

Stellar Reaches

A Fair Use Fanzine for Traveller



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A Samardan Press Publication

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Issue #12, Christmas 2010. Version 9.

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The Stellar Reaches fanzine's website can currently be found at <http://stellarreaches.nwgamers.org>. Please feel free to browse the site for more information, as well as back issues and other downloads as they become available.

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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:

Welcome to the Christmas issue of **Stellar Reaches**!

As is often the case with my writing, the articles tend to be long and complex. The Hegemony, Republic, and Duchy series brings everything up-to-date for the Imperial part of the sector. Two military adventures are outlined here: one has the PCs fighting a resource war on behalf of the Bwaps against the local humans, and the other is a 'soup-to-nuts' space campaign against a notable Vargr pirate base. A final adventure is not tied to a particular place, but a particular situation: an escape of a world whose star is about to go nova!

In detail:

With Hegemony, Republic and Duchy Part III, we conclude our historical survey of the Imperial Empty Quarter, bringing our chronology from the end of the Imperial Civil War to the current date, 993 Imperial. Cultural changes sweep the Six Subsectors, and then surge thru again and again, leaving their mark on the local inhabitants. Important turning points include the appointment of an Vargr Archduke in the neighbouring Domain of Antares, The Long Peace between the Imperium and the Protectorate, renewed hostilities between Hindus and Muslims, the Hebrin Rebellion, and the Panos Settlement.

The upper half of The Empty Quarter sector may be described in future issues, time permitting.

Water War describes a dryworld conflict between a water-rich Bwap settlement, and their human neighbours who have plans for all that Bwap water. Outlines of the military forces are describes, and the Bwap settlement of Apfatwa E-pabeb is described in some detail.

Daybreak is a description of a world facing extinction in the face of an imminent nova – and the PCs who are on the world at the time. This story is not tied to a particular world, but may be put into play wherever and whenever the Referee chooses to do so. The escape and the imminent aftermath of this event the focus of this episode, but further ramifications are in the hands of the Referee. The PCs will have to find a way to get to their ship fast, getting past the panicked masses and the crazy situation at the starport. Once in space, they will have to deal with the increased radiation as the world burns below them. Moreover, this is the 55th century: not all novas are natural, and the Imperium is very interested in what the PCs said and did during the world's final days...

Shutdown is an extensive space adventure, allowing the Players and the Referee to live through the creation, training, and deployment of a powerful starmerc force against an important Vargr pirate base. Referees should keep in mind that the more the PCs make their men sweat in training, the less blood they'll shed in the battlespace. Opportunities for interpersonal/interspecies conflict abound, for the PCs to deal with. A side exercise, involving a daring raid on the world in question, is also provided. Specifications of all the starships involved are provided.

The Forsaken is provided as a tribute to the tough-as-nails Native Americans of the region, as well as to the God that many of them serve.

Reading ahead,
Alvin W. Plummer
Editor, **Stellar Reaches** fanzine

BITS Task System

From pg. 8, BITS Writers' Guidelines June 1999. Copyright ©1999, BITS. All Rights Reserved.

T20 Open Game Content from the article "Extending the Task Resolution System to T20" Copyright 2003, Jason Kemp.

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 $2D + Skill \geq 8$. Maria requires $2D + Forgery \geq 12$ ($8 + 4$ for Staggering difficulty). Alternatively, the GM may prefer to apply the target modifier as a negative modifier on the dice roll, i.e. $2D + 4 - 4 \geq 8$.

MT: Staggering difficulty is equivalent to MT's Formidable (15+), thus the task is $2D + Skill + (Stat / 5) \geq 15$. For Maria this is: $2D + 4 + 2 \geq 15$.

TNE: Staggering difficulty is equivalent to TNE's Impossible, thus the task is $d20 \leq (Skill + Stat) \times \frac{1}{4}$. For Maria this is $d20 \leq 3$, i.e. $(9 + 4) / 4$ rounded down.

T4: Maria requires $4D \leq INT + Forgery$. (Note that T4's Staggering rating of 3.5D is ignored.)

GT: Maria requires $3D \leq Forgery + Target Modifier$, i.e. $3D \leq 16 - 6$.

T20: Maria requires $d20 + 18 \geq 30$. (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.

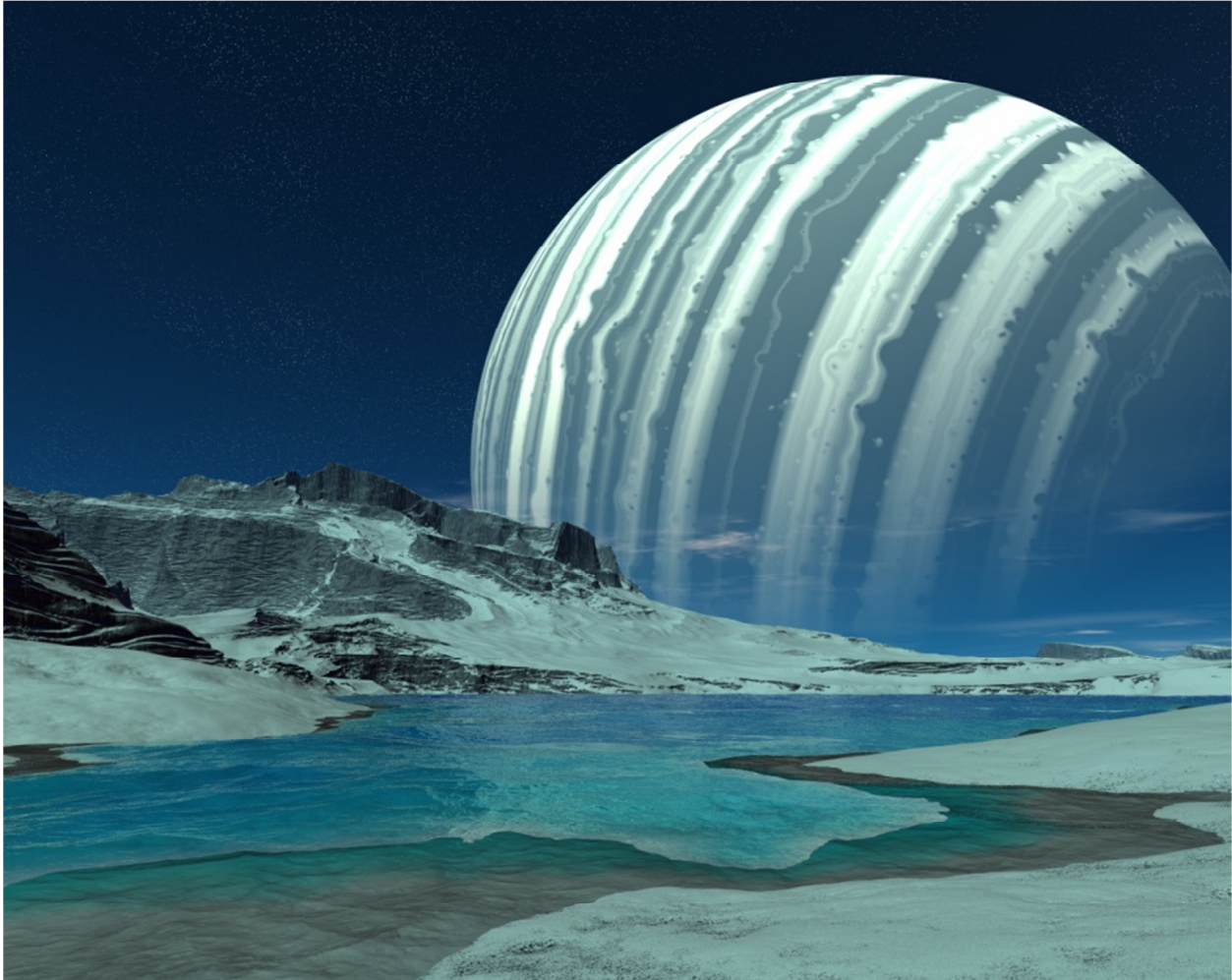
Spectacular Failure: They have become lost.

+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.

Hegemony, Republic, Duchy: Part III

By Alvin W. Plummer



In the frozen wilderness of Rajan in spring, 993 Imperial.

The graphic above is titled "Cold Wine" © pushinfaders

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=562835

Summary

With the conclusion of the Imperial Civil War, peace is again restored to the Six Subsectors. However, the appointment of a nonhuman Archduke causes great controversy among these worlds, who never come to accept the rule of a Vargr. The Solomani Cause grows within these systems, even as it declines in the Imperial Courts. The Julian Protectorate and the Imperium build an enduring peace together, setting aside old disagreements. The renewed strife between Muslims and Hindus finally bring a firm resolution, by the hand

of Prince Panos – but at the cost of billions dead on Hebrin. For a time, various flavours of rationalism & socialist revolutionary parties reshape the heart of the region, even as new immigrants and internal migrants change the face of the Six Subsectors. Today, the decline of old passions permit a chance to build prosperity among these long-downtrodden worlds, even as pirates terrorize peaceful trade. But future troubles are on the horizon: increasing distance between the Nobility and the Citizens is leading to new interstellar authorities, separate from the Noble aegis, while old tribal affiliations surge forward again.

The Vargr Archdukes

The treasonous actions of Archduke Glazdon Deirdin of Antares, and his eventual execution by Admiral Soegz in 622, had only one notable effect on the Imperial Empty Quarter: the shifting of Corsabren from an Imperial Client to a non-aligned system (although she retained her Imperial Navy Base.) However, the Imperial Empty Quarter had never reconciled itself to the raising of Soegz to Archducal status in 628. There is a widespread belief that nonhumans have no place ruling multiple systems, and should not be allowed any Ducal or higher rank. A greater distaste was rooted that the ruler of the wealthy Domain of Antares wasn't just any alien, but a Vargr, the old enemy of much of the region. Moreover, the continued development of Antares Sector, contrasted with the enduring poverty of the Imperial Empty Quarter, strengthens the general feeling of envy and resentment towards the Antarean Vargr Archdukes up to the present day.

A fool may be known by six things:
anger, without cause;
speech, without profit;
change, without progress;
inquiry, without object;
putting trust in a stranger,
and mistaking foes for friends.
Arabian Proverb

Attempts by the Vargr Archdukes to smooth relations with their poorer Imperial cousins are resented, and strongly rebuffed. Rumours that Archduke Soegz was interested in incorporating the Empty Quarter into his domain was met with widespread riots across the sector: many notable personalities – especially among the Arabs – made it clear that such an act would invite a large-scale rebellion. Empress Arbellatra, working to bring healing and peace to the bruised and war-weary Imperium, made it clear that the Domain of Antares would not be expanded in 631: this position has been maintained ever since, and will likely continue to be maintained so long as local nobility continues to reject the feelers sent out from the Archducal court. These overtures grow rarer over time: it has become obvious that incorporating the Six Subsectors into the Domain of Antares would be a net drain on Antarean wealth and energy, for no return.

Since the end of the Imperial Civil War in 622, the Alkhalikoi Dynasty has pursued a policy of stability over expanding the Imperial borders. As this policy became established, relations between the Imperium and the members of the Protectorate shifted from a cold peace/cold war cycle to today's more cordial relationship. The Vargr Archdukes have been a major force behind the warming of relations, gaining the approval and respect of the Emperors and their advisors.

A major milestone of the warming relationship between the Julian Protectorate and the Third Imperium was the downgrading of the Imperial Naval Depot at Lazisar to a (rather large) Imperial Naval Base in 741, with much of the unused space now retasked as a civilian habitat. Solariopolis is a major trading centre, and a notable outpost of Imperial Cure culture in a region far from the Imperial mainstream.

Humanist Politics and the Solomani Party

The Solomani Party as an organization was never particularly popular within the Imperial Empty Quarter: familial, clan, religious, cultural and planetary allegiances greatly overshadow...

...an authoritarian, secretive organization, accountable only to distant strangers 200 parsecs away who believe that the empty quarter is a mathematical rule involving fractions.

- Political pundit 'Ristal', speaking on the Solomani party, 744 Imperial

In the centuries when the Party had real influence in the Imperial Court, Party membership was considered just another ticket to punch on the way to the top – or, at least, on your way out of the loser bin most considered the Imperial Empty Quarter to be. When the Imperial Court turned against the Party in the latter half of the 7th Imperial century, the few Gushgusi Nobles involved sloughed off party membership like a snake shedding his skin. Among commoners and planetary governments, the Party organization always seemed to be faintly ridiculous: when the Imperial government turned decisively against it, the limited public support the Party collapsed into nothingness.



The Imperial delegation arriving over Ikon, to negotiate with Julian diplomats. 790 Imperial
The graphic above is titled "International Space Station 8" © Max V. Nimos.
See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=831632

However, while the Solomani Party never amounted to much, the Solomani Cause is held in higher esteem across the Imperial Empty Quarter. The solid majority of local Solomani (and Solomani-culture) humaniti do see Terra as a uniquely blessed and sacred world. Pure-blooded Solomani are unusually common here, supported by the Arab preference for first-cousin marriages and contempt for population control measures. Those that are pure Solomani are seen to be 'extra lucky', 'bear the favour of Allah', or 'have unique connections to the world of the spirit' - a significant percentage of the Six Subsector's population, Muslim & Hindu alike, sees them as the only True Humans in existence. Mixed Imperial humans emphasise their Solomani heritage to the exclusion of other ancestors: there are 'Mixed Vilani', but no 'Mixed Solomani', only Solomani. And the Party claim that it the Solomani have a manifest destiny to rule the galaxy gives a narcissistic boost to local Solomani & pro-Solomani men, who like most sophonts enjoy self-serving ideologies.

"I will never understand Solomani tribalism."
"*I* don't understand Solomani tribalism!"
Imperial Scouts Luu Ushaashun
(pureblood Vilani)
and Luz Carusina (pureblood Solomani),
696 Imperial

Strife Across the Six Subsectors

The period between the end of the Imperial Civil War and the Psionic Suppressions was dominated by the slow decline of the Stellar Sheiks and Bengali Lions. Long used to using corporate power to family advantage, their weakened state after the Civil War led more and more Nobles becoming the pawns of local business interests, as they fought to deflect and negate the growth of interstellar & megacorporate customers and revenue within The Empty Quarter.

Cutting off your nose to spite your face?
Standard operating procedure in the Quarter!
An exasperated Marquis Frank of Ispumer
(The Remnants/Dagudashaag),
CEO of General Products, LLC,
in mid-rant before the Sector Court
Nulinad, 769 Imperial

With a few localized exceptions – Zukhisa's relationship with General Products being the most notable – parochial business interests were successful in protecting their markets, at the cost of cutting the Imperial Empty Quarter off from megacorporate investment and funding. This had a direct impact on the (lack of) development within Imperial Gushgusi space.



The destruction of Chandur, the renowned Hindu centre of psionic study and culture in the Empty Quarter. Irash, 811 Imperial.

The graphic is titled "Taipei ruins" © Jenovah-Art. See his work at <http://browse.deviantart.com/?qh=§ion=&q=Taipei+Ruins#/d31t180>

The Psionic Suppressions of 800 – 826 was aggressively supported by the Arab-influenced cultures of the Imperial Empty Quarter, seen as beneficial by the Vilani systems, and viewed with mild distaste by the American Indians. The large East Indian-derived communities strongly resist the suppressions, but prove no match against Imperial force, once unleashed. Several massacres occurred, with the largest – the violent Imperial suppression of the 822 Imperial worldwide riots and subsequent insurrection, provoked by the closing of the Psionic Institute on Irash - involving 24.2 million dead.

During the early-to-mid 800s, the Stellar Sheiks nobles use the Psionics issue to tar the Bengali Lions, undermining their position within The Empty Quarter. East Indian resistance was generally ineffective, and appeals blocked by the Sheik-dominated Courts. However, Bwap leadership made an appeal to the Empress, not thru the noble hierarchy, but via the Imperial Scouts. Their appeal – enthusiastically backed local East Indian and American Indian cultures, and supported by the Vilani and Lazisari – were heard by Empress Tomutova II in 868.

In 308-868, she declared from the Iridium Throne that Prince Panos will investigate and decide the matter personally. A special Imperial Warrant was issued, to grant the Prince the necessary authority to enforce his ruling. Prince Panos chose to temporary relocate his retinue to Nulinad – along with two subsector fleets, a regiment of Imperial Marines, and three divisions of Imperial Army troops, including the Household Calvary.

This looks bad. Very, very bad.

SubCommander Metrina-Cubed, Imperial Navy half-blinded by the jump-flashes of Prince Panos' escorting warships as His Imperial Highness entered Nulinad system, 265-869 Imperial

After arriving, he proclaimed the ruling of the Empress on 284-869. Both the Sheiks and the Lions were declared 'essentially corrupt', and all noble houses and senior Imperial government officials attached to these factions were to report before Prince Panos to verify their fitness to rule. Refusal to do so automatically forfeited their Noble title and Imperial authority. Any challenge to Imperial Authority whatsoever would be met with lethal force. Compliance with the Imperial Will will be rewarded with leniency.

Naturally, it didn't take long for the first attempt on the Prince's life to occur, on 115-870. In compliance with local traditions, the attack on the Prince's life was

rewarded with an extremely harsh response, with the Prince promising a rapid and ferocious escalation of reprisals for every such incident.

The Hebrin Rebellion

Resistance to the Imperial Will did not end with this incident. Rumours that the Prince would eject all Sunni Moslems from the Sector Military sparked a mutiny within the 161st fleet, based in Hebrin Subsector. Imperial denials of the rumours were taken as confirmation of their essential truth, and the Hebrin Subsector Duke raised the banner of rebellion on 112-871, declaring the rebirth of the Caliphate of Hebrin.

Good intentions will always be pleaded for any assumption of power.

United States Senator Daniel Webster
-2739 to -2669 Imperial

It was going to be a short life for the Caliphate. Because of the small number of systems within Hebrin Subsector, the local subsector fleet was only ¼ of a standard Imperial Numbered Fleet. The other Dukes of the subsector pleaded with the erstwhile Caliph to end his hopeless rebellion and throw himself at the mercy of Prince Panos, but this he would not do. He has had enough of the humiliations against his people, culture, and religion, and this day he would stand like a man, fight like a man, and die like a man if need be.

The 306th fleet (Gimushi) moved first. Some elements were sent to reinforce Yogesh Subsector and the weak 86th fleet based there, but the majority of the force was used to stifle raiding on the Hebrin Main by the 161st fleet. The 309th fleet (Core Subsector), part of Prince Panos' escorting fleet, was split in two: one half drove the 161st from the Rajan branch of the Hebrin Main. The other half entered Neelamani system to take the naval base from hostile forces, but the squadrons of the 161st quickly surrendered, declaring their loyalty to the Imperium. A few elements of the 309th was left behind to keep an eye on them while the rest moved quickly to secure the Mugama branch of the Hebrin Main for the Imperium.

The other half of Prince Panos' escort, the 312th (Core Subsector) struck at Hebrin herself. The major elements of the 161st – her single Battle Squadron and three Cruiser Squadrons – were destroyed in the Battle of Hebrin (156-871), but the 312th did not move on to attack the world herself. The Task Force commanders preferred a blockade of the world, insuring that ice ships could not deposit the water Hebrin's billions needed to survive.

The siege lasted for 24 days. By the end of the second week, large swaths of Hebrin was in open rebellion of the Caliphate as the death toll started to rise swiftly to the millions, then hundreds of millions a day. The Bwaps, with their vast stores of water, suffered the most as their residences were attacked by huge mobs. Murderous thongs were killing people for their blood. Tribes that had lived on the world since their settlement were hauling the away the dead to be dehydrated and drained for their water content. The wealthy hid in heavily guarded closed-cycle environments, capturing their sweat and waste water, purifying it, and reusing it over and over again.

Before all else, be armed.

Niccolo Machiavelli, -3052 to -2994 Imperial

Finally, on 180-871, the siege came to an end as a young nephew of the Caliph held up his uncle's head in the air, proclaiming his loyalty to the Imperium, and the end of anti-Imperial resistance. By this time, only 2 billion of the original 14 billion of the population still remained alive: another 600 million would die over the next few days as the water transportation network was once again primed and restarted.

Thanks to the actions of the nephew, the ancient Temiz dynasty was permitted to retain their Ducal seat, but the government of the world was taken from them and entrusted in a Vilani-style bureaux framework. The

wealth of the system fell drastically, from TL 12 to TL 8 by 900. Finally, the demographic composition changed drastically as millions from populous worlds such as Mugama, Irash, and Lazisar moved to the hollowed-out world. Most notable was the millions who immigrated from the asteroid settlements of Eninsish, fourteen parsecs away. These former space dwellers took advantage of their liberty from family size restrictions to rapidly make up a significant fraction of the population, and their pro-Vilani leanings let to the formation of the current bureaux system government.

In his final address to the Sector Court before leaving for Capital (104-872), Prince Panos acknowledged the Freedom of Conscience, but underlined the role of religion in fuelling local interstellar conflicts, especially regarding Hindu/Islam and human/nonhuman hostilities. The Prince also insisted that the need for Imperial Unity superseded any religious or racial considerations. His smooth and urbane contempt for local religious, racial, and cultural/tribal considerations still sparks local anger decades later – an anger mocked as 'Emptyheaded rage' by the sophisticated and wealthy Core Imperials of the era.

This is defeat. Avoid it.

Captain Adios Ateso to Prince Panos,
While surveying the deathly silent city
of Osar Gamasa, 187-871 Imperial



The silent aftermath of the Hebrin Rebellion, 871 Imperial.

The graphic is titled "The Sleepy City" ©Philippe Bullot. See his work at <http://www.darthmagus.com/wallpapers/TheSleepyCity-3.jpg>

The Panos Settlement

After the cleanup of the local Nobility and senior bureaucracy, Prince Panos laid down guidelines, restrictions and quotas regarding Imperial personnel in The Empty Quarter in 873. Referred to as 'the Panos Settlement', most of these restrictions expired over the next 40 years – after reshaping the nobility and the government of the Imperial Empty Quarter. The limits on Ducal eligibility are permanent, subject to revision only by Prince Panos, his heirs, or the Emperor himself.

[N.B. Prince Panos currently has 34 living descendants as of 993 Imperial, and make up a cadet line of the Alkhalikoi Dynasty.]

The most important of the temporary guidelines – which has aftereffects that last 'til today (993 Imperial) - was tying the ethnicity of a ruling noble to their world, 'unless special circumstances dictate otherwise.' The most important permanent restrictions involved candidacy for the subsector ducal thrones, as follows:

- Lentuli: only Bwap nobles may rule this duchy
- Nulinad: only Vilani/Mixed Vilani nobles may rule this duchy
- Yogesh: alternates between Bwap & Vilani/Mixed Vilani noble houses
- Gimushi: only nobles of the various human races native to Lazisar. No pure-blooded Vilani or Solomani may ever rule this duchy
- Hebrin: only Solomani Arab nobles may rule this duchy
- Udusis: only Solomani East Indian nobles may rule this duchy

Moreover, no Stellar Sheik or Bengali Lion could be a Subsector or a Sector Duke.

Will this motley, random collection of thugs, fanatics, racists, ignoramuses, pig-headed chauvinists, thieves, pirates, and nit-picking bureaucrats ever get the message?!?

Prince Panos to Major Mazun Lishenii,
Imperial Household Calvary,
Nulinad system, 872 Imperial

As he successfully rammed through his reforms, Prince Panos entrenched the ethnic divisions of the Imperial Empty Quarter: but by establishing clear and enforced requirements among the subsector duchies, he restricted the range and scope of possible conflicts among these cultures. Moreover, his aggressive and consistent secularization of the Imperial Nobility and bureaucracy has made the Imperium generally

respected as a 'neutral referee' in intercultural and interplanetary disputes (when it is not despised as an alien elite, valuing money & power far more than the claims of morality & tradition.) In the century since Panos returned to Capital in 877, his Settlement has become a fixed feature of Ducal Nobility within the sector. The secularization of the Nobility has weakened somewhat over the last few decades: however, the more religious Muslims and Hindu nobles have avoided attracting further Imperial attention, restricting their conflicts to the legal and economic sphere of various worlds. Moreover, a solid majority of Gushgusi nobility remain secularists, if to a lesser degree than previously.

A counterpoint to the broadly successful Panos Settlement was the Prince Panos Education Initiative. The Prince wanted to funnel the best and the brightest of the sector into a chain of Princely universities and academies, to properly indoctrinate them in the need for Imperial Unity and mould their thinking into a suitably 'impersonal, scientific, objective basis', free of the delusions of local superstitions and religious doctrines. While the schools got off to a strong start in 873, by the early 900s they had become caricatures of themselves: fiercely doctrinate; contemptuous of students, parents, and business leaders; and their professors only interested in intellectual posturing on obscure topics in unreadable academic prose.

