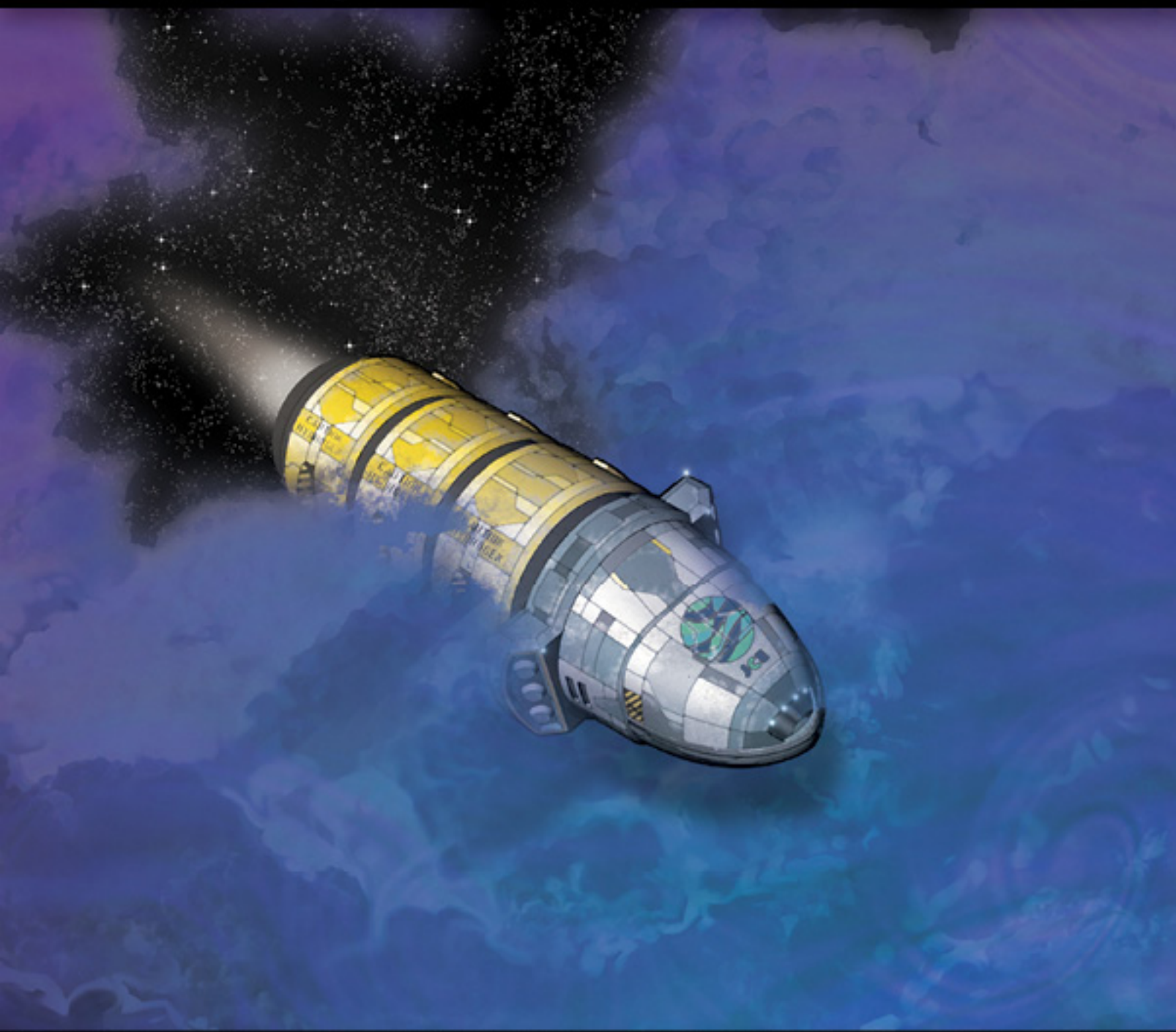


TRAVELLER

REFEREES BRIEFING 1 : COMPANIES & CORPORATIONS



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

REFEREE'S BRIEFING 1 : COMPANIES & CORPORATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Economics is one of the fundamental driving forces in any society, and Charted Space is full of groups trying to make a living – or better, a big profit. Companies and Corporations presents some of these groups along with their agenda, their methods and any dark secrets they may have. These commercial bodies are much smaller than the great Megacorporations, but some of them are major players in their own field. They might be encountered as patrons, allies, opponents or victims of the Travellers' schemes, adding depth and colour to that generic row of starport cargo brokers and putting a backstory to that pile of freight containers.

The companies and corporations in this book can be used in a variety of ways. They can be used as a quick means of filling in some detail when the Travellers decide to go off script, or can become a regular part of the game as opponents, allies, patrons or simply part of the scenery. Little details like a company logo on a shipping container can bring a game to life, and can be worked into the plot of a game to show that something is not right.

If the Travellers find the logo of company that only deals in electronics and cybernetics on a container of guns, they will suspect something is amiss. The referee could just tell them they know this company does not sell guns, but it may be better to let the Travellers realise for themselves. If they have dealt with this company before, even just as a passing incidental detail a couple of starports ago, the mystery will come to life in a subtler way.

In short, this book contains a number of commercial entities which can be used by the referee as part of the backdrop or a key part of an adventure. Since the Travellers keep encountering detailed companies, they will not be able to guess which one is important to the plot and which are essentially red herrings.



COMMERCIAL & SHIPPING

Interstellar commerce is big business. It is also quite small business, and every size of business in between. Commercial and shipping firms range from a loose alliance of starport brokers to major shipping lines operating numerous merchant vessels. Technically, a Free Trader is a single-vessel 'shipping line' and many style themselves as such, but this is seen as highly pretentious by the more important players in this sector. Most savvy Travellers can tell the difference between a Free Trader captain trying to sound more legitimate and an actual multi-ship concern, but in truth there are more than a few single-ship 'lines' that are worthy of the title due to their professionalism and excellent service. There are also a number of outright crooks who hide behind a shiny corporate façade.



Starlink Merchant Factors, Incorporated

Starlink is a small (by interstellar standards) corporation which operates in the interstellar trade and commerce sector. It has brokerages in several major starports, especially along the Imperial-Aslan Hierate trade routes. These are large and well staffed, with a legal team as well as negotiators and commerce experts. Offices are always situated in a prominent position, with expensive but understated décor and an extremely professional demeanour.

Most of Starlink's business is simple buying and selling of cargo from passing starships, including the provision of brokerage services to third parties. The firm is a little unusual for one of its size, in that it is quite willing to broker very small, low-profit deals for Free Traders and other single-ship operators. This has gained it a

reputation as 'the Free Trader's friend'. It is unlikely that the firm makes enough on most of these deals to do more than offset its costs, but there are other benefits to a close relationship with Free Traders.

One such benefit is a steady flow of low-level commercial information. Free Traders pick up a lot of rumours in the ports they frequent, and see a side of the interstellar commerce marketplace that a broker in a three-piece suit does not. Most of this information is useless on its own, but when fed into Starlink's extensive commercial intelligence analysis network it provides data on the flow of trade that might not be available elsewhere. Major-port brokers know what is bought and sold there, but often have no idea where it ends up or who the final buyer might be. Starlink makes it a priority to know, and uses this information wisely.

In addition to its normal shipping and brokerage activity, Starlink often charters merchant vessels to carry a cargo for it, or offers a profit-sharing deal whereby it subsidises a trade run carried out by an independent vessel. Knowledge of the end-market enables Starlink to put just the right shipload of goods into a backwater port with a solid expectation of a reasonable profit. The vessel transporting the cargo gets part of the proceeds and will usually come out ahead, and of course the transporting vessel bears little of the financial risk inherent in speculative trade.

