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SYSTEM BOOK 2: XIBALBA

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SYSTEM BOOK 2: XIBALBA

CREDITS

AUTHOR & INTERIOR ILLUSTRATIONS
Constantine Thomas

COVER ART
David Redington

EDITOR, INTERIOR DESIGN & LAYOUT
John Griffiths

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SYSTEM BOOK 2: XIBALBA
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INTRODUCTION

System Book 2: Xibalba is the second in a series of books by *Spica Publishing* that present a detailed planetary system with scientifically accurate physical data (given the state of knowledge at the time of writing) and an interesting setting to enable Referees to run exciting adventures there.

While designed for use with the current edition of the Traveller SF RPG rules, these books can be used for any science fiction role playing game as the specific rules involved have been kept to a minimum.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Traveller Core Rulebook: The World Creation chapter of the Traveller Core Rulebook will be helpful, however, this is not essential.

Outer Veil: While this product is intended to be generic, specific notes have been included in the Referee's Information on page 10 detailing how to incorporate Xibalba into Spica Publishing's *Outer Veil* setting.

References to Other Books: In this book, references to specific pages in other books and products are shown as the page number followed by a code for the relevant book, both in italics, thus: 28 *TMB* or (28 *TMB*).

- Traveller Core Rulebook: *TCR*
- System Book 1: Katringa: *SB1*
- Outer Veil: *OV*

Die Throw & Notation Conventions The die throw and notation conventions used in this book are the same as those described on 3 *TCR*.

Standard Time Units: When 'days', 'weeks', 'months', and 'years' are mentioned in the text, they refer to the 'Standard Time Units' used on Earth (i.e. a 'day' is equal to 24 hours, a 'year' is equal to 365.25 'days', etc.).

Universal World Profiles (UWPs): Physical information about the bodies in the Xibalba system is presented in generic terms and as UWPs.

The 'S' world size code is used in one of the UWPs to describe one of the bodies here. 'S' means 'Small World' and is used for bodies that have a radius of less than 400 kilometres.

SYSTEM BOOK 2: XIBALBA

System Book 2: Xibalba is designed to be slotted into any high-tech interstellar science fiction setting, presenting a backwater system that harbours a strange mystery. Ships have disappeared; a deadly madness has claimed the population of a habitat and those who remain live with mysterious 'manifestations' as best as they can. Is the system really haunted by the ghosts of the dead as some believe? Or is there a more rational explanation for the unsettling events that occur in Xibalba?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is divided into two chapters:

The Xibalba System

This chapter describes the white dwarf primary and its surviving family of planets that make up the Xibalba system.

History and Society: This section describes the colonisation history of Xibalba and its society, as well as important habitats and key events in its history.

Strange Phenomena: This section describes the mysteries and challenges that face the inhabitants of the Xibalba system.

Referee's Information

This chapter includes information for the Referee's eyes only, and includes advice on how to use the system in existing campaigns (including some Adventure Seeds), how to present the 'manifestations' that affect the inhabitants of the system, how to incorporate Xibalba into the *Outer Veil* setting, and some suggestions as to what is really going on in Xibalba.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Constantine Thomas has been world-building since the late 1980s. He has a doctorate in Planetary Science, has written two articles for *JTAS Online* and co-authored of Steve Jackson Games' *Transhuman Space: Under Pressure* and Spica Publishing's *System Book 1: Katringa*. He lives in British Columbia, Canada.

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THE XIBALBA SYSTEM

Xibalba is a bleak, empty system consisting of three charred rockballs, a dispersed asteroid belt and a superjovian gas giant orbiting the cooling corpse of a star.

The system's naming scheme is based on the Mayan underworld of Xibalba (*'shi-BAHL-ba'*) and the 'houses' within it that contained different trials to torment its victims, although the names have diverged slightly from the original Mayan. The system is generally referred to as 'the Xibalba system' or just 'Xibalba'. The asteroid belt is usually referred to as 'the Xibalba belt'. The primary star is named for the Mayan goddess of suicide.

THE XIBALBA SYSTEM

UWP: Xibalba D000224-9 As Lo Ni G

Star: Ixtab (White Dwarf)

System Data

Orbit	Orbit (AU)	Name	UWP
—	—	Ixtab	D
I	4.59	Akabna	X700000-0
II	9.63	Balamna	E701224-9
III	16.40	Chamna	X800000-0
IV	26.70–33.00	Xibalba Belt	
	27.22	Nuevo Tikal	DS00224-9
V	67.35	Sisna	LGG

STELLAR DATA

Stellar Data

No. of stars in system	1
Star name (local)	Ixtab (<i>'ESH-tahb'</i>)
Spectral type	D (White Dwarf)
Age	3 billion years (1.5 as WD)
Star Colour	Blue-White
Mass	0.593 × Sol
Luminosity	0.0005 × Sol
Effective Temperature	8,000 Kelvin
Radius	0.01417 × Sol (9,864 km)
Metallicity	Solar

Ixtab was most likely a 2.04 solar mass A1 V star that formed about 3 billion years ago, evolved through its red giant phases and became a white dwarf about 1.5 billion years ago.