Their existence was subsidised by Imperial Civil Service requirements for 'a degree from a recognized university' until an embarrassing series of scandals in the mid-920s revealed 1) the incompetence of their graduates, compared to graduates from local non-Imperial institutions like Administrative Academy of Kasawa, and 2) the enormous financial waste and corruption of these institutions, from incompetent professors who can't be dismissed to endless construction projects for non-existent students. Alkhalikoi corporate interests – who were footing the bill for this fiasco – placed enormous pressure on the Imperial Throne until Empress Margaret II finally revoked the charters of the Princely universities in 930, and instructed the Imperial Civil Service not to hire their substandard graduates. The universities quickly collapsed: the status of higher learning in the Imperial Empty Quarter has not recovered to this day (993 Imperial).

The New Atheism and Immigrants

With the widespread shift in the zeitgeist from Hindu/Muslim religious conflict to secular/statist political unity came a wave of atheistic movements and initiatives. The very first notable occurrence was the True Work utopian movement. A primarily Mixed Vilani group from Antares Sector, they felt that unchanging utopia of the Vilani imagination would never be achieved after death, no matter how deeply you revered the ancestors or followed the ancient rituals: it had to be made in this life, if it was to arrive at all. A very organized and industrious group largely restricted to the then-great world of Juba, they obtained the rights to Rasu – abandoned during the Civil War – and settled en mass in 828. Over a million people, largely in low berths, simultaneously arrived in orbit, got thawed out, and shuttled down to pre-fabricated residences in the largest one-time colonization in the history of The Empty Quarter. Over the next two centuries, their population grew quickly on the world, even as their moral strictures grew more demanding and comprehensive. They also had mean-spirited pleasure of seeing the home they rejected decline in importance.

Another notable ideology was the The Way of the Will. Later shortened to just The Will, this form of atheistic mysticism insists that the fabric of reality is shaped by the conscious decisions of men (later expanded to all sophonts). It was founded in the 720s by Dr. Cuyocraju Viconga – a scientist working on the odd Antarean world of Am. The Will never became more than a minor cult in Antares Sector, but during the early 800s, The Will's leading professors, teachers and counsellors taught their doctrines within Nulinad and Gimushi subsectors. Here, it garnered a respectable following among scholars, technocrats (including much of the Imperial civil service), Travellers, and media professionals.

It had also gained a following among psions, who were strongly attracted to both the doctrine and the mysticism of the now full-fledged religion. However, psionic activities were greatly restricted, and psions themselves lobotomized or killed during the PsionicSuppressions, then coming into full swing. While The Will officially withdrew from psionic activities, it secretly hid and sheltered psionic members. By the 820s, a sophisticated network provided transportation, alternate identities, safehouses, training centres, and general support for psions of The Will, eventually coalescing into The United Will, a highly secret order of religiously committed psions.

A man is never so innocently employed as when he is making money.

Adam Smith, -2798 to -2731 Imperial

A third group of transplants, the Iper'mar, were not so committed to atheism as such. The beliefs of these technologically sophisticated nomads from Lambert/Becker/Fornast 0540 are more closely related to 'go with the flow' agnostics, who'll simply worship and believe as the locals do – so far as it doesn't interfere with business. The average Imper'marion governs business and life with the Old Law - a highly successful union of classical Vilani Trade Law and the 'Words of Hargin', a Long Night Lambertan philosopher. While the 'Tech Tyrants' are resented, they have boosted local trade and technology.

Lambert is not far from The Empty Quarter, so there has always been a small Lambertan presence in the sector. It is difficult to sharply divide the transition from 'traders from Lambert' to 'Iper'mar Nomads', but by the 830s it was clear that such a shift had taken place. By the 990s, they had spread to Fornast and Ley sectors, with a branch established in the unimaginably distant Spinward Marches, clear across the other side of the Imperium. While tied to no world, they are stout Imperial patriots: they appreciate the consistency of Imperial justice (and the predictable forms of Imperial corruption), and understand the importance of a more-or-less unified interstellar society for peaceful traders. Moreover, Iper'mar attempts to expand outside the boundaries of Imperial Space have had dismal results.

One group of immigrants of the period were quite devout, even self-sacrificing. Various religious charities from the Imperial Core, responding to the need to succour the poor and the sickly in the ever-depressing Empty Quarter, established a major medical centre on Charity in 806 Imperial. While the charitable work they did was extraordinary – even heroic – the funds surge soon levelled off after the initial enthusiasm faded away. By the 880s, even the consistent givers were shifting their attention to new causes, and the religious institutions had difficulty making ends meet even as demand for their services continued to increase.

Abadani

Within the Quarter, the strongest manifestation of secular politics as religion was with the Abadani party (Hindi: 'Prosperity'.) Arising first on Indara in the mid-890s, this utopian ideology focused on the concept of the Common Purse, the extermination of the wealthy Elites and corrupt Nobility, and the redistribution of their wealth under the wise guidance of the Fathers of Prosperity. Despite vigorous suppression by local nobles at the turn of the century onwards, the Abadani increased their support in both the general population and intellectuals.

Imperial propaganda to the contrary, they were never affiliated with the Solomani Party – the Abadani saw them as mere fronts for senior Solomani nobility and corporate interests, and intrinsically incapable of creating Prosperity For All. However, the Abadani were unofficially humanist, and pure- and near-pure-blooded East Indian Solomani dominated the better positions within the various Abadani organizations. Following the intellectual trends of the time, they were also anti-clerical, and contemptuous of supernatural religions. Naturalistic & materialistic religions were tolerated, if they didn't challenge Prosperity and Party Unity.

"Our country is a peace-loving democracy...."

"Of course it is!"

Major Motoko makes her entrance,

Ghost in the Shell (1995)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhIVqkSvORU>

Between the 920s and 950s, various Abadani and Abadani-influenced parties rose to power within the Sashar-Pamushgar Cluster, with a commensurate rise in law levels, decline in population, and stagnation in technology. Several attempts to create an Abadani interstellar shadow government failed, due to resistance from non-Abadani systems as well as

aggressive action by the Nobility, the Diplomatic Corps, and – when push came to shove – the Imperial Marines.

One Party! One People! One Purse!

Marching Abadabi slogan, 920s Imperial

Over the last four decades, the attractiveness of Abadanism has fallen significantly. The ideology was not rejected due to trivialities such as bloodshed, oppression, or corruption: the problem was that, long term, Abadani consistently failed to deliver the goods. The reaction against Abadanism has powered:

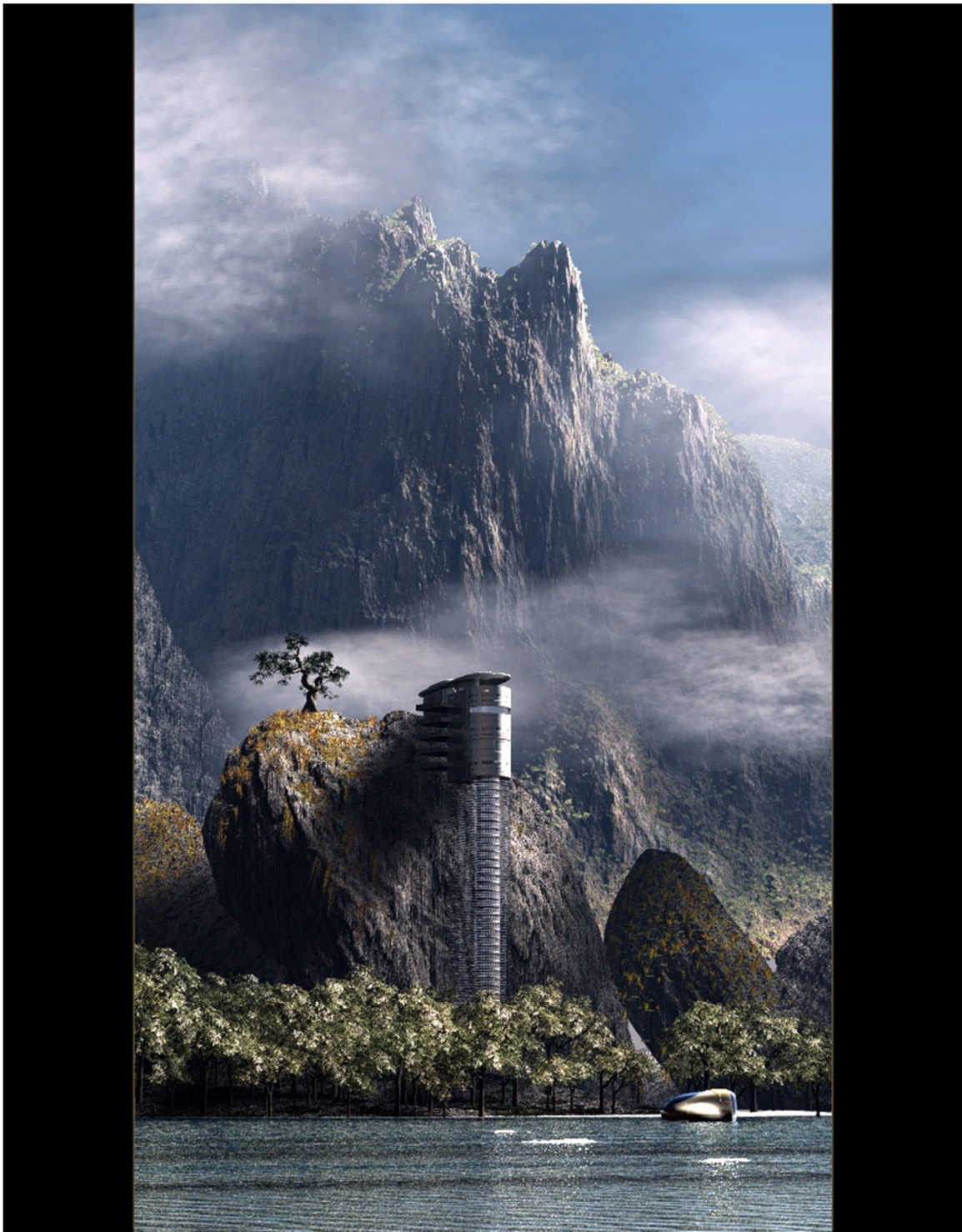
The reaction against Abadanism has powered:

- a strong rise in the prestige of local Nobility
- a general loathing of populism and democracy (outside of the Sashar-Pamushgar Cluster, the heartland of Abadani ideology)
- a sharp decrease in planetary law levels across The Empty Quarter (compared to most of Chartered Space)
- and a widespread if shallow recovery in the prestige of Islamic imans, Hindu priests, and the occasional Native American shaman within the Imperial Empty Quarter.

By the early 980s, the most dreaded arm of Abadani power, the covert PANs (Political Action Networks), had morphed into criminal organizations that use the ideology as cover more than anything else. The HRF (Hebrin Revolutionary Front), noted in **Stellar Reaches #4**, can be seen as an example of this. Other after-effects include an increase in the number of democracies & crypto-democracies, and the widespread use of the Smiling Man – the old Abadani symbol – across the Empty Quarter.

One cannot accomplish anything without fanaticism.

Eva Perón, -2602 to -2561 Imperial



The Golden Chandigarh Resort, on Akiar. A secluded getaway spot, it was often patronised by Abadani leaders in the early 900s: as such, it was kept under surveillance by various Imperial agencies.

The graphic is titled "Joshua Outpost" © Chipp Walters. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1247978



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Onboard the *Boogiepop*, the youngest human pirate band in the Quarter, the Red Stripes - led by the boy genius Salil Jayappa - looks for their next victim in their life of crime. Even guided by the Shadow Cartel's advisor/mentor, Avalanche, their life is filled with danger and risks. Askaath system, 993 Imperial.

This graphic is titled "Space Pirates" © Renan Motta Lima. See his portfolio at <http://renancretino.cgsociety.org/gallery/>

Today's Empty Quarter

Compared to earlier eras, internal strife within The Empty Quarter is at a low ebb. The sporadic, religiously and racially-fuelled conventional conflicts of the past have been replaced with hostilities based on trade and monetary gain, coupled with a shift to covert operations, psychological warfare and political manoeuvring. Relations with the Julian Protectorate are so placid that even an assassination of the Archduke of Antares, while on tour in the Protectorate, caused little more than the slaughter of the over-ambitious Vargr band behind the attack. One of more surprising outcomes of the Machiavellian power-plays has led to the recent rise of a Bwap Sector Duke, something unimaginable a mere generation ago.

The only fly in the ointment of the sector's Pax Imperia is the unplanned-for rise in interstellar piracy and criminal activity, which is directly linked to the withdrawal of the Imperial Sector Fleet to the Old Expanses front of the Solomani Rim War. The Shadow Cartel is the major, yet still mysterious force behind the increase in both the scope and sophistication of illegal interstellar activity within the Six Subsectors, and is

known to operate within the Protectorate as well. Anti-Vargr attitudes have been stroked with recent pirate raids – often organized and funded from the Vilanized culture of the Rukadukaz, crewed by bloody-minded Blood Vargr from the lawless Ssilnthis Zone, and slipped into Imperial Space via hidden fuel depots, some deep within the Lesser Rift, but others within an AU (Astronomical Unit) of the official fuel depots along the Saeghvung-Turley-Exile Run – the better to strike at unwary merchantmen at a strategic chokepoint.

The Imperium is still generally respected, and most support for the Imperium in her war against the Solomani Confederation. The solid majority of the population are pro-Solomani in racial and cultural matters, but this does not extend to sympathy for the enemies of the Emperor: as an analogy, consider that most British, American, and Soviet soldiers – both officers and men – of World War II believed in white superiority, but this did not weaken their hostility to the Nazi armies of the era. Despite widespread – if shallow – loyalty to the Iridium Throne, there is still much dissatisfaction and unhappiness of their lowly place in the eyes of the Imperial elite. Moreover, the

endemic poverty of the region continues to make interstellar trade and commerce a mere shadow of

other Imperial border regions (like the Spinward Marches or Delphi), never mind the Imperial Core.



An Imperial Noblewoman surveys her estate. Her mount, a Cisint, is one of several breeds of biped reptilianoids bred across The Empty Quarter. Within the Six Subectors, the riding animals are referred to collectively as 'ghova', while the meat animals are referred to as 'aharahna'.

The graphic is titled "Desert Patrol" © Christopher Gerber.

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=412427

Little Guys Come First

After the Panos Settlement, the political presence of the Stellar Sheiks refocused on Hebrin subsector – and especially on Hebrin herself. When the elderly Count Chatura Zinta of Irash died without issue in 869, the Lions disintegrated as a unified force, as there was no longer an expanding enemy to be feared and resisted. The Bwaps replaced the Arabs in much of the sector bureaucracy, joined by Amerindians and qualified sophonts drawn from Antares Sector.

Since the return of Prince Panos to Capital, the major Noble concerns have been economic. Policy differences among the nobility today reflect the perceived interests of their demesne – the basis of their wealth and power.

In order of their power within the Sector Court:

- Hebrin, an enormously influential world, strongly supports the status-quo in most affairs, but tend to lobby for an increased role

for Islamic norms, restrictions on Bwap power at the interstellar level, and less interference in local affairs by Imperial authorities. A current of anti-Indian, anti-alien feeling tends to run thru their proposals and actions.

- This world – and indeed, nobility from much of Hebrin subsector – are the most consistent opponents to Sector Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa – whose name they informally shorten to as 'Duke Death', a gross violation of Bwap protocol.
- Lazisar, Nulinad and Gudina usually place the will of the Iridium Throne over all lesser concerns, lobbying for stricter obedience to the Emperor's commands and goals. They also lobby hard for a stronger Imperial military establishment, and tend to view the Vargr

with intense hostility – but place a high value on Bwap counsel.

- The current Sector Duke owes his position to the intervention of Nobles from these systems.
- The Bwap worlds, led by Marhaban and Wesaswek, prefer a tightly ordered and predictable economy, and often lobby for a stronger and more unified interstellar government and more powerful and extensive bureaucratic controls.
 - Bwap nobility are, naturally, the strongest supporters of Duke Dethwab-takebwebwakawa. Before his rise to the Sector throne, many Bwap worlds were under Duke Dethwabtakebwebwakawa's authority as the Duke of Lentuli.
- Gimushi and Sashar sticks fairly close to encouraging traditional Vilani principles when it comes to Imperial affairs: unity, conformity, and stability are their mantra. However, the Vilani need for prosperity and corporate authority is generally downplayed in favour for local (read: Vilani) mores. They often side with the Bwaps in administrative debates.
 - Vilani Nobles are generally 'soft-core' supporters of the Sector Duke. Despite their long alliance with the Bwaps, they are still unhappy at the Duke's elevated status, seeing it as a deeply untraditional, even revolutionary, choice with all sorts of unknown ramifications.
- Pamushgar, Eninsish, and Zukhisa are solidly pro-corporate, pro-industrial systems. They consistently push for greater trade and corporate influence in subsector and sector affairs. However, they also tend to work against business interests outside of their unofficial cartel of worlds.
 - Unlike their brothers elsewhere, these strongly corporate Vilani Noble Houses don't care very much about the Duke's racial heritage, but they care deeply about how his policies affect established (mega)corporate interests.
- Ushmigad, Niketan, Rasu, Yogesh, and Turley are all rapidly developing worlds with an outsized presence in local interstellar affairs: their nobility prefer strongly pro-development, pro-free market, pro-planetary independence policies.
 - These worlds are generally ruled by entrepreneurial 'Young Houses', typically Solomani and heretical Vilani (in Ushmigad's case). They share a distaste for Bwap rule, both for public reasons ("Lords of evil bureaucratic regulations, strangling free enterprise, the lifeblood of the Imperium!") and private reasons ("Slimy amphibian towelheads, running the lives of free men!")
- Kenrasda, Arakaad, and Udusis' nobility rarely intervene in Imperial politics, except to make sure that their systems are left alone.
 - Nobles from these worlds view the new Bwap Sector Duke with great hostility, as they resent both the imposition and increased enforcement of Imperial rules and regs, and the incorruptibility of the new Sector Duke – and thus, the inability of money to provide an escape valve from nitpicking supervision of their actions.
- Mikik's Baronial title has only rarely been active in the history of the Imperium. As of 993, it has been unclaimed for over 700 years.
 - The last Baron Mikik, a Glasicom executive, died with his men trying to defend Glasicom's new private starport from a tank assault in 248. Glasicom gave up their development license and noble claim on Mikik the following year.

The local economy of the Imperial Empty Quarter has been slowly growing since the early 700s. Most of the real economic growth in the sector is on worlds like Niketan and Gobi: smaller, Solomani-dominated systems with more agile governments, able to capitalize quickly on fleeting opportunities. These few worlds have come out early from poverty, and are developing nicely. Most common than these success stories are the numerous worlds that recovered to their original tech level (say, TL 11), but then failed to surpass their old high-water marks.

You aspire to great things? Begin with little ones.
Saint Augustine, -4125 to -4091

Interestingly, the 'new Bwap worlds', settled only since the end of the Imperial Civil War, can also be placed in this category. Consider the widespread objection to the Imperial gift of Woswaab (formally the uninhabited

world of Sabtah) to the Bwaps in 690 – as a way of thanking them for keeping the Imperial bureaucracy running during the Civil War. This gift still inspires resentment among the Arab population of the sector, three centuries later. In contrast, the handover of

Ebwathwa (formally the lightly inhabited world of Kazipet) to the Bwaps does not inspire the same level of hatred, as humanity had little attachment to the world. In both cases, the technology levels are clearly on the low side for a Bwap world.



A visitor of SkyOrb, the Imperial Starport of Akiar, 993 Imperial.

The graphic is titled “Cloud Cities II – Arrival” © Alexander Kröner. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=311455

“Here’s a tidbit: there are more branches of the Flat Earth Society in The Empty Quarter per capita than anywhere else in the Imperium.”

“Better them than some visionary with a master plan!”

“Well, yes, but you do get tired of people who swear that jump technology is some kind of nefarious conspiracy created by the Jesuits.”

“Oh, they’re not so bad. I kinda like the locals. After all, life would be so much *duller* without the Emptyheads. If everyone was a sensible little Vilani Corporate Ritualist, what would a Scout do?”

Kobo Abe and Kimball Kinnison,
Imperial Scouts,
Relaxing on Ababat/Empty Quarter, 733 Imp.

As the Arabic, East Indian, and Vilani cultures turn away from dreams of sector-wide dominance, the American Indians, long suppressed and ignored, are now carving out their own niche in Gushgusi society. Their first great success story was as mercenaries during the dynastic conflicts and the pirate surges of the Imperial Civil War: while still the leaders in that field, several of the larger tribes are intermediaries, investigators, scouts, and diplomats of all sorts. Blocked from specializing in technology by the Iper’mar nomads, the Amerindians are instead branching out into the civilian side of the Imperial Civil Service. The American Indians insist that their culture, religions (both tribal animism and Reformed Christianity – an unusual mix, to be sure), and history make them uniquely able to comprehend local controversies without having to choose sides, giving them the ability to render an

impartial judgement beneficial to all and strengthening Imperial unity across the board.

Their most recent notable achievement was in gaining control of additional systems for their own exclusive use. Aleshanee has been an Amerindian system since the early days of the Third Imperium, but despite her prestige as a noble academy, can only maintain a small population. Chimalis and Enola are long-settled independent systems, deep within the Rift: the land area has been split between Native American settlers and the Blood Vargr for centuries. Their cultures are similar in many ways, yet different: Chimalis was settled by a mix of Amerindian and Vargr exiles from Hebrin, while Enola was a combination research expedition/colonization venture, established during the early days of the Third Imperium. However, both systems are outside of the Third Imperium.

Since the 950's, however, the Amerindian minority on several high-population worlds have grown more assertive, and there is widespread interest in obtaining a pleasant Imperial world with a breathable atmosphere as an 'American Indian homeland.' However, this is proving to be very difficult, as all the local worlds have been taken, and won't be given up easily. Certain megacorporations have entered into negotiations with the more powerful tribes: they are willing and able to terraform a suitable world or two at an affordable price, in return for certain economic concessions...

When I get old, I don't want people to say how sweet I am. I want them to say, "Look out, she may be armed."
Native American Adage,
Imperial Empty Quarter



An Amerindian explorer scans the horizon from ancient ruins. The world of Coorg is part of a double world system: her partner, Niketan, can be seen in the sky. Niketan system, 956 Imperial
The graphic is titled "Distant Shores III" © Christopher Gerber. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=398649

Two 'split ownership' worlds are worthy of note. The rights to settle and govern Anata are rented from the planet's owners, an old Vilani-Iranian family now

residing in Antares Sector. The major Amerindian families also have a large minority share in Niketan: two East Indian families are major shareowners of the

world's shipbuilding business. The right to own or rent additional worlds are being hammered out between newly rich Native Americans and old-line Vilani, East Indian, and Arabic noble lines and corporate owners: deals regarding Prakesh and Sakari are the major focus of discussion.

Another surprising beneficiary of the modest recovery was the Surogotans: their talent as surgeons was discovered only in the early 800s. As the renown of their medical skill grew, so did their wealth and their political voice in the courts of the local nobility. (Being Chief Surgeons to several of the more powerful Nobles doesn't hurt, either.)

The medical institutions on Charity also underwent a major change, as the Iper'mar – under the leadership of Baroness Mai – purchased the infrastructure on Charity (and the world itself) in 955. The Baroness, as CEO of the newly-created Charity LIC, provided the financing to refurbish the decaying medical centres. Crucially, she reoriented the local medical institutions to serve the needs of the wealthy and the powerful, quickly established a sustainable flow of profits. A

declining institution made a strong turnaround, and the Baroness herself became 'The Fatima', a near-sacred figure in the eyes of the planet's inhabitants – and an expanding circle of grateful members of the interstellar elite, as well.

A New Duke

With the formal recognition of Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa of Lentuli as Sector Duke in Holiday-991, the Imperial Empty Quarter is being led by a nonhuman for the first time. Most political observers believe that this is a temporary state of affairs. Firstly, the Sector Duchy has been a 'Rank Noble' position for centuries (instead of being an inherited position): generally, the Emperor has 'parachuted' Nobles into the position either on their way up (so they can learn the ropes) or on their way down (so they can save face.)

Send him to rule all the other Emptyheads. Imperial Chancellor Ikshu, referring to a ne'er-do-well relative of Empress Margaret, 722 Imperial
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The Bwap city of Taeswath, on Wesaswek, 991 Imperial. The central tree is the official residence of Sector Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa, in his capacity as Baron Wesaswek. Note the massive Weather Control installation – the 'Pesta-wasakeswasa' – at the top-right hand corner.

The graphic is titled "Generators of the Rain" © Nikolay Yeliseyev.