This practice generates a modest but fairly steady income for Starlink, and has endeared the firm to many of the local Free Trader captains. There is, however, another side to this activity. Starlink quietly dominates the offworld trade of several minor worlds. Its ability to flood the local market with exactly what it needs tends to make the same ports less viable as trading destinations for independent ships that are not affiliated with Starlink. Those that are not providing Starlink with commercial (and sometimes other) information are frozen out of this lucrative market and can find their own speculative trade undermined. The result is that an increasing proportion of local trade ships are essentially in the pocket of Starlink Merchant Factors Incorporated. Why the firm might want this remains an open question.

TCA

TCA

It is quite difficult to find out what 'TCA' stands for, but those in the know may reveal that it is an abbreviation for The Courier Alliance. This is more than likely true, since the 'firm' (it is really more of a loose association) exclusively operates Type S Scout/Couriers.

The vast majority of these vessels are operated by former Imperial Interstellar Scout Service personnel who have been assigned a vessel when leaving to go on Detached Duty. This means that most of TCA's ships are old and battered but serviceable, and more importantly they are maintained by the Scout Service and cost the operators nothing more than life support and running costs. Many people associate small ships like the Scout/Courier with the 'small package trade', which is often a euphemism for smuggling. In fact, with such a low overhead a Type-S operator can make a reasonable profit entirely above the law... though that does not preclude the occasional piece of smuggling if the opportunity arises.

TCA specialises in small-cargo shipping and courier work, to which its vessels are well suited. They can also carry a passenger or two, though not in great comfort, and undertake a variety of mapping, survey and contract-science operations for independent clients. There are many who resent the fact that The Courier Alliance has essentially been provided with its vessels for free and can undercut operators who have mortgage payments and other overheads, but there is little that can be done about it.

Competitors often try to discredit TCA by pointing out that its personnel are detached Scouts with a duty to provide intelligence to their active-duty colleagues back at the nearest IISS base. TCA members are quite open about this, however, which makes it hard to present as a dirty secret. TCA ship operators will confirm that any chart they make or scientific mission they carry out will be included in their next report, but that report may

not be made for a very long time. If the client wants confidentiality, they can pay someone else a whole lot more to carry out the same job.

TCA has found a niche in the local commercial sector, and the Scout Service is apparently quite happy with the situation. Presumably the flow of information from TCA members is deemed useful enough to be worth essentially subsidising private business on the part of the scout ship operators. Although TCA is a loose organisation, and not really a business firm in the usual sense, it does fulfil a traditional meaning of the term 'company', i.e. an association of individuals engaged in the same enterprise. Its members look out for one another and will occasionally gather several ships together for some purpose.

The most famous incidence of this was when sixteen Scout/Couriers mustered and a cargo of valuable artefacts was placed aboard one of them, with the others acting as decoys while the principal ship made its run. Hiring sixteen starships for several weeks was not cheap, but the gambit worked well enough that it has been used on a smaller scale on other occasions.



Halberd Salvage and Rescue

Halberd Salvage and Rescue is primarily a salvage and starship-breaking company. It has small yards at various Class C starports where old or damaged ships can be dismantled for spare parts. These yards sell components but do not undertake repairs. However, starfarers will often take the components they have bought out of the yard and the landing pad across to their own ship where they install them with the assistance of a technician from the yard. This practice puts a little legal distance between the company and the ship if something goes wrong.

Halberd operates legally, and takes due care to ensure that it only handles legitimate components whose origin can be traced. This can be a nightmarish exercise in bureaucratic puzzle-solving but it has gained the firm a solid reputation for fair and honest dealing. There is still the occasional legal complication, especially where salvage laws differ from one system to another. For example, some world governments claim that legitimate salvage undertaken in one system becomes illegal because the components were transported through its territory, even though the operation was legal at both ends. Halberd refutes such claims but as a rule tries not to become embroiled by avoiding systems with convoluted salvage laws. Even if they have no means to enforce them in space, such world governments can cause legal trouble, usually with the intent of gaining ownership of the 'illegal' salvage.

The dismantling and component-sales side of the business brings in a steady income from starship captains who want to save money on spares and repairs, and is augmented by a flotilla of rescue and salvage tugs. These have the ability to tow a distressed vessel (though multiple tugs would be needed to tow a larger ship) and have facilities to take off a crew who have no option but to abandon their vessel. Among the standard fittings of a Halberd tug is a device designed to catch escape pods and bring them into a rescue bay. This system is, unfortunately, also used by some smugglers who will drop an escape pod containing contraband to be picked up by another vessel. Halberd tugs are regularly boarded and searched, but have never been implicated in smuggling.

Halberd Salvage & Rescue operates out of several Class C and D starports, most of which cannot afford rescue craft of their own and instead hire a Halberd tug for a flat fee. The firm's reputation for getting there in time and averting a catastrophe is sufficiently good that the presence of a Halberd vessel often influences trader captains' opinion of a system's safety. Halberd craft are usually armed for self-defence but routinely refuse to be nudged into a pirate-deterrent role. Their standard contract explicitly states that they are not obligated to enter a situation where weapons fire is ongoing or hostilities are likely. Halberd ships will sometimes assist a vessel under fire anyway, but they are careful to avoid creating a situation where port operators use them as defensive craft.



Eclipse Lines

Eclipse is a fairly typical 'small-ship' merchant line whose vessels are all named for a world or star with the word Eclipse added (e.g. Eshadi Eclipse). The firm operates a mix of standard vessels, mostly Type-R Subsidised Merchants on local routes and Type-A2 Far Traders on connecting or priority runs. Most vessels provide a scheduled service either along a main or between two points, with some ships jumping back and forth between the same two ports for years on end. The choice of runs has traditionally been skewed towards a steady flow of freight rather than passengers, and some Eclipse vessels have been converted to pure freight haulers. Most ships carry a mail safe or secure cargo area and are paid a subsidy as mail carriers by some or all of the worlds on their route.

Eclipse vessels are all armed, albeit lightly, and provide a timely and reliable service. Or rather, they did. The firm's reputation is still intact but in recent years its activities have been increasingly disorganised. It is only a matter of time before the decades of good service are undermined by the current rather slipshod management practices. At one time it was virtually certain that a Jump-2 service from a different main or cluster would mesh perfectly with the Jump-1 ships operating in the local area, ensuring fast and efficient cargo transfers. Recently, changes in the operating schedules – apparently intended to increase efficiency or revenue generation – have caused significant disconnects in the chain.

There are no obvious reasons for this sudden outbreak of ineptitude, no management reshuffles or mass personnel replacements. The firm does seem to have had a run of bad luck exacerbated by poor decisions about how to deal with it, but again there is no real pattern to this and every questionable decision is explainable – there are no outright stupid choices being made, just an uncanny ability to pick the wrong option every time.

Eclipse is still profitable, and individual ships continue to give a generally good service, but the firm overall is on a long-term path to destruction. Its best option would be to break into smaller regional companies, but this is not a move the management are likely to consider. Instead Eclipse is moving from its normal model of low-risk freighting with some passenger work towards speculative and even exploratory trade missions outside its normal area of operations.

Eclipse has some ships suitable for this kind of work, but has created an 'Eclipse Associate' status for vessels undertaking exploratory trade on its behalf. These ships are in some cases chartered but more commonly operate on a profit-sharing system with subsidies from Eclipse. A few of the firm's regular routes have been adjusted to take advantage of the new markets opened up by these vessels, and thus far the move seems to have been a successful one. However, given the generally bad fortune Eclipse has suffered in recent years many observers consider it is only a matter of time before something goes terribly awry.



