
TRAVELLER

THE PIRATES OF DRINAX

Written By Gareth Hanrahan

THE VORITO GAMBIT

'Imperial assent and licence to be granted unto them, that they, at their own adventures, costs, and charges, as well for the honour of this Third Imperium of Humaniti, as for the increase of our navigation, and advancement of trade of merchandize, within our said realms and the dominions of the same, might adventure and set forth one or more voyages, with convenient number of ships and pinnaces, by way of traffic and merchandize to the Outrim Void, in the Trojan Reach and subsectors adjacent and to as many of the worlds, moons and ports, asteroids and other places, thereabouts, as where trade and traffic may by all likelihood be discovered, established or had; divers of which systems, and many of the worlds, moons and ports, thereof, have long since been discovered by others of our subjects, albeit not frequented in trade of merchandize.'

- Charter Document of the General Development Company

The Vorito Gambit is the seventh adventure in the *Pirates of Drinax* campaign. If you are a player in this campaign, **STOP READING NOW!** If you are a referee, then you should first read *The Pirates of Drinax Campaign* document to get an overview of the campaign.

This adventure takes place throughout the Trojan Reach sector. The year is assumed to be 1105. The adventure can begin in any system in Tliowaha or an adjacent subsector.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The pirates have a stroke of luck – they capture a courier vessel intact. On board are documents implicating the General Development Company in a grand scheme to fortify the Trojan Reach against takeover by the Aslan. According to these documents, the company has agents and informants in dozens of systems – including Drinax! The merchant Rachondo is their spy in the court of King Oleb.

The characters must then choose how to confront Rachondo – and save him from assassins apparently dispatched by

GeDeCo to eliminate him. Under the right pressure, he crumbles and reveals the sector headquarters of GeDeCo on the nearby world of Vorito contains a secret vault, and in that vault is treasure beyond compare.

Next comes the heist – even with Rachando's complicity, breaking into the secret vault will not be easy. They have to use the opening ceremony for GeDeCo's new starport at Vorito as cover to sneak in.

After entering the secret vault and bypassing its defences, they encounter a holographic representation of a scientist named Dr. Gaemal Jaskarl, a psychohistorian and the architect of GeDeCo's secret conspiracy in the Reach. The hologram explains the characters match a psychohistorical profile that makes them perfect for his plans – he is willing to put GeDeCo's resources behind them, if they agree to let Drinax fall when the time comes. Can the pirates escape the web of fate woven by GeDeCo?

THE GENERAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

The General Development Company, popularly referred to by the staccato contraction GeDeCo, was founded more than four hundred years ago, in the Year 700, by investors and nobles in the Domain of Deneb. Its mission, as the name suggests, was to be a long-term investment vehicle, a company that would help struggling worlds develop and become productive trade partners. GeDeCo has always looked towards the long term – you invest your MegaCredits now, and your great-great-grandchildren reap the rewards. The company's headquarters and chief investors remain as they always have in Deneb Sector, but the corporation focussed its effort on building up the chaotic Trojan Reach.

From the beginning, GeDeCo offered what amounted to a Faustian bargain to its client worlds. Say you are a primitive TL 6 warlord on some wartorn rock in the Reach. You rule one of several nations on your balkanised planet. You know that

there are other planets out there, but you have little conception of the scale of the Imperium or the Hierate compared to other local powers – after all, your only contacts with the stars are infrequent visits by battered tramp traders, or raids by marginally more advanced neighbouring worlds.

Then a new ship arrives, a *new* ship, not one that has been patched together for centuries. The newcomers bow to you, and say that your civilisation has been *pre-approved* for a General Development Type I contract. They'll put the might of GeDeCo behind you – give you weapons and training to unify your world, build a new starport to attract traders, instruct your technicians and scientists on new technologies to lift you into the modern era. In return, they ask only for a small share in the prosperity to come, a voice in your court, and a few minor monopolies on certain imports and exports.

Within a year, you are the king of the world.

Within five, you realise that everything you have built relies on GeDeCo's support, and when they ask you for another little favour, another minor monopoly, you cannot refuse. You are a king – and kings are just one more thing that GeDeCo produces on an industrial scale.

The Jaskarl Report

In 841, GeDeCo established a district headquarters at Vorito, in Tliowaha sector. While GeDeCo had no direct involvement in trade with the Aslan Hierate, they had development contracts with more than 70% of the worlds on or near the trade route, so monitoring Aslan trade was a concern of theirs. In 843, the manager of that district headquarters hired a scientist to compile a report on how trade patterns were likely to develop in the coming decades.

That scientist was Gaemal Jaskarl.

Jaskarl is one of the galaxy's greatest experts in the field of psychohistory, the mathematical modelling of large populations and forces to predict future events. Psychohistory was partially discredited in the 800s after the psionics suppressions, but the Jaskarl scandal didn't help either. Jaskarl was found to have experimented on primitive societies on isolated Red Worlds, even introducing plagues to study how a civilisation reacts to catastrophes. He fled into the Reach to avoid arrest by the Imperial authorities.

He spent ten years travelling the Trojan Reach on a Leviathan-class trade ship, gathering data and modelling the sector in his psycho-historical mathematics, and then submitted what became known as the Jaskarl Report. The first section of the report consisted of some nine hundred pages of densely

packed psychohistorical calculations, and a one-page summary in plain Galanglic.

The summary of the summary:

'You are screwed. The Aslan are inevitably going to eat the Reach for lunch, and there is a high probability that they will go far enough to take Corridor sector and cut the Domain of Deneb off entirely, as their attack will likely coincide with some other Imperial crisis like a civil war. All your work building up the economy of the Reach just makes the worlds more attractive to conquest.'

The second part of the report consisted of more than twenty thousand pages of mathematical symbols, and there was no plain summary. Jaskarl translated that part in person. He outlined a scheme, or rather a complex, branching set of probable schemes, that would turn the Trojan Reach into a tiger trap for the Aslan. It would turn some worlds into fortresses, others into xenophobes or conquerors. It would manipulate both the Imperium and the Hierate into investing in trade, while also promoting mistrust and militarisation of the border. It would cost the lives of millions – but it gave the best possible chance of stalling an Aslan advance within the next millennium.

The Trojan Reach branch of GeDeCo became the tool of a grand conspiracy to remake the sector. Only a small fraction of the corporation is part of this conspiracy; they are a secret society within the GeDeCo, like an apocalyptic cult that worships the mathematics of the Jaskarl Report. The Head Office in Deneb has no idea that the Vorito branch has gone rogue in a way that's both spectacular and invisible, although their accountants grumble about the number of strange investments and unexplained losses reported by Vorito.

In addition to developing low-tech worlds, Jaskarl's plan called for other interventions. GeDeCo secretly sponsored the planet of Theev to support piracy in the Reach (thus forcing the Imperium and Hierate to invest more military resources in protecting shipping); they founded the renegade transhumanists of TechWorld (with the ultimate goal of producing superweapons); they engineered amphibians on Thalassa and secretly supply technology to the crazed priests of Tlazotleotl.

Recent Events

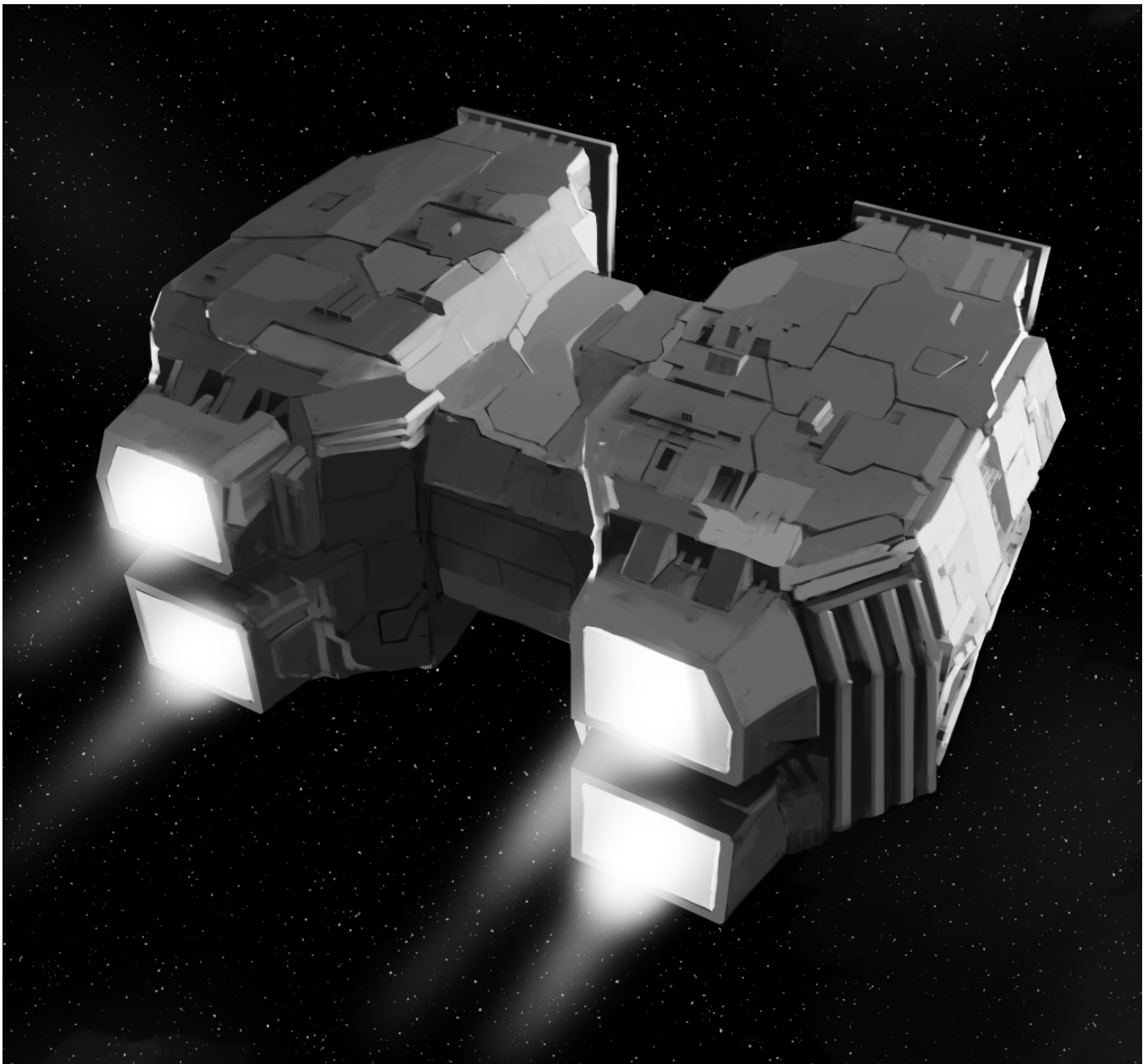
The corporation deemed Jaskarl valuable enough to warrant prolonging his life, though he is little more than a brain in a jar these days, his withered organs replaced by cybernetic parts or pumped full of anagathics. Jaskarl continued to refine his plan and develop a psychohistorical model that could perfectly predict the Aslan; he departed the Reach thirty years ago to go and study with the Hivers, the acknowledged masters of manipulation.

