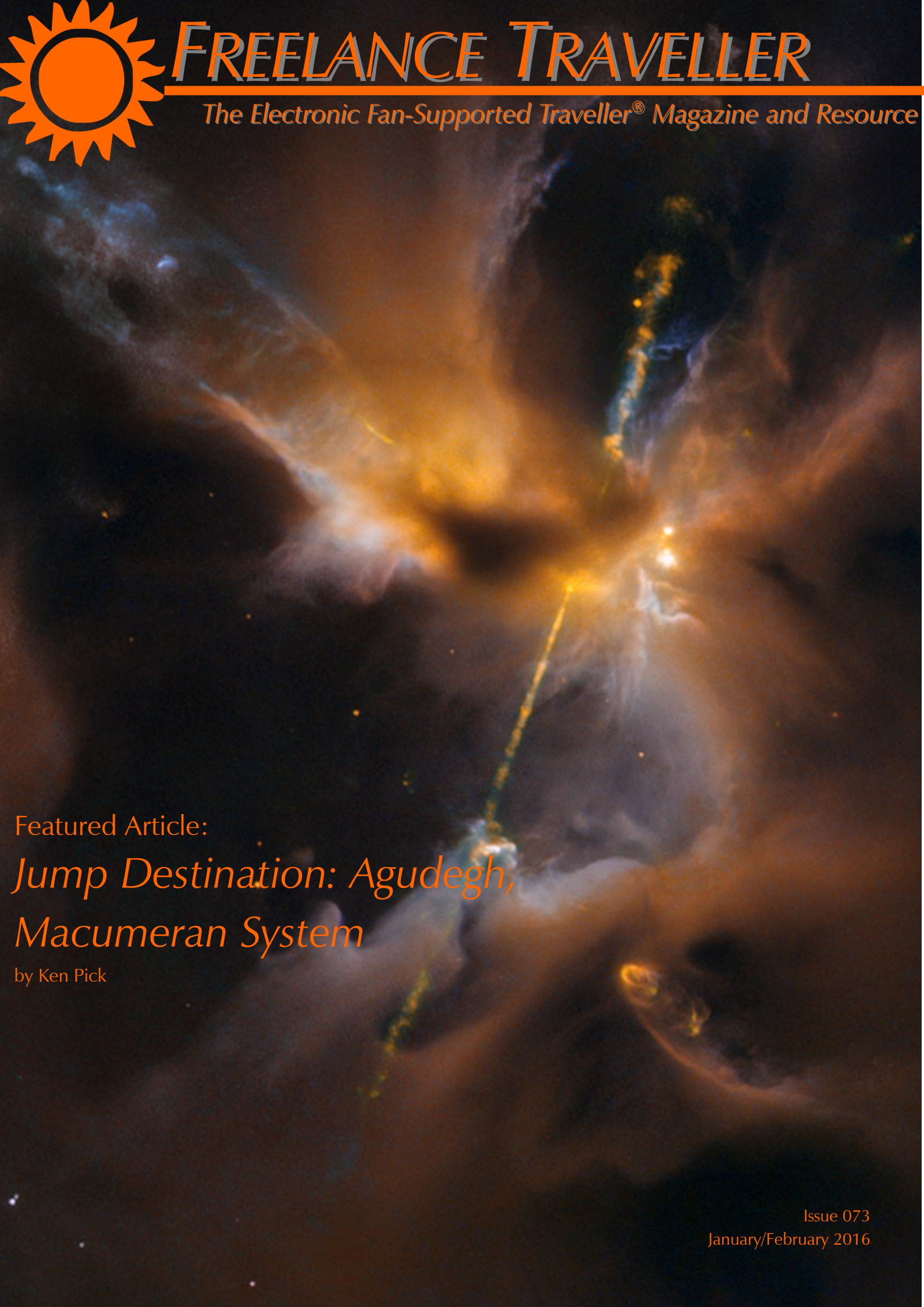

FREELANCE TRAVELLER

The Electronic Fan-Supported Traveller® Magazine and Resource

Featured Article:

Jump Destination: Agudegh, Macumeran System

by Ken Pick

Issue 073
January/February 2016

A Note About Production

Freelance Traveller is prepared using Microsoft Office Publisher 2010 running on a Windows 7 Ultimate x64 system. The program is reasonably easy to use, and produces good results with moderate effort; it also supports advanced typographic features such as typographic quotes and apostrophes, small caps, ligatures, swashes, and stylistic alternatives (if the advanced features are implemented in the font). Generation of the PDF files is built in to this version of Microsoft Office; no additional products are needed.

The title and heading typeface is ZapfHumanist BT, a Bitstream adaptation of Hermann Zapf's digital redesign of his 'hot lead' typeface Optima, chosen as a 'tie-back' to the title typeface of the original edition of *Traveller*. The black-and-orange of the section headings is also a tie-back to *Traveller*'s origins, though we felt that the 'correct' red was too dark. The heading sizes vary from 12 to 16 points. Body text is set in Palatino Linotype, also designed by Hermann Zapf, and is set at 11 points for most body text, giving approximately the same text spacing as Times New Roman at 12 point (which was the original *Freelance Traveller* body text), but a lighter 'color'. Palatino Linotype also 'balances' better as a body text typeface to Optima as a titling typeface.

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Cover: *NASA, ESA, Hubble Heritage (STScI/AURA)/Hubble-Europe Collaboration; Acknowledgments: D. Padgett (GSFC), T. Megeath (University of Toledo), B. Reipurth (University of Hawaii).*
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Freelance Traveller is published monthly in PDF form by the editor. The current issue is available from *Freelance Traveller*'s website, http://www.freelancetraveller.com.

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From the Editor

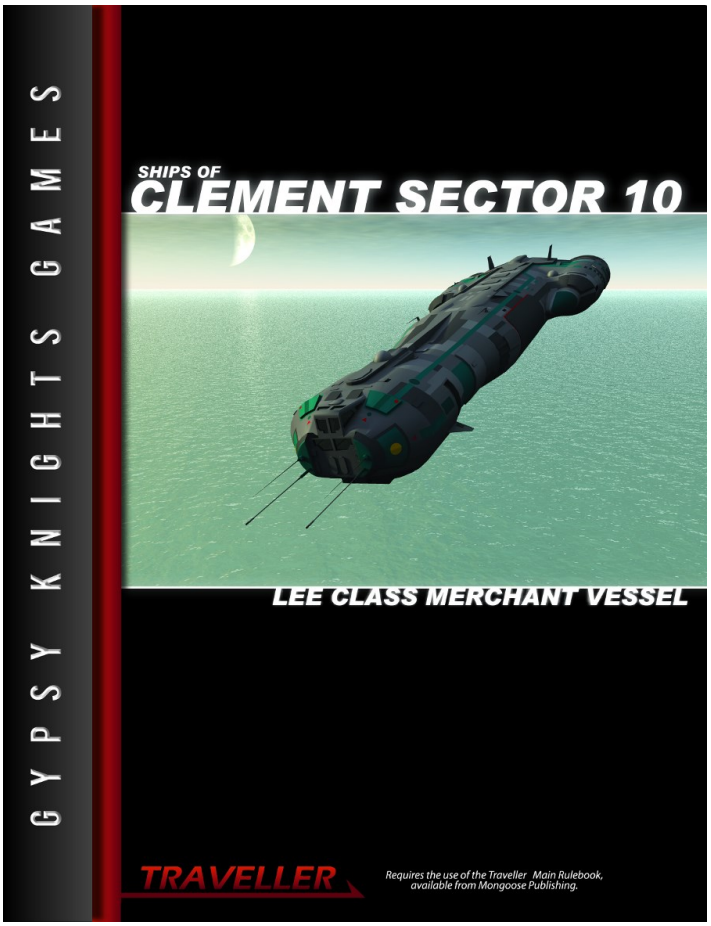
It's not often that I can say I've gotten well ahead of a self-imposed deadline. This issue, though, I get to say exactly that, and to announce a slight change in the future publication schedule of *Freelance Traveller*. Last issue, I announced that I'd be going to an every-two-months schedule, with the planned publication weekend being the last weekend of the first month of the cover date—that is, the original plan was that this issue would be released the last weekend of January 2016. Instead, it's been released early, and I will be targeting future issues for the final week of the month before the cover dates—so that if I can manage it (a good possibility), the next issue, March/April 2016, should be available for download the final week of *February*.

This is where I put out the call for material from you, the *Traveller* community. *You* write *Freelance Traveller*; I just gather it, clean it up a bit, and package it. With the change in issue size, I have a bit more flexibility in selecting articles; I can now take longer articles that I might not have previously, because I have more room to "play" with. Long or short, though, I encourage you all to write, and write more, and write both in and out of your "comfort" zone—I've said it before; nobody "owns" any section of the magazine; if you want to write, do so , even if you believe you're not as good as whoever seems to have the most articles in the section you want to write for. Writing for a new department is also a good way to upgrade your writing skill, so if you've mostly written adventures, maybe you should try a character profile, or a house rule. Or, if you do world profiles, maybe try an adventure or a story set on the world, instead. Or, if stories are your thing, try for an "encyclopedic" article on the underlying world or culture. Or something like that. I'll have more to say on this next issue… ✪

Ships of Clement Sector 10: Lee-class Merchant Vessel

Reviewed by Paul Hillers

Ships of Clement Sector 10: Lee-class Merchant Vessel. Michael Johnson. Gypsy Knights Games http://www.gypsyknightsgames.com
26pp., PDF
US$4.99/UK£3.35



I picked up my copy of *Lee-class Merchant Vessel* based almost purely on past experiences with Gypsy Knight Games' quality work. That and the art. Never, ever forget that artwork helps sell—especially when you are talking science fiction. I have been continually impressed with the Clement Sector product line. Even though I don't game in that setting, it's actually quite easy to drop most any of their vehicles, source material, or ships into your standard or alternate *Traveller* setting. They definitely adhere to a small-ship universe concept, which isn't at all a bad thing. While their warships tend to be on the smaller side, their adventure-class ships are perfect for small groups of adventurers hoping to make a megacredit or three doing dangerous missions or dodging pirates while making a hopeful killing delivering cargo.

Like in many of their previous supplements, there are several pages of fiction accompanying the actual ship design. I have found this to generally be rather enjoyable, as it seems to breathe more life into the ship setting. While the fiction isn't terribly detailed, it is still enjoyable to read. Perhaps one day GKG and their author(s) would put together a compilation of sorts, discussing the activities on the decks of each class of ship as they move towards a momentous rendezvous in space somewhere.

It was also nice to read that one of the main characters was an uplift, something you really don't encounter too much in regular *Traveller* fiction. Usually an uplift is replaced with one of the minor alien races. Not that this is a bad thing! Uplifts feature prominently in the Clement Sector and they deserve page space like any other sophont out there. Besides, who can resist a monkey in a Hawaiian-style shirt?

Like many of the previous ship supplements, the technical portion begins with an overview of the history and origin of the *Lee* class, discussing why some of the design choices were made, and adding flavor to the whole thing. While I can always look at stats on a ship, I really don't, for example, know why the classic *Beowulf*-class Free Trader came to be. With the *Lee*, you are told what the inspiration for the design was, why the maneuver rating was kept low, and the advantage of having a 6m-high cargo hold vs. the standard 3m.

The next section goes into more detail on the ship's specifications. Here we are told how many turrets it normally mounts (one from the builder, but fire control tonnage is set aside for a full complement of four). I had to ask where the fourth turret was located as the most excellent artwork clearly shows examples of the three dorsal mounts. It turns out the single ventral mount is located beneath the chin of the bridge. I also exchanged with the publisher my thoughts on the lack of ammunition stor-

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age. The placement of the turrets excludes having magazines shown on the deckplans. The description does mention that no provision for ammunition storage is made, as the ship is a merchant and not a fighter. That's all well and good, but I personally wouldn't want to go into battle with only a single round in the turret. Any pirate or privateer would know that a *Lee* would be easy pickings unless the owners chose all energy weapons. It is mentioned that mounting a single laser/missile/sandcaster launcher in a triple turret is common—though I think this concept may change with the introduction of the Mongoose *Traveller* 2.0 rules for mixed turrets.

The ship deck descriptions call out all of the main features of the upper, lower and cargo hold. They also nicely detail some of the interesting features. For example, a collapsible catwalk that connects the port and starboard engineering spaces can be folded in/out depending on what kind and size of cargo is being carried. The hold itself is pretty roomy at 160 dtons, with access doors both port and starboard as well as the rear. Like the subsidized merchant, the cargo hold has internal doors that can be closed or left open as needed.

Something I like to see on deckplans is both a rational layout (e.g., having extremely large open spaces on a spaceship that sometimes run the length of the ship seems stupid to me), but also one that has the little things you look for—things like lifts between decks, storage spaces for space suits next to airlocks, even little things like galleys and their accompanying food storage areas. While there are still (in my opinion) poorly-placed access points in the middle of deck walkways, they are pretty minimal here. While I suppose you could always have magical 52nd century ladders appear and disappear, from a purely safety point of view it's best to put access portals like that off to the side. It's a minor complaint, and one nearly every *Traveller* deckplan has done. Which doesn't make it right in my book, but it's no worse than anything else.

There's only two pages of actual deckplans, but really, no more are needed. Much of the rest of the book is taken up with artwork, even more of a selling point because the artwork is by Ian Stead. That man sure can draw some beautiful starships. I do wish that Mongoose would find the money to buy more of his artwork. If he ever follows down the path of Stewart Crowley, I think I will be adding to my sci-fi art book collection.

Finally, we come to the section that outlines the ship's crew who were previously introduced to us in the fiction at the beginning. The art portraits are sufficient for what is required, and they run true to similar character portraits throughout the Clement Sector supplements. Once you get used to them the artwork is fine, but it's a bit different than the starship drawings. Then again, one would expect character art and starship art to be a bit different. Each crew member gets a short description, including their skills, and little bit of what drives them to be on the *Nebula's Ghost*. Last, and certainly not least, is a d6 list of adventure seeds that a referee could use to help flesh out encounters or settings with the *Nebula's Ghost* or any other *Lee*-class merchant. As an added bonus there is size comparison chart, similar to the recognition silhouettes of enemy aircraft, which shows the relative size of some of the ships that inhabit the Clement Sector.

At a price point of just $4.99 the supplement is almost a no-brainer to pick up. It has great art, good ship specifications, and can be easily used in either its native Clement Sector setting or dropped into any *Traveller* campaign. As an adventure-class vessel it can easily be used by your players or encountered by them somewhere. With its relatively large hold it would be interesting to see a Q-ship or perhaps even a light carrier variant. Overall it's a solid product. I would like to see the ship section get a little extra text work, tightening it up to read more concisely. That's more of a personal view than anything else. It's easy to recommend this to anyone who enjoys supporting smaller publishers and/or adding new ships to their game setting. Five stars! ✪

Jump Destination: Agudegh, Macumeran System

by Ken Pick

Macumeran System (Twilight 809)

A Vargr lost colony that built itself back up after its own personal Long Night, Agudegh is now the terminus of a Jump-2 trade route and a major trade partner in the area. It is the only primary Vargr world in the subsector, isolated from all others; any other Vargr worlds in the subsector are Macumeranese secondary colonies.

The system ("Makumoezhong" in the local Vargr tongue) consists of Macumeran ("Makumvonutoe"), an F7V main-sequence star with eight planets and two asteroid belts, grouped into three distinct zones.

Macumeran Inner System

The inner system contains three planets, none of which are habitable or settled.

Planets I and II (both XS00000-0), **Kzargann** (Orbit 0) and **Zakergann** (Orbit 1) are both tiny Mercuriforms in "torch orbits", too close to the sun to be of use. Kzargann's bright face is literally red-hot.

Planet III, **Urghann** (X8B0000-0, Orbit 2) is a Cytherean world with a dense, corrosive atmosphere, a surface temperature of over 800° and two moons (rare for an inner-zone world). Both moons are in decaying orbits; the larger inner moon just outside the Roche limit (D100213-8) has a solar observatory with a small population of around 100.

Macumeran Middle System

The inhabited portion of the system is a settler/belter's dream, with a small gas giant and a T-norm mainworld in the "Goldilocks Orbit" between two asteroid belts.

The **Inner Belt** (D000363-8, Orbit 3) is a chondrite-asteroid belt worked by about 5000 belters.

Planet IV, **Knaergann** (SGG, 30 M_E, Orbit 4), is a small gas giant of about 30 M_E (almost the ideal size for fuel skimming) with blue-and-white water-cloud banding, no rings, and two moons.

- Knaergann's inner moon, **Agudegh** (C566753-9) is the system main world, a T-norm satellite world with a population of some 70 million Vargr. From orbit or approach, it appears as a T-norm world with blue oceans and orange-and-green landmasses under a swirl of white clouds.
- Knaergann's outer moon **Zhodegh** (D330411-8), well-placed as a highport and transfer point, is a tawny-colored twin of Mars with a population of some 50,000 in domes and dug-ins.

The **Outer Belt** (E000304-8, Orbit 5) is a belt of nickel-iron asteroids with some belter activity, enough to support a permanent population of 9000 belters "organized" into small independent packs and packless wanderers.

Macumeran Outer System

The outer system contains two ringed gas giants (one large and one small) plus a large iceball. None are permanently settled. The system's population is too small to support outer-system development, though "unlicensed privateers" (corsair bands) might have covert boltholes.

Planet V, **Ounarghann** (LGG, 450 M_E [1½ M_J] Orbit 6), is the large gas giant of the system, a "Jupiter and a half" with a thin close-in ring, three major moons, and dozens of minor captured-asteroid moons. Ounarghann has too high a surface gravity and too violent an atmosphere to be suitable for fuel skimming. Massive upwellings of white and pastels break and swirl among the brownish and yellow cloud bands, giving the planet the "Jupiter with acne" look of an outer zone superjovian. The two largest moons orbit fairly close-in; the third-largest is in an eccentric far orbit with the "temps".

- The innermost and largest moon (X622000-0) is "fire and ice", a larger Io with violently-erupting lava volcanoes, thin sulfurous atmosphere, and oceans kept liquid by geothermal heat.
- The second-largest middle moon (X320000-0) is a volcanically-active Mars.
- The outermost moon in a far orbit (X100000-0) is a nondescript iceball.

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- Though not counted in permanent moons, at least two dozen captured asteroids form temporary moons in every orbit imaginable.

Planet VI, **Phargann** (SGG, 50 ME, Orbit 7), is pastel yellow with white cloud bands, an elaborate double-ring system, and six moons, a smaller sister of Saturn. The six moons cluster in two orbital groupings:

- In close orbits: two nondescript small rockballs and a Mars-sized Io with a trace atmosphere of sulfur vapor.
- In far orbits, three small nondescript iceballs. If the system has any covert corsair bases, they'll be among these moons.

Planet VII, **Thorzarg Tsan**, (X860000-0, Orbit 8) is an Earth-sized Titaniform iceball on the edge of the system with a medium-dense atmosphere of inert cryogenic gases and enough greenhouse effect to have liquid hydrocarbons on-surface. Normally, a cryoworld like this would be exploited for its hydrocarbons, but it's too far out to be practical at TL9 and there's been no out-of-system interest.

Beyond Thorzarg Tsan, there are only the ice asteroids of a Kuiper Belt.

Agudegh

Agudegh C566753-9 Rich, Ag

(Macumeran IV-A, the larger/inner moon of Knaergann)
Eaglestone Trade Index 3

Agudegh ("Jewel World" in old Arrghoun) is a T-norm satellite world, caught in the tidal-stress tug-of-war between Knaergann and Zhodegh ("Wandering World"), seismically and volcanically-active.

Planetary Geography

Agudegh has a typical satellite-world geography – a "ring ocean" with all landmasses centered in two major groups directly under the primary and at the antipodes.

The Knaergannside hemisphere has four landmasses separated by narrow straits which function as a single continent ringed with smaller volcanic islands and archipelagoes. Coastal plains and river deltas ring the quadruple continent below a "Mogollon Rim" of canyon-penetrated cliffs transitioning to the interior highlands—"basalt badlands" spotted with usually-active volcanoes and the great calderas of supervolcanoes like Yellowstone, Tambora, Toba, or Long Valley. Settled areas mostly hug the coast or follow river canyons through the Rim into the interior.

The Antipodes (the Farside hemisphere) has no single continent, just a cluster of volcanic islands built around shield volcanoes. The larger islands (fused together into mini-continents) have some of the "Mogollon Rim" geography of Knaergannside Continent, but the distinction between inland highlands and coastal lowlands is normally less.

Generally Antipodes volcanoes are less active and less explosive than those on Knaergannside; a super-volcanic eruption could nuclear-winter the entire planet, and is believed to be the reason the original colony crashed. The less-violent Antipodes eruptions have more risk of triggering tsunamis.

Surface Conditions/Sky Picture

The day is 57 hours long (2.4 T-days), with a year of about 268 local days (1.76 T-years) and a Zhodegh month of about three local days (7.14 T-days). Climate is fairly constant year-round, with long scorching days and cold nights throughout the year. Seasonal variations are found only in the northernmost and southernmost lands. Most inhabitants sleep through the hottest part of the day and coldest part of the night, with two sleep/wake cycles per day.

The main difference a visitor will notice is the gravity – only 5/8 of a gee. Sea-level atmosphere density and pressure are otherwise normal, but the lower gravity causes less pressure drop from altitude. The atmosphere is breathable up to 10km altitude, though daytime UV radiation from the sun becomes unsafe above 6km.

Both hemispheres have spectacular sky views:

- On the Antipodes, the night sky is filled with spectacular aurorae, the result of dueling magne-

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tospheres and heavy solar wind. The tawny outer moon of Zhodegh grows and shrinks in the sky, with a maximum diameter (at opposition) of 1½ times that of Earth's moon.

- On Knaergannside, the sky is dominated by the primary, a white-streaked-with-sapphire globe forty times the apparent diameter of the Earth's moon and over 2000 times as bright, waxing and waning as Agudegh orbits around it.
    - Due to the axial/orbital tilt, for about half the year centered around Spring and Autumn Equinoxes Knaergann eclipses the sun each day with even more spectacle — for up to three hours (maximum at the equinoxes themselves), the primary becomes a red ring in the sky, mega-bolt lightning storms flickering over the night side.
    - Every night, the sky brightens as Knaergann phases to full, until at midnight the sky is only a bit darker blue than at noon. Zhodegh is visibly smaller than on Farside, shrinking almost to a rust-colored speck as it passes behind the primary.
- In both hemispheres, the sun is visibly smaller, a brilliant ice-white welding-arc in the daytime sky. The deep atmosphere generates clouds that are tall and towering, often sorting into several layers of stratus, altostratus, and cirrus pierced by towering mega-cumulus like those of a volcanic or nuclear explosion. Only in the high "basalt badlands" of the interior will there be days without a cloud in the sky.

Peculiarities

"Macumeranese Vargr" are visibly different from the standard Vargr, forming a distinct local ethnic type. A standard Vargr among the Macumeranese will stand out like a timber wolf among coyotes, larger and more robust.

The lower gravity and heavier solar radiation have left them lighter and more gracile, resembling coyotes or jackals more than wolves. When generating characters, roll 2D-2 Strength, 2D+1 Dexterity, 2D-2 Endurance.

The higher radiation load has also shortened their lifespan compared to standard Vargr; aging rolls start at 30 (three terms) instead of 34 (four terms), and continue as standard Vargr of one term older.

Native Life

Agudegh is home to two interpenetrating biospheres: Native sea life and land vegetation, and transplanted land life and vegetation common to Vargr "terraforming" projects. Land life is somewhat limited in variety – native life is only a handful of species which have adapted to land, and transplanted Vargr life from colonization was a limited-diversity biosphere based on Earth's. The two biochemistries are compatible but mutually toxic to varying degrees.

Unlike most life-bearing worlds, Agudegh's native life evolved well beyond the usual bacteria, to a Life Index of 7 – complex multicellular plants and animals, primarily sea-borne, roughly similar to Earth when life was first coming onto land.

Native multicellular animal life is primarily various types of pseudo-arthropods, worms, pseudo-mollusks, and other invertebrates similar to the Cambrian-era zoology of the Burgess Shale. Native land life is primarily vegetation and pseudo-arthropods, from centipedes to arachnoids to insectoids. Native vegetation uses carotenoid compounds and pigments instead of the chlorophyll of Terran plants, and is colored various shades of the interior of a carrot.

Transplanted life is familiar to anyone of human or Vargr stock, similar to Terran species of the late Pleistocene without most of the megafauna. Plants are similar and green instead of native plants' carrot -orange, and most of the animals are livestock breeds.

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The dual ecosystem has shaken down during the Long Night, but still has some problems with invasive species, including several species of pseudo-centipede which have adapted to transplanted plants and have made themselves agricultural pests.

Cautions and Hazards

The sun is F7, with intense ultraviolet emissions translating to severe sunburn danger at higher altitudes. This is offset by the lower gravity; the atmosphere doesn't thin as much with altitude. At sea level, the danger is only slightly-higher than Earth but increases with altitude, becoming severe above 6000m, the altitude of most of the nearside and far-side highlands. At this altitude, sunburn occurs three times as quickly and is three times as severe as at sea level; any humans in the open in the basalt badlands must be dark-skinned or otherwise sun-screened; both humans and Vargr must take precautions against UV glare blindness and long-term eye damage.

The planet is seismically and volcanically-active; seismic quakes and volcanic eruptions are constant macro-scale dangers. Populated areas are normally well away from active volcanoes, but volcanic event encounters are still common, the most common event being caught in an ashfall, with accompanying atmospheric taint.

The deep atmosphere and multiple cloud altitudes increase the power of storms, from simple (and spectacular) thunderstorms to powerful hurricanes. Weather can become very violent very fast, though there is usually some advance warning. Usually.

Much of the native plant life and most of the sea life are poisonous to both Humans and Vargr. Seafood is not on the menu here, except for some less-toxic species similar to Fugu.

Most of the (toxic) native plant species are easily distinguished from the (usually not toxic) transplanted Vargr-world species. Most of them. "Go with the green plants and avoid the orange" is generally safe. Offset by the fact that scent-oriented Vargr deliberately cultivate and raise several native plants for the pleasant aromas they emit.

However, if you're not into X-treme Gardening or going around grazing, the most common toxic-plant encounter is a contact skin rash similar to poison ivy or poison oak. Getting the irritant toxin off Vargr fur is a bit of a problem (involving shavers), and the aftereffects look and feel more like mange than anything else.