Hardway Line

The Hardway Shipping Line gets its name from a comment made at its inception a few years ago – 'we're creating a shipping line and we're doing it the hard way.' This was an apt statement; Hardway was formed by a group of Free Trader and other independent ship operators who banded together for mutual benefit. The firm attempts to present the image of a well-organised shipping line but many of its captains are still Free Traders at heart. Individualism often outweighs the benefits of a standard colour scheme and smart uniforms. Thus Hardway is more of a 'family and friends' setup than a formally organised shipping line.

Hardway has regulations in place about vessel colours and the uniforms but does not enforce them. It is far stricter about quality standards, delivering on a deal and protecting the firm's good name. Captains who fail

to live up to its standards are initially nudged by peer pressure and then instructed to change their ways or go back to being independent. Those that do not shape up are coerced as far as the firm can manage, usually by a mix of public denunciation in the newsvids and word-of-mouth condemnation.

This is surprisingly powerful among the community of small-ship operators and users. If word gets around that Hardway kicked a captain out, that will be damning in the eyes of many since it means the skipper failed to live up to the deal he agreed with them and has essentially betrayed the trust of friends into the bargain. If that captain continues to use the Hardway logo and uniform, his status is downgraded to that of a crook and a liar in the eyes of many. Not everyone cares what is said on the grapevine, but in the areas where Hardway operates it is a useful way of getting back at former members who have misbehaved.

Hardway has no portside or planetary assets whatsoever. Everything it owns flies or is carried aboard a vessel. Its captains are its directors and the head office is located aboard the yacht Hardway Central, which was converted to an upmarket passenger carrier and re-registered as the firm's primary asset.

Hardway has a generally good reputation. Its captains are reliable and generally honest, though internal loyalty is worth more than playing fair by one-off passengers. Thus the Hardway logo is not a complete guarantee that a given captain will not overcharge or otherwise bend a deal to his benefit, but it does mean that his conduct will remain within acceptable limits.

Hardway is resented by various former members and to a lesser extent by many independent shipping operators. This is largely due to the insinuation that a captain who has not signed up with Hardway is somehow less trustworthy than one who has. Hardway states that it never intended anyone to believe this, it is just a natural consequence of the way it holds its captains to a decent standard and anyone else is welcome to build their own good reputation. It is a fair point, but the firm still has its staunch opponents. Some of these are sufficiently influential on a local level that there are some ports where Hardway vessels are not welcome.



Kfuergeanghaghzoe Uknodantueks Naekhfaenoungvozghou

Kfuergeanghaghzoe Uknodantueks Naekhfaenoungvozghou is a Vargr business group, whose name is not surprisingly shortened to Kfur-Naek for most purposes. A literal translation into Galanglic is virtually impossible, but the idiom and general meaning can be presented as something like 'Charismatic Alliance of Heroic Starship Leaders'.

Kfur-Naek is a business group in the Vargr sense, in that whilst it does have a head office and all manner of paperwork, its real nature is as an alliance of starship captains or leaders of small groups of ships. There tends to be an assumption that whenever four or more Vargr get together aboard a starship piracy inevitably breaks out, but this is more of a racial stereotype than anything else. Kfur-Naek's captains are not pirates and would be very offended at anyone who suggested they were.

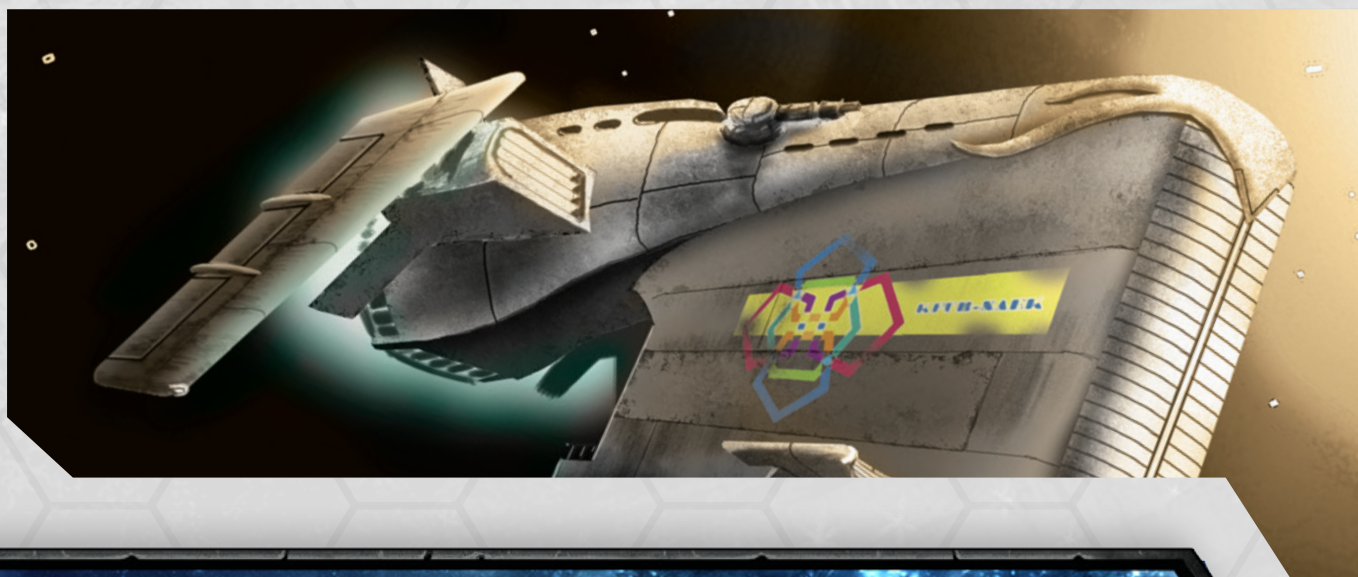
That is not to say that Kfur-Naek's business practices are particularly ethical. Most captains take the attitude that their ships can defy the law of gravity, so lesser laws can be ignored by those with the capability and the daring. This flouting of laws is mostly confined to

playing fast and loose with traffic control directives and similar minor nuisance type infractions that will not result in repercussions that will affect business, but the overall attitude to laws is that they only matter if those who made them can provide effective enforcement.

Kfur-Naek ships are quite happy to undertake smuggling. Indeed, most captains make no distinction between smuggling and normal commerce, other than a recognition of the need to bypass patrols and defeat inspections. They will honour a deal made in good faith and will get even with those who do not. They are flamboyant and daring, preferring speculative trade to mundane freighting, and will deliberately go in harm's way to make a profit. Kfur-Naek ships can be spotted in ports with heavy piracy or making runs through dangerous star systems. They will even land at known pirate havens to undertake honest trade, essentially thumbing their muzzles at pirates and anyone else who interferes in their business.

Kfur-Naek does have a significant turnover in vessels as a result of its risk-taking, and its ships will occasionally gain a new captain when someone fails to live up to the buccaneering standards of the group or loses the faith of his crew. Nevertheless, their aggressive and daring business practices generally make good profits and tend to attract new recruits who want to be part of this heroic trading siblinghood. Kfur-Naek will happily accept non-Vargr so long as they meet its standards.

Members of the group will help outsiders who are in need, and never forget who owes a favour or a debt to whom. This works both ways – help a Kfur-Naek member and he will owe you, but if he saves you from pirates he will someday call it in and he will expect the debt to be paid. Kfur-Naek ships will race to the aid of someone under pirate attack while everyone else is jumping out, precisely because it is dangerous and because they are better than everyone else. They never tire of reminding anyone within earshot of it, too.



