
SHADOWS

OF SINDAL



TRAVELLER

TRAVELLER

SEARCH OF SINDAL

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TRAVELLER

PART 1: IN SEARCH OF SINDAL

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INTRODUCTION

Shadows of Sindal is a three-part adventure that takes place in the region around Noricum, the old capital of the Sindalian Empire, and is intended to tie into the *Pirates of Drinax* campaign, although it can be run as a standalone mini-campaign instead. Part 1 involves worlds within the Drinax Chain, the small interstellar main on which Drinax lies. Parts 2 and 3 take place on the Sindalian Main, or the Dustbelt, as it is often known.

In Part 1: *In Search of Sindal*, the Travellers journey to Paal, which used to be a vassal world of Drinax. There, they discover forces attempting to recreate the vanished empire and encounter a sinister bioweapon that turns Aslan into primitive, feral monsters.

In Part 2: *The Plague of Sindal*, the Travellers discover the bioweapon has been used elsewhere, devastating other Aslan communities. If it is released on a major Aslan world, it will wreak havoc but also result in an invasion of the Dustbelt once the Aslan realise what has happened. To prevent this, the Travellers must find the source of the plague and stop the next attack.

In Part 3: *Prince of Sindal*, the Travellers discover the plague is the work of a group dedicated to recreating the Sindalian Empire for their own ends. As open warfare breaks out on the world of Acis, and both Imperial and Aslan fleets converge, it is up to the Travellers to prevent the incident from escalating into a wider conflict. To do so, they must defeat Prince Richter, self-styled heir to the Sindalian Empire.

OVERVIEW

The opening of this adventure takes place at the Floating Palace of King Oleb on Drinax and assumes the Travellers are crewing the commerce raider *Harrier* in Oleb's service. If a different opening is required, the Travellers will need to come into possession of the rod and the knowledge that it is a key. They will also have to learn that it opens a vault on Paal. There are many ways this could happen, from a lucky find to a gift from an academic Contact. Once the Travellers have the rod, knowledge and general location of the vault, they can proceed with the adventure.



The biochemical weapon in this adventure strips Aslan of their dignity and civilised nature, turning them into degenerate monsters. This will have a more dramatic effect on the Travellers if the contrast with their usual violent but honourable nature is made clear. Rather than presenting feral Aslan as just 'bad guys', the Referee should play up the horrific nature of this weapon and the fact that these once-proud people are now just feral killing machines. They have been robbed of what in another context would be termed their humanity. To the people of the multi-species Trojan Reach, seeing an Aslan degenerate this way would be no different to seeing it happen to a member of their own species.

SIDE TRIPS AND OPPORTUNISM

Since this adventure and the others in the *Shadows of Sindal* series involve movement through several star systems, it is entirely possible that the Travellers may decide to do other things along the way. A bit of opportunistic trading or piracy might seem like a good way to make extra money. However, any illegal activity might have consequences, forcing the Travellers to leave the adventure path for a time.

How the Referee deals with this is a matter of preference. Most minor side trips can be incorporated into the adventure narrative; a certain amount of leeway is available. However, when a major plot point is imminent, it may not be appropriate to do so. It seems implausible that Aslan forces massing for an attack on a community would somehow decide to fiddle around for three months while the Travellers go on a raiding cruise, get their ship repaired and upgraded, and finally come back just in time to deal with the attack.

In such cases, the Referee may find it best to have the attack or other major event go forward 'off-camera' and for the Travellers to return to the aftermath. This might seem unsatisfying to some but is a natural consequence of ignoring obviously imminent events. If the Travellers enjoy a true 'sandbox' universe, then this may happen from time-to-time; if they want everything to revolve around them then they will have to follow a tighter script or at least turn up when things are actually happening. Of course, it may be desirable for some events to take place while the Travellers are elsewhere – some may be glad to be far away when a huge battle unfolds.

If the Referee (or the Travellers) prefers, the early part of the mission to Paal can be extended with a series of stopovers or raids at other worlds. There is no requirement to go straight to Paal but once there events will unfold quickly towards the adventure's climax.



C H A P T E R - O N E

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

The following information is for the use of the Referee. How much of it is made available to the Travellers, and in what manner, is for the Referee to decide. Much of this data is commonly known or available through data terminals, info feeds to Travellers' comms and so forth. However, the commonly available version may be incomplete, dumbed-down or wildly inaccurate for all manner of reasons. The Referee has the whole story; if the Travellers want accurate information they may have to search for it or use inventive means.

REMNANTS OF THE SINDALIAN EMPIRE

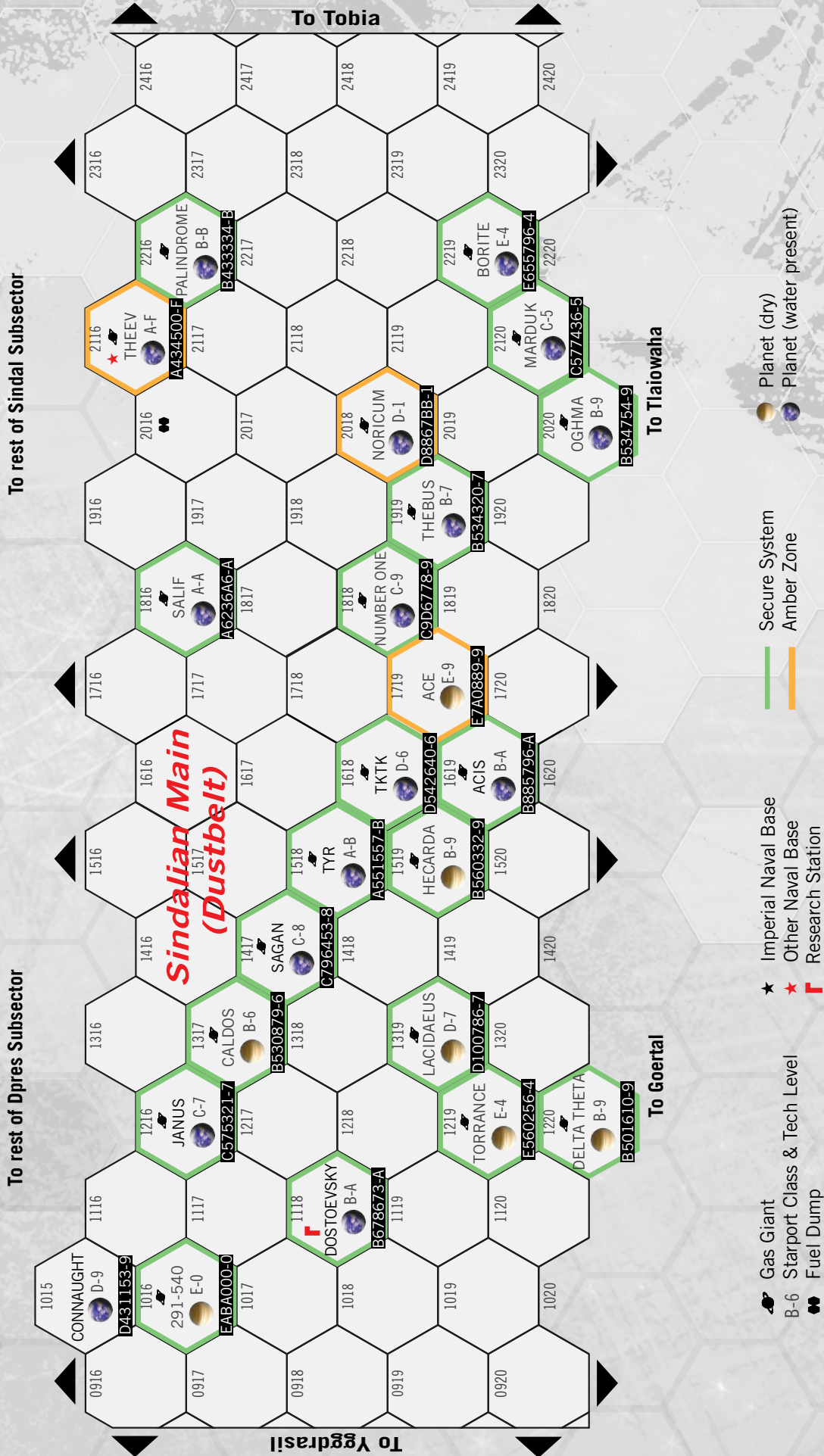
Sindal subsector was once extremely important in the affairs of Trojan Reach sector, since it was the home territory of the Sindalian Empire, which had its capital at Sindal (now Noricum). The collapse of the empire – and indeed much of its reign – was extremely violent, with nuclear and biochemical weapons used both during

the final death-throes of the empire and also against rebel worlds during its reign of terror.

As a result, there are remnants of the great Sindalian civilisation across the subsector, often surrounded by wilderness or uninhabitable regions. Many worlds regressed to a level little above barbarism and some achieved a sort of technological barbarism made all the more nasty by the existence of high-tech weaponry.

Today's Sindal subsector is of little economic importance, although the Sindalian Main (also known as the Dustbelt) runs across the rimward (bottom) end of the subsector and is an important link for starships headed from Imperial space to the Aslan Hierate or Florian League. This is by no means a safe route; there are pirate havens along the way and worlds whose inhabitants can be extremely unfriendly. It is, however, the most practicable route for ships with jump-2 capability. Faster ships can make a more direct transit but for those that cannot cross a three parsec gulf there are few alternative routes.





The remnants of the Sindalian Empire include several worlds like Drinax, whose leaders can claim (truthfully or otherwise) descent from the Sindalian Empire. Some of these leaders have plans to use the old Sindalian connection as a means of gaining political legitimacy or increasing their influence over Sindal subsector. Others, such as Paal, were traditionally subordinate to Sindal or successor states like Drinax.

In some cases these formerly subordinate worlds retain friendly links or at least fairly fond memories of their association with Drinax and other Sindalian successor states. Others have moved on and do not care about centuries-old ties and might resent an attitude of superiority on the part of modern Drinax. There are also several worlds that harbour lingering resentment or envy towards Sindal, Drinax or, in many cases, both.

Paal is one of those worlds. Its relationship with Drinax was very much subordinate, with bulk agricultural goods from Paal traded for high-tech items from Drinax at an unfavourable rate. The memory of this exchange – exploitation might be a better word – still rankles but equally the taste for high-tech goods remains. Other sources are available, of course, but Paal retains a cultural association of Drinax with desirable advanced technology.

THE DRINAX CHAIN

The Drinax Chain has other designations in Imperial and Aslan starcharts but internally it is still known by the name of what was once its most important world. Astrographically, the Chain runs through Tlaiowaha subsector from Khusai to Tyokh and Iroioah, with a minor branch at Sink leading to Byrni. However, those worlds lying within the borders of the Aslan Hierate are not usually considered to be part of the Chain by local navigators due to the additional complications inherent in visiting them. Local spacefarers thus consider that there are eight worlds in the Chain, plus three Aslan worlds associated with it.

The Drinax Chain is important to the plans of several Aslan clans, all of which seek to expand into it, and is thus of interest to the Imperium for the opposite reason. Various other groups have a political or economic interest in the Chain.

There is a fairly large volume of interstellar trade moving along the Chain and three major routes cross it. Jump-3 ships from the Imperium typically transit through Tanith to Blue and then stop over at Pourné before entering Aslan space. Jump-2 ships are more common



on the Imperial-Hierate route; these either go via Torpol and Asim or else Paal by way of Tech-world and Exe in the Borderland Cluster. These systems (Paal, Asim and Pourné) are the most heavily influenced by the Imperium, with Imperial presence being much smaller in other systems. This applies equally to political influence, naval patrols and economic activity.

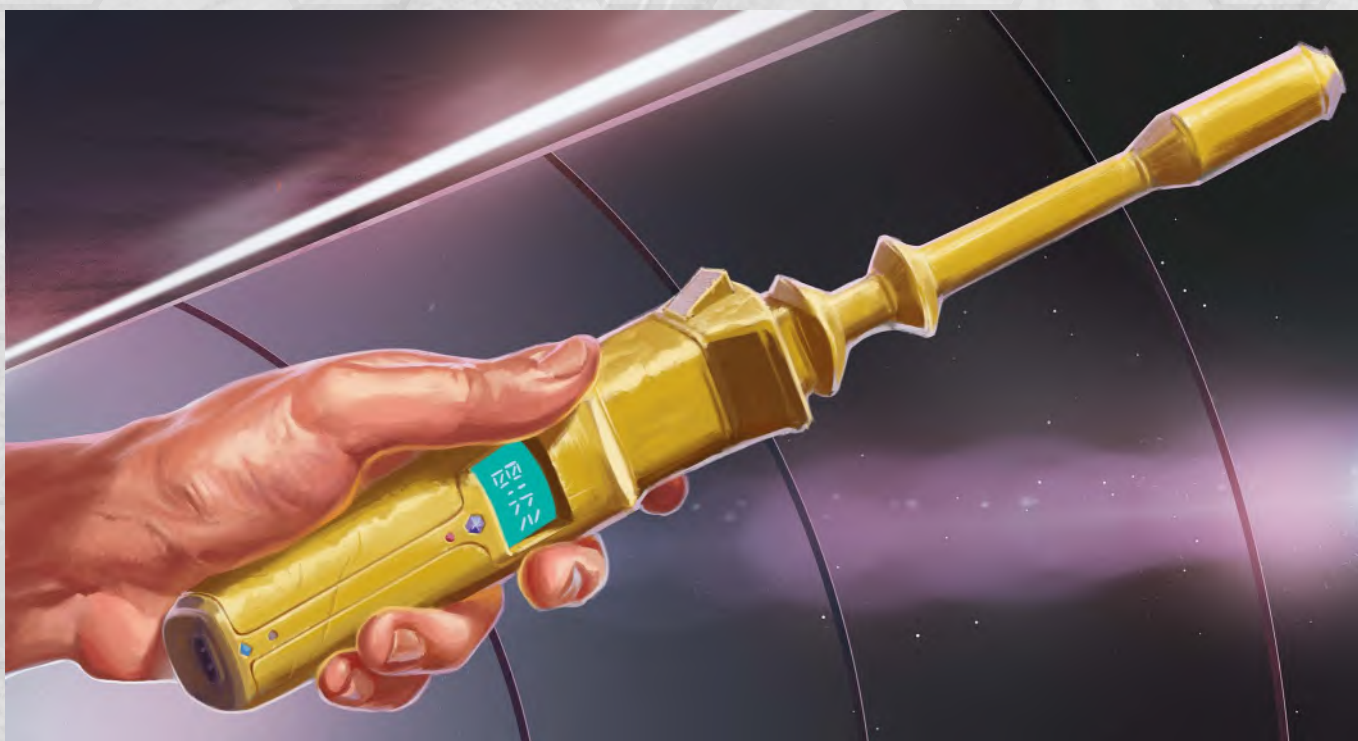
The Imperium considers the Dustbelt and Drinax Chain both important to its long-term interests. This means that the Imperium is keen to contain Aslan expansion into these systems but that desire is rarely translated into action. The Imperium is a big and complex place with limited resources and these two mains are sufficiently distant from the Imperial border that few ships and little money are available to influence events there. Imperial involvement is typically limited to a few shoestring operations intended to bolster friendly governments and the occasional sweep by a naval task force.

The primary source of Imperial influence in the Drinax Chain is its trade ships. Although most pass straight through to sell their goods in the Aslan Hierate, some ships do buy and sell cargo in the ports of the Chain and, more importantly, their crews spend their salaries there. Imperial trade is important to the local economy and disrupting it will result in enmity among many local powers. Imperial merchant ship captains, at least those representing a major shipping line, have a lot of influence in the ports of the Chain. However, this is fairly subtle; it is not backed up by naval might but instead by the prospect of long-term economic damage.

THE ROD AND THE VAULT

In the last years of the Sindalian Empire, it became obvious that others might use the same tactics against Sindal as the Empire had against rebel worlds. Bunkers were built on various worlds for a variety of purposes; some intended to protect key figures or act as emergency command posts, whilst others were vaults filled with supplies for emergency rebuilding. Given the nature of the Sindalian Empire in those days, 'rebuilding' meant the ability to impose a ruler's will on the local population and giving them the means to get industry restarted. The survival bunkers and storage vaults were keyed to officials of the Sindalian Empire considered loyal enough to control them.

Sindal fell in due course and was bombed to a poisoned wasteland. Other worlds got the same treatment before and after the fall of Sindal, so some of the rebuilding caches were used. Perhaps some of the vaults were opened and their contents expended in a valiant attempt to alleviate the suffering of the populace. More likely they were used to support petty local lords who ruled the ruins for a little while. Some caches were never opened, since their keyholders were either killed or had fled the fall of their worlds. One such individual came to Drinax, where presumably he or she joined the remnant kingdom there. Eventually, this individual's rod of office was stored and forgotten.



The Floating Palace on Drinax contains thousands of treasures, gradually sold off at rock-bottom prices to buy supplies and equipment the Kingdom of Drinax desperately needs. As a treasure room was being cleared out, a short (40 centimetre) rod of 'probably-mostly-gold' with a few small gemstones was initially overlooked as being worth little. However, it came to the notice of one of King Oleb's scholars, who investigated further.

This unassuming-looking (as these things go, at least) rod of office had been subjected to a routine evaluation to ensure a decent price was obtained if sold but a closer look suggested it had a data storage capability and hologram projector. Again, that was nothing special and the circuitry was badly decayed. A little repair work indicated the rod could not contain very much data at all and was therefore more or less useless as a personal computing device; it had to have a specialist purpose. After some investigation, King Oleb's scholars developed a strong suspicion that the rod was more than it seemed to be – a simple decorative item with a built-in computer – and might in fact be a senior official's access key.

After further investigation and some outright guesswork, King Oleb's scholars are reasonably sure the rod will grant access to a hidden bunker on Paal, a former vassal world of Sindal and later Drinax. Badly corrupted data on the rod's storage unit suggests there were several repositories on Sindalian worlds where regalia items would be stored or important people could take refuge. Recovering items of this sort would improve Oleb's status by strengthening his claim to be the rightful successor to the Emperors of Sindal.

Whilst not an immediate economic or military advantage, this could grant political leverage that might be very useful. Or maybe the vault is full of money. That would be good, too. King Oleb decided not to sell the rod but instead send someone to Paal with orders to find the vault, enter and plunder the living hell out of it.

THE WORLD OF PAAL

The Paal system consists of a type F3 V (yellow-white main sequence) star, which is hotter and a little more massive than Earth's Sun. This higher energy output is not especially hazardous and in most ways the Paal system is fairly typical. It has three gas giant planets and six terrestrial (rocky) worlds, of which Paal itself is second out from the sun. There are no planetoid belts.

It is not certain exactly when Paal was first settled by humans but it was clearly long ago. The world is rather dry but has a standard atmosphere. Mean surface temperature is a little higher than on Earth but there

are still cold regions and ice at the poles. Most of the inhabited regions are close to the world's many small, shallow seas and not surprisingly, the population is distributed into numerous small nations and states.

When Paal was a subject world of Sindal (and later Drinax), it was subdivided into administrative regions that, over time, evolved into states in their own right. Most retain the trappings of the old Sindalian system, with hereditary (and some non-hereditary) leaders holding ranks with noble titles. Thus Paal has numerous kings, princes and dukes ruling its larger states, with lower nobles owing them allegiance. These titles can be confusing to outsiders as some are actual dynasties while others are given to elected or appointed officials. It is possible to encounter an elected king on Paal or a prince who was appointed to the rank by a bureaucratic government in his home state.

Paal has a local Tech Level of 6, although with a planetary population of six million distributed among many small states, there is little in the way of large-scale industry. This is one of the reasons for Paal's technological stagnation. It never had the capability to increase its technological base by internal efforts and could not buy sufficient tech for an uplift programme, so remains forever stuck in its post-Sindal mid-tech niche.

The kings, dukes and princes of Paal are all keen to obtain offworld technological items, often for different reasons. Some require a specific capability, some want status symbols. Others hope to collect enough technical toys to somehow push their state's capabilities forward. This means that some states will pay top credit for data processing equipment, industrial machinery or other quite mundane items whilst others are only interested in weapons, grav cars and other more showy devices.

Paal is heavily Balkanised, with the starport being (at least in theory) neutral ground jointly owned and funded by the larger states. In return for their backing, these states get a portion of its revenue and the right to maintain trade and diplomatic missions at the port. Ships arriving at the downport are often bombarded with invitations to exclusive trade fairs or diplomatic functions in what is known as Embassy Town. Embassy Town adjoins the starport but is a separate jurisdiction from the main startown that surrounds the port.

The port has a modest highport component but the world's states try to entice starship crews to the downport by a combination of lavish facilities groundside and a very basic service in orbit. The intent is obvious – they want crews on-planet where they can be influenced to sign up for trade deals or manoeuvred into contracts that favour the state they are dealing with.

The port is defended by a low-tech squadron of defensive craft, based at the highport, plus batteries of missiles. Some of these have nuclear warheads but whilst most states on Paal use nuclear fission power, few have the capability to produce weapons. The port's combat craft are slow and clumsy, however they are heavily armoured and have more than once proven enough to destroy or drive off pirate vessels, although they cannot respond quickly to a threat anywhere other than in close orbit over Paal itself. Paal has seen some very cheeky pirate raids close to the port, with the attackers jumping out before the system defence flotilla can send a lumbering gunboat to intercept.

The port is policed by a paramilitary security force that also operates the missile systems and defensive gunboats. This force is supposedly non-political but in practice is beset with internal machinations as well as external pressures from the more powerful or influential states. Actual law enforcement is very efficient, apart from the occasional breakdown where cross-cutting agendas derail an operation.

The downport has good facilities for those wanting to enjoy their stay planetside, especially if they bring a big stack of Credits. It is possible to avoid or not even notice the politics but those who know how to wring the most out of Paal's downport know that the trick is to get invited to private functions or have a potential client pay your bar bills in the hope of getting a sweet deal. In order to benefit from this, a visitor has to look like they are worth the effort – crews from big, shiny ships get invited to better parties than those from run-down free traders.

Away from the starport, Paal is characterised by small states made up of several towns or minor cities, or largish city-states, all surrounded by an area of agricultural land. A nuclear-powered rail network connects most of the cities, with huge 'graintrains' (they actually carry all manner of goods and foodstuffs) thundering across the dusty plains towards the starport, where the produce is sold offworld. Most graintrains have a small passenger section and this is the primary means of long-distance travel on Paal.

Starships are not permitted to overfly any part of Paal except approaches to the starport. In theory, permission could be granted for all manner of reasons but there are political complications. No state wants another to invite ships to its doorstep or else the revenue stream from the port might dry up or be so divided that the port becomes

unviable. Thus permission is rarely granted and the no-fly rule is enforced by surface-launched missiles. Some states on Paal are just itching to shoot down a rogue starship in their airspace, since this would allow the salvage of valuable components from the vessel, as well as any cargo. Most know the aerospace defences are a little trigger-happy.

Some regions are beyond the coverage of missile batteries but as a rule there is nothing in those areas worth landing for – unless you are a land-seeking *ihatei* hoping to grab a holding and build it up later. Paal has had problems with *ihatei* in this manner for many years and some remote regions are thought to contain a large Aslan population. There are also 'stateless' humans living in small towns and villages in these marginal lands. Their relations with the *ihatei* tend not to be cordial, so whichever group has the numbers and weaponry to run the other off will tend to do so.

THE GREHAI MOVEMENT

The Grehai Movement follows an individual named Richter Grehai, who styles himself as a Sindalian Prince. Grehai claims to be a distant descendent of the old ruling house and heir to the ancient Empire. This claim is probably spurious, or so tenuous as to be irrelevant, but Grehai and his supporters either believe it or have chosen to pretend they do. His Movement consists of three types of members.

Grehai has what might be termed an Inner Circle of supporters, who are for the most part either highly skilled individuals or leaders with their own resources. The Inner Circle are at least competent and in some cases very good at what they do. They include merchant captains and trade brokers, as well as political activists and personnel with combat or military leadership skills. There are also large numbers of associates and contacts who are not part of the Movement as such but can provide equipment and support for a price.

In between these two groups, in terms of loyalty at least, are the majority of Movement members. They are organised into chapters on various worlds and are for the most part, amateurish locals who have been inspired by 'Prince Grehai' to follow him. Some chapters are far better organised than others but most are made up of ordinary people who have chosen to join. They are no more or less skilled and competent than any other group of random citizens.

The chapter at Paal downport is typical of the type. Its members are loyal and in some cases genuinely inspired by the Movement's mission but are amateurish and clumsy in their activities. The exception to this is a small core of Inner Circle supporters who organise and coordinate the chapter. These are not local people and are much more professional than their associates.

Movement members typically come over as earnest and amateurish, which is exactly what most of them are. Grehai's message is gradually spreading along the Drinax Chain and the Dustbelt; he is a rallying point for those worried about Aslan expansion. In his own words: 'We welcome our Aslan cousins as traders, guests and friends. But let them always walk softly in the shadow of Sindal.'

The result, so far, of Grehai's efforts is a small but growing network of trade ships connecting pockets of 'Ihatei Hardening' on the worlds facing the Aslan Hierate. These are mostly local militias and political activist groups, all of whom are doing their best to stay legal on their own worlds but make things harder for the Aslan to gain control.

These efforts are real and earnest, and not only on the part of ordinary Movement members. Grehai himself believes in a strong frontier blocking Aslan expansion. His vision is rather more unified than most members believe; Grehai wants to rule the region as a prince of the resurrected Sindalian Empire. This makes him either an enemy or an ally of Drinax, depending on how relations develop.

Grehai and at least some of his more ardent supporters are willing to use robust methods. If a coup looks likely to install an anti-Aslan government, Grehai would consider it worth lost lives and support it. He will give weapons to very bad people if they fight the Aslan – especially because more fear of an invasion means more support for his moderate-but-determined leadership of the resistance. He is also willing to try extreme measures, including the use of biological weapons. In that at least, he is truly a son of Sindal.

THE WEAPON

In this adventure, the Travellers will encounter evidence of a biochemical weapon used against Aslan *ihatei*. This compound takes the form of a yellowish-white liquid, which is toxic to most animal life for a few minutes after being exposed to air but then degrades to become more or less harmless to most species. Contact with water

contaminated with it, or eating the flesh of animals that have drunk from that water, results in exposure but most species are unharmed and completely unaffected.

Aslan who are exposed show no symptoms for 1D days, then begin to exhibit a fever and general symptoms of a mild viral infection. After another day or so, the victim suffers rapid degradation of cognitive function, becoming effectively a feral, animalistic version of their former self. Some memories are apparently retained in the form of unconsciously used skills but the victim ceases to be a person. The result is a feral, hyper-aggressive but cunning predator in the form of an Aslan. Both male and female Aslan are affected the same way.

Infected Aslan see other predators (humans and Aslan very definitely count as predators) as rivals and will try to eliminate them. They are also constantly hungry due to an out-of-control metabolism that increases STR and END by 1D+1. Infected Aslan do not see other Aslan or sophonts as any different to non-sentient prey animals and will kill and eat anyone they can defeat.

There is no known cure for this condition but it is only transmitted through ingestion of contaminated water or food. Screening of food for toxins would detect the biochemical weapon but this is rarely possible in frontier settlements. There is no danger of a plague-like outbreak but this will not be immediately obvious. Likewise, it is not obvious that most other species are unaffected, which could heighten fear of the weapon. The only species known to be partially affected is a bird native to Paal, which was used in the development of the weapon.

Note that infection cannot be passed by biting a victim. Feral Aslan might try to eat a live person or bite them in combat but only in the case where an opponent bit an infected Aslan would there be any danger. Even contact with contaminated blood is not a great risk unless ingested.

The biotoxin that causes this condition breaks down fairly quickly if it does not enter an Aslan's digestive system. An area contaminated with the weapon should be safe again within a matter of weeks but any Aslan who take food or drink from that area during the hazardous time may become infected. The probability drops over time – within the first few days it is almost 100% but gradually falls away thereafter. Thus, the weapon cannot produce an out of control plague but can wipe out an Aslan community before it burns itself out.

IN SEARCH OF SINDAL

In Search of Sindal is the first of three adventures making the *Shadows of Sindal*. In this adventure, the Travellers voyage to Paal to search for treasures King Oleb believes to be found there. They have only the vaguest indication of where the bunker tied to their rod of office might be, so talking to a local or maybe getting guides might help eliminate some locations. After some incidents at the starport, the Travellers discover a possible location for the vault. However, there are complications.

Not only are people living around the vault, they are under attack from Aslan behaving very strangely. The

Aslan are infected with a transmissible bioweapon that has the possibility to become known as the Plague of Paal. It causes Aslan (but not humans) to revert to a feral, primitive state and become mindless, uncontrollable killers.

The Travellers must deal with feral Aslan about to slaughter everyone near the vault. There are various approaches to this but whatever happens the Travellers will not be able to enter the vault while the fighting (or carnage) is going on. Afterward, they find that the vault contains potentially useful items but not vast riches and must decide what to do with them.



A CRUISE ON THE DRINAX CHAIN

The opening to this adventure takes place on Drinax, at the Floating Palace of King Oleb. The Travellers receive something that could be construed as a boisterous invitation to have a few drinks or an arrogant demand for their presence in the throne hall, depending on their opinion of King Oleb. The scene when they arrive is much as usual; the hall is cluttered with priceless artworks, with courtiers milling around all over the place.

The chaos is increased by the fact that several tables have been set up in the throne hall. These are surrounded by scholars arguing about the value or utility of the items on them, whilst King Oleb stomps from one to another looking pained and drinking heavily every time he hears an estimate of an item's possible sale price. 'I'm gonna need to be a lot more drunk before I agree to THAT!' he keeps shouting but items are gradually being moved to the 'ready for sale' pile.

Seeing the Travellers arrive, Oleb is, well, 'furious but not at them' is the best way to describe it. After a certain amount of incoherent shouting about the injustice of it all, he personally hands out drinks and begins waving one of the items that has been evaluated. It is a 40 centimetre long rod, apparently of gold and other precious metals, with jewels encrusting the ends. If Oleb holds it still long enough, the Travellers can see it is decorative but hardly a source of excitement.

'Got offered a price for this!' Oleb shouts. 'A very bad price!! Got so mad I told my scientists to take it away and bring it back when it was more valuable. And they did!' Oleb thrusts the rod at one of the Travellers and demands they take a good close look. While they do so he explains: 'This is the rod of office of the Grand Jerhebop of... something or other. Doesn't matter. It's a key!'

Oleb's excited rant covers several key points – some of them several times. The gist of the story is that:

- Some important officials fled when their worlds were bombed and came to Drinax.
- One of them carried this rod. It contained access codes for a set of repositories on Paal.
- The repositories were never opened since the only key had fled the planet with its owner.
- The goodies are STILL THERE!

- Oleb has no real idea what is in the repository, nor exactly where it is.
- Most of this is supposition and guesswork.
- But Oleb is very excited about it anyway.

The Travellers will begin to realise that they are being given a mission. They are to go to Paal, find the vault and bring its contents back to Drinax. Oleb believes the vault contains money, weapons and other things he can use to improve his position, although he really has no idea what is there. The Travellers are free to undertake any sideline activities they feel like along the way and indeed are encouraged to do so if it improves the situation for Drinax. With no real idea of what is in the vault, Oleb cannot offer a particular reward but instead makes loud and vague promises that the Travellers will get a share of the benefits.

Referee's Note

The existence of secret vaults and bunkers left behind by the Sindalian Empire is fairly common knowledge. Indeed, there are vid shows about doomsday weapons released from them or treasure-hunters racing to be the first to reach a newly-discovered cache. The truth of the matter is that whilst various bases, bunkers and repositories did survive the destruction of the Sindalian Empire, most if not all were looted generations ago. However, King Oleb is more than a little obsessed with the idea that one remains intact.

Pirates of Drinax touches on this concept in *The Treasure of Sindal*, although the repository there is a military base rather than a cache left behind by the Empire. It is all the same to King Oleb however; he will keep on sending parties out to search for hidden bunkers until every stone on the Drinax Chain has been turned over and thoroughly examined. He is not willing to listen to anyone who claims the Empire's caches were all looted long ago and success in this mission – however minor – will simply strengthen his resolve to find the Motherlode of goodies left behind by his Sindalian forebears.

Oleb will be very displeased if the Travellers do not seem to be enthused by this mission or at least making a diligent attempt to carry it out. He is very excited about the vast riches he has convinced himself he is about to receive and will be loudly impatient with a band of Travellers who are not scurrying to get their ship ready. Drinax will be an unhealthy place for the Travellers to remain a few days after this incident. Oleb would accept a credible attempt ending in failure but he will not be tolerant of a lack of effort.

DRINAX TO PAAL

The simplest route from Drinax to Paal for a jump-2 ship is via either Pourné or Hilfer, a trip requiring two jumps; a quick transit might take 16–18 days if the Travellers refuel and move on quickly. The Travellers could, of course, take a more roundabout route, especially if they want to disguise their eventual destination for some reason or intend to undertake some incidental operations along the way.

Pourné and Paal lie on the trade routes between the Imperium and Aslan Hierate, so considered areas of interest by the Imperial Navy. The Travellers will have to tread carefully if they have been engaging in piracy in the region. An encounter with an Imperial ship is most likely in one of these two systems. If the Imperial flotilla from *The Game of Sun and Shadow (Pirates of Drinax, Page 145)* is in the region, this is likely to be a small vessel such as one of the *Gazelle*-class close escorts or a patrol corvette (or a task force plus a support ship) detached from the flotilla.

Small ships of this sort rarely voyage far from their bases unless part of a task force, so an independent ship is more likely to be a larger vessel. If solo, this will typically be a destroyer or fleet escort, although occasionally the

Imperium will put a major warship, such as a heavy cruiser, through the local ports on a 'flag-showing' cruise. Although the warships assigned to this duty tend to be old, second-line vessels, these are still very impressive ships by the standards of the local spacelanes.

Other encounters are more likely. Traffic volumes are average to high in these systems, with in-system transports connecting outposts and installations elsewhere in the system with the mainworld. Jump-1 traders routinely ply the Drinax Chain or jump back and forth between two worlds on it, whilst higher-jump ships follow the same routes or transit across into the Borderland Cluster, or else make the run up to the Dustbelt worlds by way of the jump-2 links through Torpol and Clarke.

Three more detailed starship encounters are provided on Page 36. These might be incidental encounters, old friends with information, victims for piracy or simply passing ships. The Referee might use these vessels as recurring encounters; there is no official storyline assigned to each of them so their fate is very much up to the Travellers and the Referee.

POURNE

Pourné is a hostile-environment world where humans cannot survive outside the sealed cities. Perhaps not surprisingly it has developed a very strict set of maintenance codes and this paranoid attitude to survival has spilled over into areas such as customs inspections and bureaucracy in general. Importing anything into Pourné's cities means running a gauntlet of nit-picking inspections of both paperwork and the cargo itself, although regulations are a little less draconian for vessels merely trading cargo at the starport.



The port itself is well protected by orbital defence installations and a large flotilla of well-armed craft. These are a primarily customs-inspection force but represent a significant naval presence by the standards of the region. Piracy close to Pourné itself is made even more hazardous by the frequent visits of jump-3 freighters on the Imperial-Hierate run. These are well-armed and, whilst they will not unduly concern themselves with protecting local traffic, their captains are well aware that blasting a pirate from time-to-time enhances the safety and stability of the area and that can only be good for business.

Jump-2 ships transiting along the Drinax Chain often bypass Pourné and its invasive customs force, so most encounters with local ships in this system will be with either jump-1 vessels or those that have business on Pourné itself. Imperial and Aslan goods are available in the starport, making a visit worth the trouble by the reckoning of some local free trader skippers. However, the general rule is that if you do not need to go to Pourné it is better to bypass it and get what you want in a less bureaucracy-infested marketplace.

HILFER

Hilfer once enjoyed a higher Tech Level and a more prosperous economy as part of the Kingdom of Drinax. Dissent led to rebellion and was inevitably followed by orbital bombardment. The result was a dramatic drop in local technological and industrial capability, and most critically the collapse of the world's water-reclamation network. This has partially been replaced by small local systems but Hilfer is no longer able to support much in the way of agriculture or large population concentrations.

Some of the old cities of Hilfer have survived, albeit in diminished form, whilst the extensive 'watered areas' used for agriculture reverted to desert long ago. The scavenged remains of the old cities are a constant reminder of what Drinax did to Hilfer, resulting in a generally hostile attitude to all things Drinaxian.

The system is far less well defended than Pourné and cannot build vessels of its own. It must instead rely on a handful of armed small craft maintained by offworld technicians. This paltry force eats up a large portion of the starport's revenue but is necessary for continued operation. It is backed up by a few mercenary ships and craft, when the government can afford them, and by an array of rather primitive surface-to-orbit missiles.

As a result, Hilfer is more prone to pirate attacks than Pourné and is a logical place for pirate-hunters to operate. There are persistent rumours of a pirate gang operating from one of the system's three other planets but no base has been located. Despite this, Hilfer is a necessary stopover for jump-1 ships or jump-2 vessels wanting to avoid the suffocating red tape of Pourné and so a significant volume of traffic comes through the system despite its hazards.

PAAL STARPORT

However the Travellers choose to make their transit and whatever minor adventures they have along the way, they will eventually reach Paal and can begin their approach to the starport. At this point the adventure proper begins.

First impressions of Paal are of a dry, mostly-brownish world with greener areas dotted around here and there. These unmistakably centre on small cities and as a ship approaches it is possible to see the straight lines of the world's rail system radiating out from the downport. Traffic at the port is fairly high, necessitating some time spent in an orbital holding pattern, which astute spacefarers (or experienced pirates) can quickly determine is not a completely safe place to be. Ships in the outer part of the pattern are beyond the effective response range of the world's rather basic defence flotilla and thus vulnerable to a quick strike.

The world's database makes much of the fun times to be had at the downport, noting also that the highport is extremely basic and utilitarian. If the Travellers still want to dock there, they can but will soon find the description was downplayed – Paal Highport is even more drab and basic than expected. There is virtually nothing to do and the available accommodation makes cabins aboard the Travellers' ship seem spacious.

Shuttles are available to take the Travellers planetside if they want to leave their ship in orbit. This will be necessary for their mission and if they intend to do any trading on Paal – no negotiation is permitted at the highport as the downport operators want to draw visitors there.

The downport is a rather different prospect. Once through customs it is a noisy, vibrant place whose many attractions vie for attention and cash. Intense competition between the various lords of Paal long ago drove out any vestiges of good taste or decorum – instead Travellers are approached by shills, leaflet-shovers, helpful locals, guides-for-hire, official-looking representatives and attractive strangers, all of whom want to hook the Traveller and get him to where cash can be bargained out of him.

Some find this sort of environment wearying, others exhilarating. Either way, it can quickly become an impediment if the Travellers are trying to obtain information about their goal or just want a quiet lunch somewhere. Among the many attractions and groups vying for attention are several bars, restaurants, hotels and other recreational establishments, as well as representatives of political and economic groups.

King Earheart of Orarle Valley

A representative of the king (who rules three towns totalling about 18,000 people) would like to invite the Travellers to a trade summit, which turns out to be an offer of preferential rates if they will ship in agricultural machinery and refuse all offers from other potential buyers. In short, the king wants to avoid having his much-needed equipment bought out from under him.

'Some sort of local business association'

A representative who is politely evasive about her backers invites the Travellers to dinner to discuss their future trade links with Paal. In fact, this group is a collective of smaller landowners and minor nobility trying to create a collective bargaining framework and bring in some valuable goods (at a pre-negotiated price) for resale on planet.

Paal Merchants' Guild

Paal Merchants' Guild is a front for a group of business owners who use the lure of trade dealings to get clients into their overpriced bars and hotels. The Travellers are invited to a meeting over dinner but the 'client' never shows up. This fairly harmless ruse is simply intended to get them sat down in a restaurant, after which they will most likely start spending money.

The Grehai Movement

A pair of very polite and surprisingly non-pushy individuals request that the Travellers let them make a business proposal. This is all much less strident and arm-wavy than the usual approach on Paal and the pitch is equally professional – complete with holographics and projected figures. The pitch is a bit vague about who is behind it but the client wants

someone to begin shipping certain machinery – metal stamping equipment, chemical processing machines and so forth. It is not hard to spot that the client is chasing the makings of an arms-and-ammunition industry and the representatives will confirm this quite freely – but will not name the client. There is nothing illegal about any of this machinery on Paal but making guns without a license is most definitely a major crime. However, the Travellers would probably be immune to prosecution due to trade laws.

The Merchants' Guild of Paal

The Merchants' Guild of Paal really does exist and does not like the activities of their imposters. The guild represents various local interests and will try to persuade the Travellers to accept an exclusivity deal whereby they only sell to guild members.

Duke Maix

Duke Maix rules a largish city-state and is very keen to obtain showy, high-status items. These include grav cars and the like but he is also very aware that advanced (by local standards) computers and such are also admired and envied. He wants anything the Travellers can get him, from advanced-materials clothing and jewellery containing electronics to tanks and missiles. He is not a warmonger and has no interest in conquest but does think that having a grav tank precede his limousine down the road lends him a certain air of importance.

