

We Few, We Happy Few

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The Third Imperium rules the space between the stars. Member worlds are free to work out their own destinies.

Every Imperial citizen recognizes this principle as one of the cornerstones of freedom within the Imperium. Laissez-faire principles, however, conceal a fundamental disregard for the individual. As long as no Imperial interests are threatened, the Imperium is content to watch as its citizens are butchered by thugs calling themselves a planetary government. Civil wars are even good for business, because both sides need to buy off-planet weaponry.

-- *Professor Ingrid Dagmarsdottir, Confederation Institute for Political Studies*

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

-- *Edmund Burke*

These adventures take place on Ibon, an out-of-the-way Imperial world wracked by a brutal civil war.

Ibon

Ibon is a low-tech world, located off the trade routes in a backwater subsector of the Imperium. The referee should choose or create a world in the campaign area that meets the following criteria:

- The tech level is 5 or less.
- The atmosphere is breathable without assistance. The world has no any notable resources (when detailed using either *GURPS Traveller: First In* or *GURPS Space*).
- The climate is between cool and hot. In particular, the civil war is in a region where it is possible to live all year without a shelter.

The government can be virtually anything -- the survey data is now out of date. Offworlders in the capitol are generally safe, so the world may not be rated as an amber zone.

The Conflict

Ibon is a backwater world, generally ignored by the interstellar community. Its

people are simple pastoralists and agriculturalists living much the same life their ancestors lived. Local industries are based on agricultural products, and mostly serve the domestic market.

-- *AAB Entry for Ibon*

All this changed a decade ago. Prospectors searching for iron ore discovered placer deposits of zucchai crystals -- a key component in jump drives. The Ibon government decided against immediate development because of the social and environmental costs. A significant minority, including Ibon's small professional class, supported development and four years ago launched a coup. Neither side prevailed, and the fighting has settled down into a series of raids and attacks on known and suspected supporters of the other side. Incidents of banditry and atrocity have become commonplace.

The rebels are a relatively small minority, but are better equipped than the government forces because they have been trading zucchai crystals for arms.

The conflict has been classed as a civil war by the Imperium. Neither side may import mercenary units (although training cadres is legal), but otherwise the Imperium is letting the locals sort things out between themselves.

There are no sides. We're all in this together!

-- *Eccles, on The Goon Show*

Like most civil wars, Ibon's is a tangled web of conflicting claims, priorities, loyalties, and outside interests.

There is little chance of material profit, but adventurers may have a chance to "do the right thing" -- if they can figure out what it is.

A Note on Atrocities

Exactly what atrocities are being committed is left up to the GM. Some gaming groups

will want graphic accounts, others will *not* want to know the details. While this situation is loosely modeled on the current situation in Sierra Leone, there are, sadly, no shortage of atrocities to use as models. Rwanda, Tibet, East Timor, Afghanistan, the Congo, Colombia, and Yugoslavia are just a few of the contemporary examples -- referees can easily find far too many more.

Corporate Contact

The adventurers are looking to score when one of their shadier acquaintances comes to them with a proposition. His principal, an unnamed corporation "with dealings in many areas" (gray-op-speak for "megacorporation"), is looking for some representatives to act as fronts for a contract that, although legal, is "politically sensitive."

They have set up and registered a shell company, but need experienced employees who will not be connected with their corporation. The party will be paid a small salary and a share of the profits.

Assuming they agree, the group will be briefed on the situation. A decade ago, zucchai crystals were discovered on the neighboring world of Ibon. Four years ago, a coup replaced the original government, which opposed developing the mines, with more progressive leaders who favored development. Reactionary forces are still fighting, however, and the new government needs proper military support. They have indicated a willingness to grant a 100-year concession on all zucchai-crystal trading in exchange.

The shell company is an arms-length way of dealing with the Ibonese -- being directly associated with a civil war is not good public relations. Unfortunately, direct intervention contravenes the Imperial non-interference policy, but material support and non-combatant military advisors are legal. The group's task will be to assemble the necessary personnel and equipment, accompany them to Ibon where the zucchai crystals will be loaded in exchange, and return with the crystals. While some of this will be dirty, unpleasant work far away from civilization, the potential profits are enormous.

Petrin Muatrii, one of the government's top leaders, is arriving in a couple of days to finalize the contract. The players should be prepared to work with him in determining exactly what supplies and assistance are required.

Merchant Contact

These things happen sometimes. The mortgage is due, cash flow is tight, and the ship needs minor repairs. For whatever reason, the crew is in need of some quick cash when a contact tips them off about a special delivery. The catch? It's to Ibon, a nearby low-tech world with an on-going civil war.