In 1098, mysterious saboteurs attacked the GeDeCo's headquarters on Vorito, destroying the planet's Class-A Highport with a fusion bomb while other assassins murdered key GeDeCo executives. Everyone assumed that one of the Aslan clans were responsible – the clans may not know about the secret conspiracy, but they recognise that GeDeCo is a threat to their expansionist goals. In fact, the attacks on GeDeCo were orchestrated by GeDeCo – the loss of the Highport was a necessary sacrifice according to the ineluctable mathematics of the Jaskarl Report, and the murdered executives were replaced by loyal members of the conspiracy.

Now, in 1105, the Jaskarl Report predicts the rise of a new power in the Reach. That power must be co-opted to serve the plan. The mathematics admit no other options.

Players & GeDeCo

The players may have crossed paths with GeDeCo in the past – the sinister corporation plays a major role in *Adventure 2: Treasure Ship* and *Adventure 4: the Demon's Eye*.



ALTERNATE HOOKS

If the players do not bite at the dangled hook of the *Exalted Spirit*, here are some other ways to get them involved:

- If they have a pirate fleet, one of their other ships captures the *Exalted Spirit*, finds the data drum, and passes it onto them
- If the players have a good reputation, then Fria Belsen decides to quit GeDeCo and sign on with the pirates. As proof of her good faith, she offers them the data drum.
- An alien salvage trader offers the players a curiosity – a data drum retrieved from the wreckage of the *Exalted Spirit*, a Far Trader. Decoding the data drum is beyond the trader's skills, but it is rumoured that the players are closely associated with the fabled Scholar's Tower on Drinax. Perhaps they can make something of it.

1. SOUR JUMP

A tradition dating back to the first Solomani explorers is the belief in the 'sour jump'. Sometimes (or so it is said) a ship runs into a wavefront of concentrated bad luck in jump space (bad luck is, as everyone knows, a psionic phenomenon). If a jump goes sour, then everything the ship and her crew does when they arrive will go disastrously wrong. Perishable cargoes go off, buyers suddenly cancel the deal, the refined fuel's full of sludge, and the starport bar's full of ugly belters instead of pretty groupies. The only cure for a sour jump is to jump again and try to shake off the bad luck.

The Far Trader that just jumped in near the Pirate's ship is having one hell of a sour jump. Not only did it arrive within spitting distance of the player character's Harrier (or whatever they are flying at this stage in your campaign), it's jumped in well outside the hundred-diameter limit, meaning it has a long flight ahead of it before it can land and refuel. From the way she turns and accelerates, the PCs can tell that the Trader's got a full cargo bay – a very juicy prize for a pirate.

The Far Trader is the *Exalted Spirit*, a rustbucket that's been knocking around the Trojan Reach for centuries. She is a familiar sight in half the worlds on the Dustbelt. Her current captain is **Fria Belsen**, who inherited the ship when she shot the previous captain over a game of cards. She has a crew of five – three humans, a Vargr, and an old robot of uncertain provenance that also came with the ship. To keep the *Exalted Spirit* flying, Belsen signed on with GeDeCo. She makes supply runs from Vorito to various client planets throughout the sector, carrying advanced machine parts and other high-tech goods. She also

picks up encoded reports transmitted by GeDeCo agents and spies; these are automatically received and stored on a data drum hidden in the *Exalted Spirit*'s smuggling compartment. Belsen never needs to know who the GeDeCo agents are on each world – she jumps in, the black box reports that it has received a status report from someone in the system, and she knows she is clear to jump out again.

As the *Exalted Spirit* turns (presumably to flee the players – see the *Alternate Hooks* sidebar if your players are not bloodthirsty enough), one of her hull panels cracks. It is only a microfracture, but it is enough to start leaking atmosphere. Unfortunately for the *Exalted Spirit*, the law of the sour jump means that the panel is the one over the smuggling compartment. She is leaking air from what should be part of her fuel tank according to the schematics of a standard ship of that class. That should be enough to tell the players that there is something interesting about this ship.

Capturing the Exalted Spirit

Belsen's dealt with pirates before, and knows that her ship is no match for a determined cutthroat. As soon as the PCs start shooting, she offers to dump a portion of her cargo as a bribe. If that fails, then she tries fighting back in hopes of convincing the attackers that the bribe is an easier option than pressing the attack; should the players keep attacking, then she surrenders once the *Exalted Spirit* takes two Structure Hits or loses a critical system.

The *Exalted Spirit* has two double beam laser turrets.

Fria Belsen

Age 34, 4 terms

STR 8 DEX 9 END 6 INT 9 EDU 7 SOC 4

Gun Combat (slug) 2, Gunnery (turret) 2, Tactics (naval) 1, Pilot (spacecraft) 2, Vacc Suit 1

Equipment: Vacc Suit (6), Shotgun (4D)

Crewmen

Age 26, 2 terms

STR 7 DEX 7 END 9 INT 6 EDU 6 SOC 4

Engineering 0, Gun Combat 0, Gunnery (turret) 1, Mechanic 1, Pilot (spacecraft) 1,

Equipment: Vacc Suit (6), Body Pistol (3D6-3)

Rusty the Robot

STR 12 DEX 6 Hull 4 Structure 4

Mechanic 2, Melee Combat (brawl) 2

Equipment: None (Robot Claws – 3D melee damage)

On board, the players discover a cargo of 40 tons of Advanced Machine Parts, 10 tons of Advanced Electronics, and 10 tons of Robotics, for a total value of MCr8 (of course, the fence will take most of that, but it is still a valuable prize).

They can find the hidden smuggling compartment with any suitable skill – Investigate to search the ship, Engineer to compare the schematics to the air leak seen from outside, Comms to trace the connections between the drum and the ship's communications systems, Sensors to closely probe the structure, Persuade to intimidate or convince the crew to give up the compartment. Inside a cache of gemstones worth MCr2 (Fria's emergency fund) and the data drum.

If questioned, Fria admits that she is on contract to GeDeCo, and that they installed the data drum.

The Data Drum

The data drum is a cylinder of TL 14 electronics the size of an oil drum. It is similar to the mail containers used to transfer non-critical data between systems in the Imperium. A quick examination of the drum with Comms or Computers (an Easy (+2) Education + the appropriate skill check) reveals the drum is programmed to tap into the ship's communication system after each jump, and listen for a radio message containing a particular code. It then records whatever data follows the code, before signalling to the ship's bridge that a message has been received.

Breaking into the actual data stored in the drum is exceedingly difficult (Intelligence + Computers, Formidable (-6), 1-6 years), and the drum is rigged to erase all its contents if it suspects someone is trying to hack into it. The players might be able to get at it if they brought it to Scholar Voha of the Scholar's Tower, but even then it would take months and they would owe him a huge favour.

However, they can get into the low-security communications database easily enough, which gives them a list of systems visited by the *Exalted Spirit* and a timestamp noting if and when the drum picked up one of the message it is listening to. The *Exalted Spirit*'s been around the sector over the years, and has picked up GeDeCo messages in dozens of systems.

