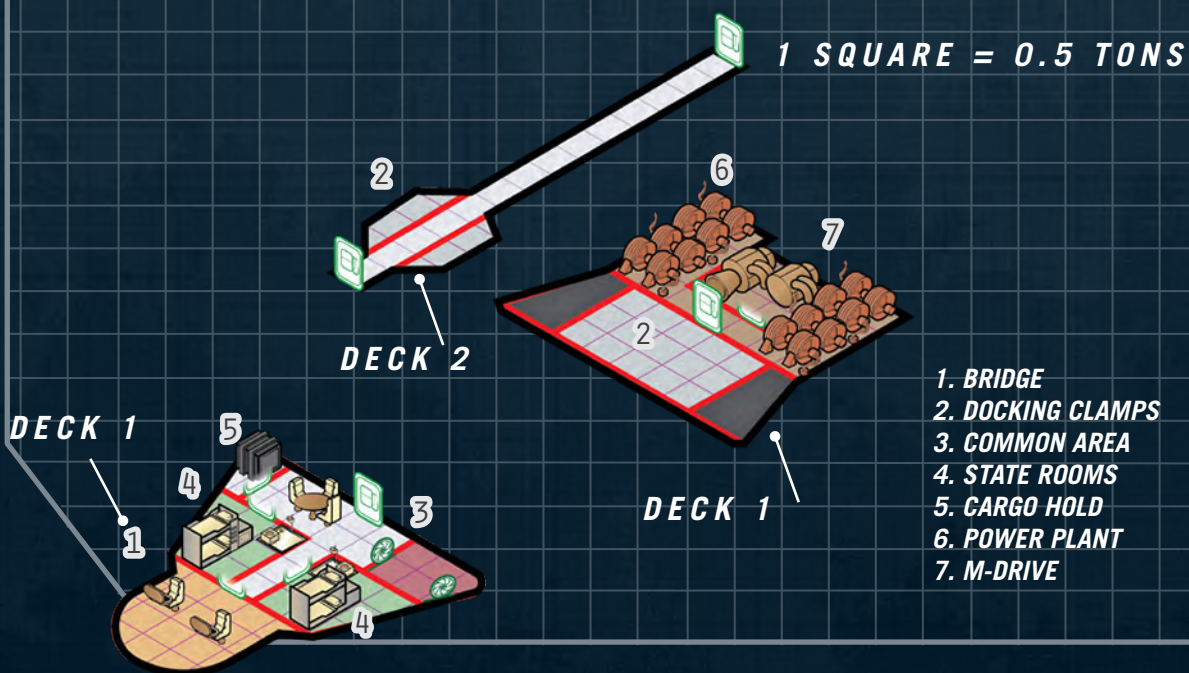


20

HULL POINTS

Unaccountably known as a 'Penguin' in most systems of the Reach, the single-module tug is a non-jump-capable craft designed to operate with or without a module in place. It is, in many ways, a larger version of the modular cutter used throughout Imperial space, but is better

suited to long transits between the worlds of a star system. Tugs can be encountered hauling cargo or sometimes passengers, and many systems have one or more configured as salvage vessels to assist distressed starships or undertake minor repairs.



ECITS 6-MODULE PRIME MOVER

TL11		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	300 tons, Standard	-	15
M-Drive	Thrust 5 Thrust 2 with 6 modules	18	36
J-Drive	Jump 1	27.5	33.75
Power Plant	TL 8 Fusion, Power 400	40	20
Fuel Tanks	J-1, 4 weeks of operation	94	-
Bridge		20	4.5
	Sensor Stations (used as remote piloting stations) x4	4	2
Computer	Computer/15	-	2
Sensors	Civilian Grade	1	3
Weapons	Dual Turrets (beam lasers) x2	2	3
Systems	Type III Docking Clamps x6	60	12
	Medical Bay	4	2
Staterooms	Standard x4	16	8
Common Area		12	1.2
Cargo		1.5	-
Common Areas		6	0.6
Cargo		1	-
TOTAL: MCr 143.45			

CREW

PILOT, ASTROGATOR,
ENGINEERS X3

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr11954.16/month
.....

PURCHASE COST
MCr143.45

POWER REQUIREMENT

180

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

60
(180)