Relative Distances (AU)

From/To	Akabna	Balamna	Chamna	Nuevo Tikal	Caracol	Sisna
Akabna	—	5.28	18.32	20.73	21.25	70.83
Balamna	5.28	—	22.43	20.03	21.00	74.75
Chamna	18.32	22.43	—	19.89	18.70	52.50
Nuevo Tikal	20.73	20.03	19.89	—	1.928	63.57
Caracol	21.25	21.00	18.70	1.928	—	61.64
Sisna	70.83	74.75	52.50	63.57	61.64	—

Travel Times

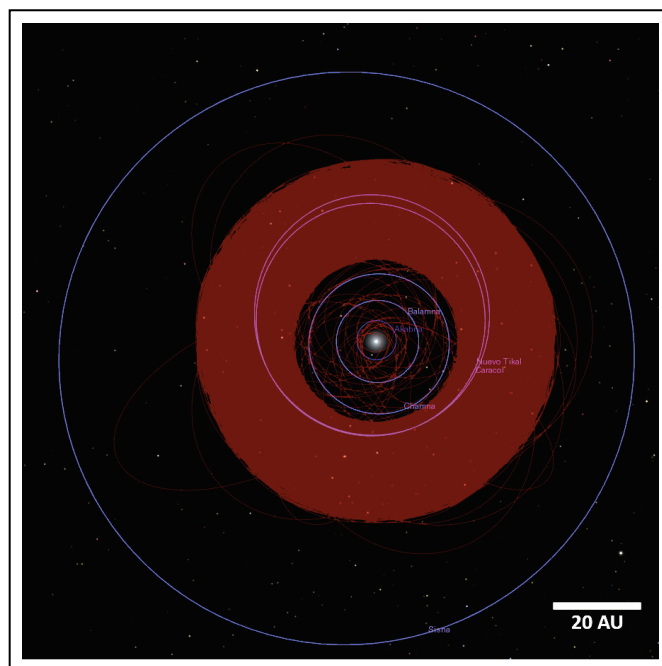
From/To	Akabna	Balamna	Chamna	Nuevo Tikal	Caracol	Sisna
Akabna	—	4.65	8.66	9.21	9.32	17.02
Balamna	6.57	—	9.58	9.05	9.27	17.48
Chamna	12.24	13.55	—	9.02	8.75	14.65
Nuevo Tikal	13.02	12.80	12.76	—	2.81	16.12
Caracol	13.18	13.11	12.37	3.97	—	15.88
Sisna	24.07	24.73	20.72	22.80	22.45	—

Times in the Travel Times table are shown in days and assume acceleration-turnover-deceleration. 1G acceleration travel times are shown in normal type; 2G acceleration times are shown in **bold** type.

Any planetary nebula that the star possessed has long since dissipated; these only survive for a few tens of thousands of years, at most. It is likely that Ixtab had at least one rocky world in a close orbit that was consumed during its giant phases; the orbits of the surviving planets expanded outwards as the star shed most of its mass in its final giant and planetary nebula phases. Ixtab is an otherwise fairly unremarkable white dwarf. Ixtab's current orbital zones are shown below.

Orbital Zones

Zone	AU
Inner	within 0.025
Habitable	0.025–0.055
Middle	0.055–0.139
Outer	beyond 0.139
100D jump limit	0.01315 AU (1,972,800 km)

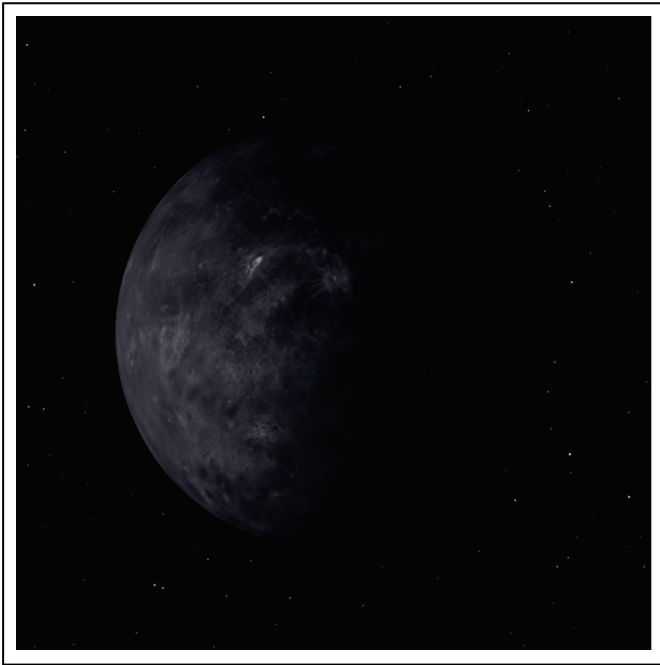


This image shows the current orbital configuration of the major bodies in the Xibalba system (Sisna is the outermost blue orbit). The brown area shows the extent of the Xibalba belt.