One of them is Drinax. The *Exalted Spirit* has visited Drinax nine times in the last seven years, and there are seven timestamped messages. On another world, that would not be enough to identify GeDeCo's spy, but the Floating Palace is a small place. Cross-referencing (possibly with an Investigate or Computers checks) those visits with the movements of the handful of residents who regularly come and go from Drinax confirms there is only one possible suspect.

The merchant Rachando arrived on Drinax seven years ago. Every time both he and the *Exalted Spirit* have been in the same system, there's a timestamped message in the logs. The players cannot read what Rachando sent to GeDeCo, but have proof that he is their spy.

2. A TIME TO ROLL CAROUSE

The players return to Drinax to find the courtiers of the Floating Palace enmeshed in a new intrigue. Two weeks before the players arrived, a courier brought a message to King Oleb, inviting him or his representatives to attend a grand ball to celebrate the opening of the new highport at Vorito.

Vorito – the headquarters of the General Development Company – is one of the wealthiest, most populous planets in the whole sector. Its highport was destroyed in a terrorist attack seven years ago, downgrading the planet from possessing a top-of-the-line Class A port to a paltry Class E and virtually cutting the planet off from the rest of the galaxy. Now, after years of reconstruction, Vorito will soon once again be fully open for business. The ball is going to be the most prestigious social event of the year, attracting dignitaries from across the sector. Even the notorious insular Floriani will be sending representatives.

The name of Drinax still carries a certain weight in the Reach. This is the last outpost of the old Sindalian Empire, after all. It would be unthinkable for Drinax not to send someone to the ball, especially as Vorito is a mere six parsecs away. King Oleb put the cat among the pigeons (or, as they say on Drinax, the pet hypertiger among the Hawk Warriors) by declaring that he does not want to attend the ball. Ever since the efforts of the player characters brought Torpol back into Drinax's sphere of influence, the King's developed an obsession with Torpolian water polo, and they have nearly finished building his water polo field on the Underlinth of the Floating Palace. He's not going anywhere for the next month.

So, who will Drinax send? Potential candidates (all of whom are detailed in the ***Pirates of Drinax Campaign Overview document***) are as follows:

- **Princess Rao:** The ambitious princess is the architect of Drinax's resurgent glory. She is an able diplomat, and the heir apparent to the Floating Palace, so she would be the obvious choice in normal circumstances. However, her brother and his supporters in court object, arguing that Prince Harrick is the eldest child and so should represent Drinax. They also whisper that Rao delights in playing politics and intrigue too much, and her machinations risk annoying the powerful GeDeCo.
- **Prince Harrick:** King Oleb's oldest son was severely injured twenty years ago in an Aslan attack. It took the scientists of the Scholar's Tower that long to rebuild him – more than 90% of his body is cloned flesh or cybernetic replacement organs, but Scholar Voha insists that Harrick's brain was salvaged 'mostly' intact and unburned. Since his resurrection, the Prince has gathered a number of allies in court, to counterbalance his sister's influence. The opening of the HighPort at

Vorito is the perfect opportunity for Prince Harrick to present himself to the dignitaries and politicians of the civilised parts of the Trojan Reach.

- **Lord Wrax:** The commander of Drinax's military forces (well, acknowledged military forces, not whatever fleet of cutthroats and thieves that the players have assembled thus far) might be a compromise candidate if the Floating Palace wants to show that it is a strong military power. Lord Wrax thinks that this is a good course of action – fly the flag, rattle a few sabres, and ensure that Drinax is not targeted by any pirates or raiders. Half of the nobles attending the ceremony will be there solely to give the impression that their worlds have GeDeCo support and protection. Drinax is too proud to prostrate itself before a corporation, so it needs a strong representative like Lord Wrax. Of course, Drinax is a high-tech joke in terms of force projection, with a space fleet composed mainly of TL 15 yachts converted into fighting ships.
- **Lady Hil:** Lady Hil considers herself the mistress of the court and the arbiter of proper behaviour. She has more titles than there are systems in the Sector, and woe betide anyone who fails to address her correctly. If Drinax wants to keep a low profile, and reinforce its

reputation as a flying asylum for inbred nobles from a dead empire, then they should send Lady Hil as their representative. Lady Hil has made it known that she would be willing to show the rest of the sector what *true* breeding and decorum look like.

While the pirates have no official standing in the court of Drinax, everyone knows they have the king's ear. Their opinion carries weight. Therefore, Prince Harrick, Lord Wrax and Lady Hil all approach the players for their support. Each of them can offer a favour in exchange for this support.

- Prince Harrick recently accompanied the Vespexer tribes of Drinax's seared surface on a hunt. He discovered an underground structure that was still partially intact, and managed to salvage and repair a suit of TL 15 Battle Dress dating back to the old Empire of Drinax. He will award this suit to the future Admiral of his Royal Fleet – in other words, the player who gives Harrick the most support.
- Lord Wrax grudgingly admits that the pirates may be Drinax's best chance for regaining something of its former glory. If they bury any old grudges by supporting him in court, he will put his best naval officers at their disposal (three Excellent-quality crewmen).



- Lady Hil will consider having sherry with the players; in fact, she will let it be known that she intends to have sherry with them. That is worth a permanent +1 increase to their SOC.

Lobbying For a Delegate

King Oleb is all too happy to hand over yet more of his boring duties to the players – first warfare, now petty court politics. He accepts whatever suggestion they make – if they want to tell Rao that she cannot go and send someone else in her place, that is fine, they have his approval. Just wait until he is out playing inverted-gravity water polo before telling the Princess that she cannot go to the ball.

If two or more players disagree, they can both take their cases to the king – that is an opposed Social Standing + Persuade check.

Alternatively, the players can put themselves forward for the post of Drinax's representative at Vorito.

The Chosen Delegate

Note who is chosen as the delegate from Drinax. This dignitary is referred to in later scenes as the Delegate.

THE ASSASSINS

Section 4, The Assassins, can be run at any point during Sections 3 or 5, or in between. Send the Assassins after the players or Rachando whenever the action lags.

3. THE MERCHANT

Map the flow of trade across the Trojan Reach. The blazing lights of the Imperium and the Aslan Hierate dominate two opposing corners, where trillions of credits worth of trades are done every day. The Florian League glows brightly too, its trade patterns strangely regular and predictable. The Glorious Empire, the Aslan splinter-state of slaver lords is like a dying ember – still hot and bright, but fading with every passing year. The Imperium/Hierate and Imperium-League trade routes are blazing trails across the stars, setting fire to every world they touch. Beyond those bands and patches of wealth, though, there is little else in the sector. Vorito gleams with light reflected from the nearby trade route, the Strend cluster is surrounded by the weird infrared glow of high-tech smugglers, and the Senlis Foederate sheds enough light to be seen. There are few other trade routes of note in the sector.

Tramp traders, then, are the backbone of interstellar commerce in the Reach. These brave explorers, flying old Far Traders and similar ships, bounce from world to world picking up whatever cargo consignments or speculative trade is available. According

to the stories told in the Floating Palace, Rachando was once such a tramp trader, until he came to the Floating Palace.

He was not the first trader to visit Drinax since the Aslan attack, but he was the first to become staggeringly wealthy. According to the old charts, Drinax was a rich world, so previous traders brought luxuries and exotic delights and delicacies. Rachando brought basic goods – cheap foods, building materials, practical items like clothing. The Floating Palace had plenty of caviar and fine wine, of jewelled gowns and ceremonial armour, but was desperately lacking in basic necessities. Even better, Rachando was willing to trade his supplies for antiques and treasures from the Floating Palace instead of demanding actual cash.

Today, Rachando's Bazaar fills two ballrooms next to the hangar where his Far Trader, the *Invisible Hand*, is docked. It is a bizarre market – here, you can trade jewels for bread, or gold plate for simple steel, and count yourself ahead on the deal.

Investigating Rachando

While the evidence from the GeDeCo computer records is damning, it's also circumstantial. The characters may suspect Rachando of being a GeDeCo spy, but they may wish to gather proof before confronting him, especially as the merchant is one of the most powerful and influential people in the Floating Palace. Everyone from King Oleb on down to the lowliest hydroponics farmhand owes Rachando innumerable favours (of course, since this is the Floating Palace, the lowliest hydroponics farmer is technically able to claim the title the Grand Duke-Admiral of Goertel).

If the players fail any one of the checks below, then not only do they fail to gather any useful information about Rachando, they also anger someone who owes him a favour.

- Failing one check just leads to social complications – someone complains about those dastardly pirates harassing that nice merchant Rachando.
- Failing two checks turns Drinax from a Haven to a merely Tolerant Port for the players. Optionally, this can be a good trigger to start *The Assassins*.
- Failing three or more checks turns Drinax to a Suspicious Port, and forces King Oleb to call the players for a private hearing of their grievance against Rachando. If the characters are unable to convince Oleb of their suspicions, then this adventure takes a different course – see *Turn In Your Pirate Hat*, page 8.

Background Investigation: There are several possible ways for the players to investigate Rachando; they may come up with tactics not anticipated here. Any plausible approach has a chance of working – determine what the most appropriate characteristic + skill combination is, then have a player make that check.

Track the total Effect generated by all these checks.

