Stellar Reaches

A Fair Use Fanzine for Traveller

Stellar Reaches

A Fanzine for Traveller T20 and Classic Traveller

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The **BITS Task System**, although modified to include Traveller T20 difficulty classes, has been provided with permission by **British Isles Traveller Support (BITS)**. Its presence here does not constitute any challenge to the rights for this system, and we gratefully acknowledge Dominic Mooney and Andy Lilly for their generosity in allowing our use of this system to allow future adventures to be written in such a manner as to be more useful to all published Traveller rules sets.

For more information on BITS, check out their website at http://www.bits.org.uk/

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Letter From The Editor

Greetings, Fellow Sophonts:

If you thought that **Stellar Reaches** was dead, I cannot blame you for thinking that. It's been well over a year since I released Issue #8, and there are many that probably felt that this issue would never see the light of day. To our fans, I apologize, and I hope that you find this issue to be worth the wait.

Within this issue are four fantastic adventures by the prolific and talented Alvin Plummer, which should provide many sessions of fun and excitement at your gaming table, as well as provide more support for the Empty Quarter sector. You'll also find an article on converting the traditional Traveller careers into Starting Occupations as presented in the Modern System Reference Document, for those interested in using that system to adventure in the Third Imperium.

This issue also clears out the last of the slush pile of articles I've gathered from our various contributors, aside from one article that came to me via snail mail from David Hahn and which I have not had the time or energy to type into an electronic format. (My most sincere apologies for the delay, David, but it will have to wait for yet another issue.) As I've said before, **Stellar Reaches** cannot survive without the aid of its fans and contributors. If you have an article or two you'd like to contribute, **Stellar Reaches** is a Fair Use fanzine of Traveller interested in providing free support for the gaming systems and universe we enjoy playing in, and we would certainly appreciate your support.

With that in mind, let's wrap this up and get on to the good stuff.

Prepare To Jump,
Jason "Flynn" Kemp
Editor, **Stellar Reaches** fanzine

BITS Task System

MegaTraveller (MT), Traveller: The New Era (TNE) and Marc Miller's Traveller (T4) all use a graduated system of task difficulty ratings – Average, Difficult, Formidable, etc. 'Classic' Traveller (CT) and GURPS Traveller (GT) use modifiers to the task rolls instead. Traveller T20 (T20) uses difficulty classes (DCs) to define target numbers for skill checks. The BITS Task System provides a simplified common ground for all these rule sets, using difficulty ratings with corresponding task modifiers for CT and GT and DCs for T20 as shown in Table 1. The means by which spectacular (GT: critical) success or failure are achieved are defined by the rule set used. Similarly, the GM should apply the rules for special tasks – opposed, co-operative, hasty, cautious, etc. – according to the rule set used. As always, these are only guidelines – the GM may alter any task roll as appropriate to enhance the game.

TABLE 1: TASK DIFFICULTIES

BITS Task Difficulty	T4 Difficulty	T4.1 Difficulty	GT Target Modifier	TNE Difficulty	MT Difficulty	CT Target Modifier	T20 DC
Easy	Easy (Auto)	Easy (1D)	+6	Easy	Simple	-4	10
Average	Average (2D)	Average (2D)	+3	Average	Routine	-2	15
Difficult	Difficult (2.5D)	Difficult (2.5D)	0	Difficult	Difficult	0	20
Formidable	Formidable (3D)	Formidable (3D)	-3	Formidable	Difficult	+2	25
Staggering	Impossible (4D)	Staggering (4D)	-6	Impossible	Formidable	+4	30
Impossible	(5D)	Hopeless (5D)	-9	Impossible	Impossible	+6	35
Hopeless	(6D)	Impossible (6D)	-12	Impossible	Impossible	+8	40

Ex. Maria Charles is forging a complex document, which the GM rules is a Staggering task. Maria has Forgery-4 (GT: Forgery-16, T20: Forgery +18) and the relevant attribute (MT, T4) is INT 10 (TNE: INT 9, T20: 15).
CT: Task success is normally 2D + Skill >= 8. Maria requires 2D + Forgery >= 12 (8 + 4 for Staggering difficulty). Alternatively, the GM may prefer to apply the target modifier as a negative modifier on the dice roll, i.e. 2D + 4 – 4 >= 8.
MT: Staggering difficulty is equivalent to MT's Formidable (15+), thus the task is 2D + Skill + (Stat / 5) >= 15. For Maria this is: 2D + 4 + 2 >= 15.
TNE: Staggering difficulty is equivalent to TNE's Impossible, thus the task is d20 <= (Skill + Stat) X ¼. For Maria this is d20 <= 3, i.e. (9 + 4) / 4 rounded down.
T4: Maria requires 4D <= INT + Forgery. (Note that T4's Staggering rating of 3.5D is ignored.)
GT: Maria requires 3D <= Forgery + Target Modifier, i.e. 3D <= 16 – 6.
T20: Maria requires d20 + 18 >= 30. (Note that the INT modifier is already factored into the skill check.)

Task definitions should always be used sparingly – the GM should be able to define the difficulty and required skills and equipment for most tasks using common sense. Where strange skills or equipment are needed, these can usually be listed, without requiring a full task definition. Where a full task definition is required, use the following format (you don't need to use the bold or italics formatting; plain text is fine):

To find a boar:
Difficult Recon (GT: Tracking), or
Difficult Hunting (T20: P/Hunting), or
Formidable Survival
+1 Difficulty if riding at full gallop.
+1 Difficulty if lost.
-1 Difficulty if moving slowly.
Spectacular Success: They have surprised a boar and have one round to act before it reacts.
Success: They have found boar tracks and can begin following them.
Failure: No tracks found.
Spectacular Failure: They have become lost.

+1 Difficulty indicates a harder task (e.g. an Average task becomes Difficult) whereas –1 Difficulty is an easier task (e.g. Difficult would become Average).

NOTE: This system has been extensively play-tested but suggestions for refinements are always welcome.

Traveller Modern: Occupations

By Jason "Flynn" Kemp

A few years back, Wizards of the Coast released a supplement for their *D20 Modern* product line entitled simply *D20 Future*. Being the Traveller fan that I am, I happily rushed out and picked up the book, my head filled with images of Traveller goodness. I had high hopes of mining the book for new material for my Traveller T20 game, and felt confident in my ability to convert potentially useful material from the D20 Modern system to T20 without much difficulty. I picked up the book, and drove home rather hectically, seeing as how reading while driving is a recipe for disaster. Once I got home, I settled down with anticipation to an evening of reading my newly acquired treasure.

Needless to say, I was sorely disappointed. The *D20 Future* supplement was good, very good actually, but it tried to be too many things all at once, and in doing so, much of the potential within it was watered down or washed away. Given the vast differences in approach to technology levels and game mechanics, I felt there was little that inspired me in terms of my T20 campaign at the time, and so I put aside the book and returned to the wonderful world of Traveller supplements.

Recently, however, I began looking at the Modern System Reference Document for yet another project I was developing for publication under Samardan Press, and I came across the concept of Occupations as part of D20 Modern character development. It occurred to me that Occupations might be a good way to represent Traveller careers using the D20 Modern engine, and thus the seed for this article was born. Not knowing the state of the Traveller T20 license at the time of this writing, I can't help but think that there are some who might prefer to tinker with either the Traveller T20 or D20 Modern systems to come up with their own D20 version of the game. It is to those tinkering souls that this article is dedicated. For purposes of identifying such efforts within *Stellar Reaches*, I am calling this particular inspiration *Traveller Modern*.

Below you will find a complete list of Traveller careers expressed in terms of D20 Modern character occupations. I hope this proves useful to you, and I look forward to any feedback you might have on this. As always in such articles of mine, the following game mechanics are declared Open Game Content. Enjoy!

Starting Occupations

A character in a *Traveller Modern* game may hold other jobs as his or her career unfolds, but the benefits of a starting occupation are only applied once, at the time of character creation.

Many starting occupations have a prerequisite that the character must meet to qualify for the occupation. Each occupation provides three additional permanent class skills that the character can select from a list of choices. Once selected, a permanent class skill is always considered to be a class skill for the character. If the skill selected is already a class skill for the character, he or she also gains a one-time +1 competence bonus for that skill. Starting occupations also provide a bonus feat.

Choose one occupation from the available selections and apply the benefits to the character as noted in the occupation's description.

Agent
Agents include secret agents and spies working for a planetary or interstellar government, a corporation or

megacorporation, or even a well-organized criminal syndicate.
> **Prerequisite**: Age 18+.
> **Skills**: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.
> Bluff, Disguise, Gather Information, Hide, Investigate, Move Silently, Sense Motive.
> **Bonus Feat**: Select either Brawl or Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Army
The Army is primarily utilized in a defensive and protective capacity, although some army personnel serve as part of elite Special Forces units.
> **Prerequisite**: Age 18+.
> **Skills**: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Craft (electronic, mechanical), Demolitions, Drive, Knowledge (tactics), Repair, Survival, Treat Injury.

Bonus Feat: Select either Combat Martial Arts or Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Athlete

Athletes include amateur athletes of Olympic quality and professional athletes of all types, including gymnasts, weight trainers, wrestlers, boxers, martial artists, swimmers, skaters, and those who engage in any type of competitive sport.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Balance, Climb, Jump, Ride, Swim, Treat Injury, Tumble.

Bonus Feat: Select either Archaic Weapons Proficiency or Brawl.

Barbarian

Barbarians are not the frenzied berserkers portrayed in fantasy game systems, but simply refer to individuals from low-technology worlds or regions.

Prerequisite: Age 14+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Handle Animal, Hide, Move Silently, Ride, Search, Spot, Survival.

Bonus Feat: Select either Animal Affinity or Archaic Weapons Proficiency.

Belter

Belters are those that live in an asteroid belt or make their living as a deep space miner or prospector.

Prerequisite: Age 14+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (electronic, gravitic, mechanical), Demolitions, Knowledge (physical sciences), Navigate, Pilot, Repair.

Bonus Feat: Select either Aircraft Operation (spacecraft) or Zero-G Training.

Bureaucrat

Bureaucrats encompass administrative careers such as office workers and desk jockeys, lawyers, accountants, insurance agents, bank personnel, financial advisors, tax preparers, clerks, sales personnel, real estate agents, and a variety of mid-level managers.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Diplomacy, Forgery, Investigate, Knowledge (business, current events, civics, technology), Research, Sense Motive.

Bonus Feat: Select either Attentive or Educated.

Diplomat

Diplomats manage interactions between diverse cultures and organizations, striving to create resolutions that are profitable without leading to conflict.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Bluff, Computer Use, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Intimidate, Knowledge (behavioral sciences, business, current events, civics, history, popular culture, theology & philosophy), Sense Motive.

Bonus Feat: Select either Personal Firearms Proficiency or Trustworthy.

Doctor

A doctor can be a starship medic, a military field medic, a physician (general-practitioner or specialist), a surgeon, or a psychiatrist.

Prerequisite: Age 22+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Craft (electrical, pharmaceutical), Computer Use, Diplomacy, Knowledge (behavioral sciences, business, earth and life sciences, technology), Research, Spot, Treat Injury.

Bonus Feat: Select either Medical Expert or Surgery.

Flyer

Flyers represent the members of planetary air and close orbit defense forces, or the relevant divisions of a unified planetary military structure.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (electrical, gravitic, mechanical, structural), Knowledge (tactics), Navigate, Pilot, Repair, Spot.

Bonus Feat: Select either Aircraft Operation (heavy aircraft, helicopters, jet fighters, or spacecraft) or Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Hunter

Hunters include big-game hunters, naturalists, bounty hunters, skip tracers and other careers that track down things for a living.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Drive, Gather Information, Knowledge (behavioral sciences, civics, earth and life sciences, tactics), Navigate, Pilot, Spot, Survival.

Bonus Feat: Select either Guide or Tracking.

Law Enforcer

Law enforcers include uniformed police, regional police, interstellar patrols, detectives, forensic investigators and military police.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Gather Information, Intimidate, Investigate, Knowledge (behavioral sciences, civics, streetwise), Search, Sense Motive, Spot.

Bonus Feat: Select either Combat Martial Arts or Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Marine

The Marines provide security for interstellar military installations and act as a rapid strike force, working in close conjunction with the interstellar Navy to address crises as they arise.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (electronic, mechanical, structural), Demolitions, Disable Device, Knowledge (tactics), Pilot, Treat Injury.

Bonus Feat: Select either Personal Firearms Proficiency or Starship Gunnery.

Merchant

Merchants in Traveller Modern serve aboard a commercial starship or at a starport that services such, and includes those that work for a single vessel as well as for an interstellar corporation.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (electrical, gravitic, mechanical), Diplomacy, Knowledge (art, business, civics, current events, popular culture, streetwise, technology), Navigate, Pilot, Repair.

Bonus Feat: Select either Personal Firearms Proficiency or Spacer.

Navy

The Navy encompasses military service in an interplanetary or interstellar naval force, covering a diverse range of activities including local system defense, protection of commercial traffic, interstellar law enforcement, piracy suppression and interstellar offensive strikes.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (electrical, gravitic, mechanical), Diplomacy, Knowledge (business, civics, tactics), Navigate, Pilot, Repair.

Bonus Feat: Select either Starship Gunnery or Zero-G Training.

Noble

Nobles represent the social elite, both individuals with titles and those with significant influence such as that which comes from incredible wealth or political power.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Bluff, Diplomacy, Gamble, Gather Information, Knowledge (art, business, current events, civics, history, popular culture, theology & philosophy), Perform (act, dance, keyboards, percussion instruments, sing, stand-up, stringed instruments, wind instruments), Sense Motive.

Bonus Feat: Select either Creative or Educated.

Pirate

Pirates encompass corsairs, privateers, hijackers, smugglers, raiders, and other individuals or groups that prey upon interstellar commerce for a living.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (electrical, mechanical), Disable Device, Gather Information, Navigate, Pilot, Repair.

Bonus Feat: Select either Brawl or Zero-G Training.

Rogue

Rogues includes con artists, burglars, thieves, crime family soldiers, gang members, bank robbers, and other types of career criminals or anyone with a background from the wrong side of the law.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Disable Device, Forgery, Gamble, Hide, Knowledge (streetwise), Move Silently, Sleight of Hand.

Bonus Feat: Select either Brawl or Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Sailor

Sailors represent the members of planetary "wet navy" or aquatic defense forces, or the relevant divisions of a unified planetary military structure.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (electrical, mechanical), Drive, Knowledge (business, tactics), Navigate, Swim, Treat Injury.

Bonus Feat: Select either Surface Vehicle Operation (powerboat, sailboat, ship) or Personal Firearms Proficiency.

Scholar

Scholars include librarians, archaeologists, professors, teachers, and other education professionals.

Prerequisite: Age 22+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (writing), Decipher Script, Gather Information, Knowledge (art, behavioral sciences, business, civics, current events, earth and life sciences, history, physical sciences, popular culture, tactics, technology, or theology and philosophy), Read/Write Language, Research, Speak Language.

Bonus Feat: Select either Educated or Studious.

Scout

The Scout Service encompasses explorers, information couriers, system surveyors, deep space recon, first contact specialists, and other peripheral interstellar services.

Prerequisite: Age 18+.

Skills: Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill the character selects is already a class skill, he or she receives a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Computer Use, Craft (electrical, gravitic, mechanical), Knowledge (behavioral sciences, business, civics, earth and life sciences, physical sciences, tactics), Navigate, Pilot, Repair, Survival.

Bonus Feat: Select either Aircraft Operation (spacecraft) or Zero-G Training.

Feature Adventure: Black Zone

By Alvin Plummer

Introduction

Black Zone is an exploratory/cultural tour, ending on a possible time–travel campaign. Some ship–to–ship action is possible, depending on PC actions. The PCs are assumed to be merchantmen or adventurers with their own ship, looking for some coin. If the starship has fuel for two jumps, well and good: things get interesting if the ship only has fuel for one jump. A PC with a connection with one of the Imperial intelligence organizations is more likely to get involved in this particular adventure, as is an academic researcher in the Chronology field.[1] "General Purpose" adventurers, capable of some trader, scouting, and military activity (but specializing in nothing but getting out alive) could work out even better than usual. The adventure starts out 'somewhere in Gimushi subsector', detailed in **Stellar Reaches** #1 – but NOT on Vipan. The start date is 247–993 Imperial.

Please note that time–travel 'sideways' and 'backwards' is not established in Traveller Canon. Only 'timelost' starships jumping far forward in time is properly Canon, as is low berthing the centuries away. This adventure is rules–light: what rules exist assumes the Classic Traveller ruleset. Task difficulty is set according to the BITS format. The Black Zone concept was originally spotted in a long–lost Challenger magazine article: while the concept was attractive, the possibility of actually hiding from the starcharts a full–blown starsystem simply isn't on. Stars are rather hard to hide…

"Starship for Hire"

Somehow – connections, a friend of a friend, surfing the news feeds, reading the newspaper, hearing out the town crier, deciphering the semaphores (flag signals) – they hear of Ikhuukhalaan Ma'oudzksoes. Professor Ma'oudzksoes is a notable Julian archaeologist who gained fame across the Empty Quarter for his discovery of the Cimbajah Graves on Vipan/Gimushi in 988.[2] He is now interested in gaining the services of a small ship for "a simple expedition into the void." Unlike those uptight human archaeologists, the Vargr Professor sees nothing wrong in letting friends take a few artefacts 'as payment for services rendered.' The small trader community[3] is familiar with the Vargrs' generosity: many Emptyhead adventurers have received some small but profitable boon, and a few have managed to hit the jackpot. If the PCs plan to beat out other hungry small–

timers in offering their services to the Professor, they had better hurry.

The Referee should determine if the PCs reach the Professor before some other ship captain does. Fortunately, the Professor just happens to be on the same planet they are, which makes things a lot less complicated.[4] If they are on a low–tech world, or a world with a Starport of D or less, the PCs don't have any competition, and can easily make a good deal chartering their ship and crew with the Professor. If they are on a high–tech world (TL A+ in the Quarter), or on a world with a Starport of C or better, they'll have to compete with other ships to get the retainer. PCs that pride themselves on their competitive business skills should fight it out against the big dogs in the major subsector ports: Gobi, Fathwaas, Lazisar, or Pamushgar.

The PCs can easily see that Professor Ma'oudzksoes is a very gregarious and outgoing professor – occasionally a bit crude, but generally good–hearted and friendly. The good Professor wants a starship to meet him at a mutually–acceptable starsystem, and bring him to Vipan, arriving in orbit 77 days from now – 324–993 – in order to keep a crucial appointment. (He'll pay a small bonus if they hit the system precisely on that date, and insist on a penalty if they miss the date by more than a day.) Depending on what happens at the meeting, they'll then ship out to Pamushgar, Dorado, or make a jump into a Void hex. He'll give the PC the precise co–ordinates for the Void hex jump if they need it, but it's not on his person. He can't guarantee that there will be a refuelling source there, so they had better pack away enough liquid nitrogen to make the jump home, just in case.

Referee: insure that the PCs actually have to work out where and when they pick up the Professor to transport him to Vipan, and that they take the time to plan out their journey. Sloppy planning indicates that they aren't serious, and the Professor – who is no fool – refuses to deal with them, ending the adventure. If you feel that your PCs aren't into realism, but just want action now, then you should dump the 'appointment' bit, and just have the Professor insist on transport to Vipan ASAP.

Just Cruising

Assuming the PCs agree on the deal, they are likely to have one to two months to keep on

trading/scouting/cracking heads/whatever they usually do. It is certainly possible to stick in a few more adventures in the two months of wait time. However, remember that every ship jump takes at least one week – double this, if you use the official 'week–long downtime' rule at every stop. For interstellar Travellers, this isn't a lot of time: enough for four to nine jumps, depending on how you play the rules, how good your ship is, and how skilled your pilot and navigator are.

> Example: say the PCs meet the Professor on Dharmendra, on day 247. The Professor plans to go to Ardamashi: from there, he wants the PC to pick him up and bring him to Vipan's High Port on day 324. Assuming the PCs have a Jump–1 starship, they need to make three jumps, to cover the three parsecs from Ardamashi to Vipan. Using the official rules, star travel involves one week in jumpspace, one week in the docks refueling, bidding for more cargo, recalibrating engines, etc.
>
> So, assuming three jumps and two stays in port – the Professor can be dropped off at the beginning of the third stay, on Vipan – the trip will take 35 days. As 324 – 35 = 289, and 289 – 247 (the present) equals 42, this leaves 42 days for the PCs to conduct other business. Enough time for a few quick trades, but not much more.
>
> For a Jump–1 starship, the situation would be much worse if the distances involves were even just a bit greater, or available time a bit smaller. The time crunch isn't nearly as hard with a Jump–2 ship, but it's still there. Excluding the navies, only a few ships in the Quarter are capable of Jump–3 or better – the vast majority of which are from the Vargr–dominated Rukadukaz Republic, build in the famous orbiting shipyards of Ikon.

If the PCs spend some time trading, they may well have to drop everything and go as 'crunch time' arrives. Any unsold or in–transit cargo they have must be stored, or handed off to a fellow small trader – possibly at a loss. Or perhaps the PCs can call in a few favors: all of the long–time small merchant ships in the Imperial Empty Quarter have heard of each other, and you could meet them all in less than ten years – if you know where all the watering holes are, and if your ship has great legs (Jump3+.)

Primitives in the Clouds

If the PCs are playing the trading game in Gimushi subsector, it's quite likely that the PCs have visited Vipan before, so none of the information below should be a surprise to them 'in character'. Professor Ma'oudzksoes has never visited the world before, so they can point out the sites for the Vargr.

Vipan (Gimushi/Empty Quarter CAB6498–8) is a hellish world with a very dense & corrosive atmosphere and a roasting environment, similar to Venus of Sol system. Fortunately, Vipan's atmosphere is composed largely of carbon dioxide. This gas is poisonous but comparatively inert, allowing a floating city of 30,000 sophonts to live and work at cheaply processing the more dangerous and valuable gases & liquids below into a form in demand by nearby industries. The town, called Vipanpura ("Vipan town" in Hindi), is noticeably on the low–tech side of such things, but it is reasonably self–sufficient. Living standards are noticeably better than you'd expect for a (largely) closed–system TL 8 habitat[5], but still nothing to write home about.

The very name, Vipan, means "Sail" or "Petty Trade" in Hindi. The world has been a centre of a minor trade network since the days of the Ziru Sirka: the very design of the city, relying on buoyancy instead of antigrav to remain in the air, points to its antiquity.[6] The current city was originally built by the Bwaps in –220: the Bwap noble who ruled the system bartered it to an Indian prince in 581, but it's a different Vilani/Indian family, descended from an old pirate clan than went legit (sort of), that sits on the local throne today. PCs that are well–versed in the byways of Gimushi subsector are well aware that the system is a favorite haunt for minor–league pirates: dangerous in large numbers, but relatively weak when isolated and divided (as they usually are.)

There are no hostiles waiting for the PCs when they arrive in–system. But before being allowed to dock in the high port, the local Planetary Guard insists on boarding the PCs ship. These rent–a–starmerc types – barely a step above pirates themselves – put the minimal effort possible in 'inspecting' the PCs ship before asking for bribes in a none–too–subtle fashion. The size of the bribes depends on the cargo the PCs are carrying. This system has a certain reputation, so if the PCs planned ahead (by asking around, scanning the Net, etc), they should have little or no cargo on them: so the Guard is satisfied with a token payment "to pay proper respect."

If a fight breaks out, the starmercs are wearing only torso cloth armour, helmets, and laser rifles: treat as Green, with the commanding NCO as Trained (a touch below Regular troops). Their "System Defense Boat" is a Free Trader named *Bullwhip*: it is armed with two lasers, one of which is working: treat the crew as Green (they have grown fat in bullying the defenseless, and simply aren't ready for a fight.) The *Bullwhip* also carried a standard 20–ton gig with an additional laser: since the crew can't be bothered with drills and practicing, it takes 2D6+3 combat turns for the gig to deploy. The ruling noble, Baron Jatin Lurgadagig of Vipan, insists that the PCs stand down "by the authority

of the Emperor": should the Planetary Guard be neutralized, he quickly changes his tune, welcoming the PCs to his town as Honoured Guests, and invited to dock in the local High Port.

However, if the PCs are defeated (and assuming they survive the loss) they are promptly imprisoned in a small orbital prison until someone come along who is willing to buy the PCs. After their purchase, the buyers – pirate slavers – inspect the PCs: after realising that they are spacers with valuable skills, he offers to buy their lives for the service of his pirate band, and give them the opportunity to earn a place with them as an equal, rather than as a slave. If they refuse, he's happy to simply sell their skills to the highest bidder: technically skilled labour commands a high price throughout the Quarter. In any case, the PCs (and their Vargr passenger) have left this adventure… although they might pick it up again later, if they regain their freedom.

Assume the PCs remain free, they dock at the surprisingly primitive Imperial High Port. Even the lowliest Imperial ports are built at no lower than TL 12, but this space oddity is primarily at TL 8 – no better than the local yokels. Bugging the local Imperial Starport Authority folks reveals that the previous port was lost in a nasty docking incident, and a new high port will be provided – as soon as the Rim War is concluded. Until then, the ISA is stuck with using stone knives and bearskins for handling traffic control. For defence, the ISA have eight fusion turrets and a single flight of Imperial fighters. *"Yeah, I know, I know: 'It's the Empty Quarter – what did you expect?' But by the Great Prophets, this is supposed to be a Class–C Imperial Starport!"* Fortunately, the local pirate infestation hasn't dared to touch the port itself: the Imperium is extremely protective of her starports, even those of the "two tin cans and some solder" variety. But until the Lazisar Directorate Navy starts showing the flag, local traffic has to provide their own security. (Referee: at your discretion, the station may be ordered to fire only in self–defence, and not to protect interstellar traffic.)

The PCs must take a 20–ton shuttle[7] to Vipanpura: the floating city just doesn't have the facilities to handle anything larger. The city is welcoming of most outworlders: while the permanent population is 30,000, there are about 200,000 short–term contractors in the city at any single time – mainly Vilani from Ikkimam or Sibikaar, and the occasional Indian from Indara. Professor Ma'oudzksoes has a great reputation for bringing good luck to the city, and if the PCs show a reasonably good image and a liberal purse, the locals are happy to treat any friend of the Professor as a friend of theirs.

Oddities

While the Vargr Professor spends the next few days talking with tight–lipped men with darting eyes, the PCs are free to enjoy the sights. The official language is Inadtiu, a very distant relative of Assamese: but most people speak Modern Vilani. PCs may tour the winding byways of the city, or ride the rails between the major city domes. Some might head to one of the viewing platforms[8], and watch the hardened 5– and 10–ton shuttles haul up liquid containers for refining, or observe others as they help process the insanely lethal atmosphere, laced with dimethylmercury. 'Whee'.