THE XIBALBA SYSTEM

PLANETARY SYSTEM

IXTAB I: AKABNA



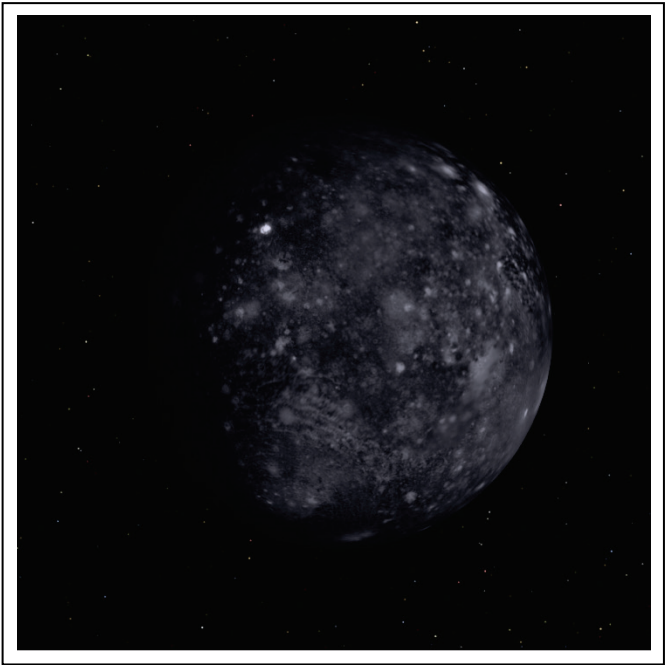
World Data

Pronunciation	'ack-AB-na'
Meaning	'Dark House'
UWP	X700000-0
Body	Rocky planet
Orbital Distance	4.59 AU
Orbital Eccentricity	0.063
Orbital Period	12.77 years
Radius	5,588 km
Surface Temperature	29 Kelvin -224 °Celsius

Akabna is the closest surviving world. It narrowly escaped being consumed because of its orbital expansion but was still so close to the star during its final red giant phase that its surface melted entirely.

The surface cooled and re-solidified when the star became a white dwarf and today Akabna is a frozen, airless world. While its crust was severely depleted in volatiles by its global melting event it is still sufficiently large and young enough to be tectonically active and some new hotspot volcanoes and fissures have broken through its dark, basaltic surface.

IXTAB II: BALAMNA



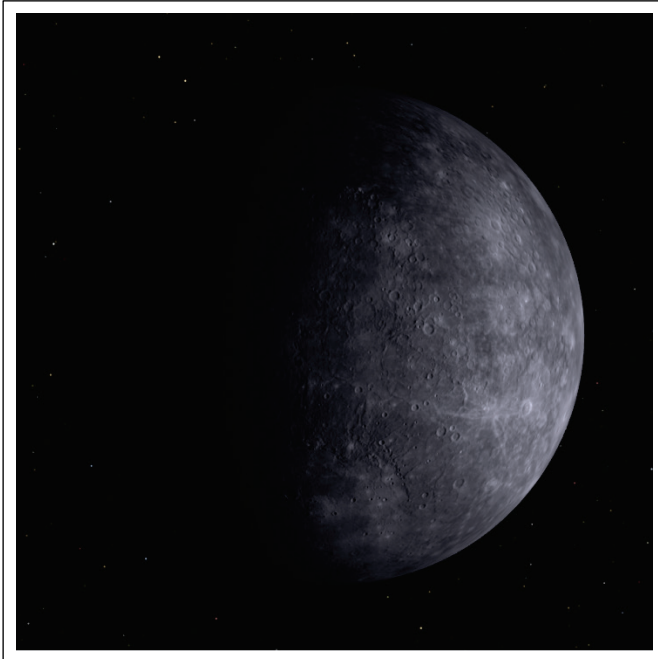
World Data

Pronunciation	'buhl-AM-na'
Meaning	'Jaguar House'
UWP	E701224-9
Body	Rocky planet
Orbital Distance	9.63 AU
Orbital Eccentricity	0.042
Orbital Period	38.81 years
Radius	5,707 km
Surface Temperature	23 Kelvin -250 °Celsius

Balamna was not close enough to the star during its giant phase for its surface to melt but still lost its original atmosphere during that period. It is tectonically and volcanically active but unlike Akabna it retained most of its internal stock of volatiles. Volcanic activity tends to be more widespread and violent as a result, though it is far too cold for any gases erupted to remain as an atmosphere. The gases freeze out onto the surface around the volcano fields, spreading water, nitrogen and carbon dioxide ices over a larger area of the planet; these icy ejecta fields give the planet a distinctive 'spotty' appearance. Balamna may have once orbited in the habitable zone of the main sequence progenitor star, though no evidence of any primitive life that may have existed on the world during that era has been discovered.