On land, the bite of some insectoids can trigger allergic reactions, mostly of the severe bite-inflammation variety; severity varies from person to person. When bitten, roll 2D against Endurance + 1D; if End+, take 2D damage from anaphylactic shock, else just severe swelling and reddening of the bite site. Various forms of insectoid repellents and nettings are common at certain times of year when they swarm.

Outside densely-populated areas, another major hazard is wildfire. One of the local families of plant life, a myriad of closely-related species collectively called "Firewood Trees", are similar to Eucalyptus in their variety and extreme flammability – these plants contain so much resin they burn even when green (orange, actually). Wildfires are part of their reproductive cycle in the manner of California Chaparral, clearing the ground and fertilizing it with ash that used to be a forest; fire-resistant seeds are released during the burn to germinate and sprout in the ashes. With volcanic soil seeded with ash, these forests grow back fast, ready for the next burn within a few local years. When a wildfire starts, whether by accident, arson, lightning, or volcano, it's bad – a raging wall of fire consuming everything in its path.

Population and History

Macumeran System was originally colonized by Vargr an unknown time ago, possibly during the First Vargr Diaspora, more likely during the breakup of the Gvurrdon Hvaek. Given the mytho-

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logical dimension of Vargr-recorded history, any reconstruction of Macumeran's early history will always be speculative.

Some time after its establishment, the colony crashed due to a global natural disaster. Either a supervolcanic eruption of one of the Knaergannside mega-calderas, an asteroid impact from either of the belts, or both in combination killed most of the population and ushered in a planetary Long Night.

For centuries, Agudegh's packs struggled along at an estimated Tech Level 2bis, primitive "wolfpacks" preying on each other and churning within. Then slowly, over more centuries, they built themselves back up, from tribal packs to "city-states" of packholds surrounded by grazing land to short-lived pack alliances under charismatic leaders, paralleling the original rise of Vargr civilization on their ancestral homeworld.

With one important difference – the ruins and artifacts and surviving knowledge of the original colony. These provided guidance (and surviving tech stashes for charismatic warlords), aided by Vargr racial inquisitiveness and curiosity. Eventually things shook out into a characteristically-Vargr civilization.

With the rise of mass media, one highly-charismatic pack became dominant over a wide area on Knaergannside – the ancestors of today's "Royals", who have kept on top of the crazy-quilt of Vargr politics for the past 300 or so years.

Economy and Trade

Trade Class: Rich, Agricultural

Eaglestone Trade Index: 3 (200 passengers, 7000 dtons/week)

Exports: Various cash crops, organic chemicals

Imports: TL10+ manufactured goods

Services: Refined fuel

"Agricultural" exports are mostly various plantation-grown cash crops for the subsector. As befits a carnivorous race, domestic-consumption "Agriculture" is more likely to be ranching than farming. As a Rich world, Agudegh is also a popular passenger stop.

Cities and Starports

For a world with a population of some 70 million (over 60 million of them on the quadruple continent Knaergannside), Agudegh has very few large cities.

The largest is The Royal City of some 4 million, location of the main C-class downport. This downport is actually a "C+" port, offering refined fuel.

The highport, also C+, is a medium-sized space station keeping station around the Knaergann-Agudegh L1 point (directly between the two planets) with a crew/population of under 4000. It normally handles refueling and loading/unloading for large unstreamlined ships, comsat, and GPS coverage over Knaergannside, and acts as a depot for fuel-skim lighters and belter operations.

The five other "major cities" (four on Knaergannside, one on the largest Antipodes island) are all under one million, varying from 500,000 to 900,000 population and C to D downports. All six (The Royal City and the other five) compete for offworld traffic; a free-trader Jumping insystem will probably be "steered" to multiple downports all at once.

The world's other "cities" are more properly large towns averaging around 50,000 population or so, usually from closely-related packs. These towns originated from self-sufficient pack freeholds and are well-spaced with a ring of open land surrounding them for agriculture, ranching, and firebreaks.

Tech Level notes

Agudegh is Tech Level 9 ("Y2K"), at least on Knaergannside; the Antipodes can vary anywhere from TL2 to 8 depending on location and isolation.

Kneargannside is an Information Age society with hemisphere-wide Internet, mass media, and satellite/cell/GPS coverage routed from the highport at L1. Because of the slight lightspeed lag to and from the L1 point, the highest-bandwith applications require landline connections. Satellite/cellphones

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here are primarily-audio telephones, not the all-in-one datasystems of higher tech levels. GPS navigation (map box) is accurate to within 100 meters.

Masonry architecture (usually volcanic stone or dark grey brick) predominates, with metal-framed buildings a close second; local wood is too much of a fire hazard, and the less-flammable woods are rare and expensive.

However, local wood can be processed into both solid and liquid fuel. Resins extracted from the wood can be refined into a thick fuel oil; some of this can be mixed into biodiesel for internal-combustion engines (Diesel or gas turbine), but the thickness of the raw oil favors external-combustion engines (steam or Stirling). The leftover wood pulp is also useable as a cream-colored solid fuel analogous to low-sulfur coal.

Grav vehicles are rare and usually imported from offworld; wheeled vehicles or aerodynamic aircraft are much more common. The major cities (all six of them) are all-electric with imported fusion plants, while freehold towns often have their own wood pulp powerplants for local power.

The Antipodes are completely different, almost like another world. There the highest Tech Level is 8 ("Late Cold War"), and that only on the hemisphere's only large city and its mini-continent large island. Once you get outside of there (by bush plane or ferryboat to the other islands), all bets are off – Tech Levels down to 2, spotty (mostly radio) communications, and no GPS or wireless/Net.

Society

Macumeranese Vargr society reverted to their ancestral canid pack structure during their Long Night. The basic unit is an extended family pack, usually numbering 20-200 adults, with the usual Vargr churning among alphas, betas, and omegas. These family packs tend to live together in "pack houses", descended from a communal "Long House" arrangement.

Depending on planetary region, a "pack house" could be a true communal "longhouse", a tight cluster of individual dwellings, or (in urban areas), an apartment block. Traditionally, longhouses were clustered around a central communal area with a shrine or fire pit and were rimmed with protective perimeter walls. To this day, Macumeranese pack houses and apartment blocks follow a similar pattern, grouped around central courtyards.

Another archaic custom is that all pups are counted as offspring of the pack's alpha couple(s), and the alphas do bear a majority of the pack's pups. Lower-ranking bitches are discouraged from breeding and often "married off" to other packs, binding the packs into some sort of connection. The Royal Pack is no exception; "marrying a minor princess" is a common theme in Macumeranese romance and storytelling. (As any Saudi male with the ancestral patronymic "ibn Saud" is a "prince", so any member of the Royal Pack can style themselves "prince" or "princess". The exact level of kinship is open to debate, especially with Vargr churn in the Royal Pack.)

In interstellar society, some of these bitches are married off to non-Vargr (usually humans), eliminating the chance of messy heirs. (And providing hooks for stories and adventures.)

Attitude towards psionics is intermediate; tolerated so long as it isn't blatant. A folk-magic mythology grew up around psionics during the Long Night, and remains to this day in tradition and fiction – the "witches" deep in the wilderness, the "wierding packs" of wizards, the "Fire Witch" riding the firestorms in the Outback.

Philosophy and Religion

Vargr have never been much for philosophy *per se*, and Macumeranese Vargr are no exceptions, tending to be very pragmatic and down-to-Agudegh, with a sprinkling of folk beliefs and one major exception.

On the subject of religion, Vargr tend towards highly-charismatic and personal "holy roller" fig-

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ures and high-energy observances. Again, Macumeranese Vargr are no exceptions. The most widespread faith insystem bears many similarities to mainstream Vargr's Senghik Outon faith, but developed independently.

Senghik Outon is an abstractly-monotheistic form of Spiritualism, whose enthusiastic rites center around channeling the spirits of the dead in small congregational meetings, from "words of prophecy" messages to Voudoun-style possession. The Macumeranese equivalent adds several specific folk beliefs and doctrines, resulting in a "Santeria" form:

- An intermediate level of "demi-deities" between the abstract Godhead and spirits of mortal Vargr called "The Divine Pack"; though most analogous to "patron saints", in some branches these approximate the "Loa" of Voudoun. The most widespread branch has a sunrise-observance ritual of Morning Howls to the Divine Pack.
- Emphasis on the spirits of pack Ancestors looking out for their descendants, akin to pack-specific saints or "guardian angels". Some of these (especially the founders of a pack lineage) are not far off from demi-deities/patron saints and are included in the Morning Howls.
- Like mainstream Senghik Outon, there is no central hierarchy, though the Royal Pack's branch is the largest and is considered "first among equals".

In addition, Macumeran is a fertile ground for offworld missionaries whose faiths reflect Vargr sensibilities (or can easily be made to): small independent congregations and energetic charismatic worship.

Though not religions *per se*, many fraternal organizations (analogous to Freemasonry) also exist in parallel, many with overlapping memberships. These trans-pack Brother/Sisterhoods tend to stabilize Macumeranese society, acting as damper rods for the rapid-turnover "churn" of Vargr society.

Government

Vargr society is based around small-scale tribal/pack structures, with a lot of turnover among the pack leaders as beta males and beta bitches gain Charisma enough to challenge the alphas for their positions. Loyalties are very fluid, as Vargr will flock to support the new pack alpha. Once the change shakes down, the pack structure remains stable until some external change (even a succession crisis) triggers another interlude of chaos.

At its worst, this Charisma Churn becomes a banana republic "Coup of the Week". With much less lethal consequences for the loser; usually there is a public challenge (physical or non) and the loser steps down with reduced Charisma; sometimes he remains with the pack as a beta, sometimes he leaves as a packless wanderer.

Among Macumeranese Vargr, the existence of the above-mentioned cross-pack fraternal organizations ("Brotherhoods" or "Guilds") has damped out some of the chaotic excesses of this system through sheer inertia of size; the resulting society has drifted into a peculiarly-Vargr brand of feudalism and a world-wide limited monarchy. Feudal in that all packs and factions theoretically give allegiance to a "Royal Pack" who handles all dealings with offworlders and speaks for the whole world. In practice, it's Vargr; a swirl of packs and individuals gaining or losing Charisma and position tempered only by the inertia of large-scale organization.

The current Royal Pack has stayed "on the throne" for a record 300 local years, cultivating some impressive political skills which translate in game terms into higher Charisma.

In game terms, belonging to the Royal Pack gives a Vargr +1 to +4 Charisma due to "family connections", an otherwise-obscure Royal would get the +1; the monarch or his/her immediate sons/daughters the +4.

Succession among the Royals is typically-Vargr: "Electors" – high-Charisma individuals among the Royal Pack and most influential "Noble" packs and

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Brotherhoods/Guilds choose the next Alpha from the pack of immediate heirs within the Royal Pack, and an Alpha may be deposed and replaced by a vote of no confidence from the Electors. Continuity of administration is maintained by a secondary bureaucracy of single Vargr from various packs or packless "wanderers" who have effectively formed their own pack within the system.

Though the Royal Pack is the official (and theoretically-unified) planetary government, other packs and Brotherhoods and Guilds operate parallel "shadow governments" at all levels, though all theoretically owe fealty to the Royal Pack — sort of a Balkanization-without-Balkanization.

The Royal Pack holds fealty (not "control") only across Knaergannside, where 90% of the population reside; though some of the Antipodes is "civilized", most of the islands are split up into independent packs and fiefdoms, many of them with lower-tech "tribal" societies.

Armed Forces

The system maintains 25 regiments of ground forces, equipped to Tech Level 9 (Y2K technology); the 3 offworld-capable regiments are grouped into an "expeditionary division".

Except for the offworld-capable regiments and Royal Guard (a single regiment drawn from the Royal Pack), armed forces are raised by feudal levy from sanctioned mercenary/corsair packs. These levies can be any size from small units to full regiments, and often see action against each other, in minor inter-pack skirmishing.

As a requirement for Royal sanction, the Royal Pack insists on more-or-less standardized organization and equipment, so sanctioned units are fairly consistent. This standard organization is unique, with squads, companies, and regiments the only permanent units; platoons and battalions are *ad hoc* combat teams organized as needed in the field. Most of the heavy equipment is either bought offworld or produced under license, as Agudegh has only limited manufacturing capability.

Vargr units (especially feudal levy "militias") normally elect their own officers and commanders according to Charisma; even in Royal Guard units, appointed officers normally team with and command through the highest-Charisma leader-type in the unit regardless of formal rank. Since Charisma is so volatile, Vargr unit leadership can vary considerably. And often; if a commander loses Charisma in the field, the unit can depose and replace him/her in a "field mutiny" with a new high-Charisma commander.

Vargr morale is more fragile than humans; Vargr will often rout when ambushed or when the fight is going against them. However, they rally and recover morale much easier than humans, usually under new command after a field mutiny. Often a human unit has routed a Vargr OPFOR, only to find themselves blindsided by a rally and counterattack "under new management".

In Royal service, corsair packs/bands are contracted mercenary companies. Offworld, these corsairs maintain a quasi-legality as "mercenary units" and "privateers", and often hire out as such under the subsector's established Mercenary codes and bonding agencies. In addition, many "unbonded" units skulk and lurk on the edge, going corsair or criminal. (And, of course, a change in Charisma/command can move a mercenary/corsair pack to the other side of the line. Or back. It's Vargr. Woof.)

The system maintains 4000 tons of system defense assets — SDBs, fighters, patrol craft, surface missile bases, and surface anti-missile lasers — plus grants letters of marque to corsairs, contracting them to serve as planetary/system navy for specified durations; the system otherwise discourages corsairing under pressure from neighboring systems. Naturally, unbonded corsairs find ways around this.

As a satellite world, the hundred-diameter safe Jump limit is determined by the primary Knaerrgan, a Size 45 planet with a safe Jump distance of

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8,000,000km (intermediate between the "small gas giant" and "large gas giant" distance). As Agudegh is in orbit around Knaergann, use the "small gas giant" distance when boosting directly out and the "large gas giant" distance when going "the long way" around Knaergann.

Language

Macumeranese Vargr have a unique spread of language and dialects, descendants of Arrghoun instead of the usual Gvegh spoken by mainstream Vargr. (This is evidence for initial settlement during or immediately after the time of the Arrghoun-speaking Gvurrdon Hvaek.) The system appears to have been originally colonized by Arrghoun-speaking packs, and the language drifted during their system-wide Long Night.

Arrghoun itself is a dead language, having been replaced by the Gvegh language family some 900 years ago. Originally a trade pidgin, it is known for its simple word structure and lack of elaborate noun declensions and verb conjugations. Macumeranese Vargr speak dialects which bear the same relationship to original Arrghoun as Spanish or Italian does to Latin. The rise of mass media has diminished regional variations except on the islands of the Antipodes.

One example is the names of the planets in the system, which are in a very archaic Arrghoun. Except for Thorzarg Tsan ("Outer Gate"), the planetary names are the equivalent of "Macumeran I", "Macumeran II", etc. – literally "First Planet", "Second Planet", etc. The exceptions are the moons of Knaergrann ("Fourth Planet"), which use the suffix -degh ("World") – Agudegh ("Jewel World", presumably because it was naturally habitable) and Zhodegh ("Wandering World", presumably from its wandering motion in the sky of Agudegh).

Result: Macumeranese Vargr speak completely different tongues than offworld Vargr, with little or no commonality.

Zhodegh

Zhodegh D330411-8 Poor, Des, Non-Ind

(Macumeran IV-B, the smaller/outer moon of Knaergann)

Knaergann's outer moon, Zhodegh is a slightly-smaller, sandy-colored equivalent of Mars, partially "terraformed" during the initial colonization. Some ruins exist from that period, mostly buried under the sands, but none of the original Vargr there seem to have survived the Long Night. The current population of 50,000 are all post-Long Night settlement.

Zhodegh is also tidally-locked to Knaergann, with a roughly 170-hour day/night cycle (7.14 T-days, about three Agudegh days). Knaergann appears about half the size it does from Agudegh, and eclipses the sun only near the equinoxes themselves, while Agudegh is visible from Knaergannside, growing and shrinking as it orbits.

Though the "terraforming" lichens have resulted in an oxygen/nitrogen atmosphere, it is still much too thin to breathe unassisted and is tainted with windblown silica dust. So thin that liquid water barely exists on the surface – what surface water there is are night-time frosts which usually sublime/evaporate during the day.

The sky is dark at the zenith and sandy-colored near the horizon, with occasional cirrus clouds.

Local vegetation is mostly lichen of varying colors, but darker than the native soil; you can see the seasons change from Agudegh

Small settlements (none larger than a few thousand population) dot the world under domes or dug-in underground against the long scorching days, freezing nights, and not-quite-breathable atmosphere, working various forms of resource extraction, Agudegh-forming, and "rooning" artifacts left over from before The Long Night. The three largest of these settlements have planetary-defense bases and D ports.

The Asteroid Belts

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Knaergann (and Agudegh/Zhodegh) orbit directly between two asteroid belts. At Tech Level 9 with offworld connections, both Inner and Outer Belts are Belter country open to exploitation, with a lot of Vargr charismatic chaos above and beyond that of normal Belter operations.

Inner Belt D000363-8 Asteroid, Non-Ind

Macumeran Inner Belt is carbonaceous chondrites and various stony asterioids, with a permanent population of some 5000 belters. Much of the asteroid mining here is organized by corporate bodies (Guild, large pack, offworld corp, or partnerships of all the above) based out of dwarf planets in the Belt, with few freelancers or independents. Similar to a more scattered Vargr version of the movie Outland.

Outer Belt E000304-8 Asteroid, Non-Ind

Macumeran Outer Belt is nickel-iron and other heavy metals, with a permanent population of around 9000 belters. Unlike the Inner Belt, the Outer Belt is the realm of independent Belters who have formed into *ad-hoc* packs; solo prospecting, claim-jumping, and even minor Corsairing – the direct Antipodes of the Inner Belt. Many of the independents are exiles from pack politics or asocial self-exiles/"Mountain Man" types; even the *ad-hoc* packs and Belter "bases" are more akin to a spacegoing Deadwood than Outland.

Adventure Nuggets

Wolf among the Yotes: Mainstream Vargr from offworld visit Macumeran. Local Vargr are a distinct ethnic type with an isolated culture; opportunities for culture shock. They don't look like Vargr, they don't smell like Vargr, they don't speak like Vargr, they don't act like Vargr…

Don't Mess with the Missionary Man: Offworld missionaries of a charismatic human faith are making converts among the Macumeranese Vargr. The existing native-religion packs don't like having their members rustled and try to win them back. Could go anywhere from "can you top this" competition to win members back to violence.

Woof! You're my PhD thesis: A variant of Wolf among the Yotes. Arrghoun is a dead language; some Vargr linguists have been searching for extant Arrghoun-speaking worlds for study. Well, here's one off in this backwater cluster and where the specimens are the scientists will swarm. The locals may not take this very well. Especially when the most interesting dialects are spoken on the isolated islands of the Antipodes. Which leads directly into:

Kaboona say "But first, SHU-SHU!": So far, we've assumed on-world means the TL9 civilization of Knaerrganside. What about adventuring in the more low-tech and chaotic "South Seas" of the Antipodes? Could go anywhere from tropical resorts to pulp South Sea adventures to "Cruise of the Kawa" absurdities to Cargo Cults to "Death by Shu Shu" danger. Above and beyond the natural Antipodes hazards of superstorms, seismic quakes/tsunamis, and volcanoes. Spotty communications and transportation could leave high-tech Travellers at the mercy of shortwave radio and/or crazy coyote bush pilots.

On the Frontier: Macumeran Outer Belt is just becoming established; as time passes and the system develops, the existing small Belter packs and lone Belters (often exiled losers from pack politics) will yield to organized/corporate asteroid mining as is done in the Inner Belt. Civilization (or at least the Vargr version of it) is coming to the frontier. A strike of some valuable mineral (Second Stable Series? Ransdell Metal a la Bronson's Star?) could trigger a rush. WELCOME TO FURRY DEADWOOD!

Brotherhood of the Coast: Corsairing (i.e. Piracy) is a spacegoing Vargr's racial pastime. Officially, Macumeran System has no corsair activity; under pressure from the other systems in its subsector, it operates only licensed privateers (effectively "naval mercenary companies") under official Letters of Marque. However, some of the privateers might do a little freelance raiding on the side and/or corsair

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bands might operate in secret from covert boltholes in the outer system. Keeping secrecy (or sniffing out corsair bands) provides lots of opportunities for cloak-and-dagger as well as going Viking, as a corsair's survival here depends on keeping their existence secret. This could be combined with "On the Frontier", as the lone Belters of the Outer Belt would be natural go-betweens.

Designer's Notes

The main world of Agudegh was originally rolled up (under the temporary name of "Lupine") as part of a subsector for a 1982 *Traveller* campaign but never came into play.

Its accompanying system (named after a "land of dog-headed people" from medieval travellers' tales) was randomly rolled from *Book 6: Scouts* some years later, breaking down into three distinct zones (inner, middle, and outer) with the middle zone prime real estate of a small gas giant with habitable moon/satellite main world between two asteroid belts.

Appendix: Macumeranese Ground Forces Organization

Though raised by feudal levy from sanctioned corsair packs, the Royal Pack insists on more-or-less standardized organization and equipment as a requirement for Royal sanction, so sanctioned units are fairly consistent.

This standard organization is unique and complex, with squads, companies, and regiments the only permanent units; platoons and battalions are ad hoc combat teams organized as needed in the field.

Much of the weaponry are offworld designs and/or imports, as Agudegh has only limited manufacturing capability.

Light Infantry/Militia Company

The basic unit is the section, a squad of two fire teams with an attached heavy weapons team. Six sections plus six support weapons sections (three direct-fire of a different type than the squad weapons teams, three indirect-fire) make up a company. The company support weapons sections may be Vargr-packed or mobile on "Technicals" (repurposed all-terrain trucks mounting a heavy weapon such as a Tac Missile, 23mm autocannon, or mortar).

These six sections are organized into *ad hoc* platoons, under either a "Three by Two" or "Two by Three" system.

- Three-by-Two: Three *ad hoc* line platoons, each of two sections plus one company heavy weapons team/technical. Indirect-fire (mortar) sections are kept together with HQ as a fourth platoon.
- Two-by-Three: Two *ad hoc* line platoons of three sections; company heavy weapons are kept together as a third dedicated heavy weapons platoon.

Mechanized Company

Three tanks, three APCs (each carrying an infantry section) and a two-vehicle HQ. The HQ is always a command post APC with one attached weapons vehicle, either a tank-chassis point defense vehicle or an APC-chassis mortar carrier with rapid-fire autoloading mortar.

- Three-by-Two: Three *ad hoc* line platoons, each of one tank and one APC.
- Two-by-Three: Three-tank *ad hoc* tank platoon and three-APC infantry platoon.

All armored vehicles use the same basic chassis, a twelve-wheeled semi-rollagon; each wheel is independently-powered with large low-aspect balloon tires. These are imported designs, from the human world of Grenna in the Dole Subcluster.

- Tanks mount a 130mm CPR gun in a low "onion-dome" turret along with a 23mm autocannon. Macumeranese prefer the more flexible CPR gun instead of the Grennan's HKP hypervelocity cone-bore which can only fire KEAP rounds.
- APCs are straight imports from Grenna, twelve-passenger vehicles mounting a remote-mount 23mm autocannon. Each normally carries a standard infantry section of two fire teams plus a heavy weapons team (usually a light tac missile).

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FAV Company (Recon, Attack, or Mixed)

Six sections, each of two FAVs. FAVs are like "dune-buggy technicals", fast four-wheeled vehicles, either unarmored or armored against small-arms fire, mounting a 23mm autocannon plus either sensors/stealth (for recon) or a light tac missile (for assault).

In the field, the company deploys as either six independent (scout) sections, three two-section platoons, or two three-section platoons. If deployed "Three-by-Two" as independent platoons, indirect-fire sections (single mortar on technical) might be attached to each platoon; otherwise, they are usually concentrated in a mortar platoon at Company HQ.

Protected Forces Company

Protected Forces are equipped for offworld operations, especially vacuum and/or hostile atmosphere conditions. They are the only grav-mobile regular forces on Agudegh, riding in G-carriers. They are equipped accordingly, often with imported TL10bis equipment – early vacc-capable Combat Armor, recoilless gyrojet weapons instead of CPRs (ARL gyrorifle, ARL-SAW gyro-LMG, 20mm Heavy Gyrorifle/LAG, 20mm gyrocannon HMGs), and tac missiles.

A company consists of six G-carrier sections (grav APCs of similar capacity to the wheeled APCs and mounting 20mm gyrocannons), three "guncarriers" (G-carrier based grav tanks with laser main gun and 20mm gyrocannon secondary), and an HQ with attached grav-mobile

- Three-by-Two: Three *ad hoc* platoons, each of 2 G-carriers and one grav tank.
- Two-by-Three: Two *ad hoc* platoons of 3 G-carriers and one of 3 grav tanks.
- HQ is always one command post G-carrier with any additional heavy weapons (usually artillery or point-defense lasers) attached on G-carrier-based grav chassis.

There are only two or three Protected Forces regiments (each the usual six companies) on Agudegh; all are Royal Pack/Royal Guard and are the most likely regiments to deploy offworld.

Regiment

A regiment consists of six line companies (which may or may not be of the same type) plus Regimental Artillery (usually artillery, point defense, or direct-fire heavy weapons in six-mount batteries). They are also split into *ad hoc* battalion task forces on a Three-by-Two or Two-by-Three pattern, with regimental assets usually attached on a pro-rated basis.

Artillery are TL9 rocket howitzers and/or MRLs.

There is no permanent organization above regiment, but regiments can be grouped into brigades or divisions as-needed or for administrative purposes.

Corsairs

Corsairs use any organization they damn well please, with little or no commonality. Most corsair bands/ships have landing parties smaller than company-strength; the most common organization is two-sections-plus-heavy-weapon-team platoons such as are found in the Light Infantry/Militia or Protected Forces Three-by-Two.

Designer's Notes

Macumeranese armed forces organization are based on another canid race, the "Rauwoofs" of FGU's 1980 *Space Marines* SF miniature rules by A Mark Ratner.

Since six sub-units is too wide a span of command, the main difference is in-the-field organization into the "Three-by-Two" or "Two-by-Three" *ad hoc* combat teams/task forces. Vargr tend to be very chaotic in general, and would probably go for a system with a lot of individual variation. It's a miracle that the Royal Pack has enough clout and Charisma to enforce what standardization there is. ✪

#20: Mixed Feelings

It's happened before, in 1987 and 1993. Then again in 1996 and 1998. These are the dates, of course, of the release of *MegaTraveller*, *Traveller: The New Era*, *Marc Miller's Traveller* and *GURPS Traveller* respectively. 2002 and 2007 might also be added for *Traveller*[20] and *Traveller HERO*. And 2008 and 2013 for the current Mongoose *Traveller* and *Traveller*[5].