The Railway Institute

The Railway Institute is a consortium that runs the railways outside the various states and is in many ways more powerful than a lot of Paal's small nations. The Institute has several 'rail towns' where workers dwell and these are slowly becoming a highly-dispersed nation. The Institute needs a regular supply of components for its nuclear-powered trains. Even with shipping costs, it is easier and cheaper to bring these in from a high-tech supplier rather than making them locally. The Institute thus wants to secure a contract or at least a first-refusal deal for any useful components the Travellers might come by.

SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION

Any of these contacts could lead to further adventures on Paal or the local area, although for the most part they should serve as an indication of what it is like doing business on Paal. Drinaxians are not popular on this world, due to historical events, but the locals will take Drinaxian money as readily as anyone else's. They are less likely to volunteer information, however, so unless the Travellers conceal their origins or are not obviously in Drinaxian service, they may find getting information a slow process.

There are no real academic institutions or centralised records on Paal; information is scattered around wherever it is useful. The best source of information about a possible repository location is the Railway Institute, as they have survey data of many regions. Some of this data has been retained from long ago, such as locations of cities destroyed in offworld attacks or the course of disused rail tracks. Combining these will lead the Travellers to a possible location for their vault.

There are other ways to find this information. Orbital maps are available and could be processed using personal computers. This will yield indications that there used to be a small city with its own rail link about 500 kilometres from the downport. The rail line was a spur of a line that is still used but was off-limits to normal rail traffic.

The Travellers could make their own orbital survey, providing they stayed in high orbit to avoid violating the no-fly laws on Paal. However, this might look suspicious; the Travellers' ship might be mistaken for a pirate looking for prey (there is an irony there...) and trigger a response from the system defence squadron.

Simply asking enough people will yield some clues. There are old stories about the collapse of Paal and records of rods of office (like the one the Travellers are carrying) being used by government personnel. A segment of the world's elite did indeed flee the planet instead of helping deal with the many crises its people faced and since that time a few bunkers and repositories have been found and – in some cases at least – forced open to retrieve their contents.

A search of old administrative records – which are fragmentary and confusing – will suggest that the rod the Travellers have is tied to the holdings of the Counts of Ghormount, whose seat was well to the north of the capital. The last Count Ghormount was a trusted advisor of the planetary king but betrayed his position in the final days to flee. This ties in with the railway, and other records, and should indicate the general location of the repository.

ENCOUNTERING THE GREHAI MOVEMENT

When the Travellers start looking around, they will bring themselves to the attention of the Grehai Movement. Whilst members will not advertise their allegiance, they do not deny it either. Most members tend to assume everyone knows they have joined and that there is nothing out of the ordinary about membership of such a group. Thus any approach to the Travellers will be made quite openly but without explaining on whose behalf it is.

The most likely approach is for a couple of members of the local chapter to approach the Travellers in the street and offer to help with their inquiries in return for a discussion of mutual assistance. This is delivered in a ham-fisted manner that falls somewhere between earnest, slightly sinister and unintentionally hilarious.

If the Travellers ask, the members will happily tell them that they belong to the Grehai Movement, a political group that supports Prince Richter Grehai. Exactly what he is prince of is not made clear but on Paal the obvious inference is that he is one of the world's many petty nobles with big titles. This false impression suits the Movement for now and is not challenged if the Travellers make this assumption.

The short version of the Movement's agenda is 'we don't want to be overrun by Aslan', which is entirely true. If the Travellers are amenable, they might be invited to a Chapter Rally or the discussion might take place over lunch in a bar and grill somewhere. The 'rally' turns out to be essentially a beer-and-burgers event in a local function room, with a couple of the chapter's senior members standing up to give impassioned but clumsy speeches about the great progress the Movement is making towards an *ihatei*-proof Paal.

The Paal Chapter has about 30 ordinary members, most of whom are regular people who would not want to do anything illegal – and the Movement does not ask them to. Its members are devoted to Prince Grehai's ideal of a stronger, perhaps even unified society along the Aslan Frontier (as they call it). They are not racists and do not actually hate Aslan but are frightened of the prospect of being invaded. Theirs is very much a political rather than racial movement.

The chapter pitches the idea that the Travellers might want to become associated with it or even join. This pitch is made in a charmingly clumsy manner, citing the benefits of having friends in every port and a

growing network of contacts to rely upon. In return, the Paal Chapter wants accurate, up-to-date news from the worlds the Travellers visit and a few minor favours like letting some of the chapter's members work passage to another world. Somewhere in the discussion, talk turns to sourcing machinery the Movement needs, which sounds suspiciously like the gun-and-ammunition production equipment the Travellers may have already been approached about. Movement members will freely admit they also have people making formal approaches to merchant ship crews but are cagey about whether or not they want to manufacture guns.

If the Travellers seem amenable to the idea of aligning themselves with the Movement, they can expect some minor help while on-planet. The Movement has a policy of assisting those it can, hoping goodwill comes back to them later. The Movement's ordinary members at the downport have no idea about what is going on in the north but their leaders are aware of what is about to happen and have sensed an opportunity. If they can find a plausible pretext, they will assist the Travellers' mission and even provide them with weapons (see below) since having a bunch of uninvolved offworlders as witnesses to the 'Aslan Rampage' that is about to occur will help spread the story more widely and increase its credibility.

MAKING PREPARATIONS

Once the Travellers have a reasonable idea of where the repository is, they can begin making preparations to get there. Using their ship is not a good option – they will be fired upon in transit by planetside defences and attacked by the system defence flotilla while on the ground. Pirates are rarely concerned with laws and regulations but laser fire is more of a problem.

Thus a trip on the ground is necessary. The repository is in or near the ruined city of Ghormount, which was abandoned two centuries ago. The quickest way there is to take passage on a graintrain to Parflex Junction then hire or otherwise obtain a vehicle. Parflex Junction is about 120 kilometres south-west of Ghormount and

the old rail line could be followed easily enough to find the city. Taking a vehicle all the way from the starport to Ghormount is feasible but means a 500km drive along roads that vary from poor to virtually non-existent.

There is also the question of weaponry. Paal does not permit personal ownership of weapons, other than for certain necessary tasks such as vermin control. These, along with weapons used by law enforcement or the armed forces of the many small states, are strictly controlled. The port has a good set of weapon scanners at the entrance, making it very difficult to get weaponry into the port from offworld. Thus, the Travellers are unlikely to have much, if anything, with them at the downport. Bringing guns from their ship would necessitate going through the port's detectors unless some clever means of bypassing the customs posts can be devised.

If the Travellers have established even a tenuous working relationship with the Grehai Movement, they will be offered weaponry for the trip. This is in case of 'pirates, raiders, bandits and damned *ihatei*', all plausible enough threats. The Travellers will not have any documentation for their weapons and will have to conceal them whilst in transit. The Referee should note that if they bring their own guns, the Travellers may have to ditch them or somehow get them out again through customs – outgoing starfarers are routinely scanned just the same as those coming in to the starport.

If the Grehai Movement provides weapons, these will be pretty disappointing; a sawn-off shotgun, a shotgun, a rifle (with Scope) and a revolver. The Travellers are also handed a singularly unimpressive amount of ammunition – a double-handful of 28 rounds for the rifle, plus 19 for the revolver and a partially empty box of shotgun ammunition containing 15 shells. Clearly the Grehai Movement considers that this constitutes weaponry; the Travellers may disagree.

Ultimately, whatever schemes the Travellers may have for obtaining weaponry or getting to the repository, they are going to need to get underway.

THE WILDERNESS OF PAAL

With only six million people on the entire planet, Paal is very sparsely populated. This population is concentrated into towns and cities, making the regions in between a virtual wilderness. Population centres are generally found close to seas and other bodies of water, so as a general rule Paal is both greener and more 'tamed' in the coastal and well-watered areas. Much of the rest of the planet is dry, with large expanses of uninhabited semi-desert between the inhabited zones.

These semi-deserts are crossed by wide-gauge railways that carry enormous nuclear-powered trains. Most are used for bulk transfer of agricultural produce and are generally known as grain trains but there is usually a passenger car or two. Travelling from the downport to Parflex Junction aboard such a train is inexpensive and very safe. The train lumbers along at around 100 kilometres per hour, slowing occasionally on inclines but only stopping once to take on incidental cargo at a minor town. The line is not direct as the crow flies but the Travellers can be in Parflex Junction in six or seven hours if they use the train.

Going overland is a more difficult prospect. If the Travellers have an ATV or similar vehicle they can use it but it will be searched for weapons in accordance with local law. If they do not, they will have to rent one or more vehicles. There are no grav craft or ATVs on offer

for rent at the downport, for the simple reason that there are few of them on Paal and little demand for travel off the rail system. If the Travellers come up with a spectacularly good plan for finding and obtaining a suitable vehicle, the Referee may permit this but if not they will have to make do with local transport.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

The natives of Paal use a variety of offroad vehicles, most taking the form of 4-wheel-drive jeeps and similar types (such as the Dune Buggy on page 82 of the *Vehicle Handbook*). These are tough and rugged but not in the same league as an ATV. Travellers using local offroad transport will have to contend with broken (or no) internal climate controls, quirky transmission and other minor glitches whilst crossing an expanse of semi-desert.

Renting a typical offroad vehicle costs Cr500 as a deposit (refunded only in part or not at all if the vehicle is damaged or lost) plus Cr50 per day. Most are electrically powered and can be recharged in any settlement. Their power cells are good for around 500 kilometres of moderate driving; high speeds and tough terrain will reduce this.





If the Travellers are following a current or disused rail line, the land is flat but still tough going. The vehicles can make about 40 kilometres per hour on average, plus 10% for every skill level the driver has in Drive (wheel). The rail lines also lead past the few settlements likely to be found outside the main inhabited zones. These are small, few and far between but offer the prospect of shelter and a recharge rather than a night in the open.

Striking out into the semi-desert is more challenging, with vehicles making only 20–30 kilometres per day on average, plus 10% per level of the driver's skill.

Whether the Travellers get to Parflex Junction by train or do it the hard way by driving across the semi-desert, they will have to proceed from there overland. The encounters on page 23 can be taken as representative of the sort of thing the Travellers might have to deal with on a long desert transit; the Referee is encouraged to add extra difficulties. The Travellers should not die while lost in the desert, however, unless they do something monumentally stupid. It is one thing to get killed in the course of doing something important and quite another to meet a pointless end due to a single bad decision during a side trip; although that could be a learning opportunity about sandbox-style gaming environments.

PARFLEX JUNCTION

Parflex Junction is a railway town, which exists only to support the the trains coming through. It has a population of about 2,000 people and little incidental industry. There are a few farms but, for the most part, its people are employed by industries that support the railway. There are several (very long) sidings where a train can stop over, a maintenance bay capable of undertaking minor repairs and a track-repair train that operates out of the town. Two lines, one of them coming from the downport, meet at Parflex Junction and three lines leave headed northeast, east and northwest. The latter has a disused spur that eventually leads to Ghormount.

There is little to see or do in Parflex Junction. There are a few bars and some basic recreation facilities for the local population but not much else. The townsfolk are quite welcoming to outsiders, however. They are not the sort who crowd around starfarers to hear their tales of interstellar adventure but will share a beer or two with strangers just to enjoy the company of someone new.

The Travellers can obtain supplies, vehicles and some advice from the locals. Among this advice is a warning that small bands of Aslan *ihatei* have landed in the northern lands over the past few years. Most live in

fairly remote areas and do not trouble anyone else but as additional colonists arrive some groups have begun annexing more territory. This has led to skirmishing with the forces of nearby cities. More importantly, *ihatei* tend to be aggressively territorial and may chase off or attack anyone passing through areas they have claimed.

Overall, Parflex Junction is a friendly place but a dull one; the Travellers will want to move on as soon as possible. The first 30 kilometres of this trip are fairly easy, following the northwest railway line. However, once the disused spur branches off, the terrain becomes more difficult. From this point the Travellers have about 90 kilometres to go, which can be done in a day if they push on and do not become distracted.

Encounter: A Ruined Farmstead

The Travellers pass the remains of a large farmstead, located not far from the railway tracks, close to a small lake. The place was big enough to support maybe half a dozen families but seems to have been abandoned long ago. It is in ruins but does not seem to have been destroyed by violence. If the Travellers choose to investigate, they find signs that people (it is not clear of what species) have camped in the ruins from time-to-time.

Currently the only occupants are a small group of wild Horx, a herbivore that looks a like a cross between a cow and a horse. Horx are used as beasts of burden and food animals on many worlds in the Reach and are not native to Paal but have been herded on-planet for so many centuries they are often assumed to be by

the locals. Horx are like agile oxen and placid beasts for the most part. They are far more likely to wander away from people than attack them and will clumsily flee from loud noises or sudden movements close to them, honking as they go.

Encounter: A Flock of Birds

As the Travellers are getting close to their destination, they see a flock of perhaps three dozen large birds take flight ahead of them. This has happened several times before and would normally be unremarkable. However, some of the birds seem distinctly unsteady in flight and one or two fail to take off at all or flop back to the ground after a few flaps of their wings.

Investigation shows they are weak and probably dying, which may account for their aggressive behaviour when approached. The birds will try to peck anyone who handles them, although they are not particularly threatening. There is no obvious indication of why these birds are sick, although clues may become apparent later.



HORX

| ANIMAL | HITS | SPEED |
|-----------|-------------------|-------|
| Horx | 34 | 6m |
| SKILLS | Survival 0 | |
| ATTACKS | Stampede (3D) | |
| TRAITS | Alarm, Large (+1) | |
| BEHAVIOUR | Herbivore, Grazer | |

THE RUINS OF GHORMOUNT

Ghormount was never a very large city but had a fair amount of industry supported by mines in the surrounding region. It was targeted for destruction during the same period that saw Drinax bombarded and Ghormount received much the same treatment. The palace of the Counts of Ghormount was located atop a nearby large hill – grandly termed a mountain but not worthy of the name – which was destroyed by a tactical nuclear weapon leaving an oddly misshapen lump on the landscape. Another tac nuke came down on the northern edge of the city and flattened most of the industrial district. The rest of the city received orbital weapons fire and was then destroyed by a combination of fire and population panic. Much of what was left was scavenged for materials after the attacks ended.

The result is that today there are three distinct zones to Ghormount, plus the cratered hillside above. The northern sector is a wide depression, with buildings that are little more than stumps giving way to an overgrown bowl of mildly radioactive land. It is possible for an unprotected person to stay in this zone for a period of weeks or even months without ill effect – the weapon was pretty ‘clean’ to start with and radioactivity has decayed since. However, eating food grown in this area would be unwise due to radioactive toxins picked up from the soil.

The central region is less damaged but with few structures more than three or four stories remaining even remotely intact. Taller buildings have typically collapsed into rubble, bringing down nearby structures as well. This area is essentially a sea of rubble upon which soil has been deposited and vegetation grown. The jagged stumps of buildings jut from rubble mounds, softened by creepers and other vegetation. Birds are abundant around these artificial cliffs, which are strangely beautiful in the daytime and distinctly creepy at night.

The southern, least damaged, area around the terminus of the old spur line survived better than the rest of the city and became a shanty-town for survivors using scavenged materials to shore up the structures. Most of these have fallen but the old railway buildings are intact; warehouses, loading sheds and similar industrial structures that were, for the most part, no more than two or three storeys high.

Some buildings still have roofs and these have clearly been used for shelter in recent years. There is a small collection of makeshift huts within one of the buildings,

which at first sight look like the work of primitive people. However, closer inspection shows salvaged wiring has been used to run supply cables through the tiny town, with light, heat and even rudimentary plumbing in place. The shelters look to have been uninhabited for months or years. There are signs of a fight – what appear to be bullet holes and the odd laser scorch can be found, although inspection shows these are all unusually high. Either the combatants were extremely tall or someone was deliberately shooting high to scare off the inhabitants.

Referee's Note

The camp was used by scavengers from the nearby human settlement when they were picking over the city ruins. They were run off a few years ago by the first Aslan *ihatei* to land in the area, although this was done without killing anyone. The Aslan shot high, made a lot of noise and scared off the unarmed scavengers – they did not kill because they did not need to. The Travellers may realise this contrasts sharply with the current behaviour of the *ihatei*.

Encounter: An Aslan Behaving Strangely

Whilst they are exploring the ruins, the Travellers come to the attention of something that lives within. It used to be a male Aslan warrior, a minor son of a proud clan. Now it is something altogether more primitive. This feral warrior has been exposed to a biochemical agent that has reduced his intellect to an almost animal level whilst increasing aggression and suppressing pain response. Since the starting point was an Aslan warrior, this is a formidable creature indeed. His memories of who he once was might still be intact but he cannot make any sense of them in his present state. He is simply an angry and very smart animal that knows something is wrong with him but cannot do anything other than lash out in rage.

The feral warrior's motivations are simple. The Travellers are in his range, or territory. He is a predator and sees them as both a threat to his food supply and part of that food supply. His perception of risk is totally skewed – he will sneak up for the best chance to make a kill rather than to avoid being shot. He does retain some vague inkling of what firearms are but simply does not care.

This degenerate Aslan (see page 35) will stalk the Travellers for a time, looking for a good opportunity to attack, before taking it. He cannot speak or understand any form of language, cannot be reasoned with and will eat anyone he kills. If alternative food items are offered or become available he will eat them or stash them, for later, but in his feral state he is attracted to fresh meat and also wants to eliminate what he sees as rivals. The feral Aslan can be driven off if wounded but will continue to stalk the Travellers if at all possible.

This feral Aslan retains some habits from his former life. He wears rags, that were once highly decorative clothing, and will use hand weapons with considerable skill if they are available. He retains some knowledge of how to use more complex items such as firearms and door handles, up to a point. Essentially this means that if he puts his hand on a gun he will point it and pull the trigger but will not think to reload or operate controls like a safety catch. He can operate door handles but would not think to turn a key to unlock a door. His intellect is not quite that of either a person or an animal – he is horribly damaged and has reverted to a semi-animal state.

EXPLORING THE RUINS

The ruins are quite extensive and they are not contaminated by radiation or biological hazards to a degree sufficient to harm humans. Of course, the Travellers may not realise this. Whilst exploring, it becomes obvious that whilst the ruins ceased to be a city long ago, they were not entirely abandoned. Old paths snake through the undergrowth, not well-travelled but not quite lost to nature. Areas have obviously been

Referee's Note

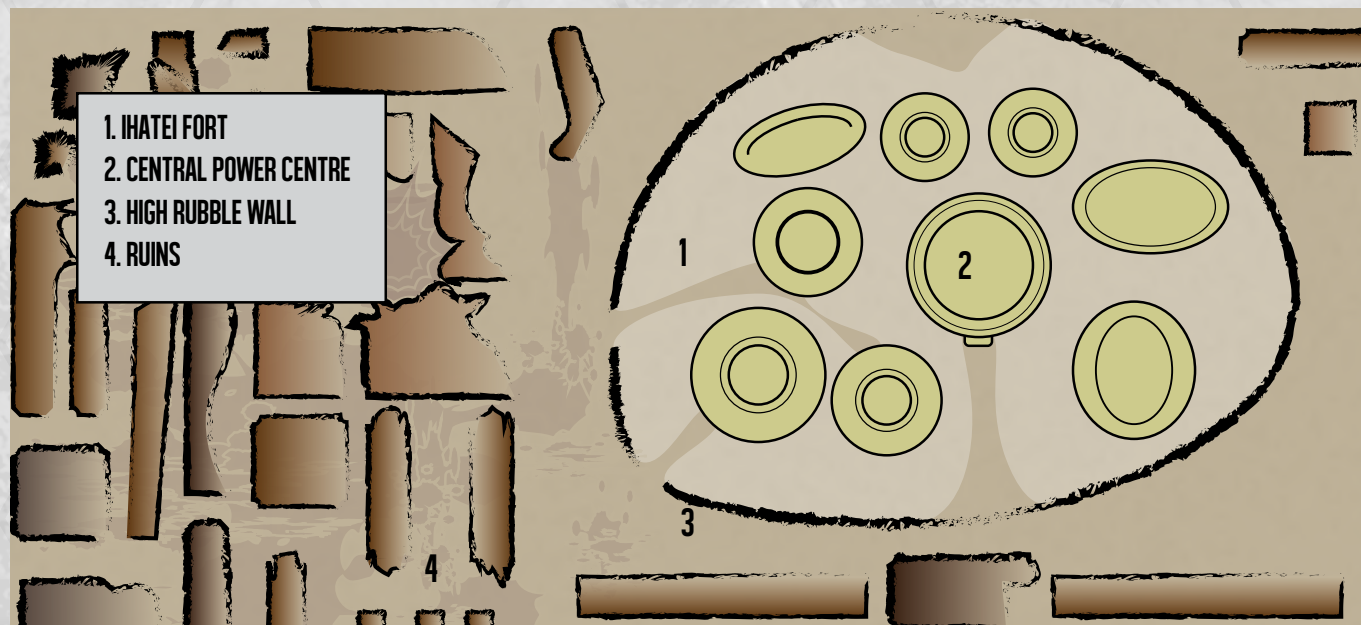
The feral Aslan's plight, and his behaviour, should be at once terrifying and tragic to the Travellers. Aslan are a proud, cultured and brave people who do not eat other sophonts. The Travellers might find themselves wondering what could cause someone to revert to such an animal state and might draw a connection to the birds they saw earlier.

scavenged, with rubble dug up in some places and blocks stacked neatly ready for transportation elsewhere. This activity took place much more recently.

Within the ruins, other discoveries await. The first is a large clearing on the eastern outskirts of the city. The land is flatter here, with a stream and easy access to territory beyond the city. In this area, which appears to have been deliberately cleared, is what appears to be a fort.

THE IHATEI FORT

This naturally flat area has been fully cleared of rubble and additional debris has been brought in to create a two-metre-high rubble wall right around the clearing. There are gaps for access, protected by rubble sangars, which would make excellent firing positions, and in some areas surviving building walls have been incorporated into the defences. The whole wall is faced with a ditch about a metre deep, giving the wall an effective height of nearly three metres. It is not a true wall and could be scrambled over with some effort but anyone on the crude firing step constructed on the inner side would have little trouble preventing access.



Within the wall is a settlement capable of housing perhaps 200 people. The buildings are prefabricated and obviously of Aslan origin. There is a central power centre that used to house a fusion reactor, plus a prefabricated dwelling, workshop and possibly medical buildings. Ground impressions suggest there were a couple of grav vehicles here plus some wheeled offroad trucks or jeeps but there is no sign of most of them. The only remaining vehicles are a tracked earthmover and an offroad truck, both of which are riddled with bullet holes.

The settlement is eerily quiet, with no-one around but the sense of someone watching. A search turns up more questions than clues.

- The settlement has clearly been attacked. There are ammunition casings on the ground in clumps, suggesting light automatic weapons such as assault rifles. The calibre is right for such weapons but markings on the cases are not very helpful – the cartridges were generic rifle and carbine ammunition available all over the Reach.
- There are very few bodies; just three in fact. All are Aslan, filthy and dressed in rags like the degenerate encountered previously. They appear to have been gunned down by several automatic weapons and left where they fell.
- There are about two dozen bodies buried in a patch of cleared earth at one end of the settlement. If exhumed, they are Aslan males, females and children with about half featuring no signs of violence. The others have died from various violent causes – gunshot, dewclaw and blade wounds for the most part. Some have been bitten, mostly non-fatally and almost always more than once.
- The settlement has been comprehensively looted. Vehicles, weapons, heavy equipment and even some building components have all been removed. In order to do this, whoever took out the settlement must have had plenty of time, no interruptions and some means to move all loot.
- The majority of the population are simply missing.

The fort looks like it was hit by raiders using spacecraft. This is not an uncommon tactic used by some pirates but a couple of hundred *ihatei* should have put up a tremendous fight. Overall, this explanation does not feel right. Anyone who has taken part in a planetside raid will get the impression that something else happened here and the fort was looted against virtually no resistance.

THE CANISTERS

In a much smaller clear area between two mostly-ruined apartment complexes, perhaps once a small park or ball-games court, the Travellers find a set of four metal canisters of a sort that usually contain industrial gases or chemicals. Inspection shows they are empty but no indication of what they contained. A sample could be collected for later analysis, although the Travellers might be wary about the possibility of contamination.

The canisters' location is not particularly close to the fort but there is a fair amount of game in the area, in the form of small birds and animals. This is a likely spot for Aslan to hunt, if anyone thinks to make the connection. A tracker (someone with the Survival skill) can easily tell that Aslan have hunted in the area. There are boot prints, snares and blinds set up here and there to shoot game from, all of which look like the work of Aslan warriors.

Other than a couple of birds that seem to be sick in the same manner as those already encountered, most of the local wildlife seems quite healthy, suggesting the contents of the canisters is non-toxic. This is more or less true – the contents have now degraded to the point that they are not harmful to humans and most animals, and in any case were tailored to the biochemistry of Aslan. More detailed notes can be found on page 67.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

The Travellers may be reluctant to enter the depression (crater) in the north side of the city but conditions there are not harmful in the short or medium term. Vegetation has long ago reclaimed the area and with it came wildlife that does not seem harmed by any lingering radiation. The Aslan from the fort hunted here and some have moved into the area after being infected with the bioweapon. Encounters with savagely hostile Aslan are more likely in this area than the rest of the city but most of the Aslan have dispersed and can be encountered anywhere.

Exploring the city and surrounding area will eventually yield signs of continued human habitation and a possible location of the repository. It is located on the far side of the hill where the Counts of Ghormount had their palace and was presumably sheltered from the nuclear detonation. As the Travellers approach, it is obvious that someone is living right on top of where the vault entrance must be.

DEUS VAULT

The repository took the form of a secure bunker protected by heavy blast doors, cut into the rock of a natural fault near the base of the hill. Like many things Sindalian, it was not enough for the builders to create a functional entryway; they had to make it decorative. Thus the entrance to the vault proper is reached by passing between tall statues of former Counts of Ghormount and their families, close supporters and the like. The grandeur is a little diminished by the presence of a small community living around the vault entrance.

There are perhaps 60 people, all of them human, living around the repository entrance. They use the tunnel leading to the blast doors as a cool place to store food and other perishables, and dwell in well-constructed but rather basic huts, which nevertheless have electric lighting. This is powered by a jury-rigged takeoff cable from one of the vault door access panels, suggesting the repository still has some power even after all this time.

The inhabitants of the settlement are alert and wary, so will more than likely spot the Travellers as they approach. They will be challenged by people openly holding the settlement's few guns – rifles for which there is very little ammunition – and asked to state their business.

The locals are not hostile but are scared. Unless first contact goes very badly, the Travellers will be approached by an individual named Eteane, who seems to be some sort of leader. Eteane is a middle-aged woman who – if asked – describes her role in the group as 'dealing with the traders – and everything else'. She is always accompanied by a couple of capable-looking young men or women when dealing with outsiders.

The initial meeting will be in the open, short of the settlement, and the locals will resist any attempt to simply march in and investigate. However, if a little goodwill can be established (not trying to kill and eat Eteane is a good start...) then the Travellers will be invited into the settlement for a meal and more civilised discussion.

THE GHORMOUNT REMNANTS

The people dwelling around the vault are the remains of the population of Ghormount. When others wandered away or died in the chaos after Paal was bombed, a fairly large group stayed in the vicinity of the city and made a life for themselves as best they could. The present population are descended from these survivors or others who arrived later, looking for a place to settle.

For the most part, the remnants (for want of a better term) are subsistence farmers who scavenge the ruins for technological items they can repurpose or sell to the occasional trader who comes through. There are similar small groups elsewhere on Paal, just getting on with their lives as best they can. Most, like the remnants at Ghormount, have no real desire to live anywhere else. This is their home, they have friends and family here, and they understand their environment. Moving elsewhere would be a leap into the unknown and the remnants' worldview is sufficiently small that this is deeply frightening to them.

Eteane and her people are quite open about their situation. They farm the land around their settlement, hunt and look after one another. They have created a pseudoreligion around the statues, which claims they were left as guardians and guides. The remnants get power from the vault door and know there is something on the other side. One day, they say, the door will open and they will find out what is inside. The remnants generally expect it to be something good but are not sure what it could be.

Announcing that the Travellers have a key to the vault will elicit a mixed reaction. Some remnants will be delighted, others annoyed that strangers have the means to open 'their' vault. The more pragmatic among them will wonder what the Travellers mean to do and try to strike a deal. However, there are more immediate problems.

THE REMNANTS TALE

The remnants have lived in this area for generations, ever since the Fall of Ghormount, as they call the bombing. About three years ago, a band of Aslan *ihatei* arrived, followed by a couple of shiploads of their kin (the remnants know very well what a starship is and will be surprised that anyone would think they might not) who built a fortified settlement in the city ruins. After a few months they ran off the scavenger parties the remnants had sent to the city, although the remnants are pretty sure the Aslan deliberately avoided hurting anyone.

Since then, any remnants entering the city run the risk of being shot at by the Aslan or grabbed and roughed up before being released. The remnants know that even an unarmed Aslan can thoroughly mangle a human but they have limited themselves to a few slaps and growls, followed by a stern and clear warning to stay out of their territory. In short, the *ihatei* have muscled in on territory they wanted but have not hurt anyone they did not need to. Nor have they sought conflict for its own sake or tried to grab more land than they can use. They seem to consider the whole city as theirs, and have made it clear that they will swat the remnants if they cause trouble, but have otherwise played the part of honourable conquerors. They have ignored attempts to open diplomatic relations, however.

A few weeks ago, a starship landed close to the city. The remnants can describe it but essentially all the Travellers get from this is that it was a subsidised merchant. The remnants heard some distant gunfire and the ship departed a few hours later. It came back a week later, this time apparently landing at the Aslan fort, and there was more gunfire. After a while it flew away but returned twice more in the next few days. Since then, it has not been seen.

A few days later, a lone Aslan female approached the remnants' camp, carrying her young child. She was filthy and wounded, and apparently had trouble speaking. No Aslan had ever come to the remnants before but she was in obvious need and they helped her. She stayed only one day, leaving the settlement that night without her child. The remnants found her body a few days later and presumed she had died of her wounds. They buried her and did their best to care for the child but it was sick and died soon afterward.

If pressed, the remnants can describe how the baby became violent and tried to claw anyone who came near it before having a series of convulsions and dying.

The remnants sent a party into the city to find out what had happened but they were attacked by raging, incoherent Aslan who had devolved into crazed animals. Some of the party were killed and the survivors swear they saw Aslan eating their bodies. The Aslan seemed to have dispersed but some have remained together and are now in the vicinity of the remnants' settlement.

Referee's Note

The unknown Aslan female knew what was happening to her, having seen others succumb to the effects of the bioweapon. Having fled her settlement, she went to the only possible source of aid and left her baby there. It is obvious she deliberately went away to die so that she would not endanger her baby or the people who might care for it. If the Travellers understand this, it will make the actions of the feral Aslan all the more alien and perhaps make the Travellers pity their opponents as victims rather than just enemies to be shot.

A POSSIBLE DEAL

Eteane proposes a deal. Her people fear imminent attack by a mob of feral Aslan. If the Travellers help them fight off the assault, her people will give the Travellers access to the vault door. If not, they will resist any attempt to open it. There is an additional consideration – Eteane has no more idea than the Travellers what might be inside but she feels her people deserve a fair share of it. After all, if opening the door reveals some horrible threat, it is the remnants who will be in the greatest danger.

If a deal can be worked out, Eteane will instruct her people to help the Travellers get the vault open but there is the pressing concern of possible attack. The vault might have to wait, she points out, since the settlement's lookouts have spotted someone approaching.

THE LAST BATTLE OF GHORMOUNT

Most of the feral Aslan have dispersed to hunt for food – which in some cases is other feral Aslan. However, some *ihatei* were less affected than others and have retained a vestige of their former selves. They are crazed killers but cooperative ones rather than individual hunters. This makes them far more dangerous than those who have degenerated further. These Aslan are cunning and vicious, and have decided on some primal level that the humans living around the vault are their mortal foes. This may be because it was humans who attacked their fort but the reason is now irrelevant – they intend to wipe out the human settlement and hunt down everyone who flees. They cannot be reasoned with or bribed. Thus begins the final battle of Ghormount.

Referee's Note

There will be about five or six Aslan in this group, depending on the number of Travellers. The Referee should play for tension and threat, with half-seen figures moving around in the undergrowth or out in the darkness. The Travellers should have a hard time establishing how many Aslan there are and what they are doing and they should continue to feel threatened even if they remove the group, since they will not be sure they got all of them. Thus, rather than a simple 'monsters charge, we shoot' situation, this incident can go on for a while and could be very tense.

Matters might be complicated by people wanting to rescue wounded friends or even trying to help feral Aslan who have been downed. Whilst laudable, and under normal circumstances the right thing to do, this is both pointless and dangerous, as even a dying feral Aslan will try to kill anyone within reach. One that can still move and fight, but which loses consciousness and is brought into the settlement, could be a real problem.

THE FIRST SKIRMISH

A handful of Aslan warriors is approaching the settlement. They look much like the other degenerate Aslan – filthy, dressed in rags and communicating in a series of incoherent snarls. They are behaving like a hunting pack using terrain for concealment where possible, and sometimes taking an indirect route, but always heading for the settlement around the vault entrance. All have hand weapons of some kind, ranging from high-tech blades to tools or improvised objects.

There is some debate about whether it may be possible to talk to them or scare them off. Few of Eteane's people have truly grasped how feral these Aslan have become – they are still thinking of them as a proud and honourable people who behave in a rational manner.

Any attempt at a parlay will fail, in a bloody manner. The Aslan will pause if they are approached, assessing the situation, but cannot communicate and do not want to. They are smart enough to withdraw if badly outnumbered but otherwise they will simply seek the best position to attack from and then do so. Individuals will back off if badly injured but scare tactics such as fire and loud noises will not work at all. Feral Aslan may be startled by noise and are wary of fire but have no primal fear of either.

If there is no attempt at parlay, this group begins prowling near the settlement, trying to catch someone alone or overwhelm a small group. They will not go away unless at least two of their number are killed or seriously wounded, which means either shooting at them or fighting hand-to-hand. Even then, they will not withdraw far and the Travellers should not be able to determine if they have eliminated the threat.

TAKING STOCK

A larger group of Aslan, perhaps 30–40, are approaching the settlement. There is a little time before they arrive and many questions about what to do. The Travellers, if they still have vehicles, could simply escape and leave the Ghormount remnants to their fate. This would thin the Aslan out a bit, making it perhaps a little easier when the Travellers come back to try an entry to the vault. Indeed, maybe the Aslan will move on and all there will be to do is move half-eaten bodies aside to get to the vault. If the Travellers find this acceptable, they can simply drive away. If not, they will need to assist the remnants in defending their home.

There are around 50 people in the settlement, including children and those too weak to be any use in a fight. It might be possible to muster about 30 able-bodied people but the remnants are scared and inexperienced, whilst their opponents are pathological killing machines.

The remnants can equip themselves with a range of improvised hand weapons but have only a few guns among them and typically only 1D rounds per rifle. They normally hunt with traps and rather basic homemade bows, saving precious ammunition for special circumstances. This constitutes such a circumstance.

There is not much time and the Travellers have no idea how long they have, so elaborate defensive preparations will not be possible. However, it may be possible to throw together some defensive measures. These might include organising fighting teams and casualty-extraction squads, throwing up hasty barricades between the statues to create a redoubt or trying to create a battle plan. The Travellers might also try to get into the vault before the attack begins but this will not be successful for reasons discussed further on.

The remnants are in no way a fighting force. They can shoot their (rather weak) bows or rifles at attackers well enough but if charged by a frothing degenerate Aslan they are likely to panic, drop their weapons and flee. Keeping them together and in the fight will be a problem, as Travellers with the Leadership skill or military experience will quickly spot. However, many of the remnants will fight desperately to protect their homes or children. If the Travellers can provide a rallying point and direction, the remnants stand a chance. If not, they are doomed.

This latter fact will be painfully obvious to most ex-military Travellers and might be the deciding factor that makes them stand and fight alongside Eteane's people. If they do so, they must win or die.

THE SECOND ATTACK

Some feral Aslan are more devolved than others and even in their regressed state the less degenerate members of the group can tell it is only a matter of time before they turn on the others. The answer, of course, is to send them to attack the settlement, weakening the defenders whilst reducing the threat from the most feral of the Aslan.

This attack takes the form of a straightforward charge by the most degenerate of the Aslan; eight of them. They make little attempt at subtlety or use of cover, just rushing at the nearest clump of remnants and trying to hack, club or rip them to pieces.

The sheer animal ferocity of the assault is terrifying, as is the fact that these feral Aslan are more or less immune to pain and fear. They have to be brought down to stop them and that is a difficult task. It is likely some remnants will flee or panic in the face of this onslaught, creating dramatic incidents for the Travellers to deal with.

The ferocity of the Aslan could be used against them, for example by using someone as bait to draw one into an ambush by several concealed fighters. This is virtually guaranteed to work and to keep on working – the feral Aslan just charge at the nearest target they see and do not seem to learn that this can lead into a trap. Thus, it might be possible to deal with the assault relatively easily or it could end up being a desperate scramble against opponents who will not go down no matter how badly they are wounded.

The rest of the Aslan pack moves into position whilst this assault is taking place but will not begin their attack straight away. This is partially because they want their insanely ferocious brethren dealt with by the remnants, as they know very well they, too, will be attacked if they enter the settlement while any are still alive.

Therefore, there is a brief pause after the second attack at which point the final assault begins.

THE FINAL ASSAULT

The final attack is made by around 25 feral Aslan; males and females alike. They are not quite as reckless as the last group, making use of cover and concealment, but are only a little less crazed. These Aslan can be driven off if seriously wounded but are still powerful opponents.

Rather than a simple skirmish, the Referee is encouraged to run the fight as a dramatic narrative. The Travellers will catch fleeting glimpses of feral Aslan rushing across the gaps between statues or chasing a panicked remnant fighter who has dropped his weapon. They may be able to drag a comrade to safety or ambush an Aslan that is chasing someone. The fight should be lurid, violent and fluid, and played for drama rather than dice rolls.

If the Travellers are badly overmatched, the Referee should remember that some of the Aslan are more degenerate than others and may attack former comrades. Some may stop to feed on the flesh of the

fallen. It is not necessary to account for every Aslan and remnant; the Travellers can only see chaos happening right in front of them and will have little idea what the big picture looks like.

Less 'fighty' Travellers can still take part in these scenes. If the Travellers prefer, they may play out dramatic scenes against the backdrop of the fight. An impassioned speech to rally some scared remnants and get them back into the fight, a bit of medical drama at the improvised aid station or even a doomed romance blossoming amid the chaos. If the Travellers want to take centre stage in the fighting, they should be permitted to do so but if not the Referee can craft a dramatic narrative of the remnants' narrow victory and let the Travellers do whatever suits them while the fight is occurring.

Either way, the Travellers and surviving remnants should be able to resist this assault, leaving them in possession of the settlement and the vault entrance. Perhaps there are more feral Aslan out there but the worst is now over and the repository can finally be entered.



THE LEGACY OF GHORMOUNT

The remnants will not permit the Travellers to simply march up to the vault and plunder it. They will want a fair share of what is inside and are willing to resist an attempt to take it by force, at least up to a point. If they are obviously overmatched, they can be bullied but there is still the possibility that someone will throw a rock or knife at one of the Travellers, perhaps starting a tragic massacre. Hopefully a deal can be worked out; Eteane and her people feel entitled to a share but are willing to accept that they would never have got anything from the vault if the Travellers had not showed up with a key.

The key is easy to use. It is simply inserted into a hole beside the door, close to where the power takeoff has been jury-rigged, at which point it emits a strange warbling signal. After an anticlimactic moment, the rod's holographic projector displays an image of the door opening, overlaid with a countdown using the ancient Sindalian number system. Even if this can be read, it is not much help as the displayed number frequently jumps up or down.

The display is an estimated countdown to the door opening, which would normally be just a minute or so while the machinery inside engages. However, in this case a heavily degraded data unit is talking to an equally decrepit computerised locking mechanism and is having trouble generating the right access codes. Once this is done the machinery will have to open the door and, having been buried without maintenance for a couple of centuries, it is not in good condition.

All this means that an attempt to open the vault before the attack will not be successful, although the door might open during or just after the battle. The contents of the vault will not (under most circumstances) be available to assist in repelling the feral Aslan. However, there is a possible deus ex machina in the vault to save the Travellers if they are being overrun.

ONE LAST PROBLEM

The vault is guarded. Just behind the main blast doors stands a Sindalian combat robot (see page 36) It is a basic anti-personnel model, consisting of a body in the form of an upright cylinder a metre tall, running on short tracks. A dome atop the body contains a shotgun-calibre anti-personnel weapon capable of firing heavy

buckshot rounds or lighter 'stingball' ammunition. Its internal magazine holds 100 rounds of each ammunition type.