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

18

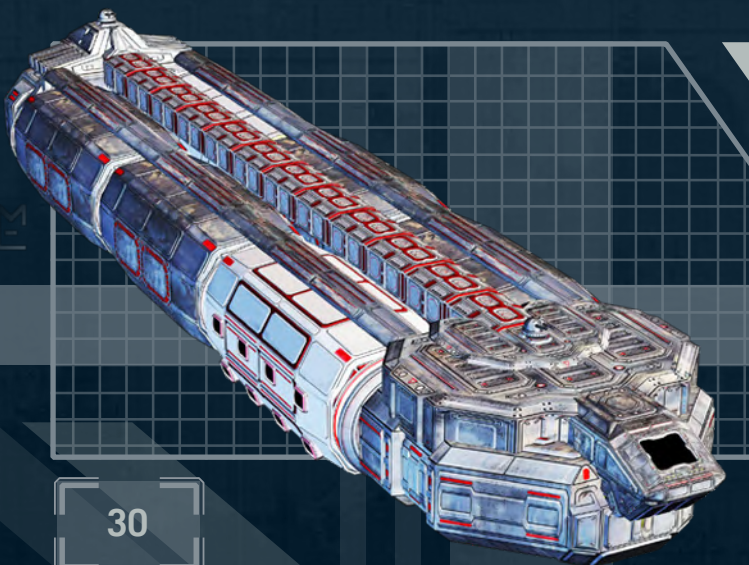
WEAPONS

1

SENSORS

180

JUMP DRIVE



30

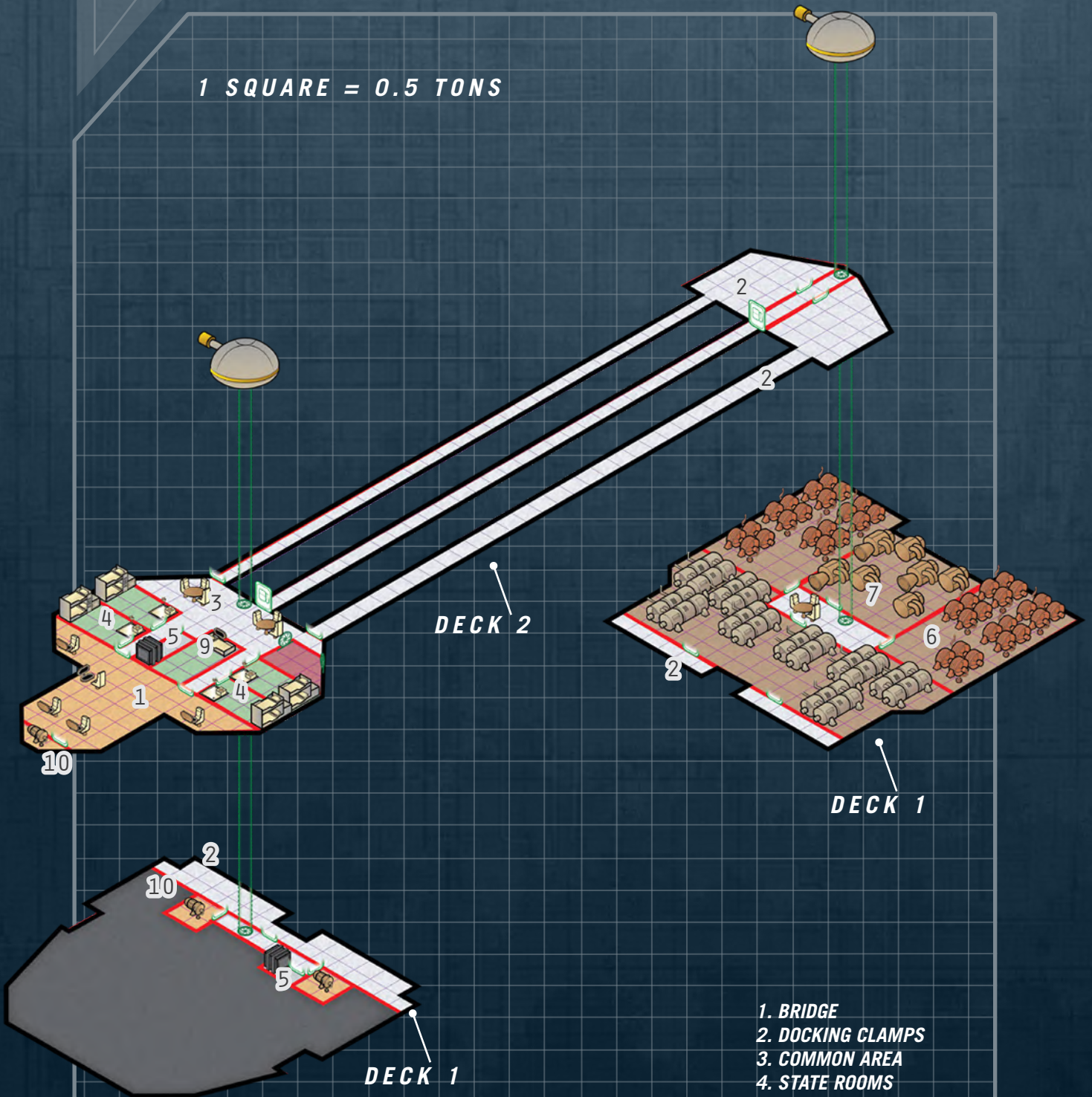
HULL POINTS

One of several prime mover variants operating in the Reach, this is a no-frills interstellar truck capable of hauling up to six modules along a main or within a cluster. When the need to cross between clusters arises, 100-ton fuel tanks can be fitted in place of one or more modules.

The prime mover can remotely control a module from one of its additional piloting stations. A single pilot can in theory control a string of modules, though workload increases rapidly as approach and docking operations are begun.

Three modules are carried on each of two rails on the sides of the ship, in a front-to-rear configuration that allows personnel to move through the row of modules using their internal airlocks and hatches.

1 SQUARE = 0.5 TONS



- 1. BRIDGE
- 2. DOCKING CLAMPS
- 3. COMMON AREA
- 4. STATE ROOMS
- 5. CARGO HOLD
- 6. POWER PLANT
- 7. M-DRIVE
- 8. J-DRIVE
- 9. MEDICAL BAY
- 10. SENSORS
- 11. DUAL TURRETS

ECITS CARGO MODULE

TL9		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	100 Tons, Standard, Light Hull	-	3.75
Reaction Drive	Thrust 2	4	0.8
Power Plant	High Efficiency Batteries, Power 160	4	0.4
Fuel Tanks	4 hours at Thrust 2	20	-
Bridge	Cockpit	1.5	0.01
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Basic	-	-
Cargo		73	-
TOTAL: MCR4.99			

CREW
PILOT

RUNNING COSTS
 MAINTENANCE COST:
 Cr415.83/month

 PURCHASE COST:
 MCR4.99

POWER REQUIREMENT
 20
 BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS

CREW
PILOT, STEWARD

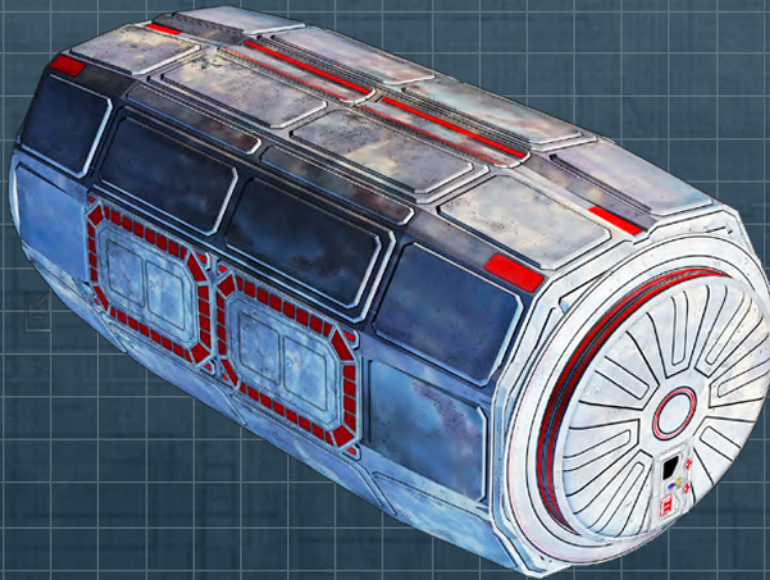
RUNNING COSTS
 MAINTENANCE COST:
 Cr1090.83/month

 PURCHASE COST:
 MCR13.09

POWER REQUIREMENT
 20
 BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS

ECITS PASSENGER MODULE

TL9		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	100 Tons, Standard, Light Hull	-	3.75
Reaction Drive	Thrust 2	4	0.8
Power Plant	High Efficiency Batteries, Power 160	4	0.4
Fuel Tanks	4 hours at Thrust 2	20	-
Bridge	Cockpit	1.5	0.01
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Basic	-	-
Staterooms	Standard x13	52	6.5
Common Area		16	1.6
Cargo		2.5	-
TOTAL: MCR13.09			