Each time referees and players have faced learning new rules. Each time there's been the adjustment of things not being quite as they were before. Some changes have been bigger—TNE's switch to the standardized Game Designers' Workshop rules is one example. Some might cite *GURPS*, particularly with its Imperial units of measurement. Some have even introduced dice of different shapes to the traditional d6! Some have been smaller adjustments—the change from the original *Traveller* to Mongoose *Traveller* for example. This is before you even start to think about setting revisions which are also the subject of much pain and loathing on occasions, even when they're fascinating.

Of course, not everyone has been through every change. There are those who've steadfastly stuck with 'classic' *Traveller* and know no other system as though they were some kind of heresy. There are those embedded in the *GURPS* multiverse and the opportunity for switching between settings. There are no doubt those who were introduced to *Traveller* with Mongoose and know nothing else. There may even be fans for whom T5 is the bible and no other version will do. Some of course may have switched once or twice—as I did from the original rules to *MegaTraveller* and then Mongoose. (Which isn't to say I haven't loved other editions, just that I've not played under them or had to learn actual rules[1].)

Soon, it's been announced, we'll have another date to add to the roll call above: 2016. Mongoose Publishing have announced a second edition of their rule set to be published next year. It's different enough to be considered a new version with skills, for example, changing. Conversion between 2008 and 2016 rules shouldn't be difficult, but it will be an adjustment, more to learn (and unlearn) and more choices of what a referee wants to manage.

Naturally I understand the need to be contemporary although that seems to mean designing pages with text on graphics that are difficult to read. Of course I understand the need to appeal to new generations of gamers who don't have any knowledge of what's gone before. I can even see something of the sexiness of isometric deckplans even though they are rather useless for placing characters or objects accurately. The revision isn't aimed at the likes of myself who is no doubt going to come to cherish it eventually regardless of any faults. I just struggle with having to learn, for example, combat again when I still battle with the 2008 version because I do it so little. Or I wonder how much it's a way of selling the same setting material yet again. Or I feel daunted by having to revise manuscripts not yet submitted for publication to meet the new standards. Or I wish, sometimes, that more attention was paid to getting the basics right—such as editing and proofreading—rather than the flash and the whizzy. And I really feel for those third party publishers who've invested a lot already in supporting material which will now feel outdated even if it's still excellent and useful.

But I'm also excited to see *Traveller* breaking new ground; attracting new players; introducing new aspects of rules or settings that we've not seen before. I'm delighted that Mongoose's recent slowing of titles isn't due to losing interest but due to their work on the new edition. I'm thrilled that *Traveller* continues to go from strength to strength. Long may that continue. And I'm sure that I'm going to enjoy creating, and playing and writing with the new book(s). I wish Mongoose all the best with the venture and despite my mixed feelings want the future to get on and arrive now.

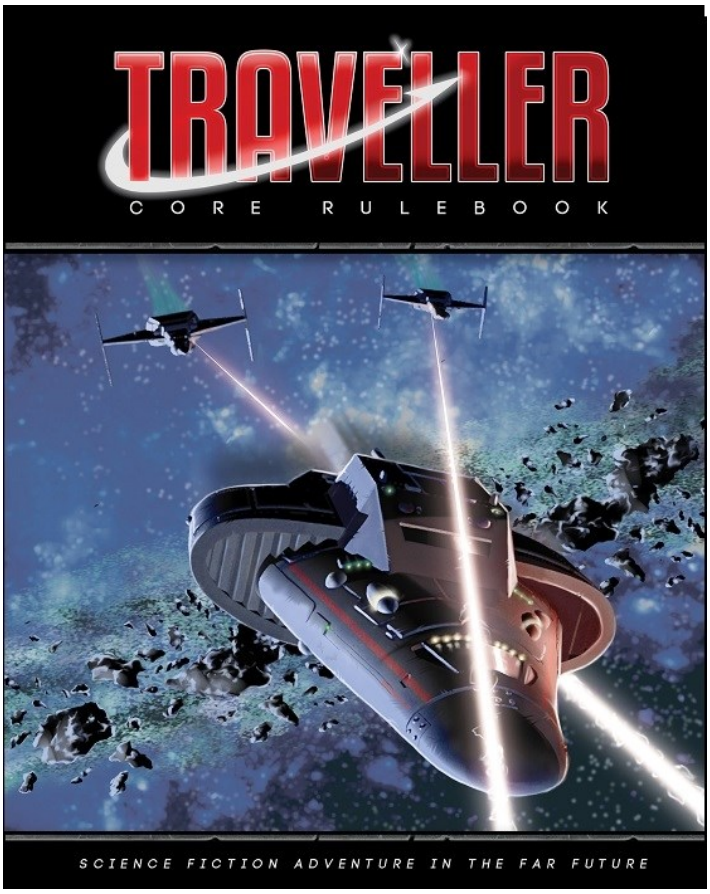
[1] *That's not quite true. I have waded through two different editions of GURPS character generation in order to provide stats for JTAS contributions and I'm pretty certain I have some unused MMT bits and bobs in my files.*

Traveller J Core Rulebook (Beta)

Reviewed by Megan Robertson

Traveller J Core Rulebook (Beta). Matthew Sprange.
Mongoose Publishing http://www.mogoosepublishing.com
248pp., PDF
US$20.00/UK£13.19 (*Credit toward final PDF purchase from same source*)

This review originally appeared on rpg-resource.org.uk in Sept. 2015



OK, so why do we need a new set of rules? Let's see what is here and how it improves on what has gone before. It is supposed to be broadly backwards-compatible with existing Mongoose *Traveller* materials, but will of course have resources—sourcebooks and adventures—crafted specifically for it in due course.

The Introduction begins by explaining what *Traveller* is: a science-fiction role-playing game of the far future that can be used to play out whatever you fancy—and adds that if you have a favourite SF film or TV series (or presumably book!), *Traveller* ought to be able to replicate it on your tabletop. It touches on the Third Imperium (the Official *Traveller* Universe, as it's known) and gets a little muddled in the distinction between the players of the game (that's you and me) and the characters that they play. I am not (alas) a *Traveller*, my character is, the lucky tode! It talks about the sort of adventures and campaigns you can enjoy and runs through some game conventions (standard terminology) before explaining the concept of Tech Levels and, in brief sentences, showing what each one means from TL0 to TL15.

Next, Chapter 1: Character Creation introduces the unique Traveller 'life path' character generation process. It is recommended that a group of players generate their characters together, primarily so as to establish connections between them—it's also to be noted that lots of players enjoy creating characters as a game in its own right even when they don't need one! (However there is a new connections bonus that can lead to an additional skill level for both characters involved.) The process is well explained with plenty of detail (and suggestions, even here, for adventures) and there is a large flowchart that makes the process clear. As a double-spread page that would be fine, it's worth printing out at least those two pages from the PDF to get the full benefit. Each career—and the pre-career options of university or military academy—provides the character with not just skills but life-events that have in-game consequences as well as game-mechanical ones. Overall, the actual process has not changed much, but it is laid out and explained well. Character generation is primarily human-centric, with a brief mention of aliens and scant details of Aslan and Vargr—the intention is that they will be covered in separate sourcebooks. Tucked at the end is a new career, that of the Prisoner. It's not one that you choose for your character, but events that may arise during character generation will land him there without the option!

This is followed by Chapter 2: Skills and Tasks, which gets down to the business of explaining how to use the skills that your character has and the task resolution system. Although still based on the classic 'roll 2 dice against a Referee-set difficulty' the use of modifiers other than those based on the character's

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own capabilities has been replaced by the use of extra 'boon' or 'bane' dice. These come into play when conditions are beneficial or adverse to the attempt being made. A third die is rolled. If conditions are favourable, the player discards the lowest roll and uses the other two dice to resolve the task as normal. If things are against him, he discards the highest die roll before resolving the task. Neat, and a lot easier than having to determine just how beneficial or otherwise the circumstances might be! The idea is that task difficulties and applicable modifiers ought to be fairly standard for any given task, all you need to decide is if the circumstances under which you are trying to accomplish it warrant a boon or a bane die to be added to your roll.

Chapter 3: Combat then takes a long, hard look at how fighting is run within the game. Combat is still deadly, and relatively speedy. Characters use their skill in the weapon they are using, and wield them in initiative-order sequence in combat rounds. The system has been streamlined and integrated with personal combat, vehicle combat and starship combat all working the same way.

Naturally, getting caught up in a brawl is not the only danger to be faced in the far future, so Chapter 4: Encounters and Dangers provides loads of hazards and the game mechanics necessary to deal with them. Environmental dangers abound… but fortunately there is also a section on healing. Animals (which may or may not be hostile) are also covered here with a broad outline of a system to create animals and encounters with them. Several examples are given—and it can be great fun thinking up exotic critters for the worlds the party visits in its travels. Animals, of course, are not the only beings they will encounter, so there is also a section about NPCs which includes quick generation of them and the sort of encounters that may be had… there's even a rudimentary patron encounter system here for generating really fast adventure seeds on the fly.

Next comes Chapter 5: Equipment. Starting off with notes on money and standards of living it soon launches into The Core Collection, a catalogue of much of what the well-equipped traveller might need—which is presented like a real-world catalogue complete with illustrations (well, some of them, and plenty space earmarked for more) and sales-speak as well as the necessary game mechanics to use them. As well as the weapons, armour and gear you'd expect, the Core Collection also includes augmentations—cybernetic or biological modifications to improve on or even add things to the standard human.

Chapter 6: Vehicles follows; but here the emphasis is on what vehicles can do and how they are operated. It also includes vehicle combat. Quite a few examples are provided for those who want to get going quickly. This is followed by Chapter 7: Starship Operations which looks at the bread and butter of running a starship and starship encounters, including things like running costs and starship security. There's a separate chapter for starship combat, which allows characters to play a part in different roles—and makes starship captains worry about how much power they are using! Both ship-to-ship combat and boarding actions are covered here.

Next, Chapter 9: Common Spacecraft looks at ships which are familiar to the experienced *Traveller* player, but presents them in a new and visual manner. Statistics appear in a neat panel that gives you all you need to know, whilst deckplans have gone isometric. This gives a nice impression of what it would actually be like to wander around the ship in question and matches up well with the external views. They won't work so well as old-style deckplans for people who like to run combat aboard like a miniatures skirmish, though. There's a good range of standard craft here from traders and scouts to liners and yachts.

Separated out—not everyone likes to use them—is Chapter 10: Psionics. (They are, however, mentioned within the lifepath parts of character generation: with several opportunities to be contacted and

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Critics' Corner

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tested. If you don't want to use them, you'll have to roll again if you get one of those results.) The default model is that psionics are rare and viewed with offical caution if not outright hostility—in the Third Imperium, for example, they are banned. If you do choose to use them, psionic strength and skills are covered here as well as the psion career path.

Next comes Chapter 11: Trade. This provides a system for conducting interstellar trade that manages to be quite detailed and yet abstracts the process to a few die rolls, a neat method that allows a party to focus as much or as little attention on it as they please whilst still providing the possibility of a rationale for their travels and an income to fund it.

Finally, where are you going to travel to? This is covered by Chapter 12: World and Universe Creation which lays out the way in which worlds, systems and sectors are described and how to design them, and Chapter 13 which details the Sindal Sub-Sector in the Trojan Reaches—the new setting to be developed for this latest iteration of *Traveller*.

Overall, this book presents something that is still recognisably *Traveller* but with the benefit of 30-odd years of game design building on the original concepts. It shows great promise particularly in terms of integration and streamlining of game mechanics, and presentation values look as if they will be good too - although of course in this playtest version quite a lot of the art is missing. There are also a few typos which will hopefully be caught before the final version… but it bodes well for the future of the game.✪

Active Measures

Solstice

by Michael Brown

Synopsis: Tensions threaten to boil over aboard a stellar mining station targeted for destruction by a religious fanatic.

Solstice is designed for 2-5 Classic *Traveller* characters of varied career backgrounds, who may not have worked together before the adventure; the referee can easily use this scenario to gather a new player group. No particular skills or equipment are necessary, although skills such as Vacc Suit, Mechanical, and Engineering may be valuable. Useful former careers are Belter and Scientist (*Supplement 4: Citizens of the Imperium*.)

Author's Note: for inclusiveness, and to preserve the egalitarian flavor of the Far Future, this adventure uses the gender-neutral pronouns *xe* (in place of he/she) and *xir* (in place of him/his or her/hers.)

Pre-Adventure Preparation

The referee should select or create the following items:

- A star system with a mainworld of Tech Level C or better, a Trade Classification of Industrial (In), and a star of type G or less.
- A reason for the group to take work aboard the station. For example, perhaps their starship is in need of (very expensive) repairs, or they owe someone a substantial amount of money.
- (Optional) An encounter table for interactions with the station's crew, similar to that found in *Book 3: Worlds and Adventures*.

In addition, the referee should create a Heat score (see "Life Aboard Arinna" below) for use during the adventure.

Prologue: The Sun is New Each Day

None of you remembers just how you all got stuck in this system and it no longer matters. What does matter is that it takes credits to get off this world. Credits that are woefully lacking. Credits that you don't see a way of making any time soon.

But then a lucky break: one of you spotted an open advertisement for temporary workers on the system's stellar mining platform. You've heard of the place: a station devoted and equipped to draw-

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ing raw plasma from the system's star and extracting the resulting useful elements, as well as acting as a source of power. Difficult and dangerous work, but paying enough credits to eventually buy your way out of your troubles…for now.

One cattle call, several rounds of interviews, and a 3 day shuttle flight later (during which a fellow passenger, one Vaulis Piirsin, makes a pest of xir-self), you watch through the heavily polarized portholes as the platform looms closer; a thin, bright plume of stellar plasma lancing toward it from the primary 3 solar radii away. The shuttle pilot "thanks you for choosing so-and-so Spacelines, please observe all safety precautions upon disembarking" and you're unceremoniously dumped onto a dirty, grubby installation among surly, roughneck types who look you over like lions sizing up prey.

Welcome to Stellar Mining Station Arinna.

One: Ascend the Brightest Heaven

This system meets some of its material and energy needs by drawing and refining plasma directly from the surface of its star. The result is a near-limitless supply of raw material. The heroes, in an attempt to earn enough money to leave the system, have signed on to work in the local stellar mining operation.

Once the heroes are onboard, the miners immediately show themselves to be a surly lot suspicious of outsiders. They react to the group at -2; ignore results of "Violent. Immediate attack" or "Hostile. Attack on (x)," for now, but note which heroes drew the reactions. Before trouble starts, the heroes are hustled into an orientation (consisting of a holographic presentation of the information found under "Stellar Mining Station Arinna", below), a short tour, the signing of forms, safety briefings, and initial skill assessments; all of which takes eight hours. Afterward, the team is left at liberty.

The heroes doubtless learned the location of the station's bar during the tour. Any who return there finds it well attended. Vaulis Piirsin (see below, and note special instructions), also tags along. Unfortunately, the hostility the group encountered upon arrival aboard the station still exists. The PCs are subjected to hard looks and veiled insults, with the heroes who previously sparked "violent" or "hostile" reactions as the main targets. Any act of returned ill-will starts a fight that quickly becomes a barroom brawl; the referee may run it in whatever way xe sees fit.

Adventurers in a position to do so notice that during the brawl, Piirsin doesn't fight xir opponents. Instead, he has a brief, quiet talk with them, whereupon they either choose another target or protect xir. Up to 1D+1 opponents take xir side in this manner.

The fight ends in 4D combat rounds when station security arrives. No one is seriously punished since the station is a rather bare-knuckled place, but the newcomers are warned that any similar occurrence in the future means demerits (see below).

If no PCs patronized the bar, ignore the above. But in the ensuing days, they notice that Piirsin seems to be making fast friends among the other miners, with 1D+1 always seeming to hang around xir (see below). If they took part in the bar fight, they recognize several of xir new buddies as would-be opponents. If asked about it, xe simply chalks it up to mutual respect and understanding.

The next day, the adventurers are assigned to their work areas, as detailed under "Life Aboard Arinna," below. Each adventurer is paid Cr500/week. This figure assumes the company has already deducted for basic life support; anything else may be purchased from the company store. The store (not detailed here) carries a reasonable stock of supplies and sundries, but not weapons. The referee is free to create a list of items found therein or use published canon lists. However, the influx of cheap energy and raw materials has translated into economic inflation; prices are 30% higher than published.

Two: Doubt Thou the Stars Are Fire

The referee should allow the group to settle into their new routine for 1-3 weeks, using the weekly tasks and encounters given under "Life Aboard

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Arinna" above. At the end of this period, events take a much darker turn:

During the heroes' shift a plasma breach alarm sounds and fire control teams are scrambled. Any PCs present are witness to the reason for the excitement: one of their fellow workgroup members is unhappily standing directly in front of a section of plasma conduit that breaches. The worker is killed in seconds by the resulting wash of plasma; xe doesn't even have time to scream.

The plasma breach sparks a fire which the PCs are expected to help fight. Firefighting equipment is nearby, but not all heroes will be able to get their hands on it. Each PC does so on 5+. Only one throw is allowed per individual in the area.

To run the fire, the referee should begin by throwing 2D+3. This represents the fire's intensity (i) and the amount of damage it does to living flesh per combat round of direct contact. Multiply the intensity by the following:

- 10i to determine the fire's initial size in cubic meters.
- 100i to determine the fire's initial "hit points" (see below.)
- 5i determine the fire's growth. This number is added to the fire's size and hit points each interval.

Finally, throw 1D. This is the interval, the number of combat rounds it takes for the fire to add another level of growth, assuming enough combustible material around.

The effort to put out the blaze is conducted per *Book 1* combat. Each piece of firefighting equipment does 2D against the fire's hit points; once they reach zero, it's snuffed. But note the Growth factor above.

The station is equipped with a fire-suppression system, but it doesn't trigger until the fire has grown to 350 cubic meters. When it comes on line, it does an additional 6D per round against the fire until it's either put out or has grown beyond control.

If the fire reaches 500 cubic meters, it's considered out of control and the station's computer begins the decompression process for the entire deck. Decompression can't be stopped once started; anyone who doesn't leave immediately (4+ to escape) takes 2D damage vacuum exposure per combat round per the rules in *Snapshot* (available from Far Future Enterprises.)

Once the fire is out, the chaos dies down and the workgroups return to their duties; Station Superintendent Wesleigh Devereaux (see below), arrives flanked by two aides to inspect the damage. Xe makes a great show of concern, talking to witnesses, and displaying leadership. But xe's lying; an ex-Bureaucrat or an ex-Diplomat can determine this automatically; anyone else does so on an 11+. As xe talks with the heroes, throw xir Reaction to each and take note of the highest result. If there's a tie, note which PC has the lower SOC.

In the wake of the excitement, the heroes may (9+) note the station's chief astrophysicist, Aeolwyn Chancellor (see below), paying a rare visit to the Refinery. Xe takes Devereaux aside and has what looks to be a hushed but heated discussion. Xe storms off after a few minutes without talking to anyone else. Devereaux stays mum, citing confidentiality. Heroes who "eavesdrop" using Telepathy or Clairvoyance hear Chancellor accuse Devereaux of "ignoring the data" and warning that "disaster's right around the corner" while xe's focused on chasing credits.

1D hours later, Devereaux summons the PC who elicited the highest reaction from her. She offers xir a chance to work for her, keeping a close eye on Chancellor and passing along information on xir (Chancellor) to xir (Devereaux). As a secondary mission, they're also to pass along tidbits of information concerning events among the workers. To force the PC into compliance, xe implies that if the hero refuses to play ball, xe'll put the word out that xe's a snitch regardless. Once that word reaches the other miners, unpleasantness is bound to ensue. But xe also sweetens the pot by offering 10% more pay each week along with other, unspecified benefits.

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If the adventurer refuses, Devereaux keeps xir word; xe spreads word that the hero is a mole, with the result that reactions must be thrown against the adventurer again, at an additional –2. In addition, she makes sure the hero is assigned to the dirtiest, most dangerous jobs in the refinery (–4 to the weekly success throw thereafter.) If the PC agrees, Devereaux expects a report at least once a week. In addition to the above throws for success and rumors, Devereaux's pawn must also throw 9+ each week to pick up on any misdeeds by xir fellow miners. These aren't important to the adventure; the referee may make up whatever minor transgressions xe likes (such things as contraband, minor scuffles, and petty theft are common in a place like Arinna.) But each time the hero makes a report, xe must throw 9+ to avoid the other miners finding out and branding the informer accordingly.

Since Chancellor was specifically cited by Devereaux, the team may want to find out more about xir. How they get the information is their choice, but the base chance of them getting useful information is 10+. Devereaux's puppet gets a DM of +4 due to access to confidential files. If the throw to gather intel comes up a natural 2, Chancellor is alerted and requests they stop or be reported to management. Diligent investigation reveals that Chancellor's especially concerned about the star's recent activity.

Investigating Dr. Chancellor offers the side benefit of putting the heroes in a position to intervene when they interrupt a group of miners beating Chancellor up in a back corridor. The miners—whom the adventurers will recognize as being among Piirsin's new friends—number the same as the PCs, and are initially unarmed. If the adventurers prove to be too tough, however, the opponents pick up whatever's handy as a weapon. They'll flee once 30% of them have been neutralized.

By the time the PCs rescue him, Chancellor has taken 3D damage. If xe's still conscious—and the PCs haven't tipped xir off that they've been investigating xir—xe requests that xe be taken to xir quarters instead of Medical, where the ruffians will no doubt try to finish him off.

Three: Time is the Fire in Which We Burn

If the PCs ask Chancellor about xir work or xir suspicions of the star's activity, xe'll eagerly discuss them. In xir role of studying the star, xe's found an abnormal increase in magnetic activity in the areas in which the station has used its meson gun to "prime" the stellar material. Xe's traced the cause to the way the meson beam interacts with the star's magnetic lines of force. The result has been pressure and plasma plumes that have sometimes been only barely controllable. The plasma breach that killed the worker was caused by a sudden uncontrollable surge in the plume. Worse, long-term problems are occurring in that pressure is building up deep within the star that, sooner or later, is going to result in a coronal mass ejection (CME) that's sure to destroy the station with all hands.

Xe's tried to bring this to Devereaux's attention to no avail. Meanwhile, xe's been collecting mounting evidence of the coming disaster and storing it in xir portion of the station's computer. While xe hasn't yet pinpointed when the CME will occur, xir data—based on an algorithm xe devised to calculate the rate of increase—indicates that it will be sometime in the coming week.

When xe tries to show them the algorithm, xe discovers it missing; xir computer has been hacked and some of xir files deleted. Heroes with Computer skill observe that the data deletions are precise and surgical, suggesting a modicum of skill. The pattern of the file deletions suggests that someone wanted to get rid of only data concerning the star's unusual activity, leaving data on its normal state alone. Curiously, a file Chancellor kept concerning information on the Church of Stellar Divinity (see below) was among those deleted.

The party has a chance to track the digital assailant forensically, on a throw of 13+ (DM: Computer

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skill.) If successful, the group finds that the attack came from a terminal in the habitat area.

The PCs now know that the station is in danger; a person or persons unknown for unfathomable reasons want that danger to occur; and the Station Superintendent is more concerned about the flow of credits and xir grudge with Chancellor. With clues falling into place and attacks on them mounting, the PCs should realize they're in a position to prevent the station's destruction. Chancellor's injuries prevent xir from helping directly, but xe promises to try and rebuild the algorithm so the impending disaster can be monitored.

A PC working for Devereaux is in a tough spot. Xe's expected to report this turn of events to the superintendent ASAP. On the other hand, doing so might jeopardize efforts to save the station as Devereaux feels xe must protect xir assets. Making the report exposes the adventurer to being outed as a snitch (9+).If the adventurer makes the report, be sure to make the throw to be outed as a snitch (9+). Devereaux promises simply to "look into it," but on hir way out of the office, the hero notices (on 11+) the Superintendent going for the comm.

Unfortunately for the heroes the clock starts ticking. The referee should throw 4Dx10; this is the number of hours until a CME obliterates the station with all hands (xe can of course change this figure.) This figure should be further divided by ten; these represent timepoints in which increasing "wild" flare activity occurs—at the 4th, 6th, 8th, and 9th timepoints. The 10th of course is when the CME occurs. The flares do damage to the station per the rules in *Book 2: Starships*. Referees with *Book 5: High Guard* can use the tables therein instead, with a hit occurring on 7+ and damage as a plasma gun.

The adventurers of course have no knowledge of when the flares hit or when the CME is due. Chancellor's algorithm—if xe gets it rebuilt in time—can give them that knowledge. The referee should throw 1D; this is the number of hours it takes xir to write the program. A PC with Computer skill can assist xir, providing a DM to the throw equal to hir (the PC's) Computer skill minus 1. The effort succeeds on 10+. Failure means another 1D hours and another success throw. If a stellar flare damages the station's computer, impose a -2 DM to subsequent throws.

The flares naturally raise the heat and radiation levels. The referee should immediately impose another HEA damage throw for the station per the rules below.

In the meantime, the group still needs to find out who wants the station destroyed. Their best clue (if they successfully traced the hacker) leads them to Azar Khurshid (see below), a low-level IT officer. The adventurers immediately recognize xir as one of Piirsin's boon companions. Xe talks—with very little persuasion—about anything the team wants to know except who encouraged xir to hack Chancellor's computer. A Reaction throw of 10+ (Responsive) makes xir talk anyway (DMs: Liaison or Interrogation skill, or +1 per point of physical pain). If so, the team learns that the one who put Khurshid up to it is none other than Vaulis Piirsin.

As the adventurers are leaving Khurshid's quarters, they get a comm call from Chancellor. They don't hear much—sounds of a struggle; and a strained cry, abruptly cut off. Clearly there's trouble. PCs rushing to Chancellor's quarters find themselves ambushed midway by a group of miners outnumbering them 2:1 and armed with metal rods (treat as Cudgel.) They attack until they've taken 60% casualties or all of the adventurers are unconscious.

If the heroes win, they reach Chancellor's quarters only to find sings of a violent struggle. The scientist is gone, xir computer drives wiped clean and xir hardcopy files missing. They might find a clue: a small item dropped by one of the abductors (referee's choice, but something the PCs previously observed on one or more of Piirsin's companions.) The result of this encounter plays out in similar fashion to that with Khurshid.