THE XIBALBA SYSTEM

IXTAB III: CHAMNA



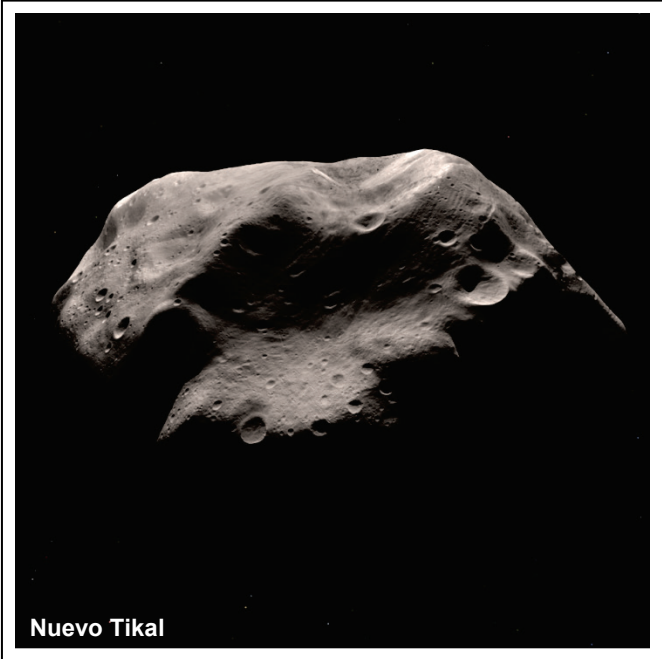
World Data

Pronunciation	'CHAM-na'
Meaning	'Razor House'
UWP	X800000-0
Body	Rocky planet
Orbital Distance	16.40 AU
Orbital Eccentricity	0.060
Orbital Period	86.24 years
Radius	6,611 km
Surface Temperature	20 Kelvin -253 °Celsius

Chamna is a frigid world slightly larger than Balamna and is the last of the rocky planets. Unlike Balamna and Akabna, Chamna shows no evidence whatsoever of any internally-driven geological activity on its surface. This is unusual, as it is large enough to still be volcanically active. No sign of any large-scale resurfacing events are evident on its rocky surface, which is covered with thousands of impact scars accumulated over the planet's 3 billion year history.

The most interesting features on Chamna are the long, deep, permanently shadowed chasms that arc around its north pole, ending as suddenly as they begin. Their origin is unknown; they have not yet been explored but they seem to have formed very recently, possibly even within the past few million years.

IXTAB IV: XIBALBA BELT



World Data

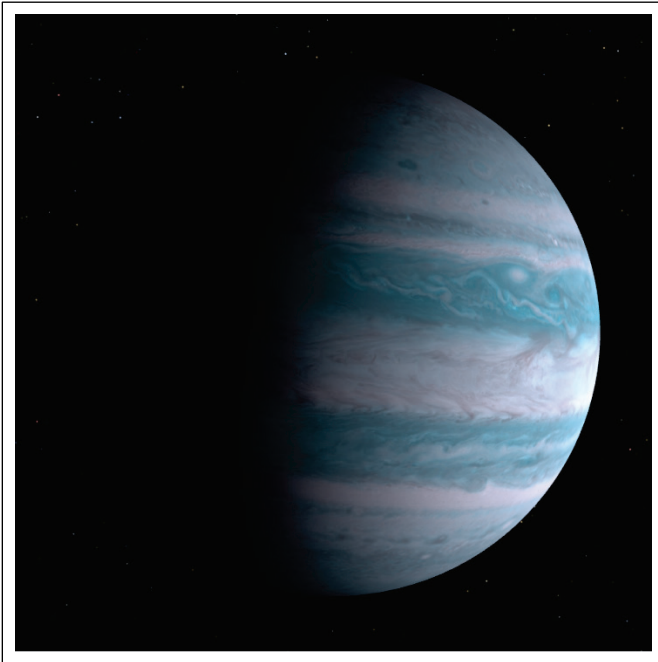
Pronunciation	'shi-BAHL-ba'
Meaning	'Place of Phantoms'
UWP	—
Body	Asteroid belt
Orbital Distance	26.70–33.00 AU
Orbital Eccentricity	—
Orbital Period	—
Radius	—
Surface Temperature	—

The Xibalba planetoid belt is where the mainworld of Nuevo Tikal, a 206 km radius asteroid, is located. The belt ranges between 26 and 33 AU from the primary and is comprised of approximately 90% rocky asteroids and 10% metallic asteroids; there are no icy bodies. Strangely, there is a significant lack of objects smaller than about 50 metre radius within the belt.

The Xibalba belt is very sparse as a result of the asteroids orbits expanding outwards as Ixtab lost its mass at the end of its red giant phase. Asteroids can be tens of millions of kilometres apart within the belt and locating significant ore-bearing bodies is difficult given the belt's dispersed nature. The long orbital periods of the asteroids of between roughly 150 and 250 years (depending on the exact orbit) provides some stability since asteroids near Nuevo Tikal change their position very slowly relative to the colony.

THE XIBALBA SYSTEM

IXTAB V: SISNA



World Data

Pronunciation	'S/ISS-na'
Meaning	'Cold House'
UWP	Large Gas Giant
Body	Superjovian
Orbital Distance	67.35 AU
Orbital Eccentricity	0.118
Orbital Period	717.74 years
Radius	76,344 km
Surface Temperature	140 Kelvin -133 °Celsius

The system's solitary gas giant, Sisna is a superjovian that lies on a distant elliptical orbit ranging between 59 and 75 AU from Ixtab. Although it is just over four times as massive as Sol's Jupiter it is not much larger in radius.