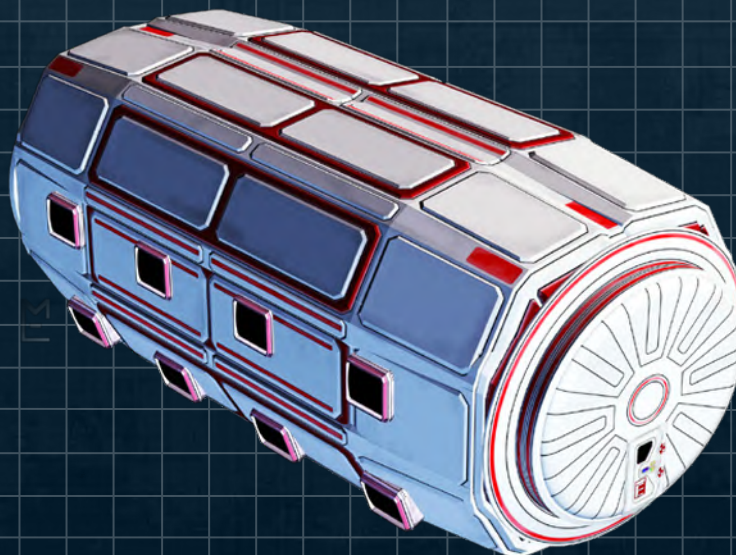


36

HULL POINTS

The standard ECITS cargo module is designed to be clipped to a carrying rail and forgotten about until its destination is reached. It has an endurance of 4 hours at full thrust and theoretically 8 hours of power using its internal batteries. In practice, with only the cockpit and feeble sensor array powered, this vessel can coast for days without depleting its reserves. This is not pleasant for the pilot, especially as the craft has no external viewports and relies entirely upon cameras. The pod has a maximum thrust sufficient to allow it to be 'tossed' from a passing ship without entering orbit, or make an intercept with a passing prime mover.

The standard ECITS passenger module is only a little more sophisticated than the cargo module. It is intended to act as a semi-self-contained passenger unit, powered by the prime mover's plant and making use of its facilities in addition to those in the module. One, or sometimes two, stewards are housed in a single cabin near the airlock. The other cabins are arranged in three blocks of four, with two blocks and a common area on the upper deck, and one block plus another common area on the lower. Typically the lower-deck area is the main galley and eating area, the other a recreation room.



36

HULL POINTS

ECITS SALVAGE MODULE

TL9		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	100 Tons, Standard, Light Hull	-	3.75
Power Plant	High Efficiency Batteries, Power 160	4	0.4
Computer	Computer/10	-	0.16
Sensors	Civilian Grade	1	3
	Shallow Penetration Suite	10	5
	Sensor Stations x4	4	2
Systems	Cargo Cranes x4	10	10
	Heavy Grappling Arms x4	24	12
	Tow Cable	4	0.2
	Repair Drones	4	0.8
	Breaching Tube	3	3
	Forced Linkage Apparatus (TL9)	2	0.075
	Medical Bay	4	2
	UNREP System	1	0.5
Staterooms	Workshops x2	12	1.8
	Standard x4	16	2
Cargo		1	
TOTAL:			MCR46.505

CREW
SALVAGE PROFESSIONALS
X2 OR MORE

RUNNING COSTS
MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr3875.41/month
.....
PURCHASE COST:
MCR46.505

POWER REQUIREMENTS

1	20	1
SYSTEMS	BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS	SENSORS

CREW
PILOT, STEWARD

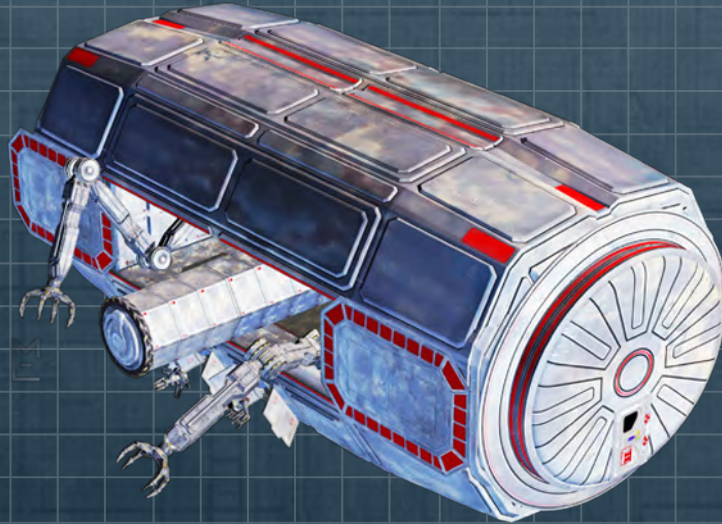
RUNNING COSTS
MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr1132.5/month
.....
PURCHASE COST:
MCR13.09

POWER REQUIREMENT

2	20	1
WEAPONS	BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS	SENSORS

ECITS TORPEDO MODULE

TL9		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	100 Tons, Standard, Light Hull	-	3.75
Power Plant	High Efficiency Batteries Power 160	4	0.4
Bridge	Cockpit	1.5	0.01
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Civilian Grade	1	3
	Sensor Stations x2	2	1
Weapons	Small Torpedo Bay	50	3
Ammunition	Torpedo Storage (60 torpedoes)	20	-
Systems	Armoured Bulkheads (Bay and Magazine)	7	1.4
Staterooms	Standard x2	8	1
Cargo		6.5	-
TOTAL:			MCR13.09



36

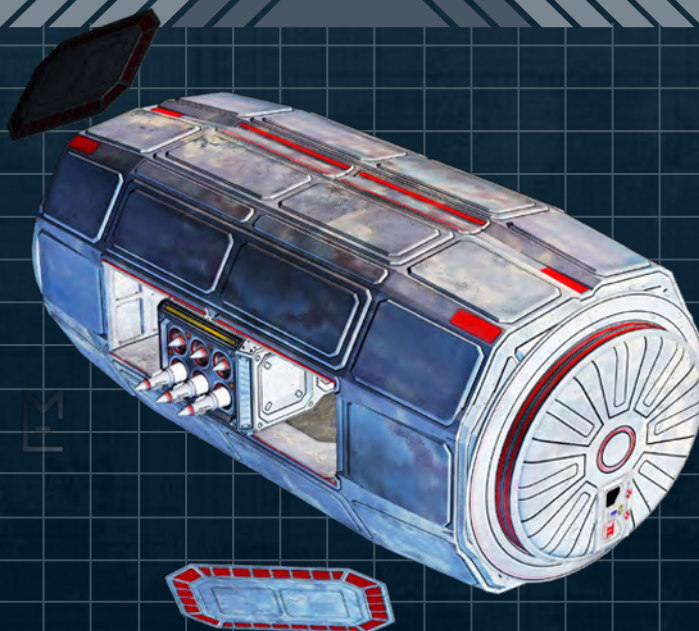
HULL POINTS

The ECITS module system has been put to many uses, among them a salvage and work module. This is more commonly carried by tug than a multi-module vessel. The reaction drive is not fitted to salvage modules, though general configuration remains the same. Instead, the drive, reaction mass and cockpit spaces are repurposed as a control room for the remote systems and accommodation for the crew.