Gathering Rumours: Average (+0) Intelligence + Investigate, 1-6 weeks. Rachando claims to have been a free trader for years before coming to Drinax and establishing his bazaar; by asking questions in other systems, the characters discover that Rachando lied; he was only a free trader for a few months before arriving at the Floating Palace. His history before that is a mystery – where did he get his ship and cargo?

Observation: Difficult (-2) Intelligence + Deception, 1-6 days. The characters watch Rachando going about his business. They learn that he meets with several fellow pirates and traders, the sort of people who might know about the players' secret operations on behalf of the King.

Financial Analysis: Average (+0) Intelligence + Broker, 1-6 weeks. Tracking Rachando's financial dealings turns up a suspicious set of transactions. As usual, Rachando trades basic commodities for treasures from the Floating Palace. All those supplies, though, can be traced back to GeDeCo suppliers within one or two jumps.

Hitting the Starport Bar: Difficult (-2) Endurance + Carouse, 1-6 days. Getting various informants drunk in the palatial starport bar reveals that Rachando has several of his own agents working the bar and other entertainments of the Underlinth – he is spying on the Floating Palace.

False Signals: Very Difficult (-4) Education + Comms, 1-6 hours. By spoofing a handshake signal from the *Exalted Spirit's* data drum, the characters can receive an answer from somewhere in the Floating Palace. There is definitely a GeDeCo agent somewhere on Drinax.

Sneaking Onto The Invisible Hand: Very Difficult (-4) Dexterity + Stealth, 1-6 minutes. Rachando's personal ship has elaborate security systems that can be bypassed by a talented thief. On board, the player finds a transmitter of a similar design to the data drum, as well as encrypted instructions on a Vorito-made data crystal.

Confronting Rachando

Call for a Difficult (-2) Social Standing + Persuade check when the players finally confront Rachando, and add the Effect of this check to the total gathered through their investigation (failing this check does not count towards the penalties for failing a check during the investigation). The total Effect determines how Rachando reacts.

Less than 0: Rachando not only denies the accusations, he goes straight to King Oleb and convinces the King that the players are attempting to launch a coup in Drinax. See *Turn in your Pirate Hat*.

TURN IN YOUR PIRATE HAT

Overly rash players may end up blundering through the political minefield of the Floating Palace, and force King Oleb to censure or even disown them. If this happens, there are several ways to salvage the game.

- The players can continue investigating Rachando. If they assemble an additional Effect of 6+ through investigation, they can convince the king that they are onto something.
- One of the other major NPCs of the Floating Palace becomes the players' patron. They might ally themselves with Princess Rao or Prince Harrick.
- King Oleb promotes an NPC pirate to command his pirate fleet. The players must deal with their former employee being promoted over them for an adventure or two, until they can retake their rightful position.
- **** the King! We're pirates! Let's blow this overly linear adventure and go loot something!

1 – 2: Rachando strenuously denies any involvement with GeDeCo, but the characters have assembled enough evidence for King Oleb to be suspicious. The king has Rachando imprisoned and the *Invisible Hand* ransacked until they turn up proof of the merchant's duplicity. Proceed as per *Interrogation*, but the public investigation of Rachando's affairs alerts GeDeCo that their agent is compromised. Run *Assassins* if you have not done so already.

3 – 5: Rachando admits involvement in GeDeCo. Run *Interrogation*, as well as *Assassins* if you have not done so already.

6 – 8: Rachando not only admits involvement, he is very willing to talk. The players get DM+2 to all checks during *Interrogation*.

9 – 11: Rachando confesses everything. There is no need to roll during *Interrogation*.

12+: Not only does Rachando confess everything, he is so completely devastated by the players' expose of his secret activities that he attempts to atone by giving them the *Invisible Hand*. It is a converted Far Trader with pop-up beam laser turrets.

4. THE ASSASSINS

The GeDeCo assassins can target the players (if their investigations get too close to the truth) or Rachando (if he is in danger of being uncovered, or if he is already in prison). The assassins arrive as passengers on board a merchant ship from Marduk. There is one assassin per two players. They pretend to be a delegation of traders, here to negotiate for access to

Drinaxian high-technology expertise. They wear the traditional garb of Marduk diplomats – elaborate head-dresses made to resemble the Sea Gods, including articulated tentacles that can be controlled by tongue-puppetry, so the diplomat can communicate the gestural trade-language that is the only common language on their balkanised world. Beneath the masks, though, the assassins are all identical clones.

If the players encountered the Widows of Blacksand in *Adventure 1: Honour Among Thieves*, they may recognise the underlying approach, although the assassins use a different genetic template to the Widows.

GeDeCo Assassin

Age 16 – 4 terms (vatgrown)

STR 10 DEX 14 END 12 INT 7 EDU 10 SOC 9

Athletics (co-ordination) 2, Comms 1, Computers 0, Deception 1, Diplomat 0, Flyer (grav) 2, Gun Combat (energy) 3, Gun Combat (slug) 3, Investigate 2, Medic 1, Melee (brawl) 3, Persuade 1, Steward 1, Streetwise 2

Neural Comm, Subdermal Armour (3), Enhanced Vision

Lightweight Polycarapace Armour (12)

Stunner (3D), Laser Pistol (3D+3), Gauss Rifle (4D)

The assassins might:

- Stalk the players as they investigate Rachando
- Pretend to know something useful about Rachadno, and lure the players to an isolated ballroom or down onto the wasted surface of Drinax to ambush them
- Stow away on board the players' ship (or look for passage on board)
- Send out a distress call and wait for rescue (or 'rescue') by the pirates.

If targeting Rachando, the assassins might:

- Break into the prison while the players are interrogating Rachando
- Travel across the Underlinth and use an explosive device to gain access to the section of the prison containing Rachando
- Hijack a ship and attempt to crash it into the prison

Rachando can identify the assassins as GeDeCo clones.



5. INTERROGATION

Once they have Rachando in custody, the players can interrogate him on any of several topics. He reveals the first entry in each category automatically; give more detailed information if the players have earned it (by accumulating a high Effect during the investigation phase, excellent roleplaying, good Persuade checks).

No matter what questions he is asked, he will always suggest the plan to break into the Vault (page 15). Ideally, let the players draw the plan out of him; if they do not, then have Rachando offer it in an attempt to save his own skin while preserving GeDeCo.

When roleplaying Rachando, keep in mind:

- He knows he is in trouble, but believes GeDeCo is much more dangerous than Drinax can ever be. He is looking to find that point of balance where he reveals enough about GeDeCo to convince the Drinaxi to spare his life, but not enough that he can never make amends with GeDeCo.
- He believes in the GeDeCo cause, and thinks the corporation is ultimately beneficial to the Reach. He also knows that GeDeCo members do ghastly, unthinkable things in pursuit of the company's goals.
- Factor the players' reputation into his reactions. If the players have a reputation as cunning tricksters, he will try to strike a deal. If they are mass murdering cutthroats, he will talk as fast as he can to save his own skin.

The General Development Company

- GeDeCo is more than just a trading company; it conceals a secret conspiracy that manipulates events, governments and whole star systems across the Trojan Reach.
- The conspiracy's aim is to prepare the Trojan Reach to resist the Aslan, in order to protect the Imperium.
- The conspiracy is, in Rachando's opinion, ultimately beneficial to both the Imperium and the Reach. They do great and wonderful things – but there is nothing they will *not* do to further their plan.
- GeDeCo has a plan. He does not know the details, but knows that it involves a man named Jaskarl (a Very Difficult (-4) Education + Social Science check lets a player remember a Professor Jaskarl who worked in psycho-historical modelling).

Rachando & GeDeCo

- Rachando admits that he is a spy for GeDeCo.
- He believes he is the only agent on Drinax, but can't be certain. His only contact was his handler, a GeDeCo spymaster on Vorito called **Nierr**.

Drinax & GeDeCo

- Rachando's mission on Drinax was to observe shipping and space traffic, as well as note visitors to the Floating Palace.
- Vorito sees Drinax as a potential source of stability and advanced technology. Once Drinax has moved out of the shadow of its warmongering, Sindal-influenced past, it can become a useful part of the Trojan Reach.
- Rachando has (by default) little knowledge of the players. If they have boasted openly about their piratical exploits on Drinax, or otherwise exposed themselves, then he has reported them to his superiors on Vorito. Otherwise, he assures them that GeDeCo is largely unaware of them (at least, as far as Rachando knows – if the players went up against GeDeCo openly in *The Demon's Eye*, there is definitely a file on them).

GeDeCo's New HighPort

- The new HighPort is exactly what it looks like. It means that Vorito is once again open for trade. It will bring lots more traffic past Drinax. This may offer more opportunities for piracy, but it will also draw the attention of the Imperium towards Tliowaha subsector. This may interfere with the plans of the Drinaxians and their pirate allies – do the characters want the HighPort to reopen.
- The HighPort is heavily defended – the corporation will not tolerate a second attack. Rachando has no idea how saboteurs managed to make it on board the first time. The only window for a raid on the HighPort would be during the opening ceremony.