While it orbits in the coldest reaches of the system, Sisna emits considerably more heat through natural internal heating than it receives from its primary star. This internal heating drives many active belts and storms that keep the temperature at the '1 atm pressure' level of its atmosphere at a relatively warm -133 °C.

Oddly it does not have any satellites, not even captured asteroids. The lack of distant irregular satellites might be explained by primary star's mass loss but the lack of major satellites is curious. Sisna's distant location and high gravity preclude it from being used as a refuelling base.

HISTORY AND SOCIETY

Formerly known as Twilight Belt, Xibalba was originally settled 43 years ago by Terran miners of predominantly Central American stock. Initial strikes seemed promising but strange events started to occur soon after.

Tragedy struck 11 years later, when a mysterious madness swept through the Caracol habitat. The outbreak was contained but not without the loss of the entire population of the habitat.

Around this time, the superstitious settlers came to the conclusion that they were cursed and renamed their system 'Xibalba' after the Mayan underworld. Many abandoned the system soon afterwards and moved to other, more fruitful systems nearby where they had better luck.

A few hundred miners remained to eke out a living among the seared rocks of the inner part of the belt, searching for that elusive 'lucky strike'. While there may not be much to offer in such a backwater system, long-term residents of the system have their own reasons to stay, ranging from a preference for solitude, a stubborn unwillingness to move elsewhere, to those who see it as a challenge to remain for as long as possible in such unusual circumstances.

Most of the population of the system lives in the Xibalba belt. The main settlement in the belt is Nuevo Tikal which is also the name of the asteroid on which it is located. Nuevo Tikal houses about 700 of the system's 830 permanent inhabitants; the rest live and work at the refuelling station on Balamna.

In recent years the population has started to shift from Nuevo Tikal to Balamna as outsiders usually prefer to refuel there; it may become the system's official mainworld in the near future. Temporary shelters are scattered around the asteroids near Nuevo Tikal, which are used by miners on forays into the belt. The other worlds in the system have only been briefly surveyed and are largely unexplored.

Nuevo Tikal

The Nuevo Tikal ('noo-AY-vo TEE-kal') habitat is a fairly basic arrangement of modules that have been expanded under the surface of the asteroid. Living conditions are spartan but not uncomfortable; the residents have learned to get by without many luxuries but barter the ores that they find on their mining excursions for any luxury goods brought in by traders.

Both Nuevo Tikal and Balamna Station are essentially run as democratic co-operatives with matters decided by general agreement or referendums. One surprising export from the system is hard liquor; an enterprising family among the original colonists grew agave plants in the habitat's hydroponics section as a hobby and managed to produce an exceptional tequila, imaginatively marketed as 'Tikala Tequila', whose reputation has spread across nearby systems.

The Caracol Disaster

Caracol ('cara-COL') was a habitat that housed about 300 people, located on a large asteroid about 2 AU from Nuevo Tikal. It was the largest settlement in the system until disaster struck 11 years after the system was colonised, when a strange madness suddenly started to affect the inhabitants. The vectors of this insanity were unknown but it spread like wildfire, starting as extreme paranoia and then driving victims into a homicidal rage. The inhabitants of Caracol were all dead within a couple of days, before Nuevo Tikal could send anyone to respond.

THE XIBALBA SYSTEM

When the rescue teams did arrive, they reported gruesome scenes of violent death and some sections of the habitat had been depressurised with the frozen corpses of unprotected people in them. Before the rescuers could return they also succumbed to the mysterious rage and the final act of the last investigator who still had a shred of sanity left was to crash their ship into the asteroid to prevent it from spreading the affliction elsewhere.

The strangest part of this story is that the rescuers started exhibiting symptoms while wearing their sealed spacesuits, without ever being directly exposed to the environment.

After the disaster the shaken residents of Xibalba strictly forbade all further access to Caracol and its asteroid. This seems to have contained the phenomenon to Caracol and similar symptoms have not manifested elsewhere. It is unknown what caused the 'madness' or whether it is still active there, primarily because nobody is willing to investigate the ruins from a combination of fear and respect for the dead. Over the past few decades Caracol has slowly edged closer to Nuevo Tikal as both bodies progress in their long orbits around Ixtab, which is making the more superstitious inhabitants somewhat nervous.

Balamna Station

About 130 people live on Balamna and mine the icy fallout from the volcanoes that erupt on its surface. The ices are atmospheric gases that freeze out of the eruption plumes, consisting mostly of water, nitrogen and carbon dioxide. In particular the water is useful as fuel for fusion reactors and jump drives.

Every 30 days a supply ferry from Nuevo Tikal transports processed fuel back to the asteroid. Ships passing through the system usually go straight to Balamna for refuelling and continue onwards. The spaceport and other facilities at Balamna Station are currently very basic, though there are moves to improve them given the traffic that they receive.

A large liquid hydrogen lake was reportedly spotted near Balamna's south pole during an orbital survey but attempts to locate it since have not been successful. Hydrogen gas is a small constituent of volcanic gases and the temperature in the polar regions is in the right range for liquid hydrogen to exist, so it is not unreasonable to believe that the lake is real. If it exists it could provide a significant, easily exploitable fuel source for the system and for export.