INDUSTRIAL & MANUFACTURING

Travellers use all manner of equipment, usually without pondering where it came from. In the immediate sense that rarely matters unless the item is defective, but the process of putting a tool in a spacefarer's hand or a spare part in a locker is a long and complex one. From raw materials and energy generation through design and development to the manufacturing process, every item out in space is at the end of a chain of near-miracles made possible by technology and ingenuity. The existence of something as mundane as a spanner or a hand-held diagnostics unit implies a multi-million-credit industry at the very least, and a chain of supply and procurement stretching back several parsecs. All this industry forms part of the backdrop against which Travellers have their adventures. Occasionally that backdrop leaps into sharp relief.



**OUTSYSTEM
MINERALS**

Outsystem Minerals

Followers of vid dramas could be forgiven for believing that most of the mining and mineral extraction taking place outside a mainworld's gravity well is done by independent beltlers using ramshackle old ships, and that mining companies have nothing better to do than oppress and harass the beltlers. In fact, the bulk of mineral resources that reach the factories of major industrial worlds are mined by corporate bodies on an efficient, large-scale basis, often in areas that have little or no beltler presence.

Outsystem Minerals is one of the many corporations that supplies mid-level industrial worlds with bulk minerals. It specialises in mining asteroids and outsystem moons, though it does have a few outposts on rockball planets here and there. Operations tend to be modest, with mining towns of perhaps 200-300 people on a

moon. These towns usually include a fair number of dependents as well as people employed in peripheral industries such as maintenance, fabrication and recreation. Not all of these are employed by Outsystem; many are independents or subcontractors who support the extraction and ore-processing marketplace.

Asteroid mining is normally carried out by jump-capable mobile platforms which carry a flotilla of cutters or shuttles. Mining platforms are usually supported by one or more transport ships, which are often independent merchant ships on a short or medium-term contract. Outsystem is well respected in the Free Trader community as a fair client who pays on time; an ore-hauling contract is not the most exciting of jobs but it provides a steady stream of modest income plus a reference that can be useful when working with other corporate clients.

Outsystem also works with independent beltlers and their communities. Far from oppressing them or stealing their claims as the vids suggest, Outsystem Minerals has discovered that paying a fair price for the rights to work a claim creates goodwill and makes beltler groups more inclined to bring their claims to the firm rather than registering them and undertaking small-scale extraction as and when they can. This partnership between a mid-sized mining firm and freelance traders, prospectors and surveyors runs contrary to the stereotype but it generally works well.

Outsystem will often deploy a small 'proving' vessel to a new claim and begin small-scale extraction and sampling. If the claim proves worth exploiting, one of its larger mining platforms will be jumped in. These are not huge, but can produce a significant volume of ore on a regular basis and process it down into ingots for transportation. The presence of such a vessel in a given system can be very good for the local economy. Stores and supplies are typically bought from the mainworld, and trade ships are often attracted as a result. Ore may be supplied to local industry at a discount, since it is cheaper to haul it across a star system than to jump it to another.

If a ship mining ship is deployed for a long period, or an outpost is set up, the local world typically sees more ships through its port, an expansion of its planetside industry and some additional starport revenue as outsystem crews take some R&R time. When the ship leaves, these benefits are lost. This means little to a

major industrial world but to a backwater planet it can be an economic disaster. There is thus an element of politics about the deployment of mining platforms which may escape the casual observer. Rumours that a platform is due to pull out of a system can have significant effects on the local situation in terms of protests at the port as well as long-term economic ramifications.



JCE

Jovian Chemical Extraction

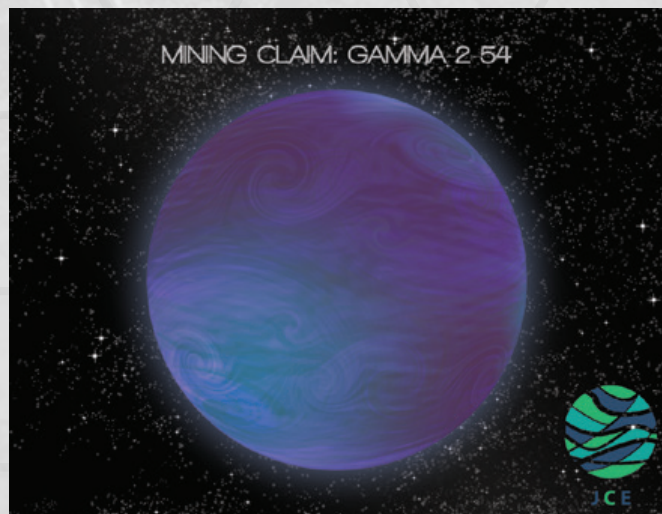
Jovian Chemical Extraction (JCE) operates in a single market niche, albeit a high-value one. The firm specialises in extracting useful chemicals from the atmospheres of gas giant worlds. At its most basic level, this can be done by most starships, which dive into the atmosphere and 'skim' gases into their tanks for processing. Starships are equipped only to produce hydrogen from gas giants (and to condense it to a liquid state) whereas the gas-rigs used by JCE can extract a variety of useful chemicals.

A JCE operation usually takes the form of one or more gas rigs positioned in high orbit by a parent vessel and then descending to its operating level under their own power. Gas rigs are essentially spacecraft, though they are slow and clumsy ones at best. Rigs can filter gases themselves but normally operate by launching manned or remote controlled 'skimboats' which dive deep into the atmosphere where the gases are thicker and fill their tanks over a series of 'skips'. A skip is a descent and climb back to a safer altitude, where the boat loiters for a while until its current load of gas has been liquefied and pumped to the internal storage tank. A series of skips is required to completely fill the storage tanks, after which the skimboat returns to its berth and pumps its cargo into the rig's processing tanks.

Depending on the intended market some rigs are specialised for extracting one type of chemical. Others have multiple products. This is common where a number of chemicals are being extracted, each in in small volumes, or where a single rig is supplying a mainworld's chemical industry. Most rigs also process hydrogen for their own fuel needs and often sell it to passing starships or ship it to a dry mainworld for sale at the starport.

Gas rigs are typically serviced by small transport ships including Free Traders, which bring in necessary supplies on contract but often ship additional goods for sale to the workforce. The availability of fuel and a willingness to trade with passing ships has ensured that some rigs have become regular refuelling stops for vessels passing through certain systems. There are many reasons for wanting to bypass the mainworld, not least of which is the possibility that it has a very poor starport. JCE does not tolerate any conduct that will endanger its rigs or its personnel, but is otherwise quite happy to make an additional profit selling fuel to passing ships.

Working on a gas rig is of course dangerous, and JCE pays its staff well. Those that have to go outside in heavily armoured suits are of course on a high salary, but even shopkeepers and plumbers who work aboard the rig receive a hazard supplement. JCE has a deal with various local navies and mercenary groups to refuel their ships for free if it has enough surplus fuel aboard a rig they visit, a move intended to create goodwill and ensure the protection of local armed forces. There are rumours that this courtesy is sometimes awarded to less reputable groups as well, but this has never been proven.





Siggushda Yards

Siggushda is a small shipbuilding consortium with yards on several worlds. Most are capable only of undertaking repairs to smaller vessels or constructing sub-100-ton craft. However, Siggushda does have yards that can build starships of up to 400 tons. Typically, these turn out a steady stream of Subsidised Merchants and Free Traders for the local commercial market, but one of Siggushda's yards has a license to build the controversial 400-ton Corsair.

Although named a Corsair, these ships were not designed as pirate vessels but instead as inexpensive multi-role warships for planetary navies and mercenary units. This is the market sector Siggushda hoped to exploit by producing these vessels, but since some Corsairs (not necessarily built in Siggushda's shipyards) have ended up in the wrong hands the firm has acquired a bad reputation as a supplier of vessels to pirates.