The robot is very old and virtually non-functional, which unfortunately means it cannot process the access codes and treats everyone as a threat. It is very slow, squealing along on all-but-jammed tracks, and might be more tragic than threatening. However, it can and will shoot anyone in sight. Ammunition selection is wayward; for each shot the robot fires the Referee should roll 1D. If the result is odd, it has fired a non-lethal round; if even, a lethal one.

The robot can be dealt with in a variety of ways, including smashing it up or just tipping it over somewhere its gun cannot find a target. It might be hacked to make it take the access codes or someone could get close enough to use the rod of office. There is a slot on the rear of the robot's casing that will take the rod, which uses an override code to give the Travellers control of it.

The robot can be treated as a lethal threat by the Referee, but might better be considered a problem-solving exercise. If the Travellers can disable it without destroying it, they might be able to reactivate and reprogram it later. The plight of the vault's last defender, lurching around on its crippled tracks, might actually make them pity the poor thing, especially since its aim is terrible and half its shots are non-lethal.

On the other hand, if the Travellers initiate the door opening sequence before or during the Aslan assault, then the robot might come out to help... or join the fight at random. This can be a deus ex machina (machina ex machina, maybe?) to save the Travellers if the Referee is feeling kind or could just be another complication in a very difficult situation.

The robot will have to be dealt with somehow before the Travellers can enter the repository.

THE VAULT

The vault was built as a repository for valuable items. It consists of a short tunnel behind the blast door, which doglegs before coming to another blast door that opens at the same time as the outer entrance. The whole

repository is dimly lit by emergency lights, which show a tunnel cut into the rock behind this second door, with side entrances leading to storerooms and a utility space.

The latter contains a fusion reactor that is almost out of power, plus machinery for drawing moisture from the air and a rather basic living area containing shower and toilet cubicles, tables and a starship-type galley that no longer works. There are no personnel here but the vault was designed to serve as an emergency shelter if necessary.

The other chambers are large storerooms, containing in total around 200 tons of metal ingots. Most are common construction materials, mainly steel and some copper, but there is a small quantity of starship-armour grade crystalliron and a whole ton each of gold and silver bullion. Other chambers contain drums of powdered chemicals and machinery for making metal components to almost any specification. There are also chambers full of ration packs, although these are not edible after 200

years. The same goes for the large number of first-aid kits and similar emergency equipment stored in the vault, although some items such as coveralls, boots and filter masks are still useable.

The vault was not a treasure house, as King Oleb had hoped. It was a storehouse for emergency rebuilding supplies that could enable Ghormount to remain a viable community. This makes the flight of the last count even more of a betrayal – he took with him the key to food and medical supplies his people desperately needed.

Much of the material stored in the vault is salvageable, although it might be a long task to work through it all. The metals, whilst not immensely valuable on the open market, could be useful in kick-starting a small industrial base. If they can be shipped to Drinax, the more exotic alloys will be useful in repairing parts of the Floating Palace whilst almost anyone can make use of bulk steel and copper. Drinax has to pay top credit for imported metals; King Oleb's disappointment that



he is not being presented with immense treasure would be offset by not having to sell priceless treasures to buy a few tons of steel.

The machinery would be very useful to the Grehai Movement, since it fulfils most of their needs for gun-making equipment. The remnants could be shown how to set it up to make tools and similar necessary items for themselves and other communities, and might be willing to produce weaponry for the Movement; there is a possibility for a partnership here, with the remnants at Ghormount producing items for the Movement and arming themselves to prevent future *ihatei* incursions.

Alternatively, the materiel from the vault could be shipped to Drinax, or sold, or whatever else the Travellers feel like doing with it. It may be possible to obtain permission to bring a spacecraft to Ghormount but that will more than likely be at the cost of part of the cargo. Using the materials in situ and transferring finished items overland will take much longer but also create a stronger community in Ghormount.

QUESTIONS AND DECISIONS

The immediate crisis is over and the Travellers have time to decide what to do with the contents of the vault. Both King Oleb and the remnants feel they are due part (in Oleb's case, a large part) of the contents of the vault and the Grehai Movement are likely to want a share once they find out about it. The Movement has no real claim on a share but they perceive a need for some of the vault contents and might take action to obtain it.

Oleb is expecting riches and has convinced himself that the Travellers are going to return with a shipload of valuables. He will not be impressed with steel ingots and a broken combat robot, unless the Travellers can convince him that he is getting something good after all. If they can sell Oleb on the idea that the vault contents (and what the Travellers did with it) actually furthers his cause or greatly benefits Drinax, he will naturally be pleased and offer suitable rewards. Since the value of the repository contents is hard to determine, he just pulls figures out of the air.

Oleb's reward takes the form of a case full of cash – Cr25,000 per Traveller – 'and a couple of weeks off!' as he declares it. This comes in the form of a voucher for a casino complex at one of the better starports in the region, covering docking for the ship, VIP accommodation and spending money for an extravagant

holiday. This cannot be taken as cash and can only be used in the casino and entertainment complex. However, winnings and prizes can be taken. Exactly how this VIP pass, which would normally be given to high-end dignitaries like planetary rulers and their immediate associates, came into Oleb's possession is a potentially important question... but that is an adventure for another day.

If the remnants feel they have been treated generously, they will become good friends to the Travellers, providing the equivalent of a tiny Haven on Paal. Getting their ship to Ghormount without being shot at might be tricky but someone else has clearly managed it. Ghormount could become a place to be safe among friends, make repairs using the materials in the vault and hide from wider events.

The Grehai Movement would be delighted to be given (or sold, at a reasonable price of no more than Cr250,000) the machinery from the vault. This would gain the friendship of the local chapter, who would naturally inform other chapters that the Travellers have helped them. This translates to the occasional piece of useful information or help from chapters on worlds the Travellers visit and the possibility that Prince Richter may hear of them and take an interest.

A middle road, such as setting up machinery at Ghormount and selling some weapons to the Movement would benefit everyone, although it would please the remnants more than the Paal Chapter of the Movement. The result of this will be the beginnings of a manufacturing base, albeit a small one, at Ghormount and an armed and strengthened Paal Chapter. If the reactor at Ghormount could be refuelled and serviced (any starship engineer knows how) then someday the tiny remnant community might grow into a town or city. Eteane's people will never forget the Travellers who gave them power, tools, machinery and most of all, hope.

The Travellers may be left with a few outstanding questions, notably:

- The Grehai Movement and Prince Richter... are they a threat to Drinax or a possible ally?
- The existence of a bioweapon that can turn Aslan feral but not other species is deeply disturbing. Where was it created? Has it been used elsewhere?
- Someone robbed the Aslan after using the bio weapon. They did not take their loot offworld and possibly had permission from one of the local states to fly a spacecraft over their territory. Could someone on Paal be behind the weapon, or the attacks, or both?

CHARACTERS AND OPPOSITION

THE REMNANTS

The remnants are a nominally TL6 society but have to trade for most of the items of this level they can get. Much of their equipment is old and off-repaired or is a low-tech equivalent to a TL6 item. They are smart, but ignorant of most wider issues, and can come over as very parochial.

What the remnants are good at is surviving in the wilderness with a minimum of technological help and wringing the absolute most out of everything they have. They do not like waste or people who treat precious tools as something to be used until it breaks.

TYPICAL REMNANT

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|---|---|---|--|--|
| Human | | Male | | - | |
| TRAITS | | | | | |
| - | | | | | |
| STR | 7 | INT | 7 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 8 | EDU | 3 | Gun Combat (archaic or slug) 1, Melee (bludgeon or blade) 0, Recon 1, Survival 2 | |
| END | 8 | SOC | 4 | | |
| PSI | - | | | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Club (2D) or Knife (1D), and Rifle (3D) or Short Bow (2D-3) | | | |

FERAL ASLAN

Aslan in the course of degeneration are confused and incoherent but retain the ability to act rationally, more or less. Once the infection has run its course, most become feral but some proceed to an even more degenerate state where they are essentially crazed starving berserkers.

All Aslan retain their weapon skills in this state but use them in an instinctive, rather than cleverly tactical, manner. They cannot be reasoned with or bribed and are motivated only by territorial instinct and hunger.

FULLY DEGENERATE "BERSERKER"

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|----|---|---|---|--|
| Aslan | | Either gender | | - | |
| TRAITS | | | | | |
| - | | | | | |
| STR | 16 | INT | 1 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 6 | EDU | 0 | Melee (blade or natural) 3, Recon 2, Survival 1 | |
| END | 16 | SOC | 0 | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Dewclaw (1D+2), and Blade (2D) or Club (2D) | | | |
| NOTES | | STR 9+2D (16) END 9+2D (16) | | | |

DEGENERATE MALE ASLAN

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|----|---|---|---|--|
| Aslan | | Male | | - | |
| STR | 12 | INT | 2 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 6 | EDU | 0 | Gun Combat 0, Melee (blade or natural) 3, Recon 2, Survival 1 | |
| END | 12 | SOC | 0 | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Dewclaw (1D+2), and Blade (2D) or Club (2D) | | | |
| NOTES | | STR 9+1D (12) END 9+1D (12) | | | |

DEGENERATE FEMALE ASLAN

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|----|---|---|--|--|
| Aslan | | Female | | - | |
| STR | 10 | INT | 2 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 7 | EDU | 0 | Gun Combat 0, Melee 0, Recon 2, Survival 3 | |
| END | 10 | SOC | 0 | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Dewclaw (1D+2), and Blade (2D) or Club (2D) | | | |
| NOTES | | STR 8+1D (10) END 8+1D (10) | | | |

SINDALIAN COMBAT ROBOT

| HITS | SPEED | TL |
|-------------|---------------------------------|----|
| 25 | 2 m | 12 |
| SKILLS | Gun Combat 0, Recon 0 | |
| ATTACKS | Shotgun (4D or 2D Stun) | |
| TRAITS | Armour (+6) | |
| PROGRAMMING | Hunter / Killer | |
| COST | Cr56,000 (in current condition) | |



STARSHIP ENCOUNTERS

The following ship encounters can be used in a variety of ways. They can add a bit of colour to a journey in or out of a starport, or could be seen engaging in their business as the Travellers pass through. Or they can be recurring characters, with the Travellers running into a particular ship multiple times until it and its crew become rivals or old friends.

Any of these vessels might have a sinister story, or could be part of one. Finding a wrecked free trader might not be unduly upsetting to a band of Travellers but finding the wreck of a ship they know could make an adventure a lot more personal. In short, these encounters can be used in any way the Referee sees fit, from adding a bit of depth to a chance encounter to being the centre of a full-scale adventure.

Starhawk, Scout/Courier

One of a great many vessels bearing the same rather grand, and all-but-clichéd name, *Starhawk* takes her pretensions to a new height by calling herself a 'personal liner', 'VIP passenger transport' or even 'Yacht' when she advertises for business in starports.

Starhawk is a very smart ship – for a scout/courier at least – with black-and-gold paint on the hull and a major internal redesign. The air/raft dock, probe operations room and workshop found aboard most scout/couriers have been converted into a central recreation and social space, outfitted to the very highest standards. It is only slightly marred by the fact that the ship's engineer has to pass through on his way to and from the drive room. The cargo deck has also been heavily modified, leaving only two displacement tons of cargo space. The remainder of the area has been converted to a luxury

suite for one or two passengers. Again, this is very well outfitted and regularly refurbished.

Starhawk routinely flies with a crew of four, who would normally have a cabin each but can double up to make room for up to four additional passengers. These are usually bodyguards and staff employed by the occupier of the suite. The crew consists of the ship's captain and owner/operator, Liam Hvrein, who also pilots and navigates. He is assisted by an engineer, a steward/medic and a gunner/bodyguard. The latter two often accompany clients ashore.

Starhawk is paid for, and thus has quite low overheads, but can only make a profit by charging large fees on a charter basis. Although in the final analysis 'only' a scout/courier, she is luxurious enough and provides a sufficiently high-quality service that she is rarely short of clients. Most contracts are for a set period rather than a single journey, with the vessel taking her client wherever they want to go.

Occupying a rather unusual niche in the merchant shipping marketplace, *Starhawk* is well known in the regions she frequents and enjoys a good reputation. She is occasionally encountered on a long cruise, either for business purposes or when someone wants a very expensive vacation covering several star systems. Her crew take good care of the client, and will protect them, but they do not tolerate clients who needlessly put themselves in danger. Thus *Starhawk* will take a businessman to a dangerous region or a government official on a properly-planned safari but will not be used as a status symbol by a rich idiot who wants to throw his weight around.

There are a few ports where, ironically perhaps, the fact that someone has travelled aboard *Starhawk* gives them a no-nonsense air that can help with business dealings.

This is not so much because the individual can afford to hire a shiny black-and-gold scout ship and more to do with the fact that *Starhawk's* crew accepted them as a client.

Cashcow, Free Trader

The Type A free trader *Cashcow* is in many ways typical of the type. Capable of jump-1, she plods along the mains or makes circuits of the local star cluster, engaging in freight and occasional speculative trade. *Cashcow* is coming to the end of her mortgage, with just a few months to go before she is paid off. This makes her almost 40 years old and due for her 20-year refit; not that she is likely to get it. Standard maintenance and an annual fortnight in dock is sufficient to keep a ship in good running order for many years but eventually refurbishment becomes necessary. In the case of *Cashcow*, this means everything from table tops in the galley to fuel flow regulators in the Power Plant.

None of this is especially urgent nor dangerous but if the refit is missed the cost of fixing all the little defects that will eventually show themselves will be much higher. In the meantime, the ship looks run-down and seedy, making its tawdry pretence of 'First-Class High Passage' little short of fraud.

Cashcow's crew are not very competent and this problem is exacerbated by the fact that the ship is owned jointly by her three core crewmembers. This came about by way of a very complex round of debt-settling, resulting in a situation where the nominal captain, Varis Ritter, has less authority over the ship than the twin sisters Elizabeth and Unna Steinforr. The twins are an effective partnership as the ship's astrogator and pilot, and also in terms of making good business decisions, but only when they are not at odds over some trivial matter. Since they are at one another's throats most of the time, *Cashcow* is rarely a happy ship.

Varis is the ship's engineer, a situation that is not all that uncommon among free trader crews. It does mean that he is not on the bridge during a crisis and often distracted from important decisions by routine maintenance issues. Other crewmembers – typically one to three at any given time – tend not to stay long aboard *Cashcow* and the vessel has a bad enough reputation that skilled personnel are hard to hire.

The result of all this bickering and high turnover of crew is that the vessel is usually short-staffed or using under-trained personnel. This does not lead to a pleasant experience for passengers, lured aboard by almost entirely fictitious advertising that claims a luxury service even for Middle Passage. Once tickets have been accepted, passengers are disappointed by the peeling

vener on the common area tables, flaky entertainment units that often do not work at all and sullen attitude of largely incompetent stewards. *Cashcow* has the dubious distinction of being nominated three years running for the 'how not to travel' award run by a well-known gazette and was the subject of a vid documentary exposing poor-quality starships.

Despite all this, *Cashcow* gets by. She typically frequents backwater ports where her shortcomings are less readily apparent and moves to new operating areas regularly to stay ahead of her reputation. Attempts to dabble in speculative trade have rarely gone well for her crew, yet they keep trying.

Most of the time, *Cashcow* carries out normal freight runs, although occasionally she will take a regular freight contract instead. This ties her to a particular run but ensures regular payment whether or not her hold is filled. The income is modest but there is virtually no financial risk, making this a fallback for the hard-up free trader. However, *Cashcow's* crew seem to be able to sour this simple deal and even if they do not somehow screw up delivering a bunch of containers to a particular spaceport, income from incidental passengers tends to nosedive as word gets around.

Once a route becomes unviable, *Cashcow* moves on. She often leaves behind unfinished contracts and broken promises; astute captains watch for this sort of vessel and sometimes pick up a good deal to fix whatever mess her incompetent and dysfunctional crew have left behind.



Mayfly II, Far Trader

Mayfly II is a whimsically named Type A2 far trader that has seen better days. Many, many days in fact and not all of them good ones. Her name is both an ironic reference to her longevity and an acknowledgement of the fact that she is rather prone to breakdowns.

Outwardly, *Mayfly II* is just another far trader, albeit an extremely battered one. Her hull is sturdy enough to pass a spaceworthiness inspection but certainly is not pretty. Her nose section has a curious asymmetric ripple that resulted from a 'hot' docking approach some years back. Her portside ventral surface has a large section of almost brand-new hull due to a hard 'pancake' landing. This incident also resulted in the replacement of most of the ship's landing gear. The portside cargo ramp no longer functions and is welded shut, with heavy reinforcement on the inside.

Despite this appearance, *Mayfly II* is essentially spaceworthy. She can manage jump-2 without difficulty, although her manoeuvre drives are rarely run above 0.85G acceleration. If pushed beyond this, the drive begins to run raggedly, with thrust fluctuating every few seconds. This is not particularly hazardous to the ship but is alarming for passengers and can cause motion sickness as well as minor accidents when crew are moving around.

Mayfly II typically operates on backwater routes and is lightly armed for self-defence. Her weaponry consists of a dual pulse laser turret that was retrofitted and is clearly from a ship of a different class; its origins are quite legal – it came from a reputable salvage yard – and it works well enough. In addition, the second hardpoint mounts a homebuilt missile launch cradle, which carries two standard ship-to-ship missiles in a one-shot mount. This would have to be rebuilt if the missiles were ever fired but does provide a useful punch if the vessel is attacked.

Mayfly II is owned and operated by Joseph Leng, a career spacer who must be at least 70 years old. Leng has owned the ship for over 50 years, which he freely admits is less than a third of its lifespan. He is embarrassed and touchy about the appearance of his vessel, and can be cranky in general, but is an experienced free trader captain whose advice is sought by other skippers trying to keep a beat-up old ship running. He actually claims to be retired but his retirement seems to show little difference to his career.

The rest of the crew changes over time. Some who come aboard remain for years and fall in love with their wayward old ship. Others collect a salary until they can find a better berth somewhere else. Many of the latter are down on their luck or very inexperienced and it is not

uncommon to find *Mayfly II* flying with a crew made up almost entirely of people working their passage.

This has contributed to the generally down-at-heel and unfortunate air that accompanies the vessel, yet is a trap Joseph Leng simply cannot break out of.

Mayfly II does not even bother offering High Passage tickets, although if someone offered to pay for it the captain would be delighted to accept. He would do his cranky best to provide a decent service but *Mayfly II* simply cannot justify High Passage rates any more. She does carry passengers but the cabins are rarely full.

Typical cargoes for *Mayfly II* are general freight, shipped for the standard rate. Every now and then Leng has a fit of optimism and buys a speculative cargo and he has occasionally made a multiple-jump speculative run. For the most part, however, *Mayfly II* is a weary old far trader plodding along the backwater spacelanes with a hold more or less full of general-freight containers. It is possible to make a living this way but nobody ever got rich by doing it.

Joseph Leng accepted this reality a long time ago and is more or less content in his routine and mundane starfaring retirement home. He does retain his pride, however, and can be provoked to rage if his ship or what it does is disparaged. He is also virtually impossible to scam or con, partly because he has seen it all before and partly because he has forgotten how to hope for the 'big score' that so many free trader captains chase.





PART 2:
THE PLAGUE OF SINDAL

INTRODUCTION

This adventure takes place mostly in the Dpres and Sindal subsectors of the Trojan Reach and is intended to tie into the *Pirates of Drinax* campaign, although it can be run as a standalone mini-campaign instead. The adventure assumes the Travellers have access to a jump-capable starship. This may be the *Harrier* from the *Pirates of Drinax* but a different ship might well be suitable; a jump-2 vessel can reach all the worlds in this adventure. A jump-1 vessel would have to use deep-space refuelling or carry additional fuel to do so but this is not impossible.

If the Travellers have not played through *In Search of Sindal* it is recommended that adventure be played before this one, however *The Plague of Sindal* can stand alone if need be. The Travellers will need a starship and to be capable of crewing it (or at least to have some NPC crewmembers to do it for them). The

adventure assumes that the Travellers are crewing the commerce raider *Harrier* in the service of King Oleb of Drinax but an independent band of Travellers will also be quite suitable.

The adventure could begin almost anywhere, with a band of Travellers becoming aware of events on Paal and their wider significance. However, the opening takes place on Paal, a short while after the Last Battle of Ghormount. If the Travellers did not play *In Search of Sindal* or have moved on since, they may learn of the incident by way of starport rumours or might even meet the intrepid band of heroes who defended the vault and saved – or failed to save – the people there. The adventure can be modified to start somewhere else if the Referee prefers. Similarly, King Oleb's orders to investigate the biochemical weapon used on Paal could come from someone else if necessary.



REFEREE'S INFORMATION

THE DUSTBELT

Also known as the Sindalian Main, the chain of 11 star systems popularly referred to as the Dustbelt runs from Noricum (formerly Sindal) in Sindal subsector to Janus in Dpres subsector. Its jump-1 trade links were important to the development of the Sindalian Empire and many of its worlds grew to prominence. That was, however, very long ago and fortunes have been mixed since the heyday of the empire.

The Dustbelt is used as a transit route by ships conducting Imperial-Florian League trade as well as by local vessels. Its jump-2 links are important to Imperial trade out to Rimward and Spinward, making the Dustbelt an area of Imperial interest. It is also a prime target for Aslan expansion into Trojan Reach sector. Many Imperial analysts have stated that the future of the sector will be determined on the Dustbelt. However, the Imperium does not have the resources to directly influence events there to any great extent, other than with long-range patrols and some financial support for local allies.

RECENT EVENTS ON PAAL

A band of Travellers, having come into possession of some ancient Sindalian Empire regalia, discovered it was a key to a vault located at the ruined city of Ghormount on the world of Paal. Journeying there in the hope of finding great riches, the Travellers discovered a low-tech remnant human community living in the area and a band of Aslan *ihatei* camped nearby.

The Aslan had been exposed to a virulent biochemical weapon that caused them to regress into feral, near-mindless killing machines. The Travellers helped the people of Ghormount defend themselves against the savage onslaught and subsequently opened the vault.

The vault contained not riches but industrial supplies and emergency equipment intended to help the people of Ghormount rebuild after a catastrophe. Much of it was ruined but sufficient remained to help the remnant population build a better life for themselves. If the

Travellers have recently completed *In Search of Sindal* then they get to decide what happened to the contents of the vault. Indeed, they may still be in the process of deciding when *The Plague of Sindal* begins.

CHIRPERS

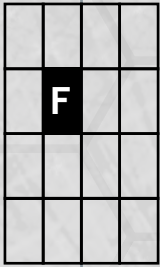
Chirpers, as they are widely known, are semi-intelligent creatures typically massing about 25kg (about one-third as much as a human). They get their name from the birdlike chirping sounds they make and bird-like appearance.

Chirpers are tool-using omnivores, typically eating fruits and berries gathered in the wild or hunting small game with basic weapons such as spears or throwing clubs. They are fast and clever, falling somewhere between the upper range of intellect for animals and lower range for humans and are capable of organising themselves into small communities.

The sophistication of Chirper society seems to vary between communities, which are scattered all over Charted Space. Some are advanced enough to make quite sophisticated tools, build villages and even learn some human speech. Others seem to be little more than packs of cooperative animals with a hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

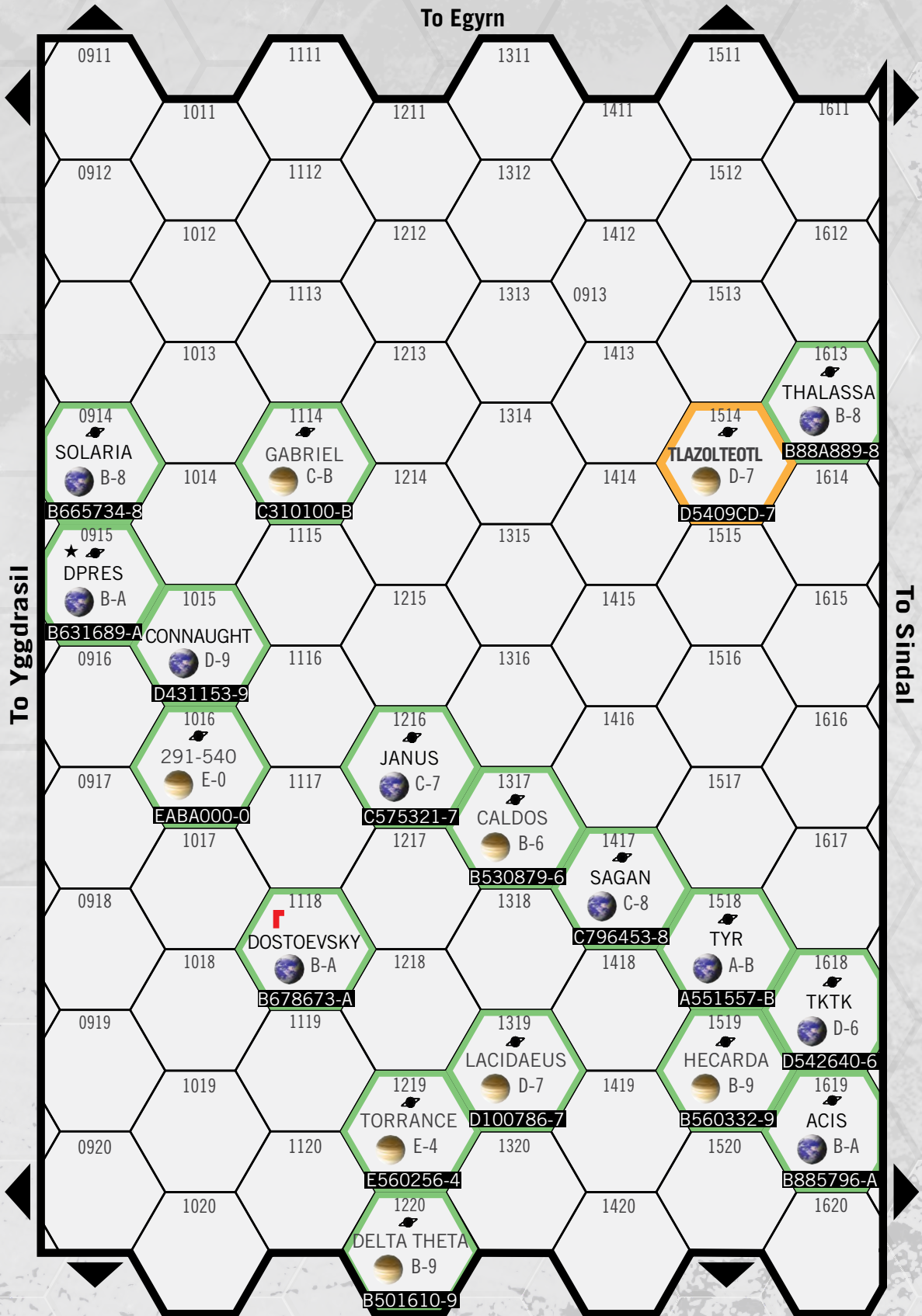
Chirpers are not very territorial and prefer to hide rather than confront intruders. Many of their settlements are so well concealed that it is possible to walk right through one without realising. Likewise, Chirpers themselves are extremely skilled at remaining unseen and have a knack for disappearing if threatened.

The Chirpers of Ttkk (a world on the Sindalian Main) tend towards the high end of Chirper sophistication and are known to be in possession of metal tools. Whether these were made by the Chirpers or obtained through trade (or other means) is not known. The Chirper villages of Ttkk are hard to find even when following a known track and their inhabitants are not inclined to initiate contact. Indeed, some astronavigational charts describe the Chirper population of Ttkk as a myth, since survey teams have found no evidence of any such population. Others report friendly interactions with Chirpers on a long-term basis.



Trojan Reach

DPRES SUBSECTOR



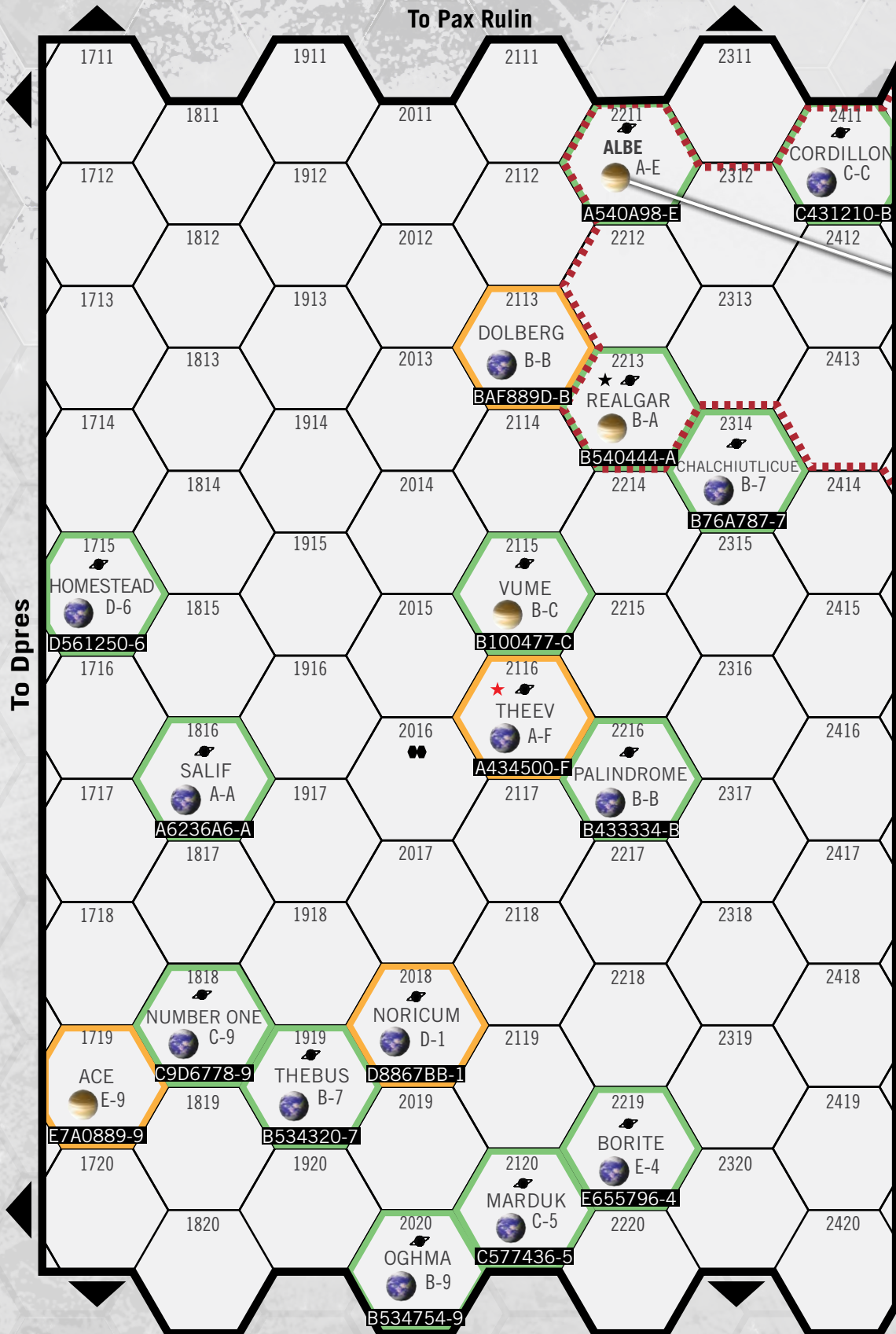
To Egyrn

To Yggdrasil

To Sindal

To Goertal

- Gas Giant
- Starport Class & Tech Level
- Imperial Naval Base
- Secure System
- Research Station
- Amber Zone
- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)



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Trojan Reach

SINDAL SUBSECTOR

- Gas Giant
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
- Fuel Dump
- Imperial Naval Base
- Other Naval Base
- Secure System
- Imperial Border
- X-Boat Route
- Amber Zone
- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)

AT PAAL STARPORT

Paal (B564679-6) is a link on the Drinax Chain and sees a considerable amount of traffic moving along the chain as well as across it from the Borderland Cluster into the Aslan worlds to Spinward-Rimward. Some of this traffic uses the highport but it is deliberately set up with minimal facilities to drive starfarers to the downport.

The airspace above the port is quite busy most of the time and ground traffic is also high-volume. Paal starport is the surface trade hub for the planet and acts as a nexus for the world's railway network. Several large stations on the outskirts of the port zone feed into goods lines and light railways for passengers, some of which criss-cross the city surrounding the port whilst others run straight to the Downport terminals.

The port itself is a noisy, vibrant place whose many attractions vie for attention and cash. Travellers are approached by skills, leaflet-shovers, helpful locals, guides-for-hire, official-looking representatives and attractive strangers, all of whom want to hook the Traveller and get him to where cash or a deal can be bargained out of him. The Travellers may have further interactions with the various business groups they met in *Shadows of Sindal* or the Referee might introduce some all-new annoying skills. The Travellers will also have the opportunity to seek information and perhaps meet up with some of their previous contacts.

THE GREHAI MOVEMENT ON PAAL

If the Travellers gave a significant amount of what they found in the vault to the Grehai Movement, they will have made some enthusiastic, if slightly inept, friends. The Travellers will be invited to celebrations and gatherings and there is much talk of what will happen to any *ihatei* who dare land on Paal once the local chapter is ready. It is pretty obvious that this is mostly talk; the majority of Movement members are very keen on the idea of anti-*ihatei* militias but not willing to put these ideals into practice.

Travellers who interact with the Movement in a more than superficial way will be able to find out a little more about it. Nothing they discover is secret as such but

there are aspects of the Movement rarely discussed among ordinary members. This is largely to do with a lack of interest – most members are not really concerned about things happening 10 parsecs away and only part of the movement out of concern for their own world's security.

It will become apparent that the Paal Chapter of the Movement includes a few who are a lot more clued-up than the average member; some of these are locals, some offworlders who came to Paal as advisors to the local chapter. None are rabid fanatics and few display any signs of racism against Aslan. The Movement weeds out such people as undesirable and genuinely does not hate Aslan for what they are. It is deeply concerned with the prospect of domination by the Hierate or *ihatei* bands, however, making the Movement's opposition to the Aslan political rather than racial.

Interacting with these people is a little different to meeting the average Movement member. They are all well-educated and highly competent, so would be useful contacts to have. Where the average Movement member makes a lot of noise about blasting *ihatei* right back off the planet, these people talk in terms of political pressure, 'target hardening' and economic measures to make an *ihatei* incursion untenable. They seem to actually have a plan beyond armed confrontation and, more importantly, it sounds workable.

A name comes up in conversation once the Travellers have been around the Movement for a little while – Prince Richter. Richter Grehai is the founder of the Movement, it seems, and can trace his ancestry all the way back to the Emperors of Sindal. He has never personally visited Paal but has representatives on many worlds and is gaining support in his endeavour to keep *ihatei* out of the Dustbelt and Drinax Chain. Nobody really knows more about him than this, although some will claim to have met him. Nobody knows where he is currently, since he moves around the region rallying support.

As regards the bioweapon, reactions are mixed. Everyone hates the idea of being overrun by *ihatei* and a few voice the opinion that those at Ghormount got what they deserved. Most Movement members are at least troubled by the use of biochemical weapons and some are openly

horrified. It is quite possible that the question of whether such a weapon should ever be used will trigger arguments but the overall consensus is that nobody ever wants to be in a position where they would have to consider such an option. In short, the Movement's members on Paal are opposed to the use of such a weapon, although a few are willing to consider the possibility that it might be useful as a last resort. It is apparent nobody here was involved in its development or use.

Note: The Grehai Movement's representatives on Paal are what they seem to be. They are sincere and believe in their leader's mission. It seems that the higher up the Movement hierarchy someone is, the more likely it is they will speak softly of sensible and workable measures rather than spouting tough talk of the 'git-mah-gun' sort.

THE MYSTERIOUS STARSHIP

The remnant people at Ghormount told the Travellers that just before Aslan at Ghormount went feral, a starship landed at their fort. From the description, it was a Subsidised Merchant and not Aslan. The remnants also heard gunfire from the area, suggesting the vessel raided or otherwise attacked the fort. It returned twice more over the next few days, then was not seen again.

Normally, starships are not permitted to land anywhere but the downport and there are no records of permission being granted to this vessel even if the Travellers can somehow gain access to the Port Authority's database. However, some detective work can give them an indication of when the ship came through the downport, if indeed it did.

Whilst official logs are either inaccessible or contain no relevant data, asking in the right places – e.g. the technical crews who service ships of this size – will produce some information. A Subsidised Merchant did land at the downport at around the right time. Actually, several did but one stood out for two reasons. Firstly, its flight logs and clearances were extremely confused, requiring the intervention of higher-ranking officials who eventually granted the appropriate clearances just to get the damn thing off the landing pad.

It is not possible to backtrack this interaction through official channels. Apparently the whole thing was left off the books and nobody can remember (or will say) who was involved. Most of those involved were probably just trying to sort out a mess without getting into trouble but it is possible that someone slipped this ship through the port for reasons of their own.

The vessel also took on an unusually large amount of fuel for a Subsidised Merchant, far more than would be needed for jump-1 and a few weeks' operation and indeed more than a standard Type R has tankage for. This suggests that the vessel is modified with extra fuel tanks, perhaps to permit it to cross a two-parsec gap between mains.

These two factors make the ship stand out in the memory of port workers. After a few vague guesses, a name and description emerges that other workers agree with. The ship, apparently, is the *Dawnsearcher*. She is registered as an independent merchant ship out of Tanith and the fact that she has crossed the two-parsec gap into the Drinax Chain suggests that she is indeed fitted with extra fuel tankage. The Paal Downport ship database (which is freely accessible to anyone) shows she passed through Paal a few times in the past couple of years, usually at intervals of several months. She is listed as being armed and her current captain is one Almex Vindersson. Apart from the fact he is a qualified ship's master there is no information on Vindersson in the public database.

The Travellers should not have much difficulty figuring out that this mysterious starship is somehow connected with the biochemical weapon used on Paal. If they somehow miss this inference, King Oleb will explain it to them when they go back to Drinax. That should incite the Travellers to pay a bit more attention to the implications of what is going on around them. If Oleb can see it, it is truly obvious.

THE REMNANT PEOPLE AT GHORMOUNT

If the Travellers treated the people of Ghormount generously, they will have won friends there but not very influential ones. Any machinery or useful items given to the remnants will greatly improve the quality of their lives and may even be enough for them to get a local economy started. In the very long term this may lead to the creation of a viable settlement but in the meantime the remnants are insignificant.

It may be possible to convince King Oleb of Drinax to send some support to the remnant people. This might be a tough sell, since resources on Drinax are already extremely short. However, the costs involved would not be great and it is possible that Ghormount might become an unofficial support base for ships out of Drinax; ships that prefer to stay away from major starports, for example.

LEAVING PAAL

The Travellers have no reason for hanging around on Paal once their business is concluded. Their orders from King Oleb were to grab whatever was in the vault and take it to Drinax, with the implication that this would be something very valuable. He is unlikely to be very pleased with an outcome that does not involve a vast treasure, so the Travellers may be reluctant to return to Drinax until they have something to present to their patron. However, delaying too long will also anger Oleb (in fact, most things seem to anger Oleb) so the Travellers will have to weigh their options.

The voyage directly back to Drinax from Paal will be by way of Hilfer or Pourné, or both. These worlds are detailed in *In Search of Sindal* and provide possibilities for trade or acquisition of wealth by other means. The Travellers may also wish to undertake some side trips that may lead to unexpected adventures. Some profitable trading or a bit of opportunistic piracy might net some loot that will please Oleb but sooner or later the Travellers will have to head back to Drinax and explain that things did not quite go according to plan.



RETURNING TO DRINAX

As the Travellers approach Drinax, they will detect no less than four foreign (i.e. non-Drinaxian) starships in orbit. All are openly transmitting their transponder codes, which identify them as independent. However, they all have an identical but unofficial and non-standard additional code, which identifies them as vessels of the Royal Bodyguard Squadron. The fact that there is no indication of whose bodyguard they are could be taken as high arrogance.

Two of the vessels are Type T patrol corvettes; they are named Stalwart Bastion and Heroic Fortress. The third ship is a Type A2 far trader named Fort Kreinda. The last is a Type S scout/courier named Royal Messenger. From their pretentious names, it might seem that King Oleb had acquired himself a new squadron of ships but these vessels are not Drinaxian.

An additional ship is on the landing pad at King Oleb's floating palace. This vessel, too, displays the Royal Bodyguard Squadron code and declares itself as the Broadsword-class mercenary cruiser Sindalsword. As the Travellers approach to land they can see this is a very smart looking ship, with uniformed armed guards and an obvious security zone around it. Sindalsword has obviously seen action and been repaired at least a couple of times but the initial impression of a well maintained and efficient ship is borne out if anyone gets close enough to take a good look.