There are several good eateries (for Vilani and Indian tastes) and dance venues (only East Indian), but no real pubs, bars, or fast food places – unless tea houses are your thing. Unlike the Islamic–influenced worlds of the Quarter, alcohol can be easily found on Vipan: the wine is good, but the beer and liquors are flat and tasteless. However, the local smokes are surprising good, and every establishment has its own set of unique ashtrays – quite nice bits of local art, actually.

There is meat for sale, but not at a restaurant: instead, reptiles sized from pigs to horses are kept at the butchers, and the PCs are expected to kill and butcher their own food with a sharp implement – just like the locals do. (Firearms & lasers are specifically banned from the slaughterhouse, but blunt instruments are OK.) Hopefully the PCs didn't forget their swords, kirks and daggers. Someone trained in Animal Husbandry automatically knows how to do a quick kill on these animals: different breeds of these same food and riding reptiles[9] can be found across the Imperial Empty Quarter, and into Antares, Ley, and even Fornast sectors. Merely maiming the reptiles drives these usually placid herbivores into a powerful frenzy, putting the PCs life in serious jeopardy. "They stab it with their steely knives... but they just can't kill the beast!"

Within 1D6 days of the PCs arrival, a 400–ton Fat Trader named *The Holy Moley* docks in the distant High Port. Soon enough, a shuttle arrives with a troupe of female acrobats, on an entertainment tour of the minor systems. Calling themselves "The Imperial Acrobatica[10]" they provide quite a lot of very daring acrobatic stunts: they themselves wear no grav belts or safety wires, but there are several TL–E "QuickCatch" antigrav robots in case of trouble. Fortunately, there are no difficulties, and a lot of happy families get's their money worth from the show.

At the end of the show, the Professor asks the PCs to join him in a local antigrav platform he is renting the next day – day seven of their stay in the city – to watch the local Rite of Ascension. All of the 200,000 people in the city crowd into the main habitat, to loudly chant as a priestess clad in white and pseudo–techno 'wings'

begins to slowly ascend to a small hatch at the top of the dome. The iris hatch at the top of the dome briefly opens to let her out, then snaps shut: she continues to ascent into an odd vehicle, which closes around her. A sudden silence occurs as the vehicle, now shaped like an egg, rises silently: and then cheers as she disappears past the clouds, not to be seen again in Vipan System.

As the crowds disperse, Professor Ma'oudzksoes quietly hands the PC pilot a thin data crystal, containing the co–ordinates for a jump into the Void – hex 1138, to be exact. He expects the PCs ship and crew to be ready to move in 24 hours.

Preparations

The PCs are no doubt very curious on what does the professor expect to find in the blank hex. The usually jolly face of the Vargr grows grim, and he consistently evades the question: instead he simply insists that the PCs take every precaution to insure that they can jump back home again. He implies that it's a very, very good thing for the PCs not to know what he expects at the other side of the jump: their lack of knowledge may well save their life and their ship.

As seasoned Travellers, the PCs are sure to have heard the usual rumours of Secret Imperial Facilities and Long Lost Treasures waiting to be found in the uncharted blank hexes between the stars. They may have experience with these wild goose–chases, or have even heard of some hard–on–their–luck free trader taking a shot in the dark – to go missing for years, unable to find fuel to jump back into a system, to be found stone–dead by some curious Naval patrol or pir… umm, freelancing traders. They have even heard of some crank banging on about having "Documented Evidence!!!" on "Massive Imperial Conspiracies" using "Secret Black Zone worlds" to contact "Intelligences from Beyond the Galaxy!" Rank nonsense, of course. If the PCs decide to stop wasting their time at this point, the Vargr holds no hard feelings, and may even through a party for them (he does love to party so…)

If the PCs decide to continue, they are expected to take this next jump in deadly earnest. They need to be able to carry enough fuel to jump in and exit a blank hex: they cannot bet their life on the good luck of finding some frozen debris to use as fuel. At the very least, the Vargr passenger isn't willing to bet <u>his</u> life on such happenstance!

If the Referee judges that the PCs aren't taking it seriously, he should warn them verbally twice. If they insist on misbehaving, Professor Ma'oudzksoes revokes his contract, and the adventure is (technically) at an end. If they STILL insist on being flippant, the Referee should determine the results of the jump as usual: then, flip a coin: 50–50 that they end up in the Deep Dark without

enough fuel for a jump home. There is a certain noble pathos in roleplaying out the failure of heat and light and the victory of the Bone–Cold Eternal Night, but most folks prefer to just roll up new characters…

PCs can't bolt on extra fuel tanks, unless the jump engine is specifically designed to handle the additional tons. An insistence on ignoring this fact leads to a misjumps. A more practical decision is to use inflatable internal tanks to hold the extra Liquid Hydrogen. Hopefully, the PCs bought them before arriving at Vipan, as they aren't available at the local Starport. (They might be able to get a passing trader to part with theirs – with a major mark–up in price, naturally.)

The Referee should warn the PCs that LHyd is something that Likes to go Boom. If the PCs don't double–check their work, look out for leaks and punctures, etc, the Referee should determine the chance that they missed something, and if they did, how bad the leak is. A worthless job means that the ship Blows Up Real Good without even leaving the starport![11] However, any reasonable amount of care should be rewarded with green lights, or at worst a triple–checked patch job before lift–off. Assuming green lights, the PCs need to calculate a precise jump. The consequences for error are a good deal harsher than usual, so it's worth the PCs while to take the time to do it right.

Vipan's Planetary Guard is scheduled to shift when the PCs leave the system. The *Toothsome*, an armed 200–ton Free Trader similar to the *Bullwhip*, arrives in–system around the time the PC party leaves. The Referee should roll 2D6–7 to determine the exact time. For example: a result of –3 means the *Toothsome* arrives three hours before the PCs can get out of the Imperial Starport. If the Bullwhip was destroyed, the *Toothsome* demands to know what happened. If the Toothsome catches the PCs in dock, they attempt to convince the ruling Baron (who is the final authority over the Starport) that the PCs are themselves pirates, and a threat to Imperial & system security. If the PCs contest this, it is a Difficult (average of Liaison and Legal) task for them to persuade the Baron to let them go: otherwise, their ship is impounded, and the PCs ordered to remain in the Starport until a court date is set. The difficulty is raised from to Formidable, if the PCs acted like thugs or brutes while in port or in the city. If the PCs are detained, the Vargr dumps the PCs, finding a different ship to make his Jump Into Nothingness. (Whenever this is a blessing in disguise is left for the Referee to determine.)

If the PCs are let go, their ship is closely shadowed by the *Toothsome* as it prepares to jump. It is an Easy Ship Tactics task to determine that the *Toothsome* is preparing to attack. However, in reality the *Toothsome* is attempting to psyche out the PCs, to get them to fire

the first shot. The *Toothsome* is armed with a laser and a missile turret: her crew is of Regular quality. Unlike *Bullwhip*, *Toothsome* does not carry an armed gig. If the PCs open fire, the *Toothsome* dives into the fight to avenge their fallen brother. They cannot fail a morale check for 1D6 turns of battle, after this period, the Referee should resolve morale as usual. If the PCs don't open fire, they escape without injury, but they had better keep an eye out for the *Toothsome* in their future travels.

Into the Out Of

While in Jumpspace, Professor Ma'oudzksoes speaks to the guy in charge of communications. As soon as the ship comes out of jump, he wants the vessel to transmit a particular coded sequence. The sequence is in a 'black box' that he wants to link up to the system's radio (and other, if available) transmission equipment. Inspection of the box verifies only that it is Imperial Navy equipment: it's sealed, except for the standard hook–up points. It is an Average Electronics task to link up the Black Box into the systems in question. PCs who were former Imperial personnel may be very curious to learn just how this shiny little black box fell into the hands of a Vargr archaeologist from the Julian Protectorate, but again, "It's better for all of us if you don't know about that."

If the PCs refuse to plug in the Little Black Box, the Vargr turns away: but he tries hard to convince the PCs to plug it in throughout the time they are in Jumpspace. If they haven't done so within a few hours of emergence, he locks himself in his cabin and prays to the Ancients for help. Upon arrival, the PCs find a dead and silent world. Professor Ma'oudzksoes joins them on the bridge if he can, tell them that he was wrong to come here, and that they should head back.[12] If they look at it, shrug, and turn away, nothing happens. If they attempt to land on the world, they are blown out of the sky by naval–grade meson weaponry without warning or hesitation.[13]

It is possible that a highly skilled, ex–Imperial Navy technician could obtain the digital data of the black box without opening it (which is sure to wipe the data squeaky clean off the storage media) or breaching the built–in security protocols. To do so, the technician must first pass two tests: an Average Electronics test and a Difficult Computer test. This simulates his knowledge of the relevant Imperial protocols. Then, he must pass a Staggering Electronics task, and then a Staggering Computer task. Failure at any stage automatically wipes the data clean off the holocrystals, which then promptly crumble into fine dust. Success in all four tasks provides a copy of the data and black box programs into the Navy technician's computer: it may now be manipulated, studied, or copied to his heart's content.

There are several interstellar governments and powerful concerns, legal and otherwise, who desire a copy of the communication protocols for their own purposes. The successful technician could end up a wealthy man, but is more likely to wake up dead, wealthy or not.

Assuming that the PCs acted correctly, their ship successfully arrives 60,000 km from a large, dark planetary mass – apparently, a size five planet which has long escaped the grip of her primary sun. No star or other object can be seen nearby. Seconds after their ship emerges out of jumpspace, Professor Ma'oudzksoes' Little Black Box starts squawking into the Void. After two minutes, the box shuts up.

There is silence in the heavens for half an hour.

Then, a simple Ship's Boat emerges from the dead world below. A transmission is received, with a clipped military voice ordering the PCs to stand by and prepare to be boarded in the name of the Imperium: failure to do so will result in the use of lethal force. "This is your first and only warning."

Upon docking with the PCs ship, ten Battle Dressed Marines promptly and professionally scopes out the crew and the ship. A second ship – this time, a larger naval cutter – docks, and twenty technicians in duty overalls unload and start scanning and testing everything, from computers to plumbing. They are polite, determined, and very through. For example, it takes a mere ten seconds for them to find the Little Black Box, once they open up the commo cabinet, no matter how well hidden it is.

Soon, the PCs are questioned one by one in a commandeered cabin. Questions from the PCs are swatted aside, but the PCs are strongly advised to answer all questions as truthfully as possible. Noble characters are permitted certain privileges, like getting a few vague answers to their queries. If they wish, PC Nobles may speak to the local Base Commander for more detailed answers than the troopers are allowed to provide. Each PC is politely but thoroughly interrogated for 20 minutes, except the ship's Captain, who is questioned for an hour. Professor Ma'oudzksoes is interrogated privately for two hours, on the Navy cutter.

If the PC Captain wishes to deceive his questioners, he must pass a Formidable Liaison task. Other PCs must pass a Difficult Liaison or Streetwise role. Statements are cross–checked with each other, and ALL the ship's logs and records are combed over carefully. In this instance, the PCs suffer no harm for telling the truth, but they don't know this. The usual penalties for perjury apply.

Two hours after boarding, the PCs are told to board the Ship's Boat. PCs that are found to be lying or otherwise resisting Naval authority are arrested, and duly punished. (Noble[14] PCs may be able to evade punishment and even obtain transport back to civilization, depending on their Liaison skill, contacts, and military & noble service record.) Otherwise, they are interred in a fairly comfortable set of holding cells for several days, and are permitted most creature comforts in their detention cell. However, they may not leave their set of rooms without an armed escort, and their mobility is tightly restricted outside of their area. They do not see the Professor at all.

Nobles who ask to speak to the Base Commander must make an appointment. (Other PCs may ask, but they have no chance of seeing him unless they were former Imperial flag officers – who are generally knighted lords, anyways.) Within a week, the Noble is given permission to do so – after he puts on a 'blinder': a helmet that blinds and deafens him, and nullifies any possible psionic powers.[15] After he puts on the helmet, he led by the hand up and down various passageways, and using various passenger vehicles until he arrives at the Base Commander's office. A tall, formal, and highly aristocratic man wearing an Imperial Army dress uniform with Colonel's tabs greets the Noble.

Colonel Sir Adalgiso Heffernan explains that this world is Black Zoned: that is, there is no record of this world in the any Imperial or Planetary database, and information on the world's very existence is a closely held secret. Revealing the existence of a Black Zoned world – knowingly or not – is a violation of the Imperial Official Secrets Act, subject to penalties up to and including maiming, personality reconstruction, mind wipes, imprisonment, massive fines, penal slavery, banishment, disenfeoffment (losing Noble rank), and execution. The Noble PC may then ask for the name of the world, and why this world has been Black Zoned: the Base Commander cannot give him an answer to either question until the Noble's identity has been verified, and his level of security clearance has been determined. Finally, the Noble PC may ask for additional creature comforts: some things are not possible, but the minor pleasures of life – good wine, pleasant conversation, access to the local gym, the latest news from the Rim War, debt market updates – can be made available.

Strange Times

After 2D6+12 days of a fairly pleasant imprisonment, the PCs are suddenly called to the Base Commander's office. Interestingly, they don't have to wear blinder helmets, so they can look around them and observe the buzz of activity. An observant man, well–versed in Imperial military life, can spot not only numerous Army and several Navy uniforms, but an odd purple–red–black uniform that he never saw before. There are a lot of technicians and sophisticated equipment, but few troopers or front–line equipment. There are no civilian contractors at all, but quite a few spooks in their 'uniform' of grey, black, and/or dark blue business suits. The long, slim, heavily reinforced tunnels and lack of large rooms suggest that they are deep under the surface, at least 100 km in. Moreover, the 'bulgy' nature of the tunnels imply the use of meson weapons as initial' excavators'. There are no snakes of wires on the ground, and no evidence of patching or 'make–do' rigging. This fact suggests that they are in a long–inhabited base, at least over a decade old, perhaps much longer.

When they finally enter the office of the Base Commander, they also discover Professor Ma'oudzksoes, another man who looks like a very haughty Noble, and an intense young man who seems to be a scientist or professor. The Noble is introduced as Duke Ronson Puga y Minkirashirbiissa, and the young man as Professor Ramón Mugica. The Base Commander asks the PCs if they desire to head back to their normal lives, or if they wish to serve the Imperium in exploring a new frontier. Those that do wise to serve should continue: those PCs who don't wish to serve should move on to the "Memories Fade, But the Sky Still Lingers" section.

Those PCs who want to serve the Imperium on a new frontier are first sworn into service to the Imperium, as an Imperial Time Scout. ("What's that?" "You will be informed shortly.") Secondly, they take a blood oath of secrecy: breaking the oath is penalised by being marooned in time or a formally executed by "sword or sidearm". Finally, the young Professor Mugica gives them the goods: the Imperium is successfully using his research and theories to explore other timelines, and this Black Zoned World – named (Referee's decision) – located in a quiet, low–tech frontier far from interstellar strife and trouble, is the forward station of the next wave of Imperial expansion. The initial trade posts, exploratory bases, and military forts are being laid down now: within three decades, it is expected that a public announcement will be made by the Emperor, and formal settlement shall begin. As of now, all Imperial citizens and installations outside of the main timeline are under the authority of Duke Ronson – officially a paper Duke for his patronage of the sciences, he has secretly been granted the Imperial Outtime colonies and installations as his demesne.

"Memories Fade, But the Sky Still Lingers"

Those who want to head back are led away by a guard back to their starship. The ship is refuelled, and the PCs simply let go. During the next night cycle of the ship, the recent log entries are corrupted by a virus, while a

chemical triggering short–term memory loss of the last three weeks is injected into the ship's atmosphere. Most ship crews put down both the memory loss and corrupted data to the after–effects of a misjump: only a few merchants would try to piece together what really happened. If most of the PCs want to go one way, but one or two want the other choice, the minority should retire their characters and start anew. In game, the minority either stayed in the Black Zone, or the minority was transported by a Naval courier, and dropped off on a friendly world. The PCs suffered short–term memory loss regarding the past few weeks, but are up and about soon enough.[16]

Since the memory loss only covers the last three weeks, the crew still has memories of Professor Ma'oudzksoes and his mysterious mission to jump into the void. They can't remember what happened to him: but many people in Vipan can recall seeing them in his company. If the PCs think to ask, the Imperial Starport can even help them partially reconstruct their ship's long. (No, the Imperium didn't give them any orders regarding the PCs – due to oversight, laziness, the issue being bumped by other problems of higher priority, or the traditional Imperial 'Hands off!' policy manifesting itself again.) Some of their memories can be reconstructed, but others are gone for good. In the meantime, the Vargr Professor is initially thought to be missing, but later, the Admiralty issues a brief press release, stating that he is currently serving the Imperium in a classified project.

Afterwards

The very first mission of these new Imperial Time Scouts is not to research other timelines, but to observe their own past. Because of the anti–paradoxal nature of Chronophysics, time travellers can't interact with the past of their own timeline: but they can observe and record it, and bring back invaluable data. The ability of current Chronotravel to retrieve time travellers fades out after ~600 years, but Imperial engineers & theorists believe that they can double this range – to the founding of the Imperium, and even to the late Long Night era – before they start hitting the limits of the possible.

The current limit is barely enough for Professor Ma'oudzksoes, to finally discover the identity of the Noble who lies in the Cimbajah Graves. But to get there, not only does he need to travel in the past: he needs a unique starship/timeship that can successfully Jump him to Vipan. As time travellers are non–corporeal in their own past, he can't travel using the native starships of that era – he can't even speak to anyone there, or interact with local reality, matter, or energy. Guess who crews the ship?

As the Imperium slowly expands across the timelines, ripple effects begin to manifest itself, especially in the

forms of alternate Imperiums – some only slightly different…

- The Imperial sunburst is edged with gold, and pureblood Solomani still rule from the Golden Throne on Terra. While the human genome remains unaltered, numerous species have been uplifted by the Divine Race of True Men. The Zone of Imperial Settlement now stretches two hundred parsecs rimward of Holy Terra, encompassing numerous interesting species like the Aslans and the Yontil, protected in Guarded Reservations encompassing whole systems! (Is not the Blessed Emperor generous?) But the Vilani States, a mere 50 parsecs from Sol, still remains a potent threat…

…to rather exotic…
- The Zhodani/Vilani Psionic Alliance, after dominated Charted Space for 5,000 years, finally meets its match. One of the long–hidden cloned Children of Grandfather, after secretly rebuilding a powerbase on a ringworld, formally declares victory in the Final War, and publicly proclaims his right to Rule the Galaxy! Can the legendary Consular Guard hold back his innumerable Droyne hives long enough for the Unity of Mind to contain the Child? And what about strange tales of a hidden star system, of robotic servants from a chaotic, ever–changing culture, with mysterious knowledge of the Great Enemy?

Moreover, while the Alternate Imperiums initially are 'over there', the new alterations of jumpspace will insure that a few will eventually come 'over here' – mainly by exotic misjump incidents.[17]

How the mainline Imperium interacts with them is bound to be a major issue for the future.

Characters

Professor Ikhuukhalaan Ma'oudzksoes
Vargr, 42 years old, UPP: 9B489B
History–3, Archeology–2, Instruction–2, Grav Belt–1, Anglic–1, Vilani–1, Admin–1, Carousing–1, Liaison–1, Persuasion–1, Streetwise–1, Sensor Ops–1, Vacc Suit–1, Astronomy–0, Grav Vehicle–0, Robot Ops–0, Computer –0, Handgun–0
Native Language: Ourmakten (an Ovaghoun Vargr language common on Ikon)

An outgoing and gregarious Vargr from the Protectorate, Professor Ma'oudzksoes is fascinated with making new discoveries in the past. Sniffing out hints of an amazing discovery, he cannot rest until all is revealed.

Professor Ramón Mugica
Solomani human, 26 years old, UPP: 455CF9
Chronophysics–6, Physics–3, Astronomy–1, Computer–1, Sensor Ops–1, Robot Ops–0, Grav Vehicle–0
Native Language: Anglic, Castilliano

A young, driven genius, Professor Mugica is the brains behind the current Imperial drive to expand to different timelines. He is bound to be mentioned in the same breath as Euclid and Newton – if he doesn't burn out first.

Colonel Sir Adalgiso Heffernan
Base Commander
Imperial human, 42 years old, UPP: 9B68BB
Admin–3, Recruiting–2, Computer–2, Grav Vehicle–2, Long Blade–2, Legal–1, Physics–1, Gravitics–1, Intrusion–1, Robot Ops–1, Battle Dress–1, Vacc Suit–0, Energy Weapon–0, Electronics–0, Chronophysics–0
Native Language: Anglic

Colonel Sir Heffernan, an aristocrat's aristocrat, has not only given the best years of his life to the Imperium, but has also kept his mind flexible, able to handle new concepts while rooted in the bedrock of loyalty and tradition.

Ronson Puga y Minkirashirbiissa
Duke Nokinia (paper duchy: secret Senior Noble of the Imperial Outtime Territories)
Imperial human, 20 years old, UPP: 55877F
Grav Vehicle–1, Streetwise–1, Computer–0, Energy Weapon–0
Native Language: Anglic

Duke Ronson's problems with impulsive violence, simmering anger, and intemperate speech has turned the young noble into a well–bred failure. Unable to find a place in any military academy… banned from the Imperial colleges… the Outtime Frontier is his last hope.

Cull Cientaa
Captain, *Bullwhip*

Imperial human, 30 years old, UPP: 4794D8
Engineering–2, Carousing–2, Pilot–2, Grav Vehicle–1, Electronics–1, Jack–o–Trades–1, Computer–1, Medical–1, Modern Vilani–1, Mechanical–1, Gambling–1, Laser Pistol–1, Vacc Suit–0
Native Language: Anglic

From a promising drivehand to a hungry pirate, to a purser on a brand–new free trader, Captain Cientaa has seen his share of ups and downs. With the combination of luck, skill and a good shooting hand, he has managed to get the captain's chair, and has found some legit work for his crew.

Jose Lip
Captain, *Toothsome*
Imperial human, 38 years old, UPP: 379BA5
Electronics–3, Pilot–2, Gravitics–2, Language–2 (Referee's choice), Admin–2, Long Blade–1, Trader–1, Broker–1, Liaison–1, Commo–1, Laser Pistol–1, Grav Vehicle–0, Computer–0, Rifleman–0, Vacc Suit–0, Ship's Tactics–0, Turrent–0
Native Language: Anglic

Captain Lip has laboured long and hard to get to where he is, first on the Free Trader *Copa Copa*, and then on the *Toothsome*. Now, instead of a pure trade route, he's mixed up in doing anti–pirate work on the side – with crews who are only this far from crossing the line themselves.

Jatin Lurgadagig
Baron Vipan
Imperial human, 22 years old, UPP: 49725C
Grav Vehicle–2, Ground Vehicle–1, Computer–0, Energy Weapon–0, Anglic–0
Native Language: Inadtiu (distantly related to Hindu)

Baron Jatin is a gentle soul, but not particularly smart. After doing well enough in his tour of duty as a driver for a senior naval officer, he formally inherited the barony from his dead father. Guided by his mother and his smarter sister, Baron Jatin rules fairly well, as he is good at doing what he is told.

Starships

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Ship: Holey Moley       Class: Type R          Tech Level: 9
Type: Subsidised Merchant
Architect: Standard (Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)
USP
        AR-4211111-020000-10000-0 MCr 137.190 400 Tons
Bat Bear            1    1      Crew: 5
Bat                 1    1      TL: 9

Cargo: 228 tons Passengers: 9 Low: 10 Fuel: 44 EP: 4 Agility: 0
Pulse Lasers
Craft: 1 x 20T Launch          Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
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Architects Fee: MCr 1.372      Cost in Quantity: MCr 109.752
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Ship: Bullwhip           Class: Type A          Tech Level: 9
Type: Free Trader
Architect: Standard (Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)
USP
        AA-2611111-000000-10000-0 MCr 68.240 200 Tons
Bat Bear                    1        Crew: 4
Bat                         1        TL: 9

Cargo: 71 tons Passengers: 7 Low: 20 Fuel: 22 EP: 2 Agility: 0
Pulse Lasers
Craft: 1 x 20T Gig
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Architects Fee: MCr 0.682   Cost in Quantity: MCr 54.592
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Ship: Bullet      Class: Gig                 Tech Level: 7
Type: Gig
Architect: Standard (Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)
USP
        QG-0201111-000000-00001-0 MCr 9.700 20 Tons
Bat Bear                      1   Crew: 2
Bat                           1   TL: 7

Cargo: 8 Fuel: 1 EP: 0.2 Agility: 1
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Architects Fee: MCr 0.097   Cost in Quantity: MCr 7.760
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Ship: Toothsome              Class: Type A     Tech Level: 11
Type: Free Trader
Architect: Standard (Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)
USP
        AA-2611111-000000-10001-0 MCr 69.200 200 Tons
Bat Bear                    1   1   Crew: 5
Bat                         1   1   TL: 11

Cargo: 91 tons Passengers: 7 Low: 20 Fuel: 22 EP: 2 Agility: 0
Pulse Lasers. Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Architects Fee: MCr 0.692   Cost in Quantity: MCr 55.360
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Footnotes

[1]A professor of Chronology studies the nature and effects of time: everything from calendars, to the time–distortion effects of gravity, to the effects very long life has on sophont minds. As a discreet scientific discipline, Chronology has existed for only the last 400 years, younger than Psionicology. Chronophysics, is closely related to Chronology and Hyperspatial physics (a.k.a. Jumpspace physics). The handful of students in Chronophysics are carefully screened and licensed by the Imperium.

[2]The Cimbajah Graves were buried deep in the roaring oven of Vipan. Professor Ma'oudzksoes, using a method, technique, or information he has refused to divulge, somehow determined the exact location of the Graves in the early 980s. However, the archaeological dig was fraught with danger: Hostile Environment suits failed with depressing regularity, winds of up to 500 kph ripped apart shelters, and more than one excavator, researcher, and technologist died in screaming agony as he literally melted away. Finally, new site protection techniques developed by the Free Academies of Antares were deployed in early 987, permitting work to accelerate and reveal the long–hidden graves.