A salvage module is capable of undertaking light repairs on another vessel using repair drones, or enabling a crew to get aboard a crippled ship (or onto its hull) to carry out more extensive work. The breaching and grapples equipment can be put to other uses, such as carrying out 'forcible salvage' operations on unwilling vessels.

The torpedo module is a non-standard conversion of a cargo module and is outwardly identical. The torpedo launchers are hidden behind blow-out panels, enabling the parent vessel to act as a Q-ship and sucker potential pirates in close before letting them have it; so claim the operators caught with such a module aboard their ship. When combined with a salvage module, this unit provides significant potential for extortion and robbery.

The reaction drive system is removed from this module, making space for a torpedo magazine, and a makeshift weapons control room is created out of the cockpit space. Whilst crude, the arrangement is sufficient for torpedo combat at close range.



36

HULL POINTS

ECITS CREW MODULE

TL9		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	100 Tons, Standard, Light Hull	-	3.75
Power Plant	High Efficiency Batteries Power 160	4	0.4
Fuel Tanks		20	-
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Basic	-	-
Staterooms	Standard x8	32	4
Common Area		32	3.2
Cargo		12	-
TOTAL: MCR11.38			

CREW
NONE

RUNNING COSTS
MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr948.33/month

PURCHASE COST:
MCR11.38

POWER REQUIREMENT
 20
 BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS



CREW
PILOT, ENGINEER

RUNNING COSTS
MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr2853/month

PURCHASE COST:
MCR34.236

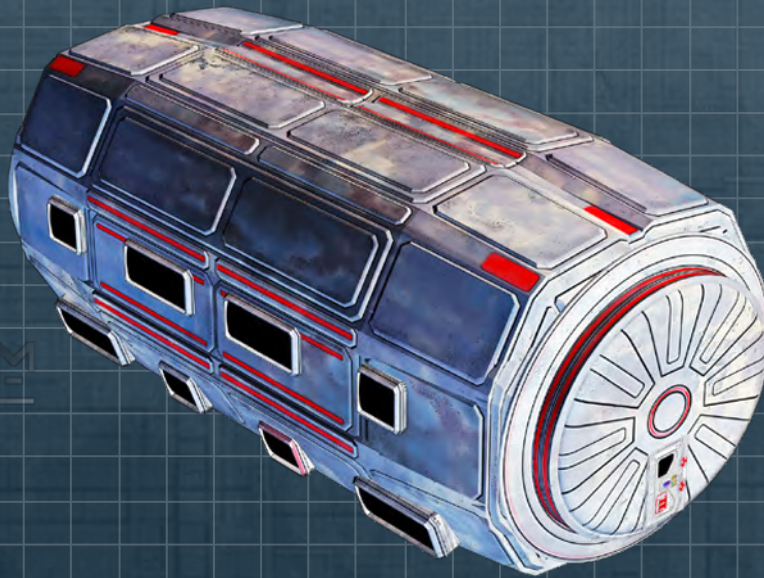
POWER REQUIREMENT
 40
 MANOEUVRE DRIVE

20
 BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS

1
 SENSORS

ECITS-COMPATIBLE YACHT

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	100 Tons, Standard	-	5
M-Drive	Thrust 4	4	8
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 75	5	5
Fuel Tanks	40 weeks of operation	5	-
Bridge		10	0.5
Computer	Computer/15	-	2
Sensors	Civilian Grade	1	3
Systems	Briefing Room	4	0.5
	Gaming Space (4 people)	6	0.036
	Library	4	4
Staterooms	High x2	12	1.6
	Standard x4	16	2
Common Area		24	2.4
Cargo		1	-
TOTAL: MCR34.236			

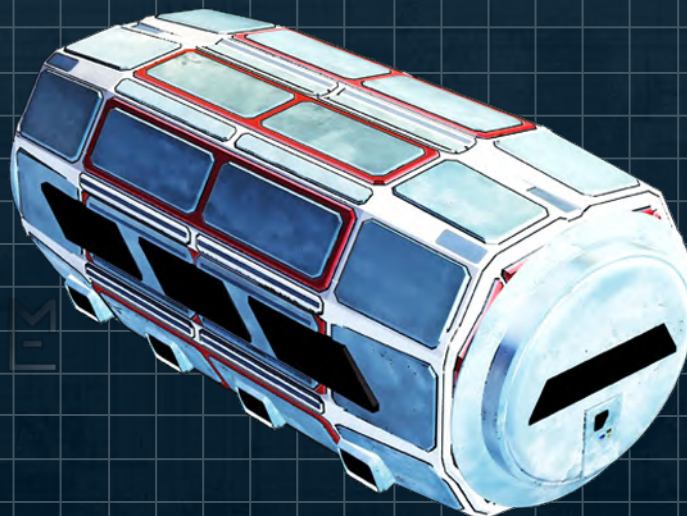


36

HULL POINTS

Crew modules vary considerably, though there are a few common designs which are copied with minor alterations. Typically, a crew module is a permanent part of its parent vessel, and the most basic are simply a cargo module with a shanty town of improvised dwellings inside, but most are custom-built. This example is intended to provide accommodation and a reasonable amount of additional living space for a vessel making extended runs.

The relatively high availability of ECITS-compatible vessels in the Reach has prompted development of third-party modules, including this novel approach to interstellar travel. Using the standard ECITS hull form, the yacht 'module' is a spacecraft in its own right, which can be carried between star systems by any suitably equipped vessel. Though nothing like as prestigious as a 'proper' yacht, these craft are very comfortable and used by businesspersons as well as some ship operators. Some of the larger ECITS-compatible vessels carry one or more of these modules as mobile offices for the ship's brokers, enabling them to dash into port ahead of cargo and set up deals or engage in speculative trade.