In an effort to redress this, Siggushda has in recent years offered discounts on conversions to existing ships intended to harden them against pirate attack or turn them into anti-piracy vessels. Common modifications include uprated computer security and enhanced weapons fits, and more radical alterations such as the addition of launch cradles for fighters. Carrying a fighter in a converted section of cargo bay is clumsy and makes for slow recovery operations, but Siggushda has created a launch system that at least gets the fighter out and ready for combat as quickly as possible.

In theory, this move should have helped establish Siggushda as part of the 'piracy solution', but in fact the recent upsurge in the number of merchant fighter carriers and Q-ships (merchants with concealed weapons) has not made any real difference. Most such vessels are operated in an amateurish manner and are easily avoided by all but the dumbest and short-lived of pirates. More successful has been the provision of Corsair class vessels to certain trade alliances and

government-sponsored security organisations. These vessels can carry a reasonable amount of cargo or ground troops, enabling them to work as hardened transports or assault vessels for raids on known pirate havens.

Siggushda is still trying to clean up its reputation, and as a result is sympathetic towards any potential client wanting to enhance security or protect its trade vessels. It has begun operating a security consulting service and offers training in defensive and security operations for starship personnel. There is nothing unique about this, and Siggushda is nowhere near the best supplier of such training, but the firm is trying hard to make up for something that was not really its fault in the first place, and takes its newfound role as 'the secure shipbuilder' very seriously.



VacTec Incorporated

VacTec was once known as 'Unified Space Technologies and Related Industries', which whilst not a catchy name does encapsulate the firm's business interests. VacTec is a major supplier of vacc suits, rescue gear and components intended for use in space. These are not only supplied to starship operators or constructors; they are found at starports, aboard satellites and on rockball outposts all across the sector.

VacTec is best known for its range of vacc suits and survival equipment, ranging from emergency softsuits through standard shipboard and heavy-duty suits all the way up to armoured rescue and work suits. One of the firm's most popular products is its 'Crew Wear' branded 'enhanced duty uniform'. This is basically a standard coverall as worn by many ship crews, available in a range of styles and colours. It is more expensive than a standard coverall, but provides protection from partial vacuum and will enable the wearer to survive long enough to self-rescue even in total vacuum. To function, the coverall is paired up with a set of gloves, a hood

and an emergency mask. VacTec suits are worn by many shipboard personnel and also portside workers who might be exposed to vacuum, such as cargo handlers at orbital stations.

There are numerous competing brands in the same market niche of course, but VacTec equipment is well respected and is often considered a market leader. This makes it a common trade item for ships visiting remote installations. The benefits of workwear that enables survival in an emergency do not need much talking up by a trader, and a container of VacTec gear can often be broken up and sold on an individual item basis for a good profit.

VacTec also makes a range of vacc suit compatible tools and accessories, most of which are commonplace items such as wrenches and vacuum-capable welding kits. The firm does market some highly specialist equipment, largely for hostile environment use, and undertakes considerable research in this field. VacTec sponsors a number of hostile-environment scientific projects or record-setting attempts either to gain publicity or in many cases by way of a field test. The firm is also amenable to constructing one-off equipment sets for specific purposes, though the cost tends to be high unless a deal is struck whereby VacTec offsets the cost against some other benefit such as an exclusive supply deal or a high-status project garnering significant media interest.

VacTec is something of a household name, and whilst it cannot compete with the Megacorporations it does have a significant market share which seems to be slowly expanding. It is highly likely that any given starship has something aboard built by VacTec; the firm's logo is recognised right across the sector and is generally seen as a guarantee of quality at a reasonable price.



CIREC (Consumer and Industrial Robotics, Electronics and Cybernetics) Group

CIREC produces high-technology electronic and robotic equipment for a variety of market sectors. Most of its products are very mundane such as personal communicators, computer networks for installations and starships, and data transmission equipment. This is a large market niche, with huge quantities of goods shipped all over the sector, but one that is so commonplace as to be forgotten about by most starfarers.

CIREC's more obvious products are found in many industrial installations and starports; the group produces some of the most common loading and cargo handling robots in the region along with other heavy-duty robotics for a variety of purposes. Among these are the enormous automated mobile logging units deployed on some worlds, which have generated considerable controversy and not a few protest movements. CIREC robots are also used in hostile environment applications ranging from exploration and mapping to construction and maintenance.

The firm also produces security and defence-sector systems. Most of these are self-contained units such as vehicular add-on laser turrets capable of downing a reconnaissance drone or a moderately large flying predator. Designed to provide protection for explorers, these units have found their way onto numerous battlefields and are a popular item with insurgents seeking to offset their enemies' technological advantages. This connection with rebels and guerrillas is downplayed by CIREC, which considers the image of colonists protected from predators by the defensive fire of their automated laser mount to be more marketable.

CIREC's military and defence products also include security robots, which can be armed with weapons ranging from stunners and similar less-lethal equipment up to submachineguns and shotgun-calibre weapons.

Heavier combat robots are available, but only to government and licensed mercenary clients. These are mostly armed with lasers or light machineguns, but CIREC's support robot range includes versions armed with mortars and light missile launchers.

These heavier combat robots are controversial, even though they are designed to be closely monitored by human personnel and are not fully autonomous. They are only available to military clients but sometimes turn up on the black market. They are also deployed to protect CIREC's installations, a practice that has attracted some negative comment from time to time. Opponents of the firm like to present it as building forest-devouring monsters that march across the landscape at the head of an army of combat robots. Its proponents use quite similar imagery, but stress the defensive and economic advantages of the products rather than their destructive potential.

CIREC has recently moved into hostile-environment engineering in a big way, unveiling its new range of mineral extraction and construction robots optimised for corrosive and insidious atmosphere worlds. There are persistent rumours that a combat version is also due to become available, and is undergoing testing on an unspecified hostile world at the present time.

OFFROAD SOLUTIONS

Offroad Solutions

Offroad Solutions builds rugged vehicles for frontier exploration, transportation and utility tasks. It has a grav vehicles arm, which mainly builds standard air/rafts and enlarged versions for a variety of purposes. Most of these are little different from any other air/raft, other than being designed to seat eight or ten people or to carry a small amount of cargo in addition to four personnel. A few variants stand out, however.

Among these is Offroad Solutions' heavy-lift platform, marketed under the Strongarm brand. This vehicle is modelled on the standard six-seater air/raft but has

additional lifters on outriggers. It is designed to carry a small crane but is sometimes deployed as a simple heavy-lift truck. Another interesting variant on this vehicle is the Strongarm Bridgelayer, which carries a pair of folding arms with a light roadway over the top. The Strongarm Bridgelayer is a quick but expensive solution to the problem of getting ground vehicles across an obstacle. Its automated systems will keep it in place while a convoy passes over but its power is not unlimited; at some point a proper bridge must be constructed.

Most of Offroad Solutions' vehicles are wheeled. They are usually driven by electric motors powered from a rechargeable fuel cell but hydrocarbon-burning variants are available. These often have filter and compression systems to enable use on thin or tainted atmosphere worlds. Offroad markets a range of SUV-type 'light trucks' which mostly use a four-wheel chassis. Some have six wheels instead, but all vehicles of this sort are fairly light in terms of load they can carry. This does not prevent Offroad's light trucks from becoming popular with insurgents and militias – and low-budget mercenary units – all over the sector. The usual conversion is to mount a machinegun in the bed of a pickup truck style vehicles, but other conversions have been seen.

Heavier vehicles include an eight-wheel offroad truck, which can be paired with an eight-wheel trailer unit to create an outback cargo hauler. These vehicles can be provided with a pressurised cab and life support for the crew, and are popular with colonial operators or explorers. There are numerous colonies where what passes for infrastructure consists entirely of trucks of this type pounding across the undeveloped countryside between small settlements.