See his work at <http://nikyeliseyev.blogspot.com/>

Secondly, the Bwaps arouse too much envy to retain leadership over humaniti within the Quarter. The need to restrain corruption within the Imperial Empty Quarter has prompted the ever-expanding use of Bwaps – despite the strong, occasionally violent

repercussions from displaced East Indian and Arabic bureaucrats. (Vilani bureaucrats tend to work well with Bwaps, and are usually retained by the mangers of the Imperial Civil Service.) With the Bwaps now taking a stronger grip on the local Imperial Nobility, the

threatened Solomani, nobles and commoners alike, feel that a 'red line' has been crossed. Even the senior Solomani Dukes who supported Dethwabtake-bwebwakawa's ascension have fallen silent.

Thirdly, it is deemed unlikely that – even ignoring the issue of envy – the tribal/caste-minded Solomani Nobles who dominate the region will tolerate non-Solomani leadership for long. Professional politicians expect the new Duke to eventually retire to the 'back office' – perhaps as a major bureaucrat on Capital – so some blundering Imperial Core aristocrat the Emperor wants out of the spotlight can be 'promoted' to Sector Duke of The Empty Quarter. However, no suitable victim viable contender for the sector throne has risen up - yet.

By the end of the War for Freedom, the Imperial military establishment had successfully learned the wrong lessons, focusing on logistics, timetables, and technology while forgetting the hard-won schooling on leadership and character. The natural result of military expertise and superb equipment without a humane, Solomani spirit was evaded during the Fifth Frontier War with the surprising prominence of the Duke of Regina. However, the following conflict would bring the hidden flaws of the Imperial military ethos into sharp focus – lessons that the Race must accept today, or pay a similar bitter price.

Academician Anster Yo, Cinderella/Newworld,
A.D. 5741 (1220 Imperial, 20 NE)

Murmurs of 'assisted removal' have been overheard in certain circles. However, the simple fact is that the Emperor – currently fighting a major war against the racially supremacist Solomani Confederation – would be *extremely* displeased should anything unfortunate happen to the new Bwap Duke. The well-founded fear of incurring the high-octane wrath of a powerful and forceful Emperor has stayed the hand and silenced the tongue of more than one disgruntled Imperial servant.

The Solomani Rim War

Despite the strongly Solomani character of local nobility, support for the Imperium in the Rim War is widespread in the Imperial Empty Quarter. Most locals believe that Holy Terra (see: 'Sacred Ganges River'; 'Mecca & Medina'; 'Jerusalem') should be under Imperial administration: the small community of Star Diviners also desire Imperial rule for Aldebaran – the First Star and birthplace of their religion, currently deep behind Solomani lines. Many Nobles see the War as the

royal road for glory, honour, and – not incidentally – their ticket to get themselves and their family out of the Quarter. Most business leaders simply want a chunk of the tidal wave of money that is being used to finance this war: the political lobbying of certain 'purse-holders' is very intense. Public sentiment on the high-population systems consistently range from mildly to strongly pro-Imperial: no major world or cultural leader has taken an openly pro-Confederation stance, and every notable publicly supports the Imperial cause. At the start of the Solomani Rim War, 100,000 members of the Solomani Party were placed in internment camps. For political reasons, several of the most prominent leaders were removed from the camps and instead placed under house arrest, at their home, in a comfortable hotel or as a 'guest' in a Noble's residence. In 991, roughly 1/3rd of the camp inmates - largely second-rate rank-and-file members - were released upon the hatching of the Sector Duke's first clutch of eggs from his mate.

However, over 60,000 Solomani Party members, generally hard-core activists, group organizers, and senior officers, still remain in small, discreet internment camps across the rimward Quarter. While well-treated, their contact with the outside world is heavily restricted, and their lives revolve around make-work projects, maintaining their prison-towns, and enduring Imperial re-education seminars. The most violent and dangerous operatives of the Solomani Party & the Solomani Confederation government are kept at Velphac, a maximum-security Imperial asteroid prison in Eninshish system.

Psionic Scandal

A number of recent financial and trading scandals in Gimushi subsector has uncovered a broad-based network of psions working in sensitive positions in the banking and financial industry. The Imperial Ministry of Justice is already overworked trying to keep a lid on interstellar crime – especially with the pirate menace in full swing, and smuggling spiralling out of control. However, the aggressively anti-psion Emperor, usually uninterested in the affairs of his most backward sector, has made it crystal clear that psionic suppression is of great importance in his eyes: only loyalty to the Iridium Throne and winning the Solomani Rim War are more important. Several units of Imperial Ministry of Justice Special Suppression Agents – nicknamed 'Inquisitors' by just about everyone else – are en route to the sector to effectively enforce the Psionic Suppression Orders.



Steelblock, an Imperial prison on Paweba, a Bwap world, c. 990 Imperial. Note the remarkable array of anti-psion equipment, to inhibit teleportation, mind reading, and any other psionic activity. As of early 993, New equipment is being shipped in from Antares, and installed on a weekly basis. Naturally, the residences and work areas remain underground, to discourage an air/raft pickup. The graphic is titled "Crater Wall" © Richard Jeferies.

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1127894

At last, we will reveal ourselves to the Imperium.

At last, we will have our revenge.

The evil psion President Von Mort,
in the popular 2D/3D serial

Defenders of Nobility, 987 Imperial

The company commanders of local Imperial MoJ units plan to focus on known criminals first. Moreover, dragnets and sting operations are to be set up in the old psionic centres on known psion-friendly worlds, as well as the Irash, home of the former Psionic Institute for the sector. The Sector MoJ is at risk of failing to accomplish either pirate or psionic suppression: bringing in bounty hunters and activating auxiliary forces is a certainty as the nobility labour to uphold the Imperial Mandate. An extensive network for the capture and treatment of psionic criminals is rapidly being established right across the Six Subsectors. The Imperium is putting pressure on the Hegemony of Lorean and the Rukadukaz Republic to discourage Imperials from accessing the Psionic Centres in their space, with poor results so far. Finally, the old Imperial 'psion-proof' prison on Paweba is being refurbished, to support the new anti-psion drive.

The Grand Tour

A collection of fourteen worlds – Hebrin, Lazisar, Wesaswek, Marhaban, Ka-aswa, Nulinad, Rommel, Cooke, Lukaau, Rajan, Ushmigad, Rasu, Gobi, and

Yogesh – have plans to send three separate trade & business delegations on journeys across the coreward Imperium, to try and drum up business for The Empty Quarter. One group is expected to work at Capital for several years, reinforcing the permanent trade office there. Another is being prepped for the long journey to Vland: both will be travelling via Tukera Lines. Despite difficulties organizing transport noble political pull has proven effective, and the trade mission is expected to leave within the year (993 Imperial.)

A third, more ambitious delegation are planned to travel on a permanent circuit to these notable systems. Distances are approximate:

- (start) Nulinad/Nulinad/Empty Quarter – Sector capital
- (16 parsecs) Naeen/Sakhag/Antares – a high-tech trade nexus
- (16 parsecs) Antares/Antares/Antares – the most important world on the circuit. Capital of the Antares Sector and Antares Domain, Antares is also the gateway to the Julian Protectorate. Several major corporate offices are located here, including the Imperial offices of the Menderes Corporation. The delegation will attempt to transcend the long history of animosity between the primitive Gushgusi (the nice term for Empty Quarter inhabitants) and the advanced Antareans.
- (38 parsecs) Taccis/Taccis/Lishun – a world of enormous importance, due to her

high population and extreme tech level. Taccis is the home of several major businesses, and several Vargr corporations also maintain representatives on the world. Lishun nobility – who are rather more familial, influential, dynastic and aggressive than Nobles from other sectors – also keep family friends on the world.

- (21 parsecs) Derku/Shinkan/Core – a notable trade entrepôt, Derku is most famous as a major sports and entertainment centre within the Imperium. In addition to various entertainment businesses, numerous Nobles and other influential sophonts make it a point to visit the world once every five years or so. While the millennial Imperial Olympics are to be held on Capital, Derku has already been selected to host the 1010 Olympics. This is the eleventh time the world has hosted the games.
- (22 parsecs) Khangesa/Madu/Fornast – a quiet world in a quiet sector, few starships bother to visit the world – despite its high population and better-than-average technology. It is rumoured by reliable sources that various discreet projects and manufacturing concerns have their operations based here. The trade delegation plans to determine what is needed to encourage the rise of such a discreet and wealthy system in The Empty Quarter, as well.
- (25 parsecs) Daramm/Spearhead/Ley – one of the most powerful worlds in the Imperium, the wealth of Daramm is greater than the entire Imperial Empty Quarter, greater than all the worlds of The Empty Quarter, put together, including Ikon. Even the planetary population is greater than *half* the population of the *entire* Empty Quarter, as of 993 Imperial. The Empty Quarter trade delegation plans to establish a two-year trade office, to encourage the relocation of people, businesses and expertise from this pillar of the Imperium to the backward Empty Quarter.
- (18 parsecs) Return to Nulinad.

A 10,000-ton ‘showcase starship’ is planned for this delegation. However, all local ports able to build such a large ship are currently tied up in producing warships, and purchasing such a ship outside of the Imperium runs the risk of it being seized when it enters Imperial space ‘for the war effort.’ Plans for the third delegation are shelved until the end of the Solomani War, unless some kind of breakthrough occurs.

Analysis: Walking the Cliff’s Edge

Prince Panos’ Legacy

The indirect Imperial campaign to weaken the impact of human religious faith among the aristocracy of the Imperial Empty Quarter – ‘to strike at the root cause of Hindu/Muslim and human/non-human interstellar clashes’ – continues to bear some fruit. The importance of religious & cultural/tribal authority among starfarers and the upper classes was on a steady decline until relatively recently, displacing to some extent the old ethno-religious Solomani bonds to Race and Faith. Not coincidentally, the crippling of competitors for the allegiance of Imperial Nobility has also strengthened the overall position of the Imperial State vis-à-vis competing ideas and societies.

“But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give Interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.”

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Keep your gifts for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him.”

King Belshazzar and Daniel, -5060 Imperial
From The New American Standard Bible

Until recently, the Imperium was clearly powerful enough to intimidate any rival, while the example of the cultural elite fuelled the slow rot of the predictable, stable society the lower classes depend on: changes impose risk, and unlike the wealthy elites, people living on the edge (like much of the citizenry of The Empty Quarter) cannot afford risk. However, the recent decline of faith in impartial Imperial justice, the traditional restraints on Noble power, and the weak Imperial ability to ‘control the space between the stars’ has opened the door to re-tribalization, as people restrict their trust to kinsmen and close relations (genetically, religiously and/or culturally). While reducing the risk of deceit and fraud, re-tribalization has also increased tensions between the various races and religions within the Imperial Empty Quarter.

Under the leadership of the current Bwap Sector Duke, Imperial Law is increasingly inflexible, enforced to the last subclause regardless of facts on the ground. It is also increasingly judged to be arbitrary, untrustworthy, and essentially tyrannical by the Solomani population. Emperor Gavin is perfectly aware of his more bureaucratic servants tendency to make endless calls

for more bureaucrats, more money, more power, more laws, and less accountability (and to use failure as a rationale for even *more* of the above ‘to really fix the problem, once and for all!’) His pointed refusal to grant Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa either the regulatory authority or the monies His Grace cries out for has kept genuine tyranny at bay, but the excuse of ‘the demands of the Solomani Rim War’ must someday come to an end, and the Emperor must then issue a clear response to the Sector Duke, either yea or nay.

Already, a different set interstellar legal authorities – usually religious or ethnic, but sometimes corporate – are being called upon to handle interstellar disputes, avoiding the Imperial Courts. Whether this is 1) in response to the cost in time and money to get Imperial Justice 2) the preference to avoid detailed, nit-picking Bwap investigations (and the unwelcome legal surprises they may uncover) or 3) an implicit rebuke to a nonhuman Sector Duke is a point in hot dispute. What isn’t in dispute is that Imperial Authority is being steadily eroded – and the absence of the Imperial Fleet isn’t helping matters at all. The dreaded condition of ‘the cyndeath’, defined as “the rot and death of the essential legitimacy of the Imperial government via cynicism and contempt” – is becoming a real possibility.

Good to know that my most barbaric realm Is leading the Imperium in <i>something!</i> Emperor Gavin, while discussing the cyndeath and The Empty Quarter 042-993 Imperial

What is Urgent, What is Important

As always, most of the local Nobility are focused on their own worlds & financial concerns: the more broadminded and influential Nobles are heavily involved in the war effort, labouring to build up the sector’s economy, tied up in the various intrigues surrounding the new Bwap Sector Duke, or organizing planetary or Colonial Navy responses to the pirate scourge. Current debate among the few nobles watching the growing ‘Mind Gap’ revolves around the question of the cultural distance between nobles and commoners, and the possible spread of discontent to traditionally loyalist Vilani societies. The Nobility are unwilling to roll back interstellar secularism, and again accept traditional restraints on their private behaviour: on the other hand, their alienation from local society means that they can’t call on local authorities to confer legitimacy in a crisis, and are not considered to be ‘one of us’ by the general populace.

So far, increased Imperial patriotism grounded in the Solomani conflict has worked to quiet dissent, buying time to develop an appropriate response. There remains a strong bedrock of support for the Imperium: the leaders of the anti-Imperial backlash are still weak and – most importantly – disorganized & disconnected from each other. The few violent incidents are restricted to certain branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and Abadani PANs, and can be contained for now. Distracted by other concerns, no Noble or other senior public figure has positioned himself as a ‘Leader of the People’ – not yet, at any rate. Whenever Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa is able to use the gift of time wisely remains to be seen.

Return of the Tribes

Unfortunately, the Duke’s strengths as a master administrator and bureaucratic infighter are not very useful when it comes to controlling and channelling simmering religious and ethnic passions – something that his fact-oriented, systematic, and tightly organized brain has great difficulty comprehending. The impersonal, materialistic, highly organized, and deeply ritualistic nature of the Bwap religion is compatible with Vilani Ritualism, Confucianism, and Abadanism, but provides a poor vantage point for comprehending Islam or Hinduism – the dominant religions of the Imperial Empty Quarter.

The Duke’s Vilani advisors, always ready to turn to the past for solutions, are trying to analyse the failure of Prince Panno’s Education Initiative. While reasons for the fiasco differ, the consequences for the failure are apparent. There are a few competent technical institutes on the industrial worlds and subsector capitals, but no good research universities in the Imperial Empty Quarter. Various Islamic madrasahs, Hindu temple-schools, Bwap training centres, Vilani academies, and Christian knowledge-networks do quite a good job in communicating their religious beliefs, literature, history, and sophisticated cultural matrix to their students – and all are explicitly parochial, pointedly intolerant of challengers, and (excluding the Bwaps) routinely supremacist regarding other religions and cultures. The best ‘pure science’ establishments – the genetic labs on Rommel, say, or the industrial research labs of Ushmigad – are harnessed to an essentially tribal cause (Solomani supremacy and an outcast Vilani reform movement, respectively.)

Quite simply, tribalism energizes people, and gives them the focus for trust, loyalty, dedication, a moving narrative, and a worthy reason for self-sacrifice. A nebulous cosmopolitanism simply can’t compete here:

when the chips are down: few are willing to fight, kill, and die for the sake of 'reason' or 'sophont rights', but billions are happy to do just that for their race, their religion, their homeworld, or even their Noble (if he is 'one of us,' and not 'one of them.')

The Imperium is able to provide such a focus, in the person of the Emperor: but the Iridium Throne is so remote from the lives of the ordinary Imperial Citizen that such loyalty must be carefully nurtured, if it is not to wilt and crumble under stress.

The Indian summer of the Imperium.
The last great sigh of Reason
before the madness to come.
Teacher First Class Wikitarson,
in his poem "The Wistfulness of Autumn"
Lilad system, Regency of Deneb, 1162

In other sectors with a clear ethnic majority or distinct dominant culture, it is possible for a Duke from said

majority to symbolise the unity of the region: when he kneels to the Emperor, the sector kneels with him. This unity is not possible within the highly sectarian Empty Quarter. Until some kind of unifying factor can be created that all the various sophonts of the region can identify with, no Sector Duke can hold the area together – only allegiance to the Emperor can do that.

Imperial analysts believe that the Vargr Archdukes, while valuable within Antares and in Imperial-Protectorate relations, are a divisive factor in the Quarter: it is felt that they can help most by staying out of the sector. (As an analogy, consider the reluctance of any Western leader to visit Afghanistan or Pakistan.)

The rise of a Bwap Sector Duke opens the possibility of Archduke Koktso visiting the sector, perhaps in 997, before travelling to Capital – perhaps together – for the Imperial Millennium celebrations. The consequences of such a visit are difficult to perceive.



An American Indian approaches the Golden Heart, a notable centre for tribal religious ceremonies. On Niketan, with Coorg, the partner of the double-planet system, dominating the sky. 940 Imperial.

The graphic is titled "Chromatic Dreams III" © Christopher Gerber.

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1540800

Water War

By Alvin Plummer

Introduction

Water War is a military adventure, focusing on the defence of the water tanks of a Bwap settlement, which is greatly desired by nearby human communities. It can be fought on a small or on the medium scale, as the Players & Referee desires. More peaceful Referees, with Players interested in trade or exploration, can use the Bwap dryworld settlement depicted for his own purposes.

The players will decide if they want to play their regular characters, or play Bwaps. If the players prefer to use their old characters, the flavour of the human portion of the adventure can be altered to focus on mercenary, starship merchant, or scout activities, to suit the player group. The players need not own a starship: if they do have one, it's their call to risk it in action or not. The Bwap group is assumed to be members of the Tap-a-wewaka-atapas ('Guardians of Order'), generated for this particular adventure: use the usual guidelines for military personnel, but all have the following skills at a minimum: Vacc suit-1, Slug Rifle-1. This adventure uses the BITS Task System, with Classic Traveller rules. As a Bwap oriented adventure, a review of **Stellar Reaches #1** article, [The Bwaps, A Minor Race Of The Imperium For T20](#) written by Jason "Flynn" Kemp is in order.

The adventure starts on 331-993 at Xerxes Imperial Starport, and ends in two weeks, on Day 345, at Apfatwa E-pabeb. It is based on Sashar (Nulinad/Empty Quarter 0536 D454A57-7), a ringed and heavily populated world of 12 billion in Nulinad subsector. It is focused on the defence of Apfatwa E-pabeb, a Bwap settlement of 50,000, located just inside the dry, flat Qeusm saltflats, 850 km west of Xerxes. Not far from Apfatwa E-pabeb is the vast Damquan Prairies, dominated by Solomani Persian/Arab humaniti.

For Bwap PCs:

The local Kasepbewa-atta-wapawab ('Planetary Council of Crèches') has decided to lend a hand to the isolated Bwap settlements inland, including Apfatwa E-pabeb. A large percentage of these settlements are suffering water raids from nearby humans, and lack sufficient resources to guard both their populations and their water supply. The Bwaps of this adventure are armed members of the Tap-a-wewaka-atapas, sent to provide

additional military options to deter human aggression. A few Satha-a-atta-wapawab ('Elders of the Crèche') are also dispatched, to work with local crèche elders as diplomats on behalf of the Bwap settlements. The planetary government, the Ustad Dat, will also state their intention to send a military observer, to insure that the Bwaps do not breach their treaty and attack human settlements: Bwap collective self-defence is permitted, but nothing more.¹

The PC Tap-a-wewaka-atapas are provided with TL A Combat Environment suit modified for Bwap needs. Not only does the suit provide a 97% humid to the wearer, it also adds +1 to the user's strength. These powered suits can run for 24 hours before requiring a recharge.

They are armed with an Advanced Combat Rifle (ACR), four magazines of HE rounds, and a magazine of DS rounds. Spare magazines of slug rounds are available on-site: while cheaper and within local manufacturing abilities, they are not as effective as the off-world ammo. There are twenty rounds per magazine.

Each rifle is also equipped with a RAM Grenade Launcher: two HE and four flechette rounds are provided per Bwap soldier. Two altered 'quick-mines' are also provided: these anti-personnel are designed to be quickly buried (and act as a pressure mine) or set up to be triggered when disturbed (often under some trash, loose dirt, or rock). A knife and an entrenching tool is also issued. The soldiers are expected to requisition additional rations on-site.

Tap-a-wewaka-atapas scout specialists are equipped with a modified TL B vacc suit, with increased internal humidity (of course), a reduced infrared signature, limited self-patching abilities, and a reinforced skeleton (adding +1 to the user's strength). These suits are unarmoured, and being powered, their weight does not add to personal encumbrance. These suits can run for 72 hours before requiring a recharge. They are armed with a TL A Laser Carbine, with a lightweight backpack power source capable of providing 70 shots before requiring a recharge.

For human PCs:

The PCs are on a layover between missions & jumps, when they are contacted by a Bwap elder, Wasabpebdabar, for a short term (two-week) mission:

- If the PCs are mercenaries, they are hired to provide security for a threatened Bwap settlement, Apfatwa E-pabeb. They will be used mainly in defensive situations, to back-up local Bwap forces. The human's ability to move quickly in the dry environment, unencumbered with Combat armour or Vacc Suits, will be exploited to the full.
- If the PCs are scouts, they are hired initially to explore a suspected enemy mustering area, to gather information on enemy positions, equipment, and manpower. After the main goal has been met, additional requests to continue monitoring enemy movements, obtain and decipher SIGNET intelligence, and make educated guesses on future enemy moves will be made: the PCs need to determine the price for their services before performing them.
- If the PCs are merchants, they are hired on a two-week charter to transport armed Bwaps and their equipment to Apfatwa E-pabeb. Renting the ship itself is way too expensive for Wasabpebdabar, but he is willing to charter a starships' air/rafts and perhaps even a ship's boat.

A starship is a valuable asset. On the other hand, a common civilian starship like the Beowulf class can definitely be used as a military platform in low-tech conflicts, as well as for transportation. If the PCs decide to use the starship itself to support the goods, they will have to get the permission of the planetary government: this is a Formidable task (using the BITS task system) taking one week (a.k.a. the PCs get only one try before the attack begins).

If the PCs fail, and defy the planetary government by using the starship anyways, they come under attack by planetary jets armed with TL 7 missiles, specially designed to punch thru a starships hull. Starships are tougher than jets, but each TL 7 missile inflicts 1 point of damage – and several flights of jets will be launched against the PCs. (The starmercs on the government payroll are too far away to support the jets.)

If need be, the PCs can retreat to the starport – the port is outside of the jurisdiction of the planetary

government. However, when they decide to leave the system, they will come under attack by TL B SDBs hired by the planetary government to protect it from pirates. These attacks will continue until the PC starship exits the 100-diameter limit, that marks off planetary space from Imperial space: at this point, the SDBs retire, and the PCs are free to leave (but are advised not to return).

Pay is determined by a contest of Legal & Trader skills (Legal skill is necessary to handle the extensive Bwap paperwork.) Responsibility for equipment, re-supply, extraction, and penalties for breaking contract is determined in a similar manner.

The Bwap contact makes it clear that the PCs are expected to support the Bwaps and protect their water supply against the desires of local humaniti: if they are unable to do so, the negotiations immediately end.

The Referee is reminded that there is no cell phone network or Internet wireless grid on Sashar. If the PCs want to contact the Bwap of Apfatwa E-pabeb, they can:

- make a phone call (the lines have been cut)
- write a letter (the mail still goes thru – after being open, read, and re-sealed. It just takes a few days...)
- send a courier (roll 1D6: 1-3 the courier is turned back; 4-5 the courier is captured or killed, and the message falls to enemy hands; 6 the courier gets through)
- send a 'message bird' (roll 1D6: 1-2 the bird is killed, and the message lost; 3 the bird is killed, and the message falls to enemy hands; 4-6 the bird gets through.)

Journey to Apfatwa E-pabeb

Arrival: Human PCs may make the 850 km journey from Xerxes Imperial Starport to Apfatwa E-pabeb using their own transportation. They may also take an 850 km train ride to the town (a journey of about 35 hours, changing trains twice), or even hire a taxi or rent a car.

The trek from Xerxes to Apfatwa E-pabeb involves three stages. The first third is quite comfortable, as the PCs will be travelling from one large TL 7 city to another as they cross the industrialized Kavir Cone. The second third of the journey is quite rural, as they cross the Damquan Prairies - now dominated by human agriculture, growing analogues/modified versions of wheat, corn, and rye. If driving on the road, the first third is easy (essentially, highway driving, occasionally

tied up in traffic jams), as is the second (the PCs need to avoid racing youngsters, maxing out their cars on the straight and endless road) but more difficult in the last third of the journey. Here, the roads are more poorly kept as you go on in your journey, with fewer amenities: the drivers grow more reckless, as well.

PCs who somehow survive the firefight without being captured now have to get to Apfatwa E-pabeb with about 200 - 400 soldiers in town looking for them. Most of the soldiers will be in groups of five – ten: some of them will be mounted on pickups. Previous roadblocks will also be alerted, and new ones set up.