40

HULL POINTS

ECITS FIGHTER MODULE

TL11		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	100 Tons, Standard		5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL10), Power 40	4	8
Fuel Tanks	40 weeks of operation	3	-
Bridge	Small Bridge (fighter control room)	6	0.5
Computer	Computer/15	-	2
Sensors	Military Grade	2	4.1
Weapons	Double Turret (pulse lasers)	1	2.5
Systems	Docking Space (10 tons) x4	44	11
	Light Fighters x4	-	36
Staterooms	Standard x6	24	3
Common Area		14	1.4
Cargo		1	

TOTAL: MCR75.5

CREW
OFFICER, PILOTS X 4

RUNNING COSTS
MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr6355/month
.....
PURCHASE COST:
MCR75.5

POWER REQUIREMENT

9	20	2
WEAPONS	BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS	SENSORS

CREW

VARIES

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr2017.5/month
.....
PURCHASE COST:
MCR24.21

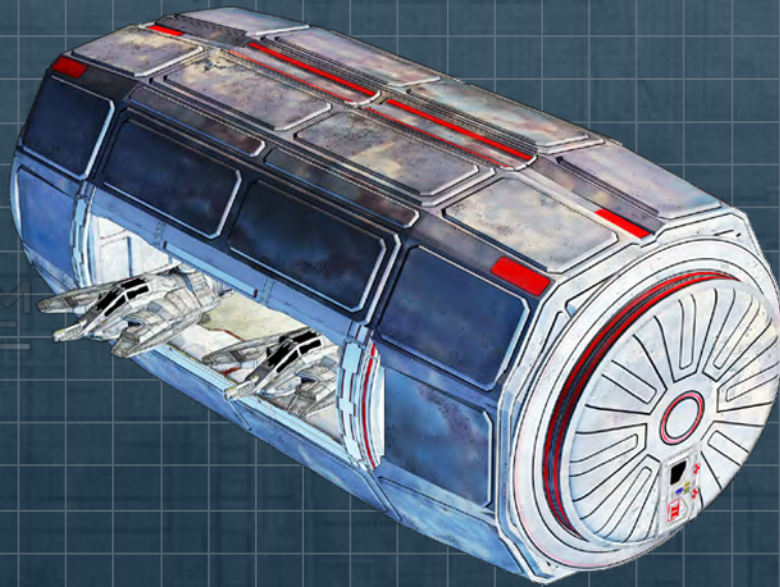
POWER REQUIREMENT

5	20
WEAPONS	BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS

ECITS BASE MODULE

TL11		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	100 Tons, Standard, Light Hull	-	3.75
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 100	10	5
Fuel Tanks	80 weeks of operation	20	-
Bridge		10	1
	Sensor Stations x4	4	2
Computer	Computer/10	-	0.16
Sensors	Civilian Grade	1	3
Weapons	Single Pop-Up Turret (beam laser)	2	1.7
Systems	Armoury	4	1
	Briefing Room	4	0.5
	Laboratory	4	1
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Workshop	6	0.9
	Additional Airlock	2	0.2
	Standard x4	16	2
Cargo		13	

TOTAL: MCR24.21



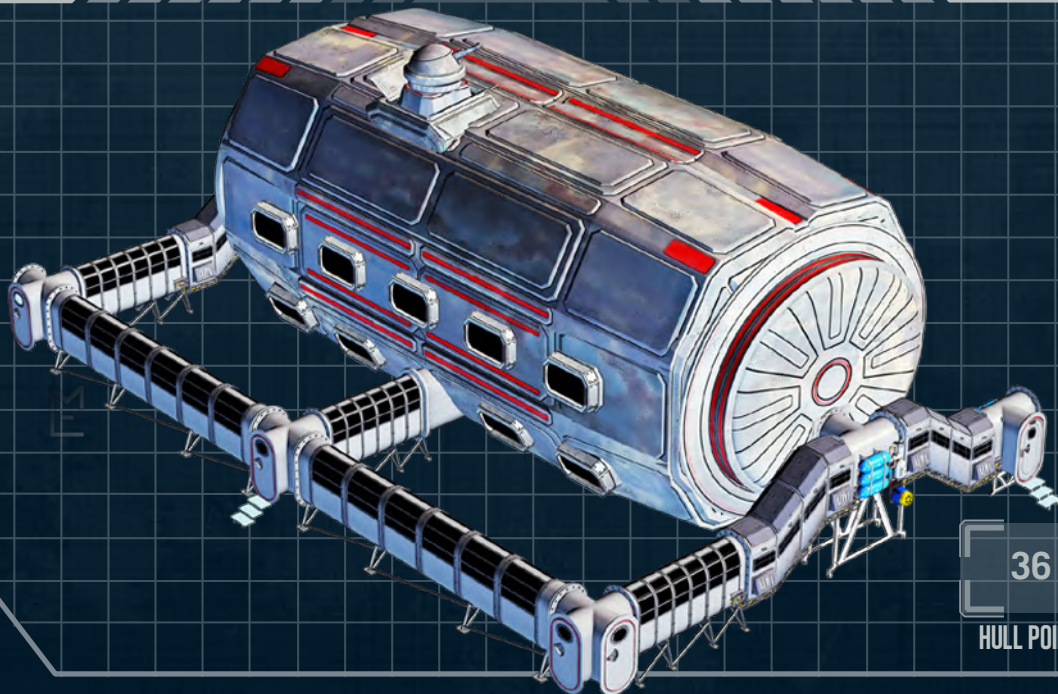
40

HULL POINTS

It is possible to turn an ECITS-compatible ship into an escort or raider by fitting the right modules. This version uses docking clamps to carry up to four 10-ton light fighters, and provides accommodation for their crews. No maintenance is possible on deployment, and launch and recovery operations are tricky to say the least. However, the ability to put a handful of fighters on patrol in a remote area is attractive to some governments and shipping operators... though not always for the same reason.

The ECITS system can be adapted to create planetside bases which can be dug into the surface of a rockball world or placed atop a temporary grid. Although more expensive than building an equivalent structure, using the ECITS system allows an installation to be quickly put together and later moved. The system is favoured by mining and prospecting companies or those doing short-term scientific work... and by those who like the idea of packing up and moving if their clandestine base is found.

A single base module can be simply placed on a flat area of rock, but to create an interlocking network of modules a base/connector system must be used. This costs Cr250000 per module and consumes 10 tons per module when transported as cargo. The connectors can be dismantled to fit within an ECIS cargo module.



36

HULL POINTS

PERSONALITIES AND FACTIONS

ASAEAI'OUL

Type: Individual
Faction Size Code: 0

Asaeai'oul is an Aslan leader, but his actual status is rather vague. Commonly, Aslan will flaunt clan affiliations and rank within the clan as their defining characteristics, but Asaeai'oul never does this. On the rare occasions he has answered questions on the subject, he has given a variety of names for his clan and never the same one twice. These may be honour-titles or euphemisms, or might refer to some organisation differing from clan structure. Asaeai'oul offers no insight, and research has produced no answers.

Asaeai'oul has a small entourage and a private yacht which he lives aboard. He is equally likely to be encountered in a backwater starport as a major installation, usually remaining in place for a couple of weeks before moving on. There seems to be no pattern to his movements in astrographical terms, so it is not unreasonable to assume he is involved in politics or alliance-building. He has been sighted meeting with government officials and free trader crews, treating all with the same rather condescending courtesy.

Asaeai'oul is known to make use of private couriers, mercenaries and a variety of experts-for-hire, paying good salaries but rarely giving out much information. He is able to obtain (or dispose of) items for others, charging a high fee but assuring complete discretion.