The cargo is several containers of agricultural implements, already cleared for loading. Payment is triple the usual charter fee, both directions, and the party will be free to use whatever space their client doesn't require for private speculation. Accompanying the shipment will be Petrin Muatrii, one of the leaders in the rebel government, and some offworld "technical advisors."

The outbound trip goes relatively smoothly, as long as the crewmembers refrain from discussing politics with Muatrii, or otherwise provoking his ferocious temper. On arrival, he directs them to land at the rebel's "starport" -- a patch of ground with a landing beacon and a nearby lake for fueling. The agricultural implements are unloaded and replaced with cases of zucchai crystals (requiring about 5% of the ship's cargo hold). The group now has a couple of days to look for a replacement cargo.

Successful streetwise rolls may find a few shady, small-time dealers in zucchai crystals, but the rebel government has officially granted the zucchai concession to an offworld corporation. Bribery is endemic, however, and "sneaking" a few crystals onto the ship should be no problem.

While looking for more bargains, the adventurers meet Julania Viyangmutii, a slender woman in worn outdoor clothing, carrying a large pack and a small child. She won't talk much about herself, saying only that she was an aid worker, that her home was destroyed by soldiers, and that she escaped carrying everything she owns. She wants transport to a neighboring world for herself and some children. Although she can't pay in advance, she promises that the group will be paid after she arrives. Taking the children won't seriously inconvenience the crew -- there is little cargo here, anyway.

Assuming that the party takes Viyangmutii and her orphans, the results will depend on their attitude. If they insist on payment, then they will be paid, but will also acquire a small negative reputation as traders in human misery. If they refuse payment -- they get a small positive reputation, but they will also unknowingly acquire an enemy: the division of the Imperial megacorporation that is profiting from the civil war. This will not be obvious at first, but after the media limelight fades, the crew will be subject to minor harassment -- small delays, critical parts back-ordered, and similar occurrences.

Meanwhile, Viyangmutii has not been idle. Shamelessly exploiting her popularity and calling in favors from old friends, she is pressuring the local Imperial nobility to intervene and end the fighting. The crew could help by ferrying more refugees. Of course, this time they can't simply land at the rebel starport . . .

Military Contact

The group is contacted by an old friend with a job offer: a cadre ticket on a backwater world training insurgent forces. Depending on their situation, she is either recruiting for the mission or looking for a team to carry out the mission.

The world is Ibon.

The rebel government has recently acquired a quantity of heavy weapons, which their troops don't have the skill to use. While the Imperium has prohibited direct involvement, training cadres are allowed, and so the rebels are looking for training.

Adjust the ticket to suit the party. The group's employer is the corporation supplying the arms, not the rebel government itself -- a legal point that may cause friction later.

The group travels to Ibon on a chartered merchant, with the heavy weapons in the cargo

hold.

After arrival, they meet Peltin Muatrii, the rebel leader, and are presented to the insurgents they are to train. Their students are all young, more concerned with having fun and fighting than politics. Attempts to discuss diplomacy, strategy, politics, economics, or similar issues will fail, with "Muatrii knows" being the usual "last word" on the subject.

After a while, the camp is attacked by government forces, and the team must defend themselves. After the attack, Muatrii decides to move the camp, which involves a trek of several days through the bush. Food is provided by local villagers -- those who don't willingly donate are brutalized or killed.

The trainers now have a choice to make. Their contract calls for them to train Muatrii's forces. Are they accessories to war crimes if they honor their contract? Are they liable for damages if they break the contract? Can they live with themselves if they keep it? Will the rebels let them live if they break it?

Diplomatic Contact

One of the team's contacts -- an official in the foreign service -- tells them there's someone they should meet. There's a job that needs doing -- no money, plentiful danger, and virtually nothing in the way of official support. If the group isn't interested, the contact presses them to at least hear the story first-hand, and sets up a meeting at a local park. There they are introduced to a slender woman in worn outdoor clothing, carrying a large pack and a small child.

"Ser Viyangmutii, " says the contact, "has been doing amazing things on Ibon. Rather unpleasant situation there right now, and nothing we can do officially. You're not official, though, so we'd rather hoped you might pitch in a bit."

Julania Viyangmutii will tell her story, starkly describing horrors in a flat voice totally devoid of emotion. She managed to save a few dozen women and children. Thousands more are suffering. What can the team do?

Depending on the adventurers' skills and inclinations, they can either take direct action or apply indirect pressure. Simply flying in and rescuing refugees won't solve the problem, but might gather enough media attention to force official action. Pressuring the megacorporation supporting the war is another potential line of attack. Other solutions are certainly possible, and creative players will undoubtedly surprise you.

Non-Player Characters

The adventurers may encounter the following people from Ibon.