And what was actually discovered? A carefully arranged circle of soldiers, dressed in a type of Imperial Battle Dress in use during the 480s within the Quarter. They were buried upright in a known Imperial parade formation, each bearing a TL–D PGMP, a gauss rifle, and extra ammo in a protective formation around a single man, probably a Noble, wearing a distinctive blood–red Battle Dress with gold and ebony highlights. Preliminary research on the remains at the University of the Stars (in orbit around Match, a world itself orbiting Nulinad's secondary star) revealed that the noble died due to sustained traumas spread over four years of hard soldiering: apparently, some of his most loyal Huscarles chose to be buried with him, to provide a suitable escort to the afterlife.

While the Noble remains nameless, his DNA, dental records, bone structure analysis, and a detailed holographic record of his armour and equipment has been sent to the Imperial College of Arms on Capital in an attempt to identify him. Various noble houses across the Imperium – some junior, some quite senior indeed – have expressed great interest in determining his identity, and are willing to provide considerable resources to solve the puzzle. It is expected that he and his troops will be reburied after his identity has been resolved.

[3]I'm using the term 'small trader community' to include free traders, far traders, small exploratory traders, freelance scouts and couriers, and assorted interstellar rift–raft who, by one means or another, got their hot little hands on a small starship. Noble yachtsmen, pirates – full–time pirates, anyways – and starmercs are not included in this group, but smugglers are.

[4]To make things a lot more complicated (and more realistic), have the PCs discover the Professor's request on a weeks–old news flyer or Net posting. This alone should not cause the PCs to lose heart: news only travels by jump, and has to reach the right ear at the right time before it is acted upon. The Professor could be in another system: in the same system, but on a different planet or moon, or even on the same planet as the PCs, but 'off the grid'. A world is a big place…. However, they'll only have a month to find the Professor at most: if this time passes without finding the Professor, then they have certainly failed: another, smarter/luckier starship captain got the retainer.

But not even this need be the end of the story: perhaps the other guy's ship suffered a major accident, or got impounded by the Imperium, or dropped the Professor for a better deal elsewhere. Perhaps the PCs cornered the Professor, and offered him a better deal than the competition does. The Vargr aren't stickers for contracts, and PC creativity and perseverance should be rewarded with success.

Naturally, the PCs might have made a new enemy while getting the deal done, but that's just part of life in the Quarter. Until they meet again, under even more interesting circumstances….

[5]The observant Empty Quarter astrographer would have noticed not only the relative poverty of the sector compared to the rest of Charted Space, but the certain Tech Level 'floor'. For example, in Anthony Jackson's map of Charted Space – http://maps.travellercentral.com/map.html – Core Sector has five TL 4 mainworlds (three breathable), two TL 3 (one breathable), one TL 2 (tainted), and none at TL 1 or TL 0. In the Empty Quarter, there are 10 TL 4 mainworlds, 2 TL 3, 1 TL 2, no TL 1, and 1 at TL 0: all of which has breathable atmospheres (5 or 6).

Now, why is this? A handcrafted sector is the out–of–game reason; but in–game, the simple fact is that you simply can't put your life on interstellar traders: they are too unreliable, the Navy is spread too thin (even before the Rim War – nobody on Capital cared to pour valuable resources in this worthless backwater), and the raiders & pirates too hungry to trust them. Fortunately, while the pirates and raiders are hard on shipping – especially on the small fry – they show more mercy to the worlds, satisfying themselves with just collecting 'taxes & tribute' instead of stealing or destroying the equipment the lives of the locals depend on. "Why kill the sheep when you can fleece them again and again and again?" In return, the local worlds tend to keep their mouth shut when the Navy patrol arrives, and look the other way when a known pirate docks in the port for repairs.

[6]"The easiest planet (other than Earth) to place floating cities at this point would appear to be Venus. The thick carbon dioxide atmosphere is significantly denser than air, which means that any large structure filled with air (molecular nitrogen and oxygen) would float on the carbon dioxide, with the air's natural buoyancy counteracting the weight of the structure itself. The main challenge would be using a substance resistant to sulfuric acid to serve as the structure's outer layer; ceramics or metal sulfates could possibly serve in this role. (The sulfuric acid itself may prove to be the main motivation for creating the structure in the first place, as the acid has proven to be extremely useful for many different purposes.)" – From the Wikipedia article "Floating cities (science fiction)" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floating_city_%28science_fiction%29 , as of May 19, 2007.

[7]While the station is at TL 8, the shuttles are at TL D, to handle the corrosive atmosphere.

[8]A visual for the viewing platform is titled, surprisingly enough, "Viewing Platform", created by zfigure7:

[9]The large reptiles bred for meat are collectively called 'aharahna' within the Imperial Empty Quarter: the riding reptiles are called 'ghova'. A majority of Imperial Emptyheads can tell you the different breeds and species, but most Travellers don't need the details.

[10]Whether "The Imperial Acrobatica" is actually funded by an Imperial ministry, has a license to use the term "Imperial", or simply likes the name, is up to the Referee to decide. Punishment for unlawful use of the term "Imperial" is up to the Referee to decide.

[11]Small spaceports are toasted by the explosion, as well. This is something that Imperial starport personnel is well aware of, considering how slack certain Emptyheads are with ship maintenance…

[12]Professor Ma'oudzksoes does NOT know what an "Imperial Black Zone" is. He was only told by his very scared contacts that if you transmit the right signal from the right equipment as soon as you jump into certain off–the–chart locations, you might – might – be able to live long enough to explain your presence to Whoever or Whatever is in charge there. If you can't transmit the right codes at the right time, your best bet is to bug out pronto: there is a good chance that Whatever is guarding these places will let you go. "Just don't talk about your experiences with anyone – especially when you're drunk or intoxicated."

[13]This summary execution assumes a Grey Imperium, using GURPS Traveller terminology. There are other ways to insure curious adventurers and unofficial scouts don't report the location of a Black Zoned system, depending on the Referee's vision of the Imperium.

A "Bright Light" Imperium won't even have Black Zone worlds (worlds and dim stellar objects kept off the official charts). A Light Imperium detains the ship, removes all data on the location of the world and sends them off with a Jump program that self–destructs after one use. A "Light Grey" Imperium captures the crew, and selectively erases their short–term memories and portions of the ship logs (possibly plugging in an unconscious fear or false memories, to discourage further investigation), and sends them off again using the single–use–only Jump program: this keeps collateral damage low and the world hidden. A "Dark Grey" Imperium can go several ways, including (but not limited to): a more extensive rewrite of the PCs minds; using captured crew and passengers as forced settlers or unfree labour in other timelines, or by simply killing them. Black Imperiums use lethal force out of hand, or alters uninvited guests in a manner that insures Travellers avoid certain parts of space.

Due to the top–secret nature of time travel, and its possible military uses, it is certainly possible that a generally Good Imperium turns really, really nasty when it comes to keeping certain things in the dark. This adventure assumes a standard Grey Imperium, "with occasional light and black spots." Unfortunately, a Black Zoned system counts as one of the black spots.

[14]Offically, "Noble status" requires a rank of Baron and above. However, in this adventure, the use of the word includes senior Imperial knights.

[15]The helmet also detects and flags the use of any psionic powers. Under the rule of the current Emperor, use of psionic powers by nobles (or anyone else) demands an immediate lobotomy – no ifs, ands, or buts. However, noble cursed with psionic powers are given highly professional, high–tech lobotomies with good post–surgery therapy, so they suffer very few or no distasteful after–effects.

[16]No doubt, some of the more pragmatic & efficient Vilani officers out there wonder "Why didn't the Imperium just kill them?" The overriding reason is that it's better for a Referee to give a second chance to their players, whenever reasonable. But in–game….

First, the Imperium – even a Dark Grey or Black Imperium – is dependent on the support (or at least acquiesce) of their citizens and/or subjects. For roleplaying purposes, there is a limit on just how black a Black Imperium can get: in a truly totalitarian empire, the scope of adventures, experiences, and margins for mistakes is extremely limited (as any Soviet, Nazi, or North Korean citizen could tell you.) Thus, even most Black Imperiums are wise enough not to cross certain lines; understands how quickly a bad example spreads; and works hard to keep up a pretty mask.

Second, the Imperium prefers to avoid killing off interstellar traders, the very lifeblood if the Imperium. This is especially true in the Imperial Empty Quarter in 993, where interstellar trade is on the thin side in any case. Most Emptyhead nobles are desperately eager to encourage some kind of interstellar trade, and are a good deal more tolerant of grey– and black–market activities than the nobility in more civilized realms would put up with.

Third, the surviving traders tell others to avoid certain regions of space, a form of gossip the Imperium is pleased to manipulate. I suspect that most Imperiums, like the early Roman Empire, strongly prefers 'gossip control' and mimetic propaganda techniques to sending thin–lipped censors around, hauling dissidents away. (From the GDW materials I have read, it seems that the Official Traveller Imperium also avoids most forms of

blatant censorship, preferring to use Traditions and a 'sensible consensus' to limit the scope of ideals instead of censors or Zhodani–style Thought Police.) This all ties in to a continual thread in Imperial culture, the formlessness of power. "Revolt? Revolt against what? So we burn down the starport, and kill the local Baron – then what? What have we gained that we didn't have before – besides the hatred of the Emperor, and lots of hard–faced spacers with nukes?"

[17]If the Referee and his party wants some levity & irony, he can start tossing in (to pick out the obvious possibilities) 'rumours of odd–looking Solomani ultra–racialists with blond hair, crooked crosses and jumpdrive technology speaking gibberish; dead Imperial Navy warships with insane AI's who want to die in a spectacular fashion, and mysterious minor races with pointed ears, green blood, and amazing technology…' A more serious campaign would consider Vargr, Bwap, or K'kree rule over the Empty Quarter, or an Islamic, Hindu, or dual–religion theocracy dominating the region.

Images

The low–tech 'Imperial High Port' is based on the image "Low Orbit" created by helix3d: http://www.scifi–meshes.com/gallery/showphoto.php/photo/164/ppuser/1635 . Note that the world below bears no resemblance to Vipan.

The simple orbital prison the PCs are interned in is similar to the image "Over Olympus Mons" by David Robinson: http://digitalart.org/art/14430/science–fiction/over–olympus–mons/

My mind's eye view of Vipanpura is something like this: "Floating City" by Lown, http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1313798

Images of high–tech and technofantasy acrobatics, all by zfigure7:
"Tightrope" – http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=700449
"Ímperial Acrobatica" – http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=669094

"The Arch of Revolution" – http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=612981
"Deep Space Dive" – http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=602930
"Levitation" – http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=598496
"The Swing" – http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=575267
"Aerial Acrobat" – http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=507905
"Dangerous Trapeze" – http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=502207

The Rite of Ascension is derived from the image "Ascension" by zfigure7: http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1103161

Professor Ramón Mugica:
"The Prince of Slytherin" by verauko http://www.deviantart.com/deviation/20615460/?qo=25&q=prince&qh=boost%3Apopular+age_sigma%3A24h+age_scale%3A5

Duke Ronson Puga y Minkirashirbiissa "Righteous Anger" by David Willicome (davidwillicome) http://davidwillicome.cgsociety.org/gallery/488247/

Colonel Sir Adalgiso Heffernan "General Silus Montaner" by Piero Macgowan http://forums.cgsociety.org/showthread.php?f=133&t=472181&highlight=Montaner

Cull Cientaa, Captain, *Bullwhip* "Spaceman 3" by Rogério Serra http://digitalart.org/art/28121/science–fiction/spaceman–3/

Jose Lip, Captain, *Toothsome* "Cyberpunk Guy" by Tim Goernert http://digitalart.org/art/25945/science–fiction/cyberpunk–guy/

Feature Adventure: Monsters in the Dark

By Alvin Plummer

Introduction

Monsters in the Dark is a simple, one–shot adventure set in the Imperial Empty Quarter. A space–based adventure, it assumes that the PCs starship is dry when they enter a hex, and needs to fuel up to continue on their way. It is not necessary for the PCs to own a ship: a friendly and adventurous starship crew and ship is available. *The Snark*, manned by Martin & Osa Putih (and family) can serve as the PCs base during the adventure. This adventure assumed familiarity with caravanseries of **Stellar Reaches** #6's "Empty Quarter Echo", by Jeff M. Hopper. Classic Traveller rules and the BITS task system are assumed.

Stuck!

The PCs jump to the *Desert Winds III* caravanserie in hex 0832, not too far from those hostile hotheads over at Arakaad.[1] If they are long–time traders in the 'Four Corners' region of Quadrant I of the Empty Quarter, they are well–aware that *Desert Winds III* is where you go for the best small–lot merchandise in the area, thanks to the trade flows from nearby Tapawa, Charity, Kawatas, and the weak but real influence of Lazisar, Fathwaas, and Datawo.[2] The lack of Imperial supervision only helps things run smoothly – but there is a price to be paid for refusing Imperial protection….

When the PCs jump in, what they see twists their stomach. The caravanserie is smashed to pieces, and they see ten derelict small traders and several distant clouds of debris that might have been starships, once. The area is as silent as a tomb, and – despite deceptive radar echoes – the PCs are all alone. More importantly, they have no fuel to jump out: if they don't find some, they are going to become a permanent part of the spacescape soon enough! If the PCs are passengers onboard *The Snark*, they'll see Osa openly weep for her old friends on the caravanserie while Martin's face grows dark with anger: their children speak in hushed tones around them. If the PCs have their own ship, the Schooner[3] soon jumps in after them, also out of fuel, but able to assist the PCs.

Among the Ruins

There is a possibility of survivors on the dead ships. Whoever attacked the *Desert Winds III* did a real number on her, and searching for survivors there is hopeless – if you can find a big enough part of the station to 'search'. It takes time to match courses with the tumbling wrecks, and skill to board them successfully – the Referee should make these tasks Difficult or Formidable for the PCs. To determine ship integrity, the Referee should role 1D6:

1 – The ship is shattered, and is visibly breaking up as the PCs move onboard. No life support, gravity, or power is available. The PCs are in real danger of being crushed or tossed into the Void as the ship tears herself apart.

2 – The ship is badly damaged, with no life support or power. The PCs must watch out for equipment tumbling around in the inky–black and frozen environment. Floating shards of the ships hull can slice open vacc suits in a hurry: caution is advised.

3–4 – The ship is badly damaged, with sporadic life support & power. Gravity may be steady, dead, or – worst of all – flaky, with PCs and equipment being bounced around in an unpredictable fashion. When lit, it is easily seen that the ship has obviously been boarded, the crew and passengers shot to pieces, and anything valuable ripped from the bulkheads.

5 – The ship is badly damaged, with steady life support & power. It's obvious that the pirates had to struggle to take the ship: the fiends didn't have the time to steal everything possible before they had to get out. The PCs should watch out for untriggered traps set by the crew, from electrocution to explosives. There is a possibility for survivors in still–sealed cabins, or in the low berths. Remember that medical skill is needed to thaw out the 'popsicles' properly: incorrect revival procedures lead quickly to a warmed–up corpse.

6 – The ship is seriously damaged, with steady life support & power. Here, the crew have actually managed to punish the boarders hard enough to repel them, yet at a time inconvenient to the pirates: they didn't have sufficient time or missiles to destroy the ship out of spite before they jumped out. 1D6 heavily armed and adrenaline–hopped survivors are onboard. A careful introduction and slow, easily–visible movement is usually enough to calm them down. They are in need of food, water, and medical care. Low berth survivors are also likely.

There is still the question of getting together enough fuel to jump out. Unfortunately, the enormous fuel tanks onboard the *Desert Winds III* are now just so much scrap metal. There isn't enough fuel aboard the surviving ships to make up enough liquid hydrogen for one jump for any ship. However, there are enough unused supplies on the shot–up ships to extend life

support for both *The Snark* and the PCs ship (if any) for quite a while – even several weeks, if the Referee decrees it.

The Cowards and the Courageous

Before the week is out, the PCs, the crew of *The Snark*, and the survivors (if any) observe other ships jump into the local area. Most of them, like the PCs, don't have enough fuel to get out again. The Referee rolls 2D6 per day: on a result of 2 to 6, no one arrives. On a result of 7 to 10, one trader arrives, also out of fuel. On a result of 11–12, the trader is an 800–ton Fat Trader, modified for Bwap usage. The *Pabatdo–teb* has just enough fuel to jump out, but none to loan to the other ships. However, the Bwaps are willing to transport marooned survivors and the PCs to Kewepab for free, and will certainly notify the authorities. The PCs may elect to take this route out of the empty hex. The Putih's send their children onboard the Bwap's hot and humid starship, under the care of their eldest daughter, and supplied each child with credits and clan contacts the kids can get in touch with when they arrive on Kewepab. The Putih's remain onboard *The Snark* until a fueller arrives.

Continue rolling as usual over the next two weeks as usual, but after the two weeks change the results: word of the loss of the *Desert Winds III* is starting to circulate among the Traveller community, and the number of ships jumping into the 'spacer's trap' falls sharply. Roll 2D6 a day: on a result of 2 to 9, noone arrives. On a result of 10 to 11, one trader arrives. On the first result of 12, a Succour–class starship, owned by Charity LIC[4], arrives to replenish life support for local starships and provide medical assistance – at a hefty price, of course. On the second result of 12, a Vargr pirate vessel, the *Oangf'fa'ogreo*, arrives to pick at the leavings. A member of the Red Tooth pack based on Ikon, the *Oangf'fa'ogreo* stresses that if the other traders leave him alone, he'll leave them alone, and strip and/or seize only the abandoned ships in the area. If the PCs leave him alone, he's as good as his word – but there's a price to be paid. If the PCs fight the Vargr, the outnumbered pirate leaves as quickly as he is able.

If the PCs fought the Vargr, then the next time a 12 comes up…
…the visitors are a small taskforce from Lazisar, consisting of a fueller, a troop transport, a tender, and two small destroyers. All intact ships are topped up, and are able to head out. Partially damaged ships are repaired, boarded, and join the fleet as they return to Lazisar: they will be returned to their owners (usually the banks) as soon as possible. The troop transport contains Lazisar investigators, to determine who destroyed the station.

If the PCs let the Vargr be, then he notified his pack soon after he left the location. Therefore, instead of the task force…
…the visitors consist of the *Oangf'fa'ogreo* and three friends: two similar pirate ships (The *Fovsunk Ashous Leingil* and the *Kegrusuvoegzaka'ng*) and their flagship, the TL–14 corsair *Udkrroumii*.[5] The *Udkrroumii* engages the PCs and the other merchantmen, drawing their fire and working to cripple them quickly. The other three pirates gang up on one merchantman, and attempt to board him. If they succeed in boarding and taking over the ship, the pirates quickly leave. If the chosen victim surrenders before boarding begins, the pirates opens communications with the other small merchants: if they cease fire, they will let the surrendering crew and passengers board their ship's boat and leave unmolested, while the pirates take the starship and cargo, jumping away to points unknown. If the pirates gain extraordinary success – putting all merchantmen out of the fight, including the PCs– they'll take the time to steal two starships, not just one, and threaten to destroy any ship that doesn't hand over their cargo as well.

The Beat Goes On

If the PCs choose to stick around, they can get a hands–on lesson on the interstellar ecology of the Imperial Empty Quarter. The next time a 12 is rolled up, a small flotilla shows up. Consisting of Iper'mar[6] starships and crew from the Coreward Belk clan, the fleet consists of two fuellers, a stationship, two scout/couriers, and five small traders. It takes three weeks for the stationship to be reconfigured into a fully–functioning caravanserie, but the wheeling and dealing gets going long before then. Within two days, two 1000–ton starmercs – hired muscle – also arrive, to protect the new station from unwanted visitors.

While the *Desert Winds IV* is being set up, the Iper'mar found a consortium, consisting of themselves, the surviving owners of the destroyed *Desert Winds III*, surviving owners of the destroyed or lost ships, and interface & subsector–scale shipping lines in the region. (The Imperium is granted observer status, and noble ship–owners who suffered loses in the attack may have membership in the consortium, if they desire it.) The PCs were involved in one or two minor, scavenging pirate attack(s), but not in the main attack that destroyed the station. They are not expected to join the consortium, but may argue the point. Referees: use both Streetwise and Liaison skills to determine success, and Legal skill when circumstances demand it.

The consortium has already hired freelance investigators and forensic personnel to comb over the wreckage and damaged logs, to determine who destroyed the *Desert Winds III*. As soon as they are finished with a set of wreckage, scavenging free traders, looking for bulk

debris to sell for metal content, bundle up the remains for resale elsewhere. Teams of bounty hunters, starmercs, and mercenaries – perhaps even the PCs! – are placed on retainer, and are expected to be deployed after the investigators release their findings to the consortium.[7]

Finally, as soon as the *Desert Winds IV* is up and running, the fuelers fill her up and take their leave. The scout/couriers jump away, to spread the news of her existence and her location to the Traveller community at large – especially traders. The free traders now officially start their buying and selling – after a small Hindu/Vilani ceremony is made, to lay the memory of the *Desert Winds III* to rest. A separate Bwap ceremony is held at the same time, to commemorate their own.[8]

Starships

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Ship: The Snark                    Class: Racer
Type: Schooner                     Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 14


USP
      SC-2133631-000000-40003-0 MCr 234.822   250 Tons
Bat Bear                  1   1   Crew: 7
Bat                       1   1   TL: 14


Cargo: 9 tons. Passengers: 1 Emergency Low: 2 Fuel: 90
EP: 15. Agility: 3
Craft: 1 x 20T Ship's Boat, 1 x 2T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Backups: 2 x Model/3 Computers


Architects Fee: MCr 2.348   Cost in Quantity: MCr 187.858


HULL: 250 tons standard, 3,500 cubic meters, Needle/Wedge Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Navigator, 2 Engineers, Medic, 2 Gunners
ENGINEERING: Jump-3, 3G Maneuver, Power plant-6, 15 EP, Agility 3
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/3 Computer, 2 Model/3 Backup Computers
HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 1 Triple Missile Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-3), 1
Triple Beam Laser Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-4)
DEFENCES: None
CRAFT: 1 20 ton Ship's Boat, 1 2 ton Air/Raft
FUEL: 90 Tons Fuel (3 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 8 Staterooms, 2 Emergency Low Berths,
1 Middle Passenger, 9 Tons Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 237.170 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 2.348),
MCr 187.858 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 64 Weeks Singly, 52 Weeks in Quantity


COMMENTS: The schooners are a signature product of the shipbuilders of
Niketan, a highly advanced Imperial world in Udusis subsector. The Racer
class are certainly schooners, but are not as bleeding-edge as other schooner
classes. Instead of a pure performance vehicle, a substantial amount of space
has been utilised to increase crew comfort and cargo capacity.
The Snark, in particular, has a homely feel to it, with several children
onboard. Internal space is filled with Noble and Imperial memorabilia and
souvenirs. Despite the vigilance of the captain, not all of this stuff is
locked down in case of high-G manoeuvres or loss of antigrav or the inertial
dampers.
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Ship: Oangf'fa'ogreo, Fovsunk Ashous Leingil,Kegrusuvoegzaka'ng
Class: Type P
Type: Corsair                          Architect: Standard
Tech Level: 11                         (Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)


USP
        PP-4423321-000000-30000-0 MCr 224.400 400 Tons
Bat Bear                    3       Crew: 9
Bat                         3       TL: 11


Cargo: 142 Fuel: 102 EP: 12 Agility: 0
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Architects Fee: MCr 2.244    Cost in Quantity: MCr 179.520


HULL: 400 tons standard, 5,600 cubic meters, Close Structure Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Navigator, 3 Engineers, Medic, 3 Gunners
ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 3G Maneuver, Power plant-3, 12 EP, Agility 0
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/2 Computer
HARDPOINTS: 4 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 3 Triple Beam Laser Turrets organized into 3 Batteries (Factor-3),
1 None Empty Turret
DEFENCES: None
CRAFT: None
FUEL: 102 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance,
plus 10 tons of additional fuel)
On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 10 Staterooms, 20 Low Berths, 142 Tons Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 226.644 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 2.244),
MCr 179.520 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 82 Weeks Singly, 65 Weeks in Quantity


COMMENTS: This is the ugly mug of the general, run-of-the-mill Vargr Corsair,
loathed and hated across the coreward Imperium.
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Ship: Udkrroumii                      Class: Ankgv'sar
Type: Pirate                          Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 14


USP
        PP-2132432-000000-03003-0 MCr 175.318    200 Tons
Bat Bear                   1  1   Crew: 20
Bat                        1  1   TL: 14


Cargo: 1  Fuel: 68  EP: 8  Agility: 2   Marines: 12
Craft: 2 x 5T Boarding Pod, 1 x 10T Gig
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Backups: 2 x Model/3 Computers
Architects Fee: MCr 1.753   Cost in Quantity: MCr 140.254


HULL: 200 tons standard, 2,800 cubic meters, Needle/Wedge Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Engineer, Medic, 2 Gunners, 3 Flight Crew, 12 Marines
ENGINEERING: Jump-3, 2G Maneuver, Power plant-4, 8 EP, Agility 2
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/3 Computer, 2 Model/3 Backup Computers
HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 1 Triple Missile Turret organized into 1 Battery (Factor-3), 1
Single Plasma Gun Turret organized into 1 Battery (Factor-3)
DEFENCES: None
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CRAFT: 2 5-ton Boarding Pods (Crew of 1), 1 10-ton Gig (Crew of 1)
FUEL: 68 Tons Fuel (3 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 10 Staterooms, 2 Low Berths, 1 Ton Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 177.071 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 1.753),
MCr 140.254 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 57 Weeks Singly, 46 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENTS: The Ankgv'sar class is a pain to traders when it shows up. The
superior maneuverability and improved Avionics really puts the hurt on when
battle is joined. The small craft allows the main ship to keep her distance
while the pods and the gig finish the fight. Fortunately, there are not a lot
of high-value targets in the Imperial Empty Quarter, worthy of the special
attention of an Ankgv'sar-class predator…
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Personalities

Martin Putih
Imperial Human, 42 years old, UPP: ACBADA
Pilot–3, Jack–of–all–Trades–2, Navigator–2, Ship's
Boat–2, Mechanical–1, Instruction–1, History–1,
Admin–1, Persuasion–1, Commo–1, Electronics–1,
Ship's Tactics–1, Fleet Tactics–1, Recruiting–1,
Leadership–1, Zero–G–1, Vacc Suit–1, Rifleman–1,
Hunting–0, Wheeled Vehicle–0, Tracked Vehicle–0,
Computer–0, Writing–0
Native Language: Anglic

A former Naval Commander, Putih is a very
adventurous individual. Currently, he is working as both
a journalist with *Imperial Astrographic* (the magazine
with the famous yellow & black border) and an
unofficial courier for Tukera Lines. He respects
courageous and adventurous men like himself, and tends
to be courtly before the ladies. He has a special love of
wildlife – the more untamed and dangerous, the better –
but he's only starting out as a hunter.