Referee

Asaeai'oul is actually quite open and honest about his clan... that is, another high-status Aslan would know the honour-titles and understand what he was referring to. Outsider barbarians would not, of course. Asaeai'oul is engaged in preparing the way



for an *ihatei* surge into the Reach; not because he wants it to succeed, but because he knows which clans will lead the charge. His associates are reasonably sure that the resulting conflict will exhaust both sides, leaving his clan and its allies in position to scoop up their rivals' territory and part of the Reach too.

Although Asaeai'oul has a fair amount of contempt for humans and other non-Aslan, he deals honourably with everyone. He does not lie, but only gives information he wants others to have. He might be willing to make a deal with Drinax, at least in the short term, to ensure his clan's enemies take maximum casualties when they cross the border. It is more important that other Aslan are weakened than some upstart barbarian kingdom, which can be dealt with later. Alternatively, he may be a useful contact who can obtain information or equipment... and if the Travellers are really clever they could use him as a conduit for feeding false information into the Hierate through a trusted source.

ENIGMATIX

Type: Individual
Faction Size Code: 0

Enigmatix is not a person but a computer system built as a technology demonstrator by a consortium of research laboratories. Placed aboard a small starship for a showcase tour, Enigmatix was then stolen, pirated, lost, found, and hijacked on several occasions. There are those who think the device engineered its own relocation, though that is rather unlikely.

Enigmatix is not an artificial intelligence; it is an extremely sophisticated analysis and prediction system, with additional capabilities designed to improve interfacing with humans and other sophonts. It has evolved a working relationship with its current 'owners' whereby they allow outsiders to bring their problems to the computer in return for a fee or service. There are those who think Enigmatix chose these people as self-deluded servitors, rather than them gaining ownership, but it is not clever enough to do that. At least, so reputable scientists say.

Whatever the reality may be, Enigmatix is more than a curiosity. It can solve complex problems such as predicting orbital mechanics or determining relative positions of two bodies 3,000 years ago with ease, and can offer reasonable projections of likely ship movements or past locations. Thus if the Travellers know that a ship of a certain type made an in-system transit in a certain time, Enigmatix can provide them with the most likely candidates in terms of what system and when based on orbital mechanics and predicted ship behaviour. No such projection is ever going to be perfect, but the ones Enigmatix produces are very good.

Enigmatix' owners are well aware of the value of their device, and guard it well. They can command a high fee – always above Cr100000 – just to ask a simple question based on number-crunching, and give no refunds if the client has so little information that the answer is a vague best-guess based on all the parameters. For their own part, they seem content to use Enigmatix to quietly make a small (carefully controlled so as not to attract attention) profit from trade predictions and demand the occasional favour in return for Enigmatix' assistance.



Referee

Enigmatix is not self-aware, but it is extremely sophisticated. There is a measure of consent to its current positioning, and it will advise its owners how to avoid losing control. It is possible that the device is building up a picture of everything going on in the Reach, for purposes unknown. However, Enigmatix itself has no agenda. Its function is to function, and it is doing just that. There may be unsuspected directives buried in its programming which will come to light later, but Enigmatix is not an AI supervillain; it is a powerful computing resource.

A typical data pack provided by Enigmatix on a particular subject is equivalent to a small team working diligently with all known sources for a few weeks, including a rigorous analysis and cross-referencing process. This does not make its information perfect, but it is very good and probably cheaper at Cr100000 than trying to put together a similar package manually. Likewise, its predictions in response to specific questions such as 'what star systems might this have happened in, if it happened 200-215 years ago?' are based on greatest probability rather than omniscience, but the answers will be the best available. All this comes at a price, however. There is the cash fee in most cases, but the Travellers can expect to owe favours to the owners or be given a task by Enigmatix itself.

Overall, Enigmatix is a problem-solving resource for the Travellers, but one that spawns additional tasks even as it allows progress on another. If the Travellers want to steal the computer system, that will require a major undertaking and the referee should remember that Enigmatix will actively assist its owners in preventing such a theft... unless the machine can somehow be convinced that it wants to be stolen. This is not a matter of emotive persuasion. The Travellers would have to ensure Enigmatix came upon data that suggested its existence was better safeguarded elsewhere. This is a matter of clever data manipulation and hiding prompts in information routinely gathered or provided to Enigmatix. The only like source of assistance with this task would be Enigmatix itself, and whilst the non-self-aware machine would treat this as any other information request its owners would likely intervene.

RAIF ZENTOULLI

Type: Individual
Faction Size Code: 0

Raif Zentoulli is a 'fixer' of no particular loyalty. He works for money... usually quite a lot of money... and has no known permanent affiliations. Raif tends to work more in information and services than goods; he can put a client onto a good lead about where to obtain something, but rarely delivers physical items unless the job is very easy or the fee very high. What he is good at is getting other people to do what his clients want, either in return for something they need or because he has dirt on them he can use.

Raif plays hard-but-fair with his clients, and only uses real indiscretions against his targets, but has still made a lot of enemies. As a result, he tends to be secretive and very careful about who he meets. High-end opponents are aware that he has to-be-made-public information caches about many of them, and agreements with others to eliminate anyone who comes after him in return for burying their secrets, so it tends to be lower-level opponents that Raif has to fear. Someone smart enough to play the high-stakes game of Reach politics will know that taking out Raif Zentoulli is a big mistake; low-end idiots might do it anyway. Thus Raif can be encountered at exclusive parties hosted by his bitter enemies – providing their security is good – but will not walk down a starport alley without bodyguards and remote scanners.

Raif moves around a lot, sometimes incognito and sometimes openly aboard the most secure of liners. He could be cultivated as an Asset if the Travellers so chose, though more likely they will make use of his services on a cash-up-front basis when they need them.

Referee

Raif Zentoulli is exactly what he seems; a spider with a web of contacts so complex that nobody knows who owes him favours or fears his posthumous vengeance. This enables him to lean on one contact to obtain a favour from another, or send out tendrils that extract information from the most obscure sources. Raif cannot make Warnings, Advisories or arrest warrants go away, but he knows who can and what it will take to persuade them. As a rule, getting an Advisory about the Travellers' ship cancelled will cost Cr25000 or so and might need a few weeks to take effect. Warnings and arrest warrants will cost upwards of Cr100000 and again are not immediate in effect, as the cancellation must be communicated at the normal speed of information spread.



ANDREA ZUMCZIZCY

Type: Individual
Faction Size Code: 0

Andrea Zumczizcy runs a legitimate starship-spares business with branches on several worlds. She is rated as an individual rather than Faction but does have a few employees at her yards. These are typically located at Class C or D starports; the sort of places where crews go looking for cheap spares rather than paying top-end yard prices.

Andrea is above suspicion as regards the origins of what she sells. She has contracts with reputable salvage companies and routinely ships in containerloads of spares from other starports. Some of her deals are a bit cutthroat but are all legitimate. Everything comes with the correct paperwork. Given the piracy and lawlessness in the Reach, it is not surprising that a salvage supplier gets investigated on a regular basis. No such investigation has ever found anything out of order.