Offroad also produces a popular family of All-Terrain Vehicles, including a version of the fairly standard eight-wheel ATV. A small four-wheel version, marketed as the 'All-Terrain Scout' has most of its components in common with the larger members of the family and is often paired with them for larger expeditions. A dedicated transport version of the standard eight-wheel ATV is also in widespread use, largely with private operators but also with some planetary military forces as a lightly armoured all-terrain transport vehicle. Some of these transports have been converted to weapon carriers, typically mounting missile or laser systems, but this is not an officially available option.

Vehicles produced by Offroad Solutions make extensive use of off-the-shelf standard components, and are thus easy to maintain in the field. This has proven a strong selling point to date, making Offroad Solutions one of the larger transportation firms in the region despite the existence of higher-specification vehicles marketed by its competitors.

T R A V E L L E R OTHER FIRMS

Some business organisations are highly diversified or difficult to categorise. Usually there is some internal logic to which pies they have their fingers in – often a firm's history will give a clue to why its interests are very diverse. However, some organisations are very difficult to figure out. This may be the result of deliberate obfuscation but can often simply be due to a lack of information. Commercial entities are rarely generous with their information, forcing outsiders to take a best guess based upon observations that can be misleading. Some firms likely show their strengths; others prefer to conceal or confuse them. Others are based on an alien way of thinking and can be difficult to fathom from a human perspective.



Stellar Security Services

Stellar Security calls itself a 'diversified security provider', a phrase that does a reasonable job of describing its activities. Stellar owns and operates just one starship, the Patrol Corvette Stalwart, but has several branches on different worlds providing other services. Stalwart is quite an old ship, bought as surplus from one planetary navy or another and refitted to a good standard. She is in good running order but long in the tooth with some annoying quirks. These do not seem to greatly affect her combat capabilities; Stalwart has engaged pirates and other hostile vessels on several occasions, always giving a good account of herself.

Stalwart is typically hired by merchant lines as an escort or by a world government as a guardship or patrol vessel. She is usually found protecting commerce or

installations in systems where piracy is common, but may also hire out as a pirate-hunter or undertake an anti-piracy cruise on a freelance basis. The latter is only viable if bounties can be collected, so the usual method is for Stalwart to team up with an ordinary-seeming merchant ship which gathers information or acts like a tempting target. Pirates attempting to take the prize are counter-attacked, though this can be a risky strategy. The preferred mode of pirate hunting is for the merchant crew to uncover clues to a pirate lair or a vessel that has turned pirate. Stalwart will then hunt down the target and attack by surprise.

Stellar prides itself on being a protector rather than a warmonger. The firm has turned down offers to join a planetary navy for a war or other dispute, and will not even consider taking on a contract to carry out offensive operations against rival shipping. Likewise, the firm's groundside assets are all about security rather than aggression. Specialists train merchant crews and starport personnel in anti-hijack and similar security procedures, and the firm also hires out shipboard and portside security detachments.

Security detachments are equipped for their role, favouring laser weapons for most applications. Shipboard personnel have armoured vac suits or in some cases combat armour, and are trained in cybersecurity as well as physical responses. Most teams also include a legal expert, who provides a line of defence against attacks using writs and injunctions which can be as damaging as a physical assault under the right circumstances.

Stellar Security Services is widely known for its integrity and strong 'protector and guardian' ethic, but it is not a squeaky-clean organisation. Its tactics are distinctly heavy-handed, and mistakes have been made in the past. The firm does not believe in due process, and trains its personnel to react aggressively to a presumed threat. Vessels have been fired upon for navigational errors, and ports flung into lockdown while security teams rampage around looking for imaginary saboteurs. Stellar can rightly claim it has done a considerable amount of damage to pirate and smuggler groups in the region, but the collateral damage has also been significant.



Vuxistast Byukosoyay

The borderline-unpronounceable name of this Droyne group has defied translation from the original Oynprith, with scholars suggesting meanings ranging from 'Favourable Association' to 'Trojan Reaches Insignificant Event'. The group – it is not clear if it is a business in the normal human sense – is typically referred to as V-B or 'Veeb' by most humans.

The assets associated with Veeb include a number of small starships and enclaves on at least three non-Droyne worlds. The latter occupy part of the Starport but might as well be on another planet as far as human interactions go. Their leaders have dealings with the port authorities, world government and port users when it suits them, which means intermittently and with no discernable pattern. These dealings are typically commercial but occasionally stray into diplomatic territory as the Droyne suddenly request, demand or say they have been granted certain concessions. Like most interactions with Droyne, these dealings tend to be baffling and a bit alarming to humans.

Most of what is known about Veeb is based upon observations; the Droyne do not discuss their operations or way of thinking with outsiders, at least not in a comprehensible manner. It has been observed that Droyne facilities and vessels affiliated with Veeb use the same symbol; a sort of distorted disc with various different projections that presumably denote... something or other.

Virtually all observed assets of Veeb are constructed at TL14, and are aesthetically similar in many ways. The portside enclaves number a few hundred Droyne of the usual caste mix, and seem to have a little manufacturing capability. Certainly they do not import enough of anything to supply their estimated needs, and Droyne ships do not visit the enclaves often enough to resupply

them. The ships themselves range from 200 to 800 tons; most seem to be cargo or transport vessels though it is possible that the smaller ones act only as personnel transportation.

The Veeb's emissaries will ignore outside contact for weeks or months, then pick up discussions as if no break had occurred – or start a new one in apparent ignorance of anything that has previously been agreed. Despite this maddening tendency, there are still many who want to do business with the Droyne. In some cases, this is for a secondary purpose, such as learning more about them in the process of commercial activity, but many simply see the Droyne as another market. Their occasional tendency to vastly overpay for something quite mundane offsets the intense frustration of trying to interact with a species so very alien... at least to some extent.

Veeb ships do not carry commercial cargo, nor do they take non-Droyne passengers aboard. However, their leaders will sometimes charter a non-Droyne crewed vessel to carry items, or to accompany a Droyne ship on some mission. This usually turns out to be something startlingly mundane, but occasionally the chartered crew will find themselves trying to follow confusing and perhaps conflicting directives with no clear indication of what their patrons want from them.

Veeb is definitely doing something, and they will occasionally pay non-Droyne to take part in it. Beyond that their activities are shrouded in mystery.





Diversification, Inc

Diversification, Incorporated is more commonly known as DiCorp, and is exactly what the name suggests. It is a business group with interests in everything from shipbuilding to art galleries. DiCorp was formed by the merging of several smaller corporations and – unusually – has retained virtually all the businesses it started with. Most merged business groups find a market sector and concentrate on it, but there seems to be little pattern to the operations of DiCorp other than the fact that it will concern itself with nothing that does not make money.

Most of the firms acquired or merged into DiCorp were at least modestly successful, and so long as they remain so the corporation seems to be content. An asset that ceases to be profitable is fixed or sold off, but even here there seems to be a habit of giving failing businesses a fair chance to turn around. Whilst inefficient in terms of maximising profits, this huge diversification has permitted DiCorp to ride out several catastrophic market events, as at least some of its interests tend to remain healthy during a slump. The firm's executives do not give much away but do have an openly stated policy of being 'in it for the long haul'.

DiCorp has assets on many worlds, usually but not always at the starport. Its holdings are sometimes directly associated with starships and interstellar trade; sometimes they are almost entirely unconnected. Travellers are as likely to spot the DiCorp logo on a bar wall or the equipment of a datanet security firm as on a trade ship or maintenance robot.