STRANGE PHENOMENA

Although the remaining colonists are less superstitious than their departed comrades, they still acknowledge that something is not right in the Xibalba system. Some claim that the system is haunted and point to the catastrophic madness that wiped out the Caracol habitat as being the most conspicuous part of a chain of unusual events that befell the colonists from the moment they arrived.

Travellers who have visited the belt often hear strange tales from the locals and some return with eerie stories of their own. The veracity of these tales is uncertain as the storytellers often have to be plied with alcohol before they will loosen their tongues enough to talk about it.

Some claim to have seen strange lights, not unlike mining suit spotlights, moving around some of the rocks when no miners were anywhere near them, or to have observed glimpses of movement. In one case faces were seen outside the windows of a spacecraft; others have experienced unexplained power fluctuations and strange bursts of unidentified radio chatter.

These 'major manifestations' with strong visual and auditory elements are generally unpredictable and rare, and can be extremely unsettling. However, smaller events that cause minor inconvenience or disorientation are much more common, and are noted or reported on an almost daily basis.

Beyond these visible manifestations, visitors to the Xibalba system experience an inexplicable feeling of 'tension' while in the system; the locals have become accustomed to it but visitors will often feel most unsettled by it. This usually manifests as a feeling of unease, ranging from an unnerving feeling that something is about to happen to a disconcerting feeling that one is being watched.

As a result, people tend to be more on edge, restless, short-tempered and perhaps even fearful or paranoid while in the system, for reasons that they cannot understand or express. The feeling is not unique to humans: other organic species passing through Xibalba also report similar discomfort. Even animals become agitated; nothing seems to be immune to the malaise.

These feelings are more exaggerated in psionically sensitive individuals and Artificial Intelligences. AIs report feeling uncomfortable in the Xibalba system, with the sense that there is 'static or interference in their synaptic systems' even though diagnostics reveal no problems or external influences.

Psions report similar symptoms, although none are able to pin down a specific presence, malevolent or otherwise. Erratic behaviour has been known to manifest in both AIs and psions after long exposure to this 'atmosphere', including an irrational need to 'escape' the system. They will often detour around the system unless there is no other option, and do not linger any longer than they have to if they are forced to pass through it.

The locals are quite used to the strange events and manifestations they may witness and still live, work and function normally in Xibalba. They may be unnerved by unusual occurrences but assuming the event caused no harm they will quickly put the event behind them and do not live in a perpetual state of fear or terror.

Even though this causes them to be dour and stoic in their outlook, the inhabitants of Xibalba have a very strong sense of community because of their shared experiences and are always there to support each other if something does happen. In fact, experiencing a major manifestation is generally viewed as a 'rite of passage' and visitors who have experienced one will often find that the locals are more open with them after the event.

Most of the unusual sightings and events have been reported in the vast expanse of the Xibalba belt since that is where the majority of the resident population is located, though the ice mining station on Balamna is similarly affected. It is not known whether these events are centred on a specific location; further study is hampered by the fact that these phenomena are so unpredictable.

THE XIBALBA SYSTEM

These phenomena appear to be limited to the Xibalba system itself, since no unusual occurrences have been reported beyond it. Manifestations have not been recorded by crews of ships in jump space within the system, indicating that the phenomenon is confined to our own universe. If travellers have reason to travel to the other worlds in the system, they may prefer to use in-system microjumps to avoid complications.

Sceptics (who often have not visited the system) generally ascribe these events and feelings to the mistaken identity of debris reflecting the dim starlight, or to flaky technology, or to mass hysteria but most people who claim to have seen these believe that they have seen or felt something unusual.

At least two starships have also disappeared in the system with all hands over the years: the survey vessel the *Richard's Regret* vanished without trace about 40 years ago while en route from Sisna and a decade ago a private organisation from a nearby system sent the science vessel *Light of Truth* to investigate the strange claims. It ventured deep into the belt and was never heard from again.

Regional authorities have unofficially advised against travel to the system but have not gone so far as to issue a formal 'Do Not Travel' advisory yet. These unusual phenomena have increased the system's general allure and a growing number of scientists, investigators, thrill-seekers and sceptics are descending on Xibalba to see if they can experience the mysteries themselves.

The locals begrudgingly tolerate their presence since they bring much-needed money, trade and information from outside but they often prefer to keep to themselves.

Challenges

The most significant challenge faced by visitors and settlers is the malaise that permeates the system. Humans seem to be able to tolerate the feeling of unease best but only the most stoic will last for long in Xibalba. The feeling that the system is 'cursed' or 'haunted' is not unjustified.

Aside from the major physical manifestations that are occasionally reported, electronics seem to have a higher chance of failure in the system and mechanical parts seem to be more likely to wear out or break down at inopportune moments.

Ships passing through the system may be affected by minor manifestations that usually just cause inconvenience and discomfort, though this is not always true; the missing ships and the habitat disaster testify to that.

Another major challenge is the mind-numbing cold. Even on Akabna, daylight peak temperatures are comparable to the cryogenic cold of Sol system's Oort Cloud. Asteroids in the Xibalba belt are too small to have an internal heat source and are 10 degrees above absolute zero at most. Ixtab's feeble illumination is barely as bright as the full moon on Earth at Nuevo Tikal.