Referee: if most of the PCs are used to driving on the right-hand side, then Sashar cars drive on the left (and vice-versa). Traffic signals may or may not be easily understood by the PCs, at your discretion. Vary the policing of the roads and road laws as you wish: recall that the general law level is 'moderate' at 7. Most people do not understand Anglic or Modern Vilani, instead speaking one of the local languages. In a random encounter, roll 3D6: on a roll of 16 – 18, the commoner can speak Anglic or Modern Vilani. Increase the probability if the commoner is educated, or wealthy. One good thing: everyone speaks money. The locals greatly value and hoard Imperial currency, prefer to use gold and silver coinage for major purchases, and use government, corporate, and bank script for day-to-day life.

Referee: in this situation, all the roadblocks will open fire on the PCs as soon as they see them, unless they have camouflaged themselves to look like locals. And, as soon as a question is asked of the PCs in the local language...

They may attempt to obtain a vehicle and drive the 10 km to Apfatwa E-pabeb off-road: certainly possible, but they will stand out like a sore thumb, and 1D6+3 pickups (of which 1/3 mount machine guns) will set off in hot pursuit. Sneaking over on foot is possible: there will be patrols attempting to intercept them. It is a Difficult task to evade these patrols. If there is an encounter, roll 2D6: if the roll is 2 – 8, then the patrol comprises of 5 – 10 green men on foot. If the result is 9 – 10, the patrol contain a pickup carrying 6 green soldiers. If the result is 11-12, the pickup has a mounted machine gun.

From a distance, they can see the white and hot Qeusm saltflats. If travelling by train, then at Meybod, the last stop before Apfatwa E-pabeb, the PCs will see quite a large gathering of armed men outside the train window. (A few stops before arriving at Meybod, they may notice that there are fewer and fewer ordinary passengers in their train car, and more and more young men, dressed in subdued colours and carrying duffel bags and long objects wrapped in cloth, glaring at the PCs.) If travelling by car, PCs will notice more and more pickups with young armed men, a few of these pickups will have machine-guns mounted on them. They may also notice a few trucks, with cars or pickups with armed men driving before and behind as escort.

Referee: It is possible for sufficiently high-tech PCs to defeat the entire company of soldiers on their own. If they do this in the human town of Meybod, the central government will take the action as a threat to their authority, and will send Veteran or Elite-level TL 7 Technarch troops to take them down within a week. If Technarch forces are defeated, a large mercenary team of TL B soldiers, with air/raft support, will be sent to kill the PCs within 1D6+3 weeks. If they are defeated, a major force of TL 7 armour and infantry, of regular or Veteran level, will arrive to kill the PCs.

Meybod – by Train

At Meybod, some of these gentlemen are going to ask the PCs if they are going to continue on to the Bwap town of Apfatwa E-pabeb. If the PCs look like soldiers, they will be made to leave the train, using gestures, arrests or firearms.

- the soldiers cannot speak Anglic, Vilani, or Arabic (some can read/write Classical Arabic). As it's hard to find someone quickly who can, they will use non-verbal communication instead.
- at this train station, there are about 40 to 60 disorganized green soldiers, armed with TL 5-6 slug carbines and rifles (no grenades) who will run to support the fifteen soldiers who are in the same train car as the PCs.

Additional force escalation is left in the hands of the Referee: note that, as Imperial forces are at a premium right now in the Empty Quarter, the Imperial military will not get involved unless there is a threat to the starport, or to Imperial rule per se. The PCs could conceivably overthrow the planetary government without incurring Imperial opposition, so long as the PCs are willing to swear allegiance to the Iridium Throne – but 12 billion locals at TL 5 – 7 overmatch a band of four-five PCs (even equipped to TL F levels, and with access to a starship for transport), unless the Referee insists on a re-enactment of Pizzaro's conquest of the Aztecs – and even that conquistador had a few hundred men.

If the PCs don't look like soldiers, non-verbal gestures and doodles will be used to try and persuade them to get off the train: but determined, civilian-looking PCs will be permitted to continue on to their destination.

Meybod – by Car/Taxi

If driving to Apfatwa E-pabeb, the PCs will encounter 1D3+3 road blocks as they approach Meybod. If the PCs look like harmless civilians, they will be permitted to go thru: there is a chance that a bribe will be requested before they are permitted to pass, however. PCs that look like trouble will not be permitted to pass the first roadblock unless they have a native-speaking local do some fast talking: this is a Difficult task, using BITS task system. The second roadblock will need both fast talking and a hefty bribe, and is a Formidable task: the third roadblock will not willingly permit non-locals to pass (a Staggering task, unless a demonstration of armed force is made, which reduces the difficulty to Average). All other roadblocks will fire on the PCs on sight, and are guarded by 1D3 * 10 green soldiers with carbines and rifles. Evading the roadblocks becomes more difficult, simply because the amount of paved road surface shrinks dramatically as you push thru Meybod. After the PCs push past the last roadblock, they are permitted to drive on to Apfatwa E-pabeb unmolested: local forces will not give chase.

Meybod – by Air/Raft

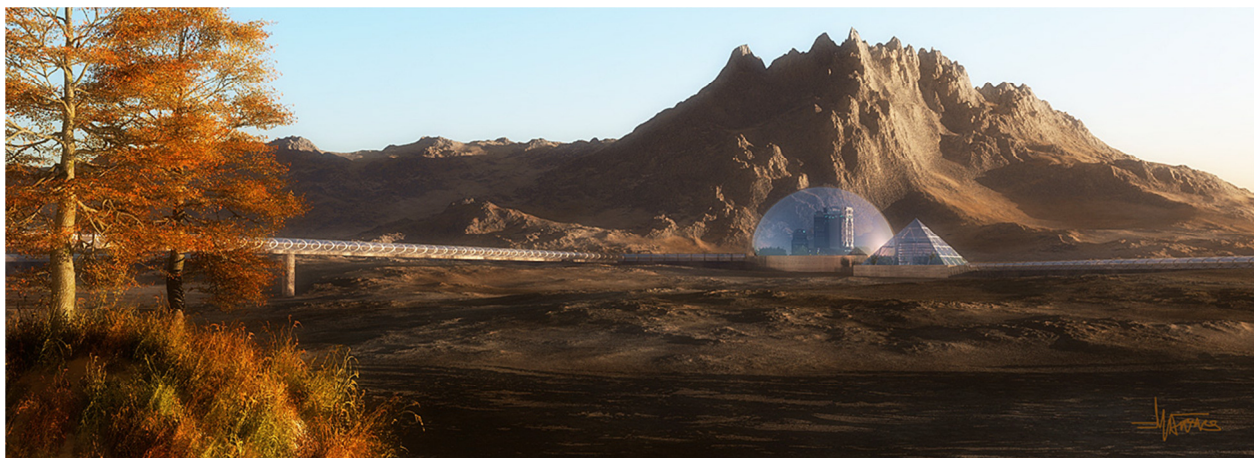
PCs that have the use of an air/raft have the pleasure of just looking down as the natives impotently fire their

weapons at them – assuming that they show a bit of care, and keep a respectable amount of meters above the soldiers. Grav beltors should show a bit more care: there is a small chance that a 'lucky round' could make contact. PCs that are willing to stir up a hornets' nest may go ahead and strafe the gathered soldiers: it won't take long before the locals have all taken cover, though, and there will be consequences for attacking a human city on behalf of the Bwaps.

Referee: under the local rules of war (which the human PCs will almost certainly not have bothered to look up, but Bwap PCs of the Tap-a-wewaka-atapas know by heart and will insist on adhering to), it is permitted for a Bwap-backed force to attack roadblocks that hinder them from supporting/reinforcing a Bwap town, but it is forbidden for any such force to attack a human town.

Meybod - Captured PCs

Captured PCs are held by the local forces until the conflict is over. Afterwards, they are turned over to the Ustad Dat. After being found guilty of attacking a human settlement on behalf of hostile non-humans – a foregone certainty, regardless of PC actions – they will be sentenced to work as G-hands, on behalf of government terraforming efforts, for a term of not less than fifteen years to pay off their blood debt. See the section "Xerxes – Sources of Wealth" at the end of this adventure for more information.



Aswaebwopsaba-papa-e-eb, a large Bwap desertworld settlement on Sashar. More prosperous than Apfatwa E-pabeb, these residents can afford to place a dome over their residences and workplaces, and a separate pyramid over their factories and railway station.

The graphic is titled "Experimental Lab Location 6", © Chip Walters. See his work at

http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1883676

At Apfatwa E-pabeb

The PCs are heartily welcomed to Apfatwa E-pabeb by the local Bwap elders and soldiers. If they came by air/raft (and didn't strafe Meybod) they will be put on scout/air support duty. The air/raft could easily develop into a major advantage in any battle. If they came by a ground vehicle, the Bwap will hope that the PCs had the foresight to bring some supplies for the fight ahead. PCs who came by train, successfully evaded the native soldiers, and crossed the 10 km to safety will be first aggressively quizzed on what they saw ("How many soldiers did you see? What language did they speak? Did it sound like this – [lyrical gibberish] or like this [grunting gibberish]? Did they look well-fed? Did you see any officers?"), then rewarded with a feast - 'in the human style', if the PCs are human, in the Bwap manner if the PCs are Bwap.)

Human PCs will be put to work on their specialty:

- Scouts to gather information in the field, and report via large, unencrypted TL 7 walkie-talkies and field radios. (While on-air, the PCs will use code words and phrases.)
- Mercenaries to reinforce the 600-Bwap local Tap-a-wewaka-atapas. The humans can walk around on the outside without dehydrating, and don't need vac suits or irreplaceable Bwap combat armour: they are also bigger and stronger than the Bwap soldiers. As such, they will be used as a hard-hitting, fast reaction force: getting their first and pouring in the hurt until the Bwap backup arrives. Any tech advantages the PCs have (be it air/rafts, infrared vision, TL 8 drones with cameras, or laptops with wireless connections to portable webcams) will be deployed aggressively.
- Merchants will be shipping in Bwap soldiers and equipment. Usually they will be leaving empty, but there will be the occasional passenger and cargo load. 'All they need to do is move high and fast enough to avoid the rifle fire, and they will be fine.'

Bwap PCs will be quickly integrated to the local green Tap-a-wewaka-atapas force. It is assumed that they have some kind of advantage (experience, equipment, etc) that they can bring to the table: now's the time to let the PCs shine.

Note: all local Bwap can understand & speak the Bwap tongue. All can understand the local human language: 25% can speak it. About 33% can understand Modern Vilani and/or Anglic.

(For roleplaying purposes, a small team of 10 Bwaps, the local 'best of the best', is included. They may be considered company captains, long service 'retired' Bwap Marines, etc.)

There are ~2000 armed members of the local Tap-a-wewaka-atapas:

- 1000 Bwap, UPP 4646666, Green
Skills: Rifle-1 Grenade-0
Armed with one TL 7 rifle
- 500 Bwap, UPP 4646666, Green
Skills: Rifle-1 Grenade-0
Armed with one TL 7 rifle
three TL 7 frag grenades
Cloth armour
- 500 Bwap, UPP 666666, Regular
Skills: Vacc suit-1 Rifle-2 Grenade-1
Forward Observer-0
Armed with one TL 7 rifle
Six TL 7 frag grenades
Two HE grenades
Vacc suits (treat as cloth armour,
Permits outside activity)
- 10 Bwap, UPP: 777777, Veteran
Skills: Vacc suit-2, Rifle-2, Grenade-1,
Forward Observer-1, Recon-1, Leader-1,
Ground Tactics-1, Cudgel-1
Armed with one TL 7 rifle, one TL 7 pistol
Six TL 7 frag grenades
Two HE grenades
Vacc suits (treat as cloth armour,
Permits outside activity)

Apfawa E-pabeb: a brief overview

Apfawa E-pabeb has existed more-or-less continuously for 800 years. While the environment is quite hostile for Bwaps, it is substantially better than the numerous vacuum worlds which sophonts of all kinds have made a home. The main benefits the Bwaps get from living in the middle of nowhere is isolation from envious humans, an improved security environment (in a flat, featureless salt plain, you can see the humans coming from a long ways), and easy access to a rail network to ship out Bwap manufactures... and, surprisingly, Bwap food, grown in large aquaponic hothouses. Humans can digest and enjoy Bwap fruits, vegetables, and meats – and vice-versa. Note that among the Bwap, actual cooking via fire & heat is rare. Pickling food in brine or soaking it in mild, natural acids is a good deal more common.

Three major crèches have made their home in Apfawa E-pabeb: the Kebbo-ebwowab (15,000 Bwap), Tesa-abba-wa-awa (7,000 Bwap) and Wawakasawaspa-bab (5,000 Bwap): there are also another 200 lesser crèches, with an average of 100 Bwap members per crèche. The lesser crèches are discriminated against; having to pay (with the local currency, the obebsaek²) for the use of the tunnels and facilities built by the greater crèches, and generally shut out of the major foci of power. There is little resentment in this, as they feel that this is their proper place in the universe: at a given point in time some will always be greater, and others will be lesser. (Those crèches who are really aggravated in this may disband their crèche, or relocate elsewhere.)

The major crèches have distinct roles in society, with the Kebbo-ebwowab dominating construction and manufacturing, the Tesa-abba-wa-awa handling horticulture, water networks and life-support, and the Wawakasawaspa-bab controlling external trade, scouting and warfare. These are not hard-and-fast divisions, but are good rule of thumbs, especially useful when the outsider realizes that every crèche comes with their own highly distinctive skin patterns of greens, browns, yellows, and blues (with dark colours laid over light colours.)

Map creation for Apfatwa E-pabeb

Note that no map is provided in this adventure: the Referee is expected to create one. Due to the hostile environment – very dry and very hot in the daytime, frigid at night – the Bwaps require some sort of hostile environment suit to go outdoors, unlike the humans.

When designing a map for Apfatwa E-pabeb, note the following:

- Buildings are built at TL 7 specifications, most of which have no windows.
 - Roughly 70% of these buildings are circular residences with domed roofs, holding 20 – 50 Bwaps, (diameter of 20 - 30 meters, height of 5 – 10 meters)
 - another 20% is used for TL 7–8 aquaponic, aeroponic & hydroponic greenhouses (diameter of 50 – 100 meters, height of 5 – 10 meters)
 - and a final 10% to handle energy production (via 20 circular fields of TL 9 solar panels, with each solar cell farm having a radius of 200 meters)
- TL 8 robotic light manufacturing (producing expensive TL 7 goods: each of the four factories are

housed in a separate rectangular building, 800m by 500m). The factory floors are not air-conditioned or humidified: Bwaps work via remote-controlled robots or in vacc suits.

- rail transport (to bring in materials needed for manufacturing, and to ship out the finished product.). Located close to the factories, most of the railway station is open to the elements, and the Bwap railway hands work in vacc suits. There is a single oval building for offices and passengers, 100m by 80m by 7m.
- and a TL 7 water pump, to access the artificial aquifer 400 meters below the salt flats.

All Bwap buildings are built to maintain a very humid environment, with an interior temperature of 33° C. They are connected to large water tanks: buried beneath the building, they are as large as the building itself, and supply the water needed for the Bwap to live. Only the water pump and a few military buildings, with their characteristic ‘headless pyramid’ shape, have aboveground water tanks: these tanks are surrounded by 2D6 guardhouses, barbed wire, and 2D10 anti-personnel mines. Each guardhouse holds 2 – 5 soldiers, and are solid concrete structures with large, TL 7 bulletproof windows (and gun slots)

The buildings are made of solid concrete, and not breachable by grenades or other low-yield explosives. All doors leaning to the outside are airlocks, and are well-armoured. The walls and roofs of the military buildings are as strong as a civilian starship hull. One of the military buildings contains an emergency generator and sufficient gasoline to provide emergency power for Bwap life-support for 48 hours.

There are three great networks of low-humidity (30% humidity) above-ground tunnels, which require the Bwaps to use moisture-retaining kaftans while using them. The three major crèches in Apfatwa E-pabeb each have their own network. The tunnels meet in a circle at the centre of town. In the middle of the circle, in the open air, is a large tree geneered to survive in the harsh environment, requiring only a little water and nutrients every year. This tree serves as the ‘flag’ of the community.

Attack

During the first week, there will be probing attacks by the human opposition. Usually, this will involve 1D4+1 teams of 1D6+3 men, armed as usual with carbines and rifles, mapping out Bwap defences and testing reaction times. Small “robot snakes” will also be used: imported from off-world, these TL 9 robots are surprisingly effective at approaching unseen, then detonating.

Sometime during the first week, a TL 7 helicopter will also arrive, bearing Ustad Dat markings. (The local Bwaps will prevent the PCs from firing on it.) A human male with a large suitcase, escorted by a plain-clothed bodyguard and four armed men in uniform, will exit. He and his observers will insure that there are no attacks on human communities during the current conflict: while they will not harm the Bwap or give any aid to those attacking it, they won't raise a finger to protect them, either. The soldiers, Elite personnel armed to TL 7 levels (and carrying TL 8-9 surveillance and observation equipment), will be observing the hostilities in person. They will be using expensive TL 8 equipment to keep in touch with central command and the local senior observer. A TL 7 spy satellite owned by the Ustad Dat will be tasked to observe the area as well.

The main attack will be launched during the second week. A force of 2,000 men will move under cover of night from Meybod to the edge of Apfatwa E-pabeb, just out of sight of the stationary sentries. The Referee may divide this group into 20 units of 100: he is encouraged to divide up the Bwap units similarly. (Remember that only the 'elite' Bwaps, and the PCs, may leave the Bwap habitats to fight in the field. All other Bwap must remain their habitats, or risk death by dehydration.)

The primary goal of the humans is not to kill the Bwaps, but to take their water. (The humans deeply resent the Bwap hogging all that water 'for their own selfish use', which could be used to grow tons of food and supposedly make droughts 'a thing of the past'.) As such, they want to drive all the Bwap indoors, but they won't go after them in most cases. Instead, after securing the area, they will call in a fleet of trucks to pump out the water in the local Bwap water tanks. Afterwards, the Bwap water pump will be assaulted as often as needed in order to take it: after it is taken, it will be quickly fortified and troops will be dug in to insure that it is not retaken. Naturally, the pumps will be taken off-line.

If the Bwap surrender, sufficient water will be provided until the Bwaps are transported out of the area. The water from the aquifer below will then be piped to irrigate human farms and towns. Human settlers will be moved into the Bwap quarters, as well. If there is no surrender, the men are quite comfortable with simply waiting until the Bwaps habitats dry up. After waiting another two additional weeks, assault teams will break into the Bwap habitats and tunnel network, to kill any

survivors and break any eggs – 'as Bwap tradition demands'.

The human assault force consists of:

1000 men, UPP 777777, Green

Rifle-1, Recon-0.

Armed with one TL 6 Rifle

300 men, UPP 777777, Trained

Rifle-1, Short Blade-1, Recon-1.

Armed with one TL 7 Rifle, 1 Knife

300 men, UPP 777777, Trained

Rifle-1, Grenade Launcher-0.

Armed with one TL 7 Rifle,

1 single-launch TL 7 Grenade launcher

(treat as a single-shot Auto-grenade launcher)

100 men, UPP 687777, Veteran

Rifle-1, Pistol-1,

Pistol w/extra clips, Cloth armour,

6 fragmentary grenades,

6 High-explosive grenades.

These are the 'tunnel rats', which will go

after the Bwap in their habitats as necessary.

6D6 pickups, each carrying 6 men.

2D6 pickups, each carrying a machine gun and crew.

Should the assault drive the Bwaps and their defenders into their habitats,

4D6 Water trucks, which will continually ferry water out of the Bwap water tanks until they are dry.

2D6 Earth moving equipment, run by soldiers for fortifying the water pump.

200 men, UPP 777777, Trained

Rifle-1, Ground-Vehicle-1,

Combat Engineering-0, Pistol-0, Cudgel-0

'combat engineers' (the 'cudgel' is for their shovels, which can be used as surprisingly lethal weapons if needed.)

Armed with one pistol.

Ignoring their grenade launchers and their rifles, the human attackers have no real anti-air ability. However, they will certainly discover the identity of the PCs who hindered their attacks on the Bwaps. The locals believe in nursing their grudges, and (if the PCs are human) a few locals will make it their business to extract vengeance on the off-worlders who betrayed their race in the name of wet Bwap cash.

Notable personalities:

Sir Wasabpebdabar, MOW

Bwap Elder & PC contact

Member, Order of Wampallally

UPP: 699AAB Legal 4, Trader 2, Liaison 2, Admin 1,

Watercraft 1, Streetwise 1,

Short Blade-0

Sir Wasabpebdabar is an old merchantman, who led a drive to simplify and clarify the sector-wide interstellar trading laws and regulations of the Imperial Empty Quarter. Some of his arcane insights influence the interpretation of interstellar trade law across the Imperium. This is still his primary work, but as an Elder and a member of the Kasepbewa-atta-wapawab he is willing to lend a hand in the field.

Footnotes

¹Note that the Ustad Dat does not use force the inland human communities to cease their attacks on the Bwaps. In part, this is due to a fear of redirecting local human anger against the central government – a distant regime that the locals don't particularly like. In part, this is to placate various anti-alien factions in the feudal technocratic government, who would see such an action as at once 'Unnatural, unrealistic, anti-evolutionary, and profoundly anti-human.' And in part, this policy exist to avoid aggravating the religious inclinations of the local population, who stoutly believes that aliens are below humans in the eyes of the Deity and the Saints, just as unbelievers are below believers.

³The obebsaek is the local currency of the community, representing the particular amount of water, electricity, and food one adult Bwap uses in one day. The obebsaek is revalued once every ten Bwap years.

Library Information: Bwaps on Sashar

The Vilani initially settled Sashar (then called Mumsapgakha) in c. -5200. Organized as a food-production centre, it was never heavily populated, but a few Bwap settlements were founded in -4950. However, most of the population traces their ancestors to a single, large colonization fleet of Iranian & Arab settlers. This fleet, led by the war hero Sashar Javanmardy colonized this world during the Rule of Man, in the -2120s, overwhelming the earlier Vilani and Bwap settlements on this world. The surviving hamlets of the original Bwap settlements were overrun and destroyed during the Long Night Bwap purges, but some of the feuding Sasharan governments of the early Dawn period (0 to 100 Imperial) paid for Bwap support with land and settlement rights. All Sasharan Bwap crèches can trace their origins to this agreement.

Most Bwaps live with humaniti in the heavily populated cities near the seas of Sashar, where there is easy access to water. However, the more independently-

mind crèches live in the dry inland regions of the planet-girding landmass, far from the salty seas. (Recall that the majority of Sashar's surface is land: not water: the term 'continents' have no meaning here.) Only a few crèches prefer greater freedom for cultural expression over reliable access to water.

Order of Wampallally

Order of Wampallally: an order of Imperial Knighthood founded by Emperor Cleon. Membership is restricted to Bwaps who meet the requirements of outstanding loyalty, outstanding diligence and outstanding achievement among Bwap administrators, scientists, and merchants.

Ustad Dat

The Ustad Dat ("Master Law") is the name of the Feudal Technocratic government of Sashar. A federation of noble houses who dominate technological and corporate interests on Sashar, this world-state claims ownership of the entire star system, but the Imperium only recognises the claim to the Sashar mainworld. The Imperium will revise its opinion if and when the Ustad Dat gains the ability to *enforce* its claims on the rest of the solar system: something rather difficult for a TL 7 world to do, even a heavily populated one.

Xerxes

Xerxes is the wealthiest (but definitely not the most populous) city of the planet, and seat of the Ustad Dat, the government of the planet. While the majority of the planet must live at TL 5 to TL 7, the flow of trade thru the Class D Imperial Starport, thin as it is, permits the wealthiest neighbourhoods to live at TL 8. Roughly 12 million sophonts live in this city, including one million Bwaps in the Bwap quarter, and 121,000 Vargr on their best behaviour. The forces of the law are quick to expel undisciplined Vargr from their beautiful capital city – and woe to any adult, human, Bwap, or Vargr, who is caught without a current work permit or authorized Noble licence!

(There is more leniency to unattended and abandoned children, as they are simply rounded up and placed in government boarding schools. Naturally, after graduation they will spend working off their education debt as soldiers, bureaucrats, city & road workers, or – God forbid – workhands for government terraforming projects. By the kindness of the Council of the People's Servants, all work terms have a maximum of fifteen years.)

Architecture in the Bwap quarter ingeniously uses low-tech methods to create the sealed, extremely humid environment the Bwap needs to survive, including heavy use of sprinklers and mist dispensers, careful engineering of pressurised enclosures, and numerous, comfortable baths and soaking stations. Almost all street traffic is by foot or by sealed, electric go-carts & streetcars. Most of the sunlight falling on the area falls onto transparent roofs, evaporating the large water catchments and increasing local humidity: the sporadic rainfall of the area is similarly husbanded and redirected to Bwap usage.