The Opening Ceremony

- The ceremony will draw visitors from all over the subsector. While security will be tight, it might be possible for the pirates to sneak aboard, either as guests or as part of some noble's entourage.
- Rachando suspects that this gathering might be part of some scheme by GeDeCo, but has no idea what it could be. The company is capable of anything.

The Vault

- At the heart of the new HighPort is a mysterious Vault. The whole station was built around this Vault – it is of immense significance to GeDeCo. Rachando was only there once, when he was sworn into the company's service, and he only saw a small portion of it. He believes that the Vault's contents are precious to GeDeCo.
- If the players could break into the Vault and steal or threaten its contents, then they could negotiate with GeDeCo. Maybe they could come to an arrangement with the megacorporation. Both GeDeCo and King

Oleb have a vision for a strong, united Trojan Reach, and poor Rachando has been trapped between these two visions.

- Alternatively, if the vault is at the heart of the HighPort, and the HighPort is vitally important to GeDeCo's plans, then blowing up the station could temporarily remove GeDeCo's influence from the Reach, giving the Drinaxians free reign to implement their own plans. Nierr once hinted there were weapons in the Vault.
- All Rachando knows about the Vault is its location (at the heart of the HighPort) and two of its security measures.
 - The door requires a DNA sample. He knows that his handler, Nierr, was on the approved list.
 - The door also required a passcard. Nierr didn't have such a passcard – one of the guards that escorted Rachando into the vault carried it.

EXECUTE THE TRAITOR, MY LIEGE!

Players unconvinced by Rachando may choose to have King Oleb throw the merchant back in the dungeons, or have him airlocked. Rachando goes to his death pleading that while he may have spied on Drinax, he never truly betrayed them. The players may choose to follow the plan of breaking into the vault, or implement their own schemes to counter GeDeCo.

Planning the Heist

Before the players depart for Vorito, ascertain:

- Who the Delegate from Drinax is (it may be one of the players)
- Which ship they are taking to Vorito (taking more than a single ship will draw attention)

Depending on your preferred style of play, you may also wish to determine what specialised equipment the players are bringing with them. It may be simpler and more dramatic to let the players decide retroactively what criminal tools they brought along (*'of course I brought an electronic codebreaker'*) if you wish to avoid a lengthy planning session.

From Rachando, they know the vault has at least two security systems – they need to obtain a passcode of the right security clearance (he has no idea what that clearance is), and they need a DNA sample from Nierr or someone else authorised to access the vault. If there are other barriers, they will have to cross them when they get there. It may be possible to bypass some of these security checks, but doing so will take time and risks triggering countermeasures.

Note that there is no time to do extensive reconnaissance of the HighPort before the opening ceremony.

ALTERNATE APPROACHES

Your players may decide to try another approach, like sneaking onto the HighPort or even attacking the Vault from outside. If they do, run with it – everything leads to the dark confrontation in the Vault in section 8.

6. THE UNVEILING

According to its designers, the Vorito Highport is a rotating dodecahedron with reconfigurable docking arms extending from each primary vertex. To the players, it resembles a metallic spider or maybe a squid, reaching out to strangle them.

They are not the only ship in the system when they jump in. Space here is crowded. Huge System Defence Boats in GeDeCo livery guard the approaches to the world. Megafreighters – true leviathans, ships of a size never seen in the reach outside the trade routes – move with the stately implacability of planets, while their escorts and tenders buzz around them like fast-orbiting moonlets. More interesting, from a pirate's perspective, is the cloud of smaller ships – traders, couriers, messengers and government transports – that cluster around the starport. Their IFF transmissions are a who's who of the Trojan Reach, and beyond. Imperial signals, Aslan, and even Floriani. Minor systems too, especially those beholden to GeDeCo.

If the players do not have the Drinaxian Delegate on board, they are challenged as soon as they enter the system, and politely informed that Vorito is temporarily closed to non-authorised visitors. Please proceed to the refuelling station orbiting the gas giant Voree and then leave. Failure to comply will result in the use of force as sanctioned by the governor-general.

If they do have the Delegate on board, and present appropriate credentials, they are permitted to dock.

The Vorito Highport is staggeringly huge. Right now, it is also very empty. The players are escorted through huge hallways and concourses that are designed to welcome tens of thousands of visitors at a time. When this station opens, it will not just service the needs of the ten billion people living on Vorito below – it will be the financial hub of the whole rimward half of the Trojan Reach.

Once they dock, the players are greeted by **Ammun Ko** (see **GeDeCo Personnel**) and escorted to the Grand Banqueting Hall.

Security

Entry into the HighPort means passing through several levels of security.

- Before the players' ship docks, it is scanned at close range by one of the SDBs using a Densitometer. This detects any usual objects or weapons on board. The players can get around this security check with a Densitometer Cloak (see *Book 6: Scoundrel*) or by not bringing anything that would show up on a ship-level scan.
- After docking, the players are met by Ammun Ko and an honour guard of GeDeCo security (one per player). One of the GeDeCo guards has a handheld densitometer and bioscanner, which is programmed to detect weapons and other contraband. Any players carrying illegal weapons may conceal them with a Difficult (-2) Dexterity + Stealth or Deception check. Failure means the guards request the players return any illegal items to the ship, and keep a close eye on the players after that, giving DM-1 to any further tests to sneak around the station.
- Ammun Ko gives each of the players a passcard, and explains that it is used to open doors, purchase items and track their needs on board the station. As a courtesy, their passcards have been preloaded with credits, so anything they purchase on board the station is free (within reason – it is to cover drinks and souvenirs, not a new starship). The cards give them Level 1 Clearance, sufficient to access the luxurious corporate lounge suites and other exclusive facilities on board.
- The players are escorted through several security checkpoints; at each checkpoint, Ammun Ko swipes her passcard to open the hatch. It is clear that the opening ceremony is taking place in an extremely secure section of the station - the players may never get this close to the core again.

GeDeCo Personnel

Notable GeDeCo personnel encountered on the station:

Ammun Ko: Ammun Ko greets the players when they arrive, and introduces herself as their personal liaison. She is smart, perky and very, very enthusiastic. She comes from Regina, in the Spinward Marches of the Imperium; crossing the wild and perilous Trojan Reach, even in a passenger liner, was the biggest adventure she has ever had. She has a datapad of facts about Drinax, and immediately launches into the hard sell, trying to convince the Delegate and the rest of the entourage to buy into a GeDeCo Development Contract. Why, with GeDeCo's backing, they could re-terraform the planet and make the radioactive wastelands habitable again in only five or six generations! For the low low price of 5% of your planet's

GDP, GeDeCo will bring its eco-engineering expertise to bear, and they will throw in an expanded starport for free!

Ammun has no idea about the vault, Rachando, the conspiracy, the Jaskarl Plan or anything else. As far as she knows, GeDeCo's just a great company to work for.

If Princess Rao is the Delegate, then Ammun clamps onto her like a star-struck limpet. A real life princess!

Security Clearance: Ammun has a level 2 passcard, and her DNA is not on the vault registry.

Playing Ammun Ko:

- Bubble with enthusiasm. Customs are 'quaint', aliens 'adorable' and pirates are 'just like out of the holos'.
- Carry a folder of notes. Refer to it constantly, as if your whole life script is (checks folder) written there.
- Smile. Smile. Smile more. Does it hurt? If not, you are not smiling enough.

Fae Borshune: The administrator of the HighPort and one of the most prominent public faces of GeDeCo, Borshune's a former Imperial Navy officer who retired to take up a better-paying corporate job. She is not part of the inner core of GeDeCo, but is aware that the company is more than it seems.

The last Highport was destroyed by sabotage, and she is determined not to let that happen again on her watch. She has a special hatred for pirates and other terrorists, and will tolerate no unusual or suspicious behaviour on her station. If 'Vorito Highport 5' were a television series about a space station that is a crossroads for humans and aliens, all alone in the night, then she would be the charismatic star.

If the Delegate is Lord Wrax and the players encounter Borshune at the ceremony, then the two of them get into a bitter argument about military tactics (specifically, the career of Gani Peras, the famed admiral of Sindal who played a part in *Adventure 5: The Treasure of Sindal*).

Security Clearance: She has a level 4 passcard but is not on the DNA approved list

Playing Fae Borshune:

- Keep a military bearing; stand up straight, speak crisply.
- Project strength; not only must you make it clear that Vorito Highport is an unassailable fortress, immune to pirate raids or sabotage, you have also been told to show the delegates that GeDeCo can protect them from the vicissitudes of history
- Tap your finger on the table before making an announcement or declaring something; it not only draws peoples' attention, it also reminds you of firing your cruiser's spinal cannon at enemy ships

Security Chief Brule: The station's acting security chief is a Vargr. She was severely injured in a pirate attack on a GeDeCo outpost, and was surgically and cybernetically rebuilt by the company. Now, she is fanatically loyal to GeDeCo. During the opening ceremony, she stalks through the room, monitoring everything through his augmented senses and data links.

If Prince Harrick is the Delegate, he and Brule have a lot to talk about at the ceremony – both were brought back from near death by advanced technology.

Security Clearance: She has a level 3 passcard, but her DNA is not on the list.