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If the heroes lose, they awaken locked up in Security. The referee must determine how much time has passed. The guards inform them that they've been terminated due to the discovery on their persons of plans to sabotage the station (forged, of course) and they'll be shipped out on the next shuttle. PCs working for Devereaux, however, have the opportunity to explain the situation to xir. Xe'll buy the story on a 9+ and have the entire group released and reinstated. Otherwise, the team must find its own means of escape. If they do so, they'll be hunted by Security for the rest of the adventure.

Four: And Pay No Worship to the Garish Sun

Events are now coming to a head. If the PCs were confined and subsequently escaped, they may be hunted by station security. They have yet to solve the mystery of where Dr. Chancellor—who was rebuilding an algorithm to monitor and predict the increasing stellar flare activity—was taken. But they have a suspect: Vaulis Piirsin, whose mysterious plans are almost complete. While it's probably still unclear what xe's up to, they should be quite convinced that xe's up to *something*, and they must put a stop to it.

Finding Piirsin has probably risen to the top of the group's to-do list. Xe's still aboard the station, but has gone into hiding, with xir contemporaries covering for him at every opportunity. Xe hasn't even shown up for the past several work shifts. The group can search for xir during their off hours, with each PC having a chance to find xir on a throw of 15+ (DMs: Liaison, Streetwise, or Tactics skill). If xe's found and confronted, he naturally denies the accusations, but sends 1D+5 goons to silence the adventurers later. If pushed, xe'll use xir Influence ability on a PC; this is a last resort, since it reveals xir as a psionic. Then, xe Influences the most powerful member of the group to protect xir while xe disappears.

Finding Chancellor might be easier. Xe's alive, but even more badly injured. The kidnappers are holding xir in a maintenance area in the warren of tunnels surrounding the station's spinal mount, where a small crew of Influenced crewmembers is working on the station's meson gun. Xe's guarded at all times by two goons, but the group can find xir on 12+ (same DMs as above) Piirsin visits the area frequently, and can be found there at any given time on 8+.

On Piirsin's orders, the men are rigging the weapon to hypercharge it and produce a much stronger meson beam than it's rated for. This will, of course, destroy it and damage the station. Meanwhile, the beam reaches deep into the star and creates an explosion big enough to bring about the coronal mass ejection ahead of Chancellor's calculations. Devereaux has no idea this is occurring and has ordered another burst of the cannon in 2D hours to start the next round of extractions. If the referee wants to amp up the tension, xe can shorten this time frame to minutes.

Piirsin's motivation is religious extremism. While the Church of Stellar Divinity is a generally peaceful sect, Piirsin believes that the station (and the corporation behind it) is raping a benevolent deity and is thus worthy of destruction. Xe is quite devoted to xir self-styled cause, and prepared to die for it.

Piirsin's people outnumber the PCs 3:1. Fortunately for the adventurers, roughly 30% of the opponents are engineers working on the meson gun; they only fight if attacked. Another 20% are nowhere near as potent as the heroes. The enemies use heavy tools (treat as Cudgel) except the ones guarding Chancellor; they're armed with homemade shivs (treat as Dagger). Although Influenced, none of them fight to the death; they flee once they've taken 25% casualties.

Depending on how loud the battle gets, Security may be alerted (10+. DMs: +2 if explosives or disruptions such as power outages are involved. +4 if deliberately trying to create a disturbance. -4 if the sta-

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tion is suffering full-blown rioting—see Heat below.) Once alerted, 1D+1 guards arrive in 1D+3 minutes.

Five: Fear No More the Heat O' the Sun

Once Piirsin's plan has been stopped and Chancellor has been rescued, the group's work isn't over. If the stellar flares have raised the station's Heat, riots may have broken out all over the station. Superintendent Devereaux may ask the group (through xir pawn) to help put down the violence. Xe's not particular about how they go about it; she's quite desperate at this point and the group may be able to get concessions out of xir, not the least of which is their exoneration if Security was after them.

Once the violence is dealt with, they should be able to assist Chancellor in recreating xir algorithm and making xir case to move the station. Faced with the evidence of events leading to this point, Devereaux has little choice but to compromise. Xir resentment is aimed against both Chancellor and the PCs from then on, however. And she takes it out on the workers by making them foot the bill for lost production associated with moving the station. Everyone can expect to lose half a week's wages, but at least there's no longer the danger of being destroyed.

If Piirsin survived the final conflict, the PCs have a choice of who to turn xir over to: the company, through Devereaux, wants xir for attempted sabotage and disruption of production. The planetary authorities would no doubt want a word with xir about disruption of commerce, first-degree kidnapping, and several hundred counts of attempted murder. Since the station is in space, even the Imperium could claim jurisdiction on the grounds of harboring illegal psionic abilities and several violations of astrotime law, plus the aforementioned kidnapping and attempted murder charges.

Whoever the heroes decide to hand Piirsin over to, the resulting reward should be enough to fund their way out of the system. They'll finally be able to put some distance between themselves and the boiling cauldron of emotion known as Stellar Mining Station Arinna.

Major NPCs

Wesleigh Devereaux, 668A99; Age 50; Cr240,000
(8 terms) Bureaucrat (Manager);
Arinna Station Superintendent
Admin-4, Interrogation-3

Devereaux runs the station with an iron fist. In an effort to maintain control, xe relies heavily on xir overworked security staff and suborned pawns gained through cash, blackmail, and even sex. Xe feels that Aeolwyn Chancellor (below) is an alarmist fool and resents him intensely. Rumors A, E, I, U, W, and X.

Aeolwyn Chancellor 567DE6; Age 31; Cr30,000
(3 terms) Scientist (Astrophysicist)
Computer-3, Jack-O-T-1

Chancellor is the station's astrophysicist. Xe spends much time locked in xir lab, but readily confronts authority if xe feels the cause is just. Xe's been noticing dangerously unusual stellar activity due to use of the station's meson gun, but xir warnings go unheeded by the station Superintendent. Rumors C, D, K, M, and P.

Vaulis Piirsin 586C57; Age 35; Cr20,000
(4 terms) Other;
Stellar Mining-0, Streetwise-1, Blade Cbt-1, Mech-2
Psi Strength-6, Influence (see below)

Piirsin is secretly an extremist devotee of the Church of Stellar Divinity (see Rumor L below.) Xir mission is to destroy the station for stealing the star's plasma and provoking its wrath. To help xir, xe has been using his psionic talent (below) to create as many allies as he can. After an initial 1D+1 sycophants taken in the bar fight, xe influences 1D-2 (minimum 1) more each week until xe's stopped or xe's collected 20 recruits, whichever comes first. For self-defense, xe discreetly carries a shiv he made from sharpening a stray piece of metal (treat as Dagger). Rumors B, C, L, and P.

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Influence (Special): This limited telepathic ability allows Piirsin to interface with the target's caudate—the area of the brain responsible for feelings of trust and some decision-making—making xir regard Piirsin as a trustworthy ally whose best interests should be acknowledged. Influence is useless against a shielded mind, and Piirsin must be able to see xir target. Influence takes 4 psionic strength points to perform plus range modifiers as Telepathy (Book 3).

Azar Khurshid 496BB4; Age 26; Cr6,000
(2 terms) Scientist;
Computer-3

Typical **Arinna Station Security Officer**
Various; 778767; Terms variable; Cr N/A
Brawling-1, Gun Cbt-1
Snub Pistol (w/Tranq rounds), Cudgel

The referee is encouraged to round out the other Arinna crew members (over 700) using whatever method best works for xir.

New Skill

Stellar Mining: the individual is skilled in operations involving the extraction and refining of raw materials from stellar plasma. The skill covers such functions as the operation and maintenance of machinery used in the process, the specific techniques used, and all safety regulations intended to preserve life and avoid injury.

Stellar Mining Station Arinna

Stellar Mining Station Arinna is designed to draw off stellar plasma by magnetic collimation and extract useful elements from it. It's built in a roughly cylindrical configuration attached to a huge polycarbon sunshade, which is the most prominent feature when viewed from outside. See the diagram for particulars

In addition to the protection provided by the sunshield from the extreme light and heat, the station is protected from hard radiation by hull armor. Repulsors (Book 5: High Guard) provide protection from meteoroids and space debris.

The extraction process begins with "priming" the plasma. A spinal mount meson gun creates a disturbance on the star's surface resulting in a small coronal mass ejection controlled by powerful magnetic collimation. The plasma, which is cooled somewhat by its long journey to the station, is admitted into areas where serviceable elements and minerals are extracted and refined. Some hydrogen from the plume is also diverted to the station's fuel tanks. Once begun, the process lasts for about a week as the plasma is drawn up by stellar pressure, similar to how liquid is pulled into a straw.

Shuttles call at regular intervals with crew rotations and fresh supplies. Specially outfitted shuttles haul away the raw materials. The station has no provision to dock with any vessel larger than a Type S Scout Ship.

Arinna is Law Level 9 for purposes of weapon possession and use.

High Guard Statistics

Stellar Mining Station Arinna (TL13)

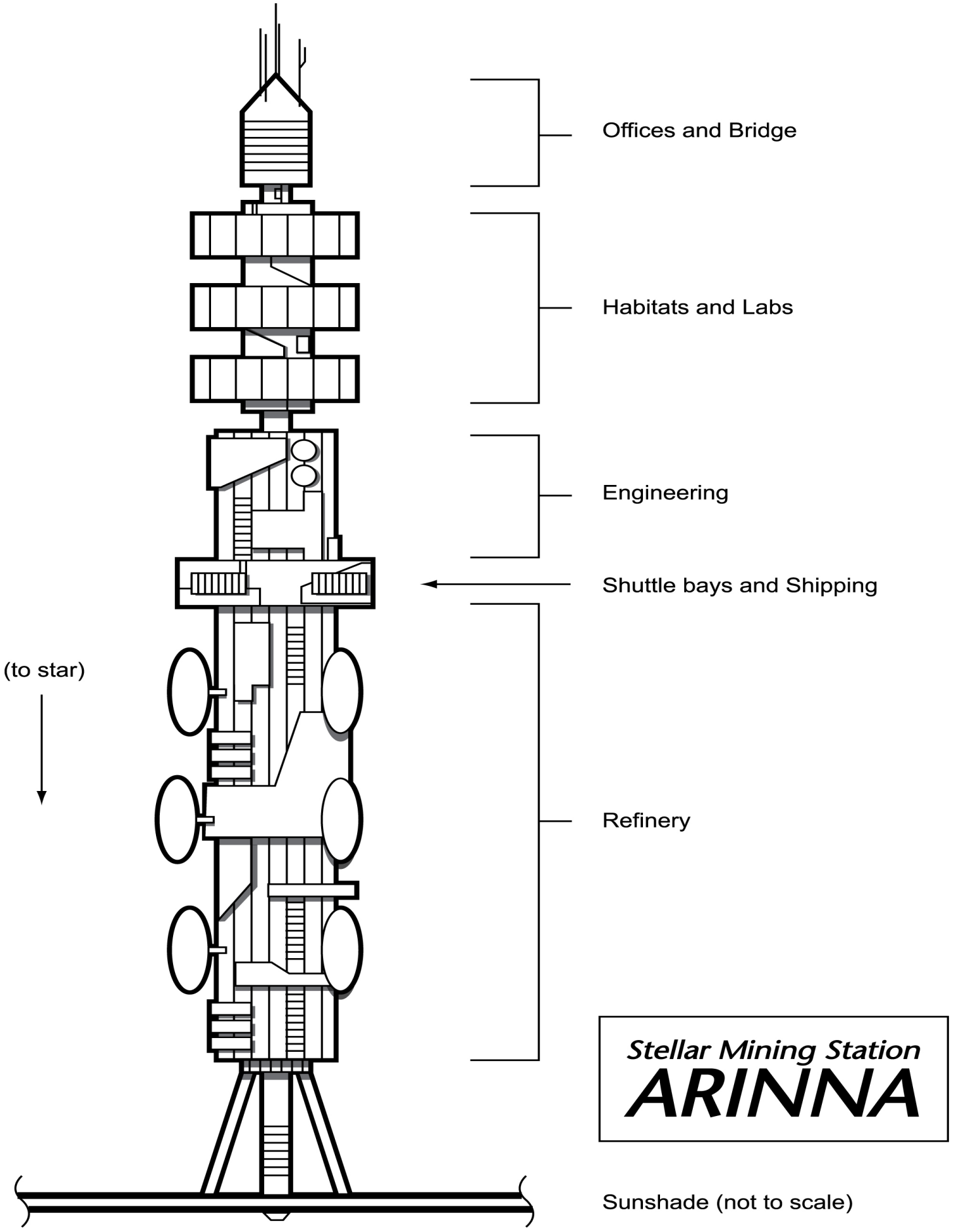
SN-R4012F2-000070-00K00-0	MCr34083.3
	100,000 tons
	Crew=700
	TL=13

Passengers=0. Low Berths=0. Cargo N/A. Fuel=2000. EP=2000. Agility=0. Troops=0.

Life Aboard Arinna: The heroes' first two weeks consist of an accelerated course designed to teach them the ropes. At the end of this period, each hero automatically gains Stellar Mining-0 (see above). Ex-Belters gain Stellar Mining skill equivalent to their Prospecting skill minus 2 (minimum 1). Pay for the Orientation period is 50% of normal.

The PCs are all assigned to the Refinery, composed of 13 workgroups of ten workers each. The PCs' workgroup includes Vaulis Piirsin (see NPCs previously, and note special instructions.) The refer-

(Continued on page 28)


Offices and Bridge
Habitats and Labs
Engineering
Shuttle bays and Shipping
(to star)
Refinery
Stellar Mining Station
ARINNA
Sunshade (not to scale)

(Continued from page 26)

ee should be prepared to add enough NPCs to bring the workgroup's total (including PCs) to ten.

Shifts are 12 hours, with frequent short breaks. Quarters are close and frugal, but the station offers multipurpose areas which double as facilities such as small bars, theaters, and gymnasiums. Station personnel with performing talent provide live entertainment. The computers have extensive databases of holovids and games that are replenished and rotated on a regular basis.

Time aboard the station is measured in weeks. Each week, the heroes should throw the following:

- 8+ (DM: Mechanical skill) for success. Failure means throwing END or less to avoid 2D injuries, and INT or less to avoid drawing 1D demerits (see below.)
- 8+ to hear a rumor (DM: Liaison, and see table below).

At the end of each week, the referee should record the elapsed time, any rumors or Demerits (see below) the adventurers have picked up, and their accumulated pay. The players may be tasked with keeping track of these items themselves.

Demerits: Infractions draw sanctions from Management in the form of cumulative Demerits. 45 Demerits means the individual is fired immediately and shipped off the station on the very next shuttle. Xe may be kept in confinement until then. Demerits are largely imposed or removed at Management's discretion. On Arinna, most infractions involve safety violations; but fighting, theft, and deliberate sabotage also top the list.

Heat: Arinna is constantly bombarded by high temperatures and radiation. Even though it has the latest in a sunshade, heat-dissipating systems, and hull armor, enough gets through that it combines with the close quarters and heavy workload to fray nerves and turn the station into a bubbling cauldron of stress; which in turn manifests as interpersonal and labor problems. To simulate this, the referee should keep track of Heat (HEA), expressed as points. The station has an initial HEA score of 75. Each week, the station takes 4D of cumulative HEA damage. The dwindling score directly relates to the current tension level, with effects as follows as the indicated threshold is crossed:

50% HEA: Raucous protests against Management and/or scattered interpersonal brawls, which occur at any given time on 8+. Organized violence (rioting, sabotage, etc.) occurs on 10+. PCs must throw less than the highest of STR, DEX, or END to avoid or take 1D damage. Work completely stops for 1D-3 days. Management responds by docking 10% of pay across the board and handing down 1D Demerits; each PC throws 6+ to avoid Demerits.

25% HEA: Hostility and irritation becomes more blatant. Brawls occur as above on 5+; organized violence on 7+. PCs must throw DEX or less to avoid 1D injury; DMs as above. Management responds by docking pay across the board 25% and handing down 2D Demerits; each PC throws 9+ to avoid Demerits.

10% HEA: Organized violence automatically erupts, manifesting as brawls, sabotage, and rioting. Management responds by locking down the station, giving Security *carte blanche* to handle the situation, handing down 3D automatic Demerits, and revoking the entire weeks' pay. Active rioting lasts for 2D hours. PCs failing a throw of DEX or less are caught in the riots for 1D+3 damage.

Each PC also should be given a personal HEA score equal to their END, which are affected by the above; they take 10% of any damage the station takes (round down, but minimum of 1). When HEA reaches 1/2 of total, subsequent throws also manifest as physical and emotional damage (apply to STR, DEX, END, and INT per Book 1 rules). When either HEA or a PC stat reaches 0, the hero must spend time in Medical or on furlough until recovery is complete. The referee may impose other penalties for heat effects. To make things easier for the referee, players may keep track of their own HEA scores.

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Encounters

The sheer number of people aboard the station precludes providing a detailed encounter table. While interactions with the rest of the crew are largely unnecessary to the adventure, the referee may want to include some as a way of making the station come to life for the players. One method is found under Pre-Adventure Prep above; the referee and even the players may think of others.

Rumors

Rumors are heard per the weekly Rumors throw. The referee may also provide them as a reward for good investigative work or roleplaying, as well as add to or subtract from the list:

2nd Die	1st Die					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1	A	B	C	D	E	F
2	G	U	U	W	W	H
3	I	U	Y	Y	W	J
4	K	X	Z	Z	V	L
5	M	X	X	V	V	N
6	O	P	Q	R	S	T

Rumors in italics are completely or partially untrue.

Rumors in bold are expected to be brought by xir mole to Devereaux's attention (see above).

A. The station's establishment wasn't without controversy. Protests and lawsuits tied up the corporation's initial investments for 10 years. If finally took an act of the planetary government to clear the way for the station's construction and now it has to make up for lost time.

B. The station's meson gun is military-grade, purchased from the Imperial Navy with special permission. Any use of the cannon other than in mining means big trouble from the empire.

C. A coronal mass ejection can destroy the station in mere minutes. It's already had several close calls with small ones.

D. Constant exposure to hot environments aggravates negative emotional states such as anger and irritability, causes lack of concentration, and causes safety lapses.

E. The risk of death is a part of the job, but the many safety regulations are supposed to make that risk almost negligible.

F. The adventurer the crew initially reacted to the worst is invited to drinks with a group of 1D+3 miners to "clear the air" and start over. But the invitation is nothing but a setup to a beating.

G. The station orbits at 3 stellar radii. It can move at 1g if need be to avoid damage.

H. Arinna has plenty of nooks and crannies in which to hide all sorts of contraband, including the computer system.

I. The station is built to be easy to maintain and repair, but this makes it vulnerable to sabotage.

J. The star is actually a living being, and eventually it will smite the station for stealing its plasma.

K. Coronal Mass Ejection (CME): a massive burst of stellar matter and radiation out of a star's corona into space.

L. Church of Stellar Divinity: a religion whose adherents hold the basic belief that all stars are gods, conscious beings of transcendent power. If one worships xir star, lives an upstanding life, and follows church doctrine, xir soul will acquire spiritual mass, which will be drawn into the star/deity at death. The faith is popular in the Imperium, and tolerated by the Imperial government.

M. The star, like many others, has a strong magnetosphere. At times, two opposite magnetic fields come together, resulting in a sudden release of energy stored in the original fields, resulting in flares and coronal mass ejections.

N. Arinna is on average a 72 hour flight from the mainworld, but a skilled pilot can make it in 60.

O. Arinna is a dog-eat-dog environment. One is either the big dog…or the little one.

P. Each use of the meson gun creates minute but detectable turbulence in the star's magnetic field. Over time, this turbulence builds up and creates

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Active Measures

(Continued from page 29)

long-lasting disturbances such as uncontrollable solar flares, CMEs, and magnetic storms.

Q. The company that owns the station has a track record of keeping resources flowing no matter what. Investors love this; workers, not so much.

R. Devereaux is totally ruthless when it comes to the bottom line. As long as the credits keep flowing, xe couldn't care less about the workers.

S. An off-duty miner is overhead complaining about the slowness of the hologame xe likes to play. Someone must be filling up a database somewhere again.

T. Several plasma conduits are quite old, and may even predate the station. They were no doubt salvaged from some other vessel.

General Rumors

U. Stellar mining isn't a widespread method of obtaining resources. Many worlds find the risks and cost-to-benefit ratio too high, especially during the stations' initial years of operation. Nevertheless, the eventual rewards are fantastic.

V. Arinna is failing; Management has already missed several payments to the consortium, and it's just a matter of time until the station is shut down and scrapped.

W. The station extracts not only hydrogen and helium from the stellar material, but also carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, neon, magnesium, silicon, sulfur, and iron; all torn apart by the high temperatures of the star's corona.

X. The station orbits its parent star as close as it can get before risking vaporization. Even so, the sunshade and the hull armor are hard-pressed to keep the station habitable.

Y. Station Superintendent Devereaux started in the Company as a low-level secretary, and clawed and fought (some say slept) xir way to where xe is now. That's why xe's so ruthless.

Z. *Newbies should remember that the station is a very good place to make enemies.* ✪

Raconteurs' Rest

Changes of Mind

by Andrea Vallance

Part 4

247th of 2029 (075-98): Kalu Marasiin Downport

The liner *Aurea Portici* slowly swung into orbit around the pure blue marble of Kalu Marasiin. Traffic control directed Captian Ragnall O'Donal to take the ship to the highport. An hour later a shuttle departed for the downport; it landed some fifteen minutes later. The passengers disembarked and got their first taste of the tainted air of the world as they stretched their legs on one of the handful of islands that rose out of the vast ocean that made up 99.9% of Kalu Masariin's surface. Among the last to disembark were two men and one woman, travelling together from the Imperium, supposedly to seek a local distributor for an unknown brand of soft drinks.

247th of 2029 (075-98): Hotel Itle, Kalu Marasiin Startown

The clerk at the desk had thought the three Imperials who checked in were perhaps a little 'odd'. Certainly something about them made him feel uncomfortable, the woman particularly so. However, Hotel Itle clientele were often a little 'odd' and making him uncomfortable was hardly unheard of. Plus at the Hotel Itle, it frequently did not pay to inquire too closely of the guests. So, he simply checked them, gave them their room keys and left them to their own devices. He idly noted that the three were now ensconced in the bar, huddled together in furtive conversation. He thought to himself ,"Yes, it pays not to ask questions."

Charles was a little concerned. "According to you, there as six others travelling with him including, if your information is to believed, an experi-

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enced and highly decorated former member of the *Verasasol* and this doesn't worry you?"

Colonel Petris Fant hissed, "If My Lady is not worried neither should you be."

Charles was not mollified. "We have one ex-special forces, an experienced Protectorate veteran, whom I can guarantee is beyond tough. One Imperial veteran and one unknown. Plus probably another two Protectorate veterans who *might* be there. If 'My Lady' is untroubled by this then she is a fool. Numbers count!"

Fant balled his fist, his rage exploding from him and rose from his chair. *Frifrue* Niaz Teequow, who had until now watched the two men argue with bemusement, simply raised a finger and *tsk*ed. Fant shrank back, though his ire was obviously unabated. She first addressed her lover, her voice tender, reassuring, if superior. "It's alright, Little One; I shall deal with this." Her attention shifted to her other companion, her eyes flashed with authority. "Charles, there will be ample time to recruit suitable 'help' locally."

Charles opened his mouth to speak, Niaz simply smiled and focused. He closed it soundlessly as an odd sense of peace and submission came over him.

249th of 2029 (077-98): On approach to Kalu Marasiin

My head still hurt a little, but it was only at the edge of my perception. Afira had piloted *Raledenet* into orbit with usual precision. I could see Kalu Marasiin, a massive world some sixteen thousand kilometres in diameter as it grew on the viewscreen in my room. Home to some seventy million people and location of the nearest Imperial base. Fakri had come to join me as we approached. I was more or less recovered, well enough for my duties at least, but he still popped in to check on me and, well, I didn't object.

"So, I'll be leaving you here." His voice matter of fact, almost nonchalant.

"Yes." Mine as if I were far away at the end of a dark tunnel. "What will you do?" Probably a foolish question.

"Return to my post, I expect. There'll be debriefing, quite a lot, I imagine. A fair amount of finger pointing and blame, too, more than likely."

"Will you be alright?" Concern, genuine in my tone.

A snort of a snigger. "I don't know. I doubt this will do my career any favours, for sure." A reassuring smile. "But the worst would be it ending, so I will survive, if that was your concern."

It had been a concern, if not the only one. "I will miss our games of *Zamkii*."

His eyes joined his mouth in the smile. "Yes, me too."

We sat silently awhile as the blue orb grew ever larger. "Well, I suppose I should go get ready; we'll be on approach soon."

"Yes." I would miss far more than just the games of *Zamkii*.

We touched down a little over an hour later. I didn't see him off, I think I would have cried.

250th of 2029 (078-98): Kalu Marasiin Downport.

The boring mundane routine of our cover continued. There was cargo to find and load. No passengers this trip, so nothing for me to do. I wasn't alone in that; Sakuya and Ariaryn where at loose ends, too. Only Jane, tinkering with her engines, and Siish, brokering for cargo, were really busy. Afira had completed the plotting, navigation and filing of flight plans. The four of us were in the common room, playing a game of *Mmialaryn*, jelly bean a point. Sakuya would not play for even token cash, against his beliefs to gamble for money, apparently. Possibly a good thing; the boy had amassed most of our jelly beans. Despite his success, Sakuya seemed to be tiring of the game.

"I wonder what this world is like?"

"Wet, more than likely, and soup for air like Verasryn, too, I'd think." Ariaryn's distaste for the atmosphere of that world was unabated.

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Sakuya was not the socially perceptive of souls. "Yes, but don't you want to see it? I mean, no point in travelling to a world if you don't get out and see it."

"We're not here as tourists or even regular merchants. We're here to do a clandestine special mission, dearheart." Afira had found a pet name for him; I understood Luriani enough to know that meant she felt close to him, protective I think. A big sister maybe.

"Yes, but surely we need to preserve our cover, we're supposed to be normal merchants. Shouldn't we be behaving like them?" He was learning, however, and rather quickly.

Ariaryn laughed, "He's got you there, Afira."

"There's an Imperial base here, Sakuya; it's not safe for you, they want you back. They've already tried. I know you'd like to see the place, but it's just not safe."

"But Isabella, they can't know I'm here, can they? And if you're all with me I'd be safe, wouldn't I?" I was a little surprised at that; normally, that would have ended his wanderlust.

"Isabella's right, dearheart, it's not safe for you."