Osa Putih
Imperial Human, 38 years old, UPP: 4797B8
Liaison–3, Streetwise–2, Ship's Boat–2, Admin–2,
Trader–2, Broker–1, Legal–1, Mechanical–1,
Electronics–1, Computer–1, Engineering–1, Gravitics–
1, Rifleman–0, Photographer–0, Grav Vehicle–0,
Mathematics–0
Native Language: Anglic

Previously an Assistant Station Head for a Sector–wide
line, Osa Marason fell for a man in uniform, got
married, and eventually left her old job in order to work
with him after he retired. Mrs. Putih is interested in
Imperial Nobility, and enjoys discussing noble
marriages, gossip and pageantry. Noble PCs will be
fussed over by Putih, and PC knights can expect first–
class treatment.

Penelope (girl, 16), Walwyn (boy, 10) and Quennel
(boy, 8) are also members of the family. Grimshaw
(boy, 980–990) died in a cargo accident.

Footnotes
[1] See "Star Lieutenant Bel Geddes" in Biographies from
Stellar Reaches #7 for a small taste of that culture.

[2] It's working the angles like this that makes the
difference between a small annual profit and eventual
ship ownership – the mark of a successful trader – and
the annual losses many traders struggle with every year.

[3] A Schooner, in local Emptyhead parlance, is a small
ship, Jump3+/Maneuver 3+. It's the dream of many a
captain to be the master of such a fine ship, but few ever
get the privilege to master one.

[4] F or more on Charity LIC, please see the "Empty
Quarter Echo" of **Stellar Reaches** #5, written by Jeff
M. Hopper. For an introduction to Charity herself, see
the adventure "Sand Castles" in the same issue of
Stellar Reaches.

[5] One of the most painful facts of life in the Imperial
Empty Quarter is that some Vargr pirates may out–tech
not only the poor traders, but local naval forces as well.
Only the Regular Navy and the Tap–a–wewaka–atapas
can match their abilities, and now with most of the
Imperial Navy gone…

[6] For more on the Iper'mar, see "Minor Races of Charted
Space: The Iper'mar" in **Stellar Reaches** #5.

[7] With most of the Imperial Sector Fleet fighting two
hundred parsecs away, available forces are limited to
the Bwap Tap–a–wewaka–atapas[9] and the Lazisar
Directorate Navy. Both are happy to provide logistical
and intelligence support: the Tap–a–wewaka–atapas
share a major naval base with the Imperial Navy nearby
in Tapawa, the Lazisar share a colony world with the
Bwaps in Shikua[10] system, and both have an interest in
the safety of local trade. However, both parties are

overstretched right now, trying to fill the void the Imperial Navy left behind. Neither will actually contribute fighting ships to the consortium unless populated worlds are threatened.

[8]The Bwap are absolutely inflexible when it comes to the exact procedure to commemorate their dead, and won't alter it for any reason. However, they are willing to hold their ceremony at the same time as the humans, as a gesture of solidarity – especially with the Vilani, whom they sincerely respect.

[9]For information on the Tap–a–wewaka–atapas – "The Cudgel of the [Bwap] Grand Council", see "The Bwaps, a Minor Race of the Imperium for T20" by Jason "Flynn" Kemp in **Stellar Reaches** #1. Also, there are a few tidbits in the footnotes of "Visiting Wesaswek" in **Stellar Reaches** #7 that may be useful.

[10]For an introduction to Shikua, see the adventure "Sand Castles" in the **Stellar Reaches** #5.

Images

For images of the stationship as it arrives and transforms into *Desert Winds IV*, see:
"Colony starship Ares II", "Starship Ares–Disassembly Begins", and "Ares II colony–Disassembly complete" – all three are created by critter 3x6, and are located at www.renderosity.com (obtain membership, and then do a search by the artist's name to locate.)

Feature Adventure: Ikonic Voyage

By Alvin Plummer

Introduction

Ikonic Voyage is a diplomatic adventure, deal–making puzzle, and travelogue for the Empty Quarter. Fighting opportunities exist – especially small and sharp starship battles with pirates – but the sheer number of such fights threatens the mission and PC survival. PCs need to choose carefully when to make their stand. The culture of Yogesh/Yogesh, an overview of Ikon/ Tsahrroek, the significance of Saerrogh/Kakhasaek, and the current pirate scourge also shape the adventure.

The characters are in the service of a notable planetary leader, either as outworlder friends (who refer to him by his Imperial title of Duke Yogesh), or local servants and allies (who use his planetary title of First Administrator of Yogesh.) Depending on PC choices, the goal is either to encourage trade between Ikon and Yogesh[1], or forge a negotiated halt in pirate attacks on Yogesh subsector. The Players should be given a choice: build characters tailored for the mission and culture of Yogesh, or play as characters who have a good business relationship with the Duke. Players need not all make the same selection, but doing so helps with party unity.

PCs that choose to be Yogeshio need to generate a new character. Such PCs are assumed to be tied to House Dwivedi – the ruling family of Yogesh system, and the subsector. Rules for generating such a character are provided in this adventure: they are also provided with a starship for transport. PCs that choose the second option can simply use their old characters.

All Yogeshio parties are provided with a starship by the Duke. Other parties must have their own starship. It must be capable of travelling Jump2, to access the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile Run as detailed in Jason "Flynn" Kemp's article "Deep Space Stations" in **Stellar Reaches** #2. Their ship should be capable of handling at least four passengers, and 5 tons of cargo. At least one PC should have Liaison skill, and have some familiarity with the Vargr of the Julian Protectorate's Rukadukaz Republic: but this is not strictly necessary. PCs with some skill in diplomacy, naval combat, and pirating or anti–pirate activities are especially welcomed.

In this adventure, most PCs are expected to behave in–character as either trusted friends or loyal servants – at least for this adventure. (Lower–class non–Yogeshio PCs are the exception to the rule: see "Friends Helping Friends" for more information.) Referee punishment for flagrant violations of this trust is explicitly endorsed. The punishment shouldn't be a pure Deus ex machina, but instead naturally derives from the consequences of the PCs actions. Classic Traveller rules and the BITS Task system are used. The adventure starts on Yogesh, on 001–993: Holiday, the start of the Imperial year.

Setting the Stage: Creating the Yogeshio PC

The concept of caste is the most important trait of a Yogeshoi character. All Yogeshoi PCs should be of either low or high caste: the middle class hardly exist on Yogesh. There is little class strife on Yogesh: the lower and the upper classes live in starkly different mental universes. The elite exist to rule, the commoners exist to serve, and that is that. How this is justified – via religion, science, Party ideology, tradition, or the Will of the People – is left for the Referee to determine.[2]

Vgriimnikr'ru, the premiere city of Ikon
"Alexandria—The Second Chamber" by Nathaniel West (NathanielWest)
http://features.cgsociety.org/challenge/eon/entry.php?challenger=12065

PC parties should have at least one high–caste and two low–caste members. If no player wants be in a low–caste, the Referee should not force the issue: just generate 2+ NPC low–caste personnel, to handle the muscle work for the adventure. If no–one wants to play a high–caste character – an unlikely occurrence – the Referee should generate one. The Referee should make this individual intelligent, but with weak social skills, making him reliant on the PCs for advice. If the Superior Man also has poor decision–making skills, so much the better: it makes the PCs even more important as advisers.

After the character's caste has been chosen, the players should generate the other character stats as usual, with the following changes: low–caste characters all receive +1 for their physical stats (Strength, Dexterity, and Endurance), with a final result no lower than 6. The minimum level of Intelligence and Education is 4, and Social Standing must be between 2 and 4. (Levels of 1 or 0 imply criminal activities and/or ostracism from respectable society, and are not found in the service of the First Administrator.)

High–caste characters all receive +1 for Intelligence and Education, with a final result no lower than 8. The minimum level of Strength, Dexterity and Endurance is 4. Social standing must be between 9 and B. The characters are <u>extremely</u> aware of social standing, and the one with the highest standing is automatically the leader of the group, regardless of his other qualities.

Racial determinations may now be made. Yogeshio players may choose or randomly determine their race, using their given table:

	Upper–caste family	Lower–caste family & general population
Solomani	75%	64%
Mixed Vilani	20%	33%
Bwap	05%	03%
Vargr	none	>0.5%

Vargrs are deeply distrusted by the planetary population, and none serve in the household of the First Administrator. Note that the Bwaps are over–represented in the higher levels of society: their law–abiding & bureaucratic nature has again won them a place in the hearts of the Powers That Be. Only the lack of water inhibits the growth of Bwap society on Yogesh.

Due to familial duties, relatively few Yogeshio females leave the system. There is a 20% chance that the adventuring Yogeshio player is female. Players may choose to override the random result.

Upper–caste individuals receive a slightly better education than the average Traveller characters. Unusually, lower–caste members of House Dwivedi also receive extra education and training. In addition to the usual results, low–caste PCs of House Dwivedi roll 1D2 (a coin will do fine), and take one or two of the following skills: Interrogation, Streetwise, Brawling, Computer, Short Blade, Steward, Pistol, or Mechanical. High–caste PCs should do the same, but use a different skill list: Admin, Language (Ourmakten[3]), Language (Modern Vilani), Legal, Liaison, History (Rukadukaz Republic), Sophontology (Ikonaz Vargr), Economics (Interstellar).[4]

Referees may restrict skill selection as he pleases, to reflect the caste of the PC: for example, he may decide

that lower–caste PCs may not take Liaison, and upper–caste PCs can't take Streetwise.

When generating wealth and property, the Referee and the players should understand that lower–caste PCs don't actually own anything: all they have is technically the property of their master. Only their lives & bodies, their families, and their clothing are their own.[5] Upper–caste PCs are expected to live simply: they show their high status by their technological abilities, the amount of profitable business concerns they are a part of, the parties they attend, and the names they can drop.

In regard to the adventure, the low–caste PCs have been chosen for strength, cunning, determination, and, above all, their loyalty to the First Administrator of Yogesh. PC experience with piracy, especially with Vargr hunting packs, is a bonus: naval experience is useful, but only in regard to anti–pirate activity. All lower–caste PCs are assumed to have had experience in dealing with outworlders, and have left Yogesh system a few times in their lives. Their attitude to the First Administrator is one of utter loyalty. They judge upper–caste PCs with the same prism, and may take extreme action if they feel the First Administrator is being betrayed by other PCs.

The high–caste PCs may be part of House Dwivedi, but they are not completely trusted by the First Administrator. Instead, they are hooked by the First Administrator in some way – by debts (money, power, honour, political, etc.) or by promises of wealth, prestige, or vindication.[6] They may be beholden to the First Administrator, but they are NOT servants; at least, not in any literal sense. The First Administrator treats them as equals and friends, and – unlike the lower–caste people – they are permitted to challenge, contradict, or even defy the First Administrator, up to a point.

Setting the Stage: Friends Helping Friends[7]

Unlike some members of the Imperial High Nobility, the Duke Yogesh does not use a formal bureaucratic administration to run his demesne. Indeed, when it comes to intelligence and covert operations, the Duke insists that he has no spies, no network of agents, and the only bureaucracies he tolerates are those mandated by the Emperor (The Imperial Ministry of War, etc.) He just has friends, lots of carefully chosen friends. And what could be more natural than friends talking to each other, sharing their experiences, helping each other out?

The PCs are just such a group of friends. They do favors for him, and he does favors for them.

Following the 'quid pro quo' relationship model, three ways the PCs could have gotten themselves involved are presented below (the Referee is welcomed to invent his own):

o The PCs are long–service naval personnel (Imperial Navy or the Yogesh System Guard). After years of honourable service, they are chosen to fulfill a crucial mission for the system and the local Imperial government.

o The PCs had earlier got into interstellar hot water with some rather powerful adversaries. They heard that the Court of Yogesh is willing to give small traders and adventurers a fair hearing – and they won! Eventually, there came a time when he couldn't justly side with the PCs – but he was willing to lessen the penalty, "in return for an unspecified Imperial service in the future."[8] Of course, the Future is Now.

o Years ago, the PCs were contacted by friends of 'a patriotic Imperial'[9] to handle simple ferrying assignments. The PCs were reliable, and the ferrying assignments gradually became more interesting, involving more responsibility, more danger, and more iffy legal territory. The rewards grew with the risk, and the nature of the PCs handler rose as well.

If the PC "face guy" is middle or upper–class (Social level 6+): the NPC contact shifted from
  - just another shipping jobber, yelling orders in the warehouse to
  - a mid–level trading house bureaucrat in a busy downtown office to
  - well–tailored lawyers and execs in a posh restaurant to
  - powerful planetary leaders in ornate offices, steps away from busy command rooms staffed with uniformed personnel

If the PC face is lower–class (Social level 5–): the NPC contact changed from
  - just another shipping jobber, yelling orders in the warehouse to
  - grungy pushers of semi–legal wares in smelly dives and poorly–lit alleys to
  - meeting tattooed and cybered thugs with unexplained amounts of money and/or surprising merchandise in a really bad part of Startown to
  - secret meetings in deep space with twitchy members of the informal interstellar economy, still repairing ship damage from their latest business transaction

Happy Holiday!

Depending on the leadership of the PC party, their journey and mission follows either the "Aboveground" or the "Underground" adventure. Most PCs are expected to go the Aboveground route. Only 'lower–class' PCs – smugglers, pirates, or deep cover Navy operatives pretending to be criminal scum – are permitted to take the Underground route. Lower–caste Yogeshio aren't

permitted to enter the adventure without an upper–caste Yogeshio to handle supervision and be the official master of the ship. Such a crew must take the "Aboveground" adventure.

Different Imperial worlds mark Holiday in different ways. This is certainly true in the Imperial Empty Quarter, where celebrations range from a simple radio transmission of the Emperor's Holiday message to the xenophobic world of Mikik, to Tokitre's ringing church bells and soaring desert prayers for the Emperor's health and long reign, to riotous Carnivals taking over entire cities on Hebrin, to the massive Nuremberg–style rallies on Liamea, to the solemn toasts to the Emperor among the millions of Imperial servants and soldiers within the Quarter.

On Yogesh, work slows to a halt as first the Emperor… then the Sector Duke… then the Subsector Duke speaks on the Tri–V. Then, a parade is held by Imperial, Household, Planetary, and Corporate forces down the major underground super–corridors and major access chutes, finally ending up topside on the nearly airless sea of grey–black sand that covers Yogesh. With electronic transmissions shut off (except the starport, emergency and military channels), the population turns to live entertainment troupes, impromptu dances, and singing contests to celebrate the occasion. Many couples take the time to get married on the day, for 'good luck.'

Aboveground: The Diplomatic Mission

The PCs are introduced to the Duke Yogesh in his crowded Throne room. (On Holiday, he only answers to his Imperial title.)   The Throne room is a bright and very large room, about 30 meters high, 50 meters wide and 400 meters long, with ornate pillars and a high throne on a dais. Half–way up the 70 steps to the Ducal throne is a secondary throne, usually occupied by the Sector Admiral, Legal Counsel, or other Imperial official as the occasion demands. For Holiday, the senior Imperial Baron of Yogesh sits there. Set in the air above the petitioner and the Duke is a spherical holographic projection of local/system–wide/subsector space, on an as–needed basis.

After His Grace greats the PCs and a few more dignitaries, the Duke leads a silent progression of thousands to the Shrine of Force Commander Blanco. In 605, a combat team of 40 Imperial Marines held off 2,000 Vargr raiders here for 10 long hours, until reinforcements finally arrived to rout the rabid dogs off Yogesh. After the Duke leads the crowd in offering Vilani oblations and ceremonial chants, everyone sings the Imperial Anthem[10], and the crowd of dignitaries, officials, and civilians disperses to enjoy various balls, dances and speeches, leaving the Duke alone with the PCs and a few Imperial Scout bodyguards.

The Duke now gives the PCs their mission: they are directed to go to Ikon via the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile Run. Ikon is a very wealthy market the Duke wants to crack open for the robots produced on Yogesh, and perhaps organize a technology exchange also. After the negotiations are completed, send word to him by multiple couriers, and return to Yogesh via the best route. During their journey to Ikon, it's important that they touch base with contacts on the following worlds for additional funds, information, and personnel: Anata/Gimushi, Hebrin/Hebrin, Sahale/Hebrin, Saeghvung/Nisaga, Cotan/Cotan, Tokitre/Tokitre, and Khastok/Kakhasaek.

Non–Yogeshio characters are expected to use their own starships for transport. As a favor, the Duke orders the port to overhaul the PCs starport (with the Duke footing the bill), and additional equipment (up to a value of 10,000 credits) is to be installed on the PCs ship to support the mission. The PCs get to decide what this equipment is: as an important port able to handle TL 14 shipping, Tampici Imperial Starport is able to provide a large selection of equipment to the PCs.

Non–Yogeshio PCs must transport two upper–caste Yogeshio diplomats to Ikon. They are respectful and friendly to PCs with Social Status of 9+, condescending or contemptuous of those with a Status of 4 or less, and uncertain how to treat people with a Status between 5 and 8. Regarding nonhumans, they are comfortable around Bwaps, view Vargrs with distaste, and are curious about other humanoid aliens (Aslans, Droyne, etc.) Reactions to non–humanoid aliens, ranging from astonishment to stark terror, are up to the Referee. Note that the access codes for the Ducal funds & information is kept in the hands of the diplomats, not the PCs.

Yogeshio characters are provided with a Jump2 Far Trader, the *Commodore Bwana*, owned by various members of the upper–caste (including the First Administrator). The ship is middle–aged, leaving the Antares yards on 957 Imperial. Fortunately, the ship has received a through overall and refitting on the well–regarded Haydia Interstellar port at Haydia/Lentuli: [11] with a new lease on life and dressed in House Dwivedi livery, she should do well on the journey.

The upper–caste PCs are the negotiating team of the First Administrator. As representatives of Yogesh system, they are expected to hammer out a deal that increases trade between Ikon to Yogesh, opens up the market to Yogesh robots[11], and encourages the use of the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile route instead of the cheaper, easier, shorter, and safer Antares route. What incentives they use to make it happen is up to them. Of course, any deal they make is subject to the Duke's final approval. They are also to meet with the current

representative of the Ikon Collective of Progress (as the last–known name of the planetary government was.) Finally, the PCs themselves control the purse strings for their travels: accessible funds are set at 110% of projected needs, and the PCs are granted a low–level Imperial security clearance, for information related to their travels and trading mission.

For both Yogeshio and non–Yogeshio PCs, the quid pro quo for helping the Duke is up to the PCs to negotiate. Liaison skill is of some importance here: the Duke would be insulted if this was treated as a mere cash transaction, but he does understand that a real friend always returns a good favor. Trading in 'intangibles' – a special trading privilege here, some insider information there, an introduction to a powerful network of 'connected' free traders elsewhere – should be encouraged.

Underground: the Saerrogh Job

The PCs are spending Holiday in one of the more lively 'market squares' in a lower–caste district. During the late hours of Holiday, the lower–castes celebrate by intoxicate themselves to ludicrous levels, and entertain themselves by trying to top the other guy's stunt, usually involving sharp objects, electricity, firearms, large weights, fast–moving vehicles, and airlocks. The PCs when they are paged by one of their more reliable contacts, Dede, on a possible new job. They ignore the page of course, but the next morning this adventure assumes that they call it up. A meeting is arranged at a nice hotel, located behind the XT (extraterritoriality) Line in Tampici Imperial Starport.

Dede lays out the job for them: ship out immediately with two diplomats, and go where they tell you. Eventually, you'll have to cross up the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile Run, and go to a major Vargr pirate stronghold, Saerrogh, where the diplomats will have a little chat. When the talks are over, drop off the diplomats on Ikon – alive and well – pick up the final payment, and their work is done.[12] Details regarding payment, retainers, and penalties if either party breaks the contract are hammered out between the PCs and Dede. Dede doesn't give out details on the route, saying that the diplomats will make that decision. He does stress that the PCs need to know how to do business with Vargr pirates, and they might have to give some advice to the diplomats on how to talk to lawless & violent types.

Astute PCs might press the question, "Why me? Why arrange diplomatic transport with us, instead of, say, a Navy cruiser?" Besides the fact the Navy cruisers are in great demand elsewhere right now, Dede thinks that the goal of the diplomats is to deal with the pirates in a way they feel comfortable, not to intimidate them. But that's just his guess: "No one important tells me anything."

Aboveground & Underground: The Itinerary

Money and contacts used to fund the journey are located in these 'anchor systems' along the route to Ikon. The PCs are expected to send a brief message to update the Duke when they arrive at an anchor system. (If they are Yogeshoi, it is an unspoken request that has the force of an order.) The exact route between anchor systems is left for the PCs to decide.

Yogesh/Yogesh A420599–C
➢ The seat of the ruling Ducal house, and the starting point of the journey
➢ Pirate risk: low within the 100–diameter zone, but much higher elsewhere in the system. Ships arriving via misjump must be cautious.

Avoiding the occasional lone pirate, the PCs travel five parsecs to…
Anata/Gimushi B202625–B
➢ One of the culturally nicest worlds in the Imperial Empty Quarter, Anata is a wealthy, sensibly–run, and very democratic world, populated by American Indians following an idealized Ancient American (c. –2600 to –2500 Imperial) pseudo–agrarian/pseudo–hunter–gatherer culture within their habitat domes. As a trading and banking centre, Anata fits the same entrepôt role as Switzerland, Singapore, or old Amsterdam.
➢ Pirate risk: Local system space is pretty calm, as the world is guarded by some tough Amerind mercenary and starmerc groups.
➢ Additional funds for the journey are located here. Also, the Goshe Contact Group, famous for their deep understanding of Vargr psychology, is located here.[13] Yogeshio personnel are required to visit them. The upper–caste receive a strong framework on how to negotiate with the Vargr, while the lower–caste get a practical grip on using Vargr tools and controls, physical fighting techniques and weak points, and do's and don'ts on Vargr psychology and charisma contests. Unfortunately, a week just isn't enough time to study the Vargr languages, religions, or economic systems properly.

It's a quiet three parsecs to…
Hebrin/Hebrin B550A88–9
➢ A crucial system and home to over a quarter of the Imperial Empty Quarter's population. Hebrin is arguably the cultural heart of local Imperial space. This world is detailed in the adventure "Hebrin Nights", written by Mark "Commander Drax" Bridgeman in **Stellar Reaches** #4.

- Pirate risk: Normally, Hebrin is one of the most secure systems within the Imperial Empty Quarter. Unfortunately, with the absence of most of the powerful subsector fleet, Hebrin must rely on her fleet of largely TL 9 System Defence Boats to protect her lifeline, the in–system Ice trade. Many higher–tech starmercs have been hired to strengthen the line against Vargr raiders: however, the sheer number of raiders and their generally superior tech level guarantees that some will break thru, holding ships for ransom or raiding the world herself. Fortunately, the scale and number of attacks have been falling sharply over the past year, ever since, in a double–whammy, a network of corrupt naval officers was revealed and three deep–space pirate bases were uncovered and destroyed.
- Besides additional money, three documents are available here that should be perused: an official public update of the current political situation within the Julian Protectorate (recently issued by the local Julian consulate), and two confidential Imperial reports on pirate activity within the Empty Quarter: one report focusing on Gamma and Delta quadrants, and another, more sensitive report on Alpha and Beta quadrants. These confidential reports require a low–level security clearance to obtain.
- Representatives of the subsector and planetary governments insist on contacting Yogeshio diplomats. A meeting is arranged in the famous Duke Ubaid bin Tamam bin Shafi al–Hebrin Botanical Planetary Preserves – commonly referred to as the Imperial Gardens.[14] Depending on the result of the meeting – covering three days – the PCs maybe merely sent on their way, gain additional information on projected Vargr pirate threats, or be offered a partnership with two planned Hebrin trading delegations (to the Rukadukaz Republic and the Lorean Hegemony) due to be launched within three weeks. The Hebrin delegations each have their own Imperial Navy patrol ship for transport – normally, they would at least rate a frigate, but those ships are too valuable to be released from anti–pirate activities.

Be suspicious about 'calls for help' on the three parsec journey to...
Sahale/Hebrin A335537–9
- A strongly Sunni Muslim world, the planetary King claims lineal descent from the Prophet Muhammed. The culture is quite conservative, but fairly peaceful. Local architecture and culture is closely based on the era of the Abbasid Caliphate.
- Pirate risk: The world has suffered from regular pirate raids, being the gateway to the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile Run. The Imperial response to their cries for protection is less than adequate. Several local notables, sheiks, and businessmen are contacting Islamic friends throughout the subsector, especially on Hebrin, to organise a jihad against the Vargr raiders.
- The PCs pick up a major contact here – Ambassador Ingaghkeeneng ('but just call me Vrguugh'). Ambassador Vrguugh is a famous, high–Charisma Suedzuk Vargr diplomat from the Asimikigir Confederation, which covers most of Amdukan Sector and is the dominant state of the Julian Protectorate. As a Suedzuk – "Red Vargr" – his race is discriminated against by humans, Bwaps, and even some Vargr, due to his cultural's reputation for savagery and violence. (Suedzuk Vargr were the primary instigators and actors in the notorious Sack of Gashikan.)