The many and various businesses owned by DiCorp rely on good interstellar communications for their continued success. The firm does operate a handful of starships, and it has a ship repair yard, but for the most part it charters vessels or puts cargo into the normal freight marketplace to be transported. This is the commonest way that small-ship operators interact with DiCorp, but

occasionally some complex project comes to fruition and several ships converge at a single port. The logistics behind sending goods and personnel from many different businesses across several market sectors all to the same place at the same time are nightmarish, but DiCorp seems capable of doing it reliably.

At this point, DiCorp starts to make sense. It can provide a client with anything and everything the client needs, all operated or built by related firms with the same standards and protocols. Machinery, robots, vehicles, kitchen appliances and art objects all somehow fit together in a functionally and aesthetically coherent whole. A number of influential personalities (planetary rulers, entertainers, scholars and others) have spent vast sums on outfitting their home, business premises or even a small town with goods from DiCorp. The end result is a seamlessly integrated, coherent whole that can be vibrant and attention-grabbing or functional to the point of being essentially invisible.

Even when not engaged in an ambitious project like this, DiCorp has a good reputation for producing quality goods and delivering an excellent service, and their 'Of course!' marketing slogan is well-known. This translates to "Yes, we can do that for you. Yes, we can make that for you. Yes, we can meet that need. Now, what is it you were wanting?" Delivering on this promise means that DiCorp often has to pull together many different threads, and reliable outsiders are often brought in to help. Working with Diversification, Incorporated is demanding and complicated... but always interesting.



The Jaice Group

The Jaice Group

The Jaice group's public face takes the form of a chain of offices on mid-range starports that do not have particularly strict business laws. Jaice presents itself as a diversified manufacturing and services business group, which is sort of true. It might more accurately be described as a legitimate-seeming front for a variety of semi-legal and outright criminal activities including starship re-registry, salvage and the procurement of 'items of limited availability'. Most people translate this to Jaice being a front for pirates, smugglers and gun-runners, which is reasonably accurate.

Jaice treads a fine line between overt respectability and murderous rapacity. It presents itself as a legitimate business group which openly skirts the outer edges of the law because that is where the biggest profits are to be made. It aggressively protects its 'good name' through legal channels and also by less-than subtle intimidation. Jaice prefers to shut up its critics using legal writs, but if this does not work the next stage is to give them a sound economic reason to change their attitude. It is well known that the Jaice Group plays hardball in the economic marketplace and will bury competitors if it can. Since it is well-connected and rich, this is a credible threat which can be carried out in a completely legal (but perhaps immoral) manner. Often the rumours that Jaice can send saboteurs or pirates against those that it is in conflict with is enough to deter its opponents.

This image of an aggressive but basically legal corporation is more accurate than many suppose. Jaice does, of course, engage in a great deal of legitimate commercial activity, but carries out its dealings in a hard-nosed and at times downright nasty manner. The firm's subsidiaries do have dealings with pirates

and smugglers, but the group as a whole maintains just enough distance to avoid trouble from the authorities – at least most of the time. Jaice's experts long ago concluded that the occasionally burned finger would be less significant than the money to be made by sailing very close to the wind. Thus its salvage yards sometimes process pirated ships or components, and if they get caught then a few executives will go to jail but the business group will be able to ride out the storm easily enough.

The Jaice Group works through intermediaries and cut-outs, enabling it to make a big profit repairing pirate vessels and laundering cargoes, components and of course money for the pirate gangs yet avoiding being implicated if they are caught. This would not work on a lot of worlds, where the laws are tight and enforcement is honest, but the Jaice Group does not have facilities on worlds like that. It favours corrupt governments and loose laws, and has a whole political arm designed to ensure they stay that way.

The Jaice Group actually promotes law and order, since chaos and lawlessness are bad for business and Jaice both engages in legitimate business and makes money off those who prey on the trade ships. Too much disruption of trade would be bad for the group's bottom line, so Jaice perversely acts as a moderating influence. If things get too safe and legal, or too wild and lawless, the firm would lose out badly. So its considerable influence is used to maintain an environment in which piracy and smuggling are possible and profitable, but not too damaging to interstellar commerce as a whole.

Outsiders working with the Jaice Group are usually given some entirely legitimate task – the bulk of the firm's income does come from legal if unnecessarily harsh commercial activity – and if they seem amenable might gradually be offered shadier work. However, one of the tricks the group uses to protect itself is to send disposable assets (such as Free Trader crews) off to do tasks that look illicit and are likely to trigger an intervention. When the case finally gets hauled through the courts, it will be established that nothing illegal was going on. By this means the Jaice Group attempts to build an image of a hard-nosed firm vilified by its rivals and political opponents for their own purposes. The policy has worked well enough to date that Jaice has never been successfully implicated in major wrongdoing, even when one of its repair yards was caught buying components from known pirates.



Auuasmadshagmar Colonial Services

Auuasmadshagmar Colonial Services

Auuasmadshagmar Colonial Services (ACS) takes its name from an old Vilani settlement which was for a long time thought to be their first outpost in the Trojan Reach. This claim is now disputed but the name continues to have connotations of long-established and enduring settlement, which suits the firm's preferred image.

Auuasmadshagmar provides a variety of services in the exploration, settlement and development marketplace. Its survey teams create overview maps of a world or conduct detailed exploration of a region. This can include surveying possible settlement sites or generating a report on potential mineral resources. Depending on how much the client is willing to pay, Auuasmadshagmar will undertake a detailed investigation of the local ecosystem or simply present a few paragraphs of observations undertaken whilst carrying out other groundside work. Rather than investigating a site picked by the client, the firm is also able to provide a list of suitable locations for an installation from its own database or to go out and find one, though the latter is an expensive undertaking.

Auuasmadshagmar also offers a 'proving and preparation' service, whereby it lands a team at a potential colony or settlement site and 'proves' the location by having people live there for a suitable period. The proving team will continue to undertake surveys and exploration while they are on-site, and can provide a detailed final report with recommendations to the client when the proving period is over. A larger-scale operation is required for a preparation mission, wherein Auuasmadshagmar personnel set up a colony or settlement site ready for the first arrivals. This typically means flattening ground, constructing the first buildings to house new arrivals, and ensuring that new colonists do not have to build their new home town from the ground up.

This end of the market is typically undertaken by small field teams of four to six personnel, or larger deployments consisting of several field teams and a management group. Development operations are less common, and require more personnel. This can be anywhere between about twenty and hundreds of workers, administrators and support personnel. Auuasmadshagmar is able to undertake many tasks but is typically hired to develop a small colony quickly and efficiently in a manner that its own settlers cannot. Spaceport construction, roads, rivers and dams, and similar infrastructure builds can be undertaken along with important technical work ranging from installing a power and sewerage grid to setting up an advanced datanet.

Auuasmadshagmar personnel include engineers, construction workers, scientists, surveyors and computer technicians, and in addition the firm acts as a clearing house for colonial missions that require key personnel. For a fee it will find a doctor who wants to live in a frontier colony or a retiring police chief who can head up security. The firm has a good reputation and works hard to maintain it. Its personnel can be encountered in remote areas of mainworlds, distant moons or in transit from one job to another. They usually have hair-raising stories of narrow escapes to tell; colonial operations on the frontier are not for the faint-hearted.



Aiaokhtaestiyh Kyoawaihoawea Yu

Aiaokhtaestiyh Kyoawaihoawea Yu (AKY) is an Aslan trading group whose vessels can be encountered almost anywhere. The company – the human term is useful but does not quite describe this grouping – is made up of assets from several clans, but does not contain all of the trading assets of any given clan. It might be best described as a special-purpose business group with some political overtones.