Playing Brule:

- Deliver corporate management speak in the tone of voice you would normally use for feral roars and demonic chants. *GHRRAWL! I am HAPPY to HELP you. Rrrgh! Have a NICE day!*
- Loom. Sniff the air. Look at people suspiciously.

Lando Nierr: A dull, plump man, Nierr introduces himself as a 'planetary network externalities consultant' who can help your planet develop trade links with its neighbours. He is the conversational equivalent of white noise. inoffensive, almost relaxing, with the hint of a message or meaning beyond the reach of your ability to perceive it. He is also one of the members of the inner conspiracy of GeDeCo, and is Rachando's handler.

Security Clearance: He has a level 2 passcard, and is on the DNA approved list.

Playing Lando Nierr

- In public, be intensely boring. Speak in a low voice, hesitate. Talk about trade volumes and relative wealth indices.
- In private, you are more commanding, more determined, but still quiet. Drink information in, and give nothing away.
- Fold your hands in front of you and speak to them instead of the person you are actually talking to.

OTHER DELEGATES

Where possible, bring back previously established NPCs from your campaign to attend the party. Almost anyone who is vaguely connected to a planetary government in the Trojan Reach could show up on Vorito. If any NPCs from the campaign made a big impression on the players, then they are at the party. Some potential candidates are listed below – adapt their descriptions and attitudes to match developments in your campaign. For example, if the players accidentally shot Gerret Hodol, replace him with the maniacal Professor Rex Darke of TechWorld.

HIVER JIM

Perhaps the most exotic guest at the ceremony is a Hiver, who introduces itself as Jim. Its real name is untranslatable. Jim is a 'consulting artist' for GeDeCo, and helped develop the Jaskarl Plan. The Sculpture (see below) is its work, and its eager to talk about it while throwing back wine and cheese (Hivers do not metabolise alcohol like humans, but it is getting a terrific buzz off the cheddar). Apparently, it symbolises the 'invisible connections of historical necessity' and 'incorporates the observer into the art.' If the players wait long enough, Jim gets intoxicated on cheese to start groping the character's hands with its manipulator, and even gives birth to a few larvae (Hivers treat their hatchlings as inconsequential vermin).

Security Clearance: Jim has no passcard, but its DNA is on the list. In fact, its hatchlings share enough of their parent's DNA that one of them could be used to bypass the genetic lock.

Playing Jim:

- Humans! Such simple, trusting creatures. So brave, though, always rushing blindly ahead without the slightest bit of planning or preparation. A whole cluster of civilisations fuelled by sheer undirected lust and greed. It must be so relaxing to be so stupid.
- If you can, emphasise Jim's alienness by climbing down under the table, and holding your hand up like a puppeteer using a glove puppet. Talk with animated hand gestures.

Unless otherwise noted, none of these delegates have any security clearances beyond the level 1 passcodes given to all visitors to Vorito.

Keeper Malos of Clarke (Adventure 1): The lugubrious monk enjoys nothing more than bringing down a celebration by talking about death.

Grand High Provost Falx of Torpol (Adventure 1): Falx has risen in station since the players last encountered him, thanks to a GeDeCo development contract. He enthuses about the company's investments on Torpol.

Olais of Marduk (Adventure 1): The lord of one of the more powerful domes on Marduk, Olais hopes to attract GeDeCo support so she can defend her people against Oghman raiders. She will complain to anyone who listens about the Oghman.

Vargas (Purser Vaughn) (Adventure 2): 'Vargas' was the purser on board the Imperial Treasure ship in *Adventure 2: Treasure Ship*. He was also a GeDeCo spy. If that adventure ended with GeDeCo successfully spreading rumours of a false treaty, then Vaughn's triumph was rewarded with a new identity and a position in the GeDeCo-influenced government of Cordan. If it was a failure, then 'Vargas' was demoted to the rank of tramp trader, much like Rachando or Talbis Doherty (see *Adventure 4: The Demon's Eye*) or Jarel Yean (see *Adventure 3: I hate it!*). Either way, he's a member of the conspiracy and is here to report to Nierr. He nervously talks about trivia and the weather. (There is not any weather in space, but he tries anyway.) **Security Clearance:** Passcode Level 2, DNA

Regent Stoylis of Byrni (Adventure 2): The commander of the brave Star Guard of Byrni, Stoylis holds his world and its fleets in trust for the Emperor of Sindal. If GeDeCo succeeded in planting their false treaty, then Byrni has entered into a development contract with them; if the plot in *Adventure 2* failed, then Stoylis is here as a courtesy only. He discusses Drinax's history and future with the players – Drinax and Byrni have a lot in common, as both are strongly influenced by their Sindalian history.

Takhweirl of the Company of Profits That Rise Like Mist (Adventure 3): An Aslan trader from the world of Keiah, Takhweirl is eager to find trading partners outside the Hierate.

Gerret Hodol of TechWorld (Adventure 4): Depending on the events of *Adventure 4: The Demon's Eye*, the characters may be secretly conspiring with Hodol to break TechWorld free of GeDeCo control, or he may be a loyal employee of GeDeCo, here to talk about the benefits of advanced technological research.

Warden Rannib of Number One (Adventure 5): The child ruler of Number One got to stay up past her bedtime for this party. She still thinks pirates are yucky.

Visionary Prophet Zarn of Ace (Adventure 5): She claims to be able to foretell the future in the storms of Ace, and tells anyone who will listen that a giant star dragon will eat its own tail when a hawk is struck by lightning.

Tiznee Zazzle of Salif (Adventure 5): The celebrity ruler of Salif adds a touch of tawdry glamour to the ceremony. Her secret police suspect the masses will revolt against her rule, so she is on the look-out for a planet to retire to. Drinax sounds nice.

Eridani, niece of the Duke of Tobia (Adventure 6): If the players kidnapped her during *Adventure 6*, then they have got an awkward conversation ahead of them at the party.

Ht! Ujj!: A Barnai representative from the Florian League, Ht!'s idea of small talk is a little peculiar – '*what useful information can you convey to me in the next two minutes*' is her version of 'hello'.

Mingling at the Party

The players may wander freely about the party. They may extricate themselves from a conversation without causing offence with an Easy (+4) Social Standing + Carouse check. They may also make Carouse checks to get into a conversation with a specific GeDeCo rep or delegate (for example, if they want to get close to Nierr). The party is an excellent opportunity to offer plot hooks and side missions to the players, or to update them on events in the Reach.

Observant players may spot other GeDeCo agents secretly making contact with Nierr. Call for Intelligence + Investigate checks; a successful test means the player notices a spy approaching Nierr.

The Sculpture

In the middle of the room, surrounded by the best buffet table in the sector, is a curious sculpture of alien design. It looks vaguely like a tree made of glowing tubes and fist-sized nodes of what appears to be marble. It is quite grotesque, and is exactly the sort of corporate-funded art project one would expect to see a starport like this; its deliberate ugliness makes the rest of the place seem even more polished and streamlined.

Anyone paying too much attention to the sculpture must make a Difficult (-2) Endurance check to avoid developing a mild headache. Psionically gifted players can tell the sculpture incorporates some sort of psionic technology.

A close examination reveals that the sculpture is connected to the station's internal computer network by a high-density data cable. It is producing (or somehow picking up) a staggering amount of data. Tracing this connection with a Computers check confirms the sculpture is connected to the secret vault.

The Sculpture is the work of Hiver Jim. It scans the thought structure of everyone in the room, generating psychographic profiles of their personalities and feeding that into the Jaskarl plan. This is not telepathy – it cannot read thoughts or memories – but does give insight into the instincts and personality types of the various delegates, which is immensely valuable to the psycho-historical predictions used by GeDeCo. The Sculpture uses Hiver technology and techniques unknown in the Imperium.

Cutting The Cable: The Sculpture is harmless, at least in the short term. Having their brains scanned by the sculpture will not affect the players. However, it does underline GeDeCo's sinister intent.

The Sculpture may be immediately useful as a distraction – if the players sabotage the data cable, a swarm of GeDeCo techs swoop in to fix it as quickly as possible. Borshune claims it is a ‘necessary adjustment of the environmental systems, nothing to worry about’, but all the comings and goings can give the players an opportunity to sneak away (see Sneaking Out, page 16).

The Ceremony

For those used to the wild excesses of King Oleb or the endless, dusty ceremonies of Drinax, the GeDeCo ceremony is dull but mercifully brief. To polite applause, Borshune address the crowd from a floating podium. She thanks all the delegates for attending, and gives a brief description of how GeDeCo's investments and partnerships have improved trade and technology across the Trojan Reach. Holographic displays around the room echo her words with charts and friendly diagrams. Brightly coloured arrows point to the future; curves climb joyously skywards showing how the Outrim Void is slowly becoming less of a war-torn wilderness, and more of a valued adjunct to the Imperium, and a safe and secure highway for trade with the Aslan and Floriani.

The re-opening of Vorito HighPort, she claims, will usher in a new era of peace and prosperity for the Trojan Reach. The coming years will put an end to piracy and raiding, as GeDeCo intends to invest in more SDBs and patrol ships to drive these twin scourges out of the system. The coming years will unite the disparate worlds with trade links, and raise those planets that have fallen backwards to ever-higher technology levels. GeDeCo Standard Development Contracts are the future for the Trojan Reach, and the HighPort is a symbol that the company is here for a very long time to come.