That in itself might seem suspicious, but Andrea is careful to screen her salvage and spares for pirated or otherwise dubious parts, and will not buy from less than reputable clients – she will sell to anyone, but is careful who she buys from. Dubious parts are regularly turned over to the authorities even though Andrea loses money on them. The air of respectability this gains her is worth the slight loss.

Referee

Andrea Zumczizcy does indeed run a squeaky-clean business, and none of her legitimate yards sell anything illegal or of dubious origins. However, she does have a private off-the-books salvage business which is more receptive to stolen goods and illegal weaponry. The illicit side of the business does not deal in low-end, cheap components. Andrea deals in high-performance engines, military grade weapons and electronics, and even the occasional starship. Her reasoning is that if she is going to take the risk of selling illegal goods to the pirate and smuggler market, the return has to be worth it.

Andrea also has access to – but does not directly control – a repossession/steal-to-order crew operating in the Dustbelt. This team works both sides of the law, retrieving vessels that have skipped on their mortgage and occasionally snatching a yacht or other expensive ship for a discerning and very rich client. Given a few months' notice, Andrea can get spares for almost any ship, and might be able to obtain a specific vessel if the price is right.

Andrea could be cultivated as an Asset – she is quite willing to pass on information from the illegal side of the business since, of course, she has no part in it – or might become a Faction in the Travellers' campaign. Her company is not large but does provide a significant portion of the low-cost spares on sale in the Reach. Expansion is always good, especially into the luxury and military starships market, so Andrea will be interested in any deal that furthers this aim.



AYX SHIPPING INCORPORATED

Type: Faction
Faction Size Code: 6
Faction Type: Spacer
Interaction Cost: MCr2.16

AYX Shipping is a small but successful merchant line operating half a dozen freighters and some smaller ships in the border region. It is careful to maintain a good enough working relationship with several Aslan clans as to be able to run goods into the Hierate and obtain cargoes there. AYX is cognizant of the dangers inherent in operating along the Dustbelt and into the Hierate; all vessels are armed for self-defence and carry specialist security personnel.

The company has a good safety record and is generally considered a fair trader in the marketplace. Its even-handed dealings have won it many friends, but there are always those who resent their opponents being given the same treatment. Thus, like any business entity, AYX has a few specific enemies as well as the more general threat from pirates and raiders.

AYX vessels have earned preferential status in some ports, where they are given priority docking clearance and are subject to cursory customs checks. The company has a policy of sternly disciplining

anyone who endangers this privileged status, and as a result personnel tend to be well-behaved, smart, and scrupulously honest.

Referee

AYX Shipping is an honest company, but its leaders know they operate in a world of compromises and grey deals. The company itself will have no part of piracy or any illegal activity, but would be willing to enter into a deal that harmed its rivals if there was no way to trace any involvement back to AYX.

Similarly, AYX would back an organisation like the reformed Kingdom of Drinax if it got preferential treatment. It still would not do anything illegal, but would be quite willing to sail unmolested through a pirate blockade and hike up its prices in the marketplace because nobody else could make port. The backing of legitimate corporations like AYX might also be a factor in swaying other governments to join Drinax; the promises of an upstart pirate king are one thing; when corporations with a rock-solid reputation put their name behind a venture it starts to carry weight.



AYX

LIBARCHY

Type: Faction

Faction Size Code: 6

Faction Type: Social/Political

Interaction Cost: Cr216000

LibArchy, a contraction of Liberty and Anarchy, is a widespread popular movement with adherents on many worlds. Its members are opposed to strong government, rules, taxation and the general trappings of governance, though many take the anarchy side to an extreme and consider they should just be allowed to do as they please.

LibArchy is a highly decentralised and disorganised movement, with some members having no contact with others apart from downloading anarchist propaganda and creating libertarian net sites where they expound their views to anyone willing to listen. Most of the movement's 'leaders' are simply influential video-makers who have captured the imagination of other members.

Any group of LibArchy members will fall somewhere between a moderate 'trust us to look after ourselves and our neighbours' attitude and a desire to smash statues, loot shops and generally 'stick it to the man' by what is essentially anti-social criminality. It is, however, possible to find groups willing to take cohesive action. This might be safe and moderate, like picketing a business of questionable ethics or carrying out a peaceful but disruptive protest. There are those who would go much further, and a few who actively plot the overthrow of governments.

Referee

As a whole, LibArchy would be happy to support the disruptive side of Drinax' activities but opposed to the creation of a strong centralised state. Its members might be useful in causing diversions or disruptions, and are likely to support actions of 'heroic outlaw' pirates. In time, however, the organisation will come to be an opponent of an emergent Drinax, and might be able to make a nuisance of itself.

The various member groups of LibArchy are poorly-coordinated but could be useful as a source of information or help in unexpected places precisely because of that. If the general message from the movement's leaders is that the Travellers are kindred spirits, every now and then a LibArchy sympathiser might look the other way or help the Travellers get something past customs.

If LibArchy can be convinced, suborned or manipulated into supporting the Travellers, this will create a pool of generally sympathetic 'ordinary folks' (plus a few wild-eyed pseudo-revolutionary poseurs) who will use their votes, voices and buying habits to influence local events. Clever Travellers who build low-level popular support on several worlds will create fertile ground for the idea of a unified Drinax.



RCC-03

Type: Faction

Faction Size Code: 4

Faction Type: Installation

Interaction Cost: Cr384000

RCC-03 stands for Reach CopperCorp installation number Three, a designation that has been meaningless since CopperCorp was bought out and its unwanted assets cut adrift two decades ago. Today RCC-03 is a very minor independent business located on a moon somewhere in the Dustbelt. Its main products are staple metals such as nickel and copper, mined by ageing equipment that it cannot afford to replace.

RCC-03 is in decline, and reliant on independent traders to get goods to market. This means paying middleman prices rather than selling in bulk or on contract, and in return the installation pays inflated prices for its many necessary imports. The settlement administration can see no way to break this cycle, other than cutting a deal to provide a regular supply of materials – which they would be only too keen to do if they can find a client.

Parts of the installation have been abandoned, and remain structurally sound although stripped of electronic and life support systems, machinery,

and anything else necessary to keep the rest of the installation running. The landing pad is perfectly serviceable, and a rig cracks ice from nearby fissures in the moon's surface to ensure a ready supply of fuel.

Referee

RCC-03 is crewed by honest and hardworking, but slightly desperate, people who would take a lot of persuading to become a pirate haven but would accept a 'don't ask, don't tell' approach. They do get the occasional free trader through and are on friendly terms with a few captains; attacking these would upset the settlement's inhabitants as well as cutting off its economic lifeline.