REFEREE'S INFORMATION

All too often in science fiction RPGs life and travel in space is taken for granted or considered 'routine': everything is already explored, nothing is a frontier anymore and any sense of mystery is gone. The central goal of this book is to serve as a reminder that, while Humanity may have the ability to colonise and 'conquer' space, there are some things that cannot be anticipated and that will not readily understandable. There are plenty of places where the infinite dark that surrounds a frail human colony will feel overwhelming.

Nuevo Tikal is a tiny 'candle in the dark' in the Xibalba system. Even without the unusual manifestations, the system would be fairly bleak and oppressive: a long-dead star orbited by dead planets, a widely dispersed asteroid belt where the nearest neighbour could be several AU distant and a remote gas giant are not particularly welcoming.

The unsettling occurrences in the system drive its inhabitants closer together, huddling in the darkness in their habitats much like villagers in an isolated, lonely settlement surrounded by foreboding, unknown wilderness. Are there monsters out there? Maybe there are, maybe there aren't, but there is safety in numbers and nobody is brave enough to step outside to look.

Still, there is a sense of wonder. Even though the inhabitants of the belt are not particularly motivated to explore the system, Xibalba has a reputation among mystery-hunters, 'truth-seekers' and researchers. What is causing the apparitions and strangeness? What created the chasms on Chamna? What happened to the missing starships? Does Sisna hide any secrets in its atmosphere? Was there ever any life in the system? Do these mysteries have a common origin? There is clearly something unusual to investigate here that draws people from other systems and many theories that purport to explain what is happening.

While there is a 'horror' aspect to the atmosphere of the system it is not intended to be the central focus of what is going on. 'The unknown' is not necessarily malevolent; while the Caracol disaster and the vanished spacecraft certainly test that theory, there have been no similar events since and they may not even have anything to do with the strangeness that pervades the system.

As the Xibalba system is intended to add elements of mystery and wonder into science fiction gaming, it should be reasonably straightforward to incorporate it into settings with any level of scientific realism simply by adjusting the level of the 'supernatural' occurrences.

INCORPORATING XIBALBA INTO THE OUTER VEIL

Xibalba can be inserted into *Spica Publishing's Outer Veil* setting with little difficulty. Xibalba would be located in hex 3223 in Vantage subsector, adjacent to Alpha Corvi in hex 0124 of Aningan/Subsector I. This subsector has not been officially covered in *Outer Veil* products at the time of publication but is described (117 OV) as the only settled subsector beyond Sol sector. Xibalba would be located in the 'Outer Veil' region.

The system's history in the *Outer Veil* timeline is as follows:

2116: Xibalba is settled during the First Space Rush;

2120: The *Richard's Regret* vanishes;

2127: The Caracol disaster strikes;

2149: The *Light of Truth* disappears.

As a result of the Caracol Disaster and the Space Crash of 2126, most colonists abandoned the system and moved closer to the Core. The system was then largely forgotten by other worlds and was only re-contacted in the early 2140s. Rumours abound that Monument Builder artefacts are hidden somewhere in the system that may be responsible for the strange events.

MANIFESTATIONS

The 'manifestations' that occur in the Xibalba system should be eerie, unsettling and unnerving but not outwardly hostile, malevolent, or damaging. They generally are classified as 'major' or 'minor'. Major manifestations are larger in scale and usually have significant visual or physical components that make them more memorable or disturbing. Minor manifestations happen on an almost daily basis and are usually limited to causing slight inconvenience or discomfort.

None of the reported manifestations have involved direct physical movement of objects, though sounds of unknown origin have been reported and recorded within ships or settlements and mechanical parts have shown signs of inexplicable weakening. These imply that physical interaction with matter must be occurring but there have been no reports of objects being physically displaced as yet.

Major manifestations include:

Premonitions or Visions: Visions of the future or of events that may or may not have occurred can occur in dreams while sleeping or as 'waking visions'. They may feel very real or may be obviously illusory.

Hallucinations and 'Ghosts': Indistinct images or silhouettes of people or humanoid figures may be seen when no one is there. They disappear when they move out of view and may even leave tracks or traces of their passing. 'Visitations' and long conversations with friends or loved ones who are elsewhere or even known to be dead have been reported. These 'visions' have been known to affect electronics: radar detects objects that are not there and cameras and audio devices record 'visitations'.

Disembodied Voices: There have been reports of whispers from dark corridors and electronic messages from friends and loved ones that they did not - or could not - send. Mysterious radio chatter is sometimes heard; usually this is mundane, other than the fact that the source is unclear. Sometimes the chatter is indistinct, sometimes it is very clear. The voices usually sound human but occasionally they are in an unknown language, possibly with voices of non-human origin. Sometimes conversations are 'decoupled from time', with radio operators unwittingly talking in real-time with crews of ships from years past or even from the future.

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

Minor manifestations include:

Flickering Lights and Power Fluctuations: On-board lighting flickers for a few minutes when the power is stable. Power levels fluctuate when they should be stable and have no reason to vary. Battery power is used up more quickly than normal for no apparent reason.