He looked dejected. "But a little trip, just to see a bit, so I can say I have. Couldn't hurt, could it?"

"Well, if we all went with him and made a short trip." Ariaryn had a heart so soft, and I think he was a little stir crazy, too.

Sakuya pounced on it. "See, Ariaryn agrees!"

I sighed; he wouldn't be discouraged. "Okay, how about we all go for a *short*…" I stressed the word *short*. "…excursion in Startown." Sakuya did have a point; it would be good to get out and he was right; the chances of anything going wrong were very slim.

Gami January was bored; he'd been watching the ship for three hours now. Sure, it easy money; sit and watch a ship, if anyone came off or on radio it back then follow them; but it was tedious. He was thinking about popping off and grabbing a bite to eat; nothing was happening. The hatch to the ship opened and four people exited, including the one he'd been told to keep an eye for. He tapped his communicator. "Four leaving, including the mark."

A woman's voice. "Excellent; tail them and keep me informed."

250th of 2029 (078-98): Enli's Family Bar, Kalu Marasiin Downport.

Things were heavy here, the surface gravity was a quarter again over the standard. However, it was good to out; had to admit that. We'd taken precautions of course; armed ourselves, discreetly, naturally, and lightweight armour under our fatigues, but we weren't expecting any trouble. We'd found what seemed like a quiet, safe bar in Startown; well, as quiet and safe as a bar in a Startown can be. One old man serving and a waitress cleaning tables, collecting the empties. A handful of patrons scattered around, keeping themselves to themselves. Ariaryn was trying to teach Sakuya how to play *puol*[12]. Afira and I were having a drink and watching with amusement.

"You know, Issee, Sakuya is likely to be quite good at that, once he gets it."

"Oh, why do you think that?"

She took a drink. "He's a genius, works out DeBrett equations in his head, manages to make sense of *Kamminlu*; *puol* is just a matter of hitting a ball and working out angles. He'll be good at it."

I looked at him. "Yeah, I think you're right."

Afira nodded. "'Course I am, but either way, do him good to have a bit of fun. He's been a bit stressed since Winchel."

I looked at her in disbelief. "Afira, since Winchel he's killed somebody, spent several weeks in Sesh Liryn, and trust me, that place was every bit as bad as the place the Imperials put you. Then had to come to terms with the fact that he won't ever see his friends, family or home ever again. And to top it all

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off, an Imperial hit squad just tried to kidnap him. I think he's coping remarkably well, all in all."

She was obviously a little embarrassed at that. All she could manage as a reply, "Yeah, yeah, you're right." She changed the subject. "So, you and Vu, you spent a lot of time together during the last jump. Did you see to your… er, health?"

"No, Afira, I didn't sleep with him. We just spent some time together."

"You think you'll see him again?"

I was about to answer when I felt it. Can't describe exactly how or what, but I felt something, something very wrong. "We need to leave, right now!"

She just stared at me "Why? What's up?"

"Can't explain it but we need to get out of here right now." I stood, ran to Ariaryn and whispered so Sakuya couldn't hear, "We need to get out of here, now. Something's wrong."

He instinctively tensed and scanned around. "What?"

"I don't know, just a feeling in my gut, something bad is coming."

He hesitated, thinking. That's when the window exploded.

Three hissing cylinders landed, *tonk, tonk, tonk,* on the floor and began to splutter, spewing out a cloud of white smoke. I automatically reached for the respirator on my belt; not only was that cloud almost certainly some kind of gas, probably tranquillising, the tainted atmosphere was now pouring into the room. I saw Ariaryn and Afira had done the same. Sakuya on the other hand had frozen. I grabbed his mask and thrust it onto his face as gently as I could. The door burst open, three figures entered and began to spray the room with automatic fire. Ariaryn and Afira already had their weapons out and were returning fire but it was hard to see through the thick white gas that was now filling the bar. Ariaryn grunted as he tipped the *puol* table on its side to provide better cover. "Okay, in the future I'll trust your gut, but right now we need to get out of here."

I had my own gun out now and fired off three shots aimlessly into the gloom. "You reckon?"

Afira had paused to reload her revolver. "I saw another door over behind the bar, probably leads to the kitchen."

"Best bet. I'll cover you, then you cover me." Ariaryn stood and fired again, one of the figures went down but another three had entered.

Sakuya was huddled down, rocking slowly. I took his hand. "You need to run, stay close to Afira and me."

We sprinted for the bar, keeping low. Afira turned and fired as I pushed Sakuya over, then scrambled across myself. There was somebody else here. Laying motionless. I checked for a pulse, none. Nothing I could do so I stood and covered Afira as she joined us. I saw another figure fall. Afira laughed, "Hey, you're getting better." She had just reloaded again.

I chuckled, "Just luck." I'd just shot another human and I laughed about it, it disturbed me again. "Don't complain, two down is good." She noticed the body. "Alive?" I shook my head. "Bugger" She moved on. "Right on three." She counted, we stood and fired as Ariaryn ran then vaulted the counter to join us.

He sat, panting. "Right, Afira, where's this door?"

She pointed. "Over there."

"Okay. Isabella, you get Sakuya through, then we'll follow."

It was a store room, not a kitchen, but I saw another door; hopefully it led outside. Ariaryn and Afira joined us a few seconds later. "Okay, now what?"

Ariaryn was piling things against the door, trying to bar it. "We get the hell out of here. You head back to *Raledenet*, keep Sakuya safe. Afira and I will hold them up, then head back to join you."

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Niaz Teequow was quietly pleased; two of her 'helpers' were down, but that left five, more than enough. She did have a concern, the second man, the unknown still had not appeared. Still, she had seen him and would know him when he did appear. She smiled as her quarry bolted into a back room. She focused and scanned, a mental image of the room and beyond forming in her mind. Her smile turned to a frown. One of the women was hidden to her. She had to be the one, the one she wanted. She addressed her companions, her voice flat and emotionless. "There is a door that leads to the alley behind this place. Petris, take two and deal with that." Her attention moved to her other companion "You will deal with the door. But first ensure there are no witnesses."

250th of 2029 (078-98): An Alleyway. Kalu Marasiin Downport.

I could hear several shots ring out from bar as I opened the door cautiously. It was dark, a dimly lit alley. I found myself smiling, how much like a cheap action holodrama my life had become. I took Sakuya's hand as I edged out. "It'll be okay, honey, I'll keep you safe." He was shaking and trembling, the terror in him obvious. I moved slowly and carefully, keeping to the shadows, scanning always for any sign of movement.

Sakuya's grip was a vise on my hand. "I'm scared, Isabella."

"I know; it'll be okay, we'll get back to the ship and it'll be fine."

There was crack then a burning pain in my left shoulder. My pistol clattered to the ground noisily from the hand on that arm as I was spun by the bullet's impact and fell, dragging Sakuya with me.

He screamed, "Isabella!"

I couldn't answer, I just groaned with the pain, fighting to retain consciousness. I heard heavy foot steps approaching, and saw three figures, two men one woman, all heavily built and armed, stubby automatic carbines in their hands.

One of them spoke, "Joan, take the man, I'll 'deal' with the woman." His voice malicious, a certain glee at the violence in it. The woman, Joan, took Sakuya roughly, dragging him to his feet, the look in his eyes, beyond terror. The man knelt beside me "You have something My Lady wants; where is it?"

I didn't understand; I grunted through the agony "What are you talking about?"

"The box, the *Uhuln*! Where is it?" His voice angry, hissing.

It clicked, the box, the one I'd found on the Sesheryn ship; he wanted it. It was on *Raledenet* still. I tried to feign ignorance. "What?"

He placed his thumb in the notch of the V of my collarbone and began to push. I started to choke and splutter as he screamed, "Tell me now!"

There was a thundering boom; the woman holding Sakuya collapsed clutching her chest as the shotgun round hit her from behind. Another boom as the man choking me released the pressure and turned to see who was firing. The remaining man with him fell, twisting from the impact of the pellets. The one who had been choking me lifted his gun and fired, bullets cascading from his weapon, spraying across the alleyway. The shotgun fired again; I struggled to see who was firing it as my tormentor dove for cover, his sub-machine gun chattering aimlessly as he did. I turned to see Afira appear at the door, she was looking to see what was happening.

I rolled onto my right side, yelping with pain from my wound. "Over there!" I pointed as best I could. "He's over there."

Her eyes struggled to focus as she cursed someone, then she fired. A man screamed as the round found its target. The shotgun rang out at the same time, its payload of steel balls striking the alley wall where my tormentor had taken cover. Afira tensed as she looked for this new threat.

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(Continued from page 34)

I grunted, struggling to talk. "No, I think it's okay. Whoever it is, is on our side." Or at least I think they were.

Afira paused. "If you're with us, step out with your weapon above your head or I start shooting!"

A man stepped out, a shotgun above his head. He was smiling as he looked at first Afira, then me. "Manish *Wa*, may I be of assistance?"

I laughed; it hurt. "You already have, Fakri."

Ariaryn slammed the door as he joined up and began to pile what he could find to bar it. "They'll be through in a moment, at least four of them." He turned and saw Fakri. "What in all the Gods?" He pointed his pistol.

I was growing used to the pain. "It's okay; he's with us."

"I assure you, Mann *Serganet*, I'm here to help."

Ariaryn surveyed the scene. "Yes, you are. Afira, get Sakuya up. You help Isabella; we need to be elsewhere." Again, leadership fell naturally to him.

Fakri knelt on the ground beside me. He looked at the wound. "Nasty; you have your medkit?"

"Yes, of course!" Maybe not as good with the pain as I thought.

He opened it, took a tube of trauma spray.[13] "This will sting." A smile. "But you know that."

He sprayed; I winced, but kept the scream inside. "Yes, a little."

Fakri helped me to my feet; I was woozy and everything ached. Afira had taken Joan's gun, Ariaryn the other. "What about the other, over there?" She indicated where my tormentor had been.

"No time, we've gotta go." Ariaryn valued withdrawal far more than 'cleaning up'.

Naiz Teequow was impatient as her 'help' forced the door. "Faster!" She'd felt her lover's pain. The door finally gave; she let her thugs go first, then stepped out herself. The alley was silent; she could see two bodies laying there, neither of whom she cared about. She focused and scanned for her lover. She found him in an instant and noted only one of the bodies was a corpse. She drew her pistol and corrected that. She widened her search and found her quarry. Not far away; she guessed their heading from their position, it made sense. She moved to her lover; he was laying unconscious, a wound in his side. She turned to her other companion. "Take Gami and Peter. They're heading for their ship. You should be able to get to the entrance before they do. Enlashi will remain with me." She would need her assistance with her lover.

250th of 2029 (078-98): Enroute to *Raledenet*, Kalu Marasiin Downport.

We weren't making good progress; I couldn't move fast even with Fakri's help. Ariaryn realised it, too. He called a pause. I appreciated it; I had to catch my breath. "We won't make it; they'll be able to get ahead and cut us off. We need another way in."

I was slowing them down, putting them all at risk. "Just head for another entrance."

Fakri looked at me. "You won't make it, so not really an option."

He was right; trauma spray doesn't work if you don't rest. Already I could feel blood seeping from my wound. "Leave me, then; get Sakuya to safety."

Ariaryn just looked at me. "We don't leave people behind."

"Then what do you suggest?"

Afira had an idea. "They'll try to ambush us; we need to flank them, or at least somebody does."

Ariaryn turned to Fakri. "Fakri, do I have your word you're with us?" It was the first time he'd ever used his first name; he clearly trusted him.

Fakri nodded. "Yes."

"Then you need to be the flanker; Afira can take Isabella."

He felt good, he was free again. Sure, he owed his freedom to a twisted psionic monster, but that was strictly temporary and what she'd promised

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was worth the inconvenience. His rank would be restored, well not fully, only to captain, but he would be back in good standing and reinstated with his regiment. He'd finish this mission, distasteful though it might be, and resume his career. He'd not tried to catch the fugitives, that would have been pointless, they could choose any one of a number of routes back but all of them lead through this point. He'd laid out his 'assets', if you could call two hired goons assets, with his usual precision, now he just had to wait.

Ariaryn had called another halt; we'd reached a natural choke point, he said; this would be where they'd try to take us. He'd called in to Siish, told him what was happening, but there wasn't much he and Jane could do. Ariaryn, Fakri, and Afira were all scanning the area ahead, looking for a safe way through.

"There's nothing for it, *Oommin*, we have to walk straight into it." She was stating the obvious, but she was right.

"Yes, nothing for it." He paused, considering. "Okay, Fakri, you think you can make your way round them?"

"I'm not special forces like you, but I should be able to."

Me, now. "Isabella, how are you holding up?"

"I'm fine." I lied; my tunic was stained with my blood and I was fighting to remain conscious.

He studied me and knew. "Right, let's do this. You get going, Fakri, and be fast."

Walking straight into an ambush is never easy. Ariaryn was ahead, Afira holding me up; I couldn't walk unassisted now. We were going slowly, carefully, noting everything that could be used for cover. This was not a good place. Suddenly the stutter of three automatic weapons, bullets flying everywhere. Sakuya screamed in pain and toppled as one struck his leg, Ariaryn dived for cover and started returning fire, but he didn't have much ammunition for the carbine.

Afira looked from me to Sakuya, hesitating. I made up her mind. "Him first."

A brief nod; she let me fall, gently, well as gently as she could, grabbed Sakuya, and dragged him to cover. She was pulling me in when Ariaryn went down. She didn't hesitate, just stood and fired before ducking back to reload.

"Only two clips, then it's pistols."

The firing stopped, a deep male voice, commanding, calm rung out "*Komada-Lekhtenant*, it's pointless. Just like in the camp. Give yourself up and you and the other walrus can go. You have my word."

Afira shuddered and spoke through clenched teeth, "Diishu."

Special Agent Fakri Vu considered how his life had changed. Here he was, helping two wanted fugitives from Imperial justice escape. Only a few weeks ago, he'd been trying to bring those very fugitives in. He smiled, his mother would be proud. He could hear automatic fire, the trap had been sprung; time for him to do his part. It wasn't easy, he didn't know where he had to be. He'd climbed, gained height. He had PRIS goggles and a shotgun; he scanned, he could see the muzzle flashes, three on one side, one on the other. Down then round, he had his course.

I was trying to dress Sakuya's wound, it wasn't bad but he wasn't going to be moving anywhere soon. Physically he'd be okay but he was nearly catatonic emotionally. This was bad, very bad.

"Afira, who is that man?"

She was slumped. "Diishu, Force Commander Charles Diishu. He was in charge of Interrogation Centre Seventeen." She touched her scars. "He's the one who did this to me." There was hate, pure hatred, in her voice.

I groaned as I finished a simple dressing on Sakuya's leg. "It'll be okay Sakuya." I tried as hard as I

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could to be comforting and reassuring but he wasn't in a place where he could be. I turned to Afira. "You can't let him get to you." I was slipping into unconsciousness but I needed to hang on.

She gritted her teeth. "Have no intention of it." She checked her weapon then yelled, "Hey Diishu, you still there?"

His voice came back, "Of course, *Komada-Lekhtenant*, I'll always be there."

She took a breath then yelled with utter determination, "You didn't break me then, and you won't break me now, you *jkomovaa*," as she stood and fired off another burst.

Fakri saw as Ariaryn went down, then he heard a voice he remembered and smiled. He mumbled to himself, "Diishu; be good to see him again." He started to mull over suitable dramatics for the moment.

Charles Diishu was feeling good, quietly satisfied with things. His major worry, the special forces sergeant, was down, two others wounded and the remaining fugitive pinned down and certainly low on ammunition. It was only a matter of time. He was about to move in for the kill. He had discounted all of Teequow's talk of another as just that, talk. Diishu had never placed any faith in her kind of mystical psionic mumbo-jumbo. He turned to his 'troops'; already he was imagining his return to a proper military command. "Peter, you'll move forwards while Gami and I cover you, then you'll cover us. You understand?"

There was booming thunder and Peter pirouetted to the ground from the impact of the shotgun blast. Diishu turned to see Special Agent Fakri Vu's smiling face. "Hello Charlie; you might want to surrender."

Diishu looked up in utter disbelief. "You!"

Gami January wasn't very smart but he knew things had gone badly wrong. He also knew he was facing a death sentence if he was captured from this job. At least six people had died in that bar. He jerked his weapon up to fire. Special Agent Vu was faster though, he pivoted, the shotgun boomed and Gami January was thrown backwards. He no longer had to worry about his capital crimes as his life slipped away.

Former Imperial Marine Force Commander Charles Diishu knew an opening when he saw it. Vu's attention was elsewhere momentarily; he weighed the odds. Vu there; that walrus Lieutenant-Commander behind him uninjured. The odds were not at all good. He rolled, fired inaccurately at Vu, sprung to his feet and sprinted.

Fakri Vu noticed the movement subconsciously as he fired, he twisted. Diishu's sub-machine gun stuttered and spat bullets in his general direction. He dove for cover instinctively then rose and fired at Diishu's fleeing figure. The range was not great but Diishu was weaving and he missed. He quickly considered then discounted pursuit. There were three injured who probably needed urgent attention. They were far more important.

I was failing, slipping away. I'd lost a lot of blood. Funny thing, medical training. I knew I'd be unconscious soon and death would follow shortly thereafter. All very matter of fact. I hugged Sakuya, trying to calm and reassure him. Afira had fired off the last clip for her automatic weapon. She had her revolver out, but one woman with a revolver was no match for them no matter how determined. It would be all over soon.

I smiled at her. "Thank you, you did your best."

Her face with set with grim resignation "Not over yet; I've got another six rounds still."

My eyelids fluttered and the world started to fade away. I heard something like distant thunder. I wondered at that as I finally slipped away.

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251st of 2029 (079-98): *Raledenet*, breaking orbit from Kalu Marasiin.

My eyes opened, the light was blinding. I wondered if this was heaven, or perhaps hell. Well, right up until I saw Fakri's face appear. I blinked, again. Still there. I tried to move, I managed to lift my head perhaps ten centimetres before the world started spinning. I slumped back.

"You need to take it easy, Isabella; the wound was bad, you lost a lot of blood and frankly you're pumped full of painkillers"

He was right. "How?" was all I could manage to say.

He grinned. "Well, after I single-handedly dealt with Diishu and his goons, your friend Afira and I got you, Ariaryn, and young Lord Trace back here. Was a bit of an effort, not to mention the bribing starport guards to turn the other way while we brought three badly wounded people through. I must say, your brother can be quite persuasive, not to mention free with cash. But we managed. Then I treated you and the others. That's how."

"Where's here?"

"The sick bay on your ship. I believe we're breaking orbit and moving out to the jump point."

I blinked again. I thought my head was starting to clear but I must have been wrong. "What?"

He repeated, slowly, "On your ship moving out to jump."

I squinted my eye, trying to understand. "Why are you here?"

"Because somebody had to treat the wounded."

"Yes, but why? Siish doesn't like you."

He beamed at me. "Oh, I wouldn't say that. He certainly doesn't trust me, yet at least, but we get on okay."

Head still spinning. "Okay, but what about…" I caught myself and closed my mouth.

"Your secret mission for the Protectorate? He hasn't mentioned it, but I assume you're on one. The Imperium is well aware you're not just merchants, has been since Winchel. I have no idea what it is though. Like I said, your brother doesn't trust me."

The haze was slowly clearing. "Yes, but…" I was stumped. "…why are you here?"

He took a long breath in through his nose. "I'm defecting."

I looked at him, wide eyed. "What?!"

"I'm defecting."

Okay, this was all getting far too confusing. "Why? You have a career, a life in the Imperium. Why are you giving that up?"

He sighed, "Whoever got Diishu released has to have immense pull, both official and unofficial. His actions had to be sanctioned." His eyes fell downwards. "Diishu got away. Doubtless my superiors will know about my actions shortly. My career there is over, possibly my life, too."

"Why did you let him get away? You must have known what it would mean?"

Another sigh. "Yes, but it seemed more important to get you and the others to safety."

I looked at him and understood. He'd made the same choice I had. "Thank you."

"You are more than welcome."

My head was definitely clearing now. I sat up a little more. "Okay, what I don't understand, though, is, how did you come to be there, with a shotgun, in that alleyway?"

He looked sheepish. "Ummm… I hadn't reported back in to the ministry. I was putting it off a few days. So I was laying low in a startown hotel. I found one relatively 'safe', well for startown. I heard gunshots, I took my shotgun and went to investigate. You know the rest."

My eyes narrowed; he was leaving something out. "And why weren't you reporting in?"

He chuckled. "I was a little concerned that my arrival might tip the Imperium off to your presence

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Raconteurs' Rest

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here. I was giving you a little time to 'conduct your business', so to speak."

I tried to laugh, but it hurt again and ended up as a splutter. "Well, regardless, I am very glad you're here."

He just grinned. "So am I."

I'm not sure what came over me next, maybe the mixture of painkillers. "I believe it is the custom of your people that a kiss is appropriate now?"

He looked awkward. "Not necessary."

My turn to grin. "But I insist."

He sighed, bent down and kissed me lightly on the forehead. "There you go."

"No, not quite." I reached up, took his face between my hands and pulled him down till his lips met mine.

Notes

Notes numbered 1-11 appeared with earlier parts of this story.

12. A game similar to the pre-spaceflight Terran pool.

13. Combined anaesthetic, broad-spectrum antibiotic, antiviral, and wound sealant. ✪

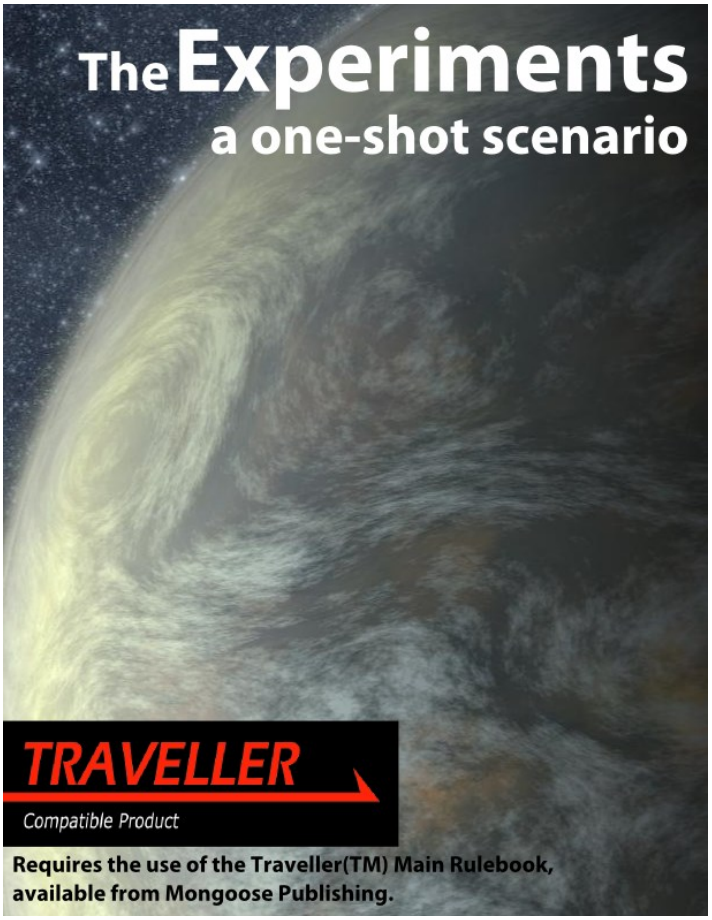
Critics' Corner

The Experiments: A One-Shot Scenario

reviewed by Timothy Collinson

The Experiments: A One-Shot Scenario. Felbrigg Herriot. Felbrigg Herriot http://behindtheclaw.blogspot.co.uk 17pp., print-on-demand softcover (Lulu) or PDF (DTRPG) US$4.82(S)$1.99(P)/UK£2.99(S)£1.31(P)

Author's warning: Partial spoilers



This is a delightful little scenario from the producer of the excellent *Behind the Claw* audio podcasts (http://behindtheclaw.blogspot.co.uk/) and the *Decopedia* compilations. At just 17 pages plus cover, the Referee has all that's needed for a three- to four-hour game.

The set-up is very traditional for a convention-style adventure—the PCs awake to find they're in an unknown location facing unknown obstacles. They need to find out where they are, how to escape, and sometimes—although not in this case—who they are. (For comparison, see Edd Quick's "The Y699 Occurrence" (*Freelance Traveller*, August 2011, "After-Action Report: TravCon 11", under 'Cons at a Con') or Derrick Jones' "I'm Not a Celebrity" (Freelance Traveller, May/June 2012, "After-Action Report: TravCon 12", paragraph beginning "Following another curry…").

In *The Experiments*, the PCs have signed on to help set up a colony on a waterworld which is a rich source of minerals. To extract the minerals, the Dymoola Corporation needs workers capable of operating under water and to meet their quotas they've decided to surgically alter their 'volunteers'. A natural disaster hits the Dymoola lab, however, and the PCs awake from pre-op preparations to find them-

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selves alone in a medical facility that is rapidly flooding.

The scenario deals with the PCs' attempt to avoid the dangers of the lab—rising floodwaters, previous colonists further along in their alterations, and some local critters as well. In their efforts to escape, they may be able to establish what's going on as well. Throughout the scenario, time is pressing and the characters have little time to think; a referee handling this well will put that pressure on the players as well and increase the sense of urgency and desperation as events unfold.

A sense of the danger can be gathered from the offering of ten potential characters with the instruction that players should choose two! (I feel fortunate perhaps that in the online chat game of this I played, the four of us players managed to escape with only one of our eight PCs dying.) One oddity of the adventure is that although the cover proclaims that Mongoose *Core Rulebook* is required, the PCs are offered with Classic *Traveller* skills. This probably stems from *Behind the Claw*'s Classic *Traveller* focus, but the scenario is rules-lite enough that this isn't really a problem and could certainly be easily adjusted by any referee who was fussed about this. The five floorplans of the lab are very clean, clear and nicely produced. The layout and descriptions of the rooms are interesting as well as offering just enough puzzle to make it less than straightforward to leave the premises. The author also offers some fun 'extras' to throw at the players to either speed them up or slow them down as required.

There is great potential for horror in this adventure if desired, although it can be played humorously as well, depending on the players. My experience of it was a little of both, although I did find myself at a slight disadvantage in not being quite as familiar with the horror genre as the other players. It was only a disadvantage of 'shared experience' however, rather than a disadvantage of the story itself.