SUMMONED TO THE PALACE

The Travellers would normally be expected to report to King Oleb as soon as they land but such is his impatience to find out what vast fortune the Travellers have uncovered for him that he sends no less than three different messengers with official summonses to the palace. The Travellers are expected to wear court dress for an audience with or presentation to King Oleb. Exactly what constitutes 'court dress' can vary but Oleb likes formal wear, uniforms and ostentation. The more important the people at his court look, the happier Oleb is.

The Travellers would be well-advised to dress smartly for their coming audience but not to keep Oleb waiting. Smart Travellers will have already dressed for court

as the ship was on approach and will make their way to Oleb's throne room as quickly as decorum permits. There, they will be kept waiting outside for a couple of minutes, just to remind everyone that King Oleb is in charge. He is too impatient to wait long for news, however, and soon the Travellers will be announced and ushered into the royal presence.

It will be obvious as the Travellers approach the throne that there are newcomers at court. These are humans, all dressed in a manner sure to please King Oleb; richly decorated court clothes and well-tailored uniforms. Personnel in uniform wear handguns as sidearms; those in suits and ball gowns do not. Their leader would be a fairly non-descript man were he not dressed in finery suitable for the court of an Aslan warlord or an Imperial Duke and wearing a highly ornate sword at his waist.

There is no time for introductions as the Travellers approach the throne but the visitors are identified by King Oleb himself, as he booms, 'Prince Richter, here are my emissaries with good news!' A grand gesture invites the Travellers to deliver their news and begin describing the enormous treasure haul they discovered.

Of course, there is no enormous treasure haul. The Travellers will have to break this news to King Oleb in front of the whole court. Not only is this an immense disappointment to him but he will also lose face in front of his guests. Oleb's prideful expectations give way to dismay, as the Travellers explain the situation, and then to a ferocious display of rage. He can be mollified a little by clever presentation of the facts and by any economic gains the mission has created. Nevertheless, Oleb puts on a fine performance and eventually orders the Travellers out of the court to await new orders after having a good rant at them.

OLEB AND RICHTER

The Travellers are left cooling their heels around the Floating Palace for a few days, which might have been quite pleasant but for the fact that everyone knows they are out of favour with the king. Still, this is a chance to get some rest or catch up on personal projects before Oleb sends them out on another mission.

Before that happens, the Travellers receive a very polite request to attend upon Prince Richter Grehai at his

quarters. He has been assigned a suite of rooms for his use whilst staying at the Floating Palace, where he receives the Travellers semi-informally. The tone of the meeting is quite different to encounters with King Oleb. Oleb makes a point of demonstrating his power by any and all means, from deliberate ostentation to shouting a lot. Richter, on the other hand, is far more subtle.

The trappings of power and wealth are there, of course. Efficient servants, some of them robotic, provide high-quality refreshments and can generally predict what a Traveller will want before he or she asks. Armed bodyguards are in evidence but they are 'just there' rather than being shown off as a symbol of importance. Astute Travellers will realise Richter is doing exactly what Oleb does, just more tastefully and probably more effectively. Oleb comes off as a self-promoting loudmouth whereas Richter quietly displays real power. The message between the lines is: 'I'm extremely rich and powerful but I'm not treating you like underlings. Instead I've chosen to meet with you as valued associates.'

Prince Richter introduces himself with handshakes all round and thanks the Travellers for meeting with him. He expects his courtesy to be returned and will not react well to boorish behaviour or disrespect. Assuming the Travellers display at least an attempt at good manners, they will find Richter a likeable and amusing companion. Those with a background in diplomacy may suspect his demeanour is more professional than genuine but even they will have to concede that Richter is good at this game.

Richter makes some small talk about the statuary in the palace and difficulties of keeping a matched set of servant robots in good working order before getting down to business. He is on Drinax to seek an alliance with King Oleb and quite open about his reasons. He wants to 'harden' what he calls the Aslan Frontier against incursions by *ihatei* and Oleb is positioned to be a powerful ally. The Aslan would never have dared move against the old Sindalian Empire, he says. Whatever its sins – and it committed a great many – the Empire would have held back the Aslan encroachment. Even today, it casts a long shadow and true sons of Sindal like Oleb and himself have a duty to shield those dwelling on the frontier from the *ihatei* threat.

Richter seems quite sincere in this, for the very good reason that he believes in this mission. He is not, of course, revealing his whole agenda but this part of it is entirely true. He does not want to lure the Travellers away from Oleb's service, he says – that would be rather discourteous – but he has seen that they are resourceful and potentially useful allies.

Richter does not know if the Travellers have encountered any local chapters of the Movement named after him and will try to fill them in on the basics. He is (apparently) candid about the Movement, openly admitting that many of its members treat it as a social club or talk tough without any intentions of following through. There are also rather too many of what he calls 'small-world yahoos' who have attached themselves to the Movement. However, he has a cadre of good people and growing support along the Aslan Frontier.

More than anything else, Richter is trying to build a network of starship operators to ensure information about incursions is spread quickly. As a general rule, an incursion that is quickly ousted will be taken as a 'good fight, fair enough' by the sponsoring clan – the Aslan respect strength and whilst defeating their *ihatei* will displease the clans, it is acceptable. However, once a settlement has 'taken root' as it were, attacking it is often seen as an attack on the parent clan and may trigger a forceful response.

The answer, in the short term at least, is to dislodge *ihatei* landgrabs as quickly as possible and that requires a timely spread of information. Any ship could help with this but the Travellers can go further if they choose. Richter is aware that King Oleb uses 'rather aggressive mercantile practices' to obtain wealth and exert influence. In this, his objectives align with those of Prince Richter; he knows where *ihatei* vessels will be and can point out targets for groundside raiding. His own people are not set up for this sort of activity, so there is potential for King Oleb to make money and increase his power whilst helping Richter keep the frontier Aslan-free.

Richter is not trying to get the Travellers to act against King Oleb, merely offering a mutually beneficial arrangement. Indeed, he has information on a rather underhanded deal to bring weaponry and industrial machinery to a new *ihatei* colony. If the shipment were to be intercepted, that would make him very happy and King Oleb would also benefit.

This offer is entirely genuine. An *ihatei* band has managed to secure a foothold on Thebus and arranged for equipment to be sourced from nearby markets. Few human merchant skippers will deliver to *ihatei*, for various reasons; they are difficult and often dangerous to work with, and can turn on their trade partners if displeased – even if the situation is beyond the trader's control. Just as importantly, most trader captains realise that in the long term assisting the *ihatei* will create unwanted changes in the economic environment whilst in the short term there may be repercussions if the deal is discovered.

Nevertheless, there are some willing to undertake such trade if the price is high enough. One such is the far trader *Principled Profiteer*. This vessel has been connected to dubious deals and outright smuggling but seems able to stay ahead of the authorities. Her skipper has agreed to deliver large quantities of hardware to the *ihatei* on *Thebus* and made the mistake of trusting too many people in her efforts to draw together the necessary equipment. Richter has obtained her schedule for the next couple of runs and will happily pass it on to the Travellers if they want. It is a win-win scenario for everyone... except maybe the *ihatei* and their human supporters.

The Travellers do not have to agree right away. Richter's offer stands for as long as he is in contact with Oleb and the Travellers.

NEW ORDERS: NO NEW ORDER

A little after the meeting with Richter, King Oleb barges unannounced into whatever room the Travellers happen to be in and gestures everyone else out. In a surprisingly conversational tone he announces, 'I don't trust that man'. He goes on to add that he has seen right through Prince Richter and knows his ultimate aim. Richter, declares Oleb, wants to recreate the old Sindalian Empire with himself as its leader. In short, he is doing more or less what Oleb is doing but using the threat of the *ihatei* as a unifying influence. Oleb has no illusions about whether there will be room for two 'sons of Sindal' in the new order if Richter succeeds.

So, he declares, there must be no new order. Richter and his Grehai Movement might be useful allies for now, and there is certainly no point in picking a fight with them, but the day will come when Prince Richter seeks to dominate Drinax.

For now, Oleb wants the Travellers to accept Prince Richter's offer of cooperation and work with him whenever profitable. If the Travellers can capture the *ihatei* shipment, it will partially make up for their failure at Paal, Oleb says. He is utterly incapable of admitting that his own expectations were unreasonable, or apologising for his outburst in court, but he does have some gifts for the Travellers. These are not a peace offering – Oleb will not admit there is any reason for the Travellers to be unhappy about their treatment, so obviously he is not trying to make peace with the Travellers – but he would like to present the Travellers with something they might find useful.

The gifts are laser pistols dating from the Sindalian Empire or excellent reproductions of them (see page 77). They are highly ornate and would be valuable for their iridium inlay and quality of workmanship even if they were not antiques. Each comes with a hand-tooled leather belt bearing the royal crest of Drinax, inlaid with silver; surprisingly tasteful compared to some of Oleb's gifts. Each gun issued by King Oleb comes with three power packs and a set of accessories including stock and foregrip.

Oleb wants the Travellers to head back out as soon as possible, to intercept the *Principled Profiteer* and take her cargo and to carry out whatever other raids or operations the Travellers think will most benefit Oleb's cause. Along the way, Oleb says almost casually, the Travellers should find out more about the biochemical weapon they encountered on Paal. Even if they did not tell him about it, Oleb has found out – and he is deeply concerned.

For all his bluster and pig-headedness, Oleb understands politics and how certain actions can completely upset the local balance of power. This weapon has the potential to do that, he tells the Travellers. If used against a major Aslan world, it will either create an advantage for someone who is not Oleb, or trigger a backlash that will interfere with his plans. Neither is acceptable. The Travellers should find out as much as they can about this weapon and who is using it.

Ideally, Oleb would like to control the weapon but grudgingly accepts that taking it out of the strategic picture would be acceptable. Biochemical weapons, he asserts as if presenting some great philosophical insight, can be unpredictable. He points downward as he speaks, presumably offering the blighted surface of Drinax as proof of his point.

In short, the Travellers' mission is as follows:

1. Build cooperation with Prince Richter and find out more about him.
2. Intercept *Principled Profiteer* at Thebus and steal her cargo for profit, incidentally pleasing Richter by denying the *ihatei* their expected cargo.
3. Find out more about the biochemical weapon and possibly secure it.
4. Bring home riches for King Oleb.

The Travellers, says Oleb in a conversational tone that fools nobody, might want to think about getting underway as soon as possible.

DRINAX TO THEBUS

The shortest route from Drinax to Thebus for a jump-2 ship is by way of Torpol and Marduk, although the Travellers could take a different route, especially if they are seeking opportunities for plunder or trade. Other destinations might result in additional complications, however. Any route that is not through Torpol will add an extra jump at least and transiting through Borite will probably require a stopover at Noricum.

Torpol (B55A77A-8) is what many spacers call a 'mostly-water world' but features a good starport that has a reputation for being very straight-laced and no-nonsense. Torpol Highport is a good place to undertake trade but intolerant of boisterous behaviour.

Marduk (C577436-5) has a more basic starport than Torpol, built upon an artificial island. The rest of the planet is largely uninhabited as a result of the wars that ended the Sindalian Empire. There are few reasons to venture beyond the port island.

Both worlds are detailed in *Pirates of Drinax*, along with adventures that take place there. It is possible that the Travellers might become involved in these adventures, or some other activities along the way, and such incidents are at the discretion of the Referee. Prince Richter Grehai has given the Travellers the schedule for their target vessel, which is due to make several visits to Thebus. The time frame is a little vague, since under-the-counter deals with alien landgrabbers and criminal contacts do not always go to schedule. However, the Travellers have several opportunities to intercept the *Principled Profiteer* as she makes semi-regular runs to Thebus.

The Referee can therefore play a little fast and loose in this section of the adventure if the Travellers undertake side trips. Ultimately, they will have to proceed to Thebus in order to carry out their mission.

THEBUS

Given its location, it is not surprising that Thebus was one of the founding worlds of the Sindalian Empire and suffered terribly in its fall. The population was more or less wiped out, with small enclaves surviving in areas far from the main cities. Many of these later succumbed to

disease or starvation and the current official population figure includes only the inhabitants of Thebus City, which surrounds the small downport. Thebus City has about 8,000 people dwelling there, many of whom work in underground hydroponic facilities to produce food. This enables the rather more important highport to remain largely self-sufficient in terms of basic supplies.

The rest of the planet is officially uninhabited but in fact has a few small settlements here and there. Some are mining camps or other temporary facilities, others more permanent and may have survived since the days of the Empire. Thebus is not a welcoming world but whilst its very thin atmosphere is insufficient to support humans or Aslan without a compressor mask, Thebus is not totally inimical to life. It has water and breathable air can be compressed with very basic equipment, making the world a little more attractive than a simple rockball.

Worlds like Thebus are not prime targets for Aslan *ihatei*, who like to roam around outdoors and hunt the local wildlife – or at least to show off the fact that they could do so, if they were so inclined. However, real estate is real estate and at times *ihatei* groups have landed on Thebus. Most lacked the support or equipment to create a viable colony but recent reports suggest that at least one *ihatei* band has managed to create a small industrial base and begin expanding.

In some ways this is not a threat to other interests – Thebus is more or less a dead world and has never been recolonised apart from the small enclave at the downport. A growing Aslan presence on another part of the planet is not an immediate concern. However, at some point the parent clan of the *ihatei* will recognise ownership of the planet, making it Hierate space. This will make life rather difficult for the orbital port's operators and shipping that uses it.

The highport at Thebus is a large and modern facility, which sees considerable local trade as well as being an important link on the Imperial/Florian League trade route. The rest of the system has three gas giants, two planetoid belts and several terrestrial (rocky) planets,

most of which are rockballs of little value. As with most star systems, there are usually belter ships and the occasional corporate mining vessel operating among the planetoids and gas giant moons, and it is possible that small settlements are present on some bodies in the system. These might include unregistered mining or scientific outposts, intelligence-gathering posts maintained by more powerful worlds in the region or pirate bases.

The ships using the highport, along with the port's operators, pay little attention to what goes on in the rest of the system. So long as trade ships are safe and food-and-water shuttles continue to ply between station and surface, little else matters. Even *ihatei* presence on Thebus is a distant concern. The port operators might be quite relieved to see the *ihatei* meet some misfortune but they are in no position to cause it.

ARRIVING AT THEBUS

As is normal at busy ports, when the Travellers reach Thebus they will spend some time in a traffic holding orbit before being permitted to enter the highport. The facilities are good, with plenty of opportunities for trade or recreation, and it is not hard to locate records of ships that passed through.

Seeking Information on the *Principled Profiteer*

The *Principled Profiteer* has not been through Thebus Highport or Downport for several years. This, of course, does not mean it did not go planetside without entering the port. This is all the information available in the public record but a little digging will locate a couple of datanet entries recording an encounter between *Principled Profiteer* and the port's defensive craft about a year ago. A couple of fighters sent to investigate an unidentified vessel approaching Thebus on an unusual vector 'eyeballed' the far trader and made contact with the crew but no further action was taken.

The far trader was not in distress and did not intend to enter the controlled zone around the port, so the fighters broke off and returned to base. The news report is chiefly interesting for quoting a vitriolic denunciation of 'rogue merchants' who were accused of running weapons to the *ihatei* on Thebus. The quoted source goes on at some length and includes several offers of proof but ultimately does nothing but point fingers. The rant is attributed to one Anders Grehai, which the Travellers may be able to discover is a pseudonym commonly used by spokesmen for the Grehai Movement. No Anders Grehai can be found on Thebus.

Seeking Information on the *Dawnseeker*

Dawnseeker has passed through Thebus on various occasions, usually several months apart, and her last visit was just a few weeks ago. Not much more can be learned from the public record but it would be relatively simple to cross-reference available data with trade and maintenance logs if those can be accessed. It is apparent that *Dawnseeker* did not buy or sell any cargo at Thebus, other than minor incidentals totalling less than one ton. 'Minor incidentals' in this context usually refers to small items sold by the crew rather than cargo, but can also mean spares and components surplus to the ship's needs. Experienced pirates or smugglers will be aware that some kinds of cargo can be broken up and sold in this way, with the total sold vastly under-reported. Thus, it is possible (but by no means certain) that *Dawnseeker's* crew disposed of proceeds of raiding or part of a broken-up cargo, which might have been obtained by piracy. Records also show that *Dawnseeker* took on more fuel than a Subsidised Merchant can normally carry.





The flight plans filed by departing ships are not routinely published, although any ship seeking freight or passengers has to make one public in order to attract business. *Dawnseeker* did not file a public flight plan or take on either freight or passengers. Her flight plan was recorded but this information is classified. If it can be obtained, the departure plan says *Dawnseeker* went to Number One.

Other Business on Thebus

The Travellers can be reasonably sure that *Principled Profiteer* will not go to the starport when she arrives at Thebus. Indeed, she is likely to try to slip into orbit without being detected; whilst she does not need to do so, since trading with the *ihatei* on the planetary surface is beyond the jurisdiction of the port authority, it is simpler to avoid possible complications by evading detection altogether.

The Travellers may well have experience of doing much the same thing, which will permit an accurate prediction of the best place to lie in wait for the incoming ship. It may also be possible to get at least a partial picture of the highport's sensor capabilities and fighter patrols. From this data, the Travellers will be able to extrapolate a good ambush point, which will give them maximum time to disable and loot the far trader.

The Travellers may well have other business in Thebus Highport, unconnected with the interception of *Principled Profiteer*. The Referee should allow

enough slack in the timing for a reasonable amount of sideline activity but if the Travellers wander too far off the timetable, they will miss the interception on this occasion. There may be future opportunities, of course, but this one will be lost. That might be a useful reminder that the universe around them does indeed continue to move forward when the Travellers are doing other things.

Intercepting the *Principled Profiteer*

Principled Profiteer is a standard Type A2 far trader, armed with a single beam laser turret. Her drives and other systems have been tuned to keep emissions to a minimum, imposing DM-1 to any Electronics (sensors) check to detect or track her. She emerges from jump on the far side of the planet from the highport and begins a low-power manoeuvre to bring her into orbit whilst remaining in the sensor shadow of Thebus. Her crew are alert but not expecting trouble.

How the interception is set up will determine the course of events to a great extent. The Travellers should present the Referee with a plan for what they intend to do. If this is little more than rolling an Electronics (sensors) check and chasing down the incoming vessel, then the Travellers are likely to have a hard time. If, however, they do some good planning and set up the interception correctly, they might find things go better than expected.

How easy or hard the Travellers' task is depends on how many Advantages they can accrue before the target arrives.

Prediction: If the Travellers come up with a reasonable plan to predict the arrival point of the *Principled Profiteer*, and try to set up an intercept that gives them maximum time before any intervention by the port's patrols, they may make an Average (8+) Tactics (naval) check and an Average (8+) Astrogation check. Each successful check grants them one Advantage.

Positioning: If the Travellers chose to position their ship on the far side of Thebus to the Highport, they gain three Advantages. If not, but their ship is in space rather than sitting in the port when the target arrives, they gain no Advantages but may still attempt an interception. If the Travellers are still in port when *Principled Profiteer* arrives, they will not be able to detect it. It will be gone in a day or so and it is quite possible that the Travellers may never know. There really is no reason for this to happen other than carelessness; the Travellers know to within a week or so when the target is to arrive. Lying in wait might mean a boring few days of sensor watch but you cannot be an effective pirate from the comfort of a starport bar.

Early Detection: When the target finally arrives, the Travellers have a chance to detect it early if they are on alert. The Travellers will naturally say of course they are but maintaining a tight sensor watch for days on end requires a level of discipline rarely found outside the military. A successful Difficult (10+) Leadership check indicates the Travellers are diligent – only one Traveller can make the roll but it does not have to be the ship's official captain. If the check is made, the Travellers may make a Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (sensors) check to detect the incoming vessel very early and gain two Advantages. If this check is failed, a Difficult (10+) check can be made to gain one Advantage. If this one is also failed, or the Travellers were not maintaining a diligent sensor watch, an Average (8+) check can be made; if successful the Travellers gain no Advantages. If this check is failed the Travellers may make further Average checks until they succeed but lose one Advantage every time a check is failed. This cannot take the total number of Advantages below zero.

Interception: Once the target arrives, the Travellers may make a Difficult (10+) Astrogation check to set up an optimal interception. If this check is made, the Travellers gain two Advantages. If the check is failed, the Travellers can make a Difficult (10+) Pilot check to gain one Advantage.

The number of Advantages accrued by the Travellers will help determine how much time they have to make an interception and do whatever they have in mind.

It is a fairly simple matter to shoot up a starship until it comes apart and this will certainly prevent the delivery of equipment and weapons to the Aslan. However, there is no profit in this and whilst it suits Prince Richter's agenda, it will not please King Oleb at all. Oleb wants loot, so whether or not the Travellers destroy *Principled Profiteer* or her cargo, he will only be satisfied if the Travellers bring him something of value.

Transit time for the target from its jump emergence to the surface of Thebus is about eight hours. Under power, she could make the run faster but she is coasting most of the way in the hope of reducing the chances of detection. Whilst eight hours might seem like a long time for a ship to make an intercept, the Travellers have to get into position and set up a course that lets them board the incoming vessel, unless they merely intend to destroy her. *Principled Profiteer* is, of course, well aware that some ships have ill intentions; her crew will be suspicious of any vessel they detect on an intercept course, so to a great extent the Travellers' planning is not so much about making an intercept possible as disguising their intentions or evading detection altogether to give the largest possible window for looting.

Once *Principled Profiteer* becomes suspicious of an incoming vessel she will react decisively, accelerating away from the Travellers' ship and broadcasting a distress call. The port's fighter patrols will respond to this quickly but are likely to be on the wrong side of the planet. They will not have to move very far around Thebus in order to get a line-of-sight on the Travellers' ship but it will be some time before their weapons can engage without endangering both vessels.

Initial response will be by a single light fighter (see *Traveller Core Rulebook*, page 188) on distant patrol. The fighter will attempt to investigate the situation by interrogating both ships and closing to 'eyeball' the combatant vessels. This will take some time – how much time is indicated by the result on the Interception table – and even once established, the fighter will have to get into weapons range. Its pilot may decide that discretion is the better part of valour and wait for backup before engaging, giving the Travellers more time to carry out their raid. Similarly, the Travellers can confuse the issue either by giving deceptive responses to the fighters' challenge or using electronic jamming. If the Travellers can make it difficult to figure out which ship is which, or who is attacking whom, the port's fighters may delay their attack.

Advantages Table

| 2D+ Advantages | Result |
|----------------|---|
| 2-5 | The Travellers' ship is badly out of position and cannot make an intercept for boarding before <i>Principled Profiteer</i> reaches the surface of Thebus. The Travellers may decide to abort the intercept and pretend to be just another passing ship or may choose to attack the target with combat starting at 75,000km. |
| 6-8 | Poor Intercept. <i>Principled Profiteer</i> detects the Travellers' ship early and makes a run for it. A port fighter has line-of-sight to the incident and can see it develop in real time. Intervention begins immediately. Combat begins at 50,000km. |
| 9-11 | Borderline success. <i>Principled Profiteer</i> becomes suspicious of the Travellers' ship and turns away, necessitating a chase. It will be 2D minutes before the port's fighters can begin to investigate her distress call. Combat begins at 35,000km. |
| 12-14 | Solid success. <i>Principled Profiteer</i> is intercepted on a favourable vector. It will be 4D minutes before the port's fighters can begin an investigation into any distress call. Combat begins at 20,000 km. |
| 15+ | Total success. <i>Principled Profiteer</i> does not become suspicious until the Travellers' ship is almost on top of her and the port's fighter patrols are in a bad position. The Travellers have 6D minutes before the first fighter can be in a position to investigate. Combat begins at 5,000km. |

Additional craft will be launched once the first fighter moves to investigate. These will be launched in pairs at six minute intervals and require 40+4D minutes to reach a point 10,000km from the Travellers' ship, at which point they begin an attack. Fighters will not fire on the Travellers' ship if it is docked with the target unless they can close to Short range or less.

A maximum of 7 Advantages can be obtained by total success in the interception sequence. Assuming the Travellers' ship is in space and ready to make an interception at the time the target arrives, roll 2D, add the number of Advantages accrued by the Travellers and consult the Interception table. This will indicate the general conditions of the intercept and how long the Travellers have before intervention materialises.

Ranges given indicate the point where *Principled Profiteer's* crew decide they are under attack. The Travellers may, of course, decide to start shooting before this range is reached or may hold their fire. If they do not shoot, *Principled Profiteer* will also not fire her weapons, at least not at first, in the hope of delaying a firefight until help can arrive.

Once combat begins, *Principled Profiteer* will be accelerating away from the attacker and the Travellers will have to close distance as per the normal space combat rules. Although engaged in illegal activity, *Principled Profiteer's* crew are not hardened space pirates and are more inclined to surrender than make a desperate last stand. As soon as their ship takes significant damage, the crew will attempt to negotiate a surrender. This might pose a problem for the Travellers, since the offered terms are cargo in return for safe passage. King Oleb will be

fine with this but Prince Richter would prefer to see the ship out of action and the whole crew taken or destroyed, rather than being captured.

If the Travellers offer reasonable terms, *Principled Profiteer* will surrender and not resist a boarding. Her crew retire to the bridge and engineering areas, sealing the iris valves, then open airlocks to receive boarders. This is common practice, enabling the cargo to be taken without unduly endangering the crew. The Travellers are on a limited time frame since fighters are inbound but will be able to retrieve some of the vessel's hold contents.

All containers are unmarked and there is no official manifest since *Principled Profiteer* is carrying goods bound for an *ihatei* settlement. It is thus pot luck what is grabbed and what is left behind. The time to remove containers is detailed on page 54 of *Pirates of Drinax*.

Exactly how long the Travellers can afford to stay aboard their target is an open question. The fighters can fire on the Travellers' ship as it breaks off at any time after they reach 10,000km and will continue to close until they can disable the raider from close range if it remains docked. The Travellers will have to balance their acquisitive tendencies against the need to make a timely escape.

The Travellers might decide to destroy what they cannot steal, which probably was not what the crew of *Principled Profiteer* agreed to. There is little they can do about it, however. If the Travellers decide to search the parts of the ship they have access to instead of looting the cargo containers, each may make a Difficult (10+)

Recon check every 2D minutes they search. Success indicates the Traveller has found a hidden smuggling compartment containing several cases of cash. There is quite a lot of it – just over half a million Credits' worth, in fact – but it is Aslan currency rather than Imperial Credits. The money is not marked, and can be disposed of without attracting attention, but someone who suddenly blows a huge amount of Aslan money in a casino will be linked to this raid.

Once the Travellers have made good their escape, there will be time to open the cargo containers and see what they have found. For each container grabbed, roll 1D:

1: The container is full of basic colony supplies such as ration packs, clothing and tools with a value of Cr10,000.

2–3: The container has a fair amount of basic colony supplies but also contains small arms and ammunition totalling Cr2,5000.

4–5: The container is filled with machinery and spares for it. The equipment is mass-produced and not of high

quality but has a resale value of about Cr50,000.

6: The container houses advanced colony equipment such as miniature fusion generators and manufacturing equipment, with a value of about Cr100,000 on the open market.

King Oleb is expecting the Travellers to return with useful equipment or cash from the sale of a cargo. He will actually be more pleased with machinery than money. The Travellers could get away with selling off some of the loot and pocketing the cash but Oleb is not an idiot and will want his security people to go over internal camera footage or question the Travellers about what they captured. He is not concerned with a certain amount of skimming from the take, especially if the Travellers can justify it, given the expenses of running their ship. If he thinks he is being robbed by the Travellers, he will be rather less relaxed about the matter.

However, giving King Oleb his share of the loot will have to wait, since the Travellers are still on the trail of the *Dawnseeker*.



ONWARD FROM THEBUS

The Travellers should be able to deduce that whilst *Dawnseeker* has been fitted with additional fuel tanks, she is still only capable of jump-1. This gives two possible destinations after she left Thebus – Noricum and Number One. Noricum has little to offer trade ships, so unless *Dawnseeker's* captain planned to loop back to Marduk – and there is no evidence she did so – she must have proceeded to Number One and thence perhaps along the Dustbelt. This makes sense; the main is a major trade route for jump-1 ships, although most of the lucrative markets are at the far end.

It may be possible to pick up clues as to where *Dawnseeker* is operating from or at least where she has been calling. The obvious next port of call is thus Number One, although it is possible that the Travellers will proceed directly to Ace in the hope of catching up.

NUMBER ONE

Number One is not an inviting world. Its extremely dense atmosphere is unbreathable at sea level, forcing human inhabitants to dwell in high mountain valleys. These are widely separated, leading to balkanisation among the world's states. As is often the case, more than one of the states claims to own the 'official' starport. However, the vast majority of traffic uses the confusingly named High Point Downport, co-located with High Point, the world's highest major settlement.

High Point Downport is not a large facility but is well maintained and smoothly operated, unlike some of the other ports on planet. These vary from extremely primitive installations to quite large but run-down facilities that might have challenged for the title of main starport a few decades ago but are now in desperate



need of investment. Some of these ports are known to be very seedy and may well cater to smugglers or pirates. High Point is rather more reputable and can handle several small vessels at once. Larger ships moor at the small orbital station, transferring personnel and cargo using shuttles.

High Point Downport is subject to a high Law Level, with restrictions or tariffs on most goods moving in and out of the world's economy. This does not affect anything that remains aboard a ship whilst it is in port, however. The port is clean and safe, perhaps a little too sterile for the tastes of some visitors. Official records are very hard to access, since strict regulations apply to data as well as goods. However, it is much easier to get information out of port staff and technicians.

Asking about *Dawnseeker* produces a few vague answers before someone remembers the ship. One Type R Subsidised Merchant looks very like another, although the actions of her crew stood out. They were obnoxious during their stay in the port, which was only a few days but seemed like more to those who had to deal with the crew, recalling a smart and well-dressed team who seemed very sure they were better than everyone else. Nothing was good enough for these people; food was sent back and they even considered the fuel hoses to somehow have been connected to their ship in an unsatisfactory manner.

One observation that comes out among the gripes and general annoyance is that *Dawnseeker* was not as good a ship as her crew seemed to think. Sure, she was serviceable and well armed – two twin pulse laser turrets – but she had signs of old damage that had not been properly repaired and indications she had received an internal refit from a substandard yard. Those on the receiving end of the crew's attitude at least had the satisfaction of knowing they were pretentious idiots and their pretty princess of the spaceways is in fact an overdressed turkey.

Once the ground crews get going, they can recall all manner of little incidents that annoyed them, including the fact that *Dawnseeker* carried her own large cargo-handling robot but her crew would not use it. True, there was not much to be loaded, just a handful of containers, and nothing was sold or unloaded at Number One, but all the same the job would have been made easier if they had used their robot instead of standing around chatting whilst the port crew brought up theirs.

Large cargo robots are expensive and generally used only by vessels that frequent backwater ports where efficient cargo handling might not be available using local resources. It is by no means unknown for a Subsidised Merchant to carry a cargobot but most do not as the sort of routes they operate on tend to have decent ports and it is an additional expense.

If the Travellers investigate what was loaded aboard *Dawnseeker*, they will discover the ship's crew did not buy anything at Number One nor seek freight. Instead they presented paperwork for cargo dropped off a few weeks earlier. The contents listing for these containers is vague but contains a mix of electronics parts – some of them quite specialised – plus life support spares, clothing and general personnel-related items of a sort that might be required by an outpost or hostile-world spaceport staff.

Although no destination was listed for these items, many of the port workers at Number One are aware that once in a while a shipment of this sort arrives aboard a commercial freighter and is dropped off to wait for a local ship. Sometimes the same ship comes back through Number One's port a couple of weeks after picking up the cargo. Some of the port staff mention that the crew of these ships often have alien trinkets to sell. Chirper stuff, apparently. Primitive but nicely made and popular with the kids. Several workers have bought necklaces and the like. The nearest world with a significant Chirper population is Tktk, two parsecs away.

Dawnseeker left Number One a few weeks ago. Nobody in the port knows her destination but she did not take on any new cargo and was not carrying passengers. There is not much more to be learned at Number One, although the Travellers might find all manner of ways to entertain themselves and/or get into trouble.

ACE

Ace is the reason much of the local trade along the Dustbelt turns around at Acis. There are no gas giants in system and the mainworld has virtually no surface water. The starport, if it can be called that, is a rudimentary facility consisting of little more than a landing area marked out near one of the world's habitation domes.

The 700 million people living on Ace dwell mostly in domed cities or underground, with tunnels and semi-subterranean railroads linking settlements. The atmosphere is an unbreathable mix high in Argon and the world has no indigenous life above the level of lichens.

The population of Ace is unwelcoming to outsiders, although not particularly hostile. Most simply have no interest in the wider universe and since Ace's technology is sufficient to maintain the status quo, there is little to be desired. A few ships call but in some cases they are simply ignored until they go away. Those that do manage to undertake trade find little profit to be made here.

Ace would be a dead end for a ship that arrived here without fuel to move on, were it not for the creation of an orbital refuelling station a few years ago. The station itself was formed by refitting a derelict Subsidised Merchant (which had become stranded years before and fallen into disrepair) into what amounts to an orbiting fuel tank. The former cargo hold is now kept topped up with liquid hydrogen fuel by other vessels bringing it from Acis, whilst the passenger area is now a living area for the crew and a sort of bazaar of the strange and unusual. All manner of small items can be traded there and, according to rumour, the station is used to negotiate deals between people who do not want to be seen meeting or even being on the same planet as one another.

The refuelling station actually still has functional drives and could leave if necessary. It sells fuel at grossly inflated prices but this would never cover the cost of keeping it in service were it not for financial support from the government of Acis. Acis runs a regular jump-1 merchant service through Ace and Number One to Thebus and considers the investment worthwhile. If fuel stocks are low, the crew will not sell to non-Acis vessels

until the next shipment arrives. This is rarely more than a week or so but the delay has caused sufficient friction that it has become common knowledge that the station's weapons are perfectly functional.

The crew of the station are bored and tend to be chatty. They remember the Subsidised Merchant *Dawnseeker* quite well. Her crew are described as 'stuck-up asshats' but they usually have some small items for trade when they come through. They are not regular or frequent visitors to the station but they have passed by a couple of times. The station crew will casually mention that *Dawnseeker* 'was carrying some stuff for the research station on Tkkt'. They can add that the crew seemed oddly tense and were even more rude and condescending than usual.

The crew of *Dawnseeker* never deliberately told anyone about their destination but the refuelling station staff are bored and nosy. The existence of a research installation on Tkkt is not public knowledge but ships delivering equipment and supplies come through the surrounding ports and some crewmembers are less than tight-lipped after a couple of drinks. The fuel station staff do not know what the installation at Tkkt does but given that there is a Chirper population on the planet the usual assumption is that its focus is 'cultural studies or something'.

There is no major trade to be done at Ace and not much reason to hang around. However, the Travellers should now have a clear idea of where *Dawnseeker* went.



TKTK

Tktk is a small and very dry world with a thin, tainted atmosphere. Although uninviting, it can support life with no more sophisticated assistance than filter masks and air scrubbers in dwellings. The population numbers around five million, of whom about two million are Chirpers.

Although it lies in the Dustbelt, Tktk is bypassed by most of the trade ships operating on the Sindalian Main. Jump-1 vessels mostly follow the chain of decent starports from Janus to Acis, before heading back up the main once more. Likewise, jump-2 ships tend to skip past Ace, jumping between Acis and Number One. The world is thus very much a backwater.

The human population of Tktk is scattered in small cities located wherever there is well-watered farmland. These regions are widely separated and there is little cooperation between the city-states of Tktk. Most are governed on a democratic basis, sending representatives to a world council that serves as a central government in name at least. Although the world council has some powers to control and influence the actions of any given city-state, it is inefficient and ineffectual, with the result that most city-states make their own policies.

Most of the city-states receive few or no offworld visitors and some do not even have a landing area for spacecraft. Those that do use various small craft for trade; there are few overland links between the city-states, so some city-states are highly isolationist by choice or isolated by circumstances and have a different cultural flavour to those tied into the planetary trade net. The isolated city-states tend to be xenophobic and even those with offworld contact are wary of outsiders.

Tktk has few exports but manages to bring in a trickle of offworld goods, which are traded internally. The city-states are, for the most part, self-sufficient, with a modest manufacturing base powered by nuclear energy. The threat of raids by hostile starships is countered by missile batteries located outside the cities, mostly in heavily reinforced bunkers. Tktk's city-states are able to manufacture nuclear warheads and maintain a mix of conventional and nuclear

missiles for self-defence. They have proven willing to use these weapons against intruders, gaining Tktk a reputation as a bad place to raid.

The Chirper population lives mostly apart from the human cities, although there are some small settlements where humans and Chirpers co-exist in apparent harmony. Tktk's xenophobia does not extend to the Chirpers, who are mostly ignored. They dwell in remote areas and with such a low planetary population even Tktk's limited useable land is more than enough. There are rumours of ruined cities in the Chirper lands but these are generally dismissed as spacers' tales.

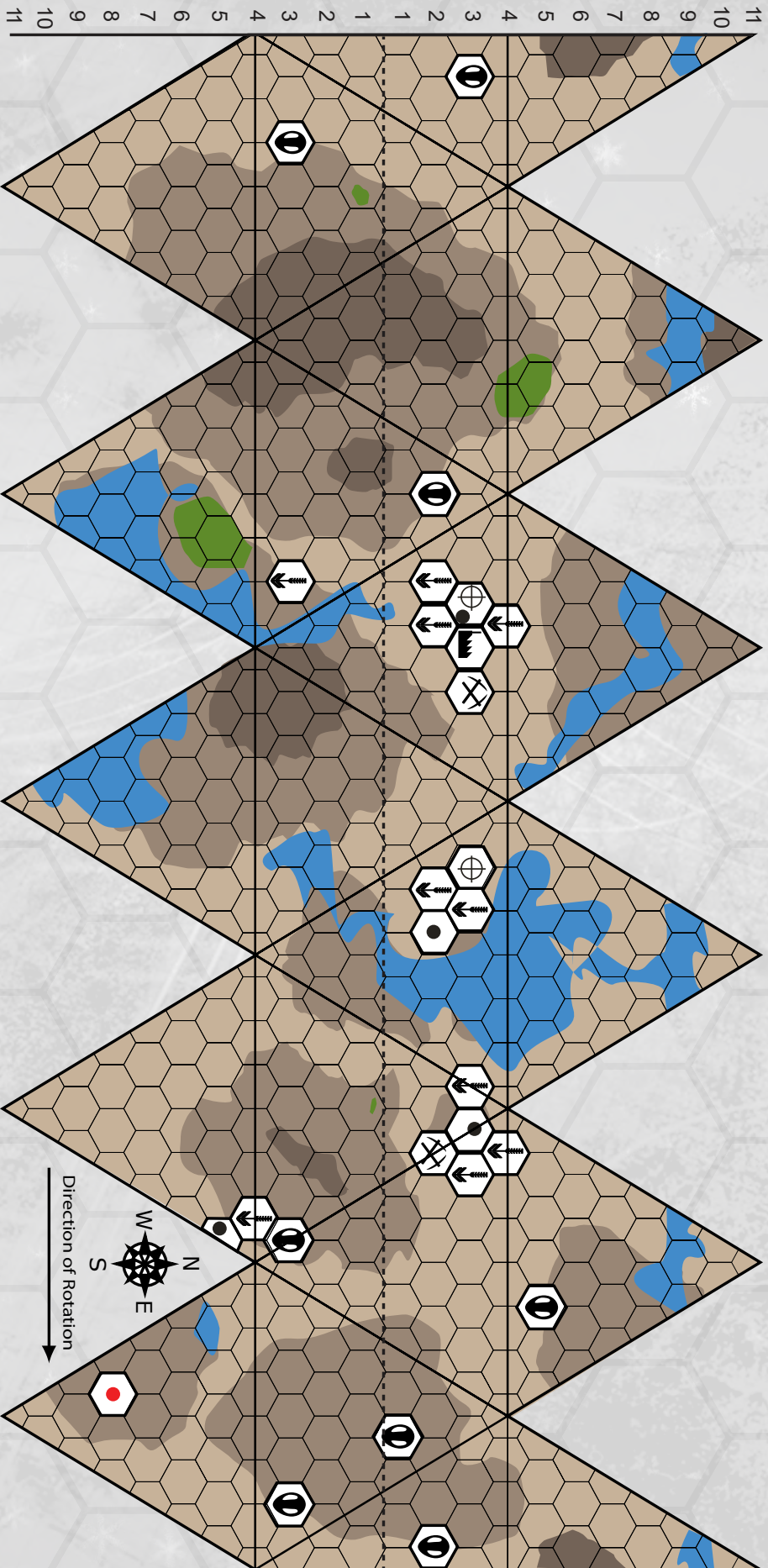
Tktk's starport is a rather basic installation located atop a natural aquifer away from any of the city-states. Its associated startown acts as a centre of government for the planet and provides amenities for the few visiting starship crews. Most of its population farm the surrounding lands or work in cottage-industry manufacturing centres. This population is more cosmopolitan than that of the city-states and includes a proportion of offworld contractors who fly and maintain the trade boats that link the cities.