A long journey across eleven cold and dark parsecs to
Saeghvung/Nisaga D668724–6
- A beautiful world largely inhabited by impoverished and feral Vargr cultures, Saeghvung is civilized only in scattered TL 6 townships and the startown (and 'planetary capital') of Tzashgrouroerd. Tzashgrouroerd herself is only a hundred years old: all of the other towns are no older than four decades. The towns are supported by Vargr 'racial uplift' groups, who are attempting to kick–start the development of Saeghvung, to match the human worlds of Sahale and Turley.
- Pirate risk: As the end–point of the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile Run, aligned with neither the Imperium nor the Protectorate, and without any local system security force, the Vargr–dominated Saeghvung system is simply crawling with pirates. The Protectorate's Star Legion has permanently stationed a small flotilla here, shepherding incoming traffic and racing to save misjumped starships before they are ripped apart by hungry raiders.
- Also to be found here is a hard–bitten resident agent of Duke Yogesh, with up–to–date information on Cotan and Nisaga subsectors. He is sure to clear up rumours of vast pirates roaming the Hegemony: "Pirates? Ha! For every pirate, there are five Star Legion ships looking to give him a bad day." However, he does have some good advice for the PCs on how to deal with the few pirates in the region: "Never let them board your ship." Fortunately, the pirates here tend to be low–tech (TL 9, and

a few TL 10's), and operate in ones or twos. Unfortunately, there are a ton of pirates in the gap between the Republic and the Hegemony…

Eight parsecs of peace and rest welcomes you between Saeghvung and
Cotan/Cotan C877887–5

- ➢ At one time the most famous world in the sector, Cotan is still recovering from her long and bitter fall. The pirate guilds that – until recently – dominated the world were crippled by recent Star Legion strikes, leading to the current free–for–all as pack fights pack fights Legion. The world's government, currently dominated by high–tech Vargr starfarers and (ex–)pirates, is under greater and greater stress from the now restless, low–tech human majority.
- ➢ Pirate risk: There is only one single pirate, who has grown wary of the Star Legion. They rarely show themselves, so only the unluckiest Traveller will have to deal with the ship. A member of the 'Tailless Hunters' Suedzuk pack, they have taken to chasing and eating unarmed humans when they board a ship.
- ➢ The expected money and contacts for the PCs here are missing. However, Ambassador Ingaghkeeneng is willing to use his prestige and very high Charisma to get compensation from the local government and pirate groups. In general, he should get enough back to allow the PCs to continue – but he himself will remain on the world, to try and heal the rifts between the ruling Vargrs and the angry humans. He warns the PCs on the pirates that comb the worlds between the Republic and the Hegemony…

Eight parsecs of fear and terror, follow the PCs.
Finally, the PCs arrive at
Tokitre/Tokire B550A77–B

- ➢ The leading Imperial Client state in the coreward side of the Lesser Rift, the only reason why they aren't a part of the Imperium is because the Imperium doesn't wish to tick off the Protectorate. As it is, many natives act 'more Imperial than the Imperials': a majority are better informed on the sector politics of Antares and The Empty Quarter than local Imperials are! Moreover, the Tokitre are solidly anti–Vargr and anti–Julian to a greater or lesser degree.
- ➢ Pirate risk: in this system, very low to non–existent. The various Tokitre navies strongly agree that killing Vargr raiders is far more important – and way more enjoyable – than killing each other. The few Vargr pirates who

chance the system strongly prefer to be captured by Imperial forces than the locals. Vargr merchants prefer to avoid the system whenever possible: local forces have a remarkably broad definition on what constitutes a 'Vargr raider.'

- ➢ There is a major Imperial naval base on Tokitre: because of treaty stipulations, the local naval garrison is still at full strength.[15] Several local naval instillations are scattered across the system, watching over the Oort cloud, the two asteroid belts, and the four gas giants. Two monstrous orbital defence/naval bases (and numerous smaller defence platforms) are in orbit over Tokitre herself.
- ➢ As the epicentre of Imperial power and wealth on the Vargr side of the Lesser Rift, Tokitre is host to a wide range of businesses, main offices, research and educational centres, and diplomatic networks. A vast number of large Imperial organizations keep their "final frontier" office on this world. Local Imperial traders jokingly call Tokitre "The Last Homely Home" or "Rivendell" before entering the howling chaos that is the Vargr Extents.
- ➢ The PCs learn that the planetary government of Ikon – the "Ikon Collective of Progress" – has recently collapsed, and replaced with the "Ikonok Llirrusukh"

Seven parsecs of paying fees to "uniformed pirates" –
a.k.a. the vessels of the Rukadukaz Navy – until...
Khastok/Kakhasaek A515485–A

- ➢ While living standards within the Rukadukaz Republic are noticeably nicer than most worlds in the Quarter, most of the republic is dependent on the planetary powerhouse economy of Ikon to live as comfortably as they do. Khastok, in contrast, has chosen to stand on her own two feet. While they aren't as comfortable as most Republican worlds, they don't get influenza every time Ikon sneezes.
- ➢ Pirate risk: like in much of the Vargr Extents, pirating is just a fact of everyday life. Because of the strong Vilani influence in the Republic, local pirates are properly organized and structured, with 'fees' and 'tariffs' publicly posted on the Net, local interstellar trading houses, and starports. While just about every trader gets a haircut, nobody gets hurt – unless you put up more than a token fight, and even then the reprisal tends to be restricted to "an eye for an eye" level, rather than merely lawless reprisals. ("A life for an eye, a life for a tooth, and ten lives for a life" as less civilized Vargrs put it.)
- ➢ On Khastok reside several 'honorary Imperial consuls' – some human, but most Vargr – who

may be able to provide last–minute support and advice for the PCs and the diplomatic teams. PCs who are wise in the ways of the Vargr ask some of the Vargrs to join them in the negotiations.

If the PCs followed the <u>Aboveground</u> branch of the adventure…

Six more parsecs of polite pirates, moonlighting as naval customs (or is that vice–versa?) until, finally, the PCs arrive at
Ikon/Tsahrroek C253AC7–E
  ➢ "Welcome to the Light of Vargr Civilization."
  ➢ Pirate risk: none. There are only various tax collectors in various uniforms – admittedly, very neat, clean, and well–pressed uniforms. Instead of worrying about pirates, the PCs should work on avoiding being 'taxed' more than once.
  ➢ On negotiations: first, the PCs need to find someone to negotiate with. As the Ikonok Llirrusukh – the government of (most of) Ikon – is in a state of flux, this is no mean feat.
  ➢ If this is accomplished, getting the leaders of Ikon to trade with Yogesh via a costly and time–consuming route is very difficult indeed. They insist on assurances and financial guarantees that the Duchy of Yogesh simply can't afford to make. But the real PC rainmaker can find a way to get a deal that satisfies the canny Vilani traders of Ikon, while providing another revenue stream for the Duchy as a whole – and the Duke as an individual.
  ➢ The Yogeshoi diplomats also need to know their product. We know that Vargrs distain personal robots as they can't grant Charisma, and that they only provide poor maintenance for them. How about only selling industrial robots? Can Yogesh manufacturers design a robot that actually grants Charisma to their owner? You can also build ultra–low maintenance robots, or 'hide' the robot as something else – a grav vehicle, a pet, an alien plant…
  ➢ The Referee should reward PCs who put real effort into clinching the deal: finding out what makes the Ikonaz traders and negotiators tick, sniffing out how to get them to say 'yes', figuring out what kind of metrics gets them promotions, determining what kind & amount of coin helps to grease the wheels of commerce, etc.
  ➢ For additional information on this remarkable world of Ikon herself, look for "Ikonic Details" later in this adventure.

If the PCs followed the <u>Underground</u> branch of the adventure…

Five more parsecs of polite pirates, moonlighting as naval customs (or is that vice–versa?) until, finally, the PCs arrive at
Saerrogh/Kakhasaek B110300–F
  ➢ The PCs arrive at a small moon. In close orbit around the moon is a small space station, escorted by four defence platforms. There are about 20 + 4D6 starships nearby: largely small traders with pirate markings, but also dedicated corsairs and military–grade starships.
  ➢ The PCs are cordially hailed. Assuming the PCs provide a respectful response, they can make their request to negotiate for a halt to pirate attacks in Yogesh subsector. The leader of the Saerrogh pack, Oekhikr'rugosankis, asks, "Why?" The Referee then determines what the Saerrogh counter is. Depending on the PCs words, actions, and body language, the response can range from contemptuously ignoring the PCs; to mocking laughter; to the pack ripping apart the PCs ship; to amusement; to interest; to an invitation to the station for dinner.
  ➢ The Referee can modify the reaction of the pack, depending on how well the PCs understand and respect Vargr mores and psychology. Good PC roleplaying should be rewarded.
  ➢ The leader of the Saerrogh pack is not impressed by offers of Danesgeld, and doesn't place a high value on Imperial honours or privileges. Imperial threats are dismissed out of hand. Oekhikr'rugosankis is perfectly aware that most of the Imperial fleet is out of theatre, and isn't likely to return for years and years. He also knows that, as a legitimate planetary leader of the Rukadukaz Republic, any Imperial attack on him or his forces within Protectorate space by a representative of the Imperium is an act of war against the Republic. Depending on the Imperial reaction, the rest of the Protectorate may quickly join in, and authorize the Star Legion to go on the offensive against the Imperium. (The Legion needs no special authorization to defend Protectorate members against any foe.) The conquest of Antares sector is a possible result: if this happens, the fall of the rimward Empty Quarter is a certainty.
  ➢ Oekhikr'rugosankis is interested in expanding Vargr settlement into Imperial space; gaining additional powers and privileges for his raiders within Imperial territory; and gaining more and better starships at a steep discount. Additional training for his crews is also appreciated.

- Oekhikr'rugosankis considers himself a Rukadukaz patriot, and is willing to drop any special gains for himself and his pack… if the Imperium concedes certain gains for the Republic. Revoking Client state status for all systems on the Protectorate side of the Lesser Rift would be a good start. Recognising Rukadukaz claims to all non–aligned systems on their side of the Lesser Rift would also be pleasing.
- Even if the Pack Leader is inclined to grant the PCs request, it takes time to get the word out to his forces. He could persuade several other major Vargr pirate packs to leave Yogesh alone, if the PCs can make it worth it to them. If only Saerrogh pack abandons Yogesh subsector, attacks over the next year fall only 15% – but many of the high–tech raiders, the real heavy hitters of the Vargr pirates, leave the region. This makes it much easier for local forces to fight and defeat the remaining pirates. If Oekhikr'rugosankis is given the material needed to persuade other pirate groups to abandon Yogesh, then pirate activity falls 50% over a year, and another 20% the following year. However, raids on other Imperial territories rise correspondingly – perhaps in another Empty Quarter sector, perhaps in Antares or Lishun.

Follow–up

If non–Yogeshio characters provide an extraordinary success in their mission – which is the transportation end of the mission, not the diplomatic result – the additional equipment the Duke had installed on their ship is explicitly given to them as a Thank You. On a regular success, the Duke 'forgets' to take back the additional equipment he had installed on the PCs ship, and fulfills his part of the deal. He will continue to 'forget' unless the PCs do something to annoy him, in which case his memory suddenly makes a remarkable recovery. Penalties for failure are as agreed upon by the Duke, mainly involving partial or non–payment of bonuses. Of course, he insists on getting back the equipment he loaned to the PCs. Catastrophic failure makes the PCs persona non grata so far as the Duke is concerned: criminal charges and/or civil lawsuits may be seriously contemplated.

For Yogeshio characters, extraordinary success in their negotiations means more responsibilities and more missions. A financial reward of 1D6 million credits is also on the table per upper–caste PC, in addition to any previous rewards the PCs negotiated. Lower–caste PCs receive larger accommodations, public commendations, and additional privileges for themselves and their immediate family, as well as 10,000 Cr that they must spend within 24 hours. Successful negotiations means

that the PCs are rewarded as agreed to, while lower–caste PCs get to enjoy a party on the house, and a sum of money (less than 1,000 Cr) that they must spend within 12 hours. Failure leaves the PCs as they are, but they receive less prestigious duties until they work themselves into the Duke's favor again.

Catastrophic failure leaves upper–caste PCs vulnerable to demotion to the lower–caste, cut off from their caste and their family (who usually choose not to join the failure in his demotion.) Lower–caste PCs and their immediate family are exiled from Yogesh with nothing but a set of expired identity cards, 10,000 Cr in cash and their clothing in a plastic bag. They are expected to take working passage or accept steerage accommodations: there is no possibility that they'll be allowed to re–cross the XT Line from Tampici Imperial Starport back home to Yogesh.

Personalities

Anoop Dwivedi
Duke Yogesh (Imperial title)
First Administrator of Yogesh (Yogesh title)
Archon, House Dwivedi
Solomani human, 62 years old: UPP 67579CF
Leadership–6, Vacc Suit–2, Grav Vehicle–1, Admin–1, Engineering–1, Bribery–1, Carousing–1, Computer–0, Modern Vilani–0
Native Language: Anglic

Descended from a high–caste Brahmin family, Anoop was bred and raised to rule. He has grown into the role during his 32 years as First Administrator and 20 years on the Ducal throne, and is one of the most respected personages within the Imperial Empty Quarter. His family's pro–technological outlook, coupled with his remarkable ability to understand, govern, and inspire his subjects, has led to a nice economic boom – a boom that is now threatened by the steady rise of pirate activity and the withdrawal of the Imperial Fleet. His most proud accomplishment was persuading most major upper–caste Yogeshio families to place a strong emphasis on the moral and technological training of their lower–caste workforce: before his reign, the lower castes had a –2 modifier on Education.

Referee's Note: The Duke Yogesh is designed to be an "idea Imperial Noble" during the Gavinian Era: strong on planetary development, independently wealthy, aggressively loyal to the Imperium, respectful of nonhumans (but still holding humaniti 'a step or two above the rest'), rather technophilic, endorsing close family ties, and pragmatically secular, following Gibbon: "the people believed that all religions were equally true, that the philosophers believed them all equally false, and that the magistrates believed them all equally useful."

'Nusli "Dede" Daram'
Ducal Agent (Retired Imperial Army Commando Instructor)
Solomani human, 30 years old, UPP: A9BBA9
Streetwise–2, Interrogation–2, Leadership–2, Vacc Suit–2, Forward Observer–1, Ground Tactics–1, Combat Rifleman–1, Martial Arts(Brawling)–1, Demolitions–1, Survival–1 Battle Dress–1, Admin–1, Long Blade–1, Combat Engineer–1, Heavy Weapons–1, Zero–G–1, Instruction–1, Grav Vehicle–0, Computer–0, Navigation–0, Legal–0, Medical–0, Handgun–0, Fusion Rifle–0.
Native Language: Anglic

A Yogesh native, "Dede" was a member of the Imperial Army, and served as a Commando with distinction, eventually becoming a Commando Instructor. After mustering out, he returned to his homeworld and was chosen as one of the First Administrator's more respected friends. His actions in defusing the Ten Day's Crisis – coupled with four generations of loyal service – were rewarded in the greatest way possible in his society. His lower–caste family was raised to the upper–caste, by a landslide vote of 599 to 168 in the Pure House of Excellence.

As his name and face became famous across the subsector, it was no longer possible for "Dede" to do what he loved best: field work, covert ops, and dealing with the underbelly of interstellar society. In the end, he was forced to alter his face, invent a new name, and build a new identity for himself. He allows himself to contact with his beloved family only once every two years, communicating only via the select few who know both his old and new identities.

The benefits of being a Ducal Agent mainly involve extensive access to Ducal resources in the subsector. Unlike military outfits like Imperial Naval Intelligence, Dede can't call on warships for fire support, nor does he has carte blanche access to the Imperial databanks. He has his wits, his courage, excellent training, legal law enforcement powers, certain emergency powers (in case Imperial martial law is declared, or an anti–Imperial insurrection is in progress), a network of friends and contacts, and the favor of the subsector Duke. This is more than enough for "Dede" to do his job.

On the job, Dede is hazy about whom, exactly, he represents. If pressed, he'll admit that he speaks for a 'patriotic concern'. If absolutely necessary, he can demonstrate that he has some kind of official standing.

Finding anything else about him is going to take some time–consuming legwork, very knowledgeable contacts and major resources.

Oekhikr'rugosankis
Saerrogh Pack Leader
Ikonaz Vargr, 34 years old, UPP: 9D5C7C
Ground Tactics–2, Infighting–2, Long Blade–1, Pistol–1, Rifleman–1, Energy Weapon–1, Intrusion–1, Battle Dress–1, Leadership–1, Robot Ops–1, Stealth–1, Zero–G–1, Modern Vilani–1, Jack–of–all–Trades–1, Vacc Suit–0, Grav Vehicle–0, Computer–0, Anglic–0
Native Language: Oksukhonmoere (a minor Ikonaz language)

Unlike most members of the Saerrogh pack, Oekhikr'rugosankis hails from Vreskegh/Kakhasaek, not Ikon. Highly intelligent and gregarious, he was a useful of several corsair groups and aggressive merchantmen until his ship boarding skills caught the eye of a member of the Saerrogh pack. Joining the pack in 988, he rose swiftly thru the ranks, sometimes by his excellent prizes, sometimes by the sudden death of a fellow ship during a raid, sometimes by winning charisma contests, and sometimes by using his infighting skill in a leadership challenge.

Rising to 'Commodore of Imperial Operations' in 990, he convinced his pack mates to abandon most of the safe, boring, and low–charisma work in Republic for high–yield, high–impact, high–fame work in Imperial Space. While he sent a few ships down the expected Antares route as a feint – to be quickly caught by the Antares Sector Fleet, as expected – the bulk of his forces was sent down the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile Run. The Imperium naturally monitored and caught some vessels, but thanks to special fuelling arrangements he made with the Red Tooth human/Vargr pack of the Lorean Hegemony – the bulk of his hunters entered into Imperial space, for easy pickings. His TL13+ corsairs have proven to be outstanding performers, easily wounding and driving away most local SDBs, and letting nothing stand in the way of the hunt.

Unfortunately, news of the easy kills has spread around, and the Shadow Cartel – a mere third–string operation a decade ago – is now snatching his prey out from the muzzle of his brothers in the hunt. Something will have to be done about that… something fast, hard, and unexpected.

Ikonic Details

Overview

Ikon is roughly three to four times wealthier than the rest of the Empty Quarter, *combined*. The closest contender, the Imperial Client system of Tokitre/Tokitre, Imperial Pamushgar/Gumushi & Lazisar/Gimushi, and the Lorean system of Zuethun/Tsosoe, all fall short for various reasons. Of the four, Zuethun has the greatest potential to challenge Ikon someday, simply because it alone of the four (barely) avoids classification as a desert world, and avoids spending vast sums merely to feed herself.

Since Ikon is a Vargr–dominated non–Imperial system on the wrong side of the Lesser Rift, few Imperials grasp the system's significance to the Vargr Extents. To the Julian Protectorate, Ikon is the Rock of the Sector: not only a powerful economic and cultural force within the Protectorate, but also the focus of Star Legion defenced strategy. Culturally, Ikon is the heart of the Vargr/Vilani cultural synthesis followed by billions of Vargr. Because pro–Vilani Vargr are have a more unified culture than other Vargr, the arts, philosophies and sciences of Ikon allow the system to punch above her already considerable population and financial weight, leading to her other nicknames: "The Light of Vargr Civilization" (Ikonaz Vargr: "Vgra'ougovkrroerradz"), "The Ikon of the Extents" (untranslatable Anglic pun: an approximate Ikonaz Vargr equivalent is "Ghegk Roa Rronkghoegz") , and "The Hope of the Quarter" ("Aekhoutra'oug" – a name of mystical/poetical significance among the Ikonaz Vargr, much like Columbia for the Americans, Yamato for the Japanese or Avalon for the English.)

Civilization

The planet itself is home to 10 billion sophonts… but looking at the planet's nightside from orbit, you'd be hard–pressed to spot any of the usual constellations of city lights you'd expect to see. Even the floating cities that naturally dot the sky of a TL 14 world are largely absent. Instead, the land surface of the planet is covered with symmetrical, elegantly designed formal gardens on a heroic scale. Where the determined gardeners couldn't get anything to grow, they shifted rock and ice into complex patterns and sophisticated curves. Even the mountains are chiselled, shifted, and blasted into a type of visual poetry that pleases the Ikonoaz.

Instead, almost the entire population lives undersea, with 80% of the population living in extremely advanced cities next to the flooded, abysmal gashes left after the Event occurred. Snuggled close to the highly automated mines and refineries that cover the undersea gashes, these magnificent cities are the pride of the Ikonaz race. Typically, an Ikonoaz undersea city starts

out as a dome or a cylinder, of a height no less than 80 km in height. Within the megastructure are several mushroom–shaped 'platform cities': soaring between 6 and 10 km into the air, they are topped by a round 'platter' with a diameter of about 5 km. The platter has its' own dome which ascends a height of 2 km, holding a series of buildings averaging 500 m and 800 m in height. Between 10 to 40 of these 'platform cities' are enclosed inside the massive dome. The space between the platforms is usually used as forests or gardens, but the area may also be turned over to urban development.

Demographically, 62% of the population is Ikonaz Vilani, and 38% are Ikonaz Vargr: a trace amount of non–Ikonaz humaniti, descendants of the Im also reside on the world. Generally, the Vargr are somewhat wealthier, and have an unconscious air of superiority vis–à–vis the Vilani. The best estimates fixed Mixed Vilani at 0.03% of the population, with 'other sophonts' numbering no more than 10,000.

Linguistically, the world has several contending languages. Julian Anglic, the official language of the Protectorate, is used among the elites for interstellar trade and commerce, but the culturally dominant Ikonaz Vilani language – with its dual pronunciation forms (for both human and Vargr Ikonaz) is the official language of Ikon and the Rukadukaz Republic. Major local languages includes Gvunkkone, Ourmakten, Kr'ra'ogovtzarr, and Ukazk: local humaniti, in addition to Ikonaz Vilani, may also speak Modern Vilani, Transform (the dialect of Antares), and NuLingo (the old slave tongue of the Impservers, closely related to the Old Imperial Anglic of seven centuries ago.)

Most Ikonaz Vargr despise Vargr languages other than their own: local scholars are more likely to know Old High Vilani or Ancient English than a single word of Vuakedh (widespread among the Vargr of the Protectorate) or Evrgoer (the most common Blood Vargr tongue of the Hegemony.) Several Ikonaz Vargr traders have some command of these languages, but they will pretend ignorance in polite company. Whenever possible, Ikonaz Vargr prefer to use portable translators or robots instead of filthing their tongues with the babble of the lesser Vargr.

History

Ikon serves as the homeworld of the Ikonaz Vargr. Practically all Vargr within the Republic are descended from the Vargr who conquered the riches of Ikon in – 1711, near the end of the Vargr Pillaging. Unlike most Vargr cultures, the conquerors of Ikon were generally willing to let the Vilani be, so long as they could get the important titles and collect the taxes. Over time, the

Vilani culturally overran the Vargr overlords, reshaping the local Vargr to what they are today.

It is well known that Ikon was shaped by a sophont species which lacked jump technology. First, it was deeply scarred in an Event that occurred about –10,200 Imperial. The Event shattered the northern hemisphere of the planet to a depth of 1000 km, about a third of the way into the heart of the planet. The level and nature of the shattered crust and mantle suggests an impact with a large object moving at near–superluminal speeds. Soon afterwards, between –9,000 and –10,000 Imperial, the world was extensively terraformed, with a bulked–up atmosphere, the stabilisation of the world's mantle and crust, and the transport of an ocean's worth of water to the world. However, development of the world stopped abruptly at about –9,050, before lifeforms was introduced. The identity of the 'worldshapers' remain unknown to this day.

Politics

The current planetary nationstate, the Ikonok Llirrusukh, is an unstable network of business interests, tribes and clans, research federations, and entertainment figures. While planetary governments rarely last a year in office, the form of government – a Charismatic Oligarchy – remains the same. Moreover, governments rise and fall with little or no bloodshed, with the new government often retaining elements of the old. The Ikonok Llirrusukh currently controls 85% of the mainworld, one–third of the Ikon system's planets and moons, as well as most of two external mainworlds and their systems: Kuell/Tsahrroek and Suezka/Tsahrroek. (Another colony world, Guezdhe/Kakhasaek, declared independence on 977 and made it stick. Before independence, it acted as the starship dockyards of Ikon, a lucrative position it has retained.)

As the low level of the starport hints, most of Ikon's wealth is kept on the world. This has been a successful strategy for the world, allowing her largely Vargr population to live in the kind of peace and comfort only dreamt about in most of the Extents. However, her unVargr–like introversion comes at a major political cost. Most of the money used to run the Rukadukaz Republic comes from Ikon, and Ikon indirectly contributes a significant percentage of the Julian Protectorate's annual budget… but her say in deciding how that money is spent is a good deal less than you'd expect.

Footnotes

[1]Yogesh is a major source of robots in the subsector, and the centre of advanced robotic research and development within the Imperial Empty Quarter. The Sinkiaan Robotics Conference, held every five years, is where the very best of local robotic technology is seen. See "Gamma Quadrant of the Empty Quarter" by Jason

"Flynn" Kemp in **Stellar Reaches** #1 for more information.

[2]Looking at Yogeshs' UPP — A420599–C – the system is ruled by an Impersonal Bureaucracy, and the law level of 9 is a rather oppressive to this writer, but not greatly so. The local lifestyle is quite comfortable at TL 12, and the leaders are happy to reward good servants with better training, entertainment, more and better food and water rations, and – most prestigious of all – more living space. The money economy exists, but only local elites may participate, due to whatever pretext the Referee cares to dream up.

[3]Ourmakten is an Ikonaz Vargr language common on Ikon. A large minority of Ikon–based shipping prefers to use this language: only Modern Vilani is more popular.

[4]Note that the high–status PCs have some skills tailored for interaction with the Rukadukaz Republic, a member state of the Julian Protectorate – which is why they were chosen for the mission.

[5]Off–duty personnel are expected to wear Household livery while on duty, but off–duty wear is their own business. Certain low–caste individuals own some extremely expensive threads! Naturally, the upper–caste elite dresses in only the simplest manner: many have a fondness of plain white linen cloth. The First Administer himself is never seen in anything except standard cotton/polyester blends…

[6]No blood members of the family are involved in this adventure. Most are either managing other family concerns, serving various subsector Dukes within the Imperial Quarter, or are upholding the will of the Emperor in the Solomani Rim War.

[7]The basic idea behind the concept of Noble Friendship is taken from a post from Jared's "Decades of Darkness" alternate universe regarding the fictional Napoleon V, from soc.history.what–if, June 28, 2006: http://groups.google.com/group/soc.history.what–if/browse_thread/thread/bfe2c8b989308971/a08dfc584069ef91?hl=en#a08dfc584069ef91

[8]Or, following the Godfather: "Someday – and that day may never come – I'll call upon you to do a service for me. But until that day, accept this justice as gift on my daughter's wedding day." Wishing the Duke's next grandchild will be a masculine grandchild is appreciated.

More aggressive promoters of Imperial Family Values are invited to contemplate the implications of the famous Season 5 poster of the Sopranos: http://www.lbracco.com/images/sopranosseason5poster.

jpg (which is itself based on a less famous bit of Renaissance art: http://answers.google.com/answers/threadview?id=59 5092) and, for all around corporate mood–setting, the top–left photo at http://www.lbracco.com/sopranos5articlesreviews.htm .)

Finally, the Family–oriented Empty Quarter Referee should understand the local nobles are a pretty sharp bunch – as they must be, within the Quarter – and live by three mottos:

      1) the Medici: "Money to gain Power. Power to protect Money"

      2) Solozzo's words "I'm a businessman, Tom. I don't like violence. Blood is a big expense." …and especially …

      3) Michael Corleone: "Fredo, you're my older brother, and I love you. But don't ever take sides with anyone against the Family again. Ever."

[9]It is perfectly possible that the PCs don't even know who they are really working for. Even after meeting the Duke, they may still be in the dark. Duke Yogesh is happy to leave them in their ignorance. Information is power, and as a rule Nobles avoid giving it away needlessly.