This is indeed a one-shot scenario, although it wouldn't be impossible to use a similar set up for an on-going group of PCs if they'd been persuaded, perhaps in ignorance, of the need for the job or the 'minor' surgery that is actually anything but minor. Any waterworld—or even near waterworld—would be an acceptable location. It could certainly lead into other adventures if the PCs wanted to go after the higher Dymoola management, or continue with the colony set up, or offer assistance to the "altered" colonists if they've survived.

I hope *The Experiments* isn't just a one off, well, experiment and that the author goes on to produce more in this line. Like the *Decopedia* volumes, this is short, sweet and straightforward. For the price it offers a great evening's entertainment.

Feeding the Masses: Basic Imperial Food

by Ade Stewart

Food is arguably the single most vital commodity within the Imperium. There are multiple trillions of beings that require nourishment: if you fail to provide the masses with their daily bread, it won't take long for the Empire to descend into ungovernable chaos.

As such, the Imperium takes care to ensure that its citizens don't starve to death. When there is genuine need it oversees the distribution of free food; otherwise, it makes sure that safe, edible, and above all cheap food is always available. This is most commonly in the form of *shuluum* meals or food pills. These are produced in facilities directly (though not too overtly) maintained and overseen by the Empire.

Digestion

Whether human or not, food is the body's main energy supply for movement, for growth, and for

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repairing itself. It carries the macronutrients (for humans, carbohydrates, proteins, fats) and the various trace minerals and vitamins that the body requires. These substances generally make up a percentage of the overall amount of food eaten: the rest is mostly cellulose, tough protein strands, and water.

Food bulk is required to allow the human digestive system to operate properly. The body is a complex, integrated system, and digestion is not a separate, isolated function: other bodily functions simply don't work properly without an active digestive transit. It doesn't even need to be that much food bulk, bearing in mind the tales of soldiers, for example, who survived and even triumphed on little more than a handful of rice a day. Icky and organic though it is, it is a fact of life.

Food Pills

The classic food pills much loved by sci-fi are broadly available within the Imperium. They are cheap and portable, they last almost forever if properly stored, and they provide all of the basic nutrients that the body requires: they even (gently) expand in the gut to provide bulk and give a sense of satiety. It is normal for food pills to come with a stick of flavoured gum to chew.

A regime of food pills will be lacking a number of things, however: texture, flavour, and a tangible sense of having eaten. A long term absence of these can have devastating effects on an individual's psychology and morale, which is exactly what the Imperium wants to avoid. And you *must* drink plenty of fluids with them, which can be an issue if clean fresh liquid is in limited supply.

Food pills are fairly small. A normal recommended intake is one pill per meal for individuals weighing less than 40kg, two pills for those weighing up to 100kg, and three pills for those weighing in excess of 100kg. Food pills are generally carefully rationed, with their distribution usually controlled by trained stewards or medical personnel.

Consuming too many food pills at once can cause serious harm. However, all Imperial-approved food pills have a built-in safety feature: as they expand, a harmless chemical marker is released. When this reaches a certain concentration within the stomach, it chemically triggers a dormancy mode in any unexpanded elements of pill, thus preventing unlimited expansion (and the possibilities for gluttonous misadventure, murder, torture, and similar mayhem). Of course, there are ways around the marker, but they are not generally public knowledge.

Within the Imperium, food pills are seen as a last resort, the sort of thing handed out to disaster victims or consumed by those in desperate circumstances. Very rarely are they the food of choice, although some beings use them for dieting.

Shuluum Meals

Shuluum meals are dense nutritious protein- and carbohydrate-rich meals fortified with minerals and vitamins. They are entirely vegetarian, they are very cheaply produced within automated facilities and are shipped out by the kiloton.

"*Shuluum*" is a Vilani word, and has become a generic and universally recognised term for plain, safe, mass-produced food. It has also acquired the slang name "slum food" on various higher population planets due to its staple use by the poorer members of the populace.

Imperial *shuluum* comes in five basic types, each colour-coded for customer convenience: Yellow (flavourless granules or sheets), Blue (mildly sweet bars), Green (mildly spicy balls), White (seafood sticks), and Red (umami or meaty cubes). Packaging varies greatly: the standard size is 100 grams in a resealable plastic pack. Larger sizes and multipacks containing a variety of *shuluum* products are also available. All packaging is appropriately coloured.

Production Plants

Imperial production plants can be found on most worlds, particularly those that are considered to be only marginally habitable. Such facilities are usually located within the extraterritorial zone of the star-

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port. Smaller production plants are common in military and naval bases and other Imperial facilities, especially those isolated from normal logistics.

Imperial plants vary in size – some are just a few tens of dTons in volume, others are vast complexes covering many kilometers. Most are considered to be Imperial strategic assets and as such are secure, actively monitored, and adequately guarded. They are built to a minimum of TL10, but will never be built at a lower TL than that of the planet on which they are located.

The earliest point at which a planet can support its own domestic production of *shuluum* is TL8 – this is not a matter of plant and machinery but of supporting technologies in biological, medical, genetic and engineering fields. Imperial production, of course, is completely independent of local manufacturing capability.

The Manufacturing Process

Within a *shuluum* production plant biomass is grown inside fermentation vats. Each vat is filled with an aseptic nutrient solution derived from organic materials and biowaste of all kinds – an on-site purification plant manufactures the nutrient solution on demand. Each colour of *shuluum* uses a different starter culture (Yellow uses a yeast, Blue and Green each use different algae, and White and Red each use different types of fungi).

Throughout the growing process the temperature, pressure, local gravity, aeration levels, nutrient levels, etc., within the fermentation vats are closely controlled, and any waste products are carefully extracted. Once the vat is full the biomass is removed and processed, the equipment is sterilised, and the cycle begins again.

Fermentation tanks vary greatly in volume. Using bioengineered fast growing cultures, precision environmental control and the application of other relevant advanced technologies a few grams of starting culture typically yield 500 grams of dry biomass per litre of tank volume per month. Note that this is significantly faster and more efficient than can be achieved on 21st century Terra, but that's many centuries of determined hi-tech Imperial R&D for you.

Each production plant includes a largely automated processing facility. This adds additional ingredients (typically vital fats, minerals, vitamins etc) to the basic biomass. It sizes and cooks the resulting dough, and packages the finished product ready for shipping. Finished, packaged *shuluum* stores for decades or longer. Plants will have storage areas for the raw materials, warehousing for the finished products, a control centre and computer, and dedicated transport links. Many produce their own power.

Flavour and colour are not added to Imperial-produced *shuluum*. That comes from the organisms that produce the biomass, and everybody therefore gets the same thing. Years of research and geneering have produced starter cultures that give acceptable but bland flavours and appropriate colouration.

Shuluum meals can be eaten straight out of the pack or combined with all kinds of additional ingredients and condiments to make them more palatable. They can be heated, or cooked with liquid to make a kind of gruel or soup. They are not in any sense considered to be haute cuisine.

Administration

Imperial *shuluum* production is generally run through the administrative offices of Subsector nobles, or through military authorities. They are subsidised by the Imperium: their budget is legislated for by the Imperial Moot and approved by the Emperor. They are ubiquitous, occurring throughout the Empire and manufacturing effectively identical *shuluum* products. It falls to the Administration branch of the Scout Service to arrange delivery of shipments and top-ups of food pills, starting cultures, nutrient, and finished *shuluum* meals to where they are needed.

The Scout Service subcontracts almost all Imperial *shuluum* production and delivery to corporations holding a Limited liability Imperial Charter. The costs to the Company are generally offset against the

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annual 2% Imperial dividend the Charter grants to the Emperor. Although Tukera and LSP are the best known of the megacorporationss involved in this, many other companies holding LICs are involved to some degree. Even Instellarms are heavily invested in the building and security of *shuluum* installations.

Imperial authorities very closely control the production and distribution of starter cultures: the Imperium ensures that these are standard across the Empire. Testing is carried out during every stage of production, often by independent authorities, and supplies and stocks are regularly checked.

While the production of *shuluum* is an efficient process, the raw materials need to be topped up. The starter cultures are widely available and reserves are stored in truly vast quantities at facilities across the Imperium. Likewise, nutrient solution is relatively easy to make and utilises waste materials, but even the penny pinching Imperium sees the wisdom of occasionally providing fresh drums of concentrated pure nutrient.

The bulk of deliveries take place on regular schedules using normal commercial trade, occasionally with a Scout inspector riding along to oversee the process. Scout personnel will intervene directly in disaster relief or other crises. The Scout Service are also responsible for repairing, servicing and updating any Imperial production plants, though again this duty is often subcontracted out.

Shuluum History

Large-scale production of *shuluum* dates from the earliest days of the Imperium, and was originally sponsored and operated by the Ministry of Colonization. When the Sylean Federation became the Imperium and expanded into new and largely unknown territory, the first explorers, pioneers and colonists faced the very real problem of finding reliable long-term sources of food.

The Imperium's solution was *shuluum* meals, made from trustworthy ingredients and providing everything required in order to keep the human body healthy. Production facilities were set up throughout the new territories as the Imperium expanded. They provided a vital lifeline to the colonists settling the newly acquired Imperial worlds.

As an interesting footnote, there was an underlying reason for the bland flavours of Imperial produced *shuluum*: it couldn't be made to be too nice, the reasoning went, or those brave pioneers wouldn't be inspired to discover and exploit locally available foodstuffs.

As the Imperium matured and local foodstuffs became trusted and broadly available, the need for *shuluum* meals diminished. However, the Imperium saw the benefit of a contingency plan in case of emergencies. *Shuluum* production was maintained (at much reduced levels) to provide a reliable source of food should internal supply problems arise.

The Civil War period (604 to 622) saw a great deal of disruption within the Empire, with interstellar trade being hit relatively hard. These momentous events underlined the need for a reliable backup to normal supply and demand.

The Imperium continues to produce *shuluum* meals in large quantities and stockpiles both the ingredients and finished products against future need. Instances have occurred when a crisis has overtaken a world and Imperial-produced *shuluum* meals (discreetly provided to the world's government by the Scout Service or by agents acting on behalf of the Empire) have bridged a crucial gap in supply.

A certain percentage of Imperial Shuluum production is offered commercially, always at very low prices. It provides a trusted and familiar option for individuals who are struggling with local cuisine, and a safe and cheap dietary option to those who may be experiencing difficulties in their personal circumstances.

Private companies manufacture their own brands of *shuluum*, which universally have a better texture and flavour than the Imperial product. None of these other brands can match the artificially low

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Kurishdam

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Imperial prices, and indeed none try. They sell themselves on their excellence.

Most citizens will never eat Imperial-produced *shuluum* meals, instead choosing local produce or consuming staples and delicacies imported from agricultural worlds.

Other Imperial Food

The Vilani legacy

Shugilii (food preparers) from Vilani culture maintain a tradition of being able to convert unpalatable or downright toxic materials into edible foodstuffs. Those techniques still exist: in fact, modernised and mechanised versions of various *shugilii* processes are in use on a great many Imperial worlds. They provide cheap (and typically bland) food from local sources that has fed countless generations for millennia. In many cases *shugilii*-processed foods supplant Shuluum production.

Agriculture

Other avenues of food production include hunting game, traditional agriculture, geneering and biotech, cloning, artificially grown flesh, and of course hydroponics. All of these (and many other processes) are valuable sources of food within the Empire.

Most worlds within the Imperium have some degree of agricultural capability; basically any world not specifically designated as non-agricultural. Such worlds often employ *shugilii* agricultural techniques. They generally only produce enough foodstuffs to feed their own population, and more often than not there will be a deficit in production. Interstellar trade will usually more than service any shortfall.

Agricultural worlds, however, produce vast amounts of foodstuffs and export their produce across the Empire. Their exports include soil and loam, grains, real fruit and vegetables, fresh fish and other seafood, meat that has been raised on the hoof, decorative plants, shrubs and trees, seed crops, specialist foods such as wines and teas, and anything else you can imagine. Such products command premium prices, of course. It is no coincidence that many Ag worlds are Rich worlds too.

Conclusion

It should be noted that this overview is from a human perspective, though similar initiatives exist for minor human (with very specialist diets) and non-human citizens.

Tampering with Imperial food production or otherwise interfering with or preventing distribution is a serious crime against the local government, the Imperial state and the person of the Emperor. The full weight of the law will be brought upon offenders. Overtly disparaging *shuluum* (typically by irresponsible use of public media) is frowned upon and appropriate action may be taken. Referring to *shuluum* as "slum food" is generally not done publicly.

Author's Note: If you fancy trying some shuluum *for yourself, a good early 21st century equivalent is Quorn (please, any less than positive statements in the paragraphs above are no reflection whatsoever on delicious, nutritious Quorn or any similar products). Go for the unflavoured variety to get the full Imperial experience.*

Critics' Corner

The Cascadia Adventures

reviewed by "kafka"

The Cascadia Adventures. John Watts.
Gypsy Knights Games http://www.gypsyknightsgames.com/
92pp, softcover
US$19.99/UK£11.81

The Cascadia Adventures compiles previous PDF adventures into a single volume, revamping some and making them better through better art and less repetition. If you have already purchased the single adventures you will be happy with this upgrade. Gypsy Knight Games has once again shown itself to be a leader in creating interesting and dynamic adventures which can be linked together as a campaign or still played as one-shots.

(Continued on page 45)

The brief synopsis is contained below…sorry, no spoilers just like all of my reviews of adventures.

Save Our Ship

A "whale ship". That's what the casinos on Chance call a starship sent to ferry back a wealthy gambler. The Razz Casino dispatched their "whale ship", *Royal Flush*, to pick up an influential politician on Roskilde. However, something has gone wrong. Now the casino has hired you to find out what has happened. Another casino horning in on the business? Political enemies? An accident? It is up to you to find out.

The Lost Girl

A daughter lost. It tugs at the heart of any parent. Khalil Moskalawicz, a former card dealer at The Razz Casino, has lost contact with his only daughter, Frida. When no one else will help, Khalil turns to his former boss, Carrie O'Malley. And when Carrie O'Malley needs someone to take on a tough job, she calls on you. Has Frida been kidnapped? Murdered? Turned to a life of crime? It is up to you to find out the truth.

Fled

Thousands of credits stolen from the Razz Casino on Chance is just the beginning! Milton 'The Monk' Hawthorne, security officer, has robbed the Razz Casino and fled the system. Carrie O'Malley, owner of the casino, has hired the crew of MV *Dust Runner* to locate Hawthorne and recover the stolen money. However, Hawthorne may have far bigger plans, including an act of revenge that may change the course of Cascadian politics forever. Is Hawthorne a mad genius? Or just a pawn in a far greater conspiracy? Can the characters stop Hawthorne? Can they recover the money?

Because these were linked one-shots, they had a somewhat hastily assembled feel to them. By bringing them all together, Gypsy Knight Games has actually managed to give a more coherent campaign feel to them. Furthermore, there is excellent character art to accompany the pregens. Overall, Gypsy

Knight Games has made sure that if you purchased the original adventures you will be happy with the upgrade. While these adventures are specific to the ATU of the Clement Sector, they can be ported into the OTU or another ATU with minimal effort, as Gypsy Knight Games has made every effort to keep it generic with references that are quite universal and may be applied to other universes because of common tropes. This might also be a weakness, though – they risk becoming 'vanilla', as in the early days of GDW's *Traveller* or the original *Star Trek*, where stand-ins for the powers of the day are rife. While we all steal from the headlines or do a riff from current events, and thus risk our adventures becoming dated, Gypsy Knight Games steadfastly avoids this pitfall. Their work occasionally does, however, have a bit of a hasty or unfinished nature about it. That is not necessarily a bad thing, as it is very much in keeping with the "Old School Revival" – to make roleplaying more sandbox-like.

Personally, I prefer a more narrativist approach with different sounds, smells, colours described

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prose, whether purple or otherwise. This gives a full sense of depth to an adventure that adds to the Sense of Wonder that is so vital to SFRPGs. Boxed purple prose and flowcharts would do it, as in the 'nugget' adventure format from DGP. However, I realize that is not how *Traveller* operates. Or at least not since DGP's sad demise.

The adventures themselves are well written and follow a pretty standard set of tropes. There are no great mysteries or enigmas to be solved. In many ways they would right home in an espionage game. They do utilize the "international" elements of the Clement Sector but in ways that native inhabitants might find rather stereotypical. However, *Traveller* has long been "Yanks in Space" and even the shifting of the license over to Mongoose has done little to shift that bias beyond their *2300AD* line.

All in all, it is a solid product, but perhaps not for everyone – as my *Traveller* campaigns come to resemble more *Star Trek* or *Battlestar Galactica* (which place an emphasis on exploration), these settled areas give a more *Firefly* feel to the game. And, many people have compared *Traveller* to *Firefly* – naturally, it is a matter of choice. If referees are looking to integrate a sense of wonder into the adventures, they are best off picking up the subsector guides which will give more detail on worlds and systems. ✪

Zhodani Character Generation for *Traveller: The New Era*

by Peter Gray

This article originally appeared on the Freelance Traveller website in 2003.

Generating Zhodani characters according to TNE rules requires a few modifications. The persistence of psionic superiority within their culture adds a few advantages to Zhodani characters when attributes are rolled. The attributes of Zhodani characters follow the usual 2D6-1 system outlined in the rulebook. But if their dice-generated social standing is A or B, the character is immediately tested for psionic potential. Should the character have a psionic strength of 6-, their social standing falls to 9, and they do not receive psionic training. Characters who have a psionic strength of 6+ are either Intendants (Social Standing A) or minor Nobles (Social Standing B). This is a significant point, as nobles and intendants automatically receive commissions upon enlistment within certain careers, and have a different starting educational background. Nobles generated by this system are assumed to be savants or especially gifted psions that succeeded in the Olympic Games at a young age; Intendants are the average psions who have to wait for the chance to prove themselves at a more advanced or seasoned age.

All character generation for noble and intendant characters begins at age 13, when they enter the first level of the Aristocratic Academy (see below) and begin receiving an intensive education in psionics. During this time, progressive testing of talents and aptitudes predetermine the career path of most of these individuals, usually within the government, military or academia. Intendants are the functional managers and facilitators that run most important functions of the Zhodani Consulate. Their careers are usually Attorney, Bureaucrat, Law Enforcement, Engineer, Manager, Professor, Scientist, Doctor, Psionics Researcher, and all military options. Nobles are the *creme de la creme* of Consulate society and usually are found in Attorney, Bureaucrat, Engineer, Manager, Professor, Doctor, Psionics Researcher and Wealthy Traveller. No normal Zhodani Noble or Intendant will have a prior career in Athlete, Barbarian, Entertainer, Criminal, Corsair, Tough or Prisoner careers by choice, and those that do are considered to be deviants, with a social standing of 1. Nobles

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rarely are found in the Undercover Agent and Law Enforcement careers.

Zhodani Proles, those with a social standing of 9 or less, have access to all careers in the TNE rulebook except for Barbarian, Wealthy Traveller and Psionics Researcher. The Criminal, Corsair, Tough and Prisoner careers are rare, and any Zhodani Prole with such a career background has their social standing reduced to 1, and will be outlaws subject to harassment or arrest by Zhodani police and Tavrchedl' forces. Proles are generally not found in senior management positions, and those that have managerial or military commissions are limited to a rank of O5 or less. Prole social standing is effectively limited to 9, unless they are in a scientific, medical or legal career where social advancement is listed under the "Other Effects", in which case such benefits represents recognition for distinction within their fields, but this is a Ceremonial Nobility without power or authority, in contrast to the Authentic Nobility with psionic talents.

Noble Social Advancement: Regardless of career chosen, the Authentic Nobility advance one social point for every two terms served in a career. Ceremonial Nobility only advance according to their careers. Those in the specific Noble career simply receive a generic "officer" rank that denotes their standing as a junior or senior member of a particular noble strata, and are expected to obey their seniors or command their juniors.

Starting Cash: Nobles start with four times the cash rolled on the starting cash table, and Intendants start with two times. In addition an Authentic Noble always has land and responsibilities commensurate with their social standing, usually a fief of 1D10× (Social Standing×2) square kilometers that generates 2D6×100 credits a month per square kilometer. Nobles with such land must spend at least one third of a Zhodani year in contact with their managers or present on their estates, or forfeit their grants. Nobles may liquidate their grants for 2D6×100 credits per square kilometer of fief.

Noble Name Suffixes: With every advancement in social standing above B, the name suffix of the noble character changes to reflect their position. This suffix is always taken in place of the last syllable of the character's name as originally generated:

Zhodani Noble Name Suffixes	
Social Standing	**Name Suffic**
A	-iepr
B	-atl
C	-stebr
D	-tlas
E	-tlasche'
F	-iashav

Pre-Career education: Zhodani characters have access to every education option available in the rulebook (except Hiver Technical Institute). Intendants have the additional option of going to an Aristocratic Academy; in any case they take, in addition to the normal skills under each education listing, an asset of 3 in Psionics.

A. **Aristocratic Academy:** The elite prep schools in which Zhodani nobles and intendants are prepared for careers in the Zhodani government, military and security services. Intendant characters do not have to take this option, but it does fast track promotions, and automatically allows for the character to compete in the Psionic Olympics, which are the only means by which a character may enter the authentic nobility. The Academy is divided into two levels: A Basic Academy that begins for a character at age 13 takes a full term to complete. Upon finishing this term, a character may opt to enter undergraduate university, military academy or flight school, or continue on to the Advanced Academy, which also takes a full term:

Prerequisites: Social Standing A+, Homeworld in Zhodani Consulate

First Term (Basic Academy):

Skills: Psionics-4, Determination-2

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Second Term (Advanced Academy):

Skills: Psionics-2, Physical Science-2, Social Science-2, Interaction-1, Perception-2, Determination-1

All Terms:

Contacts: If student enters Advanced Academy, they receive two contacts, either Noble or Academic.

Other Effects: No secondary activities may be taken during either level of academy.

Advanced Academy students may either enter Postgraduate university, or the Noble or Intendant careers. Intendants may immediately try out for the Olympic Games. Nobles receive an additional Psionics asset of 1 upon completion of the first term.

B. **Olympic Games:** The psionic competition that determines the advancement of intendants into the ranks of the nobility. Intendants may only enter the competition once during their careers, but are not barred from entering again if they change careers. The Olympic Games count as one term.

Prerequisites: Social Standing A. Must have completed Basic Aristocratic Academy.

Resolution: The competition is divided into preliminary and final rounds. During the preliminary rounds, a character must throw his or her psionic strength or less on 3D6 for *each* psionic talent they possess. In the final round, the character must roll for 12+ on 2D6, DM+1 for each successful preliminary competition (each talent successfully rolled for) and DM-1 for each failed preliminary competition.

Skills: If more preliminaries were won than lost, Psionics 1 in each victorious talent.

Finals winner receives Psionics 2 in each victorious talent from preliminary round, and Social Standing B.

Other Effects: No Secondary Activities during Olympic Games. Characters who win the final round automatically become either nobles, or enter the Noble career.

Zhodani Service Skills: Most Zhodani careers are virtually the same as those presented in the TNE rulebook. However, a Noble or Intendant may substitute advancement in Psionics for any skill listed in their career path. Additionally, Prole characters may opt for either Interaction or Perception even if it is not normally part of their career's skill package.

Zhodani Careers

Zhodani Noble

The Zhodani Noble is the pinnacle of his or her society. By dint of their superior mental capabilities, they are given immense power over their less talented and enlightened equals. But this power is not to be taken or used lightly. A noble is only as good as his or her moral character, for power breeds responsibility. This well-intentioned social contract has created contradictions, however, that have rattled the normal equanimity of Zhodani culture in recent years. For in theory all Zhodani are equal before the law, and a noble is no higher or greater than the lowest prole. But their power and responsibility are calculated to protect their charges from the evils of emotional turbulence and deceit. And protectors are by definition not equal with those they protect, as the Proles are dependent upon their guidance and vigilance. And it is not clear if this division should rely upon the supposed superiority of psionics. This bit of "all are equal, yet some are more equal than others" Orwellian logic has come under greater scrutiny as psionic talents have waned and waxed in some regions of the Consulate, and cracks long plastered over by the Consuls have manifested into bloody conflict and schisms farther to coreward. Nevertheless, the nobility represent the best and brightest that the Consulate has to offer.

Prerequisites: Social Standing B+, Homeworld in the Zhodani Consulate. Graduate of Advanced Aristocratic Academy.

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First Term:

Skills: Psionics-4, Economics-2, Determination-1, Social Science-1

Subsequent Terms:

Skills: Psionics, Social Science, Determination, Interaction, Economics, Perception, Social Science, Vehicle

All Terms:

Special Adventure: 7+ for Aircraft, Engineer, Charm, Vehicle or Vice

Promotion: 9+, DM+1 if Psi 8+ and Int 8+

Contacts: Two per term among Nobility, Academia or Government

Other Effects: Three ship DMs per term for a Scout, Trader or Yacht (players choice)

Zhodani Noble Intendant

But while the nobles bask in their glory, it falls to the unsung Intendants to actually keep the trains running. In many ways the Intendant is the touchstone between the Proles and the eternally busy Authentic Nobility, the medium of communication between the two main strata. The middle ground that an Intendant occupies is critically important to the health of the Consulate, in that information flow constantly reaches the insulated upper classes. But it is an unglamorous job. Most Intendants naturally have ambition for advancement into the upper ranks of the nobility, and nearly all spend years concentrating upon the psionic advancement that would allow them to successfully pass the Olympic Games.

Failure to advance is grudgingly accepted by the losers, though the anonymity of defeat is clearly not preferred. But if the Intendants are the watchmen, who watches them? While their ambition is laudable, the examples of elders who failed to succeed in the Olympic Games makes competition for advancement intense. And the process awards the strongest of psionic talents, not the smartest or the most experienced. The flow of information that Zhodani nobles receive, then, is biased and manipulated by social climbers who are basically indifferent to bringing any bad news, exacerbating the schisms that have appeared in Zhodani culture in recent decades.

Prerequisites: Psi 6+ and Social Standing A, Homeworld in the Zhodani Consulate, Graduate of Advanced Aristocratic Academy

First Term:

Skills: Psionics-4, Economics-2, Interaction-2

Subsequent Terms:

Skills: Aircraft, Charm, Economic, Perception, Interaction, Social Science, Psi, Vehicle

All Terms:

Special Adventure: 8+ for Psionics, Explore, Charm, Engineer, Artisan, Gun Combat, Vice, and Spacehand

Contacts: Two per term, Government or Noble

Added Effects: Two Secondary Activities per term. Double Starting Cash. Two ship DMs per term for a Scout, Trader or Yacht (players choice)

Zhodani Bureaucrat

Beneath the nobles and intendants are the colorless pencil pushers and data entry clerks of the various Consular, subsector and planetary councils. Oddly, this gives the Bureaucrats a greater degree of power than one would expect, since the Consulate depends upon the flow of information, but in many cases the Intendants and Nobles are too busy to pay much attention. The ability to know where all of the bodies are buried allows for these grey fellows to avoid or redirect scrutiny by the Tavrchedl' or other authorities that would curb their power and access to easy wealth. Many have recently begun redirecting money and information to their own private stockpiles, in anticipation of further disintegration. After all, any successor state will still need tax collectors and functionaries in order to grow and survive, and after centuries of tireless duty these people are ready to get that long promised gold watch.