Julania Viyangmutii (20 points)

A dark, slender woman in her mid-30s, dressed in bush clothing. Although she is beautiful, her eyes are hollow, carrying a haunted expression. She is always accompanied by Maiea, a silent toddler who cannot let Viyangmutii out of her sight.

ST: 9 **DX:** 11 **Speed:** 5.5

IQ: 11 **HT:** 11 **Move:** 5

Advantages: Acute Hearing (3 levels) [6]; Beautiful Appearance [15]; Charisma (2 levels) [10]; Fit [5]; Less Sleep (3 levels) [9]; +2 to Reputation (Small class) [3]; Status 0 [0]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages: Alcohol Intolerance [-1]; Curious (1 level) [-5]; Dependent (0-point loved child; 12 or less) [-64]; Nightmares [-5]; Selfless [-10]; Struggling [-10]; Truthfulness [-5]; Workaholic [-5]; Xenophilia (1 level) [-5].

Skills: Administration-11 [2]; Agronomy-13 [8]; Area Knowledge-13 [4]; Computer Operation-11 [1]; Detect Lies-10 [2]; Driving-9 [0.5]; First Aid-12 [2]; Leadership-12 [4]; Politics-11 [2]; Psychology-10 [2]; Research-12 [4]; Riding-9 [0.5]; Scrounging-13 [6]; Swimming-12 [2]; Teaching-13 [8]; Xenology-11 [4].

A xenologist by training, Julania Viyangmutii first visited Ibon as a student on a work-study program. Something in the culture resonated with her, and upon returning to "civilization" she switched her major to agronomy, then moved back to Ibon to live, teaching literacy and agricultural techniques at a small rural college. Luxuries were few, but the rich local culture was enough for her.

Then disaster struck -- her village was targeted by the rebels. Viyangmutii watched helplessly as her students were butchered, then she and the other women assaulted and tortured. Upon recovering consciousness, she managed to lead the few survivors to the next village, carrying the few surviving children -- many of whom were too mutilated to walk.

She threw herself into looking after the victims, using hard work to keep the nightmares at bay. But there was no end -- every week more victims arrived.

If she is met offworld, the story is that she eventually begged a ride on the *Sacula*, a passing tramp trader, and came here, only to discover that the Imperium has classified the conflict as a civil war and will not interfere.

She is now looking for allies to help end the conflict.

Peltin Muatrii (120 points)

A tall, somewhat coarse-featured man, Peltin Muatrii looks like what he is -- a 40ish farm laborer in a tattered militia uniform. He is missing the index finger of his right hand.

ST: 12 **DX:** 10 **Speed:** 4.25

IQ: 10 **HT:** 11 **Move:** 4

Advantages: Alertness (2 levels) [10]; Average Appearance [0]; Average Wealth [0]; Charisma (3 levels) [15]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness (4 levels) [8]; Hard to Kill (2 levels) [10]; +3 to Reputation (Large class) [7]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages: Addiction [-5]; Bad Temper [-10]; Bloodlust [-10]; Callous [-6]; Horrible Hangovers [-1]; Missing Digit [-2]; Proud [-1]; Sadism [-15]; Status -1 [-5].

Skills: Area Knowledge-12 [4]; Axe/Mace-11 [4]; Brawling-13 [8]; Camouflage-11 [2]; Carousing-10 [2]; Dancing-10 [2]; Driving-10 [2]; Gesture-11 [2]; Guns (Pistol)-11 [2]; Guns (Rifle)-12 [4]; Interrogation-11 [4]; Intimidation-12 [8]; Knife-12 [4]; Knife Throwing-11 [2]; Leadership-11 [4]; Politics-11 [4]; Stealth-11 [4]; Streetwise-9 [1]; Swimming-10 [1]; Tactics-10 [4]; Throwing-9 [2].

Ten years ago, Peltin Muatrii was no one in particular -- just another migrant farm laborer on Ibon, drifting with the seasons. Then zucchai crystals were discovered and Muatrii joined the rush, working the sluices of the wildcat mines. While recovering from the accident that mutilated his right hand, he realized that those getting rich were the middle-men. Since Muatrii lacked business skills, he re-invented the protection racket and was soon leading a small gang of "soldiers."

When the government of Ibon decided that the foreign exchange from zucchai crystals wasn't worth the social dislocation of the seething mining camps, Muatrii and his men refused to quit. The government sent police; Muatrii routed them. The government closed the starport; Muatrii continued selling to Imperial customers who landed directly at the mines. The government stopped food shipments; Muatrii began "taxing" the surrounding villages.

Peltin Muatrii is a brutal man who rules with an iron hand, and his troops are the same. While some members of his government are trying to moderate his actions, particularly the professionals who joined him because they believed in economic development, those who oppose him are frequently killed, and most of the survivors have silently acquiesced to his methods.