Xerxes – Sources of Wealth

Setting aside the large (for Sashar) income generated by out-system trade, commerce, and the small but lucrative information market, the various sources of Xerxes' wealth is

- The taxes of the rest of the planet, gathered by the technocracy and funnelled to Xerxes. While much of those monies is immediately re-circulated back to the general economy, a bit of that wealth sticks to the hands of those collecting it. Over the decades, this has led to Xerxes being built up to a beautiful capital city, especially in the gilt-edged Palace District, where the major families maintain their premiere residences.
- TL 6-7 fishing and aquaculture: dominated by humans and Vargr clans, the entire Hengam Sea has been turned into a fish & kelp cultivation & harvest zone;
- the water purification, distribution, and recycling trade: an exclusively human occupation, this competitive industry purifies and pipes water to the massive cities within the Kavir Cone, a manufacturing region 500 miles inland of the Hengam Sea, where a significant fraction of the planets' 12 billion sophonts live.
- TL 8 information processing: while the populous cities of the Kavir Cone provide Sashar's TL 6-7 manufacturing plant, the design work for the major planetary corporations is handled with the TL 8 computers available in Xerxes. These machines and their networks are run and maintained by off-world expatriates, especially the Iper'mar detailed in **Stellar Reaches #5**;
- There is a major network of terraforming/waste processing facilities on Xerxes. The same corporations that ship in water to the heavily populated cities of the Kavir Cone also pump out the organic waste

generated by all those bodies. This waste is extremely useful in building up the topsoil of Sashar: it is dried, processed, and irrigated to fertilize the land.

- C-hands: "The Economic Means"
At TL 5–7, most of the work is handled by a vast army of terraforming corporate workhands, hired via yearly work contracts, and paid in room, three rations of food & water, free smokes, free uniforms, medical care, and a small number of silver coins. Twenty years of profitable service is rewarded by a small pension and the possibility of a proper corporate position for their children. "We are poor, we struggle, but we are free."

Those who elect to serve with the low-tech terraforming corporations under a lifetime contract are given 'bronze handcuffs': a permanent job, guaranteed food, shelter, clothing, and medical care until death, and free education, uniforms, and medical care for their children (up to age 16). Only a token amount of silver is paid, though: most 'money' is actually corporate script, which can be tendered only at company stores. "Our chains rest lightly on our wrists."

- G-hands: "The Political Means"
In contrast, government workhands – usually political enemies of the State, but sometimes debtors to it – are expected to care for themselves: refusal to work is rewarded with beatings, sometimes to death. No pay, food, shelter, or care is provided: the workhands are expected to handle that themselves, while fulfilling their daily work allotment. Some G-hands manage to organize themselves and survive the four to fifteen years of enforced servitude until they regain their liberty; but others don't. Everyone suffers greatly during their time here, except perhaps the guards. "We're paying the price for angering the wrong people."

The Worldbuilders – various groups of idealists, patriots, and fanatics – voluntarily take up the work to build up the topsoil of Sashar. The Ustad Dat insures that they get an ample supply of dried human waste to spread across the wilderness, just as they please: otherwise, they are largely ignored. Most of these groups only last a week or a month before returning to their homes in the cities, but a few are in it for the long haul. Despite the low-prestige, low-tech, back-breaking labour, the hard core Worldbuilders get great joy in seeing previously barren fields and valleys turn into green and fertile fields, especially after the rains come. While they sometimes work for the pay of land developers, this market is dominated by the corporations: the Worldbuilders generally do their work on rough land that is likely to be left uncultivated, even after the topsoil has been laid down and the first wave of hearty, drought-resistant biogeneered plant-life has rooted itself into the soil. “We’re bringing our world to life.”

- I-hands: “The Illegal Means” Subsector slavers have taken to dumping surplus cargo here in recent years. In return, they get paid enough to make it worth keeping the slaves alive a bit longer, instead of just tossing them out in jumpspace. When the planetary government can afford to pay for it, they also discourage small-time pirates from lurking around. “This turf is taken – go play somewhere else.” Naturally, they vanish when an Imperial Navy ship arrives, but somehow always reappear mere days after the Navy ships leave.

The I-hands don’t officially exist, and suffer greater abuse than even the G-hands. Truly disposable slaves, they

are worked very hard, and expected to scrounge for their own food and build their own shelter on their own ‘copious spare time’. (In fact, they are valued as less than proper slaves, who are at least fed, housed, and receive medical treatment at the expense of their owner.) These individuals are never freed: they labour in ‘the Fields of the People’ until they die. Note that chattel slavery is illegal within the Imperium: attempts to rescue the slaves tend to result in ‘disposing of the evidence’. All paper trails lead to small-time criminals, who are easily handed to the Imperium (and just as easily replaced) without a second’s thought. “A grim way for a man to die.”

- TL 7-8 Bwap agriculture: most of local Bwap food production only supplements the city’s needs. The Bwap of other cities, who specialize in both quantity and quality production, actually produces most of the vegetable foodstuffs of the city. Most of the Bwap of Xerxes work as bureaucrats in the various government, technarch, and corporate hierarchies. A large minority work as local agents of starfarers and interstellar organizations, especially for Bwap- and Vilani-run corporations: only a relatively small minority work in food production. A rather secretive branch of the Tap-a-wewaka-atapas, referred to by humans as ‘the Plumbers’, make *absolutely certain* that the Bwap community has access to the water they need to survive. Fortunately for all concerned, no-one has seriously threatened the independent, self-sufficient, triple-redundant Bwap water network in over a century.

YouTube

Crawling Robotic Snakes:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8t2nFHjtIJQ>

Earth as a Ringworld:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UT2sQ7KIQ-E>

Daybreak

By Alvin Plummer

Introduction

Daybreak is a short, highly compact adventure that can be relocated anywhere the Referee wishes – so long as he understands the in-universe consequences. This is a genuine end-of-the-world adventure, based on a famous science-fiction short story¹. The adventure assumes that the PCs are on a different mission, a few hours from their ship at the starport via the fastest transport they can grab in a hurry, lawfully or otherwise. The world should be fairly low-tech, around TL 7 or less.²

If the Referee is kind, he should make the world a fairly familiar one to the PCs, so they are used to the sky, the tides, and the general environment. The more unfamiliar the PCs are with the environment – especially the sky – the more time they waste when Bad Things Happen.³ They may even miss the significance of what is happening around them until it is entirely too late.

Most old-school SF readers should be able to pick up the very first clue that Something Bad is Going to Happen. The Referee is advised NOT to warn ignorant Players, if they don't pick up the hints soon enough: some lessons are best learnt the hard way, and frankly makes for a more memorable adventure.

This adventure uses the Classic Traveller rules, but is used only once in this document. Tasks are handled by the BITS Task System. Because of the no-second-chances nature of the adventure, the Referee is advised to have a very tight grip of the rules, especially in regard to speed, communication, and weaponry. The start-up sequence of the PC's starship may be of critical importance as well, depending on just how little margin the PCs have.

The adventure assumes the world has an atmosphere: a breathable atmosphere on a garden world is better for creating the sense of normality needed to really shock the PC when they realize exactly what is going to happen. A nearby celestial body, visible to the naked eye, is also necessary – be it a gas giant the PC's starting world orbits, a planetary ring, a moon, or a large, nearby planet visible to the naked eye. For the

rest of the adventure, it is assumed that the object is a local moon, and the PCs are on an Earth-sized world.

The identity and neighbourhood of the doomed world in question is worth a bit of careful thought by the Referee. The scarring or destruction of a famous world has an impact that can be felt sector-wide, and possibly Imperium-wide. The same thing to a minor world restricts the consequences to a more manageable, focused, smaller scale, where the PCs acts have a bigger impact. Played out correctly, it is possible that, after this dramatic adventure, the PCs will feel a permanent bond to the world they barely escaped from, be it an obscurity like Mihirkiran (Empty Quarter 1533) or Capital herself (Core 2118).

Moonlight

The PCs are either in the midst of a different adventure, just plying their trade, or are simply relaxing. The details are left for the Referee: he should shape the starting point to fit his vision of a good story, and how much he wants to take the PCs unawares.

The adventure proper start is very subtle. It is early in the evening, the local primary sun has set within the last two hours, and the moonlight is nice and bright.

And it gets brighter.

And brighter.

And Brighter.

AND BRIGHTER...

Meanwhile, the usually pitch-black sky starts to shine with the reflected light of the moon. (Even if the 'moon' is really a planetary ring, the intensity of reflected light starts going wayyyy above normal.) It is quite likely that the sky becomes breathtaking beautiful: the Referee should be free to describe the awesome colours and auras of the starless sky, and let the more thoughtful PCs ponder on the reason behind the light show.

Soon, the moonlight drowns out the stars.

On most TL 5 - 7 or less worlds, the TV and radio signals dissolve into static around this time, or earlier. TL 4 worlds may have a telegraph/undersea cable grid: while bandwidth is quite thin ("dot-dot-dash-dash-dash-dot-dot-dot"), it is also more robust than broadcast media.

On TL 8+ worlds, global communication networks, which have been steadily degrading for hours, being to undergo complete collapse. Whenever they were able to send word on the ongoing event – and thus spark worldwide panic – before they fell is left to the Referee.⁴

If the Referee chooses, he can quite easily underplay all these signs for a few hours – long enough for certain PCs to grow bored and go to bed. A PC with a low Intelligence stat (and thus, with weak imagination and logic) is at a disadvantage here. Brighter PCs on a new world could easily miss them, or dismiss them as merely normal phenomena – unless a local, not grasping the significance of what he's seeing, remarks upon it. Scientifically ignorant people of TL 7+ societies might also miss the implications – but, interestingly enough, may well make the intuitive jump that this is Bad News.⁵ Perhaps they understand these heavenly signs as signifying spiritual displeasure of the off-worlders, should they be newcomers...

Assuming a Size-8 world (i.e.: Earth-sized), and sunset at 6 pm local time, then at around midnight the Referee should take the time to really describe what is going on – unless the PCs are completely blind. Or asleep. (Depending on the foresight and utter ruthlessness of the Referee, they could be mere hours from making a pile of money, or capturing the bad guy, or getting their long-sought revenge – completely missing the omens – and, more importantly what those omens mean....)

Around 2 am, the local weather starts to grow... strange. The clouds start to streak, as if they are running away from... something. The winds blow stronger, and over the next few hours get more and more ferocious. On most human-compatible worlds (i.e.: those with large bodies of water) it then start to rain. Hard.

If the PCs are sleeping at this time – a quite likely possibility – the loudness of the rising wind should serve as their first wake-up call. As soon as the PCs look outside, they should realize that Something is Wrong – but exactly *what* is wrong is going to take some simple connect-the-dot thinking.

If the PCs still haven't figured out what is going on, then the Referee should let them return to bed. But he must be sure to awaken them later, even as the wind screams around them.

Regardless of the chaos around them, they should not miss the Dawn.

Exodus

For the sake of the story, the Referee must not cheat, nor can he let the Players cheat. Regardless of how much Intelligence or Education, the PCs are NOT allowed to use their stats to figure out what is going on. If they can't figure it out in time, they can face the consequences.

And what *IS* going on?

All you need to consider is what moonlight reflects. And understand the implications, if the glow of the moon gets really, really, really bright. And remember that you are in the night side of the world. And what's going to happen, when Dawn comes.⁶

The first Player to figure out what is happening is going to tell the other party members very quickly. Seconds afterwards, the need to get to the starport is going to become crystal clear.

While staying in the shadow of the planet they are fleeing, of course.

Mobs

If the PCs are unusually dense, the Referee may decide that local world-dwellers begin to realize what the unnaturally bright moon means – if the society has widespread scientific literacy, of a basic level. (Advisory: scientific literacy is *not* a function of tech level.) Non-scientific-minded societies may well riot, for mystical/religious reasons or as a terror-driven reaction to the ominous strangeness above them.⁷

Expect mobs of hundreds or thousands, surrounding the PCs. Some mobs demand that they and theirs get off-world immediately, before Sunrise. Other, more mystically-driven mobs are likely to have their own demands: perhaps bloodthirsty, maybe bizarre, and possibly justified by nothing more than moon-driven lunacy.

The Referee decided which mobs are driven by the raw fear of death, and which ones are powered by visions of the Apocalypse.

For battle resolution, assume that the fear-driven mobs have a morale level of Elite: yes, they are perfectly willing to take on PCs armed with laser-rifles or FGMPs, even if the locals themselves have nothing but pitchforks, torches, or their bare fists. Assume that 50% of the mob must suffer casualties before a morale-check is needed. Continue to make morale checks at the 50% casualty level, until the mob has fled or died. The morale level of the mob never falls below Elite.

(i.e.: if the mob is originally 500-strong, make morale checks at the 250, 125, 60, 30, 15, 7, 3, and one-combatant level.)

Mobs driven by mystical mania need no morale check: they attack the PCs, either to capture (for reasons the PCs are sure to discover first-hand) or to rip to pieces (if the masses are simply driven insane by the terrifying signs in the heavens.) Either the mob succeeds, or the mob dies: the possibility of retreating simply no longer exists in their minds.

Naturally, every moment wasted fighting delays the PCs from reaching their ship in time. It increases the possibility that those PCs with the vital skills needed to power-up and run the ship are incapacitated or killed.

If the PCs are in an urban area, there is a 1 in 10 chance that the PCs get caught in a Götterdämmerung trap. If this happens, the Referee resets the mob's morale to Infinite: any retreating mob members are trampled flat by incoming, desperate, crazed newcomers, eager to get their hands on their one and only chance of life at any cost. Word has gotten around that the PCs are the *only* key to survival before the new day arrives, and there are *always* more reinforcements to replace the dead members of the mob.

Or at least, there will be enough reinforcements to tie the PCs down until Dawn comes.

How the PCs break out of the trap – if it is even possible to do so – is in their hands.

Flight

The best way to travel is via teleport, but this is unlikely unless all the PCs are trained Zhodani noble psions, or have access to Ancient technology. Even if they have these abilities, they can expect serious trouble

concentrating under extreme stress of their minds/equipment.

If the teleport attempt is successful, the Referee should not deny their reward for 'cheating' – frankly, the Referee has only himself to blame, for giving the PCs such a great boon. The nature of teleportation is not affected by exploding stars or huge solar flares – at least, in all the official versions of the Traveller Universe.

The PCs should be given a few precious hours to get 'ahead of the curve' and plan out what they want to do before the Local Sun crosses the horizon-line. They need to keep in mind the desire of the Powers that Be for their starship: as of that moment, a working starship and capable crew is the most valuable thing in the system, outweighing any amount of water, food, medicine, gold, stocks, credits, land, rank, or status. (Only breathable air is still of greater value - *if* it is difficult to obtain.)

If the PCs aren't Zhodani or in possession of highly restricted Ancient technology, then the best way to get to the starport is via air/raft or grav belt. There might be some trouble landing: even starports of TL 7- worlds have anti-air defences, and they may (or may not) be active at the time of the PCs arrival. Depending on the local availability of aircraft, they may be a massive 'traffic jam' at the starport: everyone is leaving at the same time (with some captains simply ignoring ground control) while all sorts of craft are coming in, their crews and passengers gambling on their only chance to outlive the coming of the Sun.

This is a good time to remember that all this is being done at local night. Fortunately, the bright, bright moon and the sky – now luminescent with the coming of the Sun – helps quite nicely with vision. Of greater import is the increasing turbulent weather, and the highly charged atmosphere which is playing havoc with electrical and electromagnetic controls of all the craft in the sky.

Including the control systems of the PC's air/raft or grav belt.

(If the air/raft or grav belt is military-issue, then it is shielded for electricity surges and radiation, and is likely to survive the increasingly dangerous environment.)

If the PCs have no flight ability, then they can drive instead. Most low-tech worlds place their starport some distance away from inhabited regions, in case a

smashed ship contains a major hazard (biological, chemical, military, etc.) This gives the PCs a fighting chance to reach the starport via off-road (or other highly unexpected) means. Low-tech cars, with few components vulnerable to electromagnetic radiation, are a good bet, as are fast-moving riding beasts.

Should the PCs have no vehicle – but still be placed by a kind Referee ‘an hour or three’ from the starport – then those hours must be spent riding on horseback at high speed, riding a motorboat, or by forced march. This is not a good time for equipment failure, or a sprained ankle, or for a low-Constitution PC to hold back the rest of the group.

Arrival

Should the PCs be really on the ball, they’ll make for the starport early, before most of the still-slumbering population figures out what’s going on. They have to face only sparse traffic and guards that are still simply dazzled by the moonlight, instead of being driven to lunacy by what it symbolizes.

If the PCs arrive early, they become aware of the low hubbub of the night-watch. There is a lot of comment on the brightness of the moon – certainly a once-in-a-decade moment. The later the PCs arrive, the less the wonder, and the greater the fear in the eyes of the starport night shift.

At a certain point of time, the starport shift snaps: PCs arriving after this moment are seized immediately with the use of lethal force threatened. The *use* of this force is balanced on a razor’s edge: the crew know in their head that certain PCs must be kept alive, to run the ship and make the jump. (The starport personnel who know how to pilot and jump a starship have either already done so, or died trying.) However, the maddening fear/dread that is eating away at their sanity grows increasingly unstoppable, straining the bonds of self-discipline...

If the PCs promise to take as many people as they can, several possibilities immediately arise:

- An all-out fight among the starport personnel (and any bystanders) to decide who gets on the ship and lives, and who stays behind and dies.⁷
- The leader of the mob picks who lives and who dies, and the mob obeys his order. It is likely that ‘who lives’ are simply the people with the guns, and ‘who dies’ are those who don’t have guns.
- The mob is not a lawless rabble, but a group of

highly self-disciplined men. Starport personnel have a high spirit de corps, capable of holding the group together in the face of certain death: most likely, this is grounded in military-grade bonds of loyalty to Imperial Authority, the local representative of the local Noble house, to a steel-hard Starport Honour Code⁸, or even sheer professionalism. A shared self-image of manhood, heroism, tribal identity, or religious commandments may also have such grip on starport personnel that even impending death can’t shake.

If the PCs are met by such men, they may still be forced to take passengers – but those passengers are NEVER the men themselves, but are instead ‘the truly worthy’ or ‘the protected weak’: those of noble Imperial houses, local aristocrats, women and children, and/or the weakest and frailest of stranded passengers. Highly revered religious figures (or quasi-religious individuals, like doctors or greatly loved celebrity-saints in the Princess Diana mode) may also be escorted to the PCs starship.

There is an extremely slim chance that the PCs would be allowed to abandon the world without any passengers, but only with, say, valuables and irreplaceable treasures. It is far more likely that such PCs would blast their way to the starship and off the world.

Dawn

PCs that arrive late to the starport - but before Sunrise – had better have access to a deep, well-prepped bunker, built to outlast an intense nuclear bombardment. Such bunkers, of course, are already in use, locked down, and heavily defended by the time the PCs are at the starport. Even if the PCs somehow uncovered the location of these bunkers in the few hours before Dawn - if they even exist – it is nearly certain that the PCs merely die on the wrong side of these Imperial, planetary, Noble, or (mega)corporate bunker gates.

If the Sun has gone nova, and the PCs are still on the world when Dawn arrives, they die, spectacularly. If they somehow manage to enter a bunker thanks to a string of very unlikely miracles, they are probably still dead, regardless. Only extremely deep bunkers, with extensive protection against a vast array of radiation, stand some sort of chance against a nova. And even they are likely to fail within a few months, unless they

were specifically built to handle such a sustained and broad radiation assault.

If the ominous signs in the heavens point to a solar flare, instead of a nova, the PCs may be able to live *if* the flare dies down and *if* they are far from shore, thus evading the incredibly turbulent seas (reacting to the hot/boiling oceans on the dayside face of the world.)

Their continual survival, on a shattered world and a maddened society is very unlikely. The destruction of the interconnected banking and communication system leads directly to mass starvation and the death of civilized society on worlds above TL 6 – 7. Fortunately, on worlds below TL 6, most people are still subsistence farmers, so most shall eat until the coming harvests fail later in the year – and for many years to come – thanks to the soot in the air, drastically cooling the world. Asthma and other breathing disorders are certain to rise, as well. On the other hand, the ash and suspended particulate matter guarantees spectacular sunrises and sunsets for decades to come.

Surviving PCs with functional equipment may, with some ingenuity and a good chunk of providence, be able to attract the attention of curious starfarers within two months of the solar flare. Whenever these starships are lawful representatives of the Imperial government, compassionate and wealthy civilians, or loot-hungry, rampaging pirates is left for the Referee to decide.

Escape

If the PCs managed to successfully escape the doomed world, they look down on a dimly lit globe completely covered in turbulently swirling clouds (if there is enough open water) or to a backlit globe, much of which is glowing red with heat (if there is little sanding water on the planet.)

As the atmosphere no longer shields them from the murderous surge of the Sun's radiation, ship alarms ring. Radiation, more than vacuum, more than cold, more than misjumps, is the great hazard of space travel – and the space around the planet is absolutely alive with lethal levels of radiation. Traveller ships are all well-shielded from 'normal background radiation': ships with more than the minimal amount of armour for their thrust level can provide bonuses against radiation damage.

Task: for determining radiation damage:

6D6 - (ship's armour level – ship's max G rating) if the star went nova;

2D6 - (ship's armour level – ship's max G rating) if the planet is struck by a solar flare.

The same radiation result is applied to all sophonts on the ship.

Apply the damage to the PC's Strength + Endurance. The PCs determine how much damage is applied to a given characteristic.

If there is no resulting damage, everyone on the ship escapes all serious radiation damage: however, due to accumulated rads, survivors may be susceptible to various cancers, if additional radiation is received.

If the resulting damage is less than 4, then no sophont may die from radiation: that is, neither Strength nor Endurance may be reduced below 1.

If the resulting damage is less than 8, then no sophont may immediately die from radiation, and immediate damage is halved: however, damage not applied immediately is applied by one point a week, until the full damage is taken.

If the resulting damage is equal or greater than the combined PC's Strength + Endurance, the PC dies painfully within a week, before the starship exists jumpspace.

If the resulting damage is equal or greater than twice the PC's Strength + Endurance, the PC dies painfully before 24 hours have passed: i.e., before a day has been spent in jumpspace.

To **evade** radiation damage, the pilot may risk jumping while in atmosphere, far below the 1-diameter limit. Standard Traveller rules should be used to determine the result. If jump is made within the 10-diameter limit, standard procedure should be used to determine the result, but **halve** radiation damage taken by the ship.

It is assumed that the pilot remains in the shadow of the planet during the sprint to the jump-point.

This is an Easy task for any pilot, but should it fail during a *nova*, the ship is swiftly disabled and utterly destroyed. If this task fails during a *solar flare*, roll 1d6:

1-2: the ship escapes substantial damage, as the flare was already dimming by the time the mistake is made. In addition, all onboard receives +1 in radiation damage.

3-4: the ship receives 1D6 damage from the flare, and all PCs/NPCs receive +4 in radiation damage.

5: the ship receives 4D6 damage from the flare, and all PCs/NPCs receive +8 in radiation damage.

6: the ship is destroyed, and all onboard are lost.

Detention

If the ship successfully exits jumpspace near an inhabited world, the PCs are directed by the destination space traffic controllers to land their radioactive ship in an isolated berth. Survivors are swiftly whisked away for medical treatment. As the last ship known to escape the doomed world, they are also vigorously debriefed by Imperial authorities, and their ship impounded. (The Imperials are combing for evidence for the artificial creation of the nova/solar flare.) Standing orders require that anyone who is fleeing a destroyed world must be held in detention, until properly debriefed by the authorities.

Any evidence of criminal activities on the part of the PCs merely lead to their immediate arrest: any unusual system journeys or odd cargos by the PCs peak the interest of many, many branches of the Imperial government. It takes quite a while before the Imperial authorities are satisfied that the PCs have nothing to do with the nova/solar flare that trashed the world they fled.

The actions of the PCs do not shorten the time of their administrative detention, but it does improve their standing in the eyes of the investigators. If the Imperium sees the PCs as basically heroes, they enjoy their 'protective custody' in a nice hotel – complete with occasional interviews with famous talking heads.

By default, Nobles spend their detention as unexpected guests of a local noble house, or at a very nice, five-star hotel. Senior corporate executives (of subsector-wide or greater enterprises) are also kept at high-class hotels. Knights, serving Imperial officers and middle-managers of megacorporations or Noble houses are billeted at a nice middle-class hotel at Imperial expense.

Run-of-the mill merchantmen & adventurers, tainted with the usual shady dealings but with no (serious) criminal record, are warehoused in minimum-security facilities: not the greatest place to be, but not all that bad either, so long as you keep your nose clean. If they

are not charged with any crime, the PCs are likely to get weekend paroles, but must remain nearby and return by a given hour. Abusing this privilege is not advised.