[10]*Arrival Vengeance* the legendary MegaTraveller supplement, describes the Imperial Anthem only as a sombre tune. I assume that it is actually wordless, but various species, worlds and interstellar regions have come up with their own words/beats/dances/bioelectric flashes/whatever to go with the music. Strictly as a fan, I recommend that Peter Buffet's "Nebraska" be recognized as the official Imperial Anthem. I have nothing to say about Imperial warhymns, mottos or battle cries.

[11]See "Gamma Quadrant of The Empty Quarter Sector" by Jason "Flynn" Kemp, in **Stellar Reaches** #1, for more information on the Haydia and the Yogesh systems

[12]While the Duke sent only planetary diplomats, not Imperial ones, he still takes his responsibility to his lieges the Sector Duke and the Emperor seriously. Increased traffic on the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile would help the entire Imperial Empty Quadrant get out of their rut of poverty and stubborn resistance to growth and development. And frankly, like many humans within the Quarter, the Duke has a certain animosity to the oh–so–wealthy, oh–so–famous, oh–so–successful Antares sector. If given half a chance, he'd rather lock them out of any deal he makes – just for principle.

[12]The Referee might notice that no provision is made for the return of the (semi–)criminal PCs back to Imperial space. This is not an accidental oversight.

[13]"Goshe" is an Apache name for dog. Incidentally, note that Vargr culture was modeled after the Navajo Indians: as the Amerinds have held on to their heritage, they have a better grip on the Vargr mind than the Arabs or the East Indians that dominate Imperial space within the sector.

[14]The Duke Ubaid bin Tamam bin Shafi al–Hebrin Botanical Planetary Preserves are three very large domed structures, which contains a Terran, Vilani, and Sylean rain forest respectively. On a world where water doubles as the local currency, maintaining the priceless Botanical Preserves is insanely expensive, making them the very symbol of Noble wealth and Imperial pride within the subsector. The largest and most heavily guarded portion of the Duke's wealth is housed below the Preserves, as is the Ducal residence and the senior levels of the subsector administration.

[15]The Tokitres are pleased to no end that they enjoy a stronger Naval presence than other systems in the Empty Quarter. They think this makes perfect sense too, considering who their neighbours are. The warship crews ignore the chatter and continue their endless patrols across the Client States. The Star Legion, in turn, continues to keep an eye on all that Imperial hardware.

Images
"Throne Room 2" by Hideyoshi
While the basic design of the Yogesh Throneroom is the same as in Hideyoshi's illustration, Duke Yogesh's Throneroom is a lot more bright and ornate than the glum and scary place shown here.
http://www.deviantart.com/deviation/34371020/?q=Throne+Room&qh=boost%3Apopular+age_sigma%3A24h+age_scale%3A5

"Sand Mine" by Richard Raidel
I imagine Tampici Imperial Starport to look something like this.
http://digitalart.org/art/46227/science–fiction/sand–mine/

"Shrine" by larkin2
The visual model I used when thinking about "The Shrine of Force Commander Blanco"
http://www.deviantart.com/deviation/53066703/?qo=6&q=Shrine&qh=boost%3Apopular+age_sigma%3A24h+age_scale%3A5

"The Last Gardens" by Yann Souetre (REMAIN–SILENT)

This, in my mind's eye, is how the three Imperial gardens on the heavily–populated, bone–dry world of Hebrin look like.
http://remain–silent.cgsociety.org/gallery/504527/

"Alexandria—The Second Chamber" by Nathaniel West (NathanielWest)
This image inspired me to write about Ikon.
http://features.cgsociety.org/challenge/eon/entry.php?challenger=12065

"Alien City" by –max–
In my mind's eye, the mining and processing systems on Ikon resembles this image.

http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1337751

"sea of lights" by aiRaGe
An image of a major city on Tokitre
http://www.deviantart.com/deviation/30858064/?qo=1&q=sea+lights&qh=boost%3Apopular+age_sigma%3A24h+age_scale%3A5

"Flying over a sea of flames (2) by stefan_vitanov
My mental image of the high–tech corsair base at Saerrogh
http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1174916

Feature Adventure: Against the Steel Fists

by Alvin Plummer

Introduction

The Traveller is always and everywhere a stranger.
– Sir Abid as'Jalisk, IISS

Against the Steel Fists is a social/roleplaying adventure for biopunk fans, blade men and smugglers. The PCs are assumed to be Iper'mar humans, but with some rewriting. The adventure can fit the generic PC party. Most of the action occurs on three systems:

Rommel: a mildly authoritarian, strongly discriminatory 'near–future' society, the Rommelnan are driven by the desire to become genetically flawless men
Reshkhuda: a world with a remarkable biosphere, the earlier society has radically morphed into a low–tech utopia, ruled by a technologically–elevated dictatorship, and
Zuethun: home of an ancient East Indian society, thousands of years old, which is now being reshaped by local elites into an idealized version of Hegemony culture.

The referee should watch the science–fiction movie *Gattaca*, which I use as a model for the world of Rommel. Violence is generally of the 'unserious' type: fisticuffs & swordplay feature prominently.

PCs are divided into 'ship–based' and 'ground–based' groups. At least one PC should be experienced in bodyguard work. A few PC skills in counter–espionage work are recommended, complete with work tools (anti–bugging sensors, white–noise generators, 'body pockets', field craft abilities, etc.) PC foresight is recommended, but the game is more entertaining (for the Referee) if the PCs just plunge in without a single worry. There is some scope for business, but only on behalf of the greater profits of Charity LIC. As usual, the BITS task system is used, as well as Classic Traveller rules.

A certain amount of cloak–and–dagger work is involved on Rommel, a Solomani culture dominated by eugenically–minded Nobility. Uncovered information here requires the PCs to journey to their homeworld of Charity (Lentuli/Empty Quarter 0830: B225454–D). From Charity, the PCs are given a new assignment, which requires a journey to the distant world of Reshkhuda, across the Lesser Rift in the Hegemony of Lorean. Here, the PCs, forced to work in an odd human culture with 'stone knives and bear skins', must challenge and defeat the Steel Fists, bringing both their sword skills and their intelligence to bear.

In the first part of the adventure, the PCs may use their own ship if available: a generic free trader, scout ship, or even standard tickets on a liner can be substituted instead. The journey to Reshkhuda requires a modified version of the Iper'mar Hospital Ship, a common sight in the low–tech Six Subsectors of the Imperial Empty Quarter. Note that, at one point in the adventure, ship–based PCs and ground–based PCs are separated for a while.

PC Flavoring

We sleep safe in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm.
– George Orwell

The PC party – consisting of the usual mix of combat–oriented and ship–running Iper'mar humans – is under the direction of two medical professionals: Dr. Yasini England, a geneticist or a bioengineer researcher, and his aide, Dr. Danijela Novak, a hands–on physician and highly qualified medical technician. Both the PCs and the party NPCs are assumed to be Iper'mar Nomads of the Coreward Belk clan, working as starfaring employees of Charity LIC. More information on the Iper'mar Nomads and Charity LIC can be found in the articles 'The Iper'mar', 'Sand Castles' and the 'Empty Quarter Echo 'in **Stellar Reaches** #5.

Most Iper'mar disdain military service, preferring to focus on technology and trade. However, there are always the oddballs, like the PCs. If they have served well within the Imperial military, these clansmen may be employed as bodyguards, training cadre, or the protectors of Clansmen or Clan resources that they don't trust to the usual mercenaries. At least one PC should be trained as a professional bodyguard, and one PC should be a professional 'face': comfortable with interacting with local law enforcement and military forces, and a quick study when it comes to the mores and procedures of the local 'low–tech yahoos.' A medic may be appreciated by the other PCs, but is subject to indirect pressure by the Charity doctors to 'dump these gun–nut losers and get a Real Job as a full–time technician, like normal people should.'

The PCs may come from a variety of worlds (or born on a starship, if their Social Standing is 8+), but all should be roleplayed in accordance to the stereotypical Iper'marion (singular of Iper'mar) personality. Being military specialists, the PCs should be given greater leeway for violence & aggression than most Iper'mar would act, but they should retain a love of technology for its own sake, demanding and astute in business dealings, a distain for low technology (defined as anything TL B and below), a superficial politeness to nonhumans (for the sake of business), and a deep vein of respect, even reverence, for the Imperial government.

PCs may deviate from the script, but they will pay a social price for it, and will never get very far in the far–flung outposts and enclaves of Iper'mar society. This is a real price to be paid: the Empty Quarter is dominated by low–trust societies (excluding Alpha Quadrant), and it really pays to have a friend in most starports and high–tech installations. It is possible that the reason why they are soldiers (a low–status occupation among the Iper'mar) is because their attitudes bar them from better–paid and more comfortable employment among their people. Note that most of the Empty Quarter considers the concept of 'armed Ipera'mon' to be a laughable contradiction in terms. The PCs are often insulted by other combat professionals within the Quarter, and their abilities in combat routinely held in derision. How they react to this abuse is left to the PCs to determine.

It is unnecessary for the PCs to be Iper'mar blood–employees – a form of multi–generational servitude which is either marginally legal or out–and–out illegal within the Third Imperium, depending on the Referee. However, if the Players insist on a roleplaying challenge…

A Very Tidy World

> I belonged to a new underclass, no longer determined by social status or the color of your skin. No, we now have discrimination down to a science.
> – Vincent, *Gattaca*

The adventure starts on 246–993 Imperial, with the PCs acting as bodyguards to the two doctors on Rommel (Nulinad/Empty Quarter 0134: B7B6859–A), a peaceful if somewhat regimented society close to Antares Sector. As they are licensed bodyguards and armed escorts, the PCs are permitted to carry discreet daggers, saps and wear bladeproof vests, but are not permitted to bear projectile, laser or explosive weaponry. The PCs also are issued special passes which allow them to have access to upper–class areas that they, as naturally–born humans, would be usually barred from entering.[1]

Dr. England is busy attending a Solomani–dominated academic symposium on genetic engineering, held in the upper–crust part of Tor Forscher, the startown that encircles Captain Sir Luke Starkiller Imperial Starport. Having accomplished the serious technical work and academic glad–handling of the journey, he is currently amusing himself as an observer of the perennial controversy: 'Should the Solomani Race alter itself into a true Master Race, or does the purity and sacred nature of the Race forbid such sacrilege?' He has a side–bet with a fellow colleague, to the effect that not one of the ten increasingly infuriated speakers are actually 100% Solomani…

…meanwhile, an increasingly bored Dr. Novak asks the PCs if they want to find 'a real symposium.' (In the original Greek, a *symposium* was a place for Greek men 'to debate, plot, boast, or simply to party with others.') Iper'mar culture strongly endorses 'party culture', and prefers to handle business affairs during a major feast with the liberal use of mild intoxicants, from downing mugs of beer to chewing on Oak–boak nuts from Woswaab. 'If it works for business, it should work for science as well!'

Most of Rommelnen society is as formal, straight–laced and conformist as you please: it's hard to find a good drinking establishment open in 'daylight' (i.e. work) hours. Most of the Rommelnen within Tor Forscher are part of the planetary upper classes, called the Betters, Übermensch, 'Proper men' or 'Bottleborn': products of genetic engineering, they tend to be physically flawless and fairly smart, but also unimaginative, fixated on routine, and rather arrogant to naturally–conceived humaniti, Solomani or otherwise. As outworlders, the PCs are treated with more (condescending) respect than local Lessers, Undermensch, 'Randoms' or worse.[2] The few drinking houses open in daylight are tucked away in the Lesser areas of Startown.

Time and Chance

> Were there eight kings of the name of Henry in England, or were there eighty? Never mind; someday it will be recorded that there was only one, and the attributes of all of them will be combined into his compressed and consensus story.
> – R. A. Lafferty, And Read the Flesh Between the Lines

Clean and Dirty Tor Forscher are kept in separate domed enclosures, and linked by Mendel Tube (a.k.a. Mendel Avenue.) Only the better (read: subservient, obedient and humble) Lessers are permitted to work in Tor Forscher, and very few are willing to risk their jobs, privileges and the wrath of the Safety Patrols by attacking Outworlders. They take great pride in their part of the city: 'Dirty Tor' is a good deal cleaner than most of the cities of the Imperial Empty Quarter. (The

'Dirty' in Dirty Tor refers to the dirty blood of the locals, not their environment.) It is technically illegal to run a drinking establishment in 'daylight': the PCs must use their interpersonal skills to get the somewhat xenophobic Lessers to reveal one.

If the PCs fail to find a place within 1D6 hours, 'daylight' hours come to a close, and it becomes legal to open a drinking house. No big deal, but the PCs receive an earful from Dr. Novak for their failure and incompetence. It's quite possible that her ferocious tongue–lashing of 'you idiot muscle–headed thugs' will severely anger the PCs, leading to unexpected consequences.

Within the establishment, a fair crowd of about a dozen men (and no women) are listening to a well–lubricated orator roar on about the greatness of 'Field Marshall Rommel, our noble namesake, as he led the Prussia Imperium to victory after victory in the 50–year Great Civil War of Terra!' In one of the bizarre coincidences possible only in the Third Imperium, the only people who actually <u>care</u> about a war fought 2,600 years ago – a.k.a. the PC's – has just stepped into the room. Should a fight break out (the possibility approaches certainty the longer the PCs keep their mouth open), each PC gets to deal with 1D6/2 patrons to deal with. If the PCs draw their knives, so do the patrons: but if the PCs don't, the Referee should disappear the knives of the patrons as well. (Yes, this is a cinematic fight.) As the PCs are trained in hand–to–hand combat – and the local drinkers aren't – the fight should go well for the PCs. The Referee may throw in an opportunity for the PCs to redeem themselves in the eyes of Dr. Novak as well – who, true to both her sex and her culture, will vigorously avoid the violent festivities.

An Interesting Find

> I'll never understand what possessed my mother to put her faith in God's hands, rather than her local geneticist.
> – Vincent, *Gattaca*

> He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless.
> – Tom Bombadil, The Lord of the Rings

After things settle down (and paying the owner of the drinking house for damages), the lead PC sits next to one of the non–combatant local men, by the name of Henk Confusione. He is friendly, and doesn't care about being seen chatting with the weird outworlders – indeed, he relishes the chance to talk to the PCs. He has always dreamed of going to the stars, and – by sheer determination and solitary study – has gained quite a good command of the theoretical skills needed to navigate both N–space and J–space. (Normal and jump space, respectively) However, being born a Lesser means that the closest he can get to piloting the local interstellar craft is as a highly–ranked janitor of a corporate–run local starport. He's visiting the Imperial starport for additional training in cleaning, resetting and re–equipping foreign–made starcraft, but he'd give anything for the chance to cross the heavens as a real navigator.

An astute Iper'marion (including Dr. Novak) can smell the scent of 'useful labour – cheap!' from a parsec out, the doctor (or a PC experienced in starship ops) may immediately act to secure his services as a poorly–paid trainee. As an additional incentive (or as one of his tales he recalls after his hire), he has information on how a competing start–up company is working to undermine Charity LIC in one of her major accounts – supplying the personal and governmental medical needs of the King Atacales of Reshkhuda. When pressed, he admits that he only has second–hand information from a wandering far trader, but can provide some details both on Charity's operations and how the competition plans to undermine them. To verify his claims, however, would require a trip to head office on Charity…

About 2D6 – 4 days later, (minimum of one day) the genetic symposium comes to an end, and Solomani scientists, genetic researchers, Racial guardians, and agents of all types (Imperial government, Solomani Party, Noble, Corporate, and Planetary) from a 30–parsec radius head to the crowded starport for the journey home. The PCs themselves head off–world, with enough spare time to watch a few of the local TL B plasma rockets (!) arc towards a local gas giant before setting off to Charity.

There is a problem, though: Mr. Confusione's unmodified genes don't only bar him from most of the better jobs and segregate him from the nicer restaurants, public transport tubes and shops: they also restrict him from leaving Rommel. Trying to fight the bureaucracy in this matter is a Formidable task, taking 2D6+1 **weeks** per attempt. The political pull a PC Noble or Knight has reduces the time needed to 2D6+1 **days** per attempt. As every Iper'mar knows, Time is Money, and the Referee may force the PCs to abandon Mr. Confusione until the paperwork gets sorted out. Follow–up on this matter is left to the PCs: the adventure is suspended until they can get him off–world.

There are other, more interesting ways to skirt or subvert the regulations, involving underground contacts and large sums of cash. (Making those contacts is a Difficult Streetwise task.) Some of those methods, using TL B medical technology to impersonate a Better individual, can be quite expensive, time consuming, and painful to the subject. Other methods, involving database cracking, arranging the right bribes to the right people, or sneaking Mr. Confusione past local & Imperial security into the Imperial Starport, have their

own risks. Note that impersonating a Proper Man – or assisting a Lesser in such an activity – carries a penalty of 2D6 years paid employment as an involuntary medical test subject in one of Rommel's fine research institutions. The survival rate is actually pretty high – over 70%! – but the long–term cost in your health is usually steep.

A Moment of Rest

>   Increase your charity as you increase your wealth.
>   – Empty Quarter proverb

After the PC's return to Charity, they are paid all wages due, and given a week's furlong before having to report for duty again. Charity can be a very comfortable world if you have steady work and are good at handling your money, and the PCs, being natives, know where to go to enjoy the best of what this world has to offer. After their furlong, the PCs are given various minor security jobs and short–term contracts on Charity. The work keeps food on the table, but it isn't what they do best, and the PCs can't seem to get a good lead to 'interesting' or off–world work. PCs with connections, contacts, and/or good people skills may eventually uncover the truth: the Powers that Be are keeping them on a short leash, for unknown reasons.

The Referee may just breeze past this period, or provide several short–term encounters if he is so inclined. They may be randomly generated using standard Traveller tables, or cut–and–pasted from the movies or real–life incidents. Charity's law level is 'four', so only blades, concealable firearms and non–lethal 'stunner' grenades are legal for civilian use outside of the home. The permanent population of Charity is only ~20,000: although most of the people in the street are only temporary contractor, there is a good chance that the PCs can recognise any given local, quite possibly on a first–name basis.[3] Because of Charity's status as a magnet for the wealthy in need of superior medical care, the possibility of crossing paths with 'the good and the great' are fairly high.

"Mr. Ten Percent"

>   "When Vilani Eyes are Smiling": a highly derogatory Solomani drinking song on Vilani business ethics…. Banned from public performance on 15% of the worlds of the Third Imperium.
>   – Imperial Encyclopaedia, 92th edition (978 Imperial)

After 1D4 weeks, the PCs least favorite job broker contacts the PCs to meet him at a well–known fine restaurant 'with the kind of client that you'd be interested in.' At the restaurant, he introduces the PCs to Mr. Confusione – the friendly local the PCs discovered on Rommel – and Mr. Ipati Sidorov, the Charity field manager assigned to the Reshkhuda account. After light

chit–chat and some good food, Mr. Sidorov gets down to brass tacks: he is satisfied that Confusione's information checks out, and he wants to go to Reshkhuda himself to make sure that any swindle the competition might attempt is neutralized by a proper counter–proposal by Charity.

As this involves a delicate matter involving a foreign (ie: non–Imperial) system, he would like the PCs to provide security for Charity personnel, instead of going the usual mercenary route. Compensation is as per usual: half up–front, half held in escrow by a third party until acceptable results are provided. The PCs provide their own gear; approved transport expenses handled by Charity LIC; medical services are provided by Charity LIC at a 90% discount, and scaled bonuses for work 'above and beyond that required by the contract' as adjudicated by a mutually acceptable third party. Ten percent of the party's take goes to the PC's least favorite job broker (a Vilani, naturally. His name is to be decided by the Referee, for his own entertainment.) As 90% of a good paycheck is better than 100% of chump change, the PCs are advised to take the offer. If they refuse, the adventure ends.

As part of the contract, the PC pilot is expected to train Mr. Confusione on the practical issues of navigating a starship. All PCs also spend some time training on using a short sword and shield: the Kingdom of Reshkhuda forbids any kind of weaponry more sophisticated than that available during the Bronze Age. After training, all PCs receive 0–skill (i.e.: 'trained') in both Sword and Shield, and are provided with a Roman–style short sword and a large circular shield, both made of high–quality steel. PCs who already have a skill in a low–tech weapon receive a boost in that skill, in addition to their training in low–tech swordfighting.

A small corporate hospital ship, the *Arcagathus*, is detailed for the use of the Reshkhuda mission. Like the rest of the Helper III class, the 200–ton ship is quite new, being the first hospital ship built from the keel up to TL–D standards, instead of being a TL C/D refit. She is built to run with six crewmen and 11 additional mission specialists (mainly medical types). In addition, she carries two high passengers, four middle passengers, and 20 low berth passengers, for a total of 47 on board. For this mission, all positions and passenger places are filled (the PCs count as crew or as mission specialists, depending on their shipside or groundside focus.)

The upper echelons of the Charity LIC corporation are fairly small: the PCs must again work with the gentle Dr. England and the fire–tongued Dr. Novak, with Mr. Sidorov onboard as Head of the Reshkhuda mission. The PCs may crew the ship and/or head mission security, as their speciality dictates. The PCs are given three days to prepare before the *Arcagathus* leaves port.

Suitable compensation

Not long ago, a woman called to me at church. "I wanted to show you," she said. "I knew you'd like this." She lifted her hat and I saw the head the doctors had shaved and the curving line where they'd split her skull. I hugged her and she said goodbye. She'd already picked her box.
– "Washed" by Nathan Wilson, Credenda/Agenda, issue 19–1,
http://www.credenda.org/issues/19–1.php

The journey from Charity to Sahale (Hebrin/Empty Quarter: 2227 A335537–9) is about 14 parsecs, or three and a half months at Jump2. In 993, piracy is a real concern for this journey: the Referee may provide a small starmerc to escort the *Arcagathus* to Sahale, if he so desires. The likelihood that any individual ship will be attacked is small, but if the *Arcagathus* is attacked, her ability to defend herself or escape is limited. If captured, her crew is likely to be sold to slavery as knowledgeable slaves, and the ship either stripped of her valuable medical equipment, used to serve a criminal organization as a lab or black market body shop, or sold as a hospital to some poor Emptyhead world in desperate need of a decent hospital.[4]

While docked at Hebrin (Hebrn/Empty Quarter 1930: B550A88–9), the manager of the local Charity office directs the *Arcagathus* to bring aid and comfort to nearby Daruka (Hebrin/Empty Quarter 2230: D474645–5). The planetary government – a.k.a., The Republic of Daruka – has finally come up with the money needed to eliminate Russak's Cough, a chronic disease that eventually destroys the human (and Vargr) trachea over a period of one to two decades. A two–pronged program is to be initiated: one prong involves vaccinating the general population, with Charity personnel directing this operation, in partnership with the local medical establishment. The other prong concerns treatment of mild and serious cases of the Cough: critical cases are not to be treated, as the funds needed for such major trachea reconstruction and the intensive treatment regime are not available. The *Arcagathus* is provided with the necessary medicine, and ships out.

The world of Daruka is detailed in the article "Walking in the Air" in **Stellar Reaches** #6. The work itself is not dangerous: however, military PCs must keep an eye out for thieves wanting to steal the expensive equipment, while ship–bound PCs handle the travelling arrangements for the Charity doctors and medical specialists. Business–oriented PCs may bargain with local grandees for 'the unique chance for the cure of what ails you and your loved ones.' It isn't often that Daruka gets access to TL D medicine, and the bidding for Charity's services is fierce among the Darukan elite.

Treatment for those who can't pay is strongly discouraged by the business ethos of Charity LIC, but selected discounts to the Right Sort are permissible. One or two Charity personnel (possibly a PC) also wear the 'ombudsman' hat: in addition to handling complaints and insuring that the high standards of Charity are maintained, the ombudsman arranges for good PR media events for the corporation. On the low–tech world of Daruka, this includes distribution of thin high–glossy magazines (made practically for free on Hebrin) glorifying the good works of Charity LIC to the populace. As most of the people here has never *seen* a high–production value glossy magazine (TL 5, remember?), this bit of propaganda is sure to become a treasured keepsake for generations to come… just the way the Fatima of Charity (and head of Charity LIC), Baroness Yasmin Mignonne Mai, would want it to be.

Crossing the Lesser Rift

Imperial point–men, first–in scouts, and starship navigators know one thing: sometimes, God doesn't give you a second chance, and an honest mistake will get you killed.
– Scout Sutton, IISS

The Saexile [Saeghvung–Turley–Exile] Run separates the men from the dead.
– Dame Softness Gokusen

The work on Daruka should take 1D5 +1 weeks (roll 1D6, toss out results of 6, and then add one week), until the locals can handle the remaining work themselves. Afterwards, the *Arcagathus* returns to Hebrin, re–equip for the second leg of her journey to Reshkhuda, and makes the two jumps to Sahale. Once there, they take advantage of the good starport to make their last–minute preparations: starship–based PCs should be intensely involved in this. Then comes the serious business of crossing the Void – the 'Purified–Fuel Only' run.

PC navigators are assumed to be experienced in deep–space runs, complete with proper certification. If they lack certification, Charity LIC secured the services of a properly–licensed pilot for the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile Run. The young, eager, and poorly–paid Mr. Confusione insists on being involved in handling navigation, or at least being allowed to watch the navigator over his shoulder. Details on the Saeghvung–Turley–Exile Run may be found in the article "Deep Space Stations" in **Stellar Reaches** #2.

Near the end of the run, on DSS 2720, they are hailed by Mr. Kenneth Wright, manager (and sole employee) of the closet–sized Charity LIC office on the station. He is eager to contact senior heads of the Reshkhuda mission, including the PC head of security and the PC starship captain. He prefers to talk with the PCs onboard the *Arcagathus,* instead of his office 'which may have

been compromised'. (PCs who are technologically adept and sweep the office & computers will discover two microscopic bugs, and two carefully hidden viruses on his personal computer, which transmit information to another hidden file on the system mainframe of the Deep Space Station. Tracing down where this information goes is an interesting question, but outside the scope of this adventure.)