Prerequisites: Int 7+ and Edu 5+, Homeworld in Zhodani Consulate. Nobles and Intendants

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must be graduate of Basic Aristocratic Academy

First Term:

Commission: Automatic for Intendants and Nobles. 8+ for Proles, DM+1 if Edu 8+, DM+2 if Soc 8-9

Skills: Computer-2, Perception-2, Economics-1, Interaction-1, Technician-1

Subsequent Terms:

Skills: Language, Interaction, Economics, Charm, Computer, Technician, Vehicle

All Terms:

Promotion: 8+, DM+1 if Soc 8-9, DM+2 if Soc A+

Special Adventure: 8+ for Gun Combat, Language, Aircraft, Space Tech, Perception, Vice

Contacts: Two per term, government or law enforcement

Other Effects: Nobles and Intendants receive two Ship DMs per term, proles receive one ship DM per term

Zhodani Consular Guard

The elite psionic militia of the Zhodani Consulate is pervasive and omnipresent in their society. The Consular Guard is charged with the protection of the Zhodani Consulate and its societal system against all enemies, foreign or domestic. For the most part the normal Guardsman is a soldier who uses his or her psionic abilities to devastating effect against enemy militaries and guerrillas. These soldiers wear the distinctive "bug-eye" battle dress and combat armor made infamous during the Frontier Wars with the Third Imperium. This armor is specially designed so that its electronic features do not interfere with psionic talents. In CG service, Nobles are the officer corps, while Intendants are the rank-and-file and NCOs. Because of the scarcity and value of these troops, training is more extensive, with heavy concentration in psionics and exploration talents. Military skills are often neglected at their expense, so that these troops are deployed more for their shock value than their combat abilities.

Prerequisites: Soc A+ and Psi 7+, Homeworld in Zhodani Consulate, Graduate of Basic Aristocratic Academy

First Term:

Commission: Automatic for nobles. 10+ for Intendants, DM+1 if Psi 8+

Skills (officers and enlisted): Spacehand-1, Psionics-4, Explore-2

Other Effects: No Special Duty or Secondary Activities during first term

Second Term:

Skills (Officers): Determination-1, Explore-1, Gun Combat-2, Tactics-2, Interaction-1, Spacehand-1

Skills (Enlisted): Gun Combat-2, Space Tech-1, Heavy Weapons-1, Spacehand-1, Thrown Weapons-1, Personal Transport-1, Explore-1

Subsequent Terms:

Skills (Officers): Gun Combat, Tactics, Heavy Weapons, Artillery, Personal Transport, Spacehand, Determination, Interaction, Charm

Skills (Enlisted): Gun Combat, Melee, Heavy Weapons, Artillery, Space Tech, Personal Transport, Spacehand, Vice

All Terms:

Promotion: 8+, DM+1 if Psi 8+

Special Duty: 7+ for Melee, Aircraft, Vehicle, Vice, Interaction, Technician, Artillery, Determination and Psi

Contacts: One per term, Military or Law Enforcement

Other Effects: One Ship DM per term in either trader or warship (player's choice)

Tavrchedl' (Thought Police)

The Tavrchedl' ("The Guardians of our Morality"), or the Thought Police to non-Zhodani, are the guard dogs of the Zhodani flock. Combining the elements of police, undercover agents, psychologists and triage medics, the Tavrchedl' is forever on the

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lookout for the kinds of mental defect and emotional turmoil that could infect the entire community. In that sense they are closer to public health officials in their demeanor and respectability. Patrols rove through the community at periodic intervals, summoning proles to reeducation sessions and therapy that cleanse them of their grief, resentment and hostility. But as a Solomani philosopher once said, when you look into the void, the void looks into you. In the past, too many Tavrchedl' of conscience became burned out by the emotional turmoil they encounter and become confused or embittered, and even begin to question the underpinnings of their society. These people do not last long, and are eventually purged, leaving to a perfunctory and partially corrupt petty officialdom the all-important task of gauging the health of the body politic. The void of society has become a void within the government itself, a black area that the upper classes had unknowingly veered into.

Prerequisites: Previous term in Consular Guard, Telepathy and Sense talents

First Term:

Commission: Automatic for nobles. 10+ for Intendants, DM+1 if Psi 8+

Skills: Psionics-3, Determination-1, Vehicle-1, Perception-2, Interaction-1

Subsequent Terms:

Promotion: 8+, DM+1 if Psi 8+

Skills: Psionics, Determination, Perception, Interaction, Charm, Vice, Vehicle

All Terms:

Special Duty: 7+ for Vice, Crime, Language, Melee, Medical, Technician, Social Science

Contacts: One per term, Law Enforcement or Prole

Other Effects: One Ship DM per term in either trader or warship (players choice), If more than one term served, +1 Initiative

Prole

The Salt of the Ear… er, Zhodane. The base of the Zhodani pyramid consists of the basic skilled workers that work tirelessly away in Zhodani factories and offices and other basic places of employment. Up until the Dawn Heralder rebellion to coreward, it was safely assumed by most nobles and intendants that the Proles could be convinced of their contentment and place in society. Now nothing is fixed or stable, and the lower class are beginning to worry about their place in the disintegrating Consulate. Centuries of indoctrination and Tavrchedl' reeducation has destroyed the independence of the Proles, so that they are now sheep willing to follow any shepherd that promises stability, even if it destroys the Consulate in the process. Proles always use enlisted ranks (E1 to E10). A skill cascade must be chosen from the Prole cluster listed below; and that subsequently becomes the characters career focus, and must choose every other skill from that cascade.

Prerequisites: Soc 9-, Edu 5+

First Term:

Skills: 8 in any Prole cluster, Interaction or Perception

Prole Cluster: Economics, Technician, Vehicle, Animal Handling, Artisan, Engineer (except for Combat Engineer), Fine Arts, Spacehand, Medical, Space Tech

Subsequent Terms:

Promotion: 9+, DM+1 if Edu 8+

Skills: Prole specialty, Interaction, Perception or Charm

Special Adventure: 8+ for Gun Combat, Aircraft, Spacehand, Vice, Vehicle, Explore

Contacts: Two per term, Prole or Academic

Other Effects: +1 Secondary Activity at end of career

The Saga of the Free Trader *Boxcars*

by Ken Pick

This is a story of the Foible Federation Campaign, originally posted to the Freelance Traveller website in 2001.

Unlike most *Traveller* tales, this one doesn't begin with the Type A Free Trader getting into trouble out on the Federation frontier. That comes later.

This one begins with Sir Lazarus Myrinn, newly-retired Guardian Knight. As a boy, he dreamed of being a Scout, adventuring on the fringe of the Federation. When he turned 18 and applied, the Scout Service rejected him, and he ended up drafted into the Navy. Testing revealed a high psi potential, and he was tapped for the prestigious Guardian Knights. For the next twenty years, Laz served the Foible Federation as a Guardian Knight, racking up a distinguished career and the respect of his peers. Then "Old Laz" retired, to pursue his dream of "finding ways to get in trouble out on the frontier". Since even his generous retirement benefits came nowhere near owning a ship, he did the next best thing: put together a balanced ship's crew—pilot, navigator, medic, engineers, gunners—and hired on to a ship in search of a crew.

Sir Lazarus Myrrin, run by Wayne Shaw, who described him as resembling "a forty-ish Lorne Greene", though I always assumed he had Wayne's stocky build and trademark cowlick. I remember Wayne introducing us (i.e. handing me the character sheet):

Me: "Sir Lazarus Myrinn… Soc 11—he's a 'Sir', alright… Seven terms… 'Guardian Knight'?

Wayne: "Special elite Other."

Me: "Telepathy and Awareness, pretty much maxed out—figures you'd be running a psi… Skill list… **Lightsaber-3***?"*

Wayne: "Yeah. Don's got Jedi Knights in his campaign."

One of the first he tapped was "Caesar", a former free-trader navigator/gunner with various mechanical/technical skills. Caesar was a male Cynthian—a 75cm tall, upright Himalayan cat with a face-mask like a raccoon—who pretty much became Old Laz's sidekick. Now, Cynthies are heavy-duty matriarchal; male Cynthies are these timid, docile subs to the females' doms. Not Caesar—he was orphaned as a kitten, unofficially "adopted" and raised by human free-traders. He wore clothes, went after human women, and had a bad case of "Short Man Syndrome"—twenty kilos of in-your-face machismo.

Caesar the Macho Male Cynthian, run by Tim McGrady, who'd heard of Cynthians but didn't know the details of their behavior. When he found out, Caesar's personality had already been established, and we adapted his past to explain it. According to Tim, Caesar was seriously freaked out by "real Cynthies" and avoided them whenever possible. He also liked human women, "though he really couldn't do anything with them, just curl up in their laps and get them to 'pet the kitty'." Though the crimson leisure-suit jacket, silk ascot scarf, and cigarette holder loaded with Cynthian Nip would tend to spoil the illusion…

If Caesar had a theme song, it'd be "Macho Man" by the Village People. For everyone else, it would have been Meco's disco cut of "Star Wars".

And Anjin—at least that's what I think his name was; everyone usually referred to him as "That Sonofabitching Fighter Pilot". Ex-Navy fighter ace, who got discharged on a Section Eight (mental instability), completely rebuilt a surplus *Canard* fighter to full operational condition, and hired himself and his fighter out to free-traders as "pirate insurance". (This part of the Fed frontier had continuing problems with Slishii raiders.)

Anjin the crazy fighter pilot, player's name lost to history. Maxed-out Small Craft Pilot/Gunnery. Always thought of him as Eurasian, with a gi-top shirt and a Samurai-style topknot; the guy flew like a Kamikaze, he could at least look Japanese. And his rebuilt Canard*—single-seat aerospace fighter of about 15 tons or so, 8-10 G engines, fully atmosphere-capable, with the standard Fed fighter fit of twin beam lasers and a Mod2/bis.*

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These three formed a permanent "core group", fleshed out by two or three additional "temps" at any given time.

Now for the temps. With only two men and one furball, the "LazCo core group" was seriously short-handed—especially engineers and gunners—so they hit the hiring halls and Startown spacer-bars for new hires, Laz using psi to evaluate the potential temps.

During one of these hiring expeditions-turned-bar-crawls, they run into this Kree woman, a tall amazon with sky-blue skin and Navy-blue hair. Caesar pops a serious woody at the sight of her and makes his move—"Let me handle this one, Boss…" Well, his "pet the kitty" act and brilliant pick-up line didn't work. At all. She tells the little furball to buzz off—in the Kree dialect of Navy Creole. Caesar's case of Short Man Syndrome kicks in and he gets in her face.

"Time to put the cat out." She picks him up by the scruff of the neck and the root of his tail and gives him the bar-rag treatment down the length of the bar and right through the front window—

"HEY! BOSS! HELP!" >*CRASH!*<

Caesar came to in the local ER, somewhat the worse for wear and with his wardrobe completely trashed. When he's released, who's there to greet him but Old Laz—with one arm around the Kree, whose name's Teramell. During the resulting bar fight and its aftermath, Laz had found out—among other things—she was an experienced master gunner and hired her on-the-spot, getting out of the bar fight unscathed and undetected using a combination of her Brawling skills and his psionic mind-tricks. Oh, and while Caesar was getting patched up, Laz and Teramell had filled in the rest of the temps for the ship's crew. And more…

Teramell had an additional inheritance, including some prize shares from her days as a privateer among the independent worlds beyond the Fed borders. With the additional backing of her Kree clan and warrior society, she could swing enough additional cash to put LazCo over the top for a down on a modest ship. Laz immediately inducted her into the "core group" as co-owner, with her connections as silent partners, and changed plans. Instead of hiring onto an existing ship, they'd try to get their own.

Enter the *Boxcars*, an armed and modified Type A Free Trader, available at a big discount from a bankruptcy liquidation sale. She was an old ship, with a lot of mods from her prior career—slightly-uprated computer/avionics, a pair of twin turrets with a pulse laser and a sandcaster apiece, some of her passenger staterooms and low berths deleted to enlarge her cargo hold, and 15-20 tons of that cargo hold refitted to take a single small craft. All in all, typical of an old free-trader on the frontier, as far from the Federation's bureaucracy as possible. A bit of haggling over the price, a last-minute deal against Anjin's fighter, and LazCo had their ship.

***Free Trader* Boxcars**. *200 tons. Jump-1. 1-G. 30 tons fuel. Model/1bis. 6 staterooms, 10 low berths. Two twin turrets (pulse laser/sandcaster). 83 tons cargo + 20 tons small craft. Streamlined. 4-6 crew. MCr 40.5, marked down to under MCr 30 due to age and desperation.*

Anjin's fighter fitted into the small craft bay in the forward cargo hold, using a trapeze arrangement for launch and recovery. The 15-20 tons thus unavailable for cargo cut way into a Type A's ability to break even, but with Slishii raiding the local border areas, survivability took priority over profitability.

Rebuilt* Canard *Fighter. *18 tons. 8-G. 2 tons fuel. Model/2bis. Single-seat cockpit, twin beam lasers. Streamlined. MCr30 originally, rebuilt from salvaged/scrounged components.*

With her crew roster filled, the *Boxcars* then set off on the usual routine of a free trader—load spec cargo, jump to next system, sell spec cargo, occasional adventures on-planet, repeat as needed. System after system, world after world—Nephi, Ebios, Thraxis, Alkaida, Laman—working their way out to the Fed frontier and the loose halo of independent worlds beyond, where free-traders can actually break even.

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Old Laz and Teramell continued their relationship, becoming partners in more than the business use of the term. Over the next few months, they worked their way through the Federation frontier, dipping into and out of the Fed itself, through strings of D- and E-port homesteaders' worlds like Taranis, Epona, and Tanna-Sheru, where the only ships you'll run into are other free-traders, Scouts, system-defense militias, small privateers, occasional Navy anti-pirate patrols with corsair-class patrol corvettes and frontier crews as "piratical"-looking as their quarries—and Slishii raiders.

Now comes the part where the Free Trader gets into real trouble on the frontier. Boosting out from the frontier colony of Ponderosa, the *Boxcars* was almost ready to jump to the next system when the sky around them went Cerenkov blue with jump emergences. *Slishii!*

The *Boxcars*, already powering up for jump, was *not* about to stick around with three Slishii corsairs incoming. Seeing easy prey, the raiders opened up on the *Boxcars*, scoring a couple hits before she sparkled blue and vanished into jump space. None of the hits was ship-threatening, but one slagged the port turret—where Chief Gunner Teramell had just strapped in to return fire.

Local convention: Blow-through from a starship hit does 10D damage to anyone in its path, reducible to 5D by wearing heavy armor (ballistic cloth or better).

They pulled the Kree woman—or what was left of her—out of the turret, peeled off her suit as best they could, dosed her with Necronol and other trauma stabilizers, and froze her down into one of the low berths. Critically injured, she was still alive and stable—sheer Kree toughness, if nothing else—when the lid of the low berth sealed over her.

Local precaution: Always keep a couple of low berths empty; if it looks like trouble, prep them for casualties. If you're nailed by a ship hit and not immediately killed, you have a lot better chance of survival if your shipmates freeze you down and get you to a full starport trauma center than if they try to treat your injuries aboard ship.

Three weeks, two jumps, and some field repairs later they got back across the border to Terminus, a B-port with a major trauma center—only to find that Teramell had died in freeze.

Laz took it hard. *How? She was Kree! Stronger and tougher than a human! She was stable when we froze her down; Terminus has the best trauma center and unfreezing record for five parsecs—This Couldn't Happen!*

As they laid over in Terminus for repairs, Anjin and Caesar took care of business while Laz made the arrangements with Teramell's clan and warrior society, working out his grief. He checked the medical records at the trauma center, tore down the low berths, went over the ship's recorders for any explanation, any clue, *anything*. All he found was some evidence of a minor low berth malfunction; it had performed a bit under spec, normally not serious, but coupled with Teramell's weakened condition, it had been enough.

Though Psicometry was not one of his Talents, he even attempted a mind-scan for any psionic residue—"Ripples in the Force"—that Teramell could have left as she lay there, reaching for some remaining part of her. Nothing clear; just some ambiguous mixture of the ship's crew who'd used or maintained the low berths—Teramell, Caesar, a couple unidentifiable shadows of others.

By the time they were repaired and ready to put to sky, Laz had come to one conclusion—*Never Again!* On his own, he took them deeper in debt—replacing the low berths, rigging Anjin's fighter for rapid-launch, buying a pair of decoy-emitter rounds for the sandcasters. Everyone's Vacc Suit was refitted with layers of Cloth and Reflec to yield makeshift Combat Armor—temps and new-hires at their own expense—and Laz initiated a near-constant series of combat drills like he was back in the Navy.

Over the next month or two, routine aboard the *Boxcars* returned to its post-Teramell normalcy—load spec cargo, jump to next system, sell spec cargo,

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and drill, drill, drill… Turnover on the temps was a bit higher, thanks to the last item.

Load spec cargo, jump to next system, sell spec cargo, and drill, drill, drill… In a big ragged loop from Terminus beyond the border, through systems without official names, where the Nostran Consortium (a cross between a corporate merchant house and a privateer fleet) provided extra-legal protection where the Fed Navy couldn't reach.

If System A4-0802 had been inside the Federation proper, it'd be a waystop between two major worlds, with a real name, fueling station and patrol base. Here on the frontier, it was uninhabited and unnamed, with an automated nav beacon and an occasional Consortium patrol the only signs of life.

The *Boxcars* had just jumped in-system and was getting its fix on the beacon when fire-control radars lit them up. What they thought was a 400-ton Type R passing through the system turned out to be another Slishii corsair, lying in wait.

Laz and Anjin were standing bridge watch when the "Type R" dropped the pretense and started boosting on a 3-G intercept course. This time, Laz was at the controls. Guardian Knights were trained to respond to emergencies and/or combat situations with a Zen-like state of "no-mind", operating entirely by their psionic awareness and subconscious ("Using The Force"). Training kicking in, Laz triggered his "panic button", launching a pair of decoys from the ship's two sandcasters and starting evasion jinking while Anjin dashed down to the refitted forward hold—dodging the gunners climbing into the turrets—and powered up his *Canard*.

On the Slishii radars, the target free-trader split into three targets, all jinking at 1-G. This time the decoys worked, drawing off the corsair's first salvo while one of the three targets separated another, smaller object. Away and free, Anjin's fighter spun and closed on the Slishii, jinking past incoming fire. Twin beam lasers raked gouges across the corsair's hull, then Anjin was past, flipping a one-eighty and continuing fire as he coasted away. Another thrust burn sent him back at the Slishii for another pass; this time the lasers raked across the forward section, and the raider went from three gees to zero amid a cascade of secondary explosions.

As Anjin shot back towards the *Boxcars*, flipping for another pass, the Slishii stopped firing. And emitting. Now silent, it tumbled towards the free-trader and fighter, what should have been its bridge and crew compartments torn open and outgassing. *Boxcars'* pulse lasers scored a couple additional hits as it tumbled past, without response; Anjin held fire, then boosted after it, matching speed and trajectory. Again, no response. He brought the fighter closer, scanned, then radioed the *Boxcars* to follow.

The Slishii ship still tumbled silently as the free-trader boosted up to match it at a pitiful 1-G, both pulse lasers trained and ready. Still no sign of life. Some quick radio chatter, then the *Boxcars* closed to almost touching and a scratch boarding party in EVA suits leaped from the airlock, covered by both ship's and fighter's guns.

First into the corsair was Laz's mind, telepathically probing; second-in was Laz himself, lightsaber fired-up and ready. Nothing. After a sweep-and-clear, they realized what they had—a salvageable 400-ton warship, free for the taking, fully legal under Right of Salvage in the Federation, never mind beyond the border. Anjin's fighter had gutted the crew compartments and part of the bridge, killing the entire Slishii crew while leaving the ship mostly untouched—engines, powerplant, computer, and most of the armament either intact or repairable.

Anjin's lasers had rolled a critical hit (crew), with little damage to the ship's major systems.

They spent another day and a half in-system, repairing and altering the corsair to where a skeleton crew could limp her through jump space. Putting a prize crew aboard, they formation-jumped her back to Terminus as booty.

If LazCo could sell the prize, not only would it be shares all-around, but they could pay off the *Boxcars* and/or trade up to a larger ship. The problem

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was, finding a buyer. Because of Federation laws and regs, it'd have to be to independents—beyond the border again, but who?

The Nostran Consortium was an obvious choice; their factor put in an initial bid almost before the *Boxcars* and her prize landed. But Laz had dealt with them before, during his active-duty days as a Guardian Knight, and he'd blow up the ship before he'd sell it to them.

The Consortium ran the biggest "Tambu Ticket" in the subsector, offering anti-pirate protection to independent worlds—for a price. And the price was often enough to indenture the worlds; those who refused often ended up with their shipping hit by mystery raiders to the point of collapse. Twenty years before, a newly-knighted Lazarus Myrinn had helped break up their protection racket within the Federation itself; the resulting scandal had ended up with the impeachment of three senator/investors and the outlawing of Consortium paramilitary operations within Federation space.

> *Though it was never told in detail, young Laz's experience with the Consortium probably paralleled a young Obi-Wan Kenobi's experience with the Trade Federation in the later* Star Wars: Episode 1: The Phantom Menace. *(Remember, Laz was there first—some twenty years before Lucas filmed that movie. Cue the filk "The Saga Begins" by Weird Al Yankovic…)*

Then came an under-the-table offer from the Panthalassan Militia. A semi-pelagic world beyond the border, Panthalassa had kicked out the Consortium, nationalizing all its on-world assets as repatriations for prior treatment. After a sudden increase in mystery raiders, the Panthalassans started shooting up any Nostran ships on sight; the Consortium had responded with a direct naval blockade. This stalemate had lasted a couple months, during which both sides had been hiring mercenaries and privateers all over the subsector—covertly within the Federation, and openly beyond the border.

The Panthie offer was the equal to the Consortium's initial offer; with Fed regulators starting to take an interest in the transaction, LazCo quickly closed the deal, letting the Consortium bid up over MCr300 before going with Panthalassa's initial offer. One ex-Slishii corsair, in fully-operational condition, for MCr200 Federation, payment on delivery to Panthalassa, ASAP.

Problem with the delivery: they'd have to run the blockade twice; once in with the corsair, once out alone. On the leg in, the plan was to piggyback the *Boxcars* onto the corsair, with the attach points the corsair had used to haul off her prey; even with the *Boxcars* attached, the corsair could still make jump-2 and 2 to 3-Gs, cutting their time in jump by half and the run-in from jump point to surface from five hours to well under three. On the leg out, LazCo got a commitment from Panthie system defense to provide cover to jump point, at which point extra fuel and intermediate jump-1s through interstellar space should elude any pursuit. Dangerous, yes, but with an after-expenses prize of around MCr 180 for shares, repairs, and a new ship.

This required more hiring, to yield a full crew for the *Boxcars* and a skeleton one for the corsair. Including a new female gunner named Delana Solo—a tall, dark-haired human amazon, vaguely reminiscent of Teramell. When Laz hired her on, Caesar objected, triggering an argument. Not just an argument; Caesar was adamant—"No way, Boss! If she comes aboard, I go!"

Laz's voice raised, Caesar's got hissy; the two had had differences before, but never like this—by the time the shouting/hissing match ended, the Cynthie's fur was on end, his tail lashing, ears flat and fangs showing, raw emotions blasting against the edges of Laz's telepathy. Just as Laz was about to stuff the little parafeline into an air duct, Caesar backed off with "Enough of this! I need a smoke!"

After the furball left to chemically calm himself, Laz stood there puzzled for a moment. Cynthies—especially the females—had short fuses, but what had set off Caesar like that? His mind had been

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screaming jealousy—strong enough for Laz to feel even without using his Talents—but why? That new gunner had given Laz a faint echo of Teramell, but then he got that impression from a lot of females these days. Something nagged at the back of his mind; he'd felt a psi-signature like that somewhere before, and not too long ago…

Then he remembered with a "*Gurk*!" He had felt a "Ripple in the Force" like that once before. A faint residue from the low berth where Teramell had died.

Tim (making reaction roll for Caesar): "Snake-eyes. She must remind him of the Kree…. Ooop!"

Wayne's eyes light up like something out of a cartoon… (He literally didn't know until Tim's slip-up…)

Tim gets an "Oh. Shit." expression as Wayne flips into character and closes for the kill… It was lke watching that old vaudeville bit, "Slowly I Turn… Step by step… Inch by inch…"

Checking his lightsaber, Laz went looking for a small white parafeline in a red-and-gold leisure suit. He found him in a secluded spot outside, filling his lungs with Cynthian Nip.

"Caesar? You got your fur back down yet?"

The Cynthie parked his cigarette holder in his muzzle and stretched like the cat he resembled. "Pretty much, Boss."

"What was with you back there?"

"That gunner, Delana. I got one of your 'Ripples in the Force' from her. She's gonna be bad luck, and we need all the luck we can get on this run."

"I… see." Laz checked around to be sure they were alone, then continued. "Caesar, what are you certified in? Besides Navigation and Gunnery."

"Mechanical and Life-support. Why?"

"Like the skills that would be needed to sabotage a low berth?" Caesar's eyes went wide, his tail shooting out like a bottlebrush, cigarette falling to the pavement; Laz shot his mind out in a full psi-probe, got confirmation from the reaction and memories that flashed through Caesar's mind.

Caesar's body pistol appeared from nowhere. "Boss! You can't do this to me! You need me to run that blockade!"

"Not when it comes to murder." A superhuman blur of motion and his lightsaber flared, cutting Caesar's gun in two at the receiver without touching the Cynthie, then hummed back to cut off the furball's escape, backing him into a corner and pinning him against the wall.

"***Noooo! Boss!***"

They lost another week and a half with the police investigation and depositions for the trial. Laz would have been willing to stay and see it through, but word was the Panthalassa blockade was tightening and rumors flew about a final showdown with the Consortium. If they didn't take off now, the corsair deal would be off. So, after leaving depositions, they put to sky for Panthalassa.