Tktk has large areas of land that are more or less uninhabitable on a large scale but which can support small settlements at the subsistence level. It is widely supposed that some of these regions have been 'landgrabbed' by Aslan *ihatei*, although this poses little threat to the human or Chirper populations as such settlements cannot support a large enough population to grow into a major colony. Some *ihatei* are content to control large expanses of marginal land where they can hunt and indulge their delusions of being great landowners. Known colloquially as 'dead-end plots', these settlements are mostly ignored.

It is rumoured that worlds like Tktk make useful pirate or smuggler bases, allowing crews to walk outside (albeit in a filter mask) and build themselves a community where it is possible to unwind and relax between raids. No evidence of such activity was discovered when the Imperial Navy swept the system a few years ago but that could have changed in the intervening time.

NAME: TkTk

UWP: D542640-6



- City
- Starport
- Mining
- Farming
- Industry
- Power Plant
- Military
- The Installation
- Chirper Settlement

Hex Scale
7180C

World Gravity
0.45 G

Mean Equatorial Temp
400C

THE INSTALLATION ON TKTK

The research installation is not hard to locate if the Travellers know where to look. It is not on any official map of the world but that should not be a surprise as maps tend to be out of date and incomplete in any region that does not have a major power with the budget to maintain a cartography service. The installation is in a remote area, located in a shallow valley with a small stream nearby. An exposed area of rock clearly serves as a landing area.

The regular lines of buildings are present but the facility was constructed by setting up structures then largely burying them under an irregular earth mound. With a few bushes and a covering of grass, this softens the outlines of the structures to the point where the installation would likely not be spotted by anyone who was not searching for it.

The installation consists of several buildings, although since these are all covered by the earth mound only one is readily accessible. Ventilation ducts run upward although the mound but are covered with filter units, making access difficult by this means.

When the Travellers' ship touches down there is no sign of life at the installation. There is no response to communication attempts, although a sensor scan indicates the facility has power and warm air is escaping from the ventilation shafts.

Landing on the rocky area in front of the installation, the Travellers can see no signs of life. The main entrance appears to be an airlock door, which stands closed. A larger door, presumably for vehicles, stands partially open. Inside the building, the lights are on and there appear to be vehicles parked inside. Moving closer, the Travellers can see a blood trail leading away from this doorway.

The blood trail leads to a dip in the ground, where the corpse of a Chirper can be found. The Chirper apparently suffered serious injuries from some kind of stabbing implement but was able to flee this far before succumbing to its wounds. The Chirper does not appear to be ill-fed or to have been maltreated. Indeed, it has what appears to be a tool pouch hanging around its neck inscribed with the name 'Nicky'. The pouch contains basic tools like screwdrivers and files, and is a fairly standard item that could be bought in any utility store. It is human-made, from synthetic materials, and almost certainly not a Chirper artefact.

THE INSTALLATION

Virtually the whole installation is underground. Most of it is constructed on a single level, built out of concrete on a thick solid base. Concrete pillars also support and stabilise the earth mound above the base. The only projection above the single level of the base is the upper floor of the command area and the antenna trunks that extend to the surface from it.

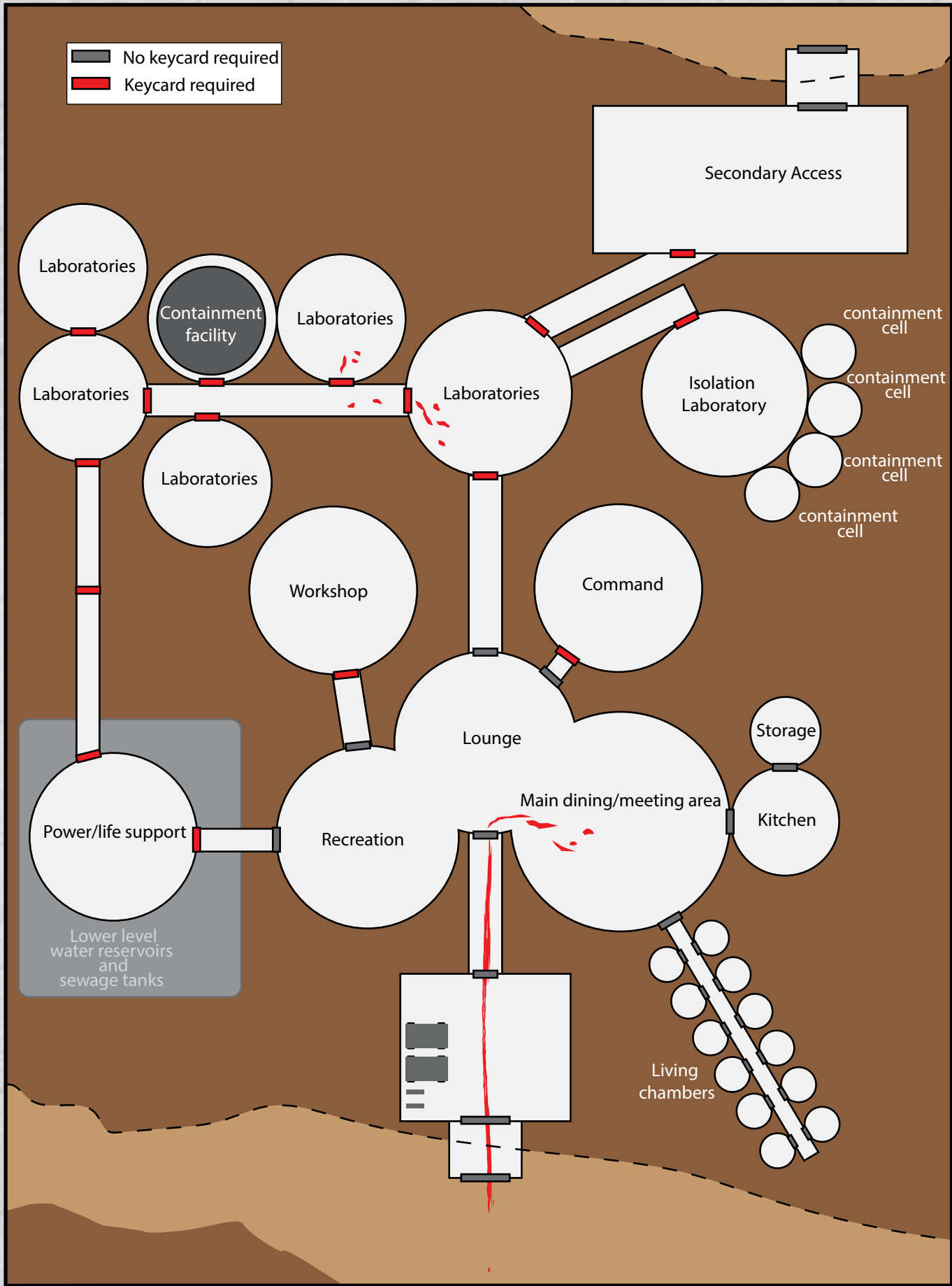
Below the level of the main base is a set of water and sewage tanks connected into the power, living and laboratory areas. It would be possible to crawl from one of these areas to another using the maintenance shafts as all are interconnected. The laboratory area also has a section with a floor that is one storey below the main level.

All other areas are on the same level. Floors are flat and even, with non-slip utility flooring over concrete. Lighting is generally good and normally operates automatically. Most other systems, such as kitchen appliances, tools and computers, are in good working order even if they are not new. Indeed, some equipment in the facility is very old and has probably been refurbished several times. It is all well maintained, however, and most items work as they should. Those areas that have not been trashed are clean and tidy.

The overall layout of the installation is constructed around a central living and sleeping area, with wide corridors leading out in opposite directions to the primary access and laboratory sections. Slightly smaller corridors lead to the workshop and power/life support areas. The command area is also accessible only from the living quarters, by way of a short accessway.

The power and laboratory areas are connected and from the laboratories two small corridors run parallel. One, secured at both ends and in the middle by heavy doors, grants the only access to the isolation labs area. The other is longer and leads to the secondary access area, from which another corridor runs around to the workshops.

The facility ran with a staff of seven, although it could have accommodated more. Three scientists and two research assistants were supported by a robotics and electronics technician and a power systems engineer. In addition, the facility had two domestic and two laboratory robots. The latter are in the laboratory area or what remains of them. They have been thoroughly smashed up by a feral Aslan who thought they were a threat, food or simply in the way. The domestic robots continue to wander the base trying to tidy up and clean the place, despite the staff all being dead. This means



that some areas where combat occurred have clearly been interfered with, which may confound attempts to figure out what happened here.

In addition to the robots, the researchers had five distinctly unconventional assistants. These were Chirpers who attached themselves to the research staff some time ago. They were not being studied, except inasmuch as the scientists observed their behaviour on a daily basis. Instead, they were somewhere between mascots and sometimes-useful assistants.

The research facility was not engaged in research involving Chirpers but was in fact experimenting with biochemical weapons. There are no records within the base of whom the weapons were being made for or against but it will be apparent that several agents have been investigated. Some of these date from the Sindalian Empire era and there are indications that the science staff were trying to replicate some of the more infamous agents used during its latter days.

In general, despite the sensitive nature of the research going on, the facility's security was very lax. The laboratory and particularly the isolation labs were subject to careful biochemical security measures and test subjects were always properly secured. However, security of the installation as a whole largely came down to keeping the outer doors closed. Most internal doors open automatically when approached, with the exception of the labs, power/life support and command areas. These need a keycard for access; all base personnel had one, as did one of the Chirpers. The base's domestic robots also have access to all areas; it is possible to get into the command rooms by just following a robot, for example. Only the isolation labs cannot be accessed this way.

Primary Access Structure

The primary access structure consists of a personnel entry airlock with decontamination capability and a general-purpose storage/ready area linked to a garage/vehicle workshop. The garage contains two four-wheel-drive buggies and two offroad motorcycles, all of which are electrically powered. There are also rather basic maintenance and repair facilities for the vehicles, which appear to have seen very little use.

There is a blood trail across the garage floor, from the living-quarters accessway to the outer garage door. The latter is partway open and will probably be the Travellers' easiest point of entry. There is blood on the door control and the trail leads outside to where the Chirper 'Nicky' lies dead. It is apparent that the Chirper operated the door in an attempt to escape. This might raise some

questions if the Travellers think about it; the simple answer is that Nicky the Chirper was mauled by one of the test subjects but managed to make his escape before succumbing to his wounds. It may also lead the Travellers to the conclusion that the Chirpers were not confined within the installation.

Living Area

The living area is the largest section of the installation. It has three fairly large chambers, one set up as a lounge and another as a recreation area. The third is a dining/meeting chamber adjoining the kitchen and food storage area. There are 12 individual living chambers, of which only seven were occupied. Each chamber is similar to a starship cabin, with a desk, fresher and bed plus a small amount of storage for personal items. The lived-in chambers vary from obsessively clean and tidy to something resembling a disaster zone, although this seems to be the natural state of the chamber rather than the result of a struggle.

The living area gives access to the power/life support chambers, command area, workshops and laboratories, all of which are labelled. The doors at the living area end of the corridors open automatically when approached but the laboratory, command and power sections all require keycard access at the far end. The short tunnel to the entry area does not require a keycard, although there are manual locks on the inner doors that can be used to seal them from the inside.

The main dining/meeting area was the site of an attack by two feral Aslan, which resulted in the deaths of four base personnel. Tables are overturned, small items are scattered around and there are signs of gunfire. The bodies have all been dragged around, mauled and partially eaten and the food stores have also been ransacked. As well as human bodies there is a dead male Aslan in a corner, with gunshot wounds. A blood trail leads towards the workshop area. Most of the installation's guns are in the living spaces, too. Three of the bodies still have their keycards but one is missing; the power systems engineer's special-access card.

Power and Life Support

The power and life support chambers contain sealed equipment – water recycling, air scrubbing, the installation's main fusion reactor and power distribution systems – plus control areas to monitor and operate it. There are several floor access panels giving access to water, power and sewage ducts. These can be used to enter the water reservoirs or sewage tanks if the Travellers really want to, or to gain covert access to other areas of the facility.



Access to the area requires a keycard, which must also be used along with a password to gain control of the facility's key systems. The password is not written down anywhere and will require a Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (computers) check (1D minutes, INT) if the Travellers want to do much more than turn the heating up or down a little. It is possible to cut light or power to a whole section of the installation from this area but this requires authorisation from the command station.

There are no signs of a struggle in the power systems/life support area. The doors are all closed, requiring keycard access and it is not obvious that someone let the ferals into the living area this way.

Laboratories and Containment

The main laboratory area contains several well-equipped biochemical laboratories, all of which are fitted with decontamination equipment and an airlock doorway. A fusion powered incinerator unit takes up one corner of the lab area; presumably it has been used to dispose of experimental subjects. Several HAZMAT suits are stored here. Some were obviously in use, others are still in their wrapping. A secure storage area contains numerous containers for chemicals including cylinders for gas. There are several obvious gaps in the racks, suggesting some containers have been removed. They are not present anywhere in the facility.

There is also a section with a recessed floor, creating a two-storey containment facility for experimental subjects. A variety of animals and birds are caged in this area, most of them healthy. They are running out of food but kept supplied with water through automatic dispensers. A few specimens show signs of hunger and some of the cages have been torn open. The inhabitants seem to have been messily eaten, raw, wherever they were caught.

The laboratories have been used to study, develop and test various biochemical agents. The scientific staff were scrupulous in decontaminating and making safe every area after use but when disaster struck one of the lab areas was in use. Several highly dangerous chemicals are still out of storage and, whilst they are safe enough in their containers or analysis equipment, could contaminate unwary Travellers who blunder around a biohazard area poking into things they do not understand.

Treat the contaminants as a poison (see page 76 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*) with a Difficult (10+) END check, 1D damage and an interval of 6D minutes.

The laboratory area is the obvious site of a fight, in addition to the ransacking of the experimental subject cages. There are no human bodies but there are blood splashes and bullet holes here and there. A thorough search will find the power systems engineer's keycard in a corner, where it was dropped during the struggle.

The doors to the isolation labs are locked open, which they should not be. Just inside the corridor are the bodies of a middle-aged human male and Chirper. Neither has been eaten. An examination of the bodies and blood trails in the corridor show that both received gunshot wounds and may have tried to support one another as they made their escape. The Chirper has a tool pouch round its neck, curiously inscribed 'Also Nicky', containing several small tools as well as a keycard identical to those used by the facility's staff. The human's card is missing.

One of the laboratories is closed and sealed, within is the body of another human. She was apparently mauled by an Aslan's dewclaws and brought here for treatment. She died sometime later, propped up with pillows facing the door with a revolver in her hand.

Isolation Laboratories

The isolation laboratory area consists of a central working space, entered through an airlock, and four containment cells. Two of these have been set up with emergency low berths, with a capacity of eight in each laboratory. Some of the berths are full, containing a mix of male and female Aslan. If awakened or studied by a medical scientist, it will become apparent they are all infected

with the biochemical weapon. The progress of the infection varies – some will be confused and aggressive but capable of understanding what is happening, others have reached the feral stage. It is apparent that others did hold occupants but have been subject to an awakening procedure – some done carefully and some by simply hitting the emergency controls.

The two isolation rooms have been thoroughly trashed. One door stands open, the other has been torn off its hinges. It appears this took a great deal of effort; there is blood on the inside of the door and broken claw fragments here and there. The undamaged room has drag marks in blood leading to it and contains the body of a scientist. She seems to have been bludgeoned with something heavy and then bitten to death by an Aslan but has not been fed upon.

Workshops

The workshop area contains equipment for light metal and plastic fabrication, and an electronics workshop for maintenance of lab equipment, robots and the like. It has not seen a great deal of use, and an area in one corner has been cleared of equipment but partially blocked off by storage crates. Within this area is what can best be described as a microcosm of a Chirper village. Trinkets and a few prized tools like amid bedding clearly taken from the living quarters.

There are three dead Chirpers and an Aslan in the ‘village’. The Chirpers have been partially eaten. Two seem to have been trying to fight with improvised weapons, whilst the third has a revolver. All the Chirpers have tool pouches naming them as ‘Alfredo’, ‘Beatrice’ and ‘Clever Amy’. The Aslan appears to have succumbed to her wounds after feeding on the Chirpers.

Secondary Access

The secondary access area has an airlock door leading outside and airlocks on the corridors to the workshop and laboratories. All have decontamination capability. Within the chamber, which is far too large for a simple access area, there are emergency bunks, a small backup power unit, freshers and stocks of food and water. This chamber is clearly intended to act as a citadel in the event of the installation becoming contaminated or suffering disaster. Among the stores are spare HAZMAT suits of standard design and two Contaminated Environment Rescue Suits (see pages 79–80).

The doors to the lab area are secured and require keycard access and there is some debris here and there as if someone fled through the area in a panic. The outer door has not been opened but the inner doors to the workshop function normally and do not require a keycard for access.

Command Area

The command area requires a senior-rank keycard to access; these cards were carried by the senior scientist and power engineer. To make use of the command facility, passwords are also required but most functions of the command area are available to anyone once they are in the chamber.

The lower floor of the command chamber is on the same level as the rest of the base. This area contains general operations systems and two offices. One is used for day-to-day operations and the other for scientific record-keeping. The upper floor contains communications equipment and the main computer systems.

Communications and general operations monitoring are ‘open’ functions but access or download of the research data requires the senior scientist’s keycard. Most other command functions require a senior card, i.e. that of the chief scientist or the power engineer.

In addition to its command function, this area also contains a small armoury that is accessed with any keycard. The armoury normally contains six pocket snub revolvers and four security carbines (see page 36) but none are present now.

The command area has not been disturbed and at first looks like it has not been entered. However, the lucid female has been using it as a secure lair and has moved food and bedding into a corner where it will not be obvious until the upper area is searched.

Referee’s Notes

The investigation of the research facility is best played for tension, as a sort of science-fiction haunted house situation. Gradually, the Travellers will become aware of what happened at the installation and that they are not alone. It is better to have the opposition stalk the Travellers than to fling everything at them all at once.

Dawnseeker arrived at TkTk several days ago, bringing supplies for the research station as well as several Aslan specimens in low berths. All were infected with the biochemical weapon used at Paal and were in various stages of reversion to feral status. After a day or two, *Dawnseeker* loaded several canisters of the latest version of the weapon and departed for Sagan where her crew intend to carry out a large-scale infection of Aslan.

The day after *Dawnseeker* left TkTk, the research team began unfreezing the Aslan specimens and studying them in the isolation laboratory. The first two were near death from injuries and the freezing process; they died almost immediately and their bodies were incinerated. The next two were in much better health. One was

almost fully degenerate but the other was still lucid. That combination proved to be the undoing of the facility's staff.

The most degenerate of the Aslan smashed his way out of his cell and critically injured one of the research staff before getting loose in the facility. The wounded scientist was taken to the laboratory area for treatment and locked herself in whilst her colleagues tried to find the escaped feral.

The other Aslan, seemingly normal, managed to talk the staff into releasing her so she could help bring down the feral now rampaging around the laboratories. Instead, she killed the scientist who let her out and awakened two more of the least-injured Aslan from low berths. These were feral and immediately began searching for food. The laboratories provided a suitable source and for a time the ferals were contained within the isolation laboratory area.

The lucid female protected herself by hiding until the ferals had moved on, then began to find out more about her location. The situation might have been contained had the five remaining research staff locked the doors to the laboratories and called for help but instead they armed themselves and began a brave, if ill-fated, attempt to locate and rescue their comrades.

Three of the research crew entered the laboratories from the living quarters and were rapidly repelled, with serious injuries, by the feral Aslan. The two who came in through the secondary entry area were ambushed by the feral female who killed the senior scientist (and his Chirper assistant) and took his keycard. The other researcher escaped through the secondary access chambers and closed the doors to the laboratory area behind him.

Thinking they were now safe, if badly hurt, the four surviving researchers retreated to the living quarters to plan their next move. They were caught unawares there by the ferals, who had been released from the laboratories using the chief scientist's stolen keycard. The fight was short and bitter, leaving one feral dead and another critically injured. This feral died soon afterward but not before cornering and massacring some of the facility's Chirpers. All the research staff perished in the living area.

The present situation is that the lucid female is beginning her descent into mindlessness. At present, she is the most dangerous she will be – psychotic and physically enhanced but still clever and capable of using technology. She is armed with a security carbine and revolver from the armoury but has little ammunition.

There are also two feral males wandering the facility. They can move between the secondary access, workshop and living areas, and may be cunning enough to pull up an inspection cover and crawl through the ducts to other areas. One is injured from the fight with the research staff, but not seriously, and one is fully functional. He was released just hours ago by the feral female, who is also prowling the facility. She has the senior scientist's keycard, and thus access to all areas, and is smart enough to lock doors behind her. This is partially to keep the other ferals at bay and partly to make the intruders (the Travellers, once she detects them) think there are safe areas in the facility.

The Travellers can find out where *Dawnseeker* went from records in the command area but to get access to these they need either the senior researcher's or power systems engineer's keycard. The former is in the possession of the lucid female Aslan; the latter is in the laboratory where it was dropped. Thus the Travellers will need to search the installation whilst risking attack from the surviving ferals. Along the way, they may manage to piece together what happened here.

DATA ON *DAWNSEEKER*

Once access is gained to the installation's command centre, data on *Dawnseeker* is not hard to find. It is surprisingly explicit and not encoded in any way. Nor are there any polite euphemisms about its mission. Indeed, it is all spelled out in cold, hard scientific language.

Dawnseeker is en route to Sagan, carrying 12 cylinders of something called Agent Sindal for what is described as a 'final field test'. The target population is not confirmed but is simply noted as 'any suitable *ihatei* enclave, ideally of over a 1,000 inhabitants'. The data goes on to confirm that the target is not a single enclave. Instead, a variety of methods are to be used at different locations in order to evaluate their effectiveness.

Wide Dispersion: At the first target location, *Dawnseeker's* crew will deliver Agent Sindal into the local ecosystem on a general basis, with the intent that communities will become infected as a result of local animals being hunted or kept for food.

Water Dispersion: At the second target location, *Dawnseeker's* crew will introduce Agent Sindal into the local water table with the intent of infecting the population directly through contact with water and on a secondary basis when local animals drink and are then consumed.

Direct Infection: One target location will be chosen for a more direct approach. This is nothing short of dropping canisters of Agent Sindal directly onto the target area creating a cloud of the agent, which will infect targets directly. This is a new version of Agent Sindal, hoped to be its final weaponised form. Rather than being immediately toxic like previous versions, this agent enters the body by way of respiratory contact or eating food that has been contaminated. Confidence in this version of the agent is high but final testing is required before large-scale production can begin.

The report concludes with some final observations that are chilling in their callous detachment. *Dawnseeker's* crew are to withdraw and observe the results of the three infection methods. It is hoped that the dispersion-by-air method will achieve near-total infection almost immediately, whereas the other methods are noted as being more chancy and likely to take longer for infection to reach what is described as a 'satisfactory' level. It is also hoped that the infection will spread to other *ihatei* enclaves not deliberately targeted. The crew of *Dawnseeker* have been advised to remain in orbit in case the agent becomes capable of infecting non-Aslan, although this is noted as being extremely unlikely.

If successful, this field test will confirm the agent is ready and fully weaponised. It is hoped that an air-dispersed version will prove viable, in which case Agent Sindal will cast a long shadow over the Aslan Frontier.

These closing words are significant, because they echo almost exactly the phrasing Prince Richter used when he described his mission (see page 10). This does not prove anything, of course, but it rather strongly (and correctly) suggests the Grehai Movement is involved in the development of Agent Sindal.

The Travellers now know that *Dawnseeker* is headed for Sagan, two parsecs away. It will take her at least two weeks to get there, possibly more if she stops over at Tyr for a few days. It should be possible to get there first or at least in time to deliver a warning. It is obvious that if the field test works, Agent Sindal will upset the balance of power along the Aslan Frontier. This is not in King Oleb's interests, even if the Travellers can stomach the murder of thousands of proud and civilised, if alien, people on Sagan.



SAGAN

Sagan is a link on the Dustbelt trade route. Whilst jump-2 traffic tends to proceed directly between Caldos and Tyr, jump-1 ships must go through Sagan, allowing an otherwise unimportant world to develop a modest interstellar economy. The world itself is habitable, with plenty of water and a dense, if tainted, atmosphere. The world's ecosystem is a mix of native and imported species, and could support a large population without needing to import food. All these factors make Sagan a desirable piece of real estate but at present it is home to just 20,000 people.

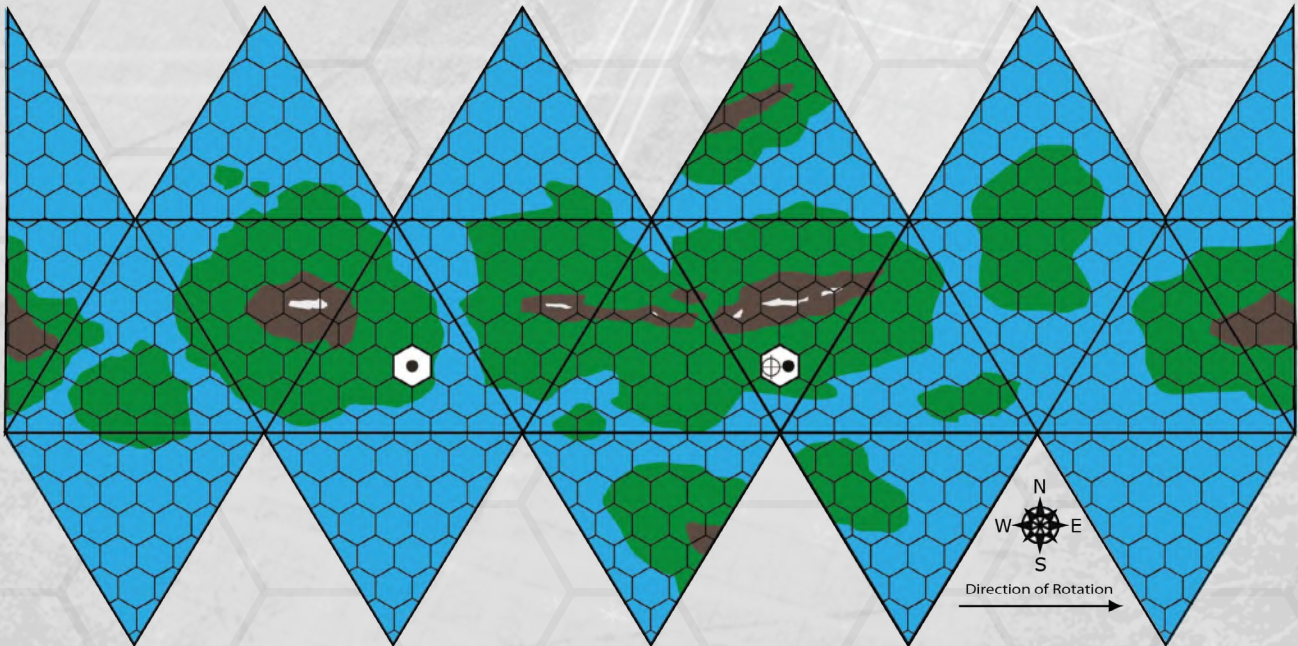
Sagan has been passed over for settlement for several reasons. The world was once quite heavily populated during the era of the Sindalian Empire and suffered

more or less total extinction of its human population due to biotoxins and natural plagues, which rendered the world uninhabitable for centuries. Unable to determine exactly when it was safe to return to Sagan, most settlers went elsewhere. In short, thinking of Sagan as a death-world became a habit in the local region.

The plagues burned themselves out long ago but with little organised settlement going on in the region, and a bad reputation, Sagan was largely ignored until a small city was set up to support a starport, the only officially recognised settlement on Sagan. The rest of the planet is 'officially uninhabited' wilderness and is not policed or otherwise subject to influence from the starport.

NAME: SAGAN

UWP: C796453-8



City Starport



Hex Scale

718k

World Gravity

0.9 G

Mean Equatorial Temp

30°C

The port at Sagan was, unusually for this region, not constructed by the General Development Corporation but was instead the result of private investment. The result is a rather complex political situation, with various services and utilities forming the powerbase for important figures. The owners of the power, manufacturing and similar services became the original political leaders on Sagan and these tiny empires have (in some cases) passed through many hands since.

The result is a situation in which getting anything done is an exercise in wrangling and compromise, and with few resources available to start with, there is little chance of any major project coming to fruition. This does not greatly displease the leaders of Sagan; passing starships bring a reasonable income and the elite see no reason to rock the boat. Sagan's government, if that is the right word, is thus quite happy with the present situation and surprisingly insular for a consortium of starport owners. Sagan cares little for what happens in the wider universe (which includes events not far away on the planetary surface) so long as the ships keep coming and fees get paid.

Not surprisingly, groups of Aslan *ihatei* have been landing on Sagan for some time. Most settlements are as yet rather small but there is little to stop them growing into a major power that vastly outnumbers the human world population. Most *ihatei* have chosen to take land away from the ruins of the old Sindalian cities – Sagan still has a bad reputation – but a few groups have braved the wreckage and begun 'mining' it for materials to build their own communities. These settlements are growing fast, a fact that seems to concern offworlders more than it does the government of Sagan.

INTERCEPTING THE DAWNSEEKER

Dawnseeker is a jump-1 ship and, despite the importance of her mission to the development of Agent Sindal, not proceeding in any great hurry. This is not least since the best way to attract unwelcome attention in the Dustbelt is to look like you are going somewhere quickly. *Dawnseeker* intends to stop over for a couple of days (at least) on Tyr, then proceed to Sagan as if she were any other passenger or cargo ship. This creates an opportunity for the Travellers to get ahead of her and stage an ambush.



The surest way to prevent the delivery of Agent Sindal would be to prevent *Dawnseeker* from reaching the surface of Sagan. If she is disabled in orbit, the agent will probably not survive entry to Sagan's atmosphere (although there are always risks). Failing that, it may be possible to board *Dawnseeker* and secure the weapon canisters. Even if some targets have already been attacked, it should be possible to save lives by preventing the full test from being carried out.

Disabling or destroying the ship should also prevent data on the test from reaching those who instigated it. The deaths of the scientists on Tktk mean that the only way to replicate Agent Sindal is to use the data from the facility (which the Travellers may have already wiped) or obtain a sample of it. Thus the key to preventing widespread use of Agent Sindal lies aboard *Dawnseeker*, as does the best chance of obtaining it for use if the Travellers or King Oleb so desire.

Sagan has very little capability to intervene in an attack that takes place beyond the reach of the missile turrets mounted on its small orbital highport. Vessels using the port might come to the assistance of a ship under attack but are more likely to run for safety than risk becoming collateral damage in a firefight, especially if it is not clear who is the instigator.

An intercept could be set up in a similar manner to that used at Thebus against *Principled Profiteer* but since *Dawnseeker* is not making any real effort to conceal herself (other than by pretending to be an innocent merchant ship) it is possible to simply follow her and launch an attack when the opportunity arises. *Dawnseeker* proceeds inward to the starport like any other vessel; most ships visiting Sagan land rather than refuelling at the very small orbital facility and *Dawnseeker* is no exception. At the port she stops over for a couple of days refuelling and taking on stores (although no passengers or cargo), before taking off and proceeding to her first target on a ballistic path that takes her into low orbit.

During the stopover, *Dawnseeker's* crew decide on their targets. The first two are small enclaves of around 200 Aslan each, both located in remote areas. The third, targeted for air dispersion, is a settlement of over 2,000 *ihatei* located on the fringe of a Sindalian empire-era ruined city. The Aslan there are thought to

be searching for relics to use or sell, so it is possible that a plague outbreak might be blamed on something they found. Sagan does have a reputation as a former plague-world, after all.

The Travellers thus have several opportunities to attack *Dawnseeker*:

- During the initial approach to Sagan
- In port at the downport
- During transit to the first target or whilst the ship is on the ground and the crew are dispersing the agent
- During transit to the second target or whilst the ship is on the ground and the crew are dispersing the agent
- During transit to the third target or the dispersal process

After Agent Sindal has been delivered to all targets, *Dawnseeker* will land in a concealed location and wait for a few days, monitoring communications traffic to observe developments. If infection is not prevented, matters proceed much as might be expected; water and general dispersion produce patchy results, which gradually escalate as the agent works its way through the local food chain but infection never goes above 30% and eventually burns out. Air dispersion produces almost 100% infection within hours, although it is some time before symptoms become apparent. The target community will be wiped out and there is a real possibility of the agent spreading to other *ihatei* communities.

Sagan does not have the resources to deal with or analyse a plague of this nature and the likely response will be to hunker down and ignore it, especially if it is thought the *ihatei* unearthed an old bioweapon. A few ship crews may try to help and eventually assistance will come from neighbouring worlds, however by then it will be far too late. An explosive spread beyond Sagan is extremely unlikely but the agent will endanger other Aslan communities on Sagan and will frighten everyone. Indeed, the world's reputation will become even worse and the chances of colonisation efforts or enhanced investment being secured will become remote.

It may be possible to attack *Dawnseeker* whilst she is on-planet awaiting the outcome of her crew's actions. This will not prevent infection but will secure the last stocks of Agent Sindal and will prevent the Grehai Movement receiving an accurate report on the operation. This would be a distinctly marginal victory, however.

DAWNSEEKER AND HER CREW

The crew of *Dawnseeker* are fervently opposed to *ihatei* expansion into the Dustbelt. Some are racists who hate Aslan, some have lost friends to *ihatei* incursions and some are politically motivated. All are dedicated to their mission and well aware they face a grim fate if caught dispersing biochemical weapons. The revulsion with which such weapons are viewed in most areas is amplified across the Sindalian Main because many local worlds were devastated by such weaponry. Whilst there are those who would use them as a tool of state, the average person has a deep-seated fear and loathing of such devices.

Thus the crew of *Dawnseeker* will fight almost to the last if they cannot talk their way out of a situation. They are not fanatics and will try to negotiate but are aware they might be shot out of hand even after surrendering. Some are sufficiently devoted to their cause that they would try to deliver the weapon as a last act of defiance if there were no other way, seeing this as a heroic last blow against the enemy. In short, although ship's company are no more skilled than the average Dustbelt merchant crew, they are determined, motivated and possibly desperate. This makes them very dangerous.

Dawnseeker is a typical Type R Subsidised Merchant (see page 160 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*) in many ways, although her cargo hold has been modified to carry an extra 50 tons of fuel instead of freight. This



gives her the ability to make two consecutive jump-1s and extends endurance in normal space. *Dawnseeker* is armed with two triple turrets, each carrying a pair of pulse lasers and a missile rack. The portside turret has been modified to allow the delivery of Agent Sindal canisters instead of missiles but these are 'deadfall' weapons with no propulsion of their own. The turret is a secondary means of delivery; normally the ship's launch would be used for a manual airdrop.

Dawnseeker carries an oversized crew consisting of her captain (who functions as astrogator and backup pilot), chief pilot, two engineers and four multi-skilled individuals who act as stewards, cargo handlers, gunners, medics and anything else that needs doing. In addition, for this mission she is carrying two technicians who have received training in the handling of biochemical weapons.

In short, the crew of *Dawnseeker* can be considered to consist of four combatants, four flight personnel and two technicians, all detailed on page 76.

The Agent Sindal canisters themselves are safe to handle (relatively speaking), not least since this version of the agent is much less toxic to non-Aslan than earlier variants and will kill humans only in very high concentrations. The canisters are stored in an armoured carrier that consumes two tons of cargo space and would normally be handled by personnel using HAZMAT or vacc suits. Unless breached, a canister should be entirely safe for unprotected personnel to move around but convincing anyone to do so without protective clothing might be a challenge.

If attacked, *Dawnseeker* will behave much like any other merchant ship. She will defend herself and try to flee from the attacker and her captain would be reluctant

to broadcast a distress signal as he does not want to have to explain the canisters aboard his ship to any rescuers. *Dawnseeker* will therefore only call for help if a fight is going very badly and by then it may be too late. Her crew will put up a determined fight if boarded or ambushed on the ground and are not likely to surrender unless their situation is truly hopeless.

It is likely that boarding *Dawnseeker* will be necessary, if only to secure or destroy the remaining canisters. The chances are high that the Travellers will find themselves meeting resistance aboard the ship.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The *Plague of Sindal* ends at Sagan, one way or another. Ideally, the Travellers will be able to prevent the delivery of Agent Sindal but whether or not this is achieved they will have learned much along the way. There are clear indications that the Grehai Movement, and probably Prince Richter personally, are involved in the development of biochemical weapons for use against the Aslan. Richter's ultimate goal is not yet clear but there are strong indications that he means to rule the Dustbelt as a Prince of Sindal.

These events set the stage for the third instalment in the *Shadows of Sindal*, in which Richter's powerplay begins. For the time being, the Travellers find themselves on Sagan, with precious little to take home to King Oleb other than troubling news. They may decide to undertake raiding or trading in the hope of generating wealth for their patron or might have other ideas. They have a little time now to do as they please but pretty soon events will overtake them and their plans may have to be put on hold. That is a story for another day, however.



CHARACTERS AND OPPOSITION

FERAL ASLAN

Aslan in the course of degeneration are confused and incoherent but retain the ability to act rationally, more or less. Once the infection has run its course, most become feral but some proceed to an even more degenerate state

where they are essentially crazed starving berserkers. All Aslan retain their weapon skills in this state but use them in an instinctive rather than cleverly tactical manner. They cannot be reasoned with or bribed and are motivated only by territorial instinct and hunger.

Degenerate Aslan

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE |
|-----------|--------------|---|---|---|
| Aslan | | Male | | – |
| TRAITS | | | | |
| STR | 9+1D (12) | INT | 2 | SKILLS Gun Combat 0, Melee (blade or natural) 3, Recon 2, Survival 1 |
| DEX | 6 | EDU | 0 | |
| END | 9+1D (12) | SOC | 0 | |
| PSI | – | | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Dewclaw (1D+2), and Blade (2D) or Club (2D) | | |



Degenerate Aslan

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE |
|-----------|--------------|---|---|--|
| Aslan | | Female | | – |
| TRAITS | | | | |
| STR | 8+1D (9) | INT | 2 | SKILLS Gun Combat 0, Melee 0, Recon 2, Survival 3 |
| DEX | 7 | EDU | 0 | |
| END | 8+1D (10) | SOC | 0 | |
| PSI | – | | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Dewclaw (1D+2), and Blade (2D) or Club (2D) | | |



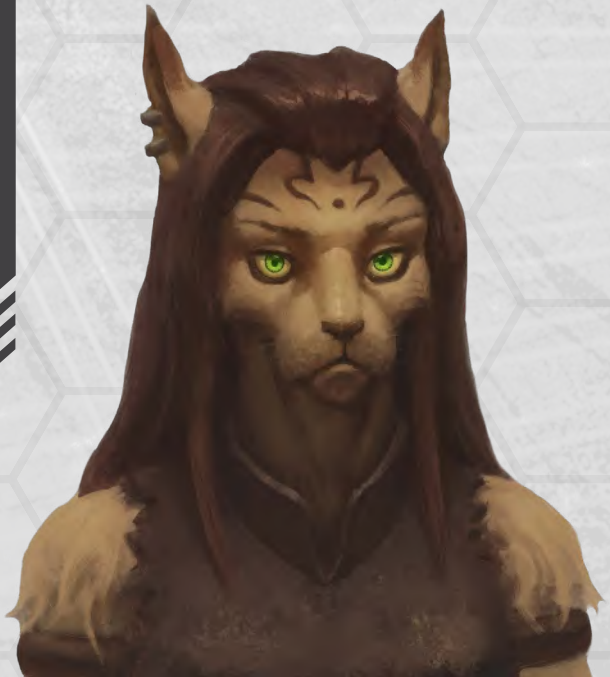
Fully Degenerate 'Berserker' Aslan

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|--------------|--|---|--|--|
| Aslan | | Either | | - | |
| TRAITS | | - | | | |
| STR | 9+2D (16) | INT | 1 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 6 | EDU | 0 | Melee (blade or natural) 3, Recon 2, Survival 1 | |
| END | 9+2D (16) | SOC | 0 | | |
| PSI | - | | | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Dewclaw (1D+2), and Blade (2D) or Club (2D) | | | |



Lucid Aslan

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|--------------|--|---|--|--|
| Aslan | | Female | | - | |
| TRAITS | | - | | | |
| STR | 8+1D (9) | INT | 6 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 7 | EDU | 6 | Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee 0, Recon 2, Survival 3 | |
| END | 8+1D (10) | SOC | 0 | | |
| PSI | - | | | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Dewclaw (1D+2), Security Carbine (3D+2), and Pocket Snub Revolver (3D-3) | | | |



THE CREW OF DAWNSEEKER

Dawnseeker currently has a crew of eight plus two bioweapon technicians. Four of the crew can be considered 'combatants' and are equipped for resisting boarding actions. The flight crew are armed but not skilled in combat. They will fight with

determination, however. Crewmembers can be assumed to also have a basic competence in relevant areas such as electronics or steward if these skills are connected with their shipboard job.