On–board the *Arcagathus,* Mr. Wright outlines the problems that he has heard from the beleaguered Charity office on Reshkhuda. The briefing is in two parts: the PCs are permitted to hear about the violent assaults on unarmed medical personnel by screaming swordsmen, raids on local Charity facilities, stealing everything from autodocs to the imported kians (a hearty, fearless, quick–learning, omnivorous and just plain *tough* biped riding mount found across Imperial space, originating from Prilissa/Trin's Veil/Spinward Marches. Imperial nobility and military units prefer to ride kians as well as horses in ceremonial – and not–so–ceremonial – occasions.) Most worrying, local freighters carrying Charity material and goods have a higher, statically measurable chance of being attacked by pirates than other ships: this is leading to higher transport costs, and problems in meeting their contract obligations to King Atacales of Reshkhuda.[5]

After this information is relayed, the PCs are dismissed: a second briefing, meant only for the ears of Mr. Sidorov, follows. After a half–hour, Mr. Sidrov goes directly to his cabin, and locks the door. Over the next few days, private meeting are held with the section heads of the mission, eventually including the PC head of the ship's crew and head of security. They are told to assume that the Charity office on Reshkhuda has been compromised, and to lay down plans to severely restrict access to the *Arcagathus* once they arrive. They will make a special petition to the King for him to allow security to carry guns – and, hopefully, regular personnel too. The Protectorate's Star Legion is to be alerted to the problem, as well as the various star forces of the Hegemony of Lorean.[6]

On the trip to Reshkhuda, the Referee is NOT encouraged to tell the PCs to:
Learn the native language of Reshkhuda (hint: Meroj isn't a dialect of Vilani or Anglic, nor a Vargr tongue). Nor should he casually mention the possible differences between Protectorate Anglic and the PC's Transform Anglic. And why bother note that the common tongue of the Hegemony are variations of Azulan?

   Learn something about the world's population, environment, and history
   Learn exactly what Charity LIC is doing on that world, Charity resources available there, etc
   Learn about odd circumstances about the world. For example, just how did Reshkhuda get to be a high–population world at a technological level of *two*?

Some things are best left to experience. Of course, there may be the annoying and suspicious role–player who will ask perfectly reasonable questions. When this occurs, the Referee must admit his cover has been blown, and provide a summary of the information requested in the Library data. If the PCs are so complacent as to just relax as they journey to Reshkhuda, the Referee may then rub his hands with glee….

A Pleasant Chat

Sam: This is it.
Frodo: This is what?
Sam: If I take one more step, it'll be the farthest away from home I've ever been.
Frodo: Come on, Sam. Remember what Bilbo used to say: "It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to."
– From the movie "The Fellowship of the Ring"

The journey crossing the Hegemony of Lorean is a lot less exciting than the journey from Charity to Sahale. The widepsread Star Legion presence, coupled with small roving flotillas of Hegemony patrol ships, make for a safe environment – good for the mission, but a bit boring for the PCs. Jumping into Reshkhuda, they find the 1000–ton Hegemony warship *Ensurance Trap* on patrol – Third–Captain/Major Doriete Darco, Hegemony Second Flotilla, commanding. Mr. Sidorov offers his greetings on behalf of Charity LIC, and asks for a private meeting or commo link to discuss his concerns on the safety of Charity–laden freighters and shipping. Whenever the PCs are involved depends on how useful and professional they have been up to now: if they have proven themselves, they are invited to dine with the starship captain. The *Ensurance Trap* has no small craft, so a fold–out tunnel is to be used to connect the two ships.

PCs that care can look up the starship on their databanks if they are interested in the specs. Some interesting lessons in Hegemony naval doctrine can be gleaned from a proper understanding of the numbers before them. The dinner with the Hegemony officer is initially friendly, mirroring the good relations shared between the Imperium and the Protectorate (and the traditional friendship between the Imperium and the Hegemony herself.) The PCs can quickly observe the following things:
   The entire crew is composed of human males, generally of Mixed Vilani or pure Vilani origin, with a minority of Solomani (generally officers).
   The crew and officers seem rather friendly and welcoming to their Imperial civilian visitors, but few are able to communicate. The official language of the

Second Flotilla is P–Azulan, which isn't derived from Anglic at all (but bears some relation to Vilani and Hindi.)   Only the captain and a few officers understand Transform Anglic (the dialect of the Imperial Empty Quarter) and Old High Vilani, while Modern Vilani is understood by, perhaps, a third of the crew.

There is good discipline maintained onboard, and pride in their worn but well–kept starship.

While the bare bones of the ship is around TL 12, there are several higher–tech upgrades (holographic keyboards, upgraded internal sensors, etc.)

The Third–Captain/Major is happy to discuss the dual Space/Ground force rank structure of the Hegemony military, and share general small talk and unclassified but interesting trivia and stories: this includes the general nature of the Hegemony's naval organization into flotillas, based on motherships, long–duration starships, and some jump–capable tenders (instead of the base–focused organization of the Imperial Navy.) He is guarded about the state of human/non–human relations within the Hegemony, but as the PCs are (if roleplayed as typical Iper'mar) humanists themselves, this shouldn't be a major problem. He is willing to relay any concerns on piracy to higher authority.

On his tour of duty, he has seen few direct attempts to attack a civilian from an attacking pirate ship: the Star Legion and Hegemony flotillas are simply too strong to risk it. But, sabotage and hijackings are definitely something to watch out for. Starship captains should also be wary of brokers willing to pay big bucks to ship 'sealed livestock': there is at least one instance of this 'livestock' actually being a team of nasty Vargr hijackers from the Facepeeler Band. "The Red Sparks [Blood Vargr of Beta Quadrant] are bared from starship ownership, making things safe for humaniti to go about their business peaceably. But some of those animals just *refuse* to *learn*!" Note that the starship captain won't back down from his strong language: he's seen far too many nasty things in his career to care what 'a bunch of coddled Impies' think. Hot–headed PCs who cross the line into open disrespect are invited to leave the table: moreover, they can expect a dressing down later by Mr. Sidorov – who couldn't care less about the Vargr – for souring relations with the Hegemony and putting the entire mission into jeopardy.

Third–Captain/Major Darco is very eager to hear news from the Solomani Rim War: unlike many Protectorate citizens – who enjoy seeing the Imperium cut down a notch or two – he has a mild preference for an Imperial victory. A strong Imperium gives the Hegemony leverage when bargaining with the central Protectorate government on Asimikigir. He is also curious to hear how the ordinary Emptyhead is dealing with their new Bwap Sector Duke, and has a professional interest in

learning how the planetary and Colonial fleets are handling the pirate scourge in the Six Subsectors.

Assuming that dinner goes thru fairly well, the visiting PCs and NPCs are each given a gift – a holograph of a major Hegemony city skyline at night – and saluted as they depart the ship. A good reaction after dinner means that Charity LIC has gained an important contact who can be cultivated (in the usual Charity LIC manner) to be a real asset to the corp. A poor leave–taking does not make the PCs an enemy, but they can rely on the Third–Captain to do his formal duty to protect them – but forget about gaining inside information on local pirate activity, or the *Ensurance Trap* bending a few rules to help out the *Arcagathus* to sort out a 'misunderstanding'.

Sperany Customs

Bureaucracy, the rule of no one, has become the modern form of despotism.
– Mary McCarthy

After their meeting with *Ensurance Trap*, the *Arcagathus* is now ready to make the short N–space jaunt to Reshkhuda …

…no, they're not. As they make their approach, they receive a signal from the small asteroid/moon of Sperany to dock at the military facility there for inspection and interrogation. As a wing of four Turcap–class fighters take off to intercept the *Arcagathus*, the base warns that they are equipped with sufficient firepower to cripple or destroy the PCs unless they comply immediately. The Head of the mission directs the PCs to comply, and dock at the base – despite the fact that no such base is mentioned in their (admittedly old) ship databases.[7] If the PCs ignore this, they come under assault of two factor–8 Particle Accelerators, and ten Plasma guns from the moon (10 factor–3 Dual turrets, organized into five batteries of factor–4 damage each): it is not possible for the PCs to defeat the base or cripple the weapons, given the tools that they have. The four fighters, describe in the appendix, also join in on the fun with furious aggression. The Referee may permit a skilled PC pilot to bug out: otherwise, it is hoped that the PCs surrender before they are destroyed.

Assuming that the PCs are wise enough to comply with the base's command, they are escorted by the fighters to the base on Sperany. After they dock, men – no, men and women – in what seems to be oddly–festooned light combat armor bearing gauss rifles and shotguns enter the ship, and search it for contraband – i.e. firearms and explosives. All such weapons – including the shotguns and laser rifles in the ship's armoury – are locked up in a portable strongbox. Most of the troopers can only speak variations of Azulan fluently: excluding the squad leader, they only know a few orders in Anglic –

'STOP!' 'DROP IT!', and suchlike. A PC mercenary can make a Difficult Education check to place their unit patch – 'The Steamboys' (an Anglic mispronunciation of their actual E–Azulan unit name, Staninzoyzi), a well–respected 'unattached command of the Hegemony spaceforces'.[8]

The PC ship captain, PC security officer, and Mr. Sidorov should by now be demanding to speak to the base commander, and asking by whose authority this search is being conducted. The squad commander – who has a basic command of Protectorate Anglic, Modern Vilani and a Blood Vargr language – would prefer to have them just shut up so he can finish his job without harassment, but he can be persuaded to contact his superiors to get some answers. If the PCs didn't make waves, they would be told after the search that the planet is prohibited to Charity ships & personnel unless they have special permission to enter. This special visa may be gained at the Kingdom of Reshkhuda's embassy on Zuethun, the senior Hegemony world in Beta Quadrant. The Referee is directed to adventure section entitled **Ship PCs: Official and Underworld Realitie**s to handle their arrival at Zuethun.

If the PCs made waves, then they are told to wait until a Royal Trade Counselor is assigned to them. In 1D6 hours, such a counsellor contacts them over a low–tech radio channel. The referee may imitate the high–pitched 'tuning' noises of a 1930's style radio, for veracity. He is incredulous that a Charity LIC ship dared to appear in orbit again 'after the destruction their defective products caused last time!' Mr. Sidorov is a good wheeler–dealer, and fluent in Meroj, the language of the planetary government, bureaucracy, and about 8% of the general population. He is able to sweet–talk away the anger of the Trade Counselor while trying to figure out exactly what went wrong. After an hour of negotiating over the radio, he is able to convince the Royal Trade Counselor to allow the *Arcagathus* to land at an appointed time – after turning over all firearms and explosives to the Steamboys 'for safekeeping.' Before allowing the ship to leave, the mercenaries' base commander, communicating thru the squad leader, insists that the *Arcagathus* take onboard two of his troops (the squad leader himself, and a woman–trooper) to lock down the weapons turret and 'keep everyone on their best behavior.' As per regulations, they retain their weird armor, which, while useful in zero–G warfare is mighty uncomfortable for 24–hour wear.

The Kingdom

Women are the kind of people that people come out of. My daughter–in–law has a T–shirt that says it all: "I can grow people." Given how many people are on the globe, it is amazing that we are all not sitting around all the time, staring at one another in absolute befuddlement.

– "Just a Bit Odd", Douglas Wilson, Credenda/Agenda, issue 19–1, http://www.credenda.org/issues/19–1.php

The arrival of the *Arcagathus* is an extraordinary affair. As the starship gracefully begins her descent to the world below, the PCs can admire the green and fertile landscape speed below them. Reshkhuda (Tsosoe/Empty Quarter 2605: D567A86–2) may be a low–tech world now, but the towering high–tech ruins that dot the landscape speak to great power and authority, not so long ago. As the landscape below shifts to a semi–desert badland, the *Arcagathus* makes her way to the D–class starport, enclosed within the high walls of King Atacales' city–palace of Jax Maranho. They can watch a crowd form up at the elevated landing platform, their flat faces turned up to watch the visitors from a distant star.

The starport/palace itself looks like a flat plane from the air, only lightly specked with people – except for the landing platform, where a substantial crowd has gathered. Mr. Sidorov and the lead PCs decide who's on the landing party: the Steamboys remind them, again, that no firearms, high–tech weapons, or explosives are permitted (yes, they have been previously locked up). Before the landing party exists, they must be scanned and frisked (again) by the wand–waving Steamboys who quickly park themselves by the airlock. The Referee is reminded that swords, shields, daggers, bows and arrows and suchlike ARE acceptable to carry: the cunning PC may be able to slip some high–tech, unpowered melee gear past the guards.[9]

When the PCs finally leave the ship, they are greeted by a blast of hot air and small party of Royal Attendants. Surrounding the raised starship platform are trumpeting attendants, and the broad red carpet that flows from the exit ramp to the steps, to the Welcoming Hall, is lined by an honor guard of blue–clad men – not a weapon in sight, low–tech or otherwise… A keen–eyed PC may spot a single, spherical blue robot floating 20 meters in the air. This lightly–armored TL E robot, imported from far–away Damlaer/Lorean/Amdukan, is armed with a single laser rifle (200 shots), an array of three cameras, and a long–range microphone. It is remotely–controlled by the Steamboys.[10] (Details of the robot are left for the Referee to create.)

At the surprisingly comfortable – for Tech Level 2 – Welcoming Hall, the landing party are shown their rooms, complete with flushing toilets and running hot & cold water (yes, this is doable at TL 2). The PCs may refuse and insist on sleeping on the ship, but this is taken as a severe insult unless handled very well. (Mr. Sidorov will sleep in his appointed room.) Each PC is assigned two minders, who speak Protectorate Anglic and Modern Vilani fairly well. Differences between

Protectorate Anglic and the Imperial Transform dialect spoken in the Empty Quarter are left for the Referee to decide.

The PCs then taken to the Hall of Wealth, where they are encouraged to purchase various articles with their off–world currency. Trade–oriented PCs can spot some very nice things here, but without command of the Meroj or a local trade language (and no way to get the good off–world), he can't make any profitable shipping deals on the side. But at least some trade samples can be had, for future reference…

The next day, the landing party is called to Court to discuss the major issues involving Charity's place on the world. Mr. Sidorov briefs the PCs on court etiquette, which includes kneeling and singing the praises of the mighty Kingdom and her exalted King: if the PCs have problems with humbling themselves, then they should speak up now and stay out of the court before they jeopardize Charity interests. Within the Court – protected by glaive–bearing soldiers (in TL 2 padded armour), a few swordsmen (wearing colorful, crested helmets and bronze chestplates), and a single hidden Steamboy sniper with a silenced rifle, behind the ceiling curtains – Mr. Sidorov negotiates with the elderly man on the throne in fluent Meroj: the uncomprehending PCs are simple onlookers here.

After the audience, Mr. Sidorov asks the PC security head to locate a private area where they can't be overheard. Once there, Mr. Sidorov relays his words with the grandson (!) of the King: visiting doctors from the Protectorate government claimed that Charity was deliberately providing inferior medical care and flawed clones, as a way to milk the Kingdom of extra cash. The field manager knows for a fact that no such act was authorized: Charity's reputation is much too valuable for such madness to be sanctioned. However, *proving* it is going to be difficult. He's going to have to send Dr. England to Zuethun to sort this out on the *Arcagathus* – "You could wait a month on Reshkhuda and not see another starship, so forget waiting for a liner!" As the ship–bound PCs prepare to head out, Mr. Sidorov continues to brief the remaining PCs. He managed to wrangle a Royal Writ to release Charity personnel and equipment: the PC security team, armed with swords and mounted on riding kains, are to cross the planet and free Charity's people.

Ground PCs: The Rolling Purple Hills of Reshkhuda

Of distant lands I dream, of far utopia,
A land of health and rest, untroubled by the cares of civilization.
– Guardian Ansa Nakshatra of Nisaga

The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in,

but you cannot forever fence it out.
– Gandalf, The Fellowship of the Ring

While the ship–based PCs journey to Zuethun, the ground–based PCs must organise a low–tech expedition, and spend eight months journeying across the continent of Liciajin to contact the scattered Charity installations, on land and along the coast via sailing ship and rowing galley. As they understand neither the language nor the culture, they must hire guides, guards, labourers and carriages to protect themselves and their property. While the technological level is officially at the Renaissance level, no black powder guns or cannon exists on the world: the available guards are generally green ex–soldiers and inexperienced 'young men of adventure' with spears, axes and daggers. The few scattered forts guarding the roads are manned with units of 100 – 200 trained men with swords, pikes, javelins, and crossbows, are usually supported with catapults, arbalests, longbowmen, and pots of boiling tar. Groups of 10 to 20 cavalry troopers, mounted on ten–footed 'running worms', patrol the well–tended cobblestone roads.

After the PCs leave the starport/palace of Jax Maranho, they must travel for a few days across the dry badlands they saw during their landing. Crossing the local mountain chain is easier than expected, as the road is well–maintained and constantly patrolled. Once over the guarded mountains, they enter 'the real Reshkhuda': an outrageously bountiful and healthful land, capable of supporting billions with minimal agricultural techniques. The vibrancy of the biosphere makes sanitation a non–issue, the water given half–a–chance practically purifies itself, and the atmosphere is deeply invigorating: the PCs can practically feel the years being added to their life, and numerous minor ailments and aches fade away. The people themselves are not particularly beautiful, but they are very healthy, strongly built, and deeply satisfied with their way of life.

However, the Reshkhudai are quite parochial: they are deeply wary of foreigners, and hate non–humans – a.k.a. 'monsters' – with a passion, especially the infamous Vargr. Technology beyong the renaissance level is certainly seen as corrupt, and quite likely twisted and evil: even the ability to read without moving your lips is 'unnatural.' The locals are aware of the decaying ruins of high–tech cities around them, and consider them as the pathetic result of 'getting too big for your britches': outworlders asking too many questions about the distant past is very annoying, and could spark a riot. Religiously, they prefer to worship the land, 'the source of all good things': animism and nature–spirits are also widely followed. The King is held to be in mystical union with both 'planet and people': "when he speaks, we speak". PCs must spend a good deal of time demonstrating their peaceful intentions, and may have

to sleep far from the numerous cities and towns. Frankly, this isn't a bad way to travel: the available moss–beds and soft, ridiculously fertile earth are very comfortable to rest on.

Ground PCs: Sword and Shield

> In this universe, all joy is protected joy: all gardens must have walls.
> And those walls need armed men, men with swords, or guns, or nukes.
> – General Abd Al–Hamid, Imperial Marines

> Not all walls are made of bricks.
> And not all weapons can be seen with the naked eye.
> – Baron Sir Horest Whynott, Director of the Vermene (Tukera Lines Security)

Brigand bands and highwaymen do exist, but are fairly rare and don't have the stomach for a stand–up fight. Still, when Charity personnel was imprisoned by order of the King, many brigands took the opportunity to seize the now unprotected outworlders 'as good patriots'. But, before the PCs can act to free them, they must look to their own survival: news of the wealth of the PC party is sure to spread quickly, so they can expect to handle a fair deal of sword–fighting in their travels. Also worthy of note are night–time attacks by stealthy thieves, attempting to purloin some high–tech equipment that they don't understand, but covet nevertheless.

The Royal Writ is sufficient to free Charity people and property held by the government: the PCs can expect effusive thanks by the various mainly Iper'marion physicians, nurses, and technicians, well and truly sick of being imprisoned, held in house arrest, or stuck in a low–tech jail cell. However, some of Charity's people and property (including the stolen riding kians) are being held hostage by brigands and thieves. These criminal groups send emissaries to contact the PCs, to make a deal for the release of the hostages. Official corporate policy puts a priority on securing the freedom and liberty of the hostages and regaining company property. Unofficial policy demands that the criminals be punished ferociously and publicly, to discourage others from doing the same thing. How this is arranged is left for the PCs to decide. Note that the usual network of friends and allies that Charity LIC usually enjoys is non–existent, so far from Imperial Space: the PCs must do a lot of the legwork themselves – without a command of the local language.

Ship PCs: Official and Underworld Realities

> Surprises are foolish things. The pleasure is not enhanced, and the inconvenience is often considerable.

> – Jane Austen

As the *Arcagathus* arrives in Zuethun (Tsosoe/Empty Quarter 3007: B76297B–B), they find the landing stack unexpectedly crowded with dozens of starships and hundreds of spaceships, arriving from in–system colonies. Conversing on the low–priority 'chatter' channels reveals that the world is a pilgrimage site to a notable Hindu sect, who are holding a major celebration this week. A very experienced pilot from the Six Subsectors may see such a mass of flying spaceships around him, but it certainly not an everyday occurrence!

As they are given permission to land, the PC pilot has a chance to note the odd approach vector of the Free Trader *Isoplut* (a Difficult Navigation task.) If the PC fails to pick out the *Isoplut* from all the other ships around the *Arcagathus*, he notices the oblique approach of the *Isoplut* only after the ship is practically on top of him. If he fails, he has a chance to evade the ship: it's a Difficult Piloting task to outwit the *Isoplut*, and have it roar past the *Arcagathus.* If he succeeds, the *Isoplut* chooses to chance a misjump and bugs out of the system, rather than face the hornet's nest of Star Legion patrol ships and Hegemony fighters who just turned their tender attentions to him.

If the PCs fail to dodge the bullet, the *Isoplut* strikes, firing lasers into the *Arcagathus* at point–blank range. Chaos immediately erupts around the two ships, and system security springs into action, commanding the *Isoplut* to power down or be destroyed. If the *Arcagathus* is without manoeuvre power, the *Isoplut* quickly draws alongside (in a masterful bit of cliff–edge piloting) and six suited Vargr swiftly cross over to the *Arcagathus'* cockpit. They immediately plant explosives on the windows of the cockpit, quickly blowing it open. As the Isoplut behind them is ripped apart by heavy fire, the Vargr storm the *Arcagathus.* They command any surviving PCs to immediately jump out of the system to a set of given co–ordinates, if they value their lives. If the PCs don't, the Vargr attempt to kill everyone they see, and then leave the cockpit, quickly clawing their way across the ship's hull to the ship's internal dock. Blowing the docks open, they grab an air/raft, and attempt to scoot across the chaos surrounding them to a nearby friend, the *Antipax*. If the authorities fail to keep track of the small air/raft in a sea of distractions, the guilty Vargr board the 'innocent' Subsidised Merchant *Antipax* undetected. The *Antipax,* (still green–lit by the authorities) coolly reports that they have no time to wait for the general situation to resolve itself, powers out to the jump limit, and disappears into jumpspace.

Ship PCs: Surrender, and then…

> When a robbery victim does not defend himself, the robber succeeds 88 percent of the time, and the victim is injured 25 percent of the time. When a victim resists with a gun, the robbery success rate

falls to 30 percent, and the victim injury rate falls to 17 percent. No other response to a robbery – from drawing a knife to shouting for help to fleeing – produces such low rates of victim injury and robbery success.
– David Kopel

Should the PCs agree to the pirate's demands, they jump out immediately. Jumping out this close to Zuethun (within ten diameters) risks a misjump, to be resolved normally. If the PCs jump out correctly, they are herded by the Vargr to the air–tight regions of the ship. The Blood Vargr uses the PCs as go–betweens between them and the rest of the crew. PCs with experience with the Imperial Navy may recognise their unit patches and insignia, identifying them as part of the Facepeeler Band (an Average Education task). If so, he also recalls several other things about this Blood Vargr pack; among them, that the Facepeelers don't take prisoners, and can quietly alert the other PCs on the unpleasantness that's likely to happen, if they don't get out of this fix soon.

After a week, the *Arcagathus* exits jump near Zuethun's small, dim binary star. Another starship, the *Antipax*, is waiting for them. The five Vargr, certain that they have the situation under control, have ditched their vac suits and begin to herd the crew to the *Arcagathus'* dock. Tactically knowledgeable PCs can smell that Something Bad is about to happen, and the best time to change things around is **now**, while all five Vargr are in the corridors, contemptuous (and therefore unwatchful) of the humans, and too busy stroking their claws and licking their lips (their minds focused on the blood sport that is to come) instead of carefully observing the 'harmless prey' around them.

Should the PCs succeed in whacking the Vargr before the Vargr whack them, the *Antipax* tries to hail the Vargr. Assuming no response is made, a small ship's boat is sent to check things out. How the PC's handle things from here is up to them. Note that the ship's boat is crewed by men, not Vargr (and green men at that – mere ship's hands, not professional soldiers.) It is possible for the PCs to pull a truly heroic stunt, and capture the *Antipax* (which is crewed by a handful of ordinary spacers, led a very cruel captain who is experienced in corporate power–plays, not shootouts.) If they pull it off, they can successfully learn more about the Steel Fists via interrogation and raiding the computer files and personal effects of the captain and crew, gathering enough information to enable the Star Legion to neutralize this threat to Charity's operations. Even if they pull off this great victory, they haven't traced the identity of the competitor who pushed the Steel Fists to focus on exclusively attacking Charity's corporate interests.

Ship PC: Debriefing

I have no idea how the Menderes' manage to keep that crazy quilt of a nation together. If I tried to make the Vilani equal to the Solomani – while allowing both to run independent star nations, with their own navies – there would be a major civil war in no time. And we're both human!
– Emperor Martin III

If the PCs successfully avoided the *Isoplut*, they still have to deal with the howling chaos surrounding them. It is an Average Piloting test to avoid a collision, and two successful tests are needed to get on the ground quickly and out of the line of fire: Difficult Piloting (to jockey your ship properly) and Difficult Liaison (to handle traffic control). Failure to land quickly means that the PCs must face more delays, as the Star Legion orders all ships to power–down and freeze their relative location. As soon as this is done, a Legion patrol craft immediately makes its way to the *Arcagathus*: they want a face–to–face conference, and they want it now. After they are let in, the PCs are surprised to see a mixed Vargr/human crew, captained by an Amdukan Vargr (the Legion is a lot less discriminatory than the Hegemony, or certain other member states.) The Legion doesn't search the *Arcagathus*, but they do ask a lot of questions before letting the PCs go.

If the PCs managed to dock quickly, they are met by Legion and Hegemony officials as soon as they open the hatch. The Legion wants to question the PCs vigorously, but the Hegemony prefers to let them go as they did nothing wrong ('…and they're human, too… just another victim of the Vargr criminal mind.' they *don't* actually verbalize to their human & Vargr Legionary colleagues.) In the end, the Hegemony has the decisive word in this matter, and the PCs are let go after a half–hour interrogative questioning.

Ship PCs: Zany Zuethun

Peace reigns on Zuethun – for certain values of the word 'peace'…
– Scout First Class Sanjay–947B, 'Sanjay's Surveyors'

Zuethun is a populous world, divided into human and Blood Vargr nations of varying strength and power. There are only seven human and human–dominant nations (largely descended from South Asian stock), but they are generally wealthy, politically stable, and avoid fighting other humans. The Blood Vargr nations – which cover 2/3rds of the planet – number in the thousands, and are in a constant state of war and near–war with each other, their human neighbours, and anything else that gets in the way. Under pressure from their human neighbours and the humanist Hegemony, however, they have redefined their 'wars' to mean very bloody staged battles, fought among warriors on

formally demarked battlefields with swords and claws. Command of the Vargr grav tanks and nukes of real warfare are awarded on an annual basis to the Vargr victors of the sword–based conflicts. By an informal agreement, modern wars may only be fought against human and human–dominant nations.