One wall of the banqueting hall becomes transparent, and a squadron of GeDeCo patrol ships takes up formation just outside. One of them releases a cloud of gas from a tank, and the others fire lasers and particle beams into the gas cloud. The intersection of the beams forms the GeDeCo logo, which burns for a moment in space before dispersing.

After the ceremony, the party bursts back into life. Knots of delegates gather and break up, agreements are made with or without GeDeCo mediation, friendships are forged, alliances broken and the whirl of galactic politics sweeps around the room. As the evening wears on, the business of diplomacy gives way to carousing; the real deals will be made later on, in the small hours of the morning, or in private meetings elsewhere on the station.

The players, though, are here to break into the GeDeCo vault, not to make deals. At least, that is what they think.

7. BREAKING INTO THE VAULT

Outside the sumptuous banquet hall, the station is still unfinished. All the essential systems are in place, but it's a warren of metal corridors and exposed life support systems. In fact, it is much more like the rest of the Trojan Reach here than it is in the completed sections – most of the other spaceports and ships in use in this sector look similarly run-down and industrial.

Making their way through the highport, the characters come closer and closer to the central vault. At times, they even catch glimpses of the vault through portholes – it is a cube of black metal, scarred in places as if it was once hit by laser fire. It is obviously much older than the rest of the space station. A pair of robot maintenance pods hover outside it, attaching power cables and other infrastructure. Before the station is open to other traffic, the vault will be walled away behind thick slabs of bonded neutronium, and no outsiders will ever know it was there.

To break into the vault, the players need to get to the vault, bypass two major security systems, and defeat its internal defences – and they need to do all that before GeDeCo realise anything is amiss.

Timing

Start by rolling 1D+6 to determine how much of a safety buffer the players have before they are discovered. This safety buffer is referred to in the rest of the scenario as the Countdown.

Modify this Countdown as follows:

- Subtract 1 for each roll made by the players that takes less than sixty seconds.
- Subtract the Effect of a failed final roll in a task chain to bypass security systems
- Subtract 1-6 for each check that takes 1-6 minutes
- Add 1 if the players succeed with an Effect of 4-5
- Add 2 if they succeed with an Effect of 6.

If the Countdown drops below 0, and the players are not inside the inner vault, then the alarm is raised. The players have one more chance to make it into the vault – they get one more check. After that, hit them with a GeDeCo security team. Defeating the security team increases the countdown by 1-6. If they run out of time again, then the next security team is twice as big, fully equipped with battle dress, and has the Delegate as a hostage (see page 7).

Ideally, the players should avoid doubling up on checks. Instead of calling for a check from each player, they should instead use Task Chains to work together. For example, when leaving the party, one player might make an Intelligence + Deception check to spot an opening, another could make Social Standing + Carouse to cause a distraction, and finally one makes a Dexterity + Stealth roll to sneak out.

GeDeCo ELITE GUARDS

Age 16 – 4 terms (vatgrown)

STR 10 (16) DEX 14 (18) END 12 INT 7

EDU 10 SOC 9

Athletics (co-ordination) 2, Battle Dress 2 Comms 1, Computers 0, Deception 1, Diplomat 0, Flyer (grav) 2, Gun Combat (energy) 3, Gun Combat (slug) 3, Investigate 2, Medic 1, Melee (brawl) 3, Persuade 1, Steward 1, Streetwise 2

Neural Comm, Subdermal Armour (3), Enhanced Vision Battledress (18)

Stunner (3D), Laser Pistol (3D+3), Gauss Rifle (4D)

Lady Hil can bore anyone; she just gives a flat DM+1 to sneaking out attempts.

Other distractions (making a scene, sabotaging the Sculpture) should also give DM+2 or more.

Avoiding Detection

To make it through the corridors while avoiding GeDeCo security cameras and patrols, call for Dexterity + Stealth checks. The players might make a Task Chain involving:

- Education + Sensors, 1-6 minutes to disable security scanners
- Strength + Brawl, 10-60 seconds to take down some guards without being noticed
- Intelligence + Engineering, 10-60 seconds to find their way through the station's maze of access tubes and crawlspaces

Sneaking Out

To sneak out of the party, the players need to make Social Standing + Carouse or Deception taking 1-6 minutes (remember, the players can accept DM-2 to their check to act more quickly, bringing the time needed down to 10-60 seconds).

Matching the right delegate to the right GeDeCo rep causes enough of a distraction to give DM+2.

The Vault Entrance

The door to the vault is strangely unguarded. The whole area around it is suspiciously deserted.

The vault itself is dark and oppressive. Even though it also appears unoccupied, it hums with energy.



Bypassing Security

There are two security systems that control access to the vault. The players need to swipe a passcard, and they need to provide a DNA sample.

Passcards: Level 3 access is needed to open the vault door. Call for an Intelligence + Engineering (electronics) check taking 10-60 seconds to gain access. Apply DM-2 if the players have only a Level 2 card, DM-4 if they have only a Level 1 Card, and DM-6 if they have no card.

DNA: If the players have a DNA sample on the system registry, they can bypass this security system without a check. If they do not have a suitable sample, they have to hack the sensor with an Intelligence + Medic or Engineering (electronics) check.

Internal Defences

If the players did not have both a Level 3+ passcard and a valid DNA sample, then their tampering activates the vault's automatic internal defences. Hatches in the ceiling pop open to deploy combat drones.

DRONES

Strength 12, Dexterity 10, Hull 4, Structure 4
Gun Combat (laser) 2
Armour 9, Laser Rifle (D+3)

8. IN THE VAULT

The doors slide open. Inside is an endless black space – no visible ceiling, no floor, no walls. Objects can be dimly perceived in the distance, cloaked by some sort of holographic distortion. Are they files, computer archives, objects, treasures? It is hard to tell.

When the players enter, a hologram appears. It is an old man – well dressed, with a thin, devilish beard.

It is Professor Jaskarl – or, to be accurate, an interactive computer program created by Professor Jaskarl.

'I am Professor Jaskarl. I don't know who you are, but you fit a very specific psycho-historical profile. I can say with 89.4% certainty that you are or work for a resurgent polity within the Trojan Reach. You have used piracy and economic pressure to garner influence over neighbouring worlds, with the eventual goal of forcing concessions from a major power. I commend you on your efforts thus far.

"How do I know this, you might ask? I don't know if you're asking – my predictive methods apply only to large populations,

to entire star systems and civilisations, not to individuals. I do not know anything about you, I can only know the probable shape of history.

"The larger the population, the more accurate my predictions. Applied to multiple sectors, probabilities become certainties. Some time ago, a consortium of concerned Imperial citizens hired me to apply my techniques to the future of the Spinward Marches. In brief, my conclusion is that, without active intervention, the Aslan Hierate will inevitably expand to conquer the entire Trojan Reach and Corridor sector, cutting the Marches off from the main body of the Imperium. Trillions will die."

As he speaks, more holograms appear in darkness. The stars of the Trojan Reach – neutral stars in white, the deep purple of the Imperium, the cool blue of the Florian League, and the bloody red of the Aslan. The red expands, swallowing system after system until it crashes into Tobia and Pax Rulin.

"This disaster can be prevented. The General Development Company's secret purpose is to prepare the Trojan Reach. By uplifting and fortifying key civilisations, we turn them into... caltrops, into tiger traps that will disrupt and slow the Aslan advance. By labouring in secret over many generations, the company can alter the otherwise inevitable future."

The hologram rolls back, then displays another potential future. In this version, the Aslan advance rolls forward much, much more slowly, then stops.

"My predictions show an upcoming intersection between your efforts and ours. As conflicts grows within the Aslan Hierate between their trader and warmonger clans, this pressure manifests as incursions into neutral space. You may have already experienced such attacks; they are but a small taste of the conflict to come.

"I have a proposition for you. Let us make your polity our lightning rod. We will fortify you, lend you our aid. This will draw the Aslan onto you.

"You will endure. You will fight bravely – but in the end, you must lose. Your destruction will have consequences that ripple out across the Trojan Reach, inspiring other systems to prepare for the Aslan assault. The General Development Company will protect you or a small few individuals of your choice, but the destruction must be otherwise absolute and... memorable.

"Refuse this proposition... and events will transpire as the mathematics dictate. There is still an 88% chance that the Aslan strike at you, even without GeDeCo assistance."

The players may question Jaskarl briefly. The hologram will not answer any questions that do not relate directly to its proposition,

saying only that “*your query is outside the predicted parameters of this interaction*”. Subtract one from the Countdown for each question asked.