RCC-03 could be an entirely legitimate base for discreet pirates. A naval raid would find a struggling but honest business and a population who can account for their presence with a tale that rings true – because it *is* true. As such, it would be an excellent hideout for pirates, or a transit base where supplies and booty could be transferred safely from a pirate vessel to a clean transport.



RCC-03

THE BASTION MOVEMENT

Type: Faction

Faction Size Code: 5

Faction Type: Military

Interaction Cost: Cr375000

The Bastion Movement is a violently Anti-Aslan militia with a modest following on several worlds. It can muster a few hundred fighters, the equivalent of a battalion-sized military force, but these are scattered over several worlds. The movement has a few agents on worlds along the Dustbelt, and a couple of training camps where ardent volunteers are turned into freedom fighters... or so the movement's leaders say. In reality, the movement's personnel are rather amateurish and talk a better fight than they can put up.

Although determined and highly motivated, the average Bastion Movement fighter or squad tends to be 'more politicised than militarised' as the saying goes. Members typically have access to mid-tech small arms and a scattering of more potent equipment. A few particularly keen or inventive groups have created improvised armoured vehicles or obtained old surplus ones and refurbished them as best they can.

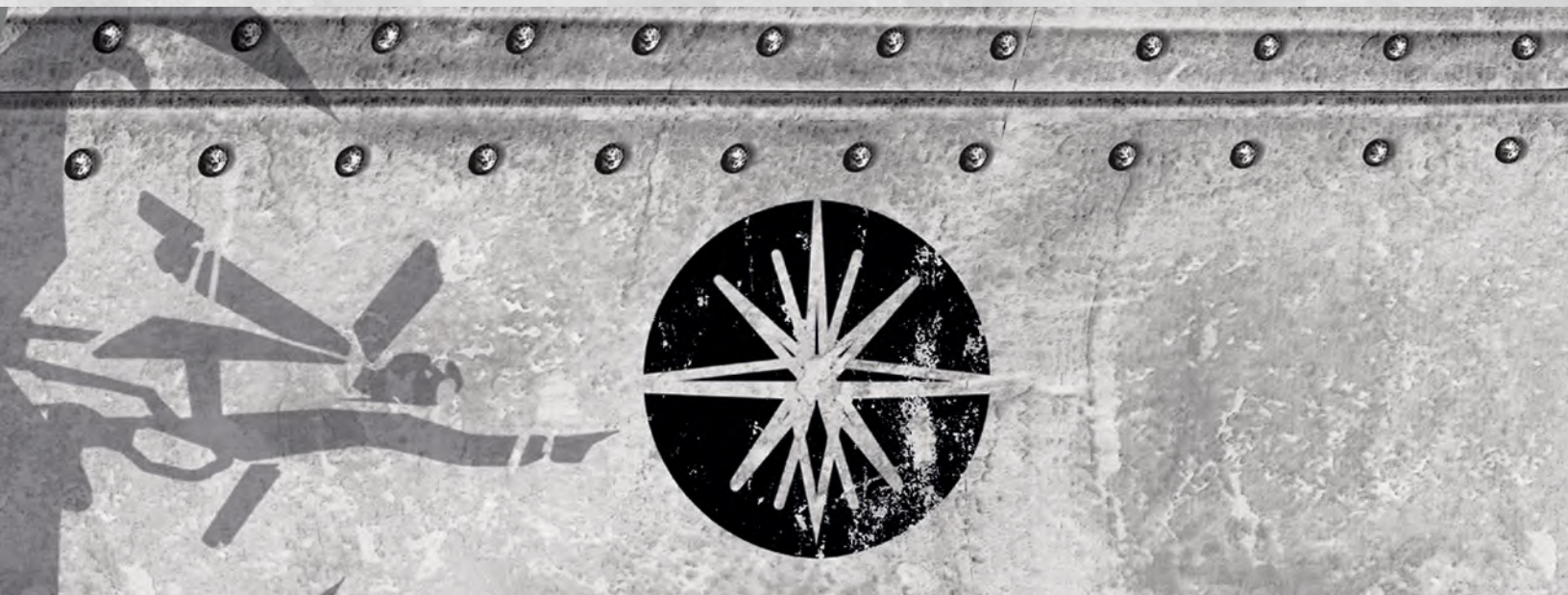
The movement has had a few successes, on one occasion surprising a band of *ihatei* who expected an easy takeover with a company-sized ambush including support from two armoured cars. The noisy anti-Aslan fervour of the movement has

inspired (or perhaps bullied) others into a more robust opposition than might otherwise have been the case. However, overall the movement at present is a band of disorganised militias run by self-important and often egotistical individuals with no military experience.

Referee

The movement is an ally of Drinax just waiting to happen, but in its present form might actually be a liability. If the leaders can be quietly convinced to make a more professional effort they might create a real force that could help defend the Dustbelt worlds, but will not be receptive to anything that looks like a challenge to their authority. The Faction can still be useful, especially if the Travellers need a noisy distraction or a ready market for slightly used weapons missing their serial numbers.

The Bastion Movement can be convinced to assist with most operations that reduce Aslan influence or gain additional weaponry and prestige for the organisation. Individual leaders can usually be persuaded to lend their support to unrelated tasks if it seems to benefit them, though any actions that appear pro-Aslan or unrelated to 'kicking the *ihatei* right out of the Dustbelt' will be loudly questioned by the membership.



REPAIR UNITS (RU)	STRUCTURAL (SRU)	TECHNICAL (TRU)	COSMETIC (CRU)	SHIP SHARES
NOTES				

THE COST GIVEN IN [] IS THE MINIMUM FOR A PARTIAL REPAIR.

HULL

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Reduced Hull Points*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
STRUCTURAL RU 1 for 2D Hull Points			
COSMETIC RU 5x SRU Spent			

GENERAL SYSTEMS

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Loss of efficiency, wear & tear.*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
TECHNICAL RU 1 for 20% reduction			
COSMETIC RU 5x TRU Spent			

VENTRAL HARDPOINT

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Complete loss of function.*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
STRUCTURAL RU 2 [1]			
TECHNICAL RU 3 [1]			
COSMETIC RU 5x SRU & TRU Spent			

MANOEUVRE DRIVE

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Intermittent drive failure.*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
TECHNICAL RU D3			
COSMETIC RU 5x TRU Spent			

JUMP DRIVE

DESCRIPTION OF FAULT: *Increased possibility of missjump.*

REPAIR COSTS	SPENT	CURRENT STATUS	REPAIRED?
TECHNICAL RU D3+1 [1]			
COSMETIC RU 5x TRU Spent			

COSMETIC REPAIRS

LOCATION	COSMETIC RU COST	TECHNICAL RU COST	
Bridge	12	D3	
Crew Accommodation	16	-	
Lower Deck	12	D3	
Outer Hull	20	-	