The base culture of Zuethun is shaped by an amalgam of Indian Hinduism and the Hegemony's crypto–official cult: 'Last Man' Mystical Rationalism. The temples of both religions dot the landscape, occasionally even sharing a temple or holy site. However, they have very different motives in worship, as their art shows. The Hindus follow the traditional focus of the body – human and non–human, sentient and otherwise, liberally mixed with arabesque patterns. The Last Man temples are a good deal more austere, dominated by sharp geometric shapes; pale, ice–cold walls covered with bas–relief Azulan motifs of the Eternal Struggle between Man and Beast (a.k.a. the Vargr), and highly elegant use of light and shadow, mirrors and water.

Even as religions old and new compete and blend into each other, so Zuethun has successfully adjusted to Hegemonic rule, being the unofficial capital of Beta Quadrant. Even as local humaniti accepts the Hegemonic principle of human supremacy, they make so many 'reasonable and proper exceptions' as to enervate much of the force of Hegemonic doctrine. On the other hand, the Union Societies and Last Man cults that shape so much of the Hegemonic way of life have more followers here – in both raw numbers and percentage–wise – than in any other high–pop system in Beta Quadrant. Hegemonic idealists and visionaries still stream in, driven by their New Visions of Man, and they can still quickly find thousands of disciples on Zuethun.

Ship PCs: Down to Brass Tacks

A meeting is an event where minutes are taken and hours wasted.
– James T. Kirk

Blood Vargr society is quite violent and dangerous to the uninitiated, but 'coincidentally', the starport, Hegemony governmental centres and assorted embassies and trade centres are all located in human–dominant territory. The Royal Reshkhudan Embassy, located near the starport, is coldly formal to the PCs. If they haven't gain permission to land on Reshkhuda, they must apply for a visa: obtaining one is a Formidable Liaison task, taking 1D6+5 weeks. This is a repeatable task.

If the PCs are here to disprove the claims that they sold substandard material and services to the Kingdom of Reshkhuda, they must first contact the local branch of the Protectorate Office of Care. This Office handles interstellar medical issues and controversies, and often works as a mediator between systems, and a channel to disseminate new medical discoveries. As the bureaucracy ruled against Charity, they are very reluctant to reverse their decision – and admit their fallibility in public. However, a determined PC with Admin–1+, Legal–1+ or Liaison–1+ can determine how to begin the appeal process: this takes 1D6 days minus (combined Admin and Legal ranks of the lead PC) to get it started. After the appeal process begins, the PCs must wait until the first hearings begin: this takes 2D6 – 1 weeks (no less than two weeks) minus (combined Admin and Legal ranks of the lead PC).

At the hearing, the PCs have the option of either having the Protectorate undertake a review of the evidence accumulated against Charity LIC, or have a third party, acceptable to both Charity LIC and the Kingdom of Reshkhuda, conduct a new survey on Reshkhuda. The lead Player should be given the option to make his own decision: if he picks the first option, the Referee should roll a Difficult (Education + Admin or Legal, whichever skill is higher) test for him. If he passes, tell him that he has a strong gut feeling that he should have the third party take a look.

If the lead PC has the Protectorate investigate its own people and procedures, then in 2D6 + 4 weeks the Protectorate Office of Care naturally declares itself innocent 'after an extensive and through review.' No further action is taken: the PCs must organize the withdrawal of all Charity assets from Reshkhuda, declare the account lost, and eventually face the anger of the Fatima of Charity.

This is not a good thing.

If the lead PC selects a review by a third party, then they must attend daily meetings with the Office of Care and a consul of the Kingdom of Reshkhuda, and fight for a reasonably unbiased third party to make the review. The Referee can slug it out, or have the party roll a Formidable Liaison task for every day of meetings (add the Liaison skills of the entire party, as well as half the value of their Legal skill). The Referee rolls secretly until the party receives two Outstanding Successes, or three Outstanding Failures.

Two Outstanding Successes means that the party comes up with the ingenious suggestion that a Blood Vargr medical team – the Mmarrrreragvgroikh – be sent to verify the Protectorate's work. While this greatly angers the Kingdom, it gains the strong support of the Protectorate, and they twist the arm of the Kingdom until they accept the decision. Blood Vargr become physicians for very different reasons than humans do (for one thing, they just *love* the energizing scent of blood), but the Vargr professionals selected are extremely competent and have a fierce,

uncompromising integrity. The PCs could not have made a better choice.

Three Outstanding Failures means that the third party selected – the human–dominated Elipis Medical Group – is already in the pocket of the Protectorate. While it is still possible for Charity to be vindicated, they must work very hard to make it happen. Not only must the evidence on behalf of Charity be picture–perfect, but some kind of under–the–table compensation must be offered to ease the pain of annoying the Protectorate with an unexpectedly adverse ruling. Something as blunt as an unmarked brown envelope is dismissed out of hand: the PCs must *work* to find the right coin to buy the justice they cannot get any other way.

No matter what third party is selected, the PCs must now head back to Reshkhuda, and let the chosen third party do the job it was paid for.

Together Again

> Han Solo: How we doin'?
> Luke: Same as always.
> Han Solo: That bad, huh?
> – Return of the Jedi

After the *Arcagathus* returns, they dispatch the contractors chosen to review the Protectorate's work. The crew may then relocate the PCs on the ground; by radio, or by using the couriers of the Royal Mails (as part the Kingdom's intelligence network, they keeps a discreet tab on the PCs location and activities.) While still forbidden to regain their guns and explosives by the ever–present Steamboy minders, the PCs can get access to the starship's air/raft and ground buggy, making travel far easier – but terrifying the natives far more, if they don't take care to travel discreetly at night, and land some distance away from the cities. With the ground buggy, reduce the remaining time needed to release all Charity personnel by 80%: with the air/raft, cut it by 95%. Various tactical possibilities to handle recalcitrant highwaymen also present themselves, even if the PCs can't slip a few items past the watchful guards.

The availability of the *Arcagathus* makes the ground–based PC's job much easier. The intimidating bulk of a 200–ton starship hovering over a brigand's camp makes negotiations run much smoother. The Referee should encourage the PCs to get as creative as possible in securing the release of their colleagues. Strengthening the reputation of Charity LIC is also looked upon kindly by senior management, most definitely including the Fatima herself.

As the PCs interrogate various prisoners, they discover that, upon occasion, the thieves had sold the stolen high–tech equipment to an interested buyer. Quick–

thinking PCs should be able to connect the dots, and determine that the same buyer has been purchasing the stolen goods: while the actual front men change, the currency (Julian Stars), purchase prices negotiated, and terms of delivery are consistent. Capturing and interrogating a few of these front men leads the PCs to a possible dumping point for the stolen goods: a particular warehouse near the starport…

The PC security team should carefully plan out their approach to the warehouse. A wise leader should make quiet feelers, to see if he can get access to firearms and explosives 'in case things go pear–shaped': to get the teams guns back for this one instance takes two Difficult Liaison tasks: one discussion involves the local Sherriff (who speaks fluent Meroj, but only halting Protectorate Anglic), and another radio conference with the Steamboy leadership is required (which draws in a Royal representative, in any case.) The Steamboys refuse to dedicate any men or equipment to the PCs attack, unless there is evidence that the bad guys are using firearms or explosives.

From the outside, the warehouse is guarded by two muscular men with hidden knives: they will fight the PCs, and flee from a Steamboy attack, but respect Royal authority, letting Royal soldiers in without a fuss. Entering in, the warehouse, the PCs find nothing but the usual set of crates, boxes, and tidy piles of good waiting for transport. One of the crates has a hidden door: as soon as it is opened there is a shout, and a shotgun blast. There is a shouted warning (in Meroj) for the PCs to leave now, or the man with the shotgun is going to come out and kill anyone caught in the warehouse. After waiting a minute, the armed thief steps out to make good his word.

If the PCs desire, they can get the Steamboys involved now. If requested, one (1) Steamboy is sent ("It's just one battle, right?"), wearing light combat armour, a weird combination grav belt/jet pack, a guass rifle, and two automatic pistols.

The door leads to a one–meter–high tunnel, lit by low–tech but efficient diodes. The armoured Steamboy has serious difficulty entering the tunnel, and is forced to remain outside: the PCs have no trouble in making their tunnel crawl. About 2D6 + 2 minutes after entering the tunnel, they are halted by gunfire: four green locals – two armed with pistols, two with pistols and a single fragmentary grenade each – have been sent to slow the assault team down. After they have been overrun, the PCs must continue for another 1D6 minutes… until the lights suddenly go out. Nothing happens, and the PCs may continue on for another 1D6 minutes until they come out into some kind of cavern. Thirty seconds after entering the cavern, a massive strobe light is flipped on into their faces, in an attempt to blind them. If successful, they are quickly tackled, pinned, and taken

hostage themselves by the three remaining criminals. After 2D6 days, they and the equipment are abandoned: Charity LIC has paid for their release, and stood by (for now) as the culprits flee into the teeming billions of Reshkhuda.

If the PCs successfully defeat the pistol–welding criminals (Veteran highwaymen: no grenades, and inexperienced in the firearms they carry) and take at least one alive, the survivor(s) are quite willing to spill the beans (in the Meroj language) in the hope of reward or leniency. They were equipped with firearms and given the cash to purchase the stolen goods by a hooded man, claiming to speak for the Steel Fists. When pressed for more information, they mention that they always met him in the forests outside the city of Kasaco To, 80 km away, near a tall upright stone. If questioned, he also admits that he would recognize his voice, if he heard it again.

The PCs can share this information with the Sherriff. If they leave it for the local constabulary to resolve, they are rewarded in 1D6 weeks by the arrival of a bound man in chains. The soldiers hauling him along ask for his execution, as the prisoner, Fansaj Kiiat, shot seven men (killing four) until they finally caught him: it took a direct order from the surviving officer to prevent them from immediately chopping him to bits.

A Reshkhudai who has travelled the stars, Fansaj Kiiat is fluent in Protectorate Anglic and can make himself understood in the PC's Transform dialect. After some pressure is brought to bear, he admits his role as a purchaser of stolen good, and acting as the 'hand' of the Steel Fists on Reshkhuda, instigating attacks on Charity's on–sight assets: but he had nothing to do with the claim that Charity LIC was corrupt in her dealings with the Kingdom. 'That's wayyy above my pay–grade,' he insists in the local lingo. He has no idea why attacks were directed against Charity specifically: he's a 'made man' of the Fists, but not one of the 'fathers', and has no idea about the reasons behind his orders.

If Mr. Confusione, the navigator–in–training from Rommel, is available to question Mr. Kiiat, he is able to ask more of the right questions. The information he can gather includes the names and ships of 1D6 Imperial captains with a grudge against Charity, 1D6 leads on how they might be connected with the Steel Fists, and a hint on the identity of the corporate competitor who's pushing so hard against Charity LIC.

Unless the PCs have any further use for him, Mr. Kiiat is taken away for a swift and clean execution.

Here Come the Judge!

That was messy.
– Section Administrator Rachiel Tannam, Tukera Lines, while observing Blood Vargr justice in action.

In 1D3 months, the third party judges are ready to make a ruling regarding the activities of Charity on Reshkhuda. If the Vargr judges of Mmarrrreragvgroikh were selected, they rule unanimously that Charity LIC is innocent of all charges, and insist that the Protectorate pay damages for slandering Charity's reputation – "Preferably in blood, but a sufficient sum of money will do as well." Mr. Sidorov, speaking for Charity LIC, asks for the heads of the incompetent bureaucrats responsible to be shipped to the world of Charity – bodies to be shipped separately. The Vargr grins joyfully as the Protectorate representatives blanch…

In 1D6 + 2 weeks, the bureaucrats responsible for the errors are hauled into the court as the PCs finger their swords. They throw themselves at the mercy of the PCs, claiming that they were bribed to rule against Charity by men speaking for 'powerful people', and willing to help the PCs if they will just spare their lives. Mr. Sidorov is willing to accept the proposal, if they are willing to throw in lifelong servitude to Charity LIC as an additional reward for sparing their miserable lives 'just like proper Imper'mar blood–servants are supposed to'… but he asks the PCs for advice, before giving his final word.

If the Elipis Medical Group was chosen, the Referee should roll a Difficult Liaison role (using Mr. Sidorov's Liaison skill): every PC that provided substantial assistance to get the Elipis Medical Group 'to see things their way' adds a +1 modifier to Mr. Sidorov's roll. If he succeeds, then the major charges are dropped, and Charity LIC only has to pay for the minor damages they were found guilty of (the guilty ruling was made solely to permit the Protectorate Office of Care to save face.) If he fails in the roll, then Charity LIC must pay for all damages, and is banned from operating on Reshkhuda for forty years.

If the PCs get a favorable ruling, Charity medics are finally permitted to care for King Atacales, at 302 the oldest living man in Beta Quadrant (excluding various low berthers, misjump survivors, etc.) They are also permitted to thaw out the cloned women designed to his great–great–grandson's specifications. Stored until now in the *Arcagathus'* low berths, they are to be used as guards and entertainers at his castle.[11]

Epilogue

> Home is the sailor, home from sea:
> Her far–borne canvas furled
> The ship pours shining on the quay
> The plunder of the world.
> – A.E. Housman

If the Reshkhuda mission is successful, the return of *Arcagathus* to the Charity system is deemed worthy of a day's public celebration by the corporate board. The PC are thoroughly debriefed, and actions of the PCs are carefully considered, with an eye on how they affected the prestige of the corporation, as well as bottom–line results. After one to two weeks, the Corporate Review board hold a public session, to individually reward and/or punish all PCs and NPCs as they deem warranted, from the young Mr. Confusione to the mission commander, Mr. Sidorov. The presence of the Fatima herself is unlikely: but if she *is* present, it serves as a signal to the PCs can expect great reward, or crushing punishment….

Appendix: Timeline

Start date: 246–993, on Rommel
- Additional days spent at the symposium: min 1 day
- Time needed to get Mr. Confusione off of Rommel: min 3 days
- Travel time from Rommel to Charity (PC ship: assumed to be Jump2): 5 Jump2, or 10 weeks
- Time spent on odd jobs on Charity: min 2 weeks
- Days to prepare for the journey to Reshkhuda: min 3 days
- Travel time from Charity to Hebrin: 6 Jump2, or 12 weeks
- Travel time from Hebrin to Daruka: 2 Jump2, or 4 weeks
- Time spent on Daruka: min 2 weeks, average 4 weeks
- Travel time from Daruka to Hebrin: 2 Jump2, or 4 weeks
- Travel time from Hebrin to Sahale: 2 Jump2, or 4 weeks
- Travel time from Sahale to Saeghvung: 6 Jump2, or 12 weeks
- Travel time from Saeghvung to Reshkhuda (assuming no caravanseries, as
- described in the "Empty Quarter Echo", Stellar Reaches #6): 12 Jump2, or 24 weeks
- Time on Reshkhudan orbit: min 1 day
- Time on Reshkhuda: min 2 days
- Travel time from Reshkhuda to Zuethun: 3 Jump2, or 6 weeks
- Time spent on Zuethun:
- starting the appeal process: min 0 weeks
- obtaining a suitable third party as adjudicator: 6 days
- additional day (official rules: a starship must spend at least one week at every port): 1 day
- Travel time from Zuethun to Reshkhuda: 3 Jump2, or 6 weeks
- Time needed to complete the tour, using the air/raft: min 7 days
- Time needed to capture and interrogate the local hand of the Steel Fist: min 1 week
- Time needed to render a judgement:
- 4 weeks – (7 days air/raft tour) – (1 week capture): min 2 weeks
- Travel time from Travel time from Reshkhuda to Saeghvung (assuming no caravanseries, as
- described in the "Empty Quarter Echo", Stellar Reaches #6): 12 Jump2, or 24 weeks
- Travel time from Saeghvung to Sahale: 6 Jump2, or 12 weeks
- Travel time from Sahale to Hebrin: 2 Jump2, or 4 weeks
- Travel time from Hebrin to Charity: 6 Jump2, or 12 weeks
- Total travel time, in days, minimum: 1018 days

End date: 169–996, on Charity

Summary
- Straight travel time: Charity to Reshkhuda: 52 weeks
- What if: Travel time from Saeghvung to Reshkhuda, with a caravanserie at hex 2815:
- 9 Jump2, or 18 weeks
- New travel time: Charity to Reshkhuda, with a caravanserie at hex 2815: 40 weeks

Appendix: Starships

```
Ship: Arcagathus       Class: Helper    III          Type: Hospital Ship
Architect: Alvin Plummer                              Tech Level: 13
USP
        H-2621222-030000-20000-0   MCr 109.880 200 Tons
Bat Bear          1      1               Crew: 17
Bat               1      1               TL: 13
Cargo: 5 tons          Passengers: 6     Low: 20
Fuel: 44               EP: 4                       Agility: 1  Pulse
Lasers
Craft:       1 x 2T Air/Raft, 1 x 1T Ground Buggy,
```

```
     1 x 4T Ambulance G-Carrier
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Backups: 2 x Model/2 Computers
Architects Fee: MCr 1.099    Cost in Quantity: MCr 87.904


HULL: 200 tons standard, 2,800 cubic meters
    Flattened Sphere Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Engineer, Steward, Medic, 2 Gunners, 11 Additional Crew (Mission
    specialists, usually medical personnel)
ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 1G Maneuver, Power plant-2, 4 EP, Agility 1
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/2 Computer, 2 Model/2 Backup Computers
HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 1 Single Pulse Laser Turret organized into 1 Battery (Factor-2)
DEFENCES:   1 Single Sandcaster Turret organized into 1 Battery (Factor-3)
CRAFT:      1 2-ton Air/Raft, 1 1-ton Ground Buggy,
    1 4-ton Ambulance G-Carrier
FUEL: 44 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
    On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS:     15 Staterooms, 20 Low Berths,
    2 High Pgnrs, 4 Middle Pgnrs, 20 Low Pgnrs, 5 Tons Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS
    1 Sick Bay (15 tons, Crew 6, 0.050 Energy Point, Cost MCr 0.1)
    1 Medical Lab (5 tons, Crew 2, 0.030 Energy Point, Cost MCr 0.1)
    1 Pharmacy (3 tons, Crew 1, 0.010 Energy Point, Cost MCr 0.03)
    1 Analysis (5 tons, Crew 2, 0.025 Energy Point, Cost MCr 0.2)
COST: MCr 110.979 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 1.099),
    MCr 87.904 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 57 Weeks Singly, 46 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENT: The Sick Bay holds a surgery theatre/trauma center, an intensive
care unit, and a ward of 5 beds.
```

```
Ship: Ensurance Trap    Class: Nightwatch
Type: Corvette                 Architect: Alvin Plummer      Tech Level: 12

USP
    LL-A423322-A00000-30008-0  MCr 1,740.080 1.5 KTons
Bat Bear                    2    1     Crew: 24
Bat                                    2    1     TL: 12          Pulse
Lasers

Cargo: 4 Tons      Fuel: 480 tons     EP: 45 Agility: 2
Shipboard Security Detail: 2
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Backups: 1 x 2G Maneuver Drive, 1 x Jump 2 Drive,
     1 x Factor 2 Power Plant, 3 x Model/2 Computers
Architects Fee: MCr 17.401   Cost in Quantity: MCr 1,392.064


HULL:  1,500 tons standard, 21,000 cubic meters,
    Close Structure Configuration
CREW: 10 Officers, 14 Ratings
ENGINEERING:  Jump-2, 3G Maneuver, Power plant-3, 45 EP, Agility 2
    1xJump-2 Backup, 1x2G Maneuver Backup, 1xPower plant-2 Backup
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/2 Computer, 3 Model/2 Backup Computers
HARDPOINTS: 1 50-ton bay, 5 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 1 50-ton Missile Bay (Factor-8), 5 Triple Pulse Laser Turrets
organized into 2 Batteries (Factor-3)
DEFENCES: Armored Hull (Factor-10)
CRAFT: None
FUEL: 480 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 112 days endurance)
```

```
     On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 17 Staterooms, 4 Tons Cargo
COST:  MCr 1,757.481 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 17.401),
    MCr 1,392.064 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 127 Weeks Singly, 102 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENTS:  The Nightwatch class of starships is designed by the Hegemony
    Naval Board for maximum length of time on-station, operating far from
    reliable support. The ship is heavily armored and with numerous redundant
    systems. Sufficient life support is provided to run the Nightwatch for 112
    days. To save space, no small craft is provided. If using the backup power
    plant and maneuver drive, Agility is reduced to 1.
```

```
Ship: 'Head-cracker'          Class: Turcap          Type: Fighter
Architect: Alvin Plummer      Tech Level: 12


USP
        L-0506A11-100000-03000-0   MCr 32.425 25 Tons
Bat Bear                        1      Crew: 1
Bat                             1          TL: 12


Cargo: 0.25 Fuel: 2.5 EP: 2.5 Agility: 6
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
Backups: 1 x Model/1 Computer


Architects Fee: MCr 0.324   Cost in Quantity: MCr 25.940


HULL: 25 tons standard, 350 cubic meters, Sphere Configuration
CREW: Pilot
ENGINEERING: Jump-0, 6G Manuever, Power plant-10,
    2.500 EP, Agility 6
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/1 Computer, 1 Model/1 Backup Computer
HARDPOINTS: 1 Hardpoint
ARMAMENT: 1 Single Plasma Gun Turret organized into 1 Battery (Factor-3)
DEFENCES: Armored Hull (Factor-1)
CRAFT: None
FUEL: 2.5 Tons Fuel (0 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: Acceleration Couch/Fold-out bed, 0.250 Ton Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 32.749 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 0.324), MCr 25.940 in
    Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 13 Weeks Singly, 11 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENTS: The Turcap is a Plasma-based fighter, in use within the Hegemony of
    Lorean.
```

Images

The starport for Reshkhuda is inspired by "Arrival" by max– :
http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=705511&member

My model for the bizarre light armour used by the Steamboys is illustrated here, as "uzilite 10" by fabriced:
http://market.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1376088&member

The side view, highlighting the ridiculous backpack, as as "uzilite 9" by fabriced:
http://market.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1340681&member

My model for the regular Steamboys uniform is shown here, as "Pre Flight" by 3–DArena:
http://market.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1250097

My model for the 302–year old King Atacales of Reshkhuda is "The Old Kng" by go:

The clones purchased by King Atacales' great–great–grandson are based on "Lonely Dawn" by Pauli: http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1407026&member

Footnotes

[1] Genetically engineered outworlder PCs are treated as upper–class Rommelnen: on this world, having engineered DNA is more important than religion, race, politics, language, caste, character, or site of birth. While most residents and the culture is Solomani, the Vilani locals who have accepted bioengineered children – a big leap, for the Vilani – have found acceptance, success and contentment in the conformist and well–ordered Rommelnen society. Nonhumans face insurmountable restrictions on their freedom of movement and action: they need Imperial Knighthood, Imperial Noble, or Off–world Ambassador status to even gain permission to exit the Imperial starport. No nonhuman has been permitted to leave the startown and see the rest of the Rommel in over 60 years.

[2] As the Iper'marion PCs can sneer at the local 'elite' for their inferior technology, everyone can have their prejudices confirmed and go home happy.

[3] The actual population on Charity is about 100,000 in 993 Imperial, with tightly–regulated temporary labour (mainly Iper'mar technicians, medical professionals and highly–trained support specialists from across the subsector.) Incidentally, aristocratic cultures like the Third Imperium tend towards formality: on Charity, only friends and old acquaintances are addressed by their familiar name.

[4] Referee's option: Charity LIC has a reputation for protecting her crew, indirectly rewarding those who help her people, while making sure that those who interfere with her operations meet sticky ends. If the Referee desires, he may highlight this political fact by having small–time Imperial pirates back off when they learn that this is a Charity–owned starship.

[5] Like many Iper'mar, Mr. Wright strongly believes that the company should restrict operations to Imperial space, for pragmatic and philosophical reasons. A superstitious fear of non–Imperial space is also a factor, but more as a matter of the heart than a specific reason in itself: 'The mind chooses what it wants to believe, and then creates the necessary rationalizations.'

[6] The Kingdom of Reshkhuda has no spaceborne assets available to defend herself. But, she can call upon the Hegemony….

[7] The military base established on Sperany is a temporary structure. As such, it is not noted on Imperial maps, for the same reason why powerful starships are not noted on the star maps.

[8] The Hegemony discourages freelance mercenaries from operating in its' territory, and dos not permit local mercenaries to be mustered. For an interstellar government that remains somewhat authoritarian, there is a remarkably weak unified command structure, consisting of the Oath of Order and Obedience, the Army judiciary (which handles naval issues as well), the military Academies, the Sword Temples, and the Hegemon himself. The largest military bodies are the independently–minded Flotillas/Battalions and the Fleets/Corps: several independent Squadrons/Regiments and Ship/Squad exists as well. A handful of single–environment units, like the Lorean Rangers (see "Downed on Uzula" **Stellar Reaches** #6) and the Azulan Fleet operates as single–environment units: members of these organizations bear normal ranks ("Lieutenant", "Colonel", etc), and are subject to more experimentation and flexibility than the regular Hegemony units.

[9] Certain short–tempered PCs may want to do something about this. As he handles this situation, the Referee should know that the troopers are expected to report once an hour, and are to be eventually relieved in a few hours by the Steamboy squad based in the starport. Failure to do so sets in motion a sequence of events best left to the Referee's imagination.

[10] The bored, tactically–minded PC may want to play 'spot the port buildings' – i.e, where the radio shack, power supply, radar array, portable equipment, starship maintenance men, and Steamboy garrison is based. This is a Staggering Education task for civilians, Formidable for most starfarers, Difficult if the PC has worked for the Imperial Starport Authority.

[11] Following the advise of the high–powered lawyers that make up Charity LIC's legal counsel, the clones were first given a free basic food, housing, medical care, and education – reading, writing, arithmetic, basic science, history, and an appreciation of the good works of Charity LIC. Then, they were given the choice of refusing transport to Reshkhuda (and ten years' indentured service to the Kingdom), and instead be relocated to Arakaad to serve a year's contract as secretarial staff of a notable corporation there (which happens to have friendly relations with Charity LIC). This was done to stay clearly on the right side of Imperial slave trafficking laws.

About ⅓ of any given batch of clones decide to quickly gain their freedom on Arakaad. The remainder are given one to five years education and training before being

delivered to their purchasers… er, employers… to work off their five to fifty–year contracts. Charity LIC creates and trains only high–value labor, and 'Charity's Children' generally live much better than most Emptyheads: but what they don't have is liberty. Even so, most of humaniti prefer safety to freedom, be they clones, geneered, or naturally conceived.

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