BIOWEAPON TECHNICIANS

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE |
|------------------|---|--|---|----------------------|
| - | | - | | - |
| STR | 7 | INT | 8 | SKILLS |
| DEX | 9 | EDU | 7 | Gun Combat (slug) 1, |
| END | 6 | SOC | 6 | Medic 1, Melee (0) |
| EQUIPMENT | | Submachinegun (3D) Armour: Hazmat Suit (+3) or Vacc Suit (+10) | | |

FLIGHT CREW

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE |
|------------------|---|----------------------------|---|--|
| - | | - | | - |
| STR | 6 | INT | 8 | SKILLS |
| DEX | 8 | EDU | 8 | Gun Combat 0 |
| END | 6 | SOC | 7 | Captain/Astrogator Skills: Astrogation 2, Pilot 1, Leadership 1, Tactics (naval) 1 Chief Pilot Skills: Pilot 3, Electronics (sensors) 2 Chief Engineer Skills: Engineering (j-drive) 2, Engineer (m-drive) 2 Assistant Engineer Skills: Engineer (power) 2 |
| EQUIPMENT | | Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G) | | |

COMBATANT CREW

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE |
|------------------|---|--|---|---|
| - | | - | | - |
| STR | 8 | INT | 6 | SKILLS |
| DEX | 8 | EDU | 7 | Gun Combat (slug) 2, |
| END | 9 | SOC | 6 | Melee (bludgeon) 1 Gunner Skills: Electronics (sensors) 1, Gunner (turret) 1, Recon 1 Steward/Cargo Handler Skills: Mechanic 1 |
| EQUIPMENT | | Breacher Assault Weapon (3D, Auto 2 or 4D+2, Bulky) Armour: Flak Jacket (+5) or Vacc Suit (+10) | | |



EQUIPMENT PAGE

A03/48956

SINDALIAN HEAVY LASER PISTOL

Although not the standard sidearm for all personnel, these weapons were once quite common, issued to countless naval officers as a token of achievement. Today, they are likely to be found in non-functional condition; repairable examples are very rare. A cache of these weapons was found in the Floating Palace at Drinax and some were returned to operating condition. They are now given out by King Oleb for much the same reason as they were originally issued; a token of esteem or reward for good service.

The heavy laser pistol can be operated in an Overcharge mode that boosts its power but quickly drains, or even ruins, the power pack. In Overcharge mode, damage is increased to 5D but every time an Overcharged shot is fired, roll 1D. This is the number of normal shots' worth of power used up and a result of 6+ means the power pack is ruined.

Some heavy laser pistols come with a set of accessories, including stock and foregrip, that turn it into a small carbine. This increases the Range to 75 metres,



| Weapon | TL | Range | Damage | Kg | Cost | Magazine | Magazine Cost | Traits |
|-----------------------------|----|-------|--------|----|----------|----------|---------------|--------|
| Sindalian HeavyLaser Pistol | 12 | 25 | 4D | 3 | Cr32,000 | 20 | Cr4,000 | Zero-G |

A03/75674

POCKET SNUB REVOLVER

The pocket snub is designed to fire standard snub pistol ammunition and be as small as possible. It uses a very conventional side-swinging cylinder design, with one of its six chambers marked with a luminous pattern visible to the user but not anyone in front of the weapon. If lined up with the indicator on the frame, then this chamber will be the next under the hammer, enabling the user to carry the weapon set up to fire a specialist round first (or last, depending on where the cylinder is aligned).

The pocket snub has a very short barrel, even by snub pistol standards, and few projections to snag on clothing when drawn. It is small enough to be carried in a purse or an ankle holster as a backup or emergency weapon and is modestly effective at close range.

The same weapons are also used to deliver tranquiliser rounds. These do D3 damage on impact and cannot penetrate armour. If a tranq round enters the target's body, it takes effect after D3 rounds. The target must make a Difficult (10+) END check or become unconscious. Additional checks are made at a difficulty level of Average (8+) at intervals of 1D minutes. Once one is made the target begins to wake up.



| Weapon | TL | Range | Damage | Kg | Cost | Magazine | Magazine Cost | Traits |
|----------------------|----|-------|--------|----|-------|----------|---------------|--------|
| Pocket Snub Revolver | 8 | 5 | 3D-3 | - | Cr150 | 6 | Cr10 | Zero-G |

A03/48956

SECURITY CARBINE

This weapon is designed to be somewhere between a shotgun, carbine and specialist munitions delivery system, using a round with the same dimensions as a standard 10mm snub pistol cartridge, compatible with most snub weapons.

The carbine uses a pump-action triple-feed system, with a 10-round tubular magazine running under the barrel and two six-round magazines along the sides of the breech. None of these is detachable; all are manually loaded a round at a time through the breech using the selector to choose a magazine. It is notoriously easy to load the wrong ammunition into a given magazine, with alarming and potentially fatal results, but in theory this weapon allows the user to deliver a range of specialist ammunition types to cover all possible security applications.



| Weapon | TL | Range | Damage | Kg | Cost | Magazine | Magazine Cost | Traits |
|------------------|----|-------|--------|-----|-------|----------|---------------|--------|
| Security Carbine | 8 | 10 | 3D | 2.5 | Cr250 | 10 (6/6) | Cr25 | Zero-G |

A03/75674

SNUB AND SECURITY CARBINE AMMUNITION

Both the snub revolver and security carbine can be loaded with variant ammunition, as can standard snub pistols. Baton rounds are intended as a non-lethal option, while flechette rounds split in flight to spread over a wide area. Finally, tranquiliser rounds can render a target unconscious. If a tranquiliser round causes any damage, the target is affected by a poison that requires a Difficult (10+) END check to resist. Damage is being rendered unconscious, with an Interval of 1D minutes

| Ammunition | TL | Range | Damage | Magazine Cost | Notes |
|--------------|----|-------|--------|---------------|-----------------|
| Baton | 8 | 5 | 3D-3 | Cr25 | Stun, Zero-G |
| Flechette | 8 | 5 | 2D-3 | Cr40 | Blast 2, Zero-G |
| Tranquiliser | 8 | 5 | D3 | Cr250 | Special, Zero-G |



A03/48956

BREACHER ASSAULT WEAPON

The Breacher is essentially two weapons; a cheap-and-simple short-barrelled assault rifle with folding stock, mated to an under-barrel pump-action breaching gun. One or the other weapon can be fired each round. Breacher gun rounds have an explosive core and flatten on impact, creating a shaped charge effect, which blows a small hole in light internal doors or similar obstructions. They are ineffective against bulkheads and armoured hatches but enable a light structure to be quickly breached by an entry team. The shaped-charge is most effective against a flat, hard surface.

A pump-action version of the breacher gun is available with its own stock and grip, turning it into a standalone weapon.



| Weapon | TL | Range | Damage | Kg | Cost | Magazine | Magazine Cost | Traits |
|--------------------------|----|-----------|--------|----|-------|----------|---------------|--------|
| Breacher Assault Weapon | 8 | 200 25 | 3D | 5 | Cr850 | 30 | Cr15 | Auto 2 |
| Breacher Round | | | 4D+2 | | | 6 | Cr30 | Bulky |
| Pump-Action Breacher Gun | 8 | 25 | 4D+2 | 1 | Cr250 | 6 | Cr30 | Bulky |

A03/75674

HAZMAT SUIT

The Hazardous Material and Environment Protection Suit (almost always abbreviated to HAZMAT) is a multipurpose protective garment designed to give complete barrier protection against hazardous liquids, gases and disease pathogens. It offers minimal protection against radiation but will prevent radioactive particles (e.g. contaminated dust) from coming into contact with the wearer's skin.

The suit is very light and feels little different to wearing normal clothes other than the gloves and head covering. Normally the suit is worn with a belt-mounted air filter of the powered 'blower' type to improve comfort. An external air supply can be used instead, with hoses using the same connector as the filter. A HAZMAT suit can be used as an emergency space suit but its seals are designed to keep air out rather than in and will fail after 1D minutes.



| Armour Type | Protection | TL | Rad | Kg | Cost | Required Skill |
|-------------|------------|----|-----|----|-------|----------------|
| HAZMAT Suit | +8 | 12 | 10 | 1 | Cr900 | None |

A03/48956

CONTAMINATED ENVIRONMENT RESCUE SUIT

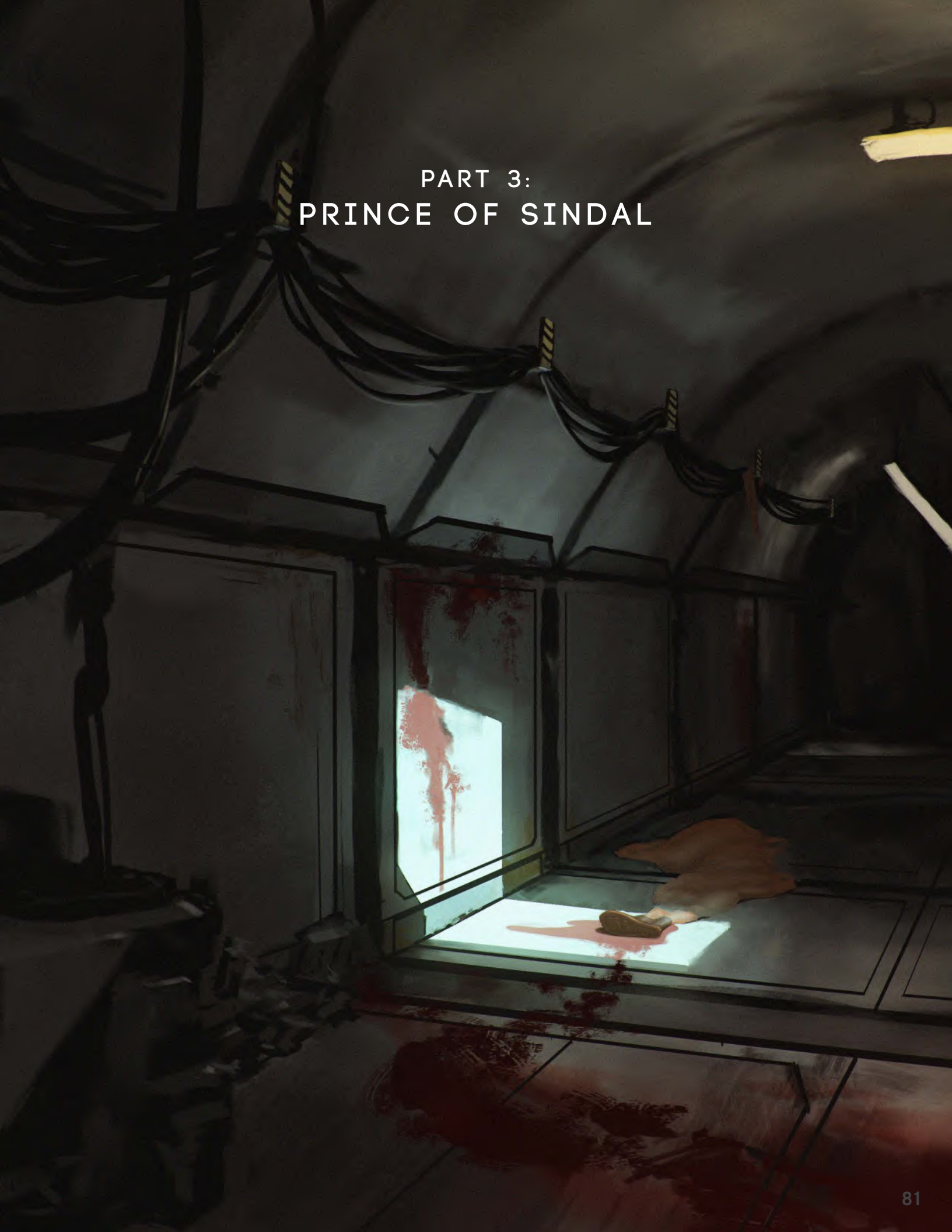
The Contaminated Environment Rescue Suit is similar to a vacc suit but designed to operate in at least a very thin atmosphere and will withstand hard vacuum only for a few minutes. The suit consists of an under-layer not dissimilar to a standard HAZMAT Suit and has a heavy-duty helmet unit with built-in lights, thermal cameras and heads-up display, which is keyed to a range of automatic sensors built into the suit that analyse atmospheric contaminants, dust composition, thermal effects and air currents. The suit can usually identify toxins and indicate threat levels to the suit's wearer as well as to unprotected and partially-protected personnel.

Dispensers on the suit's belt contain emergency filter masks, gloves and gas-impervious sheets, which provide some protection from contact contaminants. There is also a drugs kit with emergency injectors containing antidotes for common contaminants and supplies of Fast Drug, to keep casualties alive long enough to extract and treat them.



| Armour Type | Protection | TL | Rad | Kg | Cost | Required Skill |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----|-----|----|----------|----------------|
| Contaminated Environment Rescue Suit | +4 | 12 | 95 | 6 | Cr15,000 | None |

PART 3:
PRINCE OF SINDAL



INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

This adventure takes place mostly in the Dpres subsector of the Trojan Reach and is intended to tie into *the Pirates of Drinax* campaign, although it can be run as a standalone mini-campaign instead. The adventure assumes the Travellers have access to a jump-capable starship. This may be the *Harrier* from *the Pirates of Drinax* but a different ship might well be suitable; a jump-2 vessel can reach all the worlds in this adventure. A jump-1 vessel would have to use deep-space refuelling or carry additional fuel to do so but this is not impossible.

If the Travellers have not played through *In Search of Sindal* and *The Plague of Sindal* it is recommended those adventures be played before this one but *Prince of Sindal* can stand alone if need be. The Travellers will need a starship and to be capable of crewing it (or at least to have some NPC crewmembers to do it for them). The adventure assumes that the Travellers are crewing the commerce raider *Harrier* in the service of King Oleb of Drinax but an independent band of Travellers will also be quite suitable.

The early part of the adventure sees the Travellers moving through various star systems picking up rumours and seeking information. There is no set timeline to this part of the adventure, so if the Travellers wander off to investigate something of interest, or perhaps to do a little trading, piracy or something else entirely, this will not affect the course of the adventure. It can be assumed that the various factions are gathering their strength or readying themselves whilst the Travellers are busy elsewhere.

However, once the Acis Conflict starts, there is a timeline that must be followed. There is some leeway for the Referee, but it does not make sense for a war to break out and then everyone to hang around for months while the Travellers voyage halfway across the sector and back. The Travellers will have to keep up with the pace of events. If the Travellers decide to do something that places them elsewhere when a major event unfolds then it will happen 'off camera' and the Travellers will hear of it or witness the aftermath.



C H A P T E R - O N E

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

RICHTER'S PLAN

The Acis system is one of the key entry points for *ihatei* entering the Sindalian Main, by way of a two-parsec transit from Akhwohkyal. Most other jump-2 entry points require passage running dangerously close to the territory of the Glorious Empire – although their *ihatei* use these points relatively freely. The result of this astrographical situation is that the Spinward end of the Sindalian Main has a mix of *ihatei* from the Hierate and Glorious Empire, who fight among themselves for prime settlement locations, whereas the Trailing sections have few *ihatei* from the Glorious Empire.

None of this matters to Richter, at least not directly. What he is concerned about is the fact that Acis is the key to reducing *ihatei* incursions and will likely some day be the flashpoint for a major confrontation between the Hierate and its opponents. The current government of Acis makes a pretence of trying to prevent *ihatei* moving through the system and onward into the Dustbelt but it is only really concerned with its own territory. This is entirely understandable, given no single world can hope to survive a clash with even one Aslan clan, let alone a concerted effort by several.

Richter sees Acis as the bastion of the Dustbelt and has been working towards '*ihatei* hardening' the system for some time. Until recently, his efforts were low-key and not effective but recent events have convinced him that Acis must be brought around to a policy of actively blocking *ihatei* movement into the Sindalian Main. If that means toppling its government, so be it.

This will be a difficult undertaking. The people of Acis are, for the most part, comfortable with their way of life and resistant to change. They have lived under the shadow of the *ihatei* for a long time and are used to a policy of token resistance unless Aslan try to settle Acis itself. Indeed, most are quite happy this way, since it makes a war they cannot win much less likely. Acis is sometimes unkindly referred to as the 'Dustbelt's doormat' but without strong support from other world governments there is little Acis can do and no real desire to try.

Prince Richter intends to precipitate a crisis at Acis, in the hope of forcing the government (or some successor government; Richter does not really care) to change its policy. He knows this is a risky strategy but, if

successful, it could effectively slam the door in the face of the *ihatei*. That is a worthwhile goal in its own right but although Richter's stated agenda is to keep the Dustbelt as a visitors-only destination for Aslan, he has a larger purpose. He wants to be the popular hero who forced Acis to live up to its responsibilities, who turned back the *ihatei* tide and who will lead the worlds of the Dustbelt to a new age of prosperous security.

Richter intends to place the government of Acis in a position where it has no choice but to accept assistance – a package put together by the heroic diplomatic efforts of Prince Richter Grehai. Hopefully the situation will never go beyond the crisis stage but Richter is well aware that matters could escalate further.

If things go well, Acis is redirected along the path Richter wants and he gets the credit for protecting the Dustbelt. If matters go awry, he has a number of backup plans. One is the biological weapon; it could be used as a threat or deployed en masse to poison a world. Richter does not want to use it but is willing to do so to prevent his scheme from backfiring.

Richter's plan takes advantage of a visit by Aslan leaders. They belong to a group known as the Ailairlil, which translates to Anglic as roughly 'relatives of successful *ihatei*'. Whilst not a major player in the politics of the Hierate, the Ailairlil have widespread influence. Their visit has several purposes, all connected with increasing their own power and paving the way for more *ihatei* to claim land in the Dustbelt. Richter knows where the emissaries of the Ailairlil are to be and has arranged for them to be eliminated. Ideally, he wants to pin this act on Drinax, so has engineered a pirate attack on their ship.

This is only part of the plan. Richter has expended a great deal of effort in convincing the government of Tyr that the Ailairlil are to sign a secret treaty with Acis, granting free access through the system in return for placing Aslan mercenaries at Acis' disposal. This is not very far from the truth – there has been some discussion of the *ihatei*-access question behind closed doors – but Richter's version presents Acis as treacherously opening the way to a flood of *ihatei* and this is not the case.

There is a long history of conflict between Acis and Tyr and precedent for Acis' use of Aslan troops. It has

taken Richter a great deal of time and effort but he has managed to convince the Tyrians that the '*ihatei* treaty' will result in a major threat to Tyr. A diplomatic effort to persuade Acis not to agree the treaty would be unlikely to succeed and, since the Ailairlil are already in the Dustbelt, more direct action is required.

Meanwhile, Richter has been attempting to destabilise Acis, which has not gone so well. He has people positioned to cause unrest but his hope of engineering a coup is a forlorn one. Nevertheless, he feels his overall plan has a real chance of success and intends to press ahead.

Richter intends to leak news of the *ihatei* treaty, which will then be taken up by his supporters on Acis. They will foment riots and other disturbances, generally trying to make it look like more of the populace is outraged than is really the case. There is no treaty but this will be hard for the government to prove. The majority of the population are unlikely to be much affected by the news of the treaty but Richter hopes that by causing as much ruckus as possible he might be able to encourage others to jump on the bandwagon.

In the meantime, the murder of the Ailairlil may or may not cause a backlash from the Hierate but it will certainly create fear of one. With anti-Aslan rioting on Acis and attacks on Aslan diplomats in the Dustbelt, plus some well-fabricated evidence implicating them, the government of Acis should (rightly) fear they will be blamed.

Outright war is unlikely, especially with the Hierate already embroiled with the Glorious Empire but a response of some kind seems inevitable. Acis will need allies and Prince Richter is able to provide them. The Grehai Movement has won friends among various corporate and governmental bodies, and will call upon these friends to assist Acis in its stand against the *ihatei*. Not everyone will respond but Richter expects a large amount of low-level support. Even if no government or corporation does much, the effect will still be to strengthen Acis and ensure Richter is seen as the architect of this alliance.

The lynchpin of Richter's plan is Tyr. Long at odds with Acis, Tyr has been placed in a position where it can get what it wants two ways. If the alliance Richter proposes seems workable, then Tyr benefits from reduced *ihatei* activity and – not coincidentally – Acis will be distracted from events in the Dustbelt, enabling Tyr to pursue its own agendas unhindered. If the alliance fails, then Acis will be in turmoil and ripe for exploitation in a more direct manner. Tyr is not prepared for an open war with Acis but a limited operation could produce results. The Tyrians thus face a win-win situation given the circumstances – as they believe them to be.

Richter's hope is for a noisy crisis defused by his brilliant solution, increasing his power as head of the new alliance and hero who prevented a war but still shut the door on the *ihatei*. Of course, this assumes everything goes to plan. Richter has no reason to believe it will not, despite his backup plan (the bioweapon) being derailed by a band of Travellers. As Richter begins his powerplay, he believes those Travellers are out of the picture.

BIOLOGICAL WARFARE IN THE DUSTBELT

Biochemical weapons were liberally used in the wars of the Sindalian Empire, creating a strange mix of familiarity and disgust among the people of today's Dustbelt communities. Attitudes vary from place-to-place; some cultures consider non-persistent chemical weapons acceptable or do not view them with the same violent outrage biological or biochemical weapons inspire. However, the plagues of Sindal are the stuff of legend on the Dustbelt and this has affected the cultures who remember them.

The use of biological weapons of any sort will therefore alienate a large proportion of Dustbelt worlds. Many factions, even some quite extreme, would not consider using them for moral or perhaps more practical political reasons. There will always be those who consider the ends justify the means or who want to obtain the capability to use biochemical warfare as a last resort. Among them are Prince Richter Grehai and some of his associates. Many of their followers would be alienated by proof that Richter authorised the use of a biological weapon, assuming the proof was believed.

Richter has taken care to conceal his faction's work on biological weapons and build layers of deniability into the arrangement. He can pin the project on 'fanatics who hijacked our noble mission', whilst at the same time working towards a tailored plague that will devastate Aslan communities and leave humans unharmed. This could be used in various ways; a threat perhaps or weapon of last resort. Richter is a clever man and has found other ways this weapon can further his cause without being tied directly to him.

The weapon was first field tested on Paal, where it worked more or less as expected. A small community of Aslan *ihatei* was turned into feral killing machines, slaughtering one another and attacking a human settlement. Further tests were scheduled for Sagan, although these were disrupted by the actions of a band of Travellers. Stocks of the weapon still exist, albeit an earlier version than that destined for Sagan. Whether or not Richter uses his weapon will depend on the outcome of events unfolding on Acis.



A REMINDER: OLEB'S ORDERS

If the Travellers have played through the other two adventures in the series, they are likely in service to King Oleb of Drinax. Oleb is trying to build an empire and sees Richter Grehai as a potential threat. There are (or were) obvious benefits to cooperation and so he was happy to go along with Richter's proposal that Oleb's pirates undertake a mission of benefit to both. This led to the events of *The Plague of Sindal*.

The Travellers have completed some of Oleb's instructions, which has taken them further up the Sindalian Main than they might have expected. The question of what to do next is an obvious one. In general terms, their standing orders are to make money for King Oleb, advance his political position within the region and obtain information on 'Prince' Richter Grehai.

King Oleb also explicitly stated that he does not trust Richter despite, or because of, his obvious warmth and sincerity, and that he fully expects him to become a threat to Drinax. He was also concerned with the biochemical weapon used on Paal and wanted the Travellers to find out more about it – and who was using it. That part of the mission has been partially completed, although it is not yet clear whom the weapon's developers were working for.

Whilst Oleb is not available to yell in the Travellers' ears, his wishes are easy to infer. He will want the Travellers to:

- Continue to find out about the weapon, if anyone still has access to it and who that might be.
- Find out more about Prince Richter.
- Throw a spanner in the works if Richter is doing too well in his own endeavours.
- Find a way to make a lot of money for Oleb.



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

TRIGGER INCIDENT: PART ONE

The opening incident can occur anywhere on the Dustbelt, perhaps as the Travellers' ship approaches a starport.

The Travellers receive an anonymous message through the local datanet. Although there is no signature or any way to identify who sent it, the style is familiar; in fact, the message is fake and intended to deceive the Travellers into thinking it comes from King Oleb of Drinax. If the Travellers are not in the service of King Oleb, this message might come from a local contact instead, perhaps someone notorious for selling the routes of merchant ships to pirates. If the Travellers are not pirates at all, they may instead witness the incident, perhaps after receiving a distress signal.

The message is written in much the same way that King Oleb shouts:

Urgent! Urgent! URGENT! Local slimebag contact has info. Get the info (be nice. Don't say slimebag!). Act on the info. DO NOT OFFEND THE SLIMEBAG! Info is about a Big Score. I want that score! Set up an ambush, steal their keys, whatever. I want their cargo. Urgent.

There are no contact details, just an encrypted message code. This is a not-uncommon way of setting up a clandestine meeting. Dropping the code into the local net produces a surprisingly fast response, in the form of a bland greeting and address at the starport. The address turns out to be a place of business; a respectable-seeming starship chandler who makes a modest living providing life support spares and pre-packaged meals to passing ships.

The owner is one Jenville Igashku, a middle-aged man who wears a business suit jacket over coveralls and jokes about needing to be both businessman and plumber at the same time. He makes chitchat about typical spacer topics – exciting things like how far you can get without changing the fuel filters and the best

way to get algae out of an internal pipeline – whilst sorting out a bulk order for rations, then suddenly says in an almost frighteningly conversational tone:

'The liner Hustwik. Gold, platinum and bulk currency. Armed but not so you'd notice. Moving on the quiet, off the main lanes. His Noisy will see I get my fee. Here's the data. Now, I have a new line in luxury pre-packaged rations and a discount on this godawful cardboard stuff. See anything you like?'

Jenville hands over a data wafer containing information on the target. He acts as if he does not expect questions – in truth he does not; most of his contacts know that everything they need is on the wafer. Jenville will be genuinely puzzled if the Travellers do ask questions. He also believes he is acting on the wishes of 'His Noisy', i.e. King Oleb of Drinax and is not knowingly deceiving the Travellers.

The data wafer contains basic information on the liner, which is listed as a standard Type M Subsidised Liner, armed with two single beam laser turrets, a privately-operated vessel registered out of Tobia. The data gives her expected route and timings but is not explicit about her cargo. It does state that she is carrying bulk currency, which suggests she is carrying a delivery for a corporation or a government.

The liner is due to wait for a rendezvous in the outsystem before proceeding to its next destination. The data does not say what ship it is to meet, nor why, but the liner will be there for at least a couple of weeks. This presents a golden opportunity for an ambush.

It seems obvious that King Oleb has people watching for suitable targets and one has identified this ship as a good score. Obvious, but untrue. The message did not originate from 'His Noisy' at all but from someone who stands to benefit from the destruction of this vessel.

INTERCEPTING THE *HUSTWIK*

Jenville's information is good, at least in terms of the ship's location and timings, and the Travellers should not find it hard to set up an ambush. The liner is avoiding larger ports and using gas giant refuelling wherever possible, so it should be possible to hit her somewhere along her route up the Sindalian Main where there will be no quick response from patrol ships.

The interception goes smoothly enough. Indeed, the liner is strangely slow to react. Once she does perceive a threat, her response is fairly typical for such a ship; she sends off a distress call and tries to run, firing warning shots if she has not already been fired upon. If she has, there is no point in trying not to escalate the situation and the liner defends herself as best she can.

Hustwik will not fight to the last or very well. After a while, she ceases to manoeuvre and fire but does not surrender. Indeed she makes no response to communications. It should be obvious that something has happened aboard the vessel, possibly as a result of the Travellers' weapons fire. Once the ship is boarded, the reality of the situation becomes apparent.

ABOARD THE *HUSTWIK*

As soon as the Travellers enter the liner, it is obvious something is badly wrong. Anyone with an open faceplate can smell blood and there are pockmarks of weapons fire on the walls. After a short search the Travellers will find the first body. It is a human female (the ship's chief engineer), and she has been partially eaten. More bodies confirm the suspicion; the Travellers have seen this before.

The passengers appear to have all been Aslan and from what remains of their clothing some of them were quite important – minor leaders, emissaries and the like. Some of the passenger quarters are decorated with the banners of the Ailairlil.

The Travellers should be able to piece together much of what happened here. The Ailairlil diplomatic party was travelling covertly, having sent its own ship and escort vessels elsewhere as a decoy. The Aslan were infected with the bioweapon by way of a meal served in the galley. As the chaos began a few hours later, some Aslan realised they had been betrayed. They eliminated the human crew and sealed themselves in the bridge, hoping to avoid infection until they could reach a port.

They were unsuccessful; infection had already begun. In the rest of the ship, their former comrades ran amok, killing anything that moved. Few now remain.

By the time of the interception, the Aslan on the bridge were well into their mental decline and barely able to operate the vessel. They tried anyway, until one degenerated too far and killed some of the others. The remainder are alive and confined in the bridge area.

Moving Around the Ship: There are a few degenerate Aslan left, slinking around the vessel looking for prey. They are cunning predators and will seek to ambush the Travellers if they can manage it. Not all of them are beyond reason; in some cases the progress of degeneration has been slow. At least one of the Aslan is still more or less lucid. He knows what is happening to him and may seek an honourable death rather than endure the process. In the meantime, he will try to assist the Travellers, which may cause confusion if they are ambushed and the attacker is then attacked in turn. There are not many Aslan left out of the 18 who originally boarded the ship but the Travellers will not know how many there are. These foes can be used to create tension and to make the exploration of the liner dangerous at unexpected moments.

The Bridge: A handful of degenerate Aslan remain on the bridge. They will immediately attack anyone opening the doors and are as relentless as any others in their state. Fighting on the bridge has left half-eaten corpses lying around and a great deal of blood on the consoles. Obtaining any information from them will be an unpleasant business but if someone wants to try, it will be apparent that the Ailairlil were using the ship to make a visit to enclaves on various worlds and attend diplomatic meetings. They were also carrying a considerable amount of money and had already handed over quantities to some of their contacts.

The Hold: The hold does indeed contain crates of bulk currency. About MCr60 in fact. Using it would be risky in the extreme, since the shipment is logged and turning up in a port with a boatload of cash listed as being aboard an overdue or known-to-be-pirated vessel is a bit of a giveaway. However, there are things that can be done by the right people.

The cash can be slowly leaked onto the market through shady connections, getting about 5% of its actual value, or laundered by someone who has the time and capabilities. Someone like that might pay as much as 20% of the face value and may make 30–50% of the nominal value of the cash if they were willing to take their time. King Oleb has such contacts and, of course,

expects the Travellers to bring back something of great value. Crates of money will appeal to his baser instincts and will delight him in a way that other objects, however valuable, might not. Of course, Oleb will want most of the money for himself but he will likely be generous.

There are also shipping containers of precious metals – mainly gold and platinum – just as Jenville said. Each container has a nominal market value of Cr50,000. There are 97 such containers, plus five containing general items for the Aslan delegation. These include ceremonial clothing, furnishings and the like.

LOOTING THE HUSTWIK

It will take a long time to manually load 97 containers full of precious metals from one ship to another and there is always a chance that some of the degenerate Aslan may still be at large. Sooner or later, the distress call will bring a response, which could make things awkward.

There are various ways to deal with this. One is to claim salvage rights on the (untrue) basis that the Travellers responded to a distress call and found everyone already dead. This is unlikely to succeed, especially if the ships exchanged weapons fire. Another useful trick might be to hide the liner on a moon or asteroid somewhere and come back for it later. Discovery is possible in the meantime but not likely. If the Travellers want to put a prize crew aboard and take

the ship back to Drinax, this is a good plan but will require extensive repairs to the ship's systems, which were damaged in the internal fighting. They will need to source spares and install them, which is again best done after hiding the ship.

The alternative is to grab what they can and leave, which may be galling. The Referee should grant the Travellers some time to take a reasonable amount of loot, make a plan to hide the ship and then announce that a patrol ship is headed towards the location of the attack.

It will be possible to take more than just the cargo, following the rules on page 22 of *The Pirates of Drinax*. There are all manner of items belonging to rich Aslan, as well as weapons and starship components, lying around the ship. If the Travellers loot the galley or choose to search they will find a small container of the bioweapon stashed among the galley stores, along with equipment used to introduce the toxin to the Aslan food.

ALTERNATIVES

If the Travellers are not feeling piratical, they might instead find the liner drifting after being attacked and may even find pirates savaged to death in the corridors. It is possible that they might respond to the distress call and see the pirate craft jumping away from the scene of the attack. One way or another, the Travellers should witness the use of the bioweapon to assassinate the Ailairlil diplomatic party.



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

TRIGGER INCIDENT: PART TWO

The Travellers may wonder what exactly has happened here. The fact that they were directed to the liner's location just as the bioweapon took effect is not coincidental. In fact, they were selected as a cover for the incident and possibly a scapegoat – the Ailairlil will investigate the deaths of their people and a pirate attack on their ship will deflect suspicion. It may even implicate Drinax, which would please the attack's real instigators.

Note that Jenville is what he seems – a portside businessman who sells information to pirates – and he believed his data was good. It was, mostly, just with a few details missing. If the Travellers go back to have a word with him, they find he was killed in an unfortunate accident a few days after the meeting. Local security forces are not considering the incident suspicious but the timing suggests otherwise.

As the Travellers are going about their business in some starport or planetside town (they might be returning to talk to Jenville or could be elsewhere; it does not matter), they are subject to an attempt on their lives. This incident can be worked into the normal activities of the Travellers wherever it seems to fit. The attackers are local and have access to illegally obtained weapons so, other than very secure areas, the Travellers could be in danger anywhere.

Of course, danger is never far away for interstellar adventurers, especially those who engage in piracy and related activities. This could be nothing more than a random attack or might be the work of someone they have offended. There might be quite a list of suspects in that case. However, the Travellers will probably want to know why the incident occurred and who is behind it. The search for information will eventually lead them to Acis and the climax of this adventure. There is much to do along the way, however.

STAGING

THE ATTACK

This attack is carried out by inexperienced but basically competent people convinced they are doing right (see page 115). They are not fanatics but believers in a cause and have steeled themselves to what needs to be done. The most likely form the attack will take is for one of the group to spot the Travellers and call the others,

who will try to throw together an ambush or surprise attack. This may well take place in broad daylight, in a public place. The attackers will try to avoid collateral casualties but the attack is likely to be a bit amateurish and involve a lot of semi-random gunfire.

The Travellers will have a chance to spot that something is awry (a Recon check or two will suffice). The attackers are nervous and not behaving like a professional team. Instead, they are trying to cobble an assassination together on the fly. Their weapons are concealed as best they can manage but their demeanour makes them stand out. Indeed, they might attract the attention of security or even local crime figures, creating a complex situation where the Travellers might not be able to figure out quite what is going on.

In all probability, the attack will be triggered by the Travellers responding to the threat as it develops. If they do not realise something is happening, one of the attackers will open fire – perhaps thinking he has been spotted or believing the Travellers are about to leave the area – and precipitate a general scramble. The attackers' plan was to have a couple of their number hang back to take precise shots with longer-barelled weapons whilst others get close and deliver a close-range fusillade of gunfire to put the Travellers down quickly. What is more likely is an escalating firefight as some of the attackers, caught out of position, rush to join the battle.

THE ATTACKERS

The attackers are members of the Grehai Movement and the assassination was ordered by Prince Richter himself. The attackers do not know this, of course. They simply received orders from their contact, along with a fair quantity of hardware and details of the target. They are low-end members of the Movement, of the sort that Richter calls 'small-town yahoos'; sincere enough in their belief but of no importance to the Movement itself.

Some of the attackers are known to be Movement members, some not. Some have a criminal record, others do not but are loud-mouthed racists or have genuine reasons to dislike the Aslan *ihatei*. They have been told that the Travellers are Aslan sympathisers who are a danger to the Movement, which they believe.



The Travellers have two main leads to follow whilst trying to figure out what just happened and why. The first is the connections the attackers had; the second is their weaponry.

Connections: If the Travellers can get access to security databases or ask in the right places, they will discover the attackers had at some point been seen at a meeting of the local Grehai Movement chapter. Some are affiliated with other groups, including a rather nasty militia, whose members talk loudly about resisting *ihatei* invasion, but mostly just cause trouble and engage in petty crime.

If the Travellers seek out the local Grehai Movement chapter, they will find it easily enough – it advertises its meetings on the datanet. Charging in shooting is an option and if so the Travellers will find themselves murdering a bunch of innocent, unarmed people attending a regular ‘beer, burgers and BS’ meeting. This is an entirely innocent meeting of a bunch of basically decent folks who had nothing to do with the attack.

A less violent approach will produce better results. If they are provided with names and descriptions, the local chapter leaders will readily admit they know

at least some of the attackers. They have attended meetings, yes, and some have been asked to leave after expressing views the Movement disapproves of. ‘We are not racists, we are simply not willing to be victims of what is essentially a criminal element within Aslan society’ is the standard line used by the Movement and it applies here.

The Movement insists it is not behind the attack but admits the attackers have been associated with the Movement at times.

- Some came to a few meetings but faded away: ‘I think some of them expected us to be wild-eyed revolutionaries or something and they were disappointed.’
- Some seemed like decent folks: ‘I’m really surprised to hear he/she is involved. Seemed like a regular citizen to all of us...’
- Some were suspected of being criminals: ‘A movement like ours does attract some, err, ‘fringe’ people looking for an excuse or maybe a support network. We try to distance ourselves from that sort of thing.’

The chapter's leaders are all very sincere and in general they are telling the truth. What most of them do not know is that whilst the attackers are indeed the sort of undesirable fringe hangers-on the Movement attracts, they are exactly the sort that some of the Movement's leaders use to do their dirty work. Whether swayed by bribery or idealism, people of this sort are useful sometimes.

The individual who gave the orders is not heavily involved with the local chapter. He is a minor official working at the starport, who pops along to the odd meeting but has no official place in the local hierarchy. Instead, he deals with offworlders who do not want open contact with the Movement and passes along shady tasks to a small group established for the purpose. The attackers do not know him by name; all orders are passed through couriers or done electronically.

It is thus unlikely that the Travellers will make any further progress with this avenue of investigation.

The Weapons: All of the attackers were armed with brand-new weapons from the same source. This is Trojan Hardware, an Imperial-registered corporation based on Tobia. Trojan Hardware is an entirely legitimate corporation that supplies weaponry and military equipment to clients across the sector. It has a holding facility at the small starport on Janus, from whence bulk shipments are broken up and sent out to their end destination. Whilst it seems highly unlikely that Trojan Hardware would hand out guns and send people after the Travellers, the facility might have information on who took delivery of these weapons.

If the Travellers are able to find out where the attackers live, a search of their homes will turn up a crate of 20 identical weapon kits, minus those already broken out and used, plus a large quantity of ammunition. There are no records of such a crate coming through the starport, even if the Travellers are in a position to check.

WHAT NOW?

It should be obvious that someone wants the Travellers dead and that they have the connections to obtain weaponry in shipping-crate quantities. There are no obvious indications as to who might be behind the attack, although it is not hard to infer that the Travellers' recent interference in the bioweapon test might be the reason. Finding out who ordered the attack might go hand in hand with identifying the bioweapon's instigator. It could also be a good idea for reasons of self-preservation.

The guns are a reasonable lead, especially since they are in their original crate, which can be checked against shipping records at Janus. It is likely the Travellers will want to go there next but might wander around the Dustbelt instead. This is not a problem; the timeline at this stage of the adventure remains loose.

If the Referee wishes to nudge the Travellers in the right direction, a patron at their present starport might have a delivery for Janus. The data about the guns that the Travellers would pick up at Janus could also be found elsewhere at the Referee's discretion.

From Janus, there are other worlds the Travellers may visit in their voyages where they will have more chances to gather information, specifically Caldos, Tyr, Hecarda and Acis.



JANUS

Janus lies at the Spinward end of the Sindalian Main. With plenty of surface water and a standard, albeit tainted, atmosphere, Janus would normally be a good candidate for a thriving world. However, it is currently populated by just 9,000 people.

This was not always the case. Janus once had a fairly high population, with cities scattered across much of its surface. Like many neighbouring worlds, Janus suffered severely in the wars associated with the fall of the Sindalian Empire and never had a chance to recover. Raided and warred over intermittently, Janus has remained a backwater ever since. The world was conquered by forces from Tyr during the era known as the Tyrian Lordships and its eventual liberation was, if anything, more destructive than the conquest.

Since the fall of the Tyrian Lordships, Janus has been raided on numerous occasions, often by ships out of Tyr, and there are rumours that the Tyrians are searching for something left behind on Janus. Others have also attacked the world from time-to-time, resulting in further decline of an already small population.