Temperature Variations: Cabin temperatures drop or rise very rapidly by 10 to 15 degrees Celsius for no reason, even when temperature control systems are functioning normally. Normal temperature is usually restored after 30-60 minutes.

Flaky Systems: Normally reliable systems become erratic. Some may be difficult to start or refuse to turn off, will not respond to controls, or will be otherwise unreliable. Mechanical systems 'stick' or fail and parts may break completely. Most effects are temporary, clearing after 10 minutes or so.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

Xibalba can be used either as 'interesting background' while the PCs are on the way to another system, or it can be the focus of an adventure or campaign to get to the bottom of what is causing the manifestations in the system. While Xibalba is a backwater system, there are still reasons for the PCs to visit the system.

1) Centre of Attention: The PCs are in a neighbouring system when they are hired by mystery-seekers hoping to experience some of Xibalba's 'strangeness' themselves. They get more than they bargained for as their ship becomes the site of a major manifestation that seems to be centred on one of the passengers. Unbeknownst to everyone else the passenger has strong psionic potential, and their erratic behaviour under the influence of the phenomena may pose a danger to passengers and crew.

2) Ghosts from the Past: The PCs are passing through the system and refuelling at Balamna Station when the local authorities ask them to investigate a faint, garbled distress call that was unexpectedly received earlier that day. Since there have been no records of anyone visiting Chamna or even being anywhere near it for years, the locals are hesitant to investigate it themselves but the PCs are better equipped to respond and will be paid for their trouble.

At Chamna they discover a ship that has crash-landed near one of the polar chasms: it's the long-lost *Richard's Regret*! Where has it been for the past 40 years? What secrets does it contain? What happened to its crew? Why has it reappeared now?

3) Communication Breakdown: The PCs are hired by a researcher in a nearby system who is convinced that the manifestations in Xibalba are the result of an undiscovered entity's attempt to communicate with the human inhabitants. She wants to join the PCs as they investigate the sites of recent manifestations and has equipment that she plans to use to respond to the supposed 'entity' if the PCs encounter any manifestations themselves. Will it work, or will the attempt result in unintended consequences?

4) Waking the Dead: The PCs are approached by a man who wants to hire them to take him to the ruins of the Caracol habitat to find out what happened there. He will warn them that the local authorities in the system will do whatever they can to prevent them from reaching Caracol but will pay them handsomely if they accomplish their task.

The man is a descendant of one of the miners who died there, whose surviving relatives in Nuevo Tikal fled the system after the disaster. He claims to have recently discovered the fate of his ancestor and says that he wants to see the habitat for himself. He does not tell the PCs of a family legend saying that his ancestor found a strange artefact while on a mining expedition that remains at Caracol. The man will try to gain the PCs' trust but he is driven to see if the legend is true and if the PCs become suspicious he will have no qualms about resorting to threats and blackmail. Will the PCs be able to make it to the station? Is the artefact real? If so, did its discovery unleash the madness that swept through Caracol? Is it related to the manifestations that plague Xibalba?

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

Instead of providing Referees with a definitive explanation for the phenomena in Xibalba the suggestions below can be used by the Referee as rumours, 'the truth' or to represent the many theories that attempt to explain what is happening in the Xibalba system. Proof is hampered by the lack of any solid evidence but perhaps the truth can be found in any, all, or none of them.

1. Xibalba *really* is haunted by the ghosts of the dead. The sudden deaths of hundreds of colonists in the Caracol outbreak resonated with an unusual psionic field in the Xibalba system, unleashing a torrent of psychic energy that is manifesting itself as the strange occurrences in the belt.

2. The strange phenomena are caused by sentient energy beings that live in the Xibalba system. They may be curious about the system's new inhabitants but their attempts at communication with those in the physical world are causing the eerie events in the system.

3. One of the asteroids hides an ancient installation from a long-dead, very advanced alien race; in the *Outer Veil* setting this is most likely to be the Monument Builders. Its automated defences activated when settlers started to arrive in the Xibalba system and its field projectors and nanotech have been sabotaging their efforts ever since.

4. Millions of years ago an alien race established a base on Chamna to research ways to manipulate jump space. One of the experiments backfired, unleashing enormous gravitational stresses that utterly destroyed the base and created the huge tectonic gashes. The system was abandoned afterwards until human settlers arrived but the experiment created a stable 'hole' into jump space remains hidden in the shadowy depths of one of the chasms near the planet's north pole. Although the hole is only a few millimetres across the chaotic energies of jump space are leaking through it into the universe and causing the strange occurrences in the Xibalba system.

5. Nothing at all supernatural is occurring in the belt. The colony was afflicted by some bad luck in the beginning but a mythology has been perpetuated by the locals, resulting in 'mass hysteria' as people ascribe unearthly origins to normal events. The 'madness' at Caracol has been exaggerated in the years since and the deaths were actually caused by a mentally unstable engineer overriding the safety systems and venting the habitat to space.

Inspirations

Films: Solaris (2002 remake), Event Horizon, The Mothman Prophecies, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Below, The Abyss. **Books:** Terran Trade Authority: Spacewreck, Sphere.

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