The purpose of the Aiaokhtaestiyh Kyoawaihoawea Yu group, so far as it can be discerned by outside observers, is to generate wealth and prosperity for the clans providing assets to the group, and to ensure future prosperity. This means that AKY is not just about trading in the ports where its ships dock; it also wants to alter the local political climate so that future trade is more profitable and more importantly not endangered by outside events.

One important implication of this policy is that AKY is for the most part opposed to the activities of the typical ihatei group. Ihatei are all about grabbing land or territory wherever they can, which can create a backlash that may be detrimental to a clan's trade in the area. The leaders of AKY recognise that the activities of ihatei are good and proper, and necessary to the future of their parent clan, but this does not rule out opposing

them if circumstances require it. Aiaokhtaestiyh Kyoawaihoawea Yu is thus a stabilising influence along the frontiers, attempting to guide the actions of its associated clans' ihatei in directions that provide maximum long-term benefit to the clan rather than to the specific band of ihatei.

When this policy works well, it means that well-respected AKY leaders meet with hot-blooded young ihatei and offer them guidance towards targets that benefit everyone in the longer term. If the ihatei go along with the advice, AKY will often support them – though usually in a fairly minor way. If they insist on going their own way, the worst-case scenario is that escort vessels operating under the Aiaokhtaestiyh Kyoawaihoawea Yu banner may fire on ihatei ships, and AKY ground troops might even help defend a human settlement against encroaching ihatei. This causes a certain amount of friction, but this is accepted as part of the challenge facing an ambitious ihatei.

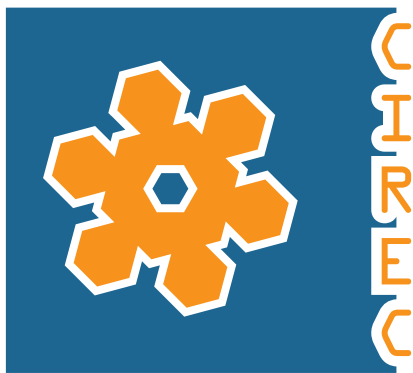
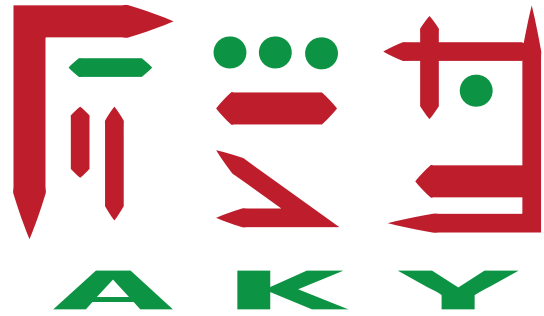
AKY operates a range of merchant ships, some of which are optimised for long-distance trade missions into the heart of the Imperium and other major powers. All vessels are well armed and carry a contingent of security troops, and in many cases a trade mission resembles a military convoy. Even on fairly short missions, it is not uncommon for a cluster of small to medium sized merchant vessels to be supported by tankers and escort ships, proceeding to a central point together before spreading out to trade in the local ports. This can be alarming for ship operators in that region; a dozen Aslan ships including three or four small warships suddenly jumping into a system can cause some concern.

It is an open secret that there is a political dimension to AKY's activities. In addition to working towards better trading conditions and the creation of trade lanes, AKY gathers intelligence and attempts to sway local opinion in favour of closer ties with the Hierate. This is all done in a fairly blunt and open manner for the most part, with AKY taking the position that every major state does this sort of thing, and the Hierate is simply more honest about it than most.

A P P E N D I X



Auuasmadshagmar Colonial Services

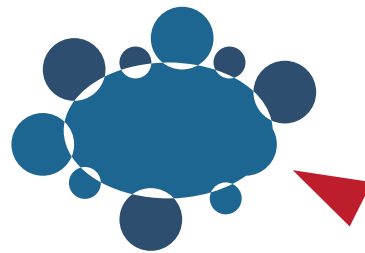
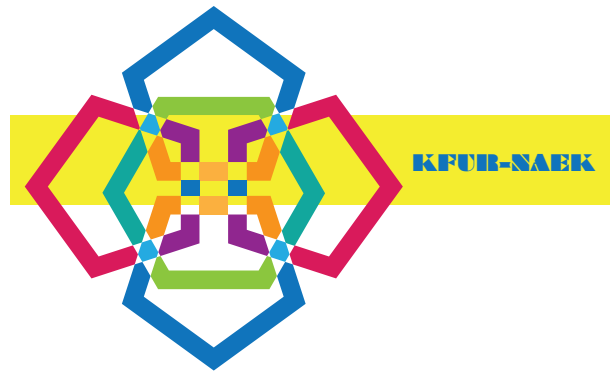


Diversification
INC.



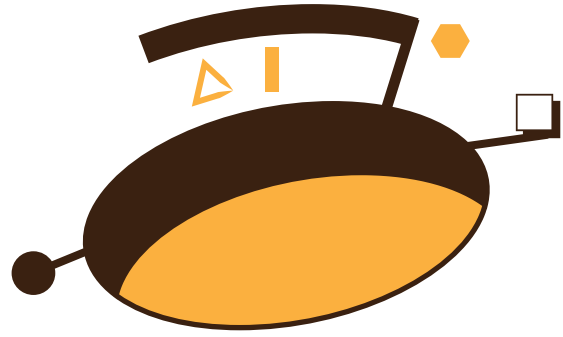


JCE



**OUTSYSTEM
MINERALS**



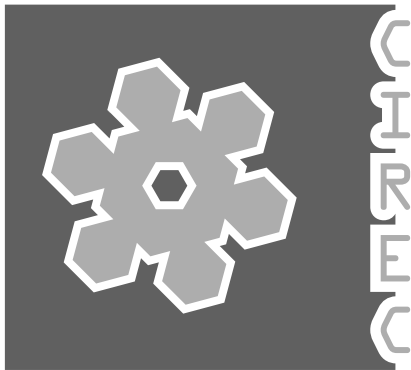




ACS

Auuasmadshagmar Colonial Services

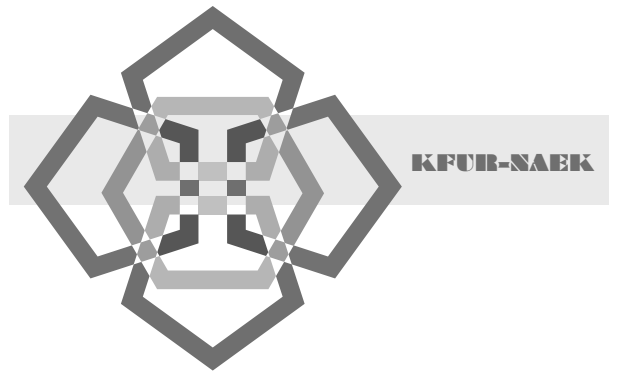
AKY



The 
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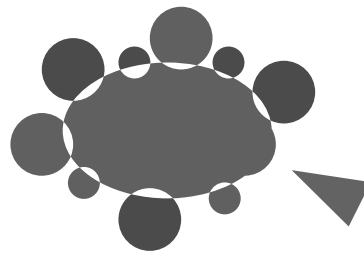


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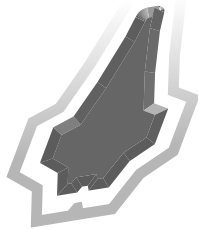


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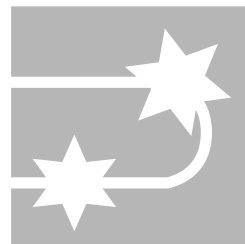
OFFROAD SOLUTIONS



**OUTSYSTEM
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Stellar
Security Services

TCA