Currently, there are reports of *ihatei* settlers – probably from the Glorious Empire – in remote regions. Little is known one way or the other, as the remaining population is mostly clustered around the starport. There is a safe zone around the port, largely as a result of Imperial interests. Janus lies on the Imperial/Florian trade route and is a stopover for some ships. Its highport is small and basic, with most of the planetary population employed in supporting industries for the downport.

What keeps Janus safe – part of it at least – is an Imperial presence. With research outposts at Gabriel and Dostoevsky, and an Imperial client state at Dpres, the Imperium has some interest in securing the surrounding systems. Few official resources are available but there are other ways to go about protecting a friendly port or world. The Imperial corporation Trojan Hardware has been encouraged to set up a distribution centre at Janus and has a small but efficient security force to protect it.

The Trojan Hardware security contingent is sufficient to deal with minor threats but could not withstand a serious military force. However, the presence of an Imperial facility, albeit a private one, means an attack might

trigger a response from the Imperial Navy; few raiders are willing to chance that, so the region around Janus starport has been left more or less alone. It may be that Trojan Hardware is the best thing to happen to Janus for a century or two.

The Trojan Hardware distribution centre deals in Imperial goods from a number of suppliers as well as its own. Shipments coming down the Sindalian Main are held at the facility and broken up into smaller consignments for trans-shipment around the local region. Word is getting around among local traders that Janus is a good place to pick up a few tons of Imperial goods, although it is a matter of pot luck for what is on offer.

The population are, on the whole, fearful of outsiders and avoid contact. They value the presence of the Trojan Hardware personnel and those that work directly with the starport staff have generally warmed to them. The majority do not share this attitude and consider anyone not born on Janus to be a threat. Given the world's troubled history, it is easy to see why.

THE TRAVELLERS AT JANUS

At any given time, Janus tends to have a handful of small starships in port. These are mostly subsidised merchants and free traders working the Dustbelt plus the odd far trader from Spinward. From time-to-time, an Imperial freighter or patrol ship stops over, mooring at the highport and sending shuttles down to conduct business. Impromptu auctions are not uncommon in the downport concourse. These tend to be loud and often chaotic.

The Travellers will be able to conduct trade at Janus if they desire and may be in time to catch an auction if a freighter has been through the system recently. Asking Trojan Hardware directly about arms shipments and who they went to will result in a polite refusal to disclose sensitive data but it would not be hard to bribe or persuade into letting the Travellers have access to the information they want.

One immediate and unsurprising fact stands out. Prince Richter Grehai has visited Janus several times in person over the past few years (or, at least, his ship has) and has

an account with Trojan Hardware. Some of what he has purchased is non-military – construction equipment, light manufacturing machinery and quite a lot of basic personal electronics of a sort typically used in education or technological-uplift programmes. He has also bought fairly large quantities of small arms and has done so quite openly.

The shipment the Travellers encountered was not bought directly by Prince Richter but obtained on the Grehai Movement account. It was shipped out aboard a subsidised merchant named *Porthang* several months ago. *Porthang* is a semi-regular caller at Janus; her crew often take part in cargo auctions and are known for being a bit rowdy in the starport bars. Unusually, they also have contacts among the local population, who in general shun contact with offworlders.

THE SUBSIDISED MERCHANT *PORTHANG*

Whenever a vessel calls at a starport of reasonable quality, its public details are listed in the portside databases. This is not much information; just the ship's class, port of registry and general capabilities, along with any notes that might be appended by portside bureaucrats. In the case of *Porthang*, there is a fair amount of additional verbiage, most of it irrelevant.

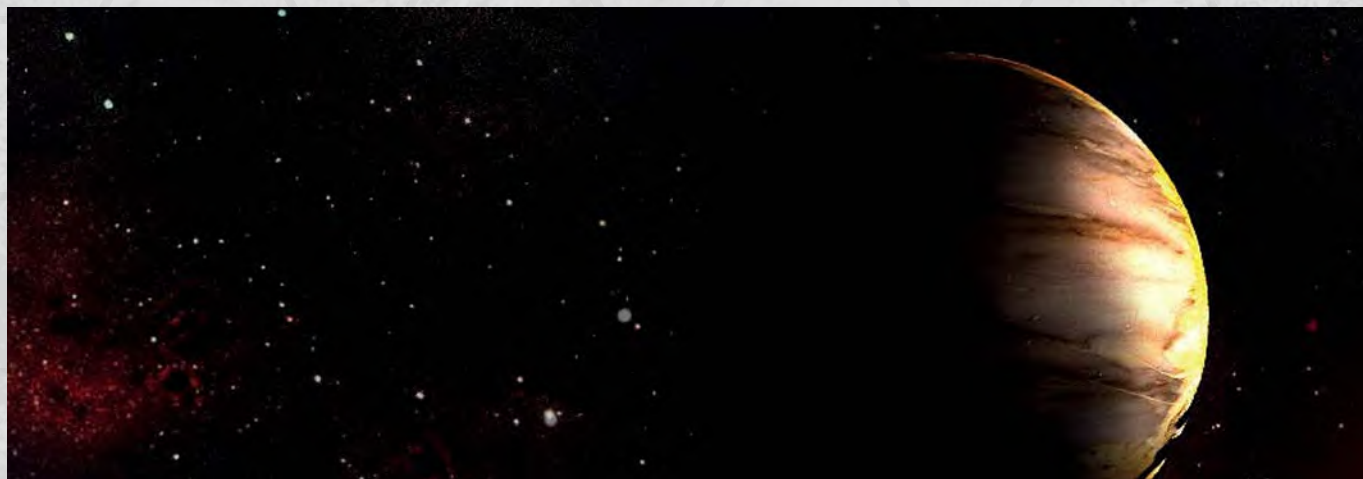
Porthang is an old ship, re-registered out of Thebus about 60 years ago. Her history before that is not listed. A note explains the ship's name is a corruption of 'poor thing' and that she lives up to it. There are copious details about breakdowns and repairs, a succession of ship's engineers jumping ship or ending up in the slammer due to fights they seem to have picked just to get out of keeping the ship running any longer and assorted similar minor notes pointing to a vessel in poor repair.

From the timings of her visits, which are typically 80–100 days apart, *Porthang* has been 'running up and down', as local spacers call it, for several years now. 'Running up and down' refers to the run along the Sindalian Main from Janus to Acis and back, and it looks like *Porthang* has settled into a comfortable routine. Records of what she brought into Janus starport are not in the public database, nor are details of what her crew bought or shipped there.

Investigation around the port will corroborate the impression gained from the public database. *Porthang* is a tired old ship crewed by second-rate personnel, running mixed freight up and down the Sindalian Main. Occasionally her crew seem to engage in speculative trading but do not seem to have done well. Crew turnover appears to be fairly high; in particular the port staff recall seeing different engineers almost every time *Porthang* made port. Her crew also tend to drink a lot and get very loud when on liberty. This is a familiar story that rings true; there are many ships like *Porthang* plying the spacelanes.

Porthang's last visit to Janus was a little different. Not only were her crew far better-behaved, the cargo they took on was different. Normally the cargo is a mix of various Imperial goods, with some paramilitary hardware thrown in. In this case, however, there was a cargo waiting, all in neat identical containers and just enough to fill her cargo hold. The details of this cargo are not public but a little persuasion or bribery will jog someone's memory.

The containers were filled with weapons. Some were typical smallarms and support weapons but there were also several surface-to-orbit missiles of a sort suitable for defending a ground installation against starship raids. They could, of course, also be used to ambush a ship coming in to land at a downport.



CALDOS

Caldos is one of the more important markets on the Sindalian Main. It is a harsh desert world with a very thin atmosphere, populated by 800 million or so people. Caldos is capable only of mid-tech manufacturing, so provides a ready market for technological goods. It also imports bulk items such as foodstuffs and chemicals necessary for assisted agriculture.

Life is hard on Caldos and internal conflict common. As might be expected, control of the world's artesian wells is the key to dominance, with the population divided between city-states and small nations surrounding these sources. Water rights are the commonest cause of violent clashes but (to an outsider at least) the world's population seem willing to fight one another over almost anything. Some conflicts have become traditional, with their roots in an incident now lost to history, whilst others seem to have come about for no reason other than spite or disaffection with the local lifestyle.

Caldos has been the target for a few *ihatei* groups, although its harsh terrain is not particularly desirable. As a result, the groups that landed on Caldos tend to be under-equipped to seize better land. A few enclaves have survived and occasionally a band of *ihatei* will join forces with locals on a temporary basis that might someday become permanent.

Although most communities on Caldos have strict laws about weapons possession, arms are a popular import. They are bought in modest quantities by militias or official forces of a state and individually by anyone who can afford them. Most communities turn a blind eye to weapons possession, providing the owner is a member of a militia or has proven willing to fight against other states, if necessary, but some actually enforce their strict laws, trying to keep guns in the hands of security forces instead. How successful this is varies from place-to-place; much of Caldos is wilderness with no reliable law enforcement.

THE TRAVELLERS AT CALDOS

Caldos has a well-equipped if relatively small Class B orbital starport, with most of the world's larger states having a modest downport. The highport is not

owned by any of the world's governments but run by a private concern under the bland title of The Caldos Starport Corporation.

The port sees a fair amount of local traffic as well as ships moving along the Imperial/Florian trade route. In addition, there are several mining centres in the system's two asteroid belts. These feed into a modest processing facility, with shipments of metal ingots and useful minerals arriving at the port on a regular basis. Some of this produce is shipped to their destination by contracted vessels; the rest is sold at the port and might end up almost anywhere. The port often sees parties of miners enjoying recreation time and tends to be tolerant of their behaviour so long as they spend money.

Arriving at Caldos highport, the Travellers will find it busy, with a handful of small patrol craft guarding the local traffic. The port is a good place to buy or sell cargo, although customs checks are more stringent than in many other ports in the region.

If the Travellers are seeking information, they will turn up a few interesting facts. The subsidised merchant *Porthang* is a regular visitor to Caldos but often goes directly to one or another of the world's downports rather than docking at the orbital installation. Her crew were involved in an incident a year or so back where they essentially sold the same bulk shipment of firearms to three different states, then broke it up and sold the contents individually at a sort of free-for-all arms fair. They have not been planetside since.

Another semi-regular visitor to Caldos is Prince Richter Grehai, who is in general highly thought of on-planet as well as at the port. Richter has toured the states of Caldos several times, preaching his message of 'unity against incursion' and recruiting people to his Movement. He has dumped a large amount of money into the economies of several small states, typically by funding the construction of factories and infrastructure. He has also raised several companies of what are essentially mercenaries, although they do not hire out in the usual manner. Instead, some companies have gone offworld – their destination is not public knowledge – and others augment the security of vulnerable states.

TYR

Tyr possesses the best starport on the Sindalian Main and benefits from its status as a trade hub. Although the world's population is relatively low, at around 800,000, the world's technological base enables it to export large quantities of goods in demand elsewhere. One of Tyr's largest imports is minerals and metal ingots from the asteroid mines of the Caldos system.

Tyr has a long history of conflict with Acis and at one time lay at the heart of a pocket empire. This era was known as the Tyrian Lordships and came to an end when exiles from Acis brought a force of mercenaries from the Glorious Empire into the Dustbelt. The fighting was extremely bitter and there has never been any real talk of reconciliation between the two main powers of the region. However, the Tyrians are realists and when not at war with Acis they are willing to trade and even cooperate.

Tyr is a feudal technocracy, dominated by captains of industry and those who control critical infrastructure. This has led to a corporate style of thinking regarding all aspects of governance; Tyrians are constantly engaged in a risk/reward tradeoff and willing to put aside their old feud with Acis in return for getting what they need. Of course, they also view economic warfare as a legitimate means of defeating an enemy and have an adage that 'economic warfare is best conducted in peacetime'.

The armed forces of Tyr are geared towards control of space and operations from orbit. There is no army as such, only a large (for the population) force of marines trained to operate from starships. They are backed up by a paramilitary security force better suited to robust and aggressive law enforcement than heavy combat. The bulk of the military budget is spent on space forces, including locally produced combat starships.

THE TRAVELLERS AT TYR

Tyr has the best and busiest starport in the Dustbelt, and is a common stopover for long-range trade ships as well as local traffic. It is a hazardous place to conduct piracy or smuggling, since Tyr has an effective space defence force and powerful interest in keeping trade ships safe. There are often foreign warships in the system as well, usually Imperial vessels or a patrol ship from one of the more important local economies.

Thus, it is likely the Travellers will conduct legitimate business at Tyr; perhaps some trading or shopping for starship components. Tyr is also a good place to research local shipping schedules or set up an interception in a less well travelled system. Those with the right contacts can obtain surprisingly detailed information at Tyr's orbital port, although reliable data about shipping timetables, patrol routes and cargo manifests is not cheap.

It is possible that the Travellers might be approached by potential patrons whilst in port at Tyr. If the Referee feels it appropriate, the Travellers might be sent on a side mission or two. However, there are a few pieces of important information to be picked up here and they point towards something major happening at Acis.

When the Travellers arrive, there is an Imperial warship in port. This is the *Kinunir*-class colonial cruiser BC-9515 *Sun Tzu*. Whilst the *Kinunir*-class is unimpressive by the modern standards of the Imperial Fleet, on the Dustbelt she represents a potent armed presence and more importantly serves as a tripwire for Imperial interests – firing on any Imperial ship will spark a robust response. *Sun Tzu* is operating in conjunction with a naval auxiliary; a subsidised merchant designated INA-7744, nicknamed Kalvain's Conveyor.

The Imperial ships exchange polite greetings with any vessel that communicates with them but do not reveal any information about their mission or next destination. A few hours after the Travellers make port, the two vessels recall their personnel and jump out together.

Whilst in port, the Travellers will pick up some rumours about troubles on Acis. The tone is often rather gleeful when recounting the situation, although available information is vague. It seems there has been a skirmish with *ihatei* ('which serves them right for letting the *ihatei* pass through') or some sort of insurrection.

It is also obvious that the navy of Tyr is undertaking some sort of exercise involving a handful of small vessels. There is no official word on the purpose of the

exercise but 'everybody knows' the navy is on alert in response to the situation on Acis. After a couple of days, several small Tyrian vessels dock at the port and their crews enjoy 48 hours of shore leave before boarding their ships again. They make a squadron jump, all to the same destination.

Asking about Prince Richter and the Grehai Movement produces a lot of basic information. There are several Grehai chapters on Tyr, varying from a serious local defence association in the planetary outback to an ineffectual drinking club with very complex rules about clothing and etiquette at the starport. Prince Richter himself has visited the world on occasion but is thought to have failed in his bid to secure an audience with senior members of the government.



HECARDA

Hecarda is a desert world of little importance. The human population is clustered around the small downport, with the rest of the world officially uninhabited. Never a hospitable planet, Hecarda suffered massive population die-off in the last years of the Sindalian Empire, as much to do with starvation as warfare but the effect was the same. Accounts vary as to whether any of the current population are descended from the survivors – many claim to be but there is no hard proof.

There was little incentive to recolonise Hecarda after the fall of Sindal. A few groups have tried but without bringing in large quantities of weaponry capable of damaging a spacecraft these outposts were simply making themselves raider-bait. Similarly, few *ihatei* are interested in desert, however much of it is up for grabs. There are a few small *ihatei* enclaves here and there but these, too, have suffered at the hands of raiders.

Hecarda's downport takes the form of a small but fairly high-tech town located next to the landing area, mostly underground, climate controlled and self-contained. Few of the populace venture outside the downport, which exists for the sole purpose of providing storage space for the highport.

Much of the downport is given over to underground warehouses. These store starship components for repair yards at the highport and cargoes waiting for pickup. A steady stream of shuttles plies between the downport and the highport, mostly carrying cargo but occasionally a starfarer or two goes planetside. The offices of the Hecarda Starport Corporation are located planetside, not least because the port's main shareholders are the ruling families of Hecarda itself.

Virtually all the traffic that comes through Hecarda uses the highport and moves on and, despite the low planetside population, there is a fair amount of money to be made in trade. Indeed, the starport corporation employs more people than the entire population of Hecarda. Most never set foot on the planet but instead serve a few years at the port then move on to another job. In that, Hecarda is more a place to work than a place to live.

The port is defended by a small mercenary force that ignores everything taking place out of missile range of the highport. In essence, the port makes money for the planetside population, brings in goods they want and serves as a shield against events in the wider universe. The people like it that way and are quite happy to pay outsiders to make it all happen whilst they enjoy a high standard of living under the surface of what is to all intents and purposes a dead world.

THE TRAVELLERS AT HECARDA

The other worlds of the Hecarda system are of little interest to the port corporation, except the innermost gas giant, which is the site of a small fuel-skimming operation. An orbital platform uses scooperboats to harvest gases that are then processed for fuel, drinking water and useful chemicals. A chain of large tanker spacecraft travels back and forth between the highport and the gas giant. These are armed and will defend themselves but beyond this the mercenaries do not care what happens in the rest of the system. There are usually a few belter craft or small mining ships picking over the gas giants' Trojan asteroids and sometimes other vessels in the system for other purposes. The Travellers could do almost whatever they like here without fear of intervention.

If the Travellers choose to go planetside, they will find the locals to be not-quite-hostile but certainly uninterested in whatever the Travellers have to say for themselves. Folks at the highport are less aloof and will converse or carouse with new arrivals. The Travellers may be able to discover that Prince Richter is a regular and sometimes frequent visitor to Hecarda highport and has occasionally gone planetside on business.

There is a small Grehai Movement chapter at the port but no strong anti-*ihatei* feeling here so the chapter is populated mostly by racists and tragic figures who lost someone in an *ihatei* raid. Travellers trying to talk to these people will hear unpleasant things and maybe the odd rant or two, but nothing beyond a general hatred of *ihatei* and vague wishes that something bad will happen to the lot of them.

ACIS

Acis is one of the most important ports on the Imperial/Florian trade route and a major player in the economy of the Dustbelt. Its position two parsecs Coreward of Akhwohkyal gives easy jump-2 access to several Aslan worlds and ensures Acis is the entry point for most *ihatei* groups operating in the Sindalian Main. The other easy jump-2 routes are by way of the Drinax region or require a transit through the territory of the Glorious Empire.

Conversely, some human traders use Acis as a jumping-off point for a cruise along the Coreward edge of Aslan territory, usually returning to non-Aslan space at Asim or Paal. Others transit through Akhwohkyal en route to the worlds around Hliyh. An industrialised world with a population of around 10 billion, Hliyh is a major trading partner for Acis, with goods finding their way further into the sector from there.

Thus the attitude of Acis towards Aslan ships coming through its territory is coloured by the fact that most are legitimate traders who contribute enormously to the local economy and in particular to the prosperity of Acis. It is easy enough for those who benefit less from trade with the Hierate to demand a 'shut door' policy but Acis must tread carefully to avoid losing these benefits. In the extreme case, a single Aslan clan could easily overwhelm and conquer Acis. Action against *ihatei* must be carefully considered against possible retaliation by their parent clan.

Acis itself is a garden world with a dense atmosphere and plenty of water. The population of around 60 million are concentrated in several large cities, with smaller settlements scattered across the planetary surface. All major cities are within 500km of the starport, tied into a sophisticated trade net that radiates out from the port. Offworld trade is absolutely vital to maintaining the citizens' standard of living and offworlders – along with their ideas, culture and especially their money – are very welcome in the cities of Acis. There are significant Aslan enclaves in most cities.

Some groups of *ihatei* have settled unofficially on Acis, usually in regions quite distant from human habitation. The usual response when this happens is to negotiate a deal with the parent clan, which will usually grant some minor concessions in return for establishing a foothold. This has worked to reduce the amount of *ihatei* trying to settle on Acis, as their own clans encourage them to push further and not antagonise the friendly gatekeepers of the Dustbelt. Sometimes this encouragement takes the form of Aslan troops forcibly moving their own settlers on, with the government of Acis turning a blind eye.

The *ihatei* settlers do sometimes compete with local humans and things are not as harmonious in the outback as the great cities. However, 60 million humans and a far smaller number of Aslan is not a lot of people for an entire planet, so conflict has traditionally been minor – until recently.

In recent years, skirmishes between Aslan settlers and human towns has increased considerably and investigation has shown the townsfolk are much better armed than expected. Offworld volunteer companies have been identified fighting alongside the townsfolk and there is evidence that although the volunteer companies portray themselves as honourable defenders of the oppressed, some have engaged in inflammatory actions. It may be that some of the outback conflicts have been provoked deliberately.

This has never been more than a distant, low-level threat but in past months there have been incidents in the cities as well. These range from what appear to be amateurish assassination attempts directed at Aslan and those who deal with them, to running brawls between gangs of humans and young Aslan males. Some news channels have chosen to portray these incidents as a huge upsurge in violence threatening to engulf the key cities but in fact there have been relatively few serious incidents.

Although Acis relies mainly on goodwill for protection, its highport is a fortress protected by a surprisingly large flotilla of gunboats and fighters, and equipped with a truly massive missile armament. Non-jump-capable vessels patrol the rest of the system but Acis has virtually no capability to project power beyond its own star system – and no desire to. Conflict with Tyr has been sporadic over the years but Acis' policy has been to take a defensive stance and pay others to take the fight to the Tyrians. The fact that mercenary forces have at times been recruited in the Hierate has not improved relations with those concerned about Aslan incursions into the Dustbelt.

Ownership of weapons, other than shotguns, is not permitted on Acis without special permits. It is virtually impossible for a city dweller to obtain a permit to own or carry any weapon – carrying of shotguns is not permitted in the cities – but for those dwelling in the outback there are special considerations. Shotguns, in fact smoothbore personal weapons of almost any description, can be bought without a license. There are still restrictions on wandering around with a weapon in the towns of course; a smoothbore pistol loaded with snakeshot will not attract attention in a frontier town but a combat shotgun probably would.

It is also possible to obtain permission to own and use rifled weapons for hunting, shooting and defence of property, although the process is complex, which tends to put off many applicants. Some Local Defence Associations are known to have obtained paramilitary weapons but as a rule this is ignored unless their existence is brought to light by some incident. LDA personnel who are caught with these illegal weapons tend to suffer no worse consequence than having their guns confiscated and receiving a bill for administrative costs.

So long as guns are not used for criminal purposes, the government really does not mind its outback citizens being able to resist *ihatei* activities. Indeed, an unofficial skirmish between locals and *ihatei* would be viewed as a fair fight by the parent Aslan clan and not attract a response. The government has walked a fine line for many years between earnestly promising to disarm its citizens of illegal weapons as soon as they can be located and winking at their possession of the guns that prevent the *ihatei* from spreading.

That situation is now changing. The presence of volunteer companies has escalated what was originally nothing more than the occasional skirmish into what approaches a guerrilla war, forcing the government to take notice. Attempting to disarm the outback settlers when they so obviously need self-protection would cause ill-feeling but deploying troops to protect them would result in a direct clash with the *ihatei* and that would anger the parent clans. The government of Acis is in a difficult position and things are about to get much worse.

THE TRAVELLERS AT ACIS

When the Travellers arrive at Acis, it is obvious that the starport region is both very busy and well defended. The port is big and efficient, so waiting times are not long. Among the vessels present in the system is an Imperial *Kinunir*-class colonial cruiser, the *Sun Tzu*, in company with an auxiliary. The Travellers may have already encountered this ship at Tyr.

There is nothing particularly unusual about an Imperial patrol ship being here; Acis is an important port on the Sindalian Main and frequently sees Imperial freighters coming through. Showing the flag once in a while is a useful deterrent to those who might interfere. However, it is notable that neither the cruiser nor her support vessel is granting liberty. Parties entering the port are on business and return quickly to the vessel, which maintains an exclusion zone around herself as if on alert in a tense situation – which is exactly what is happening.

As soon as the Travellers reach Acis, the adventure begins to move to its climax. Subsequent events will happen at a fairly rapid pace, so the Referee may wish to give the Travellers a chance to do whatever they want at the highport before pulling the trigger on the escalating crisis about to overwhelm Acis.

If the Travellers decide to check, they will be able to ascertain that the subsidised merchant *Porthang* is currently in port – although she is at the downport – and Prince Richter's entourage of vessels is also at the highport. *Porthang* arrived two weeks ago; Richter and his people have been here for about five days. However, before the Travellers can do anything with this information, events begin to spiral out of control.

C H A P T E R - T E N

TRIGGER INCIDENT: PART THREE

Soon after the Travellers arrive at Acis highport, they will start to notice news bulletins from the planetary surface. Different channels are reporting the same incidents as more or less serious but there is certainly something going on planetside.

FIRST REPORTS: THE OUTBACK

In the outback, a clash between the population of a small town and an *ihatei* settler group has escalated into open conflict. Some channels are downplaying the incident but others are all but screaming that it is the beginning of the great *ihatei* takeover and demanding why government troops are not defending the settlements of the region. The government has responded by sending a few squads to escort 'observers on a fact-finding mission' and is trying to play down the seriousness of the incident.

What looks like just another bulletin catches the Travellers' attention. As they watch, they realise they are seeing humans overrunning an Aslan settlement, cheering among the burned-out wreckage of buildings or overturned vehicles as what looks like a well-armed militia closes in on the last pockets of resistance. Everyone who speaks to the camera has an Acis accent and can be identified sooner or later as a resident of the world but those in the background in many cases have darkly suntanned skin, typical of desert-world dwellers.

If the Travellers choose to look more closely, they can discern that the human militia are well-trained and organised, and uniformly equipped with non-descript coveralls and rifles, much like those sold by Trojan Hardware on Janus. It seems likely these are mercenaries raised on that world. It is also obvious that this is no defensive action; it is an attack and massacre of an *ihatei* settlement. Those talking to the camera are citing all kinds of provocation but this is beyond anything that has happened before on Acis.

SOON AFTER: THE CITIES

Soon after the massacre video is aired, reports come in of riots in the major cities and open fighting between human and Aslan gangs. Citizens are urged to get off the streets and seek shelter, as gunfire has been reported. Again, some channels are proclaiming the end of civilisation on Acis while others downplay the incidents. Just as the highport's announcement system begins telling those aboard a security alert is in place and that they should go to their dwellings or designated safe areas, another report comes in from the city of Haklis.

A large underground explosion has demolished two of the city's high-rise dwelling blocks and weakened others, with casualties estimated in the tens of thousands. Debris and unsafe buildings are hampering rescue efforts and it is obvious some other buildings are going to come down. Rescue workers are converging on the scene and trying to forge a path through the wreckage but time is not on their side.

The government of Acis has gone into emergency session at the capital and already issued a call for assistance. Crews of port shuttles are shown racing to their craft to launch an unauthorised rescue attempt and someone – nobody knows who – has issued a call for anything that will fly to take people off the weakened buildings.

The Imperial cruiser's commanding officer goes on the air saying her ship will assist and makes a fast run over the city. Her pinnace peels away towards an endangered dwelling block and news footage shows tiny specks falling from the cruiser's hull. These are drop capsules, containing Imperial Marines in battle dress. Later, they will be seen smashing their way through the rubble with plasma guns and explosives to reach trapped survivors. Their efforts are unsophisticated but certainly earnest and vigorous.

In the meantime, ships at the highport begin to respond. A merchant vessel can pack in a lot of people in an emergency and already some captains are announcing their intention to land on or hover next to the damaged buildings and take people off before a collapse occurs. Within moments, Prince Richter Grehai is on almost every channel, making an impassioned plea for 'every ship in the system' to go to Haklis and rescue as many people as possible. His own entourage of vessels is launching and true to his word Richter takes his ships down to join the rescue.

If the Travellers watch closely, they may note that two of Richter's five ships – a scout/courier and far trader – are landing to pick up survivors. The other three; two patrol corvettes and Richter's own flagship *Sindalsword*, have a slightly different destination. As the corvettes hover close by, *Sindalsword* lands next to one of the city's governmental buildings and deploys a cordon of ground troops, hurriedly bringing aboard a number of people from the administrative centre before returning to orbit. Although Richter's other ships return for more survivors, *Sindalsword* and the escorts do not.

HEROES OF HAKLIS

This is a chance for the Travellers to be heroes. Their ship could take off survivors and ferry them to safety or assist in other ways. The Referee should indulge the Travellers if they come up with a plan to help, even if it is a bit fanciful. If they do not want to take their ship down, the Travellers can hitch a ride aboard one of the shuttles headed for Haklis.

In addition to the obvious ploy of trying to take people off endangered buildings, the Travellers may be able to help in different ways. Medical experience is desperately required, and those with engineering skills can help solve problems with ruined buildings. Fires, power loss and groups of people too scared to follow instructions all offer opportunities for Travellers to help in a meaningful and life-affirming way.

In the middle of the Travellers' good deeds, or at the highport if they just watch the news reports without trying to help, someone tries to kill them. This is another hurried assassination attempt thrown together on the fly. The attempt will be made by a group roughly equivalent in number to the Travellers. About half have firearms; Modular Personal Weapons in PDW configuration (see page 35). The rest are armed with knives. As with the previous assassins, these people are determined but not very adept and responding to an opportunity rather than executing a plan. Their attack will not be well coordinated and will be abandoned if the Travellers put up a firm resistance.

INVESTIGATING THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

The presence of Trojan Hardware weaponry does not prove these attackers are connected with the others but it is a strong indication. The Travellers by now should have a fair amount of information linking Prince Richter and the Grehai Movement to the attempts on their lives – weaponry shipped from Janus by *Porthang* has apparently been used in the attack on the Aslan settlement, whilst guns from the same source have turned up twice in the hands of people trying to kill the Travellers. Prince Richter is known to have raised mercenaries on Cالدos, where *Porthang* has previously delivered weapons. There is no real proof however.

Likewise, the Travellers might well be aware of the link between Prince Richter and the bioweapon by now. It was used aboard the liner *Hustwik* just before the Travellers were tipped off about its cargo – and subsequently the assassination attempts began. There is a lot of circumstantial evidence pointing to Richter's involvement but, again, nothing solid.

If the Travellers try to confront Richter they will not be able to. He is aboard his flagship in orbit and they will not be able to get close. He will take a call from them, however, and reply personally. He will display no surprise to see them – he was aware their ship had docked – and expresses nothing but concern if the Travellers tell him about the bioweapon, assassination attempts and so forth. Accusations will draw a response somewhere between amused disbelief and hurt feelings, after which Richter suggests that whilst it is obvious someone is upset at the Travellers, and it does seem likely this is the same person or group behind the bioweapon, he personally has no interest in harming them.

Richter says he wants an alliance with Drinax, not least because Drinax can dominate one of the easy *ihatei* access routes to the Dustbelt region, and would really prefer to work with the Travellers than be at odds with them. It seems to him, he says, that someone wants to derail the alliance. He would dearly like to know who, so if the Travellers can provide him with whatever information they have, he will try to figure it out when the present crisis is over.

Richter is, of course, lying. The Travellers are a loose end that he very much wants tied up. However, right now, he has bigger concerns.

ESCALATION

Newsfeeds light up with reports of a squadron of warships emerging from jump over Acis. Within minutes they have identified themselves as vessels of the Tyrian navy, on a 'goodwill tour' of the Dustbelt's major ports. The Travellers will not be party to communications between military ships but can (correctly) infer that since there is no love lost between Acis and Tyr, tension caused by these new arrivals will be considerable. Certainly, it is obvious that local system defence craft have taken up position to block the Tyrians from approaching their port. The gesture is more symbolic than anything else but the message is clear.

The standoff goes on for several hours, with reports still coming in of riots and skirmishing in various cities and outback settlements. The government is calling for calm and has declared martial law in some cities. Troops are being deployed to separate the fighting gangs. This has escalated in some places into a three-way street battle, with government troops under attack from stone-throwing mobs and armed gangs who want control over segments of the city, along with incidents of looting and random violence. The government proclaims it is getting the situation under control but some of the news channels are telling a different story.

The situation is actually not as bad as it looks from the news feeds. Astute Travellers may note the same footage is being used repeatedly by some channels and different views of the same incident are being portrayed as having occurred elsewhere. All the same, things are not looking good on the surface of Acis, while the highport is on alert but there is an atmosphere of business-as-usual. Commerce continues, shops are open and, as far as possible, the port staff are echoing the government position that the incidents will soon be resolved.

The Travellers might have all kinds of ideas about what they might do during this period of escalation. Depending on where they are, they might end up being invited to a 'revolution party' in some starport bar filled with people just looking for an excuse to celebrate,

or they might be planetside, witnessing or even being involved in the violence. If so, they will soon draw the conclusion that the government position is correct; the violence is not anything like as bad as the news footage suggests.

Government troops are steadily pacifying the troubled zones of the city. The Travellers might be impressed with the forbearance of the troops in the face of extreme and sometimes reckless provocation. It is notable that this is almost always human groups – Aslan caught up in the fighting tend to be willing to stand down as soon as they can, although some young hotheads are enjoying the opportunity to demonstrate their warrior prowess. It is obvious that some news channels are making the most of the situation to gain better ratings or perhaps for some other reason; the Travellers may wonder if someone with an agenda is trying to represent several incidences of serious violence as a planet-wide uprising.

They would be correct in thinking that.

THE ASLAN ARRIVE

Just as matters seem to be calming down, a force of Aslan ships emerges from jump close to Acis. Some are transports, although there are also escorts and small warships. This force belongs to the Ailairlil and has been dispatched in response to reports that their emissaries have been murdered. The mood aboard these vessels is angry and confrontational, and it is soon obvious that they are inclined to fight rather than talk. Screened by their escort ships, the Aslan vessels begin descending towards the planetary surface, apparently heading for the recently overrun settlement.

The Travellers are not likely to be able to listen in on the large volume of signals traffic coming from the planet but there are reports that the Aslan have been warned off by the defence force. There is no sign of a response. The small fleet continues for a few minutes until, quite suddenly, an Acis defence vessel launches a salvo of missiles at the Aslan ships.

This should be a moment the Travellers will remember. Wherever they are, there is a collective intake of breath as hundreds of people see the live feed simultaneously. There are cheers in some quarters and shouts to give the lousy Aslan the rest of the magazine. Others are shocked and horrified. It is as if the world holds its breath as the missiles cross the gap between two fleets. The Imperial vessel, *Sun Tzu*, lights her drive and dives towards the missiles, firing her beam lasers at them in a futile attempt to thin the salvo, before decelerating hard, placing herself between the Aslan and Acis forces as the Aslan ships begin shooting down the missiles. One gets through, exploding on the hull of an Aslan escort ship.

There is no return fire.

It is as if all Acis has stopped in its tracks. Someone can be heard whispering, 'please...' into the silence. Then the comms networks begin to report what the various ships are broadcasting.

The Imperial captain, a surprisingly young-looking woman, is calling for all sides to step back from the brink. She declares she Imperial assistance has already been requested but everyone knows it could be months before more ships arrive. In the meantime, she says, *Sun Tzu* will keep the peace even if that means firing on ostensibly friendly vessels. The next ship to fire a weapon or launch a missile will be incinerated.

Meanwhile, Acis Orbital Defence Command issues a statement that it did not order its vessel to fire on the Aslan. An order to launch a single missile as a warning shot must have been misinterpreted. In a bureaucratic manner typical of all official Acis government actions, Orbital Defence Command begins outlining the form the official inquiry will take and expected duration before an outcome can be expected.

The Tyrian contingent is rather less talkative. A short statement is issued by their commanding officer that although Tyr and Acis have had their differences, Tyrian ships will stand beside their 'brothers and sisters of the Dustbelt' in this time of crisis. The Aslan force halts but does not make any communications. The newsfeeds report sources within the government have indicated that the Ailairlil have contacted the leaders of Acis and are discussing the situation with them.

Then all communication from the capital is cut off.

DECAPITATION

After a few moments, it becomes apparent what has happened. Newsvids show smoke rising from the governmental headquarters, although after a few moments it becomes apparent that the damage is not severe. Some buildings and installations, apparently including the main communications complex, have been damaged and there appears to be fighting on the ground. Observers are speculating that a coup has begun. They are correct in this, although at the present time there is no way to know for sure what is happening.

There have also been explosions at the downport and ships are scattering as quickly as their crews can get them off the ground. If the Travellers think to check, the merchant *Porthang* is among those lifting off, although rather than climbing to orbit she seems to be making off at low altitude. *Porthang* is not the only ship doing so – other captains have decided to stay low and get the planet's bulk between them and the armed standoff around the starport. This is sensible but may arouse the Travellers' suspicion. A course projection places *Porthang* on a ballistic low sub-orbital path almost directly towards the scene of the recent *ihatei* massacre.

RICHTER'S POWERPLAY

Amid all this chaos, Prince Richter Grehai begins to broadcast from his flagship *Sindalsword*. He wears a military uniform that students of history (or those with access to a datanet terminal) will recognise as that of a senior officer of the Sindalian Empire navy, although rather than the usual naval rank insignia he wears the crest of the Sindalian Imperial Household, an honour permitted only to close blood relatives of the emperor. Beside Richter stand a commodore of the Acis system defence force and the Senior Secretary for Foreign Affairs, one of the most important governmental officials, both recently rescued from Haklis by Richter himself. The Travellers might find that rather convenient but for the moment they are the only members of the government and armed forces able to communicate.

Richter introduces himself briefly, as Prince Richter Grehai, direct descendent of the Emperors of Sindal.



'The Sindalian Empire has cast a long shadow over our history,' Richter says. 'We recall the brutality of its fall and the devastation left behind. Yet what of its greatness and its glory? What of the years of prosperity and peace wrought by the empire?'

'In the years since the fall of the empire, every world of the Dustbelt has suffered at the hands of raiders and pirates. I hate encroach upon our homes and each band that settles brings the day closer when we are absorbed into the Hierate as second-class citizens or simply as slaves. The Imperials treat our worlds as a thoroughfare for their commercial starships but we benefit little from their one-sided deals and political machinations. Nobody cares about the people of the Dustbelt; nobody but us!

'For too long have we lived in fear. Yet it does not have to be so. Let us join together here and now, as the sons and daughters of Sindal. Let us forge an alliance to defend our worlds against outsiders – be they Aslan or Imperial – and let the shadow of Sindal fall over our enemies!'

At this point the Senior Secretary for Foreign Affairs speaks up. In a bland tone, as if his words are utterly inconsequential, he says: 'As the senior representative of the government of Acis active at this time, I formally request assistance from any and all parties willing to stand with us in the present crisis.'

Within seconds – far too soon for the announcement to be unexpected – the commander of the Tyrian contingent replies with an offer of military assistance pending ratification by her government. Prince Richter offers the support of his Movement. There are smiles and handshakes all around, with few channels broadcasting the furious protest from the Imperial cruiser *Sun Tzu*.

The Tyrian and Acis naval forces begin to move toward one another, forming a single fleet blocking the approach of the Aslan. Between them lies the Imperial cruiser, trying to maintain a peace that nobody seems to want. Newsfeeds show fighting around the government buildings and there is only silence from within. Then, as if nothing could get any worse, a salvo

of surface-to-orbit missiles is detected. It is coming over the horizon, from the vicinity of the massacred Aslan settlement. The target must be one of the groups of vessels over Acis but it is not yet clear which.

CRISIS POINT

Richter has, at this point, more or less won. He has engineered the crisis he wanted and a representative of the Acis government has requested aid from both his Movement and Tyr. There is no real chance of toppling the government of Acis but Richter does not need to; he only needed them out of commission long enough for a representative to formally request assistance. The government would find it difficult to back out of the new alliance now and even if it collapses in a few weeks, Richter has gained enough political credit to advance his position.

There are, however, some loose ends to tie up. Richter is concerned about what the Travellers know – and more importantly, what they can prove – about the bioweapon and his part in fomenting the crisis on Acis. He chooses to see that as an opportunity rather than a problem, however. It will soon be very obvious that offworld interests were involved in the crisis, so why not pin the whole mess on a band of meddling Travellers. If the Travellers are in service to King Oleb of Drinax, so much the better. It may be possible to create ill-feeling towards Drinax, especially if Oleb can be tied to the bioweapon.

Richter thus makes an announcement that he is in possession of information regarding the recent crisis. As the Travellers watch the newsvids, they see images of the aftermath of the bioweapon, with tearful human survivors of the incident on Paal recounting the degenerate Aslan attack on their settlement. That part is real and truthful but Richter's claim that the Travellers delivered the weapon is nothing but fabrication – a damning one nonetheless.

The claims go on. Images of the installation at Tktk flash up, with pictures of the Travellers and their ship. The Travellers are implicated in acts of piracy (they are quite likely guilty of some of them) and gunrunning to rebels on Acis. Richter urges the immediate arrest of the Travellers, who he says are dangerous pirates and terrorists. There is no concrete proof, of course, but what Richter wants is an emotive response. Ideally, he would like to provoke a lynching.

THE TRAVELLERS' SITUATION

If the Travellers are in a public place, it quickly becomes apparent that Richter has succeeded in turning the population against them. Well-meaning concerned citizens confront the Travellers demanding they account for themselves but this quickly degenerates into a mob baying for blood.