PCs that have a history of serious crime face a more unpleasant stay in one of His Imperial Majesties' Prisons: however, even they are eventually let go if there is no hard evidence of wrongdoing. PCs that have supported anti-Imperial activities or a record of breaking the Imperial Laws of War disappear into the Imperium's secure interrogation centres: assuming they didn't do anything wrong, they will be eventually be released with 'only minimal mental damage.'

Time spent in detention: Initial roll: 1D6 + 1 months. Roll separately for every PC. This excludes any prison terms, fines, or additional punishment for violating Imperial laws & regulations.⁹

In the Imperium, who you are and who you represent matters. Sophonts of Social Rank 9 have a month shaved off their detention time, to a minimum of two months. Social rank 10 (Knights) have half their detention time removed, to a minimum of one month. Barons – Social Rank 11+ - are detained for no longer than two weeks. Those of Social Rank 12+ - Marquis or greater – are detained for no longer than two days.

Low status individuals who can prove that they work for a megacorporation, a major planetary government (pop 9+, TL 12+), or are low-ranked Imperial servants (i.e.: serving Imperial soldiers, etc) have half their detention time removed, to a minimum of two months. Credentialed servants of a Noble house are detained for no longer than two months.

Note that servants of a major Noble house are usually high-status individuals in their own right. Also, most senior Imperial military officers are high-status individuals, knights, or nobles. Imperial officers of flag rank are treated as Barons for the purpose of detention: Imperial Naval Captains and Army/Marine Colonels are treated as Knights.¹⁰

Time the PCs' starship is impounded: 1D4+1 months. Any damage the ship sustained escaping the doomed world is not repaired, unless the PCs become media darlings for highly heroic acts. In this case, the PC's ship is repaired for free 'with the thanks of the Imperium.'

Conclusion

After the Imperial government has satisfied itself that the PCs were not the cause of the disaster, they are released from administrative detention.

Heroes walk into an adoring crowd of admirers and reporters. They are in high public demand for 1D3 months: if their actions are especially inspiring and noteworthy, the most heroic might well win a knighthood or even a minor barony. The friendship of nobles – especially those tied to the doomed world – is a reasonable possibility, and may lead up to being formally inducted into a nobles' household. (Heroic PCs of noble blood are invited to formal adoption into a new noble family, complete with inheritance rights and a place in line to inherit the noble's seat.) Really sharp PCs could easily make their temporary fame a springboard into something more permanent....

Ordinary merchants and adventurers are greeted by their family and buddies, and maybe a scribe or cameraman or two. Perhaps they didn't make any money from THAT port of call: but they have stories that'll last a lifetime, a stronger bond with their crewmen (having near-literally 'gone thru the fire'), and perhaps given a helping hand when it was needed most. Green PCs before this adventure are now considered 'one of us'; experienced hands are promoted to vets: old hands that survived now become walking legends.

Criminals walk away, alone. If they weren't caught, and if they don't backstab each other (both big ifs), they may get quite a windfall. This ocean of cash permits them to live large until they spend off every last credit - or until scrawny Imperial tax collectors with heavily armed friends show up for a little chat.

The more mercenary PCs may have engaged in certain ignoble acts, like looting the world before it burned, or refusing to take on desperate passengers when they had plenty of room to spare. The Imperium is nearly certain to uncover these acts, unless the PCs do a truly fantastic job in cleaning out every scrap of evidence before leaving jump space.

Should such callous acts ever be uncovered, the PCs will certainly face formal criminal charges. Even if they beat the rap, they will have reason to fear if the damaged/dead world had many off-world friends - from colonies to religious believers to wealthy and/or numerous expatriates. The 'informal interstellar justice system' is especially potent on frontier regions like the Empty Quarter, and certain Imperial authorities won't investigate too hard if the PCs simply fail to return to their docked ship one day.

Footnotes

¹The original story this adventure is derived from is Inconstant Moon, by Larry Niven. I strongly recommend a review of pre-1990 Science Fiction short stories for the serious Traveller Referee: a bonanza of story ideals wait to be brought to life.

Certain old TV anthologies, like the Outer Limits (The original and the 1990s comeback) and the Twilight Zone (again, both the original and the comeback) are also great places to mine for new stories.

Remember: 'Traveller *IS* Old-School Sci-fi, brought to your dining room table.'

²The reason why this story is set on a TL 7- world is to give the PCs a sporting chance to get to the starport, get in their starship, get out of the system, and live. If the story is set on a high-tech world, the PCs should be a mere 15 minutes from the starport when news of the nova/solar flare/other end-of-the-world disaster hits the airwaves. Any more distant, and they had better have the teleport skill for any realistic chance of getting out alive.³

Even at a mere 15 minutes travel time, they can expect the fight of their lives, getting to the starport, past the local security, and to their starship. It is quite possible that they must fight their way past Imperial Marines: they naturally want to Get Out Now too, and are more likely than most to have the skill set needed to get into the ship, grab the controls, and make the jump before the solar shockwave/epic solar flare hits.

A kind and merciful Referee should have the PCs land the ship dirtside, just when the newsflash of the nova/solar flare hits. The PCs get the priceless opportunity to make the deals of the lifetime, if they can keep control of the ship, repel all boarders (regardless of who they are, what they say, what they wear, or what they do), and get out of the system before Dawn arrives. Greedy PCs should be tempted to stay just a *mite* too long...

³No teleport? An Imperial Warrant or Ducal rank *might* do the trick. So would senior Imperial military rank. Best to have a company of high-tech experienced troopers in battledress at hand when you present your credentials, though.

None of the above? Then just buy a few lawnchairs, fight your way against the stream of panicked humaniti, set the chairs on top of the highest skyscraper, and enjoy the view when Dawn arrives.

⁴As a rule of thumb, the higher the law level, the more likely the population was left in ignorance: after all, the Powers That Be must avoid a banking panic until they themselves are off-world/in the bunkers, with as much of their money transferred to off-world assets or on their 'getaway' yacht as possible.

⁵There are significant differences between a full-on nova and a massive, moonrock-melting solar flare. The story [Inconstant Moon](#) turns on the difference, and should be considered required reading for the Referee. The end result in both cases is most likely a short but very exciting life: but the solar flare gives much bigger breaks to those who survive the Dawn.

⁶Their may be circumstances the Referee wants the PCs to waste time – to increase drama, or to nullify much of the advantage of the PCs technology vis-à-vis other people, when they suddenly realise that it is time to leave. Now.

⁷Highly passive societies, various non-human sophonts, and certain very odd human cultures *don't* riot. What they do instead is completely left in the hands of the Referee.

⁷As centres of Imperial authority, it is possible that a well-prepped deep bunker exists at the starport, capable of handling an orbital bombardment, or a solar flare. (It's very unlikely that a starport bunker would be capable of handling a nova event.) Roll 2D6 – Starport level (Starport A = 5, B = 4, etc.): a result of 4 or less indicates the existence of such a bunker.

Naturally, by the time the PCs arrive, said bunker is already fully occupied, sealed tight as a drum, and protected by frightened men with guns.

⁸The possibility of such an Honour Code among *civilian* servants of the Emperor is actually fairly likely, given the level of endemic low-level violence of the Official Traveller Universe. This strongly implies that civilian life in most of the Imperium is a lot more hard-edged and disciplined than in the Western Democracies of the early 21st century.

⁹It is important to note that this time is (probably) not a solid block of daily interrogations and questioning. Most of this is pure waiting, and is a result of the slow FTL travel time in Traveller. The Imperial bureaucracy needs the time

- for information to be routed to the right people;

- for sufficient Imperial resources to be tracked down and retasked;
- and to redeploy the resources to the right places.

Even though things seem to be moving at a glacial pace from the viewpoint of the PC's, the disaster has secured the undivided attention of the local Imperial government, so things are actually moving a good deal faster than it would in normal times. All sorts of resources and personnel are being torn screaming from their usual posts, and are being rushed hither and yon to track down the cause of the nova/solar flare, to investigate any and all parties that benefited from the destruction, and to bring succour to the surviving population (if any).

¹⁰Frankly, I would expect all Traveller Referees to grant baronial status to all flag-rank Imperial officers, with a handful of famous exceptions.

Naturally, PCs who are currently in the Emperor's Service will demand that they be released immediately. However, the Imperial's overwhelming need to **know** what they were up to when an entire **world** was destroyed trumps most other considerations. Couple this with travel times, and only the most connected or persuasive PCs are able to avoid cooling their heels.

Appendix: Making Stars Go Boom

There is one known way to create artificial novas in the Official Traveller Universe: the Darrian Star Trigger. During the lifetime of the Official Third Imperium, the Darrians claimed to have such a device, but in truth they only had a non-functioning version. The fact that it didn't actually work was known to at most three people within the Darrian government.

(Note that, in the GURPS Alternate Timeline, the Darrians created a functional version between 1117 and 1120.)

Other ways to create artificial novas have been suggested in SF literature. For example, in the Jack McDevitt story [A Talent For War](#), one of the characters devised a relatively 'cheap' method of creating novas by using anti-matter. However, the character decided not to utilize the weapon, as he feared the implications would lead to the destruction of interstellar civilization.

Running this adventure in the Spinward Marches at any time would immediately cast suspicion on the Darrian Confederation: regardless if their Star Trigger is real or not, the Imperium **must** assume that it is. The Darrians

are allies of the Third Imperium, so they have a reasonable chance of evading blame and pacifying Imperial accusations: if not, the consequences will be unpleasant.

If the Referee chooses to go the 'antimatter star-killer' route, then he should be prepared to handle the follow-on consequences of a genuine military revolution, similar to that caused by iron weapons, the use of the stirrup, the European utilization of gunpowder, NBC warfare, anti-gravity technology, jumpdrives, and the meson cannon.

The cheap creation of star-killing weaponry would transform the Traveller universe. Things are sure to get messy in the next Great Power War, be it the ongoing Solomani Rim War, the future Fourth Frontier War, or even a future Imperial Civil War – now 'new and improved'.

Besides the spectacular, the Referee should not neglect the more mundane uses of antimatter, as both weaponry and in power-production. I have always felt that Traveller never properly reflected the implications of 'free power' fusion power plants imply: a Referee-created Antimatter Revolution would be the perfect occasion to correct this problem.

Shutdown

By Alvin Plummer

Overview

*Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.*
Sun Tzu, **The Art of War**, 6th century B.C.

Shutdown is a naval adventure for an elite team of starmercs, preferably with experience with commanding Early Stellar Tech capital ships (i.e. TL 9 to B). It involves a major raid on Edzummalisu, a pirate cove controlled by the Suedzuk Vargr in the Sslinth Zone – the lawless space between the Rukadukaz Republic (a member state of the Julian Protectorate) and the Hegemony of Lorean (an Associate State of said Protectorate). Despite the heavy hardware at the disposal of the PCs, surviving this raid is still heavily dependent on their actions. Classic Traveller rules and the BITS Task Systems will be used in this adventure.

As this is a specialized adventure, the PCs will be expected to generate naval officers as their characters. At least one should attain the rank of a line Captain. Skill in Space Tactics (or their equivalents, in your version of Traveller) would be quite useful. For flavour, at least one PC should have skill in speaking an Ovaghoun Vargr language – several popular ones on Ikon, the most influential Vargr world in the Empty Quarter, include Gvunkkone, Ourmakten, Kr'ra'ogovtzarr, and Ukazk.¹ Vargr PCs can expect a tough time while on Tokitre: they will have to discover which part of the local startown tolerate Vargr, and do so quickly. (Forget seeing the rest of the planet.)

Skill in speaking Julian Anglic (a.k.a. Protectorate Anglic), the *lingua franca* of Tokitre, is pleasing, but not absolutely necessary: Transform Anglic – the dialect of the Imperial Empty Quarter – and Julian Anglic is generally mutually comprehensible. Linguistics can compare it to the differences between Spanish and Portuguese.

All the PCs are expected to have worked together from the same space force. The identity of their organization – Imperial Navy, Star Legion, one of the Hegemony military groups², or a planetary naval force – is up to them to decide.

Introduction

Spending money like a drunken sailor
Ancient English idiom

The PCs are relaxing after some difficult work on Rivendell – a.k.a. Tokitre/Tokitre – enjoying the money they have earned³.

[The Referee should give each PC 1D6 x 10,000 Cr to use as they see fit, just to see what they are going to spend it on. He can also decide exactly what the PCs were up to previously, and who is still angry at them about their actions. Note that 10,000 Cr is quite a bundle: the average TL A Tokitrean earns ~5,000 Cr a year, and a comfortable home in a nice neighbourhood is about 20,000 – 40,000 Cr.]

Tokitre residents should be depicted as desert-dwelling Imperial Catholics who are stereotypically 'more Imperial than the Imperials'. They are quite hostile to the powerful Vargr cultures that they have been fighting for millennia – even as they 'borrow' styles, technology, and techniques from their more advanced and wealthy neighbours. Unlike the generally Asian & Arabic heritage shared by most of the sector, the inhabitants of Tokitre are of Polish extraction (although this fact is unknown in 993 Imperial, more due to negligence than suppression or gaps in the records.) For more information on Tokitre and the crucial world of Ikon, see **Stellar Reaches #8**, 'Sacred Mission', and **Stellar Reaches #9**, 'Ikonic Voyage'.

Big Iron

If we had less statesmanship we could get along with fewer battleships.
Mark Twain, c. 1905

The PCs do their job because they love it, not because of financial need. And one of the joys of their work is the opportunity to command a capital starship in action, a privilege that doesn't come to just anybody. While doing the due diligence to vet the offer (handled personally or by a trusted contact), the PCs determine that the patron requiring their services is backed by a

division of the Menderes Corporation, *THE* power of the Julian Protectorate, and a discreet alliance of Imperial corporate interests. PCs curious to know why such powerful forces can't just send a Star Legion or Imperial Navy task force to do the job will learn an appreciation of politics: the Imperium is operating under treaty restrictions when it comes to deploying major combat assets on the wrong side of the Lesser Rift, while the Protectorate would prefer to avoid the political complications a direct intervention would cause. The patron would rather not discuss the exact terms of the mission on Tokitre, but will state that 1) it will be a strike against pirates 2) it won't be against any Imperial, Protectorate, Republic, or Hegemonic interests 3) the opposition is expected to be strong, worth sending a capital ship to deal with.

After determining the terms of the contract (via roleplay or a set of skill contests), the PCs board a run-of-the-mill Suleiman scout/courier, and the *Bluenote*, bearing Menderes Corporation livery, makes the jump. A week later, the *Bluenote* exits within the parsec hex, but a good 20 billion km from Tokitre, far below the star system's ecliptic plane. Thanks to their very competent pilot/navigator⁴, the PCs arrive about 10,000 km from what looks like a brick wrapped by a mass of grid work and assorted collections of cans.

[Referee: Twenty billion kilometres is 18.5 light-hours, or 133.5 AU. Note that one Astronomical Unit is the distance between the Earth and the Sun (or Terra and Sol, in-universe). Or, put another way, Space is Big.]

The 'tin-cans collections' are various specialised cutter modules linked together to make ad-hoc space stations.⁵ Two 3,000-ton liners are at rest nearby, apparently serving as living quarters for the slapped-together 'ship yard': a floating tank farm, topped up every month, serves to refuel jump drives. Three SDB's, in equidistant positions 60,000 km from the centre of activity, keep watch against interlopers.

The Mission

Don't worry, my friend's down there. He'll have that shield down in time.

[pause]

Or this'll be the shortest offensive of all time.

Lando Calrissian, *Return of the Jedi*, 1983

The PCs exit the *Bluenote* and into one of the sprawling tin-can rigs. Here, they meet Sheikh Rafee Miandad, the lead planner of the mission. Over tiny cups of very sweet coffee, he outlines the plan.

The *Vivica* – the capital ship the PCs will be commanding – will be leading a strike against a dug-in Er Uts Pack base on the planetoid of Edzummalisu, in Unang system. The PCs will be jumping in directly in battle, and they will be able to refuel to go home only after the fight has been won. The *Vivica* task group will include ten escorts: three destroyers, eight mercenary ships, a tanker, and four scouts. They might be able to swing a TL C warship, but mostly, they will be working with TL A – B starships. The opposition is expected to be in the same tech range, but generally smaller: between 15 and 30 200-ton Vargr raiders, designed to steal from the weak, not fight warships.

However, a major problem is an unknown number of TL E 50-ton missile bays that the corsairs have somehow obtained and redeployed for the defence of their base. There is also the problem of the *Ollifhe*. A TL E T'Quorg-class corsair, the *Ollifhe* has the potential to make life painful for the low-tech strike force. A covert ground force is planned to bring down the missile bay before the *Vivica* task group arrives, and certain observers have determined the periods when the *Ollifhe* is unlikely to be in the area: the PCs will be attacking during one of these gaps. However, the PCs will be expected to lead in contingency planning, and as the mission commanders, responsibility for the success of the mission rests on their shoulders. "It's why we pay you the big bucks."

Planned timeline

It takes three years to build a ship; it takes three centuries to build a tradition.

Admiral Sir Browne Cunningham,
Battle of Crete, 1941

The current date is 47-993.

Between Day 47 and Day 145, the PCs must accomplish the following goals:

- Recruit 635 crewmen to man their warship. These crewmen must be comfortable with using and working in a TL B technical environment. They must sign up for at least one year of service, with a possibility of extending it to a three year commitment. For this period of time, they will be under military discipline, and subject to various confidentiality and secrecy agreements. And of course, there is the distinct possibility that they will die or be severely maimed in the course of their duties.

Of this group, 58 (minus the number of PCs) will be officers. In addition to the above, the officers must already be quite competent in their jobs, to reduce time in preparation and going up the learning curve. (Getting the backers to pay for this level of expertise will be an interesting exercise). Moreover, they must be trustworthy, and be able to do their jobs with little or no supervision.

A reminder to the players (the characters in the game already know this). Note that this is a commercial military force: a mercenary force, if you will. The crew is not bound by an oath, but by the opportunity for gain in money, prestige, or some other coin. Appeals to duty fall flat, but appeals to professionalism may get results. The actual individuals recruited are up to the PCs, be they men or women, humans or other.

Note that increasing the diversity of the force decreases the unity of the force. This heightens the possibility of interpersonal conflict and miscommunication issues. The financial backers have some serious money on the line, and will frown on actions that weaken the probability of military success in order to meet idealized socio-political goals. This is not the 21st century A.D.: military efficiency, effectiveness and unit cohesion profoundly outweigh diversity & egalitarian idealism.

The Referee may well decide to let the PCs go this route anyways, if they so desire: he should roleplay the inevitable clashes between orders, discipline, and sex when highly masculine men encounter women in a military environment, or men with a long-standing (and, perhaps, well-justified) animosity against the Vargr are required to work with them in a military operation against a Vargr pirate base. (Assuming the Vargr would even join in such an operation – the race is known for their racial pride.) And of course, the Referee should determine how many Vargr brought onboard are moles, spies, or passive assets of the pirates, waiting for the right time to strike, like Major Hasan of the 2009 Fort Hood incident.

Moreover, because of time issues, the PCs will have to conduct their recruitment drive on Tokitre. It's the best place to do so in a six-parsec sphere, but there are still drawbacks.

- The top TL of the system is A, but the capital ship is TL B. Most spacers here would have difficulty using the ship systems of the Vivia, while the available ex-Imperial Navy types are used to TL E.
- The men here are fiercely anti-Vargr. This helps with recruitment, but will cause problems if the PCs are Vargr, or if they wish to use Vargr in their force. (And they are men: some local women will fight, but for sacred/religious causes, and not for base coin. See **Stellar Reaches #8**, Sacred Mission, for more information.)

None of this changes the fact that, in some circumstances, a Vargr or a woman or a Hegemonio may indeed be the right individual for the job. And of course, this is theoretically a strictly merit-based, professional force, where messy emotions and atavistic drives aren't permitted to interfere with the Official Plan. There is a price to be paid, regardless of the PCs decision.

It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, for the PCs to do all the in-person interviewing for these positions. They will simply have to delegate some of the work to others, while they themselves interview the prospective officers & petty officers. How they delegate this work is up to the PCs: they will discover how good or bad the job they did in the field.

- Recruit a deployable ground force for the ship. This force will be required to operate in an airless, low-G environment. The PCs decide how long the force should be expected to operate before returning to the ship, but the 'rule of thumb' is 6 hours if opposition is light, 24 hours for sustained opposition. Whether this is an armoured battalion, trained Protected Forces infantry, or regular infantry with vac suits, with mobile 'air & waste' replacement teams, is up to the PCs. Warbots would be quite useful, but are hard to find: Tokitre's TL A society does not produce them, and the powerful Ovaghoun civilization to spinward dislikes robots, just as the rest of Vargr civilization does. (Ruling robots does not grant charisma to their owner, and are poorly maintained, in any case.) The PCs will have to negotiate with their backers regarding financing, the cost of hiring experienced

personnel vs. hiring greenhorns and training them yourself, etc.

- Transport said force and their equipment to the Vivica preparation site, with some discretion. Even after getting all the men and material together, the PCs will have to haul it all to the middle of nowhere, with some level of confidentiality. This operation has the support of the major Tokitre governments, so a meeting with certain security agencies can be arranged to work out just how the job will be done. There are few Vargr around to spy on things, but there are always human sell-outs, no matter how hated they are. (If the PCs catch one, they may legally choose to skip the part about trials...) The financial backers can provide the ships and crews needed to handle the raw transport needs, with rather little fuss.

145-993: The *Vivica* is fully repaired, refitted, powered up, and ready for trials.

- The PCs are in charge, and they decide when the ship is ready for commissioning. Hopefully, the officers they hired are competent enough to train those under them, with the PCs just handling paperwork. If not, there will be delays, incidents, and an overall lower level of military proficiency. Admin and leadership skills are important, as is ship handling and technical skills. Based directly on the PCs skill in recruiting and leading their men, the Referee can assign an experience level to the ship's crew: Green, Trained, Regular, Veteran, or Elite.
- The *Vivica* is a quirky ship. She was mistreated in her journey to Tokitre, and was floating dead in space for several centuries. Over the last three years, she has been warmed up, re-pressurised, and worked on relentlessly, with her innards yanked out and replaced. Most of the metal fatigue problems have been solved, but there is still unexpected creaking and moaning onboard. (More than one spacehand insists that the ship is haunted.) All system labelling is now in Anglic, but there are still a few mysterious inscriptions in a long-lost language bolted on the walls here and there. And there are several cubbyholes, corridors that lead nowhere, and sealed rooms here and there.

There may well be more substantial issues. All the major ship systems have been partially tested, but there may be unexpected reactions when everything is powered up at the same time. The partially rebuilt manoeuvre and jump drives need watching. How's the accuracy of the spinal weapon? Missile bays? Plasma bays? How about the HVAC? Gravity? Do the control panels explode every time the ship takes a hit? (If so, space the supervising engineer, and get somebody competent!)

194-993: The deadline for trials. The ship must be ready by this point. If not, there's a 50% chance that the mission goes ahead anyway: the PCs may reasonably choose to bail now without penalty, rather than go to battle onboard a ship they have already deemed unready for battle. The adventure ends at this point... but the Referee may set up a chain of consequences in later adventures. Perhaps they were replaced by a command team that made it work, and who are now intense professional rivals. The ship may have just vanished in jumpspace, increasing the cachet of the PCs and making them the 'go-to' guys when it comes to certifying major warships for action. There may have been a major military disaster which some surviving spacers irrationally blame the PCs for.

If the backers stand by the PCs in denying commissioning, then the PCs adventure still ends... for this year. The military operation may still go ahead, but using different vessels: or more time may be spent in getting the ship ready, with the PCs tapped to check out the ship again in one to three years. The Referee will decide the matter.

If the PCs decide that the ship passes the trials, then....

Between Day 194 and Day 261, the PCs must have the crew work up to battle readiness. 'The ship is good, but the crew still has a ways to go.' Even if the PCs somehow recruited an Elite mercenary crew – a stunt several interstellar navies will be curious to learn more about – they will still need time to jell and learn to work together. In reality, the PCs will have to put a lot of sweat just to get a decent Regular-quality crew together, with Trained or Green crews being much more likely. Elites may need the time to sharpen their skills with a new set of tools, but Green crews need the time just to be taught not to panic when the

neighbouring crewman suddenly loses his head, or the air starts getting mighty thin.

If the PCs aren't doing a continuous cycle of battle repair drills, battle station drills, gunnery drills, power loss drills, emergency manoeuvre drills, repel boarder drills, emergency jump drills, communication failure drills, and hull breach drills, then they simply aren't doing their jobs. The requirement of the human body to sleep, eat, and defecate should be the only real restraint here – and these limits should be tested, from time to time.