- If the players agree, then GeDeCo will support the Kingdom of Drinax – until the Aslan attack.
 - After the attack, GeDeCo will ensure that the player characters are ‘protected and provided for’. The players may assume that this means ‘a cushy corporate retirement’ or ‘shot in the back of the head and buried in an unmarked grave’ as they wish.
 - The Aslan *must* destroy Drinax. The destruction of Drinax is a necessary adjustment to the psycho-historical progression of the Trojan Reach. If the Aslan attack is repelled, it will throw Jaskarl’s calculations off and put the whole Imperium at risk. So, if the players are to keep to their bargain with Jaskarl, they will have to ensure Drinax’s destruction at the claws of the Aslan. They may have to sabotage their own defences.
 - If the players speculate about taking the GeDeCo offer, getting help from GeDeCo, but then *not* betraying Drinax when the crisis comes, then the simulation hologram just says ‘*your query is outside the predicted parameters of this interaction*’.
 - If they ask why Drinax must fall, the hologram explains that the plan requires the reactivation of the golden age myth. To translate the subtle mathematics of psychohistory into crude words, the culture of the central Trojan Reach is still haunted by the memory of the Empire of Sindal. That empire is too far in the past to be of use, but if those cultural associations can be refired with the temporary ascension of a new empire, then the destruction of that new empire will be especially traumatic – it will be the shock needed to drive the whole Reach to adopt a new and more belligerent attitude towards the Aslan.
- If the players refuse the GeDeCo offer, then they are free to go. As far as GeDeCo is concerned, Drinax is doomed anyway – there is an 88% chance that the Aslan will attack within a few years, and an equally high chance that any such attack will wipe Drinax out.

The Rest of the Vault

Roll on the Vault table to determine what characters exploring the other sections of the vault discover. There is no easy way to search the vault, as the holographic darkness occludes everything until you are right on top of it. If the players have a gadget like a densitometer, they make may a Hard (-4)

Intelligence + Sensors check and add the Effect to their next roll on the table below. The players get one roll on the table for each point of Countdown remaining. Note that there is no guarantee that the players will be able to *keep* these treasures – see *Escaping the Vault*.

2D	Useful Item Discovered
2-4	Nothing – oh, there might be something buried deep in these corporate financial reports or personnel archives, but it is not immediately obvious
5	MCR1-6 in physical credits, gold, jewels, bearer bonds and other easily portable treasures
6	Schematics for the HighPort, along with a high-clearance computer access terminal. With these, the characters may be able to prepare an escape route for themselves by opening hatches, redirecting maintenance robots, or just overloading the station’s reactors and running for their ship while sirens blare
7	MCR2-12 in physical credits, gold, jewels, bearer bonds and other easily portable treasures
8	Information about a GeDeCo scheme on another world; exposing that scheme moves that world one step towards Haven
9	Information about an exceedingly valuable cargo being shipped through the Reach – a tempting target for piracy
10	The identity of a GeDeCo agent in a position of power on a neutral planet; exposing that agent moves the world two steps closer to Haven
11	Computer archives containing the Jaskarl calculations. Destroying these will severely disrupt GeDeCo’s operations in the reach
12+	Something unusual – an Ancient relic, cryo-frozen clones of key Imperial officials, some lost treasure from the Sindalian empire, a Black Globe generator, or a psycho-historical planning document for a scheme that, if exploited, moves a world three steps closer to Haven

Destroying The Vault

If the players brought explosives or heavy weapons with them (and somehow got them on board the station without being detected), or if they improvise some other way of inflicting massive damage, they can damage the Vault with its precious Jaskarl archives. The hologram and associated computer systems are not the only copy of the Jaskarl Plan, but it is the most up-to-date psychohistorical simulation, and it does have all the added data from the Hiver Sculpture. Destroying the Vault will therefore set GeDeCo’s plans back by several years.

Escaping the Vault

If the players have any Countdown left, they can try to escape. Closing the door and leaving no trace requires a Difficult (-2) Intelligence + Engineering (electronics) check taking 1-6 minutes, and a Difficult (-2) Intelligence + Investigate check also taking 1-6 minutes to remove forensic evidence. They can return to the party, have a few expensive cocktails on GeDeCo's tab, then stroll back to their ship, having committed the perfect crime.

Alternatively, they can just race to their ship and blast off, and hope they make the 100-diameter jump limit before they are caught by GeDeCo (you can, if necessary, have GeDeCo let them go – remember, GeDeCo *want* a 'lightning rod' like Drinax to take the brunt of the next inevitable Aslan attack).

Time To Leave The Party

If the players are out of Countdown, then a heavily armed squad of GeDeCo marines arrives at the Vault to take the players into custody. The squad are mostly hulking, cybernetically augmented brutes in battle dress, but at their head is Mr. Nierr. He has the Drinaxian Delegate as a hostage, if necessary.

GeDeCo security relieve the players of any money or gear stolen from the Vault, as well as any weapons, but otherwise do not ask any questions or interrogate them. If the players try to describe what they say, Nierr just shakes his head and says *'it's better not to talk about it.'* Fighting back or arguing with Nierr results in violent repercussions; while the Jaskarl plan calls for GeDeCo to let the players go, they do not have to let them go unscathed.

If the players try to follow Rachando's advice about negotiating with GeDeCo by holding the Vault's contents hostage, then Nierr just sneers at them.

'We only make deals on our own terms. You have already had our offer.'

9. NULL CHOICE

If you believe in psychohistory, and the Jaskarl Plan, then it makes little difference what decision the players make in the darkness of the vault. Whether they accepted the hologram's offer or not, whether it is Drinax or some other world that is attacked and destroyed by the Aslan,

whether it is the pirates or someone else – history will play out as it must.

King Oleb gambled that a few brave souls could change the destiny of an Empire.

The General Development Company hedge their bets, and believe that the destinies of Empires are dictated by population pressures, by economics, by the needs of the masses, and by the inevitable forces of history.

If the players did take the hologram's deal, then GeDeCo covertly builds up Drinax – the stronger and more respected Drinax is, the more effective its fall will be as a warning and inspiration for the rest of the Reach according to their psychhistorical predictions. The players may roll 3D, and move ports towards Haven a number of times equal to their total (so, it would cost 7 to move a port from Hostile to being a Haven).

The full ramifications of the players' choice – and whether or not they flee Drinax before the end – will be determined in *Adventure 10: Finale*.



APPENDIX 1: WORLDS OF THE REACH

The World

Most of the population of The World have no idea that anything exists outside their space station. They do not even know they are on a space station – they assume that the entire universe is a crumbling ring of corridors and hydroponics bays and overcrowded habitat modules. Only the command staff – the gods and rulers of The World – know the truth.

Patron: Governor Olc.

Reward: The World becomes a Haven.

Mission: Find a replacement for the World's malfunctioning fusion control module. *Replacing* the ancient Second Imperium-era reactor is not an option, as it would expose the population to the truth of the world. He needs the players to find a thousand-year-old reactor part (or a suitable substitute) and bring it to the World before the lights go out.

Pourne

Named for the ancient writer Pournelle, this world is ruled by a calcified, paranoid bureaucratic caste who assume that all offworlds are probably saboteurs sent to destroy the planet. Pourne customs officials are notoriously aggressive and heavily armed, and the planet is protected by a bristling array of SDI satellites. Despite this attitude, its stability and technology level make Pourne is one of the most important trade hubs in the subsector.

Patron: Nevin Yrral, Bureau of Investigation

Reward: Cr10,000, and Pourne moves one step closer to Haven

Mission: A jump-capable scout ship of possibly non-human design arrived in the Pourne system some months ago. The only crew member was dead, and the remains were sufficiently degraded by radiation exposure that it was impossible to determine species. The Pourne bureaucracy fears this was an advance scout for an alien invasion force. The mission is to locate the origin world of the scout ship and determine if it is a threat.

Vorito

A company world, run exclusively by the General Development Company.

Patron: Lando Nierr

Reward: Become one of the Pirate Lords of Theev; Vorito becomes a Haven for the purposes of selling cargo and avoiding spies

Mission: This mission is only available if the players take the Jaskarl Hologram's offer. Later, Nierr contacts them and offers them the chance to become a Pirate Lord. Theev is secretly operated and maintained by GeDeCo, in order to sow fear across the Reach and drive planets under GeDeCo's protection. The planet of Salif in Sindal subsector recently fought off a pirate attack from Theev – if the players make an example of Salif, then Nierr will give them the opportunity to depose the current rulers of Theev with the assistance of the fabled Widows of Blacksand.

Sink

The only settlement on Sink is a small monastery, established by an obscure religious sect from Earth. They spend much of their time sinking things in the deep swampy lakes around their fortress.

Patron: Malcalypse the Younger, Pope

Reward: Sink becomes a Haven; five tons of flax.

Mission: Sink something really, really big in the swamps.

Fantasy

The inhabitants of Fantasy are the descendants of a slave ship from the Glorious Empire. The human slaves were the product of an experiment in genetic engineering by the Aslan; traits like strength, endurance and physical attractiveness were enhanced, while intellect and the capacity for independent thought were diminished. The sex ratio was also changed, so on average ten females are born for every male.

The planet was named by an Imperial Scout who spent several years monitoring the planet.

Patron: Tarya

Reward: Fantasy becomes a Haven

Mission: Tarya discovered the wreckage of the Aslan slave ship that brought her ancestors to this world centuries ago. On board, she also found notes on genetic modification that are beyond her capability to understand, but she suspects the limits placed on her peoples' intellect can be reversed. She wants some offworlder to take the genetic information and use it to undo the Aslan modifications, allowing the people of Fantasy to develop their own technology and advanced culture.