Even if the Travellers are willing to use lethal force, they stand no chance of simply fighting their way through the mob and, in any case, if they kill people the authorities will respond with lethal force themselves – they will simply be confirming what people think of them. As yet, the situation is not in any way official – the Travellers have not been declared fugitives, not least because the government is still out of commission and most law enforcement personnel have more pressing issues. This works in Richter's favour as the Travellers can be disposed of without inconvenient details coming to light at a trial but equally it gives the Travellers a chance to escape.

The Travellers' best option is to escape the mob and get to their ship, which might require some creativity. Ironically perhaps, the Travellers' best chance of assistance is from law enforcement or other officials. Since they are not actually wanted by the law (just yet), the security forces will be unsure exactly what to do with the Travellers. They certainly will not stand by and let a mob tear them apart. Clever Travellers can make use of this situation.

This segment of the adventure can play out in different ways, depending on where the Travellers are and what they do. If the Travellers are not in a public place, they may not have to evade the mob and can get to work reaching their ship. Of course, if they make a mistake and become involved in a confrontation they may be back to square one, escaping yet another mob before trying a different method to get to their ship.

ESCAPING THE MOB

The first order of business is to avoid being lynched. There are some obvious ploys but the Travellers might come up with their own plan.

Distract and Flee is the most basic plan. If the Travellers can engineer some sort of diversion they should be able to get away from the majority of those confronting them. Few people are inclined – or sufficiently outraged – to make much of a pursuit, although there will be a few individuals more zealous than the rest. It may be necessary to impede or disable these pursuers, which might or might not involve the use of weapons. Creative Travellers may use fire suppression equipment, furniture or hacked delivery robots to buy themselves a few moments to break contact.

Talk Their Way Out is more difficult. Prince Richter is the hero of the hour and has painted a very black picture of the Travellers. However, the Travellers might be able to point out their own good deeds at Haklis or persuade the mob that they are innocent (or at least that a lynching is not something they want to be party to). It may also be possible to bargain or bribe the mob or scare them off in some manner. Convincing the mob that the Travellers are innocent is the hardest of these options; making them hesitate long enough for the Travellers to escape will be much easier.

Other Options include convincing a third party to assist, (perhaps a law enforcement officer who owes the Travellers a favour) or the Travellers might appeal to the mob's baser instincts by providing them with an opportunity to loot a shop or help themselves to drink from a trashed bar. Opportunistic use of passing vehicles or a daring escape by going somewhere less desperate people are not inclined to follow are also options.

GETTING TO THE SHIP

Having broken contact with the mob, the Travellers will need to get to their ship. The direct approach, possibly using a vehicle, is an option but the Travellers might be more subtle. Contacts might be persuaded to bring a vehicle the Travellers can covertly board or smuggle them through some secret path. The journey back to the ship can be as convoluted as the Referee wishes; Travellers with underworld connections may be particularly useful in making a covert journey.

Once the Travellers reach the port, they have a last obstacle to overcome. Access to the docking area is controlled by the port security force, who are on high alert. It might be possible to sneak in if the Travellers are clever or to bluff or bribe their way in. The direct approach might also work if the Travellers are persuasive – they are not officially wanted for arrest and given the complex situation many officials would be reluctant to make a decision one way or the other.

It is quite possible for the Travellers to talk the security guards into letting them access the dock – at this point the guards are half-expecting to be attacked by rebels or infiltrators or something, so dealing with a band of polite Travellers who may or may not be the subject of an arrest warrant in the future is not a high priority. Some officials might want to lock the Travellers up and worry about it later but most just want to not deal with the question right now and will take the path of least resistance. If that means letting the Travellers leave, so be it.

Once at their ship, the Travellers will have time to ponder their next move. They are clearly in big trouble; if they did not know already, they now have confirmation that Richter is trying to make them scapegoats for his operation. Most worlds have a death penalty for using biochemical weapons and the Travellers are unlikely to want to risk a trial.

One option is to simply make a run for it. This does mean passing through the armed standoff currently going on in space outside the highport but if the Travellers can jump out of the system they should be safe for a while. However, this will be taken as an admission of guilt by many and will leave Prince Richter in a strong position at the head of an alliance between Acis, Tyr and his own Movement members, with additional support and goodwill throughout the Dustbelt. At the very least this will damage the position of Drinax and is likely to be personally hazardous to the Travellers. The Grehai Movement has a lot of support and clearly wants them dead. Running may only delay the inevitable.

The alternative is to strike back somehow but a direct assault is a losing proposition. Quite apart from the fact that firing on the flagship of the new alliance's heroic leader is another good-as-admission-of-guilt, it is also unlikely to succeed. *Sindalsword* is escorted by two corvettes and currently positioned within the joint Acis/Tyr flotilla. An attack would be suicide.

The Travellers need some way to unravel Richter's design; some proof that he engineered the whole situation or at least exploited it for his own gain. The key to this is the merchant ship *Porthang*. *Porthang* left the downport as the ground fighting began and disappeared over the horizon towards the massacred Aslan settlement. Not long afterward, a salvo of missiles came from that direction. The Travellers may also recall that *Porthang's* last cargo included a consignment of missiles.

If the Travellers want to track the missiles, this is not hard. They are headed towards the standoff in space around the highport, making it difficult to determine which ships are their target. In the tense situation, none of the factions has positioned craft to intercept them, although all have adopted a defensive formation around their more vulnerable vessels.

As the missiles close in, it finally becomes apparent that they are targeting the Imperial ship *Sun Tzu*. Richter makes a big show of requesting all vessels – including the Aslan – to support the Imperial ship, and denouncing the Travellers for making a cowardly attack on a foreign vessel. With so much firepower available, it is not hard to swat all the missiles but for a time the space around the highport is a scene of total chaos.

This provides a window of opportunity for the Travellers to launch their ship and accelerate away, and if they do so there is no pursuit. The situation is still fractious and Richter is now playing out his endgame. He congratulates everyone on coming together at last – including the Aslan contingent – and starts playing the peacemaker. Acis and Tyr (he starts referring to their new alliance as the Guardians of Sindal) stand ready to resist aggression but Aslan who come as friends will always be welcome in the ports of the Dustbelt. Is it possible, he asks, to step back from this crisis? For wisdom to prevail despite the best efforts of those who seek to destabilise the worlds of the Sindalian Main for their own ends?

Richter goes on at some length, all of it broadcast across the planet. He is close to achieving all his aims; he has his alliance and managed to de-escalate the situation sufficiently that conflict is now unlikely. Everything is going more or less as planned and he is pleased with himself. He will get around to dealing with the Travellers in due course but in the meantime, he is busy... which might just give the Travellers enough time to derail his scheme.

PRINCE RICHTER'S UNDOING

The subsidised merchant *Porthang* is grounded on the far side of Acis, in a deep canyon near the settlement overrun by Richter's mercenaries. She cannot be detected from orbit, although the Travellers have a rough idea where she came down. This correlates pretty well – too well to be a coincidence – with the launch point of the missile salvo.

Porthang's mission is to pick up the mercenaries who remained close to the settlement after it was overrun. Their mission was twofold; remove all witnesses to the attack and operate the missile battery deployed there. After firing, the missile launchers were to be disassembled and removed by *Porthang*, leaving no evidence that the salvo was not launched by Aslan *ihatei*. However, this plan has gone awry.

The Aslan of the settlement were caught by surprise and overrun but some were able to escape. Most were females and young, with most of their males killed trying to cover their retreat. They have holed up in a set of caves nearby whilst their remaining males try to fight back. The *ihatei* were not defenceless and although they were outgunned and outnumbered they inflicted several casualties on the mercenaries – enough that the survivors were not tracked down.

The remaining mercenaries carried out the missile strike as planned and began to dismantle the launchers, harassed by sniper fire from the surrounding countryside. When *Porthang* arrived, it looked like the mission had been a near-complete success. Then a salvo of shoulder-fired missiles struck the subsidised merchant as she approached for landing. The Aslan warriors who made the strike did not survive the return fire but lived long enough to see *Porthang* crash-land in the canyon. Her crew are working to repair her damaged lifters but for the time being they are grounded.

This is the opportunity the Travellers need to find proof that Prince Richter is behind the events on Acis. Not only are the missile launchers aboard the ship but she has been running weapons back and forth to the mercenaries using Grehai Movement funds. Her communications logs contain explicit orders from Prince Richter to begin the attack on the settlement, launch the missile salvo against the Imperial ship and many other parts of the operation. In addition to all this, there is a single canister of the bioweapon aboard. If the Travellers can secure the ship, they will have all the proof they need.

CONTACT

As the Travellers close in on the grounded subsidised merchant, they receive a weak signal, of a sort that might come from an unboosted personal comm. If they are already on the ground, the Travellers will be directly approached instead. The signal is urgent yet cryptic:

'Vessel grounded in Seioairah canyon is hostile to us. If hostile to you also, greet us on the ground at these coordinates.'

The Travellers may infer (correctly) that Seioairah is an Aslan word (it means 'green, deep and shady', more or less) and the sender is Aslan. If they ignore the signal and continue towards the downed ship, the Aslan party may still be able to assist them but will not be in direct contact. If they land at the coordinates nearby or encounter the Aslan party on the ground, they will find themselves confronted by an elderly male Aslan and four young males – two are nowhere near adulthood – plus a female.

The Aslan carry a mix of hunting rifles and assault rifles, except the female who has only a pistol. The elder – who is clearly not in good health and far too old to be chasing about the outback – approaches the Travellers, ostentatiously slinging his rifle.

'If you are here to complete their work,' he gestures towards the canyon with a dewclaw in a curiously human-like manner, 'then we will fight here. But there are times when a warrior has nothing left but pride and hope... and it is thus I stand before you.'

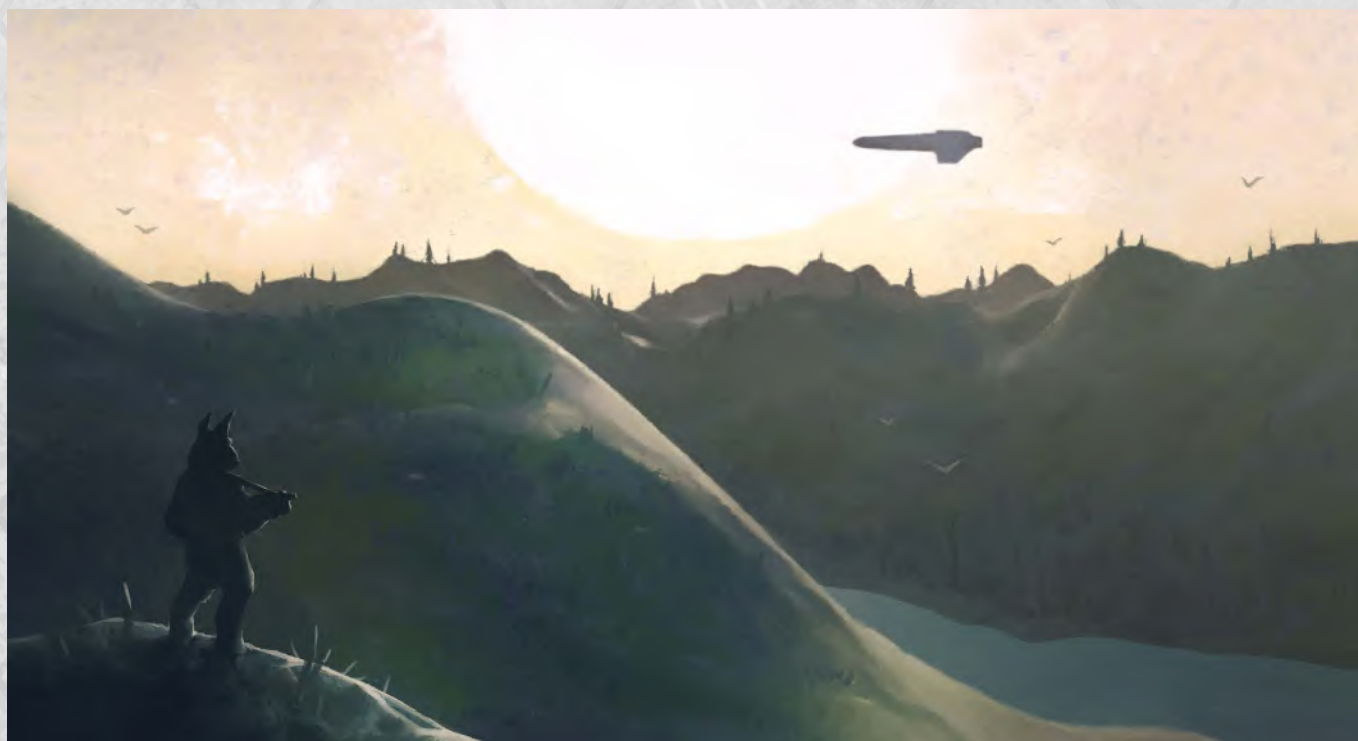
This is a mildly cryptic and roundabout way of asking if the Travellers are enemies of the mercenaries and crew of *Porthang*. The Aslan are a proud people and even in this extremity they are reluctant to ask

humans for help. If the Travellers are receptive, the old Aslan continues.

'I am Eoao of the Aukouuirle, advisor to our leaders and once a holder of land. We did not provoke this. There are human settlements nearby; we are not friends but we are hteauiaolo'ai'iy – honourable neighbours, if you will. The local humans did not attack us. This was the doing of offworlders. They attacked without warning, killing indiscriminately and pursued our noncombatants to their deaths. Some were saved but there are few of us to fight. Thus, I come to stand before you in pride and hope.'

Eoao and his band are not the only Aslan in the area, but the others were scattered by the superior firepower of the mercenaries. He has sent a message to the Aslan vessels in orbit asking for help but they have declined to do so. The Travellers might be able to fill him in on why. Eoao can also tell the Travellers that the mercenaries set up a missile battery in the canyon and fired a salvo a while ago, then began dismantling it. He presumes (correctly) that the merchant ship was coming to pick them up and proudly tells of how the vessel was shot down by warriors of his band.

Eoao is fighting to protect the surviving members of his community – an old man and some boys, armed with weapons taken from the dead. He knows there are a few others out there who might be able to help but will assist with any plan that results in dead mercenaries



and/or the withdrawal of the enemy from the area. Ironically, that might have been achieved by not crippling the merchant ship but that is done now.

If the Travellers outline a plan to attack and seize the ship, Eoao will go along with it as long as it suits his ends. His band are anything but hardcore fighters, although the younger Aslan are a bit too eager to get stuck into the fight. He will prefer to give fire support or for his people to act as sharpshooters – even young Aslan tend to be adept hunters – but is willing to be convinced of the merits of a different plan.

Eoao does not know how many mercenaries are in the area but does know that some are off on patrols, hunting his people or trying to chase down lone snipers. There are roughly half a dozen mercenaries in the canyon at present, plus the crew of *Porthang*. They are busy dismantling the last of the missile battery but there are likely to be guards on alert and everyone else will have weapons handy.

APPROACHING *PORTHANG*

There are various ways to approach the grounded merchant ship. The Travellers could simply fly up and land alongside, although that approach will get noisy fast. *Porthang* is not heavily armed – just a single beam laser turret on the starboard side and a dual pulse laser/missile turret to port. Her guns do not have a 360-degree field of fire, so anyone familiar with the design (i.e. almost any spacer and certainly any pirate) could land in a blind spot of one of the turrets.

There are more subtle options, however. The Travellers might make a stealthy approach on foot and may even be able to enter the ship unobserved. There are five crewmembers and six mercenaries in the canyon, most of whom will be busy dismantling the missiles and moving them inside the ship. The cargo doors are open while this is going on.

There will always be one crewmember on guard at the ship entrance, although 'on guard' can mean wandering around the cargo hold drinking coffee and otherwise not being very attentive. In addition one mercenary will be detailed as security, moving around the canyon with his rifle ready, and another has taken up a concealed observation position high on the canyon side.

This leaves four crewmembers and four mercenaries doing the actual work. All have sidearms but larger weapons are stacked by the ship or missile battery. The mercenaries were more alert earlier but their colleagues have successfully driven off the Aslan who were sniping at them, they have become a little complacent. The mercenary patrols are scattered over a wide area; some may be able to return if the Referee wants to make the Travellers' task harder.

Sneaking up to the ship requires avoiding detection by the work crews and also the sniper/observer on the canyon side. This individual could be quietly put out of action first if the Travellers discover him with a Recon check. None of the Aslan in Eoao's band have the requisite skills and willingness to do so. Good timing will place the patrolling mercenary out of sight and it may also be possible to enter the ship whilst the whole working party is inside.

If the Travellers choose to enter the ship by stealth they will have to get past or eliminate the crewmember on guard and any others who happen to be inside. If the Referee wants to spring a surprise on the Travellers, the crew might include a couple of additional personnel still inside the ship.

If the Travellers are spotted, they will be challenged and at the very least ordered out of the area at gunpoint. The mercenaries will go for their rifles as soon as they see anyone and shoot Aslan on sight. The likely outcome of any attempt to approach the ship, or being spotted close to it, is a hail of handgun fire as the mercenaries rush for their weapons, with the sniper/observer and patrolling mercenary joining in as soon as the first shots are fired. The Travellers might find themselves taking fire from several directions.

Eoao and his band will try to support any effort to reach the ship with long-range fire. This is likely to be poorly aimed but should distract the mercenaries. The younger Aslan might become over-enthusiastic and take risks, such as standing up to empty a rifle with automatic fire, and it is possible that one or more of the Aslan might try to enter the canyon for close quarters combat. This might place the Travellers in a position where they must rescue the young hothead or leave him to his fate.

The Travellers will need to move quickly in order to get inside the ship before the crew seal the doors. If they can get buttoned up inside *Porthang*, the crew have only to wait for the mercenaries to return. The Travellers are up against the clock here.

INSIDE PORTHANG

Porthang is a typical subsidised merchant. A bit older and more broken-down than some but basically the same except for a few modifications.

Lower Deck

The cargo hold occupies the almost whole lower deck. The rear half is full of shipping containers; most are still sealed and contain bulk rations of a sort used by mercenaries. There are also 12 containers of weapons. These include several Infantry Weapons Packages (see page 36), still in their factory wrappings, and a quantity of TL8 assault rifles and light support weapons. There are gaps where some containers have been removed and the front of the cargo area is taken up with missile launchers and supporting scaffolding, creating a maze that makes access to the rear of the ship tricky.

The drive and engineering spaces are a nightmare of jury-rigged replacements and permanently-temporary repairs. It is possible to crawl into the fuel processors access chambers at the base of the vessel's wings by way of inspection covers – some of which are missing. There are many hazards like sharp edges or live cables, making transit through these areas an interesting experience (use a DEX check to avoid 1D damage). Crewmembers might try to hide here if the fight is not going well.

Upper Deck

Porthang's passenger accommodation is very worn, much like the rest of the ship. In recent years, the vessel has not carried many passengers and several cabins have been used to store spares and items that nobody wants to throw away but which have no useful function. Sifting through these junk rooms would take some time and turn up nothing of immediate use.

The low berth chamber has not been used for months, at least not for its intended purpose. There are HAZMAT suits hanging on a rack on one corner and one of the low berths has been rigged up as a

hazardous-material storage unit. Inside is a heavy-duty crate designed to hold four cylindrical containers, although there is only one and it is unlabelled. The containers look exactly like those used to transport the bioweapon encountered earlier by the Travellers. This cylinder contains a batch of one of the earlier and less effective versions of the weapon, which is still toxic enough to contaminate a wide area.

The passenger boarding area is rarely used and currently home to four inactive flying drones equipped with what looks like an aerosol dispenser. These are intended as the delivery system for the bioweapon if it must be used but have never been loaded – the ship does not have the means to decontaminate the drones, so any that have been used must have been left behind rather than bringing the toxin back aboard on their surfaces.

There are also two small security robots in this chamber, which will be activated as soon as the crew comes under attack. They are programmed never to leave the upper deck of the ship and to fire on anyone not cleared to be aboard. The security robots are not very imaginative but capable of staging an ambush if the opportunity arises.

The ship's bridge is normally locked when on the ground but can be accessed by either bypassing the security system or using sufficient violence. The ship's logs are unencrypted, although accessing them will require either a crewmember's cooperation or disabling the crew-only lockouts on the ship's control systems – a Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (computers) check (2D x 10 minutes, INT) will be required for that. The logs contain communications between the mercenaries and Prince Richer, with explicit instructions to be ready to use the bioweapon at short notice if ordered.

The logs alone contain enough to discredit Richter and possibly indict him on a range of charges. Aboard the ship there is also proof that the missile strike – against an Imperial warship no less – was made on Richter's orders. There are guns used by the mercenaries in their unprovoked attack on the Aslan settlement... and there is the bioweapon.

In short, there is enough here to bury Richter and his alliance.

SUBSIDISED MERCHANT

(TYPE-R)

| TL12 | | TONS | COST (MCr) |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|------|------------|
| Hull | 400 tons, Streamlined | — | 24 |
| Armour | Armour 0 | — | — |
| M-Drive | Thrust 1 | 4 | 8 |
| J-Drive | Jump-1 | 15 | 22.5 |
| Power Plant | Fusion, Power 135 | 9 | 9 |
| Fuel Tanks | 4 weeks operation, J-1 | 41 | — |
| Bridge | | 20 | 2 |
| Computer | Computer 5 | — | 0.03 |
| Sensors | Civilian Grade | 1 | 3 |
| Weapons | | — | — |
| Systems | Fuel Scoop | — | — |
| | Fuel Processors (20/tons a day) | 1 | 0.05 |
| | Docking Space (20 tons) | 22 | 5.5 |
| | Launch | — | 5.607 |
| Staterooms | Standard x 19 | 76 | 9.5 |
| | Low Berths x 9 | 4.5 | 0.45 |
| Software | Jump Control/1 | — | 0.1 |
| | Library | — | — |
| | Manoeuvr | — | — |
| Common Areas | | 5.5 | 0.55 |
| Cargo | | 201 | — |

TOTAL: MCr 90.287

CREW

PILOT, ASTROGATOR,
ENGINEER, MEDIC,
STEWARD

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr7524/month

•••••
PURCHASE COST:
MCr90.287

POWER REQUIREMENTS

40

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

80

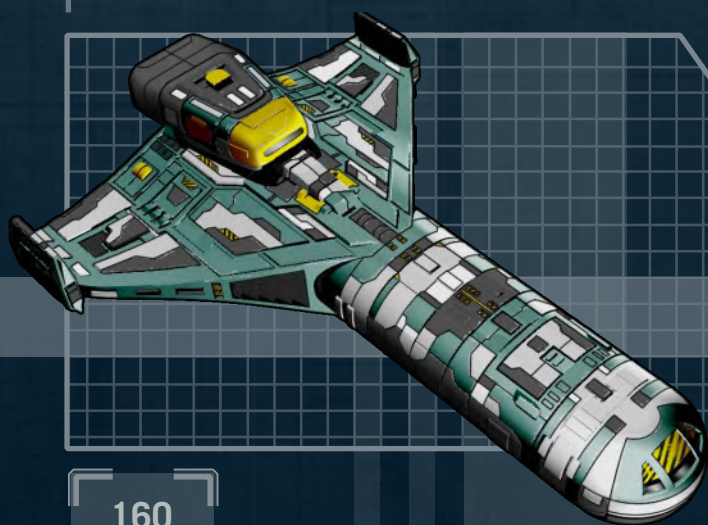
BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

40

JUMP DRIVE

1

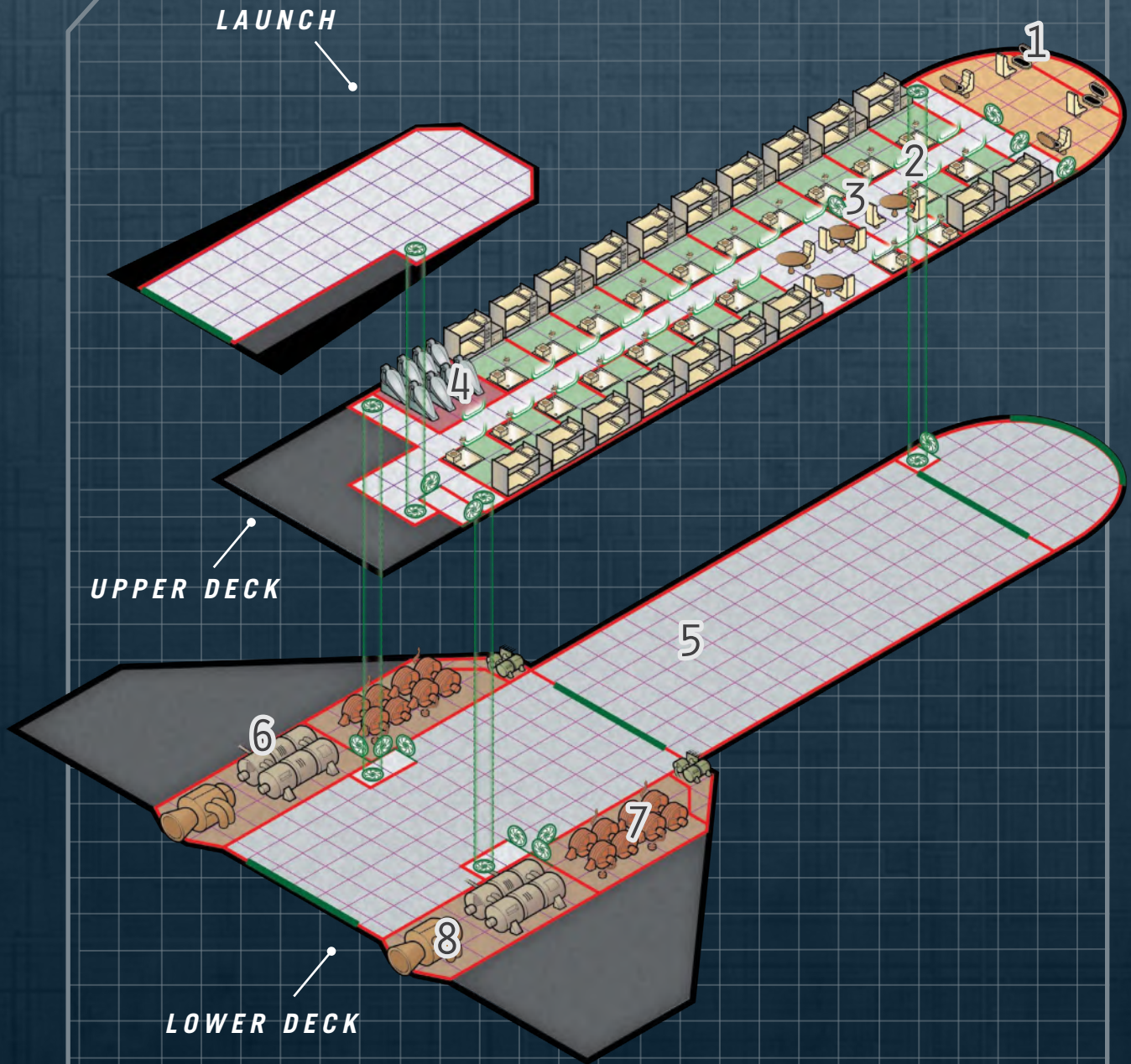
SENSORS



160

HULL POINTS

The subsidised merchant (also called the fat trader) is a trading vessel intended to meet the commercial needs of clusters of worlds. It is twice the size of a free trader but carries cargo far more efficiently with a cavernous cargo bay more than twice the size of that within its little cousin. In fact, if its cargo bay doors were larger, the subsidised merchant could theoretically swallow a free trader whole. This ship normally requires a crew of five, although the pilot also operates the launch, a steward is only necessary if carrying commercial passengers and gunners may be added to the list if weapons are installed.



- 1. BRIDGE
- 2. CREW COMMON AREA
- 3. PASSENGER COMMON AREA
- 4. BOARDING AREA
- 5. CARGO HOLD
- 6. J-DRIVE
- 7. POWER PLANT
- 8. M-DRIVE

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

ENDGAME AND AFTERMATH

What the Travellers do with this information is up to them. The simplest option is to lock themselves in the ship and begin broadcasting the logs to anyone with a receiver, accompanied by a denunciation of Prince Richter and his movement. The immediate result of this is a shifting of orbit by the colonial cruiser *Sun Tzu*, which places itself over the canyon and declares an exclusion zone. Soon, there are battle dress-equipped Imperial marines on the ground, securing the site and assisting the Aslan.

Of course, the Imperials will want the bioweapon, saying it is far too dangerous to be in any hands but theirs. It will, the Travellers are assured, be destroyed once this can be done safely. Reluctant Travellers will be offered a flat MCr1 from the ship's contingency fund, balanced against the polite but very real threat of Imperial personnel taking the weapon by force.

Richter, naturally, denies the allegations but it is obvious that his credibility has been destroyed. As the government of Acis emerges from its communication blackout, it denounces Richter and repudiates the alliance with Tyr. The fleets move apart and a standoff begins, which eventually dissolves when the Tyrian fleet jumps out and Richter's squadron follows suit.

This outcome sees a return, more or less, to the status quo. Richter loses a lot of support, especially from official bodies and world governments, and some elements of his movement fragment. He still retains some grassroots popularity, especially with rabid Aslan-haters prepared to forgive even the use of biological weapons so long as they are directed at the 'right'

target. Several Aslan clans put a bounty on Richter's head, which will make life difficult for him in the future.

As to the Travellers, the government of Acis extends little more than polite thanks for their role in recent events. There is a distinct undertone of suspicion behind the formalities, which may be justified. However, the Travellers are told they have salvage rights to the merchant *Porthang* (once any trace of the bioweapon is removed) and they have generated some goodwill that might be used to their advantage later.

If the Travellers are willing to take a bigger risk, they could try bargaining with Richter instead. This is a very risky course of action but could result in a big payoff for their silence, the return of the weapon and *Porthang's* logs. If the Travellers do not denounce Richter, the alliance will hold and may form the basis for his ambition to recreate the Sindalian Empire. He will never forgive the Travellers, however, and sooner or later there will be another, more serious, attempt to eliminate them.

RETURNING TO DRINAX

If the Travellers are in service to King Oleb of Drinax, he will be expecting them to come home with vast riches. Oleb does not like to be disappointed but there is no reason for him to be. It is quite possible that the Travellers will be able to bring in a merchant ship (*Porthang*) loaded with guns and missiles, and perhaps also the liner *Hustwik* and its contents too. That, coupled with discrediting Oleb's rival Prince Richter, will be enough to satisfy him... at least for a day or two.

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

CHARACTERS AND OPPOSITION

WOULD-BE ASSASSINS AND MOB MEMBERS

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|---|--|---|--------------|--|
| - | | - | | - | |
| TRAITS | | - | | | |
| STR | 6 | INT | 6 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 7 | EDU | 7 | Gun Combat 0 | |
| END | 7 | SOC | 6 | Melee 0 | |
| PSI | - | Athletics (dexterity) 1 | | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Dagger (1D+2), Modular Personal Weapon (2D, 2D+1 or 2D+3, Auto 3) | | | |



Would-be Assassins and Mob Members:

The assassins, or attempted-assassins, are for the most part ordinary citizens with little or no experience of violence. They are determined and motivated but not very skilled. Most will be armed with modular personal weapons as detailed on page 118.

PORTHANG CREW

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|---|--|---|-------------------|--|
| - | | - | | - | |
| TRAITS | | - | | | |
| STR | 6 | INT | 8 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 9 | EDU | 7 | Gun Combat 0 | |
| END | 6 | SOC | 5 | Melee (unarmed) 1 | |
| PSI | - | | | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Autopistol (3D-3), Improvised Weapon (2D-2), Shotgun (4D, Bulky) | | | |



Porthang Crew:

The crew of *Porthang* are spacers, not fighters, and not experienced at fighting beyond a starport bar brawl. They tend to fire wildly as they run for the safety of their ship. All have sidearms; two also have shotguns available but will probably not be carrying them unless on alert.

MERCENARIES

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE | |
|-----------|---|---|---|---------------------|--|
| - | | - | | - | |
| TRAITS | | - | | | |
| STR | 8 | INT | 6 | SKILLS | |
| DEX | 8 | EDU | 7 | Gun Combat (slug) 2 | |
| END | 9 | SOC | 6 | Melee (bludgeon) 1 | |
| PSI | - | | | | |
| EQUIPMENT | | Assault Rifle (3D, Auto 2), Autopistol (3D-3) Flak Jacket (+5) | | | |



Mercenaries:

The mercenaries are more ruthless than skilled but still capable of carrying out basic military tactics. They are reasonably loyal and professional but will withdraw or surrender if facing overwhelming odds.

A11/58231

SECURITY ROBOTS

Porthang's security robots, like the rest of its systems, are old and oft-repaired. They are not complex, being little more than an upright cylindrical body with the guts of a laser carbine mounted on a revolving platform at the top. The whole device runs on four independently powered and steerable wheels, and stands about 80cm tall. The gun is capable of limited elevation and complete 360-degree traverse.

| Robot | Hits | Speed | TL | Cost |
|----------------|----------------------------|-------|----|-----------|
| Security Robot | 26 | 5 m | 9 | Cr710,000 |
| Skills | Gun Combat 1, Recon 1 | | | |
| Attacks | Laser Carbine (4D, Zero-G) | | | |
| Traits | Armour (+12) | | | |
| Programming | Advanced | | | |



EOAO AND HIS BAND

Eoao is old and a bit feeble, whilst his followers are not fully mature. The female is armed and will fight to protect her two sons and their friends but instinctively defers to any male Aslan in combat, even if he is only a child. She will take the lead in planning and any non-violent course of action but hangs back in a fight and passes ammunition rather than taking an active role. This is fairly normal behaviour for Aslan.



OLD AND VERY YOUNG MALE ASLAN

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE |
|------------------|---|--------|---|--|
| Aslan | | Male | | - |
| STR | 5 | INT | 8 | SKILLS |
| DEX | 8 | EDU | 6 | |
| END | 7 | SOC | 9 | |
| EQUIPMENT | | | | Autorifle (3D, Auto 2), Dewclaw (1D+2) |

FEMALE ASLAN

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE |
|------------------|---|--------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Aslan | | Female | | - |
| STR | 8 | INT | 8 | SKILLS |
| DEX | 7 | EDU | 6 | |
| END | 8 | SOC | 8 | |
| EQUIPMENT | | | | Autopistol (3D-3), Dewclaw (1D+2) |

FERAL ASLAN

Aslan encountered aboard the liner *Hustwik* will be degenerate cannibalistic killing machines. They have retained their weapon skills but will use them in an instinctive rather than cleverly tactical manner. They cannot be reasoned with or bribed and are motivated only by territorial instinct and hunger.

DEGENERATE FERAL ASLAN

| SPECIES | | GENDER | | AGE |
|------------------|------|--------|---|--|
| Aslan | | - | | - |
| TRAITS | | | | - |
| STR | 9+2D | INT | 1 | SKILLS |
| DEX | 6 | EDU | 0 | |
| END | 9+2D | SOC | 0 | |
| EQUIPMENT | | | | Blade (2D), Dewclaw (1D+2) or Improvised Club (2D-2) |





EQUIPMENT PAGE

The following equipment and weaponry may be encountered during this adventure or elsewhere in the Reach.

A03/48956

MODULAR PERSONAL WEAPON

The Modular Personal Weapon takes the form of a common receiver, which can be mated to a range of barrels and stocks to tailor it to various applications. The receiver is blocky, with a wraparound bolt and no external moving parts. When fitted with a short barrel, it creates a rather heavy and bulky weapon that can be used as a handgun but a longer barrel, which has a vertical foregrip, can be used to extend the versatility of the weapon. Essentially this allows it to be configured as a pistol, personal defence weapon or short small-calibre carbine. All configurations use the same 24-round magazine, although interpretation of whether the handgun version counts as a pistol or light automatic weapon for legal purposes varies from world-to-world.

This is a cheap and simple weapon sold in large numbers for urban security and personal defence purposes. Its standard fittings can take a variety of accessories including advanced sights, laser pointers and the like but the basic weapon is sold in its simplest form to keep costs down. In sidearm configuration it is inaccurate and lacks stopping power, a factor made up for only a little by the use of burst fire. Most users prefer the slightly larger personal defence weapon configuration or use it as a carbine. The weapon is sold as a kit containing three barrels, a stock that can be fitted or not, according to the user's wishes, and the receiver.



| Weapon | TL | Range | Damage | Kg | Cost | Magazine | Magazine Cost | Notes |
|---------|----|-------|--------|-----|------|----------|---------------|--------|
| Sidearm | 8 | 10 | 2D | 1.7 | 450 | 24 | 10 | Auto 3 |
| PDW | | 25 | 2D+1 | 2 | | | | |
| Carbine | | 100 | 2D+3 | 2.4 | | | | |

A03/48956

INFANTRY WEAPONS PACKAGE

Cynically described as an 'insurrection in a crate', the IWP is advertised as a means to outfit a security force or settlement militia on a budget. The concept is valid but it seems that far more kits are bought by those with an agenda than those simply wishing to protect themselves.

The IWP is based on the concept of a 10-person infantry squad. All weapons use the same non-standard 5.2 x 48mm ammunition, which is currently produced only by Trojan Hardware. The play is obvious – you can get guns at a

bargain-basement price but must buy ammunition from the same supplier forever more. Trojan does sell its ammunition at a reasonable price, however, so most users consider the deal a fair one.

The kit contains six assault rifles manufactured to TL8 standard, two carbine versions of the same rifle with a slightly shorter barrel and a folding stock, a semi-automatic 'marksman' version of the rifle and a light support weapon. This is essentially a drum-fed version of the same rifle with

a heavy barrel and bipod fitted. All weapons can use the 30-round rifle magazine or 70-round drum. Performance of these weapons is about average for an assault rifle and they are well – if inexpensively – made.

In addition, the kit contains 10 personal headset communicators with a basic scrambler feature and a ‘command comms’ belt-mounted unit that can tie the squad’s headsets into a wider communications net. There are no boots, uniforms or body armour, although Trojan does offer these items as a package or on an individual basis.

A handful of rifles at a knock-down price would not normally attract comment but the kit also contains heavier weaponry. There are eight disposable light anti-armour weapons that can be used against aircraft, vehicles or bunkers. These one-use weapons have a basic guidance system and shaped-charge

warhead. In addition, there are four multimode mines, which can be set to anti-vehicle mode (they will only be triggered by a ground vehicle passing over them and detonate in a shaped-charge mode with no blast radius) or anti-personnel mode. In the latter case the mine will be triggered by anyone passing within one metre of it. A case of 12 fragmentation and 12 smoke grenades rounds out the package.

Trojan IWP kits have turned up in the hands of raiders and have been used in asymmetric warfare operations by revolutionaries and others with a violent agenda. The inclusion of mines and anti-armour weapons has attracted negative comment as this gives the user the ability to fight government forces or mine a major highway. Trojan Hardware counters this allegation by pointing out that the kit also allows colonists to defend themselves against raiders using improvised armoured vehicles.





| Item | TL | Number in Package | Range (m) | Damage | Kg | Cost | Notes |
|---------------------------------------|----|-------------------|-----------|--------|-----|---------|-------------------------|
| 1. Assault Rifle | 8 | 6 | 200 | 3D | 4 | Cr500 | Auto 3 |
| 2. Assault Carbine | 8 | 2 | 150 | 3D | 3.5 | Cr400 | Auto 3 |
| 3. Marksman Rifle | 8 | 1 | 250 | 3D | 4 | Cr600 | Scope |
| 4. Support Weapon | 8 | 1 | 200 | 3D | 6 | Cr850 | Auto 4 |
| 5. Light Anti-Armour Weapon | 8 | 8 | 300 | 8D | 4 | Cr1,250 | Blast 1, One-Use, Smart |
| 6. Multimode Mine | 8 | 4 | Contact | | 3 | Cr250 | |
| 7. Anti-Armour | | | | 12D | | | |
| 8. Anti-Personnel | | | | 6D | | | Blast 3 |
| 9. Fragmentation Grenade | 8 | 12 | 20 | 5D | 0.5 | Cr30 | Blast 9 |
| 10. Smoke Grenade | 8 | 12 | 20 | - | 0.5 | Cr15 | Blast 9 |
| 11. Comms Headset (15km range) | 8 | 10 | - | - | - | Cr15 | - |
| 12. Command Comms Unit (50km range) | 8 | 1 | - | - | - | Cr100 | - |
| 13. Rifle Magazine, 30-round capacity | 8 | 48 | - | - | - | Cr15 | - |
| 14. Drum Magazine, 70-round capacity | 8 | 4 | - | - | - | Cr30 | - |
| 15. Ammunition Crate, 1000 Rounds | 8 | 4 | - | - | 20 | Cr400 | - |

Single IWP kits can be bought direct from Trojan Hardware and discounts may apply if larger quantities are purchased

| Item | TL | Kg | Cost |
|--------------------------|----|-----|-------|
| Infantry Weapons Package | 8 | 180 | 7,500 |