Between Day 261 and the Deployment Date, the PCs must wait. And wait. And wait. Sometime in this period, the PCs will get the message to ready for deployment, but until then, they have to mark time. Drilling should be less intense, but the PCs need to balance the need to conserve their crew's strength, maintain and increase morale, and keep the edge sharp, as they don't know if the order to move will come in tomorrow, three weeks from now, or in 15 minutes.

[Referee: pick a day between Day 261 and Day 365. That's your Deployment Day.]

Deployment Day: The *Vivica* is ordered to jump to Odzagh system. This will be their staging area for the assault on Edzummalisu, two parsecs away, located in the Unang system.

Over Odzagh

This adventure breaks PC operations in Odzagh system into three parts: force composition, intelligence, and training.

Force Composition

I wish to have no Connection with any Ship that does not Sail fast for I intend to go in harm's way.
Captain John Paul Jones, 1778

Very soon after the *Vivica* appears in Odzagh system, several small Vargr scout ships decide to leave, pronto. 'What a coincidence.' There's nothing the *Vivica* can do about this, as her orders don't permit her to kill any ship here (except in self-defence), nor does her commanders have any law-enforcement powers.

Odzagh herself is a major Suedzuk military strongpoint, and have no love for humaniti. However, certain bargains have been struck thanks to intrepid corporate agents and gutsy diplomats with ice in their veins. In

return for mislabelled containers full of... stuff... quietly transferred between 'bloodthirsty Blood Vargr raiders' and 'helpless civilian freighters', the masters of Odzagh system will permit the *Vivica* to gather her forces over Okhgrnuagzae, the dry world in the closest orbit to a small, dim red primary star. Note that all incoming task force ships must first jump in over Odzagh, so her military can give them the 'once over'.

As agreed, no Suedzuk Vargr will board a task force ship. 'This is for the best.' No member of the crew is permitted to set foot on Odzagh, or on a Suedzuk Vargr ship – unless he wants to see his foot in a curio cabinet later, or used for a fun-filled sporting event.

Over the next 1D6 weeks, a collection of warships and scouts jump in over Odzagh, and make the one to two day journey over to Okhgrnuagzae. At the end of the time period, the Referee rolls 1D6, with the following results:

Roll of 1:

No Tankers

No Destroyers.

Two 1,000-ton, TL A Darina Corvettes

Two 800-ton, TL C Broadsword-class Mercenary ships
(all version I)

Six 400-ton, TL C Vayu-class Patrol Cruisers.

Ten 100-ton, TL B Suleiman-class Scouts

Roll of 2:

One 10,000-ton, TL A Vision Tanker

One 2,000-ton, TL B Araby Destroyer

Two 1,000-ton, TL A Darina Corvettes

Four 800-ton, TL C Broadsword-class Mercenary ships
(three version I, one version II)

Four 400-ton, TL C Vayu-class Patrol Cruisers.

Eight 100-ton, TL B Suleiman-class Scouts

Roll of 3:

One 10,000-ton, TL A Vision Tanker

One 2,000-ton, TL B Araby Destroyer

Two 1,000-ton, TL A Darina Corvettes

Four 800-ton, TL C Broadsword-class Mercenary ships
(two version I, two version II)

Three 400-ton, TL C Vayu-class Patrol Cruisers.

Six 100-ton, TL B Suleiman-class Scouts

Roll of 4:

One 10,000-ton, TL A Vision Tanker

Two 2,000-ton, TL B Araby Destroyers

Three 1,000-ton, TL A Darina Corvettes

Six 800-ton, TL C Broadsword-class Mercenary ships
(three version I, three version II)

Five 400-ton, TL C Vayu-class Patrol Cruisers.

Four 100-ton, TL B Suleiman-class Scouts

Roll of 5:

One 10,000-ton, TL A Vision Tanker

Two 2,000-ton, TL B Araby Destroyers

Four 1,000-ton, TL A Darina Corvettes

Eight 800-ton, TL C Broadsword-class Mercenary ships
(six version I, two version II)

One 400-ton, TL C Vayu-class Patrol Cruiser

Four 100-ton, TL B Suleiman-class Scouts

Roll of 6:

One 10,000-ton, TL A Vision Tankers

Three 2,000-ton, TL B Araby Destroyers

Five 1,000-ton, TL A Darina Corvettes

Eight 800-ton, TL C Broadsword-class Mercenary ships
(all version II)

Four 100-ton, TL B Suleiman-class Scouts

The Referee should roll for every ship, to determine if they are Green, Trained, Regular, Veteran, or Elite.

Roll on this table, using 2D6

2-4: Green (modifier: -2 to tasks)

5-7: Trained (-1)

8-9: Regular (0)

10-11: Veteran (+1)

12: Elite (+2)

Yes, it is perfectly possible for an unarmed Scout to have an elite crew, and a destroyer crew to be green. Let's hope it goes the other way....

Note that the tankers and destroyers are *jump1* vessels (the tanker carries two parsecs of fuel for herself, as well as tons for others). Thus, it will take them two weeks to cover two parsecs with these two vessels.

Intelligence

Many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain.

Karl Von Clausewitz, **On War**, 1832

After everyone is at the party, the PCs now have to plan for the encounter. Who is doing what? What information do they have on Edzummalisu? On the Er Uts Pack? And how old is that info? Do our backers have any friends there, keeping an eye on things? Even if they do, the PCs had better get their own people over there to take a look-see, pronto. (Remember that elite unarmed scout? He just became worth his weight in gold.)

If the PCs decide to send a few scouts ahead to scope out the target, the Referee should determine 1) if any scouts return and 2) how good their intel is. The Er Uts Pack are well aware that an attack is planned, but the backers of the assault has laid down some red herrings for them to follow, so the scouts shouldn't have to face a barrage of death as soon as they pop in. Even so, it is a Formidable task for the scouts to come in, take their snaps, and get out before things get really hot. It is a Difficult task to decipher actionable information from the information gathered.

[Referee: use the experience level of the scout as a modifier to the survival role. Add the modifiers for both the scout and the (analyst) crew of the *Vivica*, divide by two (round down), and use that as the modifier to gain information from the data gathered by the surviving scout. Roll separately for each scout. If a PC has experience as an analyst, he can put his brains to work as well: the Referee determines how this influences the end result.]

According to the plan, the PCs are to train with the gathered fleet, until the word is given to launch the attack. The corporate backers of the attack will have an elite covert team go ahead of the attack, to demolish the TL E missile bays on the planet before the main strike. The Referee should roll 2D6 to see the results (the rolls assume an elite team):

2-4: Total failure: all eight missile bays intact, team lost.

5-7: Partial failure: three missile bays destroyed, team lost OR all missile bays intact, but team recovered: actionable intelligence gained.

8-9: Partial success: five missile bays destroyed: team lost.

10-11: Success: all eight missile bays destroyed: team lost.

12: Great success: all eight missile bays destroyed: team recovered: actionable intelligence gained.

[Referees: while this is primarily a naval adventure, certain PC groups will want in on the covert strike. Go ahead: let them generate a different set of characters, geared to the elite strike mission; have them choose their equipment (up to TL C if realistic, TL E if cinematic); plan out the entry, assault, and extraction; and determine the results. See the 'Covert Strike on Edzummalisu' section below for more information.]

'Actionable intelligence gained' directly impacts the success of the mission. Each item of 'actionable intelligence' modifies the Space Tactics (or equivalent skill in your Traveller game) of the PCs, or of a chosen

ship captain. It can also be used to increase the experience level of a ship for this mission only, with each 'actionable intelligence' discovery translating directly to an 'actionable finding', increasing the ship experience level as depicted below:

One Actionable Finding:
to raise Green to Trained
Three Actionable Findings:
to raise Trained to Regular

Actionable Findings cannot raise a ship's crew level above Regular.

Oh, and one more thing: the PCs are not the only one interested in gathering intelligence. The problem of space warfare is that it is impossible to hide a ship, and there always seems to be a few Vargr scouts loitering about juuuusst outside easy shooting range of the *Vivica* task force. Fortunately, the PCs *do* have permission to use lethal force to whack interlopers here: but the scouts are quick to jump away, with replacements inevitably dribbling in after a few days.

(The PCs might want to keep an eye out for 3-ton to 5-ton observation satellites and space robots while they're at it. They're really difficult to spot, but so satisfying to shred with the lasers...)

Training

You have got to learn WHY things work on a Starship.
Admiral James T. Kirk, **Wrath of Khan**, 1982

While the ship crews and captains are of varying experience, they are still individual units. As highly experienced naval officers, the PCs know that a strike fleet must work together, as one fist, in order to get the biggest impact with the smallest butcher's bill possible. Thus, another regimen of hard drilling, frantic ship manoeuvring exercises, joint firing exercises, and red-on-blue pseudo-firefights over Okhgrnuagzae.

Classic *Traveller* makes use of the Fleet Tactics skill. PCs (and no one else) will use their Fleet Tactics and Leadership skill to mould the force into one unit: success increased their fleet command ability by one for this mission only. (Repeated success with this skill shifts the bonus from a single event, to a single group of ship captains. The goal: have the captains read your mind⁶ and use their own initiative and intelligence to bring your plan to reality.)

A more general skill such the Tactics skill of *Mark Miller's Traveller* (a.k.a. T4) skill can also be used successfully. A successful use of Leadership and Tactics will increase the Tactics skill of every captain by one for this mission only. (If they lack the skill, they gain Tactics-0 for this mission only.) Repeated use of this skill, in situations of combat or in a Naval academy, is needed to make the increase permanent.

The difficulty of the task depends on the experience of the captain in question. This formula assumes that a Green captain commands a Green ship, for simplicity's sake.

Green: Staggering task. No gain above skill-0
Trained: Formidable. No gain above skill-0
Regular: Formidable. No gain above skill-1
Veteran: Difficult. No gain above skill-2
Elite: Difficult. No limit to possible gain.
(It's why they call them *elite*.)

Assault on Edzummalisu

This business will get out of control. It will get out of control and we'll be lucky to live through it.
Admiral Josh Painter,
The Hunt for Red October, 1990

Training continues over Okhgrnuagzae for 1D6+3 weeks. At the end of this period....

A scout ship jumps directly into the PC's task force⁷ (or as close as possible, given the Referee's sense of drama.) The scout notifies the PCs the results of the covert team strike, and how many missile bays they should expect when they strike.

The word is given to the PC task force commanders to launch their strike at their earliest convenience. The latest intel is provided, but it is over ten days old - and by the time the PCs come out of jump, it will be about 17 days old. Moreover, it isn't very useful: the extraction forces for the strike team were too busy getting out Right Now to bother take pretty pictures, and the surviving ships, data collection equipment, and digital hardware came out a bit worse for wear. (If the covert team won actionable intelligence, the info is relayed to the PCs at this time.)

In a week, the *Vivica* task force arrives over Edzummalisu. What they do next is up to the PC's plans and orders.

World and system description

Unang system, hex 1608, Kouare subsector, Empty Quarter

Edzummalisu: UWP X300000-0. (Hidden pirate base (Er Uts Pack, Suedzuk Vargr). Real UWP: F3003A4-6.) They can only produce TL 6 equipment, but use TL 9-B in their daily life. Located in Unang system, orbit-5 (Inner orbit, i.e. 'hot')

Edzummalisu is a single heavenly body: not a moon, no natural companion, no native ice formations, and far from easy access to shipping. ("So, no need to look for a pirate base here...")

Unang mainworld: UWP B520469-9 (The mainworld is located in orbit-8, the 'life zone').

The primary star type is a red giant, M3 III. Orbits 1 and 2 are within the star, and planets – including two gas giants and three asteroid belts – extend to orbit-13.

Enemy forces and disposition

Anti-ship base forces:

Zero to Eight 50-ton missile launchers. Each bay is rated factor-8. Each bay is equipped with the equivalent fire control of a H Model/8fib (TL E) Computer and sensor grid.

(The actual number of missile launchers is determined by the covert strike force operation. See the section 'Over Odzagh: Intelligence' for more information.)

20 triple missile turrets, in three batteries. Each battery is factor-5. Each battery is equipped with the equivalent fire control of an E Model/5fib (TL B) Computer and sensor grid.

20 triple laser turrets, in ten batteries. Each battery is factor-3. Each battery is equipped with the equivalent fire control of an E Model/5fib (TL B) Computer and sensor grid.

Starship & spacecraft:

1D6-4 400-ton

TL E T'Quorg-class Vargr Corsairs

2D6+6 400-ton

TL B Type P-class Vargr Corsairs

1D6-2 200-ton

TL E Ankqv'sar-class Vargr Corsairs

1D6-3 200-ton

TL 9 Beowulf-class Free Traders (unarmed)

1D6 200-ton

TL B Empress Marava-class Far Traders (unarmed)

6D6 50-ton

TL 9 Lawks-class Vargr Launches

(unarmed vessel: 35 boarders. Each boarder has a TL 10 Combat Environment Suit (space capable), laser rifle, laser pistol, 2 to 4 fragmentary grenades, TL 10 ceramic claws, axes, and swords (no monofilament edge, but lighter and stronger than steel.) One out of every four carry demolition charges, to breach sealed doors.

One of ten boarders also carries a light rapid-fire 'laser machinegun', set on a tripod, for fire suppression. This weapon is capable of operating autonomously, firing when movement is detected downrange. While bearing a grav-mounted power pack weighing 40 kg, good for 1000 shots, it is designed to be plugged into/hijack the starship's power grid, permitting an unlimited number of shots.

Ground forces:

50 Elite Vargr:

TL 14 Battle Dress, FGMP-14, Gauss pistols, grav belts, TL 14 bonded superdense claws and axes (monofilament edge) grenades and portable sensor mines. Forty hours of air. Their infonet is automatically plugged into the wireless base sensor grid. They have access to override commands for base equipment (control over gravity, iris doors, electricity, and lighting.)

400 Veteran Vargr:

TL 10 Combat Environment Suit (space capable): Laser Rifles OR Assault Rocket Launcher, Autopistol, grenades, TL 10 ceramic claws and axes (no monofilament edge, but lighter and stronger than steel.) Four hours of air.

1000 Regular Vargr:

The equivalent of TL 8 Reflec armour, worn over TL 10 Vacc suit, worn over TL 7 mesh armour. Assault rifles with RAM Grenade Launchers (frag if expecting unarmoured troops, HE if armoured.) TL 7 steel claws & cutlasses. One out of four will replace the assault rifle with shotguns or submachine guns. Four hours of air.

5000 Green Vargr:

TL 10 Vacc suit. Of this total, 2000 have TL 7 steel claws. Of the 2000, 1000 have pistols or revolvers.

Base structure

The Er Uts pirate base is extensive. The ground is hard enough to support a starships' weight with minimal preparation – paint and lights, basically. The missile bays are widely separated and dug into the ground.

The turrets are emplaced in three groups: two batteries of seven turrets, and one battery of six turrets. A team of five Veteran and ten Regular Vargr guards every missile bay and every battery group, with shift changes every four hours.

The laser batteries are mounted on 20-ton G-carriers, with two turrets set on each G-carrier. Each G-carrier bears two gunners, one driver, and six Regular troops as guards.

The base itself is set on the surface, and is well camouflaged – it looks like nothing more than a set of rock-strewn hills, like all the other hills in the area. In High Guard terms, assume the base is armoured to a level of 1. (The base commander would have preferred to have it properly dug in underground, but that proved too expensive and difficult.)

There are various patrols, small TL A sensor balloons overhead (“black bubbles in the black sky”) and sensor nets on the ground. Starships are placed in thin-walled hangers: well-camouflaged, but unarmoured. The fuel tanks are dug in underground: assume that they are armoured to level 2, in High Guard terms.

All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.

Sun Tzu, **The Art of War**, 6th century B.C.

Tactics & Strategy: Anti-ship

Contrary to rumour, Suedzuk strategy is a good deal more sophisticated than ‘scream and leap’. Their major weapon, the (surviving) 50-ton missile launchers, will be used to attack the *Vivica* until her spinal weapon and M-drive is out of commission: then, fire will be directed against the destroyers and corvettes until they also are broken. The secondary missile batteries will direct their fire against the destroyers, corvettes, and mercenary ships in that order. The missile batteries are situated that a few kiloton nuclear strikes are insufficient to destroy them all: assume 2D6+5 kilometres are situated between each missile battery.

The ten tertiary laser batteries are mobile, and are split into two groups. One group of five is tasked for anti-missile operations: the other is targeted against the thin-skinned ships: first the tankers, then the scouts. After those targets have been knocked out of the fight, fire can be directed ‘at any target of opportunity.’

Tactics & Strategy: Naval

In contested space, the T’Quorg and Ankgv’sar corsairs will work together to harry the *Vivica*, while the Type-Ps take on the destroyers and the corvettes. The captured Beowulfs and Empress Maravas are unarmed, but can run interference for the corsairs, threatening to ram elements of the PCs’ task force and drawing the *Vivica* attention away from the real threat. In the meantime, the numerous Lawks-class launches will attempt to breach and board all the major enemy vessels, fighting their way to the bridge or the engineering section, whichever is closest to their entry point.

For purposes of experience and morale checks, assume that the T’Quorg and Ankgv’sar ships are Veterans, as well as half of the Type-P ships. The other half of the Type-P ships are of Regular morale: unarmed traders are Green. The crews and boarders of the Lawks launches are of Regular experience, but the boarders treat morale checks as if they were Elite – they love the shedding of blood too much to retreat merely because a few of their pack mates just got sliced.

[The Referee may treat other Er Uts Vargr as Veterans – in terms of morale checks, not necessary battle know-how or combat proficiency. Alternately, he may change the results of a failed morale check: instead of retreating, the Suedzuk recklessly attack until he or the target is dead.]

Tactics & Strategy: Ground

On the ground, the 5000 Green Vargr represents the ordinary spacer, techie and other support staff: they may be skilled in other ways, but have only ordinary fighting skills, used enthusiastically. The 1000 Regular Vargr represents standard ground security forces: two-thirds of this force will be kept in the base, to resist invasion. Over 300 Regular Vargr will be deployed to defend the ground-based anti-ship weaponry from attack by *Vivica*-based ground forces.

About half of the Veterans are dispersed with the Regular and Green Vargr, to stiffen the general force. The remaining 200 Veterans, led by an experienced commander, acts as a emergency reaction force, going wherever they are most needed. The Elite Vargr are led by the pirate Pack leader. If there is a ground assault against the pirate base, the Pack leader will not be used in the most tactically efficient manner: instead, he will lead his forces to wherever the center of the action is. He prefers to be in the center of the violence whenever possible, with his Battle Dress splattered with the blood of his enemies.

Aftermath: Victory

We have met the enemy and they are ours...

Comodore Oliver Hazard Perry,
Battle of Lake Erie, 1813

The *Vivica* Task Force's victory conditions are simple: smash the Er Uts base at Edzummalisu, kill the pirate ships, and leave. The planned follow-up after victory involves the task force moving at 1G – the speed of their slowest ship, the Vision tankers – to the gas giant of Awgounmma in orbit-10, bypassing the (probably hostile) Unang mainworld.

[Referee's note: Unang, at orbit-8, is 19.6 Astronomical Units (AU) from the primary star. Edzummalisu at orbit-5 is 2.8 AU from the primary, and Awgounmma at orbit-10 is 77.2 AU from the primary. Here are some travel times, for both 1G and 2G, generated by using the AstroSynthesis program:

Mean Distance (AU)	Travel time 1G	Travel time 2G
Edzummalisu to		
-Unang 2.8	12 days, 16 hrs	8 days, 23 hrs
-Awgounmma 77.2	25 days, 3 hrs	17 days, 19 hrs

Remember that the task force ships have only 28 days of power plant fuel, as per Classic Traveller rules. If there are any delays, the PCs can be cutting the time a bit close.]

After arriving at Awgounmma, the PCs will find that their corporate patrons have arranged for a 1D6+2 sub-800-ton support ships – ship tenders, far traders with supplies, medical craft, and patrol ships – to tend to the task force, before everyone returns to Tokitre.

Rewarding the PCs will be at the level they negotiated. In addition, their fame and reputation will spread, not just among possible employers, but among the general public as well. A sufficiently impressive victory increases the interested parties to interstellar governments and major criminal networks.

Aftermath: Defeat

A wise man fights to win, but he is twice a fool who has no plan for possible defeat.

Louis L'Amour, Western author, 1908 - 1988

Failure to destroy the base implies that the PCs lost the *Vivica* battleship in combat. If this happens, the PCs

know well enough not to surrender. They will have to retreat under heavy fire, make repairs to their ships as best as they can, and lead the fleet to Unang, the nearest refuelling location. What happens there is determined by the Referee: the PCs may possibly find a way to negotiate for what they need, but it will come at a high price – or they may simply die over Unang, instead of over Edzummalisu. The actions of the PCs will be reviewed by their backers, who will decide what penalties apply for a given level of failure.

Covert Strike on Edzummalisu

Not by strength, but by guile

Motto, British Special Boat Service

The PCs wish to be part of the pre-attack covert strike on Edzummalisu, using a different set of generated characters. The strike force is equipped with fusion rifles, battle dress, grav belts, kiloton nuclear explosives, extra air/waste/power packs for their battle dress, and extra ammo for their weapons. They enter a cutter module on Taetha, the closest Protectorate world to Unang. Equipment TL is C if the referee is realistic, TL E if cinematic. (The PCs will be sneaked to the base on a Vargr Corsair, manned by Ovaghoun Vargr pirates who are playing a high-stakes game with the Suedzuk of Unang). They remain sealed and unaware of what is going on outside for 1D6+1 weeks. (Assume that their module's life support is beefed-up, so their basic needs are attended to during this period.)

Eventually, they are released from the cutter module, and find themselves and their equipment in the middle of nowhere. A 3D map is promptly downloaded into their Battle Dress computers, as is a timeline to hit all the missile bays, and head back to a designated pick-up spot is given. Sneaking up to a missile bay and properly place their micronuke charge is a Staggering task (lower to Formidable if the PCs think to detect and disable the various sensor grids surrounding each missile bay.)

Failure initially means 2D6 Regular Vargr move in to attack their position, supported by armed Vargr in air/rafts. Follow up with additional groups of 3D6+3 Regular Vargr every ten minutes, for as long as they remain in the vicinity of an Er Uts missile bay. Recall that there is 2D6+5 km between each missile battery, including the missile bays. Assuming that the PCs move quickly, they should be able to neutralise another missile battery or two before the opposition gets ferocious. And the opposition *will* get nasty: orbiting pirate ships will start homing in on the PCs position, firing lasers and ship-to-ship missiles. (One of

these ships is tagged 'friendly' by their battle dress computer....) Security around the remaining missile bays will get beefed up, and several hunter-killer teams, with TL B equipment, will be sent on air/rafts. Finally, the Pack leader will break up his Elite unit into three: while ten will remain to guard his person, two teams of 20 Vargr each will search for the covert team, working together to isolate and flank them.

[Aside: It will be interesting to see how the PCs put those micronuke charges to use. They may use them up before destroying all the missile bays: if so, fusion rifles can make an acceptable stand-in, depending on how well the PCs can handle their weapons.]

After the PCs destroy all the missile bays, they head to the extraction zone. They find a well-camouflaged Er Uts Lawks-class boarder waiting for them, crewed by a single pilot and engineer. They will fling themselves to one of the attacking pirate ships (don't make a mistake here!), dodging fire all the way. (Their target ship is 'firing to miss'.) The PCs are expected to impact the 'friendly' ship at a specific speed, relying on their battle dress to protect them. (The boarder is constructed to impact in a certain manner, 'hooking' itself onto the target while directing the stress of impact away from the relatively fragile cargo inside). As soon as they impact, the pirate – actually a turncoat, on the side of the PCs – will make his jump.

[Referee: if the ship is destroyed before smashing into the target craft, the PCs may be able to get to the target ship themselves, using their battle dress and their grav belts. The difficulty of doing so ranges from Formidable to Impossible using the BITS task system, depending on the referee – high skill levels in Zero-G, Battle Dress, and Grav belt may be used as prerequisites. The target will attempt to assist the PCs, but this will probably break his cover...]

If the PCs decimated large numbers of Er Uts ground forces, this should be reflected by changing the numbers available when the main attack strikes.

Variations on a Theme: Crusades, Jihads, and Purges

If war is ever lawful, then peace is sometimes sinful.

C. S. Lewis,

God in the Dock:

Essays on Theology and Ethics, 1970

This adventure assumes that the primary drive behind the mission is economic: the Er Uts Packs has been

biting too hard on Menderes and Imperial corporate interests, and needs to be put in their place. However, while money is the most common motivation behind violent action, it is not the only possible motive. The Suedzuk Vargr are deeply hated above all the detestable race, so far as the Second Empire of Gashikan⁸ is concerned, and the Legion of Beskain, a Gashikan order of knighthood dedicated to crushing the Vargr menace once and for all, could be the major force behind the creation of the *Vivica* Task Force.