If there was any luck on this run, it was good luck; they ran the blockade with a perfect emergence at minimum jump distance and a 3-G dash using both ships' maneuver drives, separating the *Boxcars* just before they hit atmosphere, planetary defenses giving them covering fire after the first exchange of IFF. One ex-Slishii corsair, delivered as contracted.

Now, to turn the ship around and get away to spend their payment. If they could. The blockade had tightened over the last few days; rumor was something big was about to go down.

GM: "You notice something. You're the only civilian ship left in port—everything else is military or merc. You get a bad feeling about this…"

The *Boxcars* spent only two days in turnaround on a secondary starport site, fueling up, checking and rechecking systems, and loading a minimal spec -trade shipment (they were free-traders, after all) as they waited for an opening in the blockade. The plan was for surface-based defenses to give covering fire as they made their break, but they'd have the best chance if they aimed for an already-weak spot. They'd need all the help they could get; *Boxcars* was

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a Type A Free Trader, and could only make 1-G; getting to safe jump distance would require five hours from launch. So they waited for an opening. And waited. And waited. And waited.

Then, in early morning, the alarms went off all over the port as the sky filled with moving stars and Cerenkov blue flashes. The blockade was over; the Consortium attack had come.

Now for another prophetic parallel to a future Star Wars *movie: the "Escape from Hoth" scene from* Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back.

Boxcars was last to launch, after a squadron of corsairs (including the one they'd just delivered) and another of older second-string fighters. From the islands on the horizon, the port defenses went live; surface-mounted bank lasers thundered artificial lightning through the sky, trading fire with the Consortium; artificial thunderheads flickered explosive fire as laser *Shilka*s caught incoming missiles.

Boxcars cleared the port, staying low as Laz took her in a dash across Panthalassa's dark side at low altitude. A series of flashes as the port passed below the horizon told of a rake by incoming bank lasers or a missile salvo that had gotten through. They continued around the dark side, getting planetary-defense telemetry from the chaos of signals—most of Panthalassa's settlements were on islands and minicontinents around the main and secondary ports; an incoming attack would probably concentrate there, and a strong defense would force the attack to concentrate on one side of the planet.

The other side of the planet was the unbroken World Ocean that had given Panthalassa its name—uninhabited and unimportant. By dashing around to the antipodes and staying in the shadow of the planet as they boosted out, Laz and Anjin hoped to get out while the Consortium was busy shooting up the defenses and port. Hopping from storm cell to storm cell in Panthalassa's constant equatorial cloud belt, they tried to mask themselves inside the emission signature of the lightning.

Once a series of bright streaks passed them on the horizon—Consortium ships and armed gigs ("poor man's fighters") inbound to some surface target, trying the same wave-hopping trick as the *Boxcars*. They passed without incident, either intent on their mission or judging the free-trader too unimportant a target of opportunity.

According to the chaos of signals, the main Consortium force was concentrating on bombing the ports; blockade ships on the far side were being pulled off into the rapidly-developing dogfight. Figuring now was their best chance, Laz and Anjin stood the *Boxcars* on her tail and boosted out, trying for a slingshot assist from the planet's rotation.

Now for the cold equations. The *Boxcars* could only make 1-G; even with Panthalassa's size, getting to the 100-diameter safe jump distance would take over five hours, of which half would be spent making the first 20-25 diameters. If they reached 30-40 diameters, they would have built up enough velocity to stand a good chance of getting away. If they made it that far.

Ten diameters: 5 turns out; 92% chance of misjump, 58% of catastrophic (ship-killing) misjump.

As Laz had hoped, most of the attacking force was busy in a battle around the port, blasts of electrical noises and explosion flashes announcing where and when someone got hit. From ground telemetry, the blockade force on the far side was only a few Corsairs and a couple Mercenary "Cruisers", already thinning as more ships were fed into the growing furball over the port. *Boxcars* aimed for the biggest hole in the coverage and boosted on, gunners ready in their turrets and the rest of her crew strapped in and waiting, Jump solution ready to engage in an instant.

Twenty diameters: 8 turns; 83% chance of misjump, 42% catastrophic

Somebody in the blockade force had noticed. A single corsair left its station and started in on a 3-G intercept course. Anjin started jinking with all the tricks he'd learned in the Navy; Laz tried to break in

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on the planetary-defense frequencies with a Mayday as the free-trader's turrets started laying anti-laser sandclouds and decoys.

The Consortium Corsair bored in—and went from three gees to zero as a bank laser shot from the surface shredded its engine compartment. Laz had gotten through to the planetary defenses, and at least one surface site was giving covering fire.

Thirty diameters: 10 turns ; 72% chance of misjump, 28% catastrophic.

Two other Corsairs of the blockade force opened fire on the jinking free-trader, both of whose turrets were now frantically firing anti-missile with their pulse lasers and laying sandclouds with their sandcasters. The *Boxcars* shuddered with her first hit—surface and hold damage, nothing serious. Yet.

(Laz has always denied that his psionics were responsible for getting them that far unmolested, that Guardian Knight training isn't as powerful as all the urban legends make it out to be. The crew that was with him remains unconvinced.)

Another Corsair—this one Panthalassan—opened fire at long range into the developing fight; one of the Nostran ships broke off to return fire, the other was distracted enough to miss with its next salvo. (To this day, Laz is sure that Panthie ship was the ex-Slishii one he'd just delivered…)

Forty diameters: 12 turns ; 58% chance of misjump, 17% catastrophic.

Now a Mercenary Cruiser accelerated out of its blockade position, joining the remaining Corsair—two against one, both larger than the *Boxcars*, closing for a kill. They pulled their punches with their first salvo, only one laser turret each, apparently intending to disable and capture instead of destroy—the natural reaction of privateers going after small prey.

It was almost enough. Again, no ship-threatening hits, but two laser bolts tore through one of the *Boxcars*' turrets; Delana's scream cut off—just like Teramell's had—as her turret went silent, debris falling behind the ship. Another hold hit shuddered the ship, and Anjin began unstrapping amid the blaring alarms.

"We'll never make it! I'll launch off—hold them until you get away—try to catch up before you jump—" Pushing off of his pilot's couch, Anjin made for the bridge exit and the fighter bay.

Beside him, Laz shook out of his state of No-mind . "No! You'll never make it!" Engaging Auto-evade, he unstrapped and tackled the pilot.

Fifty diameters: 13 turns; 42% chance of misjump, 8% catastrophic.

Another hit; for a moment the powerplant faltered, then internal gravity failed and the bridge's rear bulkhead became the deck. Three hundred kilos of grappling Guardian Knight and suicidal fighter pilot crashed onto the new "deck" and continued their wrestling match as more alarms joined in—remaining sandcaster out of ammunition, a third Nostran ship coming in for a "stall-and-cannon" trap…

Sixty diameters: 14 turns; 28% chance of misjump, 3% catastrophic.

Three enemy ships, totaling eight times their tonnage, incoming—closing range before firing and boarding. Only one pulse laser surviving, only sandcaster empty, the entire ship only one solid engine hit away from being trapped insystem, alarms and red lights blazing through the bridge. Laz released Anjin, climbed the Zero-Gee handholds to the controls, and "going by the Force" engaged the Jump Drive—"What have we got to lose?"

As the Mercenary Cruiser and pair of Corsairs closed in, the free-trader sparkled Cerenkov Blue and vanished into Jump.

They didn't misjump. Down three crew—two permanently—and disarmed, hold open to space and cabins in zero-gee, the *Boxcars* limped back to Terminus, arriving about three weeks afterwards. Dock in the orbital port and transfer the Low Berths of badly-wounded—including a barely-alive Delana—into the same trauma center where Teramell had been pronounced dead.

This time, it didn't happen again. Unlike Teramell, this female gunner survived, though disabled—she'd probably never serve on a ship again.

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Laz made sure he was there when she regained consciousness, more for his own sake than hers.

Leaving Delana with her share of the Corsair sale—enough to pay disability income for the rest of her life—the remaining LazCo and *Boxcars* crew celebrated and caught up on the news they'd missed during their month-and-a-half away. Including the fate of their former shipmate, Caesar.

The macho male Cynthian had been convicted of Teramell's murder—second-degree, crime-of-passion—and sentenced to "reprogramming" to a "normal Cynthian Male". One tabloid had speculated whether Caesar's jealousy motive was because of being sexually involved with Laz, but Laz's reaction had more to do with the sentence.

Laz had been trained as a Guardian Knight, and knew what psionic manipulation could do. He had also crossed paths with Cynthians in his career. To him, reshuffling Caesar's personality like that—to a submissive wimp, always at a matriarch's beck and call—was worse than killing him. Telling no one else, he laid plans to break Caesar out of prison before sentence could be carried out. (At least that's what he said he planned to do. To this day, I don't know whether Laz was going to break Caesar out or kill him personally.)

As a Guardian Knight, even a retired one, he had special pull with the authorities—enough to get him into the prison and in position for whatever his plan was, with the assistance of Guardian Knight mind-tricks. He got in as far as the last level of security—the one with psionic jamming—before everything went to hell. A frenzied dance of lightsaber against rifle-stunners, slicing sidearms and parrying stun-bolts, and Old Laz got dropped.

All the *Boxcars* crew found themselves arrested as material witnesses and possible accessories, spending a few days alternating between local lock-ups and police interrogation rooms until the Guardian Knights took jurisdiction, as one of their own was the main perp. All involved were shipped to a Guardian Council Board of Inquiry on Starbase Two, an artificial planetoid in a nearby system a single Jump-4 away.

Approaching Starbase Two was probably like another Star Wars scene fresh in everyone's mind—the one where the Millenium Falcon gets pulled into the Death Star.

For all except Old Laz, the investigation was relatively easy—a thorough, deep psi-probe by a Master and Pupil team and internment in the station's guest quarters until everything was concluded. Laz had to face the Board of Inquiry, including his former Master.

He squeaked through, barely, with nothing over a formal reprimand; in the process, he used up all of his remaining favors from his career as a Guardian Knight.

Don (the GM) and Wayne role-played this out directly, with Wayne as Laz and Don taking the part of his Old Master in a formal "Jedi Council".

When they returned to Terminus, Laz was in the position he'd wanted to be in since he tried to join the Scout Service, all those years before—a free agent on the frontier. Although now he had the nucleus of a crew and (by trading in the *Boxcars*) enough for a real ship.

At the time the campaign closed, Laz and Company were having a custom ship built—a combination free-trader and heavy scout of 300-400 tons, to be named the Teramell. *There was a rumor that the (reprogrammed) Caesar would be paroled into Laz's custody.*

So ended the Saga of the Boxcars, *what was probably the best* Traveller *romp in my experience. I mostly ran some of the "temps" (including Delana), starting from about the time of Teramell's death up through the Board of Inquiry. The story before this (the Times of Teramell) was filled in from the other players, and handed down as oral history.* ✪

In the Name of the Dead

by Michael Brown

This adventure was originally posted to the pre-magazine Freelance Traveller website in 2006.

Requirements

The PCs need a starship, preferably equivalent in capability to a 200-ton *Empress Marava*-class Far Trader. Although the adventure as written takes place on Feri (2005 Spinward Marches) the GM can set it on any other world currently undergoing insurgency or open warfare.

Players Information

The adventurers have been fortunate. Their last run, while not their most lucrative, allowed them to pay off a few outstanding bills. And a new client (and his much-needed money) was immediately available. The patrons is a high cleric of the Ferai, or "Chosen", a minority religion based on the nearby world of Feri. The Ferai are not well liked, and suffer official discrimination in many of Feri's countries.

Recently, a large group of Ferai became victims of Feri's ongoing international conflict. They were massacred in an outlying province in Ivar, Feri's smallest country, but the scene of some of the most intense fighting. The violent deaths shocked the Ferai worldwide; in their grief, they commissioned a huge cenotaph to be created by offworld Ferai and erected on what they now considered sacred ground. The cenotaph, a large stone cylinder 5 yards in diameter and 20 yards high, is carved in intricate detail with the history of the Ferai, and the names and genealogies of the victims. The stone is so large it has been sectioned into four pieces—each fitting to the others only in certain ways, to prevent mix-ups—to fit in a starship's hold. Along with equipment necessary to hold the sections firmly in place, the cenotaph is expected to take up most of the ship's cargo bay and weighs well over 200 tons.

The Ferai cleric is authorized to pay the group for the entire value of their cargo hold (Cr179,400, assuming a full Far Trader hold at Cr650/ton) and high passage for himself. He can pay the group up front if they ask, but only after the cenotaph has been loaded onboard. There are also two conditions. One, the cenotaph is considered a sacred object; the cleric asks the group not to touch it (except for during loading and offloading) or try to read the inscriptions without his permission. Two, the PCs are to undergo a purification ritual in order to be considered fit to transport the column. This will involve prayers and other rites that will take an entire day.

Upon arriving at Feri, the party will run into a problem: the Ferai that were to take possession of the cenotaph are overdue. A check of the local newsfeeds will reveal that they were killed in an ambush en route to the starport. The cleric is desperate; without reliable alternate help to transport the cenotaph to its destination, he is forced to extend the adventurers' contract. He will offer up to an additional Cr10,000 to help get the cenotaph to its new home, plus he will fund the hiring of whatever vehicles and equipment they need to complete the task.

GM's Information

World Data on Feri can be found in *GURPS Traveller: Behind the Claw* on p.81.

The cenotaph is massive. The PCs will find it necessary to get some heavy lifting equipment, with grav lifters being preferred. The GM should determine the availability and price of such equipment. Remember that Feri is a world at war, and it may take more than just a comm call or a stroll down the block to get hold of suitable machinery.

Ivar has seen an upsurge of insurgent activity recently. It has gotten so bad the legitimate government is in danger of being overthrown. Guerilla bands roam the countryside almost at will, attacking targets with impunity and setting up armed camps.

The guerillas are equipped to TL9. They have the capability to take on armor, including shooting down aircraft. Most of them are battle-hardened and are intimately familiar with the terrain. The group will be able to determine this basic information from local news reports. Stats for a typical insurgent ap-

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pear below. The team is well-advised to travel overland using wheeled or tracked vehicles; aircraft, even civilian craft, are in great danger of being shot down if they fly over Ivar. Any team member will realize this with a successful Tactics roll.

The cenotaph's final resting-place is in the countryside about 300 miles from the starport. The first hundred miles will be relatively uneventful, as the trip is through a country friendly to the Imperium—and helps protect offworlders—and is powerful enough to battle intruding troops. Once they reach the border of Ivar, however, they are in danger of attack from insurgents and Ivari soldiers alike.

Encounter tables for the trip appear below. The GM should roll the indicated chance for encounter every four hours. Reactions from all parties encountered are at -2 because the visitors are with a despised minority, and a further -1 for general suspicion, for a total of -3.

The target area is in a beautiful wooded valley. The Ferai have established a small community of about 100 people here, constructing log cabins for dwellings, digging wells, planting food crops, and setting up a temple. The cenotaph site is in the center of the village.

As the group approaches the community, they may sense that something is amiss; the cleric has +2 to determine this. Unknown to the group, the entire community has been taken over by a force of 30 armed guerillas, who have enslaved the Ferai while they use the hamlet as a base of operations. The Ferai have been docile, and the lack of trouble has caused the intruders to relax their guard (-1 on Tactics rolls). Half the guerillas are active at any time, but can summon the other half as backup in less than five minutes.

If the players realize the danger in time, they can conceal their approach; roll a Quick Contest between the guerillas' Perception and the players' Stealth or Camouflage rolls. If the guerillas win, they will hide and prepare ambushes for the team. The GM may also allow a Quick Contest of Tactics rolls if the two groups have detected one another.

The Ferai are noncombatants and will not help in the final conflict unless the cleric specifically rallies them. Even then, they will confine their actions mostly to non-violent methods, such as creating distractions, sabotaging vehicles, etc.

If the team and the Ferai win the encounter, the intruders will permanently quit the community. The cleric will pay the adventurers as promised, and after erecting and blessing their cenotaph, the Ferai will fete the players for helping them.

Encounter Table (War Zone, 10-)

3d6	Encounter
3-9	2D Civilians
10	Event (Roll on Event table)
11-15	8D Insurgents
16-18	10D Ivari Military

Civilians

These are noncombatants, going about the business of survival. They will try their level best to avoid strangers, especially armed ones.

Insurgents

The Ivari guerillas are composed of all manner of individuals: disaffected Ivari soldiers, activist civilians, and an assortment of adventurers and crazies. Their collective training and experience is similar enough that they can all be represented with one set of statistics (*GURPS* 3Ed). All skills are at TL 9.

Stats

ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 10 [0]. Speed 5.25.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Fanaticism (Patriotic) [-15]; Fearlessness +1 [2]; Fit [5]; Sense of Duty (to comrades) [-5].

Skills

Armoury (Small Arms)-10 [2]; Brawling-12 [2]; Driving*-11 [2]; Electronics Operation (Comm Systems)-10 [2]; First Aid-10 [1]; Gunner (anti-tank weapon or surface-to-air missile launcher) -11 [2]; Guns (Assault Rifle)-12** [1]; Guns (Auto Pistol)-12**

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[1]; Hiking-10 [1]; Knife-11 [1]; Scrounging-10 [1]; Tactics-9 [2].

Equipment

5.5mm Assault rifle (as described in *GURPS Traveller*:114), large knife (as described in *GURPS Basic Set*:206 [3rd Edition] or :272 [4th Edition]). 2 in 6 also have a sidearm, either revolvers or auto pistols. 1 in 6 have captured body armor vests equivalent to Cloth. Gunners will have portable anti-tank weapons or surface-to-air missile launchers.

Notes

For Fourth Edition GURPS, add 10 points to the DX stat, raise the level of Gunner skill to 12 and lower the level of the Guns skills to 11 each.

* Driving skill varies widely depending on the individual. Most can operate a light civilian vehicle (motorcycle, ground car, or equivalent). 2 in 6 can operate heavy vehicles (trucks, buses, or construction equipment). 1 in 6 can operate military vehicles.

** Gun skills all include +1 for IQ 10.

Ivari Military

Elements of the regular Ivari Armed Forces. They are feeling besieged and thus jumpy and belligerent; they react to others at an additional -1. For quick-and-dirty stats, use the Insurgent NPC template. Or the GM can use the military character templates from *GURPS Traveller* and *GURPS Traveller: Ground Forces*.

Event

An encounter with Feri's environment occurs. The GM should roll 1d for the event type on the table below, and roll vs. the War Zone encounter chance above for possible additional encounters.

Event Table

Roll	Result
1	Battle
2-4	Weather
5	Ordnance
6	Stampede

Battle

The band is caught in a pitched battle between Ivari soldiers and a force of guerillas. The PCs can avoid the fighting with a successful Tactics roll. The GM can game out the result, or each PC can simply roll vs. HT; failure indicates 2d injuries.

Weather

Adverse weather conditions move through the area. A roll of 1d+1 indicates the system's severity; the resulting number is a general penalty to the group's movement, combat actions, and vision. The GM should use appropriate imagination to describe the type of weather based on the roll. For instance, a 1d+1 roll of 2 could be a light but steady rain, while a 7 may have the group nervously scanning for funnel clouds. The storm will last 10d minutes. GMs may instead use the Weather generation tables in *GURPS Traveller: First In* (sidebars, p. 72-74).

Ordnance

The group's vehicles contact a land mine or an unexploded bomb, perhaps a booby trap set by insurrectionists. The explosive will do 6d damage to the unfortunate vehicle, probably disabling it, with each person in the vehicle who fails a HT roll taking 1/4 of this damage (after subtracting the vehicle's DR and any DR for personal armor). The GM must determine the chances of repairing the vehicle based on the total damage.

Stampede

Armed conflict in the area has sent large numbers of either wildlife or civilian refugees on a panicked flight from the area. Roll a d6 and multiply by 2; the resulting number is the divisor for vehicle movement rates for the duration of the stampede and thus an indicator of the density of the crowds. Anyone outside the vehicles and thus in the path of the stampede must make a DX roll; failure indicates 1 point of damage per point the roll was missed by. The stampede will last for 3d+3 minutes.

Feedback

Please tell us …

- what you think of both magazine and website
- what you think of the articles we publish
- how we can make our magazine better
- how we can make our website better
- what kind of articles you do or don't want to see
- what you think of our look
- how we can make it better

Please, give us your opinion! We've provided several ways you can do so:

- e-mail: ***feedback@freelancetraveller.com***.
- feedback form at ***http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/feedback/ftfbf.html***.
- Forums:
  Traveller Fanzine section of SFRPG: ***http://www.sfrpg-discussion.net/phpBB3/viewforum.php?f=36***
  Lone Star at Citizens of the Imperium: ***http://www.travellerrpg.com/CotI/Discuss/forumdisplay.php?f=13***
  Note: you must be registered with the forums to be able to use this method.

Traveller on the Internet

IRC: The #Traveller and #LoneStar channels

Freelance Traveller sponsors channels for *Traveller* fans on the Undernet and Otherworlders IRC networks, and the two channels are "bridged" so that if you're visiting either, you can see what's going on in the other, and talk to people there. For more information about both channels, see our informational pages at ***http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/travnet.html#IRC*** and ***http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/travchat/index.html***. Come talk "live" with other Traveller fans about anything at all, Traveller or not, and make both channels "jumping" places to hang out!

You can also run "play-by-IRC" game sessions in either channel; please stop in and ask one of the channel operators (FreeTrav or EMT_Hawk) to schedule it, so we can ensure that the 'bridge' and the 'bartender' are set into a nondisruptive mode.

Please watch the Traveller Mailing List, the Mongoose Traveller forum, and the Lone Star section of the Citizens of the Imperium forum for announcements of Topical Talks!

News About Traveller

Recent Traveller News and Findings

November and December 2015

- **Christian Hollnbuchner** has released *Space Stations XXII: Skyfortress*, *Space Stations XXIII: Medium Habitat*, *Space Stations XXIV: Seashell Capital Shipyard*, *Starships Book I00I00I: Blazing Guns*, *Starships Book I00I0I0: Bulk Freighter*, *Slaver Barque*, and *Harbour Monitor*.
- **Infinite Roleplay** has released *Heavenly Bodies* Issue #1, *Heavenly Bodies* Issue #2, *Form-Fillable Planetary Readout* #2 and *Graphical Galaxy Sector Map*.
- **Gypsy Knights Games** has released *Ships of Clement Sector 10: Lee-class Merchant Vessel*, *Ships of Clement Sector 11: Fedpost Mail Courier*.
- **Felbrigg Herriot** has released *The Experiments*, and *Decopedia Volume 2*.
- **Avalon Game Company** has released *Kit Bag 7: Hostile Environments*.
- **Nienhaus Games** has released *Perfugia-Class Space Station*.
- **Thornwood-Daarnulud LLC** has released *Herald Class Starships*.

Submission Guidelines

What is *Freelance Traveller* looking for?

We're looking for anything and everything to do with *Traveller* – reviews of products, house rules, alternate settings, NPC profiles, world write-ups, adventures, equipment, starships, fiction, "color" articles… If you see it in *Freelance Traveller*, or on our website, we're interested in it. Even if you don't see it in the magazine or on the website, we might be interested; write to ***editor@freelancetraveller.com*** and ask.

Some things that we want that you might not think of as "*Traveller*" would include reviews of non-*Traveller* products that easily lend themselves to being 'mined' for ideas for use in *Traveller*, or reviews of fiction (in any medium) that "feels" like *Traveller* in some way. In these cases, your article should focus on the *Traveller*-esque aspects of the item. There may be other things, as well; if you're not sure, write and ask.

What about …

The rule of thumb is "If it's a *Traveller* ruleset, or a setting that has been published for use with a *Traveller* ruleset, go for it!". That includes the non-Official *Traveller* Universe settings that have been published for use with any version of the *Traveller* ruleset, including (but not limited to) *Judge Dredd*, *Strontium Dog*, *Babylon 5*, *Reign of Diaspora*, *Twilight Sector*, the two *GURPS* variants on the Official *Traveller* Universe, Avenger Enterprises' *Far Avalon*, and the forthcoming *Traveller Prime Directive*, and any others we may have forgotten.

…Hyperlite?

We've made the decision to support *Hyperlite* as though it were an alternate *Traveller* setting, much like *Twilight Sector* or *Reign of Diaspora*. The changes that Sceaptune Games has made to *Traveller* to get *Hyperlite* aren't really much more than the differences between Classic *Traveller*, *MegaTraveller*, *Marc Miller's Traveller*, and Mongoose *Traveller*, and converting between any of those systems and *Hyperlite*, in either direction, should be 'trivial'.

… Diaspora, or Starblazer Adventures?

If your article is about "crossing over" between these products and any of the "standard" or supported *Traveller* rulesets or settings, by all means, submit it! If it's support for those systems beyond *Traveller*, we'll accept and hold the submission, but will not print it unless/until we've had a reasonable level of expression of interest in such support from our readers.

How should I submit my article?

What needs to be in the submission?

At the very minimum, we need the submission itself, your name (for credit), and a valid email address to contact you at if we need to.

What format should I submit it in?

That depends on what you're submitting. Generally:

Text should be submitted in Microsoft Rich Text Format (RTF), Microsoft Word 2003 (DOC) or 2007/2010 (DOCX), OpenOffice Writer (ODT), or plain text (TXT). Most word processors will support one of those; if yours seems not to, please write to us for assistance. Avoid PDF if at all possible; it is difficult to reformat PDFs for our magazine or website.

Graphics should be submitted in the format that's best for the type of graphic. Most of the time, that will be GIF, PNG, or JPG/JPEG. Submitting in higher resolutions is better; we have tools to resample a picture to make it smaller if we need to – but it's not possible to make a picture larger without it becoming pixellated.

If you're submitting a graphic that you'd like to see us use for a cover of an issue, please make sure that it will fit nicely on both US Letter and ISO A4 pages—we'll crop the picture to fit, to avoid distorting shapes, so please leave reasonable "margins"; don't run "critical" imagery right to the edge where it will look bad if we crop it. A good resolution is 100 dpi or more.

Plans (deck plans, building plans, maps, etc.) may be better submitted in a vector-based format such as CorelDRAW! format (CDR) or any format that can be imported into CorelDRAW! X4. Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG), Windows Metafile (WMF), Enhanced Metafile (EMF), Encapsulated PostScript (EPS), or Microsoft Visio (VSD) are some common vector formats that can be imported.

How do I get it to you?

Email it to us at our submissions address, ***submissions@freelancetraveller.com***. Your subject line should specify the type of article that it is, and what section you think it should be put in, e.g., "Combat Rules for Doing It My Way".