The Most Serene Order of the Queen of Heaven, a powerful Imperial Catholic religious order with a strong following among the ruling elites of Tokitre, are capable of securing the resources needed to create the *Vivica* Task Force. If the Vargr have attacked one too many group of pilgrims or harmless Catholic settlement, the all-female Shining Swords, the military arm of the Order, is likely to take direct action against the 'vile, blood-thirsty animals'. For more information, see 'Sacred Mission' in **Stellar Reaches #8**.

In a way similar to that of the Serene Order, Muslim and Hindu militants can get involved in attacking the Vargr pirates. Many Last Man cultists would be quite willing to join such a military strike against the Vargr – and perhaps, a wealthy member of that religion put his desires into action, quite likely with unofficial Hegemony backing.

Finally, the Ovaghoun Vargr and the Suedzuk Vargr are not exactly friends. The highly civilized (and highly Vilanized) Ovaghoun roundly despise the Suedzuk, seeing them as the very scum of the noble Vargr race. And the Ovaghoun has engaged in genocidal action against lesser breeds of the Vargr race before...

In their turn, the Suedzuk see the Ovaghoun as deeply, wilfully humanized – practically walking abominations. "At least the Irilitok have the excuse of not being able to fight back against the humans, as they bred them to be cute and friendly sentient pets of the stinking flat-faces. But *you!* *You* decided to imitate the tailless cowards that your noble ancestors, *real* Vargr, conquered and enslaved! Your very ancestors would roar their approval if I tore out your throat open right now!"

Starships – Vivica Task Force

Ship: Vivica
Type: Battleship
Tech Level: 11

Class: Automatic Earth
Architect: Alvin Plummer

USP

BB-Q1244E3-B80004-05K08-0 MCr 107,865.422 90 Ktons
Bat Bear 2 2 51 8 Crew: 635
Bat 2 2 71 A TL: 11

Cargo: 658 tons Passengers: 12 Emergency Low: 163
Fuel: 21,600 EP: 3,600 Agility: 3
Shipboard Security Detail: 90
Fuel Treatment: On Board Fuel Purification
Backups: 2 x Model/5fib Computers 1 x Bridge

Architects Fee: MCr 1,078.654 Cost in Quantity: MCr 86,292.338

HULL: 90,000 tons standard, Needle/Wedge Configuration

CREW: 58 Officers, 577 Ratings

ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 4G Manoeuvre, Power plant-4, 3,600 EP, Agility 3

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/5fib Computer

1 Backup Bridge, 2 Model/5fib Backup Computers

HARDPOINTS: Spinal Mount, 12 100-ton bays, 7 50-ton bays,
15 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT: Particle Accelerator Spinal Mount (Factor-K),

10x 100-ton Missile Bays (Factor-8),

7x 50-ton Plasma Gun Bays (Factor-5)

DEFENCES: 2x 100-ton Repulsor Bays (Factor-4),

15x Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-8),
Armoured Hull (Factor-11)

CRAFT: None

FUEL: 21,600 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)

No Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 332 Staterooms, 163 Emergency Low Berths,

2 High Passengers, 10 Middle Passengers, 658 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 108,944.076 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 1,078.654),
MCr 86,292.338 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 198 Weeks Singly, 159 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

The cargo space may be converted to temporary bunkrooms for 164 bunkrooms, holding six men each, for a total of 984 troopers. It may also be used to hold addition missiles, or life support material for long patrols.

HISTORY:

The Vivica was originally built in 142 Imperial, in Dukh/Nightmare/Ley Sector. It was part of the local Colonial fleet, and remained in the subsector as the superior, TL C warships were deployed in the Julian War (175 to 191). During the collapse of the Imperial coreward-trailing front in the late 180s/early 190s, a major Ovaghoun Vargr pirate group successfully defeated and boarded the Vivica, at around 248-190.

After repairs, the vessel was transported to Ikon as a war prize, arriving in early 192, after the war had ended. The Vargr decided to keep the old name for bragging rights, and the vessel was used as a major combatant by the Ighdza'oukar corsair bands.

In 251, the aging ship was used as a lead element on a raid against Tokitre/Tokitre/Empty Quarter. It was crewed by politically connected pack members, as the fleet commander valued loyalty over competence. The ship was caught in a tight spot in the battle, outside of the 'battle scripts' the officers had memorized. Due to their incompetence, the ship was crippled in the battle, and unable to jump out. Her sister ships abandoned her, and the Vargr crew started to starve to death as the vessel left the inner system. The crew finally managed to cease acceleration, but the damaged power plant finally gave up the ghost: the crew expired soon after the power plant did.

Sometime in the early 700s, the ship was rediscovered by an unknown merchantman. The merchant returned successfully to civilization, and sold the location to certain parties. A few Vargr pirates and buccaneers stripped the vessel of most useful, movable material (ignoring the frozen Vargr).

The vessel was again left undisturbed until a small group of researchers rediscovered the last known location in 957 Imperial, while going thru the spotty records of a long-dead Vargr pirate group. Given the information, it was easy to plot the current location of the Vivica. This information was sold to one of the governments of Tokitre, who sold it to an interested Imperial salvage firm, which was a subsidiary of Bear Power and Light, an Imperial business specializing in fusion plant construction.

Bear Power and Light was one of the local businesses who decided to back an expedition against local pirates. The Tokitre government sympathised, but would not risk the necessary resources. The business coalition managed to get the support of the extremely powerful Menderes megacorporation, but the Julian Government refused to take action. Both governments signalled their tolerance of a major raid against the pirates, but the business leaders would have to pay and arrange it themselves: there will be no official involvement in the matter.

A senior executive of Bear managed to recall a bit of trivia about a lost ship, which led to another 'rediscovery' of the vessel in 986. Two years were spent sketching out the feasibility of repairing and reactivating the vessel, with work starting in earnest (and out of the public eye) in 990 Imperial.

Ship: Spotlight
Type: Tanker
Tech Level: 10

Class: Vision
Architect: Alvin Plummer

USP

T-K511142-080000-20000-0	MCr 2,889.604	10 Ktons
Bat Bear 1 2	Crew: 56	Pulse Lasers
Bat 1 2	TL: 10	

Cargo: 0 tons Fuel: 8,470 EP: 100 Agility: 0
Shipboard Security Detail: 10
Craft: 1 x 30T Ship's Boat
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Backups: 2 x Model/4 Computers

Architects Fee: MCr 28.896 Cost in Quantity: MCr 2,311.683

HULL: 10,000 tons standard, Sphere Configuration

CREW: 12 Officers, 44 Ratings

ENGINEERING: Jump-1, 1G Manoeuvre, Power plant-1, 100 EP, Agility 0

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/4 Computer, 2 Model/4 Backup Computers

HARDPOINTS: 16 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 8 Single Pulse Laser Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-2)
DEFENCES: 8 Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 1 Battery (Factor-8)
CRAFT: 1x 30 ton Ship's Boat (Crew of 2)
FUEL: 8,470 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance, plus 6,370 tons of additional fuel)
 On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 56 Staterooms
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 2,918.500 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 28.896), MCr 2,311.683 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 160 Weeks Singly, 128 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENTS:
 This is a standard low-tech tanker. It can travel two parsecs, and it has a fuel capacity of over 6,000 tons of fuel.

Ship: Embrace and Extend Class: Araby
 Type: Destroyer Architect: Alvin Plummer
 Tech Level: 11

USP
 DE-B1268E2-340000-30304-0 MCr 2,508.130 2 Ktons
 Bat Bear 2 4 1 1 Crew: 50
 Bat 2 4 1 1 TL: 11

Cargo: 5 tons Fuel: 560 EP: 160 Agility: 5
 Shipboard Security Detail: 2 Marines: 10
 Craft: 1 x 50T Modular Cutter
 Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops
 Backups: 2 x Model/5fib Computers

Architects Fee: MCr 25.081 Cost in Quantity: MCr 2,006.504

HULL: 2,000 tons standard, 28,000 cubic meters, Needle/Wedge Configuration
CREW: 11 Officers, 29 Ratings, 10 Marines
ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 6G Manoeuvre, Power plant-8, 160 EP, Agility 5
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/5fib Computer, 2 Model/5fib Backup Computers
HARDPOINTS: 1 50-ton bay, 10 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 1 50-ton Particle Accelerator Bay (Factor-3), 4 Triple Missile Turrets organised into 1 Battery (Factor-4), 4 Triple Beam Laser Turrets organised into 4 Batteries (Factor-3)
DEFENCES: 2 Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-4)
 Armoured Hull (Factor-3)
CRAFT: 1 50 ton Modular Cutter (Crew of 2)
FUEL: 560 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
 On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 30 Staterooms, 5 Tons Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 2,533.211 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 25.081), MCr 2,006.504 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 132 Weeks Singly, 106 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENTS:
 The Araby is a standard low-tech destroyer in the Imperial Empty Quarter. It is fairly common among planetary navies, and a few examples are in the hands of elite starmerc groups.

Ship: Riskware
Type: Corvette
Tech Level: 10

Class: Darina
Architect: Alvin Plummer

USP

CO-A2147D2-840000-40000-0	MCr 1,337.076	1 Ktons
Bat Bear	2 2	Crew: 30
Bat	2 2	TL: 10

Cargo: 4 tons Fuel: 170 EP: 70 Agility: 4 Security: 1 Marines: 3
Craft: 1 x 20T Gig
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Backups: 2 x Model/4fib Computers

Architects Fee: MCr 13.371 Cost in Quantity: MCr 1,069.661

HULL: 1,000 tons standard, 14,000 cubic meters,
Airframe Cone Configuration

CREW: 11 Officers, 16 Ratings, 3 Marines

ENGINEERING: Jump-1, 4G Manoeuvre, Power plant-7, 70 EP, Agility 4

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/4fib Computer, 2 Model/4fib Backup Computers

HARDPOINTS: 10 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT: 8 Triple Pulse Laser Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-4)

DEFENCES: 2 Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-4),
Armoured Hull (Factor-8)

CRAFT: 1 20 ton Gig (Crew of 2)

FUEL: 170 Tons Fuel (1 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)

On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 21 Staterooms, 4 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 1,350.447 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 13.371),
MCr 1,069.661 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 120 Weeks Singly, 96 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

The Darina-class corvette is a Tokitre-designed long-range patrol ship, built to work in and near gas giants. It boasts superior performance while within a gas giant's atmosphere, and a heavy laser battery able to deal with most pirates. In addition to the ship security man, three Marines are kept for boarding and ship inspection duties.

Coupled with the popular Vision tanker, jump range is improved to include Tokitre's near abroad: together, they make visits to the dead space between the worlds and stars into round trip affairs.

This class of starship is popular among Tokitre national, martial religious, and for-profit military forces. It's relatively low tech level means that it is serviceable even in the lower-tech spaceports of the system, and the jump1 performance means that it can make 'surprise appearances' at any of Tokitre's four gas giants, without the bother of being tracked in N-space by hostile forces.

Ship: Ball Games
Type: Mercenary Cruiser
Tech Level: 12

Class: Broadsword (version I)
Architect: Standard
(Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)

USP

CC-8533351-000000-00000-0 MCr 494.620 800 Tons
Bat Bear Crew: 8
Bat TL: 12

Cargo: 24 tons Passengers: 17 Fuel: 312 EP: 24.000 Agility: 2
Craft: 2 x 50T Modular Cutter, 2 x 30T Modules, 1 x 3T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops

Architects Fee: MCr 4.946 Cost in Quantity: MCr 395.696

HULL: 800 tons standard, Sphere Configuration

CREW: Pilot, Navigator, 5 Engineers, Medic

ENGINEERING: Jump-3, 3G Manoeuvre, Power plant-3, 24 EP, Agility 2

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/5 Computer

HARDPOINTS: 8 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT: 8 None Empty Turret

DEFENCES: None

CRAFT: 2x 50-ton Modular Cutters, 2x 30-ton Cutter Modules, 1 x3-ton Air/Raft

FUEL: 312 Tons Fuel (3 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance, plus 48 tons of additional fuel). On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 25 Staterooms, 17 Middle Passengers, 24 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 499.566 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 4.946),

MCr 395.696 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 112 Weeks Singly, 90 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

Yes, this is the Happy Fun Ball, beloved by Travellers everywhere.
Note that this is the default, unarmed version.

Ship: Deathsphere
Type: Mercenary Cruiser
Tech Level: 12

Class: Broadsword (version II)
Architect: Alvin Plummer

USP

CC-8533352-040000-23002-0 MCr 509.620 800 Tons
Bat Bear 2 22 2 Crew: 16 Pulse Lasers
Bat 2 22 2 TL: 12

Cargo: 22 tons Passengers: 17 Fuel: 312 EP: 24 Agility: 1
Craft: 2 x 50T Modular Cutter, 2 x 30T Module, 1 x 3T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops

Architects Fee: MCr 5.096 Cost in Quantity: MCr 407.696

HULL: 800 tons standard, Sphere Configuration

CREW: Pilot, Navigator, 5 Engineers, Medic, 8 Gunners

ENGINEERING: Jump-3, 3G Manoeuvre, Power plant-3, 24 EP, Agility 1

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/5 Computer

HARDPOINTS: 8 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT:

2 Triple Missile Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-2),

2 Triple Pulse Laser Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-2),

2 Dual Plasma Gun Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-3)

DEFENCES: 2 Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-4)
CRAFT: 2 50-ton Modular Cutters, 2 30-ton Modules, 1x 3-ton Air/Raft
FUEL: 312 Tons Fuel (3 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance, plus 48 tons of additional fuel)

On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 25 Staterooms, 17 Middle Passengers, 22 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 514.716 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 5.096),
MCr 407.696 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 112 Weeks Singly, 90 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

This particular version of the Happy Fun Ball is loaded out with two missile, two laser, two fusion, and two sandcaster turrets. The price is an extra 15 million credits, a reduction in agility, and double occupancy in the staterooms.

Do not taunt the Happy Fun Ball.

(Note that it is possible to have an armed Broadsword with an agility of two: but at least three turrets must remain empty.)

Ship: Dasalenu

Type: Patrol Cruiser

Tech Level: 12

Class: Vayu

Architect: Standard

(Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)

USP

CT-4134432-000000-30002-0 MCr 315.560 400 Tons

Bat Bear 2 2 Crew: 11

Bat 2 2 TL: 12

Cargo: 41 Passengers: 1 Low: 4 Fuel: 136 EP: 16 Agility: 2

Craft: 1 x 30T Ships Boat, 1 x 8T G-Carrier

Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops

Architects Fee: MCr 3.156 Cost in Quantity: MCr 252.448

HULL: 400 tons standard, Needle/Wedge Configuration

CREW: Pilot, Navigator, 4 Engineers, Medic, 4 Gunners

ENGINEERING: Jump-3, 4G Manoeuvre, Power plant-4, 16 EP, Agility 2

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/3 Computer

HARDPOINTS: 4 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT: 2 Triple Missile Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-2),

2 Triple Beam Laser Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-3)

DEFENCES: None

CRAFT: 1 30-ton Ships Boat, 1 8-ton G-Carrier

FUEL: 136 Tons Fuel (3 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)

On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 12 Staterooms, 4 Low Berths, 1 Middle Passenger,

4 Low Passengers, 41 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 318.716 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 3.156),
MCr 252.448 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 82 Weeks Singly, 65 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

This is the standard Imperial space patrol vessel. It is also sometimes referred to as the Lurushaar Kilaalum class.

As of 993, a lot of Emptyhead merchants and nobles are missing the presence of these vessels. Despite their inability to fight major (or even medium) ships of the line in the Solomani Rim War, they do the basic patrol job admirably well, and - in an era where all interstellar communication and 'space awareness' is transmitted by jump-ship - the Admiralty have need of these vessels to keep tabs on what the Solomani are up to. (Their jump3 mobility helps, too).

Ship: Aurora Class: Suleiman
Type: Scout Architect: Standard
Tech Level: 11 (Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)

USP

SS-11222R1-000000-00000-0 MCr 52.134 100 Tons
Bat Bear Crew: 4
Bat TL: 11

Cargo: 4 Fuel: 34 EP: 2 Agility: 2
Craft: 1 x 3T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification

Architects Fee: MCr 0.521 Cost in Quantity: MCr 41.707

HULL: 100 tons standard, Needle/Wedge Configuration

CREW: Pilot, 3 Other Crew

ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 2G Manoeuvre, Power plant-2, 2.000 EP, Agility 2

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/1bis Computer

HARDPOINTS: 1 Hardpoint

ARMAMENT: 1 None Empty Turret

DEFENCES: None

CRAFT: 1 3-ton Air/Raft

FUEL: 34 Tons Fuel (3 parsecs jump and 56 days endurance)

On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 4 Staterooms, 4-Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 52.655 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 0.521),

MCr 41.707 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 38 Weeks Singly, 30 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

Yes, this is the inescapable Suleiman scout. No matter where you are, a Suleiman got there first... somehow. They are unarmed, as loading their single empty turret with anything hits their agility, which they need to survive.

"What IS it with these ships? They're like the cockroaches of Charted Space!"

HULL: 200 tons standard, Needle/Wedge Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Engineer, Medic, 2 Gunners, 3 Flight Crew, 12 Marines
ENGINEERING: Jump-3, 2G Manoeuvre, 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 organised into 1 Battery (Factor-3), 1 Single Plasma Gun Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-3)
DEFENCES: None
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:
With her long legs, superior weaponry, and ample boarding facilities, the Ankgv'sar is just bad news for any merchantman that she happens across.

Ship: Fengerrg 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, Close Structure Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Navigator, 3 Engineers, Medic, 3 Gunners
ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 3G Manoeuvre, Power plant-3, 12 EP, Agility 0
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/2 Computer
HARDPOINTS: 4 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 3 Triple Beam Laser Turrets organised 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.

Ship: Excellent Spirits Class: Beowulf
Type: Free Trader Architect: Standard
Tech Level: 9 (Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)

USP

AA-2611111-000000-00000-0 MCr 67.200 200 Tons
Bat Bear Crew: 3
Bat TL: 9

Cargo: 91 tons Passengers: 7 Low: 20 Fuel: 22 EP: 2 Agility: 1
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops

Architects Fee: MCr 0.672 Cost in Quantity: MCr 53.760

HULL: 200 tons standard, Flattened Sphere Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Engineer, Medic
ENGINEERING: Jump-1, 1G Manoeuvre, Power plant-1, 2 EP, Agility 1
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/1 Computer
HARDPOINTS: None
ARMAMENT: 2 Empty Turrets
DEFENCES: None
CRAFT: None
FUEL: 22 Tons Fuel (1 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 10 Staterooms, 20 Low Berths, 7 Middle Passengers, 20 Low Passengers, 91 Tons Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 67.872 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 0.672),
MCr 53.760 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 57 Weeks Singly, 46 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENTS:
This is the standard free trader, in all its' TL 9 glory. Fits well with the Empty Quarter, don't you think?

(Moffatt-Vallance's design was modified to include the two standard empty turrets.)

Ship: Little Liminaries Class: Empress Marava
Type: Far Trader Architect: Standard
Tech Level: 11 (Andrew Moffatt-Vallance)

USP

A2-22212R1-000000-00000-0 MCr 98.800 200 Tons
Bat Bear Crew: 4
Bat TL: 11

Cargo: 66 Passengers: 6 Low: 4 Fuel: 44 EP: 4 Agility: 1
Craft: 1 x 3T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops

Architects Fee: MCr 0.988 Cost in Quantity: MCr 79.040

HULL: 200 tons standard, Cone Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Engineer, Steward, Medic
ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 1G Manoeuvre, Power plant-2, 4 EP, Agility 1
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/1bis Computer
HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 2 Single Empty Turrets

Footnotes

¹Learning a Suedzuk language is more useful in their line of work. However, the Suedzuk Vargr are quite paranoid vis-a-vis each other (never mind flat-faced humans), even more fragmented than other Vargr races (and thus even more fragmented linguistically), and certainly don't believe in outsiders learning their language. Even if the PCs learnt one, that language would be useful for only a single pack of Suedzuk – or just a portion of said pack.

²For more on the Hegemony of Lorean's many military groups, see **Stellar Reaches #6**, 'Downed on Uzola', footnote 1, and **Stellar Reaches #9**, 'Against the Steel Fists', footnote 8.

³Actually, the PCs earned quite a bit more, but this is all the money they are allowed to play with. The rest goes to 'The Firm': the business identity of the PCs, it employs a small team of about a dozen lawyers, secretaries, researchers, cooperative violence professionals (active like themselves, or retired), and cultural liaison specialists.

⁴The PCs should really make the time to chat with him – the man has been many places, and pulled off many stunts, to earn the position of a Prime Menderes Pilot. A very handy man to have on their team, if they can ever pry the Menderes golden handcuffs off of him...

⁵For a survey of the amazing array of cutter modules available, see GURPS Traveller's supplement Modular Cutter.

⁶This is strictly meant as an analogy, of course. (Eyes the Imperial Ministry of Justice building...)

⁷Yes, the scout ignored the direct orders of the Vargr of Odzagh: by not going to Odzagh first before travelling by N-space to Okhgrnuagzae, he preserved some operational security at the price of angering the local Suedzuk Vargr groups. Being an honourable man (and under corporate orders to keep the Vargr as happy as possible – there are few enough stable Blood Vargr contacts as it is, in the Sslnthis Zone) he returned to Odzagh to apologize to the senior pack leaders in person.

They shredded him alive, of course.

But they also preserved some of his torn flesh and a vial of his blood as a symbol of his honour and bravery. (Both the scout and the commander who gave him his orders knew that he would have to take one 'for the team' as it were.) And, with Suedzuk honour satisfied, relations can continue on an even keel between the local packs and the various corporate backers of the *Vivica* task force.

⁸The Second Empire of Gashikan has no territory within the Empty Quarter, but if you continue to travel coreward, you will find that it does control quite a large number of worlds in Mendan, Amdukan, Gashikan, Trenchans, and Gzaekfueg sectors. This is in 993: the empire collapses and is reborn by the time of the Classic era of 1105 Imperial, but the territory held has shrunk somewhat in the meantime.

The Forsaken

By Duncan Campbell Scott

I

Once in the winter
Out on a lake
In the heart of the north-land,
Far from the Fort
And far from the hunters,
A Chippewa woman
With her sick baby,
Crouched in the last hours
Of a great storm.
Frozen and hungry,
She fished through the ice
With a line of the twisted
Bark of the cedar,
And a rabbit-bone hook
Polished and barbed;
Fished with the bare hook
All through the wild day,
Fished and caught nothing;
While the young chieftain
Tugged at her breasts,
Or slept in the lacings
Of the warm *tikanagan*.
All the lake-surface
Streamed with the hissing
Of millions of iceflakes
Hurled by the wind;
Behind her the round
Of a lonely island
Roared like a fire
With the voice of the storm
In the deeps of the cedars.
Valiant, unshaken,
She took of her own flesh,
Baited the fish-hook,
Drew in a gray-trout,
Drew in his fellows,
Heaped them beside her,
Dead in the snow.
Valiant, unshaken,
She faced the long distance,
Wolf-haunted and lonely,
Sure of her goal
And the life of her dear one:
Tramped for two days,
On the third in the morning,

Saw the strong bulk
Of the Fort by the river,
Saw the wood-smoke
Hand soft in the spruces,
Heard the keen yelp
Of the ravenous huskies
Fighting for whitefish:
Then she had rest.

II

Years and years after,
When she was old and withered,
When her son was an old man
And his children filled with vigour,
They came in their northern tour on the verge of
winter,
To an island in a lonely lake.
There one night they camped, and on the morrow
Gathered their kettles and birch-bark
Their rabbit-skin robes and their mink-traps,
Launched their canoes and slunk away through the
islands,
Left her alone forever,
Without a word of farewell,
Because she was old and useless,
Like a paddle broken and warped,
Or a pole that was splintered.
Then, without a sigh,
Valiant, unshaken,
She smoothed her dark locks under her kerchief,
Composed her shawl in state,
Then folded her hands ridged with sinews and corded
with veins,
Folded them across her breasts spent with the
nourishment of children,
Gazed at the sky past the tops of the cedars,
Saw two spangled nights arise out of the twilight,
Saw two days go by filled with the tranquil sunshine,
Saw, without pain, or dread, or even a moment of
longing:
Then on the third great night there came thronging and
thronging
Millions of snowflakes out of a windless cloud;
They covered her close with a beautiful crystal shroud,
Covered her deep and silent.
But in the frost of the dawn,

Up from the life below,
Rose a column of breath
Through a tiny cleft in the snow,
Fragile, delicately drawn,
Wavering with its own weakness,
In the wilderness a sign of the spirit,

Persisting still in the sight of the sun
Till day was done.
Then all light was gathered up by the hand of God and
hid in His breast,
Then there was born a silence deeper than silence,
Then she had rest.

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